



Ten opportunities for Europe post-coronavirus

Exploring potential
for progress in EU
policy-making



IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS

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Whilst much commentary and analysis has understandably been focused on reaction to, and mitigation of, the immediate impact of the coronavirus crisis in Europe and worldwide, relatively little attention has been paid to areas of potential opportunity which the crisis may offer to improve policy for the future. This EPRS analysis looks at ten areas which may offer potential for progress, including working more closely together on health policy, using climate action to promote a sustainable recovery, re-thinking the world of work, future-proofing education, harnessing e-commerce and championing European values and multilateralism.

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Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic that hit the world from January 2020 onwards, with Europe at its epicentre for some weeks in the spring, has led to a major, multi-dimensional global crisis. Pressure on national health services, a major economic down-turn and new sources of tension on the world stage are just some of the most obvious negative consequences that spring to mind.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, analysts have produced an abundance of new forecasts, with many earlier ones made redundant by the new situation. The focus has mainly been on negative consequences and risks. As important as this approach is to underpin strategic planning and enable policy-makers to prepare for the worst, no analysis of a post-coronavirus world would be complete without a look at the other side of the coin – the opportunities that it may offer too.

Where there is crisis, there is also opportunity

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, in medical Latin, the word *crisis* refers to 'the turning point in a disease when an important change takes place, indicating either recovery, or death'. The root of the word is, however, the Ancient Greek verb *κρίνειν* – to decide – and a crisis can be defined as 'a time, when a difficult or important decision must be made'. Like every other crisis, the coronavirus crisis is a crossroads at which important decisions have to be made, bringing both the necessity and the opportunity for change.

Taking the best from the crisis

The opportunities arising from a crisis are not immediately obvious and sometimes obscured by difficulties. The pandemic and the resulting confinement have had some immediate positive consequences – such as reduced CO₂ emissions and the boost to e-commerce. Other potentially positive consequences are avenues to explore – such as bringing the Member States closer together on health or rejuvenating European industry.

Turning the immediate positive effects into lasting change and seizing the less obvious opportunities requires both reflection and action. Europe's capacity to nurture the catalytic, but sometimes disruptive, positive effects of the crisis will be the measure of its resilience: the resilience of its liberal political systems, its economy, and its people – individually and as a society.

A critical moment for Europe

In the public discourse, the search for a 'new normal' is omnipresent. The Union will not re-create itself. Major shifts can, however, be triggered by particular opportunities, such as the debate on the future financing of the Union and the recovery plan, and the Conference on the Future of Europe. The European Parliament has made – in its resolution on the conclusions of the extraordinary European Council meeting, adopted on 23 July 2020 – a strong case for health, research, digital transformation and innovation. The Conference on the Future of Europe offers a valuable opportunity to engage in a more structured public debate, taking into account the challenges and opportunities brought by the pandemic. The debate should be aimed principally at improving the way the EU works, in terms not only of institutional dynamics, but also of policy design, in order to offer citizens a positive and constructive perspective.

Snapshot of ten opportunities

This paper replicates the formula of the 'Ten issues to watch' series produced by EPRS at the beginning of every year. Some of the opportunities described in the following chapters are very specific; others are more about the big picture. The aim is not to cover all possible issues but to highlight a few. The paper can be read in conjunction with a broader body of work, analysis and research being undertaken by EPRS on the longer-term implications of the coronavirus crisis, such as [Towards a more resilient Europe post-coronavirus: An initial mapping of structural risks facing the EU](#), and a set of 20 'Ideas Papers' on EU policy and resilience as the Union emerges from the crisis.

1. Moving closer together on health

The coronavirus pandemic shows that new health crises can emerge at any time, and that health threats do not respect borders. Awareness and demand for cross-border cooperation, for coordinated response and for high levels of preparedness, have risen. If its lessons are learned, this crisis could be pivotal for EU health policy.

From health gap to policy shift?

While responsibility for health lies primarily with the individual EU Member States' governments, the EU complements national policies, especially those with a cross-border dimension. Yet, with the exception of a few flagship initiatives, such as the 'Europe against cancer' programme launched in 1985, health policy remained a predominantly national issue – until the coronavirus. The disruption caused by the pandemic and the fatalities left in its wake have cast a cruel light on major disparities in the 27 EU Member States' health systems, capacities and policies. At the same time, EU health policy has been characterised by a 'gap' between public expectations and actual EU engagement. In a 2018 [Eurobarometer survey](#) for the European Parliament, over two thirds of respondents expressed support for increased EU action on health and social security. The coronavirus has catapulted EU health policy into the spotlight and is an opportunity to transform the EU's role in health.

The pandemic's impact on public health and healthcare

The coronavirus pandemic, much like a 'truth serum', has highlighted pre-existing problems in European health and care systems. There was arguably inadequate preparedness, along with a lack of medical equipment and protective supplies. Frontline health workers have been overburdened, hospital capacities overwhelmed. Vulnerable groups, including the elderly, have largely borne the brunt of Covid-19, with many coronavirus fatalities recorded in nursing homes. However, any crisis also brings opportunities. One of the immediate positive consequences of the pandemic has been a heightened awareness of the benefits of [better hygiene skills](#), as a means to mitigate the impact of coronavirus and protect oneself and others from getting sick. Hand hygiene, cough etiquette and the use of facemask have become almost second nature to most, and will prove useful in any future outbreaks. Better [health literacy](#) is another helpful outcome. By now, Europeans are familiar with [key Covid-19 terms](#) and have learned to find [reliable health information](#). As a corollary, the crisis has empowered people to be more discerning about [misinformation, disinformation and digital hoaxes](#) – a pertinent skill in fighting the 'infodemic' – and boosted [public trust in science and science-based information](#). It has engendered a collective sense of recognition, esteem and gratitude towards the doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals working tirelessly to treat coronavirus patients, often sacrificing their own health. Moreover, the crisis has broadly confirmed that, despite the extreme pressure they were under, Europe's healthcare systems have by and large had the [capacity](#) to cope with one of the greatest public health crises of modern times.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Gaps in preparedness at EU and national levels in facing health crises	- Improve the EU's health security through existing and new bodies.
Shortages of essential medicines and medical equipment	- Incentivise European manufacturing of medicines and medical devices. - Revisit the EU's industrial and production model to reduce over-dependency on third countries.
Differences in hospital capacity at national and regional levels	- Encourage the establishment of common treatment structures. - Set up regional hospitals that specialise in pandemic services.
Need for a Covid-19 vaccine as a lasting solution to overcome the pandemic	- Boost European research into vaccines through joint EU laboratories for vaccine development.
High Covid-19 mortality among the elderly in long-term care facilities	- Initiate reform of the long-term care sector.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Mental health problems both among healthcare workers and in the general population	- Define and implement an EU mental health strategy.
Forceful test of health systems' resilience	- Prioritise health reforms to boost resilience.
Need to reshape notions of healthcare	- Exploit the possibilities offered by the Treaties in health or expand the EU's health competences.

Lessons the EU is learning from the pandemic

Within the limits of its powers, the EU [acted quickly](#) to help limit the spread of the coronavirus, ensuring the availability of [medical supplies and equipment](#) and supporting efforts to develop [vaccines and treatments](#), among other measures. The EU established a **rescEU strategic medical stockpile** of therapeutics, equipment and supplies under the Union civil protection mechanism, [coordinated](#) by the Commission. Under the large-scale **joint procurement of medical equipment**, launched in 2014, four calls for tenders have been successful, with more than 50 contracts signed since April 2020. EU leaders [agreed on](#), and then [reaffirmed](#), their commitment to a solidarity-based approach and many [practical examples](#) have illustrated this **European solidarity in action**. EU countries have helped each other by donating masks and delivering medical equipment to protect health workers and citizens. Some countries also took in critically ill patients from others where intensive-care capacities were at their limit. Organising this solidarity at EU level has taken a strong show of leadership. The need to **strengthen the EU's health capacity**, in order to boost resilience in health emergencies, has also been [systematically reiterated](#). With its proposal for [Next Generation EU](#), the Commission is responding to calls for common health and preparedness action. Drawing [lessons from the crisis](#), it is proposing to reinforce rescEU, the Union's civil protection support capacity. It is also putting forward a [new health programme](#), **EU4Health**, to tackle cross-border health threats, make medicines available and affordable, and strengthen health systems. It will allow for the creation of strategic stockpiles, thus complementing the capacity under rescEU for emergency response in a more forward-looking way, and will provide for a reserve of healthcare staff to be deployed in times of crisis and where such resources are most needed. EU4Health will also reinforce the European Medicines Agency and the [European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control](#). The programme's catalytic potential cannot be overstated: Health and Food Safety Commissioner Stella Kyriakides has [called it](#) a 'game changer, a real paradigm shift in how the EU deals with health'.

Joint EU-level action to help Member States **find an effective coronavirus vaccine** is [at the core](#) of the June 2020 **European vaccine strategy**. In two fundraisers in [May](#) and [June](#), almost [€16 billion](#) was pledged from the EU, governments and donors worldwide for universal access to coronavirus tests, treatments and vaccines. All eyes are also on the [upcoming pharmaceutical strategy](#), [aimed at](#) securing Europe's supply of safe and affordable medicines and supporting the European pharmaceutical industry's innovation efforts. With **Europe's Beating Cancer plan**, [also expected](#) this year, the EU wants to support Member States in their efforts to improve cancer prevention and care. This '[ambitious but realistic plan](#)' could showcase EU added value in health. The EU has also begun [exploring](#) ways to improve **health system resilience** and [new approaches](#) to **organising healthcare**. The [Conference on the Future of Europe](#) will include a debate on the future of health. If the EU harnesses this momentum, the crisis could mark a new beginning for EU health policy.

Role of the European Parliament

The European Parliament has consistently promoted the establishment of a [coherent EU public health policy](#). In an April 2020 [resolution](#), the Parliament called for the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency to be strengthened, as well as for the creation of a European health response mechanism, to improve the preparation and coordination of the response to health crises. It also suggested that a post-crisis strategy could include greater powers for the EU to act in the event of cross-border health threats, with new and strengthened instruments for EU-level coordination. In addition, the European Parliament has just created a special committee on beating cancer.

2. Using climate action to promote a sustainable recovery

The drop in CO₂ emissions due to the coronavirus crisis will be quickly forgotten if the recovery goes wrong. The EU is in a position to use the recovery from the economic impacts of the pandemic to accelerate the transition towards a climate-neutral economy, while creating jobs and safeguarding social cohesion.

Climate change: The other global crisis

Even if the number of infections, hospitalisations and deaths as a result of the coronavirus crisis in Europe has dropped significantly, the cost has been one of economic loss, unemployment and a temporary restriction of civil liberties. The impact of climate change on European society is expected to be at least as serious, but in a very different way. Climate change is happening at a much slower pace, there is a significant time lag between actions and effects, and local action on greenhouse gas emissions has a global impact, but no obvious direct local benefits. Despite almost three decades of climate negotiations, global greenhouse gas emissions have kept growing, except in times of crisis (the financial crisis of 2008-9 and the current pandemic), at the cost of increased risk of drought, heatwaves and other extreme weather events, wildfires, melting glaciers and ice sheets and rising water levels. The EU is the first major economy to announce a long-term climate neutrality target, an intention to raise its medium-term climate ambition and an overarching programme to move towards climate neutrality – the European Green Deal. All parties to the Paris Agreement must submit their long-term strategies and update their medium-term pledges by 2020.

The impact of the pandemic on climate change

The measures taken in response to the pandemic have led to a steep, but temporary, drop in worldwide [CO₂ emissions](#) (by up to 17 %), alongside other beneficial effects such as cleaner air. While most of the drop in CO₂ emissions is due to a **reduction** in social and economic activity, a **shift** in behaviour has also contributed. For example, teleworking has reduced rush hour traffic and video-conferencing has replaced business travel. Yet, the emission cuts resulting from the pandemic crisis are neither sufficient nor sustainable. They have come at a high cost in terms of welfare, employment and freedom of movement, but fall short of the sustained emission cuts needed to meet the targets of the Paris Agreement.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Deep economic crisis with a negative impact on private-sector investment in low-carbon technologies	- Introduce economic recovery packages to use public funding to kick-start the European Green Deal and accelerate the transition towards a climate-neutral and sustainable economy.
Restrictions on personal mobility for the duration of the pandemic	- Consider whether experience gained during the pandemic, in teleworking for instance, could become enduring habits, to reduce emissions from commuting and business travel.
A need for solidarity and responsibility in the face of an existential threat	- Use the opportunity of the European Climate Pact to tap into the spirit of solidarity and responsibility shown during the pandemic.
New challenges for international cooperation	- In parallel to efforts to develop vaccines and cures for infectious diseases, encourage like-minded countries to cooperate on breakthroughs in clean energy and carbon removal technologies.
A greater need for preparedness and adaptation	- In parallel with pandemic preparedness, the EU and Member States can strengthen adaptation to and preparedness for climate impacts, including the health impacts of climate change.
Disproportionate impacts on vulnerable regions and social groups, bringing inequalities between countries and between social groups into the spotlight	- Use the focus on these factors to help make climate action more inclusive and equitable, including for those who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic.

How EU climate action can contribute to post-pandemic recovery

Recovery packages: Measures to halt the spread of the coronavirus have strongly reduced economic and social activity, leading to job losses and financial difficulties for companies and citizens. To prevent a long-lasting economic depression, national governments and the EU have initiated recovery packages amounting to more than [€3 trillion in Europe](#) and [US\\$10 trillion worldwide](#). By focusing recovery funds on the European Green Deal and taking a similar approach in national recovery packages, the EU and Member States have a unique opportunity to prevent a rebound in emissions, and to accelerate the transition towards a climate-neutral economy, while also promoting European leadership in key green technologies.

New habits: The pandemic measures forced citizens, companies and schools to adopt new ways of working and communicating: with teleworking, video conferences and virtual classrooms. There is an opportunity to continue these practices, to modernise working practices, reduce time spent in traffic jams or on business trips, and cut traffic-related CO₂ emissions. The EU institutions can lead by example and the EU can support digital tools and infrastructure for telework and telepresence.

A shift in values: Citizens have shown a great willingness during the crisis to accept personal restrictions in the face of an existential threat, and to show solidarity with people at risk and medical staff on the frontline of the health crisis. The climate crisis presents a similar opportunity for solidarity with people in vulnerable regions and today's young people who will suffer most from future climate impacts and emerging climate-related health threats. The EU can address these issues in the [European Climate Pact](#) and the conference on the future of Europe.

International cooperation: The coronavirus crisis has demonstrated once again the value of international cooperation, for: sharing information about the virus and the disease, sharing protective equipment, coordinating the re-opening of borders, and developing medicines and vaccines jointly. In the area of climate action, there are opportunities to strengthen international cooperation beyond climate diplomacy, in the United Nations framework and sectoral organisations for aviation and shipping. The EU can cooperate with like-minded countries on breakthrough low-carbon and clean energy technologies, CO₂ removal and adaptation practices.

Preparedness: The pandemic has demonstrated the value of preparedness. Strong medical systems, stocks of medicines and medical equipment and pandemic preparedness planning have helped to handle this crisis. For the climate crisis, there is an opportunity to strengthen preparedness for and adaptation to the impacts of climate change, such as weather extremes or health impacts. The EU can play a leading role in risk assessment and coordination.

A focus on inequalities: The coronavirus does not affect everyone in the same way. For example, elderly people are at greater risk, some Member States have experienced larger outbreaks and some professions and business sectors have suffered more from the measures. Climate change impacts, but also the effects of climate action, are also unevenly distributed across demographic groups, regions and economic sectors. There is an opportunity here to identify these inequalities and to address them through effective social protection systems and specific EU instruments such as the proposed Just Transition Mechanism and Just Transition Fund.

Role of the European Parliament

The European Parliament has been advocating more ambitious climate action for a long time, insisting on an EU budgetary framework that provides adequate financial resources. Parliament called for the establishment of a just transition fund as early as 2017. Its [resolution of 17 April 2020](#) on EU coordinated action to combat the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences stressed that responses to the pandemic should be aligned with the EU's climate neutrality objective and that the European Green Deal and the digital transformation should be at the core of the recovery and reconstruction package. The Parliament's [resolution of 15 May 2020](#) on the new multiannual financial framework, own resources and the recovery plan calls for investment in the Green Deal, the digital agenda and European sovereignty to be prioritised in strategic sectors, and stresses that the projects that benefit from these funds must comply with certain criteria, including the Paris Agreement and the EU's climate neutrality and biodiversity objectives.

3. Re-thinking the world of work

While the coronavirus crisis has accelerated the spread of home-working to an almost general practice and has, at the same time highlighted unresolved issues in relation to digital workplaces and atypical work forms, it has also given the EU the opportunity to find more effective solutions.

Before the pandemic

At the end of 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic and the ensuing containment measures, the [employment rate](#) of people aged 20 to 64 in the EU 27 stood at 73.9%. The target of 75 %, set out in the 2020 strategy was within reach. Strong job creation over the year cut [unemployment](#) still further, down to 6.2 % in 2019 from 6.6 % a year earlier. Economic and technical changes (mainly relating to [digitalisation](#), [automation](#) and artificial intelligence) were continuing to redraw the map of the [world of work](#): new jobs appeared while others became obsolete, and atypical work patterns replaced full-time work and open-ended contracts. Social security was lagging behind, as social security systems were originally designed for workers in forms of employment that no longer applied to the working patterns of the majority of people. In addition, increasingly, work was beginning to be carried out on online platforms, or by large project teams across borders and time zones. How to achieve a good work-life balance and a better and more equal distribution of caring tasks between men and women were hot topics. Teleworking was not commonly used to achieve these goals: according to [Eurostat data](#), it was only used by 5 % of workers in 2017. Generic (or higher) digital skills were becoming a prerequisite for entry into many jobs. The largest skills deficit related to the use of software for content manipulation. Despite high unemployment rates, there was a lack of digitally skilled people to fill job vacancies. The forecast for 2020 was a [deficit](#) of more than 500 000 information and communication technology (ICT) professionals in Europe.

The impact of the pandemic on the world of work

The coronavirus public health crisis led governments to shut down all workplaces, apart from those providing essential goods and services, in order to bring the spread of the virus under control. Workers who were able to do so began to work from home, initiating an unprecedented [social experiment](#): according to one [survey](#), 37 % of the EU population was teleworking in April 2020 (in certain Member States, such as Finland, the figure was up to 60 %). Telework has ensured continuity for many businesses, and has saved many people's jobs. It has enabled working parents to continue to work despite having to care for their children full-time in the context of school closures. The line between work and home has become blurred, and work has spilled into family time for about 27 % of workers. [Research](#) has also demonstrated that the crisis has had a disproportionately greater impact on women, owing not least to their greater presence in frontline roles ([for instance, 75 % of healthcare workers are women](#)) and as carers.

The [platform economy](#) – the use of digital networks to coordinate economic transactions – has also been [affected](#). Platform providers have faced changes in demand and applied various strategies in response. This, in turn, has impacted on workers' employment and working conditions. Different types of platforms have been affected in different ways: while some (connected with the delivery of food and goods, but also software development and translation) have experienced higher demand and even expanded their services, others (household services and personal transport) have had to downscale to cope with the drop in revenue arising from decreased demand.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Lack of basic and advanced digital skills required by teleworking	- Upgrade the population's digital skills to reduce the digital skills gap.
Mandatory nature of teleworking for many workers	- Consider the transition from regular, office- and factory-based organisation of work to flexible and agile task allocation and management by objectives as the future for the organisation and distribution of work.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Difficulty for teleworking parents of having to work while also caring for their children full-time because of school closures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use this experience to explore new ways to manage and coordinate the needs of work and family life; potentially shaping new hard or soft law on work-life balance. - Harness teleworking to help maintain productivity levels.
Disproportionate impact of the coronavirus crisis on women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rethink the strategies relating to gender and work-life balance (for instance, allowing more parental leave for men).
Blurred lines between teleworking and private time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rethink the basis on which salaries are calculated, moving away from working hours, for instance, to indicators of results achieved or work done.
Insufficient social security coverage (sick leave, unemployment benefits) for platform workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further develop a coherent EU-wide approach to social security for workers in atypical work forms and establish a directive or guidelines in this area.

Turning the crisis on its head: Avenues for EU action

The downturn in factory production has raised the question of the further automation of jobs (mainly those involving routine tasks, such as assembly-line work, but also bookkeeping or accounting). If this path is pursued with due respect for [ethical guidelines](#) and the interests of both employees and employers, it could be beneficial to the economy. Another phenomenon experienced during the lockdown was the switch to digital (tasks previously performed in person were carried out online, from workers' homes). This experience has demonstrated that digital technologies can make people's physical presence unnecessary in certain cases (even for meetings, conferences or school lessons), but also that a new agility and adequate digital skills are essential. Reducing the mismatch between the skills available and those demanded for a digital transformation of the economy has been a key [EU-level priority](#) for the past decade and should continue to remain one, for instance through the new [European Skills Agenda](#).

In August 2019 a [directive](#) entered into force, introducing a set of legislative measures designed to encourage a better work-life balance for parents and carers, encouraging a more equal sharing of parental leave between men and women, and addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market. This path can be pursued in the future. Given the disproportionate impact of the crisis on women, it is necessary to seek ways to improve in women's employment conditions and to secure families' financial stability, further extending the right to flexible working arrangements to carers and working parents of children.

The [Council recommendation on access to social protection for workers and the self-employed](#) and the [Directive on transparent and predictable working conditions](#) already provide for the inclusion of new groups of workers within social security systems. This has to be made a reality: social security measures need to be extended to workers in [non-standard work forms](#) (such as platform workers, the self-employed, part-time workers, and workers with fixed-term contracts). This could be achieved through separate directives and/or guidelines for the individual groups concerned (for instance regulating the social benefits of platform workers).

Role of the European Parliament

In February 2019, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) on a comprehensive European industrial policy on artificial intelligence and robotics. It stressed that education curricula must be adapted to automation, including through the establishment of new learning paths and the use of new delivery technologies. In a 2017 [resolution](#), Parliament asked the European Commission to propose rules on robotics and artificial intelligence, in order to exploit their economic potential to the full and to ensure a standard level of safety and security. The Parliament has always followed the situation of platform workers closely. Shortly after the outbreak of the pandemic in spring 2020, Parliament addressed a [written question](#) to the Commission, expressing concern regarding the health and labour protection of platform workers in the food delivery sector and asking whether a policy proposal would be presented soon. In June 2018, MEP Joachim Schuster presented a [draft directive on platform work](#) as a contribution to the policy discussion.

4. Future-proofing education

When the pandemic forced schools and other teaching institutions to close, alternative methods, mostly dependent on digital technology, had to be adopted very rapidly. The EU has been following developments in the Member States through its agencies and networks, while video-conferences between education ministers have enabled them to discuss the issues and learn from each other's best practices.

A steep learning curve

What began as an emergency has become a revelation, as existing educational gaps have become more visible. None of the Member States was [prepared](#) but some regions fared better than others in making the transition to online schooling. Socio-economic inequalities, special educational needs and barriers to home-school communication and to communication between teachers and educational authorities have been compounded by inadequate digital tools and skills. The sudden leap has heightened awareness of resources whose potential was previously under-exploited. These include numerous online platforms and other resources that were made freely available in a bid to salvage the situation. As teachers, students and parents have experimented with new tools, [policy-makers](#) are looking at what can be [adopted](#) more systematically in the future to make education more flexible and inclusive, and what needs to be dropped. These issues are not limited to schools; vocational education and training (VET) and adult education institutes and universities have also struggled to maintain their activities. These establishments will also be involved in post-pandemic recovery efforts, with guidance and career counselling key to reskilling and upskilling the workforce.

The impact of the pandemic on education

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
(Partial) Closure of early childhood education, schools, universities and vocational education and training institutes, with some gradual and partial reopening later. Use of remote tools to compensate	- Update aspects of formal education to 21st century . Develop more mature use of technology, review curricula and bridge non-formal, informal and formal learning within life-wide and lifelong frameworks. Protect apprentices and trainees in VET. Develop emergency remote teaching models.
Suspension of on-site adult education , with some providers potentially unable to survive the impact of closure	- Develop support for adult educators and providers and a safety net for small-scale, grassroots adult education initiatives that reach the disadvantaged.
Suspension of face-to-face guidance and counselling in many Member States	- Improve easy, up-to-date information for services on skills needs, education and employment opportunities. Train staff in alternative ways to reach end-users.
Special measures to reorganise exams and admit students to the next level	- Reflect on the adequacy of current models of assessment and reconsider role of continuous and formative assessments.
Obligation on parents or guardians of young children to provide non-stop care and support the continuation of lessons from home	- Build on home-school communication and cooperation. Support learning by low-skilled parents, and resources to give parents the ability to support children's education and internet safety , while maintaining their own resilience.
Obligation upon inadequately trained teachers to improvise a sudden shift to online teaching, exposing them to increased stress and even censure	- Provide teachers with training options to add online tools to their repertoires. Encourage teachers' networks to reflect on their practices together and share experiences and resources. Consider providing technical support staff.
Students' lost access to resources such as library equipment, computers, school meals and gyms	- Ensure access to safe public recreational spaces for children; access to books and digital tools at home; make schools more permeable to the local community.
Effective remote learning depended on family resources and measures for special educational needs, increasing inequalities . Risk of increased numbers of early school	- Focus on a child guarantee to combat poverty Place greater emphasis on study skills, digital literacy and critical thinking skills. - Design tools for special educational needs .

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
leavers and young people not in education or training (NEETs)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer greater autonomy to students who struggled at school but thrived on remote learning. - Strengthen policies to lessen early leaver and NEET numbers.
Initial stranding of mobility students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop protocols for emergencies.

How the EU can contribute

While a number of EU programmes support investment in education and training, European Semester recommendations following the financial crisis to cut public spending have had adverse effects on the public sector financial support for education. The pandemic is pointing to another, possibly even deeper, recession. In the context of the [European Semester](#), this time there needs to be greater [coherence](#) between the invitation to investment in education and optimisation measures. The European Social Fund Plus, the European Investment Fund, Digital Europe, the Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ are the tools the EU will be able to deploy to deal with the gaps in education and training within the European Union.

The [European Social Fund](#) (ESF) distributes funding to the Member States to finance operational programmes and employment-related projects. This normally addresses educational gaps, poverty and social inclusion. The current ESF will be updated and become [ESF+](#) under the 2021-2027 multiannual financial framework. The revised version adopted by the Commission on 27 May 2020 strengthens the [youth guarantee](#) and introduces a specific objective to combat [child poverty](#). Both are long-standing demands of the European Parliament.

Currently, the European Investment Fund has a [new pilot guarantee facility](#) of €50 million to finance individuals and organisations looking to invest in skills and education. This will make it possible for financing institutions, universities and vocational training centres to offer loans, counter-guaranteed by the EIF, to students, learners, European enterprises and European organisations active in education and training, including in early childhood education.

The Commission has organised a pan-European [hackathon](#), to unearth disruptive solutions to challenges linked to: e-learning methods and tools; family life during remote working and education; challenges related to primary, secondary and university education; and other aspects focused specifically on students. Other initiatives include Impact [EdTech](#), a €6 million programme co-funded to accelerate the most disruptive EdTech solutions. The Commission has also indicated that it will review the digital education action plan to shore up support for online learning across the EU. This complements funding from [Digital Europe](#), the [Connecting Europe Facility](#) and [Horizon Europe](#).

Networks such as [European Universities](#) may provide a sounder basis for learning mobility. [E-Twinning](#), [School Education Gateway](#) and [EPALE](#) can further widen and deepen collaboration between teachers and other educators for professional development, and the [Youth Portal](#) and [EURES](#) can convey a good overview of work, volunteering and learning opportunities. These initiatives are supported by the EU's programme for education, training, youth and sport: [Erasmus+](#).

Role of the European Parliament

The European Parliament has often argued in favour of increased efforts to secure inclusive and [up-to-date](#) educational systems that start with early childhood and prepare for lifelong learning. As the coronavirus crisis has evolved, members of the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT) have [followed](#) the situation of student mobility closely to ensure that the Commission does all it can to promote students best interests. As negotiations unfold, the Parliament is insisting on a bigger budget for Erasmus+ in the upcoming [multiannual financial framework](#) and a more active role for itself in the governance of the programme. Parliament is looking forward to engaging actively in [discussions](#) on updating the [digital education action plan](#). Parliament considered this plan to be a [first step](#) towards a comprehensive EU strategy on digital education and skills within the nascent [European education area](#). It identified the preparation of teachers and digital skills for adults as top priorities.

5. Re-invigorating EU industry: Back to the future

Is the coronavirus crisis an opportunity to 're-industrialise' Europe? The EU is in a position to accelerate its switch towards a digital and green economy. If it can capitalise on the recovery instruments and expand its vision for the future of industry, decisive change is within reach.

Made in where?

EU is a both a global economy, and a strongly interlinked internal market. In 2019, the single market was the most important [trade destination](#) for goods for all Member States except Cyprus. The EU [value-chain](#) is however split almost equally between intra-EU and global value-chain trade (where manufacturing also includes producers from third countries) and about 70 % of total EU exports are linked to global supply chains. As is the case for other developed economies, the share of [manufacturing](#) in value added has been declining in the EU since the 1990s, partly because of the '[farshoring](#)' of production to Asia, and China in particular. The idea of reindustrialising Europe in order to stimulate economic growth and jobs has been high on the [EU agenda](#) since the beginning of the last crisis. The last few years have seen only modest [reshoring](#) however. Trade [tensions](#) before the current crisis had rekindled the debate about the sustainability of present economic [model](#).

Coronavirus: Questioning the dogmas

The pandemic and the unprecedented economic crisis it has engendered have raised the stakes. Already in early February, the manufacturing industry started to experience [shortages](#) of inputs due to developments in China. The virus has exposed the fact that in the quest for efficiency and cost optimisation – the foundations upon which the globalised economy has been built – the importance of security of supply has been underestimated. Once the pandemic hit Europe, shortages of crucial medical supplies and protective equipment, followed by shipments of substandard goods from China, highlighted the fact that heavy [reliance](#) on foreign sources can backfire in times of acute crisis. Already before the pandemic, the liberal [rules-based order](#) had been challenged. Increasing pressures on multilateralism and a changing geopolitical landscape have led the EU to place new emphasis on achieving [strategic autonomy](#) and [technological sovereignty](#). Coronavirus-related developments, such as growing scepticism about global sourcing and the questionable reliability of established ties in an emergency, are creating opportunities for a decisive strategic [shift](#) in this new [direction](#).

The measures taken to halt the spread of the pandemic, such as lockdowns and ensuing weak economic and social activity, have resulted in unprecedented drops in [CO2 emissions](#) and a much cleaner environment. What was thought by many to be near impossible occurred with dramatic speed. While 'lockdown life' is not a solution to the climate emergency, it has helped to demonstrate that a return to the *status quo ante* is not the most desirable vision for the future. This creates an opportunity for a bold vision: re-industrialise the EU by exploiting its [global leadership](#) in many sectors and technologies with high value added, greener production and a low ecological footprint.

The coronavirus crisis has also highlighted the importance of the digital dimension of our [lives](#) and [economy](#) – technology became an online lifeline when the world shut down. This calls into question established patterns of working, learning and socialising. Now that people and organisations have become accustomed to relying on digital solutions, they are likely to continue using them more than before. This offers a unique opportunity to accelerate the [digital transformation](#) of EU industry.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Unprecedented economic crisis with devastating impact on EU industry and supply chains .	- Use economic recovery packages to accelerate the green and digital transition of industry.
Virus mitigating measures leading to reduced CO ₂ emissions, cleaner air and environment	- Focus on mission-oriented policy-making to cluster policy fields and achieve common goals.
A great digital experiment of living, working and interacting during the pandemic	- Implement EU industrial strategy and expand it or relaunch a stronger version.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Intensified focus on the strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty of the EU economy and EU industry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boost the alliance and/or cooperation between R&D and industry in key areas. - Bring in new instruments, like the Strategic Investment Facility, to support key value chains and sectors. - Achieve long-term competitiveness. - Step up skilling and reskill measures. - Develop key enabling technologies. - Establish a single market for data.
Tightening of supply chains	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Achieve security of supply in strategic chains. - Reach circularity goals without the need to ensure compliance of non-EU suppliers. - Modernise supply chains using new technologies such as artificial intelligence and robotics.

Towards 'made in the EU'

Europe was once an industrial powerhouse. The return of industry to its former glory is unlikely, but this crisis could help to improve the EU's economic standing in the longer term. In order to mitigate the devastating economic consequences of the crisis, national governments and the EU are investing in unprecedented public sector [intervention](#) in the economy. Rather than focusing on a return to the status quo, the [recovery](#), is rightly being designed to have a [transformative](#) effect. As already stated in the March 2020 [industrial strategy](#), in order to remain globally competitive in the longer term EU industry must become more green and digital. If this message can be embedded within the recovery efforts (and national plans follow suit as part of a coherent [European Semester](#) framework) there is an historic opportunity to accelerate and deepen this transition. There is also an opportunity to redefine industrial strategy into a more coherent, bold EU-level vision, harnessing Europe's potential to the full, via avenues such as [smart specialisation](#) and advantageous division of labour. Regional aspects can be managed by means of [multi-level governance](#). Mission-oriented policy-making along the lines of the [European Green Deal](#) will need to become a more common practice, uniting national governments and EU institutions. To that end the EU must nurture the collective political ambition to embark on a transformative journey to a new [green](#) and digital industrial base.

Some key 'enablers' are necessary to boost the reindustrialisation of Europe. Importantly, cooperation between the research and innovation [community](#) and industry must be strengthened, focusing on [areas](#) where the EU can achieve strategic autonomy. This includes [key enabling technologies](#) and many digital technologies with high growth potential, such as [artificial intelligence](#) and [robotics](#). Some of these technologies also help to offset the cost of bringing manufacturing back to the EU. Making use of the full potential of [data](#) pooling in the EU will also be a must. The EU should also oversee delivery of critical digital infrastructure, such as 5G, through its [research](#) and [investment](#) programmes. The new [Strategic Investment Facility](#) will be an important instrument, helping to build strong and resilient value chains across the EU and enhancing the Union's strategic autonomy. Many also [advocate](#) making better use of [important projects of common European interest](#) (IPCEI) to that end. The future of industry will also depend on the [skills](#) of its [workforce](#). The European Social Fund Plus, the European Investment Fund, Digital Europe, the Connecting Europe Facility, Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ are the tools to be deployed. Tighter supply chains may also give the EU greater control of important [policies](#) such as the [circular economy](#).

The role of European Parliament

The European Parliament has long argued for the need to [strengthen](#) EU industry. In its [resolution of 17 April 2020](#) it stressed the need for a more competitive and resilient industry when contending with global shocks, calls for the reintegration of supply chains inside the EU and action to step up EU manufacturing of key products. The Parliament's [resolution of 15 May 2020](#) calls for recovery investments to centre on the Green Deal, the digital agenda and European sovereignty in strategic sectors. It also calls for an industrial strategy to match, with action to shorten and diversify supply chains.

6. Harnessing e-commerce

The closure of shops and the fear of contamination has generated a major boost for the e-commerce sector. The pandemic is an opportunity to rethink the EU framework for supporting the growth of e-commerce while securing a more protective environment for consumers and workers.

Changing consumption and labour patterns

In the last decade, e-commerce – defined broadly as the sale of goods and services online – has been growing steadily in the EU. Today around 17% of EU enterprises are [reporting](#) online sales amounting to at least 1% of their turnover (up from 13% in 2009) and the growth of e-commerce has had a disruptive effect in many ways. There has been a tremendous [rise](#) in digital services and products available online and digital contact-less payment models have been widely adopted. Digital platforms have expanded their businesses throughout the EU and some, such as Amazon, have grown [tenfold](#). Digital platforms have brought new forms of work organisation and a surge in [platform workers](#). The EU has accompanied these changes in recent years, adopting a range of common rules, for instance to end unjustified [geo-blocking](#) measures, facilitate [cross-border parcel deliveries](#) and harmonise rules on [digital contracts](#).

Pandemic impact and opportunities to rethink the EU e-commerce framework

The pandemic crisis is amplifying changes in customer demand and consumption patterns, accelerating the [switch](#) to e-commerce. Traditional brick-and-mortar shops have closed in large numbers and confinement and social distancing measures have led European consumers to turn to online shopping. Companies have therefore been obliged to shift their resources to e-commerce. Business-to-consumer (B2C) sales, especially for household essentials and food products, have increased, as has business-to-business (B2B) e-commerce. The adoption of remote online purchasing behaviour now [extends](#) to a wide range of online services, including in the entertainment, health (telemedicine) and education (online teaching) sectors. Changes in shopping [behaviour](#) are expected to lead to a significant growth in e-commerce in the long term.

However, the crisis has also raised some outstanding issues. The importance of digital infrastructure in enabling the population to connect while social distancing has highlighted the adverse effects of the [digital divide](#), not least for rural and low-income households. The impact of the pandemic has also highlighted work-related challenges in the digital environment. While some digital platforms are benefiting from the market opportunities brought by the closing of on-site businesses, platform workers, entitled to [limited](#) protection only, have been [hit](#) severely by the crisis. Consumer protection issues, such as unreasonable price increases, product safety and cybersecurity concerns have been [amplified](#) in the pandemic context as well. Consumers are increasingly likely to buy counterfeit products online and the current system to ensure the safety on online marketplaces has been [put](#) into question. However, in the new normal, consumers will require a safer online shopping environment and companies will have to adjust to new consumer expectations and provide more [transparency](#) and [cybersecurity](#). Finally, from a global and long-term perspective, the pandemic has [shown](#) the need to agree on international rules governing e-commerce. The current context is therefore an opportunity to rethink the EU's e-commerce framework in many ways.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Heightened digital divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Foster investment in the high capacity networks necessary to provide e-commerce services - Reinforce EU universal service and social inclusion policies to bridge the digital divide both within the EU and across Member States
Exposure of limited platform worker protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reflect on ways to strengthen platform workers' social rights

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
	- Clarify the situation of self-employed individuals providing services through platforms
Increased consumer protection issues in the online environment (such as unreasonable price increases and product safety)	- Reinforce product safety rules and consumer protection standards in the e-commerce space - Promote more transparency in the online environment
Increased cybersecurity threats	- Strengthen the security and infrastructure resilience of online activities
Highlighted need for international rules on e-commerce	- Foster enactment of international common rules on e-commerce - Capitalise on the EU's already well-developed framework (e.g. in consumer protection and cybersecurity) to become the global standard.

Where the EU comes in

Following its pledge to turn Europe into a [Gigabit Society](#) by 2025, the EU has been very active in fostering the availability of the broadband connectivity that is critical for the rise of e-commerce. However, there are still swathes of the EU population that do not have access to broadband. The EU should foster the adoption of financial instruments (such as the [Connecting Europe Facility](#) digital programme) as part of the next long-term EU budget 2021-2027 and could revise its [universal services](#) rules to help businesses and households connect, harnessing the power of e-commerce.

Another key condition for boosting e-commerce is strengthening online consumer protection. The EU cannot miss this opportunity to secure greater transparency and accountability online so as to protect European consumers and create a safe and trusted digital ecosystem. Against this backdrop, the forthcoming [Digital Services Act](#), scheduled for the end of the year, could tackle the dramatic [increase](#) in the online availability of illegal or unsafe products and [introduce](#) safeguards and safety obligations for products sold on online marketplaces. Furthermore, EU initiatives should be taken to foster a cyber-secure e-commerce environment, especially for [small and medium-sized enterprises](#).

While social legislation and policy on platform workers remains mostly Member States' responsibility, the EU can set guidelines and shape recommendations in the area of social policy. In this context, the EU has already begun to provide guidance on the employment status of platform workers, with the [European Agenda for the Collaborative Economy](#) and the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), and has gradually taken legislative action such as the 2019 directive on [transparent and predictable working conditions](#), which also covers platform work. There is a strong [case](#) for EU policy makers at national and EU level to consider further action to address working conditions and social protection challenges faced by platform workers.

Finally, figures in both the [European Commission](#) and the [European Parliament](#) have called on World Trade Organization (WTO) members to step up the work on developing international rules on e-commerce. By relaunching international negotiations on e-commerce the EU can promote its vision of a trustworthy online environment.

Role of the European Parliament

The pandemic is an opportunity for the European Parliament to push for a renewed agenda in different areas of e-commerce. The Parliament has long [underlined](#) the paramount importance of safeguarding workers' rights in the context of the collaborative economy. Furthermore, in its [resolution](#) on EU-coordinated action to combat the coronavirus pandemic, the Parliament expressed concerns over the digital divide, cyber threats and fraud, calling on the Member States to extend protective measures to platform workers, and urging the Commission to push forward with WTO e-commerce negotiations to establish rules for the rapidly increasing online trade. Building on on-going and new initiatives, for instance concerning [responsibility](#) for online platforms, Parliament can play a crucial role in connecting EU people and businesses and protecting EU consumers and workers in today's digital economy.

7. Using connectivity to strengthen solidarity

Necessity has brought technology to the fore as a means of demonstrating solidarity and building community. The EU has the potential to lead the way in using the massive disruption caused by the pandemic to build a more resilient and cohesive society that can not only recover from shocks but also grow from them.

#strongertogether at EU level and locally

Solidarity is one of the guiding principles of the Treaties of the European Union. Alongside pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice and gender equality, it is one of the principles that should guide the Union and its Member States. The EU [Charter of Fundamental Rights](#) establishes that solidarity includes a wide range of fields including to the right to collective bargaining, the right to all kinds of social protection and fair working conditions and the right to a healthy work-life balance. In practical terms, this implies two types of solidarity: a pan-European between countries and between individual EU citizens and the more traditional forms of national solidarity, centred on domestic (and regional/local) institutions. The ongoing [digital transformation](#) has brought about both challenges and opportunities in the 21st century. Whereas connectivity can be socially divisive, widening inequalities, it can also be the driver for growth and productivity. [Digital connectivity](#) has been harnessed for the greater good in many ways in recent years across Member States with the support of the EU.

Impact of the pandemic on solidarity and connectivity

The coronavirus crisis has opened the door to more and new manifestations of solidarity, from local and regional levels to national and supranational levels, with a wide range of players involved. The [European Solidarity Tracker](#) shows how the focus, breadth and depth of solidarity have been shifting throughout the crisis. In addition, new ways of connecting have been [critical](#) in easing the burden of confinement. From early on in the crisis, [digitally augmented human intelligence](#) has been used to help to improve understanding of the virus, monitor its progress in real time, and help to contain and combat it.

Since the pandemic hit, a great number of local-level solidarity initiatives have been taken, many facilitated by digital means. These have ranged from collective [singing](#) and applauding of health workers to boost everyone's mental health, to [online exercise classes](#), community groups mobilising [to deliver supplies](#) to elderly people and other [vulnerable groups](#) who have been shielding, and [non-profit organisations](#) and [platforms](#) being set up to link people in need of help with people wanting to volunteer. Some of these platforms also [connect groups](#) whose lives have changed dramatically owing to the lockdown measures and who could help each other, such as for example, tele-working parents and recently unemployed artists, entertainers and musicians. [Social network platforms](#), such as Facebook and WhatsApp have enabled communities to coordinate action without central control during the crisis. They enable rapid proliferation of news, task requests and real world support that a centralised organisation is not capable of on that scale.

The short-term goals of these informal community projects have been to meet an urgent need, but their long-term effect has been to help build community. Some platforms have grown into [national networks](#) of volunteers helping local community groups to organise mutual aid throughout the coronavirus crisis, and setting an example beyond their national territories. Others have grown into global movements. The [Hack the Crisis](#), a two-day online hackathon, organised by the public and private sector immediately after an emergency situation was declared in Estonia in response to the coronavirus pandemic, has spread to over 40 countries and reached more than 100 000 participants, evolving into what is now called [The Global Hack](#). This small but mighty community-driven initiative is now reaching and helping populations across continents.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Development of various manifestations of solidarity in response to need (at various levels) Solidarity at local, regional, national and European levels leading to more societal cohesion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make solidarity, cohesion and upward convergence guiding principles in the design and governance of the EU budget. - Further promote non-discrimination, equal opportunity and free movement through policies and programmes based on the principles of European Pillar of Social Rights.
Pressure to find new ways to cope with unexpected challenges, spurring breakthroughs and accelerating pre-existing trends in digital applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make the EU the 'global brain' that facilitates collective experimentation and problem solving.
Rapid roll-outs and dramatic surges in the use of technological solutions increasing the risk of infrastructure overload and breakdown, cybercrime, privacy violations and inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aim for digital resilience, e.g. by combatting the digital divide in relation to accessible and affordable internet connectivity and digital skills and competences. - Promote open data, while protecting citizens' privacy and fundamental rights.

Avenues for EU action

All these examples show a shift in the behaviour of the general public owing to the crisis. They also demonstrate how technology can be used to [build and strengthen communities](#). While technology is fundamental to overcoming this crisis, its applications also come with risks and challenges, from its potential impact on society to the inadvertent 'hardwiring' of crisis management policies to the exposure of infrastructure vulnerabilities. The EU has [several tools](#) at hand (e.g. legislation, mutual learning and funding) to promote and strengthen positive trends and circumnavigate the possible pitfalls arising from the crisis. The new proposal for a multiannual financial framework (MFF) [coupled with](#) New Generation EU aims at generating solidarity among Member States in the coming years by taking practical steps towards [mutualising debt](#), equalising fiscal resources and improving local absorption of asymmetric shocks. The future governance of the budget can improve solidarity, not least by pushing Member States [towards internal reforms](#) that prioritise a sustainable, fair and green digital transformation, while also potentially giving more responsibility and ownership to [national parliaments](#) and [citizens](#). In addition, applying the principles of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#) the EU can function as a [holding space](#) for updating welfare states to the new realities of work and daily life.

The new levels of digital connectivity could be regulated in a way that gives more opportunities for growth while mitigating inequalities. The EU can play a leading role in [policy design and practice](#), and allow more stakeholder and citizen participation and the flow of [open data](#), while [protecting citizens' fundamental rights](#). By acting as a 'global brain' with a solid institutional set-up the EU could help to harness [collective intelligence](#) – large groups of people making collective decisions often with the help of technology – to support modern day transformations. The [EUvsVirus Hackathon and Matchathon](#) organised by the European Commission in April and May, mobilising 30 000 people from across the EU, was a good example. Lastly, the Union can continue efforts to make basic [broadband available to all](#), so as to combat the urban-rural divide; to develop resilient and trustworthy telecommunications networks to meet the Commission's [Gigabit Society objectives for 2025](#), i.e. 5G and fibre networks; and to promote [skills development](#), and [digital](#) skills in particular.

Role of the European Parliament

In its April [resolution](#) following the outbreak of the pandemic, the European Parliament noted that solidarity was one of the fundamental principles of the Treaties and called for joint European action in immediate response and as a way out of the crisis. It emphasised the role of the MFF as an instrument of solidarity, and proposed the creation of an EU Covid-19 Solidarity Fund – expanded the [following month](#) to a call for a much larger recovery fund – partly outside the MFF in the form of grants and in loans guaranteed by the EU budget. It also stressed that the recovery and reconstruction package should have the European Green Deal and digital transformation at its core in order to kick-start the economy. This included the planned update of the digital education plan. In its May [resolution](#), the Parliament reiterated the need for 'an ambitious, responsible and solidarity-oriented MFF contingency plan' as the basis for adequate crisis response and recovery.

8. Accelerating the transition to sustainable and smart transport

As the EU looks beyond the crisis, the transport sector has great potential as an enabler for economic recovery through innovation and will play a key role in the transition to a more sustainable economy.

Tackling the consequences of transporting people and goods

The global trends of climate change and rapid urbanisation will outlive the pandemic, leaving policymakers to grapple with the associated challenges, including the environmental impact of transport. The EU is still fully committed to tackling climate change and improving the sustainability of transport. It has introduced CO₂ emissions limits for road vehicles and targets for alternative fuelling infrastructure and clean vehicle procurement. It supports the electrification of transport and the development of alternative fuels, while also seeking to improve the sustainability of air and maritime transport and supporting increased use of railways and inland waterways. The EU has also long championed the transformation of urban mobility and efforts to harness digitalisation and automation, so as to move towards a more sustainable and liveable urban environment.

The impact of the pandemic on transport

The imposition of confinement measures saw drastic reductions in traffic across all modes, especially in passenger transport, with predictions of a return to pre-pandemic levels several years off, and state intervention necessary to save companies in the sector. Freight transport volumes decreased as demand fell but the movement of goods by road across the EU's internal borders was ensured by the creation of [green lanes](#). Transport emissions dropped dramatically as activities were wound down, but have been increasing as restrictions have been lifted. The pandemic has added a new imperative of contagious disease prevention to the organisation of transportation and shone a spotlight on how urban mobility is organised and the associated challenges of congestion and crowding. Use of public transport and the return of travel have been sluggish since the lifting of restrictions, as people may be fearful of being exposed to the virus in confined spaces. Meanwhile, demand for transport services has changed owing to increased working from home and greater use of online shopping, which may continue into the future. The immediate steps taken by a number of cities have included encouraging cycling and enlarging bike lanes and vehicle-free zones to allow greater social distancing. However, the pandemic has also sparked a debate on how, by harnessing developments in automated vehicles, new vehicle design and mobility as a service, ways could also be found to protect people's health and boost confidence in public transport.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Greater importance of innovation and new business models for European economic recovery and global competitiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote development of smart and sustainable transport within national recovery plans. - Promote use of alternative fuels.
Need for state intervention in individual transport companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Offer incentives in state rescue packages to accelerate sustainability of transport operators, and modal shift and multimodal transport.
Possibility that companies will diversify transport supply chains and re-shore manufacturing to boost resilience against future disruptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote sustainable transport infrastructure links, and reinforce initiatives to boost freight transport by rail and inland waterways.
Greater use of e-commerce and teleworking potentially changing demand for urban mobility, with fear of infection putting people off using public transport Shift in public expectations of the urban environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Share best practices in reorganising urban spaces. - Reinforce support for the development of automated and connected mobility, intelligent transport systems and new vehicle designs. - Commit EU funding for cycling infrastructure development.
Increased public acceptance of contactless last mile delivery options, e.g. drone delivery, small automated vehicles or package robots	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforce support for research into and development of contactless delivery, including traffic management - Study appropriate regulatory frameworks to boost market development.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Reluctance to travel long distances changing citizens' expectations of holidaymaking	- Support initiatives to develop local tourism options, including cycling tourism.

Avenues for EU action

The economic downturn caused by the pandemic is [predicted](#) to be largest since the Great Depression. Innovation will be key to the return to economic growth, with those innovating quickest reaping the greatest rewards. Technological development and digitalisation in transport provide a number of opportunities to innovate with new services and business models, with a spill-over effect for other sectors, and to maintain and enhance EU competitiveness. The proposed [European recovery plan](#), along with the [Green Deal](#), already puts significant emphasis on smart and sustainable transport, with a Commission strategy to be delivered by the end of 2020. The EU should step up efforts to support research and development, develop regulatory frameworks and promote the use of the recovery package and national recovery plans to develop smart and sustainable mobility, also tackling the new health-related concerns in the sector.

With many having glimpsed a possible future for the urban environment, one where people work more from home, do more shopping online and cycle more, the EU could step up its efforts to help cities develop sustainable urban mobility, with a renewed focus on improving coherence with urban spatial planning. The planned sustainable and smart mobility strategy should be a comprehensive roadmap with concrete actions and a robust research and development support package, to harness the potential of technology and digitalisation to reduce crowding and congestion and boost sustainability. The EU could redouble its efforts to develop a framework for automated and connected vehicles and support large scale demonstration projects. It could also promote development of mobility-as-a-service solutions to bolster shared vehicle use in urban transport and micro-mobility, innovative contactless last mile delivery solutions, and innovation in new automated and sustainable public transport vehicles. In order to promote health and quality of life in the urban environment, the EU could also use the current momentum to promote bicycle use, share best practice in cities, promote use of EU instruments to develop appropriate infrastructure and study possibilities for greater use of bikes for cargo delivery. As citizens may look for tourism opportunities more locally, the EU could assist in sustainable tourism initiatives, including cycle tourism.

Examples of national assistance to the aviation sector, linked to cutting short-haul flights in competition with rail services, and to the aerospace sector, focusing investment in alternative fuel aircraft, may show the way forward. Should there be a return to pre-pandemic forecasts of traffic with estimated doubling of passenger traffic by plane and road freight transport, tripling of air freight and quadrupling of maritime container handling in the coming decades, the EU will need to do more to boost the sustainability of transport if it is to achieve its climate targets. It could put in place incentives and set ambitious targets for the production and use of alternative fuels in forthcoming air and maritime transport initiatives and for alternative fuels infrastructure. It could also support the development of rail and inland waterway transport, short-sea shipping and intermodal transport. In the EU's [industrial strategy](#), the Commission states that Europe needs to bring more manufacturing back to the EU, and the pandemic could accelerate reshoring, as companies seek to improve the predictability of supply chains. This could have an impact on transport infrastructure and increase the pressure to ensure sustainable transport links. Meanwhile, the pressure for further reshoring to within national boundaries could potentially be eased by ensuring that the EU ensures a stable framework for trade flows in the event of disruptions, such as the green lanes.

Role of the European Parliament

Through its resolutions, the European Parliament has called repeatedly for greater action to improve transport sector sustainability. The Parliament is a strong proponent of harnessing digitalisation and technological development to boost the sustainability and safety of urban mobility. It will set out its priorities for the smart mobility strategy and the economic recovery initiatives, and, as co-legislator, will shape the legislation underpinning future mobility strategies in the EU.

9. Championing European values and multilateralism

The pandemic is a global stress test for democracies worldwide. With its human-centric values more pertinent than ever, the EU has an opportunity to unite democratic allies in stepping up standards.

Seizing Europe's moment when the post-pandemic reality bites

The coronavirus pandemic is reshaping and transforming the world. It is already clear that the world is entering its [deepest recession](#) since the great depression. What has also become clear is the contrast between the EU's multilateral, human-centric approach on the one hand and the authoritarian, nationalist regime-centric model on the other. One of the earliest and most visible geopolitical effects of the crisis was the [battle of narratives](#) in which some authoritarian state actors – with China at the forefront – attempted to deflect blame for the outbreak while aggressively undermining the reputation and credibility of the EU. These campaigns appeared to promote totalitarian systems as the most efficient solution in times of crisis. Moreover, governments across the world have used the crisis as a [pretext](#) for tightening their grip on their societies, notably through limits to media freedom and freedom of expression. The pandemic has also unleashed a [new wave](#) of [surveillance programmes](#), benefiting tech companies from authoritarian countries, in which the absence of human rights have enabled such technologies to gather vast data and experience. Thus, the increased use of surveillance appears to benefit authoritarian states financially while also boosting their soft power. At the same time, the pandemic has accelerated the trend towards the diminished global leadership role of the increasingly isolationist United States under Donald Trump, who [suspended](#) US funding for the World Health Organization (WHO) in April 2020 despite the urgent need for increased global cooperation and for action to boost – rather than weaken – multilateralism in the quest for collective, sustainable, fair, democratic, and human-centric solutions.

Promoting human-centric values and governance in times of crisis

Against this backdrop, the EU's internal and global response to the pandemic has been true to its human-centric [values](#), with a pronounced, explicit focus on human rights, human dignity, health, multilateralism, sustainability and solidarity in foreign policy. Moreover, the EU's internal action on data protection, privacy and the protection of freedom has blended seamlessly with its external action. It has become ever clearer that – just as the virus knows no borders – the pressure on democracy, and the urgent need to defend it, is a task that must be tackled in a holistic manner, in unison with democratic allies across the world and in the spirit of multilateralism. International solidarity is at the heart of the EU's [global response](#) to the pandemic, including a €100 million emergency response and efforts to lead a coordinated multilateral response. The EU has already raised [€9.8 billion](#) in pledges, in line with the United Nations (UN) Secretary General António Guterres' call for any vaccine and treatment to be considered as [global public goods](#). Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has, meanwhile, [stated](#) that the EU 'will do all in its power to ensure that all peoples of this world have access to a vaccine, irrespective of where they live'. Regarding trade, where the EU has consistently promoted a more [sustainable](#) form of globalisation, the pandemic has been an opportunity to further this goal, with the [proposal](#) on new rules on mandatory human rights and environmental due diligence in EU companies' global supply chains.

Coronavirus impact on European values, including multilateralism

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Authoritarian state actors deflecting blame for poor handling of the outbreak, distracting from own failures and undermining the credibility of democratic actors such as the EU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Step up sustainable strategic communication, promoting facts about the EU's response - Boost the rapid alert system with Member States and the G7, created ahead of the European elections - Further increase cooperation with NATO.
Increasing pressure on multilateralism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lead efforts to update multilateralism to new post-pandemic realities, promoting coordination in multilateral forums.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Resilience of democracy tested across the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Boost efforts to counter foreign interference (in line with the work of the European Parliament's new special committee). - Empower citizens to reengage.
Increased surveillance and capitalisation of personal data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reinforce the EU's role as the vanguard of privacy and a values-based digital sphere, further increasing the 'Brussels effect' of its regulatory powers.
Human rights, democracy and the rule of law under pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Step up internal and external support for human rights and freedoms, including media freedom and freedom of expression. Raise the cost of violations.
Rising inequality, making societies across the world more vulnerable to tension, and boosting populist, nationalist, authoritarian tendencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sharpen the internal/external focus of the human-centric approach of the EU – including in development aid – as opposed to the regime-centric approach of authoritarian states.
Growing geopolitical rivalry, including in the EU's neighbourhood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Solidify engagement in the Eastern Partnership countries and also in the Western Balkans. - Boost the European Parliament's democracy support efforts, including in the field of human rights and election observation.

How the EU can champion European and global democracy

With multilateralism at the core of its foreign policy, the EU is playing a leading role in efforts to reform, strengthen and revitalise multilateral institutions. This includes the EU-sponsored independent [investigation](#) into the WHO's handling of the Covid-19 outbreak, as well as efforts to secure the future financing of the body. In the midst of the pandemic, the WHO and the EU have [reinforced](#) their cooperation on Universal Health Coverage to reduce health inequality. The EU's efforts to protect democracies also go beyond its borders. The EU has already assumed the role of democracies' bellwether in terms of putting pressure on key online platforms to counter disinformation. This push became an integral part of the [European approach](#) to tackling online disinformation in 2018, and efforts have been further stepped up during the 'infodemic'. Just as the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) became a gold standard for the rest of the world, the EU's Digital Services Act has the potential to project the EU's values and norms in the digital sphere far beyond the continent (the so-called '[Brussels effect](#)') as the global [vanguard](#) of digital rights. In the same vein, the '[new push for European democracy](#)' announced by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has the potential to become a new push for global democracy. To this end, the EU needs to further strengthen bonds with like-minded democratic allies around the world, as well as coordinating shared values and joint visions. These united democratic allies have to fill the – hopefully only temporary – void that the United States has left on the world stage. The EU's unique global impact as legislative and economic superpower means that, by [empowering](#) the Union to deal with a more competitive geo-political landscape, the EU automatically also empowers democracies across the world to do the same. However, this role also comes with a significant responsibility to walk the talk, not only at home, but also – crucially – in the EU's neighbourhood and the western Balkans.

Role of the European Parliament

The [European Digital Media Observatory](#), which began work on 1 June 2020, is set to be complemented by national hubs in the EU's Member States. Potential further hubs in partner countries could be involved in election observation efforts. The European Parliament plays a key role here and could – in coordination with the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – push for hubs to be established as part of efforts to align and mainstream disinformation monitoring and research across the world. With the new [special committee on foreign interference](#), to be operational from September 2020, the Parliament is sending a strong internal and external signal that it is ready to step up its role in the fight against the efforts of authoritarian states to undermine democracies. This work should be used as the basis for a holistic European approach to countering authoritarianism with a smart, multifaceted democratic toolbox.

10. Revitalising European security: From dove to phoenix?

The EU is in a position to turn the coronavirus crisis on its head and give a new 'raison d'être' to CFSP. Capitalising on security and defence instruments while broadening its vision of present and future threats could place it ahead of the curve.

The insecurity of European security

The threats to Europe's security are manifold, and immune to the virus. Conflict is brewing in the EU's southern neighbourhood and, to its east, Russia continues to [violate the truce](#) in eastern Ukraine and to unsettle neighbours through its [build-up](#) in the illegally occupied Crimean peninsula, with hybrid warfare, offensive cyber activities and disinformation activities giving growing cause for concern. Globally, the pandemic has [intersected](#) with existing tensions and weak governmental systems, prompting the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General to call for a, largely unanswered or short-lived, global [ceasefire](#). Climate change, pandemics and [biological](#) weapons: such are the threats that have become the '**new conventional' threat landscape**. While these threats are [far from being limited](#) to the military, traditional threats such as [nuclear weapons](#) maintain their relevance.

Finally, when the multilateral system suffers, the EU suffers. Caught in the crossfire of Sino-American rivalry, international institutions are increasingly paralysed. China's international confidence is in step with its place as the world's [second-largest military spender](#) but contrasts with the growing disengagement of the United States (US). The Trump administration's [retreat from multilateralism](#) is casting an ever-longer shadow over the US security guarantee to Europe. This has consequences for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and EU defence integration.

Impact of the pandemic on international security

The ravaging effect of the coronavirus pandemic has left countries vulnerable in their bid to contain and stop its spread. Europol has reported an increase in [cyber-attacks](#) as perpetrators have adapted to exploit populations' reliance on the internet during worldwide lockdowns. [Non-state armed groups](#) have increased their activities in the Middle East and Africa, taking advantage of disrupted peacekeeping and crisis management operations and of global attention being focused on the virus. For example, [Islamic State](#) has used the global distraction to recruit and to carry out attacks. Russia also increased its provocations by recurrently [violating NATO airspace](#). The coronavirus crisis has additionally inflamed the weaponisation of information, resulting in a life-threatening '[infodemic](#)' – overwhelming and confusing people with immense amounts of information. The aim is to reduce trust and increase societal [polarisation](#) so as to undermine effective crisis responses. The pandemic has also challenged 'outdated thinking about [what constitutes conflict](#)', and heightened risks of violence and instability worldwide. In short, the pandemic has acted as an accelerator for some of the pre-existing threats to European security. However, every crisis also brings opportunities.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Malicious actors exploiting vulnerabilities brought by the crisis to assert control	- Capitalise on the integrated approach. - Reinforce common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions and operations .
Economic hardship making fertile ground for conflict eruption in the neighbourhood	- Boost local training and capacity building.
Exposure of both the limitations and the indispensable nature of international organisations (UN, NATO, EU)	- Take the lead to adapt multilateralism to new geopolitical realities - Pioneer the reform of institutions
Forceful test of defences and resilience (cyber, disinformation, societal)	- Prioritise resilience and capacity-building across policy areas (including the integrated approach)
Decreased operational capacity in peacekeeping and crisis management operations	- Reinforce CSDP and broaden its scope to address new conventional threats (i.e. pandemics) more effectively.
Renewed impetus for strategic autonomy across intersecting policies	- Strengthen existing instruments. - Boost political will to deepen joint responses.

(Potential) impact	Opportunity for the EU
Decrease in defence expenditure and defence investments	- Promote the added value of initiatives for public finances such as permanent structured cooperation and the European Defence Fund.
Heightening geopolitical competition	- Consolidate a coherent EU approach to great power engagement and the EU's global role.
Reshaping of notions of 'conflict' and 'insecurity'	- Take the initiative to start discussing ways to craft anticipatory responses in unconventional scenarios with Member States.

How EU action can turn the crisis on its head

The pandemic has illustrated 'the [complex](#) nature of security' and the added-value of coordinated civil-military responses. Taking an 'all hands on deck' approach, EU Member States and institutions have deployed all means available to counter the coronavirus crisis, including the military. As [armed forces](#) supported overwhelmed civilian authorities in situations ranging from building hospitals, deploying military medics and distributing food, citizens have witnessed the versatility of military instruments in addressing crises. As future defence budgets are likely to be strained, the EU could identify new ways of **streamlining civil-military approaches** in its foreign and defence policy. Dubbed '[modern deterrence](#)' by some, civil-military answers are suitable both for addressing 'new conventional' security threats and for building resilience. EU instruments such as permanent structured cooperation, the European Defence Fund and also the [civilian CSDP compact](#), among several others, fit the bill. Furthermore, the **EU's integrated approach** – which aims to streamline diplomacy, economic sanctions and crisis management through EU external action – could be deepened and better linked with CSDP. The incorporation of new security strands into such an approach, followed by thorough implementation, would leave the EU more resilient and able to react to future threats. As defence and peacekeeping budgets tend to be [sacrificial lambs](#) in times of economic hardship, the EU will likely have to learn to do more with less.

Multilateralism is core to the EU's foreign policy and the EU can lead efforts to upgrade rather than undermine international institutions. There is room for the EU to deepen its cooperation with the UN, for instance. NATO's [response to the coronavirus](#) and coordination with the EU also showcases the value of partnership and civil-military approaches. Broader cooperation could be built into strategic planning: [NATO's 2030](#) agenda and the EU's [strategic compass process](#).

In articulating a '[robust foreign policy for the uncharted day after](#)', the EU requires an operationalised, honest and coherent threat assessment. The EU could also fill the increasingly evident vacuum in the international rules-based order. International credibility to do so however requires military power alongside civilian and normative power. A fact-based illustration of EU solidarity, the [European Solidarity Tracker](#) demonstrates that the EU is in a strong position to act as a catalyst for Member States' foreign policy ambitions. As its contributions during the crisis have become visible to citizens, the EU can use this momentum to continue winning 'hearts and minds' and to boost awareness of challenges while building the legitimacy to tackle them. The coronavirus crisis could, in this way, represent the ashes from which the dove emerges as phoenix.

Role of the European Parliament

As High Representative Josep Borrell and Commissioner Thierry Breton have [pointed](#) out, the pandemic has revived questions about the EU's [sovereignty and global role](#). They argue that, dove-like, 'Europe has come of age'. As the European Parliament has repeatedly [called for action](#) to enhance the EU's 'capacity to act as a global partner ... and as a positive force', it could do more to help other EU bodies to seize this momentum. Through its reports and resolutions, Parliament can feed a citizen-centric perspective into this debate while also raising awareness among the electorate about these matters. The global (inter)dependencies exposed by the virus provide momentum for the EU to boost its self-reliance in foreign, security and defence policies. For example, one area for immediate action could be for the EU to position itself credibly as a leader in ethical technological innovation. The Parliament has [already](#) provided valuable input in this area and [continues](#) to do so.

Whilst much commentary and analysis has understandably been focused on reaction to, and mitigation of, the immediate impact of the coronavirus crisis in Europe and worldwide, relatively little attention has been paid to areas of potential opportunity which the crisis may offer to improve policy for the future. This EPRS analysis looks at ten areas which may offer potential for progress, including working more closely together on health policy, using climate action to promote a sustainable recovery, re-thinking the world of work, future-proofing education, harnessing e-commerce and championing European values and multilateralism.

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