



## European response to COVID-19 crisis

Rarely before has a crisis of such scale impacted so many, in such a short time, across our planet. This is an unprecedented challenge to our societies, which humanity must face together. Solidarity and ambitious cooperation, not nationalism or egoism, will ensure we come out of this crisis stronger and wiser. We must leave no one behind and face this together with open hearts.

We the **European Greens** and the **Green/EFA Group** stand united to take our part in the response to the pandemic. Together.

- We express our heartfelt sympathy with all those who have been infected by the virus and are fighting for their lives as well as with their families and friends; we share the grief of those who lost loved ones to the illness.
- We affirm our solidarity with and deep appreciation for those who are risking their lives in caring for those affected by the virus. No one can underestimate what contribution they have made to our societies; this should not and will not be forgotten. Likewise, we can't thank enough all the workers who are making sure essential services are maintained, risking their own health every day.
- We salute the initiatives and creative solutions from ordinary people and organised civil society across the EU which are helping our societies to cope with our new daily reality. We also deeply value the role of local governments and administrations that are on the front-line in managing this crisis on the ground.
- We salute the signs of solidarity that we have witnessed among countries and regions. At the same time, we strongly regret the lack of solidarity from EU Member States shown during this crisis in particular towards Italy, whose call for medical supplies remained unanswered, and towards Spain, also heavily affected by the current situation. We ask all the Member States as well as the EU institutions to coordinate together along with all European states in our region, in order to guarantee the most strategic production and efficient use of medical supplies, exchange of information and expertise, economic support as well as the continuation of free circulation of goods in order to avoid possible shortages of basic goods.

- The private sector has shown bright examples of responsiveness and creativity in answering the crisis. But here too, we are witnessing attempts at taking undue advantage, exploiting the legitimate anxieties of the population. In particular, we strongly oppose all attempts at the mass collecting of personal data, be it by private or public institutions.
- We recognise that EU governments are now acting, in good faith, to identify the best way to overcome the health crisis and its social and economic consequences. Wherever Greens are in government or in opposition, we are sparing no effort to contribute to the common goals.
- We are however gravely alarmed by the unilateral actions of certain EU governments particularly with regard to the emergency measures. Any restriction to fundamental and human rights must be as limited as possible in its duration, and in any case effective, but not disproportionate. We are highly concerned by some governments attempts to benefit politically from the pandemic. The crisis should not be misused as a pretext for destroying democratic checks and balances, nor social and labour rights. Governments should remain accountable, and extraordinary powers must be applied in good faith.
- We welcome the commitments already made at EU level by the Commission and the ECB to do “whatever it takes” to mitigate the economic and social consequences of this crisis, in particular in regards to the suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact as well as the Quantitative Easing plan of the ECB, but we believe they must go further. In particular we demand financial assistance to those Member States that are most severely affected, through grants and low interest loans without any politically dangerous conditionality. Governments and EU institutions should work together urgently set up Eurobonds to help raise the required funding for health and recovery policies.
- We also urge the Member States and the EU to coordinate in order to foresee strong measures to prevent massive job losses and to stabilize the income of workers affected particularly the most vulnerable. For the time immediate after the crisis we will need an investment package, which should be focusing on small and medium size companies, solo-workers and should contribute to gearing our economy towards a social-ecological transition.
- We acknowledge the global dimension of this crisis and the solidarity European countries have been already offered by many non-European States. In the same way, EU solidarity must not stop at EU borders, the EU must deliver the necessary humanitarian aid and the best medical resources, particularly to countries in the Global South. The EU must ensure maximum collaboration with the WHO and other international bodies to develop an effective medical response (research cooperation for vaccines etc) and to share that research.

In tackling the crisis, we believe our common compass should be guided by following elements:

1. We must collectively ensure that no one is left behind, especially those who are most vulnerable within and on the fringes of our societies. In no way should our crisis management deepen injustice and exclusion. We believe in particular that the management of this crisis should not prevent the EU and its Member States, together with other European countries, from acting urgently and responsibly to relieve the worsening situation in migrant camps on the Greek islands. The migrant camps on these islands must be evacuated in order to ensure safe access to healthcare, quarantine and other appropriate measures against the coronavirus.
2. An effective, efficient and lasting response to the crisis demands collective action. Protecting lives means leaving behind narrow national or economic interests. In that sense, while we salute the coordination efforts of the EU institutions thus far, they must now switch to a leadership role.
3. Finding answers to the crisis requires us to act and think out of the box, notably in terms of macro-economic policy. Organisations, laws, rules and procedures must be made to serve life, not the other way around.
4. Public, free and well-funded healthcare systems are and must remain a backbone of our welfare states and the EU should strive for more cooperation among them and for mechanisms to support them further. We want to turn this crisis into the starting point for more European integration, moving towards a stronger, greener and more social Europe.

Let us make no mistake about this: the way we manage this crisis and our ability to coordinate and mutually support each other, can either irremediably damage both the European project and our democracies as we know them; or, conversely, it can reinforce both.

We are convinced that once this crisis is overcome, there can be no going back to business as usual, nor can it be used as an alibi for harsh austerity policies as was the case after the global financial crisis. Like climate change, which will remain an urgent and existential challenge, the pandemic profoundly questions the way our societies are organized, the way we live on this planet and a host of conventional policies. More than ever, we collectively need a new compass; in that perspective, the COVID-19 crisis reinforces the absolute need for transformative initiatives such as a bold European Green Deal and a massive reinvestment in quality public services, above all in the health sector. Only then will this crisis lead to more just, more sustainable and more democratic societies.

In addition, the Greens/EFA Group believes the following measures are crucial to getting us all through the crisis and better preparing us for future shocks:

## **1. LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND**

- The protection of the most vulnerable must be the priority at this time. It is crucial that the EU coordinates the critical preparedness, readiness and response actions

of Member States. The EU must assist Member State governments to pool best practices and support those groups and people who are socially isolated, those with certain pre-existing medical conditions, the homeless, the elderly, and those, such as the Romani (the largest ethnic minority of the EU) who are marginalised or suffering from discrimination and inequalities in access to health care and detainees. Continued provision of personal assistance and care for persons with disabilities must be guaranteed.

- Targeted measures must be taken to protect the homeless and to provide financial assistance to those NGOs and local authorities providing frontline assistance.
- The Commission and governments must ensure that health-related information and general public safety-related information is presented in a clear and simple manner, including in accessible and usable formats for persons with disabilities.
- We must not forget vulnerable people, including refugees and asylum seekers trapped in appalling conditions at the EU's borders who should be immediately relocated to safe places in EU Member States where they too can access healthcare, irrespective of their residence status.
- The EU and its Member States must use every financial instrument available to support the hundreds of thousands of people who have lost their jobs or income across Europe because of this crisis.
- For those able to work from home, as well as children and students who need to study and others who have to isolate themselves, the Commission should ensure that Member States implement current telecom rules that require everyone to have access to an affordable and adequate broadband internet service.
- Policies implemented to combat this health emergency must include a gender and child protection perspective focused on areas where women and children are disproportionately impacted to the coronavirus outbreak. In particular, services for victims of violence must remain open and available. Reports on gender based violence must not be considered less important or disregarded during this time. Special measures should include the reinforcing of helpline services, the organising of networks of support and a public information campaign overseen by Commission to inform victims and witnesses to domestic violence about their rights.
- EU solidarity must not stop at EU borders. A continent as rich and developed as ours should lead by example in helping other countries face COVID-19 with the necessary humanitarian aid and the best medical resources. The EU must strive to be a leader in international solidarity.
- The EU must ensure maximum collaboration with the WHO and other international bodies to develop an effective medical response (research co-operation for vaccines etc) and to share that research.
- Any restriction on fundamental rights to fight the COVID-19 outbreak must be as limited as possible in its duration, and in any case effective, necessary and proportionate. The crisis cannot be used as a pretext for destroying democratic

checks and balances. Governments should remain accountable, and extraordinary powers must be applied in good faith.

- We welcome and support the statement issued by the European Data Protection Board with regard to processing of personal data. While anonymised and aggregated data, including from mobile phone networks, might be useful for assessing the effectiveness of distancing measures, we reject any individualised tracking based on this data, since it is too diffuse anyway to locate and trace contacts. Instead, testing facilities have to be massively enhanced, including through EU-wide coordination. It is paramount, that democratic, parliamentary oversight and a clearly defined expiration period is set out for these emergency measures and that they are dismantled gradually with an improvement or solving of the COVID-19 crisis.
- The EU must act against attempts to misuse the Corona emergency to curtail democracy and silence critics of authoritarian governments. Viktor Orbán's emergency bill to govern by decree, merely inform, not any more consult parliament and impose chilling punishment on the spread of what government considers fake news is unacceptable. We call on the EU Commission to call out this authoritarian attack on Hungarian democracy for what it is, as Commission defended democracy in Poland and Romania against unacceptable draft laws before.
- Actions by governments and the Commission must remain under strict public and parliamentary scrutiny, also to guarantee they are respected as legitimate. Therefore, parliaments need to find ways to remain operational while being exemplary in living anti-corona safety recommendations. The European Parliament shows how digital work and voting in urgent cases can reconcile European democracy with the emergency imposed by the virus.

## **2. USE THE SINGLE MARKET TO SAVE LIVES**

- Governments and EU institutions must cooperate to the maximum extent to ensure a coordinated response, proactively sharing – including through the use of common EU databases- all relevant information and expertise to ensure that medical supplies, food and other essential goods and personnel can move freely across borders to meet the needs across the EU.
- The Commission and Member States must ensure not only the free flow of medical material and equipment such as protective clothing, testing kits and ventilators, but also ensure a coordinated EU-wide approach to stepping up production and distribution to where it is most needed. This could include setting up fast-track joint procurement procedures and requisitioning where necessary in the public interest.
- The need for hospital beds must also be identified and the supply managed in a cooperative EU-wide manner so that countries with spare capacity can help those most under strain.
- The Commission must waive or ignore, at least for the duration of the crisis, any commercial or trade barriers to the production and distribution of items essential to

the medical response to COVID-19 created by patent rights on medical products or related restrictions on scientific research or provisions in trade-agreements.

- While temporary border measures may be acceptable, provided that they are appropriate, proportionate and limited in time, they may not infringe free movement rights, in particular the non-discrimination principle. The cross border travel of frontier workers, in particular healthcare and elderly care professionals but also in the food sector (including seasonal farm workers) must not be limited and their healthcare must be ensured. Furthermore, border measures may not affect the right to asylum nor the right to family reunification or family life, or have the result that people are not allowed transit to reach their home country. Borders must be kept open for trade, and in particular the supply of food. Checks must be fast tracked so that fresh products do not spoil. The need for cross-border seasonal farm workers may become even more pressing if, as many envisage, there will be a second COVID-19 wave coinciding with the harvest period.
- Until the situation of long queues and refusal of entry at certain borders between Member States and between the latter and third countries is under control, all exports of live animals to non-EU countries and all transport of live animals on journeys over 8 hours between Member States should be suspended.
- The EU and its Member States need to ensure that any barriers at EU level in Single Market and Economic and Monetary Union rules are rapidly identified and removed to allow reasonable national measures, for example, the deferral or temporary lowering of taxes, interest on loans, rents, utility bills and other fixed costs – designed to alleviate the financial burden on individuals and businesses (in particular SMEs).

### **3. CRISIS BUDGETS MEAN INVESTMENT, NOT AUSTERITY**

- What people need most at this moment is reassurance that political leaders (from the national to the local level) and EU institutions will, together, act decisively do “whatever is required”. We call upon those authorities to think “out of the box” of self-imposed institutional limits and be courageous and creative in finding and delivering the medical, social and economic means to overcome COVID-19.
- The Commission’s Corona Response Investment initiative is welcome but the EU institutions and Member States must go even further and urgently find and deploy every eurocent of unallocated EU budget and mobilise all non-committed money in the EU budget – whether under the Common Agriculture Policy, Cohesion funds, European Globalisation adjustment fund or European Social fund to meet the medical, social and economic needs of the fight against COVID-19. The needs of countries that were already suffering economically before COVID-19 must be given special attention.
- EU institutions should move swiftly to allow a significant increase of programmes and funds mobilised in the framework of the EU response to the COVID-19 crisis. The 2020 EU budget includes margins and flexibility instruments of more than



EUR4.0 billion, which need to be urgently mobilized. No EU region should be left behind.

The EU institutions should swiftly and before the summer break adopt an upward revision of the MFF regulation in order to allow a significant increase of programmes and funds mobilised in the framework of the EU response to the Covid-19 crisis.

- The EU institutions must agree on a “Multi-annual Financial Framework” that sets EU budget limits in the long term and accept the need, for the EU to have the overall resilience the crisis has underlined the need for, of an overall size of the budget of 1.3% GDP.
- The EU must ensure more visibility and predictability for next year’s budget before the summer, either by agreeing on the forthcoming MFF at the above-mentioned level or by adopting a contingency plan in order to avoid a general shutdown of the EU programmes at the end of 2020” .
- It is critical that the European Stability Mechanism immediately extends precautionary credit lines to countries that seek access to it as a result of financial distress caused by COVID-19. Given the extraordinary nature of the current crisis, this funding must not be subject to fiscal conditionality.
- Member States which are the most severely affected, as Italy, should be financially helped without having to borrow and without politically dangerous conditionality. Governments and EU institutions should work together urgently set up Eurobond facilities to help raise the required funding for health and recovery policies. EU Member States should agree on a significant injection of capital into the European Investment Bank to enable it to rapidly contribute its substantial firepower to mitigate the economic impact of COVID-19, including the creation of a new EIB credit line to guarantee permanent liquidity to small and medium-sized companies.
- SMEs can be further helped by changing public procurement rules to allow local firms to be favoured in public tenders.
- This crisis has made it clear yet again that the EU, and the Eurozone in particular, lack the tools of economic governance that allow the shifting of funds to where they are needed to stabilize economic conditions. It is therefore key that ongoing reforms of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) governance take the need for stabilization into account. Such reforms include the Budgetary Instrument for Convergence and Competitiveness, as well as considerations for a reinsurance system for national social security schemes.
- Solidarity, including financial support, must also be extended to our neighbours, including the countries in the Western Balkans that are working to join the EU in the future. Being aware of aggressive Russian and Chinese propaganda efforts exploiting the COVID19 pandemic with the aim to undermine the EU and to sow mistrust in the local population towards the EU, it is crucial to counter these narratives and effectively assist and communicate about EU’s financial, technical and medical support.

- It is now critical that the “European Stability Mechanism” – the fund set up for that purpose – immediately extends precautionary credit lines to countries which could potentially enter into financial distress from. This funding must not be subject to “austerity” conditions as they have in the past. It is also key to set-up an interest-free loan system for National Social Security Schemes to support reduced working-hours, whether for employees or the self-employed, and workers affected by temporary dismissals.
- The COVID-19 crisis has underlined the vital importance of well-funded and coordinated, free and universally accessible public health systems. This should never be forgotten in setting priorities at EU and national level that affect the funding and working conditions in these priority public goods.

#### 4. WE MUST BUILD A BETTER FUTURE

- We must learn the key lessons from the current crisis and work together to rapidly put in place all the necessary means at EU, national and international level to face such crises with confidence in the future.
- The COVID-19 crisis has shown that we need more, and not less Europe. We are convinced that, now more than ever, the Conference on the Future of Europe needs to lead to reforms of the Union and its decision-making mechanisms. The EU must be enabled to decide and act in a coherent and solidary manner when crises arise.
- We believe that this crisis should make our leaders rethink our socio-economic model in order to make it more resilient to systemic threats – be they environmental, medical, economic or societal in origin. We need to rebuild our systems in a way that they take into account planetary boundaries as well as providing the well-financed essential public services and other means to ensure a fair and resilient society.
- COVID-19, swine flu, SARS, MERS all arose when viruses jumped from animals to humans. The interface between humans and animals must be the focus of major international collaboration to ensure improvements that reduce the risk of future epidemics.
- The crisis has underlined how much we all depend on the tremendous work of often underpaid and overworked occupational groups in hospitals, shops and care-facilities – the majority of whom are women – and many working in direct contact with others despite the associated danger of infection. We must not forget these people’s contribution after the immediate crisis is over and reflect our gratitude by ensuring the improvement of their working conditions.
- The fight against climate change and biodiversity loss provides potential for huge job creation and economic development that can help the EU economy recover from the COVID-19 shock. Beyond funding the pressing short term needs, funds at EU level – whether from the EU budget, ESM or EIB – should be massively increased and channelled into an EU-wide Green Recovery Investment Package that goes beyond the current Sustainable Investment Plan in terms of ambition.