

Commissioner's monthly update

May 2020

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Good afternoon

As Europe continues working together to fight this pandemic, researchers and innovators are key. They are providing the scientific knowledge that we need to beat coronavirus, and we need to support them. To have even stronger impact, we need to cooperate closely across the EU and beyond, and keep supporting open science and the principles of open access.

Yesterday's [Coronavirus Global Response](#) virtual pledging conference kick-started efforts to close the immediate budget gap and accelerate the development and deployment of universally available and affordable vaccination, treatment and diagnostics. [The opening event already raised €7.4 billion](#) from donors worldwide, including [€1 billion under Horizon 2020](#) budget. This almost reaches the [initial target](#) of €7.5 billion and is a solid starting point for the worldwide pledging marathon, which will continue in the coming weeks.

I continue to work closely with national ministers and the European Parliament to tackle the crisis. On 24 April, I had an exchange of views with the European Parliament Committee on Industry, Research and Energy and on 4 May another exchange of views, this time with the Committee on Culture and Education. I warmly welcome the support EU research Ministers gave to the first immediate [“ERAvsCorona” Action Plan](#) and I was glad to launch the [European COVID-19 Data Platform](#) that gives researchers an open, trusted, and scalable environment to store and share information to help us better understand, diagnose and eventually overcome this pandemic. Our own experts at the Joint Research Centre manage [a unique database of containment measures and casualties](#). As they have since the start of the crisis, JRC experts continue to monitor and model the expected development of the pandemic, feeding into [the European roadmap to lifting containment measures](#).

Throughout April, we redoubled our efforts to support culture, education and sport through this pandemic. I took part in ministerial conferences on all three areas over the last month. These meetings were a good opportunity to present measures the Commission is taking, including the [Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus](#), [Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency \(SURE\)](#) and [the Temporary Framework for State Aids](#). I reminded Member States that these horizontal measures could be used for the education, culture and sports sectors. I also announced the [actions we're taking within the Creative Europe programme to support culture](#). Of course, we are fully aware that the answers to the current crisis cannot consist only of temporary measures. The pandemic sheds light on the most pressing challenges of our times in education. The prominence of distance learning has highlighted the need to ensure inclusive and equitable access and to deploy the best online learning methods, which effectively deliver academic excellence. The European Commission will soon present an updated [Digital Education Action Plan](#) for this purpose.

One of the economic sectors most hit by the crisis is culture. It was therefore

essential that culture was among the initial five areas eligible to receive support through the Temporary Framework for state aid. It was a good signal to see the [extension of the Commissions' crisis aid rules](#), which now include State aid for research and development related to COVID-19, facilitating the support that research and innovation can give to tackling this emergency.

Just over a week ago, under my patronage, we called on Europe's innovators to hack the coronavirus challenge and work together for ground-breaking solutions to this crisis that support our citizens. 21,000 participants from 141 countries, supported by hundreds of partners and volunteers, submitted 2,150 solutions. A total of [117 innovative solutions](#) were selected as winners and will become reality in the near future. The pan-European hackathon is an example of how Europe can come together in times of crisis. It's inspiring to witness this show of solidarity by our community of innovators.

The coronavirus outbreak is a global emergency, and we need to defeat it together. I was pleased to see the [EU and Africa stepping up their collaboration](#) through the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership ([EDCTP](#)), which is a key player in the global health research arena. Now, extra funding is available and initiatives ongoing to combat the outbreak outside EU borders too.

The JRC's work continues to be fundamental and internationally renowned. Last month I received a letter of thanks from the WHO, for the positive collaboration on the [Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources](#) initiative. The system we have developed together sorts through 228,000 articles on coronavirus daily, making it available to experts across the globe who are tracking the pandemic.

Reliable testing remains a key part of moving past this crisis. I'm proud to see that [the JRC-developed control material](#) for accurate tests is now being used by laboratories across Europe and beyond. Together with [new criteria to help improve overall test performance](#), this will benefit all EU citizens.

JRC research sites are also playing their part in helping local communities. Labs in Geel and Ispra are donating stocks of personal protective equipment to hospitals. [A workshop in Ispra has been repurposed to produce 3D printed ventilator equipment](#), and computers are being lent to local families in Lombardy to help provide children with the equipment they need to continue their education during lockdown.

With best wishes for the month ahead,

Mariya Gabriel

My portfolio updates

Coronavirus Global Response: €1 billion mobilised under Horizon 2020

To help reach the objectives of the [Coronavirus Global Response](#), €1 billion will be mobilised under Horizon 2020.

The €1 billion from Horizon 2020 can be broken down into:

- €450 million for developing scientific solutions for testing, treating and preventing against the coronavirus and developing health systems;
- €400 million EC guarantee of the European Investment Bank lending to finance pre-commercial stage investments in COVID-19 (including scale up of relating production facilities);
- €150 million for disruptive innovations on COVID-19 under the European Innovation Council's Accelerator.

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#StrongerTogether – An ERAvsCorona Action Plan to fight the virus

On 7 April [EU research and innovation Ministers](#) supported 10 priority actions of [the ERAvsCorona action plan](#).

Building on the objectives and tools of the [European Research Area](#) (ERA), the Action Plan includes short term, joint efforts to tackle coronavirus.

As part of the Plan, [the Commission launched](#) a [European COVID-19 data platform](#) for rapid collection and sharing of research data, marking another milestone in EU efforts to support researchers fighting the pandemic. It is the result of a joint effort by the Commission, the European Bioinformatics Institute of the European Molecular Biology Laboratory ([EMBL-EBI](#)), the [Elixir](#) infrastructure and the [COMPARE project](#), EU countries and others.

Other actions focus on funding coordination, extending clinical trials, supporting innovative companies, a one-stop shop [ERA Corona platform](#) with all funding opportunities, and supporting a [pan-EU EUvsVirus Hackathon](#).

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#EUvsVirus Hackathon for innovative solutions to coronavirus challenges

On 24, 25 and 26 April the European Commission - in close collaboration with EU member states – [hosted a pan-European hackathon](#) that connected [21.000 participants](#) from civil society, innovators, partners and buyers across Europe to develop innovative solutions to coronavirus and deploy them across the EU Single Market.

The [#EUvsVirus Hackathon](#) addressed six categories of problems that need short-term solutions: coronavirus health and life, business continuity, remote working and education, social & political cohesion, digital finance and an open category for other challenges.

The event, which involved over 380 volunteers, 2,400 mentors and over 800 partners, brought together people of 141 different nationalities, as well as different areas of expertise. [117 innovative solutions were selected as winners of and announced on 30 April](#), out of 2160 submitted proposals for 37 challenges.

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Additional €150 million for the European Innovation Council to fund breakthrough ideas tackling coronavirus solutions to coronavirus challenges

On 30th April, the European Commission approved €150 million of additional budget for the [European Innovation Council \(EIC\) Accelerator](#) to support game-changing innovations to tackle the coronavirus crisis. The Commission will also award special [Seals of Excellence](#) to high quality coronavirus relevant applications that cannot be funded with this €150 million in order to support their financing from other sources. Companies selected for EIC support will be announced in late May.

A record number of close to 4000 start-ups and SMEs applied to the EIC Accelerator pilot in March - over 1000 of which have innovations relevant to the coronavirus outbreak. With the EIC, the Commission aims to be flexible, adaptable and fast, be able to respond to this demand for R&I funding, especially in times of crisis.

This support to start-ups and SMEs is part of the Commission's coordinated [coronavirus response](#).



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State Aid extended for Covid-19 R&D

To enable Member States to accelerate the research, testing and production of coronavirus relevant products, to protect jobs and to further support the economy in the context of the coronavirus outbreak, the Commission adopted a [Temporary Framework for State aid](#) allowing targeted, effective and rapid state aid in response to this crisis.

On 3 April 2020, the Commission [extended its crisis aid rules](#). Now, they also facilitate State aid specifically for research and development (R&D) related to COVID-19. To address the current health crisis, Member States can now grant aid in the form of direct grants, repayable advances or tax advantages for coronavirus and other relevant antiviral R&D. A bonus may be granted for cross-border cooperation projects.



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#CreativeEuropeAtHome: highlighting online cultural activities

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the cultural and creative sector, artists and their audiences alike. Many activities carried out under the Creative Europe Programme cannot take place as planned due to measures to contain the spread of the virus. While there is no denying the gravity of the situation, it is also important to acknowledge and highlight the many positive examples of cultural and creative life in Europe: movie archives opening up their websites for the public, theatres and musicians livestreaming their performances online, and so on. With this in mind, we launched #CreativeEuropeAtHome - a social media campaign highlighting great online cultural activities throughout the Creative Europe community, available to culture lovers currently stuck at home.



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Creatives Unite: new platform by the sector, for the sector

We've also set up two new platforms to support the cultural and creative sectors during the pandemic. One platform helps Member States to share best practices. A second platform is done by the sector, for the sector, was launched today - [Creatives Unite](#)

Creatives Unite is a single access point for everyone looking for information on cultural and creative sector initiatives in response to the crisis. It will help them sort through the multitude of resources, provide weblinks to relevant networks and organisations and offers a platform to co-create and upload contributions to finding solutions.



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Creative Europe: supporting culture during the pandemic

The European Commission remains committed to supporting, with all its means, the culture and creative sectors. Several actions are being taken within Creative Europe, including:

- additional funding for the book translation scheme;
- redirecting the work of the Support scheme for the cross-border dimension of performing arts works towards digital and virtual mobility, with a €2 million call;
- speeding-up the evaluation of the 2020 cooperation projects to allow a first substantial part of the overall sum to reach the sector via the pre-financing instalments very quickly;
- €5 million supplementary allocation of funds in the form of 'vouchers' for those cinemas most severely affected by the lockdown;

all these measures are either already launched or will be before the summer.

The European Commission has now prepared a full set of actions to adapt and reinforce the Cultural and Creative Sectors Guarantee Facility so that it can be used optimally in this specific situation. Actions include allowing for credit

holidays or setting aside payments of the interest on loans for several months.

Lastly, in order to communicate on the available measures in the Creative Europe programme and via other horizontal tools, the European Commission have updated the current information available online on how the EU supports its cultural and creative sectors during the pandemic. The most up to date information, published on 27 April, [can be found here](#)



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Commission issues guidelines on coronavirus testing

The Commission has released [guidelines on coronavirus testing methodologies](#), as part of the European Roadmap towards lifting coronavirus containment measures.

Test performance criteria developed by the JRC are intended as additional guidance to the requirements laid down by [EU legislation](#).

The guidance aims to support Member States in effectively using testing tools in the context of their national strategies and during the different stages of the pandemic, including when phasing out confinement measures.



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JRC: science and knowledge in a time of crisis

From the preparation of guidelines and control materials for testing and better characterisation of the pandemic, to the detailed analysis of epidemiologic and economic impacts, the JRC is evaluating and anticipating the evolution of this crisis so that it can be managed effectively.

Security remains a top priority and the JRC is involved in monitoring and early detection of risk signals.

Social aspects and the environmental perspective cannot be forgotten – the JRC is carefully monitoring the situation from the citizens' perspective. Understanding their fears and concerns will allow national and international institutions to better manage the crisis.



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European Union Prize for Literature: shortlists announced

On 16 April we published [the European Union Prize for Literature 2020 shortlists](#). The Prize is awarded annually to new and emerging authors, recognising literary talent from all corners of Europe. It is open to the 41 countries involved in the Creative Europe programme, with all countries taking part over a three-year cycle. National juries comprised of publishers, booksellers, authors and critics will select the winners from each of the 13 countries participating this year. The winners will be announced on 19 May and will receive their awards at a ceremony in Brussels on 29 September. The EU Prize for Literature also joins the #CreativeEuropeAtHome campaign with new online activities to promote their laureates and bring their stories directly to audience's homes – [find out more](#).



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Supporting education during the pandemic

On 6 April we launched an online forum for Member States representatives to exchange on continuity of education during the coronavirus crisis. I announced this platform at a Ministerial video conference on 12 March, to facilitate exchanges between ministry representatives in European education systems on the topic of distance learning during the crisis.

We have also been organising regular webinars with Erasmus+ National Agencies(NAs)to reply to the increasing questions and concerns of participants. These webinars include a targeted one on Crisis Communication during the pandemic, which took place on 30 April to ensure NAs will receive support and good practices to tackle the communication challenges during the pandemic.

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3D-printed valves for emergency ventilator masks

Various different services of the JRC are making efforts to support local services.

A technician working at the JRC's technical workshop is using a 3D-printer to produce valves for emergency ventilator masks for use at a local hospital.

The JRC's medical service has donated personal protective equipment to hospitals care homes.

50 PCs have also been donated to facilitate distance-learning activities.



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Calls and collaborations

Top-up funding awarded to ERC grantees to spur innovation

Fifty five grantees of the European Research Council have been awarded ERC Proof of Concept grants to explore the commercial or societal potential of their research results. The grants are part of the EU's research and innovation programme, Horizon 2020.

The awarded projects cover a variety of topics e.g., a faster and cheaper approach to detect disease-causing microorganisms; low-power, energy-harvesting hearing implants; or developing a sustainable social business to manage and ethically distribute donated DNA data to scientists.



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An EU global strategy against coronavirus – Stepping up R&I cooperation with Africa

As part of the [EU global response to coronavirus emergency](#), the EU has been stepping up its research and innovation cooperation with Africa to combat the outbreak.

In April, the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership ([EDCTP](#)) launched [three calls for expressions of interest](#) funded with up to €28 million from Horizon 2020, to support research on the coronavirus, strengthen research capacities, and develop pandemic preparedness in sub-Saharan Africa.

The EDCTP brings together the EU, 16 African and 14 European countries to fund research to combat infectious diseases in sub-Saharan Africa. It funds clinical research to accelerate the development of new or improved medical interventions against infectious diseases in sub-Saharan Africa.

[Factsheet with an overview of all Coronavirus-related activities by the EDCTP.](#)



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European Institute of Innovation and Technology supports coronavirus response

Europe's largest innovation ecosystem, EIT, have created a COVID-dedicated webpage that presents the measures, activities and solutions powered by its eight [Knowledge and Innovation Communities \(KICs\)](#) to respond in a strategic and operational manner to the short-term challenges resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.

For example, [the EIT Health KIC is providing more than €6 million in funding](#) for short-term projects to help combat the pandemic as part of its Rapid Response initiative.

The webpage also looks ahead to the expected immense economic and social challenges to follow.



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Marie Skłodowska-Curie actions during the pandemic

In light of the coronavirus pandemic and the difficulties applicants or participants may experience, the Commission has created [a dedicated info page](#) with all the relevant, up-to-date information for the MSCA Community in one place. We have also decided to [extend the RISE 2020 call deadline](#) by two weeks, until 12 May 2020, 17:00 Brussels time.

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European Solidarity Corps: volunteers play their part

European Solidarity Corps volunteers are providing help and support, where possible, during the coronavirus pandemic. [Learn more about their activities.](#)

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