

COVID-19 – Council adopts measures for immediate release of funds

The EU is taking swift action to make available money to help tackle the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council today adopted two legislative acts to quickly **release funding from the EU budget** for tackling the COVID-19 crisis. One of the acts amends the rules of the structural and investment funds, while the other extends the scope of the EU Solidarity Fund.

The **Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative** will give member states access to **€37 billion of cohesion money** to strengthen healthcare systems, as well as support small and medium-sized enterprises, short-term working schemes, and community-based services.

Of the total, about **€8 billion** will come from unspent pre-financing in 2019 under the structural funds. The new measure allows member states to spend unused money to mitigate the impact of the pandemic instead of returning it to the EU budget. Another **€29 billion** will be disbursed early from allocations which would have been due later this year.

Expenditure will be made available as of **1 February 2020** to cover costs already incurred in efforts to save lives and protect citizens.

Member states will also have **greater flexibility to make transfers** between cohesion policy programmes in order to redirect resources to where they are most needed.

The Council also amended the scope of the **EU Solidarity Fund to include public health emergencies** in addition to natural disasters. This will help member states and accession countries meet people's immediate needs during the coronavirus pandemic.

Next steps

Given the urgency of the situation, both legislative acts will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 31 March and will enter into force on 1 April 2020.