

Stronger together: EU Agencies join forces to respond to COVID-19

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, nine Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) agencies (CEPOL, EASO, EIGE, EMCDDA, eu-LISA, Eurojust, Europol, FRA and Frontex) have been supporting the Member States and EU institutions in meeting the unprecedented challenges resulting from the outbreak of the virus – each agency in its respective area of work, in both the short term and the long term.

In the past months, all JHA agencies have taken the necessary measures to ensure business continuity and uninterrupted operational support. At the same time, the Justice and Home Affairs agencies' network (JHAAN), under the chairmanship of Eurojust, has initiated a dialogue to share their experiences in dealing with the pandemic and consider new avenues for closer cooperation among the agencies and with key stakeholders inside and outside the EU.

The agencies' individual and joint efforts to deal with the impact of the pandemic have been captured in a [Joint Paper on the COVID-19 response by the JHA agencies](#), which was formally endorsed by the heads of JHA agencies during a videoconference held on 9 July. During their meeting, the heads discussed the latest developments, including the fundamental rights implications of government COVID-19 measures, the quick adaptation of organised crime to the changing circumstances and the recent surge in drug use, domestic violence and child abuse.

To tackle these and other issues more effectively related to the protection of citizens and freedoms, there is a need for increased interagency cooperation in the field of digitalisation and for sustainable financial resources in the coming years.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Justice and Home Affairs agencies' network. In the past decade, this family of JHA agencies joined forces as guardians of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Together, they contributed to the implementation of EU's objectives in the fields of migration, asylum and external border management, the fight against serious organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism, gender equality and respect for fundamental rights.

Spain: Support for the European automotive industry – EIB finances

ZANINI Auto Group's innovation strategy with €25 million loan



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- The EU bank funds will enable ZANINI to advance driver assistance technologies to develop self-driving vehicles and new safety systems.
- The agreement is supported by the Investment Plan for Europe.

The European Investment Bank (EIB) will provide €25 million to finance the research, development and innovation (RDI) investments of Spanish group ZANINI, which specialises in the development of components for the automotive sector. The EU bank is providing these funds under the [Investment Plan for Europe](#), with a view to supporting innovation within the European automotive industry and thereby driving the economic recovery following the COVID-19 crisis.

The investments will be implemented over four years – by 2023 – at the multinational's facilities in Barcelona. The project will make it possible to improve its production plants and expand its capacity by building a new plant in Parets del Vallès. The aim of this innovation strategy is to strengthen its new business line focusing on new technologies for radar integration, which is key to self-driving vehicle development (ZANINI's specialist area). Environmental and safety improvements will also be made in the facilities and the company's ICT technologies will be modernised.

ZANINI's EIB-financed RDI strategy will also enable the company to develop new Advanced Driver-Assistance Systems (ADAS) technologies. These will improve vehicle safety by providing new automatic emergency braking and speed control systems. The development of these new technologies will contribute to the design of lighter and therefore more energy-efficient and less polluting vehicles.

The loan is backed by the [Investment Plan for Europe](#), which enables the EIB to finance projects that present particular value added owing to their structure or nature. The project will help to safeguard and create highly skilled jobs. ZANINI has production centres in 10 countries and currently has almost 1 400 employees. The implementation of this innovation project will enable it to expand its headcount, including in its RDI division.

"We are delighted to sign an agreement that will help drive innovation in the European automotive industry, a sector employing 14 million people and that, like many others, is having a particularly difficult time due to the economic crisis caused by the pandemic," said EIB Vice-President Emma Navarro, responsible for the Bank's activities in Spain. "This financing will enable ZANINI to implement cutting-edge technologies in Spain to drive the development of self-driving vehicles and improve car safety and energy efficiency. Supporting innovation and the development of clean technologies is a key priority for the EIB to foster a sustainable economic recovery."

Paolo Gentiloni, European Commissioner for the Economy, said: *"With European Investment Bank support under InvestEU, ZANINI will be able to expand its capacity – including with the construction of a new manufacturing plant near Barcelona – and will invest in innovation and the development of safer and less polluting vehicles. Supporting new technologies in Europe – such as the development of self-driving vehicles – will be key to the recovery of our economies."*

ZANINI Chairman Joan Miquel Torras added: *"With this long-term loan from the EIB, ZANINI is safeguarding innovation financing for the coming years and will be able to develop its Expansion Plan linked to the new line of electromagnetic transparency and backlighting (ETB) products for electric and self-driving cars."*

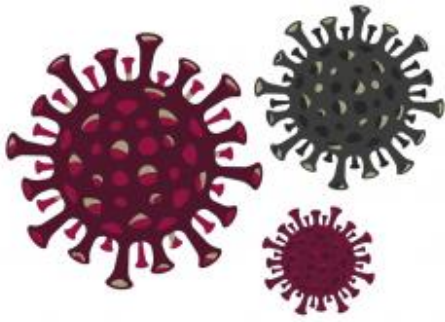
Financing RDI and climate action

Innovation and skills development are essential ingredients in bringing about sustainable growth and the creation of highly skilled jobs. Both play a key role in achieving long-term competitiveness. This is why financing innovation is one of the EIB's top priorities. In 2019, the EU bank provided €14.44 billion to finance different RDI projects. In Spain alone, last year the EIB made available over €1.32 billion in support of the innovation projects of Spanish companies.

The EIB is the world's largest multilateral provider of climate finance. Its goal is to be a leader in mobilising the finance needed to limit the average global temperature increase to 1.5°C compared to preindustrial levels in order to meet the Paris Agreement objectives. On 14 November 2019, the EIB

Board of Directors approved its new climate objectives and the new energy lending policy. The Bank will gradually increase its financing for climate and environmental objectives up to 50% of its activities by 2025, with the goal of ensuring that the EIB Group mobilises at least €1 trillion in the critical decade between 2021 and 2030 to promote investments helping to meet these objectives. It also announced its commitment to aligning all of its activities with the Paris Agreement. To this end, the EIB will cease financing fossil fuel-based projects from late 2021.

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COVID-19

Response of EU Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Agencies

Supporting Member States and EU institutions to:

- ▶ meet the operational challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- ▶ gather expertise and provide analyses; and
- ▶ foster dialogue and learning between key stakeholders.



#StrongerTogether

"Since the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, the EU Agency for

Fundamental Rights has been monitoring the impact of government COVID-19 responses on the human and fundamental rights of everyone, in particular the most vulnerable. Now is the moment for EU Agencies to work together in defence of fundamental rights and for the benefit of everyone in the EU," said FRA Director Michael O'Flaherty.

In the past months, all JHA agencies have taken the necessary measures to ensure business continuity and uninterrupted operational support. At the same time, the Justice and Home Affairs agencies' network (JHAAN), under the chairmanship of Eurojust, has initiated a dialogue to share their experiences in dealing with the pandemic and consider new avenues for closer cooperation among the agencies and with key stakeholders inside and outside the EU.

The agencies' individual and joint efforts to deal with the impact of the pandemic have been captured in a [Joint Paper on the COVID-19 response by the JHA agencies](#), which was formally endorsed by the heads of JHA agencies during a videoconference held on 9 July. During their meeting, the heads discussed the latest developments, including the fundamental rights implications of government COVID-19 measures, the quick adaptation of organised crime to the changing circumstances and the recent surge in drug use, domestic violence and child abuse.

To tackle these and other issues more effectively related to the protection of citizens and freedoms, there is a need for increased interagency cooperation in the field of digitalisation and for sustainable financial resources in the coming years.

The EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has been issuing a [regular bulletin on fundamental rights implications of government measures to fight the virus](#). The bulletins reveal the main fundamental rights concerns, such as data protection concerns surrounding the use of contact tracing apps, as well as the groups most affected by the pandemic, such as older people, migrants, victims of domestic violence or the homeless.

The COVID-19 pandemic coincides with the 10th anniversary of the Justice and Home Affairs agencies' network. In the past decade, this family of JHA agencies joined forces as guardians of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. Together, they contributed to the implementation of EU's objectives in the fields of migration, asylum and external border management, the fight against serious organised crime, drug trafficking and terrorism, gender equality and respect for fundamental rights.

[Vaccine against COVID-19: Council adopts measures to facilitate swift](#)

development



Today, the Council adopted a regulation which aims to speed up the development and the deployment of a vaccine against COVID-19 in the EU. The act provides for a temporary derogation for clinical trials with such vaccines from the prior environmental risk assessment required in the EU legislation on the deliberate release in the environment and the contained use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs). In addition, it clarifies that this temporary derogation also applies when member states allow medicinal products containing or consisting of GMOs intended to treat or prevent COVID-19 to be used in certain exceptional and urgent situations defined in the pharmaceuticals legislation. The environmental impact of medicinal products (including vaccines) containing or consisting of GMOs intended to treat or prevent COVID-19 will remain part of the marketing authorisation process, respecting the environmental safety requirements set out in the GMO legislation.

The regulation will apply only as long as COVID-19 is regarded as a pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) or as long as an implementing act by which the Commission recognises a situation of public health emergency due to COVID-19 applies.

A vaccine against COVID-19 is urgently needed. This regulation will ensure that clinical trials in the EU can start without delay and that no precious time is lost. The act adopted today shows that the EU is ready to take the lead in the global effort to secure the development of a safe and efficient vaccine.

Jens Spahn, Federal minister of Health of Germany

The regulation provides for a derogation from certain provisions of Directive 2001/18/EC on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically modified organisms and Directive 2009/41/EC on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms. The derogation provides that most operations related to the conduct of clinical trials will not require a prior environmental risk assessment or consent. These operations include packaging and labelling, storage, transport, destruction, disposal, distribution, supply, administration or use of investigational medicinal products for human use containing or consisting of GMOs intended to treat or prevent COVID-19. The manufacturing of such products will however still be subject to all provisions in those directives.

The regulation also clarifies that certain provisions of Directives 2001/18/EC and 2009/41/EC are not applicable when member states grant access to medicinal products containing or consisting of GMOs in certain exceptional and urgent situations. These cases are defined in Directive 2001/83/EC on the Community code relating to medicinal products for human use and Regulation

(EC) No 726/2004 laying down Union procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use.

The regulation was adopted by written procedure.

Background and next steps

The Commission adopted its proposal on 17 June 2020. The European Parliament voted in favor of the proposed regulation on 10 July 2020. The regulation will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union on 17 July and enter into force on the following day.

Council adopts temporary measures related to the European Citizens' Initiative



The Council today adopted a regulation extending several deadlines linked to the European Citizens' Initiative due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The temporary measures, which will apply until the end of 2022, give organisers of initiatives more time to collect statements of support in order to reach the required threshold of one million signatures from across the EU.

For the initiatives that were ongoing on 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization announced a worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, the one-year collection period is extended by up to six months. For the initiatives that started collecting signatures between 11 March and 11 September, the collection period will run until 11 September 2021.

The Commission can further extend the collection period for initiatives, if necessary as a result of public health measures related to COVID-19, to a maximum of two years in total.

In addition, the regulation allows for an extension of the time limits for the verification of signatures in member states and for the examination of successful initiatives by the EU institutions. If the organisers of initiatives agree to this, they can participate remotely in meetings with the Commission and the European Parliament and in the public hearing concerning their initiative.

With regard to initiatives for which the collection, verification or examination period ended after 11 March, the deadlines are extended with retroactive effect.

Background

Under the EU treaties, the European Commission has the sole right of legislative initiative, with exceptions in only a few areas.

The European Citizens' Initiative is an instrument of participatory democracy which enables one million EU citizens from at least one quarter of the member states to invite the Commission to propose a legal act in areas where it has the power to do so.

In the event of a successful European Citizens' Initiative, the Commission is required to provide its answer in a communication setting out its legal and political conclusions on the initiative, the action it intends to take, if any, and its reasons for taking or not taking action.