

Eurojust action against criminal groups abusing corona crisis

The Hague, 8 April 2020

✘ Eurojust has taken action in various cases of online fraud and computer hacking by criminal organisations abusing the current COVID 19-crisis. At the request of, for instance, Germany, France and the Czech Republic, cross-border investigations are actively supported, regarding fake sales of protective face masks and hand gels. In the Czech Republic, criminals have even hacked the computer system of a hospital, forcing its temporary closure. Eurojust, the EU Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, is assisting national authorities in the follow-up of this case.

The Agency has furthermore stepped up its support to judicial authorities to execute the European Arrest Warrant (EAW) in times of corona. A full mapping out of practical implications for prosecutors in the Member States has taken place, in close cooperation with the European Judicial Network (EJN).

Whilst ensuring full business continuity over the last weeks, various cases have been opened at Eurojust to assist and pursue investigations into online fraud by criminals pretending to sell protective face masks and gels. In Germany, for instance, the authorities uncovered a large-scale fraud with an offer of ten million face masks for a price of EUR 15 million, for which one German state had shown an interest. Alleged suppliers in Asia were supposed to deliver the masks to a German sales company, via other European distributors, to be finally handed over in The Netherlands.

The perpetrators tricked the German sales company into paying an advance of EUR 2.4 million to accounts in other European countries. On the day of the planned delivery in The Netherlands, it became clear that the German sales company had become the victim of fraud. The German desk at Eurojust provided active support to the investigations, ensuring judicial cooperation with three countries. Two suspects have been arrested in The Netherlands and over EUR 2 million have been frozen in assets.

In France, a company in Dijon became the victim of swindling by unknown perpetrators using a Hungarian enterprise, supposedly selling protection masks and hydro-alcoholic hand gel. The French company ordered protection supplies for an amount of EUR 132.500, which were never delivered, whilst the money had immediately been transferred to Hungary.

The Public Prosecutor's Office of Dijon issued a European freezing order to recover the money and requested Eurojust to facilitate its urgent execution. Via a rapid and close collaboration between the French and Hungarian National Desks, the total amount was successfully frozen on the Hungarian bank account. Further investigations are ongoing in this case.

In Brno in the Czech Republic, most of the computer system of a hospital was

recently hacked by a criminal organisation, which had encrypted the communications. This forced the temporary shutdown of the entire hospital in spite of the ongoing corona emergency, as hospital staff was unable to get adequate information on patients. Via Eurojust, European Investigation Orders and requests for Mutual Legal Assistance have been issued to France and Switzerland to follow up investigations.

Practical implications in times of the corona crisis

Eurojust continues to be fully operational. It will follow up all requests for judicial cooperation and support investigations in these and other corona-related cases. Between 13 and 31 March, [202 new cases have been opened](#) and eight coordination meetings have taken place. The Agency has as well stepped up efforts to support judicial authorities, ensuring criminals cannot hide behind national borders. In the past weeks, Eurojust has worked closely together with the EJM and Member States to map out the practical implications for judicial cooperation in the current situation, notably for the EAW.

The first results were presented in an informal meeting of EU Ministers of Justice on 6 April, who welcomed the initiative and asked the Agency and EJM to continue monitoring the situation. An EAW crisis group will be set up by the European Commission, in which Eurojust, EJM and the General Secretariat of the Council will participate.

Prosecutors and investigative judges have turned extensively to their National Desks at Eurojust and EJM contact points to process urgent requests related to the EAW in this special situation. Casework studies have revealed a number of recurring issues related to the execution of the arrest warrant.

In order to have all relevant information at hand, Eurojust and the EJM have swiftly compiled an inventory of key judicial measures taken at national level to respond to the global health crisis. The inventory covers measures by all EU Member States, Iceland and Norway and will be continuously updated as the crisis response further develops.

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[COVID-19 outbreak: Council approves measures to help the most deprived EU citizens](#)

EU ambassadors today agreed amendments to the regulation on the fund for aid to the most deprived (FEAD). These amendments are intended to minimise the effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the most deprived. They will make it easier for member states, partner organisations and other parties involved to access

the fund and protect their staff involved in distributing the aid. Around 13 million EU citizens benefit from the fund each year.

The COVID-19 outbreak is a major challenge for our efforts to help our most vulnerable citizens. The changes agreed today will give member states access to an increased co-financing rate from the EU budget and will make it possible to finance the provision of protective equipment to the most deprived, as well as to those involved in distributing the aid.

Vesna Bedeković, Minister for Demography, Family, Youth and Social Policy of Croatia

The proposal introduces the following new elements:

- temporary possibility of 100% co-financing from the EU budget
- expenditure for crisis response operations to be eligible as of 1 February 2020
- the cost of purchasing personal protective materials and equipment for partner organisations to be considered an eligible cost
- certain elements of the operational programme in response to the outbreak will not require approval by the European Commission

The amendments also provide for costs to be eligible in cases where the delivery of food or basic material assistance is delayed, or where operations are suspended or not fully implemented.

Compared to the Commission proposal, the Council position provides for the possibility of delivering food aid and basic material assistance not only through electronic vouchers, but through vouchers in any form.

Background

The FEAD regulation was adopted in 2014 and established a new instrument to deal with the worst forms of poverty and food deprivation, as well as homelessness and the material deprivation of children. The criteria for identifying those most deprived persons requiring assistance are set by member states or partner organisations, taking into account local needs. The resources available for the fund for the period 2014-2020 amount to EUR 2.5 billion at 2011 prices. The proposal to amend the regulation was adopted by the Commission on 2 April 2020.

Next steps:

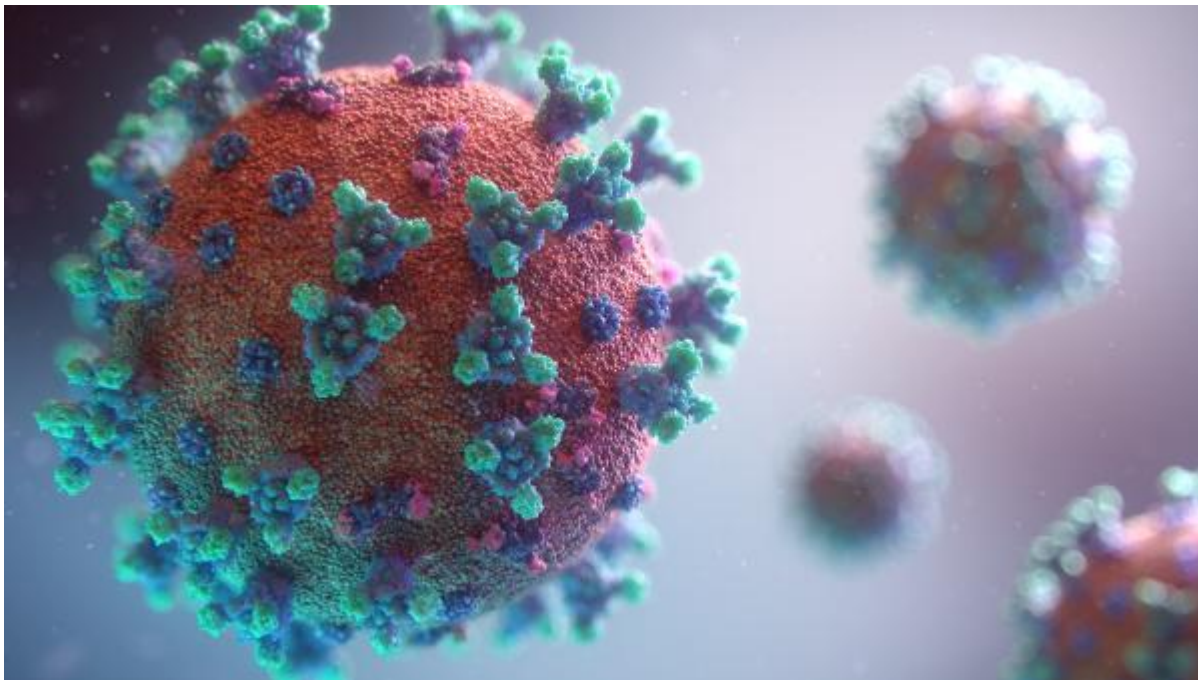
The presidency of the Council will now inform the European Parliament that should it adopt its position in the form set out in the text agreed by the Council, the Council will approve the European Parliament's position and the act shall be adopted in the wording which corresponds to the European Parliament's position. The presidency will also ask the European Parliament to use the urgent procedure.

[CEPOL webinar on returning unaccompanied children and fundamental rights](#)

The webinar's aim was to equip immigration services, border police and other return-enforcing authorities' staff with the relevant knowledge from a fundamental rights perspective.

This includes options for durable solutions and child protection safeguards. This will contribute to ensure that authorities concerned proceed in full rights compliance. Over 155 participants attended the webinar.

[EIB Group contributes € 5.2 billion to EU response to Covid-19 outside European Union](#)



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- Accelerated financing and targeted technical assistance for partners in 100 countries as part of Team Europe response package
- Short-term support for health and business investment in Africa, Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood Countries, Western Balkans, Asia and Latin

America

• Increased backing for business impacted by the pandemic

The European Investment Bank Group, the bank of the European Union, today announced details of a comprehensive response to the coronavirus pandemic outside the EU that will provide up to € 5.2 billion in the coming months. This financing is part of the Team Europe response and supported by guarantees from the EU budget. It will both strengthen urgent health investment and accelerate long-standing support for private sector investment that reflects financing needs in more than 100 countries around the world.

The immediate fast-tracked support will help to sustain jobs and livelihoods in sectors most threatened by the economic and social impact of the coronavirus, and will be followed by additional long-term health and business financing as needed.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is already hitting many countries and will have profound economic consequences around the world. Many people will lose their jobs and livelihoods. Especially in vulnerable countries this crisis will destroy entrepreneurial networks and exacerbate existing debt distress. We urgently need to show that Europe is there for our partners when they need us. As part of Team Europe, the EU Bank will in the coming weeks identify and support new health and business investment outside the European Union. We will work in close partnership with the European Commission, EU member states, European development finance institutions and other multilateral financial institutions to ensure that public and private partners can better access finance essential to cope with the pandemic shock”, said Werner Hoyer, President of the European Investment Bank.

Responding to immediate and medium-term needs in 100 countries

In recent days the EIB has been in contact with public and private sector clients in more than 100 countries of operation outside Europe to determine the most effective approach to enhance public health preparedness and business resilience, as part of the EIB’s longstanding support for sustainable and inclusive growth around the world.

This rapid response will be adapted to reflect the specific sector needs and new local challenges as the impact of the coronavirus continues to develop. The EIB will also provide technical assistance and share sector expertise to strengthen and enhance the impact of new investment.

Accelerating support for health and business investment and strengthening private sector resilience to the economic and social impact of the coronavirus

The EIB stands ready to accelerate about € one billion of disbursements on existing approved loans to help the health sector in countries outside of the EU face the coronavirus pandemic, as well as to ensure that business activity can access immediate financing to counter cash flow and liquidity challenges.

Immediate support for longstanding global health sector clients will include support for new public health efforts, helping clients to refocus existing operations to tackle the health crisis and accelerating disbursement of approved private and public sector projects.

Reinforced support for the health sector will benefit from the EIB's unique technical experience and financial expertise gained from more than € 30 billion of hospital, healthcare and health innovation investment across Europe and around the world in recent years.

Rapid identification of priority projects will be further enhanced by the EIB's close existing cooperation with health ministries and health sector partners outside Europe.

The EIB's response will also support enhanced access to finance for small and medium-sized enterprises, including through scaling up existing credit lines managed by local banks around the world.

The immediate response will focus on supporting companies in sectors most impacted by the coronavirus pandemic and where production capacity is most exposed.

This will also help to reinforce the key role of local banks and financial institutions, including microfinance partners, whose local knowledge will be key for ensuring a successful long-term response.

Local and international corporates, SMEs, farmers and entrepreneurs around the world will benefit from the EIB's private sector response.

Ensuring governments can better respond to the virus impact

Public sector investment in countries around the world is expected to be significantly challenged and constrained as a result of the coronavirus.

The EIB will work with public sector partners to increase concessional financing available for both health and business investment. This will include support for public services including health, regional trade and highly vulnerable sectors such as tourism and hospitality.

Fast-track financing will be available for countries where the EIB already operates. The initiative has been designed so that EIB financing can be supported by additional backing from international and European development finance partners.

[FRA joins Justice Ministers'](#)

discussion on crisis coordination during the COVID-19 outbreak

Ministers discussed the impact on the outbreak on the justice system. This included the work of civil and commercial courts, as well as judicial cooperation across Member States.

They also considered new sanctions introduced for contravening restrictions imposed by governments to contain the spread of the virus, and other pandemic actions that could be taken at the EU level.

FRA's report on the fundamental rights implications of the COVID-19 outbreak provides data from Member States on the impact of the outbreak on the justice system and on prisoners.