

# Members Speak: Messages from CoR Members and Partners on the coronavirus crisis



The European Union's many efforts this week to respond to the COVID crisis include a major participative initiative to harvest the ideas of organisations, experts, and ordinary citizens across the continent – in other words, a pan-European hackathon. The **#EUvsVirus hackathon** starts this evening (Friday, 24 April) and continues until Sunday afternoon – timing that makes clear the collective, voluntary nature of the work. The hackathon, whose agenda is [here](#), will focus on six challenges: health and life; business continuity; social and political cohesion; remote working and education; digital finance; and 'other' issues. Some of the ideas you will hear more about in the coming weeks and months will, no doubt, be born here. One of the ambassadors of the event is a CoR member: [Emil Boc](#) (EPP), the mayor of Cluj-Napoca and former prime minister of Romania.

**ESPON**, the applied research programme aimed at supporting the formulation of territorial development policies in Europe, has collected on one page a [list](#) of COVID-related projects and actions taken by European associations of regions and cities, EU institutions, European research associations, and similar international organisations and groupings. The list, which is [here](#), is regularly updated.

We have been informed of a new collaborative network that is not on the ESPON list, from the Netherlands. The [Resilient Society](#) offers a co-creation platform for two of the major cities in The Netherlands, one of its largest provinces, the national knowledge institute TNO, all four Dutch technical universities and many others. The network is currently discussing the possibility of cross-border partnerships.

The **Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments** has an [online platform](#) on what municipalities are doing to contain the spread of COVID-19. The national government is providing grants to help cover some costs incurred by local governments during the crisis. The state is contributing to benefits to families or individuals, up to €40 per person per month for a period of three months. The state has also postponed tax deadlines. Among other measures are efforts to protect food; personnel involved in the distribution of food has been fitted out with protective clothing and gloves, and provided with disinfectant. More details [here](#).

Looking beyond the EU, several non-EU associations and municipalities have been in contact with the CoR's COVID-19 platform. The **Local Government Association for England and Wales** shared a page on which it has collected good local practices during the crisis; it can be [found here](#). Two Turkish municipalities – Corlu and Sultanbeyli – also wrote in. **Turkey** has closed public buildings, postponed national and international events (including

academic conferences), and halted sports competitions, after initially restricting them to being played behind closed doors. In mid-March, universities closed for a three-week holiday; distance learning has now been launched. The municipality of **Corlu** has created a hotline to provide information on the coronavirus infection. **Sultanbeyli Municipality**, part of the Istanbul agglomeration, has disinfected many public spaces and services (streets, bazaars, pharmacies, parks, places of worship, public buildings, public transport, and garbage containers), installed hand-sanitiser dispensers at the entrance of marketplaces, and set three metres as the socially acceptable distance in bazaars. The municipality has been distributing masks, and raising awareness with, for examples, billboards and boards in many central areas. More details of Sultanbeyli's efforts are [here](#).

How should the lockdowns in place across the EU be lifted? In his capacity as head of the **Irish delegation**, Michael Murphy (IE/EPP) of Tipperary Council has written to the European Committee of the Regions to emphasise that localised, step-by-step approaches will be needed. Accordingly, the letter calls for local and regional authorities to be involved in the decision-making processes. This would also ensure that lockdowns are eased in an organised and systematic way.

The head of Spanish delegation, Guillermo Fernández Vara (ES/EPP), president of the region of Extremadura, has written to the European Committee of the Regions to underline that local and regional authorities need as much support as can possibly be given in their frontline role of helping citizens and local economies. The public wants a comprehensive approach based on brotherhood and solidarity; this is what the EU now needs to provide. (He highlighted the particular need to facilitate the reception and distribution of medical devices and protective equipment from outside the EU.) A comprehensive approach, he said, would require a significant increase in the EU's budget together with an ambitious and exceptional European stimulus recovery plan.

The president of the Region of **Valencia** in Spain, Ximo Puig, has also written in, to highlight the necessity to stay united and work together in fighting the virus. In his letter, he calls for a European Marshall Plan that would mobilise all the necessary resources and instruments to guarantee social and territorial cohesion, ensure the stability and prosperity of EU citizens, and respond to the greatest threat since World War II.

The **Lombardy** region in Italy has put in place a three-year investment plan worth €3 billion, with €400 million earmarked for local authorities and €2.6 billion to support the local economy (including €400 million for strategic investments). Of the €400 million for local authorities, Milan and surrounding areas will receive €51 million for public works (roads and schools); the remainder can be spent by other communities on – for example – energy efficiency, renewable energy, urban re-development and sustainable development, sustainable mobility, heritage, and hydro-geological works. Separately, the region has set aside €10 million to produce medical and personal protective equipment, and €82 million in bonuses for health workers who have been involved in combating the epidemiological emergency.

Authorities in the **Valle d'Aosta** region of Italy have approved two packages of measures to cope with the economic crisis and lack of liquidity. Under a bill presented by CoR member [Pierluigi Marquis](#) (EA) on 23 March, they allocated €3.7 million to help business, workers, and households, and €2 million to top up employees' salaries. The region has also suspended mortgages for one year and has set up a risk fund to support SMEs and the local economy, to last 48 months. These resources come from central government. On 17 April, the regional council followed up with a second package, this time worth €25 million.

The Spanish region of **Valencia** has launched seven innovative projects targeting COVID-19. One project is to develop an open-source prototype of an economically affordable ventilator. Three projects seek to harness artificial intelligence to enable early detection of the disease. Other projects aim to create a diagnostic test, a system for the analysis of the immune system's response to the virus, and a tool to measure the effectiveness of antivirals. The region received 265 proposals in one week, for grants totalling €562,818. As a result of the success of this first phase, the call was increased to €3,250,000. To keep up to speed, follow the Twitter handle [@GVAInnova](#). The region has also been distributing gloves and face masks en masse. With the help of the Vefa Social Support team, it has provided thousands of food and health packages to the elderly or people living alone.

The Government of **Navarra** in Spain and its CoR member [Mikel Irujo Amezaga](#) (EA) have provided fresh information about the region's crisis measures. At a cost of €2 million, and working through the public body Sodena and private companies, the regional government has secured a large consignment of sanitary material (masks, gowns, gloves and hydro-alcoholic solutions, among others) from China. The regional government has also channelled the energies of citizens towards creating face masks and facial screens for health personnel. As well as facilitating the 3D printing of personal protective equipment (PPE), a new [platform](#) now puts volunteers in contact with organisations providing basic social services and health care. As of 15 April, 104 projects had been reported. The platform can be found [here](#).

The Regional Ministry of Health in **Murcia**, Spain, has launched an online tool to make a better record of cases of coronavirus and avoid transmission among citizens. The regional government has launched a Strategic Plan for the Recovery of Industrial Activity, with differentiated approaches. Efforts in the education sector include the development of a collaborative platform to facilitate online adult education and distance learning, as well as the provision of content and material for other digital education platforms. More details [here](#). Separately, the president of the Region of Murcia has stressed the need for a collective effort by European citizens, businesses, local and regional authorities, and national governments to ensure a robust economic recovery for all. He calls on the EU to provide its support, assistance and cooperation.

The southern French region of **Côte d'Azur** has put €36 million into France's national Solidarity Fund for businesses. A first tranche of state aid was made available on 1 April; a second tranche – the fruit of collaboration between the state and the regions – has been available since 15 April. More

details [here](#).

In **Lyon**, confinement measures have been in place since 17 March. Leaving one's home is permitted only with a certificate. Schools are closed. Tests for COVID are reserved for care staff and the most serious cases. The city has created a pool of volunteers – a 'Metropolitan Reserve' – to help ensure public services continue (such as telephone calls to vulnerable people and child-protection efforts) and provide help to other community activities, such as food banks. The city has also suspended rents for companies operating from Lyon Métropole properties – until June if necessary. Consideration is currently being given to a support fund for companies in the private sector.

The **Kuopio** region in Finland has created an online platform called '[The Good Mood Kiosk](#)' that aims not only to inform the public about COVID-19, but also to encourage them to fight it. The platform collects various cultural and sporting tips from the City of Kuopio and other actors intended to support lifestyle changes. The platform, which is constantly updated, suggests that now is a good moment to learn something new, to improve lifestyles, and to enjoy experiences for which people did not previously have the time or opportunity. The Kiosk also offers a wide range of free online books, and points to museums that are offering online tours and presentations.

The Portuguese municipality of **Mafra** has increased its response capacity on several fronts, working with district authorities and the Metropolitan Area of Lisbon. Civil-protection actions include the creation of a diagnostic unit to trace contacts, the acquisition of personal protective equipment, the reinforcement and patrols, the closure of beaches, the suspension of mass activities, disinfection, and a public-information campaign. To address the social challenges created by the virus, a Social Emergency Fund has been created to support families (with an initial €1 million) and a Municipal Emergency Fund of €500,000 to meet immediate needs. A project has been set up to provide support to the isolated or to at-risk groups. Various municipal taxes and fees have been suspended, reduced or removed.

The municipality of **Mosina** in Poland's Wielkopolska province on 3 April agreed a package of support for local businesses, and, at the same time, encouraging them to cooperate with each other to ease the recovery. Among the measures (listed [here](#)) are postponements to tax submissions and tax payments, the remission (in full or in part) of some tax arrears. The town collects taxes on real estate, agriculture, forestry, and modes of transport.