

## Press release – Do not take the EP's consent on MFF for granted, says Budget Committee Chair



During a live interview on the Parliament's Facebook page, the Chair of the Committee on Budgets, Johan Van Overtveldt (ECR, BE), commented on the economic recovery fund announced by the Commission and [reiterated Parliament's position](#) that the fund should be substantial, and also that it should be part of next long-term EU budget for 2021-2027 (Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF).

Concerning the question of grants versus loans, he would like to see the fund keep a balance between solidarity for the countries that are hit hardest and responsibility: "For the coming days, weeks, and months, the big challenge is to find the right balance between responsibility and solidarity, so that everybody can agree on the final compromise."

He underlined the importance of preparing for an MFF contingency plan, which Parliament is set to demand from the Commission in a [separate resolution on Wednesday](#): "When we go into June, time will be short to get the MFF voted through and up and running in time. Discontinuing current European programmes would be very bad for the citizens right now and for the reputation and political coherence of the EU."

He added: "Of course, the EP has an important role to play in this whole process – the Parliament's consent has to be obtained and that surely is a much less sure thing than it was for the current MFF, which is now running out. So everybody – the Commission, the Council – should take notice of what the EP is aiming for, what it wants. I clearly sense a desire in the Parliament to really show that we are here not for our own sake, but in the interest of citizens, to make sure that the MFF and the recovery fund are the

best possible answers to this severe crisis that we are now living through and that will have consequences for many years, for all European citizens.”

[View the full Facebook live interview](#)

[Find out more on this week's plenary budget debates and votes in our plenary newsletter](#)

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## **Egypt: EIB and BDC provide \$100 million to finance SMEs**

The **European Investment Bank (EIB)** has signed a financing agreement of \$100 million with **Banque du Caire (BDC)** to finance the investments of Egyptian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the manufacturing and services sectors to improve their competitiveness. The new financing is expected to sustain 4 000 jobs in 100 companies.

This new agreement will help to finance the investment projects – including working capital needs – of private sector companies in the productive and services sectors of the Egyptian economy.

The EIB financing is in line with the objectives of the European Union External Lending Mandate and the EU cooperation with Egypt as set out in the new EU Single Support Framework for Egypt for the period 2017-2020, as well as the EU-Egypt Partnership Priorities. In particular, support for the SME sector will promote the development and competitiveness of the Egyptian economy and fuel increased productivity and job creation. By increasing access to finance for SMEs, this project is also in line with the priorities of the Egyptian Government to improve access to finance and financial inclusion.

Due to its widespread presence across Egypt and especially outside the metropolitan areas of Cairo and Alexandria, Banque du Caire is a valuable counterpart for EIB support for SMEs in Egypt. This is the second financing agreement signed between the EIB and Banque du Caire.

This new financing brings total EIB support for the Egyptian private sector to €2.7 billion since 2015. The EIB financing for private sector development contributes to sustainable growth. It aims to support SMEs – the key drivers for economic development and employment.

**[Egypt and the EIB](#)**

**[Economic Resilience Initiative](#)**

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# EMCDDA trendspotter briefing – Impact of COVID-19 on drug services and help-seeking in Europe

*EMCDDA, Lisbon, May 2020*

## **Summary**

Since the start of 2020, European countries have been experiencing an unprecedented public health threat with the emergence of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In order to investigate the effects and implications of this outbreak for drug services in Europe, the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction instigated a mixed-method trendspotter study to provide a snapshot of the current situation. This exercise provides a rapid assessment of the state of play in respect to the impact of COVID-19 on service provision and help-seeking behaviour among people who use drugs.

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**Main subject:**

[health and social responses](#)

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## COVID-19: New EMCDDA study highlights drop in availability of drug services in Europe but increase in innovation

As Europe grapples with the unprecedented public health threat posed by COVID-19, how is the outbreak affecting drug users and service providers? In a new study published today – [Impact of COVID-19 on drug services and help-seeking in Europe](#) – the EMCDDA reports signs of a drop in the availability of drug services during the pandemic and in the numbers of those seeking help. But the study also provides insight into how services have adapted and innovated during the fast-changing crisis in ways that could be carried forward into the future.

The report is the first in a series of briefings resulting from an EMCDDA 'trendspotter' study, launched in April to explore the impact of COVID-19 on the drug situation and responses to it. The agency's [trendspotter](#) methodology explores emerging drug-related trends by rapidly collecting and triangulating data from a variety of sources to allow for timely assessments of topics of concern. Due to national emergency restrictions, the method was adapted to suit online investigation and the study designed to be carried out in successive waves <sup>(1)</sup>. The findings released today stem from the first wave of the investigation which focused on drug services.

Results highlight that [COVID-19](#) and national lockdowns have led to reduced availability and provision of treatment and harm-reduction services in most European countries. Emerging evidence suggests that, like other healthcare providers, drug services are facing a range of challenges including: staffing shortages; access to personal protective equipment; and managing infected clients and staff vulnerability to infection.

Preliminary findings from the study show that drug services are adapting and innovating during COVID-19, with similar characteristics reported across Europe. With face-to-face counselling curtailed during containment, telemedicine by phone or video has been embraced as an alternative across European drug services. Providers of opioid substitution treatment (OST) have also acted rapidly to change the way in which they provide medication (e.g. mobile OST) and respond to new treatment demands (e.g. new induction procedures), while most countries have relaxed regulations on take-home OST for stable patients (e.g. prescribing for larger quantities or longer periods).

Harm-reduction services have also been swift to adapt, playing a key role in providing frontline support during the crisis. This includes: increasing outreach work and needle- and syringe-exchange activities; providing shelter management for homeless and marginalised groups; maintaining drug consumption room services (in situ or mobile) and moving some interventions online (e.g. drug checking).

The briefing presents a snapshot of how the demand for specialised treatment evolved between January 2020 and March 2020, providing a first insight on the impact of COVID-19 on help-seeking behaviour. Data show that there was some drop in demand for treatment services during this period for reasons including closure or restricted access to treatment centres and clients' inability to reach centres due to confinement measures. But this was partially compensated by remote technology and modified interventions.

When questioned on the 'new normal' for drug services in Europe post-COVID-19, many of the experts surveyed were in favour of maintaining some of the service changes rapidly introduced in recent months. The use of telemedicine was the most cited example, being seen as a useful complement to face-to-face services in the future. Coordination between public, private and non-governmental actors during the crisis was also welcomed by respondents and seen as particularly beneficial for services users.

As confinement procedures are eased, drug services will be expected to

maintain a broad range of health protection measures, adapt their routines and reinforce contingency planning in case of a second wave. Negative economic forecasts for national economies raise particular concerns over potential budget cuts for drug services and greater marginalisation of certain social groups. Nevertheless, many survey respondents remained hopeful that the innovation and collaboration seen in recent months would remain positive features of drug services in Europe in the foreseeable future.

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## Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Council approves conclusions

The Council today approved **conclusions** on the Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020, reaffirming its **strategic importance**, and the joint commitment to building a **common area of shared democracy, prosperity and stability**.

Today's Council conclusions follow up on the conclusions of the European Council of 20 June 2019, which marked the 10th anniversary of the Eastern Partnership, and the **joint communication: "Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020: Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all"** of 18 March 2020.

In its conclusions the Council welcomes the significant achievements of the Eastern Partnership to date, and reiterates its incentive- and conditionality-based approach as a means to **encourage Eastern partner countries** to continue **engaging in reforms** and increasing efforts in this regard. The Council confirms that the **current policy framework**, including the set of **'20 deliverables for 2020'** is valid and brings tangible results and benefits for people.

The Council also stresses the importance of the future Eastern Partnership being a more **strategic, ambitious, flexible** and **inclusive** framework for cooperation, allowing participants to tackle common and global challenges jointly in a wide range of areas, especially in the current unprecedented situation caused by the **COVID-19 pandemic**.

The conclusions call firmly for a **renewed commitment** to the **fundamentals** of the Eastern Partnership. These include democracy, human rights, rule of law, good governance, and successful anti-corruption policies, but also economic reforms, environmental, climate and energy challenges, digital transformation and investing in people.

Finally, the Council looks forward to the **next Eastern Partnership Summit**, which is expected to review the results achieved since the last Summit in 2017, endorse long-term policy objectives, and set out the way forward in further strengthening and deepening cooperation, as well as give a mandate for preparatory work on the next generation of post 2020 deliverables.