Reinforced EU support to the Western Balkans in tackling coronavirus crisis and in post-pandemic recovery

Overview of EU support

The EU, together with the EIB, mobilised over €3.3 billion to support the Western Balkans in tackling coronavirus health crisis and post-pandemic socio-economic recovery.

Coronavirus health crisis

The EU supplied a €38 million immediate support package to the Western Balkans health sector to procure medical equipment such as masks, ventilators, visors and testing kits.

The EU supplied free control material developed by the EU’s Joint Research Centre to Western Balkan partners to enable them check the accuracy of coronavirus tests.

The EU opened the Joint Procurement Agreement to the Western Balkan partners to purchase personal protective equipment.

Through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism EU Member States helped the Western Balkans partners by providing equipment and repatriation assistance for stranded citizens.

The EU included the Western Balkans in information sharing over coronavirus early warning and response, facilitated by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control.

The EU exempted the Western Balkans from export authorisations for masks and other personal protective equipment, making them the only region outside the European Economic Area receiving such preferential treatment.

The EU quickly provided vulnerable individuals, such as Roma, with essential food and hygiene packages, and will continue supporting the elderly, children, victims of domestic violence, minorities and migrants to ride out the crisis.
The EU reallocated €389 million of Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) funding to build-up resilience of the national health systems and to cushion for the social and economic impact of the crisis, with special attention to the most vulnerable.

The EU proposed €750 million of Macro-Financial Assistance, in tandem with the International Monetary Fund, to support Western Balkan governments that requested help with balancing the payment crisis.

The EU extended the EU Solidarity Fund to the Western Balkan partners that have started accession negotiations.

A lifeline for Western Balkans businesses

The EU is providing €455 million to ensure survival in the short-term, and recovery in the medium-term of businesses in the private sector. This funding will be channelled through up to 70 local banks in the region to help Small and Medium Enterprises in getting more flexible terms for repayments, or easier access to new loans, and to enable entrepreneurs to cope with the immediate effects of the crisis and thrive afterwards. Through the European Investment Bank (EIB), the EU is also providing €1.7 billion for additional loans for public sector investments, and further credit to enterprises, to help safeguard jobs for the many people working in SMEs in the region.

Focusing on SMEs, start-ups and innovative companies, this EU assistance will in particular be available for innovative businesses, farmers and agri-businesses, rural and tourism enterprises, as well as women- and youth-led businesses. It will provide a lifeline for many people all over the Western Balkans, especially those working in vulnerable and small-scale enterprises.
As part of its global response to the coronavirus outbreak, the European Commission is mobilising an emergency support package for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine:

**€80 million** for immediate needs

**Up to €883 million** for the short and medium term to support the social and economic recovery of the region

### At regional level

**Responding to immediate needs:**

- **Support to the health sector (€30 million)**
  - Working with the WHO to supply medical devices and personal equipment such as ventilators, laboratory kits, masks, goggles, gowns, and safety suits.
  - Training medical and laboratory staff, and raising awareness across the six countries.

- **Support for the most vulnerable groups in society (€11.3 million)**
  - Grants of up to €60,000 to civil society organisations to respond to immediate needs, such as supporting local schools with distance learning – already available through the EU’s regional “Rapid Response Mechanism”.
  - Launch of the “Eastern Partnership Solidarity Programme” to target the most affected parts of the populations, with sub-grants to smaller, local organisations.

### Limiting the social and economic impact:

Working closely with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and financing institutions from EU Member States to provide a coordinated European response as **TEAM EUROPE**:

- **New €100 million support programme to help SMEs**, including self-employed and others to **easily access credit and boost their businesses** after the crisis.

- **€200 million** of existing **credit lines** and grants to **SMEs** in local currency through the **EU4Business** Initiative.

- **€500 million** available for the EU’s Neighbourhood through the EU’s major de-risking instrument, the **European Fund for Sustainable Development** (EFSD) to rapidly provide liquidity across the region.
What support is the EU providing to individual partner countries and how will this be reinforced?

Armenia
Over €92 million to support immediate and short-term needs.
Example of support: Over 3,000 vulnerable households, with elderly people and people with disabilities and large families in Shirak, Tavush and Lori regions will receive humanitarian aid packages thanks to the support of the European Union.

Azerbaijan
Over €14 million to support immediate and short-term needs.
Example of support: With EU funds, the Vocational Education Schools in several regions (Ganja, Mingachevir, Jalilabad, Gaxh and Ismaelly) will purchase equipment to produce personal protection garments for medical staff.

Belarus
Over €60 million to support immediate and short-term needs.
Example of support: Thanks to EU cross-border cooperation projects linking communities in Belarus, Ukraine and Poland, emergency medical services such as ambulances and respirators are available in the hospitals to help doctors fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

Georgia
Over €183 million to support immediate and short-term needs.
Example of support: A Georgian producer of medical textiles has produced 40,000 medical gowns within a week after he was able to purchase 12 additional sewing machines thanks to a micro-grant provided by the EU.

Republic of Moldova
Over €87 million to support immediate and short-term needs.
Example of support: EU projects in Moldova are already working to provide protection sets such as gloves and masks for vulnerable people and medical staff, as well as sterilizers for equipment across the country.

Ukraine
Over €190 million to support immediate and short-term needs.
Example of support: The EU supports the building of community resilience through assistance to vulnerable people, transition to online education, fighting disinformation and strengthening cultural diversity and creativity online.