

## Commissioner's monthly update

April 2020

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Dear reader, we are sending you this preview edition of **Commissioner Mariya Gabriel's monthly update** because you are a subscriber to the JRC newsletter. To receive the Commissioner's update every month direct to your inbox, [sign up here](#).

Good morning and welcome to the first of what will be a monthly update from me on my portfolio as European Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth.

During this very challenging time dealing with the coronavirus outbreak, the European Commission is working hard on all fronts to help tackle the emergency and protect people's health. Science, research and innovation are at the heart of these efforts. Last month we mobilised considerable funding as part of our coordinated response against the spread of COVID-19, including [up to €80 million in financial support to vaccine developer CureVac](#).

[We launched a new website](#) that will be updated regularly with the latest information on coronavirus research and funding opportunities.

[I gave my support to a call this week](#) for all coronavirus publications and the data supporting them to be made immediately publicly-accessible, so that researchers can have access to the data and information they need. I also took part in a UNESCO-organised dialogue with Ministers on the topic of open science. Open access is already a tangible reality in the EU and we can lead by example thanks to our scientific expertise, technological development and innovation capacity, while cooperating closely with international partners.

Our own scientists at the Joint Research Centre have designed [a control material that labs can use](#) to check that their tests accurately detect the virus. This will help to ensure that testing carried out in labs across Europe do not return incorrect results.

JRC experts developed the [Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources platform](#) together with the World Health Organization, and have been tracking the outbreak since it first emerged in China. They are also at the forefront of research that's helping us better understand the spread of the virus, the effectiveness of control measures and the impact on our economies.

As control measures are implemented across the EU, I stand ready to help Member States ensure the continuity of education and training and support their cultural and creative sectors. We will be as flexible as possible when it comes to the implementation of the flagship programmes like Erasmus+, European Solidarity Corps and Creative Europe to minimise the impact of the Coronavirus crisis on the beneficiaries of those programmes. This is the main message we passed on to Erasmus+ National Agencies during a recent webinar: we are here to support them in their daily work for a smooth running of the programmes, and to provide clarifications and practical advice to participants in light of the COVID-19 outbreak ( [see latest factsheet](#)).

I've also been taking part in video conferences with EU Education Ministers to

work together on a coherent EU-wide response to the situation. We have had positive discussions on making sure our children don't miss out on their education, by sharing knowledge on virtual classrooms and online learning. I am working hard with the Croatian Presidency to set up similar meetings with Culture and Sport Ministers. In the meantime, to help ensure continuity in education and training activities, [we have launched a webpage](#) gathering the wide range of online learning resources available online. I hope you will find it useful!

Finally, I want this monthly update to be a useful reference for readers during the current emergency and in the future. The newsletter is a team effort from colleagues working across departments to bring you the latest information. We would welcome your feedback on the aspects of my portfolio that you would like to see more of in this medium, so if you have suggestions please [get in touch with my office](#).

With best wishes for the coming weeks,

Mariya Gabriel

## My portfolio updates

### Advancing knowledge for the clinical and public health response to COVID-19

On 30 January, through Horizon 2020 the European Commission launched a request for expressions of interest entitled **'SC1-PHE-CORONAVIRUS-2020: Advancing knowledge for the clinical and public health response to the [COVID-19] epidemic'** with a budget of €48.5 million.

18 research projects involving 140 research teams from the EU and beyond have been shortlisted for funding, following evaluation by independent experts. They will work on epidemiology and public health, including preparedness and response to outbreaks, rapid point-of-care diagnostic tests, new treatments and new vaccines.

DG Research and Innovation is reviewing, in close cooperation with the European Investment Bank, the allocation and prioritisation of the financial means available under the **InnovFin financial instruments**.

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### A new control material for accurate coronavirus tests

Joint Research Centre scientists have designed a new control material that laboratories can use to check that coronavirus tests return correct results.

Timely and accurate laboratory testing is an essential part of the management of the pandemic. This material will help labs avoid tests returning negative results even if a person is infected. Up to 3000 samples are ready for dispatch to testing laboratories across the EU, including major reference virology centres and hospitals.

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## Global support for open access to research articles and data in the fight against coronavirus

The European Commission has added its support to a call to the scholarly publishing community urging them to make Covid-19 and coronavirus publications and the data supporting them immediately accessible to support the ongoing public health efforts. The letter was signed by 16 other countries across the world. Already [37 groups within the scholarly publishing community](#) have answered the call.

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## Funding for vaccine development

On 16 March, the European Commission offered up to €80 million of financial support to CureVac, a highly innovative vaccine developer from Tübingen, Germany, to scale up development and production of a vaccine against the Coronavirus in Europe. CureVac was previously [the recipient of the EU's first inducement prize in 2014](#) for its innovative vaccine technology.

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## Joint Research Centre: science supports coronavirus response

From the outset, the JRC has mobilised its wide expertise to help the Commission understand the COVID-19 emergency, anticipate its impacts, and support contingency planning.

A [website](#) and tools such as the [Epidemic Intelligence from Open Sources platform](#) and [Europe Media Monitor](#) are being used to monitor the spread and responses. Maps are produced and shared through [the Emergency Response Coordination Centre](#). Reports on coronavirus misinformation are also being provided.

JRC experts have developed a model to inform the Commission about the effects of containment measures on the spread, in Italy and in all Member States. Other analyses have been carried out to study the economic impact of the various measures and assess potential scenarios for the lifting of the lockdown.

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## Stay active during the crisis: Commission launches #BeActiveAtHome

The European Commission has launched #BeActiveAtHome, a social media campaign to motivate people to keep fit and on the move whilst confined to their homes. European citizens are invited to show what they are doing to stay fit and to share their new exercise ideas with others. The posts should include the dedicated hashtag #BeActiveAtHome mentioning @EUSport on Twitter and @european\_youth\_eu on Instagram.

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## Online learning resources and eTwinning help teachers and students during the outbreak

With most schools and campuses closed this month, the Commission has launched [the 'coronavirus: online learning resources' website](#) with resources and tools for learners, teachers and educators to ensure continuity in education and training.

The Italian eTwinning Support Service launched a [distance learning initiative](#) to help teachers exchange online teaching and learning best practices, and to provide webinars on methodologies with experts.

In Codogno, a small town in the heart of the area hardest hit by the Coronavirus, the project “THE RED ZONE: Isolated but connected!” connects the local school with one in the UK. It provides a space for pupils to exchange thoughts, drawings, songs, letters and experiences during this time.

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## Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions support cutting-edge research on infectious diseases

The COVID-19 outbreak has not caught EU-funded research off guard. The European Commission's Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions support top-notch researchers in finding solutions to challenges posed by infectious diseases. Ongoing projects include:

- [Unravelling species barriers of coronaviruses](#)
- [Secretory mechanisms of cytokines in bat and human cell cultures in response to coronavirus infection](#)
- [Host switching pathogens, infectious outbreaks and zoonosis](#)
- [Disability and disease during the 1918 influenza pandemic: implications for preparedness policies](#)

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## Enjoy quality opera from your home

Operavision - the opera streaming platform supported by Creative Europe - is scaling up its programming during the coronavirus outbreak. Teaming up with some of Europe's best opera houses it will offer a programme of bi-weekly streams, which can be accessed free of charge from anywhere. This month opera lovers will be able to enjoy famous works from Verdi, Gluck, Rossini and Mozart.

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## Calls and collaborations

### Extended deadlines for Horizon 2020, Erasmus+ and EU Solidarity calls

Horizon 2020 call **deadlines have been extended**. The recent escalation of restrictions related to the coronavirus outbreak may hamper applicants' ability to prepare and finalise high-quality proposals. For this reason, for Horizon 2020 calls with original deadlines between now and 15 April, extensions will be applied. The precise new deadlines for each call and topic will be published on [the call and topic pages on the Funding and Tenders Portal](#).

Deadlines have also been extended for a number of [Erasmus+ and European Solidarity calls](#) to give people more time to prepare their applications.

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### Funding for start-ups and SMEs to help tackle outbreak

On 13 March the Horizon 2020 **European Innovation Council (EIC) Accelerator pilot** alerted start-ups and SMEs with technologies and innovations that could help in treating, testing, monitoring or other aspects of the coronavirus outbreak to apply urgently to the next round of funding with a budget of €164 million. The European Commission received approximately 4,000 applications, including over 1000 from startups and small and medium-sized companies with innovations relating to preventing the impact and spread of the coronavirus applied

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