EU response to the coronavirus pandemic in the Southern Neighbourhood

Overview of the EU support

As part of its global response to the coronavirus outbreak, the European Commission stands by its partners in the Southern Neighbourhood and is adjusting its on-going assistance programmes and re-orienting its programming for 2020 to mobilise emergency support. Based on needs expressed by partner countries, this re-orientated EU support is focussing specifically on health, economic and social sectors.

Responding to health-related needs

Regional level

As a first emergency response at regional level, the EU signed a contract with the European Centre for Disease Control to provide tailor-made support to enhance the preparedness and response capacities of partner countries in the current emergency situation. This new EU Initiative for Health Security for €9 million covers all neighbourhood and enlargement countries and focuses on capacity building of epidemiologists and frontline health staff.

Country level

At country level, the EU response is being adapted to a variety of situations. In Lebanon, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt ongoing EU projects are being reallocated to support national health systems, ensure continuity of critical health care and provide most-needed protective equipment, specific training and technical assistance in hospitals.

Refugees and migrants

EU funding to improve access to healthcare and alleviate the effects of close proximity living conditions is channelled by the EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis, the EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, and PEGASE instrument (in Palestine*) to Libya, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, all greatly affected by the significant presence of refugees, migrants or internally displaced people.

Limiting the socio-economic impact

To address the economic impact of the coronavirus crisis and to provide a coordinated European response, the EU with International Financial Institutions (IFIs) is strengthening a number of regional facilities to support SMEs in the current context, deliver trade facilitation and provide more financing in local currency. Meanwhile, the EU is reorienting its cooperation programmes to provide direct support to the budgets of partner countries to help them face the social and fiscal costs of the crisis.

* This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.
What is the EU already doing for its Southern Neighbourhood partners to face the coronavirus emergency? Some examples

Algeria
- The EU is working closely with the Algerian authorities since the beginning of the crisis to identify their needs and explore possibilities for help. The EU is ready to reorient up to €75 million of existing programmes on the basis of clear needs and priorities expressed by the Algerian authorities.

Egypt
- The EU is ready to release funds worth €89 million to support the immediate needs of the Egyptian public health system. In addition, the EU is planning to use up to €200 million of planned cooperation programmes to support the social and economic recovery of Egypt, including support to the private sector and an increased social protection for the most vulnerable. Together with International Financial Institutions, the EU is considering to redirect funds to the Egyptian coronavirus response, through support on the short-term to the health sector as well as on the long-term for SMEs, youth and women.

Jordan
- The EU is accelerating delivery of its financial support to the Jordanian budget. It is also funding the purchase of Personal Protective Equipment, and diagnostic kits for the Ministry of Health. Emergency departments in three public hospitals have been equipped to deliver emergency healthcare and, through the Jordanian Red Crescent Society, community based health education and first aid awareness activities have been carried out.

Israel
- The EU is supporting the engagement of Israel in Horizon 2020 dedicated calls for coronavirus treatments, testing and vaccines.

Lebanon
- The EU Regional Trust Fund in Response to the Syrian Crisis is purchasing personal protective equipment and hygiene items to equip 60 primary health care centres and financing awareness raising of personal hygiene and prevention guidance. 2,500 surgical masks and 1,000 FFP2 respiratory masks have been procured for social development centres. The Lebanese Red Cross has been funded to rehabilitate its Emergency Dispatch Centre, making it more efficient in handling emergency calls and dispatching help.

Libya
- The EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa continues to provide essential emergency medical assistance to the host communities and the most vulnerable. Specific awareness-raising initiatives to encourage migrants to adopt good hygiene practices were launched.
**Morocco**

- The EU provides backing to the Government by reallocating €150 million specifically dedicated to the needs of the Moroccan Special COVID-19 Pandemic Management Fund which will support actions from strengthening the resilience of the national health system to combating the mid- and long-term social and economic effects of the pandemic. In addition, the EU is accelerating the disbursement of €300 million already allocated to answer the exceptional budgetary needs of the country in coping with the pandemic.

**Palestine and Palestine refugees**

- The EU has accelerated and paid in full €82 million to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) which will be partly used in the short-term for the coronavirus response and to continue providing access to primary healthcare and aid for 5.5 million refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan.

- The EU plans to allocate an additional €9.5 million to the six East Jerusalem hospitals to help cover coronavirus costs, raising its total contribution to €22.5 million in 2020. The hospitals provide a range of high quality tertiary healthcare.

**Syria**

- Inside Syria, the EU is supporting non-state actors, notably in Idlib, to deliver health services to a population that has suffered nine years of conflict.

**Tunisia**

- The EU is stepping up its support to the health sector. The programme ‘Saha Aziza’ will be expanded to cover all public hospitals in the country. With a total allocation of €70 million, it will allow health authorities to purchase medical supplies and provide training and technical assistance. The EU will also extend its support to local authorities by providing funds to buy equipment and material for disinfecting and sanitizing public spaces. The EU will also redirect up to €250 million to mitigate socio-economic impact.