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 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.

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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.