

European Greens response to COVID-19 crisis



Rarely before has a crisis of such scale impacted so many, in such a short time, across our planet. This is an unprecedented challenge to our societies, which humanity must face together. Solidarity and ambitious cooperation, not nationalism or egoism, will ensure we come out of this crisis stronger and wiser. We must leave no one behind and face this together with open hearts.

We, the European Greens, stand united to take our part in the response to the pandemic. Together,

- We express our heartfelt sympathy with all those who have been infected by the virus and are fighting for their lives as well as with their families and friends; we share the grief of those who lost loved ones to the illness.
- We affirm our solidarity with and deep appreciation for those who are risking their lives in caring for those affected by the virus. No one can overestimate what contribution they have made to our societies; this should not and will not be forgotten. Likewise, we can't thank enough all the workers who are making sure essential services are maintained, risking their own health every day.
- We salute the initiatives and creative solutions from ordinary people and organised civil society across the EU which are helping our societies to cope with our new daily reality. We also deeply value the role of local governments and administrations that are on the front-line in managing this crisis on the ground.
- We salute the signs of solidarity that we have witnessed among countries and regions. At the same time, we strongly regret the lack of solidarity from EU Member States shown during this crisis in particular towards Italy, whose call for medical supplies remained unanswered, and towards Spain, also heavily affected by the current situation. We ask all the Member States as well as the EU institutions to coordinate together along with all European states in our region, in order to guarantee the most strategic production and efficient use of medical supplies, exchange of information and expertise, economic support as well as the continuation of free circulation of goods in order to avoid possible shortages of basic goods.
- The private sector has shown bright examples of responsiveness and creativity in answering the crisis. But here too, we are witnessing attempts at taking undue advantage, exploiting the legitimate anxieties of the population. In particular, we strongly oppose all attempts at the mass collecting of personal data, be it by private or public institutions.

- We recognise that EU governments are now acting, in good faith, to identify the best way to overcome the health crisis and its social and economic consequences. Wherever Greens are in government or in opposition, we are sparing no effort to contribute to the common goals.
- We are however gravely alarmed by the unilateral actions of certain EU governments particularly with regard to the emergency measures. Any restriction to fundamental and human rights must be as limited as possible in its duration, and in any case effective, but not disproportionate. We are highly concerned by some governments attempts to benefit politically from the pandemic. The crisis should not be misused as a pretext for destroying democratic checks and balances, nor social and labour rights. Governments should remain accountable, and extraordinary powers must be applied in good faith.
- We welcome the commitments already made at EU level by the Commission and the ECB to do “whatever it takes” to mitigate the economic and social consequences of this crisis, in particular in regards to the suspension of the Stability and Growth Pact as well as the Quantitative Easing plan of the ECB, but we believe they must go further. In particular we demand financial assistance to those Member States that are most severely affected, through grants and low interest loans without any politically dangerous conditionality. Governments and EU institutions should work together to urgently set up Eurobonds to help raise the required funding for health and recovery policies.
- We also urge the Member States and the EU to coordinate in order to foresee strong measures to prevent massive job losses and to stabilize the income of workers affected particularly the most vulnerable. For the time immediate after the crisis we will need an investment package, which should be focusing on small and medium size companies, solo-workers and should contribute to gearing our economy towards a social-ecological transition.
- We acknowledge the global dimension of this crisis and the solidarity European countries have been already offered by many non-European States. In the same way, EU solidarity must not stop at EU borders, the EU must deliver the necessary humanitarian aid and the best medical resources, particularly to countries in the Global South. The EU must ensure maximum collaboration with the WHO and other international bodies to develop an effective medical response (research cooperation for vaccines etc) and to share that research.

In tackling the crisis, we believe our common compass should be guided by the following elements:

- 1.** We must collectively ensure that no one is left behind, especially those who are most vulnerable within and on the fringes of our societies. In no way should our crisis management deepen injustice and exclusion. We believe in particular that the management of this crisis should not prevent the EU and its Member States, together with other European countries, from acting urgently and responsibly to relieve the worsening situation in refugee camps on the Greek islands. The refugee camps on these islands must be evacuated in order to ensure safe access to healthcare, quarantine and other appropriate measures against the coronavirus.
- 2.** An effective, efficient and lasting response to the crisis demands collective action. Protecting lives means leaving behind narrow national or economic interests. In that sense, while we salute the coordination efforts of the EU institutions thus far, they must now switch to a leadership role.

3. Finding answers to the crisis requires us to act and think out of the box, notably in terms of macro-economic policy. Organisations, laws, rules and procedures must be made to serve life, not the other way around.
4. Public, free and well-funded healthcare systems are and must remain a backbone of our welfare states and the EU should strive for more cooperation among them and for mechanisms to support them further. We want to turn this crisis into the starting point for more European integration, moving towards a stronger, greener and more social Europe.

Let us make no mistake about this: the way we manage this crisis and our ability to coordinate and mutually support each other, can either irremediably damage both the European project and our democracies as we know them; or, conversely, it can reinforce both.

We are convinced that once this crisis is overcome, there can be no going back to business as usual, nor can it be used as an alibi for harsh austerity policies as was the case after the global financial crisis. Like climate change, which will remain an urgent and existential challenge, the pandemic profoundly questions the way our societies are organized, the way we live on this planet and a host of conventional policies. More than ever, we collectively need a new compass; in that perspective, the COVID-19 crisis reinforces the absolute need for transformative initiatives such as a bold European Green Deal and a massive reinvestment in quality public services, above all in the health sector. Only then will this crisis lead to more just, more sustainable and more democratic societies.

