**The Brief – We are all in this together, but not equally**

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In a call for unity, leaders around the world have said that the COVID-19 outbreak is hitting us all regardless of age, sex, race or social class. They are right. However, some groups are particularly vulnerable to this crisis and they should be protected accordingly.

The existing inequalities in society are often exacerbated in times of crisis. The coronavirus outbreak is no different.

Those in the front line, and therefore far more exposed to the disease, often face poor working conditions, low wages and difficult access to social protection, from truck and bus drivers to social workers and nurses, cleaners, farmworkers and supermarket cashiers.

According to the International Labour Organisation, in the health sector, 70% of the most exposed jobs are held by women.

Lockdown measures imposed by governments, while saving lives, put people in distress too. Families with low incomes face higher risks of poverty and social exclusion and struggle to access social protection. Children are being deprived of education – which will only widen inequalities – and often of the free meal they would get at school.

The containment measures have also led to women, children and other vulnerable people such as the LGBTI community to be [enclosed with their abusers](https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/covid-19-isolation-could-create-fertile-ground-for-domestic-violence/). In isolation, reaching for help is far more difficult, especially if victims are economically dependent on their aggressor.

For people with disabilities, who often rely on social services, the outbreak is an enormous threat as well. Many of them are even struggling to access information, as it is not adapted to diversity, and face [discrimination in the treatment.](http://edf-feph.org/newsroom/news/international-disability-alliance-urges-who-condemn-discrimination-treatment-covid19)

Homeless, the Roma community, migrants and asylum seekers trapped in overpopulated camps… the most vulnerable groups in our society are at a far higher risk during the worst public health emergency that Europe and the world have seen in decades.

The socioeconomic consequences of it will hit them harder too.

Commissioners Helena Dalli, Nicolas Schmit and Stella Kyriakides have urged member states [in a letter](https://twitter.com/helenadalli/status/1248207633896660997) to pay particular attention to some of those vulnerable groups and proposed to channel the [Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived](https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1089&langId=en) to ensure support in the context of the outbreak.

However, according to a draft revised [working programme of the EU executive seen by EURACTIV](https://www.euractiv.com/section/eu-priorities-2020/news/eu-to-delay-human-and-minority-rights-initiatives-due-to-covid-19/), most human and minority rights initiatives are to be delayed precisely as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

Europe, and the world, were too slow to counter the public health emergency which has claimed the lives of thousands of people, but the socioeconomic crisis could have an enormous impact too.

The EU must ensure that the economic and social response now, and the one that follows the crisis, live up to the consequences of the emergency. This will require us to question assumed mantras and business as usual solutions. But extraordinary times require extraordinary action.

And whatever the recovery plan leaders will draft next week, it should be inclusive enough so that it protects those who even in normal circumstances are already one step behind, and who were in the front line when we needed them.

**The Roundup**

*Make sure you stay up-to-date with everything to do with coronavirus across Europe’s capitals with*[*EURACTIV’s comprehensive overview,*](https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/linksdossier/coronavirus-whats-happening-in-europe/)*regularly updated with the help of our pan-European network of reporters and media partners.*

The EU’s digital czar Margrethe Vestager has attempted to ally privacy fears over the use of certain mobile applications in the fight against the coronavirus, in an [exclusive interview with EURACTIV’s Sam Stolton](https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/news/vestager-its-not-a-choice-between-fighting-the-virus-and-protecting-privacy).

Austria’s environment minister [says that state aid for Austrian Airlines](https://www.euractiv.com/section/aviation/news/austrian-airlines-bailout-to-be-linked-to-climate-targets/) should support efforts to cut aviation’s carbon footprint, as the government negotiates with the firm’s parent company, Lufthansa.

Spain’s socialist Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, has [proposed a national pact for the economic and social “reconstruction” of the country](https://www.euractiv.com/section/coronavirus/news/spanish-parties-bicker-over-national-pact-for-post-coronavirus-reconstruction/), calling on all political parties, regional governments and social actors such as trade unions to take part.

Central and Eastern European countries may not have the huge human resources of China, but they do have plenty of advantages that must be used after the end of the pandemic, says Bulgarian Deputy Prime Minister Tomislav Donchev in an [exclusive interview](https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/interview/bulgarian-deputy-pm-eastern-europe-could-replace-china-in-sectors-critical-to-the-eu/) with EURACTIV Bulgaria.

The [registration and processing of asylum applications](https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/member-states-must-comply-with-asylum-laws-despite-covid-19-says-eu/) must continue and member states must comply with asylum law, despite the COVID-19 crisis, the European Commission warned on Thursday (16 April).

EU trade ministers have [promised to protect](https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/eu-aims-to-bar-predatory-takeovers-of-weakened-firms/) strategic European companies weakened by the virus-triggered downturn from “predatory” takeovers.

A new report on the impact of COVID-19 on [student exchanges](https://www.euractiv.com/section/economy-jobs/news/erasmus-students-in-limbo-about-losing-grants-from-covid-lockdown/) in Europe, suggests that almost two-thirds of respondents do not yet know what will happen with their grants and are trying to get information from universities or national authorities.

Meanwhile, environmentally-minded investor groups have [commended Anglo-Dutch oil and gas major Shell](https://www.euractiv.com/section/climate-environment/news/investors-hail-shells-net-zero-emissions-pledge/) for committing to cut emissions to net-zero by 2050.

Euractiv Germany’s Florence Schulz ponders whether the coronavirus pandemic will cause the [comeback of Germany’s political centre](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/will-the-coronavirus-bring-the-comeback-of-germanys-political-centre/).

And Greenpeace’s Sini Eräjää argues that Europe’s relationship to food and nature must not be put to one side because of the COVID-19 crisis, and instead be [front and centre](https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/opinion/covid-19-fixing-our-relationship-with-food-and-nature-is-more-important-than-ever/) in the recovery.

**Look out for…**

*The Spring Meetings of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank*

***Views are the author’s***

*[Edited by Benjamin Fox]*

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