



POSITION PAPER

POTENTIAL IMPACTS OF THE NEW CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC ON HEALTH RESEARCH PROPOSAL DEADLINES AND ACTIVE PROJECTS

As Europe's novel coronavirus disease cases are expected to increase further, many European governments at the forefront are taking the extraordinary step of locking down the entire country to fight the virus. A growing number of countries, regions and cities are declaring the state of emergency for the worldwide outbreak that the World Health Organization has officially classified a pandemic.

In these very uncertain times solidarity in the EU is critical. Only by working together the EU will be successful to overcome the current challenges. Health research is one concrete example for showing continued cooperation and renovated commitments.

Across Europe and beyond, concern is rising about the potential impact on research projects, project-related travels, or field work such as pilots and workshops, as well as new proposals. Universities are making impressive efforts to digitise courses, exams and research activities that do not require lab work, amid region- and country-wide quarantines are already being put in place or likely to be announced soon by the governments. Health and care organisations, schools, municipalities and all the organisations that provide services to citizens are overwhelmed with the bulk of demand and this affects their capacity to respond to other priorities beyond the Covid-19 implications.

Despite significant efforts to minimise the effects of the crisis, some research activities are disrupted. With meetings cancelled up until May or later, researchers need to find workarounds to be able to deliver meaningful results for several projects on time. Smart working and videoconferencing are certainly a suitable alternative for many activities but not for lab and field work which is being suspended in many cases.

Such decision is a *force majeure* one due to the impossibility to

carry out normal lab activities while safeguarding researchers' health and the fact that a large number of research projects foresee the realization of trials, pilots and tests requiring the active participation of patients, vulnerable population groups and older people. We want to express our support for any decisions the EC is undoubtedly currently working on in relation to Horizon 2020 active projects, where partners will likely need an extension of deadlines.

Overall, indications about eligibility of costs incurred for meetings that could not take place are being provided. However, a concerted plan and guidance from the European Commission (and funding Agencies in its dependency) for delays of projects that are being affected is urgently needed.

Furthermore, the European institutions will be well aware of the impact the global Covid-19 emergency is having on the capacity of European organisations (specifically, although not exclusively, hospitals, health and care organizations, public health authorities, social services, non-profit organizations and municipalities) to dedicate time and efforts to the preparation of proposals to apply for the next (and last) H2020 round of calls.

Priority number one is taking care of patients while protecting the health of all population and making our best to stop the infection curve. Such organisations will be at a clear disadvantage in the competition for funding compared to those based in less affected areas that, anyway, are progressively being all involved in the Covid-19 outbreak. We trust the EC will take the necessary action for the current H2020 calls to be able to receive the highest quality of proposals and extend the submission deadlines to minimise the risk of promising proposals being abandoned whilst key frontline partners are prioritising their Covid-19 response.

FOR THE REASONS STATED ABOVE, THE ORGANISATIONS WHICH SUPPORT THIS INITIATIVE BRING TO THE ATTENTION OF THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS THE NEED TO:

- 1) Provide guidance on the actions in place to mitigate the impact of the new coronavirus on active projects.**
- 2) Delay the deadlines for the currently open calls for proposals under the Societal Challenge 1 until at least end of May 2020 (excluding emergency calls on COVID-19).**

