



RESOLUTION

Cities and municipalities ensure stability in the COVID-19 crisis - European states and the EU must now maintain and strengthen the local authorities' ability to act

The COVID-19 pandemic threatens the health of people in Europe and the rest of the world. It has a major impact on their everyday life as well as significant social and economic consequences, which cannot be foreseen yet in their entirety.

Local authorities reliably perform a large number of key tasks on behalf of citizens in the crisis. These include tasks in the health sector, social services and in ensuring public services. They also play a key role in implementing measures to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus and in their gradual relaxation.

In the crisis it is evident once again: the local level ensures stability. It is an essential pillar of the countries of Europe. We will not be able to overcome this and future crises without cities and municipalities capable of action and efficiency. That is why the European states must ensure the efficiency of their local authority services, administration and facilities.

The European Union must likewise help support the local authorities – within the scope of its competences. For many years now, the EU has recognised the importance of local authorities in implementing core EU policies. Effective climate protection cannot be achieved and the digital transformation not promoted without cities and municipalities. Within the scope of its competences and in co-ordination with national government measures, it can boost the local authorities' ability to invest by setting up programmes and funding opportunities.

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis on local authorities

Local authorities themselves are also affected by this crisis in very different ways. In many local authorities, ensuring municipal tasks under the aggravated conditions of the crisis causes a very heavy workload for their employees and those of municipal enterprises. In many countries, numerous sick and dead particularly among those working in the health sector are to be lamented and mourned.

Putting into effect measures ordered by the responsible higher government levels to reduce the spread of the virus has partly made local authorities face severe challenges, which so far they have met reliably, resolutely and pragmatically. In addition, restricting the possibilities of assembly and movement has also hindered the customary processes of local democracy.

The COVID-19 crisis entails a number of high extra costs in local authorities – e.g. through additional requirements particularly in social services, in healthcare, through measures to protect the health of citizens and employees. At the same time, in many places the economic effects of the crisis are causing revenue to be reduced owing to the lack of tax payments or rates.

Local authorities' ability to act must be ensured – the Socialist Local Representatives' demands

The following demands are addressed to the responsible levels of the European states:

- To protect their citizens and employees in the crisis, the local authorities require the equipment needed to perform their tasks. The national governments must provide this literally vital equipment – especially for health sector staff – or help procure it.
- To guarantee the effective and rapid implementation on the spot of the measures taken by the higher government levels to reduce the COVID-19 virus, the local authorities require clear and unambiguous regulations. We all want a return to normal everyday life. Yet this can only happen gradually with caution. The local level should be consulted in determining or relaxing measures because of their experience from the practical implementation of many measures at local level and their knowledge of local circumstances.

- The rights guaranteed in the Council of Europe's Charter of Local Self-Government must also be respected in the crisis. Under no circumstances may national governments use the crisis to permanently restrict these rights and direct financial revenue in particular.
- If necessary, the national legislators responsible must ensure the functionality of local democracy with appropriate legal adjustments and back it up with technical measures. For instance, by enabling council and committee meetings to be held as a video conference.
- To guarantee that local authorities are able to act, they require proper financial resources. Rapid, direct and unbureaucratic financial support is needed in the crisis to enable them to carry on performing their tasks in a reliable way. Moreover, they also need medium-term and long-term financial support to maintain and improve municipal infrastructure. Municipal investments in infrastructure are an indispensable basis for maintaining cities and municipalities worth living in and for economic, social and ecological development. So many jobs also depend on these investments. That is why the economic recovery after the crisis will also be crucially reliant on the cities' and municipalities' ability to invest.

The following demands are addressed to the European Union:

- Local authorities in Europe are affected very differently by the crisis. Many cities and municipalities are not prepared for the profound impact of the COVID-19 crisis, and need rapid, unbureaucratic assistance. It is also necessary to act quickly in the crisis. EU aids should reach the local authorities directly and as swiftly as possible. Furthermore, control of state aid and of public procurement must be adjusted to the requirements of the exceptional situation of this crisis.
- A rapid agreement on the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) with an increase of funds provision for the cohesion policy and extra resources for local authorities and regions is more urgent in the present situation than ever. The EU Commission's proposal of May 2018 is far from being sufficient.
- The Green Deal must not fall victim to the current crisis. On the contrary, it can even play a major part in overcoming the economic crisis. A climate protection policy that ensures sustainable mobility and the conversion of energy supply to renewable energy sources is a priority and must be provided in the cohesion policy with appropriate resources. The local authorities are crucial players in implementing the Green Deal.
- We Socialists stand for a society based on solidarity and social cohesion. What is crucial for this is also an economic system for which sustainability, social equity and social justice, and gender equality are fundamental cornerstones. Hence European programmes and measures to master the crisis should invariably help put into practice the aims of the European Pillar of Social Rights. We want a social Europe with fair wages, good working conditions, equal pay and equal pension. This would also benefit women, especially since in many areas they are shouldering the main burden in coping with the crisis. There is also the necessity of enabling more affordable housing in our cities and municipalities throughout Europe in a joint effort on every level.
- PES Local welcomes the conference on the future of Europe announced by the EU Commission. This conference will also draw lessons from the current crisis and have to come up with ways for a better and more effective co-ordination of member states measures on a European level. Because of its proximity to the citizens, its outstanding importance for many forward-looking EU policies and its significant role as an anchor of stability in crises, PES Local demands direct involvement of the local authority level in this conference.

Learn from one another: exchange of experience in the crisis

Solidarity and exchanging experience are important in the crisis. The European Committee of the Regions underlines the importance of co-operation and the exchange of experience among local authorities in the crisis, and for this purpose has set up an online platform aimed at exchanging solutions and improving mutual assistance (<https://cor.europa.eu/de/engage/Pages/COVID19-exchangeplatform.aspx>). PES Local strongly supports this initiative.

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