



**Friends of
the Earth
Europe**



**FROM FRAGILITY TO
RESILIENCE:
How EU Covid-19 recovery
plans can tackle pandemic
and planetary breakdown**

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Table of Contents

- 3** Introduction
- 4** Four pillars
- 6** Short term demands

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From Fragility to Resilience:

How EU Covid-19 recovery plans can tackle pandemic and planetary breakdown

Introduction

Europe faces at once a pandemic and planetary emergency – as does the whole world.

This is a lethal combination for all of humanity, both in the near and far term. But those already disadvantaged in our grossly unequal societies are disproportionately hit by the Covid-19 pandemic and its immediate consequences, and by climate and ecosystem breakdown.

In these unprecedented times of interconnected crises we look to our leaders to rise to their responsibilities and respond holistically to the multiple emergencies we face. This means acting in the common interests of people and the planet, in the immediate and the longer-term.

The Covid-19 pandemic is demonstrating all too clearly the interlinkages between human health, the natural world, our economic system and our democracies. Governments must make solidarity central to the response to the pandemic – between countries, and regions, and with marginalized members of society and frontline communities. They must unite and direct relief funds to build back a more resilient, equal and caring world within the Earth's limits.

Building back better

The mobilisation of funds for the post-Covid-19 economic recovery by European governments is necessary and welcome. It proves that finance ministries and financial institutions can act decisively and make huge sums available for crisis response and mitigation when they choose.

Rather than propping-up a broken economic model which is fueling inequality and planetary breakdown, these funds should serve the transition to a sustainable and fair Europe, under a strengthened European Green Deal. This is a moment to double-down on the Just Transition and on sustainable solutions for food, agriculture, energy, nature, and resource use. Covid-19 must not be allowed to weaken or delay the action we need on the planetary emergency – despite pressure from vested interests to do so.

Avoiding future pandemics

Epidemics and diseases have been shown to be related to the destruction of natural forests and other land use changes, increases in factory farms, the illegal trade in wild animals, and invasive species that carry microbes into new habitats. Added to that, our economies have been built around highly mobile lifestyles, densely populated cities, and the over-consumption of products from complex global supply chains – conditions which facilitate the spread of viruses.

Part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic must be efforts to live in harmony, not competition, with the natural world. We must reconsider our relationship with nature, restore ecosystems and biodiversity, end factory farms, create more localised models of production, and reduce unnecessary travel and transport to help avoid future pandemics.

Four pillars

Friends of the Earth Europe calls on the EU institutions and member states to take action in response to the Covid-19 crisis under the following four pillars:

- 1. Solidarity with people**
- 2. Building resilient ecosystems and tackling climate change**
- 3. Creating an economy that cares for people and planet**
- 4. Ensuring and strengthening democracy**

1. Solidarity with people

Any kind of recovery plan must be based on solidarity – between countries, and regions, and with marginalized members of society and frontline communities. Sharing resources, including those needed to tackle the pandemic, is a fundamental part of solidarity – be they medical, financial, scientific, technological or other. Debt relief is another way to help response and recovery. This applies for solidarity within Europe and globally where Europe should show leadership.

Recovery plans need to prioritise people, not lost profits of multinational companies. This should include improving the pay and conditions of essential workers providing healthcare and basic services.

The human rights of workers all along global supply chains must be respected and protected by states and businesses, especially against abuses by companies operating transnationally. We see already how the crisis is impacting those in precarious, freelance and zero- hour jobs; short-term financial relief and support from governments should prioritise those impacted the most. In the long-run, recovery plans and funds should prioritise the creation of decent and safe, quality jobs and the move away from precarious work conditions.

2. Building resilient ecosystems and tackling climate change

The EU and its members must maintain and strengthen environmental and climate regulations and standards. The Covid-19 crisis must not be allowed to be used by industry or policy-makers with vested interests to weaken or scrap environmental legislation and protections.

It should fast-forward the transition to a just, sustainable future by increasing the ambition of the European Green Deal. This requires transformational solutions and investments across sectors. We need sufficient support to community-owned renewable energy and quality low-energy buildings through an ambitious and legally binding Renovation Wave; scaled up restoration of natural habitats; transformation of our food and farming systems towards agroecology and methods of food production that are climate resilient and can withstand

crises, and reduction of overall consumption to halve the EU's material footprint. (See Friends of the Earth Europe's detailed recommendations for a European Green Deal capable of putting us on a path to a just and sustainable future at: www.foeeurope.org/Principles-for-transformation).

Pandemics and diseases are related to the destruction of nature and forests, biodiversity degradation, the increase in factory animal farms and the trade in wild animals. By restoring natural ecosystems and biodiversity we can ensure more resilient and stable ecosystems for the future.

3. Creating an economy that cares for people and planet

It's time to end the age of austerity in Europe, and work towards a macroeconomic framework that tackles inequality, and invests in human wellbeing and the preservation of the natural environment that sustains us.

We need to build a caring economy where care work – work that is overwhelmingly carried out by women – is recognised, and the responsibility of this work is shared between men, women and the society. An economy in which the basic needs of all people are met, and where we care for the planet. This means abandoning the paradigm of endless consumption and growth. The privatisation of core public services, like health, needs to be ended so that we can have stronger public services controlled by people. Bail-outs are an opportunity for the state to re-nationalize public services, like health, transport, energy generation, and banking, and to shift towards more sustainable production and consumption patterns.

We call for the introduction of a Corona Wealth Tax on rich companies and individuals to ensure they contribute to the costs of the rescue and recovery packages. This is on top of putting an end to tax avoidance, evasion and secrecy.

4. Ensuring and strengthening democracy

Fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, including upholding civic space, must be a non-negotiable prerequisite of any EU recovery plan.

Restrictive emergency measures must serve the purpose of combating the pandemic only, be time-limited and compatible with the rule of law and the EU's fundamental values, and come with the proper checks and balances.

While we live under restrictions to prevent the spread of infection, proper transparency of decision-making processes must be ensured. European Commissioners must only meet registered lobbyists and must publish details of all their (virtual) interactions. Other decision-makers should adopt the same practice.

Dialogue with, and support for, organised civil society must be maintained.

(See Friends of the Earth Europe's briefing *Thriving Civic Space for Strong European Democracy* for more on civic space: www.foeeurope.org/Thriving-civic-space-for-strong-European-democracy)

Short term demands for EU recovery plans and Covid-19 response measures in 2020:

1. Increase standards, protections and the ambition of policies for the environment, climate, nature, workers and human rights to meet the scale and urgency of the crises; at the minimum there must be **no deregulation, lowering of standards or delaying** of protections and policies.
2. Place an immediate **moratorium on all arbitration claims** by private corporations against governments using international investment treaties, and a permanent restriction on all arbitration claims related to government measures targeting health, economic, and social dimensions of the pandemic and its effects.
3. Put an **end to tax avoidance, evasion and secrecy**, and make sure the rich pay their fair share, including through a Corona Wealth Tax.
4. **No bail-out** of fossil fuel industries, companies with a substantial part of their business based offshore in tax havens or companies with track records of environmental, human and workers' rights abuse and violations, or corruption.
5. **Condition bail-outs** of companies on the prioritisation of jobs and decent salaries and on lowering climate and environmental impacts; prioritise SMEs and the non-profit sector. Use bail-outs to bring public services under public ownership and control.
6. **Limit profit extraction** – in the form of dividends, buying-back of shares, and increased management salaries and bonuses – by companies that receive bail-outs for at least 5 years.
7. Ensure transformative policies within a **European Green Deal** are agreed and implemented in a timely way, and match economic recovery packages to the aims of the European Green Deal to accelerate its implementation, including the Just Transition.
8. Set aside **sufficient funding** and devise measures, including debt relief and a more ambitious Just Transition Fund, to support those impacted most by economic slow-down and those that need to transition out of fossil fuel and other industries, and create new, decent, quality jobs.



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Friends of the Earth Europe campaigns for sustainable and just societies and for the protection of the environment, unites more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups and is part of the world's largest grassroots environmental network, Friends of the Earth International.

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