

Expertise France is taking action against COVID-19: strengthening international cooperation and supporting partner countries

Expertise France (EF), the French public agency for the design and implementation of international technical cooperation projects, is actively working in AFD Group for the “Team Europe” global response to the COVID-19 crisis.

In many of our partner countries, the COVID-19 pandemic adds to other major existing health challenges and they only have fragile health systems. Similarly, the crisis will have huge economic and social consequences, adding to the considerable budgetary pressure on often heavily indebted countries and paralysing much of their private sector.

The agency can rely on a pool of experts who are already working in its countries of operation, in particular in French-speaking Africa, in order to provide an immediate response to the crisis. The agency is making every effort to mobilise these experts to support the requests of our partner countries in the fields of health and macroeconomic management, in conjunction with the relevant donors.

The impacts of the pandemic will go beyond the fields of health and the economy. There is a risk they will exacerbate the situation of vulnerable populations, increase inequalities and destabilise regions and localities that are already fragile. Consequently, all EF’s activities in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and Europe will be geared to the situation in order to address the challenges ahead.

Presentation of Expertise France

Expertise France (EF) is a public agency with a mandate to meet the expertise requirements of partner countries in the main areas of public action: democratic and financial governance, security, sustainable development and human development. Through its action in the field, it contributes to the objectives of solidarity and influence of the French and European development policy.

To this end, it relies on the in-house expertise of over 350 employees at headquarters and the project offices in our countries of operation, some 600 contributors in the field, as well as a pool of over 10,000 experts from the French civil service and private sector, and the main public policy actors in the North and South.

In 2019, the agency implemented over 500 international cooperation projects in around one hundred countries. It is accredited by the European Union for the delegated management of Community funds and is also one of the three European agencies accredited with DG ECHO.

In this context, EF has identified the following areas of work to contribute to the effort coordinated by EU institutions and delegations.

1. Mobilising our network of experts in Africa for the health and economic management of the crisis

❖ Technical assistance platform in the health sector in Sub-Saharan Africa

Expertise France set up a COVID/Health technical platform back at the end of March 2020. It includes a documentary database, a pool of leading health experts coordinated from Paris, and its network of technical assistants and project managers deployed at various levels of national health systems in Africa. The objective of this platform is to build the capacities of African health systems to address the pandemic.

By developing health crisis management skills and supporting public health decision-makers, the platform goes beyond a strictly humanitarian response to the COVID crisis. It takes innovative action integrating emergency and development, by articulating International Health Regulations (IHR) and Health Systems Strengthening (HSS).

The COVID/Health platform is an interdisciplinary mechanism that articulates information from partner countries and the latest global scientific and technical knowledge about the pandemic. The platform therefore provides resources to support the COVID response in Africa. It builds the technical capacities of decision-makers in regions and countries, while helping Team France and Team Europe, at their request, target their aid to fight the pandemic. The mechanism is composed of three complementary entities:

- **A pool of leading experts** covering the following disciplines: public health systems; health and development; infection prevention and control (IPC); management of cases; pharmacy and medical supply; health security; laboratory monitoring and tests; access to healthcare; health economics. The pool of experts provides training and technical assistance directly to health and political authorities in Africa, with a focus on developing response plans, defining needs, identifying partners and suppliers, selecting and using state-of-the-art equipment, etc.
- **A network of focal points covering 12 Sub-Saharan African countries**, including 11 French-speaking countries: Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, CAR, Chad, DRC, Equatorial Guinea, Guinea, Madagascar, Mali, Niger and RCI. The focal points act as transmission belts, firstly between the pool of experts and documentary base and, secondly, the authorities in the country where they are deployed. Access to the database, training and ongoing mentoring enables the focal points to give appropriate advice to the health authorities they are assigned to and report their needs to the platform.
- **An interdisciplinary documentary base** maintained by the pool of experts and network of focal points. The objective is to share validated and relevant scientific and technical information for partner countries about the COVID-19 epidemic, as well as information from the field concerning the management of the crisis, the state of the health system and the needs identified locally that are not covered by the technical and financial partners (TFPs). The documentary base thereby ensures there is a better exchange of experience between partner countries with similar circumstances. In addition, the comparison of knowledge of advanced techniques and information from operational contexts provides partner countries with more effective support tailored to their needs.

❖ *Technical assistance platform for the management of the economic and financial consequences of the crisis in French-speaking Africa*

Still relying on our experts who are already working in several African partner countries and on projects under implementation, Expertise France is able to provide immediate technical assistance for the management of the economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This remote assistance can be mobilised on request and aims to help countries formulate and implement economic recovery policies. It specifically targets tax and customs matters, budgetary management, the implementation of public expenditure and support to the private sector. This mechanism will use the technical assistance already in place in the economic and financial administrations of the countries in question, as well as the expertise of French partner administrations (Public Finances Directorate General – DGFIP, BPI France...). DGFIP has already agreed in principle to support Ivorian administrations. BPI France will be prepared to support guarantee fund mechanisms in Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon and Senegal.

This specific assistance will complement the support initiated by projects, in particular **in Cameroon, Guinea, Libya and Tunisia**. In the coming weeks, the agency will be able to provide specific complementary support in the other African countries where it operates and in the Middle East.

❖ *Dissemination of online training for civil protection actors in French-speaking Africa*

In response to the COVID-19 crisis, **in French-speaking African partner countries, EF is disseminating an online training module for firefighters and first responders**. The module is freely available and aims to disseminate good practices for prevention, management and mitigation related to biological risks. It has been created under the European CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear) Risk Mitigation Centres of Excellence Initiative. This training has been developed by and for French civil protection actors and is now available and disseminated in some twenty French-speaking African countries.

The purpose of the platform is to support all the firefighters and first responders concerned by the Covid-19 crisis. These sessions were initially intended for a public of specialised professionals but allow anyone to have a good basic knowledge of the disease, the ways in which it spreads and what to do to protect yourself against it.

EF has already organised three distance training sessions for the partner countries of CBRN Centres of Excellence projects. Other sessions are also planned in the near future. As the implementing agency, EF ensures the proper functioning, monitoring and evaluation of this system.

*Firefighters in West African countries are widely called upon to transport patients or for decontamination operations, in addition to the routine interventions of firefighters. Through its “**Three Borders**” programme financed by AFD, Expertise France has supported civil protection services in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger by delivering 70,000 cloth face masks. A manufacturer in Burkina Faso has been called on to produce these reusable masks, thereby providing a more permanent solution for firefighters while supporting the local economy.*

2. Integrating activities to mitigate the impacts of the crisis on populations into our projects

❖ *Participating in national health response plans*

EF is continuing to support the fight against HIV-AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria in some forty countries *via* **The Initiative**, to complement and support the Global Fund, while integrating the necessary response to COVID-19. **The Initiative decided very quickly to adapt its methods *via*:**

- i) Reprogramming facilities¹ and additional financing² targeting preparedness and response activities for the COVID-19 pandemic (up to a total of EUR 2.5m);
 - a. At 15/06, EUR 266,236 had been reprogrammed
 - b. and EUR 2,151,815 of additional financing had been allocated.
- ii) A redirection of funds allocated to operational research towards research programmes on comorbidities between COVID-19 and HIV and/or tuberculosis and/or malaria:
 - a. At 18/06, 6 projects had been selected among the projects shortlisted from the COVID-19 call for projects by the French Agency for Research on AIDS and Viral Hepatitis (ANRS), for a cofinancing amount of EUR 934,003.
- iii) Its technical assistance. The Initiative assist countries, upon request, with their reprogramming efforts for Global Fund grants. At 15/06, ten missions had been supported, with a budget commitment of some EUR 411K. Finally, the Initiative has made experts available to the EF COVID-19 Platform who contribute to the agency's coordinated response in countries at various levels.

In **Mali**, Expertise France has delivered 20,000 masks to the health services of the Malian Armed Forces *via* the **PARSANTE project** financed by the European Union (and equipment for three garrison infirmaries). In CAR, EF has also integrated specific COVID inputs into the ongoing mobile clinics project with the Ministry of Health (MEAE/Crisis Centre financing).

On the East African coast (**Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Seychelles, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia**), the **European MEDISAFE project** aims to combat the proliferation of substandard and counterfeit medicines. In the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the project experts made sure that national response plans were dealing with the fight against counterfeit medicines.

In **Guinea**, a EUR 1.5m project is under discussion with the EU to participate in the national response plan.

Furthermore, still in **Guinea**, a new EUR 7m project is being developed along with AFD on the prevention and control of infections.

Finally, from a regional point of view, Expertise France supports the West African Health Organization (WAHO) to help Member States in their crisis communication facing the COVID-19. This EUR 123k technical assistance is financed by the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs.

¹ Of up to 10% of ongoing grants.

² Of up to 15% of ongoing grants.

❖ Supporting the economic recovery measures and public finances in order to maintain the economic fabric, jobs and the financing capacities of public policies (Africa)

In Guinea, Expertise France is assisting with the implementation of the national plan for the economic response to COVID-19 *via* the **PACCAF and MAMRI support projects** financed by the European Union and AFD, respectively. The assistance involves **reducing customs and tax formalities** and analysing the tax potential of income from mining and land.

In Cameroon and Côte d'Ivoire, under projects financed by the European Union for Ministries of Finance and internal and external audit bodies, Expertise France has been called on to contribute to the establishment of **national COVID-19 response plans** in conditions consistent with international best practices for public good governance, transparency and accountability.

In Tunisia, under the **INNOVi project** financed by the European Union, Expertise France is supporting “tech” initiatives for **partnerships between the health sector and private sector**. The project will finance innovative solutions and challenges (led by technology parks, engineering schools, R&D centres, companies/start-ups). Expertise France represents the European Union in the multi-donor coordination of this component.

In Libya, the activities of the **EU4PSL project** financed by the European Union have been redirected to assist the local authorities with the implementation of an economic recovery plan including: i) the creation of a special fund to support the private sector based on three main pillars: business financing, safeguarding jobs and supporting consumption, ii) the implementation of emergency regulatory measures, iii) the rapid creation of a guarantee fund, iv) the installation of a call centre to inform people about these different measures.

In ACP countries, under the **Investment Climate Reform (ICR) Facility** financed by the European Union, British Council and GIZ, Expertise France will contribute to the creation of a rapid response mechanism for COVID-19 to meet the immediate needs expressed by public and private actors in the countries to support and revive the private sector.

In West and Central Africa, the **WeCAPS project to strengthen security and safety in ports** (EUR 8.5m, financed by the EU; 01/2019 – 12/2022) will implement activities for training and the provision of protective equipment. These activities will help the partner ports respond to the health emergency and thereby continue to supply the related countries and hinterlands in the region.

❖ Strengthening social protection systems and employment to meet the increase in needs of populations

Social protection systems in countries affected by the crisis can and must play a crucial role in the response to the new challenges they are facing. The 2007 financial crisis showed that countries with strong social protection systems, covering as much of the population as possible, have been able to mitigate the economic and social impact of the crisis and have avoided a severe impoverishment of their populations.

SOCIEUX+, European Union Expertise on Social Protection, Labour and Employment (European programme currently being extended with new cofinancing from France), is a mechanism to facilitate access to the expertise of Member States. The facility focuses on the demand and needs of the institutions of over **145 EU partner countries**. In consultation with its implementing partners (FIIAPP,

Enabel, BELINCOSOC) and DEVCO, EF has adapted the project procedures to be able to quickly call upon European public experts for remote and temporary interventions to provide a response to foreign governments for their management of the social dimension of the COVID-19 crisis, *via* the exchange of experiences.

Under the AFD-funded **TELEMA project to support the productive inclusion of vulnerable populations in the Republic of Congo**, financing has been made available to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Humanitarian Action. These resources have financed a communication campaign on the protection measures, as well as the distribution of hand washing kits and food for vulnerable populations. In addition to efforts to meet urgent needs, the project is currently considering the possibility of covering a larger number of vulnerable populations by supporting 4,000 people (2,000 initially targeted), in order to mitigate the socioeconomic impacts of the crisis.

❖ *Ensuring respect for fundamental rights and the principles of good governance during the crisis (Latin America, Europe, West and North Africa)*

Fully in keeping with the European approach, in the current context, Expertise France is committed to continuing its efforts to promote the principles of good governance, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality, non-discrimination and decent working conditions.

In **Latin America**, the **EL PACCTO** programme, which is implemented by EF, FIIAPP and IILA, has set up a “COVID Channel” communication system to put people in touch who are responsible for monitoring the crisis in police, judicial and penitentiary institutions. The objective is to exchange on the experiences and good and bad practices implemented by these institutions in response to the pandemic. This Channel will also facilitate exchanges between Latin American countries.

To address the announced increase in conjugal and domestic violence related to the lockdown, the mechanism deployed by the European **EUROsociAL+** programme, which fights for social cohesion and against inequalities in **Latin America**, is stepping up its actions to combat violence against women.

In **Ukraine**, the **PRAVO-Justice** project, which is financed by the European Union, is mobilised to ensure the proper continuity of legal proceedings, by providing prison staff and local probation officers with protective equipment.

In the Sahel, the **Sahel Gender Fund**, which is financed by AFD, will be partly redirected on the basis of COVID, as most of the fund’s thematic areas of operation can be adapted to the fight against the negative impacts of COVID on gender equality: economic empowerment, women’s participation in the response to the crisis, etc. The start-up study and call for projects that will follow will reflect this redirection as of June 2020.

Finally, in Africa, while the continent is gearing up to face the pandemic, **PAGOF (project to support open governments in Francophone Africa: Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire and Tunisia)**, which is financed by AFD, is making its expertise available to African civil society and governments in order to strengthen transparency, accountability, access to information and citizen participation.

❖ *Strengthening the resilience of regions and territories to the COVID-19 crisis (Middle East and Caribbean OCTs)*

i. **In the MENA region**, the agency is working on improving social ties among populations, strengthening the link between State and society, economic development, and is assisting with the management of risks and natural disasters. Our teams in the field are already mobilised to assist our partners with the management of the health crisis and strengthen the resilience of the most vulnerable populations to the pandemic.

In close coordination with our European donor (FPI), activities have been proposed under the **HERNES project in north-east Syria**, cofinanced by the European Union and France (CDCS), in order to provide a response to the health crisis. Indeed, this project aims to **strengthen the stability and resilience of populations in north-east Syria**, in particular by rehabilitating and supporting the proper functioning of health centres. In the present context, measures to ease congestion in health centres and awareness-raising activities are currently being prepared. EUR 0.6m of additional IcSP financing has been provided to purchase personal protective equipment (masks, safety glasses, gowns, etc.), oxygen bottles for hospitals, set up a medical waste treatment system and provide distance training to medical staff. It is also planned to equip certain primary health centres supported by the project with triage tents to isolate patients with COVID-19 symptoms.

Activities have also been adapted under the **INES project**, which is financed by France (CDCS). Brochures indicating WHO recommendations have been distributed in areas where partner NGOs are working, as well as in a refugee camp. In addition, distributions of hygiene kits including soap and water cans have been organised.

Expertise France is also taking action in north-west Syria where the COVID crisis risks further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict and the displacement of over 850,000 people.

EUR 0.5m of financing should soon be approved by the EU under the **Gaziantep Initiative** programme to support the health system *via*: i) the purchase and delivery of priority equipment and consumables for the main health facilities (oxygen generators, masks, drugs...); ii) support for the local economic activity and food security to contribute to reducing the exposure of vulnerable groups to health and economic risks. In addition, strict and stronger prevention measures and active awareness-raising campaigns, as well as the distribution of hygiene kits, will be implemented alongside each activity.

Furthermore, the **INOS project, which aims to contribute to improving living conditions for displaced persons in the Idleb region**, is about to be launched in partnership with our network of local organisations. This EUR 0.5m project financed by France (CDCS) will follow WHO recommendations on the health measures to put in place, while implementing activities to contribute to restoring basic services.

In Lebanon, the **QUDRA II project**, which is financed by the European Union and aims to **strengthen the resilience of refugees and local communities** in response to the Syrian and Iraqi crisis, is adapting its social protection services for the most vulnerable to the constraints of the lockdown and travel restrictions. Expertise France is also making 8 mobile intervention units available to the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs in order to distribute hygiene kits and raise awareness among isolated communities of the risks of the COVID-19 crisis, throughout the country.

Under the projects **YANHAD, to promote civic engagement, employment and entrepreneurship in Iraq**, cofinanced by the European Union and France (CDCS), **SHABAKE, to strengthen civil society in Lebanon**, and the **Jordanian social protection support programme to assist civil society organisations**, the latter two financed by AFD and the European Union, respectively, the civil society organisations supported will focus on providing socioeconomic responses to the crisis in order to mitigate its negative consequences.

ii. Under the **ReSEMBiD project for resilience to climate change in the Overseas Countries and Territories of the European Union in the Caribbean**, which is financed by the European Union, a significant part of the planned activities have been redirected towards a fast-track initiative to help public actors and civil society respond to the health crisis in these island territories and the economic losses related to the decline in tourism.

The agency is at the disposal of the European Union to discuss the coordination of the various technical assistance programmes which are proposed to be set up or redirected in response to COVID-19, based on a Team Europe approach.

Appendix: Non-exhaustive table of the COVID-19 activities implemented by Expertise France and presented in the note.

“x” / “example”: the Team Europe projects are highlighted in bold in the table below.

Sub-Saharan Africa							
Country	Health Platform	Economic and Financial Platform	Health Response Plan	Economic Recovery	Social Protection	Human Rights /Governance	Resilience
Guinea	X	X	PASA2 PCI IP9	PACCAF MAMRI PASA2 PAGEF			
RCI	X	X	IP9	Support to the audit body Caisses des Dépôts		PAGOF	
Mali	X	X	PARSANTE IP9	Project to Support Business Facilitation in Mali (PAFAM) PAMEFIP Projects			
Niger	X	X	IP9	Support for the Mobilisation of Domestic Resources			
Burkina Faso	X	X	IP9	Technical Assistance Facility for the Caisses des Dépôts		PAGOF	
Djibouti		X		ADIL			
Chad	X	X	IP9				
Mauritania		X	IP9	PAGEFIP II			
CAR	X	X	SONGO IP9				
DRC	X	X					

Country	Health Platform	Economic and Financial Platform	Health Response Plan	Economic Recovery	Social Protection	Human Rights /Governance	Resilience
Cameroon		X		Technical assistance project to support the public finance management reforms			
Burundi	X						
Madagascar	X						
Congo		X	IP9		TELEMA		
Ethiopia				Technical assistance program to support Economic reforms in Ethiopia			
Kenya				KENGEFIP			
East Africa			MEDISAFE IP9				
North Africa and Middle East							
Tunisia		X	Sidi Bouzid	INNOVI Project to support CDC to finance the innovation ecosystem (Enlien)		PAGOF	
Morocco		X					
Libya				EU4PSL			
Lebanon							QUDRA SHABAKE
Jordan				Support for local governance		X	
Iraq				YANHAD			YANHAD
Syria							Gazantiep Initiative HERNES

Europe							
Country	Health Platform	Economic and Financial Platform	Health Response Plan	Economic Recovery	Social Protection	Human Rights /Governance	Resilience
Ukraine						PRAVO	
Montenegro				BESME			
Latin America and Caribbean (Regional programmes)							
EUROSOCIAL					X	X	
EL PACCTO						X	
EUROCLIMA							X
RESEMBID (Caribbean OCTs)							X
Multi-Country							
SOCIEUX +					X		
ACP				ICR Facility			