

*Koen Doens
Director General
DG International Cooperation and Development*

*Christian Danielsson
Director General
DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations*

Brussels, 18 March 2020

*CONCORD a.i.s.b.l.
Rue de l'industrie, 10
B - 1000 Brussels*

RE: Call for actions to respond to COVID-19 impact on DEVCO/NEAR projects

Dear Director-General Koen Doens, Dear Director-General Christian Danielsson,

We are writing to you regarding the impact that government responses to the COVID-19 is having on the implementation of projects funded by DG DEVCO and DG NEAR. We would like to request your urgent action to clarify key issues which are vital to the continued delivery of our ongoing commitments.

In the exceptional environment created by the spread of COVID-19, organisations have been obliged to take exceptional measures to guarantee due diligence and duty of care considerations towards both staff and communities affected by the crisis and to contribute to the world-wide effort to fight the pandemic. The European Commission took a lead in putting in place clear guidance for its staff, thereby hoping to limit the spread of the virus. Measures which our members have had to put in place include dealing with travel restrictions, visa issues, isolation requirements, restrictions on gatherings, closure of suppliers etc.

Members are also raising very practical concerns related to the implementation of projects funded by your Directorate-Generals and related to compliance with relevant rules and regulations. We are preparing a more detailed list of issues which we will share with you shortly, but urgent guidance is sought on the following:

- **Application of “force majeure”**

We would ask you to consider applying the notion of “force majeure” as an overriding principle in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. If acknowledged as such by DG DEVCO and DG NEAR it should facilitate decision-making and approval by Authorising Officers in line with

General Conditions articles 11.1, 11.2, 11.8, 11.9 and 11.10. This would then apply to the proposals below.

- **Projects in their final stages of implementation**

We would urge you to authorise no-cost extension requests for projects in their final stages of implementation. Member organisations are experiencing delays in the implementation of final activities and closing events and will require a no-cost extension to comply with planned activities, monitoring and evaluation and reporting requirements. Given the unpredictability of the situation, it is currently difficult to plan the remaining activities. We therefore request flexibility in terms of the duration and the possibility for changes to programmatic responses to address the evolving situation related to COVID-19.

- **Eligibility of costs and contingency reserves**

We would like to ask you for a clear indication that all reasonable costs pertaining to all ongoing projects will be considered eligible, including (but not limited to) the ongoing payment of project staff and partners and any costs associated with the cancellation of flights, meetings etc. **Member organisations are incurring additional expenses for travel and relocation of staff.** During this period, staff will remain active to minimise the impact of suspended activities. Secondly, we would like to be able to use the contingency reserves before the end of the project, which clearly necessitates enhanced flexibility in the approval process.

- **Redirecting activities of ongoing projects to respond to COVID-19**

In order to be able to support the countries where our members operate and face the crisis of COVID-19, we would like to request a faster written approval of DG DEVCO and DG NEAR for redirecting some activities of ongoing projects towards awareness-raising, work with communities, healthcare workers, ministries etc.

- **Ongoing calls for proposals**

Several recent calls for proposals have a deadline in the coming months. Owing to the current (and growing) level of restrictions, it risks being very difficult for us to prepare submissions. We would therefore like to request an extension of the deadline for recently launched calls.

CONCORD Europe is working on a more detailed overview of the difficulties currently faced by our members and expected challenges. In the meantime, we would like to ask you to set up a central contact point in both DG DEVCO and in DG NEAR for instructions and guidance for project implementers.

Lastly, we would very much appreciate it if DG DEVCO and DG NEAR could apply a co-ordinated and consistent global approach to the issues we have outlined above.

We look forward to hearing from you and would welcome the opportunity to discuss our ideas with you. We remain at your disposal to provide any additional information needed.

Sincerely yours,



Tanya Cox

Director of CONCORD

CC:

Luc Bagur, Director DEVCO R

Nicolas Stoetzel, Acting head of Unit R.3 Legal Affairs

Mark Johnston, Director NEAR R

Christos Komninos, Head of Unit R.2 Legal issues

