



**European Research Council**  
Established by the European Commission

09-04-2020

## ERC actions on Covid-19

### Background

The European Research Council, set up by the EU in 2007, is the premier European funding organisation for excellent frontier research. The ERC operates through an 'investigator-driven', 'bottom-up' approach, which allows researchers to identify new opportunities in any field of research. Scientific excellence is the sole selection criterion in its competitions. There are no pre-defined research priorities, and applicants, of any nationality, are free to come forward with proposals on any subject in any scientific domain.

### Action taken by the ERC to address the COVID-19 pandemic

Whilst the ERC is fully bottom-up, the research carried out by grantees actually addresses a wide range of issues that have significant societal, economic and policy relevance. Over 50 ongoing or completed ERC projects supported for a total value of about EUR 100 million are contributing to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic by providing insights from several different scientific fields: virology, epidemiology, immunology, paths for new diagnostics and treatments, public health, medical devices, artificial intelligence, social behaviour, crisis management. These ERC projects form part of the EU's broader response to the COVID-19 pandemic as regards research and innovation.

In addition, as stated on its website in reaction to the COVID-19 crisis, the ERC grants *"offer grantees the flexibility to adjust their research project"*. This is an efficient measure because several ERC grantees already enquired about the possibility of addressing COVID-19 related research in their ongoing ERC project.

All this information is publicly available on this ERC website, which also includes testimonies from funded ERC grantees on how bottom-up frontier research is critical to deliver new – and sometimes unexpected – insights relevant for better understanding and fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for providing social behaviour and crisis management related solutions.

### Examples

The project ['ReservoirDOCS'](#) shows how viral evolutionary analysis could be useful to study the origin of the SARS-CoV-2, and in this context contributed to recent findings based on comparative analysis of coronaviruses genomic data. Other ERC projects (['ANTIVIR'](#), ['REGMAMKID'](#), ['Trep-AB'](#)) contribute to the characterisation, development or repurposing of antivirals and drugs (such as hydroxychloroquine) against the SARS-CoV-2. In the area of artificial intelligence, the project ['EAR'](#) just launched a new mobile phone 'COVID-19 Sounds App' (now available for Android phones on the Google Play Store) collecting data to develop machine learning algorithms that could automatically detect whether a person is suffering from COVID-19 based on the sound of their voice, their breathing and coughing. In the area

of social sciences, the project '[HEY BABY](#)' recently produced six sheets of 'tips' addressing one-on-one time, positive instructions and praise, structures and routines, preventing and responding to problem behaviours, managing stress and talking about COVID-19 (translated into 55 languages). Finally, the project '[COMPROP](#)' portrays how to behave to prevent untrustworthy information from circulating regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Further information**

- [List of ERC projects related to COVID-19](#)