

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Version 5: August 2021

# For UK organisations with projects funded by the UK National Agency

## 1. What should I do if participants (or staff) are due to go abroad as part of a project?

Although the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office](#) has lifted some of the restrictions on travelling abroad, their advice is kept under constant review and is subject to change with little notice.

Given the circumstances we appreciate that it may be difficult to progress with your project at the moment. Please bear in mind before arranging travel, accommodation or any other activities that these costs may not be covered by your project contract, for example where the level of risk means it is unrealistic to deliver your project. Organisations may wish to consider 'blended' activities, with virtual elements supported by physical activities in the future. If your organisation will be unable to meet the requirements for a virtual activity (i.e. at least 30-38 hours of activities per week, no job substitution) or activities will not be in line with your project objectives, the activity should be postponed.

It is important that you email the UK National Agency (UK NA) with any proposed changes and you will be advised as to whether they are possible and if there needs to be an amendment to your contract.

## 2. What should I do if I need to make changes to my project as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak?

There are many ways in which the Coronavirus outbreak has had an impact on projects. In many cases it may not be necessary to make an amendment to your contract; for example it is possible to delay activities provided that the contract end date is respected. It is important that you email the UK NA with any proposed changes and you will be advised as to whether there needs to be an amendment to your contract. Projects may request an extension to the duration of their project through a contract amendment request to the UK NA.

## 3. In respect of my ESC contract, what is force majeure, and how does it apply in the case of the Coronavirus outbreak?

If an organisation is unable to fulfil the terms of their contract or would like to make changes to their contract, this is sometimes because of a situation beyond their control, i.e. a force majeure. The Coronavirus was considered to be a force majeure, however any changes to an ESC contract will need to be approved by the UK NA first. As stated above please email the UK NA outlining the proposed changes, and you will be advised of the next steps.

Please note, a force majeure case at the start of the pandemic in 2020 may not be classified as such today. This is because beneficiaries have options to mitigate the risks to projects due to the Coronavirus outbreak, such as **travel insurance; project duration extension requests; changing the timing of the project activities; implementing blended activities;** applying for **interruption days** (on MT+) or **suspension** if needed.

You are therefore strongly advised to check the relevant government guidance and support channels (like: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus> and <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice>), and to review and **accept all risks** attached to advanced bookings. This also relates to any expensive travel costs you may incur as a result of cancelled flights, cancelled activities or tickets that need to be bought at the last minute due to imposed lockdowns or new travel restrictions. You are expected to have relevant travel insurance in place (as a part of good project management and risk assessment plan) to cover such costs; only in circumstances where such expenditure cannot be covered by your insurance, can this be considered as a force majeure case. In such situations, relevant documentation from the insurer will need to be provided to the UK NA.

#### 4. What if I have incurred additional costs as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, for example if additional flights have been purchased?

If you have incurred additional costs as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak, you must consult with your insurance provider in the first instance to ascertain if it is possible to reclaim these costs through an existing policy. If you are unable to claim against your insurance, you may be able to claim the costs as part of your European Solidarity Corps grant under force majeure.

Please note that it is not possible to exceed the total amount of funding you have been awarded in accordance with your contract, but it is possible to make other changes to your project. Please email the UK NA outlining the proposed changes, and you will be advised of the next steps.

#### 5. Due to the Coronavirus outbreak some of my European Solidarity Corps activities need to be delayed. Is it possible to extend the project contract accordingly?

If you wish to extend your contract end date you must email the UK NA outlining the proposed changes, and you will be advised whether or not it is possible, and if so, of the next steps.

#### 6. For UK organisations involved in a project that is coordinated by an organisation overseas, who should I contact regarding the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak?

Please seek advice and guidance from the organisation responsible for coordinating the project. The organisation coordinating the project has a contract for its delivery with the National Agency (NA) of the country in which they are based, and they should seek support from their relevant NA.

#### 7. Who should be contacted for advice if, as a UK organisation, we are coordinating a centralised project, funded by the European Commission's Executive Agency?

As the contract for the delivery of the project is with the European Commission's Executive Agency, you must [contact them directly](#) to seek advice on any changes to your contract or on how to proceed in light of the Coronavirus outbreak.

## 8. I am a participant in a project and I am currently abroad on a placement. Is there any action I need to take given the restrictions on foreign travel and movement within countries?

It is important that you maintain contact with, and follow the advice provided by, the organisation coordinating the project – your sending organisation (as well as the host organisation and other partners where relevant).

## 9. I am a participant in a project and despite the restrictions on foreign travel and movement within countries, I am able to continue my placement remotely via virtual communication channels. Is this permissible?

In cases where the host organisation abroad has made it possible to continue your activity placement through virtual learning or other virtual activities, it is important that you also have the approval of your UK sending organisation to do so. Your UK sending organisation will be able to advise you about any alternative arrangements, including your grant where appropriate. It may be that in some cases it is not possible to continue placements virtually and unused funding may need to be reimbursed.

## 10. What is a virtual activity and what is a blended activity?

A virtual activity takes place in the home location of the participant remotely. A blended mobility combines virtual activities with a physical activity period. Virtual activities undertaken in home country of the participant as part of a blended activity will be subject to the additional financial and contractual rules outlined in your Grant Agreement Addendum.

Please note that when recording activities in Mobility Tool+, if the virtual element of the activity is taking place in the host country, then the activity can be classed as a 'physical' activity in Mobility Tool+. However, if the activity starts or ends virtually in a home country of the participant, then the activity can be classed as a 'blended' activity in Mobility Tool+.

Please note that an ESC activity should not be entirely virtual. Exceptional cases will be considered and you should contact the UK NA for prior approval.

## 11. Can I do a virtual activity in the host country?

A hosting organisation may need to switch from a planned physical activity to virtual activities in accordance with government advice and/or for health and safety reasons due to the Coronavirus outbreak – as a physical activity will have taken place, this will be a blended activity. This is permissible in the context of the Coronavirus pandemic only. Virtual activities should be agreed and documented between the hosting organisation, the sending organisation and the participant. Virtual activities should also only form a small part of an activity – the physical part of the activity should form the majority, where possible.

Alternatively, a change in the type of activity from physical to virtual can be considered as a force majeure reason for a participant to return to their sending/home country if the Coronavirus situation requires it, and it should be encoded as force majeure in MT+. This should be considered if the virtual activities will not meet the requirements as outlined under question 12 below, for example.

## 12. What should be considered when implementing virtual activities?

Activities must be in accordance with the rules of the European Solidarity Corps Programme, i.e. activities do not constitute job substitution, are as varied as possible and allow participants the opportunity to use their initiative, and activities are for 30-38 hours per week (to also include activities such as mentor meetings, language learning, Youthpass reflection, Training and Evaluation Cycle On-Arrival Training or Mid-Term Training).

Evidence of virtual activities must be retained, for example: updated timetable of activities for virtual activities, screenshots, meeting minutes, electronic outputs, etc. Periods of virtual activity and physical activities must be recorded to include in the participant's Declaration of Attendance certificate to submit during reporting and to retain for checks or audits.

During periods of virtual activity in the home country or the hosting country, the UK NA recommends that mentor meetings are at least bi-weekly and that participants can virtually socialise with other participants to avoid issues around social isolation.

Please email the UK NA for any further advice and support.

## 13. Can I claim costs for Coronavirus tests?

We have now received guidance from the European Commission (EC) on the matter of costs related to Coronavirus tests. The EC acknowledges that Coronavirus testing has become more and more a prerequisite for physical activities abroad and because of this, and as part of the exceptional rules that apply under the Coronavirus outbreak framework, they are eligible for funding under the exceptional costs budget heading. The reimbursement rate is set at 100% of the eligible costs incurred based on supporting evidence of costs incurred.

As part of the Coronavirus outbreak framework, the EC has approved the transfer of up to 10% of funds from any budget category to exceptional costs. The circumstances where this applies, and the rules relating to the transfer, are set out in the Addendum issued to you by the UK NA. The transfers should not exceed 10% of the overall last budget approved by the UK NA, unless agreed as an exception through the submission and UK NA prior approval of a significant contract amendment to the Grant Agreement. In all cases, it is not possible to request additional funding over and above the total grant amount approved by the UK NA.

All costs will be subject to approval by the UK NA upon submission of the Final Report form and must be recorded within Mobility Tool+. Grant Agreement requirements relating to supporting documentation for exceptional cost items must be respected.

## 14. Can I claim for mandatory quarantine periods when travelling abroad for a physical activity?

Under the European Solidarity Corps, where participants must go into a compulsory mandatory quarantine period upon arrival, this period can be considered as part of their activity period and covered through the grant. Therefore, participants should **undertake virtual activities during quarantine in the host country for this period to be eligible** (see question 13 above). The same rate of individual support will then be applied as for the regular activity period that the quarantine is connected to. Additional costs may be considered under force majeure and claimed under the Exceptional Costs budget. Please also read question 3 above.

The support for the quarantine period is only eligible for the time spent in the host country of the activity and does not apply to a period of quarantine when returning to the (sending) country of origin of the participant. Should a period of isolation be required mid-activity due to a positive Coronavirus test, the formal test result should be retained as evidence and costs may be claimed under force majeure, drawing funds to cover costs from the original grant awarded.

In all cases, it is not possible to request additional funding over and above the total grant amount approved by the UK NA. Please contact the UK NA for further advice and support.

