

The role of the EU's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

2020/2118(INI) - 23/06/2021 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 443 votes to 40, with 209 abstentions, a resolution on the role of the EU's development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in addressing the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 is a global pandemic affecting every country in the world but the economic and social impact of the pandemic has been felt most strongly in developing countries. The pandemic has greatly exacerbated the existing debt problems of developing countries, undermining their efforts to mobilise sufficient resources to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The economic consequences of the measures taken to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic in developing countries will exacerbate existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, including by further weakening health infrastructure, worsening food insecurity, widening education gaps and increasing poverty and social exclusion.

Team Europe approach

While welcoming the EU's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Members called for significant new resources to be mobilised in a flexible way to help developing countries around the world address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. Making safe vaccines, treatments, equipment, therapeutics and diagnostics available globally in a fast, equitable and affordable manner must be one of the first steps. Members welcomed COVAX, a global scheme to ensure equitable and universal access to COVID-19 vaccines, and the strong support of 'Team Europe', which is the largest donor and has so far allocated more than EUR 850 million to the initiative. They stressed that safe vaccines should be made easily accessible and affordable for all, insisting that health workers and the most vulnerable people should be given priority.

The report called on the 'Team Europe' to strengthen effective mechanisms to ensure policy coherence for sustainable development. The EU and Member States should allocate additional funds to countries that will suffer the greatest impact of the pandemic.

Food security

Stressing that the pandemic threatens food security in rural, urban and peri-urban settings, Members stressed the development of resilient food systems and the need for a global transformation to accelerate the development of equitable, safe and healthy food systems, using the UN Food Systems Summit 2021 as an opportunity to better rebuild after the COVID-19 crisis.

Refugees and displaced persons

Parliament stressed the importance of helping refugees and displaced persons to cope with the disproportionate socio-economic consequences of the pandemic, by further strengthening livelihoods and supporting income-generating activities, as well as their access to safety.

Strengthening the health sector

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the persistent problem of global drug shortages, which has serious consequences in developing countries.

Members stressed the need to address delays in national immunisation programmes as soon as possible and to ensure that the provision of other basic health services is resumed. They urged the EU and Member States to: (i) work towards equal and affordable access to universally available vaccines based on the principle of international solidarity and (ii) commit to making anti-pandemic vaccines and treatments a global public good, accessible to all.

Human rights, governance and democracy

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, many governments have used the emergency to justify placing restrictions on democratic processes and the civil space, including limiting humanitarian access, and to oppress minorities. The resolution highlighted the particularly severe consequences of COVID-19 lockdowns and the collateral damage that has been suffered by women, girls and children, in particular the rise in gender-based violence. The EU is called on to better mainstream children's rights in the fight against climate change and in its actions to promote resilience and disaster preparedness directly in social sectors such as education, health, social and child protection.

The Commission and Member States are invited to support parliaments in continuing to play an active role in scrutinising government measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic and in assessing the human rights implications of public health measures.

Debt service and sound budgets

Members called on the Commission and Member States to promote the full implementation of the G20 initiative to suspend debt servicing for the poorest countries. They urged the Commission to support international efforts in this regard, saying that the interest saved by the suspension should instead be invested in the health sector, which is often severely underfunded in developing countries.

The resolution also stressed the importance of addressing debt sustainability in partner countries as a priority. The Commission is called upon to take further steps to tackle the problems of illicit financial flows, tax evasion and tax fraud to improve the tax bases of developing countries.

Resilience

Parliament stressed the importance of exchanging best practices with and assisting partner countries (including capacity building of their local and regional administrations) and of exchanging best practices with and assisting local civil society organisations in identifying vulnerabilities and building up prevention and crisis response mechanisms as well as protecting critical infrastructure in order better to deal with future systemic shocks of all kinds.

It underlined the importance of adopting a **One Health approach** from central government down to community level, in order to prevent or combat zoonoses.

Parliament called on the recovery strategy to pursue the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Resilience against future public health crises must also be built upon research into diseases that cause deadly outbreaks in developing countries on a regular basis. In this regard, the EU and its Member States are called on to fund more research with a view to developing vaccines that prevent future outbreaks of diseases such as malaria or zika.