

COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future

2022/2076(INI) - 26/06/2023 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Special Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic adopted a report by Dolors MONTSERRAT (EPP, ES) on the lessons learned and recommendations for the future.

In response to the consequences of the pandemic, the European Parliament decided to set up a special committee on Covid-19, with the aim of assessing the European Union's response to the pandemic, drawing conclusions and putting in place recommendations for the future.

This report examines the lessons learned from the crisis and makes proposals to improve crisis management and EU preparedness for future emergencies. It reflects the architecture of the Special Committee's mandate, attempting to assess the impact of the pandemic under four pillars: (1) Health; (2) A coordinated approach respecting democracy and fundamental rights; (3) Societal and economic impact; and (4) The EU and the world.

Holistic approach

The report recommended that the EU implement a holistic approach to pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, so that it continues to be a global driving force in this respect and in line with the G20 Rome Declaration and the internationally agreed principles for action to fight, prepare for, prevent and respond to pandemics.

The EU has to make sure that its policies across a whole range of sectors are also preventive-health policies, integrating a One Health and Health-in-all-policies approach, throughout agriculture and food production, transport, the energy sector, industrial development, education and social services, while investing in data collection, digitalisation, sharing and analysis.

It called for the European Union to establish a European day of remembrance for the victims of COVID-19.

Building the European Health Union

Members consider that health promotion and the prevention of, preparedness for and response to existing and future cross-border threats to public health should be the cornerstones of the European Health Union. They called on Member States to invest more in primary healthcare, to develop a public health crisis management plan and to carry out urgent stress tests on their healthcare systems. They suggested using financial instruments, such as the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) or the Cohesion Fund, and investing in a preventive approach to health, the healthcare workforce and education. They called for the organisation of healthcare services to be optimised to avoid excessive pressure on hospitals or emergency services, particularly in times of crisis.

Research and development

The report encouraged further investment in R&D oriented to address objectives of public interest, by increasing the resources of the EU framework programme for research and innovation and the EU4Health

programme and establishing the emergency preparedness and response authority (HERA) as a future EU agency supporting research to make vaccines as well as innovative and other treatments available in times of crisis and beyond.

In addition, the revision of EU pharmaceutical legislation should ensure that Europe remains an attractive destination for investments in research and innovation and should create a business environment where the pharma industry works in the interest of patients and citizens.

Supply chains

Noting that the pandemic has put pressure on global supply chains, including for the pharmaceutical sector, resulting in disruptions and unpredictability in the supply of vaccines, medical supplies, equipment and other countermeasures, Members stressed the importance of introducing EU and national policies aimed at strengthening global supply chains to support the production and free flow of medical countermeasures, including vaccines, and at removing export restrictions within the single market.

It is also necessary to safeguard the transparency of production and supply chains in the event of a health crisis. The Commission and the Member States are called on to promote more joint European public procurement.

Cyber-threats

The report noted that healthcare institutions and services faced heightened cybersecurity threats in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. Member States and the EU institutions and agencies are called on to introduce measures that enhance the security of digital networks in order to protect health institutions and patients from cyberattacks and to ensure the protection of health data and the ability of institutions to operate normally at all times, especially during public health emergencies, while respecting the EU data protection framework.

It reaffirmed the need to improve the security of critical infrastructure, such as power grids and financial systems, and to guarantee their functioning, while protecting them against any emergency, such as cyberattacks.

The EU is also called on to protect itself from misinformation and disinformation on social media and traditional media outlets.

Better cooperation

Members called for a stronger political will among national governments when communicating and working together under the coordination of the European Commission and the Parliament. They also called for greater European coordination for timely epidemiological forecasting and

surveillance led by the ECDC, in cooperation with the EMA, HERA and the Member States, and for studies to be carried out on the use of existing medicines on new diseases, improving the EU's overall preparedness capacity.