

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

2022/2076(INI) - 12/07/2023 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 385 votes to 193, with 63 abstentions, a resolution on the Covid-19 pandemic: 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.

Based on the recommendations made by the special committee, this resolution examines the lessons learned from the crisis and makes proposals to improve crisis management and EU preparedness for future emergencies. It assesses the impact of the pandemic under four pillars:

1. Health

Parliament encouraged the EU and its Member States to implement the European Health Union package to develop a permanent health programme. In this context, it called on the Commission to bring forward legislative and regulatory measures to identify the basic healthcare services and minimum standards for high-quality healthcare that should be guaranteed for all throughout the EU. It stressed the importance of strengthening European and international cooperation on epidemiological surveillance through the implementation of mandatory surveillance, monitoring, alert and preparedness plans for public health threats.

Members advocated (i) strengthening the means of providing qualified staff, health equipment and materials, and medical infrastructure to meet the specific treatment needs of these patients and (ii) pursuing the digitisation of administrative services in the health sector and, wherever necessary and possible, using online healthcare services, while taking appropriate measures to protect personal data and ensure the cyber-resilience of national health systems and their infrastructure.

Parliament stressed the need for better preparation in the context of **joint purchasing procedures** for medicines and medical products. It called for contracts to be concluded and price negotiations to be conducted in a transparent manner. Recognising the importance of **Parliament's scrutiny** role, Members called for particular attention to be paid to transparency in the negotiation of joint procurement contracts.

Members believe that the EU should **reduce its dependence on trading partners** and act to avoid shortages of medicines. They stressed that the pandemic has highlighted the need to improve the **EU's strategic autonomy** in essential supply chains and critical infrastructures and services, saying that the EU should increase the share of essential medical production on its territory to strengthen the autonomy of Europe's supply chain.

Parliament encouraged continued investment in **research and development** focused on public interest objectives, by increasing resources for the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation and the EU for Health Programme, and by creating HERA, the EU body that will support research to make vaccines and innovative and other treatments available in times of crisis and beyond.

Members asked the Commission to present a proposal for the revision of Council Directive 89/105/EEC relating to the **transparency of measures regulating the prices of medicinal products**, with the aim of

ensuring effective controls and full transparency on the procedures used to determine the price and reimbursement of medicinal products, particularly cancer drugs, in the Member States. They called for responsible ways to improve transparency in the financing, contracting and public procurement of vaccines.

2. Coordinated approach with respect for democracy and fundamental rights

The resolution stressed that transparency and accountability must remain a priority during crises, particularly in order to strengthen and maintain citizens' confidence in the functioning of public institutions. The Commission is called upon to ensure that the highest standards are respected to protect the public interest.

Parliament recommended that the European institutions and the Member States draw up **guidelines** on how to tackle ethical issues that may arise during a health or other crisis. These guidelines should place particular emphasis on how to protect the most vulnerable populations and ensure that their rights are safeguarded, including in crisis situations. Member States are invited to (i) **put an end to discriminatory triage practices**, in particular those based solely on age, pre-existing medical conditions and quality of life, (ii) improve access to healthcare for people with **disabilities** and (iii) address the increase in domestic violence where restrictive measures are in place and take into account the difficulties faced by LGBTQIA+ persons.

The Commission is called upon to present guidelines for health emergencies concerning the fundamental rights of children, young people and families, including guidelines for access to outdoor spaces depending on the epidemiological situation.

Members stressed that Member States must also ensure democratic control in crisis and emergency situations. They stressed the importance of ensuring **transparency in the public decision-making process**, and of involving and informing citizens in an accessible and comprehensible way.

3. Social and economic impact

Parliament called on the Commission and the Member States to take the necessary measures to defend Europe's social market economy, which is resilient and responsive to crises and maintains a **genuinely business-friendly environment**, with increased access to capital, greater simplification of procedures and less red tape for European businesses, especially SMEs, to enable them to react quickly.

The resolution called for the **single market** to be strengthened and safeguarded, especially freedom of movement (of people, goods and services) in the event of future pandemics, while always taking account of public health considerations and the epidemiological situation. It stressed the need to harmonise regulations and guidelines on travel and disease screening between national Member States.

Members also called on the EU to **maximise the use of recovery funds** to strengthen the single market.

Parliament recommended:

- combatting gender-based violence in all its forms and wherever it occurs, whether inside or outside the home or in the workplace;
- gathering more information on the impact of the pandemic on children's rights, such as the right to health, the effects on psychosocial development caused by social isolation due to quarantines, and develop clear action plans for schools to address the effects of the pandemic on learning and learning outcomes;

- taking urgent action to meet the health and care needs of Europe's ageing population by promoting healthy and active ageing, and to invest in a health and care plan to meet the needs of the growing elderly population in a socially just way, including residential and care facilities.

4. The EU and the world

Parliament called for the EU to move towards **open strategic autonomy**, encouraging global diversification and resilience of supply chains and relocating production according to need in order to overcome situations of heavy dependence on third countries around an open, rules-based multilateral trading system, so as to ensure the global availability of medical products.

The EU should play a more strategic, assertive and effective role in global health and be an official observer at the WHO.

The Commission and Member States should financially support increased **local and regional production of vaccines** and encourage the transfer of knowledge, technology and other essential health products to low- and middle-income countries.

The EU should also find a constructive solution to **intellectual property protection** that provides sufficient security and incentives for investment in R&D and should include licensing agreements to increase production.

Parliament called for the obligations and enforceability of the International Health Regulations (IHR) to be simultaneously strengthened and, at the same time, for the gaps (particularly in terms of financing, equity and global governance) through the new Pandemic Treaty or another international instrument. It called on the EU and Member States to guarantee the inclusion of pandemic prevention in the treaty and to ensure that enabling the effective participation of civil society and scientists is a priority in the negotiations.

Lastly, Parliament stressed the urgent need to **increase global vaccine production in the long term** to meet global demand, and the need to invest in production capacity in low- and middle-income countries to make them self-sufficient in the long term.