

Global Health Summit

The Global Health Summit – jointly hosted by the European Commission and Italy, as chair of the Group of Twenty (G20) – will take place on 21 May 2021 in Rome. Bringing together leaders, heads of international and regional organisations and representatives of global health bodies, it will provide a platform for sharing lessons learned from the coronavirus pandemic. The discussions will feed into a declaration of principles that can guide multilateral cooperation and joint action to prevent future health crises. Meanwhile, in a parallel process initiated by European Council President Charles Michel, world leaders are calling for an international treaty on pandemics.

Context

Global health emergencies, and particularly the coronavirus pandemic, have shown the [critical need](#) for preparedness. The world is interconnected, and ['no-one is safe until everyone is safe'](#). At the same time, there are [large disparities](#) in how countries are able to cope with, and recover from, the pandemic, as illustrated by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) dashboards on [preparedness](#) and [vulnerabilities](#). Under the United Nations sustainable development goal (SDG) 3, which seeks to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, target [3.d](#) sets out to 'strengthen the capacity of all countries, in particular developing countries, for early warning, risk reduction and management of national and global health risks'. Progress can be visualised in the UN SDG indicators [database](#) and the open-source ['Our World in Data'](#) SDG [tracker](#) (2018 data). The collective failure in global preparedness is laid bare in [A World in Disorder](#) (2020).

The summit in brief

The [Global Health Summit](#) aims to prepare and endorse a 'Rome declaration' of principles for sustainable health security preparedness and response that could guide structural change through international cooperation. It will build on existing health security initiatives: (i) the [Coronavirus Global Response](#), a pledging marathon launched by the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, that in 2020 raised almost €16 billion from donors worldwide to ensure equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines, tests and treatments; (ii) the work of multilateral institutions and protocols, such as the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Health Regulations ([IHR](#)), a binding instrument 'to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease in ways that are commensurate with and restricted to public health risks, and which avoid unnecessary interference with international traffic and trade'; (iii) other health processes, including those ongoing in the Group of Seven ([G7](#)) and the G20.

The G20 is a [forum](#) for international cooperation among major economies that [together represent](#) about two thirds of the world's population, 80 % of global gross domestic product and 75 % of global trade. G20 leaders [promised](#) in March 2020 to do 'whatever it takes to overcome the pandemic', urging a coordinated international response to contain the pandemic and to address its economic impact. They [agreed](#) in April 2020 to make Covid-19 vaccines available and affordable for all. The 2021 Italian [G20 presidency](#) focuses on 'people, planet, prosperity'.

Participants

In addition to the G20 countries, participants will include heads of state or government from Portugal (as EU Council Presidency), Norway (as co-chair of the [ACT-Accelerator](#), a global collaboration to speed up development, production and equitable access to Covid-19 tests, treatments and vaccines), and Switzerland. Leaders of international and regional organisations – including the United Nations ([UN](#)), the [WHO](#), the [World Bank](#), the International Monetary Fund ([IMF](#)), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)), the [African Union](#), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)), the New Partnership for Africa's Development ([NEPAD](#)), the World Organization for Animal Health ([OIE](#)), the World Trade Organization ([WTO](#)), and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)) – will also take part in the summit, as will global health actors, such as [Gavi](#) the Vaccine Alliance, [The Global Fund](#) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations ([CEPI](#)).

Run-up and preparation

The process of elaborating the principles is both evidence-informed and inclusive. To take account of scientists' views, the Commission and the Italian G20 presidency have set up a [high-level scientific panel](#) of 26 international senior experts with experience in local and global Covid-19 response and science advice that will present its findings to the summit participants. Peter Piot, the European Commission President's [special advisor](#) on Covid-19, is one of the panel's five co-chairs. Andrea Ammon, Director of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control ([ECDC](#)), is among the experts. To ensure that [civil society](#) and other stakeholders' views are taken into account, a civil society [consultation](#) was hosted on 20 April 2021. It addressed [three questions](#): what is needed to ensure effective multilateral cooperation when responding to a global health crisis? What can be done to ensure that all countries, independent of their size or income, have the capacities to tackle the next crisis? How can the necessary resources be mobilised globally? A report on the consultation's findings will feed into the principles.

Other health security initiatives at EU and global level

It is [seen as essential](#) for the EU to have a rapid response capacity that enables it to react to major cross-border health threats in a coordinated way. In the European Parliament, reflections are under way to [identify gaps](#) and pinpoint [opportunities](#) and options [to enhance](#) the EU's resilience to [structural risks](#), not least to forestall future health crises. In November 2020, as first steps towards a [European health union](#), the Commission put forward a [set of proposals](#) to [strengthen the EU's health security framework](#) and reinforce the crisis preparedness and response roles of the [ECDC](#) and the European Medicines Agency ([EMA](#)). It also [initiated work](#) on a European health emergency preparedness and response authority ([HERA](#)) that would improve EU-level action in health crises by enabling rapid availability, access and distribution of counter-measures. In February 2021, the Commission presented the [HERA incubator](#), a new European bio-defence preparedness plan against Covid-19 variants, which will bring together scientists, industry and public authorities. In March, as an immediate action under the incubator, it introduced a measure to [speed up the authorisation](#) of adapted Covid-19 vaccines. The European Union's new health programme for the 2021-2027 period, [EU4Health](#), will invest €5.1 billion, not least to boost EU preparedness for major cross-border health threats and strengthen health systems so they can face epidemics and long-term challenges, such as [cancer](#). [Horizon Europe](#), the European Union's 2021-2027 research and innovation programme, with a €95.5 billion overall budget, will have a strong [focus on health](#), and help the EU's health systems prepare for future pandemics.

Call for an international treaty on pandemics

At the 3 December 2020 UN General Assembly special session in response to the coronavirus pandemic, European Council President Charles Michel [proposed](#) an international pandemics treaty that 'would enable the international community to better anticipate, prepare for and manage future pandemics'. The treaty – to be developed in the framework of the WHO and existing protocols on global health cooperation, such as the IHR – could address risk monitoring; better financing and coordination of research; a more efficient system of alerts and information-sharing; improving access to healthcare; and strengthening healthcare systems and securing supply chains. In a [commentary](#) published on 30 March 2021 in newspapers worldwide, the leaders of [26 countries](#) – including 9 EU Member States (Germany, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and Romania) – and the WHO backed the proposal. As the commentary notes, 'the main goal of this treaty would be to foster an all-of-government and all-of-society approach, strengthening national, regional and global capacities and resilience to future pandemics'. It would also include recognition of the '[one health](#)' approach that recognises the close connection between the health of people, animals and their shared environment. To achieve this, the signatories said they would work with leaders globally and stakeholders, including civil society and the private sector.

The European Parliament has consistently promoted global solidarity and cooperation in health. In a July 2020 [resolution](#), Parliament noted health's international dimension, stressing that cooperation with third countries on knowledge and best practice exchange on health system preparedness and response should be reinforced. It called on the EU to cooperate fully with the WHO and other international bodies to fight infectious diseases, achieve universal health coverage and strengthen health systems. Members also [welcomed](#) the European health union proposals, underlining the importance of stepping up efforts to counter cross-border health threats.

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