Lessons learned from COVID-19 and recommendations for the future

During the July plenary session, the European Parliament is expected to discuss the final report of its Special Committee on the COVID-19 pandemic, and vote on a series of recommendations to improve EU preparedness for future health emergencies.

Background
In March 2022, Parliament approved the establishment of a 'Special committee on the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future' (COVI). The committee – 38 members, chaired by Kathleen Van Brempt (S&D, Belgium) – evaluated the pandemic’s impact on health systems, the vaccination campaign, the broader socio-economic impact, the impact on the rule of law and democracy, and the international response to the pandemic. It organised a thorough consultation process through public hearings, workshops and on-site missions, exchanging views with experts, policymakers from EU institutions and international organisations, epidemiologists, national health authorities, pharmaceutical companies, healthcare workers and researchers. Its mandate ends on 19 July 2023.

On 5 May 2023, welcoming the World Health Organization (WHO) statement that COVID-19 no longer constitutes a public health emergency of international concern, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen underlined in a statement that the pandemic has changed the EU, now far better prepared to face future health crises, with new tools such as the Health Emergency and Response Authority (HERA).

COVI committee final report
On 12 June 2023, COVI adopted its final report on the COVID-19 pandemic: lessons learned and recommendations for the future (with 23 votes in favour, 13 votes against, and 1 abstention). The report highlights the effects of the pandemic on the economic and social life of European citizens, and establishes a set of recommendations to the Commission and Member States to address gaps and weaknesses in the response to the crisis and to better prepare the EU for future cross-border health threats.

The report calls for action under four pillars: health, democracy and fundamental rights, social and economic impact, and EU and the world. In the field of health, it calls for: implementing a strong European health union; investing more in healthcare in order to reduce healthcare disparities, strengthen national public health and enhance cross-border health cooperation; introducing surveillance plans on emerging health threats; carrying out stress tests on national healthcare systems; increasing joint procurement activities; and improving the EU’s strategic autonomy on key pharmaceutical medicines. In the field of democracy and fundamental rights, the report recommends in particular better crisis communication and transparent decision-making processes. On the social and economic impact of the crisis, the report asks for stronger action to reply to the needs of children, young people, the elderly and vulnerable groups.

As regards global action, it calls for international investment and coordination to be increased in order to scale up critical vaccines manufacturing, for a constructive solution to be found on intellectual property protection, and for more cooperation between the EU and the WHO to strengthen the International Health Regulations while addressing gaps highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic through the negotiation of a pandemic treaty.

Own-initiative report: 2022/2076(INI); Committee responsible: COVI; Rapporteur: Dolors Montserrat (EPP, Spain).