

## **EXPERT PANEL ON EFFECTIVE WAYS OF INVESTING IN HEALTH**

### **Request for an opinion: European solidarity in public health emergencies**

#### **Background – Rationale**

The COVID-19 pandemic has proven the value of EU solidarity in public health emergencies. One of the key learning points of the pandemic was that fragmentation of effort in tackling cross-border health threats makes all Member States collectively more vulnerable. This calls for strengthened coordination at EU level as the health situation in one Member State is also contingent on that of others. In her 2020 State of the Union address<sup>1</sup>, the President of the Commission announced the need for a European Health Union<sup>2</sup> as a means to protect our way of living, our economies and societies.

As a first step towards a European Health Union, the European Commission presented three legislative proposals in November 2020: an upgrading of Decision 1082/2013/EU on serious cross-border health threats<sup>3</sup>, a strengthening of the mandate of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)<sup>4</sup>, and an extension of the mandate of the European Medicines Agency (EMA)<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the Commission also put forth the outlines of the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority, which should be operational by 2023.<sup>6</sup>

This package aims to reinforce the EU's resilience for cross-border health threats. These include, for example, a reinforced joint procurement agreement beyond the EU; creation of a vaccine monitoring platform; development and implementation of both an EU level and national level preparedness and response plans; support to Member States to strengthen the resilience, accessibility and effectiveness of health systems through co-operation; best practice exchange, training schemes, technical support; resilience dashboards and financing from EU programmes.

The European Health Union proposals also link to the proposal for enhancing the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM)<sup>7</sup>, proposed by the Commission in June 2020<sup>8</sup>, as well as create synergies with the existing instrument under the UCPM.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/strategic-planning/state-union-addresses/state-union-2020\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/strategic-planning/state-union-addresses/state-union-2020_en)

<sup>2</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/promoting-our-european-way-life/european-health-union_en)

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-regulation-cross-border-threats-health\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-regulation-cross-border-threats-health_en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-mandate-european-centre-disease-prevention-control\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-mandate-european-centre-disease-prevention-control_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-mandate-european-medicines-agency\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/proposal-mandate-european-medicines-agency_en.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0724&qid=1605690513438>

<sup>7</sup> The Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) allows the Commission to support Member States in coordination of efforts to prevent and prepare for disasters as well as through its Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) in responding when their national capacities are overwhelmed by any kind of disaster, including ones such as COVID-19. Indeed, amidst the pandemic, EU Member States, UCPM Participating States as well as third countries resorted to the UCPM for support requesting for in-kind assistance in form of PPE, sanitation, but also for requesting for support of medical teams.

<sup>8</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020PC0220>

The COVID-19 pandemic has tested the ability of EU, national and regional health authorities to cope with serious cross-border health threats efficiently. In March 2020, the European Commission adopted the legal base that allowed the development of rescEU medical stockpiling capacities.<sup>9</sup> In April 2020, the European Commission issued guidance on EU emergency assistance in cross-border cooperation in healthcare related to the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>10</sup> In July, it also offered, via the ESI instrument, funding support for cross-border health operations (transfers of patients and medical teams)<sup>11</sup>.

In an article published in March 2020, the Expert Panel has called for stronger European solidarity and an enhanced cooperation at EU level to tackle both the current pandemic and future health emergencies.<sup>12</sup> In an opinion on cross border cooperation<sup>13</sup> in 2015, the Expert Panel considered areas, which would potentially benefit from greater formal cross-border cooperation and collaboration in health care provision, focusing on service configuration in border regions. They highlighted obstacles to successful cross-border cooperation in health care and suggested ways of overcoming those obstacles.

The Expert Panel has also identified elements of cross-border cooperation in its opinion on the organisation of resilient health and social care following the COVID-19 pandemic, published in December 2020.<sup>14</sup> In this opinion, they concluded that adaptive surge capacity, in particular, is an important area in preparing for and dealing with unexpected events that could be enhanced by EU cross-border solidarity.

In public health emergency situations, health systems require appropriate surge capacity, among other capacities, in order to ensure sufficient and equitable access to health and social care services. Building on lessons learnt from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as on existing instruments, guidelines and recommendations, the Commission is seeking expert advice on what EU solidarity would entail in practice in future health emergencies. Such advice would take into account actions and initiatives that have already been taken or proposed to improve cross-border cooperation.

**The target audience** of this opinion are policy makers at EU, national and regional level working in health emergency preparedness.

## QUESTIONS TO THE EXPERT PANEL

The Expert Panel is requested to provide a concise and meaningful document with analysis and practical recommendations on the following points:

1. How can we plan and prepare for EU solidarity in health emergencies? How can we strengthen cross-border cooperation in future public health emergencies?
2. What are the limitations to EU level actions, how can we overcome these limitations and what can be done to promote EU solidarity?

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<sup>9</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/GA/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32020D0414>

<sup>10</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/guidelines\\_on\\_eu\\_emergency\\_assistance\\_in\\_cross-bordercooperationin\\_healthcare\\_related\\_to\\_the\\_covid-19\\_crisis.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/guidelines_on_eu_emergency_assistance_in_cross-bordercooperationin_healthcare_related_to_the_covid-19_crisis.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> The Emergency Support Instrument's Mobility Package [https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/esi\\_mobility\\_package\\_qa\\_25062020\\_0.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/echo/sites/echo-site/files/esi_mobility_package_qa_25062020_0.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://blogs.bmj.com/covid-19/2020/03/31/saving-lives-by-european-solidarity-and-cooperation-in-response-to-covid-19/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/expert\\_panel/docs/009\\_crossborder\\_cooperation\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/expert_panel/docs/009_crossborder_cooperation_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/expert\\_panel/docs/026\\_health\\_socialcare\\_covid19\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/expert_panel/docs/026_health_socialcare_covid19_en.pdf)

3. What transformation needs to take place at EU, national and regional level in order to operationalise EU solidarity in public health emergencies?

**Timing**

Finalisation by June 2021

Associated DGs: SG, REFORM, ECHO