

COVID-19 EU update

European Commission:

- On 18 September, the Commission signs the second contract to ensure access to a potential vaccine with Sanofi-GSK. The contract will allow all EU Member States to purchase up to 300 million doses of their vaccine. Moreover, Member States may donate reserved doses to lower- and middle-income countries. The Commission has already signed a contract with AstraZeneca and continues discussing similar agreements with other manufacturers (Johnson & Johnson, CureVac, Moderna and BioNTech) with which it has concluded exploratory talks.
- On 18 September, the Commission confirmed its participation in the [COVAX Facility](#) for equitable access to affordable COVID-19 vaccines.
- On 18 September, the Commission published a set of [recommendations](#) for a common COVID-19 testing approach in Europe, as a follow-up initiative of the 15 July [Communication on Short-Term EU Health Preparedness for COVID-19 Outbreaks](#). The recommendations set out concrete actions to support countries in the planning and organisation of their testing efforts during the different stages of the pandemic. The recommendations have been endorsed by the Health Security Committee, in view of streamlining national approaches and ensuring more coherent COVID-19 testing across the EU.
- On 17 September, the Commission adopted a [Communication on Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2021](#). The Communication sets guidance to EU countries on how to spend the €672.5 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility, the bulk of the €750 billion recovery fund agreed on in July.
- On 14 September, the WHO/Europe and the Commission have issued a [joint statement](#) to boost their already strong partnership and adapt it to new health priorities and emerging challenges. It calls for closer partnership in 5 priority areas of shared interest: health security against health emergencies and other threats effective, accessible, resilient and innovative health systems a comprehensive response to noncommunicable diseases with a focus on cancer sustainable food systems and health cooperation with non-EU countries in the WHO European Region.
- On 14 September, the Commission announced the setting up an [interoperability gateway service](#) linking national apps across the EU. The gateway is a digital infrastructure that ensures apps work cross-borders. Users will only need to install one app and will still be able to report a positive infection test or receive an alert if they travel abroad. The Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Latvia are participating in a Commission-led pilot project. The Commission notes that no other information than arbitrary keys, generated by the national apps, will be handled by the gateway. The information exchanged is pseudonymised, encrypted, kept to the minimum, and only stored if necessary, to trace back infections. It does not allow the identification of individual persons. The gateway is developed and set up by T-Systems and SAP and will be operated from the Commission's data centre in Luxembourg. After testing, it will start to be operational in October.

European Parliament:

- On 22 September, from 9.00 - 12.00, ENVI and ITRE will be holding a joint public online hearing on the critical issue of "How to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens." [Programme - Joint ENVI-ITRE Public Hearing](#) The members of both committees will be hearing key players representing the pharmaceutical industry, academia, civil society and the European Medicines Agency addressing the multiple challenges the EU faces regarding the deployment of a future vaccine. The debate between the members and the experts will focus on the questions of adequate clinical trials, speedy manufacturing and commercialisation as well as equitable distribution of a safe vaccine across the EU.

- On 17 September, adopted a resolution highlighting that the EU member states need to harmonise health assessments and measures. According to the resolution, common definitions, health criteria and methodologies are key to effectively fighting the ongoing pandemic and its economic consequences in the EU. Please find more [here](#).
- On 17 September, the Parliament approved a €6.2 billion budget increase to tackle the crisis and speed up vaccine deployment. The amount will allow the EU to improve its chances of having an effective and safe vaccine available as soon as possible, and to step up COVID-19-related cohesion funding. This was agreed by the Council of the EU already on 11 September. Please find more [here](#).
- On 17 September, the EP adopted several resolutions:
 - [COVID-19: EU coordination of health assessments and risk classification and the consequences for Schengen and the single market](#)
 - [Strategic approach to pharmaceuticals in the environment](#)
 - [Shortage of medicines - how to address an emerging problem](#)
 - [Draft amending budget No 8: Increase of payment appropriations for the Emergency Support Instrument to finance the COVID-19 vaccines strategy and for the impact of the Corona Response Investment Initiative Plus](#)

ECDC:

- ECDC [reports](#) about increasing cases of COVID-19 across Europe. According to the latest COVID-19 data, the 14-day case notification rate has been increasing for more than 50 days, with over half of all EU countries currently experiencing an increase in cases. While increased testing contributes to better awareness of all ongoing transmission, it is not the only reason for the increase of COVID-19 cases, which is also linked to the relaxation of physical distancing and other preventive measures. ECDC warns that as schools reopen and more indoor activities are held, the increase of cases comes as a reminder that the pandemic is not over. The Centre adds that with the influenza season approaching, the preparedness of healthcare systems across Europe is vital.
- ECDC [outlines](#) COVID-19 testing strategies and objectives. The Centre proposes five main objectives for testing in order to control transmission. It adds that testing strategies should be flexible and rapidly adaptable to change, depending on the local epidemiology, transmission, population dynamics and resources. Ideally, all people with COVID-19 symptoms should be tested as soon as possible after symptom onset. This requires easy access to testing for all, including non-residents. Moreover, test turnaround time should be minimised, people testing positive should isolate and timely contact tracing should be carried out, ensuring that all close contacts are tested, irrespective of symptoms.
- ECDC offers a [30-day projections of COVID-19 in the EU](#) together with the inherent model assumptions and uncertainties. The Centre stresses the projections illustrate potential future trends in COVID-19 transmission in EU while cautions that both the model projections and the data to which the model is calibrated should be interpreted with caution given the differences between national surveillance systems, case definitions and testing policies.

WHO/WHO-Europe:

- [WHO-European Regional Committee outcomes](#): At its 70th meeting, the Regional Committee, composed of the ministers of health of the WHO European region, adopted the [European Programme of Work for 2020-2025](#). The protection against health emergencies is a priority, as is the achievement universal health coverage and the creation of healthy communities. In terms of

pandemic management, WHO-Europe highlights the importance of solidarity, strengthening and preparing health systems, and acknowledging the interdependence of health and the economy. CPME [commented](#) on an earlier draft of the document, i.a. in a roundtable with Regional Director Dr Hans Kluge.

- [WHO/Europe and the European Commission agree future common action in 5 key areas](#): WHO-Europe and the European Commission have updated their [priorities for cooperation](#) to ensure more effective European health policy. The future partnership will focus on health security against health emergencies and other threats; effective, accessible, resilient and innovative health systems; a comprehensive response to noncommunicable diseases with a focus on cancer sustainable food systems and health; and health cooperation with non-European Union countries in the WHO European Region.
- [Access to COVID-19 Tools-Accelerator Facilitation Council holds inaugural meeting](#): In April, the WHO, the European Commission, France and The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched the Access to COVID-19 Tools ACT-Accelerator. The objective was to create a high-level network of facilitators in politics, economics, and science to support advances on diagnostics, therapeutics, vaccines and the health system. It aims to finance the production and equitable distribution of 2 billion vaccine doses, 245 million treatments and 500 million tests, for which an additional \$35 billion is still needed. The council is co-chaired by the president of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa and the prime minister of Norway Erna Solberg and includes 30 high-level national politicians, as well as representatives from the Wellcome Trust, the World Economic Forum and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, WHO, civil society representatives and industry representatives. The inaugural meeting saw the finalisation of a strategy which i.a. foresees a high-level event to take place on 30 September.

OECD:

- [OECD official: 20% of all health spending in Europe is pure waste](#): OECD's deputy director of employment, labour and social affairs Mark Pearson, who was also the lead author of the [2017 Report on Tackling Wasteful Spending on Health](#), gave an interview to Euractiv in which he identifies opportunities to optimise spending on pandemic preparedness and management. He highlights in particular the importance of investing in prevention and improving the social determinants of health; creating system preparedness so measures such as tracking and tracing can be rolled out effectively; and improving trust in health decision-makers.

Data Protection and COVID-19:

- On 17 September, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on [COVID-19: EU coordination of health assessments and risk classification and the consequences for Schengen and the single market](#). The resolution asks the Commission to develop a harmonised passenger locator form to build trust in an EU-wide monitoring system. The use of tracing apps should be encouraged, according to MEPs, who expect the national systems to be interoperable by October, to allow for EU-wide COVID-19 tracing. They underline that these apps must operate in full compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation.
- On 15 September, the European Parliament Think Tank published a briefing on the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) judgment in the Schrems II. In July, the CJEU declared the European Commission's Privacy Shield Decision invalid on account of invasive US surveillance programmes, thereby making transfers of personal data based on the Privacy Shield Decision illegal. The Court stipulated stricter requirements for the transfer of personal data based on standard contract clauses (SCCs). Data controllers or processors that intend to transfer data based on SCCs must

ensure that the data subject is granted a level of protection essentially equivalent to that guaranteed by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFR) – if necessary with additional measures to compensate for lacunae in protection of third-country legal systems. Failing that, operators must suspend the transfer of personal data outside the EU. See briefing [here](#).

- More than 2 million out of Finland's 5.5 million citizens have downloaded the country's coronavirus app, [Koronavilkku](#). Around 218 users have used it to notify that they tested positive for the virus. There is a high level of trust in public institutions and authorities in Finland, and the population is tech-savvy and accustomed to a digitized public sector. The app's release was also followed by a viral social media campaign, partly fueled by social media influencers.

Human Rights and COVID-19:

- On 29 September, FRA's Director Michael O'Flaherty speaks at an [international conference](#) on lessons learned from COVID-19 for strengthening older people's rights in times of digitalisation. The German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth organises the [online event](#) together with AGE Platform Europe and BAGSO (German National Association of Senior Citizens' Organisations). It falls under the German Presidency of the Council of the EU.
- On 11 September, FRA's Director posted a [video blog on Covid-19 and Roma children](#) speaking about the devastating effects of the pandemic on the Roma community. Roma children are in danger of losing a whole year of schooling.