

Chronology: the European Union response to the first wave of the Covid-19 pandemic (January to August 2020)

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Introduction

The novel coronavirus (Covid-19) made its appearance in Wuhan in the province of Hubei, central China on 17 November 2019. Two months later, on 22 January 2020, the Chinese government locked down the whole region. One week later, on 30 January, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a public health emergency of international concern and, on 11 March, characterised the situation as a pandemic.

Within the European Union (EU), between 8 and 17 March 2020, most Member States established health protection protocols and tried to coordinate their actions through the European Council and the Council of the EU and by following the recommendations issued by the European Commission and European and international health bodies (see chronology below). Member States adopted increasingly restrictive measures: in particular, national lockdowns, the closing of national borders, air traffic restrictions, requirements to wear a mask, campaigns promoting safety precautions and school and business closures. These measures were gradually lifted between the end of April and mid-June 2020.

National policies were initially not coordinated, with Member States adopting differing levels of restrictions. While France and Italy basically forced their populations to stay at home, Germany, for example, put its trust in a large-scale tracing campaign and compliance with social distancing, without imposing a strict lockdown. Sweden and the Netherlands (and initially the United Kingdom) adopted a policy based on acceptance that the virus would spread within the population, hoping to achieve herd immunity, while taking measures to protect those most at risk.

January¹

28 January: the Croatian presidency of the Council of the European Union activates the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) in ‘information sharing’ mode. (Croatian presidency of the Council, press release, 28 January 2020)

1. This chronology is largely based on the timeline produced by Christophe Degryse (ETUI) entitled the ‘Covid Social Impact Timeline’ and on the European Health Care Newsletters no. 53 and 54, written by Rita Baeten and Boris Fronteddu (OSE). <https://www.etui.org/covid-social-impact> and http://ose.be/health_newsletter/newsletter_soins_sante.htm

28 January: the European Union activates the Civil Protection Mechanism to repatriate European citizens. This follows a request from France to provide consular assistance to French nationals in Wuhan, China. (IP/20/142)

30 January: the European Commission launches an emergency call for expressions of interest for research projects relating to the epidemic, its clinical management, response preparation and the public health response. (European Commission, *Advancing knowledge for the clinical and public health response to the 2019-nCoV epidemic*²)

February

4 February: the European Medicines Agency (EMA) activates its plan for managing emerging health threats. The Agency analyses all available information on drugs in the process of development. It works together with EU public health authorities. (EMA/57041/2020)

13 February: on the basis of a steering note from the Croatian presidency, the Council adopts conclusions on the Covid-19 epidemic, with a view to strengthening European and international cooperation in the field of public health, while welcoming the EU response to the threat of a possible pandemic. (Council of the EU, *Conclusions of 13 February 2020*)

24 February: the European Commission releases an aid package worth €232 million to support the World Health Organization (€114 million), research (€100 million) Africa (€15 million) and to help repatriate European nationals from Wuhan (€3 million). (IP 20/316)

28 February: the Commission launches a first call for tenders for personal protective equipment (PPE), in this case for the supply of gloves and coveralls.³ (IP 20/523)

March

2 March: the Croatian presidency of the Council of the EU triggers ‘full activation’ of the IPCR. (Council of the EU, press release, 2 March 2020)

2 March: the European Parliament suspends all its non-legislative activities. (EP, CP D(2020)9024)

2. For Covid-19 research projects (co)financed by the European Commission, see European Commission research projects on Coronavirus. https://ec.europa.eu/info/research-and-innovation/research-area/health-research-and-innovation/coronavirus-research-and-innovation_en

3. The European Commission also launched calls for tenders on 17 March (goggles, face shields, masks and respirators), 19 March (laboratory equipment including testing kits) and 17 June 2020 (medicines for intensive care units). 26 Member States participated in these calls. See European Commission, coronavirus response, public health. https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/public-health_fr [accessed on 4 November 2020].

9 March: Italy is the first European country to lock down its entire population. (Euronews, 10 March 2020)

10 March: first meeting of the EU executive steering group on shortages of medicines caused by major events.⁴ (EMA, 10 March 2020)

11 March: the World Health Organization (WHO) characterises the Covid-19 epidemic as a ‘pandemic’. (WHO, *Opening remarks by the WHO Director-General*)

12 March: the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) recommends social distancing and remote working. The Centre calls for all health care and long-term care staff and infrastructure to be prepared to tackle the pandemic. (ECDC, 12 March 2020)

12 March: the European Central Bank (ECB) announces additional long-term refinancing operations, bank lending support measures for those most affected by the spread of coronavirus and a new envelope of net asset purchases.⁵ (ECB, Monetary policy decisions)

13 March: the European Commission publishes a communication setting out all the instruments and mechanisms it can use to tackle the many health, social and economic challenges generated by the pandemic. (COM/2020/112 final)

13 March: the European Commission adopts a recommendation inviting economic operators, as well as the competent authorities and bodies, to deploy all measures at their disposal to ensure that the supply of personal protective equipment matches the continuously increasing demand within the EU. (OJ L 79I of 16 March 2020: 1-5)

15 March: the European Commission adopts an implementing regulation requiring prior authorisation for exports of personal protective equipment outside the EU. (OJ L 77I of 15 March 2020: 1-7 and OJ C 91I of 20 March 2020: 10-15⁶)

16 March: the European Commission publishes guidance to facilitate and coordinate checks at EU external borders to implement the temporary restriction on non-essential travel to the EU.⁷ (OJ C 102I of 30 March 2020: 3-11)

16 March: the European Commission publishes guidelines on mobility between the EU Member States, including movements of sick people for access to health care; cross-

4. This group is made up of representatives from the European Medicines Agency (EMA), the European Commission and the national competent authorities.

5. See 24 March on the Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme.

6. These restrictions on exports were relaxed on 23 April. (OJ L of 24 April 2020: 7-15)

7. See also: on 11 June 2020, the Commission publishes a communication calling on Member States to maintain checks at the EU’s external borders until 30 June 2020. (COM(2020) 399 final)

border workers, especially health care workers; and free movement of essential goods.⁸ At the same time, the Commission issues guidance concerning checks at the external borders and confirms that medical equipment and supplies are essential goods and services, for which free movement is crucial. (OJ C 86I of 16 March 2020: 1-4)

17 March: an Austrian aircraft co-financed by the European Union repatriates 290 European citizens from Marrakesh (Morocco) to Vienna. This is the first pandemic-related repatriation measure organised in collaboration with the European Civil Protection Mechanism.⁹

17 March: the European Council adopts five priorities: limiting the spread of the virus, providing medical equipment within the EU, promoting research, tackling the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic and repatriating European citizens stranded in third countries. (*Conclusions by the President of the European Council*, 17 March 2020)

17 March: the European Investment Bank (EIB) mobilises €40 billion to finance small and medium-sized enterprises and midcaps. Member States are asked to provide further guarantees to ensure that this support is effective. (EIB, 2020-086)

17 March: the European Commission sets up an advisory panel on Covid-19. This panel, made up of epidemiologists and virologists, is tasked with drawing up guidance on managing the risks linked to the pandemic. (C (2020) 1799 final)

18 March: the European Commission recommends measures related to national testing strategies and sets out criteria for imposing social distancing and population lockdowns. (European Commission, *Covid-19: EU recommendations for community measures* and European Commission, *Covid-19: EU recommendations for testing strategies*)

19 March: the European Commission adopts a communication on a temporary framework for state aid measures to support the economy. Paving the way for a long series of exceptional state aid authorisations, this measure constitutes a paradigm shift away from the political management adopted in the aftermath the 2008 economic and financial crisis.¹⁰ (OJ C 91I of 20 March 2020: 1-9)

8. See the Communication on implementation of the Green Lanes under the guidelines for border management measures to protect health and ensure the availability of goods and essential services. (OJ C 96I of 24 March 2020: 1-7)

9. For a list of all the repatriation flights, see European Commission, Summary tables of repatriation flights, 29 July. https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/summary_tables_of_repatriation_flights_29_july_2020_002.pdf

10. On 4 April and 13 June, the Commission adopts communications elaborating on this text, listing further State aid measures deemed to be compatible with Community legislation (OJ C 112I of 4 April 2020, p. 1-9 and OJ C 164 of 13 May 2020, p. 3-15). For further details, see European Commission, Competition, State aid rules and coronavirus. https://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/what_is_new/covid_19.html

19 March: the European Commission creates a strategic reserve, ‘rescEU’, within the European Civil Protection Mechanism, of essential medical equipment. It is fully funded by the EU; rescEU centres are established in Germany and Romania. The Emergency Response Coordination Centre is responsible for distributing equipment to the Member States. (OJ L 82I of 19 March 2020: 1-5)

23 March: the EU Finance ministers activate the general escape clause in the Stability and Growth Pact. While not suspending SGP procedures, this measure allows for temporary departures from normal budgetary requirements. (Council of the EU, press release, 23 March 2020)

23 March: the European Competition Network publishes a statement permitting companies to cooperate to meet demand, while at the same time reminding them that sanctions will be imposed for excessive pricing. (ECN Joint statement)

24 March: the European Commission launches the ‘Covid-19 Clinical Management Support System’ to facilitate the rapid exchange of information between hospitals designated by the Member States as reference centres for Covid-19. (European Reference Network, press release, 30 March 2020)

24 March: the European Central Bank launches a temporary asset purchase programme, the ‘Pandemic Emergency Purchase Programme’ (PEPP), with an envelope of €750 billion until the end of 2020. (OJ L 91 of 25 March 2020: 1-4)

25 March: the European Commission updates the Horizon 2020 work programme to prioritise research and innovation projects concerning the Covid-19 virus. (Horizon 2020, press release, 25 March 2020)

25 March: the European Commission publishes guidance on screening foreign direct investment (FDI). This guidance is issued in response to risks of foreign acquisitions of health care capacities or related activities. (OJ C 99I of 26 March 2020: 1-5)

26 March: the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) publishes recommendations on the use of textile face masks and the decontamination of respirators or surgical masks in health care settings in the event of shortages. (ECDC, Technical report)

27 March: the European Commission adopts a communication to help Member States maintain and facilitate air cargo operations, particularly for essential goods such as foodstuffs and medical supplies. (OJ C 100I of 27 March 2020: 1-4)

30 March: the European Parliament and the Council sign a regulation facilitating the granting of financial assistance to Member States and to countries negotiating their accession to the Union that are seriously affected by a ‘major public health emergency’. (OJ L 99 of 31 March 2020: 9-12)

30 March: the European Central Bank recommends that credit institutions refrain from distributing dividends to their shareholders or entering into irrevocable commitments concerning payment of these dividends at least until 1 October 2020. (OJ C 102I of 30 March 2020: 1-2)

30 March: the European Commission publishes a communication to ensure the free movement of workers in essential professions (including cross-border and posted workers). (OJ C 102I of 30 March 2020: 12-14)

30 March: the European Commission calls upon Member States to review their national strategies in accordance with its recommendations and to pursue actions to reduce pressure on national health systems. (European Commission, *European Commission recommendations on health systems resilience*)

30 March: the presidents of the Council and the Parliament sign the ‘Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative’, making 37 billion euros available to Member States by redirecting cohesion funds to, in particular, strengthening health systems, support for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and short-time work arrangements. The Council also expands the scope of the European Union Solidarity Fund, releasing European funds to help tackle Covid-19. (OJ L 99 of 31 March 2020: 5-8 and 9-12¹¹)

30 March: the Council of the EU adopts a regulation suspending the obligation for airline companies to use at least 80% of their take-off and landing slots. (OJ L 99 of 31 March 2020: 1-4)

April

1 April: the European Commission publishes guidance on using the public procurement framework in cases of extreme urgency, enabling public buyers to acquire medical equipment and supplies. (OJ C 108I of 1 April 2020: 1-5)

1 April: nineteen Member States¹² publish a joint statement calling on the European Commission to monitor national emergency measures to ensure that these do not violate the fundamental values of the EU. (Government of the Netherlands, Diplomatic statement 01-04-2020)

11. On 23 April 2020, the European Parliament and the Council adopt additional measures as part of the ‘Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative Plus’, introducing a more flexible use of the structural and investment funds. (OJ L 130 of 24 April 2020)

12. Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden.

2 April: the European Commission proposes a regulation establishing a European instrument for temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE). This instrument would have lending capacity of up to €100 billion to address sudden increases in national public expenditure due to national short-term work schemes. To finance SURE, the Commission intends to take out loans on the financial markets. (COM/2020/139 final)

3 April: the European Commission publishes a communication calling on the Member States to strengthen cross-border cooperation, in particular by coordinating supply and demand of intensive care beds and co-funding emergency transport of patients and medical staff when a Member State asks for help via the Civil Protection Mechanism. (OJ C 111I of 3 April 2020: 1-5)

3 April: the European Commission introduces a temporary exemption from VAT and customs duties for medical devices and personal protective equipment imported into the EU from third countries. (OJ L 103I of 3 April 2020: 1-3)

6 April: the European Medicines Agency (EMA) announces the setting up of the i-SPOC system, which pharmaceutical companies can use to inform the EMA directly of risks of shortages of medicines useful for tackling Covid-19. (EMA, *Press release*, 6 April 2020)

6 April: the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, calls on the 47 Member States to take urgent measures to protect the rights of people deprived of their liberty. (COE, Commissioner for Human Rights, Statement of 6 April 2020)

7 April: the European Central Bank adopts a set of measures to facilitate bank lending to companies and households. (ECB, *ECB announces package of temporary collateral easing measures*)

8 April: the European Commission, the Member States, the European Blood Alliance (EBA), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and other health professionals are developing a common programme for the donation, collection, testing, processing, storage, distribution and monitoring of plasma for the treatment of Covid-19. (European Commission, *Covid-19 Convalescent Plasma Transfusion*)

8 April: the European Commission publishes guidelines to reduce the risk of shortages of essential medicines. (OJ C 116I of 8 April 2020: 1-6)

8 April: the European Commission publishes a temporary framework authorising companies, subject to certain conditions, to coordinate production, stock management and distribution in order to prevent shortages of essential medical equipment and supplies. (OJ C 116I of 8 April 2020: 7-10)

8 April: the European Commission invites the Schengen Member States and the Schengen Associated States to prolong the restriction on non-essential travel from third countries into the EU+ area until 15 May 2020. (COM/2020/148 final)

8 April: the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) publishes recommendations urging patients to be sent home from hospital as soon as possible, to maintain health care capacity for the most seriously affected patients. (ECDC, Technical report)

8 April: in the view of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), there is a high risk of health and social care system capacity in the EU/EEA and the UK being exceeded. (ECDC, *Rapid risk assessment: Coronavirus disease 2019 – eighth update*)

14 April: the European Commission publishes guidelines calling on Member States to protect the health of workers in the maritime transport sector, seafarers, passengers and other persons on board ships. (OJ C 119, 14 April 2020: 1-8)

15 April: the European Commission publishes guidelines on Covid-19 in vitro diagnostic tests and their performance. (OJ C 122I of 15 April 2020: 1-7)

15 April: the European Parliament adopts a resolution calling on Member States to take measures to ensure that workers, including the self-employed, are protected against losses of income resulting from the pandemic. It calls for rapid implementation of the temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency (SURE). (EP, 2020/2616(RSP))

17 April: the presidents of the European Council and of the European Commission publish a joint European roadmap towards lifting Covid-19 containment measures. The Emergency Support Instrument is the financing arm of this roadmap, preparing for post-Covid recovery.¹³ (OJ C 126 of 17 April 2020: 1-11)

17 April: the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA) publishes a statement on principles to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 on the occupational pensions sector. (EIOPA, *statement on principles to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus on the occupational pensions sector*)

17 April: the European Commission publishes guidance to ensure the continuity of asylum and return procedures while protecting the health and fundamental rights of those concerned. (OJ C 126 of 17 April 2020: 12-27)

17 April: the European Parliament and the Council revise the EU budget for 2020, mobilising the ‘Flexibility Instrument’ to provide emergency assistance to the Member States and to strengthen the Civil Protection Mechanism and rescEU. (OJ L 125 of 21 April 2020: 5-6)

13. For the list of actions taken under the Emergency Support Instrument (production and supply of treatments, transport of essential goods, medical teams and patients, intensive care training for health professionals), see European Commission, coronavirus response, emergency support instrument. https://ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/health/coronavirus-response/emergency-support-instrument_fr

21 April: the presidents of the European Council and of the Commission publish a roadmap for a comprehensive recovery plan, aiming, notably, to re-establish a fully functioning single market and providing an ‘unprecedented’ investment effort. (European Council and EC, *A Roadmap for Recovery*)

22 April: the European Central Bank (ECB) relaxes its criteria for the purchasing of securities to avoid credit rating agencies carrying out a mass downgrading of European assets. (ECB, *ECB takes steps to mitigate impact of possible rating downgrades on collateral availability*)

23 April: the European Parliament and the Council of the EU endorse a regulation to strengthen the synergies between the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund. (OJ L 130 of 24 April 2020: 1-6)

24 April: the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (EU-OSHA) publishes guidelines on the return to the workplace, particularly regarding risk assessment, coping with absences, and managing people working from home. (EU-OSHA, *Covid-19: Back to the workplace – adapting workplaces and protecting workers*)

24 April: the president of the European Commission, in cooperation with other international organisations including the World Health Organization (WHO), launches an appeal for donations to develop and ensure equitable access to coronavirus vaccines, tests and treatments. (European Commission, *Coronavirus Global Response*)

24 April: the European Parliament and the Council of the EU sign a regulation enabling the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF) to support specific measures in the fishery and aquaculture sectors to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. (OJ L 130 of 24 April 2020: 11-17)

29 April: the European Commission adopts a package of measures to support the aviation, rail, maritime, inland navigation and road sectors. (To view all of these measures, see European Commission, *Coronavirus: package of measures to support transport sector*)

May

4 May: the European Commission adopts eleven implementing regulations to support the agri-food sector and proposes that Member States use rural development funds to compensate farmers and agri-food businesses. (OJ L 140 of 4 May 2020)

6 May: the European Commission publishes its economic forecast for spring 2020, describing a ‘deep and uneven’ recession and an uncertain recovery. (European Commission, *European Economic Forecast, Spring 2020*)

8 May: the European Commission publishes a communication intended to ensure the free movement of health professionals and to facilitate recognition of their qualifications when they travel across borders. (OJ C 156 of 8 May 2020: 1-4)

8 May: the eurozone finance ministers reach an agreement on the details of the Pandemic Crisis Support instrument. This is a €540-billion credit line. Loans will be granted via the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the only requirement being that eurozone Member States requesting aid must commit to use this credit to support domestic financing of direct and indirect health care, cure and prevention-related costs due to the Covid-19 crisis. (Eurogroup, *Eurogroup Statement on the Pandemic Crisis Support*)

13 May: the European Commission publishes guidance and recommendations aimed at gradually abandoning the restrictions on leisure travel and at allowing tourism businesses to resume their activities. (For all the texts in the ‘tourism package’, see IP 20/854)

18 May: Germany and France present a proposal for a €500-billion European recovery plan. The proposal envisages, notably, the EU being given the capacity to borrow on the capital markets. (France Diplomatie, *Initiative franco-allemande pour la relance européenne face à la crise du coronavirus*)

19 May: at the 73rd World Health Assembly of the World Health Organization, 130 countries adopt a resolution in which they undertake to ensure equitable access to all essential health technologies and products to combat Covid-19. (WHO, *Historic health assembly ends with global commitment to Covid-19 response*)

19 May: the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) issues guidance to the Member States on the establishment of surveillance systems in long-term care facilities and the setting of surveillance objectives. (ECDC, *Surveillance of Covid-19 at long-term care facilities in the EU/EEA*)

19 May: the Council of the EU adopts ‘SURE’: temporary support to mitigate unemployment risks in an emergency. (OJ L 159 of 20 May 2020: 1-7, see 2 April)

20 May: the European Commission publishes its country-specific recommendations as part of the European Semester. For the first time, it issues health-related recommendations to all Member States. (European Commission, *2020 European Semester: Country-Specific Recommendations / Commission Recommendations*)

26 May: the European Investment Bank (EIB) approves the establishment of a €25-billion Pan-European Guarantee Fund to provide finance to companies which are ‘viable in the long term but are struggling in the current crisis’. For the fund to become operational, the Member States will have to contribute. (EIB, 2020-126)

27 May: the European Parliament and the Council of the EU sign a decision to provide €3 billion of financial assistance to certain third countries destabilised by the pandemic and its consequences, in order to support their economies and encourage structural reforms. (OJ L 165 of 27 May 2020: 31-37)

27 May: the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) gradually resumes its activities in Greece, Cyprus, Malta and Italy, after these were suspended in March 2020 as a result of the pandemic. (EASO, *EASO resuming full operational activities in Member States*)

27 May: the European Commission publishes a communication laying the foundations for a recovery plan. It proposes the creation of a new instrument, ‘Next Generation EU’, with a budget of €750 billion, in addition to targeted increases in the EU budget for 2021–2027, bringing the total amount available under the recovery plan to €1,85 trillion. (COM (2020) 456 final)

28 May: the European Commission proposes an increase, for the period 2020–2022, in the financial resources of the ERDF, the ESF and the FEAD to help Member States tackle the social and economic impact of the pandemic. (COM (2020) 223 final)

28 May: the European Commission proposes an extension to the scope of the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+), particularly the measures to support short-term working schemes, for people who are not in immediate socio-economic vulnerability. (COM (2020) 447 final)

28 May: the European Commission proposes a new health programme, ‘EU4Health’. This includes actions to ensure adequate medical human resources, to secure the manufacture of medicines and supply of equipment, as well as access to essential goods and services. EU4Health would have an exceptionally high budget: €9.4 billion. (COM (2020) 405 final)

29 May: the European Commission proposes a new solvency support instrument. This is linked to the European Strategic Investment Fund and is intended to mobilise private resources to provide emergency support to ‘viable’ businesses in the sectors, regions and countries hardest hit economically by the pandemic. (COM (2020) 404 final)

29 May: the European Commission presents a proposal for a regulation to expand the scope of the InvestEU programme to better meet the needs of the European economy and to ensure the strategic autonomy of essential sectors. (COM (2020) 403 final)

June

2 June: the European Commission publishes a proposal for a decision amending certain features of the Civil Protection Mechanism. The aim of these changes is to boost the Commission’s intervention capacity and give the EU greater autonomy in the event of a crisis, particularly a health crisis. (COM (2020) 220 final)

3 June: the European Commission proposes to amend the EU's general budget for 2020, making €11.5 billion available to tackle the consequences of the pandemic and to relaunch the European economy. (COM (2020) 423 final)

3 June: the European Commission classifies Covid-19 as a risk group 3 human pathogen with regard to the directive on the protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents at work. This decision is strongly criticised by the trade unions, who were asking for the virus to be classified at the highest risk level, in group 4. (OJ L 175 of 4 June 2020: 11-14 and ETUC, *Press release*, 14 May 2020)

3 June: the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) stops all air traffic management activities linked to the European Commission's DG MOVE. There have been several reports of DG MOVE officials encouraging employers to reduce salaries in the context of the pandemic. (ETF Press release, 3 June 2020)

4 June: the European Central Bank (ECB) increases the envelope for the pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP) by €600 billion, resulting in a new total of €1,35 trillion. (OJ L 248 of 31 July 2020: 24-25)

8 June: the Council of the EU adopts measures concerning the 'Team Europe' package, which aims to provide financial assistance to third countries to support the fight against Covid-19. (*Council conclusions on Team Europe Global Response to Covid-19*)

11 June: the European Investment Bank grants a loan to the company BioNTech for the development and production of a vaccine against the new coronavirus. (IP 20/1034)

13 June: France, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands sign a contract with the company AstraZeneca for the purchase of a potential future vaccine against Covid-19. (French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, *Inclusive Vaccines Alliance reaches agreement with AstraZeneca*)

17 June: the European Commission presents the EU strategy for Covid-19 vaccines. The purpose of the strategy is to secure sufficient production of vaccines in the EU through advance purchase agreements with vaccine producers via the Emergency Support Instrument, and by 'adapting' the regulatory framework to speed up the development, authorisation and availability of vaccines. (COM (2020) 245 final)

17 June: the Administrative Commission for the Coordination of Social Security Systems publishes a decision indicating that the pandemic may make it impossible to apply the normal procedures for reimbursing certain social benefits between Member States. (OJ C 259 of 7 August 2020: 9)

18 June: the European Commission announces that Member States can now apply for additional funding from the Emergency Support Instrument to transport essential goods, medical teams and patients affected by Covid-19. (IP 20/1118)

19 June: the European Commission proposes a regulation to support the ‘rail market’ in view of the Covid-19 pandemic. (COM (2020) 260 final)

24 June: the Council of the EU approves, on its first reading, the Parliament proposal for a regulation facilitating the granting of loans by credit institutions to households and businesses. (OJ L 204 of 26 June 2020: 4-17 and COM (2020) 169 final)

25 June: the European Medicines Agency grants a first conditional marketing authorisation for a treatment for Covid-19. (EMA, *First Covid-19 treatment recommended for EU authorisation*)

26 June: the European Commission publishes a statement on the health and safety of workers who are or can be occupationally exposed to Covid-19. It emphasises the requirement for the employer to communicate all the necessary information on health and safety risks and the full protective and preventive measures. (OJ C 212 of 26 June 2020: 8-10)

July

1 July: the European Commission issues a proposal for a Council recommendation to strengthen vocational education and training for young people, given the economic recession, while ensuring that they are in step with the automation and digitalisation of the economy. (COM (2020) 275 final)

1 July: in the face of the recession, the European Commission publishes a communication encouraging the Member States to make use of the resources available under the Next Generation EU programme and the future EU budget in order to step up the support given to youth employment. (COM (2020) 276 final)

8 July: the European Parliament adopts a resolution on the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities during the Covid-19 crisis, emphasising the importance of access to social and health services. (European Parliament, 2020/2680(RSP))

15 July: the European Investment Bank approves €16.6 billion of additional financing to support, in particular, the health response to Covid-19 and the economic recovery. (EIB, 2020-197)

15 July: the Commission presents measures to reinforce the preparedness of EU health systems to counter future waves of Covid-19, especially with regard to testing, contact-tracing and availability of medical supplies. (COM (2020) 318 final)

17 July: the Parliament and the Council of the EU adopt a temporary derogation to some of the rules governing clinical trials in order to accelerate the development and authorisation of vaccines against Covid-19. (OJ L 231 of 17 July 2020: 12-16)

17 July: at the request of the European Parliament, the European Commission publishes guidelines to ensure respect of the rights of seasonal workers, which have been seriously endangered by the pandemic. (OJ C 235I of 17 July 2020: 1-7)

17-21 July: the European Council reaches an agreement on the 2021–2027 budget and the €1.82 trillion recovery plan. The European Commission's ambitions have been significantly reduced, particularly the 'EU4Health' programme, the budget of which has been cut from €9.4 billion to €1.67 billion (see 28 May). The 'centrepiece' of the post-Covid recovery plan, the 'Recovery and Resilience Facility', has a budget of €672.5 billion and is to be used to finance the green and digital transitions. The budgets that could be allocated to tackling the pandemic include ESF+ (€88 billion, i.e. down 9% compared to the previous amount), the Horizon Europe research programme (€5 billion), the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (€1.9 billion) and the InvestEU investment-support fund (€5.6 billion). (Extraordinary European Council, 17-21 July 2020)

21 July: the European Medicines Agency sets up infrastructure for real-world monitoring of Covid-19 treatments and vaccines. (EMA, press release, 21 July 2020)

22 July: the European Union is co-funding, to the tune of €100 million, a call from the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to support the rapid development and global manufacture of Covid-19 vaccines. (European Commission, *Coronavirus: EU supports vaccine research with additional €100 million*)

30 July: the European Investment Bank grants a €2-billion loan to support the Italian health sector. (EIB, 2020-212)

31 July: under the Emergency Support Instrument, the European Commission invites more than 200 blood collection services to apply for funding for the purchase of plasmapheresis equipment, to take plasma from blood donors. (IP 20/1435)

August

1 August: the European Commission is financing 23 research projects linked to the fight against the pandemic, for a total amount of €128 million. (European Commission, *New research projects on coronavirus*)

19 August: the European Commission establishes a multidisciplinary network, financed by the Emergency Support Instrument, for training health care professionals and supporting intensive care units. (IP 20/1498)

20 August: the European Commission concludes a series of exploratory talks with pharmaceutical companies concerning the purchase of a potential vaccine against Covid-19 to ensure an EU supply of vaccine. (IP 20/1494)

22–28 August: the European Commission provides medical equipment and protection gear to the Côte d’Ivoire and to Venezuela under its ‘Coronavirus Global Response’ programme. (IP 20/1509 and IP 20/1532)

24 August: the European Commission concludes exploratory talks with the pharmaceutical company Moderna for the potential purchase of vaccine doses. This is the fifth company with which the Commission has started discussions on a purchase agreement. (IP 20/1513)

27 August: the European Commission signs a first contract with AstraZeneca. This should enable the purchase of 300 million doses of vaccine by the Member States, and includes an option for 100 million additional doses, to be distributed on a population-based pro-rata basis. This contract would also allow the donation of vaccines to ‘lower and middle-income’ countries. (IP 20/1524)

31 August: the European Commission confirms its commitment to participate in the COVAX facility and invests €400 million in it. COVAX, co-led by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance,¹⁴ the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)¹⁵ and the WHO, is a structure which aims to accelerate the development of a Covid-19 vaccine and to ensure broad and equitable access. (IP 20/1540)

All links were accessed on 19 October 2020, unless stated otherwise.

Sources

The main sources of information for this chronology are the following:

Council of the EU

<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/president/news/>

ECB

<https://www.ecb.europa.eu/paym/intro/news/html/index.en.html>

European Commission

<https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/home/en>

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control

<https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/news-events>

European Medicines Agency

<https://www.ema.europa.eu/en/news-events/whats-new>

14. <https://www.gavi.org/fr>

15. <https://cepi.net/>

European Parliament

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en>

The follow-up to all these issues is based on information in the Europe Daily Bulletin:

<https://agenceurope.eu/en/home.html>