

Statement from the European Parliament Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare

MEP Interest Group delves deeper into the EU COVID-19 response and what this means for equitable access

The COVID-19 pandemic has clearly demonstrated that we need to act collectively to reform healthcare systems across the EU to avoid future scenarios when we are forced to prioritize emergency pandemic response over critical long-term care¹. This is a fundamental human rights issue.

Against this background, the MEP Interest Group on Equitable Access is ever more committed to ensure that equal access is high on the EU policy agenda and that patients across the EU receive timely and quality care, treatment, and support that they need, even during times of turmoil.

In this regard, we strongly welcome the initiative to use an EU joint procurement mechanism of medical countermeasures for vaccines and medical equipment. This was the only way to ensure that European citizens have fair, timely and equitable access, and to prevent chaos, insecurity, and the exacerbation of disparities among Member States. We urge the European Commission together with the Member States to explore the feasibility of applying this approach to other areas of strategic importance, particularly in the context of the European Health Union.

The accelerated development of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines represents a remarkable achievement of science and our joint European efforts to support research and development. This breakthrough must be accompanied by robust, well-coordinated and timely rollout strategies to ensure that the procured vaccine doses reach the population in different parts of the EU at the same time, including remote and outermost regions. The European Commission needs to examine all possibilities to support the Member States efforts in this regard and insist with vaccine manufacturers that they respect the concluded arrangements and supply the agreed quantities in line with the initial delivery schedules. The European Commission also needs to put forward a coordination mechanism to ensure that any surplus doses are not wasted but distributed swiftly to our neighbors and international partners. With this act the EU will reinforce its commitment to global health and meet its responsibility to promote and act upon the intrinsic values of equity and solidarity. We welcome also joint efforts to address vaccine confidence across the European Union which has been identified as critical in the context of COVID 19, and beyond.

We will strive to ensure that equal access is central to EU policies and programmes. One way of doing so is through better use and monitoring of existing regulatory and financial instruments, which can ultimately deliver meaningful, impactful, and patient-focused change in favour of better access on the ground. The untapped potential of powerful instruments such as the EU cohesion funds, and the Cross-Border Healthcare Directive needs to be utilized better.

To further this goal, we also invite the European Commission to ensure that access is prioritized in the national recovery and resilience plans in line with the recommendations put forward in the European Semester cycle and the shaping of a European Health Union.

The Co-chairs of the Interest Group will be addressing these topics and others, in the work programme for 2021.

¹ Health at a Glance, 2020. "How did countries try to maintain access to high quality care for non-COVID-19 patients during the first wave of the pandemic?"; pp-61-67. Available [here](#)

Supported by the following Members of the European Parliament:

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About the European Parliament Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare

The Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare was officially launched on 27 January 2015 at the European Parliament. The Interest Group aims to tackle health inequalities and enhance proper access to high-quality healthcare for all patients. The main objective of the Group is to play a major role in providing a platform for discussion and concrete action, in cooperation with patients and the healthcare community. It promotes synergies and knowledge-sharing regarding disease specific initiatives in the European Parliament relating to access. The secretariat is being provided by the Patient Access Partnership (PACT).

In its second mandate (2019-2024), the Group is co-chaired by: MEP Sara Cerdas, MEP Kateřina Konečná, MEP Andrey Kovatchev, MEP Tomislav Sokol and MEP Tiemo Woelken.