FOREWORD

For almost two years, the European Union and the world have been experiencing the worst public health crisis in modern times.

This unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has caused immense human suffering and loss of life, and triggered a shock to the economy and labour markets around the world, with huge socio-economic impacts. It has particularly exposed our health systems, which have had to adapt to a situation never before experienced. While at first the Member States responded to the crisis in isolation, the evolution and cross-border impact of the health situation showed that the action and coordination of the European Union (EU) and the solidarity that has come with it, has proved essential to address a health threat of this magnitude.

Faced with successive waves of the pandemic, EU Member States gradually coordinated more and more closely with each other in order to develop common solutions and to respond to the new organisational and financial challenges faced by their health care structures. This report provides an opportunity to look back at several of the significant initiatives taken, to highlight them and to draw inspiration from some of them in order to continue building the future.

France, which will hold the Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2022, and the European Commission are sending out a strong message calling for better and stronger cooperation in the area of health within the European Union, in order to strengthen the resilience of each of our health systems and to guarantee citizens access to quality, equitable and affordable care. Faced with a global health threat, the EU is only as strong as its weakest link. The health situation in one Member State is contingent of the health situation in another. COVID-19 has showed this very clearly.

The current challenging situation has led us to analyse the impact of this crisis and to recognise that it was the solidarity, cooperation and coordination at cross-border and European levels that has been the determining factor in the effectiveness of the responses provided.

To this end, the European Union has taken unprecedented steps to support the Member States to strengthen the resilience of their health systems, in particular through the new EU4Health programme, the largest EU funding programme for health ever with a budget of €5.3 billion and part of the EUs response to COVID-19. The four general objectives of this programme include improving health in the EU, combating cross-border health threats, preventing, preparing for, and responding to cross-border health threats, developing suitable therapeutic solutions, medical devices and strengthening health systems.

The EU needs to work together to build a strong European Health Union. The strengthening of the mandates of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency, as well as the creation of the new European Health Emergency Response and Preparedness Authority (HERA) are part of the essential pillars of the Health Union we have embarked on building.

Beyond these initiatives and on the basis of our common values, it is up to us to be a force which proposes and promotes new instruments of cooperation together, for a European Health Union at the service of its citizens. This not just about COVID-19 – but about investing in our common future.

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