

1. COVID-19

Vaccination

1. The European Council addressed the worsening epidemiological situation in the EU and the impact of the emergence of Omicron, a new variant of concern. It reiterates the vital importance of vaccination in the fight against the pandemic. Rolling out vaccination to all and deploying booster doses are crucial and urgent. In that context, overcoming vaccine hesitancy, including by addressing disinformation, remains key. In addition to vaccination, the implementation of the EU strategy on COVID-19 therapeutics, including joint procurement, should be taken forward.

Coordination

2. Continued coordinated efforts are needed to respond to developments based on the best available scientific evidence, whilst ensuring that any restrictions are based on objective criteria and do not undermine the functioning of the Single Market or disproportionately hamper free movement between Member States or travel into the EU. The European Council calls for the speedy adoption of the revised Council recommendation on safe free movement and of the revised Council recommendation on non-essential travel into the EU. The European Council stresses the importance of a coordinated approach on the validity of the EU Digital COVID vaccination certificate and takes note of the fact that the Commission will adopt a delegated act on this issue.

International cooperation

3. The European Council underlines that the pandemic will only be overcome through global cooperation based on trust and mutual assistance. In this context, it commends Botswana and South Africa for their vigilance and transparency in detecting, sequencing and reporting the most recent Omicron variant of concern so rapidly, and stresses the importance of scaling up global genomic sequencing capacity.
4. The EU is committed to playing its role in achieving global vaccination. The EU is the biggest donor and exporter in the world. We will continue to export and share vaccine doses and ancillary materials, and step up our support for the countries most in need, in particular in Africa, both by continuing to provide support to COVAX and on a bilateral basis, in cooperation with partners.
5. In order to address bottlenecks in vaccine sharing and administration, and to rapidly remove the obstacles hampering the global roll-out of vaccines, the European Council calls on the Commission to further enhance support to Member States and third countries, to further engage with manufacturers, and to strengthen coordination with the World Health Organization, COVAX and other partners. The European Council invites the Council to monitor closely the fulfilment of vaccine pledges in all transparency and will revert to the matter as appropriate.
6. The European Council welcomes the agreement reached by the World Health Assembly on 1 December 2021 to start a global process to draft and negotiate a convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, with a view to its adoption under Article 19, or under other provisions of the Constitution of the World Health Organization as may be deemed appropriate by the intergovernmental negotiating body.