

European Union Health Policy and the Response to COVID-19 Pandemic: Building a European Health Union

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Abstract : The European Union has long been the most developed model of economic and political integration that has brought a common market, a common currency and a standardization of national policies in certain areas in consistent with EU values and principles. To this direction, there is a parallel process of social integration that effect public policy decisions of member states. Even though social policy, i.e. social protection and moreover healthcare policy, still remains in state's responsibility to develop, EU applies different mechanisms in order to influence health policy systems, since from a more federalist point of view, EU ought to expand its regulatory and legislative roles in as many policy areas as possible. Recently, the pandemic has become a turning point for health care provision and at the same time has also highlighted the need to strengthen the EU's role in coordinating health care. This paper analyses the EU health policy in general, as well as the response to COVID-19 pandemic with an attempt to identify indications of interaction between EU policies and the promotion of sustainable and resilient health systems. More analytically, the paper investigates the EU binding legal instruments, non-binding legal instruments, monitoring and assessment instruments and instruments for co-financing concerning health care provision in member states and records the evolution of health policies before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper concludes by articulating some remarks regarding the improvement of health policy in EU. Since the ability to deal with a pandemic depends on continuous and increased investment in health systems, the involvement of the EU can lead to a policy convergence, necessary for the resilience of the systems, maintaining at the same time, a strong health policy framework in Europe.

Keywords : EU health policy, EU response to COVID-19, European Health Union, health systems in Europe

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