

## CONCORD analysis of Communication on the Global EU response to COVID-19

Adopted on 8 April, the Communication on the Global EU response to Covid-19 sets out how the EU ('Team Europe') will address the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic and the immediate health and socio-economic needs of the most vulnerable countries and people globally. It represents an attempt to assert European leadership in the global response to the crisis.

The Communication spells out a number of positive initiatives that respond to the pandemic, such as the recognition of solidarity as a guiding principle, the commitment to multilateralism and international cooperation, the endorsement of "good governance, human rights, the rule of law, gender equality and non-discrimination, decent working conditions, as well as fundamental values and humanitarian principles", a commitment to work with and to support partner countries to achieve a prosperous and sustainable future for the people and the planet in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the European Green Deal.

However, the EU's global response is guided by the fact that it is deemed to be in the EU's 'strategic interests' to support partner countries. This approach is highly regrettable. The EU should rather be guided by the principle of solidarity. And with that in mind, the EU should target its support where it is needed most with a special focus on least developed countries to ensure the most marginalised people and countries are not left behind.

While the Communication does include references to the most marginalised and excluded people, including children, refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and women and girls, it lacks a focus on the devastating social impact of the current health crisis on these groups. It fails to say that the EU will systematically *prioritise* these people in its response and the kinds of measures it will adopt to reach them. The Communication does not, therefore, live up to the 'leave no one behind' principle of the 2030 Agenda.

CONCORD Europe urges the EU to take a true **people-centered approach** that addresses the immediate and future concerns of individuals. These concerns stem from the massive inequalities that have been allowed to grow over the past few decades and that are now worsening due to the secondary effects of the COVID-19 crisis. In response to the crisis, the

EU should support targeted and sustained action to increase **investment in human development**, so as to reduce inequalities between people and build resilient societies.

The crisis has made extreme global inequalities even more visible. CONCORD Europe acknowledges that the proposed measures consist of a solid three-fold approach to the emergency response: strengthening the health, water, sanitation systems; boosting research capacities; and addressing the social and economic consequences of COVID-19. However, we had hoped for **more multidimensional and intersectional inequality analysis** of the current situation in each of the three Team Europe priorities. Such an analysis would have informed an equality-driven EU response to this pandemic.

CONCORD Europe regrets that no new EU funding has been made available to respond to the pandemic. The promised **€15.6 billion will come from within the existing EU budget**. Without fresh funds, there is a risk that the original set of priorities, sectors and projects that were agreed upon with partner countries, multilateral institutions or global funds will be replaced by new COVID-19 related measures. These new priorities might be seen as superseding the original political priorities, either thematically (e.g. climate change or good governance) or geographically.

Moreover, of the €15.6 billion, only around €3.3 billion will be dedicated to interventions specifically addressing health challenges in partner countries. While this is a significant amount, the need in partner countries is tremendous. CONCORD Europe believes that a strong and effective EU response should **prioritise measures that strengthen health systems** by ensuring universal access to quality health services, as well as focusing on global health research and development.

With regard to Team Europe's support packages, CONCORD Europe agrees that the EU must play a role in coordinating the EU and Member States' collective response (at EU level and through the EU Delegations). However, a top-down approach should be avoided as it may result in deteriorating trust between the EU and its partners. It is imperative that the EU - through its Delegations - considers local contexts. To this end, **targeted consultations with a variety of stakeholders**, including local civil society organisations, are key to ensure that the crisis response is **locally owned and appropriate**.

CONCORD Europe is concerned that the Communication foresees a limited role for civil society in implementing these measures, even though local NGOs are often well-positioned to support government efforts. The **EU must promote enabling frameworks for civil society organisations to complement governments' efforts** and to hold their institutions and authorities to account. Women-led local responses should be prioritised.

CONCORD Europe regrets that insufficient attention is given to concrete measures that could support women and girls in this crisis, and to acknowledge their important role in the emergency response. The Communication insufficiently addresses the rise in sexual and

gender-based violence, and the need for greater access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

CONCORD Europe urges the EU to focus on developing a common strategy to make stronger linkages and **ensure policy coherence** between the various levels and spheres of action, starting by bringing together and scaling up the external response. With COVID-19 afflicting all of us, **the 2030 Agenda must guide us through a just recovery**, towards a healthy and equitable future for all. The absence of policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD) is a significant threat to the successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). PCSD must be used as a key framework to address policy challenges caused by COVID-19. All EU internal and external policies should be aligned with SDGs across all sectoral policies and programmes.

Lastly, the EU must ensure that all measures taken to control the pandemic (in Europe and in countries receiving EU support) are fully in line with democratic principles and the protection of all human rights, the rule of law and civic space.

