

Health Security in a Globalized World: Preparing for Future Crises

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the profound impact that health crises can have on national and international security. Disruptions in health systems and medical supply chains can undermine societal stability, economic functioning, and government capacity to respond to emergencies. In addition, access to medicines and vaccines has increasingly become a factor in geopolitical competition, influencing alliances and global influence. This working group examines how health is integrated into security policy and strategic planning, how international cooperation can be strengthened, and how preparedness and resilient health systems contribute to overall stability and security in a complex world.

Summary of the Discussion in the Working Group

Discussions highlighted that Europe and the world face multiple challenges in strengthening health security. These include limited funding, diverse values and perspectives, weak coordination, dependence on global powers, fragile supply chains for essential resources, and unstable political commitments. The COVID-19 pandemic further showed that vaccine cooperation often turned into competition, revealing tensions between national interests and the need for effective global collaboration. The first expert from HERA highlighted the challenges associated with long supply chains, emphasizing the delicate balance between cost and resilience. Europe faces a strategic choice: prioritize cheap and efficient production or invest in greater robustness and self-sufficiency in the health sector. The second expert focused on the weaponization of health in conflicts. Discussions centered on the difficult question of when civilian infrastructure, particularly health-related facilities, may be considered legitimate military targets under international law.

Key Questions Emerging from the Discussion

- Should the EU have stronger authority over member states in health emergencies and if yes how far should that power go?
- Sometimes youth organisations are included in the process of health policy development, but we are often not taken seriously. How can we change that, to support generational justice?

Summary of the Discussion at the Closing Panel

In response to a question about youth participation, one panellist emphasized the role of citizens in shaping Europe, stating: “We, the citizens of Europe, are Europe, and we can influence a lot.” She stressed that young people should be actively included in decision-making processes and encouraged to engage politically. In particular, the digital age provides numerous new opportunities for participation, enabling young citizens to organize, express their views, and contribute more directly to public debates and policy discussions. The panelist emphasized that while cooperation within the EU is essential, it remains challenging because European states face very different circumstances and priorities.

The group’s speaker also stressed that Europe must strengthen its resilience to better prepare for future challenges.