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WEEKLY EU HEALTHCARE NEWS UPDATE

15 OCTOBER – 21 OCTOBER 2022

EUROPEAN PUBLIC PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE LAUNCHES INVESTIGATION INTO THE ACQUISITION OF COVID-19 VACCINES

The European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) confirmed it opened an inquiry into the Covid-19 contracts signed by the European Commission on behalf of the 27 Member States. The decision comes right after numerous members of the European Parliament severely criticised a lack of transparency surrounding an agreement with Pfizer.

The EPPO's website indicates that the crimes investigated include corruption and/or fraud that damages, or is likely to damage, the EU's financial interests. According to the press release, the potential damage may "affect revenues, expenditures and assets covered by, acquired through, or due to the European Union budget and the budgets of the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies established under the Treaties, and budgets managed and monitored by them." The European Commission has been a pre-purchaser of the vaccines for all the EU's Member States, but it is the countries, who have been responsible for buying supplies from the centralised stock. However, it is not clear what or who was the target of the ongoing investigation.

In September, the European Court of Auditors published a report accusing the European Commission of refusing to disclose President Ursula von der Leyen's role in negotiating a €35 billion contract with Pfizer/BioNTech back in 2021. The report also revealed that European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly opened an investigation into the "European Commission's refusal to grant public access to text messages exchanged between the Commission President and the CEO of Pfizer, Albert Bourla at the time of the preliminary negotiations."

Source: <https://www.eppo.europa.eu/en/news/ongoing-eppo-investigation-acquisition-covid-19-vaccines-eu>

WORLD HEALTH SUMMIT: GLOBAL LEADERS PLEDGE

\$2.6 BILLION IN FUNDING TO ERADICATE POLIO

Seventeen governmental and private donors pledged an additional \$2.6 billion in funding to the global polio eradication initiative's (GPEI) 2022-2026 Strategy. Participants made the commitment during the closing day of the World Health Summit co-hosted by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which took place between 16 and 18 October in Berlin.

The summit had its good and bad moments in its finale, much like the rest of the three-day event. On one hand, the donations, including a pledge of \$1.2 billion by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, mean that the GPEI has achieved more than 50% of the funding target of \$4.8 billion.

Moreover, WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus signed a new memorandum of understanding with a global network of parliamentarians - "UNITE." Such collaboration offers WHO a new and valuable channel for reaching out beyond top national government officials to more diverse groups of elected politicians who control national budgets and develop legislative priorities.

On the other hand, however, a new WHO report: "Protect the Promise", released on Tuesday at the summit, points out the setbacks in women's, children's and adolescent's health recorded due to the pandemic and climate change – rolling back years of progress in this field. At the launch of the report, Dr Ghebreyesus said that "almost three years on from the onset of COVID-19, the pandemic's long-term impact on the health and well-being of women, children and adolescents is becoming evident: their chances for healthy and productive lives have declined sharply."

Source: <https://www.who.int/news/item/18-10-2022-global-leaders-commit-usd-2.6-billion-at-world-health-summit-to-end-polio>

EUROPEANS DIVIDED WHEN IT COMES TO DIGITAL HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS

There is increasing support for digital healthcare solutions once again. According to the latest STADA Health Report, 64 per cent of Europeans are willing to have an online consultation with a doctor. This year's 7 per cent increase comes after a period of compulsory digital use due to restrictions in 2021, in which only 57 per cent of Europeans said they were willing to make an online appointment.

Opinions on caring for one's health via digital tools vary from country to country. The greatest supporters of e-visits are the residents of Portugal (86 per cent), Romania (79 per cent) and Spain (78 per cent). In Poland, more than half of people (58 per cent) are willing to use online consultations, while Austrians and Germans (55 per cent each) are much less convinced. The list of 15 countries participating in the survey is closed by Belgium - the only country where less than half of the population (47 per cent) is in favour of digital solutions for taking care of their health.

The most common argument against e-visits is the lack of direct contact with the doctor. For 20 per cent of Europeans, this is sufficient reason to abandon this treatment entirely. Time-saving and greater accessibility are not convincing for 40 per cent of Poles - 20 per cent would feel uncomfortable during an online visit, while 21 per cent are totally opposed to them due to the lack of personal presence at the surgery. Due to the need for face-to-face interaction, more than a quarter of people in rural areas (26 per cent) have opted out of online consultations, surpassing the percentage of Poles (21 per cent) and all Europeans (20 per cent) pointing out this reason.

Source: https://www.stada.com/media/7197/health-report-2022_final.pdf

Thank you for your attention!

ul. J.P. Woronicza 3 lok. 254

02-640 Warszawa

tel./fax: +48 22 749 13 13

e-mail: visiongroup@visiongroup.pl

www.visiongroup.pl



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