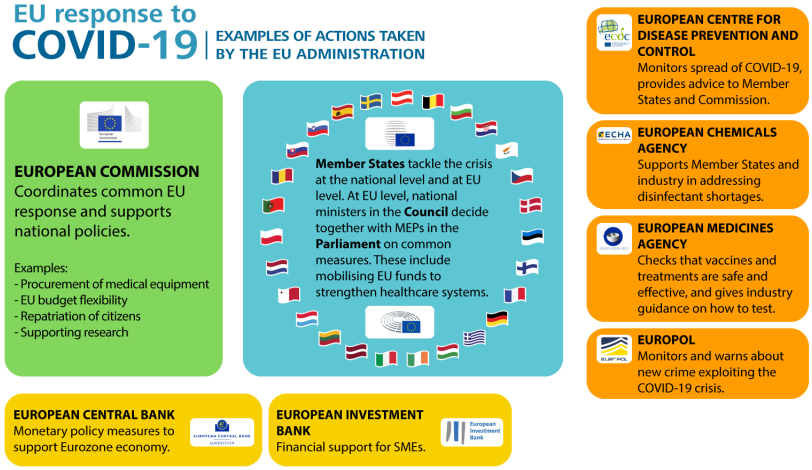
European Ombudsman



Overview of European Ombudsman's initiative looking into the COVID-19 response of the EU administration

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In response to the unprecedented situation created by COVID-19, many of the EU institutions, agencies and bodies were required to adopt targeted measures and/or to adapt their working processes to deal with the challenges of the emergency. In April 2020, the Ombudsman began examining the work of the EU administration in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. As a first step, at that stage, she drew the attention of the [Link]**European Commission and Council** to the fact that their obligations concerning transparency were not diminished in the crisis response.

In July 2020, the Ombudsman launched a series of inquiries and initiatives, looking at specific aspects of the work of different EU institutions, agencies and bodies.

The Ombudsman's inquiry [Link] into the work carried out by **the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)** in gathering and assessing data linked to the COVID-19 crisis concluded in February 2021. Based on the inquiry, the Ombudsman set out a series of suggestions [Link] to the ECDC. The ECDC responded positively to the Ombudsman's suggestions.

The Ombudsman also conducted an inquiry into the COVID-19 response of the [Link]**Council of the EU** , notably as regards the transparency of its decision making. The Ombudsman found

that there were initial problems with transparency but the Council subsequently took steps to make meetings more transparent. The Ombudsman took the view that more could be done and made four suggestions for improvement [Link] to this end.

The Ombudsman also launched an initiative concerning the [Link]**European Medicines Agency** (EMA) and, in particular, the role of its pandemic task force (COVID-ETF), which was created to help take quick and coordinated regulatory action on the development, authorisation and safety monitoring of medicines intended for the treatment and prevention of COVID-19. In September, EMA replied to the Ombudsman, committing to independence in how it assesses medicines for COVID-19 and to publishing clinical data about them.

On 29 July 2020, as a follow up to her letter in April, the Ombudsman set out a series of more detailed questions to the [Link]**European Commission** , notably regarding the transparency of public procurement procedures (including for vaccines), scientific advice and lobbying activities in the context of the crisis. The Ombudsman identified certain matters on which she asked the Commission to provide further information. The Commission replied, giving basic information on steps it has taken to ensure transparency. The Ombudsman acknowledged the steps taken by the Commission but reminded it of its obligations [Link]concerning transparency and record keeping of meetings. She will continue to monitor these matters.

The Ombudsman also launched a strategic initiative [Link], looking into the transparency of the measures introduced by the **European Investment Bank** (EIB) in response to the COVID-19 crisis. The Ombudsman set out questions to the EIB concerning the transparency of the terms and criteria related to new financing measures for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Ombudsman received the EIB's reply in September 2020.

** This news article was updated in October to update the progress of the different inquiries and initiatives.*