

A resilient tomorrow: COVID-19 response requires societies to transform

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Future policy measures need to rebuild the economic, human and social capital eroded by COVID-19, and grasp the opportunity of getting out of the crisis greener and fairer.

The European Commission Joint Research Centre (JRC) has been

working to put resilience thinking into policymaking since 2015.

Researchers have now summarised the key strategic lessons learnt from this scientific work and discuss them in the new light of the COVID-19 emergency in a freshly published report co-authored with Professor Enrico Giovannini, member of the Italian Task Force for handling Phase II.

Not the first and not the last crisis to come

The COVID-19 emergency impacts our society at different levels, affecting the human and [social capital](#), institutions, communities, the production process, consumption, and investment.

The pandemic has also provided a warning to governments worldwide that new crises of unforeseeable nature are likely to emerge in the future.

This is not the first crisis to hit the EU, and it will not be the last. A few years ago, the global financial crisis triggered a major recession, and for a decade many EU countries struggled with its consequences.

The problem is that each crisis is different from the previous one.

"This pandemic has been the most disruptive shock since wartime—in its scope, intensity and impact. For Europe to bounce forward and become better prepared for future crises, we must boost resilience of our societies with a wide, 360-degree approach. Strategic foresight—with anticipation and preparedness at its core—will therefore be key. This is an opportunity for transformation and we must tap into it fully," European Commission Vice-President for Interinstitutional Affairs and Foresight Maroš Šefčovič said.

So how can we prepare for unknown shocks? How can we make our societies resilient, so that we are able to face unexpected changes in such a way that our well-being is preserved, without leaving anyone behind, and without compromising the heritage for [future generations](#)?

Time for transformative resilience

The JRC report emphasises that societies should not try to "bounce back" to the conditions as we knew them before the crisis.

Rather, policies should be designed to "bounce forward," towards a better and more sustainable path.

"The COVID-19 shock is so extreme that it is simply impossible to expect the society to absorb its effects or find ways to go back to how things were before the crisis. It is also not enough to adopt simple adaptation measures to recover from this crisis. We should rather look at it as an opportunity to "bounce forward" through transformative measures that will make us more resilient to unknown future shocks," said JRC researcher Jessica Cariboni.

The report urges to use a holistic, multidisciplinary approach, which takes into account complexities and interconnections when designing these transformative measures.

Future policies must provide the necessary positive impulses to encourage such measures.

This kind of efforts can boost the political ambitions to put the EU on a more sustainable path from an economic, social and environmental point of view. And they can make people stronger, mobilise their creativity and ambition to deal with crises.

"A resilient society is one where people are resilient. But people should not be left to deal with the crisis on their own. Individual resilience can and should be supported by the governing institutions," Jessica explains.

The scientific recipe for dealing with a crisis

Science is a powerful tool when dealing with a crisis. It can help understand changes and their impact and find solutions. It can also help design frameworks for "bouncing forward," stronger than ever.

The JRC report makes some recommendations for dealing with the fallout from the current crisis.

First of all, policy measures are needed to rebuild the capital eroded by COVID-19, whether economic, human or social.

Secondly, the current policy measures have to focus on the short-term to deal with the immediate effects, but they should also exploit the opportunities to transform our society in the medium-long term.

The opportunity of getting out of the crisis greener and fairer should not be wasted in the name of urgency.

The report recommends re-assessing how our health systems work. It proposes to address the trade-offs between security and privacy, boost the use of digital tools in education and work, and move towards more sustainable tourism.

Finally, JRC research has demonstrated that the success of [crisis](#) management and recovery depends on the resilience of people and the [society](#) as whole. The report highlights the importance of the societal mood and people's perceptions in driving people's behavior.

A clear and effective communication from national governments and the EU is identified as a key factor to boost trust and confidence in the capacity of these institutions to manage the recovery process.

More information: Time for transformative resilience: the COVID-19 emergency: [ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publicatio ... e-covid-19-emergency](https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/2020-05-18-a-resilient-tomorrow-covid-19-response-requires-societies-to-transform)

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