

# PANDEMIC & THE ECONOMY 2023 “A PANDEMIC-RESILIENT SOCIETY”

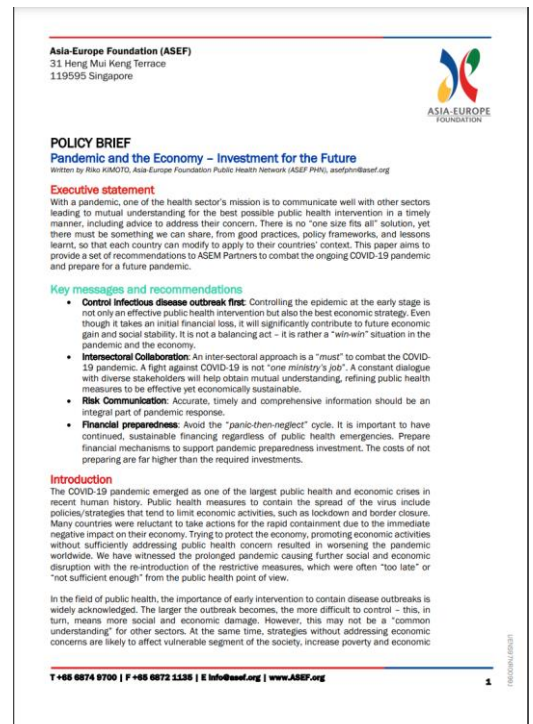
6-7 June 2023 - Helsinki, Finland



## Scope & Purpose

### Pandemic & the Economy – Investment for the Future

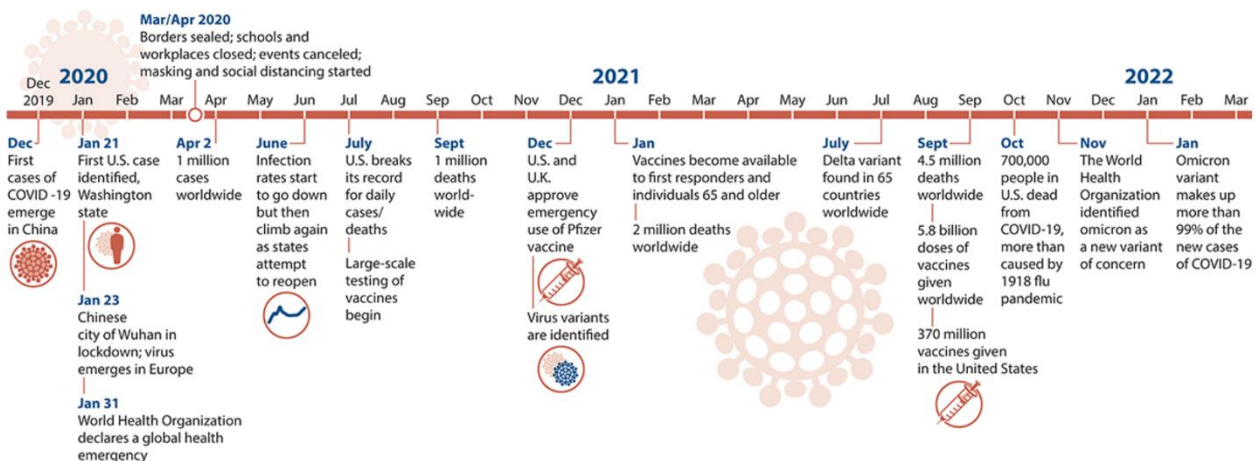
Since the outbreak of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), the pandemic of unprecedented scale in recent human history has had a devastating impact on the public health sector and beyond. In April 2021, ASEF PHN hosted an online roundtable to facilitate a much-needed dialogue between the public health sector and non-health sectors when deciding on COVID-19 related policies and strategies in different countries' settings. The online roundtable's exchanges focused on the initial response to the pandemic, and how an agreement could be reached amongst governments, public health authorities and non-health sectors on practical ways to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. Featured experts hailing from countries across Asia and Europe highlighted four essential points for consideration: 1) **controlling an infectious disease outbreak** at the onset is the **optimal financial strategy**; 2) **intersectoral collaboration** is critical to overcoming difficulties in decision making related to the pandemic; 3) **accurate, timely and comprehensive information** should be an integral part of the pandemic response, and 4) **sustainable financial preparedness** is key to combat a pandemic. To access the full policy brief, please click the image on the right.



### Shifting to the “New Normal” – A Pandemic-resilient Society

We have witnessed an ever-changing situation regarding our society's response during the course of the pandemic; vaccines have been rolled out in record time and new variants continue to emerge. It is now acknowledged that prioritising public health would be the best economic strategy at the onset of the

disease outbreak. At the same time, ensuring economic recovery and growth during a pandemic recovery is also key to avoid a compounding negative impact on the livelihoods of the public. Accordingly, adjusting policies and strategies swiftly depending on the stage of the pandemic and the characteristics of the disease is essential, yet it has proven to be highly challenging for governments. How do we strike a balance between protecting public health and avoiding economic disruption? There is no single correct answer on how to best shift from a pandemic response mode to a pandemic-resilient “new normal”. Timely decisions may have to be taken weighing the advantages and disadvantages of different policy options, even if the ultimate outcome is not in everyone’s best interest. Since national priorities would vary depending on a particular country’s context and would also be influenced by the unexpected nature of the disease, decision-makers would find it very challenging to reach an agreement on the preferred policy response.



<https://covid19.macmillanlearning.com/>

### The Whole-of-government/ whole-of-society Approach: The Importance of Intersectoral Dialogue

In complex circumstances, like those around decision-making in pandemics, constructive dialogue, especially intersectoral discussion, is key to overcoming difficulties. In the field of public health, it is widely acknowledged that health investment leads to economic development. For each \$1 spent on health, a country can expect an economic return of \$2-4.<sup>1</sup> However, this might not be a known fact to other sectors. How well different government and society sectors communicate with each other to reach an agreement will significantly contribute to moving forward in a more favourable direction on concurrently protecting/safeguarding population health, economic growth, foreign relations, etc. For example, at the start of the pandemic, a large number of economists argued that containment measures would cause considerable economic damage. Few, if any, instead stressed the potential financial loss countries would incur if no appropriate public health measures were to be taken in a timely manner. Public health, especially when it comes to pandemics, can be politicised because of its huge impact on the economy. Engendering a constructive dialogue under the whole-of-government/society approach will be beneficial to minimise negative political disagreements to ultimately safeguard not only a country’s public health but also its economy.

In 2023, ASEF PHN has partnered with the government of Finland to host a follow-up event on the relationship between pandemics and the economy. This is a multi-country and multi-sectoral conference focusing on generating bi-regional dialogue to protect both Public Health and the Economy.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8568597/>

## Objectives of the conference

The overall aim of this conference is to facilitate a much-needed dialogue between the public health and non-health sectors when deciding on COVID-19 related policies and strategies in different countries. The focus will be on how to best shift from a pandemic response to building a pandemic-resilient society after the initial response. As each country possess different health, economic and social infrastructures, no “one-size-fits-all” response is expected. Nonetheless, the conference will seek to identify some general guidelines for policy action that can be considered by ASEM Partners for future implementation.

The specific objectives are:

- To bring together officials representing different government portfolios such as Public Health and Economy, as well as other stakeholders, to identify the priorities in order to best address the COVID-19 pandemic, especially after its initial phase.
- To share lessons learnt and best practice across Asia and Europe on dealing with the apparent public health-economy trade-off.
- To identify potential actions linked to the points identified above in order to build a pandemic-resilient society; and
- To address the role of the health sector in connecting health and governance during pandemics for better inter-sectoral/international collaboration.

## Target Audience

The conference will address three target audiences: 1) senior-level health officials who are working in the area of the COVID-19 and other pandemics; 2) senior-level officials from other ministries who are working in the area of economy and/or policy related to COVID-19; and 3) Other representatives with expert knowledge on pandemics and the economy. The target audience more specifically includes:

- Senior-level officials, advisors, and/or other decision-makers from Ministries of Health of ASEM Partners or equivalent who work in the area directly related to the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Chief/directors from national health agencies of ASEM Partners or equivalent who work in the area of pandemic preparedness and response, including COVID-19;
- Senior-level officials from Ministries of Finance and Foreign Affairs of ASEM Partners, other government representatives who work on the matters related to COVID-19 related economic policy;
- Representatives of international organisations and non-profit organisations (NGOs) as well as academic with relevant specialities.

## Date & Location

This conference will take place in Helsinki, Finland on 6-7 June 2023 in a face-to-face format. It is a strictly closed-door event by invitation only. For any enquiries, please get in touch with ASEF PHN via [asefphn@asef.org](mailto:asefphn@asef.org)

## Expected Outcome

A summary/policy recommendations paper will be developed as the outcome of this conference. This will be then disseminated widely among ASEM Partners.

## Organisers

### Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) & ASEF Public Health Network

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)<sup>2</sup>, founded in 1997, is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation representing the 53 ASEM<sup>3</sup> Partners: 30 European and 21 Asian countries, plus the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. Following the 6<sup>th</sup> ASEM Summit (ASEM6; 2006; Helsinki, Finland), where the leaders expressed their determination to combat avian influenza and a possible human influenza pandemic, the *ASEM Initiative for the Rapid Containment of Pandemic Influenza*, financially supported by the Government of Japan, was officially launched at the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (ASEM FMM9; 2009; Hanoi, Viet Nam). Since then, the 2 components of the Initiative (*ASEM Stockpiling of Anti-viral Drugs and Personal Protective Equipment*, as well as *ASEF Public Health Network*) have contributed to strengthening ASEM Partners' capacity to manage public health emergencies.

### Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL)

The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (THL) is an independent state-owned expert and research institute that promotes the welfare, health and safety of the population. THL's duties are established in the Finnish legislation. In terms of administration, THL operates under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

THL key duties are to carry out research and expert work to

- prevent illnesses and social problems
- develop the welfare society
- support the social welfare and health care system and the social security system.

In addition:

- THL serves as a statistical authority and maintain statistics and registers in our field.
- THL provides social and health care services and forensic medicine services for which the state is responsible.
- THL steers the national information management in social welfare and health care services, including the development of systems aimed at processing the health and welfare data of the Finnish citizens.

THL provides our stakeholders with information and solutions to build a more equal, equitable and sustainable society. THL serves a wide range of different operators, including

- decision-makers in central government, municipalities, and wellbeing services counties
- local government officials
- social welfare and health care professionals.

THL communicates on health and safety issues to the entire population.

### The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is part of the Finnish Government. It is responsible for the planning, guidance and implementation of health and social policy in Finland. The Ministry is responsible for promoting wellbeing and health, health and social services, social insurance (pensions, health insurance, unemployment benefits), private insurance, occupational safety and health, wellbeing at work, and gender equality. The Ministry's strategic vision is to create a cohesive society and sustainable wellbeing through active inclusion of people, sustainable financing, wellbeing in the transformation of work, safe and healthy living and working environment, and integrated services and benefits.



ASEF PHN is financially supported by the Government of Japan.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.asef.org>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/partners>