COVID-19 at points of entry – Collecting Europe's experiences to learn for the future

In the first 1.5 years, many efforts have been made by the consortium of the EU Joint Action Healthy Gateways to support points of entry in the preparedness and response to public health threats [1]. A network and stakeholder overview has been developed, several training-of-trainers sessions have been conducted and many guidelines and documents developed to support countries in the implementation of core capacities at their designated ports, airports and ground-crossings.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, POEs faced significant challenges in operational preparedness and response. Initially in January and February 2020, the news was dominated by the severity and transmissibility of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, its global spread and the measures taken by countries at points of entry [2]. The EU Joint Action Healthy Gateways went into emergency mode and started to provide evidence- and practice-based advice to Europe's professionals dealing with COVID-29 at points of entry.

In the current literature on COVID-19, the majority of studies covering points of entry report on the effectiveness of public health measures, such as entry- and exit screening [3], hygiene measures [4], or combinations [5]. Other studies use develop forecasting models to research the contribution of travel to the spread of COVID-19 [6, 7]. However, no actual data from POEs is available yet, regarding the challenges and needs POE face. In this way, they are not yet researched as an acting entity.

Harvesting the experiences and challenges of the professionals involved with the response to COVID-19 at POE is pivotal to continuously improve COVID-control, as many countries gradually release the (total) lockdown and it is likely that traffic at POE will increase in the coming months. Equally, it is pivotal to draw lessons for future crises from current experiences.

Therefore, we, a team of several partners in the Joint Actions started a study to collect these experiences. We invited national partners and local professionals to participate in interviews. Several countries have reacted and participate in the study, but data collection will continue for some more weeks. The results of this study can be used soon to serve this collaborative workforce better, and, in the long term, to analyze the COVID-19 crisis from a point of entry perspective. We focus on adequate capacity, capability and the organizational effectiveness experienced during the first months of the outbreak. And we collect the recommendations for the operational readiness [8] that is required for the coming months in which travel and trade will increase.

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