Transcript of the press briefing: Presentation of the evaluation of the management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Luxembourg (05.10.2022)

# Speakers

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* Organiser
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Languages

* English

# Transcript

[Mathias Cormann]

[By video transmission]

[00:00:00 - 00:02:56 / Inaudible]

... that decided to help companies and employees in the country.

Luxembourg came with a large number of measures, screening, large scale screening, then other measures in employment, assistance to employees. There was ... And there were a number of measures to support employment. In the heart of the crisis, two employees out  of five could benefit from these measures.

Public authorities came with solutions for schools.  Also Luxembourg is part of the OECD countries that closed less schools than others: only 48 days for primary schools and 34 for secondary schools.

Thanks to this continuity, we do not detect negative systematic effects on the learning of 10 pupils in Luxembourg. Also there's a high level of trust for public authorities and this trust also helped in the efficiency of prevention measures, decided by public authorities in Luxembourg. The population accepted this these measures easily.

Also the increase in mortality is 60% less than the OECD average, but there are still possibilities to

improve the preparation for crisis in  Luxembourg. Taking the resilience as well, I think of four elements first to consolidate the use of data in public decisions.

It is important, it's important to mobilize scientists in the task force COVID19 and now Luxembourg, thanks to the help of the scientific committee, was able to manage that crisis. But of course this must be sustained in the future.

In order to anticipate crisis, we need governments that have the capacities to produce credible data continuously and to be able to analyze that data. Luxembourg would be better off with a permanent scientific board with more transparency.

Secondly the pandemic showed some structural weaknesses in the health system. This country, Luxembourg, is highly dependent on transporter workers in the health sector and there was no appropriate information system at the beginning of the crisis.

This report, this evaluation shows that now Luxembourg must adapt its health system in order to prepare for the future and to, to alleviate the negative effects of crisis. Today, two out of three citizens of Luxembourg say that their mental health was not as good during the crisis and it is now important to improve prevention or risks and a more multidisciplinary approach of care.

Thirdly even if we do not see any major problem in schools, similarities show that there were some problems for those pupils that had problems already and it is important to come with individual support measures and it is important to think about that for the future, so that we can adapt to pupils in need.

And finally the financial situation of most companies and employers was preserved, but some people were not as well protected. It is the case of independent workers, who were not covered by the measures to maintain employment. Only 40% of independent workers are members of the mutuality, which give them an access to health and health benefits, and vacations for family reasons.

It is important to have continuous specific system to protect workers such as short-term work, it is important to improve access to to unemployment allowances, also for younger people in a time of a crisis.

I would like to conclude, thank you and thank you for trusting us the OECD to draw the lesson of the crisis for you. Countries have a lot to learn from each other, so that they can prepare for future crises. And I am looking forward to meeting you again in November for the ministerial conference. We will talk about how to reinforce democracy and strengthen trust under your presidency in Luxembourg. Our ministers will talk about the responses to give to challenges today and we are transparent, and this shows that Luxembourg is a leader in the field.

OECD will keep on supporting Luxembourg in their efforts to increase their resilience to crises and to ensure a sustainable and inclusive recovery. Thank you very much!

[Xavier Bettel]

Thank you very much!

Dear Secretary General, dear ministers, dear members of the press, I'm here with Mrs. Lenert in a press conference in front of the media and I remember what we experienced for a long period. We had, we had numerous press conferences after ministerial meetings. We were meeting the press, we were meeting the public to tell them about the decisions made by the government.

I would like to insist before every press conference, we had a talk with the Parliament. As the Secretary General said, it's important to talk to the elected people, to the Parliament. At the beginning we were in a state of a crisis we had to take emergency measures and we noticed that we could not work in a democracy. A crisis system is not a democratic system and we encountered democracy with a lot of bills and drafts laws.

And we knew we had some changes to do and we made them. We are here to draw the first lessons of that crisis. We are looking at how the government managed the crisis politically.

When there's a crisis, we should not do political policies only. It's not, it's not, it's not the time to to say, well you know, this was bad, this was about, it's important to learn from what we did and this is why it's so important to have an external glance from OECD, independently, OECD analyzed, talked, they asked this question, they asked a large number of people.

So it was good to have that external report to know what we did well, what happened and what can be improved in the future. Yes, I admit, we were asked a lot of questions, but sometimes we couldn't find the answer. It was hard to make decisions as a government like, like us, it's hard to limit liberties and freedoms. It was hard. It must remain exceptional. It should not become a standard limiting liberties. It cannot be continuous. We had to take exceptional measures.

Today, mortality rate due to COVID is lower because, thanks to vaccination and ... But we can't say there's no COVID anymore. We see the figures. We had the director of the World Health Organization he said we are not fully protected.

We need to remain vigilant and it is important to do our duties and to think about what we did well or not as well, and it's important to learn.  I do not want to be longer ... It's important for me to listen, it's important for me to learn, it's important to know what homework you give us particularly and, and I'd like a debate, I want a debate to take place in parliament.

We want to talk about what you are going to tell us, incentives, positions, opinions, your comments ... I think that a lot of young people suffered a lot, you said it, Mr. Secretary General for us education was a priority. We have to think of a future of a generation.

So it's not up to us to give a scores, points, good points, bad points. We did not want to do that ourselves.

It's important to have an external eye and thank you Mr. Secretary General and thank you OECD! Thank you! Thank you for your report and after a crisis we cannot say we hope we have no crisis. We need to learn from this crisis, so the next time, you never know, we could be stronger  and we must prepare, we must, we must think ...

I must say, you know, it  was a hard job to be a prime minister during that period. We, we received questions but we didn't not always have answers and now there's a balance sheet, there's a report, there's a new valuation and now I'm sure that, yeah, we did make mistakes, but in the future we would be stronger.

Of course I do not hope that maybe one day there'll be a next crisis. Thank you!

[Paulette Lenert]

Secretary General, the experts of OECD, it's a great pleasure to welcome you here in Luxembourg today.

Personally I am a bit emotional also. I read my notes, everything that I wrote during the crisis and I hope that one day I can put that behind.

What did we do? We played. We played a lot of games, that we did not know. We did not know the rules, we were sure of nothing.

What was important was solidarity, was to be together and make the right decisions for our countries. After this very vague period very quickly we decided that we needed an external glance. We are today managing the end of this pandemic, but we also want to anticipate for the future, so this, this exercise is very useful for us, for our teams, all those that worked during that assessment period.

It was important to remember ...

You know when, when you are in in the heart of the action you tend to forget afterwards. You know, you lived, you lived the moment day after day, so it was really, really useful to sit down and think and remember what we did day after day, also look at the consequences and it's important to have people from outside of this country. We do not have enough distance, we are still emotional today, we were criticized a lot during the crisis and it's important now that we are assessed and I'm looking forward to listening to your reports.

A lot of things are already on the agenda. Mental health, we have a plan for mental health and we will know more about the details of your report when we read it.

I'd like to thank you! Thank you very much, it's a great step forward. I hope that one day we can turn the page and prepare for the future, whatever happens. We were not prepared for such a serious crisis before COVID. We want to be prepared for the future if that happens again.

We want to be able to close that period, there was a hard period, there were, were hard times. I'm nervous. I'm still nervous. I haven't been so anxious and nervous for years, but it's a great moment, thank you very much!

[Xavier Bettel]

I'd like to add a couple of things.

Maybe you don't know, but yesterday the Constitutional Court in Luxembourg declared that the measures we took are not against the Constitution. There was an appeal and I was, I really wanted to tell you this.

And I'd like to thank our staff in hospitals and this year again for our national day they were there in the streets of Luxembourg and I'd like to thank you for your trust.

It was a a difficult period, we represent the government, but then there are also other political parties. We were all hand in hand, we worked hand in hand and it's not only two people that made the decisions.

All the people in government, in Parliament took the decisions together and all parties were on board. Thank you very much!

Just a little precision.

[Organiser]

Let's move on to the second part of our press conference. I've asked the OECD representatives to come and join us.

[Elsa Pilichowski]

[Graphic presentations]

Thank you so much to the prime minister of Luxembourg, to the health Minister and to theSecretary General of the OECD for having opened this conference that launches our study.

Many thanks to the ministry of state and to the High Commissioner International Protection for their technical involvement in this project in the course of the past year.

It's been a huge project for the OECD. It's a 262 pages report. It's full of data, that we collected from the OECD databases, but also from our work and we collected them also from the different ministries.

So the goal of this report is to assess and learn the lessons of the responses given by Luxembourg to the COVID-19 crisis. It is based on an analytical framework, developed by the OECD that you can see here, that includes three strands preparation to the pandemic management of the crisis and response and recovery policies.

Luxembourg is the first country that has asked the OECD to carry out such an assessment, so it is also a learning time also for the other OECD member countries, not only for Luxembourg, and as such, it is an example and it is an exemplary process in terms of transparency and desire to learn and the willingness to accept a general assessment of what we did during that period that was very difficult for everyone.

The results of the study must be seen from the perspective of Luxembourg and it the size of its population, a very small population.

It's a very broad economic opening, which was, openness, which was a strength, but also a source of threats and dangers and there is a very high level of trust in public institutions in Luxembourg. The results of this study enable us to draw general conclusions that can apply to all the OECD countries and that was very useful for all the OECD countries too.

So the first message of the report is that if Luxembourg had not anticipated the risk of coronavirus the pandemic risk was, had been forecast, but not the COVID-19.

So Luxembourg could use as a support its mature risk management system to avoid major issues. So as soon as the first case of COVID-19 appeared on the national territory the Prime Minister activated this crisis unit. This activation date is the earliest one among the OECD countries. It allowed us to, it enabled us to anticipate the propagation of the virus in the country very quickly. Once the crisis happened the recommendation of the OECD about risk about major risk governance from 2014 advises the establishment of a clear leadership and setting of specific structures in order to secure the inter-ministerial coordination of the crisis.

That's what Luxembourg did by entrusting the steering of the crisis to the High Commissioner for National Protection and the minister of health and by adapting on a regular basis the organization of its crisis unit to face the challenges raised by the successive waves of the pandemic.

The system that has been put in place must be made sustainable for the future in order to enable Luxembourg to secure a robust follow-up, a robust monitoring of the crisis that will happen in the future. So in March 2020 a scientific committee responsible for advising the government was created particularly to meet the needs of the crisis, but no such formalized system bringing together intersectional scientific expertise existed before. So there was none.

But trust in scientific expertise is built through time in order to keep a high level of confidence of the citizens towards public authorities, and in order to make sure that there is a quick access to the best possible expertise in case of crisis.

Luxembourg could establish a sustainable scientific advice, a council and a transparent governance.

As the OECD data show about the evaluations of the responses to COVID-19, the crisis communication of the governments was on the whole efficient during that period. It was the case in Luxembourg too.

The crisis communication services were able to mobilize many, very many channels to reach a very broad target group and be able to listen to the expectations of the citizens. The messages were translated in the official languages of the country, as well as in certain languages frequently spoken by cross-border communities or immigrant communities such as the Portuguese one.

The national government made available to the municipalities communication tools, such as a help desk or toolboxes, to make sure that the messages were passed on and came to the citizens. 86 percent of the municipalities questioned were satisfied of those tools.

The local stakeholders that were questioned in Luxembourg, municipalities, schools, police forces, underline nevertheless a lack of consistency in the messages, even though we don't have all the data yet. It's a difficulty that other OECD countries also had to cope with.

Vertical coordination between the national government and municipalities and towns in Luxembourg worked quite well. 95 percent of the municipalities that responded think that they really benefited from the support of the central government, which they needed in the framework of the management of the crisis.

As the Security General said earlier Luxembourg can be singled out, because of the active involvement of the parliament in the crisis. That's a remarkable element that really secures the continuity of the democratic life of our nation.

But this democratic continuity of the nation even though it hinges largely on the action of the parliament, there, it would be very useful to organize citizens consultations in times of crisis.

And now, now I'm going to give the floor to my colleague Francesca Colombo who's going to present the results.

[Francesca Colombo]

[Graphic presentations]

Thank you very much! As it was mentioned already if we look at the results of Luxembourg as compared to the other OECD countries, for example the excess mortality rate, that is compared to the mortality rate during the previous five years, we can see that the excess mortality rate in Luxembourg is among the lowest in the OECD countries. Nevertheless, we have to think the results over and break them down.

Especially if we look at the proportion of elderly people that were affected by the pandemic, we can see that among those aged more than 80 years old and those who resided in long-term care homes, the mortality rate is twice as high as the average of the OECD countries.

So maybe we should take a closer look at long-term care homes. We need more reforms in that field, in that sector and more attention. Then direct consequences, the pandemic in Luxembourg are also worrying, they were quite significant, it was mentioned already.

Mental health was an issue and diagnosis and normal health care or regular health care were very often postponed, for example cancer screening, tests, colon cancer tests, breast cancer tests, a screening and also elective surgery.

So all those ... the health care that was not directly linked to COVID was largely postponed and that is an issue that should not happen again, whether, if possible. If we look at the health system on the whole, we can see that our health system has been quite flexible and has been able to adapt to the crisis situation.

The responsiveness of the interministerial crisis unit, that was mobilized and carried out many interventions, also an intensive screening of the different cases was set up as from the beginning of the pandemic, thanks to a range of .actions that were carried out very early and that really allowed reducing the number of cases, and reducing mortality, even though the hospital capacity was put to the test.

Well the number of beds was multiplied twofold in intensive care. The intensive care units and primary health care was intensified in order to be able to respond to other needs, different from COVID.

And also the vaccine campaign, the vaccination campaign, was very successful and it enabled us to be prepared .in terms of the effects on the health system of the increase of the number of cases. But the pandemic highlighted structural weaknesses of our health system, we really need to be able to adjust more in the long run and there is the issue of the resources, human resources particularly,in the healthcare sector.

There were decisive measures in terms of mobilizing more health care staff.

But Luxembourg is still very largely dependent on human resources coming from abroad. The number of physicians we have on the Luxembourg territory is lower than the average OECD rate. We know that having enough human resources is the most important resource, that is needed in order to increase the number of beds and be able to take care of the patients, but it takes a long time to train healthcare personnel.

There are other elements we should think over,for example the purchasing a center, that will be put in place to buy critical products, could be consolidated.

We also need an information system to have an information system that is able to steer the crisis in real time and we also need to strengthen our competence in terms of hygiene and medicines, the availability of medicines and also the mental health stand should be looked at, especially among the elderly in the OECD countries. That was really the last sector that reacted in the context of the crisis.

Now if I may not move on to the issue of employment. We can see that the pandemic had a quite a deep impact on the labor market in all the OECD countries and Luxembourg was no exception to the rule. The number of hours worked in Luxembourg really dropped sharply during the second term 2020, but it has to be said that this drop was lower than what was observed in France or in Belgium. And that can be explained by some of the measures. Well we had a large number of teleworkers that could continue working remotely and we have a large proportion of workers who could benefit from partial unemployment mechanisms and these enabled us to protect jobs.

We know that two workers out of three could benefit of this program. It was very important to protect employment, especially in sectors such as the building sector, also the hospitality sector and catering sector were thus protected.

Now if we move on to other provisions, that were put in place to support the income of the households, we find many mechanisms to protect jobs and to protect livelihoods, such as pay leave.

Paid leave played a significant role and there was a the mechanisms put in place were quite generous and had a broader coverage. Also family leave for extraordinary family reasons were granted and many people took advantage of that measure. The relatives of workers or workers

themselves could have get help when they had to take care of small children for example, when daycare centers were closed.

There was a quite good and easy access to unemployment subsidies .and there was a strengthening of income support measures. So we had all sorts of mechanisms, that we put in place that enabled us to protect jobs and also enable the population to have adequate incomes in that crisis period. The categories that benefited less from those measures are probably young workers and self-employed, or freelance workers. The reduction of the number of hours worked for young people and temp-workers was not so much taken care of by the partial unemployment mechanism. We can also see that freelancers or self-employed workers were excluded from the mechanisms that were put in place in order to protect jobs in Luxembourg.

And self-employed or freelance workers had less access to sick leave, paid sick leave and leave that was granted for extraordinary family reasons.

So those the mechanisms were not so efficient, did not apply so much to those categories of workers.

I would also like to underline the groups of population, the target groups, that were affected more than others whether because of mental health issues,  employment issues, we know that the young people were most affected by job losses and they were also part of the group who benefited less from unemployment subsidies that were granted in cases of job losses. So we may want to think about measures that could better protect that category of population in a future crisis.

[Paulo Santiago]

[Graphic presentations]

Thank you very much Francesca! It's my turn now to present the main results of the study carried out by the OECD in the field of education.

They focused on three main points: first of all educational continuity in times of crisis and then the effects on the results of the students and the impact on the mechanisms in order to involve all the stakeholders.

During the pandemic, Luxembourg was singled out thanks to its ability to keep schools opened as much as possible, with only 48 days of closure of schools in basic education, against 81 days for primary school on average within the OECD countries and 34 days of total closure for secondary education, as compared to 94 days on average within the OECD.

This decision is aligned to the international recommendations made by OECD in the times of the pandemic.

In those times of a total or partial closure educational continuity was made possible by measures put in place by the government, such as a national digital infrastructure that was adopted to the situation and investments in education that took place before the crisis.

Also the provision of additional digital resources from the national ministry Education and its agencies. These efforts enabled Luxembourg students not to suffer significant decreases of

their learning rates and their learning results.

The annual standardized tests or exams nevertheless observed worse results in the understanding of German in 2020 and 2021.

Those losses could have been anticipated given the nature of the Luxembourg education system and the language plurality of its school population.

Particularly for those students who don't speak Luxembourgish or German at home.

And there were also effects on the workloads of students, teachers and parents who had to face exceptional circumstances in the long run, for a long time. On the basis of the work carried out for this study we realized that the good crisis, good crisis management in Luxembourg could be improved by undertaking a few reflections and/or considering certain improvements for the future. First of all we need to give priority to opening new schools, but we also need to anticipate. Educational continuity solutions in the case of schools would have to close again. This goal depends for example on the strengthening of the capacity of the teachers to include technologies, digital technologies and skills in an educational toolbox, a toolbox that should be broader. Then it is necessary to set up differentiated support forms in order to hamper the increase of school inequalities in crisis times, in times of crisis.

In the short run the ministry should strengthen its proactive support measures to the benefits of the most vulnerable students first.

In the medium to long run, deeper changes of the educational system should continue for example following the model of European schools.

Then the distribution of risk management and equipment responsibilities should be rethought especially in the field of digital infrastructure and schools themselves, and they should be better distributed between the state that directly supplies secondary schools and the municipalities that provide equipment to the schools. We saw that the response in terms of digital infrastructure resources .was very differentiated and varied from school to school and from municipality to municipality. As to the strengthening of the commitment of the stakeholders the OECD recognizes the importance of the role played by the government structures in COVID-19 and education.

Two systemic recommendations are about the need to include the education sector in the interministerial crisis unit and set up as early as possible a stable crisis government structure in the field of education.

Then in times of crisis it is necessary to find the balance, to strike a balance between consultation times of the stakeholders, to make decisions and communication of decisions. Finally it is important to continue strengthening the information infrastructure in order to properly measure the changes that are caused by the crisis through time. As a conclusion, we think that the government should have supported more the purely educational aspect during the crisis and better take into account the where and there effects of the long duration of the crisis on the different stakeholders.

But our overall evaluation is positive! Luxembourg had a successful crisis management in the field of education. School stayed remained open very often, educational continuity was secured in close closing times, during the times when the schools were closed and the learning outcomes were on the whole stable.

So we invited Luxembourg to keep building on these very successful efforts in order to deep to reach deeper objectives and long-term fairer and better quality objectives for all the students.

[Isabell Koske]

[By video transmission]

[Graphic presentations]

With an evaluation of the crisis response we have also assessed economic measures, that have been put in place to support firms during the crisis, companies. Government action was decisive from the start of the crisis.

The government intervened by introducing business support measures equivalent to over 3.9 percent of the GDP. These fiscal measures, budgetary measures are in line with those of our other OECD countries.

As other countries of the OECD, Luxembourg increased its public expenditure to strengthen support measures, but the increase of the overall debt was lower than in other OECD countries.

Tax income was resilient as you can see on the left graph. The economic life of Luxembourg has remained quite dynamic during the whole crisis. In order to evaluate the impact of the measures we have created a database, with data collected by the ministry of Economics among others and I would like to thank these two institutions for the help.

The data show that interventions took place quite early. The digitalization of the procedures contribute to the efficiency and the promptness of the responses to the crisis. And the time that elapsed between requests for support and granting of the support, of the subsidy was shortened thanks to the digitalization of the procedure.

There is a need to increase the digitalization of administrative procedures in order to reduce the times.

The companies most targeted by the measures were not the less profitable or the more profitable. The companies that were profitable during the crisis, but that were affected during the crisis, were first targeted. This shows that there was a proper targeting of the measures. The targeting limited the risks for those companies.

And in today's context there is more support measures. It is important to continue these measures.

It is also important to look at the most affected sectors in order to reinforce resilience of the economy of Luxembourg. There is a recommendation to use all available data .to assess what will be needed for the future, as I will draw the conclusions.

[Elsa Pilichowski]

[Graphic presentations]

As a conclusion of course, we only had time to present .a limited number of recommendations and conclusions. We could have talked about the performance of diplomatic services and the enlargement of some measures, we focused here on the most important conclusions.

What did we learn from the experience here in Luxembourg? It's important now to tell other OECD countries what did we learn in Luxembourg, good practices and limits. There is a need for a strong leadership from the central state and at the same time it is important to work with local collectivities, the civil society, the private sector, in order to come with responses that are good for the whole society.

It is important to preserve the work done in parliament and it was a model here in Luxembourg.

If you look at other countries of course, this is not enough in order to ensure the continuity of democracy in a time of crisis when decisions are made very quickly with a lighter decision making process.

It's important to talk, to consult and then also to draw the conclusions afterwards, just like we're doing here today. And it is going to help us target the measures for the future and of course, ordinary periods must be used in order to prepare for future crisis. We do not hope there will be crisis in the future, but there will be unfortunately, there will be crisis, climate crisis among others.

We see that in Luxembourg there's a high trust of citizens in public structures and that the finances were healthy before 2020, before the crisis. It's important in ordinary period. It's important to reinforce trust. It helps during crises. I like to conclude.

Once again I like to thank the team of the ministries in Luxembourg, who helped.

Thank you minister, thank you prime minister for your trust! Also we are open to your questions now.

[Organiser]

This is not the third part of the press conference. I'd like to invite the prime minister to join us again on the podium. Please if you have any question!?

[Journalist]

I have a question concerning health structures. There's a high death rate, mortality rate, you have some recommendations about that topic. Could you tell us more about the conclusions to draw from that problem here? We also talked about limiting liberties, limiting the freedom of people, what are the conclusions in more details?

[Francesca Colombo]

For long-term health care in all we see countries, the impact was very negative. At the beginning of the crisis period a lot was done for hospitals but not as much for long-term care and we saw that in all OECD countries. In some countries well the structures are different. But we see that there's um a problem of structures.

We now need to reinforce human resources in hospitals but it's hard to recruit staff, it's hard to retain staff, working conditions are hard, some staff is not trained well enough.

So there are barriers and obstacles, and a part of the health system must now be consolidated. More human resources, more staff, better protocols, better care responses for transmissible diseases also, that hospitals can be more efficient.

And the elderly, some all the people live at home and it's important to bring care to these people. Most of the time they're isolated and live alone. It's important to help them and that do not suffer too much from isolation and mental health problems.

Unfortunately this is a situation that we see you in all OECD countries. Now concerning freedom in a context of a crisis decisions must be made very quickly and decisions are hard .to be made. The elderly must be protected from the disease.

And in a lot of countries it was forbidden to visit the elderly in hospitals for instance.

Now it is important to look at this and see how we can improve those mechanisms in the future, in order to protect people from being infected, but also to make sure that .family members can visit their parents or grandparents in old people's homes.

A lot of decisions must be made in a crisis, but they must remain temporary of course.

[Journalist]

But the mortality rate in medical centers and in all people's homes, Luxembourg it's one of the highest rates in OECD. Do you have more ideas to present what could have been done better?

[Francesca Colombo]

We now must hire more people, more staff, more human resources and come with better systems in case of a pandemic. Hygiene conditions must be improved in hospitals. We need to have more indicators, but we must verify and see how we can reduce negative medical impacts of the situation.

A lot of things need to be consolidated: structures, staff, human resources ... And we now have to do the right, we need to take the better measures in order to alleviate the impact of a pandemic.

We didn't have enough mask at the beginning. That problem is over. We have a more protection instruments, we are now better prepared if there is a crisis in the in the future.

[Journalist]

How do you explain that very high rate in Luxembourg compared with other countries?

[Francesca Colombo]

The response came a little later in Luxembourg than in other countries and a little later in all people's homes than in hospitals for instance.

[Journalist]

Most staff in the care sector come from neighboring countries and you know, in the type of crisis if France had closed their border, or Germany had closedvtheir borders, we would have been in a very difficult situation here. What is going to happen in the future? How can we prepare for that?

[Francesca Colombo]

Well closing borders is not a good idea in such a context, because a virus does not know borders. If you close borders between countries, you encourage countries not to say that they have a pandemic and of course labor, the labor market of Luxembourg is particular.

There must be more cooperation with neighboring countries also in a time of a crisis. And there was such a system, there was cooperation. A lot of people were mobilized and that's how Luxembourg could face the crisis.

Now in the future it will be important to make sure that borders remain open, because viruses do not see borders. It's important to coordinate with neighboring country countries.

It's especially important for smaller countries and economies that depend a lot on the workforce coming from neighboring countries.

[Journalist]

The opposition in parliament criticized by saying there was no law before the pandemic and still no law after the first lockdown, no new legislation was passed. Shouldn't we have extra laws in order to face future crisis better?

[Elsa Pilichowski]

If you look at the UK for instance, they had a general governance approach in case of a crisis, the role of parliament was defined,  this could be a lesson, this could be an insight for other countries. It's important to think of a governance system that can be put into place automatically in case of systemic pandemic for instance.

A lot of countries have parts of systems, you know to prepare, but it's not in most cases, it's not a systemic system, is such a systemic they're not systemic measures, but it could be a good idea for all countries.

[Xavier Bettel]

On this question ... I understand of course medically care, but there are some nuances in the report.

[Paulette Lenert]

Healthcare at home is very well developed in Luxembourg, we help people to live at home and in in medical care centers, in old people's homes ...

[Francesca Colombo]

I mean there's probably less people than in other countries, yeah, well the idea is to make sure that people can live at home. It's better for them if they can be, if they can if they can live at home.

[Xavier Bettel]

The sentence is that long-term health care system in Luxembourg favors the fact that people remain home. It's only very old people with comorbidity that are in old people's home. It's not, it's not the fact that more people died, it's just because in our institutions the elderly have more comorbidity than other patients, than other, elder people in other countries.

[Journalist]

I have a question for the Prime Minister and Mrs. Lenert.

Last week OECD came with a report on digital governance this report here is more about managing COVID. Is this a method that you want to use again in the future will there be more reports from OECD in the future? Is this a new method for you to analyze what the government does?

[Xavier Bettel]

Yes and no. We're not married with OECD, we are lucky to have an independent international institution, they have an external approach, an external glance. If I ask the auditors in Luxembourg they're going to criticize me and they say I'm not objective, or there's a risk that I'm going to be criticized for that. So internally we can of course do some studies and reports, but we want an external glance, we want something non-national. This is an international situation and OECD, they can compare with other OECD members and we do not have that data.

Some of our auditors they do not have access to the same data. So we're talking about Luxembourg and we want to compare with other countries this is an international crisis, so it's important to call upon an international institution, because they have more resources.

[Journalist]

Can we get to the current situation today, there's more cases today. Are you going to take measures again? Wearing the mask in public transport, more vaccines, what, what would be your measures?

[Paulette Lenert]

Yes, my answer is, in order to answer your first question, yes, I think it's really important to evaluate public policies and it's important to us external institutions.

And in order to answer your second question, yes well the situation is calm. And if some measures need to be taken, they will be taken, but of course ...

Today, yes, well this is a new season, there are more cases but the situation is rather quiet in hospitals. Today there's no need for more measures.

[Xavier Bettel]

We talk about COVID every week in our governmental meeting, we still have that item on our agenda every week.

I'd like to thank Mr. Feller. We are looking at what structures we need in order to continue vaccination, to keep on working on the problem and I like to thank you for what you did for the coordination together with Mrs. Lenert, the ministry for Health and the coordination center.

COVID has not disappeared yet, we have people in hospital, we have COVID-patients in hospitals, people, some people are sick and we see that the impact is not the same as the beginning of the crisis but it doesn't mean that the COVID is away.

[Journalist]

In our public debate here in Luxembourg the parties, the opposition parties criticized some of the measures taken, lockdowns and so on, isolation measures, curfews, maybe more evaluations will come on the consequences of those lockdowns and curfews?

[Elsa Pilichowski]

Of course this is a highly political topic in a lot of OECD countries. I don't know if more evaluations will be done. It was not in the heart of evaluation, we looked at the social impact here, systematic impact, the educational impact, the impact on the economy of the country after the measures taken during the crisis.

[Xavier Bettel]

Concerning restrictions, lockdowns, curfews, I'd like to thank, well today is a thank you day. We had another group and they looked at the impact the consequences of the restrictions: economically, socially, mentally ...

The latest evolution came yesterday. The Constitutional Court said no measure went against the Constitution. No measure that we took went against the Constitution.

This is good for democracy. We didn't take things slightly, every measure was voted in parliament. The Constitutional Court decided you didn't go against the Constitution.

The OECD doesn't say it was good, it was not good, but we see the result, well not up to me.

[Journalist]

It's a demand that is repetitive. Who are you doing more assessments? Maybe you talked about it in the chamber of deputies, you talked about the health impact of lockdowns?

[Paulette Lenert]

Well we have different studies, we have a lot of scientists working with us, who are looking at the topic and what we do is, that we follow up what they do, their studies, in order to look at the benchmarks and then the next step. Well this was a major step.

A lot of people were mobilized to carry out this evaluation. Now we are going to be part of a peer review in WHO. The first country which did it, was Portugal, if I remember well.

Then Luxembourg is looking at this project, also we now need a little time to rest and then we'll look at theother impacts in in the near future, yes.

[Journalist]

So restrictions, I mean your report did not focus on those restrictions.

For long-term Health Care Services will Luxembourg look at the structure and changes the organization? What is the government about to do?

[Elsa Pilichowski]

In OECD we do not have general conclusions for all OECD countries. We need to, we need to look at other countries at the same time. We are looking at the at the problems, we're looking at the changes that are needed.

As far as we're concerned, is at the beginning is governance. How was parliament consulted, how were decisions made; this is what we looked at the governance system behind measures.

[Xavier Bettel]

The report has just been presented. I know you're in a hurry. I'm also always in a hurry, but I would like first to give it to my colleagues from the government and talk about it with them in order to be able to share with you the conclusions of the whole government later on.

[Journalist]

Just another quantitative question, you said the Luxembourg was the first country requesting that evaluation from the OECD. How many countries have requested it and how many reports have already been published?

[Elsa Pilichowski]

None because Luxembourg is the first report and we were very happy, because it's, we set example in terms of transparency and we also expose our situation to the other 37 countries. These reports are read by all member countries of the OECD, so we really, we really set the example. We're talking with other countries about similar evaluation processes, but for the time being there is no  official candidate to another such evaluation.

[Journalist]

On this point, have you defined the scope of this study or did the government request that the study focus more on governance?

[Elsa Pilichowski]

It's still being discussed. We always have a discussion between the government and the OECD. We define together what seems important to us. For us it's quite extraordinary, because four directorates of the OECD have been working together, so it's a huge collective exercise carried out by the OECDand each directorate had their own priorities.

So the priorities of our committees, that is of the 38 member countries in certain fields. So we try to make sure that what we do for a country regarding one country is consistent, is in consistency with the priorities of the other 37 countries. That's how we got to this report.

[Xavier Bettel]

But just to be clear about this, the government never said no you can't do this, you mustn't do this.

So I would like to thank you thank, the OECD and thank you for this study. It is going to go through the different procedures, that deliver the government and the parliament.

I would like to thank you for your trust. I think it's been very important to be able to look at what we've done well and be able to accept that we haven't done everything well. We've made as, politicians do make mistakes and it's very important to be able to learn from one's mistakes or learn from what was previously unknown and from fields in which we didn't have an experience in the past. Thank you very much!