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Answer given by Executive Vice-President Mînzatu
on behalf of the European Commission
(26.8.2026)

The design and management of social protection systems, including eligibility to sickness benefits and their duration, remains fundamentally the responsibility of the Member States (Article 153 (4) Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). The Commission supports Member States through facilitating exchange of experience, analysis and policy guidance. The summary report of the 2024 mutual learning on access to social protection¹ with focus on health, sickness, accidents at work and occupational diseases shows that most measures implemented as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic were only temporary and, in some cases, structural reforms were postponed.

The Commission Recommendation (EU) 2022/2337 calls on Member States to recognise COVID-19 as an occupational disease, including when caused by work in health and social care². Eurostat's survey on the possibility of recognising COVID-19 as being of occupational origin³ shows that, in most countries, COVID-19 can be linked to work-related activities. However, the form of recognition varies between countries.

The Commission recognises the significant medical and socioeconomic consequences of Long COVID and remains committed to supporting effective responses across these areas. The Network of Expertise on Long COVID⁴, supported from the EU4Health programme⁵ and carried out in collaboration with international organisations, aims to strengthen EU and national-level responses, including a training programme for healthcare professionals.

¹ https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/events-1/mutual-learning-access-healthcare-sickness-and-accidents-work-and-occupational-diseases-2024-02-05_en.

² https://employment-social-affairs.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-recommends-recognising-covid-19-occupational-disease-certain-sectors-and-during-pandemic-2022-11-28_en?utm_source=chatgpt.com.

³ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-statistical-reports/w/ks-ft-24-006>.

⁴ https://health.ec.europa.eu/non-communicable-diseases/expert-group-public-health/network-expertise-long-covid_en.

⁵ https://health.ec.europa.eu/funding/eu4health-programme-2021-2027-vision-healthier-european-union_en.