

## Article – Covid-19: digital surveillance, borders and human rights



The [Covid-19 crisis](#) has put some of the fundamental principles of the EU to the test. During a Facebook Live, [Maria Arena](#), chair of Parliament's human rights subcommittee, talked about the human rights aspects of the EU response to the pandemic.

The EU has played an important role in enabling the free movement of goods and services, including medicines and equipment, to countries that needed them the most, Arena said, but it is "very important to come back to freedom of movement for citizens". Europe is not Europe without that, she said.

The EU is coordinating with member states to [relax Covid-induced border controls](#) to enable people to travel again, but measures to prevent the virus spreading remain and some of them raise privacy concerns. They include Covid-19 tracing apps that the EU has recognised as a way to help opening the borders. "It is important to work with technology, including tracing people to prevent contamination, but we have to respect principles," Arena said.

"The app must respect EU data protection legislation." She noted that the Parliament had asked for a number of safeguards around tracing apps in a [resolution, adopted on 17 April](#).

Processed information must be dealt within existing data protection legislation, which provides a certain level of guarantee for protecting human rights and not under emergency legislation, Arena added.

Asked about balancing privacy with practices such as thermoscanning travellers and requesting them to present a medical certificate when travelling certain countries, she said: "I agree that in a normal situation it would not be normal to have this kind of monitoring. But it is not the case now. If we want to reopen the borders, if we want to monitor the pandemic situation, we need to have more information."

[\*Watch our Facebook Live interview with Maria Arena.\*](#)

Arena also touched on the deterioration of human rights in some countries during the pandemic. "Now we have to come back to normal and bring human rights back to the centre of the discussion."

Solidarity is the most important aspect in tackling the crisis, the committee chair concluded: "Europe is just like a boat: you can't save the front of a boat without saving the back."

[\*Check out the timeline of EU measures against Covid-19.\*](#)