Press release – COVID-19: MEPs want safe vaccines, full transparency and liability for companies

The Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety today debated the EU vaccines strategy, including the state of play on the Vaccines Advance Purchase Agreements, with Sandra Gallina, Deputy Director-General of the Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety.

The Chair underlined the need for transparency to achieve trust in future COVID-19 vaccines and regretted that more information on the Commission's work related to the purchase agreements for COVID-19 vaccines had not been shared proactively by the Commission.

Ms. Gallina highlighted that a good vaccine must be efficient, safe, affordable, developed quickly and able to achieve EU market authorisation. She particularly underlined that the EU is fully committed to a global approach where vaccines must be available to all including in low-income countries as we will not be safe until everybody is safe.

COVID-vaccines: when and for whom?

Several MEPs wanted to know from Ms. Gallina when vaccines will be available as well as who will be vaccinated first. Ms. Gallina said that the first vaccinations should start already towards the end of this year and a significant number of vaccines should become available in the first part of 2021. Vaccines would be distributed to member states based on population size. The combined portfolio of the different vaccines will be enough to vaccinate all citizens that need or want to be vaccinated. However, she said it would be up to member states to decide who will receive the vaccination first which she admitted could lead to disparities across borders. She said prices for the vaccinations would be between 5-15 EUR per dose in order to

assure affordability for all member states.

Some MEPs asked for confirmation that results of clinical trials would be made public. Ms. Gallina answered that the European Medicines Agency (EMA) would provide overall data of the clinical trials – albeit not all raw data. As a general point on this, she said that access to clinical trial data would improve once the clinical trial regulation enters into force late 2021.

Civil liability for vaccine producers

Many MEPs raised the issue of liability for medical companies producing vaccines and underlined that there should be no exceptions from current rules.

Ms. Gallina stressed negotiations with companies had been difficult but underlined that those companies developing and manufacturing COVID-19 vaccines would indeed be liable according to current laws and if something goes wrong they could be taken to court. This also goes for compensation for hidden defects.

Background

Developing and deploying an effective and safe vaccine against the virus is the most likely permanent solution to stop the pandemic. To this end, the Commission has proposed an EU vaccines strategy for COVID-19.

On 22 September, the European Parliament will organise a public hearing in Brussels entitled “How to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens: clinical trials, production and distribution challenges”, with participation of CEOs of some of the involved companies together with representatives from civil society and the research community.