Press release – COVID-19 vaccines: MEPs call for more clarity and transparency

On Tuesday, members of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety quizzed Sandra Gallina, the EU's lead negotiator on COVID-19 vaccine contracts, on the latest developments regarding contracts, transparency, authorisations, availability and deployment of COVID-19 vaccines.

MEPs underlined the need for more clarity and transparency regarding vaccine contracts, as well as the decision-making process at EU level. They welcomed the European Commission's openness to share available information whilst also acknowledging that some questions can be better answered by member states and pharmaceutical companies.

Many questions concerned possible additional national or bilateral contracts. The Commission confirmed that it is not aware of any such alleged contracts. Through the Joint Procurement Agreement, the EU has priority to deliver vaccines, which will then be distributed to member states on a pro-rata basis.

Following requests from MEPs, the Commission provided information regarding a number of other specific issues:

– A reading room is open for MEPs wishing to review vaccine contracts – one contract is currently available (CureVac), with others released pending the agreement of pharmaceutical companies;

– The European Medicines Agency received the application for the AstraZeneca vaccine today – the conditional market authorisation is expected at the end of January;

– The largest quantities of vaccines are expected during the second quarter of 2021, as already agreed in the existing contracts – specific strategies for deployment, including priority groups for vaccination, are set up by each member state;

– As of next week, a dedicated platform will be available where member states can report, twice a week, the number of vaccines received and used.

Watch the recording of the debate

Background

In June 2020, the Commission proposed an EU vaccines strategy for COVID-19 in which it listed key steps for effective vaccination strategies and vaccine deployment. Any vaccine must be authorised by the European Medicines Agency (EMA) in accordance with safety and efficacy standards.

On 22 September 2020, Parliament held a public hearing on "How to secure access to COVID-19 vaccines for EU citizens: clinical trials, production and distribution challenges".

At the Plenary session in December 2020, Parliament expressed support for the speedy authorisation of safe vaccines. The Commission has since given conditional marketing authorisation for two COVID-19 vaccines, one developed by BioNTech and Pfizer and one by Moderna Biotech Spain, S.L., after the European Medicines Agency (EMA) concluded its assessments of these vaccines.