



TRIPS waiver: end the deadlock to the COVID vaccine patents

Workers' Group Statement

The past year has been challenging, to say the least, and we have had to learn quickly, to adapt and to deploy our collective resources as a union. Thanks in no small part to getting the Next Generation EU off the ground, we are now seeing some recovery in Europe.

Yet the COVID-19 pandemic continues to take lives and demand great sacrifices from our citizens, from our workers.

To finally overcome this pandemic, we need greater efforts on vaccines – in the EU vaccination campaigns have stalled in some Member States and the entire global community must pull its weight.

Vaccines have been developed thanks to workers driving outstanding advances in science and medicine and thanks to billions of public investments, so vaccines must remain a public good and the roll out should be under the control of democratic institutions.

For this purpose, Oliver Röpke, President Workers' Group at the EESC, at the debate with the European Commission President, Ursula Von der Leyen today at the EESC plenary, **advocated for patents on COVID-19 vaccines and wider health products and technologies to be waived temporarily under the TRIPS agreement at the World Trade Organisation (WTO)**. He said "*we call on the Commission to engage proactively and to lead an open debate in this respect as a matter of urgency*".

Commission President in her reply proposed a compulsory licensing for Pharma companies. The EESC would be available for hosting a first open debate.

The TRIPS waiver was proposed by India and South Africa a year ago in order to ensure that, during this pandemic, intellectual property rights cannot become barriers to urgent, universal and affordable access to and development of related health products including vaccines essential to combat Covid-19. More than 100 countries back the waiver at the WTO arguing that it will help save lives by allowing developing countries to produce their own COVID-19 vaccines at a low cost. But some countries remain oppose.

The European Union is among WTO members, which have not yet supported the proposed waiver of COVID-19 related intellectual property rights under the TRIPS agreement, including for Covid-19 vaccines.

Failure to urgently agree a waiver would mean that a few major pharmaceutical companies will be able to prevent other manufacturers from producing Covid-19 vaccines, impeding the EU's efforts to scale up production at home and the manufacturing of vaccines in developing countries around the world. It will also endanger the EU's and global economic recovery by prolonging this pandemic.

This was also the demand of the Workers Group at the debate on the opinion on Drawing the early lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic. Cinzia Del Rio, EESC Workers' Group member, reiterated the Commission President to lead an "***open debate at European level on a temporary TRIPS waiver, that would apply to COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and tests, in order to enable the ramping up global vaccine production and the lowering of costs to ensure access for people across the world***".