

IP waiver for COVID-19 vaccines is a misguided and ineffective response to a shared global challenge

PRESS RELEASE

Brussels, 7 May 2021 – "The waiver proposal at the WTO incorrectly portrays IP as the barrier to rapid access to vaccines and does not address the crisis in an effective or pragmatic manner. Such a waiver would raise false hopes of a speedy conclusion to the global pandemic and ignores the challenges facing low to middle income countries." Says Claire Skentelbery, Director-General of EuropaBio.

History will remember the speed with which COVID-19 vaccines were developed as one of science and biotechnology's greatest achievements. In a record time, biotechnology companies initiated over 900 global projects aimed at developing COVID vaccines, treatments, and diagnostics. EuropaBio absolutely supports the goal of getting the world vaccinated as quickly as possible as the best way to end the COVID-19 pandemic. Global access to COVID-19 vaccines is a public health and humanitarian imperative and, combined with the unequal pace at which COVID vaccines and treatments are becoming available around the world, it is a concern that needs to be addressed effectively and urgently.

In the last year, public and private players have worked relentlessly to increase manufacturing capacities in Europe and around the globe. Thanks to this unprecedented effort and the accelerated global collaboration, production capacities have been increased significantly and new innovative supply chains activated at record speed. Today, there is the prospect of vaccines for 70% of the global population by the end of 2021.

Contrary to some commentators, it is actually the IP rules that have enabled this unprecedented level of innovation and enabled the urgently needed collaboration between biopharma innovators and partners.

It is the same IP system that has created the conditions to build the expertise and infrastructures, mobilize necessary resources and amass technical knowledge required to combat the pandemic. This has supported advanced breakthrough technologies, including mRNA vaccines.

An IP waiver risks having negative unintended consequences:

- Starting advanced manufacturing lines in new countries is a costly undertaking that requires the right set of competencies, expertise and collaborations, as well as a high level of investment. Regardless of patents, none of this can happen quickly. A WTO waiver will NOT address the existing manufacturing constraints.



- With increasing vaccine production capacities, the demand for vaccine inputs has already created bottleneck situations. Waiving IP could actually cause inputs to be diverted away from current regulatorily approved vaccine production operations. Such moves could impact the ability of producers to maintain current production levels.
- Involuntary transfer of technologies could foster a wave of chaotic vaccine nationalism, as countries endeavour to bypass cooperative global efforts and develop national production.
- Manufacturing agreements with developing countries have already been signed through technology licensing. Abrogating patents undoes this good work, not serving existing commitments and weakening established supply chains.

In the long run, the waiver proposal undermines the existing vaccine eco-system built in the crisis urgency. It would both have a detrimental effect on incentives for biotechnology companies and their partners that take risks to find solutions for the next health emergency and send the wrong messages to investors just when that support is needed most.

The effective and pragmatic solutions to improve vaccine access consist of building further on the unprecedented current efforts by all parties: strengthening production and health infrastructures to deliver vaccines; supporting frontline health workers to administer the vaccine; and delivering vaccine hesitancy campaigns to increase acceptance of the vaccine.

Vaccine-rich countries should continue to work on eliminating export restrictions and develop effective strategies to tap existing vaccine stocks for high-risk populations that remain without access in the developing world.

Finally, EuropaBio supports COVAX, the global initiative designed to equitably distribute vaccines across the world. Our member companies commit to work with governments to ensure that COVAX has the resources it needs to ensure those most in need around the world receive vaccine doses.

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About EuropaBio

EuropaBio, the European Association for Bioindustries, promotes an innovative and dynamic European biotechnology industry. EuropaBio and its members are committed to the socially responsible use of biotechnology to improve quality of life, to prevent, diagnose, treat and cure diseases, to improve the quality and quantity of food and feedstuffs and to move towards a biobased and zero-waste economy. EuropaBio represents corporate and associate members across sectors, plus national and regional biotechnology associations which, in turn, represent over 2500 biotech SMEs. Read more about our work at www.europabio.org.

