
For Written Answer on : 05/05/2021
Question Number(s): 127 Question Reference(s): 22791/21
Department: Enterprise, Trade and Employment
Asked by: Louise O'Reilly T.D.

QUESTION

* To ask the Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise; Trade and Employment if he has engaged at European Union level regarding the waiving of intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines in order to speed up vaccination production and distribution across Europe and the wider world.
- Louise O'Reilly T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Wednesday, 5 May, 2021.

REPLY

I think it is clear that universal and equitable access to safe, effective and affordable diagnostics, treatments and vaccines is very important in the global fight against COVID-19.

International Trade is a competence of the EU under the Treaties. In exercising that competence at the WTO, the European Commission engages with Member States, including Ireland through a variety of Committees and Working Parties/Groups, including on intellectual property.

The EU position is that the challenges raised by the proponents of the Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (the TRIPS Agreement) waiver can be addressed through the existing flexibilities within the WTO TRIPS Agreement which allows governments to grant compulsory licences without the permission of the patent holder. The EU Commission also points out that the IP system incentivises and enables the stakeholders to share their innovations, to exchange knowledge and data, and to license.

The EU position is that manufacturing capacity, access to raw materials and distribution networks are the main obstacles that need to be overcome in the supply of vaccines and that increasing manufacturing capacity may be better attained through voluntary licensing arrangements by disseminating the technology and know-how of those who developed the vaccines. The EU Commission has set up a Task Force for Industrial Scale-up of COVID-19 vaccine production which aims to support the ramp-up of production capacity and address supply chain bottlenecks.

The EU is committed and open to trying to reach agreement with all members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on how to achieve the shared goal of providing timely and secure access to safe and affordable vaccines and medicines for all through the multilateral rules-based trading system. Discussions are continuing at the WTO, including in relation to how the TRIPS Agreement can support fast and effective vaccine availability. Ireland is represented in those discussions by the EU Commission.

The EU Commission considers that the COVAX Facility, the international initiative to ensure global supply and access to COVID-19 vaccines, is the mechanism that is best placed to ensure that high-income countries finance the vaccines and support the developing countries to secure their share of global supply.

For Written Answer on : 05/05/2021
Question Number(s): 551 Question Reference(s): 22790/21
Department: Health
Asked by: Louise O'Reilly T.D.

QUESTION

* To ask the Minister for Health if he has engaged at European Union level regarding the waiving of intellectual property rights on Covid-19 vaccines in order to speed up vaccination production and distribution across Europe and the wider world.

- Louise O'Reilly T.D.

For WRITTEN answer on Wednesday, 5 May, 2021.

REPLY

India and South Africa have presented a proposal to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to allow all countries to choose to neither grant nor enforce any patents and other intellectual property rights related to COVID-19 drugs, vaccines and diagnostics for the duration of the pandemic. The proposers argue that this would allow countries to scale up the manufacture of such products.

International Trade is a competence of the EU under the Treaties and in exercising that competence, the European Commission engages fully with the Member States through a variety of Committees and Working Parties/Groups, including on Intellectual Property.

The EU's current position on the proposed waiver is that the WTO international agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (the TRIPS Agreement) allows countries the flexibility to respond to the concerns raised by India and South Africa. Specifically, the TRIPS agreement allows compulsory licensing which is when a government permits someone else to produce the patented product or process without the consent of the patent owner.

The EU position is that manufacturing capacity, access to raw materials and distribution networks are the main obstacles that need to be overcome in the supply of vaccines and that increasing manufacturing capacity may be better attained through voluntary licensing arrangements by disseminating the technology and know-how of those who developed the vaccines. The EU Commission has set up a Task Force for Industrial Scale-up of COVID-19 vaccine production which aims to support the ramp-up of production capacity and address supply chain bottlenecks.

The EU continues to be committed to an open and comprehensive dialogue with all WTO members to explore how the multilateral rules-based trading system can best support universal and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines and treatments. Discussions on the proposed waiver are continuing at the WTO.

The EU considers that the COVAX Facility, the international initiative to ensure global access to COVID vaccines, is the mechanism that is best placed to ensure that high-income countries finance the vaccines and support the developing countries to secure their share of global supply.

Ireland has consistently championed collaborative responses to the pandemic, with a focus on ensuring that the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable are served by our collective effort. As a member of the global health community, Ireland continues to play an active role in ensuring fair and equitable access to vaccines for all. This includes supporting the World Health Organization (WHO), the Global Vaccine Alliance and the Global Fund, to develop, produce and equitably distribute effective technologies in the COVID-19 global response.