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P9_TA(2021)0162

The accessibility and affordability of Covid-testing**European Parliament resolution of 29 April 2021 on the accessibility and affordability of COVID testing (2021/2654(RSP))**

(2021/C 506/16)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union,
 - having regard to Articles 4, 6, 9, 114, 153, 168, 169 and 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
 - having regard to the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 March 2021 on a framework for the issuance, verification and acceptance of interoperable certificates on vaccination, testing and recovery to facilitate free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Digital Green Certificate) (COM(2021)0130),
 - having regard to the current International Health Regulations,
 - having regard to Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1595 of 28 October 2020 on COVID-19 testing strategies, including the use of rapid antigen tests ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Council Recommendation of 21 January 2021 on a common framework for the use and validation of rapid antigen tests and the mutual recognition of COVID-19 test results in the EU ⁽³⁾;
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas every EU citizen has the right to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, subject to the limitations and conditions laid down in the Treaties and the measures adopted to give effect to them ⁽⁴⁾;
- B. whereas effective testing is considered as a decisive tool to contain the spread of SARS-CoV-2 and its variants of concern, detect infections and limit isolation and quarantine measures, and will continue to play a key role in facilitating the free movement of people and to ensure cross-border transport and cross-border provision of services during the pandemic;
- C. whereas sufficient testing and sequencing capacities are indispensable for monitoring the epidemiological situation and rapidly detecting the emergence of more SARS-CoV-2 variants;
- D. whereas the Commission has proposed a legislative package for the European Health Union;
- E. whereas the accessibility and affordability of these tests differs greatly between the Member States, especially when it comes to the availability of free tests for the frontline workforce, including workers in the health sector, schools, universities and childcare facilities;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 360, 30.10.2020, p. 43.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 77.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 24, 22.1.2021, p. 1.

⁽⁴⁾ Directive 2004/38/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2004 on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States, OJ L 158, 30.4.2004, p. 77.

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- F. whereas the Commission has proposed a framework for the issuance, verification and acceptance of an interoperable vaccination, testing and recovery certificate to facilitate free movement during the COVID-19 pandemic called the EU COVID-19 certificate;
- G. whereas the EU COVID-19 certificate would facilitate the free movement of EU citizens and residents; whereas many Member States still require persons travelling to their territory to undergo a test for COVID-19 infection before or after arrival;
- H. whereas not all EU citizens and residents will have been vaccinated by the time the regulation on the EU COVID-19 certificate enters into force, either because they have not been offered the vaccine yet, or because they cannot or do not wish to be vaccinated, and therefore will have to rely on certificates based on testing or recovery to facilitate free movement;
- I. whereas the nucleic acid amplification test (NAAT) featured in the list drawn up on the basis of the Council recommendation of 21 January 2021 forms an integral part of the envisaged EU COVID-19 certificates;
- J. whereas the cost of tests, precarious working conditions and limited access to legal protection mean that seasonal workers face particular challenges in relation to testing and self-isolating for the benefit of public health;
- K. whereas COVID-19 has disproportionately affected vulnerable people, ethnic minorities, residents of care homes, residential services for older people, persons with disabilities and homeless people; whereas vulnerable populations are at increased risk of facing financial discrimination when they have no possibility to receive tests free of charge;
- L. whereas effective testing is also a key component of the strategy aimed at boosting the economic recovery and enabling educational and social activities to be conducted as normal in Member States so that fundamental freedoms can be fully exercised;
- M. whereas all Member States provide COVID-19 vaccines to their citizens and residents free of charge, but only some Member States provide free testing; whereas citizens and residents of the other Member States often have to pay high prices for COVID-19 tests, making this option unattainable for some and carrying the risk of creating discrimination based on socio-economic status;
- N. whereas to avoid inequality and discrimination between vaccinated and unvaccinated EU citizens and residents, both testing and vaccination should be free of charge;
- O. whereas test certificates issued by Member States in compliance with the EU COVID-19 certificate should be accepted by Member States requiring proof of a test for COVID-19 infection in the context of the restrictions on free movement put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19;
- P. whereas clear and user-friendly information on the availability of COVID-19 testing in all Member States and on prices, where free testing is not offered, should be available in one place;
- Q. whereas a lack of testing capacity and the issue of affordability of COVID-19 testing pose challenges in terms of effectively addressing the pandemic and constitute a significant obstacle to free movement within the EU, be it for the purpose of work, leisure or family reunification or another purpose;
- R. whereas 17 million EU citizens work or live outside their own Member State and whereas many millions live in peripheral and border areas and have to cross a border regularly, even on a daily basis; whereas these citizens have also been disproportionately affected by the difficulty and cost of getting tested; whereas testing or quarantine requirements continue to create delays in and increase the cost of cross-border transport of goods and the provision of cross-border physical services;

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- S. whereas other travellers may also face several obstacles, including financial barriers and complicated requirements caused by COVID-19 test requirements;
- T. whereas in the current pandemic, a wide range of measures, even exceptional measures, have been taken to support the general public and the economy of the EU;
- U. whereas free movement is in principle a right of all EU citizens, and in times of crisis, every measure has to be taken to ensure that all Europeans can enjoy that right equally;
- V. whereas the Commission has jointly procured COVID-19 vaccines on behalf of all Member States, ensuring accessibility and lowering prices for all;
- W. whereas the Commission signed a framework contract with Abbott and Roche for the purchase of over 20 million rapid antigen tests on 18 December 2020, making tests available to all Member States;
- X. whereas in exceptional cases, (temporary) market intervention is necessary and justified to eliminate obstacles to free movement within the single market, to ensure fair competition and to ensure the provision of essential products and services;
1. Calls on the Member States to ensure universal, accessible, timely and free-of-charge testing in order to guarantee the right to free movement within the EU without discrimination on grounds of economic or financial means in the context of the EU COVID-19 certificate, in line with Article 3 of the Parliament mandate for negotiations on the proposal for a Digital Green Certificate ⁽⁵⁾; underlines the threat of financial discrimination to which non-immunised EU citizens and residents would otherwise be subject once the EU COVID-19 certificate is implemented;
2. Calls on the Member States to ensure free testing, in particular for the frontline workforce, including health workers and their patients, and for schools, universities and childcare facilities;
3. Calls on the Commission and Member States to introduce a temporary price cap on COVID-19 tests that are not taken to obtain an EU COVID-19 certificate or within the context of the circumstances outlined in paragraph 2;
4. Stress that EU COVID-19 certificates based on a NAAT test should not cause further inequalities and social divides; underlines that fair and equitable access to testing is imperative;
5. Urges the Member States, in the meantime, to further implement Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1595 to ensure a common approach and more efficient testing strategies across the EU, as well as to fully implement the regulation on the EU COVID-19 certificate, once adopted;
6. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure sufficient funding and to further their efforts under the European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA) incubator to develop innovative non-invasive testing for children and vulnerable groups, including for variants;
7. Underlines that the Commission and the Member States should demonstrate a stronger commitment to protecting their citizens and residents, whose right to freedom of movement should not depend on their socio-economic status;
8. Calls on the Commission to mobilise its resources to facilitate a financially just and anti-discriminatory implementation of the interoperable EU COVID-19 certificate;
9. Calls on the Member States and the Commission to jointly procure diagnostic test kits and sign joint contracts with medical analysis laboratory service providers to scale up COVID-19 testing capacity at EU level; stresses the need to ensure a high level of transparency and scrutiny in health procurement; stresses that it is of vital importance to ensure that the Commission reserves a sufficient budget to acquire the equipment referred to in this paragraph to enable it to take swift and convincing action;

⁽⁵⁾ Texts adopted, P9_TA(2021)0145.

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10. Welcomes that the Commission provided for flexibility to expedite customs formalities and waive VAT on COVID-19 testing kits;
 11. Calls on the Member States to make it possible for health professionals and trained operators to collect testing data and report it to the relevant authorities; stresses the importance of adapting testing capacity according to the latest epidemiological data and stresses that all test results should be reported, even if performed in non-accredited test centres or settings;
 12. Calls for the Commission to support the Member States by activating the Emergency Support Instrument to cover the costs of COVID-19 testing, requesting voluntary contributions from Member States, securing additional financing for advance purchase agreements and ensuring vaccines are provided for free; expects this joint effort to be used as inspiration for increasing the availability of free testing for EU citizens and residents;
 13. Calls on the Commission to include clear information on COVID-19 testing availability and facilities in all Member States on the Re-open EU website and rapidly deploy an app helping users to find the location of their nearest COVID-19 testing facility; calls on the Commission to make such information easily accessible via an application programming interface, so that travel operators can easily share this information with their clients;
 14. Urges the Member States to increase testing capacities across the EU, both for NAAT and rapid antigen tests, especially in main transportation hubs and tourist destinations, including in remote and island regions and border regions by using mobile testing units and sharing laboratory facilities;
 15. Calls on the Commission to support national authorities in setting up testing centres, with a view to ensuring physical proximity;
 16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.
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