

## **Don't let trade rules stop access to COVID-19 vaccines and medical supplies!**



(26 January 2021) 'Don't let trade rules stop access to COVID-19 vaccines and medical supplies!' was the clear message from the joint PSI EPSU webinar on organised on 25 January. The webinar discussed calls in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) for a 'TRIPS Waiver' on intellectual property rights to make it easier and cheaper to produce vital vaccines, protective personal equipment (PPE) and medical supplies that are needed urgently across the globe.

That trade rules are impeding the fight against COVID-19 is a particular blow to health and care workers at the frontline on the pandemic.

As the exchange revealed however, there is little awareness about the the possibility to waive the WTO TRIPS restrictions - built into the TRIPS agreement itself - to speed up the response to the pandemic.

Participants benefited from exceptionally informative presentations that support PSI and EPSU actions to push all governments in the WTO to support the waiver in the run up to further discussions in February and March.

Susana Barria PSI Trade Organiser, Yuanqing Hu, senior Legal and Policy Advisor with Médecins Sans Frontières' (MSF) Access Campaign and Sangeeta Shashikant, legal adviser at Third World Network set out the main arguments in support of the waiver and refuting claims made by those who oppose. Their contributions drew on their extensive experience of working on the implications of intellectual property rules for health and following debates at the WTO.

Following the presentations the webinar mapped out the positions of different governments and how best to raise concerns and get support.

Actions of PSI EPSU members include:

- Writing to their governments
- Making requests for meetings and further discussions with specific ministries (trade but also health)
- Publishing statements or opinion pieces to get press coverage
- Approaching national trade centres and other sectoral unions to gather more support for the waiver
- Joining civil society actions

More actions are needed!

All actions to support the waiver are in line with our demand that the public interest should come first and that public services principles of universality, equal treatment and affordability need to shape health and trade policies.

Please see PSI website: <https://psishort.link/TRIPS> for the PSI background briefing available in EN FR DE ES PT and RU and materials.

Please see the [EPSU letter to the Trade Commissioner](#)

See also the [Policy Report 'COVID-19 Pandemic and Intellectual Property Rights \(patents\) of drugs, vaccines and diagnostic tests to treat it' published by the Centre for Research & Education in Public Health, Health Policy & Primary Health Care \(CEHP\), Greece \(EL\)](#)

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