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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL AND THE COUNCIL**

A common path to safe and sustained re-opening

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1 INTRODUCTION

The next few months of the COVID-19 pandemic will call for a careful balance. The virus continues to be a major global threat. EU citizens and health systems remain under pressure, with emerging variants triggering new cases. At the same time, there is reason to look forward to a substantial reduction in the prevalence of the virus, raising the prospect of a lifting of the restrictions weighing on citizens and the economy alike. This Communication charts the way ahead for a balanced policy and common EU approach, pointing to what we need to do to advance the time when we can recover our European way of life, but to do so in a safe and sustainable way with control over the virus.

Controlling the COVID-19 pandemic has required an unprecedented range of restrictions. Those restrictions continue to come at a high and ever-increasing cost for individuals, families, communities and businesses. With the risk of emerging variants, some Member States have extended or imposed new restrictions, causing disruption to citizens and supply chains. The conditions must be created across the Single Market to allow for safe and coordinated re-opening, so that citizens can enjoy their rights in full and so that economic and social activity can return. This will give us the foundation of strong public health on which we can launch the recovery which citizens and businesses so sorely need.

EU citizens have good reason to expect the situation to improve: above all, thanks to vaccination. Vaccination is our principal means to combat the virus, and already, there is clear evidence that those population groups who have been vaccinated have significant levels of protection from the disease. The investment in vaccine development and production made by the EU and the Member States in 2020, and the steps now under way to boost production and supply of the vaccines to the EU, are paying off: all Member States will now see increase in vaccine supply, with 300 million doses of the currently authorised vaccines expected in the second quarter of 2021. Swift and effective deployment of these vaccines by Member States will be a key driver in bringing down the number of new cases, and thus determining when and how restrictions can be lifted. At the same time, hygiene and physical distancing will remain essential measures to control the virus until high levels of vaccination coverage are achieved.

In lifting restrictions, we must learn the lessons of 2020, and avoid the extra costs of stop-start restrictions. All the steps to re-opening need to be sustainable, to command the confidence of citizens and provide a solid basis for recovery. One key step is the HERA Incubator, which specifically targets the risk that variants will bring a resurgence in the virus and limit the impact of vaccines[1].

This Communication invites Member States to adopt a coordinated approach to safe re-opening and sets out steps and tools to take to achieve that common goal. Each step towards re-opening will be more effective and more convincing if taken as part of an EU-wide approach to safe and sustainable re-opening, one which promotes the goal of lifting restrictions within a common set of measures grounded in a clear understanding of how to ensure, and maintain, an effective suppression of the virus. Reopening will take longer, cost more, and be less sustainable if the Member States do not work together; moreover reopening in a coordinated manner ensures the

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[1] "HERA Incubator: Anticipating together the threat of COVID-19 variants", COM(2021) 78, 17 February 2021

continuity of the internal market which is inextricably linked to the economic and social life of Europeans as well as those who interact with them be that from a trade and economic dimension or through mobility Our interdependence means that, so long as some Member States apply restrictions, there will be limitations as to how far other Member States can successfully reopen.

Our work inside the EU needs to progress in step with global progress. The EU's commitment to openness will drive its approach to gradually re-build open societies and economies. Only a global approach can bring a solution to this global challenge and common global solutions are the best way to ensure a sustainable recovery.

2   WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS RE-OPENING

The epidemiological situation varies across the EU and within Member States, as do the measures taken to limit the spread of the virus. But one of the lessons we have learned so far is that our interdependence means that imposing restrictions in one part of the EU has implications for all. We can expect the same to be true when it comes to loosening these restrictions. This calls for a common approach to guide action across the EU.

The various restrictions applied by governments in Member States – to movement and travel, to meeting friends and family, to schools and universities, shops, cultural venues, restaurants and bars – have played a critical part in controlling the virus. Choices about the timing and the mix of such restrictions have both reacted to and had an impact on the prevalence of the virus. The experience of the last year has shown the advantages of managing the situation proactively, rather than reacting to a situation that is spiralling out of control. The same will be true as we gradually assess the impact that vaccination has on cutting transmission chains and reducing infections. Evidence-based decision-making, based on robust epidemiological indicators will be key to opening at the right time – with the virus sufficiently under control to allow for relaxation, and to avoid restrictions lasting longer than necessary.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is today setting out a framework to help Member States to take such decisions. The approach would define tiers reflecting the epidemiological situation in each Member State. It would allow simulations illustrating how much latitude each Member State has to lighten response measures without risking a reversal in the spread of the virus. Clear indicative epidemiological thresholds will help coordination, predictability and transparency. A clearer scientific basis[2] will help to understand and manage the connection between the lifting of measures and the impact on COVID-19 incidence and mortality as vaccination accelerates. An interactive digital tool developed by ECDC will be operational in April for use by Member States[3]. Different Member States will continue to make different choices about which restrictions to apply and to lift at different times:

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[2]   The COVID-19 Scenario Analysis Toolbox of the Commission's Joint Research Centre already provides interactive tools to simulate the effects of vaccination strategies combined with different measures at national and regional level.

[3]   This would be designed so that decision-makers and public health professionals in Member States will be able to use their own estimates for the effective reproduction number and for vaccination coverage, if they so wish, or to make use of ECDC estimates.

the framework will help Member States prioritise in these choices by providing a common understanding of the likely impact.

Relying on a common basis of an agreed framework will also help the process to progress on a basis of mutual confidence between Member States. Otherwise Member States' caution about the possible impact of the situation in other Member States will act as a brake on re-opening. The Commission invites Member States to endorse this approach and to follow up swiftly.

A common framework can also help to give citizens confidence in the decisions taken, critically important as compliance is weakened by pandemic fatigue or by complacency as vaccination rolls out. It is also critical to work together to provide objective information and to counter the flood of disinformation holding back effective vaccination campaigns.

3   SAFE RE-OPENING

Returning safely to free movement

For EU citizens an important part of the lifting of restrictions will be to again exercise unrestricted free movement and other fundamental rights throughout the EU. With a sufficient improvement of the epidemiological situation, a coordinated approach to free movement will give the reassurance that re-opening is not outpacing control of the virus. Citizens must also be able to exercise their rights with full non-discrimination.

The Commission is adopting a legislative proposal establishing a common framework for a *Digital Green Certificate* covering vaccination, testing and recovery. This will put in place an EU level approach to issuing, verifying and accepting such certificates, to help holders to exercise their right to free movement within the EU, as well as making it easier to wind down COVID-19 restrictions put in place in compliance with EU law. It will allow every EU citizen and their family members, to receive a secure and interoperable certificate. All Member States would accept the certificate as sufficient proof where relevant in order to waive free movement restrictions – such as quarantine or testing requirements – put in place to limit the spread of COVID-19. It is important to stress that people without such a certificate must still be able to travel and that being in possession of a certificate is not a prerequisite of exercising the right to free movement or other fundamental rights. It is important to have trust in the certificates to allow for their acceptance. The certificates could be used to ascertain whether or not people can travel without being subject to temporary limitations which might be in place to reduce the spread of the virus, such as testing on arrival and quarantine. The package will also cover third country citizens legally staying or legally residing in the EU.

The proposal put forward today is a flexible and simple instrument, to be available in both digital and paper form. It will allow the authorities in one Member State to undertake, if needed, a quick, secure and straightforward check of the certificate issued in another Member State. It would use only the minimum amount of data necessary (for example the date of vaccination and which vaccine was administered or the date of a COVID-19 test). To be ready for an increase in travel over the summer, the proposal needs swift consideration and adoption by the European Parliament and the Council. For the immediate future, the Commission will also consider whether it should propose changes to the Recommendation on a coordinated approach to

restrictions on free movement[4]. In any event, all the exemptions for essential travel, such as those recommended for seasonal, transport or frontier workers, should continue to apply. The "Green Lanes" principles for freight transport must also continue to be applied in full in any circumstances when internal border controls are temporarily reintroduced as a measure of last resort.

Implementation of the Digital Green Certificate legislation also needs a compatible *technical framework* to be defined at EU level and put in place by Member States. This should ensure inter-operability, as well as full compliance with personal data protection. The goal should be to have this work complete and the system in place by the middle of June. The technical framework will factor in global efforts to ease travel restrictions: interoperability with systems being developed through the World Health Organization (WHO) should be taken into account from the start. It will also allow for the possibility to extend to compatible certificates issued in third countries. The proposal on the Digital Green Certificate is flexible enough to be able to take into account new scientific evidence and guidance as we learn more about the effect of vaccination, the implications of new variants and to what extent people that have recovered from an infection are protected.

The Commission is also adopting a 'twin' proposal to address the issuance of the Digital Green Certificate to third country nationals legally staying or residing in Member States and who are entitled to travel within the EU[5]. If such a third country national is in possession of a certificate which is a sufficiently reliable proof of vaccination, or has been issued under a system that is interoperable with the Digital Green Certificate trust framework, this would facilitate travel within the EU.

An important part of re-opening will be to allow the safe travel of third country nationals to the EU. *Tourism and other travel from outside the EU* are an important feature of the EU's openness and should target the same goal of safe opening as other activities. A framework is already in place with the Recommendation identifying countries whose epidemiological situation is such that non-essential travel to the EU is possible[6]. The Council should remain attentive to the evolution of the situation in countries outside the EU, and particularly where reduced incidence of COVID-19 can be seen to have been driven down on a sustainable basis, for example by widespread vaccination with vaccines of demonstrated efficacy. Another important factor would be a low level of variants of concern in a third country.

For the immediate future, the Commission will keep the operation of the Recommendation under close review, and propose amendments in line with developments in this area. This could include amendments to align the Recommendation to the Digital Green Certificate and initiatives taken on a global basis by WHO or the International Civil Aviation Organisation, which could in due course facilitate adaptation of restrictions where travellers from third countries are in a position to present certificates attesting to a relevant COVID-19 status issued

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[4]   Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/1475 of 13 October 2020 on a coordinated approach to the restriction of free movement in response to the COVID-19 pandemic
[5]   Based on Art 77 TFEU (Schengen legal basis).
[6]   Council Recommendation (EU) 2020/912 of 30 June 2020 on the temporary restriction on non-essential travel into the EU and the possible lifting of such restriction

under a system deemed sufficiently reliable or interoperable with the Digital Green Certificate, once available in EU Member States. In parallel, the Commission is working closely with international organisations including the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development[7], the UN World Tourism Organisation[8] and the G20 Tourism Working Group on the restart and recovery of world tourism in a sustainable manner.

The use of the Digital Green Certificate should be accompanied by clear and transparent communication to citizens to explain its scope, use, clarify the safeguards to personal data protection and reassure citizens that this is a tool to help in enjoying free movement rights to the full.

The guidance on testing and quarantine applied to travellers[9] will be updated, to promote a more harmonised and predictable approach to border measures that is more easily understood by travelers and transport service providers.

Testing and tracing as tools to help opening

Successful vaccination alone will not eradicate the virus. There will still be a need to monitor and respond to the epidemiological situation, so testing and contact tracing will continue to be vital tools. This will be particularly important in the phase of re-opening, to provide reassurance that any resurgence will quickly be identified.

The EU has published guidance documents to support the development and implementation of testing strategies across the EU and recommendations to support a common approach to the use, validation and mutual recognition of different tests[10]. There are regular discussions amongst Member States in the Health Security Committee on testing strategies and new tests entering the market. The Health Security Committee has also agreed a common list of rapid antigen tests for COVID-19 diagnosis as well as a selection of rapid antigen tests for which Member States will mutually recognize their results[11]. In addition, the Commission is now providing 20 million rapid antigen tests to the Member States[12]. The accuracy and the availability of rapid antigen tests continues to improve, and they are increasingly being used and are useful in the context of facilitating services and safe travelling.

Self-tests for COVID-19 (both self-swabbing and self-testing kits) are now starting to enter the market. The Commission and ECDC are reviewing these. ECDC will publish today technical guidance on COVID-19 self-tests, including details on, for example, their availability and possible impacts on the implementation of prevention and control measures, their clinical

7   http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/covid-19-international-mobility-and-trade-in-services-the-road-to-recovery-ec716823/
8   https://www.unwto.org/unwto-convenes-global-tourism-crisis-committee
9   https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/guidelines-covid-19-testing-and-quarantine-air-travellers
10 Commission Recommendation (EU) 2020/1595 of 28 October 2020 on COVID-19 testing strategies, including the use of rapid antigen tests (C/2020/7502)
11 https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/preparedness_response/docs/covid-19_rat_common-list_en.pdf
12 On 18 December 2020, the Commission signed a framework contract with Abbott and Roche allowing the purchase of over 20 million rapid antigen tests for up to €100 million, financed by the Emergency Support Instrument (ESI).

performance compared to the "gold standard" RT-PCR tests, their implications for reporting and epidemiological surveillance, and the settings for their appropriate use. Through the Health Security Committee, the Commission is monitoring if and how countries are using or considering the use of rapid antigen self-tests.

One important use of testing is to track the virus and its variants in wastewater. This can provide rapid and inexpensive information on the presence of a virus and therefore on a possible resurgence: monitoring just 6000 collection points allows the wastewaters of 70% of the EU population be tracked. Wastewater surveillance can be used for preventive or early warning purposes, as virus detection in wastewater is a sign of the possible re-emergence of the virus. Similarly, the absence of the virus in wastewater could indicate that a given population zone can be considered at lower risk, and that measures put in place to curb virus transmission have worked. It is therefore critical that Member States put in place effective wastewater surveillance systems ensuring that relevant data are promptly provided to competent health authorities.

The Commission is today adopting a Recommendation to support a consistent approach to the use of *wastewater monitoring* to track COVID-19 and its variants[13]. The Recommendation is based on the knowledge and experience of Member States and includes specific guidance regarding the design and management of a wastewater surveillance network for the rapid transmission of data to health authorities. It will promote the use of common methods for sampling, testing and data analysis, supported by a European exchange platform. Financial support will be made available to support deployment of a coherent wastewater monitoring and surveillance strategies and activities across the EU, and to strengthen Member States' and partner countries' capacities in the long term.

Testing by itself does not control infectious diseases. It must be followed up and used effectively. Tracing has a key role in assisting towards safe opening as the overall situation improves, when the effective containment of more isolated outbreaks becomes particularly valuable. By complementing traditional manual contact tracing, *mobile contact tracing applications* can help to break transmission chains and help save lives. In view of the increased transmissibility of variants, it is important that the parameters employed in the apps are reviewed and where necessary adjusted, in coordination with ECDC and national authorities. The Commission will support Member States to consider additional features to strengthen contact tracing applications and encourage their uptake and use. These additional features could for example include a dashboard displaying the latest information on the public health situation and on the rollout of vaccination campaigns, or notifying users of their past presence at an event or a venue where confirmed COVID-19 cases have been identified.

Member States also collect data from cross-border travellers entering their territory via national *Passenger Locator Forms* ('PLF'). Data exchange between Member States' contact tracing authorities can be particularly important when travellers are crossing borders in close proximity, such as in airplanes or trains. The Commission has developed a platform that enables the exchange of data between the PLF systems of the Member States.

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[13] C(2021) 1925

In order for Member States to exchange relevant passengers' data through the exchange platform, the Commission will publish draft measures to ensure that by the time of the summer travelling season, lawful processing of personal data is set under an EU legal basis[14]. This will lay down the limited and well-defined data sets to be exchanged and the roles and responsibilities of the different users.

For those Member States where there is no digital PLF system in place, the EU Healthy Gateways Joint Action has developed an EU digital PLF platform as a single point of entry and cloud-hosting services allowing the storage of the collected PLF. The two platforms – PLF exchange platform and EU digital PLF platform – are complementary and interconnected projects. These tools will allow faster and more effective contact tracing of cross-border passengers.

Continuing to manage the virus: therapeutics and medical equipment

As ***therapeutic treatment*** has developed, it has helped to save lives, speed up recovery time, and reduce the length of hospitalisation – to the benefit of both patients, and hard-pressed health care systems. The Commission is using a number of instruments, including joint procurement, to secure access for Member States to the limited number of therapeutic treatments currently in use to treat COVID-19 cases, as well as research programmes. More and faster action is needed. A ***common EU strategy on therapeutics*** is planned for mid-April. Similar to the approach used successfully with vaccines, this will seek to speed up research and manufacturing, so that Member States can have access to valuable treatments on the scale and at the speed required. More flexible regulatory measures for therapeutics, such as labelling facilitations, will be deployed to enable rapid supply at large scale during the pandemic.

Technology can also be used in other ways. Ultraviolet ***disinfecting robots*** can disinfect a standard size patient room in as quickly as 10 minutes by using ultraviolet light, and disinfect over 18 rooms in one charge. They can help ensure a sterile environment in hospitals without exposing staff to unnecessary risk. A €12 million programme is under way purchasing at least 200 robots and deploying them in Member States with actual delivery of robots throughout 2021.

Helping the most affected sectors to prepare for safe re-opening

Some of Europe's most dynamic sectors – tourism, culture, and transport – have been amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic. The more that can be done to help these sectors to re-open safely, for workers[15] and for the public, and in a way which builds trust and confidence, the quicker these sectors – in which many businesses are in great jeopardy and on which many jobs rely – can start to recover.

Europe's ***tourism*** ecosystem has been heavily disrupted. In 12 Member States, tourism generates between 25% and 10% of national GDP, while four EU Member States featured among the world's top- ten tourism destinations in 2019 in terms of international arrivals and receipts. With

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14 *https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives?frontEndStage=ISC_WORKFLOW*

15 https://oshwiki.eu/wiki/COVID-19:_Back_to_the_workplace_-_Adapting_workplaces_and_protecting_workers

a drop of 70% in revenues during 2020 and up to 11 million jobs at risk[16], tourism services are at the bottom of the business confidence indicator. EU overnight stays fell by 52% in 2020 and international tourist stays fell by 68% in 2020[17]. Some Member State economies are also highly dependent on international tourism and unable to compensate for the loss of foreign travellers with domestic tourism. Reopening travel and tourism safely will bring millions of Europeans back to their jobs, and can drive recovery faster in many EU regions[18].

Restoring travel in a safe and predictable manner requires restoring the confidence of consumers that their health and rights are protected. The downloadable application *Re-open EU* will continue to provide reliable information to citizens about the epidemiological situation and rules in place across the EU (including the Digital Green Certificates) with improved new, user-friendly "travel path" functionalities[19]. A clear, EU-wide system to give people full confidence in public health standards can be a real step forward in ensuring clarity to travellers while also dispelling remaining concerns and opening the door for the coming summer season. In 2020, the Commission provided valuable guidance to the transport[20] and hospitality sectors to help it to minimise risks[21]. The Commission has also invited the European Committee for Standardisation to prepare a standardisation document as a basis for health and safety protocols for the hospitality sector, which will be available before summer. This voluntary tool will help better inform and prepare tourism businesses to welcome people in full safety. The Commission will work with Member States and the industry to ensure the successful rollout of this '*EU tourism health seal*'.

The Commission, Member States and the industry should further cooperate on communication campaigns aiming at re-building confidence in safe travelling in Europe among Europeans but also travellers from third countries.

The third step to help the tourism sector to prepare for a safe opening is to continue supporting businesses on the ground, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and micro-enterprises, to maintain COVID-safe services and adapt the tourism product to the new reality. Member States can mobilise support and investments for most affected sectors and regions under the Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative[22] and REACT EU, while the Recovery and Resilience Facility and cohesion policy funds will contribute to the sustainable recovery of the most affected sectors. The European Regional Development Fund 2021-2027 includes a specific objective **aiming to support economic development and social inclusion in culture and tourism.** The Commission will make available a Guide to EU funding to help tourism stakeholders identify the most relevant sources of EU funding for their projects and investments.

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[16] In particular for young (13% employees under 24 years old) and female (59% employees)

[17] Source: Eurostat

[18] On 13 May 2020, the Commission adopted a set of guidelines and recommendations in a first tourism and transport package: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/QANDA_20_870

[19] https://reopen.europa.eu/en

[20] C(2020) 169/02

[21] EU Guidance for the progressive resuming of tourism services and for health protocols in hospitality establishments C(2020)3251

[22] https://cohesiondata.ec.europa.eu/stories/s/4e2z-pw8r

Sharing once again the collective experience of cultural venues and events, heritage sites and cultural tourism will be one of the most visible signs of re-opening. It will also be essential for the survival of a *cultural and creative economy* that has been particularly badly affected by the restrictions imposed to control the pandemic. This sector lost around 31% of its revenues in 2020, with performing arts (a drop of 90%) and music (a drop of 76%) being the most impacted[23]. Again, a common approach and common indicators will help decisions to lift restrictions by building confidence amongst audiences and visitors that opening is taking place in a responsible way. The Commission will use existing cooperation structures and networks[24] to exchange information on the safe re-opening of the cultural sector. In order to better coordinate Member States' measures for the safe resumption of activities in the cultural and creative sector, the Commission will develop guidelines for sectors in the field of music (festivals, venues), audiovisual (film festivals and markets, cinemas, production sets), performing arts (festivals, venues), exhibition spaces such as museums or galleries, libraries, and cultural heritage sites.

Cultural tourism boosts growth and creates jobs, with four in ten tourists choosing their destination on the basis of the cultural offer. The Commission will launch a dedicated EU social media campaign on sustainable cultural tourism, aimed at promoting EU cultural heritage sites and cultural routes, as well as cultural events and festivals. New initiatives will be backed up when conditions allow through Erasmus+ and its DiscoverEU action to promote the discovery by young people of Europe's cultural heritage by rail, during and beyond the European Year of Rail.

Building global resilience against COVID-19

A sustainable path out of COVID-19 inside the EU depends on progress at global level. No country or region in the world will be safe from COVID-19 unless it is contained at global level, and only a global approach can bring a solution to a global crisis. For as long as the virus is circulated, the human cost will continue: the toll on the world has already reached almost 120 million confirmed cases and over 2.6 million deaths reported worldwide. Continued circulation also means continued risk of resurgence and of new variants emerging with the potential to breach the defences created by vaccines. The EU has both a responsibility and an interest to fulfil its commitment to tackle COVID-19 worldwide.

The EU is at the forefront of the international response. It has provided concrete financial, emergency and in kind support to international partners and countries around the world. So far this "Team Europe" approach"[25] has contributed a total of over €40 billion for international support in the fight against COVID-19.

As inside the EU, a sustainable approach means vaccination. That is why the EU has strongly supported the work of COVAX in rolling out vaccines worldwide: with more than €2.2 billion financing, the EU and Member States as "Team Europe" are among the main supporter of

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[23] https://www.rebuilding-europe.eu/

[24] For example Creatives Unite – a platform for/by the cultural and creative sectors, https://creativesunite.eu/

[25] The EU's "Team Europe" approach is an approach drawing contributions from all EU institutions and combining resources mobilised by EU Member States and financial institutions, while respecting the EU competences and the decision-making procedures, including the voting rules, established by the EU Treaties.

COVAX, the global initiative to ensure equitable access to vaccines, and has urged all partners to join in this work. The **COVAX Facility** has started rolling out vaccine doses and intends to share vaccines with all low and middle income countries in the first half of 2021. This should be sufficient to vaccinate their entire health workforce and at least 3% of their population, to increase to at least 20% before the end of the year. The Humanitarian Buffer of 100 million doses, with a transparent allocation mechanism, will help ensure inclusive access for vulnerable populations to vaccines.

The EU and its Member States are establishing a coordinated European approach to vaccine sharing by setting up an **EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism** based on the principles of fairness, gradual build- up, zero waste and a Team Europe approach. The aim is to further support and go beyond existing bilateral initiatives of Member States, and to create and scale up an EU pot fed in an equitable manner by a share of doses from Member States. The mechanism will start and build up gradually as vaccine availabilities improve and quantitative targets are set. Vaccines will preferably be channelled through COVAX, and can also continue to be shared directly with countries, with a particular focus on Western Balkans, neighbourhood and Africa. The EU will also continue to facilitate coordination and logistics, and co-finance the transport of vaccines via the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM).

In parallel, the EU and its Member States, as Team Europe, will continue to support preparedness for and the roll out of vaccination strategies at country and regional level ensuring collective action in partnership with regional and global actors, including humanitarian actors. In the longer term, it will be essential to work with partner countries – in particular in Africa - to strengthen health systems and manufacturing, including vaccines capacity, diagnostics and therapeutics.

Scaling up vaccines production on a global level and their delivery to countries in need requires increased global collaboration between public authorities, vaccine developers and manufacturers to ensure voluntary licensing for the necessary transfer of technological know-how. The EU is supporting such efforts, including in the World Trade Organisation. It will engage with other vaccine-producing countries actions to avoid disruptions of closely integrated supply chains. The EU will also ensure that its **transparency and authorisation** scheme for exports of COVID-19 vaccines, which provides for a number of exemptions[26], is applied in a fair and equitable manner.

Readiness to react to a resurgence in COVID-19

The key health measures under way – vaccination, testing and tracing, and readiness for variants – provide a major reassurance that the reversal of progress seen at times over the past year is less likely. However, the experience of loosened restrictions followed by a resurgence in the virus means that an important part of building confidence is the knowledge that – if there were to be resurgence such as through a new variant – the EU and Member States would be ready to act. The ECDC framework described above will be of particular value in helping to quickly identify any risk of resurgence and to highlight the most appropriate restrictions to apply.

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[26] Exemptions notably include deliveries to low and middle-income countries listed in the COVAX Commitment list and exports of vaccines purchased and/or delivered though COVAX.

In terms of the health response, the Commission continues to support Member States via the **Union Civil Protection Mechanism.** I-its *24/7 Emergency Response Coordination Centre* can, within hours, facilitate and fund the deployment of emergency medical teams (as in the recent case of the deployment of Romanian, Danish and Belgian doctors and nurses to Slovakia), critical medical equipment, vaccines (where France recently shared doses with Slovakia and Czechia) and personal protective equipment (including from the rescEU medical stockpile). The Emergency Support Instrument allows for the rapid cross-border transfer of patients to ease the pressure on health facilities.

Over the longer-term, the EU must also put in place a stronger framework for resilience and preparedness in the eventuality of future pandemics. This is already the objective of the proposals for a **European Health Union**, as well as the work now under way on the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority. The ongoing revision of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism will also support this work. The European Health Union proposals to strengthen the EU health security framework should be adopted as soon as possible. The Commission will put forward a vision for resilience and preparedness in the *"lessons learned" communication* requested by the members of the European Council.

The EU should also reflect on whether the success of other emergency steps taken over the past year, such as the Green Lanes system, should be consolidated in a framework which can be activated in response to any new crisis. The upcoming *Schengen Strategy* will also offer the opportunity to put in place solid contingency planning and coordination mechanisms for measures in relation to internal and external borders, taking stock of the experience of the crisis and the necessity to limit, to the extent possible, any possible disruption to free circulation and to the functioning of the Single Market.

4 WAY FORWARD

The next few months of the COVID-19 pandemic will require decisive action to ensure a sustainable and safe re-opening of our societies and economies. Coordinated action is needed at all levels, to ensure that the steps we take are as effective as possible in driving down the incidence of the virus, supporting citizens and companies, and allowing our societies to return to normal. The Commission invites all EU institutions and Member States to take forward the common effort: stepping up communication efforts is particularly important.

The European Council

- to call for an agreed approach to a safe re-opening based on a solid scientific framework;
- to support further coordination on efforts to contain the pandemic at a global level, based on the Team Europe approach.

The European Parliament and the Council

- to fast-track discussions and agreement on the proposals for a Digital Green Certificate;
- to accelerate discussions and reach an agreement on Health Union legislative proposals before the end of the year.

The European Commission

- to continue supporting the ramping up of vaccines production and timely delivery of contractual commitments;
- to further develop technical solutions at European level to increase interoperability of nationals systems to facilitate travel, data exchange and contact tracing;
- to put forward a European strategy on therapeutics.

Member States

- to ensure the acceleration of vaccination programmes in line with increased supply;
- to ensure that temporary restrictions to combat COVID-19 are proportionate and non-discriminatory;
- to accelerate the technical implementation work on the Digital Green Certificate in view of the fast-track adoption of the proposal;
- to swiftly implement all recommendations and develop the necessary infrastructure to use available tools to fight the pandemic.