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Ispra, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021

## OPEN LETTER TO COMMISSIONER JOHANNES HAHN

Subject : Access to Italian Covid-19 vaccination campaign for staff (retired and active) and their families based in Italy

Dear Commissioner Hahn,

Since the beginning of the pandemic, **R&D** Ispra has contributed and collaborated, in compliance with its role, in the management of the emergency related to Covid-19.

We acknowledge that many positive steps have been taken, thanks also to the suggestions we have proposed in the various working groups within which we work. However, to date we must highlight the serious barriers limiting the access to vaccination against Covid-19 for staff (whether active or retired) of the Ispra site, as well as their family members. The principal barrier is due to the requirement of prior registration in the Italian Health System (Tessera Sanitaria) - which is not allowed for the Commission staff - in order to be able to make an appointment for the vaccine.

The limitation of the right to access to the vaccine in accordance with the national rollout schedule not only results in increased personal risks, but also an increased risk to public health since it doesn't guarantee the maximum coverage of the resident population which is the ultimate goal of the vaccination campaign.

We are grateful for the enormous work that has already been done, and continues to be done, by the Ispra site manager, the medical service, and PMO to find ad hoc solutions together with ATS Insubria (responsible for the public health system in the zone of the Lombardy Region where the Ispra site is located). Initially, this concerned small numbers of staff working in the medical service, the child care facilities, and the Emergency Response and Support Services. A successful ad hoc system involving a dedicated email/ telephone hotline was then implemented by ATS Insubria for the over 80s, who we believe have now mostly received at least one vaccine dose. Just this week a new ad hoc approach for the over 70s and vulnerable categories has been implemented. Unfortunately, this is an overly complicated solution involving an email with no confirmation of receipt and which requires several documents to be attached. Above all, it does not appear to result in an appointment within a reasonable time. This contrasts extremely poorly with the user-friendly online portal available to the general population of Lombardy who receive instant notification of an appointment for vaccination, which then takes place generally within a week.

The same ad hoc solution, following the Italian schedule, will be extended to the over 60s (and from 30th April the over 50s), but, as already highlighted, the procedure is too complex and it does not give assurance of an appointment within a reasonable time. We believe this solution is not effective for managing the

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increasing number of staff and family members who are now becoming eligible - in theory – for inclusion in the national vaccination programme, and for which we are falling ever further behind.

Moreover, there are no agreements with the other ATS in the Lombardy Region (e.g. Milan), nor indeed other Italian Regions (e.g. Piedmont) in which a significant part of our staff reside. Furthermore, many retired Commission staff reside throughout Italy, including those that were previously not connected with the Ispra site – these will also be facing significant difficulties in obtaining a vaccination appointment.

We absolutely do not want any privileged treatment, but demand to be included in the vaccination campaign of our host country, in accordance with its announced schedules, as has been assured to us many times by our employer. We would furthermore ask that you remind our host country that we are not only here as guests, but also live and work here by right, and that we demand to be treated with due respect and not as an inconvenience. The many statements of principle made by the European Commission and the Italian Government must now be followed by the immediate implementation of simple, timely and equitable procedures.

Below we propose some simple and quickly applicable solutions, some already in place in various other Italian regions:

1. The ATS allows appointments to be made using the online portal that need only the tax number (codice fiscale) (as is currently possible in other Italian regions, for example Emilia Romagna);
2. The Italian Authorities immediately allow the Ispra medical service to become operational as a vaccination centre for staff and family members as per the recently approved Italian legislation. We note that the Ispra medical service has already proposed itself to the authorities and has the technical capabilities in place;
3. Assignment by the ATS of a provisional health card number for use in the online portal used for vaccination reservations.

We are increasingly aware every day that passes the growing discomfort and frustration of our colleagues who do not see a clear implementations of their right to be vaccinated. If solutions, such as those outlined above, are not implemented with immediate effect we will feel that our patience and understanding to date has not been rewarded - **R&D Ispra** will give full and whole-hearted support to any colleagues who:

- despite being within an eligible age category, are not provided with a vaccination appointment, and
- need to perform a period of telework from abroad in order to obtain the Covid-19 vaccine in the country of origin, in accordance with its national rollout schedule, and with the justifiable motivation: Covid-19 vaccination not available in the host country.

Unfortunately, this solution cannot be applied to those Italian colleagues without links to Regions that do not require the national health number for a vaccination appointment, so we would expect some imaginative solution, for example, a temporary transfer to Brussels for vaccination by the medical service in accordance with Belgian rollout schedule.

We note in closing that as already foreseen by us, the impossibility to be registered in the national health system does have real impact on staff based in Italy and a permanent solution guaranteeing access for all Italy-based staff, independently of nationality, needs to be put in place as soon as the immediate crisis is resolved.

As always, we put all our collective experience and abilities at your disposal in order to fully cooperate with your services.

Yours Sincerely,

Gianfranco Selvagio  
President

Salvatore Tirendi  
Vice-President

Laura Ciafrè  
Political Secretary

Elena Stringa  
Vice-Political Secretary

Cc : Ms U. von der Leyen, President of the European Commission  
Ms S. Kyriakides, Commissioner for Health and Food Safety  
Ms G. Ingestad, Director-General HR  
Mr S. Quest, Director-General JRC  
Mr M. Stroosnijder, Site Manager JRC  
Mr I. Lombardi, Head of Unit HR.D.5 (JRC Medical Service)  
Ms I. Baltmane, Head of Unit PMO.6  
Mr A. Katsogiannis, President Central Staff Committee  
All Ispra-based staff