

(English version)

**Priority question for written answer P-007001/20
to the Commission
Luisa Regimenti (ID)
(21 December 2020)**

Subject: Measures to prevent and combat the spread of the new variant of Sars-CoV-2

There are fears in the European health sector about the way in which the Sars-CoV-2 virus has begun to spread at a faster rate.

The variant of the virus which has recently emerged in the United Kingdom and has already spread around some Member States, is indeed alarming given that, according to the initial data, not only might it spread up to 70% faster than the SARS-CoV-2 we already know, but it could be more severe and could affect the performance of some diagnostic tests.

Moreover, it is not known whether the immune response produced by the COVID-19 vaccines about to be distributed will also cover this coronavirus variant.

The alarm is such that most European countries have already suspended flights with Great Britain.

In order to examine the effect of the specific mutations in this variant, further studies — a combination of monitoring and laboratory research — are needed.

In view of this, can the Commission answer the following questions:

1. Will it promptly collect and study data on Member States that detect cases of the new variant of the virus, in order to report the results to the public?
2. How does it plan to limit the risk of the new strain being passed on from the UK to the Member States?
3. Will it step up checks at European borders with the United Kingdom?

**Answer given by Ms Kyriakides on behalf of the European Commission
(10 February 2021)**

Since the United Kingdom (UK) informed the Commission and the Member States of the new variant, Member States have been invited to notify cases of the new variant or any other new variant in the Early Warning and Response System and on the European Surveillance System for case-based surveillance and aggregate reporting. The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control also pointed out such aspects in its Rapid Risk Assessment on the UK variant ⁽¹⁾.

In its communication 'A united front against COVID-19' ⁽²⁾, the Commission recommended that all Member States increase their genome sequencing capacity.

Public health response measures are a competence of Member States. On 22 December 2020, the Commission adopted a recommendation on the EU coordinated approach to travel and transport in response to the new variant of coronavirus in the UK ⁽³⁾. The Commission recommended taking swift temporary precautionary actions and that all non-essential travel to and from the UK should be discouraged. It indicated that essential travel and transit of passengers should remain possible but advised to combine it with COVID-19 testing and quarantine measures. Blanket travel and transport bans, including for freight, should have been discontinued given the need to ensure essential travel and avoid supply chain disruptions.

On 25 January 2021, the Commission proposed additional safeguards and requirements ⁽⁴⁾ for international travellers into the EU. New coronavirus variants and the volatile health situation worldwide call for further action to ensure that any travel to the EU takes place safely.

⁽¹⁾ <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19-risk-related-to-spread-of-new-SARS-CoV-2-variants-EU-EEA.pdf>

⁽²⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/info/files/communication-united-front-beat-covid-19_en

⁽³⁾ Commission Recommendation C(2020) 9607 final of 22.12.2020 on a coordinated approach to travel and transport in response to the SARS-COV-2 variant observed in the United Kingdom

⁽⁴⁾ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission-proposal-amend-coordinated-approach-restrictions-free-movement-covid-19-pandemic_en.pdf