

### Fair distribution and global access to COVID vaccines

The coronavirus pandemic has been raging around the world for a year and a half now. The COVID-19 crisis is a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a financial crisis. The most vulnerable are being hit the hardest and, without support, may find themselves in life-threatening situations. This pandemic has shown the vulnerabilities in global health systems. While we welcome the call of President Charles Michel of the European Council and other world leaders for recognition of a 'one health' approach that connects the health of humans, animals and our planet<sup>1</sup>, we still see that countries are allowing short-term self-interest to prevail over cooperation and long-term solutions. We know that cooperation is precisely what is needed to tackle this pandemic, while focus and speed are also crucial. In the field of vaccines, as in general in the field of the fight against the pandemic, it is necessary to develop better coordination between the European authorities and the various EU states and in particular their ministries in charge of health.

In an unprecedented effort to tackle the crisis, national governments, international institutions and pharmaceutical companies created the necessary environment to develop vaccines. A whole range of effective vaccines have been developed at a record pace. But instead of making them available to the world population on a fair and equal basis, we see rich countries falling into a reflex of vaccine nationalism. High-income countries should not overstock on vaccines way above their actual populations but instead redistribute. These countries, including the EU, have bought over half of the world's vaccine supply, even though together they represent just 16 % of the world's population.

As of May, around fifteen countries have administered at least one vaccination to around 40% or more of their population. A group of mainly EU-Member States had vaccinated between 15-48 % of their population. Emerging Markets and Developing Economies (EMDE) are lagging far behind, with less than 3 people per 100 having received a vaccination as of March 2021<sup>2</sup>.

It has been reported that the slow and inequitable distribution of vaccines also increases the possibilities of additional new mutations of the virus appearing, with the risk of new variants that are more easily transmissible, more lethal, and against which current vaccines might be less effective.

Therefore, as European Greens, and with reference to the [Statement of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) of the UN Economic and Social Council on universal affordable vaccination for COVID-19, international cooperation and intellectual property, and the World Health Organization's call for vaccine equity, while we strongly support the duty of European countries to secure vaccinations to their populations, we also call for the following measures to address the problem in the short and longer term:

- for countries, the European Commission and the EU governments to take all possible steps to ramp up production and ensure universal, fair access to vaccines, including more open

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2021/03/30/pandemic-treaty-op-ed/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/35273>



and non-exclusive licensing, technology pools and use of TRIPS flexibilities, as well as drop the opposition to the TRIPS waiver and thus allow the temporary waiving of patents on COVID-19 products. The coronavirus vaccines have been made possible with the support of public investment; therefore these vaccines should be recognised as a public good in the interest of public health;

- for an end to vaccine nationalism: rich states are breaking their international obligations<sup>3</sup>[2] towards international cooperation and assistance by buying up scarce supplies at the expense of people in less wealthy countries;
- for international cooperation in ensuring universal fair access to vaccines. This is a human rights obligation for states, and a responsibility for businesses. Universal and fair access to vaccines should also include refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants in vaccine roll-out plans;
- for immediate decisions on the shape of COVAX, the EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism, the donation schedule, and additional financial contributions required from the EU and European Member States;
- for full transparency on the vaccine purchasing policy of the European Commission and the member states, as well as for companies to issue open and non-exclusive licences publishing the terms, prices and conditions of these agreements. Moreover, we demand transparency in all public financing of research and in the public purchase of medicines in European health systems, and for the EU to take steps towards reducing the oligopolistic bargaining power of the private pharmaceutical industry;
- for ensuring that prices are affordable and enabling countries to offer these vaccines free at the point of care;
- for companies to join global collaboration mechanisms such as C-TAP, allowing knowledge and technology to be shared;
- for public institutions to play a role in promoting new capacities, enlarging current industrial plants, binding partnerships between industries, a contribution to planning the supply chain, and strengthening the public role in the industry;
- to increase European participation in multilateral initiatives and organizations such as Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) or the WHO itself, as well as in all those that work to achieve a more sustainable R&D system, by increasing funding;
- to promote R&D initiatives based on new models of pharmaceutical research and development that do not rely exclusively on patents as an incentive and business model and link public funding for bio-medical research to standards for the creation and distribution of pharmaceuticals and medical technology as common goods.

<sup>3</sup> For example: **art. 12** International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, **SDG 3** on ensuring healthy lives and well-being at all ages, and **SDG 10** on reducing inequalities within and among countries.