

# Universal access to covid-19 therapeutics and vaccines

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## I. Background Information

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused substantial excess mortality and plunged national economies into deep recessions. Although the spread of the virus can be mitigated through physical distancing, face coverings, and testing and tracing — and potentially with therapeutics — the risk of outbreaks and disruption to economic and social life will probably remain until everyone has equal access to vaccines. More than 4.6 million people have died from the virus since it swept across the globe from the beginning of 2020, but it's expected that the rate of people dying will slow if more people are vaccinated. The World Health Organization (WHO) has set a global target of 70 percent of the population of all countries to be vaccinated by mid-2022, but to reach this goal a more equitable access to vaccines will be needed.

Safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines were developed in record time. But the virus is moving faster than the global distribution of vaccines. The vast majority have been administered in high and upper-middle-income countries. If these doses had been distributed equitably, they would have been enough to cover all health workers and older people globally. The main causes of inequitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution are production, trade, and health care delivery.

Globally, 97 countries would need to at least double their vaccination rates to achieve the 70 percent target. Still, the fastest acceleration in absolute terms is needed in low-income countries. For instance, Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo would all have to increase their weekly vaccination rates by at least several million people. So far, insufficient levels of vaccination resulted in US\$19,87 billion lost in GDP for these four countries as they have not been able to reach the 40 percent target at the end of 2021. If this trend continues, countries will be forced to stay in lockdown for longer and thus inhibit the socio-economic recovery needed to address other development challenges, such as education and healthcare.

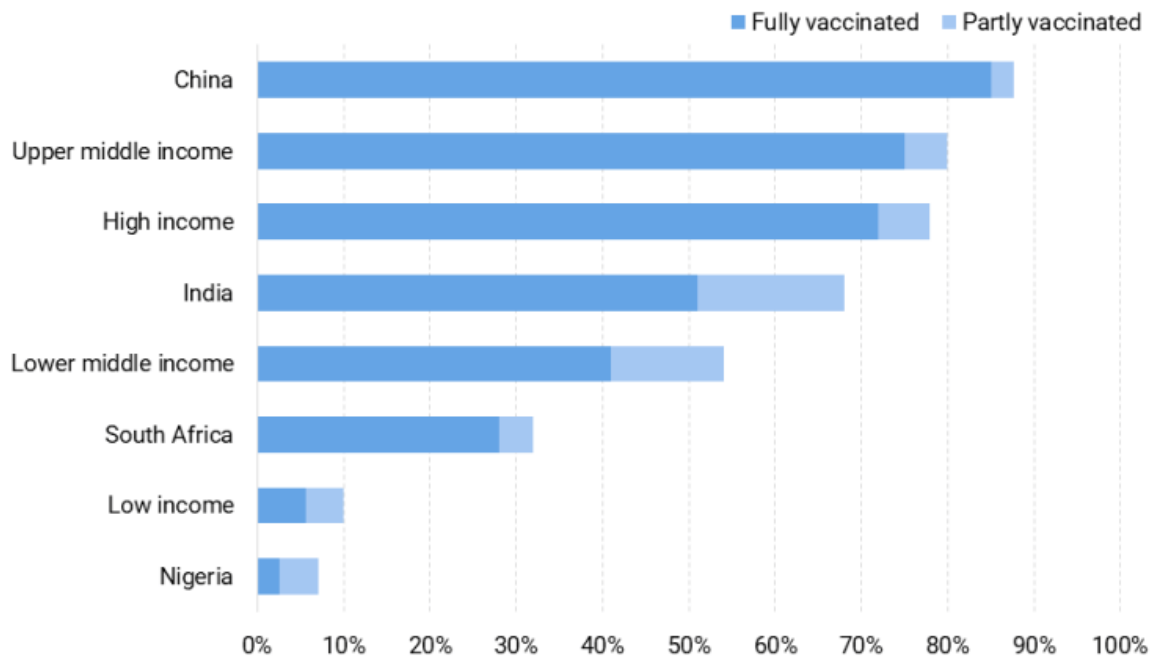
Global production of vaccines reached 12 billion doses at the end of 2021, insufficient to cover a global population of 7.9 billion. Distribution has been unequal. As of 30 January 2022, more than 3 billion people around the world were still waiting to receive their first COVID-19 vaccine dose, while many high-income countries have already reached the mid-2022 target of vaccinating 70 percent of their populations. Most manufacturers have largely spurned the opportunities to share technology and know-how and public health-oriented licensing, despite a number of mechanisms being set up including the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool and the mRNA vaccine technology transfer hub, which is currently limited to less than 20 countries.

Another issue, that appears to be even more relevant in vaccine inequity, is trade policy. International trade is essential to producing and distributing these vaccines through complex

cross-border supply chains. But nationalistic trade policies, differences in regulatory frameworks between countries, and complex and slow procedures for moving key inputs across borders have impeded trade. This has negatively affected vaccine production and distribution.

**Figure 1. Share of people vaccinated against COVID-19**

As of January 31, 2022



Source: Our World in Data.

BROOKINGS

## II. UN Involvement

In response to the pandemic, in April 2020 WHO and partners launched the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator partnership, which is a global collaboration to accelerate the development, and production of COVID-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines. One of three pillars of the ACT-Accelerator is COVAX, directed by the GAVI vaccine alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and the World Health Organization (WHO), alongside key delivery partner UNICEF. Its aim is to accelerate the development and manufacture of COVID-19 vaccines, and to guarantee fair and equitable access for every country in the world.

In 2021 the World Health Organization, alongside COVAX, has launched a strategy to achieve global COVID-19 vaccination by mid-2022. The goal is to substantially increase population immunity globally to protect people everywhere from disease, protect the health system, fully restart economies, restore the health of society, and lower the risk of new variants. With interim targets of 10% full vaccination population coverage in all countries by the end-September 2021, and 40% in all countries by end-2021, the strategy aims to first

protect health workers, older populations, and high-risk individuals with important co-morbidities, advancing next to all adults, followed by adolescents.

#### Questions to consider

- What is your country's position on providing aid to countries affected by the vaccine inequity?
- How has your country reacted to
- How can your country help to meet world COVID-19 vaccination targets?
- Which aspects of the issue are most important to your country?
- Is there evidence or statistics that help back your country's position?

#### Useful Links:

<https://www.who.int/news/item/07-10-2021-who-un-set-out-steps-to-meet-world-covid-vaccination-targets>

[https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2021/october/20211021\\_dose-of-reality](https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2021/october/20211021_dose-of-reality)

[https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s\\_res\\_2565.pdf](https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2565.pdf)

<https://data.undp.org/vaccine-equity/vaccine-equity-and-speed/>

#### Sources:

[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Events/COVID-19\\_AccessVaccines\\_Guidance.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Events/COVID-19_AccessVaccines_Guidance.pdf)

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/35244/The-Covid-19-Vaccine-Production-Club-Will-Value-Chains-Temper-Nationalism.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<https://www.who.int/campaigns/vaccine-equity>

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(21\)00306-8/fulltext#seccestitle20](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(21)00306-8/fulltext#seccestitle20)

<https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1100192>

[https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/COVID-19/Policy\\_paper\\_on\\_COVID-19\\_vaccines\\_and\\_corruption\\_risks.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/corruption/COVID-19/Policy_paper_on_COVID-19_vaccines_and_corruption_risks.pdf)

