

EU to double COVAX vaccine funding to 1 billion euros

February 19 2021, by Lorne Cook and Samuel Petrequin



In this file photo dated Thursday, Feb. 11, 2021, a health worker prepares a dose of the AstraZeneca vaccine to be administered in Fiumicino, near Rome's international airport. The World Health Organization Monday Feb. 15, 2021, granted an emergency authorization to the coronavirus vaccine made by AstraZeneca, a move that should allow its partners to ship millions of doses to countries worldwide as part of a U.N.-backed program to stop the pandemic.(AP Photo/Alessandra Tarantino, FILE)

The European Union's executive commission plans to double its contribution to the World Health Organization's COVAX program, bringing the 27-nation bloc's commitment to the initiative to deliver vaccines to poor nations to 1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion).

European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen will make the proposal later Friday during a meeting of the leaders of the Group of Seven economic powers, EU commission chief spokesman Eric Mamer said,

Von der Leyen is also set to announce an additional 100 million euros (\$121.4 million) to support vaccination campaigns in Africa in partnership with the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The EU is one of the leading donors to the COVAX program, which aims to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 shots for low-and middle-income countries. COVAX hopes to deploy some 336 million doses by the end of June, and around 2 billion doses by the end of the year.

But the program has already missed the goal of starting vaccination in poor countries at the same time that doses were rolled out in rich countries.

This week, U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sharply criticized the "wildly uneven and unfair" distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, saying 10 countries have administered 75% of the vaccinations given worldwide so far and demanding a global effort to get all people in every nation vaccinated as soon as possible.



In this file photo dated Friday, Feb. 5, 2021, Vials of the AstraZeneca vaccine and loaded syringes wait to be administered to homeless persons at the Welcome Centre in Ilford, east London. The World Health Organization Monday Feb. 15, 2021, granted an emergency authorization to the coronavirus vaccine made by AstraZeneca, a move that should allow its partners to ship millions of doses to countries worldwide as part of a U.N.-backed program to stop the pandemic.(AP Photo/Frank Augstein, FILE)



In this file photo dated Tuesday, Feb. 2, 2021, a mortuary employee wearing full PPE checks coffins containing the remains of COVID-19 victims in a refrigerated container in Johannesburg. The World Health Organization Monday Feb. 15, 2021, granted an emergency authorization to the coronavirus vaccine made by AstraZeneca, a move that should allow its partners to ship millions of doses to countries worldwide as part of a U.N.-backed program to stop the pandemic.(AP Photo/Jerome Delay, FILE)

Amnesty International said a failure to ensure global access to vaccines represents "an abject moral failure that will ultimately harm rich countries."

"The leaders of G-7 nations are shooting themselves in the foot by failing to ensure the equal distribution of coronavirus vaccines globally,"

Netsanet Belay, the research and advocacy director at Amnesty International, said as the G-7 leaders prepared to hold their first meeting of the year.

The European Union has been criticized for its handling of the bloc's vaccine procurement process. Despite the EU securing a portfolio of up to 2.6 billion doses that would be largely sufficient to inoculate its 450 million residents, vaccinations in Europe have been slowed down by delays in the production and deliveries of shots.

In addition to its COVAX contribution, the EU said it wants to share some of its doses with neighbors in Europe and Africa. Von der Leyen has regularly insisted that global solidarity is needed not only to help the world's poorest countries but also to protect the EU, as "nobody is safe until everybody is safe."

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