



# THE 2021 ARAB-DAC DIALOGUE ON DEVELOPMENT

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## ENSURING THAT THE COVID-19 VACCINE REACHES ALL TO HELP PARTNER COUNTRIES RECOVER

As the world's most developed economies receive and start applying various COVID-19 vaccines, opening the road to recovery in 2021, ensuring equitable global access to the vaccines remains unresolved. The economic aftermath of the crisis in partner countries is already significant and is set to worsen as long as uncertainty over the timing of vaccine rollouts prevails. Beyond increased development finance, effective responses to the pandemic require policymakers in advanced economies to adopt more holistic, coherent and co-ordinated approaches on vaccines, including by ensuring more effective access and rollout in partner countries.

### Accessing and rolling out the COVID-19 vaccines is challenging many partner countries<sup>1</sup>

The case for a co-ordinated multilateral response to the crisis is well established. However, further attention to the access and rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines in partner countries is still needed, not least because of limited availability and their prohibitive cost. Indeed, based on current progress, vaccines will only reach a small percentage of people living in partner countries by the end of 2021, with broader access to vaccines delayed to 2024 or beyond.<sup>2</sup> Providing timely and equitable access to vaccines for all presents enormous challenges, especially when considering competing health priorities and broader commitments in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As highlighted in the [2020 OECD Development Co-operation Report](#), given the scale and immediacy of the need, ensuring the equitable distribution of vaccines and treatments for COVID-19 to all countries is an urgent, global challenge. Achieving this objective requires global solidarity and international co-operation by all relevant actors to raise resources and sustain investment over several years<sup>3</sup>. Simultaneously, failure to meet these challenges jeopardises the global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and limits partner countries' integration into the global economy. It also requires a broader discussion on preparedness for, and response to, the challenges linked to global public goods.

Multilateral, regional and bilateral efforts to increase access to vaccines and treatments in developing countries are increasing. The Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, for example, is a collaborative co-ordination effort bringing state and non-state actors together to develop and deliver vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics. The ACT-Accelerator has a vaccines pillar that aims to deliver two billion doses of vaccines to all participating countries, including the 92 low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2021.<sup>4</sup> This initial drive aims to provide doses for up to 20% of participating country populations, focusing on health care workers and the most vulnerable groups. These efforts, however, remain underfunded and compete for limited vaccine supply, given the bilateral agreements

<sup>1</sup> This background note is based on the key messages of the OECD “*An Equal Shot at Recovery: COVID-19 Vaccines for Developing Countries*” (forthcoming, provisional title), as well as other additional sources.

<sup>2</sup> Duke Global Health Institute (2020), *Research News: Will Low-Income Countries Be Left Behind When COVID-19 Vaccines Arrive?*, Duke University, <https://globalhealth.duke.edu/news/will-low-income-countries-be-left-behind-when-covid-19-vaccines-arrive>

<sup>3</sup> OECD (2020), *Development Co-operation Report 2020: Learning from Crises, Building Resilience*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f6d42aa5-en>.

<sup>4</sup> Gavi (2020), “92 low- and middle-income economies eligible to get access to COVID-19 vaccines through Gavi COVAX AMC”, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, <https://www.gavi.org/news/media-room/92-low-middle-income-economies-eligible-access-covid-19-vaccines-gavi-covax-amc>



negotiated by developed countries. Indeed, Official Development Assistance (ODA) is an essential source of finance for health systems and vaccines in the poorest countries, but ODA will probably fall short to meet growing needs in partner countries. In fact, as of January 2021, the ACT-Accelerator funding commitments total USD 6 billion, with an additional USD 4 billion in projected funding. The ACT-Accelerator faces a USD 27.2 billion funding gap which will be reduced to USD 23.2 billion as projected funds are operationalised.<sup>5</sup> Urgent action to address these financing requirements will boost the impact of the ACT-Accelerator achievements to date, fast-track the development and deployment of additional game-changing tools, and mitigate the risk of a widening gap in access to COVID-19 tools between low- and high-income countries. In addition, providers could consider if whether scarce, additional ODA should be spent on vaccines given the impact of the pandemic on other underfunded sectors and systemic challenges. In fact, efforts to ensure equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines could be the vanguard of more holistic approaches to global challenges<sup>6</sup>.

### **Providers need to scale up their financial support but also devise more effective co-operation**

Beyond increased development finance,<sup>7</sup> effective responses to the pandemic also require to adopt more holistic and coherent approaches to support health systems, including on vaccines, to ensure particularly more effective co-operation on vaccine access and rollout. Critical issues for decision-makers are likely to include availability, affordability, and barriers to production and delivery. Furthermore, increased co-ordination among donor communities, such as the Arab and DAC providers, could ensure that development co-operation providers build on synergies and complementarities to ensure that the new vaccines reach those most in need.

Among other barriers, intellectual property rights are regularly cited as a critical bottleneck to scaling up access to vaccines in developing countries. At the same time, the sharing of technical knowledge, expertise and know-how to scale up vaccine production is increasingly seen as critical for a joined-up response to the current crises and providers could play a critical role in supporting partner countries in this sense.

The rollout of vaccines in partner countries also presents a range of challenges in terms of human capacity and infrastructure. Low-income countries have fewer health workers per capita than in other countries. In this regard, exploring opportunities for strengthened partnerships with civil society, particularly local civil society organisations (CSOs), will be critical given the important role of CSOs to raise awareness and trust in vaccination programmes among communities for vaccine uptake; as well as to support vaccine delivery especially in remote areas that are difficult to reach. Moreover, the vaccines will require refrigerated storage and multiple doses in most cases, which is a constraint for many countries, particularly where electrification levels are low. Other challenges include deciding and managing who will get the vaccines first, and dealing with related communication challenges in the development co-operation sector.

<sup>5</sup> WHO (2021), “ACT-Accelerator update”, *World Health Organization*, <https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator>

<sup>6</sup> OECD (2020), *Development Co-operation Report 2020: Learning from Crises, Building Resilience*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/f6d42aa5-en>.

<sup>7</sup> For more information, see the 2021 Arab-DAC Dialogue on Development Background Note 1 on “Supporting partner countries respond and recover from the COVID-19 crisis”



Against this background, plans to evaluate the use of ODA to support equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for low- and middle-income countries are currently being developed by the participants of the COVID-19 Global Evaluation Coalition, a platform that is multi-stakeholder and open to all Arab and DAC donors alike. Moving forward, both communities will need to build upon existing global initiatives, and only develop new and effective initiatives that can complement existing initiatives to accelerate the international response to tackle the current unequal access to the COVID-19 vaccines and ensure access for those most in need.