

Summary of Spotlight Session: COVID-19 Vaccines for All; Promoting vaccine equity and vaccines for all.

2 February 2022, 11am EST

Background on the event

The COVID-19 vaccine has emerged as major weapon against the pandemic. However, the disparity in the distribution of vaccines has led to developed countries getting the majority of available doses, with many developing and least developed countries struggling to vaccinate even a small number of their citizens. Equitable, accessible, and universal vaccination will be essential to end the pandemic.

Possible solutions, including the waiver of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) tabled at the WTO and supported by over a hundred countries, have not yet been adopted.

Developing countries are also yet to receive technology transfer for vaccines, promised by many producers. This Spotlight Session, organized by the Major Groups and Other Stakeholder (MGoS) Coordination Mechanism (MGOS CM) focused on discussing how vaccine equity is critical in overcoming the pandemic. It aimed to analyse and share recommendations on how low- and middle-income countries could get accessible, universal and free vaccination and how the United Nations and other stakeholder could contribute.

Key Issues discussed

- Sustainable COVID-19 recovery must include equitable vaccination, and no one should be left behind.
- According to the WHO, 6.25 percent of people from low income countries are currently fully vaccinated while this figure raises to 70 percent in higher income countries. No one is safe unless everyone is safe, particularly considering the emergence of new variants. Therefore, making vaccines available to all people everywhere is essential and will demand strong international cooperation and multilateralism.
- The gap in access to vaccination reflects the global inequality, which has been further deepened during the pandemic, including, for instance, unequal financial access. Financial resources are necessary not only to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic but also to improve health systems, ensure social protection, promote climate justice and build resilience for future pandemics.
- An unequal distribution of vaccines will deepen inequality and further exaggerate the gap between rich and poor and will reverse decades of hard-won progress on human development. Inequality should be addressed decisively in all its dimensions.
- Infection fatality rates are twice higher in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) than in higher income countries. Income losses, job losses, and debt burdens are higher in LMIC. Austerity measures and the cost of vaccination impact on resource allocations to health, education and other sectors.
- Lack of access to internet and connection devices (such as smartphones) impacted on access to and registration for vaccination in LMICS.

ECOSOC Partnership Forum

- Women and girls have been particularly impacted by the pandemic, with mental illness reported three times more in women than men and several countries reported increases on gender-based violence and domestic violence.

Key recommendations for action

- ECOSOC is committed to work closely with all stakeholders including the MGoS CM in vaccine equity and reduction of inequality in all shapes and forms.
- COVAX needs to be strengthened with increased funding. Agreement between MICs and global laboratories and vaccine producers should be established to ensure local vaccine supply and facilitate knowledge exchange to ensure vaccine rollout.
- Calls for immediate waiver for TRIPS clauses were made to facilitate vaccine production in different regions, including Asia and Africa.
- Caution against austerity measures (such as those proposed by the IMF) as those can lead to an increase in inequality.
- Countries should be able to suspend intellectual property obligations, including by using Article 9 of the Marrakesh agreement under WTO, which allows for a waiver in exceptional circumstances.
- A human rights-based approach is necessary to contain the pandemic, instead of “market-based solutions” and vaccine nationalism.
- Access of vaccine technology is central to the fight against inequalities and the full strength of ECOSOC as well as HLPF should be used to identify policy solutions.