

Over 60 wealthy nations join WHO's COVID-19 vaccine plan

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More than 60 wealthy nations have joined a WHO-backed programme to facilitate poor countries' access to coronavirus vaccines, but the US and China are not on the list published Monday.

The World Health Organization has in coordination with the global vaccine alliance group Gavi and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) created a mechanism aimed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of any future COVID-19 vaccines.

But the mechanism, known as Covax, has struggled to raise the funds needed to provide for the 92 [low-income countries](#) and other economies that quickly signed up.

WHO had encouraged richer nations to step up to the plate by the end of last week and when the deadline fell, 64 were onboard with another 38 expected to join in "coming days", the three organisations said in a joint statement.

Among those who have signed up are "the European Commission ... on behalf of 27 EU member states plus Norway and Iceland," it said.

The United State, which under President Donald Trump has relentlessly criticised the WHO's handling of the pandemic and which is in the process of withdrawing from the organisation, is not on the list.

And China, where the novel [coronavirus](#) first surfaced late last year, is also absent.

"The purpose of the Covax facility is to try to work with every country in the world," Gavi chief Seth Berkley told a virtual briefing when asked about China's absence from the list.

"I can assure you that we have had conversations and will continue to have conversations with all countries," he said.

'Not charity'

In addition to working to get more countries to join Covax, Berkley said there was also an ongoing dialogue with vaccine-producing countries about "if they have successful vaccines that come out, how we can make sure they are made available to others in the world."

The aim is for Covax to lay its hands on two billion doses of safe and effective vaccines by the end of 2021.

But the mechanism is facing a range of significant challenges, not least a serious funding shortfall.

The WHO has said some \$38 billion is needed for its overall ACT-Accelerator programme, which includes Covax, but also [global collaboration](#) towards developing and ensuring equitable access to tests and treatments for COVID-19, and strengthening [health systems](#).

But so far it has received just \$3.0 billion of that.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus voiced

optimism that so many countries—representing nearly two-thirds of the global population—had agreed to participate in the mechanism.

"COVID-19 is an unprecedented global crisis that demands an unprecedented global response," he said in the statement, warning countries against scrambling to acquire [vaccine](#) stocks for their populations alone.

"Vaccine nationalism will only perpetuate the disease and prolong the global recovery," he said.

"This is not charity," he told journalists.

"It's in every country's best interest. We sink or we swim together."

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