



The Mpox outbreak: a new symptom of global health injustice

On 13 August, the African Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) officially declared the current Mpox epidemic a public health emergency of continental concern. The following day, the World Health Organisation also declared the situation a public health emergency of international concern. This alert level had already been issued two years earlier, when the epidemic was developing in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and spreading to other countries. Since then, the situation has worsened, with record levels of infection and deaths, and the appearance of new variants spreading to other parts of the world.

In this context, and in order to avoid repeating the tragic mistakes made during the Covid-19 pandemic, international cooperation is not only desirable - it is essential. Viruses must be combated wherever they occur. If the global community had taken decisive action earlier on, this epidemic could have been contained and defeated. Today, coordinated and purposeful action must be taken immediately to protect vulnerable populations.

Member States and the European Commission are together donating 566,500 Mpox vaccine doses to the Africa CDC. From a public health aspect, resorting to vaccine stockpiling by high-income countries would be unacceptable, and as such, we welcome this initial reactive and supportive response in cooperation with African authorities. The Africa CDC estimates that 10 million doses will be needed to meet vaccination requirements.

In response to this epidemic, multilateral entities are also rallying. Gavi, the Global Vaccine Alliance, has activated its First Response Fund to support the roll-out of vaccination campaigns. It is also helping to coordinate donations of doses with UNICEF, which has launched an emergency call for tenders to directly negotiate supplies from vaccine manufacturers and contribute to their administration. Unitaid is already integrating Mpox awareness-raising activities into some of its programmes on the African continent and is looking at how it can capitalise on its expertise in deploying innovative solutions for the diagnosis and treatment of the disease. The Global Fund has implemented flexibilities to integrate prevention, detection and response to Mpox in its grants, while supporting community initiatives. These are key to combating diseases affecting often remote populations, who have difficulties in accessing health systems. The WHO has already committed \$1.5 million and estimates that at least \$135 million will be needed over the next 6 months.

However, the response cannot be limited to simply making vaccines available. Prevention, patient care, and vaccination campaigns rollout require increased support for healthcare systems, to increase their

resilience and strengthen responses. The fight against Mpox is not the only health concern that African health systems are facing, and it must not overshadow the broader objective of achieving universal health coverage on the continent. The current epidemic is a stark reminder that although African health systems work on a local level, the health risks, and the risk of a new global pandemic, are very real. Taking action to improve equitable access to quality health services means taking action for health security on an international scale. It is a shared global responsibility.

During the Global Forum for Vaccine Sovereignty and Innovation last June, the urgent need to improve African countries' vaccine manufacturing capacity to reduce external dependency was highlighted. The world must develop more effective mechanisms to ensure our preparedness, prevention, and response to pandemics.

As highlighted by Wolfgang Philipp (Principal Adviser, Chief Science Officer at DG HERA) during the European Parliament's ENVI Committee's Exchange of views on the Mpox outbreak on 4 September: "One of the lessons learned from Covid-19 is that support for Africa and other regions is also important for protecting the EU."

However, we must move away from the charity-model, and away from a system where a country's access to medical countermeasures depends on its income level.

The European Union has a crucial role to play in eradicating the Mpox epidemic and strengthening health systems at international level by:

- Increasing its pledge for more Mpox vaccines as part of the response coordinated by the WHO and the Africa CDC against the Mpox epidemic, as well as by giving greater priority to health and R&D within Team Europe
- Mobilising to support resource replenishment of multilateral health players such as the WHO, Gavi - the Vaccine Alliance, the Global Fund, Unitaid, etc. We call on the European Commission to make a commitment of €360 million to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, for Gavi 6.0.
- Helping to strengthen public and community health systems, in particular by training health staff and agents
- Working towards the adoption of an international agreement on epidemic prevention (in particular, via the One Health approach), preparedness and response, designed to correct a deeply unfair situation in terms of access to healthcare products.