



Jutta Urpilainen
Member of the European Commission

Rue de la Loi, 200
B-1049 Brussels
cab-urpilainen-contact@ec.europa.eu

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Dear Chair,
Dear Vice-Chairs,
Honourable Members,

It has been over a year since COVID-19 hit the world. We are still living under exceptional circumstances, putting all our efforts into the fight against the virus and in the search for a swift and tangible recovery for all. And we are doing so, true to our commitment to international cooperation and multilateralism. Your Committee is preparing a key report on the role of the European Union in addressing the global consequences of the pandemic and I look forward to it.

Since the onset of crisis, the European Commission and the High Representative have led plans for a targeted EU response to support partner countries' efforts in tackling the pandemic, combining efforts from the EU and its Member States and European development finance institutions under a '*Team Europe*' approach. We have reoriented existing programmes and mobilised fresh resources to support partners' efforts to address the impact of COVID-19. In doing so, Team Europe has quickly become our brand of solidarity and a visible way to showcase a stronger Europe in the world.

At present, Team Europe is supporting more than 130 partner countries around the world with a mobilisation of over EUR 40 billion, out of which 65% have already been disbursed. The current amount doubles the original EUR 20 billion pledged in April 2020, and is delivering concrete results.

In advance of our Structured Dialogue on 22 April, I would like to share with you an update of our EU Global Response to the pandemic, which we are rolling out as Team Europe. You will find enclosed to this letter an overview of our response.

I would like to illustrate this with some examples of the impact of our Team Europe response in strengthening partner countries' healthcare, water and sanitation systems, as well as mitigating the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

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1. **Strengthening partner countries' healthcare, water and sanitation systems** through investments worth EUR 8.5 billion, out of which EUR 3.5 billion or 41% have being disbursed on *inter alia*:

- Creating a new partnership between the **Africa Centres for Disease Control and prevention** (Africa CDC) and the European Centre of Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) to strengthen the capacity of Africa CDC to prepare for and respond to public health threats in Africa. This four-year project will facilitate continental harmonised surveillance of infectious diseases, data sharing and early detection of threats, as well as preparedness, risk assessment, rapid response, and emergency operations.
- In partnership with UNOPS and GIZ, medical equipment and vehicles have been delivered to **Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan and Uganda**, including 4.2 million surgical masks, 14 ambulances, 175,000 test kits, and over 1 million of other personal protective equipment for front line medical staff in designated high-risk cross-border areas.
- Supporting the immediate activation of the coronavirus update of the disease tracking system SORMAS in **Nigeria and Ghana**. **Côte d'Ivoire** and **Nepal** now also use this technology to track the spread of the coronavirus, thanks to Team Europe support.
- Supporting a regional disaster preparedness operation in **Cambodia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Vietnam**. Complementing government efforts to support households affected by COVID-19, this innovative operation has reached households that have been left behind or excluded from governmental programmes and at risk of compounded shocks.
- Supporting health sector preparedness and response activities in the **Pacific and Timor Leste**, by joining forces with the WHO-led Pacific Joint Incident Management Team. Activities include support for the limited capacity and capability to diagnose, the treatment and management of COVID-19 cases, and the delivery of essential services, equipment and medication.
- In the **Caribbean**, test kits and personal protective equipment are delivered across the region, and support is provided to increase the capacity of laboratory testing through additional human and material resources and to support quarantine and isolation procedures, as well as contact tracing.
- Strengthening the capacities of the national production of materials and equipment to combat COVID-19 in **Cuba**. 250 ventilators will be produced, distributed throughout the country. Production lines were also set up for elements such as surgical masks, goggles and protective masks, and for the manufacture and sterilisation of swabs for the collection of nasal samples. In addition, the prototype for a non-invasive pulmonary ventilator is being developed.
- In the **Dominican Republic and Haiti** to reduce the risk of the virus spreading in the most vulnerable communities, the EU-funded environment, climate change and disaster risk management project, equips both countries to work together on disaster risk reduction and sustainable management of natural resources, using measures to adapt to climate change.

2. A strong commitment to universal and affordable vaccines.

- Team Europe also made possible a fast and equitable access to safe, effective and affordable tests and treatments. The EU played a leading role in setting up the **COVAX Facility** and contributed significantly with almost EUR 2.5 billion to help secure 1.3 billion doses of vaccines for 92 low- and middle-income countries by the end of 2021. EU support will continue by setting up an EU vaccine sharing mechanism with a strong link to COVAX.
- Vaccine flights have been taking off almost daily, since Ghana, as the first country under the COVAX scheme, received the first 600,000 vaccine doses on 24 February 2021. By 16 April, more than 41 million doses have been distributed to over 100 countries.
- Cooperation with regional organisations such as CARPHA (Caribbean Public Health Agency) in the Caribbean has led to developing a mechanism to support the down-payment of self-financing CARPHA Member States under the COVAX Facility, jointly developed by CARPHA, the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the EU Delegation, based on the population, disease burden, age profile and other factors of each country. As a result, CARPHA ensured the **acquisition of more than 1.2 million vaccine doses** that cover 20% of the population in seven of the eight supported countries (Suriname, Antigua & Barbuda, Barbados, Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, St. Kitts & Nevis), whereas for Jamaica and Montserrat 16% and 10% of the population respectively are targeted.

3. Mitigating the social and economic consequences of the pandemic.

Our ambition does not end with ensuring global, equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines by supporting the delivery of vaccines and the rollout of vaccination campaigns. Team Europe looks farther and promotes sustainable, inclusive and resilient recovery for EU partner countries by allowing governments to deliver essential public services, offering loan guarantees to boost economic activities and bringing public and private sectors to work together.

The EU has disbursed EUR 183 million to support 29 low-income countries' debt relief efforts under the IMF's Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust (CCRT). This support has created fiscal space for much needed social expenditure and public investment. With this contribution, the EU becomes the largest donor to the CCRT. Team Europe's combined share in contributions and pledges (EUR 335.9 million) as of 16 March 2021, corresponds to 51% of the total CCRT.

Furthermore, Team Europe has supported partner countries and organisations in this area through investments worth EUR 28 billion, of which 68% have already been disbursed on *inter alia*:

- Addressing the economic and social consequences of the pandemic in the Central African region, through EU budget support payments in **Cameroon, Central African Republic and São Tomé and Príncipe**, through projects of food security in **Congo and Malawi**, and through job creation and youth empowerment in **Cameroon and Gabon**.
- In **Ghana**, for example, EUR 86.5 million in emergency budget support provided fiscal space to address the pandemic and to continue financing basic public services such as healthcare and education, strengthening its resilience.

- In the **Horn of Africa**, the Regional Approaches for Sustainable Conflict Management and Integration (RASMI) project, implemented by the International NGO PACT, works with border communities in the cross-border region of Kenya, Somalia and Ethiopia, which experiences regular outbreaks of conflict and political instability. It takes a participatory approach, enlisting local influencers to drive change within their communities and ensure sustainability.
- In **Senegal**, the Commission, the EIB and ten Member States together as Team Europe have been able to mobilise close to EUR 600 million to contribute to the government's "Fond force COVID", representing more than a third of the country's EUR 1.5 billion envelope for a socio-economic recovery that will strengthen macro-economic resilience and stability, through budget support.
- In **Ethiopia**, a Team Europe declaration signed by 22 EU Ambassadors mobilised **EUR 487 million** to support Ethiopia's health system and quarantine sites, social protection enhancement and livelihood recovery.
- In **Cameroon**, a new project to facilitate access to finance for micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) has been launched, in collaboration with the EIB. Using local financial intermediaries, the project will help MSMEs to cope with the adverse economic impact of the pandemic, providing liquidity to private enterprises, along with lower interest rates through EU grants coupled with EIB loans.
- A EUR 60 million programme "EU response to the health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in the **Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) region**", implemented in partnership with UNOPS, GIZ, UNICEF, IOM, and Trade Mark East Africa is increasing the capacity of IGAD to coordinate national responses, improving access to health and socio-economic support for vulnerable groups, ensuring borders and critical supply chains are safe for trade and promoting digital solutions to monitor the crisis. The programme is supporting vulnerable groups, including migrants, refugees, internally displaced persons and cross-border communities.
- In **Bangladesh**, the Social Security Budget Support Programme has been refocused to mitigate the COVID-19 impact on workers in the ready-made garment export sector. It will extend social protection for all, including the most vulnerable workers, by frontloading of EUR 93 million budget support payments.
- In **Timor Leste**, complementary support of EUR 12 million is being provided for capacity development of institutions and civil society under the budget support programme "Partnership to improve service delivery through strengthened Public Finance Management and Oversight (PFMO)".
- Budget support operations in the **Caribbean** have continued delivering durable development results by accelerating payments in **Saint Lucia, Barbados, Grenada, St. Kitts and Nevis, Jamaica and Dominican Republic** to progress on economic enablers, also focussing on gender.
- In **Haiti**, EU engagement has provided crucial support to continue progressing on basic education, by facilitating the adoption of the new ten-year strategy for the development of the sector.

- To support the **Caribbean** economies, EUR 10 million were provided to the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF) to help CCRIF member countries pay their disaster insurance for the 2020 hurricane season.

The **Team Europe** approach is recognised not only as the new EU solidarity brand by partner countries, but is also seen by multilateral partners as the effective vehicle for EU added-value, policy coherence and partnership. Key international stakeholders recognise the impact of the joint EU effort. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has commended the EU to #ACTogether and “teach” multilateralism in times of global crisis. GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance and UNICEF acknowledged Europe as the global leader of a truly equitable access to vaccines. Civil society, through CONCORD and Plan International, to mention two, has praised Team Europe for the generous contributions to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, mobilising ODA, fighting inequalities and supporting human development.

The European Union and its Member States and European development finance institutions must continue to lead as Team Europe. The pandemic exacerbated already existing fragilities and has cast a brighter light on the importance of fighting inequalities and building societies that are more inclusive. It has also clearly shown the strength of bonds and connections between peoples and continents, and the transformative power of acting together.

I am determined to seize the opportunity to cement Team Europe as an effective way of working together in the NDICI-Global Europe programming exercise. I look forward to our Structured Dialogue and to continuing counting with your support and that of your Committee.

Yours faithfully,



Jutta URPILAINEN

Enclosure: Annex I Team Europe response to COVID January update
Annex II EU institutions response to COVID January update
Annex III Team Europe response infographic