

# An Africa-Europe Alliance for Funding Health Systems



## Leveraging the strengths of two continents in search of more sustainable health

COVID-19 continues to rage across Europe and Africa, causing thousands of deaths while disrupting lives and economies. Yet this health crisis has spurred greater dialogue between the two continents, highlighting the crucial importance of reinforcing collaboration around pandemic preparedness and response and supporting more resilient health systems.

'An Africa-Europe Health Alliance: Pandemic Resilience and the Future of Healthcare' kicked off a week of events under the umbrella of the first Africa-Europe Foundation (AEF) Forum. Livestreamed from Brussels on 28 June 2021, the event featured high-level participants from key institutions on both continents, with the goal of shaping new political and investment initiatives to boost the healthcare systems of tomorrow.

"This the first opportunity of the AEF's Strategy Group on Health, launched six months ago, to share some of our insights and ideas on harnessing the strengths of our two continents together to deliver sustainable development, health and wellbeing for both Africa and Europe," said **Tamsin Rose**, the debate moderator and Senior Fellow at AEF. She also highlighted how the AEF aims to develop a Foresight Observatory on Health Workforces for Europe and Africa.

## Uniting around vaccine response

"It's urgent that Africa and Europe come together with health as the centrepiece of our partnership", remarked **Agnes Binagwaho**, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Health and Vice Chancellor and Co-Founder of the University of Global health Equity. She called for strategic autonomy for Africa in the field of health, notably in treatment, quality care and enhanced products including vaccines.

**Gunilla Carlsson**, Co-Chair of the AEF Strategy Group on Health and Vice-Chair of the Strategy Committee at the Global Fund, echoed these words, adding that a key lesson learned from the pandemic was that health is all about an investment in individuals and the fact that nations do matter. "Health must be embedded in our societies on a scale that we've perhaps not had because it's not only about illness, it's also about wellbeing," she added.

The COVID-19 crisis has reignited the debate about Africa's relationship with Europe. "We must reframe the way we talk about this relationship, particularly in terms of vaccine distribution," said **Zeinab Badawi**, Chair of the Royal Africa Society, international broadcaster and Member of the Advisory Board

of Afrobarometer. She noted that Africa has 16% of the global population, yet only produces 0.1% of the vaccines against this pandemic, a situation that could be considered “vaccine apartheid”.

### Health-focused funds from international lenders

On the plus side, new COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing hubs are being planned in several African countries, thanks to European and wider international support. **Kristalina Georgieva**, Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, outlined how the IMF has increased concessional lending for Africa by a factor of 13 over a year. She said that Special Drawing Rights (SDR) for more funding are now also being utilised, with a focus on health. “This pandemic must be a frontline objective collectively, so the IMF, WHO, World Bank and other multilateral financial institutions are creating a ‘war room’ for coordinating money to fight the pandemic.”

We must be creative in supporting Africa during this pandemic, said **Maria Shaw-Barragan**, Director of the Department in the European Investment Bank for Lending in Africa, Caribbean, Pacific, Asia and Latin America. She said the EIB is issuing health bonds in cooperation with the European Commission and that these could reinforce vaccine manufacturing in Africa. The EIB also offers de-risking to support the pooling and joint procurement of vital pharmaceuticals and biotech products made by African private sector companies.

The debate also explored ways of better supporting health workforces on both continents, with a global expected shortfall of 18mn expected by 2030. Better training and improved terms and conditions are one solution. Several speakers also recommended that Europe should financially compensate Africa, whenever key African healthcare professionals are “poached” by Europe.

Numerous participants voiced support for tapping far more into Africa’s extensive medical know-how, since this is a continent with widespread experience of dealing with pandemics such as HIV. Several also suggested making greater use of Africa’s traditional medicine and unexploited rich biodiversity for health purposes.

“We need preparedness for future pandemics through partnerships and international financing,” concluded **Sarah Mbi Enow Anyang Agbor**, African Union Commissioner for Human Resources, Science and Technology. Georgieva from the IMF fully agreed, while adding: “There is a pathway to succeed in tackling this pandemic and to build the resilience of health systems, but only if we recognise we are all in this together and work together.”