

#AUEUTracker

Infosheet Bulletin: Health

May 2023

The identification of health as a key priority of the 6th AU-EU Summit in February 2022 marked a turning point for the Africa-Europe health partnership as significant commitments for resources and investments were announced to support more resilient health systems.

One year on, there has been notable progress in implementing some of the Summit commitments, particularly on vaccine delivery and deployment for COVID-19 with at least €475 million mobilised. More than €1 billion from the EU and Member States budgets has been secured for the development of manufacturing infrastructure for health products and to strengthen pandemic preparedness and health security. EU investments are supporting AU initiatives such as the AU digital health strategy and the Africa CDC digital transformation strategy as well as multiple other initiatives in several African countries.

However, some concerns remain. There is significant emerging evidence of the severe damage the pandemic has caused to health gains in Africa achieved over the last decades. On the global stage, the EU and the AU have not converged on a shared position on global health, including on the WHO's first draft of a pandemic preparedness treaty. Some EU Member States have impeded African leaders in their efforts to secure intellectual property rights waivers for COVID diagnostics and therapeutics. Finally, the lack of publicly available information on the development and implementation of many flagship initiatives on health underlines the need for transparency to ensure long-term success and accountability.

The 6th AU-EU Summit in February 2022 put health at the forefront of the partnership between both continents despite high tensions stemming from the EU's rush to secure and prioritize its vaccine supplies over a more equitable share of stocks. While the pandemic and its effects have deeply challenged the Africa-Europe partnership, the Summit led to unprecedented investments and collaboration in health, including support for African strategic autonomy and health sovereignty.

Recent post-pandemic health indicators in Africa¹ show that public health gains of the past decades are in jeopardy, with the resurgence of preventable diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, polio and measles – the latter of which saw a 400% increase between 2021 and 2022. Additional trends include lower routine vaccine coverage, increased maternal deaths and reduced spending on non-COVID essential health services. Europe, in the meantime, is battling with a significant backlog of non-emergency treatments.

Yet, given the current global context, there is a risk that health may take a backseat to other priorities - from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its associated food security and energy crises, to worsening debt stress and the growing impacts of climate change. There's already some evidence of this with health being markedly absent from the State of the European Union address in September 2022.

As the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic has largely passed, both African and European institutions have augmented their health policy strategies to account for the outcomes and lessons learnt from the pandemic response. At the same time, our assessment of the follow-up of the Summit has highlighted the need to ensure health remains politically a central pillar of a renewed Africa-Europe Partnership including policy focus on the health systems and workforces of tomorrow. It is equally important to ensure enhanced alignment between the Summit conclusions and the AU Agenda 2063 (and related AU flagship initiatives in the domain of health).

AU and EU objectives and areas of action

The AU's stated priorities^{2,3} include strengthening public health institutions and workforce; expanding the manufacturing of vaccines, diagnostics, and therapeutics; increasing domestic resources for health security; and creating respectful and action-oriented partnerships. The objectives underpinning these priorities are to:

- 1) achieve universal health coverage including strengthening health systems and improving social determinants of health;
- 2) reduce morbidity and end preventable mortality from communicable and non-communicable diseases and other health conditions.

The EU's global health priority^{4,5,6} is to improve crisis preparedness and response, while its domestic priorities are centred on pharmaceutical development, the Beating Cancer plan, and investing in the resilience of health systems.

These are underpinned by an objective to ensure the well-being of citizens and quality health service delivery through improved coordination and international cooperation of health responses.

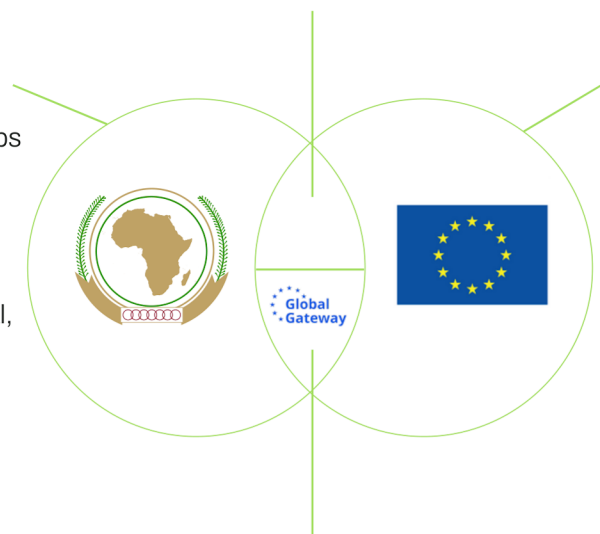
Aligned across AU and EU

- Ensuring equitable access to quality primary health care
- Increasing innovative & domestic health financing
- Promoting drivers of good health & addressing risk factors & premature mortality from non-communicable diseases
- Developing an adequate health workforce and addressing imbalances
- Strengthening health research by leveraging digitalisation & other innovations

Not aligned

AU Domestic:

- Strengthening multisectoral collaboration and partnerships
- Improving governance & accountability and stewardship of health sector at local, national, and regional levels
- Ending preventable maternal, newborn and child deaths,
- Scaling up expanded immunisation
- Reducing malnutrition



Not aligned

EU Domestic:

- Affordable, accessible, and innovative medicine through pharmaceutical manufacturing
- Prevention, detection, and care pathways for cancer
- Stronger interconnected health systems, trained health workforce, and digital health transformation (European Health Data Space)

EU Global:

- Stronger global health system institutions (WHO) and governance (political buy-in)
- Controlling anti-microbial resistance

Aligned and supported by Summit Commitments and Global Gateway

- Enhancing health emergency preparedness & response systems
- Building domestic capacity to manufacture medical products & technologies
- Strengthening domestic regulatory and monitoring capacity
- Combating emerging and re-emerging communicable diseases (AIDS, malaria, hepatitis, other tropical and water-borne diseases)
- Combating pandemics by introducing new international rules, global surveillance, & developing a permanent platform for vaccine development and access
- Access to sexual and reproductive services

Several priority areas of action are not directly aligned between the AU and EU short-term priorities. Within the areas that are aligned, only selected action areas were included under the AU-EU Summit commitments and will be supported through the Global Gateway Investment Package.

Summit commitments on health

The AU-EU Summit commitments on Health focus on mobilising resources towards COVID-19 vaccine delivery and deployment, developing manufacturing infrastructure for health products, and strengthening pandemic preparedness and health security.

Progress highlights

Fair and equitable access to vaccines

- 206,5 million of the 450 million (46%) committed COVID-19 vaccines were delivered by EU Member States in coordination with the Africa Vaccine Acquisition Task Team by October 2022.
- Funds from the European Commission to purchase an additional 200 million doses were redirected to health systems strengthening and workforce training to support effective vaccine deployment in Africa.

Despite the availability of vaccine doses, limited funding to address health system and structural barriers contributed to low and slow vaccine coverage in Africa, reaching just 51.6% compared to 73.1% in Europe as of April 2023.

An Africa-Europe Investment Package for Health

- In December 2022, EU and African partners launched a flagship initiative to enhance sexual and reproductive health and rights in Africa.

There is a lack of public information on the development of many of the announced programmes and regional and bilateral initiatives as part of the Africa-Europe Investment Package.

African Health Sovereignty through support for local mechanisms for procurement and a common agenda for manufacturing health products

- Launch of the Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines and Health Technologies (MAV+) flagship initiative to boost local manufacturing capacities in Africa and strengthen pharmaceutical systems. The EU and its Member States contributed EUR 1bn to strengthen regulatory systems and increase manufacturing capacity in Senegal, Ghana, Rwanda, South Africa and Kenya.
- In March 2023, an EU-Africa pharma and healthcare marketplace and matchmaking event was organized, bringing together the private sector, research organisations, and investors to boost local African health industrial ecosystems.

- Launch of the Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing in April 2021 to increase vaccine production to achieve the goal of manufacturing 60% of Africa’s vaccines in Africa by 2040, compared to <1% in 2022.

While patents for COVID-19 vaccines will not be enforced, limitations based on intellectual property rights will impede local manufacturing of other vaccines in Africa which are required to prevent future public health emergencies.

Significant investments in strengthening the supply side have not been met with similar actions on the demand side for locally produced vaccines risking the longer-term viability of recent investments.

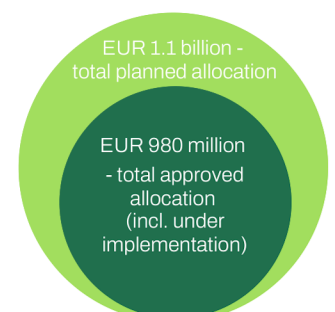
The Africa-Europe Health Partnership on the multilateral stage

- In June 2022, through the WTO Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), the patents on COVID-19 vaccines were waived for five years. However, in December 2022 and the WTO Council indefinitely extended the deadline for a decision on the inclusion of COVID-19 diagnostics and treatments in the waiver. The EU opposed the TRIPS waiver while African leaders actively advocated for it.

While the AU and EU are active in global health governance, there is little evidence of seeking joint positions. Divergent African and European positions in the WHO Pandemic Treaty meetings convened by the WHO Intergovernmental Negotiating Body (INB) highlight the distance between the two continents.

While Europe responds to continental crises emerging from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Africa has partnered with the US and China on comprehensive health initiatives and reform, including the \$20 billion US-Africa Partnership in Health Cooperation and the Health Silk Road with China.

Fig. 1: Team Europe contribution to health, March 2023



Although there has been some progress in realising the Summit commitments, significant gaps remain in health systems strengthening and multilateral partnership between Africa and Europe. There is scope for building an Africa-Europe shared position on critical global health issues such as TRIPS and the WHO Pandemic Treaty, and investing in identifying areas of convergence. Alignment on these and other pivotal global health governance issues will support Africa and Europe in achieving their joint vision outlined at the 6th AU-EU Summit.

An analysis of the Commitments of the 6th AU-EU Summit also highlighted the need for an enhanced policy focus on the future of health systems and ensuring resilient health services. This includes joint advocacy initiatives and immediate-term progress of the health workforce development agenda with policymakers operating at the national and cross-continental level, as outlined in AEF's strategic research on the future of health in partnership with Management Sciences for Health.⁷

The resurgence of preventable infectious diseases such as measles in Africa and the backlog in non-emergency health care in Europe due to the pandemic demonstrate the importance of investing in health emergency preparedness and building resilient health systems on both continents.

DISCLAIMER

Information contained in this Health Bulletin reflects our state of knowledge as of May 2023 and is based primarily on publicly available data published by regional institutions, mainstream media and think tanks operating across Africa and Europe. The Africa-Europe Foundation invites the feedback and collaboration of all partners and stakeholders interested in AU-EU commitment tracking.

Please contact us at info@africaeuropefoundation.org.

1. Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, [African Governments Need a Post-Covid Plan to Protect Essential Health Services](#), 23 November 2022.
2. African Union Commission, [Africa Health Strategy 2016-2030](#)
3. Africa CDC, [The New Public Health Order: Africa's health security agenda](#), 4 April 2023
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5. European Commission, [EU Global Gateway on Health](#), (accessed on 11 May 2023)
6. European Commission, [EU Global Health Strategy](#).
7. Africa-Europe Foundation and Management Sciences for Health, [Policy Brief: Scope for a Future of Health Workforces Initiative](#), October 2022