**Independent SAGE: Call for Global Action**

Covid-19 is a global pandemic. It can only be addressed on a global level. As long as the populations of some countries remain unvaccinated, the virus will continue to circulate around the world and new variants will emerge that run the risk of evading immunity acquired whether through inoculation or previous infections. Omicron is one such example. While we welcome the recent UK Government [pledge of $750m to the Covax programme](https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9240/CBP-9240.pdf), there is much more that can and should be done.

We call for the following as a matter of urgency:

1. That the UK drops its opposition to vaccine patent waivers
2. That the UK provides technology and expertise transfer to support and establish manufacturing hubs for Covid vaccines in all regions of the world as soon as possible
3. That, in the short term, as local manufacturing ramps up, the UK meets its pledges to donate vaccines to COVAX as well as funds (the global vaccination scheme)
4. That the vaccines provided are suitable for use in their intended destinations (timely and pre-planned deliveries to ensure sufficiently long shelf life given storage requirements).

The distribution of vaccine across the world s is marked by extreme inequality. [Low income countries[[1]](#footnote-1) have received 0.6% of the doses administered globally.](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2021/dec/20/global-covid-vaccination-failure-will-harm-britain-gordon-brown-warns) To date, fewer than [4% and 33%](https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations) of people in low and lower middle income countries are fully vaccinated compared to [71% and 69%](https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations) of upper middle and high income countries respectively. Most high income countries have a higher percentage of their population vaccinated with a third dose than African countries have with a first dose.

There are two reasons for this inequality. First, high-income countries have reneged on their pledges to donate vaccines to the poorer countries. These pledges were insufficient in the first place. The World Health Organisation estimated that, in order to meet its target of doubly vaccinating 70% of the world’s population by June 2022 it would need 11 billion doses to be donated. The leading economies pledged only 2 billion doses and, so far, only about one in five of the doses that were promised have been delivered. Even against this abysmal background, the UK comes out particularly badly. For every dose that we have administered domestically, we have donated 0.22 doses, as against a US figure of 0.41 and a European average of 0.45 doses.

But to focus on the quantity of vaccines donated only tells half the story – quality of donation matters too. A joint statement by the WHO, the African Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, and a number of other organisations noted that “the majority of the donations to-date have been ad hoc, provided with little notice and short shelf lives”. This makes it all but impossible for these doses to be administered before they expire.

The second reason for inequality is that a few powerful countries have made it difficult to accelerate vaccine production. It has been estimated that there are [over 100 companies in Africa, Asia and South America](https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/12/15/experts-identify-100-plus-firms-make-covid-19-mrna-vaccines) in a position to manufacture Covid vaccines. But they are unable to because of a refusal to waive patents. It is [over a year since India and South Africa called for vaccine patent waivers](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)32581-2/fulltext), a call which has since been endorsed by the WHO, the EU the Pope and [well over 100 countries](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-01242-1) including the US, Russia and China. The UK remains one of the very few countries now opposing vaccine patent waivers.

In sum, high-income countries have not only abandoned low-income countries to the pandemic, but have actively stopped them protecting themselves. In both respects the UK is one of the worst offenders. This must stop on grounds of humanity, of equality and of public health. The actions we call for are crucial to addressing the Covid-19 pandemic both in the UK and globally.

1. Low income countries are those with GDP of less than $1,026 per capita. They have a population of 0.7 billion people, 9% of the global population. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)