

COVID-19, THE CHALLENGE OF IMMUNISATION AND SPAIN'S CONTRIBUTION

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Summary

In the coming months the international community faces the triple challenge of developing a vaccine against COVID-19, making sure it reaches all the populations who need it and paying for the whole process in the middle of an unprecedented economic and social impact.

Two public-private initiatives, CEPI and GAVI, offer the chance to ensure universal, affordable access to this vaccine in record time, including for middle and low-income countries. The coming weeks will be crucial in determining the political and financial capital these organisations can rely on.

Spain has the opportunity and the responsibility to make a decisive contribution to this effort, by spearheading the European position to be decided at the summit on 4th May and supporting a new model of international cooperation for public health.

1. The Importance of Vaccines in Confronting the Pandemic and its Effects

Unknown infectious illnesses represent a real and growing threat to global health. Apart from their effects on mobility and mortality among the population, their impact is multiplied in the form of devastating healthcare, social and economic consequences. The outbreak of ebola in West Africa in 2014-2015² was a dramatic warning of the effects of a global pandemic like that caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus.

Scientific certainties in the face of these threats are not absolute, but one fact is beyond question: **vaccines are the most effective tool we have within our reach.** These illnesses do not recognise frontiers and are spreading around an unequal, densely populated world in constant movement. COVID-19 shows us that only by guaranteeing the global reach of immunisation will we make all countries safe and release the extraordinary potential of prevention: it is estimated that every dollar invested in immunisation generates a return of 21 dollars. Taking the social benefits of preventing these illnesses in their broadest sense, this rises to a return of 54 dollars on every one invested.³

1. This document was drawn up by the ISGlobal Policy and Global Development team. The information it contains is up to date at the time of writing.

2. The ebola outbreak of 2014-2015 in West Africa caused the death of 11,000 people and had a social and economic cost of 53,000 million dollars. It showed that, on the one hand, there are very few vaccines ready to deal with these illnesses, and on the other that a 100% effective vaccine that would have prevented this enormous human and economic cost had been under development for over a decade and was only ready to be used a year after the outbreak.

3. The return on investment estimates the money not spent and the benefits resulting from total or partial eradication of an illness. A broader approach to this estimate would be directly linked to indicators of the country's economic development in terms of human capital. GAVI (2019). [PREVENT, PROTECT, PROSPER. 2021-2025 Investment opportunity.](#)

In the coming months, Spain and other members of the international community will have to meet a triple challenge:

- **Developing one or several effective vaccines against COVID-19.** In normal circumstances, developing vaccines is a long, costly and risky process. These difficulties are multiplied when it is a race against time, as in this case.
- **Production, marketing and distribution of the vaccines once they have been developed.** The price of vaccines, as well as the logistical cost and difficulties in distribution, represent real barriers for millions of people in dozens of countries⁴. Only by overcoming these barriers can we beat COVID-19.
- **Financing this whole process,** at a time when all the world's economies face a rapid decline in income and an exponential increase in spending. This dilemma calls for the right combination of political will and financial creativity to ensure the resources that are needed right now.

This link offers an overview of research and development of a vaccine:

<https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/03/record-setting-speed-vaccine-makers-take-their-first-shots-new-coronavirus>

The following pages of this report analyse these challenges and the options Spain has for meeting them.

2. International Cooperation and Multilateralism for Immunisation⁵

No single country can make the enormous efforts required to develop and distribute a vaccine. This is stressed by international bodies like the G20 and recognised by the **European Union** itself in its [road map for dismantling the lockdown](#). For this reason, the European Commission has called a [conference on 4th May to seek a commitment](#) by member states to finance the two international instruments that are catalysing this effort: the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

In global health governance and decision-making the role of the **World Health Organisation (WHO)** as the body mandated by states centres on laying down evidence-based public health policies, providing guidelines for controlling and responding to illnesses, promoting systems of epidemiological vigilance and assuring technical support for countries and a response to emergencies. This organisation is run by a mandate from states and answers to them. Coinciding with the millennium agenda, from 2000 onwards experts, scientists, charity, civil society and professional sectors have proposed backing the creation of new actors at multilateral level that can act with greater flexibility, creating mechanisms to foster and implement public health policies on the ground to generate a direct impact on the population and at the same time force states to reinforce their investment in health.

One of the leading backers is **Bill Gates who, through his foundation,** has decided to get involved in setting up new financial mechanisms and strategies in research and development of diagnosis, treatment and vaccines tailored to meet the needs of the most vulnerable populations. An injection of over 2,000 million dollars a year drives the creation of numerous initiatives complementing the work of the WHO. But it is not only the work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation; at the same time research centres, academia, civil society and the private sector are embarking on a new stage in global health governance.

4. This is the case, for example, of child pneumonia, which every year takes the lives of over 800,000 children under the age of five. <https://stopppneumonia.org/latest/global-forum>.

5. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/en/newsroom/news/alliance-multilateralism-covid19/2333394>.

Two new models of **multilateral organisation to complement the WHO**, and of which it would be part, are emerging. These are fiduciary organisations and bodies to develop and innovate in public health goods and services. The first, the fiduciary bodies, deal with coordinating donor countries and prioritising intervention strategies, at the same time optimising the development and distribution of public goods and services. The second, focused on product innovation, work to identify public health needs globally, to develop diagnosis, treatment and vaccines which would not be produced otherwise, or would exist without ensuring universal access to them. Some fifty organisations are part of this new global architecture, most with the participation of the WHO, either directly through their governing bodies or indirectly as observers.

In the field of immunisation there are two main ones: GAVI deals with aligning global strategies and raising the funds to establish synergies and strategies for vaccination by guaranteeing purchasing and affordable prices; CEPI, on the other hand, is responsible for developing vaccines, treatments and diagnosis to prevent epidemics. These two organisations form part of the ecosystem of new actors in global health that appeared around the Millennium Agenda (2000), complementing the role of the World Health Organisation but with more flexibility. These are **alliances between public, private, philanthropic and civil society organisations to mobilise economic, scientific, industrial and logistical resources**. CEPI and GAVI show the critical role of this model in attaining the vaccine and universal access to it. CEPI finances development through the most promising projects, putting in place mechanisms for coordination between all the parties involved in order to speed up development, testing and procurement of the vaccines, and fixing their pricing conditions. Gavi, on the other hand, deals with the purchase and fair distribution of the vaccine in middle to low-countries to ensure a favourable, affordable price, at the same time reinforcing health systems through subsidies.

2.1. CEPI: The Challenge of Developing a New Vaccine

What is CEPI?

This alliance sprang from the backing of the governments of Norway (headquarters of the coalition) and India, the Wellcome Trust and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Davos World Economic Forum, where it was launched in 2017. Since then the governments of the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, Japan, Ethiopia, Australia, Belgium, Denmark and Finland have joined as donors, as well as the European Commission.

How is it run?

The following actors are represented in its organs that make decisions on priorities and goals: its public and private investors; a mixed technical committee which includes the top medical research centres in the world (including those linked to major pharmaceutical firms); and a committee of expert organisations in the field of global health (including the WHO, MSF, GAVI and UNICEF).

What is CEPI doing in the COVID-19 crisis?

The organisation has launched an appeal for 2,000 million dollars of funding over a time-frame of 12-18 months, by which it is hoped that a vaccine will have been developed. This money will be invested in increasing the number of candidate vaccines and financing clinical trials. The goal set is for three candidates to be ready to submit to the health authorities.

Since the appeal was launched on 20th February, the governments of Norway, the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Canada, Holland, Switzerland and Saudi Arabia have raised over 900 million dollars. It has also received a further 10 million dollars from the United Nations Response Fund, a fund raising platform aimed at individuals, companies and organisations.

The scenario for the development of vaccines in early April included 115 candidates, 78 of them confirmed as active and 5 of them already in phase 1 of clinical development for trials⁶.

6. https://cepi.net/news_cepi/cepi-publishes-analysis-of-covid-19-vaccine-development-landscape/.

2.2. GAVI: The Opportunity to Bring the Vaccine to All

What is GAVI?

Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is a key multilateral actor in the global health sphere because of its high impact in the area of immunisation. Since the year 2000 it has managed to vaccinate 760 million children, saving 13 million lives.

How is it run?

This alliance is made up of the World Health Organisation, UNICEF, the World Bank, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the governments of donor countries, the governments of recipient countries, the pharmaceutical industry in developed and developing countries (including the quality generic sector), civil society organisations and scientific research centres.

What is GAVI doing in the COVID-19 crisis?

GAVI is taking immediate actions in response to the pandemic to ensure that immunisation programmes are kept up and expanded and to prevent effects on other illnesses. It also seeks to strengthen health systems against the impact of COVID-19 and reconstruct them when the epidemic is over. Finally, this organisation is the best option to guarantee access to the vaccine at affordable prices and fair distribution as soon as it is available.

So far, GAVI has mobilised 29 million dollars to meet requests from 13 low-income countries in which it works. This sum is hoped to rise to 200 million in the coming weeks. At the same time, in the last six months it has started up projects to support immunisation in middle-income countries which, while not receiving direct subsidies for vaccines, benefit from preferential prices to make them affordable for their health systems.

The GAVI pledging conference in June this year has set a target of raising 7,400 million dollars to cover the 2021-2025 period. The aim is to achieve the **immunisation of 1,100 million children by the end of this year, saving 22 million lives.**

3. What can Spain do and What Does the International Community

The Spanish government has the opportunity to join the group of countries leading the global search for a vaccine and a response to the crisis caused by COVID-19. To seize this opportunity, it must make commitments in three main areas: helping to finance development and distribution of the virus; playing an active part in the multilateral decision-making process; and giving the Cooperación Española network the tools and resources it needs to take an active role in responding to the epidemic.

a) Answering the urgent appeal for finance by the two organisations catalysing efforts to achieve immunisation against COVID-19, as well as **mobilising international support** to do so. Specifically:

- **Spearheading the EU initiative to make the COVID-19 vaccine accessible and affordable for all countries.** A firm position by member states in this debate can assure the conditions of the whole process.
- **Making the maximum effort possible to finance CEPI.** These resources are not only essential for the vaccine to happen, but would allow Spain - one of the countries hardest hit by the pandemic - to be at the core of decision-making in an alliance essential to the present and future response to global epidemic threats.
- **Renewing its commitment to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance**, with the aim of making the vaccine affordable to low and middle-income countries. The latter group in particular includes priority regions for Cooperación Española such as Latin America and North Africa. Making vaccines available at preferential prices for these countries would complement Spanish assistance in strengthening healthcare systems and epidemiological vigilance.

It is important to point out that financial commitment to these two initiatives does not call for budget outlays in the short or medium term. Like most European donors, Spain can commit its resources through the IFFIm mechanism (International Finance Facility for Immunisation, see box below), which the country has used since 2005 to channel donations to GAVI. Spain's commitment could therefore be channelled by renewing the strategic financial commitment to the IFFIm with a timescale of 5 to 10 years. The kind of backing that made it possible to set up this key instrument.

How the IFFIm Financing Mechanism Works

As well as direct contributions to GAVI and CEPI, donors can also channel their funding through this mechanism. Set up in 2006, it was launched as an innovative financing proposition for GAVI programmes through the sale in financial markets of the so-called “vaccine bonds”. These bonds, pioneering in the field of socially-responsible investment, are backed up by long-term contributions pledged by GAVI donors. The aim of all this is to guarantee the predictability and stability of donors' contributions, which are capitalised immediately. It also offers the possibility of making binding long-term commitments - failing to make payments affects the donor's debt rating - without this counting as debt and with an immediate impact.

Between 2006 and 2019, the mechanism channelled over 2,600 million dollars to 71 developing countries through GAVI. Since December 2018, CEPI has also been able to receive funding through IFFIm. Spain was one of its first donors and played an essential part in the startup of IFFIm with a commitment of nearly 190 million by 2025.

b) Reinforcing with these commitments Spain's presence and leadership in defence of multilateralism, the 2030 Agenda and global health, especially in forums like the EU and G20.

- Before the crisis began, the Spanish government had already pledged to place these issues at the core of its foreign and aid policy. The [president of the government](#) himself reaffirmed this commitment recently.
- An active presence in these spheres is not only essential for Spain. It is also vital for the Latin American community, which faces the current crisis with most of its countries in the middle-income bracket and therefore not included in the aid mechanisms available to the poorest countries. Spain can play a key role in making these criteria more flexible to enable many countries in the most unequal region in the world to have access to tools for coping with the crisis.

c) Including a commitment to immunisation in Cooperación Española's response to the COVID-19 crisis

- In its response to the epidemic, Spain must align its multilateral activities, projects and contributions with the strategic priorities of the United Nations (humanitarian), the World Health Organisation (health) and the World Bank (financial).
- In the bilateral sphere, it must reinforce its humanitarian response, knowledge exchange and technical advice with its partner countries. The experience built up in this area by our healthcare professionals, researchers and experts may be of great use.
- Spain can make a major contribution by facilitating a connection between the decision-making spheres in multilateral initiatives and specific interventions in Cooperación Española member countries, a fundamental area that is being made clear by this crisis.