



COVAX: THE FINAL BATTLEFIELD FOR THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

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Vision is the think tank that brings together researchers and young European professionals who all share work and study experiences gained in the best universities and European capitals, and the belief that the technological revolution we are experiencing will lead to a radical change in the forms of institutions, the nature of competition amongst businesses and in the governance of economic systems (more details on www.thinktank.vision).

Among the most recent [projects](#), the one on a "Taxation Systems for the 21st century", "Technologies for the Reform of Civil Justice", "Internet of Beings" (on the convergence between the INTERNET and healthcare/ medical research), "Zoom Economy" (on the impact of remote working on firms' productivity, public services, digital divides and cities). Vision is also developing Social Innovation projects in Europe and Italy that see young people developing technologies that allow the elderly to access remote health services and the elderly engaged in mentoring young people seeking their first job. At the beginning of October 2020 the first [conference](#) on the future of Europe organized by Vision in Messina/Taormina saw the participation of thirty political scientists, economists and intellectuals who produced a MANIFESTO suggesting reforms of the way European Institutions work. During the first COVID19 lockdowns (March-July 2020), Vision launched its "Post-Covid Series with [proposals](#) on the "cities of the future", tourism, compulsory civil service and school.

During these months, the minds of many might have wondered back to the myriad of Hollywood's movies in which the world came close to an end. There was a time in the now ghost movie theatres in which viewers from all around the world could, from the comfort of their seats, enjoy the Armageddon. And the cinema industry largely benefited from this West's temptation to flirt with its own demise. **In these dystopian tales, however, humanity always managed to overcome divisions and unite (as in the scene preceding the final battle of INDEPENDENCE DAY) while fighting for its own survival.**

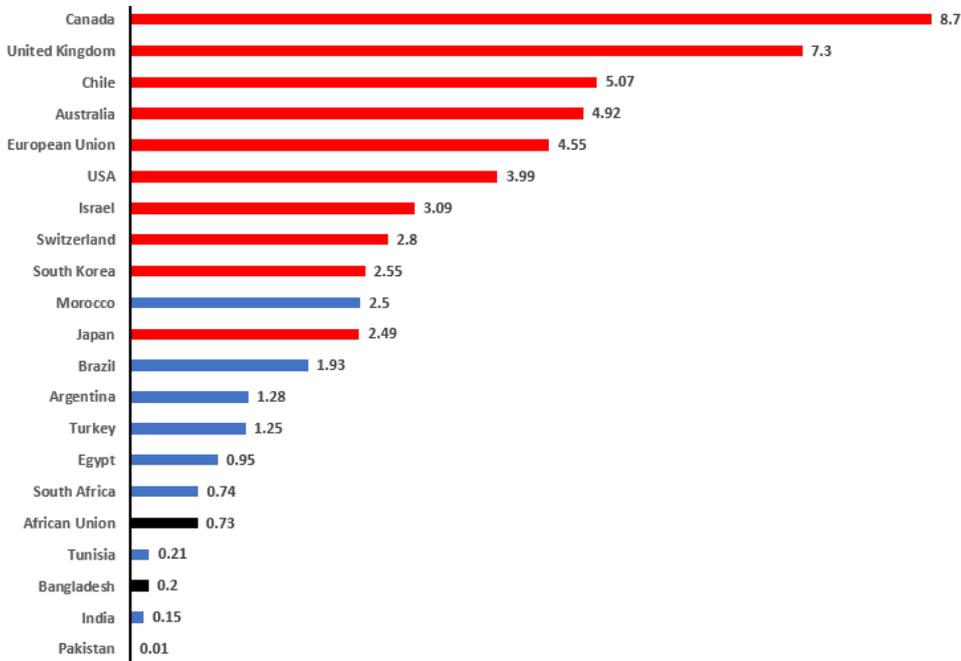
The thing is that the COVID-19 Pandemic and the race to the vaccines is creating even deeper fractures between the North and South of the World. Between an emerging East and a declining West. While the unfolding foolishness and immorality of this might be clear, it still seems like the strategy of the invisible enemy is exactly to divide us.

The big pandemic data are clear and tell of how even greater distances are being carved between different parts of the world. The fifteen countries sharing the Pacific Ocean from Asia and Oceania, have somehow managed to tame the contagion for several months now. They are home to 2,3 billion people and number fewer deaths from Covid 19 than Spain alone. Conversely, the West itself is breaking in two: on the one side with the United States and the United Kingdom who will reach in a few days, their goal to vaccinate 70% of adults and, on the other side, a European Union which is unlikely to reach the target by the end of the year. **Yet, the greatest concern might be located in the black hole opening up beneath Europe. It is a world stretching from Africa and reaching up to Syria of 1.4 billion inhabitants but a vaccination rate of one every twenty individuals.** For example, despite 20 million people live in Cairo alone, Egypt has only delivered 150,000 injections -half of the number that Italy is to inoculate in one day-.

In fact, facing a natural disaster that, for the first time, reaches all the inhabitants of the planet at the same time, coordination would have been essential. There are already 11 billion doses on the market which are enough to vaccinate 80% of the world's population. The World Health Organization (WHO) sustains that leaving the categories less at risk to a less critical phase, hence, vaccinating a third, would be enough to tame the beast. **And, instead, as the following chart shows, rich countries are hoarding doses: the European Union itself could vaccinate with those purchased at least twice everybody, including infants.** (In the graph below the red colour refers to high-income entities, the blue for middle-income level and the black for low-income level).

VACCINE: AN UNEQUAL RACE

NUMBER OF DOSES PER INHABITANT ACQUIRED (IMMUNIZATION NEEDS TWO DOSES PER PERSON WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE VACCINES PRODUCED BY JANSSEN AND CANSINO BIOLOGICS THAT HAVE BEEN COUNTED TWO TIMES; AS OF 9 APRIL 2021)

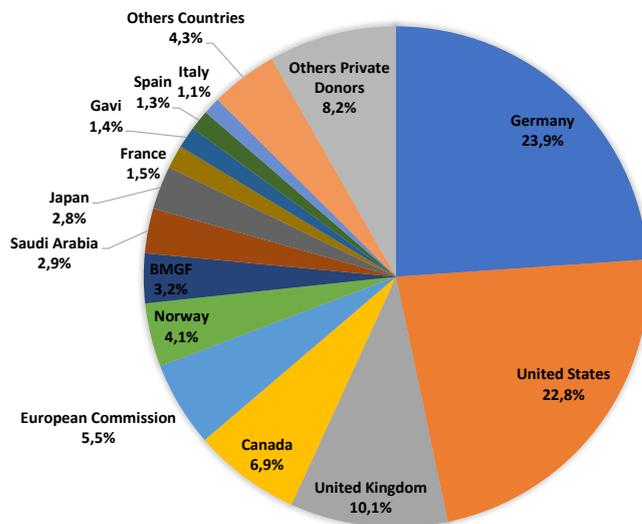


Source: VISION with data DUKE GLOBAL INNOVATION CENTER

The virus seems to be deterred by the heat; in Africa, the number of infections have been significantly lower. However, the unequal distribution of vaccines can produce two different boomerang effects; first, increase the resentment feeding the nightmares that have terrorized our cities. Second, provide the virus with the breeding ground to mutate and visit us on the next boat from Libya. Granted, an alternative possibility could be to seal the frontiers after having reached immunization. Yet this would be a disruption of globalization that would only take us back in time.

The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunizations (GAVI) and the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness and Innovation (CEPI) are collaborating with WHO in the COVAX project. The project started a year ago under the increased awareness of the creeping dangers of remaining selfish towards issues like vaccination. Both GAVI and WHO are based in Geneva and CEPI, founded during one of the WEF meetings in DAVOS, is based in OSLO. COVAX is, by far, the most substantial part of a program funded by an ambitious fund raising campaign, called Accelerator to COVID-19 Tools (ACT). The program also funds treatments, diagnostic devices and personal protective equipment for low-income countries. Germany is the first public funder together with the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF which is also among the main funders of WHO itself, of GAVI and CEPI).

FUNDS RAISED BY ACT PROGRAMME (ACCELERATOR TO COVID-19 TOOLS) INCLUDING COVAX. DISTRIBUTION OF CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED BY FUNDER (100% = 11 BILLION DOLLARS; AS OF 11 MARCH 2021)



Source: VISION with data from WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

And, yet, the project bringing together some of the most talented “social innovators” of the world, is far from its minimum goal of providing at least 2 billion vaccines in 2021. To date, COVAX has distributed 38 million vaccines in 42 days since the first shipment of vaccines to Ghana. Unfortunately, at these rates at the end of the year it would stop at roughly over a tenth of the initial goal. Two-thirds of the 33 billion budget needed to reach the goal are still missing and the total block of unused doses that COVAX expected to receive from the Western countries is shameful.

The slowdowns of the massive production processes of vaccines and the same public pressure to vaccinate even those who wouldn’t need it (in the United States they decided to reach the underage), are taking each of the most developed countries to postpone the promised solidarity. For the head of the World Health Organization, Ethiopian Tedros Ghebreyesus, we should have realized that in the face of such a devious enemy, “we will be safe, only when we are all safe together.” Instead, the world is on the verge of a resounding “moral failure”.

This certainly is a moral failure but also an institutional one; we cannot expect a world order that was born after the Second World War to solve colossal problems armed with a pocket-knife. When balanced against the challenges it aims to address, the budget of the WHO is ridiculously low, and its President does not even have the power to demand countries to share comparable data on the epidemic so to develop strategies that make sense.

In the meantime, Russia and China, which have not yet contributed to COVAX, have managed to reach hundreds of countries including Chile that has almost exclusively used the Chinese SINOVAQ or Hungary, within the European Union, which is relying on the Russian Sputnik V.

The story of the “War of the Worlds” was depicted on the radio by Orson Welles in 1938 in a broadcast that frightened millions of Americans. And it was revived, more recently, by Steven Spielberg in a 2005 film in which a virus becomes humanity’s unexpected ally in the fight against the alien invader. A crowd of terrified humans desperately gather on the pier in the attempt to board a boat and witnessing the reduction on hopes for salvation; Tom Cruise warns: **"We only save ourselves if we do it together"**. If we continue to entrust our salvation to the courageous but insufficient initiative of a few visionaries, we might risk not being able to withstand the impact of a century that is pushing us into a brave, new world.