Q4 QUARTERLY UPDATE

1 October – 31 December 2021

ACTaccelerator
ACCESS TO COVID-19 TOOLS

About this update

The Q4 Update charts progress achieved by ACT-Accelerator partners between 1 October and 31 December 2021 as they responded collectively to the global evolution of the pandemic and continued to support low- and middle-income countries with the development, procurement and delivery of COVID-19 tests, treatments, personal protective equipment (PPE) and vaccines.

Data is drawn from the ACT-Accelerator and Multilateral Leaders Task Force Global COVID-19 Access Tracker (GCAT)[1] which tracks country access to COVID-19 tools. Data is also drawn from WHO Coronavirus (COVID-19) Dashboard[2], UNICEF COVID-19 Vaccine Market Dashboard and consolidated reports from each of the ACT-Accelerator partners.

This Q4 Update features a profile of Honduras and describes how ACT-Accelerator partners have helped mitigate the impact of the pandemic and supported the national COVID-19 response in a country challenged with ongoing humanitarian crises.

State of the global pandemic

The highly transmissible new variant Omicron, first reported at the end of November 2021, has spread rapidly, signalling the alarm for what happens when COVID-19 is allowed to circulate unchecked. Highly vaccinated countries have been badly affected, significantly increasing pressure on health systems, with some reintroducing stringent public health measures. Fragile health systems in low- and middle-income countries are particularly vulnerable to large numbers of cases.

High-income countries have been able to respond by accelerating testing and providing booster doses to their populations. COVAX has continued to scale up global vaccine distribution. However, local availability and affordability of COVID-19 tools is still being driven by market forces, geopolitical interests, and national trade decisions. As a result, gross inequity remains a feature of the global response, with countries and populations experiencing dramatically different health, economic and societal impacts based on their access to COVID-19 countermeasures. For example, recent spot checks across 355 health facilities in Africa showed that just over 39% could test for COVID-19, but out of those facilities that had the capacity to diagnose COVID-19, just under 7% had

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PCR testing available. Despite the call for acceleration in the COVID-19 response made at the UN General Assembly and the US-hosted COVID-19 Global Summit in September 2021, the global target of vaccinating 40% of the world's population in 2021 was missed in 92 countries, and 36 countries didn't even reach 10% coverage. However, Q4 saw an exponential acceleration in vaccine deliveries driven by a determined push from all ACT-Accelerator partners, donors and recipient countries. COVAX will work closely with countries to reach their national COVID-19 vaccination targets in 2022.

ACT-A overall financing

An ACT-Accelerator Strategic Plan and Budget launched in October 2021, estimates ACT-Accelerator funding requirements until September 2022 at US$ 23.4bn, including US$ 16.8bn[3] in grant funding to ACT-A agencies required to address the needs of the most under-resourced countries.

Funding still needed for 2022

US$ 16.6 billion

Commitments for the 2022 budget cycle

US$ 0.2 billion[4]

[1] Update 5th Jan 2022.
[2] Data available at https://covid19.who.int.
[3] Source: Consolidated Financing Framework for ACT-A Agency & In-Country Needs.
[4] Commitments up until 31/12/2021.

Confirmed cases & deaths

From March 2020 to 31 December 2021

278 million cases

5.4 million deaths[5]

Q4 from 1 October 2021 to 31 December 2021

47 million cases

0.7 million deaths

Vaccine doses secured, shipped & delivered in 2021

Doses secured or donated in 2021

2.8 billion

Doses shipped to 144 countries in 2021

958 million

Doses delivered in Q4
(1 Oct - 31 December 2021)

637 million

Doses shipped in December 2021 alone

357 million

Cumulative procurement & delivery of ACT-A tools[6]

Since the beginning of the pandemic to end December 2021

VACCINES

2.8bn vaccines doses secured, or confirmed as donations through COVAX (958m delivered);[7] provided over US$ 1bn in 2021 for technical and financial support to 124 low- and middle-income countries to prepare and rollout vaccines.

2.8 billion

O_2

US$ 267m worth of oxygen supplies procured (US$ 177m delivered), and US$ 520m awarded to countries for medical oxygen.

US$ 267 million

DIAGNOSTICS

146m tests procured (97m delivered), and US$ 910m awarded to countries for tests.[8]

146 million

PPE

US$ 517m worth of personal protective equipment procured (US$ 432m delivered), and US$ 763m awarded to countries for protective equipment.

US$ 517 million

THERAPEUTICS

US$ 8m worth of COVID-19 medicines procured (US$ 4.7m delivered), and US$ 172m awarded to countries for therapeutics and other supportive hospital equipment.

US$ 6 million

[5] Source: Weekly epidemiological update on COVID-19 - 28 December 2021 (who.int).
[6] From start of pandemic to end December 2021. Source WHO COVID-19 Supply Chain Dashboard.
[7] Source: https://www.unicef.org/supply/covid-19-vaccine-market-dashboard.
[8] Global Fund C19RM funding to countries.

ACT-A Diagnostics Pillar

1 October – 31 December 2021

The Diagnostics Pillar is co-convened by the Foundation for Innovative Diagnostics (FIND) and the Global Fund, with WHO leading on regulatory, policy, product procurement and allocation. The Diagnostics Pillar works alongside 50 global health partners to scale-up equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostic tools.

R&D and Product Assessment

- Awarded US$ 21m to 4 manufacturers to accelerate the development of affordable, point-of-care molecular platforms that can detect multiple pathogens in LMICs
- Invested in three self-test manufacturers across diverse regions with plans for 2-3 additional contracts in January 2022 to expand access to self-testing in LMICs
- Developed a dashboard to track the impact of the Omicron variant on commercialized COVID-19 tests listed in FIND's test directory
- Licensing agreement finalized, by WHO's C-TAP and the Medicines Patent Pool, with the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC), for the rapid manufacture and commercialization of a COVID-19 serological test worldwide

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Market shaping and manufacturing

- Completed interim results of six-month Ag-RDT consumption forecasting, and initiated forecasting for molecular tests to inform manufacturers discussions and policy development
- Supported the self-testing market through needs assessment, identification of critical use cases, market segments and market sizing for LMICs, and study of patients' perspectives in nine countries
- Built capacity to expand the use of next-generation sequencing for genomic surveillance in Southern Africa that enabled the early detection of the Omicron variant
- Generated information to support the launch of self-testing policies in six LMICs - India, Malaysia, Nepal, Peru, Rwanda and Thailand (as of Dec 2021)
- Guidelines Development Group established by WHO to update recommendations on the use of Ag-RDTs, including self-testing
- Reached new agreements with several stringent regulatory authorities and three WHO EUL suppliers of COVID-19 Ag-RDTs and achieved significant price reduction for low-and middle-income countries, with new game-changing prices ranging from US$ 1.00 to US$ 2.00 per test or less (reduced from US$ 2.50 - US$ 3.00 per test)
- Published UNICEF COVID-19 Diagnostics Supply Assessment and Outlook Update (2nd Rev, October 2021)
- Launched a cross-pillar genomic sequencing task force to address issues of high variability in costs, which has initiated discussions with suppliers to improve access to sequencing diagnostics
- Supported African Society for Laboratory Medicine (ASLM) to host the diagnostic pricing database to facilitate a comparison of supplier pricing, foster competition and promote price reduction; Thermo Fisher Scientific and Hologic announced respectively, 25% and 39% price reductions in their COVID-19 Global Access prices
- Since 2020, WHO received 168 expressions of interest for emergency use listing; 28 products were listed, 86 applications are active and renewal procedures were initiated for 25 products

Procurement

- Awarded US$ 728m for procurement of tests across about 100 countries via Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) (Cumulative in 2021, not just Q4)
- Since the start of the pandemic 146m tests were procured[1] for countries in need, with 97m tests delivered (Q1 2020 to Q4 2021)
- In Q4 2021 alone, 34.5m tests (7m PCR and 27.5m Ag-RDTs) were procured, and 16m delivered

Demand generation & in-country delivery

- Awarded US$ 136m in funding to support roll-out of diagnostics tools via Global Fund's C19RM (Cumulative for 2021)
- Approved US$ 10m of Centrally-Managed Limited Investment funds to rapidly scale up testing coverage and strengthen laboratory networks and services in Global Fund-supported countries in the African region
- FIND awarded additional US$ 12m in catalytic support for laboratory strengthening, training & capacity building, expansion of community-based testing, and system strengthening activities such as TB-COVID bi-directional screening, with expanded geographic footprint to include support for the Middle East
- Mapped ACT-Accelerator partner activities in the genomic sequencing space to identify gaps in support to LMICs
- Refreshed FIND's COVID-19 tracker, which compiles data reported by up to 170 countries, to enhance data utility and inform actionable insights for decision-makers
- Supported the implementation of Ag-RDT training in 11 countries[2], training 2000 end users to date; enrolled over 4,500 clients in OpenWHO self-learning online course on performing Ag-RDTs
- Selected 13 applicants for funding following successful RFP by Country Support Working Group Operational Research Taskforce to expand community-based applications of SARS-CoV-2 antigen diagnostics
- Strengthened capacity for variant screening and genomic surveillance within member states, providing PCR-based screening kits to 40 Member States[3]
- Provided support to Malawi to improve country workforce capacity for genomic surveillance through training in laboratory genomic sequencing and bioinformatics
- Launched RFP for advocacy projects to create enabling environment for increased access to and use of COVID-19 testing with links to treatment
- Activated more than 5,500 antigen testing sites and trained over 3,000 end users to offer antigen testing across 14 countries in the AFRO region, with Unitaid and CHAI support
- Consulted on the development of the Global Genomic Surveillance Strategy for Pathogens with Pandemic and Epidemic Potential. The strategy aims to provide a high-level vision to strengthen and scale genomic surveillance for quality, timely and appropriate public health actions in local to global systems
- WHO Technical Brief on Omicron, was launched at the end of November and has been updated 6 times to provide up to date synthesis of information and impact on WHO policy, including use of diagnostics

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[1] Through Diagnostics Consortium and ACT-Accelerator partners.
[2] Bangladesh, DRC, India, Kenya, Laos, Nigeria, Philippines, South Africa, Tanzania, Vietnam, Zimbabwe.
[3] Botswana, Comoros, Eswatini, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Zimbabwe.

ACT-A Therapeutics Pillar

1 October – 31 December 2021

The Therapeutics Pillar, co-led by Wellcome and Unitaid, and supported by WHO, enhances the development, manufacture, procurement and distribution of COVID-19 treatments for populations in low- and middle-income countries. The Global Fund, UNICEF and WHO have led procurement and deployment of COVID-19 therapeutics, including oxygen and related products, with support from Unitaid on market interventions to lower oxygen prices and address supply bottlenecks.

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R&D and Product Assessment

- Expanded ANTICOV clinical trials (fluoxetine 40mg/day + inhaled budesonide 400 µg bid for 7 days) collaborating with the TOGETHER trial sites to improve recruitment
- Boosted R&D with development support to a second oral novel antiviral programme, and expanded inpatient platform trial (RECOVERY) to LMIC countries
- Included new recommendations in the WHO *Therapeutics and COVID-19 living guidelines (7th version)* to address the use of convalescent plasma
- Developed a preclinical and clinical evaluation of monoclonal antibodies for infectious diseases, along with a new INN monoclonal antibody (mAb) nomenclature scheme
- Revised the monograph on oxygen for inclusion in International Pharmacopeia (WHO)

Market shaping and manufacturing

- Under the O2 Taskforce, Unitaid and Wellcome awarded US$ 20m towards catalytic emergency oxygen equipment procurement and technical cooperation with countries to support needs assessments, surge planning and setting-up national oxygen systems.
- Negotiated reduction in prices of bulk liquid oxygen and filled cylinders from major suppliers in South Africa
- Secured 17 new bulk tanks for liquid oxygen; eleven vacuum insulated evaporator (VIE) tanks reserved for distribution to LMICs in Q4 2021 and Q1 2022
- Operationalized MoUs in Zambia and Ghana with national agreements to meet surge demand of liquid oxygen across several hospitals
- Identified available pressure swing absorption (PSA) oxygen generating plants by: conducting initial global mapping of PSAs in operation; developing a model to determine the optimal sizes of PSAs that serve the majority of estimated oxygen need; and mapping funding for PSA repairs, developing a global PSA repair tracker with live tool planned to launch in Q1 2022
- Established long-term arrangements with two manufacturers for supply of PSA plants and established contractual frameworks that will reduce lead times and give access to life-saving systems to countries in most need
- Entered into conditional agreements for the supply of Molnupiravir, to support timely access for low- and middle-income countries. Procurement of Molnupiravir is conditional on clinical recommendations, regulatory approvals and compliance with UNICEF quality assurance requirements
- ACT-A partner Medicines Patent Pool signed licensing agreement for Pfizer's COVID-19 oral antiviral treatment, candidate PF-07321332, enabling generics' entry
- Held pre-submission meetings with manufacturers with the aim of accelerating WHO Prequalification for new therapeutic options. Developed an allocation mechanism to ensure that all countries will receive quality and affordable therapeutics

Procurement

- Awarded US$ 680m for procurement of therapeutics across about 100 countries (US$ 508 m for oxygen, US$ 172m for others including C-19 pharmaceuticals and other supportive hospital equipment) via Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism. (Cumulative in 2021, not Q4 only)
- In Q4 2021, WHO procured 434,290 units of dexamethasone for 9 countries. Since the beginning of the pandemic WHO procured 3.8 million units of dexamethasone for 22 countries
- In Q4 2021, UNICEF shipped 7,779,250 million units of dexamethasone to 11 countries. Since the beginning of the pandemic, UNICEF has shipped 17,793,450 million units of dexamethasone to 40 countries.
- Established a strategic stockpile of bio-medical devices and consumables at WHO HQ and in WHO Western Pacific and Africa regions
- Ongoing collaboration between the Global Fund, USAID, WHO and UNICEF to accelerate, harmonize and optimize procurement of oxygen (liquid, PSA, concentrators) and consumables for LMICs
- Oxygen therapy products worth US$ 6m and US$ 7m were procured by UNICEF and WHO respectively in Q4. Since the start of the pandemic, UNICEF has shipped more than 40,000 oxygen concentrators (with a value of US$ 31.9m) to countries. Orders for delivery of Plant-in-a-Box (PIB) were placed for Uganda, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Senegal. WHO purchased five PSA plants for three countries in Q4, worth US$ 750k – and a total of 27 PSA plants worth US$ 8.4m since the beginning of the pandemic

Demand generation & in-country delivery

- Awarded US$ 99m to support roll-out of therapeutics tools via Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism (Cumulative in 2021, not Q4 only)
- The Oxygen Emergency Task Force[1] continued to provide technical support for oxygen work at country level, including: quantification of needs, finding procurement solutions, capacity building, oxygen strategy development, maintenance and oxygen programme design.
- Used the Partners Platform to consolidate country demands for therapeutics

[1] WHO, UNICEF, UNDP, UNHCR, Unitaid, Global Fund, USAID, World Bank, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI), PATH, Every Breath Counts Coalition (EBC), Save the Children, ALIMA, ICRC, MSF, Build Health International and Build Health Initiative.

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ACT-A Vaccines Pillar

1 October – 31 December 2021

COVAX, the ACT-Accelerator's Vaccines Pillar is co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF, guaranteeing fair and equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines in every country. PAHO/WHO works as a procurement partner for COVAX in the Americas.

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R&D and Product Assessment

- Invested in vaccine development across R&D portfolio[1] of 14 vaccine candidates against SARS-CoV-2, including four targeting variants
- Expanded partnership with Gritstone Bio to conduct Phase 1 clinical trial of Omicron vaccine candidate in South Africa - to start in Q2 2022
- Launched four vaccine development partnerships (with MigVax, VIDO, Affinivax and SK bioscience) to develop 'variant proof' or broadly protective coronavirus vaccines
- Supported additional partnerships for clinical research studies to expand access to vaccines in vulnerable LMIC populations, assess immunogenicity, establish efficacy against variants and evaluate fractional doses as additional doses

[1] Since the start of the pandemic.

- Granted Emergency Use Listing for two vaccines (Novavax and Bharat Biotech), for immunocompromised persons and for co-administration with seasonal flu vaccines
- Updated SAGE recommendations for at least 5 vaccines and further specified current policy on vaccinations for children and booster doses
- Launched a call for Centralized Laboratory Network's expansion to Africa, South America and Oceania for measurement of immune responses to COVID-19 vaccines and new viral diseases (open to any laboratory worldwide)

Market shaping and manufacturing

- Issued three WHO EUL recommendations, bringing total to 10, at 61 manufacturing sites in 21 countries
- COVAX Marketplace improved free flow of goods and supplies for COVID-19 vaccines; onboarded over 21 partner suppliers and manufacturers, and completed matches resulting in ~80 million doses of vaccine for COVAX
- Hosted the first South Africa mRNA Hub Steering Committee meeting
- Accelerated technical discussions, due diligence, and selection process for the identification of other mRNA tech donors

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Procurement

- Delivered 637m doses through COVAX in Q4, taking total doses delivered in 2021 to 958m, of which 833m went to AMC participants
- Allocated 893.4m advance purchase agreement (APA) doses by end-2021 to 151 participants. Additionally, 677m donated doses were allocated to 105 COVAX participants
- Accelerated activity in Q4 ("End of Year Sprint") proved highly successful, more than doubling the number of doses shipped in less than two months with 357 million doses in December alone
- Published COVAX global supply forecasts, showed availability of approx. 1.4bn doses by end-2021, of which approx. 1.2bn available for AMC Participants
- Announced more than 1.6bn donated doses for 2021-22
- Launched cost-sharing supply offerings for Moderna, AZ, and J&J – providing AMC participants with opportunity to procure additional doses beyond their COVAX-funded allocations
- Shipped first shipment of 1.6m doses from COVAX Humanitarian Buffer to Iran, for those displaced by regional conflicts; a further four applications to the Humanitarian Buffer, for 2.6m doses, were approved in Q4
- Switzerland was the first country to swap its place in the manufacturers' supply queue to allow COVAX to benefit from 1m Moderna doses in Q4

[2] Using data extracted on the 15th February 2022.

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Demand generation & in-country delivery

Across Gavi, UNICEF, WHO, the COVAX Country-Readiness and Delivery Workstream provided over US$ 1bn in 2021 for technical and financial support to 124 low- and middle-income countries to prepare and rollout vaccines. This funding included:

- Over US$ 220m directly to 57 countries through the Covid-19 Delivery Support to help countries fund national campaigns. This includes funding for vaccinators on the ground, to set up new vaccination sites and expand existing ones, for advocacy campaigns to promote vaccination and combat misinformation, logistics to deliver vaccines to hard-to-reach populations, and for safety and monitoring activities to build confidence and track potential issues
- Over US$ 600m in technical and financial support provided to 124 low- and middle-income countries through ACT-A Humanitarian Action for Children Appeal to prepare and rollout vaccines.
- Supported COVID-19 vaccine cold chain capacity gaps in 74 countries with US$ 51.5m – for refrigerators, freezers, cold rooms, and passive devices
- Supported Ultra-Cold-Chain (UCC) deployment to store >65m in Pfizer doses at any one time
- Surge support of >400 TA staff, 75 stock management specialists, management and leadership capacity
- Humanitarian buffer delivery support
- Intensified country support to 20+ countries with vaccine delivery challenges and lowest coverage; developed vaccine country action plans for 10 countries in Nov-Dec 2021; surge missions from WHO Regional Offices to many countries with low absorption and coverage in Dec 2021
- Intensified demand generation and risk communication and community engagement activities to increase vaccine acceptance, including COVID-19 Behavioural KAP study across 23 EMRO/MENA countries, increased use of online social listening platform - Talkwalker - to track emerging rumours and misinformation; trained over 500 infodemic managers in LMICs to address misinformation, resulting in collection of social and behavioral data and training of 6,901 faith champions to lead vaccine demand generation.

ACT-A Health Systems & Response Connector (HSRC)

1 October – 31 December 2021

The ACT-Accelerator Health Systems and Response Connector (HSRC) ensures all countries have the necessary technical, operational and financial resources to translate new COVID-19 tools into national response interventions to stop transmission and save lives. The HSRC is co-convened by the World Bank, the Global Fund and WHO, with support from the Global Financing Facility (GFF) and UNICEF; it serves as a common link with existing technical and financing country partners and platforms in low- and lower middle-income countries.

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Market shaping and manufacturing

- Personal protective equipment (PPE) prices reduced by around 30% in Q4 2021 (to less than half the price point of Q1 2020)

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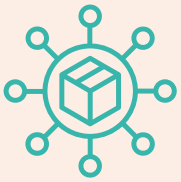
Procurement

- Awarded US$ 487m for procurement of PPE across about 100 countries via Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism. (Cumulative in 2021, not Q4 only)
- In 2021, UNICEF shipped more than 151.1m gloves, 192.5 million surgical masks, 8.5 million N95 respirators, 4.2m gowns, 412 thousand goggles, 3.5m face shields in support of 115 countries, with almost US$ 234m worth of supplies shipped to countries since the start of the pandemic
- In Q4 alone, UNICEF shipped approximately 9.4 million gloves, 49.4 million surgical masks, 619 thousand N95 respirators, 313 thousand gowns, 41 thousand goggles, and 445 thousand face shields – representing over US$ 18.5m in supplies
- Between October and December, the World Bank approved 17 additional projects to support countries for the procurement and deployment of vaccines and other COVID-19 tools

Demand generation & in-country delivery



- Launched the ACT-Accelerator and Multilateral Leaders Taskforce Global COVID-19 Access Tracker to track progress towards global targets for access to COVID-19 vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics and PPE
- In December, the World Bank launched the vaccine deployment tracker which monitors countries' vaccine deployment and related challenges. The data is harmonized with WHO, GAVI and UNICEF.
- Launched the Country Connector on the Private Sector in Health (CCPSH), whichprovides support to countries using the private sector to scale up the distribution of COVID-19 tools
- Strengthened risk communication and community engagement (RCCE) in over 100 countries, through UNICEF, including:
  - » Around 70 countries across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia set up partnerships to create social listening mechanisms to mitigate rumors and misinformation, track concerns of communities and use the data for action
  - » 21 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa invested in capacity building, evidence generation, digital engagement, and technical support
  - » 590,000 people in Afghanistan were reached with information about COVID-19 vaccines and services, with support of social mobilizers, resulting in vaccine uptake
  - » In Sri Lanka, young people's opinions were solicited on COVID-19 vaccines and shared with the Ministry of Health to better tackle concerns and questions
  - » UNICEF's ACT-A Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) funds were used to support RCCE and vaccine demand promotion in Ethiopia, reaching over 20 million people including refugees, internally displaced and conflict-affected populations
- Awarded US$ 599m in funding to support in-country roll-out of health system tools (includes protection of health care workers, support to community-led responses and strengthening of supply chains) via Global Fund's COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM), (Cumulative in 2021, not Q4 only)
- Conducted 3rd round of the *WHO National pulse survey on continuity of essential health services during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Findings from 123 countries/territories suggest that health system bottlenecks and service disruptions persist globally
- Supported 28 countries to establish facility and community surveillance systems for tracking and monitoring frontline health service capacities to deliver essential COVID-19 tools, protect health workers, and maintain essential services
- Documented best practices and lessons learned in monitoring health services and readiness capacities in different contexts and at different phases of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Monitored mortality among health and care workers due to COVID-19 and collated evidence from several country case studies to align priorities and objectives to best protect the health workforce
- Shared lessons from revenue mobilization and expenditure management, adjustments made to Public Financial Management and health financing policies, and ways forward to integrate the learnings into routine practice to enable systems to be better prepared for future emergencies
- Launched new recommendations on mask use by health workers, in light of the Omicron variant of concern
- Approved US$ 120m of COVID-19 Essential Health Services GFF grants to Bangladesh, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi andNigeria, to strengthen their COVID-19 response
- Provided specific grants and technical assistance: US$ 10m to Sierra Leone for integration of public health emergency response, delivery of quality essential health services for the most vulnerable including enabling surge capacity for the health workforce; US$ 16m to Uganda to expand availability of blood products, strengthen community health delivery systems and procure essential medicines and supplies

ACT-Accelerator Country Profile: Honduras

Honduras has faced significant challenges with poverty, insecurity and climate change events causing internal displacements, which have led thousands of Hondurans to flee annually towards the United States and Mexico. Bordering Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, Honduras' population of just 9.5 million adjusts constantly to the significant movement of people traversing this Central American corridor. Drought, seasonal hurricanes and subsequent flooding have created mass hunger, compounded poverty and brought high levels of exclusion, violence and limited access to basic services.

Against this backdrop of rising internal and cross-border displacement, COVID-19 was first reported in March 2020 and Honduras immediately instituted a strict lockdown. By June, the hospital system was overwhelmed and struggling to cope with the rising caseload.

The World Bank/International Development Association (IDA) supported Honduras with US$ 40m to procure personal protective equipment (PPE) for health workers, and supply much-needed medical and laboratory equipment. The COVID-19 Emergency Response and Health Systems Preparedness Project - combining the financial and technical strengths of the World Bank, WHO and UNICEF -quadrupled the SARS-CoV-2 national testing capacity in 2020 (for RT-PCR testing) by establishing three additional molecular biology laboratories in the western, northern, and Atlantic regions of the country. Global Fund COVID-19 Response Mechanism (C19RM) investments further strengthened the laboratory network with both equipment and laboratory supplies, and PAHO/WHO worked closely with the government to improve the health surveillance system and strengthen overall health infrastructure, enhancing access to health by telemedicine, and providing technical cooperation in the form of training courses, guides, and protocols.

The Global Fund supported Honduras with over US$ 10 million in C19RM funds; US$ 737,000 in 2020 and US$ 9,350,000 in 2021

Global Fund C19RM financing also went towards COVID-19 surveillance, and the creation and scale-up of Rapid Response Teams embedded in the community to lead prevention, case finding and contact tracing activities. UNICEF, with the Inter-American Development Bank, the World Bank and PAHO/WHO, supported development of the Honduras COVID-19 communication strategy and worked with the country's private sector to share messages on COVID-19 prevention and biosafety measures, with PAHO/WHO translating key messages into the Garifuna and Miskito languages.

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When antigen diagnostic tests (Ag-RDTs) became available in early autumn of 2020, PAHO/WHO conducted remote training for health workers and donated 135,000 Ag-RDTs to support the roll-out. Ag-RDTs and self-tests are vital, especially in places where PCR facilities are not available. Community testing has a critical role in containing the pandemic and preventing the spread of COVID-19.

COVID-19 Diagnostics Consortium and PAHO/WHO's Strategic Fund delivered 611,500 Ag-RDTs to Honduras.

Honduras became the first country to be awarded C19RM investments to procure the new IL-6 receptor blocker drug Tocilizumab, which acts to suppress an overreaction of the immune system that can be harmful to COVID-19 patients. IL-6 receptor blockers offer hope for patients and families who are suffering from the devastating impact of severe and critical COVID-19. ACT-Accelerator partners were active in promoting the treatment and advocating for the manufacturer to facilitate technology transfer, knowledge and data sharing, and broaden access to this life-saving therapy.

At the end of a difficult year, as the country was facing the growing impact of COVID-19, back-to-back tropical storms in November 2020 brought additional devastation, causing massive displacement, and increasing food and nutrition insecurity.

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The flooding caused by Hurricanes Eta and Iota affected more than three million people in Honduras and left 55,435 people in shelters. At the beginning of 2021, despite the increased risk of COVID-19 and threat of police checkpoints, thousands of Hondurans and other nationalities were on the move.

At border towns in Guatemala and Nicaragua, between 50 to 1,000 displaced people - including many children - congregated each day, most of them with health conditions. When the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Honduras began, thousands of Nicaraguans went to the Honduran border in the hope of accessing this vital protection.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Humanitarian Country Team in Honduras, which counts some 26 NGOs in its ranks, have helped deliver PPE, as well as food assistance and agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizers to thousands of rural households.

UNICEF has shipped more than 15,000 gloves, 1.33 million surgical masks, 140,000 N95 respirators, and other supplies to enable health care workers in Honduras to respond to the pandemic.

The World Bank's Honduras COVID-19 Emergency Response included US$ 20m for vaccines, to be procured via the PAHO/WHO Revolving Fund, the COVAX technical and procurement arm in the Americas.

COVID-19 vaccinations began in March 2021 when COVAX partners shipped over 4.4 million vaccine doses to Honduras, including nearly 3.7 million donated doses from the United States and 180,000 donated doses from Spain. COVAX also supported the nationwide campaign by training health personnel to administer the vaccine doses and ensuring the cold chain and storage was suitable.

Cold chain facilities had to be upgraded and donors supported Honduras to rapidly increase the ultracold capacity in the main biological storage, and two refrigerators and one ultra-low temperature freezer were delivered to each of the nine regions of the country. In addition, 1,425 vaccine-carrying thermoses, 5,760 cold packs, and 200 cold boxes were supplied to prepare for implementing increased vaccine coverage, including vaccines for children.

Despite the logistical and technical challenges of implementing rapid distribution and application of vaccines, the Honduras Secretariat of Health, with technical and financial support from PAHO/WHO, undertook the mass vaccination campaign "VACUNACION".

With support from partners across all sectors, eight intensive vaccination campaigns ran throughout the country, achieving an immediate impact; from 0.8% coverage with two doses as of June 30, 2021, vaccination rates were increased to 58% as of December 2021.

ACT-A Humanitarian Action for Children (HAC) funds enabled UNICEF Honduras to work with country partners to support the government's COVID-19 communication strategy. Producing materials for social media, radio and TV, it placed giant banners on football stadiums, buildings and highways in all 298 municipalities to promote vaccination and key COVID-19 messages aimed at motivating people to get vaccinated, as well as combatting disinformation. An initiative to support youth communication networks and adolescents, has reached 23,000 U-Reporters[1] who are using the platform to share key COVID messages and promote vaccination. At the same time, UNICEF Honduras is advocating for the safe return to schools, and for improvements in infrastructure and WASH services.

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UNICEF Honduras has continued to focus on protecting people along migratory routes – especially families and unaccompanied children – addressing the stigma of returning deportees, and helping to mitigate the high risk for women and children who are quarantined by COVID-19 with abusive partners.

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As of 24 January 2022, a total of approximately 10.3 million vaccine doses have been administered in Honduras. Of the population of about 9.5 million people, over 5 million people have had one dose of vaccine, over 4 million people have had two, and so far, nearly one million people have received COVID-19 booster shots to counter the threat posed by the Omicron variant of the virus.

Minimizing the multifaceted humanitarian impacts of the pandemic in Honduras, especially on the most vulnerable groups in society, has been extremely challenging. ACT–Accelerator partners have brought resources and essential tools within reach, to support country efforts and help reduce the burden of COVID-19.

[1] https://www.unicef.org/innovation/U-Report. U-Report is a messaging tool that empowers young people around the world to engage with and speak out on issues that matter to them.

The ACT-Accelerator Partners: