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# SDC health support to the COVID-19 pandemic

Selected examples of SDC response  
Second edition, July 2021



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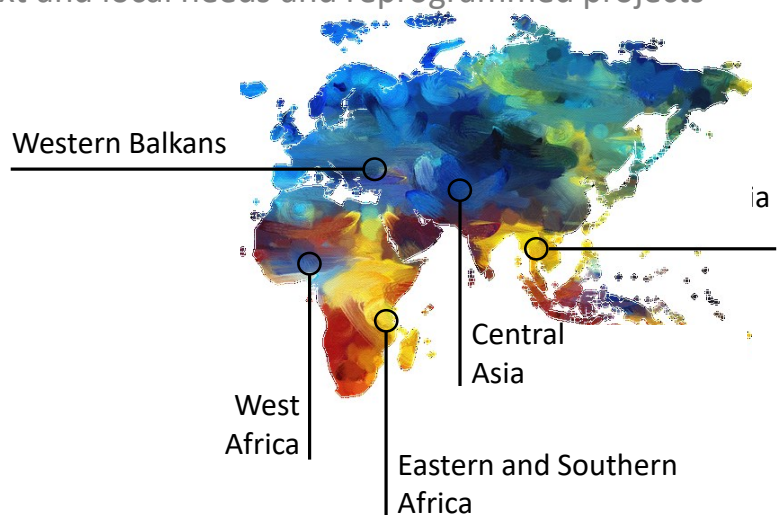


**SDC Health Network**

## *The COVID-19 response – an urgent need to mitigate impacts of the pandemic on health service provision*

As of July 2021, over 190 million confirmed COVID-19 cases have been reported, with 4.1 million deaths<sup>[1]</sup>. While the Northern hemisphere is slowly recovering from a second wave and lifting lockdowns, many countries are still struggling to properly test, monitor, vaccinate against and treat the disease. The COVID-19 pandemic has posed an unprecedented challenge to healthcare, particularly in resource-constrained low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Lockdowns and restrictive measures have complicated service provision and access, and disrupted key supply chains.

From humanitarian supplies to global partnerships, Switzerland has provided a comprehensive response to the COVID-19 pandemic over the past year. The Federal Council approved two credits for the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in April 2020 and April 2021. These involve contributions to multilateral efforts as well as to bilateral and humanitarian programmes in the priority countries for Switzerland's international cooperation. Swiss embassies and SDC cooperation offices have adapted their activities to the context and local needs and reprogrammed projects in response to the pandemic.



### OVERVIEW OF SDC HEALTH RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

# 1

## The Swiss Humanitarian Aid

Switzerland has engaged in immediate response and set up specific air cargo deliveries with diagnostics, personal protective equipment (PPE) and various medical material.

# 2

## The bilateral cooperation

Swiss embassies and Cooperation Offices are responding to local needs in mitigating the economic and social impact through immediate and medium-term adjustments of activities.

# 3

## The global response

The SDC follows a comprehensive approach by supporting global initiatives with focus on equitable access to COVID-19 diagnostics, vaccines and therapies, including health system strengthening.

<sup>[1]</sup> John Hopkins University. Coronavirus Resource Centre. 2020 [cited 2021 Jul 15]. <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>



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# Immediate response

## The Swiss Humanitarian Aid

# 1

In the first half of 2021, the Swiss Humanitarian Aid carried out several supply missions to regions facing an acute COVID crisis

- India: 600 oxygen concentrators, 50 respirators, and body bags.
- Nepal: 1.1 million antigen tests, 40 respirators, 10 oxygen concentrators and personal protective equipment.
- Sri Lanka: half a million antigen tests, 50 ventilators, 150 oxygen concentrators and testing materials.
- Mongolia: 40 respirators, 45 oxygen concentrators. In addition, SDC made a CHF 150'000 donation to the Ministry of Health to purchase three X-ray machines, the region being in dire need of such medical equipment.
- Tunisia: 15 respirators, 60 oxygen concentrators.

The WASH Unit in collaboration with Swiss suppliers sent emergency equipment and supported with capacity building of communities in health and WASH.

- In Chad, following a successful programme initiated in 2017 to respond to cholera outbreak, 30 additional WATA® devices were installed in 30 health centres.
- In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the distribution of 36 WATA® devices ensured that the local population and detention facilities in target areas had access to enough clean water and disinfectant, greatly reducing exposure to COVID-19 contamination risks for particularly vulnerable groups.
- In Syria, more than 280'000 persons (224'000 civilians, 35'000 in-patients, 21'000 prisoners) have benefitted from the supply of 179 WATA® devices through the ICRC.



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# Responding to country needs

## The bilateral cooperation

### SDC in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Lesotho, Zambia, Malawi

Switzerland was among the first donors to assist the region with mitigation measures against the spread of the coronavirus to ensure the continued provision of food assistance (3.7 million people reached in the early stages of the pandemic). Switzerland also supplied health workers with PPE and health facilities with basic equipment and appropriate medical protocols, safeguarding 40'000 people. Additional support includes:

- non-/digital awareness raising campaigns;
- rehabilitation of school water and sanitation facilities benefitting over 27'000 students;
- food and dignity packs, as well as counselling and legal services, to more than 1'300 gender-based violence survivors;
- mental health support for youth hubs via social media;
- self-care delivery pilot models to ensure the delivery of sexual and reproductive health services to 1.2 million adolescents.

### Swiss NGOs in Mozambique, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Sudan, Niger, Zambia, Nepal, India

#### SolidarMed

- Procurement of PPE and oxygen concentrators for local healthcare workers;
- Support in setting up isolation and treatment centres at local hospitals;
- Promotion of WASH in communities and awareness raising of the population to COVID (social distancing, use of masks).

#### MSF Switzerland

- Access to COVID-19 prevention and specialised care while maintaining free quality primary and secondary healthcare;
- Awareness raising among the population and engagement with community through health promotion.

#### Terre des Hommes Lausanne

- Capacity strengthening for the design and production of face protection masks;
- Technical and logistical support to health workers in triage, case management and patient care and case monitoring.

### SDC in Bangladesh

Considering the post-COVID recovery on a long-term basis, the SDC launched a COVID-19 prevention and resilience programme aiming to:

- raise awareness on preventing and treating infectious disease;
- roll out COVID-19 vaccination campaigns;
- enable access to and benefits from social protection schemes;
- providing skills development with job placements and entrepreneurial support.

### Tanzania-Swiss Cooperation Project (HPSS)

The SDC adapted a multi-years cooperation project (HPSS) in order to strengthen future epidemic resilience in Tanzania. The project assists the Government of Tanzania in implementing its COVID-19 Emergency Response Plan and contributed to the national COVID-19 Emergency Preparedness Task Force with :

- awareness raising campaigns (posters, national and local radio spots);
- capacity strengthening of the national call centre for COVID-19 by revamping its IT system, providing new tools and human resources. Since then, the call centre has received more than 250'000 calls.

16 months into the COVID-19 response, the SDC in Eastern Europe (including Southern Caucasus and West Balkans) and Central Asia has shifted the focus of its intervention from extremely rapid ad hoc response and agile reprogramming (across 7 sectors: health, economy, governance, education, water and sanitation, art and culture and humanitarian aid) to systematise lessons learnt from the crisis into longer term adaptation of existing programmes. For example, digitalization components have been successfully integrated in most projects addressing continuous education of family doctors and nurses (Ukraine, Albania), as well as prevention of non-communicable diseases in communities and schools (Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Ukraine, Albania). In certain contexts (Kyrgyzstan), the digital approaches implemented before the pandemic proved very appropriate since the onset of the crisis and could be further capitalized upon. Within the framework of the elaboration of new regional programmes, entry points are being identified to mainstream emergency and preparedness in SDC's health systems' strengthening strategy. A concrete project could be launched in Albania early 2022 already.

### Selected examples of specific health interventions in the region

#### Kyrgyzstan



Creation of 60 telecommunication centres across 5 oblasts and 44 rayons to favour continuous medical education in remote areas of the country prior to the Covid crisis is now massively used by the MoH to deliver training to the medical personnel in times of social distancing.

#### Kosovo

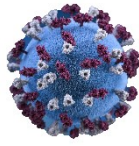
- Provision of life-saving ventilators to assist in the treatment of patients.
- 2'700 vulnerable Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families received essential health packages, including awareness messages tailored to those communities
- Support to health authorities in organizing infection control & prevention trainings for all health staff of Primary Health Care.

#### Ukraine

- Launch of the social advertisement "CARE" campaign addressing prevention and awareness raising activities. Messages are broadcasted and posted on social media on a daily basis and, among other topics, they aim to promote vaccination to a largely skeptical population.

*"Care is... finding the nearest COVID-19 vaccination point for your loved ones".*





# Multilateral cooperation

## The global response

# 3

### Pillar n°1: Access to diagnostics

#### ACT-A Dx Partnership (FIND)



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Access to testing, which still remains the first line of defence, is fragmented and inequitable. Diagnostic testing in UMICs, LMICs and LICs is occurring at a 15% rate of what is taking place in HICs. Over the past year, the Diagnostics Accelerator has enabled access to easier-to-use, accurate and more affordable diagnostic tests: access to 60 million molecular and 120 million affordable, high-quality Ag-RDTs have been guaranteed for low- and middle-income countries. Supply chains are being improved through regionalized manufacturing and plans for technology transfers, enabled by strategic investments and partnerships with key developers and manufacturers.

### Pillar n°2: Access to therapies

#### COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator (Wellcome Trust)

Access to novel safe and efficacious COVID-19 therapies is a key element to avoid hospitalization and death. Focus of the COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator lies on treatments (e.g. novel oral antivirals) that prevent mild or moderate symptoms to progress to more serious forms of the disease. By July 2021, three global platform trials (RECOVERY International, AGILE and ANTICOV) for clinical and pre-clinical work have been launched. Initial discussions about co-funding of phase III trials on promising antiviral product candidates and subsequent global access for people in lower-income countries started with Swiss and other pharma.



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### Pillar n°3: Access to Vaccines

#### Gavi Advance Market Commitment for COVID-19 Vaccine (Gavi COVAX AMC)

When the COVAX Facility was first set up mid-2020, there was no licensed vaccine against COVID-19. Within half a year, several vaccines have received emergency use listing approval by the WHO. Now, as of July 2021, the COVAX portfolio counts 11 vaccines manufacturers and developers, with whom COVAX has signed agreements to secure 3.01 billion doses through 2021 and for early 2022, with 5% destined to neglected, at-risk populations in humanitarian settings.

The COVAX AMC, specifically designed to ensure access to COVID-19 vaccines for LMICs, now counts 89 (out 92 eligible) participants, with Tanzania as the newest member. Over 96 million vaccines have been distributed to 82 of these countries<sup>[2]</sup>. In addition to its financial contribution to the AMC, Switzerland will donate 4 million vaccine doses to LMICs via COVAX AMC. Finally, besides supporting the AMC, Switzerland supports multiple international organisations (e.g. UNICEF) to vaccinate last-mile populations in emergency settings.

<sup>[2]</sup> UNICEF. COVID-19 Vaccine Market Dashboard. 2021. [cited 21 Jul 19] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/supply/covid-19->

## Pictures

1. © Taylor Brandon/Unplash
2. A woman shows a child proper handwashing technique to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in Gujarat, India. © UNICEF/UNI340982 / Panjwani
3. Swiss COVID-19 aid supplies land in Oulan-Bator airport, Mongolia on 13 July 2021 © FDFA
4. Swiss COVID-19 aid supplies land in New Dehli, India on 08 June 2021 © FDFA
5. COVID-19 Hotline, *Ayfya* (Health) call centre, Tanzania © HPSS/SDC
6. Online medical training for family doctors and nurses, Kyrgyzstan. © SDC/Swiss project «MER in the Kyrgyz Republic»
7. Social media CARE campaign post to raise awareness on COVID-19 vaccination. © *Act for Health* project supported by the Swiss Embassy in Ukraine
8. Covid-19 testing, 2020 © World Bank Photo Collection/flickr
9. The ACT-A Dx Partnership (FIND) © FIND
10. COVID-19 Therapeutics Accelerator (Wellcome Trust) © Buda Mendes / Getty Images



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