

The Omicron Variant and the impact on Education.

Vaccine Justice, Variants, agenda on Education: the position of the Global Student Forum

The outbreak of Omicron, the new variant in the Covid-19 pandemic, is a further challenge that concerns not only a difficult health situation or a complex socio-economic framework, but also the role of Education, regarding secondary school, vocational education training institutes, and university students around the world, without forgetting all those who live the community dimension of the campus and, therefore, with a specific risk of infection.

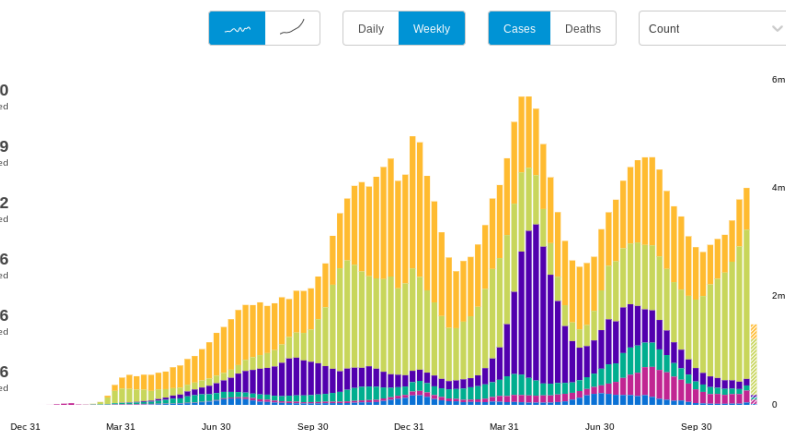
The Global Students Forum, the democratic, independent, and worldwide union of students demands the attention of CSOs and NGOs, trade unions, national and international policymakers, to share an inclusive and long-term strategy that safeguards the education sector against possible closures and against restrictions that could be dangerous for people disadvantaged in society.

In its recent [Update Statement on Omicron](#), the World Health Organisation reports that *“it is not yet clear whether Omicron is more transmissible (e.g., more easily spread from person to person) compared to other variants, including Delta”*. But Western countries (in particular, the United Kingdom and the European Union), Japan and Israel have closed flights from a large number of African countries, as if the variant had an ethnic-linguistic profile!

Situation by WHO Region

Americas	97,016,540	confirmed
Europe	87,265,549	confirmed
South-East Asia	44,572,662	confirmed
Eastern Mediterranean	16,793,616	confirmed
Western Pacific	10,251,596	confirmed
Africa	6,277,676	confirmed

Source: World Health Organization
 Data may be incomplete for the current day or week.



Otherwise, here's what WHO recommends and which we will re-launch: *"it is vitally important that inequities in access to COVID-19 vaccines are urgently addressed to ensure that vulnerable groups everywhere, including health workers and older persons, receive their first and second doses, alongside equitable access to treatment and diagnostics."*

The urgency of a global student-led organization to speak up is also linked to the ['Pact of Rome'](#) (September 5-6) drawn up by Roberto Speranza, as Minister of Health in the government chairing the G20 for 2021: a declaration of great hopes and shared wishes, but which lacks concreteness and strong financial commitments.

The 'Pact' mentioned in a correct sense one our issue:

"The pandemic - they wrote - is affecting mental health and well-being, due to isolation, rising unemployment, food insecurity, increased violence against women and girls and constrained access to education as well as health services including sexual and reproductive health. The pandemic and its socioeconomic consequences have a disproportionately heavy impact on women and girls, older persons, persons with disabilities, young people, children, as well as the poorest and most vulnerable".



However, not even the European Union changed its mind, despite the great solidarity rhetoric: while the pandemic is radically changing the public discourse on debt, spending, and the role of the State, the developed Countries stand as a bulwark of pharmaceutical company licenses, preventing even a suspension. Such selfishness in the defense of a monopoly privilege must be analyzed in a context in which, despite the right reminders of the WHO, the richest Countries in the world are proceeding with vaccination campaigns that reach the third dose. **But while 66% of persons in high-income Countries are fully vaccinated, only 2.5% of people in low-income Countries are similarly covered. Also, just 7% of African people are fully vaccinated and recent data shows that only ¼ health workers in Africa are fully protected. In reiterating our firm adherence to vaccination campaigns, we denounce an incredible and self-defeating selfishness carried out by the richest Countries.** Their vaccination campaign doesn't take into account the hardships of low and middle income Countries (particularly in the African region), relying on charity or on distribution through the COVAX program. The current campaign risks not achieving its aim. Only if the entire global population is covered in an equitable way, it will be possible to avoid dangers in the ongoing recovery of economic, social and educational activities.

On July 12, we held the international online summit *'Vaccine Justice through Fairness, Trust, and Responsibility'* in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. **We collectively decided to advocate for a just distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, supporting countries that have lobbied for vaccines to be treated as a public good free from patents.** Even as the WHO has called for helping the COVAX Facility to support a fair distribution of vaccines, governments in richer Countries have raced to secure vaccines for their national interest and deployed vaccines as a bargaining chip in vaccine diplomacy. These developments illustrate the persistence of global political and economic inequalities that put up barriers to serving the global public good. **An unfair and uneven distribution of vaccines globally can worsen the immediate and long-term harms of the COVID-19 pandemic around the world.**

The Global Student Forum was founded by the All-Africa Students Union (AASU), Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA), European Students Union (ESU) and Organising Bureau of European School Student Unions (OBESSU) and the Latin-American Student Organisation (OCLAE) as well as other national student organisations and movements. It represents the voice of 1999 Student Unions from 121 countries.



Due to the spread of the variants of the virus and the problems in vaccination campaigns that make the use of green passes necessary, we consider this danger still authentic and real.

We ask to recognise and challenge the **colonialist attitudes to the production, acquisition and distribution of vaccines** that have exacerbated the vulnerability of infrastructure and livelihoods in the poorest countries, convening a global summit of government and civil society leaders, inclusive of representative student leaders, teachers and education administrators to advance **a common agenda for universal, fair and equitable access to vaccines and medical equipment and supplies.**

We ask to disavow corporate and **nationalist monopolies on vaccine production, research and development and act to rebalance vaccine distribution that values people first and profit second, endorsing the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) waiver proposal** initiated by India and South Africa and actively advocating for other governments to follow this leadership.

We ask that rapid and PCR tests, as a **method of tracing and asserting data assessment** of whether a person is a carrier of a particular variant in the national (often unfunded) health systems, are made universally available at level of costs: not against vaccines, but in order to improve the tracing capacity, assuring a concrete right to education.

We ask to promote the Secretary General of the United Nations, also supported by the [Resolution 2361 of the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe](#), regarding the vaccine as a public common good, ensuring a high uptake of it countering misinformation, disinformation and hesitancy, also communicating transparently the content of contracts with producers.

We ask to promote **evidence-based and culturally sensitive information**



campaigns as vital, in order to engage the public in order to tackle COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and increase vaccine uptake.

[As written by Fatima Hassan, director of the Health Justice Initiative:](#)

“We need a different way of doing things. More than 100 States have been pressing for at least a year for an emergency suspension of intellectual property rights on technologies crucial to end the pandemic. The waiver would make it easier for South Africa and other Countries to produce vaccines, especially to scale up supplies for everyone and save lives. But it has been blocked repeatedly by the UK and EU countries, for no good reason. [...] If we do not want COVID-19 to continue exacerbating the racist and colonial world order, we need change. And believe it or not, it would benefit the UK and Europe, too. Because you cannot impose rigid policies or build high enough walls to keep the consequences of vaccine inequality out. We need to pull out all of the stops and remove every barrier to vaccine production – and intellectual property is first among them. We need solidarity and cooperation, not knee-jerk travel bans”.

Let’s do it, the time is now!