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"Vaccine nationalism" denounced

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PHOTO SUNDAY ALAMBA, ARCHIVES ASSOCIATED PRESS

In Lagos, Nigeria, a woman receives one of the country's first doses of AstraZeneca's vaccine, manufactured by the Serum Institute of India and provided as part of the global COVAX initiative, in March.

For months, experts have denounced “vaccine nationalism” in the fight against COVID-19. As vaccination accelerates in several countries, its uneven access around the world continues to cause concern, with fears that new variants will thwart current efforts.

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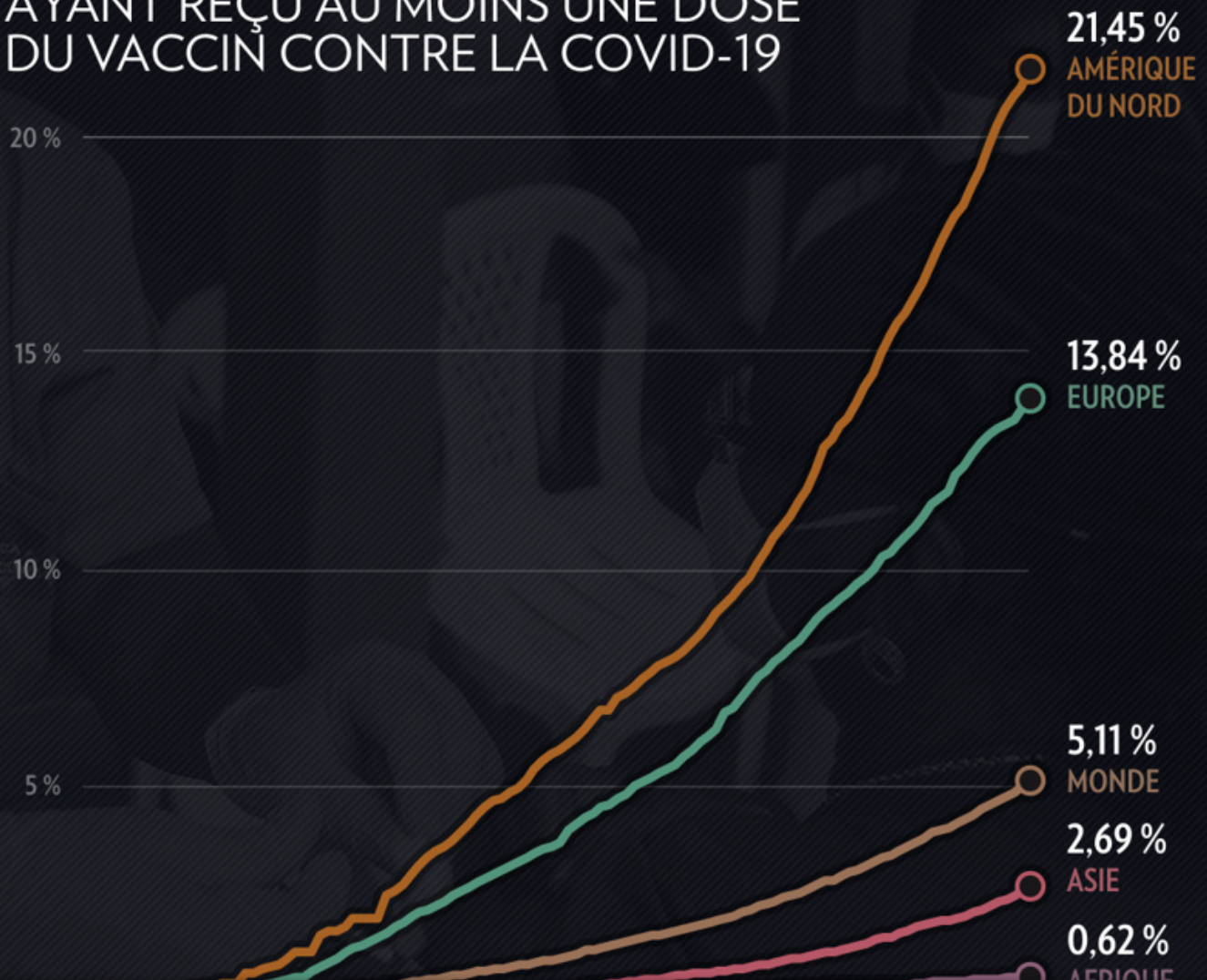
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According to the latest data available from Our World in Data, 5.11% of the population had received at least one dose of the vaccine. For the African continent, the proportion fell to 0.62%.

PROPORTION DE PERSONNES AYANT REÇU AU MOINS UNE DOSE DU VACCIN CONTRE LA COVID-19



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this initiative co-led by the Gavi Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the World Health Organization.

The group started its distribution a little over a month ago, prioritizing vulnerable populations and healthcare workers.

Delays and controversies

The program is experiencing delays. Export restrictions imposed on India, the world's largest vaccine producer, are cause for concern. Some 90 million doses from an Indian manufacturer were to be shipped by COVAX in March and April.

Of the 100 countries that have currently received doses through the program, 61 are low or middle income. Others, like Canada, have drawn criticism for also benefiting from the initiative.

« Initially, all countries were asked to basically centralize their vaccine purchases through COVAX, so that there was central access to access all approved vaccines. It was also an incentive for richer countries to give. »

— Ronald Labonté, professor at the University of Ottawa

For this holder of the Canada Research Chair in Contemporary Globalization and Health Equality, a major failure of the international effort against COVID-19 is the refusal to share information in the development of the vaccine. . Last October, South Africa and India asked the World Trade Organization to lift patents and other intellectual property for vaccines. Without success.

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PHOTO MIKE HUTCHINGS, REUTERS ARCHIVES

Protesters hold signs reading "No Profit on Patents in Times of Pandemic" outside Johnson & Johnson's offices in Cape Town, South Africa, in March.

If the information to make the vaccines were disclosed, there would still be several obstacles before obtaining a fair vaccination, according to the organization Gavi. "The biggest challenge is practical knowledge and the high cost of setting up vaccine production," notes a spokesperson for the organization in an email.

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It assesses vaccine access through the same prism as other geopolitical aspects: not only do governments put their citizens first, but vaccine distribution also enables countries to strengthen their alliances.

Many countries to which China has sold or given vaccines are thus on its new silk road, he notes. “It is clear that China is using vaccine diplomacy to advance a strategic project that was in place long before the pandemic,” he said.

The United States is no exception. “We see the Quadrilateral Dialogue for Security initiative between the United States, Japan, Australia and India, which is not normally focused on public health, making efforts to produce 1 billion dollars. vaccines for the Indo-Pacific region, ”adds Mr. Fidler.

Scott Rosenstein, director of the global health program for Eurasia, an American geopolitical risk consulting firm, is hopeful that as more vaccines become available, they can be better redistributed. “Capacity will improve when countries have enough doses for their own populations,” he said. [That countries put their own people first] is what was expected, but from a global perspective, it is not the best way to lower the health risk. A completely utopian vision would be equitable distribution to all vulnerable populations; this is not what we are seeing. ”

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