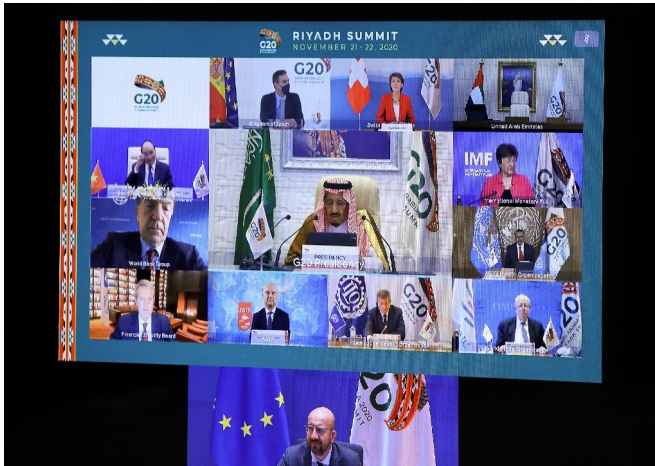


G20 leaders pledge fair distribution of coronavirus vaccine (Update)

22 November 2020



Saudi Arabia hosts a G20 summit in a first for an Arab nation, with the virtual forum dominated by efforts to tackle the coronavirus pandemic and the worst global recession in decades

G20 leaders said Sunday they will "spare no effort" to ensure the fair distribution of coronavirus vaccines worldwide, and support poor countries whose economies have been ravaged by the crisis.

As the pandemic rages, the club of the world's richest nations adopted a unified tone on the challenges ahead during a virtual summit hosted by Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia's King Salman said that the "spirit of cooperation" was needed now "more than ever to face the impact of the pandemic and create a prosperous future for the people of the whole world".

But after a weekend of "digital diplomacy", their closing communique lacked details on many of the issues dominating the talks.

"We have mobilised resources to address the immediate financing needs in global health to support the research, development, manufacturing and distribution of safe and effective COVID-19 diagnostics, therapeutics and vaccines," they said in the statement.

"We will spare no effort to ensure their affordable and equitable access for all people."

While richer nations plan their vaccination programmes, with the US expecting to launch in early December, experts warn that developing countries face hurdles that could deny billions the first proven protection against the virus.



G20 leaders will pledge to "spare no effort" in ensuring the equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccines worldwide. This picture shows nurses helping a Covid-19 patient at an Athens hospital

Calls are mounting for the G20 to help plug a \$4.5-billion funding gap in the so-called ACT-Accelerator, a mechanism led by the World Health Organization that aims to ensure access to tests, treatments and vaccines for all.

In a comment echoed by other leaders, French President Emmanuel Macron said Saturday that the coronavirus crisis was "a test for the G20", stressing there "will be no effective response to the pandemic unless it is a global response".

However, the final communique did not spell out how the massive cost of the exercise would be underwritten.

Virtual reality

The unusual format of the summit, in place of a real-life meeting that coronavirus restrictions made impossible, has produced some awkward interactions, and deprived Saudi Arabia of an opportunity to showcase itself on the international stage.

US President Donald Trump made a brief appearance at the opening session, lauding his administration's achievements on coronavirus before logging off and going golfing, while other leaders braved technical quirks and the lack of opportunity for spontaneous interactions.

The mercurial president made another splash on Sunday, defending his decision to pull out of the Paris climate accord, calling it "unfair and one-sided" and designed to kill the "American economy".

APA citation: G20 leaders pledge fair distribution of coronavirus vaccine (Update) (2020, November 22) retrieved 17 June 2021 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-11-g20-equitable-access-coronavirus-vaccine.html>

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