The European Union's response to Ebola emergency

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West Africa is currently facing the largest and most complex Ebola epidemic on record. Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone are the most affected countries. The disease has already claimed more than 6 000 lives and has seen over 17 000 cases.

The European Union has been monitoring its spread and taken collective action at home and abroad. It has mobilised political, financial and scientific resources to help contain, control, treat and ultimately defeat Ebola. On 24 October 2014 the European Council appointed Christos Stylianides, EU Commissioner for Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Management, as EU Ebola Coordinator. Between 12 and 16 November, he travelled to the three most affected countries together with the EU Commissioner for Health Vytenis Andriukaitis. On 5-7 December EU Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development, Neven Mimica, followed up with a visit to Guinea Conakry to reaffirm the EU's medium and long term support to affected and at-risk countries.

Financial assistance

The EU's total financial contribution to fight the epidemic is over €1.1 billion. This includes funding from the Member States and the European Commission.

The Commission has given €434 million to fight the disease - covering emergency measures and longer-term support.

Since March 2014, the European Commission has allocated close to EUR 60 million in humanitarian funding to address the most urgent needs. These funds are channelled through humanitarian partner organisations, such as MSF, the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent societies, IMC, Save the Children, IRC, Alima, WFP’s Humanitarian Air Service, UNICEF and WHO. EU aid contributes to epidemic surveillance, diagnostics, treatment and medical supplies; deployment of doctors and nurses and training of health workers; raising awareness among the population and promotion of safe burials.

In addition to existing EU and bilateral development partnerships, the Commission is also providing some €210 million in development and early recovery assistance. The funds are thus being delivered now and into 2015. The objectives are to reinforce the capacity of governments to deliver vital public services, notably health care, and maintain macro-economic stability. These funds are also used to strengthen food security and improve water and sanitation. Mobile laboratories for the detection of the virus and training of health workers are also funded through the development assistance. Furthermore, the EU supports the African Union's medical mission in West Africa.

To reduce the risk of further spread of Ebola, EU funding has also been allocated to countries neighboring the affected region where we support early detection and awareness building.

Emergency supplies and expertise

The EU is also sending emergency supplies and experts. The EU Civil Protection Mechanism facilitates the coordinated delivery of material support from the Member States through the Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC).

EU Member States have provided mobile laboratories, treatment centers, ambulances and field hospitals. The EU has organized logistical support including multiple airlifting operations and supports the deployment of navy ships to transport emergency supplies provided by the Member States, such as food aid, medical kits, clean blankets and chlorine for sanitations. EU humanitarian experts, including specialists in hazardous diseases, have been deployed to the three most affected countries.

Medical evacuation

International health workers operating directly on the ground are the backbone of the response to the Ebola epidemic. More health workers are needed. To support their mobilization, a European medical evacuation system has been established to ensure they would get appropriate treatment and
would be transported to hospitals in Europe in case of an infection. Member States are making capacity available for this. The medevac system ensures **evacuation within 48 hours** to an equipped hospital in Europe for international health workers and other EU nationals diagnosed with the virus. Evacuation requests are received through the ERCC and assessed by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

**Research**

There is currently **no specific treatment or vaccine available** against Ebola. To address the urgent need for research into new treatments, the EU has been stepping up its efforts to look for new effective vaccines and medication. Through a partnership with the European pharmaceutical industry under the Innovative Medicines Initiative, a **€280 million** call for proposals has been launched to support research projects involving clinical trials of new vaccines in Ebola-affected countries, the development of fast diagnostic tests and new approaches to manufacture, store and transport vaccines. The call, to which the Commission has contributed half of the budget, will use a new fast-track procedure to get successful projects up and running early next year.

This comes on top of the previously mobilised **€24.4 million** from Horizon2020 that will fund five projects ranging from large-scale clinical trials to tests of existing and new Ebola compound treatments.

The EU is also helping to fight infectious diseases in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ebola, within the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership programme (EDCTP2). This partnership will work with a budget of **€2 billion** over the next ten years, with nearly € 700 million coming from Horizon2020 and a €1.5 billion contribution from EU countries.

**Preparedness**

**The risk of Ebola to the general public in the EU is very low.** Transmission of the virus requires direct contact with a symptomatic patient’s body fluids. Furthermore, the **EU has very high standards of healthcare** infrastructures and preventive care. Nevertheless, there is a small possibility of individuals arriving in the EU with potential Ebola virus infection.

Since the outbreak of the Ebola virus disease, the Commission and the Member States have also been working on **preparedness and coordination of risk management** in close cooperation with of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the WHO.

The Health Security Committee (HSC), bringing together EU Member States and the Commission, meets regularly to coordinate Ebola prevention and readiness. It surveys Member States’ preparedness and has established a list of available Ebola assets which could be shared, including high security laboratories, hospital capacity and medical evacuation equipment. The EU’s Early Warning and Response System for medical emergencies has been activated. HSC is also providing information for travellers in all EU languages and establishing procedures for airports and health authorities on handling possible Ebola cases.

In addition, the Commission has launched the 'Ebola Communication Platform for Clinicians' - an online platform enabling the rapid exchange of information on the treatment and prevention of the Ebola disease. The platform brings together EU hospitals and physicians recognised as reference centres for the treatment of Ebola patients. This network further boosts the level of preparedness and response against Ebola by linking together expertise on treatment of Ebola patients between health care specialists.

**Exit screening**

The WHO has recommended **exit screening** of travellers leaving the affected countries in order to reduce the risk of spread of Ebola. Since the disease's incubation period is up to 21 days, it is widely recognised that such screening can be only partially effective.

The Commission in partnership with the WHO has proposed to carry out an audit of the exit screening measures in the three most affected countries. Its goal is to assess current exit screening practices and identify any gaps. The audit report is due at the beginning of December.

**Advocacy and diplomatic outreach**

From the outset of the crisis, the EU has been supporting and calling for a strong international response coordinated by the United Nations. The EU is in constant contact with the governments of the region through its Delegations as well as with regional organizations such as the African Union and ECOWAS.

The appointment by the European Council of an **EU Ebola Coordinator**, Commissioner Christos
Stylianides, aims to ensure that EU institutions and Member States act in coordination with each other and with international partners. To this end, an EU Ebola Task Force has been set up, bringing together Member States, Commission services, the European External Action Service (EEAS) and representatives of the UN, the Red Cross and NGOs. The Task Force meets daily in the Commission's ERCC, which serves as a platform for coordination of the European response.

General public inquiries:
Europe Direct by phone 00 800 67 89 10 11 or by email