The EU's response to the Ebola outbreak in West Africa

The current Ebola outbreak is affecting the West Africa region: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and now Mali. By 23 October, there have been more than 10141 reported cases, including 4922 deaths from the disease, according to the World Health Organisation (WHO). The disease has already claimed the lives of more than 240 health workers.

What are the challenges and needs?

The Ebola epidemic presents major challenges related to transport, coordination, equipment, and the availability of trained medical staff.

Air transport (commercial air services, air ambulances, or even military airlift) is essential for tackling the epidemic, notably for the entry and circulation of health workers and supplies, medical evacuation and keeping EU diplomatic missions operational in the countries concerned. Closure of borders, suspension of flights and absence of traffic rights for air ambulances are all hampering efforts to solve the situation.

Limited access to some areas in the affected countries also complicates the registration and isolation of patients. Lack of medical equipment to isolate patients and protect medical staff is a further challenge.
The immediate needs include tracing of people in contact with Ebola patients, supplying treatment centres and equipment and secure transport for medical staff and supplies. A scaling up of the presence of trained medical staff is needed.

There are large associated needs, such as social mobilisation, basic health care and response to the growing food insecurity, especially in the quarantined areas.

**What is the EU doing to help?**

The European Union has contributed over 800 million EUR in financial assistance to the fight against the epidemic. This includes funding from the European Commission (more than €200 million) and Member States.

The Commission is active with financial aid, experts on the ground, supply of mobile laboratories, support to the local authorities, reinforcement of national health infrastructures, coordination for the delivery of supplies and medical evacuations.

The Commission's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) has been monitoring developments since the outbreak started in March. 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 and NGOs. The Task Force meets daily in the ERCC, which serves as a platform for coordination of the European response.

The European Council has appointed Commissioner-elect Christos Stylianides as EU Ebola Response Coordinator. His role is to reinforce the European response to the crisis.

**Humanitarian aid**

The European Commission has reacted to the epidemics from the outset. It is active with humanitarian aid, expertise and international coordination. Close to €42 million has been allocated by the Commission for humanitarian aid.

This funding supports the provision for immediate healthcare and helps contain the spread of the epidemic. It is used by WHO, Médecins Sans Frontières and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent for the clinical management of cases, including the isolation of patients and their psychosocial support, the tracing of suspected cases, the supply of personal protective equipment, hygiene and disease awareness, transporting vital equipment to the affected region, as well as providing support to the national authorities.

**EU humanitarian experts**, including specialists in hazardous diseases, have been deployed to the affected countries. They are monitoring the situation and liaising with partners and the authorities.

The EU has set up a humanitarian air bridge to West Africa for the transportation of relief items. The EU Civil Protection mechanism has been activated for the provision of material assistance. France, Austria, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden, Slovakia, Norway, Finland, Belgium and the United Kingdom have responded to the call, providing medical equipment, sanitation products and experts. The Commission supports the transport cost.

The EU has established a system for medical evacuations of international humanitarian workers diagnosed with the Ebola virus. It enables evacuation within 48 hours by plane to designated hospitals within Europe that are equipped to deal with the disease.

**Diplomatic outreach** is being done via the Delegations of the European Union and other channels in order to facilitate the humanitarian response in the countries concerned and to
sensitize governments not to overreact to the crisis with regard to travel restrictions, trade impediments etc.

**Help from the Member States**

In addition to the collective work of the EU, Member States are providing considerable aid directly to the affected region. So far, Member States have pledged more than € 600 million and have provided in-kind assistance ranging from the provision of air lift capacities and personal protective equipment to vehicles and field hospitals.

**Support for Ebola research**

The European Commission has given €24.4 million for urgently needed Ebola research. The funding will go to five projects, ranging from a large-scale clinical trial of a potential vaccine, to testing existing and novel compounds to treat Ebola. The money from Horizon 2020, the EU research and innovation programme, will be provided via a fast-track procedure in order to start work as soon as possible.

The Commission is also working with industry on the further development of vaccines, drugs and diagnostics for Ebola and other haemorrhagic diseases within the Innovative Medicines Initiative.

The Commission has also asked the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP) to include emerging epidemics of concern to Africa, including Ebola, in its work plan. This will allow EDCTP to fund clinical trials on drugs, vaccines and diagnostics in upcoming calls.

**Longer-term Development Assistance**

The European Commission has mobilised over €137 million in development assistance for the countries currently affected by the Ebola virus in West Africa: Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia. This includes:

- €28 million to strengthen healthcare systems, including in the areas of healthcare provision, food security, water and sanitation through an LRRD (Linking Relief Rehabilitation and Development) approach
- €97.5 million will be spent by front loading Budget Support operations to Liberia and Sierra Leone to reinforce governments’ capacity to deliver public services - in particular health care - and maintain macro-economic stability
- €5 million will be provided to the newly established mission of the African Union (AU) "Support to Ebola Outbreak in West-Africa" (ASEOWA). This will support some 100 AU health workers to practice in Sierra Leone and Liberia
- €7.6 million towards providing mobile laboratories for the detection of the virus and training health workers, in Guinea, Nigeria and Liberia.
Apart from this package, the EU has activities in the health sector under ongoing and future development programmes.

In **Guinea**, health is one of the focal sectors for EU development cooperation which is provided through the European Development Fund (EDF). A large-scale project was launched at the end of last year to support the health sector in Guinea. Amounting to €29.5 million, it includes a €9.5 million contribution from the Agence Française pour le Développement. The project aims to build the capacities of the Ministry of Health, improve access to quality basic health services and ensure the access to essential medicines. Health facilities are supported, among other activities, through the training of health workers (midwives, technicians, state-employed nurses) as well as the construction, expansion and rehabilitation of facilities and equipment. The Forest region has been identified as the main area of intervention.

The budget foreseen for health in the 11th EDF for the period 2014-2020 is €40 million and €84 million for urban sanitation.

Under the 11th EDF, the EU is also considering a State Building Contract for Guinea in 2015, if the conditions are met. This would also contribute to mitigating the negative economic effects of the crisis, e.g. by helping to reduce budgetary gaps.

The EU is also currently financing (as part of its €1 billion MDG initiative) a programme in **Sierra Leone** that focuses on maternal health (€24.2 million). This project, implemented by UNICEF, supports the Free Health Care Initiative of the government of Sierra Leone and community institutions to deliver better health services, especially to pregnant and lactating mothers and to children. It helps to provide drugs and medical supplies, as well as trained doctors and health workers, and deliver food products and micronutrients (such as vitamins), for treating malnutrition.

In **Liberia** there is an ongoing Health Sector Support programme to help the government to deliver under the government’s wider health plan and assist progress towards MDG 5 on maternal health, and since 2012 the EU has supported the Government of Liberia, with
payments amounting to €19.8 million from an overall programme of €39.8. The EU plans within the next month to pay the remaining amount to the Government of Liberia.

The EU is also providing support to the governments of Sierra Leone and Liberia to deliver public services and macro-economic stability via general Budget Support.

In **Nigeria**, €240 million of support to the health, nutrition and resilience sectors is foreseen for the 2014-2020 period (part of the 11th European Development Fund). This support will focus on improving policy and institutional governance to enhance the health and nutrition and strengthen the resilience of Nigeria’s most vulnerable households, with a specific focus on the North of the country.

Several European specialist teams of the European Mobile Laboratory (EMLab) project for dangerous infectious diseases have been dispatched to Guinea and Nigeria and Liberia, with three mobile laboratories to support with viral haemorrhagic fever diagnostics, rapid analyses of samples and confirmation of cases. The laboratories have tested over 5,000 samples in Guinea, Nigeria and Liberia, providing quick diagnosis in only 4 hours. Their processing capacity is of 70 samples a day and they have diagnosed over 1,000 cases. Further, a forth mobile laboratory, more robust and self-sustained, will be sent to the region in early 2015 to reinforce diagnosis capacity for the outbreak and train local specialists.

For more information:

Ebola coordination site:


Website of the European Commission Health and Consumer DG:

Commissioner Georgieva’s website:

The European Commission’s work on humanitarian aid and crisis response:

Website of the European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs:

Website of DG Development and Cooperation - EuropeAid: