

# African countries need bold, sustainable, domestic investments to meet immunization goals

Findings and recommendations from PATH's ten countries analysis



Rachuonyo Sub-County Hospital Nurse, Cycilia Okoth, makes preparations to attend to her patients. PATH/Ruth Wanjala

## Introduction

In 2017, African leaders made a historic commitment to improving access to lifesaving vaccines across the African continent by endorsing the Addis Declaration on Immunization (ADI). This pledge included a targeted goal to expand domestic investments ensuring that every African benefits from immunization.

The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the African Union Commission conducted a comprehensive review of the ADI to assess the implementation progress of the ten ADI commitments between 2017 and 2023<sup>1</sup>, highlighting areas of slow advancement and disparities in progress among African Union member states. To corroborate this review, findings from a retrospective study<sup>2</sup>, conducted by PATH in Africa for nine African countries on immunization financing between 2017 and 2023, provided additional evidence—especially on the fluctuating trends in government financing for immunization.

This summary provides key findings and recommendations from PATH's study, highlighting common trends, challenges, and opportunities.

## Target audience and goals

Policymakers at regional and national levels can use this resource to inform legislation and strategies aimed at improving health and national development.

Civil society advocates at global, regional, and local levels can apply these findings and recommendations to engage policymakers and educate communities. They can also inform strategies for government regional accountability toward national, regional, and global targets.

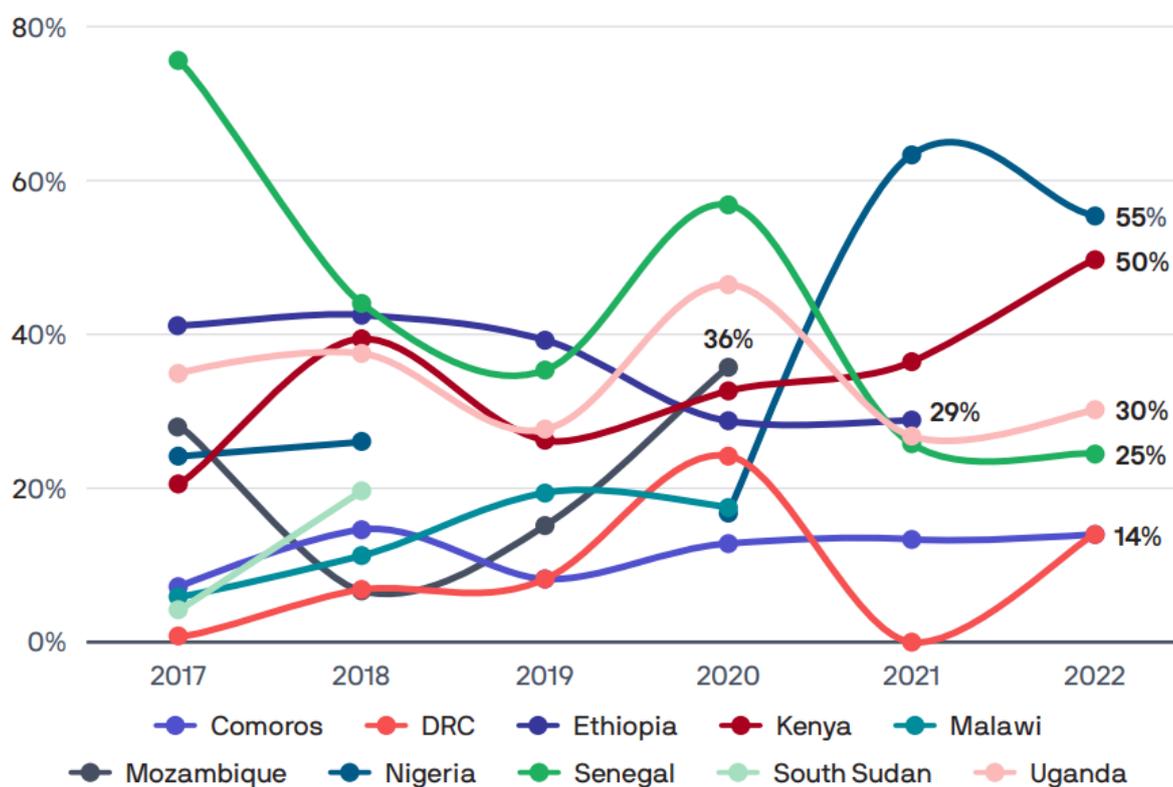
Donors and partners can use this summary to inform investments and collaborations.

**Addis Declaration on Immunization, Goal 2:** Increase and sustain domestic investments and funding allocations to meet the cost of traditional vaccines, fulfill new vaccine financing requirements, and provide financial support for operational implementation of immunization activities by Expanded Program on Immunization programs.

## Key findings

- **Government investments in immunization were low**, comprising a minor portion of health and government health budgets in the countries reviewed (see Figure 1).
- **Vaccine supply and demand face persistent and emerging challenges**, including fiscal constraints, limited data, weak health systems and supply chains, political instability, and natural disasters.
- **None of the countries met the 2001 Abuja Declaration threshold of 15.0 percent** government expenditure for health. Rates ranged from 2.5 percent in South Sudan to 10.0 percent in Malawi.
- **Low tax revenues and high debt levels jeopardized public resources**, particularly for health and immunization.
- **High donor dependence poses barriers to program sustainability**, particularly as Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, transitions approach. Countries rely on donors for at least 20 percent of health expenses, with some countries reporting 45 percent or more of their health budgets from donor resources.
- **High out-of-pocket health expenditures pose financial hardship risks** that are intensified by income inequality and its relation to disparities in health outcomes and immunization coverage.

Figure 1. Trend analysis of routine immunization financing within the cluster.



Source : PATH. Analysis of Selected African Union Member Countries' Progress Toward Sustainable Financing of Immunization. PATH; 2023  
Abbreviation: DRC, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

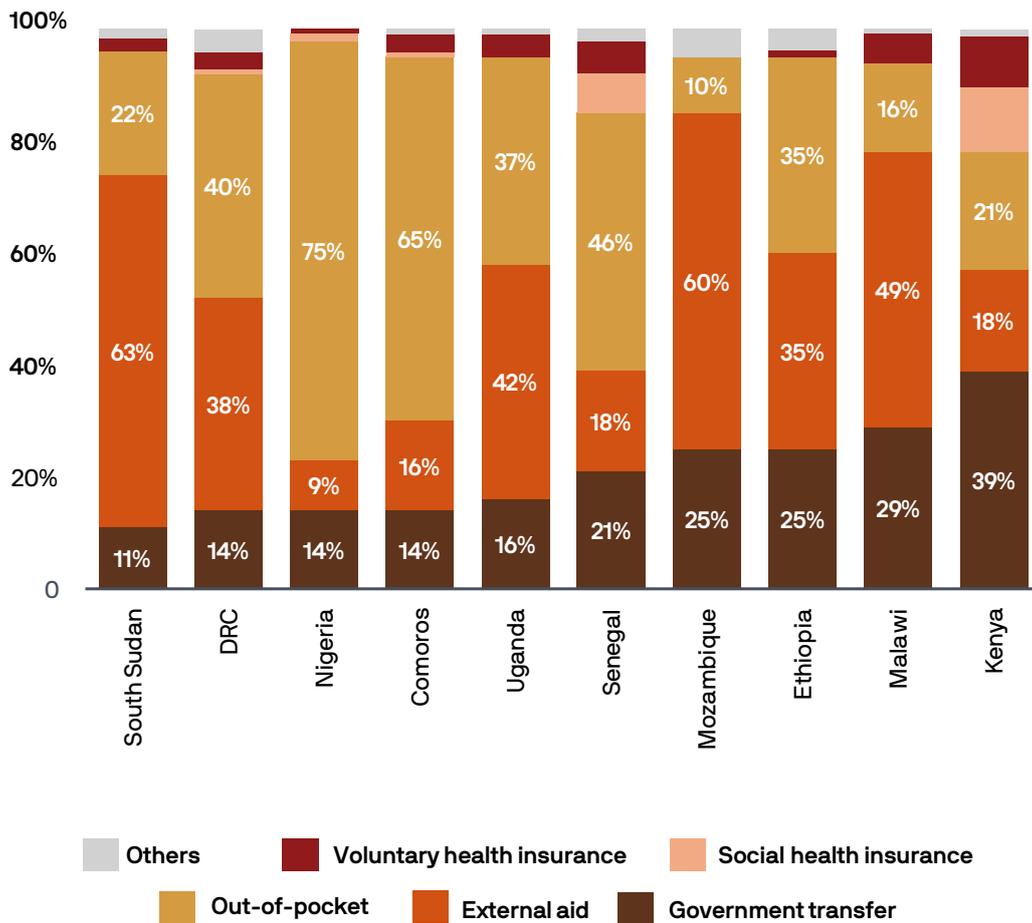
## Immunization progress and challenges for financing in Africa

Immunization is a success story for global health and development, saving millions of lives every year. As a foundation of primary health, immunization services also provide an entry point for other health interventions, making them one of the most cost-effective tools for reducing morbidity and mortality around the world. But 20 million infants still miss out on a full course of basic vaccines every year. More than half—13 million infants—receive no immunization services.

The African continent has made impressive progress in ensuring a better start in life for children, with immunization coverage steadily rising over the past decade. According to the World Health Organization, however, 1 in 5 African children are not fully immunized. The COVID-19 pandemic, in addition, caused major disruptions in immunization service delivery, leading to declines in the number of underimmunized and nonimmunized children in Africa. Furthermore, the benefits are not uniformly distributed. Marginalized and hard-to-reach populations often have limited to no access to immunization.

In all ten countries we reviewed, a combination of high child mortality, low service coverage, and the failure to meet the Abuja threshold for government health expenditure highlighted the urgent need for targeted investments in maternal and child health. This urgency grows as many countries prepare to transition from the donor support (see Figure 2) that has enabled unprecedented immunization gains. Domestic investments across the health system will be critical to improve vaccine coverage and save more lives.

Figure 2. Health financing sources.



Source: PATH. Analysis of Selected African Union Member Countries' Progress Toward Sustainable Financing of Immunization. PATH; 2023  
 Abbreviation: DRC, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

### Policy priorities

Regional commitments like the ADI can motivate action and ensure accountability. As a representation of regional leadership, the African Union can play a critical role in policies that ensure accountability and enhance domestic resource mobilization for sustainable immunization gains.

Regional growth relies on stable economies and healthy populations. African leaders must champion immunization as central to achieving equity and development goals. In addition, support for local and regional vaccine production will expand expertise and transfer knowledge across the continent.

Sustainable financing remains a key challenge, especially during Gavi transitions. While the ADI helped some countries mobilize resources, it lacks an attached funding mechanism. This encourages innovation and local ownership but makes it difficult to attribute initiatives to the ADI. A forthcoming continental immunization strategy under the leadership of the Africa CDC is an opportunity to galvanize immunization efforts and align country, regional, and continental financing priorities under a unified framework that reinforces accountability and coordination.

## A call for action

### Regional - and national - level decision-makers

- **African Union member states ought to actively support and leverage the African Vaccine Manufacturing Accelerator** as a strategic investment to reduce vaccine costs, enhance regional self-reliance, and ensure timely access to life-saving vaccines across the continent.
- **The African Union needs to nudge member states to progressively increase government financing** and budget allocation, prioritizing sustainable financing for immunization in line with the commitments set under the ADI and the Abuja Declaration.
- **The African Union must encourage and support country commitments to expand immunization**, particularly among underserved and vulnerable populations, to address zero-dose and underimmunized children. Cross-border partnerships are also essential for limiting the spread of vaccine-preventable diseases among refugees and displaced populations.
- **The African Union should hold member states accountable for the commitments under the ADI.**
- **Apply and sustain multisectoral investments** (health, education, nutrition, security, etc.) to alleviate the drivers of inequities and ill-health as articulated in Agenda 2063.
- **Explore innovative financing mechanisms**, such as public-private partnerships that support immunization services in the context of health sector funding.
- **Improve the transparency and accountability of immunization financing** to build trust and confidence among stakeholders.
- **Improve data systems** with stronger partnerships and practices for data collection, analysis, management, and distribution.
- **Collaborate regionally to improve immunization among refugees and internally displaced persons.**
- **Increase dissemination and awareness of the ADI**, and support lagging member states.

### Civil society

- **Prioritize targeted advocacy efforts and strategic collaboration** to secure domestic budget allocations for health and immunization services that will meet regional and global development goals while maximizing the ADI's impact, leading to healthier communities and strengthened health systems in Africa.
- **Track commitments to enhance government accountability** on immunization financing, forecasting, and monitoring.
- **Support countries in developing sustainable financing plans** that increase domestic investment in immunization.
- **Advocate for the creation of health emergency strategies**, in partnership with policymakers, that mitigate disruptions to immunization services due to conflict, political instability, and natural disasters.
- **Amplify solutions for social and economic development** to reduce health inequities.
- **Create partnerships that deploy new technologies to strengthen data** collection, analysis, management, and distribution.
- **Build public awareness and trust in vaccines** through outreach campaigns and engagement with community leaders.
- **Advocate for the integration of immunization with other primary health services** to improve access and efficiency.

### Donors and partners

- **Coordinate sufficient investment** to support countries in achieving immunization goals and tracking country progress.
- **Emphasize and pursue links between global, regional, and national goals** for immunization programs and health systems.
- **Incentivize and expand local and regional expertise** in vaccine development and immunization technology.

### References

1. World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa. Addis Declaration on Immunization: Status of immunization in Africa. Accessed June 4, 2025. <https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/immunization/the-addis-declaration-immunization>
2. PATH. Analysis of progress towards sustainable financing of immunization in ten African countries. Accessed June 4, 2025. <https://www.path.org/our-impact/resources/analysis-of-progress-towards-sustainable-financing-of-immunization-in-ten-african-countries/>
3. Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention. Accelerating Immunization: Seven Years of African Progress on Immunization – The Addis Declaration Review Report (2017-2023).

### Sources

Data sources for this review encompassed Expanded Program on Immunization reports, budgets, immunization financing reports, and databases from the World Health Organization, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Gavi, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.

### Acknowledgments

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