



## Choosing Vaccine Equity

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A few months ago, as the COVID-19 pandemic was spreading and vaccine mandates were being considered, I had a conversation with a friend who refused to take the vaccine. Even at risk of losing their job, they were adamant they would not be vaccinated. When their job required the vaccine, they prepared for loss of income. With the potential health and financial risks, I wondered why they were making this choice about the vaccine, so I asked. They responded that they were not opposed to the vaccine. Instead, they said: “I believe everyone should have the right to choose whether or not they are vaccinated. I choose not to be vaccinated.”

COVID-19 vaccine protocols have sparked debates globally. Questions of vaccine efficacy fueled the debate in the early days and were followed by a variety of political and medical narratives for and against the vaccine. As vaccine rollouts were implemented, there was further conflict over the vaccines themselves, with some individuals choosing which of the vaccines they preferred to take. The challenges of vaccine hesitancy and the politics of vaccine protocols are being heard around the globe.

Everyone should have the right to choose whether or not they are vaccinated. Choice in this sense is not oppositional to vaccine mandates; instead, choice is about having access and the opportunity to choose. When it comes to individuals having the ability to choose whether or not to be vaccinated, choice is a privilege many do not have. There are billions around the world who have no access or limited access to the COVID-19 vaccine, with the majority of those being on the [African continent](#).

[Vaccine equity](#) continues to be a challenge two years after the virus was named a pandemic. Poorer countries have less access and their citizens have less choice in whether or not to take the vaccine. Human Rights Watch named their concerns for access and equity in an article [entitled “COVID-19 Vaccine Access is a Right and Not a Privilege.”](#) The right to vaccines and the ability to choose should not be reserved for residents of richer countries and those with the resources and access to medical technology needed to produce the vaccine.

[The United Church of Christ is partnering with UNICEF through the Interfaith Movement to End the Pandemic](#) to ensure that all have access to the COVID-19 vaccine. The virus has resulted in more than 5.5 million deaths globally and continues to be a concern, even as [mask mandates are being dropped in public places in the United States](#). The [interfaith movement to end the pandemic](#) is focused on addressing vaccine equity globally. The UNICEF goal for 2022 is to distribute 4.1 billion doses of the COVID-19 vaccine worldwide and to provide access to more of the global population.

Access to vaccines should not be debatable or limited based on wealth and geographic location. COVID-19 is an ongoing threat to the health and wellbeing of billions. If we are to see an end to the pandemic, vaccine equity will have to be a priority.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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