



**European Commission - Speech**  
**[Check Against Delivery]**



**Speech by Commissioner Urpilainen at the "Science and the Fight against Poverty: How Far Have We Come in 20 Years and What's Next?" Colloquium of the College de France**

Paris, 23 June 2023

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

No one chooses where they are born, but that should not define who we become.

This notion has guided me through my life, whether I was teaching in a classroom or making decisions as a finance minister.

This conference could not come at a better time.

The international community has gathered here in Paris because the 2030 Agenda is in danger.

COVID-19 has wiped out a decade of progress to reduce global inequalities.

Since the epidemic began, the wealth of the 10 richest men has doubled, while the incomes of 99% of humanity have decreased.

Global temperatures are poised to break records in the next 5 years, and the countries least responsible for climate change pay the greatest price.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and its global impact – from the rise in energy prices to soaring inflation – has made the situation worse.

But while the situation is urgent, it is not hopeless. We are here in Paris to change this course.

The international community has the capacity to address poverty and systemic inequality. We must innovate, step up commitments and learn from each other.

I would have three key messages to you this morning.

First, global inequality must be tackled not with one tool, but with a toolbox.

I propose a three-shots vaccine: promoting a fair global economy, investing in people and planet and fostering inclusive and participatory democracy.

The EU actively engages in each of these areas.

One of the most effective ways to reduce inequalities is through sound fiscal policies.

We support partner countries to promote fair policies and domestic resource mobilisations.

The benefits are clear: when everyone pays their fair share, countries have more capital available to invest in education, well-functioning public health systems and stronger social protection.

The EU has launched cross-cutting programmes to support equality globally.

Through our Gender Action Plan III we work to ensure that all women and girls can exercise full, equal, and meaningful participation in public and private life.

By 2025, 85% of new EU actions will positively contribute to gender equality.

Similarly, with our first-ever Youth Action Plan, we aim to put young people in the driving seat of the global recovery.

I have taken the decision to increase our support to education from 7 to more than 10% of our total funding.

My second point is the EU's Global Gateway strategy, our contribution to the 2030 agenda and reducing inequalities.

In recent years, the SDG financing gap for Low- and Middle- Income Countries has widened to USD 3.9 trillion per year.

With Global Gateway we mobilise EUR 300 billion in mutually-beneficial partnerships in five sectors: climate and energy, digital, health, transport, and education and research.

To maximise impact, we work as a Team Europe combining the resources and expertise of the EU institutions, Member States, European financial institutions, and the private sector.

Global Gateway is about high-quality partnership. And a gateway, by definition, goes both ways.

At the 2022 EU-AU Summit, African leaders emphasised the need for strategic autonomy in vaccine and pharmaceutical production. Not just to cope with Covid-19, but also malaria and other infectious diseases.

Currently, Africa imports over 99% of its vaccines and 95% of its medicines. But we can encourage pharmaceutical companies to invest in increasing production capacity in Africa.

Through Global Gateway, Team Europe has already mobilised EUR 1.1 billion to ramp up vaccine production for Africa, in Africa.

African-led projects are taking off in South Africa, Senegal, Rwanda and Ghana. I was in Zambia this week where we also work together towards that goal.

It will bring life-saving mRNA technology to the continent and boost local economies and create jobs.

EU has 87 Global Gateway flagship initiatives for 2023. Each of them contributes directly to the Sustainable Development Goals.

My third and final point, is about taking a look in the mirror. EU is actively monitoring our own inequalities work to ensure we are making progress.

Before the SDG Summit in September, we are conducting the first comprehensive Voluntary Review of our SDG implementation both within Europe and beyond its borders.

I will present our findings at the UN High Level Political Forum in July.

When I started as a Commissioner in 2019, one of my objective was that the policies we decide have a real impact on the ground and change lives.

Today, after 3 years of hard work with experts from academia and research, I am proud to launch the Inequality Marker.

It is a concrete and innovative tool that will enable the EU to better understand, track and benchmark our impact across all sectors on inequalities.

The Marker was developed in the framework of the EU-AFD Research Facility on Inequalities with a user-friendly structure similar to the Gender Marker.

Its methodology will assess whether, and to what extent, inequality reduction is an objective of the EU's external interventions. It forces us to ask ourselves:

*Does the intervention target the bottom poorest 40 per cent?*

*How does it benefit those groups that are the most socio-economically disadvantaged such as youth, women and people living with disability?*

It will help us design targeted interventions that drive concrete progress.

The I-Marker will guide our actions by the end of 2023, and the EU will make the tool available to governments, international organizations, NGOs, and researchers worldwide.

Our goal with this tool is to contribute to the global, shared efforts to tackle inequalities head-on.

Dear friends,

When I started as a teacher, it was essential for me that any little boy or little girl's dream should have the potential of becoming reality.

I could not accept that in my class there would be a difference based on how they were born. This is what triggered me to become a politician.

This remains the guiding thread of everything that I do.

As Nelson Mandela said, "Poverty is not an accident, like slavery and apartheid. It is man-made."

Importantly, Mandela's observation did not end there. He continued, that anything made by man, can be removed by man.

We know that the international community has the capacity to extinguish poverty and other inequalities threatening the future of our planet and its people.

We have the financial resources. We have the expertise and innovation. We only need to match them with political will and work as a Team. Together, we can make a difference!

SPEECH/23/3472