On Tuesday, September 17, 2024, the European Union (EU) announced a new €40 million (approximately $44.4 million) funding initiative to enhance local manufacturing and equitable access to quality, safe, and affordable health products in Rwanda.

This grant, revealed during the two-day East Africa Pharma and Biotech Conference in Kigali, seeks to bolster the country's pharmaceutical industry.

The funding will support various EU-backed projects aimed at improving access to essential medicines and healthcare products. These projects include pharmaceutical research and development, skills enhancement, entrepreneurship, supply chain improvements, and regulatory reforms—all essential components of Rwanda's growing health sector.

This initiative is part of a broader commitment made last December by EU President Ursula von der Leyen during a meeting with Rwandan President Paul Kagame. The partnership aims to strengthen Rwanda's capacity to manufacture and distribute healthcare products, addressing both local and continental health challenges.

Yvan Butera, Rwanda's Minister of State for Health, emphasized the government's dedication to creating a pharmaceutical manufacturing hub. He noted that the EU funding represents a significant step in building local capacity to address global health disparities. "This initiative underscores Rwanda's commitment to becoming a regional leader in pharmaceutical and biotechnology industries, with a focus on domestic production of pharmaceuticals and vaccines," Butera said.

Belen Calvo Uyarra, the European Union Ambassador to Rwanda, echoed this sentiment, stating that the funding aligns with Rwanda's vision of developing a self-sustaining health sector. "These projects will strengthen Rwanda's position as a key player in pharmaceutical and vaccine production, serving both the country and the broader African continent," she remarked.

The initiative is part of the EU's Team Europe Initiative on Manufacturing and Access to Vaccines, Medicines, and Health Technologies in Africa (MAV+), which includes Rwanda. Implementation will be carried out by EU member state agencies in collaboration with the Rwandan government.

The official signing of contracts took place on the sidelines of the East Africa Pharma and Biotech Conference, co-hosted by the Rwanda Biomedical Center and Africa

CDC, with support from the German Development Cooperation under the MAV+ Team Europe Initiative.

This funding is expected to significantly advance Rwanda’s ambitions of becoming a regional hub for pharmaceutical manufacturing and biotechnology, while also contributing to wider efforts to reduce health inequalities across Africa.