



Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG)
World Health Organization (WHO)

**OPEN LETTER
TO GOVERNMENTS OF AND MEMBER STATES FROM THE GLOBAL NORTH**

Public Services International represents more than 30 million workers worldwide. We are the only global union federation in official relations with the WHO and we are deeply concerned with the status in the Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) Annex negotiations currently taking place within the Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) at the World Health Organization (WHO) negotiations. The current text might end up diluting legal guarantees that WHO pandemic agreement can provide for equitable access to VTDs, putting lives of healthcare workers, especially at the frontlines, at risk.

Global North countries, particularly from Europe, have been proposing an unbalanced system, in which Global South countries are pushed to share their genetic resources and biological materials without any guarantees that the resulting health technologies will benefit their own peoples. This would mean an institutionalization of data extractivism and would increase the risk of biopiracy. At this crucial moment of the negotiations, we urge Global North countries to compromise and agree to the points listed below.

Representing the world health and care workers, we have been one of the most involved Non-State Actors in supporting global efforts to enhance pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response. PSI's submission to the INB which drafted the Pandemic Agreement, helped shape Article 7, on the health and care workforce. We are alarmed that the world might lose a great opportunity to consolidate the gains of the PA, if Global North countries keep pressuring for a text without key points that would put equity in the center of this future instrument.

In its current form, the draft text of annex does little to alter the status quo, leaving developing countries exposed to the same inequalities they faced during COVID-19, when thousands of our colleagues died or were scarred by those terrible years. And consequently, this leaves the whole world vulnerable in the possible event of another pandemic. It is particularly troubling that several other European nations are actively working to maintain such status quo, and putting impediments to developing countries positions to be included in the text.

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Considering that, we share some of the main points that we urge you to take, which are as follows:

- **Benefit-sharing must be a binding component in order to prevent outbreaks from becoming PHEICs.**
- All actors accessing pathogens or genetic data must sign standardized contracts **regarding the terms of use and benefit sharing obligations, before they access pathogens and data.** All agreements, transactions, access to pathogen samples or data, transfers of pathogens to third parties, PABS sequence database records and benefit flows must be fully transparent and subject to public audit. **Countries must assume obligations to implement all components of the PABS system effectively, including traceability mechanism.**
- The WHO IGWG should **develop** multilateral PABS system **into a trustworthy platform for States to share pathogens and genetic data** by establishing significant benefit-sharing commitments and robust governance and accountability mechanisms that ensure that sovereign rights over shared resources are well respected and safeguarded. If this does not materialize, countries would continue sharing such resources bilaterally and unlike during Covid19 Pandemic period, each of them will seek to secure benefits through agreements. This will contribute to **the fragmentation of the Global Health Emergency Framework and** will undermine **WHO coordinated** global public health **response.**
- Countries have sovereign rights over their genetic resources and sequence information, as established by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the Nagoya Protocol (NP). Indigenous peoples and local communities also have rights over genetic resources, and countries, communities and individuals have rights over health data. All these rights must be respected when accessing, sharing or using PABS materials and sequence information if PABS is to achieve the status of a specialized international PABS instrument.

It is worrying that Global North countries, particularly European ones, do not consider these points and have rather been advocating for several topics that would undermine taking adequate steps towards a fair and equitable PABS System. As far as we are aware, European countries have been actively:

- Pushing for anonymous access to sequence information, i.e. not only without taking consent from provider countries and communities but also withholding information from them. Europe and other Global North nations should be an ABS champion and not help to facilitate what could amount to digital biopiracy;
- Advocating there is no need for standard contracts for materials transfers as in IGWG5, especially for academic entities and researchers. This position is in complete disregard of inequities faced by developing countries' health researchers while partnering with developed countries' researchers or while receiving research grants from abroad. For example, lack of due recognition or conditions forcing transfer of samples and data without any conditions for subsequent use;

- Has been opposing set asides for Vaccines, Therapeutics and Diagnostics (VTD) stockpiles and production for WHO to be used for preventing health emergencies and responding to early outbreaks. This opposition blocking access to VTDs before the declaration of pandemic emergencies is inhumane and disregards global public health principles and rationale.

The negotiations and the multilateralism itself are at a key moment, as the sixth and tentatively last round of negotiations at the IGWG started on 23 March 2026. We urge the above-mentioned governments to change their current position and engage in the negotiations to include measures that place equity at the center of the future instrument. To enable pandemic prevention, preparedness and response we must put rights above profit and protect people, including health and care workers, everywhere in the world. We, the health and care workers that most suffered and saved lives during the COVID-19 pandemic, hope to count on your support and select the right side of the History.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Bertossa', written in a cursive style.

Daniel Bertossa
General Secretary
Public Services International