

Briefing Note on the Seventy-ninth Session of the World Health Assembly (WHA79)

The Seventy-ninth session of the World Health Assembly (WHA79) will take place in Geneva on 18-23 May 2026. PSI will participate in its deliberations and related activities as a Non-State Actor (NSA) in official relations with the World Health Organization (WHO). Our six-person delegation includes the HSS Sector Officer and leaders of affiliates from Argentina, France, Kenya, and Taiwan.

Contextual background

The WHA79 is taking place in a tumultuous world with severe impacts on global health, as we [reported](#) in the wake of the 158th session of the WHO Executive Board in February. It is quite clear that the target for achieving universal health coverage as set in the Sustainable Development Goals is unlikely to be reached. Austerity measures in countries have undermined public funding for healthcare. Funding for the WHO itself has declined with the exit of the United States, which used to bear a fifth of its accessed funding.

The spirit of multilateralism, which underpinned the WHO as the leading body in international health, is also under attack. Following the regressive step of the government of the United States, the Javier Milei-led government of Argentina has also pulled out of the WHO.

It is also clear that the adoption of a Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) annexe to the Pandemic Agreement, which was expected to be done at the WHA79, will not take place. This is because the governments of rich countries in the Global North with big pharma have blocked textual formulations proposed by the majority of countries at the open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group (IGWG) and supported by relevant stakeholders like the PSI, which would promote equity and pandemic preparedness (find the PSI explainer of the issues [here](#)).

The consequence of this is that the Pandemic Agreement cannot come into effect until next year, since the WHA78 resolution passing the Agreement requires the inclusion of the PABS annexe for it to come into effect.

Health Assembly Agenda

The WHO Secretariat formulates the agenda of the World Health Assembly based on resolutions reached by the Executive Board earlier in the year. The Health Assembly works through two committees and plenary sessions. Committee A takes up most of the agenda items clustered into three broad themes: provide health; protect health; promote health. Committee B's work is primarily to address the health conditions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT). Often, some of the agenda items allocated to Committee A would be moved to Committee B towards the end of the Assembly, if there are significant items left to be addressed.

The provisional agenda of WHA79 is available [here](#). The items of concern for PSI under each of the thematic clusters are as follows:

- Provide health
 - ⇒ 12.2 Mental health
 - ⇒ 12.4 Universal health coverage
 - ⇒ 12.5 Primary health care
 - ⇒ 12.8 Report of the Expert Advisory Group on the WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel
 - ⇒ 12.6 Health in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development
- Protect health
 - ⇒ 13.1 Report of the Oversight and Advisory Committee for the WHO Health Emergencies Programme
 - ⇒ 13.3 Open-ended Intergovernmental Working Group on the WHO Pandemic Agreement
 - ⇒ 14.1 WHO's work in health emergencies
 - ⇒ 14.4 Implementation of resolution WHA75.11 (2022, i.e., on the war in Ukraine)
- Promote health
 - ⇒ 15.2 Well-being and health promotion (on Social Connection)
 - ⇒ 15.5 Draft strategy on the Economics of health for all
- Committee B
 - ⇒ 17.1 Health conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan

Side-Events

The World Health Assembly always features many official and unofficial pre- and side-events. Altogether, the count exceeds 126 this year. These will start with the *Walk the Talk: Health for All Challenge*, where celebrities, other UN organisations, Member States, athletes, and others join the WHO leadership in a walk between 09:00 and 11:00 CEST. It starts at the Palais des Nations, with people rallying from 08:00. You can find further details [here](#).

Global Health Centre open briefing

The Geneva Graduate Institute traditionally provides an open introductory briefing to the WHA the preceding day before the Health Assembly kicks off, at the Global Health Centre, i.e., 17 May this year. The theme for this year is “Can global health make progress amid rupture?”. It will take place from 11:30-13:30 CEST. More information and registration to join (in-person or online) is available [here](#).

Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2) AGM

That Annual General Meeting of the Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2) will also take place on 17 May at 14:00-17:00 CEST. It will be held in person at [Chateau de Bossey](#) and also online. Registration for online participation can be done [here](#).

G2H2 is the Hub of critical civil society organisations within the WHO and broader international health circles. PSI has played a leading role in the Hub since its formation ten years ago. It also hosts pre-WHA and pre-WHO Executive Board meetings policy dialogue webinars, which are organised by member organisations. PSI organised an “*International migration of health workers and crisis of care: what is to be done?*” session as part of this series on 7 May. PSI delegates at the WHA79 are encouraged to fill [this form](#) to physically participate in the G2H2 AGM.

Official Side-events

WHO Member States and Non-State Actors in official relations with the WHO will altogether organise sixty-two official side-events during the WHA79. These will take place during the lunch break and in the evening after Committee work every day of the Health Assembly at both the two venues of the WHA79, i.e., the Palais des Nations and the WHO Headquarters. The WHO has compiled a comprehensive list of the official side-events, which you can find [here](#).

PSI is jointly organising an important side-event on “the Economics of Health for All: Taking Action” with the United Nations University International Institute for Global Health (UNU-IIGH), the government of Colombia, Geneva Global Health Hub (G2H2), Medicus Mundi International (MMI), Oxfam, Society for International Development, and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

It will take place in Salle C at the WHO Headquarters on Tuesday, 19 May from 18:00 to 19:20 CEST. It will, however, be hybrid. Thus, affiliates, allies and others that cannot be physically present can join online. All PSI delegates to the WHA79 are however enjoined to be physically present.