

IHP newsletter: AI summary & key reads – WHO's 158th EB meeting

Introduction

The 158th WHO Executive Board meeting, currently held in Geneva, focuses on a dense agenda where **non-communicable diseases (NCDs)** have been identified as a "defining concern" of the 21st century. Amidst the proceedings, there is a sharp critique of the **influence of billionaires** and the financialization of global health, suggesting that the "rule of billionaires" must end to truly reimagine global health governance,. The newsletter highlights a transition from viewing health as a protected public good to a state of "**de-healthification**," particularly in conflict zones like Gaza.

Feat article

In the featured article, Lila Sax dos Santos Gomes argues that **health must be central to climate adaptation**. While health has historically played a peripheral role in environmental policy, it is now being inserted into the COP30 action agenda as a primary objective for promoting **resilient health systems**. The World Health Organization (WHO) frames health as the most compelling argument for climate action, emphasizing that environmental crises disproportionately impact **marginalised populations**, including women and children. The article calls for a transition that prioritises **equity and human rights** to ensure the benefits of climate action are universal,.

Highlights

WHO Executive Board meeting (2-7 Feb): Main updates

The meeting opened under the shadow of a **funding cliff** and legal uncertainty following the United States' departure from the WHO. Israel has also warned of internal pressure to withdraw, claiming the organisation has become "too politicised". Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus warned that **funding gaps** are undermining global health systems just as risks from pandemics and antimicrobial resistance rise. Although member states agreed to increase **mandatory contributions**, a significant gap remains for core priorities like emergency preparedness. Tedros emphasised that WHO's "superpower" is its **convening power**, which must be used to maintain science-based impartiality,.

WHO Executive Board Meeting: more analysis/advocacy

Calls are growing for a World Health Assembly resolution to reform the **fragmented global health architecture**. Such a process should be member-state-led and align global initiatives with **national roadmaps**. Regarding the US withdrawal, some analysts suggest the WHO should "play the waiting game," treating the exit as a **temporary hiatus** rather than a permanent divorce to facilitate future re-engagement,. Additionally, advocates are demanding concrete commitments on **health data governance** and the inclusion of alcohol policy as a key factor in NCD accountability,,.

Global Health re-imagining and reform

Some experts argue that the obsession with "global health architecture" is a distraction from building **sovereign national health systems**. Reforming the system requires moving beyond the "theatre" of decolonisation to address first principles, such as **debt cancellation** and ending austerity in recipient countries,. The world is reportedly moving into a "**post-aid**" era, necessitating a shift from donor dependency to a system based on legitimate, effective development cooperation,.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing/Funding

The search for a new WHO Director-General to succeed Tedros will begin soon, requiring a leader capable of restoring **trust in science** under severe financial constraints,. In Africa, efficiency is being framed as the "new source of financing," with calls to abandon the **Abuja Declaration**'s 15% target in favour of choices based on **accountability and sovereignty**,,. Meanwhile, studies suggest that **aid cuts** could lead to over 22 million avoidable deaths by 2030. The Gates Foundation is responding by "doubling down" on its core priorities: maternal health, nutrition, and infectious diseases,.

Tax/debt justice & reform

Negotiations for a **UN global tax treaty** are seen as the "last chance" to protect tax sovereignty and ensure polluters pay for climate damage,. Developing nations are concerned that current proposals are too weak to address **global inequalities**,. Furthermore, better oversight of private credit rating agencies is needed to safeguard development outcomes in Africa as **debt pressures** mount.

UHC & PHC

With international aid in decline, experts advocate for **domestically financed Universal Health Coverage (UHC)**. Political transitions in countries like Nepal and South Africa offer windows of opportunity for these reforms,. The UN has also updated **SDG indicators** for tracking UHC to provide more policy-relevant assessments of progress.

PPPR & GHS

Tedros expressed confidence that the **Pandemic Agreement** will meet its May deadline, despite disputes over **pathogen sharing** and equity. Africa is asserting its agency through the **Africa CDC's** ability to declare Public Health Emergencies of Continental Concern (PHECs), a move described as a **decolonial intervention**. There are also calls to bridge the divide between the global health and military security communities to improve preparedness.

More on Health Emergencies

The **mpox epidemic** persists in Africa, requiring a sustained response that moves beyond reactive measures. To bolster regional capacity, the Africa CDC has opened its **first medical supplies warehouse** in Addis Ababa to rapidly dispatch essential goods during crises.

America First "Global Health"

The US "America First" strategy has created **uneven outcomes** in Africa, with aid increasingly tied to alignment with US interests rather than epidemiological need,. For instance, **HIV prevention targets** for the drug lenacapavir are conspicuously absent from new bilateral agreements,. The EU has warned that the expansion of the **Mexico City Policy** undermines human rights and global health.

Trump 2.0

The US Congress passed a \$50 billion foreign affairs bill that maintains **global health funding** at \$9.42 billion, a significantly higher level than the administration requested,. While this preserves flagship programs like **PEPFAR**, uncertainty remains regarding the administration's willingness to implement these programs as intended,. Domestically, a public health crisis is unfolding in cities like Minneapolis as residents avoid care due to **immigration enforcement** fears.

World NTD Day (30 Jan) & other NTD news

Millions affected by **Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs)** continue to face stigma and untreated mental health conditions. Funding cuts threaten the **re-emergence of diseases** like noma, which flourishes in conditions of malnutrition and poverty,. While elimination was once in sight for many NTDs, the abrupt withdrawal of US aid has thrown these programs into **chaos**,.

World Cancer Day (4 Feb)

A WHO study reveals that **four in ten cancer cases** could be prevented by addressing 30 modifiable causes, including tobacco, alcohol, and infections,. **Tobacco** remains the leading cause, responsible for 15% of all new cases globally. Prevention strategies must be context-specific, focusing on vaccination and **stricter regulation** of risk factors.

More on NCDs

A new initiative launched in Davos aims to include "**brain capital**" as an economic indicator to spur investment in mental and cognitive health,. Additionally, **vision impairment** is identified as a \$1 trillion productivity problem that could be significantly reduced with low-cost interventions like eyeglasses,.

Commercial Determinants of Health

Insurers are being recognised as **commercial determinants** of climate and health, with calls for binding measures to ensure they support a just transition. Furthermore, researchers argue that **ultra-processed foods (UPFs)** should be regulated similarly to tobacco, as they are engineered to encourage addiction.

Human resources for health

A baseline report on the African health workforce highlights the need for a **Health Workforce Compact** to address strategic gaps across the 55 African Union member states.

SRHR

Over **4 million girls** remain at risk of female genital mutilation (FGM) in 2026. While progress is accelerating, sustained investment is required to meet the **2030 goal** of ending this human rights violation.

Decolonize Global Health

UK MPs have been warned that "**decolonization**" **language** may alienate the public, who respond better to aid framed around **tangible outcomes** like vaccines and disease prevention,.

Planetary Health

As global temperatures exceed 1.5°C, the world has entered an "**overshoot era**" that requires a fundamental rethink of climate policy accountability,. Experts warn that flawed economic models ignoring **climate tipping points** could lead to an unrecoverable global economic crash.

Access to medicines, vaccines & other health technologies

Preventive **cholera vaccination** campaigns have resumed for the first time in three years following a milestone in global supply,. However, the **geopolitics of pharmaceutical trade** are becoming increasingly complex as AI and tariffs weaponise drug development.

Conflict/War/Genocide & health

International law is at a "**breaking point**," with over 100,000 civilians killed in recent conflicts. In Gaza, the systematised destruction of healthcare is described as "**de-healthification**," while in Iran, security forces have been accused of violating **medical neutrality** during hospital raids,. The US military intervention in Venezuela further threatens a health system already in chronic collapse,.

Miscellaneous

The **Global Soft Power Index** is urged to recognise a nation's commitment to health and research as a vital contributor to its international reputation. Finally, allegations of **incomplete data** have surfaced regarding controversial vaccine trials in Guinea-Bissau .

Some key reads of the week

1. **Geneva Solutions** – [URL](#): Member states face a funding crisis and legal uncertainty following the messy departure of the United States from the WHO.
2. **Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus (WHO)** – [URL](#): In his opening remarks, Tedros emphasises that the WHO's "superpower" is its convening power and its mission to remain an impartial, science-based organisation.
3. **P Patnaik (Geneva Health Files)** – [URL](#): Member states have vowed to protect multilateralism despite significant financial pressures and difficult geopolitical realities.
6. **Arush Lal (LSE blog)** – [URL](#): This **recommended read** argues for a resolution to align global health initiatives with national roadmaps to reduce fragmentation.
7. **T Bollyky et al (Think Global Health)** – [URL](#): The WHO might facilitate a future US return by treating the current exit as a temporary hiatus rather than a permanent divorce.
8. **Luchuo E Bain (LinkedIn)** – [URL](#): This piece argues that true transformation requires building sovereign national health systems rather than obsessing over global "architecture".
9. **Nilima Gulrajani (Current History)** – [URL](#): The world is rapidly transitioning into a "post-aid" era, requiring a fundamental rethink of international development cooperation.
10. **E S K Besson (LinkedIn)** – [URL](#): In this **important read**, the author calls for burying the Abuja Declaration in favour of financing based on sovereignty and accountability.

11. **Devex** – [URL](#): The search for the next WHO Director-General seeks a leader capable of restoring trust in science amidst severe financial constraints.
12. **Tax Justice Network** – [URL](#): Ongoing UN negotiations are seen as the "last chance" for governments to reclaim tax sovereignty and ensure polluters pay for climate damage.
13. **Rob Yates (The Collective Blog)** – [URL](#): Declining international aid creates an urgent need for political leaders to launch domestically financed universal health coverage reforms.
14. **Nelson Aghogho Evaborhene (Globalization & Health)** – [URL](#): African agency is being asserted through the ability to declare Public Health Emergencies of Continental Concern as a decolonial intervention.
16. **Dieudonné Mwamba Kazadi et al (Plos Med)** – [URL](#): The mpox epidemic continues to disproportionately burden Africa, requiring a sustained global response beyond reactive measures.
17. **Nelson Aghogho Evaborhene (Global Policy)** – [URL](#): This **recommended read** explores how US health assistance is increasingly tied to political alignment rather than epidemiological need.
18. **Devex** – [URL](#): The passage of a major US foreign affairs bill leaves many questions regarding whether the administration will spend the funds as intended.
19. **Marta Ribes et al (Lancet Global Health)** – [URL](#): Abrupt cuts to international aid threaten the re-emergence of diseases like noma in regions where they were nearly eliminated.
20. **WHO** – [URL](#): A new analysis reveals that 40% of global cancer cases could be prevented by addressing modifiable risk factors like tobacco and alcohol.
21. **Health Policy Watch** – [URL](#): A new Davos initiative aims to establish "brain capital" as a vital economic indicator to spur investment in cognitive health.
22. **B Wong (CGD)** – [URL](#): Vision loss is identified as a \$1 trillion development blind spot that can be mitigated with low-cost interventions.
23. **Hiroaki Matsuura et al (WHO Bulletin)** – [URL](#): Insurers must be recognised as commercial determinants that have the potential to either advance or hinder a just health transition.
24. **Africa CDC** – [URL](#): This comprehensive baseline report maps strategic gaps and provides an investment case for the African health workforce.
25. **WHO** – [URL](#): Over four million girls remain at risk of female genital mutilation in 2026, requiring urgent sustained investment to end the practice.
26. **Devex** – [URL](#): Experts warned UK MPs that "decolonization" language can alienate the public, who prefer aid framed around tangible health outcomes.
27. **Nature/IIASA** – [URL](#): As global temperatures pass 1.5°C, climate policy requires a fundamental rethink of accountability for the "overshoot era".

28. **WHO** – [URL](#): Life-saving preventive cholera vaccination campaigns are resuming as the global vaccine supply finally reaches a critical milestone.
29. **Layth Malhis (People's Dispatch)** – [URL](#): The systematic destruction of healthcare in Gaza is described as "de-healthification," transforming health from a public good into a field of coercion.
30. **R Horton (The Lancet)** – [URL](#): Health commitments and research should be recognised as vital contributors to a nation's influence in the Global Soft Power Index.