

IHP News 879: pre-WHA week (AI summary & some key reads)

Introduction: The Road to WHA79

The 79th World Health Assembly (WHA79) begins in Geneva amidst a landscape of fragile progress and significant geopolitical shifts. A central theme is the urgent need for **global health reform**, with calls for "middle powers" to take leadership as traditional powers face internal political challenges. However, skepticism remains regarding initiatives like the European Commission's **Global Health Resilience Initiative**, which some critics argue prioritises "right-wing recipes" and private capital over global public goods. The broader backdrop includes a "reset" in development cooperation, highlighted by recent OECD meetings and the **Africa Forward Summit**, aiming to move beyond traditional aid hierarchies toward genuine partnerships.

Featured Article 1: Launching the Charter for Feminist Health Systems The Melbourne Declaration and the **Feminist Health Systems Charter** were recently launched to provide a clear path for building health systems grounded in gender equality and justice. The charter addresses the "unfinished business" of the Beijing Declaration, arguing that health systems are not neutral but reflect power choices that often prioritise markets over equity. It calls for a shift in responsibility back to States and stronger public accountability.

Featured Article 2: Domestic Violence in India – The Unacknowledged Side While domestic violence in India is predominantly experienced by women, there is an uncomfortable, hidden reality of **male victims** who lack recognition, support, and even a language to describe their abuse. Coinciding with the International Day of Families, this article urges a confrontation of this hidden violence to ensure the home is a space of dignity for all.

Highlights of the week

WHO DG Race

The campaign for the next WHO Director-General has officially opened, requiring a leader who is a **"multitasking political acrobat"** to navigate member state defections and shaky finances. While the WHO has published ethical guidelines to ensure a level playing field, "loopholes" remain; for instance, Regional Directors may campaign without taking leave, unlike other internal candidates.

Global Health Reform & Reimagining

Global health faces a structural crisis due to massive public funding cuts and an increasing, often unregulated, **dependence on private actors**. A MOPAN study indicates that current multilateral mandates are "not yet" fit for future priority functions, requiring mandate rationalisation and better collaboration. Experts emphasize the need to distinguish between **Global Public Goods (GPGs)** and global health functions to avoid overlapping mandates and misaligned financing.

The Future of Development Cooperation

Recent summits, including the OECD meeting in Paris, have focused on the "**Accra Reset**," an African-led initiative to redefine cooperation as a strategic investment rather than charity. Simultaneously, the UK's Global Partnerships Conference seeks a "Compact" to align private capital and philanthropy, though critics watch for concrete progressive policy commitments rather than just rhetoric.

Run-up to WHA79: Primers and Analyses

WHO officials describe the organisation's finances as "stable" for now, despite the U.S. withdrawal last year, having financed 85% of the 2026-2027 budget. However, this has come at the cost of **massive staff reductions** (25%) and a pivot toward a "leaner" headquarters while shifting more personnel to country offices. The **World Health Statistics 2026** report warns that the world is off track for nearly all health-related SDGs, with progress in Universal Health Coverage (UHC) losing momentum.

Africa Forward Summit (Nairobi)

The **Nairobi Declaration** prioritises health sovereignty through technology transfer and local manufacturing of medicines and vaccines. Significant milestones include a **\$180 million investment** in Biovac's manufacturing facility and advanced talks between Africa CDC and Aspen Pharmacare to scale up local vaccine production to hundreds of millions of doses annually.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing

The EU's new **Global Health Resilience Initiative** aims to position the bloc as a frontline actor by using "de-risking" tools and blended finance to mobilise up to **€300 billion** via the Global Gateway. Critics warn that this heavy reliance on private corporations may fuel higher healthcare costs and undermine true health sovereignty in low-income countries.

America First & Bilateral Health Agreements

Contentious **Bilateral Global Health Agreements (BGHAs)** under the "America First" strategy mandate that African states share pathogen specimens and data with U.S. laboratories within 120 hours of detection. Experts argue this violates human rights by extracting biological resources without ensuring equitable access to the resulting medical countermeasures.

Trump 2.0 and U.S. Policy Shifts

The Trump administration has faced criticism for plans to divert **\$2 billion** from global health programs to fund the shutdown of USAID. Furthermore, internal shifts at the CDC and PEPFAR have led some to fear that the U.S. role in global HIV programs is being dismantled in favour of direct state control and "America First" product promotion.

UHC & PHC

A new WHO working paper highlights the challenge of **forgone healthcare**, seeking to standardise how unmet needs are measured. The Montreux Collaborative notes a persistent "blind spot" in tracking health resources, urging digital transformation to integrate resource tracking into national budgeting.

Hantavirus Outbreak

A significant **hantavirus outbreak** on a cruise ship has "stress-tested" the international health system. The response highlighted the strength of the amended International Health Regulations but also exposed a "**US CDC adrift**," with the WHO and other agencies forced to lead the scientific and logistical response in the absence of U.S. leadership.

More on PPPR & GHS

The *Guardian* has heavily criticised the West's "fantasy negotiations" on the pandemic treaty, arguing that the global north has learned little from COVID-19 regarding vaccine equity. To counter market failures, some propose a **Global Pandemic Patent Fund** to overcome intellectual property barriers.

NCDs & Commercial Determinants

Controversy has erupted over UN agencies (UNU-INWEH and PAHO) partnering with ultra-processed food companies like **Nestlé and Ferrero**, leading to calls for stricter enforcement of standards for private sector engagement. Additionally, new reports warn of the aggressive marketing of **nicotine pouches** to youth and the "invisible syndemic" between climate change and NCD mortality.

SRHR and International Nurses Day

Polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS) has been renamed to **polyendocrine metabolic ovarian syndrome (PMOS)** to better reflect its complex metabolic and endocrine nature. On **International Nurses Day**, advocates stressed that nurses are a "power," not a "cost," calling for proportionate reinvestment in health workforces in source countries to stop predatory recruitment.

Planetary Health

Health will be a priority at COP31, focusing on climate-resilient systems and early warning. Meanwhile, climatologists warn that **El Niño** is meeting a warmer baseline, intensifying climate extremes. Tuberculosis is also being reframed as a **One Health** issue, with emerging evidence of zoonotic transmission from non-human primates.

Access to Medicines & Vaccines

A landmark court ruling in Colombia upheld the government's right to issue **compulsory licenses** for HIV drugs in the public interest. Africa CDC also announced major cost savings (30-90%) through its first **pooled procurement tender** for maternal and newborn medicines. Conversely, BioNTech is closing German factories due to plummeting demand, raising concerns about future EU vaccine security.

Conflict, War & Miscellaneous

Conflict-driven internal displacements reached a record **32.3 million** in 2025, surpassing disaster-driven displacements for the first time. In miscellaneous news, scholars are decrying "**visa apartheid**" as a structural threat to global health. Finally, the UN is considering **31 new indicators** to move beyond GDP, including life expectancy and measures of violence against women, to better capture human and planetary wellbeing.

Some key reads of the week

WHO DG Race

1. **Process for the election of the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO)** – [Link](#) – This official report outlines the process for the upcoming election, including planned candidate forums.
2. **The next WHO leader will need to be a multitasking political acrobat** (P. Patnaik, Geneva Solutions) – [Link](#) – The next Director-General must navigate a polarized body of member states and fragile finances.

Global Health Reform & Reimagining

3. **Global health in crisis: Six theses on the role of private actors** (K. Seitz, Global Policy Forum) – [Link](#) – **Must-read** examine of how growing dependence on private actors jeopardises the human right to health.
4. **Mapping of Organisational Mandates Against Future Priority Health Functions (MOPAN)** – [Link](#) – A first-in-series study mapping multilateral mandates against future global health priorities.
5. **Global health reform cannot wait for a new world order. Middle powers must act now** (I. Kickbusch, Chatham House) – [Link](#) – A call for middle powers to take the lead in saving multilateral health cooperation.

The Future of Development Cooperation

6. **OECD meeting on the future of development cooperation** (OECD) – [Link](#) – High-level meeting in Paris focused on "Charting Strategic Directions" for a new era of cooperation.
7. **The \$1.3 trillion gap: Why development needs partnerships** (J. Chapman, Devex) – [Link](#) – Argument that traditional aid alone cannot close the massive financing gap facing Africa.

Run-up to the 79th WHA: Primers & Analyses

8. **WHO says its finances are stable, but uncertainties loom** (Geneva Solutions) – [Link](#) – Despite securing 85% of its next budget, WHO faces difficulty mobilising remaining funds following the U.S. withdrawal.
9. **World Health Statistics Report 2026** (WHO) – [Link](#) – Flagship report warning that progress on nearly all health-related SDGs has slowed or reversed.
10. **WHO: World Health Assembly to Adopt Strategy on Economics of Health for All** (D. M. Blandina, Third World Network) – [Link](#) – Analysis of a proposed 10-year strategy to reorient economic policy toward universal wellbeing.

Africa Forward Summit (Nairobi)

11. **African leaders urge credit reforms at Nairobi summit with France** (Reuters) – [Link](#) – Leaders criticize global credit ratings and seek fairer assessments to improve development financing.
12. **Africa Forward Summit Adopts Landmark Declaration on France Partnership** (Africa Brief) – [Link](#) – The Nairobi Declaration prioritises health sovereignty through technology transfer and local vaccine manufacturing.

More on Global Health Governance & Financing

13. **European Commission strengthens global health security with new Global Health Resilience Initiative** (European Commission) – [Link](#) – New strategy positioning the EU as a frontline actor in pandemic preparedness.
14. **EU Announces Bold Global Health Resilience Initiative Amidst Geopolitical Ruptures** (Health Policy Watch) – [Link](#) – **Must-read** analysis of the EU's pivot toward "de-risking" private capital for health projects.
15. **America first and the right to science: implications for African health sovereignty** (M. Mulumba et al, Lancet Regional Health Africa) – [Link](#) – **Recommended** article on how bilateral agreements may violate the human right to enjoy scientific progress.

America First & Trump 2.0

16. **US launches partnership for American-developed mosquito repellent** (Devex) – [Link](#) – A new public-private alliance promoting American-developed products in malaria-endemic countries.
17. **The Trump administration is trying to divert \$2 billion in global health funding to pay for USAID shutdown** (CNN) – [Link](#) – Report on plans to redirect disease-specific funding to cover the costs of dismantling USAID.

UHC & PHC

18. **Measurement of self-reported forgone health care and its reasons** (WHO) – [Link](#) – Working paper seeking to standardise the measurement of unmet health care needs globally.

Hantavirus Outbreak

19. **Statement regarding Andes virus transmission and the current outbreak investigation** (P. Maes et al, International Hantavirus Society) – [Link](#) – Scientific summary of evidence for person-to-person transmission during the ongoing cruise ship outbreak.
20. **'Empty and vapid' CDC finally responds to hantavirus outbreak** (Guardian) – [Link](#) – Experts criticise the U.S. CDC for being "missing in action" during a major international health threat.

More on PPPR & GHS

21. **The Guardian view on the WHO pandemic treaty: the west's fantasy negotiations have put the world at risk** (Guardian Editorial) – [Link](#) – Hard-hitting editorial on how national interests have crowded out international vaccine equity.

NCDs & Commercial Determinants

22. **When the UN Partners With the Harm It Is Meant to Prevent** (U. Karunakara, Health Policy Watch) – [Link](#) – Critique of controversial UN partnerships with major ultra-processed food manufacturers.
23. **WHO global report on nicotine pouches** (WHO) – [Link](#) – Report warning of aggressive industry tactics used to hook a new generation on nicotine.

SRHR & HRH

24. **'Unprecedented' global effort gives new name to polycystic ovary syndrome** (Guardian) – [Link](#) – PCOS has been renamed PMOS to better reflect its metabolic and endocrine complexities.

25. **Nurses Are Not a Cost to Health Systems. They Are the Power Holding Them Together** (H. Catton, Health Policy Watch) – [Link](#) – Argument for coordinated reinvestment in source-country workforces to stop predatory recruitment.

Planetary Health

26. **Health will be a priority theme at COP31** (A. Wyns, LinkedIn) – [Link](#) – Update on Turkiye’s inclusion of health resilience and workforce preparation in its COP31 priorities.
27. **Scientists warn El Niño could intensify climate extremes in 2026** (Climate Change News) – [Link](#) – Warning that the current El Niño is meeting a warmer baseline, amplifying global risks.

Access to Medicines & Technologies

28. **Colombia wins a key court ruling over a compulsory license issued for an HIV medicine** (Stat) – [Link](#) – Landmark decision upholding the government's right to issue compulsory licenses for public interest.
29. **Africa CDC Announces Results of African Pooled Procurement Mechanism (APPM) Tender** (Africa CDC) – [Link](#) – Successful first tender achieved 30–90% cost savings for essential maternal and newborn medicines.

Conflict, Reports & Miscellaneous

30. **Internal displacements caused by violence or conflict at record high in 2025** (Guardian) – [Link](#) – Report showing that conflict-driven displacement has surpassed disaster-driven figures for the first time.