

# IHP news 882: WHA79 – final analysis (AI summary & key reads)

## Introduction

The current global health landscape is defined by a "catastrophic collision" of infectious disease and geopolitical fracture. This issue highlights the **79th World Health Assembly (WHA79)**, which convened amidst a declared **Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)** regarding the Ebola epidemic in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Uganda. This epidemic is the first major test following the dismantling of USAID and a broader global health financing crisis. Editor Kristof Decoster suggests that reform taskforces must move beyond "airconditioned & Zoom rooms" to understand the "harsh climatological circumstances" of informal workers to create a system truly "fit for polycrisis purpose".

The **Featured Articles** delve into these systemic challenges.

Hammonds and Vermeersch reflect on whether WHA79 delivered human rights-grounded governance, questioning if outcomes can match the urgent need for reform. Another feature by Martin et al. argues that humanitarian crises expose pre-existing failures in **menstrual health governance**, which remains marginalised despite being a critical intersection of health equity, gender-responsive governance, and climate resilience.

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## Highlights

### WHA79 – Continued Coverage and Analysis

Member States at WHA79 established a **joint, Member State-led process** to reform the global health architecture, hosted by the WHO. This initiative aims to address a landscape that has become fragmented, duplicative, and plagued by power imbalances. The Assembly requested a final report with recommendations for next year.

Beyond reform, the Assembly adopted over 20 decisions and 13 resolutions, including the **first-ever resolution on stroke** and an updated strategy for the **economics of health for all (2026–2030)**, which frames the economy as a lever for well-being. Significant updates were made to the **WHO Global Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel**, closing loopholes regarding care workers and ensuring ethical standards apply during emergencies. However, the Assembly faced "hyper-politicization," with nearly a dozen votes on conflict-related issues (Palestine, Ukraine, Iran) "sucking the oxygen out of the room" and limiting technical deliberations.

### Global Health Reform and the WHO DG Race

The reform debate is currently an "**odyssey**" **centered on power**. While the new 25-member taskforce aims for a "bottom-up" overhaul, critics point to a "lack of ambition" and the structural exclusion of non-state actors. Simultaneously, the WHO Executive Board (EB) has set the stage for

the **2027 Director-General election**, with a candidate forum scheduled for November 2026. Notably, Africa's poorest nations on the EB will hold significant vetting power.

### **Global Health Governance and Financing**

A "global health financing emergency" persists, driven by a **51% drop in funding between 2021 and 2025**. Major European donors (UK, Germany, France) are slashing aid budgets, which could result in over 11.5 million preventable deaths by 2030. Research also highlights the "**financialization**" of **global health**, where innovative financing initiatives sometimes privilege asset-holders over Global South health sovereignty. Meanwhile, the African Development Bank warns that while African economies are growing, weak tax collection and rising debt burdens (now 31% of revenue) are stifling the transformation of health systems.

### **Ebola Outbreak in the DRC and Uganda**

The **Bundibugyo strain Ebola outbreak** is spreading rapidly, "outpacing" containment efforts. WHO's assessment of the national risk in DRC is "very high". This crisis is particularly dangerous because **no licensed vaccines or therapeutics exist** for this specific strain. WHO Director-General Tedros has called for an immediate ceasefire in eastern DRC to allow for a response. Financing remains a hurdle; while the World Bank and Gates Foundation have pledged funds, responders warn that "up-front funding" is critical to support frontline workers immediately.

### **More on Pandemic Preparedness (PPPR) and Global Health Security (GHS)**

The "geopolitics of inequality" is wrecking pandemic agreements. The Global South demands legally binding treaties for "public goods," while Western states push for market-based "**Global Surge Financing**" mechanisms. Experts warn that "preparedness alone" will not keep the world safe if it ignores the political and economic drivers of risk, such as climate change and eroding trust.

### **Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR)**

WHA79 approved a new **10-year Global Action Plan on AMR**, shifting the focus toward prevention (water, sanitation, and vaccination) rather than just new drug development. A compromise was reached on "tech transfer," leaving legal room for generic production during emergencies. Separately, research links the **climate crisis to a 10% rise** in salmonella antibiotic resistance genes since 1940.

### **Trump 2.0 and U.S. Global Health Strategy**

The "America First" strategy is dramatically altering the U.S. footprint. A new State Department plan risks **dismantling PEPFAR's overseas infrastructure**, potentially closing 18 CDC outposts and affecting millions on HIV treatment. The U.S. is also shifting to "transactional deals," predicating health aid on access to minerals and health data, a move some critics label as "**recolonisation**".

### **UHC, PHC, and SRHR**

Universal Health Coverage (UHC) efforts are being hampered by population expectations that do not always match care quality. In the realm of Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), a proposed "African Charter on Family Values" is being criticized as a regressive attempt to oppose sexuality education and abortion rights.

## Planetary Health and the Housing Crisis

Global temperatures are heading for record highs, and the "**urban heat island effect**" is leaving millions of informal workers in Asia exhausted before their workdays even begin. Migration is increasingly viewed as a necessary form of climate adaptation. This intersects with a **global housing crisis** affecting billions, prompting the "Baku Call to Action" for sustainable housing solutions.

## Access to Medicines, Vaccines, and Technology

A major success was recorded as South Africa's **mRNA hub (Afrigen)** received GMP certification, enabling it to produce material for clinical trials. In vaccine development, a new \$140 million fund was launched for a **Strep A vaccine**, a neglected threat killing 600,000 annually. However, pharma "innovation traps" continue to extend monopolies through incremental patenting.

## AI, Conflict, and Health

Pope Leo's encyclical, "**Magnifica Humanitas**," warns of a "culture of power" driving AI and calls for "rigorous ethical constraints". Meanwhile, hunger is increasingly being used as a **weapon of war**, with over 20,000 attacks on food systems recorded since 2018. The US-Israel conflict in Iran has pushed 45 million people toward acute hunger due to conflict and oil price spikes.

## Miscellaneous and Global Trends

- **China's Strategy:** China is positioning itself as a "stabilizing force" and a knowledge producer (e.g., the Global Health Innovation Institute in Shanghai), filling the gap left by the U.S. "pause" in development assistance.
- **ODA Collapse:** Official Development Assistance fell by 23% this year, signalling a "collapse of faith" in the traditional aid model.
- **Precision Health:** A new Lancet Commission will explore how to equitably adopt data-driven health outcomes in LMICs.
- **Solidarity Alliances:** The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty represents a "post-aid" approach focused on coordination and shared ownership.

## Some reads of the week

1. **Rachel Hammonds**, [Rights, Reform, and Representation: Reflections on WHA79](#), **IHP**: Surveys whether WHA79's outcomes will deliver the human rights-grounded governance the current moment demands.
2. **Dr Jennifer S. Martin**, [What crises reveal about menstrual health governance](#), **IHP**: Highlights how humanitarian crises expose and intensify pre-existing structural failures in menstrual health policy and financing.
3. **WHO**, [Daily update: 22 May 2026](#), **WHO**: Announces the establishment of a Member State-led joint process to reform the global health architecture.
4. **WHO**, [Daily update: 23 May 2026](#), **WHO**: Details the adoption of the first-ever resolution on stroke and a landmark strategy for the economics of health for all.
5. **H. Dempster**, [Amendments to the Code Regulating Health Worker Mobility](#), **CGD**: Analyzes the implications of the updated WHO Global Code on the ethical international recruitment of health personnel.

6. **Health Policy Watch**, [WHA Advances Global Health Architecture Reform](#), **HPW**: An **important read** on the restrictive mandate and power dynamics of the newly approved global health reform task force.
7. **Habib Benzian**, [The Health Sovereignty Paradox](#), **Substack**: Explores how viruses cross borders faster than governance reforms, making health security a shared dependence rather than a national asset.
8. **Nishant Sirohi**, [Geopolitical Votes Wound The World Health Organization](#), **Geneva Health Files**: Discusses the "hyper-politicization" of the Assembly through nearly a dozen votes on conflict-related issues.
9. **Habib Benzian**, [Geneva Rules \(5\): The Human Machinery](#), **Substack**: A **recommended read** on the technical officers and staff who keep the global health machinery moving under growing strain.
10. **A. D. Usher**, [Nine member states push back on UN80 proposal](#), **Development Today**: Reports on the rejection of a proposal to merge UNFPA and UN Women by countries including Canada and Brazil.
11. **Padmashree Gehl Sampath**, [Are We Reforming Global Health or Washing Our Hands Of It?](#), **INET**: Argues that current funding slashes create "hysteresis" or lasting, irreversible damage to health systems.
12. **Health Policy Watch**, [WHO EB Adopts Process for Election of Next Director General](#), **HPW**: Outlines the DG election process where Africa's poorest nations will hold significant vetting power.
13. **S. Shariq**, [Reframing the language of global health for a leverage-driven era](#), **The Lancet GH**: Proposes a pragmatic reframing of global health funding as mutual investments in shared vulnerability.
14. **Guardian**, [UK, German and French aid cuts will take 'devastating toll'](#), **Guardian**: Warns that European aid cuts could contribute to 11.5 million preventable deaths by 2030.
15. **Bloomberg**, [UN Draft treaty aims to boost Nations' rights to tax Tech giants](#), **Bloomberg**: A **must-read** on rewriting international tax rules to capture revenue from tech giants based on user location.
16. **WHO**, [Temporary recommendations regarding the Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak](#), **WHO**: The first meeting of the IHR Committee determining the current Ebola outbreak as a PHEIC.
17. **Devex**, [The Ebola species rapidly spreading has no vaccines](#), **Devex**: Explains that the current Bundibugyo strain has no licensed vaccines or therapeutics, unlike the Zaire strain.
18. **M. Kavanagh**, [Geopolitical Chaos is Wrecking Pandemic Agreements](#), **Foreign Policy**: Argues that inequality and US dysfunction are the primary drivers of current pandemic risk.
19. **K. Buse**, [Health security: why preparedness alone will not keep us safe](#), **The Lancet Public Health**: Warns that focusing purely on emergency preparedness risks fragmenting broader public health functions.
20. **Health Policy Watch**, [WHA Member States Approve AMR Strategy](#), **HPW**: Covers the approval of a 10-year AMR plan after a intense debate over technology transfer during emergencies.
21. **Guardian**, [US voters support HIV/Aids relief – will Trump's cuts backfire?](#), **Guardian**: Reports that 74% of US voters support PEPFAR funding despite administration attempts to dismantle it.
22. **Financial Times**, [Donald Trump reboots foreign aid with cash-for-data strategy](#), **FT**: Analyzes new transactional US deals that exchange health aid for access to critical minerals and health data.

23. **Todd P. Lewis**, [Population expectations of primary care quality](#), **The Lancet Primary Care**: Conducts a cross-sectional analysis across 18 countries to show how expectations dictate health system ratings.
24. **C. Macleod**, [A draft African charter on 'family values' is flawed and dangerous](#), **The Conversation**: Critiques a regressive draft charter that threatens comprehensive sexuality education and abortion rights.
25. **Health Policy Watch**, [Global Temperatures Head For Record Highs](#), **HPW**: Relays a WMO warning that global average temperatures will likely reach record levels in the next five years.
26. **Health Policy Watch**, [South Africa's mRNA 'Hub' Awarded GMP Certification](#), **HPW**: A success story detailing Afrigen's certification to produce mRNA materials for clinical trials.
27. **UN News**, [World Urban Forum backs 'Baku Call to Action'](#), **UN News**: A **recommended read** on a new roadmap for governments to act collectively on the global housing crisis.
28. **Guardian**, [Pope Leo denounces 'culture of power' driving rise of AI](#), **Guardian**: Discusses the first papal encyclical on artificial intelligence and its necessary ethical constraints.
29. **Guardian**, [Hunger increasingly used as weapon of war](#), **Guardian**: Documents over 20,000 attacks on food systems recorded since 2018, noting the deliberate weaponization of starvation.
30. **Thiago Lima**, [A new architecture of solidarity: The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty](#), **Development Policy Review**: Evaluates a new "post-aid" template for revitalizing international solidarity through coordination and shared ownership.