



Concept Note

Upholding health equity: Access to medical products and reproductive rights

Side Event to the 59th Session of the Human Rights Council

23 June 2025

12:30 to 13:30

Room XXVII, Palais de Nations
Geneva, Switzerland

1. Introduction:

The pursuit of health equity, encompassing fair and just opportunities for all to achieve their full health potential, remains a paramount global challenge. The right to health is a fundamental part of our human rights and of our understanding of a life in dignity. This event will explore the indivisible links between equitable access to medical products, the advancement of sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and the strengthening of international cooperation as pillars for upholding this fundamental right for everyone, everywhere. The interconnectedness of these themes is central; they are not disparate issues but integral components of a holistic approach necessary to realise comprehensive health equity.

The side event is anticipated to significantly enhance participants' understanding of the complex, intersecting challenges and opportunities in upholding health equity, particularly through improved access to medical products and the full realization of SRHR. The discussions aim to identify potential policy pathways, innovative approaches, and actionable strategies for key stakeholders to address existing inequities. Furthermore, a crucial outcome will be a reinforced commitment to multilateralism and collaborative action as essential tools for tackling global health challenges and advancing the right to health, with the dialogue contributing valuable insights to ongoing policy debates in relevant international fora, especially concerning

the implementation of recent global agreements and agendas, while also strengthening networks and partnerships dedicated to health equity and human rights.

2. Background:

Equitable access to medical products, including vaccines, medicines, and diagnostics, is a cornerstone of the right to health and critical for global health security, particularly for pandemic prevention, preparedness, and response (PPR). This access encompasses not just availability but also affordability, quality, and ensuring research and development (R&D) priorities align with global health needs. Significant challenges persist, including high costs, R&D gaps for diseases prevalent in developing countries, concentration of production capacity, intellectual property rights issues and stockpiling by wealthier nations during emergencies as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. The adoption of the [World Health Organisation Pandemic Agreement](#) (May 2025) is a significant development. This achievement shows the essential role that multilateral fora can play in providing a platform to address global challenges. A critical component of the pandemic agreement for ensuring equitable and timely access to vaccines, medicines and diagnostics for developing countries during pandemics remains to be negotiated.

Access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, information, and education is linked to the right to health, gender equality, and the empowerment of women and girls, all firmly rooted in international human rights treaties. These rights are disproportionately undermined by converging global crises that disrupt essential health services and increase vulnerabilities, especially for women, girls, and marginalized populations. The Human Rights Council (HRC) has adopted [resolutions](#) advancing sexual and reproductive health rights (SRHR). Addressing diverse societal perspectives on SRHR effectively requires a human rights-based approach, emphasizing non-discrimination, equality, participation, and accountability, to ensure policies are inclusive, evidence-based, and responsive to the specific needs of all individuals, particularly marginalized groups, supported by comprehensive sexuality education and community engagement.

Advancing international cooperation is indispensable for realizing the right to health for all. Effective multilateralism, encompassing sustainable resource mobilization, capacity building, transfer of technology and know-how, collaborative R&D, and equitable benefit sharing from health innovations, is not merely goodwill but an essential component of States' obligations under international law. Despite this recognized need and backing from international human rights law and the United Nations Charter, global solidarity faces challenges from shifting geopolitical landscapes, questioning of multilateralism, and nationalistic approaches, which directly impact resources and support for global health initiatives, as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the [Pact for the Future](#) (September 2024) aims to reinvigorate multilateralism, concerns persist that it may fall short of delivering transformative changes.

The side event aims to explore ways to overcome these hurdles, foster a renewed global commitment, and ensure that cooperation genuinely supports developing countries, including through new financing models and the leveraging of South-South cooperation.

3. Objectives:

- To take stock of the current global landscape and identify key challenges and emerging opportunities for advancing health equity, with a focus on access to medical products and sexual and reproductive health rights.
- To identify strategies for enhancing equitable access to essential medical products—vaccines, medicines, and diagnostics—particularly in the context of health emergencies and considering the WHO Pandemic Agreement.
- To explore innovative and effective avenues for strengthening international cooperation and global solidarity to realize the right to health for all, with a particular emphasis on addressing the needs and priorities of developing countries and vulnerable populations.
- To foster a constructive multi-stakeholder dialogue aimed at identifying shared priorities, promoting collaborative efforts, and catalyzing political will for tangible progress on health equity.

4. Meeting Details:

The session will be held at the Palais des Nations, Room XXVII, on 23 June 2025, from 12:30 to 13:30.

Participants will include representatives from Missions, international organizations, academia and civil society organizations. To confirm your participation and registration, please contact Mr Daniel Uribe at uribe@southcentre.int.