



Concept Note

Side Event to the 60th Session of the UN Human Rights Council

The Role of the Human Rights Council in Advancing the Right to Health: From Guidance to Implementation

Date: 25 September 2025, 15h00-16h00

Venue: Room Concordia 1, Palais des Nations, Geneva

South Centre

Background

The universal right to the highest attainable standard of health is a fundamental human right. Every human being has the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Countries have a legal obligation to promote respect for human rights, including for the right to health. This includes to develop and implement legislation and policies that guarantee universal access to quality health services and address the root causes of health disparities, including poverty, stigma and discrimination. The right to health is indivisible from other human rights, including the rights to education, participation, food, housing, work and information. The United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) has made significant progress in clarifying and exercising oversight over state obligations related to health.

The HRC has several key mechanisms for advancing the right to health. The UN member states undergo regular review of their human rights record, including health rights implementation, as part of the Council's Universal Period Review (UPR) mechanism. The Resolutions passed by the Council are an additional mechanism that serves to guide implementation by countries of their obligations on the right to health and define political commitments and best practices, as well as to task the Office of the High Commissioner to support States with reports, workshops and technical assistance, including on the human rights dimension of access to medicines and vaccines in the context of the right to health. Moreover, under the system of Special Procedures, the Council has appointed a Special Rapporteur on the right to physical and mental health to monitor and advocate for health access worldwide. Despite the progress, there is a wide gap in implementation at domestic level.

This side event is convened to discuss this critical implementation gap, placing the voices and priorities of the Global South at the center of the discourse to chart a course for a more effective approach to advancing the right to health for all.

A pathway forward is to improve the use of the HRC mechanisms to advance the right to health, alongside strengthening health diplomacy. It is also critical to foster more coherence in the implementation of various international legal frameworks. A critical tension exists between States' right to health obligations and international trade and intellectual property rules, such as the WTO's TRIPS Agreement, which often favour commercial interests and can limit access to affordable medicines and health technologies. Moreover, in the face of an increasing backlash against gender and racial equity and recognition of sexual and reproductive rights in many States, a renewed and integrated approach to ensure these rights are protected within health systems is imperative.

Objectives of the Side Event

This event aims to foster a more strategic and impactful dialogue on the role of the Human Rights Council in promoting the right to health. The specific objectives are:

- Analyse key contributions of the Human Rights Council to the normative framework on SRHR and health equity, while also identifying strategic means to enhance accountability mechanisms and assist States in transforming these international norms into tangible improvements at the domestic level.
- Highlight the crucial and often complex interactions between international human rights law that promotes universal access to health services and health technologies, with trade and intellectual property regimes that prioritise commercial interests
- Understand the value of investments in health and addressing challenges in health financing
- Identify good State practices on advancing the right to health, especially access to medicines, vaccines and therapeutics, and promoting sexual and reproductive rights.

Guiding Questions for the Panel

- How can the specific mechanisms of the Human Rights Council more effectively support States in translating international obligations on the right to health into domestic laws, policies, and budgets?
- What concrete legal, policy, and programmatic steps can States take to ensure health system strengthening is rights-based and addresses discrimination?
- To what extent do intellectual property rules and international trade agreements constrain the ability of States to advance the right to health, in particular affordable access to medicines, vaccines and diagnostics, and how can the HRC promote policy coherence across the UN system and the WTO to address them? What efforts are being made?
- How can Member States build and sustain coalitions to advance sexual and reproductive rights in a context of political regression and against instituting laws, policies and practices that interfere with access to health care and increase vulnerability to ill health, particularly for poor, marginalized and vulnerable populations?

Format and Agenda

13:00 – 13:40 (40 min): Moderated Panel Discussion This segment will feature expert interventions and a cross-panel exchange on translating rights into reality.

- **Moderator: Dr. Viviana Muñoz Tellez** (Coordinator, Health, Intellectual Property and Biodiversity Programme, South Centre)
- **Panelists:**

Ms. Teboho Juliah Babedi (Assistant Director, Global Governance, Department of International Relations and Cooperation, South Africa)

Mr. Haileyesus Getahun (Founder and CEO, Global Centre for Health Diplomacy and Inclusion)

Ms. Privilige N Mharire (Principal Legal Officer, Ministry of Health and Child Care, Zimbabwe)

Dr. Ovuoraye John A. (TBC) (Director/Head, GASHE Division, Federal Ministry of Health, Nigeria),

Mr. Nirmalya SYAM (Senior Programme Officer, HIPB Programme, South Centre)

13:40 – 13:55 (15 min): Interactive Dialogue The moderator will open the floor for a question-and-answer session with Member States, UN entities, and civil society, both in the room and online.

13:55 – 14:00 (5 min): Closing Remarks The moderator, **Dr. Viviana Muñoz Tellez**, will provide a concise summary of the key themes, areas of consensus, and actionable recommendations that emerged from the discussion.

For further information or any specific inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact **Mr. Daniel Uribe Terán** via email at uribe@southcentre.int.