

## **Virtual Expert Workshop on Key Challenges and New Developments in Ensuring Access to Medicines, Vaccines and other Health Products**

Concept Note

**Date and venue**      **Friday, 16 February 2024, 10:00-12:00 and 15:00 to 17:00 (CET) via Webex**

**Objectives**      This virtual expert workshop is organized at the request of the Human Rights Council in its resolution 50/13. It will focus on key challenges and new developments in ensuring access to medicines, vaccines and other health products. This is the second out of three workshops mandated with a view to presenting a comprehensive report to the Council on the subject matter.

The workshop seeks to:

- Promote greater understanding of the human rights dimension of access to medicines, vaccines and other health products;
- Highlight key elements of a human rights-based approach to access to medicines, vaccines and other health products;
- Identify key challenges and new developments as well as solutions pathways in addressing key challenges, and thus, ensuring and enhancing access to medicine, vaccines and other health products;
- Generate actionable insights and collaborative strategies to enhance access to medicines, vaccines and other health products as fundamental components of the right to health, aligning with global health goals and human rights frameworks.

The discussion will also inform the analytical study that OHCHR will present to the Human Rights Council at the fifty-sixth session in June 2024.

**Format**      The expert workshop will consist of two sessions. Each session will last for two hours and include presentations from experts followed by a plenary discussion.

**Session one (10:00 - 12:00 CET)** will focus on key challenges in ensuring access to medicine, vaccines, and other health products.

**Session two (15:00 – 17:00 CET)** will focus on new developments and solutions pathways in addressing key challenges, and thus, ensuring and enhancing access to medicine, vaccines and other health products.

**Participants**      Participants are invited as experts given their experience and work on access to medicines, vaccines and other health products.

The expert workshop will be open to representatives of Member States, the treaty bodies and the special procedures, the United Nations system, academia, national human rights institutions and civil society organisations.

**Modalities**      The expert workshop will be held in virtual format, via Webex or pre-recorded video messages. No interpretation will be available.

Please register [here](#).

**Only those registered will receive the link to join the event, shortly before it starts. Registration will close on 14 February 2024.**

## Background

Access to medicine, vaccines and other health products is a fundamental component of the right to health. Yet, it remains elusive for many, particularly in low – and middle-income countries. The vaccine inequity exposed during the Covid-19 pandemic, which exacerbated pre-existing structural economic and social inequalities, has served as wake-up call to the world emphasizing the urgency for affordable, timely, equitable and universal access to vaccines in general as well as therapeutics.

Inequitable access to medicines, vaccines and other health products negatively affects many human rights, including the right to life, the right to the highest attainable standard of health, the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications, as well as the right to development. Unequal access also exacerbates inequality and discrimination, particularly for individuals and people living in low- and middle-income countries and contributed to widening of inequalities within and between States. It leads to poorer health outcomes particularly for people in vulnerable and marginalized situations or remote areas, including women and girls, persons belonging to minorities, indigenous populations, older persons, persons with disabilities, persons living in poverty or migrants.

Ensuring equitable access to medicines and vaccines encounters multifaceted challenges, such as inadequate health care infrastructure with insufficient healthcare facilities, lack of trained health care professionals and deficient or inexistant distribution networks making it difficult to deliver medicines, vaccines and other health care products effectively. Pricing of medicines, vaccines and other health products may be another critical barrier. Patents and intellectual property rights can lead to higher prices for essential medicines, placing them out of reach for many people and can limit the availability of affordable generic medications in low- and middle-income countries, creating an impediment to access.

Against the backdrop, in July 2022, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 50/13 in which it calls upon States to promote timely, equitable and unhindered access to safe, effective, quality and affordable medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and therapeutics, and other health products and technologies. It called on OHCHR to convene a series of expert workshops. The present expert workshop will focus on key challenges in ensuring access to medicines, vaccines and other health products and new developments in terms of both, challenges and opportunities, to ensure access to medicines, vaccines and other health products.

## Background documents

- [Human Rights Council resolution 50/13](#) of 7 July 2022 entitled “Access to medicines, vaccines and other health products in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health”
- Compendium of good practices on access to medicines, vaccines and other health products in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health – Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([A/HRC/53/50](#))
- Economic, social and cultural rights - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([E/2023/74](#)) - submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution

48/141, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights outlines challenges in relation to access to medicines that arise in the existing system for pharmaceutical innovation, its associated business models and current pricing practices.

- Ensuring equitable, affordable, timely and universal access for all countries to vaccines in response to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic - Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights ([A/HRC/52/56](#))
- [The virtual expert workshop on good practices in ensuring access to medicines, vaccines and other health products](#) (14 February 2023) Report of the High Commissioner on the human rights implications of the lack of affordable, timely, equitable and universal access and distribution of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) vaccines and the deepening inequalities between States ([A/HRC/49/35](#))
- [WHO Road Map for Access to Medicines, Vaccines and other Related Health Products 2019–2023](#)
- [HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NEW PANDEMICS INSTRUMENT - KEY MESSAGES](#)
- [HUMAN RIGHTS AND ACCESS TO COVID-19 VACCINES \(Developed in Dec. 2020\)](#)
- Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health, Anand Grover, on access to medicines ([A/HRC/23/42](#))
- United Nations Secretary-General’s High-level Panel on Access to Medicines ([web page](#)) and [the Panel’s report on promoting innovation and access to health technologies](#) (September 2016)
- [Human Rights Council resolution 41/10](#) of 19 July 2019 entitled “Access to medicines and vaccines in the context of the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.
- Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General comments [No. 14](#) (2000) and [No. 17](#) (2006).