

## **A potential framework convention on pandemic preparedness and response**

*Briefing note for Member States*

### **Context**

COVID-19 has clearly demonstrated that pandemics can disrupt lives and livelihoods on a scale the modern world has not seen, and is ill-prepared to manage. The devastating impact of this pandemic on societies, economies and health is unprecedented, exploiting inequities within and between countries. It will continue to have an impact for years to come.

COVID-19 has also confirmed that pandemic preparedness and response is a global public good. The current inequities in access to vaccines, medicines, diagnostics and non-pharmaceutical interventions are threatening to prolong the pandemic, leading to many more preventable deaths, and contributing to even greater social and economic disruption.

COVID-19 has revealed that every country is vulnerable and no one country alone has all the capacities required for a comprehensive response. The world needs a transformed global system, fundamentally built on the principals of an unbreakable chain of detection and protection coordinated at national and global level to protect people and communities everywhere. States Parties have already committed to the International Health Regulations 2005, which provides the legal framework to accomplish this at a technical level. To ensure an all of government approach within countries and sustained and sufficient political investment within and among them, an over-arching legal framework for pandemic preparedness and response could be considered.

This situation requires urgent and sustained political commitment at the highest level, to break the cycle of panic and neglect that has characterized past responses to pandemics, large scale epidemics, and public health emergencies of international concern. This commitment must translate into sustained and effective action, which may be advanced through the consideration of a binding agreement among countries in the form of a framework convention on pandemic preparedness and response.

At a time when the COVID-19 pandemic has tried to exploit our weaknesses and divisions, the international community is presented with an opportunity to come together for cooperation in the cause of global health security that will extend beyond this pandemic.

A potential international treaty on pandemic preparedness and response could bring this higher political commitment to reality, guided by a spirit of solidarity, fairness and equity as “each country will only be prepared when all countries are prepared”.

### **Purpose**

A potential framework convention could take the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and use them to build back better. The aim of a potential framework convention would be a world better prepared to prevent pandemic threats and respond to them when they do occur.

Importantly, a potential framework convention, could establish principles, priorities and targets for pandemic preparedness and response through a legally-binding international framework. In particular, the goals could be to:

1. Build national, regional and global resilience to pandemics and other global health emergencies;
2. Mobilize collective international efforts necessary to prevent, rapidly detect and effectively respond to outbreaks of disease with pandemic potential;

3. Ensure universal and equitable access to countermeasures for pandemic preparedness and response
4. Support global coordination through a stronger WHO, as ‘the directing and coordinating authority on international health work’, including for pandemic preparedness and response

The world cannot afford to wait until the COVID-19 pandemic is over to start planning for better pandemic preparedness and response. Action is needed now. If the World Health Assembly decides, negotiations for a potential framework convention could have as their objective the adoption at the soonest possible of a framework convention instrument<sup>1</sup>; one that sets out collective high-level objectives informed by the direct and indirect impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need for a comprehensive all-of-government, all-of-society, One-Health approach.

Such an ambitious goal and timeline is commensurate with the enormity of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, especially on the poor and the most vulnerable. Such an endeavor could serve to organize and measure the best of our collective energies and skills.

A potential framework convention could be based on a common understanding of the principles that guide pandemic prevention, preparedness and response, including universality, solidarity, equity, agility and sustainability, accountability and transparency.

### **Action areas**

Of critical importance in pandemic preparedness and response is the multi-national leadership required to rise above single national interests to reap the benefits of countries acting in concert, and to shore up common defenses: pandemic preparedness is a paradigmatic global public good.

Under a potential framework convention, the key areas for action could be under four main headings:

1. National preparedness and response. The world needs to strengthen and maintain national core IHR and public health capacities that are functional when a health emergency occurs.
2. Sustained, predictable funding to health emergency preparedness and response, including from domestic budgets to ensure that the world is prepared and can respond to high-risk pathogens.
3. Global preparedness and response arrangements (systems/mechanisms/tools/networks/etc.) to help prevent future health emergencies and address them more effectively when they do arise.
4. Governance and oversight mechanisms to increase trust, ensure accountability and foster transparency.

---

<sup>1</sup> modeled structurally on the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control