



European Council
Council of the European Union

An international treaty on pandemic prevention and preparedness

Latest news

When a pandemic strikes, everyone is vulnerable.

World Health Assembly agrees to launch negotiations for an agreement to fight pandemics

On 1 December 2021, the 194 members of the World Health Organization (WHO) reached consensus to **kickstart the process to draft and negotiate a convention, agreement or other international instrument** under the Constitution of the World Health Organization to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

An intergovernmental negotiating body will now be constituted and hold its first meeting by 1 March 2022 (to agree on ways of working and timelines) and its second by 1 August 2022 (to discuss progress on a working draft). It will then deliver a progress report to the 76th World Health Assembly in 2023, with the aim to adopt the instrument by 2024.

➤ World Health Assembly agrees to launch process to develop historic global accord on pandemic prevention,

Why an international pandemic instrument?

Infographic - Towards an international treaty on pandemics



See full infographic

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global challenge. No single government or institution can address the threat of future pandemics alone.

A convention, agreement or other international instrument is **legally binding under international law**. An agreement on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response adopted under the World Health Organization (WHO) would enable countries around the globe to strengthen national, regional and global capacities and resilience to future pandemics.

Such an instrument would also:

- ensure **higher, sustained and long-term political engagement** at the level of world leaders of states or governments
- define **clear processes and tasks**
- enhance **long-term public and private-sector support** at all levels

- foster **integration of health matters across all relevant policy areas**



We need to create an environment where every scientist, health worker, and government can band together for a common cause. Working together to build new solutions to protect what is most precious - our health and our lives.

— Charles Michel, President of the European Council at World Health Summit, 25 October 2021

What's the purpose of an international agreement on pandemics?

The proposal for an international instrument on pandemic prevention, preparedness and response is guided by a spirit of collective solidarity, anchored in the principles of fairness, inclusiveness and transparency.

Neither individual governments nor the global community can entirely prevent pandemics. But the international community needs to be **much better prepared** and **better aligned in responding to possible future pandemics** across the entire cycle of detection, alarm and response.

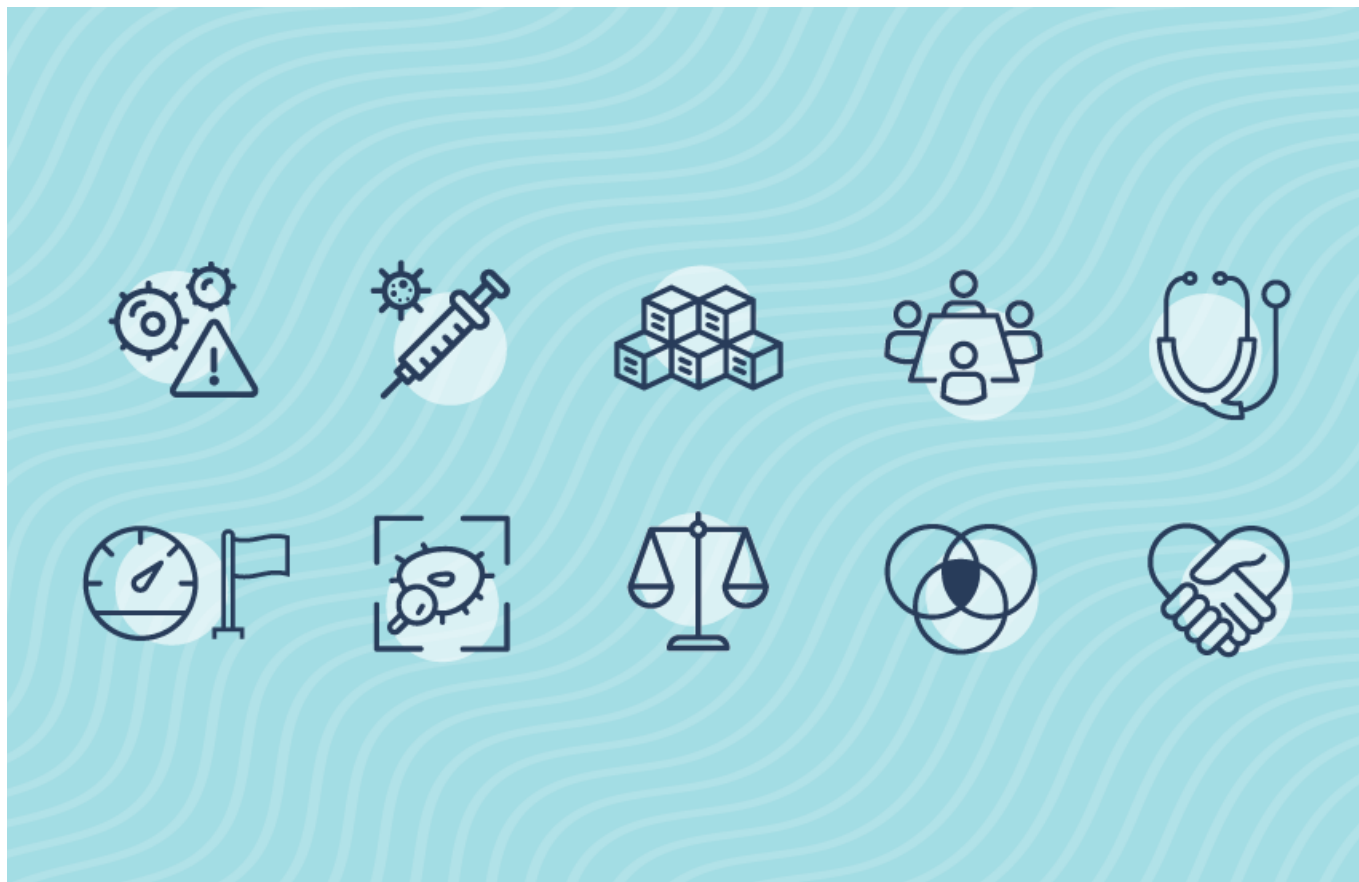
The instrument would set out the objectives and fundamental principles in order to structure the necessary collective action to fight pandemics.

An international convention, agreement or other international instrument on pandemics would support and focus on:

- **early detection** and **prevention of pandemics**
- **resilience** to future pandemics
- **response** to any future pandemics, in particular by ensuring **universal and equitable access** to medical solutions, such as vaccines, medicines and diagnostics
- a **stronger international health framework** with the WHO as the coordinating authority on global health matters
- the **"One Health" approach**, connecting the health of humans, animals and our planet

More specifically, such an instrument can enhance international cooperation in a number of priority areas, such as surveillance, alerts and response, but also in general trust in the international health system.

Infographic - 10 incentives and benefits of an international treaty on pandemics



See full infographic

What are the main incentives and benefits?

Better surveillance of pandemic risks

The monitoring of risks and, in particular, knowledge-sharing on new infectious diseases spreading from animals to humans is crucial to the prevention of future pandemics.

This could be achieved through:

- increased laboratory and surveillance capacity required to identify animal diseases in all countries
- enhanced collaboration between research centres globally
- better coordination of international funding for core capacities

Better alerts

Introducing more levels of alert commensurate to the degree of health threats would improve accuracy in communication about public health threats. This would enhance the transparency and legitimacy of restrictive or health-related measures.

Digital technologies and innovative tools for data collection and sharing as well as predictive analytics can support real-time communication and early warnings which should, in turn, trigger a more rapid response

support real-time communication and early warnings which should, in turn, trigger a more rapid response.

Better response

Health supplies and services

As demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, global supply chains and logistics systems need to be more resilient to cope with global health threats. All countries should have uninterrupted access to essential supplies, medicines and equipment from anywhere in the world.

Global coordination for effective stockpiling may also ease the pandemic response. The ability to deploy medical equipment and highly-skilled international medical teams on the ground would also represent a step forward in global health security.

Research and innovation

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how critical it is for the scientific community to mobilise quickly and for the industry to be able to rapidly scale up their manufacturing capacity.

A globally coordinated approach to discovering, developing and delivering effective and safe medical solutions, such as vaccines, medicines, diagnostics and protective equipment would benefit collective health security.

The sharing of pathogens, biological samples and genomic data as well as the development of timely medical solutions (vaccines, treatments and diagnostics) are vital in order to enhance global pandemic preparedness.

Better response mechanisms

Inequities in access to vaccines, medicines and diagnostics threaten to prolong pandemics and to take a more serious toll on human life and health as well as on our societies and economies.

The agreement would draw the lessons based on the experience of the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT-A), COVAX and other collective instruments developed since the COVID-19 pandemic started, in order to address global needs more equitably in future pandemics.

Better implementation

The resilience of national public health systems is a crucial element in fighting a pandemic. Countries need to be able to rely on their public health systems in order to effectively respond to the break-out of a pandemic. This could be achieved with a more robust country-reporting mechanism, as well as through the more widespread use of joint external evaluations and better follow-up.

Restoring trust in the international health system

The agreement would ensure that there is more transparency, more accountability, and more shared responsibility in the international system.

In addition, it will set the foundation for better communication and information to citizens. Misinformation threatens public trust and risks undermining public health responses. To redeem citizen trust, concrete measures should be foreseen to improve the flow of reliable and accurate information as well as to tackle misinformation globally.

In the Council

The World Health Organization

The World Health Organization (WHO) was founded in 1948 with the mandate to act as the directing and coordinating authority on international health work. It has 194 member states, across six regions, and more than 150 offices, and works to achieve better health for everyone, everywhere.

› [About the WHO \(WHO website\)](#)

The Council adopted on 20 May 2021 a decision to support the launch of negotiations for an international agreement on the fight against pandemics within the framework of WHO. The objective of the Council decision is to **ensure the participation of the EU in the negotiations** addressing matters falling within EU competence, in view of the EU's possible accession to the international instrument.

Such an instrument would support **international efforts to reinforce global health security**, in particular on preparedness and response to health emergencies, in light of lessons learnt from the pandemic.

› [EU supports start of WHO process for the establishment of Pandemic Treaty: Council decision \(press release, 20 May 2021\)](#)

Background

The proposal for an international treaty on pandemics was first announced by the President of the European Council, Charles Michel, at the Paris Peace Forum in November 2020.



We need to go further and learn the lessons of the pandemic. We see that it is absolutely crucial to be able to act more quickly and in a more coordinated way, to ensure that medical equipment is available and to exchange information with each other very quickly in order to protect our citizens as best we can.

— Charles Michel, President of the European Council, at the Paris Peace Forum on 12 November 2020

This call for an international treaty on pandemics was also highlighted by the G7 leaders in their statement on 19 February 2021.

› G7 Leaders statement, 19 February 2021

EU leaders agreed to work on an international treaty on pandemics on 25 February 2021.



We are committed to advancing global health security, including by strengthening the World Health Organization and working towards an international treaty on pandemics within its framework.

— Statement of the members of the European Council, 25 February 2021

› Statement of the members of the European Council on COVID-19 and health, 25 February 2021

At the World Health Assembly, the 194 members of the WHO have adopted on 31 May 2021 the decision to **discuss a new international treaty on pandemics at a special session starting on 29 November 2021**.

› Report of the WHO working group for the Special Session of the World Health Assembly (World Health Organization)

On 1 December 2021, the 194 members of the World Health Organization (WHO) reached consensus to **kickstart the process to draft and negotiate a convention, agreement or other international instrument** under the Constitution of the World Health Organization to strengthen pandemic prevention, preparedness and response.

An intergovernmental negotiating body will now be constituted and hold its first meeting by 1 March 2022 (to agree on ways of working and timelines) and its second by 1 August 2022 (to discuss progress on a working draft). It will then deliver a progress report to the 76th World Health Assembly in 2023, with the aim to adopt the instrument by 2024.



Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and Charles Michel championed the idea of an international treaty on pandemics

World leaders call for new international treaty to improve pandemic response

On 30 March 2021, leaders from all around the world joined the President of the European Council, Charles Michel and the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus in an open call for an international treaty on pandemics, drawing from the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.



There will be other pandemics and other major health emergencies. The question is not if, but when. Together, we must be better prepared to predict, prevent, detect, assess and effectively respond to pandemics in a highly coordinated fashion. To that end, we believe that nations should work together towards a new international treaty for pandemic preparedness and response.

— Joint call for an international pandemic treaty

› "COVID-19 shows why united action is needed for more robust international health architecture" op-ed article (press release, 30 March 2021)

Topics:

Share

