

World health, IP, trade bodies launch Covid platform

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The heads of the global health, IP and trade agencies on Thursday announced a joint platform to help countries plug the gaps in accessing COVID-19 vaccines, treatments and technologies.

The leaders of the World Health Organization (WHO), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) said countries would be able to access expertise in places where the three fields cross over in battling the pandemic.

WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WIPO head Daren Tang and WTO director-general Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala met on June 15 when they agreed to work together more closely to support access to medical technologies to tackle the coronavirus crisis.

"We will implement a joint platform for tripartite technical assistance to countries relating to their needs for COVID-19 medical technologies," they said in a joint statement.

The platform will provide "a one-stop shop that will make available the full range of expertise on access, IP and trade matters provided by our organisations, and other partners", in a coordinated way.

They said it would support states in assessing and prioritising their unmet needs for COVID-19 vaccines, medicines and other related technologies.

It would also help them make full use of all available options to access

such tools, including through coordinating with other countries going through similar challenges.

The leaders also announced a series of workshops to boost the flow of information in the push to get equitable access to COVID-19 technology.

Sharing technology is an increasingly hot topic in the fight against the coronavirus pandemic.

The WHO has been calling for a temporary waiver on IP rights for COVID-19 vaccines in a bid to boost production around the world and thereby increase access to doses in [poorer countries](#), where immunisation rates are way lower.

Talks are inching forward at the WTO after South Africa and India put forward a proposal in October. Agreements at the global trade body require the consensus of all member states.

The notion has long met with [fierce opposition](#) from pharmaceutical giants and some of their host countries, which insist patents are not the main roadblocks to scaling up production and warn the move could hamper innovation.

Nearly 2.8 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines have been injected in at least 216 territories around the world, according to an AFP count.

In the highest-income countries, as categorised by the World Bank, 76 doses have been injected per 100 inhabitants.

That figure stands at just one dose per 100 in the 29 lowest-income countries.

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