

IANPHI and EMPHNET Joint-Webinar:

IANPHI Pandemic Preparedness, Response and Recovery Committee  
& EMPHNET

## Cross Border Preparedness: Optimizing Pre-Pandemic & Early Pandemic Communication and Data Sharing Across Borders

To advance cooperation and strengthen early warning and response capacities, IANPHI Committee on Pandemic Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (PPRR), in collaboration with EMPHNET hosted a webinar titled “Cross-Border Preparedness: Optimizing Pre-Pandemic and Early Pandemic Communication and Data Sharing Across Borders” on October 21, 2025.

The webinar brought together public health leaders, policymakers, and experts to discuss how trust, transparency, and interoperable data systems can enable faster, coordinated responses to health threats.

### Opening Remarks

Co-moderated by Dr. Chinwe Lucia Ochu, Vice Chair of IANPHI’s PPRR Committee and Director of Planning, Research, and Statistics at the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, and Dr. Magid Al-Gunaid, EMPHNET’s Deputy Executive Director and Director of Public Health Programs, the session opened with a message by Dr. Ochu on behalf of Professor Meng Khaw, Chair of the IANPHI PPRR Committee.

In her remarks, Dr. Ochu emphasized the urgency of building cross-border mechanisms that enable countries to communicate and coordinate effectively long before a crisis hits. Dr. Al-Gunaid welcomed participants and underscored that the session would focus on translating lessons from recent health emergencies, including COVID-19, into practical strategies for operationalizing cross-border communication.

### Keynote Address: The Critical Role of Regional Coordination in Pandemic Preparedness

Delivering the keynote, Dr. Esther Hamblion, Unit Head of the Public Health Intelligence Unit at WHO Health Emergencies Programme in Geneva. Dr. Hamblion emphasized that effective pandemic preparedness depends on coordination across borders. She traced the evolution of the International Health Regulations (IHR) and the new Pandemic Agreement (2025) as global frameworks for solidarity and response. Reflecting on recent outbreaks, she underscored that “pandemics begin and end in communities,” calling for trust and cooperation from the local to the global level.”

## **Panel Discussion: Building Trust and Overcoming Barriers**

Moderated by Dr. Ochu and Dr. Al-Gunaid, the panel titled “From Plans to Action: Strengthening Regional Communication and Data Sharing” featured:

- Prof. Dr. Johanna Hanefeld, Acting Vice President at the Robert Koch Institute, Germany
- Dr. Mohamed Moussif, Chief Medical Officer at Casablanca International Airport, Morocco
- Dr. Esther Hamblion, WHO Headquarters, Geneva

Prof. Hanefeld highlighted key barriers to cross-border coordination, including fragmented systems, weak communication channels, and fear of political or economic repercussions. She stressed that overcoming these challenges requires sustained relationship-building through simulations, field epidemiology training programs (FETPs), and peer networks.

Dr. Moussif addressed the impact of misinformation, noting that infodemics can erode public trust. He outlined WHO’s distinction between misinformation (unintentional) and disinformation (intentional) and referred to several IHR Articles 21, 44, and 57, which encourage countries to formalize cross-border coordination and communication. He emphasized that risk communication and infodemic management should be integral to national preparedness plans, supported by social listening, partnerships with digital platforms, and transparent messaging to prevent information gaps.

Dr. Hamblion discussed the technical and legal challenges of harmonizing data systems, citing differences in definitions, data formats, and privacy laws. She urged the development of common data standards, investment in informatics capacity, and use of AI-driven tools to improve interoperability, drawing lessons from systems such as the Africa CDC’s IDSR and ECDC’s Early Warning and Response System.

## **Audience Interaction and Scenario Poll**

Participants engaged in a live poll simulating a regional outbreak to assess priorities for data sharing and communication.

- 44% said case counts should be shared first.
- 60% believed national governments should lead communication.
- 53% favored WHO IHR notification systems for cross-border coordination.

Panelists agreed that the results highlight the need for timely communication, trusted protocols, and regular simulation exercises to strengthen operational readiness.

## Key Takeaways

In their concluding remarks, Dr. Al-Gunaid and Dr. Ochu outlined four priorities for advancing regional preparedness:

1. Build cross-border trust through joint simulations and secure data-sharing platforms.
2. Strengthen risk communication by embedding infodemic management and ensuring unified regional messaging.
3. Align legal frameworks with the amended IHR (2025) and the Pandemic Agreement.
4. Invest in systems and skills to enhance surveillance, data interoperability, and workforce capacity.

## Closing Reflections

Dr. Al-Gunaid closed by emphasizing that pandemic preparedness requires a structured, sustained, and multi-level effort, from national to regional and global levels, rooted in transparency, equity, and professional collaboration. Dr. Ochu added that a communiqué summarizing the discussion's outcomes will be prepared for presentation at the upcoming Conference on Public Health in Africa (CPHIA).