

**CollaborateUp Input**

Draft General Comment on Science and Economic and Cultural Rights

# Introduction

At CollaborateUp, we have worked for years to build successful collective impact programs that accelerate the ability of companies, nonprofits, and governments to work together to tackle some of our world’s most pressing problems — especially through smart use of scientific innovations. As such, we want to thank the Committee for issuing the Draft General Comment and for the opportunity to provide comment. This is a timely moment for the Draft General Comment given both the continued improvement in science, innovation, and technology along with continued weakening in faith in institutions across human society. The ability for people and organizations to have access to information about these improvements from trusted and reliable sources will underpin their ability to make informed decisions.

Given the need to increase progress on all the SDGs, especially SDG 3 on health, national governments and other institutions need to both safeguard the rights of individuals to benefit from scientific progress while also ensuring accurate and unfettered access to information so they can make good decisions, especially regarding benefits and risks of new technologies and products. With this in mind, we offer the specific comments below organized according to sections of the Draft General Comment

# Specific Comments

## The interdependence of the right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and the right to the highest attainable standard of health.

In order for individuals to exercise their right to the highest attainable standard of health (para 19), members states must adopt policies that allow them to use new and innovative technologies that have the potential to solve health challenges.  These policies must also ensure individuals have access to information about these technologies and products and how they may reduce health harms so that they can make informed decisions and benefit from scientific advancements.

## The critical role of information and communication on risks and benefits of new technologies and products.

The Draft General Comment says that “information concerning the risks and benefits of science and technology should be accessible,” and designates information as one of four critical pillars of accessibility. We agree. The right to information is also a human right and as such people must have access to information on new technologies and products to ensure they understand the potential risks and benefits of using them. With access to information they can make more informed decisions to change their behaviors or use less harmful products. This could ultimately lead to improvements in human health.

Individuals and policy makers often need to make decisions in the face of imperfect information — especially in cases where insufficient data exists or when scientific and expert opinions differ about health consequences. Even in those cases, member states should take policy stances that allow for providing the fullest information possible to individuals, allowing them to make decisions and ultimately benefit from scientific advancement.

## The importance of international cooperation and harmonized policy approaches for new technologies and products

We agree and fully support the recommendations in the Draft General Comment on the importance of international cooperation. We would suggest the obligation of cooperation extend to all international and multi-stakeholder forums as well as all intergovernmental negotiations where policies are adopted on new technologies and products. This will promote harmonization among member states and their stakeholders, reduce fragmentation, and eliminate “governance gaps” in relation to new technologies and products.

## The precautionary principle and promoting beneficial scientific progress

Regulators should apply the precautionary principle when adopting policies on innovative products and technologies and they should use it as a strategy to cope with scientific uncertainties in the assessment of health risks. While regulators should exercise precaution in the face of scientific uncertainty, they should also seek to use the precautionary principle in a way that promotes beneficial scientific progress. As a specific example in the case of public health, regulators should apply the precautionary principle as a way to replace or substitute harmful products with less harmful alternatives. When scientific advancement and innovation creates less harmful products, people should have access to, and information on, these products even if the science is still nascent. This can have the impact of advancing the public good in the face of scientific uncertainty.