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POST-COVID WORLD
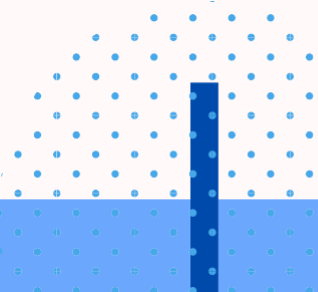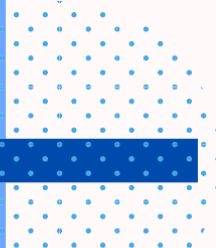
RESET, RESILIENCE, RECOVERY

FIFTY-NINTH GRADUATE

STUDY PROGRAMME

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COMPILATION OF PARTICIPANTS' WORKS

This volume is a compilation of individual and group works of seventy-nine participants of the 59th Graduate Study Programme of the United Nations Office at Geneva, which took place virtually from 28 June to 9 July 2021. Opinions, positions, statements, and conclusions expressed in these works are exclusively of their authors, and do not necessarily represent or reflect the views of the United Nations.

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Topic 1: <u>MULTILATERAL SYSTEM</u>

How has the pandemic affected the multilateral system? Is multilateralism today stronger, the same, or weaker than before COVID-19? What are the challenges? What next?

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Introduction

In the past decade, political transformations in many countries' domestic and foreign affairs appear to have been intensified by the growing popularity of far right governments and movements. However, we can consider that it is from 2016 on that these transformations visibly increase around the world, on a quantitative aspect, and become more extreme, on a qualitative aspect, in comparison to before. The impacts on democracies caused by populist and ultranationalist far right governments and its movements' growing popularity are intense and must always be considered in order to better understand how this phenomenon affects contemporary multilateralism.

The term "world politics" is preferred, by Baylis, John et al.[1] instead of "international relations" since the latter can limit the understanding of this field of study to the relations between nations or countries, while relations maintained by other types of political (non-state) entities may be just as important as those between states. Similarly, Robert Cox[2] distinguishes between "world order" and "international relations", since the latter includes certain assumptions (based on the Westphalian State) about power relations in the world that must be questioned. In contrast, "world order[3]" denotes a historically specific configuration of powers of any kind, without indicating the nature of the entities that constitute them. This is an absolutely important detail when analyzing multilateralism as insofar it allows to place this work within the framework of the critical analysis of global power relations, even though it is focused on the State and government role, for instance. Does contemporary multilateralism suit the dynamics of the current world order? Even if it can be conceived differently, is there enough global collective will to do so today? What is its role, its limits and its relevance for a world facing transnational challenges and the threat to democracies? What is the relationship between democracy and multilateralism and what are its implications? How can multilateralism respond to extremism without

undermining its own multilateral credentials? What lessons can the world take from the COVID-19 pandemic? The present work has been conceived around these questions and, based on the critical theories of multilateralism of Robert Cox[4] and Stephen Gill[5] and does not reject the dialectical perspective between multilateralism and the global order for the critical analysis of multilateralism, as insofar it highlights the vital importance of preserving and strengthening democracies already established around the world, especially today, in the light of multiplying threats to democracy and multilateralism. This work analyzes the main problems affecting the contemporary world order and their implications for multilateralism today and tomorrow, by emphasizing the vital relation between existing democracies and multilateralism.

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[1] See: Baylis, J., Smith, S., & Owens, P. (Éds.). (2011). The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations (5th ed). Oxford University Press.

[2] See: Cox, R. W. (1992). Multilateralism and World Order. Review of International Studies, 18(2), 161-180..

[3] Term preferred in this work.

[4] See: Cox, R. W. (1992). Multilateralism and World Order. Review of International Studies, 18(2), 161-180.

[5] See: Gill. (1997). Global Structural Change and Multilateralism. In Globalization, democratization and multilateralism. Macmillan [u.a.].

Challenges in the 21st Century

In recent years, it is possible to identify a trend of abandonment of multilateralism among various States across the world, with the adoption of a rather unilateral approach in foreign policy, in particular connected to the growing popularity of the far right movements in the world, not only by elected governments, but also by the strong popular support it receives, as in the United Kingdom (with the BREXIT) and France (with the results of the presidential election of 2017). Among a few others, Brazil has become one of the main examples of the States in which the rise of the populist and nationalist far-right to the national government has brought about radical changes that make up a double-dimensional

rupture: (1) an internal dimension, characterized, in general, by a State "less democratic" than before; and (2) an external dimension, characterized, in general, by a State "less multilateralist" than before. A deeper analysis of this double-dimensional rupture is fundamental to better understand how these phenomena are intertwined with one another. However, this simple consideration allows us to recognize the trend of the abandonment of multilateralism in the world as an almost expected result - or quite simply a natural aspect - of this rupture in the States, that is caused by their own democratic governments.

In 2020, for example, the Brazilian president Bolsonaro called the people for demonstrations against the legislative and judicial powers[6], institutions guaranteed by the Constitution of the Federative Republic of Brazil of 1988[7]. A comparable event is perhaps that of the "pro-Trump" riots on the Capitol of the United States in 2021, which Donald Trump would have influenced with his speech: "We fight. [...] So let's go down Pennsylvania Avenue[8]". The governments of Trump and Bolsonaro are often compared, but similarly to other national leaders around the world, their political positions are associated with populist, ultranationalist and often

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[6] See: La guerre est déclarée entre le président Bolsonaro et le Parlement brésilien. (2020, février 29). Le Monde.fr.

[7] BRASIL. Constituição (1988). Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil. Brasília, DF: Senado Federal: Centro Gráfico, 1988.

[8] See: Capitol riots timeline: The evidence presented against Trump. (2021, février 13). BBC News.

authoritarian ideas, with anti-human rights tendencies and anti-liberal values compatible with the political far right groups. Besides Brazil and the United States, other countries such as India, Poland, Italy, Hungary and the Philippines, for example, are also often placed today in the group of democratic States today with governments that claim national sovereignty to spread very controversial ideas with multiple impacts on their respective democracies, domestic and foreign public policies and, consequently, on the emerging world order.

One of the most remarkable changes of Bolsonaro's administration in Brazil, for instance, is the unprecedented adoption of a fairly anti-multilateral approach that completely contradicts the historical tradition of the State. These radical changes are so abrupt that they can naturally lead to questions about the relation between democratic

States and contemporary multilateralism. The present work considers that these relations are, today, confronted by two main elements: (1) the emergence of new global and transnational challenges, in particular issues related to climate change, to health and to digitalization; and (2) the phenomenon of the rising popularity of populist and ultranationalist far right movements and governments in democratic States. This work also considers that the latter phenomenon (the second element), insofar as it potentially represents a threat to democracies and contributes to the weakening of international cooperation, it can also potentially be considered a new global challenge itself. These two elements are, therefore, decisive in defining aspects of current State approaches to contemporary multilateralism, which may also indicate the directions of the shaping of the world order in the 21st Century.

In any case, it should be noted that radical right-wing populism has been mainstreamed and acquired more direct control over the political agenda. That is very relevant because what is evident to these governments and leaders in the world is that national sovereignty should prevail over anything else and all other types of governance. And this key notion directly erodes the needs and conditions necessary for the prosperity of contemporary multilateralism and international cooperation today.

Conclusion

By seeking to determine the underlying reasons in the world order for States to adopt rather unilateral approaches in the detriment of multilateral ones, this work estimates that the growing popularity of the populist and ultranationalist far-right in the world is very relevant to this discussion. Through a general analysis of this phenomenon around the world, it is possible to verify that it poses threats to contemporary multilateralism and international cooperation, to the extent that it contributes to eroding national democracies, and consequently, the possibilities for contemporary multilateralism to exist as it currently does and/or evolve into a new form.

Firstly, it is possible to see the trend of abandoning multilateralism and being able to tackle this reality is fundamental to confront it, especially because it can bring more context and meaning to the various challenges of today. Recognizing the problems linked to the crisis of multilateralism is the key to being able to find new solutions to fight against its current problems, by gathering the power to conceive, by instance, the "bottom-up" (or

ascending) multilateralism. The importance and significance of these considerations are therefore not only symbolic, but absolutely necessary.

Secondly, the events of the rising popularity of the populist and ultranationalist far-right around the world shed new light on their role vis-à-vis multilateralism and modern democracies. It is possible to recognize that, in most cases, far-right leaders emphasize a very ideological foreign policy that brutally confronts their historical tradition, multilateral principles or both. The cases of the United Kingdom with BREXIT, France with 2017 national elections results and the United States under Trump administration, in particular, demonstrate that supporters of this far right have contributed to political processes that ultimately jeopardized national social unity and the fundamental principles of liberal democracies.

This theme could not be more contemporary, as insofar the future of multilateralism is perhaps very closely linked to the hegemonic dispute between the United States and China in the 21st Century. However, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have highlighted that the future of multilateralism is definitely linked to the transnational and global challenges the world faces today, especially in regards to the environment and the climate change, health, digitalization, human rights and extremism. This consideration essentially means that (1) in order to counteract non-sustainable ideas of living and to overcome those challenges, they need to be, first of all, collectively recognized and (2) science might gain an increased and vital role in global politics.

Finally, this work supports the idea that the decline of multilateralism is, as noted by Guéheno[9], the logical consequence of the rise of nationalisms and concludes that in addition to transnational global challenges that generate strong tensions on contemporary multilateralism, the role of the populist and ultranationalist far right movements is also a key element in the shaping multilateralism in the 21st Century, as they ideologically and politically contribute for

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[9] See: Guéhenno, J.-M. (2014). La crise du multilatéralisme. Esprit, 407 (8/9), 49-57. p.56the deterioration of not only national democracies, but also multilateralism, by privileging unilateral approaches and downplaying transnational and global challenges that directly influence the emerging world order. This means, then, that in the face of current threats, preserving the integrity of modern democracies and multilateralism will require a

very high level of cooperation, creativity and vigilance on the part of civil society, NGOs, governments and industries.

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Introduction

The emergence of the new coronavirus disease (COVID-19) led to a high index of mortality worldwide and continues threatening to push an additional 150 million people into extreme poverty by the end of 2021 (World Bank, 2020). This experience was strongly supported by the unavailability of COVID-19 vaccines because while these provide a light at the end of the pandemic tunnel, they illuminate glaring inequalities between and within nations in terms of access to vaccines, health systems to administer them, infrastructure to store and transport them, as well as revealing issues of transparency in their distribution along with misinformation.

The World Bank (2021) asserts that National access to effective vaccines against COVID-19 is being decided by a country's financial and diplomatic clout rather than its actual health needs. This is according to leading academics and officials from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and South America. They note that this is because the planet has been divided between the rich North with rapid mass access to the vaccine and the Global South without. The World Bank (2021) further submits that in response to this global division, a completely new mindset is required to address the political issue of producing and distributing vaccines against COVID -19 in a fair, affordable way, that is one that views the virus and its impacts as more than just another disease and sees the pandemic for what it is, "a global crisis in a globalized world."

Currently, COVID-19 vaccinations have been deployed and are available in several countries. There must however be efforts to combat vaccine hesitancy (VH) COVID-19, particularly in Africa as a continent in which vaccine hesitancy has already been recorded after new vaccines have been introduced. Therefore, this paper will explain the role of Multilateralism in the fight against COVID-19 in the African continent by emphasizing the vaccine distribution, access, vaccine hesitancy and other relevant developments in the region. In terms of structure, this paper will first provide a theoretical framework that explains the African case regarding vaccine distribution, highlighting the role of Multilateralism. Furthermore, it will explain the role of Multilateralism in the fight against COVID-19, discuss COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) in Africa. Challenges and alternatives will be provided according to the information previously discussed. The findings

and analysis will be summarized in the conclusion.

Theoretical Framework

Multilateralism and global cooperation are in a constant state of transformation that reflects the power dynamics at the global level. Hence, in a multipolar world, the Multilateral system has also been diversified into different poles. The typical United Nations Multilateralism has seen itself affected by the rising problems coming from global inequalities, climate change and increasing political polarization. Therefore, academics and politicians have expressed their concern about the decline of United Nations center Multilateralism (Da Silva Gama, 2021; Oshiba, 2021). Nonetheless, the world reaction to the COVID 19 pandemic has demonstrated that multilateralism has not declined. Instead, it has mutated into regional multilateralism or serves as a platform for bilateralism multiple (Lavallée, 2021; Bellis et al., 2018).

The need for cooperation and stability has been one of the core pillars in the creation of multilateralism. In this view, a crisis can serve as the momentum for fragmentation or a catalyzer for a stronger multilateral system. Significantly, the view rooted in the liberal theory seems to be more effective when a crisis cannot be attributed to an actor, and when the consequences have a global reach. Climate change was a sign of this dynamic (Terhalle & Depledge, 2013) and now the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the thereof assumption. Yet, the reality is far more complex. Evidently, the World Health Organization (WHO) became a platform for coordinating a response to the crisis. However, scientific research remained divided into blocks and vaccine distribution divided by the Global North-South line (Sachs, 2020).

Moreover, cooperation had continued by the COVAX mechanism and by other forms through Regional Institutions and bilateral cooperation, such as the involvement of the African Union and the European Union as coordinators to close the dysfunction in global cooperation (Lavallée, 2021). In doing so, the Regional Institutions have undertaken a crucial role while at the same time they have also become hubs for United Nations Multilateral cooperation. In the case of Africa, the African Union served to distribute a portion of the donation of vaccine coming from China, which was oriented to its bilateral allies in Africa (Bridge Consulting, 2021).

In the case study, the research demonstrates the impact of COVAX in the African continent while empathizing with it the role of the African Union as a multilateral entity working to complement the United Nations centric multilateralism. In doing so, the case study challenges the traditional conceptualization to Western dominated multilateralism by exposing multi-level cooperation and the effectiveness of a more decentralized multilateral system.

COVID-19 and Multilateralism

The fight for COVID-19 resistance has led to severe vaccine nationalism and has hindered global support in the production, purchase and distribution of vaccines and it is very unfortunate that the battle to develop digital vaccine certificates has started down the same path (Nache et al, 2021). According to the European Commission (2021), thirteen vaccines have been approved in different countries and 23 more candidates are undertaking trials for effectiveness. The European Commission further says they are faced with a multitude of national and regional regulatory agencies differentially giving approval to a plethora of vaccines valid.

Nache et al (2021) however submit that a vaccine certificate valid for cross-border travel is thus likely to bring chaos and misperception if it does not go hand in hand with global support as numerous diverse messages from public administration, private corporations and the media will only compound disorder. For example, China's vaccine certificate is only valid for Chinese vaccines and also European Union's certificate would include the four vaccines approved by the European Medicine Agency (EMA), Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, Astrazeneca/University of Oxford and Jasen.

World Health Organization (2021) states that Individual European Countries such as Hungary or Slovakia which have added non-EMA accepted vaccines including Sputnik V and Sinopharm to their arsenal would include these in their certificates, whereas Greece and Israel have already made arrangements to permit their people to move freely between their countries. The situation becomes even more complex if the International Air Transport Associations and groups of airlines create their own systems beside those of national governments.

According to the Airports Council International (2021), the international Civil Aviation Organization has called for coordination of global standards and the WHO has established a

Smart Certificate Working group to figure out how to normalize and integrate all of the diverse vaccines accepted in individual countries of the world, Vaccines certificates can only be successful if there is global cooperation.

The United Nations Security Council (2021) postulates that the Security Council on the 26th of February announced the adoption of a resolution calling for strengthened international cooperation to facilitate equitable and affordable access to COVID-19 vaccines in armed conflict and post conflict situations as well as during complex humanitarian emergencies. Acting through its special silence procedure enacted during the pandemic, the Council unanimously adopted resolution 2565 (2021), recognizing the role of extensive immunization against COVID-19 as a global public good for health. It stressed the need to develop international partnerships, particularly capabilities, in recognition of differing national contexts.

Furthermore, the council requested the Secretary General to provide a full assessment of the impediments to vaccine accessibility and the COVID-19 response, including vaccination programmes in situations of armed conflict and complex humanitarian emergencies as necessary and also make recommendations to the Council. The Security Council expressed its intention to review situations brought to its attention by the Secretary-General where hostilities and armed group activities are impeding COVID-19 vaccination and to consider what further measures may be necessary to ensure such impediments are removed, and hostilities paused to enable vaccination (United Nations Security Council, 2021).

Divides between High and Low Income Countries

According to Paterson (2021), the 100 day challenge which ended on 7 April was launched in January to close the gap in vaccine accessibility between high-and low-income countries. Meanwhile, it was unlikely that any governments in the world could have at least begun to vaccinate their homes within 100 days from the beginning of the year, said Dr Richard Mihigo, the coordinator of the Regional Office for Africa's International Immunization and Disease Prevention Body Programs. However, as the deadline approached, 36 countries were covered by COVAX, the WHO's Initiative to provide global access to vaccines against the coronavirus have not yet embarked on national vaccination programs. Of these, the majority (26) are lower middle income or low-income countries. Paterson (2021) further mentions that in Africa, vaccination programmes only started from

the end of February, in Ghana about two months after they started being rolled out in wealthier parts of the world. Of the 536 million vaccine doses that had been injected worldwide at the end of March, 76% were delivered in 10 High Income Countries, including the United States, and only 27 million in Africa about 5% of the total. This evidently shows that the 100-day campaign which according to Roberto Lopez, who leads Acción Internacional para la Salud, a South American network of organisations seeking universal access to crucial medicines represented an international cry for help on the part of the WHO, had fallen on deaf ears. Indeed, the economic dependence on wealthier countries among the world's poorer states was described as a significant factor potentially inhibiting Middle and Low-Income Countries from accessing vaccines.

Despite widespread acknowledgement that viruses do not respect borders, India's devastating experience with COVID-19 calls into question the degree to which the International community is willing to translate ideas into practice. Programs like the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) are supposed to ensure a more equitable distribution of Covid19 vaccines, but the reality seems instead to reinforce the inequalities around vaccine distribution. While shipments of the AstraZeneca vaccine from the United States will be helpful, there is more that it could do to ameliorate the shortages in India and the inequitable access to COVID vaccines more generally (East Asia Forum, 2021).

The East Asia Forum (2021) postulates that a program like COVAX or donations from the United States can only do so much to resolve structural inequalities that limit access to pharmaceuticals and vaccines as it addresses the immediate issues the but not the underlying root causes that give rise to maldistribution in the first place. If world leaders want to make pharmaceuticals more accessible, they need to change the intellectual property system governing therapeutic drugs.

Youde (2021) however states that intellectual property rights grant creators the right to control who gets to produce and under what conditions through the granting of patents. This control is supposed to reward innovation by allowing creators of intellectual property to reap the rewards from their discoveries. The outbreak in India shows what happens when that collaboration is absent or slow in coming. Thus, the action needed requires a willingness to change the rules about pharmaceutical intellectual property rights to match the scope and scale of the challenge from the disease that the global community faces (East Asian Forum, 2021).

According to the United Nations Human Rights Council (2021), unfortunately this has not

been the case in almost all the Global South States in which close to 90 % of the world's population lives. The world therefore faces a sharp and highly problematic vaccine-divide in which the much richer Global North States, which host a very small percentage of the global population, have so far concerned the vast majority of available COVID-19 vaccines, leaving the bulk of the world's population with almost no access to these medicines.

High Income countries have understandably acted according to their perceived national self-interest and under great political pressure from their own populations to rapidly end the pandemic for them. They believe that the pandemic will end for them once their populations receive these vaccines, regardless of whether the same experience is simultaneously replicated in the Low-Income countries that host most of the world's population (UN HRC, 2021). In this sense, the United Nations Security Council (2021) emphasized the urgent need for solidarity, equity and efficacy," inviting donation of vaccine doses from developed economies and all those in position to do so for low and middle-income countries and other countries in need, particularly through COVAX. Similarly, to facilitate a global mechanism for pooled procurement and equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccine.

COVAX in Africa

Nachega et al, (2021) notes that continuous debate and worry is being held in Low and Medium Income compared to high-Income nations about accessing COVID-19 vaccines and roll-out gaps. Many African countries which have poor revenue, have reciprocation problems in their populations following the vaccination trials as they need to transfer vaccine production domestically. In order to convey exact information and facilitate optimum vaccine uptake, effective health communication and intense community involvement is NEEDED. In this light, national governments are addressing their problems quickly with the help of partners such as WHO and Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The African Vaccination Acquisition Team of the African Union and the COVAX collaboration, directed by the WHO, with worldwide partners aim to attain a 60% COVID-19 vaccine capability for 720 million doses by June 2022. This effort offers chances for future international co-operation to enhance equitable implementation in disadvantaged countries of COVID-19 vaccinations. As of March 4, 2021, 11 countries have begun vaccination programs across Africa. The Oxford University and AstraZeneca Vaccine have received COVAX doses among them, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Angola, Côte d'Ivoire and the

Democratic Republic of Congo under the COVAX program.

According to Nkengasong et al (2020), the grand experiment which was initiated in order to accelerate the development of COVID19 vaccines and ensure that they are distributed evenly among higher- and lower-income nations. The COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access (COVAX) Initiative is a welcome endeavor. The WHO, Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance are co-leaders. As of October 1st, 167 countries had signed up, accounting for roughly two-thirds of the world's population. Gavi (2020) however states that more people have shown interest. The effort covers a number of vaccinations that are currently being tested and it is vital to ensure that whichever ones show to be effective are available. Gavi (2020) further says even poor countries should have enough vaccines to safeguard healthcare personnel and the most vulnerable 20% of their people under this plan. Africa, though, has reason to be concerned. Several high-income countries have already inked contracts with certain businesses to purchase specific vaccines. The United States, for example, has struck deals for up to US$6 billion with a number of companies. According to Oxfam, even if all five of the most advanced vaccine options are successful, there will not be enough vaccines for the majority of the world's inhabitants until 2022 (Nkengasong et al, 2020).

Accordingly, for the Sub-Saharan Africans access to vaccinations, treatments and COVID-19 diagnosis will be a challenge. It is important to work with vaccine developers, procure COVID-19 therapeutic products and local test and diagnostic materials. A fundamental difficulty for countries in Sub-Saharan Africa will be access to effective COVID-19 therapies, since therapeutic manufacture often focuses on profitable Western markets and is poorly matched to the realities of sub-Saharan Africa. The Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in conjunction with the African Union, are able to profit from combined COVID-19 therapy procurement. The COVID-19 pandemic should be a wake-up call for sub-Saharan Africa to develop vaccinations, therapy and diagnostic capabilities to meet public health emergencies (Bright et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the use of a COVID-19 vaccination would help combat the disease. It would not be conceivable without providing vaccines for all regions of the world with their availability, accessibility and affordability. With regard to the possible availability to the use of vaccines and the need for Africa as a continent, there remains the appropriate question: who will pay for Africa? In the past, African countries had an injustice with antiretroviral

drugs, which in the past has led to the deaths of millions of Africans. The history has justified the African countries' worry over what COVID-19 vaccinations offer. If certain actions and aid are not undertaken for the continent, the burden of disease for Africa will last longer than expected (Lucero- Prisno et al. 2021).

Currently, despite limited resources in the continent, the response to coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has been rapid, forward-thinking and adaptive in many African countries. The continued growth of cases and deaths which required rapid development of an effective vaccination have led to these reactions. It is hoped that more transparency will be exercised and evidence-based methods will be provided by African Governments and public health professionals to support COVID-19 vaccines and develop fair and effective population vaccine programmes. This analysis evaluated Africa's readiness and responsiveness to vaccinations under COVID-19, possible demand, acceptability and distribution problems associated with viral management. The study examines the readiness and distribution of the vaccines in context, as well as the need for vaccines and the related problems. The report provides innovative ways and techniques to optimize the benefits of COVID-19 virus overcoming vaccinations in African countries. This would include the implementation of vaccinations that can contribute to the concession of immunity or protection against the virus in the setting of certain African countries, such as socio-cultural and economic factors (Hagan et al, 2021).

During a debate on vaccination trials on French television in early April 2020, a top French clinician advised that a vaccine study assessing the efficacy of a decades-old tuberculosis vaccine, bacille Calmette-Guérin (BCG), against COVID-19 be done in Africa. WHO Director General, who is African, was strong in his response to the ensuing debate. The Director General of the WHO condemned the remarks, calling them "appalling, shameful, and racist," and stated, "Africa cannot and will not be a trial ground for any [COVID-19] vaccine." Furthermore, "the residue from a colonial mentality must end." The Director General has said that Africa will not host vaccine tests of COVID-19 in reply to provocative comments of the two European clinicians and scientists. Such a posture could stigmatize COVID-19 in Africa and take away crucial research from Africa. On the contrary, Africa must host COVID-19 vaccination studies for public health, science and ethics (Singh ,2020).

In Africa, while images of the COVID 19 vaccination in nations with great income verify

inequalities in global health, the vaccines which are promising and largely unreliable still have a long delay. However, the global COVAX initiative to enable quick and fair access of all countries to COVID-19 vaccination, irrespective of income level, has been adopted for African countries. By the end of 2021, 20% of its population will be provided with vaccines via COVAX, however, this is insufficient for the continent, which aims at vaccinating at least 60% of the population of this continent. So, even though Africa is behind the rest of the globe in implementing COVID 19 vaccinations, receiving them around a year after WHO's emergency clearance is an unparalleled feat that shows that age long medication lags are decreasing (Rockville, MD, USA). Besides the continent's vaccine doses via COVAX, Africa alone has obtained 250 million further doses through the African Vaccine Acquisition Task Team from Pfizer, AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson. On January 13, 2021, the Chairman of the African Union, Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa, revealed that between April and June, the continent would receive at least 50 million doses. "We as a continent have focused on collaboration and joint action since the beginning of this pandemic. We took the further step to procure vaccines independently from our own limited resources," Ramaphosa stated (Adepoju, 2021).

While COVID-19 caused over a million lives worldwide by the end of 2020, Africa has prevented a large breakout. African Centers for Disease Controlling and Preventing (CDC) and several nations are collaborating with Civil Society Analysis, Patterson and Balogun (2021) postulate that answers show the kinds of agencies anchored in inappropriate contextual expertise, pan-African solidarity and the lessons learnt from past health crises concerning health messages and community mobilization. However, collaboration has not always been consistent since actors have taken a variety of methods and challenged the use of traditional medicine as COVID-19 treatment through their contact with global public health organizations and civil society partnerships (Patterson & Balogun, 2021).

African CDC Actions shows a collaboration agency, which is anchored in the need for International solidarity and a specific technical response on a continental level and which is based on this recognizable need (Nyabiage 2020). Harmonization is facilitated by developing and investing in specialized and technical knowledge in Regional Institutions such as CDC in Africa and West African Health Organization (WAHO), the specialized health organization of the West African Economic Community (ECOWAS).

Alternatives and Challenges to Multilateralism

The COVID-19 pandemic is a game-changer that raises the question of multilateralism and the current world order. It is a moment to rethink current structures, as well as bilateral and multilateral relations. "At the systemic level, the collapse of the multilateral system would unravel regimes and institutions that are crucial for global stability" (De Wijk, Thompson, Chavannes, 2020, 55). This would lead to a new global power distribution and more complications to solve the existing and arising issues, likewise, nationalism and protectionism would be dominant due to the governments' necessity to protect their countries (De Wijk et al., 2020). At present, the pandemic has also affected the global political systems in aspects like closing borders, weakening all forms of cooperation, and leaving national governments as the main decision-makers regarding COVID-19 measures. Although in many cases the role of the WHO as a multilateral institution has been strengthened as well (Esteves & Van Staden, 2020).

The pandemic stressed the importance of multilateral cooperation which has a lot to do with the basis for peace and prosperity. It is therefore beneficial for countries to cooperate. However, agreeing and supporting multilateralism is not enough, since there are multiple challenges to this, especially with a global threat like COVID-19 and the economic recovery that will be much needed (Le Pere, 2020; De Wijk et al., 2020). In the case of Africa, the pandemic stressed the vulnerability at a time when international cooperation and a more functional multilateral system could permit dealing with the systemic social, health and economic risks and conditions; without the proper measures in Africa as in most countries, the infections and fatalities will escalate. Nonetheless, the multilateral system is facing its own changes (Le Pere, 2020). Evidently, "multilateralism's biggest challenge is to come to terms with global power shifts, zero-sum nationalism, new interstate rivalries, and crises such as the COVID-19 outbreak" (De Wijk et al., 2020, 54).

De Wijk et al. (2020) submits that "there is no Plan B as an alternative for the present multilateral order". In addition, Le Pere (2020) asserts that the Multilateral system should have resilience and be more adaptive to solve the issues raised by COVID-19. In this regard, he points out some strategies to be included in foreign policies for South Africa -which could be replicated in the whole continent and other regions, such as building regional alliances and mechanisms for cooperation also with non-state actors working through the existing structures and institutions at the Africa and United Nation level to finding better ways to

address the pandemic; use multilateral mechanisms for financing the most affected countries' public health systems; and developing vaccine therapies through its medical infrastructure.

Africa has received multilateral support to tackle COVID-19 from International actors like the EU and the World Bank, the latter announced in 2020 that two-thirds of its projects would be addressed to the health sector and about USD 55 billion would be dedicated to fighting the pandemic in Africa. Similarly, other stakeholders from the private sector like the International finance Corporation (IFC) have also provided loans that help to accelerate the COVID-19 responses (Lakemann, Lay & Tafese, 2020). This kind of multilateral cooperation provides the means for African Institutions and banks to find solutions to the threats posed by the pandemic. Aside from financial support, multilateralism also facilitates exchanging knowledge, practices and other resources that contribute to finding joint solutions and thus, remains the best alternative to tackle a global threat like COVID-19.

Conclusion

Stopping the global COVID-19 pandemic requires meaningful International cooperation. Hence, efforts to address the current and future health crises should include greater collaboration among governments in low and middle income to increase their own scientific and technological capacity and produce more equitable access to intellectual property rights and cutting-edge research at the global level. At the same time, efforts in research and vaccination must consider the role of regional organizations as they are known to assist with the dilution to a certain extent of a system of bilateral cooperation that targets strategic cooperation into means of cooperation that are more humanitarian oriented. In addition, wealthier countries and big pharmaceutical companies should agree to a more democratic access to the cures that they fund and produce in cases of international emergency (Paterson, 2021).

The structure and modalities for distribution of the anticipated COVID-19 vaccine, advocate optimum involvement in the community. In order to boost the acceptance of the anticipated vaccination. It is also important to develop feedback mechanisms to recognize community efforts in past health intervention. Moreover, improved cross-sector collaboration to encourage acceptability of COVID-19 vaccinations by supplying additional resources to address the vaccination hesitancy should be launched and promoted. Further integration into

the standard immunization schedule of COVID-19 would enhance the medical system and improve the use and health of its vaccines in the whole of Africa (Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021).

Whilst countries and organizations have committed themselves to helping developing countries, further efforts are required. A robust cooperation between nations to resolve inequalities in vaccine access can help successfully combat the pandemic. The African continent is therefore vital to help acquire COVID-19 vaccinations through balancing all power dynamics affecting access and distribution. It is also necessary to defend the pan-African aims and that the countries of the continent take responsibility and explore indigenous ideas to regulate COVID-19 in Africa, and maybe Africa will finally pay for Africa (Lucero- Prisno et al, 2021).

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Introduction

COVID-19 proved to the one of the finest challenge confronting humanity in the 21st century. The pandemic presents unprecedented challenges and opportunities for restart and reset of how societies are organized. The pandemic has resulted in the huge implications on gender equality. The UN Secretary General has acknowledged the devastating effects of COVID-19 on women and all vulnerable populations. Many women across the globe especially in the developing world earn their living in informal sector with exceptionally low income hence at elevated risk of living below the poverty datum-line. The hallmark of this essay is to explore the viable solutions and approaches that can be implemented post-COVID-19 to redress the widening gender inequalities. The pandemic affects people depending on their socio-economic status, gender, age and sometimes geography. The implication of this pandemic reflects more on women and vulnerable groups in the developing world. The progress on Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 on gender equality was halted by COVID-19 hence deepening the already wide gap, hence there is need for a decisive action to reverse this gap to fulfil the SDG goals a reality before 2030. Some of the practical solutions that can be adopted to ensure the reduction of gender disparities include implementation of progressive sustainable policy agenda, adopt gender responsive programmes, empower marginalized groups through financial support of their projects, enhance social protection targeted at the vulnerable populations especially women in the least economically developed nations, implement skills development programmes, technology and skills transfer, reduce gender based violence, and add more international development assistance

COVID-19 has affected women more than men because of multiple factors ranching from biological, to places of work looking at many work women do for instance in service industries, hotels those areas were hit hard but the pandemic, hence making women more vulnerable. More so closure of schools increased the need for childcare making the mobility a challenge, they missed numerous opportunities. More women were at the receiving end of gender-based violence. In agriculture access to market became an impossible due to the imposed lockdowns and it compromised food security and livelihoods.

Cognizance of these challenges it calls for a radical shift in policy and general social norms

on how women and other vulnerable groups are treated in society, their place must change, given the unique change for a shit that the COVID-19 presented.

Attaining Sustainability IN Post-COVID-19 ERA, what can be done?

Enhance Universal Health Care

Strengthen social services in the post pandemic era should be the main aim of the international community in a collaborative manner. Building resilient health systems and secure social services systems should be the main, priority of governments and international development partners like United Nations. Investment In social protection systems will ensure universal accessibility to health and contribute to the re-building, hardening of sustainability and societal resilience. Social protection through various means like social safety nets, insurance, sovereignty funds will act as buffers against shocks and vulnerabilities in tiles of pandemics and other disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic exposes the weakness of governance and under funding of heath and research especially in Africa, countries like Zimbabwe, Burundi, Zambia. The shock was huge because the sector was neglected for a long time. There is urgent need for governments to protect women and other vulnerable population through decent investment in universal health care and social systems in a bid to reduce the widening and deepening gender disparities. Some of these programs require a joint effort to achieve in many countries in development transition phase will not be able to effectively implement some of these programs hence solidarity and collaboration will be the way to go. The COVID-19 presents the new opportunity for restructuring our health and social protection systems in order to attain the SDGs only if countries took the opportunity.

Gender Responsive Awareness and Education.

Education is a vital too of empowerment as they say information is power and the education the door to the future. Governments need to work with non-governmental organizations to design and implement gender education and policies that are pro-people and gender inclusive, to ensure that vulnerable groups have access to necessities including education, work opportunities, among others. Bottom-up and people centered policies will help to curb some harmful cultural practices. Education will also cure toxic social norms that are perpetuated in patriarchal societies in the developing countries where various cultural practices, norms and believes have a detriment effect on

equality. Increase awareness on the need for the rights of women in traditional societies will change perspectives hence this can go a long way in reducing gender imbalances. UN agencies like UN Women needs to work with governments to ensure these programs are accelerated to counter the growing gender inequalities especially in Africa and other developing continents.

<u>Collaboration for Inclusive Development</u>

Collaboration is the genesis for a successful future and sustainable development. The challenges and opportunities post-COVID-19 conundrum will offer a platform to cooperate, collaborate, reimagine, and create an inclusive and resilient future. Working and collaboration help reduces inequalities hence the pandemic is presenting a unique opportunity for the world to restart, rethink and revolve. Policies that are pro-poor and grassroots informed should crafted that so that development will be culturally sound, economically viable and technologically sound.

There is need for financing of to carry out major development projects in the post-COVID-19 era which is going to be difficulty for countries in the developing world and small Islands, therefore greater need for development partners and multilateral system to be produced plans to fund women related projects. Solidarity, cooperation, and collaboration are going to define the post-pandemic future, the era for ivory tower is long gone, for instance the issue of vaccine has shown us the successes of working together. The strengthen lies in countries working together for the common good.

<u>Accelerate International Development Cooperation and Assistance.</u>

I the spirit of not "leaving anyone behind" as envisioned in the SDGs Agenda 2030 the pandemic as proved to us that success comes only if we work together. Acceleration of International development assistance towards the developing world is becoming increasingly urgent to help those countries be self-sufficient and transition to a prosperous future. The world needs enhanced and well-coordinated international assistance systems that is ready to counter any pandemic.

In addition, targeted support should be channeled the vulnerable populations for example in Africa many women do not have adequate financial resources to secure livelihoods and to education sometimes due to difficulty in geography. Majority of out of schoolchildren in peritracheal societies face the risk of early marriages, more so the digital divide in education can be curbed by technology transfer. The international humanitarian assistance should target these groups to close the inequalities gap.

Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation

More there is need of continuous monitoring, evaluation, and research from government level to ensure that policies are inclusive and informed by the reality on the ground. This process will help in early detection of challenges hence sufficient preparation or corrective measures can be implemented prior the pandemic. Monitoring and evaluation will assist to realign laws and policies so that they cater for the immediate needs of the community.

Participation in Governance

All post pandemic recovery plans be driven by affirmative action approach. Women and other vulnerable groups of our society like the disabled, youth, indigenous communities and other excluded members of society should be included in governance structures where they have a direct voice on how things should be done. In various countries in Africa there is few women in leadership related COVID-19 recovery teams and general societal leadership. Inclusion of women will formulate policies that are gender reflective. The UN should remain at the forefront in advocating for women inclusion in leadership positions globally for us to realize the SDG 5 and Agenda 2030. For the world to walk out of this crisis there is need for inclusion of women in top leadership positions.

Policy Reform and Technology Transfer

In many parts of the World where patriarch is still deeply entrenched it has remained women do not have rights to property ownership and control of assists. This discrimination perpetuates the inequalities we see today. Hence policy reform will help the change that by recognizing women as equal human beings. This is another area I think the United Nations can play a role in lobbying governments to abolish such cultural practices. Since women cannot have access to credit facilities when they do not have tittle deeds, it means if that situation remains like that there are condemned to death. Technology transfer in agriculture and education will go a long way in empowering women to have less work in the fields. All these factors can be mitigated by radical policy shift a political will power.

Conclusion

CIVID-19 is a global disaster that comes with myriad of challenges but also present unique opportunities for radical shift in how we used to do things. Post pandemics present a last change for change for doing things differently theCOVID-19 situation has shown us that we can work together effectively when we are united.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about the "new normal"; a world of lockdowns, quarantines, social distancing, remote working, but also of severe economic and socio-political problems. Multilateral diplomacy was, of course, not left unaffected by the tide of change fueled by the pandemic. This "new normal" constitutes a reality that is here to stay, that the world needs to accept and, most importantly, to adapt to [1]. Acceptance and adaptability, both bearing change and evolution as inimical elements, undoubtedly pose as a challenge, especially given the extent to which COVID-19 has shaken the foundations of the modern world. Yet, as they say, "a crisis is a terrible thing to waste" [2]; the world, and multilateralism in particular, is now offered a grand opportunity for being better prepared for the future, for rethinking priorities, for restating goals, for refurbishing commitments, for adopting better measures to achieve them.

"Driven by necessity, [multilateral] diplomacy is adapting", many argue, and they could not be more on point [3]. Multilateral diplomacy has been challenged and called, or "forced", to adapt in two ways, namely in substantial and organisational, or technical, terms. The pandemic has served as a crash test for multilateral diplomacy and institutions, for their capabilities and their limits with regards to the quest for the global response to a lethal transboundary threat, the COVID-19 pandemic. "No one is safe until everyone is safe" became the moto of the call for cooperation, solidarity, multilateralism in the face of the pandemic, and of the call for the fight against unilateralism, "vaccine" and "mask"-nationalisms, among others [4]. Taking into consideration the fact that humanity was already "[…] in the midst of what has been termed as a crisis of multilateralism", with voices questioning its importance and effectiveness, this substantial crash test pushed the multilateral system to its limits, yet without cracking it [5]. Despite all the shortcomings, there are numerous achievements of the multilateral front, but these all fall beyond the scope of this paper. Considered trivial by many, the organisational aspect of this crash test for multilateralism should by no means be dismissed as such, namely as merely a technical issue. How multilateral diplomacy takes place, by whom, when and where, all constitute crucial factors inextricably attached to any potential outcome of such multilateral encounters. In other words, the organisational and the substantial aspect of the challenge to multilateralism brought about by the pandemic are the two sides of the same coin and should, thus, be examined through the same lens with equal attention being payed to both. In this respect, this paper will examine the organisational challenges and opportunities, as well their

substantial echoes, that multilateralism faced, is facing, and will face due to the pandemic.

As lockdowns and travel restrictions were globally imposed, multilateralism was at a crossroads; the moment when it was needed the most, it had to radically alter the way of conducting business. Diplomacy went digital; "zoom-plomacy", "Whatsapp-plomacy", "hybrid" and "e-diplomacy" became "the new normal". Despite criticized as a conservative and slow-to-embrace-evolution institution, multilateral diplomacy was quick to react to this need for immediate change in tactics, showcasing its adaptability. Online diplomatic meetings ensured easier access by capital-based officials, even by higher ranked ones, apart from on-site permanent representatives. Costs of convening meetings were reduced, given the fewer stricto sensu organisational details an online meeting has (e.g. no catering or cleaning services, no travelling schedules), while officials could be called upon to have an online meeting right at the moment an issue arose. Even as crucial an issue as decision making by the UNGA was altered to ensure "business continuity" via the introduction of the "silent procedure", a method of adopting a Resolution on essential issues without a face-to-face meeting [6].

Yet, such measures can only be considered adequate for the short-term – dubbed by some "compromise lifeline[s]" – and are by no means devoid of problems [7]. Time differences, lack of enough personnel, inadequate infrastructure or lack of infrastructure tailored to the needs of multilateral diplomacy, inability to access the Internet – especially by developing countries' officials, thus putting them at a disadvantage – lack of advanced digital training by diplomats, inefficient interpretation services, non-digitally friendly Rules of Procedure, all constitute few of the problems that arose, which, despite seemingly technical, even trivial for many, had substantial echoes that surely went beyond the "you are on mute/can you hear me" discourse. Online multilateral diplomacy and negotiations were, thus, hindered, seeing negotiation time shortened, pressuring diplomats to "think on their feet" and "react on the spot", seeing "zoom-fatigue" appear, but most importantly missing out on what physical social interactions offer [8]. "Coffee and corridor meetings", body language, personal relations fostering trust, credibility, and collegiality, protocol rules facilitating procedure and conveying direct or indirect messages, constitute elements that cannot – at least yet – take place in front of a computer screen in the same way [9] [10]. Yet, these interpersonal characteristics constitute the "[…] lifeblood of diplomacy" [11]. It was this train of thought that had the President of El Salvador question if "[…] anybody [was] actually listening […]" to the pre-filmed Heads of State/Government speeches of the first ever virtually held 75th UNGA session [12] [13] [14]. What is more, technology

is no safe place when it comes to security, confidentiality, or data integrity. This does not only pose as a security danger per se, but also hinders substantial interactions as discussions on sensitive issues, that would otherwise take place at a corridor outside the negotiation room, cannot be completely replaced by WhatsApp messages, simply because such platforms have not been created to host this kind of activity and, surely, do not benefit from so increased a level of trust by states to be confidently used as such [15] [16].

Evidently, adaptability is the key for multilateral diplomacy to effectively work amidst "the new normal". Nevertheless, adaptability should go hand-in-hand with long-term viable measures; it is here where the pandemic poses as an opportunity for evolution. The proper, diplomacy-tailored, security and confidentiality ensuring technological infrastructure should be created, one that goes way beyond "zoom-plomacy" and communication technologies, to artificial intelligence or even "open-world gaming" [17]. With the digital gap between the developed and developing world well known, "no one shall be left behind", something that requires strengthening digital governance, with the aim of ensuring universal access to the Internet [18] [19]. In a hybrid diplomacy context, a better assessment of which meeting can viably – in technical and substantial terms – be held online and which cannot is crucial, as is the alteration of Ministries of Foreign Affairs training programmes of diplomats to include advanced digital skills' learning, and the strengthening of permanent missions at New York, Geneva and Vienna [20] [21]. Long-term solutions embracing a modification of Rules of Procedure, especially regarding decision-making, of journalists and civil society participation, and of protocol for online or hybrid multilateral diplomatic interactions are necessary, given the role of these as "enablers" of such interactions [22] [23].

Moving from the negotiation table to the negotiation "screen" is no easy task; the greatest challenge, though, is the recreation in a virtual setting of the human interaction achieved face-to-face. Embracing technology's advance is part of the equation to solve this problem, yet a change in mentality is also needed. "The new normal" is here to stay and pressures for a more active, more determined multilateralism; diplomacy and its tactics need to follow suit, or they will fall behind. Physical presence interaction cannot be replaced completely, yet the discussion is not about replacement rather than adaptability in the name of efficiency. Hybrid diplomacy combining in-person with online meetings, digital skills, the right infrastructure with diplomacy-tailored capabilities and security safeguards constitute the first step, yet a change in mentality is crucial as well [24] [25]. "Innovation in diplomacy" will not come about without the acceptance of the need

to evolve and to adapt, something not unknown to the diplomatic world as can be seen by its course over the centuries [26]; after all, diplomacy is the "mediation of estrangement", overcoming communication barriers is its inimical characteristic [27]. Wishing to "return back to normal" or to postpone important decisions for when multilateral meetings will take place in person is a mere denial of today's reality. Yet, given today's critical status of our planet and societies post-COVID, multilateralism cannot afford to try to address these issues with the means – or solutions – of yesterday. Nothing comes easily, more so a change involving the now traditional debate between the importance of human and machines-facilitated interactions. Nevertheless, achieving efficiency should be considered a greater priority than contemplating on what is being lost while in a virtual environment [28].

Overall, the COVID-19 pandemic has challenged, among others, multilateralism both in a substantial and in an organisational way, both in an equally important manner. Going digital is challenging per se, while it further complicates the situation when it frustrates the use of traditional diplomatic tools, as human interaction on the sidelines of a meeting, body language, protocol, or Rules of Procedure, as well as when the digital environment is not exactly tailored or secure enough for such kinds of activities. Despite all these, multilateralism tried to show a strong face during the past year, securing "lifeline compromise[s]" and finding short-term solutions, in an effort to adapt to a situation that hindered its work and increased its importance at the same time [29]. "The new normal" is here to stay; so should the relevant mentality and will for evolution, flexibility, and adaptability in the name of efficiency of multilateralism [30] [31] [32]. The same way the telegraph did not bring the end of diplomacy, contrary to Lord Palmerston's statement, so will not COVID-instigated digitalisation of multilateral diplomacy [33].

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La pandémie de la COVID-19, une scène de stress et de revitalisation pour le multilatéralisme.

Vivant dans un système anarchique, nous ne pouvons pas attendre des solutions immédiates pour les problèmes qui affectent le monde, cependant, il est intéressant de se de demander comment ces problèmes sont abordés au niveau global et par quels acteurs ils sont gérés. Après la seconde guerre mondiale, l'ordre international s'est adressé vers les principes coopératifs du libéralisme grâce à la présence des grandes organisations internationales comme les Nations Unies ; établies après le Bretton Woods (Lagarde, 2014) et créées précisément pour canaliser et potentialiser les efforts des pays. Ces nouvelles perspectives ont ouvert la porte au concept du multilatéralisme lequel "consiste à faire face, à plusieurs et de façon concertée, à des enjeux qui concernent de nombreuses luttes comme la paix, le climat, l'environnement, la lutte contre le terrorisme, la santé" (FranceDiplomatie, 2020) et plus significativement pour ce texte, les crises sanitaires comme la pandémie de la COVID-19.

Étant la pandémie un moment si complexe pour le monde entier, elle représentait une grande opportunité pour prendre l'action vers le multilatéral. Cependant, cela n'a pas été le cas pendant la première année de pandémie, et la coopération multilatérale a été remplacée par des tendances nationalistes et des relations bilatérales (Silva, 2021). Cette dynamique a causé des grands écarts et inégalités au tour du monde réaffirmant que le multilatéralisme reste l'instrument essentiel pour gérer une telle crise et la meilleure solution pour penser à une récupération des standards de vie et une réactivation économique du monde post-covid. Afin d'illustrer la thèse intérieure, le premier argument portera sur la forte réapparition du nationalisme lié à la production et distribution des vaccins, nous parlerons ensuite des impacts que cela a causé dans les pays vulnérables, avec un dernier argument portant sur le rôle déterminant du multilatéralisme pour renforcer l'accès équitable aux services de santé et la relance économique dans tous les pays.

Gestion des vaccins

Le 2020 se caractérise pour être une année où les pays puissants cherchaient à

emporter la bataille contre la COVID-19 en démontrant leur capacité de survie pendant que la périphérie restait à la merci des aides internationales. Chaque pays a adopté ses propres mesures pour se protéger privilégiant le bienêtre de leur population. Depuis là, les initiatives multilatérales ont subi un affaiblissement et ont empiré plus tard avec le désir de produire un vaccin contre le virus, ce qui est devenu la priorité pour les puissances mondiales « faisant des investissements massifs en recherche et développement ». (Cepal, 2021)

Très peu de pays ont mené ce processus tels que la Chine et la Russie avec un grand financement public (The Washington Post, 2020). Même avec le succès d'avoir produit un antidote contre la Covid-19, ces pays ont été fortement critiqués car le vaccin s'est vu transformé dans une arme géopolitique et de Soft Power à cause des dons peu cordonnés de la part de ces états vers le pays africains et latino-américains (The Guardian, 2021). Cette stratégie de distribution semblait à une compétition pour le placement international, qualifiée par le ministre français des Affaires étrangères comme un moyen de propagande et de diplomatie agressive (LCI, 2021). Pour sa part, les États-Unis sous le gouvernement de Donal Trump et d'autres pays européens, ont réalisé l'achat massif de doses à la pharmaceutique multinationale Pfizer (Mohorte,2020), monopolisant les vaccins dans leur territoire et produisant une pénurie pour le reste du monde.

Les effets de la pandémie dans les zones plus vulnérables

Les pays en développement ont subi les impacts directs et secondaires de cette situation sous des angles différents (World Bank, 2020), rendant plus vulnérables les populations de ces régions. L'Inde par exemple vit encore une situation chaotique avec plus de 300 mil mortes à cause de la Covid-19 (France24, 2021). Du même, l'Afrique n'a pas un plan de vaccination sûr n'ayant que le 1,7% de sa population vaccinée à la date (DW, 2021). D'autre côté, l'Amérique Latine est devenue l'épicentre de la pandémie (Guterres, 2021) recevant aussi des vaccins de façon tardive et devenant « une région où les niveaux d'inégalité sont insoutenables » (ONUFemmes, 2020).

La fermeture de frontières autour du monde, a causé un fort impact économique en Amérique latine et les Caraïbes car un bon pourcentage du PBI de ces pays dépend du tourisme. L'antérieur, entraine une augmentation du chômage inévitable comme c'est le cas du Mexique et de la Colombie dont beaucoup de

postes correspondant à ce secteur, étaient occupés par des femmes (Cepal, 2020). Tout indique qu'il va être difficile pour ces pays de se remettre bientôt de cette situation car la vaccination reste lente et même avec la réouverture des frontières, les gouvernements européens continuent à déconseiller les voyages vers les pays d'Amérique-Latine sur leurs pages officielles. (FranceDiplomatie, 2021).

L'importance du multilatéralisme

Avant la pandémie, il existait déjà quelques problèmes comme le changement climatique indiquant que le monde avait une urgence de l'action multilatéral. Des intentions politiques se sont manifestées dans des initiatives multilatérales comme l'accord de Paris et d'autres traités, mais aucune avec la force suffisante pour faire face à un défi de telle ampleur.

Cependant, parmi les tendances nationalistes dans le cadre de la pandémie, le multilatéralisme s'est vu revitalisé avec la création d'une initiative multilatéral dirigé par les organismes internationaux dont l'OMS. Le COVAX (dispositif d'accélération pour l'accès des vaccins) s'est établi pour garantir une distribution de vaccins plus équitable (OMS, 2020). Étant un mécanisme qui travaille en collaboration avec le secteur public et privé (ATCTracker, 2021), il permet d'obtenir plus de ressources et de réaliser une distribution de vaccins plus coordonné. Le mécanisme qui avait déjà des grands collaborateurs comme l'Allemagne et des acteurs non-gouvernementaux comme la fondation Bill & Melinda Gates, a pris de la force en 2021 une fois rejoint par les États-Unis dans le cadre du nouveau mandat de Joe Biden, qui a insisté sur une meilleure gestion de la pandémie, et qui inclut dans ses nouveaux objectifs l'augmentation des contributions au système COVAX ". (The White House, 2021).

Les résultats de l'engagement de différentes parties, ont bénéficié notamment à des pays de la périphérie comme le Togo et le Cameroun qui ont reçu récemment 540.000 et 1,7 millions de vaccins respectivement à travers ce mécanisme, des chiffres qui restent faibles en comparaison avec les pays développés (DW, 2021), mais qui reflètent les nouvelles intentions de coopération. La création d'un mécanisme multilatéral comme le COVAX, indique que la communauté internationale et particulièrement les Nations Unies jouent un rôle déterminant pour conscientiser et guider les différents acteurs du système sur la bonne route contre les inégalités.

D'autre part, il faut comprendre que la pandémie est un résultat de la globalisation, dans un monde plein d'échanges avec des phénomènes migratoires qui ne vont pas s'arrêter et une dynamique économique interdépendante au niveau international rendant incohérent le fait d'agir sous des intérêts individuels car notre monde était déjà interconnecté. Dans ce sens, les puissances mondiales pourraient être victimes de leur comportement car même si l'Europe se réjouit de la reprise d'une vie normale, de l'autre côté du monde il y a des personnes dans une situation complexe ; les mêmes personnes qui contribueraient à la réactivation économique des pays européens à travers le tourisme.

Nous nous trouvons sans doute dans un contexte similaire à celui de 1945 où la coopération et l'action multilatérale ont été la seule solution au grand problème de la Guerre (Lagarde,2014). Conséquemment, pour penser à des meilleures conditions de vie au niveau mondial à l'avenir, il faudrait que les états, particulièrement les plus puissants, agissent de manière coordonnée à l'aide des organisations comme l'OMS ou l'OMC et sous les principes coopératifs de l'ONU ; privilégiant la création de initiatives comme le Covax ou l'Alliance pour le Multilatéralisme[1].

Conclusion

Compte tenu de ce qui précède, nous pourrions conclure que le multilatéralisme a subi un coup dévastateur au début de la pandémie de la Covid-19 à cause du désir de survie des états et de la gestion que plusieurs gouvernements ont donné à la distribution des vaccins. Cependant, la même scène a été une excellente opportunité pour que les différents organismes internationaux réaffirment l'importance du multilatéralisme et agissent dans le but de mettre en place cet instrument pour répondre de manière plus juste à des situations critiques. De plus, la leçon tirée de la seconde guerre mondiale et de la crise causée par la pandémie, nous amènent à penser que les postures unilatérales ou bilatérales entrainent des grands problèmes démontrant « à quel point le leadership, la vision à long terme et la collaboration entre tous les gouvernements et d'autres acteurs sont nécessaires."(ONU,2020)

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Introduction

On March 11th 2020, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) declared a global pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (COVID-19), discovered in 2019. The pandemic emerged quickly as the highest international priority, and as such, represents a key test case to a well-functioning global governance.

This paper seeks to identify the obstacles to stronger multilateralism in the context of the pandemic and offers three lenses whose purpose is to help navigate the international politics of the post-pandemic world.

The first section takes a systemic approach and utilizes narrative analysis to probe the potential trajectories of multilateralism in the context of a contested international order. The second section takes its cue from the realist tradition and discusses the challenges of multilateralism from the great power politics perspective. The third and last section zooms in on the WHO and analyses its merits and shortcomings in the pandemic through the notion of performance.

In conclusion, the authors of this contribution do not believe the pandemic represents a turning point for multilateralism – neither in terms of its demise nor its success. Rather, the pandemic is likely to accelerate existing tendencies in the international system. These tendencies will continue to put stress on global governance and draw attention to the relationship between effectiveness and legitimacy. Key to understanding this relationship is to appreciate the inescapable nature of politics in global governance.

Politics of contested international order

by Eero Säynäjäkangas

International Relations (IR) scholarship usually considers the source of global stability a function of persistent global order, whether that order is superimposed by the structural logic of the international system, or through socio-historical processes of institutional design and adaptation. A third view highlights purposeful agency and suggests that international order is a spontaneous social order, emerging from uncoordinated actions of human agents.

According to this perspective, the pandemic is a scene on which a battle of narratives is fought. In this battle, multilateralism is not abandoned, but it may be redefined.

The analysis of contemporary international relations often begins from the recognition that the world is governed through multilateral institutions. Scholars have argued that these institutions are in deep trouble owing to declining American hegemony (e.g., Mearsheimer 2019) and the popular backlash against liberal governance structures, such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, the International Criminal Court, or the European Union (e.g., De Vries et al. 2021).

Other recent contributions have highlighted the ontological and epistemological foundations of the global order, pointing out that the stability in the international system is to a large extent a product of *longue durée* processes of international practices and institutions (e.g., Adler and Drieschova 2021). These are principles embodied in everyday actions of international politics, such as diplomacy and trade. Taken together, these practices and institutions constitute order through regularizing interactions. Because of this organizing property, orders tend to be resilient.

But orders do change.

According to G. John Ikenberry (2018), for the past 70 years the world has been largely run by an American-led liberal order. That order, built on enlightenment ideals such as political liberalism, economic liberalism, and liberal internationalism, has facilitated globalization. It has created an environment conducive to economic growth – but also pollution, income inequality, free riding, and technological theft. Resentment due to lost jobs, immigration, and intrusive liberal values has created tensions within western political systems, while rapid economic growth in emerging economies has produced strategic and systemic rivals outside them. In a way, then, liberal international order contains the seeds of its own challenges (Lake et al. 2021, 237).

This paradigm helps understand the challenges of global governance, and the certain degree of inability with which the international community has attempted to manage some of the most pressing issues facing humanity today, such as inequality, poverty, environmental degradation, climate change and security competition.

The international liberal order is contested, and this contestation is making multilateral policy solutions difficult. But, as Börzel and Zurn (2021) argue, it is the "liberal" component

in the international order that is contested, not the order as a whole. Seventy years of economic integration has produced vested interests and deep interlinkages between states. Globalization, that is, international social, political, and economic interconnections, are too encompassing for any larger state to isolate from them. As Ikenberry (2015, 401) points out, the alternative to international multilateralism is not another type of order, it is disorder.

To probe the potential trajectory of multilateralism in the context outlined above, it is necessary to approach multilateralism more strategically.

Why do states engage in multilateralism? What do they aim to achieve through multilateral solutions that by design reduces their freedom of maneuver? According to Lisa Martin (1992), there are two principal reasons why states might agree to cede authority: stability and long-term benefits.

Multilateralism refers to "an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles of conduct" (Ruggie 1992, 571). It differs in some important ways from other forms of organizing relations between states, such as unilateralism or bilateralism. Multilateralism relies on indivisibility, generalized principles of conduct, and diffuse reciprocity, while its counterparts, bilateralism and unilateralism, rely on another type of calculus, a strategic calculation, with "regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may exist in any specific occurrence" (ibid.).

Multilateral systems are always rules-based, but they are not *only* rules-based. Bilateral and unilateral forms of organizing international interactions can, and often are, rules-based too. Think of bilateral trade agreements, or sanctions regimes, or colonialism.

What is central to multilateralism is the willingness of states to forego their strategic interests for the benefit of stability and long-term gains. This is where things have changed quite substantially over the past few years, as epitomized by the U.K. decision to withdraw from the EU in 2016, citing the need to "take back control", and the "America First" foreign policy doctrine of former U.S. President Donald J. Trump. Although the new Biden administration has pledged to return to the multilateral world order, the emphasis in his new foreign policy

agenda suggests the underlying concerns have not changed substantially from the Trump era politics.[1]

The tendency to view international politics through a more "strategic" lens has taken hold elsewhere as well. In the EU, the debate has centered around the notion of "strategic autonomy", which the EU declared one of its three priority objectives in 2020, alongside with the green transition and the digital transformation (European Union 2020, 1).

The dilemma is this: Multilateralism is the only viable institutional form of governance in a globalized world. It is likely to persist as long as globalization persists. But because it is so elusive – as Caporaso (1992, 603) points out, the term multilateral can refer to an organizing principle, organization, or an activity – its meaning is a moving target. The question is whether multilateralism is the "means or an end, an instrument, or an expression, or both" (ibid.).

Enter 2020.

A pandemic is a textbook example of a global issue warranting international cooperation and coordinated policies. Experts have for years warned that the world is ill-prepared to handle a rapidly spreading infectious disease within a highly interconnected and open system of global economy.[2] No one is in control, and this is why the initial reaction of nations and states was to turn inwards and control what they could: Borders.

But closed borders are in deep contradiction with how the global economy is organized today.

The sheer cost of lockdowns, social distancing measures, and disruption to global value chains might lead to a global economic slowdown not seen since the stock market crash of the 1930s (International Monetary Fund 2020). The shock would be massive.

Such moments of crisis are unique in world history. They put organized or patterned ways of doing things on hold, quite literally. In such moments, being – as a subjective experience

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[1] See "A Foreign Policy for the American People", speech by Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State. Washington, D.C. March 3, 2021. Available here: <https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>, accessed on 23 June 2021.

[2] See the next outbreak? We're not ready. Bill Gates. TED Talks, April 2014. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Af6b_wyiwI

of the world – is associated with a heightened sense of uncertainty. This is because they open new avenues for human behavior. A new normal.

They also serve as pivot points, critical junctures, around which to organize our understanding of how the world works.

Research on cognitive psychology suggests that fundamental to our ability to understand is how well a perceived instance fits our mental schemas.

A type of mental schema is narrative.

Narratives are powerful cognitive tools to connect apparently unconnected phenomena, cause and effect, events, identities, and places over a time period. The structure rests on a plot, the storyline.

IR literature recognizes several such narratives. These are usually organized around key events: The Peace of Westphalia (1648), the Congress of Vienna (1814–1815), the end of World War II (1945), the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991).

An event does not have to be massive to produce massive change. On the 11th September 2001 two airplanes hit the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York. A moment that heralded the beginning of a new era of war on terror.

How do we know when an event produces significant change? We do not. Until we start making sense of what happened through narratives.

There are broadly two competing explanations of what COVID-19 entails for the multilateral system. One highlights competition and suggests the pandemic constitutes a decisive break with the past (e.g., Fukuyama 2020). A new era of great power rivalry and nationalism. According to this view, the pandemic will accelerate the process of turning the world into spheres of influence, making global cooperation increasingly difficult. The other standpoint sees little change in the fundamentals of distribution of power (e.g., Drezner 2020). The world will pick up largely from where it left, albeit with a painful memory of lost lives. Unless the pandemic is prolonged.

What might not be so obvious is that after the initial shock of swift national responses to local epidemics, the support for multilateralism has remained constant. Key stakeholders in

the international system, China, the EU, the U.S., and Russia continue to refer to multilateralism as the primary vehicle for international cooperation.[3]

Only, what they mean by multilateralism differs. China and Russia emphasize the sovereign prerogatives of each state and multilateralism as the means with which to reinforce democracy *in* international politics. Rosemary Foot (2020) argues that China works within the UN to promote its alternative model for international peace and security cooperation based on a triadic model of economic development, the strong state, and social stability. Jessica Chen Weiss and Jeremy L. Wallace (2021, 657–568) found that China works strategically, aiming to ensure the survival of its political regime.

For the EU, and the U.S. and other G-7 countries, multilateralism is inseparable from liberal values, such as the rule of law, democracy, and human rights.[4] There is, nevertheless, a growing recognition that multilateralism needs to be reformed. In February 2021, the EU updated its approach, noting that the world had become multipolar and transactional (European Union 2021, 1).

It is just unclear what forms multilateralism might take under these conditions. The emphasis on the need to ensure governance is responsive to domestic demands, however, suggests domestic and international politics will be increasingly intertwined in the post-COVID world. This could reinvigorate democracy and reinforce legitimacy in multilateral governance, or it could limit the remit of multilateralism to the bare minimum.

Multilateralism and great power competition during COVID-19

by Cristian Morelli

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[3] See Secretary Antony J. Blinken Virtual Remarks at the UN Security Council Open Debate on Multilateralism, 7 May 2021, available here: <https://www.state.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-virtual-remarks-at-the-un-security-council-open-debate-on-multilateralism/>; Remarks by State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, "Let Us Unite and Put True Multilateralism into Practice", available here: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1874347.shtml>; and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks at the meeting of the UN Security Council, available here: <https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4721942>.

[4] See Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué. "Our Shared Agenda for Global Action to Build Back Better", 11 – 13 June 2021. Available here: <https://www.g7uk.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Carbis-Bay-G7-Summit-Communique-PDF-430KB-25-pages-3-1.pdf>, accessed on 23 June 2021.

COVID-19 has revolutionized the entire narrative of multilateral diplomacy. Right when the world was facing one of the highest points of isolationism in the last 70 years, the pandemic made us learn once again that multilateralism is the only instrument to fight against those invisible forces that drive the destiny of humanity. Despite the current endeavor of collaboration among all major powers in the so-called vaccine diplomacy, multilateralism still faces the greatest challenge of all: giving priority to national interests.

According to Guéhenno: "international organizations are always a reflection of the power dynamics that drive relations between their member states". In fact, just prior to the spread of the virus, the world saw cooperation declining and nationalism rising (Guéhenno, 2021, p. 31). This meant that the instances falling under art. 1.3 of the United Nations Charter, in which Member States (MS) are requested to use the United Nations (UN) as a platform to cooperate in solving whatever international problem (UN Charter, 1945), were becoming somewhat obsolete.

In terms of great power competition – and in our case vaccine competition among great powers – is the pandemic a threat to the peace which would then require the intervention of the Security Council? For Secretary-General António Guterres the answer is "yes" (Clarke, 2020). Then, what are the main threats to peace? This section will discuss three major stressors: 1) economic inequality; 2) the digitalization of diplomacy; and 3) geopolitical mutations. The following paragraphs will respect this order and will conclude by providing suggestions on reforming current multilateral practices.

First, among the many causes that could lead to war, the economic factor is surely among the primary stressors, especially in fragile societies. The current economic crisis is likely to lead to rising inequalities and a higher number of people living in absolute poverty. Eventually, this could lead to further spread of nationalist and populist sentiments in Europe and South America, insurrections in energy-exporting areas such as the MENA and Caucasus regions due to their reliance on energy revenues and, ultimately, to further development of nuclear weapons by Iran and North Korea, whose economies are also a target of international sanctions (Stares, 2021).

Undoubtedly, international organizations, regional organizations and individual Nation States will soon have to face rising inequalities among societies which in turn will become a threat to the current liberal international order (Flaherty et Al., 2021). In a few words, the COVID-19 pandemic is giving the liberal economy a critical test for its survival. The amoral

invisible hand that moves the world's market is unable to provide equal access to health care (Barnett, 2020, E130). It requires a reform so as to assign worth to all human beings.

The second mechanism through which the pandemic could affect international peace is through digitalization of diplomacy. Multilateral diplomacy is based upon direct contacts between Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers, UN officials, diplomats and all other actors determining international politics. With the spread of the pandemic and the imposed restrictions on movements between countries, mediations and the making and strengthening of new relations among such actors has become extremely challenging. The so-called digital diplomacy has not yet taken root among conventional diplomatic tools.

Alhashimi attributes three definitions to digital diplomacy: 1) good, allowing diplomats to have faster connections with their respective Governments when requesting instructions or guidance; 2) bad, because technological development can easily leave behind many countries that are already behind with technological acquisition and infrastructure; 3) ugly, because it creates opportunities for cyberattacks (Alhashimi, 2021, pp. 86-89). Countries suffering from a digital gap can be easily exposed to cyberattacks. Moreover, technological acquisition and usage during the pandemic made it harder for such countries to properly engage in multilateral meetings and share their concerns and necessities in the fight against COVID-19.

Third, whether we look at this pandemic through a realist[5], or liberal[6], or internationalist approach[7], it is essential to consider that the threat posed by the pandemic is way beyond state and boundary controls (Alaoui, 2021). Many realists consider the UN a failed internationalist project: post-Cold War postnational liberalist values are criticized as too intrusive into national affairs (Börzel et Al., 2021). At the same time, illiberal states have used this narrative to attack the selfsame liberal order (Farrell et Al., 2021). In fact, no major power, nor the Security Council itself, took steps to recognize COVID-19 as a threat to international peace. A 180° different approach compared to how the UNSC has dealt with the Ebola outburst in 2014 (Svicevic, 2020).

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[5] States' individual plans for vaccine experimentation, production and distribution; no cooperation.

[6] Collaboration among Nation-States and with Private actors.

[7] Centralized and universal – but particularistic – plan of action for the entire international community.

Keeping COVID-19 from becoming a threat to the peace makes the UNSC – the only organ with binding authority of the UN – a stumbling block rather than an ally. As millions of migrants and refugees look for security from wars and from the invisible threat of COVID-19, national interests and populist narratives impede the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Health Organization's COVAX programs from working properly and rapidly. Geopolitical boundaries are futile before a peril which is endangering the entire human race. In the presence of a global and transnational calamity, great powers should cooperate, not compete – whether to hide the truth or to find a scapegoat. Pandemics, just as climate change, requires collective decisions and actions.

In the words of Heiko Maas, German Minister for Foreign Affairs: "today, we know that a virus can be deadlier than a gun, that a cyberattack can cause more harm than a soldier, and that climate change threatens more people than most conventional weapons… Closing our eyes to this reality means refusing to learn" (Press Release SC/14241, 2020).

What should great powers do – or in other words, what should the P5 do – in order to make multilateralism once again the most useful tool in and for the future? There can be many answers, but let us begin with how to solve the problems caused by the three stressors analyzed and how reimagining multilateralism can improve the quality of the relations between and among states, and for the benefit of humanity:

1) Market-based inequalities can no longer continue affecting less-developed countries. A new multilateral market approach based on healthy competition between companies for the growth of local populations should be the end goal for a new set of rules redefining the neoliberal attitude to international commerce, trade and profit-sharing. This healthy competition should follow a set of moral values such as: a per-hour payment suitable to local inflation rates, equal employment rights to every gender and assuring sustainable development programs around the globe. In a few words, strengthen cooperation for the achievement of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

2) The UN has already taken steps to provide a working environment as suitable as possible for a digitalized diplomacy. Digital diplomatic communications, digital elections and digital intelligence are the new frontier of multilateralism. Technology grows at a speed that international actors and international law – just as national public law – cannot follow. The P5 and all UN MS should coordinate

their efforts to agree on a common plan for a secure cyber diplomacy, for a 'non-interference deal' in digital elections and severe sanctions on verified cyberattacks against another MS. No one can be left behind.

3) Geopolitical competition and nationalisms are completely defenseless in front of an invisible enemy. What the world is confronted with is a bio-weapon and, as such, it should be confronted by the UNSC under the collective security system. Whether it was voluntarily or involuntarily, the UNSC and the P5 failed to acknowledge the dangers and costs that this virus created globally so far. The pandemic has exacerbated the root causes of conflict and violence around the globe; it has pulverized some of the most important UN diplomatic achievements for peace. Geopolitics has often been associated to great power competition, but it should now take a new perspective, one where national interests and boundaries are substituted by interests for the entire human race and a world with safer boundaries from attacks and biohazards through a stronger multilateralism (Fiallo, 2021).

In conclusion, in a world still controlled by men and women coming from generations who had a 'Cold War education' and lived in an era suffocated by the idea of great power competition, in the words of an epic song by Sam Cooke dedicated to Martin Luther King Jr.: "a change is gonna come". A new generation of policy makers and diplomats, who grew with an education based on mutual respect, human rights, economic cooperation, humanitarian values, who have learned valuable lessons from this global pandemic and for the future ones, could bring a new era of multilateralism; an era where cooperation and international common moral values will spread across the earth and make this world a better place.

Performance and shortcomings of the World Health Organization

by Hunter Matson

The World Health Organization (WHO) is the primary organization for international public health, tasked with developing global health policy and coordinating responses to disease outbreaks. Intergovernmental organizations (IGO) like the WHO reduce transaction costs and assist states in overcoming cooperation problems that arise as states pursue collective

goods (Rittberger et al. 2019). They support states by contributing to the development of policy programs as well as carrying out operational activities (Ibid). Centralization and independence are two characteristics which maximize IGO efficiency and economize transaction costs, but these traits also come at a cost to member states – sovereignty loss (Abbott and Snidal 1998). Therefore, an organization's centralization and independence depend on the willingness of member states to cede sovereignty for efficiency. COVID-19 has shown how nationalism in the face of a global pandemic has led states to preserve sovereignty at all costs, which has deprived the WHO of the resources it needs to serve as a central and independent multilateral authority in the fight against the virus.

Centralization quite obviously leads to greater efficiency. With regard to policy programming, IGOs centralize technical expertise to aid member states in developing policy programs, reducing the costs of each member state maintaining its own expertise (Abbott and Snidal 1998). Additionally, IGO centralization of operational activities allows for pooling of resources and joint production which avoids duplication and ensures outputs are shared (Ibid). Independence allows IGOs to maintain neutrality among its members. In policy programming, this neutrality empowers technical experts from organizations to initiate as well as support states with programmatic decisions (Ibid). Furthermore, independence legitimizes IGOs and enables organizations to pursue rule-based operational activities even when they might conflict with member states' interests. Both centralization and independence are necessary for multilateral institutions to operate efficiently, and a deficit in either will certainly undermine the very core of an institution.

The International Health Regulations (IHR) is the WHO's primary policy tool for combating public health threats. It compels member states 'to prevent, protect against, control and provide a public health response to the international spread of disease' (World Health Organization 2005, 1). The IHR obligates states to 'develop certain minimum core public health capabilities' (Ibid, 1) in order to harmonize member states' public health systems and their ability to rapidly detect and mitigate international health emergencies before they spread. Additionally, it invests the WHO as the central organization for the 'control of the international spread of disease' (Ibid, 1) by obligating states to 'notify the WHO of events that may constitute a public health emergency of international concern' (Ibid, 1). However, at the time of the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, fifteen years after the introduction of these obligations, 'two-thirds of the world's countries lack the necessary laboratories and

surveillance systems to detect outbreaks and comply with international regulations' (Gebrekidan 2020). Despite efforts to centralize, COVID exposed just how decentralized and imbalanced global health infrastructures were. Crucially, the WHO lacked sufficient resources to assist member states in implementing the necessary infrastructure. Upon declaring COVID-19 a pandemic, the WHO requested $675 million to urgently combat the virus. Member states committed less than half of that (Ibid). Without the necessary resources to fulfill its mandate, the WHO has been unable to successfully provide a centralized response to COVID-19.

COVID-19 also exposed the limits to the WHO's independence to pursue policy programs. The IHR authorizes the WHO Secretariat to 'consider unofficial reports of public health events and obtain verification from State Parties' (World Health Organization 2005). Additionally, the Director-General can declare 'public health emergencies of international concern' and issue 'corresponding temporary recommendations' (Ibid). These measures are designed to empower the WHO to initiate policies based on science instead of politics which had plagued health emergency responses in the past. However, during the COVID-19 outbreak, the WHO's independent investigative powers were hamstrung by member states and its recommendations ignored. China silenced initial reports from medical professionals within Wuhan about the severity of the outbreak and subsequently blocked access for WHO officials sent to investigate the source of the virus (Hegarty 2020; Boseley 2021). The WHO's measured response towards China led the US to question its independence, thereby questioning its legitimacy. President Trump criticized the WHO for not acting fast enough to independently investigate the claims coming out of China, especially once reports surfaced that China was deliberately silencing medical professionals. He chastised Director Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus and claimed his response to China blocking access to WHO investigators was too soft (Croucher and Brennan 2020). Trump's decision to withdraw the US from the WHO as a result had the potential to not only undermine the legitimacy of the organization, but the withholding of funding from the US would have further exacerbated the resource constraints the organization faced.

The vaccination efforts highlight the challenges COVID-19 has posed to the WHO's ability to conduct operational activities on behalf of member states. As the primary international organization for global health issues, it would be logical that the WHO serves as the central organ for all vaccine-related efforts. Given the lack of knowledge about the virus in its early

days and uncertainty about which vaccines would be most effective, the WHO could pool resources to enhance research and development efficiency. Furthermore, once an effective vaccine was discovered, the WHO could coordinate multinational production efforts that 'achieve economies of scale, avoid duplication and unproductive competition and ensure that the outputs…are shared' (Abbott and Snidal 1998, 14). They could use scientific evidence instead of politics to prioritize vaccine deployment to the areas of greatest need. Strikingly, the WHO was effectively sidelined from the entire process. It was European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen that convened a summit of world leaders in May 2020 to coordinate global vaccine development efforts and even still, the US, Russia and India did not participate (Booth, Johnson, and Morello 2020). As a result of these abstentions, the coordinated efforts failed and instead 'vaccine nationalism' took off, with wealthy states investing directly with private pharmaceutical firms in exchange for privileged access to the initial doses of successful vaccines. Even after successful vaccines were developed, efforts to share the recipe and enable widespread production were hampered by intellectual property rights concerns. In each step of the vaccine development and deployment process, the centralization of operational activities was inhibited by nationalist policies of member states that led to unnecessary competition instead of greater coordination and efficiency. All the while, despite calls for greater cooperation, the WHO was ignored.

The independence of the WHO in operational activities was also questioned through the vaccine efforts, specifically the WHO's approval of vaccine candidates for its Emergency Use Listing (EUL). Along with capacity constraints on surveillance and monitoring, many states lacked the national health infrastructure or technical expertise to vet and authorize each of the vaccines being developed (Singh and Upshur 2020). As such, these states relied on the WHO as a neutral party to assess each vaccine for emergency use, and determine which vaccines promised more benefits than risks. Despite the WHO's transparent criteria for EUL approval (World Health Organization 2020), the organization is less forthcoming with the way in which vaccines are prioritized for consideration for the EUL. Noteworthily, the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine was the first to be added to the EUL in December 2020 and led what would be a series of approvals for vaccines developed between the US and the EU. The first of the two main Chinese-developed vaccines followed nearly five months after, and as of June 2021, the Russian-developed Sputnik V is still under review (World Health Organization 2021). The WHO notes that the priority for evaluation reflects the order in which the organization received the necessary information from the vaccine producer to

properly assess the product. However, critics of the organization point to the earmarked funding the organization regularly receives from the US as well as other Western non-government entities such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to question whether the prioritization of review was independent and neutral or whether donors were able to influence the priority.

Returning to the overarching argument of this section, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the inability of the WHO to provide a centralized and independent multilateral approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. Both in its ability to shape and coordinate policy programs as well as undertake operational activities, the WHO has suffered a deficit in resources and legitimacy necessary to be an effective multilateral institution. To play a more crucial role in the future, member states need to invest greater resources in the organization so that it can properly undertake its centralization efforts in combating international health emergencies, and additionally, states must cede greater autonomy to the organization so that it may fulfill its mandate to engage in scientific evidence-based decision making, independent from political (or financial) influence from member states. Should these necessary reforms not occur, the World Health Organization will continue to suffer from a 'capabilities-expectation gap' (Hill 1993), and be relegated to an ineffective institution of multilateralism.

Conclusion

This short paper challenged the meaning and role of multilateralism in times of COVID-19 through three theoretical approaches whose purpose was to identify obstacles to stronger multilateralism.

The first section argued that the greatest challenge multilateralism faces today is the contested nature of international order. This perspective depicts the pandemic as a scene on which a battle of narratives is fought. According to this view, multilateralism will persist if globalization persists, but its meaning is increasingly contested. This contest could change the way we understand multilateralism.

The second section discussed how major stressors - rising inequalities, difficulties caused by digital backwardness in less developed countries and geopolitical implications caused by the

pandemic - can trigger future conflicts and increase tensions among great powers seeking to achieve national interests. It is for these reasons that the achievement of the SDGs, a UN joint plan to help less-developed countries to increase their digital diplomacy capacity, and a review of the meaning of geopolitics, can change the course of multilateralism for the better.

The third section examined the role that international organizations play in multilateralism. It highlighted the efficiency gains that robust organizations can provide but also noted that organizations are limited by their members' willingness to cede sovereignty and invest the organization with authority. It used the case of the WHO during COVID-19 to demonstrate that when faced with a global pandemic, states opted for nationalist approaches instead of investing in multilateral organizations. These actions by the member state crippled the WHO's ability to fulfill its mandate and serve as the central and independent hub for global health emergency response.

In conclusion, this paper has demonstrated that the battle between national interests and multilateralism for global interests is more ferocious than ever. It is still too early to say whether the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way multilateralism is perceived and employed in international politics. The most important and critical advice that the authors would like to express is this: in front of some of the greatest global challenges humanity has faced, there is no national interest nor gain that could outlast those that would benefit the entire human race. Isolationism, narrow national egoistic interests, and divisive narratives in political discourse will only limit and hamper, if not halt completely, the efforts of the preceding generations in creating an environment of cooperation and collaboration critical to solving problems that know no borders. Multilateralism will remain central, if not the only, mechanism to save the planet.

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Topic 2: <u>UNIVERSAL HEALTH COVERAGE</u>

Is the case for universal health coverage today stronger than it was two years ago? Why? How would have the world coped differently if this system had been in place around the world? How to move forward?

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<u>Introduction to Universal Health Coverage</u>

The adoption of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development in continuation of unfinished engagements from the Millennium Challenge goals was a major milestone for the United Nations Member States to preserve and promote human rights in every aspect of our lives. Eradicating the world from hunger, poverty and disease is the universal goal (1) that countries strive to achieve. Within the Sustainable development goals framework, member states have been progressive in achieving the goals set in economic, social and environmental dimensions by 2030. Specifically, accelerating health and well-being through Universal Health Coverage (UHC) (2) is a pivotal component of social development. UHC means that all individuals and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. It includes the full spectrum of essential, quality health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care across the life course. According to the academic literature, it is estimated that about 150 million individuals worldwide face catastrophic healthcare expenditure and out of these more than 100 million are living in poverty worldwide (3). Therefore, as the UN proclaims to leave no one behind, it is an important task for state governments to act in order to mitigate poverty and disease that are set forth on the goals as health is a fundamental human right.

In order to maintain inclusion and equity, it is essential to consider under the UHC provisions what services are covered, how much do people have to pay to receive services and who is covered. UHC is therefore made up of three dimensions, given by the WHO as the extent of population health coverage, proportion of health costs covered and expansion of healthcare services [Figure 1](4).
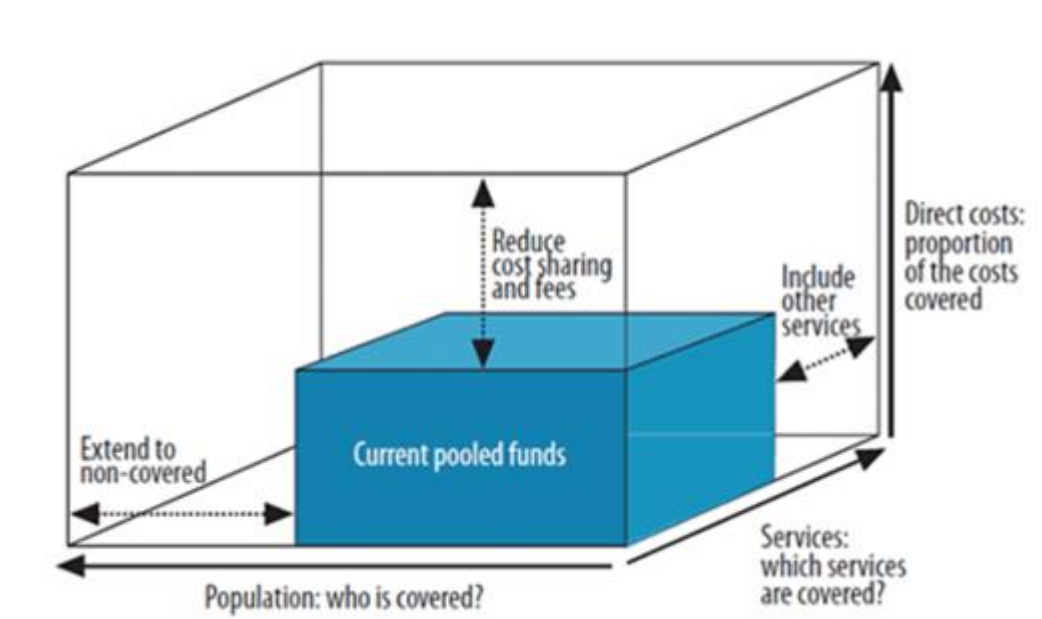
Figure 1: Three UHC dimensions given by the WHO (4)

The emergence of novel COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated health systems in all countries including those that are developed and hindered overall progress made towards the 2030 goals. The pandemic proves and shows us again the utmost importance of accelerating efforts to build strong and resilient health systems and expanding investments in this field. Based on the country's context, the pandemic hit the countries differently. For instance, developed countries that already have accessible and affordable health services face unprecedented and unexpected demands, whereas for developing countries this might be a chance to improve the health systems and prepare for forthcoming pandemics in the future (5). This paper gives an overview of the monitoring frameworks for the measurement of UHC, global UHC performances before COVID-19 and the impact of COVID-19 on UHC progress. We have provided an insight into the UHC performances based on highest and lowest country specific UHC index scores and drawn recommendations laid on the foundation of our findings.

UHC Monitoring

Monitoring of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is integral to the roadmap of attaining SDG goal 3. In 2014, the World Health Organization and the World Bank jointly launched the first monitoring framework that emphasizes on the indicators to estimate progress towards UHC. The indicators focus on service coverage (3.8.1) and financial protection (3.8.2), with a dimension of equity; both of which will be explained below. They have evolved over time

in the subsequent global monitoring reports and through various high-level meetings, building on experience and consultation with experts around the world in such a way, that these indicators involve health interventions from which every individual in every country is benefitted(6).

The service coverage is measured by the Service Coverage Index which includes indicators for prevention (health promotion and illness prevention) as well as curative services (rehabilitation and palliation). In the 2017 Global Monitoring Report, 4 categories of indicators: Reproductive, Maternal, Nutritional and Child Health (RMNCH), Infectious diseases, Non-communicable diseases, Service capacity and access were established and in the latest 2019 Global Monitoring Report, 14 tracer indicators have been used to track health services coverage. The data for this monitoring is made available by the respective national statistics offices and ministries of health at the country level (7, 8).

For the assessment of Financial risk protection, catastrophic health spending (SDG 3.8.2) is measured and is defined as out-of-pocket health spending exceeding 10% and 25% of the household budget (total consumption or income). It is measured through various ways, some of which include budget share approach, health spending minus a deduction for necessities or deduction of actual spending on food. Data obtained through household budget surveys, household income and expenditure surveys, household living standard surveys or socioeconomic surveys is used for monitoring of financial protection. The surveys and their frequencies vary according to country-income groups (6).

In May 2019, the World Health Assembly emphasized the importance of making progress and moving towards 'effective' coverage for UHC health services that could also account for health gains and quality of services being provided. Lozano et al. used this life-course approach and presented an effective UHC framework that consists of population age-groups according to selected service coverage indicators. High priority indicators that reflect the measurement of palliative care have been proposed in this index for the first time but measurements to study rehabilitation are still placed in the aspirational list due to data collection and methodological limitations at a country level (9).

To the authors knowledge, the effective UHC index presented by Lozano et al. is the most up-to-date global UHC assessment based on framework recommendations made by the World Health Assembly. This paper therefore uses the outcomes presented by Lozano et al. to reflect on the status of UHC in various countries.

Global UHC performance up to 2019

Overall, global UHC performance has improved overtime from a global UHC index of 45.8 in 1990, to 59.4 in 2017 and 60.3 in 2019(9, 10). Although global progress has been made, a gap of more than 70 UHC index points exists between the highest and lowest country specific UHC index scores. Countries achieving 95 or higher included Japan and Iceland, compared to Somalia and the Central African Republic scoring lower than 25(9).

The effective UHC coverage index shows countries achieving a higher UHC index score of 90 or above tend to be HICs (9). HICs are reported to generally have lower levels of catastrophic health expenses and increased areas of service coverage (11). Wagstaff and Neelsen did however observe a trade-off between the two UHC dimensions (financial risk protection and service coverage) which may falsely imply improved UHC progress. The authors reported variations in levels of financial risk protection, at any given service coverage, across countries with similar incomes, and vice versa, UHC index score improvements associated with improved service coverage did not translate to improved financial risk protection (11). Countries achieving a UHC index of 85 or higher generally scored at least 80 across most UHC indicators, but at times scored lower in subset indicators; for example, meeting needs for family planning or antiretroviral treatment coverage. However, these are considered areas of lower potential health gain when compared to other areas of health, namely non-communicable diseases (cardiovascular disease, diabetes and cancer) which have more potential health gain relative to the countries in question (9). This demonstrates the need for country and possibly community specific UHC indicators as health needs in different regions differ.

Iceland and other European countries, Australia, Canada, Japan, Singapore and South Korea comprised the highest UHC performing countries in 2019, with scores of 95, 89, 90, 96, 92 and 89 respectively (9). The highest scoring countries, Japan and Iceland, demonstrate having economic growth, a strong primary healthcare system, healthcare governance, workforce and pooled financial risk protection. A political consensus in building a welfare state coupled with economic growth allowed Japan to build a robust healthcare system (12, 13). The Japanese government forcefully nudged physicians to focus on primary healthcare by reducing funding for public hospitals and other measures which encouraged a PHC focus (12). Employer based and community based social health insurance (SHI) was introduced

and mandated for all citizens, in addition to introducing a maximum for co-insurance payments and strict rules regarding charges outside of SHI plans; this ensured financial risk protection for the Japanese population. The government is able to control total expenditure by operating a fee schedule financing system with a strict global budget (13). Similarly, in Iceland healthcare is state-centred, but unlike Japan, Iceland's financing system is built on public taxation (80.4%) and private spending in the form of out-of-pocket payments (18.2%) (14). The health system is well integrated, utilizing the same information health system across all public healthcare facilities for information sharing and continuity of care. In 2014, it was reported that there were 355.8 physicians and 1596 nurses practicing per 100,000 people, characterising Iceland's health system as one with higher than average healthcare resources (14).

Most of the countries that scored low levels of UHC were in sub-Saharan Africa. However, ten countries were outside Africa. These include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Haiti, and Papua New Guinea. These countries scored low across most of the index' indicators except for vaccination coverage, diarrheal disease, and lower respiratory tract infection treatment (9). The reasons for these countries' failure to achieve Universal Health Coverage are complex and intercalated. The poor economic situation, poor governance, lack of political will, the lack of sound evidence based People-cantered health policies, inadequate health system; mainly Primary Health Care insufficiencies, the lack of financial protection mechanisms, and the lack of a national health plan that puts UHC as the base of their strategy, are some of the main reasons identified in the literature for this failure(15-18). Although the economic situation of the country acts as an integral factor in achieving Universal Health Coverage (19), several high-income countries have failed to achieve high levels of Universal Health Coverage, this is mainly because of the lack the proper financial protection mechanism that ensures that everyone can financially access and afford various preventive and curative health services without hardships (20).

To reflect and further explore some of the main challenges contributing to a country's failure in achieving UHC, we will take examples from the Central African Republic and Somalia. With a population of 4.6 and nearly 16 million people (21, 22), respectively, the governments of Central African Republic and Somalia managed to provide accessible and affordable care for only 22.3% and 23.9% of their population respectively (9). One of the main reasons for this failure is the ineffective health financing strategies with out-of-pocket payment constituting nearly more than 50% of the health expenditure. Second, the health system in these countries is privatized leaving great percentage of low socio-economic

groups out of the health coverage. Third, the unstable economical and conflict conditions of these countries perpetuate the low levels of UHC. Fourth, the fragmented and comprehensive health systems with insufficient PHC facilities contribute largely to this issue. Fifth, the health workforce density in Central Africa Republic and Somalia fall below the UHC requirement of 4.5 per 1000 population recommended by the WHO which further challenges the attainment of UHC in these countries. Lastly, some of the other challenges standing against achieving UHC in the Central Africa Republic and Somalia, are the insufficient medication supply and the lack of a robust monitoring and evaluation system (21-23).

How Covid-19 impacted UHC

Covid-19 pandemic has been a lesson for the world in terms of exposing health gaps and unleashing the importance of universal health coverage. It has hugely impacted the delivery of essential health services but there is still some time before we can actually know the extent of disruption.

Two rounds of Pulse Surveys have been conducted by WHO in 2020 and 2021 to track the disruptions of essential health services during Covid-19. In the survey published in 2021 (January-March), coverage of 63 essential health services was assessed using a four-point ordinal scale with a response rate of 63%. Although the extent of disruptions has decreased from 2020 to 2021, the far-reaching impact of COVID-19 is still evident (24).

According to the report, increase in service disruptions is directly proportional to the community transmission rates of Covid-19. There is a huge gap between the income groups wherein high-income countries have reported lower levels of disruption compared to others. If we look at the level of disruption at each healthcare delivery level and according to disease specific tracer indicators, the percentages reflect the devastating effect of the pandemic. Approximately, 35% of 112 countries reported disruptions across all service delivery channels. On an average, 35% of countries reported disruptions across RMNCAH and nutrition services and more than one-third of the countries reported disruption in immunization services. Outbreak detection and control activities for non-Covid diseases have been reported to be disrupted by about 25% countries participating in the survey and the greatest disruption has been declared to be in TB diagnosis and treatment under the communicable diseases. Cancer screening is the most disrupted non-Communicable disease service reported by nearly half of the countries. Apart from these, extensively affected health services are Hepatitis B, C; Other NCD's like hypertension and diabetes; urgent dental care; malnutrition; malaria. The global economic crisis during Covid-19 has made it difficult to

make healthcare services accessible to the population when they need it the most due to increased financial barriers.

The impact of Covid 19 on UHC can be best understood by the recent reports where either reverse progress has been noticed towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) or the progress is stalled. Despite many problems, this disease has given the opportunity to all the countries to strengthen their case of universal health coverage, pandemic preparedness and response; which requires the strengthening of health systems (25).

<u>Resilient health systems</u>

Strong and resilient health systems are those that are able to withstand high-impact health emergencies, maintain provision of regular services and overcome unexpected health challenges are critical for health security and establishment of UHC (26). Health systems resilience has been defined as "the capacity of health actors, institutions and populations to prepare for and effectively respond to crisis, maintain core functions when a crisis hits, and informed by lessons learned during the crisis, reorganize if conditions require it"(27). According to World Health Assembly resolution, international organizations and other relevant stakeholders were called to support countries in health system strengthening and to assist and continue to call upon all States' Parties to take the actions according to the provisions of the "International Health regulations", including by providing all necessary support to countries for building, strengthening and maintaining their capacity to fully comply with the IHR (28). Consequently, every country responded to the pandemic differently and based on the economic status and health system resilience, the weakest countries have been receiving support through international assistance. Kutzin and Sparkes have argued that strengthening health systems requires a substantial and international focus on improving performance by moving beyond investing in the core capacities of health systems and reforming how these capacities operate together with joint financing. Thus, low-income countries should raise domestic funding to at least 5% of GDP and be given the flexibility to integrate vertical programmes into a unified health system that is compatible with attaining UHC (29).

According to the WHO framework (30), there are five dimensions that fall under the resilient health systems. Firstly, health information systems include good disease surveillance systems and their integration with health management information systems. Under the health management, those countries that have weak supply chain systems, had an opportunity to

improve the current procurement and supply chain system and locally manufacture health products. However, for instance, the vaccine producing countries produce vaccines not for their own people, but rather for the world and the accession of it was prioritized by developed countries which derives inequality. In respect to disease surveillance, real-time information is invaluable not only for providing early warnings of an outbreak but also for tracking the spread of the epidemic forecasting and preparing the health care system for the surge (31). Countries with consistent information systems such as UK and the Scandinavian countries were more responsive to the spread of COVID-19. They could do early studies of patterns of disease spread, from their well-maintained patient records, and use this to identify the chains of transmission and determine risk factors for the COVID deaths in their country (32).

As WHO adopted surge planning tool, Member States enabled to plan on intensive care capacity needs, identifying the timing and severity of the peak of the outbreak and engaging in detailed planning on human resources for health systems.

Secondly, health care workforce and financing. Human resource in the public health sector is a constant issue universally and the pandemic exacerbated it. The WHO estimates a workforce density of 4.45 doctors, midwives and nurses per 1000 population is required in order to meet up with UHC goals by 2030(33). However, a lack of political willingness to invest in human resources has resulted in the shortage of healthcare providers both in urban and provincial levels. The workforce required to provide UHC is vast and labour-intensive (34) as UHC is dependent on workforce density, capacity and ability to deliver high-quality patient-centred care (35). A shortage of such workers can stifle progressivity towards UHC by having a bottleneck effect (26). Healthcare financing is made up of revenue generation, resource pooling and strategic purchasing (34) which must be managed effectively to ensure the delivery of cost-effective healthcare that equally safeguards the population from financial risk when seeking healthcare. An estimated spend of $1398 per capita spend is required to achieve a UHC index score of 80 and $2538 per capita to achieve a score of 90 (9). Public policy in free care for all patients during the pandemic is quite universal, however, due to shortages of consumables, and amenities, there were significant out of pocket expenditures at private hospitals where public hospitals were overcrowded or with lack of beds and so forth. The pandemic proves that investments in public health by the governments is not optional, but fundamental for public good and health protection.

Thirdly, governance and values which demonstrates the ability to generate and use evidence

and learn from past experiences to keep adapting the system. Some countries used the past memory from the previous pandemic outbreak and managed with less mortality and economic constraints.

To recapitulate, countries managed differently such as developed countries relied on the current health systems and took it for granted, while low-income countries aimed to build health systems that are unified and sufficiently publicly funded are under the power of donor-driven funding. To establish universally resilient and sustainable health systems depend on all these above-mentioned factors.

UHC discourse post COVID-19

To the authors knowledge, a global comparative analysis between country-specific COVID-19 and UHC performance has not yet be conducted. However, Japan, Singapore and South Korea are countries with high effective UHC indices (96, 92 and 89 respectively) recognised to have outperformed others in responding to COVID-19(36); with lower COVID-19 deaths per 100,000 population (11.08, 0.60, 3.84 respectively)(37). In addition to high UHC performance, strong investments in community health services, epidemiological surveillance and emergency preparedness have been shown to yield sustainable and resilient health systems (38, 39). Therefore, the success of a countries response to COVID-19 is suggested to be highly dependent of the resilience of the healthcare system, global health security (GHS) and UHC indicators (40). As such, much discourse surrounding UHC and COVID-19 recommends the expansion of UHC index to include global health security (GHS) indicators, capable of measuring epidemiological surveillance and emergency preparedness (39).

Lessons can be learnt from Japan, who in addition to achieving high UHC, ranks as one of the most prepared countries in three out of six GHS indicators: (i) Early Detection & Reporting For Epidemics Of Potential International Concern, (ii) Commitments To Improving National Capacity, Financing And Adherence To Norms And (iii) Overall Risk Environment And Country Vulnerability To Biological Threats(41). UHC achievement, a robust healthcare system and investments in GHS, namely emergency preparedness, enabled Japan to develop effective COVID-19 mitigation policies and

maintain essential health services during the pandemic (36). Iceland ranks second in effective UHC performance with an index score of 95 and as one of the most prepared countries in one out of six GHS indicators, Overall Risk Environment And Country Vulnerability To Biological Threats(41); this indicator measures factors such as a countries political risk and stability, socio-economic resilience, infrastructure adequacy, environmental risks and public healthcare spending per capita(41). As a result of Iceland's well-established flexible PHC and resilient healthcare system, proactive screening activities and testing capacity, Iceland was able to manage COVID-19 and maintain a number of services(42, 43)(; with maternity and well-child care services near pre-pandemic levels(42). With regards to vaccine coverage, by June 12th, 2021, 63% of Iceland's population had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine (44), which was a significant achievement on a global stage. This can be partly attributed to Iceland's strong healthcare resources and PHC system, however, other confounding factors such as the government ability to secure vaccines and country population should be taken into consideration. In comparison Singapore, Japan and South Korea had achieved 42.8%, 23.8 % 12.6% first dose vaccine coverage (44).

As previously reported, most of the Sub-Saharan Africa countries have a low UHC index score and, they fall among the least prepared countries in terms of GHS(41) but still, did not report high COVID-19 cases and deaths compared to some of the countries with advanced UHC systems(45, 46). Taking the Central African Republic and Somalia as examples, with a UHC index at 22.3 and 23.9 respectively(9), and a GHS index at 16.6 and 27.3 respectively (41), 7,101 confirmed cases and 98 deaths were reported from Central African Republic(47), and 14, 779 confirmed cases and 774 deaths for Somalia.(48) This is not however as a result of strategic COVID-19 mitigation plans, but because of confounding factors identified and reported in the literature. Besides the genetic characteristics (45), several researchers have attributed the low levels of COVID-19 in Sub-Saharan Africa to the presence of potential protective demographic and geographic factors (45, 49, 50). In terms of demographic characteristics, the relatively young and rural populations of most African countries, including the Central African Republic and Somalia, contribute to low levels of COVID-19 transmissions and lower disease severity compared with the countries with older and more urbanized populations(45, 49, 50). Several researchers have linked the high levels of temperature to lower levels of COVID-19, regarding the geographic factors (45, 49, 50). Thus, the low COVID-19 cases and deaths do not reflect the county's ability in fighting COVID-19 but because of the likely presence of other protective factors.

In terms of the testing capacity, based on the WHO, COVID-19 status is generally underreported in Sub-Saharan Africa because most countries lack a functional disease surveillance system with a limited testing capacity (51). As of 31ˢᵗ of December 2020, Somalia and the Central African Republic had performed 1699 and 7355 tests per 1 million population, respectively (52). As of the vaccination, a total of 143,379 and 26,541 vaccines had been administered in Somalia (48) and the Central African Republic (47) respectively. These figures can reflect poor COVID-19 controlling and mitigation strategies in the region which is greatly linked with their poor UHC system.

Despite the United States of America having a high UHC index at 82 (9) and being one of the most prepared countries based on the GHS index (53), the United States of America reported high levels of COVID-19 cases and deaths with over 33 M cases and nearly 594 K deaths (54). Several researchers have linked this with the delayed governmental COVID-19 response in the early stages of the disease, uneven restriction measurements between states, the initial political denial, community ignorance, and others (55). On the other hand, the USA has been performing relatively well in terms of the vaccination, with 301,161,088 vaccines being administered as of the 4ᵗʰ of June 2021 (54) .

After COVID-19, is the case for UHC stronger?

Globally, countries have either stalled or regressed in their plan towards achieving UHC as a result of the variable impact of COVID-19 on the provision of different health services globally; thus making the situation for UHC weaker compared to 2 years ago. UHC has long been advocated as a necessity to ensure the fundamental human right of health for all members of society at all times. As demonstrated by examples previously mentioned in this paper (Japan and Iceland), a positive association has been observed between strong UHC performance and a strong COVID-19 response. This therefore reinforces the importance of achieving UHC and the strengthening of health systems in preparation for the next global health threat. However, it must be noted that countries which had reported strong UHC and COVID-19 responses had also invested in global health security measures. Such measures include a resilient healthcare system, with efficient epidemiological surveillance and emergency preparedness programmes embedded within strong primary healthcare. The combination of such investments is demonstrated to have played a significant role in mitigating the health threats imposed by COVID-19.

Strong governance and political will has also been highlighted to have played a significant

role; as despite having a strong UHC system, the USA performed poorly in their early response to COVID-19. This is mainly because of the political denial, which is reflected by the poor performance in the political and security risk domain of the GHS index (41). In the case of low- and middle- income countries, these countries have poorly managed COVID-19 because of their poor performance in service coverage index, GHS index, and having non-resilient health systems. If global UHC had been stronger, perhaps the world would have fared better.

As demonstrated by the previous examples, the system of universal health coverage alone is insufficient to reflect upon a country's ability to mitigate and handle global health crises like COVID-19. Although important, other indicators that measure GHS need to be incorporated into the UHC index in order to measure global health status and secure it in the future.

Recommendations

To strengthen the situation of UHC in the future, this paper recommends the following:

- **The modification of the UHC index**

  The current UHC index is incomprehensive when considering global health during global health threats, especially pandemics. We therefore recommend either the expansion of the UHC index to include global health security indicators, or its use as a proxy in a larger assessment, capable of measuring pandemic preparedness.

- **Stronger advocacy for Primary Healthcare Systems**

  PHC functions as the foundation for UHC as community-based services take a needs-based approach to promoting health, preventing and curing diseases, providing rehabilitative and palliative healthcare to a local population (34, 56). Greater advocation for the building of stronger primary healthcare is needed to push greater access and utilisation of services by the people leading to better population health, patient satisfaction and lesser burden on tertiary health care centres. It would also be a positive step towards achieving socioeconomic equity and decreasing catastrophic expenditures.

- **Improved Governance and Financing**

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Political will is integral to the goal of UHC. Countries lagging behind in achieving the goal of UHC should consider increasing the allocation of budget and resources towards the health sector by improving domestic tax and revenue performance. Health Policy priority areas should be identified based on the country's individual requirements and identification of bottlenecks that are responsible for hampering the progress towards UHC.

- **Improved Data systems and integration**

  As reported by the Global Monitoring Report 2019, data collection systems and tracers for addressing non-communicable diseases are still not available in many countries. Furthermore, Covid-19 has highlighted the gaps in data systems and their integration around the world. This paper recommends countries must expand and build stronger data systems used for surveillance, data collection, identifying health trends, and analysing UHC measures on a national and global scale (through global integration) (9).

- **Greater investment in Pandemic Preparedness and Response**

  All countries should invest more in pandemic preparedness and response, such that whenever the world is affected by such emerging and re-emerging infections, they can plan an immediate, robust response; such that other essential health services that could affect the populations are not interrupted and all countries manage to maintain an upward trend towards achieving UHC.

<u>Summary</u>

This paper provides an overview of UHC pre- and post- the COVID-19 pandemic by comparing countries' response to the pandemic under the different frameworks. Specifically, based on the UHC measurements, Japan and Iceland with highest index scores are compared to Somalia and the Central African Republic as they score the lowest. It highlights the ground of varying achievements per country in contexts within the UHC framework. This paper highlights the World Health Assembly recommendations for health gains and quality of services, in addition to the UHC monitoring framework indicators; the service coverage and the financial protection.

The COVID-19 pandemic is central to this paper as UHC progress is explained before and

after the pandemic and how it affected the whole system. In particular, the disruption of essential health services in the level of the equity of coverage is explained. This paper draws on the importance of having resilient healthcare systems and global health security when considering UHC during a pandemic by reflecting on country specific examples. At the end, this paper gives a conclusion on the status of UHC after COVID-19 and draws recommendations to strengthen the situation of UHC in the future at the national and global level.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACK GRUND

Each country is unique, and each country may focus on different areas, or develop their own ways of measuring progress towards UHC. But there is also value in a global approach that uses standardized measures that are internationally recognized so that they are comparable across borders and over time

Universal Health Coverage means that all individuals and communities receive the health services they need without suffering financial hardship. It includes the full spectrum of essential, quality health services, from health promotion to prevention, treatment, rehabilitation, and palliative care across the life course. Universal Health Coverage strategies enable everyone to access the services that address the most significant causes of disease and death and ensures that the quality of those services is good enough to improve the health of the people who receive them.

Many countries are already making progress towards Universal Heath Coverage, although everywhere the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the availability the ability of health systems to provide undisrupted health services. All countries can take actions to move more rapidly towards UHC despite the setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, or to maintain the gains they have already made. In countries where health services have traditionally been accessible and affordable, governments are finding it increasingly difficult to respond to the ever-growing health needs of the populations and the increasing costs of health services.

Improving health service coverage and health outcomes depends on the availability, accessibility, and capacity of health and care workers to deliver quality people-centred integrated care. The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically demonstrated the invaluable role of the health and care workforce and the importance of expanding investments in this area. To meet the health workforce requirements of the SDGs and UHC targets, over 18 million additional health workers are needed by 2030. Gaps in the supply of and demand for health workers are concentrated in low- and lower-middle-income countries. The growing demand for health workers is projected to add an estimated 40 million health sector jobs to the global economy by 2030. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has initially affected the health workforce disproportionately, has highlighted the need to protect health and care workers, to prioritize investment in their education and employment, and to leverage partnerships to provide them with decent working conditions.

Health Policy and Systems Research

Health policy and systems research (HPSR) is an emerging field that seeks to understand and improve how societies organize themselves in achieving collective health goals, and how different actors interact in the policy and implementation processes to contribute to policy outcomes. By nature, it is inter-disciplinary, a blend of economics, sociology, anthropology, political science, public health and epidemiology that together draw a comprehensive picture of how health systems respond and adapt to health policies

Health policy and systems research can be employed at several points in the policy cycle, from getting an issue onto the policy agenda to evaluating and learning from implemented policies. It focuses primarily upon the more upstream aspects of health, organizations and policies, rather than clinical or preventive services or basic scientific research. It covers a wide range of questions from financing to governance and issues surrounding implementation of services and delivery of care in both the public and private sectors. It is a crucial policy analysis tool of both policies and processes including the role, interests and values of key actors at local, national and global levels.

Health policies are subject to political processes that govern health systems. Understanding these processes is not only critical in the design of effective policies, but in the creation of evidence to inform those policies. Health policies and health systems are not separate entities: HPSR is a recognition that everything is connected.

ANALYSIS

Global movement towards UHC

Health is also an essential part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, the SDG 3.8 target aims to "achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential health care services, and access to safe, effective, quality, and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all." In addition, SDG 1, which calls to "end poverty in all its forms everywhere" could be in peril without UHC, as almost 90 million people are impoverished by health expenses every year. Access to affordable, quality primary healthcare is the cornerstone of UHC, but many people around the world still struggle to fulfil their basic healthcare needs. Mental health, often overlooked, is also an important element of UHC, as it is critical to people's ability to lead a productive life.

Mobilizing Resources for UHC

Achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is at the core of these efforts. The World Bank

Group (WBG) is supporting countries' efforts towards this goal and to provide quality, affordable health services to everyone regardless of their ability to pay by strengthening primary health care systems and reducing the financial risks associated with ill health and increasing equity. Globally, there has been significant progress towards UHC, but a 2019 World Bank/World Health Organization (WHO) research warns that, if current trends continue, up to 5 million people will be unable to access health care by the end of this decade. The report indicates that countries need to increase spending on primary health care by at least 1% of their gross domestic product (GDP) to meet the health targets agreed under the Sustainable Development Goals.

The pandemic has disrupted delivery of essential health services, threatening to reverse years of hard-won gains in health and human capital outcomes. In many countries, there are still large coverage gaps, particularly for poor and marginalized communities. Ensuring that every woman and child has access to health care is also fundamental to ending poverty, building robust economies, and achieving UHC. The Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents (GFF), a multi-stakeholder partnership hosted at the World Bank has been supporting countries with the world's highest maternal and child mortality burden and financial needs.

Pandemic Preparedness and Health Emergencies (focus areas)

Pandemics pose a serious threat not only to global health security and to achieving UHC, but also to economic security. While deadly disease outbreaks are inevitable, strong health systems can allow countries to better detect and respond to diseases and prevent an outbreak from becoming a pandemic. In response to the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, the World Bank has been closely coordinating with WHO and other multilateral and partner agencies to accelerate the international response to support countries to manage the global health emergency. The WBG's financing, complemented by policy advice and technical assistance, is helping developing countries cope with the health and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. To help recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the WBG is building on its initial COVID-19 response in over 100 countries with $12 billion to help poor countries purchase and distribute vaccines, tests, and treatments and strengthen health systems. This also includes the support for vaccine cold chains, training for health workers, better data and information systems, and outreach campaigns to promote vaccine acceptance.

Nutrition

Nutrition interventions are consistently identified as one of the most cost-effective development actions. However, an estimated 149 million children under 5 are stunted (low height for age), which compromises brain development, learning, and adult earnings. Globally, under nutrition is an underlying cause of about 45 percent of under-five deaths. Over 70 percent of countries the vast majority of which are low- and lower-middle-income countries currently face a double burden of malnutrition a high prevalence of both under nutrition and obesity. The World Bank has led the effort to estimate the cost and cost-effectiveness of nutrition interventions to support advocacy and increase investment in nutrition at the global and country levels.

Infectious Diseases

While the incidence of infectious diseases has declined globally, they continue to have major health and economic costs. Caused by pathogenic micro-organisms, such as bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi, infectious diseases, also known as communicable diseases, can be spread directly or indirectly from one person to another. Stopping the spread of infectious diseases globally is not only beneficial for a country's economy and its population's health, it is also essential for countries to achieve UHC where everyone can obtain quality health services without suffering financial hardship.

DISCUSSION

Through a paradigm shift in the planning, implementation and monitoring of the health-care delivery, there can be a way forward for ensuring UHC for India by 2022 by according priority to the needs of the most deprived groups, improving non-medical preventive health action related to employment, incomes, food security, water and sanitation, removing constraints in the health seeking behaviour of people.

The key areas of concern in fulfilling the objectives of achieving UHC by 2022, which remain to be addressed include broad agreement on the financing model for health-care delivery; type and duration of training for senior functionaries in public health, entitlement package and the cost of health-care interventions, enactment of National Health Bill 2009 as Health Act and declining State budget allocations for public health.

Means testing, treatment, care, procedures, and any other service or intervention toward a therapeutic, nursing, rehabilitative, palliative, convalescent, preventive, diagnostic, research, and/or other health related or combinations thereof, including reproductive health-care and emergency medical treatment, in any system of medicine, and also includes any of these as

a result of participation in a medical research program.

Ensuring equitable access for all Indian Citizens, regardless of income level, social status, gender, caste or religion, to affordable, accountable, appropriate health services of assured quality as well as public health services addressing the wider determinants of health delivered to individuals and populations, with the Government being the guarantor and enabler, although not necessarily the only provider, of health and related services.

CONCLUSION

The needs of the health sector in the context diversity are so complex that it is rather impossible to engage with all its dimensions. It is the obligation of the state to provide free and universal access to quality health-care services to its citizens. The various health program and policies in the past have not been able to achieve the desired goals and objectives. 65th World Health Assembly in Geneva identified universal health coverage (UHC) as the key imperative. Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is gaining in importance across the world. WHO defines UHC as "ensuring that all people can use the primitive, preventive, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services they need, of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring that the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship".

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Topic 3: <u>CLIMATE CHANGE</u>

Some evidence suggests that the first year of the pandemic had a positive effect on slowing down climate change. How to make this trend more long-lasting? Six years after the Paris Agreement, are we on track to reach the stated goals? What can be done, and how?

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With the Covid-19 pandemic we have witnessed a dramatic shift in the living habits of the world population as well as the pandemic has had an immense impact on the global economy. These changes in habits have both pros and cons and have direct and indirect impact on global climate change. To prevent the spread of the SARS-CoV-2 virus, lockdowns were announced by national governments almost all across the globe. Restaurants and shops were closed down, streets were suddenly emptied, travel restrictions were declared. Due to these lockdowns the level of carbon emissions has drastically dropped, as less transport was used and industry was operating partially, which are the main contributors of carbon emissions. According to Copernicus Atmosphere Monitoring Services CO_2 emissions dropped by almost 7% in 2020 compared to last year. At the beginning of the pandemic 17% drop in carbon emissions was recorded (Matt McGrath, 2020). This drop in concentrations have resulted in significant improvement in environmental quality. Improvement in air quality as well as the ecology in whole has been observed, especially in some of the world's most polluted cities.

One may conclude that these actions resulted in reduction of the global
CO_2 emissions and other air pollutants have changed the course of the climate. But according to CO_2 emissions scientist at The Conservatory and Botanical Garden of Geneva, Oksana Tarasova, the change in habits won't have an instantaneous impact on climate and stated that this drop in emissions from the pandemics is not significant in terms of climate change. The WMO also states that the pandemic has had little impact on the climate. The climate system is a bit complicated and a short-term change in carbon emission concentrations does not have an immediate impact. As Maxx Dilley, a climate specialist at the WMO says, " for the climate system it takes decades to catch up to what's in the atmosphere today. Therefore, the carbon emissions that we have emitted decades ago, is

today's temperature pattern we see globally".

As the lockdown has resulted only a short-term reduction of the concentrations, additional steps are needed to keep this reduction pace in the long term. Therefore, the follow actions should be taken to have a long-lasting positive impact on the climate and environment and to make this trend more long- lasting:

- Development of national and international policies on climate regulation and carbonemissions (higher taxation, subsidizing of green energy & technologies)
- Introducing innovative waste management system
- Shifting to sustainable green transportation
- Better conservation of biodiversity and avoid deforestation
- Investment in green industry

However, it is worth mentioning that though the pandemic may have a negligible impact on climate, a primary lesson learnt from this pandemic is that a change in habits and behaviour is possible, likewise, it is possible to set an ambitious action plans towards minimizing the unnecessary human interference that damages the environment and international community and national governments are capable of massive actions towards reduction of the carbon emissions.

Current status of Climate Change after Paris Agreement

The Paris agreement is the first ever international treaty on climate change that was adopted in Paris in 2015 (UNFCCC). The primary objective of this agreement is to keep the global temperature below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels, ideally, limiting the rise to 1.5 C, aiming to avoid global warming. Likewise, the agreement also strives towards developing adaptation and mitigation plans and building more climate resilient communities and promoting more sustainable financing towards greener energy. All these measures are taken in order to minimize the risk of global climate change that can have devastating consequences for humanity.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objectives, a global response is required, and it demandscontribution of all key stakeholders. Ambitious climate actions plans are needed both at national as well as international level and have to be implemented as soon as

possible. The planet Earth can no longer sustain the way human beings treat it. Therefore, according to the Paris agreement by 2020 countries have to submit a climate action plan, known as nationally determined contributions (NDC's). This action plan demonstrates the strategies, policies and steps a certain government will implement in order to reduce their GHG emissions and helps them to align with the objective of the Paris Agreement.

This year it will be 6 years since the adoption of the Paris agreement, and the central question will be, are we on track to reach the objectives stated in the Paris agreement? Based onthe UNEP Emission Gap Report it can be said that NO, we are not on track and are nowhere close to the objectives set in the Paris agreement. Emissions have to be reduced by 45% by 2030 in order to meet the 1.5 C goal (IPCC), but with the current climate action plans demonstrated through NDC's it has been estimated that global emissions would decrease by just 1%, in 2030. Though we have to be optimistic about the future trends, these numbers are quite terrifying. This data demonstrates that a drastic transformation is needed in order to meet the objectives of the Paris agreement to mitigate the risk of climate change. I believe the main issue associated with an effective implementation of the climate action plan is governments putting theeconomy at top of the pyramid. But it should be understood that the materiality of climate change is way more costly and that the economy of a country is highly interlinked with climate change and the environment. At the present time, the climate action plans demonstrated bycertain governments are not clearly stated, and the majority of them focus on the future. This focus should be shifted to the present as our current climate situation requires immediate actions with concrete governmental policies.

It is worth mentioning that it is the developing countries that are more vulnerable to climate change and as agreed by the Paris agreement the developing countries should provide support towards developing more resilient communities in the global south. The developed countrieswere obliged to make a yearly contribution towards climate finance, but unfortunately no concrete steps were yet taken by these countries, which is another step backward. The major emitting countries should be more responsible than ever, as we are living in a period where the existence of our future generation is at stake.

Solutions & Proposals

Some of the actions required to reduce GHG emissions have already been listed above, but

in myopinion one of the major steps towards climate neutrality is reducing the use of fossil fuels and switching to renewable energy. Though there is already progress seen in this regard, more investment and governmental subsidies are required to promote the use of renewable energy inall major sectors of the industry and developing greener transportation. Transportation solely accounts for 1/5 of the global GHG emissions (Wilks J, 2021), and it has to be reduced to minimum. It is not easy to turn down fossil fuels at once as many global economies are highly dependent on it. Therefore, a global cooperation is required to support the transition of those economies. The second major solution to reduce GHG emissions is to avoid deforestation. Forests absorb 30% of the global carbon emissions. But unfortunately, the past few decades millions of square of forest area has been cut down (Alan Buis, 2019). This leads to an increasein temperature and fosters climate change. I believe the government is the main actor that can tackle these issues at the national level, by developing ambitious strategies and policies towards protection of the environment and engaging in more sustainable practices. Likewise, high tariff taxes should be imposed on carbon emissions. The governments should introduce those taxes as soon as possible and increase their investment in green transition.

To conclude, climate change is a global crisis and to overcome this global threat a joint global response is needed, it can't be tackled individually by countries. Though many climate action plans have been developed both nationally and internationally, unfortunately we are nowhere close to those objectives set in these action plans. All the major emitters should recognize how serious the problem of climate change is today and there is no Planet B.

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1. Introduction

The global pandemic caused by Sars-Cov-2 has brought about constraints on economic and social life at an unprecedented scale. In the year 2020 global economic output has contracted by over 3% in the first half of the year with trade and transport constrained to limit the spread of the virus. Similar to the financial crisis of 2008, global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions have decreased at the same time as economic output faltered. In the first quarter of 2020, emissions were 5% lower than in the first quarter of 2019 (Brzezinski, 2021). At first glance, this might appear as one good news coming out of a period of global hardship since emissions reductions are sorely needed if we are to prevent catastrophic climate change. Needless to say, the restrictions placed on people should not inspire us to take similar kinds of action in the long term to meet our climate ambitions, but the aftermath of the pandemic presents us with the opportunity to rebuild our economic system to better meet both our climate and socio-economic goals.

This inquiry will therefore focus on the lessons we can draw from the pandemic to set us on a renewed, more ambitious, and more sustainable path towards mitigating further GHG emissions. For this reason, we will be guided by the question: Which lessons can be drawn from the Covid-19 pandemic to design strategies that will make the emissions reduction trend long-lasting? This paper will be structured as follows: first, we will briefly review which policies and emissions reductions strategies have been pursued in the past and point out some of the limitations and shortcomings of these policies which might have contributed to the mixed achievements in terms of real emission reductions. We will visit some basic characteristics of our economic system which may limit the effectiveness of such policies. Then we suggest some possible pathways that could be taken based on the lessons drawn from the pandemic. Alongside strategies for emissions reductions, we expand on emissions removals, as these will play an increasingly prominent role in the pathways towards net-zero by 2050 due to the limited progress on emissions reduction thus far. Then, we turn to the impact of climate change on public health and explain why we need to be prepared for this next public health crisis. Finally, we will wrap up with the conclusion.

2. Past effort and challenges to climate mitigation

Before the outbreak of the pandemic, mitigation efforts have been lacking and annual

emissions have not even stabilized, let alone decreased in the period between 2009 and 2019. At that time, projected emissions based on nationally determined contributions would have yielded a world almost 1 degree Celsius warmer than agreed in the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC (van Soest et al., 2021). The European Union has constructed its climate change mitigation architecture around two policies, the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS) and the Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) to meet the emission reduction targets under the first and second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol. The EU ETS focused on point-source emissions permit trading for energy and heavy industry installations intending to promote investments into modernizations that reduced the emissions intensity of these installations. All other emissions were accounted for under the ESR, which delegated the emissions reduction for sectors like transport, housing, and agriculture with a country-specific target to each of the EU's Member States. Overall, emissions have only been reduced by 8% in the first period and 20% in the second implementation period of the Kyoto protocol compared to 1995 levels. To achieve net zero emissions by 2050, however, such reductions would need to be achieved annually rather than every 5 years (Hu et al., 2015).

The need for climate mitigations has been recognized at the international level in the 1970s, however, the speed at which commitments are ramping up has been slow (Ciplet & Roberts, 2017). Countries had the opportunity to commit to climate mitigations via their nationally determined contributions, but this created a problem of collective coordination. As economic performance and carbon emissions are inextricably linked and are only experiencing slow relative decoupling, countries had to trade-off their economic prosperity with achieving climate mitigations (Haberl et al., 2020). Regions like the EU have achieved emissions reduction in part through effective climate policy but also offshoring production to other parts of the world. Economic performance still holds a priority position in policymaking, which is exemplified through the discourse around green growth. This articulated the clear desire to maintain environmentally decoupled economic growth, ignoring the reality that serving basic human needs requires the input of tangible inputs (Gómez-Baggethun & Naredo, 2015).

To mitigate climate change, we need to reduce the amount of GHG emissions that are emitted via our economic processes. However, this implies that we need to change a fundamental component of the way we are producing economic value, namely the extraction and combustion of fossil fuels and other synthetic energy sources. The resources we know as fossil fuels are geological pockets of carbon that have made their way into the earth's crust over millions of years. Therefore, these carbon reserves are not part of the carbon cycle that

occurs between living organisms and the atmosphere. By extracting carbon that has been locked away underground, our human activities are introducing excess amounts of carbon into the carbon cycle which ultimately has to be absorbed by the atmosphere, as other carbon sinks both on land and in water are unable to expand their capacities at the speed of humanities emissions (Jakob & Hilaire, 2015).

3.   The moment for renewable energy

Climate change is currently affecting various regions around the globe. The cost of future harm is greater than the cost to prevent it. A special report from the intergovernmental panel on climate change (IPCC) on Global Warming at 1.5°C has underlined the urgency to act swiftly on climate change, this includes the global transformation in energy use. By considering that 66% of the GHGs emissions originate from the energy sector, the IPCC unequivocally calls for an immediate, large-scale shift to renewable energy and improved energy efficiency (IPCC, 2018). Since the results of the international climate change negotiation, the transition has shown the following: To achieve the Paris Agreement, global energy demand has to be reduced through raising energy efficiency by electrifying all end-use sectors as well as diversifying the energy matrix. To this end, renewable energies have to cover at least two-thirds of the total final energy supply by 2050. Meanwhile, the share of renewable energy in the power sector would need to rise from 25% in 2017 to 86% in 2050. On the other hand, some solutions are technically feasible and economically viable to achieve this goal.

There is indeed a great potential to speed up the transformation into a digital, distributed, and decarbonized energy system. According to the study by IRENA, renewable energy, energy efficiency, and electrification is a secure, dependable, economical, and already deployed approach to achieve more than 90% of CO_2 emission reductions needed to fulfill the climate targets promised. However, this energy revolution needs a global approach that involves all levels of society - from communities, regions, and governments to public and private players. Governmental action towards climate change is not enough. All other civil society members and bodies have to be a part of decision-making to take immediate climate action (IRENA, 2019). Here, the pandemic presents the opportunity to focus on investments into renewable energy via the economic recovery programmes set up by governments around the world. In fact, many post-pandemic recovery plans presented already include specific provisions for parts of the economic stimuli to be redirected towards green and sustainable investments.

4. Energy transition investment opportunities

The shift from a fossil fuel-based to a low-carbon economy requires a substantial shift in capital structure. Fixed income instruments with a profit intended to support investments into sustainable assets are called green bonds. The market for green bonds can act as a bridge between capital suppliers, such as institutional investors, and projects to build up sustainable assets, such as renewable energy. While the cumulative issuance of the green bond is still below 1% of the worldwide total bond issuances, coordinated measures are required amongst various stakeholders to ensure continued market expansion, especially in the renewable energy sector. Policymakers may contribute to both the growth of the supply of green bonds (with the ratification of leading green bond criteria for climate change) and to support policy development in the renewables industry. Investors of public capital can contribute to the creation of renewable assets and can assist with green bonds through financial support, demonstrating issuances, and developing capacity (International Renewable Energy Agency, 2020).

In the next three decades, the government plans now seek approximately 98 trillion US$ to be invested in power systems. The planned economic incentives will drive US$ 4.6 trillion into industries that will have a significant and lasting influence on decarbonization, specifically in agriculture, industry, waste, and transportation. Significant investments need to be made into an energy system prioritizing renewable energy sources, electrification, efficiency, and allied energy infrastructure to maintain a sustainable and resilient future. These investments should not simultaneously result in lock-in consequences that are not compatible with the 1.5°C scenarios (International Renewable Energy Agency, 1981). When planning these investments one has to consider there is very unequal access to energy in rural areas compared to urban areas. According to the World Bank report 2021, the access rate in rural areas developed faster than urban during 2017 to 2019. However, 84% of the world's population still lived without access to electricity in rural regions in 2019. Since 2016, the access rate has been greater than 97%, and urban communities have approached universal access (IRENA, 2020). Liczmańska-Kopcewicz and others (2020) surveyed companies that are interested in investing in renewable energy. Almost 21% of them had plans for the next two years and over 18% of businesses had plans beyond two years. Investments in photovoltaic panels (36.36 percent) and solar collectors (34.26 percent) were most commonly stated.

5. Synergies between digitization and decarbonization

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a new paradigm in the way we work, learn, and communicate. The establishment of Work from Home, for instance, has become one of the reliable precautionary approaches being adopted worldwide. Moreover, the education sector also has been adapting its curriculum with the virtual learning experience. Hence, the idea of digital transformation has manifestly drawn upon different key aspects of life. It generates a more inclusive atmosphere, where people can freely interact with no barriers and work efficiently. Simultaneously, it has not only opened up more rooms for innovation in the IoT (Internet of Things) infrastructure but also more opportunities in decarbonizing the economy we live in.

6. The rise of Society 5.0:

Since Industry 4.0 strikes, we have been familiarized with the use of a wide variety of technologies in our everyday lives. The idea of smart manufacturing has led industries to promptly switch from analog processes to digital ones, producing advanced tools such as cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and augmented reality. Its driving forces lie within automation, improved efficiency, and interconnectivity. Following this rapid growth of industrialization, it is not only producers that perceived the revolution of technological trends. Consumers, concurrently, have evolved and become the subject that creates digital transformation. The emergence of this concept was first established by the Japanese Government, underpins the technology-based human-centered society: Society 5.0 (UNESCO, 2019).

The convergence of cyberspace and physical space powered by technologies has become the backbone of the aforementioned societal transformation. By its very nature, incorporating industrial products with social problems has molded humans into becoming the center of innovation. Following the agility of using different technologies, humans can actively participate in creating a dynamic environment in the exchange of information, thus leveraging its decision-making power in solving various societal challenges (e.g.: the aging population, vulnerability to environmental impacts, etc.). In the time of COVID-19, this growing tech-savvy era has an increasing trend in optimizing digitalization, such as digital campaigns through social media and buying products through e-commerce platforms. Correspondingly, it has shed a light on the decreasing rate of carbon emissions, in which forwarding mobility costs will create more sustainable trade-offs. Furthermore, the succession of this revolutionary approach requires strong human capital to support the

operations of the proposed integration system (de Costa Tavares & do Carno Azevedo, 2020). This will allow us to decrease the need for travel due to the limited need for business meetings and by allowing for shopping and delivery via e-commerce. Therefore, there are encouraging opportunities for emissions reductions through reduced use of fossil fuels accompanying the digitalisation in the wake of society 5.0.

7. State of the art in the development of E-Governance

The transformative nature of digitalization has come across sectors, leaving governance of sustainability a hope for further enhancements. E-Governance represents the actualization of government services to society in a virtually connected manner. The establishment of e-health services, smart cities, and ICT-based education, for instance, have created more effective means in reducing mobility and improving efficiency in administration processes. Notably, in terms of climate change, e-governance holds the key to public transparency and accountability on which the interplay between stakeholders can relied upon. Its application may vary, one of them is built in the State of Oklahoma, the US, where municipal water governance leverages the adaptation of water systems in mitigating climate change by taking into account the role of local communities (Seere & Lock, 2017). In this pandemic era, people can track emergency responses in real-time thanks to the development of innovative digital government solutions (i.e.: online dashboard in Canada & Australia, chatbots services in China, etc.). Nonetheless, the challenges of forwarding the advancement of government strategies through e-governance remain, highlighting the lacking technology infrastructure and accessibility subsidence in many regions (UN DESA, 2019).

8. Role of Big Data in shaping a low-carbon economy

Another key feature of digitalization is the emergence of Big Data, which entails the generation and evaluation of large volumes of data. With the help of these data analytics capabilities we will be able to mitigate some GHG emissions. For instance, with current agricultural practices the growing population poses a threat to food security (i.e..: destroyed marine ecosystems due to overfishing, increasing the release of GHG emissions due to predominance of agricultural capacity, etc). Hence, radical transformations in continued research, monitoring, and management efforts to reach specific objectives needed to be taken in a more holistic and integrated manner. Together with Artificial Intelligence and IoT, the analysis of Big Data will visualize in the form of textual contents, multimedia contents (video, images), and integrated platforms (social media sites, machine to machine

communications) (Calza et al. 2020). Accordingly, its massive use in growing industries holds the key to unlock the envisioned green economy. The echoing sustainable movement in industries, such as the promotion of corporate social responsibility, will resonate with the coupling of economic growth for enterprises in pursuit of low carbon emissions by adapting to green technologies. Far-reaching to see, the extrapolation of green businesses will be apt to follow.

9.   Broadening the scope for carbon capture and storage

Besides strategies for climate change mitigation involving the avoidance of emissions through direct and indirect reductions, carbon capture and storage will play an increasingly central role in achieving our climate ambitions. Carbon capture and storage (CCS) refers to several technologies which capture CO_2 at some stage from processes such as combustion. All of the human activities at the moment collectively put about 50 billion tons of carbon dioxide equivalent GHG emissions into the atmosphere each year. Carbon removal now has to be thought of as part of plan-A for responding to climate change. Broadly speaking there are two different categories of carbon removal strategies, either through biomass or more technological or chemical-based strategies. The idea is simple: we capture CO_2 from large point-sources like power stations, cement factories, and oil refineries and store it underground. This stops the CO_2 from getting into the atmosphere. However, a major concern to us is whether CCS works and above all that it is safe.

Carbon capture and storage is a key climate change mitigation technology and is currently in the process of being developed worldwide. There exist a large number of different technologies for CO_2 capture, ranging from currently available technologies such as amine-scrubbing through to 2nd or 3rd generation technologies with potentially superior thermodynamics, such as chemical or carbonate looping. Safe and secure CO_2 storage has been demonstrated and is still being demonstrated, at some sites across the world, with multi-year injections of around 1 Mt per year at many sites. Total CO_2 storage capacity is also being proven but will be sufficient for many years of CO_2 emissions. In addition, captured CO_2 is regularly transported safely in pipelines across large parts of the USA and Canada. Several technologies have been proposed which would potentially allow CO_2 to be captured directly from the air or captured CO_2 to produce useful products. Extreme care should be exercised when evaluating the climate benefits and scalability of such processes. The financial case for CCS requires that it operates flexibly, load-following ability is extremely important to long-term economics. Among the carbon capture technologies commonly

studied, the analysis based on a network map showed that post-combustion capture is the most referenced carbon capture technology with about 81% of total publications retrieved (Omoregbe et al., 2020).

10. Technology option for capture and storage

Conventional carbon engineering processes involve the use of large fans to pull in atmospheric air through a device called a contractor. The air is sent through a honeycomb structure upon which a liquid solution of chemicals is constantly raining down on it. Some of the CO_2 molecules in the air stick to that liquid and the resulting solution is processed in a few more chemical steps to form calcium carbonate pellets which are heated at very high temperatures to release pure carbon dioxide. This can be stored underground or used to create products like fuels. All the chemicals in the process are recycled, so the cycle can repeat. Compared to normal fossil fuels, fuels produced through this method emit 70% or even 90% less carbon. So it's a big step in the right direction and then with further technological innovation, we can get even closure to zero so even closure to fully carbon-neutral fuels.

The post-combustion method is used to remove the CO_2 from the exhaust stream of fossil fuel combustion, so-called flue gas. The post-combustion method in power plants uses the chemical absorption processes with solvents of monoethanolamine (MEA). This process is called amine separation. The leading technology was issued to scrub the solvents with an amine. This scrubbing of solvents is based on the chemicals which react with the carbon dioxide to generate a high temperature of CO_2, which is suitable for storage and compression of gas. In post-combustion technology, the advantage of amine scrubbing is that it can be retrofitted with the industries and existing power plants in a suitable location. This solvent scrubbing is an existing technology and already been tested in large scale operations. It has the potential in large operating units to capture 800 tons of CO_2 per day (Sood & Vyas, 2017).

Another option is to produce bioenergy combined with carbon capture and storage. This involves burning biomass like trees to generate energy but instead of exhausting the carbon emissions into the atmosphere, the emissions are captured and stored underground. This is currently done in five facilities worldwide. However, it takes a lot of land to grow all that biomass. Through the energy generated, this operation can raise funds to finance itself. Carbon captured through either approach discussed above can be injected back into the earth's crust. In this storage method, the UK is taking a lead in CCS worldwide both in terms of British government support for CCS but also because British scientists are exporting

knowledge and expertise to big emitters in the developing world like India and China. This new technology is one of the ways that Britain could reduce its emission, as well as big CO2 producers, reduce theirs. Point sources would be connected in clusters to pipelines that would take CO_2 across the country and offshore to wells where it could be injected into former oil and gas fields or deep aquifers. The assumption is that if a thick underground storage structure is good enough the gas will stay there for millions of years just as natural gas does. There is a huge amount of carbon dioxide already in the atmosphere but if we have a mechanism to collect it on a large scale, it will give us so much more flexibility in addressing climate change and will start to address all of those emissions that occurred yesterday or the day before. We need more renewable energy, we need direct air capture, we need more carbon capture and storage and we need more nature-based solutions. Besides, we need more policy development because the challenge of climate change means at the time for picking winners is gone along with scientists working around the world to find out whether CCS is a viable long-term option. This is about taking all of the above approaches because the challenge is so great (Wild, 2019).

11. Carbon offsetting mechanism

To achieve carbon neutrality, it is important to create climate projections (notably through modeling) aligned with socio-economic aspects both in the short and long run. For instance, Integrated Assessment Modelling could comprise environmental variables (i.e.: potential hazards, exposure, and climate vulnerability) and socio-economic system (i.e.: demographic, cultural reasons, local resources management, etc.). Investing in the creation of better modeling technologies through IoT (Internet of Things) that can be accessed with multi-stakeholders, ranging from government, research organizations, private institutions, indigenous people, and other related entities could be drawn upon in an integrated framework or one map policy. One of the key steps that are also supposed to be taken is through the improvement of the quality and quantity of greenhouse gas emissions data. Hence, inclusivity should be laid out as the foundation of carbon offsetting policies to unlock the proposed actionable plans. Furthermore, aligning rigorous research in identifying potential areas to be considered as a natural carbon sequestration with formulation of carbon offsetting policies is highly essential. For instance, Blue Carbon in marine ecosystem (i.e.: mangroves, seagrasses, intertidal marshes, seaweed farms, etc.) has received growing interest in reducing carbon emissions thus future recommendations on promoting them should be included in key policy fora (Ullman et al. 2013). Notably, before it can be successfully established in an

international cap-and-trade scheme, it is highly encouraged to develop national Blue Carbon policies in the countries whose most relevant habitat.

12. Public Health implications of climate change

Climate mitigation efforts will have to be intensified if we wish to create a lasting pathway towards net-zero emissions by mid-century. The Post-Pandemic recovery presents a valuable opportunity to set ourselves on the right path. Besides that, we must not underestimate the implications for public health that climate change has, which makes the issue even more urgent. The pandemic has taught us that questions of public health are highly relevant and calls from public health experts warning us should be taken seriously. This is because climate change affects the social and environmental determinants of public health – clean air, safe drinking water, sufficient food, and secure shelters. Between 2030 and 2050, climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year, from malnutrition, malaria, diarrhea, and heat stress. The direct damage costs to health (i.e. excluding costs in health-determining sectors such as agriculture and water and sanitation), are estimated to be between USD 2-4 billion/year by 2030. Areas with weak health infrastructure – mostly in developing countries – will be the least able to cope without assistance to prepare and respond.

Although global warming may bring some localized benefits, such as fewer winter deaths in temperate climates and increased food production in certain areas, the overall health effects of a changing climate are overwhelmingly negative. Extreme high air temperatures contribute directly to deaths from cardiovascular and respiratory disease, particularly among elderly people. In the heatwave of summer 2003 in Europe for example, more than 70 000 excess deaths were recorded (Golden et al., 2008). High temperatures also raise the levels of ozone and other pollutants in the air that exacerbate cardiovascular and respiratory disease. Pollen and other aeroallergen levels are also higher in extreme heat. These can trigger asthma, which affects around 300 million people. Ongoing temperature increases are expected to aggravate this burden. Climatic conditions strongly affect water-borne diseases and diseases transmitted through insects, snails, or other cold-blooded animals. Climate changes are likely to lengthen the transmission seasons of important vector-borne diseases and alter their geographic range. For example, climate change is projected to significantly widen the area of China where the snail-borne disease schistosomiasis occurs (Stensgaard et al., 2019). Malaria is strongly influenced by climate. Transmitted by Anopheles mosquitoes, malaria kills over 400 000 people every year – mainly children under 5 years old in certain

African countries. The Aedes mosquito vector of dengue is also highly sensitive to climate conditions, and studies suggest that climate change is likely to continue to increase exposure to dengue.

Globally, the number of reported weather-related natural disasters has more than tripled since the 1960s. Every year, these disasters result in over 60 000 deaths, mainly in developing countries. Rising sea levels and increasingly extreme weather events will destroy homes, medical facilities, and other essential services. More than half of the world's population lives within 60 km of the sea. People may be forced to move, which in turn heightens the risk of a range of health effects, from mental disorders to communicable diseases. Increasingly variable rainfall patterns are likely to affect the supply of freshwater. A lack of safe water can compromise hygiene and increase the risk of diarrheal, which kills over 500 000 children aged under 5 years, every year. In extreme cases, water scarcity leads to drought and famine. By the late 21st century, climate change is likely to increase the frequency and intensity of drought on a regional and global scale. Floods and extreme precipitation are also increasing in frequency and intensity (Mills, 2009). Floods contaminate freshwater supplies, heighten the risk of water-borne diseases, and create breeding grounds for disease-carrying insects such as mosquitoes. They also cause drownings and physical injuries, damage homes, and disrupt the supply of medical and health services. Rising temperatures and variable precipitation are likely to decrease the production of staple foods in many of the poorest regions. This will increase the prevalence of malnutrition and undernutrition, which currently cause 3.1 million deaths every year.

Measuring the health effects of climate change can only be very approximate. Nevertheless, a WHO assessment, taking into account only a subset of the possible health impacts, and assuming continued economic growth and health progress, concluded that climate change is expected to cause approximately 250 000 additional deaths per year between 2030 and 2050; 38 000 due to heat exposure in elderly people, 48 000 due to diarrhea, 60 000 due to malaria, and 95 000 due to childhood undernutrition. All populations will be affected by climate change, but some are more vulnerable than others. People living in small island developing states and other coastal regions, megacities, and mountainous and polar regions are particularly vulnerable. Children – in particular, children living in poor countries – are among the most vulnerable to the resulting health risks and will be exposed longer to the health consequences. The health effects are also expected to be more severe for elderly people and people with infirmities or pre-existing medical conditions. Areas with weak health infrastructure – mostly in developing countries – will be the least able to cope without

assistance to prepare and respond.

13. Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call for the globe to act on its relationship to the environment. It reinforced the damning realizations that we are a part of nature and necessarily entangle with the going on in the world around us. It was a moment for us to take stock of societal developments and generate a unique opportunity to learn from the crisis it caused. The sharp decline in GHG emissions we have experienced in 2020 was at about the rate we will need to achieve annually to meet our commitments to climate neutrality by 2050. Previously, it took a decade for a comparable emissions reduction to be achieved. This is because our economies are still relying on fossil fuel inputs, which only cease if economic activity is in decline. However, we can take away from this observation that the expansion of renewable energies in every area of our economy will be important. The pandemic has produced an ideal environment for governments to invest in such infrastructure as they plan their post-pandemic economic recovery programs. These will also attract and be outmatched by additional investments by the private sector. The use of ICT in our daily interactions, both privately and economically, has leap-frogged in the past one and a half years. This creates the opportunity for digitalization to support our climate mitigation efforts through reduced needs for travel and a greater share of our prosperity being generated via digital products. With the help of these insights, we believe we can make the emissions reductions trends more long-lasting. However, much hesitation among the international community has meant that in any scenario, to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, carbon capture and storage will have a significant role to play. This is because, without emissions removals, the emissions reduction pathways will become too steep and impede the provision of basic services to support the standard of living of the most vulnerable. Finally, we must not forget that the pandemic was just a wake-up call for an even larger public health crisis to come, for which we must be ready this time. Climate change is threatening the physical wellbeing of millions of people through extreme weather events and heat exacerbating health risks through everything from heat stress to famine and disease.

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ABSTRACT

This work contextualizes policy design for sustainable innovation in the global COVID-19 recovery as the focal point for this next phase in the fight to mitigate and adapt to climate change. We give particular emphasis to the effect of climate related security risks (CRSRs) on urban life. The proportion of the global population living in cities and towns is projected to increase from 54% in 2015 to 66% by 2050.[1] This presents but a small window of opportunity to change the way we urbanize. Existing cities will have to expand significantly, and new cities will have to be constructed to accommodate population growth and the elevated living standards that come with new levels of development. Still, over 50% of worldwide greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions are created in the production and management of basic materials.[2] Here we recognize the need for further solutions that place regenerative design and minimal natural capital loss at their center. We make the case that the public sector possesses the unique capacity and the mandate to steer societies towards a renaissance in the way citizens live, economies produce, and markets are shaped. By selectively deploying emergency relief funds, public institutions can shape capitalist markets in the public interest, employing circular economic strategies, industrial symbiosis, biophilic urban design and green infrastructure as clear pathways towards closing the gap between commitments made under the Paris Agreement and outstanding greenhouse gas emissions threatening catastrophic global warming scenarios above 2°C. Ultimately, success or failure to achieve a 'green renaissance' will be determined by our ability to improve upon 20th century economic theories and models already proven wasteful and destructive through scientific study, successive crises and capitalist systems failures.[3]

1. CONTEXTUALIZING CLIMATE CHANGE

Shifts in average global temperatures are not new to planet Earth. The climate has been changing from the time of its formation 4.5 billion years ago. Over the past one million years alone, our planet has experienced a series of ice-ages ('glacial periods') and warmer periods ('interglacial'). Glacial and interglacial periods cycle roughly every 100,000 years, caused by changes in Earth's orbit around the Sun.[4] For the past few thousand years, Earth has been in an interglacial period with a constant temperature. However, since the Industrial Revolution

in the 1800s, the global temperature has increased at a much faster rate. By burning fossil fuels and changing how we use the land, human activity has quickly become the leading cause of changes to our climate.

Human activities are releasing excessive amounts of greenhouse gases into our atmosphere. As a result, the globe is already one degree warmer on average than it was before the industrial revolutions. Figure 1 below is based on the comparison of atmospheric samples contained in ice cores and more recent direct measurements, provides evidence that atmospheric CO2 has increased since the Industrial Revolution.

Figure 1: Increase in Atmospheric CO2 since the Industrial Revolution[5]
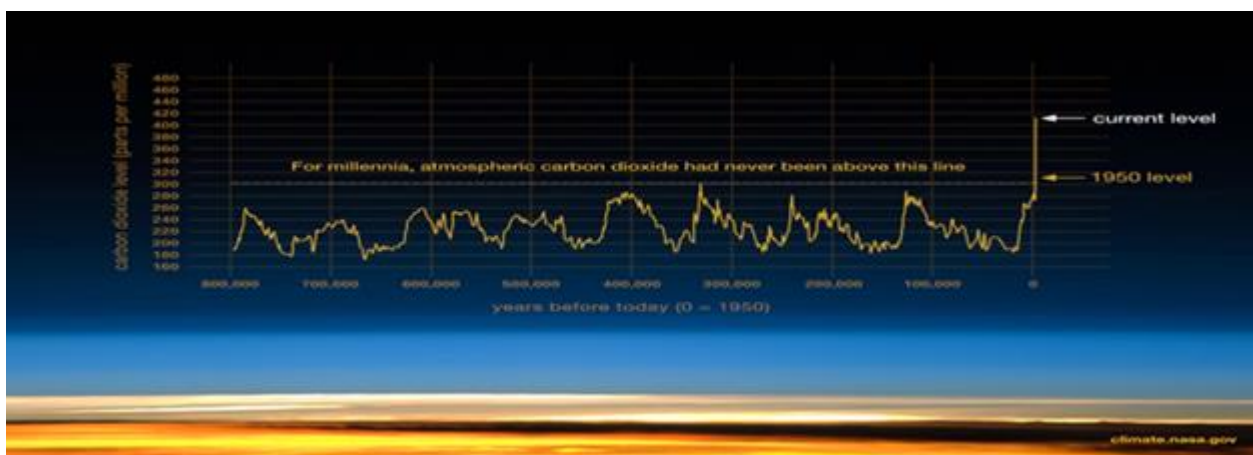
The main causes of climate change:

• **Burning fossil fuels** – Fossil fuels such as oil, gas, and coal contain carbon dioxide that has been 'locked away' in the ground for thousands of years. When we take these out of the land and burn them, we release the stored carbon dioxide into the air.

• **Deforestation** – Forests remove and store carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Cutting them down means that carbon dioxide builds up quicker since there are no trees to absorb it. Not only that, but trees also release the carbon they stored when burned.

• **Agriculture** – Planting crops and rearing animals releases many different types of greenhouse gases into the air. For example, animals produce methane, which is 30 times more powerful than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas. The nitrous oxide used for fertilizers is ten times worse and is nearly 300 times more potent than carbon dioxide.

The Effect of Climate Change on Cities: Natural Hazards

Projections related to global warming show an increase in the recurrence and extent of natural disasters that will influence the global community and the environment.[6] A natural hazard can cause widespread loss and entail severe changes in the normal functioning of societies at any location due to its interplay with states of coping capacity, vulnerability and exposure, resulting in loss to the economy, human lives and damage to biodiversity.[7] Hazard intensity is determined by the impact of a disaster on communities, and the scale of effects depends upon the decisions we make for our life and surroundings. For example, rapid urbanization under climate change, without efforts to increase resilience, is exposing cities around the globe to enormous risks, and particularly cities built along waterways or near coasts. In general, the majority of the world's riskiest cities are located in East Asia, China, Taiwan, the Philippines and Japan, on the basis of their degree of exposure to natural hazards. Many of these metropolitan areas are situated on the coast and are jeopardized by floods, storms, earthquakes and other natural disasters. Clearly, the effects of a natural hazard in some densely occupied cities can be catastrophic. This is why disaster risk planning and management is nowhere more urgent than in the world's large metropolitan areas.
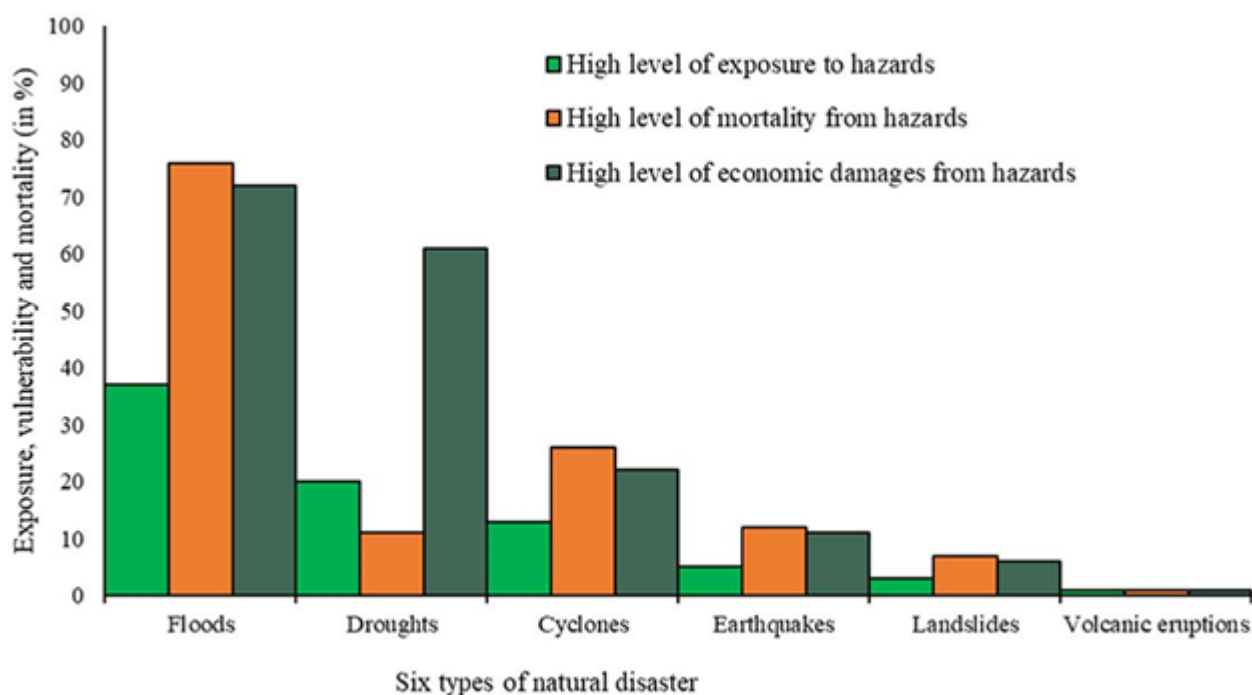
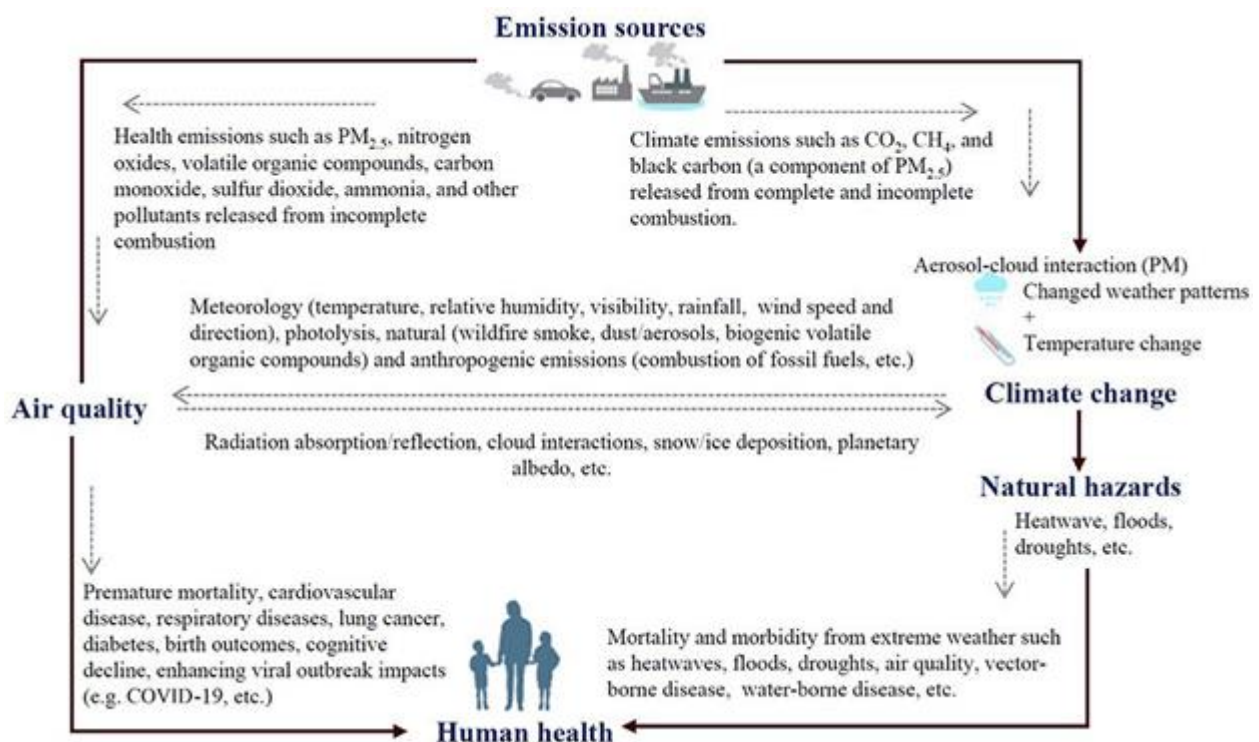**Source: Kumar, P; Climate change and cities: challenges ahead.**

Air Pollution

Climate change is the most significant threat to life on Earth. It results from natural and anthropogenic emissions of air pollutants, especially greenhouse gases (GHGs), causing

large-scale effects on the climate.[8] As depicted in Figure 3 below,[9] air pollution and climate change are inextricably linked in terms of (i) emission sources, (ii) climate characteristics and chemistry, and (iii) mitigation measures.[10] They both entail significant consequences for human health. Likewise, global temperature rise, drought, declining water resources, shrinking ice sheets, flooding and erosion in coastal areas, ocean acidification, rising sea levels, and increasing extreme weather events present irrefutable evidence of global warming.[11]

Global warming makes cities warmer, while urbanization intensifies this process via urban heat island generation and aerosol radiative forcing. The consequences of interactions among climate change, the urban heat island effect, and air pollution are expected to increase the risk of poor human health in cities globally by the middle of the twenty-first century.

The contemporary overconsumption of energy is one central cause of GHG emissions and, subsequently, global warming and climate change. Developing a sustainable energy program and effectively managing natural resources are key to tackling this issue.

Emission sources

Health emissions such as $PM_{2.5}$, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, sulfur dioxide, ammonia, and other pollutants released from incomplete combustion

Climate emissions such as CO_2, CH_4, and black carbon (a component of $PM_{2.5}$) released from complete and incomplete combustion.

Aerosol-cloud interaction (PM)
Changed weather patterns
+
Temperature change

Meteorology (temperature, relative humidity, visibility, rainfall, wind speed and direction), photolysis, natural (wildfire smoke, dust/aerosols, biogenic volatile organic compounds) and anthropogenic emissions (combustion of fossil fuels, etc.)

Air quality

Climate change

Radiation absorption/reflection, cloud interactions, snow/ice deposition, planetary albedo, etc.

Natural hazards

Heatwave, floods, droughts, etc.

Premature mortality, cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, lung cancer, diabetes, birth outcomes, cognitive decline, enhancing viral outbreak impacts (e.g. COVID-19, etc.)

Mortality and morbidity from extreme weather such as heatwaves, floods, droughts, air quality, vector-borne disease, water-borne disease, etc.

Human health

Source:.Kumar, P., Climate change and cities: challenges ahead.

How is climate changing and how has it changed in the past?

The warming of the global climate is now unequivocal. There are many observations of increasing air and ocean temperatures, widespread melting of snow and ice, and rising sea levels. More specifically, 11 of the last 12 years (1995-2006) rank among the 12 warmest

years ever recorded since global surface temperatures are measured (1850). Over the last 100 years (1906–2005), global temperature has increased by 0.74°C. Global sea level has risen by 17 cm during the 20th century, in part because of the melting of snow and ice from many mountains and in the Polar Regions. More regional changes have also been observed, including changes in Arctic temperatures and ice, ocean salinity, wind patterns, droughts, precipitations, frequency of heat waves and intensity of tropical cyclones. Temperatures of the last half century are unusual in comparison with those of at least the previous 1300 years. Most of the increase in global temperature observed over the past 50 years is very likely due to human emissions of greenhouse gases.[12]
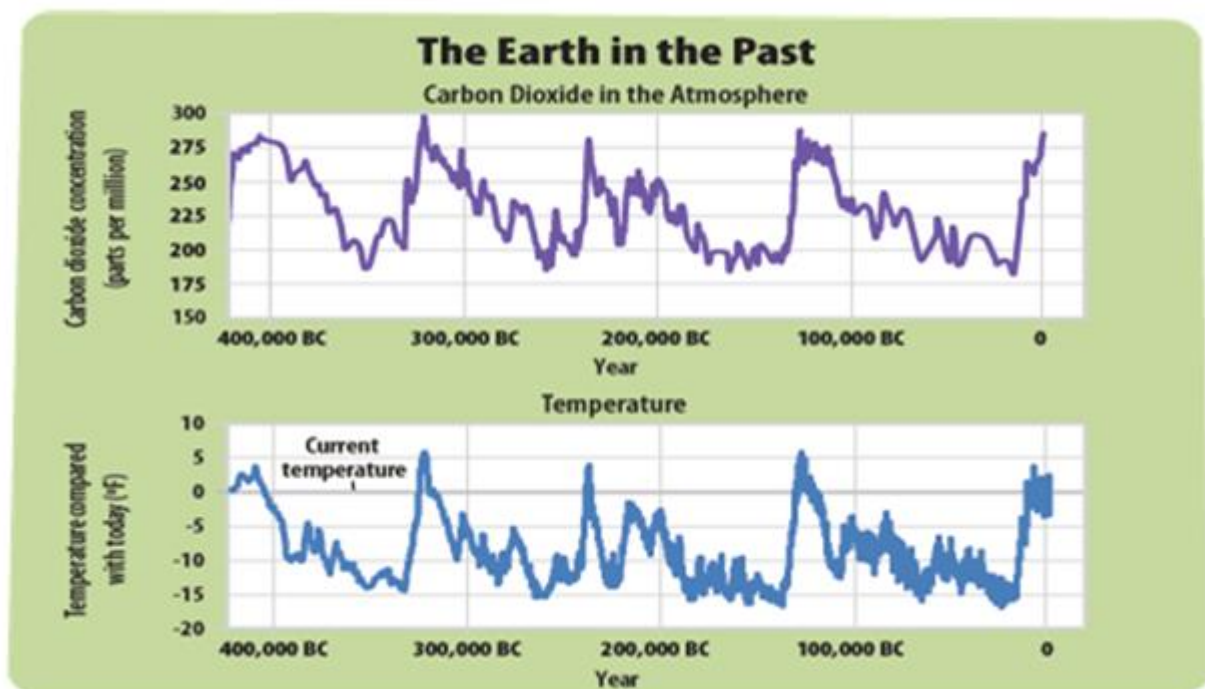
Source: EPA's Climate Change Indicators (2016), and Petit et al. (2001)

How is the climate going to change in the future?

The global average temperature is expected to increase by about 0.2°C per decade over the next two decades. Continuing greenhouse gas emissions at or above current rates would further increase global temperatures and cause many other climatic changes during the 21st century. The best estimates for projected global temperature increases from the 1980s to the end of the 21st century range from 1.8°C (1.1°C - 2.9°C) to 4°C (2.4 - 6.4°C). Global average sea level is expected to rise by 18 to 59 cm by the end of the 21st century. Warming is

expected to be greatest over land and at high northern latitudes and smallest over the Southern Ocean and parts of the northern Atlantic Ocean. Other projected changes include acidification of the oceans, reduced snow cover and sea ice, more frequent heat waves and heavy precipitation, more intense tropical cyclones, and slower oceanic currents. Warming and sea level rise caused by human activity will continue for centuries, even if greenhouse gas concentrations were stabilized. If warming persists over many centuries, it could lead to a complete melting of the Greenland Ice sheet, increasing global sea levels by about 7m.[13]

Solutions

Real, technically feasible, affordable alternatives to fossil fuels exist now. To keep warming below 1.5˚C, we need to make the switch from fossil fuels to 100% renewable energy and bring our carbon pollution down to net zero by 2050. It is important to note that this transition will not bring an end to climate change. Switching from dirty fossil fuels to clean renewable energy will be better for people, communities, and businesses all over the world. Renewable energy technologies like wind and solar are becoming more economically competitive and are being deployed more rapidly. To get to a 100% renewable energy system, we recommend urgent changes such as:

• Meeting humanity's energy needs from sustainable sources (such as solar, wind, geothermal and biofuels) not fossil fuels.

• Using energy efficiently.

• Stopping carbon dioxide emissions from deforestation.

• Living within the planet's means.

Introducing the Paris Agreement

At the United Nations climate talks in Paris in December 2015, governments acknowledged the growing threat of climate change and agreed to work towards keeping warming to 1.5°C. The world's governments agreed on a new, global climate deal: the Paris Agreement.[14] Nearly every country in the world has taken on emissions reduction targets under the Paris Agreement, making concrete a global shift to a clean energy future. However, the job is not done yet. If every country does only what it has pledged to date, we are on track for a 2.7°C-3.5°C of global temperature increase. Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) make up the central policy instrument in which parties have communicated their commitment to take action to mitigate and adapt to climate change. Current commitments

address only half the gap between business as usual and the 1.5 °C pathway and leave the problem of a nearly 15 billion ton CO2e reduction still outstanding.[15]

2. RETHINKING THE ROLE OF STATE INSTITUTIONS IN SUSTAINABLE INNOVATION POLICY

Present economic growth models have placed developed and developing nations on the path of consumption of natural capital outside of planetary boundaries. Failures endemic to the contemporary capitalist model of public-private partnerships have landed even the most developed societies at a critical juncture, pinned between the coronavirus health pandemic, recurring economic crises, and increasingly unsustainable and unequal growth.

Critical Junctures

Social movement theorists describe critical junctures as windows of expanded opportunity brought about by crises, failures or changes in leadership, natural disasters, or conflicts.[16] During critical junctures gatekeepers and the public alike become more aware of the shortcomings of the status quo and start considering changes they may not have considered before. With the critical and intersectional nature of the COVID-19 challenge, the world has stumbled forward into abrupt changes in our lives and our lifestyles that are non-negotiable. Open to negotiation instead are the policies we design to build resilience into the recovery plans for the COVID-19 health pandemic and recession. What is perhaps even more tragic than the millions of lives lost worldwide to the COVID-19 disease is the prospect that global society wastes this crisis in the pursuit of returning to a defunct 'normal'. The 2020 UNEP Emissions Gap Report has made explicit that "global GHG emissions are only projected to be significantly reduced by 2030 if COVID-19 economic recovery is used as an opening to pursue strong decarbonisation".[17] Unfortunately, the pandemic-induced recession has again exposed the contradictory behavior by signatories to the Paris Agreement regarding bailing out carbon-intensive firms and sectors without making access to emergency relief funds contingent upon credible commitments to bringing their business models, supply chains, or production more in line with state NDCs.

This section proposes necessary shifts in first principles underlying the global capitalist paradigm regarding the role of the state and of supranational institutions such as the EU and the United Nations in bringing not only the rate, but the direction of economic growth in line

with planetary boundaries. Planetary boundaries are environmental thresholds that, if crossed, "will trigger non-linear, abrupt environmental change within continental- to planetary-scale systems", beyond which humanity cannot safely operate.[18] The concepts of 'missions' and the 'mission-oriented economies' championed by Mariana Mazzucato, author and expert in economic innovation, feature heavily as frameworks for shaping the way public, private and third sector partnerships are formed so as to recreate the foundation of capitalist market economies.

The predominant narrative of the public sector as but a slow, bumbling, inertial bureaucracy that exists solely to 'fix' market failures is not entirely true in contemporary capitalist societies. Mazzucato has described this role as an 'entrepreneurial state', or a state with certain capacities and convictions that acts as a market-shaper rather than solely a fixer of market failures. We challenge policymakers to recognize the decisive role that the state has played in funding missions like the development of a COVID-19 vaccine, and to challenge old narratives when designing policies for sustainable innovation. State and supranational institutions such as the UN and the EU are unique in their capacity to identify grand challenges, create the necessary social and political consensus to address these challenges in the public interest, and articulate from these challenges definitive objectives— or 'missions'—wherein public, private and third sector actors collaborate in a mission-oriented approach to solve these challenges. Here we make the case for 'missions' a central vehicle for designing and delivering the specified sustainable innovation policies recommended in the body of this article.[19] Here we hope to recontextualize the historical practice of missions into Mazzucato's new narrative, which describes more accurately the historical role certain public institutions in the US, UK, and EU have played in economic innovation.

Missions & Mission-Oriented Economies

The solution endorsed in this work to the grand challenge of climate change and the impediments in capitalist market systems is to reorient public-private partnerships towards a mission-orientation. The four essential characteristics of a 'mission' are as follows: first, a mission should be defined at the granular, technological level that facilitates division to intermediate goals, monitoring, and accountability. Second, a mission is a portfolio of R&D and innovation projects carried out in good faith. Because the state in a mission-oriented economy does not 'pick winners', it picks the willing, actors contributing to the development of what could amount to a variety of solutions to a mission's core problem should not be

punished for failures. Third, missions should result in investment across different sectors and include various types of actors. Lastly, missions require "joined up policymaking", which follows from the earlier discussion of nexus thinking and the co-creation of value in civil economies, and circularity.[20] This solution is already under implementation in the European Union, in the United Nations with regard to the SDGs, in Scotland, and in the United Kingdom, allowing a mission orientation to guide their approach to address grand challenges by turning them into 'moonshots'.

100 Sustainable Cities by 2030: An EU Mission for Climate Neutral and Smart Cities

Framing a grand challenge widely is important in order to inspire ambition, however, the Sustainable Development Goals have been critiqued for having too wide of a frame without actionable plans breaking them into bite-sized pieces. Taking SDG 13: climate action as an example, we can observe how Mazzucato and her team have already begun contributing to UN efforts to develop frameworks for breaking down the grand challenge of climate action into a mission to build 100 carbon neutral cities across Europe by 2030 (see figure below). This mission of 100 carbon neutral European cities by 2030 convenes real estate, energy mobility, behavioral economics and construction materials industries with the discrete goal of systems transformation.

Breaking Down SDG 13: Climate Change into a Mission[21]
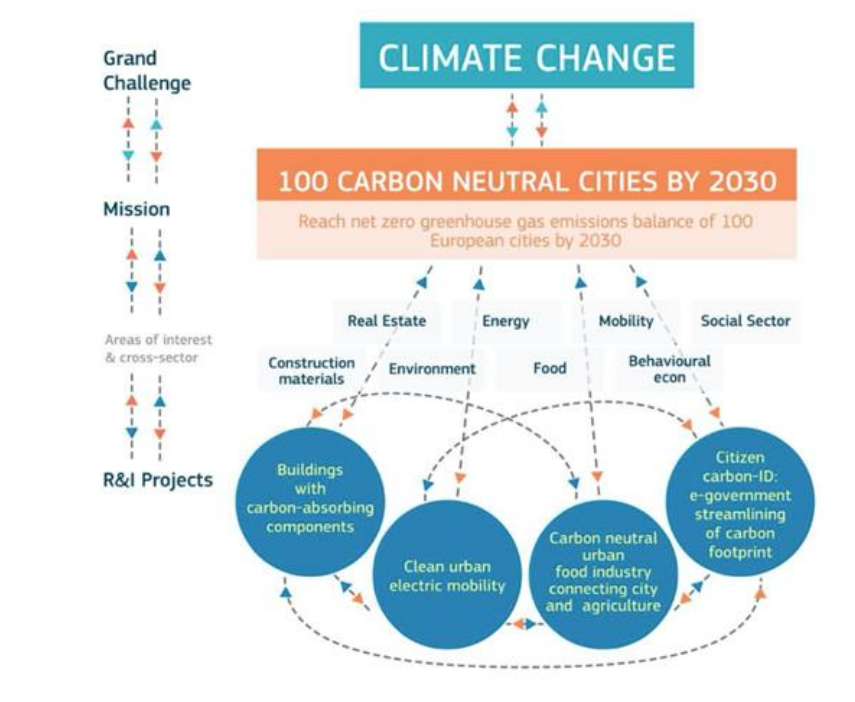
A new narrative is needed about this historical practice of shaping markets, one that more accurately reflects the public sector as a co-creator of public value. New narratives make way for building on existing state capacity to identify, design, monitor and evaluate missions in the public interest. As an example, the springboard that made rapid mRNA vaccine development possible has been at work for decades.[22] The COVID-19 vaccine is evidence of a mission made possible through years of publicly-funded research, development, innovation at the U.S. National Institutes of Health.[23]

To execute the technical recommendations made within this work at the granular, national, sectoral, and municipal levels, first we must depart collectively from limited belief systems that have limited the capacity of the private sector.[24] The conviction that entrepreneurs and financial executives are the only real risk-takers in the market despite evidence of long-term, patient financing of early stage disruptive technology by the state—and therefore taxpayer––is a has allowed surplus profits to accrue largely unchecked to private interests, massive corporations, and the lobbyists and to be siphoned out of the real economy.[25] This will continue to constrict financing essential for investing in the 21st century green economy.[26]

3. INDUSTRIAL SYMBIOSIS, NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, & THE ROLE OF BUSINESSES

The disruption of economic activities, social interactions, work organization by the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted attention away from the many prior challenges of sustainable development, most prominently climate change. However, the crisis has also demonstrated that governments can intervene decisively once the scale of an emergency is clear and public support is available.[27] Additionally, governments are putting in place recovery packages that are often unprecedented in size since the post-war period.[28] The decisions that will be taken by governments in the coming years, both on the design of recovery packages and on climate policy ambition, can determine whether the COVID-19 crisis will crowd out decarbonization efforts or create synergies, leading to a green recovery.[29] The exogenous shock resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the proactive economic policy approach taken by many governments to address the crisis has opened opportunities for fast-tracking decarbonization through increased government spending and green sectors' investments, to decouple economic recovery and greenhouse gas emissions.

Circular economy is a systematic project, involving the government, administrative departments, enterprises, and all walks of life among others. The management content of the

circular economy is much wider than that of traditional environmental management. According to the EU circular economy policy acts, the economy should shift from a linear model approach based on production consumption-disposal towards a circular model, where the waste reuse is maximized, and the use of natural resources reduced. The fact that countries, companies and organizations are in different phases of the transition to a circular economy does not pose a problem. In fact, we need to move towards concrete commitments and setting targets for circular economy together.

COVID-19 pandemic brings new opportunities to low carbon economy transformation as well as helping in the achievement of the carbon reduction goal by promoting renewable energy and reduction of waste. Industrial symbiosis is regarded as an approach in which firms collaborate in a coordinated effort to create competitive advantages through resource exchanges, in which firms interact with other firms to create mutual benefits, and which is promoted through geographical proximity. Industrial symbiosis allows entities and companies that are traditionally separated, to cooperate amongst each other in resource sharing, contributing to the increase in sustainability with social, environmental and economic benefits. Producing more with neither spending more energy nor resources through cooperation is the ultimate objective pursued by the industrial symbiosis which involves companies to use by-products or waste products from other companies as raw materials in production. It is an effective method which can highly contribute to attaining the level of zero waste.[30]

The Paris Agreement has made a significant contribution to raising awareness on climate change issues and the search for long-term solutions. These solutions are essential not only for keeping carbon dioxide emissions below the limits set by international agreements, but also for making better use of the available resources. Industrial symbiosis has been shown to be a strong ally for the achievement of these objectives without jeopardizing the economic growth of the parties involved.[31,32] The opportunity for new investments may put the world on track to meet the Paris Agreement goals, but the design concept of recovery packages will be critical in determining if the crisis will be an enhancer of climate action or will reinforce current socio-technical regimes and the carbon lock-in these regimes impose. The fact is COVID-19 pandemic has offered us some wisdom related to the climate problem.

At present, the relevant regulations and policy systems of the circular economy are not perfect, and some environmental laws may not be adhered to as required. However, the means and methods provided by traditional environmental protection laws are obviously unable to meet the needs of a circular economy and the requirements of sustainable

development. Due to the lack of necessary price intervention and resource tax regulation, enterprises are motivated by interests and unwilling to economize and recycle resources. Most enterprises may have a relatively weak scientific and technological foundation, poor ability of independent technological development, and some technical bottlenecks, hence restricting the development of a circular economy is relatively prominent. Most enterprises are not able to develop the recycling technology to eliminate pollutants and recycle wastes, and they also lack the channels to understand the relevant technical information. The circular economy policy, economic information system and technical consulting service system are not perfect.

Industrial symbiosis has been fostered through certain factors, including saving resources, obtaining economic benefits, meeting environmental requirements such as reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, scarcity of natural resources and reduction of waste that would eventually end at the landfills and incinerators.[33] If the willingness of various governments to take immediate fundamental action for sustainable development would be similarly high as that of fighting the pandemic, issues such as social standards in supply chains or climate change could be highly regulated to a far stronger degree. [34]

What can be done?

In the long run, the circular economy can be better realized by building regional ecosystem circulation. Focusing on industrial symbiosis will create more profit as well as saving on cost by ensuring nothing goes to waste.

4. URBAN DESIGN AS A TOOL IN TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

As mentioned in the above sections, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many opportunities to tackle climate change through institutional shifts and large-scale green recoveries on the national and regional level. Decentralising from the national and regional scale, this section focuses on exploring urban design as a tool in tackling climate change while building resilience in cities through strategic adaptation in the post-pandemic world. The localized approach focuses on green solutions that relate to the built environment, and the main concepts that drive this approach are namely 'biophilic urbanism' and 'green infrastructure'.

Figure x. Biophilic Urbanism in Singapore (Source: https://www.i2c.com.au/2018/04/singapore-green/)

Biophilic urbanism draws on the concept of biophilia, defined as the innate need of human beings to be in permanent contact with 'nature'.[35] Relating back to the context of modern-day built environments, this tendency is often expressed through biophilic design. Drawing from Kellert et al. (2008) and Beatley (2010), Biophilic design is the attempt to achieve the benefits of human-nature interaction within the modern built environment by incorporating the presence of nature. This includes internal and external placement of natural elements, as well as its integration in buildings, built infrastructures and across the urban space. Kellert (2008) asserts that biophilic planning and design principles intend to support appreciation and direct engagement with nature. On one hand, it encourages responsible interactions and utilization of natural resources and planning according to climatic conditions and local ecological processes, and on the other, it creates vital and equitable places that support fundamental human needs while fostering a sense of community.

Holding a similar affinity, green infrastructure is a strategic, planned network of natural, semi-natural and artificial features and networks designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services and quality of life benefits.[36] In an urban setting, green infrastructure networks may include traditional parks, woodlands, wetlands, rivers, private gardens, street trees, allotments, playing fields, cemeteries and newer innovations such as green roofs and sustainable drainage systems.[37]

Relating back to the context of climate change, this section focuses on regional and local level interventions that involve top-down provisions and bottom-up community engagement.

In the following section, two main types of built environment interventions that relate to biophilia and green infrastructure will be introduced. These interventions are designed to aid urban environments adapt to climate adversities such as flooding and droughts, as well as reducing the urban heat island effect. At the same time, green infrastructures can also effectively ameliorate the quality of environment such as by improving air quality by acting as a barrier to sources to urban pollution, as well as encouraging the flourishing of biodiversity through increasing quality and connectivity of natural habitats and green spaces.

Why opt for green infrastructure?

Green infrastructure features can be implemented across different scales: building scale, neighborhood scale, city scale, catchment scale and across different landscapes.[38] The high flexibility of green infrastructural design allows implementation across different contexts due to its great ability to adapt and capture the benefits of different topography, ground conditions, hydrology and microclimate.

Furthermore, green infrastructure has great potential for multi-functionality. Drawing to Fairbrass et at. (2021), by using green infrastructure rather than conventional approaches to managing the built environment, benefits per spatial unit can be maximized. A common example would be a single green infrastructure measure – if designed and managed effectively – being able to address both quantity and quality control of surface water runoff in buildings.

In addition, measures can be combined to target site-specific issues and deliver wider benefits such as enhanced biodiversity, air quality and urban cooling. With this flexibility, green infrastructure can easily be integrated into urban development where its function can go beyond surface water management, air quality improvement and biodiversity, and in turn, also improve livability and wellbeing of residents, as well as foster social and community cohesion.

With reference to the publication of Fairbrass et al. (2021), the following built environment recommendations are made in response to tackling the issues around urban surface water and the urban heat island effect.

Surface Water Management

Urban surface water refers to rainwater that falls on city surfaces, including ground, streets, roofs, parks, and gardens.[39] Surface water management aims to reduce flooding by storing or infiltrating rainwater and slowing down the flow of surface water to reduce downstream

flooding. This approach addresses water quality issues of rivers, streams and other water bodies by removing surface water pollutants as well as works towards alleviating the impacts of drought through retaining and harvesting rainwater.

Drawing from Fairbrass et al. (2021), a network of green infrastructure can improve overall water quality and maintain water stream form and function across the city scale. In the UK, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) is an approach used to manage surface water through the mimic of natural hydrology while minimizing surface water runoff into sewers and drains.[40] SuDs may include natural green spaces, as well as semi-natural spaces such as rain gardens, bioswales, planter boxes and bioretention ponds.
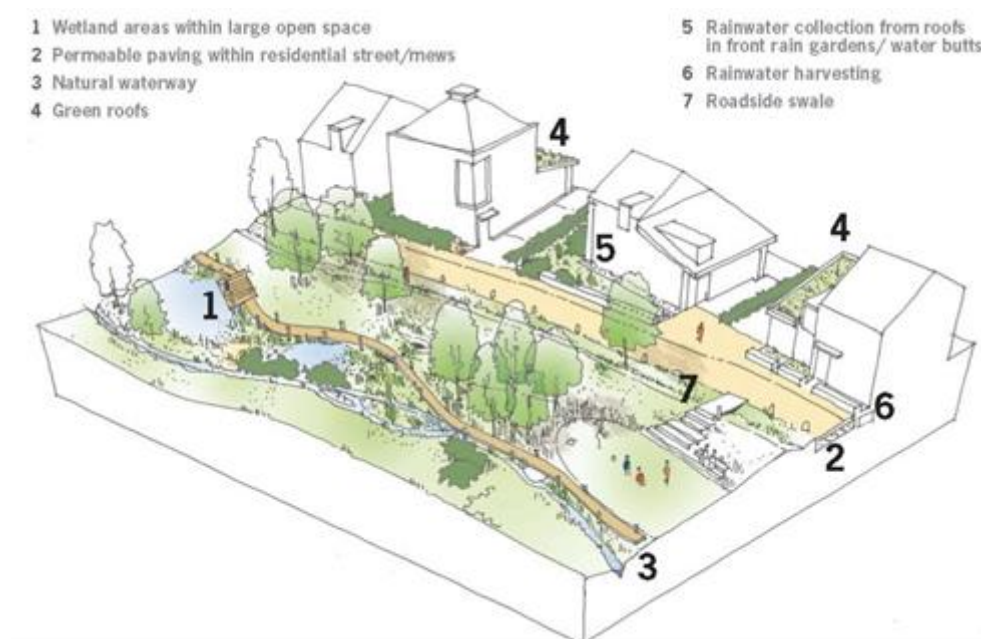
Figure x. Sustainable Drainage Options in Low Density Developments (Source: https://consult.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/kse/)

By incorporating green infrastructure in the drainage system, stress on piped sewage systems can effectively be alleviated in addition to reducing the frequency of sewer flooding. At the catchment scale, the said approach provides solutions to restore and maintain the health and functions of urban water bodies.

Mitigating Urban Heat Island Effect

The Urban Heat Island (UHI) effect refers to the higher temperatures observed in big cities, largely due to heat released from vehicles, power plants, air-conditioning and other urban sources.[41] The adverse effects of UHIs include an increase in ground-level ozone, and subsequently negatively impacting the living environment.[42] To mitigate the prolonged

effects of the UHI effect, the addition of greenery on urban canvases through biophilic interventions and green infrastructures can be considered.

Green roofs and façades

To reduce energy consumption while building insulation and regulating temperature on the building level, green roofs and façade can be considered. According to research, surfaces with a green canopy layer are effectively 5-20 degrees cooler than sunlit surfaces as vegetation can help reduce air temperatures through shading and evapotranspiration.[43] Moreover, shading can modify building cooling and heating by reducing solar radiation and surface temperature and therefore diminish the impacts of the UHI effect.

A green rooftop garden in Singapore (Source: National University of Singapore; NParks)

Strategic tree planting

Strategic planting of trees around building infrastructures is very common to reduce energy expenditure of buildings through lowering surrounding air temperature. According to Rosenfeld et al. (1995), the said strategy has effectively reduced summer air-conditioning energy by 10-35%. Furthermore, lower air temperatures can reduce the activity of chemical reactions that produce secondary air pollutants in urban areas.[44] However, it must be noted that vegetation can also potentially reduce wind velocity. Thus, the strategic placement of trees is vital to optimize its shading effects on buildings whilst promoting effective natural ventilation.

Limitations

The proposed biophilic and green infrastructural solutions undeniably bring considerable benefits to urban environments. However, it is imperative to note that not all biophilic and green infrastructure components are suitable in all conditions and that the effects should not be generalized across different contexts. More detailed monitoring of air pollution, biodiversity and surface water is needed to support better prediction of environmental quality and the impact of green infrastructure. There is a risk that green infrastructure components may be implemented inappropriately, and as a result, the intended benefits may be undermined and instead, increasing the costs and likelihood of erroneous implementation.

To better account the costs and risks associated with biophilic interventions and green infrastructure, there is a need to address and strengthen the evidence base about its function and impacts alongside its benefits. In the long run, the adherence to such practices would allow more robust decision making and encourage more adaptive approaches to planning and built environment management across different cultures, built environment contexts and nations around the world.

There's still a lot more to say about negotiating and managing spaces in cities, regarding whom and by what means. Nevertheless, in the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, we now know that changes and quick adaptations in our cities are possible. The need for quick adaptation for public health in cities has allowed us to rethink our everyday physical spaces, in addition to more sustainable ways to manage our built environment. Such a tendency has granted us the ability to experiment—to see what works and what doesn't, and in the process, prompt us to think how we can make cities more livable by integrating the natural world while exploring new visions of public realms.

CONCLUSION

In response to the question of climate change, this policy paper urges for multi-scalar cooperation across international, national, regional, and local level governance and encourages intersectoral collaborations in response to the augmenting impacts of climate change across the globe. The Paris Agreement has undeniably brought new significance to climate adaptation on the international level, nevertheless, more substantial changes are needed on different governance levels. The rapid changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic has now proven that quick adaptations within our institutions, countries and cities are possible.

Moving forward and towards our post-pandemic world, there is a need to reprioritise the agenda for sustainable development. It is in this critical juncture of social and economic disruption due to the coronavirus, in the decade or more it will take to stabilize the global economy, and in successive economic collapses sure to follow that private and third sector actors are ever more reliant on the public sector for financing and economic relief. At this point, when crises are intersectional, cyclical, and pose threats to national security in the way characteristic of CRSRs, public institutions have a unique opportunity to introduce and enforce a profound and consequential conditionality. With information gaps closing, and the emissions gap rising, public trust in democratic and capitalist institutions will hinge on government responsiveness to the threats posed by direct and indirect climate-related security risks. State institutions and governments are now charged with either steering industry, agriculture, urban design, and infrastructure towards the inclusive, sustainable green renaissance elucidated above, or calling in the climate catastrophes that will expedite our extinction.

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Climate change is advancing rapidly, but containment measures during the COVID-19 pandemic slightly reduced greenhouse gas emissions. However, controversies about the participation of governments in the Paris Agreement cause a stir. World leaders can achieve the agreement's goals through cooperation.

The current and continual spread of coronavirus worldwide and its classification as a pandemic by the World Health Organization has had a favorable impact on the environment by showing a temporary daily carbon dioxide emissions reduction in the first half of 2020. The industrial and transit halt resulting from the confinement has caused a dramatic decrease in greenhouse gas emissions. NASA, for its part, has shown some incredible satellite images that reflect an impressive decrease in emissions of nitrogen dioxide (NO2) compared to the time before the confinement. NO2 is commonly present in fossil fuels. According to NASA, "researchers found that since February, pandemic restrictions have reduced global nitrogen dioxide concentrations by nearly twenty percent."[1] In environmental terms, these data are positive. According to the World Health Organization, "air pollution kills 4.2 million people every year."[2] However, once the lockdown is complete, emissions may reach record levels for the sake of recovery. For instance, the measures that both authorities and the business sector will take later to stimulate the economy and workers' return to factories will again increase pollutant emissions above historical averages to achieve financial recovery.

The United Nations warns the importance of the protective role of biodiversity in the face of the risk of diseases and not forgetting the climate crisis occurring on the planet to face the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. The responses and measures to control the spread of COVID-19 have generated positive effects on environmental pollution, which directly impacts climate change. A positive impact during the lockdown reveals that humans' habits are perturbing for the planet. For example, we have fewer people using vehicles, producing less CO2 emissions and less carbon footprint. The positive impact also brings communities closer to realizing how individuals pollute one another as well as ecosystems.

China, a relatively large population, applied quarantine and isolation in the first half of 2020. Hence, the absence of cars on public roads made the emissions caused by the automobile fleet decrease in China. Many activities responsible for greenhouse gas emissions, such as cruising, stopped working during the pandemic, thus generating less CO2. Quarantine, for instance, will help world leaders to evaluate how to handle their practices on a global level. In the coming years, global leaders will have to develop and implement social engineering

programs that should be modern, progressive, and radical.

Above all, the world needs to maintain social cohesion, equity, and solidarity in all societies amid climate crises. The world had to adopt new measures through the pandemic, for example, reducing government expenditures that are sources of unsustainability, such as large transportation infrastructures and military spending. Societies must adopt a new lifestyle to prevent global warming from exacerbating in the long run. Countries' measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have generated a positive impact on the environment. The planet was asking for a break, a break from the high pollution levels generated by humans every day.

Some lessons learned and applied with greater or lesser success during the pandemic can develop solutions to the climate emergency. For instance, world leaders shall protect the most vulnerable social groups while adopting and implementing social protection mechanisms—correspondingly, advances in responses to the demographic challenge and depopulation. Many families and workers from urban settings have settled in rural and inland areas. Governments should improve health systems' adaptation and response capability and the rest of the administrative and governance structures to act in unforeseeable crises. Given that climate action is one of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), defined by the U.N. to face global problems and protect the planet, at the end of 2015, the signing of the Paris agreement went into effect to engage power states to mitigate climate change.

Six years after the Paris Agreement, the world is far from reaching its stated goals. The data so far show unsatisfactory results. According to the Climate Change Indicators report by the Environmental Protection Agency, "In 2019, the Annual Greenhouse Gas Index was 1.45, which represents a forty-five percent increase in radiative forcing- a net warming influence- since 1990."[3] This data is alarming considering that greenhouse gas emissions are increasing rapidly compared to 2010 levels, reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. And if the purpose of the Paris Agreement is to cap global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius, emissions must decrease by a quarter from the date of the agreement by 2030 and reach net zero in the next 30 years. Meeting the objectives established in the Paris Agreement, greenhouse gases would not decrease by the designated date, which means that global warming would not fall at the speed required to reach the 2 degrees Celsius benchmark.

Developed countries that generate higher environmental pollution must make more contributions to achieve the Paris Agreement's objectives. However, the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement could have profoundly affected the accumulation of greenhouse gases on the planet. The U.S., being a leading global economy, should maintain its commitment to

the international sphere. Otherwise, it could trigger the withdrawal of other members who ratified the agreement and the failure to comply with the goal of not exceeding 1.5 degrees Celsius as it is one of the countries that most pollute the planet. As reported by UCSUSA, Each Country's Share of CO2 Emissions report, the U.S. is the "second carbon dioxide emitter in 2018 of total emissions."[4] According to The Most Consequential Impact of Trump's Climate Policies? Wasted Time article, Trump's administration delayed the battling progress of climate change. Stokes said, "It's not just that we've been moving in the wrong direction, but also we haven't been moving in the right direction."[5] With the U.S. withdrawal from the agreement, its obligations and commitment imposed at the beginning of the treaty would have ended and affected the stated goals making them unattainable. According to the Climate Interactive portal, one of the negative impacts is that the breach of the deal by the U.S. will aggravate the prospects for global warming, "with an increase of 3.6 degrees Celsius in 2100 compared to pre-industrial levels."[6] Nevertheless, the current U.S. president, Joe Biden, signed a long series of imperative executive orders. The text declares that he accepts the Paris Agreement and each of its clauses to combat climate change. As the White House has highlighted through its new profile on social networks, Joe Biden's statement on the climate section and the corresponding executive decree finalized with sending a petition letter to the U.N. to rejoin the Paris Agreement thirty days later. The United States will be in a position of global leadership to progress and achieve the goals that will keep the planet at a safe temperature. In addition to the reincorporation of the U.S. to the Paris Agreement, the Biden administration signed an executive decree to stop the contracts and concessions of the Keystone XL project.

Similarly, President Biden pledged to make the U.S. energy sector pollution-free by 2035 and the country to become a zero-emission economy by 2050. The United States is an excellent example because it is "one of the most significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions."[7] For example, the climate summit in April 2021 discussed how the necessary climate action would promote the creation of good, well-paid jobs, the development of innovative technologies, and the need to help the most susceptible countries adapt to natural disasters. At the summit, the U.S. also announced the modernization of the hydroelectric energy installed in the country and new measures to combat deforestation.

On the other hand, Argentina expressed its contributions apart from reducing emissions and developing clean hydrogen production. It emphasized that, among its new measures, is the protection of natural spaces, in which deforestation will be a crime. Correspondingly, the European Commission said that the Paris agreement works as life insurance for people. Also,

the E.U. plans to impose prices on the infrastructure sector and energy production. Italy also identified that the measures of the Paris Agreement so far are insufficient to slow down the speed of global warming. To address climate change, each country, in collaboration with international organizations, should promote mechanisms to increase adequate preparation and management of climate change in developing countries.

Currently, threats such as food and water shortages are becoming more serious, which can cause conflicts and deterioration of the conditions in which the population with fewer resources lives. The COVID-19 also highlights our economic systems' low resilience and great fragility, based on profit and continuous resource consumption. What seems as growth, produces many problems such as pollution, contribution to climate change, loss of biodiversity, unfair distribution of wealth, and environmental and labor morbidity and mortality. In a crisis, ecological indices improve, but it generates even more panic and inequality. The international community is now far away from achieving the stated goals, but cooperation and quick action will make it possible.

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Introduction

The covid-19 pandemic created an initial drop in greenhouse gas emissions as millions of people worldwide stayed home to prevent the spread of the virus. The interaction between environmental justice and COVID-19 is climate change. Climate change is increasing environmental pollution in numerous ways, for example, through the release of persistent organic pollutants sequestered in now melting polar ice caps, generation of air pollutants from more frequent and larger wildfires, acidification of the oceans, which is increasing the bioavailability of toxic metals, and the expansion of the range of insects, which is driving the increased use of pesticides. Further, climate change is widening the economic and social security gaps between disadvantaged and higher socioeconomic groups. Both factors contribute to the inequities in COVID- 19 health-related outcomes. In an ironic twist, climate change is likely to be a significant factor in the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus from wildlife to humans. Thus, addressing climate change is essential for not only mitigating severe COVID-related illness and other environmental justice issues but also for limiting future viral pandemics.

A few researchers have recently come to place the COVID-19 pandemic next to the environment. Specifically, a significant reduction in local pollution has been noted since the COVID-19 outbreak, and this has led researchers to ask if this link is more than a correlation, but the former causes or helps cause the latter. The link between COVID-19 and climate change has also been analyzed, albeit in different ways. Some have questioned the role of climate change as one probable cause of the appearance of the virus in its transition from animals to humans.

Based on the argument that climate change and COVID-19 share a similar structure, that their economics are conceptually fairly similar, and that policy responses follow the same format, some insights derived from the COVID-19 experience may be relevant for climate change policy.

Putting Climate Change next to COVID-19

The main reason for putting climate change next to COVID-19 is because the two problems are conceptually similar, as both can be characterized as global public nuisance and as negative externalities. Climate change is a global externality and so is COVID-19, as

contagion is a transboundary phenomenon. As a matter of fact, COVID-19 is akin a transboundary pollution problem, originating in one country but able to cause damage in another country's environment, by crossing borders through pathways like water or air.

Climate change is a problem for the entire planet. It is global as it arises from greenhouse gas emissions, which are generated in all parts of the globe. Likewise, its impacts are felt in all world regions. COVID-19 is, in principle, a transboundary problem, because it is borne in one or more regions, but it can rapidly expand to the whole planet, moving from an epidemic to a pandemic.

It could be noted that the impact of climate change on a specific country is to an extent independent of its own emissions as it is evident for poor developing countries or small island states and this creates an incentive to free ride on mitigation. In the case of COVID-19, the extent to which one affected country can benefit from coping policies undertaken in another country seems limited. One exception is the free learning from other countries' experience in dealing with a new disease. Yet, in a globalized world where people are free to move, the impact of COVID-19 on a country does not entirely depend on its own actions to prevent it.

It is also believed that both climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are stock externalities with negative consequences for human wellbeing. A stock externality does not exhaust its negative impact within a single period of time, but it spreads it across time and generations. In the case of climate change, greenhouse gas stays in the atmosphere for long periods carbon dioxide for 50 to 200 years, fluorinated gases for more than thousand years so that adverse impacts affect both current and future generations. In COVID-19, the stocks of infected people increase the chances of others to be infected, increase the likelihood of health systems to collapse, which imposes external effects on the ability of new sick people to get treatment.

Policy Responses to Climate Change and COVID-19

The two main policy responses; mitigation and adaptation, are implemented with the best current technologies under gradual technological change. A game changer in the policy responses would however be the irruption of new technologies, even if there remain social and economic barriers and obstacles that prevent most of the times a first best solution.

The objective of mitigation is to delay and reduce unwanted effects. As a stock externality, the immediate focus of mitigation is on diminishing rates of infections to stay below the limit of absorption capacity of emission in the atmosphere of medical equipment

and structures so as to reduce the outcome of worst-case scenarios beyond 2 degrees Celsius.

In COVID-19, mitigation entails reducing the rate of infection. The tools available to do this are increased personal hygiene, adoption of personal protective equipment (PPE), home confinement and reduction of social interaction. Households mitigate the spread of the disease by reducing consumption, reducing hours worked, and working from home.

The climate adaptation community must develop a long-term strategy for pandemic preparedness as COVID-19 is neither the first nor only time that our globalized society will face these types of compound risks. The goal of adaptation is to alleviate the inevitable negative impacts on human beings, their activities, and the planet. In climate change, adaptation is not only necessary, but also largely case specific and mostly pertains to developing countries where negative impacts hit the hardest.

For COVID-19, adaptation measures will be needed even more in those countries where the health system is more precarious or where universal health insurance is lacking. Investment in hospitals, medical equipment and health infrastructures as well as in facilities that allow social distance are adaptation measures that apply to the case of COVID-19. Inasmuch as climate change requires intervention and investment in prevention, restoration, and resilience, COVID-19 requires active fiscal and monetary policies to contain and reduce as much as possible the consequences on people's incomes and jobs.

For both phenomena, adaptation cannot do without mitigation. In the case of the former, the underlying assumption is that some of these investments might not be needed, but the precautionary principle applies. It is possible that, given the uncertainty, under successful mitigation action some of those public investments in adaptation would be sunk, with the need to deal with a fiscal problem. Finally, addressing COVID-19 pandemic and climate change requires the same fundamental shift, from optimizing largely for the shorter-term performance of systems to ensuring equally their longer-term resilience.

Conclusion

The year 2020 has brought into sharp focus the inextricable connections between climate change, and COVID-19. Evidence that people in polluted areas are far more likely to die from COVID-19 than those living in cleaner areas provides compelling rationale to not only enforce, but also strengthen, environmental pollution regulations, and for humans globally to embrace lifestyle and policy changes that mitigate climate change to the greatest extent possible. To achieve this vision, it will be essential to develop an inclusive

framework that advocates for all people and the planet, and that highlights how injustices happening to marginalized communities are interconnected with the degradation and poisoning of places where they live, work, and play. We cannot ignore social inequality and expect to see progress in environmental health. As we struggle to overcome the complex issues associated with climate change, and COVID-19, we must keep in mind that the solution to the next viral may be locked in the brain of a child living in a deprived community experiencing higher levels of environmental pollution that limits not only their potential but also society's benefit from their contribution.

In many ways, the COVID-19 outbreak is a warning about future socio-economic disturbances that we may face with climate change and other public health crises. We can use the lessons learned from this crisis to open opportunities for addressing critical gaps in community resilience by integrating sustainability, health imperatives, and climate objectives through long-term integrated planning.

Both climate change and Covid 19 adaptation can be framed as part of countries' legal obligation to realize the right to health through their laws, policies and budgets. Under international human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, countries have obligations to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health, including taking steps to prevent epidemic disease. There is increasing recognition that addressing climate change is a component of realizing the right to health. The Paris Agreement acknowledges that in taking action to address climate change, countries should consider, respect and promote their obligations on the right to health. Robust global cooperation and governance with a human rights-centered approach supported by appropriate legal and institutional frameworks is a prerequisite for successfully confronting these multi-dimensional, overlapping challenges with integrated solutions.

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COVID-19 has proven to be the greatest pandemic ever faced by the human species (Nicola et al. 2020). The effects of this pandemic have been felt throughout entire planet (Shen et al. 2020). There are many speculations on the origin of COVID-19, but most evidence points to spread from wildlife to humans (Usman et al. 2020). In December of 2019, the initial case was reported in Wuhan, China, with suspicion that patient zero contracted the virus from the seafood market (Huang et al. 2020; Chakraborty and Maity 2020). This began the most unpredictable pandemic the world has ever faced. This pandemic has brought about unimaginable negative social, economic, emotional, mental, and physical effects (Tian et al. 2020).

Despite all the negative effects it's important to understand the effects of the pandemic on the Climate. To do so, there is need to understand the state of climate change pre-pandemic.

For the last two centuries, the world has seen rapid growth in industrialization and globalization. This has come with several significant advantages ranging from better health services, increased mobility, lower prices for products and many more. These developments haven't come without negative effects with the most notable being environmental degradation, pollution and climate change (Pearson and Foxon 2012). These environmental and climate issues have for a long time been at the top of the agenda for the UNGA (United Nations General Assembly) since 2019 (Fritz et al. 2019). Some of the notable environmental issues include land, water, air and noise pollution, from increased human activities such as transportation, manufacturing, mining and construction. It is important to note that COVID-19 has had its impact on climate change.

Effect of the COVI-19 pandemic on Climate change

As climate champions, our biggest goal is to reduce causes and impacts of climate change to the best of our ability. That said, we get no satisfaction from the positive environmental benefits that came with the COVID-19 pandemic as they came at a cost of so many lives and suffering across the world. It is evident that this pandemic has a direct impact on climate change. Despite the negative social and economic impacts of COVID-19, the lockdown that came as a result have proven to have positive impact the climate.

Decrease in Nitrogen dioxide; One of the most notable benefits of the pandemic has been cleaner and clearer air. This is because there has been significant reduction in the emission of pollutants in the air because of several lockdowns in different countries across the

world. With significant reduction in moving vehicles and less industrial facilities operating, less pollutants like Nitrogen dioxide were emitted. This gas causes many fatal respiratory diseases that affect both humans and animals (Usman et al. 2021). Nitrogen dioxide is also said to cause difficulty in breathing for people and can increase the chances of lung cancer (Al-Ahmadi and Al-Zahrani, 2013).

Decrease in Carbon dioxide; To reduce the spread of COVID-19, many governments instituted lockdowns. With these lockdowns came reduction in movement of vehicles, shutdown of airports reducing air travel, and reduction of other transportation means such as trains. This has proven to have contributed to an estimated 7% reduction in CO2 emissions from fossil fuels (Usman et al. 2021). Many of the top contributors to global emissions have reported significant decrease in their emissions with 11% reported by European Union, 12% reported by the USA, 1.7% by China, and 9% by India (World Economic Forum, 2020). This reduction is impressive but there is no clear will slow down the pace of global warming.

Shading light on the need for immediate action against climate change; Many scholars and researchers have linked the emergence, the fast spread and some of the effects of COVID-19 pandemic to climate change (Usman et al. 2021). This pandemic has also shown the importance of putting a lot of attention on prevention of similar global crisis before they happen, i.e., climate change. It brings in the question of whether humans can learn from the mistakes of underestimating such the potential impact of this pandemic in 2019 before it caused global devastation. Much like the COVID-19 crisis, Scientists have shared many warnings of the devastating effects of climate change if nothing is done about that rate of global warming. There are many attempts to get the world leaders together to reduce their country's contribution to climate change but little has been achieved from this.

How to make this positive trend more long-lasting/ more sustainable?

Increasing investment in clean and green solutions; People around the world and more concerned and aware about the status of the environment than ever before (Hughes 2020). This ranges from school going students, all the way to retired people. This is because during the lockdowns, people have had more time to access various information online or watch more global news. With this development, different citizens should come out and demand their governments and international agencies like United Nations to increase focus

on investing in greener and cleaner solutions such as electric cars to replace fuel cars, renewable energy to replace fossil fuels and many more.

Building healthy and livable cities; It is crucial world leaders to build capacity in cities, urban and suburban areas to handle the rapid increase in both medical and plastic waste. A study by (Luan and Ching 2020) clearly demonstrated how medical waste in Wuhan city spiked to 200 tons in a single day on 24th February 2020. Keep in mind that Wuhan city has a population of 11 million people. Beyond the threat of further spreading the virus, this medical waste is also a threat to the environment as most of it is plastics and synthetic materials for example gloves, sanitizer bottles, masks and many more. There is already evidence that a lot of these wastes are ending up deposited in water bodies such swamps, ponds, rivers, and seas (Saadat et al. 2020). There is need for communities and their leaders to not only manage their own waste better but to demand that their governments and municipal councils develop better waste management systems to ensure better sanitation and less pollution.

Promoting greener and cleaner tourism; In many major tourism locations, there is significant evidence of improvement in sanitation and decrease in pollution because of the lockdowns that put a pause on tourism. Due to closure of tourism activities, sites and cities, there was reduction in boat traffic which has led to significant reduction in water pollutants released by tourists. The cleaner and clearer water bodies have created a more suitable habitat for marine life to recover and return to canals in countries like the Netherlands, Italy, Greece and many more (Zambrano-Monserrate et al. 2020). It is upon both the government and the private sector players in the tourism sector to develop, promote, and fund cleaner tourism to maintain such clear and safer waters. For example, promoting of solar powered boats to replace fuel engine boats that pollute the waters. Also, Municipal councils and governments should develop policies and enforce strict rules and regulations against wastewater pollution from hotels, beaches and resorts in order to protect water bodies and the ecosystem they hold.

Six years after the Paris Agreement, are we on track to reach the stated goals?

13 CLIMATE ACTION

TAKE URGENT ACTION TO COMBAT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS

BEFORE COVID-19

GLOBAL COMMUNITY SHIES AWAY FROM COMMITMENTS REQUIRED TO REVERSE THE CLIMATE CRISIS

2019 WAS THE SECOND WARMEST YEAR ON RECORD

GLOBAL TEMPERATURES ARE PROJECTED TO RISE BY UP TO 3.2°C BY 2100

COVID-19 IMPLICATIONS

GHG

COVID-19 MAY RESULT IN A 6% DROP IN GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS FOR 2020

STILL SHORT OF 7.6% ANNUAL REDUCTION REQUIRED TO LIMIT GLOBAL WARMING TO 1.5°C

ONLY 85 COUNTRIES HAVE NATIONAL DISASTER RISK REDUCTION STRATEGIES ALIGNED TO THE SENDAI FRAMEWORK

CLIMATE FINANCE: INVESTMENT IN FOSSIL FUELS CONTINUES TO BE HIGHER THAN INVESTMENT IN CLIMATE ACTIVITES

2016
781 BILLION — FOSSIL FUEL
681 BILLION — GLOBAL CLIMATE FINANCE

CLIMATE CHANGE CONTINUES TO EXACERBATE THE FREQUENCY AND SEVERITY OF NATURAL DISASTERS

MASSIVE WILDFIRES   DROUGHTS   HURRICANES   FLOODS

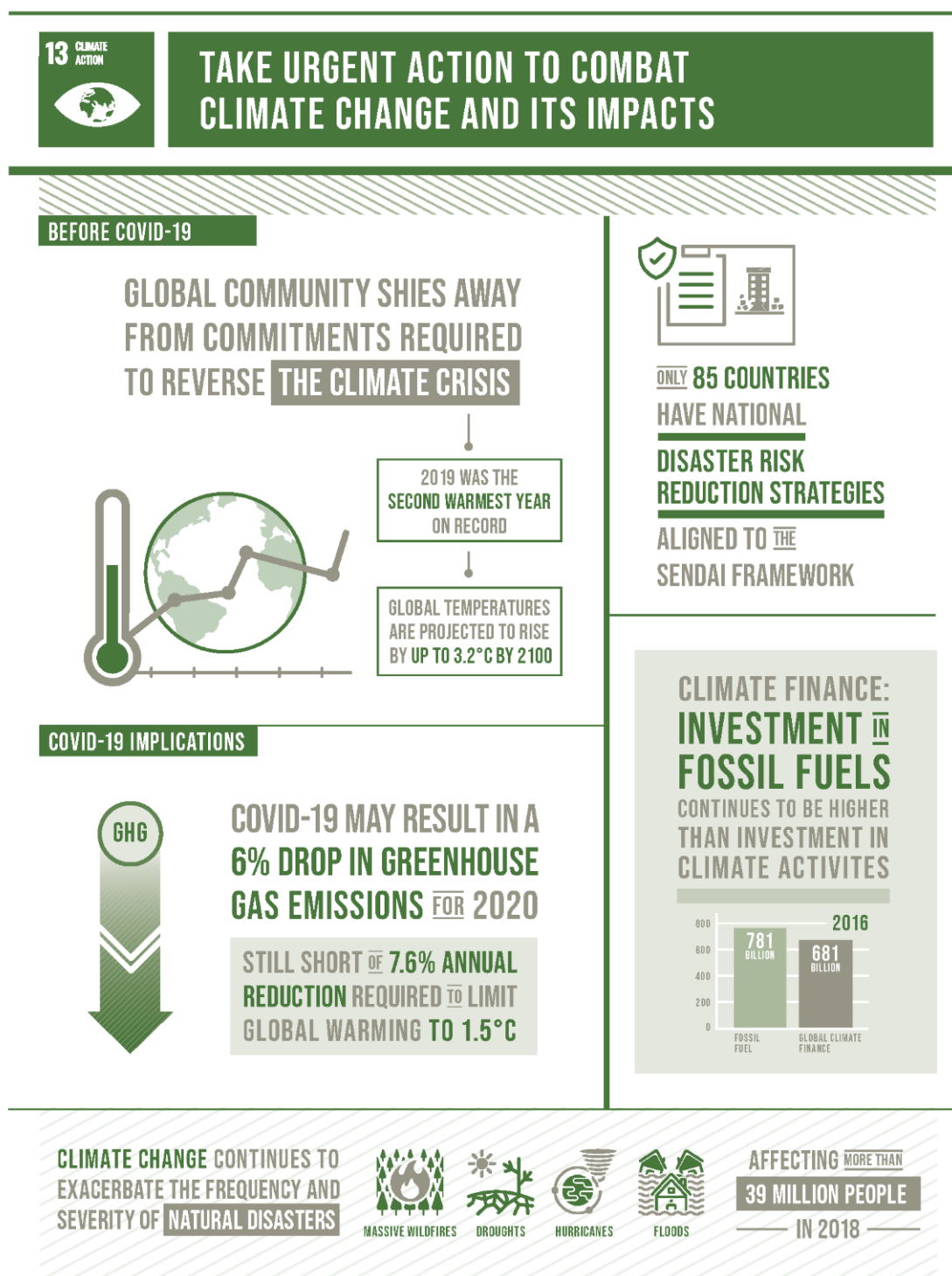AFFECTING MORE THAN 39 MILLION PEOPLE IN 2018

Figure 1: A summarized view of the current progress of SDG 13. Sourced from: sdg.un.org

It is clear that even with the 6% reduction in greenhouse emissions which is a result of COVID 19 and not any direct effort of different parties to the Paris Agreement, we are still

short of 7.6% annual reduction recurred to limit global warming to the target of 1.5 degrees centigrade.

This is a clear indicator that we are far from reaching the desired targets as set in the Paris Agreement.

According to the United Nations statistics on SDG13, the global community is way off track in realizing the climate action targets. At close examination of nationally determined contributions, many countries are not following through with these commitments. Research shows that greenhouse gas emissions developing countries are just increasing for example from 2000 to 2013, there was an increase in emission by 43.2 per cent. This is majorly attributed to a rise in industrialization and the need for increased development.

What can be done, and how?

According to the 2020 United Nations report on SDGs, "Global climate-related financial flows saw a 17 per cent rise from 2013–2014 to 2015–2016, from $584 billion to $681 billion." The United Nations attributed this increase in investment to the emergence of new private investment in renewable energy. Despite that increase, investment in fossil fuels in the energy sector is still proving to be more than that of low- carbon and climate resilient solutions. "To achieve a low-carbon, climate-resilient transition, a much greater scale of annual investment is required" (United Nations, 2020).

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During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the commitment of governments to implement strict precautionary measures raises the question of why similar regulations have not yet been taken to address another equally dangerous global health crisis, climate change. "Climate change is an ongoing, human-propelled phenomenon driven by accelerating greenhouse gas release into the atmosphere over centuries" (Coates, Andersen, & Boos, 2020). By early April 2020, carbon emissions declined by 17% in comparison with mean 2019 levels due to the shutdowns of the Covid-19 pandemic (Le Quéré, Corinne, Jackson, & Jones, 2020). Nevertheless, unless governments cooperate by committing to long-term, comprehensive and global actions, emissions will rebound and the ghost of climate change will come back to haunt the Earth more fiercely. The recovery path must consider climate implications to achieve a more resilient and sustainable post-Covid 19 world (Rosenbloom & Markard , 2020). Needless to say, policymakers, businesses, civil society organizations, and citizens must coordinate their responses and actions to combat this existential threat to humanity. The stated goals of the Paris Agreement of 2015 offer a road map to evade this environmental hazard. Today and six years after the Paris Agreement, governments must assess their performance and cooperate internationally to transform the agreement's aspirations into effective realities. In this regard, the following questions emerge:

Where does the world stand today with respect to the Paris Agreement's climate goals? What steps must be taken along the Covid-19 recovery path to meet these objectives and arm the environment against climate change?

Progress Regarding the Paris Agreement

On 12 December 2015, 196 countries joined efforts to face the environmental disaster of climate change by adopting the Paris Agreement (Encyclopaedia, 2021). The latter is a legally binding international treaty which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to hold global warming to well below 2 degree Celsius and to endeavor to limit it to 1.5 °C (Teske, 2019). To achieve these objectives, countries submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) which outline their pledges on climate action (Nationally Determined Contributions, n.d.). In 2020, many countries committed to net-zero emissions targets by around mid-century (Emissions Gap Report 2020, 2020). In April 2020, the chair of the Environment

Committee of the European Parliament launched the "green recovery alliance". The latter aims to revive the economy after the crisis by offering investment solutions compatible with the climate agreement's objectives. Likewise, in 2019, a non-binding resolution known as "the Green New Deal" was advanced by the US Congress highlighting the need to reduce fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions (Khanne, 2021). Moreover, several countries including France, Portugal, India and Indonesia have supported and are continuing to support clean energy projects (McGlade & Wetzel, 2020). Despite these promising initiatives, more steps must be taken to accelerate the world's progress regarding the Paris Climate Change Agreement. According to the United Nations Emissions Gap Report of 2020, present NDCs are not enough to achieve the objectives of the Paris agreement, and a minimum temperature increase of 3°C is expected by the end of the century.

"Countries must collectively increase their NDC ambitions threefold to get on track to a 2°C and more than fivefold to get on track to the 1.5°C goal. Global average emissions reductions required per year to meet emission levels by 2030 that are consistent with the 2°C and 1.5°C scenarios have increased remarkably.

(Emissions Gap Report 2020, 2020).

It must be noted that the pandemic has slowed down climate change in what concerns CO2 emissions, yet it has impeded the progress of the Paris Agreement in other aspects. For instance, scientific research as well as funding concerning climate change has been interrupted. In addition, the excessive use of plastic in the precautionary measures has aggravated pollution (Cho, 2020). Furthermore, with the exception of the covid-19 lockdown period, the production of fossil fuel including coal, oil and gas has continued to rise, aggravating pollution and thus hindering the objectives of the Paris agreement (Darby, 2020).

Actions Required to Accelerate the Progress

The recovery path chosen to unshackle the world from the Covid-19 pandemic must lead to a more resilient environment defiant against another global disruptor, climate change. In this regard, a sustainable and comprehensive recovery plan would revolve around three main pillars: transition from fossil fuels to clean and renewable energy, reforms in food production and consumption practices and reforestation.

To achieve the aspirational targets of the Paris Agreement, a drastic change in the global use and production of energy is required. This transition requires a more efficient use of

energy as well as the deployment of renewable energies in several sectors including transport, industry and building constructions (Teske, 2019). The decline in the use of carbon intensive energies during the pandemic can be harnessed to accelerate the shift towards cleaner energy (Rosenbloom & Markard , 2020). It must be noted that solar and wind sources are not enough to limit the global temperature rise to 1.5 degree Celsius by mid-century. Hydrogen energy, carbon capture and sequestration as well as advanced nuclear energy are required (Khanne, 2021). In addition, governments must adopt ambitious renewable energy targets and integrate them in their NDCs. These targets must be relevant to all the energy consuming sectors such as heating and cooling, transport and electricity (Ferroukhi, Gielen, & Press, 2020). Furthermore, monetary and financial mechanisms can play a significant role in exhorting the energy transition. For instance, the decline of fossil fuel prices caused by the pandemic could be counteracted by imposing a carbon tax that could promote renewable energy (Khanne, 2021). Another policy would be to direct public finance towards clean energy projects and away from fossil fuels. In fact, public finance must prioritize projects which enable infrastructure for renewables such as smart grids and electric vehicle charging stations. In addition, energy industry bailouts and financial support should be conditioned by efforts to meet energy renewable targets (Ferroukhi, Gielen, & Press, 2020). Another strategy that could be employed to accelerate the transition to clean energy consists of stimulating innovation in technology areas including "hydrogen, batteries, carbon capture utilization and storage, and small modal nuclear reactors" (McGlade & Wetzel, 2020). In addition to the long-term resilience and sustainability benefits, 3-8 new jobs per million dollars would be created.

In what concerns the food-production sector, 20% of global GHG emissions is generated each year due to deleterious practices. In addition to reforms in the production of food, changes are also required in food consumption and global diets. To elaborate, the production of ruminant meat contributes to 70% of agricultural emissions. Therefore, to be on track towards achieving the Paris Agreement targets, a large dietary shift is required. However, it must be noted that reducing the consumption of ruminant animal protein is not enough to achieve the aspirational climate targets, and major changes in other agricultural production are necessary (Climate math: What a 1.5-degree pathway would take, 2020). Thus, restorative food and agricultural systems are necessary to achieve the climate targets.

The energy transition and the food production and consumption reforms are not enough to fight climate change. Nurturing the landscape through stopping deforestation and advancing

forestation is another essential mechanism. In fact, about 15 percent of global CO2 emissions are due to deforestation. Deforestation not only adds CO2 emissions through implementing harmful techniques such as clearing and burning but also hinders the trees' role in absorbing CO2. By 2030 and even if all fossil-fuel emissions were effectively reduced and rapid decarbonization was achieved in all economic sectors, deforestation would still need to be eradicated by 75%. Furthermore, a massive and global reforestation process is required to achieve the climate agreement targets. An area the size of Iceland must be reforested each year, and by 2050, an area of 300 million hectares should have been reforested.

To guarantee the success of these measures, cooperation is required between individuals, private sector companies, national governments and international organizations. Besides the significant legislative and executive role of governments and civil society organizations, individuals must also commit to adjust their lifestyles to achieve a more sustainable and prosperous environment. Drastic changes must occur on the community, national, and international levels. Moreover, international cooperation and collaboration is essential to ensure global, consistent, and long-term actions (Teske, 2019).

Despite the immense social and economic costs that have accompanied the Covid-19 pandemic, this world-shocking event could serve as a wake-up call for the international community to form a strong coalition against the climate crisis. The decrease of the carbon intensive activities could be harnessed to advance more restorative and low-carbon strategies for the future. The recovery path must place the environment as a priority to achieve a post-Covid World fearless against the ghost of climate change. Nations must not squander the opportunity to turn the cards and transform the Paris agreement from an ambitious legal instrument to an absolute truth.

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The present crisis – COVID-19 is causing large scale disruptions in people's life, movement and their activities. And so, we are in a position to vaccinate all of our global population, to foresee a post-COVID phase which seems to be too far from now. While working towards a post-COVID phase, we should also foresee the greatest reset[1] in the present Anthropocene Epoch because of the complexities and consequences posed by climate change. Though the recovery process and procedures are well laid at the international levels, the pursuing actors are at the national, regional, local and individual level who collectively needs to contribute. When we speak on the factors such as resilience and recovery, the post-COVID phase is very much dependant on how we re-build our present foundation for the future.

The climate change and food systems are bound together in their entirety. We all know that climate change became an unavoidable determinant in all our walks of life ranging from humus formation to human survival. The Global Biodiversity Outlook – 5 requires a significant transition in human activities to achieve the '2050 Vision for Biodiversity'. Owing to that and as a part of the Decade of Action Plan[2], UN Secretary-General will be convening the Food Systems Summit 2021 which entails five Action Tracks, seven principles of engagement and assembles key stakeholders to formulate sustainable principles for transforming the current food systems. Also, FAO's (Food and Agriculture Organisation) Strategic Framework 2022-2031[3] proposes four accelerators to accelerate the 'four betters[4]' – Better Production, Better Nutrition, Better Environment and Better Life. Then, at the regional level, the 2021 EU-FAO Strategic Dialogue[5] focuses on five priority areas of which climate change and one health are one of those priorities.

The proposals for food systems transition widely echoed during the pandemic, because of the food chain disruptions and their consequences on human health (Headey et al. 2020). Therefore, the primary sector – agriculture, needs a transition to cope with climate change and future pandemics. The present globalised linear industrialized model of food production which we follow in most of the economies has not been sustainable (Pimbert 2015). So, the transformation of the current food systems from a linear model to a collective model is the need of the hour. Though the proposal of food system transition is ambitious, it has a lot of scope in studying and understanding the socio-ecological systems of a region (Estrada 2021). With less than a decade to achieve our sustainable development goals, investments in scientific research in new systems of agriculture and food need to be adopted and scaled up, all across the globe. This would enable us a smooth transition from the current linear phase

of production to a new sustainable phase in the field of agriculture.

The food systems transition has started recently, especially with the idea of Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA)[6] and Agroecology. But it seems that we are lurking behind in the process and also, we have forecasted an increase in food demand[7] in 2050. Though the terms 'CSA' and 'agroecology' are used interchangeably (Pimbert 2015), there lies a difference between the two. CSA involves only part of the agroecological principles and has an industrial agriculture tinge (linear food system) which grossly differs from the agroecology (circular food system) concept. It also overlooks environmental costs which occur due to industrialized agricultural practices. The environmental costs due to industrialised agriculture are numerous because of its larger ecological footprint and monocropping patterns. The soil in which the crops grow is at threat. In the soil levels, the top-soil formation[8], is quite a concern now because of its degradation and high erosion levels. It is degrading at a faster pace now and as scientists predict, we only have 60 years[9] of cultivation left. In response to conserve the soil, environmental benefits due to multi-cropping[10] and region-based agriculture was now actively practised by the developed countries. Largely, these methods for top-soil regeneration helps the soil to retain its nutrients and cultivate healthy crops.

The recently accepted concept of Agroecology by the scientific community adopts 'sustainable intensification[11]' which combines both knowledge and technological intensification. This concept which was once part of the food sovereignty movement is now being recognised by the scientific discipline because of its ability to adapt to climate change. In one way its approach of bio mimicking the biosphere process (Stojanovic 2017) is essential for the transition from the present linear food system to a circular food system. The key element of agroecology is its knowledge-driven evidence-based approach which provides geography-oriented solutions that help in climate adaptation and mitigation[12]. It also entails socio-economic development in a region by means of generating financial capital (D'Annolfo et al. 2017).

Therefore, this concept calls for micro-agri policies based on microclimates rather than central agricultural policy model for food production. The biggest challenge to transform the food system needs a collective and coordinated approach from farm to fork. This concerted effort in bringing together the micro-agri policies is possible by means of our modern-day earth observation satellites and satellite internets. But the research on agroecology[13] and its principles needs a global coalition so that it is not too late, to disseminate the research findings from the lab to land, as we see a decline in agricultural productivity in both

developing and developed countries (Fuglie 2018).

Not only in FAO, the vouch for global solidarity echoed in the recently held World Health Assembly 74, which direly needs strong 'political commitments and will' and not just with few allies, so that the global community can come together and uphold the One Health[14] approach of FAO for a healthy future. The recent scientific collaborations by means of effective partnerships between government and private made us stand together during the pandemic and it also led to the development of vaccines in less time. This has boosted us to pursue this 'global will' at all levels of development to save and sustain the humanity for future.

In implementing policies all around the globe, FAO encounters a plethora of governance challenges[15]. So, for effective global food governance, as stated by the open letter of HLPE Steering Committee[16], there is a need to strengthen the already well functioning science-policy panel – HLPE on Food Security and Nutrition rather than creating a new science-policy interface, which further fragments the governance systems. The recent increase in political commitments sheds some light on transforming our agri-food systems. For example, one, Transforming Agricultural Innovation for People[17], Nature and Climate' is a global campaign that calls for public funds into agriculture research and development. Two, Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture[18], which is a landmark decision to mobilize political will seems promising for the transition.

With regard to small and medium-sized farms in developing countries that lie in the tropical zones, a change in strategy needs to be adopted in farming systems, so as to accommodate its diverse landforms and micro-climates. The transition towards agroecology, in developing countries, requires agricultural policymakers in formulating a geography-based, people-centric policy at the local level and integrating the same at the national and international levels. This seems unimaginable at first instance, but to have a sustainable ecosystem in the highly populated developing countries, the concept of agroecology has to be practised. As, the developed nations while pursuing their policy on carbon markets and climate finance, it is possible to develop this complex chain of policies in the developing world on agroecology. This collective cooperation can be built by strong political commitments on climate change which further helps in the influx of international institutions related to agriculture into the developing world to handhold and guide in the micro-agri policymaking. Rather than following the industrialized agriculture model in developing countries which is not sustainable, investors should seek for investing in long term sustainable agri-food systems. This way, developing countries provide domestic and foreign investors with a fair share of

competition and thus can keep the food prices stable for the global community. Regarding the global agriculture commodity trade, the Symposium on the role of trade in the global agri-food system[19] conducted by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) acknowledges the need for food systems transition and calls for minimal governmental intervention that doesn't amount to trade distortions.

Therefore, the time is ripe to start the transition during this COVID phase to withstand in the post-pandemic world. To 'build back better' we are now in a position to build the system broader, especially a climate-resilient agri-food system to foresee a sustainable future.

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"Going back to normal": Since March 2020, it has been incredibly difficult to keep up with the number of articles, papers, or public statements, highlighting the need, or the world's willingness, to come back to the pre-COVID society, to come back to "normal". What we considered as "normal" however might be the exact reason of why the 21st century is slowly becoming the century of pandemics. The way societies across the globe produce, exchange and consume goods continues to profoundly impact the habitats of thousands of species, which greatly increases the risk of transmission from animals to humans.

An early lesson to draw from the COVID19 pandemic was that normality was the exact problem. The fact that billions of people had to fundamentally change the way they lived over a short period of time led to a substantial decrease in CO2 emissions, and therefore proved that the biggest barrier to climate action remained the internal structures of contemporary societies. COVID19 forced societies to bring about a systemic change in order to survive, and this concept should be from now on the central theme of this paper: systemic change (and systems thinking).

Because COVID19 brought about a systematic (though temporary) change in our societies, the whole question now becomes apparent: how do we maintain that change, how do we normalize it and how do we translate it into concrete policies? Before answering this question, one should look at the changes that were brought out to start with.

The first change was on the production level and on the impact that COVID19 generated on oil prices. In April 2020, for the first time in history, negative oil prices were recorded. Beyond showing the absurdity of a system where producers were in fact paying consumers to take the oil away, the crisis showed that an economic system based on perpetual growth is not sustainable, either ecologically or economically speaking. Reacting to this crisis, prominent climate campaign group 350.org explained that this situation represented "*another powerful example of how fossil fuels are too volatile to be the basis of a resilient economy. We are experiencing an unparalleled upending in our economies. And it is time for the fossil fuel industry to recognize that, from now on, the cheapest and best place to store oil is in the ground.*"[8]

The second change that COVID19 triggered was a profound, although again temporary, change in consumption habits. For months, households all across the globe strictly reduced their consumption

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[8] Rhodes Chris, "Negative Oil Prices", Resilience, https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-04-24/negative-oil-prices-theyll-pay-you-to-take-it-away/, consulted on 30 June 2021

of non-essential goods and therefore would lead countries a few months later to adopt enormous economic bailouts, to save an economy at the verge of collapse. The fact that people consumed less goods, goods often produced with a very high environmental costs, contributed to leading to a situation where global CO_2 emissions drastically dropped, but at the same time weakened an economic system based on such principles.

In the light of those two elements, production and consumption, what can the international community do to make sure that the decrease of CO_2 emissions continues in the long run? And how can a systems-thinking approach help in doing so?

First of all, what is systems thinking?

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, Western society has benefited from science, logic, and reductionism over intuition and holism. Thinking in systems means thinking systemically. In thinking in systems, we need to look at boundaries (of the system), inputs, outputs, information flows and feedbacks. Interventions based on system thinking tend to solve many problems at once. In looking at climate change, and how COVID19 led to retransforming our society, looking at these elements is essential as climate change is a **E4 crisis**, namely **E**cology, **E**conomy, **E**nergy and **E**quity. In order to do so, we must start by looking at production and the consumption levels. Because this paper has its limits, we shall focus on those two aspects only.

Changing consumption habits is not an easy task. It will require a profound cultural shift, from a paradigm of globalization (getting vegetables from the other side of the planet) to a paradigm of localization (building community gardens and urban farms locally). This would naturally not mean the end of international trade, but rather the prioritization of the local, as a way to *decommodify* food "*to reclaim food as our being, our nourishment, our identity*".[9] The international community could play a central role in normalizing the prioritization of local, while also ensuring that world trade agreements take into account the necessity to prioritize what can be localized, based on environmental principles instead of economic ones. Indeed, what makes sense from a neo-liberal perspective does not always make sense environmentally speaking.

A systems-thinking approach also helps in understanding that climate change does not function in silos. Its impacts will be multifaceted and therefore require looking at challenges as intertwined and reinforcing each other. For instance, while today's society global shipments are entirely depending on oil, food production also rely heavily on fossil fuels. While fertilizers are generated from natural

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[9] Vandana Shiva, "Who Really Feeds the World?", North Atlantic Books, 2016

gas, pesticides are then derived from oil. In this aspect then, relocalizing both energy and food production seem to be a key option forward as we rebuild after COVID19.

Some measures appear as indispensable if one is serious about making the positive effect of slowing down climate change last. From local to global, and again using the example of food systems, public policies could encourage hospitals and schools to develop local food production centers (for patients and pupils); and global policy makers could encourage direct sales from peasants to small-scale farmers while also encouraging agrarian reforms and land reforms to make land distribution fairer. Those examples, which might seem anectodical, are actually the true drivers of systemic change, bringing along all actors of society.

To conclude this paper, it is important to mention a key concept which should be at center of our reflection, and which is fundamentally embedded in systems-thinking, this concept is the one of resilience.

Thinking of resilience requires thinking in systems (groups of relationships). The goals of the Paris agreement cannot be realized without involving people, especially local communities. Communities know their needs and should also be prioritized in defining climate policies. Secondly, it is essential to start thinking of how interrelated challenges function. At a time where United Nations agencies try to work with "nexus" approaches, meaning to better articulate humanitarian, development and peace activities, complex approaches should also be used when looking at climate change.

Thirdly, adaptation is not enough. COVID19 forced us, not just to adapt, but to transform. We must start thinking of the kind of changes which are disruptive to the system, while also remaking and redefining our society along the lines of sustainability. What is meant by disruptive changes? Let us finish with some examples. **1) Food resilience**, starting with a food resilience assessment to determine the extent to which food is imported (and from how far) and looking at the vulnerability of supply chains. How can local food production be increased and how resilient are our farms to climate change and depending on imported inputs (fertilizers)? **2) Water resilience**: how can we make sure that lacs and natural water sources are free from pollutants? Water conservation is key: gray water systems, rain catchment system, water treatment system and their dependency on long supply chain: how to reduce their dependency? **3) Energy resilience**: alternative resources such as solar, wind, geothermal and hydro will mark the future. We need to explore energy storage systems. In this regard, community choice aggregation is one of the alternatives to have more control over energy supply. Lastly, **4) money resilience**: what and how to explore new financing models? How to increase local credit unions, local exchanges, local currencies to keep wealth within the community?

Some evidence indeed suggests that the first year of the pandemic had a positive effect on slowing down climate change. But only a systemic change can make it a long-term trend. While the Paris Agreement was an unprecedented diplomatic success, it is still unclear whether it will turn out to be the climate agreement the world needs so much. By keeping in mind the **E4 crisis and the systems-thinking approach**, it is possible to make a difference.

Topic 4: <u>ECONOMIC RECOVERY</u>

While no country has been spared in the pandemic, some regions have suffered more economic damage than others. What should be done to ensure a fair and balanced economicrecovery around the world? What is the role for the UN and other multilateral institutions inthis process?

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Foreword

This paper is written to fulfill the completion of the United Nations Graduate Study Program (GSP) 59. We (the writers) put our focus on economic recovery in the post-covid-19 world in which we elaborate on the challenges and the progress from each side of the world. Our team consists of several young professionals from different countries: **Alice Alcântara Gomes Lima (Brazil),** a current master's student in Economic Development with a bachelor's in International Relations. **Christian van der Woude (The Netherlands)**, majored in World Politics with a minor in Entrepreneurship at bachelor studies, after which he completed a Master's in International Economic Policy. **Mehtap Tuğba Kaynak (Turkey)**, Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Political Science and Public Administration/ Minor in Economics. And **Randa Sandhita (Indonesia)** a peace economist who has a bachelor's in International Relations and is currently pursuing a master's in Public Policy.

We (the writers) do hope that this paper will give insights about world recovery progress and could be an input in decision making at the UN strategic level.

1 INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, by causing one of the biggest health crises ever seen, shook the world economy, destabilized several sectors, increased unemployment, inflation, and caused economic and social vulnerability around the world. However, after a period of great uncertainty about the future, the international community brought extremely positive

and ambitious results with the immunization vaccine, allowing the world to gradually return to "normalcy".

Despite the advances after the start of vaccination, unfortunately, the coronavirus continues to have a significant impact on our lives and the global economy. While scientists have learned a lot about the "original" virus, new virus mutations like the "South African" and "British" variants are still a mystery. The result is that 2021 will again be a year marked by the fight against the coronavirus. The pandemic is a moment in human history, now more than ever, that compels all countries to think and work together. This experience has been affecting all societies as a whole, and there's no individual solution.

Each region has published their responses towards the economic recovery, many stimulate more cooperation between countries to avoid a big contraction in their GDP and its effects in the domestic economic sectors. The challenges that covid-19 brings to the economy highlight the importance of regional integration and international organizations for joint decision-making, and effective economic solutions, namely: The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), Association of South East Asia Nations (ASEAN), Europe and Central Asia.

2 MERCOSUR - Challenges to economic recovery in The Southern Common Market

The current moment of the coronavirus pandemic makes us think that we are going through a process of withdrawal of international cooperation. However, as it happened in the post-World War II period, the strengthening of international relations is paramount to return to normal. In South America, The Southern Common Market (Mercosur) represents a great alternative to intensify the economic recovery of its member countries in the post-COVID-19 period.

Brazil and Argentina began negotiations for the foundation of the Mercosur economic bloc in the late 1980s, marking the end of dictatorial governments in Latin America and the beginning of liberal and neoliberal democracies (Monteiro, 2014). To strengthen the economies of the Southern Cone countries and boost the regional economy - on March 26, 1991 - Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay signed the Treaty of Asunción, thus creating Mercosur (Mercosur, 2018).

The treaty is an international agreement of an economic and commercial nature that is part of the context of globalization and neoliberalism. But, even so, the process of building Mercosur, inspired by the experience of the European Union, has sought to constitute a common market aimed not only at economic integration but also at political cooperation.

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The organization's objective is to increase the job offer and the income, the region's productivity, and intensify economic relations among its members (Mercosur, 2018). Furthermore, the group seeks to provide a common space for generating commercial and investment opportunities to integrate national economies into the international market (Mercosur, 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the entire global economy, leaving many regions extremely vulnerable to its health and economic effects. According to data obtained from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2020), the Latin American region had an average contraction of 7.7% in Gross Domestic Product - GDP (ECLAC, 2020). All the countries that make up Mercosur have experienced declines in their economic activities. Argentina was the most affected country, with a contraction of 10%, followed by Uruguay, which showed a decrease in GDP of 5.7%. Brazil and Paraguay were the countries in the organization with the lowest drop, 4.1%, and 0.9%, respectively (IMF, 2021).

Graph 1 – Real GDP growth (annual percentage change)
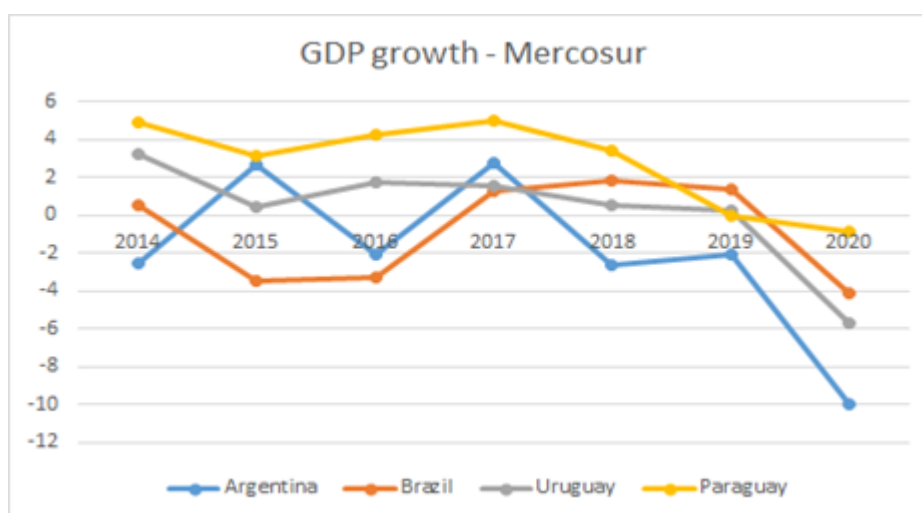
Source: IMF DataMapper (2021). Self elaboration.

The effects of the GDP's contraction are noticeable in the level of per capita income: all countries of the analyzed region showed a decrease. In addition to the reduction in income, the population of Mercosur countries also had their purchasing power affected by the increase in the inflation rate. Employment rates in all of the organization's members have decreased dramatically, and, within the employees, informal jobs without labor rights increased. In other words, the sanitary measures adopted to contain the pandemic left

Mercosur's economies vulnerable, with difficulties in producing essential goods and services (IMF, 2021).

Graph 2 – Unemployment rate (annual percentage change)
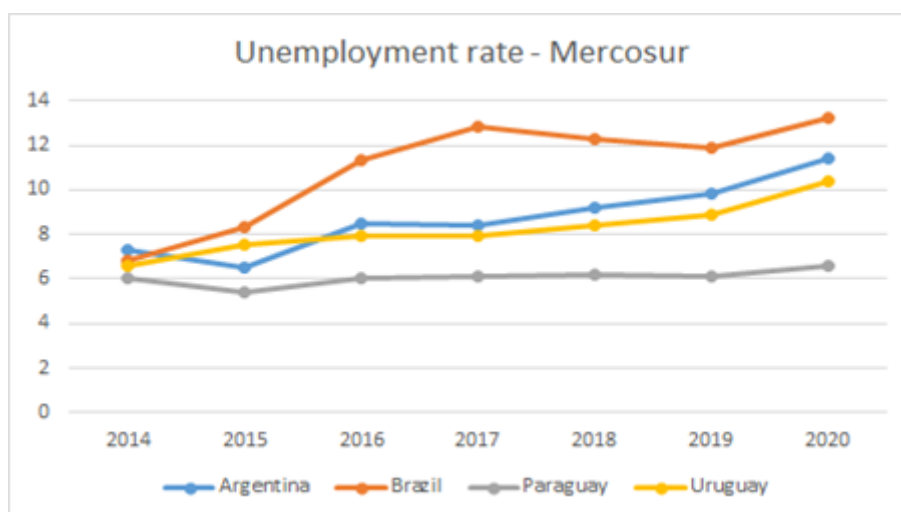
Source: IMF DataMapper (2021). Self elaboration.

With the increase of the structural problems caused by the pandemic, the need to change the development model in the region increases (ECLAC, 2020b). In addition to national efforts, the economic recovery of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay requires regional and international cooperation. Trade between Mercosur countries proved to be resilient in the face of the pandemic, with a drop of only 5.6% (ECLAC, 2020b). The members also exchanged information on the situation of the pandemic and health measures in order to mitigate the impacts on society. However, even though the numbers are considerable, now more than ever, there is a need for economic transformation and promotion of investments in environmentally sustainable jobs and economic activities, especially in strategic sectors (ECLAC, 2020a).

During the thirty years of its existence, the Mercosur group has contributed to reducing tariff barriers and attracting external investments that promote the productive integration of key sectors for the member countries' economies. However, the organization's future depends on the consolidation of political-economic alignment among its members. As the post-Covid19 economic recovery represents the major challenge faced nowadays in the

institution, it is necessary to increase the harmony between domestic and regional policies to expand Mercosur's employment offers and its relations with the international community. The group is the best chance that its members have to consolidate themselves as relevant players in the international market.

In this sense, the strengthening of Mercosur is an opportunity for these countries to grow anew and gain space in the post-COVID-19 world. Mercosur's institutional arrangements facilitate regional trade with legal and financial guarantees, contributing to leveraging free trade and the business environment within the organization (Veiga, 2021). Those arrangements provide for the free movement of goods, people, means of production, and services. Furthermore, with a common commercial policy, the same import quota for countries outside the bloc is obtained, and a zero tariff on intra-bloc trade. Thus, strengthening the integration between Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay means economic growth, important opportunities for competitive international insertion, and improvements in the quality of life of their populations.

3 ASEAN - The Association South East Asia Nation Region

In comparison to other countries around the world, ASEAN countries fared quite well during the COVID-19 epidemic. The ongoing vaccination campaign in ASEAN countries raises the chance of an economic recovery this year, although it may take longer for some countries.

3.1 The challenges and Recovery Plan

The epidemic has created unprecedented uncertainty for ASEAN, with possibly catastrophic consequences for the economy and society. The ASEAN region is expected to drop by 3.8% in 2020, the first decline in economic growth in 22 years, after expanding by an average of 5.3% over the previous decade, which can be seen on the figure below:
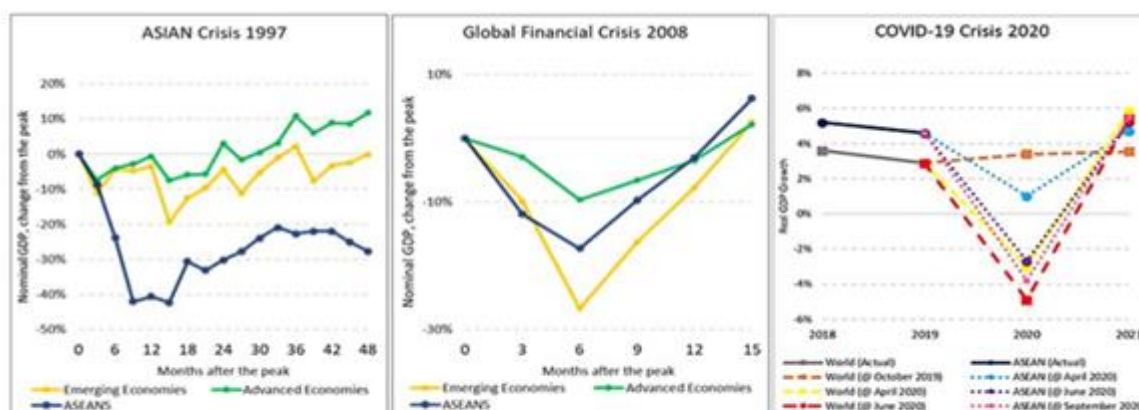
Source: Calculated by ASEAN Secretariat using quarterly data from International Monetary Funds, International Financial Statistics, World Economic Outlook, Asian Development Bank, Asian Development Outlook

The rapid spread of COVID-19, amplified by asymptomatic transmissions and high mortality rates suffered by the elderlies and vulnerable, have prompted a large-scale containment policy put in place globally. This, in turn, led to substantial production disruptions as a result of forced business closures and the inability of workers to get to work, as well as disruptions to trade and business. The pandemic has underscored the vulnerability of supply chains, including ASEAN economies as global production hubs.

The ASEAN countries reacted promptly, taking targeted and decisive action. When initial concerns about broken supply chains and travel disruptions developed, the first response to the emerging outbreak was through monetary policy, which ensured adequate liquidity in the economy. However, as the outbreak grew to pandemic proportions and the negative consequences became more obvious, to increase the capacity of the health sector and lessen the impact on the larger economy, governments implemented more powerful fiscal stimulus and sector-targeted solutions, focusing on hard-hit sectors like tourism and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), as well as low-income individuals.

Fiscal stimulus packages, monetary policy and financial measures, and sector-specific policies and interventions are the three primary kinds of actions implemented by AMS to combat the COVID19 pandemic. The correct targeting and effectiveness of these social and economic stimulus packages will be vital to sustain economic activities, jobs, and livelihoods over the next few years for the economic recovery.

Since February 2020, AMS has been implementing several economic stimulus programs at an unprecedented scale and speed. By September 2020, the announced stimulus will total USD 397.4 billion, or 12.5 % of the region's 2019 GDP3, although its efficiency

will be determined by disbursement and absorption capacity. Despite the stimulus programs put in place to counteract the effects of COVID-19, most ASEAN countries are expected to experience major recessions in 2020. Consumer and producer confidence are projected to suffer as a result of the uncertainty, as weak global demand is expected to stifle exports and tourism. Given COVID-19's extensive spread and ease of transmission, as well as the region's interconnection, adequate containment and control remain essential.

Source: ASEAN Secretariat
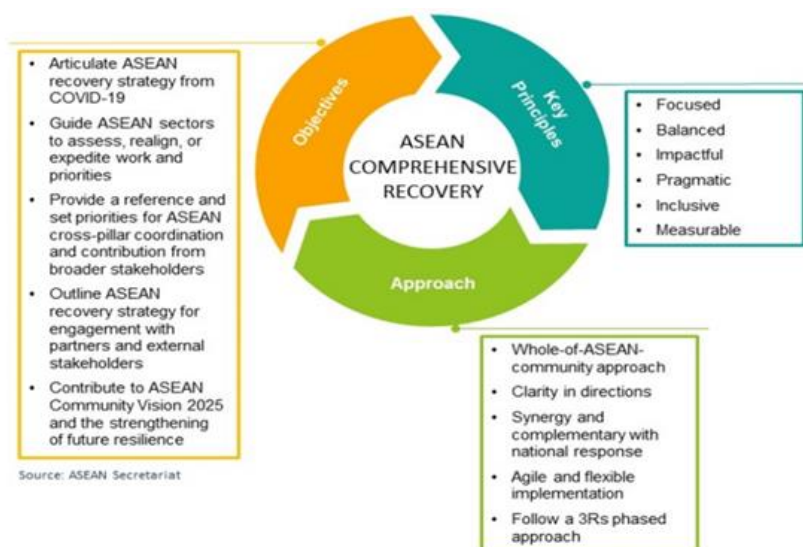
3.2 The AMS Progress

In its progress, ASEAN Member States (AMS) are doing pretty well in the recovery. For example, Vietnam's excellent response to the COVID-19 epidemic has allowed the country's GDP to grow by roughly 2% in 2020. Despite a decisive response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Thailand's economy will however contract by 6.5 % due to the country's reliance on tourism. Industries with high international demand have somewhat recovered in Indonesia thanks to a rebound in commodities prices, while sectors dependent on the home market are still struggling owing to continued lockdowns. Singapore is launching a Connect-In-Singapore project, which is one of the higher performing countries in terms of COVID-19 response, which urges businesses to have meetings in the country's COVID-19-free bubbles as part of its effort in re-opening travel into the country.

Vietnam is the region's top performer, with good growth statistics in 2020 and 2021 projected to continue. Singapore is on the mend: Covid-19 instances are low, and demand for IT and medical products is soaring, resulting in a somewhat upbeat outlook (coupled with an effective vaccine roll-out). A large number of instances have been reported in Indonesia, Malaysia, and the Philippines, and it is unlikely that they will emerge from the second slump before the end of Q2. They will, however, be able to grow greatly in 2021 due to a low basis

in 2020. If the global recovery continues and mobility improves as a result of implemented immunization programs, tourism arrivals will boost growth from Q3 onwards. Thailand appears to have recently recovered from the second wave of illnesses, but its economic recovery is lagging. The paucity of tourists, particularly in the first half of the year, will stymie Thailand's economic recovery, limiting its growth in 2021.

GDP Growth	2019	2020	2021 (f)	Δ no-Covid-19
Indonesia	5.0	-2.0	5.2	-7.2
Malaysia	4.3	-5.6	6.3	-8.6
Philippines	6.1	-9.5	9.7	-12.1
Singapore	0.7	-5.8	7.2	-6.3
Thailand	2.4	-6.1	4	-6.5
Vietnam	7.0	4.2	8	-4.2

Source: Rabobank, Macrobond

Although AMS are reliant on foreign demand and economic growth in large economies such as the United States, Europe, and China, their economies are diverse. When disparities in virus-containment success are ignored, distinct economic features can explain the ASEAN countries' unequal recoveries.

Furthermore, due to greater working from home, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and the Philippines are seeing increased demand for tech-related products (such as integrated circuits, computers, and cellphones). Thailand and the Philippines, on the other hand, may see a drop in demand for office machine products as a result of more individuals working from home. Furthermore, Thailand is a car and vehicle components exporter, for which demand has decreased as a result of reduced mobility and enterprises deferring investments in capital goods such as trucks and vehicles. Indonesia exports a variety of commodities, including coal, palm oil, and natural gas. While demand for such products is lower in times of crisis, we can see an increase in commodity prices in 2021 due to the global recovery, which enables these countries to catch up with regional peers.

Figure : Different speeds of recovery in exports

Figure : Tourism is another driver of the divergence in recovery
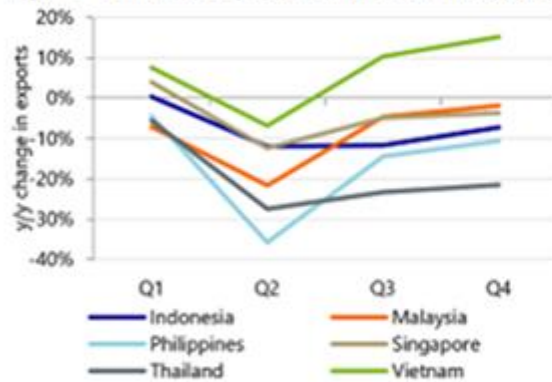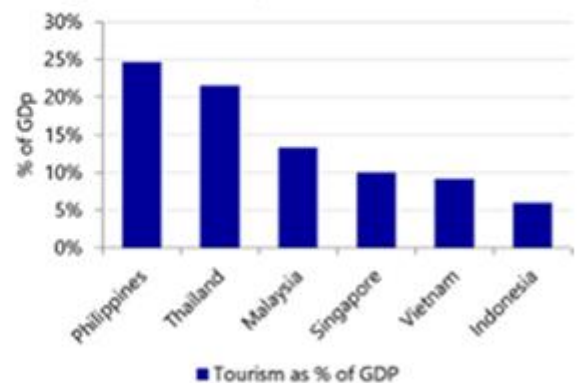
Source: Macrobond, RaboResearch

Another important distinction is the reliance on tourism. Both the Philippines and Thailand rely heavily on tourism, which accounts for more than 20% of their GDP in both countries. In terms of expectations 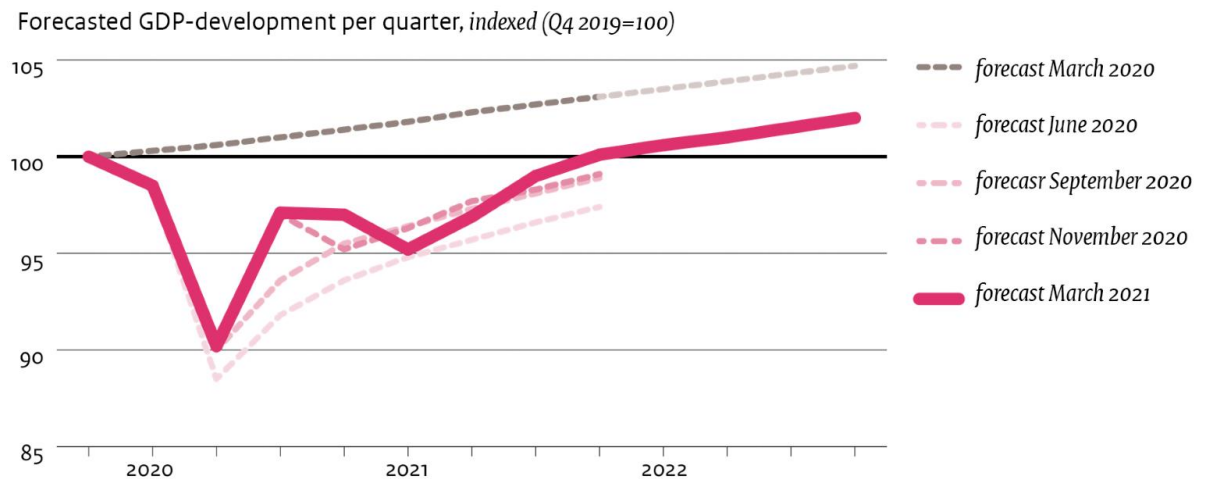for the vaccine process, the borders will stay blocked for at least the first half of 2021, posing a significant economic burden. As long as global mobility is restricted, service exports will be at a disadvantage. Reduced tourism has had less of an impact on Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam, and they are less constrained on their route to recovery in this aspect.

4 Economic impacts in the Netherlands

Just as the rest of the world, the Netherlands has experienced an unprecedented crisis. While primarily being a public health crisis, the necessary contact restrictions that have been implemented nationally and internationally have had substantial negative economic, social and societal impacts. The Dutch government and the European Union have aimed to minimize their effects on the short term, through financial support of companies, entrepreneur and civil society. Now that most restrictions are being lifted, attention is moving from short-term fixes to pursuing a more transformative strategy, that will emphasize sustainable economic growth for the future rather than keeping unsustainable business models afloat. The period of recovering and rebuilding from COVID-19 will require the government to play a more active role than it has been used to over the last decades.

Forecasted GDP-development per quarter, *indexed (Q4 2019=100)*

- - - *forecast March 2020*

- - - *forecast June 2020*

- - - *forecasr September 2020*

- - - *forecast November 2020*

━━━ *forecast March 2021*

(CPB, 2021)

Now that the number of infections is decreasing and the number of vaccinations is increasing, the Dutch economy is recovering at a fast pace. The economy is now expected to grow by 3% in 2021 and 2022 and unemployment is projected to stabilize at 4,1%; the same level of the average between 2017 and 2019 (CPB, 2021). While BNP projections for 2025 have decreased by 1,5% than projected before COVID-19, it is still higher than the negative 3% originally expected in the height of the crisis in 2020. This means that the permanent damage of COVID-19 is limited in the Netherlands.

4.1 The challenge ahead

As mentioned, the economic crisis around COVID-19 is one like no other; it is characterized by extreme production decreases in specific sectors, that show a forceful recovery as soon as the public health restrictions were repealed. This is by and large the result of the budget surplus the government has built up over the previous year, enabling an unprecedented public investment program. Consequently, the rebuilding policy should focus on adjusting the economy to heed the challenges in climate, education, housing and the labor market. Some of these challenges have also been exacerbated by COVID-19, for instance with people on temporary contracts in the gig economy suffering the most from increased unemployment or people from disadvantaged backgrounds negatively impacted by homeschooling (CPB, 2021). Consequently, these challenges should not be addressed in separate policy silos but need a comprehensive and integrated approach.

Scaling back the short-term support measures will therefore require a balanced approach, to both avoid permanent damage in opening some sectors sooner than others, but

also to make sure we don't fall back into old patterns when we do. We can already see that daily commuting traffic is starting to return to its pre-pandemic level, with all the negative consequences for pollution and urban mobility that go with it. That will cause further delay in heeding the climate challenge, requiring substantial more investment to combat it at a later stage than dealing with it now; rebuilding and reshaping must go hand in hand.

That means combatting the virus and limiting the damage; addressing social cleavages, exacerbated by the crisis, and drafting a long-term strategy on our economy, society and surroundings – as all politics is local.

4.2 The Netherlands; a decentralized unitary state in a supra-national union

Many competences of economic, monetary and social policy have been attributed to the European Union (EU) over the last decades. The EU is a supra-national organization of 27 member states that has evolved from a resource (Coals & Steel) sharing organization to a political and economic union with a common currency and an internal market (Ballin & De Jonge, 2020). To maintain a shared legal, economic and monetary order to support the common currency and market, member states have given up certain policy making pejoratives to the executive body of the EU, the European Commission (Ballin & De Jonge, 2020). That means that any rebuilding strategy for the Netherlands will be heavily influenced by overarching initiatives from the European Union. As the Netherlands has been near the modus of both GDP shock and support packages (CPB, 2021; see figure below), adjusted for GDP, the country is a good average case study of how COVID-19 has impacted countries in the block, what steps need to be taken to rebuild and – in the other sections of this paper – how that compares to other blocks in the world.

GDP of the Netherlands, China, Eurozone & U.S.
indexed, Q4 2019 = 100
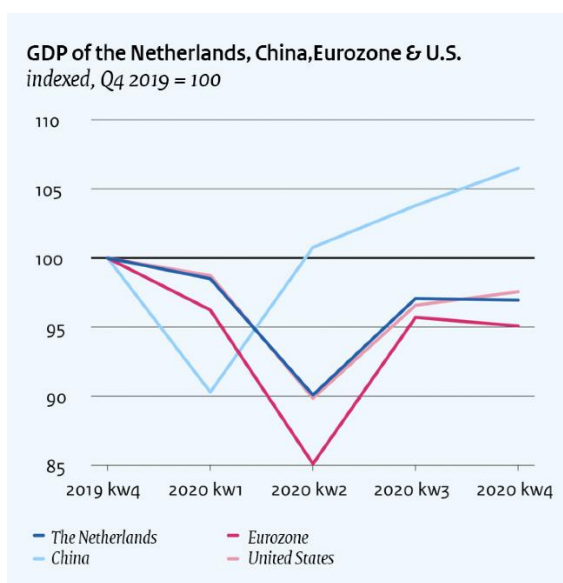
(CPB, 2021)

4.3 NextGenerationEU: the recovery plan for Europe

On 21 July 2020, the European Commission, Parliament and Heads of State/Government agreed to the implementation of NextGenerationEU, an economic recovery plan that will 'rebuild a greener, more digital and more resilient Europe' after COVID-19. On 17 December 2020, it was further augmented by additional funds made available in the multi-year EU budget (Multiannual Financial Framework, of MFF), providing a total of €2.018 billion (adj for 2021) in total stimulus packages (European Commission, 2021). The package strongly focuses on science, (emerging) technology and innovation, with over 50% earmarked for research and development (through the Science funding mechanism Horizon Europe), fair climate and digital transitions (through the Just Transition Fund and Digital Europe Programme – that guides and supports infrastructure and transformation in member states) and recovery and resiliency of the health system (mainly through EU4Health – which focuses both on disease prevention (e.g. closing smoking areas) and digital transformation of health systems). Further priorities are the modernization of wider policy instruments, such as agricultural policies, to reduce its impact on climate and modernize their digital components, fighting climate change through adaptation and reductions, biodiversity protection and gender equality.
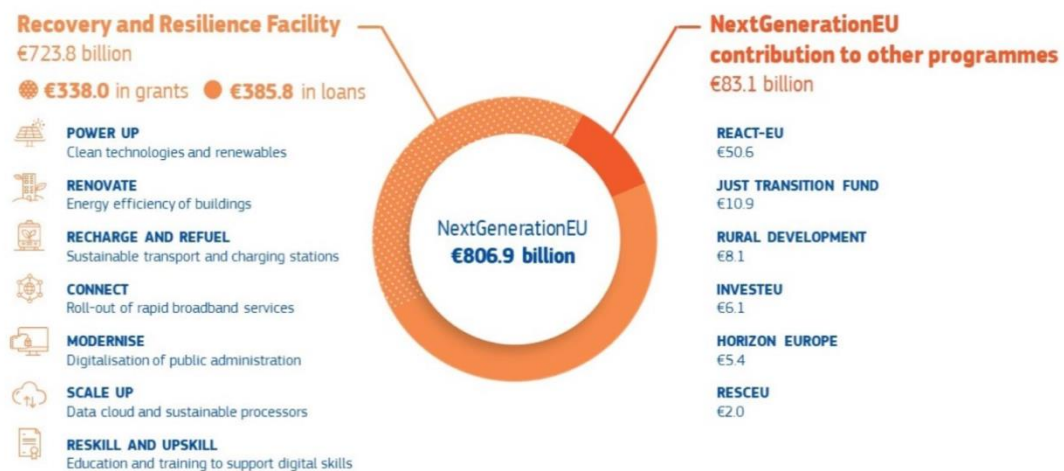
(European Commission, 2021)

The MFF is (permanently) financed through union custom duties, a union plastic packaging waste tax, VAT-based contributions from member states and GNI-adjusted

remittances. The temporary nature of the NextGenerationEU fund means that it will be funded by the EU borrowing on the markets, at more favorable rates than individual member states could through issuing EU bonds and diversifying funding streams. The Commission is proposing to repay these loans by a carbon border adjustment mechanism, a digital levy, an EU emissions trading system, a financial transaction tax, a financial contribution linked to the corporate sector and a new common corporate tax base. Consequently, the new revenue sources are directly linked to the investments (the beneficiaries and polluters are paying) and the EU is expanding its dominance over national policies further than it ever has.

After having raised the first funding round, member states can now submit bids to the European Commission to fund their rebuilding activities. The expectation is that the majority of investments will be made in Southern Europe, which has been hit hardest by the pandemic and were already heavily indebted from the previous financial crisis (Van den Bogaert, 2020). As mentioned by UNCTAD, a combination of debt relief and reforming productive capacities will be the key to unlocking their future growth (UNCTAD, 2021), whereas other countries will primarily need to focus on the longer term and address the societal challenges as identified above, before we return to old - pre-pandemic - patterns.

5 Challenges for Economic Progress of the Europe and Central Asia

COVID-19 has also led to major disruptions in the region of European and Central Asia (ECA). When the pandemic has erupted, these countries shut down their economies to prevent movement of people and goods like most other countries in the world. As the pandemic rages on, ECA countries are primarily concerned with containing and combatting the pandemic, as they have seen the highest number of cases and deaths among emerging and developing economies (EMDE).

In these circumstances, when we look at economic activity of the region, the World Bank has estimated a 2% contraction with a per capita income gains loss of at least 5 years in the ECA economy (World Bank, 2021). Particularly economies with strong trading relationships and financial integration with the Eurozone, as well as those depending mostly on tourism and services are facing the hardest consequences (World Bank, 2021). As those economies primarily fall in the EMDE category, they face steep challenges in their economic recovery. Their reliance on unstable foreign capital and high susceptibility to external shocks, combined with a high debt-quote, become clear when looking at their capital outflows and currency depreciation.

5.1 Capital Outflows

The IMF has stated that "emerging markets have experienced the sharpest portfolio flow reversal on record—about $100 billion or 0.4% of their GDP—posing stark challenges to more vulnerable countries." (IMF, 2020). Figure 1 represent the portfolio flows to emerging markets and it is seen that those flows have reversed even more in the COVID period than during the Global Financial Crisis (GFC).

1. Cumulative Nonresident Portfolio Flows to Emerging Markets
(Percent of GDP, based on daily observations)
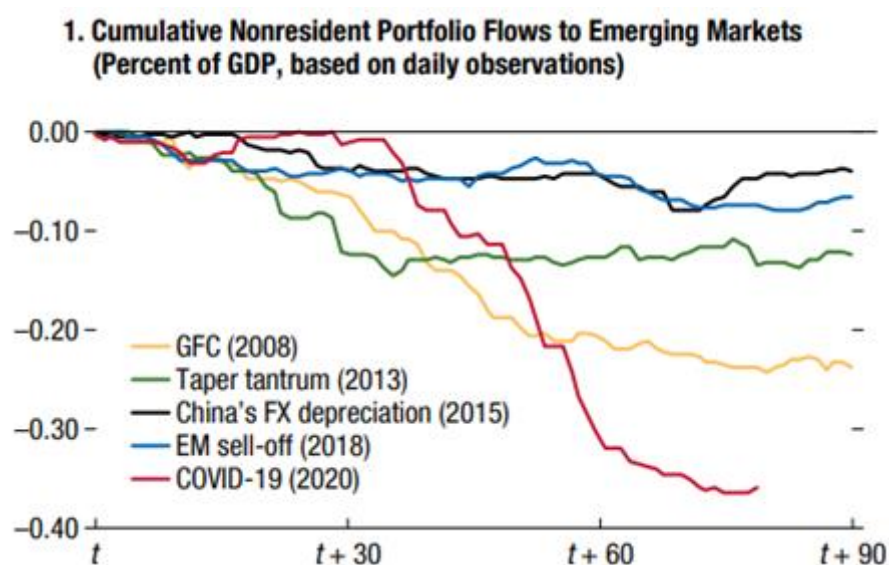
Source: IMF, 2020

Among EMDEs, ECA economies have experienced larger portfolio outflows compared to other economies in figure 2 panel A and this represents the loss of investor confidence and flight to secure economies. These outflows led to domestic currency depreciation and decline in the foreign exchange reserves. In addition to portfolio flows, foreign direct investment inflows (FDI) fell severely compared to other EMDEs in COVID-19, and it can be seen also in figure 2 panel B.

2. Portfolio and FDI Flows in ECA

a. ECA portfolio outflows

b. Foreign direct investment inflows by region, 2019 and 2020
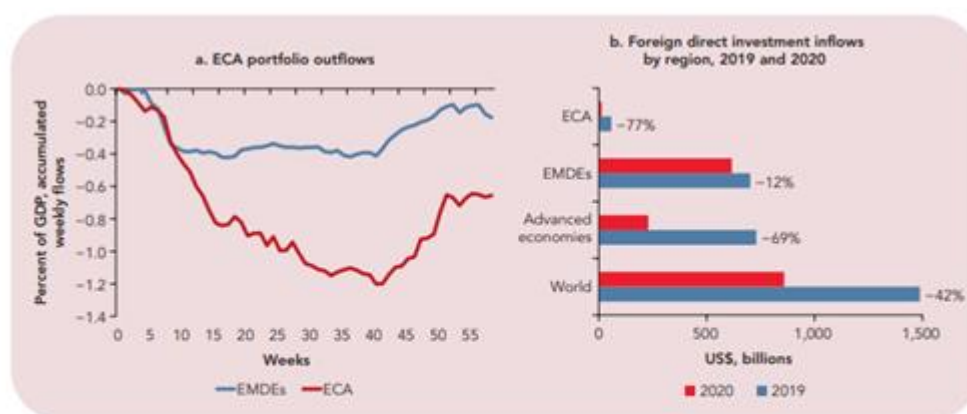
Sources: Institute of International Finance; UNCTAD; World Bank.
Note: ECA = Europe and Central Asia; EMDEs = emerging markets and developing economies; GDP = gross domestic product.
A. The start date of the COVID-19 episode is January 24, 2020. The ECA sample includes Hungary, Poland, Turkey, and Ukraine due to data limitations. The last observation is March 5, 2021.

(World Bank, 2021)

5.2 Monetary Policy Constraints

Since the COVID-19 shock led to a sudden stop of economic activity in the ECA region, central banks have intervened in foreign exchange markets to stabilise their currencies such as Croatia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Serbia, and Turkey, thus they have implemented several tools which can be classified under four groups: a) rate cuts; b) asset purchases; c) liquidity provision and credit support; d) regulatory easing. In this context, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Turkey used unconventional policies like asset purchases. However, an increase in the currency depreciation has led to an increase in the inflation and this reduced the space for implementation of the policy rate cuts. Because of the increase in inflation rate, those Central Banks raised the policy rate as well in 2021. At the same time, some Central Banks such as the Turkish Central Bank sold the international reserves at a sharper price point and thus limited the capacity of central banks to deal with the negative external shocks.

3. Macroeconomic Policies in ECA

a. Asset purchases in ECA and EMDEs
b. Inflation versus targets in ECA countries
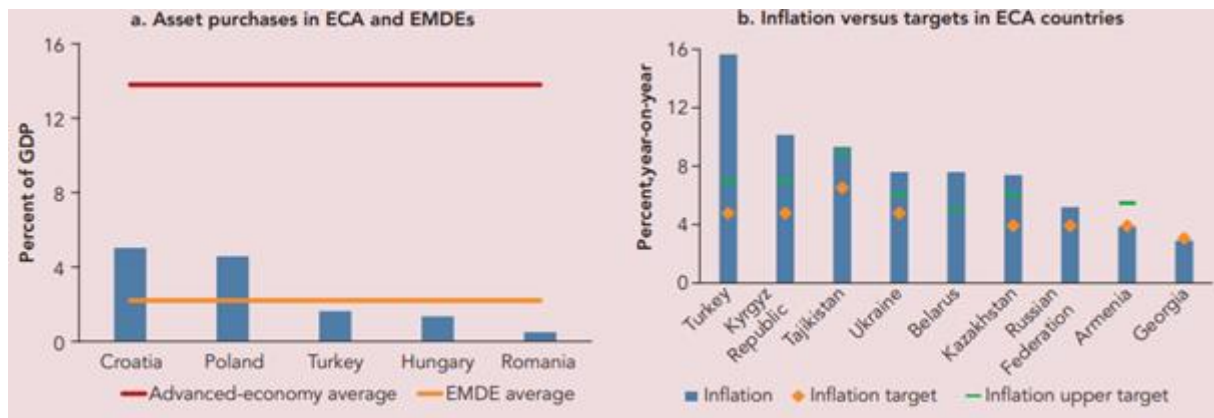
(World Bank, 2021)

After the increase in the capital outflows, there was a rise in demand for the US Dollar (USD). This increase in demand for the USD further exacerbated currency depreciations in the ECA region. In this context, monetary policy constraints also come from the hierarchical monetary system. Currencies that have a higher hierarchy in the global financial system, in which the USD holds the top position, have more leniency for monetary interventions without facing external sanctions. Therefore, while ECA economies, like other EMDEs, have provided liquidity support and credit availability for the functioning of their financial markets, balance sheet pressures put a strain on their banking sector. This was caused by the exchange rate depreciation and thus has led to the negative consequences, such as high inflation and high current account deficits and an increase in risk aversion due to a decline in Central Bank reserves. In the below graph, it can be seen how much ECA countries have faced currency depreciation compared to other EMDEs, as calculated by the OECD for the beginning of the pandemic between February and March 2020.

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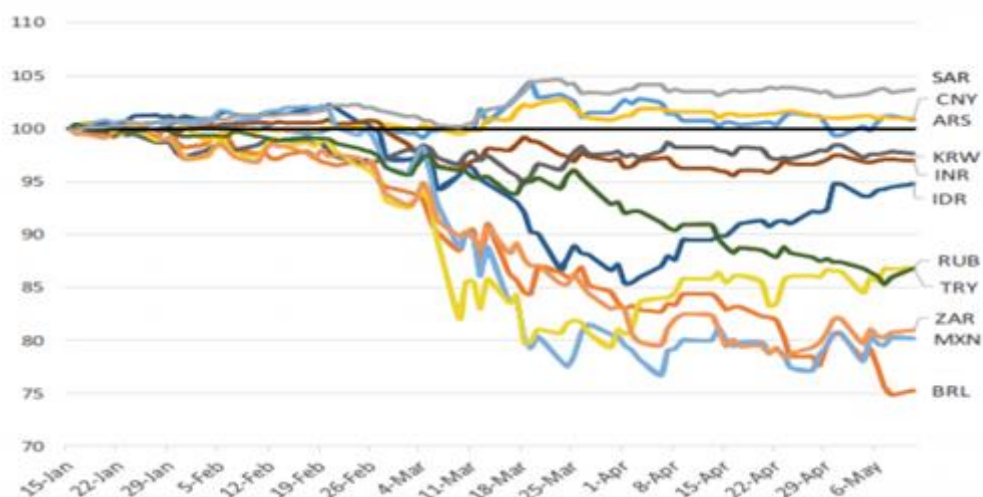
(OECD,2020)

5.3 Recovery for the Region

First, the economic recovery of the region is mostly dependent on how these economies will effectively manage the current pandemic situation and the pace of vaccine deployment. In this context, procurement and distribution of the COVID-19 vaccines have crucial importance as to not delay economic recovery. ECA economies need to increase necessary fiscal space and thus they could contain the COVID-19. Second, those economies should focus on transition towards a low-carbon economy. In this context, central banks should regulate their mandates and ensure green financing in those economies. Finally, since Covid-19 has led to erosion of the human capital due to the disruptions on health and education there needs to

6 Conclusion

After almost 1.5 years of COVID-19, we currently stand at a critical juncture on how we globally recover from the crisis the pandemic has caused. Looking at four highly distinctive regions in the world, we can see that no single country will be able to just keep on going as they have been before. The pandemic has unearthed and sharpened deeper political and societal challenges, and once again reinforced the importance of both combatting climate change and driving digital transformations. Whereas the latter has primarily been a stop gap measure to keep some level of societal interaction and economic activity going in the face of lockdowns, it can also be an enabling technology for the wider challenges we face now.

No country will be able to put its head in the sand, but no country will also be able to heed the challenges alone. We have seen in all regions that multi- and supra-lateral coordination and collaboration are vital to lay the groundwork for digitalization and greening initiatives to succeed. In the ECA region, only a regional robust approach towards monetary policy will provide the necessary slack to fund these initiatives and in Mercosur, international competitiveness for new technologies to thrive will require further trading integration and political alignment. Particularly in ASEAN and the EU, some regions have been highly reliant on tourism and have a lack of competitive productivity that could have withstood the external shock of COVID-19, as well as having to carry a lot of debt from the previous financial crisis. Both blocks' investment programs actively combat the short-term impact of the virus, but also lay the foundation for their economies to prosper in the long term and be less susceptible in case something like this ever happens again.

In the area of climate change, we have seen that temporary lockdowns and mandated remote working have both temporarily reduced commuting and subsequent traffic emissions, while also sparking a renewed interest in making our local environment greener, with sufficient and affordable housing, in lieu of commercial infrastructure and highways. One of the main objectives of the European investment fund is to have 100 climate neutral 'smart' cities in Europe by 2030 (European Commission, 2020), to respond to that demand. In all four regions, we've noted that government will need to take an active role in COVID-19 recovery, and one of those is investing in infrastructure and real estate development, while contractors are still reeling from the crisis. That gives the unique opportunity to force green transitions through the government's purchasing power, rather than only its regulatory role, as there will be for many other sectors as well. Organizations like the EU, OECD, Mercosur and ASEAN will be vital for this, as knowledge and best practice-sharing institutions that can help policy makers create a comprehensive policy approach that includes negative climate impact in pricing models and creating an international level playing field by taking a joint approach. On the latter part, especially organizations like UNCTAD, WTO and UNDP can make sure that there is no 'race to the bottom' in that regard.

On digitalization, as we have previously discussed, there is both an intrinsic economic value to these activities, providing rapid economic growth and replacing traditional processes that have been disrupted by the pandemic, but they also serve as enabling technologies addressing societal challenges and provide opportunity rather than necessity-based entrepreneurship in developing countries, taking away some of the root causes of international conflict (Shane, 2009). Again, there will be a vital role here to play for multilateral organization both as a forum to discuss best practices and policy approaches to foster innovation ecosystem growth, but also to engage technological solutions in addressing global challenges through a launching *customership* or public-private partnerships. Some good examples of the latter are the World Food Programme working with a start-up and telephone provider to track blockages in supply lines through big data analytics (WFP, 2021) or the use of a digital payment system to still provide rural farmers access to finance in the middle of the pandemic (UNCDF, 2021).

In conclusion, through our analysis we have seen that the impact of COVID-19 has been felt around the world and will have a lasting impact for quite some time to come. To ensure a

truly global recovery, it is important that the regional inhibitors to that end are uncovered and addressed in the short term, so that there is both capacity and funding for building back an economy that's sustainable and leverages all the opportunities digital technologies have to offer. We believe that this is only possible by working together, sharing best practices and making sure there is a level playing field for industry to compete both in green business models as high-technology entrepreneurship.

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While no country has been spared in the pandemic, some regions have suffered more economic damage than others.

Before we talk about the facts and the results of what is happening globally within the Covid-19 pandemic, it is interesting to consider such a part of the causes of the virus.

As we all know, the world divides into regions, which are referred to as follows: developed, developing, Least developed countries. My subjective opinion and expectation of how the pandemic might spread globally, based on the relativity of the development of the regions.

However, it may be that expectations might be opposing for many of us, the result of which many studies or institutions decided to conduct research on whom and why it touched more pandemic and then reflected on their economic situation.

Based on Advisory Board in May report - research discusses why some countries more strongly related to COVID-19 and others less. They examined four reasons: the young generation, cultural distance, environment, and government reaction or restrictions.

The study was attractive compared to the African continent because it is easy to see that most young people have a much lesser Covid case than well-known Italian's situation, where the population are elderly. For comparison, the African continent lives 1.34 billion people, while 60.36 million people live in Italy. In Africa, 5 million cases were revealed, and in Italy, 4.26 million.

The second reason is to determine the cultural distance, which is a fascinating theory since you know that even all cultures have different types of salute. It turned out that in Asian countries, there was a few cases of statistical virus because they always keep the distance by the greeting. Such countries are Japan, Thailand, India and others. On the other hand, in Eastern countries, they have handshaking and hug style greetings, which was an additional problem to spread the virus very fast. Such as Iraq and other Persian Gulf countries.

The environment is probably a more familiar reason for everyone because the virus during the climatic change period is stronger or weaker, and mostly it disappears. In this case, researchers found the first stage that the virus was primarily spread in the most moderate climatic conditions similar to the United States. It can be said that the Covid virus has been able to save itself and earn the mutation in the warm climate, followed by a more powerful epidemic explosion in the world.

And the last part, response to the government's decisions, is one of the most critical and effective leverages, which should be more than other reasons, which I mentioned

above. Let's start with the fact that many countries can be said that the late closure of borders, and other restrictions on the announcement of additional regulations, step up to the fear that the economy significant damage. The fact is that the slowdown response has further damaged all the countries of the world.

It can be said that these four classifications are the most correct assessment and description of the processes why the virus is so massively in the world. At the same time, we should not forget international or local vehicles, which also helped this hand.

Without this classification, it would not be qualified to describe how the economic crisis was distributed on all the world's continents because the spread variation, which I described, has made and gave their more effect.

The economic crisis about the behaviour of financial markets, which was observed during the pandemic. This will be even easier to understand the negative situation that is still raging in the world.

For this, I will describe the next exciting part of finance, which are: global index changes and GDP changes. After that, I think it will be enough to see what was before the pandemic, let's say in 2019 years and what reality we have right now.

As a graph.1, represent its clear to see that all indexes have been significantly reduced at the initial stage of the virus. Therefore, we can imagine how many companies have trouble because they represent themself on the stock exchange market. It clearly shows that after the first vaccination, Asian and American markets have begun to grow. However, a deplorable situation still has the FTSE index, representing the British stock exchange, which covers 100 British companies. Indexes percentage depicted that the UK have still a lot to solve and work push up the economic downturn in the shortest possible time. BREXIT and pandemic these two not desirable processes, especially the pandemic it followed one to another.

The impact of coronavirus on stock markets since the start of the outbreak
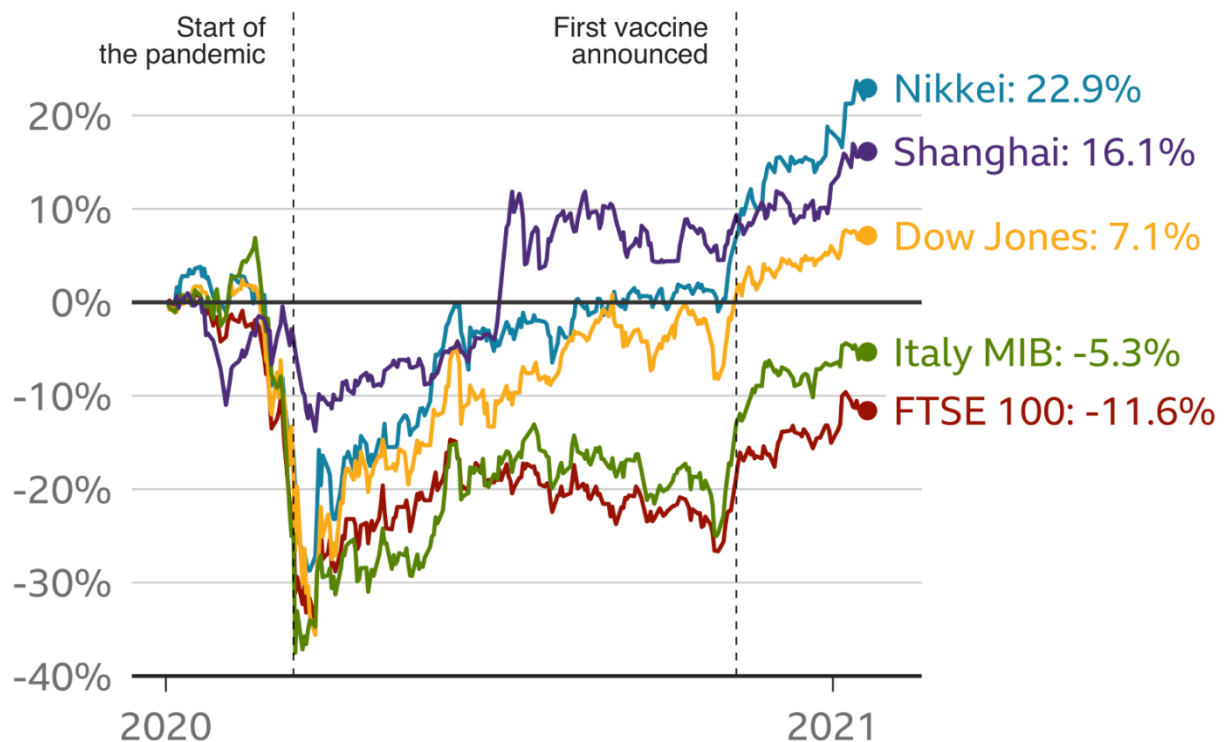
BBC

Graph.1

Graph.2 determines the world's recession, which is now going on.

China is only the only country that has actually had 2.3% economic growth. According to IMF data, we should expect a 5.2% increase globally, which is a positive signal for the world.

Therefore the countries are slowly beginning to restore economies and expect positive in this regard.

Graph.2

Majority of countries in recession
Real GDP growth

Legend:
- No data
- -70% - -15%
- -15% - -5%
- -5% - 0%
- 0% - 2.5%
- 2.5% - 5%
- 5% - 10%
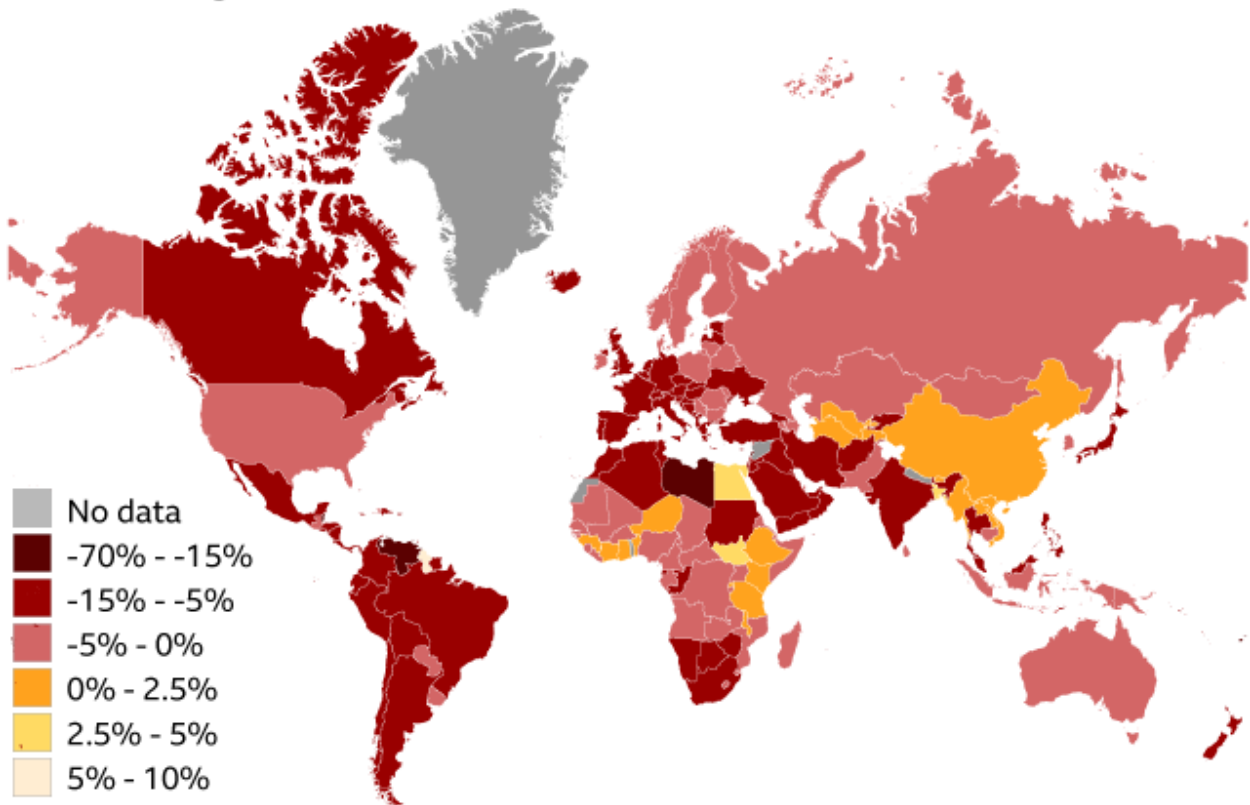
Source: International Monetary Fund

BBC

What should be done to ensure a fair and balanced economic recovery around the world?

In the first part, I tried to be more specific and to show the ongoing processes that caused Covid Pandemic during this period.

Before I try to discuss some stages of the restoration of the economy, I would like to recall the American politician Mr Ben Bernanke's words that deal with the relationship between the economy and finances. On March 12, 2009, he said on CBS television that "The Lesson of History Is That You Do Not Get a Sustained Economic Recovery As Long As The Financial System Is In Crisis." We may not have a financial crisis, but the situation in financial markets is in critical condition. The expectation of economic recovery is the main factor in the stability of financial markets.

There are lots of official vaccines created by pharmaceutical companies. Their supply is actively underway worldwide, which is the first positive signal to speed up the economic

restoration process. The economy cannot be restored if there is no global support for companies. Therefore, following supportive should be the fiscal policy for businesses, which are likely to be one of the most important solutions for the business's failure period to be exposed to the shortest period. For example, EU members: France, Germany, Italy, and Spain decided to spend an additional $ .31 trillion to support the business by the end of 2021. Logically, this amount will not be enough for those already bankrupt companies or those at-risk level, but it is impossible to restore economic stability without such support. Besides financial support, the Lockdown gradual removal is considered, as it directly damages the global economy, and it is challenging to build the business in such conditions. This is certainly realistic, but there is still a danger that the virus's various stamps will benefit from these conditions. Every decision comes with risk. Similar to the opening of the country's borders, still remain preconditions, such as the distance and other restrictions minimalist. It is interesting to have the data presented by the Audit Company PWC, which suggests that since 2021 the growth of investments will begin globally, especially in green infrastructural investments, where the union of countries is considered as US, EU and China. In addition, they said the green economy in 2040 under the 24 million new jobs will be created. This means that the countries will have excellent economic momentum after Covid-19. Therefore, it is expected economic growth.

What is the role for the UN and other multilateral institutions in this process?

UN involvement is always felt like the world's right goals that are shown annually and grow. UN has many vital projects implemented in all continents, that their mediation and to take concrete steps to monitor and support will be the most correct and reasonable decision. The UN is the institution where they have valuable information and in-depth knowledge on how the pandemic world affected the companies, people and nations. UN special mission on the African continent and their current projects are not enough. That's why the UN should be more active during this challenging time and support poor nations more than others. This can also be expressed for developing countries. Even the vaccine supply and the logistics of these processes support countries that require significantly. Lions Clubs International, the largest service club organization globally, supports countries with similar problems during the pandemic.

I mentioned this organization because Lions and UN celebrate 75 years of partnership. So far, I'm zone chairperson of Lions Clubs in the republic of Georgia; I know how strong collaboration and works we do together worldwide. The activation of such organizations and the union will provide one large and full force that will be an active solution to the pandemic problem.

Finally, as the Georgian-famous Fable Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani said, "Dzala Ertobashia" translated into English as "Strength Is In Unity". These words are also the official Motto of Georgia.

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Introduction

A major consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic has been the explosion of economic and social inequalities. Economic policies must integrate the objective of fighting inequalities and, in this sense, must promote a fair and balanced economy. The recommendations to achieve this will constitute the theme of the first part of this paper, the second part will deal with the role of multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank in this process of fair and balanced economic recovery.

1 - Fair and balanced economic recovery policies that must respond to a plurality of issues.

No country has been spared by the economic crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Many have suffered from China's economic slowdown, as well as the decline in commodity prices and the volatility of prices or the shocks of supply and demand due to the successive confinements.

The economic recovery is made complex because of several factors, firstly, it must allow to find an economic stability and satisfactory macroeconomic figures, secondly, it must respond to the social emergency that strikes the vast majority of countries, finally, as the latest assessment report of the IPCC[1] in 2021 (report recovered by AFP[2]) publishes another alarming report, economic policies should not ignore the magnitude of the climate issue.

In order to face the health crisis, the States have heavily indebted themselves to public and private agents. According to INSEE, in France in 2019 the debt amounted to 98.1% of GDP and the public deficit represented 3.0% of GDP[3] while in 2020 the debt was 115.7% of GDP and the public deficit at 9.2% of GDP[4]. Faced with the global rise in government debt, austerity policies aiming at cleaning up the books (enacted after the subprime crisis) are making their way back into the political debate. Not only does stopping or decreasing public financial aid for people and companies decrease their purchasing power and overall consumption, but it also increases inequalities and weakens populations already hard hit by the crisis. Triggering an economic recovery that allows for a reduction in inequalities while implementing a policy of austerity seems implausible, as it was proven the previous financial crisis. A fiscal stimulus policy appears to be a better response to economic, social and environmental requirements.

In order to ensure a fair and balanced economic recovery policy that addresses the major challenges of our century, here are some recommendations (not established in a specific order):

1. Nations must reinvest in their regalian obligations (health, education, internal and external security and justice) and prioritize the maintenance of social minima in order to stem the impoverishment of the social classes most affected by the crisis. It should be noted that the Covid crisis has shown us the fragility of different health systems, particularly in Western countries such as Italy, Spain and France, and an overhaul of the managerial system of this sector is essential to increase the resilience of States.

2. Increasing the purchasing power of consumers (either by lowering taxes or increasing social benefits) increases purchasing power and boosts domestic demand.

3. Companies benefiting from public financing must commit themselves beforehand to respecting a certain number of strict conditions, conditions linked to the respect of environmental standards and the respect of human rights.

4. States must define strategic sectors of activity in line with ethical and climatic requirements; these sectors will define clear axes to orient massive public investments.

5. States will have to rethink global value chains (particularly through China) and address the issue of economic and energy dependence.

6. The question of debt financing is central, and while some post-Keynesian economists advocate for the solution of helicopter money, governments are still financing themselves on financial markets and through national banks. Apart from the risk of inflation, the use of the helicopter money principle should not be ruled out.

7. Finally, economic policies must consider their social (especially inequalities) and environmental impact.

2 The Role of Multilateral Institutions in the Economic Recovery Process: Resilience as a Goal

"The pandemic has highlighted the continued importance and legitimacy of the overall framework established by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as the Paris Agreement."[5] Jutta Urpilainen, European Commissioner for International Partnerships. As multilateral institutions play a large role in

economic recovery, such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, their role is to ensure that economic growth is fair, balanced and sustainable. Multilateral institutions have several ways to intervene in the economic recovery process, including funding or triggering development assistance programs. As the economic and social contexts are specific to each country, there are great disparities in financing capacity, and development cooperation aiming to reduce the gap while respecting the "principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples".[6]

The 2008 crisis, especially in Western countries led to the conclusion that fiscal consolidation (or structural adjustment) in times of crisis is not a sound economic solution, but also negatively impacts the most vulnerable populations, for example the Greek population in 2015. To achieve a fair, balanced and sustainable economic recovery, repeating the mistakes of the past is not an option. The International Financial Institutions (IMF and WB) should not condition their financing on an austerity policy, rather than on a reliable economic strategy that complies with ethical and environmental requirements. In other words, if a State wants to benefit from these IFIs, it must offer a strategic economic plan that guarantees a certain number of rules, for instance the respect of human rights, environmental commitments, and so on.

Other international institutions such as the United Nations already offer ambitious development aid programs. Their role is to promote the construction or consolidation of resilient nations through development programs. The Covid-19 pandemic has shown us the importance of a strong health system. If the UN has been active in the development of global public goods, categorizing health as a global public good is one of the issues that UN agencies are addressing, including through universal health coverage. The beginning of the Covid pandemic was characterized by the lack of coordination between countries. In this respect, the UN have to develop efficient emergency strategies to improve international coordination in case of health, humanitarian and environmental crisis.

Conclusion

No nation can claim not to have suffered from the Covid-19 pandemic. It is a reminder of the importance of a reliable health system as well as a reminder of the extreme consequences of human impact on its own eco-system. A fair and balanced economic recovery first comes through massive public investment in regalian obligations such as education, internal and external security, health and independent justice. At the level of multilateral institutions, two important points should be kept in mind: firstly,

the IFIs must not make their financing conditional on austerity, at the risk of worsening inequalities and feeding the negative feeling of populations towards supranational institutions; secondly, it is urgent to invest in global public goods, in particular towards the environment and health (such as the COVAX initiative).

The ecological emergency must be defined as a global priority just as the social emergency is. Therefore, while we observe, at least in Western countries, the rise of political extremes and a retreat of the great democracies, economic recovery policies must address the reduction of inequalities and access to the satisfaction of the essential needs of all,

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Topic 5: <u>GLOBAL INEQUALITIES</u>

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the spotlight, once again, on stark global inequalities. Has the international community shown sufficient solidarity over the past 18 months? How can we, as the world community, do better? What is a possible blueprint for the way ahead?

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

By 13 March 2020, when the number of reported new cases of COVID-19 became greater than those in China, the World Health Organization (WHO) began to consider Europe the active center of the COVID-19 pandemic. The numbers of infected people continued to grow in every part of the world and by mid-October 2020, there had been at least 40,106,965 confirmed cases in Africa (1,646,862), Asia (12,437 324), Americas (18,866,794), Oceania (37,121), and over 1,114,636 related deaths. Because cases and deaths in rural areas and in low-income urban settings are poorly reached by healthcare services and routine health data collection, the true number of cases may be significantly higher. The pandemic has quickly highlighted the diversity that exists in most post-industrial societies and has indicated how and to what extent infection and mortality rates can be linked to personal profile characteristics, including ethnic and racial background. COVID-19 prevention initiatives will only be successful if this social diversity is factored into national prevention campaigns. Given the large and growing number of migrants in most of these populations, special attention will also need to be given to migrants.

The start of vaccination campaigns across Europe at the end of December 2020 certainly brought a glimmer of hope; the epidemiological trend should positively reflect the rate of vaccinated people which increases every day. As of 8th June 2021, more than 400 million doses have been administered in the EU/EEA countries (ECDC, report 2021)**.**

2. COVAX

2.1 General Overview

The Covax Facility represents the vaccines pillar, one of the three, of a global initiative developed in order to address and tackle the global health challenges of the current pandemic, called the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT). The other two pillars correspond to Covid-19 diagnosis and treatments. The ACT is a coalition of international public, private, and philanthropic actors that are uniting efforts for accelerating the development, production, and distribution of tests, treatments, and vaccines in the fight against Covid-19 (Kletter, 2021). Launched in April 2020, Covax was established by the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Commission, and France, being coordinated by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and the WHO (Berkely, 2020). The main aim of COVAX is to serve as a platform, which will be supporting the research, development, and manufacturing of various Covid-19 vaccine candidates. In addition, the mechanism of COVAX will be responsible for negotiating and bargaining the price of the vaccines, benefiting those governments that would not be able to afford to purchase a great number of doses otherwise (Berkely, 2020). Furthermore, one of the fundamental purposes of the mechanism is to equally distribute vaccines among the nations that committed themselves with COVAX (the mechanism is open for every country or territory to adhere to). Therefore, regardless of their purchasing power, all nations will enjoy the same benefits enabled by the initiative, which foresaw the delivery of vaccines to 20% of every member's population (WHO, 2021). The initial plan is to produce and distribute 2 billion doses among the countries until the end of 2021, which will be able to protect the most vulnerable and high-risk groups of populations, for instance, health care workers and elderly people (COVAX Joint Statement, 2021).

The funding of the COVAX facility will be collected in two different manners, respecting national governments' financial capacities. The first financing instrument for the vaccines is based on domestic health funds from high-income countries or upper-middle-income, whereas for developing countries not able to financially contribute, there will be established another instrument, the "Gavi Covax AMC" (GAVI, 2020). In addition, according to Gavi (2020), the
COVAX Facility will be in charge of:

- Ensuring that funding of vaccines is available for lower-income countries that, otherwise, would not be able to afford vaccines
- Pooling resources and sharing risk, functioning as an insurance policy
- Supporting the global scale-up of researches as well as vaccine supply, securing reliable demand for manufacturers
- Allocating equally the vaccine supply in order to contain the pandemic, ensuring reduced risks regarding the appearance of new variants

Furthermore, even governments that were able to afford the supply of vaccines for their citizens will be allowed to complement their purchase with the Covax Facility. However, these nations will also be invited to share supplementary doses with the less fortunate countries participating in this mechanism to enhance vaccine inclusion among developing countries (GAVI, 2020).

On the other side, for Low-income countries (LICs) and Low-middle income countries (LMICs), Gavi is launching a financing initiative in order to gather the required funds for non-self-financing nations, with the foreseen minimum amount needed of US$ 2 billion. Having in mind that as long as the virus is still unmanageable in every country, the globe is still in danger, this initiative is deemed to be significantly relevant in the fight against the virus. The Gavi Advance Market Commitment for Covid-19 Vaccines, as previously referred to as "Gavi Covax AMC" will be gathering resources from OECD donors and other philanthropic institutions, for instance, the Melinda and Bill Gates Foundation with the purpose of covering the costs of the immunization for around 20% of every country's population (GAVI, 2020).

In sum, with the funds gathered through these two instruments, the COVAX Facility will be able to assure producers that their supply will be met, by committing beforehand to the purchase and buying them as soon as the immunizations are licensed and prequalified by WHO. This pre-commitment is expected to incentivize manufacturers to invest in scaling up their research capacity and production, contributing to a quicker end of the pandemic (GAVI, 2020).

2.2 The Shortfalls in the Covax System:

The idea of an initiative such as Covax is one that appears to be built on altruism at first glance. It is a perfect example of how due diligence under international law comes to be or

at least what it appears to be at first glance. The definition of Coco and de Souza Dias (2020) with regards to due diligence is simplistic yet all-encompassing: " (Due diligence)... it is a standard of good governance, assessing whether a state has done what was reasonably expected of it when responding to a harm or danger". The state-centric discourse that exists when addressing certain responsibilities born out of good governance is similarly what could cause the main problems. Due to the financial structure of Covax, its dependency on high-income countries for funding is the reason why it gets pushed back as a priority under a wave of realpolitik (Usher, 2021). This is one of the key ways in which Covax could not be a substitute for states and the vaccine inequity has become ever more so apparent among countries of various income levels. The Covax scheme in itself is aware of the hurdles that it faces, and thus the target has been kept low, only the 2 billion doses until the end of 2021 that will only cover 20% of the poorer countries' populations (Open Access Government, 2021).

The second layer of how Covax's design is not set out for success is the way that it operates and interacts with its target group. Many have criticized Covax for its plan to encourage HICs to join the initiative, instead of supplying a fast roll-out of the vaccines at hand (Elder quoted in Usher, 2021). What happened was exactly what the initiative was trying to avoid. Kar comments on the slow burn of Covax's lay vaccine distribution strategy as: "It should have considered the public vs. private interest agenda, unequal power relations, vaccine nationalism and monopoly, and pseudo-monopsony by nations" (Development Aid, 2021). Many believe that the calculations Covax made were not sufficient and the countries who were dependent on Covax's aid paid the price. Similarly, the objective of Covax was deemed to be too shallow as the real factors that were inhibiting LIC's to access the vaccine, like Intellectual Property rights which could have been relaxed for emergency situations were not dealt with which affected the production and supply of vaccines which the HIC's swooped up quickly (Ravelo, 2021).

On a state level, the prioritization of certain groups to receive the vaccine, before others, especially what appears to look like years in between those in the same country, shows another way in which Covax fell short. Apart from the population of LICs, the most disadvantaged group appears to be those who are not under the jurisdiction of the government entirely. In March of 2021, Covax has recognized this need to reach out to disadvantaged communities who have been displaced and are not under the protection of a

state due to state failure and/or terrorism. The project titled 'The Humanitarian Buffer' has met a lot of controversy due to legal concerns by non-government bodies (Dodds & Parker, 2021). The attempt to include people who did not have access to vaccines in the first place due to their status of not being governed by a state, fell short due to external reasons.

Both of these reasons create halts to the efforts of being inclusive when distributing vaccines, even though Covax itself has aimed to address it. Both due to the place of Covax in the international sphere as well as its policy planning that were both lackluster in prioritization. This puts Covax in a situation where they struggle with including everyone which eventually will exacerbate already existing differences between countries with various levels of income as well as put disadvantaged people like, undocumented migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, at risk of being left behind even in their host country (Zard et al. 2021).

3. **MIGRATION**

3.1. General Overview

Today, migration is a pressing global and major political issue inextricably linked with human rights, development, and geopolitical issues at the national, regional, and international levels; and it is a complex phenomenon that involves many economic, social, and security aspects around the world (IOM, 2020). The causes of migration are varied and are constantly changing in an evolutionary way, and it is not easy to categorize migrant people as they migrate due to different circumstances, coming from different environments, and possessing different personal characteristics (Topçuoğlu at al, 2014). In addition, today, migrants have an important impact on the economic, political, and social agendas of *the sovereign nations,* civil society groups, and intergovernmental agencies, and in the previous decades, the process of globalization has significantly increased international migration, especially to developed countries, and research on migrants and their economic motivation, as well as the problems encountered by migrants, became important topics for many studies, as well as for the international political agenda (Florentina, 2020). Along with this context, it is important to note that, the free movement of persons is part of a myriad of problems, combined with terrorism and territorial security, with the protection of fundamental human rights, as well as with the permanent need for improvement and adjustment of government in order to streamline population control in *sovereign nations*. The display of these complex realities in national, European, and international legislation offers a special perspective on

them, as the globalization of problems, their great extent, accelerated external rhythms of change, unpredictability and the extent of the effects of human actions imply a radical change in the legal framework in which the migration's phenomenon takes place (see, for example, Florentine, 2020). Today with the COVID-19 pandemic global crisis, migrants, especially those without legal documents in the host countries are among the most vulnerable categories of people that are affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, understanding the extent and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic to which migrant people are exposed is essential to address the challenges that arise and to develop effective policies for the protection of migrants.

3.2. Migration in Europe Context

Europe has been a crossroads of human mobility since ancient times. Throughout history, the region has been a central part of global migration systems which its States helped to establish and shape, mainly through mercantilism and colonial expansion (IOM,2020). The coming of COVID-19 brought the movement of people to a halt as individual states and whole regional blocs have introduced travel restrictions in Europe. Some have been more cautious than others in accounting for international laws and conventions intended to protect human rights, specifically as they relate to refugees and asylum seekers (World Bank, 2020).

For many migrants in Europe, the right to seek asylum and refuge has all but been eliminated during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving countless migrants stranded in precarious conditions. Furthermore, though the virus has been slower in reaching humanitarian response areas, it has nevertheless arrived, leaving inhabitants who were already in precarious living conditions highly vulnerable to infections (Groupe URD, 2020).

Multiparty institutions such as the World Health Organization, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organization for Migration, have provided guidance on how to ensure human rights protections for displaced migrants residing in both camp and non-camp settings (IOM, 2020). These frameworks have slowly begun to be tested as humanitarian actors on the ground respond to outbreaks in refugee camps in Europe and displaced migrant communities around the world. However, much of this guidance hinges on indirect assumptions that these camps were already equipped with basic health and safety infrastructure such as water, sanitation, and hygiene(ibid).

Status reports from humanitarian areas show that access to hygiene in migrants and refugees'

settings is patchy and limited at best, medical services are limited, and living conditions cannot necessarily accommodate social distancing measures which bring into question their ability to withstand the added pressure associated with COVID-19 response (GLIMER, 2020). Although conditions for migrants living in non-camp settings are not as dire, COVID-19 has raised key issues for displaced and settled migrants in host countries. Most pressing during a global public health crisis is the fact that migrants, documented or not, are more likely not to have access to health care, a reality that has serious implications for broader society.

In response, some states have increased access to health services to all immigrants, regardless of immigration status. However, these policies appear to be the exception, not the rule, which means migrants with precarious immigration status such undocumented migrants may not have access to health care even during a global pandemic. COVID-19 has introduced additional threats to migrants' access to consistent/safe accommodation, an issue that is inherent in displaced migration leaving many at risk of homelessness (Guadagno,2020). In response, some states have provided relief for migrants at risk of losing their accommodation by halting evictions, and others have stepped in to provide accommodation for rough sleepers. An issue at the core of displaced migration is the legal framework that defines immigration systems (ILO, 2020).

COVID-19, through the travel restrictions that it ensued, has made certain components of immigration enforcement difficult, if not impossible, to implement. Specifically, practicalities around issuing detention orders, carrying out deportations, as well as the legality of extended immigration detention have created real barriers to immigration enforcement in the interior (ILO, 2020).

Further, many migrants in Europe are also overrepresented in other frontline occupations such as retail and wholesale, which means they are at a higher risk of being infected (WHO,2021). In addition to this, immigrants have been found to be overrepresented in occupations that have been hit the hardest by global economic shutdowns, such as accommodation, food, and personal services which means they are the hardest hit by the economic collateral damage of mitigation measures. Simultaneously, bureaucratic barriers such as costly and time-consuming accreditation processes often stand in the way which leaves highly qualified healthcare workers relegated to lower-paid non-medical occupations (see, for example. ILO, 2020).

3.3. Migrants as Vulnerable Population in times of COVID-19 pandemic

As stated by Liem et al (2020), as in many other crises, migrants may be particularly vulnerable to the direct and indirect impacts of COVID-19. Their ability to avoid the infection, receive adequate health care, and cope with the economic, social, and psychological impacts of the pandemic can be affected by a variety of factors, such as their living and working conditions, lack of consideration of their cultural and linguistic diversity in service provision, xenophobia, their limited local knowledge and networks, and their access to rights and level of inclusion in host communities, often related to their migration status (IOM, 2020). In addition to the immediate health risks, the management of the COVID-19 crisis has created a whole series of negative side effects for people on the move which are likely to continue in the short to medium term economically, socially, and politically (ILO, 2020). Despite this, migrants tend to be overlooked by many health and social service systems. They are also vulnerable to exclusion, stigma, and discrimination, particularly if "undocumented" or irregular. Today, migrants and refugees are among the social groups most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis and are suffering disproportionately from its social and economic consequences. They have to be at the forefront of the pandemic and need to be provided essential services, especially health care (ILO, 2020).

3.4. Effects of COVID-19 on Migrants

The immediate effects of Covid-19 include mobility restrictions, imposed by many countries where the Covid-19 pandemic is widespread to limit human-to-human transmission of the virus. As a result, many migrants found themselves stranded in host countries, without food, shelter, access to essential services, or the ability to return home (ILO,2020). Furthermore, many asylum seekers have not been able to access asylum countries to seek protection. Also, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, today, many migrants also find themselves in irregular situations, because they are not able to meet legal requirements or access visa procedures (ibid)

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased stigma, xenophobia, and discrimination, and migrants are accused of contributing to the spread of the disease. In addition, migrant families, and communities in countries of origin are also significantly affected by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic due to a drop in remittances, particularly affecting food security, nutrition, and access to basic services, such as health care and education (ILO & Fafo, 2020).

Specific groups of migrants and refugees are particularly at risk, including people in an irregular or undocumented administrative situation, low-income migrants, the migrant and refugee women and girls, people without family support or social assistance, elderly, children, disabled and stateless people(OECD, 2020). However, ensuring that migrants and other vulnerable groups involved in migratory movements are not left behind and that their concerns are included in the political agendas of recipient countries, is essential to reduce global inequalities in order to be able to achieve the goals of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, the Global Compact on Refugees and the Sustainable Development Agenda on the horizon, as well as the Development Goals as defined by the United Nations.

3.5. Migrants and Health Care Problems

Much literature shows that significant numbers of migrants and refugees, particularly, undocumented migrants, do not have health insurance or the financial means to access health services (IOM 2020; UNHCR, 2020). They may also be reluctant to access such services for fear of arrest, detention, and deportation. Consequently, in most cases, their access to health services depends on humanitarian programs (ILO, 2020). Therefore, legal and administrative regulations, as well as language differences, can limit the access migrants, especially irregular ones, have to quality health care. Many of the same factors can also mean migrants may not be aware of what they must do to avoid COVID-19, and what they must do if they, or those around them, are infected.

For example, according to studies on labor migration, generally, migrant workers in remote locations and migrant domestic workers face challenges in accessing health services; migrant workers and refugees often live in congested settings, camps, hostels, settlements, or informal and overcrowded accommodation, with limited access to clean water and sanitation, thus, in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, this increase the risk of contracting virus (ILO, 2020). Furthermore, migrant workers, especially low-income workers, often face language barriers that hinder their ability to comprehend hygiene and health directives and practice preventive measures. Migrant workers and refugees are more likely to be engaged in the informal economy as daily wage workers (ILO, 2020). The loss of livelihood opportunities as a result of the various containment measures taken due to the COVID-19 pandemic have consequently increased acute famine and malnutrition, which has many side effects on health such as 'weakened immune system and increased risk of infection with

COVID-19 and other more serious illnesses; and in the context of COVID-19, this has increased the risk and concern for the safety, health, and dignity of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in detention who are already a vulnerable population (ILO, 2021). In addition, the economic and labor crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic has pushed many migrants into unemployment, underemployment, and working poverty. This has affected their access to health and healthcare, especially in fee-for-service medical systems. Especially irregular migrants have been much more affected and should not be overlooked in accessing health care as they constitute a part of the larger migrant community (ILO, 2021).

4. EPIDEMIOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COVID-19 IN GERMANY

The first cases of COVID-19 were imported from China to southern Germany at the end of January 2020. These cases and their contacts were rapidly tracked down by the health system and transmission interrupted. By March 2020 the number of COVID-19 cases had started to increase exponentially. Consequently, a stricter lockdown started in mid-December. Germany – which has been praised for its comparably effective public health response during the first wave of the epidemic – failed in preventing a second wave (Bedford, Enria et al. 2020). Due to the rapid development of this second epidemic wave, and in view of even more serious developments in neighboring European countries, another, albeit rather moderate, the lockdown was imposed at the beginning of November 2020

The COVID-19 epidemic has had a significant social and economic impact on Germans. Many countries, including Germany, took drastic steps to combat the virus, including curfews, school and border closures, and lockdowns. Beginning in March 2020, the German government introduced universal countermeasures to slow down the spread of COVID-19, which reduced most activities and services outside the household to a minimum. There is no doubt that such measures have increased time at home with family and children while declining time in paid work for many people. But the main question is whether the transition to home-office, home-schooling, and self-isolation is hurting women more than men (Czymara). In Germany, according to the latest update of the John Hopkins database on 4th June 2020, there were 3,698,004 Confirmed Cases and 88,945 SARS-CoV-2 deaths reported out of Germany's population of around 88.4 million people (Statista).

4.1. Undocumented Migrants and Germany

Since 1990, Germany has been ranked as one of the five most popular destination countries

for immigrants in the world (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). As of 2019, around 13.7 million people living in Germany, or about 17% of the population, are first-generation immigrants.

Migrants without a valid residency permit in Germany are referred to as undocumented migrants (Kuehne et al., 2015). It is estimated that about 1.0 million to 1.2 million undocumented migrants lived in Germany in 2017. Undocumented migrants include those who have been unsuccessful in asylum procedures (rejected asylum-seekers) or those who have violated the terms of their visas ('over-stayers), as well as those who have entered the country illegally (Tsiodras, 2016).

Studies from Pew Research (2019) suggest that as of 2017, undocumented migrants made up about one-in-five; an estimate of 19% to 21% of all immigrants with non-EU-EFTA citizenship (4.2 million to 4.4 million) living in Germany. Roughly 1% of Germany's total population were unauthorized immigrants in 2017. Further research also posits that about 60% of unauthorized immigrants in Germany were male in 2017 and almost two-thirds (65%) of unauthorized immigrants in Germany were under 35 years old.

Undocumented migrants are some of the most marginalized people in Europe. They belong to categories defined by legal status. When asylum-seekers are granted asylum on the grounds that they are fleeing war or persecution in their home countries, they have temporary residency rights as official refugees. However, undocumented migrants, even those born in Europe who have inherited their status from their parents are often not recognized by the current asylum framework.

4.2. Vaccination Campaign in Germany

The European Commission adopted a recommendation for effective vaccine strategies and deployment in October 2020 citing refugees as a priority group, However, there is no mention of undocumented migrants in the recommendation for vaccine strategies (www.dw.com, 2021).
Undocumented migrants have been identified as a particularly vulnerable population facing a number of health risks (Kuehne et al., 2015). In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the vulnerabilities of this group have exacerbated since many of them are living in crowded or difficult housing conditions with limited means and opportunities to implement personal hygiene and social distancing.

Germany just administered its 40 millionth vaccine dose. Some 37% of the population have received at least one dose, and 11.2% are fully vaccinated against COVID-19. About 15 million people are scheduled to receive their first or second vaccine dose before June 7. Germany has approved Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, AstraZeneca, and Johnson & Johnson so far. All require two doses with a specified break in between the jabs apart from J&J which requires only one shot. People in Germany are classed as fully vaccinated two weeks after the second dose (or one dose in the case of J&J) (Ourworldindata web). In Germany, authorized refugees and asylum seekers are prioritized in the COVID-19 vaccines. The service is recognized in Germany as an "emergency service" and thus allows access for authorized migrants and refugees with costs covered by the State (PICUM, 2021). Although the German approach confirms that vaccinating authorized refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers (Buonsenso & von Both, 2021), the strategy is not feasible enough for vaccinating the high rate of undocumented migrants living in Germany since they proof of residence of a particular state and sometimes health insurance card which is a barrier for many State (PICUM, 2021). Another crucial hindrance in this process is the fear of undocumented migrants to be recognized when participating in a vaccination program, thus risking subsequent deportation due to art. 87 of the Residence Act of Germany (Buonsenso & von Both, 2021; PICUM, 2021).

5. **CONCLUSION**

Vaccinating migrants is in the opinion of most European countries, and it is one of the health priorities today. However, in many countries, the oratory clashes with the reality of undocumented migrants' lives on the ground as undocumented migrants find themselves sometimes have to run an obstacle course to get vaccinated. Universal health coverage is essential, especially today with the global crisis pandemic of COVID-19 when access to health services is a major challenge mainly for vulnerable people such as migrants. Large numbers of migrants and refugees, particularly those in an irregular administrative situation, do not have health insurance or the financial means to access health services. They may also be reluctant to access such services for fear of arrest, detention, and deportation. Therefore, the Worldwide government should make the COVID-19 vaccine available at no cost for everyone, no matter their immigration status and no matter whether they have medical insurance or not. As anyone can transmit the COVID-19 virus, vaccination cannot be restricted to refugees and asylum seekers only and undocumented migrants left behind, all

migrant people regardless of their legal status should have access to COVID-19 testing and treatment. As mentioned in the previous sections, in some countries such as Germany, refugees and asylum seekers have been included in national COVID-19 response plans. However, for undocumented migrants in some instances, applying migration legislation to refugees prevents them from accessing the health services they require, although in practice some refugees with specific nationalities receive differentiated and more positive treatment. As there is a consensus throughout many European and also in other world Governments especially in the refugees' host countries about COVAX, the COVID-19 vaccination must be made available to as many people as possible, and this must include undocumented migrants, one of the groups most exposed to the virus.

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Introduction

The COVID-19, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, has highlighted the vulnerabilities and flaws of many aspects of our globalized world. Outbreaks such as SARS, H1N1, Ebola as well as COVID-19 spread everywhere endangering the world. This is especially true as we live in a globalized world where people and goods are constantly moving in an unprecedented scale and velocity.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected billions of people globally, exposing and exacerbating social and economic inequalities that were present and developed over the last few decades.[1]

In 2015, the UN established a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with Sustainable Development Goal 3 focusing on the promotion of global health and the quality of public health systems in developing countries. Fernández-Portillo et al conducted a study on how COVID-19 will impact the governance of global health and they posit that the pandemic is proving to be an evident hindrance of crucial cooperation between countries in order to achieve global health goals as well as to guarantee public health coverage in developing countries.[2]

Moreover, prior to COVID-19, the world was falling short of the Sustainable Development Goals 1 target of ending poverty by 2030, with estimates indicating that 6% of the global population will still be living in severe poverty in 2030.[3] As a result of COVID-19, an estimated 71 million more people may now be living in severe poverty.[4]

In the early months of 2020, the spread of COVID-19 virus was hinged on the interconnected world we all live in and was a common denominator to all countries.[5] Furthermore, the health outcomes emanating from the crisis was not a function of divisions in wealth or between the Global North and Global South. Instead, the highest infectious and mortality rates were coming from global powers such as the United States – and Western European nations.[6] However, the infection and mortality rates were quite divided in the Global South, for example, certain low- and middle-income nations (e.g., Brazil, Ecuador, and Mexico)

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have become infection hotspots, other countries/regions (e.g., Africa, East and Southeast Asia) have had significantly lower official mortality rates.[7]

A report by the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) describes the COVID-19 crisis as 'the worst human and economic crisis of our lifetimes.'[8] Hundreds of millions of people have lost their jobs, lives and means of survival as a result of the crisis.[9] While emergency social protection measures implemented by governments have reduced the effects in certain instances, many have received inadequate or severely delayed assistance.[10] Moreover, COVID-19 has been gender centred in its approach.[11] For example, according to the McKinsey Global Institute, women make up almost two-fifths of the global labour force however they have lost more than half of their jobs due to the crisis.[12] As a result, they are 1.8 times more susceptible to the pandemic's effects than males.

Despite the inequalities, the emergence of the COVID-19 has shown the need for global cooperation and coordination. Its significance is self-evident and generally acknowledged. In May 2020, the World Health Assembly convened, and 194 member countries adopted a resolution highlighting the importance of solidarity, resource redistribution, and collaborative action.

The covid-19 epidemic cruelly demonstrates why countries benefit from health cooperation and collaboration, as well as the dangers of their insufficient commitment to doing so.[13] However, despite the logical need to cooperate and a longstanding history of efforts, one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, transmission continues, with over 100 million illnesses and over two million fatalities by January 2021.[14]

However, generally, global institutions have performed well in their missions, for example, In September 2020, Mark Lowcock, the UN Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, disbursed to the tune of US$134 million from the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) to assist in funding efforts to contain the virus in vulnerable countries. The first tranche pledged money to assist countries in the Global South such as Burkina Faso, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti, Haiti, Lebanon, Pakistan, Somalia, Sudan, and Uzbekistan in meeting urgent humanitarian needs.

The COVID-19 epidemic brutally demonstrates the dividends of collaboration and partnerships between countries as well as the dangers of their insufficient commitment to doing so.[15]

Global response in the past 18 months:

Almost all countries were affected by COVID-19 in 2020 and they all responded differently regarding issuing lockdowns, curfews and other containment measures. Even some regions and municipalities were strongly affected more than others and therefore responded with varying degrees of efficacy. Moreover, responses differed and changed as the pandemic evolved.

As a result, some of those global responses stood out like Oceania, while others did not hold up to scrutiny. However, one has to keep in mind that countries differ in regard to their financial resources, political system, scientific and technological prowess and even the level of healthcare when the pandemic first hit. This makes a fair comparison extremely difficult.

Two countries that were assumed to be most prepared and therefore have a better response for a sudden crisis, the United States of America and the United Kingdom, recorded the highest death tolls during the pandemic while poorer, seemingly less prepared countries like Vietnam and Iceland recorded very few deaths in comparison.[16]

In North America, Canada, unlike the U.S. responded better by relying on science to guide healthcare responses instead of partisan politics.[17] According to researchers, this was due to the formers experience with SARS that proved that the federal government plays an essential role in health care.[18]

In Europe, Germany deserves an honourable mention as its response was held up as a model. Unlike Spain and Italy, Germany had an impressive health care system to start with and quickly employed quick containment measures like widespread testing and transparent public communication.[19] Moreover, the country was already equipped with many hospitals and intensive care beds.[20]

INGOs response to COVID-19:

Oxfam International:

Oxfam International is ramping up its worldwide COVID-19 response in over 45 countries, collaborating with partners to provide safe drinking water, soap, and other hygiene products, as well as disseminating preventive messages via community outreach, trainings, radio, and social media. For example, volunteers were offered training in Yemen to increase information reach and promote good hygiene practices among in conflict zones. Vulnerable populations and displaced households were supported with cash, hygiene kits, and the transportation clean water to camps for those who have left their homes. To date, Oxfam's humanitarian response has impacted the lives of 14 million vulnerable populations across 68 countries globally.

World Vision International:

World Vision has assisted over 62 million individuals in its solidarity efforts towards the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigating its effect on vulnerable children and families (based on data from 70 countries as of 25 May 2021). Over 33 million people have been reached through the promotion of preventive measures and behaviours aimed at containing the spread of COVID-19; over 170,000 community health workers have been trained and supported in their efforts to strengthen health systems and workers; and nearly 25,000 front-line actors have been reached or trained on child protection as part of these efforts. Moreover, over 1.2 million educational resources have being provided to allow or promote remote learning and over 2.2 million people have been supported with cash transfers.

The World Food Programme:

Since late January 2020, the World Food Programme (WFP) has sent almost 65,000 cubic metres of cargo (enough to fill 26 Olympic-sized swimming pools) to 167 countries – or 85 percent of the world – to assist governments and health partners in responding to COVID-19. Personal protection equipment such as surgical masks, gloves, and gowns, face shields, ventilators and emergency health kits are included in these shipments. Furthermore, WFP provided take-home meals to 100,000 students in Cambodia before to the conclusion of the

school year in March 2020. In Colombia, the World Food Programme WFP introduced packed food kits and coupons to alleviate congestion at community kitchens that provide daily meals to needy migrants crossing the border. In South Sudan, the WFP doubled food deliveries to 1.2 million people as a precautionary step against the spread of COVID-19.

The Way Forward

Researchers have warned that COVID-19 isn't the last pandemic that mankind is going to be dealing with and therefore countries ought to learn from their mistakes. No country can claim to have got everything perfectly right; however some had certain policies which proved to be effective. As a result, if we collect all of the effective strategies employed, we can have a sort of a handy manual to be used in future diseases outbreaks.

1. **Preparation is key**

The lack of preparedness and the flaws of many health care systems even in the developed world have been tested due to COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 spread in many developed and high-income nations before moving to developing countries. The former was unable to help the latter as they had their hands full at home. Moreover, the severe shortage of personal protective gear, ventilators as well as health personnel was evident everywhere.[21] Healthcare systems nearly everywhere proved to be unprepared to deal with the crisis. Furthermore, pathogen and benefit-sharing are crucial during disease outbreaks in order to accelerate research and development. Despite that, there is a lack of international governing frameworks to ensure reliable and timely pathogen and benefit-sharing.[22]

It is evident that in such a situation, timing is crucial, and countries need to be swift in employing measures to manage the virus more efficiently like for example introducing a lock down early. History repeats itself and therefore governments need to strengthen their public-health emergency preparedness and have in place a thorough response plan to stop a similar thing happening again.

For example, South Korea was successful in flattening the curve as the country has learned from the MERS-CoV outbreak in 2015 and therefore was able to manage the virus more efficiently.[23]

2. Testing, tracking and tracing

According to Chung Sye-kyun, "by applying that strategy (the three Ts - test, track and trace) we've achieved a good, meaningful result."[24]

This three-tiered approach was key in handling COVID-19 cases in South Korea and proved to have immense economic and health values by breaking chains of transmission of the virus.

East Asian countries started contact tracing and testing early on in comparison to other countries that probably had hundreds of cases that they didn't know about. Therefore, governments need to replicate East Asian countries and prioritise the three-tiered approach that proved to be effective in controlling the overall death toll.

3. Effective leadership is important

The pandemic has taught us that effective leadership leads to successful country responses. For example, leaders who relied on science to shape their polices are the ones that have fared the best. Moreover, those who took the virus seriously from the beginning and prioritized timely and consistent public messaging created a better sense of commitment and were better at fighting rumours by being open and clear with the public.

Finland, South Africa and Germany performed best in that regard. For instance, Chancellor Angela Merkel constantly called for citizens to have "patience, discipline and solidarity" which are important in an effective pandemic response.[25]

4. Support people in quarantine.

According to a report by the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, less than 20% of people in England who were required to self-isolate did so fully.[26]

Making people stay at home and fully isolate is important in containing the virus. By learning from the deadly Nipah virus, Kerala was able to control the spread of the virus by supporting people self-isolating.

She insists that by ensuring support for those self-isolating, officials were able to control the spread and keep its hospitals from being overwhelmed.

5. Elderly protection prioritization

The elderly have been affected gravely by the pandemic, particularly in Europe.

Germany's federal system resulted in each state deciding independently on how to respond to the virus. For example, Boris Palmer, Tübingen' mayor in the Baden Württemberg state of Germany, said "we have to build up a special protection shield for the people who carry the highest risk. These are the elderly people, so we need special protection for them."[27]

As a result, local budget was used to support the town's elderly like delivering free protective masks to their houses, which kept the death toll significantly lower in the town's University Hospital.

Conclusion:

Guterres describes COVID-19 as a human tragedy which has provided an avenue for generational impartation.[28] Also, Guterres opines that COVID-19 has given us a chance to rebuild a more equitable and sustainable world. The reaction to the epidemic, as well as the widespread dissatisfaction that preceded it, must be founded on a New Social Contract and a New Global Deal that provide equitable opportunities for everyone while respecting all people's rights and liberties.[29] A New Social Contract will allow young people to live in dignity; it will guarantee that women have the same chances and opportunities as males; and it will safeguard the sick, the weak, and all minorities.[30]

COVID-19 has given us a glimpse of what's possible, it is helping to demonstrate our ability to organise collectively on a massive scale, it is showing that what counts most is the human life. It is demonstrating the tremendous strength of solidarity and collective action led by governments – however, although governments have begun to act forcefully on a local level, international solidarity has yet to emerge on a large scale.[31]

The international community plays in a huge role in ensuring we do not endanger the lives of children and the most vulnerable, and generations yet unborn. There is a need for solidarity where the world's wealthiest pay their fair part toward communal solutions to humanity's problems.[32] Governments need to be held accountable for promoting the right policies as well as the provision of social security and universal health coverage for everyone.[33]

Also, while we are now coping with a global crisis, it is tempting to claim that the impending climate problem is not our primary concern and that mitigation efforts should be deferred until happier and more affluent times. However, it is obvious that the COVID-19 issue teaches us critical lessons about the impending global climate catastrophe.[34]

Global crises are not unusual, but our capacity to comprehend, avoid, and mitigate them has never been stronger. It is important that we draw lessons from the present situation and as a matter of urgency, take actionable steps to avert the worst-case scenarios associated with a catastrophe that we and generations yet unborn will almost definitely have to face.[35]

Fellow researcher, Valensisi opines that alleviating the negative consequences of this perilous global scenario requires a focus on four policy objectives.[36]

1. The international community must help developing nations in generating sufficient resources to enable their health systems to respond effectively to the disaster, while also supporting disadvantaged parts of the population and the growth of small enterprises.

2. The control of the social costs associated with the COVID-19 crisis involves avoiding additional harm, whether caused by balance of payment challenges, the inflation food prices among net importers, or of debt vulnerabilities. This requires coordinated effort to provide sufficient foreign liquidity, implement a comprehensive debt standstill agreement, and, if necessary, provide further debt relief.

3. It is critical to prevent significant disruptions in local and regional food and agricultural value chains, which would further aggravate the challenges already faced by vulnerable families. With the pandemic's immediate socioeconomic effect mostly impacting the urban population, agricultural viability is critical to preserving rural livelihoods, containing price increases for basic foods, and limiting food import costs at a time when foreign currency is insufficient.

4. National and international solidarity actions to revitalise the economy should be channelled toward viable investments to bolster structural transformation and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon economy, as a key avenue for building resilience, creating jobs, and establishing/strengthening social protection programmes.

Additionally, domestic policies play a significant role in the implementation of countercyclical macroeconomic policies as well as aid programmes in both developed and developing nations.[37]However, the huge worldwide difference in financial and institutional capabilities, and the absence thereof in countries whose governments face more severe socioeconomic threats, such as least developing countries, need more international assistance to prevent a catastrophic result.[38]

Additionally, education and digital technology must be two of the most powerful facilitators and equalisers.[39] Investment in digital literacy and infrastructure must be prioritised by governments. Learning how to learn, adjusting, and picking up new abilities will all be necessary. The digital revolution and artificial intelligence will alter the nature of employment and the connection between work, leisure, and other activities in ways that we cannot yet fathom.[40]

The overarching objective would be to 'leave no one behind' and attain globally agreed-upon standards or goals, such as the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals.[41]

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Introduction

Economic inequality is defined as the gap between the rich and the poor (Kerbo, 2011). This phenomenon differs from time to time, depending on the historical period and the economic system in which it emerges (Cowell, 2011). Nowadays, economic inequality has reached historical high rates, since 70% of the global wealth is controlled only by the 1% of the global population, while 70% of the global population has power over a 3% of this wealth (Atkinson & Piketty, 2010). The argument of neo-materialism describes the economic inequality as part of a wider problem, focusing on the different material conditions of people from different layers of society. More specifically Lynch et al. (2000) claim that inequality comes with a specific political line that gives less emphasis on health services of lower social class. Wilkinson & Pikett (2009) simultaneously underline the point that economic inequality is harmful for the total society, causing even a big amount of health problems to the population as far as social problems such as reduced social coherence remain.

Greece, for example, is one of the European Union's countries with the highest level of economic inequality, which became even more visible in the aftermath of 2012. To be more specific, between 2011 and 2012 the percentage of people who lived in conditions of poverty almost doubled, reaching 37%, while unemployment also increased gradually in the middle and lowest layers, while there was not any significant change on the income of the higher social classes, resulting to the widening of the gap (Matsaganis & Leventi, 2014). Economic crisis and the austerity measures, that followed, made the inequality even more obvious. The government's policies targeted a decrease on the minimum wage, the retirements and other social concessions, as well as an increase of taxes for small and medium industries, which has always been a common but not effective way to deal with the problem of the increase of the external debt.

Although the Covid-19 pandemic is often referred to as the "big equalizer", its negative effects have mainly affected the working class in the United States. Thus, similar to other crises, the Covid-19 pandemic shed light, in addition to income, on much greater inequalities in access to work with decent hygiene and health protection (Kantamneni, 2020). Since the beginning of the pandemic in the United States, more than 80 million young people have been unemployed, and by February 2021, 18 million people were still receiving unemployment benefits. On the other hand, the pandemic created 43 new billionaires in the

US, while the total wealth of the 657 billionaires increased by more than 1.3 trillion, an increase of 44.6% (Collins et al, 2020). During the previous crises, there wasn't a solid critique against the social contract, which emerged during the 20th century. For example, during the mobilizations of the Occupy Wall Street, or Aganaktismenoi in Greece, there was an agenda, which supported a return to the previous social contract (public costs, state interventionism, more political liberties etc). During the COVID-19 crisis, this critique against the neoliberal agenda came from an IGO (WHO). Even though the WHO expressed its own doctrine for fighting the COVID-19 crisis, highlighting a palette of policies, which are identified with state interventionism, many governments, almost every government, did not forward this agenda, indicating in many cases the absence of a spirit of solidarity and cooperation.

Reactions to inequality

The previous literature has offered conflicting findings about the way people react to inequality. On the one hand, some writers refer to the paradox finding that the increased degree of economic inequality does not always come with a bigger demand of redistribution of resources. Moreover, the matter of economic inequality does not seem to concern the residents of unequal societies more that it does those of more equal ones (Bucca, 2016. Wietzke, 2016). On the other hand, it has been proven that people prefer for the resource allocation to be done in a fair and equal way (Norton & Ariely, 2011) and react to inequality by taking part in collective movements (Thomas et al, 2009). Particularly during the last decade, there have been several mass mobilizations in response to austerity measures and the escalation of the economic crisis (Occupy Wall Street). In these cases, anger and resentment, which stem from the feeling of injustice, emerge as the main factors that trigger collective action, based on the literature of social psychology (Thomas et al, 2009).

On the one hand, the inter-group conflicts created by the growing gap between rich and poor are used rhetorically by representatives of far-right populism. Representatives of far-right populism (eg Donald Trump, Nigel Farage) exploit the feelings of anxiety and fear that arise from inequality, and project a clear enemy as the culprit of the problem, which is immigrants and refugees, and in general any of the very strict boundaries of national identity (Jay et al, 2019). Finally, the support of redistributive policies emerges as a reaction to economic inequality. Redistribution policies involve the transfer of resources, rights, or income from one group to another, usually to the weaker. The paradox is that the increasing levels of economic inequality are not always linked to a greater demand for redistribution of

resources. In contrast, the desire to adopt redistributive policies is stronger in individuals who do not perceive economic inequality and the possibility of social mobility as meritocratic (Garcia-Sanchez et al, 2018).

Perceptions of inequality

From the above reports, it seems that a general question arises; how we can explain the different reactions and phenomena that accompany economic inequality. Regarding injustice, Starmans et al (2017) report that when individuals are asked about the ideal distribution of wealth in their country, they seem to prefer more unequal societies. Indeed, there is no evidence that individuals are bothered by economic inequality per se. Instead they are bothered by something that is often confused with economic inequality: financial injustice. Acceptance or rejection of economic inequality depends on whether it is perceived as fair. In other words, instead of reacting to inequality itself, individuals oppose inequality only when it violates the rules of wealth distribution (Trump, 2020). In more specific experimental study findings (Dawes et al, 2007), participants reduced and increased the incomes of other participants, at personal cost, even when no cooperative behavior was envisaged to support them. Emotions towards those who earned more became more and more negative as inequality increased. At the same time, redistribution behaviors were observed, as some participants incurred personal losses, resulting in spending more, to reduce the earnings of those who earned more than the average and increase the earnings of those who earned less than the average.

Individuals in situations of increased threat, such as the financial crisis, in their attempt to maintain a general sense of control seem to make a transition to a collective definition of self (Fritsche & Jugert, 2017). At the same time, research findings by Jetten et al (2017) report that the sense of threat posed by economic inequality increases support for anti-immigration policies. Of particular interest is the fact that in this particular study, only in the rich groups was a stronger opposition to immigrants identified, in the condition of economic instability. Finally, Jay et al (2019) point out in their research that inequality reduces social cohesion and increases the sense of threat. Due to the feelings of threat, individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, turn to identities, which offer them a sense of psychological security. Thus, the specific threatening social climate, once inequality it leads to the support of a political agenda, in the context of which distrust undermines support for the redistribution of financial resources.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic has turned our attention to the public health system and social welfare, demonstrating their high connection and the need for universal minimum income and universal access to health facilities, as fundamental rights to a dignified life and as immediate benefits, global and national, against the deterioration of inequality and poverty due to the pandemic (Zissi & Chtouris, 2020). Covid-19 appears as an intricate turning point that underlines the urgent need to tackle infectious diseases not just in biomedical dimension, but as part of a complex social contract framework that integrates national, socio-economic and political dimensions, offering perhaps a unique experience to listen to the obvious, far-reaching and multifaceted consequences of persistent social and economic inequalities in society (Stachteas & Stachteas, 2020). What is needed today is seeing health not as a privilege for the few or a marketable and consumer good, but as a social good and an obvious obligation to offer it by side of the state on an equal footing with all citizens.

This experience should enrich knowledge and lead to a revision of views, demonstrating that social determinants of health need to be included as part of public health, health policy and research priorities in order to emerge a sustainable investment and development of all interconnected sectors, including education, housing, the economy and the environment.

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In December 2019, the world discovered the first traces of a highly transmissible and pathogenic coronavirus genetic sequence, which is known as the coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) (Hu et al., 2021; WHO, 2020). The virus spread at an alarming rate across the world and an assessment conducted by the World Health Organisation (WHO) characterized Covid-19 as a pandemic. As the virus spread, governments implemented strict lockdown measures to combat the spread of the virus and mitigate the death tolls (Brothers, 2020). The virus spread massively across the world, and between the first case on 8 December 2019 to 11 August 2020, the virus had spread to 216 countries with over 20 million Covid-19 cases reported and more than 733,000 patients had died from the virus (Hu et al., 2021).

The international community unites to find a vaccine

As the virus spread, it quickly became evident that in order to have a world post Covid-19, the development of a vaccine would need to be accelerated due to the unprecedented pressure world economies and the health system faced (Brothers, 2020). The United States Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) allocated hefty funds, amounting to around 10 billion USD, to accelerate research in immunization and vaccine development into a program called "Operation Warp Speed" (OWS) (Brothers, 2020).

Moderna, an American pharmaceutical and biotechnology company, received 955 million USD from the Biomedical Advanced Research and Development Authority (BARDA), which falls under the HHS, to develop a vaccine (Clouse, 2021). Additionally, Moderna received support from the international community, such as the Dolly Parton COVID-19 Research Fund, the Vanderbilt University Medical Center and the Emory University (Clouse, 2021). The vaccine developed by Moderna is known as the Moderna Covid-19 vaccine and has a 94.1 percent effectiveness at preventing symptomatic Covid-19 (Branswell, 2021).

Oxford University developed a vaccine from mRNA research which dates back to 2002, which cost an identified 228 million Great British Pounds (GBP) worth of grants from the United Kingdom (UK) government, the European Union, charitable organisations and overseas governments (Safi, 2021). In January 2020, the UK government pledged an

additional 33 million GBP to the University of Oxford for vaccine research after the coronavirus started to spread (Safi, 2021). The university entered into an exclusive licensing agreement with British-Swedish drug maker AstraZeneca to manufacture and sell the vaccine at a not-for-profit rate (Safi, 2021). The vaccine developed by Oxford University and licensed by AstraZeneca is known as Oxford/AstraZeneca Covid vaccine with an efficacy of 63.09 percent (WHO, 2021).

Pfizer, another American multinational pharmaceutical and biotechnology corporation, received funds from Germany through its partner BioNTech SE (Griffin et al., 2020). Germany contributed 445 million USD for the acceleration of vaccines development in the German market (Griffin et al., 2020). The vaccine developed by Pfizer in partnership with BioNTech SE is known as the Pfizer-BioNTech Covid-19 vaccine which has a 91.3 percent effectiveness against COVID-19 (Silberman, 2021).

Johnson & Johnson, an American multinational corporation, received more than 1 billion USD worth of funding from BARDA, to expand its vaccine research (Keown, 2020). Additional funds were secured from the corporations subsidiary, Johnson & Johnson pharmaceutical, amounting to 604 million USD (Keown, 2020). The vaccine has been reported to have a 94 percent efficacy and is known as the Janssen coronavirus vaccine (Keown, 2020).

As at 21 June 2021, a multitude of Covid-19 vaccines have been developed by various organizations, namely; Novavax, Janssen, Pfizer/BioNTech, Moderna, Oxford/AstraZeneca, Valneva, Gamaleya/Sputnik V, Sinopharm-Beijing, Coronavac/Sinovac, Covaxin/Bharat Biotech, CanSino, Sinopharm-Wuhan, EpiVacCorona/Vector Institute, Abdala, Soberana02, QazVac and HayatVax/Sinopharm (Ling, 2021).

The international community united in a common goal to find a vaccine for Covid-19, however, there were no synergies in the work done by various organisations, outside of Moderna and Pfizer using the same vaccine technology, known as mRNA vaccines (Brothers, 2020).

The unequal distribution of vaccines

Covax is a pillar under the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator which focuses on equitable access to Covid-19 and is coordinated by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and the WHO (Berkley, 2020). Covax was created to ensure that countries unable to afford vaccines or that do not have bilateral agreements with vaccine manufacturers get access to vaccines (Berkley, 2020). This was intended to guard against vaccine hoarding to ensure worldwide vaccination for the common good of ending the pandemic (Penn, 2021). However, the scheme has been at the mercy of pharmaceutical companies and governments which have undermined it since its inception (Safi & Kirk, 2021). Covax had established an agreement to secure 1.53 billion doses from an Indian based company, however, a second wave in India has caused the government to drastically reduced the amount of vaccines permitted to leave Indian borders(Safi & Kirk, 2021).

By February 2021, 10 countries accounted for three-quarters of the 191 million covid-19 vaccinations administered (Penn, 2021). While in 130 countries, which accounted for 2.5 billion of the world population, no one had been vaccinated (Penn, 2021).

By March 2021, wealthy countries which make up 14 percent of the world population had secured 53 percent of the best vaccines on the market (Bhutoo, 2021). The African continent which is home to over 1.3 billion people had been allocated 300 million vaccine doses (Bhutoo, 2021).

By April 2021, an open letter was written to U.S President Biden to call for access to vaccine technology and know-how to accelerate global manufacturing and ensure mass immunization (People's Vaccine Alliance, 2021). It was noted in the letter that it is predicted that 9 out of 10 people in the poorest countries would not be vaccinated by the end of the year and at the present vaccine rollout rate, many nations would be waiting for mass immunization till 2024 (People's Vaccine Alliance, 2021). Covax had distributed 40 million doses to 100 countries, which is 60 million doses short of the initial projections (UN, 2021).

While efforts to unite the global community to join efforts in fighting the pandemic and attaining mass immunization were launched through Covax, the reality of rolling out the plan has been a far cry from the intentions (UN, 2021). Rich nations have been reported to

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be hoarding vaccines, while poorer nations have little to no vaccines, which highlights stark inequality and low levels of collaboration (Bhutoo, 2021). High-income countries have enough vaccines to cover their adult population twice, while low-income countries only have sufficient vaccines to cover a third of their populations (KFF, 2021).

There is a clear every-state-for-herself approach that has threatened global solidarity and the pandemic has shown that solidarity under pressure is a ruse (Amza, 2021).

Challenges for a way forward

The logistics planning required to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines is proving difficult for the global populations, with challenges faces particularly by poor countries who need cold-chain fridges to deliver vaccines to remote areas (Cushing, 2020). Efforts by Covax and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has committed to placing 65,000 solar cold-chain fridges in lower-income countries by the end of 2021 (Mancini, 2020). The hurdle of delivering vaccines across the world is further exasperated by the stagnation of air transportation (Mancini, 2020).

The weaponizing of vaccines by powerful states to gain geographic influence has been witnessed across the world, which has been accompanied by a lack of transparency in the development and distribution of vaccines (Cushing, 2020).

Low vaccine circulations across the globe threaten a rollback in the progress made in combating the pandemic, as there stands a risk for mutations of the virus to occur (Amza, 2021). Presently, there have been outbreaks of virus variants, which cement that the hoarding of vaccines by rich countries stand to prolong overcoming the pandemic (Amza, 2021). As new variants of the virus spring up, the variants may be more transmissible and resistant to vaccines, highlighting a race against time (Aschwanden, 2021).

Looking-forward

Various solutions to combat the unequal distribution of vaccines and the logistical challenges that have been suggested by experts is the collaboration of industries (Mancini, 2020). Suggestions from Dr. Prashant Yadav (as cited by Mancini, 2020) is to add vaccines to cold chain that is already predestined to targeted countries.

Experts have highlighted a need to find a transmission blocking vaccine, to halt the pandemic (Aschwanden, 2021). Breaking transmission chains would prove to be a more effective strategy in combating the pandemic.

As research and vaccines rollouts continue to be at the centre of fighting the pandemic, governments have implemented non-pharmaceutical interventions to combat the spread of the virus (Aschwanden, 2021). As it stands, halting the pandemic seems a colossal task, however, the task of each individual in helping combat the spread by practising social distancing and wearing a mask allows the human population to live in these unprecedented times in the most manageable way possible.

Page Break

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One and a half years into the COVID-19 pandemic, it is safe to say that our global economy and health systems have been shaken to their core. And although everyone has been affected, if the outbreak has taught us anything at this point it is how incredibly divergent the effects of a crisis can be for various groups of people. Age, class, caste, gender, and ethnic differences have been highlighted and societal vulnerabilities have all been magnified as a result of the pandemic.

Inequalities

Specifically, the most marginalised and vulnerable groups have had to carry the largest share of the burden: poor people, elderly, employees on temporary contracts, refugees, illiterate people — just to name a few. COVID-19 has built upon pre-existing fault lines. For instance, state-mandated school closures and remote teaching have caused 1.2 billion children worldwide to drop out of education in April last year alone (WEF 2020). Low-achieving students and students in rural areas were among the most severely affected groups, and girls were impacted more than boys (Blaskó et al. 2021, 15, 17; Grewenig et al. 2020, 14; HRW 2021a, 24-25). Also within employment, large disparities have been revealed as a result of the crisis. Black and Hispanic workers proved to be in far more precarious positions in terms of economic and health security than their white counterparts (CBPP 2021, 1; Gould and Wilson 2020, 1). Similar disadvantages were also observed among young and female workers (ILO 2020, 2; 2021; Cotofan et al. 2021, 160).

Besides inequalities within countries, another axis along which discrepancies play out is between countries. Developing countries have been disproportionately affected by the corona crisis (Cotofan et al. 2021, 159). Since the COVID-19 rescue packages were calculated relative to GDP, the ones accessed by low-income countries in sub-Saharan Africa were on average eight times lower than those claimed by G20 countries (WIL 2021, 10). These monetary differences came on top of the already existing unequal global distribution of health equipment. To illustrate, rich countries tend to have on average eight times more hospital beds, twelve times more physicians, and thirteen times more nurses per 10,000 patients than developing countries (UNDP 2020). All these examples demonstrate why COVID-19 has been labelled a "pandemic of inequality" (Nassif-Pires et al. 2020).

International solidarity

But where there is shared suffering, active efforts can be made to mitigate inequalities. One may therefore wonder how the international community has responded to these COVID-induced inequalities. Have richer countries — with the capacity and financial means to act upon such expanding differences — done enough to overcome them?

Arguably, a lot has been done with regard to global health justice. Immediately after the first outbreak, the European Commission launched a pledging marathon which raised an astounding amount of almost 16 billion euros to improve access and affordability of corona treatment, vaccination, and testing around the globe (EU 2021). The COVAX initiative was created to provide donor-funded vaccines to low- and middle-income countries (EC 2021a). This is a serious step towards fair access to medicine and has been named "a true and historic moment of global solidarity" (Von der Leyen 2021).

In addition, the European Union (EU) has directed more than a billion euros towards the strengthening of health systems in thirteen countries in Africa, in order to build resilience for future epidemics or disasters (EC 2021b, 2). Also, the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention expressed an intention to "reduce the global burden of COVID-19, while continuing to build global capacity to prevent, prepare for and control future pandemics" (CDC 2021, 1). Moreover, G20 leaders at the Global Health Summit have established a mission to share lessons learned and best practices, "in spirit of solidarity" (EC 2021b, 2).

On the other side of the spectrum, several organisations, scholars, and notable people have however argued that the international community has failed to adequately deal with the unequal impacts of the coronavirus. According to them, the global response has been too slow (Wise 2021, 1), resulting in unnecessary harm that has far exceeded the initial or inevitable damage. Viruses are by no means new phenomena; a hundred years before the COVID-19 pandemic the world faced Spanish flu. Even the twenty-first century has seen numerous epidemics. These include Zika and Ebola, and a few years back "the world ha[s] dodged a bullet" with the SARS virus (IP 2021, 15).

Looking back on these crises, quick mobilisation of aid is of essence. One of the problems with the latest Ebola outbreak was that it took a year and official warnings by the WHO

before international coordination came to up speed, financial aid was taken care of, and media started to cover the matter (Fraundorfer 2016, 346; MSF 2015, 14-15). With COVID-19, it seemed as though the international community had not learned from these previous shortcomings. Despite early warnings, countries were reluctant to act upon the virus until it had already obtained a widespread character (IP 2021, 28). Moreover, while governments were well-aware of the flaws in their public health systems, they had not carried out the prevention methods and reforms that they should have implemented based on previous epidemics (IP 2021, 16). Former President of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf strongly stated that "the shelves of storage rooms in the UN and national capitals are full of reports and reviews of previous health crises. Had their warnings been heeded, we would have avoided the catastrophe we face today" (The Elders 2021).

Solidarity in other crises

So, what could have gone better? In order to formulate what should have been done differently in terms of mitigation of the COVID-19 virus and its impacts, it is vital to understand how governments and international organisations have dealt with previous crisis situations.

Various scholars have attempted to map out levels of solidarity during previous crises[1]. Based on this vast body of research, we know that crisis situations can have an ambiguous impact on solidarity. Crises challenge solidarity and undermine cooperation, but they can simultaneously provide a breeding ground for enhanced cohesion and instigate a sense of unity. This ambivalence is illustrated for instance by the discussions and opposition regarding bail-out packages that were given to near-bankrupt EU member states after the 2008 financial and debt crisis (Lahusen and Grasso 2018, 1). On the one hand, these packages displayed inter-European morality, altruism and oneness. They were fuelled by sociotropic considerations and humanitarian responsibility towards less well-off peers (Rathbun et al. 2019, 537). On the other hand, however, these packages were faced with criticism from countless people who found it immoral that hard-working taxpayers in rich countries were the ones who had to pay for the failed economies elsewhere (idem, 523). In the end, the extent to which they truly embodied solidarity is questionable.

The same can be said with regard to the EU's track record and policy in the 'refugee crisis'. In managing the influx of migrants from the Middle East, EU actors have been accused of

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various inhumane practices and violations of human rights (Amnesty International 2019; Council of Europe 2021). In fact, the coronavirus and accompanying border closures have stimulated these practices (HRW 2021b).

The climate crisis is another example. Regardless of their share in environmental pollution, all communities are faced with the consequences of global warming, albeit to different degrees (Blau 2017, 2). Similar to the COVID-19 crisis, climate change is far more critical or urgent for some people, whose livelihoods are already destroyed or who lack the financial means to build resilience. Therefore, climate justice demands fair sharing of the burdens and benefits of climate change (MRF 2021). In a way, the 2015 Paris Agreement can be considered a major step towards climate justice, since it ensures commitment of all parties towards this common goal. At the same time, both Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement in 2017 and Bush' uneasy relationship with multilateral climate cooperation under the Kyoto Protocol demonstrate that climate justice is not always a priority for world leaders (Urpelainen and Van de Graaf 2018, 839).

Thus, as can be seen from previous crisis scenarios, governance can quickly turn into a type of trade-off between national interests and international solidarity (Takle 2018, 12). This is true for migration policy and economic restructuring, but also health crises. In several places across the globe, the COVID-19 crisis has forced governments and health personnel to make difficult decisions regarding life and death of their citizens. In this context, it is vital we remain cautious of 'vaccine nationalism' (ICRC 2021) and ensure that truly no one is left behind.

Conclusion

This paper has shed light on the socio-economic consequences of the corona pandemic. After having outlined and evaluated the international community's efforts to mitigate growing inequalities due to COVID-19, different crises situations from the past were discussed in relation to international solidarity. What these case studies teach us is that altruism and unification are key conditions for combating any crisis. Engagement of powerful actors is needed to work towards collaborative impacts. Indeed, whether confronted with a health, a political, a financial or an environmental crisis, there is no hope of sustainable and inclusive resolution or recovery without solidarity.

Thus, in order to tackle the 'pandemic within the pandemic' — social and global inequalities — a holistic, sensitive and intersectional approach is required which synergises with pre-existing vulnerabilities and aims to share the burden of the crisis justly and equally across communities and countries. This approach should recognise that even though the virus can affect everyone, some people are far more susceptible to its devastating effects than others. Ultimately, we should learn from past experiences, articulate best practices and disperse these around the globe. That way, when faced with a new pandemic, we know how to respond and prevent a new 'pandemic of inequality'.

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Since the COVID 19 has been declared a pandemic in March 2020 (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020), we had experienced a lot. Even if the virus does not respect national borders, it is discriminatory for the most vulnerable. It is not only a health crisis, but it is also a socio-political and economic crisis that has created a situation unique of inequality.

There are discrepancies between the policy responses of various countries, states, communities, gender, and class. The "inequality virus" as called by OXFAM, has hit an already unequal world. And considering the geographical and the global overview, we can advance that the pre-existing inequalities in most countries around the world made it more vulnerable for certain persons. The pandemic had a severe impact on the life of women, black people, afro descendent, indigenous people, refugees, immigrants, unemployed, the poorest, and the most vulnerable in general.

Indeed, the policy responses to the pandemic have contributed to a reinforcement of the long-standing inequality. Which already existed in the aspect of economic, racial, gender, or local. For taking an example, while ordinary people suffer from the impacts of the pandemic, billionaires are healthier, presenting an almost 55% increment (Collins, 2021). The difference is not just economic but also in the health care system. The pandemic has exposed the failure of a system where the public health system is not adequate. The government of developing and underdeveloped countries invests less and less in health care. The richest countries are dealing better with this disease because of the pre-established structures, also, they have a better possibility to extend their budget to this purpose by appropriate care or researches.

Another aspect that had shown up is the gender gap. There is a disproportional loss of work for women, besides that, with school closures and the move away to digital life, a lot of them had to juggle or choose between work and childcare. Furthermore, the situation of health insurance or access to adequate health care is one of the principal proofs of inequality, where the poorest have lack of access to basic healthcare or good hospital centers.

According to OXFAM, in the past 18 months, more than 180, have closed schools, leaving billions of children and youth out of school. In countries where students can't offer

themselves a remote education, as it is doing in the most developed countries, the students are regressing. They estimate that this gap will reverse the gains of the last 20 years of global progress made on girls' education (OXFAM, 2021).

Furthermore, the pandemic also exposed the inequality in the work system. The fact that a lot of people have been working remotely and various companies had to close their doors for the disease, contributes to the loss of hundreds of millions of jobs. Almost 92% of women work in informal and insecure jobs, in low-income countries (International Labor Organization, 2018). The restriction and confinement rules contributed to the penury of the people from the informal economy.

In America and Europe, to deal with the global health crisis and to assist, various countries had taken actions regarding food, clothes, sanitary aid, and programs for economic reintegration. Some countries have announced or extended temporary bans on evictions (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2021). However, all of those examples are national, and they were also temporary in countries like the USA (HRW, 2020).

Even if some researchers had shown that crisis might also lead to a decline of solidarity all over the word (Lahusen and Grasso, 2018), there is also proof of humanitarian solidarity. For example, some countries as UK and others are committed to vaccine nationalism, and others, including Costa Rica, to share the knowledge acquired relatively to this pandemic (Stiglitz, 2020). Even of all those has been done. It is complicated to say that enough solidary has been shown in those past 18 months, rather, we would say there has a lot to do because this global catastrophe might take longer than expected to eradicate it.

Developing countries, and those in crisis, also the ones that are already vulnerable all over the world; those that rely on the informal economy, women, those living with disabilities, refugees, immigrants, and unemployed will suffer the most. In fact, those that rely on the informal economy are the most affected (UNDP, 2020). Unfortunately, as much as it has exposed the inequalities, the post-pandemic world could experience even greater inequalities, unless governments take action. But the biggest questions are what to do, what is the way ahead, how can we do better?

Of course, this rise of inequality is not new for world history. As a record, almost all the countries concerned in both world wars, known a rise of inequality after then. Furthermore,

others in Europe and North America presented the same situation after the cold war, the same in china after the free-market reforms (Scheidel, 2019; world Inequality, 2018). In the recent decade, we have seen various situations of increase and decrease of inequality. However, the COVID case has been unique, because it has felt everywhere on earth simultaneously.

It will not be an easy ride for going forward or recovering, but there is always a way to do better. As says Arundhati Roy:

> "*Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks, and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it*" (Roy, 2020).

For having this other world, and for recovering from that rise of inequality, solidarity has been proved, nationally or humanitarian. Hence, there is an urgent and imposing need to improve collaboration, cooperation, solidarity, and equality, nationally and humanitarian. We need to show solidarity from different perspectives: economic, social, and principally in the health care system.

As individual government intervention: As governments continue to try to save their economies, they need to control and measure what matters. Lessons from the past show us that acting in the monetary, fiscal, and remittance policy are important, and they teach us that with the investment and fiscal buffers we might recover from the economy. However, it is important and necessary to invest in the education system, in healthcare, in infrastructure, innovation, and work system for all.

As global intervention: the pandemic won't be controlled until we do it in every country. If we do not contribute to the assistance needed, we might take longer to eradicate it. Solidarity is one of the better ways to go away with it, as showed up in previous crises (Agustin and Jorgensen, 2019; Fraundorfer, 2016; Gerhards et al., 2019). Urgently we need to vaccinate everyone, because for protecting the world each one must be protected. According to the UNICEF, other countries like the G7 and the Team Europe, would have enough doses of vaccine to donate or support the countries that are not able to produce (UNICEF, 2021).

Furthermore, we need to work in a world with more equity and equitability. Fighting inequality nationally or globally should be the goal of the economic and social rescue after COVID. This should include equity in gender, race, and class. If we act now to reduce inequality, instead of return to the pre-coronavirus level in 10 years, we are going to achieve it in three (3) years (World Bank, 2020). But it will make better sense if we go forward to the pre-coronavirus world and surpass the inequality. As an international community, we need to assure that the poorest have access to what they need to attempt this level of equity and the package that comes with it. In other words, we need to bring the 2030 Agenda to the center of COVID 19 for moving forward.

In conclusion, the Coronavirus has exposed the existing inequality of the world in wealth, gender, race, and geography. It has led to a crisis in the economic, health, and social system. For solving or recovering from COVID 19 we need to act together and fast, on collaboration solidarity to bring equality. We need to build a future for all kinds of people. We need to bring the 2030 agenda to the table acting in saving people first while working in the economy and the planet simultaneously.

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Vulnerability in the Global South: towards new discussions on inclusion and integration policies

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that all knowledge is not enough when the world faces greater challenges. But the Global South's previous and acute social and economic problems and the Global North's power rapidly became once again evident as the months passed by and both health system and economic development were put back on track at the North, whereas chaos reigned at the South. Even more urgent is the situation in which vulnerable groups of the Global South have found themselves in, as little to no attention was already paid to their marginalisation before the pandemic. This essay therefore discusses both the integration of the globe as a whole and the inclusion of vulnerable groups in society, using North and South not as geographical categories, but to name more and less developed economies, respectively.

COVID-19 and the Global South

It is rather clear that a pandemic was not expected, and countries were not ready to face such a hardship. As of mid-2021, however, developed countries keep advancing thorough vaccination programmes, empty hospital beds await new patients who may need them, the economy and workers have been supported by government financial aid and life begins to resettle. The International Monetary Fund (2021) already projects that Europe, for example, will rebound its economic growth in this very year.

Nevertheless, not every country can afford to promote such relief packages. The ongoing scenario of healthcare crisis appears to be more real than ever and economic recession may be a reality for the long haul. Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, India, Iran, Mexico, just to name a few, have all been infection hotspots since the Sars-CoV-2 outbreak (The New York Times 2021). In Africa, tourism have once represented 8,5% of the continent's GDP, and Asia's currencies have been depreciating rapidly due to the current scenario (Alcázar et al. 2021). The health systems in African countries are considered fragile and not able to deal with large numbers of patients at once (Makau 2021). The majority of African, Asian and Latin-American workers are allocated in the informal sector (International Labour Organization 2018), being therefore affected by their lack of labour rights

and invisibility vis-à-vis the governments. Despite the known situation, quantitative research evidence on the situation of several countries of the Global South is still scarce or non-existent (Egger et al. 2021), which may also be one of the reasons little content about these countries makes it to the news, besides the well-known western-centrism. The situation of countries undergoing fragile political systems may be also critical: Brunei, Cambodia and Laos have reported very few COVID-19 cases, but the numbers raised questions due to the autocratic nature of their governments (Alden and Dunst 2021). Egypt has been using the pandemic to turn its government into an even more authoritarian regime (Al-Ali 2020). Brazilian government has been systematically trying to censor media regarding the (lack of) federal actions to curb the spread of the virus (Valente 2020). The Arab States of the Persian Gulf were also criticised for the measures taken to stop the spread of the virus by essentially restricting civil rights (Alden and Dunst 2021), which, according to the Freedom House is a trend followed by several countries as an excuse to curb contamination rates (Repucci and Slipowitz 2020).

International solidarity became a foreign concept while countries from the Global North were concerned about their own citizens (McCann and ÓhAdhmaill 2020) behind closed borders, even interrupting refugee resettlement programmes. Western governments and China were criticised during the pandemic, the former for not properly helping Syria with medical supplies (Alden and Dunst 2021) and the latter for sending a very limited amount thereof back in April 2020 (Middle East Monitor 2020). The lack of cooperation with the Global South, however, might affect the own Global North with new strains of the virus that are resistant to the current vaccines, as new researches start to signalise.

COVID-19 has affected and will keep affecting the Global South disproportionally as it adds up to the already present challenges regarding social welfare, public policies, high crime rates and systemic corruption. It also hit in a delicate period of economic weakness after the 2010s' global financial crisis (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean 2020), therefore finding countries with limited economic capability to tackle the disease (Alcázar et al. 2021). History repeats itself as illnesses keep hitting lower- and middle-income countries harder (Makau 2021) and exposing long- and pre-existing global inequalities.

Reinforcement of vulnerabilities during the pandemic

Within the own Global South context, however, certain groups of individuals are more affected by the pandemic than others, as their marginalisation and vulnerability are due to individual

characteristics, such as race, gender, religious background, income and occupation, disabilities and age, sexual orientation and gender identity, national origin and migratory status.

Researches and data on the situation of the Global South corroborate the increase of domestic violence – as existing legal mechanisms get even less available –, including the likeliness of women with disabilities and transgender women suffering such a violence (UN Women 2021). Women also are working more than men during the pandemic, as the primary care is (wrongfully) considered to be a female duty (Alcázar et al. 2021).

LGBTI individuals have had problems to access healthcare due to stigma and those who feel unsafe around LGBTIphobic relatives were forced to stay at home with them for more hours (Al-Ali 2020). According to a research conducted by the Thomson Reuters Foundation in Brazil, one out of four LGBTI individuals lost their jobs during the pandemic and half of the transgender persons stated they could not live without income for more than another month (Lopez and Teixeira 2020), as should be already expected, as ninety per cent of Brazilian transgender women needs to turn to sex work (Associação Nacional de Travestis e Transexuais 2018).

The grave situation in which displaced people were found has also worsened, as the majority of them lives in developing countries (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 2020). Internally displaced persons in countries at war have had local hospitals bombarded, refugees in foreign countries have not been proactively tested for Sars-CoV-2, asylum seekers avoid healthcare treatment due to lack of or outdated residence papers (Al-Ali 2020).

Several migrants who worked in the informal sector, factories and as domestic workers are also more exposed to the virus, due to the lack of labour rights, poor safety practices, low wages and the fact that they are usually the first to be laid off whenever necessary (McCann and ÓhAdhmaill 2020). Migrants are also more susceptible to homelessness (McCann and Matenga 2020), which is on the rise (Deutsche Welle 2020), thus also rising the exposure to the virus.

Last but not least, researchers have also observed that the incidence and mortality rates due to COVID-19 among indigenous peoples (Fellows et al. 2021) and elderly people are higher than those observed in the general population.

Even deeper inequalities and vulnerability between certain groups and individuals could be found if such characteristics were explored through intersectional lenses, when several discriminatory

grounds intersect to form a unique, personal – and usually harsher – experience of exclusion (Crenshaw 1989), being this concept also valid for entire groups of individuals with the same or similar characteristics (Kantola and Nousiainen 2009). In sum, all marginalised and vulnerable groups in the Global South are suffering disproportionately during the pandemic.

Lessons for the post-pandemic era

Faced with this scenario, some recommendations are made based on the literature, reports and news on the existing inequalities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Al-Ali (2020) suggests that the Global North be more aware of global inequalities, mobilising its studies, advocacy and leadership to help the Global South overcome urgent issues. Oldekop et al.'s (2020) study highlights the need for multi-directional transformation towards more equality and global development, which cannot be reached without paying attention to uneven challenges. The authors also state that many issues from the South impact the North – one could exemplify this excerpt by naming all those grounds from the section above and so many others. Egger et al.'s (2021) report suggests funding and implementing long-term humanitarian relief programmes so countries from the Global South are not completely in despair when disasters approach their territories. In this same sense, Alcázar et al.'s (2021) study suggests similar programmes to aid the informal sector and the formalisation of its workers through bilateral or multilateral agreements, giving special attention to vulnerable groups. Cannon (2020) recommends the adoption of a universal basic income and the reform of the health systems, as well as the reduction of the debts from the Global South.

Besides such comments, we advocate for the importance of creating stronger bonds between countries through international instruments that would help develop the Global South towards its autonomy. We also encourage the adoption of international agreements that privilege vulnerable groups, along the lines of those already in existence, as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. In the same line, inclusion policies to reduce stigma of vulnerable groups, especially within the Global South, should also be discussed in international, regional, national and local levels.

Final remarks

Based on coherent and current data, studies and reports on the development of the pandemic throughout the world, this essay highlights the vulnerable position in which some groups have been even before the pandemic and the abyss that still exists between the Global South and the rest of the world. Some actions that could enable integration between North and South and inclusion of vulnerable groups were suggested and will hopefully be put in practice in a near future.

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Topic 6: <u>GENDER EQUALITY</u>

Women have been disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistical evidence from around the world shows that they have borne a much larger brunt of it thanmen. In the post-COVID recovery stage, what can and should be done to forcefully and effectively address the issue of gender equality?

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Gender power imbalances became glaringly visible in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic (Alon et al. 2020; Boserup et al. 2020; Bradbury-Jones and Isham 2020) but there is nothing unusual in that. If we look at the body of scientific literature, we will see that those with less power always suffered more from any given crisis. The Great Depression (Abelson 2003) hit women harder than men, the same goes for the economic crisis caused by the fall of the Soviet Union (Bridger et al. 1996), the 2008 economic crisis (Karamessini and Rubery 2014), and presumably any other crisis that had a significant economic impact. When jobs are scarce men are given preference as breadwinners, when schools and kindergartens close women have to stay at home with children as caretakers. Therefore, the gender implications of Covid-19 are not new, but it is unprecedented to see them happen across the globe almost at the same time.

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated that we live in a deeply interconnected world and the only reasonable way to solve a problem of a global scale is by creating a global solution. This also applies to gender equality, and indeed, a global approach was established with CEDAW in 1979 (UN General Assembly 1979). Since that milestone conference, the urgency and the pandemic scale of the gender inequalities became more evident, it became apparent how interconnected and interwoven the structures of social power are. We came to realize the need for an updated framework that would reflect the intersectional character and acuteness of the matter. The Covid-19 pandemic presents a unique opportunity to create a better action plan for gender equality.

I full-heartedly support the UN Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality as a solid step in the right direction, that can become this century's milestone for women's rights (United Nations 2021). The draft of this action plan targets the areas that are in most urgent need of

action, i.e., Gender-Based Violence, Economic Justice and Rights, Bodily Autonomy & Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights, Feminist Action for Climate Justice, Technology & Innovation for Gender Equality, and Feminist Movements & Leadership. The outlined actions are ambitious, well described, and have clear indicators for evaluation. An indisputable positive novelty of this framework is the focus on concrete new comprehensive commitments. The Generation Equality Forum convened by UN Women and co-chaired by the Presidents of France and Mexico is very timely and hopefully will drive major policy reforms and generate significant investments to address the consequences of Covid-19 for women and girls. However, it is not always clear how the outlined targets can be practically achieved, especially in developing countries with high levels of gender inequalities.

I argue that we can benefit from the public health approach to understand the specific interventions that are required to achieve each target. This approach includes three-level of interventions: primary, secondary, and tertiary, which are aimed at three different population groups.

Primary interventions are aimed at the general population and the interventions are largely preventive. If we take Covid-19 as an example, the primary intervention will be to educate the general public about the ways to reduce the risk of contracting the disease, i.e., washing hands, wearing a mask, get a vaccine if available. The goal of primary interventions is to prevent new cases.

Secondary-level interventions deal specifically with the groups at risk. In the case of Covid-19, these are elderly people and people with pre-existing conditions. The goal of secondary interventions is to reduce cases with severe complications. These measures might include extra precautions, i.e., self-isolation, receiving paid time off from work, preventive screening, etc.

Tertiary interventions are aimed at those who are already affected, i.e., people who contracted the disease and may include treatment and rehabilitation. The aim of the third-level interventions is to prevent serious health consequences and death.

To combat a public health crisis, it is important to act on the three levels in parallel. One can argue that gender inequality can be regarded as a societal disease of a pandemic scale that originates from the historically imposed power imbalance between the genders. In this light, it can be beneficial to apply the public health model to determine the necessary interventions.

If we take education as an example of intervention for post-pandemic recovery, on a primary level, we should empower women and girls in their rights. We should also teach men and boys about healthy masculinity. All people should understand the existence of power inequalities, how they disproportionally affect women. Everybody should be encouraged to contribute to the solution. On a secondary level, there should be specific educational measures that would target vulnerable populations, e.g., women and girls from marginalized communities, racial minorities, underprivileged families, those with front line, and low-income jobs. An example of a secondary measure could be targeted programs that educate women from these populations about their rights, help to apply for financial help, provide targeted college scholarships for girls from these backgrounds, etc. Third-level interventions would be aimed at girls and women who are already disproportionately suffering from the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic. This could include trauma-informed counseling to the survivors of domestic violence, or counseling for women who left their jobs to stay at home with children. This approach helps to actively incorporate intersectionality into the action plan as it acknowledges that women are not a homogenous group and their vulnerability can also depend on their income, race, physical ability, sexual orientation, etc.

We should also recognize that not all measures have the same impact and focus more efforts on the interventions that are proven to be impactful and have long-lasting effects. To illustrate it we can use a health impact pyramid of Frieden (see Figure 1).

"In this pyramid, efforts to address socioeconomic determinants are at the base, followed by public health interventions that change the context for health (e.g., clean water, safe roads), protective interventions with long-term benefits (e.g., immunizations), direct clinical care, and, at the top, counseling, and education. In general, public action and interventions represented by the base of the pyramid require less individual effort and have the greatest population impact. However, because these actions may address social and economic structures of society, they can be more controversial, particularly if the public does not see such interventions as falling within the government's appropriate sphere of action. Interventions at the top tiers are designed to help individuals rather than entire populations, but they could theoretically have a large population impact if universally and effectively applied. In practice, however, even the best programs at the pyramid's higher levels achieve limited public health impact, largely because of their dependence on long-term individual behavior change." (Frieden 2010)

By analogy, we can evaluate the measures aimed at addressing gender inequalities exacerbated

by the pandemic. For instance, if we take the economic dimension of gender inequality, we can divide the interventions into similar tiers. Education about gender inequalities would require the most effort in terms of human resources but might be the least effective, whereas changing socio-economic factors, e.g., guaranteed equal access to decision-making positions would be most effective but would require more political effort (see Figure 2).
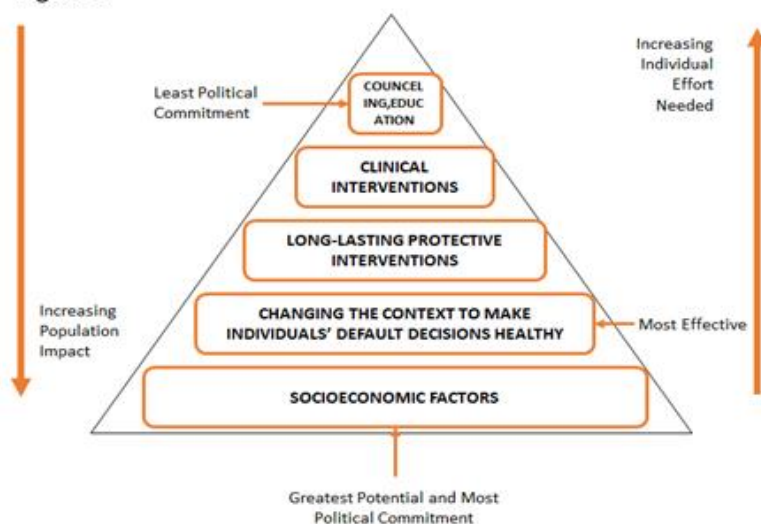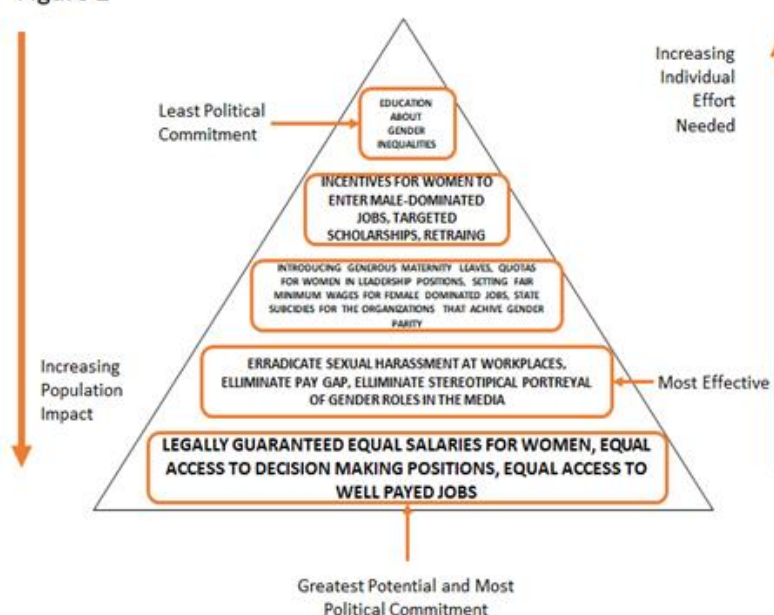
Figure 1

Figure 2

In conclusion, my suggestions for post-pandemic recovery would be:

- Adopt and start implementing the targets of the Global Acceleration Plan for Gender Equality.
- Incentivize stakeholders to follow through with this plan.

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- Pay special attention to the interventions that would make the desirable choice the default one.

- Ensure the plan at local levels, in countries that need it most. e.g., by engaging college youth to promote and implement the acceleration plan.

- Focus on interventions that are more targeted and effective.

- Encourage pro-active and preventive measures that also target men.

- Encourage men to be active supporters of gender equality.

- Make the knowledge available! The United Nations, especially UN Women should create more comprehensive and user-friendly toolkits that can help local governments, educational institutions, companies, NGOs, and activists to work more effectively.

- Extend the reach. We should not just talk with like-minded people and create an eco-chamber that gives us an illusion of change.

- Cooperate. Too often than not, organizations chose to work independently to tackle gender inequalities, which slows down the progress and makes it ineffective, often reactive, and inconsistent.

As for an immediate intervention that we need for the post-pandemic recovery, I would agree with the UN Women Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, when she wrote that "we must place women at the center of our economic recovery. Now is the moment for leaders to publicly commit to that work – by supporting the care economy, and equal wages and access to opportunities." (Mlambo-Ngcuka 2021)

I would like to finish this paper on a personal note. As a sociologist, I think that we are long aware of the ultimate solution to the problem of gender inequality, namely, we have to change the power balance between genders. In a (largely) capitalist world power is primarily associated with money. It is not a secret that the capitalist system was created by men and for men, which explains why most attempts to fit women into the system that assigns no economic value to their traditional (for a capitalist system) tasks, i.e., childbirth, care work, housework, are often not satisfactory. As a child of a communist regime, I am painfully aware that replacing the capitalist system is hardly an option, so we have to impose gender equality, which will be hard and slow. Why? Simply because for a real change to happen it is not enough to empower women -- those with more power (men, white people, fully abled people, etc.) should recognize their privilege and agree to give it up, which unfortunately does not come naturally to many of us.

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The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic has deeply impacted the lives of women all over the world. Before the pandemic, women already faced gender inequality, but currently it has deepened due to the consequences of the measures taken to stop the spread of this virus. Difficulties to access to proper health services, more financial issues for women, and a setback in the political participation are the aspects in which gender inequality has been felt more acutely. However, even if the pandemic has meant a setback in progress in gender equality it can also be seen as an opportunity to change. For this, having women in decision-making positions, introducing economic measures and investing in education are the three main lines of action to achieve gender equality.

Gender inequalities can be perceived in almost every aspect of daily life, but the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic made these inequalities even more noticeable especially in the domains of health, work and political participation. Regarding health, besides causing an emergency all over the world, the pandemic has put in danger the lives of women and girls due to the relocation of resources that were previously intended for them. The impact on sexual and reproductive health is particularly concerning due to the serious consequences on the health of women such as the increase of teenage pregnancy, maternal mortality and the transmission of sexual diseases. For instance, it was estimated that in 2020, 9.5 million vulnerable women and girls were not able to obtain modern contraceptives and safe abortion services (Cousins, 2020). This resulted in an increase of unsafe abortions and pregnancy-related deaths.

Inequality at work has also deepened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic crisis has especially affected women who are feeling the consequences more acutely given the situation of greater inequality and job insecurity than before. Currently, women are in worse conditions to face the economic crisis caused by the pandemic because they have a lower labor force participation as well as a higher concentration in informal jobs and underemployment. The sectors most affected by the economic crisis as: retail trade, accommodation and food services and manufacturing industries, have a higher concentration of women. For instance, in the tourism sector, women represent 54% of the workforce and face the almost total disappearance of their livelihoods, as COVID-19 has paralyzed tourism around the world (OAS, 2020, p. n.a.). Moreover, it is also important to take into account that because of gender roles women have more workload than men which is not usually recognized as work. According to (OAS, 2020, p. n.a.) "Women are responsible for 76.2% of all hours of unpaid care work (more than three times than of men), and it is they who have double or triple working hours, a situation that has worsened

with confinement measures".

The social and economic crisis generated by the COVID-19 pandemic has evidenced the necessity to have women in decision-making positions. However, in the political aspect women have also been the most affected by the pandemic. The financial issues and a return to traditional gender roles are worsening already-existing gender disparities in financial power and time availability, which frequently hinder women from engaging in politics. Furthermore, another challenge that women face is that in some contexts, the pandemic has made women less publicly visible and pushed debates about women's rights off the political agenda. Notwithstanding, the perceived effectiveness of women leaders in responding to the pandemic has been recognized worldwide. The main reason for this is the introduction of earlier restrictive measures that in collaboration with the population helped to maintain a low infection rate (Profeta, 2020, p. 1).

From the adoption of the Beijing Declaration twenty-five years ago, some gains were made in regard to gender equality. However, with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic there was a big setback in what was already achieved. Therefore, several cross-cutting measures must be introduced in order to not only address gender inequality but to help women that are currently facing the consequences of the global health emergency. For this, it is important to first, ensure women's representation in decision-making positions, second, introduce measures to address the socio-economic issues that directly affect women and third, put education as a priority with a special focus on girls.

Women's representation in decision-making positions is crucial to achieve gender equality and effectively address the consequences of the pandemic. A recent study by (Coscieme, et al., 2020) shows that countries led by female leaders had a lower COVID-19-related mortality rate not only because of the measures they introduced but because women create policies more oriented towards environmental issues and social equality. In consequence, by having highly qualified women in decision-making positions, efficiency gains emerge, and the quality of institutions and organizations improve which in the long-term result in positive economic and social outcomes (Profeta, 2020, p. 1).

Another important aspect to take into account is the role of women's movements that are in the front line of communities and know the needs of the population. When the pandemic disrupted daily life, states had to respond quickly but due to the emergency they were not able to cover all aspects. However, women's organizations undertook the work of filling the gap left by the state which affected especially the most vulnerable groups. One of the most important labors these organizations carried on was the support to survivors of gender-based violence that increased because of the lockdown. In this way, states must work together with women's organizations that already have experience of providing services even with limited resources in

order to ensure the well-being of women and their families.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put in evidence the socio-economic issues that gender inequality causes. All over the world, "women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs and are more likely to be employed in the informal sector" (United Nations, 2020, p. 4). Entrepreneurship has been the solution women have followed to overcome the financial issues, most of the time without the necessary means and taking high risks. In consequence, not only women's economic and productive lives are affected but also the lives of those who depend on them. The current global emergency must be an impetus for the introduction of socio-economic measures from a gender approach. Women should be able to have equal opportunities as well as equal pay and social protection. For this, economic incentives must be given to women along with better social security structures.

Finally, education is a crucial aspect to achieve gender equality. According to (UNESCO, 2021) "of 29 countries surveyed across all regions, two-thirds of low and lower-middle-income countries, have cut their education budgets due to the pandemic", this has resulted in school dropouts that might put the future of girls at risk. Besides this, it is relevant to highlight that the difficulties to access education have a direct impact on society as a whole. Women and girls that are educated have the power to transform their lives and promote social transformations which include the reduction of poverty, economic growth and a better quality of life. Therefore, education must become o priority in order to ensure the future of all children but especially of girls. The implementation of policies focused on education will significantly contribute on the achievement of gender equality and the improvement of women's lives.

The COVID-19 pandemic provoked not only a global health emergency but a social, economic and political crisis around the world. In consequence, the most vulnerable groups have had to face even more issues than before. In this context, the pandemic has put in evidence the gender inequalities at a global level. From the beginning of 2020 until now women have dealt with issues in every aspect of daily life especially in economy, health and politics. Notwithstanding, instead of a crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic should be seen as an opportunity for change. To achieve gender equality, it is crucial to have women in decision-making positions which is why states must promote the political participation of women and work together with women's organizations. In the economic aspect, it is important to ensure equal pay and opportunities for women as well as to provide financial incentives that help them to overcome economic issues. Finally, there is no way of achieving gender equality without education which is why investment and the implementation of policies focused on the education of women are mandatory.

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Women around the world have been experiencing gender inequalities in all areas of their daily lives,and the current global pandemic has unfortunately exacerbated them, leading to a delay in closing the gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2021). In this essay, I will be looking at the steps that needs to be taken in order to address some of those inequalities in the education sector, as it is botha means to ensure equal opportunities for boys and girls early on in their lives but also a place where discriminatory treatments are perpetuated in the absence of appropriate gender-responsive measures. While girls' education has a clear instrumental value due to its wide-ranging benefits, in terms of economic growth but also its positive impact on future generations (Schultz, 2002), it should be seen as an intrinsic good in itself allowing for women and girls' development. I will focuson two specific inequalities experienced by girls throughout the world in their schooling years -their lack of access to education and patterns of sexual violence in schools - as well as the impactsof the Covid pandemic and ways to tackle them.

Firstly, despite some efforts made since the 1990s, there is still a gap in access to education betweenboys and girls which urgently needs to be corrected. Some progress has effectively been made with the 'Education for All' movement as the gap in boys' and girls' enrolment rate in primary schools has shrunk and it is estimated that there are 52 million fewer girls out of school globally. Butoverall, it is still rather limited: first, it excludes certain parts of the world especially conflict areas where girls are 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys; and second, it mostly applies to primary level of education only. Indeed, there is a desperate need to improve the situation at the secondary level: in 25 countries globally, there are fewer than 85 girls enrolled in secondary school for every 100 boys (Ackerman & Scott, 2017). However, enrolment numbers are not the only important matter to secure girls' access to education: girls should be able to actually complete their school years. For example, in India, despite an increase in girls' enrolment rates in secondary education - from 10.7 million in 2000 to 25.6 million in 2012 - much less improvement is seen inthe completion numbers. Singh and Mukherjee (2018) demonstrated in their study that it is mainly due to the discriminatory processes happening within the family with the amount of domestic work given to girls being the main factor to explain their tendency to dropout. Therefore, it is not enough to enact policies to get more girls into school, but there must be a comprehensive approach tackling the existing patriarchy and 'son preference' within households and society all together, in order to guarantee girls' right to education in a meaningful way.

More problematic are the secondary effects of the pandemic which impede on the progress made. Recent research shows that the learning loss incurred by the multiple school closures is felt more harshly by girls. First, as children are not going to school, girls are on average given a lot more housework than boys (Makino, Shonchoy & Wahhaj, 2021) and must act as caregivers for sick relatives and younger children while their parents try to make up for the loss of income. In contrast, boys are encouraged to pursue their education, even remotely, and get a preferential access to technology and online schooling equipment while girls are doing chores (Mendez & Evans, 2020). Moreover, there are strong reasons to believe that the pandemic will also have disastrous long-term effects for girls. Indeed, early marriages have been shown to form part of the households' coping strategy to generate an alternative income and those generally result in girls dropping out of school prematurely. In Bangladesh, Makino et al. (2021) found that marriage talks increased post-lockdown among families with young girls, leading to a possibility to see a rise in early marriage figures once social distancing measures are lifted. Hence, the global pandemic represents a particular challenge to girls' right to education and requires an appropriate response. First, the learning loss incurred by school closures and lack of technological access should be assessed amongboth boys and girls and the curriculum must be adapted accordingly to encourage all students to safely return to school. Second, it is essential for governments to tackle the issue of child and forcedmarriage as it presents the greatest threat to girls' education in the long-term and could lead to millions of girls not returning to school once the pandemic is over. Sufficient financial support should target families with young girls to assist their parents and push them to send their children back to school once they reopen.

Secondly, there is an urgent need to tackle the problem of sexual violence happening in schools, most often targeted at girls and threatening their educational achievements. Sexual violence, definedby the WHO (2014; 2) as 'any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual commentsor advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting' is unfortunately a common reality for girls globally. While schools should be a safe haven for children, it is also a place where girls are confronted to sexual abuse from their peers and teachers, which often continues online.The latest report from Ofsted (2021), the education inspection agency in the UK, found that sexual harassment is so common that we should assume it is happening in all settings and is usually underestimated by school leaders. Most of the girls interviewed expressed a surrendering attitude towards it, refusing to report it as they do not believe anything will be done. In Ethiopia, a study by Altinyelken and LeMat (2018) revealed the worrying practices of teachers giving in to transactional sex with their students in exchange

for better grades. One related problem to the tolerance of sexual abuse in school is the fact that boys and girls do not have the same understanding about it - with boys viewing it in a much more practical and pragmatic way than girls - and illustrates the need to educate them properly about it (LeMat, 2016). Schools should adopt a comprehensive approach to sexual education which must be taught by highly trained teachers to ensure the best delivery of this sensitive topic. Sanctions must be made clear, and records of the complaints should be kept to demonstrate that those matters are taken seriously by school leaders and create a suitable environment where children feel safe to talk about those experiences. Evidently, these practiceshave considerable harmful consequences on girls, not least in terms of their physical and mental health, low self-esteem but also early pregnancy which often lead to absenteeism and schooldropout. The latest decision in Tanzania to lift the ban on pregnant girls from attending school is a first step in the right direction, but more has to be done to reflect the harmful consequences ofsexual abuse, not just on girls but on the society as a whole.

As it has been shown, the Covid-19 pandemic also increased the opportunities for sexual abuse to

be taking place, especially at home during the successive lockdowns, which should be tackled through school interventions. With the increased stress, insecurity and loss of income, there has been a dramatic rise in domestic violence around the world, at the expense of women and children who are the first victims of these 'secondary' effects of the pandemic. For instance, in Uganda, dailycalls to the Child Helpline went from around 100 usually to 1,369 on average during the lockdown to report cases of child neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Out of all calls, 20% reportedcases of sexual abuse with 98% of the victims being girls (Sserwanja, Kawuki & Kim, 2021). What is even more problematic is that with the general school closures, children and especially girls were left to themselves with no-one to talk to: this increased the risk of late detection and under-reportingof child maltreatment, in addition to creating a feeling of isolation and insecurity for children intheir own home. Now that schools are reopening, the teachers should be prepared to address those issues appropriately and provide those who have been victims of abuse, or witnessed abuse taking place at home, with the support they desperately need. School leaders should arrange for confidential conversations to take place where the students can safely report abuse cases that may have happened at home and make connections with the appropriate protection services. The teachers must also receive training to detect symptoms of abuse and offer support for girls to pursuetheir education (The Malala Fund, Plan International, UNESCO, UNGEI & UNICEF, 2020). Therefore, more than just tackling the sexual violence happening within schools, policymakers and school leaders should use them as a place to address this issue in a holistic way.

In conclusion, gender inequalities in education should be one of the main focus of policymakers, as girls' education has quite important knock-on effects on their lives in terms of their professional career, health, housing and poverty just to name a few. In essence, access to education at all levels and tackling the problem of sexual violence happening in school and through schools is necessaryto ensure that girls have an effective and valuable right to education. In the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic these issues have become even more pressing matters as the secondary effectsof the crisis have exacerbated gender inequalities in many ways, but also created opportunities forus to finally act on them accordingly.

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The recent coronavirus disease (Covid-19) has impacted the whole world due to its easy transmissibility. The mortality statistics show that men have been more affected than women. However, the pandemic has left a significantly bigger impact on women. This paper will specifically focus on how the global pandemic has aggravated gender-based inequalities in the economy and health, as well as gender-based violence. We will also propose solutions that could reverse the damage done by Covid-19.

For sanitary precautions, all businesses considered non-essential had to close following most countries' regulations, leading to the unemployment of many people. Unfortunately, gender inequality is an issue that has been here well before Covid-19. Women occupy the majority of low-income and part-time jobs, as a result, women are the ones who lost their way of income more than men. As they were already in a financially unstable situation, the pandemic aggravated their situation. Through Covid-19, employees are not the only ones who lost their jobs: business owners also lost their companies, especially small business owners.

Jablonska published an article stating that women have been advancing in their careers before the global pandemic by taking up higher positions. Unfortunately, that progress was stopped and, in some cases, reversed due to the downfall of the economy. Jablonska states that women with dependent children, colored women, and women with higher positions have been presenting high pressure, burn out and exhaustion at work. This is because they have family members at home that depend on them and have nowhere to go because schools were closed. And so, their household responsibilities added to their work have led them to face some physical and psychological issues. However, she states that fathers, colored men, and men in senior management face less of these pressures at home and work because the responsibilities fall more on their wives or companions.

To catch up with the damages that the global pandemic has caused, it is necessary to take action immediately. As women suffered the most during the pandemic, in the post-Covid-19 world, companies should update their policies in gender equity. This concept is necessary because today, a lot of women are out of jobs, without health insurance or food. Gender equity will lead to gender parity in the workplace allowing men and women to have the same financial opportunities.

Furthermore, it's also necessary to help new businesses, especially the ones owned by colored women because they are the part of the demographic that suffered the most throughout Covid-19. Startup businesses and projects could be helped by changing policies on interest rates.

New businesses should have a lower percentage of an interest rate for loans, at least for the first five years, for them to get on their feet.

In most cultures, the patriarchal system is still present, leaving many important decisions for men. This uneven distribution of power has been playing a role in favor of men. For example, the pay gap between men and women on average is 16%. Even though most countries are now putting more and more women in power, changes are not being made. in reality. For example, women are being paid 30% less than men in Ethiopia but 50% of the parliament is occupied by women since 2019. In April 2020 a survey showed that leaders in the global health sector are composed of only 30% of women. But women also represent 70% of global health and social care workers. These statistics show that women put their lives on the line every day during the pandemic but were not included in the decision-making. And so, women should also be included in important decision-making to see real change that will benefit women as much as men because women are the most vulnerable when facing obstacles such as Covid-19.

According to WHO and UNICEF, more than 40% of the world's population lives in poverty, and more than half are women. Basic hygiene products are not easily, if not at all accessible. Women need more hygiene products as they experience menstruation every month. Before the pandemic, these products were already hard to obtain for most of the population living in poverty because they would only have free or cheap hygiene products through public healthcare systems. Unfortunately, Covid-19 being a sanitary crisis, most healthcare systems have shifted their services to face the pandemic making it harder to provide for those in need of essential products. Furthermore, a survey in 2017 showed that 810 women, of which 94% represent women living in developing countries, died every day from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth-related issues. But, due to Covid-19, all public hospitals were overwhelmed and people suffering from other diseases were subsided if their situation wasn't critical. And so, the limited access to medical services has made a significant impact on women, especially ones living in poverty because they can only afford public healthcare as it is free for most services.

Recently, vaccinations against Covid-19 have started, meaning the Covid-19 cases will be decreasing over the coming year. Public healthcare centers need to focus back on other pathologies. Unfortunately, many hospitals have lost their staff members due to the pandemic, leaving them understaffed. As explained at the beginning of this paper, the economy has plunged, making it hard for hospitals to hire many healthcare professionals. And so, a solution would be to recruit civilians or medical students specializing in diverse areas, especially midwives. If not volunteers, these people could be repaid for their duties by credits (for students) or by decreasing

their taxes (for workers). This will allow hospitals to dedicate special services for people in need, especially women because the rates of maternal mortality, and sexually transmitted diseases have increased exponentially. Furthermore, recently, some health insurances have started giving a certain amount of hygiene products and contraceptive products. But people living in poverty do not have health insurance. As these products are essential for correct hygiene and protection against sexually transmittable diseases, it is important to pass a policy that allows women to have access to free menstruation and contraceptive products with their social security numbers.

For sanitary reasons, it was mandatory to quarantine in most countries. Before Covid-19, gender-based violence was an issue that kept increasing. In 2006, a study was conducted by Garci-Moreno showing that the rate of domestic violence goes from 10% to 71% across the globe. With the sanitary restrictions that were put in place, the statistics have increased significantly, especially in domestic violence. In some societies, mostly the traditional ones, they don't consider domestic violence as a violation of human rights but more as a little bickering between the couple. Only the extreme cases are considered by the authorities. Less than 40% of women report their cases. As a result, it is expected that in reality, these statistics are greater than the ones found in the studies conducted over the years (as they are based on reported cases only). Over this past year, due to Covid-19, even more, women have been subject to domestic abuse because they were forced to stay on lockdown with their aggressors. In addition, since a lot of women have lost their jobs during this period, it has made it even more difficult to leave their spouses because they depend on them financially. Due to the lockdown, it has been even more difficult for women to report their aggressors because they are watched over by them almost all the time.

Many governments have put in place many lines for women to call and report their situations. But as said above, it is sometimes impossible or very difficult as their aggressors are right next to them. Even today, as the world is slowly going back to life as before Covid, these women are still at home because they are out of jobs. And so, they believe that they will have to suffer because they have no place to go or that they will have to leave their children with the aggressors. A good solution would be to raise awareness through advertising on television and in all common places such as supermarkets and pharmacies. These advertisements can show that these women and their children are supported, contrary to their beliefs. When building a case of domestic violence, it is hard to prove the violation without any physical proof. As a result, these women end up on the streets without money or shelter. For more women to come out with their stories, they must have a safer place to denounce their aggressors (such as commonplaces) and be assured that they will have a support system backing them. And so, the government should build and support bigger shelters for women and children and make sure that women know about

these shelters. These shelters should be equipped by healthcare professionals as they went through a traumatic event and they will need to make big changes in their lives. As it could be expensive to recruit these professionals, it is possible to use the same system described earlier: the professionals could be repaid with school credits or by having to pay less tax.

All in all, Covid-19 has impacted a lot of people, mostly women. As the cases are decreasing, it is important to take imminent action to help women get back on their feet. To do that, it is important to hire more women because they will not only be able to afford basic hygiene products and healthcare, but they will also be financially independent. To be able to do so, policies and regulations in companies could be improved by having an equal salary based on the positions and responsibilities, not gender. The state could also have a better strategy with regard to gender-based violence by creating a safer space for victims to rehabilitate after the traumatic experience.

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Human rights should be taken into consideration, especially in these times of difficulty because of the Coronavirus. In this work, I will briefly present a possible action course to prevent Violence Against Woman and guarantee Women's Rights by bringing the example of the current structure of regional protection of those rights: The Court of Rio de Janeiro.

Human rights are norms that attempt to shield individuals from abuses. The concept and its application have been studied over time, which enabled the rise of several theories. A close reading of academic literature reveals that not everyone conceives human rights in the same way. The "general" concept that human rights are relevant for everyone comes from abstract reasoning about "men", which does not correspond with the realities of political rights and social justice.

Because of that, different critiques have arisen over time.

Feminism is one of those critiques, and it has consolidated itself as an intellectual, philosophical and political discourse that seeks to break the traditional patterns of patriarchal societies and end the oppression suffered by women throughout history.

However, the idea that this is a single struggle or that feminist thought is uniform is erroneous. There are currently several "feminisms" precisely because the feminist theory also has its gaps. Most of the feminist critiques do not consider important factors in society, such as intersectionality. In the constant urge to fill these gaps, we look up for the decolonial critiques.

Decolonial theory criticises the dominant assumption in human rights studies that history is universal and aims to rethink human rights from the colonised perspective. In that way, the decolonial theory is committed to: expose the colonial logic in the concept, and practice of human rights, consider how it manifests itself precisely in the so-called universality of human rights, consider alternative conceptions/histories of human rights and incorporate the perspective of the colonised.

Learning about the characteristics of Latin American's feminism, we can formulate a theory that embraces more women to expand the reach of women's human rights worldwide.

Feminists' theories have some pillars on which they are based. The first of these is gender: the understanding that the oppression suffered by women for being a woman differs from other forms of oppression. Joan Scott[1] defines gender as "both a constitutive element of social relations founded on perceived differences between the sexes, and a primary way of signifying power relations". From this concept, it can be inferred that gender is nothing more than a construction produced by culture and other social and political practices.

Gender is, in summary, a system of social relations. Thus, there is a whole construction of life

in a society oriented to follow male standards. This base is responsible for excluding women from public decision-making spaces, hindering their participation and reinforcing sexism in all areas of life.

Undeniably important in questioning the structures of society and Law, thinking feminism in that way fails to consider some aspects. Perhaps because the first discussions were concentrated in the global north, those premises focus too much on the man/woman dichotomy without realising that the people represented in this dichotomy are the heterosexual, cisgender whites. In other words, it ignores the concept of intersectionality.

Intersectionality is a concept coined and disseminated by black feminists in the 1980s[2]. It constitutes a fundamental theoretical-methodological tool for feminist activists and theorists committed to analysing the processes of interaction between power relations and categories such as class, gender and race in individual contexts, collective practices and cultural/institutional arrangements.

In its turn, decolonial thinking seeks to understand and deconstruct the ideals of Western vision that embedded the world. The history of colonisation worldwide was one of violence that involved not only those who experienced it but their legacy. The colonised's experiences were seen through the eyes of the coloniser.

Quijano[3] coins the term "the coloniality of power" to describe a power structure that began with colonialist invasions and perdures today. The coloniality of power is based on the imposition of a racial/ethnic classification of the world's population as the cornerstone of power, operating in each dimension of daily existence on a social scale.

Decolonial theories develop through the awareness of this historical erasure. In this sense, they need to seek the ideas and practices of the colonised before colonisation and create an understanding that considers the change in posture after colonisation.

Applying this decolonial way of viewing history in feminist theories, Vergés[4] states: "decolonial feminism is a feminism that, while recognising that male domination exists, does not solely focus on the question of gender equality." Therefore, decolonial feminism has the following main aims: to rise against any form of oppression, amplify the focus for more than a gender issue, and not be softened by the dominant class ideology.

With that in mind, there are aspects of Latin American feminism that are cohesive with this understanding.

One aspect that is important to note is that the formation process of Latin American feminism has a different path from the Western one. The awareness of the oppression of the colonising processes gives rise to a field of reflection with which feminism starts to dialogue. Latin American feminism is born out of women's unease with the "triple of

oppression"[5] from the intersection between race, class and gender.

In 1988, Gonzales[6] proposed the category of "amefricanidade" as a rescue of a specific unit, historically forged within different societies formed in a particular part of the world. For her, being "amefrican" represents claiming back an identity robbed by the coloniser.

Decolonial feminism denounces the structural overlap of notions of heteronormativity, racial classification and the capitalist system.

Therefore, recognising racial and class issues as an intrinsic part of the feminist struggle is a differential of Latin American thought. Their perspective analyses their miscegenation, prioritising its implications in terms of the constitutive processes of social inequalities.

The history of feminism in the global south was written in painful struggles, in which class and race were necessarily linked to gender, their urgencies all placed on the agenda, even before such articulation dominate the agendas of metropolitan feminisms.

The production of knowledge is closely linked to practice. So, it is a feminism that has always had to consider the peripheral critical eye on its experiences of life and politics and its vital formulation about exclusion and social inequalities.

Having understood that, we set out to analyse how the articulation of ideas in this movement has worked regarding women rights issues in Rio de Janeiro during the covid pandemic as a practical example.

The current crisis of Violence Against Women got worse in the context of COVID-19. Data showed[7] that since the outbreak of the virus, reports of domestic violence have increased in several countries as security, health, and money worries create tensions that only grow with the pressure of being in lockdown. The issue here is that this increase happened at the same time that lots of services were compromised. Care and support to women who had experienced violence, like psychological treatment, to mention one, were "on hold" since the health care people were handling COVID-19 cases.

In Brazil, that was not a unified public policy to treat the matter. Regardless the Courts of each state were free to decide how to address it adequately. In Rio de Janeiro, some of the actions that were taken were[8]: (i) the creation of an online service where women could make complaints and start their law actions with privacy; (ii) a partnership with the police force to distributed new materials spreading awareness of this help; (iii) the creation of coordination of judges that became responsible exclusively for processing cases of violence against women; (iv) amplification of psychological assistance.

Those measures resulted in an increase in the protective measures granted[9]. They were only possible because they took into consideration how the aspects of race and class could affect the access of those women to the Courts. The measures have enabled access to justice for women

who otherwise might not even have the means to know their rights since the women most affected by gender violence in Brazil are poor and black[10].

The studies group on "gender, race and ethnicity" had a vital collaboration in the adoption of these measures[11]. The group was responsible for crossing these data and understanding that the main focus of any measure should be given first to access to information and then provided tangible means for access to justice.

Following this example, an easy step that should be done to address the issue of gender inequality is to focus the attention on decolonial feminist theories in order to learn that the issue of gender is intersectional. Decolonial feminism – especially the Latin American one – has this more intersectional approach to human rights matters involving women's lives. Therefore, accepting their contribution is a way of updating the feminist critique of human rights and move closer to true gender equality.

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The gendered impact of COVID-19 on Women

In September 2020, following the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, UN Women published its report "From insights to action: Gender equality in the wake of COVID-19"[1] to evaluate the impact of the pandemic on gender equality. The aim of this work was to build on the observations made by the UN Secretary-General in his policy brief on the impact of COVID-19 on Women and its provision that with "the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, even the limited gains made in the past decades are at risk of being rolled back"[2].

Socio-economic impact

Less than one year later, the Group of 7 (G7) Leaders met in Cornwall (UK) On the 13th of June 2021 to overcome the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and "build back better"[3]. A special emphasis was put on the need for an inclusive recovery that doesn't exclude members of the society based on their gender. Civil society groups and international organizations have been calling on the G7 since the beginning of the pandemic to put women empowerment at the heart of their response to COVID-19 and its socio-economic consequences[4].

The COVID-19 pandemic didn't only create new challenges that face humanity, it also highlighted the fault lines in our societies. In terms of gender equality, the pandemic had a multiplier effect on exiting gender gaps and challenges as pointed out by Oxfam[5]. The global NGO highlighted the fact that women were more impacted by the pandemic and its economic consequences than men, given that women are overrepresented in unstable and precarious professional environments. UN Women have urged governments to act by stating that "unless measures are taken, a decade will be lost in the fight against extreme poverty."[6]

Beyond the public health aspect of the pandemic and its consequences on human lives, the established socio-economic fabrics of our societies have been challenged and put to the test due to exceptional events such as nation-wide lockdowns, the sudden loss of jobs and a redefinition of what's really considered "essential tasks" for the survival of our societies. The OECD report on Women at the core of the fight against COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that "women make up almost 70% of the health care workforce, exposing them to a greater risk of infection. At the same

time, women are also shouldering much of the burden at home, given school and childcare facility closures and longstanding gender inequalities in unpaid work."[7]

Violence against Women in the time of COVID-19

Following the first days of the pandemic and the multiplication of lockdowns around the globe to contain the spread of COVID-19, a surge in domestic violence was immediately noted by the international community[8]. In countries like France and India, domestic violence cases have seen a rise by a third and by the double respectively[9]. The UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, called on governments to take into consideration the protection of women in the framework of their response to the COVID-19 pandemic and urged them to "make the prevention and redress of violence against women a key part of their national response plans for COVID-19."[10]

Gender equality and Intersectionality under COVID-19

At the beginning of 2021, the European Parliament issued a report that calls on improving gender equality during and after the COVID-19 crisis through a "gender-sensitive" response[11]. The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) stressed on the fact that women were unequally impacted depending on their level of vulnerability, which was due to their age, their location, their social status, their sexual orientation and/or their disabilities. Therefore, a special emphasis should be put on vulnerable populations of women such as women-migrants, elderly in care homes, women under the poverty line and women with all forms of disability. Oxfam has estimated that in developing countries, 75% of women work in the informal sector or in a dangerous and precarious work environment[12]. In low-income countries, Oxfam estimated that this percentage rises to 92%. Therefore, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and massive lockdowns have worsened the situation of these women and increased the precarious nature of their situations.

The way forward: a gender-aware recovery

The above-mentioned observations about the unequal socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women calls for an effective and gender-sensitive COVID response that considers women empowerment and insure their protection. In its advocacy work, Oxfam called for a "Feminist Recovery Plan" to achieve gender equality between men and

women[13]. They call especially on governments to increase the social value and salaries of essential jobs where women are over-represented, put in place public policies that take into account the domestic care work carried out by women, and fight against the gender pay gap and the underrepresentation women in positions the spheres of decision-making[14].

UN Women and the Gender and COVID-19 Working Group produced an insightful research paper that highlights how the COVID-19 response could take into account the mainstreaming of gender equality through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The report entitled "Spotlight on gender, COVID-19 and the SDGs: Will the pandemic derail hard-won progress on gender equality?"[15] takes a look into the gendered impact of the pandemic across 5 of the interlinked SDGs : SDG 1 (Poverty), 4 (Quality education), 5 (Gender equality), 8 (Decent work and economic growth) and 10 (Reduced inequalities).

In terms of poverty, the Spotlight report calls on governments to ensure the social protection of working women and supporting those who are looking to accent decent jobs. Putting in place protective health insurances and unemployment benefits could help eradicate poverty and preventing vulnerable women from all forms of poverty[16].

In terms of quality education, the massive lockdowns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have hugely impacted schools and the education of young people. UNSECO noted that "one year into the COVID-19 pandemic, close to half the world's students are still affected by partial or full school closures, and over 100 million additional children will fall below the minimum proficiency level in reading as a result of the health crisis"[17]. The Spotlight report highlighted a well-known fact that was observed in previous health crises, which is that girls are less likely to go back to school after they are withdrawn.

In terms of gender-based violence, the Spotlight report called on authorities to ensure that essential services are put in place during the pandemic to support women victims of domestic and gender-based violence, such as hotlines, online counselling and support shelters[18].

In terms of gender equality, the Spotlight report highlights the need to consult civil society organizations working on women's rights when deciding on COVID-19-related laws and decisions[19]. An inclusive decision-making process is essential to guarantee that women's needs are represented and taken into account. The report goes further and tackles the post-COVID reforms put in place by governments and calls on them to "include a minimum target requiring

allocation of at least 30 per cent of the total budget to gender equality or women's empowerment projects"[20] in the framework of the newly created COVID-19 response.

Conclusion

26 years following the Beijing Women's Conference, gender inequality was still a fact before the COVID-19 pandemic, however the impact of the virus has worsened the condition of women and threatened to eliminate part of the progress that was made in this field. Further data and studies are needed on the global level to really understand and evaluate the gendered impact of the pandemic in all countries and in relation to women everywhere. Meanwhile, it's crucial that governments stick to their commitments and put gender equality and gender-sensitive measures at the heart of the newly created recovery plans. This year, the Generation Equality Forum co-hosted by France and Mexico[21] will aim to move forward with gender equality and draw from the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic to establish a more resilient and gender-aware recovery.

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Abstract

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has affected both drinking patterns and alcohol sales. Whilst alcohol consumption decreased in bars and restaurants, there was an increase in at home drinking. Alcohol effects women differently than men physiologically, resulting in a unique set of alcohol-related health harms. With increased demand associated with the Covid-19, stress levels increased. Thus, the possibility of increased alcohol consumption also increased.

Furthermore, women experienced indirect alcohol-related harms from alcohol use in their family and home environment. The combination of increased alcohol consumption and Covid-19 lockdowns may have contributed to the sharp increase in domestic violence cases, mainly experienced by women.

This paper will provide a brief overview of alcohol harm's, the effect of Covid-19 on alcohol consumption and the effect of Covid-19 on domestic violence experienced by women. It will illuminate the interrelatedness of increased levels of alcohol consumption and domestic violence cases before providing recommendations on how to prevent, protect and provide support in the aftermath of Covid-19.

Alcohol related harm

Globally, alcohol is a leading contributor to the global burden of disease (GBD). Over 200 health conditions are linked to alcohol use, ranging from liver disease to HIV/ AIDs (WHO, 2018). Women are more likely than men to abstain from alcohol and are less likely to be current drinkers or to engage in heavy episodic drinking (WHO, 2018). However, women who consume alcohol have increased their consumption in several countries, closing the gap (McCaul et al., 2019; White et al., 2015).

Physiologically women experience the effects of alcohol earlier and at lower quantities than men (Taylor, Dolhert, Friedman, Mumenthaler, & Yesavage, 1996). There are different high risk drinking guidelines for men and women, suggesting differential harm from drinking, by gender (Cherpitel, Ye, & Monteiro, 2019). Women experience greater alcohol related health harms from alcohol than men and experience them much earlier (Erol & Karpyak, 2015). Women are more vulnerable to tissue damage, alcoholic hepatitis and cirrhosis of the liver (Guy & Peters, 2013), heart disease (Erol & Karpyak, 2015), brain damage (Alfonso-Loeches, Pascual, & Guerri, 2013), breast cancer (Shield, Soerjomataram, & Rehm, 2016), injuries (Cherpitel et al., 2019) and alcohol dependence (Mann et al., 2005). Maternal alcohol consumption during pregnancy has adverse consequences on the foetus, including Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

(FASD) (Lange et al., 2017).

The psychological impact of Covid-19

Women in the U.S. reported higher rates of pandemic-related changes in sleep, mood and health concerns, than men (Palsson, Ballou, & Gray, 2020). Women with children had higher rates of clinically significant anxiety, compared to men with children and women with no young children. Similarly, women in the UK and Ireland reported a higher increase of psychological stress and depression during the pandemic period, than men (CSO Ireland, 2021; Niedzwiedz et al., 2021). As women are more likely to take on the burden of household tasks, child-rearing and caregiving, the decrease in childcare services, associated with Covid-19 restrictions, created the additional burden of remote schooling (Sugarman & Greenfield, 2021).

Employment sectors with more women were disproportionately affected by Covid-19. Women working in health and social care experienced concerns over exposure to the virus and burnout (UN Women, 2020). Women working in non-essential retail experienced reduced income and financial stress (UN Women, 2020).

Alcohol consumption during Covid-19

A key factor associated with increased alcohol use during lockdown, in Ireland, was the stress associated with increased confinement (Reynolds, Purdy, Rodriguez, & McAvoy, 2021). Studies have found that women are more likely than men to drink to regulate negative affect and stress (Peltier et al., 2019). Thus, there it is concern regarding increased female alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism for increased stresses during the pandemic.

Australian research reported an increase in alcohol consumption during the pandemic, particularly amongst women (Biddle, Edwards, Gray, & Sollis, 2020). It noted that caring for dependent children was a major predictor for increased consumption. Similarly, American and UK studies saw an increase in alcohol consumption amongst women (Pollard, Tucker, & Green, 2020) and found that the psychological stress related to Covid-19 was linked to increased alcohol consumption for women, but not men (Oldham et al., 2021; Rodriguez, Litt, & Stewart, 2020). A UK study found that women had the most significant increase in binge drinking during lockdown (Niedzwiedz et al., 2021). This may be due to the shift to home drinking, where alcohol consumption occurs in an unregulated setting.

Furthermore, alcohol industry (AI) attempts to capitalise on Covid-19 may have put women at increased risk for consumption (Movendi International, 2020). Australian research illuminated how the AI marketed their products using Covid-19 themes and increased promotion of home

delivery services (Martino et al., 2021).

As well as health harms, Covid-19 may have exacerbated social harms experienced by women.

Domestic violence

Although necessary to curb the spread of Covid-19, lockdowns, restricted travel, economic stress and closure of non-essential services are likely to increase the risk of domestic violence (Campbell, 2020). Women's ability to escape abusive situations was significantly reduced or stopped.

Many countries have already reported a rise in domestic violence instances during Covid-19, calculated by the increased volume of calls to helplines. Within EU countries, there was a 60% rise in emergency calls related to domestic violence (Mahase, 2020, as cited in OECD, 2021). Emergency calls in Chicago increased in line with time spent at home; whilst general police calls declined, domestic-related calls increased sharply (Bullinger, Carr, & Packham, 2020). Ireland saw a 22.6% increase in assaults in residential settings during Covid-19 (An Garda Síochána, 2021). Similarly, a mixture of anecdotal and scientific evidence of increased domestic violence emerged from Mexico (Silverio-Murillo, Balmori de la Miyar, & Hoehn-Velasco, 2020), Australia (Usher, Bhullar, Durkin, Gyamfi, & Jackson, 2020), Brazil (Graham-Harrison, Giuffrida, Smith, & Ford, 2020) and China (Zhang, 2020).

The United Nations (UN) Population Fund estimated that 31 million further cases of domestic violence would have occurred globally if lockdowns continued for another six months (Mahase, 2020). Whilst the UN estimates failed to consider the role of alcohol consumption, other research has listed alcohol use as a precipitator and intensifier of domestic violence during Covid-19 (Silva et al., 2020).

Domestic violence and alcohol

Alcohol consumption is a risk factor for domestic violence for both victim and perpetrator (WHO, 2006). Heavy alcohol use, a key risk factor for domestic violence, has been linked to stressful events and a lack of social support; both likely to have occurred during Covid-19 (Catalá-Miñana et al., 2017). With many bars and restaurants being closed or limited to take-away services, domestic violence perpetrators who consume alcohol are more likely to drink at home, further increasing the risk of domestic violence during the pandemic (Campbell, 2020).

Although the pandemic may be coming to an end, research suggests that increased rates of domestic violence, reported after a natural disaster, may continue for months after the event (Enarson, 1999). The expected pattern of prolonged domestic violence post-Covid, may be further exacerbated by the possibility of a continuation of home drinking patterns; 'the new

normal'.

Addressing gender equality in relation to alcohol related harms

Goal 5 of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals aims to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' (United Nations, 2015, p. 22). The World Health Organisation recently released a draft plan recommending the prevention of drinking among women of childbearing age (Capon, 2021). In the interest of gender equality, it is vital to balance the risk to the foetus with women's rights to make informed decisions about alcohol.

Covid-19 has put a spotlight on many gender equality issues, such as the rise in alcohol consumption and increased domestic violence experienced by women. In the aftermath of Covid-19 we may expect to continue to see an increase in health and social harms experienced by women, as the negative health and psychological effects of increased alcohol consumption may surface.

Below are several recommendations for: research, preventative strategies and service provision for women regarding alcohol-related health and social harms resulting from the pandemic:

1. **Research**
1. <u>Research on alcohol-related health harms</u>

    Current GBD studies do not consider gender when calculating risk of injury or morbidity (Cherpitel et al., 2019). Future studies should adapt and consider gender differences. Research should pay particular attention to alcohol-related health harms post-pandemic.

2. <u>Research on alcohol-related social harms</u>

    The estimated burden of harms caused by alcohol consumption does not consider the secondary effects of alcohol assaults (WHO, 2018). Future studies should aim to capture the indirect harms experienced from domestic violence.

    There is a need for more research on the interplay between Covid-19 related restrictions, alcohol use and domestic violence.

2. **Prevention**
1. <u>Public Health Alcohol Policies</u>

    Implementing public health alcohol policies would help to decrease alcohol consumption and in turn the negative health and social effects experienced by women. Accessibility and availability should be given particular attention following the increased AI marketing and delivery services that surfaced during Covid-19.

2. Targeted Measures

Public health alcohol policy approaches alone may neglect the specific psychological and physiological needs of women. The launch of women's health taskforces may be useful at a national level, to provide insights and recommendations into the specific needs of women.

3. Violence prevention measures

National violence prevention measures should consider addressing harmful alcohol use, as alcohol is prevalent in many cases of domestic violence; particularly those experienced by women.

3. **Provision of adequate support services**

1. Alcohol support services

As alcohol use is less visible with at home drinking, alcohol screening by GPs and other medical professionals may help to increase the uptake of alcohol services.

2. Domestic violence services

Adequate support, advocacy and therapeutic services need to be in place to help at the time of crisis and in the psychological aftermath.

3. Child support

For the future, the provision of adequate childcare services, including lockdown accommodations, would help relieve stress and may reduce alcohol consumption as a coping mechanism.

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1.Introduction

Coronavirus outbreak (COVID-19 Pandemic) exposed global weakness. Unprepared health systems in individual nations were faced with greater social inequalities thus crippling the response to the pandemic (Nicola et al., 2020). On an international level, 180 million cases of infections were reported as of June 2021 with the highest prevalence being in the USA, India, France, United Kingdom and Germany, respectively. Most of these countries (mentioned above) are developed and have thus invested more in mass testing. Undeveloped and developing nations with major socioeconomic inequalities have been testing less whilst the COVID-19 pandemic continues to overburden their health needs (CSSE, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, countries like Kenya who host over 53 million inhabitants with 36% of its population living in extreme poverty only reported 1.68 million tests done as of June 2021. Currently, Rwanda (which lies southwest to the Kenyan border) reports only testing 1.56 million of its citizens whilst having a population of over 56% living under extreme poverty. In the face of this pandemic, discriminations surpass the countries' superiority on a global level to gender as well. Women and youth that could be more exposed are the less tested in the underdeveloped and developing countries as most of them are stuck to caregiving duties.

Recently, the United Nations projected that over 96 million people have been pushed to extreme poverty due to COVID-19 as of June 2021. The same report says that the number of women living under extreme poverty is forecasted to get to a figure of an estimated 232 million by 2030 while that of men will be at 202 million. This will explicitly portray the continued post COVID-19 implications that are enhanced by the global inequalities which keep fostering poverty and gender gaps.

Women, Covid19 and labor force participation

According to the Long (1958), through OECD (2017), statistics the Global figures of women actively participating in the labor force are projected to be at 49.6%. reporting a linear trend in the past decades. Some economies such as Canada have been admirable with 61% of its women population actively participating in its formal labor force. Germany follows suit at 55%, and Brazil at 54%. Developing nations however depict a different image. In southeast Asia, an example of India highlights the gaps with the number of active women involved in the labor force standing at 27%.

The variances in women involvement signify the need to upgrade women involvement in national and global economies. The above figures outline the further need and important role

women play in our economies. Outstandingly, we cannot neglect mentioning the rapid increase of the unpaid care work (Tzvetkova and Ospina, 2017) that has tremendously tripled due to school closures and other home chores women provide in all our economies comparatively to men.

Women have for long been exposed to skewed provision of unskilled labor as well as low education levels. Their role in society has thus been undermined. Society identifies them as mothers, and caregivers amongst others thus undermining their pivotal role in the economy and in the political spectrum. Even during the pandemic most gender-based violence incidents have been against women which magnifies the undermined role that women have been allocated by society.

When COVID-19 hit, economies crumbled due to overdependence on international markets (Nicola et al., 2020) while more shocks impacted negatively on the less financially stable in the society. Intuitively these led to less risky behaviors from the more vulnerable in society. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) that are well known to be key drivers of economic stability for most Countries suffered inabilities to trade within and across boarders due to the COVID-19. This has negatively influenced 94% of SMEs from developing countries with close to 82% reporting severe decrease in sales (GAIN, 2020). Women have not been left behind as the UN-Women (2020), projects 40 percent of women to have been affected due to their nature of work as they are key drivers of most of the SMEs in the food sector and service industry. Women play a vital role in driving these SMEs in developing nations and they have thus suffered as the businesses trading capacities have been crippled by the outbreak.

> "When the first COVID-19 case was reported in the country, the stock markets declined with stocks such as Safaricom and Kenya Commercial Bank (KCB) declining by 5.4% and 7.0%, respectively, in one day" (Mollona et al., 2020)

In Kenya alone the food supply chains are driven by SMEs that contribute highly to the Gross Domestic Income (GDP). An example is the horticulture sub-sector that employs millions of women and responsible for about 40%, with vegetable share at 36% (Jalang'o et al., 2018, cited in Alulu et al., 2020). The sector is a source of food security, export earnings, rural employment and stimulates generation of off- farm employment, all of which have been threatened by Covid19. The timing of the pandemic was a major shock on the Kenyan food supply chain, corresponding with the planting seasons, locust infestation and floods (Salih et al., 2020).

Women, Covid19 and financial inclusion

Exposing the inability to trade is the underlying global gender gap in financial inclusion. Formal financial exclusion has continued to affect women more than men. In 2017, 62% of women were reported to own a formal account at a financial institution comparatively to men who stood at 72%. The pandemic merged with the socioeconomic burdens already poised on women haven sunk inclusion targets further to not being realized. Recent research show that most of the women in the developing countries live in the rural areas (Klapper, 2019b) and are reported to be less financially included due to low financial literacy high poverty levels (Ozili, 2020). Globally, the unbanked as stated by the World bank were at a staggering figure of 1.7 billion people, with 56% of the share being women (Demirguc-Kunt et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic happens at a time when commercial banking system had excluded inclusion of the rural poor and the undocumented who for a long time have been women (GSMA,2019). Undoubtedly, women bear the burden of earning less than men on average and this hinders them from accessing loans for cautioning their shocks. World Bank through Klapper et al. (2019c) reports that in the emerging economies, women are 17% less likely to access formal loans while 20% of them have no access to a formal bank account relative to men.

2. Discussion and Policy Recommendations:

As vaccination of the global population is viewed as inevitable other pressing issues that address the inequalities are discussed below. Since, the vaccination process is underway and so new, we make less references to it in the policy recommendations holding an assumption that the vaccinations will be and continue being provided to everyone without gender disparities.

Digital financing

While seeking to bridge the financial gender gap in the post COVID-19 era the need of digitizing the services targeted for women becomes more important. Cross cutting research reports that women acquire more privacy, improved self-drive and esteem besides boosted confidence when the financial platforms are provided to them digitally thus direct empowerment (Ghosh & Vinod, 2017). The world Bank through Klapper et al. (2019a) advocates for the digitization of the finance sector which can further display that the future of financial inclusion in sub-Saharan Africa to a large extend depends on levels of innovation uptake. The findings shed light on women acquiring abilities to get out of the poverty traps, improved saving skills and advancing to better jobs as a result of picking the mobile money innovation.

In Kenya specifically, the digital platforms within the finance sector have been tremendously advanced by Mobile Money transfers being used continually as a tool for financial inclusion (Hughes & Lonie, 2007). This has a major effect on savings, borrowing, and lending. Mobile money platforms have been reported by several authors to grow resistance to shocks, improve the reduction of risks, and build household resilience, findings that have been largely supported by Kaffenberger et al. (2018), Bharadwaj & Suri (2020), and Ghosh & Vinod (2017).

Recently, countries like, Costa Rica, Kenya and Rwanda have effectively used the mobile money platforms for **targeted conditional cash transfers programs** meant for the vulnerable in their societies. These digital platforms coupled with other recent findings on welfare improvement supports the importance of connecting smallholder farmers and specifically women to better mobile technology that will in turn help reduce the financial gender divide further (FinAcess,2019). Emergence of digital financial solutions designed and adapted by the developing economies seem to take root in most countries. This would be a turnaround point for most of the inclusion goals in helping target women better and reach them even in the lowest and vulnerable regions.

In East Africa to be, women are recently having ease in access to financial services. This has boosted household welfare through improved savings and loaning services, individual education, financial knowhow etc. These has been fostered by the newly introduced Mobile money platform that brings along other key services like savings, credit, insurance schemes besides even being used to pass farming information to farmers. Even as businesses and women suffered the COVID-19 shock due to lockdowns and limitation of mobility, SMEs in Kenya and Rwanda transacted on the social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram while they relied on the mobile money cashless platforms to transact their payments. This means women have more financial power in their hands and can have financial decisions unlike before.

Affirmative action is needed to boost girl child education, women leadership possibilities besides access to financing for their business. In Rwanda 64% of the parliament is led by women and women keep holding key positions in the government. This helps empower the younger generations and makes them realize that they have apposition at the high tables rather than in the kitchen. Besides banks like KWFT in East Africa have been developed with business models that only target women and women led businesses. These are some of the actions that would spearhead full inclusion for women amid the post Covid recovery campaigns.

Increase Women in Leadership

Remarkably, recently the World Trade Organization opened its doors to a female leader and vaccination was at the heart of her message. We have seen ease in enrollment and positive campaigns for vaccinations and vaccine sharing even when countries were in dire need e.g., India. While Women's role in leadership remains critical to our post COVID-19 recovery it has shown to have lasting effects at the grassroots level. The current Constitution of Kenya advocates for two thirds gender rule in the parliament; however, it is a pity that this has not been achieved since the inception of the constitution in 2010.

Nevertheless, a milestone in women's role in the Kenyan leadership has been achieved and historical. This comes with the first ever female chief justice, Hon. Justice Martha Koome being appointed by the President and approved by the parliament and senate, respectively. In Tanzania, Her Excellency President Dr. Samia Suluhu has also taken realm at the top office as president after the passing of the late Dr. Pombe Magufuli. The current Tanzanian president has propelled a quick COVID-19 response team which put in place the WHO recommended measures. This was new to a state that was critical of the process for more than a year after the outbreak.

Conclusively, the major question remaining in our heads is, is the east African community taking a leap in realizing women's inclusion in its leadership and will the pandemic be an eye opener to the important role women play in our society? We can just hope so.

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Topic 7 – <u>GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY</u>

While the UN Secretary-General has issued numerous calls for a global ceasefire during the pandemic, few armed actors have heeded these initiatives. Conflicts around the world have continued, many with an unabated intensity. Is the current global peace and security framework adequate for responding to the challenges around the world? If not, what canrealistically be changed?

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The Crisis in Yemen (Ammar Al-shaibani)

1.1 The Political Overview of the Crisis

The Republic of Yemen is considered as one of the poorest countries in the Middle East and in the Arabic world. The civil war which broke out in late 2014 initially between Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi (president of the Yemeni government) and the Houthi armed movement, has led to catastrophic results that ruined the economy, killed thousands of Yemeni people and destroyed infrastructures as well as facilities. The main cause of that conflict was failure of the transition of political power that was supposed to bring economic and social sustainability to Yemen. Coming back to the Arab Spring movement that started in 2011, Ali Abdullah Saleh was forced to give up his long-time presidency of 33 years to Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi (his deputy). However, after Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi was appointed as new president, he struggled to deal with various issues including shortage of food, high unemployment rate, corruption, loyalty of many army sections to the former president, a separatist movement from the south and (jihadist's) terrorist attacks.

The Houthi movement is popular for defending the "Zaidi Shia Muslim" (a branch of the Shia Imamiya of Iran) minority that lives in Yemen. In the last decade, they have been involved in several rebellions against the former president, took control over "Saada" province (considered as the heartland of the north of Yemen) and nearby areas by taking advantage of the weaknesses of the new president. At first, many Yemeni civilians including the Sunnis, aided and stood with the Houthis as the transition of political power brought no beneficial outcome and have disappointed them. Eventually, at the end of 2014 / early 2015, the Houthis captured the capital of Yemen "Sana'a" (Robinson, 2021). Once the capital was captured, with the loyalty of his army forces, Saleh tried to take control over the entire country again by

supporting his former enemies (the Houthis). In February 2015 Hadi and his cabinet, after briefly being held hostage by the Houthis , fled to Saudi Arabia.

As believed that the Houthis are backed by Iran (a Shia majority country), eight Arab countries, mainly Sunni Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, initiated a campaign to defeat the Houthis and end Iran's influence in Yemen and restore the collapsing government of President Hadi. France, the United Kingdom, and the United States provided intelligence and logistical support to the coalition. Saudi officials forecasted this war to last no more than a few weeks, but it has now been going on for over seven years, and the military stalemate is still going on (Sharp, 2021).

In August 2015, the ground troops landed in the port city of Aden, and over a few months, they drove the Houthis and their allies from most of the south. In November 2017, a ballistic missile was launched towards Riyadh, which led the coalition to tighten the blockade around Yemen (Reuters, 2017). The coalition accused Iran of supplying and smuggling weapons to the rebels (an accusation denied by Tehran) and called for an end to Iranian aid to Houthis. This halt eventually increased fuel and food prices and led more citizens into insecurity regarding food supply. With the collapse of the alliance between Ali Abdullah Saleh and the Houthis in November 2017, deadly conflicts broke out over the largest mosque in Sana'a and Ali Abdullah Saleh was killed in an operation launched by the Houthi fighters to capture and take complete control over the capital (Ahmed Himmiche, pp. 19-21 UN Security Council, 2018). With the escalation of conflicts, the coalition launched a major offensive to take controlover the Red Sea city of Hudaydah to capture the Houthis, hence breaking the deadlock on thebattleground. The port of the city is a primary lifeline for approximately two-thirds of the population living in Yemen. The UN took notice and warned that destroying the port would make a "tipping point", and crossing that line would lead to a large-scale famine and death thatis impossible to prevent. In Sweden, both parties agreed on a ceasefire after six months of

aggravated fighting. The Stockholm agreement asked both parties to address the conditions in Taiz, create a system for exchanging prisoners, and relinquish their troops from the Hudaydah (OSESGY, 2018). In July 2019, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a key ally of Saudi Arabia in the war which had faced international criticism of its conduct, announced a withdrawal of its forces from Yemen.

In August, fighting erupted in the south between Saudi-backed government forces and an ostensibly allied southern separatist movement supported by the UAE, the Southern Transitional Council (STC).

Forces loyal to the STC, which accused Mr Hadi of mismanagement and links to Islamists, seized control of Aden and refused to allow the cabinet to return until Saudi Arabia brokered a power-sharing deal in November 2019. It was hoped that the agreement would pave the way for a political settlement, and eventually end the civil war. However, increased air and missile strikes on many frontlines, raised the number of hostilities between coalition-led forces and the Houthis. Following the declaration of autonomy in Aden in April 2020, the STC brokered a peace deal with the internationally recognized government and announcing that they would take control of southern provinces and port city (Wintour, 2020).

Although Saudi Arabia declared a ceasefire following the Covid 19 outbreak, the Houthis did not agree to a cessation of hostilities and called for an end to the sea and air blockades in Hudaydah and Sana'a. Houthis further initiated to capture Marib (last international government) through an offensive in February 2021 and targeted international airports, facilities, and oil tankers of Saudi Arabia through missile airstrikes. In response, the coalition targeted Sana'a (capital of Yemen). The clash has killed hundreds of fighters and has been counted as the deadliest one since 2018, also complicating the peace process (UN Security Council /14494, 2012).

1.2 Economic Outlook

Yemen is one of the Arab countries that highly depends on its decreasing revenues from gas and oil reserves. While the war has worsened medical, water, food resources, unemployment and created a humanitarian crisis since 2015, it also has devastated critical infrastructure and destroyed the economy. Even before the war, in many parts of the country, depletion of water and oil resources, years of corruption, and mismanagement had caused underdevelopment, chronic poverty, and minimal access to fundamental rights and services, including health care, water, and electricity. The situation has worsened due to war, and much help would be needed after the civil war comes to an end (World Bank, 2021).

Several Yemeni citizens are now dependent on remittances and financial aid due to the protracted humanitarian crisis and Covid-19 conditions. Following the minimization of humanitarian operations, shortages in fuel supply, increased prices of foods, trade disruptions, and currency disruption rapid decline is observed in socio-economic conditions. In 2021, the addition of strain in the form of fragmentation of macroeconomic policies and intensive violence has pushed the economic condition on the verge of collapse and put the population at severe risk of famine. In 2020, the UN forecasted that approximately 24.3 million citizens were facing the threat of disease and hunger, out of which 14.4 million citizens needed help (Heritage, 2021).

In addition, approximately 19.9 million citizens do not have access to proper health care services, and approximately 20.5 million people are without adequate sanitation and safe water. Because of such conditions, Yemen has been surrounded by mass outbreaks of diseases like Dengue Fever, measles, diphtheria, and cholera. In 2018 and 2019, Yemen faced massive currency depreciation that has caused long-term inflationary pressure on its currency, worsening the humanitarian crisis. Activities related to private sectors have also been severely affected by the disruption in financial services and infrastructure. Approximately 40 percent of Yemini families have lost their primary source of income and now may not have enough money to buy the minimum food to survive. Before the conflict, almost 29 million (half of the population) were affected by poverty. Nowadays almost 71 to 78 percent of the population is affected by poverty and women suffer from the effects of poverty more than men (World Bank, 2021).

1.3 The Humanitarian Consequences

The war between Saudi-backed Yemeni government has transformed into a brutal and multi-layered conflict with the involvement of the United States, Iranian-backed Houthi, STC UAE supported, and local actors such as AQAP. While citizens and generations carry the

effects of military hostilities and unlawful practices from both non-state and state armed groups, some signs of the abating conflict can be seen as it enters the seventh year of the war. Intensified conflicts have caused severe human rights violations throughout Yemen. It is reported that over 233,000 Yemenis have died due to the humanitarian crisis and war at the end of 2019. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, since March 2015, approximately 20,000 Yemenis have been documented as being wounded or killed as a result of war and almost 16 million people wake up every day with hunger due to a man-made humanitarian crisis (UN Humanitarian, 2020). In addition, according to a report published by the UN refugee agency in November 2020, more than three million people have been displaced because of war, and approximately one million have been displaced internally. The blockade of air, sea, and land by the coalition forces, has restricted a significant supply of medicine, and food (UNHCR, 2020). Furthermore, according to the United States-based ACLED Project, since 2015, more than 100,000 deaths have occured due to the poor infrastructure, healthcare services, and lack of food. Moreover, the UN has found that both coalition forces and Houthis have attacked civilian locations, breaking international humanitarian law (Robinson, 2021). In 2015, the coalition forces destroyed a hospital operated under International Relief Organization doctors. Both sides were involved in forced disappearance, arbitrary arrests, and torture.

In this regard the United Nations Office for the Cooperation of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) has stated that: "Almost half of Yemen's children under age 5 will suffer from acute malnutrition, including 400,000 who could die without urgent treatment." This is about 2.3 million children in Yemen. In particular, the UN is worried that Yemen will soon face the worst famine in decades (UNOCHA, 2021).

Yemen remains the world's worst humanitarian crisis as seven years of conflict have pushed up food and fuel prices, fighting and widespread disease have cut off the supply routes and the devastated economy has made it difficult for people to get food and medical equipment (United Nations, 2021).

2. United Nations' Involvement in Yemen (Parisa Abbasian)

2.1 UN early efforts for the power transition in Yemen

The 2011 mass uprising and the disintegration of compact between President Saleh's General People's Congress (GCP) and the official opposition of Joint Meeting Parties (including Islamist Islah party) raised international concerns over Al Qaeda in Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) takeover of the country in the event of civil war power vacuum. As the Yemen based Al Qaeda's foiled attack on an airliner on Detroit in December 2009 had led to

the formation of the Friends of Yemen Group to assist Sanaa's efforts in a counter-radicalization strategy, the escalation of the crisis in Yemen exacerbated the group's interventions to maintain stability in the region. The United Nations was one of the members of the group, for which rising tensions created an increased role in Yemen (Lackner, Why can't the United Nations bring peace to Yemen?, 2018; British Department for International Development, 2013). In April 2011, the UN began its work by appointing Moroccan-British diplomat Jamal Benomar as the special advisor on Yemen. After taking office, Benomar, whose experience with national dialogue in Iraq was considered an advantage, started his work by traveling to Sanaa to meet with Yemeni leaders. The soft intervention of the UN in Yemen created crucial space for dialogue by bringing all the Yemeni parties together. Benomar worked with major Yemeni parties to develop a mechanism to implement the GCC agreement during the months that the GCC pushed President Saleh to step down. As the crisis escalated and President Saleh refused to resign, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2014 in October 2011, pressuring President Saleh to sign the Gulf Cooperation Council initiative (British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 2013; Root & Salisbury, 2014). The GCC agreement signed on Nov 23, 2011, included an Implementation Mechanism drafted by the UN, which outlined a two-phase transition. In the first phase, the Implementation Mechanism had the disposition of President Ali Abdullah Saleh in exchange for his immunity and formation of the government of National Unity. The second phase comprised reconstruction of the security sector and convening a two-year National Dialogue Conference (NDC) among Yemen's competing identities to draft a new constitution (Brehony, 2015, pp. 3-5; Salmutter, 2017, pp. 7-10).

The Security Council buttressed peaceful transition in Yemen through the adoption of Resolution 2051 in June 2012, which called for the participation of all Yemeni parties in a peaceful, inclusive, orderly, and Yemeni-led political transition process. Additionally, to ensure the full implementation of UNSC 2014, 2051 Resolutions, and the GCC Agreement, the United Nations established the Office of the Secretary-General's Special Envoy in Yemen. With the increased UN intervention in Yemen, on the anniversary of the signing of the Gulf Cooperation Council Agreement, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon visited Yemen in November

2012 to support the transitional regime and raise the UNSC members' awareness of the Yemeni crisis (Jafarova, 2014, pp. 47-48; Office of the Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on Yemen, 2013; UN Security Council, 2012). As the Implementation Mechanism progressed, the United Nations began to support the preparatory work of the National Dialogue Conference by working with President Hadi's office and all Yemeni stakeholders to facilitate the participation of the full spectrum of political and social forces in Yemeni society in the conference. With the formation of the Technical Committee, Benomar and his team further provided information in NDC discussions based on other countries' transitions and similar dialogue processes. The special advisor made a significant effort to ensure that NDC included previously marginalized groups, including women, youth, and the southern movement (al Hirak) (Zyck, 2014, pp. 5-7). Through the UN support and facilitation, Yemenis started the National Dialogue Conference in March 2013, receiving US $2 million in UN expertise and operational costs. The conference provided a platform for political and social groups to discuss new state structure, political reform, and internal conflict settlement. One crucial result of the conference was its vote for dividing Yemen into six regions to resolve the conflict. However, the lack of consensus among conference delegates on critical issues, including the power structure and provisions for transitional justice, delayed transition and prompted the Security Council to impose sanctions as a mechanism to expedite the power transfer. On February 26, 2014, the action was finally taken with Resolution 2140 calling for financial and travel restrictions on individuals or entities obstructing the transition in Yemen (Lackner, 2020, pp. 19-21; Burke, 2013, pp. 15-17; UN Security Council, 2014).

2.2 **The United Nations' response to the outbreak of Civil War**

While the United Nations focused exclusively on the NDC as its main concern, the Houthis increased their military control within the country. The six-region solution acted as a catalyst for raising the Houthis discontent leading to the violent expansion of their control over northern Yemen. Aware of the need to prevent Houthis' violence, in August 2014 the Security Council issued a Presidential Statement expressing concerns over the security crisis in Yemen in light of the actions taken by the Houthis. Nevertheless, the Houthis continued their acts of violence by capturing the capital and occupying central government institutions, including the army headquarters. As the last UN effort before the expansion of the conflict into the war, Benomar became involved in the Peace and National Partnership Agreement (PNPA) to end the Houthis campaign of violence and enable progress in the transition process. Yet following the formation of the new government in November 2014, the Houthis refused to fulfill their

part of the deal and called for the "re-establishment of state authority and the restoration of control over all the territory in line with the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference" (Embassy of the Republic of Yemen, 2018, pp. 2-4; Transfeld, 2018, pp. 51-52). Soon after that, in early 2015, the Houthis put President Hadi and his government under house arrest. As the crisis peaked in February 2015, the UNSC reacted by adopting Resolution 2201, demanding the Houthis to withdraw from government institutions, release the president and his government, and engage in good faith in United Nations-brokered negotiations. However, as the resolution explicitly did not authorize military intervention, the GCC strongly criticized it and threatened to take unilateral action. Following Hadi's escape from Sanaa and his request for military intervention to protect the country's constitutional legality, on Mar 22, 2015, the UNSC issued a Presidential Statement identifying the peaceful, inclusive, orderly, and Yemeni-led political process as the main solution to the Yemen crisis. Regardless, four days later, on Mar 24, a coalition led by Saudi Arabia intervened militarily in Yemen at the request of President Hadi to reinstate him in power (Feierstein, 2019, pp. 15-17; United Nations, 2015). With the launch of the Saudi led Decisive Storm, the UNSC that believed there is no military solution to the Yemen crisis adopted a resolution in April 2015. In Resolution 2216, the Security Council reiterated demands over the Houthis withdrawal from the seized areas and ceased all actions falling within the authority of Hadi's government and also imposed sanctions, including an asset freeze, travel ban, and arms embargo on individuals undermining stability in Yemen. Yet with declaring support for the GCC efforts, the UNSC resolution set the ground for military intervention and legitimized the Saudi-led offensive in Yemen. The inefficiency of Benomar's actions in resolving the crisis had eroded his credibility among all Yemeni parties leading to his resignation (United Nations, 2015; Salisbury, 2018, pp. 17-18).

2.3 **UN recent measures to reconcile the parties**

As Benomar left office, on Apr 24, the UN appointed Mauritanian Ismail Ould Cheikh Ahmed as the new Special Envoy to facilitate the UN activities in Yemen. After taking office, the Special Envoy brokered successive rounds of consultations between the Yemeni parties to end the conflict and resume a peaceful transition process, including direct talks in Switzerland in June and December 2015 and Kuwait from April to August 2016. With the lack of progress in UN-sponsored negotiations, Ahmed presented a roadmap to the Security Council consistent with the UNSC resolutions, the GCC agreement, its implementation mechanism, and the outcomes of the National Dialogue Conference. Under the roadmap, a new vice president, acceptable to both parties, would be appointed, and President Hadi would transfer his powers

to him. The roadmap also foresaw the withdrawal of Houthis and allied forces, the handover of weapons, and a national unity government formation. However, the parties rejected the proposal (United Nations Department of Public Information, 2017, pp. 92-93; United Nations, 2016; UN Security Council, 2017). After mid-2017, Ahmed sought to broker an agreement to prevent the coalition's offensive against the critically important city of Hodeidah. Along with the Yemeni Government's letter to the council expressing its full support for the Special Envoy's proposal, in June 2017, the UNSC issued a Presidential Statement supporting

Ahmed's proposal for the UN management of the Hodeidah port and installation of cranes to replace those destroyed by coalition airstrikes. Yet, the Houthis accused the Special Envoy of being biased and ceased their cooperation with the United Nations. With the resignation of Ahmed in February 2018, the newly appointed British Special Envoy Martin Griffiths started his tenure with a "listening tour" of senior Yemeni and coalition partners and further supported the consultations in Geneva in September 2018 between the Houthis and Hadi governments. While there was no indication of either sides' flexibility, the assassination of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate general in Istanbul by the staff of crown prince Mohammad Ben Salman changed the position of Saudi supporters and triggered a rush in negotiations (Lackner, 2020, pp. 25-27). With the Special Envoy's efforts in building confidence, the parties came together in Stockholm, Sweden, on Dec 13, 2018, and agreed on a series of undertakings. Under the deal, the parties agreed to form a committee including the civil society representatives to work toward the de-escalation of fighting in Taiz, swap of 16,000 prisoners, a ceasefire on the city of Hodeida and ports of Hodaidah, Raas Issa, and Salif, and redeployment of forces on both sides (Dijkstal, 2019; UN Security Council, 2018). Accordingly, on Jan 19, 2019, the UNSC adopted Resolution 2452 endorsing agreements between the Yemeni Government and the Houthis. The resolution further authorized the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Hodeidah Agreement (UNMHA) to support implementing a ceasefire and redeployment of forces in those areas. With Hadi's request for the UNSC's help following the military confrontation between his government and Southern separatists in Aden, the council issued a Presidential Statement on Aug 29, 2019. The United Nations used the statement to express its full support to the Special Envoy's work in Yemen and Saudi Arabia's efforts for convening a dialogue in Jeddah to resolve the crisis (United Nations, 2019; UN Security Council, 2019). In the wake of the Covid-19 outbreak and Secretary-General Guterres's call for a ceasefire in global conflicts, the Special Envoy sought

to broker a peace deal (Joint Declaration) between the Houthis and Yemeni governments nationwide ceasefire alongside a series of confidence-building measures and resumption of peace talks. However, despite Griffith's effort, the Joint Declaration received relatively little attention, as the Yemeni government rejected the proposal deeming it pro Houthi and in contradiction with the peace references, including the GCC initiative, the outcomes of NDC, and the international resolutions (Jalal, 2020; Jalal, 2021; UN Security Council, 2020).

3. Problems, Weaknesses and Future Prospects (Chloé Debons)

3.1 The challenge of internationalized civil wars

As previously assessed and while various humanitarian entities - about 10 UN-affiliated organisations, 31 International NGOs and 92 National NGOs (OCHA, 2018) - have been involved in seeking to relieve the humanitarian disaster in the country, the internationalized dimension of the conflict has both prolonged and complicated the stake of the conflict (Regan, 2002) in addition to making it deadlier (Einsiedel, 2017). Indeed, regional involvement from Saudi Arabia especially through the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) coalition, has complicated the stakes of the conflicts, enabled new local actors to gain power (i.e. AQAP) and worsened the humanitarian situation. However, it is important to keep in mind that the civilwar in Yemen consists of several different layers of external involvement going beyond regionalism.

The main issue preventing the United Nations' to achieve its primary goal of safeguarding international security and peace is the persistence of great power interests within the permanent members of the Security Council (P-5) which have complicated both the peace process and the effective protection of civilians. Indeed, internationalized civil wars such as the one currently unfolding in Yemen not only implies direct involvement from regional states but can also take the form of indirect involvement by P-5 powers, thus indirectly blocking effective decisions to be taken. Furthermore, it touches upon a far more sensitive issue by eroding the legitimacy of the supreme international safe guarder of peace and security while failing at the responsibility to protect civilians. Guided by double standards, the primary body designed to refrain and/or contain international civil wars from breaching international peace and security is effectively becoming an active agent in what it was built against.

In the case of Yemen, indirect involvement by P-5 members can be found in two different forms. On the one hand, indirect intervention by P5 great powers can take the form of support for one - internal or external - player in the conflict by supplying material support such as arms or logistics. For instance, the Yemeni civil war is complicated by the interventionof external players: the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) coalition, logistically supported by the UK, France and the US[1] – three of the five permanent members at the Security Council – which are all providing weapons to Saudi Arabia while at the same time, ironically, promoting humanitarian values (Jarhum, 2017;Cooper, 2018). The support of the UNSC has contributed to worsen the conflict, enabling Saudi Arabia to inflict greater humanitarian distress in Yemen with almost total impunity. On the other hand, more frequently, permanent members of the UNSC also get indirectly involved in these conflicts by using their veto power to block resolutions and create a situation of gridlock within the Council itself whenever intervention efforts might impede on their respective interests. For instance, in 2018 in Yemen, a resolution calling for a ceasefire and resumption of humanitarian aid was vetoed by the US solely due the blackmailing of their Saudis allies, threatening to abandon any negotiations in process. Consequently, the problem is a combination of regional interests of Saudi Arabia and other regional players (UAE, Iran) as well as logistic support of UNSC. Nevertheless, the lack

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[1] Before Joe Biden's decision, shortly after his investiture, to stop supplying logistic support

of action of the UNSC to end mass atrocities in Yemen implies that P-5 members are indirectly worsening the humanitarian crisis. While the permanent members pursued their interests, the Republic of Yemen was reported in 2018 by the United Nations' Secretary-General Antonio Guterres as being the country facing the world's worst humanitarian crisis with about 80% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance (Guterres, 2018).

3.2 **Towards a reform of the UNSC?**

As previously discussed, despite a distinction between humanitarian and political spheres at the UN, there is a real issue of politicization of aid in humanitarian crises especially in internationalized civil wars. Overcoming the tendency of UNSC P-5 members to apply double standards in such urgent humanitarian situations would ideally lead to a reform of the SC in order to overcome any veto blockages or indirect involvement of the P-5. However, this

possibility explored by many scholars and discussed within the United Nations is not feasible nor adequate in the near future as it would neither be technically possible nor politically viable. Indeed, it would require at least two-thirds of UN member states to agree in a vote at the UNGA in addition to being ratified by the two-third of Member states. In addition, even more problematic, all of the P-5 Members would have to unanimously agree. Consequently, we suggest a different alternative to overcome any veto in the cases of mass atrocities and humanitarian disasters as currently unfolding in the Republic of Yemen. When one thinks about the protection of civilians during a civil/internationalized conflict the principle of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)[2] is often seen as means to ensure the protection of the populations during a conflict. Therefore, in order to respond to humanitarian mass atrocities in this modern form of conflict, the R2P principle needs to become a norm embraced by all

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[2] The word principle is used here as we believe R2P has not reached the status of a norm yet

international actors (Brunnée, Jutta and Toope, Stephen J., 2008) and which is adapted to the challenges of the 21st century. Furthermore, it has been argued that the R2P contains two potential norms: the responsibility of states to protect their people (Pillar I) and the responsibilities of the international community (Pillars II&III) (Bellamy, 2019). With the most controversial component of R2P restraining its operational viability and global recognition as a norm being its third Pillar (Fiott, 2015).

In short, the issue is that the third Pillar of the R2P predominantly depends on the UNSC. Therefore, the indirect involvement of P-5 powers in such humanitarian distress has to be limited to avoid an abusive use of vetoes. Thus, we believe that following the consequences of intervention in Libya, the deadlock in Syria, and the current situation in Yemen, the most viable option is to implement a restrain on the veto based on existing attempts by the Global Centre for R2P in 2015 (Global Centre for R2P, 2015), the ACT Code of Conduct (2013) and the French-Mexican initiative (2015). However, this restraint rather than a formal interdiction to use the veto in cases of mass atrocities and humanitarian disasters, should remain a voluntary "responsibility not to veto". In other words, this voluntary and informal New Code of Conduct (added as a fourth Pillar not to disrupt the whole principle of R2P which states would potentially reconsider if Pillar IV became an integral part of) would favour dissuasion/persuasion rather than using coercion which would more likely be politically rejected by the P-5. It is true that this approach might sound benign and optimistic, but it is in the interests of the P-5 themselves to embrace it as, over the past few years, the legitimacy and

authority of the SC has come into question especially with a failure to pursue its responsibility under the R2P (Illingworth, 2020) and in achieving its main role of safeguarding international peace and security. Furthermore, although it is purely based on the will of states, restraining from using the veto will increase the overall legitimacy of UNSC whose special power was not meant to be a tool to block and curb the functioning of the SC in safeguarding international peace and security (UN Charter 1 UNTS XVI, Article 1: 1945). In fact, 'repeated vetoes like in the case of Syria undermine the authority and eventually the centrality of the Security Council, restricting the veto gives it its full international effectiveness' (Vilmer, 2018).

3.3 **Proposal of a New Code of Conduct (NCC)**

In cases where a veto is nevertheless used by at least one of the members, the latter should, in the first place, publicly justify its use which should be related to international peace and security and not based on national interests. This mechanism of naming and shaming would avoid P-5 states to use their vetoes repeatedly and without any real reasons. Secondly, wherever the UNGA considers that there might be an abuse in the use of veto, it can turn to the ICJ for an Advisory Opinion to achieve clarity on the use of veto in specific situations. Both these mechanisms have the goal to dissuade the P-5 members to use their veto power in cases of mass atrocities unless their vital interests are engaged. The ICJ will therefore analyze the situation paying attention to a potential direct or indirect involvement of the permanent member using its veto and how the latter impact on the humanitarian situation in the internationalized conflict. In its practical implication, for the case of Yemen, both these mechanisms would mostlikely dissuade P-5 member states from using their veto especially those who, while promotinghuman rights, are providing logistic support worsening the crisis. In cases of a firm deadlock in the SC despite the New Code of Conduct, this legal clarification will still be useful to underline the seriousness of the situation and convince the GA to intervene through other means, such as a "Uniting For Peace" resolution.

4. Conclusion

In order to prevent similar humanitarian catastrophes from unfolding and to react to the ones already taking place, states have to be persuaded to focus on common values and on the importance of human rights before opposing any attempts to solve the issue. More specifically, permanent members of the Security Council ought to realize that using their veto in cases of mass atrocities covered by the R2P, constitutes an infringement of the Council's legitimacy and more importantly a threat to its primary goal of safeguarding international peace and security. We believe that the good will of states will determine the future of R2P and its crystallization as a norm as such to reflect a broader consensus in the international community.

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What can we do better for peace? – Reflections from Colombia's examples

The pandemic entered without knocking on the door. The effects of the pandemic have been felt practically all over the globe and in a variety of forms that affect all areas of our lives. After the confinement measures, the pandemic put a stop to the physical displacement of many of us. But unfortunately, it did not stop many other things. The widening of the socio-economic gap was not stopped by the virus. The uncontrolled exploitation of natural resources, such as the deforestation of the Amazon, was not stopped by the virus either. And the virus could not silence weapons either. Conflicts continue, as if the tragedies of a pandemic did not generate enough pain and suffering. What can we do for a more peaceful world? This paper proposes two examples of what needs to be done to move towards a safer and more peaceful world. These two proposals, while taking Colombia as an example, are universally applicable. The first is the need to understand that the pain of others is one's own pain, and this at all levels of our societies; and the second is to guarantee protection to those who are committed to peace.

Understanding that the pain of others is one's own pain – The work of the Commission for the Clarification of the Truth

The "General Agreement for the End of the Conflict and the Establishment of a Stable and Lasting Peace" signed at the end of 2016 with the FARC-EP (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army) is a step of great value to achieve a peaceful Colombia. This agreement is considered the most comprehensive in recent decades. It is worth highlighting, for example, the importance given to the rights of victims and the gender perspective taken into account in each of the components of the agreement. One of these components[1] is the "Integral System of Truth, Justice, Reparation and Non-Repetition", which, in turn, is composed of five mechanisms, among them the "Commission for the Clarification of Truth, Coexistence and Non-Repetition" (CEV)[2], which seeks to understand the conflict, its reasons and consequences, and for this purpose provides spaces to listen to both the victims and the different perpetrators of violence, as well as to the population in general. Its three objectives are: to clarify what happened, to promote recognition of what happened (i.e., not to deny the armed conflict or its consequences), and to promote coexistence.[3] The work of the Commission is of gigantic dimensions and by the end of 2021 the final report of what has been gathered these 5 years will be made public.

Among the various and valuable initiatives of the CEV is Frente al espejo, a television series that

won the award for best Colombian journalistic production in 2020 (India Catalina Awards), available on national and regional channels, and which seeks to invite Colombia "to look at itself in the mirror so that it can recognize itself before its own reality".[4] This series, as well as the rest of CEV's gigantic work, seeks, among other objectives, to bring closer the cruelty and the dimension of the conflict to those who were not "that affected" by the conflict and invite us to develop empathy for the pain suffered by so many Colombians. The more the cruelty of violence becomes evident and the more we put ourselves in the shoes of the victims and perpetrators, the better we will understand the conflict and the less we will be willing to tolerate violence. This same empathy and understanding of what has happened allows us to create a social tissue too.

And it must be emphasized that both the farmer and the businessman, as well as the president, are part of society. It is not only the common people who must take care of the social tissue. Companies, multinationals, the media, as well as governments themselves must also do so. It suffices to see the insults and violence witnessed in the parliamentary sessions of various countries to realize that those elected by the people are not setting an example. How is it possible that those entities from where the systems that govern our societies are structured do not have an atmosphere of peace? Is empathy present in the diplomatic world? Are the representatives of each country guided by self-interests or inspired by the search for a common good beyond their borders? As was said in the first session of the GSP59 on Tuesday, the great and medium powers, even in the midst of a pandemic, continue to seek their own self-interest. The international social tissue must be promoted at the higher levels too.

Guarantee protection for social leaders and ex-combatants.

We live in societies with different degrees and forms of violence. Colombia is no exception, and it is a violence that, fortunately and in the good sense of the word, is becoming increasingly unbearable. In fact, "el paro", that is to say the recent social protests that took place in the main cities of Colombia for a month and a half since the end of April this year and which embodied the discontent of society, denounced various forms of violence: the violence of the tax reform that would negatively affect the middle class and the lower strata of society; police violence during the protests, including sexual violence; violence towards the environment by mining companies and the use of glyphosate; and also violence towards social leaders and ex-combatants.

In the communiqué of April 19, 2021, the Special Jurisdiction for Peace (JEP), highlights that since the signing of the Agreement at the end of 2016, the number of murdered social leaders rose to 904, while that of former FARC-EP combatants to 276, of which 253 appeared before the JEP.[5] The

situation is such that it puts at risk "the mission of the JEP, the CEV and the UBPD".[6] In this communiqué, the Ombudsman's Office is requested to "adopt an ombudsman resolution that outlines a road map" to identify the causes and strengthen the protection measures.

Although there is a National Protection Unit (Unidad Nacional de Protección)—which is the state entity that determines who needs protection according to risk and provides protection measures—there are several failures recognized by the director of the entity himself [7], among them: the entity's financial deficit; the structural failures such as the lack of technological structure for data management; and the alleged cases of corruption and impartiality of the entity.

The dilemma is obvious: how is peace going to be achieved if those who bet on peace are being killed? Not only are more violence and pain being perpetrated, but peaceful human capital is being taken away from the country and humanity. It is therefore imperative that, as long as violence continues, mechanisms are created, improved and adequately financed so that social leaders and ex-combatants are guaranteed security. But not only that. It is also necessary to inform social leaders about the protection mechanisms and that the people have confidence in these same mechanisms, as stated by Ángelo Cardona[8], human rights defender and activist for peace and disarmament:

> In terms of security and protection […] there are two big challenges, the first is that most social leaders/human rights defenders do not know how to act or who to turn to when they receive threats. So, the first thing is to generate tools and dialogues where they can be taught step by step what to do if they receive threats. The other big challenge is related to corruption and the discrediting of the institutions of the current government. Many social leaders/human rights defenders do not feel safe to contact the stipulated government institutions to request protection or raise cases of threats for fear of being profiled by the National Government, which has publicly expressed its opposition to the Peace Accord. For this reason, one of the great challenges of the current government is to regain the trust of the Colombian people in their institutions.

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To conclude, the corona virus pandemic has shaken the world. However, it did not put a stop to the destruction of ecosystems, nor to the social inequalities, nor to the perpetrations of violence. The pandemic has made more evident the wounds and pain we carry with us as humanity. Commissions

that seek truth-telling, reconciliation and non-repetition are essential to healing not only as countries but also as humanity. The empathy that is cultivated in spaces of dialogue and initiatives as those proposed by the CEV, as well as facing devastating consequences of violence, make us less and less tolerant to the violence perpetrated to others. In the meantime, and parallel to this, guaranteeing protection to those committed to peace is essential.

I only hope that this year's key terms "reset", "recovery" and "resilience" rhyme with "reconciliation" and "non-repetition".

Author: Megan Byrne

On March 23rd, 2020, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres initiated an urgent appeal for global ceasefire as a consequence to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The aim was to instead focus on the 'true fight' – defeating COVID-19. This proposal was propositioned with the objectives to not only prevent the spread of COVID-19 but also create opportunities to provide the necessary aid, create opportunities for diplomatic discussions and also bring hope to individuals in conflict zones who were particularly vulnerable to the pandemic due to a lack of resources caused by conflict. This ceasefire was endorsed by over 180 countries, the United Nations Security Council, regional institutions, non-governmental organisations and millions of citizens globally, demonstrating a collective push towards global peace and reconciliation. However, despite the enthusiasm for the ceasefire, this was not entirely successful. Countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Libya and Syria have endorsed the call for a global ceasefire during the pandemic, however, these conflicts have continued and, in some cases, intensified. The pandemic has contributed towards greater political unrest in some regions due to instances such as delayed elections, food insecurity and mass unemployment. Additionally, terrorist organisations have taken advantage of this political instability and have contributed towards the increasing conflicts and security issues globally. Consequently, the actual response to Secretary-General Guterres' appeal for a global ceasefire has been mixed, with conflicts in some regions halted whereas others have continued with an unbated intensity.

The current global peace and security framework of the United Nations is led by the United Nations Security Council, which the principal crisis-management body that deals with issues such as civil wars, natural disasters, arms control and terrorism. It is one of the leading sections of the United Nations that has contributed towards the global response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It offers a forum for mediation and conflict resolution that creates an atmosphere of sympathy towards others. Additionally, in the last few years, the United Nations Security Council has highlighted the principle of the 'Right to Protect' – that states have a responsibility to protect their populations from crimes against humanity and the international community has a responsibility to use peaceful means to protect threatened populations. During the height of the pandemic, it ensured that all states had the means to help their populations with access to healthcare, PPE, food and basic human necessities. Currently, this has transitioned to a stress upon vaccine equality and ensuring a fair COVID-19 vaccination roll-out and there is access to the vaccine globally. Currently, there is the particular need to ensure stability and peace worldwide as otherwise vaccine supply chains and distributions would be hindered by outbreaks of conflict, particularly in poorer regions who are relying on vaccines from other states.

Although Secretary-General Guterres' call for a global ceasefire was largely successful, it can be suggested that the current global peace and security framework is not optimal to responding to the challenges across the world. For the remainder of this report, I will propose several changes that could potentially optimise the role of the United Nations Security Council in the global sphere.

Firstly, there is the argument that there is the need for more state actors involved in the UN Security Council as the nature of the crises discussed have grown to a global level. As previously mentioned, the United Nations Security Council is not only designed to address and mediate conflicts, but it is also responsible for tacking natural disasters and global events. COVID-19 has been a prime example to demonstrate the global impact that natural disasters such as pandemics can have and the necessity for global action to be taken. It is questionable whether fifteen member states can be responsible for leading the global response to global incidents like the pandemic. If the number of member states of the UN Security Council increased, it could be inferred that it would be easier to create a global response to crises and implement the policies necessary to respond to these challenges.

Secondly, it could be suggested that the representation of states in the members of the United Nations Security Council could be improved to become more reflective of modern, 21st century international relations. Outside of the five permanent members of the Security Council, the remaining ten seats are split between 5 different regions – the African group has three seats; the Asia-Pacific Group has two seats; the Eastern European group has one seats; the Latin American and Caribbean Group has two seats and the Western European and Others Group has two seats. A suggested reform to help to respond to the global challenges is to alter the allocation of seats in addition to enlarging the size of the Security Council. For example, it could be suggested that there is a necessity to add a new Arab region, as Arab states have become increasingly powerful and influential in international relations in the last few decades. Currently an Arab seat alternates between the Asian-Pacific Group and the African Group due to an informal agreement. It could be argued that as Arab states have grown increasingly influential and have the resources to become more involved in tackling global challenges, it may be necessary to have a separate Arab group in the UN Security Council. Furthermore, it is important that the UN Security Council is reflective of regional powers that have become increasingly prominent in international relations. For example, Brazil, Germany, India, Japan, Nigeria and South Africa have all sought to secure permanent seats of their own. I do not think it would be realistic to double the number of permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, nor do I believe it would be successful due to unique abilities for permanent members like the power to veto. However, I do think that the representation of states needs to be altered in the Security Council to be reflective of great powers in all regions.

A final change to the United Nations Security Council that could be implemented to improve the current global peace and security framework in responding to global challenges could be to prioritise mediation in early levels of conflict to stop conflict occurring rather than a focus on conflict resolution. The United Nations Security Council could have the ability to offer a forum to help cooperation in regional disagreements between member states as it would allow for a neutral ground for mediation to occur. This would be more beneficial as it would reduce the chance for military action, civilian causalities, destruction and other grievances that are a consequence of armed conflict. By focusing on de-escalation to address the root causes of conflict through mediation, it would reduce the need for conflict resolution and state reconstruction and ultimately, the risk of armed conflict would be reduced. However, it is optimistic to believe that a focus on mediation and cooperation would stop all armed conflicts and that it will be clear which situations are in need of de-escalation and mediation. Yet, I believe that a preventative approach towards conflict will reduce the probability of armed conflict between states.

Although UN Secretary-General Guterres' call for global ceasefire during the pandemic was largely successful, there has still been instances in the last 18 months where conflicts have continued and even increased. The current framework to address global security issues of the United Nations Security Council is largely successful in responding to challenges, however, I have suggested three realistic changes that could be implemented to optimise its role in responding to global conflicts. First, I have suggested that there is a need for actors to be involved in the Security Council, due to the increasingly global problems that need to be addressed. Secondly, I suggested an alternative method to the representation of states and their regions so that it is more reflective of regional powers in the 21st century. Finally, I have suggested that there needs to be a greater stress on preventing conflict by creating a forum for mediation and de-escalation to address the root of conflict, rather than focusing on conflict resolution and state reconstruction.

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The United Nations' (UN) creation came with a motivation "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" (Preambule to the UN Charter). Indeed, the largest forum of world leaders finds itself working through intricacies of politics, international law and principles year-round in order to provide for the human rights of the world's people. This can be through, amongst others, development, humanitarian aid and assistance but also peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy. And when tumultuous factors are added into the equation, there is a need for increased vigilance in dealing with conflict zones and its populations. Crisis Group (2020) reiterates the effects that the pandemic has and is expected to have on global peace. Needless to say, there has been continued escalation of conflicts on the global level despite the UN Secretary-General's calls for a global ceasefire. This paper therefore aims to take a look at the global peace and security framework and evaluates whether it is adequate for the challenges that the world is facing. First, we will take a look at what this framework is, with a focus on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and how it has reacted during the pandemic to threats to global peace. We will then delve into the reform debate to take a look at its intricacies and whether we can single out solutions, at least partial, to the issues faced.

The Global peace and security framework

This paper builds on the thought that although multiple bodies, organisations and entities are eventually responsible for the maintenance of global peace, the UNSC is the most influential given its prerogatives.

The General Assembly (GA) "Uniting for Peace" resolution 377 (V) comes to mind when thinking of a balancing prerogative to the UNSC veto. It allows the GA to consider security issues when the UNSC fails to act (usually due to a veto), in order to restore and maintain global peace and security (United Nations, 2019). Despite multiple situations where critics of the UNSC deem failures to act due to vetoes (notably on Palestine and Syria) in the 21st century, this resolution has not been evoked since 1997.

Peacekeepers are an instrumental part of the global personnel attempting to keep the world afloat, and although employed and deployed by the UN Secretariat, this deployment necessits a UNSC resolution allowing the process to take place (United Nations Website).

Other various organisations and entities are part of the global peace and security framework through their work on peacebuilding (e.g. World Bank though development projects), demining (e.g. UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS)) and aiding vulnerable populations especially in conflict zones (e.g. UN Women, OCHA etc.).

Reforms have been taking place in order to enhance the system such as the creation of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA) (Universal Rights Group, 2020). Although good additions. The current system still needs a reform of the UNSC for the reason mentioned before - its prerogatives.

With the creation of the UN came the UNSC in 1945, originally consisting of 5 permanent members and 6 non-permanent ones elected by the UNGA for two year terms. 1965 brought a UN Charter amendment which allowed the only reform of the Security Council, increasing the number of non-permanent members for the total number of seats to be 15 (Britannica, 2020). No further reform of the body has taken place since.

Adequacy of the Security Council

Whilst it is incontestable that the UN has done a lot of good for the populations of the world, critics of its operations and procedures often make a reference to the Security Council's inadequacy and ineffectiveness. In fact, a specific recurring argument is the fact that the UNSC has failed to act in time on multiple occasions, notably Rwanda in 1994, Bosnia in 1995, Sudan in 2000 etc.

The context of the pandemic has rendered the work of the SC even more difficult, due to logistical issues amongst others. Another reason that seems possible to infer from the an article on the Security Council Report (2020) is that the politicisation of COVID19 could have hindered the work, with claims from members that the issue is not part of the council's prerogatives or a non-agreement on the release of an official unified statement on the pandemic. Regardless, with the SG's multiple calls for a global ceasefire and the fact that the body has previously dealt with similar situations (i.e. during the Ebola crisis) - therefore could rely on its precedent Resolution 2439 regarding Ebola in the DRC to call for a ceasefire in a specific country during a pandemic - the SC has its tools available to continue its work.

Liaising both the critics of the SC and the pandemic, the latest backlash arises in regards to the situation in Palestine during the pandemic. Heavy and repeated commitment of international crimes have taken place and the death toll is so dynamic that giving the specific number at time of writing would be obsolete, especially at the rate that the international community is taking to react. There has been no adequate or appropriate reaction to the newest waves of aggression so far. The example of the Palestinian question is pertinent because of the ally Israel has as a Permanent Member of the SC. The furthest the SC has gone so far in dealing with the issue has been the release of an official statement calling for a full ceasefire (UN News, 2021).

Answering the question of the adequacy of the SC to deal with the issues of the present can be answered by a comment made by Samantha Powers (US Ambassador to the UN) in 2004 to AlJazeera English: "It is the permanent members who decide when atrocities warrant humanitarian intervention, but this decision is made by two of the planets' worst human rights

abusers [she means China & Russia] and one country [the US] that exempts itself from most international human rights treaties" (AlJazeera English, 2013). In between the politicization of human rights issues, the attempts to use procedural tricks (of which attempting to pass new resolutions as amendments for them to be voted on first according to AlJAzeera English, 2018) and the abuse of veto power, it is no question that there needs to be reform - and the discussion of this reform has been in the making for years.

What reform?

There are several issues that come with the question of reform. First, the reform of the SC necessits an amendment of the UN Charter, which proves to be a difficult task to achieve. Article 108 of the Charter states that an amendment would require a ⅔ majority adoption of the GA members, ⅔ ratification of member states, including the 5 permanent members of the SC (United Nations, 1973). From the amount of deadlock in the council, it proves to be a difficult feat for these states to lose their grip on global power.

Should a reform actually take place, focus so far has been given to the need to remediate the issue of representation, especially given that the current structure is anachronistic, with permanent members chosen based on the context of 1945. The direction has been towards creating more seats to reflect the global situation (AlJazeera English, 2013). The so called G4 (India, Japan, Brazil and Germany) had been looking to become Permanent members and other seats would be added as non-permanent ones to increase the ratio of represented states versus member states. Ironically, no Arab or African state is represented in that draft version 3 of the SC as a Permanent Member. The question of representation is a tricky one, with the criteria list for Permanent Membership problematic: Is it economic strength? Contribution to peacekeeping? Human Rights soundness - based on what indicator? Furthermore, a UK ex-diplomat Carne Ross states that he finds it disturbing that in SC discussion, there is no representation of the people most affected by the issue addressed via an official representative (Syrians, Iraqis and Kosovars were his example).

An option for the SC's current work to be fulfilled could be one that has been on the table for years" the addition of medium term seats to be filled by countries elected by the GA to sway the council (Uniting for consensus camp) until more comprehensive reforms are on the table. This definitely does not replace the need for a reform that tackles deadlock and veto use in the case of mass atrocities. Questions here arise in regard to whether the veto could actually be eliminated when tackling R2P measures. Can the conception of veto in itself be altered? Could it turn into a "democratized" vote of Permanent Members on each veto (i.e. when the US vetoes, could there be a way to vote on the veto either through permanent member vote or SC vote)?

The evidence is that the United Nations system as a whole, including specifically the peace and

security framework has provided for a lot of relief across the world. It is also undeniable that there could have been more appropriate reactions to some situations that ended up being extremely costly in human lives and suffering. It is also evident that a short paper cannot be enough to tackle the intricacies of the global peace and security framework. In short, there needs to be a reform, and this will take years to accomplish (if possible). An intermediary solution should be found in order to avoid more disasters such as those seen in the pandemic in Artsakh and Palestine amongst others. This could be through the establishment of medium-term seats, even though it does not solve the issue of the veto. For a step forward to be taken, there needs to be a unification of countries and specifically the Permanent Members on the idea that the politicization of human lives will only cause more loss to everyone, everywhere.

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Overview of the global peace and security in a pandemic:

In the wake of a raging Coronavirus pandemic, the United Nations Secretary General, on March 23, 2020, called for a global ceasefire of all warring parties to focus all energies on fighting the common enemy: Covid-19, emphasizing how "the fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war." (UN, 2020). Despite some early optimism that the pandemic would bring the much-needed cooperation and generate motivations for a humanitarian pause in aggression, war and conflict have continued to wreak havoc around the world and the pandemic appears to have changed little in the existing patterns of global violence. In many conflict-affected states, violence remains unabated or has even escalated – making it challenging to render broad judgments about its costs.

There is not a straight, easy response to how the pandemic affect the risk of conflicts and prospects for peace around the world; but what may be plausible for gauging how Covid-19 could increase the risk of an armed conflict between the major powers will most certainly be different to assessing how civil unrest could worsen in vulnerable fragile states. The same cloud of uncertainty also engulfs current and prospective efforts to control violent conflicts. For every media report of a ceasefire or development in peace negotiations, there is a corresponding story that highlights a deteriorating situation in peacebuilding (Associated Press, 2021). And just as progress in one area can bolter the cause of peace in another, so the reverse is often true.

Many of the root causes of armed conflicts are likely to significantly worsen and entrench social and economic inequalities due to the pandemic. If this trend is not closely watched, it could expand the already delicate danger of conflict around the world (Blattman and Miguel, 2010; Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch, 2011). Loss of jobs because of lockdowns have disproportionally affected the youth – creating unemployment vacuum (low opportunity cost) and a major risk factor since unemployed youth can be easily recruited into armed rebellion (Collier and Heoffler, 2004). Increases in the price of food and commodities, and major disruptions in global trade are an additional cause of grievances and unrest (Hendrix and Haggard, 2015), especially in the African continent, which is a food importer and has long grappled with food security and hunger. The pandemic has also exacerbated and, to some extent, widened the gender inequality gap. Conflict tends to be prevalent in low-income countries, where women are more likely to be employed in the informal sector than men. Moreover, domestic violence, which primarily victimizes women, has substantially increased during lockdowns while public violence towards women has remained constant. Research has shown that gender disparity not only relates with an increased threat of armed

conflicts but also diminishes the likelihood of negotiated nonviolent resolutions to ongoing ones (Nagel, 2020).

Low state capacity in some conflict-affected states has led to inadequate public health responses which has strained government-society relations. Virus-mitigating policies such as lockdowns have proved to a bitter pill in conflict-affected countries where citizens' trust in the state is low and security outfits deployed to enforce public health guidelines, are equally mistrusted. The population's denial to comply with government mandates has already fueled violent clashes in several countries like the United States, Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, and Iraq. If not tamed, this violence might grow into anti-state mobilization, repeating patterns experienced during in the Ebola disaster (Gonzalez-Torres and Esposito, 2016).

The pandemic is having a toll on vulnerable, marginalized, and aggrieved groups – especially immigrants and minorities. A new study shows that coronavirus is piling hatred towards refugees and migrants (ICG, 2020). The tagging of the virus as "Chinese disease" has led to accusing of Asians, Hispanics, Africans, and immigrants more widely and drove a global increase in discrimination and xenophobia. Additionally, war-affected countries in Asia, South America, and Africa are home to the world's 70 million forcibly uprooted persons. These group is especially at a risk of wide-spread Covid-19 because of squalid living conditions in their camps.

From Africa to South Asia and Latin America, regimes across the globe have taken advantage of the Covid-19 vacuum to silence and arrest critics (Nygard et. el., 2020). Government exploitation of crises for political mileage is not a new prodigy. Yet, such violations of dissent and civil liberties – some of which are likely to persist after the pandemic – happen in the context of dictatorships across the world, thereby exacerbating preexisting tendencies and setting more states on a backsliding democratic path (Luhrmann, Edgell, and Maerz, 2020). Perhaps, it is too soon to envisage the impact of such democratic lapse on future conflicts. However, research has showed that tyranny can induce conflicts and escalate its effects by aggravating grievances (Young, 2013). Overall, it is safe to say, the pandemic will create a less democratic and less free world than it was before.

In the absence of international peacekeeping forces, government and rebel forces have expanded. Global leaders currently have devoted little time to conflicts and peace negotiations. For example, at the time of the Berlin conference in January 2020, safeguarding a ceasefire in Libya was a top-priority but this has stalled and no longer getting diplomatic attention. Democracy advocates preoccupation with mitigating the pandemic at their homes has limited their ability to root for pro-democracy allies and sanction human rights abuses. The UN peacekeeping and conflict monitoring missions have also been harshly curtailed by counter-pandemic actions (ICG, 2020). Yet, without renewed and sustained global diplomatic cooperation among actors with a stake in peace and stability, the effectiveness to counter the impact of Covid-19 on conflict will remain futile.

What can be realistically changed?

The COVID-19 pandemic has not only claimed millions of lives, but instigated political, social, and economic hardships around the world. The pandemic has proven to the global, regional, national, and local policymakers that we must collectively discuss how a sustainable society and world beyond the pandemic should be established. I have endeavored to explore a viable post-COVID-19 peace model – at a global and individual levels – as a plausible argument for achieving realistic peace and security in the post-pandemic era.

Perhaps the most critical question of the day facing all humanity is: what should we prioritize in the post-Covid recovery effort – economy or society; profit or strong public health; citizens' psychological physiological, and spiritual well-being or plutocracy? (Cherkaoui, 2020). Every attempt must be directed to building an equal and inclusive societies and human relationships that empower society to be more resilient and cooperative in the face of pandemics like COVID-19, and other global challenges. As global policymakers ponder the next world after the pandemic, they need to collectively respond to a critical question: What kind of visions would emerge from the COVID-19 crisis? The pandemic has offered an opportunity for academics, humanists, civil societies, and citizens to engage in a dialogue on a post-Coronavirus sustainable world – but we must also explore how we should redefine a sustainable and creative peace at individual levels and global scale.

Therefore, the international political arena in which differing and opposing economic and political ideologies, ambitions, and interests clash needs a sustainable and creative peace model that encompasses all humanity. Apart from envisioning a sustainable peace on a global level, holistic peace model for each human individual must be taken into serious account as part of post-COVID-19 vision. Normative and even unrealistic as it may sound, the traditional argument that human beings are passive actors in global politics needs to come to an end. Rather, it is a responsibility of each human citizen as a critical and transformative agent to contribute to building sustainable global peace.

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The COVID-19 pandemic is not only a health crisis but a multidimensional one, as its consequences go beyond medical and public health; threatening global peace and security by reversing peacebuilding gains and development progress, aggravating structural inequalities, poverty , violence and the humanitarian impact -particularly in countries affected by conflict; exacerbating social, political, and economic crisis, as well as producing a huge impact on human rights.

Due to this unexpected global enemy, on March 23rd, 2020, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres issued the called for a "global coronavirus ceasefire" that would allow actors to focus on battling this virus and to ensure that extremely vulnerable populations living in conflict areas keep getting aid while the pandemic lasts (UN News, 2020).

This peace tool is not the first time that is being used. There are also historical precedents in natural disasters that created conditions for peacemaking in affected regions, such as the 2004 Asian tsunami; and specifically, there is a precedent in a major health crisis, that is the Resolution 2439 on Ebola in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the Council called for a cessation of hostilities by all armed groups (Security Council Report, 2020).

At the beginning, the appeal was resonating across the world. Religious leaders such the Pope Francis, states, civil society, non-state actors and regional partners, endorsed it; and by April 2nd, 2020, approximately 70 UN Member States were supporting it, of which 11 were involved in long-term conflicts like Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Colombia, Libya, Myanmar, the Philippines, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Ukraine, and Yemen (United Nations Secretary-General, 2020).

However, we can see that the results of the call were very diverse depending on the country and actors involved (The International Crisis Group, 2020):

- **Cameroon**: The Rebel Southern Cameroons Defence Forces announced a temporary ceasefire on March 25th.
- **Colombia:** The National Liberation Army guerrilla group announced one-month unilateral ceasefire from April 1st.
- **Israel/Palestine:** Israel and the Palestinian Authority have cooperated on COVID-19 measures while the Gaza ceasefire held.

- **Libya:** Despite a brief humanitarian pause, clashes worsened between Tripoli government and Haftar-aligned forces.
- **Philippines:** Communist insurgents endorsed the UN appeal after the government announced a temporary ceasefire.
- **Sudan:** Unilateral ceasefires were announced by the government and most armed groups.
- **Thailand:** The largest rebel group in South endorsed the ceasefire in early April.
- **Ukraine:** Ceasefire call was welcomed by warring parties but fighting persisted.
- **Yemen:** After an earlier escalation of fighting, Saudi-led coalition announced two-week ceasefire with rebel Huthis.

Subsequently, on July 1st, 2020, the UN Security Council issued the Resolution S/RES/2532, which demanded a cessation of hostilities in all situations on its agenda to support the Secretary-General's appeal. The resolution also called for "all parties to armed conflicts to engage immediately in a durable humanitarian pause" of at least 90 consecutive days (UNdocs, 2020).

This Resolution generated that by July 2nd, 180 UN Member States, more than 800 civil society organisations and over 20 armed movements, had supported the call (Brangwin, 2020).

Despite the political support and hopes for the initiative, it had remained a rhetoric device only; not having been translated to reductions in violence across conflict-affected countries. Is true that there were some conflict parties that initially followed up on the ceasefire call, but the problem later was to get other armed actors to cooperate.

Even, Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, pointed out that despite the call, deadly conflicts have continued in many places and emerged in others (Security Council, 2021).

In addition, extremist groups have been taking profit from the uncertainty due to the spread of the virus, such as the Islamic State that has called for its supporters to spread the coronavirus and exploit the pandemic along with the protests (Glyn Williams, 2020).

Therefore, we can see that there was a huge distance between the declarations and the actions, due to the difficulties in the implementation of the global ceasefire.

PROBLEMS

The main problem detected with this initiative is that most conflicts have ancient roots, predating the COVID-19 pandemic; and likely to continue to exist during this crisis. Therefore, the actors have different and particular motivations, to get involved in conflict, for which the pandemic is not an obstacle for them (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Indeed, the actors that endorsed the appeal were a heterogeneous group, whose motives for supporting the appeal were different, as some supported it for the public image, without intention of putting it into practice, or for tactical political strategies. Others did for the real health advantages to their regions; and many other groups promised to temporarily stop hostilities but leaving a margin of play in the conditions to implement it (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Furthermore, Gowan (2020) explains that in each conflict, not all the actors were committed to carry out the ceasefire. In some conflicts, only one party accepted the initiative, and the other did not. Hence, in these cases the call has had no real effects.

Nevertheless, even when all the parties have agreed to pause conflict temporary, there was no ceasefire structure to implement it and translate a ceasefire offer into a technical agreement with clear terms and security guarantees from all parties. Causing that the belligerents have acted with distrust and insecurity about the application.

Another issue is the late action of the UN Security Council in issuing a resolution supporting Guterres's initiative. This occurred due to the discrepancies between the permanent members, which has caused a decrease in the political credibility of the ceasefire.

Consequently, it is possible to observe that the current global peace and security framework was not adequate to respond to this crisis and to the challenges of the 21st century. The current international peacemaking structures are facing complex challenges when dealing with new geopolitical situations, and the dynamics of conflict make it difficult for the states and multilateral institutions to engage with the actors in conflict effectively to address the peace and security threats.

FACING THE FUTURE

Learning from the Ceasefire Call´s problems and looking ahead, we can say that the peace initiatives

should be targeted to the context, in order to be translated to real facts. Since every conflict and country is different, an effective plan requires context targeted strategies.

In addition, the design of a peace initiative should be more realistic and planned. It cannot be thought that simply because international actors call for a cessation of hostilities, the belligerents will endorse it. They seek conflict with fighting motivations behind. Thus, a ceasefire appeal should be a well-organized plan with a written agreement, neutral parties to carry it out, security guarantees and by giving certain benefits to the belligerents, inducing them to actually reflect on the advantages of stopping fighting. For example, some armed groups could receive aid resources to help their supporters deal with the pandemic in exchange for the temporary cessation of hostilities. These benefits can be translated into medicines, medical assistance, COVID tests, hospital equipment, vaccines, among others.

Furthermore, in the middle of this type of crisis, the international cooperation and coordination between the actors must be strengthened with real diplomatic efforts. Considering how the Security Council performed, during critical and unexpected situations with global impact, a real, fast, coordinated, and collective support between actors, is vital.

On the other hand, keeping in mind the current legal framework for global peace and security; as the COVID-19 is a multidimensional crisis, the solution must be multifaceted, addressing the impacts in a comprehensive and united way.

One of the big problems is that efforts to address the crisis were fragmented. Building and sustaining peace requires addressing security, peace, human rights, humanitarian aid, development, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and good governance, in an integrated manner, as they are inextricably linked topics.

Recovery from COVID-19, must prioritize the multilateral cooperation to meet complex challenges effectively and the development of a collective security framework in a unified manner, having into consideration the nexus between human rights, humanitarian aid, development, peace, and security.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, with no country left unaffected, this pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of the multilateral system in dealing with peace and security threats from the crisis.

This crisis has taken the world by surprise, and it is understandable that in the face of despair, international actors act hastily to combat this new enemy. Nonetheless, the pandemic reinforces the idea that, to address global problems, the international action must be planned, coordinated, and organized. Not just sayings that are hard to be converted into sustainable acts.

Beyond the fact that the initiative at the beginning got a good response, the results gained have been very fragile and short-lived. In many countries, we have seen no let-up in fighting and some conflicts have even intensified. Therefore, the current global peace and security framework must be adapted for responding to the new global challenges and producing real impacts.

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During the pandemic, and facing the advent of numerous conflicts, the UN Secretary-General made several requests and demands for global ceasefires with speeches aimed at recalling the need to focus on the emergency at hand: the COVID-19 health crisis. However, according to the Peace Research Institute of Oslo (PRIO), the number of armed conflicts in 2020 increased from 54 in 2019 to 56, having reached the highest level since 1946. Most of these conflicts are intrastate, which means they happen within states' borders, however almost half of these have been led with foreign contributing troops to one side of the conflict, signaling the strong third state action in civil wars. Several of these conflicts include countries such as South Sudan, Yemen and Afghanistan, the latter which suffered 40% of all total battle deaths worldwide this past year. With travel restrictions and governmental changes in travel policies, it is difficult for NGOs and even the UN to deploy officials promptly to crisis areas or for key actors, such as the Secretary-General, envoys and special representatives to the Secretary-General to practice preventive diplomacy at crisis locations, however there must be a high level of engagement virtually in order to tackle these challenges.

Facing the limiting agreement at times from the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), responsible for determining the actions required to guarantee international peace and security, there needs to be different avenues to address emerging and continuing conflicts. One of the options is to increase inclusivity and multilateralism, and to create **higher avenues for the implementation of the "Uniting for Peace" resolution**, which would provide the General Assembly with higher independence in acting should the Security Council fail to reach an agreement on urgent matters.

Similarly to what happened in February this year, when the UNSC unanimously denounced a ceasefire to local conflicts in order to allow for COVID-19 vaccinations to reach all citizens and all sides of conflict parties, this level of **agreement and multilateralism should continue** in conflict matters that reach the Council. It is important that all UNSC members address conflicts with the same urgency and impartiality as the pandemic has required from the international community.

Since also many countries with armed conflict have had deeper stress on their health systems, the current global peace and security strategy should include **measures aimed at accessing and improving health systems** at a higher level, facilitating citizens reaching health care and vaccinations, which delay presents a security concern. States in situation of armed conflict are in more vulnerable conditions to fight a pandemic, since their fragility undermines their capacity to address COVID-19, especially in locations more affected by conflict and hostilities.

Despite the existence of global conflicts, several initiatives, besides the Secretary General's calls for ceasefire, have evidenced regional willing to end conflicts, such as the African Union "Silence the Guns - Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa's Development" initiative that was adopted in 2020, which involves a mass media campaign and strong civil society engagement in order to raise

awareness in preventing conflict and foster peaceful conflict resolution. This type of **regional initiatives should be acknowledged and praised at an international level**, especially at the UNSC, who should support such initiatives, knowing that Africa continues to be the continent with higher number of peacekeeping missions and on-going armed conflicts, with the highest, and increasing, number of one-sided conflicts, as well as the highest number of non-state conflicts.

While peacekeeping shows a positive correlation with higher chance at peace, the amount of funding that is invested is still meager- a mere 0,5% of the global military spending-, with an approved budget from July 2020 to July 2021 of $6,58 billion. Meanwhile, the amount of military spending outside the UN reaches increasing levels. Therefore, more **investment in peacekeeping missions** is needed, which requires the current global peace and security framework to demand more investment from its permanent members who, at the same time, are also among the largest contributors to military weapons and arms sales to human rights breaching countries and that perpetuate armed conflict in countries such as Yemen. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), global military expenditure rose in 2020 to $1981 billion, with the US, China, India, Russia and the United Kingdom counting for the largest spenders. The investment made in the military industry needs a re-focus that is directed towards maintaining peace, and evidence from RAND Corporation has shown that peacekeeping operations are highly successful in doing so, as well as proving to be cost-effective. This evidence can help support major global powers and P5 members to invest in UN peacekeeping. Increasing missions in situations where a ceasefire can be reached would increase the probabilities of the ceasefire to persist, the sustainability of peace and the possibility for citizens to reach access to health services safely and more promptly.

In addition, another component of the global peace and security framework in need of further advances is the **inclusion of gender perspectives and women participation in all aspects of peace, conflict resolution and security**. While advances have been achieved since the 1995 Beijing conference and consequent UNSC resolution 1325 adopted in 2000, which advocates for women's full participation in matters of conflict resolution, peace and security, also called the WPS agenda, the actual participation of women in positions of political power and in matters of peace and security is still meager. Specifically, there has been an increase of 11% to 23% of women in parliamentary seats pre- and post-resolution 1325, however the number of women involved in peace talks and negotiations is still low. A report by UN women has shown how between 1992 and 2011, women constituted 4% of signatories, 2.4% of chief mediators, 3.7% of witnesses and 9% of negotiators, while other empirical analysis has shown that between 1990 and 2014, only 13 out of 130 peace agreements had women signatories, which seems to indicate that the number of women signing peace agreements had actually not increased since the implementation of the UNSC resolution 1325. If there is evidence that increasing women's participation in peace negotiations and agreements increases the level of sustainable peace, this should also be a priority in the global peace and security

framework. Before peace negotiations, women have also been part of reaching ceasefires, which can be done locally, nationally and internationally. Women have had important roles in reaching truces and ceasefires agreements locally, which happened in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Yemen and Cambodia, showcasing the importance of local peacebuilders in reaching ceasefires. This means there is a need to **continue the support of civil society groups, including women groups** that, through their location, knowledge of the conflict and access to the warring parties can facilitate dialogue and the end of hostilities. Recommendations at this level have been made by international civil society organizations such as ICAN – International Civil Society Action Network – which focuses on the women peace and security framework and the impact women have in all stages of conflict resolution. Research from different academia and organizations must be tapped into, since evidence suggests the high correlation between gender equality and peace and the role of civil society in peacemaking processes leading to more sustainable peace.

The current pandemic has definitely shown the many ways in which the world remains unequal, with poor cooperation in enabling health care and vaccinations from reaching the Global South. At the same time, it has not stopped on-going conflicts from persisting and to unite for a common global cause. The pandemic has revived the strong need for solidarity, multilateralism and increased corporation, with military spending requiring a re-focus on peacekeeping missions and the role of regional initiatives, civil society and women in contributing to peace and security. There is a need to continue active and close engagement, even virtually, from UN enjoys and representatives in order to increase the success of preventive diplomacy and show support for conflict resolution.

Topic 8: <u>THE INFODEMIC</u>

The COVID-19 pandemic has been followed by a persistent and not less dangerous infodemic – a deluge of fake news, misinformation and disinformation, often promoting conspiracy theories about the virus and the vaccines. This trend has caused immense damage and still represents a serious challenge to the global efforts to end the pandemic. What steps should the governments, the civil sector, academia, media, and international organizations take to tackle this issue? What is the best way to go about it?

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Abstract

In this dissertation, wishing to answer the proposed questions for this Infodemic theme, what I argue is that only so much can be done to mitigate this "deluge of fake news, misinformation and disinformation" – actions to restrain people's views, whether true or false, are limited by the right to free speech. Taking that into account, what I will advocate for are two different solutions to this problem: the development of fact-checking and science educative platforms; and the subsequent reliance on people's good reasoning. I will also reflect on how social media networks are managing the spread of deceitful information online, and I will engage in the discussion of how the rise of such acute skepticism has come (again) to defy scientific knowledge.
<u>Keywords:</u> Infodemic; media; science; knowledge; learning

Introduction

"What steps should the governments, the civil sector, academia, media, and international organizations take to tackle this (Infodemic) issue? What is the best way to go about it?" – with such research questions established, my objective with this short essay is to present the solutions I see fit to put up with the challenge of information management.

All circumstances considered, I found that the best method to ground my argument was through documental, secondary data. This means, it was by reading and reflecting on existing, pertinent studies from relevant authors that I decided I would build up my opinion.

My chosen references were, in no special order: Joel Achenbach, a journalist and author of several books, who wrote an outstanding relevant article for the National Geographic magazine, in 2015, titled 'Why Do Many Reasonable People Doubt Science?'; Yang et al. (2021), a group of academics involved in an extensive research about the spread of the Covid-19 Infodemic on social media, namely on Facebook and Twitter; and, lastly, Shtulman & Harrington (2016), two psychologists who developed an investigation about the 'Tensions between science and intuition across the lifespan'.

On top of these publications, in my bibliography, I also include references to other works I came across when studying the three pieces I just identified.

As for the structure of this essay, I start by approaching social media platforms for they "play a strong role in propagating misinformation" (Vosoughi et al., 2018), more specifically, these days, they're "used to spread Covid-19 misinformation" (Ferrara et al., 2020). Next, I develop on why this is happening: what might be the root causes for such a phenomenon. I address the relationships that humans have with science and its acceptance. To conclude, I suggest what roles must be played by which actors.

Social media: the Infodemic playground

According to the statistics, the consumption of new (Internet-linked) media has already surpassed traditional media (printed press, radio, and television). So, I considered adjusted to focus attention on what is going on online. Despite the quality of information reported by traditional media being a potential matter of discussion, those are not likely to be the main responsible platforms for the Infodemic phenomenon. They might be accused of sensationalism, biasedness and can be partly accountable for the reigning skepticism surrounding the current pandemic. However, even if the accuracy of their mediated news may be poor, traditional media has lost their predominance in people's consumption habits, if not also in the construction of public opinion.

I decided to target the online world, then, as I found it the main vehicle for the spread of misinformation. Moreover, to specify the domains of the web I covered in my investigation, I determined social media to be the relevant actor due to "its peer-to-peer transmission of information" (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

In their 2021 research article, Yang et al. took two major social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, and examined them to obtain answers to three major questions:

1. What is the prevalence of low-credibility content on Twitter and Facebook?
2. Is the sharing of misinformation concentrated around a few active accounts?
3. Is there evidence of inauthentic coordinated behavior in sharing low-credibility content?

Now, the authors themselves recognize some gaps and flaws in establishing the appropriate methodologies to go about their investigation. However, all research weaknesses identified, they consider that the existing margin of error to their study could not have produced many different outcomes. Outcomes which, they condensed into the brief lines that follow:

"Our results indicate that the primary drivers of low-credibility information tend to be high-profile, official, and verified accounts. We also find evidence of coordination among accounts spreading Infodemic content on both platforms, including many controlled by influential organizations. Since automated accounts do not appear to play a strong role in amplifying content, these results indicate that the COVID-19 Infodemic is an overt, rather than a covert, phenomenon.

We find that low-credibility content, as a whole, has higher prevalence than content from any single high-credibility source. However, there is evidence of differences in the misinformation ecosystems of the two platforms, with many low-credibility websites and suspicious YouTube videos at higher prevalence on one platform when compared to the other. (…) The two platforms have very different user demographics. According to recent surveys, 69% of adults in the United States say they use Facebook, but only 22% of adults are on Twitter. Furthermore, while Facebook usage is relatively common across a range of demographic groups, Twitter users tend to be younger, more educated, and have higher than average income. Finally, Facebook is a pathway to consuming online news for around 43% of U.S. adults, while the same number for Twitter is 12% (Perrin and Anderson, 2019; Wojcik and Adam, 2019)."

What I intend to show by referring to this study is that social media platforms are, in fact, notable means of disseminating misinformation. To combat the Infodemic, there's a need for a moderator to intervene in these forums but along with that moderation an ethical dilemma rises. On the one hand, free speech is everybody's right and it should be protected, on the other hand, misleading, "false narratives can have negative repercussions on public health and safety" (Yang et al, 2021). So, where is the line to be drawn and by whom? Isn't there a chance that moderation goes sour into deliberate censorship?

New developments, old hindrances

The trouble goes way back, Achenbach (2015) explains: "The scientific method leads us to truths that are less than self-evident, often mind-blowing, and sometimes hard to swallow. In the early 17th century, when Galileo claimed that the Earth spins on its axis and orbits the sun, he wasn't just rejecting church doctrine. He was asking people to believe something that defied common sense—because it sure looks like the sun's going around the Earth, and you can't feel the Earth spinning. Galileo was put on trial and forced to recant. Two centuries later Charles Darwin escaped that fate. But his idea that all life on Earth evolved from a primordial ancestor and that we humans are distant cousins of apes, whales, and even deep-sea mollusks is still a big ask for a lot of people. So is another 19th-century notion: that carbon dioxide, an invisible gas that we all exhale (…) could be affecting Earth's climate."

A pattern can be perceived, then – humans tend to resist, not to accept scientific knowledge. Interested in what could be in the way of our learning ability, I discovered a possible, plausible response in the field of cognitive psychology.

Shtulman, & Harrington (2016) wondered if pre-instructional theories - termed "folk theories", "naive theories," or "intuitive theories" – would lose some of their preponderance in limiting our learning ability, through higher levels of education and age. This

psychologist's research question was, "whether (experienced) scientists are more efficient at retrieving (scientific) knowledge when it conflicts with an earlier-acquired intuitive theory". Surprisingly enough, the answer they achieved was 'no' – older scientists and younger students performed similarly.

There are, though, explanations why intuitive theories seem to persist across the lifespan.

"They may be represented in the brain in a cognitively impenetrable format, similar to the seemingly impenetrable representations of language (Coltheart, 1999) and vision (Pylyshyn, 1999). In vision, for instance, we can be well aware that our eyes deceive us when viewing the Muller-Lyer illusion or the Ponzo illusion, but we perceive the illusion, nonetheless.

Another explanation (…) is that intuitive theories are actively reinforced by how we talk about natural phenomena in everyday discourse and how we perceive natural phenomena in everyday situations. Much of our colloquial language seems to be predicated on intuitive conceptions. The terms 'sunrise' and 'sunset', for instance, imply that day and night are caused by movements of the sun rather than movements of the earth."

The persistency of intuitive over scientific knowledge "across domains, concepts, statements, and participants", conclude Shtulman, & Harrington (2016), "suggests more than just a handful of stubborn misconceptions. Rather, it appears to reflect a fundamental property of science learning, namely, that intuition can be overridden but not overwritten.".

This being said, I ask: to what extent can we be blamed for our resistance to scientific learning? How culpable are we for our lasting stupidity?

Conclusion and Discussion

In my opinion, information published via social media, as it already is, should continue to be diligently monitored by the people in charge of those platforms. A narrative potentially harmful for human lives should be taken seriously and coerced at least with deletion.

Regarding the way to conquer skeptics, I identify two possible approaches: a rational and an emotional one. My tendency, as a believer in human rationality and intelligence, is to take the path of increasing the facts feed and educational levels.

However, I recognize that an appeal to human emotions would be a more powerful weapon to face the difficulty of breaking barriers into scientific knowledge acceptance. I don't think it is the ideal way of achieving truth, but if the end ever justifies the means – let it be for truth. Charismatic, articulated, competent and relatable leaders are needed.

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Introduction

The Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) disease pandemic emerged as an immense global crisis that had impact on nearly every single domain of life. Nevertheless, the pandemic, dangerous itself, has been followed by a persistent and not less serious infodemic - an explosion of information, in a vast majority unofficial, unverified, misleading or entirely false. This information, publicized and shared on an enormous scale created a phenomenon that has not been seen on such a scale before (Cinelli et al., 2020). The isolation caused by the pandemic and the atmosphere of uncertainty pushed people to search for information in a digital space where everyone was directly exposed to misleading information, rumors or conspiracy theories. After the lessons of the first month of COVID-19 pandemic, the gravity of the infodemic problem was noticed and the importance of managing it became undeniable. In the age of social media, when information sharing is as easy as it was never before, it is especially important to find efficient policies and steps to take in order to tackle this serious challenge.

The Infodemic

The outbreak of COVID-19 disease pandemic was unexpected and sudden for many. This great health risk that appeared from nowhere with such a peace caused an atmosphere of panic and uncertainty. Following the disease spread, an infodemic emerged, in many cases spreading even further and faster than the virus itself. Infodemic was described as "much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak" by World Health Organization (WHO) (World Health Organization, 2021). Director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said at the 2020 Munich Security Conference that "We're not just fighting a pandemic; we're fighting an infodemic." (World Health Organization, 2020). The overburdening of information, however not dangerous on a first glance, appeared to be a serious threat for tackling global COVID-19 pandemic. The phenomenon of infodemic is not novel itself but for the first time in history it happened on such a scale (Cinelli et al., 2020). The rate in which new content referring to COVID-19 has been appearing was overwhelming. Millions of tweets and further millions of hours of videos related to COVID-19 appeared in months after the outbreak (Pan American Health Organization, 2020). Reportedly almost four billion people worldwide use social media platforms nowadays (Dean, 2021). The reality of lockdown pushed a great number of people into the virtual world and COVID-19 updates on the Internet became a main source of information for many, irrespectively of the authenticity of sources it came from. The new reality also brought a bunch of negativity. As it was reported, isolation and anxiety further increase digital screen time, and the continued overload of information may have a negative impact on public health and

social behaviour (Banerjee, 2020). Studies conducted show that digital media usage had increased during the lockdown, with sleep-wake cycle disruptions and lowered sleep quality (Cellini et al., 2020) (Léger et al., 2020). Further concerns about mental health are raised by studies that suggest a link between uncertainty of a pandemic and chronic isolation and issues like panic and psychological distress, strengthened by the endless stream of information, which predominantly comes from social media (Banerjee, 2020). Apart from mental health, infodemic appears to be a danger for public health. Misinformation proved to be a challenge for public health in recent years (Gyenes & Mina, 2018). During the last months spread of unconventional methods for curing the virus had happened and various theories about origin and causes of the pandemic emerged (Cinelli et al., 2020). Furthermore, a correlation between the perception of COVID-19 origin and perception of social distancing rules and compliance with sanitary measures was suggested (Reyes et al., 2021). This impact on social behaviour is likely to put at risk efforts to limit COVID-19 spread.

The Problem

Following the definition of infodemic provided by WHO the problem could be disassembled into two parts that can be considered separately. The characteristic features of an infodemic are (1) much information including (2) false or misleading information. In other words the major problems coming with infodemic are the immense amount of information and the questionable quality of this information. To better understand both these aspects they will be discussed separately.

The amount of information

Previously mentioned data (Pan American Health Organization, 2020) has shown the enormous volume of information about COVID-19 shared in social media. The rate and intensity in which information appeared dominated the public space and created an atmosphere of an overwhelm. One of the features of an infodemic is a large increase in the volume of information associated with a specific topic. Furthermore, such an increase happens in a short period of time and is strictly correlated with a particular incident, for instance the current pandemic. The volume of the information seems to be a problem. Given that current predictions show a continuing increase in the use of social media (Tankovska, 2021) it is not unreasonable to assume that future infodemic will be even greater in size. Curiosity is one of the basic human instincts and social interactions are only increasing it. The important role is to satisfy this curiosity with reliable information. Moderation plays a significant role here. In a situation of information overload, it is especially important to not overwhelm people with the amount and form of the communication. The communication channel and form of the information itself must be adjusted to potential recipients so the message does not disappear in the overabundance of information. The emotional aspects of a message also seem to be important. The existence of confirmation bias encourages people to search for information that

proves their already existing beliefs ("Confirmation bias", 2021). More recent studies show also that certain mental states lower human ability for falsehood recognition (Weeks, 2015) and there exists a tendency to spread information with greater emotional impact (Milkman & Berger, 2014).

The quality of information

Another problematic aspect of an infodemic is the quality of information which is often described as "misinformation", "disinformation", "fake news" etc. The terms are broad and not necessarily easy to define. In the context of COVID-19 misinformation was described as "any message that conflicts with the best available evidence related to the pandemic, and that would likely not be corrected if it was challenged." (Krause et al., 2020). It was already mentioned that misinformation presents a challenge for public health (Gyenes & Mina, 2018). An example for its impact on social behaviour may be reported increase in xenophobia, social stigma, racism and prejudice against the asian communities in the United States (Croucher et al., 2020). Certain mental states, like stress or anger, may hinder human ability of falsehood recognition, which appears to be a key skill in preventing spread of false information. Banerjee & Meena (2021) points out controlling compulsive information sharing and educating the differentiation of "true-fake" news as important yet challenging issues. Growing interest in debunking misinformation by social media owners and other technology companies appears as a light of hope in this reality. First optimistic results of their efforts were reported and the work continues (Scheufele & Kraus, 2019) (Banerjee & Meena, 2021). Given the amount of information shared, such an automated, algorithmically driven approach for misinformation detection is a promising solution.

Conclusions and recommendations

- The volume of information is very unlikely to decrease in future infodemics. It is nearly sure that given the current trends the amount of information shared will grow.
- Effort should be made to prevent one topic from dominating public space as it creates an overwhelming atmosphere full of anxiety and stress.
- There is a need to mitigate the dire atmosphere and share positive messages and hope to remind people about positive aspects of life to reduce negativity.
- While the will to share and discover is fully in line with human nature and it is virtually impossible to expect people to not discuss topics they care about, internet users should have a possibility to opt out from being exposed to a stream of endless news, for instance by the means of information filtering.
- It is very important to remember the role emotions play in communication and information consumption, especially in a reality like pandemic. Raw facts and cold logic-based

communication might have little impact in such situations. Officials should benefit from modern, more direct communication channels that are more familiar for regular internet users.

- Education, raising awareness, fact-checking skills and digital literacy are widely recommended although challenging solutions without clear evidence of effectiveness.
- Emerging algorithmic solutions for fact checking and misinformation detection experienced advanced growth in recent years and proved their efficiency. Debunking misinformation, sharing related clarifications and providing further explanations for misleading information seems to be a reasonable solution.

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The Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic is not just a health crisis, it is also an information crisis. A wave of false information and beliefs is added to the viral and virulent spread, a few moments after the discovery and announcement of the pandemic in February, by national and international authorities, the World Health Organization in the occurrence.

Crises are by their very nature the bearers of destabilizing situations. According to François Buton, researcher at the National Centre of Scientific research CNRS (France) who explained that a health crisis can be defined as a public health problem, most often an epidemic which, by its magnitude, has brutal effects on the whole of society, in particular the functioning of the economy and therefore puts politicians to the test [1]

Add to this, these uncertainties with regard to official, political, media and even sometimes scientific discourse. The current questioning of the elites and the words of experts, which popular common sense opposes. Coupled with unlocked access to news, explain the proliferation of self-proclaimed experts (notably thanks to the Dunning-Kruger effect) and the spread of the fake news phenomenon in recent years.

In this respect, the news forged work like a virus: they insert themselves into the social body to destabilize or even destroy it from within. In this sense, several factors of the phenomenon can be brought to light. In public health, spreading false information can cost lives. The WHO advocates instituting good practices as soon as people post and webcast simply because information should not be a brake, but a solution to an epidemic.

"Infodemic" is the neologism, which springs in a press statement by Antonio Guterre, Secretary-General of the WHO, to reflect the conspiratorial scourge of, usually, collective anxieties, concerns and ignorance of the situation. Infodemic is just as real as Covid-19, to such an extent that it is made a multi-and multi-disciplinary specialty "Infodemiology" and is defined as a discipline of the management of infodemic, at the initiative of the WHO and Dr. Sylvie Briand, Director of Global Infectious Risk Preparedness.

It is quite difficult to recall, in this paper, the top fake news and conspiratorial ideas that have flooded the internet as well as the media, because each country is specific as to the ideas received from its communities and societies. One of the most famous is that 5G phone networks are spreading disease. However, the specialists of the World Health Organization (WHO) are categorical. No, this

is wrong, viruses "do not circulate on radio waves or through mobile phone networks". Moreover, the organization recalls that the Covid-19 is also present in countries and areas where the 5G network is completely absent. The coronavirus " is spread by respiratory droplets projected when an infected person coughs, sneezes or speaks. We can also be infected by touching a contaminated surface, then his eyes, mouth or nose", repeatedly reminded the WHO.

A second more dangerous than the first: drinking alcohol or other substance protects against Covid-19. Several serious accidents have been reported around the world. But this is obviously false, "frequent or excessive alcohol consumption can increase the risks to your health" soberly reminds the World Health Organization on its website. The coronavirus is a respiratory disease and alcohol does not "kill" her. A fortiori, drinking or applying hydroalcoholic gel or medical alcohol on the body is an extremely dangerous act.

Beyond the initiatives undertaken by international organizations, it would be more effective for each country to adapt its strategy to fight infodemia according to its context and, above all, its logistical, human or even regulatory resources.

In this regard, a monitoring unit at the level of each country would be a globalizing strategy. A combination of the efforts and multivalent resources of public and private actors. A government unit where the skills of all are pooled. That is to say that the academic expertise, the professionalism and the visibility of journalists as well as public health actors. It would be a comprehensive strategy to contain the infodemic.

It is quite possible that the maneuver needs to be epi centric. In other words, less global than the first that each of the actors works at the level of their skills. This does not detract from performance. However, the results will only be seen in the long term. As a point of clarification, the university, as a place of training for media professionals, and therefore, it is from this place that the work for the fight against the infodemic should begin. This is done through training in scientific journalism and the development of tools and techniques for verifying scientific information. These very often meet intellectual and scientific requirements different from those of conventional journalism.

It is not only a question of introducing fact-checking teaching units, since the verification of facts is inherent in the information profession but, above all, in a rational and adequate management of this gap between research and media time. Two antinomies. Therefore, this impropriety between the discourses involved causes the leakage of misinterpretations and doubts to embed themselves in the minds of media audiences. They vary, in turn, from the average citizen to an executive in a multinational.

Training specialists in scientific information is a first major step towards enhancing and framing the debate with experts, researchers and scientists.

As for the latter, beyond the scientific articles and theses they produce in order to fuel scientific life, an effort on scientific mediation could combine with the first maneuver. Popularization, and through good communication, makes science accessible and understandable to all. The closer the field of science gets to the general public, the better. As a result, transmitting scientific knowledge makes the process of appropriation of knowledge less complicated by the general public and even for journalists.

The media, a key player in stemming this information pandemic, could give more importance and resources to crisis treatment and even to establish exclusive work charters in times of crisis. This is not to sow panic but on the contrary to inform without offending, to raise awareness without distressing or panicking.

To be more precise I do suggest the creation of a page dedicated to verifying information relating to the corona virus and the subjects which revolve around it, including vaccination. This is the subject of many conspiratorial theses mainly due to the ignorance of the subject.

Therefore, on the page the audience and the public is invited to ask us their questions and concerns in order to verify them and make it a Fact-checking article after the investigation to provide answers and clarifications.

The most important thing is to show the method used in order to arrive at the verdict. This is to provide the public with the necessary tools to verify sources and information, but above all to empower them.

Provide a general overview of the health situation in neighboring countries or around the world, in an interactive map with explanatory indicators in order to understand the evolution of the health situation in each country. This map must of course be updated very often by the team in order to give correct figures and put them in context.

The video broadcast in several languages should, among other things, be a reference for the Internet user. Videos Capsules and media realizations should be made by professionals enrolled in a multidisciplinary approach in order to transmit information without distressing and offending those who may watch them. Popularization and storytelling are important elements of the

proposed videos.

Fact-checking has now become a practice, if not a journalistic genre in its own right, with advantages and limitations on the same pedestal. However, many editors are getting down to it and still discerning, especially during the first months of this pandemic, the role it can play. Between demystifying false allegations on the health situation and these ready-made advice to guard against the corona virus: the challenge was to save lives and keep the debate around public health.

Legislation can also support the fight against the massive proliferation of fake news, particularly on the internet and social networks. However, the legislation need not interfere with what is called the principle of "freedom of expression". Moreover, many countries, at the start of the health crisis, implemented laws criminalizing and penalizing the dissemination of false information that was harmful. Without these being well defined.

In short, the fight against the infodemic which guarantees good information on viruses. This must also find the guarantor and the executor in a position to put them in place and to ensure their sustainability and its adaptation to the realities of each environment and conditions. The United Nations can be, in this case, one of the promoters. Better yet, to encourage and call on others to get started and pool resources and efforts to train and help those less experienced in the field, such as those most affected by the infodemic.

Author: Iheanyi Genius Amaraizu

Common journalistic issues like lack of information objectivity, bias, half-truths or perceived accuracy have further made it difficult to conclusively define what 'fake news' is. There has been elaborate discussion on this with a description of fake news by the use of terms like news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, and propaganda (Edson et al, 2018). Infodemic could mean different things to different people, especially with the increasing use of the term 'fake news' to express common disagreement in the information space. This seemingly makes it easier to describe what fake news is not, rather than what it is. An investigation on how fake news has been defined by scholars between 2003 and 2017 through an analysis of 34 scholarly articles by Edson, Tandoc, Zheng & Richard (2018) identified relevant contemporary discourse on 'fake news'. They started with an insight into what 'real news' is: "News has been defined in many ways, ranging from being an account of a recent, interesting, and significant event (Kershner, 2005), an account of events that significantly affect people (Richardson, 2007), to a dramatic account of something novel or deviant (Jamieson and Campbell, 1997). News is often seen as an output of journalism, a field expected to provide "independent, reliable, accurate, and comprehensive information" (Kovach and Rosenstiel, 2007, 11)" p.140. From a non-political perspective, the idea of fake news is closely described using terms like: 'fabricated content', 'lies', 'bad information', 'disinformation', 'biased information', 'misinformation', 'story without proof', 'incorrect stories', 'speculation', all alluding to an intentional nature of fake news.

With the fear, panic and uncertainty that came with the COVID-19 pandemic, the damaging effects of fake news, which included self-medication, striving superstitious and conspiracy theories, were visible. The widespread of misinformation that consumed the media space, especially the social web spaces contributed gravely to the deaths of millions of people. Furthermore, fabricated contents ranging from the origin of the virus down to modes of transmission to fatality rate and even cure have overly been circulated on different social media networks. This probably led John Naughton (2020) to publish his article during the early days of the virus, "Fake News About Covid-19 can be as Dangerous as the Virus", where he highlighted that the major difference between the Covid-19 and previous pandemics the world experienced is the dominance of social media. Infodemic during a pandemic before the internet era would be curtailed easily as gatekeepers would curate information, unlike in this era of social media with its wide, open access. This article categorizes these concerns into two wide division of social networks: the large-sized environments and the small-sized environments. This categorization is based on their reach, surveillance, and media influence, and as a case study, Facebook rightly falls under the former, while Whatsapp falls under the latter.

Infodemic in Large-sized social media environments

Large-sized social media environments are prominent in every dimension of measuring reach, surveillance and media influence. Examples are Facebook and Twitter. A single post by a user shared just on the user's wall on these platforms has a viral potential of reaching millions of people in a twinkle of an eye.

Facebook is the most popular social media network, and as such controls an unimaginable media presence. Initially started as a platform for strengthening personal acquaintances, the network has long metamorphosed into a corporate giant were all kinds of information exchange occurs. This information exchange is without any form of isolation, and this includes real news and fake news. As a large distribution platform, distribution is not limited, and it includes the distribution of fake news. Facebook was a primary target of propagating and spreading fake news during the Covid-19 pandemic, and this is not far from the exponential ability of the platform to reach millions of people around the world instantaneously. This, Sahadeo (2016) adjoined to be predicated on the basis of ad revenue which is generated for the source website when it attracts clicks, and companies engaged in massive fabrication of fake news to generate clicks that increases profit at the expense of the society. Other incentives for sharing misinformation on large-sized social network environments exist and understanding why people aid or share such is a step towards tackling the menace.

Infodemic in Small-sized social media environments

Unlike the large-sized social media platforms, the small-sized platforms are limited in reach, in a measurement of same efforts and action. These are mostly instant messaging applications and interpersonal communication devices involving conversation between familiar identities. For example, small-sized environments lack the technological allowance that can sustain satirical identities or parody. This automatically plays a capacity limitation in the disseminating reach of fake news for the small-sized social media networks. However, these platforms are considered the most effective in the impact of fake news. This is true to the knowledge that small-sized environments usually involves messaging between friends and family, or people sharing to a certain extent familiarity as individuals or groups.

WhatsApp, despite being a 'small-sized environment' has the potential of spreading news very fast. A major attribute of WhatsApp is the identity that comes with sharing behavior. The platform affords users the expressive possibilities of instant messaging from text, photos, memes, audio and video notes, files, emoticons, stickers, GIFs, contact numbers, geo location and direct access to camera. According to Herrero-Diz, et al (2020), the quasi-compulsive activity that

emphasizes the sharing behavior and drives instant messaging on WhatsApp is the ability or features for 'sending and forwarding'. This feature makes WhatsApp an important player in the problem of infodemic. In analyzing teenager behavior when sharing content on WhatsApp, Herrero-Diz, et al (2020) adopted a comparative analysis of four typical cases code named: News, Clickbait, Parody, and Fake. The result of their works showed that the structural presentation or appearance of digital content in WhatsApp determines the sharing potential for such a content. Content with a headline, an image and its body or link presented in form of a news is likely to be shared regardless of its credibility in reality. Also, 'to inform others' and 'because I find it interesting' topped the list of average reasons, therefore maintaining the predominance of information-related reasons for sharing.

Tackling infodemic on Social Media

In 2016, two articles indicting Facebook were published by Gizmodo, a technology news site (Carlson, 2017) showing alterations and the effects done by human curators working to set agenda, or what is called 'Trending Topics' on Facebook. This is an action that is otherwise believed to be a consequence of automated algorithm; the shocking revelations exposed the 'behind-the-scenes functioning of Trending Topics'. The second story particularly accused Facebook of censoring conservatives, suppressing any news or voice from such angle while promoting the counter, although Facebook was unable to identify any bias.

Kastalia Medrano article on Newsweek (25 January 2018) accused Facebook of being responsible for the viral distribution of fake news about a flu outbreak being caused by a flu vaccine itself. This was shortly after Facebook had announced a reformatting of its news feed to suppress the journalistic role of the platform in favour of its bonding role among friends and family. Medrano explained that barely two weeks after this announcement, Facebook algorithm prompted the sharing of fake news by more than 60,000 users. These accusations and studies show that social media platforms have the capacity to suppress or promote information and must rise to use such expertise as regulated by trusted public institutions and fact checkers to suppress misinformation. Generally, the ambiguousness of the term 'fake news' in political rhetoric has made it difficult to ascertain self-perceived exposure to fake news (Müller & Schulz, 2019), and individuals convinced that established media outlets are not reliable for credible news relax back to consume information from social media crediting it as alternative credible source. This is in cases where users rely on their own individual judgement of the source and the message to evaluate credibility. Therefore, two key variables can be derived from the above to tackle infodemic:

- Legal mandate
- Media literacy

A legal mandate to suppress infodemic effectively led by the government will establish

legal consequences on the social networks' inefficiency in suppressing confirmed fake news. In this case, fake news will not be subjective but institutionally confirmed, especially when it concerns information on public health, safety and general public welfare. On the other hand, media literacy efforts help to shape tangible behavior on news verification. Both governments, the civil sector, academia, media, and international organizations must join efforts to initiate public debates meaningful to serve as a reminder of fake news exposure and consequently trigger a verification behavior, especially among users who evaluate social media news source trustworthy.

In recent times, Facebook has put measures in combating fake news, an example is its collaboration with fact-checking platforms, state, and national governments in tackling fake news on covid-19. When browsing through the news feed on Facebook, one is likely to see attached label warning of misinformation along with a link to a fact-checked article on third party authored articles. Facebook had also banned advertisements and commerce listings for masks, hand sanitizer, surface disinfecting wipes and coronavirus testing kits to help protect against inflated prices and predatory behavior (The Economic Times, April 22, 2020). This responsibility should be extended to all other social media platforms and a proactive established code of operation be put in place by the government for social media operations as it concerns managing infodemic.

Conclusion

The infodemic variables – news satire, news parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising, propaganda, biased evaluation, blame attribution, intention, and facticity-tend to represent fake news meaning independently. In diverse ways, these variables were tools that caused immense damage and a challenge in the global effort to end the Covid-19 pandemic. Social media networks were a fertile ground for spreading misinformation about the pandemic and understanding the capacities of these platforms reinforces the need for governments, the civil sector, academia, media, and international organizations to take charge in tackling the challenge. The 2021 First Quarter Operational highlight released by Facebook on 28 April 2021 summarizes the wild and interesting statistics that make Facebook one of the most relevant platforms in the history of social media. In the report, Facebook confirmed that the platform hosts a daily active users (DAUs) of 1.88 billion; a monthly active user (MAUs) of 2.85 billion; a family daily active people (DAP) of 2.72 billion; and a family monthly active people (MAP) of 3.45 billion. This was on the average for the month of March. Likewise, WhatsApp commands an incredible interpersonal reach. Independent, established, and trusted institutions must rise up to a gatekeeping role for the social media (this role should not be left for social media owners only), and a massive investment in media literacy will be a game changer that limits infodemic.

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Abstract

Fake news on COVID-19 has increased in recent times and lead to persistent conspiracy theories about COVID-19 and its vaccines. Thereby, causing immunization hesitancy among people and creating setbacks to the global efforts to end COVID-19. Researchers have written about the pandemic extensively but failed to provide the steps that need to be taken by the governments, the civil sector, academia, media, and international organizations to tackle Infodemic. This study fills this gap using the doctrinal research method. Primary and secondary materials were relied on. It is discovered that poor coordination between governments and lack of adequate technological know-how hinders efforts of sustaining infodemic. We suggested that a universal legal framework for the prohibition of fake news dissemination is needed and investment in modern technology to keep up with the influx of fake news.

Introduction

The world is experiencing unprecedented changes due to the Covid-19 that is causing the world to adjust and adapt to the new norms like social distance, lockdown, etc. This new situation has led to the forging of massive global cooperation between countries and organizations to come up with measures that will checkmate the spread of the COVID-19.[10] However, the persistent spread of misinformation about the COVID-19 and its vaccines is rendering global efforts of containing Covid-19 useless; because fake news spreaders claimed that the vaccines produced causes blood clotting and infertility, thereby causing fear among people to get vaccinated.[11] This keeps happening although researchers have debunked their claims by studying the Covid-19 vaccines, the impacts of fake news, how social media is playing a significant role to fuel misinformation.[12] However, what is not studied is how the governments, the civil sector, academia, media, and international organizations can tackle this issue. This study aimed to address this gap.

Fake News and Its Impacts on Global efforts towards Covid-19 Containment

Fake news is not a new phenomenon; it is how it spreads that has changed in both speed and magnitude due to the internet, which made it impossible to pass information without using social media, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, where social media is relied upon to pass information to keep people connected

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and informed. Despite that, social media became the fertile ground for the spread of misleading information,[13] via chatbots, which are used to manipulate information, disrupt communication, and gain user attention to either blackmail or gain a political advantage.[14]

As a result of this, the world is now facing the infodemic challenge that is undermining the global efforts of eradicating COVID-19.[15] Due to that, a significant number of conspiracy theories about vaccines emerged.[16] For example, some people believe that the Covid-19 is not real; to them, it is an effort at population control perpetrated by wealthy people like Bill Gates.[17] Others believe that vaccines cause blood clotting.[18] These theories continue to thrive despite the scientific studies that said ''blood clots only in rare cases after vaccination''.[19]

These theories confused a significant number of people, making them hesitant and skeptical of being immunized.[20] For example, in the United States, France, Sweden, and the United Kingdom, a significant number of people openly and unequivocally protest against the government policies that mandated them to either stay at home during a lockdown or to wear a facemask.[21] The protesters cited not trusting the Covid-19 vaccines produced in record time with no long-term studies available on their potential side effects as the reason for their protest.[22] Others argued that the governments are using the pandemic to implant microchips in people's bodies.[23] To some, the vaccines produced causes infertility.[24]

In Africa, misleading information on Covid-19 continues to dissuade people from getting immunized; the people cited not trusting the vaccines and the governments presenting the vaccine to them as the reason for

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their refusal.[25] Because of this, many countries in Africa are struggling to administer vaccines. For example, on the 23rd of March 2021, the Nigerian government received its first order of 3.92 million dosages of AstraZeneca. However, by 23rd April 2021, just over 1.15 million dosages were administrated.[26] At this rate, it could take many months to finish the first dosages and a significant number of years to immunize the country.

Based on this, there is a need to tackle fake news about Covid-19 because it is the factor causing people to do not want to take the vaccines and if not properly addressed, could continue to spread and the death rate could highly increase.

What needs to be done to tackle fake news and misinformation

The disregard shown to COVID-19 vaccines and the governments presenting them for people's use has not only underlined the sheer magnitude of the misinformation but also the negative impact misinformation has on trusting the vaccines, health care, governments, and scientific findings. At the moment, countries like Australia, Malaysia, and Hungary, etc. attempted to mitigate fake news by enacting regulation and mandating the digital industry to introduce a code that prohibits and punishes misinformation.[27] The actions of these countries are commendable, however not adequate to handle infodemic globally. As such, there is a need for global cooperation between governments, media organizations, academics, and civil societies; as each has a role to play towards infodemic control. To start, the governments need to come together and introduce universal legislation that will cater to misinformation.[28] The legislation shall mandate media platforms to fact check every news before publishing; failure to do that shall be criminalized to protect the people's rights to be safe from the adverse impact of inaccurate information.

There is a need to engage with academicians for research and formulation of new strategies for infodemic mitigation, which if developed and implemented shall help in curbing infodemic. Similarly, civil societies and international organizations shall be engaged and mandated with the duty of issuing public advisories, advertising campaigns, holding press conferences, and instituting a case against media platforms that allow their site to spread false information. This will reduce the workload on the governments, thereby cutting costs, which will allow reallocating of excess funds towards new technology capable of detecting fake news.

Conclusion

Without trust and correct information, the COVID-19 immunization is not achievable, and COVID-19 will continue to wreak havoc on humanity. As a result of that, this study concluded by providing the following

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recommendations.

a. To mitigate the anti-vaccine movement, there is a need for international organizations and countries to prepare for the danger related to such propaganda and respond accordingly. This means creating awareness of the fact that certain people are against COVID-19 vaccines, and they use misinformation to achieve their goals. As such, people need to be cautious in evaluating claims of any vaccine side effects.

b. There is also a need for the enactment of or amending existing legislation prohibiting fake news. The stiffer penalty is introduced and meted on any social media platform or person that publishes misleading COVID-19 information. This will make social media companies and people cautious of which content to publish. Thereby, reducing the circulation of unverified information.

c. There is also the need for the governments, media houses, academia, and international Organization to keep debunking anti-vaccine misinformation. This can be done by continuous sponsorship of radio and television programs on mainstream media and inviting experts to adduce genuine evidence that shall counter the fake information. This will help in reclaiming people's trust and increases the level of vaccine acceptance.

d. Similarly, there is a need for the governments through ministries like the Ministry of Health to keep providing accurate information about the vaccine's potential risks and benefits (if any). This will make people trust them, as when information comes from reliable sources directly on reaction after taking the vaccine- the claim of harms being hidden will be less acceptable to the people.

e. There is also a need for a change in the way governments communicate with the people concerning the pandemic. The current system adopted is poorly executed, as people are not carried along, hence worsening fear of the vaccine's side effects. Engaging people through civic societies, traditional institutions, and institutions of learning are necessary because people respect them and when they pass the information on governments' efforts to control the pandemic, people will listen to them.

f. There is also the need to keep momentum on social media to reduce the spread of misinformation. This is because social media literacy is relatively low; and as such, combating misinformation will require constant efforts to educate its large audience.

g. The technologies capable of detecting misleading information without human intervention are emerging, which means it will take time to deploy them fully, and even if deployed fully in the future, they are likely to be disadvantaged; because those seeking to misinform people will continue to create loops in the technology that the governments use to tackle fake news. As such, there is a need for sustained investment and regulations on current and emerging technologies that will especially focus on the big multinational technology companies. To avoid the stifling of innovation, the said regulations need to be smart and accommodating.

h. There is also a need for the governments to initiate, introduce and compel usage of the fact-checking mechanism by mainstream media and social media users. To do that, there is a need for global cooperation with the social media companies like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to flag fake news and misinformation before being published to the public.

Topic 9: <u>WORLD OF WORK</u>

How has the pandemic affected the world of work? While many professionals could workfrom home most of the time, daily laborers and service sector workers have often not had such luxury. What is the future of work, post-COVID-19? Will telecommuting become a standard for white-collar workers? Will the gap between different categories of workers further grow this way, and what can be done?

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The world has witnessed a life-altering event since the beginning of the spread of the dangerous Covid-19 virus across all nations in a matter of weeks. This crisis continues to make a positive impact on our planet Earth by a remarkable reduction in pollution, particularly in the year 2020 but also led to horrifying repercussions on global public health and numerous human lives. In fact, this brunt touched many pillars of the world population including the labour market where the majority of businesses that inevitably relied on a physical state and their frontline workers were harmed the most. On the contrary, white-collar workers managed to avoid health hazards in their work as well as temporary or permanent unemployment risk during the pandemic. This raises the intriguing question about the future of the world of work post-Covid19 as well as the gap between different types of workers, their current working situation and how they envision their careers in the near future.

Frontline Workers

Frontline labourers and service sector workers are the most impacted professionals during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has posed a lot of hazard to them and their families as well as psychological challenges due to work overload. This phenomenon mainly addressed the health industry where frontline doctors and nurses cannot perform their duties unless there is a certain physical proximity with both Covid-19 and non Covid-19 patients. Another restriction to the health industry is that flexible workspaces were never an option, given the important number of patients and the compulsion of medical supplies and equipment depending on the patient's health condition and other criteria. The same problem applies for production and warehousing and other industries with complex daily activities, but it doesn't for the educational sector since online learning has proven to be remarkably practical in 2020.

However, the health industry workers are not the only individuals that were deprived of the opportunity to telecommute during a global pandemic. Other public and private service sectors were negatively impacted, especially in the least developing countries where the unprecedented Covid-19 crisis left no time for governments to set new policies that could enhance and accelerate public service digital transformation, notably in public administrations. This resulted in a high risk of Coronavirus contagion between frontline labourers and service seekers as well as a lower work engagement than pre-pandemic. Workers have different definitions of the concept of work engagement. Some perceive it as a consequence of finding meaning behind their jobs while others relate it to the working environment and conditions they support. That is why changes in work engagement during the pandemic differ by the job category which perhaps cannot comply with social distancing.

A post-Covid19 world of work is just as unpredictable as the current one for daily labourers. Many actions could be taken either by governments or business owners in order to keep their activities running and minimize human loss from their respective workforces. Nevertheless, these actions could come with a high price, mostly for low-wage and low-hour frontline workers who consequently have no choice but to adapt to these unsatisfactory conditions. The world of wok in a pandemic proved to these labourers that comfort and safety were no longer guaranteed in the labour markets that are performing poorly due to this planetary health crisis.

Frontline workers not only work in hazardous conditions with a positive contagion probability no matter the safety measures taken into consideration, but they also suffer from the long-lasting risk of losing their jobs in the midst of the pandemic. This could be the outcome of the world of work for these individuals, primarily if they are employed in a non-market labour, a dynamic private business or in the leisure and hospitality industry which has suffered significant losses and continues to face the greatest deficiency in number of active jobs.

White-collar Workers
During the Covid-19 crisis, many professionals successfully performed their jobs with a risk-free Work from Home (WFH) policy that later on led to reduced working hours in some cases. Most of these professionals were white-collar workers who benefited from these circumstances since their job responsibilities were very flexible and adjustable to digitalization. These responsibilities included both job performance and meetings. This class of labourers were affected the least with the virus and its correspondent overwhelming safety protocols given that most of them still continue to work remotely or in a hybrid environment. Unlike frontline workers, they do not require much more than a functional computer and an adequate internet connection to meet their job needs.

The digitalization's feasibility for these two classes of labourers was what made the difference between multiple private service providers during the first year of Coronavirus. For instance, personal care taking, and sports and leisure industries offer services that are impossible to carry out while telecommuting since they require physical interaction either from the customer, the worker or from both. On the other hand, businesses in the retail industry only took a short period of time to quickly adjust their activities to a completely safe online approach with the support of delivery services. Meanwhile, most existing e-commerce businesses took advantage of the Covid-19 situation both in terms of sales where the industry grew about two to five times faster and also in terms of effortless remote work implementation by the respective Human Resources departments without having to suspend or terminate any employments. In fact, some of this electronic business grew so fast during the first quarter of the pandemic period that they had to recruit more people in order to satisfy the massively scaling demand.

Another compelling perk of the WFH system, specifically for white-collar workers is the rising number of opportunities for career-advancement in such a short period of time. Telecommuting allowed these individuals to manage their time better and find ways to multi-task while in confinement. These tasks included trainings, online part-time freelancing, entrepreneurship and other part-time or night jobs that these workers performed remotely, like their primary functions. The purpose of this polyvalence was to boost their careers in a fast and productive way as the labour market was becoming more competitive by the minute.

White-collar workers may not truly suffer from the Coronavirus's economic recession as much as frontline workers who risk being laid off at any time due to business failure, infections with Covid-19 or cost cutting urgency. However, in the long term, mental frustrations can be originated from constant workload and full-time quarantine for job performance and running meetings. This is more frequent with the case of online crowd working which many white-collar workers are adapting to during the pandemic, either by choice or by obligation from their superiors. Mainly, the major advantages that these workers have garnered during this global health crisis are work-life balance and living cost minimization which in other categories of workers represent the complete opposite.

The World of Work Post-Covid19

The Coronavirus global pandemic has no determined end date due to continuous scientific research and laboratory experiments for permanent global health solutions. Therefore, the effects that were generated from it on multiple dimensions also don't have a due date. In the labour market, this pushes blue-collar business owners and superiors of frontline workers to cut costs either by laying

off a significant number of their employees due to lack of resources or by temporarily suspending the business activities. These actions are already leaving major impacts such as economic recession, especially in developing countries and a rise in resource expenses particularly in developed countries such as office spaces that have become very costly due to the necessity of complying with safety protocols and standardizing social distancing in different work environments.

The impact gap between the two categories of workers is noteworthy and will continue to pose problematics on the long term because it is difficult to make any assumptions regarding the end of the Covid-19 spread or the fact that WFH policies will ever cease to exist. Thus, the labour features' disparity between frontline and white-collar employees could possibly grow further and actions need to be taken from many parties to limit it.

Available options that seek to minimize this gap include but are not limited to implementing cost-efficient policies for digital transformation of work activities in the service sector and reducing working hours for frontline workers rather than reducing the number of employees and overburdening the remaining labourers. This could maintain the work flow as well as human resources' safety against the Coronavirus. As for white-collar workers, there has been some confusion between remote work and remote intelligence. The possibility of remote work allowed this category to continue being active in the labour market with the privilege of a risk-free environment when it comes to Covid-19 contagion. However, remote intelligence is in fact building a sub-gap within the same category where artificial intelligence applications have proven to be a substitute even to some white-collar workers. This labour division is inescapable in such a dynamic environment and ecosystem during this crisis but monitoring it can make a progressive change for the better. Good examples of programs that can contribute to closing this gap between workers are active labour market policies. These measures include offering counseling services for jobseekers, administrating unemployment benefits, encouraging employment incentives and start-up incentives as well as providing flexible resources for equal opportunities to employees.

The future of work post-pandemic depends on many dynamic factors that are difficult to predict. Subsequently, pre-preparedness to the continuity of the crisis is very important to ensure equally available and safe working opportunities for all classes of labourers in order to prevent other economic and social problems that might influence the progress of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals' Agenda negatively.

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I.Introduction

It has already been more than a year that humanity is experiencing a devastating economic and social disruption caused by a worldwide pandemic. There are no doubts, COVID-19 has fundamentally changed our daily routine and shaped the way we used to live, creating a fear of unknowing (Caligiuri et al., 2020). The impact of the virus is tremendous, touching all the sectors of the economy, dramatically challenging the professional environment and transforming the labour market in general. In a fight with the coronavirus outbreak governments have implemented large-scale measures ranging from social distancing, restrictions on the free movement and the closure of non-essential businesses, to the severe lockdown of entire cities (International Labour Organization, 2020). Around the globe, companies within various industries are being forced to adjust their policies, modify business operations and adapt to measures on a constant basis in order to comply with the safety rules and assure healthy working conditions for their employees. Organizational management has a major role to play in ensuring business continuity while simultaneously coping with the psychological effects of outbreaks at the workplace (Fadel et al., 2020).

This study seeks to examine the extent to which the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has affected the professional environment on the multinational level for the purpose of raising awareness on important issues. I will primarily examine the effects of the pandemic in the labour market, emphasizing its implications on the employee's well-being. The analysis would lead me to make some predictions with regards to future work in the post-pandemic environment. The contribution concludes by providing recommendations from an organizational management perspective to mitigate COVID-19's impact on employees.

II.The effects of the pandemic on the white- and blue-collar workers

In the past year, the global labour market has shaped profoundly both in the composition and the structure, undergoing massive transformations. Whereas white collars' occupation activity during the pandemic was mostly shifted to remote work, for low educated workers and blue collars were instead more likely to remain in the regular workplace or, to a larger extent, were pushed to stop working. These pronounced differences in labour market outcomes led to significant economic implications and affected the level of an individual's life satisfaction. Based on the cross-country empirical evidence, the authors determined that there are more individuals satisfied with their life among those working from home (Galasso and Foucault, 2020). In fact, from January to March of

2020, approximately 12 percent more white-collar employees reported feeling happy than blue-collar workers, a gap that subsequently widened to 14 percent from April to December. Figure 1 illustrates that in the UK overall level of happiness was considerably lower by blue-collar workers than by white-collar workers (Cotofan et al., 2021).

Figure 1: Changes in happiness for workers during COVID-19 in the United Kingdom
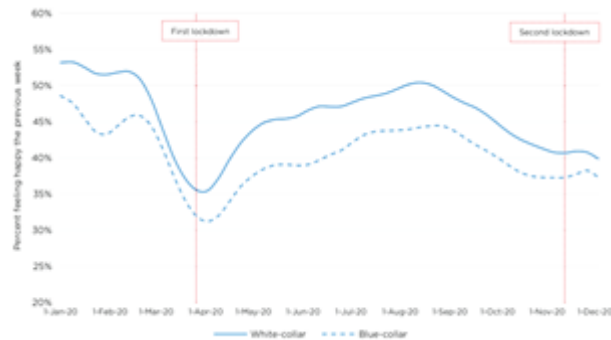
That suggestion goes in hand with the Jahoda's (1982) latent deprivation model, proposing that unemployed people suffer because they are deprived of employment and its positive psychological effects. According to the author, when engaging in paid work to have an income for a living (the manifest function of employment), employees simultaneously profit from five latent functions: time structure, collective purpose, social contact as well as social identity/status, and activity (Jahoda,1982 as cited by Paul et al., 2007). In 2009 researchers found that employees scored higher on 4 dimensions in comparison to unemployed persons (Paul and Batinic, 2009). The subsequent study determined that holding a high-level occupation is associated with better access to latent work benefits, which in turn leads to better mental well-being (Batinic et al., 2010).

III. The outlook on the labour environment in the pandemic and post-pandemic world

The COVID-19 pandemic has been described as a twin pandemic - a grave and global challenge to health and the extreme issue for the wealth of nations (Mayhew and Anand, 2020). The combination of such a great uncertainty, fear of contamination, and restraints imposed by public authorities have caused a sharp contraction in overall economic activity. Future projections claim that the unemployment rate will even exceed the peak of the global financial crisis as many companies have put on hold hiring processes and implemented multiple job-retention schemes. OECD officials put in evidence predictions that such devastating economic conditions will certainly increase inequalities among the most vulnerable groups-the low skilled, youth, migrants as well as women (OECD, 2020).

"The pandemic is deepening pre-existing inequalities, exposing vulnerabilities in social, political and economic systems which are in turn amplifying the impacts of the pandemic", stated a UN policy brief. "Across the globe, women earn less, save less, hold less secure jobs, are more likely

to be employed in the informal sector. (UN Women 2020)" The pandemic is more likely to affect service occupations with higher rates of female employment such as restaurants and hospitality. In addition, closures of schools and kindergartens have increased childcare needs, sharply impacting mother's work-life balance (Alon et al., 2020).

Not only women will be deeply affected by the effects of the pandemic, "young people are likely to be particularly hard hit by the economic fallout of the crisis" (Puerto and Kim, 2020). Lack of experience compared to the more skilful colleagues, engagement in "non-standard forms of employment", such as part-time, temporary or 'gig' work with usually lower payment are just some of the multiple reasons putting young people in the disadvantageous position (Puerto and Kim, 2020). Tourism, lodging, and travel businesses, where many of the young people are employed, were especially affected by the shocks of epidemics and will probably continue suffering a sharp drop in demand (Chang el al., 2020 as cited by Jung et al., 2020). Millions of workers worldwide found themselves without any constant occupation, as the entire industries such as travel, hospitality, sports, and entertainment were shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic (Kniffin et al., 2020).

By aggregating the published information on the effects of the pandemic on job security for migrants and low-skilled employees, it was determined that these occupational groups became extremely vulnerable to the impact of COVID-19 in the wider community. In some less-developed regions where the living situation is quite precarious, basic public health measures, such as self-isolation and appropriate hygiene became difficult to implement (Koh, 2020). The relative rate of job loss increased sharply for initially employed immigrants as the economic lockdown came into force, whilst the relative probability of finding work declined for immigrants that were initially without occupation (Borjas and Cassidy, 2020).

IV. Implications and suggestions to cope with the crisis

While the pandemic outbreak itself might come to an end in the near future, its impact on the global world of work may still endure for a long time. The dynamics of the effects in the labour market are hardly predictable and difficult to foresee. In the wake of the crisis, it is possible that some workers might begin to look for job opportunities offering more financial stability and security, whereas some others would rather prioritize a meaningful and socially supported professional environment, with a strong emphasis on the employees' mental health and well-being (Cotofan et al., 2021). As a result, it stays paramount to demonstrate suggestions for the organizations facing a challenge to remain responsive and adaptive when managing their workforce. The practical implications should create a stable climate in organizational work environments where employees perceive less job insecurity.

Businesses having the most ties with the affected areas were required to quickly understand key risks across operations and the supply chain. But beyond such immediate actions, ensuring the ability to navigate a crisis and reassessing the workforce planning is absolutely crucial in the long term. The restrictions on the possibility to move across the borders and the increased need to work remotely created significant disruptions in the daily balance. Therefore, managers must be mindful that health concerns lead to increasing employee anxiety, impacting overall productivity (Hauenstein 2020). Meister and Brown (2020) argue that "this is HR's moment to lead organizations in navigating the future". The alleviating policies might be applied in the form of resilience-promoting interventions in the workplace, organisational safety combined with human-machine collaboration (Pacheco et al., 2020). Installing the measures through which employees systematically participate in decision-making processes will help to empower them and regard their jobs as an important part of the organization and thus, reduce the feeling of job uncertainty (Jung et al., 2020).

V.Conclusion

To curb the spread of the coronavirus, governments were forced to urgently impose severe restrictions and preventive measures that have dramatically hit the economy worldwide. The global economic downturn created by the pandemic has and will likely continue to result in the downsizing of employment in different career stages and across different business sectors (International Labor Organization, 2020). The advent of this challenging period of global vocation uncertainty is tightly connected to considerable loss of life and illness, creating an intense level of grief, psychological and emotional instability and deterioration of the mental health of both white and blue-collar workers (Blustein et al. 2020). Thus, the impacts of COVID-19 on the employees and workplaces across the globe became truly dramatic and will likely endure for some time in the future.

Realizing the necessity of thoughtful HR responses to the COVID-19 pandemic helps to alleviate the drastic consequences of the crisis and manage the situation proactively. Managers should be able to identify threats perceived by organizational members and help to correctly address these issues, building close relationships to secure jobs and ensure employee retention (Jung et al., 2020). Even though it appears unlikely that the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic will be resolved quickly, reconstructing a better and more resilient labour market already now remains an essential investment for the future generations (OECD, 2020).

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The world of work has been one of the major sectors that have been greatly affected by the ongoing coronavirus disease (COVID-19) global pandemic. The crisis has brought several unprecedented impacts on workers, businesses, and enterprises globally. Thus, aside from being a global health emergency, it has also become an economic threat that continues to endanger the livelihood of workers and the survival of businesses.

Every worker has felt the negative effects of the pandemic. For some, it has caused delays in their career developments, reduction of their salaries and benefits, or realizations that they have always lacked the basic protection and security they should have had from their employers and their governments. But for many others in the job sector, it resulted in the loss of their livelihood – especially the ones who work in the informal sector. Certain businesses were able to move their presence and overall operations online, but small and medium-sized enterprises, to which United Nations' ninth Secretary-General António Guterres refers to as, "the engine of the global economy"[1], had a more difficult time catching up with the needed changes and obtaining external support to successfully survive through the current crisis. Up and coming business ventures were put on a halt, and some more established ones were even forced to stop operations and close down.

It must be noted that the world of work is more than just the interplay of the relationship between governments, businesses, and workers. It also involves both the creation of the supply of goods and services and the demand for the same through consumption and investments.[2] Aside from disrupting the regular course of business of various enterprises, the pandemic has also affected other important sectors which directly impact the different levels of the world of work such as foreign direct investments, international trade, global supply chains, and more.

Fast forward to now – more than a year and a half after the discovery of COVID-19 – millions of people have already lost their jobs, are underpaid, or are forced to stay in positions they are overqualified in. The problems in the world of work that have already been present before the pandemic have been made worse by the emergence and onslaught of COVID-19. Planning how the world of work should look after COVID-19 is a must. Though the current health crisis has been showing signs of slowing down due to the fast development of vaccines, the increased understanding of the nature of the virus, the easing of travel restrictions, and most importantly, the implementation of vaccination programs in different parts of the world, history has shown that events such as a pandemic of this scale are sure to have lasting effects on society and the workplace.[3] Hence, the best

time to study, formulate, and implement changes in the world of work, to do a "workplace revolution"[4] so to speak, is now rather than later.

Reset: Have we been doing enough even before COVID-19 happened?

The current crisis has exposed a number of shortcomings in the world of work. According to the 2020 Sustainable Development Goals Report of the United Nations, humanity has already been behind its targets for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit.[5] By the end of 2019, the global effort to achieve the 17 SDGs by the year 2030 was already off-schedule.[6] With the pandemic entering the equation in early 2020, most of the progress achieved concerning the SDGs has been set back as activities and developments in various sectors were put into a sudden halt, or worse, have digressed.

The progress towards realizing the SDGs which are related to the world of work, such as SDG No. 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, SDG No. 9 – Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, SDG No. 12 – Responsible Consumption and Production, has been mainly affected by the sudden changes in national and international policies in efforts to control the spread of COVID-19. Moreover, unlike the economic analysis and predictions that have been discussed in many venues, researches, and platforms, the negative impact of the pandemic on the mentality of workers might not be easily quantified and qualified at the moment. Vulnerable groups such as women, the youth, LGBTQIA+, migrants, refugees, people with disabilities and more – those who have been at a disadvantage within the workforce before the pandemic – have been further affected negatively by the crisis. Said workers are much more at risk of experiencing the destructive economic effects brought about by the pandemic aside from its more obvious threats to their health and survival.

There is a definite need to deep-dive into the problems that have already been present in the labor and economic markets around the world, and use the opportunity presented by the COVID-19 crisis to do a reset in the way we work and how workers are treated. Given the workplace inequalities that have been spotlighted due to pandemic, governments, businesses, and other key players should review and reconsider previous laws and existing policies to make sure that workers are truly taken care of, and small to medium-sized businesses are supported.

Resilience: How do we ensure that everyone can recover quickly and move forward?

Resilience is pertinent to ensure that the world of work not only survives but bounces back despite the difficulties presented by the pandemic. To continue ensuring and achieving resilience, meeting the needs of the workers and businesses at present is of utmost priority. These include providing workers and the enterprises themselves with the necessary digital infrastructure to enable remote work. It also includes state intervention in the form of relief packages and monetary stimulus to make sure that people and businesses survive. Both the private and public sectors should, most importantly, guarantee that the hardest-hit workers during these times – those in the health, food production, and services sector – are sufficiently protected from the occupational health hazards of COVID-19. The front-line workers should be protected by their governments and their employers as they are the engine that keeps the world of work running despite the limitations imposed by the pandemic to other kinds of jobs and careers. Furthermore, most workers in the front lines are also those who are considered to be part of vulnerable groups which makes their protection and proper compensation all the more important.

Overall, governments, workers, and employers play critical roles in safeguarding the long-term viability of businesses and jobs. When the world of work is resilient, there will be more room for innovation, creativity, and well-researched policy changes which would lead to improved conditions when recovery finally comes.

Recovery: What's next in the world of work after COVID-19?

While it is true that the end of the COVID-19 pandemic is on the horizon, the impact it brought to the world of work will surely remain – especially the ones which have exhibited a positive effect on both workers and employers.

Businesses and enterprises should continue to improve their digital infrastructures to ensure that their employees can efficiently work remotely and efficiently and deliver the needed outputs. Employers should also guarantee that their workers are well taken care of and have access to physical workspaces when needed. Governments should make sure that their countries are prepared for the fast-developing digital revolution which is now going on full speed as the world of work embraces technology and is continuing to innovate it further.

Civil society should also keep the public and private sectors in check to make sure that they are contributing to the development and upskilling of formal workers, investing in the training and

qualifications of informal workers, and campaigning on decent work for everyone. Additionally, the new and updated policies within the world of work should be in line with the climate agenda as it is closely interconnected to the overall development agenda itself. Creating and adopting green policies and giving importance to the development of disadvantaged workers are both equally important during these times.

Though the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be fully described until it officially comes to an end, the crisis humanity is currently facing is also an opportunity for stakeholders to reset and re-think the way the world of work operates and should operate while it is on its path to recovery. Also considering that there is still a lot to be done in catching up with the SDGs, the world of work should implement positive and necessary changes at exponential speed to make sure we not only recover, but ultimately revolutionize the way we do work for the better of humanity.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has rapidly accelerated a global trend towards digital transformation that will cause a large and lasting impact in the workforce[29]. The labour market has experienced deep changes because of the pandemic, such as the remote work and virtual meetings normalization for millions of workers[30]. Home based jobs are likely to stay, although less intensively than at the pandemic's peak, as business leaders continue to focus on rapid digital transformation, with 84% of employers overseeing a significant expansion of remote work, with a potential to move 44% of their workforce to operate remotely[31]. Many businesses are planning a flexible hybrid working format which allows employees to be sometimes on-premises and sometimes working remotely, the preferred model for more than half of the workforce[32].

Jobs in areas with high physical proximity will undergo the most relevant transformations in the post-pandemic world. On one side, most of the jobs involving customer interaction have switched to e-commerce and this change will probably remain. On the other side, computer-based office jobs, that rapidly adjusted to working at home during the pandemic, are now the most likely to continue in a hybrid. In some business sectors, such as ICT-intensive services (40%), knowledge-intensive business services, education, and publishing (30%), and telecommunications, finance, and insurance (20%), there was already a big share of teleworkers before the COVID-19 outbreak[33].

Even though many employees would like flexible remote work options to continue, the majority of workers cannot go remote[34]. For instance, the outdoor production and maintenance areas including construction, sites, farms, residential and commercial grounds, and other outdoor spaces, characterized by low proximity, will likely remain unchanged[35]. There are also occupations with high level face-to-face interaction, such as servers or personal service workers, that will continue to be performed from the standard worksite. Furthermore, jobs that require use of specialized equipment, handling and moving objects or controlling machinery, will necessarily continue to be done in person. Overall, some jobs might go partially or completely remote, others

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are less likely[36].

Telework implies inequalities. According to a Eurostat survey, there is a higher prevalence of telework among high-skilled workers as access to telework was considerably more widespread among well-paid individuals situated in the top quarter of the EU-27 income distribution (25% in comparison to 10% in the bottom half). The pandemic will certainly exacerbate the divide of those who can easily work from home and those who cannot, such as assemblers, plant, and machine operators. Those white-collar workers highly educated and well-paid will be the minority of the workforce enjoying a hybrid work format. However, even for some of them, the change to remote work will not happen due to the existing cultural barriers in some industries, such as the legal or financial ones[37]. On the opposite side, workers least likely to work remotely would be young, without a college education, working for non-standard contracts, employed in smaller firms, and those at the bottom of the earnings distribution, suggesting that the pandemic could exacerbate inequality[38].

Even though remote or hybrid work can be seen as a privilege, it implies many problems such as the lack of working space, infrastructure, and personal interaction, and it can also create two classes of employees. The ones in the office would benefit from the higher interaction with managers, and increased access to information and top assignments. They could also potentially receive an earlier promotion, while those at home may feel left out and facing constant communication barriers which impede them to perform at the same level as their in-office mates.[39] [40] [41] Furthermore, remote workers should face a complex equilibrium with private life and hyperconnectivity issues[42].

Despite their pitfalls, digital transformation and remote work can foster democratization of opportunities and a movement of skills around countries because it widens the talent marketplace. As an example, remote job postings on LinkedIn increased more than five times during the pandemic[43]. So remote work can also be a lever to attract the best and most diverse talent, promoting diversity at the workplace. Giving employees more flextime and telecommuting can also increase gender equality because mothers can better balance their work and family responsibilities, and more couples share housework more equally. Nevertheless, some experts

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argue that since women are more likely to work from home, this could lead to a 1970's male culture in various offices[44].

The greatest challenge that we face regarding the labour market is what happens to the 60% of workers who cannot work from home. It has been reported the considerable effect that will have the decline in daily commuters on those whose jobs support and serve these workers. This includes more than 25% of the workforce, mainly professionals coming from transportation, food service, cleaning and maintenance, retail, and personal care industries. These jobs, often lower paid, are disappearing or are at risk of disappearing in the near term[45]. In addition, according to a recent forecast from McKinsey & Company, more than 100 million low-wage jobs risk to be automated before 2030. Regarding the business travel, the effective use of technology during the pandemic could augur the beginning of long-term structural changes in a sector that would not recover until the end of 2024 and would even remain under its 2019 level in the future.[46] [47]

The analysis shows that the group of workers who may lose their jobs or who have already lost their jobs largely coincides with those who cannot telework. Why is this so? First, as previously stated, workers in the service sector are affected by the drop in demand in the inner cities due to the spread of teleworking. Secondly, the greater reliance on e-commerce and changes in tastes for goods and services could also entail lost jobs in retail, tourism, dining out and personal activities. Finally, the pandemic has accelerated the pace of automation in industrial manufacturing processes and logistics. As the International Monetary Fund has pointed out, we may face a recovery without employment for the less qualified jobs[48].

The best way to avoid widening inequalities is to improve the skills of the most vulnerable least qualified workers. Governments should take steps to support additional training and educational upskilling and reskilling programs for workers to facilitate them the transitions set off by COVID-19 and more generally, by the digital economy. Workers should acquire the skills necessary to get from their current jobs to new careers in a digitalized economy. If no action is taken, social polarization trends[49], accentuated by the pandemic, will be increasingly greater, due to the impoverishment of the middle classes and, in some countries, the loss of employment will immediately lead to social exclusion.

The most pressing issue is the need of filling the existing gaps in certain jobs, sectors, and skills for both mid-

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career and early-career workers. The skills shortage is especially pronounced in the technical field as the demand for information and communications technology specialists is growing fast. According to the European Commission, in the future, 9 out of 10 jobs will require digital skills, but at the same time, 169 million Europeans between 16 and 74 years -44%- do not have basic digital skills in a new decade characterized by the acceleration of digital transformation processes by companies and governments. This gap is even more pronounced in low- and middle-income economies, which lag behind in the use of digital technologies.

There is a need of more participation of the private sector and academia in policymaking in the field of education, labor, and economics, to understand the current trends and needs in workforce supply and demand with the aim of promoting the acquisition of new skills for taking up new occupations. The situation is especially serious for young people, with a global youth -between 15 and 24 years- unemployment rate prior to COVID-19 of 13.6%, and more than 20% of this age group neither working nor in formal education or training[50]. The International Labour Organization recall that the continue decline in young people's engagement in the labour market reflects not only the increasing enrolment in education, but the persistence of the youth NEET challenge, especially among young women, that is amplified due to the COVID-19 outbreak and to the increasing demand of tech jobs. In this regard, globally, according to UNESCO, female scientific researchers represent 28%, and only 35% of students enrolled in STEM disciplines are women.

There will always be people who will find it more difficult to telework because the nature of their profession requires them to be in a particular place. This situation will be increasingly reduced due to digitalization. What we must realize is that it is more and more necessary to have the technical skills to compete in a changing and highly specialized technological market. Education is needed to ensure an effective working transition to the new digital era. Governments and academia should work hand in hand with companies to offer flexible academic programs tailored to the specific industry needs and trends. Workers will have to update their knowledge during their lifetime, upgrading existing skills or learning new ones through fast-learning solutions and certificates suited to adapt to the rapidly evolving marketplace. Avoiding the teleworking divide will always go by extending training opportunities to enlarge the middle class and to create a more inclusive and egalitarian society.

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Topic 10: <u>LESSONS LEARNED</u>

What are the lessons that the global community has learned so far, over the past 18 monthsof the COVID-19 pandemic? How can we improve, do better, and avoid similar scenariosin the future? What are the weakest links, what are the strong points, how to be better prepared for the next epidemic?

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Keywords: human rights, inclusion, physical education, diversity, health, Bourdieu.

In 2015, the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development (UN, 2015) became the leading global policy driver for transformative action in areas of critical importance for the sustainability of humanity and the planet. Individuals, organisations and governments are called to invest and take action in a set of 17 goals and 169 targets, with a view of building an inclusive and sustainable future for all.

At the core of the Agenda 2030, there are three transversal principles that sustain the targeted priorities: 1) a human rights-based approach; 2) the notion of leaving no one behind; and 3) gender equality and women empowerment (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2020). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are grounded on human rights norms and instruments. Rattray (2019) points out that over 90% of the goals and targets correspond to human rights obligations and, consequently, they are "two sides of the same coin". Based on the pledge to safeguard human rights, the commitment to leaving no one behind is addressed many times: "We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world on to a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind" (UN, 2015). Thus, starting with the most vulnerable is of primary importance for the implementation at the local, regional, national and international levels.

In order to achieve this set of goals and targets, a defined, interdependent, multidisciplinary approach is required (Stafford-Smith, M., et al. 2017). All knowledge disciplines are called to align with the SDGs and collaborate to reduce inequalities and promote inclusive social development for everyone. Physical education, physical activity and sport are three areas that can drive, enable and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs (Masdeu Yelamos, et al., 2019). In this sense, the preamble to the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2016) acknowledges sport as an enabler for the goals:

> "Sport is also an important enabler of sustainable development. We recognize the growing contribution of sport to the realization of development and peace in its promotion of tolerance and respect and the contributions it makes to the empowerment of women and of young people, individuals and communities as well as to health, education and social inclusion objectives."

Sport is a global socio-cultural phenomenon that promotes value-humanistic ideals (Naumenko, 2018), as the Olympic values. The 37th session of the Human Rights Council (2018) adopted the resolution "Promoting human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal", which highlights the valuable contribution of sport towards advancing human rights. Sport is a universal language, a cost-effective tool to achieve other broader objectives such as education (Ascione, et al., 2018), social inclusion (Kelly, 2011), or community development (Schulenkorf, 2012). Sport is a vehicle for social protection and human rights as well as having inherent obligation in human rights instruments.

> "The unique ability of sports to transcend linguistic, cultural and social barriers makes it an excellent platform for strategies of inclusion and adaptation. Furthermore, the universal popularity of sport and its physical, social and economic development benefits make it an ideal tool for fostering the inclusion and well-being of persons with disabilities (and other marginalised groups)" (United Nations - Disability, 2018)

Over the last decades, it has also become a relevant socio-economic sector, engaging with diverse worldwide agencies and individuals in various roles (i.e. athletes, coaches, fans, spectators, managers, sponsors, volunteers, etc.). In this article, the term sport will be used in the same comprehensive manner as outlined in the Kazan Action Plan (UNESCO, 2017 p.1), which considers it a generic term "comprising sport for all, physical play, recreation, dance, organized, casual, competitive, traditional and indigenous sports and games in their diverse forms".

In late 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic started to revolutionise the status quo of our communities, bringing changes in multiple dimensions of our lives such as health, economy, social life, politics, etc. COVID-19 pandemic has been undoubtedly a health problem, but also a political challenge, as leaders across the world were forced to react in real-time to an unknown, fast-changing scenario to control the disease (Grix, et al., 2020). The UN Human Rights Council (2021) outlined the impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic on the enjoyment of human rights around the world, including good practices and areas of concern. There is not enough data to measure the impact of COVID-19 on the SDGs, however, Mukarram (2020) claims three possible consequences of this global pandemic to the advancement of the SDGs: 1) it might be a drawback for some of the achievements made so far; 2) it might slow the progress of some goals due to resetting priorities, and 3) it might require a reallocation of resources to support priority sectors.

Ali, et.al., (2020, p.415) claim that the "COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted the already marginalized groups in our societies". This fact has also been reported in "the other pandemic of system inequity" (Gray, et.al., 2020), which highlights inequity in access and enjoyment of social determinants of health and well-being. Despite being an unprecedented multi-layered crisis, the outcomes of the pandemic arguably bring us back to the starting point of the SDGs

and raise the following question: How can we improve, do better, and avoid similar scenarios in the future?

The core principles of the SDGs are reinvigorated with the new context. The core premise should be strengthened: Starting with the most vulnerable, by applying a human rights-based approach, to leave no one behind. The World Health Organisation (2020, p.1) affirms that "human rights frameworks provide a crucial structure that can strengthen the effectiveness of global efforts to address the pandemic". Human rights enshrine human dignity and, consequently, upholding human rights means the acknowledgement of the intrinsic worth of all human beings, regardless of age, gender, disability, religious belief, socioeconomic status, ethnic minority or any other social or personal characteristics. Yet, a greater awareness of human rights by rights-holders as well as by duty bearers might be needed. Likewise, an increased understanding of roles and responsibilities pertaining to human rights is required and should move towards inclusive actions, advocacy, and investments across multiple sectors (Carty, et al., 2021), including the education sector and the sports sector.

Sport can provide a comprehensive framework for learning values, thus contributing to the development of soft skills needed for responsible citizenship (UNESCO, 2020). Human rights education in and through sport is an innovative methodology to instil abstract concepts (i.e. human rights), in a comprehensible, applied and fun way for individuals, in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Through values-based education using sport, individuals can be better prepared to face challenges that life may present, as is the case with the current global pandemic. The Rights Understanding Sport Toolkit (TRUST) (TRUST, 2021) is a practical example of how human rights education through sport can bridge the theory-practice gap and empower sports practitioners to embed and fulfil human rights in and through sport. Two online modules are freely available to build the capacity of individuals to provide human rights education through sports taking into consideration the needs of marginalised groups such as refugees, people with disabilities and LGBTQI+ community.

Sport inherently contributes to the advancement of human capital in its multiple forms (i.e. economic, social, physical, intellectual, emotional and individual) (Bailey, et al.,2013) and, therefore, it enhances the development of humanistic capacities. The systemic adoption of humanistic competences and abilities can be instrumental in giving response to the individual and social needs and can facilitate the rebuilding of the post-COVID recovery stage and, beyond that, the creation of resilient communities. SDG implementation in and through sport and the adoption of human rights-based approach should lead to more robust healthcare systems, improved social protection mechanisms, better labour conditions, etc.

In the post-COVID recovery stage, one of the priorities is to reinforce a rights-based habitus to leave no one behind. Addressing inequalities and discrimination should be at the centre of recovery efforts. Drawing from Bourdieu's concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 2018, p.170), which can be defined as an "internalised need converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practice and meaning-giving perceptions", a rights-based habitus is the internalisation of human rights and consequent behaviour to respect, protect and fulfil them. A rights-based habitus can only be achieved by coordinated and collective action, in safe, inclusive and interconnected environments and nurtured by human rights education activities such as awareness-raising, training, information, events, etc. Human rights education through sport has the potential to contribute to transforming the understanding of human rights, instil a rights-based habitus, strengthen the SDGs core principles and, ultimately, support the establishment of a more inclusive and sustainable social contract worldwide.

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One important lesson that we have learned so far that we are not prepared for any situation like this and things haven't changed since our past experienced. Most recent pandemics such as the Spanish flu, MARS & SARS implied the urgency of information and improvement of health infrastructure but the ongoing Covid Pandemic exposes countries' medical assistance readiness with the overwhelming infection cases, the whole health system got collapsed and government across the globe looks helpless. It is not the first global outbreak but if we look back in the past 20 years the world has seen outbreaks such as SARS (2002) following MERS (2012), H1N1 influenza pandemic, Ebola Outbreak, and ZICA outbreak in 2016.

On the MARS outbreak in 2012, a Korean businessman came from the Middle East. On arriving he had a fever and pneumonia kind of symptoms but unknowingly, he had transmitted the disease to other people, by the time he was diagnosed with the unknown virus, the disease has already been transmitted to large masses. To break the chain of transmission, South Korea has adopted the idea of **Contact Tracing**, in which an infected person's detail and travel history has been stored into a system and other people who have crossed his travel spot have been alerted through an SMS. MERS pandemic was devastated for South Korea; and have reported the highest number of cases and death outside of middle east but it also teaches Korea to be prepared for the future outbreaks and they planned and prepared for the next outbreak like Covid 19. At the outset of the Covid 19 pandemic, Korea has reported the highest no of covid cases after mainland China but in February 2020 something has changed, when the rest of the world curbing covid by putting nationwide lockdown and restriction, Korea has opened and allowed its citizen for free movement because they have controlled the disease by contact tracing and manufacturing a large number of **Rapid Testing Kit** for better and accurate diagnosis. Like South Korea, other nations such as Singapore, Hongkong, Taiwan, and Germany have also followed the same tool. Contact tracing is controversial but Korea **prioritizes public health over privacy.**

A covid 19 patient can infect two or three people, that two or three people can spread to another two or three people & chain will go on; fatality rate of Covid 19 is like one death in every 200 people but supposed if a transmission rate is much higher than covid-19 like average 6 people from one infected person and death rate is staggering high; This devastating scenario was a condition of smallpox. Smallpox has created havoc and killed more people for generations and centuries and by **vaccination**, it has been controlled in Europe and North & South America in the 19th century. By the time it has reached Asia in the early 20th century, it has been realized that disease couldn't be eradicated until every country in the world is free from Smallpox. Global community pledged

and by **Global Cooperation** in the form of World Health Organization, large vaccination drive was introduced across nations such as Africa, China, and India. In 1974 in 5 months 15000 people had died of smallpox in India, which triggered WHO to proceeded in a more targeted approach like **Ring Vaccination**. In this experiment, instead of vaccinated every individual, a contracted individual and people who are in direct contact with the person and other people who are in contact with other contracted people are vaccinated, this process creates a buffer of vaccination and stop the disease to further spread and it worked and by this achievement WHO has followed the same technique to other nations and declared smallpox eradicated in the year of 1980.

In smallpox, it could be stopped from the widespread by vaccination but unlike smallpox, Covid 19 was originated from Bat which is an animal vector and could reappear again in the future; also, a big challenge is that in smallpox an infected person shows symptoms after infection which is easier to detect and isolate but in Covid 19 it is difficult to detect, as an infected person could be asymptomatic and continue to spread the disease to others until it is identified.

At the beginning of the Covid-19 countries across the world have chosen the more **nationalist approach** where they have restricted export of the vital covid medicine, Mask and protective gear, United States has pulled out the funds from WHO. In September last year, UN chief Antonio Guterres has said that **"The pandemic is the clear test of International Cooperation- a test which we have essentially failed"**. The vaccine is not a problem; new technology could expedite the vaccine demand much quicker but the lack of **Global solidarity** makes the pandemic last longer and complicated to eradicate.

Our world is so far has achieved the multilateralism and all countries around the world come under the same roof of the United Nations but is it really works the way it should be? In May 2020 United States government had a Vaccine deal worth $1.2 billion for 341 million vaccine doses with the British drugmaker company Astra Zeneca. A similar deal United Kingdom had with the same drug maker company for 90 million doses. Rich countries around the world had the same deal with all potential vaccine manufacturing companies to ensure if any company would be made it to safety and efficacy level then they will exchange vaccine with lump-sum investment. This kind of deal is called **Bilateral Deal.** Under this deal, rich countries stockpile vaccines more than their requirement, for example, the United States alone has bought 2 times more vaccine doses for their total population and leads to vaccine scarcity for middle-income and poor countries in the world. The rich countries have made this Pandemic last longer by creating **Vaccine Inequalities** and it will certainly kill more people from a new variant of the viruses, which is made vulnerable for all of us.

In 2009 Swine Flu outbreak rich countries have pledged to pool 120 million doses for H1N1 vaccines but they only started sending this donation after the virus was no longer a threat. Bilateral deals are initiated to expedite the research, manufacturing, and distribution of vaccines but it is not sure that which vaccine candidate will work, so multiple such bilateral deals have been done by high-income countries in exchange for large vaccine demands. World Health Organization and along with other two organizations have created an initiative known as **Covax**, where Covax plays a mediator role between countries and the vaccine manufacturing companies. The purpose of Covax is to provide vaccine to 92 middle- & low-income countries, it ensures that all nations across the world can access vaccine at the same time when the rich countries are receiving. It's a multilateral effort and term into two phases, in the first phases rich countries will create a pool of funds by donating in the Covax pool, which gives Covax dealing power with the multiple covid vaccines manufacturing companies even if one or two vaccine maker candidate failed to reach to efficacy level then other vaccine maker maintained the portfolio to keep the deal, Unlike bilateral deal where vaccine deals are between a country and vaccine maker, its more feasible in **a multilateral system** like Covax, where all countries such as high income and middle-income countries will get their equal vaccine share without loss of funds. In another phase, rich countries, charities, and wealthy organizations pool funds on Covax for vaccine development for lower-income countries so that everyone could access the vaccine at record time. A wise idea to implement but Covax was formed much late before the Bilateral deals have already been administered, Covax system by far is not feasible at least in this pandemic because rich countries are already on the priority list of vaccine distribution in a bilateral deal. So it is most unlikely the poor countries might get their share at the end of September 2021. Vaccine inequality is not good for a pandemic and the current system will surely not effective in future threats. We have to restore the multilateral system stronger to eradicate vaccine inequality and Nationalist ideology.

If a plane crashed in midair or during the takeoff or in landing, we conduct a full-blown investigation to learn the exact causes of the tragedy and also to understand the mistake whether it could be of human error or technical so that we can resolve the issue in future air travel but in the Covid-19 pandemic, we still do not know the exact causes, its already over 1 year but we still live-in speculation. Lack of cooperation by the host country, **data censorship**, lack of international cooperation put the investigation in delay. Until we know the origin of the virus, we cannot better prepare for the future threat of more dangerous viruses. **Covid 19 is far from the worse that nature has offered us but it is clear that we are not ready for something worse.**

Amplify	Abolish	Strengthen
Health System Readiness	Nationalist Ideology	Global Cooperation

Contact Tracing	Vaccine Inequality	Global Solidarity
Rapid Testing Kit	Bilateral Deal	Multilateral System
Vaccination	Data Censorship	Multilateralism