



Social Forum 2020: Poverty and Inequality



QUICK FACTS

- The COVID-19 pandemic has increased global poverty for the first time since 1998 and will push 150 million people into extreme poverty by the end of 2021.
- As of April 2021, the World Food Programme (WFP) estimated the number of people at risk of starvation at more than 270 million.
- The world's top billionaires have increased their wealth by 25% since the COVID-19 outbreak, amassing two thousand billion dollars.
- Developing countries collect between 10 to 20% of their GDP through tax revenue, whereas developed countries collect between 30 to 40%.
- 50% of the rise in global poverty due to COVID19 is expected to be in Africa, which accounted for only 14% of the global population.



The participation of marginalised populations, such as migrants, in policy making is crucial if we are to solve inequalities and poverty.

Abdul Aziz Muhamat, Human Rights Advocate

The Social Forum 2020 calls for international cooperation and solidarity to overcome the dramatic increase in global inequalities and poverty caused by the COVID19 pandemic

People in vulnerable situations and without social protection were most affected by the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic. This includes people living in poverty, marginalised women and children, older persons, persons with disabilities, people of African descent, racial, ethnic and religious minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees. In particular, the unpaid or undervalued care work done by women during the pandemic and the disproportionately high numbers of women employed in the informal sector resulted in an increased feminization of poverty worldwide. Due to poor access to digital technology, many students and workers worldwide also lacked technological equipment and a reliable internet connection to take part in remote education and working, exposing the glaring disparities and digital divides between developing and developed countries in the ability to take measures to contain the pandemic.

Poorer nations are facing challenges to their ability to deliver on economic and social rights, including foreign debt. They are suffering from collapsing trade, falling remittances, capital flight, currency depreciation and limited international development assistance. This makes international cooperation and solidarity urgent and imperative for developing countries, especially least developed countries and small island developing States.

Overcoming the negative impact of the pandemic will require a reversal of long-standing cycles of poverty and inequalities and a strengthening of commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals and human rights. As reflected in the Declaration on the Right to Development, poverty and inequalities derived from multiple, complex and interrelated causes at the local, national and global levels, including macroeconomic and neoliberal policies, structural adjustment and privatization that undermine human rights and sustainable development. Therefore, a new global deal towards more inclusive global governance, better regulations on finance, trade and investment, debt relief, progressive tax systems, and the promotion of productive capacities in vulnerable countries is needed to overcome poverty and climate change-related challenges.

States and other actors, including international financial institutions, multilateral development banks and transnational corporations, have an important role to play in securing an enabling international environment. They also have an obligation to uphold human rights and contribute to reducing poverty and inequalities.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE FORUM

- Human rights, including economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development, must be placed at the forefront of the pandemic recovery efforts and provide the basis of a new social contract. The COVID-19 response should attack asymmetries of power and exclusionary economic and social systems, institutions and policies.
- International and regional human rights mechanisms should continue to provide States with guidance on addressing poverty and inequalities.
- The international community should consider alternatives to the debt architecture, including a debt restructuring mechanism. Private creditors should be included in efforts to address debt sustainability.
- States should have the necessary fiscal and policy to invest in social services such as health systems, education, care work, housing, water, sanitation, electricity, infrastructure and digital resources, supported by a strong multilateral system.
- Productive capacities should be developed through State-led efforts to diversify economies and promote structural transformation, paying special attention to sectors with high productivity, optimizing the use of existing capacities and improving local value chains and economies.
- Data collection should guide policies by identifying those most in need of assistance and areas to be prioritized.
- Active, free and meaningful participation of civil society and poor and marginalized communities should be ensured in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of national and international policies combating poverty.
- The increase in child poverty should be addressed with specific plans, including measurable targets and dedicated funds. States should consider linking child protection benefits to wage growth to reduce intergenerational transmission of poverty.
- States should address land concentration through land reform and promote local, peasant and indigenous food systems and agroecology.
- States should adopt a human rights-based approach to taxation to raise the necessary resources for public investments in basic social services. Measures could include progressive personal and corporate income tax, temporary COVID-19 profit taxes and wealth tax. Concrete steps to curb illicit financial flows and tax abuse by transnational corporations are needed.
- The multilateral economic, financial and trade system should be democratized, including by expanding voting rights to developing countries and revising regulations on finance, trade and investment.
- All stakeholders should work with the Technology Bank for the Least Developed Countries and cooperate to promote technology transfer and overcome obstacles such as the expansion of intellectual property rights. Access to vaccines should be recognised as a global public good. Intellectual property barriers should be removed for COVID-19 treatments.
- States should remove or refrain from imposing unilateral coercive measures, especially those that aggravate poverty and inequality in targeted countries.
- International financial institutions, multilateral development banks and transnational corporations should undertake human rights impact assessments and be held accountable for human rights violations.
- The 2021 Social Forum should take into account the conclusions and recommendations of all previous Forums.



The COVID-19 pandemic is a test to us all and to societies and systems. To come out of it stronger we need to show solidarity. To be most effective, measures to stop the spread of the virus need to include actions to protect the most vulnerable. It is precisely in times of crisis that human rights values can help us steer the best course.

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