



CRISIS GOVERNANCE FORUM

Rule of Law-Based Policymaking for
COVID-19 Response and Recovery



COVID-19
RESPONSE

ADVANCING JUSTICE FOR BUILDING BACK BETTER: LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND IN COVID-19 RESPONSE AND RECOVERY POLICIES

Online Discussion

Thursday, 4 February 9:30 to 11:00 am EST/15:30 to 17:00 CET

1. Since its onset, the COVID pandemic has exposed the multi-dimensional fragilities that characterize the world today. Inadequate health systems, gaps in social protection, structural injustices and climate related risks have all been laid bare, compounding pre-existing inequalities and leaving more people behind.
2. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres recently observed that “inequality defines our time.”¹ With the COVID pandemic exacerbating inequalities further and leaving new segments of population unprotected, fulfilling the collective commitment that the international community has entered into in 2030 Agenda to combat inequalities and “leave no one behind” has become more compelling and more urgent than ever.²
3. The present discussion at IDLO’s Crisis Governance Forum is a part of a series of online dialogues launched in July 2020 to provide a platform for policy makers and practitioners engaged in COVID-19 crisis management to share insights and discuss policy solutions toward responses to, and a sustainable recovery from, the pandemic guided by the rule of law and the principles and objectives of the 2030 Agenda.
4. Building on the outcome of the previous thematic session of the Forum that addressed policies to promote equitable access to healthcare, this session will focus on strategies specifically targeting those most at risk of being left behind: their place in the overall context of policies to advance equity, fairness, non-discrimination, and social inclusion, and their role in addressing the emerging and growing vulnerabilities resulting from the pandemic. Experiences and lessons learned by governments at national and local levels will be reviewed with the achievement of the goals of 2030 Agenda as a basic frame of

¹ <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/annual-lecture-2020-secretary-general-guterres-full-speech>.

² Reinforcing the commitments embodied in the 2030 Agenda, the Declaration on the Commemoration of the 75th Anniversary of the United Nations (8/RES/75/1) reiterates that “growing inequality within and among countries are jeopardizing our efforts to ensure the future we want” and pledges to “address the root causes of inequalities including violence, human rights abuses, corruption, marginalization, discrimination in all its forms, poverty and exclusion, as well as lack of education and unemployment”.



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reference, examining their contribution both to strengthening social resilience in the ongoing response to the crisis and to creating the conditions for building back better in the future.

5. The Preamble to the 2030 Agenda points to equal access to development gains for all communities and individuals, and to the ability of governments to prioritize and fast-track benefits for the most disadvantaged, as key objectives underpinning the success of the entire Agenda. It states “As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first”.
6. **The present session will provide an opportunity to examine how challenges in designing and implementing “leave no one behind” policies and measures have been further compounded by the COVID-19 crisis, and to share experiences in overcoming them.**
7. **One such challenge relates to the availability of suitable data.** From the outset of processes for the implementation of Agenda 2030, it was clear that the capacity to frame effective policies targeting all the vulnerable groups identified in the Agenda – including children, youth, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, older persons, indigenous peoples, refugees, internally displaced persons and migrants – would be significantly affected by the availability of disaggregated data.³ Addressing inequalities and discrimination furthermore, requires the generation of evidence and data collection and disaggregation that encompass, beyond gender, geography and age, all grounds of discrimination identified under international law.⁴ During the current pandemic, the operation of a vast majority of national statistical offices have been affected, with 9 in 10 in low- and lower-middle-income countries reporting funding cuts,⁵ creating additional obstacles for the successful design of “leave no one behind” policies, but pointing at the same time to a crucial area where international development cooperation will need to be intensified and prioritized in the period ahead.
8. **Literature on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda’s call to “leave no one behind” distinguishes between two basic conditions of “vulnerability”:** between those in conditions of *absolute deprivation*, living in multidimensional poverty or below other minimally accepted standards of security, income, public services, infrastructure or well-being; and those living in conditions of *relative disadvantage*, where they face **exclusion, discrimination and/or entrenched inequalities** that brings about unequal development

³ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2016/leaving-no-one-behind#>.

⁴ <https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind>.

⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2020/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2020.pdf>.



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outcomes.⁶ To the extent that both categories have been severely and disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, “leave no one behind” strategies in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery policies will need to target in a differentiated but equally deliberate and intensive way both categories.

9. In his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela wrote: “A nation should not be judged by how it treats its highest citizens, but its lowest ones.”⁷ Along with this vision of governance, in a situation where more than 70 per cent of the world’s people were already experiencing prior to the onset of COVID-19 an increasing income and wealth gap, and this gap is significantly rising as a result of the pandemic, prioritizing the needs of those left further behind becomes, for governments and public service providers, an inescapable, compelling responsibility.⁸
10. **The responsibility of local and national governments to provide adequate social protection is further amplified in crisis settings.** With the spread of the novel coronavirus infection, the introduction of emergency measures and lockdowns, and their impact particularly felt on the informal economy, the magnitude of the challenge has multiplied.⁹ In 2020, global extreme poverty is expected to rise for the first time in over 20 years as the pandemic is estimated to push an additional 88 million to 115 million people into extreme poverty this year, with the total rising to as many as 150 million by 2021.¹⁰
11. **Along with a worrisome trend of sliding back to extreme poverty, there is evidence of a growing number of groups being disproportionately affected by the pandemic with insufficient protection in place.** These include people experiencing homelessness;¹¹

⁶ See, “What Does It Mean to Leave No One Behind? A UNDP Discussion Paper and Framework for Implementation,” July 2018 https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwi2tfvXiPbsAhUPTd8KHbu7D-MQFjABegQIBhAC&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.undp.org%2Fcontent%2Fdam%2Fundp%2Flibrary%2FSustainable%2520Development%2F2030%2520Agenda%2FDiscussion_Paper_LNOB_EN_Ires.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1bJN86ueuFP1QWuZ6Umq0b. See also, Development Co-operation Report 2018 *Joining forces to leave no one behind*, OECD 2018, pp. 55-63. <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/dcr-2018-7-en.pdf?expires=1604949180&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=37D87210C903DAD7908775DEFFED85E>.

⁷ Mandela, N. (1994), *Long Walk to Freedom*, Little, Brown and Company, New York.

⁸ <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/news/entry/annual-lecture-2020-secretary-general-guterres-full-speech>.

⁹ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/06/1067502>.

¹⁰ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021>.

¹¹ <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/coalition-for-the-homeless-testifies-on-the-disparate-impact-of-covid-19-on-homeless-people-in-new-york-city/>.



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forcibly displaced persons,¹² migrants,¹³ and a range of marginalized groups experiencing relative deprivation based on gender, racial, ethnic or linguistic identities.¹⁴

12. **Women and girls continue to be especially and disproportionately impacted.** Women are on the frontlines of COVID-19 exposure, making up 67% of the health care workforce, according to a survey of 104 countries, and 80% of nurses. Women's economic prospects are further diminished by school closures and their role in informal economy, which was hardest hit, while lockdowns have significantly increased their risks of intimate partner violence.¹⁵
13. In providing a new, comprehensive concept for renewing the human development framework, and at the same time addressing the "new frontier" of leaving no one behind, the **Human Development Report 2020¹⁶ introduces a crucial reminder:** as we advocate for inclusive and just access to health care and social protections for those at risk of falling behind, **sustainable development dictates that we not exclude future generations whose development capabilities risk to be jeopardized today by global environmental degradation.**
14. **The effectiveness of COVID-19-related legislation, policies and measures in alleviating the impact of the pandemic on people at risk of being left behind will depend, to a significant degree, on governance' capacity to identify different social groups disproportionately affected by it and to design measures specifically geared to the particular needs and circumstances of each of them.** Discussions at the session of relevant experiences and best practices will be pursued in this perspective.
15. **Ultimately, leaving no one behind requires political will and determination to address the entrenched inequalities** that the pandemic has exposed and is significantly aggravating and to act deliberately on their root causes. **It requires renewed international solidarity to address inequalities among as well as within countries** and a concerted attack on the structural and other factors that have resulted in the pandemic having such a disproportionate impact on the economic systems and the social fabric of African countries and of least developed, land-locked, small island countries, as well as conflict

¹² <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-coronavirus-covid-19-on-forcibly-displaced-persons-in-developing-countries-88ad26de/>.

¹³ https://www.iom.int/sites/default/files/our_work/ICP/MPR/migration_factsheet_6_covid-19_and_migrants.pdf.

¹⁴ See, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25916>, and https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Minorities/UN_Network_Racial_Discrimination_Minorities_COVID.pdf. See also, for example, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>; and [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(20\)31102-8/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(20)31102-8/fulltext).

¹⁵ <https://www.usglc.org/coronavirus/women-and-girls/>.

¹⁶ <http://hdr.undp.org/en/2020-report>.



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affected countries.¹⁷ It requires the transformation of deeply rooted systems and of governance structures at all levels. It is in this perspective that the COVID-19 recovery effort can serve to renew progress toward the realization of the objectives of 2030 Agenda and create new opportunities for sustaining peace and development in the period ahead.

¹⁷ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/leaving-no-one-behind.html>.