



# PolyPandemic

Munich Security Report Special Edition on Development,  
Fragility, and Conflict in the Era of Covid-19

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Fragility, and Conflict in the Era of Covid-19

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# Foreword by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, Chairman of the Munich Security Conference



Wolfgang Ischinger

Dear Reader,

In just a few short months, the coronavirus pandemic has become a poly pandemic – a multifaceted crisis that threatens core development goals like equality and food security but that also endangers key democratic principles and international cooperation as a whole. The poly pandemic has not spared any country in the world. However, the ability to resist and recover from its multiple shocks is not equally distributed, a fact that has received disturbingly little attention. Likewise, there has been little discussion of how Germany, Europe, and the international community can support weaker states in this moment of crisis.

The report aims to raise awareness of the disruptive effects of Covid-19 in the most vulnerable parts of the world. The pandemic, it highlights, might well reverse decades of development progress and further exacerbate state fragility. And by destabilizing nations and aggravating deprivation, the shocks produced by Covid-19 could become catalysts for violent conflict itself. But the report does not just seek to alert. It also aims to fuel the debate on how to better protect the world's most vulnerable people while also helping them invest in long-term crisis resilience.

In this regard, the report chimes well with a long tradition of activities on human and health security by the Munich Security Conference (MSC). From the high-level discussions at our main conference and



events conducted as part of our Human Security Series to regular coverage in our annual Munich Security Report: The MSC's activities over the past several years have been centrally concerned with the multitude of threats to human lives and livelihoods posed by non-traditional challenges. And without a doubt, the issues of development and fragility, of hunger and repression covered in this report link back to some of the broader (geo-)political questions regularly raised by the MSC. This includes questions about the future of the multilateral order, about the trajectory of systemic competition, and about Europe's and Germany's ability to take on the roles commensurate with a changing international environment.

As always, there are many partners to thank who have contributed to the report in one way or another. First and foremost, this applies to the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), which has generously funded the research behind this report, and to the many partners, including those of our Human Security Series, who have supported this report with valuable input and relevant data.

It is my hope that this text helps promote both understanding and support for policies that can successfully confront the dramatic challenges we are facing.

## Preface by Dr. Gerd Müller, Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development



Gerd Müller

We will either beat coronavirus worldwide or not at all. That applies to the whole of Germany, to Europe – and most definitely, it applies to the people living in the world's poorest countries, people living in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

The pandemic has triggered one of the world's biggest economic crises and there is a danger that it will develop into one of the most massive poverty and hunger crises. The achievements made in terms of realizing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development are in danger of being reversed. According to UN estimates, the number of people around the world suffering from hunger is likely to rise by another 130 million as a result of the pandemic. Our neighboring continent, Africa, is particularly affected: we must expect an additional 330,000 deaths from malaria and more than 500,000 victims of AIDS and tuberculosis as a result of shortfalls in supplies. Furthermore, after 25 years of economic growth, Africa is now facing its first recession; some 20 million jobs are in danger.

The Munich Security Conference shows in its study how peace and development are jeopardized by security risks which are a result of hunger, poverty and suffering. Crises that come to a head far away from our shores have impacts reaching right up to our doorstep. That is something we are feeling directly at the outer borders of the EU, in the Middle East, in North Africa, and in the Sahel region.

Violence and conflicts are destroying successful development; they are destroying societies and state structures. When that happens, the void that is left allows crime to thrive, offers a bolthole for terrorists, and gives space for the trade in arms to flourish. We cannot stand idly by and watch that happen.

The international community is therefore called upon all the more urgently to take decisive action: Germany is already leading the way with a comprehensive Emergency Covid-19 Programme that has been set up to support developing countries in their efforts to address both the acute health crisis and the economic, income and food crisis that it has brought in its wake with fast, effective measures. The EU should follow our example and likewise set up a strong special Covid-19 programme, in order to fight the severe negative economic and social consequences for developing countries and emerging economies. And we must strengthen multilateralism: because, in this one world of ours, the only way we can meet the global challenges of our time is through global cooperation.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Agreement show us the path we must take and what we must do, especially following after the coronavirus pandemic, in order to create a world that is more just and peaceful. That is what we must work towards, together, in a spirit of true global and social responsibility.



## Executive Summary

With Covid-19, the world is being confronted with multiple pandemics rather than just one. Covid-19 has provoked a polypandemic that is undermining development progress, exacerbating state fragility, and potentially further eroding international cooperation. If left unmitigated, the coronavirus pandemic and the pandemics that accompany it, including those of hunger, inequality, and authoritarian rule, will disproportionately hit those populations that were most vulnerable to begin with.

The Covid-19 pandemic is a global and multifaceted crisis. No region of the world has been spared its dire toll on lives and well-being. And no part of the globe has remained unaffected by the socio-economic shock produced by Covid-19 and its grim effects on human livelihoods. Yet, some nations, societies, and people are struggling more than others. In places that already suffered from low development, state fragility, and violent conflict before Covid-19, the pandemic's direct and indirect fallout threaten to be much more severe. Facing weak healthcare systems, frail economies, and tattered state-society relations, many of these contexts lack the capacities to cope with coronavirus-induced shocks.

At the moment, however, there is a huge imbalance between, on the one hand, the human suffering and the threats to international peace and security that the pandemic might provoke in these contexts and, on the other hand, the attention and assistance that Germany, Europe, and the international community have dedicated to them. In this regard, wealthier states' pandemic responses are a continuation of a pre-pandemic trend: one of underinvestment in the safety and well-being of the world's most vulnerable places. By highlighting the consequences, Covid-19 has served as a magnifying glass for the mistakes of the past. It has relentlessly exposed the extent to which insufficient efforts to foster development, curb fragility, and reduce violent conflict have gradually weakened many countries' capacities to cope with significant stress. And it has highlighted the costs of pre-pandemic policies that successively eroded the collective tools for solving global problems and for containing their effects on the world's most vulnerable people.

But the pandemic is not just opening our eyes to troubles that long predate the coronavirus outbreak. It also represents a critical juncture. The international community now has two options: It can either continue on the track of underinvestment, thereby allowing the pandemic to exacerbate existing disparities and vulnerabilities. Or it can finally change course and embrace policies that understand solidarity as self-interest and protection as a strategic investment in the future.

The first scenario is highly worrisome. Without decisive action, the pandemic might well wreak havoc in the most vulnerable parts of the world. Already, it threatens to undo years of progress in global development, potentially pushing millions more into poverty and causing food insecurity in various parts of the world. Democracy faces fierce headwinds as a result of Covid-19 and violent nonstate actors have already begun to exploit the pandemic to extend their own reach. And with the world distracted by Covid-19, some actors have even intensified their involvement in conflict – including in Europe’s immediate neighborhood.

Yet, the damage that could be done by Covid-19 will by no means only impact states. It could also affect the international stage. By aggravating great-power competition inside multilateral institutions and by intensifying nationalist and protectionist sentiments, Covid-19 has already revealed its potential to exacerbate the crisis of multilateral cooperation. For the countries that are hardest hit by the fallout of Covid-19 and that disproportionately depend on global solidarity and effective multilateral solutions, this is particularly dire news.

This gloomy scenario is by no means a given. Decisive action by the international community can prevent this outcome from materializing. By relentlessly exposing the extent to which our well-being depends on the well-being of others, the pandemic could well serve as a wake-up call.

Instead of further dismantling the multilateral architecture, it could induce actors to revive cooperative formats. And instead of turning inward and exclusively focusing on the challenges that confront them at home, Germany, Europe, and other wealthy states could come to understand the urgent need to protect the world’s most vulnerable people, to aid them in resisting and recovering from Covid-19, and to increase investments in development, resilience, and peace.



In a first step, states should fully renounce protectionist measures in the realm of medical supplies and protective equipment. Protectionism is a serious threat to the world's most vulnerable nations and their ability to protect their own people. And if vaccine nationalism prevails, the Global South will be the first to lose out.

Second, saving lives and protecting livelihoods must be the order of the day. To this end, wealthy states need to extend the financial generosity that characterized their own domestic pandemic responses to ongoing humanitarian relief efforts. To date, major global humanitarian initiatives still face considerable funding gaps. To help its most vulnerable members, the international community needs to link short-term aid to meet immediate needs with investments in countries' long-term crisis resilience. Even in light of growing pressure on all governments' budgets, ODA must not fall victim to cuts. Instead, for European and other key players, it is time to (re-)commit to the 0.7 percent target of ODA spending. Furthermore, efforts to limit the pandemic's disruptive effects in the most vulnerable parts of the world will also demand discussions on debt relief. Here, the G20 is uniquely positioned to lead.

Third, as countries help others rebuild and recover, efforts to improve prevention and strengthen resilience should accompany them at every step of the way. Investments in stronger healthcare systems, in resilient economies, and in solid and trusting relationships should be at the heart of such efforts everywhere in the world. But states also have to "build back better" at the international level. They particularly need to strengthen the collaborative institutions and instruments that are crucial for effective global solidarity.

And the pandemic has revealed something else: The relationship between more and less developed parts of the world does not need to be a one-way street. When it comes to fighting infectious diseases, the past months have evinced, the developed West has a lot to learn from many developing states.

Moments of crisis always represent a chance. The polypandemic might offer many of them. For Germany, Europe, and the international community it offers a tremendous opportunity to support affected countries in their efforts to "build back better" and thereby decrease the global disparities that undermine international peace, stability, and resilience.

# The Polyandemic at a Glance

<b>+100%</b>	<b>The Hunger Pandemic</b> Covid-19-induced increase in the number of people facing acute food insecurity <sup>1</sup>
<b>83–132 million</b>	People that could become undernourished due to Covid-19 in 2020 <sup>2</sup>
<b>828 million</b>	Most drastic estimate by the FAO of the total number of people that could be undernourished by the end of 2020 <sup>3</sup>
	<b>The Inequality Pandemic</b>
<b>30% vs. 9%</b>	Death rate spike until July among People of Color vs. white people in the United States <sup>4</sup>
<b>29 vs. 3</b>	Physicians per 10,000 people in OECD vs. least developed countries <sup>5</sup>
<b>4,200 vs. 74,255</b>	Covid-19 tests per million people in Africa vs. Europe by early July <sup>6</sup>
	<b>The Poverty Pandemic</b>
<b>88–115 million</b>	Additional people in extreme poverty in 2020 due to Covid-19 <sup>7</sup>
<b>1st</b>	Increase in global poverty since 1990 <sup>8</sup>
<b>495 million</b>	Full-time jobs estimated to be lost due to Covid-19 in 2020 <sup>9</sup>
<b>ca. 20%</b>	Drop in remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries expected for 2020 <sup>10</sup>
	<b>The Violence Pandemic</b>
<b>21,000</b>	People killed in conflict in the first three months after the UN Security Council's global ceasefire resolution <sup>11</sup>
<b>21%</b>	April uptick in engagement with violent extremist content online recorded in the United States in areas with confinement measures in place <sup>12</sup>



**30%** **The Authoritarianism Pandemic**  
Global spike in government repression between mid-March and the end of July<sup>13</sup>

**1 day vs. 3 months** **The Nationalism and Unilateralism Pandemic**  
Time it took the UN Security Council to pass a resolution on Ebola in 2014 vs. Covid-19 in 2020

**92** Jurisdictions that had implemented export controls on medical supplies as of October 16, 2020<sup>14</sup>

**91%** **The Education Pandemic**  
Share of students worldwide affected by temporary school closures<sup>15</sup>

**1.6 billion** Children and youths out of school by April 2020<sup>16</sup>

**3.6 million** Children projected to drop out of school in West and Central Africa by the end of 2021<sup>17</sup>

**2 million** **The Health Pandemic Beyond Covid-19**  
Estimated non-Covid-19 deaths due to health service disruptions<sup>18</sup>

**29** Number of countries that had suspended measles shots by July<sup>19</sup>

**769,000** WHO estimate of malaria deaths in 2020<sup>20</sup>



Introduction

# 1 A World Ill-Prepared

Which states and contexts will be hit the hardest by the fallout of Covid-19? What role have developing countries, fragile states, and conflict settings played in the pandemic responses of wealthy Western states? And why was the world so badly prepared for the pandemic and its consequences?

## A World Ill-Prepared

Sophie Eisentraut,  
Juliane Kabus,  
and Luca Mieke

“Disease and insecurity are old friends,” argued the World Health Organization (WHO) Director-General Tedros Ghebreyesus at the Munich Security Conference in February 2020.<sup>21</sup> What Ghebreyesus described as “a key lesson of history,”<sup>22</sup> is currently powerfully on display. Since March 11, when the WHO labelled the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, the virus has spread to every region of the world and has killed more than one million people.<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, the measures taken to curb the virus’s spread have caused a massive global economic downturn, pushing countries into recession and people into unemployment.<sup>24</sup>

In a matter of weeks, the coronavirus pandemic has become a polypandemic – a multifaceted crisis that is confronting the world with more than just a health emergency. As a result of Covid-19, development is regressing, repression and human rights infringements are increasing, and the root causes of conflict are thriving almost everywhere.<sup>25</sup> In fact, the coronavirus is threatening to also provoke a “hunger pandemic,”<sup>26</sup> an “inequality pandemic,”<sup>27</sup> and, by challenging core democratic principles, even a “pandemic of authoritarian rule.”<sup>28</sup> And this is not to speak of the less visible pandemics, the “shadow pandemic[s]”<sup>29</sup> sparked by Covid-19. Among them is the spike in intimate partner violence that evidently occurred when coronavirus lockdown measures were in place.<sup>30</sup>



“The response of wealthy nations – who have thrown out the rulebook to protect their people and economies – has been grossly inadequate. This inaction is dangerously short-sighted.”<sup>32</sup>

United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator  
Mark Lowcock,  
Global Humanitarian Response Plan,  
July 2020

The destabilizing consequences of the pandemic and the harm it does to human security via its secondary effects are palpable in every part of the world. Yet, in the world’s most vulnerable places, regions that were already suffering disproportionately from low development, fragility, and conflict before the pandemic, the threat posed by Covid-19’s fallout is much more severe.<sup>31</sup> This is particularly true for many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and in South Asia. In some of these regions, confirmed cases of Covid-19 still remain lower than initially feared. Nevertheless, it is in these vulnerable contexts that the disruptive effects of the pandemic will likely be worst. It is here that the ability of countries to withstand future shocks will be most durably impaired. And it is here that the resilience of the international community will be most fundamentally impacted.

Still, the fates of more vulnerable world regions have barely played a role in the pandemic responses of wealthier states. The United States has spent trillions of dollars on domestic coronavirus relief but has made no effort to spearhead

global assistance to less developed states.<sup>33</sup> And while European Union (EU) member states agreed on a coronavirus recovery package worth 750 billion euros,<sup>34</sup> the EU's global support package,<sup>35</sup> totaling 36 billion euros, amounted to less than five percent of that value. Meanwhile, the Federal Minister of Labor and Social Affairs has estimated that, in 2020, the German government will spend 20 billion euros on its *Kurzarbeit* program, a government unemployment insurance system.<sup>36</sup> Germany is thus spending more money on protecting its citizens from the socio-economic shock of the pandemic than the EU initially pledged in coronavirus support for the entirety of its partner countries.<sup>37</sup>



“You could not have a better example of ‘Westlessness’ than the response we are not seeing globally, from the US and Europe, to the largest crisis we have had since World War II.”<sup>41</sup>

Ian Bremmer,  
Munich Security Conference  
Transatlantic Conversation,  
April 27, 2020

In light of the massive human suffering that the polypandemic may well engender in the Global South, the reaction from Germany, the EU, and the international community is highly irresponsible. Additionally, given the myriad of “exportable problems”<sup>38</sup> that could result if Covid-19 is permitted to further disrupt fragile and developing states, it is a massive strategic mistake. Clearly, if European governments and those of other developed states allow the pandemic to wreak havoc elsewhere, the consequences of this “neglect will come full circle” and will come back to haunt them at home.<sup>39</sup> For that reason, as Wolfgang Ischinger recently argued, “solidarity [...] is an imperative of humanity as well as it is in our very own interest.”<sup>40</sup>

Covid-19 has served to magnify serious pre-pandemic troubles. It has emerged in a world of “Westlessness,”<sup>42</sup> where wealthy Western democracies have become increasingly inward-looking, and where the collective tools for solving global problems and assisting the world's weakest countries were already in poor working order. In the pre-pandemic world, the United States and Europe had seemingly lost the ambition and capability to effectively address problems that are global in scope and decisively engage with the troubles of less fortunate regions.<sup>43</sup> In the world's conflict zones – in Syria, Venezuela, and elsewhere – this reluctance had become particularly obvious. And before the coronavirus hit, the institutions and instruments desperately needed to mitigate global threats and contain their effects on the world's most vulnerable people have been gradually hollowed out by growing anti-globalist sentiment, rising great-power competition, and an increasing tendency towards unilateral action among the world's leading states.<sup>44</sup>

The crisis provoked by Covid-19 has thrown these failings into painfully sharp relief: In 2008 and 2009, the transatlantic partners still closely coordinated their responses to the global financial and economic crisis. Likewise, the G20, called to action by the United States, took decisive measures to

limit the global ripple effects of this shock.<sup>45</sup> The coronavirus crisis is different. This time around, collaboration among transatlantic partners seems largely non-existent and the G20, critics argue, is far away from “repris[ing] the fire-fighting role”<sup>46</sup> it performed little more than a decade ago.

But the polypandemic is not destined to “accelerate history.”<sup>47</sup> It does not necessarily have to exacerbate the worrisome trends that predated Covid-19. Instead, it could serve as a wake-up call for the European Union, the transatlantic partners, and the international community as a whole. By relentlessly exposing the costs of underinvestment in development, resilience, and peace and by highlighting the extent to which our well-being depends on the well-being of others, the pandemic has directed attention to the urgent need to better protect the world’s weakest countries. As a result, it might prompt the revival of cooperative formats that serve the most vulnerable members of the international community and support them in resisting and recovering better from the fallout of Covid-19. It may also lead decision-makers in Germany, the EU, and elsewhere to (re-)commit to ambitious investments in fostering development, curbing fragility, and containing conflict in the world.



“My fear is that the world after [the pandemic] will look like the world before, only worse.”<sup>48</sup>

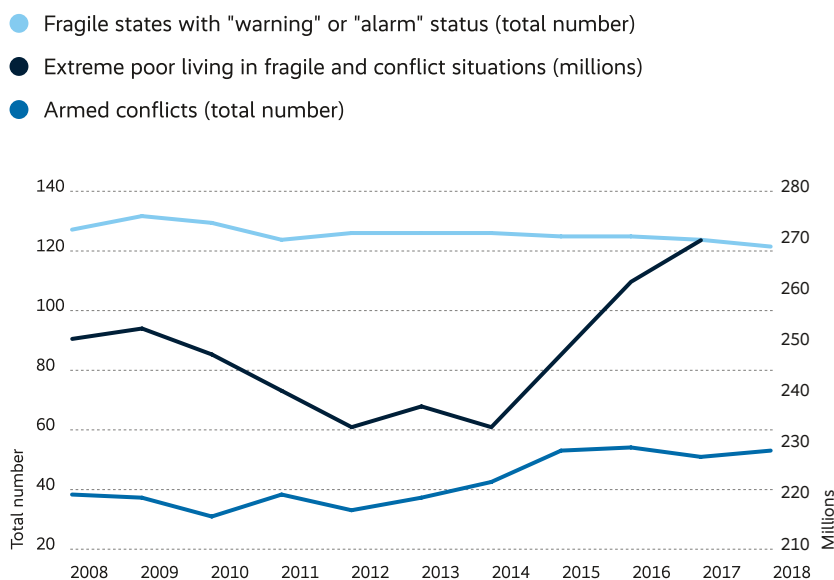
Foreign Minister of France  
Jean-Yves Le Drian,  
Le Monde,  
April 20, 2020

A first step in this process would be to realize what has gone wrong. But if they are to devise better strategies and measures to protect the world’s most vulnerable people from the ripple effects of Covid-19, Germany, the EU, and the international community need to do three things: First, they need to look at where and why exposure to Covid-19 is especially pronounced ([Chapter 2](#)); second, they need to better understand the disruptive effects of the polypandemic, including both the direct effects of the virus and the many indirect pandemics it has provoked ([Chapter 3](#)); and third, they need to grasp how broader global trends risk exacerbating these detrimental dynamics ([Chapter 4](#)).

Clearly, this will not be the last pandemic. Nor will it be the last global shock experienced by the international community. The damaging effects of a global climate crisis may well outlast those of Covid-19. But without significant investments in the safety and resilience of the most exposed populations, better global crisis preparedness will remain little more than a pipe dream.

One thing is certain: The coronavirus pandemic has hit a world that was ill-prepared for significant shocks. Shortcomings in fostering development, curbing fragility, and reducing violent conflict have gradually weakened many countries’ capacity to cope with significant stress and have left millions of people exposed to a sizeable shock.

**Figure 1.1**  
**Poverty, fragility, and conflict before Covid-19, 2008–2018**



Data: The Fund for Peace, Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO) Armed Conflict Dataset, and World Bank. Illustration: Munich Security Conference



“We were terribly late for Ebola. More than 28,000 people were infected, 11,000 died. We had no vaccine or rapid diagnostic tests, no special treatment. Have we learned the lesson we were supposed to learn?”<sup>49</sup>

President of Doctors Without Borders  
 Joanne Liu,  
 Munich Security Conference,  
 February 18, 2017

By 2019 – four years after the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in the belief that this would represent the “founding act of a new global solidarity”<sup>50</sup> – collective progress on reaching these goals was already “slowing down.”<sup>51</sup> This was despite a significant global reduction in extreme poverty, which dropped “from 36 per cent in 1990 to [ten] per cent in 2015,”<sup>52</sup> and progress on several other fronts: The number of children dropping out of school and communicable diseases declined, and more people had better access to safe drinking water.<sup>53</sup> Yet, although the international community had planned to fully eliminate extreme poverty in a decade, around ten percent of the world’s population continued to live on less than 1.90 US dollars a day.<sup>54</sup> In Sub-Saharan Africa, the number of people in extreme poverty even started to rise in 2015.<sup>55</sup> The same was true for fragile and conflict-affected settings, where the number of extremely poor people grew steadily from 2012, reaching 270 million in 2017 (Figure 1.1). Overall, the world was “not on track”<sup>56</sup> to meet its development targets by 2030, leaving it highly exposed to additional stress.



At the same time, the international community did not succeed in significantly reducing state fragility, which has remained at an elevated level. According to the most recent *States of Fragility* report published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), almost two billion people – representing 23 percent of the world’s population – were residing in fragile contexts before the onset of the pandemic.<sup>57</sup> By definition, fragile contexts often lack the resilience needed to deal with serious risks. While this phenomenon is not restricted to any one region of the world, it is disproportionately prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and the MENA region.<sup>58</sup> In fact, more than eight out of ten people in Sub-Saharan Africa live in a context that is considered fragile.<sup>59</sup>

People suffering from violence and conflict are particularly vulnerable to additional shocks. Against this background, the growth in armed conflict observed in the pre-coronavirus era does not bode well for overall crisis preparedness. According to the World Bank Group, “[v]iolent conflicts have increased to the highest levels observed over the past three decades.”<sup>61</sup> Among the types of conflict that have particularly exploded since 2010, intrastate conflict stands out.<sup>62</sup> On the eve of the coronavirus pandemic, a fifth of all people living in the MENA region resided in close proximity to ongoing conflict.<sup>63</sup> And although the number of fatalities from violent conflict has declined since its peak in 2014, conflict deaths were significantly higher at the onset of the pandemic than they were just a decade ago.<sup>64</sup>



“Those who think they can get along better on their own are mistaken. Our well-being is shared and so is our suffering. We are one world.”<sup>60</sup>

German Chancellor  
Angela Merkel,  
September 22, 2020

What’s more, the human suffering associated with poverty, fragility, and violent conflict has contributed to a gradual rise in levels of displacement. Reporting on 2019, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) documented “the largest forced displacement crisis ever recorded,”<sup>65</sup> with 79.5 million people registered as forcibly displaced.<sup>66</sup> Of these, 40 percent are children.<sup>67</sup> Clearly, refugees and migrants are among the most vulnerable people in any given context, as they disproportionately lack access to social safety nets. In the Covid-19 pandemic, this vulnerability has become particularly evident. Faced with spikes in xenophobia and an elevated risk of contracting infectious diseases, these vulnerable communities are at even greater risk. In short, to employ a health metaphor, the world suffered from serious pre-existing conditions. It was, so to speak, a world full of high-risk patients.



## Key Points

- ① The coronavirus pandemic has become a polypandemic – a multifaceted crisis that is confronting the world with more than just a health emergency. As a result of Covid-19, development is regressing, repression and human rights infringements are increasing, and the root causes of conflict are thriving almost everywhere.
- ② Before Covid-19, a stalling or even reversal of progress in promoting development, curbing fragility, and containing violent conflict had already eroded many states' capacities to cope with significant shocks.
- ③ Within high-income states, the disruptive effects of the pandemic and the human suffering produced by it in more vulnerable parts of the world have received far too little attention.
- ④ Covid-19 hit a world where wealthy Western states had become increasingly inward-looking and where the collective tools to assist the world's most vulnerable regions were already in poor working order.
- ⑤ The pandemic is not destined to exacerbate the trends that predate Covid-19. It could well serve as a wake-up call for the EU, for the transatlantic partners, and for the international community about the urgent need to better protect the world's weakest populations.



## 2 The World's High-Risk Patients

What specific vulnerabilities do developing, fragile, and conflict-affected countries have in the face of Covid-19? Could the pandemic serve as an equalizer or will it exacerbate global disparities? What are the strategic advantages for crisis management in fragile states?

## The World's High-Risk Patients

Sophie Eisentraut  
and Juliane Kabus

While the pandemic is affecting everyone, it is not affecting everyone equally. All over the world, there are people who, through no fault of their own, are more vulnerable to the poly pandemic than others. Even in developed countries, marginalized communities have been hit exceptionally hard. In the United States, deaths among People of Color went up by more than 30 percent in the first seven months of this year, while deaths among white Americans increased by nine percent.<sup>68</sup> Women have suffered disproportionately from the effects of the virus. In many places, they represent up to 70 percent of those working in healthcare and thus bear an excessive risk of contracting the virus.<sup>69</sup> The direct and indirect consequences of the virus may also prove to be more severe for other vulnerable groups, among them migrants, older people, persons with disabilities, and children.<sup>70</sup> Even though “the virus does not discriminate,” major international organizations argued in a joint op-ed in June, its “impact is definitely not equal.”<sup>71</sup>



“[E]pidemics can quickly take root in the places least equipped to fight them.”<sup>72</sup>

Bill Gates,  
Munich Security Conference,  
February 18, 2017

The fact that the coronavirus is not “a great equalizer”<sup>73</sup> is not only evident within states. It is also visible between countries. Pre-existing conditions have rendered entire states more vulnerable to the coronavirus crisis than others, chief among them poor development, fragility, and ongoing conflict. States afflicted by at least one of these ailments usually have significant deficits in the structures that influence their ability to cope. These structures include robust health and sanitation systems, resilient economies, and state-society relations that are characterized by trust. For instance, developing countries often lack the financial reserves needed to mobilize large stimulus packages in response to looming economic crises. Likewise, fragile states might not have the legitimacy to effectuate necessary lockdown measures without using force, and countries embroiled in war may lack the necessary health infrastructure and personnel to cope with surging numbers of infections.

### Health and Sanitation Systems

The pandemic has proven its ability to “overwhelm”<sup>74</sup> even relatively robust healthcare systems. It took no more than three weeks until the healthcare system in northern Italy showed signs of collapse, forcing medical staff to triage patients and leave some to die while others received treatment.<sup>75</sup>



Naturally, healthcare systems in developing states will be overwhelmed much more easily. In the past years, significant strides have been made in improving global health. Maternal and child mortality have been reduced and significant advances have been made in fighting infectious diseases.<sup>76</sup> For instance, in 2020, the African continent was declared polio-free.<sup>77</sup> Yet, achievements have not been sufficient, especially with regard to improving basic healthcare. In 2018, more than half the global population still lacked access to essential healthcare services.<sup>78</sup> In any health emergency, acute doctor, nurse, and hospital bed shortages are a lethal liability, and, in the coronavirus pandemic, a lack of intensive care unit (ICU) beds and ventilators may prove particularly disastrous if severe cases surge.

When the coronavirus started to spread, vital health resources were in short supply everywhere in the world. In the Global South, however, this shortage was and is much more pronounced. While OECD countries have on average 29 physicians for each 10,000 people, the least developed countries (LDCs) only have less than three.<sup>79</sup> For ICU beds, the picture is not much brighter: A survey conducted by the WHO in 47 African countries in March 2020 found that “there were on average nine intensive care unit beds per one million people.”<sup>80</sup> Germany, by contrast, had 339 for the same number of people.<sup>81</sup>

**Figure 2.1**  
Medical personnel and hospital beds by a country’s development status, 2010–2018, per 10,000 people

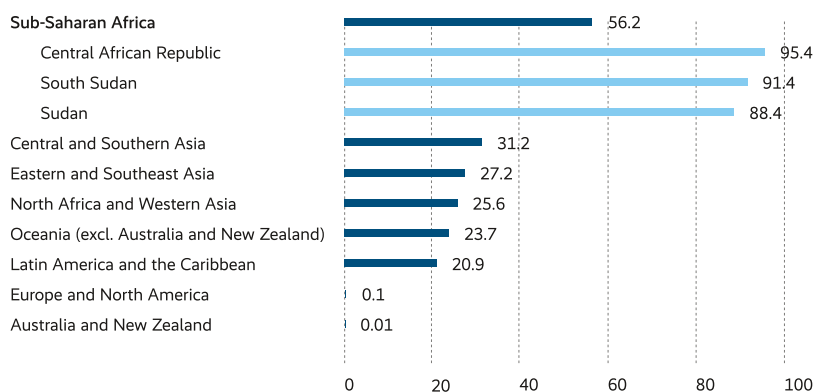
Preparedness	Lowest <span style="float: right;">Highest</span>		
	Physicians	Nurses & midwives	Hospital beds
Least developed countries	3	6	7
Developing countries	12	23	21
OECD	29	80	50

Data and illustration: UN Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities

Exposure to the virus is elevated in densely populated areas, as recently highlighted by surging coronavirus infection numbers in the working-class districts of Madrid.<sup>82</sup> The risk is compounded in developing countries, especially in LDCs: Where people live in cramped conditions in informal urban settlements, hygiene, sanitation, and social distancing measures are often particularly difficult to maintain.<sup>83</sup> If people do not have access to clean water or the means to isolate themselves from others, basic measures to curb the spread of the virus – such as physical distancing or hand washing – are simply destined to fail. In 2019, the WHO reported that three billion people did not have access to basic handwashing facilities; in the LDCs, this affected three in four people.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, according to UN statistics, more than one billion people across the world live in slum-like conditions,<sup>85</sup> where distancing is challenging if not downright impossible. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the share of such people is particularly high.

Figure 2.2

**Proportion of the urban population living in slums, by world region, 2018, percent**



Data: UN Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, UN Human Settlement Programme.

Illustration: Munich Security Conference

Combined with contact tracing and quarantine measures, comprehensive testing is vital for effective virus containment. Yet, data suggests that, in developing nations, testing is entirely insufficient.<sup>86</sup> This has also given rise to fears of a “silent epidemic,” in particular on the African continent.<sup>87</sup> By early July, according to data from the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Pre-

vention (Africa CDC), African states had conducted 4,200 tests per one million people – at the same time, European states, which had been affected by the virus earlier, had already conducted an average of 74,255 tests per one million people.<sup>88</sup>



“The IMF is projecting global economic activity to decline on a scale not seen since the Great Depression. It is truly a crisis like no other.”<sup>99</sup>

Managing Director  
of the International  
Monetary Fund (IMF)  
Kristalina Georgieva,  
Finance & Development,  
June 2020

There are manifold reasons why healthcare and sanitation systems may be vulnerable. Underinvestment in basic healthcare has played a significant role. “A hard truth is that we could have been better prepared for this crisis,” stated a recent UN report.<sup>89</sup> But according to the report, few countries invested sufficiently in their healthcare systems and in ensuring universal health coverage.<sup>90</sup> Global assistance initiatives, for their part, often had different priorities. In 1990, 21 percent of official development assistance (ODA) for health actually went into strengthening healthcare systems – by 2019, this share had shrunk to just 14 percent.<sup>91</sup> Likewise, the WHO’s funding model has prevented it from investing more strongly in universal health coverage among all of its members. Because its budget depends on voluntary contributions,<sup>92</sup> the WHO has had to accept funders’ preferences for combatting specific diseases rather than investing in the overall robustness of healthcare systems.<sup>93</sup>

But the dire state of public health in many parts of the world is not only the result of underinvestment. It is also the consequence of violent conflict.<sup>94</sup> In conflict-affected areas, warring factions target both health infrastructures and health personnel, further damaging already-limited health capacities. In 2019, the WHO recorded more than 1,000 attacks on healthcare infrastructures and workers, nearly 200 of which ended in fatalities.<sup>95</sup>

### Socio-Economic Systems

Covid-19 is a health crisis. But as UN Secretary-General António Guterres has rightly warned, “it is far more” than that.<sup>96</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has also led to severe social and economic crises. In fact, many experts fear that the socio-economic shock produced by the pandemic will create much greater damage than the pandemic itself. Lockdown measures taken to contain the spread of the virus have severely disrupted economic activity in several sectors, massively affecting working hours and earnings and prompting a sizeable fall in demand for certain products and services.<sup>97</sup> As a result of this, as managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Kristalina Georgieva has asserted, global economic activity will fall to an extent “not seen since the Great Depression.”<sup>98</sup>



“The Covid-19 pandemic is more than just a health crisis. It has already led to a global food and economic crisis. Global supply chains are breaking down. Hundreds of millions of people have lost their livelihoods practically overnight – without short-time work benefits, without unemployment benefits. More than one billion children are currently unable to go to school, causing about half of them to lose their only meal of the day.”<sup>102</sup>

Federal Minister of  
Economic Cooperation  
and Development  
Gerd Müller,  
Munich Security  
Conference  
Digital Conversation,  
April 30, 2020

For developed nations, the consequences will be painful. For developing nations, they will be devastating. In contrast to wealthy nations, which have invested billions of dollars in fiscal stimulus packages to absorb the socio-economic shock of the virus, developing countries “have far fewer options.”<sup>100</sup> In less wealthy states, capital flight, large amounts of debt, and plummeting commodity prices will further stretch financial capacities – capacities that were already limited to begin with.<sup>101</sup>

Where exposure to commodity price swings is highest, the pandemic will disproportionately decimate government revenues – and thus shrink the financial space for countries to respond to the crisis. Developing nations will be particularly affected.<sup>103</sup> According to a study published by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 64 percent of developing countries are commodity-dependent.<sup>104</sup> In light of the coronavirus-induced plunge in global demand, especially with regard to oil and raw materials, developing countries’ budgets will be further depleted.<sup>105</sup> Nigeria and Angola are cases in point. As oil makes up more than 80 percent of their exports,<sup>106</sup> both countries will disproportionately suffer as a result of the recent oil price crash, which predated the pandemic but was compounded by it.

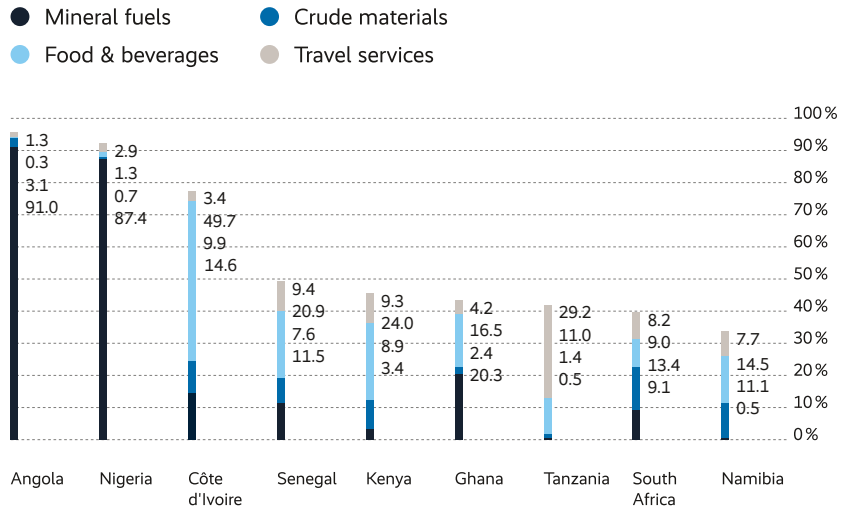
In such countries, a high vulnerability to capital flight is further adding to the worrisome mix. In moments of crisis, capital is usually withdrawn from “riskier” developing and emerging markets and invested in the markets of advanced economies.<sup>107</sup> And indeed, by April 2020, the capital outflows from developing states had already put those experienced during the full period of the 2008 financial crisis in the shade.<sup>108</sup> Lastly, high levels of debt place an extra burden on the public finances of many developing states, further thwarting their crisis responses. According to a study published by the IMF, in 2020, 43 out of 73 poor countries that were recently granted a suspension of their debt service payments will still be spending more on repaying debt than they will on the health of their people.<sup>109</sup>

In developing countries, budgetary constraints – compounded by capital flight, debt, and plummeting revenues from commodity exports – are being further exacerbated by a lack of social safety nets. Without the kind of compensation for income losses offered by Germany’s *Kurzarbeit* program, many people simply cannot afford extended periods of lockdown. In the OECD, 36 percent of people lacked social safety nets before the onset of the pandemic. In Sub-Saharan Africa, the share was 80 percent.<sup>110</sup> Part of the reason for this is almost certainly the significant role of the informal sector



Figure 2.3

Major exports of selected countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, share of total goods and services, 2018, percent



Data: Institute of International Finance based on UN International Trade Statistics Database, International Monetary Fund, and national authorities.  
Illustration: Munich Security Conference



in emerging and developing nations – it makes up 30 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) and more than two thirds of total employment.<sup>111</sup> In Africa, a total of 300 million people are working in the informal economy.<sup>112</sup> For them, the risk of falling “through the cracks of existing social protection systems” is a massive one.<sup>113</sup>

### Political Systems and State-Society Relations

While trust is a vital resource in any moment of crisis, this is particularly true for pandemics. To contain infectious diseases, governments are forced to take exceptional measures, including introducing radical restrictions on the freedom of movement or assembly. To ensure compliance with these measures without force, state-society relations need to be built on solid foundations of trust. In fact, scholars note that “to date, high-trust societies such as South Korea have been much more successful in combatting the virus than low-trust ones.”<sup>114</sup> Earlier health emergencies have proven this point: During the Ebola epidemic, eruptions of violence against the authorities were especially frequent “in places with low trust in state institutions.”<sup>115</sup>

Likewise, in many liberal democracies, there has been significant backlash against pandemic response measures.<sup>116</sup> In fragile states, where the social contract between the state and society has already been severed,<sup>117</sup> the repercussions promise to be much fiercer. In this regard, some countries in both Sub-Saharan Africa and the MENA region face particular difficulties in developing an effective crisis response. Only 46 percent of Africans surveyed by the *Afrobarometer* between 2016 and 2018 stated that “they trust their elected leaders ‘somewhat’ or ‘a lot’.”<sup>118</sup> In many Arab-majority countries, trust is even lower.<sup>119</sup>

To develop effective pandemic response measures, governments need to be capable of collecting and disseminating data on the spread of Covid-19. Yet, many fragile states lack effective bureaucracies with the capacity to take on this challenging task. Worse still, in some contexts, governments might want to deliberately withhold this type of information to obscure the extent of the crisis. Governments with a history of transparency problems are particularly prone to cover-ups. At the end of August, observers found that numbers released by the Syrian regime “vastly understate the scale of the outbreak.”<sup>120</sup> By mid-September, scholars from Imperial College London estimated that only 1.25 percent of Covid-19 deaths in Damascus were reported.<sup>121</sup> Early official infection numbers released in Egypt also gave cause for suspicion. In March, when Egypt officially only had three cases, a study conducted by scholars from the University of Toronto estimated that the country was already well beyond the 19,000 mark.<sup>122</sup>

Overall, the pandemic has highlighted the vital importance of investing in robust health and sanitation systems, in resilient economies, and in state-society relations characterized by trust. And while relevant progress had been made before Covid-19 in some of these areas, in other areas, there were setbacks or stasis. The polypandemic has thrown the consequences in painfully sharp relief. They come in the form of tremendous exposure to the virus and its detrimental effects, particularly by communities in developing, fragile, and conflict-affected settings.

The toll of underinvestment in emergency-ready healthcare systems is particularly palpable these days. In this regard, neither states nor multilateral institutions have lived up to their potential. As wealthy countries are preoccupied with the domestic fallout of the coronavirus crisis, there is significant risk that the foreign assistance needed to boost crisis preparedness will be further cut back. Yet, investments made today will decisively shape countries’ capacities to cope with the crises of tomorrow. Against this back-

ground, states must increase their international support at the earliest possible date. In this regard, countries that have weathered the pandemic relatively well – Germany, for instance – have a special responsibility. They need to pay attention to the human suffering and disruptive effects induced by the pandemic elsewhere in the world and ensure that foreign assistance to weak countries is not one of the victims of the coronavirus pandemic.

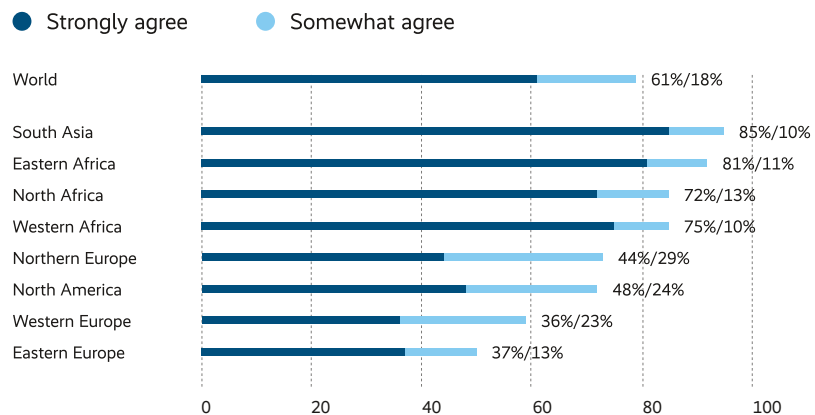
### Strategic Advantages

While weak healthcare and sanitation systems, insufficient social safety nets, and fraught state-society relations have left countries of the Global South exceptionally vulnerable to the pandemic and its harmful effects, many of these states have also displayed some unique assets and coping capacities in recent months.

First, while a young population cannot protect a state from the virus's secondary effects, it at least seems to limit the number of severe Covid-19 cases. On average, younger people seem to experience much milder symptoms or even none at all.<sup>123</sup> For many developing countries, which have comparatively young populations, this is clearly an advantage. The ten countries with the lowest median age in the world are all in Africa.<sup>124</sup> Niger tops the list, with a median age of 15 in 2015.<sup>125</sup> In the same year, the median age in Germany was 46.<sup>126</sup>

Figure 2.4

Trust in vaccine safety, selected world regions, 2018, percent



Data: Gallup (2019) Wellcome Global Monitor. Illustration: Munich Security Conference

Agreement with the statement "vaccines are safe"



“Rarely has there been a more pressing time for creative thinking and innovation.”<sup>130</sup>

President of the Seychelles  
Danny Faure,  
UN General Assembly,  
September 22, 2020

Second, less developed regions of the world appear to have much greater trust in the safety and effectiveness of vaccines.<sup>127</sup> According to a survey conducted by the Wellcome Trust in 2018, 81 percent of East Africans strongly agreed with the statement that vaccines are safe – among Western Europeans, only 36 percent did so.<sup>128</sup> It is clear that without a relevant share of countries’ populations getting vaccinated against Covid-19, “any notion of immediate herd immunity is a pipe dream.”<sup>129</sup> Vaccine skepticism thus represents a significant challenge for efforts to defeat the novel coronavirus. Apparently, this is a challenge that will affect decision-makers in Africa or South Asia much less than those in Europe or North America.

But most importantly, many developing states, particularly on the African continent, have extensive experience with infectious diseases and thus responded swiftly to the coronavirus outbreak. Several African states are struck by at least one epidemic per year.<sup>131</sup> Because of these earlier epidemics, especially the 2014 to 2016 Ebola outbreak in Western Africa, African nations had invested substantially in epidemic preparedness.<sup>132</sup> For instance, medical screenings at ports of entry were commonplace for arrivals at various African airports. Well before the first case of Covid-19 was recorded on the continent, the Africa CDC, which was established to combat malaria, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS, quickly set up a Covid-19 task force “to oversee preparedness and response to the global epidemic.”<sup>133</sup> Institutions created in response to Ebola, like Senegal’s Health Emergency Operations Center, have likewise helped African states to quickly assess and boost response capacities.<sup>134</sup> Generally, developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were much better prepared for Covid-19 than many wealthier states. And at a time when innovative responses to the pandemic are in high demand, many African nations have revealed a particularly impressive creativity. Countries like Tanzania simply repurposed isolation facilities set up for Ebola to tackle Covid-19.<sup>135</sup> To facilitate social distancing and ease the effects of lockdown measures, Sub-Saharan leaders also exploited high use rates of mobile money services.<sup>136</sup> In fact, almost 500 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa have mobile money accounts.<sup>137</sup> As the pandemic hit, some African governments were quick to increase transaction limits and even disbursed Covid-19 stimulus grants via mobile platforms.<sup>138</sup>

Clearly, forward-looking leadership is an asset in a moment of crisis. However, where healthcare systems are weak, economies frail, and state-society relations tattered, even effective crisis policies will soon face limits. What is more, by inhibiting development, increasing fragility, and fueling other root causes of conflict, the polypandemic could produce a world that is much less able to cope with significant shocks in the future.

## Key Points

- 1 The polypandemic is not affecting everyone equally. Countries characterized by poor development, fragility, and ongoing conflict are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic and its ripple effects.
- 2 The pandemic has highlighted the importance of investing in robust healthcare and sanitation systems, resilient economies, and trusting state-society relations. It has underscored the fact that the investments made today will decisively shape countries' ability to cope with the crises of tomorrow.
- 3 Pandemic preparedness and swift early action have helped countries to decisively reduce the damage of the coronavirus crisis. In this regard, more developed countries have many lessons to learn from developing regions with extensive experience in tackling infectious disease outbreaks.







Underdevelopment, Fragility, and Conflict

# 3 The Long-Term Damage of Covid-19

How did conflict actors around the world respond to UN Secretary-General Guterres' global ceasefire call? What are the post-pandemic outlooks for development progress? And who are the crisis profiteers?

## The Long-Term Damage of Covid-19

Luca Mieke,  
Sophie Eisentraut,  
and Juliane Kabus

When, on March 23, UN Secretary-General Guterres asserted that “the fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war”<sup>139</sup> and called for a global Covid-19 ceasefire, hopes were high that global violence could be halted, at least for a while. These hopes, however, were quickly disappointed. The coronavirus has to be contained under adverse conditions of ongoing war and the pandemic itself has the potential to be highly disruptive: It might well reverse decades of development, further exacerbate state fragility, and aggravate some of the root causes of violent conflict. As a result, human security, which thrives under conditions of peace, development, and respect for human rights,<sup>140</sup> faces fierce headwinds in many parts of the world.



“The only war we should be waging is the war against Covid-19.”<sup>141</sup>

UN Secretary-General  
António Guterres,  
Global Humanitarian  
Response Plan,  
March 2020

### Violent Conflict: Masked Wars

Covid-19 may represent an opportunity to “bring the world together,” argued former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon in April 2020.<sup>142</sup> And indeed, some initial responses to the call for a global ceasefire issued by his successor Guterres suggested that a “pax epidemica,”<sup>143</sup> a pandemic peace, might actually be possible. Developments in the Philippines seemed particularly promising in this regard. Starting mid-March, both President Rodrigo Duterte and rebels from the Communist Party of the Philippines declared unilateral ceasefires,<sup>144</sup> which were followed by an immediate drop in violence in the country.<sup>145</sup> Yet, half a year later, the picture is much more somber: Violence has quickly resumed and returned to pre-pandemic levels in the Philippines and beyond.<sup>146</sup>

The call for a global ceasefire, reiterated again at the UN General Assembly debate in September,<sup>147</sup> remains “unanswered”<sup>148</sup> today. In May, The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) asserted that “out of 43 countries where there have been at least 50 reported events of organized violence this year, only 10 saw actors ‘welcome’ the [global ceasefire] call, declare a unilateral ceasefire, or establish a mutual ceasefire agreement.”<sup>149</sup> In many places, Yemen and Libya among them, conflict actors rhetorically embraced the ceasefire appeal, yet fighting went on and sometimes even intensified.<sup>150</sup> Apparently, “even amidst worldwide crisis and uncertainty,” actors will not cease to use violence to achieve their political goals.<sup>151</sup> The pandemic might change conflict actors’ opportunities and incentives, but it does not seem to alter their basic motivations.<sup>152</sup>



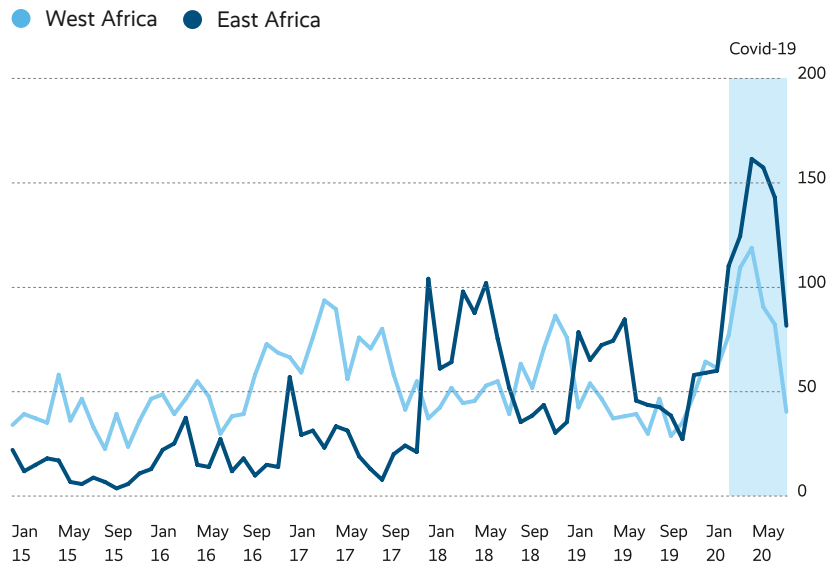


“While the novel coronavirus poses multitudes of challenges to our peace and security landscape, it also provides us with opportunities to work decisively to end violent conflicts on the continent and address their root causes.”<sup>157</sup>

African Union Commissioner for Peace and Security  
Smâil Chergui,  
African Union Op-Ed,  
April 17, 2020

In fact, just as the world has been distracted by the pandemic, some actors have even ratcheted up their conflict involvement.<sup>153</sup> While ACLED has highlighted the importance of not “attribut[ing] these shifts to the coronavirus alone,” communal militias in East and West Africa were engaged in 70 percent more violent events than before the pandemic.<sup>154</sup> In the three months after the UN Security Council had formalized the global ceasefire call, more than 21,000 people have been killed in conflict, including 5,800 civilians.<sup>155</sup> And despite the spreading virus and the international arms embargo, the United Arab Emirates and other states continued to send arms and fighters to Libya.<sup>156</sup>

**Figure 3.1**  
**Communal militia activity in East and West Africa, 2015–2020, events**



Data: The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).  
Illustration: Munich Security Conference



While “most conflicts continue unabated,” as the OECD has noted, “peace-keeping missions and humanitarian response are extremely constrained.”<sup>158</sup> In fact, the virus has created significant obstacles for those who are working for peace. Diplomatic missions have been reduced to essential staff, UN special envoys have interrupted their travels, and mediation initiatives have been halted in response to Covid-19.<sup>159</sup> For conflict diplomacy, the virus has intensi-



“Without peace, health can be an unattainable dream. But the opposite can also be true: epidemics have the potential to cause severe political, economic and social instability and insecurity.”<sup>165</sup>

WHO Director-General  
Tedros Ghebreyesus,  
Munich Security  
Conference,  
February 15, 2020

fied the fundamental challenge of access.<sup>160</sup> As a result, the African Union (AU) Commissioner for Peace and Security Smail Chergui notes, Covid-19 clearly “delayed the implementation of critical peace agreements.”<sup>161</sup>

Peacekeeping efforts have likewise been affected: In April, UN peace missions had to halt rotation and deployment to inhibit virus transmission.<sup>162</sup> As many as 50 peacekeeping missions were put “in full crisis management mode” – that is, they were operating under the imperative to keep peacekeepers safe from the virus.<sup>163</sup> And in some cases, the pandemic made peacekeepers the target of xenophobic reactions. In South Sudan, for instance, tensions erupted after the first official Covid-19 case in the country was detected in a UN staff member.<sup>164</sup>

Looking at the past, “one seldom finds any discussion of epidemics causing wars or of wars deliberately started in the middle of widespread outbreaks of infectious disease.”<sup>166</sup> Yet this is cold comfort. If efforts to reduce violent conflict are stymied, peace will still be significantly affected. And one thing remains certain: In contexts where verbal support for the ceasefire appeal is not translated into an actual truce, where weapons embargoes continue to be breached, and where external actors are allowed to keep fueling conflicts, measures aimed at fostering development and reducing fragility will struggle to have any lasting effect.

It is up to Germany and its European partners to back up calls for a global ceasefire with what David Miliband, CEO of the International Rescue Committee, has called “serious diplomatic muscle.”<sup>167</sup> According to Miliband, Germany is particularly “well positioned to warn and work against the abuse of power.”<sup>168</sup> While the external actors that fuel intrastate conflicts are easily identifiable, the political levers that could be used to increase the costs of their actions remain all too often unused.

### **Underdevelopment: On Life Support**

On January 22, UN Secretary-General Guterres presented his hopeful outlook for development in 2020. Wherever he went, Guterres recounted, he had found “tremendous enthusiasm” for the SDGs.<sup>169</sup> Despite acknowledging that the world was “off track” in meeting the ambitious development targets, his speech was replete with hopeful rhetoric and was met with applause by a packed audience of envoys and diplomats.<sup>170</sup> Shortly after, the world took a turn. UN hallways in New York City emptied and developmental roadmaps for 2020 had to confront a harsh new reality.



“[W]ithout action, we’ll see the worst recession since the Great Depression, the sharpest collapse in per capita income since 1870, the first increase in global poverty since 1990, and the first reduction in global life expectancy for a generation.”<sup>171</sup>

UN Emergency Relief Coordinator  
Mark Lowcock,  
Remarks in Conversation  
with the Center for Strategic  
and International Studies,  
July 22, 2020

The polyandemic now threatens to undo years of progress in global development, compromising each and every one of the 17 SDGs. By the end of this year, Covid-19 could push an additional 115 million people into extreme poverty,<sup>172</sup> double the number of people that are acutely food insecure,<sup>173</sup> and see two million non-Covid deaths because many health services are disrupted.<sup>174</sup> For some development goals, the negative effects of the coronavirus crisis have already begun to materialize. Job and income losses mean people are struggling to cover their daily needs, school closures are depriving hundreds of millions of children of their daily meals,<sup>175</sup> and as people are forced to stay at home, the number of victims of domestic violence has spiked.<sup>176</sup>

By hitting those who were already disproportionately vulnerable with particular force, Covid-19 has also become an “inequality pandemic,”<sup>177</sup> as UN Secretary-General Guterres recently called it. It threatens to further deepen long-standing development gaps and exacerbate existing disparities within the international community. Many countries of the Global North can hope for a quick recovery. Poorly developed and fragile states, however, will likely struggle much longer to return to a growth trajectory. The OECD projects that G20 countries will rebound to prior GDP levels in a “fragile recovery” by 2021.<sup>178</sup> For Sub-Saharan Africa, the Institute for Security Studies (ISS Africa) estimates that, in the best-case scenario, a return to pre-pandemic per capita GDP will happen in 2024 – in 2030 in the pessimistic scenario.<sup>179</sup>

In June 2020, the IMF predicted a -4.4 percent contraction of global GDP for the year.<sup>180</sup> For many structural reasons (Chapter 2), developing states are disproportionately vulnerable to this massive socio-economic shock. As highlighted earlier, many of them lack sufficient domestic resources – including tax and non-tax revenues – to spend on development, let alone to counter the effects of the crisis. By June, low-income developing countries had on average spent less than two percent of their GDP on fiscal measures to cushion the effects of Covid-19.<sup>181</sup> By contrast, G20 countries had announced fiscal support measures worth 7.6 trillion US dollars, exceeding eleven percent of their collective GDP.<sup>182</sup>

The coronavirus-induced economic crash has reduced domestic resources further: The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that an equivalent of 495 million full-time jobs will be lost due to Covid-19.<sup>183</sup> With their high degree of informal labor, developing states will be disproportion-



“No time ever in our history have we been at such a crossroads where we have both a health pandemic and an economic recession on the continent.”<sup>186</sup>

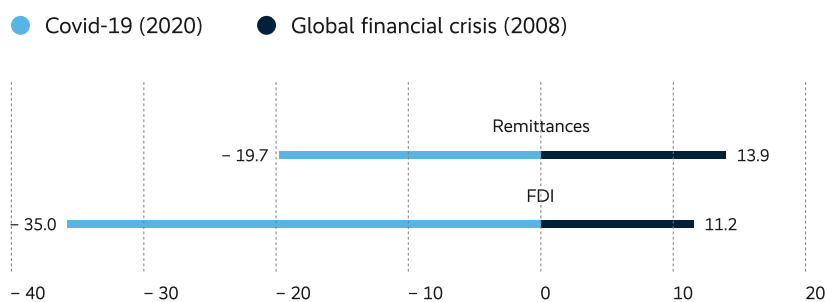
Executive Secretary  
of the UN Economic  
Commission for Africa  
Vera Songwe,  
June 17, 2020

ately affected. According to the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, informal workers have seen their livelihoods impacted more than “any other type of worker.”<sup>184</sup> They are expected to see their earnings decline by 82 percent, with the largest declines in continental Africa and Latin America.<sup>185</sup>

Moreover, commodity price fluctuations and a dip in demand from China have put the budgets of developing economies, African ones in particular, under additional pressure.<sup>187</sup> Susceptible to external shocks, resource-exporting states – predominantly low-income countries – have seen their revenues slashed and their trade deficits rise.<sup>188</sup> And to make matters worse, governments’ tax revenues have fallen as domestic consumption declines and travel restrictions have dealt a massive blow to the tourism industry.<sup>189</sup> Due to the pandemic-induced shock, South Africa was forced to take out an IMF loan for the first time and Zambia is now on the brink of becoming the first Sub-Saharan country to face a Covid-19 debt default.<sup>190</sup>

In addition, the global recession is projected to slash external financial flows – chief among them remittances and foreign direct investment (FDI) – that could otherwise have helped to stabilize developing economies.<sup>191</sup>

**Figure 3.2**  
Change from previous year value of selected external private financial flows to developing countries, 2008 and 2020, percent

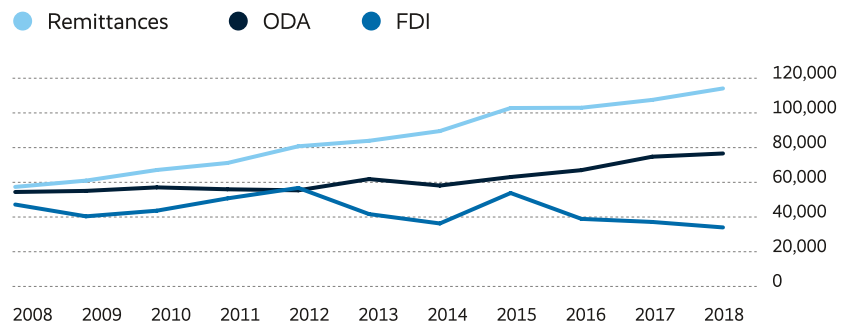


Data: OECD. Illustration: Munich Security Conference

In this regard, the pandemic's effect on remittances is particularly troubling, as remittances are a “vital source of income” for many developing states.<sup>192</sup> In fact, at the outset of the pandemic, remittances made up nearly three times the volume of global ODA.<sup>193</sup> According to the World Bank, due to the global nature of the coronavirus crisis, the total amount of global remittances to low- and middle-income countries is expected to shrink by almost 20 percent in 2020.<sup>194</sup> The pandemic is thus depriving households in poorer countries of a significant safety net that has served as a buffer in previous crises.<sup>195</sup> While the World Bank currently expects remittances to recover in 2021, this outlook very much depends on how the pandemic evolves.<sup>196</sup>

Figure 3.3

External financial flows to fragile contexts, 2008–2018, constant 2018 USD millions



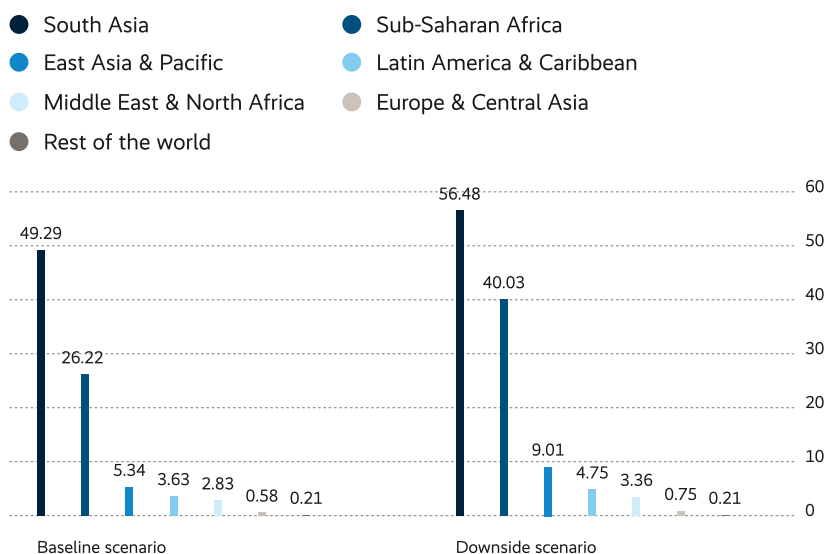
Data and illustration: OECD



The socio-economic shock produced by Covid-19 is set to wipe out progress on various SDGs, most prominently the goals of “no poverty,” “zero hunger,” and “good health and well-being.” For the first time since 1990, global poverty could actually increase. The effects of the pandemic could reverse “almost a decade of progress” on curbing poverty globally.<sup>197</sup> World Bank projections indicate that, depending on the extent of global GDP contraction due to Covid-19, between 88 to 115 million people could fall into extreme poverty in 2020 and could thus be forced to live on less than 1.90 US dollars a day.<sup>198</sup> In the most drastic scenario, more than nine percent of the world's population could find itself in extreme poverty by the end of this year.<sup>199</sup>

Figure 3.4

### People projected to fall into extreme poverty in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, by world region, millions



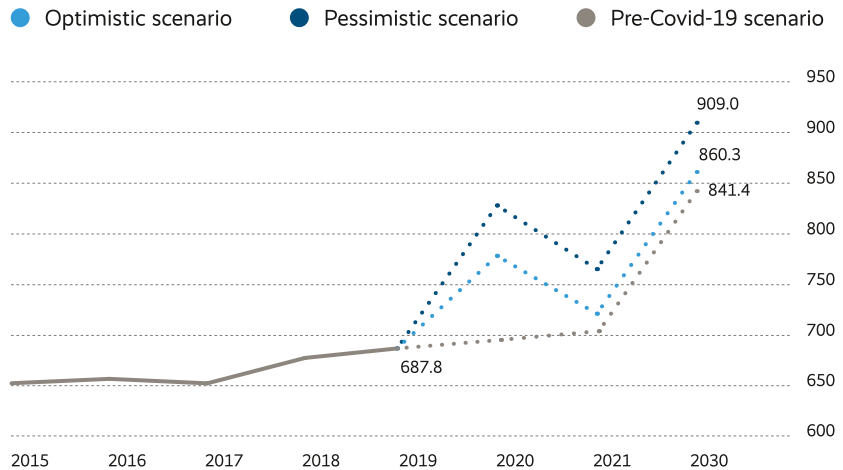
Data: World Bank. Illustration: Munich Security Conference

As always, some places will be hit much harder than others. Countries and regions that already have high poverty rates and larger absolute numbers of poor people will experience the greatest numbers of additional poor people. According to the World Bank, nearly half of new extremely poor people will be in South Asia, and a third or more in Sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>200</sup> In these fragile regions, the economic shock produced by Covid-19 could spawn “poverty levels similar to those recorded 30 years ago.”<sup>201</sup>

As far as the goal of eradicating global hunger is concerned, the outlook is hardly less dismal. With 135 million people acutely food insecure in 2019, the world was already facing an unprecedented number of people at “the brink of starvation.”<sup>202</sup> The pandemic is set to worsen this dire trajectory, possibly doubling the amount of people who are acutely food insecure by the end of this year.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, in 2020, between 83 to 132 million people could become undernourished according to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other international organizations, increasing the total number of such people to 828 million in the most drastic scenario.<sup>204</sup>



**Figure 3.5**  
**Undernourished people worldwide, 2015–2030, millions**



Data: FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO. Illustration: Munich Security Conference



“At the same time while dealing with a Covid-19 pandemic, we are also on the brink of a hunger pandemic.”<sup>205</sup>

UN World Food Programme  
 Executive Director  
 David Beasley,  
 UN Security Council,  
 April 21, 2020

As a result, Covid-19 is as much a “hunger pandemic” as it is a health emergency, notes David Beasley, executive director of the World Food Programme (WFP).<sup>206</sup> For people who “were already living hand-to-mouth,” the disruption of work and income generation caused by global lockdown measures has been particularly devastating.<sup>207</sup> With household purchasing power declining and remittances stopped, many people simply lack the means to cover their daily needs. And with schools closed in almost every country during the first peak of the pandemic, 369 million children worldwide lost out on nutritious daily meals at school.<sup>208</sup>

To make matters worse, the pandemic has often added to pre-existing food insecurity caused by climate change and environmental disasters, violent conflict, and previous economic shocks. For instance, before Covid-19, the Horn of Africa was already struggling with yet another massive wave of locust infestation – the biggest in 25 years for Somalia and in 70 years for Kenya – that destroyed crops and livelihoods. The region also faced the driest summer in 35 years.<sup>209</sup>

But with the Covid-19 poly pandemic, yet another SDG has been impacted. Progress on improving global health and well-being has clearly been deferred into the distant future. Within nine weeks, between mid-July and

mid-September, reported global Covid-19 cases doubled to a total of 30 million.<sup>210</sup> Until a global vaccination strategy is in place, the health of millions more will be affected. Pictures of makeshift field hospitals in New York City, mass graves in Manaus, and army convoys transporting coffins from crammed morgues in Bergamo symbolize the historic dimension of human suffering that is shared across the world.<sup>211</sup> Researchers from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) estimate that by spring 2021, a total of 200 to 600 million people could have contracted the virus. Yet, at that point, “well over 90 [percent] of the world’s population will still be vulnerable to infection—more if immunity turns out to be transient.”<sup>212</sup>

In addition to coping with the virus’s direct health impacts, stakeholders at various levels have struggled to address the indirect health effects of Covid-19.<sup>213</sup> Most importantly, the pandemic has disrupted a myriad of essential health services.<sup>214</sup> WHO Director-General Ghebreyesus drew attention to this fact when he argued that “many people who need treatment for diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disease, and diabetes have not been receiving the health services and medicines they need since the Covid-19 pandemic began.”<sup>215</sup> Added to this, Covid-19 containment measures have massively impacted immunization efforts for other diseases.<sup>216</sup> In this regard, a recent report by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation paints a particularly dire picture, arguing that “[w]e’ve been set back about 25 years in about 25 weeks.”<sup>217</sup> As of July 2020, 29 countries had suspended measles immunization campaigns due to the pandemic – with 18 of them reporting new outbreaks.<sup>218</sup> Malaria, one of the leading causes of death in Africa, is also likely to rise, with the WHO predicting a doubling of malaria deaths to 769,000 in 2020.<sup>219</sup> And according to UNAIDS, in Sub-Saharan Africa, a six-month interruption of HIV treatment would see an additional 500,000 people dying from AIDS-related illnesses.<sup>220</sup>

At the pandemic’s outset, developed countries were more affected by Covid-19 infections and deaths, mostly due to a higher travel frequency and deeper international economic integration. By mid-summer, “middle-income countries ha[d] taken over high-income countries in terms of new confirmed cases and deaths.”<sup>222</sup> While this dynamic has been driven by surging cases in hotspots, among them India and Brazil, it is also clear “that the pandemic is heading south.”<sup>223</sup>



“In Africa, curbing Covid-19 is a marathon and not a sprint. We are observing multiple local outbreaks each with their own infection patterns and peaks. It is by bolstering the response at the community level that we will win this race.”<sup>221</sup>

WHO Regional Director  
for Africa  
Matshidiso Moeti,  
August 13, 2020

Experts have consequently dreaded a widespread collapse of overburdened healthcare systems in the developing world, in particular on the African continent. As of early fall 2020, African states have successfully avoided this trajectory.<sup>224</sup> Of course, realities in the continent's 54 countries differ substantially. But by mid-October, the Africa CDC reported 1.5 million cases and 39,000 deaths for a continent of more than 1.3 billion.<sup>225</sup> What's more, death rates among the infected are significantly lower in Africa than in the rest of the world.<sup>226</sup> However, Covid-19 cases could rise quickly. And with testing facilities in Africa being severely limited, infections have likely been undercounted – even more so than in other parts of the world.<sup>227</sup> For that reason, in and beyond Africa, developing countries continue to be at risk.

As progress on different SDGs is closely interlinked, the detrimental effects of the pandemic cannot be reduced to an increased risk of poverty and hunger, and a reversal of progress in global health. Covid-19 also has the potential to compromise other development goals. These include the goals to ensure quality education and to reduce inequality – gender equality in particular.



“While children have largely been spared the direct health impacts [of COVID-19], they face catastrophic health impacts from the unprecedented measures to contain it.”<sup>228</sup>

Executive Director UNICEF  
Henrietta H. Fore,  
remarks on the occasion of  
the UN Secretary-General's  
report on the impact  
of Covid-19 on children,  
April 16, 2020

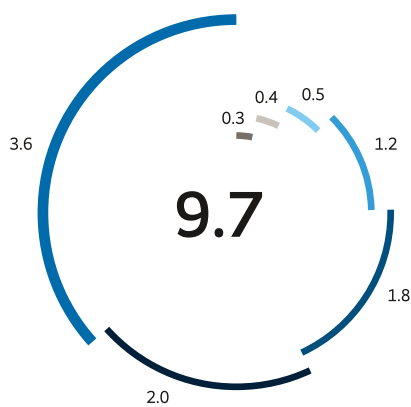
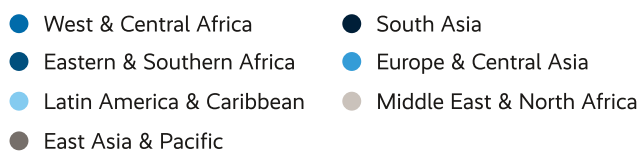
The UN reports that “more than 91 per cent of students worldwide” were affected by temporary school closures, pushing 1.6 billion children and young people out of school by April 2020.<sup>229</sup> While swift transition to alternative forms of teaching were an insurmountable task even in some industrialized nations, 2020 will be a “lost year”<sup>230</sup> for education in many developing contexts. And some children will never return to their classes: In West and Central Africa alone, 3.6 million children are projected to drop out of school by the end of 2021 (Figure 3.6).

As boys and girls are forced to stay out of school, the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic “could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights.”<sup>231</sup> The UN asserts that women around the globe have played a “disproportionate role in responding to the virus,” yet societies' and politicians' response to the virus may strongly “exacerbate existing inequalities for women and girls.”<sup>232</sup> And with people trapped at home, gender-based domestic violence has surged since the onset of the pandemic.<sup>233</sup>

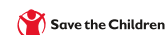
Generally, crises feed discrimination and inequality. An analysis of five major pandemic events since the turn of the century has shown that within five years of each of these events, the Gini coefficient, a common indicator of

Figure 3.6

Children projected to drop out of school due to the pandemic by the end of 2021, by world region, millions



Data: Save the Children. Illustration: Munich Security Conference



“The task before us is to chart the course for a transformative and inclusive future in the aftermath of the coronavirus pandemic; and to do so in a manner that respects the worth and dignity of every human being.”<sup>237</sup>

President of the Republic of South Africa and President of the African Union  
Cyril Ramaphosa,  
75th Commemoration of the UN General Assembly,  
September 21, 2020

inequality, has gone up significantly.<sup>234</sup> The coronavirus pandemic has again “put a spotlight” on socio-economic disparities that put vulnerable communities at particular risk.<sup>235</sup> As highlighted earlier, this is certainly not confined to developing nations. Marginalized communities have been hit exceptionally hard in every part of the world, further increasing inequality gaps.

As global development is at risk, the willingness to help is there. But there are challenges in delivering this assistance. Covid-19 has had a terrible effect on both donor countries and organizations delivering aid. The WHO asserts that the logistics of global aid allocation “ha[ve] been made extremely difficult by the collapse in commercial transport worldwide.”<sup>236</sup>

ODA is also at risk. While it might not be the largest source of development financing, it has been a stable one over time – and a crucial one in moments of crisis. In this time of Covid-19, as other sources of developments finance are suffering, the significance of ODA is increasing.<sup>238</sup> In the face of a global recession and declining GDPs, governments would have to raise nominal

ODA levels simply to keep the current ODA volume steady in absolute terms.<sup>239</sup> Otherwise, according to the OECD, “total ODA could decline by [US dollars] 11 billion to [US dollars] 14 billion” in 2020.<sup>240</sup> The fact that donor countries are also being massively hit and need additional resources for recovery at home is creating extra pressure.

Despite an avalanche of negative forecasts, we should not ignore the positive indications. Many ODA budgets for 2020 were finalized before the crisis hit, so the impact might be lagged rather than immediate.<sup>241</sup> Moreover, the OECD has observed “positive early signals” from various countries committed to raising their budgets for development cooperation.<sup>242</sup> Already in late April, Germany’s Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) announced an international assistance emergency program worth one billion euros.<sup>243</sup> This type of commitment is urgently needed for the global recovery. In this regard, (re-)committing to the 0.7 percent aid target, according to which 0.7 percent of gross national income should be spent on ODA, would be an important first step. In the past, few countries have met the target. Now is the time to live up to this goal – unless the international community wants to see its achievements in the field evaporate in a matter of months.

And with debt stymieing the pandemic response of many developing states, it is high time to take bolder steps on debt relief and possibly to overhaul the architecture of international debt.<sup>244</sup> As the head of the IMF, Kristalina Georgieva, has recently argued, the international community’s ability to prevent an imminent wave of defaults “can make the difference between a lost decade and a rapid recovery” for many developing states.<sup>245</sup> According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Argentina and Ecuador are already in default on their external debt while Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco “are in a tough spot.”<sup>246</sup>

It is clear that without decisive action by the international community, the overall goal of sustainable development – “to end poverty, protect the planet, and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere” – will not be achieved in 2030. Worse still, in 2030, the world may be further away from achieving many SDGs than it was in 2015, when the goals were adopted.<sup>247</sup>

### **Fragility: Malignant Actors**

Within a few months’ time, the pandemic and its ripple effects might reverse the development gains of several years. But Covid-19 might also become a catalyst for yet another disruptive phenomenon: state fragility. Fragile states struggle with at least one of their three core functions, namely the authority

to control violence, the capacity to meet peoples' basic needs, and the ability to be viewed as legitimate by their own populations.<sup>248</sup> They are disproportionately exposed to various types of risk.<sup>249</sup> But the pandemic does not only “prey”<sup>250</sup> on countries with little resilience. It also threatens to aggravate state fragility along the three lines of preexisting deficits.

### Box 3.1

#### Impact of Covid-19 on fragile contexts

The coronavirus pandemic will have a significant effect on sustainable development and peace in fragile contexts. As of October 1, there were approximately 2.3 million reported cases and 65,000 reported deaths in fragile contexts, accounting for around seven percent and six percent of the global total, respectively. Despite such low rates, 26 million additional people are projected to fall into extreme poverty due to Covid-19 in fragile contexts by the end of 2020. The percentage point increase in extreme poverty experienced in fragile contexts is almost twice the increase in nonfragile countries. Additionally, 36 million more children will be living in households that cannot make ends meet, and as of mid-July, 223 million primary-age schoolchildren were out of school due to closures. Covid-19 will also affect prospects for sustaining peace. As of September 12, 2,453 incidents of political violence had been recorded in fragile contexts since the start of the pandemic, resulting in 550 casualties.<sup>251</sup>



“The Covid-19 crisis is fast threatening to become a protection crisis.”<sup>252</sup>

President of the International Committee of the Red Cross  
Peter Maurer,  
UN Security Council,  
May 27, 2020

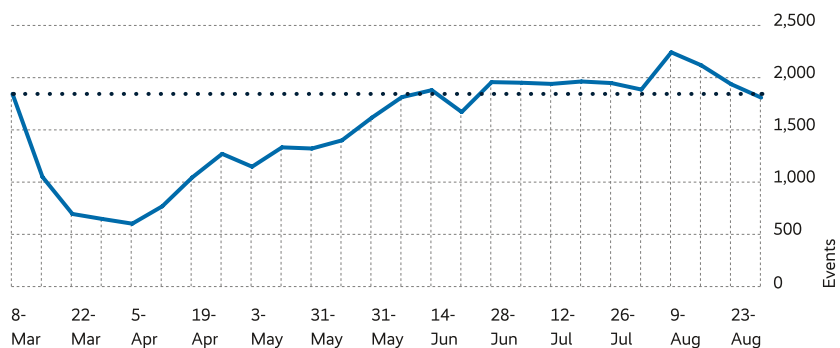
Without a doubt, the polypandemic is further decimating government capacity. Whether in Senegal, Spain, or South Carolina, Covid-19 is profoundly challenging states' abilities to provide basic public services – from health to education, and from administration to social protection. Moreover, the Covid-19-induced global economic downturn is further depleting the financial resources needed for these tasks. At a time when the demand for protection is skyrocketing, the government resources needed to provide it are thus taking a sizeable hit. And the damage done to public service provision may well be a long-lasting one: There will be insufficient funds for much-needed investments in health, infrastructure, or education – investments that could shock-proof countries for the future – for many years to come.



But the pandemic is also affecting state authority. As security forces have to limit their activities in order to reduce exposure to the virus and as soldiers are redeployed for pandemic relief or lockdown enforcement,<sup>253</sup> governments might see their control over violence further erode.

And even state legitimacy might fall victim to the virus. Most analysts agree that governments’ pandemic responses will determine attitudes towards them for the foreseeable future. Governments stand to gain if they can position themselves as effective crisis managers. But the opposite is also true: Throughout history, there have been numerous examples of how poor crisis management has eroded trust in political leaders and fueled unrest and domestic upheaval.<sup>254</sup> Governments worldwide have been confronted with protests over their Covid-19 responses.<sup>255</sup> In fragile contexts, discontent is adding to frustrations that preceded the pandemic. In fact, while lockdown measures introduced in response to the pandemic led to a worldwide drop in demonstrations by 30 percent,<sup>256</sup> people quickly began to remobilize. By June, when some countries under lockdown had gradually begun lifting restrictions, demonstrations had already exceeded pre-pandemic levels.<sup>257</sup> This suggests that Covid-19 will compound the pre-pandemic “trend of increasing demonstrations, riots and general strikes.”<sup>258</sup>

**Figure 3.7**  
**Global demonstrations during Covid-19,**  
**March 8–August 30, 2020, events**



Data: The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).  
 Illustration: Munich Security Conference



Concerning states' resilience in the face of future challenges, two developments are particularly troubling. The first pertains to democratic backsliding in various parts of the globe and the second to violent nonstate actors and conflict entrepreneurs that exploit states' weakness to extend their own reach. Both developments durably compromise state capacities "to manage, absorb or mitigate"<sup>259</sup> the various shocks that confront them. By driving popular discontent and empowering actors that perpetuate violence, these developments also have the potential to trigger future security crises.



"Even though there were good reasons to impose temporary restrictions on our freedom of movement and assembly; even though it was discussed and examined by the public and the courts; even though a large majority were in favour of restrictions in order to protect health and lives: the corona crisis has made it clear to us just how vitally important the public space is to our democracy."<sup>261</sup>

Federal President  
Frank-Walter Steinmeier,  
Forum Bellevue on the  
Future of Democracy,  
June 29, 2020

### Democratic Backsliding

Before Covid-19, liberal democracy was already on the defensive. Freedom House declared 2019 "the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom."<sup>260</sup> It is in governments' hands whether their pandemic responses will further compound or finally put an end to this trend. Efforts to curb the spread of the virus have seen states in many parts of the world restricting democratic rights and civic liberties. In order to break infection chains, decision-makers postponed elections and took measures that dramatically inhibited peoples' freedom of movement and assembly. However, the standards of proportionality were not respected in all cases. Some governments clearly used the pandemic to excessively scale back freedoms, ramp up repression and political violence against their own people, and further tighten their grip on power. Furthermore, the large sums being made available to cushion the socio-economic shock of the pandemic have created fertile ground for rampant corruption.

According to the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), Covid-19 has "profoundly impacted" electoral processes in every part of the world.<sup>262</sup> For governments that are facing an upcoming election, Covid-19 creates a fundamental dilemma: There are serious risks for legitimate rule associated with both pulling through and postponing. Holding elections on schedule might "cast a shadow" on the electoral result, as the pandemic taints the voting process with "low voter turnout, unequal campaign conditions, and limited domestic or international observation."<sup>263</sup> But postponing an election is likewise fraught with risk. Clearly, overextended term limits threaten to erode trust in the constitutional order. In the past, in Africa and beyond, the unconstitutional extension of mandates all too often triggered coups, conflict, and chaos.<sup>264</sup> For fragile states, where relations between governments and their citizens are frequently troubled to begin with, the choice between holding and postponing elections is thus a particularly difficult one.<sup>265</sup>



Aware of the vital importance of transparency and active participation in the most fundamental democratic process, the Kofi Annan Foundation recommended that any decision to postpone electoral events should be “guided by rules that the government and the opposition agree upon, that are clearly communicated to the public, and that ensure the inclusion of vulnerable groups.”<sup>267</sup>

But government responses to the pandemic have not just curbed democratic participation; they have also seen civic freedoms excessively curbed. In Hungary, emergency coronavirus legislation gave Prime Minister Orbán sweeping new powers, enabling him to rule by decree and opening the door for a wide range of measures against critics.<sup>268</sup> According to Reporters Without Borders (RSF), many governments restricted freedom of information, severely curtailing people’s “right to freely reported, independent, diverse and reliable information.”<sup>269</sup> In Egypt, for instance, doctors and journalists have come under pressure for speaking out about the extent of the pandemic.<sup>270</sup> In general, states in which the media enjoyed little freedom pre-Covid-19 were also more likely to engage in censorship of information about the pandemic.<sup>271</sup>

Moreover, Covid-19 has led to growing calls for tracing and surveillance tools for public health responses. For instance, in Israel and South Korea, citizens who might have contracted the virus were detected via smartphone location data.<sup>272</sup> And in Hong Kong, people arriving in the country were mandated to wear an electronic wristband to track their location.<sup>273</sup> But as surveillance technology spreads, there are also growing “risks for political abuse.”<sup>274</sup> Among regimes with pre-existing transparency and accountability deficits, this risk is particularly high. In these places, surveillance and tracking measures adopted during Covid-19 “could result in permanent losses of privacy.”<sup>275</sup> For that reason, observers fear that the coronavirus may trigger a “pandemic of authoritarian rule”<sup>276</sup> – a crisis that accelerates existing trends towards “techno-authoritarianism.”<sup>277</sup>

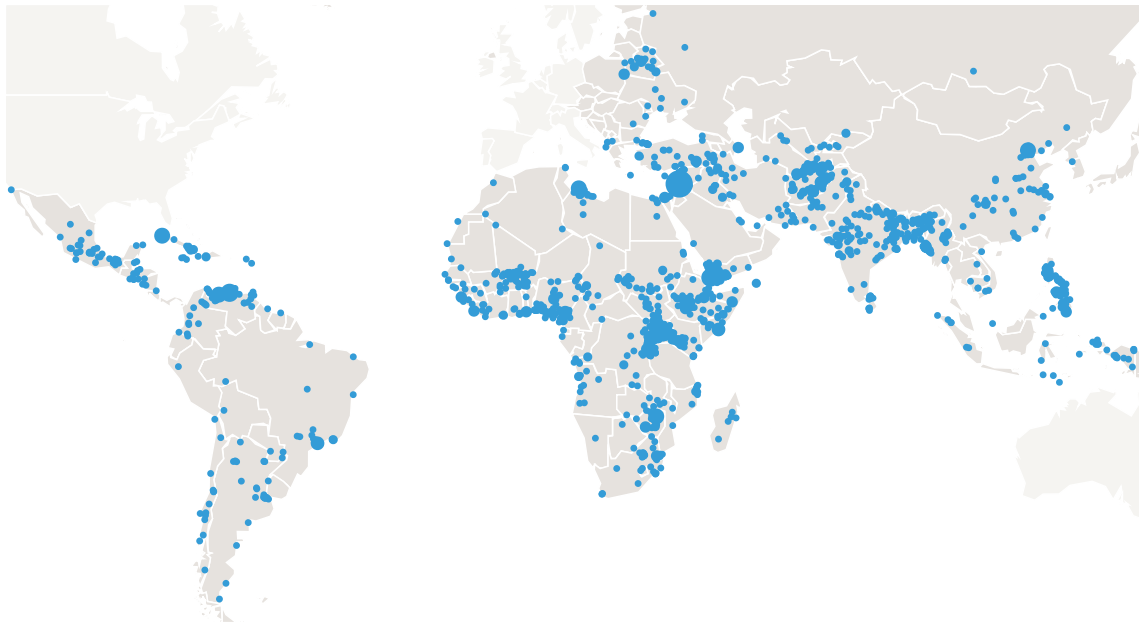
There is also evidence that governments have ramped up repression and violence against civilians during the pandemic. Between mid-March and July 2020, data collected by ACLED revealed a 30 percent surge in state repression and a slight increase in violence against civilians.<sup>278</sup> According to ACLED Executive Director Clionadh Raleigh, during the pandemic’s early stages “[g]overnments became more likely to suppress their citizens and crack down on opposition and minority groups, often under the guise of lockdown measures.”<sup>279</sup> Likewise, police abuse was reported in several places

after movement restrictions were imposed.<sup>280</sup> By early April, for instance, more people in Nigeria had died in the course of lockdown enforcement by security forces than had died from Covid-19.<sup>281</sup> And violent lockdown enforcement was also recorded from other places, among them China, South Africa, and India.<sup>282</sup>

Yet it is not just scaled-back freedoms, ramped up surveillance, or increased violence against civilians that represent challenges to liberal democracy – challenges that may be exacerbated in the pandemic. Rampant corruption is of equal concern. Even before Covid-19, health-sector fraud was massive. A 2018 study found that, out of 7.35 trillion US dollars that are spend on healthcare per year, about 455 billion US dollars are annually lost “to fraud

**Figure 3.9**  
**State repression during Covid-19, March 11–September 5,**  
**2020, events**

1 ● ● ● 48



Data: The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED).  
 Illustration: Munich Security Conference



and corruption.”<sup>283</sup> And a 2017 OECD study reported that around 45 percent of people around the globe – and about a third in OECD countries – perceive their country’s health sector as either corrupt or extremely corrupt.<sup>284</sup>

Covid-19 might be further compounding this problem. Already, allegations concerning the misuse of coronavirus funds have been leveled against various governments.<sup>285</sup> The German Press Agency estimated in early July that up to 22 million euros in coronavirus *Soforthilfe* – emergency aid the German government provided for businesses and the self-employed – has been connected to fraudulent accounts.<sup>286</sup> Countries strongly affected by the virus are particularly vulnerable to corruption, as they tend to adopt “risky procedures for emergency public procurement.”<sup>287</sup> It is unsurprising that given the speed with which governments and international organizations have had to react to the pandemic, “normal due-diligence checks” have often fallen by the wayside.<sup>288</sup> Until the end of July, the IMF made 83 billion US dollars available in emergency aid.<sup>289</sup> Anti-corruption regulations were barely incorporated. Transparency International found “47 [financial assistance] agreements without a single government commitment linked to using funds in a transparent way.”<sup>290</sup> Rapid, unbureaucratic, and direct emergency assistance is of course vital in this moment of crisis. However, lax regulation and a lack of oversight risk undermining the effectiveness of assistance and might further compromise the rule of law in various places.

With democracy and the rule of law facing even fiercer headwinds as a result of the pandemic, turning inward is not an option for the world’s democratic states. Democracies everywhere, in Europe in particular, have to showcase that governance based on transparency, pluralism, and accountability is much better equipped to deal with the fallout of Covid-19. With the coronavirus pandemic, the “global battle of narratives” between authoritarian and democratic regimes, as EU High Representative Josep Borrell recently put it, is in full swing.<sup>291</sup> Against this background, the EU must step up its attempt at “winning hearts and minds,”<sup>292</sup> both within Europe, but also beyond. And EU member states and democracies elsewhere also have to ratchet up pressure on governments that exploit the pandemic to roll back democracy and liberal rights – be they in Europe itself, as currently observed in Hungary,<sup>293</sup> or in other parts of the world. Last but not least, it is up to the world’s democracies to ensure that bilateral and multilateral assistance is clearly tied to rule-of-law and good-governance benchmarks. Otherwise, pandemic relief and recovery efforts might boost authoritarianism and corruption rather than long-term resilience.



## Violent Nonstate Actors

In March 2020, António Guterres warned that terrorist groups might be “taking advantage” of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>294</sup> And in fact, they did not hold their breath. Attacks conducted by terrorists and other violent nonstate actors have certainly not ceased. In Mali, for instance, the first seven months of 2020 saw more fatalities than the whole previous year.<sup>295</sup> In West Africa and the Sahel, groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State (IS) West Africa Province continued with “routine attacks,”<sup>296</sup> following a grim pre-pandemic trend.<sup>297</sup>

For many violent nonstate actors, the pandemic seems to represent an opportunity rather than an ordeal. With governments distracted and many counter-terrorism missions currently on hold, pressure on extremists has waned.<sup>298</sup> At the same time, conditions for recruitment and radicalization are excellent. As Covid-19 endangers people’s livelihoods, socio-economic grievances are bound to grow. And when government assistance provided during the pandemic fails to reach everyone equally, perceptions of injustice will mount. Using propaganda and misinformation,<sup>299</sup> extremists will happily exploit both of these sentiments. And prolonged periods of self-isolation, combined with strong social media exposure, may further increase individuals’ “vulnerability to extremist narratives.”<sup>300</sup> In fact, in April, a US start-up monitoring extremism online recorded a 21 percent uptick in engagement with violent extremist content in places where confinement measures were in place.<sup>301</sup>



“Securing public health and protecting refugees are not mutually exclusive. This is not a dilemma. We have to do both.”<sup>308</sup>

UN High Commissioner  
for Refugees  
Filippo Grandi,  
April 22, 2020

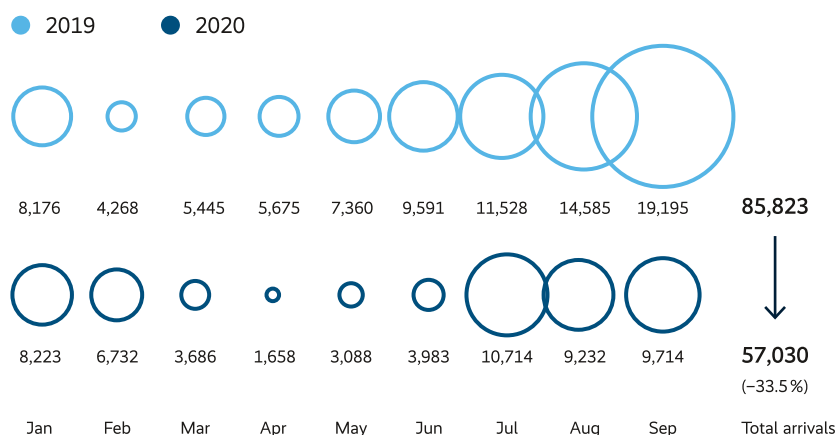
Evidence is mounting that insurgent groups are swiftly adapting their propaganda to exploit the pandemic in their favor.<sup>302</sup> In this vein, East Africa’s militant group Al-Shabaab has blamed the virus on the African Union, describing the organization as a foreign “crusader force.”<sup>303</sup> Meanwhile, Al-Shabaab has continued to expand into northern Kenya and stage attacks in Somalia.<sup>304</sup> In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the IS offshoot Central African Province has tried to woo new followers by claiming that the “medicine for that virus is here with us.”<sup>305</sup> In addition, extremist and other violent nonstate actors are eagerly exploiting the shortcomings in governments’ crisis responses, trying to extend their reach by assuming the role of aid providers or confinement enforcers. For instance, in Brazil’s *favelas*, gangs have enforced lockdown measures,<sup>306</sup> and in Mexico, cartels handed out food and soap.<sup>307</sup>

For some nonstate actors, the human suffering created by the pandemic is even a business to exploit.<sup>309</sup> Migrants and refugees are particularly vulnerable prey. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM),

mobility restrictions since the beginning of the pandemic contributed to a 33.5 percent decrease in migration flows from West and Northern Africa to Europe in the first nine months of 2020 – compared to the same period in 2019.<sup>310</sup> These disruptions went hand in hand with heightened vulnerabilities among migrants, who got stranded on their perilous journeys. In June, IOM counted 50,000 stranded migrants in West and Central Africa alone.<sup>311</sup> And Covid-19 movement restrictions left hundreds of Rohingya migrants stranded at sea.<sup>312</sup> Travel restrictions might be in place, but people are nevertheless fleeing political violence and persecution, creating huge markets for human smugglers and opportunities for trafficking networks.<sup>313</sup>

Figure 3.10

Irregular migrant arrivals in Europe by sea from January to September, 2019 and 2020, total number



Data: International Organization for Migration. Illustration: Munich Security Conference

Overall, the pandemic and its multiple effects have presented significant challenges to development, resilience, and peace. They have erased progress on curbing poverty, further aggravated state fragility, and threaten to fuel violent conflict. Worse still, the negative dynamics engendered by Covid-19 are mutually reinforcing. Setbacks in one area are also stymieing progress in others. Hence, without decisive action that pays due regard to the many interlinkages, the pandemic might trigger a worrisome downward spiral.

## Key Points

- 1 The polypandemic is threatening years, if not decades, of progress on global development and might be making it more difficult to curb fragility and promote peace.
- 2 The international community's crisis response must be holistic in nature, linking short-term aid to meet immediate needs with long-term investments in crisis prevention. It must also pay due attention to the complex interactions between poor development, fragility, and conflict.
- 3 In support of the call for a global ceasefire, Germany and Europe must ratchet up pressure on actors breaking international weapons embargoes and continuing to foment intrastate conflict.
- 4 Despite growing pressure on state budgets everywhere, ODA must not fall victim to cuts. Instead, it is time to (re-)commit to the 0.7 percent target of ODA spending.
- 5 The world's democracies cannot afford to turn inward. Instead, they have to show that democratic societies are much more capable of dealing with massive shocks like Covid-19. They also need to raise pressure on governments that use the pandemic to roll back democracy and liberal democratic rights.





The International Scene

4

# Multilateral Organ Failure

Will Covid-19 exacerbate the crisis of multilateralism? How does the pandemic relate to broader trends of growing nationalist sentiments and a more inward-looking West? Are there causes for optimism with regard to global cooperation?

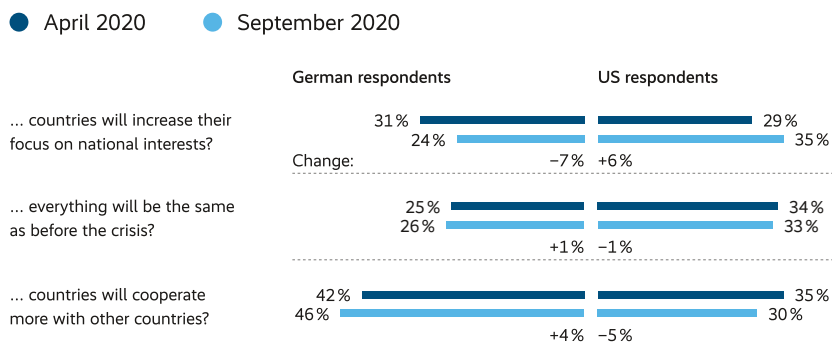
## Multilateral Organ Failure

Sophie Eisentraut

By disrupting humanitarian assistance, aid flows, and peace operations, the pandemic has directly and dramatically impaired collective efforts to protect the world's most vulnerable people. Yet, its consequences for global cooperation and collective problem-solving might well be more serious than these immediate effects. And they will likely outlast the coronavirus itself. By aggravating great-power competition inside multilateral institutions and intensifying nationalist and protectionist sentiments, Covid-19 risks exacerbating a crisis of multilateral cooperation that preceded the coronavirus pandemic. For those hit hardest by the fallout of Covid-19, this represents a significant threat. Their ability to cope with the pandemic hinges on global solidarity and on effective multilateralism.

Figure 4.1

US and German views on cooperation after the coronavirus crisis, April and September 2020, percent



Data: Körber-Stiftung and Pew Research Center.  
Illustration: Munich Security Conference

Körber Stiftung    Pew Research Center

Once the coronavirus crisis is over, do you think ...

### Great-Power Competition

Even before the pandemic struck, great-power competition had been increasing. Geopolitical competition once again preoccupied governments in the world's major powers.<sup>314</sup> What's more, great-power tensions had begun to significantly impede global cooperation, as major powers transformed multilateral institutions into venues for confrontation rather than cooperation. In this regard, US-China competition stood out – not only for the intensity it had acquired but also for its effects on international organizations. Even be-



fore Covid-19, multilateral fora had become instruments of Sino-American competition and collateral damage of the tensions between the two countries.<sup>315</sup> In 2018, for instance, the United States’ ambassador to the World Trade Organization (WTO) linked Washington’s intent to obstruct the dispute settlement body of the WTO to allegations that China was employing “trade-distorting policies.”<sup>316</sup> The pandemic has accelerated this trend: It has spurred US-China competition while also amplifying and deepening its detrimental effects. Global health organizations have become “yet another battleground”<sup>317</sup> in an increasingly fraught geopolitical battle.

Great-power competition is clearly part of the reason why at the outset of the pandemic, core international institutions struggled to rise to the occasion. The WHO, the UN Security Council, and the G7 were chief among them. As has rightly been argued, “multilateral institutions are what states and their leaders make of them,” and in this regard, powerful members have held particular sway.<sup>318</sup> However, in contrast to how they responded to earlier health crises, among them Ebola in 2014, this time around the United States and China failed to cooperate.<sup>319</sup> Worse yet, their efforts to blame each other for the pandemic and the magnitude of its fallout actively stymied the collective response to Covid-19.<sup>320</sup>



“Even with the best relations between the United States and China, mounting a collective response to Covid-19 would be hugely challenging. Unfortunately, the pandemic is exacerbating the U.S.-Chinese rivalry, increasing mistrust, one-upmanship, and mutual blame.”<sup>321</sup>

Prime Minister of Singapore  
Lee Hsien Loong,  
Foreign Affairs,  
June 4, 2020

According to observers, the WHO has become the primary battleground in this blame game. US President Donald Trump has depicted the organization as “a puppet of China”<sup>322</sup> and withdrawn US contributions to the WHO’s budget.<sup>323</sup> But the geopolitical blame game between Washington and Beijing has also hamstrung the pandemic responses of other international institutions. In 2014, it took the UN Security Council one single day to unanimously pass a resolution on Ebola that called the outbreak “a threat to international peace and security.”<sup>324</sup> In 2020, in the case of Covid-19, it took the Council three months. Half a million people died between the issuing of the global ceasefire appeal in March and the final resolution adopted in July – and observers argued that “momentum” on peace had already been lost.<sup>325</sup> This delay was centrally related to US-China tensions, including over whether or not the resolution should mention the WHO and the origins of the virus in Wuhan.<sup>326</sup> In late March, the same disagreement also prevented the G7 countries from issuing a joint statement.<sup>327</sup>

In that regard, great-power rivalry has already weakened the multilateral crisis response, hampering the delivery of much-needed assistance to the world’s most vulnerable places. But the damage done to international insti-

tutions might well last much longer, durably impairing their ability to foster collective solutions. For instance, the withdrawal of US support and funding from the WHO has dealt a long-term blow to its ability to foster global health. The aggressive way in which criticism is being levelled against the WHO and other organizations may further undermine public trust in multilateral cooperation and jeopardize governments' willingness to heed these institutions' advice.<sup>328</sup> And by leaving the global images of both Beijing and Washington tainted,<sup>329</sup> great-power competition is weakening major powers and impairing their ability to lead in the event of a future global crisis. As a result, global institutions have been deprived of the leaders they need.<sup>330</sup> While everyone loses when global cooperation falters, the people who suffer most are those in the most vulnerable parts of the world.



“[The pandemic] will change the nature of globalization, with which we have lived for the past 40 years. [...] [I]t was clear that this kind of globalization was reaching the end of its cycle.”<sup>331</sup>

President of France  
Emmanuel Macron,  
Financial Times,  
April 16, 2020

### Nationalism and Protectionism

The pandemic might intensify and deepen yet another global trend that jeopardizes multilateral cooperation and global solidarity: growing nationalism.<sup>332</sup> Even before Covid-19, many people perceived openness and interdependence as significant threats; they saw cooperation as a zero-sum game and closing off from the world as the only viable option.<sup>333</sup> In the economic realm, this trend was particularly evident. The past few years have seen a major bilateral trade war, trade restrictions introduced in the name of national security, and efforts to decouple by several states. But even before that, the global economy had shown signs of disintegration. In fact, efforts to liberalize the international trading system have been paralyzed for almost two decades. Politically, globalization has also come under attack from both left-wing forces, who highlight the environmental and social costs of global connectivity, and from nationalist populists, who exploit and foment xenophobic sentiments and push for fortified borders and immigration restrictions.

If globalization and free trade had already come under fire pre-Covid-19, the pandemic certainly added fuel to the fire. If anything, the virus relentlessly exposed the costs associated with the free flow of goods and people.<sup>334</sup> As German Health Minister Jens Spahn argued in March, the pandemic has also highlighted the risk of “dependency” on foreign medical supplies.<sup>335</sup> He pointed to the fragility of the global supply chains for medical goods and protective gear. States' first reactions to the pandemic were utterly self-centered and reflected little concern for cross-border effects. Governments closed borders, implemented travel bans, and either bought up medical and protective equipment or halted their export. Against this background, pundits wondered “whether globalization itself might fall victim to the coronavirus.”<sup>336</sup>

The world's most vulnerable were hit hardest by these inward-looking policies and by spikes in anti-globalist sentiments. Border closures left migrants stranded in every parts of the world, where they faced an increased risk of catching the virus while being left "without access to minimal care."<sup>337</sup> At the same time, migrants and refugees have also become the victims of what UN Secretary-General Guterres termed a "tsunami of hate and xenophobia."<sup>338</sup> Together with members of other minority groups, they have been falsely blamed for spreading the virus.<sup>339</sup> In Bangladesh, Rohingya refugees faced mounting distrust, rumors, and hate speech, contributing to "rapidly deteriorating security dynamics" between local and refugee communities.<sup>340</sup> And in both the United States and in Europe, migrants have faced racist online allegations of being primary virus carriers – with possible real-life consequences.<sup>341</sup> Clearly, as economic conditions worsen and socio-economic tensions rise, xenophobic incidents and the scapegoating of foreigners might become even more frequent in the future.<sup>342</sup>

Overall, the pandemic and its effects risk exacerbating the protectionist, zero-sum thinking that had taken hold in many corners of the world beforehand. In places where people felt left alone by other countries and international institutions,<sup>343</sup> go-it-alone instincts and nationalist sentiments will find fertile ground. Already, there is widespread talk of "de-globalization, de-coupling, [and of] bringing supply chains home."<sup>344</sup> According to a survey of companies investing in the United States that was published in May, more than three quarters of respondents expected the United States to become more protectionist in response to Covid-19.<sup>345</sup>



"All we are saying is let's not be sucked back into isolationism [...]. We need each other today more than we ever did."<sup>346</sup>

President of Kenya  
Uhuru Kenyatta,  
Financial Times,  
June 19, 2020

This is a massive economic challenge for rich trading states such as Germany.<sup>347</sup> But for developing countries and fragile states, the effects of nationalist thinking and sustained protectionism promise to be disastrous. This especially applies in the fields of medical supplies, protective equipment, and vaccines, as such thinking deals an additional blow to countries' resilience in the coronavirus crisis.

Developing countries are clearly the most vulnerable to the recent increase in protectionism as regards medical devices and protective equipment – a spike akin to the "largest international market shock" since 1973.<sup>348</sup> According to data collected by the Global Trade Alert project, as of October 16, 92 jurisdictions had implemented a total of 202 export controls on medical supplies.<sup>349</sup> For instance, the European Commission imposed export restrictions on protective equipment to other world regions as early as mid-March.<sup>350</sup>

And in early April, the US administration banned exports of surgical masks manufactured in the United States, invoking a “Korean War-era law.”<sup>351</sup> Yet, most developing countries are “completely dependent”<sup>352</sup> on the import of medical goods, either from the EU or the United States. According to the OECD, more than half of Africa’s medical and pharmaceutical products are imported from the EU-27.<sup>353</sup> Analyses published by the Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE) suggest that, for certain African states and certain product types, the dependency is significantly higher. Against this background, protectionism jeopardizes the ability of poor states to cope with Covid-19.

Figure 4.2

Share of total imports African states sourced from the EU in 2018, by product subject to EU export restrictions\* during Covid-19, percent

\*EU export restrictions were imposed on March 15, later modified, and ceased to apply on May 26, 2020.

	90–100%	80–89%	70–79%	60–69%	50–59%	<50%
	Face shields	Mouth-nose-protection equipment	Protective spectacles and visors	Protective garments	Gloves	
Cape Verde	91	87	89	75	91	
Central African Republic	18	74	100	59	70	
Tunisia	86	63	35	89	41	
Senegal	55	61	51	33	56	
Congo, Rep.	51	67	45	36	55	
Niger	54	71	71	5	26	
Angola	63	29	62	29	42	
Benin	36	31	68	70	18	
Morocco	78	54	9	34	22	
Nigeria	55	45	12	28	6	
Mauritania	37	52	12	15	25	
Seychelles	35	19	55	9	8	
Algeria	55	22	7	9	9	

Data and illustration: Peterson Institute for International Economics

“Vaccine nationalism”<sup>354</sup> is another serious threat to the world’s most vulnerable nations and their ability to protect their own people. Global leaders, including UN Secretary-General Guterres have rightly argued that “a Covid-19 vaccine must be seen as a global public good” that demands equal access for all.<sup>355</sup> Only a coordinated international approach can ensure this type of access. Uncoordinated national approaches risk “squandering” scarce quantities of an eventual vaccine on low-risk individuals when they should be used to immunize high-risk individuals in all parts of the world – health workers first among them.<sup>356</sup> Still, national leaders seem more concerned with their attempts “to lock up future supply.”<sup>357</sup> Due to the absence of coordination, they also risk “bid[ding] against one another, driving up the price of vaccines”<sup>358</sup> for everyone involved. And according to a recent survey published by *The Economist*, a third of citizens in the ten countries covered want “first dibs” on a coronavirus vaccine.<sup>359</sup> The death toll due to inequitable access to expensive vaccines would clearly be highest in the poorest places on earth.



“Maybe, out of the dark days of this epidemic, we could see an opportunity to actually move beyond those trade disputes and political tensions.”<sup>362</sup>

Wellcome Trust Director  
Jeremy Farrar,  
Munich Security Conference,  
February 15, 2020

Beyond jeopardizing countries’ access to medical supplies and vaccines, heightened nationalism also poses a more general, long-term threat to fragile and poorly developed states. Nations that view the pandemic as confirming their prior perceptions about the international order – namely that international institutions are weak and that you cannot rely on other states to protect you – will likely contribute less to multilateral initiatives engaged in fostering development, curbing fragility, and containing conflict elsewhere in the world. The “increased pressure on budgets” provoked by the economic downturn, combined with the fact that leaders are preoccupied with the domestic fallout of Covid-19, threatens to push the struggles in less fortunate regions further into the background.<sup>360</sup> In fact, according to UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock, there is a wide gap between what wealthy countries have spent on domestic stimulus programs and what they have dedicated to international assistance – a gap he describes as “dangerously short-sighted.”<sup>361</sup>

It is unsurprising that the initial response to the pandemic predominantly featured nationalist and protectionist measures as well as a strong desire for nations to turn inward. However, a few months into the pandemic, these types of responses are no longer justifiable. It is high time for the international community to put a clear end to policies that impede everyone’s ability to cope with Covid-19 but disproportionately disadvantage developing states. Most importantly, states have to fully renounce protectionist measures in the realm of medical supplies and protective equipment.

While it is evident that states need to reduce their dependence on single sources of supply, this should not happen at the expense of less diversified economies. Most importantly, it cannot take the form of disrupting global supply chains. Instead, diversification should be the order of the day. But wealthy states should not only improve the resilience of their own economies and supply chains; they should also assist less developed states in doing the same. For Europe, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offers relevant opportunities. More trade on the African continent may not only stimulate growth and development but may also represent a unique chance to strengthen regional supply chains and thus African resilience in the face of future economic shocks.<sup>363</sup> At present, however, there is still a “vast infrastructure gap”<sup>364</sup> that greatly limits any significant expansion of intra-African trade. Substantial investments in connectivity and infrastructure will be a key factor for the success of the AfCFTA. Here, European cooperation and support can make a decisive difference. Rather than decoupling, Europe should invest in connectivity.<sup>365</sup>

States also need to revive the multilateral institutions and instruments that are desperately needed to manage global crises like Covid-19 – institutions and instruments that have been greatly weakened over the past months and years. The Ebola epidemic has proven that a cooperative global approach to the supply of medicines, protective equipment, and vaccines is in everyone’s interest. According to the CEO of GAVI, the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation, the Ebola vaccine was a truly global product. It was “originally made in Canada,” afterwards “transferred” to US-based biotech and drug making companies before finally being produced in Germany.<sup>366</sup> In short, cooperation increases everyone’s crisis resilience.



“This crisis is different. We have suddenly found ourselves in the same boat. As much as individualism and nationalism are visible, it has revealed the capacity of people to support each other and to build solidarity with the weakest among us.”<sup>368</sup>

President of Ethiopia  
Sahle-Work Zewde,  
Message for Global Solidarity  
Against COVID 19,  
May 13, 2020

### Cause for Optimism

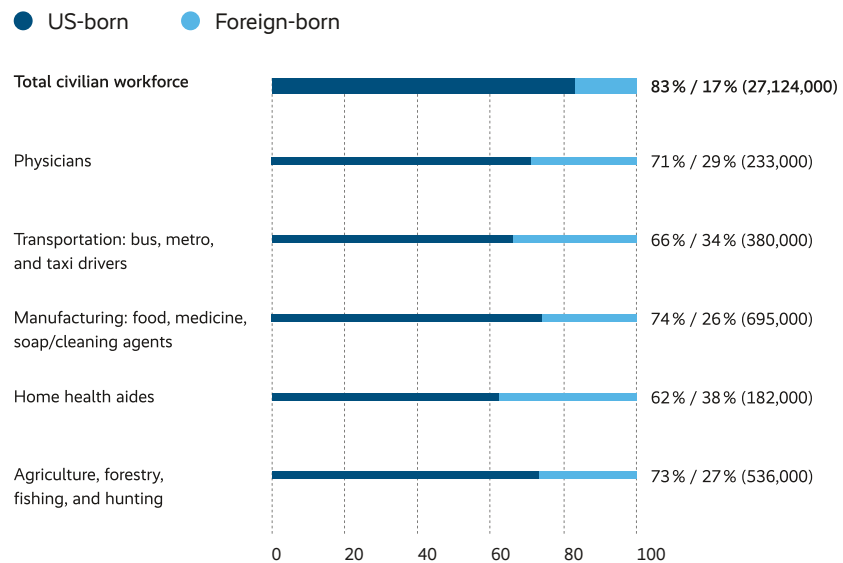
The pandemic might not only “give new ammunition to the ‘nationalistas’,”<sup>367</sup> but could also end up strengthening globalist and multilateralist forces. This would be good news for the world’s most vulnerable nations, which disproportionately depend on multilateral solutions and on genuine global solidarity.

For instance, while the pandemic has spurred xenophobic sentiments in many parts of the world, it has also provoked a tremendous amount of gratitude towards immigrants. As physicians and care workers, agricultural workers and drivers, foreign-born essential workers have been saving lives and keeping vital services running during the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>369</sup> In the

EU, immigrants – from other EU members states or outside the EU – make up 13 percent of essential workers.<sup>370</sup> In the United States, 19 percent of key workers are foreign-born.<sup>371</sup> And in both the EU and the US, immigrants are overrepresented in key occupations at the frontline of the pandemic response. In this regard, there is hope that the pandemic could “make attitudes to immigration healthier.”<sup>372</sup>

There is also hope that it could increase the pressure on decision-makers to recognize migrants’ vital contributions. And indeed, there have been baby steps in the right direction in the past weeks and months, including efforts to improve “migrants’ access to labor markets, social protection, and basic services.”<sup>373</sup> For instance, to ensure they have access to healthcare during the pandemic, the Portuguese government decided to temporarily grant all migrants and asylum-seekers full citizenship rights.<sup>374</sup> The challenge of the upcoming months is to ensure that these reforms and initiatives survive into the post-coronavirus period – and to ensure that they are further extended.

**Figure 4.3**  
Immigrant workers in essential businesses, United States, 2018, percent



Data: Migration Policy Institute. Illustration: Munich Security Conference





“This crisis also shows that international cooperation is neither an ideology nor an end in itself. On the contrary, it delivers results.”<sup>377</sup>

German Foreign Minister  
Heiko Maas,  
September 29, 2020

Export controls on medical goods might still be in place in many parts of the world, yet governments have evidently grown more conscious of the costs of imposing them. National leaders have learned the hard way that dependency is mutual and that protectionist measures may backfire. In a world of complex globalized supply chains, even highly developed countries with the capacity to manufacture their own medical goods depend on imports of critical components.<sup>375</sup> For instance, the Trump administration quickly dropped its threat to stop the export of respirators to Mexico and Canada when it learned that the United States’ production of surgical masks and ventilators depended on critical inputs from both of its neighbors.<sup>376</sup> While some countries may suffer disproportionately, medical protectionism clearly harms everyone’s access to relevant medical products.

And although multilateralist approaches were initially slow to respond to the pandemic, they have sprung to life in a great many forms, including in the most vulnerable regions of the world. The past months have seen the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) coordinate a Global Humanitarian Response Plan to help “fight the virus in the world’s poorest countries.”<sup>378</sup> They have seen the IMF provide “financial assistance and debt service relief”<sup>379</sup> to members suffering from the economic fallout of the pandemic, especially poor countries. And they have witnessed the WHO and nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations like GAVI and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation set a powerful example against vaccine nationalism: In the framework of the Access to Covid-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator, these and other actors are cooperating “to accelerate development, production, and equitable access to Covid-19 tests, treatments, and vaccines.”<sup>380</sup> By July, the European Commission had already raised 15.9 billion euros in support of this effort;<sup>381</sup> by September, 156 states had signed up to the vaccine pillar of this collaborative effort;<sup>382</sup> and in mid-October, the World Bank pledged a 12 billion US dollar aid package for developing countries to “finance the purchase and distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, tests, and treatments,” throwing its weight behind this multilateral effort.<sup>383</sup>

The African continent has seen a remarkable flurry of collaborative initiatives, particularly under the auspices of the AU and its Africa CDC.<sup>384</sup> As one observer put it, “while the rest of the world seems to have reverted to the logic of national sovereignty,” Africa and the AU in particular represented “a rare case of internationalism.”<sup>385</sup> As early as February, the Africa CDC launched a special taskforce, the Africa Task Force for Novel Coronavirus, to “support pan-African cooperation” on Covid-19 preparedness measures,

including information sharing and capacity building.<sup>386</sup> It has also offered trainings and workshops, and, by mobilizing resources within its “Partnership to Accelerate Covid-19 Testing” (PACT), it is working to strengthen the continent’s “capacity to test, trace, and treat Covid-19 cases.”<sup>387</sup>

Various regional organizations across the African continent have played an active role in containing the pandemic and its ripple effects: In West Africa, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has distributed critical medical supplies, launched awareness campaigns, and introduced measures to soften the socio-economic fallout of the pandemic.<sup>388</sup> In East Africa, the East African Community (EAC) provided training and mobile laboratories,<sup>389</sup> and the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) “has proven to be essential”<sup>390</sup> for regional information-sharing during the pandemic. And last but not least, the African Development Bank launched a 10 billion US dollar Rapid Response Facility (CRF) to “bolster health systems and disease surveillance” of countries in East Africa, the Horn of Africa, and in the Comoros.<sup>391</sup> According to South Africa’s president and current chairperson of the AU, Cyril Ramaphosa, one “jewel in the crown of pan-African cooperation”<sup>392</sup> is the Africa Medical Supplies Platform, which was launched in June – an online platform designed to help the continent access the medical goods critical to cope with the pandemic.<sup>393</sup> Cooperative efforts like these will strengthen African nations’ ability to recover from the pandemic and boost countries’ resilience in the wake of future security crises.



## Key Points

- 1 By aggravating great-power competition and by intensifying nationalist and protectionist tendencies, Covid-19 risks exacerbating the crisis of multilateralism that preceded the coronavirus pandemic.
- 2 Those hit hardest by the coronavirus pandemic will likely suffer the most if cooperation continues to falter. For this reason, Germany and Europe must make greater strides towards building back better at the international level itself and must seek to strengthen and revive relevant multilateral instruments.
- 3 Developing countries and fragile states are being disproportionately affected by protectionist policies and zero-sum thinking among nations. Protectionism is jeopardizing access to medical supplies and protective equipment. And if vaccine nationalism prevails, the Global South will be the first to lose out.
- 4 High-income countries should work on shock-proofing relevant supply chains and assist developing countries in similar efforts. In this regard, strong European support for the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) could be a first decisive step.





Conclusion

5

# Building Up Global Resistance

What can Germany, Europe, and the international community do to protect the world's most vulnerable people? What concrete steps can be taken to meet immediate needs and what are the most urgent investments in countries' long-term crisis resilience?

## Building Up Global Resistance

Sophie Eisentraut,  
Luca Mieke,  
and Juliane Kabus

The coronavirus pandemic, as some observers have argued, might well mark the beginning of a new era of security threats. Like the pandemic, the threats of the future are less “battle[s] to be won” than they are “challenge[s] to be weathered.”<sup>394</sup> In this new era, characterized by health shocks and climate crises, by economic warfare and cyberattacks,<sup>395</sup> a nation’s security is inseparably tied to its ability to resist and recover.

Unfortunately, this ability is not evenly spread: Some countries, societies, and people are disproportionately vulnerable to the threats of the future. Poor countries, fragile states, and societies afflicted by conflict are chief among them. But it is wrong to assume that elevated exposure to shocks and insufficient capacities to cope with them are problems for these states and societies alone. Far from it: They are everyone’s problems. If there is one truth that the polypandemic has evinced, it is that the international community is only as strong as its weakest link. One country’s ability to resist and recover depends on others’ ability to do so as well.

Clearly, if the virus is not defeated everywhere in the world, it will keep coming back. And if the polypandemic is allowed to wreak havoc in the most vulnerable parts of the world, the effects will not be contained by borders. In an unparalleled manner, the coronavirus crisis has exposed the extent to which the well-being of one nation depends on the well-being of others. For that reason, Germany, Europe, and the international community as a whole will have to make much greater efforts to protect the world’s weakest players. “[S]olidarity is self-interest,”<sup>396</sup> as UN Secretary-General Guterres recently argued. Helping now is thus “an investment in the future.”<sup>397</sup>



“If Covid-19 is not beaten in Africa it will return to haunt us all.”<sup>398</sup>

Prime Minister of Ethiopia  
Abiy Ahmed,  
Financial Times,  
March 25, 2020

To help the international community’s most vulnerable members, Germany, Europe, and other key players need to link short-term aid to meet immediate needs with investments in countries’ long-term crisis resilience. The details will have to be discussed and hammered out in the weeks and months ahead. However, a few of them are already evident.

First and most importantly, high-income countries need to end measures that disproportionately harm developing countries. This includes renouncing detrimental protectionist measures. In the realm of medical and protective equipment, these measures hamper poor states’ ability to defend themselves against Covid-19. And in the realm of agriculture, protectionism is aggravat-





“[T]his is a global pandemic of historic proportions. Unless you control a pandemic globally, you will not have controlled it anywhere.”<sup>401</sup>

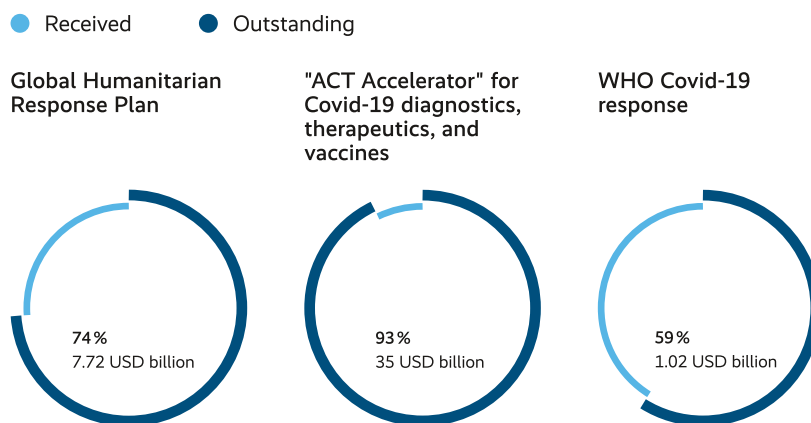
Director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)  
Anthony Fauci,  
Friends of the Global Fight Interview,  
September 11, 2020

ing food insecurity on the African continent.<sup>399</sup> As one observer aptly put it: “Until the pandemic is contained everywhere, it is a worry anywhere. The same is true for protectionism.”<sup>400</sup> The G20 is uniquely positioned to take a lead on this front and encourage the rest of the international community to follow suit.

Second, Europe, together with other members of the international community needs to make much greater efforts to ameliorate the adverse effects of the pandemic – chief among them poverty and hunger – on those who are disproportionately exposed. Saving lives and protecting livelihoods must be the order of the day. To this end, EU member states need to extend the financial generosity that characterized their own domestic pandemic responses to ongoing humanitarian relief efforts. To date, major global humanitarian initiatives still face considerable funding gaps.

The overall funding gap for Africa’s pandemic response is estimated at 100 billion US dollars for each of the next three years.<sup>402</sup> The debate among high-income countries on how this gap can be closed should start at the earliest possible date – and European governments should spearhead these discussions. In the meantime, Europeans must make sure that ODA is not cut – even in light of growing pressure on all governments’ budgets. In the past, few countries have met the 0.7 percent aid target, according to which

**Figure 5.1**  
Covid-19 funding gaps of selected multilateral initiatives,  
2020, percent



Data: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and World Health Organization. Illustration: Munich Security Conference

0.7 percent of gross national income should be spent on ODA.<sup>403</sup> In 2019, only three EU member states lived up to that goal.<sup>404</sup> In the face of massive global suffering, doing more is an urgent imperative. As UN Emergency Relief Coordinator Lowcock has rightly argued: “This is not business as usual. Extraordinary measures are needed.”<sup>405</sup>

Efforts to limit the pandemic’s disruptive effects will also demand discussions on debt relief. Here again, the G20 is uniquely positioned to lead. By establishing the Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), its members took a concerted first step on this matter. The DSSI granted debt-service suspension to 73 low-income states, helping them “concentrate their resources on fighting the pandemic.”<sup>406</sup> Yet, evidence that this step is insufficient is mounting. According to observers, the DSSI itself could be further improved. The topics that warrant discussion include an extension of the initiative beyond mid-2021, measures to ensure more comprehensive participation by creditor and debtor countries, and steps to prevent global rating agencies from downgrading states that joined the initiative.<sup>407</sup> And the DSSI alone will hardly be sufficient. Most importantly, it does not cover the debt-service payments countries owe to “private creditors, bondholders, and multilateral lenders,” which among African states included in the DSSI account for 61 percent of due payments.<sup>408</sup>



“[W]e have a responsibility to recover better.”<sup>411</sup>

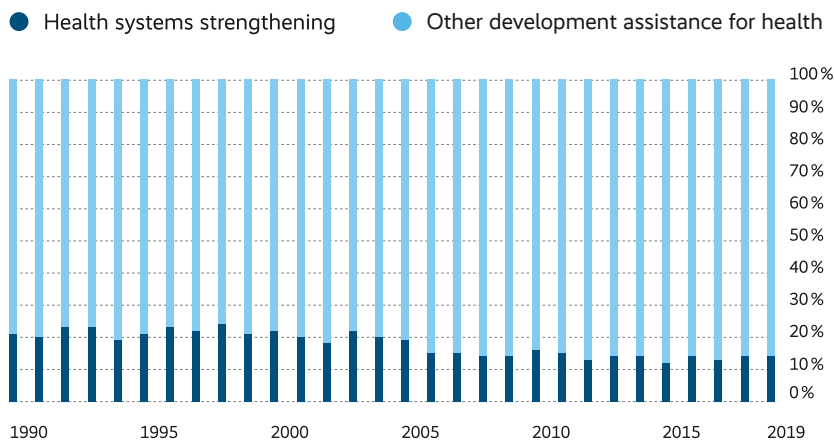
UN Secretary-General  
António Guterres,  
Global Humanitarian  
Response Plan,  
March 28, 2020

Third, the international community has to “break the cycle of panic and neglect”<sup>409</sup> that is typical for how it has dealt with crises. As Stefan Oschmann and Wolfgang Ischinger recently highlighted, states need to start planning for the post-pandemic future.<sup>410</sup> As countries help others rebuild and recover, efforts to improve prevention and strengthen resilience should accompany them at every step of the way. Investments in stronger healthcare systems, in resilient economies, and in solid and trusting relationships should be at the heart of such efforts everywhere in the world. But states also have to “build back better” at the international level. They particularly need to strengthen the collaborative institutions and instruments that are crucial for effective global solidarity.

“This will not be the last pandemic,” WHO Director-General Ghebreyesus recently warned.<sup>412</sup> And in fact, evidence suggests that the vulnerability to diseases is rising in many parts of the world.<sup>413</sup> To improve their crisis resilience, countries need to invest in public health systems that are adaptable to various types of health emergency. They also need to make greater strides towards universal health coverage. In a first step, governments could reduce the practical and legal barriers that prevent migrants, refugees, and other vulnera-

Figure 5.2

### Funding for strengthening health systems as a share of overall development assistance for health, 1990–2019, percent



Data and illustration: Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation via Council on Foreign Relations

ble groups from access to vital healthcare services.<sup>414</sup> Yet, efforts to strengthen health systems across the world also require international assistance. The resources allocated to this are currently not commensurate with the task. Instead, ODA for health that actually goes into strengthening healthcare systems has been gradually declining over the past 20 years.<sup>415</sup> Reversing this trend is just as important as increasing the WHO's share of mandatory funding.<sup>416</sup>

Better crisis preparedness also has to extend to the economic realm. In the Covid-19 pandemic, excessive dependence on single supply sources has proven to be a significant vulnerability – for high- and low-income countries alike. Yet, rather than disrupting and repatriating global supply chains, which may harm less diversified economies, states should discuss how to make their supply chains more shock-proof and sustainable. Wealthy states – European countries in particular – should assist less developed regions in their efforts to build up resilience. To this end, the EU should seriously think about (re-)committing to connectivity efforts while introducing a more explicit angle of sustainability and resilience.<sup>417</sup> Likewise, Europe should eagerly support the AfCFTA, which offers African states a unique chance to strengthen regional supply chains and boost their resilience in the face of future economic shocks.<sup>418</sup>

Governments that can rely on their citizens' trust are exceptionally equipped to weather crises. This pandemic is not the first health emergency that has evidenced this link.<sup>419</sup> Investments in relationships of trust are thus investments in future resilience. In fact, the pandemic itself represents a chance for governments. The decision to respond to it “with compassion or corruption” will have a long-term effect on relations with their people.<sup>420</sup> In this regard, democracies in Europe and elsewhere in the world have an important role to play. They have to showcase the superiority of a democratic response to Covid-19 while ratcheting up pressure on governments that exploit the pandemic to tighten their grip on power. The world's democracies must not be naïve: In the ongoing “battle of narratives”<sup>421</sup> between authoritarian and democratic regimes, pandemic responses are about more than saving lives and livelihoods. They will also shape the future of democracy itself.



“The virus has reminded us that we have to protect each other if we want to protect ourselves.”<sup>422</sup>

President of the European Commission  
Ursula von der Leyen,  
Video Message on Coronavirus Global Response,  
May 4, 2020

Collective efforts to improve crisis resilience among the world's most vulnerable people also need to focus on the institutions and tools for collaboration themselves. And there are encouraging signs that multilateralism might well experience a comeback. According to a survey recently conducted by the Pew Research Center in 14 countries, almost 60 percent of people are convinced that “greater global cooperation could have reduced the human toll from Covid-19.”<sup>423</sup> Leaders worldwide now have to make good on these views.

Moreover, leaders in Europe and beyond have plenty to learn about tackling Covid-19 from Africa and its multilateral initiatives.<sup>424</sup> The major powers, for their part, could find inspiration in history, which offers many examples of cooperation, even during times of intense rivalry. If the United States and the Soviet Union were able to collaborate “at the height of the Cold War” in the fight against smallpox, then Washington and Beijing should be able to cooperate equally well now.<sup>425</sup> COVAX, a collaborative initiative aimed at developing, producing, and equitably distributing a coronavirus vaccine, would be a particularly worthy starting point.<sup>426</sup> However, by mid-September, decisive support from the United States, China, and Russia was still lacking.<sup>427</sup>

As many have touted, the fight against the polypandemic will not be a sprint – it will be a marathon.<sup>428</sup> At the moment, however, nations are running at different speeds. And the pandemic is increasing the risk that some states will fall further behind. It is up to the international community to prevent this from happening. Efforts to increase global resilience are the price of success. The price of failure is a more brittle world.

## Key Points

- ① In the face of new security threats, from health shocks and climate crises to economic warfare and cyberattacks, a nation's security is inseparable from its ability to resist and recover.
- ② The ability to resist and recover is not evenly spread: Poor countries, fragile states, and societies afflicted by conflict will be disproportionately vulnerable to the threats of the future.
- ③ If some countries and societies struggle disproportionately, this is a concern for everyone else. If there is one truth that the pandemic has evinced, it is that the well-being of one nation depends on the well-being of others.
- ④ Germany, Europe, and the international community have to make much greater efforts to protect the world's most vulnerable people, linking short-term efforts to meet immediate needs with investments in countries' long-term crisis resilience.

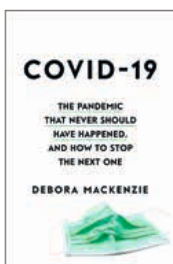




# Food for Thought



## Food for Thought Books



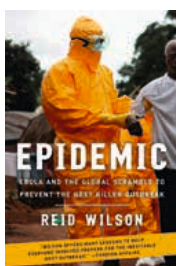
Debora MacKenzie (2020), The Bridge Street Press  
**Covid-19: The Pandemic that Never Should Have Happened and How to Stop the Next One**

From Ebola to MERS, SARS, or Zika – the world has had its fair share of public health crises in recent years. Yet, the Covid-19 pandemic’s swift spread across every continent in early 2020 indicated that the lessons of the past had gone unheeded. Veteran science journalist Debora MacKenzie lays out Covid-19’s trajectory, discusses fatal public health failures, and shows how to better prepare for future pandemics.



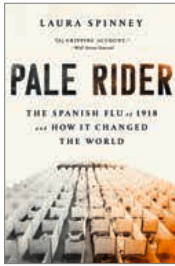
Thomas J. Bollyky, (2018), MIT Press  
**Plagues and the Paradox of Progress: Why the World Is Getting Healthier in Worrisome Ways**

Global health expert Thomas J. Bollyky tackles a modern paradox: While huge leaps are being made in tackling global health issues and improving global income generation, efforts to address long-standing governance deficits are not keeping pace. This book examines the question of why news about the global decline of infectious diseases is not all good news.



Reid Wilson, (2018), Brookings Institution Press  
**Epidemic: Ebola and the Global Scramble to Prevent the Next Killer Outbreak**

*The Hill* correspondent Reid Wilson explores how the Ebola epidemic made it from a small West African village to the White House and lays bare how ill-prepared the world was for the major Ebola outbreak. Wilson’s call for reform to increase global preparedness reverberates in 2020 as tens of millions have contracted Covid-19 and the world finds itself in yet another struggle to act decisively.



Laura Spinney (2017), PublicAffairs

### **Pale Rider: The Spanish Flu of 1918 and How it Changed the World**

Up to 100 million people died from the Spanish flu of 1918–1920, making it one of the greatest human disasters in recorded history. A century later, as we are only starting to decipher the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, Laura Spinney offers a glimpse into the many ways in which a global pandemic could change the world of tomorrow.

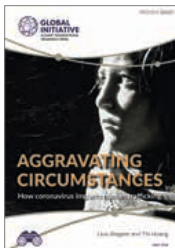
## Reports



CARE (May 2020)

### **Gender-based Violence (GBV) and Covid-19: The Complexities of Responding to the “Shadow Pandemic”**

As Covid-19 rages across the world, UN Women has warned of the “shadow pandemic” of gender-based violence (GBV). This report presents early evidence of GBV during the coronavirus pandemic and outlines how to meet these pressing issues with a comprehensive response.



GITOC (June 2020)

### **Aggravating Circumstances: How Coronavirus Impacts Human Trafficking**

A lack of labor protection, economic downturns, and socio-economic grievances are among the key factors rendering people vulnerable to trafficking – and all of these are being exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. This report assesses the impact of the coronavirus on human trafficking, outlines how criminal networks are adapting to the pandemic, and presents courses of action.



World Bank Group (April 2020)  
**COVID-19 Crisis Through a Migration Lens**

Significant drops in remittance flows and the accompanying increase in stranded migrants are only two of the many Covid-19-induced issues at the intersection of migration and development. This report presents striking regional trends that concern the flow of people and remittances across the globe while making a strong case for incorporating migrants into governments' pandemic responses.



ISS Africa (July 2020)  
**Impact of COVID-19 in Africa: A Scenario Analysis to 2030**

ISS Africa offers three possible scenarios on how the coronavirus might impact Africa. For the continent, the pandemic represents a watershed: Years of development progress are at stake. While the prospects are less than rosy, the report offers several recommendations on how to tailor a “sensible and effective response.”



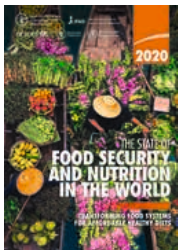
IEP (June 2020)  
**COVID-19 and Peace**

Covid-19's impact on economies is complex and multifaceted, and the journey towards post-pandemic recovery will be “long and arduous.” This report combines key economic and political perspectives to analyze the repercussions of the pandemic – including positive ones: The authors highlight the opportunities inherent in the coronavirus crisis, arguing that now is the time to rethink the old economy and build better economic resilience.



OECD (September 2020)  
**States of Fragility 2020**

Since 2005, the OECD has offered diverse insights into fragility in the world. The latest edition of its *States of Fragility* report outlines the slowly emerging impact of Covid-19 on fragile contexts. “There are no easy answers to fragility,” but this report helps the reader navigate a world marked by challenges to resilience.



FAO (July 2020)

### **The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World**

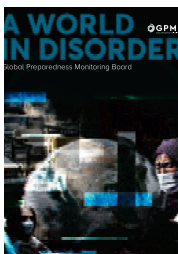
The total number of undernourished people might increase by up to 132 million people because of the Covid-19 pandemic and its wide-ranging and complex ripple effects. This report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) presents a comprehensive picture of the multifaceted challenges for food security and the nutritional status of the most vulnerable communities in 2020.



World Bank Group (2020)

### **Strategy for Fragility, Conflict, and Violence 2020–2025**

By the end of the decade, more than half the world's population will be living in places marked by conflict, fragility, and violence. Covid-19 will only add fuel to the fire. The report covers the pressing global-fragility-related questions that are vital to achieving the World Bank Group's twin goals of eradicating extreme poverty and boosting shared prosperity.



Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (September 2020)

### **A World in Disorder**

The WHO's Global Preparedness Monitoring Board (GPMB) was right all along: One year ago, its first report offered a stern warning that a global pandemic was a "very real threat." Yet, no decisive action was taken. By offering a frank assessment of the collective global failure in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, GPMB's report serves as a reminder to listen to good advice before it is too late.



# Notes



Please note that quotations originally in British English have been adapted to American English.

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# List of Abbreviations

ACLED	The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
ACT	Access to Covid-19 Tools, collaborative WHO campaign for equitable access to Covid-19 technologies
Africa CDC	Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention
AU	African Union
GDP	Gross domestic product
CEPI	Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations
Covid-19	Coronavirus disease caused by SARS-CoV-2
DSSI	G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative
EU	European Union
FAO	UN Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GAVI	Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation
ICU	Intensive Care Unit
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IS	Islamic State
LDCs	Least Developed Countries
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NIAID	US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACT	Partnership to Accelerate Covid-19 Testing
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNAIDS	Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNHCR	UN High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
USD	US dollar
UN	United Nations
WFP	UN World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization





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# Acknowledgments

This report was made possible by the generous support from many organizations and their teams.

The Munich Security Conference would like to thank the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development for supporting this report project. In particular, we would like to thank Martin Schuldes and André Budick for their extraordinary commitment.



The Munich Security Conference would like to thank the following organizations for their cooperation:

ACLED, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF), Gallup, International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), Institute of International Finance (IIF), IOM, Körber-Stiftung, Migration Policy Institute (MPI), OECD, Peterson Institute for International Economics (PIIE), Pew Research Center, Philip Morris International (PMI), Save the Children, Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP)/Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO), UN Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities, Wellcome Trust, WFP/FAO, World Bank Group, World Health Organization (WHO).

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their considerable support:

Julia Black (IOM), Chad P. Bown (PIIE), Andrew Cohen (Pew Research Center), Maya El Tabchy (PMI), Wolfgang Engel (IIF), Harsh Desai (OECD), Chelsea Dreher (IFES), Julia Ganter (Körber-Stiftung), Julia Gelatt (MPI), Mark Green (McCain Institute), Marvin Große (Save the Children), Benjamin Hilgenstock (IIF), Hans Georg Hoellerer (BMGF), Tobias Kahler (BMGF), Roudabeh Kishi (ACLEDE), Christoph Lakner (World Bank), Mark Micallef (GITOC), Theodore Murphy (ECFR), Janka Oertel (ECFR), Kiki Papachristoforou (Gallup), Andrew Rzepa (Gallup), Rolf Schwarz (OECD), Bettina Rudloff (SWP), Joshua Webb (Körber-Stiftung), Jan Weidenfeld (MERICS), Nishant Yonzan (World Bank).

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This report went to print on October 30, 2020.

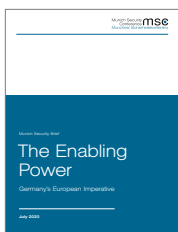
## Latest MSC Publications



### Munich Security Report 2020: Westlessness

Tobias Bunde, Randolph Carr, Sophie Eisentraut, Christoph Erber, Julia Hammelehle, Laura Hartmann, Juliane Kabus, Franziska Stärk, Julian Voje, “Munich Security Report 2020: Westlessness,” Munich: Munich Security Conference (MSC), February 2020, <https://doi.org/10.47342/IAQX5691>.

Is the world becoming less Western? Is the West itself becoming less Western, too? What does it mean for the world if the West leaves the stage to others? What could a joint Western strategy for an era of great power competition look like? The Munich Security Report 2020 sheds light on the phenomenon that it refers to as “Westlessness” – a widespread feeling of uneasiness and restlessness in the face of increasing uncertainty about the enduring purpose of the West. In this context, the Munich Security Report 2020 provides an overview of major security policy challenges and features insightful data and analyses across selected geographic and thematic spotlights.



### The Enabling Power: Germany’s European Imperative

Tobias Bunde and Sophie Eisentraut, “The Enabling Power: Germany’s European Imperative,” Munich: Munich Security Conference (MSC), Munich Security Brief, July 2020, <https://doi.org/10.47342/QTTQ4437>.

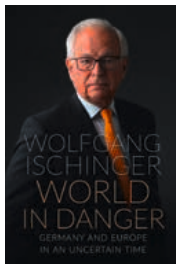
The special Munich Security Brief, published on the occasion of Germany’s EU Council Presidency, calls for Germany to become Europe’s “enabling power” – a power that spurs and facilitates rather than slow-walks European progress. To this end, the Munich Security Brief argues, Germans now need to embrace and implement the “European imperative”: Whatever Germany does in the months ahead, it should evaluate its actions according to two criteria. First, whether they enhance the EU’s ability to recover economically and politically; and second, whether they enable the EU to become a more credible international actor that can protect its values, interests, and sovereignty in an increasingly harsh security environment.



### **Zeitenwende | Wendezeiten: Special Edition of the Munich Security Report**

Tobias Bunde, Laura Hartmann, Franziska Stärk, Randolph Carr, Christoph Erber, Julia Hammelehle, Juliane Kabus, “Zeitenwende | Wendezeiten: Special Edition of the Munich Security Report,” Munich: Munich Security Conference (MSC), October 2020, <https://doi.org/10.47342/SBID8214>.

30 years after German unification, the Federal Republic is confronted with enormous challenges. Europe’s security is threatened, Europe’s democracies are on the defensive. The special edition of the Munich Security Report “Zeitenwende | Wendezeiten” provides an overview of the state of German foreign and security policy six years after the “Munich consensus”. “Zeitenwende | Wendezeiten” provides analyses and new ideas for a German foreign and security policy that is already changing – and is yet in danger of not being able to keep up with the speed of global change.



### **World in Danger**

Wolfgang Ischinger, *World in Danger: Germany and Europe in an Uncertain Time*, Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, November 2020, ISBN 9780815738435, <https://perma.cc/EY2V-VR5N>.

The world appears to be at another major turning point. Tensions between the United States and China threaten a resumption of great power conflict. Global institutions are being tested as never before, and hard-edged nationalism has resurfaced as a major force in both democracies and authoritarian states. From the European perspective, the United States appears to be abdicating its global leadership role. Meanwhile, Moscow and Beijing eagerly exploit every opportunity to pit European partners against one another. But a pivot point also offers the continent an opportunity to grow stronger. *World in Danger* offers a vision of a European future of peace and stability.

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Königsdruck

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47342/CJAO3231>

Please cite as: Sophie Eisentraut, Luca Mieke, Laura Hartmann, Juliane Kabus, “Polypandemic: Special Edition of the Munich Security Report,” Munich: Munich Security Conference (MSC), November 2020, <https://doi.org/10.47342/CJAO3231>.

ISSN (Print) 2365-2179

ISSN (Online) 2365-2187

This special edition of the Munich Security Report is also available in German, titled “Polypandemie” (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47342/WOJX4826>) and is available on the Munich Security Conference website.

In just a few short months, the coronavirus pandemic has become a polypandemic – a multifaceted crisis that might well reverse decades of development progress, further exacerbate state fragility, and even become a catalyst for violent conflict. Among the populations that were most vulnerable to begin with, the pandemic's direct and indirect fallout threatens to be much more severe. This has received disturbingly little attention. In this regard, Covid-19 represents a critical juncture: If the international community does not embrace a policy that understands solidarity as self-interest and the protection of the world's most vulnerable populations as a strategic investment in the future, the post-Covid-19 world will be much more brittle than the world that entered the polypandemic.