

COVID-19 RESPONSE MEASURES: RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS ON INVESTING IN PEOPLE FOR A JUST RECOVERY

Amnesty International is calling on G20 Finance Ministers to demonstrate global leadership by adopting bold plans at their meeting on 18-19 July 2020 that invests in people for a just recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic that respects the full range of human rights. We need to build a better future for all.

INVESTING IN PEOPLE FOR A JUST RECOVERY AND A BETTER FUTURE

COVID-19 has highlighted our vulnerabilities as well as our inter-connectedness. It has brought to the fore pre-existing structural inequalities in our societies, which stem from the current economic, educational, social and labour order which continues to fuel and grow inequality. The pandemic has also highlighted the massive inequality between and within countries in their access to material and technical resources. While COVID-19 response measures have been implemented across many countries – many of which would have seemed unthinkable beforehand, such as measures to address homelessness or vast levels of social security support - their impact will be very different depending on the ability of the country to invest sufficiently in their economy, and their social security and health systems. Without urgent and targeted measures based on solidarity and international cooperation, there is a grave risk of mass unemployment, housing and health crises and even starvation in the countries with the fewest resources.

Those from the most marginalized groups, especially people with multiple and intersecting identities, are likely to be most at risk of infection as well as adverse consequences of the responses to the pandemic. This is true in both wealthy and low-income countries, where those who are homeless, displaced, in prisons or immigration detention centres, living in inadequate housing or refugee camps, and working in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions are at higher risk of being infected in the first place. In many countries, these are mainly people from ethnic minorities or people suffering structural discrimination, including on the basis of work and descent.¹

The economic fallout from COVID-19 has been uneven and disproportionate, hitting workers in precarious employment hardest – especially in the informal sector and gig economy, including migrants, and those in supply chains in the Global South. There is a risk that countries will weakened labour standards in order to encourage investment and boost the economy.² As in other crises, women and girls risk being particularly and disproportionately impacted. Similarly, LGBTI people, Indigenous peoples, those discriminated based on descent and work, refugee and migrant communities, and people with disabilities, among others, and women and girls within these groups, are among those often ignored and denied a voice in public policy-making responses to crises and are therefore further marginalized. Older people and those with disabilities, even when not directly affected by the virus, often find themselves more isolated, and public health measures introduced in the context of COVID-19 may make access for many of these groups to essential needs and services, such as housing, water and sanitation, even more difficult than before.

The pandemic has laid bare that we are all only as safe as the most marginalized person amongst us. If we are to build resilience to future crises, we need to address existing inequalities – not just through crisis response but also long-term structural changes. Plans to recover from this crisis cannot, once again, be based on austerity measures introduced without adequate safeguards and due regard for human rights. Temporary measures to support people in accessing their economic and social rights during the pandemic, such as emergency temporary housing for those who are homeless, evictions moratoria and targeted economic support should form the foundation of the recovery. Maintenance of equivalent levels of economic and social rights protections during the recovery phase will be vital. G20 countries must lead the way to a just and inclusive recovery that puts the wellbeing of people and the planet at the centre. This would not be a

¹ Don Bambino, Geno Tai, Aditya Shah, Chyke A Dubeni, Irene G Sia, and Mark L Wieland, *The Disproportionate Impact of COVID-19 on Racial and Ethnic Minorities in the United States*, June 2020, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32562416/> and European Commission, *OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS MEASURES ON THE MARGINALISED ROMA COMMUNITIES IN THE EU*, 23 April 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/overview_of_covid19_and_roma_-_impact_-_measures_-_priorities_for_funding_-_23_04_2020.docx.pdf

² Hindustan Times, *Some states put freeze on labour laws to get business going*, 9 May 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/some-states-freeze-labour-laws/story-6JMELEPdlugsHt8YIQ75vN.html>

handbrake on progress and innovation, but rather will build economies that are resilient, protect human rights and respect environmental boundaries. Without these changes, it will be impossible to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, which the G20 has committed to implementing.

Accountability should also be a crucial part of recovery from the pandemic so that states can learn lessons to ensure that any failure to adequately uphold human rights in their responses is not repeated in any future waves of the covid-19 pandemic, or any other mass disease outbreaks. Comprehensive, effective and independent reviews into pandemic preparedness should be carried out with effective and accessible remedies for any human rights violations established to have taken place,

RECOMMENDATIONS TO G20 FINANCE MINISTERS

Amnesty International is making the following recommendations to member states of the G20 and to those invited to the 2020 process as they develop G20 COVID-19 Action Plans and national level recovery and economic stimulus packages:

BUILD A BETTER FUTURE THROUGH A JUST RECOVERY BY INVESTING IN PEOPLE

- Urgently invest in health and social protection systems that foster equality and non-discrimination and provide access to adequate housing and essential services for everyone, including migrants and those forced to seek sanctuary in another country due to conflict and persecution in their own.
- Avoid austerity measures introduced without adequate safeguards and due regard for human rights.
- Take urgent measures to realise the G20 commitment to Universal Health Coverage by ensuring equal access to health care for all persons, free from discrimination. The inability to pay or immigration status should never be a barrier to equal access to health care.
- Create a new deal for social security:
 - Protect workers rights, and ensure they are valued and paid a fair wage – including migrant workers;
 - Ensure everyone is protected from loss of income including as a result of unemployment, old age, and sickness, and that care work is properly valued and compensated;
 - End homelessness and stop forced evictions, and ensure everyone can access affordable housing, adequate water and sanitation, and allocate the necessary financing to do so, building on temporary measures where these exist.
- Ensure that all measures meet women’s and girls’ specific needs and are adequately resourced to do so in line with the 2019 G20 commitment to “take further action to improve the quality of women's employment, reduce gender pay gaps, and end all forms of discrimination against women and combat stereotypes and to recognize women as agents of peace, and in the prevention and resolution of conflict”³;
 - Take urgent steps to implement the G20’s commitment to close the gender pay gap by 25% by 2025 by investing in women’s economic empowerment;
 - Provide public education and challenge gender norms to ensure ensure gender equality, including a more equal spread of the burden of unpaid care.
- Explicitly and publicly recognise the important role that human rights defenders play in responding to the pandemic, including the monitoring of government responses, and ensure they are protected from physical and verbal attack and enabled to carry out their important work.
- Ensure adequate budgetary support for comprehensive, effective and independent reviews into the level of G20 states’ pandemic preparedness and response with a view to learning lessons and providing remedy regarding any identified failures to adequately uphold human rights.

COVID-19 is not only a health and economic, but also a human rights crisis. It has also shown us that governments are capable of urgent, fast, decisive and multi-sectorial action in the emergency response that protects economic, social and cultural rights. This is an opportunity for the G20 to demonstrate global leadership as we move from emergency to recovery, to create a “new normal”, that is just, fair and leaves no one behind.

³ G20 Osaka Leaders’ Declaration, 29 June 2019, <http://www.g20.utoronto.ca/2019/2019-g20-osaka-leaders-declaration.html>