

IIMHL & IIDL Leadership Briefing XLVIII

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Inequalities

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22 December 2020

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic is a serious challenge to all of humanity, threatening not only our livelihoods but our very lives. At the same time, it provides us as a global community with an urgent impetus to reshape our societies in order to be more healthy, inclusive and fair for all.

This Briefing focuses on solutions to existing inequalities often heightened by the pandemic.

International approaches

Amnesty International: Mental Health and Human Rights of People on the Move

October 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has simultaneously shed light on and exacerbated many of the world's most persistent problems. One of these is the unfulfilled promise, as enshrined in international law, of the right of refugees and migrants to the highest attainable standard of not only physical health – but also mental health.

Amnesty International states that the world's governments have failed to prioritize people's mental wellbeing, despite its undisputed importance, and have neglected to provide adequate funding and services for refugees and migrants. They recommend that countries should anchor their policies and practices in the international human rights norms that bind them.

They suggest that this means at least three things:

- First, states or governments must ensure that their health policies fully integrate refugees and migrants, ensuring their right to the highest attainable standard of not only physical but also mental health.
- Second, wealthier states/countries must provide adequate support to lower income states in their efforts to respect, protect and fulfil the right to health of people in their jurisdictions, including people on the move.

- Third, states/countries must refrain from migration policies and practices that violate human rights and cause mental distress, such as separating families and detaining children.

<https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/POL3030422020ENGLISH.PDF>

The International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) and the International Labour Organization (ILO): The impact of COVID-19 on indigenous communities: Insights from the Indigenous Navigator

October 2020

On the basis of a collaborative, community-led data-gathering effort and testimonies from Indigenous communities, this report provides first-hand information on the situation of Indigenous peoples in eleven countries where communities have participated in the Indigenous Navigator initiative.

Indigenous Navigator data has shown that significant gaps in access to adequate and culturally appropriate health, social security and education run the risk of leaving Indigenous peoples further behind. Furthermore, the loss of livelihoods and obstacles in access to land are among the causes of rising food insecurity among Indigenous peoples.

Considering the Indigenous realities described, the report makes eight recommendations which can be found via the following link:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---gender/documents/publication/wcms_757475.pdf

UK

University of Manchester: Rapid Evidence Review: Inequalities in relation to COVID-19 and their effects on London

September 2020

The Greater London Authority (GLA) commissioned the University of Manchester to conduct a rapid evidence review to document and understand the impact of COVID-19 (in terms of both health and the broader impacts on existing social and economic inequalities) on those with protected characteristics, as well as those living in poorer, or more precarious, socioeconomic circumstances, paying particular attention to its effect in London.

Groups of interest included: disability, ethnicity and religion; gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression; socioeconomic position, age, and other vulnerable groups among others.

The report provides the outcomes of the review, as well as a series of 35 recommendations, which are focused on identifying tractable policy solutions in order to prevent, or mitigate, the inequalities in relation to protected characteristics and socioeconomic position that result from the COVID-19 pandemic and policy responses to it.

The report identifies substantial inequalities across protected characteristics and socioeconomic position in relation to the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic. This is both in terms of risk of COVID-19 infection, complications and mortality, and in terms of the negative economic, social and psychological consequences of Government policies to mitigate the health impacts of the pandemic. These COVID19 related inequalities are caused by processes of marginalisation and oppression, which before the pandemic had led to well-documented social and health inequalities, inequalities that have been exacerbated during the coronavirus pandemic.

Thirty-five recommendations are made across the following target areas:

- Reshape the context within which the development and implementation of policy takes place;
- Reduce inequalities in risk of infection, complications and mortality;
- Reduce the amplification of economic and educational inequalities;
- Reduce the risk of domestic abuse and violence;
- Protect the rights of those with marginalised identities;
- Prevent loneliness and social isolation in vulnerable groups; and
- Reduce the impact on inequalities in mental health.

<https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/rapid-evidence-review-inequalities-in-relation-to-covid-19-and-their-effects-on-london>