

Forum: ECOSOC

Issue: Promoting social and economic policies in order to ensure an inclusive and sustainable recovery in the post-pandemic period

Officer: Pau Tong Lin Xu

Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Term Definitions	4
Pandemic	4
Renewable energy (Green energy)	4
Sustainable development	4
Unemployment	4
Wealth gap	4
Stimulus package	4
Digital transformation	4
Background Information	5
Brief History of Pandemics	5
The COVID-19 Pandemic	5
Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic	5
Sustainable Development Goals	7
Countries and Organisations Involved	8
United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)	8
United Nations General Assembly (GA)	8
United Nations Security Council (SC)	8
International Labour Organisation (ILO)	8
European Union (EU)	9

Timeline of Events	10
Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions	12
United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	12
Paris Agreement	12
S/RES/2532	12
A/RES/74/270	12
A/RES/74/274	13
Previous Attempts to Solve Issue	14
Possible Solutions	15
Bibliography	16

Introduction

COVID-19 is an infectious disease that was first identified in China in 2019 and declared a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. This pandemic has led to a range of crises that affected every country in the world. When the health crisis put entire economies on a halt, industries collapsed, firms went out of business, and workers lost their employment. According to the US Census Bureau, unemployment in the US spiked from 4% to 13.3% in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. As a consequence, social issues such as inequality and exclusion were exacerbated. For instance, 80% of the Roma population in Spain face poverty or social exclusion. In the dawn of the post-pandemic period, these social and economic issues remain evident and governments are currently faced with the challenge of ensuring an inclusive recovery that is in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals.

Term Definitions

Pandemic

An outbreak of disease that occurs over a wide geographical area and affects a significant portion of the population.

Renewable energy (Green energy)

Any energy type that is generated from natural resources such as sunlight, wind, and water. They do not harm the environment because they do not release greenhouse gases.

Sustainable development

Economic development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Unemployment

Term referring to individuals who are above a specified age and are actively seeking a job but are unable to find one.

Wealth gap

Economic inequality that is often measured using the distribution of income and distribution of wealth.

Stimulus package

Set of economic measures by a government or bank that is intended to encourage economic activity or growth.

Digital transformation

The process of using digital technologies to create or modify business processes, cultures and customer experiences.

Background Information

Brief History of Pandemics

Throughout the history of humankind, the world has been hit by several epidemics and pandemics that have threatened to wipe out our existence. The Black Death (or Bubonic plague) killed around a third of the world's population in the Middle Ages and the Spanish flu had a death toll of 17 to 50 million people within a two year period after the Great War. The similarity between these pandemics is that the world was able to recover after the population gained general immunity and that these periods of crises incentivized innovation.

The COVID-19 Pandemic

In December 2019, the COVID-19 virus was first detected in China. The virus rapidly spread to every country in the world and the World Health Organisation declared it a pandemic on 11 March 2020. Governments around the world had to face a difficult choice: ensure people's health or save the economy. Developed countries tended to opt towards ensuring the safety of their citizens at the expense of their economic activity, while Lesser Economically Developed Countries opted to maintain the economy alive at the expense of human health. But to a greater or lesser extent, all countries attempted to decelerate the spread of the virus by adopting restrictive measures that reduced human activity and travelling. In November 2020, the US became the first country to have more than 10 million confirmed cases, followed closely by India and Brazil. Throughout the pandemic, variants of the COVID-19 virus emerged, namely, the Alpha, Delta, and Omicron variants that were first detected in the UK, India, and Botswana, respectively. The COVID-19 pandemic is ongoing as of 2022 and caused over 400 million reported cases and over 5 million deaths.

Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that are relevant to the topic being debated can be classified into three main categories: economic, social, and environmental.

On an economical level, as revenue received by firms decreased due to the health restrictions, companies started to dismiss excess labour. Marriott, the world's largest hotel company, furloughed 117,000 employees (66% of all their workers) in 2020. The International Labour Organisation estimated that 400 million jobs were lost between April and June 2020. The tourism industry collapsed as travel restrictions were imposed, causing airlines, hotels, restaurants and cruise ships to go out of business. Similarly, the retail sector also suffered severe losses. Retailers in North America and the Middle East experienced a 50 per cent drop in traffic, while those in South America and Europe saw a 40 per cent drop. According to the International Labour Organisation, the income generated globally dropped by 10.7% between January and September 2020. In addition, the pandemic is projected to have a cost of 82 trillion USD on the global economy. India, the United Kingdom, Mexico, France, and Italy were the worst economically affected countries in terms of percentage change in real income.

The economic repercussions and the restrictions have also led to a range of social issues. First, the wealth gap has significantly increased during the pandemic as people on the lower end of the wealth spectrum have exhausted their capital and resources while those on the higher end of the spectrum have drastically increased their wealth. The wealth gap between countries also widened. The average GDP growth rate of all countries decreased by 7.3, while high income countries only saw a 6.4% decrease. Educational systems were also impacted when countries mandated the closing of schools and switching to online learning. Students and families of low income households were the most severely affected because these students were more susceptible to interruptions in their learning and their parents suffered opportunity costs because taking care of the children prevented them from working.

Nevertheless, the COVID-19 crisis does have several positive aspects. Firstly, when travel restrictions and lockdowns led to a general decrease in demand and consumption of fossil fuels, policy makers and businesses were able to reconsider their energy sources. Subsequently, the transition to clean energy use was accelerated. Renewable energy companies increased their share in the energy sector of both economically developed

and developing countries. For instance, China aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2060 and South Korea launched the 26bn USD Green New Deal during the pandemic. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has spurred innovation and advancements in several technological industries. For example, the value of the Nasdaq Stock Exchange grew by 41% since the beginning of the pandemic. The digital sector experienced a boom when students and workers transitioned to online learning and working. Many of these workers are expected to continue to work from home either full time or partially after the pandemic. This digital transformation of society as a whole has been paving the way for E-commerce and will continue to do so in the future. In Spain, the share of e-commerce as a percentage of total sales increased by a factor of 4.7 in 2020.

Sustainable Development Goals

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 with the objective of reducing poverty through economic development without compromising the environment. These consist of 17 goals that include: no poverty, no hunger, good health, quality education, gender equality, etc. Due to COVID-19, several of these goals have been disrupted. Today, 700 million people live below the extreme poverty line and the United Nations Development Programme estimates that this number will increase by between 44 million and 251 million in the coming years as a result of economies coming out of the pandemic weaker, especially in Lesser Economically Developed Countries. On the other hand, the switch to sustainable energy use has been accelerated. For example, the International Renewable Energy Agency has been aiding Sub-Saharan African nations transition to sustainable energy and the European Union approved the Next Generation EU COVID-19 recovery plan, whose major focuses include promoting clean energy use.

Countries and Organisations Involved

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

ECOSOC is in charge of the United Nations' economic and social response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The council warned about the catastrophic humanitarian consequences that the health crisis would have on countries and informed about the financial aid that would be necessary to slow down the economic recession. On 11 May 2020, it held the discussion "Joining Forces: Effective Policy Solutions for COVID-19 Response" to find cooperative solutions to the pandemic and reinforcing the Sustainable Development Goals. On the 23rd of July, the incoming president of ECOSOC outlined a focus on ending the pandemic, reaching the Sustainable Development Goals, and mitigating climate change. This organisation has helped organise and guide countries around the world to cooperate in responses to the pandemic.

United Nations General Assembly (GA)

In April 2020, two resolutions that addressed the COVID-19 pandemic were passed by the General Assembly. The first resolution (A/RES/74/270) was on the topic of "Global solidarity to fight the coronavirus disease 2019" intended to mobilise a coordinated international response to the pandemic and its social and economic impacts. The second resolution (A/RES/74/274) urged global cooperation to provide vaccines and medical equipment equitably. On September 11th, two more resolutions (A/RES/74/306 and A/RES/74/307) were adopted that called on member states to cooperate internationally by sharing data and research materials.

United Nations Security Council (SC)

In July 2020, the Security Council passed a resolution (S/RES/2532) that demanded an immediate ceasefire of armed conflicts around the world to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

International Labour Organisation (ILO)

The International Labour Organisation repeatedly informed about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment levels. In 2020, the organisation reported the

actual and potential future consequences that lockdowns have on employment levels and it also urged firms to help contain the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace. The organization also warned that child labor would increase during the pandemic. In July 2020, the ILO organised a summit that addressed the pandemic and concluded that decent jobs were necessary to rebuild the economy. Reports that informed about the consequences of the pandemic continued to be published. This information was essential for Governments to evaluate the effectiveness of their policies.

European Union (EU)

The European Union has coordinated European nations in responses against the COVID-19 pandemic. On 21 July 2020, the European Council agreed on the Next Generation EU (NGEU) recovery plan to aid countries that were severely impacted by the pandemic. On 17 December 2020, the EU adopted a 2.018 trillion euro budget that complimented the NextGenerationEU recovery plan to boost the post-pandemic recovery while promoting digitization and green energy use. In January 2021, the EU purchased 300 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines and distributed them between Member States.

Timeline of Events

December 2019

The coronavirus is first detected

The novel SARS-CoV-2 disease is detected in Wuhan, China. Attempts to contain the virus failed and it started to propagate globally.

13th of January 2020

First case outside of China

The first case of coronavirus outside of China was detected in Thailand.

11th of March 2020

COVID-19 declared a pandemic

The World Health Organisation declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.

March 2020

Large scale lockdowns

90 countries around the world imposed mandatory lockdowns on a total of 3.9 billion people.

2nd of April 2020

Resolution A/RES/74/270 passes

The UN General Assembly passes a resolution with the objective of mobilising an international response to the pandemic and its socio-economic impacts.

11-12th of April 2020

First US stimulus check delivered

A 2.2 trillion USD stimulus package was delivered to support low and medium income households in the US.

20th of April 2020

Resolution A/RES/74/274 passes

The UN General Assembly passed a second resolution that urged countries to cooperate in the development and equitable provision of vaccines and medical equipment.

28th of April 2020

US is the first country to surpass 1 million cases

The United States became the first country to record more than 1 million COVID-19 cases. The death toll in the US was 57000.

1st of July 2020

Resolution S/RES/2532 passes

The UN Security Council passed a resolution demanding an immediate ceasefire of armed conflicts for humanitarian access.

21st of July 2020

Next Generation EU passes

The European Council agrees on a 750 billion euro recovery package to support member states that were impacted by the pandemic.

2nd of December 2020

UK approves COVID-19 vaccine

The United Kingdom becomes the first country to approve a COVID-19 vaccine and mass vaccination begins.

Relevant UN Treaties/Resolutions

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Consists of 17 Sustainable Development Goals that were adopted in 2015 by all Member States of the United Nations. It calls on all countries to end poverty by improving healthcare and education, reducing inequality, and spurring economic growth. At the same time, countries should tackle climate change and preserve the natural environment.

Paris Agreement

An international treaty signed by 191 countries plus the European Union that attempts to mitigate climate change. It includes long term guiding goals such as limiting the global temperature increase in this century to 2 degrees celsius, reviewing each country's efforts every 5 years, and financing developing countries to tackle climate change and its repercussions. It marks the beginning of a global effort to shift to zero-emissions and is an important step to reach the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

S/RES/2532

This resolution was adopted by the Security Council on 1 July 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It demanded an immediate ceasefire of all armed conflicts for a period of 90 days. The resolution also requests an acceleration of the international response to the pandemic.

A/RES/74/270

The resolution was passed by the General Assembly on 2 April 2020 with the objective of fighting the coronavirus disease and ensuring an inclusive and sustainable recovery of the pandemic through global cooperation. It calls for member states to share scientific knowledge, prevent acts of discrimination, give special assistance to vulnerable demographic groups, and mobilize coordinated responses to the pandemic.

A/RES/74/274

This resolution was passed by the General Assembly on 20 April 2020 to ensure global access to medicines, vaccines, and equipment through international cooperation to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. It encourages countries to fund the research and development of new vaccines and safety equipment and also recommends institutions to identify methods to strengthen supply chains and increase the scale of manufacturing to ensure that the provision of medical equipment is equitable and has a wider outreach, including developing countries.

Previous Attempts to Solve Issue

During the pandemic governments and policy makers around the world have taken different approaches to ensuring inclusive and sustainable recoveries.

The United States delivered three stimulus packages to its citizens to support low and medium income households. The first package called Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES Act) was announced on 25 March 2020 and delivered on the 11th and 12th of April. Each qualified tax-paying adult that had a Gross Income of less than 75000 USD received 1200 USD and an additional 500 USD per child under the age of 16. The total value of the package was 2.2 trillion USD. The Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act of 2021 and The American Rescue Plan were two other stimulus packages approved on 27 December 2020 and 11 March 2021, respectively. These three packages allowed low and medium income households to afford basic necessities or pay off debt. However, this mass printing of money has caused inflation levels to rise, and its effects are becoming evident with the rise of prices of goods and services. Similar stimulus packages were delivered in the European Union, China, Japan, Australia, Canada, etc. In Europe, for example, the packages paid for wages while quarantine was imposed, which allowed for the subsistence of workers and their respective jobs.

On 17 December 2020, the European Union adopted a 2.018 trillion euro long-term budget that complemented the Next Generation EU recovery plan that focuses on sustainability and inclusion. These focus on promoting research and innovation, addressing climate change, transitioning to more digital lives, and improving resilience. The plan also pays attention to modernising traditional policies, protecting biodiversity and ensuring gender equality. It should be noted that a third of the total funding will be allocated to fighting climate change.

Possible Solutions

One solution to the economic impacts of the pandemic is the provision of funds, either directly or indirectly. These assists particular individuals, firms, or industries that have been affected by the pandemic or that the government wishes to promote. The funding can take the form of subsidies that are directly paid to the recipient, reduction in interest rates, or tax cuts for specific groups.

Another solution is promoting partnerships between the public and the private sector. In these partnerships, parties are able to collaborate in financing, developing and operating projects. As a result, innovation will be accelerated and public services will be improved. At the same time, these partnerships will be aiding the economic recovery.

Investments in green infrastructure will reduce the cost and promote the use of renewable energies in alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals. In addition, these investments will create job opportunities that will compensate for the unemployment caused by the pandemic. The Economic Policy Institute has estimated that for every 100bn USD invested into infrasture, 1 million full-time jobs will be yielded.

Guaranteeing equal access to vaccines can ensure an inclusive recovery. At an international level, Lesser Economically Developed Countries should be provided with vaccines so that their economies are able to resume their normal functioning. At a national level, governments must ensure that all socio-economic groups have equal access to vaccines so that everyone has the opportunity to work.

If handled strategically, digital transformation can also ensure an inclusive recovery as it may provide people with equal access to public services and job opportunities.

Facilitating retraining and upskilling programs for workers should also be a major consideration. A consequence of the innovation spurred by the pandemic is that many jobs have become obsolete while vacancies have been created in particular sectors. Therefore it is important that countries retrain these human resources so that they can reincorporate themselves into society.

Bibliography

Shannon J, Carlson I. Creating economic recovery and growth after COVID-19 [Internet]. pwc. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from:

<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/government-public-services/six-challenges/economic-recovery-after-covid-19.html>

de Haas E. Shaping tomorrow's government [Internet]. pwc. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from:

<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/industries/government-public-services/six-challenges.html>

Economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic - Wikipedia [Internet]. Wikipedia. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_impact_of_the_COVID-19_pandemic

United Nations response to the COVID-19 pandemic - Wikipedia [Internet]. Wikipedia. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_response_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic#United_Nations_Economic_and_Social_Council_\(ECOSOC\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_response_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic#United_Nations_Economic_and_Social_Council_(ECOSOC))

COVID-19 lockdowns - Wikipedia [Internet]. Wikipedia. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_lockdowns

Mojarro N. Here's why COVID-19 is a game-changer for renewable energy [Internet]. World Economic Forum. 2020 [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from:

<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/covid-19-is-a-game-changer-for-renewable-energy/>

Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals [Internet]. SDG Integration. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from:

<https://sdgintegration.undp.org/accelerating-development-progressduring-covid-19>

THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development [Internet]. Sdgs.un.org. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

The Paris Agreement | United Nations [Internet]. United Nations. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>

Siles M. Impact of the Coronavirus Stimulus Checks on the Economy [Internet]. Julian Samora Research Institute. 2022 [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from: <https://jsri.msu.edu/publications/nexo/vol-xxv/no-1-fall-2021/impact-of-the-coronavirus-stimulus-checks-on-the-economy>

Recovery plan for Europe [Internet]. European Commission - European Commission. [cited 14 February 2022]. Available from: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/recovery-plan-europe_en

US unemployment sees surprise improvement in May [Internet]. BBC News. 2020 [cited 28 February 2022]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-52938993>

Chislett W. COVID-19 ups Spain's income inequality [Internet]. Real Instituto elcano. 2020 [cited 28 February 2022]. Available from: <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/covid-19-ups-spains-income-inequality/>

Global economy gets COVID-19 shot from US stimulus, but pre-existing conditions worsen | UNCTAD [Internet]. Unctad.org. 2021 [cited 28 February 2022]. Available from: <https://unctad.org/news/global-economy-gets-covid-19-shot-us-stimulus-pre-existing-conditions-worsen>

M Sanchez J. COVID-19's Economic Impact around the World [Internet]. Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. 2021 [cited 28 February 2022]. Available from: <https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/regional-economist/third-quarter-2021/covid19s-economic-impact-world>

The future of work after COVID-19 [Internet]. McKinsey and Company. 2021 [cited 28 February 2022]. Available from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/the-future-of-work-after-covid-19>