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**COVID-19 consequences on vulnerable groups and related responses:**

**UNESCO Chairs’ perspectives**

1. **Background**

UNESCO reaches out to one of its most vibrant networks, that of UNESCO Chairs in human rights, to ask through a brief questionnaire their input on: the impact of COVID-19 on groups in situations of vulnerability in their respective city/country; promising and innovative initiatives to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic, as well as additional possible measures; and preliminary lessons and recommendations for post-pandemic societies.

1. **Questions**

Please note that the questions are separated into two segments. The first segment aims at generating information about the current impact of COVID-19, while the second concerns the design of post-pandemic societies with emphasis on solidarity and the reduction of vulnerability.

1. ***Impact of COVID-19 – IMMEDIATE INPUT***

We would be grateful if UNESCO Chairs could **respond to this set of questions as soon as possible**.

1. Since the COVID-19 outbreak, fear and anxiety for contamination together with lack of information about the characteristics of the viral disease as well as other reasons, have led to **social stigma and discrimination** against people whose ethnicity, language or other identity were associated to the virus.

* Have you witnessed this kind of stigma and discrimination in your city/country? If yes, please share your testimony, describing briefly the phenomena in question. (How are these manifested? Are these connected to pre-existing grounds of discrimination?)

● Since all people over the age of 65 were in confinement, I had no opportunity to make direct observations, but I followed the situation through the media. Thus the discriminations that I saw in the media were against aged people and health personnel ̶ the latter probably because of fear from infection. Those discriminations were sharply criticized immediately after their presentation.

* Have there been any measures and initiatives -such as campaigns – to counter such stigma? Please share any promising practice you are aware of, describing in particular any action your Chair is involved.

● To face the discrimination against aged people, local authorities and NGO’s all over Turkey, organized –under the name of VEFA (fidelity, loyalty)– groups whose members visited aged people living alone and who were in confinement, and made their shopping, visited them in special days, like Mothers’ Day, Fathers’ Day, their birthday, etc.

To compensate, just a little, the discrimination against health personnel and to express our gratitude for their work, our Chair offers, with the support of the university, scholarships for health personnel, who wish to work for an M.A. degree in human rights.

1. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a global pandemic. An increasing number of countries have sought to restrict people’s movements, imposing lockdown and declaring the state of emergency. These measures have affected all spheres of life, notably the economy and education. **Their consequences are expected to weight heavier on groups in situations of vulnerability**, such as refugees and migrants, persons with disabilities, the homeless, elderly people, women and children. With this in mind:

* What has been from your perspective the **broader impact** of COVID-19 on groups in situations of vulnerability? What rights have been particularly affected?

● I think that Covid-19 was *used*, all over the world, *as a pretext* for already existing different kinds of discrimination. The right to life and security of the person (art. 3 of the Universal Declaration), as well as the right to health were particularly affected. The so-called “herd immunity” as a method to fight against Covid-19, is a violation of the right to health and even of the right to life, which are basic rights of the individual.

* How have these measures affected the **education** of disadvantaged groups? Please describe also the situation in your own University.

● After March 14, education, at all levels, was made online. This affected disadvantaged groups in primary and secondary education. In my university, so far as I know, it created no special problem. We gave the courses online. But we should not forget, that online courses, especially in some areas, cannot replace face to face education.

1. Aware of the increased vulnerability of certain groups to the consequences of general lockdown and protracted state of emergency, many governments – central, regional and/or local – have taken **explicit support measures**. With that in mind:

* Please share any measures aimed at mitigating the impact of the crisis on disadvantaged groups that you consider promising practice. Report in particular any such initiatives undertaken to improve access of such groups to education, starting from those implemented by your University and in which your Chair is involved.

● Besides the practice I mentioned in A/1, related to aged people who live alone, to make possible for students of primary and secondary education, who couldn’t afford the equipment necessary for following the courses given on a special TV channel, local authorities, all over Turkey, provided them with computers and other necessary equipment.

* What other innovative and pertinent measures could be envisaged and what role could be played in this regard by UNESCO Chairs?

● One very important measure would be to promote human rights education worldwide, so that at least a few people become able to find out what should be done in the existing conditions of his/her country for the protection of human rights, critical situations included, as well as what could be done to persuade the relevant authorities to carry it out.

1. ***Post-pandemic societies – INPUT BY 25 APRIL 2020***

This question will require more careful consideration. In addition, as the situation still unfolds, there can be no certainties at this stage but only preliminary reflections. With that in mind, we would like to request UNESCO Chairs to share their preliminary thoughts. These will constitute a starting point for our collective thinking. Hence, to allow for adequate time to consider the content of your input we set **the deadline for 25 April 2020**.

1. **Post-pandemic societies shall need to draw lessons and take measures** to increase preparedness, enhance solidarity and reduce vulnerability in the face of future unexpected and protracted emergencies.

* In your opinion what are the preliminary lessons that should be drawn as regards discrimination and the enjoyment of basic human rights by groups in vulnerable situations?

● In my opinion, we have to become aware of what *we have not* done though we should, and what *we have done* though we should not, in connection with different kinds of discrimination, ̶ e.g. ,we taught human rights only as law, though we should have taught them first of all as ethical principles. ̶ and with the enjoyment of basic human rights in general, and more specifically in relation with vulnerable groups. Law can compensate, up to a point, human rights violations, but cannot *prevent* their violation. Law cannot help us in recognizing *new* kinds of violations either.

* What areas should be prioritized?

● A human rights training that promises to make capable the trainee to protect human rights, also includes training in the methods helping us to find out what should be done for the protection of human rights, as well as which area should be prioritized, in the existing conditions of a country, a region and worldwide is, in my opinion, teaching human rights as ethical principles first of all and on this base their legal implications, for all levels of law.