



## Background Guides — HMUNEA'21 Agendas

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### Public Health and Education Infrastructure

The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered the very fabric and foundations of our nations, society, health, education, and human behavior. People affected by already prevailing humanitarian crises and those living in low capacity settings have been stringently impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. In these settings, critical measures for COVID-19 prevention and control that have been a feature of the response in higher resource settings may be more difficult to implement and some of them are potentially harmful to the survival of many community members. In addition, capacities for testing, isolating and treating those who develop the disease, tracing and quarantining contacts may be severely lacking locally owing to weaker health systems.

Hence, public health and social measures in these settings need to be balanced against other risks affecting their communities, such as lack of income, access to basic services and social nets, and food insecurity. The outbreak of COVID-19 has also affected the education system dramatically. Students from privileged backgrounds could find their way to alternative learning opportunities. But those belonging from disadvantaged backgrounds often remained shut out when their schools shut down. Moreover, this crisis has exposed many inadequacies, from access to the broadband and computers needed for online education to the supportive environments needed to focus on learning.

### Global Solidarity in the face of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended almost every dimension of human existence. To deal with the pandemic and curtail its effects, individual countries are devising various measures to shore up their health care systems, stabilize their economies, and assist affected workers and businesses. With declining global demand for raw materials, breakdown of the global supply chain, and mounting debt burden, the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is estimated to exceed US\$220 billion.

With greater uncertainties and fear of global recession looming, governments are looking for resources needed to lessen the socio-economic pains of the crisis. The spread of COVID-19, especially in places with weak governance and health infrastructures is expected to be overwhelming if the international community

does not act tactically and vigilantly. Hence, it is critical for the international community to fulfil the humanitarian appeal for COVID-19 response while protecting existing commitments to long-term development and other ‘silent’ emergencies. Doing so will help protect the most vulnerable people from being exposed to the effects of COVID-19 and preserve hard-earned development gains in fighting global poverty and expanding basic services.

Though the COVID-19 pandemic is a devastating crisis in history, it also posits an opportunity to remind the global community why multilateralism is vital to securing the world’s peace, security, and prosperity. The health crisis of today’s globalized world interlinks the global economy, geopolitics, and social values. Our effective response to the public health crisis should be key to resolving the ensuing economic, humanitarian and development challenges. Therefore, understanding this interlinked and complex reality of COVID-19, governments need to work together closely to take coordinated actions and share scientific information, resources and expertise.

### **Equitable Vaccine Distribution**

With the effects of the pandemic dooming over the entire globe, no topic is as pertinent to the world today as that of vaccines. Although immense progress has been made with the launch of the first vaccines against COVID-19, the race to develop and deploy safe and effective vaccines everywhere is a top priority for the international community, especially with new contagious COVID-19 strains.

Tragically enough, the equitable distribution of the COVID-19 vaccine continues to be a serious risk. The absence of a comprehensive approach to ensure vaccine access in developing countries also threatens to prolong the pandemic, escalating inequalities and delaying the global economic recovery. It is morally worrying that the young healthy population in rich countries gets vaccinated against COVID-19, whereas the weak and elderly from poorer countries remain in danger without it.

There is a vital need for the global community to explore every option for boosting production, from voluntary licences, technology pools, flexibilities on trade-related intellectual property rights to waiving certain intellectual property provisions and investing in local vaccine manufacturing. Hence, it is essential to bridge financing gaps, build national capacities and maximize vaccine supply and rollout, so the disparities are eliminated and equity ensured.

## **COVID-19 Biomedical Waste Crisis**

Biomedical waste can be defined as a type of waste that is generated during the diagnosis of humans as well as animals. Biomedical waste can also be termed as 'hospital waste.' A significant part of this biomedical waste is highly infectious. For instance, hospital waste happens to be highly infectious when it is fresh and hence it demands proper waste management techniques. As per the estimations, the world has collectively produced thousands of tons of biomedical wastes which include face masks, gloves, face shields, PPE kits etc., since the onset of the perturbing and deadly pandemic COVID-19.

According to the World Health Organization, about 85% of the biomedical waste that is generated is normal, i.e., non-hazardous and non-infectious. The remaining 15% is considered infectious and hazardous. Every year around 16 billion injections are administered worldwide but unfortunately not all the needles and syringes are adequately disposed of. As per the reports, in the past two years, there has been almost four times more generation of hospital waste worldwide as compared to the yesteryears. Moreover, biomedical waste increases the odds of post-covid health hazards and sets off warning bells as illegitimate waste management will certainly lead to serious health complications in the post- covid phase worldwide.

Thus, biomedical waste is an overriding issue that the world needs to tackle right now. The ongoing pandemic has made us think about a lot of things and foremost is the biomedical waste crisis. It becomes imperative to mention that the world needs to put in a lot of effort and resources to bring about the changes in the biomedical waste management system.

## **Push towards Green Economy and Sustainable Energy**

Green Economy focuses on the protection of the environment and natural resources while seeking ways to sustain economic growth. It is the practice of designing and managing the production, consumption, and disposal of products, services, operations, and institutions to reduce harm to human health and the environment. This means addressing how our economy interacts with natural resources, business models, and government policies.

Green Economy and Sustainable Energy become important as it is a conducive policy to sustainable economic development, job creation, poverty reduction, and international competitiveness. It promotes sustainable global development, green technology, renewable energy sources, efficient use of energy and natural resources, and ecological conservation.

Other than governments and not-for-profit organizations, the UN Environment has been working with the private sector in several ways to bring about greener economies around the world. Whether it be promoting green buildings, green transport, sustainable production and consumption, green finance, or pollution mitigation and remediation, there are a variety of tools and policy options available for countries and agencies to support green practices and cost-effectively reduce environmental impacts.

### **Role of Frontline Workers in Healthcare, Sanitation and Hygiene**

The COVID-19 pandemic has reminded all of us about the vital role health workers play to relieve suffering and save lives. Working during this COVID-19 pandemic has placed frontline workers under immense and unprecedented pressure, putting their physical, mental and social well-being at risk.

They have faced genuine threats to their physical safety and indirectly to that of their families. They have had to manage higher numbers of patients with high mortality rates in a high-pressure environment. In addition, they have dealt with unforeseen challenges in delivering care with strict infection control measures in place and not always with adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Since many of them have been redeployed into new roles, teams or newly proposed wards, they have been working in unfamiliar settings and without any established social support from colleagues.

As COVID-19 has progressed around the world, we have heard repeatedly about the mental health burden faced by frontline healthcare workers globally as they have worked relentlessly to treat patients affected by the virus. Henceforth, the media representations have aptly described that the frontline healthcare workers have been rendering services “on their knees”.

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