



# Shifting Dynamics: The International Order in a Post-Pandemic World

1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> of December | 2020

## Politics and Pandemics:

Humanitarian Aid in the  
Time of COVID-19

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# Politics and Pandemics: Humanitarian Aid in the Time of COVID-19



- No one is safe from the impact of COVID-19 until everyone is safe.
- The distribution of vaccines should be based on medical priorities, not on nationalist sentiments. Measures should be taken to ensure vaccine access for the most vulnerable, including refugees, migrants and poor countries.
- Global hunger was already on the rise before COVID-19, however, the pandemic has exacerbated the situation. There is a need to help poor communities become more self-reliant.
- The positive role of refugees and migrants in some European countries, such as their contribution to health care services during the pandemic, needs to be highlighted.
- The media is frequently portraying refugees and migrants in an unfavourable and inaccurate light, especially in the context of the pandemic, facilitating the rise of populism. The needs to be countered with accurate news based on facts.
- Developed countries need to realise that assistance provided to poorer nations during critical times like this is also ultimately in their interest.

## Summary of the Session

**T**he Panel “Politics and Pandemics: Humanitarian Aid in the Time of COVID-19” discussed the challenges faced by governments, charities and international organisations in dealing with the impact of COVID-19 on the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable communities worldwide.

Francesco Rocca, President of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, stressed the need for governments to ensure equal access to COVID-19 vaccines. He warned that discrimination against vulnerable groups, such as refugees and migrants or poor countries when distributing vaccines, would lead to counterproductive results. He highlighted the motto: “No one is safe (from the pandemic) until everyone is safe”.

Drahoslav Štefánek, Special Representative of the Council of Europe’s Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, emphasised that the pandemic has worsened the situation for migrants in Europe. Prior to COVID-19, European labour markets did not have a sufficient labour force and thus needed migrants. Now, amid high job losses, the public perception of migrants has worsened.

Valerie N. Guarnieri, Assistant Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme, noted that global hunger was already on the rise before the world was hit with COVID-19. The pandemic, she noted, has exacerbated the situation, making it more difficult for aid groups and humanitarian organisations to carry out their work in the world’s poorest countries.

Jorge Moreira da Silva, Director of the Development Co-operation Directorate at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, highlighted the fact that because developed countries are suffering financially due to the impact of the pandemic, they are likely going to spare less material aid to developing or needy nations.

All the participants stressed that it is vital for the media to play a positive role – based on facts and science – when covering the coronavirus crisis and its relation to migrants and vaccines.

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# Francesco Rocca's Highlights



## President of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Francesco Rocca is the president of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. He joined the Italian Red Cross in 2008 when he was asked to lead the change process of the Italian Red Cross and transform the structure from a public-sector organisation to a private volunteer-based organisation. Mr Rocca was elected president of this new structure in 2013. In 2009, when the Italian Red Cross was elected member of the IFRC Governing Board Mr. Rocca was the appointed representative. In 2013 he was elected Vice President and in 2017 he was elected President of the IFRC.

- ” “Our work has become very difficult because many of the donors, the traditional donors, the governments, have turned to support internally the needs of their own countries.”
- ” “It is important to call on governments to give equal opportunities and equal access to COVID-19 vaccines for every human being. This is why we are so vocal in advocating for the protection of vulnerable communities. Migrants and refugees are maybe the most vulnerable one at this particular moment.”
- ” “Overcrowded refugee camps are places in which the spread of the COVID-19 virus or the risk of the spread of the virus is very, very high. These places should be prioritised by the governments. In protecting these communities we are protecting ourselves. This is what should be understood by everyone. As the motto used by international actors says: ‘no one is safe until everyone is safe’. That means that we cannot use the vaccine as a nationalistic tool. If our neighbour is not safe, we are not safe. And this is the dynamic at the global level.”
- ” “We have to protect everyone [from COVID-19]. This is something that must go beyond a xenophobic approach and the other things that unfortunately we are experiencing, especially in western countries. We must be very rational.”
- ” “We must torpedo these waves of fake news. That’s the big spread of fake news, especially claims about migrants and refugees bringing the virus in the country. This is a reason for concern and we must be vocal about it.”
- ” “We have to prioritise [giving the vaccine to those] who are most vulnerable. It is our common responsibility to protect the most vulnerable. We don’t need a genius to understand this. This is why we are very concerned about the so-called nationalistic approach.”
- ” “Let’s wait for the regulatory authorities to say something about the vaccines. We don’t have to jump on the scientific dialogue. Let the scientists do their work. We must trust them. We must not torpedo the trust that every citizen in the world must have in the regulatory authorities. We must protect them.”
- ” “The best that we can do is to disseminate how important it is to wear the mask, how important is physical distancing (which is ironic when we talk about the overcrowded refugee and migrant camps), how important is personal hygiene and washing your hands - and building trust. Trust is something extremely important to protect.”
- ” “The good side of this is the aspect that we are working now more than ever through the local actors, with our volunteers and the local communities. They are taking care of themselves and all these camps because they are the only actors [present on the ground]. The travel ban due to COVID-19 is making the work of the international organisation more difficult. This is a good occasion for the local actors to do their job, which we have always advocated.”
- ” “Governments can make a difference with big investments to tackle the socioeconomic consequences [of the COVID-19 crisis]. If these investments will be green, resilient and inclusive, that can make a difference, especially in the poorest countries.”
- ” “The role of the media is extremely important. Since the beginning of the first wave of the pandemic, the media started to follow the political debate and not human beings, unfortunately[...] [the real story should be about] the role migrants can play in our community, to report the real causes of what is happening on the ground in many places of the world.”

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# Jorge Moreira da Silva's Highlights



## Director of the Development Co-operation Directorate at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Jorge Moreira da Silva is the Director for Cooperation and Development at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Previously, he served as Portugal's Minister of Environment, Energy and Spatial Planning from 2013 to 2015, Senior Environmental Financial Advisor at the UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy from 2009 to 2012, Senior Advisor to the President of Portugal from 2006 to 2009, and Secretary of State for Science and Higher Education and Secretary of State for Environment and Spatial Planning from 2003 to 2005.

- ” “Developing countries are facing the perfect storm, not just the reduction in private finance through foreign direct investment, but they are also dealing with high levels of poverty. It now pushes them back two or three decades. They have limited space to use fiscal policies, because several of these countries were already highly indebted before the [COVID-19] crisis.”
- ” “In dealing with this crisis, we [developed countries] should not only focus on our own countries. We have an obligation of supporting our citizens, our economies, but at the same time we need to boost collaboration [with developing countries] and help others to address the crisis.”
- ” “In our response to the COVID-19 crisis, we have to address the other crises – of climate and inequality.”
- ” “This is a moment for multilateralism, for collaboration, for solidarity.”
- ” “Some signals are worrying. We know that there is huge pressure in our constituencies to get access to vaccines the soonest, and we risk developing countries not getting access as a matter of priority. We have to ensure that developing countries will have the vaccines in an equal and well-coordinated manner.”
- ” “There is the need for a good plan not just on the mobilisation of resources to get the vaccine, but also to focus on ensuring that equal access to vaccine by developing countries.”
- ” “This is an important moment to address fragility. The OECD state of fragility report notes the fact that unfortunately 76 percent of the poorest live in a fragile context. Our report shows that the pandemic is exacerbating the fragility dimensions in developing countries. So we have to do more, not just in mobilising resources, but by ensuring that we address the root causes of fragility. We need to put the prevention agenda at the top.”
- ” “Now, everybody knows that we are only safe when everybody is safe. I have some hope that this [COVID-19] crisis will be a source of inspiration to deal with other crises that we have been fighting, such as climate [change].”
- ” “We need to have policies informed by evidence and by science. I think that the [COVID-19] crisis has revealed the real need to build trust in institutions, in scientists, following their advice. Bringing the evidence is fundamental when we know that social unrest and populism may use this crisis to challenge other policies and other assumptions.”
- ” “We in the north are dependent on global growth. There will be no growth in OECD countries and no growth in the G20 economies unless we help developing countries, especially where tourism and trade are going down, with foreign direct investment being squeezed.”
- ” “When you discuss the refugee crisis in Europe, European citizens think that all refugees have crossed the Mediterranean and are being hosted in Europe. But then you realise that 90 percent of the refugees are hosted in developing countries. So European citizens on many occasions are not really aware of the facts and evidence, and therefore some of the choices are not made in a well-informed manner.”
- ” “We won't get rid of populism unless we bring facts and evidence to the political debate. Therefore, the media plays a vital role not just for this crisis, but for all crises that we have been facing and will face in the future.”
- ” “We need multilateralism to be part of the political discussions at the national level, rather than just something that is addressed by heads of state and governments in global summits. We need citizens to be part of this game.”

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# Valerie N. Guarnieri's Highlights



## Assistant Executive Director of the United Nations World Food Programme

Valerie N. Guarnieri has been Assistant Executive Director, United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) since January 2018. In this role, she leads cutting-edge programme and policy development towards ending hunger, spearheading WFP efforts to ensure protection and inclusion, expand school meals and nutrition programs, empower women, build resilient food systems and support cash transfers and social protection. Previously, she also provided oversight for emergency and supply chain functions, ensuring delivery of essential food assistance to the most vulnerable, food insecure people around the world. Prior to this appointment, she served as WFP Regional Director for East and Central Africa providing supervision, strategic guidance and support for some of WFP's largest and most complex country operations, as WFP's global Program Director, and in a variety of country office, regional and headquarter positions since August 2000. Before WFP, she worked in the U.S. Government, at the National Security Council and the US Agency for International Development (USAID), as part of dedicated, inter-disciplinary teams to save lives and help create conditions for sustainable peace, with particular focus in Africa.

- ” “What we've seen broadly, globally, is that hunger has been on the rise in the past few years, mainly driven by conflict, climate and economic disparities. And COVID-19 has come on top of that, really exacerbating the situation and deepening the hunger, particularly for the most vulnerable.”
- ” “We've seen an 80 percent rise in the people who are acutely hungry, 270 million people facing starvation this year as a result of multitude of crises, including COVID-19. We have four countries that are literally at the brink of famine: South Sudan, northern Nigeria, Burkina Faso and Yemen.”
- ” “Yemen is the worst humanitarian crisis in the world right now. We have 20 million people, two thirds of the population, who really don't know from one moment to the next where their next meal is going to come from. The country itself is already dependent: 90 percent of the food consumed is brought in from abroad.”
- ” “What we're generally finding in the eighty-three countries where we work on the ground, it's that the socioeconomic impact of the virus that is driving vulnerability more than the risk of the disease itself. That is the main impact that we're seeking to address.”
- ” “Not only are we looking for government cooperation, we're also looking for government action. Governments are required to be stepping up and strengthening their own safety nets and social protection systems in order to reach the most vulnerable. And so a good part of our job is to strengthen those systems, to ensure that they are providing the level of assistance necessary and that they're inclusive of those who are most vulnerable in the country.”
- ” “When we look forward to 2021, we're concerned that the domestic pressures that come with the fiscal stimulus packages that nations have had to do, to deal with their own recessions, may impact their ability to be similarly generous in the face of growing challenges that we expect next year.”
- ” “The prospect of the vaccine and its equitable distribution is a ray of light that we all need to count on.”
- ” “I think media clearly plays an important role when it comes to the role for mobilising attention and support. When media attention comes on a crisis, it does bring additional attention. And with that attention comes pressure and resources to support action on the ground. So that can be quite positive. One of the areas where we've been less successful has been in holding that media attention for long enough to really get at some of the complexities of the crises, the root causes of those crises and the action that is also needed by a range of different actors in order to address these in a sustainable way.”
- ” “It would be good to see a media focus staying with these very complex situations a bit longer and beyond the headline and the story of the moment. And that would enable work to be simultaneously addressing the short term and the long term needs. So I'd like to see a more constant media engagement in some crises.”

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# Drahošlav Štefánek's Highlights



## Special Representative of the Council of Europe's Secretary General on Migration and Refugees

Drahošlav Štefánek is Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees, Council of Europe. Ambassador Drahošlav Štefánek is the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees at the Council of Europe. He previously acted as Head of the Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic to the Council of Europe. At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, he served as the Director General for the UN, International Organisations, EU Affairs and Human Rights. His diplomatic career includes posts responsible for human rights and political affairs at the Slovak Permanent Mission to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva, and at the Permanent Mission of Slovakia to the UN in New York. Prior to that, he served as an agent of Slovakia and as a member of the national delegation before the International Court of Justice. He holds a JUDr in Law from Matej Bel University and law degrees from Bratislava and Utrecht universities.

- ” “Migrants and refugees are a vulnerable group of population, in any case scenario, even without pandemics. With COVID-19, they became even more vulnerable.”
- ” “Every crisis brings its opportunities. In some European countries, refugees are engaged in providing health care services to help people in the pandemic. We should think about this positive angle; how to engage migrants and refugees into addressing the crisis[...] There are many groups of migrants and refugees helping the local population. We have to speak about those.”
- ” “When engaging in the vaccination campaign, states should not forget about migrants because, to use the sentence, which is quite often quoted, ‘No one is safe until everyone is safe’. If this group is put aside, then that can backfire in the long run. Access to the vaccine resources should be guided by medical criteria. Migrants and refugees should not be left out. There should be no discrimination and no differentiation between the [host] population, and migrants and refugees. All human beings are equal and should get the standard according to medical needs.”
- ” “The situation before the COVID-19 pandemic was more favourable to migrants. At the OECD conference on 15 and 16 January, member states were declaring that migrants are actually needed to supplement the labour market. The labour markets of the EU and OECD countries did not have a sufficient labour force. Now, I'm afraid because of the negative narrative that people are losing jobs, a number of politicians across the globe are saying ‘we have migrants and refugees coming, and they will take the jobs which are not even available now to our local population’. We are concerned about this because many of the opportunities which had been there [for migrants] before March 2020 are now gone.”
- ” “The media plays a crucial role in the perception and in creating positive or negative narratives. We should work with the media to provide them with necessary information, objective information, and also to provide them with good practises and good examples of the work we did with migrants and the refugees.”
- ” “Unfortunately, the reality is that the media are focussed more on negative news rather than positive because they attract more attention. You can try to build positive narratives and positive consideration, but then sometimes it is destroyed by one or two events by some individuals, which actually destroys also the image or the perception of hundreds of thousands of people.”
- ” “What I am more concerned about is what I'm reading sometimes in the comments sections of articles on the internet. Media outlets should take responsibility for [the comments] and deal with hate speech and hate comments, which are often under articles about migration and refugees.”
- ” “We need contingency plans. I think the lack of those was revealed by this crisis. And even after the first wave of the pandemic in the spring, we have not learnt a lesson, because as soon as the situation got better in the summer, we became relaxed and we under evaluated the preparation for the fall.”
- ” “We should come back to humanity, come back to human dignity. Human dignity is a fundamental value not only in Europe but all around the world. Health care is a prerequisite for the preservation of human dignity -- equal access to health care for all, including migrants and refugees.”



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