



Social Sciences & Humanities 7 COVID-19 Recovery

Overview

A series of statements from national social science and humanities bodies in the G7 on one of the greatest challenges we face: the COVID-19 pandemic and our recovery from its impacts.

The UK is the host of this year's G7. In recognition of this, the British Academy has convened a virtual forum of SSH7 - social science and humanities representative bodies of every country in the G7. Our world-leading humanities and social sciences sectors across the G7 are coming together to provide a global platform for this research excellence and for the vital contribution these disciplines can bring to major societal, behavioural and environmental challenges of today.

We have agreed a series of statements on one of the greatest challenges we face, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and our recovery from its impacts.

By way of background to these statements, it is worth reflecting on the wider picture. Despite the strides that different countries have made in tackling the spread of COVID-19—through testing, vaccinating, treatments and driving down cases and hospitalisation – it would be mistaken to believe that the impact of the pandemic is coming to an end. Even with the advent of vaccines and the relaxing or flexing of behavioural restrictions in some areas, the societal, cultural and economic ramifications will continue to unfold and play out in the G7 and across the whole world. We are conscious that countries worldwide are in different situations in their recovery and response to COVID-19. A globally equitable response is key to making an effective contribution to the challenges of the pandemic in every country, such as in supporting enhanced vaccination rates, as otherwise a large viral reservoir will be maintained, where the virus can mutate.

The British Academy's substantial review in this area highlighted we are entering a COVID decade: the social, economic and cultural effects of the pandemic will cast a long shadow into the future – at least a decade and perhaps beyond. The sooner we attend to and understand these impacts, the better placed we will be to address them.

The statements presented here have been informed by this work and much else from across our organisations. The Royal Society of Canada is convening over 450 experts to do what it can to ensure Canada emerges as a better society coming out of the pandemic and has published over 20 policy briefings and three times as many informed perspectives on topics ranging from restoring trust and the future of long-term care to renewing the social contract. The Royal Society of Canada is now in the process of evaluating the impact of the policy briefings. Many of these documents have resulted in the authors having discussions with the relevant government departments nationally and in some instances provincially as well. The document on long-term care has been downloaded more than 20,000 times.

The member academies of the Union of the German Academies of Sciences and Humanities have been organising workshops and published several documents and books on topics like vaccination, coronavirus pandemic, public health, and social impacts resulting from the pandemic to mention just a few. In addition, a working group on "The Future of Work After Corona" was established.

The Social Science Research Council collaborated with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine to form the Societal Experts Action Network (SEAN), coordinating leading social, behavioural, and economic sciences experts to provide evidence-based recommendations to local, state, and national decision-makers, and awarded 82 rapid response grants to support research on social, behavioural, and economic questions related to COVID-19.

The Science Council of Japan (SCJ), with approximately 210 council members and 2000 members, consciously works on building trust between the public and academia, based on the principle of collaborating beyond academic disciplines, especially in the time of the pandemic. SCJ quickly announced various statements and established working group and subcommittees for topics including "prevention

and control of infectious diseases” and “strengthening ICT infrastructure, promoting digital transformation for infection control and social change” whose tasks are in progress proactively.

In 2020 the Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei established the COVID-19 Committee, dedicated to the pandemic emergency. The Committee is responsible for setting up working groups to discuss and propose solutions for various issues (preparedness and mitigation, international cooperation, school and education, civil rights and law features, economy and social profiles, access to vaccines, etc.). In relation with the Italian presidency of the G20 in 2021, the Lincei promoted an S20 joint statement on Pandemic preparedness and an SSH20 joint statement on Crises: economy, society, law, and culture to be brought to the attention of the heads of state and governments ahead of the G20 Summit.

The Fondation Maison des sciences de l’homme in Paris has organised an international webinar and edited a podcast (The Pandemic as a Magnifying Glass) on the ways in which the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted governance weaknesses in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and contributed to their ongoing crisis of legitimacy. As a founding member of the Paris Institute of Advanced Studies (IEA), the FMSH will co-fund the World Pandemic Research Network (www.wprn.org) launched by IEA in April 2020. The WPRN maintains a searchable global directory of the scientific projects, initiatives and resources available on the societal and human impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these initiatives the FMSH aims at promoting worldwide academic collaboration and increasing free access to academic knowledge on issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

There are of course many impacts which flowed from lockdowns, including effects on lives and livelihoods resulting from reduced economic activity (generally and in particular for some sectors) and limits on the ability to see family and friends, travel or take part in leisure activities. While some of these immediate effects may ease as lockdowns come to an end, there are a set of deeper impacts on health and wellbeing, communities and cohesion, education systems, and skills, employment and the economy which will have profound effects upon the world for many years to come.

The pandemic has exacerbated existing inequalities and differences and created new ones, as well as exposing critical societal needs and strengths. These emerge differently across places, and along different time courses, for individuals, generations, communities, regions, and nations. In some ways this is not surprising – history has shown us that pandemics are just as much social and economic crises as they are medical and health ones. History also indicates that times of upheaval can be catalysts to rebuild society in new ways, but that this requires vision and interconnectivity between policymakers at local, regional, national and international levels. Pandemics and other crises can lead to change, but we must actively seize the moment and the opportunity.

The statements of the SSH7 representative bodies on resilience and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic focus on the following:

- **Community engagement:** Focusing on how context specific to place, culture, social and economic factors, shape people’s responses to COVID-19.
- **Education, skills and employment:** Focusing on responses in and beyond the pandemic for education, work and employment;
- **Trust, transparency and data gathering:** Focusing how COVID-19 has affected society’s relationships with information, data, the media and the role of experts;

- **Inequalities and Cohesion:** Focusing on how COVID-19 has affected and highlighted inequalities and relationships between communities of people, and senses of community and belonging;
- **Fiscal policy and recovery:** Focusing on how economies and societies can collectively harness their fiscal resources to respond to the challenges posed by the pandemic.