Global Platform for the Right to the City
Plataforma Global por el Derecho a la Ciudad
Plateforme Globale pour le Droit à la Ville

Protecting human rights during and after the COVID-19
Joint questionnaire by Special Procedure mandate holders

Submission by the Global Platform for the Right to the City

The [Global Platform for the Right to the City](#) (GPR2C) is an open, flexible, diverse network of civil society and local government organizations committed to political action and social change through the promotion, defense and fulfillment of the Right to the City at all levels, paying special attention to people and communities affected by exclusion and marginalization.

With the emergence of COVID-19 and the social, economic and human rights crisis related to the pandemic, the GPR2C has worked with its members and allies in a joint response to know how different communities around the world have been affected, putting at the center the protection of human rights and the actions led by civil society and local grassroots organizations. In [this dedicated page](#) you can learn more about the GPR2C actions in response to COVID-19.

Common questions

Impact on human rights

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, not only in terms of health, but also concerning the social, economic and political implications of the measures taken by authorities to contain the virus, have inflicted widespread Human Rights violations around the world. These violations have most touched and affected long standing vulnerable groups such as the homeless, slum dwellers, people threatened by evictions, displacements and collapses of their homes due to natural or everyday occurrences, informal workers and impoverished people, particularly women, older people and dissidents of all ages, who suffer multiple forms of violence.

The social and economic crisis spurred by COVID-19 has exposed the fragility and short-commings of our current economic and social protection systems, which have been historically pointed out by mobilized communities and civil society organizations. The pandemic has also opened the path for an increase in Human Rights violations under the ["exception" or "emergency"](#) situations declared by States around the world, with episodes of police repression,

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restrictions to protests and gatherings, limited access to justice, mass evictions in informal settlements, forced displacements and discriminatory practices against informal workers, homeless, migrants and other vulnerable groups.

At the same time, the crisis has seen the emergence of policies put in place to address vulnerable groups in the face of the pandemic, with measures that go from basic income initiatives, direct cash transfers, moratoriums on evictions, regularization of undocumented migrants, protection to women victims of domestic violence and repurposing of hotels and other facilities for housing. These policies have in many cases emerged through the mobilization of organized civil society and have been overall welcomed, even though in many cases they still present shortcomings. Moreover, as the pandemic evolves around the world, preoccupation arises on whether and how these policies will be continued in the short, middle and long term, as budgets are re-structured and the terms for the loans from international financial institutions and States are (re)negotiated.

It is vital that these policies and measures be seen not as punctual emergency responses, but as a part of an in depth structural change for both the medium and long term. From the GPR2C, along with our members and allies we have engaged in efforts to debate the challenges that have been exposed by the COVID-19 crisis and start setting the basis of how this long-term transformation could look like. In a statement we have highlighted three particular efforts:

1) Recovering and strengthening community public services, under and integral perspective that recognizes the integrality and interdependence of rights and moving from a previous trend of privatization of services;

2) Moving towards a care society, recognizing the particular care role of women within households and communities, which was made evident during the pandemic, with the over-representation of women in essential services and for the care of families and communities;

3) Design democratic mechanisms for a massive redistribution of social wealth and an economy at the service of life and the commons, in order to readdress the massive and deep ingrained inequalities observed around the world.

In this sense, it is important to note that the COVID-19 has exposed the urgent need to recognize the universality and interdependence of all human rights, for all. The pandemic highlights these issues, showing what we have been defending for long amid the Right to the City movement: that it is not possible to separate access to water and sanitation from health, housing, food, education,

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work... For this reason, it is urgent to place a Human Rights approach at the centre of the strategy, both for emergency response and for medium and long-term transformations, which puts the most vulnerable first, recognizes the interdependence and indivisibility of rights and moves towards long-term transformations.

Statistical information

As previously pointed out, between the long standing vulnerable groups that have been most affected by the health, social and economic consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are:
- The homeless,
- Slum dwellers,
- People threatened by evictions, displacements and collapses of their homes due to natural or everyday occurrences,
- Informal workers and impoverished people,
- Women, older people and dissidents of all ages who suffer multiple forms of violence,
- Migrants,
- Indigenous people and racial and ethnic minorities.

In terms of statistics, it is fundamental that the data being produced by authorities and specialized agencies takes into account the different ways in which such groups experience the pandemic, both in terms of health but also in social and economic terms. It is important to point out that in many cases these groups are "statistically invisible" by not being properly taken into account when data is gathered. Special attention should be taken in the case of undocumented migrants, informal workers, homeless people and those living in "informal" or precarious settlements, who, by not being properly recognized by formal institutions and mechanisms, are more prone to be underrepresented in terms of data collection and often do not have the adequate access to policies being developed by states during the pandemic, such as cash transfers.

Moreover, from a Right to the City perspective, it is also key when dealing with statistical information to take into account the territorial dimension of the

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COVID-19 crisis in its health, social and economic facets. In many cities and territories around the world, the spread of the virus can be observed under a clear territorial dynamic, in which poorer communities living in informal settlements or in areas without an adequate provision of basic services have been more affected by the pandemic. It is urgent to take a territorial approach in the response to the virus, working with community networks to address their needs.

Participation and consultation

Around the world, the public health efforts to halt the pandemic have largely relied on "exception" or "emergency" measures that have limited participation mechanisms and led to policies and strategies being adopted mostly in a hierarchical, "top-down" manner and at times with little transparency. In some cases, authorities have responded to calls and mobilizations from the organized civil society, incorporating some of their demands into the official emergency response, as with the development of basic income programmes or the moratoriums on evictions put forward in some countries, regions and cities. It is also interesting to note some efforts from local authorities to reinforce or put in place ad hoc participation or communication channels with its communities.

However, the issue of lack of transparency still remains, especially in regards to the future of the policies implemented during the first months of the pandemic and how they will be continued in the near future, when budgets are revised and normal activity is gradually resumed (with the reopening of courts, for example). In this transition, it is therefore fundamental to reinforce horizontal and democratic collaboration between actors and institutions (government, communities, civil society) at different scales (neighbourhood, city, national, international).

Finally, it is also important to review how the restrictions being imposed during the pandemic are affecting the organization of elections in different territories. The GPR2C along with social organizations from France was involved in a participatory effort to engage in the debate of the 2020 municipal elections from a Right to the City point of view. Such initiative was resumed and is being carried out for the second turn of the elections to take place on the 28th of June. If, on one hand, the COVID-19 crisis and the community mobilization it

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spurred have reinforced and strengthened the overall debate and community engagement towards the election; on the other, the changes in calendar and the limited time and possibilities of public events, debates and demonstrations, have affected the overall development of the electoral cycle.

Internet

As the social isolation measures put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic have moved important parts of day to day life towards the internet, inequalities in the access and use of such platforms have been made evident. First, there is the division between those who were able to adapt their work routine to digital platforms and those who saw themselves unable to maintain their usual economic activities while isolation measures are being imposed.

Then there is the pressing issue of the digital divide, which has become more pressing and urgent than ever during the pandemic. As communities become more and more reliant on the internet to access information, engage with public authorities or register to emergency or health assistance, work, study and talk to friends and loved ones, pre existing inequalities are aggravated through the inequality in the access to the internet.

Right to adequate housing movements have been pointing out that "stay at home" policies rely on the assumption that there is a widespread access to housing and that the housing conditions for the majority of the population are compatible with such policies. A similar reflection must be carried out in terms of access to the internet, as the pandemic has accelerated a trend that will very likely continue in the near future with more and more essential day to day activities being carried out online. From a Right to the City perspective, we advocate for the internet to be considered as a basic service, along the lines of water, electricity and sewage systems. If the digital gap is not urgently addressed, the long term consequences will amplify and deepen pre-existing social, economic and racial inequalities, hampering other efforts to reduce them.