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No. 2, NOVEMBER 2020

# Fight Against COVID-19: National Measures Against the Pandemic



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# FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19: NATIONAL MEASURES AGAINST THE PANDEMIC

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## ABSTRACT

COVID-19 has emerged as a profound global crisis with long-term implications for countries, international structures, companies, and societies. Some even compare the implications of the pandemic to World War II. In only nine months, the life we used to live has certainly changed dramatically, and we are now talking about a "new normal." The pandemic-induced economic recession and rise in unemployment have undermined countries' vital interests, while the virus itself has exposed existing crisis-management methods in many countries as dysfunctional. All states have all felt the pandemic's negative consequences, regardless of their position in the international system. For this reason, the pandemic has made political structures fragile, isolated individual states, and rendered conventional decision-making mechanisms redundant. Thus, there is an imperative for states to embrace new methods of decision-making that emphasize public health.

At the beginning of the crisis, the World Labor Organization announced that 30 million people had lost their jobs worldwide in the first quarter of 2020. This figure reached 195 million in the second quarter. Compared to the 25 million people who lost their jobs in the 2009 global economic crisis, the extent of the pandemic's damage is colossal. The entertainment sector was hit the worst, as artistic events such as concerts and theaters as well as sporting events were suspended. During the summer, we saw limited openings in this sector, but by the fall, they were suspended again. The transportation sector was also hit hard by the pandemic. International and national travel were interrupted, and governments closed their borders temporarily. Many airline companies went bankrupt. Land, air, sea, and rail transport collectively saw a 50% reduction in the number of passengers. Accordingly, the tourism sector was decimated. Meanwhile, schools started distance education, and academic activities such as large-scale conferences were cancelled. The manufacturing sector, on the other hand, faced severe challenges after the period of interruption, and the automotive industry was one of the most affected, with an endemic imbalance between supply and demand. Thus, demand for second-hand cars soared.

**REFERENCE:** Karadağ, Haluk, "Fight Against COVID-19: National Measures Against the Pandemic", *Global Academy Talks Series* (İstanbul: Global Academy and International Relations Council), No.2, November 2020, [https://www.globacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/HKaradag\\_NationalMeasures\\_v.3.pdf](https://www.globacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/HKaradag_NationalMeasures_v.3.pdf)

**DOI:** 10.13140/RG.2.2.31883.11047

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The word COVID derives from the first two letters of the word corona (CO), which means crown in Latin, the first two letters of the word virus (VI), and the first letter of the word disease (D). It is called COVID-19 because it emerged in 2019. After emerging in Wuhan, China in December 2019, it spread to many cities in China, thanks partly to the national “Spring Holiday”, until experts identified this novel coronavirus and Chinese authorities implemented quarantine measures. By then, it was too late for the rest of the world, as Chinese people traveled to various countries without knowing that they were carrying it. As soon as governments realized that the virus was spreading rapidly and posed serious health problems, they stopped the flights to China. However, this decision only delayed the spread of the virus.

The virus subsequently caused ruptures in political structures across the world, including in the European Union (EU). Italy and Spain become initial epicenters of the pandemic, but they did not receive the support from the EU when they needed it. At the beginning, member states were hesitant to share much-needed materials and equipment since they could not predict the pandemic’s future. This disunity among EU member states damaged the union’s core principles.

According to data from the World Health Organization, the virus had infected 34 million people with 1 million

deaths as of October 2020. The United States, India, and Brazil led the world in the total number of cases and deaths. Worldwide, the education sector, social and economic life, judiciary and military services, freedom of travel, etc. have all been negatively affected. The pandemic certainly underlined the importance of healthcare specialists in decision-making, and world leaders are now working closely with teams of healthcare consultants and scientists. The virus, which causes symptoms such as fever, dry cough, fatigue, and loss of the senses of taste and smell, has created severe problems in many areas such as academic, economic, social, and security issues at the state and international system level. The pandemic-induced crisis, for which no definitive damage assessment has been made, has ultimately highlighted at least three essential duties for governments going forward.

- To keep the healthcare system intact and support the healthcare sector
- To support the private sector, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises
- To reduce unemployment rates.

In this context, the present study examines the measures taken by some major countries in the following sectors: economic, social, education, and healthcare. This paper analyzes eight countries, which were chosen because they have unique or outstanding features, as revealed in the media: (1) The People’s Republic of China, the origin country; (2-3) the United States and Brazil, which have

<sup>1</sup> This policy brief was produced as part of the project entitled “Rethinking Sustainable International Cooperation in the Post-COVID-19 World (RESCO-World),” which was funded by Heinrich Böll Stiftung and the International Relations Council of Turkey. For this brief, I would like to thank Ambassador Sir Dominick Chilcott, Prof. Dr. Müşerref Şule Akçay, Prof. Dr. Onur

Başer, and Doç. Dr. Ümit Akçay, who kindly agreed to contribute to our webinar, “Fight Against Covid-19: National Measures Against the Pandemic.” To watch the panel please, see Uluslararası İlişkiler Konseyi YouTube Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOPJcsKlkyY&t=126s>.

the highest number of cases in the world; (4-5) Italy and

Spain, the initial epicenters in Europe; (6) the United Kingdom, which initially applied herd immunity; (7) Israel, a small non-western country; and (8) Turkey.

**Table 1:** PRC economic indicators (Source: World Bank<sup>2</sup>).

	2017	2018	2019	2020f	2021f
<b>GDP</b>	6.9%	6.7%	6.1%	1.6%	7.9%

## National Measures in the Economic Field

The economic field has experienced the most significant impact of COVID-19. Many workplaces were closed or their activities were suspended because of nationwide lockdowns, curfews, and social restrictions. In order to prevent widespread waves of unemployment, states did their best to support employers. In some states, layoffs were suspended with the introduction of legal regulations. However, private-sector employees, who were not fired during the pandemic, could not receive their full wages.

Most national economies entered a recession. The underlying causes of this current crisis have multiple underlying factors, including lack of demand, insufficient supply, suspension of activities in various sectors, and evaporation of financial capital. In this context, the impact of COVID-19 on national economies will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis.<sup>3</sup>

COVID-19 has had a severe impact on the People's Republic of China (PRC). According to the World Bank, the PRC will see its lowest growth rate (1.6%) in 2020 since 1976. One of the reasons behind such low growth is curfews and restrictions that were initiated in several provinces, especially in Hubei province. As a result of the restrictions, factories had to suspend production at the beginning of the epidemic. The suspension of flights to and from the PRC and the interruption of the transportation and domestic and foreign tourism sectors have also hurt the Chinese economy.

The economic situation was more or less the same in the United States. The pandemic resulted in the lowest gross national product (GNP) since 1947. GNP figures decreased by one third compared to the first and second quarters of the previous year. The high number of people who applied for unemployment benefits reflected the full gravity of the situation. Between January and July 2020, around 30.2 million people applied for unemployment

<sup>2</sup> World Bank Group (2020). Leaning Forward: Covid-19 and China's Reform Agenda. China Economic Update: July 2020, Washington DC, p.9.

<sup>3</sup> Ebru Vovoda ve Eriş Yeldan, (2020). The study "COVID-19 Salgının Türkiye Ekonomisi Üzerine Etkileri ve Politika Alternatiflerinin Makroekonomik Genel Denge Analizi",

supported by Tübitak – SOBAG under the category of "1001-Bilimsel ve Teknolojik Araştırma Projelerini Destekleme Programı" 120K541 project no, titled with "COVID-19 ve Toplum: Salgının Sosyal, Beşeri ve Ekonomik Etkileri, Sorunlar ve Çözümler".

benefits from the federal state. According to data from the US Department of Labor, the unemployment rate rose by 0.9% in March to 4.4%, the highest monthly increase since 1975. The support package of approximately USD 1 trillion provided by the federal government helped ease the economic pain, but recent economic indicators are not promising.<sup>4</sup>

Brazil allocated USD 4.7 billion to support its economy during COVID-19. Despite this support, the unemployment rate in the country reached 14% in the first six months. According to studies conducted by the Brazilian Statistical Institute, one-fourth of the companies working in the service sector will either close or have to dismiss large numbers of employees as soon as the support package ends. This means that unemployment will increase dramatically, and the current economic crisis will likely deepen in the coming months.<sup>5</sup>

Italy and Spain experienced the crisis most intensely in Europe. Taking the necessary measures to prevent the spread of the virus, the Italian government quarantined 14 provinces in the northern Lombardy region. Nevertheless, it could not prevent the spread of the virus to the south. Thus, the fight against the virus launched in the north was replicated in all provinces. Due to the epidemic, the Italian government restricted mobility from 10 March 2020. Production was suspended in many non-essential sectors. Lombardy, Piedmont,

Emilia-Romagna, and Veneto regions, the country's economic locomotives, were among the most affected. The government passed a EURO 80 billion aid package, but it did not serve as the economy's lifeblood. According to the president of the Italian Central Bank, Italy's GNP is expected to shrink between 9% and 13% by the end of 2020. To revive tourism, one of the country's vital income generators, the government opened its borders to EU countries on 3 June 2020.<sup>6</sup>

Spain has also struggled to cope with the economic problems caused by COVID-19. The Spanish government allocated a support package of EURO 200 billion, the largest resource mobilization in Spain's history, but there were still significant losses in the automotive, textile, and other production sectors. Only the primary food production sector showed a positive trend. Losses in the tourism sector, which constitutes 12% of Spain's GNP, also contributed to the economic downturn. The Spanish economy shrank by 17% in the second quarter of 2020, the highest rate since the 1930s.<sup>7</sup>

At the beginning of the pandemic, the UK faced national and international critiques due to its decision to implement a "controlled pandemic" strategy to achieve herd immunity, which was subsequently abandoned for strict control measures. In this change of policy, Prime Minister Boris Johnson's infection with COVID-19 played

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of Trade, Turkey, "ABD: COVID-19 Gelişmeleri", <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/kuzey-amerika/abd/ulke-profilii/kovid-19-gelismeleri> (Accessed October 22, 2020)

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Trade, Turkey, "Brezilya: COVID-19 Gelişmeleri", <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/guney-amerika/brezilya/ulke-profilii/kovid-19-gelismeleri> (Accessed October 22, 2020)

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Trade, Turkey, "İtalya: COVID-19 Gelişmeleri", <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/avrupa/italya/ulke-profilii/kovid-19-gelismeleri> (Accessed October 22, 2020)

<sup>7</sup> Ministry of Trade, Turkey, "COVID-19 Salgınının İspanyol Ekonomisine Etkileri", <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/avrupa/ispanya/ulke-profilii/kovid-19-gelismeleri> (Accessed October 22, 2020)



a significant role<sup>8</sup>. Following his recovery, the government developed a three-stage plan. According to the regions where the pandemic risk was present, risk levels were identified as medium, high, and very high. The pandemic also damaged the British economy, which is estimated to contract by 10.2% by the end of 2020<sup>9</sup>. An economic support package of GBP 300 billion was allocated to stimulate the economy, but it will be the course of the pandemic that will determine the effectiveness of the package.<sup>10</sup>

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Israel has implemented lockdown measures twice. As a result of the increase in the number of cases, the Israeli government declared its second three-week nationwide lockdown in October, which is estimated to have cost the Israeli economy USD 1.8 billion<sup>11</sup>. As stated in the OECD's Israel Country Report, it is predicted that Israel's economy will shrink by 6% in 2020. Nevertheless, the economy is expected to grow again in 2021. The unemployment rate from January-July 2020 was around 5%. The temporary unemployment rate, which increased due to the lockdowns and social restrictions, reached 35% in April 2020, but decreased in the following months.

Turkey's fight against COVID-19 began two months before its first case on March 10. In order to prevent the

spread, curfews were imposed for citizens in various cities. Thus, tourism and transportation revenues decreased. In this respect, the government allocated TL 100 billion to support businesses. However, the expected economic growth for the end of 2020 was revised by the IMF, which estimates that the Turkish economy will decline by 5%.<sup>12</sup>

**Table 2:** Israel economic growth statistics (Source: OECD Economic Survey of Israel<sup>13</sup>).

	2019	2020	2021
GDP	3.4%	-6.0%	2.9%

## National Measures in the Field of Social Services

One of the primary measures in the fight against COVID-19 is "social distancing" or "physical distance." Avoiding crowded public places and keeping at least 1.5 meters of distance from other people in schools, workplaces, public transport, concert, cinema, theater, exhibition, museum, etc. has become a rule for all. Social distancing and other related measures that limit social interactions have negatively affected many sectors, such as artistic activities, sports competitions, weddings, funerals, and other collective celebrations. Even religious rituals have

<sup>8</sup> BBC News (Turkish). "Koronavirüs: İngiltere'de virüsün kontrollü yayılma planı işe yarayacak mı?" <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-51871575> (Accessed October 22, 2020)

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Trade, Turkey, "İngiltere: COVID-19 Gelişmeleri", <https://ticaret.gov.tr/yurtdisi-teskilati/avrupa/ingiltere/ulke-profilii/kovid-19-gelistmeleri> (Accessed October 22, 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Harari ve Matthew Keep, (2020) Coronavirus: Economic Impact, House of Commons Library.

<sup>11</sup> BBC News (Turkish), "Koronavirüs: İsrail ülke çapında yeniden karantina kararı alan ilk ülke oldu." <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-54141925> (Accessed October 23, 2020).

<sup>12</sup> Ebru Vovoda ve Erinc Yeldan. (2020) "COVID-19 Salgının Türkiye Ekonomisi Üzerine Etkileri ve Politika Alternatiflerinin Makroekonomik Genel Denge Analizi", s.5. The study published by Tübitak-under the category of SOBAG project report.

<sup>13</sup> OECD Economic Survey of Israel: Executive Summary (Accessed September 2020).

been curtailed; celebrations of religious and national holidays were canceled due to the pandemic. The phenomenon of social distancing also undermined activities in the economy, education, and healthcare. Even family members who live in the same house have distanced from one another by quarantining.

The most radical measure taken by governments worldwide in the fight against the virus has been curfews. In this context, many people had to live like prisoners in their homes, as freedom of travel was restricted. Only markets, pharmacies, and hospitals remained open, and measures were imposed to prevent people from gathering together. Older people, who were most exposed to the virus's destructive effects, were not allowed to go out. Many people did see their elderly family members and relatives. More or less, all governments have applied the same social measures, including lockdowns, curfews, and social distancing.

In China, harsh quarantine measures were taken, especially in Wuhan where the epidemic emerged. These measures were implemented rigorously and thus succeeded. It is argued that the communist regime helped implement these successful social restrictions. For example, non-compliance with quarantine measures was punished with imprisonment to ensure collective compliance. As of 28 March 2020, foreigners with Chinese visas and residence permits were temporarily suspended from entering China. Those coming to Beijing and Shanghai from outside the country were kept in quarantine.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Liza Lin, How China Slowed Coronavirus: Lockdowns, Surveillance, Enforcers. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-china-slowed-coronavirus-lockdowns-surveillance-enforcers-11583868093> (Accessed: October 24, 2020).

In the United States and Brazil, national leaders undermined the pandemic response. US President Donald Trump described the virus as the "Chinese virus" and blamed the Chinese government.<sup>15</sup> President Trump refused to wear a mask and argued that social measures were unnecessary. Eventually, he had to take a step back after the virus spread all over the country, which, in a short time, recorded the highest number of cases in the world. Furthermore, President Trump and his wife tested positive in October, a significant development showing the seriousness of the situation. In the United States, the existing gap in terms of social inequality has also deepened. In social studies conducted on this subject, it is underlined that Americans, whose financial situation is below the national average, do not have the opportunity to work remotely since they mostly work in the service sector. Therefore, they face temporary and permanent job losses, which in turn leads to social unrest. In some states, American citizens are protesting social restrictions. Meanwhile, the presidential election continued at full speed, although it is unwise to participate in election campaigns and rallies during a pandemic. It is believed that ongoing protests and election campaigns have hastened the spread of the virus.

Brazil has a population of approximately 210 million, consisting of 26 states and a federal region. President Jair Bolsonaro initially undermined the virus much like US President Trump, which played a defining role in spreading the disease. Also like in the United States, the

<sup>15</sup> Eren Orbey, The New Yorker, Trump's "Chinese Virus" and What's at Stake in the Coronavirus's Name, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/whats-at-stake-in-a-virus-name> (Accessed October 24, 2020).

growing number of cases forced the government to change its policy. Bolsonaro and his wife's positive COVID-19 test results in July triggered harsh measures, including curfews, to prevent further spread. However, also like in the United States, groups resist these restrictions and organize demonstrations on the streets.

The rapid increase in the number of cases in April suddenly placed Italy in the second worst position after China. As a result, the Italian government declared a state of emergency and applied restrictions in all social areas, cancelling all social activities, restricting travel, and allowing only one family member to go to the market. A strict program was implemented with the help of a contact-tracking application called "Immuni." Launched on June 1, Immuni aimed to keep social distance by sending a warning message to those closer than two meters to someone carrying the virus. Thus, with the software in question, those in close contact with virus carriers were informed and advised to isolate themselves and test. While cases in Italy decreased, a second wave also started. The government transferred power to the states regarding social restrictions, but the public perceived this situation as the government refraining from taking responsibility. As a result, Italian citizens opposed further lockdowns and social restrictions, launching protests in October.<sup>16</sup>

The increase in cases has put Spain in the second worst position in Europe after Italy. By introducing restrictive measures, the government restricted mobility and took

measures to restrict social life. On 14 March 2020, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez declared a 15-day state of emergency across the country. Spain mobilized its army, closed its land borders, and suspended activities such as sporting events, museums, theaters, and playgrounds. The first wave slowed down after the summer, but signs of deterioration have returned in the fall. Protests started in various provinces against the measures. A total of 3,268 families took the Spanish government to court for causing death by negligence and failing to fulfill its obligation to protect citizens.<sup>17</sup>

England faced a severe increase in the number of cases. While many other states were taking immediate action, PM Johnson was late to do so, often going out in public without a mask, kissing people, and shaking hands. Then, he was infected with COVID-19. Britain started to take restrictive measures, which were declared in March, including a partial lockdown. However, as in other countries, the public reacted negatively to restrictions on social activities and social distancing rules. In July and August, when the virus's spread had slowed, these restrictions were removed, but the transmission rate increased again in October. Now, the UK government is trying to avoid imposing new lockdown measures out of a concern for wrecking social and economic life.

Israel may be the most interesting case in terms of how it has combated the virus. In a country with a population of 8.5 million, the government implemented a three-week national lockdown when the number of daily cases

<sup>16</sup> Övgü Pınar, BBC, Koronavirüs Uygulaması: İtalya'da temas takip uygulaması Immuni kullanımda. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-52920104> (Accessed October 24, 2020)

<sup>17</sup> Zack Budryk, Families of COVID-19 Victims Bring Lawsuit Against Spanish PM, <https://thehill.com/policy/>

[international/europe/497310-families-of-covid-19-victims-bring-law-suit-against-spanish-pm](https://thehill.com/policy/international/europe/497310-families-of-covid-19-victims-bring-law-suit-against-spanish-pm) (Accessed October 24, 2020)



reached 9,000. Israel is the first country to impose nationwide lockdowns twice.<sup>18</sup> In practice, citizens cannot move more than 500 meters from their homes. A maximum of ten people are allowed in indoor spaces and twenty people in open spaces. Despite the restrictions and lockdown, the number of cases has continued to rise. As part of the fight against COVID-19, social and religious places were closed, and social activities were suspended. In March, an open-source smartphone application called HaMagen (shield) was developed.<sup>19</sup> With the application, users can see whether there is a person infected with the virus next to them. However, the increase in the number of cases continued several months after the program was developed.

Meanwhile, Turkey has tried to take necessary measures since the beginning of the crisis. By holding daily informative meetings, the Ministry of Health ensured that social measures were being taken in consultation with the scientific advisory committee. In this respect, curfews were applied in provinces with high numbers of cases. During the curfews, only hospitals, pharmacies, markets, and bakeries were open. Venues such as weddings, meetings, restaurants, cafes, bars, and shopping malls were closed. Events such as sporting events, cinemas, theaters, concerts, and religious celebrations were temporarily prohibited, while tourism activities were suspended along with some factory production. All these measures were taken to prevent the community from crowded social gatherings. With the

Hayat Eve Sığar (HES) application, information on the whereabouts of COVID-19 cases was shared, which increased public awareness.

## National Measures in the Field of Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely impacted education. The pandemic initially prompted China to close its schools, and other countries followed suit. In most countries, distance education options were operationalized for all levels of education, from primary school to the Ph.D. level, and the sector has adapted to the new reality after an initial stage of confusion. Schools re-opened the first week of May in Wuhan, China, and children in grades 9-12 resumed their educations. Afterward, all schools opened in China but with preventive measures; for example, students were obliged to wear masks at school.<sup>20</sup>

Some US states extended spring school holidays in March and, when they resumed the education, they held distance-learning programs. However, the rapid rise in cases prevented schools from opening, and higher education institutions decided to continue with distance education in the fall of 2020. Due to the federal governing structure in the United States, different states and cities have applied different practices. For example, as of October 2020, schools are completely closed in Washington DC, partially closed in California, Oregon, New Mexico, West Virginia, North Carolina, Delaware,

<sup>18</sup> BBC News, Koronavirüs: İsrail ülke çapında yeniden karantina kararı alan ilk ülke oldu. <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-dunya-54141925> (Accessed October 23, 2020)

<sup>19</sup> Israel Ministry of Health, HaMagen 2.0, <https://govextra.gov.il/ministry-of-health/hamagen-app/download-en/> (Accessed October 24, 2020)

<sup>20</sup> Xinhua, Commentary: School Reopening in China Dawns New Confidence and Vigor, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/01/c\\_139334948.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-09/01/c_139334948.htm) (Accessed October 23, 2020)

and Hawaii, but fully open in Florida, Texas, Arkansas, and Iowa.<sup>21</sup>

Like the United States, schools were suspended in some states when the virus spread in Brazil. However, a few months after the declaration of the pandemic, the reopening of schools became a subject of heated debates, and the federal states made decisions. Thus, in Brazil, schools in some states are open, but in other states they are closed.<sup>22</sup> In Italy and Spain, schools were closed in February. After a long break, they reopened in September. In England, schools reopened in September, despite the fact that cases remain high. In Israel, under the shadow of the coronavirus, schools reopened, and education started in the fall.

In Turkey, the Ministry of Education decided to reopen schools gradually. First graders were given priority in face-to-face education. Other critical levels, such as 8th graders and 12th graders, started face-to-face education in the fall. It is expected that all levels will start face-to-face education in November. It is important to note that parents were given a chance to decide between face-to-face and distant education. With parental consent, students can continue distance education but take exams in the classroom. However, the situation is different in higher education. Many universities in Turkey started the 2020-2021 academic year with distance education.

The pandemic has forced educators and decision-makers around the world to alter their methods of teaching and assessment. Most basically, educators are striving to find

the most convenient way to teach under the new conditions, which present direct challenges for traditional classroom-based teaching, the norm for centuries. This paradigmatic shift highlighted the importance of the available distance education technologies such as video conferencing. Moreover, the pandemic's main challenge to the education system was the elimination of "temporality" and "spatiality". To put it frankly, distance education has now emerged as a competitor to classroom education. From now on, a student could attend school from anywhere and take classes online. Software companies have taken advantage of this emerging opportunity and developed user-friendly distance education and assessment systems.

Today, we are witnessing a revolution in the education sector, which is similar to the fourth industrial revolution that started earlier this century. It seems quite difficult to resist this radical change. As Eric Hoffer mentioned in "The Pain of Change," transformations that occur in intellectual infrastructure take place painfully. Thus, radical changes are needed to break the resistance of societies against such changes.<sup>23</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic enables such a radical change and even triggers it.

### National Measures in the Field of Healthcare

The most acute impact of COVID-19 has been on the healthcare sector, as the speed of contagion has

<sup>21</sup> CNN, Where Schools are Reopening in the US, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2020/health/coronavirus-schools-reopening/> (Accessed October 21, 2020)

<sup>22</sup> Lucas Berti, The Brazilian report: Eight Brazilian States set a Date for School Reopenings, <https://brazilian.report/coronavirus->

[brazil-live-blog/2020/10/06/eight-brazilian-states-set-a-date-for-reopening-schools/](https://brazil-live-blog/2020/10/06/eight-brazilian-states-set-a-date-for-reopening-schools/) (Accessed October 23, 2020)

<sup>23</sup> Eric Hoffer, (2003). *Değişim Sancısı*, İstanbul: Ayışığı Yayınları.

overwhelmed national healthcare systems. Since a vaccine is not yet available, many have lost their lives. Although there is no commonly agreed method to fight COVID-19, countries with robust healthcare systems—ample numbers of hospitals, bed capacity, intensive care beds, doctors and nurses, respirators, etc.—have been the most successful. In addition, different countries have taken different measures to fight the disease with varying success.

At the beginning of the epidemic, the worst mortality rate occurred in China, but as the situation changed, the United States ranked first in the number of cases and deaths. In Wuhan, China's strong performance owes itself to the many doctors and nurses who were transferred to the city from elsewhere in the country. However, the same situation could not be done for other provinces because of governmental differences. Another reason for success in Wuhan was the rapid construction of mobile hospitals in Hubei province, where Wuhan is located, which brought extra beds and additional intensive care capacity. China also started to produce test kits immediately and were able to control the disease by testing thousands of people in a short period of time. Here, the secret of success was that Chinese officials informed the public frequently and enforced prohibitions strictly by using the communist system's advantage.

In the United States, President Trump's reckless attitude caused delays. In a statement, Trump said that "the weather will be warm soon, and the virus will disappear by itself." As a result, the number of cases rose from 270 to over 300,000 in one month. American media criticized the president, arguing: "seventy days were wasted in the fight against coronavirus."<sup>24</sup> The inadequacy of the health system in terms of hospitals, intensive care units, and healthcare personnel was another reason for the country's failure. The situation continues to deteriorate in the United States, which has vast geography, and case numbers continue to rise.

Brazil had a similar experience to the United States. President Bolsonaro called COVID-19 like a "mild flu" virus and initially refused to wear a mask. He and his wife subsequently got infected. Mortality rates are also alarming in Brazil, which ranks third in the world in the number of cases. The government had stopped sharing data with the public due to the increasing number of cases and deaths in June, but a court case forced them to share it. Bolsonaro dismissed his Minister of Health, who criticized his way of dealing with the pandemic, replacing him with a general who had no experience in the healthcare sector. He even threatened the WHO and left the organization on the grounds of having ideological prejudices.<sup>25</sup> With this move, he proved that he did not take COVID-19 seriously, and therefore his strategy was harshly criticized.

<sup>24</sup> Yasmeen Abutaleb, Josh Dawsey, Ellen Nakashima and Greg Miller, The U.S. was beset by denial and dysfunction as the coronavirus raged, The Washington Post, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true&itid=lk\\_interstitial\\_manual\\_40&itid=lk\\_interstitial\\_manual\\_41](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2020/04/04/coronavirus-government-dysfunction/?arc404=true&itid=lk_interstitial_manual_40&itid=lk_interstitial_manual_41) (Accessed October 25, 2020)

<sup>25</sup> Deutsche Welle, Brezilya'da korona rakamlarına hükümet müdahalesi, <https://www.dw.com/tr/brezilyada-korona-rakamlar%C4%B1na-h%C3%BCK%C3%BCmet-m%C3%BCdahalesi/a-53723540> (Accessed October 24, 2020)

Italy's experience with COVID-19 was difficult because of insufficient intensive care units and medical staff. Many COVID patients had to be treated in hospital corridors.<sup>26</sup> The number of cases started to decrease in July and August, but in the last week of October, it rose again to 19,000. As a result, the government decided to close schools in some regions and impose night curfews. Italians are tired of these restrictions, and have sporadically demonstrated against the government's policies. Patient treatment is carried out in hospitals, and the fight against COVID-19 has resumed its normal course.

In terms of the number of cases, Spain ranks second in Europe after Italy. In the last week of October, it recorded 19,000 daily cases. Authorities explain that this increase is due to the Spanish lifestyle of socialization and strong family ties. Spain was, however, caught unprepared by the pandemic. The healthcare system's capacity was limited, and the country had insufficient medical equipment, such as protective clothing and medical masks. The government was also late in taking necessary measures during the incubation phase and failed to restrict social life, including football matches. These all accelerated the spread of the virus.

Similar to Spain, England was slow to start its fight against COVID-19. As an island, its geography was perhaps more conducive to isolation, but it could have been more successful in preventing contagion if it had taken early measures. England's position was similar to

Taiwan, with a population of 23 million and a low number of infections and deaths. However, late intervention produced a proliferation in the number of cases and deaths. Only after the development of test kits did England start to test 250,000 people daily. Citizens had to quarantine for 14 days if they came into contact with an infected patient. Social distancing has been among England's best measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

Israel failed to prevent the spread of the virus and had to implement its second nationwide lockdown in October, after the daily number of cases reached 9,000. This three-week lockdown was necessary because social restriction measures proved insufficient.

Turkey has taken active measures to prevent contagion from the beginning. Immediately after the first cases in China, the Ministry of Health established the Scientific Advisory Board on 10 January 2020, and prepared the first guideline on combating COVID-19 that month, which was sent to healthcare units. Turkish healthcare institutions were, in other words, alarmed even before the virus fully unfurled itself. The guidelines are updated regularly to include new findings and measures.<sup>27</sup> In the meantime, necessary medical and material stock was made available, and a smartphone application to track positive cases was developed. Elective surgeries, meanwhile, were postponed, if possible, and hospitals organized themselves to prepare. In Ankara, two or three hospitals were designated 'pandemic hospitals', where

<sup>26</sup> Lorenzo Tondo, Italian Hospitals Short of Beds as Coronavirus Death Toll Jumps, The Guardian, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/09/italian-hospitals-short-beds-coronavirus-death-toll-jumps> (Accessed October 19, 2020)

<sup>27</sup> T Ministry of Health, Turkey, Scientific Advisory Board of Coronavirus, "COVID-19 Salgın Yönetimi ve Çalışma Rehberi", <https://covid19.saglik.gov.tr/Eklenti/39058/0/covid-19salginyonetimivecalismarehberipdf.pdf> (Accessed October 18, 2020)

teams closely monitored and followed up with the patients.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Medical Association began publishing monthly reports based on the findings of COVID monitoring groups that presented critical assessments of the identified problems<sup>28</sup>. Moreover, the newly established Social Sciences Advisory Board is addressing the social and psychological dimensions of the pandemic. Lastly, Turkish scientists have been working hard to develop a vaccine.

## Conclusion

Humanity's destruction of nature and overpopulation are the main reasons behind the pandemic, which has left a profound mark on modern history. The fight against COVID-19 continues, and scientists are working hard to prevent the virus' spread. Vaccination is considered the primary instrument in our fight against COVID-19, and vaccine trials and studies have turned into a global race. As a new global threat, the virus has spread to almost every country, recognizing neither borders, nor races, nor religions. The downplaying of the virus by some leaders and their overconfidence led to mismanagement and dire consequences. It must be understood that the fight against the virus will only be as successful as the weakest link of the chain. We certainly hope that it is successful. It should never be forgotten that the world is the common property of humanity.

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<sup>28</sup> Turkish Medical Association (TTB) COVID-19 Monitoring Board, "COVID-19 Pandemisi Altıncı Ay Değerlendirme Raporu",

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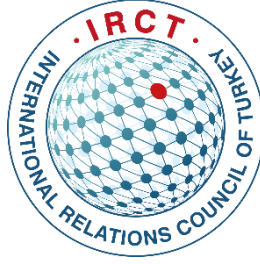
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Global Academy Talks Series are supported by the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Turkey.

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