

COVID-19 – HUMAN (IN)SECURITY ISSUE

Vanja Rokvić¹ 

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Abstract: *The objective of this review is to provide an overview of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on human security. By an analysis of the literature, it has been estimated that the pandemic had a direct impact on the health dimension of human security, leading to a high rate of mortality and morbidity. On the other hand, measures undertaken at global and national level, such as lockdowns and curfews, have led to tectonic disruptions in the economy, job losses, the access to food and health care, as well as an increased rate of violence and human rights derogations. Threats to human security within one dimension and the consequences caused by them spill over into others, thus creating a vicious circle of threats to basic freedoms – from want, from fear and to live in dignity, as well as decline in the process of achieving sustainable development goals. Taking into account that pandemics of infectious diseases are a constant of human civilization, it has been concluded that in the future, states would have to find a balance between the measures undertaken to fight infectious diseases, on the one hand, and the welfare of ordinary people, on the other hand.*

Introduction

Throughout history, the world has been affected by many pandemics that have taken away a large number of human lives, and have also significantly influenced changes in the strategic landscape and security.² In accordance with

¹ Vanja Rokvić, Associate Professor, Faculty of Security Studies, University of Belgrade, Gospodara Vučića 50, +381 11 6451843, vanjarokvic@fb.bg.ac.rs

² Like the Justinianic Plague in the 6th century or the Spanish flu in the 20th century.

the conditions of the time, certain measures were taken to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, but the measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the consequences of this pandemic for global society, were unprecedented. After the declaration of the pandemic in March 2020, almost every country took measures of closure and restrictions, and 95% of countries engaged the armed forces, giving primacy to the fight against non-traditional security threats (Erickson et al., 2023).

Due to the undertaken measures, there have been tectonic disturbances in the global economy, the loss of jobs, the access to food and health care, as well as an increased rate of violence, the derogation of human rights, xenophobia and hatred at global and national level. In other words, the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the measures taken, have led to the denial of basic human needs and rights, as well as the spread of waves of fear and uncertainty, thus endangering the vital principles on which human security rests – freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom to live in dignity (United Nation Trust Fund for Human Security, 2016, p. 6).

In this paper, based on the analysis of the content of scientific and review papers, reports by international organizations and media articles, a part of the scale of the impact of COVID-19 on all aspects of human security - health security, economic security, food security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security will be shown. In order to obtain relevant data, the JSTOR, PubMed, the National Library of Medicine and Google Scholar databases have been searched. The literature on the specific topic of the impact of COVID-19 on the mentioned dimensions of human security has been analyzed, including literature from the fields of medicine, economics, environmental protection, as well as political and security sciences. Considering the multidisciplinary nature of the topic and the large number of published papers, the selection criteria have exclusively been papers on the direct impact of COVID-19 on human security that have been published in Serbian and English. For each dimension of human security, those papers and research have been chosen that have illustrated this topic in the most adequate way with indicators and analysis. At the same time, the paper presents data on the achievement of certain sustainable development goals (SDGs), due to the fact that "the human security approach is a crucial ingredient to achieve sustainable development" (United Nation Trust Fund for Human Security, 2016, p. 5).

What I have to point out is that this type of review is not a novelty, since there have already been published works dealing with the analysis of the impact of COVID-19 and the measures taken on some or all dimensions of human security (Newman, 2022; Caparini, 2021; Onyeaka, et al., 2021). The contribution of this paper is reflected in the fact that, in accordance with the parameters for its preparation, this analysis has been expanded and deepened with a larger number of research and data, as well as a special reference to published experiences from Serbia.

The concept of human security

The development of the concept of human security is related to the UNDP Human Development Report from 1994, which states that security has been interpreted too narrowly for a long time, as a matter of protecting territorial sovereignty and national interests, while problems (such as disease, crime, unemployment, threats to human rights, etc.) that ordinary people face on a daily basis are completely neglected (UNDP, 1994). The authors of the Report conclude that "the world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily life" (p. 1), and that it is necessary to redefine the concept of security, which would include human security in addition to national elements. Therefore, after the adoption of the Report, a large number of authors, as stated by Newman (2022), have devoted themselves to questioning the dominant military, state-centric view of national security. In other words, the attention of the academic community has focused on studying „the welfare of ordinary people“ (Paris, 2001, p. 87).

The Report (1994) states that the definition of human security cannot be rigorously determined, but that two aspects have to be taken into account in the determination: "safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression; and protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life - whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" (p. 23). In order to understand it better, this concept is viewed through seven dimensions, from which the greatest threats to ordinary people arise. These are economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security and political security. Taking into account the outlined dimensions and threats, Tadjbakhsh (2005) defines human security as the ability to identify threats, avoid them when possible, that is, to mitigate their consequences in the event of their occurrence.

In order to see the impact of COVID-19 on human security, it is necessary to define its dimensions, at least in the broadest sense. Thus, economic security requires an assured basic income, food security means that all people have at all times both physical and economic access to basic food, while environmental security means the protection from natural hazards and other threats, as well as the access to sanitary water supply, clean air and a non-degraded land system. Personal security is the security against physical violence, community security refers to the protection of cultural identity and the protection from sectarian and ethnic violence, while political security in the broadest sense refers to the protection of basic human rights and freedoms. The greatest problem is the definition of the concept of health security, since, as stated by Malik, Barlow and Johnson (2021), there is no agreement on what exactly is meant by this term. According to Cárdenas et al. (2022) and Caparini (2021), health security implies the existence of an environment without diseases and infections, as well as the access to health services.

If the above-mentioned dimensions are examined, it could be said that COVID-19 as a disease, or SARS-CoV-2 as a virus, has had the most significant impact on health security. This is evidenced by the WHO data, according to which, as of 17th

May 2023, 6,932,991 people died and 766,440,796 people were infected worldwide as a result of COVID-19 (WHO, 2023). On the other hand, the measures taken in order to prevent the pandemic, lockdowns and mobility restrictions, as well as other measures, have led to endangerment of other dimensions. Therefore, when analyzing the concept of human security, one should always have in mind that exactly the state, in this case the measures taken, 'may be the primary threat to human security' (Newman, 2022, p. 434).

Health (in)security in the time of COVID-19

In addition to the previously mentioned indicators in the form of mortality and morbidity, COVID-19 has had a negative impact on health security due to the impossibility of the access to health care for people suffering from other diseases. According to the UN report on the achievement of SDGs by the end of 2021, in 92% of 129 countries, "the pandemic has severely disrupted health systems and essential health services" (United Nations, 2022, p. 30). Thus, for example, the research on cancer diagnosis and treatment showed that the pandemic has dramatically impacted cancer care worldwide (Edge et al., 2021), while the research conducted by Einstein et al. (2021) on the subject of heart diseases in 108 countries, showed that diagnostic procedures decreased by as much as 64% in the period from March 2019 to April 2020. According to the research conducted in Serbia on the access to health services for thyroid patients, it showed that out of 206 respondents, as many as 60.4% had to switch from state to private treatment in order to receive the necessary medical service (Žarković et al., 2022). The transition from state to private treatment has additionally created pressure on economic possibilities of patients, leading to consequences for economic security, as well as discrimination of those who cannot afford it. During the pandemic, there was also a 93% decrease in the access to mental health services in 130 countries. The UN data state that the global prevalence of anxiety and depression was increased by 25% in 2020 (United Nations, 2022, p. 25).

The impact of COVID-19 on health security can be viewed by analyzing the achievement of the SDGs 3: good health and well-being. According to the UN data, the pandemic has reduced global life expectancy, has negatively affected the immunization process, so that 68 million children around the world remained unvaccinated. The disruption to health and vaccination services and the limited access to diet and nutrition services have the potential to cause hundreds of thousands of additional under-5 deaths and tens of thousands of additional maternal deaths in 2020. At the same time, the pandemic has also affected the increase in mortality from tuberculosis and malaria (United Nations, 2022).

Although the above-mentioned examples have already shown the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on the health dimension of human security, special attention has also to be paid to vaccination against COVID-19, that is, vaccine hesitancy as an additional way of endangering health security. According to the research

conducted by Watson et al. (2022), the COVID-19 vaccine prevented 14.4 million deaths in 185 countries between December 2020 and December 2021. However, the COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy is growing around the world (Sallam, 2021). In the research on vaccine hesitancy in Serbia, conducted by Rokvić (2023) in 2020 on a sample of 585 respondents, 40.3% of respondents declared against vaccination. Although mass vaccination in Serbia began on 19th January 2021, only 28.43% of citizens have been vaccinated with three doses so far.

How has COVID-19 affected economic security?

The pandemic has affected economic flows, sending 'shock waves' and causing a global economic crisis, thus deepening the existing poverty and inequality (World Bank Group, 2022). According to the data from the World Bank Group (2022), the world economy has shrunk by about 3%, and increased inequality within and between countries. Although the consequences for the economy can be seen both at global and national level, the emphasis in this paper will be on the analysis of the impact on human security. Starting from the fact that economic security requires a guaranteed basic income, for the purpose of this paper, the research on the loss of jobs, that is, the impossibility of achieving a basic income has been analyzed.

After the adoption of restrictive measures, a large number of people around the world have lost their jobs and basic income. In studying the impact of the pandemic on job losses in the US, Montenegro et al. (2022) have concluded that just in the first few months of 2020, this loss was significantly greater than "the total multi-year effect of the Great Recession" (p. 851). Using the data from the World Bank High Frequency Phone Surveys, Khamis et al. (2021) state that in the East Asia and Pacific region 21% of respondents lost their jobs, 29% in the Europe and Central Asia region, 48% in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, 45% in the Middle East and North Africa region and 26% in the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Serbia was no exception. According to the official statistical data, 94,100 jobs were lost in the Republic of Serbia just in 2020 (UNDP 2020, p. 37).

The above-mentioned data give only an indication of the level of inequality and poverty. The loss of employment and income has led to a reversal of progress in achieving the SDG 8: decent work, as well as the SDG 1: no poverty. According to the UN (2022), pandemic "precipitated the worst economic crisis in decades and reversed progress towards decent work for all" (p. 42). The UN estimates that from 2019, more than 70 million people are expected to be pushed back into extreme poverty, being the first rise in global poverty since 1998. At the same time, for the first time in the last two decades, there has been an increase in the number of the world workers living in extreme poverty, from 6.7% in 2019 to 7.2% in 2020, pushing an additional 8 million workers into poverty (United Nations, 2022, p. 26). The pandemic has also led to "the first rise in between-country income inequality in a generation" (p. 17), that is, to the regression of the SDG 10: reduced inequalities.

The derogation of human rights during the COVID-19 era

Due to the restrictive measures introduced by states, a debate began in the academic and public discourse about the violation of basic human rights and freedoms, that is, about the political dimension of human security. At the very beginning of the pandemic, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called on governments to ensure that measures comply with human rights standards (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2020). We should have in mind, as stated by Spadaro (2020), that the disease itself already threatens basic human rights - the right to life and the right to health. Therefore, according to Enmark (2007), the government can introduce restrictive measures, such as isolation and quarantine measures, which will, on the one hand, protect the right to health and life, but on the other hand, will affect other rights, such as the right to freedom of movement, gathering, and also on the rule of law. However, with the introduction of measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, the world faced a "pandemic of human rights abuse" (Kelly and Pattison, 2021).

According to Human Rights Watch (2021), in at least 83 countries, the authorities used the pandemic "to justify violating the exercise of free speech and peaceful assembly". The research by Human Rights Watch (2021) shows that in at least 52 countries new laws have been adopted criminalizing media reporting that is considered undesirable, in at least 18 countries security forces have physically attacked or killed journalists, the representatives of the political opposition and attorneys (e.g. in Cambodia in 2020, more than 60 activists, journalists and representatives of the political opposition were imprisoned).

A lot of controversy in the context of rights violations has been caused by the decisions of individual countries on the introduction of the digital COVID-19 surveillance for tracking contacts. As some of the examples by Sekalala et al. (2020) cite Indian decision to make the contact tracing app Aarogya Setu mandatory for all employees, or Singapore's decision to make the TraceTogether app mandatory exclusively for migrant workers. The mentioned authors believe that such mandatory applications for workers, especially for migrants, represent additional economic pressure, since the application requires the user to have a suitable smartphone and the internet (Sekalala et al., 2020). Therefore, this is a question not only of political, but also of economic security. In other countries, such as Israel, Mexico or Turkey, telecommunications were monitored for the purpose of contact tracing. This is just a part of the digital COVID-19 surveillance that points to a possible violation of the right to privacy and misuse of data, as a confirmed discriminatory policy towards minorities (Sekalala et al., 2020).

Discrimination of certain groups can also be viewed within the concept of community security, which clearly indicates the mutual connection of different dimensions of human security. Thus, in the analysis on the derogation of human rights in Serbia, it is stated that certain measures, such as curfews and movement bans, were rather more difficult for certain categories of the population. Namely, in

informal Roma settlements, the restriction of the freedom of movement meant at the same time the restriction of means for the prevention of infection, primarily water, as well as the loss of income (Trifković, 2020).

In the implementation of measures against COVID-19, even 95% of countries engaged the armed forces and other security forces, and the fight against the virus was described using war metaphors and military narratives. Due to all of the above-mentioned, the introduction of measures in many countries has resulted in the indignation of citizens and various protests and riots. In the analysis of the database of ACLED - Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project: COVID-19 Disorder Tracker, Rokvić points out that in many countries there have been anti-government demonstrations due to the state response to the pandemic and the socioeconomic measures taken, the impossibility of work and threats to the rights and freedom (Rokvić, 2020).

Bearing in mind the data presented, it is not surprising that in analysis of the impact of the pandemic on the derogation of human rights, Lebret (2020) concludes that "Human Rights Courts will certainly be overwhelmed by applications in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis". In Serbia, moreover, proceedings have been initiated in front of the Constitutional Court on an initiative in which it is considered that the conditions for the declaration of a state of emergency and the measures taken in accordance with it were not met in Serbia at all. However, this initiative to start the procedure was rejected (Trifković, 2020).

The shadow pandemic – personal (in)security and the rise of gender-based violence

As stated in the previous part, personal safety means safety from physical violence. In the 1994 UNDP report, it was stated that threats to personal security arise from the state (physical torture), other states (war), groups (ethnic tensions), individuals and gangs (crime, street violence), threats directed at women and children, as well as threats directed at oneself (suicide) (p. 30).

Analyzing the relevant literature, I have noticed that almost all types of threat to personal safety were present during the pandemic. As an example, I will cite violence carried out by the state. Thus, according to Kelly and Pattison (2021), in Kenya the police killed at least 15 people in the first 9 weeks of the curfew, while in Uganda during the arrest of the presidential candidate Bobi Wine, 54 of his supporters were killed and 45 were wounded. Also, the previously mentioned data on violence against journalists can be examined within the concept of personal security.

However, during the pandemic, a particular type of violence stood out - and that is violence against women. Bradbury-Jones and Isham (2020) consider that lockdown measures have given abusers "greater freedom to act without scrutiny or consequence" (p. 2047). Wijk et al. (2021) state that violence in family has increased by 23-32% in the WHO Europe member states since the lockdown began, while the

UN data show that globally since the beginning of the pandemic, 45% of women have been exposed to some form of violence. In their systematic review of literature, Mittal and Singh (2020) state that, for example, in Australia there was a decrease in the crime rate on the one hand, but on the other hand a 5% increase in violence in family, while this increase in the US was between 21%-35%. The research conducted in other parts of the world also shows an increase in the number of calls related to violence, such as an increase of 30% in France or 25% in Argentina, while according to research by Vora et al. (2020) in India at the beginning of April 2020 the number of complaints about violence increased by 100%. Serbia was no exception. According to Despotović (2020), at the beginning of the introduction of a state of emergency in Serbia, the number of calls to the Autonomous Women's Centre regarding violence tripled.

In the analysis of the achievement of the SDG 5: gender equality, it is stated that the pandemic has delayed the exercise of women's rights and equal opportunities, and it is estimated that with the current pace in the exercise of women's rights, it will take 286 years just to abolish the existing discriminatory laws (Azcona et al., 2021). Due to the scale of violence against women during the introduction of measures to combat the pandemic and poor progress in achieving the SDGs, this negative trend is called the shadow pandemic of COVID-19 (UN Women, 2021).

A perfect storm for inequality

As in the case of the previous dimensions of human security, the pandemic has left negative consequences for community security, as well, and this can be concluded from the previously mentioned examples. According to UN Secretary General António Guterres, the pandemic has released "a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scaremongering" (United Nations, 2020a). Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, stated that the pandemic has had a "disproportionate toll" on people from ethnic or religious minorities, as well as indigenous people (United Nations, 2020b). The pandemic is thought to have created the conditions for a perfect storm of disproportionality and inequality (McClure, 2021).

In the comprehensive review "Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on religious and ethnic minorities", Loft et al. (2022) state that in many countries these groups have been the subject of hate speech and violence. According to these authors in the US, the UK and South America, certain ethnic minorities and indigenous communities have had a higher mortality rate due to living conditions and the inability to access medical institutions. As stated by Newman (2022) in the UK data on COVID-19, related deaths by ethnic groups indicated that "black males were 4.2 times more likely to die from a Covid-19-related illness than white males and black females were 4.3 times more likely than white females to die". The research conducted by Boserup et al. (2020) showed that in all states of the US the percentage of mortality was higher among minority racial/ethnic groups (African American, Hispanic, Asians, etc.) than whites.

The research by Human Rights Watch (2021) showed that in many countries the cases of discrimination and violence against the Asians were recorded, while according to Burke (2020), in Pakistan, the Shiite Muslim minority group was accused of bringing the virus from Iran. Burke (2020) also states that in Bangladesh, the government has cut off the internet access for about 900,000 members of the Rohingya, a group in the Cox's Bazar refugee camp, which has reduced the availability of information about the virus, and the stigmatization of potentially infected people has led to the fact that possible symptoms of the disease are not reported and not seeking an adequate medical treatment. According to Trifković (2020), Serbia was also among the group of countries where support for certain groups was lacking. Namely, due to the inadequate treatment and the lack of support for the Roma population, the European Court of Human Rights initiated proceedings against Serbia.

Rising food insecurity

In order to understand the extent of the impact of COVID-19 on food security, it is necessary to start from the definition of this term: "food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food" (Boyac-Gündüz et al., 2021). Boyac-Gündüz et al. (2021) state that this definition of food security implies several dimensions, such as food availability, access, utilization, and stability of food supplies at global, national, and local level. Analyzing the impact of the pandemic on the mentioned dimensions, these authors conclude that due to the measures taken, both at national and international level, all aspects of food security during the pandemic were threatened. In their research, Mouloudj et al. (2020) state that the pandemic had the greatest impact on perishable food and caused remarkable food shortages in poor countries, conflict zones and war-affected regions, and also in some developed ones, whereas developing countries are the most affected due to their high dependency in securing their food supplies.

The extent of the impact of the pandemic on food security is indicated by the UN data on the achievement of the SDG 2: zero hunger. In the UN Report, it was estimated that due to the consequences of the pandemic, 1 in 10 people worldwide is suffering from hunger, as well as that in 2021, 150 million more people faced hunger than in 2019. At the same time, 2.3 billion people were moderately or severely food insecure in 2021, meaning they lacked the regular access to adequate food. The most worrisome increases have been seen in sub-Saharan Africa, followed by Central and Southern Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean (United Nations, 2022, p. 28). According to the database on the achievement of the SDGs in Serbia, the prevalence of serious food insecurity among the adult population increased from 1.7% in 2015 to 3.8% in 2020 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, 2023). Food insecurity additionally affects the (in)security of other dimensions of human security, such as health, especially of children. Thus, the UN data (2022) show that in 2020, 22% of children under the age of 5 (149.2 million) suffered from stunting (p. 29).

The polluting footprint of COVID-19

Although on the one hand there are studies that indicate that the introduction of certain measures in the fight against the pandemic has had positive effects on the environment (Gautam et al., 2020), especially in terms of air pollution decline (Venter et al., 2020), on the other hand, the use of protective equipment, such as masks, and large amounts of waste has led to its degradation.

Benson et al. (2021) estimate that on a daily basis, 3.4 billion single-use face masks/face shields are discarded, globally. According to the estimates of these authors, by the end of 2020, the most plastic waste was generated in Asia, with 1.8 billion of discarded face masks per capita a day. The data from the European Environmental Agency (2021) indicate that about 0.75 face masks per person a day, were imported to the EU during that period, resulting in additional greenhouse gas emissions and other types of pollution. This amount of waste, according to Shams et al. (2021) in a longer period of time will lead to mismanagement of plastic waste, that is, improper incineration, illegal dumping, and overloading the landfill capacity. In their study of the impact of plastic pollution from mismanaged face masks in coastal regions of 46 countries, Chowdhury et al. (2021) estimate that approximately 0.15 million tons to 0.39 million tons of plastic waste could end up in global oceans within a year.

In addition to the impact of plastic waste on the environment, a number of works are dedicated to researching the impact of COVID-19 on deforestation. According to the estimates by Brancalion et al. (2020), deforestation alerts were detected during the first month, following the implementation of government confinement measures to reduce COVID-19 spread, which were doubled compared to 2019. These authors state that deforestation increased by 63% in the US, 136% in Africa, and 63% in Asia-Pacific, and impacted most countries within these regions (the US: 24 of 28 countries; Africa: 30 of 47 countries; and Asia-Pacific: 15 of 28 countries). At the same time, according to Caparini (2021), in many countries, for economic reasons, the authorities made a decision to withdraw regulations on environmental protection, which has led to numerous illegal activities and environmental crimes. Unlike the previous dimensions of human security, where certain indicators were presented for Serbia as well, in the part related to endangering the environment in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, I have not found any adequate research.

Conclusion

The pandemic of human rights abuse, the shadow pandemic, a perfect storm for inequality, a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, are just some of the terms used to describe the impacts and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in the analyzed literature and reports. On the one hand, the pandemic has directly affected the health dimension of human security, leading to high mortality and morbidity rates. On the other hand, through the measures adopted by the states in order to prevent the

pandemic, the impact on all other dimensions has been reflected. The global closure, movement bans and other measures have caused waves of economic shocks, violence, interrupted the process of food supplies, the access to health institutions... Threats to security within one dimension and the consequences caused by them have spilled over into others, thus creating the vicious circle of threats to basic freedoms (from want, from fear and to live in dignity) and regression in the process of achieving the SDGs.

Taking into account that pandemics of infectious diseases are a constant of human civilization, in the future, based on the lessons learnt from 2020, states would have to find a balance between the measures taken to fight infectious diseases, on the one hand, and the welfare of ordinary people, on the other hand. It should be kept in mind, as stated in the 1994 Report, that the world can never be at peace unless people have security in their daily life. However, unfortunately, the Global Health Security Index (2021: 5) shows that all countries are "dangerously unprepared to meet future epidemic and pandemic threats".

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