



DEMOCRACY & EMERGENCIES

LESSONS FROM THE
COVID-19 PANDEMIC FOR
DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

Final Report of the Global Commission
on Democracy and Emergencies

December 2021

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FOREWORD

“Never allow a good crisis go to waste”

Uttered by White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel at the onset of the global financial crisis of 2008, and – some say -- by Sir Winston Churchill towards the end of World War II, the phrase resonates ever louder today, as the COVID-19 pandemic approaches its second anniversary.

For nearly two years, the pandemic has been burdening the world with a desolating balance of lives lost, broken livelihoods, and shaken certainties. For those of us living in democratic countries, COVID-19 has taught us that the resilience of democracy – the ability of democratic systems to function, to deliver policies that meet our needs, and to gather leaders, citizens and institutions around a shared commitment to democratic values and principles – is not to be taken for granted.

Not allowing COVID-19 go to waste calls upon us to believe in democracy’s capacity for self-correction, and draw from the dynamic global mosaic of democratic experiences during the pandemic a series of lessons

learned to strengthen democratic resilience before the next emergency hits us. This is the task that the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies, which I had the honor to chair, undertook in early 2021.

Having now concluded our deliberations, we present in this report a series of recommendations based on our collective experience, as well as the expertise of over 30 academic researchers, civil society leaders, business representatives and senior policy-makers from around the democratic world. We put them in your hands, hoping that you – government officials, parliamentarians, judicial experts, civil society leaders and all engaged citizens – will draw from them to lay the basis for a more effective and more democratic response to the future emergencies that, no doubt, we are bound to face.

Every democracy is different, and every emergency is different. But strengthening democratic resilience to safeguard our shared values through the next crisis, is a matter of shared responsibility.



Yves Leterme

Prime Minister of Belgium (2008, 2009-2011)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The **COVID-19 pandemic** has been a terrible crisis for health and the economy. It has also raised many questions on governance and the ability of different political systems to handle emergencies. In democratic countries, it hit at a time of unease – a crisis of truth and trust, a crisis of representation, growing populism, polarization, and growing questions on democracy's ability to deliver effective responses to the challenges of the 21st century. The pandemic galvanized those trends, brought the weaknesses of democratic institutions, administrations and leadership in the spotlight, and at the same time spurred a rapid wave of necessary democratic innovation.

Nearly two years into the pandemic, it is incumbent on democracies to draw lessons from their experience of COVID-19 to be better prepared to face future emergencies with an effective and democratic approach. To contribute to that process, based on the unique perspective that senior political leaders can bring, Club de Madrid convened a **Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies**, bringing together

former Heads of State and Government as well as eminent leaders from multilateral and civil society organizations from around the world, under the chairship of former Prime Minister of Belgium Yves Leterme, with former Prime Minister of Senegal Aminata Touré and Secretary-General of International IDEA Kevin Casas-Zamora as vice-chairs.

Over the course of nine months, the Global Commission held a series of work sessions, deliberations, and regional consultations aimed at identifying, on the basis of the experience of COVID-19 in democracies around the world, and taking into account the dynamic nature of the pandemic, good practices and lessons learned regarding democracies' ability to keep their democratic institutions in function; to protect fundamental rights within emergency response; to deliver services, including emergency services, inclusively to all citizens; and to respond to the crisis with the kind of leadership that will uphold citizens' trust in democracy. Three knowledge partners – International IDEA, Oxfam International, and

Edelman – helped guide their reflections by providing data, analysis and basic frameworks for the Global Commission’s recommendations.

This report presents a series of **20 recommendations**, directed at government leaders, public institutions and civil society actors around the world, to help guide their steps as they seek to put in place the conditions that will allow a more effective and more democratic response to the future emergencies that we are bound to face in coming years. As the need for protection from critical risks grows, so must democracy’s ability to deliver.

Leaders must elevate **emergency preparedness** on the political agenda, as well as in civic awareness. National structures for emergency preparedness, and the reports they periodically produce, must command more attention from political leaders, institutions and citizens alike. Democratic institutions, like parliaments, courts and electoral bodies, must also have their own emergency preparedness and contingency plans. They should adopt flexible rules of procedure in case of emergencies, and embed digital technologies in their normal functioning for enhanced flexibility.

It is essential that emergency situations do not permanently tilt the **balance of powers** or damage the rule of law. Parliaments must be able to provide legislative oversight over emergency response in the very early moments of a crisis. Strengthening the role, independence and ability of courts, including Constitutional Courts, to function in an emergency is also fundamental. Parliamentary and judiciary oversight structures must assess the necessity, proportionality and constitutionality of emergency measures, to prevent executive overreach and ensure the transparency, justice, equity and gender responsiveness of emergency response.

Countering disinformation is critical in an emergency. Governments should fill the information space with facts and evidence, support and enable the work of responsible journalism and media, and work with social media platforms and technology experts to devise solutions, within the boundaries of freedom of expression, to stop or slow down the viralisation of harmful content. Governments must bridge the digital divide between their citizens, and improve access to digital connectivity as well as digital literacy for all.

An important pre-condition for democratic resilience during a crisis is the ability for the state to respond to citizens’ needs. Learning from a pandemic that has affected the health and economic well-being of so many citizens, governments must renew their commitment to **inclusive social development**, starting with social protection and healthcare for all. The proposal for a Global Fund for Social Protection, and the UN Secretary-General’s call for a World Social Summit in 2025, are critical steps in that direction. So is the adoption of effective, equity-enhancing fiscal policies and enforcement instruments to mobilize resources for inclusive social development.

Effective leadership in times of crisis requires the ability to navigate uncertainty. Democratic leaders must make decisions based on the best available evidence, and be transparent about what they know and what they don’t know. They must act quickly and decisively; inform parliament, political parties and social actors promptly; and share simple, clear and coherent messages with the public.

They must also invest in strong, long-term **partnerships** with other stakeholders, starting with local administrations. Business alliances are also particularly suited to provide surge capacity for service delivery and foster rapid innovation in emergencies. Civil society organizations can help implement emergency responses, deliver essential services and reach out to communities from a position of proximity.

Finally, to feed a growing appetite for **civic engagement**, democratic institutions and leaders should build upon digital tools developed during the pandemic to create new, wider channels for interaction with citizens. Broader civic engagement in future emergencies will work better if the right mechanisms are already in place and embedded in the normal working of public institutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE GLOBAL
COMMISSION ON DEMOCRACY AND EMERGENCIES

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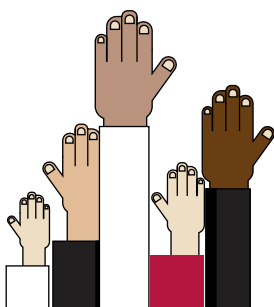
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10

- Expanded connectivity infrastructure and access
- Digital skills



EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP & DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

11

Be prepared

- Increased political attention for emergency preparedness
- Coherent strategy for emergency risk management
- Clear roles for national vs local governments
- Post-hoc oversight and policy learning

12

Lead with facts and decisiveness

- Evidence-based policy-making
- Strong advisory structures
- Clear hierarchy of policy objectives
- Open consultations with parliament, opposition parties and social actors

13

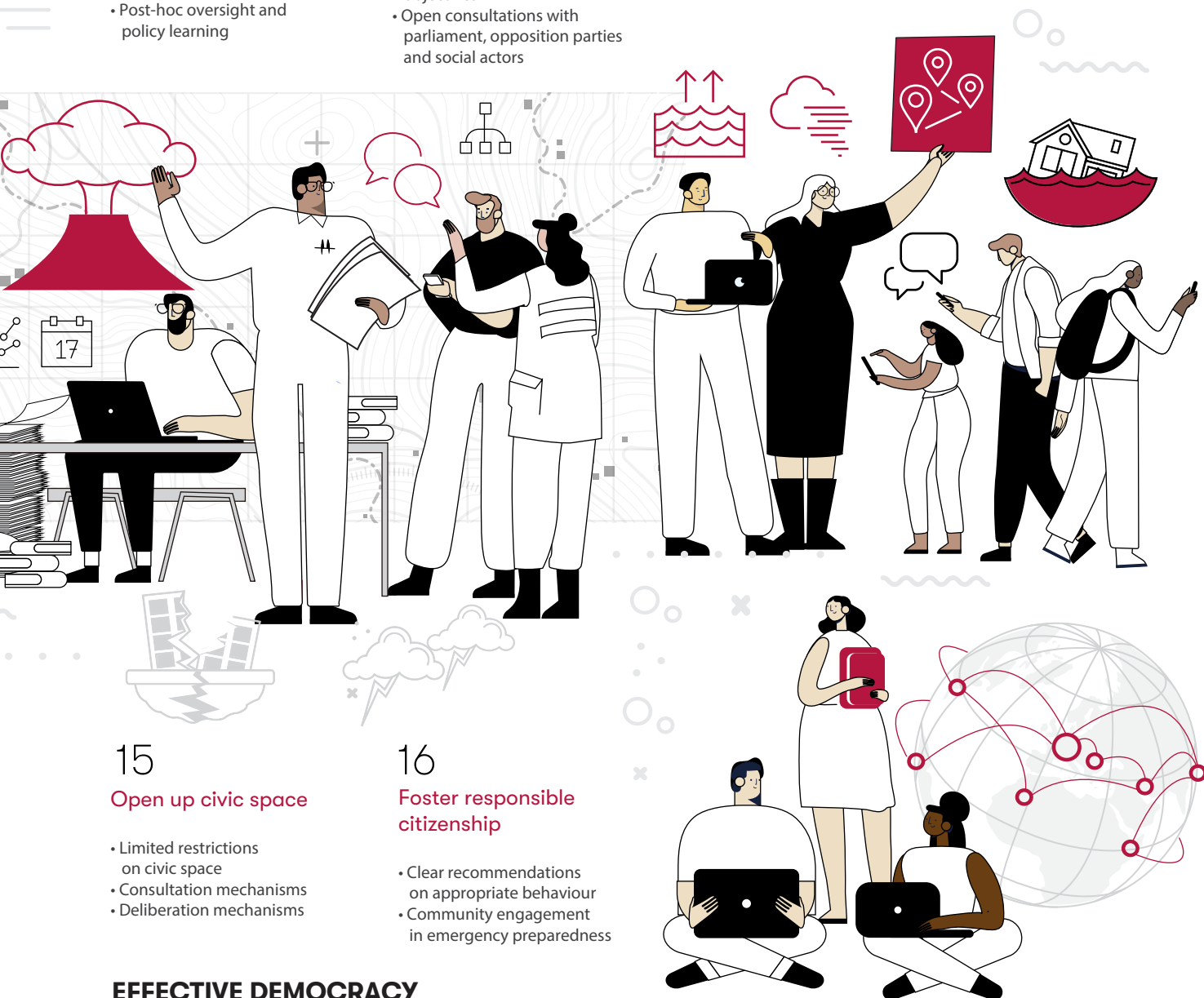
Communicate with truth and empathy

- Straight talk
- Proximity communication
- Clear and consistent messaging

14

Build partnerships

- Local authorities
- Businesses – with transparency and due diligence
- Civil society



15

Open up civic space

- Limited restrictions on civic space
- Consultation mechanisms
- Deliberation mechanisms

16

Foster responsible citizenship

- Clear recommendations on appropriate behaviour
- Community engagement in emergency preparedness

EFFECTIVE DEMOCRACY THAT SERVES US ALL

17

Include women in decision-making

- Disaggregated data on gender-differentiated risks.
- Oversight mechanism with gender focus
- Gender balance in emergency management structures

18

Include youth in decision-making

- Mechanisms for youth engagement in emergency preparedness and response
- Capacity-building and empowerment

19

Think of future generations

- Mechanism for policy scrutiny focused on long-term risks and impacts

20

Work with international partners

- Democratic peer networks
- Democratic solidarity between countries
- Multilateral institutions

INTRODUCTION

The global spread of the coronavirus disease COVID- 19 has been shaking societies around the world for nearly two years. In the democratic world, the pandemic erupted in the context of a crisis of democracy long in the making. In some countries, it precipitated a worrisome deterioration of democratic governance and jeopardized the stability of democratic institutions. In others, it has provided an opportunity for democratic leaders to rise to the occasion and regain citizens' trust in their capacity to deliver on the nation's interests. But in most countries, what COVID- 19 has cast is a potent spotlight on previously unnoticed or insufficiently attended systemic flaws that limit democracy's capacity to come out of the crisis unscathed. The COVID-19 pandemic is teaching us that the resilience of democracy – that is, the ability of democratic systems to function, to deliver, to be trusted and to command the enduring commitment of their citizens to democratic values and principles – in the face of an emergency is not to be taken for granted.

Nearly two years into the pandemic, it is incumbent on democracies to draw lessons from their experience

of COVID-19 to be better prepared to face future emergencies with an effective and democratic approach. Many are calling for national and global leaders to rethink the foundations of our societies. In the democratic world, they invoke democracy's capacity for self-correction and enjoin democratic leaders to take action, here and now, to enhance their democracies' resilience, as well as their ability to deliver in uncertain times.

Drawing lessons from the experience of COVID-19 to **enhance the resilience of democratic systems to future emergencies** is an enormous task, particularly as the pandemic continues to evolve through successive and uneven phases. Political scientists and democracy experts from around the world – in international organizations, governments, think tanks, academia and civil society – have been collecting data, producing analyses and putting forward recommendations to that effect, in impressive numbers since the pandemic began. To integrate the thoughts put forward by the broad community of experts into a single global effort,

across thematic silos, geographies and communities of practice, Club de Madrid convened a **Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies**.

Formed by a group of 16 commissioners -- former Heads of State or Government and current leaders from international and civil society organizations -- the Global Commission held a series of work sessions, deliberations, and regional consultations over the course of nine months, with the aim to identify, on the basis of the dynamic experience of COVID-19 in democracies around the world, good practices and lessons learned regarding democracies' ability to keep their democratic institutions in function; to protect fundamental rights within emergency response; to deliver services, including emergency services, inclusively to all citizens; and to respond to the crisis with the kind of leadership that will uphold citizens' trust in democracy. Three **knowledge partners** -- International IDEA, Oxfam International, and Edelman -- helped guide these reflections by providing data, analysis and basic frameworks for the Global Commission's recommendations.

For the purposes of this exercise, **emergencies** are understood to be situations in which an exceptional event (or series of events) causes human suffering or poses an imminent threat to human lives or livelihoods, dislocating community life and exceeding the remediation capacity of the responsible governments. The COVID-19 pandemic is one of few truly global emergencies in recent times. But pandemics, natural disasters, financial crises, industrial accidents and international terrorist attacks have all affected large parts of the globe in this century. With climate change expected to produce more and more intense perturbations of our natural environment, with accompanying dislocations in our economies and societies, democratic resilience to emergencies will become all the more important.

This report presents the Global Commission's recommendations to help political leaders, senior decision-makers in key democratic institutions, and civil society defenders of democracy strengthen the ability of democratic systems to face future emergencies and navigate contexts of uncertainty with an effective and democratic approach. It contains a set of **20 recommendations**, divided in 4 chapters.

Building on the data, analysis and framework provided by International IDEA, **Chapter 1** presents

the Global Commission's recommendations to protect basic democratic institutions and fundamental rights in emergencies.

Chapter 2 draws on data and analysis provided by Oxfam International to put forward recommendations to protect and promote social inclusion and cohesion in emergencies, by alleviating some of the pressures associated with rising inequalities within and between countries.

With trust as a fundamental pillar, **Chapter 3** draws on data provided by Edelman to put forward recommendations for effective leadership and resilient democratic culture in the challenging circumstances of emergency situations, in which dynamic uncertainty and the imperative for quick action pose extraordinary challenges for decision-makers.

Chapter 4 presents recommendations on issues that cut across all components of democratic systems, in emergencies as well as under normal circumstances. It refers to stakeholders who, in many countries, are left out by all components of democratic systems -- by democratic institutions, by democratic leaders, and by the structures that deliver and distribute the dividends of democracy: women, youth and future generations.

Finally, a **fifth chapter** offers reflections on the roles and responsibilities of different actors in democratic systems, as well as Club de Madrid's own commitments, to take these recommendations forward and boost our collective democratic resilience to future emergencies.



01

**The mechanisms
of democracy
& fundamental
rights**

ANALYSIS¹

The COVID-19 pandemic hit the democratic world in the context of a crisis of democracy long in the making. The Economist Intelligence Unit's [Democracy Index](#)² reached an all-time low in 2020, after several years of downward evolution, while International IDEA's [Global State of Democracy 2021](#) reports that the number of countries moving in an authoritarian direction outnumbered those going in a democratic direction for the fifth consecutive year. A crisis of representation, a crisis of truth, a crisis of trust, a crisis of leadership: the ills of democracy were numerous when COVID-19 began.

The disruptions occasioned by the pandemic have exacerbated pre-existing trends towards the deterioration of democracy. Nearly [half](#) of the world's democracies introduced COVID-19 related measures which were concerning from a democratic perspective -- measures that were unnecessary, disproportionate, unbound, illegal or that violated basic democratic principles. The functioning of democratic institutions, the unfolding of democratic processes and the protection of fundamental rights -- particularly civil and political rights -- were directly impacted. According to the World Justice Project's [Rule of Law Index 2021](#), over 74 percent of surveyed countries experienced declines in their rule of law performance during the past year. While concerning developments were most frequent in democracies that were already ailing prior to the pandemic, worrying signs of deterioration were also observed in previously healthy democracies.

Elections, and the decision to hold or postpone them in the midst of the health emergency, have perhaps been the most high-profile theater for COVID-19's impact on democratic institutions and processes. Roughly [half](#) of the electoral processes scheduled for 2020 were postponed. However, examples of good electoral practice, such as the Republic of Korea's, soon paved the way for collective learning and adaptation. A clear legal framework and a consensus-based approach to decision-making on election postponement were key for electoral integrity in the midst of the emergency. Innovation in the use of Special Voting Arrangements have also allowed numerous countries to adapt their

electoral practices and protect the right to vote despite the emergency context.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also perturbed the functioning of other institutions that are essential to the healthy functioning of democratic systems, such as parliaments and courts. This perturbation has been both direct, disrupting the operations of these institutions; and indirect, through the adoption of State of Emergency legislation that concentrated power in the hands of the Executive. In the first half of 2020, [72 percent](#) of democracies in the world declared a national State of Emergency. While State of Emergency declarations are a legitimate tool of democratic systems to deal with crises, their use -- and misuse -- during the pandemic underscored the dangers of inadequate frameworks to regulate them. The duration of States of Emergency has been a serious issue, with an average length of [eight months](#) in democratic countries. Executive overreach, through the unnecessary side-lining of oversight mechanisms, has been another.

Although the vast majority of parliaments have continued to function throughout the pandemic, in several countries the shift towards COVID-19-safe working modalities caused [35 parliaments](#) to suspend parliamentary sessions, while [others](#) adjourned or dissolved. In almost one third of countries, there was no direct parliamentary oversight over the government's initial response to the pandemic. Even when they were operational, parliaments were too often sidelined in the approval of State of Emergency declarations and emergency-related legislation.

[110 countries](#), including 78 democracies, also introduced restrictions that affected judicial institutions, leading to court closures, reduced services or an exclusive focus on urgent cases. As a result, 94% of countries covered by the [Rule of Law Index 2021](#) experienced increased delays in civil, criminal and/or administrative proceedings. This has limited the material possibility for citizens to claim their rights in court, including in relation to emergency measures and their sometimes

1. For more detailed analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mechanisms of democracy and fundamental rights, please refer to the [Issues Paper prepared by International IDEA](#) on behalf of Working Group 1 of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies.

2. Words that appear in red are hyperlinks. In the digital version of this report, you may click on them to access the source of the information. Should you wish to consult a digital version, please access it on Club de Madrid's site (www.clubmadrid.org) or request it via email at clubmadrid@clubmadrid.org.

discriminatory or excessively forceful enforcement. In numerous jurisdictions, the role of courts – in particular Constitutional Courts – in scrutinizing the legality of emergency measures was also hampered by operational limitations, executive overreach, and lack of independence of the judiciary. The possibility that the imbalance between the three powers of the State may persist after the end of the pandemic has been raised as major concern.

In all countries of the world, emergency measures adopted in response to COVID-19 have imposed restrictions on fundamental rights and freedoms. Many of these restrictions were warranted to protect higher order of rights, such as the right to life and to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. Restrictions to freedom of expression, adopted in over **50 percent** of countries under the pretense of curbing pandemic-related disinformation, however led to numerous situations of undue interference with the work of information professionals, activists and members of the political opposition. Restrictions to personal integrity and privacy, through the introduction of movement- and contact-tracing tools without appropriate safeguards, have also raised concerns, not least about the risk of political surveillance.

More generally speaking, digital technologies were already a game-changer for democracy before the pandemic, and democratic systems were barely beginning to face the digital challenge. The lack of preparedness of democratic systems to democratically handle threats arising from the new information ecosystem – both in terms of disinformation and of privacy – increased their vulnerability during the pandemic.

But digital technologies also became a fundamental instrument of resilience, enabling democratic institutions to devise ways of functioning despite the health emergency. According to the **World e-Parliament Report 2020**, by the end of 2020, 65 percent of parliaments had held virtual or hybrid committee meetings, and 33 percent a virtual or hybrid plenary meeting. In Latin America, the **Latinno** report identifies 128 examples of democratic innovation in 2020 – nearly as many as in the three previous years combined -- 85 percent of which rely on digital technologies for participation. The necessary digital

transformation of democratic practices brought along numerous advantages: increased access to voting as Special Voting Arrangements were expanded; increased transparency as parliamentary meetings were live streamed; increased opportunities for citizen engagement as digital tools were rolled out for everything from political campaigning to public consultations and participatory budgeting. Digital tools have also provided new tools for government leaders, public institutions and civil society to share and access information, and to communicate with citizens throughout emergency response.

As states move to examine the efficiency of their democratic institutions' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, a long list of legal, institutional and operational reforms will be identified as necessary to face the next emergency with a steadier foot. The following section presents our assessment of what reforms should be considered in priority, and how to go about approaching them.

By November 2020, 43% of democracies had introduced COVID-19 measures that were concerning from a democratic perspective

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Strengthen institutional resilience & capacity to deal with crises

Democratic institutions – parliaments, courts, electoral management bodies, political parties, etc. – should amend their **rules of procedure** to enable continued functioning, including deliberation and decision-making, in situations of emergency. Often, the extraordinary modus operandi will involve making greater use of digital technologies to enable remote engagement. Parliaments, in particular, should have rules of procedure that allow remote participation in parliamentary sessions. This is imperative in emergency situations, but can also have benefits under normal circumstances, facilitating participation by parliamentarians from remote areas and easing the conciliation between duties in capital and in their constituency.

Democratic institutions should also design and adopt **emergency preparedness protocols** that set clear rules on how and when to activate extraordinary modus operandi. They should ensure that extraordinary modus operandi consider the needs of vulnerable persons and different social groups (eg. women, minorities), the impact of the crisis on other actors involved (eg. service providers), and that any

extraordinary use of digital technologies comes with guarantees for personal data protection.

Given the sensitivity surrounding electoral processes, electoral management bodies (EMBs), legislatures and any other authorities making **election-related decisions** during an emergency should ensure a transparent and consultative decision-making process, inclusive of all political parties. This is particularly important in decision-making regarding possible changes to the electoral calendar. Rules allowing for special voting arrangements, online electoral communication and remote electoral observation should also be adopted with the largest possible consensus. To favour confidence, measures should be taken before the next emergency hits to strengthen the integrity of special voting arrangements, particularly those able to facilitate the participation of historically marginalized groups.

Democratic institutions should adopt **digital technologies** as part of their normal mode of functioning, to pivot more easily to remote operations when a crisis makes it necessary. Digital technologies can also boost the inclusivity of legislative processes at all times, and make the work of parliaments and courts more transparent and more efficient.

Finally, in countries with **multi-level governance structures**, constitutional provisions on shared-rule and self-rule matters related to emergency preparedness and response should be reviewed to mitigate challenges related to overlapping jurisdiction, clarify the distribution of powers, and strengthen both vertical and horizontal inter-governmental coordination.

A CASE IN POINT: REPUBLIC OF KOREA

In April 2020, the Republic of Korea became the first country to hold national elections during the COVID-19 pandemic, and a shining example of electoral good practice. The elections were carefully planned through extensive consultations between the National Election Commission, the Ministries of Health and Interior, and National Centers for Disease Control. Strict protocols and sufficient protective equipment were put in place, and special voting procedures were developed to allow for increased social distancing at voting stations. Well-informed voters turned out in the highest number in three decades, and no new COVID-19 cases were reported to have been directly linked to the elections.

“It is necessary to invest in and update the infrastructure for digital technology to make sure this mode of interaction works well, is inclusive, and increases institutions’ resilience when an emergency comes”

Ted Piccone, Chief Engagement Officer, World Justice Project

A CASE IN POINT: BRAZIL

In Brazil, the National Congress quickly transformed itself at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to allow for remote work. The highly qualified in-house digital team was a key factor in such transition. The National Congress was able to provide oversight over the government and pass legislation, through virtual sessions where they approved decrees, put legislative pressure and created a mixed committee to monitor the actions of the government. They legislated quickly over a number of issues, such as telemedicine and school meals distribution, overturned different vetoes issued by President Bolsonaro and closely scrutinized the financial aspects of the government’s pandemic response.

their definitions of grounds for emergency declarations adequately reflect the critical risks of the 21st century; and whether constitutional provisions for emergencies provide sufficient safeguards to mitigate the risks of abuse of emergency powers.

Institutions pertaining to all three powers of the state should comply with **international legal obligations and human rights standards** at all times in emergency response. Derogations from rights protected by ratified treaties should be notified timely, and any measure restricting human rights must be necessary, proportionate, temporary, rooted in the law, and applied with equality.

The domestic **legal framework for emergencies** must be clear, accessible and publicly available in advance. If it allows for several levels of emergency, the differences between them – as to causes, extraordinary powers, and oversight mechanisms – should also be clear. The State should always opt for the least radical emergency level available to meet the circumstances at hand, and define emergency measures with strict consideration for the principles of proportionality and necessity. All emergency measures should have sunset clauses; and the legal framework for emergencies should outline a clear process for the phasing-down of emergency powers. Governments should refrain from attempting to embed extraordinary responses to large-scale emergencies in flexibly-framed ordinary legislation, as this carries the risk of a long-lasting erosion of checks and balances and fundamental rights, and concentration of power in the Executive.

It is also essential that emergency situations do not permanently tilt the balance of powers or damage the rule of law. Parliaments must ensure that all state institutions intended to oversee executive power are provided with enough political, legal and human resources to perform their duties.

2

Protect checks and balances, fundamental rights and the rule of law

It is fundamental that democracies be sufficiently robust, in their legal and institutional frameworks, to allow for prompt executive decision-making in emergencies while preventing the use of emergency powers to weaken democracy, permanently erode checks and balances, or infringe on fundamental rights and the rule of law. To this effect, **constitutional frameworks** should be reviewed to assess whether

“Parliaments must not be sidelined during emergencies. Having a permanent cross-party committee on emergencies, with rules of procedure that allow it to sit, can work to provide oversight over the government’s emergency responses”

Martin Chungong, Secretary General, Inter-Parliamentary Union

The constitutional and legal framework for emergencies must guarantee **parliamentary oversight** over emergency measures. Special parliamentary committees should be established or activated, and flexible procedures should be adopted, to swiftly oversee the actions of the executive during an emergency. Post-crisis parliamentary commissions should also be set up to assess at length the country’s response. To facilitate that work, governments should ensure meticulous record-keeping, by an independent third-party, throughout emergency response. Parliamentary oversight structures should also feature a diverse set of legislators, from all political parties and with ethnic and gender balance, and they should have a mandate to protect transparency, equity and gender responsiveness.

Strengthening **judicial oversight** over emergency measures is also critical. Courts should review the constitutionality and legality of state of emergency declarations and emergency measures, and evaluate their necessity, proportionality and procedural fairness. Rapid assessments mechanisms should be

considered to allow swift oversight while the lengthier, regular legal review processes are carried out.

Democratic institutions should buttress the **independence of the judiciary**, to prevent executive overreach and co-optation. Judicial bodies should also review the rules of standing to ensure that citizens, civil society organizations and independent institutions can bring issues of executive overreach and inaction to court.

While they are not democratic institutions per se, **civil society and the media** also have a crucial role to play in scrutinizing government action during emergency situations. Governments must ensure that access to information continues unhindered through emergency response. This includes publicizing official

A CASE IN POINT: AUSTRALIA

In April 2020, the Australian Senate established a Select Committee on COVID-19 to oversee the government’s response to the pandemic. The Committee’s effectiveness at scrutinizing government action and engaging with citizens shows the importance of legislative oversight in emergencies. In its first six months, the Committee received 463 submissions, held 35 public hearings (online), and submitted hundreds of questions to government agencies. Its influence was felt in key pieces of COVID-19 legislation, including laws on contact tracing and employment support.

“The rise in citizen discontent makes it imperative to protect checks and balances during emergencies, and the best way to do so is to strengthen judiciary institutions, in particular constitutional courts”

Danilo Türk, President of Slovenia (2007-2012), President of Club de Madrid

A CASE IN POINT: GERMANY

The judicial system, from regional administrative and constitutional courts to the federal Constitutional Court, has provided effective oversight over COVID-19 response in Germany. Strict measures taken by the Länder and federal government to contain the pandemic in its early phases, triggered a large number of judicial challenges. In 2020 only, over 6000 cases had been registered. As of March 2021, the Constitutional Court had received 321 constitutional complaints related to the COVID-19 measures and resolved 273 of them. The Courts' decisions have respected the imperative of swift executive action to contain the pandemic, while ensuring that the measures taken continue to abide by fundamental rights.

documents describing their course of action, enabling virtual meetings with government representatives, and creating communication channels for civil society to request information about the emergency response.

Finally, governments should **avoid the militarization of emergency responses**. Deploying the military to enforce emergency measures or using military surveillance technology to monitor compliance, for instance, increases the risk of human rights violations related to the disproportionate use of force. It may also undermine the principle of civilian control over the security sector, and risk destabilizing nascent democracies, particularly in conflict-affected and transitioning states.

3**Pre-empt and counter disinformation**

Restoring information integrity in the new digital environment is a titanic task. Many more emergencies are likely to happen before the challenges of the platform-driven information ecosystem are resolved. There are, however, a number of actions that political leaders and democratic institutions can take to limit the damage of information bankruptcy in the face of future emergencies.

Governments should take affirmative action to **fill the information space** with facts and evidence about the crisis, lest disinformation takes first-mover advantage. They should make official information about the emergency available in multiple formats and languages, and particularly target specific audiences, including those – like young people, vulnerable minorities and the elderly – who may be particularly vulnerable to disinformation. This can be done by working in collaboration with civil society and community actors, to reach out to citizens through their trusted proximity channels; and by making effective use of the opportunities offered by digital technologies for swift, direct communication.

Governments should also **encourage other credible actors**, beyond their own spokespersons, to fill the news space throughout the emergency. **Edelman's** data shows that the perceived credibility of international organizations like the World Health Organization has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Giving

“Protecting the rule of law and the principle of equality before the law is fundamental for democratic resilience during and outside of emergency situations. This requires strengthening the independence of the judicial power and preventing its co-optation by power-hungry political leaders”

Jorge Fernando Quiroga, President of Bolivia (2001-2002)

“Unless measures are taken, the confusion between facts and disinformation among citizens will be the biggest challenge for governments around the world in facing future emergencies”

Maria Ressa, CEO and President of Rappler Inc, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

A CASE IN POINT: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Because many communities in Africa have a strong cultural tradition of storytelling and oral communication, countries such as Zambia, Mali, and Uganda have used radio to share accurate information about the pandemic. In some regions in Chad, traditional storytellers have shared messages about COVID-19. Several studies about the 2014 Ebola epidemic in West Africa emphasized the importance of engaging with community leaders, including religious leaders, to help spread key messages to curb the spread of the disease.

more prominence to the briefings offered by these organizations in the national news space – eg. on national television during prime time – can help facts prevail over disinformation. Supporting **responsible journalism and media**, by enabling a free and safe environment for information professionals during emergency situations, can also help make sure that high-quality information and analysis reaches citizens.

Citizens have a responsibility to improve their **information hygiene**, but public authorities must help them on. During a crisis, this translates into the imperative to create, or support independent third-parties to create tools to debunk mis- and disinformation about the crisis. Governments must also work with social

Disinformation vs freedom of speech in emergency situations: Finding the right balance when fake news can cost lives

During the COVID-19 pandemic, **more than half the countries** in the world restricted freedom of expression, alluding to a need to limit the spread of pandemic-related disinformation. In some cases, this was done within the limits of the law, as part of genuine attempts to limit the spread of unscientific information that could have induced citizens to adopt behaviors that would put their own or others' health at risk. In other cases, however, restrictions were used to harass and arrest journalists, close down news sites, and silence civil society, limiting the space for any criticism of the government's response to the pandemic.

Where should democracies draw the line?

- Restrictions on freedom of expression should be minimal, and any sanctions related to the spread of fake news should be defined with utmost consideration for the principle of proportionality. The circulation of information about an emergency enables public debate and allows for public scrutiny over government action.
- Governments should counter disinformation by filling the information space with facts, science and readily-accessible information about prevention and response measures.

A CASE IN POINT: CZECH REPUBLIC

In the Czech Republic, the circulation of disinformation promoted by pro-Russian actors is a long-standing problem that intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic. To help limit the spread of disinformation, a group of communications professionals set up the **Nelez** initiative. Together with business and civil society partners, they developed a methodology to identify disinformation websites, which they list on their webpage. They also notify companies who advertise on these websites that their brand may be linked to disinformation, which may jeopardize their own reputation; and they help advertisers prevent their ads from appearing on disinformation websites, thereby blocking the flow of financial resources going to their websites.

“Increasing citizens’ digital literacy is the way to make sure they know where to go to get facts instead of fake news”

Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand (1999-2008)

media platforms and technology experts, as well as civil society organizations and human rights experts, to devise solutions, within the boundaries of freedom of expression, to stop or slow down the “viralisation” of harmful content and content that has been found to be false. Political parties and traditional media could also contribute to a healthier media environment by adopting codes of conduct committing to reduce polarization and adopt preventive action against disinformation.

Public investment in **information awareness and digital literacy training**, through direct government action or civil society partnerships, can also help foster more responsible information behaviour on the part of citizens. While these are often conceived as long-term objectives, the experience of successful digital literacy projects targeting opinion-shapers during COVID-19, such as **IREX’s**, has shown that they also bring results in the heat of a crisis.

4

Rethink institutional design for participation

One positive democratic development observed during the COVID-19 pandemic is the growing appetite for **civic engagement in decision-making**, and the growing potential offered by digital technologies to feed that appetite. Democratic institutions should build upon the numerous digital platforms and tools developed during the COVID-19 pandemic to create new, wider channels for interaction with civil society, during and outside of emergency situations. In preparation for future emergencies, they should establish permanent mechanisms for public dialogue about critical risks, preventive action and preparedness. Groups who are most likely to be affected by future emergencies – such as vulnerable minorities and those living in disaster-prone areas – should be part of that process.

Having societal input into policy-making is particularly important when there are **rights dilemmas or new concepts of rights** that emerge as a result of the emergency. In the COVID-19 pandemic, the right to privacy came into sharp focus, as it was contraposed to public safety. Freedom of speech, and the limits that can reasonably be imposed upon it to preserve information integrity and prevent life-threatening disinformation, was also cast in a new light. Political institutions and policy-making processes should be redesigned to facilitate and incentivize citizen input into this type of issues, and make decision-making more inclusive, responsive and accountable.

A CASE IN POINT: FINLAND

In both 2020 and 2021, the Ministries of Justice and Finance of Finland worked together with the Timeout Foundation, the Dialogue Academy and Sitra to organize the “Lockdown Dialogues”, a series of 232 dialogues over 9 days, in which over 1600 people from across Finland discussed their experience of the pandemic and the response measures taken by the government. Their observations were compiled to provide the Finnish government with a better understanding of the impact of the pandemic in Finnish society. “The Lockdown Dialogues have been very valuable to us in the Ministry of Finance. Through them, we have received important information that can be used, for example, in COVID-19 preparedness work, governance policy guidance and the confidence assessment on Finland conducted by the OECD”, highlighted a Ministry of Finance spokesperson.

Privacy vs public safety in emergency situations: Finding the right balance when lives are at stake

Questions around personal integrity and data protection were raised during the COVID-19 pandemic as countries introduced contact tracing apps to monitor citizens’ infections status, movement and contacts. Although these apps were more commonly introduced in democracies, issues such as compulsory use and data sharing between governments and app providers, posed serious democratic dilemmas. Contact-tracing apps that were introduced without a privacy policy – there were 19 of them – generated particular unease.

Where should democracies draw the line?

- The humanitarian community provides various models of principles and standards for privacy protection in critical situations. Measures that infringe on privacy online as offline, should be embedded in law, necessary and proportional. Citizens must be informed how their data will be treated.
- New legal frameworks may be necessary to guide data use, collection, analysis, storage and sharing in emergency situations.
- More civic awareness of online privacy issues is also recommended.



02

**Social
inclusion**

ANALYSIS³

COVID-19 hit a world that already was highly unequal in terms of wealth and income. According to the **World Inequality Report 2018**, at global level, the top 1 percent richest individuals captured twice as much growth as the bottom 50 percent between 1980 and 2017. At national level, income inequality has been increasing in nearly all countries, albeit at largely different rates, depending on tax, wage-setting and educational policy frameworks. In large parts of the world, enduring inequalities were limiting the possibilities for enjoyment of basic economic, social and cultural rights for large segments of the population. Prior to the pandemic, over **three billion** people lacked access to healthcare, and **75 percent** of workers – particularly among the world's 2 billion informal workers – were not covered by social protection. Women, indigenous peoples, minority groups and migrants predominated among those who were left out.

Most countries – with a few notable exceptions, mostly in Western Europe – had not adopted adequate frameworks to tackle these inequalities, nor to take them into consideration in emergency response. As a result, in late 2020, World Bank economists predicted an increase in inequality – as measured by the Gini index – ranging from **3.5 to 13.5 percent**, depending on the country and post-COVID recovery scenario. At the same time as the collective wealth of the world's billionaires grew by an estimated **3.9 trillion USD**, the equivalent of **255 million** full-time jobs were lost and around **100 million** people were pushed into extreme poverty. The effects of these inequalities were also felt health-wise: COVID-19 deaths have been **found** to be more correlated with inequality than with old age. Public health prevention measures, including frequent hand washing, testing, teleworking and avoiding public transportation, were impracticable for large segments of the population, including vulnerable communities and the working poor. Several of the lowest-paid jobs were found in essential services, exposing their workers to higher risk. In the US, age-adjusted hospitalization rates due to COVID-19 were **five times** higher for Black, Hispanic and Native Americans than for White people.

In numerous countries, the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on certain segments of the population

have created a sense of exclusion that many believe to be a critical and possibly enduring threat for democracy. Social exclusion, anxiety and uncertainty, combined with unmet vital needs, make for a favourable environment for democracy-degrading political movements to take root, from populism to authoritarian-leaning strongman leadership. The ability of democratic systems to deliver dividends for the people, and protect economic, social and cultural rights for all, is important in all circumstances – but it becomes particularly critical in situations of emergency that put extraordinary pressure on the lives and livelihoods of so many.

The scale of job and income loss during the pandemic has generated unprecedented demand for social protection, and most countries adopted some income-replacing measures. However, action has tended to be temporary and partial. According to the ILO's **Social Protection Report 2020-2022**, as of September 2021, only 47 per cent of the global population has access to at least one social protection benefit, while 53 per cent (4.1 billion people) obtains no income security at all from the state. Coverage varies widely between regions, with those regions with most democracies – Europe and the Americas – being above the global average; but gaps remain across the globe.

Increasing the ability of democratic systems to meet the needs of all citizens in emergency situations requires that more attention be paid to inclusive social development. Inclusive access to the pillars of equal opportunities -- education, healthcare, housing, decent work and social protection -- is widely thought to be fundamental for the resilience of democratic societies in future emergencies. So is the adoption of emergency response measures, including livelihood support mechanisms, that effectively meet the needs of all citizens, regardless of their socio-economic status, age, gender, language, race, religion or ethnicity.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, various proposals emerged for governments to move the needle on inequalities by adopting temporary fiscal levies on the rich to finance the costs of emergency response. Progressive civil society organizations, but also associations of wealthy individuals (like **Patriotic**

3. For more detailed analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social inclusion, please refer to the **Issues Paper prepared by Oxfam International** for Working Group 2 of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies.

“Addressing inequality has to be at the heart of building any culture of emergency preparedness”

Kaveh Zahedi, Deputy Executive Secretary, UN ESCAP

Millionaires and **Millionaires for Humanity**) and multilateral institutions such as the IMF, called for the adoption of wealth taxes, surcharges on personal or corporate income tax, and taxes on excess profits to pay for pandemic response. The OECD’s recent breakthrough in brokering a global agreement on a minimum corporate tax rate and tougher action against corporate fiscal evasion, avows an acknowledgement that the global tax system also needs a rebalancing between countries, and between corporations and citizens.

The potential for the corporate sector to contribute to democratic resilience in emergency situations is enormous. In countries around the world, COVID-19 has seen abundant examples of businesses who helped make COVID-19 response more inclusive by providing relief to vulnerable communities, through initiatives of their own or in alliance with public or community-based groups. Others used their innovation capacity to develop new solutions to pandemic-related problems, from protective equipment to digital platforms for public engagement. The growth in profits in numerous large companies during the pandemic – Oxfam **reports** that 32 of the world’s largest companies saw their profits increase by \$109 billion in 2020 – however suggests that there is still space to ask these companies for greater fiscal effort to meet the extraordinary demands of the crisis.

Increasingly, citizens are calling for the inequalities that the pandemic has amplified and evidenced to be redressed. A **Study of Key Protest Issues in the 21st Century** by Columbia University and Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung affirms that, despite lockdowns, the impact of COVID-19 on jobs and livelihoods has led to an increase in the number of protests demanding economic justice. With future emergencies looming, particularly

natural disasters and extreme weather events that are bound to become more frequent, or even recurrent, due to climate change, devising solutions for equity-enhancing emergency preparedness and response, and doing so quickly, becomes an imperative for democracy that delivers. This section presents our assessment of what solutions should be sought in priority, and how to go about achieving them.

COVID-19 pushed 100 million people into extreme poverty

Prior to the pandemic, over 3 billion people lacked access to healthcare

RECOMMENDATIONS

5

Adopt an equity-based approach to emergency response

A few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the Members of Club de Madrid adopted a declaration of **Principles for Equity during Global Crises**. They deemed that a principled approach, with equity at the center of decision-making related to public health, the economy, public discourse, political participation, and multilateralism, was necessary to guide an effective and equitable response to the COVID-19 crisis. When countries emerge from the pandemic, governments should use **post hoc oversight mechanisms** – such as national commissions – to assess how well their response to the COVID-19 pandemic performed against these principles. In future emergencies, having

an **oversight mechanism** – such as a parliamentary commission – review emergency measures with an equity lens, as the crisis unfolds, could also help detect and redress flaws and blind spots to make emergency response more equity-based.

The lessons drawn from the post-hoc analysis of the equity dimension of COVID-19 response should also feed into revised emergency planning. Having **equity-sensitive national risk management and emergency preparedness plans**, aligned with overall strategies to reduce economic inequality, could go a long way to ensure that future emergency responses are mindful of the differentiated needs and possibilities of vulnerable communities, and allocate resources accordingly. Knowing the main pockets of vulnerability in the face of critical risks could also help guide preventive, equity-enhancing action before the next crisis hits.

6

Finance emergency response through progressive and effective fiscal frameworks

Numerous stakeholders, from Oxfam International to the IMF, have called for the adoption of **temporary fiscal levies** to cover the exceptional costs of emergency response during COVID-19. “National solidarity in the face of a universal threat like the pandemic requires the rich to contribute to the relief effort”, **writes** Yale Professor Daniel Markovits. While wealth taxes have been the most debated option, the IMF rather suggests that a surcharge on personal or corporate income tax, for the highest income levels, would be easiest to implement. A tax on excess profits has also been raised as an option to leverage a greater fiscal contribution from businesses who prosper during the crisis.

A CASE IN POINT: BANGLADESH

Only 13 percent of Bangladesh’s population of 165 million has regular internet access. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Bangladeshi government had set up a national telephone hotline – 333 – where citizens could receive critical information about public services and report social problems, free of charge. When COVID-19 erupted, government efforts to provide an equitable response, inclusive of citizens without internet access, led to the repurposing of hotline 333 first into a platform for self-reporting of COVID-19 symptoms, and then also to access telemedicine services, claim urgent food relief, handle commercial transactions, and access audio lessons for primary and secondary schools. The Bangladeshi government highlights this transformation as an example of innovation in public service delivery; it is also a shining example of public service delivery guided by a desire to serve all citizens.

A CASE IN POINT: ARGENTINA

In December 2020, the Argentinian Parliament signed off on the *Solidarity and Extraordinary Contribution of Great Fortunes Law*, which aimed to impose a one-off fiscal levy on the wealth of the richest 0.02 percent of the country's population, to finance COVID-19 response, relief and recovery measures. While similar wealth taxes were discussed in many jurisdictions, Argentina was the first country to adopt one. As of May 2021, the tax had raised 2.4 billion USD, or about 75 percent of the expected amount, from about 10,000 contributors. Many legal challenges are, however, questioning the constitutionality of the tax, leaving its fate in the hands of the courts.

Permanent progressive fiscal instruments would also indirectly contribute to collective resilience to future emergencies, by helping redress the economic inequalities that make the poorest individuals and communities so much more vulnerable than others to emergencies of all kinds. New taxes on capital and wealth, higher corporate taxes, and broader tax credits for the working poor, are among the solutions being called for. Strategic fiscal spending, aimed at boosting the resilience of the most vulnerable communities through social investment, would also be recommendable, and could be financed through innovative instruments such as resilience bonds.

Increasing governments' tax collection capacity also requires strong legal frameworks, policy instruments and a genuine commitment on the part of leaders to make **effective tax collection** a priority and invest resources in the prevention of tax evasion and fraud. Fiscal frameworks related to extractive industries, in particular, should ensure that the benefits of natural resource exploitation fully and transparently feed into collective well-being. Increased domestic and international efforts to **prevent and combat corruption** are also fundamental, particularly in emergency circumstances, where reduced controls on government spending open up additional opportunities for corruption. Overall, we call on governments to pay more attention to **good governance** in fiscal, budgetary and financial policy development and implementation. Stronger international instruments on corruption, such as the UN Convention against Corruption and the existing proposal for an International Anti-Corruption Court, should be given serious consideration.

Finally, new and more agile mechanisms are needed to redress **international imbalances in preparedness and response capacity** ahead of future emergencies. Improved mechanisms for the frontloading of help, both financial and material, are needed. The international community, under the leadership of the IMF, the World

Bank, the multilateral development banks and the G20, must stand ready to utilize instruments (such as Special Drawing Rights) in ways that benefit low- and middle-income countries quickly and significantly, right at the onset of any future emergencies. Countries that have committed to spend 0.7 per cent of their gross national income on development assistance to low- and middle-income countries should also honour their commitment, and ensure that their development assistance budgets are aligned with locally-identified needs for greater resilience to critical risks.

7

Build universal social protection and healthcare systems

During the COVID-19 pandemic, governments around the world scrambled to quickly broaden the reach of their social protection systems, as lockdowns deprived millions of their livelihoods. While laudable, these efforts had gaps. In developed and developing countries alike, incomplete social registries and insufficient administrative capacity resulted in delays or exclusion from benefits for millions of citizens in need. Informal workers were also left out of these schemes, if these were contribution-based. To avoid these issues in future emergencies, governments should strive to build **universal social protection systems**, combining contribution-based schemes with rights-based instruments, and coupled with complete population registries and sufficient administrative capacity. The COVID-19 pandemic has opened a policy window that governments can use to strengthen their social protection systems, building on the

“Social protection networks reduce social uncertainty in the face of upheaval and are also important for the sustainability of democracy”

Kevin Casas-Zamora, Secretary-General of International IDEA,
Vice-President of Costa Rica (2006-2007)

extraordinary instruments they adopted during the crisis. The ILO’s social security standards, including the **Social Protection Floors Recommendation of 2012**, are an internationally agreed framework that governments can use as a guide towards that objective.

Building **universal public health systems** should be another, complementary goal. In addition to universal access to healthcare, with limited out-of-pocket payments, governments must ensure that the quality of care is equitable and appropriate to respond to the needs of women and girls, ethnic and religious groups, LGBTQi populations, minorities and migrants. For maximum resilience to future emergencies, investments in resilient healthcare infrastructure and human resources should also be considered, together with flexibility mechanisms for their geographic redistribution when emergencies create local pockets of need.

Ensuring that existing social protection and healthcare mechanisms have **strong contingency plans** to continue functioning in various types of emergencies should be another objective. Having nimble channels for

A CASE IN POINT: THAILAND

Thailand’s relative ability to contain the COVID-19 pandemic has been widely applauded - and it has been attributed to enduring investment in healthcare infrastructure and qualified healthcare personnel. Thailand’s strategic investments in healthcare can be traced as far back as the 1960-1975 National Health Development Plan, and culminated with achievement of universal health coverage in 2002. The experience of past decades, captured in strategic preparedness plans for health risks, has also played a key role in Thailand’s success.

the routine delivery of social benefits, such as digitalized or mobile cash transfer, has been **shown** valuable during the COVID-19 crisis. The capacity to scale up quickly, and reassess entitlements in a timely manner in the face of rapidly evolving circumstances, is also fundamental to offer protection to new beneficiaries.

A CASE IN POINT: SPAIN

The enormous impact of lockdowns on jobs and livelihoods in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Spanish government to accelerate the adoption, in May 2020, of a new instrument of social protection: a minimum living wage, accessible for all persons residing in Spain whose wealth and income are below established thresholds. Spain had been the last country in the Eurozone without this type of social support. When fully implemented, the minimum living wage is expected to benefit about 850,000 households, or 2.3 million people, about 40 percent of whom were in situation of extreme poverty.

Countries like Bolivia, Cabo Verde and Timor Leste have shown that, with political will, universal healthcare and social protection is within reach for middle- and low-income countries. Fiscal space exists, even in the poorest countries, to mobilize domestic resources for rights-based social protection schemes. In the poorest countries, however, concerted international support is essential to fast-track progress. Drawing on the successful example of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis, the proposal for a **Global Fund for Social Protection** points the way forward to combine international support with domestic resource mobilization. Officially mandated by the International Labour Conference to pursue this idea, the ILO also counts on the support of UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who endorsed the proposal in his report on **Our Common Agenda**.

Governments from all countries should work with the ILO to define practical, effective and fair operational modalities to make the Fund a reality.

8

Ensure that emergency response meets the needs of vulnerable minorities

Economic inequalities are an important driver of social exclusion and heightened vulnerability in the face of emergency situations – but they are not the only one. The COVID-19 pandemic has put in sharp relief the relevance of other intersecting factors associated with greater vulnerability, starting with racial, ethnic or religious identities. Migrants, persons with disabilities, elderly persons and persons in situation of homelessness are also particularly vulnerable in emergencies of various kinds. Because decision-makers lack information and awareness on the conditions and needs of minorities who are under-represented in decision-making structures, emergency response measures too often fail to meet their needs, and may even result in a roll-back of their rights.

To prevent this situation, it is primordial that governments put in place information-gathering systems to map the basic conditions and needs of vulnerable minorities, as well as the impact an emergency situation has or could have on them. **Disaggregated data** would help channel preventive action as well as emergency response efforts to these communities, and frame them in the most effective way given their lived reality.

When an emergency hits, **oversight bodies** (like parliaments) should also review emergency response measures with a rights-based approach, to ensure that they do not occasion a **roll-back of rights** for vulnerable minorities, directly or indirectly by favoring **discrimination**. The **Flagship Report** of the Pathfinders Grand Challenge on Inequality and Exclusion suggests, for instance, that broad-based support programmes in sectors that benefit vulnerable minorities are preferable to programmes that target households based on identity, because the latter risk reinforcing

discriminatory perceptions and provoking backlash. It is also important to monitor the distribution of emergency relief services and the enforcement of emergency-related restrictions, to prevent resources from being diverted away from essential services for vulnerable communities, as well as negligent or prejudiced actions in emergency response on the part of public administrations and law enforcement agencies.

Governments and other democratic institutions should also develop specific strategies and operational instruments for **communicating with vulnerable minorities** during emergency situations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, language, cultural and trust barriers made it difficult for many public authorities' mainstream outreach campaigns on COVID-19 prevention to reach vulnerable minority groups. Having dedicated communication tools and channels – such as informative brochures in multiple languages, or online briefings directed at specific communities – may help breach that gap.

Finally, as civil society organizations are often the best monitors of, and advocates for, the needs of vulnerable minorities, governments should make every effort to **empower civil society organizations** to continue

A CASE IN POINT: OTTAWA (CANADA)

Ottawa Public Health is the municipal public health agency of Canada's capital, a diverse city where roughly 24 percent of residents are foreign-born and 2 percent are from indigenous communities. Ottawa Public Health's strategic approach to service delivery has a health equity objective, and particularly strives to offer equitable protection for under-served populations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Ottawa Public Health's communications team rose to national fame thanks to an inclusive approach that used humour, sincerity and human connection to educate and inform their citizens. The agency's website, social media posts and online engagement platforms all featured resources and live events in multiple languages, some of which were particularly tailored for indigenous communities, African, Caribbean and Black communities, and Somali communities, among others, and organized in collaboration with community associations.

their activities with these communities in emergency situations. To this effect, governments should reinforce the infrastructure that civil society needs to operate in the challenging context of an emergency, through short-term support measures such as emergency funding, tax exemptions and administrative flexibility. Governments should also enhance and use the relationship that civil society organizations have with vulnerable minorities, partnering with them in needs assessment, outreach and communications efforts.

9

Encourage corporate social responsibility in emergency response

A key lesson to draw from the COVID-19 pandemic is that the impact of an emergency on private companies can be as varied as its impact on individuals. While many companies were struggling to keep afloat, relying on emergency support funds, others have seen their business flourish during the crisis. In both groups, examples of good and bad practices of corporate social responsibility emerged, pointing to one key observation: the corporate sector is an important actor in emergency response, and should be encouraged to approach this role with the **highest standard of corporate social responsibility**, building on the examples of those companies that put their resources and know-how to the service of their community during the pandemic.

An essential principle of corporate social responsibility in emergency situations should be that any **emergency support funds** channelled to a private company come with an obligation of responsibility. Governments should impose a moratorium on executive bonuses and shareholder payouts for large companies that have received publicly-funded financial support to weather the crisis. Governments should also ensure that targeted economic stimulus programmes are also channelled to small and medium businesses and the self-employed, in ways that allow them to protect jobs. Whatever the support, these smaller corporate actors should also be held to the highest standards of transparency in the use of the public funds received.

A CASE IN POINT: FROM NEW YORK (US) TO JHARKHAND (INDIA)

Soon after the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, New-York based stock market **Nasdaq** announced a \$6 million donation in support of a more inclusive and effective response. The money supported small business owners through the Opportunity Fund, offered meals to vulnerable communities through the World Central Kitchen's #ChefsForAmerica campaign, and encouraged citizens to be COVID-smart by offering free advertising time for public service messages on the Nasdaq MarketSite Tower in Times Square. Meanwhile, in Jharkhand, steel manufacturer **Tata Steel** launched a ten-point corporate social responsibility programme to combat COVID-19. Beyond providing meals to vulnerable communities and cloth masks to frontline workers, Tata Steel has also engaged with the local administration in East Singhbhum to set-up a Civil Society Coordination Cell to help with data collection and analysis to identify gaps in COVID-response in the district. Both Nasdaq and Tata Steel's responses stand out for addressing multiple dimensions of the crisis, and supporting governance aspects as well as resource distribution.

The **2021 Edelman Trust Barometer** reveals an appetite, on the part of citizens, for business leaders to play a greater role in society: 68 per cent believe that CEOs should step in when government does not solve societal problems. In emergency situations where the government's capacity to respond is overstretched, this calls for **greater corporate contributions** to relief efforts. Business leaders should step forward, as many have done during the pandemic, to provide solutions to emergency-related problems, with both a business perspective and a social responsibility perspective. Governments should create incentives – such as matching funding programmes or brand acknowledgements – for corporate social responsibility programmes aimed at responding to an ongoing emergency or building resilience to future ones.

“The internet has been influencing our societies very profoundly, but unfortunately, there is a great divide between developed and developing countries. This disparity is a cause of great concern, and closing the digital gap is essential to deal with future emergencies”

Han Seung-soo, Prime Minister of the Korea (2008-2009)

10

Bridge the digital divide

Finally, digital technologies rapidly expanded as instruments of resilience to the perturbations occasioned by the COVID-19 pandemic in professional, educational, commercial and social activity. In that process, the **dynamics of exclusion related to the digital divide** were also more keenly felt. Citizens who lacked access to digital devices and internet services had fewer options for online education, online access to public services, and information and communication during the pandemic. The possibility to participate in public affairs – get information about elections and voting, or monitor government emergency responses – was also severely limited. Among those with digital access, lower rates of digital literacy and skills also hampered effective access to valuable public information and heightened vulnerability to disinformation.

This has given rise to numerous calls for governments to make every effort to **bridge the digital divide** between their citizens, as a resilience-building measures for future emergencies. Expanding connectivity infrastructure, guaranteeing a basic digital basket (eg. a device and connection package) for every household, enhancing access to digital financial services, and providing digital literacy support, including for elderly citizens, have been mentioned as necessary avenues to make digital technologies an instrument of resilience for all in future emergency situations.

A CASE IN POINT: CHILE

The closure of schools and subsequent pivot to online learning in March 2020 in Chile left hundreds of thousands of students from poor households and remote rural areas without effective access to education. To remedy that situation, the Chilean Ministry of Education implemented a series of measures aimed at bridging the digital gap. It distributed computers with internet access to 125,000 scholarship students, and reached agreements with two internet service providers (Movistar and Entel) to extend free internet access to an additional group of 110,000 students who already held state-sponsored devices. The lack of internet connectivity in certain remote areas, however, remained a barrier and the Ministry had to complement the provision of digital resources with the distribution of printed educational material to some 240,000 additional students.

The **digital divide between countries** also merits greater consideration. In the COVID-19 pandemic, digital technologies were fundamental not only for individual resilience, but also for the resilience of democratic institutions and the continued delivery of social services (including social protection, healthcare and education). Fostering access to digital connectivity in all countries would help build our global, collective resilience.



03

**Effective
leadership
& democratic
culture**

ANALYSIS⁴

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic was a shock for the ability of democratic governments to meet the needs of their citizens. In addition to bringing about a spike in demand for healthcare and social benefits, the pandemic also disrupted the operational set-up for the delivery of most public services, from education to public transit and administrative services. The challenge of weighing public health concerns against individual rights and economic considerations added an extra layer of complexity. In that context, governments' ability to maintain the enduring support of their citizens has depended heavily on their ability to lead effectively through emergency response and foster a strong democratic culture in their country.

Citizens' trust in political leaders and public institutions, as measured by opinion surveys, is an indicator of the health of the relationship between political leaders and citizens – and another fundamental element of democratic societies that was ailing long before the COVID-19 pandemic began. The failure of public authorities to protect the economic interests of large segments of the population in the global financial crisis of 2008 has been **singled out** as the starting point for what **UN Secretary-General** Antonio Guterres has called a *global trust deficit disorder*. The **2020 Edelman Trust Barometer** points to a number of factors fuelling this trend: a growing sense of inequity and unfairness, dynamics of social exclusion, corruption, citizens' concerns about their own economic future, and the rise of disinformation and polarization in the new information ecosystem.

The onset of COVID-19 pandemic prompted an initial “rally around the flag” effect. By May 2020, citizens' trust in governments around the world had increased **12 points**, making governments the most trusted institution for the first time in 20 years. A year later, however, all the gained ground was lost again. Trust in news sources also hit record lows. According to the **2021 Edelman Trust Barometer**, more than half of the population believes that journalists and government leaders are deliberately trying to mislead them. The lack of trust is affecting the success of pandemic response, by undermining confidence in and willingness

to comply with public health measures, including mask wearing and vaccination.

In healthy democracies, where an open media environment and a basic level of civic education enable citizens to bestow their trust judiciously, effective and ethical leadership is fundamental to build and maintain trust. In that sense, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a litmus test for political leadership.

Government leaders have been faced with the imperative to make decisions with far-reaching implications on the basis of imperfect and incomplete information, in compressed timeframes that significantly reduce the possibility to consult other political actors, including parliament, opposition parties and civil society. Emergency powers, adopted in **109 countries**, gave them legal cover to act alone, but that does not make decisions easy. Instances of policy reversal have been numerous – such as on **mask-wearing** or on the use of **hydroxychloroquine** for COVID-19 prevention – as new evidence emerged or new opinions (including from judicial oversight mechanisms) weighed in.

The pandemic has also heightened the challenge of public communications. In circumstances of high uncertainty and social anxiety, public leaders have had to compete for information space with what the **IPPPR** has dubbed a *global infodemic*, that is, the rapid and uncontrolled spread of information, misinformation and disinformation. Transparency and empathy have been **found** crucial for the effectiveness of pandemic-related communications. Incoherence and contradictions in messaging, however, have been a common cause of confusion among citizens, particularly as they revealed a lack of coordination in both policy and messaging between public administrations, whether different agencies or different levels of government.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore the role of science in policy-making. Beyond showcasing the importance of evidence-based decision-making, it has also brought scientists and public health experts into the public spotlight. While their advisory

⁴. For more detailed analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on trust, leadership and democratic culture, please refer to the **Issues Paper prepared by Club de Madrid with Edelman** for Working Group 3 of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies.

role is undeniably important, political analysts have **warned** of the dangers of masking the political nature of decision-making on emergency response, and confusing citizens as to the locus of accountability.

The role of citizens and civil society organizations in policy-making has also been significantly altered during the pandemic. As **152 countries** adopted measures that restricted freedom of assembly, civic space was severely curtailed; and the concentration of power in the hands of the Executive under State of Emergency declarations has further reduced the possibilities for civic engagement in policy-making processes. Nevertheless, not all forms of civic expression have been halted. **Protests** have continued despite lockdowns, and digital technologies have opened up new online spaces for civic engagement, from virtual town hall meetings to the web-based crowdsourcing of policy ideas. Participatory mechanisms, such as citizen assemblies, have been used in several jurisdictions to bring citizens' input into fundamental questions related to emergency response; and while they remain experimental and embryonic, they have shown their value to build common ground from the bottom up when public trust is under strain.

Rebuilding trust after COVID-19, and maintaining it through crises to come, will require every institution to play its part. There are, however, a series of actions that only political leaders can take, now and when the next crisis hits, to protect and rebuild trust through effective and ethical leadership. The following section presents our recommendations of what actions should be considered most essential, and how to go about engraining them in policy-making systems and leadership structures before the next emergency hits.

Roughly 34% of protests between February 2020 and January 2021 were related to COVID-19

RECOMMENDATIONS

11

Be prepared

Despite the existence of multiple recommendations on emergency preparedness, such as the OECD's 2014 Recommendation on the Governance of Critical Risks, the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that most countries were not prepared to handle an emergency of that magnitude. It is incumbent upon political leaders to elevate **emergency preparedness** on the political agenda, as well as in civic awareness. National structures for emergency preparedness, whether polyvalent or risk-specific, and the reports they periodically produce, must command more attention from political leaders and citizens alike.

Executive leaders should ensure that their government has a **coherent strategy** for emergency risk management

– one that assigns clear leadership for preparedness to various types of critical risks, defines decision-making structures in emergency response, considers the views of multiple stakeholders (including representatives of specific demographic groups, such as women and youth), and plans for appropriate administrative and financial arrangements for the continuity of essential services in the event of an emergency. Contingency plans, including national emergency stocks, must be reviewed periodically. Cross-party consensus on preparedness is also fundamental to ensure the strategy is taken forward through electoral cycles.

To make sure future emergency preparedness strategies build on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic, governments should consider using **post hoc oversight and policy learning mechanisms**. Post hoc commissions on emergency response, whether independent or embedded in parliament, have shown on numerous occasions their value to improve preparedness. International platforms for cooperation on emergency preparedness could also help countries

“Emergency preparedness and response should be elevated to the highest levels of government, with the mandate to drive whole-of-government coordination for both”

Helen Clark, Prime Minister of New Zealand (1999–2008)

A CASE IN POINT: NIGERIA

The lessons learned from the ebola crisis underpinned emergency preparedness in numerous countries across West Africa. In Nigeria, a strong risk management strategy has been identified as a key factor for the effective containment of COVID-19 in the early phases of the pandemic. Monitoring and risk assessment structures began operating long before the first national case was reported. Testing facilities were upgraded, isolation centres were habilitated, medical supplies were pre-positioned, and healthcare personnel were trained on case management. The first public health advisory was disseminated on traditional and social media nearly a month before the pandemic reached the country; and policy coordination structures, including a presidential taskforce, were put in place. While the lengthy duration of the pandemic and vaccine inequity have blurred the benefits of preparedness and early action, there is no doubt that it shielded Nigeria in the first months.

A CASE IN POINT: THE US

After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the US Congress mandated an independent, bipartisan commission to review the circumstances surrounding the attacks, including preparedness and immediate response, and formulate recommendations to increase security against future attacks. Composed of five Republicans and five Democrats, supported by expert staff, the 9/11 Commission held nineteen days of public hearings, over 1200 interviews, and reviewed thousands of classified and non-classified reports. Its report, published in 2004, led to a major reform of the US national security bureaucracy, including the creation of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the creation of a National Counterterrorism Center, and a new blueprint for cooperation between the CIA and the FBI.

learn from each other's experience and evolve towards common practices, building on the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030.

Preparedness plans should also address the respective roles of **national vs. local governments** in emergency response. While national authorities must play a necessary role of coordination in national or transnational emergency situations, empowering local governments with the necessary competences and resources to make and implement decisions on emergency response is also necessary. In emergency situations where the level of risk varies within the geography of a country, local administrations are an essential partner for evidence gathering, policy making and service delivery. This requires strong and healthy pre-existing intra-governmental coordination and communication structures.

12

Lead with facts and decisiveness

A key learning from the COVID-19 pandemic is the imperative for **quick action** at the onset of an emergency situation. **Questions** that have arisen regarding democracy's ability to face critical situations as effectively as autocracies take their origin in the usually lengthy processes of consultation and deliberation surrounding decision-making in democratic systems. In order to respond quickly, democratic leaders must be attentive to warning signs of an impending emergency and stand ready to gather facts and advice quickly, so that their policy responses can be agile and based on the best **evidence** available. Setting up a close **advisory structure** – or activating it, if it already exists – is essential to get a good view of thematic and institutional matters surrounding the impending crisis.

An early priority for executive leaders in emergency response must be to define a clear hierarchy of **policy objectives**. Drawing up timelines for policy response, assessing costs, identifying financing mechanisms, and verifying the legality of various policy options, are all elements of decision-making that must be considered very early on. In federal systems, where national leaders face the additional challenge of leading policy coordination across government levels, the early set-up or activation of policy coordination structures is also fundamental.

In order to avoid the political bickering over emergency response, and ensure broad support for the measures to be taken, executive leaders must also make a point to openly **consult parliament, opposition parties and social actors** early on, and regularly as the situation progresses. While this is important in all democracies, it is most crucial in countries with a bi-partisan or otherwise heavily polarized political environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that parliaments, in particular, have been able to respond quickly with flexible arrangements to provide multi-party input and oversight over executive action.

13

Communicate with truth and empathy

When a crisis erupts, political leaders must be quick to **fill the news space with facts**, reporting what is known, however little that may be, before rumours and disinformation gain the high ground. They must have the courage to **talk straight**, and regularly share honest information with citizens. They must not be afraid to explain complex situations, and be transparent about the information and advice underpinning their decisions. Clearly stating the specific policy objectives towards which their decisions tend will also help citizens understand the measures taken. But leaders must also be transparent about what they don't know, and prepare the public for the possibility that they may change course if new evidence points to a new policy direction.

In communicating their policy decisions on crisis response, leaders must **empathize** with and address people's fears. Proximity communication – engaging with citizens with evidence-based, yet clear and simple messages, through the same platforms they use to communicate with their community – can provide a fertile context for empathy. To increase the chances that the information they provide will be understood and perceived as trustworthy, political leaders must also build alliances with trusted third-parties – scientific advisors, like those who came into the spotlight during COVID-19, but also community leaders and business leaders. With business leaders standing

A CASE IN POINT: NEW ZEALAND

New Zealand is often mentioned as an example of effective leadership in the management of COVID-19, and its success is mainly attributed to the clarity of government communications. The Prime Minister of New Zealand, accompanied by the Director General of Health, have communicated firmly yet empathetically, in both formal briefings and informal live sessions on social media. Prime Minister Ardern's regular personal presence on social media, strong working relationship with the science community and willingness to answer questions are said to have been determinant for her success.

as the most trusted source of information in Edelman's latest Trust Barometer, working with them to amplify public messages could be an effective means to raise trust in the information that is shared.

Finally, leaders must also ensure that public institutions **speak with one voice**, transmitting clear and consistent messages. This – communicating both quickly and in a coordinated fashion when a crisis erupts – requires public institutions to be prepared with well-oiled structures for both policy and message coordination. Coordinating communications with advisory bodies, including those who may dissent with the policy decisions being taken, is also important to make sure that the data, trade-offs and arguments underpinning policy decisions are well explained to citizens.

“Leaders have to trust citizens’ capacity to understand complex situations, and be transparent about the objectives and reasons of policy measures”

Yves Leterme, Prime Minister of Belgium (2008, 2009–2011)

14

Build partnerships

Meeting the challenge of effective and inclusive public service delivery during an emergency requires governments at all levels to address business continuity as part of their emergency preparedness plans (see above). It also requires the state to have the capacity to respond to rapid surges in the demand for certain public services and/or to rapidly channel state resources to the most affected areas – an effort that requires close coordination with **local authorities**.

To that effect, political leaders must invest in building strong, long-term partnerships with other stakeholders. Business alliances are particularly suited to provide surge capacity for service delivery, and to foster rapid innovation for the development of new solutions to emergency-related problems. Businesses' capacity to rapidly develop **solutions** to COVID-19 challenges – from protective equipment to contact-tracing apps and vaccines – leaves us in no doubt of their essential role in crisis situations. Examples such as **Mauritius**, where two business associations closely coordinated with the government a series of actions in support of social protection and lockdown logistics, show the potential for corporate social responsibility to add value to emergency response. Governments must, however, place **transparency and due diligence** at the heart of their business relations, from procurement processes to data transfer.

The experience of COVID-19 has shown that **civil society** organizations are another critical partner in implementing crisis responses and delivering essential services. Community leaders – religious groups, grassroots groups, local radios or other locally influential figures – can also play an important role in the communication of policy responses, helping ensure that government messages speak to the people, in their cultural context. Drawing on civil society, based on healthy long-term partnerships, can help governments find an alternative to military intervention when the civil structure of the state needs extra support for the delivery of emergency services.

A CASE IN POINT: MAURITIUS

In Mauritius, the private sector was strongly involved in the COVID-19 response. Around 1200 local companies and the Chamber of Commerce coordinated actions with the Government to attend citizens by facilitating the making of food packs distributed by the Ministry of Social Security to families on the Social Register of Mauritius. They also ensured food supply chain continuity and contributed to devising the Work Access Permit and the alphabetical order strategy for shopping during the lockdown.

“We need to re-think top-down, centralized approaches to devolve more responsibility and capacity to local communities. This requires empowering citizens, building their capacity, and giving them more space for decision-making. Designed from below, coordinated and funded from above”

Samir Saran, President,
Observer Research Foundation

15

Open up civic space

Trust between citizens and institutions is best maintained if there is a two-way dialogue. In order to uphold citizens' trust, governments must be prepared to listen to citizens' ideas and trust their ability to contribute to problem-solving. In a crisis situation, this requires first and foremost that **restrictions on civic space** be limited to those strictly necessary – both in stringency and in duration – to address the risks at hand. It also requires governments to share information with citizens, openly, in disaggregated form, and through accessible channels.

A CASE IN POINT: UNITED KINGDOM

In May 2020, 4 UK NGOs convened a rapid online discussion with 28 members of the public – the 'Lockdown Debate' – to explore attitudes to the use of a COVID-19 contact tracing technology for transitioning out of lockdown. The project was deliberative, bringing together participants from a range of backgrounds. It provided participants with a space to discuss and understand different viewpoints, to learn about the subject matter and to reflect on a variety of views as they formed their own opinions. Over three weeks the participants assessed the evidence and debated and deliberated on the requirements that would make a government contact tracing app trusted and justified. Views evolved alongside the changing picture of the spread of the pandemic and the government response.

Giving a voice to civil society in emergency preparedness and emergency response is also recommendable to secure and maintain trust. While the imperative to respond quickly to an emerging crisis may require executive leaders to make early decisions behind closed doors, governments should create opportunities for social actors such as civil society organizations, business leaders, trade unions and other opinion-shapers to **participate in policy processes** at the earliest feasible opportunity, through briefings, hearings or participation in consultative structures. Digital technologies may afford

opportunities for informal, light-touch interactions with civil society throughout emergency response, as Finland showed through the real-time posting of emergency decrees on a [legal blog](#) to invite public scrutiny.

Direct **deliberation mechanisms** involving selected groups of citizens, like citizen assemblies, have also proven helpful in providing input into some mid- and long-term challenges posed by COVID-19, based on consensus that emerges from the bottom up. In the UK, for instance, the three-week [#LockDownDebate](#) initiative brought a group of 28 citizens to formulate recommendations on the requirements that would make a government contact tracing app trusted and justified for transitioning out of lockdown. While this type of deliberative structures can hardly be activated in the very early phase of emergency response, when quick and decisive executive action is needed, they can add value at later stages of emergency response and in emergency preparedness processes, as a complement to parliamentary deliberations. They will however work best if they are designed and institutionalized before a crisis hits. They must also include particular allowances to ensure the equitable participation of all segments of civil society, including women, young people and minority groups.

16

Foster responsible citizenship

Finally, governments also have a responsibility to help citizens engage as responsible agents of emergency response. In the heat of an emergency, this is best achieved through effective communication on how citizens should respond – with timely, specific, feasible and well-justified **recommendations on appropriate behaviours**. As the [Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency](#) puts it, governments must make it easy for citizens to do the right thing.

Countries that have a long track record of citizen-focused emergency preparedness efforts, such as Sweden and Japan, also emphasize the importance of **community engagement in emergency preparedness**. Periodic public communications on critical risks and public awareness activities such as emergency drills, are also useful to keep citizens informed about potential risks and help them assimilate their role in emergency

A CASE IN POINT: BHUTAN

With a population of 800,000 people and one single recorded death from COVID-19, Bhutan has been held as an example of good practice in the management of the pandemic, with good preparedness and an engaged citizenry as key factors of success. Preparedness efforts can be traced back to 2018, when the government set up a health emergency operations centre and a WHO emergency operations centre. In 2019, it upgraded the national Disease Control lab, and involved law enforcement forces, health officials and volunteer citizens in an exercise at the country's international airport, simulating the arrival of a passenger with a suspected infection caused by a new strain of coronavirus. All these measures enhanced system-wide awareness of public health risks and brought attention to the need for preparedness. When COVID-19 erupted, thousands of Bhutanese citizens signed up to join DeSuung, a national civil corps that supported the public health response to COVID-19 as basic frontline responders.

response. A growing body of evidence from countries as diverse as **Indonesia**, **Brazil** and the **US** also shows that digital technologies have the potential to contribute to these efforts through gamification – the modelling of emergency situations in video games, to inform and educate the public about the choices and behaviours that lead to the best results.

While national governments have the responsibility to coordinate efforts towards civic education, the engagement of **local administrations and community actors** is essential to bring these initiatives to citizens, in their proximity settings. The formal education system should also be used to increase awareness on emergency preparedness and response from the early years.

A CASE IN POINT: OMUTA CITY, JAPAN

In Japan, disaster education is part of the national curriculum. In the city of Omuta, informed citizenship, education and collaboration were key factors for an effective response to COVID-19. Omuta City had been bringing all sectors of society together – schools, NGOs and businesses – for several years to discuss disaster risk reduction, environmental sustainability and the SDGs, including through formal structures such as the Board of Education. When the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, this well-established collaboration, cooperation and trust among all sectors of society in the city helped better inform citizens about the crisis. It also helped various social actors organize and cooperate very efficiently, to mitigate the impacts of the pandemic on all aspects of local life.



04

**Effective
democracy that
serves us all**

ANALYSIS⁵

The mechanisms of democracy and fundamental rights, social inclusion, and effective leadership and democratic culture are three distinct components of democratic systems in which the COVID-19 pandemic has posed particular challenges; and the recommendations we have presented thus far refer, in rather distinct ways, to legal and institutional frameworks in the first case, the social contract in the second, and notions of leadership and citizenship in the third. There are, however, a few additional considerations that at the same time underpin, cut across and hang over all components of democratic systems, in emergencies as well as under normal circumstances, and whose importance has proven critical during the pandemic.

These considerations refer to stakeholders who, in many countries, are left out by all components of democratic systems – by democratic institutions, by democratic leaders, and by the structures that deliver and distribute the dividends of democracy: women, youth and future generations. While each group bears its own dynamics of democratic exclusion, they have in common that they are not minorities, and they are not exclusive to certain countries or regions. They are also diverse demographics, intersecting with all other axes of society. Devising solutions to remedy their long-standing democratic exclusion, during and outside of emergency situations, is essential to maintain the very relevance of democracy.

Women and girls around the world have been **disproportionally affected** by the COVID-19 pandemic. While more men than women have died from COVID-19 infection, the pandemic has severely impacted women's health by diverting resources away from other areas of healthcare, such as sexual and reproductive health services. Home confinement, disrupted social services and reduced access to justice have also led to a dramatic increase in gender-based violence, in **at least 38 reporting countries**. Homeschooling and caring for the sick and elderly – responsibilities that disproportionately befall women -- also increased their dedication to unpaid **duties**, while they have borne a disproportionate share of the economic impact of the pandemic. Because women earn less, hold less secure jobs, have less access to social protection, and

head the majority of single-parent households, their capacity to absorb the economic shock of COVID-19 has been less than that of men. The pandemic has pushed 47 million women and girls into **poverty** and it is estimated that around 435 million women and girls worldwide will be living with **less than 2 US dollars per day** by the end of 2021. Women from underprivileged socio-economic backgrounds, minority groups and racialized women have been hit hardest.

COVID-19 has also had a disproportionate impact on younger segments of the world population, whose immediate and future prospects have severely suffered from interrupted access to education, training and employment. This has been particularly hard on young women, teenagers and youth living in low-income countries. Nearly **10 million children** are at risk of never returning to school after school closures, and the pandemic is expected to leave a USD 77 billion gap in education financing in low- and middle-income countries in 2021-2022. In Sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that **80 to 95 percent** of young people depend on the informal sector for survival, and have had little or no access to livelihood support during lockdowns. Largely excluded from political institutions – the global average age of parliamentarians is **53** -- young people have also been left out of decision-making on emergency response in most countries. In

A CASE IN POINT: KENYA

Tecnosafi is a mobile-phone based population health and education platform founded by young entrepreneurs Andy Chen and Leonard Kilekwang in West Pokot county, Kenya. Utilizing principles of human-centered design, social responsibility and local sustainability, it was designed to reduce the incidence of water-borne disease through crisp messages crafted in collaboration with women and youth. When COVID-19 erupted, Tecnosafi quickly pivoted to send out pandemic-related information based on WHO guidelines, including educational material about virus prevention, helping slow the spread of the disease in the area.

5. This analysis draws on all three Issues Papers prepared for the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies, as well as on the conclusions of the regional consultations.

countries where the demographic weight of young people is particularly heavy, the dynamics of social and political exclusion that COVID-19 has evidenced and enhanced could – it is feared – fuel growing levels of unrest and create conditions for alternative models of government to take root.

Yet, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, women and young people in all countries have demonstrated their potential to be active agents of change in emergency response and recovery. They have been on the frontline as healthcare workers, scientific researchers and communicators. They have innovated and worked within their community, within or outside of organized civil society, to bring solutions to pandemic-related challenges.

Strengthening the agency of women and youth in emergency preparedness and response is a domestic as well as an international challenge. In fact, most of the recommendations put forward in this report, like the COVID-19 pandemic itself, allude to domestic processes that could best be strengthened through the international exchange of good practices. International networks of democratic institutions, from the Inter-Parliamentary Union to the Association of World Election Bodies and the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics, have proven their value in gathering, sharing and analyzing the lessons learned from various countries' experience during the pandemic.

COVID-19 is expected to leave a 77 billion USD gap in education financing in low- and middle-income countries in 2020-2021

At least 38 countries have reported an increased in gender-based violence during COVID-19

Finally, in thinking about the importance of strengthening our collective ability to offer an effective and democratic response to future emergency situations, the twin challenge of climate change and environmental degradation comes to mind. It is both a likely cause of new emergency situations in the near future, through more frequent natural disasters and extreme weather events; and an emergency situation in and of itself, albeit on a different time scale. As the causes and effects of climate change and environmental degradation play out over decades, the sense of emergency around this issue is less compelling; yet the solutions also take time to produce results, and time is running out to avoid the worst scenarios. Avoiding the worst scenarios responds to the interest of future generations – perhaps near-future generations – which is not captured by current political systems.

The environmental unsustainability of some of the solutions adopted in response to COVID-19 is testament to that. Researchers report that **129 billion** disposable, plastic-based face masks are being used and thrown out globally every month. In 2020, Amazon alone made 7 billion deliveries that generated nearly **500 million** pounds of plastic packaging. While Heads of State and Government from around the world underscored the importance of a green recovery from COVID-19 in their **statements** to the UN General Assembly last September, and numerous jurisdictions put forward ambitious plans for a green transformation at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow, little was done to prioritize environmental sustainability in the response to the COVID-19 crisis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

17

Include women in decision-making

In Chapter 2, we highlighted the importance of having disaggregated data to better understand and respond to the basic conditions and needs of vulnerable minorities in emergency situations. The same can be said for women. Having **gender-disaggregated data** on vulnerability factors would help frame emergency prevention and response efforts to better respond to the needs of women, that are often different from men's.

Having an oversight structure, such as parliament, **audit emergency responses with a gender lens**, and make recommendations to enhance gender equity and protect the rights of women and girls in emergency response, would also help produce better emergency policies for women. Avoiding possible negative impacts of emergency measures on women's rights – including on gender-based violence – is necessary, but it is not sufficient. Putting gender equality at the core of parliamentary oversight would also mean ensuring that emergency responses proactively respond to gender-differentiated needs.

A CASE IN POINT: UNITED KINGDOM

In March 2020, the British parliament adopted the Coronavirus Act granting the government emergency powers to handle the pandemic. The Women and Equalities Committee, whose usual mandate is to oversee the application of the Equality Act, promptly stepped forward upon receipt of data showing that people with protected characteristics were being disproportionately affected by both the COVID-19 pandemic and the government's response. The Committee undertook to assess the impact of emergency measures on different groups of citizens, and gauge whether the government's policy-making process had given due consideration to equity.

“Gender parity among leaders at all levels is essential to produce an inclusive political agenda and yield policies that benefit women, including in an emergency situation”

Maria Noel Vaeza, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, UN Women

A CASE IN POINT: TUNISIA

The first three months of the COVID-19 pandemic saw a major spike in the number of reports of gender-based violence in Tunisia: the number of complaints filed through the Ministry for Women's hotlines increased five-fold, reaching over 7,000. With court proceedings limited to emergency cases, women experiencing violence faced a long wait for justice. The Tunisian Association of Democratic Women, a local civil society organization who promotes the rights of women, pursued intensive lobbying with the Superior Law Counsel and Ministry of Justice, and successfully convinced them to class cases of violence against women among the priority cases the courts could hear.

To achieve more gender-sensitive emergency responses and oversight, it is primordial to ensure balanced gender representation in the decision-making structures involved, whether executive, legislative or judiciary, national or local. While achieving gender parity in ministerial cabinets, parliaments and courts is a long-term endeavour, there are measures that can be taken in the heat of an emergency to ensure balanced gender representation in emergency-related decision-making. Ad hoc committees and advisory structures on

emergency response, for instance, can be constituted quickly with a gender-balanced approach. **Political parties should also prioritize gender equality by encouraging their female members to participate in these structures.** This is essential to ensure that the decisions taken are informed with an understanding of the lived reality of both men and women.

Finally, civil society and the media also have a key role to play in monitoring progress, suggesting reforms and facilitating debate around equality, within and outside of emergency circumstances.

18

Include youth in decision-making

The lack of representation in democratic institutions is also an obstacle for the adoption of emergency responses that meet the needs and aspirations of young people. To bridge that gap, democratic leaders and institutions should put in place mechanisms for greater **youth engagement** in democratic policy-making, that can be drawn upon to engage youth in defining responses to future emergencies.

To that effect, **parliaments** can play a leading role. They can set up permanent consultation mechanisms with youth organizations such as National Youth Councils; ensure that national budgets, including extraordinary funding for emergency response, provide for youth programmes; and hold governments accountable for the implementation of youth policies, including in emergency response.

A CASE IN POINT: SOUTH AFRICA

In June 2020, the Parliament of South Africa hosted a Youth Parliament, attended in hybrid format by various national youth organizations, parliamentarians and members of the national, provincial and local governments. The day-long discussion was an opportunity for youth representatives to present their views on challenges faced by young people during COVID-19, with focus on education, unemployment, entrepreneurship and gender-based violence. The participants proposed policy solutions for national and local governments, and entrusted Parliament to oversee that these are duly considered.

Governments should also improve the capacity of administrations to deliver public services, including emergency services, that respond to the needs of young people. Education, employment and social protection policies must be informed by the lived reality of young people, particularly those from the most vulnerable groups. To that end, governments should set up mechanisms to involve youth in **national and local planning processes** -- for public service delivery in general, and emergency preparedness in particular. Ensuring that young people are represented in ad hoc committees and task forces put together to define emergency response is also important.

Nevertheless, opening up spaces for young people's participation and representation is not sufficient: they must also be given the opportunity to develop the skills to use these spaces constructively. Policy-oriented **capacity-building and empowerment programmes**, whether convened by the State, by civil society organizations or by international partners, can go a long way to help young people step forward as a constructive force in policy-making, in emergencies and otherwise.

“Addressing the needs and aspirations of youth, and giving them a voice and a role in decision-making, is a matter of survival and of purpose for democracy”

Aminata Touré, Prime Minister of Senegal (2013-2014)

19

Think of future generations

Bringing the interests of future generations into emergency-related policy-making is a challenge of a different kind. While long-term considerations should bear particular relevance in the post-emergency reconstruction or recovery phase, the impacts of new laws and policies on future generations should be taken into consideration at all stages of decision-making. Governments should consider embedding that approach in policy-making processes by setting up a dedicated institution, embedded in existing executive or legislative structures, to **scrutinize the potential effects of new policies and laws on future generations**. In emergency situations, this institution could be called upon to assess the long-term impacts of emergency responses and propose amendments to protect the interests of future generations.

In the current context of climate change and environmental degradation, protecting the interests of future generations means, inter alia, approaching emergency situations as opportunities to propel a **green transition** through the recovery process. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that governments, businesses and citizens are capable of uniting for bold action and rapid innovation in the face of a crisis. Government leaders should strive to keep up the momentum and drive the same level of action geared towards environmental transformation, through COVID-19 recovery and beyond.

A CASE IN POINT: WALES

In 2015, the National Assembly for Wales adopted the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act*, which requires public bodies in Wales to think about the long-term impact of their decisions. A Future Generations Commissioner has been appointed, with the mandate to highlight long-term risks, challenge short-term policy making, and innovate for long-term policy planning, inter alia by fostering wide partnerships and engagement around long-term issues. The first of its kind, the Welsh institutional set-up for future generations has been applauded by the UN.

20

Work with international partners

Finally, most of the recommendations put forward in this report, with just a few exceptions, are contained in the domestic sphere. They refer to the improvement of democratic institutions and processes at the national or local level; the capacity of national and local administrations to deliver for all citizens; and the role of national leadership and democratic culture in emergencies. This is in line with the precept that democracy must grow from within each country; it cannot and should not be imposed from the outside. Nevertheless, democratic leaders and institutions must remember, in emergencies as in normal circumstances, that they are part of a global community of democracy practitioners who can lean on and learn from each other.

Governments should encourage participation in **peer networks** between democratic institutions to share and promote good practices in emergency preparedness and response. In seeking to improve their resilience, parliaments, electoral management bodies and courts should consider lessons learned from their peers in other jurisdictions and, in turn, showcase their own experiments with democratic innovation. There is no perfect democracy; all democratic societies are subject to self-assessment and continuous improvement, and all can benefit from cooperation in developing solutions to common challenges.

Governments should also be mindful of the imperative for **democratic solidarity between countries**. The recommendations we have put forward in this report will not apply equally in high- vs middle- or low-income countries, nor in consolidated vs emerging democracies. While we have been mindful to take a variety of circumstances into consideration, and formulate recommendations that could work for all, financial means and political circumstances will necessarily condition each country's capacity to take action to strengthen its democratic resilience to future emergencies. But those who have financial means and favourable political circumstances should lend a helping hand to those who do not. Strengthening democratic resilience is a matter of shared responsibility.

Governments who are committed to strengthening democratic resilience should also work closely with **multilateral institutions** on several of the issues raised in this report. Several regional organizations, including the EU and the OAS, have instruments to protect and promote democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law among their Member States. Engaging in dialogue on the use of these instruments, and ways to strengthen them, could help strengthen regional oversight over democratic practices in emergencies. International monitoring mechanisms for human rights can also help prevent infringement on fundamental rights in future emergencies. New processes or institutions may also be needed to foster greater international cooperation, at least among democracies, on managing the risk of future emergencies. Global institutions, like the ILO, UNDP, the World Bank and regional banks, are already leading the way in several initiatives that will bolster resilience, particularly through social inclusion. Nascent initiatives to bridge the digital divide will also help build resilience to future crises and should be supported, including in their role as transmitters of good practices and democratic innovations across countries and regions.



05

**Roles,
responsibilities
& next steps**

OUR CALL TO ACTION

The recommendations put forward in this report address the whole democratic community. Protecting democracy by strengthening its resilience to future emergencies is a responsibility shared among all actors in democratic societies, from executive leaders to parliaments, from judicial institutions to regional organizations and civil society.

This section draws on the recommendations put forward in Chapters 1-4 to identify a few actions that we particularly enjoin each democratic actor to consider, in the context and circumstances of their own country. It also lays out a few initial commitments that Club de Madrid, as convener of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies, intends to take on board in follow up to the recommendations contained in this report.

1

For executive leaders

Executive leadership is particularly important to ensure that the lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic are integrated in **national plans for emergency preparedness**, and that these are high-level considerations on the political agenda and in the national budget. Lessons learned regarding the decision-making and policy processes for emergency response, particularly with respect to policy coordination between government agencies and with other levels of government, should be prioritized. They should also work with their peers around the world, through multilateral organizations and international fora, to build resilience together.

Executive leaders are also best placed to take action to tackle the challenges of the platform-driven information ecosystem. We enjoin them to **fight disinformation with facts** – to embrace radical transparency, support responsible journalism and media, and work with civil society organizations in debunking disinformation and fostering digital hygiene among citizens. We also call upon them to engage with technology companies in the quest for solutions to challenges arising from the digital environment.

Increasing resilience through equity-enhancing policies also requires strong executive leadership. We enjoin executive leaders to identify the gaps that COVID-19 has revealed in their country's **social protection systems**, and put forward proposals to mend them, in close collaboration with social actors, including those representing the interests of vulnerable minorities, women, and youth. Fiscal policy is another instrument that governments can use to build democratic resilience through greater equity, not least by broadening the tax base and redoubling efforts to fight corruption. Governments must also take action to bridge the digital divide, to make digitally-enabled resilience a reality for all.

2

For Parliaments

Parliaments also have a fundamental role to play to build democratic resilience to future emergencies. Conduct **post-hoc scrutiny of their government's COVID-19 response** should be a first step, to assess performance and make recommendations for improvement particularly against criteria of efficiency, equity and gender-responsiveness.

Parliaments should conduct, in the post-COVID period, a review of their country's **legal and constitutional framework for emergencies**, to make sure its definition of emergencies adequately reflects the critical risks of the 21st century, and that constitutional provisions for emergency declarations provide sufficient safeguards to mitigate the risk of abuse of emergency powers.

Parliaments must also make sure that their own plans for emergency preparedness are robust enough to allow for effective **legislative oversight during future emergencies**. They should plan for flexible rules of procedure, swift structures and processes for legislative work, and a ready capacity to embrace digital technologies as an instrument of resilience.

They should also build upon the digital tools developed during the pandemic to create new, wider channels for

engagement with civil society and citizens. While this befalls all democratic institutions, Parliaments, as representatives of the people, have a particular responsibility in that regard. They can play a leading role to develop innovative mechanisms to address the crisis of representation and bridge the gaps of representation that affect numerous social groups, including women and young people.

3

For judicial institutions

Judicial institutions have a fundamental role to play to ensure that the **rule of law** is the guiding principle of democracies' response to future emergencies. When the COVID-19 pandemic comes to an end, courts will be called upon – as some already have – to scrutinize their government's response against criteria of necessity, proportionality, procedural fairness, and respect for fundamental rights.

Like Parliaments, judicial institutions must also make sure that their own plans for emergency preparedness are robust enough to allow for swift **judicial oversight during future emergencies**. Rapid assessment mechanisms may be a useful tool to consider in that regard.

4

For civil society & the media

While they are not democratic institutions per se, **civil society and the media** contribute to shaping the political agenda. As COVID-19 unfolds, and when it comes to an end, their words and actions will shape public scrutiny over their government's response. Therefore, they have a particular responsibility to hold and promote good information hygiene. They also have the power to bring issues into the spotlight, and could be a catalyst for future emergency policy that better engages with and meets the needs of under-represented groups, including youth, women and vulnerable minorities.

In preparation for future emergencies, civil society organizations should advocate for more **public dialogue about critical risks**, preventive action and preparedness, particularly including groups who are most likely to be affected by future emergencies.

5

For regional & international organizations

While democracy is best built and strengthened nationally, regional and international organizations have an important role to play in **fostering collective lessons learned** from the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting greater shared resilience. International mechanisms for human rights monitoring can help draw useful lessons on respect for fundamental rights in emergency response; and those regional organizations that have instruments to protect democracy, fundamental rights and the rule of law among their Member States should reflect on the use of these instruments for regional oversight over democratic practices in emergencies.

We also encourage global institutions, like the ILO, UNDP, the World Bank and the regional development banks, to continue their ongoing efforts to build resilience through social inclusion, and call upon national governments to support them.

CLUB DE MADRID'S COMMITMENT

Finally, as convener of the Global Commission on Democracy and Emergencies, and as an organization built around a global vision of democracy that delivers, Club de Madrid commits to using the recommendations contained in this report as a basis to inform its own future strategic decisions and programming.

As a priority, Club de Madrid will build on the work of the Global Commission in 2022 and 2023 in the following areas:

- **Digital technologies and the new information ecosystem:** As part of a five-year initiative on *Human Governance in Digital & AI Societies*, Club de Madrid will work in partnership with the Boston Global Forum to advocate for human-centered approaches to digital governance. The need to pre-empt and counter disinformation, to build digital literacy skills, to bridge the digital divide, and to encourage the use of digital technologies for democratic innovation, will all be addressed as part of this initiative.
- **Resilience through equity:** Building on a long-standing partnership with the Alan B. Slifka Foundation, Club de Madrid will continue to develop and advocate for equity-oriented policy-making as part of the *Shared Societies Project*. The political, economic and social inclusion of all identity groups – a fundamental tenet of *Shared Societies* – will be an area of particular focus.
- **Inclusive social development:** Building on long-standing engagement with the UN community, more lately in relation to the *Our Common Agenda* report, Club de Madrid will continue to work alongside UN institutions and Member States to promote renewed national and global commitment to the social development objectives of Agenda 2030. We will particularly support the process towards a World Social Summit in 2025, as called for by the UN Secretary-General, and build on the recommendations of the Global Commission to feed into the development of its agenda.
- **Effective leadership, democratic culture and preparedness:** Club de Madrid will take forward the reflections put forth in this report on the bases of effective leadership and democratic culture to launch a new initiative in 2022, aimed at identifying what kind of leadership is needed, in democratic systems, to secure and maintain citizens' support for bold climate action.
- **Youth and women participation:** Club de Madrid's *Strategy 2020-2022* defines the organization's commitment to gender equality, through our programmatic work as well as our own *modus operandi*. Going forward, Club de Madrid will continue to make sure that women and men have equal opportunities to be active participants in our activities and contributors to our policy reflections and conclusions. We will also build on successful experiences of the last year to strengthen our engagement with young democratic thinkers and leaders, *inter alia* through partnerships with universities and youth-led civil society organizations.

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