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Covid-19 responses and the right to health for seniors

New data released today show the impact of countries' responses to the Covid-19 pandemic on the right to health.

The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) is publishing data using a new indicator to reveal how well high-income countries, in particular, are ensuring people's right to health. The United Nations Population Division provides data that can be used to calculate how likely a 60-year-old is to reach the age of 80. Using this information, HRMI can calculate how well a country is doing, compared to what should be possible at its level of income.

Looking at the HRMI scores over time, we can see a dichotomy emerging between countries in how their scores changed from 2019 to 2020. Some countries had steady increases in their score for the right to health, while others had sharp decreases. This difference largely correlates to a country's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, giving insight into the effects of different policies and approaches.

HRMI currently has data on the right to health for adults (seniors) for 65 high-income countries. Looking specifically at 6, we can see the possible impact of their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic.

For countries whose quick and robust responses have been praised, such as South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand, their longevity scores for the right to health increased from 2019 to 2020, despite the pandemic's widespread effect on older people. For example, South Korea's score increased from 95.6% in 2019 to 100% in 2020.

On the other hand, for countries whose responses have been criticised, such as Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, these scores all decreased during this time. For example, Italy's score decreased from 99.8% in 2019 to 95.1% in 2020, the first time this score has decreased. The United Kingdom's score dropped from 93.3% to 89%, and the United States experienced a dramatic fall from 84.5% to 78.7%, squarely in the 'bad' range of scores. All these scores are adjusted for income, and constitute a failure in each country's basic human rights obligations to its people.

HRMI co-founder Dr Susan Randolph said, "A focus on human rights is even more important in the context of Covid-19. How can we prevent the deaths of those who contract Covid-19 if people don't have access to affordable healthcare? It's not just a matter of stemming the pandemic, but also of focusing our admittedly more limited resources on those factors that make the most difference to people's lives."

Because the score for the right to health comes from the percentage of 60-year-old people surviving to age 80, it is evident how Covid-19 policy choices could have an impact on this survival rate. According to [Johns Hopkins University](#), the case-fatality ratio (deaths per 100 confirmed cases of Covid-19) for South Korea is 0.1%, while Italy's was 7 times higher, at 0.7%. With data from during the pandemic becoming more available, it is important to use that data to analyse the success or failure of past policy choices, as well as inform future ones.

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About the Rights Tracker: The Rights Tracker is a global project to track the human rights performance of countries systematically. Our 2023 dataset launched today includes annual data on eight civil and political rights for up to 44 countries from the years 2017 to 2022, with Bangladesh, Thailand, and the Maldives added this year. Our data also include inaugural scores on the right to freedom of religion and belief in a pilot set of nine countries. Annual data on five economic and social rights for 196 countries from 2007 to 2020, based on the award-winning SERF Index methodology, is also available. Please visit rightstracker.org for the freely available dataset.

About HRMI: The Human Rights Measurement Initiative (HRMI) is an independent non-profit organisation part of a global movement building a world where all people can flourish. We track the human rights progress of countries, producing robust data that anyone can use to push for improvements in how governments treat people. What gets measured gets improved: if something isn't being systematically measured, it can be more easily overlooked and undervalued. HRMI data make it easier for decision-makers to monitor their progress, and prioritise human rights. Advocacy based on sound information is one of the key drivers of change. www.humanrightsmeasurement.org

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