


Chapter 9

Economic and Societal Inequalities in the Time of COVID-19

Mehtap Isik

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5210-4480>

Bogazici University, Turkey

Arda Can Aktürk

Bogazici University, Turkey

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on economic and social inequalities is analyzed in five dimensions: health, income, education, gender, and digital inequalities. Cases from developed countries provided as the evidence of the stimulating effects of COVID-19 pandemic on the inequalities. The requirement of emergent transformation of the traditional methods to digital ones put a certain pressure on the social and economic structures. The existing dynamics has been stimulated by the containment and closure policies of the governments. Even in the developed countries, the financial packages couldn't prevent the detrimental effects of the lockdowns on the equities and inequalities. In this chapter, these effects are discussed, and some policy recommendations are offered.

INTRODUCTION

Inequalities have been in a two-way relation with pandemics over the entire modern history. In the past, the Spanish Flu and the HIV pandemics were worsened by the

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social and economic inequalities in the public. At the same time, the inequalities across income groups within a country and across countries increased after these pandemics. (Farmer, 2001). As of June 2022, some groups look like even more vulnerable to any kind of shocks. Only in 2020, 140 million more people are estimated to be in extreme poverty while most of them are from already poor regions like Africa and South Asia (Laborde et al., 2020). This study questions whether the Covid-19 pandemic made the existing inequalities more visible. Analyzing different cases from different countries, the proper policies are aimed to be investigated.

Covid-19 pandemic created severe acute symptoms not only on humans but on society and the existing economic system and business environment. Some of these symptoms are now permanent. Some income groups and some regions in the world were affected more. Especially, the safety measures to slow down the spread of the virus expanded the negative effects. Social distancing and lockdowns were two of the main strategies used by the policy makers all over the world. Some workers who needed to work physically in-person which were also called essential workers had to face the risk of being infected by the Covid 19 virus.

Almost three years after the first Covid 19 case observed in the world, some group of people have to confront many other economic, social, physical and psychological challenges. Several help packages have been announced and distributed by the most of the governments and non-governmental organizations. However, some economic and non-economic conditions limit the improvements. The major aim of this study is to address the types and roots of the inequalities and identify the groups who are mostly affected from the pandemic related issues. The economic and societal inequalities are analyzed in five dimensions: Health, income, education, gender and digital inequalities. In this purpose, we identify inequities and inequalities in each dimension so that we can correctly diagnose the maladjustments. The role of governmental and non-governmental organizations and institutions are questioned during the pandemic. Based on the cases analyzed, policy recommendations are constructed for a better future.

The chapter surveys the literature for a theoretical framework. Within this framework, cases are analyzed by collecting economic and non-economic data in order to discuss the possible policies that can reduce the existing inequalities. The study shows that even the most developed countries fail to identify the groups to be supported and allocate the aids in an effective way. Although the authorities announce that we are all together in this course, the negative impact of Covid-19 creates deeper economic and social gaps. The picture is even worse for developing countries where already exiting structural problems surfaced and crushed the barely working systems.

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