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## **The COVID-19 pandemic hits harder urban areas and women**

In June of last year, we had analysed the main mechanisms through which the COVID-19 pandemic would create a food crisis [\[read\]](#). We had warned then that the poor and vulnerable would be more affected and that the impact might be felt more in urban than in rural areas [\[read\]](#).

### **Poverty and hunger**

Little by little information is being released on the extent to which the pandemic is causing more poverty and hunger in the world. It is as yet either very broad or quite partial, but the direction and importance of what is happening cannot be questioned.

At global level, the World Bank has published estimates stating that COVID-19 pushed around 120 million additional people into extreme poverty in 2020 [\[read\]](#). It is, of course, too early to say what the impact will be in 2021 in countries like India or Brazil that are being particularly hit by the pandemic. FAO's projections set at between 80 and 130 million the additional number of food insecure people, because of the crisis [\[read\]](#).

Everywhere, households suffered from a drop in income, but it was attenuated in rich countries that implemented unprecedented social programmes.

Through phone surveys, the World Bank found that in most countries covered, more than half of families declared a reduction of income. This proportion reached up to 85% in Senegal. Not surprisingly, it is the urban areas that have been hit harder, particularly the households dependent on informal employment [\[read\]](#).

### **Urban areas most hit**

This impact has been so strong that, in certain countries, poverty is now almost as important in urban than in rural settings. Official data published by four Latin American countries (Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Paraguay) illustrate well this change.

In Colombia, there was a significant increase of urban poverty, while the situation improved slightly in rural areas. For the first time, the prevalence of poverty in the countryside is similar to what it is in the cities.

The same evolution was observed in Costa Rica. In Ecuador, poverty surged faster in urban than in rural settings. In Paraguay, poverty remained nearly unchanged in rural areas, while it aggravated in urban areas.<sup>1</sup>



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## The India/China contrast

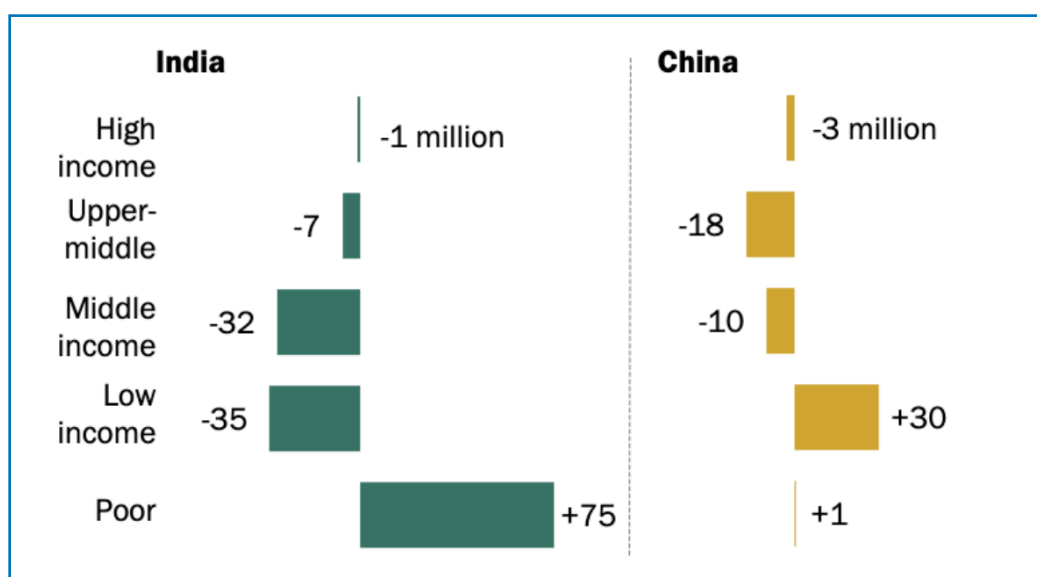
The Pew Research Center used the World Bank's PovcalNet data to compare the impact of the pandemic and the resulting global recession of 2020 on the two Asian giants China and India.

In China, where GDP grew by 2% in 2020, the Center estimated that the number of poor increased by one million people only, while in India, where GDP fell by 9.6%, the number of poor jumped by 75 million.

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<sup>1</sup> Based on a forthcoming publication by L. Tornarolli et al.

### Estimated changes in income tiers due to the global recession of 2020 in India and China



Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

### More food insecurity

Simultaneously to the increase in poverty, food prices surged by 38% since the beginning of 2020. The World Bank's phone surveys have shown that a significant number of people are running out of food or are obliged to reduce their consumption. This confirms at the micro level the direction of the global estimates made by FAO.

The data on food security conditions released recently by the [Famine Early Warning System Network](#) (FEWS NET) demonstrate the unprecedented scale and severity of the current food security crisis, with circumstances comparable, in several countries, to those prevailing in a situation of famine.

### The [Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs) seem out of reach

Based on experience, one can expect that it will take time for the world to recover from the COVID-19 crisis, as the pandemic is likely to generate a medium- to long-term vicious cycle between poverty, inequality and food insecurity. Its consequences could also undermine social cohesion, fuel nationalist and protectionist trends, and, in the worst cases, lead to unrest and violence, as is the case, for example, in Colombia [\[read\]](#).

Even before the pandemic, the world was not on track for meeting the SDGs. Now this has become virtually impossible and the United Nations have warned that they could only be achieved if a 'poverty miracle' occurred – a scenario of unprecedented annual GDP/person growth of nearly 10 percent and a spectacular reduction in inequality in all low- and middle-income countries [\[read\]](#).

## Women are hit strongest by the pandemic

The pandemic also hit more women than men. This is because women are more exposed to informal employment and more involved in services than men. And it is precisely the informal sector and services that were more impacted by the crisis caused by COVID-19. First, because persons active in services and in the informal sector (e.g. petty trade) were more affected by lockdowns, and second, because informal workers could not benefit from most social protection measures implemented by governments.

As a consequence, incomes of women working in the informal sector fell drastically during the pandemic and many lost their jobs in the services sector, more than men [read]. Moreover, there is strong evidence that declining incomes, lockdown and food insecurity have caused an increase in domestic violence.

Under current circumstances, international solidarity is more indispensable than ever. It should be both economic and sanitary (ensure availability of vaccines for people living in poor countries).

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To know more :

- Kochhar, R., In the pandemic, India's middle class shrinks and poverty spreads while China sees smaller changes, Pew Research Center, 2021.
- Lakhner et al., Updated estimates of the impact of COVID-19 on global poverty: Looking back at 2020 and the outlook for 2021, World Bank Blogs, 2021.
- FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets, FAO, 2020.
- World Bank. Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2020.

Selection of past articles on [hungerexplained.org](https://hungerexplained.org) related to the topic:

- COVID-19 and food crisis: the main operating mechanisms, 2020.
- COVID-19 and food - The pandemic is likely to cause a major food crisis, 2020.
- Urbanisation of hunger: the rural drift drives hunger to the cities, 2017.
- Growing inequalities are a threat to world social and political stability, 2017.
- Food crises: A consequence of disastrous economic policies, 2012.