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Global Journey to Post-Pandemic Normalcy and Revival

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Abstract

After a year of COVID-19, countries, societies, and individuals are longing for normalcy and beginning to consider what life will be like post-pandemic. Efforts and experiences of countries in the European Union, Asia, Asia-Pacific, Australia, Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States are examined as they face challenges to end the pandemic and prepare for the post-pandemic reality. What will be the post-pandemic "new normalcy"? What changes caused by the pandemic are permanent in societies and the world? What are the necessary reforms that have to take place as part of normalcy? Reflections on the impacts of vaccinations, herd immunity, societal improvements and reorganizations, trends, and actions in the post-COVID-19 world are discussed.

Keywords: normalcy, pandemic, COVID-19, European Union, Africa, Asia, Asia-Pacific, Australia, South America, Latin America, Caribbean, Africa, United States, vaccines, post-pandemic reforms, national unity, herd immunity, healthcare reforms, Roaring Twenties

Introduction

After a year into the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is impatiently looking forward to the future, expecting a return to normal life to enjoy the comforts of life's past securities. In other words, a return to normalcy. According to the Oxford Lexico (n. d.) dictionary, normalcy is the return to: "the condition of being normal; the state of being usual, typical, or expected" or, just as it was before. This term was popularized by President Warren G. Harding in 1920 during his presidential campaign when the world was coming out of the horrors of WWI and the 1918—1919 pandemic. The Spanish Flu virus infected 500 million people (about a third of the world's population at that time) and killed approximately 50 million people worldwide. Today we are yearning to return to the 2019 normal state of familiarity, stability, peace, social contacts, and group and individual functions and activities.

Nostalgia for a return to the previous familiar state can be seen everywhere. On most weekends since February 2021, regardless of the weather, there is an impromptu jazz concert in New York's Riverside Park. In addition to the surprised birds and curious squirrels, many delighted bystanders gather around the musicians

listening as the band plays jazz standards and classics, such as Bert Lown's "Bye Bye Blues," Billy Hill's "The Glory of Love," and George Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm." During winter months, the spectators danced in spots cleared from the snow; others quietly reflect and enjoy the music. There is one clearly visible expression on everybody's faces and in everybody's body language, carrying one unmistakable message: normalcy comeback! But will it return, if so when and in what form? After the music stops, we are still left with a sense of missing what we had before -- the normal. At the same time, we slowly realize that the past is perhaps gone forever, and the new world and reality that is emerging might not be the same. In this new world, many changes that have already taken place might be irreversible.

Addressing COVID-19—Herd Immunity

The highly contagious and highly lethal COVID-19 pandemic forced the world to close businesses and society in 2020 to prevent virus spread. Containing, reducing transmission rate, and ultimately eliminating coronavirus transmission have been global priorities during the first year of the pandemic. Some strategies taken during 2020 included lockdowns, quarantines, travel restrictions, isolation and staying at home, masking, social distancing, and hand washing. Prerequisites include Covid testing, contact tracing, hospitals functioning with sufficient supplies and equipment, and the availability of therapeutics.

In their comparative study of earlier pandemics, Munnoli et al. (2020) concluded that the previous pandemics were equally deadly, and vaccinations were not available at the outset. In 2021, vaccine production and distribution became the most important strategy to reduce the virus transmission rate and minimize virus variants from evolving. In his analysis, Ho (2021) confirmed the effectiveness of this strategy by reporting that developing effective vaccines will allow for the resumption of social and economic normalcy.

As more members of the population are vaccinated, countries will be closer to achieving herd immunity, resulting in resistance to the spread of the virus. As reported by Armitage (2021), to achieve herd immunity, it is estimated that between 70% and 95% of the population need to be vaccinated. With herd immunity in place, the virus might not disappear entirely, but it will be much easier to deal with as a disease. A successful conversation with society about vaccination safety and

its effectiveness is essential to motivate people to act. As stated by Wood (2021), we “must persuade many of these people to be vaccinated if we’re to achieve the vaccination rate — as high as 80% — needed to return to normalcy.”

As of February 18, 2021, seven different vaccines have become available in several countries, and many additional candidates are in development. The goal of the World Health Organization (WHO) (2021a) is to end the acute phase of the pandemic by working with governments and manufacturers to speed safe, effective vaccine development and ensure their fair and equitable distribution in all countries.

In addition to the AstraZeneca, Pfizer, and Moderna vaccines, America's recent one-shot Johnson and Johnson vaccine has strengthened the world's medicinal arsenal against the virus. This vaccine, which does not require extreme cold storage, promises possible vaccinations of millions in rural or hard-to-reach areas. It is especially timely as additional Covid variants appear and spread. The number of contagious variants might impact some vaccines' effectiveness and ultimately timeline projections for returns to normalcy. The challenge is to increase all vaccine supply and distribution throughout the world so as many as possible can be vaccinated. According to Cohen (2021), "the World Health Organization noted on February 5 (2021) that 75% of vaccinations have occurred in 10 countries. About 130 countries had yet to inject anyone with a COVID-19 vaccine."

The issue of clinical trials during the pandemic became a moral issue, as many of them were suddenly stopped at the outbreak of COVID-19. Should we keep developing vaccines while drugs for other conditions are needed? We need to do both. Vissers et al. (2020), provided practical, morally supported guidelines for stopping and restarting clinical trials during the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have seen a variety of global responses to the virus and strategies taken as they have directly impacted successes and struggles in the world's journey towards returning to normal. Advancing is a bumpy road, dependent upon the public health infrastructure and societal strategies implemented. As infection rates have begun to slow in some parts of the world, early signs of recovery and a return to normalcy are appearing with some businesses, education, travel, and cultural institutions re-opening.

Asia, Middle East, Western Pacific, Early Steps: Facilitating Normalcy Returns

Asia and Asia-Pacific countries approached the pandemic differently than Europe and the United States. Before vaccines were developed, these countries largely relied on early testing, social distancing, contact tracing, washing hands, isolation of the infected, travel restrictions, wearing masks, and more intrusive government intervention. China is one of the countries where these measures were implemented; this, in addition to the vaccines (Sinovac and Sinopharm), which were approved later. Now, a year later, life has returned to 'normal' with the re-opening of restaurants and museums and the resumption of travel. However, as reported by Chen (2020), "almost everywhere residents go, they have to scan a health QR code. This allows the Chinese government to track the spread of COVID-19." Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea implemented quarantines to control outbreaks in order to return to normal sooner rather than later. Other Asia-Pacific nations are taking careful steps towards returning to normalcy.

New Zealand (Kline, 2020) provides another example where such measures were implemented very early in the process and enabled the country to return to normal. Countries like India, Pakistan, and Turkey made substantial progress initially. However, some of these countries face Covid's return as new variants and mutations threaten their recovery. For example, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, President of Turkey, declared April 29-May 17, 2021 as a period of full national lockdown to stop the increasing wave of infections and deaths. For a time, India, a former epicenter for Covid infections, had reached the point where stores and markets were crowded once again and there were long lines at hair salons and restaurants. Conditions went back to the pre-pandemic level and it appeared that India was ready to declare victory over the virus. However, April brought back the grim Covid reality on this nation of 1.3 billion people, as a second wave devastated India's large cities, small towns, and villages, causing about 4,000 Covid-related deaths per day. In May 2021, WHO declared the Indian Covid-19 variant a "variant of global concern" as it spreads faster than other variants. As of this writing, India is experiencing shortages of vaccines, oxygen supplies, hospital beds, and even crematoriums are running out of space.

Not without significance is the fact that this country might be the world's second-largest Covid vaccine maker and India's willingness to help others is noteworthy.

As a matter of fact, many poor and/or developing countries counted on India as the "pharmacy of the world" and a very generous nation for the supply of vaccines. Millions of doses had already been sent to low-income countries. But India now must help itself and it desperately needs assistance. As a result of this tragedy, the global crisis of vaccine inequity will worsen.

This recent turn is such a tragedy since, during early 2021, India demonstrated that it was a concerned and compassionate nation and a good neighbor -- eagerly helping other countries. According to a press release on January 19, 2021, issued by India's Government, Ministry of External Affairs (2021), "keeping with India's stated commitment to use India's vaccine production and delivery capacity to help all of humanity fight the Covid pandemic, supplies under grant assistance to Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Nepal, Myanmar and Seychelles will begin from 20 January 2021." In addition to its key partners and neighboring countries, India had been helping many developing nations as well, specifically working through the Vaccine Alliance (GAVI) and the COVAX Facility. These organizations play an extremely important role in the research, coordination, collaboration, development, and distribution of vaccines. As reported by Kettler (2021), they are planning "to secure and equitably allocate 2 billion doses of COVID-19 vaccines by the end of 2021. The vaccines were targeted for World Health Organization (WHO) - defined priority populations, including frontline health care workers and other groups at high risk." As a result of the latest resurgence of Covid, India's role, as well as planning and priorities, will now change. Presently, the US and other countries are sending vaccines and additional medical supplies to help India's population.

Israel has been able to return to pre-pandemic normalcy as a result of their extensive immunization campaign. By securing millions of vaccine doses from Pfizer and distributing them rapidly to the population, the number of deaths and hospitalizations dropped drastically. According to Cohen (2021), "between December 19, 2020 and February 4, 2021, 39% of Israelis received at least one dose of the vaccine. Per capita, that is far higher coverage than in any country other than the similarly small United Arab Emirates (36%)." As per Johns Hopkins University Vaccine Tracker, as of this writing, 56.36% of Israel's 9 million population have been fully vaccinated (John Hopkins University, 2021a). Thus, Israel has outperformed the rest of the world by vaccinating a large part of its population much faster.

Australia: An Island's Approach

Australia has had a closed door policy that enabled them to contain and eliminate virus transmission. This policy was a great success and worked well early in the pandemic. Life in Australia was almost normal, with very few infections, so vaccinating the population had a slow start with the vaccination program beginning on February 21, 2021.

However, the closed border policy left over 35,000 Australian citizens stranded overseas in many countries. In April 2021, Australia took a harsh stance on those stranded in India, threatening to imprison citizens who attempt to fly in from India assuming, as reported by McGuirk (2021), that “they either have COVID-19 or are considered a close contact of someone who does.”

Thus, Australia's hardline approach has received criticism. Critics argued for a balance between rules and regulations and state's responsibility towards its citizens under the closed borders policy. As reported by Visontay (2021), a typical voice in opposition to the prolonged border closure might be Dr. Liz Allen's, a demographer at the Australian National University; she believes that the country “risks regressing” both culturally and economically without reopening to immigration, tourism, and family reunions.

Africa: Steps Forward

As the virus moved through and devastated the African continent, it became clear that all African countries, from Cape Town to Cairo, need a massive vaccination program to have a shadow of hope to return to normalcy. Africa's weak health and economic institutions are not able to meet the demands of the pandemic crisis for all nations. In addition, there are new variants that are sweeping the continent. According to the WHO, Regional Office for Africa (2021b), one of them is “variant 501Y.V2 [also known as B.1.351] first identified in South Africa. It is predominant in South Africa and Zambia and has been detected in a total of nine African nations including Botswana, Comoros, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.” On February 17, 2021, WHO called a meeting of African Health Ministers to organize a rapid vaccine rollout of two versions of the AstraZeneca-Oxford COVID-19 vaccine for emergency use which is a significant step forward towards vaccinating the continent and a reason for hope. “Africa is the only region to have developed a unified continental strategy on

COVID-19. And that strategy has delivered results," stated the WHO's Director-General (2021c) during the Emergency Virtual Meeting of African Ministers of Health on the COVID-19 Situation in Africa in May 2021. He also stated that 47 countries on the African continent have started vaccinating, but the volume of vaccines is nowhere near enough. In the coming months, the continent must focus on the three areas: production, prevention, and preparation. Due to limited supply, vaccine-induced herd immunity is unlikely for African countries in the near future.

Currently, Africa is watching India and does not want to have the same situation develop on its continent. In addition, Africa's vaccine supply heavily relies on India. The AstraZeneca vaccines have been distributed by the COVAX Project to get vaccines to low- and middle-income countries, so India's export ban on vaccines impacted Africa most severely. Some experts predict that Africa will not be vaccinated for COVID-19 until 2022 or 2023, or possibly even later.

Europe: The Vaccination Strategy Towards Restoring Normalcy

As of this writing, Europe's vaccination strategy varies from European country to country though the issues each face are generally similar as countries are currently below their respective infection high peaks. Bisserbe and Legorano (2021) reported that the European Commission, which acquires vaccines centrally for the entire European Union (EU), ordered 2.3 billion vaccine doses to be delivered in 2021 to contain the spread of the virus. It is expected that member states should be able to vaccinate 70% of adults among the 448 million inhabitants. However, delays in vaccine production and deliveries created difficulties for the EU to deliver on the plan to vaccinate a substantial portion of its population by summer 2021. Consequently, there could be a possibility of more months of restrictions and some lockdowns. In addition, the occurrence of new strains of the virus complicates possible vaccination effectiveness and a return to normalcy. However, during April and May 2021, the speed of vaccinations has increased substantially across all EU states, and positive results are already emerging, especially in the most affected countries.

The Russian vaccine, Sputnik V, has been available since August 2020. It has several advantages such as low cost, no very cold storage required, and it is easy to transport. However, this vaccine is still under review by the European Medicines Agency and so far it has not been approved. Consequently, most European countries

are not using it yet, although some are considering and waiting for the approval process to conclude.

As reported by Schmidt (2021), German Health Minister Jens Spahn announced the passing (on April 23, 2021) of the new "emergency brake" law. The new law gives the national government power to impose lockdown, curfew, or other restrictions in any affected area. This law, which is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2021, provides an additional tool to fight the virus. As an illustration of the intensity of the Covid-related efforts and how German life has been affected by the pandemic, Germans have added 1,200 new, Covid-related words to the German dictionary (e.g., Hamsterkauf, Coronazeit).

In the struggle to reach normalcy, France's example represents typical EU difficulties. According to the report "Covid-19: No return to 'normal' life" (2020), Jean-François Delfraissy, President of France's Scientific Council, stated: "The French public will probably not see a return to "normal" post-coronavirus life before autumn 2021." Many other EU countries are in the same situation. As of this writing, the total percentage of the population fully vaccinated in France is 13.63% and Germany 11.90%, as per Johns Hopkins University Vaccine Tracker (2021a). In addition, France has a 6:00 PM to 6:00 AM curfew (NB, this word has French roots). Not obeying curfew rules can result in very steep fines and/or possible court prosecution. The government's plan is to gradually ease restrictions and totally lift curfew at the end of June. Primary schools have already re-opened in France, and secondary schools will follow in May. Other signs of a return to normalcy in France, also expected in May, include the opening of shopping centers and cultural events. Also, Italy has a similar curfew in place until the end of May, when it will be reevaluated. As of this writing, Italy is still "yellow"-- applied measures may include: mask-wearing, social distancing, testing, contact tracing, and isolation.

Italy's National Institute of Health and the Ministry of Health studied 13.7 million people vaccinated nationwide. This first EU study on the vaccine effectiveness is described in the report ("Italian study shows COVID-19 infections," 2021) and concluded that "COVID-19 infections in adults of all ages fell by 80% five weeks after a first dose of Pfizer (PFE.N), Moderna (MRNA.O) or AstraZeneca (AZN.L) vaccine."

A very promising picture is emerging from across the English Channel. As reported by Woodcock (2021), British Prime Minister Boris Johnson expects life go back to normal by June 21, 2021. This optimistic forecast is the result of the success of a very intensive campaign to vaccinate the nation, which is being done with the full cooperation of the population. As of this writing, the percentage of adults vaccinated (first dose) up to and including May 18, 2021, is 70.2%, as per United Kingdom's Government (2021) official vaccination summary. Nigel Farage, a British politician, attributes this success to Brexit—the UK could make its own decisions independently from Brussels. As a result, it is doing better than the EU, he argued.

As announced in a report: “UK PM Boris Johnson, to say all schools in England to open,” the UK took another major milestone step towards returning to normalcy (United Kingdom Government, 2021). Effective March 8, 2021, all schools in England opened for in-person teaching/learning with students of all years returning to schools and colleges. Of course, there are precautions in place, such as testing, wearing masks, and social distancing, if necessary. As of this writing, the percentage of fully vaccinated in the UK is 39.6% as per United Kingdom's Government (2021) official vaccination summary. This number, plus a very high number of 70.2% of the first dose vaccinations, brings the UK very close to herd immunity.

It appears that, generally, in its journey to normalcy, Europe has turned the corner. With increased vaccine availability and speed of vaccination, the positive signs are visible all over. Greece will allow vaccinated tourists to visit effective May 15th. So will Spain, beginning June 2021, requiring, however, the "Covid Passport." Denmark is also relying on "Corona Pass" as numbers of restrictions in this country have already been lifted. Other countries like Poland, Czech Republic, Portugal, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Ireland, and Sweden, are opening schools, shopping centers, galleries, sports activities, hotels, libraries, etc., and are allowing for a variety of cultural events and non-essential travel—all during May and/or June 2021.

In addition to re-opened restaurants and department stores, another indicator of Europe's and some other countries' return to normalcy is the re-opening of museums. Also, Hencz (2021), reported that several new museums slated to open in 2021 include: Bourse de Commerce-Pinault Collection, Paris; Humboldt Forum,

Berlin (by the end of 2021); The New Munch Museum, Oslo (Summer 2021); and many others that will enrich the cultural experience of their respective publics. While countries are at different stages of the pandemic, generally, declines in the numbers of daily infections herald a positive path forward towards Europe's return to safety, stability, and normalcy.

Latin America and Caribbean: Difficult Road

This region has been extremely hard hit by the pandemic as health, economic and social problems that have existed in the region historically have been heightened by the crisis. These human and social costs are gigantic and, unfortunately, continue. According to Latin American researcher Ellis (2021), "Although Latin America and the Caribbean has 18% of the world's COVID-19 cases, it has 27% of COVID-19 deaths, more than 546,000 as of mid-January." Sullivan et al. (2021) reported that a "University of Washington COVID-19 projection model (updated April 8, 2021) forecast deaths in the region could reach 1.2 million by August 1, 2021."

Unfortunately, as of this writing, the very contagious Brazilian variant is substantially contributing to the spread as Brazil borders ten other nations; thus, containing the virus is extremely difficult. Initially detected in the Amazon region, circa January 2021, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) warned in early March 2021 that this Brazilian variant could become a threat not only to Brazil but also to the entire South American continent and the world. It is already spreading rapidly through other South American countries (Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Venezuela, Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay).

Generally, vaccination in Latin America is progressing slowly. Alvares (2021) reported that in January 2021, Brazil negotiated with China to purchase badly needed vaccines. Several countries are using these and Russian vaccines. Also, Chile is developing its own vaccine. "PAHO maintains that by the end of 2021, vaccines provided through COVAXs should cover about 20% of each country's population" (Sullivan et al., 2021). The world's organizations and other countries' help with the distribution of the vaccine will go a long way here, preventing not only COVID-19 infections but also addressing other health issues. In many countries, vaccination probably will continue in 2022 and beyond, as is the case in Nicaragua.

The pandemic has increased poverty and has had an economic impact. As reported by Ellis (2021)," with respect to poverty, the January 2021 migrant caravan from Honduras illustrates how the shuttering of businesses and evaporation of informal sector opportunities due to the pandemic, coupled with limits in the ability of governments to compensate, create long-term economic damage affecting millions." In April 2021, the International Monetary Fund projected a 7% economic contraction (Sullivan et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in some of these countries (Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Colombia, and Peru), economic growth in 2021/2022 is projected to go up. With the progressing recovery, resumption of tourism, and lifting of the restrictions, other countries should experience economic growth, especially in the Caribbean region. However, the recovery might be slow due to the limitations of the health infrastructure, poor economic conditions, and plain inequalities which predate the pandemic.

United States: Vaccination Strategy--a Path Towards Normalcy

On February 22, 2021, the United States passed the gruesome threshold of 500,000 Covid-related deaths, and it is projected that by June 2021, another 90,000 might die. Consequently, the United States has embraced rapid vaccination as a primary strategy towards reducing viral spread in this race against time and key to the path forward towards providing normalcy.

Timelines and projections vary greatly and depend upon numerous factors, including vaccine supply and distribution and different virus variants' impacts. For example: Dr. Marty Makary (2021), a professor at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and Bloomberg School of Public Health and chief medical adviser to Sesame Care, projected that herd immunity in the US would be reached by April 2021. Even though his projected timeline might be off, he deserves credit for his vision and analyses. Deaton (2021) reported about President Biden's speech entitled "My Plan to End the Pandemic" in which he stated that "Overcoming this pandemic must be our top priority as a nation" and "There's a lot more work to do, and it'll take time to get back to normal. And as we make progress every day, I know people have a lot of questions and a lot of worry." In addition, as reported by Liptak et al. (2021), President Biden announced that the US is now on track to have enough vaccine supply for every adult in America by the end of May 2021-accelerating the timeline towards normalcy. The previous deadline was the end of July 2021. In addition, Flaherty (2021) reported that Dr. Anthony Fauci, chief

medical advisor to President Biden, in his interview on ABC on February 17, 2021, stated: "Hopefully, by the time we start entering 2022, we really will have a degree of normality that will approximate the kind of normality we've been used to."

Other hopeful signs of the United States' path to recovery include: many schools are hybrid or are reopening (parochial, charter and many public, middle schools, high schools); also colleges and universities are functioning mostly in the hybrid model. Houses of worship have re-opened with precautions (masks, contact tracing), as have restaurants and some sporting events. Public cultural institutions are planning reopenings, e.g., Frick Madison, New York (early 2021). The New York's Metropolitan Opera will reopen in September 2021 with the premiere of Terence Blanchard's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*, the first opera by an African American composer to be performed at the Met. Some closed Broadway theaters have announced performances restarting in the second half of 2021, e.g., *Hamilton* on July 4, 2021 (a possible special performance); for the rest, the curtains will go up in September.

As a result of regional cooperation in the Northeastern United States among New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut, most of the capacity restrictions in these states, including retail, food services, offices, barbershops, will be lifted on May 19, 2021. In addition, the Mayor of New York announced that he is planning to "fully reopen" if this is a quote directly use hyphen. New York City in July 2021. If the progress in controlling the virus continues on the same level, California will fully open its economy on June 15.

Post Pandemic: The Emerging New Reality

The COVID-19 pandemic brought visible change to daily life. Now people walk outside and see different surroundings. Cities and towns are empty with fewer people on the streets and fewer cars on the roads. Many small businesses and restaurants closed permanently, fewer trains are running (or not running at all), and airline travel is reduced. This is the new reality in which people live after the initial year of the pandemic.

During this initial year, the world embraced the era of teleconferencing, telemedicine, virtual learning and schooling, webinars, increased use of social media, streaming music, working remotely, online markets and shopping, development of restaurant ghost kitchens, as well as relied upon virtual diplomacy.

New delivery, curbside pickup, and various transportation methods developed. Many of these changes will remain, and lessons learned during the pandemic will influence future directions.

As part of the "new normal," the workplace has changed. Many companies moved to remote working. Some workspaces were retrofitted with upgraded air handling systems to increase people's personal safety. Rather than high rise densely packed office spaces, there is a shift towards low-density offices. Bhushan Sethi (2020), Joint Global Leader, People, and Organization, PwC, comments: "The accelerated shift to flexible working has been valuable for many companies. Whatever new models emerge, it's clear that employee-oriented policies that invest in safety, protection and well-being could become the new differentiator for recruitment, retention and company reputation."

In addition, increased use of artificial intelligence and automation are transforming the way work is completed. As companies and organizations are changing and reorganizing to be more competitive and profitable, the typical traditional workplace is being reorganized. What is evolving is the model that works best for both business and labor, satisfying the needs of the companies and their employees. Working from home or anywhere in the world is now becoming the norm. Some employees take the initiative and provide ideas on how their work outside the physical office can be more productive. But will work-from-home or hybrid working be able to level scores in terms of equality and diversity? How will employees be affected by losing the social aspects of work, interaction with colleagues, etc.? These are open questions.

As a result of great collaborative efforts among Johns Hopkins University, the World Bank, and UNICEF, a new database has been created, entitled: the COVID-19 Global Education Recovery Tracker. Once fully implemented, this new global tracker will measure the pandemic's impact on education worldwide by tracking re-opening and recovery planning and developments in more than 200 countries (John Hopkins University, 2021b). As part of the return to normalcy in the US, but with global implications, this is a huge advancement.

Even the arts are affected by this transformation as the post-pandemic new reality is evolving. More digital and virtual presentations are anticipated. For example, tickets are on sale for summer 2021's New York cultural sensation: "Van Gogh:

The Immersive Experience." This 360° digital art exhibition of the works of Vincent van Gogh allows visitors to explore the paintings of this fantastic Dutch Master by stepping into them virtually. This exhibit, billed as a must-see experience, is touring the world, visiting cities across Europe, Asia, and The Americas.

Post Pandemic Reforms

The list of pandemic impacts and needed changes is long. Many important issues and challenges require immediate attention. What are the reforms that are most pressing and critical to address? What are the consequences of doing nothing or not doing enough?

Health care reform is one of the critical areas that must be addressed. Governments struggle to balance competing public health-related impacts with the pandemic's socio-economic impacts as they reflect upon priorities and directions. The virus underscored that health care, a basic human right, is ripe for reform. For people in low-income countries, the need is greatest due to the countries' socio-economic challenges. Strengthening health care and health care systems as well as reducing public health inequities are universal issues worldwide. Countries' government investments in health care systems and steering resources into health needs benefit all populations and reduce health inequities.

In the United States, as a result of the pandemic, people got free COVID-19 related health care and vaccinations regardless of their insurance status. Alex Azar (2020), the US Secretary of Health and Human Services, announced that "The (US) federal government will use a portion of funds provided by Congressional relief acts to cover coronavirus testing and treatment for the uninsured." This drastically impacted insurance companies and was a step towards the needed reform of the US health insurance system. The message was clear: the US needs universal access to affordable care (King, 2020) so that regardless of their ability to pay, people have access to essential health services and thousands are not in limbo. In addition, many, if not most of the US people, rely on health insurance received through employers. During the pandemic, millions became unemployed with many jobs never to return, e.g., in restaurant, travel, tourism, and entertainment industries. About 15 million people lost coverage received through employer-underwritten insurance during the COVID-19 pandemic. Once the job was gone, this insurance was gone.

Another issue is a fair economy, which is a global issue, not only an American one. The EU's European Commission (2020), in its "Economy that works for people" statement, said that: "Individuals and businesses in the EU can only thrive if the economy works for them." In other words, the economy in which opportunity and prosperity are shared.

Finally, we have learned how unprepared we were for the pandemic crises at the local, state, and federal levels. We also learned that communities of color were affected by the pandemic to a greater degree than other communities. Let's find out why and fix it.

Increasing Global Cooperation, Unity, and Trust

The global impact of the pandemic has been staggering. It is too early to predict what's to come and how countries will address the pandemic's effects and its socio-economic impacts. How can countries pull together to function better both nationally and internationally? Linked to this are the issues of unity and trust.

While different opinions and approaches exist, countries can work towards common overarching goals. Presently, these might be related to the continuation of addressing virus variants, vaccine and booster production and distribution, and treating Covid "long haulers." There are parts of the world that desperately need help as the virus does not recognize any borders. As a world, we have already learned that working together and sharing experiences on vaccine development and distribution efficiency has helped slow the virus spread.

Strengthening the global economy might represent another area where cooperation is beneficial. The economic interests of many countries are interrelated as all need economic growth, development, and prosperity within their respective nations.

In the coming years, a host of strategies for other impacted sectors will be needed in many industries, including but not limited to: food and restaurants, petroleum, manufacturing, financial, education, information technology, media, entertainment, travel, and tourism. Numerous reforms need to take place, with just a few identified in this essay. To move forward, there needs to be great innovation, creativity, funding, goodwill, and trust.

In addition, global awareness is necessary to understand what is going on in the world, the major issues facing the international community-- as this will also lead

to and influence decision-making. Also, this awareness may help with the development of trust, which is essential to effective negotiation strategies, international relations, multilateral relations, business dealings, and even simple cooperation among countries, organizations, or individuals.

The attempt to improve national unity can be demonstrated by the United States' experience. During the Super Bowl championship game (February 7, 2021, Tampa Bay Buccaneers vs. Kansas City Chiefs), Bruce Springsteen appeared in the Jeep.com (2021) commercial. Standing in Lebanon, Kansas, the geographical center of the US, he said:

We just have to remember that the very soil we stand on is common ground so that we can get there. We can make it to the mountaintop through the desert, and we will cross this divide. Our light has always found its way through the darkness. And there's hope on the road up ahead.

The pandemic has provided massive opportunities and responsibilities to rebuild and renew lives throughout the world. Various societies learned that many existing problems, some never resolved but uncovered and exacerbated by COVID-19, need to be addressed. It is time to work together, increase trust and unite behind shared values; doing what is good for one's nation and the world necessitates putting aside differences of convictions, prejudice, ambitions, and desires. As Bruce Springsteen said: "we can make it to the mountaintop through the desert and ...cross this divide" (Jeep.com, 2021).

Conclusion – Will the 2020s Roar?

March 2021 marked the first anniversary of the pandemic. One year ago, the whole world came to a standstill and was put through horrific stress tests—health, economic, financial, political, and social shocks. Are we stronger as a result, or are we weaker? What have we learned as individuals, society, and the world?

George Harrison (2016) famously sang: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." In the post-pandemic world, once we realize and clearly see the issues, the roots of problems, and the results or lack of them -- we will be able to find the path to their resolution. In many cases, this is precisely what is happening, and this is a cause for optimism and hope for normalcy.

The world economy is picking up as some countries expect a new post-pandemic phase of recovery and growth. Forecasts for the American economy in 2021 are looking very promising as various states keep reopening their economies. The National Retail Federation (2021) issued its annual forecast for 2021: "anticipating that retail sales will grow between 6.5 percent and 8.2 percent to more than \$4.33 trillion in 2021 as more individuals get vaccinated and the economy re-opens."

As of this writing, according to the Johns Hopkins University Vaccine Tracker, the total number of people fully vaccinated in the US is 117,647,439 (38.22%) out of a population of 328 million (John Hopkins University, 2021a). We have a ways to go, but what great progress! The Tokyo Summer Olympic Games are scheduled to be held in July 2021. This would greatly uplift the spirit of the whole world and its steps towards normalcy.

Will we have the Roaring Twenties again, just like in the 1920s? Perhaps, I believe so. We need to stay positive, test negative, vaccinate and keep our immunity strong. People are definitely ready to come out of lockdowns, get back to work, go to theaters, go to sporting events, go shopping, spend money, listen to music, and dance again. There are very resilient societies, so let's be optimistic. As Elizabeth Edwards (n.d.) said, "resilience is accepting your new reality, even if it's less good than the one you had before..." So, I accept it, and I will go to Riverside Park to listen to some jazz.

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