

## WHO - Crisis Committee - Topic Synopsis

Dear Delegates,

I'm Samantha, and I'm thrilled to be serving as a Co-director on the conference team for UCIMUN. As part of my role, I'm directing the WHO Crisis Committee, where we'll be tackling pressing global health issues with creativity and diplomacy. While this is my first year with UCIMUN, I bring with me a wealth of experience from my previous college's MUN team. I'm excited to bring that experience to UCIMUN and work together with all of you to make this conference a memorable and impactful one. Let's dive into the world of diplomacy and problem-solving together!

I am majoring in business economics, with a keen interest in exploring the intersection of economic principles and public policy. Outside of academics, I enjoy spending time outdoors, particularly hiking and exploring nature trails. On campus, I'm involved in the campus-wide honors college and I am a Chancellor's Excellence Scholar, which allows me to participate in various academic and leadership development opportunities.

Our first topic, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and global pandemic response, is of paramount importance to both our committee and the broader global community. The ongoing pandemic has underscored the interconnectedness of nations and the urgent need for coordinated, effective responses to public health crises. This topic aligns perfectly with the overarching theme of our conference, "Advancing upon the global issues of our community," as it emphasizes the necessity of collective action in addressing challenges that transcend borders and impact us all. Moving to our second topic, border security, we confront another pressing issue with far-reaching implications. In an increasingly interconnected world, maintaining secure borders while facilitating trade, migration, and cooperation is a delicate balance that requires thoughtful consideration. Both topics offer delegates the opportunity to engage deeply with complex global issues and contribute meaningfully to advancing solutions that benefit our shared community.

Delegates, as we embark on our journey of diplomacy and problem-solving within the committee, it's crucial to remember that our topic synopses serve as just the beginning of our exploration. I urge each of you to dive deeper into your research, seeking out diverse perspectives, up-to-date data, and nuanced analyses that will enrich your understanding of the issues at hand. By immersing yourselves in thorough research, you'll be better equipped to contribute insightful perspectives, propose innovative solutions, and engage in productive debates that drive our committee forward. Remember, the depth of your understanding directly correlates with the impact of your contributions, so let's commit to thorough research and elevate the quality of our deliberations.

As our conference approaches, I am filled with excitement at the prospect of meeting each and every one of you in May. I can't wait to witness the insightful debates, creative solutions, and meaningful connections that will emerge as we work together to address pressing global issues. Your engagement and dedication are instrumental to the success of our committee, and I look forward to collaborating with you all soon.

Warm regards,

Samantha Quezada  
Co-Director, WHO Crisis Committee  
UCIMUN Conference Team

## **Introduction**

In late 2019, a novel coronavirus, later named SARS-CoV-2, emerged in Wuhan, China. This virus, causing the disease COVID-19, led to an unprecedented global pandemic. Its rapid spread and the international community's response have underscored the vital role of the World Health Organization (WHO) in leading global health crises.

The World Health Organization is at the forefront of global health initiatives and acts as the United Nations' coordinating authority on international health work. Since its creation in 1948, WHO has been crucial in combating infectious diseases and promoting public health initiatives in order to improve the health and well-being of all people. As a specialized agency, WHO's mandate covers a wide-range of health-related issues, including setting global health standards and norms. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, the work performed by the WHO proved more critical than ever through their technical guidance and coordination of health efforts.

As we delve into this topic, we will explore the intricacies of the COVID-19 pandemic from its onset to the current state, focusing on key areas such as virus transmission, impact on global health systems, vaccine development, and distribution challenges. This exploration will provide a comprehensive background necessary for informed discussions and resolutions. The challenges posed by COVID-19 underscore the importance of WHO's mission and the need for international cooperation in health. Its efforts to build a healthier future for all, by addressing the immediate crisis and strengthening health systems worldwide, are crucial in our collective journey towards global health security and resilience. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted significant disparities in healthcare access and the effectiveness of pandemic responses across different regions. By examining these disparities, we aim to identify critical lessons and strategies for strengthening global health security and equity.

## Background

### *Discovery of SARS-CoV-2*

In December 2019, a novel coronavirus, later named SARS-CoV-2, was discovered in Wuhan, China, pointing towards a zoonotic origin where the disease was transmitted from animal to human (Asselah et. al, 2020). The World Health Organization's Office in the People's Republic of China notified international authorities while providing reports from local municipalities in the Hubei province (WHO, 2020). As the disease was initially dubbed a "viral pneumonia" with reports of flu-like symptoms, rapid transmission of the disease became a major concern for health authorities in China (Phan, 2020).

In January 2020, the World Health Organization prompted further investigations into the outbreak of disease and notified the Global Outbreak and Response Network (GOARN), a global partnership with nations that provides resources to counter global health emergencies (WHO 2020). As cases were tracked, it was officially reported through genomic sequencing that the disease was caused by a novel coronavirus, later referred to as COVID-19.

Initial measures meant to contain the spread of COVID-19 within China included lockdowns, mask-wearing, and social distancing (OpenWHO, 2020). However, due to the rapid spread of the virus, containment measures were limited in its effectiveness, with the first documented case of COVID-19 outside of China occurring in Thailand on January 11, 2020. It should be noted that during this period, the WHO were investigating concerns of human-to-human transmission, which have not been reported officially yet.

By mid-January, the WHO launched its first public health mission to investigate the outbreak in Wuhan, which then confirmed the existence of human-to-human transmission, leading to major concerns about the transmissibility of the virus (Center for Disease Control and

Prevention, n.d.). Neighboring countries, such as South Korea and Japan, began reporting their first cases of COVID-19, and by January 21, 2020, the United States reported its first confirmed case. On January 30, 2020, the WHO officially declared the outbreak a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern” when reconvening the International Health Regulations Emergency Committee (WHO, 2020). At this point, there were a total of 98 reported cases outside of China, but due to limited data, the actual spread of the virus was unknown to health officials around the world.

During the transition from January to February, evidencing human-to-human transmission beyond China’s border became widespread as the virus spread into numerous countries across continents - with Italy, Iran, and South Korea experiencing significant outbreaks (WHO Headquarters, 2021). The rising number of cases prompted travel restrictions and highlighted issues within healthcare systems that struggled to mitigate the spread.

On March 11, 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic, acknowledging the worldwide spread of the virus and the collective action needed to combat it (WHO, 2021). The declaration occurred during a period of exponentially rising cases and was a critical indicator of the coming months for countries to implement comprehensive strategies to counter the virus. With over 118,000 cases in over 114 countries, the declaration was a pivotal point in pandemic responsiveness, leading to further implications within world leadership and global diplomacy.

### ***Global and National Responses***

The global and national responses to the COVID-19 pandemic are multifaceted, involving unprecedented efforts to curb the spread of the virus, treat those affected, and mitigate

the socio-economic impacts. These responses have been characterized by a mix of collaboration, innovation, and challenges, reflecting the complex nature of managing a health crisis of this magnitude (Chen et. al, 2021).

Upon the pandemic's declaration, WHO escalated its efforts to guide and support global response strategies. This included the rapid dissemination of technical guidelines, the launch of the COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund to facilitate donations, and the initiation of the Solidarity Trial to find effective treatments. At the global level, coordinating efforts amongst countries facing varying levels of infectivity and cases proved to be an insurmountable challenge as many nations lacked the appropriate equipment and supplies to sustain public health measures in tandem with socio-economic necessities.

The pandemic elicited a spectrum of policy responses across nations, each tailored to the country's specific circumstances, health system capacity, and societal norms. These ranged from strict lockdowns and border closures to more measured approaches focusing on testing, contact tracing, and isolation. Countries like New Zealand and South Korea were commended due to their decisive actions and effective communication strategies, which included extensive testing, rigorous contact tracing, and transparent public messaging. Conversely, other nations faced criticism for delayed responses, inadequate testing capacities, and inconsistent messaging, which, in some cases, led to higher infection rates and mortality.

A significant challenge for the WHO and global leaders was the varying capacities of countries to implement recommended public health measures. While some nations swiftly mobilized resources to enhance their healthcare infrastructure and protect vulnerable populations, others struggled with limited healthcare capacity, shortages of personal protective equipment (PPE), and insufficient testing capabilities (WHO, 2021). As a means to accelerate

vaccine development and provide COVID-19 tests more equitably, the WHO also established the Access to COVID-19 Tools Accelerator (ACT) in April 2020, which underscores the importance of global solidarity and equitable healthcare access. Again, these disparities underscored the global inequity in health system preparedness and capacity, which WHO aimed to address through initiatives like the ACT-Accelerator and the COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP) to ensure equitable access to life-saving tools and information (WHO, 2021).

In terms of economic and social considerations, many countries also implemented diverse economic policies to buffer the pandemic's impact. These included financial stimulus packages, unemployment benefits, and support for businesses facing closure. Social interventions, such as remote learning for schools and mental health support, were critical in addressing the broader societal impacts of the pandemic. However, the economic downturn resulting from the pandemic posed a significant challenge, with the WHO and other international bodies calling for a balanced approach to safeguard public health while minimizing economic fallout.

The WHO's efforts to provide guidance and support were sometimes met with political challenges, including disputes over the origins of the virus, criticisms of the organization's handling of the pandemic, and debates over the use of specific treatments promoted by political figures without sufficient scientific evidence (WHO, 2021). Navigating the complex intersection of science, politics, and public health was a considerable challenge for the WHO, as it sought to maintain its authoritative stance on best practices while engaging with a broad array of stakeholders, including governments, the private sector, and civil society.

### *Lessons for Future Preparedness*

As the pandemic continues to evolve, the global and national responses underscore the importance of adaptability, international cooperation, and a multi-sectoral approach that considers health, economic, and social dimensions. The WHO's role in coordinating the international response, despite facing various challenges, remains critical in fostering global solidarity, sharing knowledge, and allocating resources to combat the pandemic and prepare for future health crises. The COVID-19 pandemic is a stark reminder of the global community's vulnerabilities and the imperative for more robust pandemic preparedness. Currently, remedying the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and devising a comprehensive pandemic preparedness plan, are several key initiatives that emerge which can guide future strategies.

By looking into strategies and policies that aim to strengthen health systems, provide early public health surveillance of illnesses, and coordinate equitable access to healthcare necessities, the experiences of the pandemic have laid the groundwork for a more robust system for pandemic preparedness.

## Research Questions

1. In your country, what strategies were employed to counteract the COVID-19 pandemic?  
How effective were these strategies, and what methods could be improved?
2. What role should the WHO and other international organizations play in coordinating pandemic preparedness and response, and how can their effectiveness be enhanced?
3. How can nations balance the imperative to protect public health with the need to minimize economic and social disruptions during pandemics?
4. In the context of COVID-19, what lessons can be drawn regarding the development, distribution, and administration of vaccines to ensure swift, equitable access worldwide?
5. Considering the criticisms and challenges faced by the WHO during the COVID-19 pandemic, what steps can be taken to strengthen the organization's capacity to lead future global health emergencies?
6. How can global health systems be fortified to withstand the pressures of a pandemic while ensuring equitable healthcare access, particularly for vulnerable populations?



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