

# Threat of COVID-19 to global poor

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Credit: AI-generated image

Three and a half billion people in the developing world live with a deprivation that could leave them vulnerable when exposed to SARS-CoV2—the virus that causes COVID-19.

Nearly a half-billion of the world's [poorest people](#), who live with three such deprivations, are at "high risk," according to a Briefing from the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI).

As the virus spreads across the [developing world](#), the Oxford team has used existing poverty data to analyse the vulnerability of populations on the basis of three indicators—lack of access to [clean drinking water](#), under-nutrition and a lack of clean cooking fuel. These indicators are not comprehensive, but draw upon readily available data that highlight potential vulnerabilities in populations across countries. The deprivations have long been associated with weakened immune systems and respiratory systems.

Led by Dr. Sabina Alkire, the OPHI team was recently given a prestigious Queen's Anniversary Prize for its work measuring and understanding global poverty. OPHI produces the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) with the United Nations Development Programme. Covering 5.7 billion people in more than 100 countries, the global MPI tracks the multiple interlinked deprivations that people can face in their health, education and living standards.

The three indicators highlighted in the Briefing, as relevant in a COVID-19 context, were selected from the global MPI database. Globally, around 3.5 billion people live with at least one [deprivation](#). Some 472 million people are living with all three—nearly half of whom are in sub-Saharan Africa. Some 355 million people have these deprivations and live with additional deprivations in areas such as schooling and personal assets.

Co-author Dr. Christian Oldiges observes: "This is a crisis that knows no borders. The sheer scale and devastation of this pandemic will demand bold action on behalf of the most vulnerable."

According to the OPHI team, the scale of potential vulnerability in the developing world is sobering. As the virus spreads further, the report indicates that nearly 22 % of people in sub-Saharan Africa and more than 5% in South Asia are simultaneously deprived in nutrition, water

and cooking fuel, compared with 0.3% in Europe and Central Asia.

Dr. Alkire says: "We are analysing poverty data productively to inform both the COVID-19 emergency and post-emergency response. As the year unfolds, we will continue to work with our creative and committed colleagues in poverty reduction around the world as we track the long-term profound effects of COVID-19 on global [poverty](#)."

**More information:** Multidimensional Poverty and COVID-19 Risk Factors: A Rapid Overview of Interlinked Deprivations across 5.7 Billion People: [ophi.org.uk/b53/](https://ophi.org.uk/b53/)

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