Guiding questions:

1. **What has the pandemic revealed about how deep-seated inequalities determine lifetime opportunities and outcomes including in good health and well-being?**

   - The COVID-19 pandemic exposed long-ignored risks, including inadequate health systems, gaps in social protection and structural inequalities. It has also brought home the importance of basic public health, as well as of strong health systems and emergency preparedness, for the resilience of a population in the face of a new virus or pandemic.
   
   - As we know, the poor and vulnerable communities that were struggling even before the pandemic are being hit hardest by the health and economic impacts. The groups that are suffering disproportionately include the elderly, poorer members of society, women and girls, people with disabilities and chronic health conditions, people living in remote areas and migrant populations.
   
   - Even in high-income countries, **groups facing conditions of vulnerability are being left behind**, notably elderly people living in residential care homes, people requiring palliative care, migrant populations living in poor housing with inadequate workplace protection and homeless people, who are slipping through social safety nets.
   
   - COVID-19 affects everyone, but it hits those who can least afford it the hardest.
   
   - The gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have been numerous. Globally, **women comprise vast numbers of front-line health workers, being at a high risk of infection without adequate working conditions or compensation**. Women working in other sectors have also been disproportionately affected, as, in many countries, women work in sectors heavily impacted by the pandemic or in the informal sector and have therefore been more likely to experience economic loss.
   
   - The pandemic has also entrenched gender norms, **as it is predominately women who take up unpaid care burdens, often at the expense of paid labour**. With most countries having gone into some type of lockdown, many households have had to stay indoors during an intensely stressful period, and the incidence of domestic violence has increased across the globe, particularly for women.

2. **Has the pandemic introduced new forms of inequality within and across countries that now also need to be addressed?**

   - The impact of COVID-19 exacerbated existing inequalities and can be compounded by multiple and intersecting inequalities, such as those relating to race, gender, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, geographic location or sexual orientation. **This underscores the need to have disaggregated data**; without being able to measure these specific impacts to several groups, the response to the pandemic will not effectively address their needs.
Estimates show that COVID-19 could push an additional 70–100 million people into extreme poverty.\(^1\) What’s more, a large share of the population that has newly fallen into extreme poverty will be concentrated in countries that are already struggling with high poverty rates and high numbers of poor persons. This increase in worldwide poverty threatens the ability of the most vulnerable to access health services.

3. **How can countries make effective and enduring changes towards more equitable, inclusive and just societies?**

- The patriarchal nature of global and public health systems received increasing attention during 2020. Research showed that 85.2% of COVID-19 national task forces are men, and an average of about 25% of participants in the first three committees on International Health Regulations Emergency were women.\(^2\) **Women’s roles need to be extended beyond the frontlines to participating in the design, implementation and monitoring of national COVID-19 responses and overall pandemic preparedness and response.** A gender-sensitive response to disease outbreaks is crucial, as responses are more likely to be effective for everyone if there is diversity in leadership panels.
- Civil society is a crucial bridge between governments and people left behind in emergency response. Governments must build partnerships through genuine civil society engagement and establish mechanisms for engaging civil and civic society.
- Governments must also clearly communicate on progress and the actions they are taking to achieve UHC, including setting clear targets to improve service coverage and financial protection and communicating them clearly to multi-stakeholder audiences at local, national and global levels. National targets should be publicized openly and made understandable and accessible for populations across the world. **This is essential in order for people and electorates to hold their governments to account in meeting their UHC commitments.**
- Recovering better is not just a matter of concern for health ministries. It will also require a genuine, effective, multi-sectoral approach by the whole of government, including those at a local, municipal, and regional level.
- Globally, it’s important that we give UHC principles more weight in every crisis response, namely universality, leaving nobody behind and allocating support and services equitably according to need. If the world is to tackle future pandemics more effectively, it needs empathetic leaders who make decisions based on science.

4. **What are the opportunities to be realized (and pitfalls to be avoided) in the immediate and medium terms towards these ends? How can international cooperation support?**

- Achieving universal access to COVID-19-related services should be seen as a springboard for accelerating progress towards UHC worldwide. Governments and the international community should seize the moment to protect the health, livelihoods and welfare of the most vulnerable and to ensure adequate safety nets. **This is also an excellent opportunity to pass legislation for accelerating progress towards UHC.**

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\(^1\) World Bank report Global Economic Prospects, June 2020

• Recognizing that health system reform is inherently political, global leaders and other stakeholders must come together to ensure coherent action and to build trust and accountability by widening participation in health governance at all levels.
• Governments should institutionalize and mandate social and political accountability mechanisms and implement concrete plans to monitor the impacts of UHC laws and policies.
• Where UHC laws and regulations are lacking, parliamentarians will have a key role in translating the commitments made at the 2019 UN high-level meeting on UHC and needs and demands of their own constituents into appropriate legislation.

LINKS TO UHC2030 DOCUMENTS TO POST IN THE EVENT CHAT AS WELL:

• UHC2030 Global Compact for progress towards UHC: https://www.uhc2030.org/what-we-do/working-better-together/global-compact/
• State of commitment to universal health coverage around the world: https://www.uhc2030.org/what-we-do/voices/accountability/state-of-uhc-commitment/