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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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07.05.2022

The World Health Organization says the COVID pandemic has killed nearly 15 million across the globe

The World Health Organization (WHO) released Thursday its much-awaited and anticipated report on global excess deaths associated with COVID-19 for the period from January 2020 to December 2021.



The bodies of COVID-19 victims placed on hospital stretchers in Sri Lanka (Source: Facebook)

By the end of last December, officially reported global deaths had reached 5.42 million. However, the WHO study found that almost 15 million more people perished in the same period than usual, 2.75 times higher than the official total of COVID-19 deaths. The estimate of excess deaths gives a range from 13.3 million to 16.6 million.

The WHO defined excess death/mortality as “the difference between the total number of deaths and the number of deaths that would have been expected in the absence of the [COVID-19] pandemic.”

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, WHO director-general, remarked, “These sobering data not only point to the impact of the pandemic but also to the need for all countries to invest in more resilient health systems that can sustain essential health services during crises, including stronger health information systems.”

A regional comparison of excess deaths to official COVID-19 deaths underscores the seriousness of these warnings. But more than recognizing the disparities, without understanding why these exist, little can be expected to bring about the changes advocated by the WHO. The disparities are ultimately a byproduct of global capitalism and its criminal policies that allowed the virus free rein to infect the most vulnerable and the disenfranchised.

In this sense, the *New York Times* attempts to cover the criminal policies perfected in 2021, precisely the vaccine-only strategy that forced the piecemeal and systematic return to normalcy. They wrote yesterday, “Much of the loss of life from the pandemic was concentrated in 2021 when new and more contagious variants drove surges of the virus even in countries that had fended off earlier outbreaks.”

Rather than making a straight year-to-year comparison, the *Times* only notes that roughly 18 percent, an extra 10 million people, died in 2021 than “would have been without the pandemic.” It is worth noting that when the 2020 excess death report was published, there were 3 million excess deaths and 1.8 million official COVID-19 deaths. *The Economist's* estimate placed those figures at 5.6 million excess deaths and 1.8 million COVID-19 deaths.

In other words, the number of excess deaths for 2021 is far more than twice the number that perished in 2020, despite having confirmed the efficacy of several COVID-19 vaccines and the recognition of the airborne nature of the virus, and the importance of respirators and high-efficiency ventilation to stem the tides of infection. It also became clear that the virus could mutate to forms with more virulent and contagious characteristics.

Instead, the de facto capitalist policy of vaccine nationalism and a vaccine-only strategy was used to begin the lifting of mask mandates and loosening of social restrictions and returning to “economic” normalcy that has cost the lives of millions more when every means to eliminate COVID-19 was available. That the scale of death doubled or tripled in 2021 only confirms that all remaining inhibitions for the social murder of the population had evaporated.

Twenty countries accounting for half of the global population saw more than 80 percent (11.9 million) of the estimated global excess mortality—Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Germany, India, Indonesia, Iran, Italy, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Poland, the Russian Federation, South Africa, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Turkey, Ukraine and the United States of America.

Ten countries accounted for 68 percent (10.1 million) of excess deaths—Brazil, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, Turkey and the United States.

When these are sorted according to the World Bank income groups, lower-middle-income regions had the highest estimate of excess deaths with 7.87 million (52 percent) and the highest excess deaths per capita at 236 per 100,000 people. These regions also account for approximately 3.3 billion people and have a per capita GDP of only \$2,217.

By comparison, upper-middle income regions saw 4.24 million excess deaths and high-income areas 2.16 million. But when compared on a per capita basis, they had similar excess death rates at 168 and 177 per 100,000, respectively. Low-income regions had only 0.64 million excess deaths, but the uncertainty bounds of the estimates are the largest because of poor registration systems for vital statistics.

Dr. Samira Asma, assistant director-general for data, analytics, and delivery at WHO, noted, “measurement of excess mortality is an essential component to understand the impact of the pandemic. Shifts in mortality trends provide decision-makers with information to guide policies to reduce mortality and effectively prevent future crises. Because of limited investments in data systems in many countries, the true extent of excess mortality often remains hidden.”

WHO experts told the *New York Times*, “About half of countries globally do not regularly report the number of deaths from all causes. Others supply only partial data. In the WHO African region, for example, the experts said that they had data from only six of 47 countries.”

By the WHO region categories, the population of Southeast Asia, which includes the Indian subcontinent, suffered the most significant number of excess deaths, with close to 6 million. With 4.7 million excess deaths, India accounted for nearly one-third of global excess deaths. The figure is almost 10 times higher than official COVID-19 deaths reported by Indian health officials. Most of these occurred during the explosive Delta wave that produced horrific scenes of burning piles of corpses across the country.

The delay in bringing out the report when it was completed in January was in large part due to objections raised by India on the methodology for estimating the excess deaths. According to several media reports, the complaints appear to be politically motivated to stall the release of the damning results until after elections in key Indian states were concluded in early March.

It also placed the WHO leadership in a precarious position. Many of the independent scientists working as technical advisors for the WHO and contributing extensively to the findings criticized the international agency for acquiescing to India’s delaying tactics. Though the report results are significant and now finally published, the delay underscores the politically explosive nature of the inconvenient truth.

The other country in Southeast Asia with a significant undercounting of COVID-19 deaths was Indonesia. More than 1 million people perished during the pandemic though official COVID-19 deaths stand at 156,000, a six-fold undercounting.

The case in Peru exemplifies that a robust vital registration system is not a substitute for investment in health systems and public health infrastructure. With a population of nearly 33 million, the excess deaths of 290,000 were only 1.4 times above the reported COVID-19 deaths. But on a per capita basis of 437 excess deaths for every 100,000 people, Peru is among the highest globally.

Dr. Elmer Huerta, an oncologist and public health expert in Peru, said, “When a health care system isn’t prepared to receive patients who are seriously ill with pneumonia when it can’t provide the oxygen they need to live, or even provide beds for them to lay in so they can have some peace, you get what you’ve gotten.”

In conjunction with the release of the WHO report on excess deaths, the mainstream press is acknowledging that the United States has reached the harrowing mark of 1 million COVID deaths. Though on an excess death per capita basis, the US stands in 40th place with 140 deaths per 100,000, the grim milestone is both substantively and symbolically a stain on the criminal policies that have been shaped initially by Trump and further carried out in the most criminal form by Biden.

Yesterday, new COVID-19 cases in the United States exceeded 100,000 again. Deaths sharply increased, with 1,929 deaths reported on May 4, 2022. Hospitalizations have also turned up sharply. And no preparations are underway to stem the seventh wave of infections.

World Socialist 06.05.2022