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Headline: Has the lockdown inspired new hope in the fight against global warming?

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How will COVID-19 affect the fight against global warming? A recent study, which looked at the reduction in CO2 emissions during the lockdown, offers some reasons for hope.

However, the authors of the research warn that structural measures must accompany major changes in the behavior of the world's population if global warming is to be halted.

The study published in "Nature Climate Change" shows how a reduction in CO2 emissions on a scale with the one occasioned by the lockdown could, if it was reinforced by structural economic measures, effectively combat global warming.

A temporary reduction that needs to be permanent

The team of 14 researchers evaluated data from Apple and Google on mobility during the health crisis. Their results show that close to four billion people cut down on traveling by 50% during a period that extended from February to June 2020, prompting a significant reduction in CO2 emissions worldwide.

This is encouraging news for the fight against global warming, although the impact of the reduction will be largely ephemeral due to its limited duration.

The researchers point out that even if the lockdown was extended until the end of 2021, its impact on global warming would only amount to 0.1 degree Celsius by 2030.

Long-term change to counter a looming emergency

For professor Piers Forster, who led the study, a major change in human behavior will not be enough in itself to put an end to global warming.

The world must now take advantage of a post-COVID opportunity to implement structural change in the economy with the objective of reducing emissions to a figure close to zero.

The three sectors targeted by the researchers are industry, transport and power generation. They notably argue for a massive investment in renewable energy and a policy that prevents any fossil fuel lock-ins or bailouts. And they explore the impact of these measures in two scenarios, one that is relatively moderate and another that is much more radical.

However, in both cases, governments will have to make important decisions in favor of the environment to avoid the most harmful consequences of global warming and create a more resilient future. IB

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