

What all these measures have in common was that their ranking of countries did not predict the relative performance of countries in the COVID-19 response^(20, 21, 22). The measures failed to account sufficiently for the impact on responses of political leadership, trust in government institutions and country ability to mount fast and adaptable responses⁽²³⁾. For example, while the US ranked highest in its aggregate score on the Global Health Security Index, it scored less well on universal health care access, and in relation to public confidence in government received a score of zero indicating a confidence level of less than 25%⁽²⁴⁾. The failure of these metrics to be predictive demonstrates the need for a fundamental reassessment which better aligns preparedness measurement with operational capacities in real-world stress situations, including the points at which coordination structures and decision-making may fail. The current pandemic will generate a wealth of data to guide that reassessment.

Underscoring the consequences of a failure to invest sufficiently in preparedness capacity is the increasing background level of risk. Population growth and accompanying environmental stresses are driving an increase in emerging novel pathogens. Air travel, which has increased fourfold since 1990, enables a virus to reach any place in the world in a matter of hours⁽²⁵⁾. A new pathogen could emerge and spread at any time.

Most of the new pathogens are zoonotic in origin. Driving their increasing emergence are land use and food production practices and population pressure. Global surveillance systems need to monitor burgeoning infrastructure, environmental loss and the status of animal health. One Health interagency and multisectoral collaboration need to be an integral part of pandemic preparedness planning. Accelerating tropical

Figure 2: Air travel has increased four-fold since 1990. This figure shows concurrent flights in the air as of 02 May 2021, 9pm CET

Source: FlightAware, accessed online 2 May 2021.

