



1. Introduction

The world is still in the midst of a pandemic that has spread wider and faster than any in human history. The social and economic crisis precipitated by COVID-19 is affecting families, communities and nations across the globe.

Seized by the gravity of the crisis, in May 2020 the World Health Assembly requested the Director-General of WHO to initiate an impartial, independent, and comprehensive review of the international health response to COVID-19 and of experiences gained and lessons learned from that, and to make recommendations to improve capacities for the future. The Director-General asked H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and the Rt Hon. Helen Clark to convene an independent panel for this purpose and to report to the World Health Assembly in May 2021.

The Panel has taken a systematic, rigorous and comprehensive approach to its work. It has sought to listen to and learn from a wide range of interlocutors. Since mid-September 2020, the Panel has reviewed extensive literature, conducted original research, heard from experts in 15 round-table discussions and in interviews, received the testimony of people working on the front lines of the pandemic in town-hall-style meetings, and welcomed many [submissions](#) from its open invitation to contribute.

The Panel has examined the state of pandemic preparedness prior to COVID-19, the circumstances of the identification of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) and the disease it causes, coronavirus disease (COVID-19), and responses globally, regionally and nationally, particularly in the pandemic's early months. It has also analysed the wide-ranging impact of the pandemic and the ongoing social and economic crisis that it has precipitated.

This report presents the Panel's findings on what happened, the lessons to be learned from that, and our recommendations for strategic action now to end this pandemic and to ensure that any future infectious disease outbreak does not become a catastrophic pandemic.

Complementing this report, the Panel presents a companion report describing thirteen defining moments which have been pivotal in shaping the course of the pandemic. In addition, the Panel is publishing a series of background papers representing in-depth research including a chronology of the early response.