



## Sociological Briefing

# The pandemic as uncertainty shock for intergovernmental organizations

The Covid-19 pandemic has influenced all the research disciplines and emerging issues linked to its impact are at the core of research agendas. In Sociology, academics around the world have advanced knowledge to understand the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on different areas of life, social behavior or working conditions, among many other topics. The intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) are also affected by Covid-19 pandemic and a new scenario is opened, which allows to rethink their activities.

The authors of “Intergovernmental organizations in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic: Organizational behavior in crises and under uncertainty” published in *International Sociology* address whether the fundamental changes related to Covid-19 pandemic can also be applied to IGOs, raising the following questions: “How did the Covid-19 pandemic affect the behavior of intergovernmental organizations? How can one explain this behaviour of intergovernmental organizations in response to such a major exogenous event as the Covid-19 pandemic? How can the Covid-19 pandemic be best conceptualized in terms of its impact on intergovernmental organizations?”. The uncertainty shock underpins the new scenario.

## Intergovernmental organizations facing Covid-19 pandemic

The authors include the theoretical contributions related to organizational responses to exogenous events. The effects of the crisis on organizations have been generally analyzed considering the potential transformation or non-transformation of the organizational responses. Nevertheless, it is also argued that crises are not necessarily related to transformational change and the concept of legitimacy must be taken into account. In the case of the Covid-19 pandemic, the article discusses the perspective of the rational-choice and the sociological institutionalist viewpoint. Furthermore, environmental uncertainty is relevant for organizational responses, and depending on the perspective, the expectations may have different results. The authors suggest that the rational-choice view and the sociological institutional lens are two main lenses to address this issue.

## Public responses of intergovernmental organizations

The analysis is based on a sample of 252 international governmental organizations appearing in the list of the Yearbook of International Organizations. The main source used was the available information on

the websites of the organizations. The collection and codification of the data followed six main categories, including verbal responses of the organization to Covid-19 crisis, the provision of material support to third parties or the production of knowledge. As a result of the analysis, the authors state that the responses of the international governmental organizations to the pandemic have two main features, summarized as follows “(a) they responded en mass and in a synchronized way, and (b) the pandemic triggered many non-major adaptations to the changed environment, providing opportunities for legitimation work and

minor repackaging of existing activities, but our data does not contain any evidence of major, radical structural change in organizations’ activities”. There are questions that remain to be understood, specially regarding the real transformations (or not) of these agents.

This work contributes to advance knowledge in the field of organizational studies, specially in the theories of IGO behavior facing exogenous events and their potential transformational change.