



Forum:	4 th Committee of the General Assembly
Issue:	Realising and counteracting the issue of increased plastic pollution driven by the production and usage of disposable protective equipment in order to slow the spread of Covid-19
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Description of the issue

The Covid-19 equipment, to slow the spread of the virus, is not good for the environment.

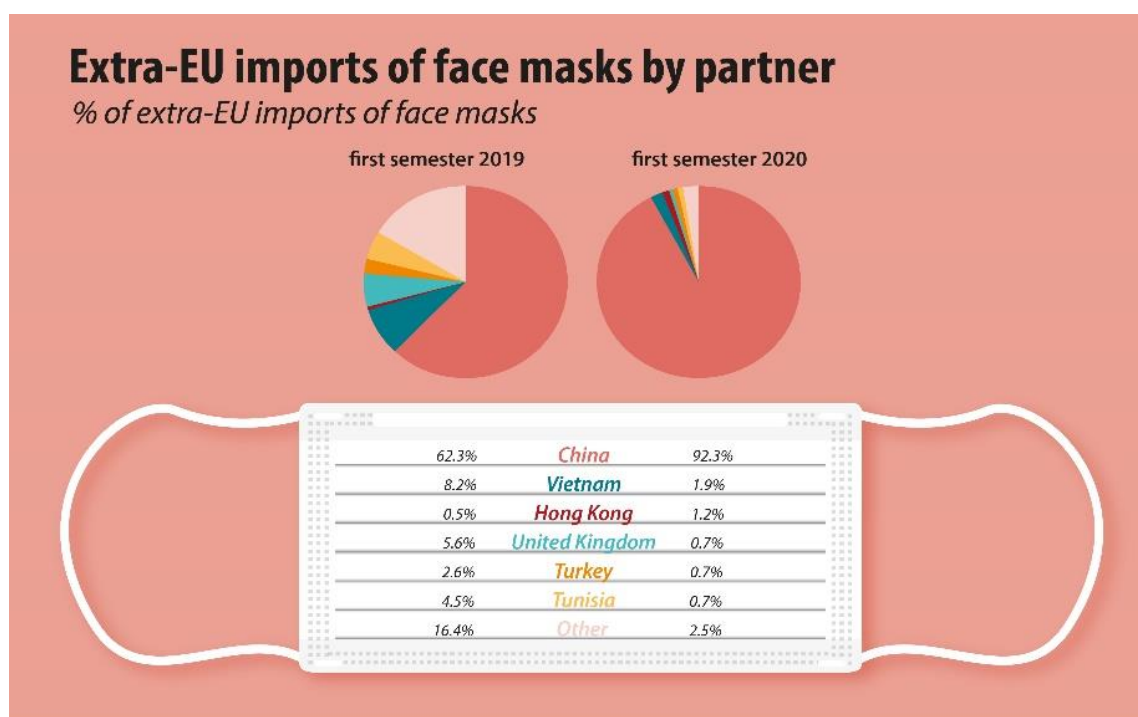
The problem with the issue is that the protective equipment to slow the Covid-19 spread is not sustainable. Since the Covid-19 pandemic started, people are daily confronted with equipment, which keeps us safe from getting infected with the Covid-19 virus, like the medical masks. For example in Germany, the Covid-19 antigen quick test has for every been available for every citizen, since March, to make those rapid tests before school, or going to hairdresser, to ensure that someone him-/herself can't infect someone else. What makes this issue a big problem is where the garbage, which corona brings with it, ends up. This often ends up in the sea, where it pollutes the water, and it can happen that animals eats it or get tangled up and suffocates or are poisoned and dies from the consequences. Every country is involved in this issue because all have to deal with corona and measures that arise as a result of using disposable² equipment.

Background Information

Covid-19, or corona, is a disease which appeared on 31 December 2019 for the first time in China. The deadly virus received the name SARS-CoV-2 and is known for its typical symptoms such as cough, fever and runny nose. However, several other symptoms are also possible, such as a loss of the sense of smell and / or taste, sore throat, shortness of breath, headache, and body aches as well as general weakness. Until June 2021 3.73 million people habe died from Covid-19 worldwide (<https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/1103240/umfrage/entwicklung-der-weltweiten-todesfaelle-aufgrund-des-coronavirus/> June 7th, 2021) and in order to prevent this

and to return to normal everyday life, the mask requirement and the rapid test were introduced and available to every citizen in most of the MEDC's, which have working landfills, unlike the LEDCs, where garbage often ends up in the environment or in the sea.

Who produces the masks?



ec.europa.eu/eurostat 

As clearly visible in the statistic, China was the biggest partner of the EU for supplying them with corona equipment such as face masks. In 2019 they made up 62,3% of face masks supplies, which raised up to 93,3% in 2020. At the end of 2020 China produced 450 million face masks daily (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1094428/china-medical-mask-daily-production-volume-by-type/>). It is worth mentioning that the masks are not made from recycled materials, and that they are hard to recycle. Since July, a French startup has recycled about 100.000 face masks, which is compared to the numbers of production a small number. In most of the European countries garbage is burnt, the real problem are the masks that get lost, or illegally



disposed in streets, parks, forests and generally in the nature. This is how trash ends up in the sea, from the MEDC's.

What kind of corona equipment is there ?

On the one hand, there are the face masks, which have been mandatory for citizens in public places such as malls or fitness studios. Further equipment are the rapid tests. Corona rapid tests mainly consist of plastic. This is not quite common, but there are still a great many people who use disposable gloves and in addition there are bottles of the disinfectant.

What is the equipment made of?

Fabric masks should be made of three layers of fabric:

Inner layer of absorbent material, such as cotton.

Middle layer of non-woven non-absorbent material, such as polypropylene.

Outer layer of non-absorbent material, such as polyester or polyester blend.

Corona rapid tests mainly consist of plastic. The test itself is made of plastic and so is the stick that you put into your nose. The bottle with the solution where the stick has to go in and the pipette for it is made of plastic

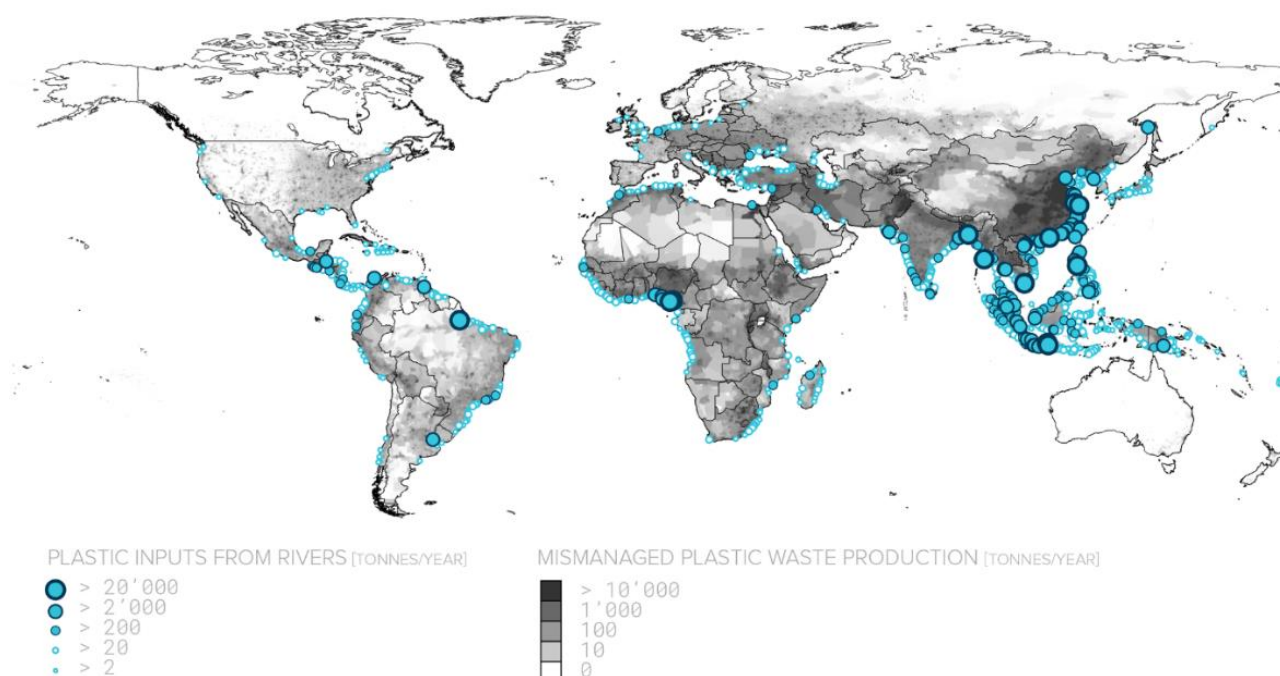
The gloves and the bottles of disinfectant are also fully made out of plastic.

What are the consequences concerning pollution?

The main consequences of the plastic pollution are the threats to animals on the land and as well as sea. Hedgehogs or birds get caught in the elastic cords of the surgical masks. Birds also use the material to build nests. If the masks get into the water, waterfowl such as ducks or seagulls get tangled in the strings, can no longer swim or feed and perish in agony. Remnants of masks and plastic have also been found in the stomachs of cats and dogs. They lead to constipation and, in the worst case, starvation. But foxes and wild boars also unintentionally eat the remains of dirty protective clothing. Rubber gloves are easy to recycle because they only

consist of one plastic. Something like quick test or medical masks consists of several plastics and this could become a problem when recycling them.

Furthermore the garbage pollutes the earth in other countries such as Malaysia. Every year since 2018, several hundred thousand tons of plastic, including garbage from Corona equipment, from countries such as Germany, France, the USA and Australia, have landed in illegal landfills in Malaysia. The plastic is recycled under dangerous conditions and the unusable residues are burned or dumped in an uncontrolled manner on open areas. Greenpeace found a 2-hectare dump directly on a river. Toxic chemicals get into the river water and poison it.



Graph 1 demonstrates how many tons of plastic a country produces (grey) and how much tons will get into the sea from the rivers (blue). Especially the region in south-east Asia is strongly affected. This graph doesn't show how much garbage of corona equipment lands in the sea, it



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just gives a general overview of which regions throw their trash in the sea. It is clearly visible, that the region in south-east Asia is highly responsible for the pollution in the sea. The biggest blue dots are widely spread in the south-east Asian region, which shows that in this region up to 20.000 tons of plastic get thrown in the sea, every year. The graph also shows that Europe has such a high amount of mismanaged plastic waste¹ production, up from 10 to 100.

Social, Political and Economic concerns

the economic issues are the problems that Corona brings with it. Many countries, such as Italy, Germany, Turkey and so on, were inevitably in a hard lockdown and had to close everything. As a result, the economy suffered a crisis phase and many restaurants, bars and clubs went bankrupt because they could no longer have visitors. Now that the incidence is slowly falling in all countries, you can slowly return to normal everyday life, provided that you wear masks. Politics, for example in Germany, has decided that you can only wear medical masks, K95 masks and ffp2 masks in public. This has the consequence that more people use these masks and therefore more must be produced which then pollutes the environment further. It can be said that the environment is being destroyed in order to protect the economy and the people of getting Covid-19. But it's important to remember that pollution is a social issue because it has consequences on our lives, particularly in poorer countries it is caused by human behaviours.

How is it affecting the society

The pollution of the environment by Corona Equipment affects society insofar as the pollution has an influence on the changes in the climate. As a result, more and more people, including a large number of young people, are worried and take to the streets to protest.

Solutions

As already mentioned, there is a French start-up, founded by Jean-Marc Neveu and Olivier Civil, in 2017, who recycle plastic. Their aim right now is to reuse the textiles of masks and therefore they started in July 2020 to collect face masks. The collected parts are exposed to UV light to kill any remaining virus particles and then placed in a shredder. The shredded masks are then mixed with additional plastic and processed into new products. Since the beginning of



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the project, the project, the founder of the start-up collected around 100.000 face masks and recycled them. Collecting masks from the environment is a difficult and expensive undertaking, as is removing them from the garbage in which they end up with other rubbish. A first step would be that every citizen stick to these 3 points:

1. Used masks, visors and rubber gloves belong in the residual waste, not in the plastic waste.
2. Cut the rubber bands before discarding them.

Glossary

mismanaged plastic waste¹ = only plastic waste which is improperly managed (mismanaged) is at significant risk of leakage to the environment.

disposable² = intended to be thrown away after use.

How to prepare as a delegate

To have fruitful debates, all delegates need to be well prepared and know his/her topics. As this research report only gives a short overview on the topic, please do further research on issue of increased plastic pollution driven by the production and usage of disposable protective equipment in order to slow the spread of Covid-19. You should definitely know what the corona measures are in your country and whether there are regulations as to whether you have to wear masks and if so, which ones. You should also find out whether your country has done something against the pollution caused by corona equipment. Please make sure that you know about your country's garbage disposal. Is there an infrastructure to collect refuse? Is the garbage burnt or deposited? Mask production countries, such as China, should be aware of the huge role they play in the subject. This also applies to the partners of China, the ones who buy the masks. Make sure to find out how your country feels about environmental protection and how they dispose of their garbage. All delegates are required to write at least one draft resolution and two/three position papers so that all topics of the forum are covered. Please send your position



papers and resolutions to your chair by XX.XX.2021. Remember that every paper sends in after the deadline will not be corrected by us.

UN resolutions regarding the topic

<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=56638>

www.un.org/Depts/los/co...17_Panel_for%20website_rev.pdf

Useful links

<https://www.condorferries.co.uk/plastic-in-the-ocean-statistics> (Ocean plastic statistics)

<https://theoceancleanup.com/sources/> (Live map pollution)

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405844021004485>

<https://www.allianzgi.com/en/home/insights/coronavirus/covid-19-plastic-pollution>

Sources

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<https://www.dw.com/de/covid-19-umweltverschmutzung-recycling-m%C3%BCII-pandemie/a-55707830>

<https://www.who.int/news-room/q-a-detail/coronavirus-disease-covid-19-masks#:~:text=Fabric%20masks%20should%20be%20made,polyester%20or%20polyester%20blend.>



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<https://www.mdr.de/ratgeber/familie/masken-tiere-gefahr-sterben-100.html>

<https://www.aerztezeitung.de/Wirtschaft/Bundesbuenger-tragen-meist-Schutzmasken-made-in-China-418066.html>

<https://www.aerzteblatt.de/nachrichten/116851/Deutschland-sitzt-auf-1-2-Milliarden-Schutzmasken>

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