

THE QUESTION OF

"WHO COUNTS?"

IN PANDEMIC RESPONSE

The COVID-19 pandemic was not the great 'equaliser'.

The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing socioeconomic inequalities with the impacts often concentrated among disadvantaged groups.

In Australia, some **refugee and migrant groups were among those disproportionately affected**, with inequalities in morbidity and mortality, and the impact of policies imposed to control the virus.

The Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was unjust in two ways:

Firstly, it failed to take account of **pre-existing disadvantages**.

Secondly, it further increased **inequalities**.

The Australian Government's response was grounded in a set of contestable assumptions related to individualist understandings of responsibility for health. It was also grounded in a tradition of exclusion and 'othering'.

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Wolff and de-Shalit conceptualise **disadvantage as "a lack of genuine opportunity for secure functionings."**

JONATHAN WOLFF
and AVNER DE-SHALIT



Disadvantage

Drawing on this theory of disadvantage, I argue that the **Australian government failed in its obligations to protect refugee and migrant groups from the health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.**

Three key claims:

1. The **moral importance of health** as one but primary (fertile) functioning at risk during a pandemic.
2. The Australian Government has a **responsibility to provide genuine opportunity for health** during a pandemic as it cannot be secured through individualist accounts of responsibility.
3. **Refugees and migrants in Australia ought to be included in the distribution of genuine opportunities for health**, not least on account of the policies imposed by the government contributing to experiences of disadvantage.