

The impacts of COVID-19 on humanitarian needs

How do vulnerable crisis-affected populations cope with the impact of the pandemic and COVID-19 preventive policy measures? This study took a multi-sectoral lens. It generated understanding on how the severity of needs has evolved, and how preventive measures were adopted by communities in seven countries affected by humanitarian crisis.

COVID-19 preventive policies worsen severity of needs

Crisis-affected populations remain at serious risk of exclusion from essential services. This study found that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities in accessing services, as well as pre-existing barriers and underlying vulnerabilities. Adoption of preventive measures varies widely across countries and sub-groups and in association with a range of factors. The secondary and indirect impacts of public health policies have further increased the severity of needs. Humanitarian actors must coordinate responses to increased needs at all levels. The indirect impacts of preventive public health policies on vulnerable groups must be considered in



REACH enumerators conducting data collection for the 2019 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) in Central African Republic. Field teams directly accessed over 8,000 households for this survey. Photo credit: IMPACT Initiatives.

Background

The onset of the COVID-19, and associated policy response measures, have exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities. There is an increasing need for humanitarian actors to address the unintended negative socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 policy measures, which aggravate poor social and health outcomes, and the severity of multisector humanitarian needs. Understanding the vulnerability of populations prior to COVID-19, the adoption of preventive measures and their multisector impacts in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Bangladesh, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Iraq, and Libya.

Methodology

An exploratory and statistical analysis of representative household-level data from structured surveys of the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) conducted in 2019 and 2020. Background data on each country's COVID-19 outbreak, policy measures, and related impacts on humanitarian services was also analysed.

Key findings

(Highlights of findings, synthesised across all countries. Detailed country results are available.)

- Both displaced and non-displaced populations were at risk of exclusion from healthcare services and face barriers to access. Distance to healthcare facilities limits access in already fragile systems.
- Households with elderly or disabled members are vulnerable and at risk of exclusion from essential services. Households with lower levels of income, higher expenditure on basic needs, or higher levels of debt, are at a heightened risk of exclusion.
- Washing hands regularly, was the commonly adopted preventive measure across countries. Higher income households were more likely to adopt preventive measures.
- Policies restricting movement have indirect effects on income-generation, exacerbating pre-existing vulnerabilities, notably in the sectors of health, food security, and livelihoods.
- Information on humanitarian assistance and its communication both increases and decreases the adoption of different preventive measures.

Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

Policy implementation by governments and the humanitarian response need to be better coordinated, to mitigate the secondary indirect impacts of the most restrictive COVID-19 prevention policies and measures.

Strategic and operational policy makers should develop humanitarian response priorities by considering the specific needs and characteristics of population groups. The interactive effects between gender, displacement status, household demographics and socioeconomic variables should be taken into account.

Reducing distance-related barriers, increasing transportation services, and enabling access is key to reducing vulnerabilities, inequality, and building resilience.

Information and awareness raising should be tailored to increase the adoption of COVID-19 preventive measures, and closely consider the needs and practices of households reliant on humanitarian aid distribution.

Recommendations for future research

Future research should consider adopting a most-similar or most-different systems research design to study the effects of policy responses and the adoption of preventive measures.

Studies should also ensure comparability of survey questions and response choices.

More evidence is needed to measure the impacts of the policy responses on the intensity and magnitude of multisector needs.

About the study team

The study team was comprised of academic researchers from the University of Manchester, Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Yonsei University, Korea, and humanitarian practitioners and researchers from IMPACT/REACH.

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Keywords

Examples: humanitarian response planning, COVID-19, pre-existing vulnerabilities, preventive measures, multisector needs

Articles and further reading

- All REACH MSNA data and reports can be found on the [Resource Centre](#).
- Results from an [external evaluation](#) of 2020 REACH-facilitated MSNAs
- Project page on Elrha website (includes blogs, data collection SOPs, and reports) <https://www.elrha.org/project/evaluating-the-impact-of-covid-19-on-multi-sectoral-humanitarian-needs/>



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