

## **CORONASYS WORKSHOP SERIES**

Addressing the corona pandemic in Armenia through systemic risk management

### **WORKSHOP 2: DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN ARMENIA**

Capacities and Challenges: Armenian disaster risk and pandemic management

#### **Rationale**

The CoronaSys workshop series brings together international experts to exchange experiences, discuss gaps and challenges, and ponder on joint questions concerning the response to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. Particular emphasis is put on medical solutions, technological innovations, and socio-political policies, as well as on the identification of best practices for prevention, detection, containment, and treatment. Reflecting on the pandemic from a whole-of-society perspective, the aim is to create a thought forum on strategies for systemic pandemic and risk management.

*The workshops are organized by the Academy of the Disaster Research Unit, associated with the Disaster Research Unit at the Free University of Berlin. They are part of the research project “CoronaSys: Addressing the corona pandemic in Armenia through systemic risk management”, sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. The workshop protocols offer insights on the conversational course with an emphasis on key points. All participants are granted the opportunity to review and comment on the draft version of the workshop protocols prior to their publication.*

**Workshop № 02, Date: 8<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2020**

#### **Workshop Topic:**

#### **DISASTER RISK MANAGEMENT IN ARMENIA. Capacities and Challenges: Armenian disaster risk and pandemic management**

COVID-19, often referred to as the largest public health emergency since World War II, posed major challenges to the health sector and civil protection systems around the globe. Armenia was already hit hard by the so-called first wave of the pandemic when the armed conflict with Azerbaijan flared up once again in late September. This has further strained the systems and resources for health and civil protection as well as almost every other area of society. In cooperation with Prepared International, the research project CoronaSys explored overall capacities, needs, strengths and weaknesses of the Armenian pandemic management and disaster risk management system.

In this second workshop of the CoronaSys workshop series, Marc Arnold, Dr Albrecht Beck, and Santiago Lema Burgos presented preliminary findings from a study conducted by Prepared International on gaps and capacities of the Armenian DRM system. A preliminary report of the study and the final document will be shared with the CoronaSys-network as soon as possible. The PowerPoint slides of the comprehensive presentation (which include the main findings and derived recommendations) will also be shared with the project partners.

## Methodology

An extensive literature review and 11 key informant interviews fed into a diagnostic tool based on the 2017 World Bank Ready to Respond (R2R) methodology with additions from the 2013 WHO toolkit for assessing health- system capacity for crisis management. In the Workshop, key insights and findings of the conducted study were presented along the five core components of Emergency Preparedness and Response: (1) legal and institutional frameworks (2) information (3) facilities (4) equipment and (5) personnel.

## Key highlights

### *Legal and institutional frameworks*

- The establishment of the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES) in 2008 contributed to efficient coordination of the Armenian Disaster Risk Management activities and strategies.
- Some of the progress Armenia has made with regard to DRM since the soviet period has unfortunately been mitigated in recent years. The focus of the DRM- system has shifted from a proactive approach (Risk reduction and mitigation) to a more reactive one (Response and Disaster recovery).
- Causes for this shift are frequent changes in leadership and strategies, centralized decision making, the lack of a shared vision between stakeholders and a lack of institutional memory.

### *Information*

- The volunteering potential in Armenia is high but there is a lack of laws and policies to coordinate volunteers in emergency response.
- The centralized decision-making process sometimes prevents local authorities from ensuring a timely and tailored response.
- Multiple single warning systems are in operation, but there is no integrated multi-hazard monitoring and surveillance programme in place.
- The MES performs risk assessments and keeps updated GIS data on the main hazards affecting the country. This information focuses on the largest regions of the country and primarily on earthquakes, without considering other hazards, such as technological and hydrometeorological ones.

### *Facilities*

- The Armenian emergency operation centre is well established and applies a comprehensive approach to handle daily situations and large-scale emergencies.
- Content and quality of hospital contingency plans vary between the facilities. But in general, planning, exercises and drills, training, information management and communications do not sufficiently meet the needs.
- The Crisis Management State Academy covers the national level through vocational and practical training, and high education courses and programmes. The Academy is funded adequately and well- equipped.

### *Equipment*

- Internet services are vulnerable to suffer from disruptions due to their dependency on Georgia's system

- A recent assessment of the Armenian emergency response capacities is pending. So is a comprehensive management plan of the response equipment owned by the MES and the Armenian Rescue Service.
- Emergency stocks for medical supplies are located all over the country. Hospitals are required to keep stocks for at least 20 days.

### *Personnel*

- Since 2009 Armenia has a multisectoral training scheme for emergency management that aims at increasing response capacities and coordination between the stakeholders.
- Additional support in preparing emergency response teams was provided through international assistance (e.g., the Swiss Academy for Development and Cooperation)
- The Crisis Management State Academy of the MES oversees training on basic protection for emergency responders, government staff and the general population. The Academy also offers vocational education and training in fire protection and rescue, specialized search and rescue, risk management, medical response, and other civil defence related topics and provides higher education courses in crisis management.
- The MoH is the lead institution regarding training for health emergency management, and the Armenian Red Cross provides courses in first aid both to the rescuers and general population.

### **Conclusions**

- Armenia has been very committed to Disaster Risk Management and crisis management in recent years.
- The establishment and the continuous strengthening of the Ministry of Emergency Situations (MES), as well as a strong legislative basis, contributed to these efforts.
- The integration of previously independent structures such as the Armenian Rescue Service and the Crisis Management State Academy also helped to pave the way for a systemic approach to integrated Risk Management.

The study also identifies some gaps.

- The Armenian budget for Emergency Preparedness and response is not sufficient.
- Community engagement should be better organized.
- Resources, decision- making powers and autonomy of local leaderships and institutions should be augmented.
- The collaboration between agencies (e.g., MES and MoH) could be improved.
- There is a lack of standardized emergency preparedness plans and comprehensive policies on Disaster Risk Management education, training, exercises, and research.
- As of now, a homogenous and complete inventory management strategy is not in place.

### **Annexes:**

## Workshop Participants

We thank all participants for their time and valuable contributions.

### Represented institutions in the expert dialogue

- Academy of the Disaster Research Unit, Germany
- Charité Universitätsmedizin, Germany
- Crisis Management State Academy of the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Armenia (CMSAA)
- Disaster Research Unit, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany
- Disaster Risk Reduction National Platform of the Republic of Armenia (ARNAP)
- Dräger Safety AG & Co. KGaA, Germany
- Federal Agency of Technical Relief (THW), Germany
- Ministry of Emergency Situations in Armenia, National Sendai Focal Point Armenia
- Prepared International, Germany

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