

CORONASYS WORKSHOP SERIES

Addressing the corona pandemic in Armenia through systemic risk management

WORKSHOP 4: VULNERABILITIES AND RESILIENCE

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 think 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 № 04, Date: 03 March 2021

Workshop Topic 4: Vulnerabilities and Resilience- Coping with COVID-19 in Armenia

COVID-19 can affect anyone. But one year into the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, it has become clear that COVID-19, like so many other diseases, does not affect everyone equally. These differences lie in the risk of contracting the virus as well as in the risk of developing a severe course of disease or suffering the economic and social consequences of the pandemic.

In addition to biological factors such as age and pre-existing conditions, it is above all social determinants that influence the extent to which people are affected by COVID-19. Socio-economic status, occupation, level of education and cultural influences, to name but a few, are among the factors that play a decisive role in determining whether and how people are affected by the current pandemic and what coping capacities they have at their disposal.

In this fourth workshop of the CoronaSys workshop series, **Dr Karinée Khojayan** (International Organization for Migration) and **Parisa Jafari** (ADRU) will present findings from their research on vulnerabilities with regard to COVID-19 in Armenia. All participants are warmly invited to discuss the outcomes, provide feedback, and share their observations concerning current vulnerabilities and potentials. Likewise, we are looking forward to exchanging ideas to support the vulnerable and to strengthen resilience.

Key highlights

- Armenia is facing various vulnerabilities, ranging from increasing rates of poverty, political instability, digital divide, and domestic violence to the high rate of non-communicable diseases, and food insecurity to unequal distribution of the health workforce and low public health spending
- The pandemic affected the economic growth in Armenia and emphasised pre-existing inequalities, problems and vulnerabilities in several sectors
- Conflict-related displacement led to additional vulnerabilities and housing issues that affected migrants particularly hard
- Government support programs for COVID-19 have in many cases not been applied to immigrants
- The main issues experienced by migrants are visa and immigrant issues, access to information, access to education, financial struggles, unemployment, housing, and access to healthcare

Detailed notes

Presentation by Parisa Jafari, Academy of the Disaster Research Unit (ADRU), Germany

- Descriptive, indicator-guided vulnerability assessment of vulnerabilities in the Armenian context
- **Demographic factors:** ageing population, shrinking population, high urbanization level, 1 in 10 Armenians having no access to adequate housing, larger and extended family households are common
- **Socio-economic conditions:**
 - The pandemic affected the economic growth rates in Armenia
 - Increasing income inequality and homelessness
 - One in four Armenians experiences poverty, high unemployment (esp. youth unemployment at 34%), one in three Armenians work in the informal sector.
 - Remittances are significant sources of income for families of labour migrants
 - Relatively low logistic performance and road connectivity capacity
 - The majority of the population has access to digital and internet services but there are some gender, age and regional gaps
 - Female labour market participation is lower than male participation, some reports on higher incidences of gender-based and domestic violence during the pandemic
 - High literacy and school enrollment rates but some issues concerning access to educational opportunities
 - Conflict-related displacement led to additional vulnerabilities and housing issues
 - Rather low institutional trust while people rely more on personal trust relationships
- **Political conditions:**
 - Political instability
 - Despite recent progress, there are issues of corruption and lack of transparency
 - Democratic changes/reform efforts are affected by the pandemic
 - Media independence still to be achieved
 - Legal discrimination and (partial) exclusion for some vulnerable groups

- **Public health:**
 - Considerable gender difference in life expectancy and mortality
 - Relatively high level of Tuberculosis incidences, rather low HIV incidence
 - Children's vaccination coverage has improved (yet some difference between urban and rural regions)
 - Risk factors such as obesity, tobacco/alcohol use, air quality (esp. in urban areas)
 - 1 in 7 Armenian lacks access to safely managed drinking water, 1 in 20 Armenian households lack access to basic sanitation facilities, 1 in 7 Armenians are considered food insecure while 1 in 20 are considered undernourished
- **Health care system:**
 - In comparison to Europe and Central Asia lower hospital bed capacity
 - Relatively high number of health care human resources but unequal geographical distribution
 - Low laboratory capacity
 - A major source of health financing is Out of Pocket Payments
 - Mental health services mainly concentrate on inpatient care
 - Family and informal caregiving are common

Discussion

- Conflicting data on health expenditure data in Armenia
- Question on living conditions in informal settlements, World Bank definition regarding the access to hygiene facilities
- Question on legal discrimination

Presentation by Dr Karinée Khojayan, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Armenia

- A high number of people depend on labour migration
- Increasing number of immigrants and asylum seekers, 3 types of residency permits: temporary, permanent, special
- 22 pandemic government support programs have in many cases not been applied to immigrants
- Rapid assessment on human rights issues under the pandemic state of emergency: 64 semi-structured interviews with most vulnerable migrants
- Main migrant groups: students, migrant workers, asylum seekers
- Main issues experienced by migrants: visa and immigrant issues (16%), access of information (19%), access to education (9%), financial struggles (34%), unemployment (28%), housing (9%) access to healthcare (22%)
- Struggles to pay rent due to loss of income, crowded shelters (greater risk of infection), language barrier for migrants (language classes interrupted), issue of information accessibility for migrants
- **Recommendations:** create a quick response mechanism to support migrant workers and other vulnerable groups, provision of basic food and sanitation supplies (channelled through churches, hostels, other networks)
- Migrants tend to be charged more than local renters (many migrants are also not aware of support subsidies), migrant businesses affected, some landlords refuse to rent apartments to migrants → implement proper oversight and control mechanisms

- Problems of access to information: ensure pandemic information in multiple languages and communication channels, multilingual universal hotline/information centre, continue language classes online
- Problem with access to health care: ensure access to early warning and response systems and healthcare institutions, esp. at the provincial level, equip migrants with personal protective equipment
- **Ongoing IOM efforts:** provision of medical assistance and access to primary and secondary health care services through mobile clinics to conflict-displaced people (UN joint response). The scope of activity will be further widened and together with the National Centre for Disease Control X-ray examination will be provided in mobile clinics

Discussion

- Conflict-displaced people face multiple issues in the areas of income generation, housing (collective centres only a short-term solution), education, health-care (some mobile clinics established to ensure access to health care), no data on Covid cases among conflict-displaced people
- Some gender-based or country-specific information?: information is more accessible to Russian-speaking people

Further workshops from this series

- “Addressing a Twindemic- Pandemic Preparedness in the Health Sector and beyond”, 16 September 2020. Protocol: [CoronaSys Workshop Series – CoronaSys \(a-kfs.de\)](#)
- “Disaster Risk Management in Armenia. Capacities and Challenges: Armenian disaster risk and pandemic management”, 08 December 2020. Protocol: [CoronaSys Workshop Series – CoronaSys \(a-kfs.de\)](#)
- “COVID-19 Logistics – Strategies and Challenges”, 12 February 2021. Protocol: [CoronaSys Workshop Series – CoronaSys \(a-kfs.de\)](#)

Upcoming workshops from this series

- “The Role of National Disaster Management Agencies in times of COVID-19 in Europe and Central Asia”, Date to be announced as early as possible

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 (ADRU), Germany
- ARNAP Foundation, Armenia
- Crisis Management State Academy (CMSA), Armenia
- Disaster Research Unit (DRU), Germany
- Federal Agency for Technical Relief (THW), Germany
- International Organization for Migration (IOM), Armenia
- Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany
- Ministry of Emergency Situations in Armenia, National Sendai Focal Point Armenia
- Prepared International (PPI), Germany
- Reliefgoods.org, Austria
- Technische Hochschule Deggendorf (THD), Germany
- United Nations Development Programm (UNDP), Armenia/regional office

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