Launching COVINFORM, a project analysing the impact of COVID-19 governmental response on vulnerable groups

Since its outbreak in Europe in February 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has had an unprecedented impact on societies. Vulnerable groups have been impacted disproportionately: even in countries with well-developed responses, the outbreak and its repercussions imperil the basic well-being of social groups whose livelihoods are already precarious, while the uneven distribution of suffering threatens to aggravate inequality and division. COVINFORM analyses and critiques COVID-19 responses on the levels of government, public health, community, and information and communications.

On 5 and 10 November 2020, a kick-off meeting was held for a new exciting project investigating the impact of the pandemic. COVINFORM is a three-year, EU-funded research project with the goal to conduct research on COVID-19 responses on three levels:

- developing risk assessment models based on available quantitative data at the European level,
- analysing documentary sources on both national and local level in 15 chosen countries,
- conducting primary empirical research in 10 target communities, gathering testimonials and analysing a multitude of sources to get a full picture of the effect of the governmental response to COVID-19 on individuals within the target communities

During all research activities, COVINFORM will take into account the intersectional nature of health and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

> *"We are currently living through a global health crisis that has and is still impacting all of us. At the same time, this crisis has not affected everyone in the same way. We could observe how health and socioeconomic vulnerabilities are intersected, how certain groups have been disadvantaged compared to others by the different responses. Within the COVINFORM project, we will analyse the impact of COVID-19 responses on vulnerable groups from a variety of different perspectives. It gives us the possibility to make a difference, for this and potential upcoming crises."*
> – said Diotima Bertel, the COVINFORM project coordinator

Promising practices will be evaluated in target communities through case studies spanning diverse disciplines (social epidemiology, the economics of unpaid labour, the sociology of migration, etc.) and vulnerable populations (COVID-19 patients, precarious families, migrating health care workers, etc.). The project will culminate in the development of an online portal and visual toolkit for governments, healthcare, and citizens. It will integrate preliminary data, risk assessment models and case study findings to prepare empirically grounded policy and assessment guidance. The goal of the project is to support policymakers with an evidence-based approach to mitigating the effects of COVID-19 and future pandemics on vulnerable and marginalised communities.

The COVINFORM project brings together 16 partners from 11 countries who will integrate their expertise in a variety of disciplines as part of the project's multi-disciplinary approach. The consortium consists of:

- A leading group of 5 academic universities who are experts in human, social and legal fields and with strong ethical and research experience.
- A driving group of 6 practitioners and research organisations representing different communities (research hospitals, NGOS, research organisations, Emergency Medical Services), providing a large coverage of the EMS and acute care practitioners, decision and policy maker chain.
- The participation of 4 Industry and SMEs from the medical and security sectors, bringing the innovation and commercial exploitation experience.

COVINFORM is *one of 23 new research projects funded by the European Commission* with a total of €128 million to address the continuing coronavirus pandemic and its effects.

Contact information