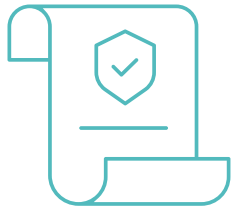




COronavirus Vulnerabilities and INFOrmation
dynamics Research and Modelling



**Policing
during
COVID-19: The impact
of Coronavirus on Law
Enforcement Agents**

Policy Brief: 8
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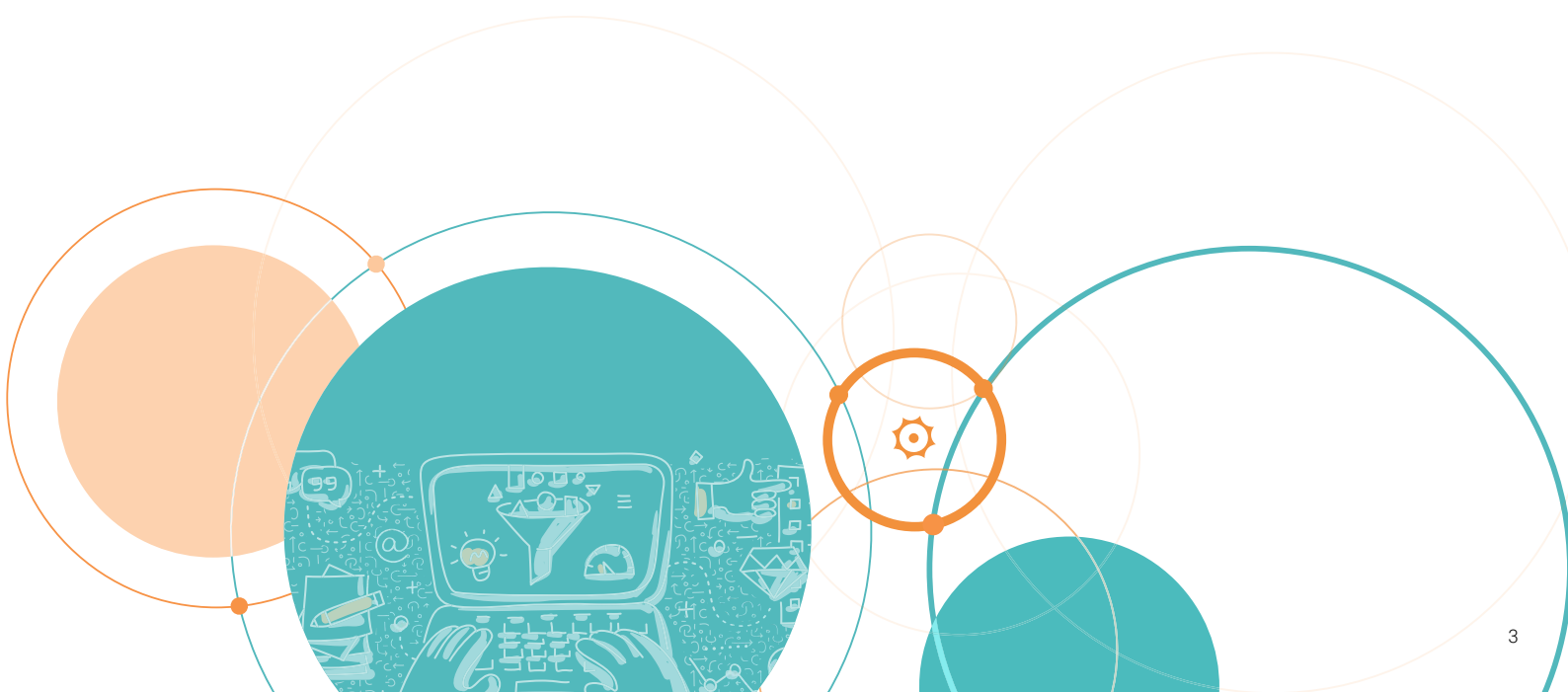
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Executive Summary

Law Enforcement Agencies have been the tip of the governmental response mechanism's spear in the constant endeavor of implementing and ensuring that societal groups adhere to the COVID-19 rules and regulations, while simultaneously making sure to identify and tackle illicit activities and criminal acts, as part of their daily basis responsibilities.

The case study of KEMEA, as part of the research activities conducted during the COVINFORM project, sheds light to valuable insight on the challenges and hurdles that Law Enforcement Agents (LEAs) faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the ways the social interaction, perception, communication and trust by and towards Law enforcement agents has been impacted. It is an undeniable fact that the negative consequences of COVID-19 have influenced socio-interpersonal relationships, communication, trust

and perception among societal groups, while in certain cases, they have been particularly negative towards Law Enforcement Agents. The impact that COVID-19, the implementation of policies such as lockdowns and movement containment had on Law Enforcement Agents remains under researched, with the exception of the research conducted during the COVINFORM project, and the Greek Case Study in particular. This policy brief aims to unravel the challenges posed by policies relating to how Law Enforcement Agents performed their duties during COVID-19, associated operational hurdles, policy efficiency and effectiveness rate critique according to findings that stem from expert interviews and subsequent recommendations for policy and decision makers.

Introduction

The role of Law Enforcement Agents during the COVID-19 pandemic has been multidimensional, since Law Enforcement Agents have been negatively impacted as units – members of the society similarly to other societal groups, whilst due to their line of duty and professional responsibilities, they have been the first and foremost first line practitioners who were responsible for the implementation of COVID-19 rules and regulations, and ensure measure compliance. Due to their role, and in certain cases inconsistencies between risk communication and implementation of policies, Law Enforcement Agents at various pandemic phases have been at the middle of societal turmoil, since they were responsible to enforce the relevant rules and policies, whilst simultaneously address all cases of civil disorder. Due to the aforementioned facts, Law Enforcement Agents have acted as a buffer zone between civilians and decision makers and policy experts, receiving the general public's discontent which was expressed in various forms, including violent protests.

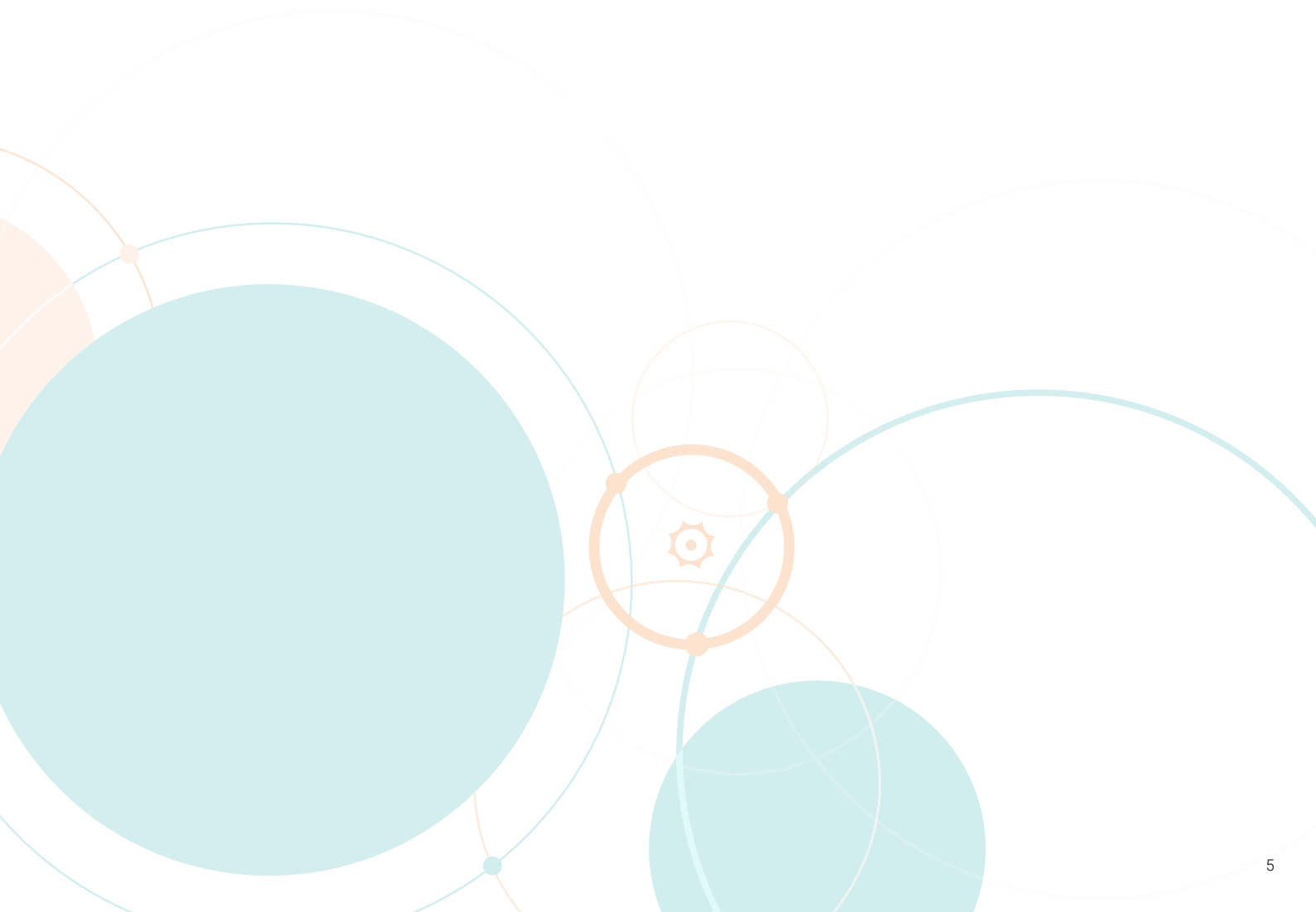
This policy brief is of particular importance and relevancy to decision makers, policy experts, Law Enforcement Agents, scholars and potentially at a lesser rate to the general public, as it sheds light to the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent policies, operational inconsistencies had on the daily responsibilities of LEAs. This brief presents a solid opportunity, encouraging academics to conduct additional research in this specific topic, simultaneously highlighting the main challenges of Law Enforcement Agents during an unprecedented crisis, therefore allowing decision makers and policy experts to document the main findings and recommendations. This brief, allows policy experts and decision makers to examine the primary challenges, analyze the main findings and take into consideration of the recommendations presented by incorporating them to the national response mechanisms and shaping a contemporary EU strategy on crisis response. Based on the main findings that stem from qualitative interviews realized within WP3 of COVINFORM project, stakeholders also be

able to increase the national crisis management effectiveness and efficiency rate, as they will gain a more in-depth sight in the daily challenges Law Enforcement Agents faced on a daily basis during a long-term widespread pandemic.

The key questions presented in this brief are the following: How has COVID-19 impacted the daily work of Law Enforcement Agents? How COVID-19 impacted the trust, societal interaction, perception and communication within the social context between Law Enforcement Agents and other societal groups? What are the mismatches or inconsistencies between operational activities and crisis management policies?

At this phase, policies in certain cases have been inconsistent with the implementation of subsequent rules and regulations, while the

rapidly changing information, risk communication, misinformation and the acceptance rate of the general public has led to expressions of discontent. Law Enforcement Agents were responsible to mitigate both the spread of the virus by ensuring the implementation of rules and healthcare protocols while simultaneously were responsible to address societal unrest and violent protests. The multidimensional impact that COVID-19 had on LEAs is under-researched, and it is highly recommended to conduct additional research on a EU-wide scale in order to identify whether common findings can be identified between target states, which can lead to a better understanding of crisis management from an operational perspective and increase the effectiveness and efficiency rate of the crisis management mechanisms.



Policing during COVID-19: The impact of Coronavirus on Law Enforcement Agents: Perception, Social interaction – compliance, communication and trust

The COVINFORM project examines the multidimensional impact and consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic. During and within the context of the project, consortium partners identified thematic areas of particular interest and conducted research as part of their case studies. The Center for Security Studies (KEMEA) conducted in depth examination and research of how Policing has been conducted during the pandemic and in particular emphasized in the impact that coronavirus has on the role of the Law Enforcement Agents, in relation to public social interaction, measure compliance, communication, perception and trust. Relevant data was acquired via qualitative research. The research sample consisted of five law enforcement agents and five minority group members and/or representatives who provided valuable insight by answering open-ended questions. The four (4) distinct sections of the interviews examined perception, social interaction - compliance, communication and trust. Specifically:

- **Section 1:** Main research question: What is the interviewees personal perception of COVID-19 and how it has impacted on their daily life and professional environment?
- **Section 2:** Main research question: What is the perceived impact of implemented COVID-19 measures on LEAs, Minorities & Vulnerable groups?
- **Section 3:** Main research question: How communication and vaccination campaigns against COVID-19 where perceived by vulnerable groups, minorities and LEAs? How have these responses have affected people's measure and vaccination compliance?
- **Section 4:** Main research question: How COVID-19 management have affected people's trust towards authorities?

An important caveat is also established in this policy brief, as this report will only emphasize on Law Enforcement Agents which is one of the primary target groups in the case study.



Perception: A successful response mechanism with room for improvement, pre-existing negative sentiments could have been exuberated, and a fair, equal treatment as “educators” instead of enforcers

LEA participants indicated that COVID-19 influenced their daily lives significantly, in specific, COVID-19 impacted their personal life, professional environment and interpersonal relations. They have experienced disproportionately increased workload, stress, widespread fear due to the unknown health-related impact COVID-19 had, an abrupt negative change on interpersonal relations and a negative impact on their mental wellbeing. Key findings indicate that the radical change on their daily lives impacted their professional activities at a moderate to high degree. LEAs identify their role as civil peace keepers and educators, awareness raisers and facilitators of assistance towards societal groups who may encounter educational, cultural and communication issues due to pre-existing vulnerabilities, and act in an educational manner.

One research finding indicates that LEAs perceive the Greek pandemic response mechanism to be effective, nevertheless, crisis management also requires improvements. According to LEAs, healthcare system and ICUs should be reinforced, municipalities ought to be more proactive regarding local community engagement via information awareness meetings and distribution of information awareness material, as well as targeted initiatives aiming towards minority and marginalized groups. According to LEAs, regardless of the means and methods utilized, some citizens and LEAs refused to be vaccinated due to the governmental approach of mandatory vaccination

instead of adopting a “my body my choice” approach, nevertheless attribute this attitude to the human nature. One key finding suggest that the perception of Law Enforcement Agents did not change towards minority groups, nevertheless appear to be more cautious towards all socio-demographic groups due to the pandemic rules, regulations and risk exposure.

According to key findings, the perception shared among LEAs is that all citizens were treated with equality and equity, fair and no discrimination was observed, while increased COVID-19 measures checks were conducted based on cases of non-compliance, and not due to biases. Another main finding suggests that if negative pre-existing perceptions towards LEAs existed, these sentiments would be exuberated due to their role as enforcers of order and measures, nevertheless the majority of the population did not change their perception towards LEAs in a radical manner, however their role became more challenging. Concluding, as the Hellenic Police received increased liberty in exercising their duties, it may have potentially created feeling of injustice among other agencies who also contributed in the fight against the pandemic, and while some LEAs indicate that the pandemic will cease some others suggest that societies will co-exist with COVID-19 despite vaccinations.

Social Interaction – Compliance: Educators than enforcers of punitive action, correlation between movement restriction measures and social unrest, COVID-19 as a lesson of paying attention to hygiene protocols in the line of duty

In relation to social interaction and compliance, LEAs indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic can be interpreted as a reality check for their colleagues, general population and vulnerable citizens who potentially did not heed to hygiene protocols. A key finding suggests that Law Enforcement Agents are particularly exposed to healthcare related risk factors such as substance abusers or citizens who may have had transmittable diseases, thus, COVID-19 had a beneficial impact on hygiene protocol compliance. According to key findings, LEAs consider the implemented measures to be hard and strict on vulnerable groups and the general population due to pricey fines, which urged LEAs to demonstrate leniency. LEAs would demonstrate leniency particularly towards vulnerable and marginalized groups, without issuing a fine, thus attempting to educate citizens on the rules and regulations to increase compliance rate and to allow citizens avoid being fined in the future. Another key finding indicates that according to LEAs, the Roma community would not abide to the rules and regulations most of the times. LEAs suggest that one core element which influenced the rate of abidance to measures was fear, particularly during the first pandemic phases, which might not be the most suitable mechanism but proved to be effective.

In relation to vaccinations, key findings indicate that a complete measure compliance would not be achieved within Law Enforcement Agencies, despite the strictness of the inner-agency modus operandi in compassion to other working environments, while LEAs suggest the mandatory nature of vaccinating is negatively as it incites counterproductive reactions.

A key finding indicates that one of the most frequent cases of non-compliance within the society were related to the movement restriction measures, and Leas should often engage in altercations with citizens. In certain cases, citizens would react negatively towards LEAs who are interpreted as measure compliance enforcers, as their liberties were restricted due to the implemented policies. A key finding suggests that the first pandemic phase witnessed limited cases of non-conformity, while that changed as negative public expressions gradually increased and escalated particularly during the second phase during which the second lockdown was implemented, during which the general public was rather exhausted psychologically and emotionally due to the impact of isolation and movement restrictions. It is important to highlight, according to expert interviews, at later phases even some LEAs participated in demonstrations against the implemented measures.

Communication: Decision and Policy makers should strive for clarity, targeted information and awareness raising campaigns that utilise contemporary and traditional means may overcome educational, societal and cultural challenges, LEAs could make a difference as crisis communicators with vulnerable groups

Regarding communication, according to key findings, LEAs indicate that despite objections, they have little faith these would make a difference in their professional environment due to their modus operandi and role. LEAs also suggest that the governmental response could not have been different, however, believe more emphasis could have been placed upon awareness raising and targeted information distribution in relation to the pandemic, measures and vaccinations.

Moreover, another key finding suggest that LEAs consider official sources of information such witnessed at vaccination campaign(s) reliable, while appear divided on which means they utilize to acquire information. Some LEAs use both traditional and contemporary means while others acquire information only from contemporary means such as the internet. LEAs highlight the importance of cross-checking information to avoid misinformation by malicious online actors, while underline that governmental information and communication campaigns were particularly successful in awareness raising with vulnerable groups that high rate of illiteracy is observed.

The implementation of measures and difficulty rate to follow by citizens and LEAs is another key finding. According to some LEAs, rules and measures were relatively easy to follow, as they were obliged to comprehend and enforce these rules as part of their role, whereas other participants indicated that they were unclear, strange and difficult to follow, while citizens raised legitimate questions regarding their lack of clarity,

therefore certain policies such as movement restriction was challenging.

This issue of clarity would be multiplied for citizens due to lack of literacy, or lack of tech-savviness, resulting to vulnerable group members such as elderly citizens frequently reaching out to LEAs for guidance in order to avoid being fined and follow the regulations properly.

Despite the availability of information regarding the mitigation of COVID-19 and relevant containment measures, hosted in the official website of the Hellenic Police, LEAs suggest that colleagues specialized in negotiations who also had a pre-established network of communication with vulnerable groups such as the Roma community, could have been utilized to achieve better compliance rate due to their familiarity with the target population, while targeted communication campaigns would also be beneficial. Overall, most LEAs suggest that the authorities managed to communicate the measures in a clear and understandable manner, however, there is also space for improvement. Specialized personnel could be utilized by decision makers in order to bridge any potential gaps of miscommunication or interpretation. Concluding, as a positive outcome, LEAs consider that information campaigns have contributed in turning good hygiene practices into daily life habits and several citizens still continue to employ in their daily lives without being obliged to do so.

Trust: Pre-existing lack of trust was intensified during COVID-19, correlation between trust and perception based on LEAs role as the tip of crisis response mechanism's spear, COVID-19 may have impacted trust albeit for short periods of time

The impact of COVID-19 on societal interactions, dynamics between social groups and trust, has a central role in this case study, particularly due to Law Enforcement Agents' role and how it has been interpreted by other social groups such as marginalized, vulnerable citizens.

According to key findings, pre-existing lack of trust was intensified, particularly in cases that citizens were fined due to violations of the measures. Disgruntled citizens would also change their perception towards LEAs due to being fined, therefore their trust would be lowered. Trust would also be impacted by how the perception of each citizen was shaped or altered due to the role of LEAs during the pandemic, nevertheless, according to LEAs, minority groups in particular, have treated Law Enforcement Agents in a similar manner as prior to the pandemic. According to LEAs, the pandemic as a catalyst would alter trust only for a limited period of time, attributing this occurrence to systemic weaknesses, implemented measures that limit individual liberties and their role in ensuring that citizens abide to measures as well as fining the offenders. According to key findings, LEAs also believe that a change on trust and

perception towards LEAs is a normal consequence for minority groups such as the Roma community, because LEAs would conduct more frequent checks due to instances of non-compliance, thus it can generate a negative reaction as a result.

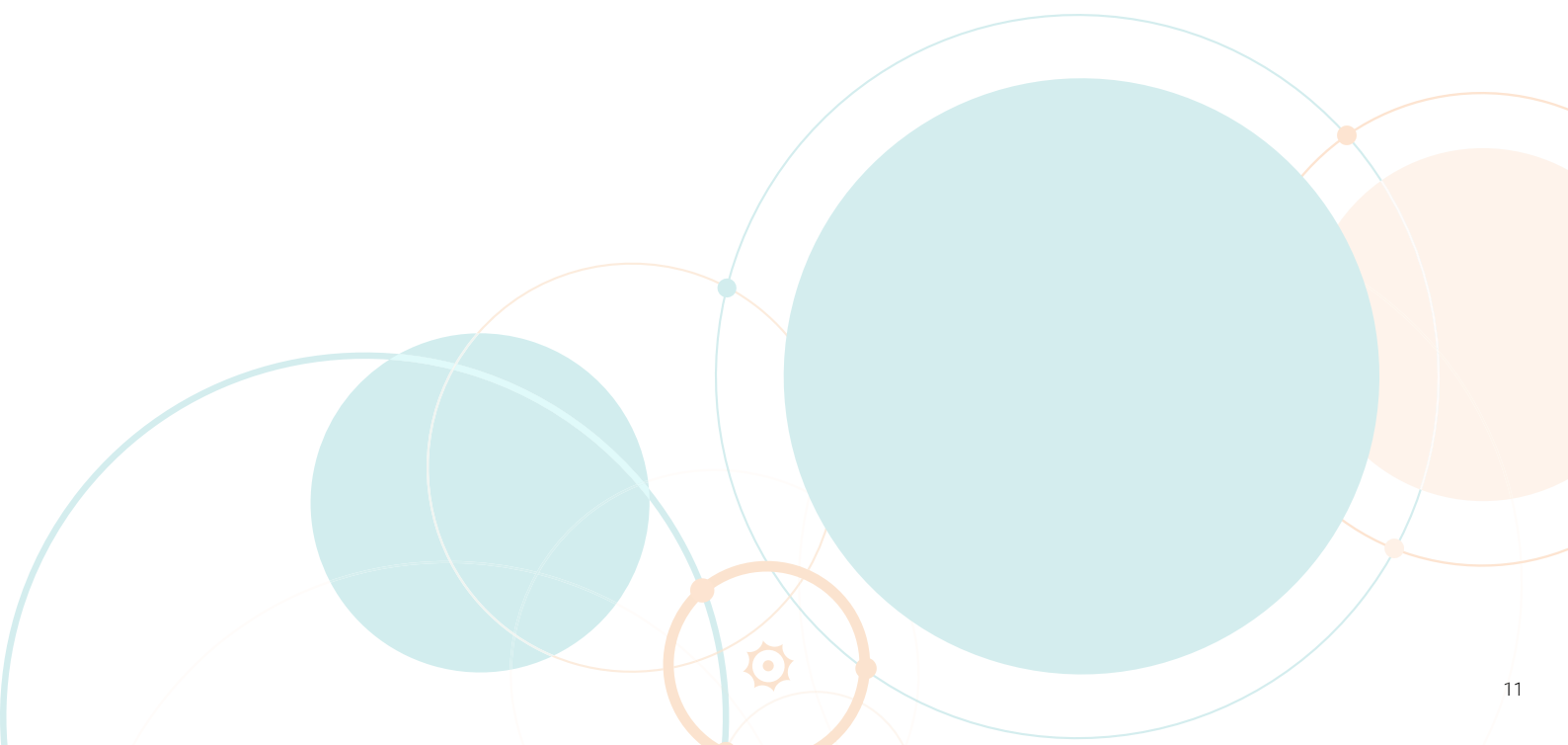
Nevertheless, LEAs suggest that there is a high level of trust towards LEAs and that trust would positively increase towards healthcare personnel and experts as a consequence to the pandemic.

Key findings suggest that LEAs actively encourage citizens, before acting based on their emotions, particularly participating on protests and being violent towards LEAs, attempt to comprehend the difficult position LEAs have been placed within the crisis response mechanism. Concluding, some LEAs suggest that they would prefer a higher rate of support from the government, as they have been the tip of the spear in the fight against the pandemic, thus, also more exposed to the public's negative reactions towards the implementation of measures and pandemic management.

Summary of key findings



- **Perception:** A successful response mechanism with room for improvement, pre-existing negative sentiments could have been exuberated, LEAs approach consisted of a fair, equal treatment as “educators” instead of enforcers.
- **Social Interaction – Compliance:** LEAs opted to be educators than enforcers of punitive action, existence of correlation between movement restriction measures and social unrest, COVID-19 as a lesson of paying attention to hygiene protocols in the line of duty.
- **Communication:** Decision and Policy makers should strive for clarity, targeted information and awareness raising campaigns that utilize contemporary and traditional means may overcome educational, societal and cultural challenges, LEAs could make a difference as crisis communicators with vulnerable groups.
- **Trust:** Pre-existing lack of trust was intensified during COVID-19, correlation between trust and perception based on LEAs role as the tip of crisis response mechanism’s spear, COVID-19 may have impacted trust albeit for short periods of time.



List of Policy Recommendations



In this section, we will present the main lessons learned and recommendations:

Lessons Learned:

- COVID-19 had a multidimensional impact on Law Enforcement Agents, influencing their role in their professional activities and daily lives, resulting in increased workload, increased risk, stress, widespread fear due to the unknown health-related impact COVID-19, as well as a negative impact on their interpersonal relationships with the rest of the community members. Public perception in some cases may have deteriorated it was the professional responsibility of LEAs to implement rules and regulations that potentially limited the personal liberties of citizens, which also included movement restrictions and isolation policies.
- LEAs highlight that the governmental crisis management during COVID-19 has been successful, nevertheless there is room for improvement, particularly in relation to awareness raising initiatives and enhanced engagement at a municipal level as well as underlining the need for policy and decision makers to generate rules and regulations in a clear and easy to understand manner, taking into consideration educational and cultural limitations, such as language barriers, illiteracy, lack of technological skills, lack of accessibility to contemporary means of information etc. In order to overcome such operational challenges, law enforcement agents, instead of resorting to a punitive approach, opted to adopt the role of lenient educators of rules and measures, thus, whenever possible, attempting to educate citizens instead of punishing them by issuing a fine.
- Measure non-conformity, according to LEAs, can be partially attributed to the human nature, nevertheless, it is important to note that the mandatory character of specific policies (i.e. vaccinations) could have functioned counterproductively in certain cases. Moreover, disobedience to healthcare protocols which have led to violent expressions of objection such as protests, are likely the result of mental fatigue by prolonged and consecutive social isolation periods during the COVID-19 phases.
- As a positive outcome, both LEAs and the general public have incorporated personal hygiene protocols in their daily lives. Law Enforcement Agents in particular, are frequently exposed to transmittable diseases as they encounter members of the society who are similarly highly exposed to diseases due to their living conditions (such as homeless citizens, substance abusers etc).

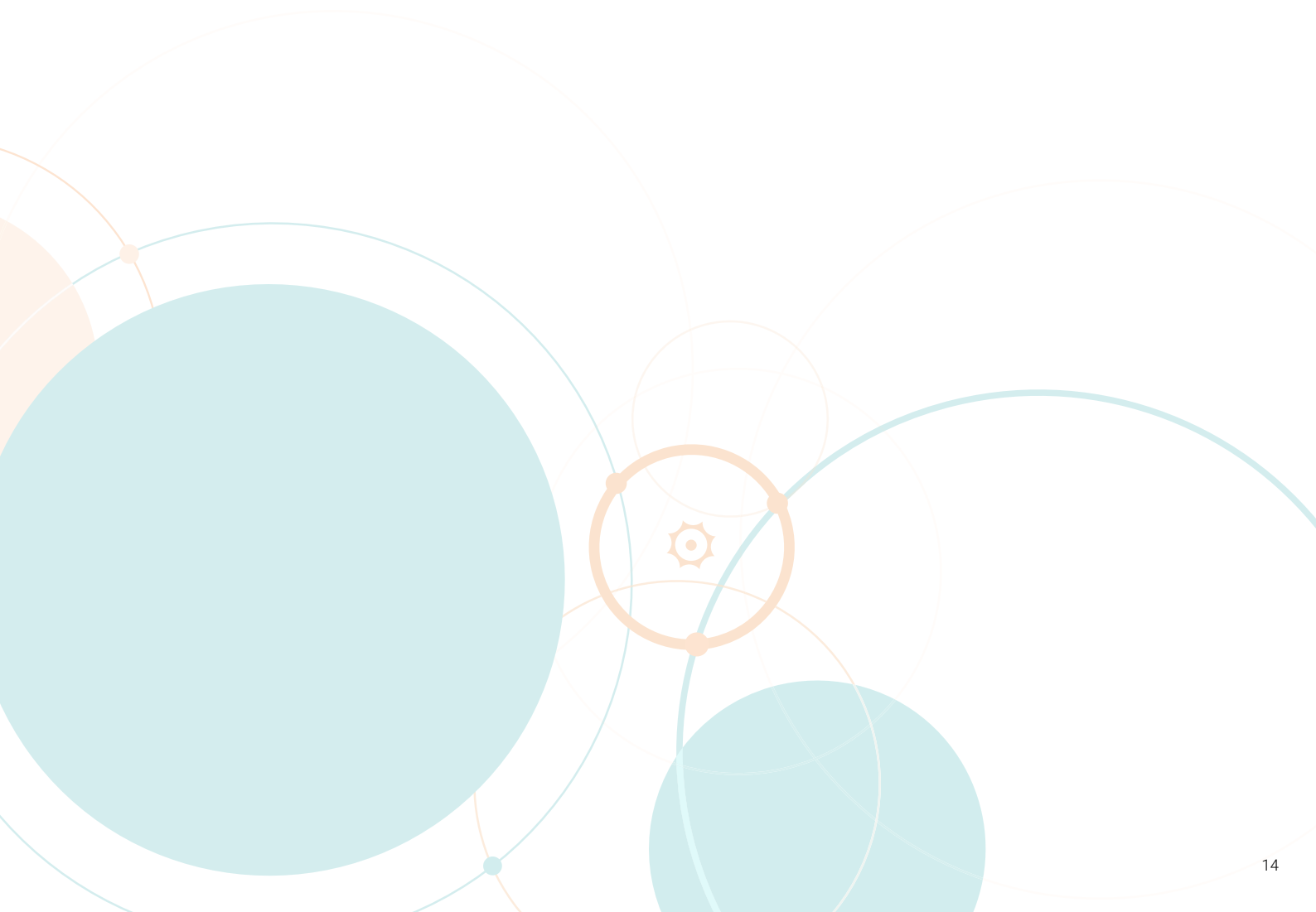
Recommendations:

- Non-pharmaceutical interventions such as lockdowns might be effective in the containment of the infection rate, nevertheless, decision makers out to take into consideration the negative socio-economic and mental-wellbeing consequences of such policies. Mitigation measures are required to achieve a better balance between these negative impacts, particularly in forms of socio-economic and psychological support towards affected socio-demographic groups.

- Governmental system ought to provide additional funding towards the strengthening of the healthcare system, thus, create ICUs whereas Municipalities should be pro-active and actively engage with the local community via conducting information awareness activities and distribution of relevant material, particularly with targeted initiatives to reach minority and marginalized groups.
- Decision makers and policy experts are recommended to take into account the negative consequences of the mandatory vaccination mechanism, while consider potential exceptions to the rule which are justified by medical experts or even a swift of the modus operandi in making vaccinations optional. The optional nature of the vaccination mechanism will likely be perceived more positively as it will be interpreted as respecting individual rights. It is highly recommended that the governmental system invests in awareness raising campaigns, particularly in combating misinformation and directly confronting conspiracy theories based on scientific facts, which are communicated in a clear and understandable manner.
- Measure non-conformity is observed during cases of prolonged social isolation, therefore, decision makers and policy experts should take into consideration the negative consequences of such measures which may lead to widespread mental fatigue. In the case of Greece, this was experienced during the second curfew. The mental impact and the lack of substantial financial assistance have been identified as a contributing factors leading to measure non-compliance.
- It is important that governmental agencies allow Law Enforcement Agents voice their concerns without repercussions. Contemporary societies are also recommended to conduct initiatives that would bridge communication, cultural and educational gaps that marginalised groups may have. It could be beneficial, particularly during crises, regional governance actors engage with representatives of marginalised groups so that the concerns of these communities can be taken into consideration. Facilitation of open dialogue between community members and decision makers is important, while governmental stakeholders could facilitate communication efforts such as awareness and information raising campaigns, in-person meetings with concerned citizens and formal method of documenting these concerns, empirical research utilizing questionnaires to minority groups and general public.
- Relevant stakeholders should communicate the implemented measures in a clear manner, taking into consideration specific characteristics of each socio-demographic group such as illiteracy, lack of tech-savviness. During crises it is observed that vulnerabilities are amplified. It is recommended that 24/7 dedicated lines are established to explain measures while also municipalities ought to also take an active role in engaging with the public on information awareness activities.
- Decision makers ought to take into account that albeit the utilization of fear can in certain cases be effective, as observed during the first pandemic phase, emphasis should be placed on alternative mechanisms whilst implementing mitigation measures, due to negative psychological outcomes.
- Law Enforcement Agencies are recommended to continue to be engaged in the communication and information raising activities, particularly in relation to prevention, protection and measures. Communication experts should also seek the engagement of regional and local stakeholders in this endeavor, whereas authorities could utilize pre-established networks between LEAs and marginalized groups in order to achieve

better compliance rate due to their familiarity with the target population, while targeted communication campaigns would also be beneficial. It is strongly recommended that relevant stakeholders emphasize in creating a real-time response mechanism which can provide accurate and clear information.

- Decision makers should not neglect the psychological impact a pandemic can have on LEAs, besides the general and vulnerable populations, therefore, relevant agencies should invest more in educating LEAs in social interactions and provide adequate psychological support without in fear of stigmatization or repercussions.
- Decision makers should take into account the importance of LEAs and healthcare experts during the pandemic, thus, provide significant support to reinforce their working environments. In the case of LEAs, they were more exposed to the public's negative reactions towards the implementation of measures and pandemic management.
- Pre-existing perceptions may likely influence measure compliance and rates, thus, hindering the role of LEAs. Awareness raising campaigns the active collaboration between regional and local actors with vulnerable communities, will likely dispel misinformation and allow a smoother crisis management and measure implementation. Decision makers should take into account that COVID-19 pandemic may have created a falsified image that LEAs as the “enemy” who on the one hand actively work to protect citizens and their rights and on the other the implemented measures would restrict citizen liberties. Therefore, policy makers should exercise caution to avoid unintended negative consequences while drafting responses.



References

Webistes

<https://www.covinform.eu/>

Deliverables

WP4 – D4.1 Baseline report: Governmental responses

WP4 – D4.2 Research design: Governmental responses

WP4 – D4.3 Analysis: Government responses to COVID-19 and impact assessment

WP4 – D4.4 Synthesis and lessons learnt on governmental responses and impacts

WP4 – D4.5 Baseline report: Governmental responses – updated M22

WP4 – D4.6 Research design: Governmental responses - update M26

WP4 – D4.7 Analysis: Government responses to COVID-19 and impact assessment - update M32

WP4 – D4.8 Synthesis and lessons learnt on governmental responses and impacts - update M33

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