

Case study

Innovative concepts to communicate science

DURING COVID-19

Contributor

COVINFORM consortium

Country of implementation

European Union (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden), State of Israel, Switzerland, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Start date of the initiative

November 2020

Track

Science communication by researchers

Target audience

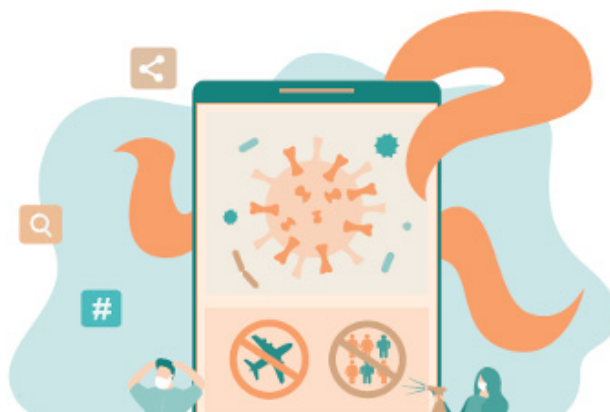
Decision- and policy-makers, scientific community & general public

Website

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

INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION IN TIMES OF CRISIS:

lessons learned and recommendations from COVID-19 and other CBRNe incidents based on recent COVINFORM & PROACTIVE findings



COVINFORM: Supporting decision- and policy-makers with relevant reports on COVID-19

Summary of the initiative

COVINFORM is a research project aimed at highlighting the disproportionate impact of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on vulnerable populations. The project applies an intersectional approach to analyse the consequences of the COVID-19 response at economic, political and social levels.

The COVINFORM project sets out to assess COVID-19 responses in a multilevel governance framework, and develop an online portal and toolkit for stakeholders in the governmental, public health and civil society/community domains. Promising practices to mitigate the inequitable impact of the pandemic are evaluated in target communities through case studies that span diverse disciplines and include vulnerable populations.

Context and relevance of the project

COVINFORM started as a research project to analyse the differential impact of COVID-19 response measures on vulnerable groups. The project was initiated by a multidisciplinary team of 16 partners from 11 countries with expertise in public health, migration studies, epidemiology, gender studies, economics, communication science, crisis management, journalism, and ethical and social impact evaluation. The team analyses the multisectoral effects of relief measures at regional and local levels. It is also assessing science communication efforts and the spread of mis- and disinformation as cross-cutting issues. The project covers the 27 member states of the European Union as well as Israel and the United Kingdom. More specifically, secondary data is analysed for 27 countries of the European Union plus Israel and the United Kingdom, desk-based research is conducted in 15 target countries, and an in-depth study involving primary research, desk-based and secondary research is conducted in 10 sub-national research sites. In addition, case studies focusing on specific vulnerable populations are conducted.

Above: Cover page of a whitepaper product by COVINFORM. Credit: SYNYO.



World Health
Organization

EPI • WiN

Summary of the analysis



Innovation factors

The COVINFORM project translates research findings into easy-to-understand articles for a diverse audience. The innovation factor is in the use of various accessible formats such as blogs, country- or topic-specific reports, whitepapers, podcasts, videos and bimonthly reports. These formats simplify the otherwise often overwhelming findings originating from a multicountry research project. The team also packages content targeted for specific audiences.

The content covers the effects of COVID-19 response measures beyond physical health. This includes mental health and wellbeing, education, employment, and political stability, among other factors of social inequality.

The reports are written in plain language which enhances accessibility and increases the reach and use of findings. The evidence-based practical recommendations in the reports facilitate informed and timely decision-making about public health and social measures. For example, the team published a report titled "COVID-19 Vaccines: History and Facts"ⁱ, which explains the science behind vaccines and also provides information on how to manage misinformation. The content is presented in a visually engaging way with simple illustrations and graphics to improve readability.

As the project involves partners from 11 countries and covers multiple countries, findings can be compared across the international context and synergies derived from international collaboration. Insights into what works in a specific context can help to inform decision-making in another setting, leading to cross-country exchange and mutual learning.

Accuracy of scientific information

For research purposes, the team considers the following approaches:

- hard-systems science: identification of constraints, objectives and goals;
- soft-systems science: interaction and communication with involved actors, including governments, international negotiators, businesses, conservationists, and civil society;
- mixed-methods case studies and triangulation of intersecting vulnerabilities: a three-level approach to data collection – European Union level, national and community level, and via case studies;
- innovative and creative theories and methods: complex systems analysis, intersectionality theory, and video journals; and
- risk assessment models and repository development.



The content included in the bi-monthly reports is based on:

- project findings, including literature reviews, undertaken by partners across Europe;
- the input and work of practitioner partners working in emergency medicine; and
- the findings from other European Commission funded research projects such as EUNOMIAⁱⁱ that has developed information hygiene guidelines to address misinformation.

The team transparently cites all their references to facilitate further information search.



Impact on knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the target audience

No formal impact evaluation has been conducted to date. The team plans to conduct their first project review in mid-2022.

Platform analytics as of December 2021 include:

- 327 followers on Twitterⁱⁱⁱ
- 151 connections on LinkedIn^{iv}
- 75 followers on Facebook^v and
- 5 subscribers on YouTube.^{vi}



Cover page of a whitepaper product by COVINFORM. Credit: SYNNO.

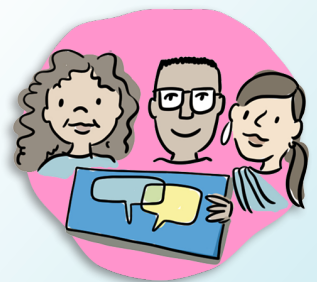
Gender equality, equity and human rights considerations

The main objective of the project is to call attention to potential adverse effects of COVID-19 response measures on vulnerable and marginalized populations. As such, equity and human rights considerations to ensure the pandemic response is fair and does not exacerbate existing inequalities are at the core of the initiative.

Additionally, the team has dedicated thematic posts on gender equality and equity. Examples include:

- A blog article on "Why gender matters in the COVID-19 response"^{vii}
- A blog article on how the project supports gender equality in terms of European Union Research and Innovation^{viii}
- A report on the importance of applying an intersectional lens to understand the unequal impact of the COVID-19 pandemic^{ix}.

By presenting some of their content as videos, the project increases access to populations with special sensory needs.



Limitations

COVID-19 travel restrictions have hindered the team's engagement with different audiences such as policy-makers to present their results face-to-face. To date, outreach has only focused on social media platforms and online webinars. Purely digital dissemination of results has been perceived as unfavourable for engaging with digitally excluded and marginalized groups. Hence, the team plans to work with nongovernmental organizations to better connect with these groups.



Looking forward

The team will continue its research to understand the impact of COVID-19 response measures in relation to the government, public health, communities and communication and misinformation. It is currently developing research designs to conduct studies with the representatives working in these areas.

References

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- ii. EUNOMIA [website] (<https://eunomia.social/>).
- iii. COVINFORM Twitter account (https://twitter.com/COVINFORM_EU).
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Illustrations by Sam Bradd

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