



# HUMANITARIAN EXPERTS NETWORK

## COVID-19 Humanitarian Outcome Survey Key findings

4 May 2020



## Introduction

This report shares findings from HEN's fourth global survey launched on 27 April 2020. This report focuses on:

- top concerns related to COVID-19 impacts
- the direct and indirect health impacts experienced in country
- movement restrictions, and
- people's access to services.
- HEN members were also asked about information gaps.

Reports that health services are overwhelmed come from HEN respondents in North America and Europe but not from other parts of the world. This is in line with media reports indicating that the pandemic has had a great impact elsewhere. Respondents in the Middle East and Africa reported the least impact on health services.

There is a perceived lack of transparency in information shared by many governing authorities. HEN members reported doubts or mistrust in statistics related to COVID-19 including the number of cases, degree of testing and tests number of available.

From April 27 to May 4, the HEN network grew to 777 members from 409 organisations across 98 countries. 100 HEN members participated in this week's survey. This report analyses the results by region (Africa, Middle East and North Africa, Asia and Oceania, South America, North America, and Europe).

## Limitations

The ACAPS' HEN survey provides a rapid, weekly snapshot of what aid workers across the globe are seeing, thinking about and doing about the COVID-19 pandemic, and how things are changing.

HEN is NOT based on a statistical sample. HEN combines and contrasts the current observations of people on the ground in different countries. It provides a distinctive source of information on people's lives not captured by statistical information, or traditional health or economic data. It is an additional information source for understanding the complex nature of the interface between the COVID-19 outbreak, the containment measures and the behaviours and actions these have provoked – this is the crisis we are trying to understand so, collectively, we can continue to respond better.

**Please share the HEN network with your contacts across the globe who can help us all develop a clearer picture of how this crisis is evolving. To join the HEN and participate in future surveys, click [here](#). If you wish to be involved to a greater degree – please contact [hen@acaps.org](mailto:hen@acaps.org) we would love to hear from you.**

## Key findings

Main concerns indicate that perceptions of people at the field level is that COVID-19 continue to affect areas of daily life beyond health. Main concerns in Africa, Asia and Oceania, Europe and North America are COVID-19 spreading further, loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, and increasing number of people in need. In South America and the Middle East main concerns were less about the spread of the virus and **more** focused on the **loss of livelihoods and food insecurity**.

In the Middle East and Africa, the case numbers remain small and COVID-19 has not overwhelmed health services; regardless the Middle East and Africa report high levels of indirect impact on food insecurity, the economy and unemployment, and lack of access to services due to travel restrictions.

HEN members expressed concern about IDPs and refugees in the Middle East, and rural communities in Africa. HEN members in Africa also reported challenges providing education for children where schools are now closed.

## What do HEN informants want to know?

We asked respondents what they saw as the biggest information gaps in relation to COVID-19. A broad range of information themes emerged:

- Rumours, myths and perceptions
- What is working in other places about mitigation, containment and protection against COVID-19
- Programming strategies during this time of limited access
- Sectors or programmes with permission to carry on
- Human rights information
- Where to find reliable information on:
  - Number of cases
  - Number hospitalised
  - Number of deaths
  - Testing capacity and number tested
  - How hospitals are coping with the caseload
  - Hotspots and spread
  - Gender disaggregated analysis

## What HEN members told us about Africa

### Key insights

- Overall, the issue causing most concern to members who responded is the spread of COVID-19.
- The indirect impact of COVID-19 is more evident than the direct impact on lives and health systems. This is particularly linked to livelihoods and food security and concerns about children being out of school. In Kenya and Cameroon health services are currently overwhelmed according to some responses, but in most of Africa, COVID-19 is not yet having a major direct impact on health care.
- Clear, reliable information on caseloads, testing capacity and on the seriousness of the virus is lacking.

### Top Concerns

We asked HEN members to rank their top five concerns among a number of possible impacts of COVID 19, including the disease's possible impact on health or education services, protection, gender-based violence, or its impact on livelihoods and food security<sup>1</sup>. HEN informants in MENA ranked the following top three concerns:

- 1. Spread of COVID-19**
- 2. Loss of livelihoods**
- 3. Challenges to humanitarian and development operations**

### Health

Most respondents in Africa (16 of 30) reported that COVID was not yet having a major impact on health services. The exceptions to this were in Kenya and Cameroon where some respondents reported that health services were already being overwhelmed.

### Living Conditions and Essential Services

Nearly half of the responses from Africa (13 of 30) reported that the secondary impacts of COVID 19 had been overwhelming or significant. Particular concerns raised were around: the impact that movement restrictions were having on access to jobs and services for IDPs, refugees and rural communities, rising food insecurity, and children being unable to access quality alternative learning with the closure of schools during COVID-19.

<sup>1</sup> The list that people could rank against included: loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, increased number of people in need, spread of COVID 19, protection concerns and violations of human rights, education, societal

"Travel from one region to the other is difficult. Only people with clearance from the government can do so. The restriction can affect small businesses that rely on suppliers outside their regions. Commodity prices may increase as transporters find alternatives to bring in goods." Senegal

### Access to Services

Accessibility to services varies across the region, and is largely dependent on the pre-existing health infrastructure, education system, and governing authorities, and this often-presented challenges prior to measures being introduced to contain COVID-19. These containment measures further constrain access to essential goods and services and livelihood opportunities.

Concerns of food insecurity are connected to price increases caused by movement restrictions that have made the food supply chain more challenging and thus more costly. Although not described overall as significant, in terms of access to essential services, non-Covid-19 health care was often highlighted as difficult for people to access. The examples given by some respondents indicate that this is something to watch closely over coming weeks;

- In Malawi, a respondent expressed concern that some basic health services were shut down due to staff strikes fuelled by fear of COVID-19 and a lack of PPE and screening procedures. The national immunization program has been placed on hold.
- In Chad, one respondent shared a concern that a measles outbreak will likely be deprioritized by humanitarian actors.
- In DRC and Tanzania there are concerns about limited COVID-19 testing and treatment capacity which make it difficult for anyone with COVID-19 symptoms to seek help.

### What HEN Informants in Africa want to know

Reliable information on the scope, scale and nature of COVID-19 is key and is not readily available. Where data is available, respondents indicated issues with data reliability on number of cases, testing, surveillance, and locations of concern ("hot spots"). Misinformation is also a concern. In South Sudan, a respondent expressed concern over the excessive amount of information resulting in communities dismissing COVID-19 as a "white man's disease," causing many to not take precautions or restrictions seriously.

### 30 HEN Informants from 14 countries in Africa answered the survey this week.

breakdown (increased crime and security incidents), non-COVID health issues overlooked, challenges to humanitarian and development operations, sex and gender based violence or, other.

## What HEN members told us about the MENA

### Key insights

- Loss of livelihoods and challenges with food security were the main overall concerns in the region.
- MENA was the region with the least concerns about health services.
- The indirect impact of COVID-19 is being described as “significant or overwhelming” by over a third of respondents from the region (7 of 18)

### Top Concerns

In the Middle east, there are extreme variations in terms of living standards, health care, economic conditions, and stability. Some of the countries known to be most affected to date (Iraq, Lebanon, and Jordan) are flattening or reducing their curves in recent weeks and beginning to talk of easing restrictions. At the same time, the conflict affected states of Syria, Yemen and Libya are not currently reporting high numbers of cases and it is unknown if they are at an early stage of the outbreak, or may be underreporting cases due to lack of testing capacity and challenges accessing healthcare.

HEN informants in MENA ranked the following top three concerns:

- 1. Loss of livelihoods**
- 2. Food insecurity**
- 3. Spread of COVID-19**

### Health

Respondents in the Middle East and North Africa were the least likely to report that COVID19 had already overwhelmed existing health services. Most responses, 12 of 18 said there had been no or minimal impact on health services so far.

### Living Conditions and Essential Services

Consistent with other regions across the globe, access to non-COVID 19 related health services is more logically challenging due to movement restrictions and limited medical capacity. This is the case and is a concern to respondents even though they are not yet seeing the health system overwhelmed.

7 out of 18 responses told us that the indirect impacts of COVID 19 had had an overwhelming or significant impact on access to most goods and services needed for daily life. Comments indicated that the impact of this is being felt most acutely for IDPs and refugees, where essential services such as food and water supplies continue to be provided in camp settings. Education services are provided online, yet this fails to

recognize the huge disparities between households. Families with limited resources including laptops, printers, tablets, or smart phones do not have access to learning, and by default children are at risk for falling behind.

Key insights across the region –

The length of time under lockdowns – some had been in place for two months – are exacerbating pre-existing economic crises, especially in Lebanon, Palestine and Syria.

Respondents stated that even with easing of restrictions in Jordan and neighbouring Iraq, the impact that the economic losses and the lack of access to basic services on vulnerable groups (including IDPs, refugees, and migrants) is not yet understood.

Humanitarians working in Palestine were particularly concerned about children’s access to education and political barriers in Gaza and East Jerusalem that prevent humanitarians from responding to people in need.

In Lebanon the worsening economic situation continues to limit access to basic services and work opportunities for refugees. In this case “the poorest are hit hardest.”

In Yemen, declining remittances due to the lockdown and oil crisis in neighbouring Saudi Arabia will have an impact on the many Yemenis reliant on the flow of cash from family members working across the border.

*“...Staying at home for many Syrians is an overcrowded, physically and mentally stressful environment, without access to adequate supplies of food or other products. Conditions are far worse for those who live in north Syrian camps, where inadequate access to basic medical, water and sanitation facilities is commonplace and a single tent may shelter as many as five to 15 people.” Syria*

### What HEN Informants in the Middle East and North Africa want to know

- More accurate information of cases, testing the spread of COVID-19 in the region
- a better understanding of access and its impact on community based project implementation
- In Yemen, respondents expressed the need to better understand the flow of remittances into the country as a majority of the populations have historically relied on remittances as their main source of income.
- The new virus has become intertwined with ideas about political warfare tactics in Yemen; understanding this will be necessary when looking to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. (See ACAPS’ report on COVID-19 in Yemen)

**18 HEN Informants from 7 countries in MENA answered the survey this week.**

## What HEN members told us about Asia and Oceania

### Key insights

- Of all issues relate to COVID-19, further spread of the virus is the issue causing most concern.
- While the direct impact of COVID-19 on health care was not yet impacting health services overall according to respondents, there are concerns that people are less likely to access health services in general than before.
- More than half of the respondents indicate a significant indirect impact on access and availability of essential goods and services including several reports that this was already showing up in negative coping strategies and societal breakdown.
- Misconceptions, rumours and unclear information is having an impact on people's understanding of the virus; in some cases stigmatization is preventing the uptake of health care for both COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 needs.

### Top Concerns

HEN respondents in Asia and Oceania (similar to respondents in Africa, Europe and North America) ranked the top three concerns:

- 1. Spread of COVID-19**
- 2. Loss of Livelihoods**
- 3. Food Insecurity**

**"Education has been impacted, there are online classes being initiated but it does not reach to children whose parents cannot afford for internet, mobile and laptops so there is increasing divide between have and have nots." Nepal**

### Health

Reports on the extent to which COVID-19 was impacting health services were mixed throughout the region and even within some country contexts.

- From Nepal, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea we heard that COVID 19 was having only a minimal, or no, direct impact on health services.
- In Bangladesh, India and Afghanistan, reports were mixed; with most respondents either reporting some impact or significant impact. One HEN member in Afghanistan said they had already seen evidence that COVID 19 was overwhelming health services.
- In India, Bangladesh and Nepal, respondents indicated that there are less people using maternal, preventative and geriatric health care, or seeking health care for

chronic illnesses. There are concerns that rumors and fears in Nepal and Bangladesh reduce the likelihood of seeking health care for both COVID-19 and non\_COVID-19 related conditions.

- In Indonesia, the poor testing capacity for COVID-19 cases limits access to COVID-19 treatment which will be a concern if the virus spreads rapidly in the coming weeks.

### Living Conditions and Essential Services

13 out of 24 HEN members in Asia and Oceania told us that COVID 19 had had an overwhelming or significant impact on people's ability to access essential goods and services. The definitions given in the questions we asked implies that people are facing unavailability of key items, price hikes and long waiting times, and that the impact is being felt as an increase in needs. Where the situation is described as overwhelming (noted by 4 responses) the impact is manifest in the negative coping strategies and in the breakdown in society in general.

Online education classes are available in parts Asia and Oceania for students unable to attend school due to closures. This enhances the divide between the "have and have nots" with many children unable to afford internet, mobile phones, or laptops.

Reports from Bangladesh indicate that access to "social services" for individuals facing abuse and loss of income are largely uncoordinated. One respondent in Papua New Guinea expressed concern for the reported reduction in GBV services due to state of emergency restrictions.

### What HEN informants in Asia and Oceania want to know

In general, there was a need for accurate, clear reliable information on all aspects of the virus, its spread, how to protect against it and what to do if infection is suspected.

Although there is a lot of information about COVID-19, respondents expressed serious concerns about the accuracy of this information and how it was being translated into community knowledge. Accurate, clear information is needed to reduce misinformation which creates social tensions and negatively impacts health seeking behaviour.

What people believe about the virus's spread, and origins, will impact how seriously they take it and their uptake of protective behaviors and treatment.

From Nepal we were told that a lack of information on types of medication used to treat COVID-19 make it challenging to preposition supplies.

**24 HEN Informants from 10 countries in Asia and Oceania answered the survey**

## What HEN members told us about in North America

### Key insights

- Further spread of the virus was the main overall concern; after this issues around livelihoods and the impact on food security and needs was seen as important.
- Respondents in North America (together with Europe) reported that health services are already overwhelmed.

### Top concerns

HEN informants in North America ranked the top three concerns as follows:

- 1. Spread of COVID-19**
- 2. Food Insecurity**
- 3. Loss of Livelihoods**

### Health

HEN members in North America and Europe were most likely to report that COVID 19 was already overwhelming access to health services.

### Living Conditions and Essential Services

No respondents in the USA and Haiti told us that the secondary impacts of COVID 19 had an overwhelming impact. However, all reported that COVID 19 had some, or a significant impact, particularly on supplies of personal protection equipment, access to testing and on tracing. Respondents in the USA and Haiti were also concerned about the impact on jobs for the most vulnerable.

In Haiti, respondents were concerned about a limited amount of supplies, PPE, and lack of access to COVID-19 screening. Interruptions in the supply chain could interrupt the next planting cycle and increase food insecurity in the rural areas. Additional concerns in Haiti included: education, because alternatives to classroom teaching are not accessible for most of the population and limited child protection services and PSEA services.

### What HEN informants in North America want to know

In the United States, respondents want to know the unintended impact of COVID-19 including an analysis of the trends impacting vulnerable population. This includes a desire to understand the specific impact on the elderly with critical medical conditions, or for individuals who no longer have access to other (non-COVID related) medical services. Humanitarians sitting in regional/global roles want to know how the COVID-19 crisis will impact the future of humanitarian assistance needs globally.

**7 HEN Informants from 2 countries in North America answered the survey.**

## What HEN members told us about in South America

### Key insights

- Food insecurity was the main concern overall.
- Understanding the scope and scale of the direct and indirect impacts are hampered by a lack of trust in information sources and access constraints to people in need.

### Top concerns

HEN respondents in South America were overwhelming concerned about food insecurity. This was different to other regions which were more concerned with the spread of the disease itself.

HEN informants in South America ranked the top three concerns:

- 1. Food insecurity**
- 2. Increased Number of people in need**
- 3. Spread of COVID-19**

### Health

Most respondents in South America reported that there had been some impact on health services, or a significant impact (3 of 4 respondents).

### Living Conditions and Essential Services

Respondents in South America said COVID 19 had overwhelmed or had a significant indirect impact on services, including transport, water and education services. HEN members in South America also raised concerns that COVID 19 was increasing prices of food and fuel beyond what many people could afford.

### What HEN informants in South America want to know

The lack of information is impeding humanitarians from knowing how and on what scale they should be planning to respond. Overall confusion was expressed by respondents in Bolivia, Columbia, Guatemala, and Venezuela about the accuracy of government statistics related to COVID-19. High levels of mistrust couple with limited access to communities prevents humanitarians from understanding the full extent of food insecurity.

**4 HEN Informants from 4 countries in South America answered the survey.**

## What HEN members told us about Europe

### Key insights

- Further spread of the virus was the main overall concern; after this issues around livelihoods and the impact on food security and needs was seen as important.
- Respondents in Europe reported that health services are already overwhelmed.
- There is a desire to understand the spread of the virus in low income countries in other parts of the world.

### Top concerns

HEN informants in South America ranked the top three concerns:

- 1. Spread of COVID-19**
- 2. Loss of livelihoods**
- 3. Increased number of people in need**

### Health

HEN members in Europe and North America were most likely to report that COVID 19 was already overwhelming access to health services.

### Living Conditions and Essential Services

Half of HEN members in Europe (12 out of 14) said COVID 19 had had some impact on access to services. HEN respondents in Greece, Germany and the UK said that not enough information was available in local languages for refugees and migrants.

This had led to many refugees in Greece being fined for breaching movement restriction rules they did not properly understand.

Livelihoods have been impacted across Europe and social protection programmes varying between countries; raising concern for those who do not qualify for support. In Italy, where COVID-19 has overwhelmed the health system, non-COVID-19 related care including physical examinations, therapies, specialists, and visits have been deprioritized. Government measures on transportation have made access to health facilities increasingly difficult in neighboring countries, such as Germany and Slovenia where regular checkups have been postponed.

“The biggest information gap to me is the bottom-up approach. We are facing a global problem which needs local solutions. There are innovative, people centered solution from people for people but the mainstream response/media/politics based their decision top-down. This is not unusual and not specific to Covid-19 but now really visible. These disruptive times are giving the chance and space to change that!”

### Switzerland

### What HEN informants in Europe want to know

In Europe, where many donors and international headquarters sit, information is widespread, but access to reliable data on the spread of COVID-19 within recipient countries is lacking.

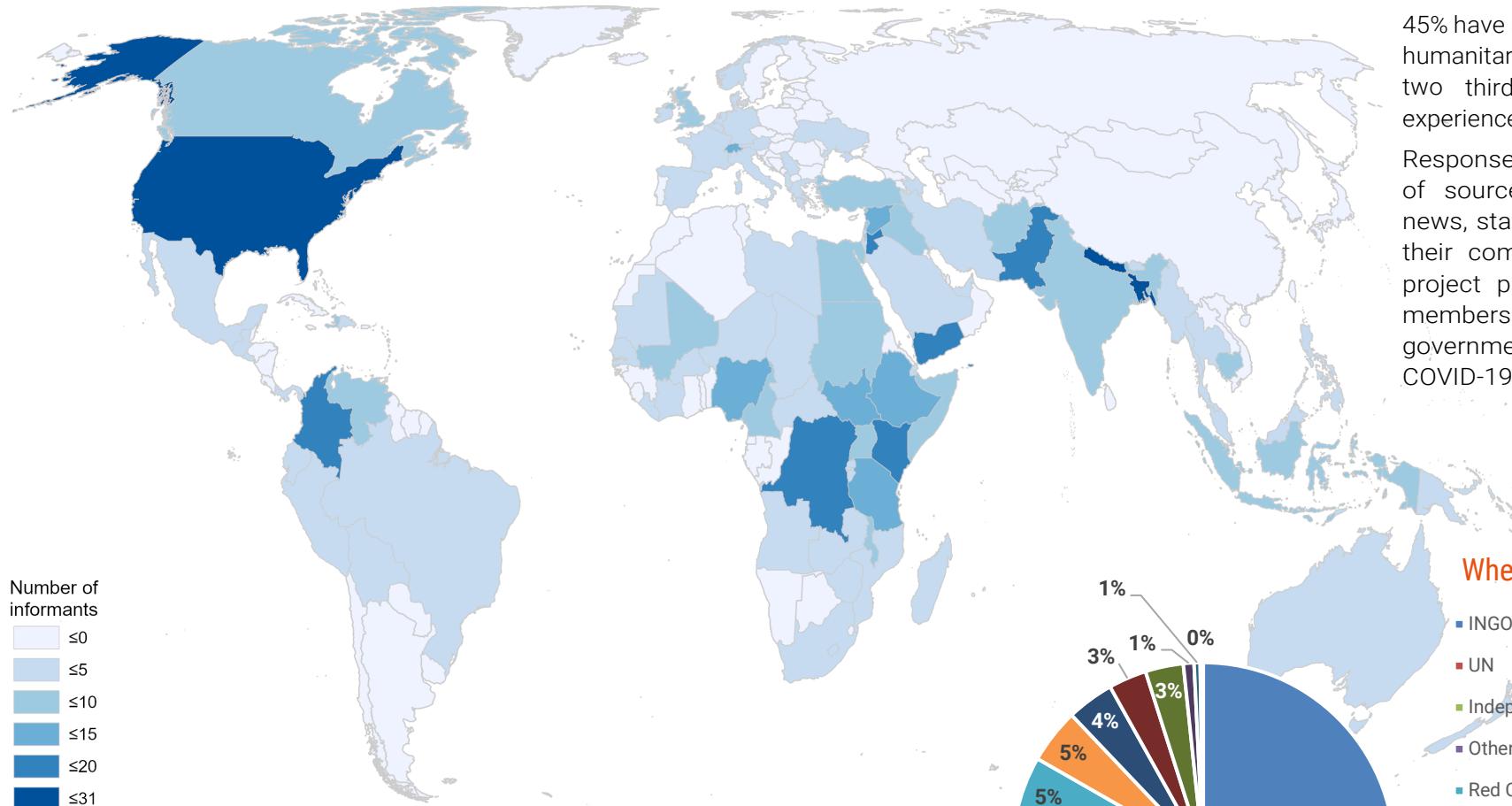
One respondent notes that divergent expert opinions regarding the virus have added to the confusion, within the general public.

The differing needs of women and men, girls and boys as well as vulnerable groups, including migrants must be further analysed.

**14 HEN Informants from 10 countries in Europe answered the survey.**

## Who is in the HEN?

Humanitarian Expert Network as of 4 May 2020



## Who are HEN members?

777 people (43% female, 51% male, 6% prefer not to say) from 409 organisations covering 98 countries

353 are in a country level position

107 are regional

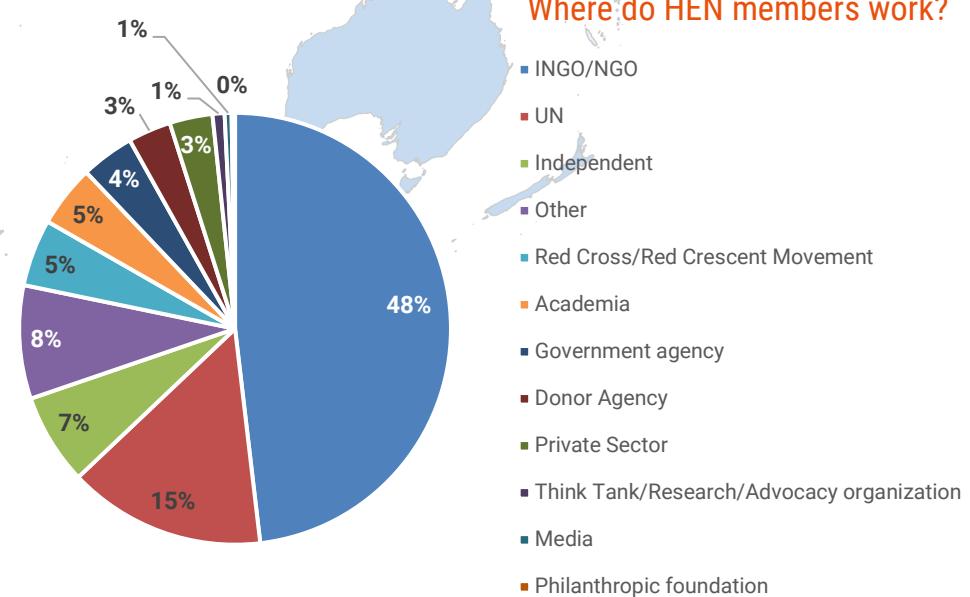
142 are global

175 did not answer

## HEN members know what they are talking about!

45% have more than 10 years' experience in humanitarian or development work, over two thirds have more than 5 years' experience.

Responses are informed by a broad range of sources: national and international news, staff and peers, visible changes in their communities, and feedback from project participants. A number of HEN members also report being part of aid and government coordination fora, or national COVID-19 taskforces.



## Where do HEN members work?

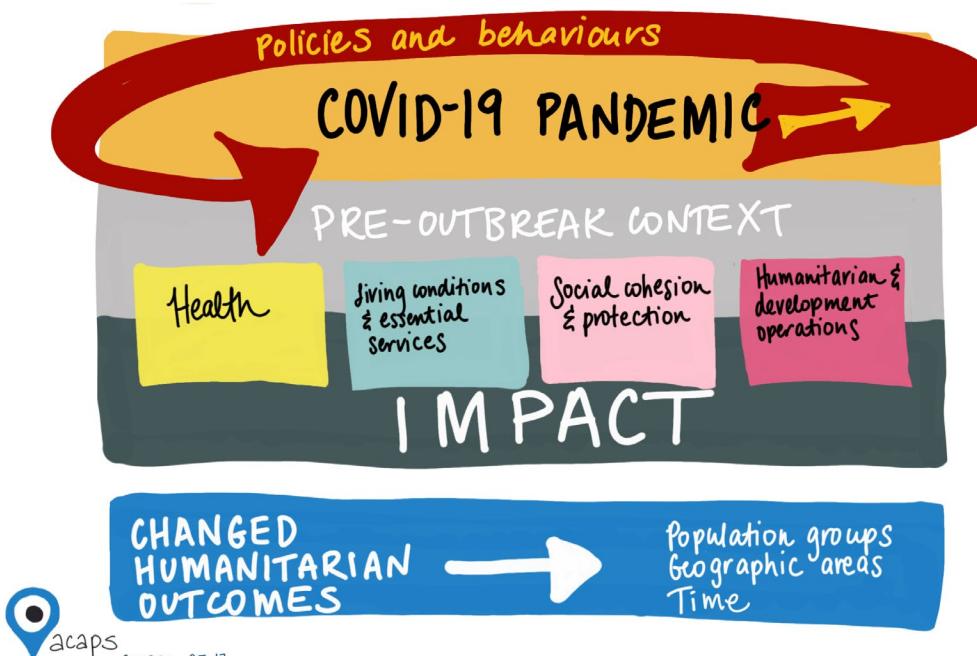
- INGO/NGO
- UN
- Independent
- Other
- Red Cross/Red Crescent Movement
- Academia
- Government agency
- Donor Agency
- Private Sector
- Think Tank/Research/Advocacy organization
- Media
- Philanthropic foundation

## ACAPS Analytical Framework

To respond to the need for information and analysis in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACAPS has developed an analytical framework on how we will approach the unfolding crisis. While the situation is in flux as the pandemic progresses across the globe, this analytical framework will guide ACAPS analysis and data collection (ACAPS 2020).

The framework looks at the pre-pandemic context and how changed policies, behaviours, and actions in reaction to the crisis impact humanitarian efforts, and what the knock-on effects of these may be. The framework categorises analysis of impacts in four main areas: health; living conditions and essential services; social cohesion and protection; and humanitarian development operations.

### ACAPS' COVID-19 Analytical Framework



## How did ACAPS analyse the data?

Six ACAPS analysts, with technical support from Satellite Applications Catapult, cleaned, coded and summarised the HEN results. We used a Grounded Theory Approach for qualitative data. The ranking question (main concerns) was analysed using Borda Count Analysis by region. Click here for more information about Borda Count Methodology.

We are presenting our findings by six regions (Africa, Asia and Oceania, Middle East, South America, North America, and Europe). Over time, with more responses, we will transition to more country level information. Our goal is to have 20 experts responding for every crisis affected country worldwide.

In this survey we looked at overall concerns and gave respondents a broad, multi-sectoral list of options to select from as well as the option to add any concern we hadn't included in the list. We also tried to unravel the impact of the crisis (i.e. the crisis we are considering being the impact of COVID-19 + measures taken to contain the virus + behaviours that are a result of the virus and the containment measures) on the health situation (what we are calling the direct impact) as compared to the other indirect impacts on daily life.

## Data and sources

Satellite Applications Catapult produced the map in this report. The INFORM Severity Index is a composite index that measures severity of humanitarian crises and disasters globally. It brings together 31 indicators impacting severity organised in three dimensions: impact, conditions of affected people and complexity of the crisis. All the indicators are scored on a scale of 1-5. These scores are then aggregated into the overall severity score. See the full INFORM Severity Index data set here.

## Acknowledgements

This report wouldn't have been possible without the time and contribution of Satellite Applications Catapult and HEN members.