

Concept Note

COVID-19 and Systemic Risk

25 November 2021, 11:45h to 13:15h CET

State of play

The devastating impacts of COVID-19 around the world illustrate that the nature and scale of risk has changed. Extending beyond the health sector, the diverse effects of COVID-19 have serious socio-economic implications. COVID-19 has demonstrated the systemic nature of risk, affecting not only discrete parts of our social and economic systems, but also challenging the functioning of the entire system. The impacts have not been felt equally with vulnerable people, the ones more vulnerable to disasters have been hit hardest. The confinement measures required to reduce COVID-19 transmission have also had a major impact on those depending on the informal economy to make a living, including displaced people.

This has stressed the need for a multi-sectoral and multi-hazard approach to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery planning for emergencies. If we look at risk from a systematic perspective, we can see that it is the result of several factors, including:

- Complex dependencies between interconnected sectors;
- Transboundary hazards that pose cascading effects on boundaries, geographical regions, and system domains that require multi-level governance approaches;
- Non-linear developments with potential exponential growth of impacts that are shifting and unequal in their distribution, making it nearly impossible to extrapolate from past experience or data sets for forecasting;
- Tipping points breached before they are known;
- Inadequate policy instruments to ensure adequate risk perception and avoid institutional inertia and short-term legislative initiatives.

This complexity challenges effective governance and raises the need to shift mechanisms from focusing on single hazards to a multi-hazards and systematic risk approach, in overall prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to emergencies. This is especially true as the effects of climate change become more and more obvious. The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic can provide important lessons for the governance of risk going forward in a multi hazard context, and what lessons can be drawn to reduce the impact of the climate emergency

This plenary session will focus on how the region can draw lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic for increased understanding of how to mitigate the effects of systemic risk. The panelists will analyze the challenges currently being faced and contribute to thinking that could shape the COVID-19 recovery. It will also examine the current lessons learnt, best practices and strategies identified, innovations achieved, and knowledge and experience gained in combating the pandemic and potential systemic risks. The outcomes of the session will also contribute to rethinking how we govern systemic risks. There is a clear imperative from the current crisis to find a better way to prevent and manage pandemics and other systemic risks through an inclusive approach that engages vulnerable groups to ensure needs are addressed.

<p>Session objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an overview of the systematic risk of COVID-19 in the health system and beyond and the need for a shift for future emergency preparedness and response. • Create awareness about systemic risks and their implications for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery to biological, natural and other hazards emphasizing the need for an inclusive approach in building resilient systems to address systemic risk. • Propose approaches to develop better prepared governance systems and improved risk reduction planning that addresses the needs of everyone, and particularly, the most vulnerable. • Understand implications for the governance of risk going forward in a multi hazard context, and what lessons can be drawn to reduce the impact of the climate emergency.
<p>Questions to be addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does understanding the nature of systemic risk matter in the midst of COVID-19? • How is epidemic and pandemic preparedness currently embedded within existing disaster risk reduction planning? • What are the best practices in national and local different sectors experiences, which demonstrate integrated pandemic and DRR preparedness and planning? • What needs to change so that institutions can govern systemic risk? • What lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic can we take to prepare for and mitigate the impacts of climate change?
<p>Expected outcomes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved understanding of systematic and cascading risk across systems and sectors. • Lessons learned identified from the COVID-19 experience that can support substantiable improvements for an intersectoral approach on risk reduction planning and on emergency preparedness and response. • Effective governance approaches highlighted that improve the quality and effectiveness of national disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness governance, including solutions for those most vulnerable to the health impacts of COVID-19, such as the elderly, those with underlying conditions, disabilities and other socio-economic factors that leave individuals and societies exposed to the harmful impacts of COVID-19.
<p>Background documents</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health Emergency and Disaster Risk Management Framework WHO (2019): https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241516181 • “Drawing light from the pandemic: A new strategy for health and sustainable development (2021)” https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-policy/european-programme-of-work/pan-european-commission-on-health-and-sustainable-development/publications/drawing-light-from-the-pandemic-a-new-strategy-for-health-and-sustainable-development-2021 • “Assessment Study of the Role of NDMA’s in COVID-19 Crisis Response and Impact of COVID-19 on NDMA’s Operations” https://www.undrr.org/publication/assessment-study-role-ndmas-covid-19-crisis-response-and-impact-covid-19-ndmas • Senarathne, R. & Amaratunga, D (Ed.) (2021). Proceedings of the Conference on COVID 19: Impact , Mitigation, Opportunities and Building Resilience. January 2021. https://covidcon.nsf.gov.lk/images/files/BookofAbs-26012021.pdf • Jonathan E Suk, Eleanor C Vaughan, Robert G Cook, Jan C Semenza, Natural disasters and infectious disease in Europe: a literature review to identify cascading risk pathways, European Journal of Public Health, Volume 30, Issue 5, October 2020, Pages 928–935, https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckz111

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