



PROJECT NUMBER
101080161

Transnational Workshop

Work Package 10



Co-funded by
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The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic has affected our lives in many ways and manifested itself in many undesirable forms, such as the negative impact of coronavirus on individual lives, it has caused many deaths, the negative impact has also been on the global economy and employment, and on the quality of life in society in the form of restrictions on social rights, such as the right to be protected from poverty and social exclusion, the right to housing and education, and restrictions on medical care. COVID-19 also has effects on the democratic debates and the enjoyment of fundamental rights in the different countries of Europe. The impact was even more pronounced from a gender perspective, because as the United Nations (2020) noted, "from health to the economy, security to social protection, the impacts of COVID-19 are exacerbated for women and girls simply by virtue of their sex". Given the mentioned situation, the European Commission has awarded the project partners with the project HEARD, which focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the democratic debate, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and the work and life of women through a gender perspective.

HEARD focuses on the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the democratic debate, the enjoyment of fundamental rights and the work and life of women through a gender perspective. The search for an adequate response to overcome the crisis that occurred during the pandemic of COVID-19 should be a result of the participation of the involvement of various social partners, civil society and decision-making bodies of a given state. By involving partners from 9 different European countries in all the phases of the project we aim to measure the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of respect for the rule of law, democratic values, and the enjoyment of fundamental human rights, with special attention to the social rights of citizens and residents of the given state.

The project HEARD consists of 11 Work packages. In this document - the Report of the Transnational Workshop - we summarise the following project results/ deliverables of Work package 10 (WP 10):

1. Event Description Sheet for the Transnational Workshop (See Appendix 1),
2. Report of the Results of the Transnational Workshop (See Appendix 2).

About the deliverables of Work package 10

Within the WP 10, the in-situ Transnational Workshop was conducted by 10 project partners in-situ in Larissa, Greece (all project partners from Slovenia, Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, Bulgaria, Sweden, Cyprus, Greece participated) and with 59 participants in total (in-situ). (**See Appendix 1**).

After the Transnational Workshop the feedback of the participants was processed, the report in English language was prepared (**See Appendix 2**).

We ensured the minimal number of participants (51/75) and a minimum number of countries, from where the participants are coming from (7-9 countries). At the event we had 59 in-situ participants coming from 9 different countries (Slovenia, Italy, France, Portugal, Spain, Bulgaria, Sweden, Cyprus, Greece).

Meet the partnership



Fakulteta za
organizacijske študije
Faculty of organisation studies



Contact Info



Co-funded by
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Appendix 1: Event Description Sheet for the Transnational Workshop

EVENT DESCRIPTION SHEET**For Transnational Workshop (Work package 10)**

PROJECT	
Participant:	01 - FAKULTETA ZA ORGANIZACIJSKE STUDIJE V NOVEM MESTU (FOS) 02 - Associazione InCo-Molfetta APS (InCo) 03 - INSTITUTO ANAPTIXIS EPICHEIRIMATIKOTITAS ASTIKI ETAIREIA (iED) 04 - CBE SUD LUBERON (CBE) 05 - Comune di Vimercate 06 - FONDATSIA ZA PREDPRIEMACHESTVO, KULTURA I OBRAZOVANIE - Foundation for Entrepreneurship, Culture and Education 07 - NORDIC DIASPORA FORUM (NDF) 08 - AYUNTAMIENTO DE MISLATA 09 - Federação de Associações Juvenis do Distrito de Braga (FAJUB) 10 - CARDET CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LIMITED (CARDET)
PIC number:	01 – 943692340 02 – 922855576 03 – 998069182 04 - 950177275 05 – 905191003 06 – 940414710 07 – 916641562 08 – 897272796 09 – 929027880 10 – 999738552
Project name and acronym:	The impact of COVID-19 crisis on diverse democratic perspectives through gender perspective - HEARD

EVENT DESCRIPTION	
Event number:	10
Event name:	Transnational Workshop »Crisis Management and Different Democratic Perspectives Through Genders«
Type:	Transnational Workshop
In situ/online:	In-situ
Location:	10 partners conducted event In-situ.

	In-situ in Larissa, Greece		
Date(s):	18. 06. 2024		
Website(s) (if any):	https://heard-project.eu/		
Participants			
Female:	41		
Male:	18		
Non-binary:	0		
From country 1 [Slovenia]:	2		
From country 2 [Italy]:	6		
From country 3 [Greece]:	39		
From country 4 [France]:	2		
From country 5 [Bulgaria]:	2		
From country 6 [Sweden]:	2		
From country 7 [Spain]:	2		
From country 8 [Portugal]:	2		
From country 9 [Cyprus]:	2		
Total number of participants:	59	From total number of countries:	9
Description			
<i>Provide a short description of the event and its activities.</i>			
A transnational workshop titled "Crisis Management and Different Democratic Perspectives Through Genders" was organised and held on Tuesday, June 18, 2024, in person at the JOIST Innovation Park in Larissa, Greece. This insightful event brought together experts and stakeholders from various fields to assess research findings, develop policy recommendations, and delve into the gendered dimensions of the pandemic's impacts across partner countries. The speakers and guests included experts and project managers from Slovenia, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, France, and Sweden. Participants engaged in discussions, gained insights into research methodologies, and contributed to shaping resilient and inclusive responses to global challenges. The event commenced with a welcome speech by Dr. Maja Pucelj, Assistant Professor and leader of the HEARD project. She introduced the topic of the open discussion and presented the panel of speakers. Dr. Pucelj continued with an overview of the project, introducing the project partners and reviewing the progress and implementations achieved by the consortium thus far. Each speaker then provided a brief introduction, highlighting their experiences in managing the pandemic within their respective roles. This was followed by a concise presentation of the project and the activities undertaken by the consortium to date, with a particular focus on the development of research results and political recommendations in three core areas: democracy, human rights, and women's work-life balance. The workshop aimed to present these political recommendations to a panel of experts and solicit their interventions and feedback through a roundtable discussion. The objective was also to encourage active discussion with the audience, which included policymakers, researchers and academics,			

representatives and members of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, community leaders, students and young professionals, and media professionals.

The prepared political recommendations for democracy, human rights, and balancing the life roles of women during future epidemic situations were the key topics of the workshop. The feedback acquired through this process has been invaluable in improving the scientific monograph.

The event concluded with a brief discussion on the proceedings and the updates that the consortium needs to make to the outputs to ensure they are as representative of public opinion as possible.

HISTORY OF CHANGES		
VERSION	PUBLICATION DATE	CHANGE
1.0	30.09.2024	Faculty of Organisation Studies in Novo mesto

Appendix 2: Report of the Results of Transnational Workshop

PROJECT NUMBER
101080161

**Report of the
Transnational
workshop "Crisis
Management and
Different
Democratic
Perspectives
Through
Genders" (WP10)**



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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly impacted societies worldwide, revealing vulnerabilities and pressing the need for effective responses to emergencies. Urgent decision-making in the face of limited time and information has sometimes sidelined democratic dialogue and social participation, raising concerns about the functioning of democracy, human rights protection, and women's work-life balance. In the wake of this crisis, ongoing research and social analysis seek to provide policy recommendations for governments to navigate future crises with broader societal consensus.

In response to these pressing issues, the Institute of Entrepreneurship Development (iED) organized a transnational workshop titled "Crisis Management and Different Democratic Perspectives Through Genders" on Tuesday, June 18, 2024, held in person at the JOIST Innovation Park in Larissa. This insightful event brought together experts and stakeholders from various fields to assess research findings, develop policy recommendations, and delve into the gendered dimensions of the pandemic's impacts across partner countries.

The workshop was part of the European project "HEARD" and was conducted in English. The speakers and guests included experts and project managers from Slovenia, Greece, Bulgaria, Italy, Cyprus, Spain, Portugal, France, and Sweden. Participants engaged in discussions, gained insights into research methodologies, and contributed to shaping resilient and inclusive responses to global challenges.

The agenda of the transnational workshop that was prepared collaboratively by all the partners is provided below:

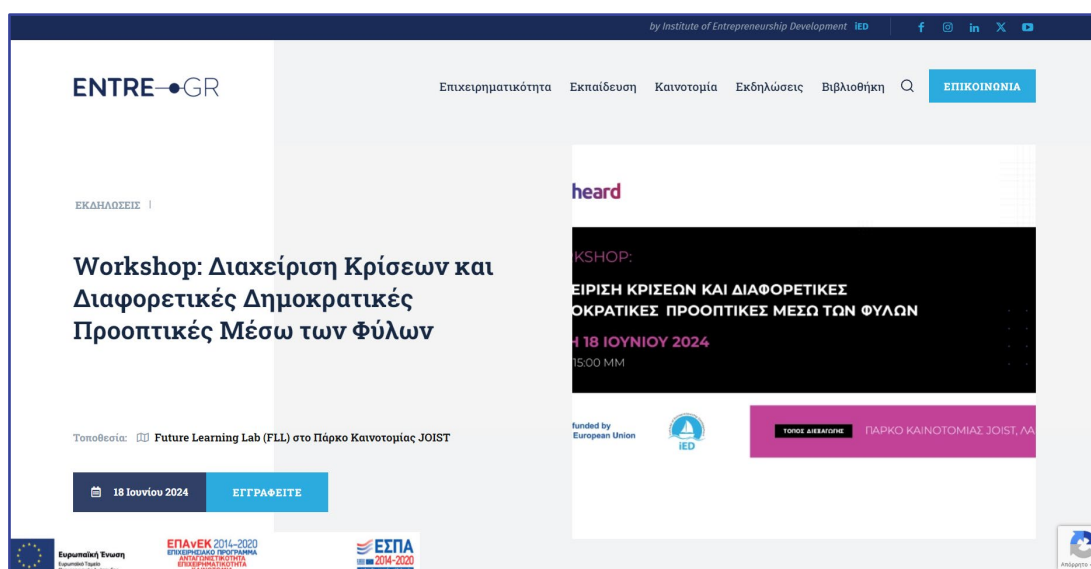
Table 1. Agenda of HEARD Transnational workshop

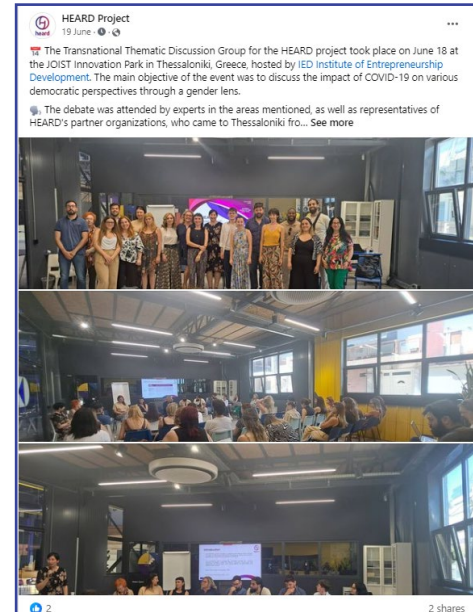
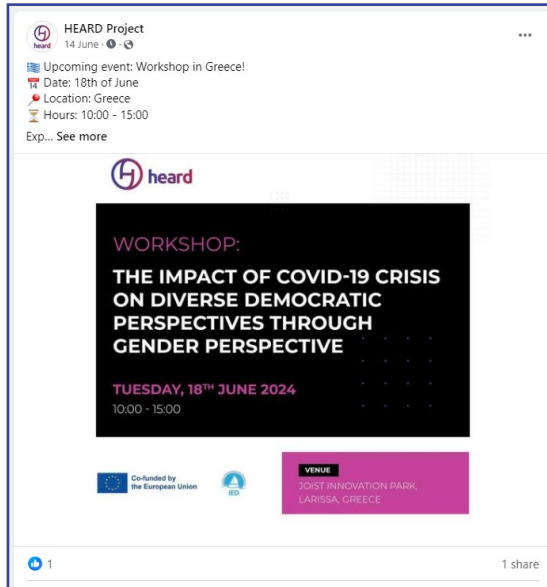
Time	Topic	Presenter
10.00-10.05	Welcome speech	<i>Dr. Maja Pucelj</i>
10.05.-10.20	Examining the impact of the pandemic <i>The analysis of research results of HEARD project</i>	<i>Dr. Maja Pucelj</i>
10.20-11:00	Good practices of handling the pandemic across different European countries <i>Slovenia</i> <i>Italy</i> <i>Greece</i> <i>Bulgaria</i> <i>Cyprus</i> <i>Portugal</i> <i>Sweden</i> <i>Spain</i> <i>France</i>	<i>Dr. Maja Pucelj, Nevena Dobрева, Justine Coatmellec, Foteini Sokratous, Adrià Vila, Maria Justo Priego, Hans Anderson, Ira Alevra</i>
11:00-11:15	Coffee break	
11:15-14:00	Policy Recommendations <i>-Presentation</i>	<i>Dr. Maja Pucelj</i>

	-Q&A and Open discussion	
14.00-14.30	Roundtable invited experts <i>Experts share their insights and perspectives on the research findings/ policy recommendations and insights into handling future pandemic situation</i>	<i>Moderator: Dr. Maja Pucelj</i> <i>Speakers: Gaël Evano-Vautrin, Eva D. Bahovec, Miguel José Araújo de Barros, Hans Anderson, Valeria Scardigno</i>
14:30-15:00	Final Conclusions and Closing of the Event	

The transnational workshop was widely disseminated through various channels. The announcement post for the event was published on the [entre](#) website on 5th of June, 2024, and was accompanied by social media posts across all HEARD and iED accounts (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram). A similar post was published on the [entre.gr](#) webpage, a site well-known in Greece for its focus on entrepreneurship, innovation, and education, attracting many interested participants. Additionally, all the consortium partners prepared and shared social media posts to further promote the event on their accounts.

The promotion of the event was enhanced by the massive sending of invitations to key stakeholders and representatives that could attend and participate actively to the event or could achieve a multiplying effect, especially in a local and regional level.





The event commenced with a welcome speech by Dr. Maja Pucelj, Assistant Professor and leader of the HEARD project. She introduced the topic of the open discussion and presented the panel of speakers. Dr. Pucelj continued with an overview of the project, introducing the project partners and reviewing the progress and implementations achieved by the consortium thus far.

Each speaker then provided a brief introduction, highlighting their experiences in managing the pandemic within their respective roles. This was followed by a concise presentation of the project and the activities undertaken by the consortium to date, with a particular focus on the development of research results and political recommendations in three core areas: democracy, human rights, and women's work-life balance.

The workshop aimed to present these political recommendations to a panel of experts and solicit their interventions and feedback through a roundtable discussion. The objective was also to encourage active discussion with the audience, which included policymakers, researchers and academics, representatives and members of NGOs and Civil Society Organizations, community leaders, students and young professionals, and media professionals.

The prepared political recommendations for democracy, human rights, and balancing the life roles of women during future epidemic situations were the key topics of the workshop. The feedback acquired through this process has been invaluable in improving the scientific monograph.

The event concluded with a brief discussion on the proceedings and the updates that the consortium needs to make to the outputs to ensure they are as representative of public opinion as possible.

Examining the impact of the pandemic: The analysis of research results of HEARD project

The event commenced with a welcome speech by Dr. Maja Pucelj, Assistant Professor and leader of the HEARD project, who introduced the topic of the open discussion and presented the panel of speakers. She provided an overview of the HEARD project, which began in 2021, and highlighted the project's focus on researching the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on diverse democratic perspectives through a gender lens. The project specifically examined three core areas: democracy, human rights, and work-life balance for women.

Dr. Pucelj emphasized that the project is nearing its conclusion in November and that the consortium has already prepared political recommendations, which would be evaluated during the workshop. She stressed the importance of active participation from attendees to finalize these recommendations and ensure they are well-aligned with future needs in pandemic situations.

The proceedings continued with an examination of the pandemic's profound impact on human lives, including economic repercussions, increased domestic violence, and the exacerbation of poverty and social isolation. The division between vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals was also discussed as a significant societal issue. The project aimed to address these challenges by preparing for future pandemic scenarios more effectively.

Dr. Pucelj presented the next steps and agenda of the workshop, and particularly emphasized the importance of active participation from attendees to finalize the political recommendations and ensure they are well-aligned with future needs in pandemic situations. The event concluded with a discussion on the proceedings and the necessary updates to the project's outputs.

Good practices of handling the pandemic across different European countries

During this segment of the event, Dr. Pucelj invited representatives from each country in the HEARD consortium to share the challenges and best practices encountered during the pandemic. Below is a summary of the presentations from Cyprus, France, and Greece.

Cyprus

Challenges: Cyprus faced numerous challenges during the pandemic, including mental health issues, domestic violence, misinformation about vaccination, and a disrupted work-life balance for women. A unique challenge for Cyprus was the closure of checkpoints due to the country's division, which hindered movement and aid.

Best Practices:

1. **Domestic Violence Campaign:** The organization PAVO launched a successful media campaign with social media posters and a website chat function to discreetly support victims of domestic violence.

2. **Vaccination Information Events:** Organizations like CARDET held events to debunk myths and provide accurate information about COVID-19 vaccines, helping the public identify misinformation.
3. **Active Citizenship Platform:** A pre-existing online platform was heavily utilized during the pandemic, allowing citizens to observe parliamentary procedures and engage in digital democracy.

France

Challenges: France dealt with widespread misinformation, aggressive democratic debates, violation of fundamental rights (such as freedom of movement and education), and increased domestic violence. The healthcare system was also overwhelmed, leading to delayed non-emergency medical interventions. Women, especially those in frontline jobs and those caring for children at home, were disproportionately affected.

Best Practices:

1. **Expert-Driven Decision Making:** France emphasized decisions based on expert opinions, which, despite leading to heated debates, ensured that public health measures were well-informed.
2. **National Consultative Commission of Human Rights:** This body highlighted concerns about the respect of fundamental rights, prompting discussions on legal and ethical considerations during emergency states.
3. **Enhanced Healthcare System:** The pandemic led to improvements in the healthcare system, including the creation of new intensive care units and the hiring of additional medical staff.

Greece

Challenges: Greece faced economic contraction, particularly in tourism, healthcare system overload, increased mental health issues, and delays in vaccinations. The pandemic also led to public compliance fatigue and debates over vaccination policies, which some perceived as infringing on personal freedoms.

Best Practices:

1. **Proactive Strategy:** The government adopted an early and proactive approach, implementing lockdowns before other countries and relying heavily on expert communication to keep the public informed.
2. **Clear Communication:** Regular press briefings by doctors and experts helped maintain public trust and provided consistent updates on the pandemic.
3. **Technological Utilization:** The government developed a comprehensive website to inform and guide the public, ensuring everyone had access to necessary information and health protection measures.
4. **Healthcare Enhancements:** Despite initial overload, Greece enhanced its healthcare system with new intensive care units and recruited additional medical staff, preparing for future crises.

Italy

Challenges: Italy, particularly the Lombardy region, was among the hardest hit in Europe, facing severe impacts from early in the pandemic. Key challenges included significant human rights restrictions, such as limitations on freedom of movement and association, which were enforced during lockdowns. The pandemic caused economic strain, with many losing their jobs and the public health system struggling under the pressure of the crisis. Additionally, Italy experienced issues with misinformation and transparency, complicating the public's ability to navigate the situation effectively.

Best Practices:

1. **Digitalization and Communication:** Italy improved digital engagement by holding municipal meetings online, allowing greater public participation. The use of digital platforms for pandemic updates also increased.
2. **Vaccination Prioritization:** The country implemented a phased vaccination strategy, prioritizing vulnerable populations and managing to vaccinate a significant portion of the population despite initial skepticism.
3. **Economic Support Measures:** The government introduced measures to support businesses and workers, including the PNR funds to aid self-employed individuals and entrepreneurs.
4. **Remote Education:** The shift to remote learning was a significant change, with increased digitalization in education becoming a lasting impact of the pandemic.

Slovenia

Challenges: Slovenia faced similar challenges to other countries, including economic impacts, job losses, and healthcare system strain. The country also grappled with misinformation and delays in vaccine distribution. Specific challenges included difficulties with remote education and the management of self-employment during the pandemic.

Best Practices:

1. **Economic Recovery Initiatives:** Slovenia implemented measures such as tourism recovery coupons to stimulate the economy post-pandemic.
2. **Support for the Self-Employed:** The government provided financial support packages, though some challenges remain, such as the repayment of aid by self-employed individuals who later experienced increased income.

Portugal

Government Measures: Portugal experienced a three-month lockdown in 2020, including school closures, restaurant restrictions, and mandatory teleworking. There were also innovative measures such as suspension of rent payments, delay of evictions, and support for companies to prevent layoffs.

Economic Measures: Financial aid included compensation for businesses, temporary regulations for migrants, and early release of prisoners to reduce population density. Strict measures were implemented in Madeira with mandatory quarantines.

Challenges:

1. Balancing regional autonomy and national coherence, especially in Madeira.
2. Legal challenges regarding face mask mandates.
3. Disproportionate job losses and increased care responsibilities impacting women more than men.
4. Mental health issues and domestic violence rose significantly.

Spain

Challenges: Spain experienced high levels of domestic violence, misinformation, and significant strain on its healthcare system. Economic difficulties and job losses were also notable challenges, with many struggling to cope with the impact of the pandemic.

Best Practices:

1. **Domestic Violence Support:** Spain enhanced support for domestic violence victims, providing additional resources and services during the pandemic.
2. **Healthcare System Adaptation:** The country made efforts to adapt its healthcare system to manage the influx of COVID-19 patients and maintain care for other medical needs.
3. **Public Information Campaigns:** Spain conducted extensive public information campaigns to counter misinformation and provide clear guidance on health measures and vaccination.

Bulgaria

Government Measures: Bulgaria declared a state of emergency from March 2020 to March 2022.

Measures included special shopping hours for the elderly, economic support for businesses, unlimited sick leave for parents, and financial stimuli for healthcare professionals.

Economic Measures: Financial compensation for businesses and support for the tourism sector. The government also provided financial incentives for front-line workers.

Challenges:

1. Significant political instability and frequent elections, leading to public dissatisfaction and polarization.
2. Domestic violence increased but was less publicly addressed.
3. Challenges in accessing healthcare due to postponed surgeries and treatment delays.
4. The economic impact was less severe compared to political and social challenges, with ineffective use of recovery funds.

Sweden

Government Measures: Sweden opted for a decentralized, voluntary strategy, focusing on social distancing, hygiene, and remote work rather than a full lockdown. The approach emphasized personal responsibility and recommended restrictions.

Economic Measures: Government aid programs supported sectors experiencing downturns. Public health measures included free transportation to support mobility and care for the elderly.

Challenges:

1. Criticism for higher per capita death rates and perceived shortcomings in protecting vulnerable groups.
2. Balancing public health and economic concerns with minimal restrictions led to societal divisions.
3. Criticism for the strategy's effectiveness and the impact on vulnerable populations.
4. Mental health issues and domestic violence increased, exacerbated by online environments.

Policy Recommendations

The policy recommendations presented during the event were the following:

VITAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS (THEMES)	RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PANDEMIC PREPAREDNESS (DESCRIPTION)
Governance and expertise in pandemic crisis management	
Form a partnership between government and trustworthy experts	Improve communication strategies to ensure achieving clarity and consistency of given information during pandemic or other crisis situations. For example: Consider establishing advanced digital communication tools that ensure the clarity, coherence, and accessibility of information to the public to improve understanding and compliance with the necessary measures in times of crisis.
Best Practices for management	Improve the level of knowledge of political leaders and other key actors or experts in pandemic or other crisis situations to ensure effective crisis management and appropriate decision-making under time pressure and other forms of pressure.
International cooperation	Highlight the necessity for stronger international cooperation and coordination in responding to pandemics. Numerous voices stressed the importance of sharing best practices, resources, and information across borders to bolster global resilience against future health crises.
Independent bodies for monitoring	Support for creating independent bodies to monitor government decisions and evaluate pandemic management strategies. Ensure an upholding of democratic principles, promote transparency, and hold governments accountable for their actions during health crises.
Electoral integrity	
Voting Techniques	Avoid scheduling elections during a pandemic and consider secure digital voting as an alternative if necessary.
Campaigns	Ensure that elections, if held during a pandemic, maintain legitimacy and trust, with improving the transparency and integrity of the electoral process.
Transparency	Ensure a greater transparency in campaign finance to prevent undue influence and ensure a fair playing field for all candidates. Disclose financial information on campaigns in order to foster trust and accountability in the electoral process.
Independent media	Implementation of independent media coverage as a crucial defence against misinformation and propaganda.

Media integrity and information management	
Media Transparency	Support and encourage credible media to disseminate information via social media.
Education on misinformation	● Promote ethical journalism and the responsible use of artificial intelligence in information management. ● Strengthen public education initiatives to improve media literacy and critical thinking when dealing with important information about the pandemic.
Media diversification	Promote diversity in media ownership and ensure plurality in the media landscape to prevent excessive influence and bias.
Transparency and democratic engagement	
Citizen Engagement and Anti-corruption policies	● Promote a culture of transparency in governmental work, especially in procurement and crisis response. ● Ensure that the public understands and participates in democratic processes in every possible way, even in times of crisis, to maintain trust and cooperation.
anti-corruption	Implementation of robust anti-corruption policies to ensure transparency and accountability in government institutions. Enhance the capacity of government officials on anti-corruption measures and foster a culture of integrity and ethical conduct.
Limited movement	
Access to healthcare	● Implement movement restrictions with clear communication and justification to balance public health needs with individual freedoms.
Education (financial programs)	● Educate the public on the importance of pursuing the goal of collective responsibility in addressing health crises.
Women's employment	Elevate the need for policymakers to implement strategies specifically targeting women to sustain their employment and support their economic empowerment. Provide childcare support, flexible work arrangements, and access to affordable healthcare services for women balancing caregiving responsibilities and employment.
Freedom peaceful assembly	
Engagement in decision making	● Explore alternative methods of public expression that comply with health recommendations during pandemics. ● Ensure that any restrictions on assembly are justified, proportionate and face time limitations.
Human rights collaborations	Improve the strengthening of international collaborations to uphold human rights, particularly in countries with weaker health

	infrastructures. Share best practices, resources, and expertise to help countries implement pandemic response measures that are both effective and respect human rights.
Limited Rights	
Access to healthcare	- Establish clear guidelines and provide adequate oversight to protect human rights in critical situations. - Carefully assess the impact and necessity of limiting rights in critical situations to ensure that they are not disproportionate or unnecessarily extended.
Essential services	Underline the importance of maintaining essential services like food, water, and electricity during lockdowns and other public health measures.
Protection of healthcare workers	Provide solidarity to healthcare workers and foster their rights and well-being, especially during pandemics.
Psychological Dimension	
Ethical Guidelines	- Prioritise mental health as much as physical health in crisis planning to ensure an appropriate response. - Develop mental health support systems that ensure adequate mental health support for those in need and promote public awareness and stigmatisation of mental health issues.
Access to psychological help	Ensure a fair access to psychological help for everyone in need c. There was a consensus on prioritising mental health support as an integral component of pandemic response efforts. Suggestions included expanding mental health services, such as telehealth and online counselling options, to reach those who face barriers to traditional care. Participants also stressed the importance of reducing stigma and raising awareness about mental health issues, along with providing training and support for frontline healthcare workers and other caregivers.
Work Policies	
Workplace flexibility	Implement measures to ensure that women have equal opportunities for advancement in crisis situations, which should aim to distribute responsibility and leadership opportunities fairly between the genders in emergency situations.
Job protection for women and caregivers	Improve the need to ensure job protection for women taking leave to care for family members, including children, elderly parents, or individuals with disabilities. There was a consensus on the importance of supporting caregivers in balancing their work and caregiving

	responsibilities without fear of discrimination or retaliation. Strengthening labour laws and workplace policies to guarantee job security and benefits for caregivers, as well as providing access to affordable and high-quality childcare and eldercare services, were mentioned. The importance of destigmatizing caregiving roles and promoting gender-neutral policies that support all caregivers, regardless of gender, was also stressed.
Domestic Violence	Address specific challenges faced by women during crises, such as increased domestic burdens and ensure equitable support.
Civil Society Organisations (CSO)	
Sharing of work	Recognise and support the role of civil society organisations in addressing specific needs in times of crisis, especially regarding women and marginalised groups.
Mental Health Support	
Mental health services	Integrate mental health support into public health responses, focusing on vulnerable groups including women and frontline workers

Presentation of policy recommendations and roundtable discussion with experts

In this section, Dr. Maja Pucelj presented the policy recommendations derived from the research activities of HEARD project with the aim to receive constructive feedback from the audience and initiate a discussion with the invited experts. The discussion had aimed to address critical issues surrounding pandemic crisis management, governance, and the incorporation of diverse insights from various countries. Dr. Pucelj began by emphasizing the need for political accommodation in managing pandemics, focusing on strategic preparedness that integrates global perspectives.

The recommendations highlighted the importance of upholding democratic values through independent risk assessments, which had been notably lacking in previous pandemic responses. Establishing guiding principles for equitable decision-making and ethical guidelines was deemed crucial for future preparedness. Furthermore, ensuring uninterrupted governance through built-in redundancies and digital solutions was identified as necessary to empower political leaders and enhance their effectiveness. This empowerment extended beyond political figures to include leaders in all sectors, as the actions of company leaders during the pandemic had demonstrated significant deficiencies.

Dr. Pucelj also discussed the need to build effective communication strategies and refine legislative processes, alongside enhancing public education on pandemic preparedness and reflection. The necessity of cross-sector collaboration was underscored, as integration of diverse fields such as medicine, anthropology, and epidemiology were deemed essential for comprehensive pandemic management.

Following the presentation of these recommendations, Dr. Pucelj addressed the questions formulated for the debate, focusing on how these strategies could be effectively implemented and what further considerations might be necessary for robust pandemic preparedness and response.

During the roundtable discussion, Dr. Maja Pucelj and the experts addressed the impact of the pandemic on electoral procedures, drawing insights from the experiences of various countries, particularly Bulgaria. As common feedback it was highlighted that, ideally, elections should be avoided during pandemic crises to minimize risks and ensure public safety. However, if elections are necessary, several critical steps must be taken to maintain the integrity of the electoral process.

Key recommendations included ensuring democratic participation through diverse voting technologies and promoting electoral integrity via transparent campaign practices. Adapting election strategies to pandemic conditions and upholding electoral integrity and transparency during crises were identified as essential measures. These strategies are crucial to ensure that elections, if conducted during a pandemic, run smoothly and maintain public trust.

Dr. Pucelj also emphasized the importance of media integrity and information management during elections in a pandemic. The pandemic revealed significant challenges in transparent communication, with information often being one-sided or withheld, which undermined public trust. Ensuring transparent communication and empowering credible media were highlighted as vital steps. During the pandemic, the credibility of media sources fluctuated, and trustworthy media were sometimes disregarded or discriminated against. Empowering credible media is essential for fostering informed decision-making and ensuring that the public receives reliable information.

Further, the experts stressed the need to foster active participation through collaborative efforts in digital democracy and civic education. Enhancing government credibility through robust anti-corruption initiatives was also deemed critical. The pandemic exacerbated existing corruption issues in many European countries, including Slovenia, where corruption levels remained high despite ongoing efforts to combat it. Addressing corruption is a continuous challenge that needs focused initiatives to prevent and mitigate its impact during and after pandemics.

The discussion underscored the necessity of adapting electoral procedures and ensuring media integrity to uphold democratic values and public trust during pandemic crises. These measures, along with anti-corruption efforts, are essential for maintaining effective governance and transparent communication in challenging times. During the pandemic, there was a notable limitation in public participation in democratic processes. To address this issue, we recognized the need to ensure that citizens have multiple avenues to engage in these processes. It is essential to establish platforms, whether online or through other means, that facilitate direct communication between the public and the government. These platforms could be managed by the government itself or through NGOs, but the key objective is to provide the public with a reliable way to voice their concerns and challenges faced during a crisis.

It was concluded that each country should determine the most suitable form of engagement based on their organizational structure and capabilities. However, it is crucial that these mechanisms allow for real-time feedback and communication, ensuring that the government is responsive to the daily challenges experienced by its citizens. This kind of engagement was notably absent during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving many people feeling disconnected from the decision-making processes affecting their lives.

Moreover, supporting mental health during crises is another critical aspect that needs attention. The isolation and stress caused by the pandemic significantly impacted mental health, and it is imperative that any democratic engagement platform also includes support and resources for mental health. Governments should

address not only the physical and economic challenges but also the psychological well-being of their citizens. Providing mental health support can help create a more resilient society capable of withstanding the pressures of future crises.

In the discussion on mitigation strategies, several key recommendations emerged, focusing on enhancing community resilience, supporting physical and mental health, and ensuring effective crisis response. Participants and experts emphasized the importance of fostering a strong sense of community during pandemics. It was recognized that building and maintaining community spirit is essential for providing emotional support and enhancing resilience. Initiatives to strengthen community connections and support networks were highlighted as vital to navigating the challenges of a pandemic effectively. The discussion highlighted the need to advocate for physical activity as a fundamental component of health during a crisis. Regular physical exercise is crucial for maintaining both physical and mental well-being, particularly when faced with prolonged periods of isolation and restricted movement. Promoting opportunities for physical activity was identified as a key strategy to support overall health during the pandemic. The importance of healthy coping mechanisms was underscored as a critical tool for managing stress and anxiety during times of crisis. The conversation focused on the need for initiatives that promote mental health awareness and provide resources for developing effective coping strategies. Ensuring access to mental health support and guidance was deemed essential for helping individuals navigate the psychological challenges associated with the pandemic. There was a strong consensus on the necessity of inclusive healthcare policies to address the diverse needs of the population. Effective crisis response requires policies that ensure equitable access to healthcare services, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized groups. The discussion highlighted the importance of designing healthcare policies that can effectively support all segments of society during a pandemic.

The dialogue addressed the role of economic support in mitigating the impacts of pandemic measures. While acknowledging that some economic support initiatives were effective, it was noted that others were less successful. Participants and experts stressed the need for a thorough evaluation of these measures to ensure they effectively address the economic hardships faced by individuals and businesses. Improving the effectiveness of economic support initiatives was identified as a crucial component of pandemic response.

The challenge of limited movement during the pandemic was discussed, with particular attention to the varying experiences across countries. It was noted that while some countries, such as Sweden, implemented different approaches, others faced significant challenges due to restrictions on movement. The need to balance necessary restrictions with maintaining a degree of normalcy and movement was highlighted as an important consideration for future pandemic responses.

The discussion on alternative methods of public expression and related policy recommendations yielded several critical insights and proposals. The need to explore alternative methods for public expression during pandemics was emphasized. It was recognized that while public expressions should comply with health guidelines, having diverse channels for individuals to voice their concerns and opinions is crucial. This ensures that public sentiment and feedback can be effectively communicated and addressed, even under restrictive conditions. A significant concern raised was the prevention of bias and discrimination in pandemic policies. It was observed that many policies, whether directly or indirectly, have disproportionately impacted vulnerable groups. To address this, there was a strong recommendation for inclusive pandemic policies that ensure equitable treatment for all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status or demographic characteristics. The discussion highlighted the urgent need to build resilient structures to combat domestic violence during pandemics. With increased isolation and stress, domestic violence incidents often rise, necessitating robust support systems and protective measures. Recommendations included enhancing services and support for victims and ensuring that these measures are integrated into overall pandemic response strategies. The

importance of inclusive healthcare strategies was stressed, focusing on equitable access to health services for all individuals. Ensuring that healthcare policies and practices do not inadvertently marginalize or discriminate against any group was identified as a key priority for effective pandemic management. The introduction of privacy-friendly digital health tracing and verification tools was discussed. These tools are designed to protect individuals' privacy while providing secure access to health data. The goal is to balance the need for public health monitoring with respect for personal privacy and autonomy.

The pandemic has also placed significant strain on healthcare workers, leading to stigmatization and other challenges. The discussion emphasized the need for measures to support healthcare workers and address stigmatization. Despite the pandemic's end, issues such as attacks on healthcare workers and ongoing stigmatization persist, particularly in countries like Slovenia. Strengthening support systems and combating stigma were highlighted as critical for maintaining a resilient healthcare workforce. The discussion noted a concerning trend of declining support for the public health sector, with a shift towards private healthcare options. This decline in public health support, exacerbated by the pandemic, has been linked to increased challenges in managing public health crises. Recommendations included reinforcing support for public health institutions and ensuring they remain well-resourced and effective.

In conclusion, the discussion has illuminated the diverse perspectives and experiences across countries, revealing that while the challenges during the pandemic were widespread, their impacts varied. For a global response to be effective, it is crucial for political representatives to fully understand the economic, cultural, and attitudinal nuances of their respective countries. The insights and interactions from this discussion offer valuable information and ideas that can enhance political recommendations, making them more effective and adaptable in addressing future challenges and crises.

Meet the partnership



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