

# Community Resilience & the Ongoing Impacts of COVID-19 on **Vulnerable** Households



Peru: Venezuelan refugees receive aid.

One year ago, Alliance2015 published the report “**Covid-19 & Community Resilience**” analysing how the effects of the pandemic were affecting the most vulnerable households in 25 countries on 4 continents. 16,000 households were interviewed focusing on different aspects: food security, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), health, education, income, indebtedness and the psychosocial conditions of households. This survey conducted in late 2020, just 6 months after the outbreak of the pandemic, showed data reflecting how COVID-19 was testing the resilience of communities worldwide, with much differentiated impacts, exacerbating existing inequities and creating new ones.

This report is a continuation of last year’s initiative, in the light of the evolving situation, based on data collected between March and May 2022, **about 22 months after the outbreak of the pandemic, and is the result of 8,461 surveys in 18 countries where Alliance2015 member organisations are working.** The focus of the survey was on how the **effects of COVID-19 are affecting several key aspects of households’ resilience,** such as their income capacity, accessing food, coping strategies and access to health and education services.

**The effects of COVID-19 are still very much present in many communities.** While in some developed countries we may believe the worst effects of the pandemic have subsided - thanks to the beneficial effects of vaccines, aid and government economic measures - in many poorer

countries the situation continues to undermine the resilience of millions of people facing overlapping crises that reduce their ability to react. **This crisis context is becoming structural for the most disadvantaged groups in the countries where we are present;** climate change, economic downturns, diseases, conflicts or wars not only impede the recovery of many households in vulnerable communities, but also aggravate their situation.

A clear picture has emerged from this follow up research, showing the extent to which growing numbers of people are being left behind. **The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 - alongside climate change and conflict - on those living in chronic poverty must be met by a response which, accordingly, focuses on addressing the urgent needs of those living in extreme poverty.** As we all learn from these

findings to inform our future interventions, decisions and advocacy, Alliance2015 sees the relevance and opportunity to continue talking about Covid-19 today in that it represents a **paradigmatic case** for our collective learning. **The pandemic laid bare a number of pre-existing systemic failures – in our food systems, in healthcare, in education, in employment and social protection, in housing, in our main business and economic model - that made coping with the global shock extremely problematic for disadvantaged countries and communities.** Learning from this experience should be paramount in view of building resilient societies, through correcting these failures by addressing inequalities and mitigating risks. Community and systemic resilience will be key to anticipate future crises, avert their worst effects, preserve access to rights and livelihoods.

#### > **ACCESS TO FOOD**

One of the aspects of the report that deserves priority attention is the effect of COVID-19 on the **ability to access healthy and sufficient food.** Access to food is still a challenge for many households. **One-third of respondents said that over the past three months some**

**members of their household had gone to bed hungry.** More than half of them (51%) reported that the **quality of the food they consumed had worsened** and 62% reported that the **quantity of food they consumed had decreased** compared to the pre-pandemic period.

Key factors limiting access to quality food are **the rising cost of food and movement and transport restrictions**, with more than half of respondents noting that **the price of basic foodstuffs had at least doubled** since the start of the pandemic, and the effects of the restrictions deployed to curb contagions are still being felt.

54% of respondents stated that the **quantity** of food available in local markets had decreased since the pandemic outbreak and one third outlined that they had difficulties in reaching local markets because of restrictions that were in place. Now, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the consequent increase in food prices has only aggravated the situation of access to food for millions of people.

#### > **IMPACT ON INCOMES AND COPING STRATEGIES**

**Income-generating capacity also continued to be affected**

**by the pandemic. 53% of the surveyed households stated they had their reduced income** due to the effects of COVID-19, and more than half of the households (57%) stated that their current income was not sufficient to buy food.

Coping strategies have been varying with the prolonged effects of the pandemic, but **informal care and support networks have had and continue to have substantial relevance in responding to any crisis. Coping strategies most frequently reported are cost-cutting (56%), borrowing (43%) and grants or assistance programmes by governments or NGOs (34%).**

**Amongst those households who reduced their expenditure, food was the first area where they cut down their costs:** 82% of respondents said they had reduced expenditure on food, followed by cuts in other spending by 63%.

Lending chains also worked as coping strategies, with **93% of households having borrowed money.** The majority of lenders were neighbours or friends (57%), family (28%) or community groups (34% of households). As mentioned above, this indicates the importance of care and support



**The food crisis has no respect for borders, and no country can overcome it alone.**

António Guterres,  
May 2022

networks in the communities we work with, that is why another measure that reinforces them is an additional insurance for strengthening community resilience.

In this regard, it is worth noting the **insufficient role of aid and assistance from government programmes**, barely 20% (due to complex eligibility processes and documentation, or lack of timely information among local communities), compared to 79% of aid received through INGOs, or even 11% from local NGOs and 27% of direct aid received, again, by family and friends. These results highlight the need for better communication, more transparent and simpler

access mechanisms adapted to the most vulnerable people, who are the ones who need this support the most.

### > ACCESS TO HEALTH AND EDUCATION

Regarding health, **only 23% of households indicated that health care had worsened**, compared to 46% who stated that it had improved. However, some countries like Peru or Georgia are out of this trend. 51% of households in Peru indicated a worsening of the situation compared to 8% who said that it had improved. In Georgia, these percentages were 27% (worst situation) and 11% (better).

Looking at the effects on **education**, for the **children and youth who were at risk prior to the pandemic the education gap has widened substantially**.

As a result, the families with the fewest resources were unable to maintain continuity in their children's learning when more pressing needs - such as maintaining a source of income - took precedent. Some of the services targeting vulnerable pupils and students, such as school meals, transportation, sanitation and protection – which typically help to ease the financial burden on families and make the environment more conducive to learning - were suppressed during confinements.

Niger: Ousseina Manzo plants vegetables to sell and trade at the local market with the help of farming equipment distributed to her as part of emergency assistance to vulnerable populations in the region of Diffa.



# Our Call for Action: recommendations to the EU

A clear picture has emerged from this follow-up research undertaken by Alliance2015. It shows the extent to which growing numbers of people are being left behind. **The consequences of COVID-19 have widened pre-existing inequalities and eroded the resilience and coping mechanisms of those who were already living in poverty.**

A central promise of Agenda 2030 was to 'leave no-one behind' with a further promise to 'reach the furthest behind first'. This research shows we – as an international community - are falling short on these promises: that our political, policy and programmatic responses are not addressing chronic inter-generational poverty in an effective way. The long-term human and financial costs of these failures is significant and growing by the day. The thread that runs through all our recommendations is clear...

**The disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 - alongside climate change and conflict - on those living in chronic poverty must be met by a response which, correspondingly, focuses on addressing the urgent needs of those living in extreme poverty.**

## WE URGE THE EU TO:

1. Strengthen its support to partner countries so that they can better deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Focus on 'prevention' by investing in mitigation and anticipatory action, using early warning systems and flexible contingency funds to anticipate shocks and quickly respond to them. Initiatives such as the Global Network Against Food Crises must be supported in order to ensure earlier responses using evidence-based interventions.
3. Within the NDICI-Global Europe instrument, increase funding for civil society organizations supporting communities to meet the needs emerging from the current multiple crisis. Enhance information and transparency about the mechanisms the EU can make available to civil society at country levels.
4. Develop a new EU Action Plan on Nutrition and revise the 2010 and 2013 Policy Frameworks for Food Security and Nutrition.
5. Strengthen the external dimension of the Farm to Fork Strategy.
6. Track and ensure transparency of EU commitments towards food security and nutrition made since the onset of the Ukraine crisis, with clarity on links to programming and civil society engagement.
7. Promote specific strategies for economic recovery to face the crisis caused by COVID-19, including the promotion of community-based and solidarity economies.
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9. Promote specific strategies for economic recovery to face the crisis caused by COVID-19, including the promotion of community-based and solidarity economies.



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