

## HEKS/EPER International Programme (HIP)



# COVID-19 Response in 2020

Strategy, main activities, learnings and perspectives of HEKS/EPER linked to COVID-19.

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Picture: **Awareness-raising** on how to prevent and deal with Covid-19 was one of many immediate actions taken by HEKS/EPER projects worldwide – as on the picture **in Haiti**, where sensitization was done with posters, flyer, radio, community meetings, market stands or visits at premises for elderly, handicapped or in schools and even in prisons.

## Summary of HEKS/EPER COVID-19 activities

HEKS/EPER is the aid organisation of the Swiss protestant churches and campaigns for a more peaceful and equitable world. It supported in 2020 jointly with 100 partner organisations and strategic global alliances with 143 projects in 33 countries with more than 3.5 million people in economic and social need. HEKS/EPER invested worldwide CHF 37.58 Million. Out of the 143 projects, 88 in 20 countries were **development cooperation (DC) projects**, 30 **humanitarian projects (HA)** in 12 countries; and 22 projects in 9 countries implement through **church cooperation (CC)**.



**Eastern Europe:** The long-standing HEKS/EPER homecare projects reacted to the COVID-19 pandemic with additional hygiene and sensitization efforts; and also taking care of elderly and sick affected by lockdown measures.

The **COVID-19 crises increased worldwide existing inequalities**, and achieving the SDGs becomes more challenging. At the same time, the pandemic hampered project implementation and made quick and flexible adaptations of intervention logic necessary – **57 projects in 29 countries** included specific COVID-19 response activities **reaching 3.165 M people**. Partly, DC projects could not fully implement as planned and therefore not spend the funds foreseen, yet HA activities and funding

respectively increased. Many DC projects will catch up in 2021, reaching the initial yet adapted overall goals. 2020 has shown the fragility of many people's access to essential resources and services.

## COVID-19 and its effects on the sector of international cooperation

COVID-19 has deepened existing inequalities, with a disproportionately more significant economic impact on the marginalised and vulnerable. They are also more exposed to the risk of infection and inadequate access to medical care, severe illness and death.

WFP stated that in 2020 957 million people across 93 countries suffer hunger with food systems failing. The number of people suffering from acute hunger and malnutrition is on the rise again. Also, WFP documents that 155 million people in 55 countries suffered acute food insecurity in 2020 – 30 million more than in 2019. Amongst the 10 countries, most in crises 6 are countries HEKS/EPER was working in 2020: DR Congo, Syria, Ethiopia, South Sudan, Zimbabwe and Haïti. Unless the manifold inequalities are not reduced, the world will not contain the pandemic with its devastating consequences, certainly for MIC and LIC countries, also in 2021 and 2022, yet probably even in the years that follow.

The seven trends/challenges elaborated by HEKS/EPER during its context analysis in 2019 (see [annexe C of the HIP Annual Report 2020](#)) are still relevant and became even more evident in 2020. COVID-19 crisis was a magnifier increasing inequality, social and economic gaps, poverty, discrimination and making them more visible. Inequality and discrimination go along with enormous economic costs, jeopardise social cohesion and political stability, and remain a key obstacle to reaching the Agenda 2030 and **'leaving no one behind'** (LNOB) agenda. HEKS/EPER's efforts to create an economically, social and political more just world became more difficult. Nevertheless, opportunities identified by HEKS/EPER in 2019 (see [HIP Annual Report 2020, Chapter 9](#)) proofed now to be critical factors to prevent or mitigate the effects of crises. Opportunities, such as inclusive business and markets, digitalization, local agroecological production or the importance of good governance by duty-bearers.

## Organizing the COVID-19 response

In April 2020, [HEKS/EPER COVID-19 Guidance Note](#) was in place, enhancing partner organisations and country offices to quickly set up an unbureaucratic, effective and relevant response to the pandemic crises, setting three strategic priorities:

- 1) Contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and decrease morbidity and mortality.
- 2) Decrease the deterioration of human assets and rights, social cohesion, and livelihoods.
- 3) Protect, assist and advocate for refugees, internally displaced people, migrants and host communities particularly vulnerable to the pandemic.

Three global and several national knowledge-sharing events aimed to coordinate all efforts and to detect adaptive and transformative practices to achieve good results. Analysis in the countries showed significant challenges such as no more remittances, reductions of mobility and less access to income-generating activities for the most vulnerable such as day labourer or small-scale farmer, decreasing economy with fewer jobs and less income, school closures and missing funds for schools creating education gaps, no access to water for simple hygiene measures, misuse of lockdown as for hindering democracy and participation, and of course insufficient health care as well as no adequate social protection.



## Main activities



**Niger:** Development partner SongES reached out to its 'regular' project participants with hygiene sensitization, delivering hygiene material as well.

Overall, in 2020, HEKS/EPER reached out to **3.165 M people** in **57 projects** in **29 countries**, assisting them to cope with COVID-19. This, thanks to a high adaption and response ability of about 50 already existing HEKS/EPER partner organizations. Thus, most people benefitting were already participants of existing HEKS/EPER humanitarian or development projects that reacted quickly to the pandemic with **adapted preventive and mitigating activities**, mainly ...

- COVID-19 awareness-raising & hygiene promotion.
- distribution/production of hygiene material.
- water and sanitation activities – including rehabilitation of water and health infrastructure.
- food security – from emergency distribution to agricultural livelihood activities.
- direct cash support and cash for work.
- Restoring economic assets.
- strengthening civil society actors defending their rights (HRBA).
- advisory services to enable access to medical, social and unemployment assistance.

## Funding COVID-19 activities

SDC has been very flexible in adjusting to COVID-19-issues in the programme and made additional funding available for urgently needed response activities. Thanks to SDC, HEKS/EPER could also air-lift material to Venezuela and upscale its response in Bangladesh.

- **SDC's IP programme** contribution co-financed **38** mainly DC projects adding COVID-19 components and assisting **890'495 people**.
- **SDC direct funding** of **4** projects that included COVID-19 activities reached **1'642'732 people**.
- Another **631'892 individuals** were reached by **15** HEKS/EPER projects fully self-finance; and not co-financed by SDC.

## Learnings & Perspectives

In many countries, HEKS/EPER is working, COVID-19 is still out of control as in Brazil, or measures hamper the recovery of social and economic life. HEKS/EPER is worried about economies further deteriorating with negative perspectives to recover in 2021 or even in the years to come. For the most vulnerable people, nutrition, food security, and income generation have become more important than ever. E.g., the population of Haiti is harshly affected by reduced remittances which form a substantial part of income. In most countries, the informal employment sector remains strongly affected. Also, partners, offices, and local civil society face increased restrictive regulations, less based on protecting health but shrinking space – as in Cambodia, Honduras and Ethiopia.

Partly, DC projects could not fully implement as planned and not spend the funds foreseen, yet HA activities and funding increased. Many DC projects will catch up in 2021, reaching the initial yet adapted overall goals.

HEKS/EPER consolidated main challenges, achievements, good practices, the mid- and long-term impacts, the learnings, and adaptations the COVID-19 crisis will have on international cooperation in general:



**Armenia:** HEKS/EPER funded Syunik-Development NGO's Youth for Peace project supported lonely elderly people with health problems, who found it difficult to get protective material from the pandemic, food and necessary first aid kits.

- **Digitalisation and ICT** were already identified as a key opportunity during HIP 21-24 context analysis to work more effectively and reach communities despite travel restrictions, due to COVID-19 yet also when security fails or Government restrictions (HRBA) disable access to people and communities. In 2020, ICT offered effective tools in managing programmes, bridging COVID-19 mobility restrictions. Since 2019, MEL unit of HEKS/EPER maintains a regularly updated and often visited intranet website on Sharepoint promoting internal and external online courses, learning events, webinars, including a wide range of links to platforms for knowledge sharing and capacity-building relevant for HEKS/EPER's work.
- Digital tools must further facilitate efficient processes and shall serve towards a more effective, CO2 friendly remote **management** of programmes and project, yet also **bridging the gap between HQ and country offices**.
- Advocate donors to demonstrate more **flexibility** and promote adaptive management within the organization to respond to real needs in fast-changing contexts and enable implementing units to apply permanent assessment of the context the achievements and embrace learning4steering. HEKS/EPER will review its PCM and Learning4Steering processes for DC, CC and HA activities and also work on the mindset of staff and partners to ensure projects and programmes respond to changing context, needs and organisational resources/capacities.
- HEKS/EPER and other iNGOs have insufficient funds to fight the mid- and long-term negative effects of COVID-19. Therefore, HEKS/EPER must increase its efforts to become even more effective and reach as

many people as possible and **invest in acquisition** to gain sufficient funding to cover increasing needs.

- The humanitarian aid agility of HEKS/EPER to cope with COVID-19 was high, certainly in Bangladesh and Venezuela. With 57 projects incorporating COVID-19 measures, flexibility was demonstrated by many partners and offices – HEKS/EPER must **build on these strengths**.
- Strengthen HEKS/EPER and partners' ability to apply risk-informed programming, ensuring the health and security of all stakeholders, not only during a pandemic yet in any fragile and conflict context.
- Finally, **COVID-19 effects will impact projects and programmes of HEKS/EPER in the next years** with economic and social crises continuing and civic space probably not opening fast. Therefore, HEKS/EPER observes its interventions logic on project, programme and global level to further adapt to the needs and ongoing challenge.

## Examples of HEKS/EPER COVID-19 Projects Worldwide

### Bangladesh – infection control and prevention during the pandemic



**Bangladesh:** HEKS/EPER and its partners trained and supported health center staff promoting prevention and mitigating the spread of COVID-19.

In **Bangladesh**, HEKS/EPER **HA** unit enabled the rehabilitation of health centres in and around Rohingya refugee camps covering access to health care for 1.7 M people.

COVID-19 emergency activities executed by **DC** partners of CO in Dhakka to protect vulnerable Dalit and Adivasi supported 20'000 people.

COVID-19 has highlighted the urgency of improving hygiene and infection prevention and control in health facilities, not only to contain the spread of the virus among patients but also by creating a safe environment for health care workers, which is crucial to

maintain health facilities operational not only for COVID-19 but also for the regular health support provided in these facilities.

In Bangladesh, HEKS/EPER was in a good position to contribute to the safe functioning of health facilities during the pandemic as it has already become an expert organisation on WASH in place by piloting WHO's and UNICEF's WASH FIT approach since 2019, which strengthens WASH in health facilities including an Infection Prevention and Control which is key in addressing the pandemic. The projects were strongly scaled with the start of the pandemic and allowed to support all 439 primary and secondary health facilities in the Rohingya Camps and the host community in Cox's Bazar district with formal training, on the job training, Facility level WASH improvement strategy development, as well as construction interventions in selected facilities.

DC partners, also with the support of SDC, provide to strongly affected female sex workers and their children food baskets, masks and soap; they installed handwashing points at community level and are launching IGA activities. An informative audio-visual documentary on the effect of COVID-19 on communities was produced.

## Haïti – COVID-19 prevention and mitigation

In Haïti from April till October 2020, HEKS/EPER responded to COVID-19 reaching out to 500'000 vulnerable people with an awareness-raising campaign (radio, posters, market stands, community meetings, etc.), the production and distribution of 50'000 hygiene masks, the installation of 78 water points and 800 handwashing stations and supported 58 health centres. HEKS/EPER was present at markets, schools, churches, centres for the elderly and handicapped and in prison.

(more COVID-19 projects: <https://www.heks.ch/corona-pandemie/projekte>).



**Awareness-raising** with posters at info points, with visits to 69 markets, and with trainings in community centres.

**Production** of 50'000 masks and of soap; and distribution including awareness-raising to the beneficiaries.



**78 water points** with tanks and **800 hand-washing stations** installed, and Rehabilitation of water infrastructure to secure access to water.

**Distribution** of hygiene material in communes and in 58 health centres in Jérémie county.



**Distribution** of hygiene items and **awareness-raising** towards most vulnerable in prisons, churches, schools – and to handicapped and elderly people.

## Venezuela

Venezuela's basic supply systems have partially collapsed because of the political crisis, hyperinflation and international embargoes. An estimated 10 to 12 million Venezuelans lack proper access to food (source: OCHA 2020), and 7 million people need humanitarian aid (source: UN 2019). The population was particularly vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic. HEKS/EPER has therefore launched a multifaceted emergency aid programme to alleviate the plight of those most in need.

HEKS/EPER was providing emergency aid for some 18.700 people, including warm meals and toiletries for needy women and children as well as the elderly. To stem the spread of the coronavirus, hospitals are actively supporting disinfection campaigns while victims of the crisis are being supplied with toilet articles and food packages. In addition, with the financial support of Swiss Solidarity, HEKS/EPER is also assisting internal migrants living under precarious conditions at the border with Colombia and who are receiving next to no government aid.



## More countries responding to COVID-19

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- **Armenia:** The HEKS/EPER partner distributed hygiene material but also seedlings, saplings and inputs to 900 farmers during lockdown to ensure food security; and organized workshops for farmers on government programmes related to COVID-19. Focus were elderly people.
- **Brazil:** 16'000 people in three DC projects of HEKS/EPER did profit from manifold activities accompanied by an awareness-raising campaign: 1) A women network produced and distributed 8.000 health kits with masks, soap, etc. 6.6 tons of food were purchased from local agroecological producers and distributed to the most vulnerable. 2) 1'700 litres of disinfectant was produced and afterwards distributed (a project with sugarcane production). 3) And another project organised 880 food kits, 50 water tanks, 700 hygiene kits and 1'300 masks.
- **Cambodia:** 131'500 individual – mainly in rural farmer families – received hygiene material and got information on prevention measures.
- **Colombia:** 500 people received COVID-19 emergency assistance – mainly biosecurity kits or food baskets, and sensitization training was provided.
- **DR Congo:** DC projects adapted interventions to distribute hygiene material (masks), installed handwashing facilities for 7'300 people. And the country office launched a public information campaign with poster, leaflets, etc.
- **Ethiopia:** HEKS/EPER delivered essential sanitation and hygiene material and water kits, promoted hygiene, improved access to safe water and installed handwashing facilities in two existing projects.
- **Honduras:** Distribution of food packages, hygiene material and awareness-raising about COVID-19 impact to 52'000 vulnerable.
- **Hungary:** 200 students being part of the regular educational project got support with food, heating and hygiene material – online learning was ensured.
- **India:** Despite phasing-out in India, the two projects still running in 2020 implemented COVID-19 activities – through an awareness-raising campaign, and also distributing health material. 7000 Adivasi did profit.
- **Israel / Palestine:** 3 projects raised awareness, distributed hygiene material, and provided emergency food baskets. 1200 people did profit.
- **Kosovo:** 4000 marginalised members of minorities were addressed with additional COVID-19 activities, such as ensuring digital home-schooling with mentoring/ tutoring components or through additional advocacy ensuring that Roma communities got access to medical care.
- **Lebanon:** CC partner have an afterschool programme for 30 children of Syrian refugees and marginalized children of local families. During the lockdown, they enabled 'remote schooling' offering digital devices. 350 Syrian refugees received hygiene material.
- **Moldova:** Homecare partner CASMED included COVID-19 sensitization and distributing hygiene material in their regular activities – reaching out to 2000 elderly and sick.
- **Niger:** With partners of 3 DC projects – Doum palm, Moringa processing and marketing and food security – HEKS/EPER was able to address the local population with sensitization and information on COVID related prevention measures and through the distribution of masks for workshops. 8'400 people were reached.
- **Romania:** The Roma Youth inclusion projects responded to COVID-19 with the distribution of food and hygiene items. Also, HEKS/EPER ensured digital home-schooling with mentoring/tutoring components to catch up again. 300 young individuals did profit.
- **Senegal:** 35'000 people in two DC projects got emergency aid with hygiene material and direct cash support (176 families). HEKS/EPER collaborated with local municipalities to launch a sensitization campaign to promoting prevention measures.

- **Serbia:** HEKS/EPER partner EHO's homecare service, with its decentralised structure, acted as distributor of SDC co-financed emergency aid with food and hygiene packages to 600 people living in vulnerable households. And EHO ensured that 100 vulnerable students were addressed with online tutoring.
- **Slovakia:** 50 students being part of the regular educational project got support with food, heating and hygiene material – online learning was ensured.
- **South Sudan / Uganda:** 1000 people got additional food assistance to maintain livelihood; sensitization and distribution of hygiene material were additional responses to the pandemic.
- **Syria:** Partners organised internet access for 40 students to participate in home-schooling.
- **Ukraine:** 4 projects provided to 1200 vulnerable people with food packages and hygiene material.



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