Socio-economic Impact of COVID-19 and Media Consumption among Vulnerable Communities in Central Asia

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MIXED METHODOLOGY

Quantitative & qualitative interviews and survey responses with vulnerable communities & content producers

120 semi-structured interviews with content producers (e.g. journalists & bloggers)

2000 survey responses and 500 in-depth interviews with refugees and stateless persons, ethnic minorities and labour migrants

Cross-comparisons & contrasts at the national & regional level (inc. special attention to gender, age, income and urban-rural divide)

Quantitative inferences and Qualitative field observations

Findings & recommendations
FINDING: SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT

Gender-impact

Serious increase in domestic violence & gender inequality

20% more women reported unemployment compared to men

Impact on labour migrants and ethnic minorities?

Border closures and economic uncertainty dramatically increased

The socio-economic roots of the protests in Kyrgyzstan were clearly identified in the data

Impact on refugees and stateless persons?

Poorest, least educated & most vulnerable during COVID-19

1% have a university degree & 63% have a low income
FINDING: MEDIA TRENDS

Preferred information channels?

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan between 50% and 63% of labour migrants and ethnic minorities report Instagram as their favorite information source.

Who gets coverage?

Labour migrants are reported as receiving far more media coverage compared to other vulnerable communities like ethnic minorities or refugees and stateless persons.

Are there Internet restrictions?

Across Central Asia, 36% of refugees and stateless persons report Internet restrictions. In Kazakhstan, 44% of ethnic minorities report Internet restrictions. In Tajikistan, 50% of ethnic minorities report Internet restrictions.
FINDING: COVID-19 IMPACT ON MEDIA CONSUMPTION AND COMBATING DISINFORMATION

**What media is reliable?**

Vulnerable communities report that international news is more reliable on COVID-19.

**Media priorities and limitations during COVID-19?**

Debunking information became a top priority for journalists due to high "fake news" exposure rate.

Little consensus exists surrounding the exact definitions of fake news and "what exactly fake news is?"

**New media approaches during COVID-19**

Journalists reached out to more experts and specialists to educate audiences and new interactive methods to engage with viewers/readers/listeners were developed.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Civil Society in Central Asia should consider...

- Supporting and working on more Internet privacy projects
- Increase their partnerships and exchange with European and international civil society and organisations
- Participate and engage in interdisciplinary and Central Asian intra-regional training projects to cooperate and support exchange of info on COVID-19

Central Asian content producers should consider...

- Reporting on and covering more news about vulnerable communities with a specific focus on refugees and stateless persons
- Consider providing targeted news coverage in more languages
- Foster better cooperation & coordination among content producers to minimize the risk of fake news
**RECOMMENDATION**

International donors and the EU should consider...

- Allocate targeted funding towards civil society and journalist capacity & exchange on fact-checking, fundraising and reporting on PVE

- Support more research and data collection on vulnerable communities, emphasising on women, low income groups and refugees and stateless persons

Voice more concern about social and economic exclusion across Central Asia, including serious Internet restrictions among vulnerable communities

Increasing transparency and access to data and research across Central Asia (e.g. allowing companies, researchers & media to conduct interviews & surveys)

Governments across Central Asia should consider...

- Design special communication strategies to inform the public about government measures to support households during the pandemic

- International donors and the EU should consider...