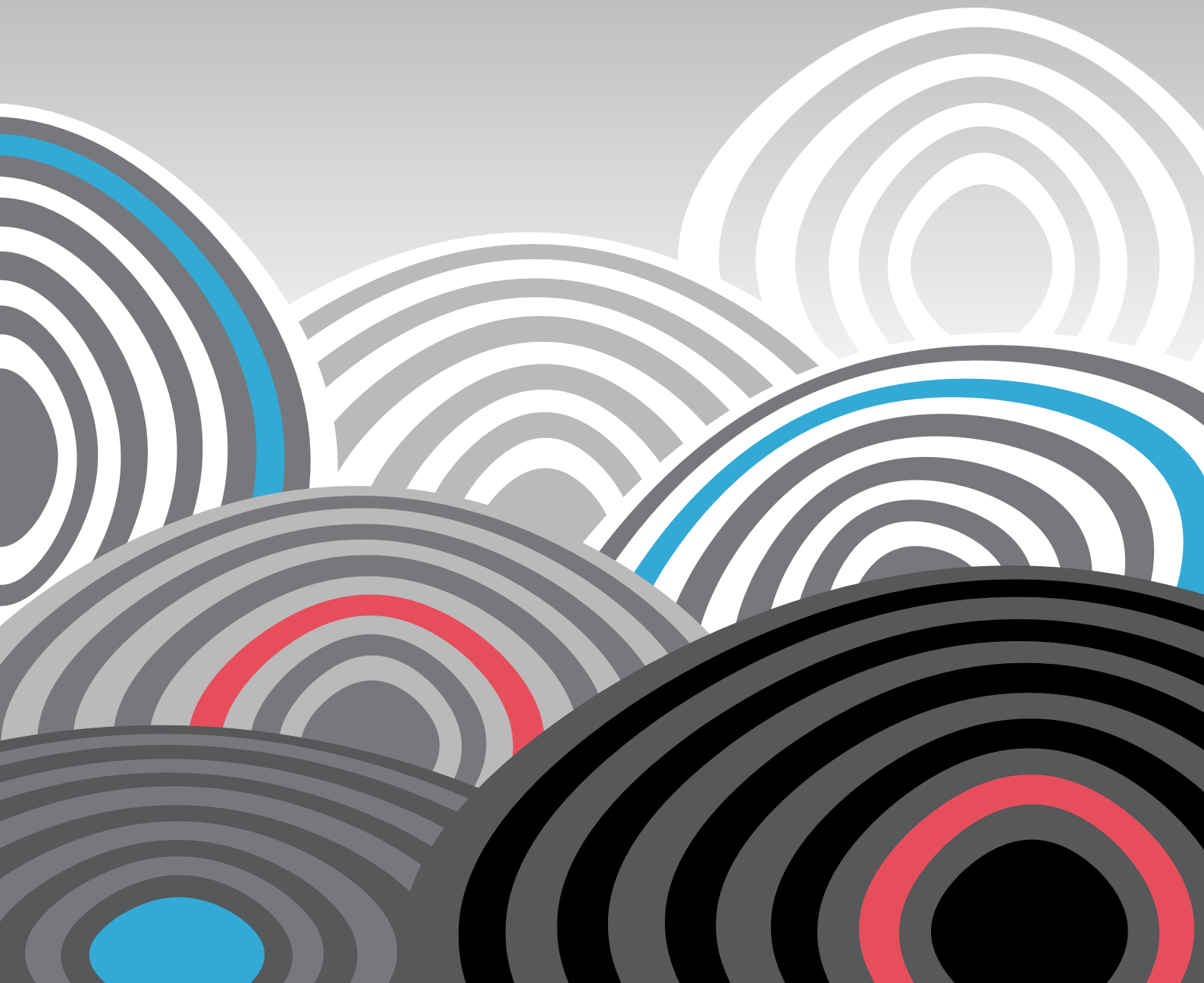# HERE-Geneva

Beyond the Pandemic

Findings Overview - 2021

Beyond the Pandemic - **Findings Overview**

Background & Purpose

Carried out in real-time in 2020-21, HERE's Beyond the Pandemic project aimed to capture evidence of the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic onto the humanitarian community. By taking the temperature of the situation, the research explored the 'burning questions' humanitarian actors found themselves confronted with and looked into ways in which the sector may need to adapt to this new reality.

Main research questions included:

What impact does the COVID-19 pandemic have on the existing humanitarian landscape and its ways of working?

What possible change should be considered for the sector to remain fit for purpose?

Methods & Timeline

Using qualitative research methods, the project incorporated the collection of both primary and secondary data, between August 2020 and March 2021.

Building on HERE's exchange mission, the project benefited from a participatory approach in both the data collection and data analysis phases. The project made use of different methodological tools for data collection and analysis:

- Global and country case studies

- Document analysis

- Key informant interviews

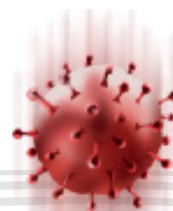- Roundtable and panel discussions

- What Next? 3-day online conference

Global Level Key Findings

HERE research has shown how the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a stress test for the humanitarian sector. It has accelerated change by forcing humanitarian actors to rapidly adapt and transform their approaches (greater reliance on digitalisation for example). In the same way that the financial crash of 2008 exposed the vulnerabilities of financial institutions, so the pandemic starkly exposed modes of working in humanitarian operations that are wildly ineffective.

The pandemic starkly exposed what works and what does not. It has highlighted the need to consciously work within perceived paradoxes or tensions: the local vs. the international, the virtual space vs. the physical space, the technocratic structures vs. the vales, the outputs vs. the outcomes... just to name a few. 'Hybrid' must be a choice.

One key tension to tackle is the one between the structures and the values. Who are we as humanitarians? Values are the conceptual framework behind our operational work. The same applies when trying to build synergies among partners. We need to find a balance between the formal structures and the informal behaviour. That is how synergies work. It is about building trust through the informal behaviours but managing opportunism through the formal structures.

How do we want to move forward? It is about starting with what we can control, one step at a time.

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closing the gap between policy and humanitarian practice

Country-Specific Findings

Cameroon

Cameroon was considered a 'forgotten' crisis prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as it failed to attract the necessary international political will and attention from the media and donors. While the pandemic resulted in some additional funds being allocated to the response in Cameroon, these were mostly earmarked for COVID-related interventions.

The focus on the pandemic reportedly **shifted donors' attention away from more pressing humanitarian concerns**: protection of civilians, the attacks on education, and health needs other than COVID-19. Only focusing on COVID-19 expected needs at the expense of those resulting from the continuous violence in the Lake Chad basin and in the North-West and South-West regions and from the presence of over 325,000 refugees from the Central African Republic in the eastern regions was reportedly seen as contravening to the principle of "do no harm".

Colombia

In a context where the focus was continuously set on resilience, COVID-19 **called for a shift of priorities towards emergency programming**.

Pre-pandemic, there was a misalignment in the analysis of humanitarian needs between the government of Colombia and the international humanitarian community. Beyond a focus on the regional Venezuelan refugee crisis, humanitarians saw humanitarian needs stemming from ongoing internal conflicts which the government did not fully acknowledge. This also resulted in a very complex coordination structure.

The pandemic has **brought both additional challenges** (lack of flexibility of humanitarian actors to respond to emergency needs) **and opportunities** (access, at least temporarily, to groups in need who were previously cut off from any assistance).

Libya

Among some of the underlying tensions humanitarian actors were confronted with pre-COVID-19, the pandemic in Libya exposed two in particular: **the lack of coherence in how to label humanitarian needs** and the crisis in Libya per se; and the **need to revisit what true proximity entails**.
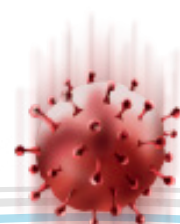
While the pandemic was generally seen as a health emergency, there were disagreements as to how to deal with the primary and secondary impacts and what to prioritise: livelihoods, protection…?

Travel restrictions linked to the pandemic further highlighted the distance between humanitarian actors and affected communities, after years of remote/semi-remote management of the response.

Myanmar

The COVID-19 pandemic occurred in the context of a human rights crisis engendering important humanitarian needs. Pandemic-related restrictions **further complicated humanitarian access** to vulnerable communities.

Until the military coup in February 2021, international humanitarian actors had been confronted with two major pandemic-induced dynamics. First, it **made international actors question their partnership approach** (and realise to some extent the need for duty of care for partners too) and their understanding of localisation as hyper-localisation (ethnic-based organisations and community-based organisations) was the only means of access. Second, the pandemic further **highlighted the different interpretations of humanitarian principles** among agencies/organisations, specifically with regards to supporting – or not – isolation and quarantine sites.

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The Geneva-based Humanitarian Exchange and Research Centre (HERE) was founded in 2014, with the goal of closing the gap between policy and humanitarian practice. Serving as an independent humanitarian think tank, HERE delivers studies, (real-time) evaluations, policy papers, practice reviews, etc. at its own initiative or the request of partners. HERE's mission is to contribute to improving performance and increasing the effectiveness and quality of humanitarian action.