

## Good Governance Strategies and Pandemic Crisis Management

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### Abstract

*COVID-19 crisis management has been a multi-level governance issue. Moreover, the way governments have approached the COVID-19 crisis has also become a major research trend worldwide. Different national and local governments have adopted various strategies in managing the pandemic response, due to differences in existing political structures and dynamics. From 2019 to 2022, the COVID-19 pandemic is the main enemy in most countries of the world, affecting in 2020 more than 50 million people worldwide. Governments around the world have had to deal with a number of uncertainties, to make difficult decisions or compromises, while facing challenges from health care, economic and social systems.*

*While the COVID-19 pandemic has hit states with various intensity, the response to the crisis has been an unprecedented challenge for most governments, which have reacted differently to the health, economy and well-being of citizens, as evidenced by studies that will be presented in this paper.*

**Key words:** strategy, factors, efficiency, decisions, governance

**J.E.L. classification:** K40

### 1. Introduction

In 2020, more than half of the world's population was forced to comply with difficult isolation and quarantine measures. Beyond the human health and tragedy of coronavirus, it is now widely acknowledged that the pandemic triggered one of the strongest economic crises in the post-World War II period. The nature of the crisis is unprecedented: beyond repeated short-term economic and health shocks, the long-term effects on human capital, productivity and behavior can be long-lasting. The COVID crisis has massively accelerated some pre-existing trends, especially digitization. It has shaken the world, setting in motion waves of change with a wide range of possible trajectories. (OECD, 2020)

### 2. Theoretical background

#### 2.1. Government strategies applied to combat the COVID-19 pandemic

The Chinese government's reactions have shown internationally that social distancing, quarantine and isolation of infected populations may contain or control the spread of the virus. This impact of the response to COVID-19 in China is encouraging for the many countries where COVID-19 has spread rapidly. However, it is not clear whether other countries can implement the strict measures that China has finally adopted. (WHO, 2020)

The OECD proposed in January 2022 the COVID-19 Response Assessment Framework developed to identify the main types of policy responses that governments need to assess at the state level, in order to better understand what worked well and what did not go well in solving the situation. The main policy responses observed at the state level correspond to the major phases of the risk management cycle, namely: pandemic preparedness, crisis management and pandemic response and recovery after a pandemic wave. (OECD, 2022)

According to this OECD report, initial assessments have shown that many governments have reached similar conclusions, enabling policy makers to identify important perspectives that can contribute both to the responses to the COVID-19 crisis and to improving future resilience. In short, the findings showed that:

- Preparation for this situation has generally been insufficient, given the major human and financial costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Governments have reacted quickly to mitigate the financial and economic effects of the pandemic, however they have failed to calculate the long-term costs of such measures.
- Communication as well as transparency were a necessity during this period.

Taking into account that government responses to the crisis have required the mobilization of actors from different fields and resources, cooperation between government institutions and agencies is a vital element in ensuring a coherent response. Governments have implemented new structures and mechanisms, as well as new institutional commitments to ensure a coordinated response to the pandemic.

For example, in Australia, the Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources has worked with the Department of Health to provide an increase in the national medical stock. The French government set up an inter-ministerial crisis unit in March 2020 to coordinate the actions of the various ministries and their responses at the collective level. In Belgium, the Hospital & Transport Surge Capacity Committee (HTSC) was set up in March 2020 with the task of monitoring the number of inpatients and proposing measures to organize adequate hospital care. (Belgian Health Care Knowledge Centre, 2020)

In order to provide a clear picture of international pandemic responses, the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) has been created, allowing an international comparison. This project includes 19 indicators, eight of which are related to closure and containment measures, four to economic measures and seven to sanitary measures. (Hale, 2021)

Gianino and colleagues study from 2021, in which the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker (OxCGRT) was applied, showed that most of the interventions analyzed for states such as Italy, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom were not correlated with the number of incident cases of Covid-19, although other studies have shown that some interventions (such as closing schools and universities and limiting meetings to 10 people) have had moderate to high effects in preventing the spread of the virus. (Gianino, 2021)

The EU-wide COVID-19 pandemic reflected different variations in the total number of registered cases, deaths, types of transmission and CFR (number of deaths / total number of cases), as identified from data published by the World Health Organization. Health, and some of the data are presented in Table 1, below.

*Table no. 1 Cases and deaths reported by the World Health Organization in Europe*

European state	Total reported cases	Total confirmed deaths
France	25.781.400	139.911
Germany	22.441.051	131.370
United Kingdom	21.508.550	169.412
Russia	17.99.431	371.169
Italy	15.106.066	160.402
Turkey	14.939.259	98.311
Spain	11.578.653	102.747
Netherlands	7.960.982	22.067
Poland	5.976.364	115.594
Ukraine	4.982.249	108.118
Austria	3.983.671	10.559
Israel	3.983.671	10.559

European state	Total reported cases	Total confirmed deaths
Belgium	3.915.732	30.997
Czech Republic	3.855.898	39.844
Portugal	3.657.785	21.851
Switzerland	3.512.106	13.031
Greece	3.137.714	27.968
Denmark	3.078.295	5.837
Romania	2.968.777	65.170
Sweden	2.491.980	18.506
Serbia	1.986.349	15.982
Hungary	1.88.007	45.721
Slovakia	1.745.004	19.523
Ireland	1.484.321	6.843

Source: World Health Organization

Figure no. 1 Chronology of suppression strategies in the most powerful EU countries



Source: (Malek, 2020)

The chronology of suppression strategies implementation in the strongest states in the European Union, but also with the most cases of disease is presented in Figure 1. Italy was the first state in the European Union to implement the blockades at national and regional level compared to other EU nations. France and Spain followed with nationwide restrictions in March, but Germany waited longer to implement a regional blockade. France reopened late (in May) compared to other countries, which reopened in April. The lack of a timely response from the authorities, weak strategies (eg quarantine postponement), an aging population and increased stress on health systems were the most important factors that contributed to the increase in the number of cases across the continent. (Rudan, 2020)

Other non-EU countries, such as China, Thailand and Singapore, have adopted virus isolation and suppression strategies, such as extended testing, contact tracking and isolation. Rapid testing led to the effective identification of COVID-19 cases, which could then be isolated and treated to limit the transmission of the virus. Moreover, due to the usage of new innovative technologies, the test result time was reduced to 4 hours.

The differences between EU COVID-19 statistics and Asian countries could be related to the different mitigation and suppression strategies adopted. However, the rate of transmission may have been linked to a variety of other factors, such as public awareness of COVID-19, personal care and management practices, and a lack of support from the authorities. While reopening the markets, the ambiguity around preventive strategies has increased, as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which is clearly a negative one, can be observed and analyzed from different perspectives, such as mental disorders, anxiety, stress, fatigue, etc.

Meanwhile, Germany and Austria stand out as nations that have adopted aggressive and early control strategies compared to other countries such as Italy, France and Spain, which have implemented similar measures, including blocking, but later. So far, Germany and Austria have had fewer deaths per capita than all other countries.

The most appropriate solution according to the main state governments that involved measures at the international level was the creation and placing on the market of a vaccine against the Covid-19 virus. From December 2020 to March 2022, the European Commission approved and agreed to four marketing authorizations for four types of Covid-19 vaccines, belonging to the companies BioNTech and Pfizer, Moderna, Astra Zeneca and Johnson & Johnson. Deliveries of vaccine doses to all EU Member States have steadily increased over the past two years. Vaccination has been widely debated, and the population was encouraged to get vaccinated, so that by August 2021, 70% of the entire EU population was already vaccinated with a complete scheme. (European Commission, 2022)

New variants of coronavirus have been discovered in all European countries, so the European Commission has decided to mobilize funds for further research and to sign new purchase agreements for buying vaccine doses and booster to adapt to these new variants of the virus. The European Commission's intervention also introduced a common procurement procedure from Member States for equipment needed for vaccination, and in the case of hospitals and doctors, it was recommended to eliminate the value added tax for test kits and vaccines. (European Commission, 2022)

## **2.2. Romania's national strategy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic**

Romania is one of the largest diaspora states in the European Union with over three million citizens living abroad, and many of these citizens have been forced to return home from countries severely affected by the pandemic, such as Italy or France. The migratory movement of the population has proven to be a good predictor of the magnitude of the pandemic, and waves of border citizens have been a huge challenge for both border control authorities and healthcare services. The problem required a quick approach, especially since the initial spread of the virus was crucial in controlling the pandemic. (Kluge, 2020)

In response to this challenge, all Romanian citizens returning home from the regions affected by COVID-19 signed a declaration obliging themselves to remain in self-isolation for a period of 14 days.

At the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic, the Romanian Government issued numerous documents in an attempt to manage the crisis as best as possible and to help the sectors that were massively affected: from health to economy, education, culture, sports, etc.

The main initial measures included:

- April - May 2020 wearing a protective mask has become mandatory;
- May - September 2020 a new state of alert was imposed, but it was subsequently followed by relaxation measures;
- September - November 2020 the schools were reopened and the local elections were organized;
- November 2020 - early February 2021: partial isolation, legislative elections were held and the vaccination campaign began;
- February - March 2021: children return to school, but the number of illnesses increases again;
- March 2021 - the third wave of cases;
- October 2021 - the fourth wave of cases;
- End of October 2021 - children receive two weeks of vacation in an attempt to reduce the number of cases;
- Winter 2021 - spring 2022 - the fifth wave of infection. (Romanian Government, 2022)

## **3. Research methodology**

In order to establish the awareness of the respondents on the strategies of good governance and management of the crisis generated by the pandemic, we considered it opportune to carry out a quantitative research, which consisted in applying an online questionnaire using the Google Forms platform. The questionnaire could be filled in for 13 days, between May 30, 2022 - June 12, 2022. During this time, the questionnaire was validated by a number of 143 respondents. This study was conducted in order to highlight the popular perception of the most successful methods and strategies for preventing and combating the pandemic in the European Union.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions and was divided into 4 sections, so that the answers given by the respondents were relevant to their level of knowledge of the topics covered. The questionnaire used both closed questions, with single or multiple answer options, and open-ended questions, where respondents could come up with their own additions.

#### 4. Findings

The respondents were 43.4% men and 56.6% women.

Most respondents are in the 18-30 age segment (46.2%), 30-45 years old (35%), 45-60 years old (16.1%) and over 60 years old (2,8%).

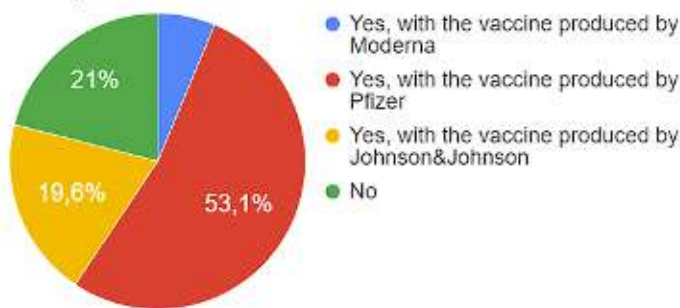
The vast majority of respondents come from urban areas, 109 people selecting this option, (76.2%), while a number of 34 people, 23.8% come from rural areas.

Regarding the level of graduated studies, 51% of the respondents state that they have a bachelor degree, 43 respondents, (30.1%) had a master degree of master's university studies, and a percentage of 17.5% graduated only high school . Only 2 respondents had a doctoral degree.

*Figure no. 2 Respondents reported their vaccination status*

Q5. Are you vaccinated against the SARS-COV2 virus?

143 respondents



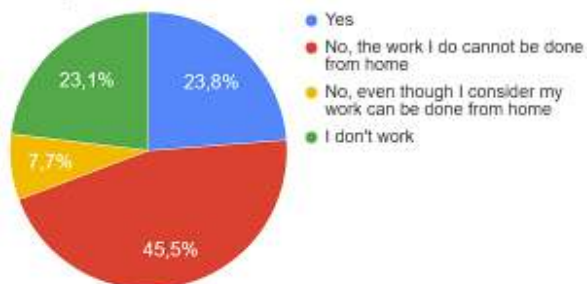
Source: Authors' contribution

When asked the first question, the respondents had to state whether they were vaccinated, with 53.1% of them being vaccinated with the serum produced by Pfizer-BioNTech. 21% say they are not vaccinated against the SARS-COV2 virus.

*Figure no. 3 How coronavirus has changed the way respondents work*

Q6. During the state of alert period, did the company / institution where you work provided you the opportunity to work from home?

143 respondents

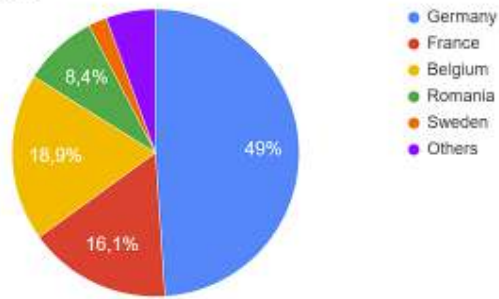


Source: Authors' contribution

During the state of alert period, 65 respondents (45.5%) did not carry out their work-related activity at home, because this was not possible, and 7.7% consider that their job allows home office, but from subjective reasons this has not been decided. In addition, 23.8% of respondents had the option to work from home.

Figure no. 4 Public opinion about the way EU member states handled the coronavirus crisis

Q7. Which EU country have managed the global pandemic the best?  
143 respondents

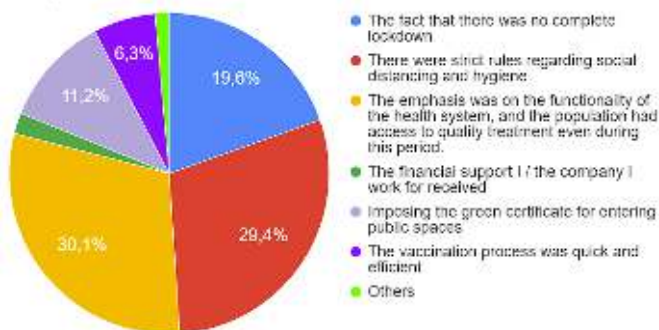


Source: Authors' contribution

The most successful strategy to fight against the SARS-COV2 pandemic is considered to be in Germany, with 49% of respondents choosing this option, followed by Belgium (18.9%) and France (16.1%).

Figure no. 5 The most important strategy regarding the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to the respondents

Q8. What EU Member State strategy do you think was most important in combating the negative effects of the pandemic?  
143 respondents



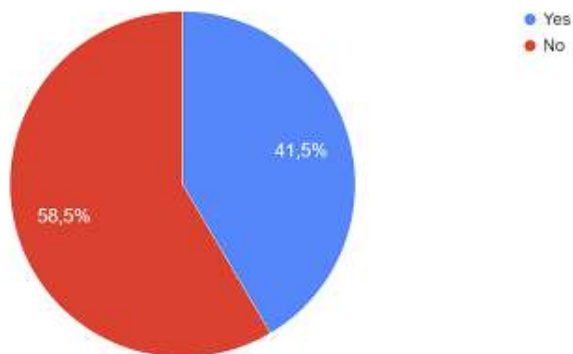
Source: Authors' contribution

If we refer to the reason why the respondents chose the Member State of the European Union, most of them, 30.1% chose this option because in that country the emphasis was on the functionality of the health system, and the medical activity has not been discontinued but continued to be provided in a manner appropriate to patients with diseases other than those caused by the SARS-COV2 virus. On the one hand a total of 42 respondents, (29.4%), consider that the very strict rules of keeping social distance and hygiene, such as imposing the wearing of a mask in closed spaces or respecting the distance from other people were vital to combat the negative effects of the pandemic. On the other hand, only 6.3% of respondents believe that the vaccination process was fast and efficient, which reveals syncope in the distribution of vaccines in the Member States.

Figure no. 6 Romanians are not impressed with China's "Zero COVID" policy

Q11. Do you consider that the measures in handling of the crisis and the effects of it have been properly carried out in China?

65 respondents



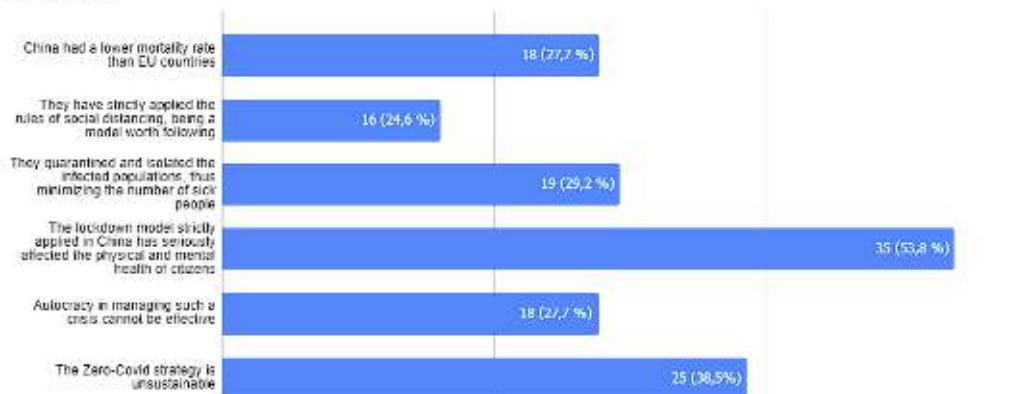
Source: Authors' contribution

If we refer to strategies outside the EU bloc, the Chinese model of pandemic management was not appreciated by the respondents, 58.5% of them considering that the management of the crisis and the effects of the pandemic were not carried out properly in their country with a totalitarian regime.

Figure no. 7 Respondents option justification regarding the previous question

Q12. What made you choose this option?

65 respondents



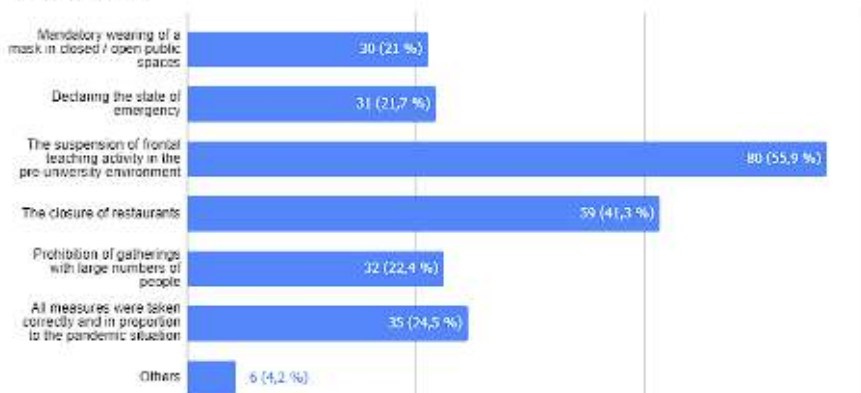
Source: Authors' contribution

When asked why they chose the previous option, we can see that most of the respondents (53.8%) point out that the lockdown model strictly applied in China has seriously affected the physical and mental health of citizens, 38.5% believe that The Zero-Covid strategy is unsustainable, and only 24.6% believe that the Chinese model can be followed, because they have strictly applied the rules of social distancing.

Figure no. 8 Respondents opinion regarding the subject of the measures taken by the Romanian Government in managing the pandemic period

Q15. What measures do you think were wrongly taken by the Romanian Government in managing the pandemic period?

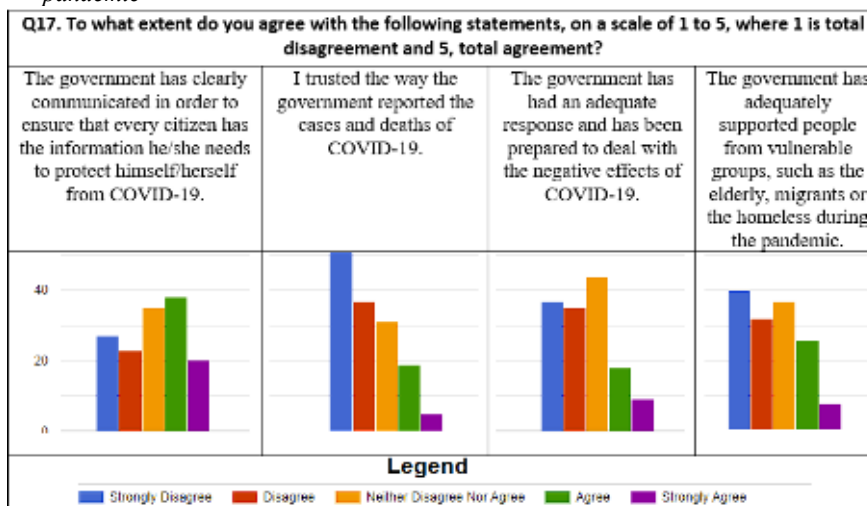
153 respondents



Source: Authors' contribution

Referring to our country, the respondents were asked to choose the measures they consider to have been taken incorrectly during the pandemic, the majority of respondents (55.9%) considering the suspension of frontal teaching activity in the pre-university environment as a mistake, and a significant percentage (41.3%) considered the closure of restaurants to be wrong. We can see that a small number of respondents (4.2%) wanted to express their own opinion, drawing attention to the erroneous way in which methods such as night quarantine were applied, (when citizens could no longer leave their home after 10 p.m.) or the imposition of the green certificate in crowded spaces or public institutions.

Figure no. 9 Likert-scale scores given by respondents for affirmations on the Government handling of the pandemic



Source: Authors' contribution

This content question consisted of 4 statements, to which the respondents had to answer, on Likert's scale, from 1, which represents strong disagreement and 5, which represents strong agreement to the statements.

At the first statement, namely that "the Government has clearly communicated in order to ensure that every citizen has the information he/she needs to protect himself/herself from COVID-19", a number of 38 respondents agreed with this it, 20 respondents stated that they strongly agreed while 35 chose the neutral option, 23 disagreed, and 27 strongly disagreed.

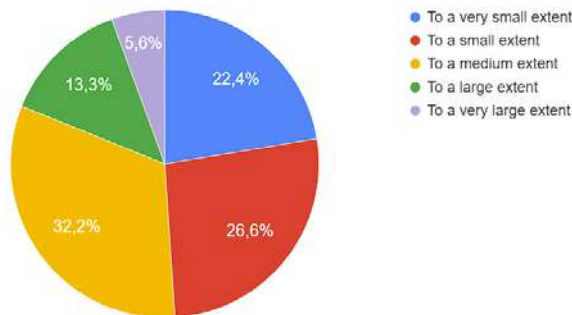
In the second statement, "I trusted the way the government reported the cases and deaths of COVID-19" 51 respondents state that they strongly disagree, 37 disagreed, and only 5 respondents state that they fully agree with the statement, which reveals a low level of confidence among respondents in the way in which the authorities transmitted the data on deaths and the number of illnesses.

The statement "The government has had an adequate response and has been prepared to deal with the negative effects of COVID-19" was assessed in a neutral way, 44 of the respondents stating that they do not agree or disagree with what was stated, 37 are in strong disagreement and only 9 respondents are in strong agreement.

The latest statement, "The government has adequately supported people from vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, migrants or the homeless during the pandemic" was one in which 40 of the respondents revealed that they strongly disagree with what was stated, 37 chose the neutral option, and 8 respondents appreciate the government's efforts, choosing the option of strong agreement.

*Figure no. 10 Worry level of respondents regarding the appearance of monkeypox cases in EU Countries*

Q19. To what extent do you think the worrying situation caused by the appearance of cases of monkeypox in EU countries could eventually lead to a new pandemic?  
143 respondents



Source: Authors' contribution

To the last question, the respondents had to choose their own level of concern about a possible new pandemic, caused by the appearance of monkeypox cases on the European Union territory. In this regard, 32.2% of respondents say that they are worried to a medium extent, 26.6% to a small extent and only 5.6% are concerned to a very large extent.

## 5. Conclusions

The COVID-19 crisis has been, and still is, a global challenge for most countries in the world and requires global solutions. The EU and its Member States support partner countries' efforts to fight against the virus by providing financial support to address the immediate health crisis and humanitarian needs. The total effort of the European team amounts to 46 billion euros. (European Council, 2022)

In order to raise awareness of the pandemic situation, the Romanian authorities have launched information campaigns at national level through various media channels, including television and social media (General Secretariat of the Romanian Government, 2022). Through this campaign, there were taken different preventive measures such as social distancing, wearing masks or using disinfectants. However, the numerous fines issued by public authorities at the beginning of the epidemic revealed citizens' reluctance to comply with the restrictions.

As strategic measures at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Romanian Government issued numerous emergency ordinances in an attempt to manage the crisis as best as possible and to help the sectors that were massively affected: from health, to economy, education or culture.

Although these measures were taken in order to reduce the negative effects of the pandemic, the result was not as desired, as evidenced by the data of the questionnaire we interpreted, the respondents being dissatisfied with the way the Government managed the pandemic, especially by taking measures that involved suspending frontal activity in pre-university education system, closing

restaurants or banning assemblies that involved meeting a large number of people in an enclosed space. Respondents also pointed out that confidence in reporting deaths and cases caused by the SARS-COV2 virus or helping people from vulnerable groups has become desirable during the aforementioned period.

Internationally, national governments have implemented a number of stringent control measures (e.g., decisions and orders to remain immobilized in the home, travel restrictions, closing non-essential business, closing schools and other gathering places), and a set of public health policies (e.g., preventive and protective measures such as washing or disinfecting hands with disinfectant gel, using gloves, wearing a mask) to reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

These similarities in the measures taken, together with the specific political and socio-demographic contexts, make complex comparisons between the effectiveness of international responses to pandemics.

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