THE COVID-19 RESPONSE: GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES AND INNOVATIONS BY CITIES AND REGIONS

Emergency Governance for Cities and Regions
July 2020

UCLG United Cities and Local Governments | metropolis | LSE Cities | LSE The London School of Economics and Political Science

INTRODUCING ANALYTICS NOTE #02

This Analytics Note focuses on the priorities and demands of cities and regions for international information exchange linked to emergency governance. The information underpinning this Analytics Note is based on a survey of city and regional governments,and complemented by additional analysis of online resources.

The first Analytics Note of this series identified a wealth of online resources and data on the social and economic impacts of COVID-19 alongside a documentation of the global policy response. Although most of these resources focus on the impact of the virus and the crisis response at the national level, some do target sub-national governments. Also, while there is little overall focus on questions of governance across these resources, there are some that include initial insights into emergency governance for cities and regions.

This publication presents a systematic analysis of these resources, establishing the gaps in information on emergency governance. These gaps are reviewed in combination with the reported information needs of city and regional-decision makers. Knowledge gaps and priority demands identified in this Analytics Note point to where research on emergency governance can be of most use, and it will be the task of future Emergency Governance Initiative publications to focus on responding to these demands. Policy Brief #01, published alongside this Analytics Note, makes a start on this task, featuring examples of innovative emergency responses in areas identified as priorities for additional information and resources: cooperation and collaboration with stakeholders; communication and consultation with citizens; coordination and integration across different tiers of government; and information technology and data management.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The EGI team would like to thank the dozens of local government officials that took time out of their busy schedules to respond to the scoping survey despite the short notice and the crisis they have been dealing with. The level of engagement is testament to the fact that sub-national governments regard information sharing and collaboration as key in developing appropriate responses to this emergency.

With the financial support of:

EUROPEAN UNION

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of UCLG, Metropolis and LSE Cities and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Sweden Sverige

This document has been co-financed by the Swedish International Development Agency, SIDA. SIDA does not necessarily share the views expressed in this material. Responsibility for its content rests entirely with the author.

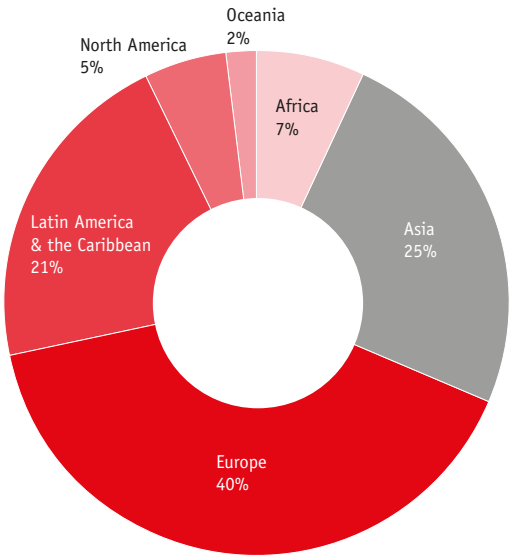
metropolis

Figure 1: Cities and regions featured in the survey

The survey was conducted from 13 July to 22 July 2020 and completed by officials working in city and regional governments. **The sample cuts across 57 territories from 35 countries on all continents**, with stronger representation of cities/regions from Europe (40%), Asia (25%), and Latin America and the Caribbean (21%). No more than three cities or regions from the same country were included in the analysis. The average population of these administrative territories is 2.3 million, but populations span from 6,500 inhabitants to over 12 million.

The survey findings were complemented by analysis of 20 online COVID-19 monitors identified as relevant to subnational governance. These resources were systematically reviewed from the first to the most recent post/publication, and each challenge or innovation mentioned in relation to a city or region was coded according to established governance domains (listed in the appendix).

Figure 2: Geographical distribution of survey respondents



Main findings

Below follows a brief overview of the results from the survey and the analysis of the online resources, structured according to emergency governance challenges, innovations, and knowledge gaps. The definitions of all terms and categories are included in the appendix of this note. The main insights include:

- **Cities and regions more frequently identified challenges related to administration, technical management, and innovation** than challenges related to the political domains of democracy, legitimacy, and inclusion.
- **The most cited governance challenges were those related to public finances, in particular 'insufficient public budgets' and 'uncertainty of funding.'** 'Difficulty working across different tiers of government' also came up frequently.
- **Challenges related to issues of governance are rarely featured in the online resources**, and when they do arise, they broadly align with the survey findings: challenges related to public finances are most prominent.
- **Cities and regions reported most emergency governance innovations in 'authority and leadership' and 'cooperation and collaboration with key stakeholders.'**
- Despite the prevalence of challenges related to public finances, **there were relatively few reported innovations in the domain of 'finance and resources.'** Lack of innovation in this area was also reflected in the monitor resources.
- **The most often reported knowledge gaps in emergency governance are related to 'finance and resources', 'public participation and inclusion', and 'coordination and integration across government units.'**

1. GOVERNANCE CHALLENGES: WHAT IS MOST DIFFICULT?

This section highlights the key governance challenges that have emerged for city and regional governments during the initial months of the COVID-19 crisis, as identified through the survey, and then cross-references these with the content of online resources. In the survey, respondents were asked to rate a series of challenges based on the extent to which they negatively impacted their government's emergency response.

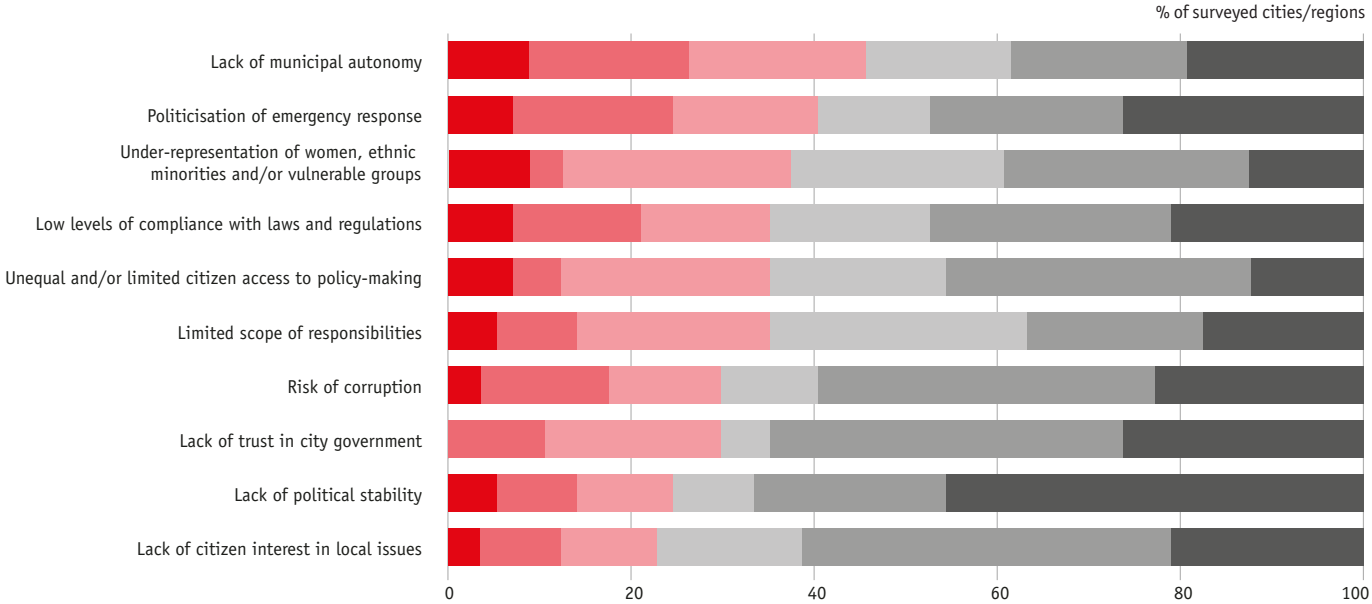
In general, governance challenges can be divided into two broad categories: (1) issues that relate to democracy, legitimacy and inclusion; and (2) issues that relate to administration, technical management, and innovation (definitions listed in the appendix).

1.1 DEMOCRACY, LEGITIMACY, AND INCLUSION CHALLENGES

Emergency governance challenges related to the 'political' domains of democracy, legitimacy, and inclusion were not prominently reported by the territories surveyed (see Figure 3). However, a considerable number of respondents did perceive a lack of autonomy at the subnational level and a politicisation of the crisis to be challenging.

Figure 3: Survey Results - 'Political' governance challenges

'Please rate each of these governance challenges based on how much of a problem they have been during your city's emergency response.' (From dark red (5) = extremely challenging to dark grey (0) = not challenging at all.)



When these survey results are compared with content covered by online resources (Figure 4), it becomes clear that these governance challenges are rarely featured in the online resources. However, in the few instances where they are mentioned, the focus seems to align with the top concerns reported in the survey – with the exception of challenges linked to the underrepresentation of marginalised groups in the emergency response. This was cited as a prominent challenge by surveyed cities and regions but did not feature in the online resources.

1.2 ADMINISTRATION, TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT, AND INNOVATION CHALLENGES

As shown in Figure 5, challenges related to public management and administration of the emergency response are much more frequently cited in the survey than those related to political governance challenges. In particular, many cities and regions highlight lack of access to financial resources and uncertainty of future funding, which can make strategic planning difficult. Difficulties arising from coordinating the emergency response across different levels of government are also major concerns, as are challenges linked to the interdependence of policy sectors.

Figure 4: Online Resources - Democracy, legitimacy, and inclusion challenges

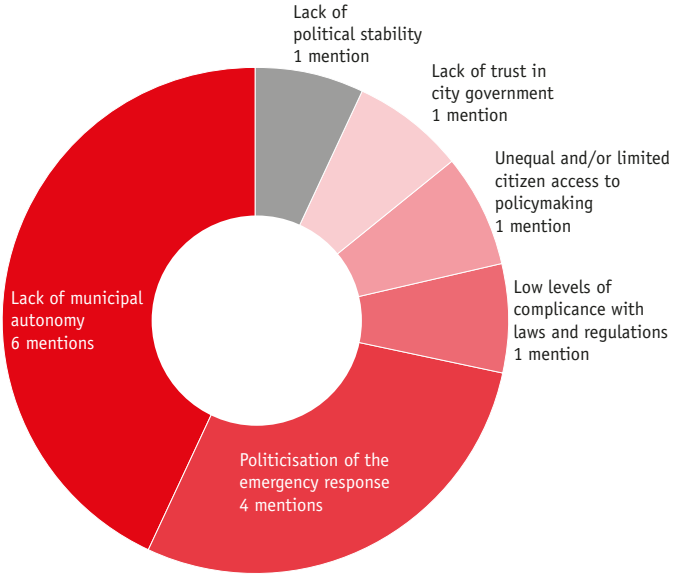
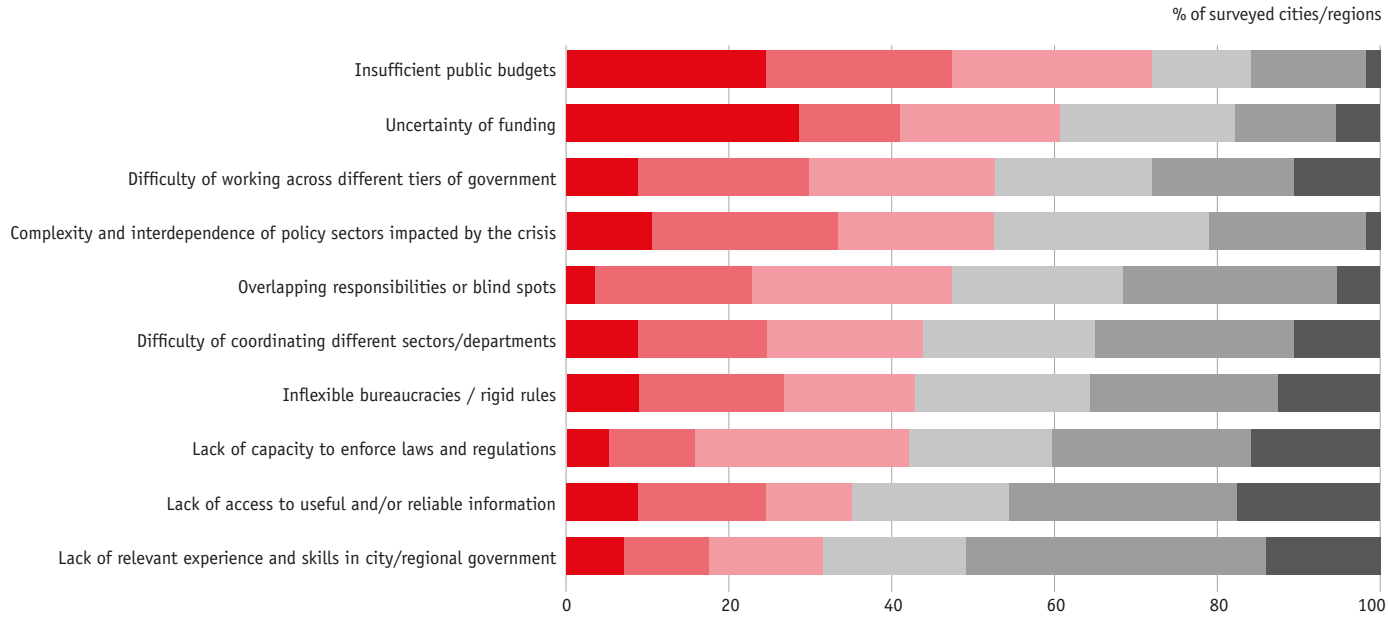


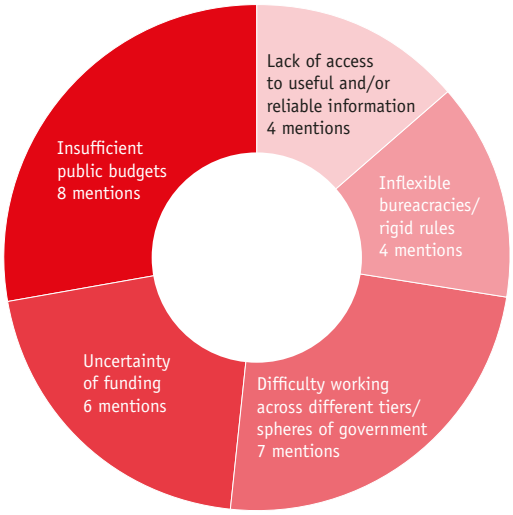
Figure 5: Survey results - 'Administrative' governance challenges

'Please rate each of these governance challenges based on how much of a problem they have been during your city's emergency response.' (From dark red (5) = extremely challenging to dark grey (0) = not challenging at all.)



Administrative governance challenges also came up slightly more in the online resources (Figure 6). Corroborating the survey's findings, issues related to insufficient financial resources and the uncertainty of future fundingwere most frequently referenced. However, there was one challenge identified by most survey respondents that did not once feature in the online resources: the interdependence and complexity of policy sectors.

Figure 6: Online Resources - Administration, technical management, and innovation challenges



2. EMERGENCY GOVERNANCE INNOVATIONS: PROGRESS TO DATE

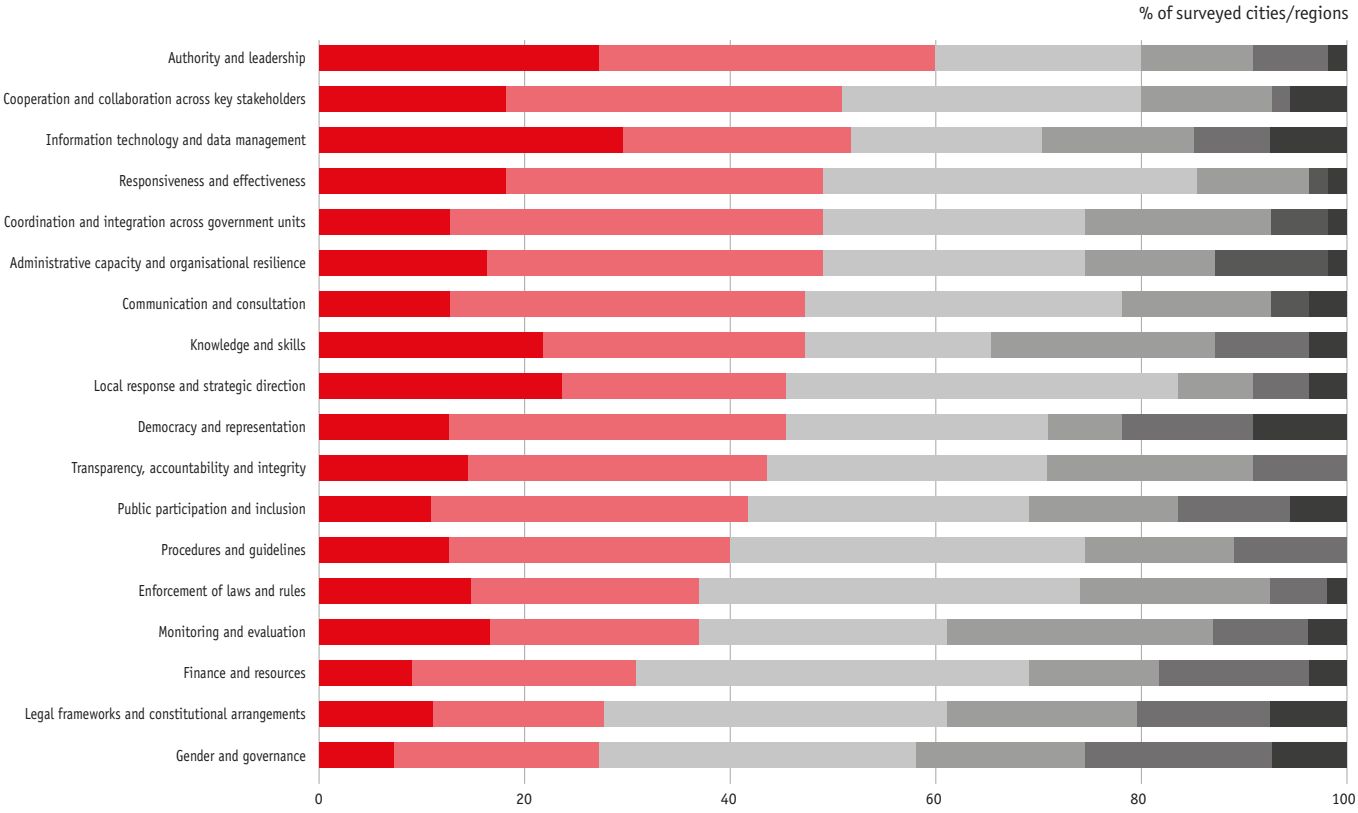
2.1 FOCUS AREAS IN SURVEYED CITIES

Most respondents reported innovation in relation to leadership and authority during the emergency response (Figure 7). This implies that many sub-national governments have focused on finding new ways to assure citizens, stakeholders and other tiers of government that they can be relied upon in times of crisis. Other important innovations reported by about half the surveyed cities and regions related to collaboration with stakeholders; information and data management; responsiveness and effectiveness; and administrative capacity.

Innovation gaps include legal frameworks and constitutional arrangements; gender and governance; and finance and resources. These results could be explained by the pace and unprecedented nature of this particular emergency, legal/institutional constraints, divergent political priorities and/or lack of available information or expertise in these areas.

Figure 7: Survey Results - Innovations by emergency governance domains

'How innovative has your city/region been as part of the following areas of emergency governance?'
(From dark red (5) = highly innovative to dark grey (0) = not innovative at all)



2.2 FOCUS AREAS IN ONLINE RESOURCES

Despite focusing most heavily on governance challenges surrounding insufficient public budgets, online resources did not include many best practice examples related to finance and the management of resources (see Figure 8). Instead, the most circulated innovations were related to information technology and data management. Online resources regularly cited examples of cities and regions creating new digital modes of connectivity between government officials and citizens, as well as innovative ways of monitoring and tracking data on infection rates, healthcare capacity, and local COVID-19 exposure risk. Stakeholder cooperation and collaboration also came up frequently, including examples of city and regional governments partnering with civil society groups and private sector organisations to strengthen their emergency responses.

Figure 8: Online Resources - Cited innovations

Listed in the same order as in Figure 7

2.3 AREAS WITH LITTLE INNOVATION

The governance domains in which city and regional leaders reported little innovation (Figure 7) were also scarcely reported on in the online resources (Figure 8). These were the areas of legal frameworks and constitutional arrangements; gender and governance; and finance and resources. The lack of information on the latter is most striking, considering the prominence of reported challenges relating to public finance.

The following section explores whether this lack of monitor coverage might be explained by an absence of government 'demand' for examples of best practice and innovation in these areas. Regardless, the scarcity of case studies for these areas is a clear indication of where international initiatives like the Emergency Governance Initiative can add more value.

3. KNOWLEDGE GAPS: WHAT CITIES AND REGIONS WANT TO LEARN

3.1 DEMAND FOR INTERNATIONAL LEARNING AND INFORMATION SHARING

Survey respondents reported a clear demand for insights on finance and resources, a priority for about half of the respondents. As illustrated in Figure 9, significant demand also exists in relation to information technology and data management; cooperation and collaboration across key stakeholders; coordination and integration across government units; and public participation and inclusion.

The areas of legal frameworks and constitutional arrangements; transparency, accountability and integrity; *and* gender and governance were less frequently selected by the cities and regions in the sample. This lower demand has various possible explanations. One is that some of the areas may be regarded by sub-national governments as being less actionable, requiring long-term changes that are unfeasible during the emergency.

Figure 9: Survey Results - Information demand by emergency governance domain

'Of the following areas of emergency governance, which would your city/regional government benefit from additional information and references to innovative practices?' (Please rank your top five areas from the list below, from the most useful areas [1] to the least useful [5])

3.2 KNOWLEDGE GAPS AND INNOVATIVE PRACTICES

While high levels of innovation accompany high levels of interest for local response and strategic direction; knowledge and skills; and authority and leadership, most other areas have considerable information needs but far fewer examples of innovative practices. This mismatch between 'demand' and 'supply' is particularly severe for the areas of finance and resources; public participation and inclusion; coordination and integration across government units; cooperation and collaboration across key stakeholders; and communication and consultation.

3.3 WHAT SHOULD BE THE FOCUS OF FUTURE RESEARCH?

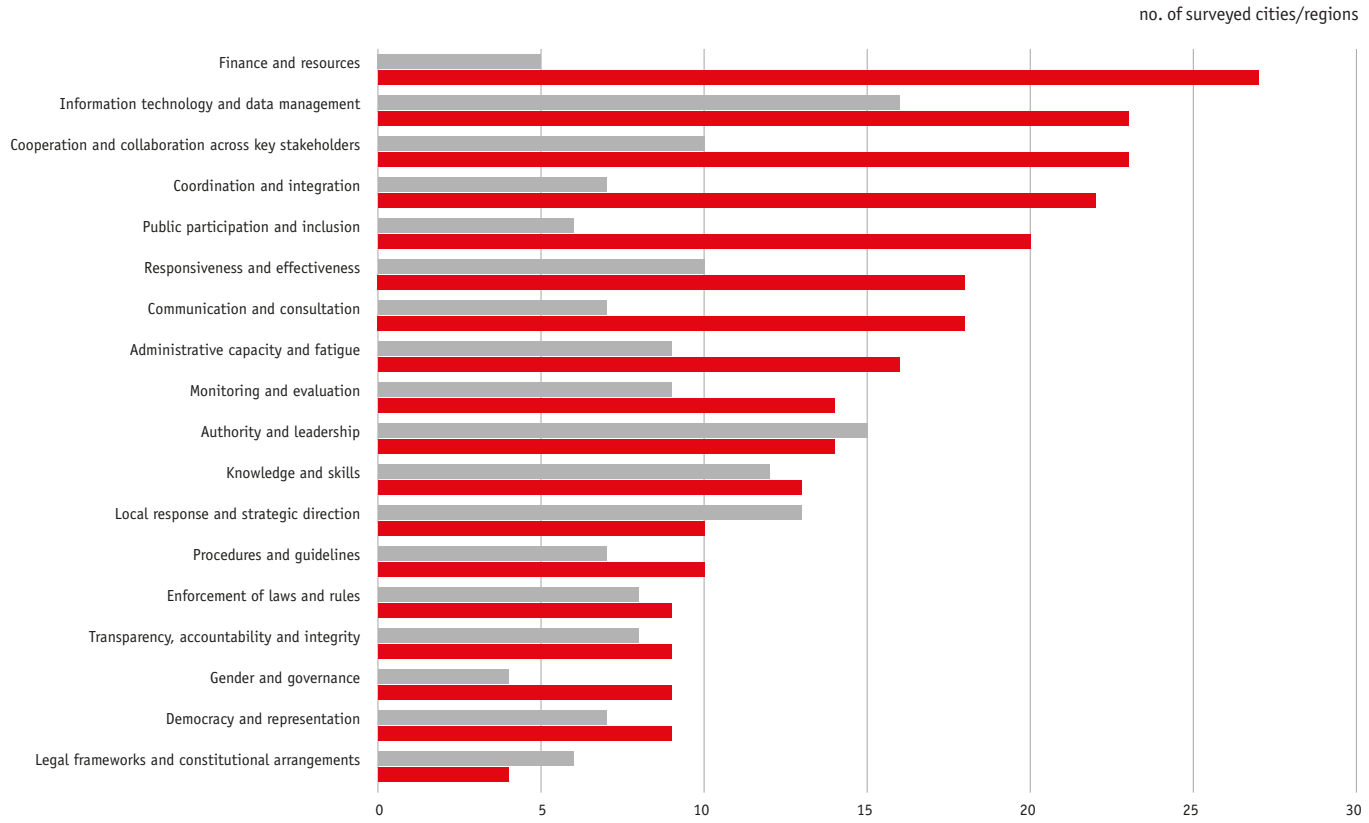
To provide city and regional governments with actionable information, suitable frameworks, knowledge and resources to navigate the new demands of leading emergency responses, **the Emergency Governance Initiative will attempt to bridge some of the existing knowledge gaps and identify innovative practices** within the governance domains that will be most useful to city and regional decision-makers.

However, this does not necessarily mean that future research should only focus on the areas that the surveyed cities and regions have singled out as priorities for tackling the COVID-19 emergency (see Figures 9 and 10). Territories with needs or priorities other than those represented should not be disregarded. **Furthermore, emergency governance reforms and innovations developed in the context of COVID-19 do not only have relevance for this pandemic.** Other challenges – climate breakdown and housing crises, for example – are increasingly framed as complex emergencies, and the experiences of city and regional decision-makers in managing the COVID-19 response will likely influence the governance of future emergencies. It is unclear at this stage whether emergencies of a different nature will lead to similar governance challenges. Even as the current crisis progresses and shifts, so may the challenges, innovations, and knowledge gaps, and feedback from city and regional decision-makers will continue to shape the priorities of the Emergency Governance Initiative.

Figure 10 ranks the various emergency governance domains according to the total number of times they were selected by the surveyed cities and regions as areas in which they would benefit from additional information and references to innovative practices (in red). The figure also shows the total number of times that respondents stated that their cities and regions have been 'highly innovative' during the emergency response (in grey).

Figure 10: Survey Results - Knowledge gaps and innovative practices by emergency governance domain

Grey = Highly innovative practices; Red = Knowledge gaps



APPENDIX – DEFINITIONS USED IN THE SURVEY

The definitions of governance challenges and domains used in the analysis are listed below

Governance challenges linked to democracy, legitimacy, and inclusion

Politicisation of emergency response

This can range from simple opposition to emergency responses due to political affiliation/party politics, up to rival political parties or political figures exploiting the crisis for electoral gain.

Lack of political stability

Weakened ability of the city/regional government to function effectively. This could be due to high government turnover (government changing frequently); political conflict; fierce competition between political parties; tensions with other government institutions (i.e. local, state, national); serious economic problems, or other fundamental challenges to the continuity of government.

Lack of municipal autonomy

The governance of the city/region is highly centralised at the state or national level and the city/regional government has limited power to decide over the emergency response without approval from above.

Limited scope of responsibilities

The city/regional government has limited responsibility for the emergency response or for policy sectors/services that would be instrumental in responding effectively to the emergency.

Lack of trust in city government

A lack of trust amongst citizens in the city/regional government and its ability to deal with its core responsibilities.

Lack of citizen interest in local issues

A lack of interest amongst citizens in city/regional issues, e.g. local government concerns such as local planning, social affairs and urban transport.

Low levels of compliance with laws and regulations

This could either be due to a lack of respect amongst citizens and/or public sector workers for laws and regulations, or due to widespread misunderstandings of the laws and regulations.

Underrepresentation of women, ethnic minorities and/or vulnerable groups

Women, ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups in the city/region – such as low-income communities, migrants, and people with disabilities – are underrepresented in the governing institutions and the wider urban governance systems.

Unequal and/or limited citizen access to policymaking

Limited channels through which citizens can contribute to policymaking and strategies for the city. More than mere consultation, this should involve co-production and active involvement of citizens in the decision-making processes. This limited access can have many causes – for example, a digital gap resulting in unequal online information and engagement, or the limited capacity of the government to coordinate with local stakeholders, such as civil society organisations or private sector entities providing food, shelter etc.

Risk of corruption

The city or region's government institutions, authorities, and local public sector are at risk of individuals or groups abusing power for private gain (e.g. accepting bribes, embezzling funds, or using political and social influence to gain preferential treatment).

Governance challenges linked to administration, technical management and innovation

Inflexible bureaucracies / rigid rules

Tight administrative setups and procedures alongside strict laws that do not allow for much flexibility and/or quick responses in the event of an emergency (e.g. inflexible budgets or stringent legal obligations for public procurement and service delivery).

Insufficient public budgets

The financial resources available to the city/regional government are insufficient for the emergency response and continued delivery of public services.

Uncertainty of funding

The availability financial resources to the city/regional government in the future is uncertain or there is no clear funding pattern or programme, which makes it harder to plan in good time.

Lack of capacity to enforce laws and regulations

The city/regional government has limited capacity to enforce laws and regulations (e.g. prevalence of informal economies, lack of policing or inspection resources, no capacity to prosecute).

Complexity and interdependence of policy sectors impacted by the crisis

Policy sectors and problems are highly interrelated, and measures designed to tackle one problem (e.g. protecting local business) may unleash unpredictable consequences that could lead to new problems elsewhere (e.g. increasing inequalities). At the same time, more ambitious integration and coordination efforts require time and effort and can delay action.

Difficulty working across different tiers/spheres of government

Difficulty co-ordinating the emergency response with other tiers of government (e.g. national government departments, district government bodies, local governments bodies, state government bodies, etc.).

Difficulty coordinating different sectors/departments

Difficulty coordinating the emergency response across different sectors/departments in the city/regional government (e.g. health department, housing department, etc.).

Overlapping responsibilities or blind spots

Instances of sectors/departments having responsibility for the same area of the emergency response, and/or instances where no sector/department has been allocated responsibility for a key area of the emergency response.

Lack of access to useful and/or reliable information

A lack of access to reliable information that would aid the emergency response.

Lack of relevant experience and skills in city/regional government

The city/regional government suffers from a lack of experience of emergency governance and/or a lack of internal staff or access to external experts with the necessary skills to respond effectively to the emergency (e.g. public health and infection control experts, data modellers, etc.)

Emergency Governance Domains

Categories used for governance innovations and knowledge gaps

Coordination and integration across government units (vertical and horizontal)

The introduction of effective measures to coordinate and integrate emergency measures across different tiers of government (national, state-level, municipal, etc.) and different departments (health, housing, social security, etc.) For example, establishing a joint body with other subnational governments to purchase and distribute medical equipment according to regional need.

Cooperation and collaboration across key stakeholders (cutting across government, private and third sector organisations)

The introduction of effective measures for cooperation and collaboration between key stakeholders from the public, private, and third sectors. For example, a joint task force dealing with safe mobility services across rail, bus, taxi and other mobility providers.

Administrative capacity and organisational resilience

For example, changes in government structures (precise designation of responsibilities, tasks, functions, etc.), human resources (skill, recruitment, training, wellbeing, etc.), and/or systems and tools (checklists, ICT tools, manuals, etc.) that increase the ability of the city government to deal with and sustain its functioning during an emergency (e.g. offering staff working on the pandemic response wellbeing and support services).

Monitoring and evaluation

The comprehensive monitoring of the emergency and evaluation of the emergency response to measure effectiveness and identify areas where a change is needed (e.g. establishing block level analytics to measure context-specific impacts of infection control measures).

Finance and resources

The innovative and flexible sourcing of additional resources (financial, healthcare, personnel, etc.), and/or applying innovative techniques to efficiently budget these resources for an effective emergency response (e.g. negotiating with local factories to retool their production lines and switch to manufacturing medical equipment).

Democracy and representation

The successful integration of the principles of democracy and public representation throughout the emergency response and recovery (e.g. establishing a democratically elected COVID-19 recovery committee).

Public participation and inclusion

For example, the use of innovative techniques of public participation to involve citizens in designing the emergency response and recovery, and to ensure that the emergency response is inclusive and responsive to the needs of all sections of society (e.g. the establishment of neighbourhood response committees which are in constant contact with city officials).

Transparency, accountability and integrity

The integration of new mechanisms to ensure that the governance of the emergency is transparent, that emergency powers are accountable and subject to regular review, and that the public interest is protected at all times. (e.g. the establishment of an independent citizens review board to monitor the emergency measures and ensure that they are necessary, proportional and temporary).

Legal frameworks and constitutional arrangements

The addition of new emergency amendments to city or regional level legal frameworks that enable an effective response to emergency situations (e.g. amendments to the city charter to enable rapid reallocation of budget resources during an emergency, or permanent changes to emergency planning acts to establish a framework for managing concurrent emergencies, should they occur).

Information technology and data management

The innovative use of data and information assisted by digital technology to carry out an effective, proportional and targeted emergency response (e.g. the use of open-source data infection spread modelling).

Authority and leadership

The display of strong leadership and authority at the forefront of the emergency response, providing assurance to citizens, stakeholders and other tiers of government (e.g. establishing new leadership platforms to inform and engage with citizens, and/or the building of new leadership coalitions such as using local community and religious leaders to inform people about the dangers of infection and the importance of following the guidelines).

Enforcement of laws and rules

Changes in the way laws and rules are enforced within the city/region (e.g. more strictly, less strictly; and/or using different methods like using drones to police lockdown measures)

Procedures and guidelines

The development of new, clear and effective guidelines to help different institutions, sectors and citizens respond appropriately to the emergency (e.g. the translation of infection control guidelines into all spoken languages in the city/region so that all sectors of society, and particularly migrant and refugee populations, are informed).

Knowledge and skills

The innovative sourcing and use of new knowledge and skills to inform the emergency response (e.g. the establishment of ad hoc virtual capacity building programmes and mentoring schemes between experienced emergency response staff and colleagues with limited knowledge and previous experience).

Responsiveness and effectiveness

Changes that ensure the effective, flexible and timely response of the city government to the emergency, both at the outset and as the situation develops (e.g. temporary suspension of procurement procedures to ensure that resources can more flexibly be deployed in the emergency response).

Local response and strategic direction

For example, the establishment of new approaches that strike a balance between the effective provision of a cohesive and unified strategic direction at the wider city or regional level, whilst also enabling local decision-makers to manage the situation in their areas with context-specific policies and strategies (e.g. establishing a centralised strategic recovery committee with representatives of local areas, whilst also leaving space for the implementation of locally developed recovery strategies).

Communication and consultation

The use of new channels of communication and consultation with citizens and stakeholders (e.g. the regular use of online citizen surveys to come to a better understanding of the issues associated with social distancing and lockdown measures).

Gender and governance

For example, the mainstreaming of gender perspectives in the emergency response and recovery plans to ensure a gender sensitive response that acknowledges that women often experience the impacts of the virus and response measures differently, and to ensure that they are not disproportionately affected by the emergency (e.g. establishing a taskforce to check in on vulnerable women during lockdown.)