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ABOUT THE PANDEMIC CENTRE

The Pandemic Center at the University of Bergen (UiB) is a leading interdisciplinary research and education hub. We are dedicated to understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by pandemics and other health crises.

In response to the global COVID-19 crisis, the center was established to unite experts from diverse fields within public health, psychology, arts and design mathematics, law, and the human and social sciences. This collaborative effort aims to foster and maintain over time innovative research and develop inclusive and effective policies.

Our mission is to enhance sustainability and societal resilience through cutting-edge research, education, and collaboration with national and international partners.

WWW.UIB.NO/EN/PANDEMIC

THE DIRECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON 2024



While the SARS-CoV-2 virus continues to cause illness and fatalities globally, the COVID-19 pandemic as an invasive threat in our daily lives has largely receded from memory. In October 2024, the Pandemic Centre celebrated its fourth anniversary, and as we approach the fifth anniversary of the lockdown in Norway, the University of Bergen has invited stakeholders from various institutions across the country to commemorate this significant milestone.

We have learnt much from what happened and that should be celebrated.

However, numerous questions about the pandemic recovery in Norway remain unanswered: Are the rising numbers of sick leave due to diminished immune responses or behavioral changes during the pandemic?

Have the learning patterns and mental health of children and adolescents been permanently altered after prolonged school closures and reduced social interactions? Are migrants, individuals with disabilities, and those in prisons—who were severely impacted during the pandemic—recovering within health systems now better equipped to address health inequalities?

Beyond Norway, the world faces a convergence of multiple, interconnected crises that have overshadowed the focus on pandemics: climate change, increasing antibiotic resistance, declining global immunization rates, and geopolitical shifts threatening the role of international agencies like the World Health Organization. The dangers of fake news and disinformation are central to many of these challenges, as they were during the pandemic. In this regard, the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning to improve surveillance and preparedness should be harnessed to provide timely, correct, and personalized information without endangering privacy and security.

To be better prepared for the next pandemic, we must continue generating evidence on the pandemic consequences and recovery, and building and maintaining trust among researchers, the media, health authorities, and civil society. Following our vision to contribute to better preparedness for health crises, in 2024 the Pandemic Centre prioritized advancing three key areas in close collaboration with non-academic partners: enhancing information and collaboration with the media, advancing interdisciplinary climate health research, and developing explainable AI models that are legally sound.

Once more, I am really proud to present in this report the work done by the Pandemic Centre and all affiliated partners during 2024. This work has been possible thanks to every single member of the team, the strategic working group, our partners and the University of Bergen. I hope you enjoy reading and please contact us for more information.

Esperanza Diaz

MEET THE PEOPLE

DIRECTOR AND STRATEGIC WORKING GROUP



Professor Esperanza Diaz
Director Pandemic Centre
Faculty of Medicine



Professor Kristin Greve-Isdahl Mohn
Faculty of Medicine



Professor Svein A. Skålevåg
Faculty of Humanities



Professor Eirik Holmøyvik
Faculty of Law



Professor Bjørn Sætre
Faculty of Psychology



Professor Lise Rakner
Faculty of Social Sciences



Professor Guttorm Alendal
Faculty of Science and
Technology



Professor Ashley Booth
Faculty of Fine Arts, Music
and Design



Professor Simon Øverland
Center for International Health

ADMINISTRATION



Andrea Magugliani
Head of Administration
*until April 2024



Mirey Alfarah
Acting Head of Administration
*June-October 2024



Gøril Vikøren Nøkleby
Head of Administration
*from October 2024



Paul André Sommerfeldt
Communication adviser

RESEARCHERS



Preben Aavitsland
Professor II 20%



Oddvar Kaarbø
Professor 10%*



Marit Voltersvik
Assistant Professor 5%

*position paid by a donation by Agnethe Harbitz



Prabhjot Kour
Post doctoral fellow



Pierina Benavente
PhD candidate



Kim Alexander Haugland
PhD candidate



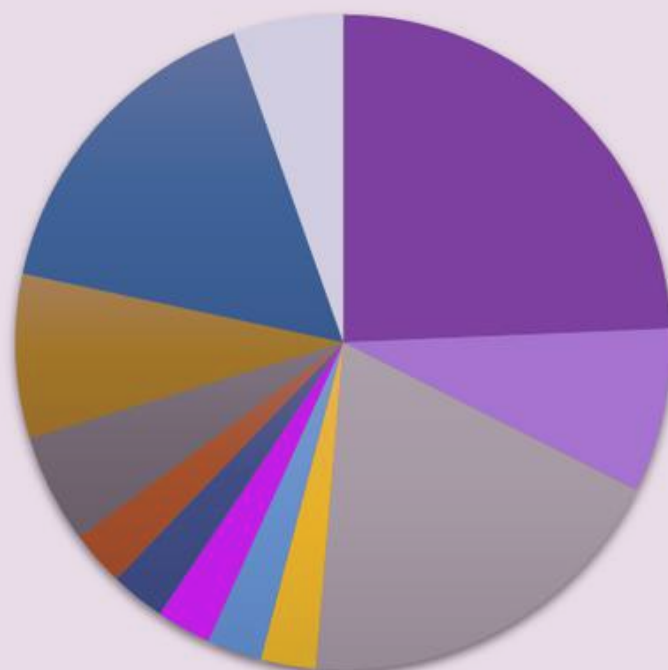
Anders Kuvaas Herting
PhD candidate

AFFILIATED RESEARCHERS

17 professors
3 associate professors
3 researchers
1 senior lecturer
1 assistant professor
1 post doc.
3 PhD's
7 master's students

INTERDISCIPLINARITY

- Pandemic Centre
- Fac. of medicine
- Fac. Of Science and Technology
- Fac. Of Law
- Fac. of Psychology
- Fac. of Humanities
- Fac. of Fine Art, Music and Design
- Fac. of Social Sciences
- HVL
- NERSC
- Bjerknes center
- Bergen Municipality



RESEARCH

Research is essential for the centre's existence, development, and foundation.

In 2024, the Pandemic Centre made significant progress in understanding how to improve public health responses and preparedness through research collaborations with national and international partners.

Selection of publications in 2024:

Frontiers in Public Health

Living infodemics across borders: Experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic among migrants from India living in Norway by Prabhjot Kour, SH Adari, Bernadette Kumar and Esperanza Diaz

Archives of Public Health

Norwegian "dugnad" as a rhetorical device in public health communication during the COVID-19 pandemic. A qualitative study from immigrant's perspectives by Esperanza Dias et.al

Journal of Clinical Epidemiology

Panel stacking is a threat to consensus statement validity by Preben Aavitsland et.al



Archives of Public Health

Cultural factors influencing COVID-19-related perceptions and behavior, seen from immigrants' own perspective – a qualitative study in Norway by Solveig Vederhus and Eirik Myhre et al.

PLoS Computational Biology

Modeling geographic vaccination strategies for COVID-19 in Norway by Preben Aavitsland et.al.

European Journal of Public Health

COVID-19-related worries: A longitudinal study comparing migrants and non-migrants in Norway by P Benavente Velando et.al

In 2024, master's students at the Pandemic Centre made significant contributions to our research efforts. Their projects cover a range of critical topics, including:

COVID-19 Vaccine Uptake

Tarteel Eissa conducted a study on vaccine uptake among Syrian refugees in Norway, providing insights into factors influencing vaccination rates.

Cultural Perceptions

Solveig Vederhus and Eirik Myhre investigated cultural factors influencing COVID-19-related perceptions and behaviors among immigrants.

Infodemic Experiences

Sai Harish Adari explored the experiences of Indian migrants in Norway with the COVID-19 infodemic, highlighting the challenges faced in accessing accurate information.

Pandemic Preparedness

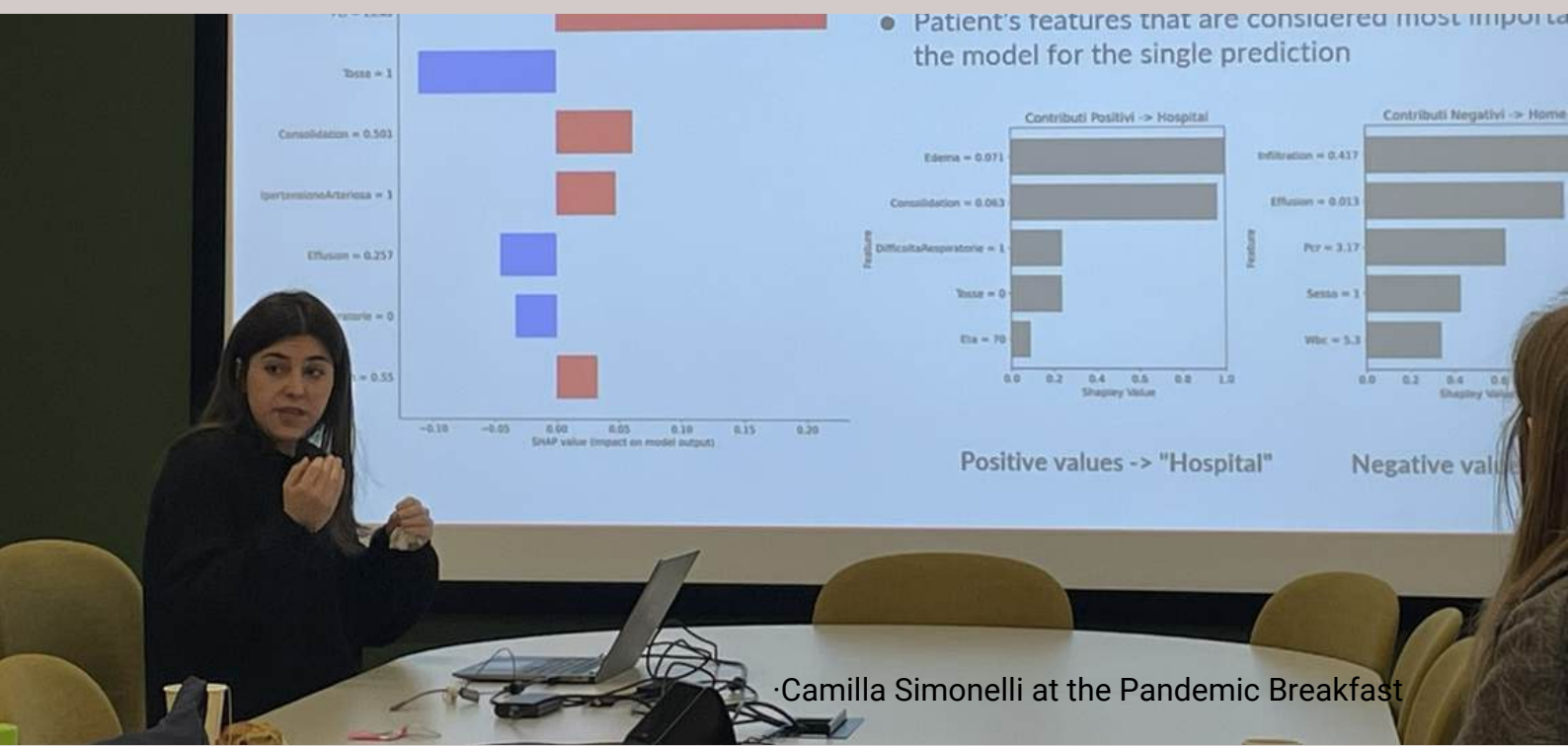
Fullbright student Leah E. Balter assessed the impact of pandemic preparedness on Norway's response to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

Dialogue with Immigrant Women

Gemma Kwamboka Agata examined the post-pandemic dialogue between researchers and older immigrant women in Norway, shedding light on their unique experiences.

Survey AlfabetoXAI residents

Camilla Simonelli, visiting student from University of Pavia, Italy. Alfabeto project: a tool created to support health care professionals in triage.

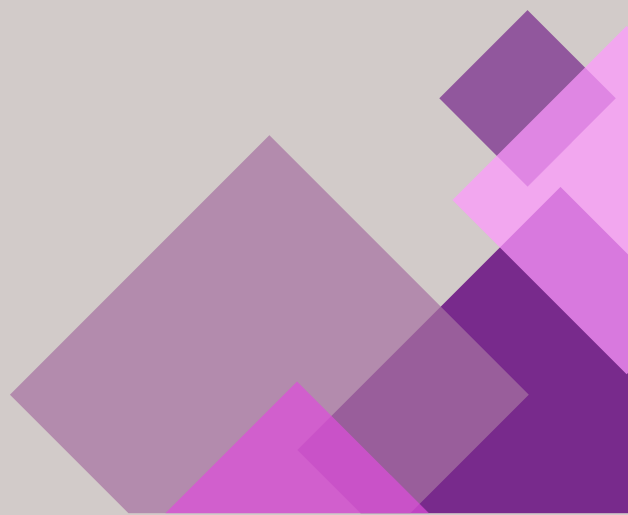


Camilla Simonelli at the Pandemic Breakfast



Bachelor student at Faculty of Fine Arts, Music and Design, Othilie Emanuelsen, presented her installation “preparedness-closet” both at the International Conference in October and the Research Catalyst in November

These collaborations and student contributions are crucial in enhancing our preparedness for future pandemics and ensuring swift responses to emerging health threats. Additionally, our research has been instrumental in shaping healthcare strategies and policies to support vulnerable populations during health crises.



EDUCATION AND DISSEMINATION

Activities and courses at the Pandemic Centre are designed to equip students and professionals with comprehensive inter-disciplinary knowledge and skills in pandemic preparedness and response to health crises.

In October we successfully arranged yet another international master/ PhD course in Bergen.

The aim of the course was to enhance the dialogue among students from different countries and disciplines and together analyse future health crises reflecting on dealing with complexity and uncertainty in order to achieve a better understanding of the generation and interaction of knowledge that is used to meet global health threats in society.



Selection of activities arranged by the Pandemic Centre or contributed to in 2024

- “ Response conference 13 February: Professor Diaz in the panel : What global trends are putting pressure on democracy and the rule-based global order – and what can we do about it?
- “ Two-day course approved by the Norwegian Medical Association in September. Program for handling Complex Health Crises
- “ Project improving dialogues Workshops March 5, April 4 and an open evening arrangement at Bergen Public Library September 18
- “ Interview NRK Radio – Studio 2 - September 20 with professor Il Preben Aavitsland: How has the pandemic affected our relationship with illness?
- “ Interview NRK Radio with professor Esperanza Diaz – Four years since the pandemic
- “ Plan- and building permit conference in Stavanger, November 12. Assistant professor Marit Voltersvik held presentation on how climate adaptation requires coordination and cooperation across sectors and government levels.
- “ Stand at the Christie conference April 23
- “ The 17. European Public Health Conference in Portugal in November. Presentations and posters under the heading: Sailing the Waves of European Public Health: exploring the sea of innovation
- “ EU project UniHealth: Kick-off meeting in Crete February and visit from partners from France and UK in April
- “ Educational project with Center for Pharmacy and CEU Universidad San Pablo – developing COIL/Blended Intensive Programme
- “ Visiting Fullbright student Leah Balter 2024
- “ Arendalsuka – largest political gathering in Norway. Participation in panel debate: Pandemic, war, and terror: The importance of Health Faculties for Preparedness
- “ Doctoral defence Robert Neil Whittaker April 26. Main supervisor professor Il Preben Aavitsland



CLIMATE HEALTH INITIATIVE

In 2024 we launched the Climate Health Initiative (CHI) to address the critical intersection between climate change and public health.

This pioneering initiative aims to enhance our understanding of how climate change impacts health and to develop effective strategies for mitigation and adaptation.

CHI brings together experts from diverse fields, including climate science, epidemiology, public health, and policy studies, fostering interdisciplinary research and collaboration. Through innovative research projects, educational programs, and community engagement, the initiative seeks to provide scientific insights and practical solutions to improve health outcomes in the face of climate change.



By integrating knowledge across disciplines and working closely with local, national, and international partners, the Climate Health Initiative at UiB is committed to building a healthier and more resilient global community.

AFFILIATED MEMBERS OF CHI

FACULTY OF MEDICINE, UIB

- Professor Esperanza Diaz
- Professor Ane Johannessen
- Professor Simon Øverland

FACULTY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, UiB and BJERKNES CENTER FOR CLIMATE RESEARCH

- Professor Stefan Pieter Sobolowski
- Professor Tor Eldevik
- Professor/Director Kikki Flesche Kleiven
- Professor Noel Keenlyside
- Senior adviser Friederike Hoffmann

FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY, UiB

- Professor Gro Mjeldheim Sandal

BERGEN MUNICIPALITY

- Climate director Stina Ellevseth Oseland
- Chief Infection Control Officer Marit Voltersvik

WESTERN NORWAY UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES

- Associate professor Maria Nordheim Alme
- Senior lecturer Joost Van Wijchen

NANSEN ENVIRONMENTAL AND REMOTE SENSING CENTER

- Senior researcher Roshin Pappukutty Raj
- Senior researcher Yiguo Wang
- Researcher Victoria Miles



CLIMATE HEALTH INITIATIVE ACTIVITIES

Could the Ocean be the key to pandemic preparedness?

Seminar at Statsraaden Bar in Bergen

18th April

-Professor Morten Hammerborg: the historic origins and repercussions of the cholera outbreak in Bergen in 1849-49.

-Professor Noel Keenlyside: new opportunities to enhance our predictions of pandemics

-Professor Oddrun Gulbrandsen: intersection between food, pandemics, and the ocean

-Professor Il Preben Aavitsland: the significance of the ocean in the emergence of new epidemics

Webinars

18.10

Adjunct professor Jeanette Magnus, Head Centre for Global Health, UiO

-Planetary Health: The Norwegian Planetary Health Alliance (NORPath)

22.11

Professor Håvard Haarstad, CET/UIB

-Presentation of Centre for Climate and Energy Transformation (CET)

13.12

Research director Kristin Aunan, CICERO

-Deadly heat in Europe: findings from the CICERO led research project EXHAUSTION

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Preparedness for multicrises

On October 28th, the Pandemic Centre arranged our international conference in Bergen. This was the 4th annual conference and second with international participants. 70 professionals from a number of European institutions gathered to discuss topics like governance in complexity, AI, planetary health and media-academic collaboration.

Keynote speaker Professor Roger Strand from UiB delivered an insightful speech on governance in complexity, followed by a panel debate on public health preparedness moderated by professor Lise Rakner. Professor Kayvan Bozorgmehr from Bielefeld University in Germany took part in the panel discussion and commented:



– I think the importance of this conference is to discuss big questions around multiple crises that intersect and that creates challenges for society and human beings worldwide.



Professor Preben Aavitsland from the Pandemic Centre also contributed in a discussion on past and future public health preparedness with professor and historian Svein Atle Skålevåg. They were followed by a conversation on media's role between Martin Larsen Hirth, journalist in Bergens Tidende, and Camilla Stoltenberg, head of NORCE and former head of the Norwegian Public Health Institute.

The conference highlighted the importance of interdisciplinary approaches and the integration of scientific insights with practical solutions to enhance global health resilience.

PANDEMIC BREAKFAST

The Pandemic breakfast a monthly meeting place to present ongoing research on pandemics and inspire collaboration and exchange between disciplines in order to understand health crises from multiple perspectives.

In 2024 we have arranged nine breakfast meetings with a wide range of topics related to pandemics and other health crises. The meetings are now hybrid in form, extending the reach of both presenters and participants. This change has been successful and will be continued in 2025.



Professors Ane Johannessen and Anne Lise Fimreite presented their research in November.

RESEARCH CATALYST

The Pandemic Centre Research Catalyst is a lunch meeting every second month, held with the goal of promoting interdisciplinary cooperation among students and early career researchers working on pandemic-related research projects. In 2024 we invited to six Research Catalysts with 12 presenters in total.

This past year we focused on multicrises. In addition to presentations on research projects that explicitly deal with pandemics, we featured presentations on topics as diverse as climate science and how art and design can help us reflect on crises preparedness.



PANDEMIC CENTRE
University of Bergen (UiB)

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