

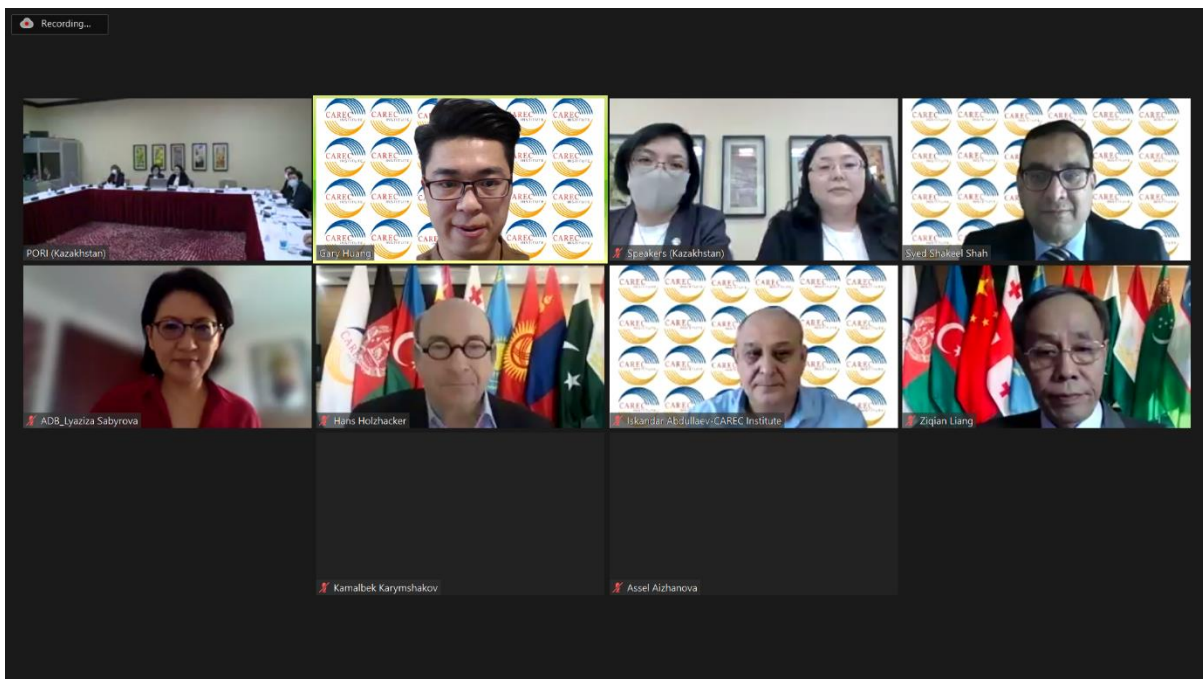


**CAREC Institute**

**Workshop Report**

**Public Attitudes Towards COVID-19 Vaccination  
in Selected CAREC Countries**

**12 March 2021**



## Disclaimer

The CAREC Institute workshop report and policy brief series is a forum for stimulating discussion and eliciting feedback on ongoing and recently completed research and workshops undertaken by the CAREC Institute staff, consultants, or resource persons. The series deals with key economic and development issues, particularly those facing the CAREC region, as well as conceptual or analytical issues relating to program or policy design and implementation.

This report is one of the outputs of the virtual workshop titled “Public Attitudes Towards COVID-19 Vaccination in Selected CAREC Countries” jointly organized by the CAREC Institute and the Public Opinion Research Institute of Kazakhstan (PORI).

The workshop was delivered on 12 March 2021 with the aim of sharing the results of the vaccination perception polls in seven CAREC countries conducted under the CAREC Institute-PORI project. There were significant differences and similarities among CAREC countries discussed, and what lessons for vaccination and information campaigns in the respective countries could be drawn. There were also areas of potential cooperation among CAREC countries explored.

The report was drafted by Mr. Gary Huang, E-Learning Specialist, the CAREC Institute and edited by Mr. Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi, Chief of Capacity Building Division, the CAREC Institute. Mr. Rovshan Mahmudov, Senior Capacity Building Specialist of the CAREC Institute has contributed to the report.

The views expressed are the views of the authors of this report, and do not necessarily reflect the views of workshop participants or the CAREC Institute, its funding entities, or its Governing Council. The CAREC Institute does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this paper and accepts no responsibility for any consequences of its use. The terminology used may not necessarily be consistent with the CAREC Institute's official terms.

This work is available under the Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 IGO license (CC BY 3.0 IGO) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/igo/>. By using the content of this publication, you agree to be bound by the terms of this license. This CC license does not apply to other copyright materials in this paper. If the material is attributed to another source, please contact the copyright owner or publisher of that source for permission to reproduce it. The CAREC Institute cannot be held liable for any claims that arise as a result of your use of the material.

Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Institute  
No. 376 Nanchang Road, Urumqi, Xinjiang, the PRC  
f: +86-991-8891151

[LinkedIn](#)

[Weibo](#)

[km@carecinstitute.org](mailto:km@carecinstitute.org)

[www.carecinstitute.org](http://www.carecinstitute.org)

## Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CI	CAREC Institute
COVID	Corona Virus Disease
PORI	Public Opinion Research Institute
PRC	People's Republic of China
WWII	World War Two

## Table of Contents

Abbreviations .....	3
Introduction .....	5
Welcoming and Opening Remarks .....	6
Session 1: Presentations of Main Poll Results.....	7
Session 2: Regional and Country Perspectives.....	8
Closing Remarks .....	9
Appendices.....	10
Agenda .....	10
List of organizers from the CAREC Institute .....	12

## Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has triggered a global health emergency, which has quickly morphed into an economic crisis of unprecedented proportions, not seen since WWII. Loss of lives and the mounting economic woes have affected the livelihood of millions of people throughout the world. The impact on the CAREC countries has been severe, with the extent yet to be fully gauged.

Overcoming the health threats and related economic uncertainties depends on various factors— and especially on the availability of vaccines against COVID-19. Securing broad and effective immunization programs for the population is vital, not only for preserving health and lives, but also for ensuring robust economic recovery in the CAREC region.

A number of reliable vaccines have become available meanwhile. Now, the CAREC countries face the challenge to reach the population in a fast and comprehensive way. Well-designed methods and channels of distribution of vaccines and well-selected information for the public are key for success. The CAREC Institute together with the Public Opinion Research Institute (Kazakhstan) conducted population polls about attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccinations in seven CAREC countries: Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The sample size was 1000 persons per country representing the various strata of the population.

The polls were meant to help provide governments with information for properly designing their distribution policies considering the concerns of the general public and prepare successful awareness raising and information campaigns. Adverse attitudes among populations against vaccination could seriously jeopardize efforts to overcome the COVID-19 pandemic, while re-enforcing science-based arguments should be reassuring.

The results showed that there is a considerable lack of information and resistance against vaccinations in the CAREC region. The report presented at the workshop analyzed the arguments put forward by the interviewees in favor and against vaccination. An interesting outcome was observed, for example, that in all CAREC countries the pro-vaccination argument “I want to protect my family” counted much higher than the argument “I want to protect myself.” The report discussed also how attitudes were influenced by previous health and economic exposure to the pandemic and by the socio-demographic background.

## Welcoming and Opening Remarks

**Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova**, Principal Regional Economist from the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Central and West Asia Regional Department, opened the workshop by welcoming all participants. Ms. Sabyrova stressed the importance of vaccines to help contain the pandemic and the crucial role of vaccination for economic recovery. She applauded the research conducted by the CAREC Institute and partners regarding the COVID-19 pandemic in the CAREC region.

**Mr. Syed Shakeel Shah**, Director of the CAREC Institute, pointed out that the crisis of COVID-19 inflicted on the world the disruption of global trade, abrupt and prolonged slowdown of national economies, extreme pressures on governments for delicate balancing of competing demands of sectors, and a stretch on public welfare systems to cater for a very large number of unemployed. People were swamped with a bewildering array of conspiracy theories, well-packaged dis-information, and pseudo-scientific analyses covering each and every aspect of the crisis. He underlined the importance to understand public perceptions scientifically so that vaccination programs could be administered to a large segment of the public. Against this backdrop, Mr. Shah introduced the project of surveying attitudes towards COVID-19 vaccination in seven CAREC countries, which was conducted by the CAREC Institute (CI) and the Public Opinion Research Institute (Kazakhstan) (PORI).

## Session 1: Presentations of Main Poll Results

Chaired by **Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova**, in this session **Ms. Botagoz Rakisheva**, Director for Project from PORI, and **Mr. Hans Holzhacker**, Chief Economist from CI, presented results of the conducted polls.

**Ms. Rakisheva** started with the basic sampling parameters of the polls. One thousand people at the age of 18 and older from different regions of seven CAREC countries participated in the survey responding to a questionnaire of 27 questions from December 2020 to January 2021. She also analyzed the demographic structure of respondents from the perspectives of gender, age, and marital status. The survey demonstrated that:

- About 70% of the respondents of the total sample in the seven countries were concerned about the consequences of COVID-19 both on the economy and on private lives.
- Nearly 60% of the respondents followed strictly the safety measures.
- 15% of respondents had experience of being infected with COVID-19 and 15% think they were sick without symptoms.
- Almost 40% of respondents had family members, friends, or colleagues who were infected with COVID-19.
- 20% believe the pandemic is overrated or made up.
- Only half of respondents considered that vaccination would be effective and 25% considered it completely ineffective.
- Around 70% heard about the availability of COVID-19 vaccines.
- 18% showed low trust in a vaccine.
- 57% would be willing to get vaccinated under the premise that vaccination is free and recognized as safe by the relevant authorities.

**Ms. Botagoz Rakisheva** presented as two main arguments pro or contra vaccination as evident from the polls: about 80% of respondents accepted vaccination for the reason “I want to protect my family,” on the other hand, 40% refused it because they were concerned about side effects. This is also in line with the result from a survey conducted by the World Value Survey which suggested that “family” weighs the most in terms of the importance of life domains in the CAREC countries.

When it came to the question - “Do you think it is necessary to vaccinate the entire population or only high-risk group?” - the opinions were quite divergent among countries. Seventy six percent of respondents from Tajikistan answered “all population,” compared with less than 20% in Kazakhstan.

The source of information was another focus of this survey. It showed that 68% of respondents from CAREC countries “often” or “sometimes” got information on the COVID-19 pandemic, and the main sources were obtained from the television.

**Mr. Hans Holzhacker** provided more details of country perspectives and gave a comparison among seven countries. The data revealed that 62% of respondents from Mongolia trusted vaccines while only 30% trusted vaccines in Kazakhstan. This is a main reason why 87% of respondents from Mongolia wanted to get vaccinated while only 28% from Kazakhstan thought the same way. However, in general, people who had experience with COVID-19 were much more likely to desire vaccination. In terms of information sources, respondents in different age groups including the youth, turned to TV for information, excluding respondents from Pakistan and Uzbekistan.

**Mr. Hans Holzacker** also correlated variables and tried to go into depth of their interactions. He found that people who got information from social media were clearly less likely to get vaccinated while those who got information from medical staff desired to get vaccinated most. Consistently, doctors and nurses were most trusted, and people had strong desire to protect their families in all countries. The main three arguments against COVID-19 vaccination were safety concerns, disregard of danger, and disbelief in vaccines.

**Mr. Hans Holzacker** and his research team also provided some policy recommendations on how to structure information campaigns about vaccinations. He suggested to **i)** base campaigns on doctors and nurses as they are the most trusted information source; **ii)** use the internet and social media, encourage person-to-person communications on various levels, but focus on running information campaigns especially through TV; **iii)** focus on concerns about vaccine safety; **iv)** share positive experiences of countries where vaccination process is already more advanced; **v)** let people who feel seriously sick share their experiences with COVID-19; **vi)** reach out to people with education levels below secondary education; **vii)** use especially the family protection argument to convince people to take part in COVID-19 vaccination.

At the end of this session, many questions from active participants were raised and addressed by panelists. A few typical questions on methodology were picked up by **Ms. Sabyrova**. **Ms. Rakisheva** explained the survey was conducted by professional companies in each country using developed methodologies while taking lots of factors into consideration, such as budget constraints, time schedule, cultural and social peculiarity, etc.

## Session 2: Regional and Country Perspectives

**Ms. Botagoz Rakisheva** chaired this session, in which one speaker was invited to address the workshop as keynote speaker, and three speakers from the Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan were invited as country representatives to present their country perspectives.

**Ms. Alua Zholdybalina**, Deputy Director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, gave the keynote speech titled “The main trends in vaccination: world experience and Kazakhstan.” She started with the developments and usage of high-ranked vaccines and quoted a survey conducted by the Imperial College of London in November 2020. The survey found that main negative attitude towards vaccinations mainly resulted from concerns about vaccine safety, implementation mechanisms, general skepticism towards vaccinations, and disinformation. Then, she introduced the three main phases of step-by-step vaccination in Kazakhstan related to the vulnerability of population groups.

A survey conducted by the Rapid Monitoring Bureau of Public Opinion about the attitude of Kazakhstani citizens toward COVID-19 vaccination showed that only 14% of respondents considered vaccines effective, which is in line with the result of the CI-PORI survey.

She concluded that confidence in the health system as a whole is a key factor for the success of collective immunization efforts.

**Ms. Gulbara Ishenapysova**, Director of the Republican Center for Immunoprophylaxis of the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic introduced the document titled “National Preparation Plan for COVID-19 Vaccine Delivery and Vaccination, COVAX Mechanism.” The Kyrgyz Republic was invited to join the COVAX mechanism in July 2020. Since then, a working group has been formed to work with COVAX,



and a step-by-step strategic plan is being developed. Besides the COVAX mechanism, the Kyrgyz Republic has signed agreements with Russia and the PRC for vaccine supply.

**Mr. Irfan Shahzad Takalvi**, Founding President of Eurasian Century Institute (Islamabad), highlighted the current situation with vaccination in Pakistan. First, he reported the number of cases and deaths, which COVID-19 brought to Pakistan. Then, he talked about how this pandemic has changed people's lives, and about measures taken to respond to it. He also pointed out that although he has no survey to support his argument, he believes that part of Pakistanis has remained skeptical about the actual existence??? of the pandemic. According to his statement, four vaccines have been approved by the Pakistan government. As for the supply side, Pakistan has received 5 million doses of vaccine from China as a gift and is expecting 17 million doses of vaccine from the COVAX platform.

**Ms. Nurshai Azimbayeva**, Head of Directorate for Control of Vaccine-Resistant Infections of the Committee of Sanitary and Epidemiological Control of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan, talked about the national infection prevention strategy and vaccination mechanisms in Kazakhstan. She reported the vaccination progress made so far and believed that comprehensive preparatory work for vaccination has been undertaken.

At the end of this session, **Ms. Rakisheva** thanked all speakers for their informative speeches and highlighted the importance of research for evidence-based policy making in this crucial area.

## Closing Remarks

**Mr. Ziqian Liang**, Deputy Director One of the CAREC Institute, concluded the workshop by some closing remarks.

Mr. Ziqian Liang stressed that vaccination against COVID-19 is crucial globally for health, the economy, and returning to normal life. In the meantime, a decent number of safe and effective vaccines were invented, and large-scale production has begun. Initiatives such as COVAX, as well as some other bilateral and multilateral initiatives by ADB and multinational organizations, have been launched. The PRC has declared its vaccines as a global public good. He pointed out that there is the need to organize successful vaccination campaigns and that this workshop made important contributions on research how to best structure vaccination campaigns in the CAREC region.

Mr. Ziqian Liang closed this workshop by thanking all participants, especially the panelists. He also thanked ADB and PORI for their support and contribution.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Appendices

### Agenda

AGENDA	
15:15-15:30 Chinese Standard Time (CHT)	<b>Connection to E-Platform</b> and Introduction of House Rules  <b>Mr. Gary Huang</b> , E-Learning Specialist, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute
15:30-15:45(CHT)	<b>Opening and Welcoming Remarks</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova</b>, Principal Regional Economist, ADB</li><li>• <b>Mr. Syed Shakeel Shah</b>, Director, CAREC Institute</li></ul>
15:45-15:50(CHT)	<b>Photo Session</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All speakers, moderators and discussants will be requested to switch on their videos in Zoom. A screenshot will be taken.</li></ul>
Presentation of Main Poll Results	
15:50-17:00(CHT)	This session will present the result of the conducted poll.  Moderator: <b>Ms. Lyaziza Sabyrova</b> , Principal Regional Economist, ADB <b>Presentation</b> (20 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms. Botagoz Rakisheva</b>, Director for Projects, Public Opinion Research Institute (Kazakhstan)</li></ul> <b>Q&amp;A Discussion</b> (10 min) <b>Presentation</b> (20 min) <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mr. Hans Holzacker</b>, Chief Economist, CAREC Institute</li></ul> <b>Q&amp;A Discussion</b> (10 min)  10 min Break
Regional and Country-Perspective Presentations	
17:00-17:45(CHT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderator: <b>Ms. Botagoz Rakisheva</b>, Director for Projects, Public Opinion Research Institute (Kazakhstan)</li></ul> <b>Presentations</b> (30 min)  Keynote speaker: <b>Ms. Alua Zholdybalina</b> , Deputy Director of the Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Ms. Gulbara Ishenapysova</b>, Director of the Republican Center for Immunoprophylaxis of the Ministry of Health of the Kyrgyz Republic</li><li>• <b>Mr. Irfan Shahzad Takalvi</b>, Founding President of Eurasian Century Institute (Islamabad)</li><li>• <b>Ms. Nurshai Azimbayeva</b> - Head of the Directorate for Control of Vaccine-Resistant Infections of the Committee of Sanitary and</li></ul>

	<p>Epidemiological Control of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan)</p> <p><b>Q&amp;A Discussion</b> (15 min)</p>
17:45-17:50(CHT)	<p><b>Wrap Up and Way Forward</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Mr. Ziqian Liang</b>, Deputy Director I, CAREC Institute</li></ul>

## List of organizers from the CAREC Institute

### **CAREC Institute**

Mr. Hans Holzacker, Chief Economist, CAREC Institute

Mr. Eisa Khan Ayoob Ayoobi, Chief, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

Mr. Rovshan Mahmudov, Senior Capacity Building Specialist, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute

Mr. Gary He Huang, E-Learning Specialist, Capacity Building Division, CAREC Institute