



Human Rights Institute

25 years promoting and protecting
human rights worldwide

IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor

Release date: 19.06.2020

1. **Gender-based violence and women's health**
2. **LGBTQI+ rights**
3. **Refugee camps**
4. **Prisoners and detainees**
5. **Informal settlements and homelessness**
6. **Disability rights**
7. **Freedom of assembly**

1. Gender-based violence and women's health

South Africa

On 14 June, South Africa's Parliament called for 'bold and resolute' action to curb rising gender-based violence in the country. As the South African government has eased restrictions of movement, implementing the 'Alert Level 3' stage of their Covid-19 lockdown plan, this has caused severe ramifications for victims of gender-based violence. According to reports released by the South African Parliament, there has been an increase in violent crime, especially murders, since South Africa entered Alert Level 3. Two weeks after the nine-week lockdown, three women were brutally murdered. The South African President, Cyril Ramaphosa, linked a surge in rapes and killings of women to the end of the country's strict coronavirus lockdown, a 'dark and shameful week' and declared that 'we need to understand what factors are fueling this terrible trend and, as society as a whole, address them urgently'.

Senegal

In Senegal, government-instructed lockdown measures implemented on 2 March have proven to prevent the rapid spread of Covid-19, with 4,155 confirmed cases and 51 deaths as of 5 June. The early detection of Covid-19 on 2 March and the implementation of 'stay at home' measures subsequently after has been considered successful in curbing the spread of Covid-19. However, a vast number of women are placed in precarious economic and social situations due to the lockdown measures. From 2 March, more than 100 cases of domestic violence have been recorded, according to the Association for the Advancement of Senegalese Women.¹ As the closure of schools increase domestic responsibilities for women, this in turn affects their ability to generate an income and increases financial instabilities and tension in the household.

Women's health

Ukraine

In Ukraine, reports have emerged of more than 100 newborns from Ukrainian surrogate mothers at Kiev-based BioTexCom Centre for Human Reproduction, the largest surrogacy clinic in the world, being stranded, as biological parents are unable to travel nationally or internationally because of Covid-19 related border restrictions.² As the Ukraine fails to report on the number of babies born to surrogate

¹ www.ceci.ca/en/news-events/women-unite-against-covid-19-in-senegal

² www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/15/the-stranded-babies-of-kyiv-and-the-women-who-give-birth-for-money

mothers, this in turn creates a huge gap in analyzing how many newborns and surrogate mothers need support during this period. Further, as Ukrainian law only permits newborns to have the citizenship of their biological parents if they are present at the time of birth, problems may arise relating to newborn's citizenship and how biological parents can prevent immigration-related issues. Lyudmila Denisova, a human rights ombudsman for Ukraine's Parliament has stated that 'stranded babies underscore a pressing need for the country to bar foreigners from hiring Ukrainian women as surrogate mothers.'³

Iran

In Iran, state hospitals and clinics have withdrawn from performing vasectomies and prescribing contraceptive pills in an attempt to increase population growth, according to the Guardian.⁴ Iran has justified this move given the decrease in the birth rate from marriages. As the annual population growth is dropping below one per cent, this could result in Iran becoming one of the world's oldest countries in the next 30 years, according to the Iranian health ministry⁵. Further, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has been calling for women to have more children, saying he wants the current population of 80 million to grow to 150 million. Several factors for the decline in birth-rate have been linked to poor economic conditions, which in turn affects the rate of marriage, and women pursuing further education as opposed to early marriage. This move is considered as a great setback to women's rights in Iran, namely their access to sexual and reproductive services, education, and economic living standards. Further, this increases the pressure on young women to give birth, and can lead to severe, detrimental effects on the psychological and physical wellbeing of women in Iran.

Egypt

In Egypt, reports have emerged of three girls - under the age of 18-undergoing FGM under the pretext of receiving a coronavirus vaccination.⁶ According to Plan International, a doctor visited the girls' house after their father told them they would receive a 'vaccination', subsequently after; the girls were reportedly drugged before undergoing FGM. Under Egypt's Child Protection laws of 2008, anyone who performs FGM can be faced with three to 15 years in prison. However, a 2016 survey by the UN Children's Fund showed that 87 per cent of women and girls aged 15-49 in Egypt have undergone the procedure.⁷ Cases such as these highlight that more needs to be done to prevent young girls from circumcision, and eradicate the practise altogether.⁸

³ www.nytimes.com/2020/05/16/world/europe/ukraine-coronavirus-surrogate-babies.html

⁴ www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/15/iran-bans-vasectomies-and-contraceptives-to-improve-birth-rate#:~:text=Iran's%20state%20hospitals%20and%20clinics,official%20has%20told%20state%20media.

⁵ www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-53048719

⁶ <https://plan-international.org/news/2020-06-16-girls-risk-covid-19-threatens-leave-african-children-behind>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-womens-day-egypt/egypt-struggles-to-end-female-genital-mutilation-idUSKCN1GK1ZL>

⁸ <https://egypt.unfpa.org/en/node/22544>

Pakistan

In Pakistan, the Ministry of Justice released a report, *Gendered Impact and Implications of Covid-19 in Pakistan* highlighting the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on Pakistani women and girls. The report indicates that only 55 per cent of women have access to adequate healthcare, and only 34 per cent have reported consulting with a doctor or a medical professional on health-related problems. These figures prove the difficulties in women seeking assistance during the Covid-19 outbreak, as women are less likely to seek medical attention. Further, as gendered roles are prevalent in some communities, the additional domestic workload on women, coupled with a reluctance to seek medical attention, increases the chances of women continuing to work even in poor health. Further, a large majority of nurses and health workers are female, and so as Pakistani women are at the forefront of identifying and treating patients with Covid-19, they are at a greater risk of exposure to the virus.⁹

2. LGBTQI+ Rights

As the Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the disproportionate treatment of the LGBTQI+ community, on 10 June, the [IBAHRI has signed a joint-statement to the UN's Human Rights Council](#) in order to urge authorities to safeguard the rights of LGBTQI+ persons during the global pandemic.

United States

On 15 June 2020, the US Supreme Court ruled that the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects workers from workplace discrimination, is now applicable to sexual orientation. Prior to this, more than half of the states in the US could legally fire workers for their sexual orientation. Although, national statistics on Covid-19 do not report on sexual orientation, data collected by the Human Rights Campaign shows that 26 per cent of transgender people of colour have become unemployed due to Covid-19, compared to 17 per cent of LGBTQI+ people and 12 per cent of the general population¹⁰. Further, for trans people unable to get suitable employment in traditional workplace environments, a high proportion turn to sex work, which has continued into the pandemic, and therefore places them in an even more vulnerable position.¹¹

Greece

On 15 June, Greek authorities imposed regulations on sex workers, urging them to keep the details of clients, subsequently losing their anonymity. Anna Kouroupou, a transgender sex workers and manager of a support group for sex workers, declared that this move would leave sex workers out of business.

⁹ <https://unic.org.pk/files/2020/04/Gendered-Impact-and-Implications-of-COVID-19-in-Pakistan.pdf>

¹⁰ www.hrc.org/blog/hrc-psb-research-release-data-on-disproportionate-economic-impact-of-covid

¹¹ www.nytimes.com/2020/06/16/us/coronavirus-covid-transgender-lgbtq-jobs.html?auth=login-google

As a vast amount of sex workers received no government support during the lockdown period, and were unemployed due to lockdown measures, these new government-instructed measures could force brothels to work ‘underground’, increasing the danger for sex workers.¹²

3. Refugee camps

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to wage into the second half of the year, refugees, migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) continue to face overwhelming humanitarian challenges. Whilst last week saw asylum seekers off of the coasts of Greece, Malaysia, Bangladesh and Tunisia being rejected at national borders, the global community came together in preparation for the launch of Refugee Week 2020 and the upcoming World Refugee Day.

Greece

Last week, Greece came under vast international scrutiny, after several reports from local and international agencies indicated that the number of pushbacks of asylum seekers arriving at sea and land borders has significantly increased since March.¹³ Only 3,000 asylum seekers have arrived in Greece since the beginning of March, a stark decrease compared to previous years.¹⁴ Yet, the UNCHR has reported a staggering increase in pushbacks, with asylum seekers being increasingly denied entry at local Greek borders.¹⁵

Footage received by *The Times* last week depicted a group of masked men, boarding a boat containing asylum seekers off the Greek coast, in order to remove its outboard motor.¹⁶ A few hours later, a Greek coastguard vessel was seen to create waves, to push the boat back towards the Turkish waters where it came from.¹⁷ Both instances have sparked global outcry, with UNHCR spokesperson Babar Baloch urging Greece to investigate the various allegations of its migrant pushbacks and better guarantee the rights and protection of all asylum seekers, in a press briefing at Palais des Nations in Geneva last Friday.¹⁸ Yet, with Greece already struggling to meet international standards for asylum seekers

¹² <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-greece-sexworkers/greek-sex-workers-criticise-covid-safety-guidelines-idUKKBN2301AJ>

¹³ www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-12-june-2020/

¹⁴ www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/6/5ee33a6f4/unhcr-calls-greece-investigate-pushbacks-sea-land-borders-turkey.html#_ga=2.219059033.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ www.thetimes.co.uk/article/masked-men-terrify-migrants-as-they-force-boats-in-aegean-back-to-turkey-tnwz6vhxk#_ga=2.220519384.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

¹⁷ *ibid*

¹⁸ www.unhcr.org/news/briefing/2020/6/5ee33a6f4/unhcr-calls-greece-investigate-pushbacks-sea-land-borders-turkey.html#_ga=2.219059033.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

currently residing within national borders, its ability to meet the basic demands of those arriving remains doubtful.

Malaysia

Last Monday saw 269 Rohingya refugees being granted entry into north-west Malaysia, after local coast guards discovered that their makeshift boat was significantly damaged.¹⁹ This comes as a second boat, said to have also departed from Bangladesh at the same time in February, was turned back by local Malaysian authorities.²⁰ The second boat, containing an estimate of 300 Rohingya refugees, has now been stranded at sea for four months.²¹ The boat, containing predominantly women and children, is currently drifting somewhere between Malaysia and Thailand's Joh Adang Island.²² Yet, Thailand remains persistent that the boat is yet to enter Thai waters, whilst Malaysia remains adamant that it is unable to grant asylum to those on board.²³

In a concerning statement last Wednesday, a UNHCR spokesperson in Kuala Lumpur claimed that Malaysia is currently unable to accept the 300 asylum seekers, due to the fact that it is overwhelmed by the process of 'assessing the protection needs' of the 229 asylum seekers already rescued last Monday.²⁴ In response, Human Rights Watch has issued an urgent plea, demanding that either Malaysia or Thailand immediately rescue the Rohingya refugees currently stranded at sea, irrespective of domestic agendas.²⁵ Yet, with both nations remaining consistent in their approach, the fate of the some 300 Rohingya remains unclear.

Tunisia

In a tragic report last week, Tunisia announced that 52 bodies were recovered by local authorities at sea, after a boat sank off of the coast of the Kerkennah Islands.²⁶ The boat, containing some 24 women and 3 children, reportedly departed from the city of Sfax with the intention of arriving in Italy later this year.²⁷ Instead, the boat was found to have sunk sometime between the 4 - 5 June, with local Tunisian authorities now launching an investigation into the matter.²⁸

¹⁹ www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-12-june-2020/

²⁰ [Ibid](#)

²¹ www.benarnews.org/english/news/malaysian/Rohingya-boats-06102020150325.html#_ga=2.152563833.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

²² <https://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-12-june-2020/>

²³ [Ibid](#)

²⁴ www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-12-june-2020/

²⁵ www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/12/malaysia/thailand-allow-rohingya-refugees-ashore#_ga=2.118807369.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

²⁶ www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-12-june-2020/

²⁷ [Ibid](#)

²⁸ https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77058#_ga=2.151443577.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

The instance in Tunisia comes as the UNHCR reported that attempts by asylum seekers seeking to reach Europe by sea from Tunisia has increased ‘three-fold’ between January and May this year, compared to last year.²⁹ In a public statement, Vincent Cochetel, the UNHCR’s Special Envoy for the Central Mediterranean, expressed concern that individuals seeking to leave Tunisia for Europe will continue to increase, particularly as many migrants and refugees continue to lost their due to COVID-19.³⁰ As such, the current situation in Tunisia further highlights the fatal economic effects of the current pandemic on the well-being of refugees, migrants and IDPs, and reaffirms the need for continued financial and humanitarian support from the global community.

Refugee Week & World Refugee Day 2020

Last Sunday saw the launch of Refugee Week 2020, with this week being geared towards several virtual and non-virtual events. The theme of this year’s World Refugee Day, ‘Step with Refugees’, seeks to encourage the global community to better support and stand in solidarity with the thousands of refugees currently fleeing persecution.³¹

Whilst protesters in Australia are defying local quarantine restrictions to protest for the abolition of offshore processing and refugee rights, other nations have pledged to hold local awareness-raising events leading up to World Refugee Day on Friday.³² International organisations such as the World Health Organisation have also sought to use Refugee Week to highlight the various challenges faced by refugees and migrants in the wake of public health threats, in hopes of avoiding issues faced in the current pandemic.³³

4. Prisoners and detainees

Prisoners

UK

In the UK, more than 1,000 prisoners released in order to curb the spread of Covid-19 ended up homeless in England and Wales, according to figures released by Lyn Brown, a Labour MP. These figures, from 23 March to 30 April, show that 840 men, 89 women and 85 young adults (18 – 24) were released, with no alternative housing, and therefore became homeless during global pandemic.³⁴ Charities and organizations have spoken out against the rise of the homeless prison leavers, with Peter

²⁹ https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/77058#_ga=2.151443577.1598752595.1592195418-950793806.1586072707

³⁰ [Ibid](#)

³¹ www.india.com/festivals-events/world-refugee-day-2020-history-and-significance-of-the-day-and-theme-for-this-year-4055957/

³² www.abc.net.au/news/2020-06-13/queensland-refugee-rights-black-lives-matter-protests/12349784

³³ www.euro.who.int/en/media-centre/events/events/2020/06/world-refugee-day-2020-united-to-stop-covid-19

³⁴ www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jun/15/over-1000-prison-leavers-left-homeless-amid-pandemic-moj-figures-show

Dawson, Director at the Prison Reform Trust stating that ‘every single person released from prison is subject to probation supervision. So it is extraordinary that for nearly a third of adult men and women discharged during the pandemic, no-one has known where they are going to be living’. Further, Dawson claims that prisoners were given with £46 in government benefits, exemplary of the financial hardships and subsequent homelessness of prison leavers.

Canada

In Canada, 100 prisoners at the Central East Correctional Centre in Ontario are staging a hunger strike, which started on the 15 June, in order to end the inhumane living conditions inside the facility, which has increased during Covid-19 restrictions. According to Kim Schofield, a criminal defense lawyer in Toronto, several issues have been raised by prisoners, such as: ‘lack of drinkable tap water, dirty clothing, poor food hygiene, inability to get books or copies of the Criminal Code, a lack of healthy options at the canteen, a lack of hygiene products and bad air quality’. Although some of the conditions have worsened due to Covid-19, the Central East Correctional Centre has received enormous amounts of complaints over the years, with 770 reported complaints in 2018-2019.³⁵

Immigration detention

South Korea

In South Korea, statistics released so far indicate that immigration detention centres have nearly reached their capacity limit, with international flights rarely available amid the coronavirus pandemic. From 18 May, the number of foreign nationals and undocumented migrants being held at three detention centers across the country increased by 85.1 percent, from 389 in March to 720 in May, according to the data from the Justice Ministry. Further, the Justice Ministry has justified the use of immigration detention, arguing that this increase is due to the limitation of international flights. Kim Dae-kwon, director of Friends of Asia, highlighted that ‘once foreign nationals enter the detention facilities, their health deteriorates. They are high-risk groups’.³⁶

5. Informal settlements and homelessness

Informal settlements

Myanmar

³⁵-www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/hunger-strike-central-east-correctional-centre-lindsay-jail-inhumane-conditions-1.5611936

³⁶-www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20200617000952

In Myanmar, the emergence of Covid-19 is concerning for those in urban, informal settlements in Yangon, with 423 informal settlements, housing 400,000 people in 72,900 households. In a report released by UN Habitat's *Rapid Assessment of Informal Settlements in Yangon* highlights some of the prevalent factors faced by residents in Yangon's large urban districts, such as livelihood security and household income, household debt and food security.³⁷ Of the respondents to this survey, more than half claimed to have a recently unemployed member of the household, reliant on loans and government assistance for food, with no available space for physical distancing and are unable to afford a mask. These figures are alarming, and highlight the disproportionate impact on people living in large, informal settlements.

Argentina

In Argentina, reports of the death of a community leader in Villa 31, a large informal settlement in Buenos Aires, sparked media attention. Ramona Medina, who died on 18 May, was campaigning for water facilities to be reinstated in Villa 31, after the water supply was cut for 12 days. Medina died subsequently from Covid-19.³⁸ Human rights activists have called for those most vulnerable to be protected, given that 35 percent of Argentina's population was estimated to be living in poverty and 25 per cent of the Argentinian population living in Conurbano, an urban settlement outside of Buenos Aires. Further, national governments must prioritize the delivery of water, food and sanitation to vulnerable populations, and support solid waste collection³⁹

Homelessness

United Kingdom

In the UK, an emergency Covid-19 scheme implemented by the British government in March, 'Everyone In', pledged £3.2mil to local councils across the country to accommodate homeless and rough sleepers. This move, welcomed by charities such as Crisis, saw 14,500 homeless people rehoused in emergency accommodation over the initial lockdown period.⁴⁰ However, for homeless people recently rehoused in temporary emergency accommodation, life after this stage is uncertain. The Manchester Evening News reported that contracts between local councils and hotels were to end at the beginning of July because of government funding for 'Everyone In' was abruptly ending. Although the UK government has declared that the £3.2bn of funding already given to local authorities would be used to tackle homelessness, this figure is not exclusively for emergency rehousing, or for ending

³⁷ https://unhabitat.org.mm/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID19-Rapid-Assessment-Survey-Report_Final.pdf

³⁸ www.batimes.com.ar/news/argentina/villa-31-community-leaders-death-from-covid-19-sparks-anger.phtml

³⁹ www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/05/covid-19-will-hit-the-developing-worlds-cities-hardest-heres-why/ ;

<https://nacla.org/news/2020/06/16/feminists-covid-argentina>

⁴⁰ www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52915913

homelessness across the country. In light of this, Crisis has stated that it would cost around £282m to permanently rehouse and support people housed in the current emergency hotels and hostels for the next 12 months. Further, statistics released by the UK government on the population of homeless people is five times lower than the statistics available at local governments, according to the Guardian.⁴¹ For young people who are reliant on ‘sofa surfing’ or without any permanent accommodation, restrictions implemented by the UK government prevents moving to different houses. Centrepoin, a homeless charity supporting under-25s in England, has seen a 36 per cent increase in people seeking support since lockdown began. Given the rise in unemployment across the country, action must be taken to ensure the homeless, and newly homeless, populations are adequately assisted.⁴²

United States

In the United States, statistics from the Coalition for the Homeless found homeless people in New York are dying from Covid-19 at a rate 61 per cent higher than the general population.⁴³ These alarming statistics highlight the pre-existing issues faced by homeless people, such as overcrowded facilities, inaccessibility of clean water, sanitation and access to healthcare facilities. A report by HUD Exchange in 2019 indicates that 553,742 people are homeless on a given night.⁴⁴ For the homeless population, an increased risk of complications from Covid-19 is a high possibility, given that on average, their physical conditions mirror those of people 15-20 years older than them. Further, 202,623 single adults experiencing homelessness are over 50 years of age, suggesting they may be uniquely vulnerable to becoming seriously ill during the pandemic crisis, according to the National Alliance to End Homelessness⁴⁵. In response to public health measures to combat the spread of Covid-19, access to public toilet facilities across the US has halted, making the task of sanitation impossible for homeless people, placing their health at an increased risk. Moreover, in a report by the National Alliance to End Homelessness, 400,000 new units are needed to prevent the spread of the virus and to quarantine those affected by Covid-19. The new accommodation units would allow for social distancing, quarantine, and isolation for people who are typically in crowded shelter settings or living unsheltered.

1. Disability rights

Kenya

A 9 June testimony from Samuel, a 21-year-old Kenyan man with physical disabilities, revealed the unique challenges Covid-19 has presented to wheelchair users who rely on public transport. With lockdown measures in place, most public transport is unavailable and Samuel is forced to use taxis.

⁴¹ www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/jun/11/coronavirus-homelessness-uk-rough-sleepers-lockdown-tories

⁴² www.bbc.co.uk/bbcthree/article/2ff6ca11-e20d-482f-a69b-1f766c5595bb

⁴³ www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/COVID19HomelessnessReportJune2020.pdf

⁴⁴ www.hudexchange.info/programs/hdx/pit-hic/

⁴⁵ <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness-2020/>

However, taxis present their own challenge with social distancing guidelines. Samuel explained: ‘When I want to get in a taxi, I have to ask someone to lift me up and put me on the seat, since taxis are not accessible for those who use wheelchairs. But, as a result of social distancing, it’s impossible for someone to get into contact, so that might make it difficult for me now’.⁴⁶ Without public transit or accessible taxis, Samuel is confined to his home and unable to visit with friends and family.

Samuel also works from home as a video editor, as he was unable to find employment in an accessible building. Prior to the pandemic, Samuel reported having at least one client per week but has not had any since Covid-19.⁴⁷ He is especially concerned by his loss of income, as he is forced to rely on his parents, who have also lost their jobs due to the pandemic: ‘I take one meal per day, and that is lunch, because I mind about tomorrow. If I take three meals, tomorrow I might end up starving. So I try to economise what we have. It’s hard’.⁴⁸ He notes that food is sometimes offered by the government, but the distribution buildings are inaccessible.⁴⁹

India

On 9 June, more than 5,000 individuals with disabilities in India took to Twitter to share their struggles during the pandemic in the absence of the financial assistance promised under Prime Minister Modi’s Garib Kalyan Yojana economic support policy.⁵⁰ The Twitter campaign, called ‘PM hamari bhi suno’—prime minister, listen to us, too—disseminated an 11 point charter of demands by Indians with disabilities, including delivery of financial aid, home delivery of rations and a disability specific pension.⁵¹ The majority of tweets revealed how Indians with disabilities were under the impression that the government would be providing them with Rs 1,000 (\$13.17) in two installments as had previously been announced by the minister of finance, and how they had yet to receive any sort of payment.⁵² Rajan Kumar, a 36-year-old man with physical disabilities commented: ‘I was teaching commerce graduate and intermediate students at a coaching institute in Sakchi that has been closed for three months now. During these three months, I have not earned a single penny. I have to pay rent and look after my wife, two daughters and an elderly father. I am virtually on the street now’.⁵³

⁴⁶ www.internationaldisabilityalliance.org/kenya-covid19

⁴⁷ [Ibid](#)

⁴⁸ [Ibid](#)

⁴⁹ [Ibid](#)

⁵⁰ www.telegraphindia.com/states/jharkhand/coronavirus-lockdown-disabled-persons-ask-modi-for-financial-help/cid/1779537

⁵¹ [Ibid](#)

⁵² [Ibid](#)

⁵³ [Ibid](#)

Singapore

On 10 June, Singapore President Halimah Yacob declared that employment for people with disabilities should be planned at the national level. She expressed her hope that the newly created National Jobs Council, which will focus on creating jobs after the pandemic, will also review how employment is created for individuals with disabilities.⁵⁴ She noted that individuals with disabilities will benefit much more if they are factored into mainstream national job creation and placement instead of being addressed in a separate programme. On the need for creating jobs for individuals with disabilities, President Halimah noted: ‘In my many conversations with parents of persons with disabilities, the lack of job opportunities for their children and the worry of how their children will sustain themselves after they are gone are often lifelong concerns’.⁵⁵ In her Facebook post announcing the new policy, President Halimah also asked more Singaporean employers to sign the Enabling Employment Pledge, which would codify their commitment to hiring and training individuals with disabilities.⁵⁶

United Kingdom

A 10 June BBC News article featured the story of Amy Jonson, who currently serves as an unpaid caregiver to her eight-year-old son with multiple disabilities in Cardiff, Wales. Amy has a back injury and finds it challenging to lift her son and notes that her flat is too small to contain all of her son’s necessary therapeutic equipment.⁵⁷ Amy’s struggles are shared with the millions of unpaid caregivers around the world as the pandemic prevents paid caregivers from working in-home and prevents individuals with disabilities from participating in programming, therapies and education outside of the home.

United States

On 9 June, Connecticut’s top health official ordered hospitals that were barring visitors due to coronavirus to make exceptions for people with disabilities. As part of the resolution, health officials are developing a statewide policy that requires hospitals and other acute settings to permit the entrance of a designated support person for a patient with a disability and permitting service providers, family members, or other individuals knowledgeable about the needs of the person with a disability to serve

⁵⁴ www.straitstimes.com/singapore/make-job-creation-for-people-with-disabilities-a-national-issue-president-halimah

⁵⁵ [Ibid](#)

⁵⁶ [Ibid](#)

⁵⁷ www.bbc.com/news/uk-wales-52982454

as a designated support person. Where patients with a disability are in such a setting for more than one day, they are permitted to designate two people, provided only one is present at a time.⁵⁸

The policy change was enacted after various disability groups filed a complaint with the federal Office for Civil Rights arguing that a lack of visitation rights deprived some patients ‘of their right to make informed decisions and provide informed consent’, and subjected others ‘to the unnecessary use of physical and chemical restraints’.⁵⁹ The action is the latest in a series of cases investigated by the federal agency alleging discrimination against people with disabilities since the beginning of the pandemic. As [previously reported in the IBAHRI Covid-19 monitor](#) in March 2020, the Office for Civil Rights formally issued a bulletin barring hospital ventilator protocols that would discriminate on the basis of race, age or disability.⁶⁰

6. Freedom of Assembly

According to the International Centre for Not for Profit Law’s Covid-19 Civic Freedoms Tracker, there are still 112 countries with measures in place to combat the spread of Covid-19 which restrict the freedom of assembly.⁶¹ These restrictions often place fines upon those who exercise their right to assembly, and do not provide provisions for people to exercise their freedom of assembly whilst observing social distancing guidelines. This is despite the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Assembly and Association stating that the Covid-19 crisis does not terminate these fundamental rights.⁶² It is UN policy to remain apolitical and thus not take part in protests, leading them to instruct staff not to participate in peaceful protests taking place in the wake of the killing of George Floyd. However, UN Secretary-General António Guterres reverted on this decision following criticism from staff, which cited anti-racism and the freedom of assembly as fundamental issues the UN has been fighting for since its establishment.⁶³

Lebanon

In Lebanon, protests have erupted in backlash of the grave economic consequences the country faces due to Covid-19 lockdown. While leaders were praised for locking the country down quickly to curb the spread of the virus, it has deepened economic issues already prevalent in the country, leaving hospitals unable to treat patients due to a lack of cash flow and food prices 50 per cent higher than the

⁵⁸ www.hhs.gov/about/news/2020/06/09/ocr-resolves-complaints-after-state-connecticut-private-hospital-safeguard-rights-persons.html

⁵⁹ www.nytimes.com/2020/06/09/nyregion/coronavirus-connecticut-hospitals-disabilities.html

⁶⁰ www.nytimes.com/2020/03/28/us/coronavirus-disabilities-rationing-ventilators-triage.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article

⁶¹ www.icnl.org/covid19tracker/?!location=&issue=2&date=&type=

⁶² www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25792&LangID=E

⁶³ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/06/08/united-nations-staff-george-floyd-protests/>

previous year.⁶⁴ The public are consistently calling for the resignation of the Government, and the Governor of the Central Bank, citing the growing epidemic of hunger as a far more imminent threat than Covid-19. Many have speculated that the grave socio-economic consequences of Covid-19 could lead to the second Arab Spring in the Middle East, which is made more apparent in the wave of protests in Lebanon.⁶⁵ Covid-19 temporarily halted citizens' ability to protest as they observed lockdown measures to protect public health, but rather than erasing these issues, the health crisis has greatly exacerbated the economic crisis, leading to the return of protestors with renewed vigour.⁶⁶ The state must respect the fundamental right of citizens to the freedom of assembly, and observe the concerns of the public and cooperate internationally to provide solutions to the current economic crisis. The protection of public health is not attainable without the protection of citizens' economic, social and cultural rights too.

United States

Protests continue to surge throughout the US, and worldwide, in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. In a statement published 10 June, UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights to Peaceful Assembly and Association, Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, and Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killings, condemned the violent crackdown on peaceful protesting after the killing of George Floyd. In the statement, they pointed to the alarming rate of arrest of protestors, and called for their immediate release, stating '*Detentions of protesters in the current context exacerbates the risk of serious disease*'.⁶⁷ As of 8 June, over 10,000 had been arrested in the US for their participation in the peaceful protests. Out of the 2,700 arrested in Los Angeles, 56 complaints are currently being investigated. Of those currently under investigation, several have reported not being informed at the time of arrest what they were being arrested for, and who have been arrested for alleged looting and violence whilst peacefully protesting.⁶⁸ Those participating in peaceful protests should never be met with force or face arrest in the first instance, but during the present crisis when they are protesting against police brutality, and when mass incarceration becomes even more dangerous due to the threat of Covid-19, the practice is even more contradictory.

Thailand

In Thailand, the state of emergency declared to combat the spread of Covid-19 has allowed a crackdown on dissent and the rights to freedom of expression and assembly. On 26 May, the Prime Minister Gen. Prayut Chan-ocha extended the emergency decree until 30 June.⁶⁹ This has led to the undue arrest of

⁶⁴ <https://news.sky.com/story/lebanon-protests-hundreds-take-to-the-streets-amid-economic-crisis-12005811>

⁶⁵ www.mei.edu/publications/could-coronavirus-lead-arab-spring-20

⁶⁶ www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/27/lebanons-protests-are-far-over

⁶⁷ [/www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25948&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25948&LangID=E)

⁶⁸ https://laist.com/2020/06/09/in_their_own_words_arrested_during_the_black_lives_matter_protests.php

⁶⁹ www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/27/thailand-state-emergency-extension-unjustified

several people exercising their right to freedom of assembly, as reported by Human Rights Watch. On 22 May, two prominent pro-democracy activists were arrested for violating the ban on public assembly despite the wearing of facemasks and precautions were taken to measure the temperature of attendees, as they took part in a remembrance service to mark the sixth anniversary of the 2014 military coup.⁷⁰ Further, Human Rights Watch reported that a request of villagers in the Singha Nakhon district to hold a peaceful protest against plans to build beach walls and breakwaters was denied, despite assurances to observe social distancing measures. The crackdown on peaceful assembly thus appears not in the interest in public health, but as an excuse by which government can outlaw public criticism.

⁷⁰ <https://prachatai.com/english/node/8549>