



# Human Rights Institute

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human rights worldwide

## **IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor**

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## 1. Gender-based violence and women's health

A recent report by UNHCR reinforces that forcibly displaced women and girls are especially at risk during the pandemic. Refugees and internally displaced women are more likely to hold precarious informal sector jobs; therefore, the pandemic is disrupting their income. Forcibly displaced adolescent girls are at risk of a disrupted education and dropping out of school, on top of the burden of extra caregiving burden duties.<sup>1</sup> A recent press release by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) highlights that female Rohingya refugees are facing more gender-based violence than before Covid-19, and migrants and refugees to Yemen face rape and torture at the hands of smugglers as this route becomes the busiest maritime migration route in the world due to Europe cracking down on alternative routes.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, early and child marriage have been reported to be on the increase in countries affected by fragility, conflict and violence (FCV), which is a risk factor for intimate partner violence. There is also a resurgence of harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. Evidence from past crises such as the Ebola crisis indicates that school closures also increase gender inequality as girls are less likely to return to school than boys; girls may also be forced to take up a job or additional household responsibilities, putting them at increased risk of violence as well as increases in adolescent pregnancy. Only four in ten women in FCV contexts are in formal employment; this drops to two in ten during protracted conflicts. Additionally, women's overrepresentation in informal and agricultural employment means they are worse hit economically as these sectors suffer more due to the pandemic.<sup>3</sup>

### Central African Republic

The Covid-19 pandemic and measures to control it in the Central African Republic (CAR) have led to a spike in gender-based violence, with a 69 per cent rise in reported injuries to women and children. School and business closures due to the pandemic have led to a drop in earnings for women, thereby heightening existing vulnerabilities, as well as trapping them at home with their abusers, with little access to support services. Since April, gender-based violence has increased by ten per cent, rape by 27 per cent, and other assaults by 45 per cent, as per a report in June. Since the first case of Covid-19 reported in the country, 97 per cent of gender-based violence victims have been female, and 76 per cent underage. Cyber-violence is also on the rise, with more people confined at home and spending more time online.<sup>4</sup> A radio communication strategy has been developed by UNHCR with women and girls who are returnees, for community sensitisation on Covid-19; this includes information about the risks of gender-based violence (including sexual exploitation and abuse), related services, and gender equality.<sup>5</sup>

### Latin America

<sup>1</sup>[https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR\\_per\\_cent20Protecting\\_per\\_cent20Forcibly\\_per\\_cent20Displaced\\_per\\_cent20Women\\_per\\_cent20and\\_per\\_cent20Girls\\_per\\_cent20during\\_per\\_cent20the\\_per\\_cent20Covid-19\\_per\\_cent20Pandemic\\_per\\_cent20-per\\_cent20July\\_per\\_cent202020.pdf](https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR_per_cent20Protecting_per_cent20Forcibly_per_cent20Displaced_per_cent20Women_per_cent20and_per_cent20Girls_per_cent20during_per_cent20the_per_cent20Covid-19_per_cent20Pandemic_per_cent20-per_cent20July_per_cent202020.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.rescue.org/press-release/covid-19-restrictions-preventing-people-fleeing-violence-or-forcing-dangerous-routes](http://www.rescue.org/press-release/covid-19-restrictions-preventing-people-fleeing-violence-or-forcing-dangerous-routes)

<sup>3</sup> <https://blogs.worldbank.org/dev4peace/gender-inequality-exacerbates-covid-19-crisis-fragile-and-conflict-affected-settings>

<sup>4</sup> [www.preventionweb.net/news/view/72771](http://www.preventionweb.net/news/view/72771)

<sup>5</sup><https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/UNHCR%20Protecting%20Forcibly%20Displaced%20Women%20and%20Girls%20during%20the%20COVID-19%20Pandemic%20-%20July%202020.pdf>

Gender-based violence has increased exponentially across Latin America since the pandemic (in some countries by more than 60 per cent); those who may want to flee such situations are ‘locked in’ as a result of the complete border closures in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras.<sup>6</sup> For example, femicides in Brazil increased 22 per cent in March and April compared to the same period last year, and calls to domestic violence hotlines as well as emergency calls to military police have surged. In Mexico, 987 women and girls were murdered in the first four months of 2020, and the number for April broke a five-year record; in a four-month period: 5,569 victims filed documented complaints, meaning 46 sexual assaults documented daily, and this is only four per cent of all sexual assault (96 per cent of victims don’t report). In El Salvador, during the last two weeks of March, over 50 per cent more women died from femicide than from Covid-19.<sup>7</sup> Women underreport gender-based violence even in ordinary circumstances (for instance, 52 per cent of women in Brazil do not report such violence), but social isolation measures due to the pandemic further prevent women from reporting.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. LGBTQI+ rights

### Poland

In the past week, two Polish courts have issued separate decisions annulling the council resolutions instituting ‘LGBT Free’ zones, concluding that they violate Polish constitutional provisions banning discrimination and guaranteeing equal treatment before the law and by public authorities. One Court held that attempting to divorce ideology from people ‘is turning a blind eye to reality’, and that ‘LGBT-free’ zones threaten LGBTQI+ people and violate the right to raise children according to one’s beliefs by limiting subjects taught in schools. The other Court characterised the discrimination against LGBTQI+ people as ‘a violation of the rule of law’. The verdicts are yet to be finalised, but the judgments are expected to have some effect on the other municipalities with ‘LGBT-free’ zones.

LGBTQI+ rights have been a contentious issue in Poland due to the Law and Justice Party’s (PiS) rise to power on a ‘traditional family’ platform. Recently re-elected President Andrzej Duda adopted an anti-LGBTQI+ platform during his campaign, labelling the LGBTQI+ rights movement more dangerous to Poland than communism. He signed a Family Charter, which pledged to ban same-sex marriage, to prevent same-sex couples from adopting and to prevent teaching of LGBTQI+ rights in public institutions. Poland is one of a handful of countries where political leaders have adopted the same tactic of using the increased visibility of LGBTQI+ people as a symbol of the encroachment of the secularism and liberalism that typifies Western hegemony and threatens home-grown traditional values and national identity. This supposed battle against indoctrination by the West included President Duda dehumanising LGBTQI+ people by stating, ‘LGBT is not people, it’s an ideology’. Poland currently has the lowest EU ranking on the Rainbow Index for Gay Rights. Although LGBTQI+ people can donate blood and are protected against employment discrimination, inroads have been made on their rights, including the revocation of many trans rights by President Duda during his previous term. The European

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<sup>6</sup> [www.rescue.org/press-release/covid-19-restrictions-preventing-people-fleeing-violence-or-forcing-dangerous-routes](http://www.rescue.org/press-release/covid-19-restrictions-preventing-people-fleeing-violence-or-forcing-dangerous-routes)

<sup>7</sup> [www.wilsoncenter.org/event/webcast-accessing-justice-femicide-and-rule-law-latin-america](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/webcast-accessing-justice-femicide-and-rule-law-latin-america)

<sup>8</sup> [www.newsecuritybeat.org/2020/07/accessing-justice-femicide-rule-law-latin-america](http://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2020/07/accessing-justice-femicide-rule-law-latin-america)

Commission has signalled to Polish authorities that EU that it may cut aid to areas of the country which discriminate against LGBTIQ+ people.

### **The impact of Covid-19 restrictions on LGBTIQ+ youth<sup>9</sup>**

LGBTIQ+ youth are disproportionately affected by suicide, which is the leading cause of death for people between the ages of ten and 34. On 15 July, the Trevor Project released its 2020 Nation Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health, which covered responses from 40,000 respondents between 13 and 24 years old on issues like discrimination, housing instability, barriers to healthcare access and conversion therapy. This reported showed that 46 per cent of LGBTIQ+ youth respondents who wanted professional psychological or emotional support were unable to receive it over the past 12 months. Almost 15 per cent of LGBTIQ+ youths had attempted suicide over this period. The figure was 20 per cent for transgender and non-binary youth alone. Some of the biggest predictors of suicide attempts include experiencing discrimination and victimisation related to sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression, and the harmful consequences of conversion therapy.

Statistics released thus far indicate that 86 per cent of LGBTIQ+ youths reported as being negatively affected by recent political events. In the US, in particular, Black LGBTIQ+ youth have been affected by increasing racial tension stemming from responses to Black Lives Matter protests. Black LGBTIQ+ youth are further affected by systemic racism as they are least likely receive mental healthcare despite experiencing rates of attempted suicide similar to those of other LGBTIQ+ youth. In general, the psychologically taxing experience of Covid-19 makes it that much more necessary that LGBTIQ+ youth are surrounded by supportive adults who affirm their identities. Affirmation can include using preferred pronouns, providing gender-affirming shapewear and clothing and providing safe spaces. LGBTIQ+ youth who had their preferred pronouns respected attempted suicide at less than half the rate of LGBTIQ+ youth who did not have this kind of support. Unfortunately, only one in five transgender and non-binary youth reported having their pronouns respected by all or most of the people in their lives. Many LGBTIQ+ youths come out to their friends before coming out to their families. Covid-19 restrictions have significantly reduced access to affirming relationships and resources, and forced them to sequester with much less supportive people.

Covid-19 is expected to increase housing instability and homelessness rates across the board, and accelerate suicide deaths as a result. As is the case outside of the context of the pandemic, housing instability affects LGBTIQ+ youths disproportionately. Their vulnerability will be exacerbated by unemployment and other economic concerns. Studies have shown that perceived family support was a significant safeguard against suicide during the recession of 2007 to 2009. This is a kind of support that LGBTIQ+ youths are unlikely to have or feel they have. According to the Trevor Project, 25 per cent of cisgender and 38 per cent of transgender and non-binary

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<sup>9</sup> Refinery 29 '[LGBTQ+ Youth Are Facing A Mental Health Crisis](#)', 16 July 2020; [Trevor Project 2020 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health](#); Forbes '[LGBTQ Acceptance Can Save Lives – And Is Crucial During Covid-19](#)', 01 July 2020; American Heart Association '[Covid-19 adds to the challenges for LGBTQ youth](#)', 16 June 2020; The Trevor Project '[Implications of Covid-19 for LGBTQ Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention](#)', 2020.

LGBTQI+ youth experienced housing instability during the 12 month period covered by the 2020 survey. Of these youths, 23 per cent of cisgender and 34 per cent of transgender and non-binary youth attempted suicide.

### 3. Refugee camps

A report published by The Transnational Institute (TNI) on 16 July reveals that the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant effect on border politics, putting migrants and refugees who are already living in vulnerable situations in an even more difficult position<sup>10</sup>. The pandemic has led to an unprecedented shutdown of borders and restrictions on migration, leading to an increase in violent pushbacks of refugees on borders, immediate refusals of asylum-seekers, raids on migrant camps and closure of ports. Crowded refugee camps and poor living conditions have led to outbreaks in Algeria, Bangladesh, France, Kenya and Lebanon. The refugees held in detention camps in Australia, the UK and the US have experienced outbreaks, increased isolation and even maltreatment due to lockdown measures. Deportations of migrants from Saudi Arabia and the US have led to the spread of coronavirus infections to low-income countries with limited resources to respond. On many borders worldwide (Brazil, Colombia, Czech Republic, Ecuador, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and the US), the Covid-19 pandemic is just an excuse to intensify border militarisation, as well as increase troops and hardware deployed on many borders worldwide. Amid the pandemic, Australia, the EU, the US and others have continued to pour billions into fortifying borders, strengthening border patrol agencies and funding authoritarian third countries to stop migration reaching their shores. Refugees and migrants are facing devastating consequences caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

#### International aid community

The Covid-19 pandemic is also hindering the efforts of the international aid community to provide humanitarian support because of the logistical and operational obstacles. A slew of existential questions is raised by the ‘new normal’ of Covid-19 for the aid sector, including the overwhelmed healthcare systems, grounded planes, crushed economic and the forced changes to the way the aid sector works.<sup>11</sup> In Afghanistan, the Afghan Red Crescent are concerned about the total collapse of institutions in case a harsh recession happens, while in other places, Covid-19 has forced the aid system to accept localisation, including localising the logistical supplies, creating enough resilience within countries and shifting the work style into telecommuting in an effective way. However, these changes haven’t changed the inequality between the wealthy western donor countries and the extremely underdeveloped, less prosperous countries and the bureaucratic inertia within the aid industry. This also inspired an evolution for the humanitarian sector to head towards increased professionalism and accountability, better coordination of aid groups large and small, and enhanced solidarity and efficiency among organisations.

<sup>10</sup> [www.tni.org/en/publication/covid-19-and-border-politics](http://www.tni.org/en/publication/covid-19-and-border-politics)

<sup>11</sup> [www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2020/07/16/Rethinking-humanitarianism-will-coronavirus-change-aid](http://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/special-report/2020/07/16/Rethinking-humanitarianism-will-coronavirus-change-aid)

## Libya

Internally displaced people and refugees in Libya are struggling with the Covid-19 pandemic and the economic fallout. Sabha, where many displaced families take refuge in because of the conflicts in western Libya, is taking the hardest hit. Out of 1,151 active cases in Libya (as of 15 July), 486 are active cases in Sabha, including 20 doctors and health care workers, amounting to 44 per cent of Covid-19 cases in Libya.<sup>12</sup> After the government-instructed lockdown in Sabha, many people can't go to work and earn a living, meaning that they simply cannot afford to stay at home any longer. Although the International Committee of the Red Cross is providing food parcels, hygiene kits and disinfection materials to families who are forced to stay at home in quarantine after their breadwinners were tested positive for Covid-19, the measures are far from sufficient. In hospitals and health centres, staff are falling ill with the virus, leading to even more serious staff shortages.<sup>13</sup> Lack of Covid-19 tests to refugees and asylum seekers intercepted at sea and returned to Libya is causing concern, which means that there is a risk that the disease is being spread in the detention centres and communities undetected. With most public health facilities closed in Tripoli and Misrata, the mobile support to the Ministry of Health by organisations like the International Rescue committee proves vital in reaching vulnerable communities in this response.

## Refugee children

Refugee children are experiencing exacerbated hardships from a lack of protection during the Covid-19 pandemic. They have suffered from multiple deprivations, but Covid-19 has made it more difficult for them.<sup>14</sup> Covid-19 leaves an estimated \$77bn gap in education spending for the world's poorest children.<sup>15</sup> They are lack of access to formal education, health care and sanitation, as well as facing a greater threat from starvation. There is also a lack of political will of the European Union to improve the conditions of the refugee children, while the European voters are becoming increasingly hostile towards immigration.<sup>16</sup> With an increase in the adoption of online education, it is imperative to bridge the connectivity gap within refugee camps to ensure that more refugee children can be afforded access to quality education—a basic human right that has been elusive for them.<sup>17</sup>

### 4. Prisoners and detainees

## China

In China, reports have emerged of Chinese authorities using Uighur detainees in Xinjing labour camps to make facemasks and personal protective equipment (PPE) in order to meet the growing demand of preventative equipment during the pandemic. According to a report by the *New York Times*, China's National Medical Products

<sup>12</sup> [www.icrcnewsroom.org/story/en/1923/libya-sabha-struggles-with-covid-19-spread-and-economic-fallout](http://www.icrcnewsroom.org/story/en/1923/libya-sabha-struggles-with-covid-19-spread-and-economic-fallout)

<sup>13</sup> [www.icrcnewsroom.org/story/en/1923/libya-sabha-struggles-with-covid-19-spread-and-economic-fallout](http://www.icrcnewsroom.org/story/en/1923/libya-sabha-struggles-with-covid-19-spread-and-economic-fallout)

<sup>14</sup> [www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/governments-must-protect-refugee-children-during-pandemic-by-kailash-satyarthi-and-prince-ali-bin-hussein-2020-07](http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/governments-must-protect-refugee-children-during-pandemic-by-kailash-satyarthi-and-prince-ali-bin-hussein-2020-07)

<sup>15</sup> [www.savethechildren.net/news/almost-10-million-children-may-never-return-school-following-covid-19-lockdown](http://www.savethechildren.net/news/almost-10-million-children-may-never-return-school-following-covid-19-lockdown)

<sup>16</sup> [www.savethechildren.net/news/almost-10-million-children-may-never-return-school-following-covid-19-lockdown](http://www.savethechildren.net/news/almost-10-million-children-may-never-return-school-following-covid-19-lockdown)

<sup>17</sup> [www.savethechildren.net/news/almost-10-million-children-may-never-return-school-following-covid-19-lockdown](http://www.savethechildren.net/news/almost-10-million-children-may-never-return-school-following-covid-19-lockdown)

Administration had four companies in Xinjiang produce medical grade protective equipment before the pandemic. By June, 51 companies making PPE were recorded in Xinjiang, with at least 17 participating in government-sponsored labour transfer programmes, which one expert said ‘could be identified as forced labour’. In support of this, *The Times* tracked the shipment of face masks to a medical supply company in the US from a factory in China’s Hubei Province, which also hosts more than 100 Uighur workers who were transferred during the pandemic. Further, the transfer of detained Uighurs to other regions across China and the subsequent detention in forced labour camps has been reported by human rights organisations, such as the Human Rights Investigations Lab at the University of California, Berkeley and the Uyghur Human Rights Project, who have provided documentary evidence of the recent labour transfers.<sup>18</sup>

As reported in previous edition of the Monitor, the forced detention of the Uighurs in Xingjang labour camps, which has been justified by Chinese authorities as a method of ‘education transformation’, began prior to the pandemic<sup>19</sup>. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, instances of trafficked Uighurs, forced to provide labour in order to boost the Chinese economy, along with forced sterilisation of Uighur women and organ harvesting, is highly concerning.<sup>20</sup> The systematic denial of abuse against the Uighurs by Chinese authorities, with the Chinese Ambassador to the UK declaring ‘Uighur people enjoy peaceful, harmonious coexistence with other ethnic groups of people’ refuses to acknowledge the growing body of evidence of forced labour and detention, must be addressed by national and international bodies.<sup>21</sup> Further, urgent action must be taken by national and international bodies in order to end the continuous human rights violations against the Uighur people.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> A new report by the Bar Human Rights Committee, endorsed by IBAHRI Director Baroness Helena Kennedy QC, demonstrates international governments’ responsibility under international law to the abuse of the Uighur population.<sup>24</sup>

## India

In India, Modi’s administration is accused of neglecting a large number of prisons in the Indian-administered Kashmir, which has led to an increasing number of prisoners contracting Covid-19. In a letter written by the Chairman of the Legal Services Authority of Anantnag Prison in south Kashmir, so far an additional 47 prisoners have contracted Covid-19, with 97 confirmed cases in total.<sup>25</sup> The Anantnag prison, built to occupy 60 people, currently has a prison occupancy rate of 193, increasing concerns of a continuous spread of Covid-19 in the absence of governmental intervention.<sup>26</sup> As various states across India are permitted to release prisoners during the Covid-19 pandemic, human rights activists have reported that the release of prisoners in Indian-administered Kashmir are yet to take place, and Indian authorities have refused to release any inmates and activists to date. After the initiation of the Public Safety Act (PSA), a law that permits detention for up to two years without trial,

<sup>18</sup> <https://uhrp.org/press-release/statement-uhrp-welcomes-global-action-address-likely-genocide-finally.html>

<sup>19</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/24/china-cables-leak-no-escapes-reality-china-uyghur-prison-camp](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/24/china-cables-leak-no-escapes-reality-china-uyghur-prison-camp)

<sup>20</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/29/china-sterilising-ethnic-minority-women-in-xinjiang-report-says](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/29/china-sterilising-ethnic-minority-women-in-xinjiang-report-says)

<sup>21</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/19/chinas-uk-ambassador-denies-abuse-of-uyghurs-despite-fresh-drone-footage](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/19/chinas-uk-ambassador-denies-abuse-of-uyghurs-despite-fresh-drone-footage)

<sup>22</sup> [www.pri.org/stories/2020-07-03/sterilization-abuse-uyghurs-china-meets-international-legal-criteria-genocide](http://www.pri.org/stories/2020-07-03/sterilization-abuse-uyghurs-china-meets-international-legal-criteria-genocide)

<sup>23</sup> [www.pri.org/stories/2020-07-03/sterilization-abuse-uyghurs-china-meets-international-legal-criteria-genocide](http://www.pri.org/stories/2020-07-03/sterilization-abuse-uyghurs-china-meets-international-legal-criteria-genocide)

<sup>24</sup> [www.barhumanrights.org.uk/bhrc-publishes-new-report-outlining-the-responsibility-of-states-under-international-law-to-uyghurs-and-other-turkic-muslims-in-xinjiang-china](http://www.barhumanrights.org.uk/bhrc-publishes-new-report-outlining-the-responsibility-of-states-under-international-law-to-uyghurs-and-other-turkic-muslims-in-xinjiang-china)

<sup>25</sup> [www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/overcrowded-prisons-kashmir-incubators-covid-19-inmates-refused](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/global-health/science-and-disease/overcrowded-prisons-kashmir-incubators-covid-19-inmates-refused)

<sup>26</sup> <https://scroll.in/article/968068/covid-19-in-conflict-zones-nearly-half-the-inmates-of-two-prisons-in-kashmir-and-assam-infected>

many Kashmiris are yet to face judicial redress, and remain incarcerated during the pandemic. Khuram Parvez, a Kashmiri human rights activist, stated that as ‘most of the people in Jammu and Kashmir jails are political detainees’ and that Modi’s administration has been ‘vindictive towards Kashmiri prisoners. These people are being punished without trials’.

## United States

In the US, over 930 employees at US immigration detention centres (ICE) have tested positive for Covid-19, according to *Reuters*. These figures, along with the 3,000 immigration detainees in ICE facilities testing positive for Covid-19, raise alarms of the conditions in ICE facilities in the US.<sup>27</sup> In June, almost 200 pages of handwritten letters from immigration detainees held in ICE facilities in south Florida were publicised, highlighting their living conditions during the pandemic. The letters mentioned how ICE facilities failed to implement adequate and humane preventative measures for those incarcerated, with one letter stating: ‘we were served spoiled food, we’re starving, bathrooms are bad, violations of rights... beds are two feet apart and not six feet apart’. In response, ICE officials claimed they are aware of reports by detainees that positive Covid-19 cases are mixed in with the untested detainees, plus allegations of a lack of masks, no social distancing, inadequate soap and hand sanitiser.

### 5. Informal settlements and homelessness

#### Venezuelan-Colombian border

##### Informal settlements

At the Venezuelan-Colombian border, of the 5,000 older migrants living in La Guajira, 84 per cent have no access to handwashing facilities and 78 per cent have no access to safe drinking water, according to a survey by HelpAge. So far, 395 cases of Covid-19 have been reported in La Guajira, with 18 recorded deaths, however, testing facilities are hugely limited. Given the lack of adequate facilities to implement preventative measures against Covid-19, such as a lack of water and sanitation, overcrowded settlements and the significant proportion of older inhabitants, the likelihood of a severe outbreak is highly possible. Marcela Bustamante, the regional Representative for HelpAge International in Latin America and the Caribbean, stated: ‘living as unsettled migrants in the harsh conditions of La Guajira and subject to the Covid-19 lockdown has left many of them much worse off, fearing death by the virus, compounded by the lack of health care and hunger’.<sup>28</sup> Further, given that a vast number of Venezuelan migrants work in the informal economy, more than 60,000 Venezuelan migrants have voluntarily returned to Venezuela from Colombia since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic as they can no longer afford to remain in their host countries. President Nicolas Maduro claimed that returning migrants could be ‘deliberately infected by other countries’ in order to spread the virus in Venezuela, and has imposed a limitation on the number of Venezuelans for entry to 1,000 per week.<sup>29</sup> Instances such as these not only stigmatise Venezuelan migrants,

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<sup>27</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-usa-immigration/nearly-1000-u-s-immigration-detention-centre-employees-test-positive-for-coronavirus-idUKKCN24E2VL>

<sup>28</sup> [www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/desperate-living-conditions-on-venezuelacolombia-border-plumb-new-depths-amid-covid19-fears](http://www.helpage.org/newsroom/latest-news/desperate-living-conditions-on-venezuelacolombia-border-plumb-new-depths-amid-covid19-fears)

<sup>29</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/13/americas/latam-venezuela-migrants-cucata-intl/index.html>

but it also places them in an even more precarious situation, left with no choice but to remain indefinitely unemployed in overcrowded informal settlements with poor sanitation.

### East Africa

In East Africa, over 70,000 people, mostly from internally displaced communities, were forcibly evicted from their homes in urban areas during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to the Norwegian Refugee Council.<sup>30</sup> A report released by the Norwegian Refugee Council, *An Unnecessary Burden: Forced evictions and Covid-19*, highlights cases of forced evictions occurring in East Africa during the pandemic.<sup>31</sup> Given the disproportionate amount of internally displaced people (IDP) and refugees in East Africa – a total of 3.5 million refugees and asylum seekers – 6.3 million IDPs, who are reliant on both the informal economy and informal settlements, face evictions that significantly detriment the health and wellbeing of an increasingly vulnerable population.<sup>32</sup> So far in Ethiopia, authorities in Addis Ababa have demolished dozens of homes deemed as ‘illegal constructions’ on land with contested ownership, leaving approximately 1,000 people homeless in April. The occupants of these houses were day labourers, many of whom had lost their jobs due to Covid-19 restrictions. In Kenya, authorities defied court orders and forcibly evicted more than 7,000 people from land in Kairobangi and Ruai informal settlements in Nairobi, justified by officials as ‘being built on public land’, therefore the houses were not permitted. In Somalia, a high number of evictions of displaced populations living in collective settlements and densely populated urban areas are recorded as 65,000, including 33,000 in Mogadishu during the pandemic.

## 6. Asylum procedures

### India

In India, an estimated 40 million internal migrants have been severely impacted by government-instructed lockdown measures, according to the World Bank.<sup>33</sup> Statistics from the International Labour Organization (ILO) indicate that 80 per cent of the Indian population is in non-agricultural employment, due to ‘limited employment creation in the formal economy’ leaving the only alternative being reliant on the informal economy.<sup>34</sup> Given the cessation of the informal economy sector in India during the pandemic, a record high of internal migrants travelled across India in order to reach their hometowns, and given the nature of the informal economy, were not protected by labour laws or social security. Further, India’s record of spending on public social protection excluding health is just 1.3 per cent of the GDP, according to the ILO’s World Social Protection Report of 2017–19.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> [www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/an-unnecessary-burden-forced-evictions-and-covid-19-in-east-africa/an-unnecessary-burden\\_nrc-briefing-note\\_july-2020.pdf](http://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/an-unnecessary-burden-forced-evictions-and-covid-19-in-east-africa/an-unnecessary-burden_nrc-briefing-note_july-2020.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> [www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/an-unnecessary-burden-forced-evictions-and-covid-19-in-east-africa/an-unnecessary-burden\\_nrc-briefing-note\\_july-2020.pdf](http://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/briefing-notes/an-unnecessary-burden-forced-evictions-and-covid-19-in-east-africa/an-unnecessary-burden_nrc-briefing-note_july-2020.pdf)

<sup>32</sup> [www.iom.int/news/total-number-internally-displaced-persons-east-horn-africa-drastically-drops-2019](http://www.iom.int/news/total-number-internally-displaced-persons-east-horn-africa-drastically-drops-2019)

<sup>33</sup> [www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/covid-19-hidden-majority-indias-migration-crisis](http://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/covid-19-hidden-majority-indias-migration-crisis)

<sup>34</sup> [www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/newdelhi/areasofwork/informal-economy/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>35</sup> [www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms\\_604882.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_604882.pdf)

The unique vulnerability of internal migrant workers during Covid-19 can be attributed to the fact that financial securities and public spending are not offered to the vast number of those in the informal economy. Statistics gathered from the Stranded Workers Action Network show that 50 per cent of workers had rations left for less than a day, 74 per cent had less than half their daily wages remaining to survive for the rest of the lockdown period and 89 per cent had not been paid by their employers at all during the lockdown. With almost 2.2 million people reliant on emergency food supplies, coupled with the loss of employment, accommodation and food shortages, a disproportionate amount of internal migrants are left without any means of support. So far, 300 migrant workers have died during lockdown, with reasons ranging from starvation, suicides, exhaustion, road and rail accidents, police brutality and denial of timely medical care.<sup>3637</sup>

### United Kingdom

In the UK, an asylum seeker who became infected with Covid-19 after an outbreak in his accommodation is taking legal action against the government, according to *the Guardian*. The asylum seeker, who is from Eritrea, highlighted in April that his facility, Urban House in Wakefield, could spread Covid-19 due to ‘overcrowded conditions including room sharing, a lack of social distancing and meals being eaten in a communal dining room’. However, the Home Office informed him that Urban House posed no risk to his health, and he would not contract Covid-19 from being housed there. Given the subsequent outbreak of Covid-19 in Urban House, with 20 confirmed cases so far, this indicates that serious failings are occurring in the emergency housing asylum scheme, implemented by the Home Office.

As reported in the previous Monitor, several instances of neglect of asylum seekers placed in emergency hotels have arisen. The Mears Group, a housing company contracted by the Home Office to provide housing for asylum seekers, has faced a £3.1m fine by the government for various failures in their first four months, according to a report by the National Audit Office. Further, the Mears Group has moved around 400 asylum seekers into Glasgow hotels since the pandemic began, claiming it was ‘necessary because of problems securing lets during the lockdown’, which has led to sharp criticism of their treatment of asylum seekers, placing their physical and mental health at a heightened risk.<sup>38</sup> A report by Sisters Not Strangers, an organisation for women asylum seekers and refugees, found increasing neglect towards vulnerable women during the pandemic. Findings in this report, with over 100 respondents, showed that 86 per cent were not able to get enough food during the pandemic, 35 per cent of women had their hearing on their asylum claim delayed or cancelled during the pandemic, and 23 per cent were homeless during Covid-19.<sup>39</sup> Natasha Walter, director of Women for Refugee Women, stated that: ‘During the pandemic they have too often been left without basic support including food and shelter. It is now vital that we listen to these women and ensure that we build a fairer and more caring society.’<sup>40</sup>

<sup>36</sup> <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/suicide-leading-cause-for-over-300-lockdown-deaths-in-india-says-study/articleshow/75519279.cms>

<sup>37</sup> [www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/56-year-old-migrant-worker-on-his-way-to-home-dies-on-road-28-year-old-migrant-dies-in-police-lathicharge-in-surat/story-O1N1IkDAWYRAAQOg4dkT6M.html](http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/56-year-old-migrant-worker-on-his-way-to-home-dies-on-road-28-year-old-migrant-dies-in-police-lathicharge-in-surat/story-O1N1IkDAWYRAAQOg4dkT6M.html)

<sup>38</sup> <https://theferret.scot/glasgow-asylum-seeker-mears-hotel>

<sup>39</sup> [https://dfbbceaf-7cbc-4bfa-8f79-6a8a879c2c25.filesusr.com/ugd/d37102\\_3eb3a41885e24e648f049a972e7e3335.pdf](https://dfbbceaf-7cbc-4bfa-8f79-6a8a879c2c25.filesusr.com/ugd/d37102_3eb3a41885e24e648f049a972e7e3335.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> [www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/20/women-seeking-asylum-left-without-basic-support-during-uk-lockdown](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/jul/20/women-seeking-asylum-left-without-basic-support-during-uk-lockdown)

## 7. Disability rights

### India

Recent measures to assist individuals with disabilities during the pandemic appear to be leaving students with disabilities behind. In May 2020, Prime Minister Modi announced that online learning channels will be accessible to students with visual and hearing impairments but failed to address how digital education will generally be made accessible for students with special needs. Further, The Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disability released its Comprehensive Disability Inclusive Guidelines for the protection and safety of persons with disabilities during Covid-19 and talked about providing essential services and assistance to people with disabilities but failed to specifically address the educational needs of children with disabilities.

Access to technology is fundamental for students with disabilities in India and is legally binding by both domestic and international law. Article 9 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities requires states to ensure that people with disabilities can access information, communication and technology systems, while Section 42 of India's 2016 Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act directs governments to ensure that 'all contents available in audio, print and electronic media are in accessible format'.

### United Kingdom

A cross-party committee examining the effects of Covid-19 on education heard allegations from disability advocates that schools across the UK are using Covid-19 risk assessments as a 'blanket excuse' to prevent students with disabilities from attending special education classes. Though children with disabilities were allowed to continue attending school throughout lockdown, the committee heard that teachers told parents things like 'your child will not be able to practice social distance' and 'your child cannot properly wash their hands' in order to keep children out of classrooms. As a result, parents are being forced to educate children with disabilities at home, and are reporting that students' physical, mental and emotional health are suffering.

In Kent, five teenagers with special needs between the ages of 13-17 have committed suicide since the pandemic began. Beyond the immediate crisis, advocates warned of a rise in disability discrimination as schools fully reopen in September, with some children regarded as too high-risk and with no focused catch-up provision for those with special education plans.

### Zimbabwe

Disability advocates in Zimbabwe have raised concerns over a lack of proper Covid-19 prevention mechanisms and are calling for specialised masks for children with disabilities. The majority of children with disabilities are not using face masks, and for those that are, face masks are either a choking hazard or are often soaked through with drool and thus uncomfortable and inefficient. Parent Elizabeth Chidi noted: 'My child needs support. He is now fully grown up, but we have to bath him as he is wheelchair bound. He is not able to use the face mask

because already he faces difficulties in breathing. I pray that if we happen to get the specialised masks we will be able to protect him from Covid-19', she said.'

Advocates in the country also noted an increase in domestic violence towards mothers of individuals with disabilities during the pandemic. Zimbabwe Parents of Handicapped Children Association President Theresa Makwara explained: 'We are championing gender-based violence programmes among our members because they are growing especially due to poverty. Some parents were locking up their children at home because of difficulties in moving around with them or due to fear of stigma and discrimination. Rejection of mothers who give birth to children with disabilities are rife hence we give information and counselling services to communities to curb such.'

## 8. Freedom of assembly

New research from the Verisk Maplecroft's Civil Unrest Index Projections suggests that 37 countries will face great civil unrest during the second half of the year, where pre-existing levels of unrest and a low capacity for recovery from the pandemic collides. The countries identified as most at risk include Algeria, Bangladesh, Brazil, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, Russia, South Africa and Turkey.<sup>41</sup> This prediction mirrors outbursts of civil unrest that we have already witnessed globally, protesting the economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis and governments' inadequate responses to safeguard citizens. While civil unrest fell during March 2020, as governments introduced lockdown measures restricting the freedom of assembly, it is now set to meet and exceed pre-pandemic levels.

### United States

On 20 July, tens of thousands of workers across industries, and across 25 cities in the United States, went on strike to call for racial equality in the workplace and better protection during the Covid-19 crisis. Frontline workers are still facing inadequate supplies of PPE, and employers' failure to provide sick leave pay is forcing many to remain in work while unwell. Some workers went on strike all day and others, who were unable to walk off their jobs, went on strike for 8 minutes and 46 seconds, the period of time that police officer Derek Chauvin knelt on George Floyd's neck.<sup>42</sup> Black workers make up 17 per cent of front-line workers, versus only 11.95 per cent of the total workforce in the US.<sup>43</sup> They are also more than twice as likely to live in densely populated housing and 60 per cent more likely to not be covered by medical insurance.<sup>44</sup> It is undeniable that the economic inequality that has led to Black frontline workers being far more exposed to the virus, and the prevalent racial injustice that fuelled the Black Lives Matter protests globally, are intrinsically linked. The collaboration of unions to protest systemic racism and inadequate protection for Black people against the Covid-19 crisis exemplifies this.

<sup>41</sup> [www.maplecroft.com/insights/analysis/emerging-markets-face-unparalleled-civil-unrest-as-economic-impacts-of-pandemic-unfold--study](http://www.maplecroft.com/insights/analysis/emerging-markets-face-unparalleled-civil-unrest-as-economic-impacts-of-pandemic-unfold--study)

<sup>42</sup> <https://news.trust.org/item/20200720092746-hoced>

<sup>43</sup> [www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid](http://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid)

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

## Israel

On Saturday 18 July, thousands protested outside Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's residence in Jerusalem and in Tel Aviv against the governmental response to the Covid-19 crisis, and calling for President Netanyahu's resignation following charges of corruption earlier this year. Protests stem from high levels of unemployment during the crisis, with unemployment rates at 28 per cent during March and April 2020, and alleged mismanagement of the crisis by the government leading to a resurgence in cases.<sup>45</sup> On 1 April, the country faced a peak of 759 new cases reported in one day. On 16 July, however, after a sharp rise in cases since the end of June, the country faced a peak of 1,931 new cases reported in one day.<sup>46</sup> Following a previous lifting of lockdown measures, on 17 July the government announced renewed lockdown measures.<sup>47</sup> Protestors at the weekend clashed with police, who used water cannons in an attempt to disperse crowds. 15 protestors were arrested in Jerusalem and 13 in Tel Aviv.<sup>48</sup>

## Australia

In Sydney, North South Wales Police Commissioner Mick Fuller is planning to block a Black Lives Matter protest due to take place on 28 July in a case at the Supreme Court. Following an official application for the protest, police expressed that even if the court's decision is to allow the protest to go ahead, they would 'take action' if health orders were breached and the protest had the potential to spread Covid-19.<sup>49</sup> In June, a Supreme Court ruling that a Black Lives Matter protest was unlawful was overturned on appeal. In an interview, Fuller cited the alleged link between Black Lives Matter protests and a spike in cases in public housing towers in Victoria, which was later refuted by the Department of Health and Human Services which clarified there was no evidence linking the two.<sup>50</sup> While there were six confirmed cases among people who attended the Black Lives Matter protest, none of these people are known to live in the public housing towers. While it is imperative to maintain social distancing to protect public health, no precautionary measures or alternative methods by which the public may exercise their freedom of assembly have been offered by the New South Wales police force. Covid-19 lockdown measures should not facilitate a total restriction on individuals' right to peaceful assembly, as previously upheld by the Supreme Court of Australia. Rather, police forces must work with protestors to facilitate safe, peaceful assemblies. The threat of Police Commissioner Mick Fuller to defy the Supreme Court's decision and take action is in worrying defiance of the rule of law and the rights of the protestors.

## Thailand

Following reports of the government using the Covid-19 crisis as a pretext by which to suppress freedom of assembly and public criticism in the [ninth edition of the Monitor](#), further protests erupted last weekend. Organised by the Liberation Youth Group, several thousand protestors called for a new constitution and an end to emergency legislation still in place. Police again fought back against the protestors, setting up barriers to block them. Further,

<sup>45</sup> [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-10/israel-seen-struggling-for-years-to-get-people-back-to-work](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-06-10/israel-seen-struggling-for-years-to-get-people-back-to-work)

<sup>46</sup> [www.google.com/search?q=cases+of+coronavirus+in+israel&rlz=1C1GCEV\\_enGB885GB885&oq=cases+of+corona&aq\\_s=chrome.1.69i57j017.2749j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](http://www.google.com/search?q=cases+of+coronavirus+in+israel&rlz=1C1GCEV_enGB885GB885&oq=cases+of+corona&aq_s=chrome.1.69i57j017.2749j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

<sup>47</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/17/israel-returns-to-partial-lockdown-with-immediate-weekend-shutdown](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/17/israel-returns-to-partial-lockdown-with-immediate-weekend-shutdown)

<sup>48</sup> [www.timesofisrael.com/in-jerusalem-and-tel-aviv-thousands-rail-against-netanyahu-covid-19-polices](http://www.timesofisrael.com/in-jerusalem-and-tel-aviv-thousands-rail-against-netanyahu-covid-19-polices)

<sup>49</sup> [www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/20/nsw-police-chief-vows-to-block-black-lives-matter-protest-planned-for-sydney](http://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/20/nsw-police-chief-vows-to-block-black-lives-matter-protest-planned-for-sydney)

<sup>50</sup> [www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jul/17/black-lives-matter-protests-a-covid-19-outbreak-and-the-link-that-didnt-exist](http://www.theguardian.com/media/2020/jul/17/black-lives-matter-protests-a-covid-19-outbreak-and-the-link-that-didnt-exist)

police loudspeakers played a recording of the text of the emergency law, to demonstrate the illegality of the gathering.<sup>51</sup> Again, the continuation of the emergency legislation despite global easing of lockdown measures appears to utilise the pandemic to totally restrict the right to assembly, and quell criticism of the government.

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<sup>51</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/18/thousands-of-anti-government-protesters-rally-in-thailands-capital](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/18/thousands-of-anti-government-protesters-rally-in-thailands-capital)