



Human Rights Institute

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IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor

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1. **Gender-based violence and women's health**
2. **Refugee camps**
3. **Prisoners and detainees**
4. **Freedom of assembly**
5. **Access to justice**
6. **Right to health**

1. Gender-based violence and women's health

According to the report by Save the Children, the Covid-19 pandemic risks the greatest surge in child marriages in 25 years. As the pandemic is increasing poverty and school drop-out rates, girls are pushed into work or marriages. An estimated 2.5 million more girls may be at the risk of early marriage.¹

Zimbabwe

A recently published study showed a dramatic spike in sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) during the two-month-long Covid-19-related lockdown. The data indicated that reports of physical violence went up by 38.5 per cent and emotional violence by 80 per cent.²

India

Women and girls from disadvantaged social groups who face additional vulnerabilities have been at a greater risk of SGBV. As rape and murder cases spiked amid the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations office in India urged the Indian Government and civil society to address violence against women. Nation-wide civil unrest was caused by the recent case of sexual assault and the death of a Dalit woman who was allegedly raped by four men at a village in Hathras on 14 September.³

2. Refugee camps

Middle East

North-west Syria continues to be under serious threat of devastation by the Covid-19 outbreak. Health officials expressed concern that fatalities will increase by up to 100,000 if medical supplies are not administered in due time.⁴ Jordan also registered a record 1,824 new Covid-19 cases on 6 October. After official warnings that this surge could bring about the collapse of the health system, multiple villages, as well as several refugee camps, went under a seven-day quarantine.⁵

Kenya

Turkana County issued a red alert after the drastic spike in Covid-19 cases, with the Kakuma refugee camp on the Somali border identified as a hotspot. The deficiency of testing facilities in the refugee camps poses a serious obstacle. Four refugees have died from the Covid-19 virus in the country.⁶

¹ www.savethechildren.net/news/covid-19-places-half-million-more-girls-risk-child-marriage-2020.

² www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20200929-study-shows-zimbabwe-lockdown-triggered-sharp-rise-in-violence-against-women.

³ www.outlookindia.com/newscroll/women-from-disadvantaged-social-groups-at-greater-risk-of-genderbased-violence-un-in-india/1949531.

⁴ www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-52054452

⁵ <https://alkhaleejtoday.co/international/5055698/Surge-in-Covid-cases-pushes-Jordan%E2%80%99s-health-system-into-%E2%80%98danger-zone%E2%80%99.html>; http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/02/c_139413930_4.htm.

⁶ <https://nation.africa/kenya/counties/turkana/kakuma-refugee-camp-a-covid-19-hotspot-after-surge-in-cases-2456950>.

Greece

Following the first Covid-19-related death in the Malakasa refugee camp, tensions rose and protests broke out. The camp has been on lockdown since 7 September. However, severe overcrowding has made it difficult to curb the spread of the virus. Moreover, in recent weeks, migrant reception centres have also been put under lockdown.⁷

Guatemala

The government has sent back 3,500 Honduran migrants travelling to the United States in a caravan, citing Covid-19 concerns. Police and military personnel set up roadblocks forcing migrants, including young children and people in wheelchairs, to turn back, including individuals who requested refuge in Guatemala. This has left some migrants in a precarious situation at the Corinto border crossing checkpoint between Guatemala and Honduras.⁸

3. Prisoners and detainees

Israel/Palestine

Reports have emerged that Israeli authorities have been using Covid-19 as a tool of suppression and intimidation against Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli prisons, including the threat of exposure to the virus by Israeli interrogators.⁹ This is in addition to findings of systematic medical negligence and, until Palestinian and international organisations placed pressure on prison authorities, the failure to supply the facilities with minimum preventative measures, such as sanitisers and masks.¹⁰

Israeli security forces have persisted in the arrest of hundreds of Palestinians, transferring them to detention and investigation centres that lack basic facilities to protect against a viral infection. Additionally, Palestinian prisoners have been deprived of family visits and communications, including child detainees, as well as restrictions on money transfers to purchase in-prison goods and high restrictions on accessing legal aid. These human rights violations have persisted after Israel's Supreme Court held in July that Palestinians have no right to social distancing, ruling that prisoners are no different to family members or flatmates living in the same home.¹¹

In April, a group of UN human rights experts called on Israeli authorities 'not to discriminate against' thousands of Palestinian prisoners facing high-risk exposure to Covid-19, particularly women, children and detainees with pre-existing medical conditions, asking the nation to release the most vulnerable

⁷ www.infomigrants.net/en/post/27642/greece-tensions-at-migrant-camp-after-first-covid-death.

⁸ www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/10/5/guatemala-sends-back-almost-3500-migrants-amid-covid-19-concerns

⁹ www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-israel-palestine-prisoners-intimidated-pandemic

¹⁰ <https://online.ucpress.edu/jps/article-abstract/49/4/47/111926/Prison-Report-Palestinians-in-Israeli-Detention?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

¹¹ www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-israel-supreme-court-palestinians-prisoners-no-rights-social-distancing

among them. The UN pointed out that Israel had released hundreds of Israeli prisoners, but failed to do the same for their Palestinian counterparts, which indicates discriminatory treatment, in violation of international law,¹² particularly CERD, CEDAW and the Convention on the rights of the Child, all of which Israel is a signatory of.¹³ There were more than 4,520 Palestinian prisoners, including 183 children, 43 women and 700 detainees with pre-existing medical conditions in Israeli jails.¹⁴

4. Freedom of assembly

Venezuela

According to the Venezuelan Observatory of Social Conflict, over 100 protests have occurred over the last two weeks in 19 out of the country's 23 states.¹⁵ Political opposition leader, Juan Guido, has especially called on teachers to demonstrate against low salaries and poor internet services that have made remote learning difficult.¹⁶ Additionally, Venezuelans' right to freedom of assembly and access to sources of income has been further limited by a strict Covid-19 lockdown enforced by President Maduro since March 2020.

Egypt

Fresh protests on the anniversary of the 2019 mass rallies have broken out across Egypt, calling for President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi's resignation in defiance of a government stay at home order. With an estimated 70 per cent of Egyptians living on the brink or below the poverty line,¹⁷ the protests were spurred on by President Sisi's decision to demolish thousands of homes in mid-September that authorities said were built illegally, affecting the poorest and most vulnerable communities, amid a deteriorating economy and the Covid-19 pandemic. Egyptian security forces have dispersed crowds by using teargas, batons, live ammunition and birdshot pellets. Amnesty International has reported that two men were killed, along with the arbitrary arrest of 496 protestors and bystanders. Egyptian authorities have justified the crackdown by citing terrorism charges, the misuse of social media, spreading fake news and unlawful assemblies, as President Sisi banned unauthorised protests when he took power through a military coup in 2013.

5. Access to justice

¹² www.un.org/unispal/document/covid-19-israel-must-release-palestinian-prisoners-in-vulnerable-situation-say-un-experts-press-release/

¹³ https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=84&Lang=EN

¹⁴ www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-israel-palestine-prisoners-intimidated-pandemic

¹⁵ <https://in.reuters.com/article/uk-venezuela-protests/new-round-of-protests-shakes-venezuela-as-public-services-fail-idINKBN26K3A0>

¹⁶ www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/383711/venezuela-opposition-calls-for-protests-on-october-5

¹⁷ www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/9/26/one-killed-in-egypt-as-protestors-demand-el-sisi-resign

Poland

The Polish Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (HFHR) reported in July that Poland was conducting criminal proceedings, such as pre-trial detention and trial hearings online via video link, on the basis of a new law permitting this conduct. HFHR stated that the rules restrict suspects' ability to contact a lawyer before the court hearing as often times the suspect will not have the lawyer's contact details or will not have been provided one through legal aid, hereby contravening the EU's Access to a Lawyer Directive.¹⁸

6. Right to health

Kashmir

Slow internet services, imposed by the Indian government, continue to encumber the health care system and hamper the fight against the spread of Covid-19.¹⁹ 20 out of the 22 districts of India's only Muslim-majority state have been restricted to 2G internet since January. Thus undermining efforts to bring the pandemic under control by disallowing doctors to easily access online resources, and contact other health practitioners, patients and family members. Therefore leaving Kashmiris unable to use Aarogya Setu, the contact tracing app that was made mandatory to download by Indian authorities.²⁰

The use of internet shutdowns is strictly prohibited, even during a state of emergency, under international law.²¹ These restrictions have infringed upon Kashmiri's right to health, as human health is contingent on access to timely and accurate information, public health guidelines, research on Covid-19 and accurate updates on transmission in the region.²² The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has previously urged all governments to end internet and telecommunication shutdowns by stating that 'amidst the Covid-19 crisis, fact-based and relevant information on the disease and its spread and response must reach all people, without exception'.²³

¹⁸ www.fairtrials.org/news/short-update-poland-restricting-access-lawyer-criminal-proceedings-says-polish-rights

¹⁹ <https://scroll.in/latest/973651/jammu-and-kashmir-2g-internet-is-enough-for-learning-public-services-centre-tells-parliament>

²⁰ www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-52659520

²¹ www.accessnow.org/internet-kill-switches-are-a-violation-of-human-rights-law-declare-major-un/

²² www.hhrjournal.org/2020/04/covid-19-restricted-internet-impacts-on-health-in-kashmir/

²³ www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25751&LangID=E