



Human Rights Institute

25 years promoting and protecting
human rights worldwide

IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor

Release date: Thursday 7 May 2020

- 1. Gender-based violence and women's health**
- 2. LGBTQI+ rights**
- 3. Refugee camps**
- 4. Prisoners and detainees**
- 5. Asylum procedures**
- 6. Disability rights**
- 7. Religious discrimination**

1. Gender-based violence and women's health

Domestic and sexual violence

On the 30 April 2020, a joint statement on domestic and sexual violence in the OSCE region during the Covid-19 pandemic, released by British Ambassador Neil Bush, declared that domestic violence increases during times of crisis, stating that this is 'particularly the case when it is linked to economic instability and fears of job losses'.¹ It is indisputable that lockdown measures have severely affected the global economy, with women facing a disproportionate impact. In the United States, the Department of Labor estimated that more than 701,000 jobs were lost during February and March. This figure is already considered outdated due to thousands of businesses continuing to lay off their staff. According to the Institute for Women's Policy Research, women, with 261,000 having lost their job in their field, make up about 60 per cent of the total job losses during this crisis. In the United Kingdom, research from the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Zurich, has found that 17 per cent of women are newly unemployed, compared to 13 per cent of men.² Empirical data collected by various organisations worldwide, namely the National Institute of Justice, suggest that significant periods of unemployment in heterosexual relationships correlate with elevated rates of abuse. As the economic gap between men and women persists, the long-term impact of the global financial decline on the vulnerable position of women is concerning.

In Haiti, there has been widespread closures of textile factories, with only three production lines continuing for mask manufacturing. This has contributed to a rising unemployment rate for women that exemplifies existing gender inequalities. The loss of jobs has in turn made women far more vulnerable to domestic violence. Data from a Haiti-based organisation for women, Rassemblement des femmes engagées de Ouanaminthe, indicates that three times

¹OSCE Permanent Council, 'Joint statement on domestic and sexual violence risks under Covid-19 in the OSCE region' 30 April 2020

www.gov.uk/government/speeches/joint-statement-on-domestic-and-sexual-violence-risks-under-covid-19-in-the-osce-region?utm_source=miragenews&utm_medium=miragenews&utm_campaign=news

² University of Cambridge, 'Women bear brunt of coronavirus economic shutdown in UK and US' 21 April 2020

www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/women-bear-brunt-of-coronavirus-economic-shutdown-in-uk-and-us

as many domestic violence cases have been reported to this organisation alone, including the rape of a minor and 12 cases of domestic violence.³

On a global scale, live-in migrant domestic workers are exposed to heightened risks of domestic violence due to the nature of their jobs. As the global economy slows down, remaining in your live-in situation can be the only way to support family members in their countries of origin. Furthermore, sexual, physical, psychological and economic abuses increase on female domestic workers because of socio-economic determinants, such as remaining in your live-in capacity, coupled with a fear of reporting your employer in times of crisis.⁴ For the estimated 250,000 migrant domestic workers in Lebanon, currently bound to the Kafala System (an inherently abusive migration sponsorship system), forced labour conditions already prevent them from accessing redress, increasing their vulnerability and exploitative conditions during the lockdown⁵. With a lack of labour law protections, and hostile immigration policies for a significant proportion of migrant domestic workers, the risk of further exploitation and abuse must be prevented in times of crisis⁶.

Since the start of 2020, Spain has seen 18 women murdered by their partners or ex-partners, according to the Government Delegation for Gender Violence. The latest victim is a 78-year-old woman killed in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria by her husband. In the first two weeks of April alone, there was a 47 per cent increase in calls to Spain's domestic violence helpline over the same period last year. The number of women contacting support services, which have been designated as essential by the government, by email or on social media is said to have increased by as much as 700 per cent.

Women's health

³ Centre Canadien d'Études et de Coopération Internationale, 'Women's organizations at the heart of the response to COVID-19 in Haiti' 4 May 2020

<https://reliefweb.int/report/haiti/women-s-organizations-heart-response-covid-19-haiti>

⁴ Al Jazeera, 'For Arab women and girls, the crisis is just beginning' 4 May 2020

www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/arab-women-girls-crisis-beginning-200428065526213.html

⁵ Amnesty International, 'Lebanon: Migrant domestic workers must be protected during COVID-19 pandemic' 14 April 2020
www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/lebanon-migrant-domestic-workers-must-be-protected-during-covid19-pandemic/

⁶ Human Rights Watch, 'Domestic Workers in Middle East Risk Abuse Amid COVID-19 Crisis' 6 April 2020
www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/06/domestic-workers-middle-east-risk-abuse-amid-covid-19-crisis

As the IBAHRI has reported in previous weeks, access to women's health has been impacted in order to prioritise healthcare services for those affected by coronavirus. Further, some governments have taken this as an opportunity to restrict reproductive rights, such as in the US and Poland. Thankfully, Poland's proposed bill outlawing abortion has been delayed in passing through parliament. Dunja Mijatovic, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, spoke out against two bills in Poland, which aimed to reduce access to abortion, and prevent children's rights to sexuality education.⁷ Following this, the European Commission opened a new legal case against Poland, for its moves to limit the independence of the judiciary. According to a UN Policy Brief on the Impact of Covid-19 on Women, the current limitations on sexual and reproductive health could 'result in exacerbated maternal mortality and morbidity, increased rates of adolescent pregnancies, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases'. It has also been estimated that in Latin America and the Caribbean, 18 million women will lose access to contraception.⁸

At the beginning of March, a new bill was introduced in Argentina to legalise abortion, which would make it the third Latin American country (after Cuba and Uruguay) to take this step. Since lockdown began in Argentina on 20 March, this bill has unfortunately been delayed until next year as part of a global trend to de-prioritise women's health. The work of Socorristas en Red, an organisation of activists who help women in Argentina access abortions by navigating the country's healthcare system, has been even further restricted by lockdown measures as counselling can no longer be carried out, and travel to access such services is now prohibited.⁹

A number of women organisations are calling for a continuation of healthcare services to be provided to women during this pandemic, and to be incorporated in governmental responses to the outbreak. In the Philippines, healthcare services for women are integral in maintaining the wellbeing of a vast amount of the populace. Data from the Commission on Population and Development indicates that 196,000 girls and young women aged between 15 to 19 years old get pregnant each year. With such a high number of pregnancies, which the Commission

⁷ The Guardian, 'Polish parliament delays decision on new abortion restrictions' 16 April 2020
www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/16/polish-parliament-delays-decision-on-new-abortion-restrictions

⁸ Un Policy Brief, April 2020
www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/policy_brief_on_covid_impact_on_women_9_april_2020.pdf

⁹ Time, 'How a Network of Activists Are Helping Women Get Abortions in Argentina During Coronavirus Lockdown' 1 May 2020
<https://time.com/5830687/argentina-abortion-coronavirus/>

declared a 'national social emergency' the suspension of services for pregnant women can lead to a heightened risk of pre-natal complications.¹⁰ Reports have already been released on a pregnant woman being refused a prenatal check-up in a health centre in Manila, and told to return once the quarantine period was over.¹¹ These situations increase the vulnerability of women, with Natalie Lourdes Verccles, Director of the Center for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Philippines stating that this is a 'matter of upholding dignity and rights, or reducing risk, loss, harm, and suffering - it is about survival'.¹²

As a global decline in women's health services during the pandemic has already taken place, several organisations have attempted to rectify this with immediate effect. In India, the Patna Municipal Corporation in the state of Bihar has collaborated with the United Nations Population Fund to help those who are increasingly vulnerable from these closures, including pregnant women and the elderly. WeCare provides services such as free travel assistance to and from health care facilities are provided to these vulnerable groups living in slum communities across Patna, the capital city of Bihar.¹³

Although services for women have faced significant cuts in recent months, Sudan has taken positive steps forward in safeguarding the wellbeing of women at risk of female genital mutilation. With the decision by both the Sudanese sovereign council and the council of ministers in Sudan to amend the criminal law on FGM to make it a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment, this is a pivotal display of recognition for all women in Sudan, and a positive step forward in completely removing the practice.

2. LGBTQI+ rights

¹⁰ Oxfam, 'Women's groups call for unhampered delivery of reproductive health services' 5 May 2020
<https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/women-s-groups-call-unhampered-delivery-reproductive-health-services>

¹¹ Manila Standard, 'Filipino women and COVID-19' 2 May 2020
www.manilastandard.net/opinion/columns/power-point-by-elizabeth-angsioco/322839/filipino-women-and-covid-19.html

¹² ¹² Oxfam, 'Women's groups call for unhampered delivery of reproductive health services' 5 May 2020
<https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/women-s-groups-call-unhampered-delivery-reproductive-health-services>

¹³ UNFPA, 'In India's Bihar state, lifesaving support for pregnant women and new mothers amid COVID-19', 2 May 2020
<https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/en/news/indias-bihar-state-lifesaving-support-pregnant-women-and-new-mothers-amid-covid-19>

In Georgia, a transgender activist in Tbilisi set herself on fire to protest the government's treatment of the trans community during the coronavirus pandemic. Madona Kiparoidze was among a group of transgender women who were protesting the 'lack of access to services and basic needs' during the nationwide state of emergency.¹⁴ This was done to highlight the plight of trans-sex workers with no income during the coronavirus lockdown, LGBTQI+ groups said on Friday as they called for more state support.¹⁵ Transgender people often rely on sex work to make a living in the socially conservative Caucasian nation, as discrimination and the lack of regulations on legal gender recognition make it difficult to find regular jobs.¹⁶

Activists criticised the Law and Justice Party (PiS) for voting on a 'Stop Paedophilia' bill at a time when mass gatherings are banned to limit the spread of the new coronavirus. The nationalist, right-wing PiS, which has been fighting corruption allegations and waning popularity since coming to power in 2015, targeted LGBTQI+ rights as a dangerous foreign idea in national elections last year. Pushing through reforms on LGBTQI+ and abortion rights during Covid-19 exploits governmental opportunities during a time when mass gatherings and protests are not possible, coupled with the diversion of international attention, to pass controversial legislation.

The Ankara Prosecutor's office in Turkey has opened a criminal investigation into the Ankara Bar Association after it filed a complaint against the head of Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate for a homophobic speech.¹⁷

The case revolves around a Friday sermon about the Covid-19 pandemic on 24 April 2020 by Erbaş, an imam who heads Turkey's Religious Affairs Directorate. During the sermon he made several homophobic remarks. He urged Muslims 'to join the fight to protect people from such evil'. Following criticism of Erbaş by rights groups and bar associations in Ankara, Izmir, and

¹⁴Pink News, 'Trans woman sets herself on fire in Georgia's capital to protest the country's horrendous negligence during coronavirus' 1 May 2020

www.nydailynews.com/coronavirus/ny-coronavirus-transgender-protest-tbilisi-georgia-set-fire-protest-20200501-il5esdanbvh7lhkbox52jr7qwe-story.html

¹⁵ Reuters, 'Trans woman sets herself on fire in Georgia as virus lockdown cuts income' 1 May 2020

<https://news.trust.org/item/20200501135226-pb1jc>

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Human Rights Watch, 'Turkey: Criminal Case for Opposing Homophobic Speech' 1 May 2020

www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/01/turkey-criminal-case-opposing-homophobic-speech

Diyarbakir, several top Turkish officials, including President Erdoğan, voiced their support for Erbaş's remarks and condemned the Ankara Bar Association for criticizing Erbaş's speech.

The Ankara Bar Association filed a complaint on the grounds that Erbaş's sermon constituted public provocation to hatred and hostility (art. 216/2 of the Turkish Penal Code). In response, the Ankara prosecutor's office opened an investigation into the Bar Association on the grounds of 'insulting the religious values adopted by a part of the public' (art. 216/3 of the Turkish Penal Code) for its statement against Erbaş.¹⁸ The justice minister endorsed the criminal investigation by posting a tweet after the prosecutor opened the case condemning the Ankara Bar Association's statement.¹⁹

3. Refugee camps

Last month, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, namely the IFRC, IOM, UNHCR and WHO, published an Interim Guidance document on 'Scaling up Covid-19 Outbreak Readiness and Response Operations in Humanitarian Situations Including Camps and Camp-Like Settings'. The message conveyed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee was clear: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), asylum seekers, refugees and migrants must not be 'scapegoated, stigmatised or otherwise targeted with specific, discriminatory measures'. Further, the right of all individuals to seek asylum must not be diminished based on a 'real or perceived fear' of Covid-19 transmission.

In a press release last week, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, issued a public appeal in support of the Guidance Document, stating that 'people who are forced to flee conflict and persecution should not be denied safety and protection on the pretext, or even as a side effect, of responding to the virus'. Yet, despite the collective efforts of the international community, this week has seen a stark increase in hostility towards asylum seekers, refugees and IDPs, in addition to a concerning increase in the denial of asylum claims. Globally, a series of unprovoked attacks and protests have been launched against refugees and IDPs residing in national borders. Further, in a press release last week, the UNHCR claimed that out of the 167

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ <https://twitter.com/abdulhamitgul/status/1254755658920071168>

countries that have fully or partially closed their domestic borders due to Covid-19, 57 of these have now extended these restrictions to encompass asylum claims.

The approach of the Greek government towards asylum claims during Covid-19 has attracted widespread criticism from the EU and the international community. With the government announcing a systematic ban for any asylum seeker arriving in Greece for the month of March, and the forcible detention and segregation of asylum seekers in unsanitary makeshift facilities arriving therein after, the sentiment behind Greece's restrictive approach appears in direct contradiction of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's instructions. This week, a Greek national was arrested for the 'attempted murder' of four refugees, currently residing in Greece's overcrowded Moria Refugee Camp on Lesbos Island. Despite Greece's currently strict social-distancing restrictions, the national was ushered in by a crowd of supporters as he attended court. Further, a rally was carried out by local residents prior to his hearing, claiming that refugees on Lesbos Island are 'to blame' for the increase in theft and criminal activity in residential neighbourhoods.

Long before the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, Australia has been under strong criticism for its hostility towards refugees and asylum seekers and forcible detention of new arrivals in offshore facilities. This week, lawyers from Australia's Human Rights Centre have filed a High Court petition against the Australian Department of Home Affairs and Minister Peter Dutton, on behalf of a refugee currently being detained in an offshore detention centre in Manus Island. The basis of their case seeks to assert that the Federal Government has breached their duty of care towards refugees during the Covid-19 pandemic, by holding them in overcrowded detention centres and failing to provide adequate means for refugees to practise social distancing and maintain adequate personal hygiene. The particular refugee in question is particularly vulnerable to the novel virus, suffering from a heart condition, diabetes and asthma. As such, he is seeking a court-mandated order that the Minister immediately releases him from detention so that he may adequately ensure his prevention of the coronavirus in a private residential facility.

With an increase in political instability and armed violence in the Sahel region, a significant proportion of refugees are experiencing severe violence during this unprecedented pandemic. In Burkina Faso's Mentao Camp, hosting around 6,500 Malian refugees, security forces raided the

camp on 2 May, injuring 32 people, in an attempt to find assailants to a crime occurring in that region. Witness reports submitted to UNHCR staff states that refugees accused of complicity with the unidentified gunmen were given an ultimatum to leave the camp within 72 hours or face death.²⁰ With travel restrictions in the Sahel region, the possibility of reaching any form of safe ground is impossible for those expected to evacuate refugee camps²¹.

4. Prisoners and detainees

Rioting and protesting prison conditions has become a frequent occurrence worldwide, in order to highlight the inadequacy of pre-existing living conditions and the cessation of vital services, such as visitation rights. On 2 May, more than 40 people were reportedly killed after rioting broke out at a prison in Venezuela. Inmates at Los Llanos jail, near western Guanare city, were angry at a lack of food and water, according to the Venezuelan Prison Observatory.²² With the rise in protesting against prison conditions, an uprising in a Brazilian prison on 2 May saw seven prison guards taken hostage in Manaus in the Amazon, because of public services being denied to prisoners. Although all guards were released with no signs of critical injuries, incidents such as these increase a fear amongst the prison population of remaining ignored, and subsequently affecting their health and wellbeing.²³

Mass detention of migrants as a means to control the spread of coronavirus is counterintuitive, yet some states have incarcerated migrants to reaffirm that the rights of these citizens can be bypassed in times of crisis. In Russia, over 8,000 people, including families with children, are being held in indefinite detention because of the near-total shutdown in international travel. In some instances, children have been separated from their parents, held in different detention centres and placed in separate removal proceedings.²⁴

²⁰ VOA News, 'UNHCR Condemns Attacks Against Malian Refugees by Burkina Faso Security Forces' 4 May 2020

www.voanews.com/africa/unhcr-condemns-attacks-against-malian-refugees-burkina-faso-security-forces

²¹ UNHCR, 'Burkina Faso: UNHCR condemns violence against Malian refugees', 4 May 2020

www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/5/5eafedba4/burkina-faso-unhcr-condemns-violence-against-malian-refugees.html

²² BBC News, 'Venezuela prison riot leaves more than 40 dead' 2 May 2020 www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-52517167

²³ Channel News Asia, 'Prisoners take guards hostage in Brazil's coronavirus-hit Manaus' 3 May 2020

www.channelnewsasia.com/news/world/covid19-brazil-manaus-prisoners-riot-guards-hostage-12697478

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, 'Russia: As Pandemic Grows, Migration Detention Deadlock' 16 April 2020

www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/16/russia-pandemic-grows-migration-detention-deadlock

For the population of undocumented migrants in Malaysia, large-scale raids and forced detention have become widespread because of the pandemic. On 1 May, 700 undocumented migrants and refugees were taken into custody as part of a scheme to contain the spread of coronavirus. Abdul Hamid Bador, the Polices' Inspector General, justified the breach of their fundamental rights by stating that given the nature of undocumented migrants, the country cannot allow migrants 'to move freely' during its lockdown, since 'it will be difficult for us to track them down if they leave identified locations'²⁵.

Severe overcrowding was a pre-existing condition for many prisons worldwide, but the current pandemic and fears of contamination makes such conditions increasingly dangerous. In a report by Amnesty International, in Tunisia's Quardia Center, there are currently 50 detainees sharing five rooms, two bathrooms and a common eating area. Evidence of these conditions was sent to Amnesty, with photos and videos detailing the close proximity of sleeping arrangements in packed cells²⁶.

In Egypt, concerns over mass incarceration has led to a hunger strike for a detainee. Prominent activist Alaa Abdel al-Fattah, re-imprisoned last September, recently began a hunger strike in protest at prison conditions. Coupled with this, the death of Shady Habash in Cairo's Tora Prison calls for immediate action to be placed on the wellbeing and health concerns of the growing number of young people detained in Egypt for producing art that directly negates Sisi's administration²⁷.

In the Philippines, a prison in Cebu City has 63 new cases of coronavirus reported since 2 May, bringing the overall total to 207 coronavirus cases. With a total of 6,000 inmates and increased concerns over the continuous spread of coronavirus, attention must be placed on mitigating further outbreaks and protecting those incarcerated²⁸.

²⁵ New York Times, 'Migrants face roundups and detention in Malaysia and surging infections in Singapore's dormitories' 2 May 2020

www.nytimes.com/2020/05/02/world/coronavirus-news.html#link-722c0fdb

²⁶ Amnesty International, 'Tunisia: Release immigration detainees amid COVID-19 pandemic', 29 April 2020

www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/04/tunisia-release-immigration-detainees-amid-covid19-pandemic/

²⁷ The Guardian, 'Egyptian film-maker who worked on video mocking president dies in jail' 2 May 2020

www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/02/egyptian-filmmaker-who-mocked-president-dies-in-cairo-jail

²⁸ CNN Philippines, 'COVID-19 cases at Cebu City jail now 207', 25 April 2020

<https://cnnphilippines.com/news/2020/4/25/cebu-city-jail-coronavirus.html>

5. Asylum procedures

As asylum authorities faced severe setbacks across the European Union because of the coronavirus outbreak, the Director of Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, highlighted that: ‘Migrants haven’t disappeared just because the borders are closed’, instructing that the ‘ongoing health crisis is an additional reminder of our obligation to assist those whose lives are in danger’.²⁹

With an increase in migrants and refugee arrivals into Bosnia and Herzegovina, considerable restrictions from authorities prevents the possibility of these communities in reaching safe accommodation during the global pandemic. The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations reported that current EU-funded temporary reception centres are overcrowded, with some having to sleep outside of reception centres. Furthermore, the increased number of unaccompanied children, including those separated from family members, are exposed to significant protection risks. In addition to the regular assistance given to those accommodated at reception facilities, reaching out to refugees and migrants outside of the centres and providing them with basic support is very important. In the long-term, suitable accommodation, facilities are needed to safely house all refugees, so they may be at least risk possible from Covid-19.³⁰

With various states blocking asylum registration, this resulted in the mass deportation of asylum and migrant workers in some countries. Earlier this month in Libya, a spokesperson for the Libyan government declared that 160 Sudanese migrants were evacuated because of the ongoing pandemic. For these evacuated migrants, the denial of asylum, legal assistance, protection and other critical procedural safeguards impedes on their fundamental human rights and directly violate Libya’s international human rights law obligations prohibiting refoulement and collective expulsion³¹.

²⁹ OSCE, ‘Overcrowded shelters put migrants at unacceptable risk amidst pandemic, OSCE human rights head says’ 4 May 2020

www.osce.org/odihr/451333

³⁰ European Commission, ‘European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations Bosnia and Herzegovina’ 29 April 2020

https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/bosnia_and_herzegovina_2020-04-30.pdf

³¹ OHCHR, ‘Press Briefing On Libya’, 28 April 2020

www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25834&LangID=E

6. Disability rights

On a global scale, disability rights advocates have called for an end of the stigmatisation of persons with disabilities, and for rapid reform of governmental policies to protect vulnerable communities in this pandemic. In North Macedonia, there are currently no reliable statistics due to the lack of resources to identify and support of people with disabilities. It is estimated that about 15 per cent of the population in North Macedonia have some form of disability, however, as there is no system in place to identify those with disabilities, the task of attending the needs of vulnerable people is logistically impossible. Incidents such as these are not rare, as persons with disabilities are often marginalised in society, and therefore are unable to voice their concerns.³²

In Scotland, research conducted by Glasgow Disability Alliance (GDA) indicates that coronavirus has ‘supercharged’ existing inequalities for a population of 150,000 disabled people in Glasgow. By use of postal surveys, the GDA reached out to over 5,000 disabled citizens. Conclusive evidence gathered from research findings revealed that the concerns of 40 per cent of disabled people were about food, medication or finances. As a vast number were reliant on services such as foodbanks or delivery services, the discontinuation of such services, or the unavailability due to high demand, leaves a significant number of persons with disabilities in an increasingly vulnerable state.³³ Coupled with this, consumer group Which? had 1,000 people contact them, who were either disabled, elderly or had illnesses and that were having difficulties in getting grocery essentials. With high demand from an estimated 1.5 million vulnerable people reliant on grocery delivery services, and an overall estimate of 16 million at risk of contracting the virus, disability rights groups have called for a drastic change in the management of such services to provide adequate support for those in vital need.

Global organisations have conducted research into locating the needs of people with disabilities during the coronavirus outbreak. A report conducted by Humanity and Inclusion set out to understand the needs of people with disabilities and their families in Jordan during

³² Helvetas, ‘A Triple Challenge? Disability and the COVID-19 Pandemic’ 3 May 2020

www.helvetas.org/en/switzerland/how-you-can-help/follow-us/blog/inclusive-systems/Disabilities-COVID-19

³³ Glasgow Disability Alliance, ‘COVID-19 supercharges existing inequalities faced by Glasgow’s 150,000 disabled people’ 28 April 2020

<http://gda.scot/our-community/news/2020/4/28/covid-19-supercharges-existing-inequalities-faced-by-glasgows-150-000-disabled-people>

the implementation of restrictions by the Jordanian Government. Data from this report states that 79 per cent of respondents claimed that food was their greatest anxiety, with 84 per cent highlighting that a lack of money is one of their greatest fears. As 87 per cent of respondents claimed to have only one member of their household in paid work, and 78 per cent of respondents reported having had a member in their household lose their job as a result of the lockdown measures, the financial pressure on people with disabilities has increased drastically because of this outbreak.³⁴

7. Religious discrimination

During times of crisis, it is integral that governments uphold religious freedom that can be applicable to emergency legislation and prevent the scapegoating of specific communities. International law requires governments to preserve individual human rights, including religious freedom, when taking measures to protect public health even in times of crisis. Human rights advocates are concerned that governmental responses to the coronavirus outbreak have exacerbated ongoing religious freedom violations.

In some states, a continuation of religious discrimination has come in the form of burial rites for Muslim communities. On 27 March 2020, Sri Lanka's Ministry of Health issued guidelines stating that both burials and cremations would be allowed for the disposal of bodies of deceased persons who were infected with, or suspected of being infected with, Covid-19. However, four days later, the government revised these guidelines to exclusively order cremations for disposal of such bodies without providing proper justification for the same. This is in contravention to the World Health Organization's guidelines for the safe management of dead bodies during the Covid-19 pandemic, allowing for either cremations or burials.

For Sri Lanka's Muslim community, which accounts for nine per cent of the population, burial practices are an integral part of the final rites performed according to Islamic culture. Forced burials ordered by the government in a time of public health emergency reflects deliberate incitement of religious insensitivity and marginalisation in challenging times. This policy has

³⁴ Humanity and Inclusion, 'Needs Assessment Impact of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities and their Families in Jordan' April 2020
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/75872.pdf>

already led to an increased sentiment of hatred and persecution against the Muslim community in Sri Lanka. The IBAHRI understands that this policy has come against the backdrop of increasing concerns of security of Muslim minorities in the nation during the Covid-19 health crisis.

Religious discrimination and stigmatisation has been increasing during the pandemic, with cases in India and Cambodia against the Muslim community, along with Shi'a Muslims in Pakistan. As the first outbreak of patients to test positive for Covid-19 came from these communities, these governments have deployed this to legitimise religious-based abuse, under the guise of as a means to containing the spread of coronavirus. A report released by the United States Commission on International Freedom highlights South Korean authorities placing blame on the spread of coronavirus on already marginalised religious groups, such as the Shincheonji Church, as a means to further marginalise these communities. Further to this, South Korean authorities have filed a lawsuit against the Shincheonji Church, alleging that the church undermined public health measures, even though the Ministry of Health and Welfare stated publicly that the church has cooperated with the government's efforts.³⁵

The Chinese Communist Party has continually suppressed religious and ethnic minorities, and recent legislation restricting the ethnic and cultural rights of Tibetans, was passed on 1 May. This comes as part of a worrying global trend to use the coronavirus crisis to pass controversial legislation whilst the eyes of the world are diverted. The highly controversial new regulations on 'ethnic unity' came into effect in the Tibet Autonomous Region, with the International Campaign for Tibet reporting that this new law explicitly departs from the principle of 'preferential treatment' for Tibetans, which was supposed to guarantee that Tibetans could maintain their culture and traditional way of life.³⁶ Alongside this, abuses of religious freedom by Chinese authorities are extended in the cases of Xinjiang and the Uyghur camps, using those detained on religious and ethnic grounds to test a range of surveillance technologies including retina scans, DNA databases and facial recognition technology.

³⁵ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 'The Global Response to the Coronavirus: Impact on Religious Practice and Religious Freedom' March 2020

www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2020%20Factsheet%20Covid-19%20and%20FoRB.pdf

³⁶ UNPO, 'Coronavirus: China & Religious Oppression' 4 May 2020

<https://unpo.org/article/21861>