



# Human Rights Institute

25 years promoting and protecting  
human rights worldwide

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

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1. **Gender-based violence**
2. **Refugee camps**
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## 1. Gender-based violence and women's health

### United Kingdom

In light of statistics released thus far on the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic, cases of gender-based violence are rapidly increasing, drawing attention to the United Kingdom's legal framework in protecting those subjected to domestic violence. Although the UK government has consistently claimed to prioritise protection for women and girls, vital services for domestic violence victims has been severely restricted, leaving those in need of this vital lifeline in dire situations.<sup>1</sup> A survey conducted by Women's Aid showed that 38 of 45 service providers had reduced or suspended at least one service due to Covid-19 as of 6 April. According to Human Rights Watch, these services are inclusive of sheltered accommodation, which already 'fell short of Council of Europe standards'. In regards to access to legal aid for victims of domestic violence, *The Guardian* has reported that a victim of domestic violence has been denied legal aid in a battle to hold on to her home, and is now challenging strict regulations that could force her to cross-examine her former partner in court.<sup>2</sup>

### Uruguay

For Uruguay, the government's preventative mechanisms to curb the spread of Covid-19 infections has proven effective, with 800 confirmed cases and 23 deaths so far. However, the rise in intimate partner violence and femicide due to the strict lockdown measures, with two women killed by male partners in May, and 80 per cent of women reporting experience of violence in the home, highlights the disproportionate effects of Covid-19 on women. In Uruguay, gender-based violence is the second-most reported crime in the country, after theft, with 40,000 reports in 2019. Coupled with this, in a study conducted by the UN in 2018, Uruguay has Latin America's second highest rate of killings of women by current or former partners.<sup>3</sup>

### Mexico

In Mexico, there has been a sharp increase in reported violence against women and femicides during the 'stay at home' measures introduced on 23 March. Since the government-issued lockdown measures to curb the spread of the coronavirus were instated, Mexico's government database has highlighted that in April, 267 women were murdered – the deadliest month in five years. Coupled with this, organisations have reported 26,171 emergency calls reporting violence against women during March. Despite these alarming statistics, the President of Mexico, Andrés Manuel López Obrador has stated that these calls to emergency services were merely fabricated, and that any resounding issues is due to the 'neoliberal governing model of his predecessors'. Further, President Obrador states that 'ninety per cent of those calls that serve as your base are false, it's proven', therefore claiming that statistical data released by his own government on violence against women is false. Issues pertaining to President Obrador's comments, given the horrifyingly large number of women who have fallen victim to gender-based violence and femicide, is not only highly controversial, but places women in an increasingly vulnerable position, preventing them from calling organisations for assistance, reluctant to feel safe.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/08/uk-failing-domestic-abuse-victims-pandemic](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/08/uk-failing-domestic-abuse-victims-pandemic)

<sup>2</sup> [www.theguardian.com/law/2020/jun/09/domestic-violence-legal-aid-judicial-review-cross-examine-partner-court](http://www.theguardian.com/law/2020/jun/09/domestic-violence-legal-aid-judicial-review-cross-examine-partner-court)

<sup>3</sup> [www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/uruguays-shadow-pandemic-of-violence-against-women-is-out-of-control](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/uruguays-shadow-pandemic-of-violence-against-women-is-out-of-control)

<sup>4</sup> <https://abc7.com/mexico-women-killed-murders-murder-rate-andres-manuel-lopez/6238118>

## 2. Refugee camps

As the Covid-19 pandemic continues to move into new global and domestic phases, the refugee, migrant and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) community continues to bear the brunt of a worsening humanitarian crisis. While IDPs and refugees in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Niger and Iran face civil unrest, police brutality and violence, refugees and migrants in Bangladesh, the Middle East and North Africa continue to suffer at the hands of Covid-19.

### The Democratic Republic of Congo and Niger

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (the DRC), an increase in IDPs has arisen as a result of violent civil conflict.<sup>5</sup> Last week saw some 200,000 people fleeing their homes after an outbreak of violence in the north-eastern Ituri province.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the DRC was placed globally as second to Syria for the number of IDPs within its state borders.<sup>7</sup>

The DRC has recently reported a surge in cases of Covid-19 within local communities.<sup>8</sup> In a public statement released last Thursday, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has also expressed concerns that IDPs have been reluctant to seek medical assistance for Covid-19, due to fears of violence.<sup>9</sup> Reports from local humanitarian organisations have found that health centres have been specifically targeted in violent attacks, so as to encourage individuals to refrain from returning home. In turn, the MSF has called for international and national organisations to increase the assistance provided to IDPs currently living in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in the DRC, so as to ensure necessary healthcare during the current civil unrest and simultaneously manage an increase of Covid-19 cases.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly in Niger, thousands of individuals have fled a settlement in Western Niger, after an attack by more than 50 armed men on motorbikes last Sunday.<sup>11</sup> The settlement, known locally as the Intikane settlement, currently hosts approximately 20,000 Malian refugees, in addition to 15,000 Nigerien IDPs.<sup>12</sup> The attack, which killed two Malian refugees as well as a host community leader, also left food supplies, mobile phone towers and water supply stations torched and destroyed.<sup>13</sup> The local Intikane community, now left without necessary water and food supplies, is facing a humanitarian crisis amongst the current pandemic.<sup>14</sup> Last week, the UNHCR's deputy representative in Niger called for international support, as local authorities battle to urgently reinstate local supplies.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc](http://www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc)

<sup>6</sup> [www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc](http://www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc)

<sup>7</sup> [www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc](http://www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc)

<sup>8</sup> [www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc](http://www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc);

[www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/democratic-republic-of-the-congo](http://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/democratic-republic-of-the-congo)

<sup>9</sup> [www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc](http://www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc)

<sup>10</sup> [www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc](http://www.msf.org/nearly-200000-people-forced-homes-northeast-drc)

<sup>11</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

<sup>12</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

<sup>13</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

<sup>14</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

<sup>15</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

## Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region

Last week saw the peak of a financial crisis within refugee and IDP communities in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.<sup>16</sup> The communities, already facing financial vulnerabilities due to funding shortfalls prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, have now been hit with a devastating reduction in cash-based transfers and other humanitarian assistance. The reduction, primarily based on a limited access to aid resources due to curfews and border closures, have left vulnerable refugees and IDPs at risk of starvation and immobility during the current pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

Notably in Yemen, the Cash Consortium of Yemen (CCY) reported last week that Covid-19 has had and will continue to have devastating effects on the domestic humanitarian cash response.<sup>18</sup> The CCY particularly noted that, due to the strain on the markets and financial systems currently relied on by the humanitarian actors carrying out Cash Transfers, aid delivery is likely to be subjected to mass delays and interruptions.<sup>19</sup> The findings of the CCY are not unfounded. This is particularly after the UN announced last Wednesday that current humanitarian programmes for IDPs and refugees in Yemen will likely be forced to stop by the end of this months, after Yemen fell more than a billion dollars short of the U \$2.41bn required by aid agencies to sponsor essential humanitarian programmes.<sup>20</sup> Last week, the UNHCR also expressed concern over the continued influx of refugees and migrants from the Red Sea in Yemen, despite a statement released by the UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres claiming that mortality rates from Covid-19 in Yemen are 'among the highest in the world'.<sup>21</sup>

In response to the reduction of cash-based transfers, local organisations are seeking to introduce digital channels for remote delivery of financial resources.<sup>22</sup> While in Jordan, mobile money, money exchanges, 'home delivery' services by local shops and door-to door distributions have been explored, the Central Bank of Libya has continuously failed to provide clear direction on the use of digital delivery mechanisms for the provision of cash assistance.<sup>23</sup> Notwithstanding the efforts of states like Jordan, it is clear that greater support is needed from the international community in order to ensure a steady flow of humanitarian resources and assistance during the current crisis.

## Bangladesh

It is undisputed that Rohingya refugees have disproportionately suffered in Bangladesh as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. On Wednesday last week, Bangladesh announced the first death of a Rohingya refugee from Covid-19, while simultaneously acknowledging the stark increase in cases in refugee camps.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> [www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible](http://www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible)

<sup>17</sup> [www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wfp-guidance\\_for\\_cash-based\\_transfers\\_in\\_the\\_context\\_of\\_the\\_covid-19\\_outbreak1\\_1.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wfp-guidance_for_cash-based_transfers_in_the_context_of_the_covid-19_outbreak1_1.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> [www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wfp-guidance\\_for\\_cash-based\\_transfers\\_in\\_the\\_context\\_of\\_the\\_covid-19\\_outbreak1\\_1.pdf](http://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/wfp-guidance_for_cash-based_transfers_in_the_context_of_the_covid-19_outbreak1_1.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible](http://www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible)

<sup>20</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

<sup>21</sup> [www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020](http://www.unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-5-june-2020)

<sup>22</sup> [www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible](http://www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible)

<sup>23</sup> [www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible](http://www.calpnetwork.org/blog/covid-19-and-cash-transfers-in-mena-whats-possible)

<sup>24</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/bangladesh-confirms-1st-death-rohingya-coronavirus-71014240>

Local media resources report that the Rohingya refugee passed away at Ukhiya refugee camp, in Cox's Bazar in an isolated centre.<sup>25</sup> Since then, 29 Rohingya refugees have tested positive for the virus, while hundreds of thousands of others remain at risk in overcrowded makeshift refugee camp facilities.<sup>26</sup> In a public statement, UN spokesman Stephane Dujarric expressed concern over the recent death of the Rohingya refugee, citing that UN humanitarian teams are now 'working very diligently with the refugee community' as well as Bangladeshi authorities 'to try to contain the outbreak as quickly and as effectively as possible'.<sup>27</sup> However, with the national total of confirmed cases of Covid-19 now reaching 53,000, the risk of more outbreaks within Bangladeshi refugee camps is likely unavoidable.<sup>28</sup>

## Iran

Earlier this year, the drowning of Afghan migrants attempting to cross the border into Iran by Iranian border authorities attracted international attention.<sup>29</sup> As a result, at the end of last month, a meeting in Kabul sparked a joint vow between Iranian and Afghan officials to 'uncover the truth' and investigate the alleged incident.<sup>30</sup> However, despite their joint pledge last month, neither the Iranian or Afghan government has made significant progress in bringing justice for the Afghan migrant victims.<sup>31</sup>

Towards the end of May this year, an investigation conducted by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission found that the alleged victims of the drowning were previously arrested by Iranian authorities whilst crossing the border from the Herat province.<sup>32</sup> The investigation found that the migrants were subsequently beaten, before being forced into the Hariroud river.<sup>33</sup> Earlier this month, the head of the Afghan governments 'fact-finding delegation' also made the astounding finding that, out of the 46 Afghans who entered Iranian territory around the same time as those drowned, 12 were killed and 17 survived.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst Iran continues to deny responsibility for the alleged beatings and drowning of the Afghan migrants, several Iranian politicians have publicly called for an effective investigation into the crimes.<sup>35</sup> Yet, with Afghan immigrants and refugees historically facing unaccounted abuse by Iranian police and border authorities, global scrutiny is needed to ensure that the victims of the latest incident are fairly and justly accounted for.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/bangladesh-confirms-1st-death-rohingya-coronavirus-71014240>

<sup>26</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/bangladesh-confirms-1st-death-rohingya-coronavirus-71014240>

<sup>27</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/bangladesh-confirms-1st-death-rohingya-coronavirus-71014240>

<sup>28</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/Health/wireStory/bangladesh-confirms-1st-death-rohingya-coronavirus-71014240>

<sup>29</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice)

<sup>30</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice)

<sup>31</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice)

<sup>32</sup> [www.aihrc.org.af/home/press-release/8849](http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press-release/8849)

<sup>33</sup> [www.aihrc.org.af/home/press-release/8849](http://www.aihrc.org.af/home/press-release/8849)

<sup>34</sup> [www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-52804293](http://www.bbc.com/persian/afghanistan-52804293)

<sup>35</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice)

<sup>36</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/28/victims-iran-afghan-border-drowning-deserve-justice)

### 3. Prisoners and detainees

#### United Arab Emirates

As Covid-19 cases continue to rise in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with 39,376 confirmed cases thus far, increasing fears on the wellbeing and treatment of the prison population is a cause for concern. Over the past month, a series of prison outbreaks in three detention facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic have been reported in the UAE, according to Human Rights Watch. Family members of prisoners have reported that they are often placed in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions, refused adequate medical care and that authorities have failed to provide information to prisoners on preventative measures to curb the spread of Covid-19. Several issues have emerged in regards to UAE authorities granting amnesty to 4,000 prisoners in April, but failing to grant amnesty to political prisoners. Moreover, Human Rights Watch has reported that prisoners with HIV have been denied vital hospital treatment and are left in an even more precarious condition. On May 18, 47 international public health groups appealed to UAE authorities to release prisoners with HIV during the Covid-19 outbreak.<sup>37</sup>

#### Ukraine

In Ukraine, national statistics indicate that out of a total of 53,000 inmates in prison and pre-trial detention centres, 507 have been laboratory tested for Covid-19, and only 21 have tested positive, among them two remand prisoners and one convicted criminal, according to Open Democracy. However, human rights groups have called for the adequate reporting of Covid-19 infection rates and for this to reflect the official statistics. Yevgeny Zakharov, head of a rights group based in Ukraine, argues that ‘the infection figures are low because we don’t test. Not even at state expense’, highlighting that crowd-funding for Covid-19 testing kits had taken place, for the 40 staff members and 20 convicted prisoners who had been in contact with the virus at the Kropyvnytskyi pre-trial detention centre.<sup>38</sup>

### 4. Informal settlements

As public health officials around the world declared ‘stay at home’ measures to combat the spread of coronavirus, governmental guidelines and preventative measures fail to protect the 1.8 billion people living in informal settlements or those who are homeless. Given the nature of informal settlements and homelessness – a lack of access to adequate sanitary facilities, overcrowded urban areas and lack of water – chances of contamination from infectious diseases are increased, with reported cases of coronavirus spreading at an alarming rate throughout urban settlements. For a significant proportion of those reliant on informal economy, this move in turn jeopardises the lives of those vulnerable.

#### India

In India, poor housing conditions in informal settlements, with physical distancing and frequent hand washing nearly impossible, increases the spread of Covid-19. Currently, 35 per cent of the urban

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/11/04/uae-prisoners-denied-lifesaving-hiv-treatment>

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/ukrainskiye-tyurmy-i-pandemiya-koronavirusa-en>

population in India live in slums, with more than 50 per cent of Covid-19 cases have been traced to 12 major cities. A recent study by Brookings India showed that 30 per cent of Covid-19 containment zones in Mumbai were inside slums. Moreover, 70 per cent of these were 'red zones', indicating the rapid spread of the virus in congested areas. An example of the rapid spread of Covid-19 in India's slums can be seen in Dharavi, the largest slum in Mumbai, with more than 1,800 confirmed Covid-19 cases.<sup>39</sup>

### Kenya

In Kenya, Kibera, one of Africa's largest informal settlements area, hosts a population of half a million people, currently with 170 confirmed Covid-19 cases. Given the infrastructure of Kibera's slum, consisting primarily of shanty houses, health ministers have stated that it is nearly impossible to prevent the spread of coronavirus. Coupled with this, Kibera was already facing a child mortality rate two to three times higher than the average of the rest of the city, increasing conditions the risk of becoming seriously ill from Covid-19.<sup>40</sup> Further, with the collapse of the informal economy and a rise in unemployment increases the economic inequalities in this region. Residents in Kibera have noted that due to the stigmatisation of living in one of the largest slums in Africa, finding employment and living in a large, urban area with a Covid-19 outbreak decreases the possibility of getting a job. For those unemployed due to the Covid-19 outbreak, along with the closures of schools, an inability to feed your children the equivalent of three meals a day is proving to be a huge problem alongside food shortages. Kijala Shako, head of advocacy for Save the Children, stated that 'the Covid-19 pandemic has exposed the fragility of not only our health systems and economies but also our food systems', arguing that the 'uncertainty over the next meal' will be a great concern for millions worldwide.<sup>41</sup>

### Brazil

In Brazil, for the population of 13 million living in favelas, urban shanty towns across Brazil, extreme levels of inequalities varying from access to healthcare facilities, unemployment, education and living conditions increases the detrimental effects of Covid-19. Coupled with this, the Bolsonaro administration fails to adequately push forward preventative legislation and economic contingency plans for those in need of assistance during the global pandemic, cutting off vital lifelines for those placed in an even more precarious position. Prior instances of infectious disease outbreaks in favelas, such as tuberculous (TB), gives evidence of governmental neglect and a lack of intervention for the vast population living in favelas. In Rocinha, the biggest favela in Rio de Janeiro, has an annual TB notification rate five times higher than the citywide average.<sup>42</sup> In an interview with the United Nations Information Centre for Brazil (UNIC Rio) states that the greatest obstacles people face in favelas is maintaining social distance. The conditions of life in the favelas – lack of basic sanitation, a shortage of drinking water and overcrowded houses that are built very close to each other – are the main challenges in preventing the spread of Covid-19.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> [www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/residents-india-largest-slum-fighting-coronavirus-200604064528752.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/residents-india-largest-slum-fighting-coronavirus-200604064528752.html)

<sup>40</sup> <https://unhabitat.org/fighting-covid-19-in-africa%E2%80%99s-informal-settlements>

<sup>41</sup> [www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/05/11/852423214/they-used-to-give-their-kids-3-meals-a-day-then-came-coronavirus?t=1591773974509](http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/05/11/852423214/they-used-to-give-their-kids-3-meals-a-day-then-came-coronavirus?t=1591773974509)

<sup>42</sup> <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/latamcaribbean/2020/05/14/brazils-so-called-invisibles-will-need-more-than-resilience-to-redress-the-unequal-impacts-of-covid-19>

<sup>43</sup> [www.un.org/en/coronavirus/brazil%E2%80%99s-favelas-organize-fight-covid-19](http://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/brazil%E2%80%99s-favelas-organize-fight-covid-19)

## 5. Disability rights

### Canada

On 5 June, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced a one time, tax free payment to individuals with disabilities, thus recognising that Canadians living with disabilities are experiencing job insecurity and increased costs for personal support workers, medication and medical supplies..

Additionally, to help people with disabilities get and maintain jobs during the pandemic, the Canadian government vowed to create a National Workplace Accessibility Stream through the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. A \$15m investment will provide community organisations with the resources to increase workplace accessibility and access jobs in response to Covid-19, such as helping companies set up accessible work from home arrangements for employees and connecting Canadians with disabilities with prospective employers. The government is also investing \$1.18m in five new projects through the Accessible Technology Program to develop affordable technology to make communication more accessible for Canadians with disabilities in the digital economy.

### Mexico

On 4 June, Human Rights Watch published an extensive report documenting the abuse and neglect many people with disabilities in Mexico face at the hands of their own families, exacerbated by the lack of government support and funding for independent living. The lack of government policies supporting independent living means people have few options but to remain with abusers, some for their entire lives. Covid-19 is likely to increase in-home violence against people with disabilities as caregivers face economic stress. Many of the individuals interviewed for the report attend schools for students with disabilities, but with school closures no longer have a place to escape to for a couple of hours.

The report also highlights how people with disabilities face serious barriers accessing justice when they attempt to prosecute their abusers. Many prosecutors' offices are inaccessible, and access to shelter for women and children is extremely limited with no such option for men. In 2007, Mexico ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities which stated that people with disabilities have the right to live independently, with choices equal to non-disabled people about where, how and with whom to live. They should not be forced to live with family members or in institutions and have the right to be protected from violence and neglect.

The Mexican government must take urgent action to protect people with disabilities during the pandemic by ensuring that any Covid-related legislation and policies specifically reference people with disabilities. The government also must work to guarantee accessibility and accommodations through the criminal justice system by developing accessible complaint mechanisms.

### Nigeria

People with disabilities who are already segregated from their communities, such as individuals with leprosy in Nigeria, face additional and life threatening challenges during the pandemic. A collection of testimonies published on 3 June reveal the variety of problems facing leprosy communities across the country. Adeaze, a 38-year-old mother, emphasised the importance of social support in already-

isolated communities and how she has been negatively affected by the lack of leprosy support meetings and being able to visit with similarly situated friends.

Lack of medical care due to nation-wide shortages of medication and equipment have forced individuals in leprosy communities to resort to herbal medicine that is notably less effective. Finally, many individuals with leprosy earn a living through trade and crafts. With the lockdown, people are unable to leave their homes to shop and thus many individuals with leprosy are finding themselves without any source of income. Adeaze warned: 'If something is not done quickly, a whole lot of us will die of starvation before Covid-19 gets to us'. Akin, a 70-year-old leader of a leprosy advocacy group, says that when the government hosts meetings to hear the concerns of people with disabilities that leaders of leprosy organisations are not invited. State and local authorities must ensure that all people with a variety of disabilities, including leprosy, have a seat at the table and are given the opportunity to inform government pandemic responses.

### **United States**

A study published on 24 May from Syracuse University and SUNY Upstate Medical University analysed more than 30,000 individuals who tested positive for Covid-19 and found that those with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) are more likely to die than those without I/DD. While the study did not investigate cause of death, researchers noted that people with I/DD had higher prevalence of comorbid respiratory, endocrine and circulatory disease across all age groups. Researchers also noted that there is a higher percentage of people with I/DD who live in congregate settings. The findings of this study reinforce the need for prioritisation of personal protective equipment for residential facilities for individuals with I/DD and also the importance of securing funding for caregivers to provide essential services safely and consistently to individuals with I/DD.

## **6. Freedom of assembly**

### **United States**

As Black Lives Matter protests have continued across many states in the US, and even further around the world, experts have said a spike in cases of Covid-19 are inevitable. However, in recognition of a longer standing inequality in public health and justice, hundreds of public health workers have signed an open letter to recognise the need for these protests to go ahead despite risks of transmission. The open letter states: 'Protests against systemic racism, which fosters the disproportionate burden of Covid-19 on Black communities and also perpetuates police violence, must be supported'. Further, in an interview the Special Envoy on Covid-19 to the World Health Organization, said on attendance of the Black Lives Matter protests 'of course you go because that matters'.<sup>44</sup> Despite such advice from public health officials, the US Government continues to perpetuate fears of the spread of Covid-19 to call for an end to peaceful protesting. Ashish Jha, Professor of Global Health at Harvard University also expressed concern that the White House will use the protestors to scapegoat a rise in cases that would have been likely to happen regardless without adequate plans for the reopening of society.<sup>45</sup> There is

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<sup>44</sup> [www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/matt-frei/how-to-protest-safely-at-black-lives-matter-uk](http://www.lbc.co.uk/radio/presenters/matt-frei/how-to-protest-safely-at-black-lives-matter-uk)

<sup>45</sup> [www.ft.com/content/1eb3d4fe-11a3-454f-a403-10897b093b12](http://www.ft.com/content/1eb3d4fe-11a3-454f-a403-10897b093b12)

also concern of increased surveillance of protestors being possible due to a normalisation of contact tracing during the Covid-19 crisis.<sup>46</sup>

### United Kingdom

In the wake of the US movement, Black Lives Matter protests have spread throughout the UK also. In Northern Ireland, citizens' right to peaceful assembly has been undermined by the issuing of 60 to 70 fines in Northern Ireland for those attending anti-racism protests last weekend.<sup>47</sup> Amnesty International have called out this practice, noting that the law allowing this imposition of fines only came into practice on the evening of 5 June ahead of planned protests on Saturday.<sup>48</sup> The last minute implementation of possible fines represents a clear strategy to undermine the protests. Prime Minister Boris Johnson also tweeted that: 'People have a right to protest peacefully and while observing social distancing', yet people in Northern Ireland are being fined and face prosecution for doing just that. The fines should be voided and allegations of racial profiling in the issue of such fines must be examined'.

### Brazil

Brazil now has the second highest number of Covid-19 cases and deaths worldwide, reporting over 700,000 total cases and 37,312 deaths. However, the total is expected to be much higher than this since President Bolsonaro has stopped the publishing of a running total of Covid-19 cases and deaths.<sup>49</sup> This has evoked widespread international criticism as a blatant attempt to block information on the severity of the situation in Brazil. This move, and the continued failure of the administration to adequately address the risks of the Covid-19 outbreak, has led to thousands of people defying lockdown in Brazil to peacefully protest against the government. Protestors also showed their support for the Black Lives Matter movement, and protested against police brutality and inequality within Brazil too. Since the start of 2020, Rio Police have killed 606 people, and during isolation measures, police brutality has further surged by 43 per cent (within the month of April).<sup>50</sup> This has led the Supreme Court to ban police raids on favelas during the Covid-19 outbreak.<sup>51</sup> Brazil's Black population is disproportionately affected by this violence, and moreover by the Covid-19 outbreak. Protestors called for the state to respect their right to life in both regards, demonstrating the need to protect the freedom of assembly during Covid-19, to ensure that state responses to the crisis fully consider the demands and rights of citizens.

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<sup>46</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/04/how-digital-contact-tracing-covid-19-could-worsen-inequality](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/04/how-digital-contact-tracing-covid-19-could-worsen-inequality)

<sup>47</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-52963039](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-52963039)

<sup>48</sup> [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/laws-restricting-protest-northern-ireland-unacceptable](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/laws-restricting-protest-northern-ireland-unacceptable)

<sup>49</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/07/bolsonaro-strips-death-toll-and-case-totals-from-brazils-coronavirus-updates](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/07/bolsonaro-strips-death-toll-and-case-totals-from-brazils-coronavirus-updates)

<sup>50</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/03/brazil-suffers-its-own-scourge-police-brutality](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/03/brazil-suffers-its-own-scourge-police-brutality)

<sup>51</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-brazil-protests-race-feature/in-violent-rio-us-protests-stoke-backlash-against-deadly-cops-idUKKBN23E0QR>