



## Human Rights Institute

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human rights worldwide

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

Release date: Friday 15 May 2020

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

### Gender-based violence

As the global pandemic has led to significant disruptions in vital public services, with quarantine measures exacerbating existing restrictions on reporting abuse, it is estimated that there are far more cases of domestic and intimate partner violence, than are being reported. *The Lancet*, a medical journal, highlighted that in the absence of adequate surveillance, it is highly improbable that rates of domestic violence can be proportionately calculated during this pandemic.<sup>1</sup> Selection biases mean that administrative datasets have consistently underestimated the expected rates of domestic violence.<sup>2</sup> Experts have laid the claim that, for every three months of government-issued lockdown implemented worldwide, an additional 15 million cases of gender-based violence will occur<sup>3</sup>.

Statistics released thus far indicate that some public health authorities have neither guaranteed, nor excluded, preventative measures to combat domestic violence in their coronavirus contingency plans. For victims situated in conflict-affected countries, significant restrictions on mobility and increasing isolation measures to combat the virus have led to difficulties in reporting gender-based violence. The International Rescue Committee indicated that a decline in reports of domestic violence, with a 50 per cent decline in reported domestic violence cases in Bangladesh and a 30 per cent reported decline in Tanzania, is arguably not indicative of the situation at hand. The International Rescue Committee emphasised that a suspension of life-saving support services to victims during the initial outbreak of coronavirus, coupled with the disruption of regular services, has led to significant delays in cases of gender-based violence being reported to local authorities and health services. For Iraq, a delay in reporting such cases was due to the difficulties in raising awareness of domestic hotline numbers under curfews, thereby restricting access to communities in need of assistance, and support being provided remotely<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30112-2/fulltext](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30112-2/fulltext)

<sup>2</sup> [www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667\(20\)30112-2/fulltext#sec1](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(20)30112-2/fulltext#sec1)

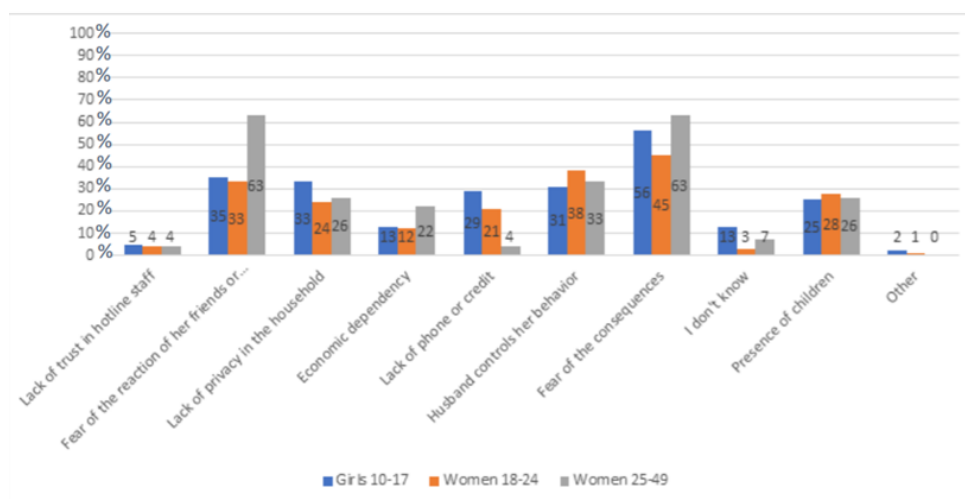
<sup>3</sup> [www.unfpa.org/press/new-unfpa-projections-predict-calamitous-impact-womens-health-covid-19-pandemic-continues](http://www.unfpa.org/press/new-unfpa-projections-predict-calamitous-impact-womens-health-covid-19-pandemic-continues)

<sup>4</sup> International Rescue Committee, 'New Data Shows a Decrease in Women Being Able to Report Incidents of Domestic Violence in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries' 7 May 2020

[www.rescue.org/press-release/new-data-shows-decrease-women-being-able-report-incidents-domestic-violence-fragile](http://www.rescue.org/press-release/new-data-shows-decrease-women-being-able-report-incidents-domestic-violence-fragile)

For a proportionate amount of women in Jordan, access to fundamental services are limited due to the transfer of in-person counselling services to online, remote services. Restrictions in accessing online services, such as limited technological resources, access to the internet, literary skills and lack of privacy, is a significant barrier faced by women in need of support. Data given by the United Nations Population Fund’s report, ‘Daring to Ask, Listen, and Act’, gathers qualitative and quantitative methods from 360 remote and telephone surveys targeting adolescent and adult men and women in Irbid, Karak, Amman governorates and Azraq and Za’atari refugee camps in Jordan.<sup>5</sup> Statistical evidence extracted from this survey, namely where women in Jordan turn to when exposed to violence, indicates that for a vast number of respondents, there are considerable social and structural barriers in seeking help from members in the community, such as friends or neighbours. Conversely, a vast amount of respondents noted that NGO or UN hotlines are trustworthy sources, which could be due to international organizations being outside of the community, retaining the anonymity of victim, and providing direct services.

FIGURE 34: FACTORS PREVENTING WOMEN FROM SEEKING HELP, BY PERCENTAGE



Source: United Nations Population Fund, May 2020<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Methods derived from this study of 400 respondents are: 360 remote and telephone surveys targeting adolescent and adult men and women in Irbid, Karak, Amman governorates and Azraq and Za’atari refugee camps, 28 key informant interviews with Gender-based violence and Sexual and Reproductive Health service providers, youth educators, and members of the government and two focus group discussions with women and girls from the refugee and Jordanian population: UNFPA, ‘Daring to ask, listen and act: a snapshot of the impacts of COVID on women’s and girl’s rights and sexual and reproductive health’, May 2020  
[https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource/pdf/20200511\\_Daring%20to%20ask%20Rapid%20Assessment%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource/pdf/20200511_Daring%20to%20ask%20Rapid%20Assessment%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> UNFPA, ‘Daring to ask, listen and act: a snapshot of the impacts of COVID on women’s and girl’s rights and sexual and reproductive health’, May 2020

In the graph above, UNFPA outlines some factors preventing women from seeking help, reaffirming that social pressures and the stigmatization of domestic violence for an overwhelming majority of respondents are a present factor in seeking help, indicated by the option 'fear of the reactions of her friends and family', and 'fears of the consequences'. UNFPA noted that, a fear negative social consequence could be linked to mandatory reporting requirements for victims of gender-based violence, thereby preventing women and girls from seeking help.

In a gender-based violence assessment by UNFPA in 2019, victims of gender-based violence have 'declined referrals to health services due to mandatory reporting requirements to the police under Jordanian law'. In 2019, 88 per cent of gender-based perpetrators reported to case management agencies in Jordan were husbands or family members, mainly males, thereby exacerbating fears of the repercussions of reporting violence to local authorities. Alongside this, respondents are polled as being reliant on UN and NGO hotline staff for vital psychosocial support services, legal aid and case management services, which during these unprecedented times, can create a barrier for those in urgent need of assistance. UNHCR reported that, during the mid-March total lockdown, there was a reduction in calls to the protection hotlines for gender-based violence, highlighting that the lack of privacy in reporting abuse via telephone a challenge for victims.

Some states have used the pandemic as a means to prevent the passing of legislation that safeguards of victims of gender-based violence. The Hungarian parliament has rejected the ratification of a treaty, the Istanbul Convention, to combat violence against women, backing a government declaration that the measure promotes 'destructive gender ideologies' and 'illegal migration'.<sup>7</sup> Spearheaded by the Council of Europe, the Istanbul Convention<sup>8</sup> is the first binding instrument to prevent and combat violence against women, from marital rape to female genital mutilation.<sup>9</sup> At a time when domestic violence is only increasing, this move

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[https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/20200511\\_Daring%20to%20ask%20Rapid%20Assessment%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://jordan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/20200511_Daring%20to%20ask%20Rapid%20Assessment%20Report_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian, 'Hungary's parliament blocks domestic violence treaty' 5 May 2020

[www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/hungarys-parliament-blocks-domestic-violence-treaty](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/hungarys-parliament-blocks-domestic-violence-treaty)

<sup>8</sup> Council of Europe, 'Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence' 2011

[www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e](http://www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e)

<sup>9</sup> The Guardian, 'Hungary's parliament blocks domestic violence treaty' 5 May 2020

[www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/hungarys-parliament-blocks-domestic-violence-treaty](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/05/hungarys-parliament-blocks-domestic-violence-treaty)

puts women at high risk. Politicians on the opposition in the Hungarian Parliament, who cited a worldwide increase in domestic violence during virus-related lockdowns, voiced their concerns, and disapproval of the Hungarian government's record on gender equality.<sup>10</sup>

## **Palestine**

For Palestine, local organisations have noted an upsurge in domestic violence cases. The Palestinian Working Women Society reported over 510 GBV calls in less than two weeks. Similarly, SAWA, another women's organisation, reported a 10 per cent increase in calls and three cases of suicide attempts. UN Women have released a report on gender analysis of the effects of coronavirus on women in Palestine. This report reveals that the pandemic is expected to disproportionately affect women, while also creating and exacerbating pre-existing gender-specific risks and vulnerabilities, and widening inequalities.<sup>11</sup> In Palestine, women represent nearly 60 per cent of workers in the care sector and 70 per cent of frontline health workers, making them more exposed to the virus. Conversely, men exert higher levels of political and community participation and engagement in combatting Covid-19. For example, 52 per cent of men said that they volunteered in their community, compared to 24 per cent of women. Consequently, the concerns of Palestinian women are largely underrepresented in decision-making processes.<sup>12</sup>

## **Women's health**

On 6 May, 59 nations have issued joint press statement on 'Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender-responsiveness in the Covid-19 crisis'<sup>13</sup>, in response to the governmental restrictions on accessing integral services for women and girls during this pandemic. As part of an already vulnerable population, women are also facing a multiplicity of other issues such as restrictions on access to abortion services, maternal health, and education. In order to address such challenges, the statement aims to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> <https://palestine.unwomen.org/en/news-and-events/stories/2019/3/rapid-gender-analysis>

<sup>12</sup> [www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20palestine/attachments/publications/2020/4/covid%2019%20-%20un%20women%20rapid%20gender%20analysis.pdf?la=en&vs=4626](http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20palestine/attachments/publications/2020/4/covid%2019%20-%20un%20women%20rapid%20gender%20analysis.pdf?la=en&vs=4626)

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sweden, 'Joint press statement Protecting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and Promoting Gender-responsiveness in the COVID-19 crisis' 6 May 2020 [www.government.se/statements/2020/05/joint-press-statement-protecting-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-and-promoting-gender-responsiveness-in-the-covid-19-crisis/](http://www.government.se/statements/2020/05/joint-press-statement-protecting-sexual-and-reproductive-health-and-rights-and-promoting-gender-responsiveness-in-the-covid-19-crisis/)

facilitate global cooperation for the health and social protection of girls and women. The importance of key elements such as Universal Health Coverage, access to sexual health services, psychosocial support services and active participation in decision-making have been highlighted in this positive effort to stand in solidarity with girls and women across the globe.

## Hungary

The Hungarian government ordered that hospitals free up 60 percent of their beds by discharging non-Covid-19 patients as necessary.<sup>14</sup> The order aimed to free up 36,000 beds, though the exact number of patients affected is unknown because the government has not shared that information. Many patients were kicked out of hospitals – some of whom have cancer or other chronic or terminal illnesses and require constant care – and ended up in alternative care facilities or were sent home to be cared for by family members.<sup>15</sup>

## Albania

While women in Albania have had rights to safe, legal abortion since 1995, the pandemic has shut down many of these services. With the infringement on rights to abortion has reached international attention in some states, Western Balkan media outlets have yet to report Albania's decision.<sup>16</sup> During the first six weeks of Albania's lockdown, most abortions were being postponed as well as contraceptive consultations. Since then, the situation for women has worsened<sup>17</sup>, as closure of gynecological services in private clinics and in all public institutions have taken place.<sup>18</sup>

## United States

The disproportionate socioeconomic implications faced by women during the Covid-19 directly impacts black and ethnic minority women in the U.S. This, in turn, has grave implications on their ability to access healthcare. This week, Human Rights Watch published

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<sup>14</sup> Insight Hungary, 'Thousands of patients relocated or sent home following government order to vacate hospital beds' 16 April 2020

<sup>15</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Hungary Kicks Patients Out of Hospitals to Prepare for Covid-19' 6 May 2020 [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/06/hungary-kicks-patients-out-hospitals-prepare-covid-19](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/06/hungary-kicks-patients-out-hospitals-prepare-covid-19)

<sup>16</sup> Open Democracy, 'Balkans women face closed clinics and unsafe abortions under COVID-19' 6 May 2020 [www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/balkans-women-face-closed-clinics-and-unsafe-abortions-under-covid-19/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/balkans-women-face-closed-clinics-and-unsafe-abortions-under-covid-19/)

<sup>17</sup> European Parliamentary Forum, 'Women and girls left without care: a snapshot in time during COVID-19' 6 May 2020 [www.epfweb.org/node/995](http://www.epfweb.org/node/995)

<sup>18</sup> Open Democracy, 'Balkans women face closed clinics and unsafe abortions under COVID-19' 6 May 2020 [www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/balkans-women-face-closed-clinics-and-unsafe-abortions-under-covid-19/](http://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/balkans-women-face-closed-clinics-and-unsafe-abortions-under-covid-19/)

an article noting that, in the United States about 700 women die each year as a result of complications during pregnancy and delivery, which can be directly associated to a lack of access to healthcare services in rural parts of the U.S. On top of this, black women are more than three times as likely to die from complications in childbirth as white women. With women's healthcare services further restricted during this pandemic, and black women are more likely to suffer from socio-economic hardship exacerbated by the crisis, it is reported that black women in turn face increased complications owing to reduced access to women's healthcare services.

## 2. LGBTQI+ rights

### South Korea

Members of South Korea's LGBTQ community fear a rise in discrimination after new cases of coronavirus cases were reported and linked directly to a man who attended nightclubs in Seoul's gay district, later tested positive for the virus.<sup>19</sup> At least 15 cases have been identified with connections to clubs in Itaewon, a neighborhood popular with Koreans and foreigners in the capital, the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (KCDC) said.<sup>20</sup>

After the major media outlet Kookmin Ilbo<sup>21</sup> ran a headline of the man visiting gay nightclubs, a social media storm ensued. The terms "gay" and "Itaewon corona" were trending on South Korea's Naver web search portal.<sup>22</sup> Some social media users also posted videos of the bars and clubs in the district, urging followers for donations "to help put a stop to these disgusting goings-on".<sup>23</sup> Homosexuality is legal in South Korea but discrimination remains rampant, with

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<sup>19</sup> Business Insider, 'South Korea recorded a new spike in COVID-19 cases after a man attended three night clubs in the capital's gay district. Now the local LGBTQ community fears discrimination' 9 May 2020

[www.businessinsider.com/anti-gay-backlash-feared-south-korea-records-new-coronavirus-spike-2020-5?r=US&IR=T](https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-gay-backlash-feared-south-korea-records-new-coronavirus-spike-2020-5?r=US&IR=T)

<sup>20</sup> Reuters, 'South Korea tracks new coronavirus outbreak in Seoul nightclubs' 8 May 2020

<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-southkorea/south-korea-tracks-new-coronavirus-outbreak-in-seoul-nightclubs-idUKKBN22K0SX>

<sup>21</sup> Business Insider, 'South Korea recorded a new spike in COVID-19 cases after a man attended three night clubs in the capital's gay district. Now the local LGBTQ community fears discrimination' 9 May 2020

[www.businessinsider.com/anti-gay-backlash-feared-south-korea-records-new-coronavirus-spike-2020-5?r=US&IR=T](https://www.businessinsider.com/anti-gay-backlash-feared-south-korea-records-new-coronavirus-spike-2020-5?r=US&IR=T)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> The Guardian, 'Anti-gay backlash feared in South Korea after coronavirus media reports' 8 May 2020

[www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/08/anti-gay-backlash-feared-in-south-korea-after-coronavirus-media-reports](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/08/anti-gay-backlash-feared-in-south-korea-after-coronavirus-media-reports)

most Korean gay people choosing to keep their sexuality hidden from family members and colleagues.<sup>24</sup>

## United States

The Trump administration is pushing forward for the removal of a policy, enacted during the Obama administration, to protect LGBTQI+ patients from discrimination, alarming health experts who warn that setback could harm vulnerable people by directly negating their progression to healthcare equality during the pandemic.<sup>25</sup> The law, Obamacare's Section 1557 provision, prohibited doctors, hospitals, and other health care workers to deny care healthcare of any patient because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>26</sup>

Trump's attempt to revoke Section 1557 will allow hospitals to admit Trans-women and men according to their birth-assigned sex, or condition emergency treatment on the stoppage of cross-sex hormones. Further, this will permit insurance companies to reinstate blanket bans on transition-related care like gender reassignment surgery or hormone replacement therapy.<sup>27</sup> Advocates have voiced their concerns that LGBTQI+ patients may be deterred from seeking care during a public health crisis. The Centre for American Progress published findings that 8 percent<sup>28</sup> of lesbian, gay, and bisexual adults and 29 percent of transgender adults said a health care provider had turned them away based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.<sup>29</sup> The coronavirus outbreak is already disproportionately impact LGBTQI+ Americans, especially those of colour, leaving a population already vulnerable to health care and employment discrimination suffering from high job losses and a growing rate of positive cases, according to preliminary data collected from multiple LGBTQI+ advocacy groups.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Politico, 'Trump team moves to scrap protections for LGBTQ patients' 24 April 2020

[www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/trump-team-moves-to-scrap-protections-for-lgbtq-patients-206398](http://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/trump-team-moves-to-scrap-protections-for-lgbtq-patients-206398)

<sup>26</sup> Vox, 'The Trump administration could soon allow doctors to discriminate against LGBTQ people' 24 April 2020

[www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/24/21234532/trump-administration-health-care-discriminate-lgbtq](http://www.vox.com/identities/2020/4/24/21234532/trump-administration-health-care-discriminate-lgbtq)

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> American Progress, 'An Effective Response to the Coronavirus Requires Targeted Assistance for LGBTQ People' 9 April 2020

[www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/news/2020/04/09/482895/effective-response-coronavirus-requires-targeted-assistance-lgbtq-people/](http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/lgbtq-rights/news/2020/04/09/482895/effective-response-coronavirus-requires-targeted-assistance-lgbtq-people/)

<sup>29</sup> Politico, 'Trump team moves to scrap protections for LGBTQ patients' 24 April 2020

[www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/trump-team-moves-to-scrap-protections-for-lgbtq-patients-206398](http://www.politico.com/news/2020/04/24/trump-team-moves-to-scrap-protections-for-lgbtq-patients-206398)

<sup>30</sup> US Today, 'LGBTQ Americans are getting coronavirus, losing jobs. Anti-gay bias is making it worse for them.' 10 May 2020  
<https://eu.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2020/05/09/discrimination-racism-fuel-covid-19-woes-lgbtq-americans/3070036001/>

## Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, government-instructed lockdown measures present risks among those who identify as hijra<sup>31</sup>, kothi, or transgender.<sup>32</sup> A recent survey to understand the impact of Covid-19 on third gender communities in Bangladesh found that 82 percent of respondents had not earned ‘a single penny in the last two weeks’ and 59 percent did not receive any support from aid programs or families.<sup>33</sup> In a 31-point directive on Bangladesh’s response to Covid-19, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina called for ‘special attention’ and relief for ‘the most disadvantaged people’ including the hijra community.<sup>34</sup> The Social Welfare Ministry has to ensure transparency in the distribution of the much-needed relief funds to these communities — including specifying how much will go to Hijra, transgender, and Kothi people.<sup>35</sup>

## Lebanon

In the Lebanon, however, the web feature, *‘If Not Now, When?’ Queer and Trans People Reclaim Their Power in Lebanon’s Revolution*,<sup>36</sup> shares stories of hope and solidarity told by queer women and transgender people activists.<sup>37</sup> By taking their struggle to the streets, through chants, graffiti, and public discussions, LGBT people have moved demands of their rights from the margins to mainstream discourse in a country that prohibits same-sex relations, punishable by up to one year in prison and systemic discrimination against the Trans community.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Scroll In, ‘Hijra, kothi, aravani: a quick guide to transgender terminology’ 17 April 2020

<https://scroll.in/article/662023/hijra-kothi-aravani-a-quick-guide-to-transgender-terminology>

<sup>32</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Bangladesh Should Support Hijra, Trans Under Covid-19’ 8 May 2020

[www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/08/bangladesh-should-support-hijra-trans-under-covid-19](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/08/bangladesh-should-support-hijra-trans-under-covid-19)

<sup>33</sup> Innovision Consulting, ‘Digest 2: Impact of COVID-19 on Third Gender community’ April 2020

<http://innovision-bd.com/covid-19-impact>

[studies/?fbclid=IwAR06k92BcnTFeJmX412ndelil3mjOzOjOITbgLn9GmTF\\_W2dIPEI\\_mjv84#COVID-19-Third-Gender](https://innovision-bd.com/covid-19-impact-studies/?fbclid=IwAR06k92BcnTFeJmX412ndelil3mjOzOjOITbgLn9GmTF_W2dIPEI_mjv84#COVID-19-Third-Gender)

<sup>34</sup> The Daily Star, ‘Coronavirus outbreak: PM issues 31-point directive’ 3 April 2020

[www.thedailystar.net/coronavirus-deadly-new-threat/news/coronavirus-outbreak-pm-issues-31-point-directive-1889137](http://www.thedailystar.net/coronavirus-deadly-new-threat/news/coronavirus-outbreak-pm-issues-31-point-directive-1889137)

<sup>35</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Bangladesh Should Support Hijra, Trans Under Covid-19’ 8 May 2020

[www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/08/bangladesh-should-support-hijra-trans-under-covid-19](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/08/bangladesh-should-support-hijra-trans-under-covid-19)

<sup>36</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Lebanon’s LGBT People Reclaim Their Power’ 7 May 2020

[www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2020/05/07/if-not-now-when-queer-and-trans-people-reclaim-their-power](http://www.hrw.org/video-photos/interactive/2020/05/07/if-not-now-when-queer-and-trans-people-reclaim-their-power)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Human Rights Watch, ‘Don’t Punish Me for Who I Am: Systemic Discrimination Against Transgender Women in Lebanon’ 3 September 2019

[www.hrw.org/report/2019/09/03/dont-punish-me-who-i-am/systemic-discrimination-against-transgender-women-lebanon](http://www.hrw.org/report/2019/09/03/dont-punish-me-who-i-am/systemic-discrimination-against-transgender-women-lebanon)

### 3. Refugee camps

On a global scale, governments are navigating their responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, the protection of asylum seekers, refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) remains at the forefront of global concerns. Whilst refugee camps worldwide have noted a stark increase in Covid-19 outbreaks, little is being done to improve the standard of living in refugee camp. Further, despite widespread international criticism, asylum seekers are being increasingly denied the fundamental right to claim asylum at borders, leaving many unaccompanied minors vulnerable and separated from their families. Despite the current movements of various states to transition into the post-lockdown phase of Covid-19, the conditions of refugees, IDPs and asylum seekers continues to be at a heightened risk of contracting the virus.

#### Greece

In the past week, the government of Greece has begun to lift its nation-wide lockdown restrictions, with citizens now able to leave their residences without the need for authorisation.<sup>39</sup> Yet, with the increase of widespread outbreaks of Covid-19 in Greece's overcrowded refugee camps, lockdown restrictions have been extended until May 21 for all migrants and refugees.<sup>40</sup> Last week, the the International Organization of Migration reported that a staggering 148 asylum seekers tested positive for the novel coronavirus in a temporary hotel facility, with other refugee camps in Titsona and the Lesbos Islands coming forward with similar statistics.<sup>41</sup>

#### Germany

In Germany, nearly half of the refugees in a camp in Baden-Wurttemberg tested positive for Covid-19 earlier this month.<sup>42</sup> Yet, with camp authorities still refusing to implement social distancing measures and forcing residents to share living facilities with those infected, the

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<sup>39</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Greece extends coronavirus lockdown at refugee camps' 10 May 2020

[www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/greece-extends-coronavirus-lockdown-refugee-camps-200510203054274.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/greece-extends-coronavirus-lockdown-refugee-camps-200510203054274.html)

<sup>40</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Greece: 148 refugees test positive for COVID-19, all asymptomatic' 21 April 2020

[www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/greece-148-refugees-test-positive-covid-19-asymptomatic-200421134039733.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/greece-148-refugees-test-positive-covid-19-asymptomatic-200421134039733.html)

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> Euro Observer, 'Half of refugees at German camp test Covid-19 positive' 16 April 2020

<https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148072>

number of cases has continued to rise, leading to hunger strikes and international protest.<sup>43</sup> Last week, a German Court in Munster held in favour of a pregnant refugee who sought to be released from an asylum seeker facility due to the inability to practice social distancing.<sup>44</sup> In a unanimous decision, the court held that the current treatment of refugees and asylum seekers in Germany is 'inadequate' and discriminatory, with unhygienic and overcrowding living conditions in refugee and asylum camps being at a stark contrast to local COVID-10 social distancing regulations.<sup>45</sup>

## Italy

In Italy, asylum seekers arriving by boat have been refused entry into mainland facilities, instead being forced to be quarantined offshore in national rescue vessels.<sup>46</sup> The relocation move has been justified by Italy's transport ministry on the needed protection of its already exhausted domestic medical facilities.<sup>47</sup> Similarly in mainland refugee camps, the Italian military has locked down several refugee squats, after increasing amounts of refugees and asylum seekers have tested positive for Covid-19 in the past month.<sup>48</sup> Last month alone saw the lockdown of a large 500-person squat in Rome, after two residents tested positive for the virus.<sup>49</sup> Overcrowded and unsanitary conditions in the facility, known locally as the 'Selam Palace', have attracted widespread criticisms and left inhabitants with the inability to prevent the inevitable spread of existing Covid-19 cases.<sup>50</sup> These cases are not limited to Italy alone, as Maltese authorities have ordered commercial ships to push migrants in boats back to the high seas, increasing international concerns on the failure to assist those stranded in the Mediterranean, one of the deadliest migration routes in the world.<sup>51</sup>

## MENA

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Deutsche Welle, 'German court: COVID-19 protection 'inadequate' at refugee home' 11 May 2020 [www.dw.com/en/german-court-covid-19-protection-inadequate-at-refugee-home/a-53395710](http://www.dw.com/en/german-court-covid-19-protection-inadequate-at-refugee-home/a-53395710)

<sup>45</sup> Deutsche Welle, 'German court: COVID-19 protection 'inadequate' at refugee home' 11 May 2020 [www.dw.com/en/german-court-covid-19-protection-inadequate-at-refugee-home/a-53395710](http://www.dw.com/en/german-court-covid-19-protection-inadequate-at-refugee-home/a-53395710)

<sup>46</sup> BBC News, 'Coronavirus: Italy orders rescued migrants onto quarantine ship' 12 April 2020 [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52263969](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52263969)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Fears for African refugees as coronavirus hits crowded Rome squat' 20 April 2020 [www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/fears-african-refugees-coronavirus-hits-crowded-rome-squat-200417232514207.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/fears-african-refugees-coronavirus-hits-crowded-rome-squat-200417232514207.html)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> OHCHR, 'Press briefing note on Migrant rescues in the Mediterranean' 8 May 2020 [www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25875&LangID=E](http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=25875&LangID=E)

In the Middle East and North Africa, the continued lockdown on refugee and asylum facilities has had devastating economic impacts. In Lebanon, refugees and asylum seekers have been unable to leave refugee camps to go to work.<sup>52</sup> As a result, thousands of refugees have lost their jobs, leaving them with no money to afford food and basic supplies. A survey conducted by the UNHCR in Lebanon earlier this year found that 70% of Syrian refugees are currently going hungry, with many also not being able to afford basic supplies such as soap.<sup>53</sup> In Jordan, some 80,000 Syrian refugees have also been locked down in the local Zaatari camp, many of which previously made their earnings by working on local farms. The UNHCR reported that refugees in Jordan have now resorted to selling their UN food coupons in order to pay for basic supplies and rent.<sup>54</sup> In Algeria, with a population of 170,000 people in the Sahrawi refugee camp, nine cases have been tested positive in this region, with increasing concerns from humanitarian actors on the impact for vulnerable displaced communities. Oxfam reported that there is a drastically short supply of vital resources in this camp, with no recorded ventilators, leaving the increasingly vulnerable refugee population at risk of further complications because of the recent outbreak on coronavirus.

#### **4. Prisoners and detainees**

UN experts emphasized this week that ‘the prohibition of arbitrary detention is absolute even during times of public emergencies’. As the global prison population is currently 11 million, with an additional 3 million in pre-trial detention, overcrowded facilities and a lack of healthcare services increases the urgency to reduce the global prison population.

#### **Israel**

In Israel, there are currently 450 ‘security prisoners’ held in Gilboa, an overcrowded prison facility. Because of these incarcerations, the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights has filed an urgent petition to the Israeli Supreme Court to ensure the safety of these prisoners. As the Israeli Prison Service refused to implement guidelines instructed by the Israeli Health Ministry

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<sup>52</sup> France 24, “We’re afraid of tomorrow’: Syrian refugees face hunger, poverty amid Covid-19 downturns’ 10 May 2020 [www.france24.com/en/20200510-we-re-afraid-of-tomorrow-syrian-refugees-face-hunger-poverty-amid-covid-19-downturns](http://www.france24.com/en/20200510-we-re-afraid-of-tomorrow-syrian-refugees-face-hunger-poverty-amid-covid-19-downturns)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> France 24, “We’re afraid of tomorrow’: Syrian refugees face hunger, poverty amid Covid-19 downturns’ 10 May 2020 [www.france24.com/en/20200510-we-re-afraid-of-tomorrow-syrian-refugees-face-hunger-poverty-amid-covid-19-downturns](http://www.france24.com/en/20200510-we-re-afraid-of-tomorrow-syrian-refugees-face-hunger-poverty-amid-covid-19-downturns)

on safeguarding prisoners during the coronavirus outbreak, immediate action must be taken in accordance to these government-instructed guidelines.<sup>55</sup> Israeli Prison Services have also noted that, at the end of March, Israeli authorities detained 194 Palestinian children, with the majority held in pre-detention trial. As Israel has ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the imminent release of Palestinian children in detention facilities is a necessary requirement under international law and Israeli law.<sup>56</sup>

### **United Kingdom**

More than half of prisons in England and Wales have recorded cases of coronavirus, with 294 prisoners and 231 staff members infected. As highlighted in the previous monitor, on the 4 April, UK ministers announced that selected low-risk inmates within two months of their release date would be temporarily released on license in order to ease pressure on overcrowded prison system. Since then, only 33 have been released.

### **United States**

In the United States, American Civil Liberties Union estimates that, given a population of 2.1 million prisoners, urgent action to reduce prison populations must be taken, as a possible 99,000 Covid-19 related deaths could occur. So far, cases have emerged highlighting the urgency of early releases. Andrea Circle Bear, a pregnant female prisoner serving a 26-month drug sentence in South Dakota, contracted coronavirus in prison, gave birth whilst on a ventilator, and died subsequently after. As the healthcare of prisoners remains ignored, cases in New Jersey's Edna Mahan Correctional Facility for Women have led to one inmate's death. The Intercept reported that, on 29 April, Tiffany Mofield, an inmate at the correctional facility, was begging to be let out of a locked shower, saying 'she could not breathe' prior to her death.

### **El Salvador**

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<sup>55</sup> Wafa, 'Adalah demands Israel protect prisoners in overcrowded Gilboa prison from COVID-19 outbreak' 12 May 2020

<http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=5k3qqha117057053223a5k3qqh>

<sup>56</sup> Middle East Monitor, 'UN officials call on Israel to release Palestinian children from prison' 12 May 2020

[www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200512-un-officials-call-on-israel-to-release-palestinian-children-from-prison/](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200512-un-officials-call-on-israel-to-release-palestinian-children-from-prison/)

Whilst there is an international need to decrease the number of individuals kept in prisons and in detention, some states are only increasing the numbers imprisoned by arbitrarily arresting those who break quarantine as a measure to enforce restrictions. On 9 April, the IBAHRI released [an open letter of intervention to President Bukele of El Salvador](#), urging him to end the arbitrary detention of 850 individuals unnecessarily detained as of 7 April in containment centers for breaching lockdown. Since this date, the number of those detained has reached 2,394 cases, facing confinement for 30 days. Those detained continue to face inadequate facilities in detainment, which only exacerbate the spread of the virus. These harsh restrictions persist despite judgements by the Supreme Court of El Salvador to end the practice.

### **Kyrgyzstan**

In Kyrgyzstan, individuals found to have breached Covid-19 curfew restrictions have faced detainment as a repercussion. In response to the crisis, a curfew is imposed to last from 9pm – 6am in a number of cities and districts. It has been reported that up to 3,000 individuals have been detained for violating curfew, and held in conditions unfit to carry out social distancing. Further to this, those placed in detention have no access to a lawyer, directly failing to implement a basic right to redress. This week, Human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, Front Line Defenders and Human Rights Watch have called upon the Kyrgyzstan government to reduce prison populations, including that of human rights defender Azimjon Askarov who is serving a lifetime sentence despite UN Human Rights Committee declaring that Mr Askarov should be released in 2016. On the 13 May, Civil Rights Defender's released a statement declaring that the the Kyrgyzstan Supreme Court denied Human Rights Defender and journalist Azimjon Askarov's appeal.<sup>57</sup>The IBAHRI has consistently called upon governments to release non-violent prisoners during this crisis, to at the very least carry out their sentence in the safety of their home, as part of a necessary effort to reduce prison populations.

### **Angola**

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<sup>57</sup> Civil Rights Defenders, 'Kyrgyzstan's Top Court Denies Justice to Wrongfully Jailed Azimjon Askarov' 13 May 2020  
<https://crd.org/2020/05/13/kyrgyzstans-top-court-denies-justice-to-wrongfully-jailed-azimjon-askarov/>

In Angola, arbitrary detention has again been used to punish those who break quarantine. As of 1 May, almost 300 people had been detained in 24 hours for violating the country's state of emergency rules. The prison population of Angola already surpassed 25,000 inmates, and reports on conditions show a lack of access to clean water, basic hygiene products or protective equipment which make the prisons ill-equipped to deal with the current threat of Covid-19. Whilst prisons are already breeding grounds of contamination, some countries' persistence to detain those who break quarantine restrictions only worsens the situation.

## Nicaragua

In Nicaragua, political prisoners detained since 2018 also remain in conditions completely unacceptable conditions, releasing any hope in minimizing the spread of Covid-19 in prison facilities across the country. The Inter-American Commission of Human Rights is urging that Nicaragua explore options to release prisoners on house arrest. Whilst 1,700 inmates were released on 8 April, these did not include political prisoners detained following the 2018 crackdown. The IBAHRI insists that non-violent political prisoners are released to carry out their sentences in house arrest, and efforts must be made to ensure that those in detention are allowed to safely practice social distancing.

## Egypt

Women human rights defenders in Egypt are among the tens of thousands of people imprisoned without charge or trial. They have been targeted for their gender, activism or political beliefs. Egypt has been under a nationwide state of emergency since April 2017. The Emergency Law (Law 162 of 1958) gives security forces sweeping powers for indefinite detention and the power to interrogate suspects with little or no judicial review. The law also authorizes mass surveillance and censorship, seizure of property, and forcible evictions, all without judicial supervision. Under international law, certain rights such as the right to a fair trial and judicial review of detention cannot be curtailed even in times of emergencies.<sup>58</sup>

## 5. Asylum procedures

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<sup>58</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Egypt: Covid-19 Cover for New Repressive Powers' 7 May 2020 [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/07/egypt-covid-19-cover-new-repressive-powers](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/07/egypt-covid-19-cover-new-repressive-powers)

Despite the combined efforts of the UNHCR, The Inter-Agency Committee and the wider international community, the devastating effects of border closures on the right of all individuals to seek asylum has increased.<sup>59</sup> A recent report conducted by the European Asylum Support Office found that the number of applications for asylum in the European Union has dropped 43 per cent since February.<sup>60</sup> Earlier last month, the European Commission released guidelines concerning the implementation and maintaining of EU asylum rules and procedure during Covid-19.<sup>61</sup> In April, the European Court of Justice also issued a ruling condemning the failure of EU countries to assist in taking refugees from Greece and Italy.<sup>62</sup> Yet, despite the efforts of the EU, the continued failure of member states to urgently equally distribute arrivals has attracted widespread international criticism.<sup>63</sup>

### United Kingdom

Last week, the United Kingdom implement measures to reunite migrant families who were rescued from refugee camps in Greece.<sup>64</sup> After several months of protests and lobbying by campaign groups such as British Alf Dubs and Safe Passage, refugees in the United Kingdom were permitted to travel to Heathrow last Tuesday to meet family members who have been trapped in overcrowded refugee camps in Greece for several months.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the measures implemented by the United Kingdom are unique compared to the majority approach towards migrant families taken by the international community during Covid-19. In a recent submission by the IBAHRI to the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants on ending child immigration, the IBAHRI put forward that states must increase refugee resettlement quotas in light of Covid-19, due to the high probability that failing to do so will

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<sup>59</sup> Euro Observer, 'Half of refugees at German camp test Covid-19 positive' 16 April 2020  
<https://euobserver.com/coronavirus/148072>

<sup>60</sup> EASO, 'COVID-19: Asylum applications down by 43% in March' 30 April 2020  
[www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/covid-19-asylum-applications-down-march](http://www.easo.europa.eu/news-events/covid-19-asylum-applications-down-march)

<sup>61</sup> European Commission, 'Coronavirus: Commission presents guidance on implementing EU rules on asylum and return procedures and on resettlement' 16 April 2020  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_20\\_666](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_666)

<sup>62</sup> New York Times, 'E.U. Court Rules 3 Countries Violated Deal on Refugee Quotas' 2 April 2020  
[www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/europe/european-court-refugees-hungary-poland-czech-republic.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/02/world/europe/european-court-refugees-hungary-poland-czech-republic.html) ;  
[www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-52133906](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-52133906)

<sup>63</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'NGOs Urge Swedish Minister of Justice and Migration Morgan Johanson to Welcome Unaccompanied Children from Greece' 22 April 2020  
[www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/22/ngos-urge-swedish-minister-justice-and-migration-morgan-johanson-welcome](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/22/ngos-urge-swedish-minister-justice-and-migration-morgan-johanson-welcome)

<sup>64</sup> The Guardian, 'Refugee families reunited in UK after rescue flight from Greece' 11 May 2020

[www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/11/refugee-families-reunited-in-uk-after-rescue-flight-from-greece](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/11/refugee-families-reunited-in-uk-after-rescue-flight-from-greece)

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

lead to an increase in child immigration detention.<sup>66</sup> This probability particularly reflects actions of States such as the United States, who in the last 11 days of March alone, expelled more than 299 unaccompanied minors under the public health order.<sup>67</sup> The number of expulsions for the month of April are yet to be disclosed from Customs and Border Protection Authorities. However, with the United States extending the duration of its 'Remain-in-Mexico' policy, it is likely that numbers have and will continue to increase.<sup>68</sup>

Further, Asylum seekers continue to face economic hardship, with a considerable amount of asylum seekers in the UK being rehoused in shared accommodation. In Glasgow, Refugee activists have called for an independent inquiry as an asylum seeker died in a guest house after being rehoused from his single occupancy flat. Mears Group, an accommodation provider, have removed hundreds of asylum seekers from their homes to hotels because of the coronavirus outbreak, with asylum benefits of 35 pounds a week being in cut, and social distancing remaining increasingly difficult.<sup>69</sup>

## Croatia

Additionally, abuse of asylum seekers has been reported in Croatia, with Croatian police allegedly spray-painting the heads of asylum seekers with crosses when they attempt to cross the border from Bosnia. The Guardian reported that a number of photographs of what has been described by charities as the 'latest humiliation' perpetrated by the Croatian authorities against migrants travelling along the Balkan route. The UN has asked the Croatian government to investigate all the allegations of abuse.<sup>70</sup>

## 6. Disability rights

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<sup>66</sup> IBAHRI press release, 'IBAHRI makes recommendations on ending detention of migrant children to UN Special Rapporteur' 5 May 2020

[www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=122cd3cd-e4fb-426f-9681-762ca5b3a856](http://www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=122cd3cd-e4fb-426f-9681-762ca5b3a856)

<sup>67</sup> CBS News, 'U.S. suspends protections for migrant kids at border, expelling hundreds amid pandemic' 7 May 2020 [www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-immigration-migrant-children-protections-border/](http://www.cbsnews.com/news/coronavirus-immigration-migrant-children-protections-border/)

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> The Ferret, 'Call for probe after man found dead in Covid-19 asylum seeker hotel' 10 May 2020 <https://theferret.scot/covid-19-syrian-man-dies-asylum-seeker-hotel/>

<sup>70</sup> The Guardian, 'Croatian police accused of spray-painting heads of asylum seekers' 12 May 2020 [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/12/croatian-police-accused-of-shaving-and-spray-painting-heads-of-asylum-seekers](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/may/12/croatian-police-accused-of-shaving-and-spray-painting-heads-of-asylum-seekers)

Last week, the UN published a policy brief, '[A Disability-Inclusive Response to Covid-19](#)'. The report highlights how people living with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and less likely to access healthcare services. The brief highlights that one in five women live with a disability, and that older people living with disabilities make up the majority of institutionalised people globally. As of 3 May, Covid-19-related deaths in care homes, ranging from 19 per cent to 72 per cent in countries with available datasets, places elderly people living with disabilities in care homes at a heightened risk of contracting coronavirus. The economic impact of the Covid-19 crisis affects persons with disabilities, who may face pre-existing exclusion from employment. As according to a 2019 world social protection report, only 28 per cent of people with significant disabilities have access to benefits worldwide. Aforementioned increased risks faced by women and those in institutions and detention, are even worse felt by those who live with disabilities.

### **United Kingdom**

Several judicial review cases defending the rights of those living with disabilities during lockdown have secured positive measures for people living with disability in the UK. A challenge to NHS England Covid-19 Guidance, which failed to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people with communication needs, has been successful. In the UK, government guidance to leave home only for one hour of exercise a day, failed to account for those living with health conditions who would need to leave the house more than once a day and travel to appointments outside of their local area. A judicial review has now challenged the government to include this consideration in its guidance. Access to justice is crucial to those living with disability to guarantee their rights. As courts struggle to stay open, it is important that alternative means for trials to go ahead are found, to allow the necessary scrutiny of government policy.<sup>71</sup>

### **Mental health**

Attention must be placed on safeguarding mental health during this unprecedented crisis, as those with mental health conditions might experience worsening symptoms, with some

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<sup>71</sup> [www.hja.net/the-importance-of-judicial-review-in-protecting-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/](http://www.hja.net/the-importance-of-judicial-review-in-protecting-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/)

possibly developing new mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress.

### **United Kingdom**

Recent reports submitted by the British Medical Journal indicate that deaths of patients detained under the Mental Health Act have doubled since 2019, with the Care Quality Commission reporting 112 deaths of detained patients from the period 1 March to 1 May, in comparison to the 56 reported deaths in 2019. These figures, which are inclusive of those subjected to hospital detention facilities and those who remain in communities, highlights an increase need for public health measures to protect those in need of vital health services.

In the UK, the Guardian has reported that those suffering from mental health conditions have struggled to find support because of the cancellations of appointments and an inability to get adequate help from their GP. Such lack of assistance can pressure those in need of support to the point of self-harm. A survey conducted by Mind, a mental health charity, indicated that one in four people were unable to access help during lockdown measures. Additionally, reports of people urgently seeking assistance from mental health crisis teams, often a point of call for those who are suicidal, could not reach these services.

### **Ghana**

So far, public health measures in Ghana are lacking vital information necessary to protect patients in mental health facilities, with instructions from the Ghanaian Government geared exclusively to staff members. With 1,671 reported coronavirus cases in Ghana, urgent measures to ensure that information on preventive measures to protect vulnerable people must be taken. After a mental health patient in Ghana's Accra Psychiatric Hospital tested positive for coronavirus, medical professionals attempted to transfer this patient to a Covid-19 ward. However, Ghanaian municipal authorities rejected this move, as this patient was suffering from mental health conditions. This clear display of discrimination, with Human Rights Watch calling for urgent amendments on the treatments of those in mental health facilities.

## **7. Religious discrimination**

The Covid-19 outbreak in has exacerbated religious tension and Islamophobia in India. After the outbreak of Covid-19 cases was attributed to a religious congregation of a Muslim missionary group in Delhi, the anti-Muslim rhetoric has continued to rise. Since 28 March, tweets with the hashtag #CoronaJihad have appeared nearly 300,000 times and have potentially been seen by 165 million people on Twitter, according to Equality Labs, a digital human rights group.<sup>72</sup> Thus implying that the Muslim minorities in the nation are to be held accountable for spreading the disease. Further, reports suggest that wards in a hospital in Gujarat for confirmed and suspected Covid-19 cases were being assigned according to the patient's faith. Such reports are concerning at a time when communal disharmony in India was at its peak right before the pandemic, due to the protests against the Bharatiya Janata Party's discriminatory Citizenship Amendment Act.

Religious discrimination and intolerance in Pakistan has increased because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Reports suggest that the Covid-19 virus is being termed as the 'the Shia Virus', as well as being attributed to the minority Ahmadiyya community in Pakistan. Such hate speech is primarily being propagated through social media platforms such as Twitter. Reports suggest that members of the Christian minority community are being denied access to essential food items, and are being forced to recite Islamic scriptures to receive aid. For the Hindu community in Lyari access to rations is only being provided after the checking of their national identity cards. Further, no measures are being undertaken by the government to protect sewage workers, as according to International Christian Concern (ICC), a non-governmental organization, Pakistan's Christians fill between 80 to 90 per cent of the country's 'dirty' jobs, including clearing sewers and risking serious health hazards.

In an open letter signed by 83 organisations, human rights advocates have called on Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin to address hate speech and violent threats against Rohingya refugees in the country amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. An increase in discrimination towards the Rohingya community in Malaysia, estimated to be about 150,000 persons, exacerbated after the Malaysian government denied the entry of a 200 Rohingya arriving via boat to Malaysian waters near Langkawi. Online posts directed at the Rohingya community emerged,

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<sup>72</sup> Time, 'It Was Already Dangerous to Be Muslim in India. Then Came the Coronavirus' 3 April 2020 <https://time.com/5815264/coronavirus-india-islamophobia-coronajihad/>

including discriminatory and dehumanising language and images, with some users threatening prominent Rohingya activists as well as their supporters with murder and sexual violence. Numerous online petitions calling for the expulsion of Rohingya were launched on Change.org and other platforms, with many receiving thousands of signatures. The open letter addresses the Malaysian government's lack of response to such divisive action, and has stated that the government of Malaysia should 'ensure threats and other human rights abuses against the Rohingya and their supporters are investigated, and perpetrators held accountable'.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Human Rights Watch, 'Joint Letter Re: End Violent Threats and Anti-Rohingya Campaign' 11 May 2020 [www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/11/joint-letter-re-end-violent-threats-and-anti-rohingya-campaign](http://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/11/joint-letter-re-end-violent-threats-and-anti-rohingya-campaign)