



Human Rights Institute

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IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor

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1. Gender-based violence and women's health

On 11 September, the United Nations General Assembly adopted an 'omnibus' resolution to encourage international cooperation in response to Covid-19. The resolution calls on States to ensure the right of women and girls to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health, including sexual and reproductive health, and reproductive rights. It also calls on States to counter the increase of sexual and gender-based violence, and harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage.¹

Meanwhile, as of 31 August, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)-supported programmes had reached an estimated ten million women in 52 countries. A UNFPA survey also showed that gender-based violence (GBV) services, in-person and/or remote, have been maintained with fewer disruptions than in the previous reporting period. The tele-psychosocial services in Pakistan and the Dominican Republic, and psychosocial services provided in quarantine sites in Somalia are examples of successful outreach. However, some countries have seen a substantial decrease in the uptake of GBV services, which UNFPA is working to address through awareness raising and community engagement.² Not long after the WHO had declared a pandemic in March, UNFPA had forecast that an estimated 31 million additional incidents of gender-based violence could be expected globally if lockdowns were to last for at least six months. For every three months that such restrictions continued, an additional 15 million incidents could be expected.³

Liberia

President of Liberia, George Weah, has declared rape as a national emergency and implemented new measures to tackle it after the West African state witnessed a recent spike of cases, according to a news report by Radio France Internationale. Over 900 cases of rape have been perpetrated against women and female and male children, including acts of sodomy targeting under-aged males, since the Covid-19 crisis hit. The move will see €1.7 million allotted to the fight to stop gender and sexual violence, as well as measures such as the appointment of a special prosecutor for rape and the establishment of a National Sex Offender Registry and a National Security Taskforce on sexual and gender-based violence.⁴

2. LGBTQI+ rights

Zimbabwe and Zambia

The lack of reliable and affordable social services has affected the LGBTQI+ community in Zimbabwe, where the government has failed to adequately supply clean water to homes. This has forced residents

¹ <http://m.theindependentbd.com/post/253136>

² https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/COVID-19_UNFPA_Global_Situation_Report_5_August.pdf

³ www.unfpa.org/press/new-unfpa-projections-predict-calamitous-impact-womens-health-covid-19-pandemic-continues

⁴ www.devdiscourse.com/article/law-order/1212237-liberia-president-george-weah-declares-rape-as-national-emergency

to fetch water from communal boreholes, which has turned out to be dangerous for the LGBTQI+ community, as Zimbabwe has taken a hard-line position in regards to homosexuality. Eswatini has seen businesses lay people off because of Covid-19 and this has led to members of the LGBTQI+ community who had moved out of their homes and were financially independent having to end their relationships and move back to their respective families where they face greater risk. In Zambia, there has been a closure of institutions that offered psychological support to the LGBTQI+ community. Due to this, the Zambian Women's Alliance for Equality, an organisation which focuses on promoting the human rights and well-being of LGBTQI+, reports that there have been increasing levels of anxiety, depression and isolation within the LGBTQI+ community because of Covid-19 lockdown.⁵

Tajikistan

The pandemic has hampered access to health services for the LGBTQI+ community. Many transgender people order their hormones online, and deliveries were suspended or subject to price increases of 30–60 per cent. Further, the postponement of gender identity clinic appointments has delayed access to legal gender recognition. Tajikistan does not recognise same-sex unions but same-sex sexual activity is legal. An estimated 25–40 per cent of young people experiencing homelessness in Tajikistan identify as LGBTQI+, and this has been exacerbated by Covid-19.⁶

Iraq

IraqQueer, an NGO advocating for the rights of the LGBTQI+ community in Iraq, has provided safe housing for LGBTQI+ community members who were unable to remain with abusive family members, as well as those who were living in temporary shelters prior to lockdown. There are reports that the hosts of temporary shelters had threatened to oust some members of the LGBTQI+ community if they did not leave the shelter.

3. Refugee camps

Greece

On 8 September, three separate fires broke out at and destroyed the Moria refugee camp on the Greek island of Lesbos.⁷ Police reinforcements cordoned off roads leading from the camp to prevent fleeing migrants from entering nearby towns and risking the spread of Covid-19 to their populations. The fires left thousands of asylum seekers homeless, while tensions between local residents, asylum seekers and police are increasing.⁸ According to Human Rights Watch, the Moria fires 'highlight the failure of the European Union's "hotspot approach" ... which has led to the containment of thousands of people on

⁵ www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-09-11-covid-19-and-lgbtq-women-in-southern-africa-a-test-for-universal-human-rights/

⁶ www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/covid19-lgbti-assessment-2020.pdf

⁷ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1071942>

⁸ <https://globalnews.ca/news/7330933/greece-refugee-camp-fire/>

the Greek islands.⁹ At protests during the weekend, people raised cardboard placards bearing slogans such as ‘We want peace, freedom’, and ‘Europe, help’.¹⁰

Jordan

The UNHCR confirmed three cases in Jordan’s largest camp for Syrian refugees, Zaatari, near the border with Syria, and two cases in a smaller camp, Azraq.¹¹ The infections in the two camps that house a total of around 120,000 refugees were the first confirmed cases since the pandemic was first reported in the Kingdom last March. The UN is stepping up efforts to curb the spread of Covid-19 and working closely with the Government of Jordan to support the humanitarian response to the pandemic and its longer-term economic impact.¹²

4. Prisoners and detainees

United States

Dawn Wooten, a nurse at Irwin County Detention Center, Georgia, has spoken out about dangerous medical practices at the Immigration and Customs Enforcement facility amid the coronavirus outbreak. Ms Wooten expressed concerns about the high number of hysterectomies performed on Spanish-speaking women at the centre, saying that detained women did not fully understand why they had to get a hysterectomy, suggesting they were completed without consent.¹³ She further alleged a refusal to test detainees with symptoms and fabrication of medical records. In a series of interviews, she also described how she repeatedly complained to staff leadership before she was demoted in early July, a move she considers was retaliation for speaking up and demanding stricter medical safety protocols.¹⁴

Kazakhstan

In March, Kazakhstan locked down its 82 penitentiaries as part of nationwide measures to contain the spread of Covid-19. Several inmates have tested positive in recent months, and are sharing overcrowded cells with no masks and no sanitary cleaning. Prison officials have suspended family and other visits since the pandemic began. Some prisons no longer allow prisoners to exercise or walk outside every day. The measures have effectively left Kazakhstan’s estimated 30,000 inmates confined to their cells. Kazakh officials have refused to say how many Covid-19 infections have been discovered among the

⁹ www.hrw.org/news/2020/09/12/greeces-moria-camp-fire-whats-next

¹⁰ www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/09/fire-destroyed-greek-camp-refugees-seek-european-support-200914080544868.html

¹¹ www.arabnews.com/node/1733586/middle-east

¹² www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/9/5f60a7524/un-refugee-chief-concludes-jordan-visit-call-solidarity-amid-covid-crisis.html

¹³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-54160638>

¹⁴ <https://theintercept.com/2020/09/14/ice-detention-center-nurse-whistleblower/>

country's prison population, and appeals for early release of the most vulnerable groups of prisoners and those convicted of minor offences have been rejected.¹⁵

Lebanon

Security authorities have announced 22 Covid-19 cases in Lebanon's largest and most overcrowded prison.¹⁶ The prison houses more than 5,500 prisoners, with a capacity of about 1,500, making social distancing impossible, and has long been infamous for poor conditions. Dozens of families of detainees staged a protest in front of a Beirut courthouse recently, demanding general amnesty for their relatives. The overcrowding could lead to a health disaster in the prison that may cross prison boundaries if internal security forces and the judiciary do not take necessary measures to protect infected prisoners and those in contact with them, especially since many prisoners suffer from weak immunity due to poor living conditions and health.

5. Informal settlements and homelessness

The Middle East

Johns Hopkins University reported that Covid-19 had a detrimental impact on the homeless war victims in Syria and Yemen. The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, an aid agency for the Catholic Church, reported that millions of homeless Syrians don't have a safe place to live, enough to eat or drink, or a way to earn a living for their families. The agency also reported that homeless Syrians cannot socially distance, access healthcare, or even find clean water. In Egypt, thousands of Egyptians living in poor, unsanitary, overcrowded areas, especially near areas that lack running water or sewers, have been exposed to the virus.¹⁷

Germany

Berlin has about 6,000 homeless people; however, the Berlin City government had only planned to house 350 homeless people as of March this year, to protect them from the virus. Bahnhofsmision Zoo, a charity centre, reports that many homeless have underlying medical conditions and have nowhere to go to protect themselves or even just to wash their hands. Although Germany has slowly reopened its economy, the elderly who usually volunteer at charity centres that assist homeless people have stopped as they are also vulnerable to the virus. With the government advising social distancing, Human Rights Watch reports that the homeless people who usually earn money by selling newspapers or making music have faced increased difficulty to earn a wage.¹⁸

¹⁵ www.rferl.org/a/kazakh-prisoners-packed-in-cells-endure-degrading-conditions-in-coronavirus-lockdown/30838547.html

¹⁶ www.france24.com/en/20200914-lebanon-lawyer-warns-coronavirus-hit-prison-humanitarian-time-bomb

¹⁷ <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Emergencies-news/Syria-Q-A>

¹⁸ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/26/how-can-germans-stay-home-if-they-are-homeless>

Chile

Many Chileans working in the informal sector lost their jobs during the lockdown in Santiago, and the most vulnerable ended up living on the streets. The government estimates that there are 15,500 homeless people in Chile and almost 7,000 live in the capital of which 43 per cent are over 50 years old and 35 per cent suffer from chronic diseases. Authorities in Chile report that at least 53 homeless people have died of Covid-19 as of June. Failure to adhere to social distancing has been cited as one of the reasons that has exacerbated the situation for the homeless population as they often live, eat, and sleep in close proximity to each other thereby exposing themselves to the virus.¹⁹

6. Disability rights

United Kingdom

A new report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation outlines that, as the furlough scheme is due to end in November, it is clear that those who have been furloughed due to being unable to come to work because of a health condition are now at greater risk of redundancy. The report urges the UK Government to establish a targeted furlough scheme to assist those most vulnerable to losing their jobs and being put in a position of increased hardship.²⁰

Israel

In Israel, it is reported that 65 per cent of those living with disabilities in the country were furloughed or have lost their jobs. Chairman of the State Control Committee Member of the Knesset Ofer Shelah said that this ‘necessitates a national emergency response plan.’²¹ As Prime Minister Netanyahu imposes another three-week lockdown following a rise in cases, it only places those living with a disability in a more vulnerable position.²²

¹⁹ <https://chiletoday.cl/site/being-homeless-in-times-of-covid-19-a-growing-problem-in-santiago/>

²⁰ www.jrf.org.uk/press/targeted-furlough-scheme-needed-new-research-shows-who-likely-lose-their-job

²¹ www.jpost.com/breaking-news/65-percent-of-people-with-disabilities-fired-or-furloughed-due-to-corona-641616

²² www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-54134869