



# 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 and women's health

The Covid-19 pandemic has had disproportionate effects on women and their economic status. Women are more likely than men to work in social sectors - such as services industries, retail, tourism, and hospitality - that require face-to-face interactions and therefore are hardest hit by social distancing and mitigation measures. For example, in the United States, unemployment among women was two percentage points higher than men between April-June 2020. This also means teleworking is not an option. About 5 per cent of women in social sectors in the United States cannot telework, and this rises to 67 per cent in Brazil. In low-income countries, at most only about 12 per cent of the population can work remotely. Further, women are more likely than men to be employed in the informal sector in low-income countries.

The livelihoods of informal workers have been greatly affected by the pandemic. In Colombia, women's poverty has increased by 3.3 per cent. The UN estimates the pandemic will increase the number of people living in poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean by 15.9 million, many of them women and girls. Women also tend to do more unpaid household work (about an extra 2.7 hours per day); therefore, after shutdowns have eased, women are slower to return to full employment. In Canada, the May job report shows that women's employment increased by 1.1 per cent compared to 2.4 per cent for men; among parents with at least one child under six years old, men were roughly three times more likely to have returned to work. Finally, pandemics put women at greater risk of losing human capital. For example, in India, since the lockdown, matrimony websites have reported a 30 per cent surge in registration as families arrange marriages for their daughters.<sup>1</sup>

### Caribbean

Rising demand for care in the context of the Covid-19 crisis has deepened already-existing inequalities in the gendered division of labour in the Caribbean, placing a disproportionate burden on women and girls with potential long-term implications for their health, wellbeing and economic empowerment. A recent survey of Caribbean households showed that the pandemic has had a greater negative effect on women's employment, nutrition and safety. Women in the region are facing more job losses and domestic violence under the pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

### Cambodia

A recent gender analysis of how the pandemic is playing out in Cambodia has found that up to 200,000 garment workers, of which 89 per cent are women, are at risk of losing their jobs. Further, stress and anxiety are endangering mental health and increasing the risk of gender-based violence, accompanied

<sup>1</sup> <https://blogs.imf.org/2020/07/21/the-covid-19-gender-gap/>

<sup>2</sup> [www.iadb.org/en/news/un-women-idb-urge-caribbean-integrate-gender-catalyst-economic-recovery](http://www.iadb.org/en/news/un-women-idb-urge-caribbean-integrate-gender-catalyst-economic-recovery)

by increased stigmatisation and discrimination of certain population groups associated with carrying the Covid-19 virus including women working with foreigners. The digital gender gap is compromising education (with more detrimental effects on girls than on boys) and access to business support measures (again disadvantaging women disproportionately due to their pre-existing economic insecurity). There is also a lack of tailored Covid-19 messaging for vulnerable groups. The main recommendations of the report are that the collection of data on Covid-19 is sex- and age-disaggregated; the provision of immediate lifesaving relief support to those most impacted and that livelihood and income support be made available based on women's identified needs and priorities.

## Ukraine

Tens of thousands of Ukrainians recently petitioned the President of Ukraine to ratify the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (the 'Istanbul Convention'), which Ukraine signed in 2011. This was in response to a report by a domestic violence support group in Ukraine stating that it had received 'almost twice as many calls' from women to its hotline during the first month of the Covid-19 quarantine than usual. In 2017, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women had observed that since the year 2014 Ukraine had experienced 'an increase in the level of violence against women' and 'a reinforcement of traditional and patriarchal attitudes that limit women's and girls' enjoyment of their rights'.<sup>3</sup>

## Africa

Reports of sexual violence affecting women and girls in conflict and fragile settings are increasing. The New Partnership for Africa's Development estimates that in Africa, nearly half (45.6%) of women and girls over 15 years have experienced physical or sexual violence, which the Covid-19 crisis has only exacerbated.<sup>4</sup> April saw the rape of a girl and shooting of a woman by two suspected soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and in a separate incident in Kenya, the gang-rape at a refugee camp of a lesbian due to her sexual orientation. In Nigeria, there are reports of a rape by a suspected militia. In Rwanda, there are reports of rape of girls at a school by three soldiers, as well as three separate instances of such sexual violence in South Sudan. Further, a 12-year-old girl was raped and two other females were attacked by unidentified gunmen in Sudan, and at least one woman was gang-raped as part of an attack on two villages by a militia believed to be financially backed by a local businessman in Uganda.<sup>5</sup>

## India

<sup>3</sup> [www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/22/thousands-urge-ukraines-president-help-stop-violence-against-women](https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/22/thousands-urge-ukraines-president-help-stop-violence-against-women)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.africaportal.org/features/issues-affecting-young-women-africa-during-covid-19/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/April-2020-Reporting-Sexual-Violence.pdf>

Around 600,000 predominantly female accredited social health activists ('ASHA workers') across India launched a two-day strike on 7 August, demanding better pay and protection from disease amid India's Covid-19 crisis. ASHA workers form a crucial part of India's front-line health workers, and therefore are essential to the country's defence against the virus. The ASHA workers' protest was launched collectively by ten unions. At least 100 health workers have died of the coronavirus in India so far but the government has not provided any insurance to their families. In Bengaluru, the ASHA workers demanded a minimum wage of Rs 21,000 (approximately GBP 215) per month, proper personal equipment kits, and medical insurance for their families. In Delhi, they held placards demanding that the government stop the privatisation of health schemes and institutions. In Bihar, the ASHA workers, who have not been paid for months, said that they will not tolerate the exploitation of labour anymore.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. LGBTQI+ Rights

### Guatemala

In Central America, the risk of violence for the transgender and LGBTQI+ community has risen drastically during Covid-19. A 27-year-old asylum seeker, who sought refuge in Guatemala after escaping violence in El Salvador, was violently killed, highlighting the need for States to better protect transgender and LGBTQI+ refugees during the pandemic. The Salvadorian LGBTQI+ organisation COMCAVIS Trans reported that of the 160 people assisted by the organisation since the start of the pandemic, 79 have been forced to escape threats of violence and gang violence.<sup>7</sup> Despite the strict lockdown and movement restrictions, violence has continued, forcing LGBTQI+ people to seek refuge in other countries where they are often treated with further hostility.

### Poland

The rhetoric against homosexuality and LGBTQI+ rights in Poland has continued and been exacerbated by the pandemic, as previously reported in the 14<sup>th</sup> edition of the Covid-19 Rights Monitor.<sup>8</sup> Following the inclusion of Hungary and Poland in the EU economic recovery deal, the IBA and IBAHRI released a statement expressing regret at the lack of accountability required of these two countries following attacks on the rule of law and human rights therein.<sup>9</sup> However, the EU rejected the application of six Polish towns to join the EU town-twinning scheme which awards up to EUR 25,000 in funding, based

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<sup>6</sup> <https://scroll.in/latest/969718/coronavirus-around-6-lakh-asha-workers-launch-protest-demand-better-pay-health-insurance>

<sup>7</sup> [www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/8/5f2bb1494/death-transgender-asylum-seeker-guatemala-highlights-increased-risks-protection.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2020/8/5f2bb1494/death-transgender-asylum-seeker-guatemala-highlights-increased-risks-protection.html)

<sup>8</sup> [www.ibanet.org/Human\\_Rights\\_Institute/Bulletins/14-Copy.aspx](http://www.ibanet.org/Human_Rights_Institute/Bulletins/14-Copy.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> [www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=7D6FD2A0-CFCF-4299-961A-83AA7DDCDBA0](http://www.ibanet.org/Article/NewDetail.aspx?ArticleUid=7D6FD2A0-CFCF-4299-961A-83AA7DDCDBA0)

upon their rejection of ‘LGBTQI+ ideology’, contrary to the EU’s commitment to equality for its entire people. In March, the International Observatory of Human Rights said one-third of Polish towns were self-declared ‘LGBTI-ideology free’ zones.<sup>10</sup>

## United Kingdom

On 30 July, NHS Improvement and Health Education England released a report ‘*We are the NHS: People Plan for 2020/21 – action for us all*’, making recommendations on how to better support frontline medics in the Covid-19 pandemic. However, as part of the report’s recommendations on how to treat disabled NHS staff, it equated staff who identify as LGBTQI+ with those living with a disability. Facing backlash from its own staff, and LGBTQI+ activists, the NHS amended the document on 6 August.<sup>11</sup>

### 3. Refugee camps

#### Crisis funding

According to the report on the implications of Covid-19 for crisis financing commissioned by the Norwegian Refugee Council, the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the fundamental weaknesses in global preparedness, including substantial under-investment, a tendency to adopt narrow thematic approaches and a widespread failure to prepare for secondary socioeconomic impacts.

The current architecture for crisis funding relied on international financing institutions linked to high GDP, which restricted its ability to move funds to countries with the most urgent needs. In the meantime, voluntary humanitarian financing contributions tend to follow a familiar pathway via the UN system, slowing the distribution of funding to frontline responders.<sup>12</sup>

As a result, less than a quarter of this year’s \$40 billion humanitarian aid appeal has been received to support 250 million vulnerable people, while an estimated \$11 trillion Covid-19 stimulus funds are launched by wealthy nations. The \$40 billion humanitarian aid is intended to support 63 countries with limited existing capacities to manage the impact of the pandemic, including 25 pre-existing humanitarian crises, such as Syria and Venezuela, where protracted conflict, disaster and hunger affected millions of people before the arrival of Covid-19. The international community is in need of

<sup>10</sup> [www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/eu-ends-funding-for-six-towns-over-lgbt-status-cnn-1-6774797](http://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/top-stories/eu-ends-funding-for-six-towns-over-lgbt-status-cnn-1-6774797)

<sup>11</sup> [www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/08/07/nhs-england-people-plan-lgbt-disabled-coronavirus-steve-russell-jackie-daniel-backlash](http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2020/08/07/nhs-england-people-plan-lgbt-disabled-coronavirus-steve-russell-jackie-daniel-backlash)

<sup>12</sup> [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nrc\\_make\\_or\\_break\\_implications\\_of\\_covid\\_for\\_crisis\\_financing.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nrc_make_or_break_implications_of_covid_for_crisis_financing.pdf)

more flexible, multi-year humanitarian funding, and a fundamental re-think of how to prepare for and respond to humanitarian crises.<sup>13</sup>

### **Women-led organisations and women's rights organisations**

On 16 July, CAFOD, CARE International UK, ActionAid, DanChurch Aid and Oxfam, partnering with local women-led organisations (WLOs) and women's rights organisations (WROs) in Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Nigeria, the Occupied Palestinian Territories, South Sudan and Uganda to issue a joint report on access to funding, partnerships and decision-making for local WLOs and WROs.<sup>14</sup>

Of the 18 women-led organisations and women's rights organisations consulted for the report, only three have been able to access new and additional funding for Covid-19 response through the UN system so far. Several partners described an almost existential threat to their organisations' abilities to remain solvent, as donors and UN agencies cut their funding or redirect their funds to other priorities and agencies. Being considered a lower priority, gender and women's rights-related funding is often among the first to be cut. Even for the WLOs/WROs that have accessed funding from the UN for Covid-19 response, the level of funds received has declined.

WLOs and WROs play a central role in humanitarian action in the backdrop of the Covid-19 crisis. However, they lack adequate funding to cover basic infrastructure and staff salaries, and they are also facing structural challenges without having direct engagement with donors. Urgent action for a more effective response to Covid-19 that centres women's leadership is needed, including more direct funding to ensure the survival of WLOs/WROs, priority to WLOs/WROs with demonstrated credibility in the funding structure through UN agencies and INGOs, and inclusion of WLOs/WROs in country-level humanitarian response plans.

### **An agenda for the forcibly displaced**

As refugees and forcibly displaced people are experiencing the worst of the pandemic, Refugees International has identified five key areas of priority to help guide ongoing and future efforts to protect them. Such recommendations include: doubling down on efforts to contain and mitigate the spread of the virus in displaced communities by governments and aid agencies; countries hosting large numbers of refugees and IDPs; countries providing refuge for those with well-founded fears of persecution, even as they take reasonable steps to manage risks to public health; governments, donors, and aid agencies taking swift action to mitigate the unintended consequences caused by the measures taken to slow the

<sup>13</sup> [www.nrc.no/news/2020/july/wealthy-nations-leave-millions-behind-with-alarmed-funding-disparities-amid-pandemic](http://www.nrc.no/news/2020/july/wealthy-nations-leave-millions-behind-with-alarmed-funding-disparities-amid-pandemic)

<sup>14</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/WLO-Covid19-Joint%20Agency%20Policy%20Brief.pdf>

spread of the Covid-19, including border and market closures and lockdowns; and donors refraining from diverting aid from other relief efforts and empowering local aid groups on the frontline of the crisis.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4. Prisoners and detainees

As human rights defenders and peaceful activists remain imprisoned despite the move to release non-violent prisoners to decongest prison systems worldwide, Amnesty International has released a new briefing, *Daring to Stand up for Human Rights in a Pandemic*. The report identifies Egypt, India, Egypt, Iran and Turkey as countries where political prisoners, peaceful protesters and those arrested for dissenting views have been excluded from the move to release non-violent prisoners to mitigate the risk of Covid-19 in prisons. The report has also identified 131 human rights defenders who have been killed, persecuted or imprisoned under the pretext of combatting Covid-19.<sup>16</sup> As many governments have moved to impose restrictive measures to protect against the spread of Covid-19, many have also taken this opportunity to unduly restrict fundamental freedoms of human rights defenders, such as the freedoms of expression and assembly.

#### Uganda

Since March, it has been reported that the number of prisoners in Uganda has increased by 10 per cent from 59,000 people to 65,000. The Ugandan Prisons Service reports that Uganda's prisons can only comfortably accommodate 20,000 inmates, further exacerbating pre-existing concerns of overcrowding and poor hygiene conditions within the prison systems. While total Covid-19 cases in Uganda have only reached 1,283 (as of 10 August 2020), three cases have occurred in prisons. The Prisons Service has reported that this has led to great concern amongst inmates over a potential outbreak, with 30 prisoners fearing infection escaping since the start of the lockdown.<sup>17</sup> More must be done in the country to decongest the prison system in the current crisis, especially following the report of 31 new cases on 8 August 2020.<sup>18</sup>

#### Malawi

<sup>15</sup> [www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/14/covid-19-and-the-other-one-percent-an-agenda-for-the-forcibly-displaced-six-months-into-the-pandemic](http://www.refugeesinternational.org/reports/2020/7/14/covid-19-and-the-other-one-percent-an-agenda-for-the-forcibly-displaced-six-months-into-the-pandemic)

<sup>16</sup> [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/covid-19-jailed-activists-remain-virus-hit-prisons-attempts-silence-them-continue](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/covid-19-jailed-activists-remain-virus-hit-prisons-attempts-silence-them-continue)

<sup>17</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-health-coronavirus-uganda-prisons/ugandas-prisoner-population-surges-raising-fears-of-covid-19-outbreak-idUKKCN25311I>

<sup>18</sup> [www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEV\\_enGB885GB885&sxsrf=ALeKk02oL0Xw4LseINWniy5a28lynIkwZg%3A1597074447087&ei=D2wxX5v7BMGx8gKZ3qLoAw&q=uganda+coronavirus+cases&oq=uganda+coronavirus&gs\\_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWlQAXgAMgQIIxAnMgUIABCxAzICCAAYAggAMgIIADICCAAYAggAMgIIADICCC4yAggAOgUIABCRAjoKCAAQsQMqFBCHAjoICAAQsQMqgwFQlxdY\\_R5gkSN0AHAAeACAAU2IAyMFkgECMTKYAQCgAQGqAQdnd3Mtd2l6wAEB&scient=psy-ab](http://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1GCEV_enGB885GB885&sxsrf=ALeKk02oL0Xw4LseINWniy5a28lynIkwZg%3A1597074447087&ei=D2wxX5v7BMGx8gKZ3qLoAw&q=uganda+coronavirus+cases&oq=uganda+coronavirus&gs_lcp=CgZwc3ktYWlQAXgAMgQIIxAnMgUIABCxAzICCAAYAggAMgIIADICCAAYAggAMgIIADICCC4yAggAOgUIABCRAjoKCAAQsQMqFBCHAjoICAAQsQMqgwFQlxdY_R5gkSN0AHAAeACAAU2IAyMFkgECMTKYAQCgAQGqAQdnd3Mtd2l6wAEB&scient=psy-ab)

In Malawi, prison authorities have confirmed that at least 86 inmates and 21 prison guards tested positive for Covid-19 in the last month, with 71 cases in one prison in Blantyre.<sup>19</sup> Further, these figures reflect only the small number of inmates tested, and so the outbreak of Covid-19 among those detained is thought to be much larger. The new President of Malawi, Lazarus Chakwera, pardoned the first prisoner to contract the virus, yet many argue more must be done to pardon non-violent prisoners.<sup>20</sup> Seven NGOs have written to the Government urging them to decongest the prison system, with the Executive Director of the Centre for Human Rights Education and Assistance noting that in one prison, 40,000 inmates currently occupy a space meant for 5,500 detainees.<sup>21</sup> Following a visit to Zomba Prison, Homeland Security Minister Richard Chimwendo Banda announced the setting aside of money for risk allowances for prison staff due to the high risk of them catching Covid-19.<sup>22</sup> The Government have also established a special committee to investigate how to further tackle the outbreak in prisons.

## Israel

As the number of cases of Covid-19 in Israel continues to increase, the first case of a Palestinian child imprisoned in Israel contracting the virus has also been recorded. On 23 July, Israeli forces detained a 15-year old Palestinian boy from his home in Al Jalazoun refugee camp. His interrogation at Shikma Prison in Ashkelon has now been postponed due to his positive Covid-19 test, according to Defense for Children International-Palestine.<sup>23</sup> His sentencing comes after the Supreme Court of Israel rejected a petition made by the Adalah legal centre for minority rights calling for Israel to implement Covid-19 protective guidelines for inmates at Gilboa prison, which hosts around 450 Palestinian prisoners.<sup>24</sup> The detention of a child amid the Covid-19 pandemic is unjustifiable, and given the rise in cases, efforts should be made to release all children and non-violent political prisoners at least on home arrest.

## 6. Asylum procedures

### United Kingdom

For the first time since Covid-19 lockdown measures began in the UK, up to 20 asylum seekers are scheduled to be deported to France and Germany on 12 August under the Dublin regulation. However, it has been reported that there will be no testing for deportees on departure or arrival, raising concerns

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<sup>19</sup> [www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/06/malawi-human-rights-groups-warn-of-covid-deaths-in-packed-prisons](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/aug/06/malawi-human-rights-groups-warn-of-covid-deaths-in-packed-prisons)

<sup>20</sup> [www.voanews.com/africa/malawi-government-under-pressure-pardon-covid-19-prisoners](http://www.voanews.com/africa/malawi-government-under-pressure-pardon-covid-19-prisoners)

<sup>21</sup> [www.voanews.com/africa/malawi-government-under-pressure-pardon-covid-19-prisoners](http://www.voanews.com/africa/malawi-government-under-pressure-pardon-covid-19-prisoners)

<sup>22</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/202008041015.html>

<sup>23</sup> [www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200807-first-palestinian-child-detainee-in-israel-prison-infected-with-coronavirus/](http://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200807-first-palestinian-child-detainee-in-israel-prison-infected-with-coronavirus/)

<sup>24</sup> [www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-israel-supreme-court-palestinians-prisoners-no-rights-social-distancing](http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-israel-supreme-court-palestinians-prisoners-no-rights-social-distancing)

at the safety of the planned deportation.<sup>25</sup> As the UK, France and Spain all face rising cases of Covid-19, the UK Government has been criticised for hastily restarting deportations despite public health concerns. This move follows the UK Secretary of State for the Home Office, Priti Patel, promising more would be done to tackle the rise in refugees arriving at the shores of the UK by boat this year. With over 4,000 refugees reaching the UK by sea this year, Boris Johnson has announced he will re-write laws making it much easier to deport refugees who arrive in the UK.<sup>26</sup>

As reported in the 14th edition of the Covid-19 Rights Monitor, an asylum seeker who became ill with the virus at the Urban House in Wakefield is taking legal action against the government due to overcrowding and a lack of social distancing. Following a further outbreak in cases in July, 84 residents were initially dispersed from the facility without being tested for Covid-19, and now more have been released.<sup>27</sup> It has been reported that residents have been forced to share rooms throughout the UK lockdown. The South Yorkshire Migration and Asylum Action Group have called for the immediate closure of the detention centre to reform it and bring it in line with current standards, especially in light of the current crisis.<sup>28</sup>

Further, a former United Nations worker seeking asylum in Wales has reported to the BBC that she went without food for a week during lockdown, unable to survive on the minimal funding asylum seekers receive.<sup>29</sup> The asylum seeker also said she found it difficult to contact the NHS when she contracted Covid-19 and was left helpless. A recent case of the UK High Court, *R (W, a child) v Secretary of State for the Home Department*, found the government's policy of No Recourse to Public Funds as unlawful for those holding family or private life visas, under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights regarding torture.<sup>30</sup> While a very positive step, many on the minimal asylum seeker allowance are still left unable to support themselves during the Covid-19 pandemic. It has also been reported that court documents have shown the failure of the government to provide housing to asylum seekers, until a court order is brought against them. In certain cases, the government has been ordered to pay back charities that have temporarily housed asylum seekers.<sup>31</sup> The pandemic has brought even more housing insecurity for asylum seekers, and the government must do more to protect them.

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<sup>25</sup> [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-asylum-seekers-deportation-coronavirus-a9657761.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-asylum-seekers-deportation-coronavirus-a9657761.html)

<sup>26</sup> [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-10/u-k-s-boris-johnson-plans-tighter-laws-to-stop-illegal-migrants](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-08-10/u-k-s-boris-johnson-plans-tighter-laws-to-stop-illegal-migrants)

<sup>27</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-53422122](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-53422122)

<sup>28</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-53563945](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leeds-53563945)

<sup>29</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53568465](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-53568465)

<sup>30</sup> [www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2020/07/30/thousands-of-migrants-in-the-uk-are-seeking-relief-from-no-recourse-to-public-funds/#375d3a6e1161](http://www.forbes.com/sites/freylindsay/2020/07/30/thousands-of-migrants-in-the-uk-are-seeking-relief-from-no-recourse-to-public-funds/#375d3a6e1161)

<sup>31</sup> [www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-asylum-seekers-housing-homeless-uk-a9632536.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/home-office-asylum-seekers-housing-homeless-uk-a9632536.html)

## Trinidad and Tobago

It has been reported that approximately 165 Venezuelan refugees have been deported from Trinidad and Tobago back to Venezuela following the arrest and quarantine of Venezuelans in the country throughout July. Due to a recent spike of cases in the country, Trinidadians have expressed concern over the spread of the virus by illegal immigrants, which has been endorsed by the government. In a press conference on 25 July the Minister of National Security claimed illegal immigrants presented a health risk, and said Venezuelans or landlords found to be harboring illegal immigrants would also be deported.<sup>32</sup> This is despite the government confirming that three new cases of the virus were imported into Trinidad and Tobago by nationals returning from abroad.<sup>33</sup> Louise Tillotson, Caribbean researcher at Amnesty International said, ‘It’s no secret that Trinidad and Tobago’s authorities criminalise irregular entry, contrary to international human rights standards. But to deport Venezuelan refugees back to the human rights and humanitarian emergency that they were fleeing, in the middle of a pandemic, is an outrageous violation of the obligations that Trinidad and Tobago has committed to under international law.’<sup>34</sup> The pandemic must not be utilised as a pretext by which states can further a xenophobic and scapegoating rhetoric, to shift the blame for the spread of the virus.

## 7. Disability rights

The discrimination faced by individuals with disabilities often leads to reduced access to basic social services and general lack of political and social recognition. A new UNICEF report argues that addressing discrimination and promoting inclusion is an issue of concern across the world and can be accomplished through quality data and evidence-based advocacy and policy. This report explains that the production of inclusive data requires the involvement of people with disabilities at all stages of data collection. It also involves the use of data collection instruments and protocols that allow for the disaggregation of key indicators according to disability status and the development of accommodation strategies that ensure that people with disabilities can participate in surveys, censuses, and data collection.

## Re-opening of schools

When schools closed their physical buildings due to the pandemic, many made valiant efforts to continue the therapies and services that help students with disabilities access education. However, as students across the world look to returning to school this autumn, parents of students with disabilities

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<sup>32</sup> [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/trinidad-tobago-deportation-165-venezuelans-violates-international-law](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/trinidad-tobago-deportation-165-venezuelans-violates-international-law)

<sup>33</sup> [www.looptt.com/content/165-venezuelans-repatriated-human-trafficking-crackdown](https://www.looptt.com/content/165-venezuelans-repatriated-human-trafficking-crackdown)

<sup>34</sup> [www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/trinidad-tobago-deportation-165-venezuelans-violates-international-law](https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/08/trinidad-tobago-deportation-165-venezuelans-violates-international-law)

worry that schools will be unable to provide the resources their children need from a distance. Many families of students with disabilities cannot afford private therapy, and the services their children get through school are often the only ones they receive. Maria Hernandez, a disability non-profit director in the United States, noted that when schools closed many therapies stopped and some students who were receiving therapy once or twice a week received it just a few times over the entire spring semester. Further, some students with disabilities have underlying conditions and medical needs that make the physical reopening of schools a terrifying prospect. ‘No one has the answer,’ noted Rebecca Cokley, director of the Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress, but many advocates agree that there is a clear need for increased funding so that schools have the resources to teach all students of all abilities during the pandemic.

## **Fiji**

While Fiji only had a limited number of Covid-19 cases, the popular tourist destination suffered greatly from international border closures and a tropical hurricane on 8 April. With a steep economic decline and loss of government revenue, many Fijians, especially those with disabilities, suffered financially. People with disabilities and their families are disproportionately represented amongst people living in poverty, and poverty itself limits the ability of people with disabilities to put in place measures to respond to the outbreak, increasing their vulnerability. While the government put some social protection measures in place, they are limited and often inaccessible to individuals with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities in Fiji already experience barriers to health services when compared to those without disabilities. This is due to stigma and discrimination and students with disabilities may be at further risk of exclusion from education if remote learning programmes are inaccessible or if they do not have assistive devices to facilitate remote participation. The report concludes with a series of recommendations such as guaranteeing the availability of disability aggregated data, ensuring the participation of people with disabilities in all Covid-19 recovery decision making, ensuring continuity of health services, and developing more inclusive services for individuals with disabilities who are victims of gender-based violence.

## **Refugees with disabilities**

Of the nearly 80 million people who are displaced worldwide, approximately 12 million are people with disabilities. Refugee women, children, and youth with disabilities are often excluded from essential services such as health care and education, economic opportunities, and programmes that address gender-based violence. A report released on 6 August 2020 by the Women’s Refugee Commission compiled information received from partner organisations in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uganda and expressed concern about lack of access to services and information for refugees with disabilities, and an increase in gender-based violence towards refugee women with disabilities during the pandemic.