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1. Gender-based violence and women's health

A recent [report](#) published by the WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO, the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Violence against Children and the End Violence Partnership has found that half of the world's children, approximately one billion children, are affected by physical, sexual or psychological violence every year, because countries have not followed established strategies to protect them. Further, the pandemic could be making things worse, with school closures, lockdowns and restrictions on movement meaning that children are stuck with their abusers, as well as access to usual support systems being restricted, such as extended family, friends, and professionals and child protection services. The pandemic has seen a spike in calls to child abuse helplines as well as an increase in hate and violence online, including bullying, and as schools are now reopening in some parts of the world, children are expressing their fear of returning to school. Harmful online behaviour such as sexual exploitation has also increased during the pandemic, even as online learning becomes central to children's lives.

India

The first signs of an increase in sexual and gender-based violence during the pandemic in India came from data provided by the National Commission for Women (NCW) in mid-April, which suggested an almost [100](#) per cent increase in domestic violence. Between 25 March and 31 May 2020, Indian women filed [more](#) complaints of domestic violence (1,477) than during similar periods in the last ten years, and nearly [double](#) the number of complaints from January to March 2020. In a majority of cases, victims saw reporting to the police as a [last option](#), reflecting a criminal justice system that prioritises protection of marriage over women's safety. While before the lockdown calls to police ranged from 900-1,000 in number and covered domestic violence, molestation and sexual harassment, now they have increased to [1,000-1,200](#) and mainly relate to domestic violence. However, most agree that this is just the tip of the iceberg, as many women are not able to reach these helplines due to lack of space and/or time, and the data accounts for complaints received through email and WhatsApp, facilities to which a majority of Indian women do not have access. Not a single complaint via post was received during the lockdown. Families are also attempting to marry off minor girls while law enforcement authorities are distracted with the enforcement of the lockdown.

Those who do not want to report turn to informal support such as aid organisations. Mumbai-based Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA) assisted [343](#) women with counselling in May alone, almost half the number of complaints that came to the NCW. Experts believe that both the scale and level of violence has escalated. For instance, a woman was beaten up after her husband lost a boardgame, resulting in a spinal injury. As lockdown was eased, one of the first businesses to reopen

was liquor stores. This of course would lead to a further rise in sexual and gender-based violence, yet no specific measures were taken to address this.

Reports have emerged in southern India of a mobile accessories shop owner and his son arrested by police on the evening of 19 June for allegedly keeping their shop open a mere 15 minutes past the curfew imposed by lockdown rules, and [subjected](#) to custodial torture including sexual abuse, leading to their deaths. The Madras High Court has ordered a probe into the matter, and asked the police to submit a report by 26 July. Further, on 30 June, a disabled contract female employee was [brutally attacked](#) by a senior government official for asking him to wear a mask. He beat her up, pulled her by her hair and threw her down on the floor after which he started beating her with an iron rod. The video of the incident is now circulating on social media. The incident exposes the various layers of discrimination that a disabled woman faces in society and at the workplace, and urgent action must be taken to prevent violence towards communities during the pandemic.

Women's health

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, new regulations were brought in to lift the ban on abortion on 31 March. So far, none of the services has come to fruition, leaving a vast number of women and girls without access to abortion services, according to Amnesty International.¹ As women in Northern Ireland have often had to face the perilous journey to the United Kingdom in order to access abortion facilities, travel restrictions to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 has prevented women from seeking urgent, medical assistance, which could drive abortion practises underground, causing further detriment to the health of women. Further, Amnesty International has highlighted that, for women in vulnerable situations such as domestic abuse or those without confirmed immigration status, travel was never an option, and are therefore reliant on the new regulations on accessing abortion in local health facilities. In response to access to abortion facilities during the pandemic, health minister Robin Swann has declined health service to 'provide abortions, commission information campaigns, and also declined to introduce emergency telemedicine measures' which has been offered in the rest of the United Kingdom during the Covid-19 pandemic.² In order to safeguard sexual and reproductive services for women across the United Kingdom, urgent action must be taken in Northern Ireland to prevent any further inequalities in healthcare and the dangers faced by women in need of access to abortion facilities during the pandemic.

¹ www.amnesty.org.uk/actions/northern-ireland-abortion-coronavirus-covid-19

² <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-britain-nireland-abortion/northern-ireland-drags-feet-on-abortion-a-year-after-uk-orders-roll-out-idUKKBN23V1LC>

2. Refugee camps

As states begin to re-open domestic and international borders in the wake of new phases of Covid-19 restrictions, the situation faced by refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons (IDPs) continues to be met with wide-spread humanitarian challenges. While refugees and IDPs in Yemen battle the consequences of humanitarian funding cuts, migrants worldwide face an increase in police brutality, arbitrary lockdown and forcible returns.

Yemen

In a closed UN Security Council Meeting last Wednesday, UN's humanitarian chief Mark Lowcock stated that cases of Covid-19 have spiked across Yemen, with those infected dying at a rate 'five times the global average'.³ Last week, UNHCR's representative for Yemen, Jean-Nicolas Beuze, also reported that, as a result of funding cuts for local cash assistance, emergency shelter and other humanitarian programmes, the agency is facing the need to 'drastically reduce' the amount of individuals that it can assist.⁴ With 80 per cent of Yemen's population currently relying on humanitarian aid to survive, it is likely that cases of Covid-19 will continue to have devastating effects on local migrant communities.⁵

As well as lacking humanitarian aid and a spike in cases of Covid-19, the situation faced by refugees in Yemen has also been worsened by the resultant stigma associated with non-nationals in local migrant communities.⁶ After the first cases of Covid-19 was announced as coming from a Somali national residing in a Yemeni hotel in May this year, migrants and refugees arriving from African nations have been highly stigmatised and denied assistance by local Yemeni authorities.⁷ In particular, refugees from Somali who have managed to sustain a job during the current pandemic have reported being rejected by potential customers in light of their nationality, in turn suffering loss of income.⁸

In addition to refugees residing in Yemeni refugee camps, internally displaced Yemenis are also currently facing widespread humanitarian issues, brought on by the latest funding cuts and the Covid-

³ https://news.e-unhcr.org/optiext/optiextension.dll?ID=gKLgKD0rqJLs4aUGAoO5omtxjCTMfM%2BUlpMyS5CY7ps_ZQV2pB%2BvOq0q2aCJrKP6ndjD0dwiZhPCEh6GmdBH5W7FLrK_w#_ga=2.153462781.472077057.1592962221-950793806.1586072707

⁴ http://aljazeera.com/news/2020/06/yemen-coronavirus-cases-expected-surge-aid-dries-200622124439279.html#_ga=2.153518461.472077057.1592962221-950793806.1586072707

⁵ <http://unhcr.org/refugeebrief/the-refugee-brief-26-june-2020/>; <http://reuters.com/article/us-refugee-day-yemen-africans/the-african-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-inside-yemens-war-idUSKBN23R09S>

⁶ <http://reuters.com/article/us-refugee-day-yemen-africans/the-african-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-inside-yemens-war-idUSKBN23R09S>

⁷ <http://reuters.com/article/us-refugee-day-yemen-africans/the-african-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-inside-yemens-war-idUSKBN23R09S>

⁸ <http://reuters.com/article/us-refugee-day-yemen-africans/the-african-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-inside-yemens-war-idUSKBN23R09S>

19 outbreak.⁹ Current statistics show that one in eight Yemenis has been made internally displaced, as a result of its brutal six-year conflict.¹⁰ Earlier this month, Human Rights Watch reported that IDPs in northern Yemen are at a particularly high risk of humanitarian crisis in the current pandemic.¹¹ This is particularly due to the movement of the ongoing conflict between Houthi forces and the Yemeni government toward land currently being used for overcrowded IDP camps.¹² The movement of the conflict has made the already difficult access of humanitarian aid workers near impossible.¹³ Hence, with the latest cuts to humanitarian funding, the already impeded access to humanitarian resources for the some 3.65 million IDPs currently residing in Yemeni borders now faces further challenges.¹⁴

Kenya

While many refugee camps struggle to manage virus outbreaks and meet the basic needs of its migrant population during the current pandemic, volunteers in Kenya's Kakuma Refugee Camp have defied global statistics.¹⁵ The camp, hosting some 200,000 refugees predominantly from Somalia and Sudan has no reported cases of Covid-19 to date.¹⁶

A radio station within the camp, hosted daily by local activist and volunteer Abdullahi Mire, has sought to shield the camp against the virus by educating residents on Covid-19 and combatting misinformation concerning the current pandemic.¹⁷ While drawing attention to the difficulties faced by local Kenyan communities to manage the current pandemic, in light of the overcrowded nature of refugee camps and limited access to hand-washing facilities, Mire nevertheless credits the success of Kakuma Refugee Camp on the fact that 'ignorance and a lack of education' is to blame for the continued spread of the virus.¹⁸ By educating refugees on the need to practice social distancing, wear masks and regularly wash their hands, Mire argues that the spread of Covid-19 can and has been better mitigated and reduced.¹⁹

Europe

In a report released by Amnesty International last week, the organisation claimed that minority groups worldwide have faced an increase in 'marginalisation, stigmatisation and violence' as a result of the

⁹ https://news.e-unhcr.org/optiext/optiextension.dll?ID=gKLgKD0rqJLs4aUGAoO5omtxjCTMfM%2BUlpMyS5CY7ps_ZOV2pB%2BvOq0q2aCJrKP6ndjD0dwiZhPCEh6GmdBH5W7FLrK_w#_ga=2.157343871.472077057.1592962221-950793806.1586072707

¹⁰ <http://reuters.com/article/us-refugee-day-yemen-africans/the-african-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-inside-yemens-war-idUSKBN23R09S>

¹¹ <http://hrw.org/news/2020/05/22/yemen-displaced-heightened-covid-19-risk>

¹² <http://hrw.org/news/2020/05/22/yemen-displaced-heightened-covid-19-risk>

¹³ <http://hrw.org/news/2020/05/22/yemen-displaced-heightened-covid-19-risk>

¹⁴ <http://reuters.com/article/us-refugee-day-yemen-africans/the-african-refugees-and-migrants-trapped-inside-yemens-war-idUSKBN23R09S>; <http://amnesty.org/en/documents/mde31/1822/2020/en>

¹⁵ <http://dw.com/en/world-in-progress-keeping-the-virus-out-of-kenyas-kakuma-refugee-camp/av-53925702>

¹⁶ <http://dw.com/en/world-in-progress-keeping-the-virus-out-of-kenyas-kakuma-refugee-camp/av-53925702>

¹⁷ <http://codastory.com/disinformation/coronavirus-kenya-refugee-camp>

¹⁸ <http://codastory.com/disinformation/coronavirus-kenya-refugee-camp>

¹⁹ <http://codastory.com/disinformation/coronavirus-kenya-refugee-camp>

current pandemic.²⁰ For refugees and migrants, this means an increase in police brutality, excessive fines and the adoption of arbitrary quarantine measures.²¹

The report particularly noted the disproportionate use of fines and curfews on minority migrant groups in Europe.²² Examples included the arbitrary extension of lockdown measures for refugee camps in Greece, in addition to an increase in the imposition of curfews in France in geographic areas where the population predominantly includes ‘Black’, Asian and ‘minority ethnic communities’.²³ The report also detailed 15 verified videos that depicted the use of racist, homophobic and unlawful insults and force by law enforcement authorities.²⁴ Further, the report noted recent actions taken by Serbian authorities, where residents at government-operated migrant housing centres were forcibly placed under a 24-hour quarantine, which was supervised by heavily armed military authorities.²⁵

Child refugees

It is undisputed that child migrants and refugees have faced disproportionate challenges in the face of the current pandemic. Indeed, Covid-19 has further magnified pre-existing issues in child migration policy worldwide. Earlier this month, Rethinking Refuge, together with the University of Oxford and the Refugee Studies Centre, released an article on the issue of ‘Child repatriation in the time of Covid-19’.²⁶ By highlighting the ways in which the current pandemic has put a halt to global migration management, the article seeks to highlight the opportunity for state governments to improve and revamp existing policy, in order to better cater to the needs of vulnerable migrant children.²⁷ In particular, the article calls on states to end the issue of overcrowding in migrant camps, the immigration detention of children and the forced return of migrant children.²⁸

3. Prisoners and detainees

United States

In the United States, there has been a significant rise in Covid-19 cases in California’s San Quentin state prison, with more than 900 prisoners testing positive for Covid-19 in the last two weeks alone,

²⁰ <http://theguardian.com/world/amnesty-international>

²¹ <http://theguardian.com/world/amnesty-international>

²² <http://theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/24/policing-of-european-covid-19-lockdowns-shows-racial-bias-report>

²³ <http://theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/24/policing-of-european-covid-19-lockdowns-shows-racial-bias-report>

²⁴ <http://theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/24/policing-of-european-covid-19-lockdowns-shows-racial-bias-report>

²⁵ <http://theguardian.com/world/2020/jun/24/policing-of-european-covid-19-lockdowns-shows-racial-bias-report>

²⁶ <http://rsc.ox.ac.uk/news/child-repatriation-in-the-time-of-covid-19-new-on-rethinking-refuge>

²⁷ <http://rsc.ox.ac.uk/news/child-repatriation-in-the-time-of-covid-19-new-on-rethinking-refuge>;

[http://researchgate.net/publication/341909383_Child_Repatriation_in_the_Time_of_COVID-](http://researchgate.net/publication/341909383_Child_Repatriation_in_the_Time_of_COVID-19)

[19_httpswwwrethinkingrefugeorgarticleschild-repatriation-in-the-time-of-covid-19](http://researchgate.net/publication/341909383_Child_Repatriation_in_the_Time_of_COVID-19)

²⁸ <http://rsc.ox.ac.uk/news/child-repatriation-in-the-time-of-covid-19-new-on-rethinking-refuge>;

http://researchgate.net/publication/341909383_Child_Repatriation_in_the_Time_of_COVID-19_httpswwwrethinkingrefugeorgarticleschild-repatriation-in-the-time-of-covid-19

according to *the Guardian*.²⁹ Due to the exponential rise in Covid-19 cases at San Quentin, prison advocates have voiced concerns over the continuation of prison transfers across correctional facilities in California, highlighting that infected prisoners have spread the virus to other correctional facilities in San Francisco, with 210 positive cases as a result of these transfers in one week alone. A petition, started last week by the Alameda County's Public Defender (ACPD) office in California, called for the immediate release of prisoners with a year or less remaining on their sentence due to the outbreak of Covid-19 in prisons, according to Al Jazeera.³⁰ From the offset of the Covid-19 pandemic, public health experts have raised the importance of preventing all prison transfers during the outbreak, in order to safeguard prisoners, prison workers and the wider public. Over the course of the pandemic, almost 80 per cent of America's prison population tested positive for Covid-19, according to the World Economic Forum. Further, the over-capacity of some prisons, such as the Marion Correctional Facility in Ohio, with an estimate of 153 per cent, is indicative of a serious public health crisis if the virus was to spread throughout overcrowded facilities³¹.

South Korea

In South Korea, over 60 deportations of migrants for breaking quarantine rules has occurred during the pandemic. As per South Korean law, a 14-day self-isolation requirement on international arrivals came into effect on 1 April, and if breached, violators can face a year in prison or a ten million won fine or deportation, according to the *Jakarta Post*.³² So far, reports have emerged of South Korean officials sentencing a man to four months in prison after he broke lockdown rules.³³ Instances such as this show the harsh legislations put into effect to prevent the spread of the virus, which in turn causes severe ramifications on overcrowded prison facilities by increasing the number of prisoners during the pandemic.

4. Informal settlements and homelessness

Urbanisation has seen the rapid growth of informal settlements without the basic infrastructure to cope with a large influx of people on top of natural population growth, according to the Institute for Strategic Studies.³⁴ This in turn has severe ramifications on children and vulnerable people. Under international human rights law, governments are obliged to ensure people's right to an adequate standard of living,

²⁹ www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/29/san-quentin-coronavirus-cases-covid-19

³⁰ www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/san-quentin-prison-sees-600-coronavirus-cases-5-days-200701192059040.html

³¹ www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/outbreak-or-breakout-how-to-protect-prison-populations-from-covid-19

³² www.thejakartapost.com/news/2020/06/10/another-indonesian-deported-from-south-korea-for-violating-covid-19-quarantine-rules.html

³³ www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/south-korea-sentences-man-to-4-months-in-prison-after-breaking-lockdown-rules/27/05

³⁴ <https://notifier.in/item/0qm7qm8ujt3xt78kltzmzbiw342ykk3/1835312.html>

so that everyone enjoys the rights necessary to live in dignity, including the rights to adequate food and nutrition, health and well-being, water and sanitation, as well as housing³⁵

Haiti

In Haiti's informal settlements, given the infrastructure of urban slums, an ability to mitigate the spread of Covid-19 via frequent hand washing, sanitisation, and self-isolation for those infected is highly challenging. Resource scarcity and overcrowded areas are likely to spread infectious diseases at an increasing rate, which has already taken a toll on Haiti's urban slums.³⁶ So far, 5,722 positive cases of Covid-19 are reported, however, given that testing capabilities are overstretched and Covid-19 cases are now being declared based on symptoms, this severely affects any attempts to mitigate the spread of the virus. Further, some Haitians reported that they do not want to be tested because of the stigma attached to coronavirus, their distrust of authorities, and as a large number work in the informal sector, with insufficient government welfare, many people cannot afford to quarantine.³⁷

Homelessness

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, 45,000 households are at a serious risk of homelessness if the eviction ban, set up to prevent the eviction of renters due to the pandemic, is lifted in August, according to the *Big Issue*.³⁸ In a report submitted by Generation Rent, an organisation based in the UK, found that 13 per cent of renters have fallen into debt, leading to a significant rise in homelessness if the UK government does not implement home retention schemes. Further, an increase in the number of families at risk of being evicted because they cannot pay rent has risen to three times last year's figure, which saw 15,000 households losing their homes, as half a million are currently in rent arrears.³⁹ As Resolution Foundation found that 60 per cent of renters have had a decrease in their income, and 1.2 million at risk of losing their jobs, these findings are indicative of homelessness being on the rise if governmental intervention fails to adequately protect renters, low-income earners and the unemployed.⁴⁰

5. Disability rights

³⁵ www.hrw.org/news/2020/06/29/protecting-economic-and-social-rights-during-and-post-covid-19

³⁶ www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-haiti-feature/in-haiti-coronavirus-spreads-in-slums-showing-challenge-for-latin-america-idUSKBN23Z0N2

³⁷ www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-haiti-feature/in-haiti-coronavirus-spreads-in-slums-showing-challenge-for-latin-america-idUSKBN23Z0N2

³⁸ www.bigissue.com/latest/fears-homelessness-could-treble-if-covid-19-eviction-ban-ends/

³⁹

https://d3n8a8pro7vnm.cloudfront.net/npto/pages/7372/attachments/original/1593549468/Gen_Rent_Recovery_plan_for_renters_July2020.pdf?1593549468

⁴⁰ www.resolutionfoundation.org/publications/the-effects-of-the-coronavirus-crisis-on-workers

Increased mental health risks for individuals with disabilities

Across the globe, individuals with disabilities are reporting increased mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression. Sarah, a 30-year-old woman in Jordan, uses a wheelchair and relies on public transit to visit with friends and family and raise awareness about disability issues. Without being able to make social visits or work, her mental health has declined so severely that she feels unable to carry out her advocacy efforts. Rashia is a 30-year-old woman with Down's Syndrome living in Egypt. She is a teacher for students with disabilities, but notes that since the pandemic her life has moved completely indoors as she is unable to teach or visit the mosque. She lives with her mother, but the social isolation has made her feel lonely and sad. 'I'm worried that Covid-19 will last longer. I want my life back', she says. Rosemary Kayess, the Vice Chair of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, has not left her house in Sydney, Australia for more than three months. 'There was constant anxiety as I couldn't physically distance from my support people, and we were unable to access personal protective equipment such as masks and hand sanitisers', said Kayess.

Defendants with disabilities

According to an 11 June report by the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, the criminal justice system in England and Wales is failing defendants with disabilities. The report notes that the complexity of the criminal justice system and its specialist language presents challenges to individuals with disabilities and puts them at risk of not being able to participate fairly or effectively in the process. These issues are only exacerbated by the digitalisation of trials during the pandemic: 'Video hearings can significantly impede communication and understanding for disabled people with certain impairments, such as a learning disability, autism spectrum disorders and mental health conditions. People with these conditions are significantly over-represented in the criminal justice system', the report said. Equality and Human Rights Commission chair David Isaac noted: 'Equality before the law means that no one defending themselves in court should be disadvantaged because they are disabled – even during a time of national crisis'.

Effect on children with disabilities

A 25 June news article highlighted the concern of early intervention experts who are worried that the pandemic has disproportionately harmed young children with disabilities. Most children are referred to specialists by staff at schools or day cares—places where an infant or young child's delays are often first noticed. During lockdown, the conventional avenues of detection were unavailable. Early intervention is particularly crucial for children with autism and related developmental issues, as roughly 90 per cent of a child's brain development happens by age five. One specialist explained: 'If you miss

that critical window of opportunity, when delays or issues can be addressed, then it becomes more difficult and more expensive to intervene later on'. The Brighton Center, a non-profit in the United States that provides in-home services to children with disabilities, usually receives about 350 referrals a month. In March, referrals dropped to around 100 per month and continue to decrease even with the state opening back up after lockdown.

Refugees with disabilities at risk

Refugees with disabilities are at particular risk of contracting Covid-19 in densely populated camps with limited sanitation resources. Mohamad, a 73-year-old man, fled war in Somalia in 1998 and has lived with his family in a camp in Kenya ever since. Physically disabled, Mohammad has spoken out on the need for more support for people with disabilities during the pandemic. He mentioned that camp residents have had training on the importance of hand washing, but said the camp is prone to water shortages and residents are still waiting for masks to be distributed. In Myanmar, land mine survivor Mr Saw was forced to relocate across the border to a refugee camp in Thailand due to lack of support for his disability in his home country. Like Mohammad, he noted water shortages in his camp and expressed concern that he does not have enough money to buy soap or a mask.