



# 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

### Australia

In Australia, more than one in ten Australian women have experienced ‘emotionally abusive, harassing and controlling behaviours’ during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to a recent survey of 15,000 Australian women conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology.<sup>1</sup> The study found 4.6 per cent of all women who responded to the survey reported experiencing physical or sexual violence by a current or former cohabiting partner during the lockdown period. Of this group, 33.1 per cent stated domestic violence was unprecedented within their relationship, and over half of those who had experienced domestic violence previously said the ‘nature of the violence had escalated’. Although the Australian government has funded a \$150m domestic violence emergency response package, these alarming findings are indicative of the rise of gender and intimate partner violence during the pandemic, and calls for more action to be taken in order to safeguard women in emergency situations.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. LGBTQI+ rights

### LGBTQI+ people at increased risk of suicide during the pandemic<sup>3</sup>

Covid-19 and social distancing/lockdown responses to it have had unquestionably deleterious effects on global mental health. They have proven particularly difficult for LGBTQI+ people. Although no national data has been collected on the subject as of yet, the UK government has acknowledged that LGBTQI+ persons are generally at a higher risk of suicide. The UK health equality and rights organisation, LGBT Hero, reported to the BBC a 44 per cent increase in the number of people accessing suicide-prevention websites during the pandemic. A surge in suicide prevention calls has been reported by eight LGBTQI+ charities, some of which have also reported multiple deaths by suicide. The deaths have been attributed to a worsening of the discrimination and ostracism to which LGBTQI+ people are routinely subjected by self-isolation and being ‘forced back into the closet’ in order to survive living with unaccepting or abusive family members. According to the US-based non-profit organisation, the Trevor Project, the idea of being safe or safer at home does not apply to LGBTQI+ youth, two thirds of whom have either experienced outright rejection from their families or feel the need to conceal their identities for self-protection. Familial rejection increases the likelihood of physical or emotional

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<sup>1</sup> [www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/sb28\\_prevalence\\_of\\_domestic\\_violence\\_among\\_women\\_during\\_covid-19\\_pandemic.pdf](http://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/sb28_prevalence_of_domestic_violence_among_women_during_covid-19_pandemic.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/domestic-violence-australia-covid19-evidence/](http://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/domestic-violence-australia-covid19-evidence/)

<sup>3</sup> BBC News ‘Lockdown: Suicide fears soar in LGBT community’’, 02 July 2020; Pink News ‘Mental health groups report huge surge in numbers of LGBT+ people at risk of suicide during lockdown’’, 3 July 2020; Forbes ‘LGBTQ Acceptance Can Save Lives – And Is Crucial During Covid-19’’, 1 July 2020; ILGA Europe ‘COVID-19 and specific impact on LGBTI people and what authorities should be doing to mitigate impact’ (2020).

domestic violence, and both of these have long-lasting mental health effects. Youth who have reported parental rejection are eight times more likely to attempt suicide and six times more likely to report suffering from high levels of depression.

## **Kenya**

Allegations have arisen of abuse against LGBTQI+ refugees in Kenya. This is especially problematic as Kenya is currently the only East African nation where asylum seekers can be granted refugee status on LGBTQI+ grounds. Many asylum seekers and refugees that reach Kenya have fled Uganda, which is exceptionally hostile towards LGBTQI+ people, but there are also asylum seekers and refugees who have fled Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Somalia and South Sudan. Despite the availability of legal protection on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, consensual same-sex sexual relations remain criminalised in Kenya, and LGBTQI+ Kenyans and foreign nationals remain vulnerable to discrimination and violence. LGBTQI+ refugees living in one of Kenya's largest refugee camps, located in Kakuma, are deprived of police protection because of their 'criminal' status, and are therefore vulnerable to violence, mostly from fellow refugees and the local population. Encamped refugees have reported being beaten, sexually harassed, sexually abused, raped and subjected to death threats. LGBTQI+ refugees are also stigmatised by medical personnel at the camp, who regularly refuse to treat them. The condition of the refugees is further complicated by the fact that the Kenyan government imposed restrictions on movement into and out of Kakuma Camp in order to minimise the spread of Covid-19. The UNHCR also been criticised for failing to protect LGBTQI+ refugees, but the UN body has stated that it always takes effort to provide medical, legal, socio-economic and psychological support to survivors of violence.

## **United States**

The Trump Administration has extended over \$16m in forgivable loans to anti-LGBTQI+ groups through the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP). PPP loans are intended to incentivise small businesses in the United States to retain their employees. The American Family Association, a religious body labelled a hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center because of its dedication to 'combating the homosexual agenda', was approved for a loan of up to \$2m. The Liberty Counsel, a legal organisation that frequently takes anti-LGBTQI+ stances in the name of 'religious freedom', including defending conversion therapy and supporting magistrates who refuse to register same-sex marriages, was approved to receive up to \$1m. Televangelist, Robert Jeffress, who also supports conversion therapy, received between \$2m and \$5m. Another televangelist, Joyce Meyer, who has implied that non-heterosexual sexual orientations are the result of emotional trauma, was approved to receive between \$5 and \$10m. In contrast, only two prominent LGBTQI+ organisations appear on the list of loan recipients published by the federal government on 7 July. The National LGBTQ Task Force received between \$350,000 and \$1m, and LGBTQ Victory Fund received between \$150,000 and \$350,000.

## **Thailand**

On 8 July, the Thai government approved a Bill that will permit the registration of same-sex unions as civil partnerships. If the Bill is passed by Parliament, Thailand will become the first Southeast Asian country with such a law on the books. It will be the second Asian country after Taiwan to provide for legal recognition of same-sex couples, although Taiwanese laws provide for full marriage rights. The Thai Bill does not fully legalise marriage, nor does it grant civil partners access to each other's pension benefits. Moreover, the new Bill only applies to couples in which at least one person is a Thai national. Nevertheless, the new law will allow civil partners to adopt children together, inherit from each other and co-own property. In general, Thai society is open and accepting of various sexual orientations and gender identities. However, despite discrimination on SOGIESC grounds being illegal in the country, some LGBTQI+ people have reported experiencing discrimination in the media, entertainment and tourism.

## **Panama**

As a part of its national Covid-19 response, the government of Panama has had curfews in place since 1 April that are based on gender. Over the course of their duration, the rules, which require women and men to stay indoors on alternating days, have negatively affected trans and non-binary people whose gender identities conflict with the sex assignments on their identity documents. In May, the Ministry of Public Security acknowledged the discrimination against trans and non-binary people and claimed to have instructed security personnel to enforce Covid-19 movement restrictions without targeting them unfairly. Between 1-7 June, the gender-based rules curfew was replaced with a time-related curfew as a part of eased restrictions. However, in the second week of June, the gender-based curfew was reinstated in the country's most populous provinces, Panama and West Panama. Discrimination based on gender identity and gender expression has not stopped, and trans and non-binary people are still being arrested or being prevented from shopping for essential items, whether they leave their homes on days corresponding with the sex markers on their IDs or they leave home on days corresponding with their gender identities. Trans and non-binary people are therefore compelled to stay at home out of fear of arrest and/or humiliation. Panama has no laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. To date, there are still no guidelines from the Panamanian government on how trans and non-binary people are expected to comply with the gendered curfew policy, which has effectively deepened social inequality and left their identities at risk of erasure.

### **3. Refugee camps**

According to the analysis<sup>4</sup> released by the Center for Global Development, Refugees International, and the International Rescue Committee on 8 July, refugees are more vulnerable to the financial impact of the Covid-19 crisis. The authors collected data from eight large refugee-hosting countries including Colombia, Ethiopia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Peru, Turkey, and Uganda, representing 37 per cent of all refugees worldwide, and they find that these countries will face worse economic situations post-2020 compared to other developing countries and world averages. Since refugees are 60 per cent more likely to work in sectors of the economy impacted most by Covid-19 and only seven per cent of refugees work in the least impacted sectors such as education and public administration, they tend to be disproportionately affected by the crisis. Refugee women are at a particular disadvantage, struggling about meeting their most basic needs.

### **Syria**

On 10 July, the first Covid-19 outbreak in the rebel-held province in north-west Syria, Idlib, is causing increasing fears for Syria refugee camps. Overcrowded and poverty-stricken, the last rebel-held province confirmed its first coronavirus case, the person affected was a doctor working near the Turkish border. With a three million-strong population in total and 1.1 million people living in tents and makeshift accommodation, people in Idlib have been dreading a devastating outbreak. Currently, there is only one polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing machine in the province, and a total of 153 ventilators and 148<sup>5</sup> beds in intensive care units are available for coronavirus patients across Idlib. Given the lack of testing and medical infrastructure, the number of infections is thought to be higher, which will be worsened if the fragile ceasefire in Idlib is broken.<sup>6</sup>

### **Sub-Saharan Africa**

On 9 July, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency and the World Food Programme warned that supply chain challenges, rising food prices and loss of income caused by Covid-19 would threaten to leave millions of refugees across Africa without food. Millions of refugees throughout Africa are reliant on regular aid to meet their food needs, with the Covid-19 situation deteriorating, the disaster is magnified for them. For refugee populations who were previously able to feed and fend for themselves, their only source of income has been lost as work possibilities disappeared due to Covid-19 prevention measures. At the same time, import and export restrictions are squeezing supply chains, causing reduced assistance for extremely vulnerable groups. WFP was forced to reduce its assistance to refugees from the Central African Republic by 50 per cent in May and June due to a funding gap, refugees in Nigeria, South Sudan and the Republic of Congo are also struggling to cope with the challenges of unstandardised health

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<sup>4</sup> [www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4994/locked-down-left-behind-refugees-economic-inclusion-COVID.pdf](http://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/4994/locked-down-left-behind-refugees-economic-inclusion-COVID.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/10/idlib-reports-first-COVID-19-case-and-braces-for-fresh-disaster-syria](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/10/idlib-reports-first-COVID-19-case-and-braces-for-fresh-disaster-syria)

<sup>6</sup> [www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53358569](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-53358569)

measures, Covid-19-induced transport delays, and rising food prices. Concerning about the negative impact of reduced assistance on refugees, UNHCR and WFP have urged donors to provide further funding to ensure refugees do not face starvation, and African governments are urged to ensure refugees and displaced populations in social safety nets and Covid-19 response plans.

### **Latin America and the Caribbean**

Latin America and the Caribbean have become hotspots of the Covid-19 pandemic, exacerbated by weak social protection, fragmented health systems and profound inequalities. According to the data provided by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, Covid-19 will result in the worst recession in the region in a century.<sup>7</sup> According to the report conducted by Mixed Migration Centre, 92 per cent of refugees and migrants in Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru feel worried about the impact the Covid-19 might have on their health.<sup>8</sup>

For health impacts, several Latin American and Caribbean countries show some of the highest numbers of absolute and per capita cases worldwide. Facing fragmented and unequal health systems, people in these countries are lack of access to quality health care. Refugees and migrants are often excluded from national social protection systems although in the face with profound challenges in accessing basic rights and services, and they are among the most vulnerable without proper health protection.

For social and humanitarian impacts, the Covid-19 pandemic will make the inequality issue in the region worse. Following a sharp drop in economic activity, the poverty rate is expected to rise significantly, and the existing food shortages, political turmoil and dwindling purchasing power will only escalate the situation. With imposed restrictions on freedom of movement and access to national territories, refugees are facing an increased risk of arbitrary detention, collective expulsion, and violation of the principles of non-discrimination and non-refoulement. Refugees and migrants should be included in national Covid-19 response programmes, aligned with other

#### **4. Informal settlements and homelessness**

##### **Brazil**

In Brazil, protection and safeguarding measures for indigenous settlements remain disputed in national politics. Last week, President Jair Bolsonaro vetoed provisions of law that required the federal government to provide adequate drinking water, hygiene and sanitation facilities to indigenous

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<sup>7</sup> [https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/EN\\_SG-Policy-Brief-COVID-LAC.pdf](https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/EN_SG-Policy-Brief-COVID-LAC.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> [www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/114\\_COVID\\_snapshot\\_LAC.pdf](http://www.mixedmigration.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/114_COVID_snapshot_LAC.pdf)

communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, according to Reuters.<sup>9</sup> Although Brazil has the second largest infection rate of Covid-19, which disproportionately affects the 850,000 indigenous people in Brazil living in remote areas with limited access to local hospitals and clinics, President Bolsonaro repeatedly bypasses the public health and wellbeing concerns of these citizens in favour of preserving the Brazilian economy. Further, President Bolsonaro has claimed that the distribution of necessary resources to indigenous communities is ‘against the public interest’ and ‘unconstitutional’ as these laws would ‘create expenses for the federal government without new sources of revenue to cover them’. Moreover, the vetoes also included ‘funding for the states and local governments with emergency plans for indigenous communities, as well as provisions to help give them more information on coronavirus, including greater internet access’. In response, the Brazilian indigenous advocacy group, Instituto Socioambiental (ISA) has urged Congress to overturn the vetoes, in order to safeguard indigenous people.

### **South Africa**

In South Africa’s Cape Town, around 146,000 households are living in informal settlements, according to data collected from Reuters. So far, around 50,000 cases of Covid-19 are reported in Cape Town, the highest rate recorded in any African city. Given the nature of these informal settlements, or ‘shanty towns’, a lack of legal security from planning and housing authorities and access to vital public health resources increases the susceptibility of catching a viral contagion such as Covid-19.<sup>10</sup> Further, the high rate of Covid-19 is attributed to the ‘limited access to economic opportunities, limited opportunities for safe physical activity and healthy food options, and high levels of depression and stress’. Although South African authorities have taken measures depopulate and demolish informal settlements in Cape Town, with 3,500 households due to be relocated because of Covid-19, issues pertaining to overpopulation, shortage of affordable well-located vacant land, insecure livelihoods and complex migratory patterns increase the difficulties in relocating the vast numbers of residents.

### **Homelessness**

In the UK, at least 16 people in England died with coronavirus while homeless, according to recent statistics collected by Office for National Statistics (ONS).<sup>11</sup> However, ONS have claimed that these

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<sup>9</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-brazil-indigenous/brazils-bolsonaro-vetoes-plans-to-offer-covid-19-support-to-indigenous-people-idUKKBN2492XX>

<sup>10</sup> <https://news.trust.org/item/20200708104926-3gwm4>

<sup>11</sup>

[www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusanddeathsofhomelesspeopleenglandandwalesdeathsregisteredupto26june2020/2020-07-10?WT.mc\\_id=9675d9ec5e3fe30c805e80ed5bb0d333&WT.sn\\_type=TWITTER&hoot.message=Our%20findings%20show%20that%20of%20deaths%20involving%20%23COVID19%20in%20England%20and%20Wales%20registered%20up%20to%2026%20June%202020%2C%2016%20were%20identified%20as%20people%20who%20were%20homeless%20%5BLINK%5D&hoot.send\\_date=2020-07-](http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusanddeathsofhomelesspeopleenglandandwalesdeathsregisteredupto26june2020/2020-07-10?WT.mc_id=9675d9ec5e3fe30c805e80ed5bb0d333&WT.sn_type=TWITTER&hoot.message=Our%20findings%20show%20that%20of%20deaths%20involving%20%23COVID19%20in%20England%20and%20Wales%20registered%20up%20to%2026%20June%202020%2C%2016%20were%20identified%20as%20people%20who%20were%20homeless%20%5BLINK%5D&hoot.send_date=2020-07-)

statistics are not indicative of the total amount of deaths of homeless people during the pandemic, as some local authorities have refused to provide details of temporary housing locations. In a statement released by Jon Sparkles, Chief executive of Crisis, highlighted the urgency in ‘emergency homelessness legislation’, as without this implementation of any adequate legislation to safeguard homelessness, the homeless population are ‘forced back on our streets or into crowded shelters’.<sup>12</sup>

## 5. Prisoners and detainees

### European Union

On 3 July, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) released a technical report, *‘Infection prevention and control and surveillance for coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in prisons in EU/EEA countries and the UK’*. Statistics released in this report, with data from the UK recording 466 inmates across 79 prisons and 949 staff members across 105 prisons contracting Covid-19, highlight the effects of overcrowding, poor sanitation and hygiene facilities, lack of testing and contact tracing and poor management of disease outbreaks on the prison and prison staff populations. Due to the rapid spread of Covid-19 in prison facilities in the EU, the ECDC report sets out to better inform national regional and international policy makers, public health and healthcare planners, prison health authorities and civil society organisations working with prisons in EU and EEA countries on how to safeguard the wellbeing of prisoners and prison staff.<sup>13</sup>

### United Kingdom

In the UK, reports have emerged of a 16-year-old placed in solitary confinement for 23 hours, with no visits, no internet and few phone calls, according to CNN. The teenager, who was placed in pre-trial detention, has been waiting for a trial that has been indefinitely postponed due to Covid-19. For the hundreds of young people placed in juvenile facilities in the UK, the Covid-19 pandemic has led to significant restrictions in contacting relatives, with visits suspended and time outside of prison cells severely reduced in order to enforce social distancing measures. Campaigners and lawyers are concerned of the grave impact of solitary confinement on the mental health of children in juvenile facilities. One lawyer has highlighted that facilities are often not readily employed for those who ask for mental and psychosocial support, with a delay of months into their detention period. Further, lawyers have reported that Covid-19 restrictions have also ‘prevented children from accessing their legal

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[10%2008%3A32%3A32&hoot.username=ONS&hoot.send\\_dayofweek=Friday&hoot.send\\_hour=08&hootPostID=597a0ce634d2f42040f4c06799f41cee](https://www.bigissue.com/latest/16-homeless-people-known-to-have-died-with-covid-19-in-england/)

<sup>12</sup> [www.bigissue.com/latest/16-homeless-people-known-to-have-died-with-covid-19-in-england/](https://www.bigissue.com/latest/16-homeless-people-known-to-have-died-with-covid-19-in-england/)

<sup>13</sup> [www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/IPC-and-surveillance-for-coronavirus-disease-in-prisons.pdf](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/IPC-and-surveillance-for-coronavirus-disease-in-prisons.pdf)

counsel’, as the UK government stated that it would install telephones in all cells, but clients claim to still have no access to any telephone, which is ‘threatening children’s basic right to legal advice.’<sup>14</sup>

## **Egypt**

In Egypt, a prominent Egyptian journalist held in pre-trial detention in Tora Prison on charges of ‘broadcasting false news’ has died of Covid-19, according to *the Guardian*. Egypt’s Tora Prison, as mentioned in the previous Monitor, is reported to have a high level of inadequate facilities for social distancing, poor hygiene and sanitation and a lack of resources for the vast prison population. Human rights groups consistently called upon President Sisi to release thousands of political prisoners ‘vulnerable to an outbreak of Covid-19’. However, regardless of the strong opposition an increase in the prison population during a pandemic, the Egyptian authorities have only sought to further stamp out dissent, arresting journalists and doctors who criticise the government’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>15</sup> So far, more than 114,000 prisoners, including tens of thousands of pro-democracy advocates, political opponents and journalists, are held in unsanitary and overcrowded prisons and detention centres during Sisi’s administration, according to data collected by the UN.<sup>16</sup>

## **Cameroon**

In Cameroon, hundreds of cases of Covid-19 were recorded among the inmates released from five prisons across Cameroon’s central region in April, according to government data sent to Reuters. So far, 1,800 prisoners were released by 8 May, according to preliminary figures from the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights., In Youande Central Prison, a senior prison official has reported that more than 31 inmates have died since April, compared with the usual one or two a month and none were tested for Covid-19. Given the lack of adequate testing, the infection rate of those released was at 58 per cent, with the Youande Central Prison still keeping 3,000 prisoners incarcerated, three times overcapacity for this prison. Further, prisoners and prison staff said they noticed an ‘unusual number of people with coughs and fevers’, and due to a lack of hygiene equipment, prisoners used bed sheets and old t-shirts to make masks.<sup>17</sup>

## **United States**

In the United States, two more prisoners have died from Covid-19 this week in California’s San Quentin Prison, with 1,899 confirmed cases of Covid-19 and an increase of 694 confirmed cases reported in the last two weeks. Reports have emerged of San Quentin prison declining free coronavirus tests and urgent

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<sup>14</sup> <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/07/14/europe/coronavirus-prisons-race-gbr-intl/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> [www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/14/egyptian-journalist-jailed-on-fake-news-charges-dies-of-covid-19-mohamed-monir](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/14/egyptian-journalist-jailed-on-fake-news-charges-dies-of-covid-19-mohamed-monir)

<sup>16</sup> [www.trtworld.com/magazine/sisi-s-egypt-more-prisons-than-new-hospitals-and-schools-37799](http://www.trtworld.com/magazine/sisi-s-egypt-more-prisons-than-new-hospitals-and-schools-37799)

<sup>17</sup> <https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-cameroon-prisons-i/coronavirus-stalks-cells-of-camerouns-crowded-prisons-idUKKBN24A0QZ>

advice, which has led to one of the largest outbreaks in US prisons to date.<sup>18</sup> Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health analysis of Covid-19 cases has found that federal and state prisons have a far higher number of confirmed Covid-19 cases and deaths than the general US population, raising alarm of the conditions of prisons in the US.<sup>19</sup> Further, researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Public Health have found that prisoners are three times more likely to die from Covid-19 and five times more likely to be infected than the general population.<sup>20</sup> Although the Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, has granted amnesty for 21 prisoners, and a further 8,000 by August, the overcapacity of US prison facilities is still resulting in the rapid spread of Covid-19, and increasing the severity of this public health emergency.<sup>21</sup>

## **6. Asylum procedures**

### **Workers' rights**

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the cessation of various services has revealed the global inequalities of workers' rights, and working conditions. For the Global South, the International Labour Organisation has highlighted that those reliant on informal economies are most likely to suffer from 'poor working conditions, unemployment, exploitation, gender and race discrimination, child labour, and exposure to health and safety hazards'. In India, Modi administration has faced accusations of exploiting millions of workers during the Covid-19 pandemic by suspending labour laws to restart the economy. Further, trade unions in India claim changes to working hours, minimum wages and health and safety regulations weaken workers' rights at a time redress is unattainable. In the US, 28 million people had their job cut or hours reduced during the pandemic. Further, 2.3 million people now say they have permanently lost their jobs.<sup>22</sup> For those reliant on support from trade unions, a vast number of employers in the US fail to recognise trade unions, and often remove workers as frequently as they wish. For those in waiting for asylum, migrant workers or those who are undocumented with no access to social security, this places the risk of job loss during the pandemic at a more precarious situation, and remaining in your job, in spite of risk, is a means of survival.

### **United Kingdom**

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<sup>18</sup> [www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02042-9](https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-02042-9)

<sup>19</sup> [www.jhsph.edu/news/news-releases/2020/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-in-federal-and-state-prisons-significantly-higher-than-in-u.s.-population.html](https://www.jhsph.edu/news/news-releases/2020/covid-19-cases-and-deaths-in-federal-and-state-prisons-significantly-higher-than-in-u.s.-population.html)

<sup>20</sup> [www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/infection-prevention-and-control-and-surveillance-covid-19-prisons](https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/en/publications-data/infection-prevention-and-control-and-surveillance-covid-19-prisons)  
[www.democracynow.org/2020/7/13/headlines/covid\\_19\\_death\\_toll\\_at\\_san\\_quentin\\_state\\_prison\\_reaches\\_nine](https://www.democracynow.org/2020/7/13/headlines/covid_19_death_toll_at_san_quentin_state_prison_reaches_nine)

<sup>21</sup> [www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/26/california-clemency-covid-19-governor-prisons](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/26/california-clemency-covid-19-governor-prisons)

<sup>22</sup> [www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/05/unemployment-rate-wrong](https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/06/05/unemployment-rate-wrong)

In the United Kingdom, the fashion group Boohoo has come under fire after the abuse of workers' rights was exposed in their Leicester factories. Leicester is also currently in a localised Covid-19 lockdown, facing the highest rate of infection in the country, and many reports have linked this surge in Covid-19 cases to the cramped conditions and lax safety measures witnessed in these garment factories. In a report released by the BBC, a man from Afghanistan, who worked in textile factories throughout the pandemic, said he sometimes sat about '80cm from colleagues who did not wear gloves or masks, and up to 40 people could touch a single garment as it went round'. Further, the exploitation of workers due to their immigration statuses increases the likelihood of remaining in dire, underpaid working conditions during a public health emergency. For another worker in Leicester's factories, who is waiting on a decision on his immigration status, receives '£35 a week' in living expenses, is not allowed to work while he waits for his asylum result, and therefore is heavily reliant on £6 an hour for survival.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of the increasing pressure to safeguard workers during this period and thereafter, workers, industry insiders and community groups say many factories are hoping the attention will divert from these inadequate labour conditions. The Gangmasters and Labour Abuse Authority has stated that: 'You've got people exploiting people, thinking: give this a couple of weeks and it'll blow over', with the primary message being, 'keep your heads down'.

Instances such as these are not limited to factories alone, with the reported deaths of cleaners from Covid-19 who worked at the Ministry of Justice during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Shadow justice secretary, David Lammy, said leaked emails, interviews and messages show cleaners were 'forced' into the department during the lockdown period and 'denied' personal protective equipment (PPE), offered no support and had medical issues consistent with symptoms for coronavirus.<sup>24</sup> Amnesty International has released a 61-page report, *Exposed, Silenced, Attacked: Failures to protect health and essential workers during the pandemic*, indicating that 540 health and social workers having died from Covid-19 in England and Wales alone, with 60 per cent of health workers who died identified as BAME. Currently, the UK has the second highest death rate of health care workers from Covid-19 in the world, after Russia.<sup>25</sup>

## **7. Disability rights**

### **Europe**

On 8 July 2020, the European Parliament approved a motion for a resolution to protect the rights of individuals with intellectual disabilities during the pandemic. Recognising the disproportionate impact

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<sup>23</sup> [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-53311548](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-leicestershire-53311548)

<sup>24</sup> [www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2020/07/14/labour-demands-probe-into-treatment-of-cleaners-forced-to-work-at-moj](http://www.shropshirestar.com/news/uk-news/2020/07/14/labour-demands-probe-into-treatment-of-cleaners-forced-to-work-at-moj)

<sup>25</sup> [www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-among-highest-covid-19-health-worker-deaths-world](http://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/uk-among-highest-covid-19-health-worker-deaths-world)

of Covid-19 on people with disabilities, the resolution called on the EU to ensure that post-pandemic policies are compatible with the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the UN Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities. The resolution also demanded that the EU investigate the abusive behaviors and practices that led to a denial of care for many people with disabilities during the pandemic, and that members of parliament develop a comprehensive post-2020 European Disability Strategy that incorporates lessons learned from the past six months.

### **India**

In last week's edition of the Monitor, the IBAHRI reported on the increase of violence against women with disabilities during the pandemic. On 2 July 2020, authorities arrested an Indian government official for attacking a female co-worker with disabilities when she asked him to wear a mask. Captured on video, the man walks into an office room and drags his female co-worker to the floor, throwing her to the floor. He then proceeds to beat her, at one point stopping to pick up a stick-like object from a nearby desk. Police say the official had harassed the woman about having a disability for weeks prior to the assault.

### **Pakistan**

A 6 July 2020 testimony from Fahad, a wheelchair user who works at a rehabilitation hospital for young people with disabilities, revealed the challenges faced by people with disabilities attempting to work or study from home during the pandemic. Many people with disabilities do not have the resources to work or study from home, and if they do have Internet or a computer, many struggle with connectivity issues and have reported that online platforms are inaccessible. Students with disabilities and students who rely on classroom support staff or who use learning aids and equipment which were not made available at home during school closures are more likely to have missed out on learning and are particularly at risk of completely dropping out of their education the longer the school closures continue.

He also noted that the closure of government buildings has made it harder to advocate for disability rights, as officials do not respond to email or phone calls.

### **United States**

In [Issue 7 of the Monitor](#), the IBAHRI expressed concern regarding medical rationing and medical discrimination against people with disabilities. Disability activists in the United States have raised alarm about the case of Michael Hickson, a quadriplegic 46-year-old father of five who died in an Austin, Texas hospital last month after he was diagnosed with Covid-19 and the hospital decided he had little 'quality of life' left and stopped treatment. He needed a ventilator to help him breathe, and the hospital felt further intervention was futile. In the days after his death, activists rallied around an audio recording

shared by his wife in which the doctor states that Mr Hickson does not have much quality of life. In response, his wife replies: ‘What do you mean? Because he’s paralysed with a brain injury, he doesn’t have quality of life?’’ The doctor replies: ‘Correct.’’ Mr Hickson was subsequently denied food and treatment for 6 days before passing away on 11 June 2020. Upon hearing about Mr Hickson’s death, activist Steven Spohn commented: ‘We live our entire lives in fear that one day a doctor will decide we just aren’t worth it.’’

Though the United States Civil Rights Office formally rejected medical rationing based on disability and age in a statement issued 28 March 2020, fears remain about doctors’ utilitarian approach to quality of life during the pandemic. California-based disability advocate Alice Wong explained: ‘Quality of life as a measurable standard is based on assumptions that a “good” healthy life is one without disability, pain, and suffering. I live with all three intimately and I feel more vital than ever in these times, because of my experiences and relationships. Vulnerable “high risk” people are some of the strongest, most interdependent and most resilient people around.’