



Human Rights Institute

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human rights worldwide

IBAHRI Covid-19 Human Rights Monitor

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1. Gender-based violence and women's health

A recent report by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) highlights that the pandemic is driving human trafficking further underground, while criminals are adjusting their business models to the 'new normal' created by the pandemic, especially through the abuse of modern communications technologies. Identification of victims is even more difficult during the pandemic, and they are also more likely to be exposed to Covid-19 and have limited to no access to healthcare. At the same time, Covid-19 affects the capacity of state authorities and non-governmental organisations to provide essential services to trafficked victims, not only because of lockdowns measures but also because countries are adjusting their priorities during the pandemic. For instance, victims who have been provided with temporary immigration documents or time-limited services linked to their status as victims of trafficking might not be able to renew them easily; the situation can worsen if borders are closed and planned repatriations cannot take place, while residence permits and related access to healthcare and social benefits have already expired.¹

A forthcoming survey reveals that almost 70 per cent of trafficking survivors from 35 countries say Covid-19 has negatively affected their financial wellbeing, while more than two thirds say that their mental health is suffering due to government-imposed lockdowns. More than half of the surveyed participants worried that the Covid-19 outbreak would increase rates of human trafficking in the future, while 43 per cent believed women and girls would be the most at risk in coming months.² It is believed that hundreds of trafficked Nigerian women are stuck abroad as border closures hamper repatriation efforts as authorities place logistical hurdles on the organisation of safe flights. As per the above survey, at least a third of anti-trafficking organisations worldwide are struggling to repatriate survivors. In 2018 and 2019, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) worked with the Nigerian government to repatriate more than 7,000 survivors every year. Since the start of 2020, IOM only succeeded in repatriating 620 survivors of human trafficking. There is also the problem of where survivors will quarantine upon their return, as shelters are no longer an option. Counselling sessions and skills training have shifted online, but not everyone has access to the internet. Meanwhile, traffickers have shown increasing versatility in the face of the virus, bribing their way across borders to move their victim's freely.³

Italy

In Italy, thousands of Nigerian women who were forced into prostitution were left to starve by sex traffickers during the pandemic, according to testimonies from volunteers, social workers and NGOs, during the prolonged and strict three-month lockdown. According to these accounts, trafficking gangs

¹ www.unodc.org/documents/Advocacy-Section/HTMSS_Thematic_Brief_on_Covid-19.pdf

² <https://time.com/5864964/nigeria-trafficking-survivors-coronavirus>

³ <https://time.com/5864964/nigeria-trafficking-survivors-coronavirus>

abandoned women and their children, who were unable to leave their homes or work and were left without food or money to pay rent. Some landlords also evicted these women. They had no recourse to financial assistance or unemployment benefits given their illegal status; many turned to volunteer associations.⁴

India

Reports of sexual assault at Covid-19 treatment institutions have started coming in; in New Delhi, a 14-year-old girl who was undergoing treatment at a Covid-19 care centre was sexually assaulted by another coronavirus patient, a 19-year-old man, when she had gone to the washroom on the night of 15 July. A similar incident of assault was reported at a quarantine facility near Mumbai on 16 July, where a 25-year-old Covid-19 patient was arrested for raping a 40-year-old woman, the accused pretended to be a doctor, entered the complainant's room and proceeded to rape her.⁵ A recent study conducted among female domestic workers in India also noted increased incidences of abusive environments at home, leading to domestic workers desperately looking to return to work (after the loss of their livelihood due to the lockdown) despite the risk of getting infected or even breaching the enforced lockdown restrictions. Some workers have stayed with their employers – at their places of work – for the duration of the lockdown, as they are scared of the abuse they would face at home from their spouses and families..⁶

Zimbabwe⁷

Cases of gender-based violence rose by 70 per cent in the last four months in Zimbabwe; 2,768 cases related to violence against women and girls were recorded from March to June. Statistics indicate that 94 per cent of the cases are women who are being exploited sexually, economically and physically, with 90 per cent of the cases being partner violence and physical violence being 38 per cent. Economic violence is recorded at 19 per cent and sexual violence at 50 per cent.

Kenya⁸

Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta has lamented an increase in sexual and gender-based violence due to the impact of Covid-19 restrictions. He addressed the country recently as he issued new guidelines for a phased reopening, stating that, 'I am concerned by increasing tensions within our homes. Cases of gender-based violence have increased, mental health issues have worsened, and instances of teenage pregnancy have escalated.' He also tasked the National Crime Research Centre to prepare an advisory

⁴ www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/jul/10/sex-traffickers-left-thousands-of-women-to-starve-during-italy-lockdown-coronavirus

⁵ <https://thewire.in/rights/delhi-14-year-old-sexually-assaulted-covid-care-centre>

⁶ <https://thewire.in/labour/lockdown-female-domestic-workers-covid-19-lockdown>

⁷ www.newzimbabwe.com/covid-19-lockdown-gender-based-violence-cases-up-by-70

⁸ <https://africa.cgtn.com/2020/07/06/kenyatta-laments-increased-sexual-gender-based-violence-due-to-covid-19-lockdown>

for the country's security agencies on remedial action within 30 days to initiate immediate prosecution of all violators of sexual and gender-based violence. Experts have said that the restrictions holed victims up in abusive spaces with nowhere to go.

2. LGBTQI+ rights

Romania⁹

In June, both Houses of Parliament in Romania approved a bill banning the teaching of gender studies in education institutions and forbidding educators from discussing transgender issues. If the bill is signed into law by President Klaus Iohannis, educators will be banned from 'propagating theories and opinion on gender identity according to which gender is a separate concept from biological sex'. In doing so, Romania will join other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which have seen a resurgence of right-wing populism in recent years. Hungary banned the teaching of gender studies in October 2018. Deputy Prime Minister Zsolt Semjen described gender as 'ideology, not science' with 'no business in universities'. The Polish government, led by the Law and Justice Party (PiS) has banned gender studies in schools, stating children should 'study normal, classic subjects'. In May 2020, the Hungarian government ended legal recognition of transgender people by defining gender as being based on chromosomes at birth. The co-Chair of ILGA-Europe has commented that the attempted and completed revocations of LGBTQI+ rights, coupled with instances of scapegoating of LGBTQI+ people as sources of the pandemic, demonstrate how repressive governments with have used the public health crisis to deprive vulnerable and minority groups of their hard-won rights and freedoms.

The Council of Europe commissioner on human rights, Dunja Mijatović, has warned that challenges to comprehensive education on sex and gender indicate opposition to women's rights and the rights of LGBTQI+ people. In Romania, the gender studies bill has been openly criticised by academics, NGOs and students. The National Alliance of Student Organisations in Romania and the National Council of Students are petitioning for the bill to be returned to Parliament by the President. They contend that the bill violates the principles of non-discrimination and equal access to education. Moreover, it increases the susceptibility of LGBTQI+ youth to bullying because of the 'vacuum of information' that the law could create. The petitioners also claim that the political stance taken by the bill directly conflicts with Romania's obligations under the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (otherwise known as the Istanbul Convention), which describes gender as 'social roles, behaviours, activities and characteristics that a particular society considers appropriate for women and men'.

⁹ Intellinews 'BUCHAREST BLOG: Romania becomes the latest battleground in Central Europe's gender wars', 2 July 2020 (www.intellinews.com/bucharest-blog-romania-becomes-the-latest-battleground-in-central-europe-s-gender-wars-186591/)

3. Refugee camps

According to a report published by Transnational Institute and Stop Wapenhandel in July 2020,¹⁰ refugees and migrants are disproportionately affected by Covid-19. They suffer from poor living conditions in crowded refugee camps, increased isolation and maltreatment in detention camps. Moreover, an unprecedented shutdown of borders and restrictions on migration has led to an increase in violent pushbacks of refugees on borders and increased deaths in already deadly regions such as the Mediterranean. Amid the pandemic, governments of Australia, the EU, the US and others have continued to pour billions into fortifying borders, using the excuse of Covid-19 to intensify border militarisation. There is a possibility that many draconian restrictions justified by governments as temporary health measures will become permanent the same way as civil liberty restrictions remained in place long after 9/11.

Israel

On 20 July, Israeli soldiers destroyed a coronavirus checkpoint set up by Palestinians used to test for coronavirus in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin.¹¹ During their operations, troops carried out a number of raids in the city and its refugee camp, shooting at least one man in the leg during protests against their presence. At least two people were arrested and detained before the soldiers left the city. Despite the coronavirus outbreak, Israeli authorities continue to abuse the most vulnerable Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank as part of decades-long attempts to drive them out of the area. One day before the demolitions, hard-liners from the illegal Israeli settlement of Yitzhar torched hundreds of olive trees belonging to Palestinian farmers in the West Bank villages of Burin and Madama, yet unpunished by the occupying Israeli forces. According to the Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs, the International Criminal Court is set to make an imminent decision in opening an inquiry into Israeli atrocities committed in the occupied territories. Should an inquiry be opened, several Israeli officials including the prime minister and army chiefs would be subject to criminal proceedings.¹²

France

The situation for migrants in the northern French city of Calais continues to deteriorate with the Covid-19 crisis and public health restrictions, including police abuse, discrimination, daily evacuations, and lack of access to water and hygiene. According to several non-governmental organisations at the site,

¹⁰ www.tni.org/files/publication-downloads/tni-covid-19-and-border-politics-brief.pdf

¹¹ <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/w/israeli-troops-destroy-palestinian-coronavirus-checkpoint-in-west-bank>

¹² www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200720-israel-soldiers-destroy-palestinian-coronavirus-testing-centre

the number of migrants in Calais is now around 1,200, twice as many as this time last year. Refugee Youth Service estimates that there are around 100 unaccompanied minors among the 200 migrants. With the arrival of the summer high temperatures and the ongoing Covid-19 threat, migrant rights groups are particularly concerned about health issues. Only one running water point is located in the Dune Zone, while in some camps, they are several kilometers away. Outside the camps, the situation is just as tense. In recent weeks, many migrants reported that city buses were not stopping at bus stops near the camps and passed when Black people or people of colour were waiting for a bus. The pressure is even greater for migrants whose asylum requests have been rejected and other undocumented migrants because an administrative detention center has reopened after closure during the lockdown. According to the NGO, Calais is in the midst of ongoing human rights violations that have become normalised, and the local and national authorities continue to maintain the rotting situation with impunity.¹³

Bangladesh

Covid-19 is fueling tensions between Rohingya refugees and Bangladeshi hosts, underscoring long-held grievances on the margins of the massive aid response. Bangladesh's Covid-19 outbreak has escalated steadily since March, and nationwide lockdowns have shattered the economy in Cox's Bazar, already one of the country's poorest districts. Increasingly, distrust and stigmatisation have been aimed at Rohingya refugees accused of carrying the virus. Aid groups report a rise in anti-Rohingya hate speech and racism, as well as 'rapidly deteriorating security dynamics' between the two communities. The influx of refugees and the enormous aid infrastructure has raised prices and sent wages plummeting, while locals say they haven't benefited enough from hundreds of millions of dollars earmarked for the Rohingya response each year. Though local NGOs have long called for the response to better include host communities and development experts have pushed for longer-term investments in the surrounding areas, critics say it has been minimal compared to the rising burden on many families. Failing to address host community grievances, analysts warn, could heighten tensions, create more opposition to aid projects, and worsen public sentiment against the Rohingya themselves.¹⁴

Greece

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), Greek law enforcement officers have summarily returned asylum seekers and migrants at the land and sea borders with Turkey during the Covid-19 lockdown on 16 July.¹⁵ In some cases, the officers used violence against asylum seekers, including some who were deep inside Greek territory, and often confiscated and destroyed the migrants' belongings. Growing evidence of abuses collected by non-governmental groups and media show that the authorities failed to

¹³ www.infomigrants.net/en/post/25590/in-calais-at-least-1-200-migrants-are-on-the-streets-twice-as-many-as-last-summer

¹⁴ www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news-feature/2020/07/27/Bangladesh-Rohingya-refugee-host-coronavirus-aid

¹⁵ www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/16/greece-investigate-pushbacks-collective-expulsions

take any precautions to prevent the transmission of Covid-19 among the migrants while in their custody. The government in Athens ‘did not allow a nationwide lockdown to get in the way of a new wave of collective expulsions, including from deep inside Greek territory,’ said Human Rights Watch’s Greece researcher Eva Cosse. ‘Instead of protecting the most vulnerable people in this time of global crisis, Greek authorities have targeted them in total breach of the right to seek asylum and with disregard for their health.’¹⁶

Greek police said a 21-year-old Afghan asylum seeker died after a knife attack on Sunday by a 19-year-old who was also living in the Moria camp. The suspected perpetrator and two other Afghan men were arrested after the incident, according to local media.

There have been repeated brawls and stabbings in and around the camp on the Aegean island of Lesbos, where thousands of migrants live in cramped and insanitary conditions. Since the beginning of the year at least seven asylum seekers, including a woman and child, have been killed in knife attacks. More than ten others have been injured.¹⁷

4. Prisoners and detainees

United Kingdom

In the UK, reports have emerged of prisoners being kept in conditions ‘akin to social confinement’ up to 22 hours a day, with less than 30 minutes of exercise and outdoor activities since the government-instructed lockdown began, according to the Howard League for Penal Reform. So far, 23 prisoners and nine prison staff members have died after testing positive for Covid-19. Various NGOs have voiced their concern over the Ministry of Justice’s failure to release the intended 4,000 prisoners over the course of the pandemic, as only 200 prisoners have been released so far, as well as the Department’s failure to combat overcrowding in various facilities across the country. Dame Anne Owers, National Chair of the Independent Monitoring Board, wrote a letter to the Ministry of Justice highlighting that: ‘The prison estate has been in a state of lockdown for 15 weeks, and it is concerning that prisoners have not yet begun to transition from that state’, reaffirming the need to safeguard the wellbeing of the prison population.¹⁸

Bolivia

¹⁶ www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200717-greece-must-be-held-to-account-for-deporting-refugees-during-pandemic-says-hrw

¹⁷ www.infomigrants.net/en/post/26272/afghan-stabbed-to-death-in-greek-migrant-camp-1

¹⁸ www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/uk-prisons-coronavirus-solitary-confinement-inquiry-deaths-a9639156.html

On 27 July, four highly populated prisons in Bolivia's Cochabamba region sparked riots on due to the death of a prisoner displaying symptoms of Covid-19. So far, eight prisoners with symptoms of Covid-19 have died in the Cochabamba region and 60 in Bolivia's prison system, indicating that there are serious issues pertaining to access to adequate hygiene and sanitation facilities, a lack of access to medical professionals, a lack of testing, and failure to reduce the 240 per cent overcapacity in prisons across the country. Further, the Bolivian government's response to Covid-19 has been criticized by various international bodies, with reports this week of police recovering 400 bodies from streets, cars and homes, most of the deceased are said to have Covid-19.¹⁹ Across Latin America, 11 prison riots have been reported across 18 countries during the pandemic, according to a report by the Center for Latin American Insecurity and Violence.²⁰

Israel

As reported in the previous Monitor, Adalah, the Legal Centre for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, called on the Israeli government to protect the wellbeing of Palestinians in Israeli prisons during the Covid-19 pandemic. This week, the Supreme Court has ruled that 450 Palestinian 'security prisoners' held at Gilboa prison are 'no different than family members or flatmates living in the same home'. Adalah argues that the 'precedent-setting ruling' uniquely endangers the health of Palestinians held in Israeli prisons, and poses a threat to greater society. As the Israeli Supreme Court has ruled that prisoners must be able to socially distance, with a required 4.5 meters for each prisoner, Gilboa currently has six prisoners sharing a 22 metre dormitory, thereby breaching social distancing regulations. Further, in April, UN experts called upon the Israeli government to safeguard the 4,520 Palestinian prisoners held in prison facilities across Israel. Since then, hundreds of Israeli prisoners have been released due to emergency measures to mitigate the spread of Covid-19, yet no Palestinians have been released on these grounds. UN experts have responded, stating 'this indicates discriminatory treatment towards Palestinians prisoners, which would be a violation of international law'.²¹

5. Informal settlements and homelessness

India

In India, a recent survey conducted of 6,936 residences in Mumbai by the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) found that 57 per cent of respondents from slums had contracted Covid-19, as

¹⁹

www.democracynow.org/2020/7/22/headlines/brazilian_covid_19_death_toll_surpasses_80_000_bolivian_police_recover_400_bodies

²⁰ www.insightcrime.org/news/analysis/coronavirus-unrest-prison-riots

²¹ www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-israel-supreme-court-palestinians-prisoners-no-rights-social-distancing

opposed to the 16 per cent reported by respondents living in residential areas.²² These alarming statistics highlight the inequalities faced by those living in slum areas, such as a lack of hygiene and sanitation facilities, inability to access healthcare facilities and densely populated living conditions. Statistical evidence gathered from this survey disproves the statements by Modi's administration, which argued that transmission rates of Covid-19 in communities are not happening, a claim widely disputed by public health experts. Shahid Jameel, a virologist and chief executive officer of Wellcome Trust DBT India Alliance, stated that due to the recent survey, the fatality rate 'will extrapolate into an enormously large number for Covid-19 infections across the country'. As India currently has 1.53 million confirmed Covid-19 cases and an urban population of around 64 million people, urgent action must be taken in order to protect the vast numbers of urban dwellers from contracting the virus.

6. Asylum procedures

This week, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has released a report stating that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused significant hardships for asylum seekers in Europe. For a number of respondents to the FRA report, barriers are primarily based around the difficulties in accessing updated information on asylum procedures, entering the European Union due to travel restrictions and a lack of vital information.²³ The report also highlights the 'number of allegations of pushbacks at borders, in contravention with the EU Schengen rules, have increased'. The pushback of migrants has been noted in Hungary and Greece, with Hungarian authorities preventing new migrants from entering at the border, and Greece had 'illegally been pushing potential asylum seekers entering from the sea and land borders'. Hungary has recently passed a law allowing for the immediate removal of asylum seekers and refugees from the territory of Hungary, which has caused condemnation from various international bodies. Further, in Belgium, 900 new requests for asylum seeker appointment were registered, but only 350 invitations to register were sent out, and only 270 could meet authorities to seek their claim for international protection.²⁴ The deportation and forcible returns of asylum seekers has been reported in Croatia during the Covid-19 pandemic, with 41 people were forcefully returned to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Iraq by the Croatian authorities. Similar instances were seen in Poland, with an increased number of deported migrants and asylum seekers, including families with children, the elderly and people who are chronically ill or have disabilities.

South Africa

²² www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/57-slum-respondents-exposed-to-covid-19-16-in-societies-mumbai-survey-120072801686_1.html

²³ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-migration-bulletin-3_en.pdf

²⁴ https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-migration-bulletin-3_en.pdf

In South Africa, the passing of the Refugee Amendment Act in February 2020, which prevents access to education, employment and political activity, has led to disastrous effects on the high number of refugees and asylum seekers during the pandemic. Due to unequal access to social security, a significant proportion of asylum seekers face destitution, starvation and homelessness. Further, the delays in processing asylum applications are increasing, along with reports of ‘deepening corruption and widening loopholes for exploitation’. Human rights activists and lawyers have argued that the Refugee Amendment Act is unconstitutional, and deprives asylum seekers from obtaining adequate living standards. Currently, the South African Home Office has reported 40,326 pending asylum seeker applications 147,794 pending refugee applications. Jessica Lawrence, from Lawyers for Human Rights in South Africa, has argued that due to ‘long queues, closed or under-functioning refugee reception offices and staff shortages’ mean that any extension of asylum permits granted by South African authorities during the Covid-19 period ‘will have little actual effect as permit and visa renewals simply won’t be processed on time’.²⁵

Ireland

In Ireland, asylum seekers placed in Kerry Direct Provision centre have started a hunger strike to protest the ‘inhumane’ living conditions in the facility, according to the *Irish Independent*. So far, 41 people are left at the hotel after 30 left the facility due to inadequate facilities, with one asylum seeker claiming that they ‘preferred to be on the street than to continue to live here’. The hunger strike is said to be in direct retaliation against the standards of the Kerry Direct Provision facility, as an outbreak of Covid-19 among a number of asylum seekers has increased concerns from asylum-seeker residents.²⁶ Further, a number of allegations from asylum seekers of being forced to ration food and water at the centre, urging for the state to provide access to social care, coupled with the transfer of asylum seekers suspected to have Covid-19 to facilities to Dublin, highlights the disregard of the rights of asylum seekers.

7. Disability rights

Americans with disabilities face huge job losses due to the pandemic

This past Sunday, 26 July 2020, marked 30 years since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) in the United States. Taking inspiration from the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the ADA was designed to protect people with disabilities against discrimination and to ensure that they can participate fully in employment, state and local government services, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications. Recently, disability advocates have expressed concern that the pandemic has set

²⁵ www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2020-07-28-covid-19-moves-refugees-and-asylum-seekers-to-the-bottom-of-priorities/#gsc.tab=0

²⁶ www.independent.ie/irish-news/we-have-been-traumatized-asylum-seekers-in-a-kerry-direct-provision-centre-on-hunger-strike-in-protest-at-inhumane-conditions-39403971.html

back many of the gains from the landmark legislation, especially in regard to employment. In early May, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics Jobs Report showed that in March and April alone nearly one million working-age people with disabilities lost their jobs – a 20 per cent reduction. By comparison, 14 per cent of working-age people without disabilities lost their jobs in that same timeframe. To help workers with disabilities regain their footing after the pandemic, US lawmakers have introduced legislation that would create specific grants for states through Medicaid for the Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) program to ensure Medicaid funding is used to support individuals with disabilities. The funds would ensure long-term home- and community-based services continue uninterrupted and that people with disabilities who can work get back on the job quickly, as part of the country's overall recovery efforts.

Disability advocates urge UK government to implement National Disability Strategy immediately

In April 2020, the UK government announced a cross-sector initiative to work with government colleagues, people with disabilities, nonprofit organisations and businesses to achieve changes for individuals with disabilities that will remove barriers and increase participation across the country. Among the stated objectives, the National Disability Strategy will 'make practical changes to policies which strengthen disabled people's ability to participate fully in society' and 'ensure lived experience underpins policies by identifying what matters most to disabled people.' In light of the fact that two thirds of people who have died from Covid-19 in the UK had a disability, disability organisation Scope and a coalition of campaigners authored an open letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson calling for the urgent implementation of the National Disability Strategy in order to prioritise the needs of people with disabilities during the pandemic. Published last week, [the letter](#) highlights the neglect people with disabilities and their families have faced during the crisis and the fear that a looming recession will exacerbate existing inequalities.

Contact tracing and surveillance may uniquely harm people with disabilities

A 20 July 2020 Brookings Institute article on how to centre disability in the technological response to the pandemic highlighted the fear of disability activists that contact tracing and surveillance applications threaten people with disabilities by increasing surveillance of an already hyper-surveilled and criminalised community. Activists note that people with disabilities already have to give up basic privacies in order to access services, support, and accommodations and that the Covid-19 tracing applications are not accurate or effective enough to justify additional surrenders of personal liberties. Further, while everyone is at risk of privacy violations in efforts to combat Covid-19, individuals with disabilities are concerned that Covid-19 data could be weaponised to further deny or deprive care.

Covid-19 adaptations may result in a more disability-inclusive world

With millions of people around the globe suddenly working and attending school remotely, and thousands experiencing lingering health problems, it's become more commonplace to think about what it means to need accommodations, rely on friends and neighbors and depend on government support. People with disabilities have long advocated for accommodations throughout their lives to help them overcome barriers, and because of the pandemic, some of these accommodations are now considered normal practice. For example, delivery options have skyrocketed, alongside measures like curbside pick-up. Flexible work arrangements have also become mainstream. With the widespread use of video chat and streaming services, previously inaccessible events and places like concert venues, religious services, fitness classes and a variety of public events are now widely available online. This allows people with disabilities to participate in social and cultural events like never before. Advocates urge that society must continue these inclusive measures in the post-pandemic world. 'Hopefully this pandemic has shown people that you can be trapped at home, by no fault of your own, and you can still contribute,' says Mik Scarlet, an expert in the field of access and inclusion for disabled people. 'In the same way that we're trying to plan our end of lockdown, can we also plan for the end of society being inaccessible?'

8. Freedom of assembly

Serbia

In early July, a second weekend curfew was announced by the Serbian Government to battle the spread of Covid-19, following a steady rise to over 300 new cases each day. In response to the re-imposed curfew, protests erupted. Following two nights of protests, President Aleksandar Vučić scrapped the curfew and instead implemented a ban of gatherings of over ten people in Belgrade and restricted the working hours of indoor businesses. His move to instead restrict gatherings seems an attempt to restrict the right of freedom of assembly. Despite this, protests continued, leading to the detention of 71 protestors.²⁷ Instances of police brutality have also been recorded, including an incident in which officers beat three men sat on a bench.²⁸ The protests began in response to the government's inconsistent method to curbing the crisis: initially playing down the crisis, followed by a strict lockdown and then followed by an almost return to normality. Many have blamed the return to normality, ahead of elections held on 21 June which secured power for the ruling party, for the second spike in the virus and a lack

²⁷ www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/11/serbian-police-arrest-71-in-coronavirus-protests

²⁸ www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/serbia-coronavirus-protests-key-questions-answered-200711101350300.html

of consideration for public health in an effort to solidify their power.²⁹ Since the elections on 21 June, the country has seen a steady rise in the number of cases. These protests make up part of a larger trend of civil unrest following the easing of lockdown and second spikes of Covid-19 cases worldwide.

Australia

Following the report in the last edition of the Monitor, police forces won a Supreme Court case to prevent a Black Lives Matter protest from taking place in Sydney due to concerns of spreading the virus.³⁰ Following this, police urged individuals not to attend the ‘unauthorised’ event. The New South Wales police department stated that while they support ‘the rights of individuals to exercise their right to free speech, large-scale events, such as these, are currently subject to restrictions under the Public Health Act’ and they ‘will not hesitate to take the appropriate action, if required.’³¹ Despite the ruling, protestors gathered in groups of no more than 20 people in the park, wore masks and used hand sanitiser to mitigate risk whilst peacefully protesting. Police still arrested six people, and several faced fines even though the protesters dispersed within 15 minutes of receiving orders to move on.³² Again, the police force failed to provide alternative safe methods of peaceful protesting or consider the precautions exercised by the protestors when arresting them.

Israel

Thousands continue to protest throughout Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, as Covid-19 cases peaked at over 2,000 new cases on 21 July. Police forces have said that 11 protestors have been detained.³³ Protests have intensified this week after the Israeli Parliament (The Knesset) passed a bill granting the cabinet of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu additional emergency powers. The legislation gives the Knesset only 24 hours to review emergency decrees before the Governmental Ordinance becomes law, reducing it from one week. Many have criticised this move as the Government utilising the crisis to secure more power, rather than taking concrete steps to mitigate the second wave or resolve the rising unemployment rates in the country.³⁴ The protests against the new emergency legislation prove the importance of preserving freedom of assembly during the present crisis, as governments continue to seek additional and undue power under the pretext of the pandemic.

²⁹ www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/07/serbia-coronavirus-protests-key-questions-answered-200711101350300.html

³⁰ www.insider.com/police-in-australian-stop-black-lives-matter-protest-2020-7

³¹ www.insider.com/police-in-australian-stop-black-lives-matter-protest-2020-7

³² www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jul/28/six-arrested-at-sydney-black-lives-matter-protest-as-dungay-family-deliver-petition-to-parliament

³³ www.timesofisrael.com/thousands-protest-against-netanyahu-government-across-country

³⁴ www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2020/07/26/coronavirus-infections-reach-60000-israel-protests-continue