



الاتحاد العربي للنقابات
ARAB TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Coronavirus in the Arab region :

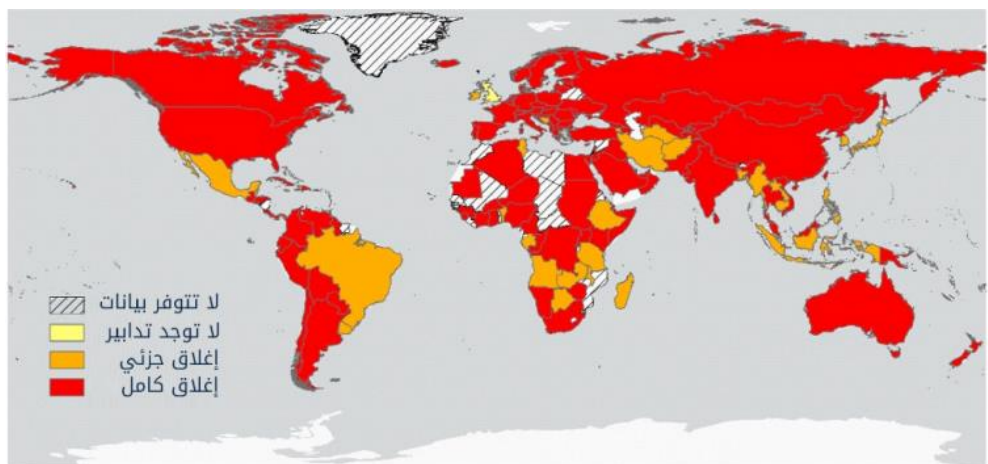
**A passing storm, an opportunity for change
or a regional disaster that threatens migrant
workers and their families**

Introduction

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the necessary measures and procedures that were put in place to contain it and combat its further spread have, movement of people had stopped in various parts of the our world. A world that has become quite interconnected. This status quo created a wholesme map of implications for migrants who depend on their work far from their home countries to support themselves, their families, as well as local their communities. It was later revealed that many of these immigrants were more vulnerable than others to the risks of contracting this virus, due to the direct impact of this pandemic on vital sectors such as agriculture due to the expected shortage of manpower in the agricultural sector.

Governments around the world have taken measures as part of the efforts to respond to this pandemic with the aim of protecting people's lives. Most of the media reports and studies indicate that the unprecedented challenges facing regular or irregular migrant workers and their family members have not been addressed so far, except in rare cases.

The measures to close up borders between countries, according to the air and maritime traffic, have redrawn a new border map across the world. As shown in the map below, this factor has stopped migration movement in general and migrant workers movement in particular.



**Travel restrictions imposed around the world
at the beginning of April 2020**

According to Haytham Omayra Fernandez, lead researcher in the Mediterranean and Arab World Department at the Royal Institute for International and Strategic Studies in Madrid the Arab region is undergoing a great amount of pressure. Therefore, such reality makes Arab countries' confrontation with the threat of the emerging COVID-19 pandemic a complicating factor for some of the region's problems.

On the social level per se, it could be reflected through an observation of the situation of migrants and workers in a challenging international context.

This includes the possibility of social and economic difficulties turning into political crises and increasing the intensity of the mounting demands for change in countries of the Middle East and the Maghreb. Unless an effective vaccine is provided to counter this epidemic, the economic and social cost of the strict restrictions imposed by Arab governments may be costly, and societies may not be able to bear it for a long period.

Is the Arab region well-equipped to confront COVID-19?

Fernandez also noted that, based on the existence of great differences between the 22 Arab countries in terms of their health systems and available resources in the face of the epidemic, in general, they remain an area that is not prepared to effectively deal with the impact of an infectious and deadly disease such as COVID-19. This disease, which continues to rapidly spread around the world.



Most of the Arab world's population, which is estimated at 435 million people, live in countries where health services are scarce, poor, or practically non-existent. The reasons are generally linked to a lack of material resources, high government spending in other areas such as defense, or defective functioning of state institutions, mismanagement, and brain drain, as well as a lack of transparency in the transfer of information and crisis management. More of these reasons could also be the lack of trust in the authorities, armed conflicts, as in the cases of Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Libya, and population displacement due to wars, along with other reasons.

Until the time of the preparation of this study, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in Arab countries remains limited, compared to other regions of the world, despite physically being in the immediate vicinity of countries that have a high rate of Coronavirus infections, such as Italy, Spain and Iran.

Although Arab countries have close commercial and geopolitical relations with countries in Europe, North America and East Asia, where the Coronavirus is spreading, confirmed cases in Arab countries remain weak. The low rate of infections is due to the reduced scope of testing and comprehensive checks caused by limited resources versus a rapid spread of the virus.

Furthermore, the Spanish Royal Studies Institute pointed out that there are many doubts that authorities in these Arab countries are not transparent in terms of providing accurate and timely information about the spread of COVID-19.

Implications of poor coordination among Arab states in the face of COVID-19

As part of its prevention efforts for the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, countries of the Middle East and the Maghreb did not cooperate with each other to confront the pandemic as it started to emerge and spread throughout the region, despite the real danger it poses to all these countries.

Although most of the Arab world's population, about 435 million people were subjected to varying degrees of various forms of quarantine, there was no governmental coordination between countries and no meetings were held among Arab health ministers or interior ministers.

The Arab League, the official diplomatic body that brings Arab countries together under one roof, remained silent on its part, with the postponement of the Arab summit that was scheduled to be held in Algiers on March 30, 2020.

Only the meetings of professional societies and unions such as the Arab Trade Union Confederation, which held several meetings in this regard, bringing together several trade unions, including those in the health sector, or those held under the auspices of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

Another meeting of some Arab leaders was also held under the auspices of the People's Republic of China.

The scarcity of available data in this regard increases the difficulty of strategic studies due to the absence of correct figures and data on the damages resulting from the intra-Arab mobility, the movement between it and its partners in Asia, Europe and America, as well as its implications for the movement of regular and irregular workers migration.

It is clear that Arab countries are today missing a double opportunity to overcome their political divisions and to cooperate in combating the spread of the emerging Coronavirus at the same time.

However, it is not too late to start coordinating measures at the regional level, as well as to start launching initiatives for cooperation and mutual support at the material, technical and financial levels.

This crisis represents a unique opportunity for the Arab League, on its seventy-fifth anniversary, to highlight the benefit of its existence beyond the mere issuance of Arab denunciations statements.

The current state of emergency and high alert can also act to reactivate regional initiatives at the level of the Arab Maghreb Union, which was established in 1989, and which is now in a state of near dormancy, especially after the border crisis between Algeria and Morocco, the Western Sahara crisis, which remains under the auspices of the United Nations (UN).

ILO Estimates: Increase in the number of unemployed people may reach 25 million worldwide, including 5 million in the Arab region

In mid-March 2020, the ILO estimated two scenarios for the increase in the number of the unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic:

An optimistic scenario estimating the increase in the expected number of unemployed at about five million unemployed individuals, while the pessimistic one estimated that the number of those affected by the crisis will increase to reach about 25 million individuals.

ILO based its preliminary estimates on the number of unemployed in March on the estimates of the global financial crisis in 2008, which at that time left about 22 million unemployed, but the scenarios are different between the two crises, as the global financial crisis of 2008 was specific, and global efforts were combined to get out of it.



While the COVID-19 crisis in 2020 - in light of its open scenarios - prompted the ILO to say - in its report issued on April 7, 2020 - that the matter depends on the future developments to control the Coronavirus, as well as the followed economic policies to face the negative repercussions of the crisis.

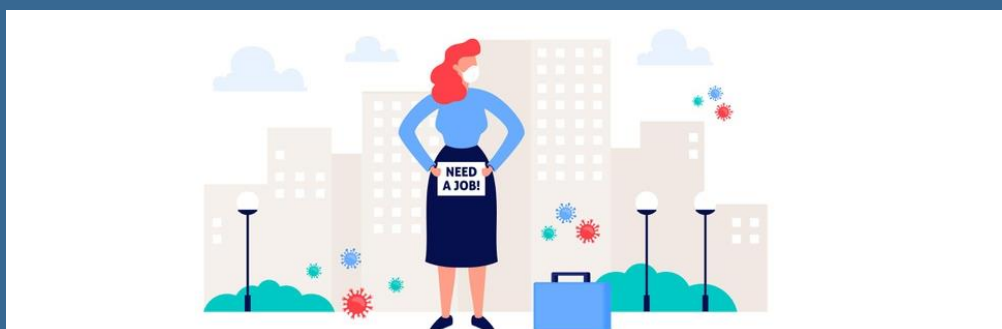
Therefore, the ILO believes that there is a great danger threatening the countries of the world in terms of the increase in the number of unemployed, so that the matter exceeds the initial estimates, and far exceeds the barrier of 25 million unemployed by the end of 2020.

As for the Arab region, ILO's report states that its share of these expectations is a loss of 8.1% of working hours, equivalent to five million full-time jobs, which is three times the estimates announced by ESCWA (Economic Community of West Asian States) in mid-March 2020. The report expected the number of the unemployed in the Arab region would increase by the end of 2020 by about 1.7 million.

The Asia-Pacific region was the most affected by the COVID-19 crisis, according to the organization's estimates, as working hours decreased by 7.2%, equivalent to 125 million full-time workers. It is natural that this region will be greatly affected due to its population density, as it is estimated that the population of this region represents about 56% of the total world population.

ILO's report does not exclude certain sectors from the negative effects of reducing working hours. The risk includes the sectors of accommodation and food services, manufacturing industries, retail trade, business and administrative activities.

The loss of the global economy for this percentage of working hours will cast a negative impact over the economic growth rates that may exceed their decline rates more than what was expected by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF).



Regimes without social welfare systems risk further dependency on other countries

Recent estimates issued by the ILO indicate that new consequences will impose themselves on the world's governments, and these consequences will be greater for the governments of that region, as they do not have social welfare systems that enable them to face the negative repercussions of the crisis, in addition to their crumbling economic structures. The same ILO report has presented four pillars upon which policies to confront the Coronavirus crisis are based at the current stage:

1

First pillar

Work to stimulate the economy to preserve jobs and work to increase employment opportunities.

2

Second pillar

supporting companies and maintaining workers' wages.

3

Third pillar

protecting workers in the workplace.

4

Fourth pillar

relying on social dialogue to find solutions to problems.

This is an agenda that all governments in developing and developed countries have resorted to confront the negative effects of the COVID-19 crisis

The views of each country differed in supporting the sectors that it saw greatly affected, and the amounts of financial support that governments pumped to support their economies differed. The United States of America had the largest stimulus budget for its economy at about \$ 2.2 trillion.

However, we have to realize that the time extension to confront COVID-19 will greatly put burden on governments in providing more economic stimulus packages, especially for the developing countries that suffer from a debt crisis as well as a funding crisis at the same time. If the Coronavirus crisis continues beyond 2020, it is not unlikely that many countries will declare their bankruptcy, their inability to fulfill their external obligations, as well as their inability to support their internal economies, and to motivate it through the provision of governmental funding.

WHO warnings for the Middle East and North Africa

The World Health Organization (WHO) warned in mid-March 2020 that the COVID-19 pandemic had not yet reached its peak in the Middle East and North Africa, stressing the need to prepare for the worst as soon as possible.

WHO complained that the countries of the region did not provide sufficient information about infections despite the seriousness of the situation, and urged them to make greater efforts to counter COVID-19.

The rapid spread of the virus in the Arab region is mainly due to human relations with the countries that were tremendously affected by the virus, due to the high and rapid movement of migration to and from East Asia, Iran and European countries.

This spread is also due to the rapid increase in population density, especially in Arab capitals, which was directly reflected in migrant workers whose suffering exacerbated after the spread of the pandemic, the suspension of air and sea transport, the closure of countries' land borders. Their conditions complicated by the straitening of home quarantine measures.

It is noticeable that **the average age in Arab countries is low compared to Asian and European countries.** For example, demographic statistics indicate that the age that divides the population into two equal groups in terms of number in Jordan is 23.8, in Egypt 24.6, in Algeria 28.5. In Morocco, 29.5, compared to 47.3 in Italy, 44.9 in Spain and 38.4 in China. This explains the low number of deaths caused by the pandemic in Arab countries, where the elderly seem to be the most at risk.

Although the Arab region is characterized by its relatively high rates of chronic diseases that can increase the number of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes.

As is the case in many countries of the world, Arab governments took some time before assessing the seriousness of the COVID-19 pandemic and taking steps to contain it and limit its spread. However, once they saw the effects of the pandemic on other countries, countries in the Middle East and North Africa witnessed some of the most severe isolation and containment measures (theoretically speaking).

These measures included the closing of borders, canceling flights, halting airline routes, quarantining residents in their homes, closing places of worship, banning group prayers, suspending work permits for foreign workers, and returning tourists to their countries.

Various forms of curfews have been imposed in several countries:

The night curfew was put to order in Tunisia since March 18

In Saudi Arabia since March 23

In Egypt since March 24

A curfew was declared in Baghdad since March 17

In Jordan, a 24/7 curfew was declared since March 21

Due to the escalation of the infection cases. It is expected that containment measures will increase in the short term as the pandemic continues to spread around the world.



Significant decline in the voice of workers' organizations with unilateral governmental actions

Several media reports indicated that there is an important observation in the Coronavirus crisis, which is the fading of the voice of workers in many countries of the world, including Arab countries, which live under an exceptional political situation in the field of exercising a range of civil and political rights.

This was observed on many occasions, such as the 1999 Seattle Conference, or in the holding of the G20 summit conferences, or the G8 industrial meetings.

No objections were recorded by workers' organizations regarding their conditions in light of this crisis, and many of them were subjected to losing their jobs and being displaced, as it happened in European countries and America.

The reason for this may be that they enjoy the existence of social protection, in addition to being considered covered by the financial funds allocated for economic and social stimulation, and this is what happened, for example, in the USA, where an amount of three thousand dollars was provided to each affected family, which is paid one time.

ILO report issued in April 2020 stated that developing countries,

especially those suffering from the increase in the number of workers in the informal sector, will be affected by the reduction in working hours, which may reach 6.7% in the world in the second half of 2020. Consequently, this segment is not expected to receive adequate social protection.

Therefore, the aforementioned ILO report called for working to provide cash and food aid to the segment of workers in the informal sector during the upcoming period, especially in countries that are on the path of growth.

So, does everything the ILO wish for is being realized? How is this achieved in countries such as India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh, and many countries that are growing and poor? How can this be achieved in a country like Egypt and the rest of the non-oil producing Arab countries?

The fourth pillar proposed by the ILO report, which is relying on social dialogue to find solutions, may be difficult to achieve in countries that do not have a democratic system, and where employers' organizations are closely linked to power, and do not allow the participation of civil society in decision-making.

Therefore, the voice of workers' organizations and trade unions was described as a faint voice if not an absent one, especially in developing countries. The reactions of employers in the private sector differed on the issue of protecting workers and preserving their wages, while the principle for such decisions is that they take place within the framework of the tripartite dialogue that brings together governments, workers' organizations and employers.

In light of this crisis, it seems that Karl Marx's call that says "Workers of the world unite" is no longer heard in the workers' movements we see today. This may be due to the fact that the crisis is greater than the circle of conflict and dialogue between workers and employers, by virtue of that it is outside the control of everyone, and is affecting the health and lives of workers and employers, as well as the poor and the rich alike.

An initiative for a “regional Arab consultation process” to discuss the effects of COVID-19 on migrants and expatriates

Representatives of member states in the “Arab Regional Consultation Process on Migration and Asylum” affirmed that the economic, social and political repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic would have a significant impact on migrants and expatriates, which may lead in the longer term to changing the features of global migration. This came in the statement issued by the sixth meeting of the “Arab Regional Consultation Process on Migration and Asylum” organized by the Arab League in cooperation with the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on July 16, 2020, regarding the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on migrants, refugees and their host countries in the Arab region.

In a statement made by the Arab League, the meeting warned that the conditions of migrant workers will be affected, and their role and contribution in supporting development, among other factors, will diminish as a result of loss of job opportunities and lower wage levels, which will increase global inequality as a result of the impact of migrant remittances. Travel restrictions and medical tests for migrants and refugees will be tightened, with the resulting spread of irregular migration, and the associated risks of falling into the hands of smugglers and human traffickers, which will increase the vulnerability of these groups. The statement indicated that the crisis has already led to a temporary suspension of resettlement of refugees, in addition to affecting the volume of humanitarian aid to refugees and displaced persons.

In the “Arab regional consultation process on migration and asylum”, the representatives of the member states valued what was stated in the statement of the Economic and Social Council of the League of Arab States at the ministerial level,

dated May 6, 2020, regarding refugees, internally displaced persons and expatriates, in light of the unprecedented conditions that the world is witnessing due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its repercussions on all walks of life, which come in light of the continued exacerbation of the refugee and displacement crisis in the Arab region.

The same process also emphasized the importance of continuing cooperation and coordination with international, and regional organizations and between member states, to ensure the provision of care and protection for migrants, expatriates, refugees and displaced persons, especially those who live in refugee camps. Among those are Palestinian refugees who were displaced from their homes in 1948, and suffer from poverty and the absence of a safety network that is required to absorb the financial and medical shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

They also called on the international community to support the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, "UNRWA". They stressed the importance of working from now on to alleviate the effects of the crisis on migrants, expatriates, refugees and their host societies, through cooperation, coordination, dialogue and joint programs between the various relevant parties, namely among them the countries of origin, countries of transit and countries of destination / host countries.

They called for the concerned international and regional organizations to play an effective role in strengthening the partnership among them and to further coordinate between them to raise awareness about the dangers facing migrants, refugees and displaced persons, as well as to ensure the following of relevant international charters, agreements and the relative global plans.

They also called to work to implement their goals and principles to protect migrants and refugees and preserve their rights,

especially the sustainable development plan extending to the year 2030, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, and the principles of the Global Compact on Refugees.

They also stressed the importance of working to contain the situation and provide the necessary protection for these groups from the most severe effects of Coronavirus, especially in light of expectations that the world will witness a second wave, by providing them with basic needs, within the available resources, such as food, water, personal hygiene tools and health care.

There is also a need to continue awareness-raising campaigns about the dangers of the Coronavirus, in addition to providing regional electronic platforms for the exchange of experiences, information and good practices between countries hosting large numbers of migrants and refugees, on ways to contain the crisis and respond to their needs.

They highlighted the importance of taking into account the indirect economic repercussions of the pandemic, such as the decrease in total remittances from migrants and their negative repercussions on their families and countries of origin. Noting as well the importance of reducing the impact of these repercussions and mitigating their repercussions within the framework of the interdependence between migration and development, including the call to suspend the compulsory repatriation of migrants in the time of the pandemic, according to a statement made by the United Nations Migration Network.

They also drew attention to the peculiarity of the situation of the Arab countries hosting refugees, in which there are nearly half of the total refugees worldwide, including 5.6 million Palestinian refugees. In reference to the pressures and double burdens placed on the health, social and economic systems, stability and social peace in these countries. They emphasized the importance of the principle of international solidarity with host countries, shared responsibility and burden sharing among the various actors in the international community.

They also warned that the direction of financial resources by governments, international and non-governmental organizations to the combat against the COVID-19 pandemic should not affect the humanitarian aid allocated to refugee and displacement crises and namely the needs of returning migrants, refugees and displaced persons.



COVID-19 effects on migrants to and from Asia and the Arab region

The stalemate continues to dominate economic and commercial activities to and from Asia, the continent that was the source of the COVID-19 pandemic. China, the country in which the virus spread in early December 2019, was forced to secure a large proportion of its workers that are spread across the world, who immigrated in regular manners to many Arab countries as a preparation to the cessation of air, sea and land flights through the border crossings.

The Coronavirus wave has raised many fears outside of China because of its impact on vulnerable refugees and migrants in conflict-torn countries.

Due to that wave, China, which swept over many Arab and African countries with its huge investments, found itself trapped between the spread of a COVID inside the country and the demands for the return of its workers to its lands as well as the temporary suspension of its projects.

Locally-reported statistics indicate that during the past week, COVID-19 cases dramatically increased in Iran, as Iran exported many infections to more than 12 countries around the world, including Iraq, Afghanistan and Lebanon.

And at least 12 million refugees live between Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey, which are countries linked to Iran, either by frequent travel, illegal migration, common borders, or all three combined.

Iran also has nearly a million refugees, most of them from Afghanistan, and an estimated 1.5 million to two million illegal immigrants, who work in agriculture, irrigation, construction sectors as well as other unregulated commercial activities.

As for Turkey, thousands of immigrants left it towards Europe and are still stranded at the Greek borders that refuse to let them in, after Turkey opened its borders in an attempt to pressure Europe to take on refugees.



Dr. Muhammad Jawad, a researcher at Imperial College London, who studies the impact of conflict on public health, said that the effects of armed conflict lead to the fragmentation of the public health system and infrastructure, which is directly reflected in migration mobility in general and on the migrant workforce in particular.

Dr. Adam Coates, a public health specialist at the University of Cambridge, explained that refugees are particularly vulnerable to the contraction of the Coronavirus or even other diseases, due to movements across the world, instability and living in dense and crowded conditions, in addition to the absence of sanitation, health care services and vaccination programs. Coates pointed out that most of the time, refugees are dismissed and excluded from any plans to prepare for disasters and pandemics. Obtaining information on refugees and migrants is also a great ordeal.

Saudi Arabia closes its airspace in the face of 20 million pilgrims and hundreds of thousands of Arab and Asian workers

Within a few weeks, the Coronavirus pandemic directly affected the region's economies. The tourism sector received the first blow, with the cancellation of many trips and tourism services in some Arab countries that depended on tourism as a main source of income and job opportunities.

In addition, on March 4, 2020, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), the Arab country that employs hundreds of thousands of migrant workers from Asia and the Middle East, suspended the issuance of 'Umrah' visas, as well as visiting the Prophet's Mosque in Medina due to the spread of the Coronavirus.

On the other hand, the Saudi Arabia was forced to cancel the Hajj season in July 2020. These measures prevented the movement of about 20 million pilgrims and Umrah visitors, stopping all economic and commercial activities that resulted from this inside and outside KSA.

The tourism sector is an important resource for regular workers and others, given the importance of the tourism sector at the economic and social level in some Arab countries. This sector contributes,

directly and indirectly, to about 15% to the GDP in Egypt, 14% in Jordan, and 12% in Tunisia, as well as 8% in Morocco.

Since tourism is a sector that requires a lot of labor, the almost complete paralysis of its economic activity due to the global crisis caused by the Coronavirus represents a severe blow to the labor and livelihoods of a large number of families in those countries.

This comes after expectations at the beginning of the current year had predicted a significant growth in tourism receipts throughout the region during the year 2020.

However, in a few weeks, these optimistic expectations were dashed.

As if this were not enough, the COVID-19 crisis was exacerbated by the oil price war launched by KSA on March 7, 2020, which led to the price of crude oil falling to its lowest level in nearly 20 years (about \$ 25 per barrel).

This caused the decline in demand from China, the main importer of Saudi oil, once it was invaded by the COVID-19 virus, which made the Saudi authorities seek to reach an agreement to reduce production with other oil-producing countries.

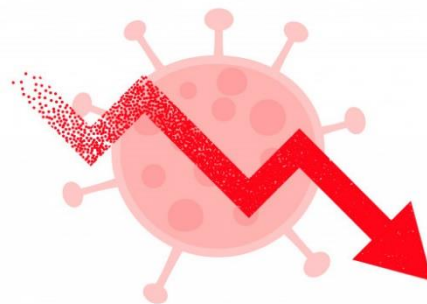
However, Russia refused to reduce its production, so KSA accepted that by taking a decision to increase its production and offer discounts to buyers in order to obtain a greater share of the market. Russia's response to this was, in return, increasing its oil production. This oversupply of oil, which coincided with the economic slowdown, caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, led to a sudden collapse in oil prices, something that was not foreseen in any of the main forecasts at the beginning of the year.

Saudi Arabia alone attracts more than 11.1 million expatriate workers, most of them originating from Asian countries, and the percentage of expatriate workers in it reaches 76.7%, while in the UAE, it reaches 90%, and in the State of Kuwait the rate is 69.3%, while it reaches about 80.9% in the Sultanate of Oman. As for Qatar 94.4%, and close to 73.5% in the State of Bahrain, according to data published by the Bahraini newspaper "Akhbar Al Khaleej".

The volume of Indian workers in the Gulf countries has increased in four decades from about 250,000 workers in 1975 to nearly 8 million workers at present, taking advantage of job opportunities in the Gulf market.

The work of the Filipino community in the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council is also remarkable. Saudi Arabia and the UAE together attract about 40% of Filipino workers outside the Philippines.

With regard to expatriate workers from Arab countries, Saudi Arabia in particular attracts huge numbers of workers from Egypt, Yemen and Sudan. Nevertheless, the unemployment factor or the dilemma of creating suitable job opportunities for citizens of some GCC countries poses a challenge to the survival of expatriate workers at current levels.



UAE threatens Asian countries that refuse to evacuate their nationals among migrant workers on its soil

The UAE announced in early April 2020 that it would review employment-related relations with countries that refuse to evacuate their citizens, including those who lost their jobs or those who obtained work permits, after the Indian ambassador and Pakistan's ambassador to the UAE stated that their countries are not ready to do so yet.

According to the "Reuters News Agency", Pakistan has started to bring back some of its citizens from the UAE. The Pakistani Consulate General in Dubai said on its Twitter page that the first PIA flight departed in mid-April 2020 bound for Islamabad with 227 passengers stuck from Dubai and other Emirates on board.

Two Emirati newspapers reported that more than 40,000 Pakistani immigrants in the UAE had registered with the Pakistani consulate to return to their country.

The UAE and other Gulf countries have reported an increase in infections among low-income migrant workers who live in overcrowded housing. Some of these countries moved to re-settle them in school dormitories or shelters, and tried to arrange trips to bring them back to their home countries as well.

Millions of foreign workers, many of which are Asian nationals, represent the pillar of economies in the Gulf region and work in sectors that were disrupted by the spread of the virus.

Fears of the return of 8.5 million Indian migrant workers

American “Foreign Policy” magazine reported that India used national aviation and naval ships to transport its stranded immigrant citizens. Among all the sources of human capital, it is noted that India has a special reason to be concerned about the return of migrants, as it has 8.5 million Indian immigrants in the Gulf, of whom 500,000 are expected to return to one province, Kerala.

Kerala State is, in many ways, a prime example of the benefits that countries reap when a large number of their citizens find jobs abroad, on the one hand, and the challenges that the country may face when reverse migration occurs, on the other.

“The government is underestimating the number of returning immigrants, as at least 1.5 million Indian immigrants are expected to return”, said Irudaya Rajan, a professor at the Center for Development Studies in Kerala state.

In parallel with that, ILO has advised the countries of origin of migrants to be prepared to utilize the skills of returnees in developing national development and growth, and the transition may be more difficult for returning migrants.

As for the millions of immigrants who were able to work in the Gulf and improve their social status there, the Coronavirus has declared the end of this era for them.



Kuwaiti official: “Referring residency dealers to the judiciary because they ‘drowned’ the country with foreign labor (manpower).”

The State of Kuwait has taken many measures to confront the Coronavirus, including partial curfews, stopping studies, preventing gatherings, canceling large events, facilitating government transactions, limiting the exploitation of workers and residents in Kuwait, and returning its stranded citizens abroad.

In this context, the Kuwaiti authorities subjected what they called “residency brokers” to judicial investigation, blaming them for the cause of the ‘inflation’ of the number of foreign workers in Kuwait, as indicated by official statements.

Kuwaiti National Assembly Representative Hammoud Al-Khudair believes that the measures taken by the Kuwaiti government “were at the level of the circumstance and exceeded expectations in terms of performance and follow-up ...”.

Al-Khudair indicated in an interview with “Al-Khaleej Online”, that the State of Kuwait was a pioneer in putting forward many initiatives, on top of which is “achieving food security among the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council ...”,

adding that “the Corona crisis has imposed on the state to confront and address many of the matters that have become due after we finish this health crisis, on top of that addressing and controlling the demographics, and fighting merchants.”

Residency permits, who were the reason for flooding the country with marginal employment, constituted the largest proportion of the virus infections out of the total number of infected people, and indeed the government took decisions to refer some of these criminals to Kuwaiti judicial authorities, in preparation for holding them accountable for the crimes they have committed against Kuwait.

Al-Khudair also noted as well to the right of the residents themselves who were victimized by these merchants, and the licenses of their companies, which were closed and withdrawn, and there is a tendency within the National Assembly to amend laws that could limit this miserable trade and impose severe fines and penalties against them, as well as legalizing entry to workers who came to the country”.

The Sultanate of Oman orders the replacement of foreign workers with its citizens to face the repercussions of COVID-19 on its economy

The Ministry of Finance in the Sultanate of Oman has given public sector companies a deadline until July 2021 to set timetables for the replacement of foreign employees with Omani citizens in all positions, including the administrative ones, to reduce unemployment rates.

The ministry stated that large numbers of foreigners still held managerial positions in state-run companies. This decision comes in response to the orders of the Sultanate of Oman for state-owned companies to accelerate the replacement of foreign employees with Omanis, especially in senior positions, with the aim of providing jobs for its citizens because of the repercussions of the Coronavirus crisis on the oil market.

Foreigners in Oman make up more than 40 % of its 4.6 million population, and they have played a major role in the development of this Gulf state for several decades.

The Omani economy is one of the region's most affected economies by the COVID-19 crisis, due to its direct connection with the economy of China,

the incubator of the Coronavirus and its first source, as Muscat exports about 45.1% of its goods to China, amid expectations of a decline in the growth rates announced by financial institutions before that.

According to "Oxford Economics", the average growth forecast in the Sultanate of Oman has decreased to 1% in 2019, 1.7% in 2020 and 2.3% in 2021, compared to expectations issued three months ago, which were waiting for the Oman's GDP to grow by 1.3%. In 2019, 3.2% in 2020, and 3% in 2021.

On the other hand, one of the factors of the crisis is the great collapse in oil prices in light of the decline in global demand, which puts the producing countries under great pressure to make further reductions.

In this regard, Omani Oil Minister Muhammad Al-Ramahi requested a short and larger reduction in oil production until the end of June 2020, to limit the country's losses due to the price's drop below \$ 30 per barrel.



The Sultanate of Oman heavily relies on the revenue from the sale of crude oil, which production rate was about 30 million barrels in July. China alone imports 78.4% of its total production, and this percentage may rise to 85% at times, which further exacerbates the crisis.

The same applies to gas, which is expected to decrease by 2% in China's demand for it this year, given that China's annual gas imports exceed 82 million tons, which means a great loss that Oman is expected to face, which is one of the top ten exporters of liquefied gas in the world.

On the other hand, it should be noted that about 25 million foreign immigrants, most of them Asians, live in the Kingdoms and Emirates of the Gulf. However, this oil-rich region has been severely affected by the drop in crude prices since 2014, and has been hit again by the outbreak of the emerging Coronavirus and its significant impact on global markets.

In the face of economic recession and a sharp decline in oil revenues, the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (the Sultanate of Oman, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain) seek to secure jobs for their citizens, diversify their economies and integrate millions of their citizens who have recently graduated into the labor market.

Gulf Cooperation Council Legislations aiming to give citizens preference over foreigners in the public and private sectors.

Bahrain: The Minister of Interior calls on the governorates to set up a mechanism to reduce the intensity of foreign labor

The latest statistics issued by the Information and E-Governance Authority, in mid-March 2020, indicated that the population of Bahrain decreased to one million and 484,000 people during 2019, after their number reached about one million and 503,000 people in 2018.

Bahrainis accounted for 47.3% of the total population, as their number reached about 702,000, an increase of 1.7% in 2019, while the percentage of Bahraini citizens reached 45.9% of the total population in 2018.

The number of foreigners in Bahrain - according to 2019 statistics, reached 782,000, a decrease of about 4%, after their number in 2018 was about 813,000.

Bahrain recorded 887 people infected with the Coronavirus, and it said that 519 of them had recovered from the disease, while five others died, as of April 10, 2020.

Bahraini media reported that the Minister of Interior emphasized during a meeting with the governors on April 9, 2020, the importance of counting the governorates for these workers and their places of residence,

the sites to which this labor will be distributed, as well as the needs of each of them, in preparation for the implementation of the necessary measures, which requires Forming working groups in each governorate, including representatives of the concerned authorities.

In this circumstance, the Bahraini government has resorted to the "Unemployment Fund", to which workers could contribute to funding from their wages.

It is a fund, whose role is to protect workers from unemployment and its social consequences. All in anticipation of the specter of faltering and the closure of many institutions and companies, and to spare workers from losing their jobs.

On March 23, 2020, a number of Bahraini MPs made an urgent proposal, calling on the government represented by the Labor Market Regulatory Authority to grant irregular workers a period to settle their illegal conditions and to leave Bahrain, in order to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

The sponsors of the proposal adopted by the “Al-Asala” stated in an explanatory note that the huge number of irregular workers, “may lead to the emergence of a virus clusters, due to random mixing between them, in addition to the inability to control these workers through the knowledge of their housing addresses, numbers, or the jobs they do.

On April 2, 2020, the Labor Market Regulatory Authority in Bahrain launched a grace period to correct the conditions of violating employment in all its categories.

“In line with the country’s general policy and the efforts being made to limit the negative humanitarian and economic impacts, in light of the current exceptional circumstances related to the spread of the emerging Coronavirus”, according to a confirmation by the authorities.

According to the Bahrain News Agency “BNA”, authorities also confirmed that coordination has been made with all concerned parties in the country to immediately start implementing the period of correcting the conditions of violating workers (grace period), which will continue until the end of the current year (2020), provided that it includes all types of violating workers.

Lebanon: Claims to halve the presence of Asian and Arab workers in Lebanon to stop currency conversion

In the context of the trend towards dispensing and laying off foreign workers, it is worth noting the statement made by the Lebanese researcher Muhammad Shams Al-Din to the Al-Markaziyah website, in which he stated that: “There are about 400,000 foreign migrant workers in Lebanon from Egypt, Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, India and others.

The two countries (excluding Syria and Palestine), 280,000 of which are legal residents holding work and residency permits, but about 120,000 are illegal workers, who entered the country with work permits but did not renew them upon their expiration. Each year, they transfer about one billion and 200,000 dollars.

Shams Al-Din added that some of them work in essential sectors, but it is noticeable that there are girls who work at home, who are considered unnecessary in many cases, as their number was estimated in 2018 at 247,000 domestic workers

These workers transfer about 660 million dollars to their countries on an annual basis, most of them Ethiopians, followed by Bangladeshis, then Filipino women.

The same researcher continued to explain that, with regard to Syrian and Palestinian workers, the situation is different, because the Syrian immigrant also used to transfer money, but after the Syrian crisis, Syrian workers brought their families to Lebanon, and thus they began to spend the money within the country.

The number of Syrian workers is about 600,000, and Palestinians count up to about 100,000, meaning that the total number of foreign workers in Lebanon as a whole is about one million and 100,000 workers.

In order to limit the transfer of “Lebanese” money abroad, Shams Al-Din believes that “the state must review the quality of foreign employment, distinguish between the occupations that Lebanon needs and the unnecessary ones which Lebanese could do. Also, preventing the recruitment of foreign workers for some Occupations, especially if the Lebanese are doing the same work, just as it is the case in most countries.

“Foreign workers in the construction sector, selling vegetables, transportation and fuel stations can be dispensed”, he said noting that replacing them with Lebanese will have a positive impact on the country’s economy.

Shams El Din considered that “Lebanese families should dispense of domestic workers, which cost the family expenses other than their monthly salary, such as transactions, travel tickets, insurance, etc”.

Shams El-Din also made a proposal to impose a tax of 10,000 dollars annually when recruiting any domestic worker, which would lead to a reduction to their number in half.

If we have 247,000 domestic workers today, their number would become 125,000, and the tax would lead to an addition of one billion and 200 million dollars, which is allocated to the National Corporation for employment, to provide assistance to unemployed youth and new graduates, until a job is found, to reduce one of the social burdens of unemployment.

“Whoever wants to bring in a domestic worker, let him bear its costs, and let’s look at all civilized countries, from Europe to America to Canada, we do not find domestic workers and the reason is that its tax is exorbitant. This is what we have to apply”, he added.

The Philippines repatriates its citizens from Lebanon at its expense

The dollar crisis is almost repeated by the majority of migrant workers in Lebanon, whether workers in domestic service or workers in gas stations, factories and companies, who are groaning from the economic collapse and a number of them have begun to lay off their employees.

In this context, Euro News Arabia published an investigative article about the effects of the scarcity of dollars on foreign workers in Lebanon, where more than 250,000 domestic workers live in Lebanon, among them more than 186,000 women hold work permits, the majority of whom come from Asia (Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) and from Africa, specifically Ethiopia.

According to the same news source, this number does not include thousands without work permits. Human rights organizations and the countries from which migrant workers are descended have often denounced their working conditions, as the sponsorship system in Lebanon, according to Amnesty International, gives employers “almost complete control” over the lives of tens of thousands of migrant domestic workers, who are subjected to all forms of exploitation and abuse.

Most workers, especially in the domestic service sector, earn weak salaries ranging between \$ 150 and \$ 400 per month, depending on the nationality of the worker.

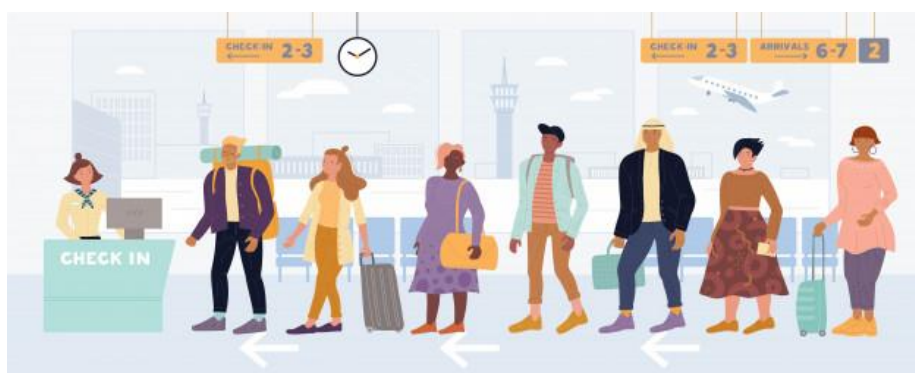
All their salaries have been affected by the scarcity of dollars due to the worst economic crisis in the country's history, especially after the Beirut port explosion, which caused material losses of 6.5 billion US dollars.

A large number of them are unable to obtain their salary in dollars, while transferring it through money change is a losing process due to the decline in the value of the Lebanese pound, and most employers resort to paying the wages of migrant workers in local currency.

Faced with this burdening reality for both the Lebanese and residents alike, domestic workers do not know what their immediate future will hold for them.

As a result, of the crisis, the Philippine Embassy in Beirut decided on December, 5, 2019 to grant free travel tickets to its nationals that were wishing to leave.

The Embassy announced that more than a thousand Filipinos, most of whom are women, accompanied by children, went to its headquarters for registration.



No difference between the status of regular and irregular Asian workers

Numerous reports have indicated that domestic workers in the Arab Middle East countries, most of whom have nationalities from the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, are also subjected to harsh pressures: regular women workers work and reside for the employer, or outside his home, while informal workers leave their places of work.

Regular workers complained about their employers' mistreatment during the crisis, the burden of serving large numbers of family members of their employers, and the length of working hours reaching 16 hours per day. In addition to the fact that they do not enjoy vacations or resting breaks, despite the huge amount of work they perform, especially when it comes to continuous sterilization and cleaning.

As for informal workers, they do not have the means to provide for their daily needs. Tamkeen followed up with more than 600 of them complaining that they are unable to provide for their needs, and 30 mothers of them confirmed their inability to provide for their children's needs, in addition to their inability to pay their housing rents, which exposes them to expulsion.

A report also stated that two domestic workers, one Sri Lankan and the other Filipino, were infected with the Coronavirus, due to their contact with infected persons. They both received health care attention in hospitals.

On the other hand, migrant beauty salon workers sometimes did not receive their wages, part of which covers their support for their families in their countries, and they were unable to pay their housing rents and meet their living needs, because their employers refused to pay them.

In the Equipped Industrial Areas, there was ambiguity prevailing in the reality of the expatriate working force there. Although most workers receive their wages at the beginning of each month, between the fourth and seventh of the month, the problems encountered by workers in complying with the ban multiplied their suffering in securing their essential needs.



These workers live under pressure from the lack of availability of foodstuffs in the vicinity of their places of residence, despite the lifting of the ban between ten in the morning and six in the evening to meet their needs, the rush of citizens for goods deprived the workers of obtaining what they needed. Such conditions also exposed them to the exploitation of some traders, by selling them expired materials, at high prices sometimes.

The conditions of African domestic workers in Lebanon are also described as particularly harsh.

Ethiopian worker Bacallo (made a statement on condition of anonymity to preserve her work), a 25-year-old domestic worker working in Beirut, stated that her employers left her outside the gates of the embassy of Ethiopia, without any explanation, without paying her salary or even handing over her passport.

Bacallo mentioned that many of her countrymen have received similar treatment over the past few months, and as a result of these circumstances, an unknown number of domestic workers opted for suicide.

Despite what the immigrant Bacallo went through, she refused to reveal the names of those who she worked for in the hope that one day after the end of the crisis,

she would regain her job and her entitlements, and she stated that her monthly salary, which does not exceed \$ 300, represented a large part of the money that her family depended on to live in Ethiopia.

In this context, it is worth remembering that the Lebanese economy was in a state of chaos and turmoil even before the emergence of the Coronavirus, which only deepened its severity and precipitated its collapse, due to the decline in the value of the Lebanese pound by 80% against the US dollar.

As a result, it became impossible for the Lebanese to maintain their previous lifestyle, so they began to dispense of their migrant workers in masses.



Jordan: This is how the curfew complicated the situation of expatriate foreign workers

The Tamkeen Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights issued a report explaining the reality facing migrant workers coming to Jordan, and their living conditions for the period between March 18 and April 2, 2020, that is, after the Jordanian government approved a curfew that applies to everyone, including migrant workers of various Arab and Asian nationalities, which caused the suspension of their wages and the deterioration of their social and humanitarian situation.

The Tamkeen Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights monitored the conditions of these workers, through telephone interviews, and contacted them through private social media, which revealed the existence of cases of deportation or administrative detention of migrants.

The report, which was carried out by several media websites, focused on the living conditions of migrant workers, after the suspension of work in public and private facilities,

with the exception of vital sectors, whether they were holders of work permits or violators. The report affirmed the economic impact of the ban on migrant workers and Jordanian workers alike, and in light of the scarcity of solutions aimed at protecting them in these difficult circumstances as well as protecting irregulars and those with flexible work permits.

The Tamkeen Center report revealed that Egyptian migrant workers, who are the largest group of migrant workers in Jordan, were forced to stop work, which led to a decrease in their ability to make ends meet, and to the cessation of their financial transfers to their families in Egypt.

Migrants' families and communities of origin are expected to face severe economic impacts and a decrease in income as a result of the cessation of remittances from migrants, which families around the world rely on to cover their expenses.

For example, a report issued by the World Bank expects migrant remittances to decline by 19.7% to countries with medium to low income levels in 2020. While BBVA Mexico expects a 17% decrease in remittances to Mexico in 2020. The rate has decreased. Annual remittances to Bangladesh increased by 13% in March 2020.

The Tamkeen Center for Legal Aid and Human Rights report stated that an Egyptian worker complained that he did not receive his wages even before the curfew was imposed, stating that his employer invoked his lack of financial liquidity, and immigrant workers in sectors excluded from Prohibition, such as grocery stores, bakeries, gas stations and support services. Two Egyptian workers residing in “Madaba,” one of them without a permit, mentioned that they continued their work in a workshop in the capital, Amman, for a week after the ban was announced, without having enough food and heating. They did not call the emergency number - although they knew it - so that the violator would not be held accountable.

The same center indicated that some migrant workers were put on compulsory unpaid leaves, in order to lift the ban and end the consequences of the Coronavirus crisis and the related procedures, so they were deprived of their wages and their living essentials.

Meanwhile, some employers postponed paying migrants' wages, even before the ban. Migrant workers also complained about the suspension of public transport, which made it difficult for them to reach their work centers, and they were forced to use expensive means of transportation which they could not afford in the first place.

Irregular migrant workers stated that they did not submit complaints to the Ministry of Labor regarding their conditions, for fear of being held accountable for working without permits.



Egypt: What is the fate of 10 million immigrants of “returning workers” from other Arab and Asian countries?

Egypt is the largest country in terms of population in the region, inhabited by about a quarter of the population of the Arab world, and it has recorded one of the highest numbers of Coronavirus infections among Arab countries, according to the Egyptian authorities.

However, the official statistics did not guarantee the accuracy of their data. It seems that the Egyptian regime confirms this plea by its decision to expel some international media outlets correspondents, the ones that published news on this subject.

A leaked document showed that two senior officers in the Egyptian armed forces had died as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, indicating that the virus is more widespread than what was declared. In light of the scarcity of sufficient data, it is difficult to obtain accurate information about the situation of migrant workers in Egypt.

The economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on Egypt is likely to be significant due to the decrease in tourism revenues,

the expected drop in sea transport through the Suez Canal and the dwindling of financial transfers sent by Egyptian immigrants from oil-producing countries, all of which will negatively affect the size of the labor force, raw material as well as food.

It is expected that the Coronavirus will spread rapidly through Egyptian cities, especially in Cairo, due to their high population density. There is also a risk that the pandemic will spread inside the overcrowded Egyptian prisons, where the sanitary conditions are poor.

Official statistics indicate that there are 9.5 million Egyptian migrant workers abroad.

In July 2018, the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics announced in its latest census on Egyptians abroad that the number of expatriates reached 9.5 million, and there is the largest share of employment (Labor force).

Egyptian immigrants in Arab countries is estimated at about 6.2 million people, or 65.8 %, while in European countries there are about 1.25 million Egyptian immigrants, or 44.8 %.

According to the same statistics, there are about 46.900 Egyptians in non-Arab African countries, and about 14.000 Egyptian immigrants residing in Asian countries, 25 percent of them in China, while the number of Egyptian immigrants in the United States is estimated at about one million people.

Egyptian immigrants residing in Arab countries are distributed between Saudi Arabia, which ranks first (2.9 million people, 46.9 %), and Jordan (1.15 million people, or 18.4 %). As for the UAE, there are 765,000 Egyptian immigrants, or 12.3 %.

Egyptian migrant workers abroad, with their financial transfers, significantly contribute to the general Egyptian balance of foreign currency, in addition to relieving the state of the burden of providing new job opportunities.

According to data from the Central Bank of Egypt, remittances from Egyptians working abroad reached about \$ 26.8 billion at the end of 2019, an increase of \$ 1.3 billion from 2018, when remittances amounted to about \$ 25.5 billion.

Unemployment is expected to rise up to 15 %

A study published by “The Independent-Arabia” expected that the value of remittances would decline in the current fiscal year (2020) to \$ 23.3 billion, of which \$ 13.67 billion was already realized during the first half of the year, with the remaining amount of \$ 8.6 billion being realized during the second half of the same year.

The study indicated that this means that the remittances of Egyptian immigrants to their countries will reach about 21.5 billion dollars in 2020. To achieve these figures, the study stipulated that stranded Egyptian workers should not return to their countries, whether it is due to being laid off or not renewing their work contracts abroad.

The study also expected more pressures on the labor market in Egypt, which would raise the unemployment rate to 15 % with the return of Egyptian migrant workers from abroad and the weakness of the Egyptian labor market structure, expecting that the problem will worsen with the return of Egyptian immigrants from the Gulf countries.

The Central Bank of Egypt announced that the balance of its foreign exchange reserves decreased to about \$ 36 billion at the end of May 2020, compared to about \$ 37 billion at the end of April 2020. Thus, the Egyptian reserve of foreign currency declined for the third month in a row to lose about 9.4 billion Dollars over a period of 3 months.

The Egyptian Minister of Manpower, Mohamed Saafan, stated that the COVID-19 crisis and the accompanying preventive measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic caused unemployment to rise by 9.2 % from the end of March 2020 to the end of April 2020. He explained that the ministry will review the plan to reduce unemployment, It planned to reduce unemployment in 2020-2021 from 1 to 1.5 %, to 6.3 % of the workforce.

The Minister also stressed that preparations have been taken by the Ministry at the level of Egyptian directorates and governorates, in order to accommodate Egyptian migrant workers returning to the country due to the repercussions of the Coronavirus crisis, and the crisis of residency violators in a number of countries as well as the organization of special trips to facilitate their return to their country.

The Minister also added that the action plan prepared by his ministry to confront the effects of COVID-19 on Egyptian workers at home and abroad includes the continuation of the ministry's policy of coordination with private sector companies in order to provide job opportunities for the benefit of the youth who would permanently return from abroad in exchange of appropriate wages, in line with their specializations and the needs of employers.

He continued, saying that: "The ministry receives periodic reports from the operations room of labor representation offices in embassies and consulates abroad, about the conditions of our children, in order to solve any problems they may face, and to ensure that they receive their full dues, as well as respond to all their inquiries."



Morocco: Officials' carelessness towards migrants despite their economic value

Professor of Sociology with interest in migration studies, Mahdi Elaiwa, said in a statement to “Euro-News” that about “at least 20.000 immigrants”, most of them from sub-Saharan Africa, are currently “in a situation that calls for urgent humanitarian intervention”, despite the initiatives of solidarity with immigrants in general. This is caused as a result of the forced cessation of practicing simple occupations in most cases or the lack of benefits from social support programs.

The head of the Association “Coalition of Southern Saharan Communities in Morocco”, Osmana Ba, told AFP that, “Those who were practicing trade had to stop their activities due to quarantine without having any financial resources”.

He added, “The situation is more difficult for irregular migrants who live in camps and cannot move, and civil organizations cannot reach them to extend a helping hand due to the quarantine imposed in the Kingdom for weeks ...”

A significant part of the southern desert community in Morocco works in the irregular sector, which accounts for more than 20 % of the Kingdom's gross domestic product. They depend on income for their livelihoods, which could only be obtained from simple occupations such as itinerant trade, guarding cars on the streets, or serving at home, without work contracts or social security.

They are dominated by fear due to the crisis, as they are unable to even obtain daily nutrition, as stated by Professor Mehdi Aliwa, who is also a founding member of the Association for the Anti-Racism Group and Defending the Rights of Foreigners.

In addition to being a transit station, Morocco gradually turned into a country of residence for a number of southern Sahrawi migrants, who have benefited in particular from regularizing the status of 50.000 of them since 2013, most of them from West Africa, while the number of Africans in an irregular situation is estimated at several thousand.

Whether African migrants are in a regular or irregular situation, they all suffer from the problems caused by economic paralysis due to the Coronavirus health crisis, according to what was confirmed by Usmana Ba, head of the Association of Southern Saharan Communities in Morocco.

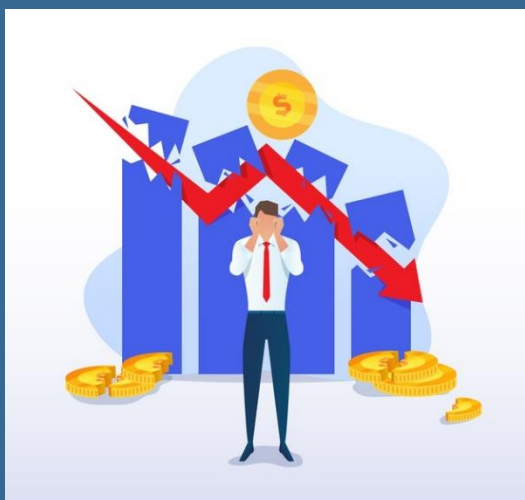
Amy Lukaki, an official with the Southern Sahrawi Migrants Council, explained that they are “at a loss, those who do not have savings are in trouble, while they were managing their affairs before the crisis”.

Morocco imposed a health quarantine since March 20, 2020, which was extended to May 20, 2020, to besiege the COVID-19 pandemic. It stipulates limiting movement except in authorized cases, and under strict supervision. Violators faced prison sentences of one to three months in prison and a fine or either penalty. Morocco has paid monthly financial support to those who are unemployed due to the repercussions of the health crisis in the organized and unorganized sectors, while it has not announced any measures for migrant workers.

Aliwa expressed his regret, saying, “Because no one in the government has discussed their situation despite all that Morocco has done in its migration policy”.

Morocco is expected to face a significant decrease in revenues from foreign currency in 2020, as the High Planning Commission announced in March 2020 that, in addition to the decline in tourism revenues, the global recession would directly affect the remittances of Moroccan immigrants working in the Middle East.

Middle East, Europe, Asia and America, which represent more than 6 % of the Moroccan GDP. This coincides with expectations of a decrease in agricultural production due to the drought that the country has experienced in 2019.



The effects of COVID-19 on the oil-producing countries of the Maghreb

The sharp decline in energy prices at the height of the Coronavirus pandemic represented a major problem that confused the budgets of countries with a rentier economy dependent on the income generated by the sale of oil and gas. This situation affected and continues to have a direct impact not only on the Gulf countries, but also on Algeria and other Maghreb states.

More than a year ago, Algeria witnessed a large-scale of popular protests, publicly known as Hirak, unprecedented in terms of their duration and the civilized position demonstrated by the demonstrators for more than 56 consecutive weeks.

Due to the COVID-19 outbreak, demonstrators decided to halt their popular demonstrations on 20 March 2020. In view of the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in Algeria.

Because this country does not have an effective health system despite the huge financial allocations that it invested in it thanks to the high oil and gas revenues during the era of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika. Indeed, the conditions of this system have greatly deteriorated due to the widespread corruption.

In light of the decrease in fuel revenues and thus the decrease in the country's reserves of hard currency and coinciding with the inflating number of infections with the Coronavirus, President Abdel Majid Tebboune initiated a plan for economic and social recovery, and took a set of reforms aimed at increasing the basic wage for workers as well as exempting low-income workers from taxes.

In spite of these measures, the rotation of the wheel of economic development was halted after it was attracting regular migrant workers.

Deportations of irregular migrants continued, at a time when there was a sudden increase in the number of young people who boarded migration boats on its way to Spanish coasts.

The Middle East: A sudden halt to remittances, and unemployment affects millions of migrants

According to a report that was published by Foreign Policy magazine, Lebanese people used to rely on Ethiopian workers to do housework and tasks such as taking their dogs for a walk or cleaning homes and taking care of children at home. Whereas the oil-rich Gulf states used to employ South Asian immigrants in driving cars, building works and exploring natural underground resources, this group of immigrants often perform tiring sets of work for low wages.

The prolonged suspension of corporate activities and economic stagnation in host countries as a result of the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic have left tens of millions of immigrants in the Middle East unemployed or on unpaid leave, and forced many of them to return to their countries that are already suffering from poverty and high unemployment rates.

Given these data, experts have expressed their fear that this reverse migration will have dire consequences for migrants and their countries of origin, as well as for their host countries.

The same report stated that Asian and African immigrants in the Middle East spend their remittances on what benefits them, such as loans to their relatives to carry out small business projects, to build homes for their elderly parents, and to pay school fees for their children. There is no doubt that their unemployment will have a multiplier effect,

as the decrease in their remittances will lead to a decrease in consumption and the disruption of local enterprises due to difficulties.

In a report issued in April 2020, the World Bank expected that remittances directed to low and middle-income countries will decline by 20% this year, which is sharper than the 5% the world witnessed after the global economic recession of 2009.

It should be noted that migrant workers coming to the Arab Gulf region live in conditions of ambiguity and uncertainty, which is caused by the harsh immigration laws and the continuation of general closures in light of the Corona pandemic. Especially since these host countries are competing to return the largest number of migrants to their countries of origin, in an effort to get rid of the duty to take care of them, as mentioned by human rights organizations. Will Gulf governments fulfill their stated promises to protect migrant workers from severe financial collapses?

Media reports quoted the story of Hassan, a migrant worker from Bangladesh, who works and lives in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. He shares a one-room apartment with 11 other people, and all of them are in quarantine after one of his roommates tested positive for the Coronavirus, after a visit to the hospital after he had a cough and a high temperature.

Hassan recalls that the police came that evening and placed the building under quarantine. Two days later, a doctor came to conduct Coronavirus tests on all residents of the building, and after another three days, Hassan discovered that he and four other of his roommates had tested positive.

“I don’t have any symptoms. Sometimes at night I feel that I have a sore throat, but then I think that my brain is fooling me. What worries me the most is money”, Hassan said in a televised interview over the phone a week after his positive test result.

While he is in quarantine, the government provides him with food supplies, but he is not sure what the circumstances will be once he recovers and is able to return to his apartment, as his company has not indicated when he will resume work or whether he will receive a wage for the days he spent not working.

Hassan is not the only person in this situation, as human rights organizations are concerned that millions of migrant workers in the Gulf will continue to be affected to varying degrees by economic uncertainty as long as host countries implement containment measures to limit the spread of Coronavirus cases in the region without clarifying the status of migrants.



Some expectations do not rule out that the rapidly changing commercial activity as a result of the restrictions caused by the Coronavirus in conjunction with the drop in oil prices, will cause unemployment in the Gulf to rise by 13%, with the possibility that the largest burden will fall on foreigners, since Gulf citizens mainly work in the sector.

“This situation will not only affect blue-collar workers, but also migrant workers of all groups, because they are largely excluded from government programs”, said Ramia Klush, director of Majority Rights.

For example, Emirates Airlines has made the UAE a global center for travel and employment, but with the suspension of flights and limiting them to basic transportation only - in the near future at least - the company was forced to lay off thousands of migrant workers to save money by avoiding losses.

A Dubai-based Indian flight attendant, who was among those laid off from Emirates Airlines, stated that he is struggling to secure his rent while his retired parents and sick sister in his native country India await the monthly salary he was sending them. He said in this regard, “Emirates Airlines is a global company that makes profits, and we are the ones who made it profitable, but they kicked us out, it was tough on us.”



Armed conflicts put a class of migrants out of all accounts

War-affected countries face a difficult situation in monitoring who enters and leaves their territories. Researchers believe that the Coronavirus is the biggest challenge in these countries that suffer from weak health systems. Scientists believe that following the methods of preventing the virus is the best way to control it, despite the fact that it cannot be applied in some camps due to pollution and overcrowding.

Fear is increasing in countries such as Lebanon and Iraq, in which the number of refugees cannot be counted as well as the number of domestic workers. At the same time, they do not have a strong health system because of conflicts and political negligence. There is no way to continuously follow the development of conditions in order to provide a strong response to public health needs.

About a million people have fled Syria towards the Turkish border due to the ongoing conflict in Syria, and these people are suffering from humanitarian crises that have exacerbated after the spread of the Coronavirus, despite the aid efforts they receive.

Researchers believe that the outbreak of the Coronavirus in northwestern Syria will be a disaster, as the displaced live without shelter or in crowded camps that lack clean water.

On the other hand, the United Nations Migration Agency recently launched a pandemic response plan focusing on migrants as part of its preparedness programs to counter the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jacqueline Wickers, Director of Migration Health at IOM, stated that it is essential to issue awareness messages in different languages in order to reach out to different migrants and refugees, and she stressed that it is important to ensure that people can report any symptoms they suffer from without fear of arrest or deportation.

Public health experts are also urging the international community to pay more attention to the causes that may lead to COVID-19 infections among refugees and migrants.

However, some researchers believe that the main reason for the outbreak of the virus in the Middle East is the state of international indifference towards these individuals, and that the reason for the deterioration of the health of refugees is due to the decrease in humanitarian support and the decline in political interest from Europe, the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

So far, there has been no frank discussion about how the Coronavirus affects refugees and migrants, and about the measures that should be taken during the outbreak.

HRW: COVID-19 exposed decades of systemic racial discrimination

By the end of July 2020, the number of cases of COVID-19 in the Gulf countries had already exceeded 20,000 cases and 150 deaths, after countries continued their ban on most passenger flights and extended internal closures and curfews to contain the increasing number of cases.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) researcher Heba Zayadin said that: “This pandemic has exposed decades of systematic racial discrimination and the depth of suffering of migrant workers who have long faced exploitation and abuse under the various sponsorship systems in the Arab Gulf states”.

The number of infections has dramatically increased in the Gulf states. Although the official authorities have published little information about the extent of the particular impact of the pandemic on migrant workers, some data indicated that many facilities housing expatriates throughout the region, such as the “largest labor camp” in the State of Qatar, have been subject to closures.

Many companies whose employees are mainly migrant workers have imposed quarantine on their employees after the confirmation of positive test results among them.

Several Gulf countries have also announced that they will work to develop policies to alleviate the increasing financial hardship that migrant workers will face because of this pandemic.

For example, the UAE required all companies to provide housing for laid-off workers until they are able to leave the country or find another job. For its part, the State of Qatar announced that it will cover the wages of all migrant workers who are in quarantine.

“But once again, groups like ours have revealed problems in implementing and the announced reforms, problems that often stem from the sponsorship system that governs migrant workers themselves. I don’t know why and how, now and during this unprecedented crisis, we can trust these governments to properly implement the measures announced to protect migrant workers from the financial collapse”, said HRW’s Zayadin.

Ambiguity regarding financial security remains a common concern of migrant workers across the region.

New wave of refugees with the exacerbation of the COVID-19 pandemic in the Middle East and Africa

The exacerbating economic crises and the specter of famine in poorer countries may lead to an increase in migration influx towards Britain and other European countries instead of Asia.

European countries may witness a new wave of asylum seekers in case the Coronavirus continues to spread further in poorer countries, according to a report by the European Asylum Agency.

Another report issued by the European Refugee Support Office (EASO) stated that the possibility of the return of ISIS, and the specter of severe economic crises and famines in developing countries, all of these are factors that may increase the number of refugees to Britain and other European countries.

The COVID-19 may “devastate” developing countries that lack resources, where there are not enough hospital beds and doctors available to cater to the size of the population. In addition to its overcrowded and hand-washing facilities that are difficult to access.

The same report states that these factors, coupled with the possibility of food scarcity and the manifestations of security deterioration in the event of an outbreak of the Coronavirus, may increase the number of asylum seekers to Europe in the upcoming years.

Moreover, difficulties in implementing social control measures on a large scale, in regimes of high coercive power and authoritarian nature, the economic cost of the severe restrictions imposed by Arab governments may be prohibitive, and societies may not be able to bear with it.

In the most difficult cases, those faced by irregular migrant workers in Arab countries, refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing security crises, who live in camps or housing without the minimum conditions of hygiene and health, the human cost could be overwhelming if the pandemic would affect them due to their lack of access to the right to treatment and health care.

Namely, in such circumstances in which many Arab governments live under the pressure of their people due to the absence of treatment, the weakness of the health care system, or the exceeding absorption capacity of hospitals designated to counter COVID-19 in case an effective vaccine against COVID-19 is not provided.

Health studies predict that many areas will turn into new foci of the virus, which puts them in front of the inevitability of a new isolation, in which movement will stop.



Global inequality worsens: The world's 22 richest men have more wealth than all women in Africa

Numerous studies reported that global inequality reached its highest levels in history in January 2020, as it showed that 2,153 people own more wealth than the wealth of the poorest 4.6 billion people in the world, and that the richest 22 men in the world have more wealth than all women in Africa. Global inequality is likely to increase in the medium and longer term, in part due to the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on migration.

On the other hand, countries such as the Philippines, Bangladesh, Ghana and Honduras heavily depend on remittances from their citizens working abroad.

In 2018, countries moving on the path of growth that exported migrants in total received foreign remittances amounting to about \$ 529 billion, equivalent to 75% of total foreign direct investment inflows received in the same year.

Writer Errol Yebok, deputy director of the Center for Strategic and International Studies and a senior researcher in the Prosperity and Development Project, believes that if migrant workers abroad are greatly disrupted due to the economic shocks resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the sources of income for their families around the world will be affected in the path of growth. It leads to multiplier effects on all economies in the world, which may widen the gap between the wealthiest countries and the poorest countries such as Africa and parts of Asia as well as the Arab region.

Yebok noted that many migrant workers - especially those with low skills - do not have the option to work at home, as they have to move to the workplace, which exposes them to the risk of contracting and spreading the Coronavirus, in addition to being exposed to more dangers because many of them do not get adequate and financially accessible healthcare.

For example, Iranian hospitals are refusing to treat Afghan migrants, which has led to many of them returning to their country that has shattered health infrastructure after decades of armed conflict.

What comes after Corona?

Reopening international borders after the pandemic could lead to “massive” waves of migration

Initial expectations indicate that the Coronavirus pandemic, which will have devastating economic effects described as “massive” new waves of migration, as soon as the borders between countries are opened after the quarantine imposed for months has been lifted, as the Secretary-General of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies Jagan Chapagin warned That “the despair resulting from this situation may have far-reaching consequences ... that may cause new waves of immigration as soon as the borders between countries are opened ...”

In a press interview, Chapagin expressed his deep concern about the secondary effects of the pandemic.

“We are increasingly seeing the impacts on jobs and the nutritional situation in many countries”, he said in the same speech he gave at the federation headquarters in Geneva in late June 2020.

Chapagin also considered that many immigrants face a risky choice between exposure to Coronavirus and starvation.

He warned that the despair resulting from this situation could have far-reaching consequences.

“What we are hearing is that a lot of people who lose their jobs will feel compelled to act as soon as the borders start opening”, he added.

“We should not be surprised if there is a significant impact on migration in the upcoming months and years...,” he said in a statement to Agence France-Presse (AFP).

The quarantine measures and the closure of the borders imposed to stop the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in the cancellation of many jobs and businesses in various parts of the world, and it is expected that it will push more and more millions of people below the poverty line.

He also expected that migration imposed on people due to conditions of despair would lead to many “tragedies” such as drowning in the sea, human trafficking and exploitation.

Chapagain called for urgent support to help “alleviate this despair”, noting that in addition to the moral imperative to help those in need, there are clear economic reasons to help avoid forced migration. “The cost of supporting migrants during transit and of course when they reach the destination country, is much more than supporting people with their livelihood, education and health needs in their country”, he said.

Chabagain, a figure from Nepal, who has been active in the humanitarian field, and who took over the General Secretariat of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in February 2020, expressed his concern that inequality in health care in the face of the pandemic may also stimulate migration.

“People can feel that there are better chances of survival on the other side of the sea”, he said, adding that the other major factor would be the availability of vaccines.

Changing the migration map towards places where a vaccine is available for COVID-19.

WHO has led a reassuring campaign that any vaccine that would be developed for COVID-19 would be considered a “global public good”, and thus will be provided in an equitable manner in all countries of the world.

However, the United States of America or the other countries that are racing to secure stocks of promising vaccines, and many fear that these rich countries will be able to access these vaccines first and monopolize them.

“If people see that the vaccine, for example, is available in Europe and not in Africa, then what will happen? People will rush to go to the place where the vaccines are available”, said Chapagain.

This would mean that the availability of the COVID-19 vaccine in some regions but not others will redraw a new migration map,

due to the availability of a healthy and safe environment for work and stability, even if was temporary.

The COVID-19 pandemic has prompted unprecedented campaigns to raise funds and conduct research in order to quickly discover a vaccine that can protect billions of people around the world from this virus.

More than 20 anti-Coronavirus vaccines are currently being tested on humans. However, despite indications that a safe and effective vaccine can be discovered by the end of 2020, it will take some time to produce sufficient quantities of it.

In this context, Chapagain condemned the efforts made in some countries to secure vaccines for their people first.

He said: “The virus is cross-border, so the fact that someone is thinking about vaccinating his/her own people, leaving other peoples without a vaccine and continues to feel safe, is largely indicative of myopia ... This is simply not logical at all ...”

Five main methods that would change the features of migration due to COVID-19

The Center for Strategic and International Studies published an article by Errol Yebok, deputy director of the center and chief researcher of the Center's Prosperity and Development Project, entitled: "Five ways in which the COVID-19 will alter global migration," confirming that the disorders associated with the Coronavirus are likely to have long-term effects on the features of global migration in five basic ways.

The writer considered that the migrant workforce represents the engine of the globalized economy. It is not excluded that permits will be granted to the owners of major professions, such as scientists, doctors, journalists, and government officials, while those who travel for work may not be able to obtain these licenses in the near future.

This will have noticeable effects on the family and the economy, and perhaps on food security. Migrant workers abroad may not currently be able to return to their home countries.

In response to current and future quarantines or "stay-at-home" orders, companies will likely also accelerate the development of their ability to use automatic devices, thereby eliminating some of the jobs often held more quickly by immigrants.

Demobilization of migrant workers with temporary visas

Furthermore, it is expected that the layoffs of some employees due to the spread of the Coronavirus will be concentrated among migrant workers in most industries, because many of these hold temporary visas.

For example, New Zealand has about 190,000 people on temporary visas; They will face difficult choices when dispensed. They either need to obtain another job, or secure a different type of visa, otherwise they will have to face the choice of returning to their home countries to meet greater economic hardship.

When jobs become available after the end of the Coronavirus crisis, the writer expects that the governments of New Zealand, the United States and many other countries will undoubtedly encourage companies to employ citizens, which will have lasting effects on migrant workers, their families and their societies.

Permanently closing the door to immigrants due to politicians' position on migration.

Anti-immigration politicians have achieved electoral success in several regions of the world in recent years.

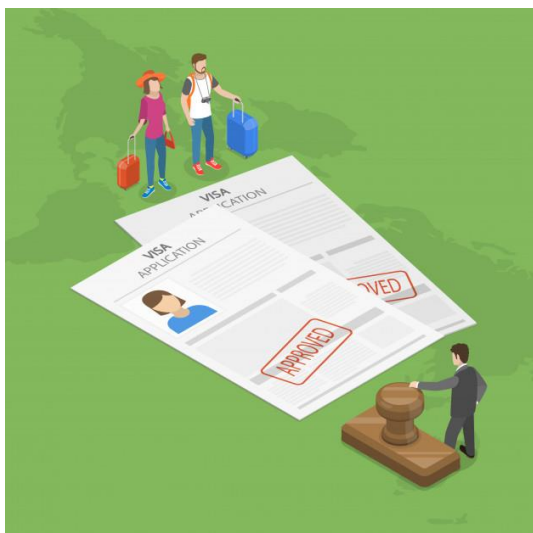
The COVID-19 pandemic has forced countries of the world to tighten travel restrictions and medical tests required of immigrants.

If most of these measures are designed to be temporary, it is not difficult to imagine Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban, for example, or others who are notorious for their hostility towards foreigners and immigrants, would continue to apply these measures to keep Hungary's borders physically closed in the face of migrants, out of fear of a second or third wave of COVID-19 outbreak or other potential pandemics.

The author notes that although a number of migration avenues will reopen after the Coronavirus threat disappears, some political leaders such as Viktor Orban will see the current immigration restrictions as an opportunity to advance broader and longer-term agendas based on xenophobia and immigration.

As the number of deaths inevitably rises in the coming days and weeks, these leaders will gain increasing public support for tight, short-term immigration restrictions.

The writer also believes that - in this context – “what the public does not realize is that it will not be easy to reopen the door to the flow of migrants once it is closed”.



The suffering of forcibly displaced people

Writer Errol Yebok asserts that refugees, irregular migrant workers, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons, most of whom are Arabs, Africans and Asians, will suffer from fewer mobility options than before.

In Italy, for instance, asylum seekers who recently arrived via Libya faced mandatory quarantine for two weeks, and fewer, if not non-existent, integration services even after the expiration of the 14-days quarantine period due to the mandatory restrictions imposed by the state on operational workers.

If migrants who come to Italy via Libya are seen as bringing the Coronavirus with them, then European public opinion from Sicily to Sweden will undoubtedly toughen in ways that will not disappear soon.

Writer Errol Yebok expects that some traffic lanes will reopen as soon as possible, as its complete shut down for a long period should have bad repercussions in the long run.

On the other hand, Colombia has halved services to respond to the needs of immigrants in Venezuela, despite the increase in those needs. For their part, the migration and refugee agencies of the United Nations Organization decided to stop globally resettling refugees due to fears caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the one hand, these and other constraints that are necessary in the short term mean that forcibly displaced people and vulnerable migrants who often live in overcrowded camps and in crowded urban areas with poor access to quality healthcare will be at increased risk.

This risk will be concentrated, especially in developing countries, where 84% of refugees and 99% of internally displaced people reside in areas that are newly hit by the virus. Thus, when the virus spreads throughout sub-Saharan Africa and the rest of the world's developing countries, it is almost certain that forced migrants will be at greater risk, as a result of a lack of testing capabilities and a lack of awareness.

Additionally, the majority of forced migrants are internally displaced, so the ban on movement paths means that these people will be stuck in or near the dangerous places that forced them to leave their homes in the first place. This can create opportunities for non-state actors to exploit their grievances against governments.



Increasing irregular migration

Errol Yebok confirms, that there is increasing evidence that restrictions imposed on regular, safe, and harmonious migration are pushing vulnerable people - some 100 million people worldwide - to pursue mysterious, irregular paths to illegal migration, in order to avoid any harm in their countries.

With the emergence and spread of the Coronavirus, the number of regular means of migration is now less than it was two months before the outbreak of the pandemic.

As a result of all this, the economic impacts, inequality, pandemic policies, and the effects of displacement will all add to the desperation of migrants.

In such a scenario, those who feel compelled to move will increasingly recourse to smugglers, traffickers and other illegal groups.

Migration will increase within developing countries and between these countries with weak health systems, especially in Africa and the Arab region.

Irregular migrants will also travel to close places with other people, and will cross international borders without documents or health checks, which will expose them, the colleagues they are traveling with and anyone on their way to great danger.

In light of the previously-mentioned expected five impacts, the writer Errol Yebok calls for controlling restrictions on human mobility in the short term, accompanied by a consideration of their long-term repercussions, in order to protect people who are currently unable to work from permanently losing their jobs.



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