

**FORUM:** Human Rights Council (HRC)

**QUESTION OF:** Infringement of human rights during an epidemic crisis

**STUDENT OFFICER:** Béla Dunn

**POSITION:** Deputy Chair

## INTRODUCTION

*“Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.”*

-Definition of Human Rights by the UN

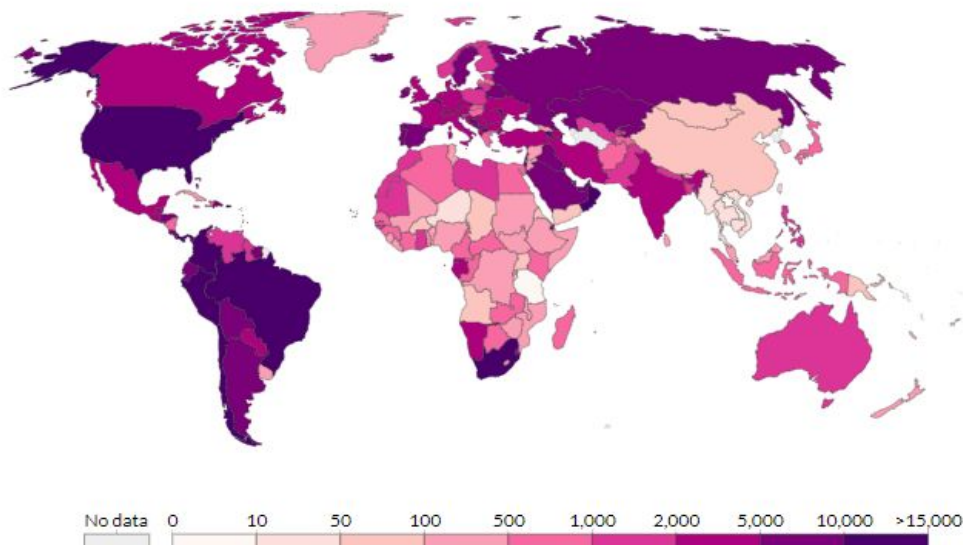
On the 12th of January 2020, China publicly shared the genetic sequence of COVID-19. What started to seem like the simple flu, later became a dangerous virus infecting 24,6 million people and killing more than 800.000. And the numbers are still rising to this very day. As a response to this rapidly increasing number of infected, countries started to quarantine, which greatly awoke a lot of protests around the world.

Governments all around the world are trying to obtain the safety of millions of people, by either forcing people to quarantine or to even commit to a full lockdown. While some of these measures have been eased in many countries, numerous restrictions are still in place.

This has generated a lot of criticism from several organizations, one of the most famous of which is Amnesty International. "More than 80 countries have declared states of emergency and there are growing reports of human rights abuses around the globe," said Joanne Lin, AIUSA's national director of advocacy and government affairs. "Some world leaders are taking advantage of contagion in order to crack down on civilians in ways previously not seen pre-COVID-19."

### Total confirmed COVID-19 cases per million people, Aug 30, 2020

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of total cases. The main reason for this is limited testing.



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Media reports alleged unlawful use of force by police in Italy while enforcing the COVID-19 lockdown measures. For example, on 14 April 2020, several police officers in Catania (southern Italy) tackled a man to the ground by hitting him with batons, after he tried to board a bus. In a video verified by Amnesty International the man did not appear to constitute a threat to law enforcement officials. According to media reports the man was suffering from poor mental health and the bus driver called an ambulance as one of his hands was bleeding. On the morning of 25 April, Italy's National Liberation Day, police stopped a group of around 10 people in Crescenzago (Milan region) on their way to a monument commemorating Second World War anti-fascist partisans. A video filmed by local residents and subsequently published online shows around 10 law enforcement officials appearing to use disproportionate force against some members of the group. An older man on a bike was pushed to the ground, a woman was hit in the face with an elbow and another woman was pushed and fell to the ground. Due to such behavior coming from the police, because of the pandemic, many people are concerned that the government will abuse its power to suppress their people.

Sweden has largely relied on voluntary social distancing guidelines since the start of the pandemic, including working from home where possible and avoiding public transport. There's also been a ban on gatherings of more than 50 people, restrictions on visiting care homes, and a shift to table-only service in bars and restaurants. The government has repeatedly described the pandemic as "a marathon not a sprint", arguing that its measures are designed to last in the long term. Critics state that these measures are not strict enough and are endangering human lives, but they also state that by handling the pandemic human rights are hurt in no way.

The Chinese government has engaged in wide-ranging efforts to suppress information about the coronavirus and the dangers it posed to public health. In late December 2019, doctors in Wuhan shared with colleagues their fears about patients with symptoms similar to the severe acute respiratory syndrome (COVID-19) outbreak that began in southern China in 2002. They were immediately silenced and punished by the local authorities for "spreading rumours." The Wuhan medical system is now overwhelmed, and medical facilities and health professionals are struggling to cope with the scale of the outbreak. Many patients are being turned away from hospitals after hours of queueing. Facilities do not have access to the necessary diagnostic tests. "China must ensure that all people affected by the coronavirus have access to adequate health care, in Wuhan and elsewhere. Containing the epidemic is important, but so is prevention and treatment – which is why the right to health should be an integral part of the response," said Nicholas Bequelin the Director at Amnesty International.

The right to health, as guaranteed under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, provides for the right to access healthcare, the right to access information, the prohibition of discrimination in the provision of medical services, the freedom from non-consensual medical treatment and other important guarantees.

The suffering of minorities is also an important topic to discuss.

The LGBTQ-Community has made many losses since the pandemic started.

Transsexuals are particularly badly affected by the negative effects of the Covid-19 precautionary measures: Consultations and group meetings are omitted, therapies and procedures for changing first names or personal status are suspended, and gender reassignment operations are postponed. In the United Kingdom, sexually active gay and bisexual men were restricted from donating plasma for a National Health Service's (NHS) coronavirus research trial. This is because the research trial followed the same rules as the existing blood donor rules.

More than a hundred pride events were postponed or canceled, including Pride in London, Leeds Pride, Brighton Pride and the national UK Pride event which was to take place in Newcastle upon Tyne. Other pride events, including Bristol Pride, announced that their events were to be online-only.

Early data of the Covid-19 crisis, broken down by race, is alarming.

In the US, in Chicago, as of early April 2020, 72% of people who died of coronavirus were black, although only one-third of the city's population is. In Georgia, as of 17 April, white people accounted for 40% of Covid-19 cases where race was reported, although they represent 58% of the state. In the UK, of the first 2,249 patients with confirmed Covid-19, 35% were non-white. This is much higher than the proportion of non-white people in England and Wales – 14%, according to the most recent census.

The psychosocial and medical care of mentally ill people is impaired. Likewise, homeless people, people with previous illnesses, people with restricted mobility, refugees and older people, etc. U. severely affected. This can be very stressful and have a major impact on mental health.

Employees are also having a hard time in these times.

As a result of the corona pandemic, employers and employees are confronted with numerous

questions. For example, there could be temporary company closings, the workload suffers in many places from a significant drop in demand and disruptions in the supply chains. Employees could

also be confronted with an order for quarantine at home or an inability to work due to childcare.

People in precarious employment are hardest hit by the pandemic, which is already having a massive impact on people and the economy. Governments must ensure that anyone unable to work due to the virus has access to social security - including sickness benefits, health care, and parental leave - these measures are also essential in order for people to adhere to the public health precautions that are being taken by each country.

## **DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS**

### **- COVID-19**

Coronavirus disease is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus.

Most people infected with the COVID-19 virus will experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring special treatment. Older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness.

### **- Lockdown**

A lockdown is a requirement for people to stay where they are, usually due to specific risks to themselves or others if they can move freely.

In our context: Being forced to follow the stay-at-home order, in which you are not allowed to leave your house unless having an important excuse.

### **- Infringement of human rights**

An infringement of economic, social and cultural rights occurs when a State fails in its obligations to ensure that they are enjoyed without discrimination or in its obligation to respect, protect and fulfill them. Often an infringement of one of the rights is linked to an infringement of other rights.

## **- Pride**

Confidence, self-respect, and solidarity as expressed by LGBTQ people, associated with openness about one's own sexual identity, and the celebration of LGBTQ culture and history.

## **IMPORTANT COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED**

### **Amnesty International**

Amnesty International is a non-governmental, non-profit organization that campaigns for human rights worldwide.

### **United States Of America (U.S.A)**

(5.8mil confirmed cases and 179k deaths)

Primarily affected by COVID-19 and also leading researching country regarding COVID-19. Strongly against any further restriction regarding the pandemic.

### **Republic of China**

(90k confirmed cases and 4.7k deaths)

The first country to be affected by COVID-19 and also second-leading researching country regarding COVID-19.

### **The Russian Federation**

(985k confirmed cases and 17k deaths)

Strongly affected by COVID-19 and claiming that it has an allegedly found a cure against COVID-19, which has not been approved yet.

### **The Federal Republic of Germany**

(243k confirmed cases and 9k deaths)

Most anti-COVID-19 protests one of the leading countries regarding COVID-19 research.

## **RELEVANT UN TREATIES AND EVENTS**

Anti-COVID19 Demo Berlin (1.8.2020 / 28.8.2020)

Multiple protests in the U.S.A (5-8.2020)

## **QUESTIONS DELEGATES SHOULD CONSIDER**

1. How is your country involved in the conflict?
2. In what way is your country affected by COVID-19
3. Is your country directly struggling due to the pandemic?
4. What are your countries laws on COVID-19?

5. How has your country fought epidemics in the past?

**USEFUL LINK/SOURCES:**

1. WHO Timeline – COVID-19

<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/27-04-2020-who-timeline---covid-19>

2. WHO Stats – COVID-19

[https://covid19.who.int/?gclid=Cj0KCOjw-af6BRC5ARIsAALPIIV6l6B5Bcfe4OS08qnveSUfXIMVJitywvJ9TgFBzk79ENgyNWfBPYIaAiwWEALw\\_wcB](https://covid19.who.int/?gclid=Cj0KCOjw-af6BRC5ARIsAALPIIV6l6B5Bcfe4OS08qnveSUfXIMVJitywvJ9TgFBzk79ENgyNWfBPYIaAiwWEALw_wcB)

3. Country & Technical Guidance - Coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/technical-guidance>

4. Wikipedia “Human rights issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human\\_rights\\_issues\\_related\\_to\\_the\\_COVID-19\\_pandemic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_rights_issues_related_to_the_COVID-19_pandemic)

5. Amnesty International - Explainer: Seven ways the coronavirus affects human rights

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/02/explainer-seven-ways-the-coronavirus-affects-human-rights/>