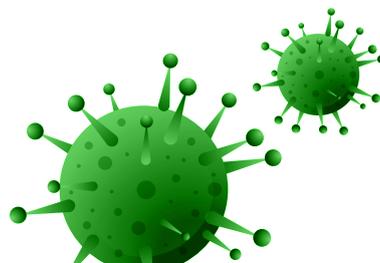


# IMPACT AND RESILIENCE IN COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A STUDY OF THE  
DWD COMMUNITIES  
IN PAKISTAN



Asia Dalit Rights Forum





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## **ABOUT ASIA DALIT RIGHTS FORUM**

Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF) is a platform of Dalits, and those working with Dalits in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka committed to the empowerment and emancipation of communities subjected to descent and work-based (caste-based) discrimination and violence (DWD&V). ADRF aims at addressing violations of the rights and entitlements of these communities, in particular their women and children, in the respective countries as well as worldwide. It focuses on supporting all the communities subjected to DWD&V and systemic discrimination in any part of the world in their noble aspirations and courageous struggles to establish an inclusive society that is marked by equity and equality, dignity and self-governance, justice, and freedom. ADRF is committed to collaborating with all national, regional, and international agencies- civil society organisations and human rights agencies, UN bodies, and state institutions espousing the cause of eliminating DWD and building an inclusive, peaceful and egalitarian society in Asia and elsewhere in the world.

## **ABOUT PAKISTAN DALIT SOLIDARITY NETWORK**

The Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network is a network consisting of over 20 civil society organizations. It was formally launched on 5th April 2009 after a research study conducted in 2007, which identified serious violation of basic rights of Scheduled Castes (Dalits in Pakistan), and specifically in Karachi, Sindh province of Pakistan. The main objectives of the network are to highlight the issue of Scheduled Castes through national and international advocacy.

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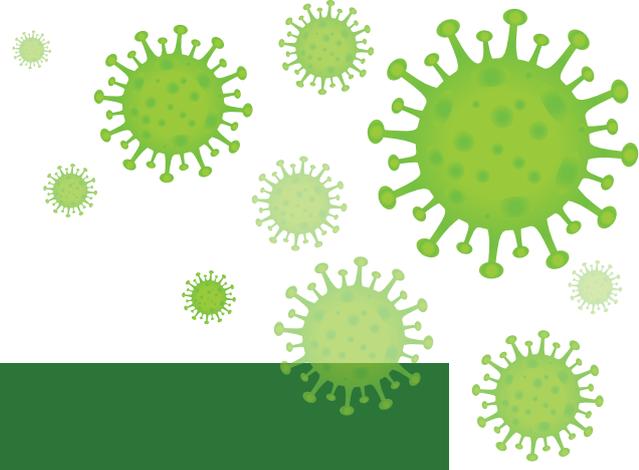
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# INTRODUCTION

The Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network (PDSN) has conducted this study on behalf of Asia Dalit Rights Forum (ADRF). PDSN is a coalition of over two dozen rights-based civil society organizations in Pakistan. It was formally launched in 2009 after research study in 2007, which identified serious violations of basic rights of scheduled castes in Pakistan. The main objective of the network is to highlight the issue of scheduled castes through national and international advocacy.

Like other South Asian countries, those Discriminated-based on Work and Descent (DWD) in Pakistan have also suffered a lot due to spread of pandemic Coronavirus (COVID-19). As with the rest of the world, Pakistan has also been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic and a prolonged lockdown created a lot of problems for the common people, especially daily-wage earning workers. According to the Pakistan government's estimates, the country has suffered an economic loss of up to PKR 2.5 trillion because of the COVID-19 pandemic in the current fiscal year. Initial official figures projected that around three million jobs would be lost in the "initial round" of the pandemic outbreak.<sup>1</sup>

Majority of those affected were employed with informal sector. Though the PBS survey did not provide detailed disaggregated data, since majority of Dalit and marginalized population earn their livelihood from informal sectors, so these communities are obviously affected.

Pakistan is a Muslim dominated country (96.2 percent of total population), where a small portion of population (1.6 percent) belong to other religions like Jati Hindus, lower-caste or scheduled caste Hindus, Christians, Sikhs, Parsi and Ahmadis. Scheduled caste Hindus and Christians are primarily considered as the Discriminated based on Work and Descent (DWD) communities, whereas a portion of Muslims associated with certain professions and crafts making are also considered as DWDs.

This section of the society is vulnerable to economic and social upheavals, and natural calamities; with most of its members facing discrimination and exclusion due to their professions and "lower" status in the society. This misery has only multiplied during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lack of health facilities and absence of any social

<sup>1</sup> Daily Dawn, *The Impact of COVID-19: How Pakistani Workers are Living with the New Reality*, 12 June 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1560876>

*they face discrimination in the society because of their customary occupation-based identity, which are primarily manual jobs.*



protection scheme provided by the State has further increased their vulnerabilities. This report provides an overview of the plight of DWD communities during COVID-19.

## Who are the DWD communities in Pakistan?

The communities Discriminated-based on Work and Descent (DWD) are widely known as Scheduled Caste (low caste) Hindus or Dalit communities in Pakistan. A section of the Christian faith, who are working as janitors or sanitary workers

are also considered as DWD communities in Pakistan. A section within Muslims such as fishermen and castes such as Machi, Khaskheli etc. and those newly converted known as Shaikh Musali can also be described part of DWD communities.

The DWD communities are present in all the four provinces in Pakistan – Punjab, Sindh, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. However, their concentration is mostly in two provinces, Punjab and Sindh. Most of these communities are associated with agricultural work which they have been doing for decades. They are also engaged in other professions like making metal tools (blacksmiths), constructions of buildings and roads and selling fruits and vegetables in markets. Ma-

majority of brick kiln workers also come from these communities.

Moreover, they face discrimination in the society because of their customary occupation-based identity, which are primarily manual jobs.

According to the last Census in 2017, out of total 208 million population, there were 0.25 percent (520,000) scheduled caste Hindus and 1.59 (3.3 million) Christians in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> The detailed data of the religious minorities have still not been released by Government of Pakistan.

The previous Census held in 1998, had estimated that the Dalit population in Pakistan was 330,000 people, which did not include 'lower castes' within the Muslim community, living under similarly depressed conditions.<sup>3</sup>

However, Dalit rights activist opined that their number in census is under counted due to various reasons including faulty census process, remote residences of Dalits and discriminatory attitude of those conducting census. They believe that actual number of Dalits in Pakistan is between 3-5 million .<sup>4</sup>

Majority of religious minorities in Pakistan complain about discrimination on the basis of religion. Scheduled Castes or Dalits suffer double the discrimination as opposed to their Hindu Jati or Christian fellows. In addition to the discrimination based on religion, Dalits suffer caste-based discrimination within their faith (i.e. Hindusim),

including the practice of 'untouchability', which is obvious in all spheres of private and public life. It is evident from the fact that Scheduled Castes often live in separate colonies, are served food in separate crockery and not allowed to sit inside with upper castes.

Though the practice is on decline, there are packets particularly in rural areas where Dalits at public places such as restaurants are served in separate Utensils.

## Prevalence of COVID-19 in Pakistan

Two Pakistani nationals who had returned from Iran were the first documented cases of Coronavirus (COVID-19) in Pakistan, confirmed by government officials on February 26, 2020. Before that many Pakistanis living abroad were reportedly infected of the virus.<sup>5</sup>

It was followed by a gradual increase in positive testing and a rising number of deaths. The country recorded 54,000 new cases and 1100 deaths in the month of May 2020 alone. The numbers peaked during May-July but then started declining as a result of strict implementation of lockdowns SOPs and other measures taken by the federal government and particularly by the Sindh provincial government, which was the first province to impose lockdown (on 23 March 2020) and took other strict measures to curtail the spread of the virus.

<sup>2</sup> Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, *Population by Religion*, available at: <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//tables/POPULATION%20BY%20RELIGION.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, *Long Behind Schedule: A Study on the Plight of Scheduled Castes in Pakistan*, 2008, available at: [http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user\\_folder/pdf/Old\\_files/asia/pdf/RR\\_Pakistan.pdf](http://idsn.org/fileadmin/user_folder/pdf/Old_files/asia/pdf/RR_Pakistan.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Surender Valasai, Member of the Provincial Assembly in Sindh and Radha Bheel, President Dalit Sujag Tahreek, in personal interviews and as their public positions.

<sup>5</sup> Dawn News, *Pakistan confirms first two cases of coronavirus, govt says 'no need to panic'*, 26 February 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1536792>

At one point, positive testing ratio came down to two percent. This helped the government lift the lockdown and ease other restrictions. Life started returning to normal with the opening of educational institutions and businesses in August 2020.

However, the respite from the virus was short-lived as the country caught up in a second wave of the pandemic with the arrival of winter in October. The graph of virus infections started going up again. The experts and government officials have termed the second wave more dangerous than the first one.

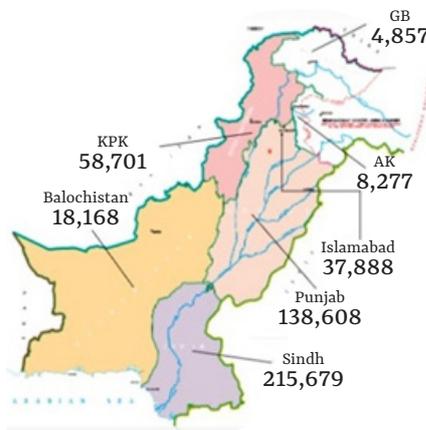
By the end of December 2020, the country already had 482,000 confirmed cases against over 6 million tests conducted. The deadly virus has taken the lives of over 10,000 people and several

hundreds were in critical conditions in hospitals.

The province of Sindh, particularly the megacity of Karachi, is the worst affected. Of the total positive cases in the country, almost half are recorded in Sindh with the majority of cases being reported in Karachi city.

Both the health crisis and economic fall-out of the measures taken to curtail the spread of virus have negatively impacted the life and livelihoods of millions of people particularly marginalized sections of the society and those working in the informal sector.

Though the country remained in the grip of the second wave of the pandemic, the government has decided to allow all economic activities with a condition to follow certain SOPs.



	CONFIRMED CASES	ACTIVE CASES	DEATHS	RECOVERIES
AJK	9,050	382	264	8,404
Balochistan	18,830	137	196	18,497
GB	4,909	19	102	1,788
Islamabad	41,493	1,342	475	39,676
KPK	67,416	2,970	1,912	62,537
Punjab	158,220	9,775	4,793	143,652
Sindh	247,727	18,740	4,004	224,983

(Source: <https://covid.gov.pk/stats/pakistan> (as of 31. 12. 2020))

## Key challenges for DWD communities due to COVID-19 vis-à-vis other communities

The DWD communities in Pakistan live in abject poverty in rural areas or in suburbs in cities, with very little livelihood opportunities and social protection. A majority of them are working in the agriculture sector, or doing manual work in urban centres, where they are devoid of any state support as they are not included in the definition of “labour” under the laws.

The agriculture workers in Pakistan are considered as informal workers so they are not registered under any social security schemes that are available to the registered industrial workers. Another chunk of the DWD communities find livelihood in exploitative sectors of employment such as brick kilns and often end up as bonded labourers.

In natural calamities like floods, heavy rains and earthquakes, the DWD communities suffer heavy losses and poverty in absence of any state support. Due to abject poverty, individuals in this community are unable to own a piece of land for tilling or to earn a living. Therefore, they are often hired on share-cropping basis or are daily wages earners, which is very meagre. Moreover, the landlords do not provide any social protection to their workers or their families.

The entire family comprising male and female members and children have to work from dawn to dusk in the fields and they have to take care

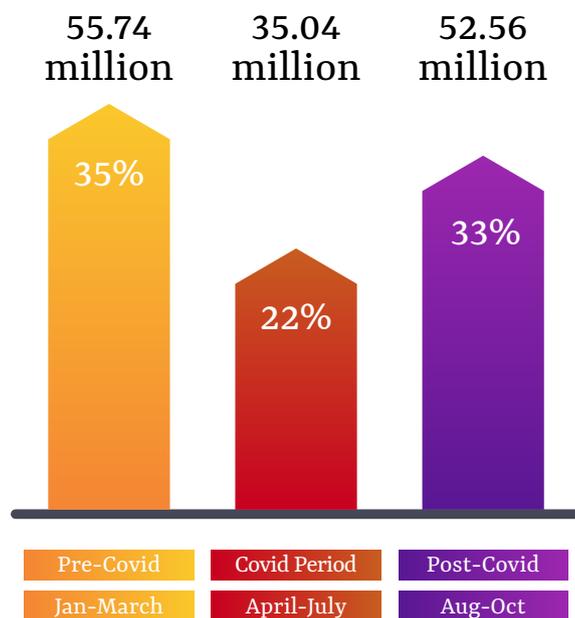
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*After spread of COVID-19 in Pakistan, a large number of workers were rendered jobless, which included a significant amount of the workers from DWD communities.*

of the livestock of the landlords, for which they are not paid any extra remuneration. Most agriculture workers build make-shift huts in a corner of the agriculture land which they are tilling for a certain period. After harvesting of a crop they have to move to another place or enter into another contract with the same landlords for another crop period. There are tenancy laws in the provinces to settle disputes between landlords and labourers through tenancy tribunals, but the labourers have never received any relief through these courts.



**27.31 million Working Population Affected**

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics

Similarly, in janitor jobs, the workers are not provided labour rights as they are hired on either daily wage basis or on contract. The sanitation workers are not provided protective gears at the work places. On many occasions they have to risk their lives to enter in dangerous manholes and often reports of deaths of sanitation workers reported while they were working in the manholes to clear blockages.

In other fields as well, DWD communities do not have basic rights. They either live in shanty settlements or KatchiAbadis, where water, sewerage, education, health or other municipal facil-

ities are not available.

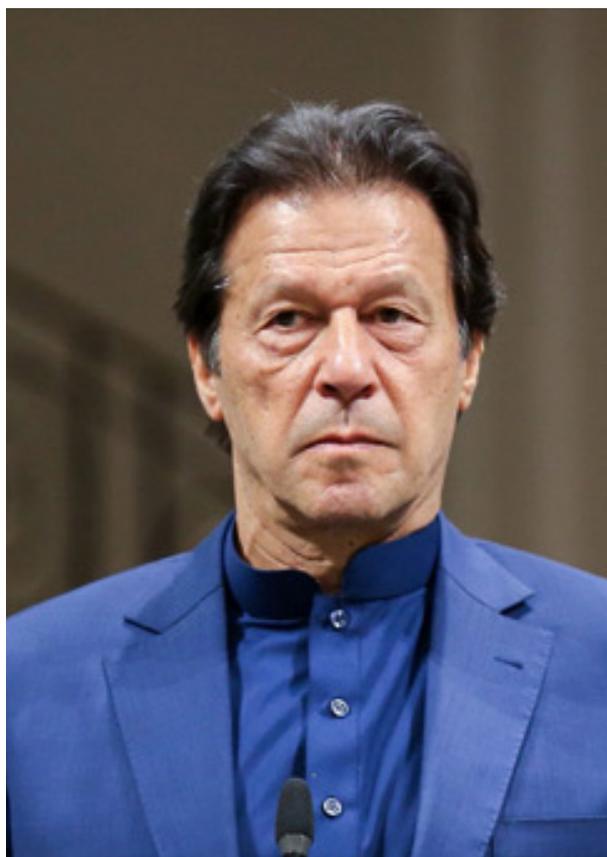
Majority of the DWD communities, working on brick kilns are reportedly working as bonded labourers, residing on kiln sites and are totally dependent on kiln owners. Their work conditions are exploitative and hazardous. Rest of the DWD communities are employed in the informal sector and are deprived of basic rights.

During COVID-19 workers of DWD communities could hardly stay in their homes as most of the people were asked to stay at home to avoid direct contact with the virus and to ensure social distancing. During COVID lockdown, these workers have to perform their duties as usual given nature of their job and also they could hardly survive without working. Those who lost their jobs due to lockdown seldom received any government support.

After spread of COVID-19 in Pakistan, a large number of workers were rendered jobless, which included a significant amount of the workers from DWD communities. Initially, the Ministry of Planning has estimated that 12.3 million to 18.5 million people in the country will lose their jobs and the economy will sustain Rs2 trillion to Rs2.5 trillion losses in just three months due to “moderate to severe shocks from the coronavirus outbreak”.<sup>6</sup>

However, a latest survey by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reveals that about 21 million people or 37% of country’s total employed labour force of 55.7 million suffered livelihood/income losses due to Corona virus related lockdown during the period between April and July 2020. The same survey claims that a large majority of 85% have returned to work once the lockdown

*The Prime Minister Imran Khan had himself admitted that the government did not have any record of 80 percent workers as only 20 percent of workforce is registered with the government’s social security schemes.*



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<sup>6</sup> Daily Express Tribune, *Coronavirus forecast to render 18.5m jobless in Pakistan*, 03 April 2020, available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2189904/coronavirus-forecast-render-18-5m-jobless>

was lifted, however, a significant number of 3.2 million people have lost jobs for a longer period and remain without work. An additional 6.7 million people reported decrease in their incomes. This means a total 27.31 million people have been affected due to COVID-19.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, it is estimated that the number of unemployed people in Pakistan will reach 6.65 million in the 2020–2021 fiscal year, compared to 5.80 million in the previous fiscal year. The COVID-19 pandemic is cited to be one of the largest factors causing the increase in the unemployment rate, particularly among vulnerable employment groups and daily wage workers.

The Government of Pakistan launched an emergency cash grant scheme for the workers, who have lost their jobs due to COVID-19 lockdown, but these communities were unable to access that grant as well. An amount of PKR 12,000 was provided for one time grant to the jobless workers under the Ehsas Programme. The government of Pakistan allocated \$1.2 billion to deliver emergency cash to extremely poor for controlling the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>8</sup>

The Prime Minister Imran Khan had himself

admitted that the government did not have any record of 80 percent workers as only 20 percent of workforce is registered with the government's social security schemes.

Lack of data on informal sector workers and daily wagers, both in urban and rural areas and lack of access to such schemes by marginalized communities left the much-needed cash support underutilized.

Social exclusion experts<sup>9</sup> believe that the scheduled castes and other DWD communities in Pakistan lack basic documents such as Computerized National Identity Cards (CNICs), which were pre-requisite for receiving such a support. The scheme also remained inaccessible for marginalized communities residing in remote areas as it was through online submission of application and data. The government or any other agency took no specific initiative to assist these communities in accessing the scheme. It is quite important to recognize the extreme marginal condition of these communities who may never benefit from generalized schemes. There needed to be specific targeted schemes exclusively for these communities.

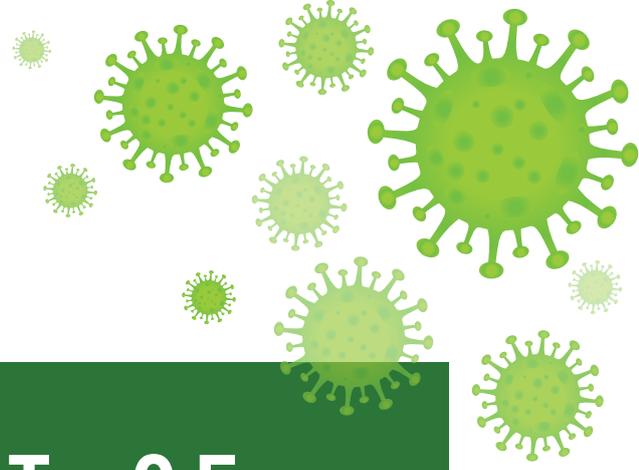
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<sup>7</sup> Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, *Special Survey for Evaluating Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Wellbeing of People*, December 2020, available at: [https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//other/covid/Final\\_Report\\_for\\_Covid\\_Survey\\_0.pdf](https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files//other/covid/Final_Report_for_Covid_Survey_0.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Daily The Nation, *Ehsaas Cash Programme helped country respond to crisis successfully*, 09 October 2020, available at:

<https://nation.com.pk/09-Oct-2020/ehsaas-cash-programme-helped-country-respond-to-crisis-successfully-sania-nishtar>

<sup>9</sup> Views expressed by Pirbhu Lal Satiyani, a representative of Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network and a Human Rights Expert based in Hyderabad, Pakistan in a personal interview.



# DATA ON EXTENT OF COVID-19 ON DWD COMMUNITIES

## General information on the COVID19 related to the country's population- infected/ self-quarantined/ officially quarantined/ recovered/death

Till November 5, 2020, Pakistan had 338,875 confirmed cases with 6,893 deaths. About 316,665 patients have recovered so far. <sup>10</sup>

On July 30, Pakistan recorded the highest number of new cases of COVID-19 in a day (903), which then started declining. However, the number of new cases has started increasing again since October 2020, the government fears advent of second wave of the pandemic to be more dangerous.

The government has re-imposed certain restrictions from November 6, 2020 including banning indoor marriages, fixing PKR 100 as fine for not wearing mask and allowing “work from home” for 50 percent staff of public and private institutions. These “non-pharmaceutical interventions” (NPIs) or new guidelines would remain in force till January 2021. <sup>11</sup>

Though the government has started easing these restrictions again in December 2020 and people are returning to normal life, the pandemic remains around and affects many individuals on daily basis.

In terms of health response, the government of Pakistan has designated 35 tertiary hospitals across the country to treat COVID-19 patients. The government has also established 153 Quarantine centers with 23,557 beds and over 200 isolation wards with 2942 bed capacity across the

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<sup>10</sup> Government of Pakistan official portal: <https://covid.gov.pk/stats/pakistan>

<sup>11</sup> Daily Dawn, *Fine for not wearing mask among new NCOC guidelines*, 07 November 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1589054/fine-for-not-wearing-mask-among-new-ncoc-guidelines>

country. Testing facility was also upscaled from 151 places in the country .<sup>12</sup>

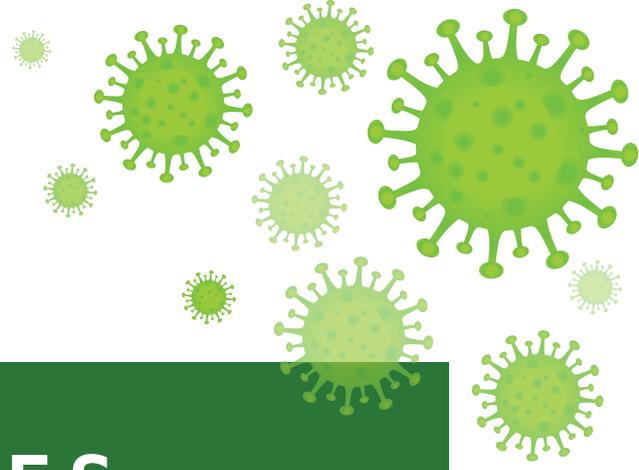
## Information available on DWD communities

The Government of Pakistan is compiling overall data for the entire country, which is provided above. There is no separate data being compiled on DWD communities.

However, it is obvious that the DWD communities because of their poor socio-economic conditions particularly with reference to pathetic living conditions and nature of their job, would have suffered more than others. There is likelihood that many DWD men and women got infected and even could not get tested as testing remained mainly in big cities in public sector hospitals and was quite expensive in private sector.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://covid.gov.pk>



# SYSTEMIC ISSUES AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON DWD COMMUNITIES

## Basic livelihood needs: food, health, housing, transport, recreational facilities, education, employment, etc.

The DWD community in Pakistan belong to the “poorest of poor” sections of society. Mostly they are living in rural areas and primarily work in agriculture. Those living in urban areas are settled in shanty settlements in suburb areas without basic facilities. Those living in cities primarily do manual jobs or work as a sanitation worker and earn on a daily wage basis. A small portion of these workers in urban areas also work in industries as garment workers, cobblers, cleaners at different private hospitals, offices, this community’s work force is focused in the informal sectors, earning on a daily wage basis.

After the spread of COVID-19 across the country,

many from the Dalit community have lost their jobs due to lockdown declared by the government and overall economic conditions. There is no specific data available on job losses among the DWD communities, broader indicators and statistics clearly indicate that these communities have been severely affected by the economic impact of COVID-19 and may need specific support to come out of the crisis.

As a result, they have been suffering for want of food. Field activists<sup>13</sup> engaged in relief work shared that the DWD communities were out of food within one week of lockdown. They were running for food after initial few days and had to survive on relief provided by philanthropists or even they did not have any other option but to sleep hungry. These communities were so marginalized that they could not sustain the kind of unprecedented restrictions on account of COVID-19. There was no work, no transport and even basic grocerias were not easily available.

<sup>13</sup> Insights shared by Parvez Jamro, a Karachi based activist who along with others provided cooked food to 200 families in Hindu Goth in Gadap Twon of Karachi.

Even though some community organisations distributed food rations among needy workers, there has been no substantial support from the government. The provincial government of Sindh distributed raw food items among affected population in rural areas. However, this became more politicized and, in many cases, did not reach to those who needed it the most .<sup>14</sup>

As mentioned earlier, there is no disaggregated data available on the DWD communities. However, a general data released by the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics revealed that 60 % population faced food security challenges and 50% had to switch to either low quality food or reduced quantity .<sup>15</sup>

Even if these general statistics are applied, over 50% of DWD communities have experienced food shortage during the lockdown. Field experts<sup>16</sup>

verify this by saying that they themselves witnessed many DWD families struggling with arranging basic food as they were short of cash and due to lockdown traditional lending sources and communication was also closed.

During the lockdown, hospitals had closed down the Outpatient Departments (OPDs), due to which DWD communities were not able to receive medical treatment for other diseases. Even the government's Expanded Programme for Immunization (EPI) was affected due to the lockdown because transport was closed down and entire government health response was diverted to COVID-19. In the PBS survey over 52 % population opine that they did not visit health facilities out of fear of COVID-19 infection. In case of DWD communities, health is hardly accessible and affordable in normal conditions so



<sup>14</sup> The Dawn, Favouritism, *political infighting mar COVID-19 relief operations in Sindh*, 20 April 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1550601>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/>

<sup>16</sup> Insights shared by journalist Jan Khaskheli during interview for this report.

in COVID-19 situation multiple factors including lack of transport restricted their access to health facilities.

Housing situation in general in Pakistan is not good both in terms of quantity and quality where as DWD community in rural areas live in small huts or mad made small house and in urban areas in one room houses in Kathchiabadis. Hence the precautionary measures of social distancing remained unimageable for these communities as they have large families and small homes. Add to the injury is civic facilities as DWD community housing is mostly deprived of sanitation and water. All this added to the miseries of these vulnerable population during COVID-19 pandemic.

In general all the social indicators such as access to education, health, communication, recreation, etc. of DWD communities have further deteriorate during the COVID-19.

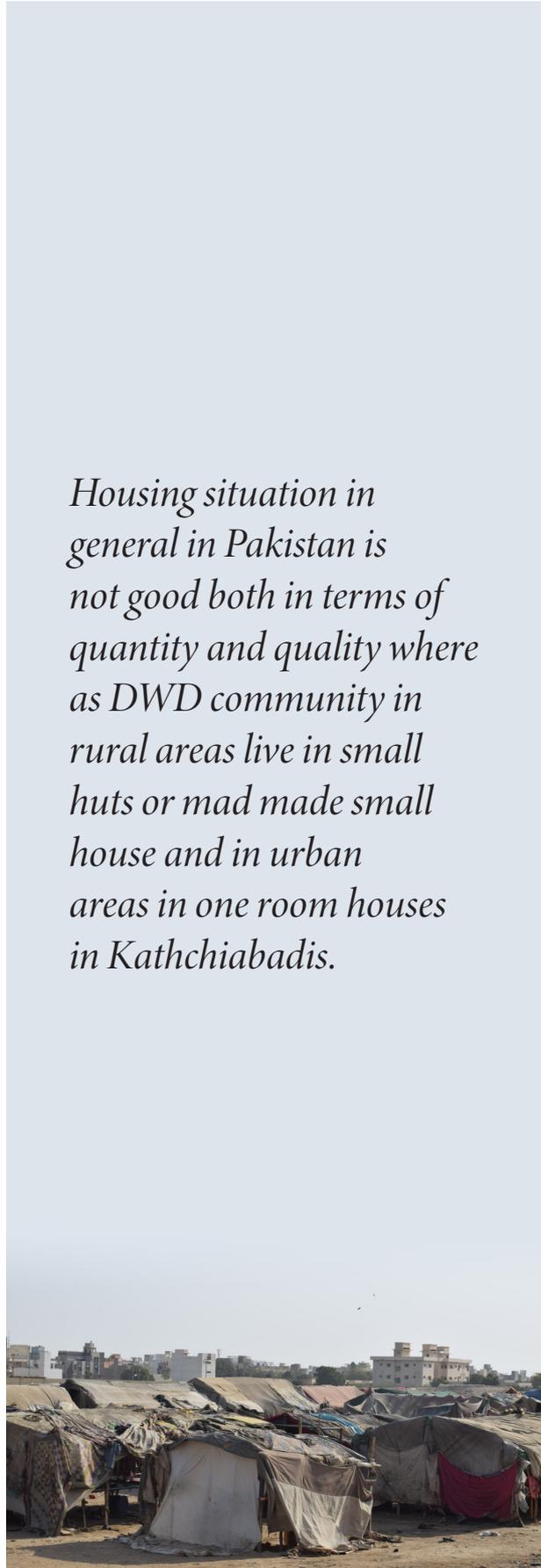
## Psychological issues/needs: anxiety/fear/adjustment, etc.

Besides physical symptoms, the COVID-19 pandemic has also caused many psychological challenges for people. Due to poverty and scant health facilities people are unable to access physical and mental health facilities.

Psychologists and other mental health professionals had earlier warned the general public about increasing rates of infection and stress related conditions as people have to undergo various mental disorders.

The prolonged lockdown caused hardship to the DWD communities as a large number of workers

*Housing situation in general in Pakistan is not good both in terms of quantity and quality where as DWD community in rural areas live in small huts or mad made small house and in urban areas in one room houses in Kathchiabadis.*



lost jobs and earning opportunities shrunk due to shut down of industries and businesses. Although the Government of Pakistan and Prime Minister Imran Khan, on many occasions admitted that they were aware of plight of workers. However, they failed to provide any relief to the affected population, a majority of which belonged to already vulnerable communities. The onetime cash grant of PKR 12,000 could not reach to all beneficiaries because the government did not have any record of workers in the informal sector.

The COVID-19 related lockdown caused insecurity, panic, fear and stress among the poor masses. Due to COVID-19 in Pakistan, people were forced to stay at home or in quarantine and self-isolation which caused many physical and psychological problems. As mentioned above, many workers either lost their jobs or were removed from their jobs due to closure of industries and businesses, which would have led to serious mental tension and social pressure.

Over 23 suicide cases linked with COVID-19 were reported from across Pakistan, out of these 7 were confirmed and another 4 were suspected of having been infected

with COVID-19.<sup>17</sup>

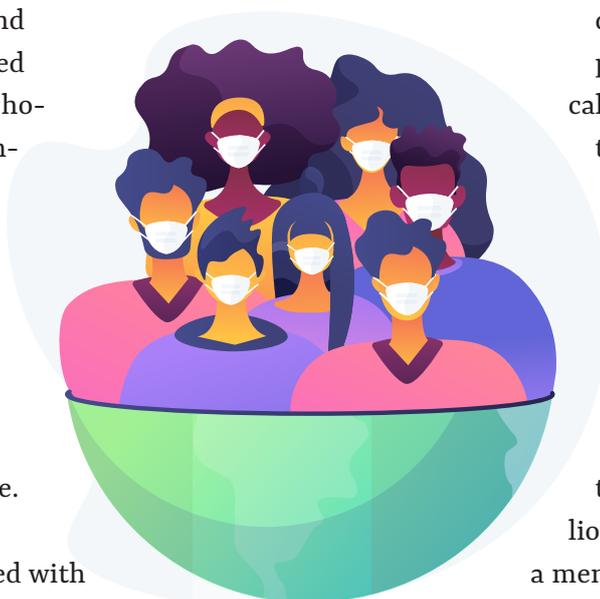
A number of suicide cases have been reported from Thar region among the DWD communities in June 2020, however, it is yet to be ascertained whether these were due to COVID-19 related mental stress or there were other factors.<sup>18</sup>

As a response to rising number of suicides in Thar, Sindh provinces Mental Health Authority plans to start a sustained support services in the region.<sup>19</sup>

Pakistani population is already facing a mental health crisis, which is becoming more serious with the passage of time due to non-availability of psychiatric or psychological support. Experts believe that mental health crisis may further aggravate during the COVID-19 period and after its end, which is still unclear.

According to an estimate there were over 50 million people suffering from a mental health disorder in Pakistan, for whom only 500 psychiatrists were available thus the ratio remained 1:100,000 psychiatrists per patient.<sup>20</sup>

*Over 23 suicide cases linked with COVID-19 were reported from across Pakistan, out of these 7 were confirmed and another 4 were suspected of having been infected with COVID-19.*



<sup>17</sup> Mumtaz Muhammad, COVID-19 and mental health challenges in Pakistan, *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, September 2020, available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0020764020954487>

<sup>18</sup> The Tribune, *Suicides in Thar*, 03 June 2020, available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2234091/suicides-in-thar-2>

<sup>19</sup> International The News, *Govt, NGOs join hands to control suicide cases in Thar*, 17 August 2020, available at: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/701776-govt-ngos-join-hands-to-control-suicide-cases-in-thar>

<sup>20</sup> Nisar, M., Mohammad, R. M., Fatima, S., Shaikh, P. R., Rehman, M., *Perceptions pertaining to clinical depression in Karachi, Pakistan. Cureus*, 11(7), e5094, 2019, available at: <https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.5094>.

The federal and provincial governments in collaboration with local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated some support mechanisms in major cities like Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad to provide counselling and psychiatric support to the patients.

After the advent of the pandemic, the Government of Pakistan has released a 26-page document providing guidelines to manage psychological impacts of COVID-19. This document provides basic instructions for how to avoid stress, tension, anxiety, and how to help one another during the lockdown.

This document was prepared by following the WHO's instructions and it was disseminated massively in multiple local languages across the country.<sup>21</sup>

Mental health professionals in public sector hospitals are providing support to masses within the available resources. Local and international NGOs are involved in addressing the mental health issues of the population by providing relevant information about impacts of mental health issues and how to tackle these issues. For instance, psychosocial support is being provided to children and families who are affected by COVID-19. They are provided appropriate care and psychosocial help for stigma prevention. Some local civil society organizations such as Amazai Development Program and Sarhad Rural Support Programme are actively working in collaboration with local administrations to extend facilities to manage mental health issues, especially in rural communities of the country.

*Only 22 % of women in Pakistan are part of the workforce and majority of them are engaged in low paid informal sectors, which had been severely affected by the COVID-19 related restrictions.*



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<sup>21</sup> [www.covid.gov.pk](http://www.covid.gov.pk)

*Females working in the informal sector were the ones who suffered the most in terms of cases of domestic violence during the Pandemic. Many working women have lost their jobs and were confined to small homes where distancing from abusive relatives was not possible.*



## Gender conflict issues

Pakistan claims to be the least infected country with comparatively fewer deaths due to COVID-19 pandemic as compared to other developed and regional South Asian countries. However, women remained the most affected by the lockdown because their male members remained jobless and due to continuous stay of male members at home also increased family feuds. Resultant job loss, reduction in family income and staying at home for prolonged periods of time proved to be a tremendous psychological pressure for DWD men, which resulted in domestic violence and there were many incidents of domestic violence reported in the media. According to rights organizations, women working in the informal sector are most impacted by domestic violence during the pandemic. Many have lost their jobs and are confined to small homes where distancing from abusive relatives is not possible.<sup>22</sup> Only 22 % of

women in Pakistan are part of the workforce and majority of them are engaged in low paid informal sectors, which had been severely affected by the COVID-19 related restrictions. A number of them also work as Home-Based Workers (HBWs) and it is likely that they have lost work and income further resulting in family conflicts .<sup>23</sup>

According to women rights organizations, females working in the informal sector were the ones who suffered the most in terms of cases of domestic violence during the Pandemic. Many working women have lost their jobs and were confined to small homes where distancing from abusive relatives was not possible.<sup>24</sup>

In such a depressing general scenario, women in the DWD communities have experienced severe challenges ranging from income losses to domestic violence and psychological pressure and denial of access to basic health services .<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> DW, *Pakistani women trapped between coronavirus and domestic violence*, 09 July 2020, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistani-women-trapped-between-coronavirus-and-domestic-violence/a-54107216>

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Human Rights, *Government of Pakistan, Gendered Impact and Implications of COVID-19 in Pakistan*, 15 June 2020, available at: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Gendered-Impact-and-Implications-of-COVID-19-in-Pakistan.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> DW, *Pakistani women trapped between coronavirus and domestic violence*, 09 July 2020, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistani-women-trapped-between-coronavirus-and-domestic-violence/a-54107216>

<sup>25</sup> Observations shared by Radha Bheel, President, Dalit Sujag Tahreek.

## Social communication issues

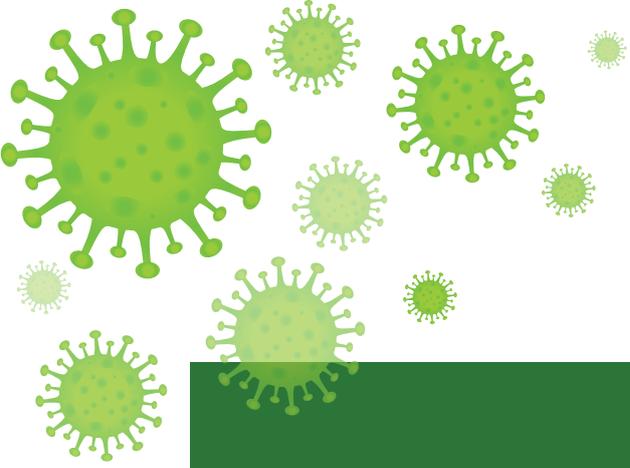
For the first time in recent history, families found themselves locked inside their homes for an extended period of time with no clear indication of when things would go back to 'normal'.

In the initial days of lock down the school-going children enjoyed vacation from the school, but they started getting boring due to prolonged shut down of schools and markets so became irritable most of the time. The use of communication gadgets like cell phones, and tablets increased manifold during the lockdown. The traditional family bond was already hampered due to the increasing use of mobile phones, this further worsened due to the lockdown. Parents found it difficult to reduce screen time for their younger children as the children were mostly glued with

gadgets due to lockdown. Children were mainly playing games or using mobiles or tablets for social media chatting and sharing information. Most of schools had started online classes after lifting of lockdown.

While those who could afford these communication tools and equipment such laptops and mobile phones and can buy unlimited Internet, the DWD communities were left deprived. Given their poor economic conditions, they could hardly afford such a luxury. This hampered their ability to connect to the world during these most difficult times.

Ironically, no international development agency or government department recognized this important need and provided with some assistance. This might have further intensified the sense of deprivation among the DWD communities particularly young population.



# IMPACT OF STATE EFFORTS: CONTAINMENT AND MITIGATION MEASURES

## Lockdown and containment plan and its effects on DWD communities

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic in January, Pakistan started taking measures to curb its spread in the country. A large number of Pakistani students study in universities in China and were kept in quarantine in Wuhan and other cities in China in the early days of the Pandemic. This created an unrest among parents and relatives of these students as the Chinese government did not allow the Pakistani students to leave their campus during this time.

When the first two cases of COVID-19 positive

were reported on 26th February in Karachi and Islamabad, the provincial governments started taking practical measures. On 27th February the provincial government of Sindh announced closure of all educational institutions after reporting of the first case in Karachi, the capital city of Sindh province. Other provinces also started closing the schools during the same week.

On March 13th the country's National Security Committee, presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan, decided to close down all the schools across the country. The high-level meeting also announced the restriction of international flights, which would only operate from Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad airports, where precautionary and COVID-19 testing facilities had been

<sup>26</sup> The Tribune, *China sends another aircraft carrying medical supplies to Pakistan*, 28 March 2020, available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2186088/1-china-sends-another-aircraft-carrying-medical-supplies-pakistan>

<sup>27</sup> Daily Times, *Pakistan-made ventilators first batch prepared*, 28 June 2020, available at: <https://dailytimes.com.pk/633155/fawad-chaudhry-says-pakistan-start-manufacturing-ventilators/>

<sup>28</sup> The Tribune, *Sindh to give rations to needy people with help of NGOs*, 25 March 2020, available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2184202/sindh-give-rations-needy-people-help-ngos>

established.

Pakistan completely sealed the country's borders with neighboring countries Iran and Afghanistan from March 16th. The traditional Pakistan National Day military parade in the capital Islamabad on March 23rd was also called off. Besides this, all the proceedings of the Senate, the upper house of the Parliament, were also postponed for two weeks from March 13th.

Pakistan announced a nation-wide lockdown from March 24th and all economic and industrial activities were closed down. Only grocery, milk shops and medical stores were allowed to remain open. Prayers in mosques and other religious places were restricted and holy shrines of saints were closed down for the pilgrims.

In the last week of March the Chinese billionaire Jack Ma's Alibaba Group Foundation sent two aircrafts carrying various medical supplies including a total of 1.8 million masks; kits for testing 210,000 people, 36,000 pieces of protective clothing, as well as essential medical equipment such as ventilators and forehead thermometers.<sup>26</sup> Pakistan also began to manufacture masks and ventilators within the country.<sup>27</sup>

During the lockdown, various government, non-government organisa-

tions initiated relief work including distribution of food rations to the needy people.<sup>28</sup>

The government had restricted all type of transport including air, rail and road, which created a lot of hardship to the people and for those who wanted to visit their ancestral places in rural areas.

Restaurants, marriage halls, barber and beauty salons, and shops remained closed. The grocery shops, fruits and vegetable vendors, medical stores and milk shops were allowed to remain open during the lockdown.

*During the Holy month of Ramazan people were not allowed to visit mosques, even not on Friday's special prayers of Taraweeh.*



During the Holy month of Ramazan people were not allowed to visit mosques, even not on Friday's special prayers of Taraweeh. Some incidents of violations of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) were reported in the media and some incidents of violence occurred in major cities like Karachi in which people were insisting for offering Friday prayers.<sup>29</sup>

However, near the Eid-ul-Fitre, shopping centres were allowed to open in order to provide an opportunity to the people to do Eid shopping. Eid prayers were also allowed. But the government had notified special SPOs for markets during Eid shopping. For Eid prayers people were asked to observe social distance. But these SOPs were not observed.

Due to shutting down of the shopping centres, restaurants and transport facilities, employees in these industries, especially daily wage workers, suffered economic hardships. The federal government as well as provincial governments had announced special packages for the unemployed workers, but that support could not reach to majority of workers due to non-availability of the data of workers in the informal sector.

The labour and trade union leaders demanded that the government provide unemployment allowance to all the workers due to lockdown and initiate a universal social security scheme.<sup>30</sup> In Sindh province the government issued an order imposing a special law called Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance 2020, which asked employers not to lay off workers during lockdown and also reduced school fees by 20%.<sup>31</sup>

Since the DWD communities survive at the fringes of marginalisation, they had been the worst victims of COVID-19 related restrictions as it impacted on their mobility, resulted in income losses and also access to health services etc. While those who have money could manage things, these poor communities faced real hardships in managing life particularly during March-July 2020 strict lockdown period.

## Accessing basic necessities measures: food security/health security/financial security

Health remained the main concern during COVID-19 pandemic as the government failed to provide medical health services to majority of the population. Outpatient Departments (OPDs) in the government hospitals remained closed during the lockdown so the patients of general illnesses and diseases had to visit the private clinics or to the emergency wards of some major hospitals in the urban centres.

Special measures were taken for testing and medical support to the COVID-19 infected people, including the establishment of special field isolation hospitals, isolation wards for COVID-19 patients in the government hospitals across the country. However, people complained about inadequate facilities, and shortage of equipment in these special hospitals like PPEs and ventilators.

<sup>29</sup> The Dawn, *Crowd manhandles policemen for enforcing Friday prayers restrictions in Karachi's Liaquatabad*, 03 April 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1546172>

<sup>30</sup> The Dawn, *Trade union leaders demand unemployment allowance for workers*, 27 April 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1552462>

<sup>31</sup> The Dawn, *Sindh governor gives assent to Covid-19 emergency relief ordinance*, 16 May 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1557385>

Due to lack of healthcare facilities, the government had to appeal to the COVID-19 positive patients to remain in quarantine or in isolation at their homes by following the established SOPs. Similarly, the COVID-19 testing facilities at the state hospitals remained inadequate so patients had to approach private facilities for initial tests. These private pathological laboratories charged the patients exorbitant prices for these tests.

Even though the government received medical equipment as donations from China and other friendly countries, those could not be distributed among provinces efficiently. The military led National Disaster Management Authority failed to provide Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to the doctors and paramedical staff of the government departments. At many places, doctors and paramedical staff held protests in major cities against non-provision of PPE to them.<sup>32</sup>

Food security remained a big challenge during the COVID-19 related lockdown in Pakistan. Some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) came forward in major cities and started distributing food rations to those who were most in need, particularly those who were affected financially due to lockdown, but these facilities remained accessible to only fraction of the population.

On March 24, Prime Minister Imran Khan announced an economic relief and stimulus package of approximately PKR 1.2 trillion to support the poor and help local industry to offset the negative impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in the country.

This package included PKR 200 billion for labourers, PKR 100 billion as tax refunds for export

*Donations from China and other friendly countries, those could not be distributed among provinces efficiently. The military led National Disaster Management Authority failed to provide Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) to the doctors and paramedical staff of the government departments.*

sector, PKR 100 billion for small and medium industries and agriculture; PKR 150 billion relief package and another PKR 3,000 cash grant for low-income families.<sup>33</sup>

The government informed the Pakistan's National Assembly, the lower house of the Parliament, on October 26, 2020 that an amount of PKR 4.84 billion was lying unutilised in the account created for receiving donations and funds from the public and overseas Pakistanis for the fight against COVID-19.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) had provided US \$30 million to the National Disaster Risk Management Fund (NDRMF) for national emergency and response for COVID-19 project. This

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<sup>32</sup> The Dawn, *Medics, health workers protest 'non-provision' of PPE in Lahore*, 28 April 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1552721>

<sup>33</sup> The Dawn, *PM Imran announces financial stimulus package to mitigate economic fallout from Covid-19 outbreak*, 24 March 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1543411>

amount was later enhanced to \$105 million to provide necessary equipment in the fight against COVID-19.<sup>34</sup>

The World Bank, French Agency for Development, Norwegian government and other donors provided funds to Government of Pakistan as well as to the local NGOs, a meagre portion of that aid went to DWD communities.

Ironically, neither government nor any development agency launched any specific relief package targeting the food and health needs of the DWD communities.

## Accessing social and psychological security measures

Besides creating medical crisis, the pandemic lockdown also created social and psychological problems among DWD population in Pakistani society. During the initial phase of the lockdown, it created panic, fear, sense of insecurity, and

stress among population.

A majority of those belonging to the DWD community live in villages or shanty settlements in suburb localities of major cities remained indoor during most of the time of lockdown to save themselves from the virus, but they faced physical and psychological pressures at home. Moreover, many people who lost their jobs were seriously in tense conditions while staying in their homes.

Those who already have health issues like blood pressure, diabetes, depression and the old people living in isolation were the most vulnerable sections of the society who suffered mental health problems during the lockdown.

Pakistan's track record on addressing mental health issues is not significant, and it is estimated that there are over 50 million people suffering from a mental health disorder in the country. Some NGOs have been providing psychological support to the masses, but the DWD population have little access to these private sector facilities because of lack of resources and lack of knowl-



edge and awareness among DWD communities of the availability of these resources. The government has initiated some measures but only limited to the main cities, but these initiatives needed be extended to even rural areas where majority of population is living.

The Sindh Mental Health Authority has launched a mental health services support for Thar region, which has a sizeable DWD population and one can hope that the initiative would sustain and provide much needed support to these deserving communities.

## Availing media and awareness creation plan for the public

Pakistan government, through local print and electronic media had launched a massive awareness campaign to educate people for adopting preventive measure. A special web-portal was launched which continuously updated on a day-to-day basis with information and supporting data on the virus.<sup>35</sup> This portal also provides awareness information and the available support mechanism established by the government. It provides guidelines and SOPs for every event and occasion in order to be safe from COVID-19. The portal contained important precautions to reduce chances of contracting COVID-19.

The government of Pakistan in collaboration with UNICEF issued a four-page “Guidelines for

*Pakistan’s track record on addressing mental health issues is not significant, and it is estimated that there are over 50 million people suffering from a mental health disorder in the country.*

Journalists and Media Professionals for reporting on COVID-19”. Besides English, document is also available in Urdu as well as 3 regional languages spoken in Pakistan – Sindhi, Pashtu and Balochi.<sup>36</sup>

## Accessing law & order machinery and complaints redressal mechanisms

Police and other law enforcement agencies were actively involved in implementing the SOPs, however, in many places they failed to do so. Even police faced resistance in many urban centres, where people attacked when Police tried to

<sup>34</sup> The Dawn, *Donors line up to support Pakistan’s fight against coronavirus*, 27 May 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1559607>

<sup>35</sup> [www.covid.gov.pk](http://www.covid.gov.pk)

<sup>36</sup> Ministry of National Health Services, *Government of Pakistan & UNICEF Pakistan, Guidelines for Journalists & Media Professionals reporting on COVID-19*, available at: <https://www.unicef.org/pakistan/documents/guidelines-journalists-and-media-professionals-reporting-covid-19>

<sup>37</sup> International The News, *Violating lockdown: Karachi traders attempting to resume business arrested*, 23 April 2020, available at: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/648644-violating-lockdown-karachi-traders-attempting-to-resume-business-arrested>

enforce the SOPs. Similarly, the shopkeepers also resisted and continued opening up their shops in major cities. Police arrested many shopkeepers in violation of SOPs.<sup>37</sup> During the lockdown, the proceedings in the courts were also suspended as a preventive measure. In Punjab the court allowed the lawyers to send their written arguments in their cases to the concerned courts.<sup>38</sup> For urgent matters the court asked to lawyers only to appear.

The Pakistan government set up a special helpline with the phone number 1166 to receive complaints and concerns regarding COVID-19. This helpline is available round the clock and patients, their relatives or any citizen can call to seek guidance for medical or testing facilities or file any complaint regarding COVID-19. The district administrations of the affected areas had also set up complaint centres in the offices of Deputy Commissioners.

## Space available for media transparency efforts

Pakistani media played an important role in creating awareness about taking precautionary measures. Social media has also percolated among the masses, so the official pages of the government and various ministries as well as NGOs were continuously posting messages and

updates regarding COVID-19 preventions.

Due to continuous media intervention, people were more aware about latest developments in treatment of the virus. Media has also played a key role in exposing corruption, inefficiencies and lacks in healthcare facilities. It keeps people updated about corruption in the government departments while distributing health and hygiene kits and rations among needy people.

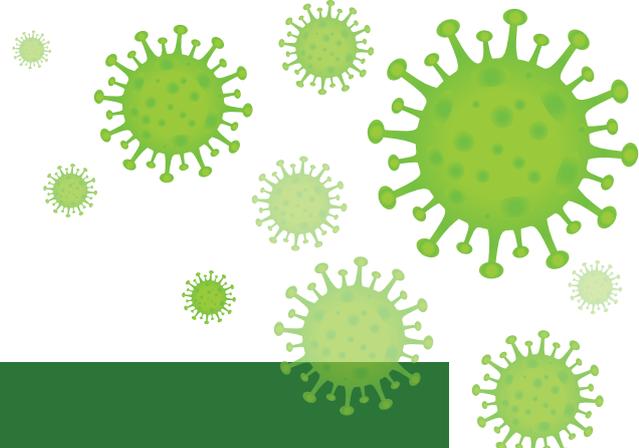
Media also guided masses regarding receiving government's cash grant of PKR 12,000. An online method was introduced to register the eligible people and media provided guidance to the general public in this regard. Educated youth and groups of civil society activists filled the forms of the needy people in both rural and urban areas so they could receive government support.

Because physical meetings were not allowed under the lockdown SOPs, the use of online and video conferences has increased manifold. Most of public and private offices were closed down and their employees were working from home. They kept themselves in contact through Zoom, Skype and other modern modes of conference calling.

Use of social media increased manifold and DWD communities also utilized this alternative media. Even though there was a little coverage of problems of DWD communities, the social media helped raise their voice.

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<sup>38</sup> The Dawn, *Lawyers can send written arguments to courts in lockdown*, 19 April 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1550367>



# FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION FACED BY DWD COMMUNITIES

## Access to the services

In Pakistan majority of DWD community people are associated with informal work. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown most of industries and trading places were closed down so economic activities remained suspended. Majority of DWD community people have also lost their jobs. ‘

The DWD communities faced difficulties in access to the government services and the government system is not efficient enough to reach the entire population. The localities where DWD communities live are already devoid of basic services like water supply, sanitation, education and health and the situation during COVID-19 lockdown became even worse where such services remained suspended in other areas as well.

The federal and provincial government had announced to provide a limited financial and food support to the affected population but that support in the form of ration and cash grants could

not reach to those who needed it most. Even the federal government failed to transfer the money to the provinces for support to those who were most vulnerable.<sup>39</sup>

The DWD communities due to their marginalized position in the society faced hardships in accessing very basic and normal services.

## Access to livelihood- food, water, shelter, jobs, wages, health needs

The lockdown multiplied the miseries of the DWD communities as their access to the basic needs was hampered. Their livelihood opportunities were severely hit as result of cut in jobs and wages and they were unable to access the health facilities because of closure of OPDs in major government hospitals.

<sup>39</sup> The Dawn, Rs. 4.84bn Covid fund still unutilised, NA told, 27 October 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1587244/>

*Majority of industries had asked their workers not to come on work due to the lockdown, so the workers remained jobless during that period. Without an income, these jobless workers suffered financial losses as well food insecurity.*

As majority of DWD communities people work as labourers, do manual works or earn a livelihood on a daily-wage basis, many were left unemployed due to the lockdown. Majority of industries had asked their workers not to come on work due to the lockdown, so the workers remained jobless during that period. Without an income, these jobless workers suffered financial losses as well food insecurity.

The departments, which were providing emergency and municipal services were opened to some extent but they were offering only limited services. They had asked workers to come on alternative days and they also laid off many daily staff.

Even though some NGOs and government organisations were providing food rations, but they could not serve the entire population. In cities those who are living in rented houses were unable to pay rents to their landlords, which created disputes among them and landlords. In two provinces, Sindh and Punjab the government had issued orders to landlords not to evict their tenants during lockdown.

In Sindh province, the provincial government had introduced a law to provide relief to the people including asking the landlords to defer rents but that law remained non-implementable. For example, the law had also prevented the private school management from forcing parents to pay fees and ordered them to charge 20 percent less fee during the lockdown period, but majority of schools refused to obey the orders. Parents of private schools held protests against schools management charging full fees. Schools were opened from August till October and in November again were closed due to increase in COVID cases. Schools, however, continued online classes.



## Impact of COVID19 mitigation measures on DWD communities- short term, medium-term and long-term impacts

Although the federal and provincial government had announced various steps to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on general population, those measures remained non-implementable due to corruption and non-efficiency in the government department.

DWD communities suffered a lot due to these faulty measures. The government had strictly ordered to maintain social distancing measures and to wear of masks at public places, but those orders were not being obeyed in majority of areas. Even in the crowded places like markets and religious places like mosques, people were not observing social distancing and seldom wore face masks. Many people were not observing SOPs because they believed in non-existence of the disease. Those who wearing were because of the SOPs and in fear of police.

Due to government measures like lockdowns, smart lockdowns in the most-affected areas and issuance of separate SOPs for each sector, the

cases of coronavirus started declining in June, but in October the positive cases began to increase again, which the government termed as the second wave. This time the severity of the disease was observed but the government refused to impose another lockdown. Even schools remained opened. The smart lock downs, however, continued in selected areas.<sup>40</sup>

## Protection from socio-cultural atrocities and violence

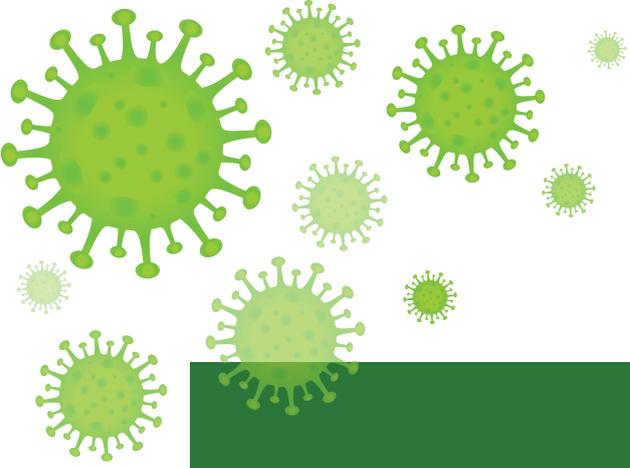
DWD communities especially those belonging to religious minorities continued to suffer as violence against Dalits could not be stopped even in the lockdown. Discrimination was meted out with the people of minority communities in distribution of food rations in major cities. Even some NGOs who were distributing food rations in poor localities of cities refused to provide ration to Dalit Hindus on religious grounds. One case was reported in Karachi in which a charitable organisation refused to give food ration packs to Hindus on religion basis.<sup>41</sup>

Many reports of forced conversion of Hindu Dalit girls to Islam were reported in media and some reports of rapes and killings of DWD communities' girls also appeared in the national media.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> The Nation, *Punjab decides smart lockdown in cities*, 10 November 2020, available at: <https://nation.com.pk/10-Nov-2020/punjab-decides-smart-lockdown-in-cities>

<sup>41</sup> Parhlo, *Religious Minorities Accuse Sindh Govt of Discrimination over Ration*, 01 April 2020, available at: <https://www.parhlo.com/minorities-sindh-coronavirus/>

<sup>42</sup> The Frontier Post, *Karachi: Five-year-old girl raped, stoned to death*, 07 September 2020, available at: <https://thefrontierpost.com/minor-girl-brutally-murdered-after-abduction-in-karachi/>



# CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSE: MITIGATION MEASURES

## Creating awareness

Pakistan's civil society organisations and NGOs played an important role in creating awareness about Coronavirus, its preventions and how to get tested or treatment right from beginning. They published leaflets, pamphlets and banners with inscription of instructions and suggestions in local languages. They arranged live talks on social media and brought experts on TV programmes to create awareness.

The provincial government of Sindh launched a mobile app called 'Sindh Relief Initiative', for people and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to register themselves so the relief and distribution work could be streamlined.

Similarly the federal government launched a separate website for registration of workers who have lost their jobs for payment of one-time grant of PKR 12,000. Many NGOs assisted people

in registration and then receiving the amount through special cash counters set up by the government at far flung areas.

## Relief and rehabilitation measures

The grassroots NGOs across the country also supplemented the government's efforts and on many occasion assisted the government in distribution of relief goods and rations. Many NGOs at district level assisted the government in identification of beneficiaries. They also conducted need assessments for various international donors.

Many NGOs and philanthropists groups came forward and distributed rations in poor localities

on their own. The food package included rice, pulses, cooking oil, salt and sugar. The packages also contained some non-food items like soaps, sanitizers and masks.

A social welfare organization in Karachi the largest city of Pakistan, called JDC Foundation, alone supported hundreds of thousands people. They were distributing about 35,000 to 40,000 ration packs every day. Besides, they served cooked food to about 50,000 people every day at designated places in Karachi.<sup>43</sup>

## Networking systems and remedial mechanism for liaison with state mechanisms

There are many networks of civil society organizations in Pakistan and Joint Action Committees of these networks who actively took part in creating awareness. The CSO networks also provided support to the government through holding consultations and giving necessary recommendations when required.

The CSOs also launched special campaigns in major cities and utilized social and conventional media. For rural populations, radio and television were the most effective mediums and civil society utilized those channels. They arranged donors' funding to initiate various projects of relief and medical assistance.

Besides this, the CSOs followed the state mechanism like SOPs in their functions and relief work.

The special campaigns helped reduce the spread of COVID-19. The CSOs in their respective fields played an effective role in raising awareness on the preventive measures, convincing people to limit their gathering to avoid spread of the disease. During their relief operation they observed social distancing and followed SOPs including wearing masks, providing masks to all participants and arranging hand washing and sanitization facilities.

## Research, documentation and advocacy plans

The CSOs and their associated research institutions, along with relevant government and non-government organisations, have been working together to find out effective ways to reduce the impact of COVID-19 infection.

Pakistani scientists designed and many manufacturers have started locally making COVID-19 testing kits, ventilators and Personal Protection Kits (PPEs).

The Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan (DRAP) has approved the first indigenously made testing kit for novel coronavirus, developed by the scientists at National University of Science and Technology (NUST) Attaur Rahman School of Applied Biosciences (ASAB).<sup>44</sup> Similarly, in July Prime Minister Imran Khan inaugurated Pakistan's first indigenous ventilators' manufacturing facility.<sup>45</sup>

Pakistani blood diseases expert Dr. Tahir Shamsi, who is head of the National Institute of Blood Dis-

<sup>43</sup> The Dawn, *This charity in Karachi is actively working towards welfare of the poor. Here's how*, 18 August 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1574936>

<sup>44</sup> The Tribune, *DRAP approves first made-in-Pakistan testing kit for Covid-19*, 12 June 2020, available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2241311/1-drap-approves-first-made-pakistan-testing-kit-covid-19>

<sup>45</sup> The Dawn, *First ventilators production facility opened*, 07 July 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1567483>



*This COVID-19 specific law in Sindh province was much appreciated by people as it has provided relief to common people. The law prohibited employers from lay off of employees and also allows delayed payment of house rents. It also provided a 20% discounts in schools fee.*

eases (NIBD) in Karachi recommended the use of blood plasma of the recovered COVID-19 patients in the serious patients of COVID-19 which could yield positive results. The technique called passive immunization was tested on many patients and many donors offered their blood. Reports of charging of exorbitant rates by some donors also appeared in the local media. Later, this method of treatment was abandoned because its results were not encouraging.

The researchers associated with local CSOs collected information on the disease spreading trends. Some Chinese researchers also visited Pakistan to assist in treatment of COVID-19 patients. The Chinese doctors' team assisted the

local doctors and health experts in battling the coronavirus. The team stayed in Pakistan for two weeks.<sup>46</sup>

Some CSOs have started collecting data on the situation of minority communities during COVID-19 situation and advocating with the local government institutions, government and non-government agencies to ensure social, financial and psychological security of minority groups. But it is felt that comprehensive research on the situation of the DWD community was urgently required so that their needs can be identified and future advocacy plans can be developed accordingly.

## Monitoring the state's mitigation policy & programs and budgetary provisions

Pakistan initiated various programmes to combat spread of the COVID-19 disease in the country and these measures resulted in positive results as disease started receding. The ratio of new cases and daily deaths declined significantly from June till mid of October. However, due to easing in lockdown and resumption of industrial and commercial activities, the number of cases started increasing again.

The government on November 6<sup>th</sup> announced fresh restrictions due to the increase in cases of COVID-19 including a fine of PKR 100 for not wearing face masks, restrictions on holding of marriages in marriage halls and work from home was instituted for 50 percent staff in government and private offices.<sup>47</sup>

The provincial government of Sindh had enacted the Sindh Covid-19 Emergency Relief Ordinance, 2020, which provided a range of relief measures to middle- and lower-income group people, who had been hit hard by the coronavirus and subsequent lockdown.<sup>48</sup>

This COVID-19 specific law in Sindh province was much appreciated by people as it has provided relief to common people. The law prohibited employers from lay off of employees and also allows delayed payment of house rents. It also provided a 20% discounts in schools fee. The civil society formed committees to observe its implemen-



*To minimize the spread of COVID-19, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued circulars, guidelines and advisories from time to time for staff, lawyers, litigants and security personnel in Court offices all over Pakistan*

<sup>47</sup> The Tribune, 'Work from home, ban on indoor weddings, fresh Covid restrictions issued, 06 November 2020, available at: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2271321/work-from-home-ban-on-indoor-weddings-fresh-covid-restrictions-issued>

<sup>48</sup> The Dawn, 'Sindh governor gives assent to Covid-19 emergency relief ordinance, 16 May 2020, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1557385>



tation. According to media reports, there were many complaints about non-implementation of the law. Many complaints of schools were receiving and lay off from factories were published. The National Trade Union Federation, a labour rights body, organised the protest at Bilal Chorangi, where labour leaders and workers, said that textile mills and factories had sacked thousands of people during the lockdown, defying the provincial government orders.<sup>49</sup>

## Engaging in governmental, Judiciary & media advocacy efforts

Civil society has been engaged in online discussions, virtual conferences, writing articles in the newspaper and holding press conferences to highlight the problems of the people and the government policies regarding lockdown and availability of testing and treatment facilities.

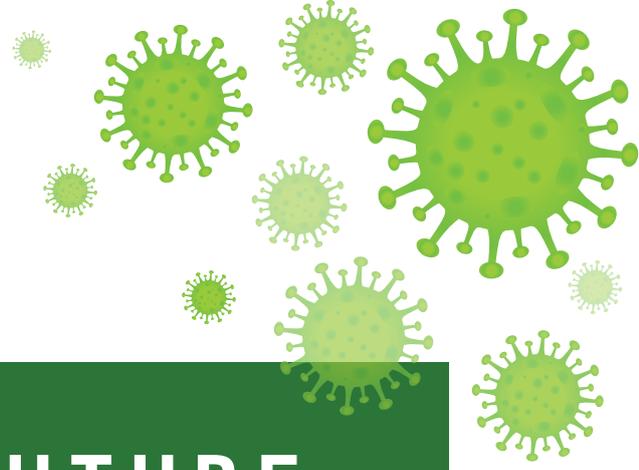
The Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) on many occasions held press conferences in major cities warning people to take precautionary measures.

Advocacy efforts of CSOs resulted in the enactment of a law in Sindh province as well as increase in testing and healthcare facilities in Pakistan.

To minimize the spread of COVID-19, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued circulars, guidelines and advisories from time to time for staff, lawyers, litigants and security personnel in Court offices all over Pakistan. As a part of additional precautionary measures, litigants represented by their counsels have been advised to avoid entering the Supreme Court premises to avoid overcrowding. However, Respondents and in-person petitioners/ parties may attend the court as and when summoned.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> International The News, *Coronavirus crisis triggers massive layoffs across Karachi's industries*, 14 May 2020, available at: <https://www.the-news.com.pk/print/658401-coronavirus-crisis-triggers-massive-layoffs-across-karachi-s-industries>

<sup>50</sup> Supreme Court of Pakistan, *SC takes additional precautionary measures for Corona Virus*, 17 March 2020, available at: <https://www.supremecourt.gov.pk/sc-takes-additional-precautionary-measures-for-corona-virus/>



# TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Pakistani medical scientists are also busy in developing of a vaccine for COVID-19. A Chinese vaccination was also tested in Pakistan. In September, the physician heading a Phase III clinical trial in Pakistan for the Chinese COVID-19 vaccine urged the people to volunteer for the trial, overcoming the resistance in the country to immunization programmes. Pakistan launched the trial in September for Ad5-nCoV, a vaccine candidate co-developed by CanSino Biologics and a Chinese military-backed research unit.<sup>51</sup> People volunteered and according to reports 18,000 tests were conducted.<sup>52</sup>

On November 11, 2020 the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Health Sciences (UHS) Punjab Dr Javed Akram told in a TV interview that a vaccine for coronavirus should be available in Pakistan “within six to eight weeks.” Dr Akram said that his institute has tested a Chinese-made vaccine on 3,000-plus people across the country during phase 3-B trials, which are currently underway. He added that the antibody response in vaccinat-

ed individuals has been promising.<sup>53</sup>

Given that the government has lifted restrictions and opened up businesses and given the trend it is more likely that Pakistan would not face much expected crisis rather it would go with the current strategy of living with the pandemic. Meanwhile, vaccine arrival would further ease things.

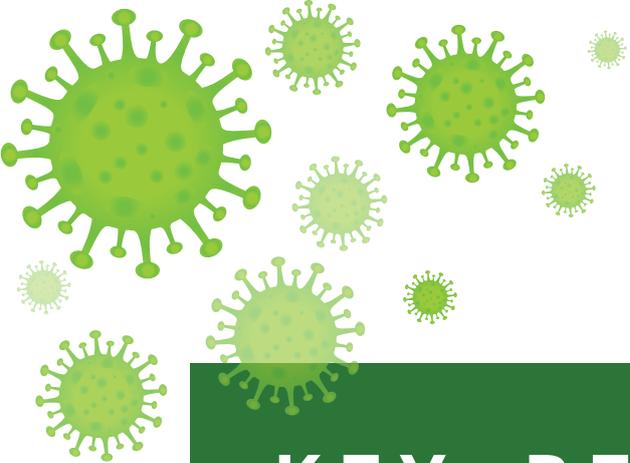
Despite positive news and hopes for an effective vaccination for COVID-19 the government of Pakistan has warned that people should continue strictly following the SOP including wearing masks, maintain social distance and avoiding coming out in public unnecessarily. According to health experts, the commercial production of vaccines is expected to be possible by early 2021, so till that time, people should continue adopting precautionary measures.

The private and government sector organisations and companies have been asked to allow half of its staff to work from home.

<sup>51</sup> Arab News, *Pakistani doctor urges people to volunteer for COVID-19 vaccine trial*, 30 September 2020, available at: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1742331/pakistan>

<sup>52</sup> The Dawn, *Clinical trial of Covid-19 vaccine completes this week*, 08 January 2021, available at: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1600340>

<sup>53</sup> Geo News, *Coronavirus vaccine should be available in Pakistan 'within 6-8 weeks'*. 01 November 2020, available at: <https://www.geo.tv/latest/317958-covid-19-vaccine-will-be-available-in-pakistan-within-six-to-eight-weeks-claims-uhs-vc-dr-javed-akram>



# KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. The DWD communities should be provided special financial support amid increasing rate of unemployment and shrinking livelihood opportunities.
- b. Government of Pakistan must ensure that all households of DWD communities should be provided social security services.
- c. All DWD community families must be registered and the provincial governments should ensure that each family has received the special COVID-19 fund amount of PKR 12,000 under Ehsas Programme of the federal government.
- d. Special instructions should be given by the government to the relevant authority to take care of DWD and other marginalised communities to cope with the economic vulnerability and health risks that the pandemic has caused
- e. All the vulnerable DWD communities should be given priority in distribution of relief goods and rations.
- f. The government should provide basic facilities in localities of DWD communities across Pakistan.
- g. Discrimination on the basis of religion, class and social status must be end and for this special laws should be made. Government should ensure that DWD communities get required documents such as CNICs.
- h. Specific measures should be taken during revival of services specifically health services and measures should be taken to end any kind of discrimination.
- i. A specific task force be made on the impact of Covid on DWDs and then follow the recommendation of the task force.
- j. Unfortunately, some cases of forced conversions were reported even during Covid, the government must take measures to end this menace.
- k. It is likely that bonded labour has increased as negative impact of Covid, the government should look into it and take measures address this issue.
- l. Women workers particularly home-based workers should be provided with specific relief package and financial support.
- m. Specific measures should be taken to improve the socio economic indicators such as health, education etc of the DWD communities.
- n. The DWD communities should be provided specific quota in government's job in new schemes like Naya Pakistan Housing Scheme.
- o. All the DWD communities should be declared illegible for National Health Card scheme.





PAKISTAN  
DALIT  
SOLIDARITY  
NETWORK



Asia Dalit Rights Forum



THE INCLUSIVITY  
PROJECT

