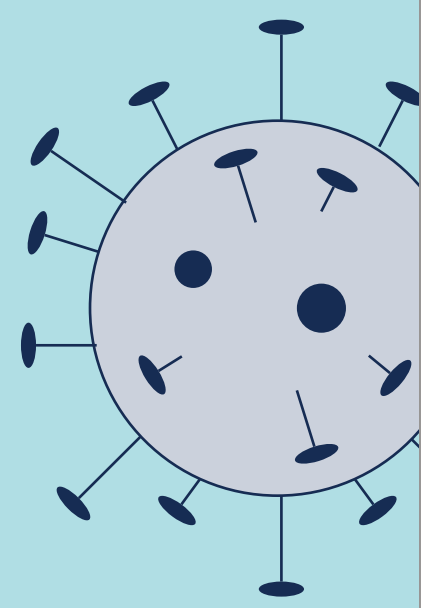
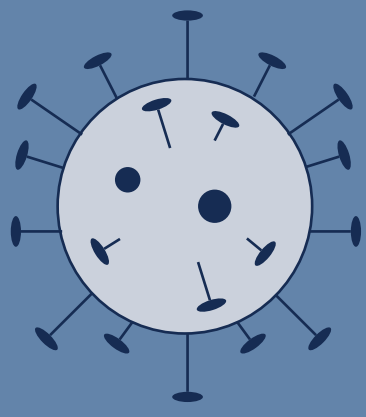


*A comparative study*

# The Coronavirus crisis:

## Do current policies achieve protection for all?

### Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia



## **Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA):**

A think tank seeks to perpetuate the values of scientific thinking in Arab societies. It is working to address issues of political, social and economic development in the framework of the traditions and scientific rules. Away from the language of incitement and propaganda, in the framework of respect for political contexts and social systems, as well as universal human values.

**It is working to provide space for the interaction** of experts, activists and researchers interested in issues of reform in the Arab region, governed by scientific principles and respect for diversity. AFA is also keen to offer policy alternatives and the potential social, not just hoped for the decision maker and the elites of different political and civil society organizations, in the framework of respect for the values of justice and democracy.

## **The Coronavirus crisis:**

Do current policies achieve protection for all?  
Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia

### **A comparative study**

#### **Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA)**

Beirut, 15 December 2020

**Senior researcher:** Mohamed El Agati

**Case studies researchers:** Shimaa El Sharkawy, Nissaf Brahimji, Zeinab Sorour

#### **Revised by AFA Consultants' Council members:**

Karam Karam: Regional Consultant- Governance and conflict issues, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Africa (ESCWA)

Asmaa Noweira: Professor of Political Science, The University of Tunis El Manar, Tunisia

#### **Translated by**

Sonia Farid

**This paper reflects the views of its writers  
and not necessarily those of AFA.**

All photos included in the paper are from  
open sources on the internet.

## The Coronavirus crisis:

Do current policies achieve protection for all?  
Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia

### A comparative study



منتدى البدائل العربي للدراسات  
Arab Forum for Alternatives

منتدى البدائل العربي للدراسات  
(AFA)

West House 3 Build., 2nd Floor Jeanne D'Arc Street,  
Hamra, Beirut, Lebanon, Olive Grove offices

[www.afalebanon.org](http://www.afalebanon.org)

Tel: +96176386477

Mail: [info@afalebanon.org](mailto:info@afalebanon.org)



## Table of contents

<b>Introduction:</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>First: General overview of state response in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia:</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>Second: Public services during the pandemic:</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>Third: Allocation of resources: Where does the money come from? .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Fourth: Vulnerable groups during the pandemic:</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Fifth: Transparency and media discourse: Is there any progress?.....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Sixth: The role of municipalities and civil society:</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Seventh: Democracy and governance: The decision-making process:.....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Conclusion:</b> .....	<b>60</b>

# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Based on official statistics, Coronavirus cases had exceeded 70 million by Mid- December 2020 and more than a million and half died. The virus affected almost all countries around the world<sup>2</sup>. The pandemic gave rise to a number of questions about the dominant economic system, crisis management approaches, equal access to public services, and the role played by national and local governments in addressing the ramifications of the pandemic. The issue of public services was particularly highlighted not only in terms of equal access, or rather lack of it, but also the quality of those services and the level of satisfaction with them.

Examining the relationship between public services and public policies seems inevitable in this context. Most countries across the world in recent years have been trying to improve public services even if for different reasons including seeking legitimacy for the ruling regime, supporting local markets through creating a class that has access to these markets, or ensuring social stability and the contentedness of citizens. In all cases, it is confirmed beyond any doubt that essential services are the basic rights of citizens on one hand and a major component of the development process on the other hand. It is through public policies that governments address those services.<sup>3</sup> The pandemic had a direct impact on public services, especially healthcare services, and particularly their provision for vulnerable groups such as informal workers, women, refugees, children, the elderly, and those who have chronic diseases.

Focusing on the case of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this paper attempts to answer the following question: Are the policy-making processes and the dominant economic systems in the Arab region capable of dealing with emergencies effectively and in a way that achieves social justice? This will be done through examining the ability of three countries in the region—Tunisia, Lebanon, and Egypt—to provide services amid crises through analyzing policy-making processes during the pandemic and exposing the gaps that need to be addressed to achieve social justice, especially for vulnerable groups.

Drawing on official statistics, the following graphs show the developments of the coronavirus crisis in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia until mid-December 2020,<sup>4</sup> that is until the first announcement of vaccination procedures in Egypt <sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> Research for this paper has been generously supported by a grant of the VolkswagenStiftung in the context of the research project Struggles over Socioeconomic Reforms: Political Conflict and Social Contention in Egypt and Tunisia post 2011 in Interregional Comparison. This project is being conducted at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt and carried out in co-operation with the Arab Forum for Alternatives (AFA, Beirut/Lebanon) and the University of Sfax (Tunisia).

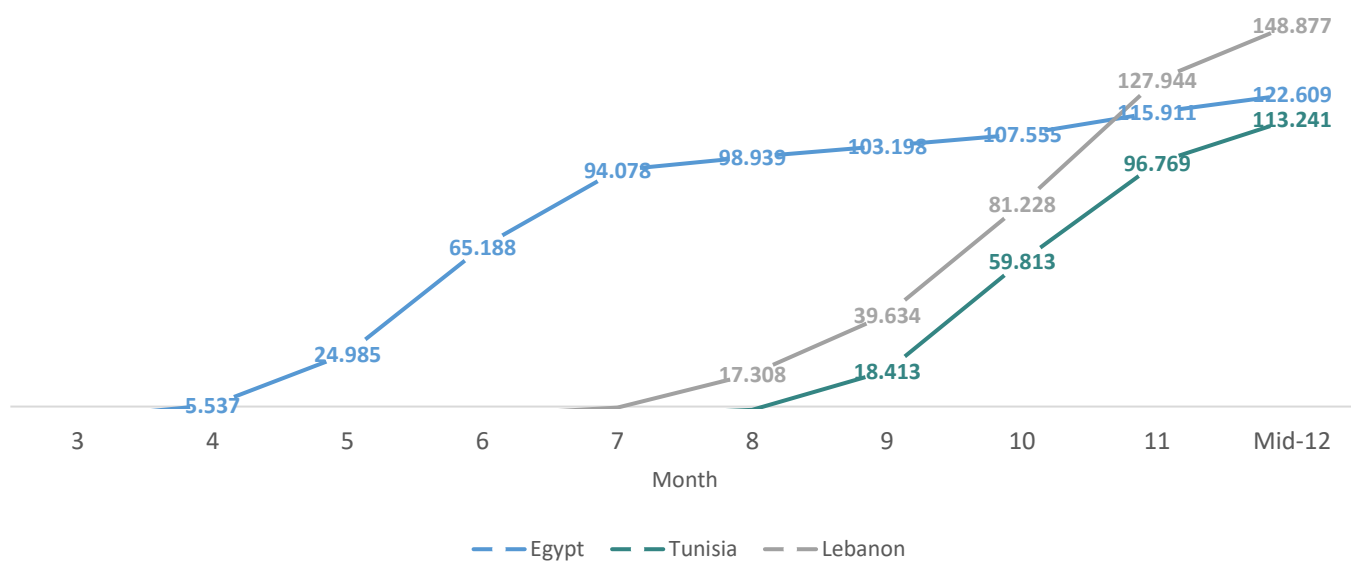
<sup>2</sup> Coronavirus Map: Tracking the Global Outbreak, The New York Times, <https://nyti.ms/33ZG4Ur>

<sup>3</sup> Mohamed El Agati, ed. *Public policies and social justice in Egypt* [Arabic]. Arab Forum for Alternatives, 2019: <http://afalebanon.org/?p=8091>

<sup>4</sup> All statistics are from: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

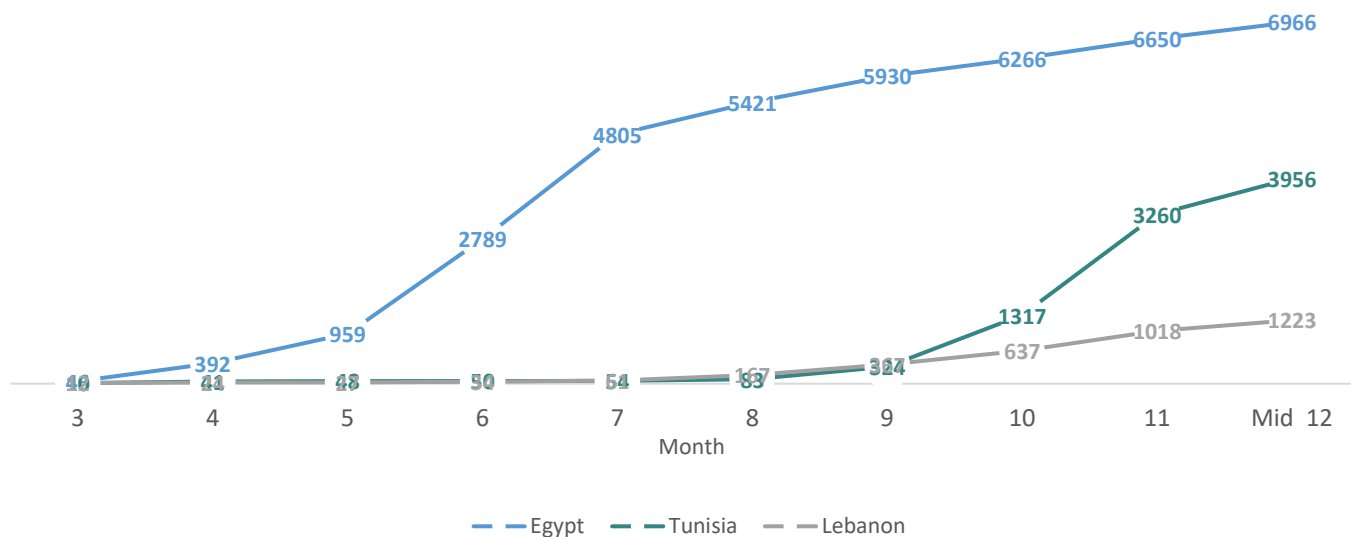
<sup>5</sup> After the first shipment arrived in Egypt ... Information about the Chinese Sinopharma vaccine against the Corona virus, Al-Masry Al-Youm, December 11, 2020, <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/2109330>

## ● NUMBER OF INFECTED PEOPLE



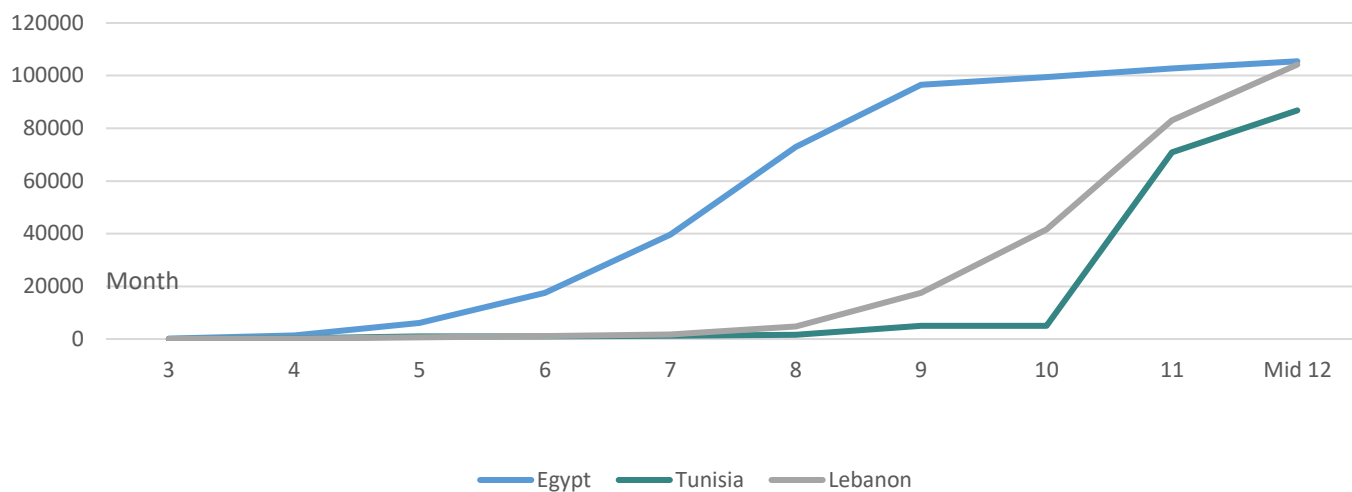
Month	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Mid-12
— Egypt	710	5537	24985	65188	94078	98939	103198	107555	115911	122609
— Tunisia	394	994	1077	1169	1535	3803	18413	59813	96769	113241
— Lebanon	463	725	1120	1740	4555	17308	39634	81228	127944	148877

## ● Number of Deaths



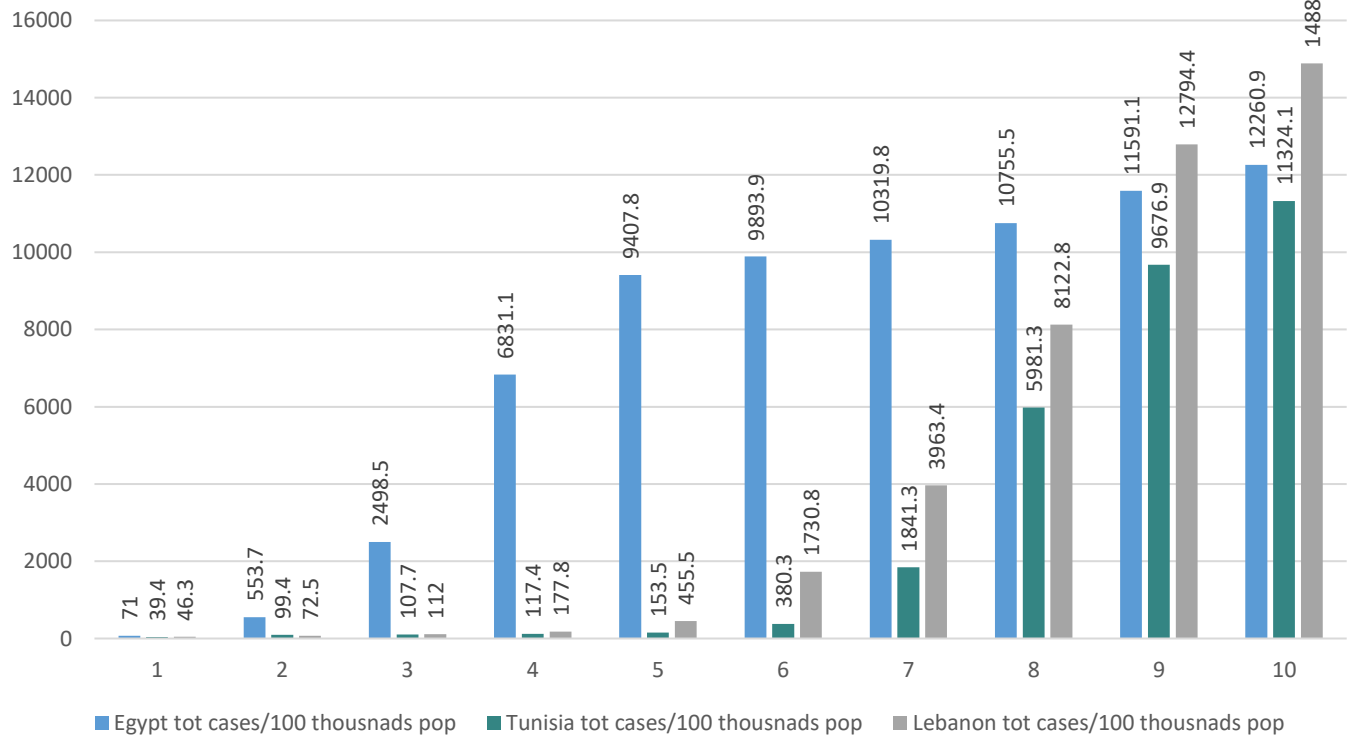
Month	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Mid 12
— Egypt	46	392	959	2789	4805	5421	5930	6266	6650	6966
— Tunisia	10	41	48	50	54	83	324	1317	3260	3956
— Lebanon	12	24	27	34	61	167	367	637	1018	1223

### Recoverd Cases



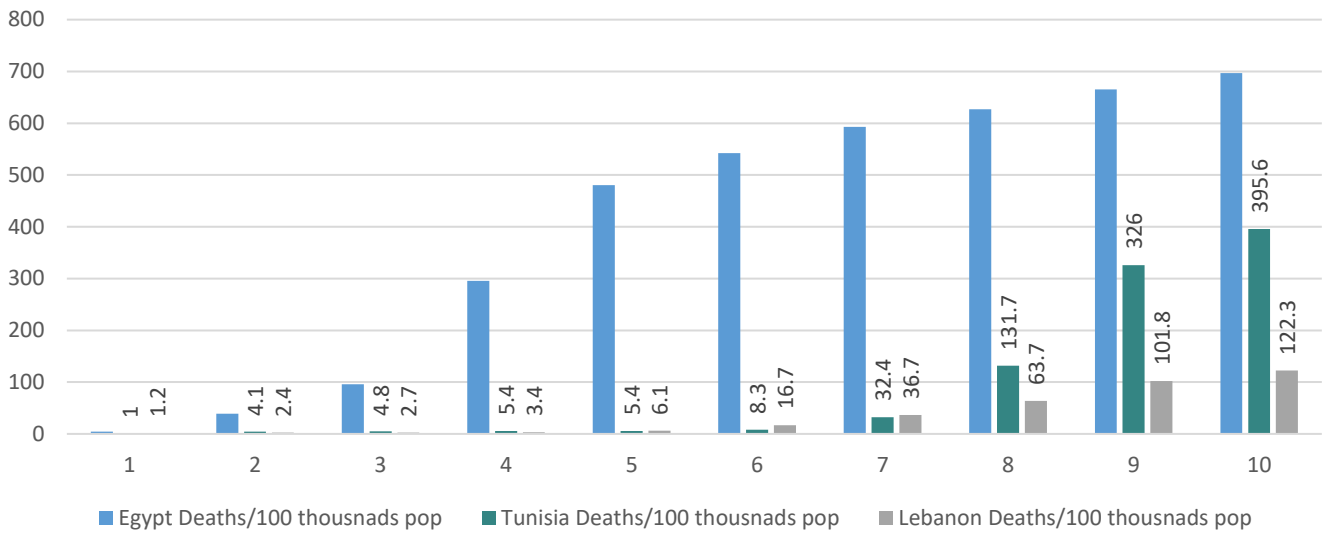
Month <sup>0</sup>	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Mid 12
Egypt	157	1381	6073	17539	39638	72929	96494	99452	102718	105450
Tunisia	3	305	960	1029	1195	1573	5032	5032	70851	86801
Lebanon	37	150	612	1153	1761	4811	17565	41624	83034	104207

### Total cases/ 100 thousand pop

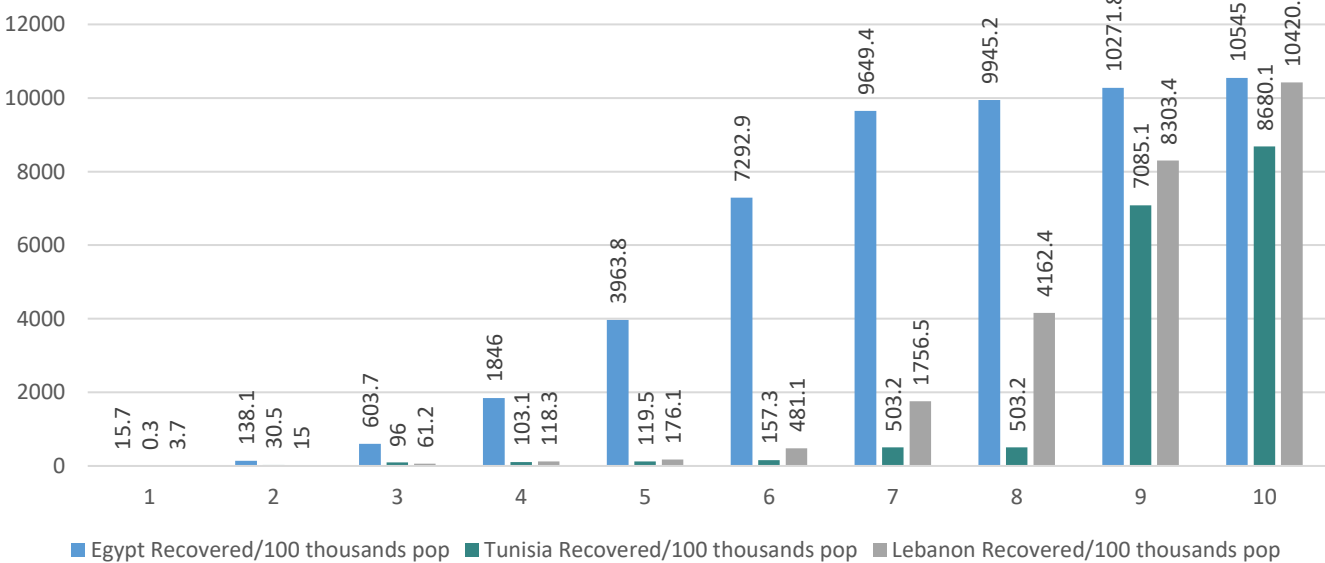




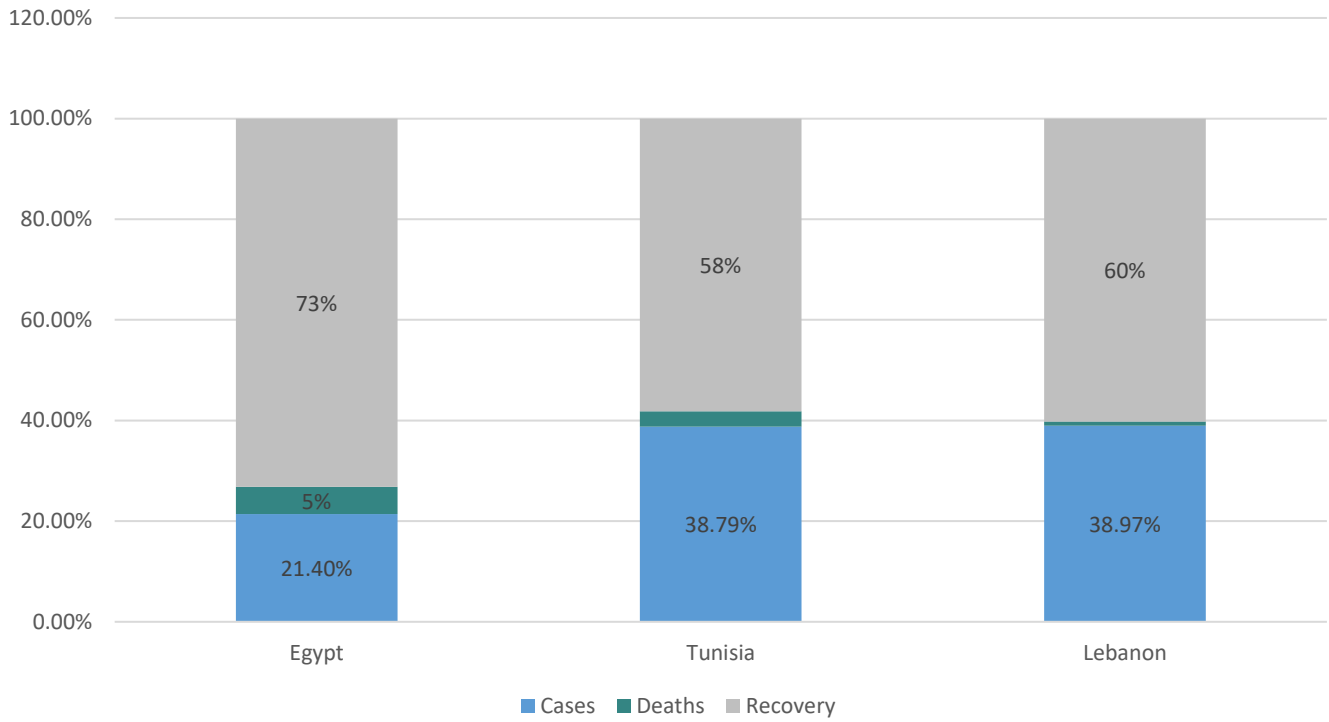
### ● Deaths/ 100 thousands pop



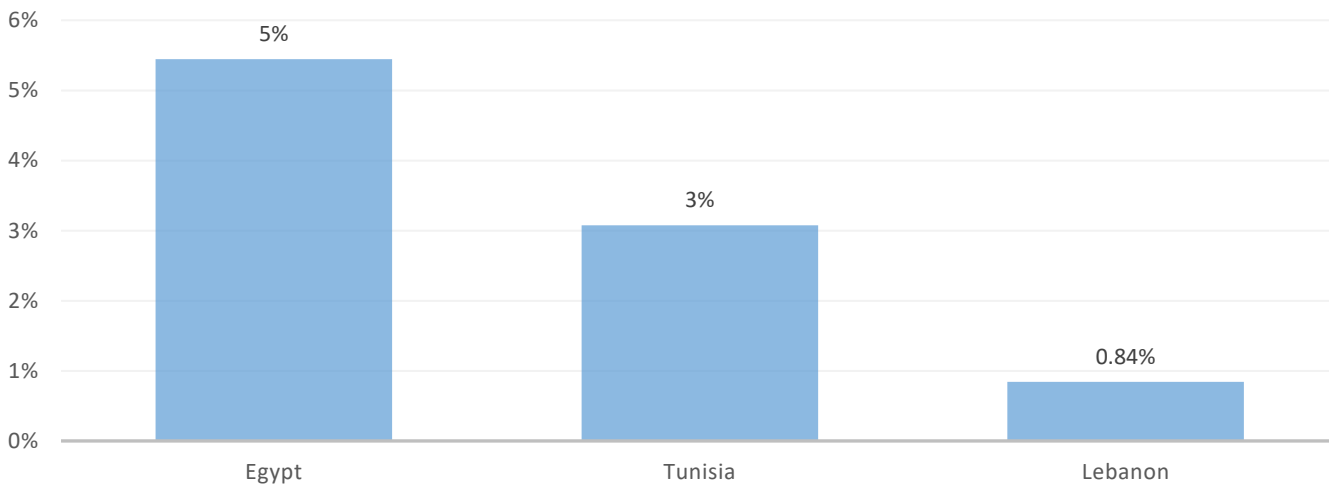
### ● Total Recovered/ 100 thousands pop

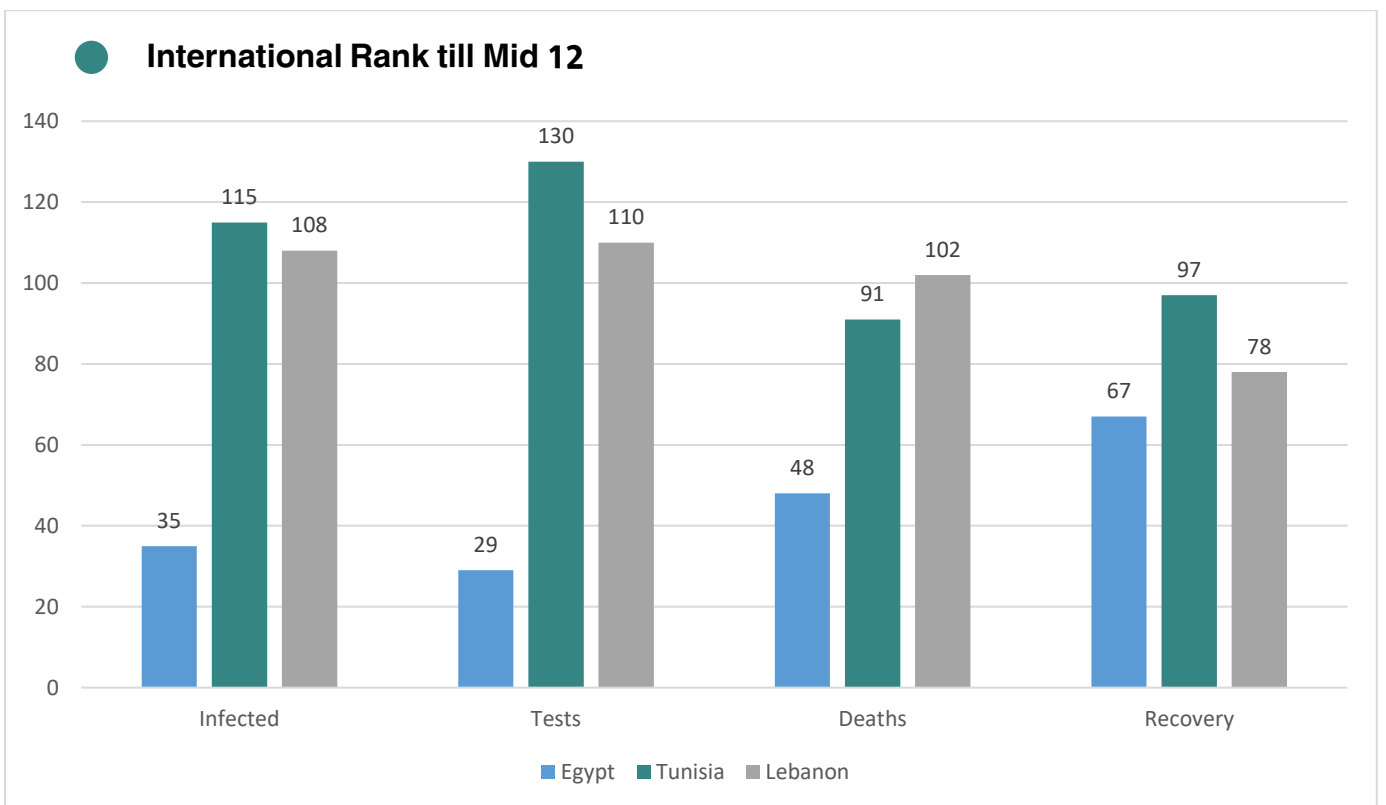
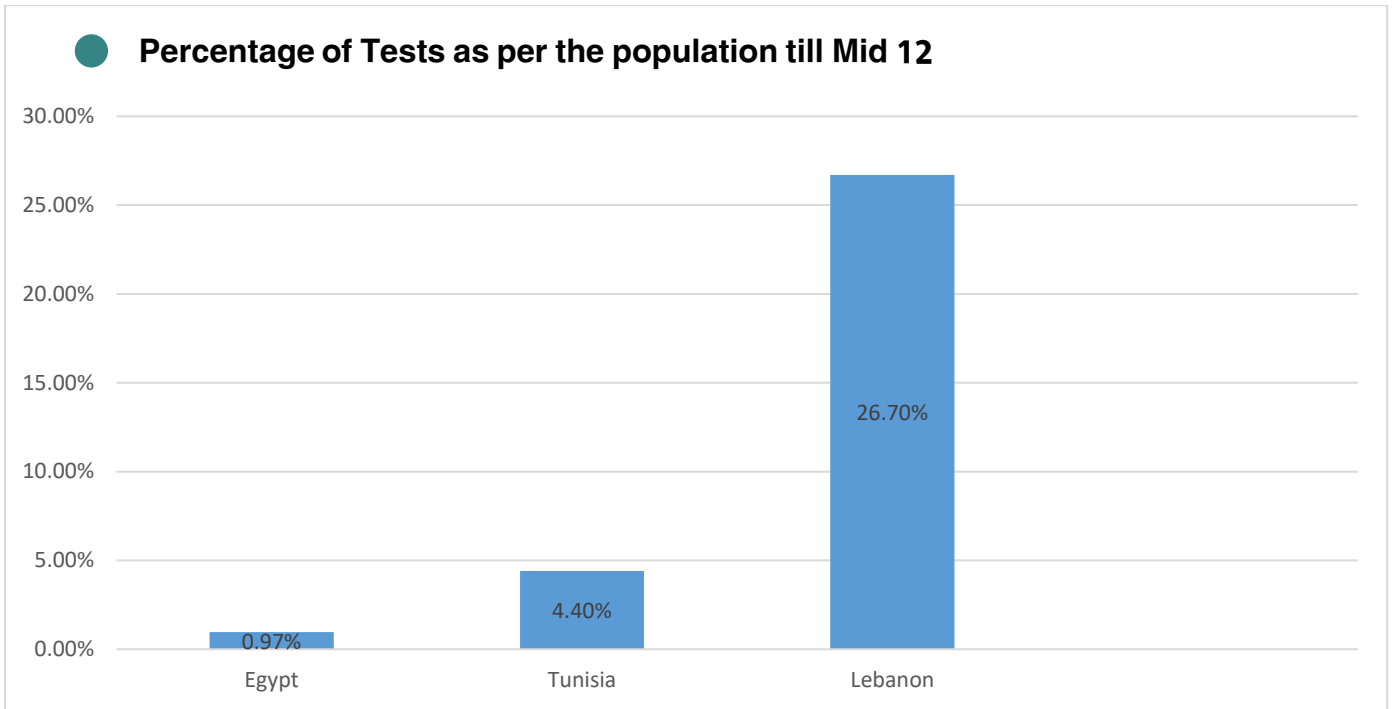


**Percentages of Recovery & Deaths and Active Cases from the full cases**



**Fatality rate per Total cases**





## First: General overview of state response in Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia:

With the spread of Coronavirus, Egypt, Lebanon, and Tunisia adopted a set of precautionary measures. In Egypt, the government started with examining passengers from China in late January 2020. Egypt recorded the first Coronavirus case on February 14, 2020 and that is when all passengers coming to Egypt were examined. This included air, maritime, and land borders<sup>6</sup>.

On March 2, 2020, Tunisia recorded the first Coronavirus case and a curfew was imposed from 6:00 am till 6:00 pm. Flights between Tunisia and Italy, where cases were on the rise, were suspended and the same applied to China while flights with France were reduced to once a week. Classes were suspended in schools and universities<sup>7</sup>.

In Lebanon, the government took gradual, yet rapid measures compared to other countries in the region. Based on statistics, these measures led to curbing the spread of the disease by late April and early May and preventing it from turning into a pandemic in the country<sup>8</sup>. This, however, changed later, especially in the aftermath of the massive explosion that took place in Beirut Harbor. Before recording the first Coronavirus case, passengers coming through Beirut airport from countries where the virus spread were examined and the same applied to everyone entering the country through land borders. On February 1, the Lebanese government created a committee to follow up on protective measures and made Beirut General Hospital the only authorized place to treat Coronavirus patients despite the deterioration it had witnessed before the pandemic.

With the first cases, each of the three countries started a plan to curb the spread of the virus. In Egypt, the Coronavirus outbreak on a Nile cruise ship on March 7, 2020, where 12 of the Egyptian crew tested positive, marked a turning point for the government. The Ministry of Health raised its alert level and created a central operations room that includes deputy health minister for public health and representatives from the departments of curative care, emergency care, and pharmaceuticals as well as representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the General Intelligence Directorate, and the Administrative Control Authority. The Ministry of Health named 27 hospitals, one in each governorate, to examine people who show symptoms and isolate them until results are out. Quarantine hospitals, six so far, have also been established. Helplines were created and personnel, based in the business high-tech district Smart Village, were trained to answer callers' questions about the virus and each 20 employees were supervised by a doctor<sup>9</sup>.

In Tunisia, the president and prime minister announced on March 20, 2020 a total lockdown and people were only allowed to go out only for basic needs such as food and

---

<sup>6</sup> "As a precaution against Coronavirus: Egypt starts examining passengers from China [Arabic]." *Sky News Arabia*, January 23, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2yt0pWw>

<sup>7</sup> Tunisian presidency portal: <https://bit.ly/3e1S7Fz>

<sup>8</sup> "We're not saved yet, but numbers are promising [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar Newspaper*, April 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2UKwwtG>

<sup>9</sup> Hossam Bahgat. "From the Corona operating room: How does the Ministry of Health run the 'war'?" [Arabic]." *Mada Masr*, March 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2xaQqoD>

healthcare and were not allowed to move between neighborhoods. Air, land, and maritime borders were closed and Tunisians who did not live abroad were repatriated. Public transportation between cities was suspended and private cars needed a permit from national security. All cultural and religious activities were suspended till April 20, 2020. Another set of measures targeted vulnerable groups and poor families through a financial aid of 80 US dollars, which is very little in light of price hikes. Financial assistance was also provided to workers in and owners of small businesses that closed during lockdown such as cafés, restaurants, barbershops, nurseries etc. Investment funds and funding lines were created to help companies affected by the lockdown and all companies were allowed to claim VAT refunds while particular companies received fiscal and customs exemptions<sup>10</sup>.

In Lebanon, measures were taken as soon as the first case was recorded on February 21, 2020. The crisis management committee decided to quarantine all those who displayed symptoms and passengers from areas that recorded cases in the public hospital. A medical center was established in northern Lebanon after several cases were recorded and the Ministry of Interior assigned municipalities the task of following up on the self-isolation of passengers from affected areas. Flights to countries that recorded high numbers of cases were suspended with few exceptions following extensive negotiations as decisions about flights came to be politicized. Universities and schools were first instructed to take all precautionary measures, but as cases increased all educational institutions were closed temporarily at the beginning until the minister of education announced ending the academic year and cancelling degrees<sup>11</sup>.

More measures were taken in the three countries as the number of cases kept increasing. When Egypt recorded 100 cases a month after discovering the first case, the Higher Committee for Novel Coronavirus Crisis Management was formed, and a number of decisions were made. These included suspending flights as of March 19, 2020 till end of March and the suspension was extended till April 23, 2020. On March 24, 2020, the government closed schools, universities, and mosques, banned gatherings, funerals, and wedding parties, suspended all sports activities, and launched awareness campaigns in all media outlets. These measures were initially meant to last for two weeks then were extended. Curfew was imposed from 7:00 pm till 6:00 am and this also applied to all means of transportation, public and private, except trucks carrying foodstuffs. All stores and shopping malls were closed from 5:00 pm till 6:00 am except Fridays and Saturdays where 24-hour closures were imposed<sup>12</sup>.

The Lebanese government declared a state of general mobilization on March 15, 2020 initially for two weeks then extended it until April 26, 2020 and imposed a set of preemptive measures. Curfew was imposed at night and borders remained closed with land and maritime borders closed to arrivals only. Government institutions were closed with few exceptions and educational institutions remained closed. The minister of interior then decided to allow cars, trucks, and motorcycles on particular days based on their license

---

<sup>10</sup> Tunisian presidency portal. Op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> For more see Faten El Hajj's report "Academic year ended and degrees cancelled: Will the minister of education stop tuition fees? [Arabic]" May 18, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3cLMZUR>

<sup>12</sup> "Government precautionary measures to deal with Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, March 24, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34kz1Ge>

plate numbers. Following extensive talks, the government set a plan for the repatriation of Lebanese citizens, yet it was faced by several obstacles as designated flights were not enough to respond to repatriation requests and the national carrier Middle East Airlines raised the prices of tickets. Quarantine centers were created, 23 until April 3, 2020, and the Ministry of Health named university hospital labs in which PCR tests are done. Police and army patrols monitored compliance with government measures, especially the night curfew, dispersed all gatherings, and reported violators by both entities and individuals. The army was placed in charge of supervising all warehouses and transporting medical supplies to public hospitals. Until May 21, 2020, the total number of tests was 67,084<sup>13</sup> and as of May 18, antibody tests were done at labs authorized by the Ministry of Health<sup>14</sup>. The ministry's field teams also take samples from those who were in contact with people who tested positive<sup>15</sup>.

In April 2020, as the month of Ramadan, in which religious gatherings are common, drew closer, the Egyptian prime minister held a press conference to announce the latest decisions made by the Higher Committee for Novel Coronavirus Crisis Management. These included reducing curfew hours to become from 9:00 pm till 6:00 am, reopening stores and shopping malls all week including Fridays and Saturdays until 5:00 pm, and allowing home delivery and take out throughout the month of Ramadan. This was accompanied by gradual resumption of some government services including traffic departments, notarization offices, and court sessions especially for inheritance. Reduction of workforce attendance at government institutions continued till the end of Ramadan<sup>16</sup>. In Tunisia, the first phase of partial lockdown started from May 4 till May 24. Work was resumed at 50% capacity in government institutions, industries, services, and construction and at 100% at private business while small businesses were allowed to resume work on May 11 with the exception of barbers, clothes and shoes stores, and department stores. Other businesses were allowed to gradually resume work during the second and third phases, May 24-June 4 and June 4- June 14, respectively, until all businesses operate at 100% capacity.

In Lebanon, a total lockdown was imposed for four days after cases started increasing and it became obvious that the country is entering a new phase that requires more than protective measures. The minister of health announced on April 17, 2020 that the danger is over in Lebanon and that the virus was contained through lockdown<sup>17</sup>. Prime Minister Hassan Diab said the virus can still come back and the number of daily PCR tests increased to 1,500<sup>18</sup>.

On May 14, Lebanon was getting ready for the third phase of repatriation while there was no clear mechanism for monitoring quarantined returnees. Meanwhile, many people stopped abiding by precautionary measures and social distancing and the government did

---

<sup>13</sup> "COVID-19 daily situation report [Arabic]." Disaster Risk Management Unit, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, May 21, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Hadeel Farfour. "Coronavirus cases are up once more: Is Lebanon heading towards herd immunity? [Arabic]" *Al Akhbar*, May 18, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bVCdKu>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Prime minister's decree on precautionary measures during the month of Ramadan, *Al Ahram*, April 23, 2020: <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2399389.aspx>

<sup>17</sup> "Lebanese health minister: The worst is over in the Corona crisis [Arabic]." *alMayadeen.net*, April 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bLoUfC>

<sup>18</sup> Rajana Hameya. "Corona cases dropping [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, April 15, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2RD23vq>

not retract its decision to have businesses resume work gradually. On May 21, cases amounted to 1,000<sup>19</sup>, yet information minister said this number still does not mean the virus is spreading<sup>20</sup>.

By early May, governments started considering a gradual return to normalcy. In Egypt, there was talk about the necessity of coexisting with the virus while adhering to precautionary measures such as social distancing and wearing face masks in public places. Meanwhile, the government stressed it would not resort to total lockdown because of its negative impact on the economy and because such a step could obstruct the provision of basic commodities and services to citizens<sup>21</sup>. The government also reduced quarantine time for returnees from abroad from 14 to seven days while isolating those who show symptoms in designated hospitals<sup>22</sup>. In Lebanon, the government decided to reopen gradually. “We’ll strike a balance between getting work done while monitoring the cases in hospitals,” said the health minister. “If at any point things go out of control, we can go back to lockdown.” The minister added that Lebanese citizens are partially responsible for the spread of the virus since while 70% abide by precautionary measures, 30% do not. The minister explained that the government applied a soft form of herd immunity while planning to reopen gradually in stages, each following a timeline and conditioned upon medical reports from hospitals<sup>23</sup>.

In Tunisia, the government announced on May 21, 2020 the timeline for resumption of work in different sectors and partial lockdown started on May 26. Lobna Jribi, spokeswoman of the National Coronavirus Response Authority, said that nurseries would open at 50% capacity while construction, services, and industry sectors would resume at 75% and the same applied to government institutions provided that employees work on two shifts while alternation of employees was suspended. Cafés, restaurants, and bars would resume working partially on May 29 then fully on June 4. Mosques, museums, historical landmarks, and sports events would also resume on June 4. The start of the academic year was postponed from June 1 till June 8 and students were allowed to start leaving their hometowns for where their campuses are starting June 4.

In order to implement those steps, each country formed special committees to deal with the pandemic. In Egypt and Tunisia, these committees were headed by the prime minister<sup>24</sup> while in Lebanon the committee was headed by the secretary general of the Supreme Defense Council. Members of the committees included ministers of defense, interior, justice, health, finance, trade, education, information, and/or social affairs. While the committees were made up of high-ranking officials, which demonstrates that the crisis was not dealt with lightly, no priority was given to scientists and there was no focus on international cooperation. There was a general state of relaxation in the three countries

<sup>19</sup> Rajana Hameya. “Corona cases reach 954 [Arabic].” *Al Akhbar*, May 20, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2LQ7yDK>

<sup>20</sup> Hadeel Farfour. Op. cit.

<sup>21</sup> For more see “Madbouli: Life might be back to normal after the Lesser Bairam [Arabic].” *Masrawy*, April 23, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3dWncVA>

<sup>22</sup> “Parliament demands scenarios of restoring normalcy [Arabic].” *Al Youm Al Sabea*, May 14, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Xi4UMq>

<sup>23</sup> “Ministry of Health: Quarantine for returnees reduced from 14 to 7 days [Arabic].” *Al Youm Al Sabea*, May 19, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bS6gD3>

<sup>24</sup> “Minister of health: We adopt the herd immunity approach and lockdown cannot continue [Arabic].” *Al Jadeed*, May 21, 2020: <https://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/news/local/21052020103>

<sup>24</sup> “Meeting of the ministerial committee for the management of Coronavirus crisis [Arabic].” <https://bit.ly/2VzwKmD>

from June till mid-September. Life seemed to be going back to normal, with the exception of travel. However, by mid-September cases started increasing once more as the second wave of the pandemic started globally. The response of the state in each of the three countries was more relaxed than the first wave.

Even though cases increased remarkably from June till August in Egypt, the state relaxed the precautionary measures it imposed before, and curfew was cancelled. Airports were reopened while applying basic protective measures both at airports and on board the planes. Several private beaches were opened while public beaches remained closed. Cafés and restaurants closed at midnight while stores and shopping malls closed at 10:00 pm. The government also allowed the resumption of social gatherings such as weddings and funerals. Courts, civil registries, and banks were back to work provided that protective measures are observed, especially wearing face masks<sup>25</sup>.

In Tunisia, former health minister Abdel Latif Mekki announced that Coronavirus was defeated and that horizontal transmission of the virus stopped and added that there are no more local cases, especially in touristic areas<sup>26</sup>. Life was back to normal as educational institutions, companies, and entertainment venues reopened while zero cases were recorded for several consecutive weeks, and patients recovered. Borders were reopened on June 27, 2020 and no restrictions were imposed on passengers from countries categorized as “green,” including France, Italy, and the UK. In July, the number of cases per week shot up tenfold and on August 1, the Ministry of Health announced the death of one of the patients, the first to be recorded since June 17, 2020<sup>27</sup>.

In Lebanon, curfew hours were reduced in early June and for the first time since the gradual relaxation of restrictions shopping malls and beaches reopened while officially the traffic system that allows vehicles in the street based on license plate numbers was maintained<sup>28</sup> and public places were to remain closed. On June 30, Middle East Airlines announced the gradual opening of the airport<sup>29</sup>. By mid-August, the number of cases in Lebanon amounted to 30,000 and reached 40,000 by early October<sup>30</sup>. After the gradual reopening that followed the end of the first phase of general mobilization, which lasted for three months, lockdown was imposed again between July 30 and August 3<sup>31</sup>. The third lockdown took place with the remarkable increase in cases since on August 3, one day before the Beirut Harbor explosion<sup>32</sup>, the number of cases was 5,062 yet reached 12,698 on August 23<sup>33</sup>. By that

---

<sup>25</sup> “New government decisions about relaxing Coronavirus restrictions [Arabic].” *Mada Masr*, July 23, 2020: <https://bit.ly/36epVfo>

<sup>26</sup> “Coronavirus in Tunisia [Arabic].” The Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication, August 2020: <http://www.jasminefoundation.org/ar/?p=5601>

<sup>27</sup> “Tunisia announces Coronavirus cases increased ten-fold one month following border opening [Arabic].” *France 24*, August 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2TZLE5g>

<sup>28</sup> “29 Coronavirus cases and repatriations are once more brought up [Arabic].” *Al Akhbar*, June 1, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34R762o>

<sup>29</sup> “Middle East Airlines announces re-opening airport to the Lebanese, Arabs, and foreigners [Arabic].” *Ministry of Information Website*, June 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2JA1Nwf>

<sup>30</sup> COVID-19 daily situation report [Arabic].” Disaster Risk Management Unit, Presidency of the Council of Ministers, November 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/387nQ7z>

<sup>31</sup> Ines Sheri. “Lebanon extends general mobilization till end of 2020 [Arabic].” *Al Sharq Al Awsat*, August 27, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2HXREI4>

<sup>32</sup> Rita El-Gammal, “Lebanon resumes the country's lockdown due to Corona and an urgent plan targets hospitals,” “Al-Araby Al-Jadeed”, 8/19/2020, <https://bit.ly/38ewqBP>

<sup>33</sup> Ines Sheri. Op. cit.



time, fewer people observed lockdown rules and the Ministry of Interior issued eight new decrees that regulated activities in villages and municipalities in which cases increased from October 5 till November 1<sup>34</sup>. On November 2, Minister of Health Hamad Hassan said he recommended a total lockdown for two weeks, but it was rejected by the government<sup>35</sup>. On October 30, the Coronavirus Follow-Up Committee asked the interior minister to impose curfew starting 9:00 pm. The minister stated that while he will look into imposing curfew, it would be very difficult materialize under the current economic crisis especially that most workers depend on daily wages and the government is not capable of compensating them<sup>36</sup>.

However, with the noticeable increase in the number of cases during the months of October and November, and the depletion of the health sector, and in light of the latter's demands during the aforementioned period, *"to close to save the dilapidated and depleted health sector ... and Health ministry, according to its sources, to close for four weeks, not just two weeks, in order to ensure control of the very high numbers of cases."*<sup>37</sup>

The Supreme Defense Council decided on November 10, for a total lockdown from 11/14/2020 until 11/30/2020, subject to exceptions<sup>38</sup> That was previously determined by the Council of Ministers in the decision to declare general mobilization. At the end of the Public mobilization period on 30<sup>th</sup> of November 2020, Lebanon decided to gradually reopen the country, and the Minister of Health clarified that "the country is on the verge of the festive season under special circumstances and life complications that require everyone to find" half-solutions "and a sense of responsibility, explaining that there will be a weekly assessment of the epidemiological reality to take appropriate measures regarding developments, alluding to the possibility of taking "more severe" decisions and measures in the near future if necessary. He stated that the third level of the spread of the COVID 19 necessarily dictates the continuation of the total lockdown, but the ministerial committee decided to gradually reopen the country in response to demands of the civil society, economic agencies and commercial activities under difficult living conditions.<sup>39</sup>

The strategies adopted by the three countries were generally in line with WHO recommendations and the strategies followed by most countries around the world, with the exception of those that adopted the herd immunity approach<sup>40</sup> at the initial stage.

---

<sup>34</sup> For details of the decisions see <http://www.interior.gov.lb/Desicions.aspx>

<sup>35</sup> Ayman Azzam. "Lebanese health minister warns of imminent disaster owing to increased Corona cases [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*, November 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/32ffuXM>

<sup>36</sup> "Fahmi: Coordination with security and army forces to impose curfew after 9:00 pm [Arabic]." *El Nashra Website*, November 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/364pCnp>

<sup>37</sup> "Return to the first fear: the closure for more than two weeks?", "The Lebanese Al-Akhbar Newspaper," 11/10/2020, <https://bit.ly/32r85F5>

<sup>38</sup> "Details of the Supreme Defense Council's Statement on the Total Lock down in Lebanon," "Al-Manar Website," 11/10/2020, <https://bit.ly/35e0vPV>

<sup>39</sup> Lebanon decides to reopen different sectors to curb the spread of COVID 19, Al Youm Al Sabea (Arabic), 29/11/2020, <https://bit.ly/2XjBIXX>

<sup>40</sup> "When most of a population is immune to an infectious disease, this provides indirect protection—or herd immunity (also called herd protection)—to those who are not immune to the disease. For example, if 80% of a population is immune to a virus, four out of every five people who encounter someone with the disease won't get sick (and won't spread the disease any further). In this way, the spread of infectious diseases is kept under control. Depending how contagious an infection is, usually 50% to 90% of a population needs immunity to achieve herd immunity." From "What is Herd Immunity and How Can We Achieve It With COVID-19?" Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, Johns Hopkins University: <https://bit.ly/3fE96yD>

Those strategies basically relied on lockdown and curfew to curb the spread of the virus in a way that enables the healthcare sector of dealing with already-existing patients. This strategy succeeded in Lebanon and Tunisia during the first wave with cases decreasing by 92% in the first and 76% in the second from mid-March till April 30. This, however, did not work in Egypt, which witnessed a 94% increase in the number of cases, also from mid-March till April 30<sup>41</sup>. When the second wave started, the three countries were less prepared to deal with the virus. This was demonstrated in reluctance to return to total lockdown, especially as far as flights are concerned, and testing returning passengers was considered sufficient.

The three countries used their international relations addressed the crisis through two strategies first to receive aids, second to build cooperation and solidarity with other countries by providing them with possible means of support. Egypt, for example, sent medical supplies and sanitizers to China, Italy, and the UK through official delegations headed by the minister of health in the cases of China and Italy, as part of the government's efforts to boost international cooperation to combat the virus<sup>42</sup>. Lebanon communicated with several countries about strategies to face the virus, especially China. The two countries exchanged experience and talked about precautionary measures while the Chinese community in Lebanon and several Chinese companies donated medical equipment and supplies to Lebanon<sup>43</sup>. The two governments discussed ways to facilitate the purchase of medical supplies from Chinese companies<sup>44</sup>. The Lebanese Foreign Ministry communicated with the governments of countries from where Lebanese citizens needed to be repatriated<sup>45</sup>. Tunisia received aid from China and Italy and the Tunisian president said his country is willing to offer aid to other affected countries despite its limited resources, which was met with a wave of sarcasm, especially on social media. On April 11, a Tunisian medical delegation was sent to Italy as a symbolic gesture of solidarity. Tunisia also received aid from the European Union to face the social and economic ramifications of the pandemic and which reached 250 million euros, according to EU ambassador to Tunisia Patrice Bergamini. The Tunisian finance minister said in a televised interview that Tunisia would get 400 million dollars from the International Monetary Fund to help curb the spread of the virus<sup>46</sup>.

The relationship between the three countries and the WHO remained the same through the second wave, especially in terms of aid<sup>47</sup>. In March 25, a team of WHO experts ended its visit to Egypt, and which aimed at offering the Egyptian government technical support and identifying points of weakness that need to be addressed in order to determine priorities. Head of the Department of Communicable Diseases at the WHO Eastern Mediterranean

---

<sup>41</sup> Statistics can be seen through <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries>

<sup>42</sup> "Two military planes to transfer medical supplies from Egypt to Italy [Arabic]." *Al Masry Al Youm*, April 4, 2020: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1755516>

<sup>43</sup> "Chinese ambassador in Lebanon: We haven't defeated Coronavirus yet and we're cooperating with the Lebanese government to deal with the virus [Arabic]." April 11, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2V6RtiB>

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Lebanese PM heads first coordination meeting on Coronavirus [Arabic]." Presidency of the Council of Ministers Website, March 20, 2020: <http://pcm.gov.lb/arabic/subpg.aspx?pageid=17384>

<sup>46</sup> Al Arab Website: <https://bit.ly/2yKHUx9>

<sup>47</sup> Statement of the WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean on the closing of the 67th session of the Regional Committee: <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/statement-of-the-who-regional-director-for-the-eastern-mediterranean-on-the-closing-of-the-67th-session-of-the-regional-committee.html>

Regional Office and the head of the experts' team announced that following several days of meetings and field visits inside and outside Cairo, Egypt is exerting "tremendous effort" to combat Coronavirus, especially regarding early testing, laboratory testing, quarantine measures, tracking cases, and patients' admission to hospitals<sup>48</sup>. In Lebanon, WHO representatives attended meetings headed by prime minister Hassan Diab and the Lebanese government followed WHO recommendations, including general mobilization and precautionary measures. In Tunisia, WHO representative attended meetings headed by the minister of health and the organization supplied Tunisia with medical equipment on regular basis. The WHO also monitors the performance of the government as far as curbing the spread of the virus is concerned and reviews the results of daily tests that are later published by the Ministry of Health, which gives this information more credibility.

Measures taken in Lebanon and Tunisia were mainly a reaction to developments while in Egypt there was a shift in strategy through adopting the herd immunity approach. This underlines the pressures to which the government is subjected by economic entities, which proved that claims about the marginalization of these entities after 2013 are not accurate. In fact, these entities remained an integral part of authority and still have the ability to influence and change public policies. This influence was demonstrated in reducing curfew hours and reopening several places known for overcrowding such as marketplaces despite the report, which stated that 52% of families subject of the study saw curfew as the best precautionary measure followed by the suspension of economic activities<sup>49</sup>. In Egypt, the government put more pressure on the groups of low income, which was shown when the prime minister approved a draft law on solidarity contributions to face the ramifications of the pandemic. Based on the law, 1% of the net income of all employees in the public sector would be deducted for 12 months starting July 1 and 0.5% of pensions<sup>50</sup>. On the level of international cooperation, the Egyptian government was the most efficient since it adopted the mutual support approach and initiated aid to countries that were hit hard by the pandemic instead of solely relying on moral support and requesting aid. The WHO played a role in the three countries, yet this role was limited to recommendations and moral support but not that of a partner or an international coordinator. That is why the effect of this role was not seen on the ground. In Lebanon, cases increased in the overcrowded Roumieh prison and the WHO representative said that while the organization is communicating with prison officials, it is not possible to stop the spread of the virus there. She also added that the organization evaluated quarantine measures and would provide technical support and send nurses to monitor quarantined inmates<sup>51</sup>.

---

<sup>48</sup> WHO delegation concludes COVID-19 technical mission to Egypt, World Health Organization, Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean: <http://www.emro.who.int/media/news/who-delegation-concludes-covid-19-technical-mission-to-egypt.html>

<sup>49</sup> "The impact of Coronavirus on Egyptian families until May 2020 [Arabic]." The Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics: <https://bit.ly/3hU81nm>

<sup>50</sup> "To make up for Coronavirus losses, the government approves draft law to deduct 1% of incomes. 0.5% of pensions [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, May 20, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bVPnYc>

<sup>51</sup> Laila Girgis. "WHO representative: We are at a crossroads and Lebanon is in a delicate situation [Arabic]." *An-Nahar*, September 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2TPlmT6>

## Second: Public services during the pandemic:

This section is going to tackle the status of public services and state responses after the outbreak of the pandemic, namely, health, education, basic commodities, aid for the private sector and communication services. We shall start by the **Health Sector**:

Sector	Egypt	Lebanon	Tunisia
Hospitals	<p>-The Ministry of Health named 27 hospitals, one in each governorate, to examine people who show symptoms and isolate them until results are out and six quarantine hospitals were established<sup>52</sup>.</p> <p>-In early May, the number of quarantine hospitals across Egypt reached 17<sup>53</sup>. Fever and chest hospitals also received cases that showed symptoms and referred positive ones to quarantine hospitals.</p> <p>-On May 3, the Ministry of Health announced a three-phase plan to equip 34 fever and chest hospitals across the country to act as quarantine centers for positive cases so that the hospitals used for quarantine can gradually go back to their original specializations<sup>54</sup>.</p>	<p>-As cases increased, the government named a public hospital in each governorate that is equipped to receive positive cases.</p> <p>-A unit dedicated to Coronavirus patients was inaugurated in a hospital in Bar Elias, in the Bekaa Governorate, and is run by Doctors without Borders<sup>56</sup>. A similar unit was opened in Baalbek in November.</p> <p>-Following the explosion at Beirut Harbor, the number of public hospitals prepared to receive Corona patients reached 14. Part of each hospital is used for quarantine and another for treatment<sup>57</sup></p> <p>-Ten public laboratories were prepared for examining samples and another 50 private ones for tests. Added to that are 10 laboratories, one of which is affiliated to the Military</p>	<p>-A state of emergency was declared in the healthcare sector. Volunteer and newly graduate doctors were called upon to participate. Several university dorms were turned into quarantine centers for returnees from abroad.</p> <p>-Several private hospitals offered ICU beds for patients for free while others agreed to do so for a high fee. Many called upon the Ministry of Health to confiscate hospitals that refused to volunteer and use them for Coronavirus patients, adding that the country is in a state of emergency and all resources have to be mobilized to face the crisis.</p> <p>-As the second wave started in August, the presidency launched</p>

<sup>52</sup> Hossam Bahgat. Op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> "Health Ministry sources: Plans to treat Corona patients at fever and chest hospitals [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, May 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2TtGVC7>

<sup>54</sup> "Plan to prepare 34 hospitals to quarantine Corona patients [Arabic]." *Sky News Arabia*, May 3, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Tsp12N>

<sup>56</sup> *Al Manar Website*, September 12, 2020: <https://almanar.com.lb/7219984>

<sup>57</sup> Fatima Salama, "Coronavirus is spreading, and this is how hospitals look like in Lebanon [Arabic]." *Al Ahed News*, August 2020: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/article.php?id=22598&cid=125>

	<p>-On May 21, the Ministry of Health dedicated 320 public and non-specialized hospitals to tests as part of a strategy to track the number of cases that test positive<sup>55</sup>.</p>	<p>Hospital, that offered drive-through testing services.<sup>58</sup></p>	<p>mobile labs affiliated to the military in areas in which cases increased such as the governorates of Gabes and Sidi Bou Zid, which relatively contributed to curbing the spread of the virus, especially that those areas suffer from shortage in medical equipment. Locals, however, had to wait for a long time to get the results since samples needed to be sent to neighboring governorates.</p>
PCR tests	<p>-Since the first case was recorded and until March 27, the Ministry of Health announced it would carry out PCR tests free of charge in two cases: people returning from abroad and people who got in contact with Coronavirus patients.</p> <p>-Starting April 8 and as cases exceeded 1,000, restrictions on free PCR tests were relaxed to include those who display strong symptoms, especially pneumonia.</p> <p>-According to the Ministry of Health spokesperson, the number of PCR tests carried out between</p>	<p>-From February till December 15, Lebanon carried out 1,663,538 PCR tests<sup>61</sup>. The number of PCR tests increased remarkably within six months.</p> <p>-According to the minister of health, the number of tests carried out until May 22 is 70,000<sup>62</sup>. The number of potential cases in each municipality, both citizens and non-citizens, is recorded through the ministry's doctors in each of those municipalities<sup>63</sup>.</p> <p>-The number of daily tests remarkably increased through time. According to Myrna Germanos, head of the Syndicate of Clinical Pathologists in Lebanon,</p>	<p>-With the beginning of the pandemic, PCR tests were only done to returnees from abroad and people who were in contact with positive cases. Later, a hotline was created for people who experience symptoms and tests increased for all staff in medical and semi-medical sectors.</p> <p>-When baccalaureate and university classes resumed, tests were done for students, teachers, and professors.</p> <p>-Tests are done free of charge in three</p>

<sup>55</sup> "Health Ministry: 320 hospitals to offer Corona tests [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, May 21, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2ylmzua>

<sup>58</sup> COVID-19 daily situation report [Arabic]. Op. cit.

<sup>61</sup> "COVID-19 daily situation report [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>62</sup> "Lebanese PM announces plan to face the spread of Coronavirus [Arabic]" *National News Agency*, May 22, 2020: <http://nna-leb.gov.lb/ar/show-news/480377/nna-leb.gov.lb/nna-leb.gov.lb>

<sup>63</sup> "List of quarantine centers [Arabic]." Disaster Risk Management Unit, Presidency of the Council of Ministers: <http://drm.pcm.gov.lb/>

	<p>February 14 and April 12 exceeds 25,000 in addition to another 150,000 tests for returnees from abroad and people who came in contact with patients.</p> <p>-On March 28, the WHO announced that Egypt has the ability to carry out 200,000 tests.</p> <p>-The WHO is still calling upon Egypt to increase the number of PCR tests across the country so that official figures on the number of cases come out accurate<sup>59</sup>.</p> <p>-Egypt remained one of the countries with the least number of PCR tests since until early November, only 1,300 per one million got tested<sup>60</sup>.</p>	<p>the number of PCR tests was limited until the minister of health issued a decree to establish a syndicate-affiliated committee to follow up on the preparedness of laboratories across Lebanon while the ministry made sure to prepare public labs for free tests. Added to this were random tests done in different districts and governorates<sup>64</sup>.</p> <p>-Tests done in Beirut's public hospital are free of charge for those who display symptoms while others pay 15,000 Lebanese pounds (100 US dollars based on the official exchange rate) as dictated by the Ministry of Health<sup>65</sup>. However, several private hospitals do not abide by this price<sup>66</sup>.</p> <p>-In early November, the minister of health warned of "an imminent disaster" with the number of cases reaching 10,000 per day. He added that there is not enough space for patients in ICU units and called for dedicating more places in public and private hospital to the treatment of Coronavirus patients<sup>67</sup>. As a result, Lebanon decided to lock down from the 15th of</p>	<p>laboratories in the northern, southern, and central regions.</p> <p>-At the beginning, tests were only done in public labs, but later the Ministry of Health authorized 45 private labs to carry out PCR tests.</p>
--	---	--	--

<sup>59</sup> Rana Mamdouh. "Who are the PCR tests for? [Arabic]" *Mada Masr*, April 21, 2020: <https://bit.ly/36k09pO>

<sup>60</sup> World Meters: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

<sup>64</sup> "Head of Lab Owners' Syndicate: Rapid tests now available at Lebanese labs [Arabic]." *An-Nahar Newspaper*, May 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/372x4zD>

<sup>65</sup> "Coronavirus is spreading, 5 new labs, and test is for 15,000 Lebanese pounds [Arabic]." *Al Modon*, March 13, 2020: <https://bit.ly/309Y4vs>

<sup>66</sup> "Private hospitals fix Corona tests at 150,000 Lebanese pounds [Arabic]. LBC Channel, March 15, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2MtjKGa>

<sup>67</sup> Ayman Azzam. Op. cit.



		December until the 30th of the same month.	
Quarantine for patients	<p>-From the very beginning, the Ministry of Health named particular hospitals as quarantine centers and for the treatment of Coronavirus in accordance with WHO protocols.</p> <p>-Based on the strategy adopted by the ministry as of February 13, all positive cases were admitted to quarantine hospitals.</p> <p>-On April 7, the ministry allowed discharging cases that were not critical after five days and transferring them to hotels dedicated to that purpose.</p> <p>-In early May, the ministry admitted cases that were not critical directly to hotels.</p> <p>-On May 14, the ministry started instructing patients whose cases are not critical to self-isolate at home<sup>68</sup>.</p>	<p>-At first, Lebanon relied solely on isolating all patients in hospitals. Later on, the government initiated a new quarantine system in coordination with governorates, municipalities, and mayors. This system divided quarantine into three types: home quarantine, community center quarantine, and communal quarantine. It is noteworthy that the three types applied to cases that were not critical, therefore do not need to be admitted to hospital<sup>69</sup>.</p> <p>-According to the Disaster Risk Management Unit, there are 17 quarantine centers across the country. <sup>70</sup></p>	<p>-At the beginning, the government relied on self-isolation yet following growing violations of quarantine rules, the Ministry of Health dedicated several hotels to compulsory quarantine while positive cases were transferred to hospital.</p> <p>-As cases increased in August, the ministry prepared new quarantine centers across the country, each comprised of 1,500 rooms<sup>71</sup>.</p>
Quarantine for returnees	-Following the suspension of flights and the repatriation of Egyptians, the problem of quarantining returnees emerged. Cabinet spokesperson stated that returnees would be	-Until May 15, the government did not take returnees to quarantine centers and only asked them to self-isolate at home. This was the subject of heated debates amid fears that those returnees	-Returnees were unable to afford quarantine expenses in hotels named by the Ministry of Health in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism and hotel owners. In areas

<sup>68</sup> "Health Ministry: 320 hospitals to offer Corona tests [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>69</sup> "Reference Manual for Setting Up and Managing a Quarantine Center":

[https://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/crisis\\_prevention\\_and\\_recovery/NAPAC.html](https://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/library/crisis_prevention_and_recovery/NAPAC.html)

<sup>70</sup> [http://drm.pcm.gov.lb/Media/News/Isolation\\_cen2.pdf](http://drm.pcm.gov.lb/Media/News/Isolation_cen2.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> Mariam El Nasser. "Tunisians refuse to stay in quarantine centers [Arabic]." *Al Arabi Al Jadeed*, September 2020: <https://bit.ly/2U3j7LZ>

	<p>paying for their stay in quarantine hotels yet will receive free medical care<sup>72</sup>. This was faced with many objections as the government was called upon to pay for returnees' accommodation, especially that a presidential decree to that effect was issued earlier<sup>73</sup>. In order to deal with those objections, the prime minister decided to make university hostels available for free accommodation for returnees while having returnees who wish to stay in hotels pay for their accommodation<sup>74</sup>.</p>	<p>do not abide by rules and transfer the virus. However, no clear strategy on dealing with returnees was adopted by the government<sup>75</sup>.</p> <p>-On July 31, the Ministry of Public Works and Transport issued a decree stating that all passengers coming to Lebanon have to submit negative PCR tests from countries of origin. Passengers from countries in which tests are known to be inaccurate would be taken to one of the designated hotels. The decree stated that passengers from those countries need to submit a reservation for at least 48 hours in one of the hotels authorized by the Ministry of Health<sup>76</sup>.</p> <p>As for the general lockdown decision during the month of November, it did not address any measure related to the airport except that it is exempt from closure.<sup>77</sup></p>	<p>that have no hotels, university hostels were used for quarantine.</p> <p>-Compulsory quarantine was applied to passengers coming from high-risk countries while others coming from medium and low-risk countries were asked to self-isolate.</p>
--	--	--	---

<sup>72</sup> "Government spokesperson: Repatriated citizens to stay in quarantine hotels at their own expense [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*, March 31, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2WSIH9T>

<sup>73</sup> "Embassies add quarantine expenses on repatriation plane tickets [Arabic]." *Daarb*, April 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3eaHteL>

<sup>74</sup> "Government to offer free accommodation to returnees in university hostels [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, May 5, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3eaHteL>

<sup>75</sup> Hadeel Farfour. "Lockdown likely to continue till after Monday [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*: <https://bit.ly/2ymuOGo>

<sup>76</sup> "Minister justifies fake Corona tests [Arabic]." *Al Modon*, July 29, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2TVg609>

<sup>77</sup> For more details on the decision, <https://bit.ly/2XikF6m>





In Tunisia, there was a shortage in medical supplies, especially face masks, gloves, and hand sanitizers. In order to respond to increasing demand especially by doctors, nurses, cleaners, and all staff working closely with patients, the government instructed local textile factories to produce face masks in large quantities and imported other medical supplies from China. Military planes took part in bringing those supplies. However, there were still not enough face masks in several regions. Field hospitals were created to support local ones and were equipped with oxygen cylinders and ICU beds. The number of beds equipped with oxygen cylinders in public facilities was raised from 400 to 1,200 and in November, the private sector contributed with 700 beds, the number of ICU beds increased to 220 in late November, and several field hospitals started working. However, the crisis does not seem to be contained<sup>78</sup> as ICU beds and beds equipped with oxygen cylinders are approaching maximum capacity and hospitals, both public and private, are overcrowded.

In Egypt, there is a shortage of doctors and nurses in the public healthcare sector. This led the Ministry of Health to close outpatient clinics in all hospitals and transfer all medical staff to hospitals dealing with Coronavirus, which is considered a substantial development to deal with the shortage and make use of all available resources<sup>79</sup>. The shortage of ventilators was another problem. Before the pandemic, the number of ventilators in Egypt was limited according to Mohamed Ismail, head of the Egyptian Authority for Unified Procurement, Medical Supply and Technology Management. When the pandemic started, the authority purchased 500 ventilators so that the total number of ventilators in Egypt reached 4,500 in addition to another 1,000 that are being repaired, some of which might not be fit for use. The government called for manufacturing ventilators locally to deal with

<sup>78</sup> "Tunisian health system on the verge of collapse [Arabic]." *Business News*, October 28, 2020: <https://bit.ly/32pTN7z>

<sup>79</sup> Alaa Ghannam. "Strengths and weaknesses in our health system in the face of Coronavirus [Arabic]." Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, April 13, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2XjHDtH>

the crisis, especially after the manufacturing company Medtronic announced publicly sharing design specifications for its ventilator so that other factories can use it to face the shortage<sup>80</sup>. An initiative to manufacture 5,000 ventilators was launched to have ICU units prepared for receiving Coronavirus patients through using the design of the basic PB 560 ventilator model shared by Medtronic after the Ministry of Health approves the first prototype<sup>81</sup>.

After the number of cases dropped in Egypt, the crisis subsided. In fact, Presidential Adviser for Health Affairs Mohamed Awad Tag El Din confirmed that several places are available in ICU units and that the number of ventilators is enough whether in hospitals affiliated to universities and the Ministry of Health or military hospitals. Tag El Din added that medical staff in these hospitals is trained to face any sudden developments<sup>82</sup>. However, Egypt still suffers from shortage in doctors and nurses, especially after the number of doctors who tested positive reached 3,576, 188 of whom died based on a statement by the Doctors' Syndicate<sup>83</sup>.

In Lebanon, which had already been suffering from a financial crisis, the pandemic exposed the weakness of state institutions, particularly the healthcare sector. Despite efforts exerted by the Ministry of Health in the first stage, the government did not put any pressure on the governor of the Central Bank of Lebanon (Banque du Liban) Riad Salameh to release the money needed for the purchase of medical supplies despite continuous complaints by hospitals and doctors, which led to a dire shortage in ventilators and protective gear for medical staff<sup>84</sup>. This shortage, coupled with the decision made by several suppliers to export available medical equipment in search for profit, led to an astronomical price hike and drove the minister of finance to ban the export of all types of medical supplies<sup>85</sup>.

On October 9, Salameh issued decree number 573 through which the central bank required that all importing companies pay their dues to the bank in cash in Lebanese pounds and not in checks or transfers<sup>86</sup>. Companies expressed their indignation at the decree, including oil companies and companies that import medical supplies, and hospitals objected. Salma Assi, head of the Medical Equipment and Devices Importers Syndicate in Lebanon, said that importers need to secure fresh money to open credits abroad, which means forgetting about the 40 million dollars deposited at the Central Bank in addition to a frozen security deposit of more than 50 billion Lebanese pounds. According to Assi, it is impossible to abide by the decree for two reasons. The first is that the money of importers has been frozen at the bank for more than four months, and the second is that the companies those importers make transactions with do not pay in cash<sup>87</sup>. The Pharmacists' Syndicate called

---

<sup>80</sup> "After 6,000 cases, are there enough ventilators to deal with Coronavirus? [Arabic]" *Masrawy*, May 3, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2ZtkU0J>

<sup>81</sup> Ahmed Azzab and Alaa Ghannam. "The role of civil society in facing the Coronavirus crisis [Arabic]." Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, May 5, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3qcfey9>

<sup>82</sup> "Presidential advisor: Egyptian experience in dealing with Coronavirus to be explained in October [Arabic]." *Masrawy*, September 12, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3p2Gt2x>

<sup>83</sup> "Doctors' Syndicate: 3576 cases and 188 deaths among Egyptian doctors [Arabic]." *Al Arabiya*, October 18, 2020: <https://bit.ly/36fnzNt>

<sup>84</sup> Hayam El Kasifi. "Indicators of the collapse of institutions [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, March 14, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2X1AbEY>

<sup>85</sup> "Finance minister: Export of medical equipment and personal protection supplies banned [Arabic]." Free Patriotic Movement, Tayyar.org, February 22, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bVHvWr>

<sup>86</sup> For the text of the decree see: <https://www.bdl.gov.lb/circulars/intermediary/5/37/0/2>

<sup>87</sup> Rajana Hameya. "Salama disbands healthcare sector [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, October 23, 2020: <https://bit.ly/214esqB>

for exempting the healthcare sector from the decree and the head of the syndicate considered the decree a fatal blow to the healthcare sector and to citizens' pharmaceutical security<sup>88</sup>. The head of the Hospitals' Syndicate seconded this view and said the only way out is exempting the healthcare sector<sup>89</sup>. The Medical Equipment and Devices Importers Syndicate gave Salameh 24 hours to annul the decree or exempt the healthcare sector, but he did neither.

Lebanon also started suffering from shortage of medications, which led many to believe that the healthcare sector is on the verge of collapse. This shortage was attributed to the policy imposed by the Central Bank and which delays shipments since the file of each one takes between a month and a month and half to be ready in case it got the necessary approvals. This, in addition to the fresh money problem, maximizes the crisis of the healthcare sector.<sup>90</sup> The crisis was aggravated when the Central Bank announced its intention to lift subsidies on basic goods. This drove pharmacies and pharmaceutical companies to keep many medications hidden until prices go up or to sell them in the black market. The situation got worse when people started stocking on medications. The minister of health had called earlier for economizing on medications in order to secure everyone's needs and added that available medications in Lebanon would only last for three months and that healthcare authorities were carrying out expansive inspections at warehouses<sup>91</sup>. On the other hand, the explosion at the Beirut Harbor made four hospitals out of service<sup>92</sup>.

Following the start of the second wave, the Lebanese minister of health stated on November 2 that the government relies on the agreement made under the supervision of Prime Minister Hassan Diab and in the presence of the head of the Hospitals Syndicate and with the contribution of the Ministry of Health. The minister admitted that the government was unable before to deal with the situation with the increase of Coronavirus cases, particularly critical ones that required admission to ICU. However, he added, the new agreement makes it compulsory for all hospitals in Lebanon to be prepared for receiving Coronavirus patients within a week, explaining that Triage-1<sup>93</sup> hospitals are to receive patients in accordance with the general mobilization law while Triage-2 and Triage-3 should be ready to receive patients within two weeks<sup>94</sup>.

**As for the education sector**, the three countries closed schools and universities at the beginning of the crisis and shifted to distance learning. In Egypt, the Ministry of Education made course material for schools available on the internet and dedicated a TV channel for the same purpose. In higher education, most institutions resorted to online classes<sup>95</sup>. In

<sup>88</sup> "Head of Pharmacists' Syndicate warns decree no. 573 to undermine citizens' pharmaceutical security [Arabic]." *Al Nashra*, October 24, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2l474f7>

<sup>89</sup> "Healthcare sector has to be excluded from decree 573 to solve hospital crisis [Arabic]." *Al Nashra*, October 31, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34Tqhsy>

<sup>90</sup> Rajana Hameya. Op. cit. <https://bit.ly/2l4esqB>

<sup>91</sup> "Medications in Lebanon from pharmacies to smugglers [Arabic]." *Mena Monitor*, October 31, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34YtXck>

<sup>92</sup> Raya Shartouni. "Four hospitals go out of service following Beirut explosion [Arabic]." *Anadolu Agency*, August 13, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2lCiyHa>

<sup>93</sup> It defines the medical urgency of patients.

<sup>94</sup> "All private hospitals in Lebanon now fully prepared [Arabic]." *Lebanon 24*, November 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3jZe2in>

<sup>95</sup> "Education minister: New decrees to help students [Arabic]." *Al Masry Al Youm*, March 26, 2020: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1630172>

Lebanon, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education announced closing public and private schools temporarily then the closure was extended. In light of the absence of an emergency plan that would cater to the needs of different segments of society, the ministry first instructed teachers to communicate with their students electronically<sup>96</sup>. Later, the ministry launched a distance learning initiative<sup>97</sup>. The president of the Lebanese University had already launched a similar initiative. The ministry announced postponing then cancelling exams and resuming the academic year online. In Tunisia, classes stopped in all educational institutions. A TV channel was dedicated to broadcasting course materials. Some universities started a distance learning program while others abstained citing lack of equal opportunity since many students do not own devices needed for distance learning and/or have limited or no internet access. In the same vein, the General Union of Tunisian Students objected to distance learning. Several private universities in Tunisia resumed classes via distance learning.

The second wave coincided with the beginning of the new academic year. Egypt took several procedures to allow the resumption of classes and adopted the hybrid system. Based on this system, students attend classes on particular days and take online classes for the rest of the week, which is expected to reduce the total number of students present at the same time at schools and universities<sup>98</sup>. In Lebanon, the minister of education and higher education announced the gradual start of academic year 2020-2021 as of the last week of September and adopted the hybrid system and planned to evaluate the health situation after three weeks to decide whether it was necessary to shift to online classes. The minister called for providing all students with laptops while giving priority to students in public schools<sup>99</sup>. On September 25, based on the recommendation of the Coronavirus Follow-Up Committee, the minister announced postponing the start of the physical classes to October 12 instead of September 28 for schools and to November 2 instead of October 26 for kindergarten and for universities that adopted the hybrid system. Later, the decision to close between November 14 and 30 included universities, public and private schools, and nurseries, of all kinds.

In Tunisia, classes started between September 15 and 19 and students attended alternately so that a class would not exceed 18 students. Parts of the curricula were crossed out while making sure core material is kept and allotting the first weeks to the academic upgrade program<sup>100</sup>.

The three countries took a number of measures to regulate the prices of basic commodities. In Lebanon, as price hikes continued, the Ministry of Agriculture announced

---

<sup>96</sup> Faten El Hajj. "Distance learning in Corona times: Public schools are the weakest link [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, March 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2w533RA>

<sup>97</sup> "Distance learning project launched via TV and digital platforms [Arabic]." Ministry of Education and Higher Education Website. March 25, 2020: <https://www.mehe.gov.lb/ar/Activities/News/Details?ItemId=1987>

<sup>98</sup> "Education Ministry announces timeframe for new academic year [Arabic]." *Al Masry Al Youm*, September 4, 2020: <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1424258>

<sup>99</sup> "New higher education minister announces new learning system at universities [Egypt]." *Al Ahrām*, September 8, 2020: <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2447467.aspx>

<sup>99</sup> "Education minister announces beginning of 2020-2021 academic year last week of April [Arabic]." *LBC Website*, August 19, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3eCEbTj>

<sup>100</sup> Michael Drabble and Antonius Verheijen. "Back to school in Tunisia amidst COVID-19." *World Bank Blogs*, September 19, 2020: <https://blogs.worldbank.org/arabvoices/back-school-tunisia-amidst-covid-19>



launching a project to regulate prices and released a nonbinding price list for fruits and vegetables. The ministry stressed that profit should not exceed 20-30% of the prices and that it will receive complaints about violations. The ministry also announced cooperating with the Ministry of Finance to look through reports about violators. The Ministry of Finance also has the authority to arrest those violators based on article 685 and 686 of the Penal Code that states the penalty can be doubled for vendors who increase prices of basic goods as well as decree 73/83 and the consumer protection law<sup>101</sup>. In May, the minister of finance named food commodities the Central Bank would subsidize then more items were added to the list in early July. The cost of subsidized food and basic commodities is estimated at 1.5-1.8 billion dollars annually, which is equivalent to the cost of half the food commodities Lebanon imported in the past few years. Items on this list would be imported with dollars entering Lebanon through electronic transfers from non-bank financial institutions<sup>102</sup>. The subsidized food list was not up to expectations and even defeated the main purpose it was created for, which is meeting the basic needs of 80% of the population, since it included many items that were seen as more luxurious than basic<sup>103</sup>.

In Egypt, the minister of supply and internal trade stressed that basic needs are available in large quantities and in all outlets and added that prices would be regulated through patrols to detect violations across the country and that a hotline was created to receive complaints<sup>104</sup>. However, there was a problem in particular goods such as face masks and sanitizers. Many suppliers took advantage of the shortage to keep those items then raise their prices, and the government responded with extensive campaigns to control the situation and made those items available at reasonable prices<sup>105</sup>. Shortly after, suppliers started complaining of the effect of partial lockdown on their businesses, which led them to raise prices especially during the month of Ramadan when consumption is much higher<sup>106</sup>. This led to a remarkable drop in the consumption of many items. For example, families' consumption of meat dropped by 25%, poultry meat by 22.8%, fish by 17.5%, and fruits by 14.5%<sup>107</sup>.

Tunisia suffered from a shortage of flour since after the lockdown people started buying it in large quantities to bake at home. While bakeries kept working and bread was available, flour remained scarce especially in big cities. The government issued a decree based on which anyone who monopolizes consumer goods or raises the prices of subsidized goods is penalized with three years in jail and a fine of 300,000 dinars (more than 100,000 dollars). Based on the decree, stores in which violations take place will be closed for six months and if the offence is repeated it will be closed for a year while on the third time the closure will be permanent<sup>108</sup>. When the second wave started, no lockdown, complete or

<sup>101</sup> Elda El Ghosein. "Finance minister: Stop eating eggs and chicken [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, April 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2KgJSaM>

<sup>102</sup> Mohamed Wahba. "The problematic food basket and subsidies robbed in advance [Egypt]." *Al Akhbar*, July 9, 2020: <https://bit.ly/32fTdcj>

<sup>103</sup> Rajana Hameya. "People's needs supplied from above [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, July 9, 2020: <https://bit.ly/364ZpVL>

<sup>104</sup> "13 procedures by the Ministry of Supply to deal with Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Veto Gate*, March 19, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2K95Axq>

<sup>105</sup> "Administrative Control Authority launches campaign against storing foodstuffs and medical supplies [Arabic]." *Al Ahram*, April 5, 2020: <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2392708.aspx>

<sup>106</sup> For more see "Meat prices goes up by LE 20 [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, April 8, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3cH7qBD>

<sup>107</sup> "The impact of Coronavirus on Egyptian families until May 2020 [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>108</sup> Prime minister's decree no. 10 for year 2020 the violation of competition and price rules, April 17, 2020

partial, was imposed, and basic commodities were available in different regions across the country.

In Lebanon, the cabinet announced in March that food rations would be distributed among citizens by the High Relief Committee and the Municipalities Union<sup>109</sup>. The army took part in the distribution process as part of the activities of the Civil-Military Cooperation Directorate. Political parties also distributed food in their constituencies. Several stores and cooperatives limited the quantities each buyer can get. Following pressure by the bakeries' mafia, the minister of finance caved in and issued a decree that limited the weight of a bread pack at 900 grams and set its price at 1,500 Lebanese pounds (one dollar according to the official exchange rate) while before it weighed 1,000 grams and was sold for the same price. The weight of a pack of medium bread loaves was limited to 400 grams for 1,000 Lebanese pounds (0.66 cents)<sup>110</sup>. With the second wave, there were no substantial changes except that the financial crises got worse and the local currency kept deteriorating. Unlike most countries that expected the second wave to start in early September, Lebanon expected it to start in early October. This forecast was based on the relatively slow pace with which the virus spread in the first wave. On July 12, Lebanon recorded the highest number of cases since February 21 as the total number reached 2,334, which raised speculations about whether the second wave started early<sup>111</sup>. On September 12, the minister of health announced that Lebanon is at the peak of the second wave and that cases increased following the resumption of economic activities<sup>112</sup>. The economic crisis made the situation worse as the local currency kept deteriorating and the political vacuum continued<sup>113</sup>. After the explosion, Beirut was declared a disaster city and relief efforts focused on families that were affected by the explosion and whose houses were destroyed. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) expressed its concerns over a looming flour crisis in the aftermath of the explosion<sup>114</sup>. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs stated that the World Food Program would send 50,000 tons of wheat flour to Beirut to help deal with the crisis that followed the explosion<sup>115</sup> while Iraq sent 13,000 tons to Lebanon<sup>116</sup>.

On November 4, the municipal police in Ghobeiry, in the Baabda district, found thousands of tons of flour, part of the relief sent from Iraq, stored inadequately in the Sports City in Beirut beneath stadium seats and in lower level rooms where it is exposed to humidity and wind<sup>117</sup>. The minister of finance clarified that 700 tons of flour were stored at the Sports City temporarily in order for them to be distributed among bakeries and added that all

---

<sup>109</sup> Al Nour Radio Station, March 19, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2XRTSsz7>

<sup>110</sup> Rola Ibrahim. "Finance minister gives in to bakery mafia [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, June 3, 2020: <https://bit.ly/375q6k6>

<sup>111</sup> Hadeel Farfour. "The second Coronavirus wave started and it's time we start to worry [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, July 13, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3k1KeBy>

<sup>112</sup> "Hassan: Lebanon is going through the peak of the second wave [Arabic]." *Kataeb.org*, September 12, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3l2vjIX>

<sup>113</sup> Taher Hani. "Beirut Harbor explosion, Coronavirus, and the economic crisis [Arabic]." *France 24*, October 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/350BXtG>

<sup>114</sup> "Wheat reserves affected by explosion: Concerns over flour supplies in Lebanon [Arabic]." *Al Hurra*, August 5, 2020: <https://arbne.ws/2JGbCj6>

<sup>115</sup> "World Food Program sends 50,000 tons of flour to Lebanon [Arabic]." *Russia Today*, August 11, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3l7lrww>

<sup>116</sup> "Iraq sends 13,000 tons of flour to Lebanon [Arabic]." *alMayadeen.net*, August 15, 2020: <https://bit.ly/366yO12>

<sup>117</sup> "Thousands of tons of flour stored inadequately in Sports City [Arabic]." *Al Nashra*, November 4, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3extAsq>

safety measures were taken to keep the flour fit for use. He claimed that photos posted on social media are of a shipment that was ruined during the process of loading and unloading<sup>118</sup>.

In Tunisia, the Ministry of Trade distributed, in cooperation with the army and security forces, commodities that were not available, especially flour, among grocery stores, to avoid overcrowding in these stores. The prices of several commodities, especially vegetables and meat, were raised. The financial crisis caused by the pandemic led to the closure of hundreds of institutions and the loss of 161,000 jobs as of March, according to the National Institute of Statistics. As a result, debts increased and by the end of 2020 Tunisia will be required to repay a foreign debt of 7.5 billion Tunisian dinars (2.7 billion dollars)<sup>119</sup>. While this did not affect the availability of goods and services, it did have a negative impact on the purchasing power of Tunisian citizens.

In Egypt, the minister of supply stressed that basic food commodities and subsidized bread would be available in all outlets across the country. The Armed Forces also made several basic commodities available at the outlets of the General Services Organization and at the permanent and mobile outlets of the National Service Products Organization across the country<sup>120</sup>. Despite statements about measures to make basic commodities available, the government reduced funds allocated to food subsidies when the new fiscal year started in July and reduced reserves meant to face any emergency related to international food prices. On the other hand, the deputy prime minister said that the quantity of subsidized goods would not be affected even though government spending on food subsidies dropped by four million Egyptian pounds. This reduction, however, did not apply to bread, yet the weight of a loaf of bread was reduced from 110 grams to 90 grams<sup>121</sup>.

Services in Egypt were affected by the crisis. Not only did many people not have internet access, which affected the process of distance learning, but water supply was also interrupted on regular basis<sup>122</sup>. This had a negative impact on one of the most important safety instructions, which is constant washing of hands. The government received complaints about water supply and tried to regulate supply cuts among different areas so that none of those areas would remain without water for a long time<sup>123</sup>. It is noteworthy that the Egyptian government did not postpone the payment of electricity and gas bills but provided the option of paying electronically<sup>124</sup>. In Lebanon, the government assigned the minister of energy the mission of negotiating with governorates and companies that are willing to contribute to solving the electricity problem through building and operating power generation stations then submitting proposals to the cabinet<sup>125</sup>. Some municipalities

---

<sup>118</sup> "Lebanese finance minister answers questions about storing flour in Sports City [Arabic]." *LBC Website*, November 4, 2020: <https://bit.ly/36bjtpx>

<sup>119</sup> Khamis ben Brik. "Is Tunisia about to go bankrupt because of tension and Coronavirus? [Arabic]." *AlJazeera.net*, September 2020: <https://bit.ly/38i9HER>

<sup>120</sup> "Armed Forces provide citizens with sanitizers and basic commodities to face Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, March 24, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2ztHqvA>

<sup>121</sup> Salma Hussein. "Who gets subsidies at the time of Corona [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, November 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/32pmlhE>

<sup>122</sup> "Crisis in Giza because of water outages [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, March 16, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bWFmdB>

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> For more see <https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1745362> and <https://bit.ly/3cqavXh>

<sup>125</sup> "Lebanese PM heads first coordination meeting on Coronavirus [Arabic]." Op. cit.

took it upon themselves to pay for generators while others that already had generators exempted locals from paying bills<sup>126</sup>. In Tunisia, utilities were not affected, and the government postponed the payment of electricity, water, and gas bills during lockdown.

**As for internet**, the three countries took a series of measures to improve and maintain services during the pandemic. In Tunisia, Ooredoo Tunisia, Tunisie Telecom, and Orange reduced the prices of internet services from 1:00 am till 10:00 am to encourage people to stay at home. In Lebanon, a special internet service had been provided for university students, yet this service did not cover all students, especially with the shift to distance learning. This led students to call for the expansion and improvement of internet services as well as upgrading the student package to five gigabytes in order for them to be able to attend online classes, communicate with professors, and submit research papers. In Egypt, the Ministry of Communication announced increasing internet speed and enhancing internet package capacities for subscribers in home internet by 20%, at a cost of 12 million dollars. This was done in coordination with internet service providers in order to facilitate distance learning. Websites launched by the ministries of education and higher education, on which course materials were uploaded, were made available for free. The ministry also coordinated with service providers and the ministries of education and higher education to launch free digital platforms on which lectures and material for school and university students would be uploaded in order to make the process smoother until the crises is over<sup>127</sup>. The three governments managed to provide educational material on the internet, yet this process was affected by a number of factors including lack of equal access to internet services and connection problems in several regions. In addition, several families cannot afford internet services to start with, which had a negative impact on the progress of their children during the process of distance learning. This exposes the problem of inequality that preceded the pandemic and made some segments of society suffer more than others.

We stop here at the Lebanese case, which, before the Corona crisis, was suffering from a suffocating economic crisis that led to the explosion of a popular uprising. Corona came to reveal the nakedness of the institutions in the country, specifically the health and hospital sector, despite the great efforts made by the Ministry of Health recently, as it has already been mentioned that the Central Bank has seized the funds required to deal with the crisis.<sup>128</sup> In light of this scarcity of basic supplies on the one hand, and the greed of merchants who deliberately exported the existing goods abroad with the aim of profit on the other hand, their prices rose dramatically, so the Minister of Economy issued a decision prohibiting the export of this type of equipment.<sup>129</sup>

---

<sup>126</sup> Mohamed Alloush. "The role of municipalities in the Coronavirus crisis: Between extensive powers and limited skills [Arabic]" March 28, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bQqj1>

<sup>127</sup> "10 procedures by Communications Ministry to face Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, April 7, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3cqvFEN>

<sup>128</sup> Hiyam Al-Qasifi, Indicators of Institutional Collapse, Op.Cit.

<sup>129</sup> The Minister of Economy: Preventing the export of medical personal protective equipment, equipment or tools that prevent contagious diseases, the Free Patriotic Movement, <https://bit.ly/2UUUzou>



Despite all those efforts in the three countries, several segments of society did not benefit from protection nets that were created during the crisis. While several measures were taken to provide financial aid to marginalized groups, governments did not compensate workers and technicians in the private sector and who were forced to continue working during the crisis. Also, no measures were taken to help small farmers, workers in the informal sector, and hundreds of thousands of poor citizens who are not registered with ministries of social affairs. Yet governments tried to handle this problem through adopting new measures to register all unregistered citizens, each country in a different way. In Egypt, the government used applications while in Tunisia, the government asked people in need to file a request with municipal authorities to apply for an 80-dollar grant.

The Egyptian government took special measures to make sure senior citizens get their pensions without overcrowding. According to the Ministry of Social Affairs, this was done through a plan in which beneficiaries were distributed through the week. This plan started in April based on analyzing the situation in March in terms of the number of people and their age ranges. In addition, cards that were blocked because beneficiaries' information was not updated, as should be done every six months, were reactivated for another three months<sup>130</sup>.

Governments resorted to a set of measures to reduce financial burdens on citizens. In Egypt, payments for loans and credit cards were postponed for six months while cancelling commissions for withdrawing money from ATM machines and transactions made through digital wallets and providing lines of credit to fund working capital, especially paying salaries for workers in companies. The government also announced fixing electricity prices in industrial facilities for an interval between three and five years. In addition, administrative forfeitures were lifted for all financiers who have unpaid taxes, provided that they pay 10% of the tax while reaching a settlement with financiers through dispute resolution committees. The payment of property taxes for factories and touristic facilities was postponed for three months and the capital gains tax was reduced for companies registered with the stock market by 50% to become 5%<sup>131</sup>.

In Lebanon, all deadlines for the payment of taxes and fees collected by the Ministry of Finance were postponed. The extension covered between March 1 and the end of general mobilization. Other measures were taken as follows:

- Exemptions from customs tax and domestic consumption tax for two months starting March 15
- Importing medical equipment and supplies to be exclusively used for testing for and the treatment of Coronavirus and accepting all related financial aid
- Reducing fees collected by internet service providers and doubling speed and capacity for users to face added traffic during lockdown

---

<sup>130</sup> "Ministry of Social Solidarity announces new measures for pension payments in April [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, March 24, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2xVSDV6>

<sup>131</sup> "New government facilities for businessmen, and early payment of April salaries [Arabic]." *Al Manassa*, April 6, 2020: <https://vww.almanassa.net/ar/story/13995>

- Renewing decree number 6036, issued on December 23, 2019, until June 30, 2020 to extend all National Social Security Fund clearances in order to facilitate procedures that require clearance by the fund

In Tunisia, several measures were taken to ease the financial burden on individuals and institutions. These included the following:

- Postponing the payment of taxes for three months starting April 1
- The deferral of payment of National Social Security Fund contributions for the second quarter for three months
- Postponing the payment of loan installments for banks and financial institutions for six months in addition to partial or full exemption from interest
- Rescheduling companies' tax and customs debts for seven years
- Providing institutions with new loan opportunities to pay running costs and salaries
- Facilitating the refund of VAT credit within a month
- Suspension of penalties on delays in tax payments for three months
- Exempting institutions that have contracts with the government from delay penalties for six months<sup>132</sup>

. In Lebanon, which had already been suffering from a crippling financial crisis, the Central Bank issued successive decrees on withdrawing US dollars from banks based on an exchange rate of 2,500 Lebanese pounds then this rate increased to 3,000 Lebanese pounds then 3,200 and 3,900 to encourage depositors to withdraw from their dollar accounts in the local currency. However, the exchange rate depended on the money deposited in each account so that holders of big accounts get better exchange rates than holders of small accounts. In fact, holders of big accounts were allowed to withdraw at the black-market rate. Also, proposals to deduct from big accounts to make up for the losses of the banking sector or to impose progressive taxes were discarded following objections by the ruling elite.

The government in Lebanon did not pay for repatriation and left the matter to the national carrier Middle East Airlines, which took advantage of the situation to make up for its losses during lockdown. Prices of tickets skyrocketed, and no financial aid was offered to students or those who cannot afford to pay for tickets. Following calls that the government pay for tickets or intervene to reduce their prices, the government declared that the chairman of Middle East Airlines Mohamed El Hout would announce a reduction in prices and offer special rates to students. Later on, the prime minister said the government would also support students who wish to come back in terms of accommodation<sup>133</sup>.

In Egypt, the government offered investors several privileges including energy subsidies for factories and touristic facilities (around 9 % of the section of subsidies in the budget went to the private sector and 49 % of the subsidies went to the government to cover its debt), the deferral of the payment of real estate taxes, and the reduction of taxes on stock sales<sup>134</sup>. The government also supported energy-intensive industries with 10 billion

<sup>132</sup> Tunisian presidency portal: <https://bit.ly/3e1S7Fz>

<sup>133</sup> For more see Ali Khedr Hassan. "The truth about repatriations [Arabic]." *Al Modon*, April 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2WQNXTR>

<sup>134</sup> "Economic procedures to face Coronavirus in Egypt [Arabic]." *Sky news Arabia*, March 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34Hv2ns>

Egyptian pounds through energy subsidies. Based on a study conducted by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, subsidies offered to a small number of companies are almost equal to monetary subsidies given to millions of poor people<sup>135</sup>. In Tunisia, companies benefited the most from measures taken by the government whether through exemptions or additional privileges. These measures show that the main objective of governments is dealing with the crisis and not supporting vulnerable groups. Even though Tunisia offered financial aid to vulnerable groups, this was not the government's priority nor a major component of the plan to deal with the pandemic. As was the case in Egypt, companies and businessmen in Tunisia were the real beneficiaries<sup>136</sup>.

It is true that businesses are bound to be negatively affected by the pandemic, yet this is not as urgent as supporting vulnerable groups. Governments, however, had a different view as they chose to prioritize the protection of businesses through a set of exemptions and privileges<sup>137</sup>. While some measures were taken to support average citizens such as postponing payments for loans and credit cards and early payment of salaries, this was not enough and the benefits businesses got were still much more substantial. When the second wave started, there was hardly any change in this approach. In Egypt, around 26% of the population- during the first three months of the outbreak of the pandemic- became unemployed while 73.5% had their incomes reduced<sup>138</sup>. According to the second edition of the report at the end of September 2020, 54.9% of the total employed individuals had a change in their working status, and that percentage increased slightly in urban areas to reach 58.4% compared to 52.2% in the countryside, and the total percentage decreased by 7% compared to the first edition of the report, which is considered a little improvement.

139



<sup>135</sup> “Despite likely continuation of pandemic, 2020-2012 government plans without Coronavirus [Arabic].” Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, July, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3mZj9RA>

<sup>136</sup> “New government facilities for businessmen, and early payment of April salaries [Arabic].” Op. cit.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> The impact of Coronavirus on Egyptian families until May 2020 [Arabic].” Op. cit.

<sup>139</sup> The impact of Coronavirus on Egyptian families until September 2020 [Arabic], CAPMAS <https://bit.ly/3mnffRS>

The nature of the political system plays a major role in shaping response to the pandemic. Because Tunisia is less centralized than Egypt, the influence of economic powers was more obvious in the latter. This is also attributed to the level of democracy in Tunisia, which made the impact of business owners more controlled. In addition, the crisis demonstrated that the three countries subject of the study do have resources, but the problem is where these resources are channeled. For example, in Lebanon, resources were used for protecting the interests of the privileged minority. This included the resources of the private sector, especially in the healthcare sector, as well as those of state institutions and political parties. The use of such resources was left to each individual entity, hence there was no comprehensive plan to face the crisis and the state was unable to integrate all resources as part of an inclusive strategy to deal with the pandemic in coordination with those entities.

## Third: Allocation of resources: Where does the money come from?

In Egypt, the president announced in a speech allocating six billion dollars to the Coronavirus crisis while the minister of finance announced the allocation of 11 million to the ministry<sup>140</sup>. Based on government statements, the six billion dollars would be taken from emergency reserves without making any change to the current budget<sup>141</sup>, yet the plan based on which this money would be used was not clear. On the other hand, the World Bank offered Egypt a 7.9-million-dollar grant to support the government in its efforts to curb the spread of Coronavirus<sup>142</sup>. In mid-May, the International Monetary Fund approved a 2.77-billion-dollar emergency loan to Egypt to help the government deal with the Coronavirus crisis and its economic ramifications<sup>143</sup>.

The budget for the new fiscal year included several exceptional measures to handle the economic ramifications of the virus and improve citizens' consumption power amid fears of an economic slowdown. These measures, announced in mid-March 2020, included raising wages and increasing taxes on high incomes to purchase medical supplies and support poorer segments of society. Among the main measures is increasing the limit of tax exemption, that is the net amount not subject to income tax, to around 1,300 US dollars annually. Employees in state institutions are the main beneficiaries of this exemption since they cannot evade taxes. The government will increase taxes on people whose annual income exceeds 25,000 dollars from a maximum of 22.5% to 25%, which could help in expanding social protection for vulnerable groups and increasing the income of lower-income individuals<sup>144</sup>.

In Lebanon, the government relied on the 2020 budget, approved by the parliament in addition to a draft law on the suspension of some terms of article 23 of the 2020 budget law. On April 16, the prime minister announced the launch of an 800-million-dollar social protection plan for countering the effects of Coronavirus, supporting daily wagers and farmers, boosting the healthcare sector, and giving loans to small industrial businesses to boost local production<sup>145</sup>. The government also ratified the modification of the agreement with the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development for a 120-million-dollar loan so that 39 million are allotted to dealing with the Coronavirus crisis, particularly equipping public hospitals and treating patients.

---

<sup>140</sup> "Finance minister: LE 187 allocated to Health Ministry to combat Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*, March 15, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/ptJmueu>

<sup>141</sup> "Government: LE 100 billion to face Coronavirus taken from emergency reserves and budget not modified [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*, March 20, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/dtJmqcA>

<sup>142</sup> Egypt: World Bank Provides US\$7.9 Million in Support of Coronavirus Emergency Response, 2 April 2020, World Bank: <https://cutt.ly/utJmsYL>

<sup>143</sup> "IMF gives Egypt 2.77 billion-dollar loan to fight Coronavirus [Arabic]." *France 24 Arabic*, May 11, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3gFu40p>

<sup>144</sup> Mohamed Gad. "Economic impact of Coronavirus: Exceptional procedures in new budget to help low-income citizens [Arabic]." *Al Manassa*, March 17, 2020: <https://vww.almanassa.net/ar/story/13889>

<sup>145</sup> "The savings of 98% won't be affected and Lebanese government in contact with IMF [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, April 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34InOzq>

In Tunisia, the government announced allocating 2.5 billion Tunisian dinars (around 850 million dollars)<sup>146</sup> from the budget to cover the expenses needed for countering the effect of the virus, particularly to support the healthcare sector, companies most harmed by the lockdown, and vulnerable groups. Based on official statement, no deductions were made so far in the money allotted to any sector and the government encouraged citizens, especially actors and football players to donate to the Coronavirus Fund. Tunisia also received grants from other countries such as a 50-million-euro grant from Italy and which was transferred to the Tunisian Central Bank as part of a plan to help Tunisian institutions face the social and economic ramifications of the virus<sup>147</sup>.

Other sources of funding include the army, syndicates, and donation accounts. In Egypt, donations to the Tahya Misr Fund<sup>148</sup> reached six million dollars from the Egyptian Armed Forces and 1,200,000 dollars from the House of Representatives<sup>149</sup>. In Lebanon, the government opened two accounts at the Central Bank, one for the fund created to face Coronavirus and the other for social aid. The government called upon the Lebanese both inside and outside the country to donate to those accounts. In Tunisia, the government opened an account for donations to the Coronavirus fund. Several businessmen took advantage of this to embellish their image through donating amounts that are too meagre compared to their wealth. A mobile application called Jesr (Arabic for “bridge”) was created by the Ministry of Relations with Constitutional Bodies, Civil Society and Human Rights for those who wish to make in-kind donations or volunteer to help in measures to curb the spread of the virus. The application is also meant to coordinate between volunteer initiatives launched by civil society organizations and national and local authorities in charge of implementing state policies.

It becomes obvious that none of the three governments put any pressure on the private sector to play a role in dealing with the virus and did not use the resources of private medical facilities despite their remarkable expansion in the past few years. In fact, private facilities benefited from the rise in the number of cases and so did insurance companies that started including Coronavirus in their plans and managed to double the number of their insurance policies compared to before the pandemic<sup>150</sup>. Business owners and stock market investors also benefited from the crisis, especially in light of the privileges offered to them by the state as previously mentioned.

---

<sup>146</sup> “Tunisian government promises 850 million dollars to face Coronavirus [Arabic].” *France 24*, March 22, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3ehhSl7>

<sup>147</sup> Website of the Italian Embassy in Tunisia, March 24, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2yJgE20>

<sup>148</sup> On July 1, 2014 the Egyptian presidency announced launching the Tahya Misr (long live Egypt) Fund to support the economy and take part in developmental projects that aim at addressing pressing crises such as Hepatitis C, homeless children, debts, and small businesses for youths. The fund’s official website: <https://tahyamisrfund.org/>

<sup>149</sup> For more see “Military spokesman: Army Forces donate LE 100 million to Tahya Misr Fund to face Coronavirus [Arabic]”: <https://www.elbalad.news/4288763> and “House of Representatives donates LE 20 million to Tahya Misr Fund to face Coronavirus [Arabic].” *Al Manassa*, March 26, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Zx9auc>

<sup>150</sup> Ahmed Atef. “Insurance companies benefit from Coronavirus crisis [Arabic].” *Al Manassa*, March 26, 2020: <https://vww.almanassa.net/ar/story/13910>





In Lebanon, the banking sector benefited from the crisis and so did the governor of the Central Bank, who is now accused by the people of being the reason for the country's economic collapse and for the increased wealth of bank owners. Banks tried to embellish their public image through modest contributions such as the six million dollars donated by the Banks Association and donations by bank owners announced in televised interviews that also aimed at

embellishing the image of the private sector and businessmen. Several politicians, most of whom are partners in banks, took advantage of the situation to appear charitable. Private hospitals made a lot of profit because of the pandemic. This brings to the forefront the growing crisis of the healthcare sector in Lebanon and which started following the end of the Lebanese Civil War when state policies facilitated a large-scale privatization plan that resulted in licensing a large number of private hospitals at the expense of public ones<sup>151</sup>. This meant that government spending on healthcare benefited private hospitals more than public ones that got a lesser share<sup>152</sup>. Nevertheless, several private hospitals were reluctant to receive Coronavirus cases. In fact, only four private hospitals are equipped to deal with Coronavirus cases<sup>153</sup> even though the other hospitals have the required resources. This is mainly because these hospitals prioritize profit over the necessity of taking part in **facing** the crisis. Private hospitals also took advantage of the pandemic to put pressure on the government to get their unpaid dues including from the National Social Security Fund and military healthcare funds, hence affecting the government's ability of purchasing the supplies required to deal with the pandemic<sup>154</sup>. The total amount due was around one billion dollars and hospitals threatened to close if they do not get their money. Negotiations the Ministry of Finance and the Health Committee at the parliament held with the Syndicate of Private Hospitals over the cost of treating Coronavirus patients reached a dead end<sup>155</sup> in addition to the already-existing dispute between private hospitals and insurance companies over the same issue. Private hospitals rejected all suggestions to solve the problem and ignored all the power the government has during the general mobilization declared in the aftermath of pandemic. "And after (private hospitals) guaranteed raising the patient's cost price and calculated the cost of an oxygen hour for a Corona patient, they barely met the emergency call resulting from an imminent massacre" according to a member of the ministerial committee dedicated to combating Corona, Mazen Bou Dargham.<sup>156</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Fawaz Trabulsi. *Social classes and political power in Lebanon* [Arabic]. Beirut: Dar El Saki, 2016.

<sup>152</sup> Mohamed Wahba. "Private hospitals reluctant to take Corona patients [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, March 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3dUo6Y3>

<sup>153</sup> "COVID-19 daily situation report [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>154</sup> "Coronavirus accentuates medical supplies crisis in Lebanon [Arabic]." *Human Rights Watch*, March 24, 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2020/03/24/339863>

<sup>155</sup> Rajana Hameya. "Corona cases dropping [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>156</sup> Hadeel Farfour, Op.Cit.

According to the Minister of Finance, in November and December 2020, the Ministry paid \$ 125 billion in dues to the Ministry of National Defense for private hospitals and doctors' committees, and it will start paying the Ministry of Health's dues to private hospitals during the coming period with a value of \$ 119 billion.<sup>157</sup>

Suppliers and importers also took advantage of the situation to raise the prices of commodities in an economy that is 90% dependent on imports and a market in which the value of the dollar keeps fluctuating and where accountability is almost nonexistent.

In Tunisia, major companies and financial institutions were the least affected, especially that they received a set of privileges including the restructuring of fiscal and customs taxes. Under those extraordinary circumstances, the government was expected to put pressure on tax evaders to pay at least part of debt, but this did not happen. In fact, those tax evaders were rewarded through the restructuring of their debts for a period that reached seven years even though the crisis was not expected to last for more than a year. Allowing corporations to get more loans through opening a 200-million-dollar credit line was also problematic, especially that the value of loans should be determined based on the need of each company and how affected it is by the crisis. Therefore, fixing an amount is quite illogical and opens the door for corruption since many companies would manipulate their needs in order to get maximum benefit. It is noteworthy that public institutions were exempted from this privilege as if they were not affected by the crisis<sup>158</sup>.

In Tunisia, economic indicators published by the National Institute for Statistics on August 15, 2020 showed that the country is heading towards a major crisis. In the second quarter of the year, negative economic growth reached unprecedented levels at -21.6%. That is why the country needs to adopt a complementary budget until the original budget is modified. In an attempt to deal with the situation, the government plans to mobilize additional resources for 10 billion dinars (3.5 billion dollars) to fund the deficit for the rest of the year<sup>159</sup>. The Tunisian prime minister called upon the Central Bank to purchase bonds to fund the deficit in the current year's budget, yet the bank declined.

In Egypt, the budget was ratified in July 2020 by the House of Representatives. Despite official statements about amounts to be allocated to fighting the pandemic, the social benefits item was reduced in the new budget to 140.7 billion Egyptian pounds, compared to 171.8 billion in the previous fiscal year. It is also less than half of the total money allocated to the Grants, Subsidies, and Social Benefits expenditure item. In addition, the government reduced reserves related to international food prices and the amount allocated to state-funded medical care increased by one billion Egyptian pounds. Meanwhile, the amount allocated to the Takaful and Karama Money Transfer Program, a social safety net, increased from 18.5 billion to only 19 billion while the money allocated to child protection remained as meagre as before. This indicates overlooking inflation rates that are expected

---

<sup>157</sup> "Clarification from Wazeni office regarding the payment of hospital dues," "al-Anbaa," 1/4/2021, <https://anbaaonline.com/news/103846>

<sup>158</sup> Moustafa Al Gweili, Op Cit.

<sup>159</sup> Aaed Omaira. "How can Tunisia overcome its economic crisis after IMF refused funding its budget [Arabic]." *Noon Post*: <https://www.noonpost.com/content/38758>



to reach 9% and could even increase to 12% based on official forecasts on which the Ministry of Finance based the budget plan<sup>160</sup>.

Other businesses flourished with the pandemic. Egypt, for example, witnessed a powerful comeback of the Cologne 555, manufactured by a factory affiliated to the Egyptian Sugar and Integrated Industries Company since it became the country's most demanded sanitizer. As soon as the Ministry of Health announced recording Coronavirus cases, the Kesma-Chabrawichi factory announced that its Cologne 555 is 70% alcohol and can be used to fight the virus. With the shortage of alcohol and sanitizers, demand on the cologne skyrocketed until it went out of stock, which drove the minister of supply and internal trade to pledge providing the market with 10,000 bottles to be available in all outlets. The minister of industry and external trade issued a decree to suspend exporting the cologne for three months<sup>161</sup>. The same applied to Mahala Spinning and Weaving Company after it started producing sanitized face masks<sup>162</sup>. In Tunisia, assistant secretary general of the Tunisian General Labor Union Mohamed Ali Boughadiri announced that large numbers of workers at private companies were laid off following the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

While some of the measures aimed at making higher income groups contribute more to facing the ramifications of the pandemic, policies adopted by governments still follow the "spill-over" approach. This is done through calling upon businessmen and company owners not to layoff workers during the crisis and to keep paying them. However, many companies did lay off workers or at least reduced their wages. Some companies even suspended their activities altogether whether on temporary or permanent basis. In Lebanon, several companies informed their staff that their salaries would be reduced or suspended until the crisis is over<sup>163</sup> and in Egypt, several companies reduced salaries<sup>164</sup>. Several experts argue that it is in those companies' best interest to resume work after reducing their workforce in an attempt to make up for the losses they sustained during the pandemic. This proves that the approach adopted by governments does not yield the desired results, especially at times of crises<sup>165</sup>.

---

<sup>160</sup> Salma Hussein. Op. cit.

<sup>161</sup> Omaila Ismail. "How Coronavirus brought an old cologne to life [Arabic]." *Mada Masr*, March 28, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/ftJmVIH>

<sup>162</sup> "Mahala Spinning and Weaving face Coronavirus with manufacturing 2,400 face masks per hour [Arabic]." *Al Masry Al Youm*, April 6, 2020: <https://bit.ly/34CsdUo>

<sup>163</sup> "Salary deductions and layoffs, the middle-class is falling apart [Arabic]." *Daraj*, April 5, 2020: <https://daraj.com/43291/>

<sup>164</sup> "ECG director explains salary deduction crisis after Corona [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*: <https://bit.ly/2WW6HaW>

<sup>165</sup> For more see Thomas Piketty's *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Translated by Wael Gamal and Salma Hussein, Dar Al-Tanweer, Cairo, 2016.

## Fourth: Vulnerable groups during the pandemic:

Group/ Country	Egypt	Tunisia	Lebanon
Daily wagers	<p>-A financial aid of 30 dollars was given to each of the one million and a half informal workers.</p> <p>-Payment is made through post offices based on text messages sent by the Ministry of Labor on the cellphone of each beneficiary to make sure overcrowding is avoided<sup>166</sup>.</p>	<p>-Issuing exceptional decrees on labor including the prohibition of the layoff of workers under any circumstances<sup>167</sup></p> <p>-Providing financial aid for workers at cafés, restaurants, and nurseries as well as craftsmen and store owners who had to close their stores as of early April</p>	<p>-Providing a financial aid of 400,000 Lebanese pounds (263 dollars) while the minimum wage was 450 dollars before the value of the local currency dropped by half and the purchasing power of needy families declined drastically<sup>168</sup></p> <p>-In March 2020, the income of all workers dropped by more than two thirds and few of them said they have savings. Most beneficiaries saw financial aid as a positive step towards mitigating the impact of the pandemic followed by food assistance offered to families<sup>169</sup></p>
Women	<p>-The prime minister issued a decree to give women who work in state institutions who support children of less than 12 years old paid leave while the crisis persists and the same applies to mothers who support children with disabilities<sup>170</sup></p>	<p>-A hotline was created to receive reports from victims of domestic violence and give them both legal and psychological support</p> <p>-Temporary quarantine was dedicated only for women coming from abroad in cooperation with the Ministry of Health for 14 days to</p>	<p>-The public prosecutor at the Court of Cessation issued a decree to the ministries of justice and interior and prosecution offices to immediately process domestic violence reports and to communicate with victims via video calls or any other means of communication if she is unable to go to the police station because of the lockdown<sup>172</sup>.</p>

<sup>166</sup> "Labor Ministry announces LE-500-grant for informal workers [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, April 7, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/FtJQjWu>

<sup>167</sup> Decree no. 2 for the year 2020, April 14, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bREHKA>

<sup>168</sup> "400 thousand Lebanese pounds to families in need and repatriations start Sunday [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, April 1, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2X1bsRa>

<sup>169</sup> "Rapid assessment highlights impact of COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable workers and small-scale businesses in Lebanon." International Labor Organization, June 5, 2020:

[https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS\\_747082/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/beirut/media-centre/news/WCMS_747082/lang--en/index.htm)

<sup>170</sup> "Persons with disabilities included in decree on workforce attendance reduction in government institutions [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, March 17, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/ltJQOK8>

<sup>172</sup> "No substantial increase in Coronavirus cases and government postpones aid [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, April 17, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2RNq8GR>

		<p>make sure they do not have the virus.</p> <p>-Victims of abuse were given permanent accommodation in shelters affiliated to the Ministry of Woman's Affairs<sup>171</sup></p>	
People with disabilities	-An exceptional leave was given to people with disabilities who work at government institutions <sup>173</sup> .	The government did not take special measures for people with disabilities.	The government did not take measures for people with disabilities and they were faced with many challenges especially in buying food and medicine under general mobilization and during night curfews. Many of them also worked as daily wagers and many were unemployed <sup>174</sup>
Senior citizens and patients with chronic and serious diseases	<p>-The president said in a speech that working senior citizens have to get leave under the current circumstances<sup>175</sup>.</p> <p>-Senior citizens and government employees who suffer from chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes were given exceptional leave<sup>176</sup>.</p>	-Financial aid was given to senior citizens with health problems and small pensions <sup>177</sup> .	<p>-The government did not take special measures for senior citizens and patients with chronic diseases</p> <p>-The second wave coincided with the Beirut Harbor explosion, which aggravated the situation of patients with chronic diseases. The economic crisis also made it harder to import medical supplies and medications used for chronic diseases<sup>178</sup>.</p>
Prisoners	-The government did not respond to calls by civil society to conditionally release prisoners in order to	-The General Directorate of Prisons and Rehabilitation sanitized cells and temporarily	-In Lebanon, visits were reduced, cells were sanitized, and social distancing was imposed. Prisoners received

<sup>171</sup> "Domestic violence up by five times in Tunisia after Corona [Arabic]." *AlJazeera.net*: <https://bit.ly/3e4b0Yh>

<sup>173</sup> "Persons with disabilities given time off to reduce workforce attendance in government institutions [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, March 17, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/ltIQOK8>

<sup>174</sup> Feras Hameya. "Coronavirus restricts persons with disabilities in Lebanon [Arabic]." *Ultra Sawt*, March 25, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2zndEcj>

<sup>175</sup> "Government likely to give women and the elderly time off work [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, April 7, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2XCNEdx>

<sup>176</sup> "Persons with disabilities given time off to reduce workforce attendance in government institutions [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>177</sup> Insurance or pension

<sup>178</sup> "Explosion makes things worse in Lebanese hospitals amid crisis [Arabic]." *Al Hurrah*, August 14, 2020: <https://arbne.ws/3l0qsb2>

	<p>curb the spread of the virus in prisons and other detentions facilities<sup>179</sup>.</p> <p>-The Ministry of Interior announced sanitizing all prisons, examining prisoners, suspending visits, installing sanitizing gates, and distributing face masks and sanitizers among staff and inmates<sup>180</sup>. Despite this, a report by Human Rights Watch suggested that Coronavirus is spreading in Egyptian prisons<sup>181</sup>.</p>	<p>suspended regular visits while allowing each prisoner one monitored visit every week. However, more decisions need to be taken about pretrial detention and the passing of verdicts<sup>182</sup>.</p> <p>- President Kais Saeid issued presidential pardons on two stages, which resulted in the release of around 2,500 prisoners.</p>	<p>assistance in the form of sanitizers and cleaning supplies.</p> <p>-Several prisoners demanded general amnesty, reducing jail time, and processing pending cases especially in light of the large numbers of unlawful detentions<sup>183</sup>.</p> <p>-The Amnesty Committee was expected to proceed with the release of 300 prisoners that received presidential pardon as part of a plan to curb the spread of the virus<sup>184</sup>.</p> <p>-In September, the minister of justice called upon relevant Courts of Appeals to look into requests to reduce prison sentences in order to protect prisoners from the virus.</p> <p>- In September, the minister of health announced that prison<sup>185</sup> administrations launched an emergency plan to isolate mild and medium Coronavirus cases while hospitalizing critical cases<sup>186</sup>.</p>
Refugees	-The WHO representative in Egypt	-The UNHCR in Tunisia, in	-Syrian and Palestinian refugees in Lebanon did not

<sup>179</sup> "Egypt: Release prisoners of conscience and other prisoners at risk amid coronavirus outbreak." *Amnesty International*, March 20, 2020: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2020/03/egypt-release-prisoners-of-conscience-and-other-prisoners-at-risk-amid-coronavirus-outbreak/>

<sup>180</sup> For more info see "Interior Ministry announces plan to curb spread of the virus in prisons [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, March 20, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3gWVYVY> and "Testing prisoners, sanitizing cells and kitchen [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, June 1, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2Y8q2W7>

<sup>181</sup> "Egypt: Apparent Covid-19 Outbreaks in Prisons." Human Rights Watch, July 20, 2020: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/07/20/egypt-apparent-covid-19-outbreaks-prisons>

<sup>182</sup> "Exceptional procedures in Tunisian courts and controversy over prisons [Arabic]." *Legal Agenda*: <https://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=6544>

<sup>183</sup> Radwan Mortada. "Prisoners threatened with death [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*: <https://bit.ly/3aBGnaM>

<sup>184</sup> Nicola Nassif. "300 prisoners to be released soon [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, May 12, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3cU0gei>

<sup>185</sup> "Justice minister pushes for special pardons [Arabic]." *Al Joumhouria*, March 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2IbATKF>

<sup>186</sup> "Justice minister pushes for special pardons [Arabic]." *Al Joumhouria*, March 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2IbATKF>

	<p>confirmed that the Egyptian government will offer all the necessary healthcare services for refugees in collaboration with the UNHCR as was the case with the treatment of Hepatitis C<sup>187</sup></p>	<p>coordination with its local partners, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, the Tunisian Council for Refugees, and the Tunisian Association for Management and Social Stability, supervises measures to protect refugees from contracting the virus.</p> <p>-A campaign was launched to sanitize all refugee centers in the south.</p>	<p>benefit from financial assistance provided by the government under the pretext that they already receive assistance from the UNHCR<sup>188</sup></p> <p>- the Directorate of General Security issued a decree that does not allow Palestinians who were outside Lebanon when the lockdown started to be repatriated with Lebanese citizens<sup>189</sup>. This decree was modified later to allow Palestinians to be repatriated only in case of availability on board the planes<sup>190</sup>.</p> <p>-The UNHCR announced covering the cost of Coronavirus tests and treatment for Syrian refugees at any medical center and based on recommendations from the Ministry of Health<sup>191</sup>.</p>
Foreign labor	<p>-The Egyptian government did not take measures for migrant labor such as female domestic workers from Africa.</p>	<p>-The Ministry of Social Affairs pledged to provide African workers, who mainly work in restaurants and cafés, with their basic needs without discriminating between them and citizens.</p> <p>-Several measures were taken to facilitate the work of organizations in</p>	<p>-Government aid did not include foreign labor.</p>

<sup>187</sup> "WHO: Egypt to provide refugees who test positive with medical care [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*, March 30, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2X0DF9h>

<sup>188</sup> Maher Al Khechen, Op Cit.

<sup>189</sup> For the decree see: <https://bit.ly/2TtRyf4>

<sup>190</sup> "Repatriation of Palestinians conditioned upon availability [Arabic]." *Al Akhbar*, May 13, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3qfc3Wr>

<sup>191</sup> "Palestinian, Syrian refugees in Lebanon camps brace for virus." *France 24*, April 5, 2020:

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200405-palestinian-syrian-refugees-in-lebanon-camps-brace-for-virus>



charge of foreign labor and to provide them with financial and in-kind aid. These organizations called upon landlords to postpone rent payments for the months of April and May.  
-Visas were extended as of March 2020<sup>192</sup>.



Building on the above overview, we can come up with certain concluding remarks, in terms of the support mechanisms, Egypt was the most efficient since it designed a system of support to vulnerable groups that merged technological tools with conventional mechanisms to cater to the needs of those who are not tech-savvy. This is demonstrated particularly in the case of women. While Tunisia did not need to do the same because of the difference in population as for, Lebanon, it was not in as much need for this because of its decentralized system. This means that each country adopted the measures that best suited its context. It was, however, expected that a support system designed in such a short time under unprecedented circumstances would face several challenges in implementation. This could have been avoided through involving municipalities, civil society, and citizens in the process. For example, in Egypt 5.4% of families depended on the informal workers' grant while 48% resorted to borrowing and 17.3% relied on charity

<sup>192</sup> Statement by Tunisian Ministry of Interior, April 7, 2020.

which explains the importance of the role of the community in dealing with the pandemic<sup>193</sup>. On the level of human rights, both Lebanon and Tunisia focused on the indirect impact of the pandemic such as domestic violence and offered support for victims. The three countries, however, did not pay enough attention to the ramifications of the pandemic on the elderly and people with disabilities. On the political level, Tunisia was the most efficient in dealing with prisoners while the government in Lebanon kept procrastinating and the government in Egypt was totally irresponsible. Egypt, on the other hand, was the best together with Tunisia in dealing with the impact of the crisis on refugees while this was not applied to Lebanon, where almost no support was provided for refugees.

---

<sup>193</sup> "The impact of Coronavirus on Egyptian families until May 2020 [Arabic]." Op. cit.

## Fifth: Transparency and media discourse: Is there any progress?

The suddenness of the event and its deviation from the usual news and political context – in addition to the lack of experience among media teams in dealing with an unprecedented pandemic – posed a challenge to media outlets throughout the world, including in democratic and highly industrialized countries. The pandemic also provoked a discussion about how to rapidly respond to such an exceptional event and reset the priorities of the media as well as remedy its shortcomings.<sup>194</sup>

There was a relative improvement in the media discourse of the three countries. For example, the government in Egypt focused on holding press conferences and releasing daily reports on the latest developments in Coronavirus cases through the official pages of the Cabinet and the Ministry of Health on social networking websites<sup>195</sup> as well as through TV channels and radio stations that also featured awareness campaigns about protection and the importance of staying at home. The Ministry of Health also used text messages for updates and a special website

(<https://www.care.gov.eg/EgyptCare/Index.aspx>) was created by the Cabinet to offer updates, instructions, and latest news<sup>196</sup>.

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Information became the official source of developments on Coronavirus through posting updates on its website<sup>197</sup>. The minister of health held several press conferences and interviews and answered citizens' questions via Facebook. In addition, Lebanese people received regular text messages on the latest developments as well as the times of press conferences and interviews with officials and details on awareness campaigns. On July 16, the minister of health launched an application called "Together Against Corona" to trace those who got in contact with people who tested positive to be installed for free and a text message was sent to all citizens with details on installing and using the app<sup>198</sup>.

The problems of Lebanese media precede the pandemic since most media outlets are linked to decision making circles both inside and outside the country. The pandemic, however, laid more emphasis on the way media outlets in Lebanon took advantage of crisis to serve political, economic, and sectarian agendas. When Lebanon recorded the first Coronavirus case, many media outlets used the news to support the political camp they represent and undermine its rivals. Several media outlets even aired news without verifying their authenticity and released reports that were not based on any scientific studies. These

---

<sup>194</sup> The Egyptian Experience in Dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic: Between Politics and the Media, AFA, <http://afalebanon.org/?p=8484>

<sup>195</sup> For more see the official Facebook page of the Egyptian Cabinet: <https://www.facebook.com/EgyptianCabinet/> and the official Facebook page of the Ministry of Health: <https://www.facebook.com/egypt.mohp/>

<sup>196</sup> For more info see <https://www.care.gov.eg/EgyptCare/Index.aspx>

<sup>197</sup> "Information minister launches Coronavirus page [Arabic]." *Ministry of Information Website*, March 20, 2020: <https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/45125>

<sup>198</sup> Health minister launches application to track Coronavirus cases [Arabic]." *National News Agency*, July 16, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2I8Awk7>



included a report on the transmission of the virus from animals to human beings, which led many to give up their pets. Many media outlets also launched donation campaigns, but those aimed at serving the agendas of businessmen and politicians, especially those involved in corruption cases who needed to embellish their image.

In the midst of contradictory news and fake reports, the government decided to coordinate with media outlets about the coverage of Coronavirus, yet no clear strategy was adopted. The Ministry of Information and relevant entities advised citizens to stick to information provided by the National News Agency. Other media outlets, especially written ones, played a major role in ensuring the authenticity of material they release and to steer clear of political and sectarian agendas while criticizing the performance of officials and decision-makers whenever necessary.

In Tunisia, it is possible to distinguish between public and private media outlets. Public outlets, both audio and audiovisual, dedicated all airtime to awareness campaigns and interviews with doctors and scientists and covered the daily press conferences held by the Ministry of Health to update citizens on the number of cases and deaths. During the first 20 days of the pandemic, the level of transparency was remarkably high, especially through the daily press conferences. However, the Ministry of Health decided to only hold press conferences when there are important updates and to post regular news on the ministry's official Facebook page. A TV channel was also created in cooperation with the Ministry of Education to facilitate the process of distance learning. National TV started a show that discussed all developments related to the pandemic and interacted with officials from the ministries of health, foreign affairs, and interior, and doctors.

The three cases prove that media outlets can be used efficiently to spread knowledge and ensure transparency and that not doing that in normal circumstance is rather because of lack of will. It is noteworthy that the number of viewers increased remarkably when the media adopted this new strategy as citizens were able to trust news and reports aired on those outlets. This proves that transparency is never a luxury and never an obstacle in the way of development. Transparency also plays a major role in eliminating corruption.

## Sixth: The role of civil society and municipalities:

It could be said that precautionary measures taken by governments were welcome by both citizens and civil society, especially that many of those measures were in response to common demands. There were reservations on a number of issues such as employers not offering workers enough protection in the workspace and delaying the implementation of precautionary measures until the situation worsened. This was demonstrated in Egypt when the first positive case in the National Cancer Institute was not taken seriously and later 17 of the people who got in contact with the first case tested positive<sup>199</sup>.

When lockdown was imposed, the majority of citizens respected the rules despite violations that included not maintaining social distance and not abiding by curfew hours especially on the part of youths. This led to imposing fines on violators and at times arresting them. It is noteworthy that the economic situation in the three countries and lack of a solid plan to make up for the losses sustained by low-income groups made it hard for many to observe lockdown. In Lebanon, financial aid given to each family was less than the minimum wage, which pushed groups that rely in their livelihood on daily wages to violate lockdown. Several protests erupted against those measures such as Tripoli where a man set himself on fire and many risked going to work during the peak of the pandemic. However, the majority abided by measures and cases of violation remained relatively limited unlike what media outlets reported.

Civil society in the three countries contributed to dealing with the pandemic through a number of initiatives that complemented government efforts and at times monitor the performance of the government. Civil society initiatives ranged between relief, awareness, and medical support. In Egypt, Ahl Masr Foundation for Development signed a protocol with the Supreme Council of University Hospitals to provide university hospitals with equipment and supplies needed to deal with the pandemic<sup>200</sup> in addition to an initiative for manufacturing 5,000 ventilators. The January 25 Hospital was built from donations via social media and placed under the administration of the Ministry of Health to use it for quarantine or as it sees fit<sup>201</sup>. Several initiatives used videos and infographics posted on social media to raise awareness about the virus and protection measures<sup>202</sup>. Youths from several governorates made posters about protection from the virus and hung them in different places across their cities, which was the case in the governorates of Sharqiya and Aswan<sup>203</sup>. Charity organizations contributed to mitigating the impact of the pandemic. For example, the Egyptian Food Bank launched a campaign to support workers and distributed 500 thousand food boxes<sup>204</sup>. Abwab El Kheir Association launched a similar initiative and

---

<sup>199</sup> Rana Mamdouh. "Testimonies of four nurses who tested positive inside at the National Cancer Institute [Arabic]." *Mada Masr*, April 5, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/Dtln4cE>

<sup>200</sup> "Ahl Masr Foundation for Development signs protocol with Supreme Council of University Hospitals to deal with Coronavirus [Arabic]." *DotMasr*, April 1, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2K5Yvh4>

<sup>201</sup> Ahmed Abdin. "Egypt facing Coronavirus: Weak official response and popular solidarity [Arabic]." *Daraj*, April 14, 2020: <https://daraj.com/44005/>

<sup>202</sup> See the official page of Shamseya: [https://www.facebook.com/shamseyaeg/?epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/shamseyaeg/?epa=SEARCH_BOX)

<sup>203</sup> "Provincial youths and store owners face Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, March 25, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3cnUyjU>

<sup>204</sup> Egyptian Food Bank initiative: <https://www.egyptianfoodbank.com/ar/Support/Day/Labour>

another to support medical staff<sup>205</sup> and the associations of Masr El Kheir and Resala launched campaigns to support families in need. The Tahya Misr Fund also launched a campaign to collect donations from institutions and individuals to purchase medical equipment and support vulnerable groups<sup>206</sup>.

Several civil society organizations in Tunisia coordinated with municipalities to provide vulnerable groups with assistance while others launched a campaign with the Red Crescent to sanitize streets, stores, and institutions. Organizations working on health launched campaigns in working-class neighborhoods while others focused on transparency through applications that allow citizens to monitor donations they made to the fund created especially to pandemic-related assistance and make sure they reached the beneficiaries in addition to tracing medical supplies purchased by the Ministry of Health in coordination with the Ministry of Human Rights. Among the most successful of those applications was the one called “Where did your money go?” Other organizations launched applications that allow communicating with and monitoring the progress of quarantined patients in coordination with the Ministry of Communication Technology.

In Lebanon, several civil society organizations provided training sessions in primary care centers and designed emergency plans for refugee camps in coordination with the Ministry of Health. Several initiatives were taken by political parties, which assume the role of the government in Lebanon. These initiatives focused on training medical staff, establishing medical centers, and providing food assistance. Added to this were similar initiatives by volunteers and civil society organizations. The National Mental Health Program at the Ministry of Health launched an initiative in coordination with the WHO, civil society, and the Lebanese University to offer psychological support to those impacted by the pandemic<sup>207</sup>. Several civil society organizations provided training sessions in primary care centers and designed emergency plans for refugee camps in coordination with the Ministry of Health<sup>208</sup>. The minister of health praised the role played by civil society organizations in facing the pandemic.

Relief initiatives were the fastest and most efficient in the three countries despite attempts at using them for political purposes in the case of Lebanon. Awareness initiatives also played an important role in dealing with the pandemic. Civil society organizations used social networking websites to spread knowledge about ways of protection from the virus and what to do in case of displaying symptoms. With the rise in the number of cases, the role of civil society was emphasized whether through providing the basic needs of groups that are most affected by the pandemic or offering help through the phone as was the case in Egypt. Bureaucracy often stood in the way of these initiatives, hence negatively impacting their scope and effect. This was shown in the case of Tunisia when volunteers had to get security permits to be able to move from one place to another.

---

<sup>205</sup> Abwab El Kheir initiative: <https://www.facebook.com/abwaaab/>

<sup>206</sup> Tahya Misr official website: <https://bit.ly/2VvXOTJ>

<sup>207</sup> “Lebanese University alumni, professors, and students take part in campaign to counter mental effects of Coronavirus [Arabic].” Lebanese University Website, March 29, 2020: <https://www.ul.edu.lb/common/news.aspx?newsId=2491>

<sup>208</sup> “Civil society on the front lines in the battle against Coronavirus [Arabic].” *UPR Lebanon*, March 23, 2020: <https://www.upr-lebanon.org/archives/9412>



The role of municipalities, on the other hand, was determined by the degree of centralism in each of the three countries. In Tunisia, in which democratic transition is progressing, municipalities played a legislative role through making decisions pertaining to their regions. Municipalities did not only implement measures adopted by the central government, but several of them added more measures to ensure the safety of locals. This was demonstrated in the case of the governorates of Sousse and Ariana such as restricting the activities of restaurants and cafés to take out and offering hotels and hostels to be used for quarantining Tunisians arriving from abroad. The pandemic was the first major test for municipalities since the May 2018 municipal elections since it demonstrated the degree of independence municipal councils enjoy. For example, the decision to change the opening hours of restaurants, cafés, and bars taken on March 13 was a positive step taken by all municipalities in addition to sanitizing streets, government institutions, means of transportation, and bus stops. Some municipalities even installed thermographic cameras in marketplaces<sup>209</sup>.

Municipalities closely monitored stores and restaurants to make sure they are abiding by opening hours and to detect any cases. Police patrols played a role too through passing through neighborhoods and raising awareness about the pandemic via megaphones<sup>210</sup>. To avoid overcrowding, several municipalities closed public spaces such as zoos, public parks, and marketplaces<sup>211</sup>.

In Lebanon, where the system is highly decentralized, municipalities played a major role in dealing with the crisis. This was particularly the case in village and towns where municipal councils are in close contact with the people. The Ministry of Interior also assigned municipalities several tasks related to dealing with the pandemic. The government created crisis management committees affiliated to municipalities to provide locals with their basic

<sup>209</sup> For example, the governorate of Ben Arous in Tunisia: <https://bit.ly/3d0fDlj>

<sup>210</sup> Osama Osman. "Tunisian municipalities fight pandemic despite scarcity of resources [Arabic]." *Legal Agenda*: <https://www.legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=6593>

<sup>211</sup> Examples include the municipalities of Tunis, Houmt Souk in the island of Djerba, and Mornaguia.

needs. Municipalities raised awareness in their regions, trained teams to offer support to locals, and created helplines across municipalities. The Ministry of Interior and municipalities issued decree 8/2020 that allows municipalities to name places that can be used for quarantine for those who were in contact with people who tested positive and positive cases that do not need hospitalization<sup>212</sup>.

Municipalities distributed sanitizers and awareness flyers and created local crisis management committees that worked with both governorates and relevant ministries. They also work with the government to provide poor families with aid, yet this was faced with several challenges including objections to the government's role in identifying poor families. The minister of social affairs announced the launch of municipal platforms that facilitate the distribution of financial aid and local funds were created for that purpose. Municipalities monitored the implementation of precautionary measures, made sure there are no gatherings, and supervised the performance of businesses exempted from full closure especially home delivery services on which many citizens depended following the lockdown. Several municipalities<sup>213</sup> reported cases and transferred patients to hospital in cooperation with the Red Cross and several local entities, many of which are affiliated to political parties. Some municipalities attempted to isolate the regions under their jurisdiction to curb the spread of the virus, but when they were unable to do that because of objections, they monitored incomers and outcomes and sanitized cars. However, the isolation of areas in which many cases were recorded is still likely even though the debate about this has been used for sectarian purposes<sup>214</sup>. On May 22, the minister of health stressed the necessity of setting a plan in which all municipalities take part, and which involved appointing a person for every region to be in charge of tracking cases together with a medical team. He said that the major role in this plan will be played by municipalities since they are more capable than security forces of ensuring the implementation of precautionary measures and respecting curfew hours and added that municipal councils will have the full power to implement those measures in accordance with the general mobilization law<sup>215</sup>.

The role of municipalities increased remarkably with the start of the second wave as cases in villages and towns were on the rise. Despite coordination between municipalities and the Ministry of Interior to contain the virus, the minister issued a decree in October to put 111 municipalities under lockdown, which led to objections by several of those municipalities while others decided to comply. Several municipal councils called upon the minister to remove them from the lockdown list either because the number of cases was not accurate or because locals would be unable to bear the economic ramifications of lockdown while pledging to follow all precautionary measures<sup>216</sup>.

In Egypt, municipalities have played no role since 2011 and role they played before that was extremely limited since they had no say in the decision-making process owing to the

---

<sup>212</sup> "Reference Manual for Setting Up and Managing a Quarantine Center." Op. cit.

<sup>213</sup> Examples include the municipalities of Minyara, Bebnine, and Qoubaiyat.

<sup>214</sup> For more info see "Municipal procedures to fight Coronavirus continue [Arabic]." March 19, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3cV3BJR>

<sup>215</sup> "Lebanese PM announces plan to face the spread of Coronavirus [Arabic]." Op. cit.

<sup>216</sup> "Shock in municipalities following closure of 111 towns [Arabic]." *Kataeb.org*, October 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/35i16QK>

highly centralized system in which they operate. Following the spread of Coronavirus, municipalities ensured the implementation of precautionary measures especially the closure of stores, cafés, and tutoring centers in addition to receiving complaints and conveying them to the Ministry of Local Development, but they did not play a crucial role in dealing with the crisis<sup>217</sup>. Therefore, Municipalities in Egypt only adopted measures dictated by the central government and followed up on their implementation.

---

<sup>217</sup> Official Facebook page of the Egyptian Cabinet. Op. cit.



## Seventh: Democracy and governance: The decision-making process:

In Egypt, the Higher Committee for the Management of the Coronavirus Crisis was created to follow up on measures to curb the spread of the virus, set an emergency plan, and officially respond to rumors about the pandemic<sup>218</sup>. The committee is also in charge of following up on the latest developments, issue all executive decrees, and adopting precautionary measures as well as following up on implementation in ministries and relevant entities<sup>219</sup>. The committee holds meetings based on latest developments, especially upon an increase in the number of cases and the detection of social practices that might lead to the spread of the virus<sup>220</sup>.

In Lebanon, the Coronavirus Follow-up Committee was created to work with the government and relevant ministries, submitted recommendations to the government, and implemented measures adopted by the government. The government also created crisis management committees in municipalities to identify the needs of each region and work with the Ministry of Interior and political parties. The committee meets on regular basis and submits recommendations to the Cabinet. For example, in its May 22 meeting, the committee warned that the virus is spreading fast and that stricter measures need to be adopted<sup>221</sup>.

In Tunisia, the National Coronavirus Response Authority, which is directly supervised by the prime minister, coordinates between different relevant entities, especially vital sectors, and makes decisions after communicating with governors and local committees in charge of crisis management.

Most committees created at the time of the pandemic were affiliated to and supervised by executive powers. While in Egypt the committee was mainly in charge of follow up, the committee in Lebanon made recommendation and in Tunisia handled coordination. Meanwhile, the decision-making process remained mainly monopolized by executive powers and state institutions. The crisis has, in fact, demonstrated the vital role the state can play in terms of providing services and dealing with emergencies. However, the centralization of the Egyptian system impacted decision making since neither civil society nor citizens were given the chance to take part in this process, make recommendations, or start initiatives. In Lebanon, decisions were generally made by the government, which drafted laws and referred them to parliament for ratification. The parliament convened for the first time on April 21, 22, and 23 and when discussion of a draft law submitted by the government to open a new line of credit for 800 million dollars, but the session ended when quorum was lost after many MPs left. The parliament convened in May and approved

---

<sup>218</sup> "Government: Higher committee to deal with Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Mal Newspaper*, February 27, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2A2WmRP>

<sup>219</sup> Higher Committee for Novel Coronavirus Crisis Management: <https://bit.ly/2VzwKmD>

<sup>220</sup> "Meeting of the ministerial committee for the management of Coronavirus crisis [Arabic]." *Al Masry Al Youm*, April 14, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2z5eav5>

<sup>221</sup> "Coronavirus to spread fast if strict measures are not taken: Committee [Arabic]." *Al Jadeed*, May 22, 2020: <https://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/news/local/2205202042>



the draft law provided that the government identifies how the money would be used<sup>222</sup>. The government assigned relevant ministries the task of issuing decrees related to their specialization and ministries, in turn, gave instructions to entities that fall under their jurisdiction. For example, the Ministry of Interior gave instructions to municipalities and security institutions. The Ministry of Health, on the other hand, did a good job at communicating with people whether through press conferences or direct conversations via social networks.

The legislative power played a limited role in Egypt. The parliament tried to follow the developments of the crisis and several MPs submitted proposals and draft laws, usually handled by the executive power, for dealing with its ramifications. There were cases when those proposals were accepted, which was the case with the suspension of classes requested by member of parliament on March 11, 2020<sup>223</sup>. Other proposals were rejected such as the one that requested postponing the payment of electricity bills. MPs submitted a number of other proposals pertaining to procedures for tracking recoveries and monitoring the implementation of precautionary measures such as wearing face masks in public transportation and making sure public places are not overcrowded<sup>224</sup>.



Specific committees at the House of Representatives followed up on precautionary measures and looked into suggestions and complaints, each depending on its field. On April 15, the parliament held a press conference to announce recommendations issued by those committees, including considering medical staff who died of Coronavirus martyrs and treating them as such based on the first article of law 16/2018, requesting that deputy health ministers in all governorates submit regular reports to MPs and that governors coordinate with them in order to make the best use of available resources. They also demanded regular sanitization of prisons and ensuring that protection measures are strictly followed there<sup>225</sup>.

In Tunisia, the prime minister submitted a request to the parliament to authorize him to issue decrees pertaining to Coronavirus based on Article 70 of the constitution. The last version of this draft law was ratified by the Committee on the Rules of Procedures, Immunity, Parliamentary Legislation and Election Law after making a lot of modifications to the original version. These modifications included duration and powers. For example, based on the latest version, the prime minister is authorized to issue decrees related to

<sup>222</sup> "Parliament ratifies additional 1,200-billion-dollar credit [Arabic]." LBC Channel, May 28, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3gZhB87>

<sup>223</sup> "Request to suspend classes because of Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Shorouk*, March 11, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2zZi7lo>

<sup>224</sup> For more info see:

<https://www.elwatannews.com/news/details/4720621> <http://gate.ahram.org.eg/News/2395012.aspx>

<sup>225</sup> "Recommendations by parliament specific committee on Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Al Youm Al Sabea*, April 15, 2020: <https://bit.ly/2RGCSIs>

curbing the spread of Coronavirus for two months on issues related to facing the ramifications of the pandemic and ensuring the operation of all vital utilities. The authorization is limited to four areas: first, finance and taxes to support individuals and institutions that are most harmed by the crisis and mobilizing resources to cover required expenses; second, rights and freedoms, court procedures and penalties, and detentions; third, healthcare, environment, education, and culture; fourth, operating vital utilities and ensuring the provision of citizens' basic needs<sup>226</sup>. Decrees issued by the prime minister under this authorization are to be submitted to the parliament for approval following the end of the two months, which means that the parliament will be monitoring the performance of the government. When the second wave started, the Tunisian parliament was in recess and the first session was held on October 1. In this session, the parliament ratified the appointment of the new government following the resignation of Elyes Fakhfakh's government. In fact, political instability that preceded the appointment of a new government played a role in Tunisia's inability to adopt all the required measures to curb the spread of the virus during the first wave.

On August 10, following the Beirut Harbor explosion, prime minister Hassan Diab resigned, and Mustafa Adib replaced him then also resigned to be replaced by Saad El Hariri. As of mid-December 2020, the government had not yet been formed due to various political considerations. The delay in forming the government comes to constitute an additional burden on the delicate and exhausted economic, social, political, and health situation the country is experiencing, especially in light of the Corona crisis, and the country's need to form a government as soon as possible to take urgent decisions that are compatible with the urgency of this period, especially since several external parties link their formation to the condition of providing assistance. And all of this in light of the absence of oversight, market breakdowns, continued smuggling, and the lira's exchange rate rapidly and massively depreciating, especially with the near maturity for banks ending in February, and the games practiced by this sector in partnership with the Central Bank and banking shops, which constitute an additional burden on the lira. And the prices have steadily risen.

Civil society organizations made several attempts at taking part in the decision-making process and succeeded at times and failed at others. In Egypt, the government responded to calls by civil society to impose partial lockdown and provide aid for informal workers and senior citizens while calls for the release of prisoners were overlooked. Civil society organizations launched awareness campaigns and conducted studies that followed up on the implementation of healthcare procedures<sup>227</sup> in addition to writing white papers such as, for example, an analysis of labor relations during the pandemic<sup>228</sup>. The media played a role in focusing on particular issues such as informal labor and the opening of factories and companies to keep the economy going. The media also lobbied for not responding to

---

<sup>226</sup> Hassan El Ayadi. "Government given the power to issue decrees and the parliament's miscalculated priorities [Arabic]." *Le Maghreb*: <https://bit.ly/2JRx36E>

<sup>227</sup> "Participatory Research on the Use of Public Spaces in light of the COVID19 Epidemic and citizens' reactions to new official policies." Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights and Shamseya: <https://www.eipr.org/en/publications/participatory-research-use-public-spaces-light-covid-19>

<sup>228</sup> "On the problematics of labor rights under Coronavirus [Arabic]." *Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights*: <https://ecesr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Labour.pdf>

calls for releasing prisoners under the pretext that such a step would compromise national security and undermine the war on terrorism.

Social networking websites managed to put pressure on the Egyptian government to make or retract certain decisions. For example, the debate about repatriated Egyptians and objections to have them pay for quarantine led to issuing a presidential decree that quarantine expenses will be taken from the Tahya Misr Fund. When this was not implemented, campaigns on social media returned until the government decided to give returnees free accommodation at university hostels<sup>229</sup>.

In some cases, civil society plays a monitoring role, usually through social media. This was shown in Lebanon in the way the government was lobbied into paying for the tickets of the repatriated, especially those who cannot afford to pay for themselves and into allowing Palestinians on board repatriation flights even though that depended on availability. Political parties adopted different strategies to deal with the crisis in areas in which they are influential and mobilized both material and human resources to make that possible<sup>230</sup>.

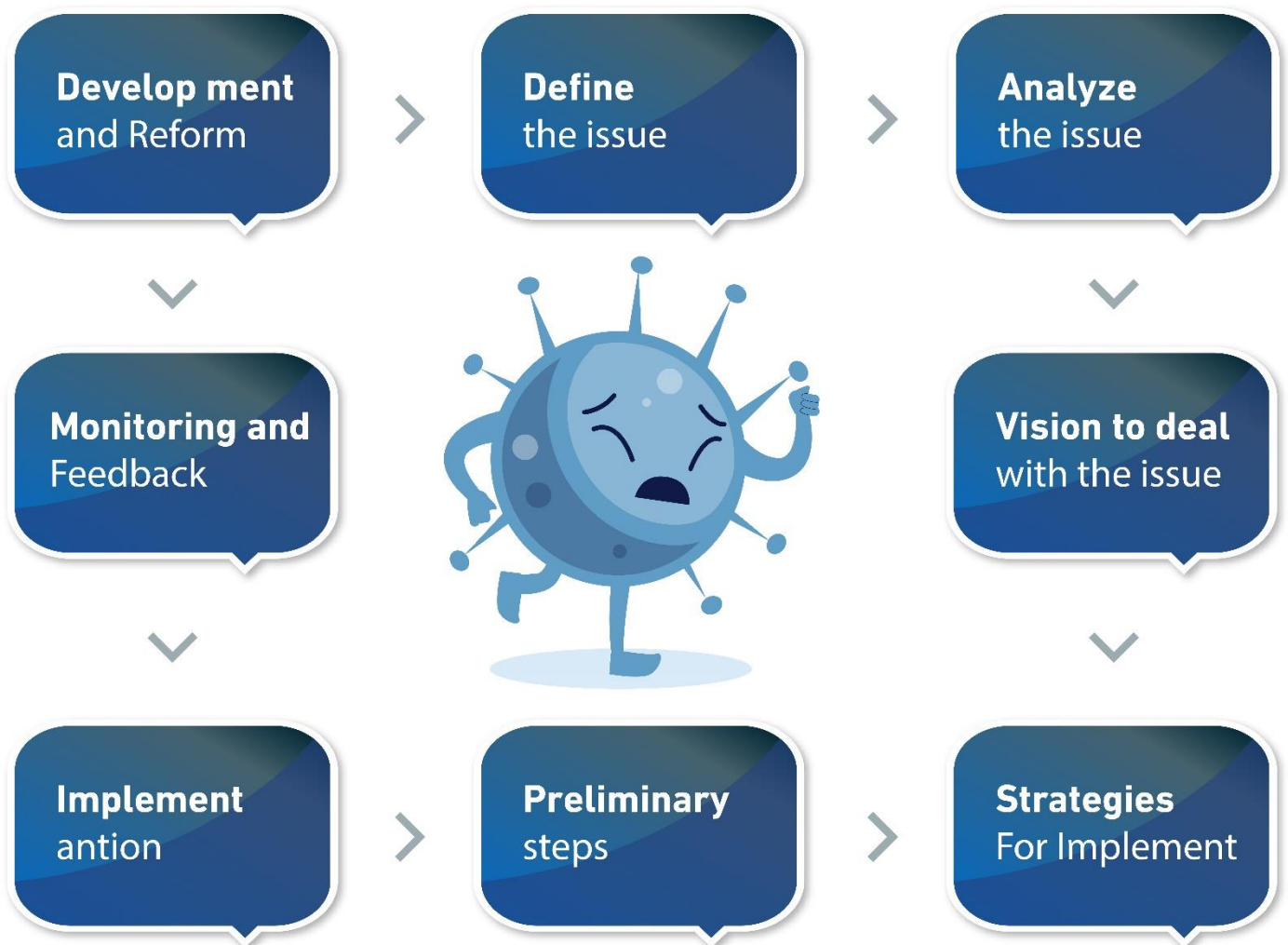
In Tunisia, the National Coronavirus Response Authority did not identify a mechanism for communicating with civil society and the municipalities or for interacting with the people to answer their questions and know their needs. No plan for monitoring the performance of the authorities was announced whether by civil society or the parliament and the authorities did not initiate contact with any of the relevant parties to get feedback on local developments, the implementation of precautionary measures, or the ramifications of the pandemic and lockdown.

---

<sup>229</sup> “Responses on Twitter to the quarantine of Egyptian returnees [Arabic].” *Deutsche Welle Arabic*, April 2, 2020: <https://bit.ly/3bUtdoT>

<sup>230</sup> For more see Khaled Mansour, “What is the bright side of the pandemic crisis? [Arabic]” *Mada Masr*, April 7, 2020: <https://cutt.ly/5tJWyaT>

# Public Policy Cycle



## Participation consultancy Mobilization

Based on the general framework of public policymaking, it becomes necessary to identify the problem. In the case of the pandemic, the problem was preidentified and the issue was how fast the response to this problem would be. It was fast in the case of Tunisia and Lebanon since both countries started adopting preemptive measures before any cases were recorded. The analysis of the problem, the second step following identification, relied in

the three countries on information released by the WHO. In the three cases, the contribution of society in the policymaking process was minimal. Objectives were also not clearly defined, which led to confusion, especially in Lebanon where cases kept increasing despite preemptive measures. The dominance of executive powers was demonstrated in the three cases and so was the limited, and usually symbolic, role played by the legislative powers.

The implementation stage looked quite promising in the three countries at the beginning of the pandemic. This was shown in committees created to monitor and follow up on the implementation of protective measures and the use of media outlets to keep citizens informed of the latest updates. While the level of performance did not remain the same, general results were good in Lebanon and Tunisia mainly through the way developments were dealt with. This was demonstrated in going back to lockdown when cases started increasing once again in late May. In Egypt, there was more inclination towards changing strategies, yet results were more linked to the implementation of the strategy and how it builds upon previous experience rather than the strategy itself. The evaluation of public policies at the time of crisis is, after all, usually based on results achieved during this crisis whether in terms of controlling it or letting it get out of control. It is, however, still early to decide how successful policies adopted in each of the three countries are and how capable they will be of overcoming the gaps mentioned in this study.

## Conclusion

In light of the financial crisis through which many countries in the world are going, the pandemic came to expose the fragility of several state institutions particularly those related to public services such as healthcare. Despite the efforts made by the ministries of health and other relevant state institutions during the pandemic, structural defects had a negative impact on results. The pandemic also brought back to the forefront the problem of security approaches, which was clear in imposing lockdown or curfew without providing vulnerable groups with their basic needs. This led vulnerable groups either to break the rules as was the case in Egypt or protest as was the case in Lebanon.

Structural defects were not the only problem since policies which restrict the government and its institutions are also defective. For example, comprehensive protection nets require increasing public expenditure while the dominant approach that is promoted by international financial institutions and which depends on austerity measures, hence does not make this possible. States are, therefore, restricted in their ability to support public services. In fact, austerity measures were even imposed on Lebanon in response to its economic crisis, hence making the situation worse. Meanwhile, other international organizations do not interfere despite numerous studies about the role of these measures in intensifying inequality and the decline of social protection. These organizations do not put pressure on international financial organizations to change their policies.

While the three countries responded effectively to the crisis, there was an obvious need for a better management of resources, which requires adopting a different approach in the policymaking process on both the procedural and technical levels. The limited role of parliaments and elected municipal councils as far as evaluation and monitoring are concerned reveals how defective the policymaking process is. Lack of proper utilization of the resources of the private sector as a means of dealing with the crisis reveals the need for revising planning methodologies. The revival of several industries during the pandemic is an example of unused resources that need to be utilized whether at times of crises or as part of an attempt to boost the economy and support production in general.

The pandemic showed that while the three countries are not on the same level of centralization, the crisis was managed in a highly centralized manner. The role of municipalities and civil society organizations came later, and they were not consulted in the planning stage, hence their role was mobilization for the people to follow the instructions, rather than contribution in the decision-making process. Executive powers were almost fully in control even in cases when there were legislative obstacles. This is demonstrated in the Tunisian case when the prime minister requested authorization to issue executive decrees. While this kind of measures can be common during emergencies if state institutions are not prepared to deal with the crisis, this situation in itself proves the importance of enhancing the role of parliaments and civil society organizations so that the state is prepared to face such crises. It is through those entities that the state can understand the needs of the people and can also request that they abide by rules.



Several main components of good governance are also missing such as transparency. Another problem was the fact that responses to the crisis were momentary and came in the form immediate reactions rather than long-term plans that link different stages of dealing with the crisis with developments on the ground. The WHO needed to provide procedural guidelines that cover different scenarios linked to developments taking place in each country and to monitor their implementation. In addition, the three countries mostly relied in communication on TV channels and the news while websites and social networks were not used for interacting with citizens but rather for informing them of updates. This meant that governments did not get any feedback on their performance and the measures they adopted. In fact, some countries in the region used the crisis to impose restrictions on internet use through unjust laws, which was the case in Morocco even though this did not last for long owing to pressure by civil society. This demonstrated how civil society can play a more prominent role during crises.

The policymaking process has to be done in a democratic and participatory manner that guarantees the contribution of citizens who should identify their problems and needs and also monitor the performance of officials. When this does not take place, the majority of people would remain under the mercy of a minority that controls economic resources and prioritize profit, which widens gaps and exacerbates injustice. In addition to their necessary contribution in the policymaking process, a partnership needs to be created by civil society organizations in order to mobilize efforts for the purpose of achieving development, forming a lobbying bloc that can affect the decision-making process, monitoring the implementation of projects, and submitting recommendations<sup>231</sup>.

The policymaking process cannot overlook other factors associated with the achievement of social justice such as gender, especially as far as the distribution of resources is concerned as well as environmental issues and the long-term impact of policies. This requires changing the methodologies not only of decision making but also of budgeting on both the local and national levels. This can be done through balancing programs instead of balancing items in the budget, hence channeling expenditure in a fairer manner<sup>232</sup>.

In addition to all of the above, decentralization becomes a substantial requirement in the Arab region. This could be done through expanding the role of municipal councils in monitoring the performance of local officials and handling complaints and interpellations. Decentralization makes it possible to base decisions on the local needs of each region<sup>233</sup>. It also ensures that voting is not the only role citizens can play, but they can also take part in monitoring the performance of officials on both local and national levels. Decentralization is not possible without a considerable level of financial autonomy in municipal councils so that they have the right to use the resources as needed within the context of their respective regions and also to have the freedom of deciding the value of

---

<sup>231</sup> "Civil society in the Arab region: Post-revolutionary development and challenges [Arabic]." *Arab Forum for Alternatives*: <https://bit.ly/3fyH0EU>

<sup>232</sup> Shima El Sharkawy. "The role of public policies in achieving social justice [Arabic]." *Arab Forum for Alternatives*: <http://afalebanon.org/?p=6526>

<sup>233</sup> "Municipal councils and the empowerment of civic engagement: Arab case studies [Arabic]." *Arab Forum for Alternatives*: <https://bit.ly/3fuhGQd>



taxes and other local fees and to have their own budgets, hence becoming capable of overcoming restrictions imposed by the central government. This not only guarantees a better distribution of resources but also ensures better handling of crises<sup>234</sup>.

Developing a social protection system basically requires funding from the central government. This can be possible through a fair tax system that includes progressive taxes, capital revenue taxes, and wealth taxes to fund this system. This system should not only include healthcare services but also all basic services citizens need as well as preparedness for crises.

Despite attempts by governments to support vulnerable groups, this support was limited especially when compared to privileges given to the private sector. This means that business owners were the group that benefited the most from government support. This proves that the surplus profit made by businessmen does not automatically benefit poorer groups, but the exact opposite is true. Even using the capitalist logic, it is important to improve the conditions of poorer classes to expand the market, hence allowing business owners to make more profit. That is why it is necessary to increase government support for vulnerable groups through a model that is closer to a welfare state than a neoliberal one. Development methodologies also need to be revised to give precedence to education, healthcare, and housing so that different sectors are prepared to deal with any arising crises.

---

<sup>234</sup> Shorouk El Hariri and Omar Samir. "Problematics of municipal systems in the Arab region and possibilities of reform [Arabic]." *Arab Forum for Alternatives*: <https://bit.ly/2YS4IGl>