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**Covid19 in Arab region: Facts, prevention procedures, and
prospect future**

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Abstract

The 2019 coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is a contagious illness that is spreading quickly across the globe. It is a true test for all health authorities, including those in Arab nations. Nearly every nation on the planet has been impacted by the coronavirus illness 2019 (COVID-19), including all 22 Arab countries. Infections with COVID-19 totaling more than 2.2 million have been reported in the MENA region (including Iran, where more than 26,000 people have already died and infection rates continue to surge). Iraq has the most confirmed cases among Arab economies, followed by Saudi Arabia and Morocco. Hence, this study intend to assess the Covid-19 impact on the Arab region, as well as the prevention procedures followed by MENA countries to overcome the challenges in their societies.

Keywords: *Covid-19, MENA, Arab Region, Arab Economies.*



1- Introduction:

The COVID-19 epidemic has shown significant cracks and weaknesses in economies, institutions, and civilizations all around the world. The Arab region initially managed to keep transmission and mortality rates below the global average, but more recent increases are worrying, especially given the fragmented health care system and the lack of primary care in many Arab countries.

The pandemic is testing some of the region's weakest and most congested medical systems. For the wealthier Gulf nations, the developing economies in the Levant or North Africa, or the fragile and conflict-affected nations like Iran, Syria, Iraq, the Palestinian Authority, Yemen, and Libya, where there is a shortage of hospital beds and testing facilities, the situation is obviously not the same. In Lebanon, Morocco, or Tunisia, the initial wave has drained public hospitals and their staff and has negatively impacted public confidence in the veracity of official numbers and the crisis's overall management. Therefore, several prevention techniques and regulations were conducted by these countries to deal with any consequences that may arise (Alwahaibi et al., 2020).



Treatment of the COVID-19 is still progressing in a manageable manner despite all the variations in political status, preventive and controlled measures, laws, and/or healthcare systems that have been discovered throughout Arab countries. The overall scope and severity of COVID-19 cases in all of the Arab countries are still seen as being at low risk and are rated fourth because of the strict and major early efforts implemented to minimize this epidemic (Najib, 2021).

On the other hand, some nations have had quickly and creatively procedures to contain the infection, as seen in the Jordanian approach to crisis management, the UAE's use of virtual doctors and sanitizing robots, or Morocco's expansion of domestic mask production and test runs. Additionally, there was a significant increase in healthcare innovation and collaboration, particularly in the field of vaccine research. This demonstrates the stark disparities between nations when it comes to their ability to respond on the healthcare front (Guterres, 2020).

Currently, COVID-19 is the top hazard to human health globally, posing significant difficulties for governments and healthcare professionals in addressing its spread, management, and prevention. Due to this, it is imperative to comprehend disease behavior and how potential



preventative, or controlled actions may have influenced its spread. Determining the prevalence of COVID-19 patients in the Arab globe and contrasting them with those in other affected nations from January to May 2020 was the goal of the literature and current analysis. Therefore, this study aims at shedding light on Covid-19 in the Arab region, introducing its facts, prevention procedures followed by these countries, as well as the prospect future of Covid-19.

2- Research Problem & Questions:

Covid-19 pandemic is already having a significant economic impact due to negative demand/supply shocks as well as a shock from the collapse of oil prices, despite the huge fiscal packages offered in the majority of countries. The capacity of people to go to work and the ability of enterprises to continue boosting the economy are being severely hampered by the containment measures that countries have implemented. At the same time, the Arab region experiences a decline in demand on a regional and global scale, and the majority of supply chains are broken.

Furthermore, falling crude oil prices have increased strain on even the wealthiest countries in the region through decreased investments from Gulf nations, who are the largest investors in the region, as well as

significantly decreased remittances from Gulf nations and fewer job opportunities for citizens of other MENA nations (Garad & Al-Ansi, 2021).

Accordingly, this study is aiming to answer the following main question:

"What are the prevention procedures and measures applied in the Arab region to contain the pandemic?"

In addition, the sub-subsequent questions can be posed:

- 1- What is the reality of Covid-19 in the Arab region?
- 2- What prevention procedures have been made in order to control the spread as well as the consequences of Covid-19 in the Arab region?
- 3- What are the future anticipations regarding Covid-19 and its aftereffect in the region?

3- Theoretical Background:

*** Covid-19 in the Arab region:**

On December 31, 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission in China made the first-ever formal declaration of coronavirus. The World Health Organization (WHO) classified COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020. Infections with COVID-19 totaling more than 2.2 million

have been reported in the MENA region (including Iran, where more than 26,000 people have already died and infection rates continue to surge). Iraq has the most confirmed cases among Arab economies, followed by Saudi Arabia and Morocco (Alwahaibi et al., 2020).

The 22 Arab nations are split between 12 in Asia and 10 in Africa. Together, these nations cover an area larger than 5 million square miles. The Arab league was established to unify the Arab nations and to advocate their citizens' interests. The resources and health systems, however, vary from nation to nation. For health officials in all Arab nations, COVID-19 is a serious test.

Although UAE was the first Arab nation to formally declare confirmed cases, Kuwait had the largest number of cases in February, followed by Bahrain, the UAE, and Iraq. The greatest reported cases in these nations coincided with Iran, which reported its first COVID-19 case on February 19, 2020 and is still one of the nation's most seriously afflicted as of May 18, 2020. For religious and personal reasons, many Arabs, especially in the Gulf Cooperation Council region, saw Iran as a major draw (Guterres, 2020).

On the other hand, Egypt was the first Arab African nation to proclaim the presence of COVID-19 on February 14, 2020, making it the second Arab nation to do so. Despite this, the number of cases did not rise during that month, therefore it did not rank among the Arab nations with the largest number of cases. At the start of the pandemic, the geographic location and the self-sufficiency of labor and other resources may prevent or restrict travel from China. Other Arab nations, which reported no incidents in February, may also fit this explanation (Alwahaibi et al., 2021).

All Arab nations, except for Morocco and Tunisia, reported an increase in the number of confirmed cases. Nevertheless, the rise of confirmed cases differed from one nation to the next depending on the preventive and controlling measures adopted by each nation. Some nations took longer than others to implement these precautions, which caused a rise in COVID-19 cases and wider spread of the illness. Even though they had fewer stringent safeguards in place, nations like Iraq, Sudan, Somalia, Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, Libya, and Syria showed less than 0.025% of confirmed instances. This percentage may have been significantly influenced by these countries' precarious political situations (Guterres, 2020). The following table illustrates the trend of the monthly-confirmed cases in all Arab region for the year 2021.

Figure 1. Trend of monthly-confirmed COVID-19 cases in all Arab countries

(Alwahaibi, 2021).

Countries	Feb 20	Mar 20	Apr 20	May 20	June 20	July 20	Aug 20	Sept 20	Oct 20	Nov 20	Dec 20	Jan 21	Feb 21	Total	Per million population
Bahrain	41	526	2,473	8,358	15,149	14,224	10,990	18,892	10,781	5,311	5,719	10,382	19,337	122,183	70,214
Qatar	1	780	12,628	43,501	39,178	14,607	8,083	6,982	6,796	6,277	5,001	7,501	12,329	163,664	58,289
Lebanon	7	463	255	495	558	2,777	12,753	22,326	41,594	46,716	53,559	119,549	73,998	375,050	55,113
Kuwait	45	244	3,735	23,019	19,152	20,762	18,152	20,075	20,744	16,709	7,951	14,673	25,695	190,956	44,282
UAE	26	643	11,812	22,076	14,110	11,839	9,725	23,959	38,439	36,231	37,891	95,787	87,915	390,453	39,165
Jordan	0	268	185	286	393	61	841	9,791	60,782	146,823	75,064	32,361	64,235	391,090	38,080
Palestine	0	117	227	283	1,980	9,409	10,892	17,170	13,621	32,127	52,357	20,958	24,471	183,612	35,451
Oman	6	186	2,156	9,089	28,633	39,197	6,455	12,863	15,849	9,265	5,168	5,459	7,170	141,496	27,254
Tunisia	0	393	605	79	95	342	2,171	13,720	42,408	36,956	40,447	71,669	24,784	233,669	19,635
Libya	0	8	53	69	694	2,398	10,744	20,559	26,570	21,714	17,126	18,696	15,496	134,127	19,346
Iraq	13	617	1,373	4,436	42,670	75,500	110,325	128,047	109,649	79,919	42,742	24,345	75,853	695,489	17,040
Morocco	0	602	3,821	3,360	4,602	10,874	38,140	59,784	94,111	141,041	80,997	33,825	12,609	483,766	13,005
SA	0	1,563	21,190	62,508	105,562	85,082	39,867	18,833	12,677	10,078	5,381	5,333	9,309	377,383	10,730
Djibouti	0	31	1,058	2,265	1,328	399	306	29	145	118	145	108	155	6,087	6,102
Comoros	0	0	1	105	197	79	41	51	56	80	155	1,961	852	3,578	4,058
Mauritania	0	6	2	522	3,619	2,121	778	426	189	938	5,041	2,993	582	17,217	3,640
Algeria	3	713	3,290	5,388	4,513	15,924	14,663	6,719	5,813	26,173	16,112	8,028	5,916	113,255	2,552
Egypt	1	710	4,827	19,447	43,326	25,767	4,649	4,352	4,306	8,526	20,733	29,307	17,059	183,010	1,766
Syria	0	10	33	79	157	478	2,008	1,435	1,528	2,159	3,547	2,614	1,540	15,588	877
Sudan	0	7	368	4,651	4,232	2,238	1,693	451	164	4,006	7,690	1,702	1,204	28,406	638
Somalia	0	5	594	1,377	948	288	98	278	353	510	263	70	2,608	7,392	457
Yemen	0	0	6	317	835	570	230	76	31	15	22	37	146	2,285	75
Total	143	7,892	70,692	211,710	331,931	334,936	303,604	386,818	506,606	631,692	483,111	507,358	483,263	4,259,756	

*** Governments' strategic actions in the Arab region:**

National governments swiftly adopted measures to increase institutional coordination after the confirmation of the first COVID-19 cases in the MENA area by establishing inter-ministerial mechanisms and strategies.

Other measures include setting up technical and scientific committees that will be in charge of tracking and assessing the development of the situation and foreseeing the direct and indirect effects of COVID-19. Taking Tunisia



as an example, the government established the National COVID-19 Monitoring Authority, which consists of senior officials from all ministries, with the goal of "imposing full compliance with measures to fight the virus." The Monitoring Authority will also ensure coordination between the National Committee against the Coronavirus, led by the Presidency of the Government, and the regional committees against natural disasters (Conde & Pataud, 2020). Additionally, it is responsible for monitoring the consistency of the supply of basic products, the distribution of social assistance to low-income families, as well as the referral of recommendations to the national committee to combat COVID-19 to adopt the necessary measures to contain the virus (Guterres, 2020).

Many governments also took action to maintain public services in nations where confinement measures were put in place. To help the ongoing operation of public administration, teleworking arrangements and online tools have been developed. In order to make teleworking more convenient, Jordan and Morocco created useful manuals on the topic. Despite efforts, teleworking in public administration proven to be challenging due to the underdeveloped digitalization of services, underdeveloped civil servant skills, and frequently paper-based work processes. In order to decrease the exchange of paper documents and lower the risk of COVID-19



transmission over paper, Morocco also developed a number of new digital delivery systems (Alwahaibi et al., 2021).

In order to educate the public on good hygiene practices and preventative steps they may take to stop the spread of COVID-19, several nations have also implemented public communication strategies like TV, radio, and social media campaigns. As part of the indoor quarantine, the celebrities and influencers in the videos provided advice on how to assist kids make the most of their free time at home. Additionally, governments created websites that contained all data pertinent to the COVID-19 situation in their particular nation. The websites aim to give residents information on the most often asked issues, avoid false information, and offer guidelines for staying safe and halting the spread of this pandemic (Conde & Pataud, 2020).

Eventually, the public procurement systems of the MENA countries adjusted to the crisis by putting in place measures to make it easier to timely purchase essential and sanitary goods in accordance with the rapidly changing needs. For instance, the Tunisian National Authority for Public Procurement has issued a circular to public purchasers to remind them of

the need to abide by the established measures for circumstances of force majeure and to ease the rules for public procurement.

*** Incorporating environmental concerns into the recovery of MENA's economies:**

For MENA countries in particular, environmental health problems associated to the COVID-19 pandemic are important. In MENA countries, particularly in their less affluent segments of society, in conflict-affected territories, and in refugee camps, lack of access to clean water and sanitation, water scarcity, and poor waste management (including on hazardous waste, such as bio-medical and health-care waste), as well as bio-medical and health-care waste, can all exacerbate the impact of pandemics. Additionally, confinement measures may lead to greater exposure to indoor air pollution, especially for those residing in poorer MENA nations who use polluting fuels for heating and cooking, as well as for those whose homes lack or have inadequate ventilation systems (Conde & Pataud, 2020).

While the immediate health crisis and COVID-19-related economic recovery measures are currently the focus, the MENA governments should not disregard the need for additional action to reduce the risks

posed by climate change, water scarcity, water and air pollution, soil degradation, desertification, and biodiversity loss. These dangers operate on a different period, but they have the potential to undermine MENAs' societies and economies (Zyoud, 2021).

Governments in the MENA region should make sure that their stimulus programs and other policy responses are in line with aggressive targets for combating climate change and other forms of environmental protection as the crisis spreads throughout the globe. They should carefully consider any unforeseen negative environmental effects of new short-term recovery measures (such as fiscal and tax provisions), preserve policy coherence, and prevent unanticipated negative environmental effects that might harm society's environmental health and future resilience.

The MENA region's governments should also link financial support to environmental advancements. Financial support measures like preferential loans, loan guarantees, and tax exemptions may be used to encourage stronger environmental commitments and performance in industries with high pollution levels that may be negatively impacted by the crisis. By emphasizing the benefits to well-being and prosperity from

more resilient communities, communication efforts can be made to increase public support for policies aimed at enhancing environmental health (Salti & Haddad, 2021).

*** Impact of Covid-19 on SMEs in the Arab region:**

An essential function in MENA economies is played by micro, small, and medium-sized firms (SMEs), business owners, and independent contractors. They make up a sizable portion of the workforce and the bulk of business units. Self-employment, both legal and informal, and microbusinesses with 2 to 9 employees make up 70% of all employment in the MENA region, close behind South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (both at 80%). To varying degrees, all MENA nations make an effort to promote and aid entrepreneurship, which is crucial for generating high-quality employment and building a more vibrant and productive economy (Al Mahyijari et al., 2021).

The current health and economic crisis has brought attention to the significance of SMEs, entrepreneurs, and own-account workers (i.e., the self-employed who do not employ other people). These groups have been severely impacted by disrupted economic activity, uncertain recovery prospects, and the containment measures implemented by governments.



The epidemic and the drop in oil prices may speed the pace of industry consolidation in sectors with a large share of family-owned enterprises. Less well-capitalized businesses can end up having to sell off the majority of the company or even the entire business, especially businesses that face persistent revenue decline and cash flow issues (UNDP, 2020).

Not to forget that SME and entrepreneurship policy has been a tool to address significant economic and development challenges over the past 20 years, including lowering unemployment, boosting innovation and productivity, and diversifying the economy away from a heavy reliance on the state and, in some cases, hydrocarbons. As a result, the loss of jobs in SMEs would be a significant setback to those efforts and have detrimental societal effects including expanding the informal sector, raising unemployment and poverty levels, and generally reversing development efforts. Thus, the private sector can take advantage of the shifting economic environment by employing several measures in reaction to Covid-19 (Zyoud, 2021).

*** Future implications of Covid-19 in the Arab region:**

The world will take action to rectify the economic harm inflicted by Covid-19 after halting the spread of the virus. It caused per capita income

to drop in 170 nations. It will only be able to do this, though, if it takes use of the globalization structures already in place while attempting to maintain national competitiveness to steer globalization in the direction of the nation-interests states (Garad & Al-Ansi, 2021).

On the other hand, other countries, like those that rely heavily on oil, may endure greater volatility because of Corona's widespread economic paralysis and the sudden decline in oil revenues, and may need to reevaluate their plans and initiatives (UNDP, 2020).

Additionally, the severe shock brought on by the coronavirus warns developing nations about the importance of comprehending that solid foundations must be laid for existing regional blocs. It serves as a permanent barrier against all "low potential and high impact" variations' negative consequences. Not to forget that significant modifications to the system of international relations will exert greater pressure than it did before the Corona virus. New international regulatory forms that modify current structures to fit this trend. Without dismissing the ongoing conflict, even if it is less heated than it was before Corona. Therefore, the role of hard power in providing economic and social services may be the most convincing in the literature on international relations. Particularly

given that, albeit to varied degrees, it had a part in this aspect in numerous nations (Garad & Al-Ansi, 2021).

Conclusion:

To sum up, despite the MENA region's overall COVID response being largely similar to that of other regions of the world, we observe significant within-region variations in terms of how COVID policies were carried out and how much residents were impacted by the pandemic and subsequently adopted public health practices. Countries with little state capacity, like Libya, Yemen, and Syria, frequently perform poorly in terms of enforcing policies or adhering to COVID-19 requirements.

Moreover, in countries where confinement measures were implemented, numerous governments took action to maintain public services. Teleworking arrangements and online tools have been created to assist with the ongoing operation of public administration.



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