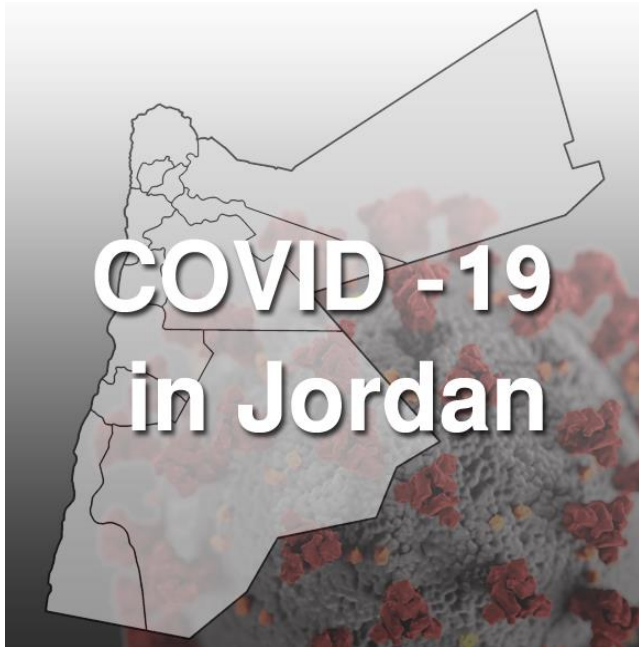


Jordan faces the Corona Pandemic



COVID-19 in Jordan

In January 2020, two years ago, lockdowns, mask wearing, and social distancing, were concepts unknown by most of us. Today they are part of our language and our daily lives. Most of us have suffered in one way or another from this global pandemic. I personally have suffered from this pandemic from several aspects, including the familial, religious, professional, and social. Jordan also has undergone challenges in response to the Corona Virus.

Personally, my young son, who is only 8 years old, was infected with this virus several days before Christmas. This prompted us to take precautionary and preventive measures, including not leaving home for two weeks, not

attending Christmas masses with the parish, and not seeing any family members during the quarantine period. Due to this pandemic, we have not been allowed to properly celebrate my eldest son receiving the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation last May. These occasions, in our oriental society, are usually celebrated in a very festive way. Under normal conditions, our custom is to have a large party in a hall, including dinner, live music, and dancing. Churches are now open, but these types of celebrations are still discouraged due to the increase in the number of people infected with the virus.

As for employment, as a tourist guide, my current situation is the same as millions of people who either closed their businesses or lost their jobs. Over the past decades, prior to the pandemic, the tourism sector witnessed continuous growth and became one of the fastest growing global economic sectors. Today, tourism accounts for about 30% of the world's exports of services and provides one in ten jobs worldwide. It also represents a vital source of jobs through tourism revenues and foreign direct investment flows. Tourism represents one of the main sources of income for many developing countries, including Jordan.

According to the statistics of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, during the year 2019 Jordan witnessed



Sterilization of all tourist sites in Jordan

the highest levels of growth in the tourism sector, as the number of visitors reached 5,360,587 and tourism income rose to 4,108.2 million Jordanian dinars. However, the Corona pandemic affected this leading economic sector in an unprecedented and negative way worldwide by stopping the movement of airports globally, in addition to adding fear to tourists around the world to travel and visit crowded sites. The closure of most airports and land borders led many companies around the world to lay off their employees and reduce their business in order to avoid a complete collapse. Unfortunately most of the hotels and restaurants located in important tourist cities like Amman, Madaba, Aqaba and Petra, have gone out of business because of Covid-19. Because I am a tourist guide, I also lost my job over the last two years and I am still waiting for the pandemic to end in order to return to work.

This pandemic has even made it difficult for me to write this article, because it is now the school's holiday period, and children are home. Since I have four young children, you can imagine the situation. We live in a

typical apartment of 160 square meters, which includes three bedrooms, one for me and my wife, the second one for my two sons of 11 and 9 years old and the third one for my two daughters of 5 and 3 years old. In



our building there are 8 other families who have in total, 14 children. Usually, when the weather is nice, children go out to play outside the building, but unfortunately there is no garden or a designated place to play, but this is the case for most families here. However, with the risk of contracting the virus, parents prefer not to let their children

play outside for long periods, therefore, they stay at home longer. Most children these days spend the majority of their time at home either on an iPad, or playing with the Play station. In most families there is no “reading culture” unfortunately, so the children spend their time at home only playing or yelling between each other. As you can imagine, this makes it very difficult for those who want to rest, read or write, as most homes do not have a designated place for that.

It is clear that it’s difficult to contain the entire topic of the Corona pandemic in an article, and therefore I will focus on the most important stages that Jordan has gone through since the beginning of the pandemic until today.

The Corona Virus pandemic in Jordan is part of this global pandemic that first appeared in late 2019 in China and later spread to most countries of the world. On february 27, 2020 Jordan started COVID-19 screening at airports and implemented a two week quarantine for positive cases. The first confirmed case was recorded in Jordan on March 2, 2020. At that time, the Jordanian Minister of Health announced in a press conference that the patient, a young man in his thirties, showed symptoms of the disease 14 days after his return to Jordan from Italy, and quarantine was imposed on him and his family members.

In response, the “Defense Law” was activated by King Abdullah II for the first time since its approval in 1992, which allowed broad powers to the Prime Minister to take preventative measures to limit the spread of the

epidemic. On March 16, 2020, the Jordanian government announced a complete curfew with the aim of stopping the spread of the disease after the first 26 confirmed cases. The government succeeded in limiting direct human interactions (also known as social distancing) by adopting distance education, encouraging remote work, employing digital financial services, and setting specific time periods for citizens to purchase their needs from grocery stores.

The army is deployed in all cities after the decision to implement the Defense Law



Due to these measures, Jordan ranked first among 13 countries in the world whose response was the most



The health sector in Jordan facing COVID-19

severe and strict in applying preventive measures during the Corona pandemic, as Jordan was the first country in the world to obtain a full score (100/100) in the strictness index, and maintained it for 34 days, which is considered the sixth longest ban in the world (*Oxford, 2020*). These efforts have led to a significant decrease in the number of cases in Jordan, which proves the efficacy of government measures.

Among the decisions that were made at the beginning of the crisis, under the directives of His Majesty King Abdullah II, was the decision to rent 4 and 5 star hotels for quarantine purposes. As of March 24, 2020, the number of quarantined individuals was 5050 persons, most of whom were located in hotels that have been rented out by the government and converted into quarantine facilities. The majority of these people have



Dead Sea Resorts used by Jordanian authorities to quarantine individuals suspected of being infected with COVID-19

been placed in quarantine upon arrival to Jordan from abroad to wait out the virus's incubation period. The total number of rented hotels reached 34: 23 in Amman, 10 at the Dead Sea area, 1 in Aqaba. (For comparison, Jordan is slightly smaller than Ohio and almost equal in population.)

Jordan approved proactive, military measures to confront Corona. The army entered the line of control since the beginning of the crisis, and

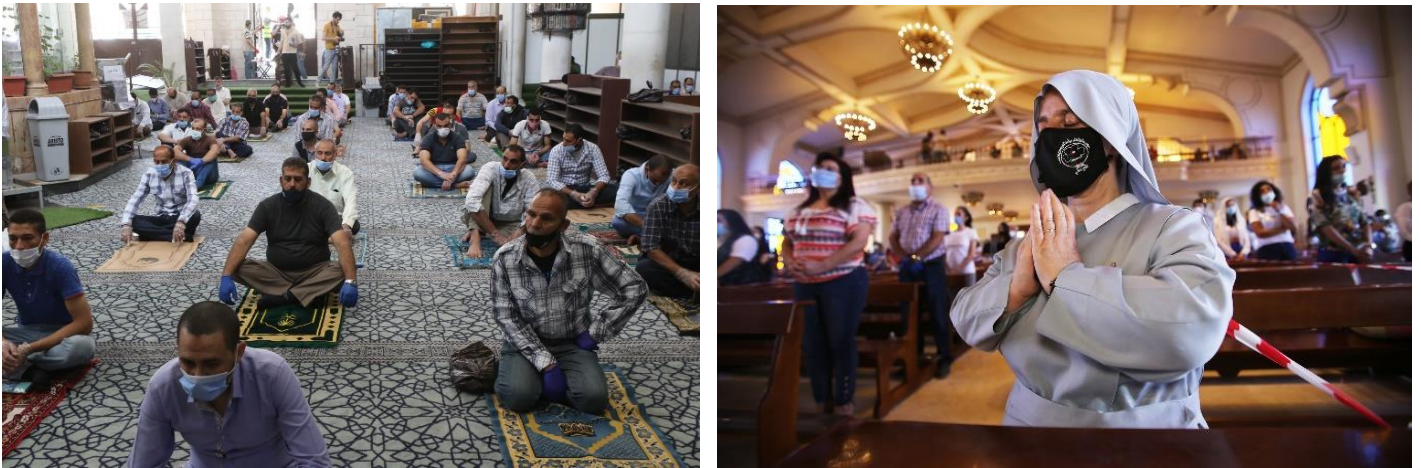
soldiers spread out to all cities. The governorates were closed, including the capital, Amman, and the epicenters of the epidemic were controlled. The Jordanian government launched an awareness website for the emerging corona virus, as part of its directions to limit the spread of the virus. The site includes sections that contain information about the emerging coronavirus and its symptoms, instructions and guidelines for home quarantine, the mechanism for reporting suspected cases, and details of government hospitals that conduct tests to detect infection with the disease, in addition to an update of the number of cases of infections in Jordan. There are many government medical



Temperature measurement - one of the procedures for entering the school

centers and government hospitals located in all the governorates of the country in which the PCR test can be done at no cost, and the result of the PCR can reach you within a day or two through a message to the cell phone. There are also many private medical laboratories that do the PCR tests at a price of about \$30-40 per test, where the result of the test can be ready within only a few hours. The total number of tests to detect the coronavirus in Jordan, as of January 21, 2022, reached 14,284,540 tests. The COVID test process is still taking place, and approximately 30,000 to 40,000 tests are done on daily basis.

The government also announced a package of decisions that Jordanians were not familiar with, including imposing a curfew on movement, based on the epidemiological situation at each stage, closing all borders and airports, suspending education in schools and universities, and closing all Mosques and Churches.



Physical distancing and wearing masks while praying in mosques and churches

On April 6, 2020, the Jordanian government launched a website (www.stayhome.jo) to allow citizens to request permits to leave their homes for emergencies, including: going to the bank for the purposes of paying workers' salaries, going to the hospital, cancer patients, obstetrics, medication requests, and deaths. There were also special permits for industry, and farmers. There were two ways to request a permit, either through the website or through a direct request at the designated governmental office. Permits were issued at no cost. Asking for a permit does not necessarily mean obtaining it, as there were many applications that were rejected. These days, there is no need for permits, as all sectors have been opened, despite the large numbers of positive cases that are announced daily.

On May 22, 2020, the Jordanian government announced the imposition of a total curfew for a period of 3 days, after the country witnessed a significant increase in the number of infected people. I can say that the government's decisions have so far been accepted by Jordanian society, despite their severity. But people were afraid, and some were terrified of the danger of contracting this virus.

On June 6, 2020, the Jordanian government announced that the risk level of the spread of the pandemic had decreased. This led to the reopening of the majority of economic and service sectors, activities and facilities.

According to a statement issued by the Jordanian government, Jordan entered this stage after data from the Ministry of Health indicated a significant decrease in the number of local infections within 14 days to less than 10 cases per day, in addition to the fact that the ratio of discovered cases to the number of tests is less than 5.0%. Based on this data, the majority of sectors, activities and facilities were opened, including: mosques, churches, nurseries, restaurants and cafes, sports clubs and events (without an audience), the hotel and hospitality sector and tourist sites for the purposes of local tourism, in addition to allowing domestic flights. The curfew hours have also been reduced, so that citizens can go out from six in the morning until twelve at night daily, and businesses open from six in the morning until eleven at night daily.



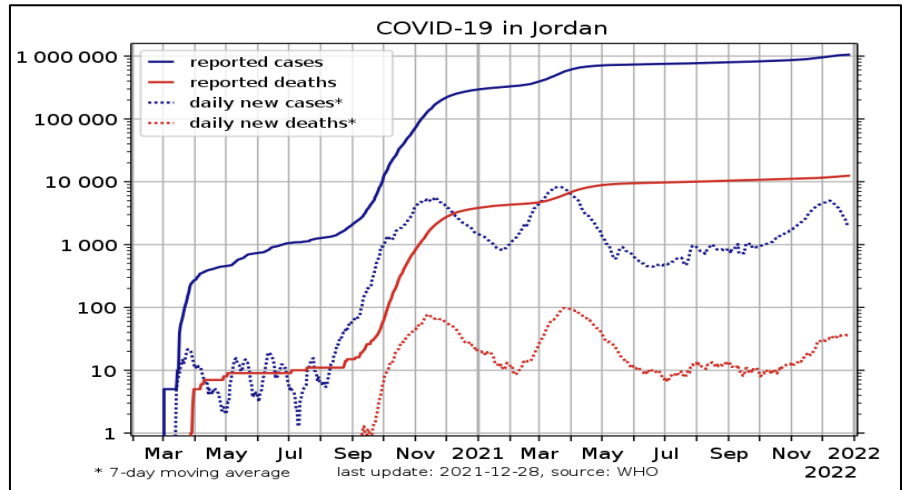
Citizens waiting in line to buy food after the Government's decision of imposing of a total curfew for a period of 3 days

After this stage, the government's confusion in making decisions began to appear in dealing with the Corona crisis. This led to widespread popular discontent on all levels. The country witnessed an unprecedented rise in the number of cases and deaths after several months of stabilizing the epidemic curve. Former Prime Minister Omar Razzaz announced that Jordan has already begun to face the second wave of the Corona virus. Meanwhile, officials in Jordan

warned of the collapse of the health sector, due to its inability to absorb the huge numbers of infected people. Meanwhile, a member of the country's Epidemiology Committee warned of the possibility that Jordan would enter an epidemic crisis and record 8,000 infections per day.

The number of confirmed new infections as of November 1, 2020, reached 75,866, up from 1,133 cases recorded since the beginning of the pandemic. Jordan also recorded the highest death rate among those infected compared to the population in the Arab world.

When vaccinations became available, people were skeptical and participation was low. They were as afraid of the shots, as they were of the virus itself. In response, the government set strict restrictions on everyone who does not receive the vaccine. These include a ban on travel,



Number of cases (blue) and deaths (red) on a logarithmic scale.

His Majesty the King and His Highness the Crown Prince receive the vaccine



the inability to complete any official transactions, the inability to enter government institutions, banks, and commercial malls without a certificate of vaccination. There are no exceptions for people that have allergic reactions, health issues, religious or moral objections, or even for those with antibodies from previously having the virus. If the vaccination certificate is lost, it is easy to be controlled by presenting the ID number.

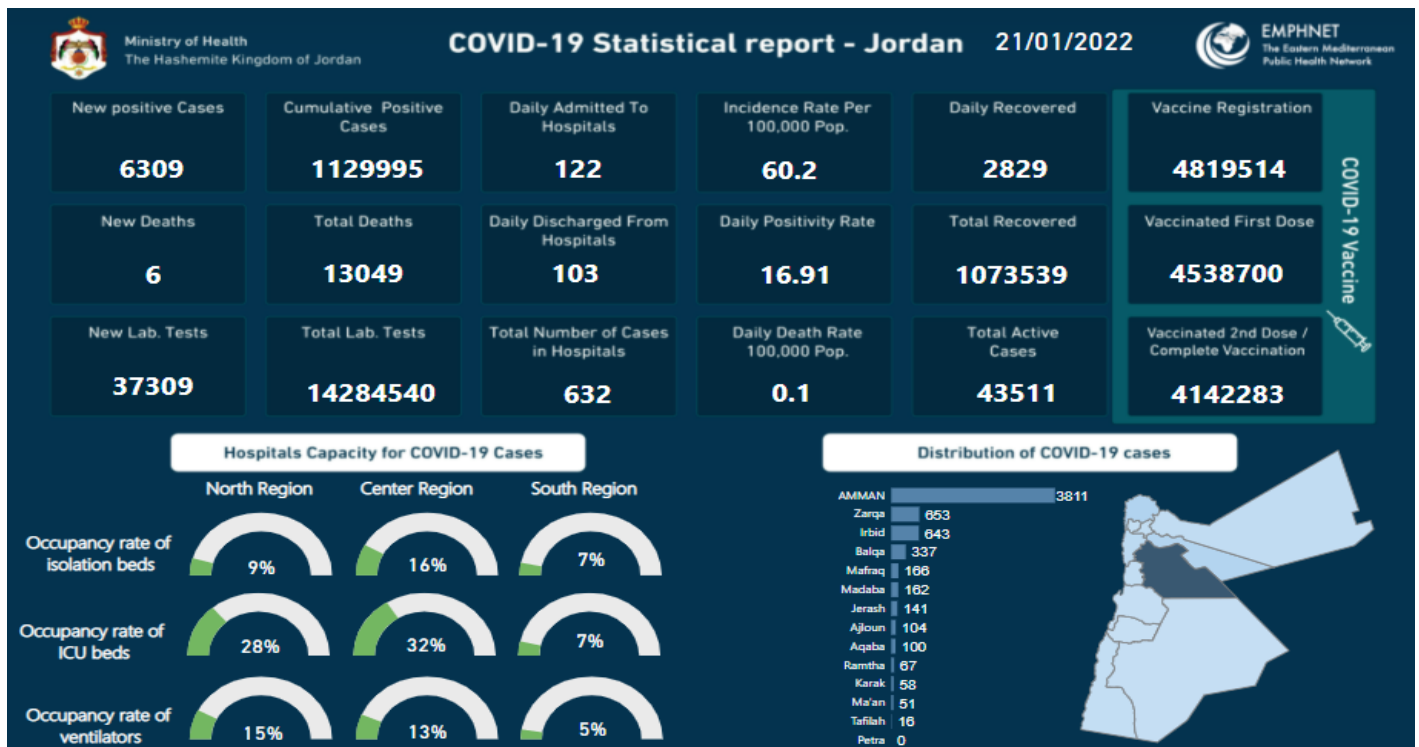
This pandemic certainly has had many negative effects on all levels, as I mentioned earlier at the beginning of this article. It has prevented us Christians from celebrating Christmas and Easter in 2020, and Easter in 2021. It also prevented us for several months, from reaching the church to attend Holy Mass. Communion has become by the hand, something we are not used to in our churches in the Middle East. Likewise, the exchange of peace, "Peace of Christ," is no longer a handshake, but rather a bow of the head.

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Economically, this pandemic has destroyed many of the projects, dreams and ambitions that many young people, families, and even the government itself were planning.

In conclusion, we pray the Lord to put an end to this pandemic, to console those who have lost a loved one, to help everyone who lost his job or source of livelihood, and to help us, as a human society, to return to normal life, hoping for a bright future, and that this pandemic may become the reason why many return to God, to the faith and to the Church.

Addendum: The chart below is a statistical report from the Ministry of Health showing the numbers of infected people, deaths, and recipients of vaccines, etc. as of January 21, 2022.



Ministry of Health: COVID-19 Statistical Report – JORDAN 21 Jan. 2022

Resources:

<https://corona.moh.gov.io/en>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic_in_Jordan

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

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