

Workers Face Health and Economic Risks



“People like us can’t afford to take safety precautions and put a stop to our work. We only know that we need to earn, even if that means working during scorching heat, temperatures below zero, or a life-taking pandemic. I don’t remember the last time I had a full stomach, but it must have been before the lockdown started, months ago. I have a home in the remote areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where my family lives. However, for a moderate-income, the city is a good place as much construction work occurs compared to where I live. I share a quarter here with 10 laborers, which is just used for a place to sleep. We all have been dragged down by the pandemic.”

Khan Muhammad has been performing labor work since the age of 8 and has never seen his work get disrupted before. Many laborers workers move to urban areas in search of work and securing a means of earning. Like Khan Muhammad, they work the whole year round so that when they visit their families during Eid they can then provide their earnings to them. Khan mentioned that because of the lockdown and transportation ban, he and his roommates could not travel back to their homes as the COVID-19 outbreak began progressing throughout the country. As these workers rely on dhaba's (cheap roadside food stalls) to tackle their hunger, the restrictions of the lockdown have also taken their basic needs of food from them. With no food source, ability to pay rent, and unable to travel home, laborers have become the largest population to be most affected by COVID-19 in terms of both health and wealth.

Hope for the Crisis to end

The coronavirus pandemic has become the most significant crisis to the wellbeing of humans. Before the outbreak of COVID-19 in Pakistan , Saima was being trained by Humanity and Inclusion (HI) in weaving and sewing to support her husband's salary.

“Saima had polio since she was one-year-old, and her legs have been paralysed from that point forward. Like many people with disabilities in Pakistan, she was not able to complete her education and so was excluded from the job market. Once Saima was completely trained, she would have made a generous contribution to the family’s income,” said Sumaira Bibi, HI’s project monitoring manager in Pakistan.

Saima’s husband is a day labourer and they have three children. As the pandemic is having severe consequences on the lives of the people, Saima’s husband stopped working due to the lockdown. The family soon found themselves without enough to eat. The outbreak has exacerbated the challenges and made it difficult for them to survive. Saima and her husband must travel to a food distribution point two hours from their home to find enough to eat for a month. Theydepend entirely on humanitarian assistance.

“My son fell seriously ill, but I was unable to take him to any of the hospitals. There was no other option than to keep my child at home until he recovered without medical assistance”.

"I should have gone to the hospital, but it is quite far in a wheelchair and I risked catching the virus. I need to use my hands to push myself in my wheelchair. So, I stayed at home with my son until his fever broke," she wheelchair and I risked catching the virus. I need to use my hands to push myself in my wheelchair. So, I stayed at home with my son until his fever was over," she explains.

As her husband was a labourer and could not earn much, with their combined income the couple was able to send their children to a nearby school. Saima hopes the Covid-19 crisis ends soon to bring an end to the suffering of the poorest in society,

including people with disabilities. In the meantime, HI is providing the family with assistance.



Asking for Money.



"There were days when I went from door to door asking for money. I had never thought I would ever have to beg someone for food. I felt ashamed and miserable. But what was I to do? I couldn't bear the hunger that my kids were suffering, let alone that my wife and I also hadn't eaten for days. I would sit on the roadside every day hoping someone would need me to mend their shoes, but with restrictions from the government, I saw no person for days. When I decided to move towards grocery shops thinking someone would require my service, I would get disgusted looks from people as if this whole pandemic was because of me. They would divert their paths from where I was in fear of getting coronavirus. Those were very difficult

times for us. To help improve the situation, my wife started working as a maid in a few houses. One of her employers has also been kind enough to provide us with leftover food from time to time. It may not be much, but to us it means the world."

How to deal with this crisis?

According to labor unions, informal laborers account for 75% of the country's total 65 million strong workforce. Around 40% of them are in agriculture sector, while the remainder work in services, manufacturing, and other sectors, according to the Pakistan Institute of Labor Education and Research (PILER). As these laborers are not registered anywhere, they do not have any social security or legal cover.

The government needs to devise mechanisms to extend the coverage of existing social protection program to informal workers to enable them to survive the immediate impact of the pandemic. Government also need to introduce reforms to stabilize the long-term impact of the economic shock on informal workers and find innovative and sustainable ways to identify and reach those that need assistance. Additional steps need to be taken to protect economic sectors that rely extensively on informal workers.

Coronavirus symptoms Include:

- Fever
- Dry Cough
- Shortness of Breath
- Tiredness

Contact your doctor or the coronavirus helpline at



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Where can I get tested?

Karachi

Aga Khan University Hospital

Stadium Road, Karachi

Civil Hospital

DOW University Campus
Mission Road, Karachi

Dow Medical Hospital

Ojha Campus
Suparco Road, Karachi

Indus Hospital

Opposite Darussalam Society, Korangi
Crossing, Karachi

Lahore

Punjab AIDS Lab

PACP Complex
6 - Birdwood Road, Lahore

Shaukat Khanum Memorial Hospital

7A Block R-3 M.A. Johar Town, Lahore

Islamabad

National Institute of Health

Park Road
Chak Shahzad, Islamabad

Rawalpindi

Armed Forces Institute of Pathology

Range Road
CMH Complex, Rawalpindi

Multan

Nishtar Hospital

Nishtar Road,
Justice Hamid Colony, Multan

For more cities visit the

[COVID-19 Health Advisory Platform](#)

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