The Performance of the Jordanian Health Sector during the COVID-19 Pandemic
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Jordan Strategy Forum shares important economic information that is collected from various local & international sources; with the aim of raising economic and social awareness. This is done in order to track the latest developments and suggest solutions that would develop and strengthen the national economy.
The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented crisis in modern history. On the 16th of March 2020, the Jordanian government announced a full lockdown whose purpose was to truncate the spread of the pandemic after the first 26 confirmed cases. At the time, there were little, if any, global practices upon which the government could rely on in its response plan. After multiple iterations, the government successfully minimized physical human interactions (otherwise known as social distancing) by digitizing education, promoting telecommuting and online financial services, and providing limited time windows in which citizens can acquire their groceries.

Within the context of the above-mentioned measures, Jordan became the first out of 13 countries in the world that had the highest government response stringency. In fact, Jordan was the first country in the world to attain a perfect score (100/100) on the stringency index, and sustained the score for 34 days, which is the 6th highest period in the world in terms of the longevity of the lockdown (Oxford, 2020). Those efforts translated to a large decrease in the number of cases in Jordan, deeming the government’s measures successful. It is worth noting that COVID-19 reporting in Jordan differentiates between local cases confirmed and cases among arrivals from abroad. This strategy is quite essential in order to reflect the reality of the COVID-19 status inside Jordan, in addition to ensuring the safety of all economic activities.

![Figure 1 - Jordan: Government Stringency Index vs. Reported Cases per Day (Scaled)- Till June 21st](image)

- **Government Response Stringency Index** (0 to 100, 100 = strictest)
- **New COVID-19 Cases** (Scaled: 0 to 100, 100= highest reported number)
Since the beginning of the pandemic, until the 21st of June, Jordan had the 42nd lowest number of corona cases per capita out 180 countries. In addition, it is worth noting that countries with less per capita cases have carried out a smaller number of tests than Jordan. In fact, in June 2020, Jordan ranked 28th out of 87 countries in terms of daily testing per thousand people, outperforming some of the major economies in the world such as Germany, Switzerland, Norway, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and New Zealand. Jordan has also sustained a relatively low number of deaths associated with COVID-19, where Jordan ranked 57th out of 208 countries in percentage of deaths with respect to the number of confirmed cases.
While the measures taken by the government have significantly truncated the spread of the virus, it is important to realize that Jordan has ranked 53rd as the youngest population out of 187 countries at median age around 23 years old, and approximately 3.8% of the population are older than 65 (the age group that is at a higher risk of death due to SARS-Coronavirus-2). Nevertheless, credit must be given to the 24,000 Jordanian doctors (16,000 of which reside in Jordan), in addition to the nursing teams across the country, that made Jordan one of the best performing countries in the world.
Despite the exemplary role that Jordan has played during this pandemic, which construed it as a success story for global practices, Jordanian citizens must not take the situation lightly and should comply with the safety measures at all costs. The World Health Organization issued an explicit warning of a “second peak” for countries that have imposed lenient measures after their first peak. Negligence of citizens is the most imminent threat to reaching this dangerous state. A second peak in the case of Jordan may be detrimental to the Jordanian economy given that the IMF projects a 3.7% decline in real GDP by the end of 2020 due to the first wave only.

**Global Practices**

While Jordan set a high global standard for COVID-19 response plans, other countries have also incorporated innovative solutions that supported them in containing the virus, as well as spreading awareness and increasing outreach. Countries of the Far East have been the most exemplary so far due to their experience in the 2002-2004 SARS pandemic.

The following innovative solutions have made a significant impact for countries around the world and shall be considered by the Jordanian government:

1) **AI Temperature Screening**: Artificial intelligence (AI)-driven temperature screening device using a smartphone fitted with thermal and 3D laser cameras. The purpose of this technology is to
screen citizens in real-time for fever, which is one of the major symptoms of COVID-19 (Singapore).

2) **Convenience Apps:** Online platforms and mobile applications were developed to allow users to locate the closest stations for COVID-19 testing, in addition to the closest vendors of protective gears (South Korea, Singapore).

3) **Telemedicine:** Through public-private partnerships, citizens have access to accredited doctors for “telemedicine” (i.e. one-to-one online session with doctors), many of whom serve mental health purposes for citizens complying with “Stay at Home” measures. (Germany, USA, South Korea and other countries in the EU)

4) **Contact tracing using Cellphones:** Similar to Jordan’s “Aman” app, contact tracing is done using citizens GPS signals, but it also monitors credit card records and CCTV footage as a secondary mode of verification. Others require inbound travelers to report their locations and health conditions on a daily basis for 14 days using weblinks sent via SMS (South Korea, Singapore and China).

5) **Utilization of Smart City Features:** Daegu city is currently under development to become one of the South Korea’s smart cities. Through the intelligent transport systems that are already installed, locations and routes of individuals that recovered from COVID-19 can be traced in order to help manage the traffic density in the city and avoid clusters of citizens that may cause an epicenter in the city.

Several countries including Jordan have also used drones for a plethora of purposes including:

1) Surveillance to reduce physical distances between people in public spaces (China and Jordan).
2) Directly warning citizens who do not wear any health equipment using a speakerphone (China).
3) Disinfectant Spraying (UAE, India, Indonesia, China, Colombia, Chile, Philippines and others).
4) Medicine and Grocery Delivery (China and USA).
5) Temperature Checks (China).
Figure 6 - COVID-19 Cases by Date of Onset in Jordan, March 2020-June 21st 2020
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info@jsf.org www.jsf.org

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