

# KFCRIS Report on the Regional and International Impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Editors: Saud al-Sarhan & Mark C. Thompson

(ISSUE No. 2) 20 Sha'ban 1441 H. - 13 April, 2020

## In this Issue |

**Overview**  
**Current Situation**

## Commentary & Analysis



How will the pandemic influence the future behaviour of the UK  
**Neil Quilliam**



What affect will Coronavirus have on social tensions in Europe?  
**Shiraz Maher**

# Overview Current Situation

The Chinese city of Wuhan, where the Coronavirus pandemic originated, is gradually lifting its 11-week quarantine as infections and deaths have subsided. However, as city residents emerge tentatively from their long lockdown other countries affected badly by the virus are observing Wuhan closely for any signs of the feared 'second wave'.

Indeed, in *The Lancet*, which is amongst the world's oldest, most prestigious, and renowned medical journals, Kathy Leung and colleagues warn of the potential adverse consequences of premature relaxation of interventions such as quarantines, lockdowns and curfews. Premature government decisions to lift these societal restrictions and ease social distancing might lead to a second wave of infections—potentially more fatal than the first.

Significantly, scientists have been focusing on 'the cluster effect', in other words how social gatherings contribute towards the spread of the virus. On 9 April, the *Guardian* newspaper identified six examples of social gatherings from around the world that fueled the spread

of the pandemic. As the newspaper report points out "thinking of the coronavirus pandemic as a process that can speed up dramatically through human clusters also affects the considerations of policymakers who are plotting a route out of the current lockdown". Hence, when governments start to relax social distancing measures, such as is happening in Wuhan, can they also afford to allow large social gatherings to proceed? In fact, strict interventions such as enforcing social distancing can slow the spread of coronavirus, but these interventions do not eradicate the virus. Consequently, the findings outlined in *The Lancet* are critical to governments globally, because they warn against premature relaxation of strict interventions.

## Latest Coronavirus Statistics as of: (12 April 2020)

### SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia implemented extremely firm measures as soon as the threat from coronavirus became apparent. If the Saudi government had hesitated to take these stringent measures at the outset of the pandemic, then the overall situation in the Kingdom would be very different than it is now. Saudi Arabia has limited fatalities in comparison to many Western states. So far, the Kingdom has avoided the worst of the pandemic, but everyone understands that this is no time to be complacent.

Confirmed cases: **4.462**

Deaths: **59**

Recovered: **761**

### Individual Countries

Up-to-date statistics on confirmed cases, deaths and recovered in specific countries can be found here:

<https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html>  
[www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/](http://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/)

If you are interested in contributing to future reports, please email **Dr. Mark C. Thompson** with a short outline of your proposed topic:  
[mthompson@kfcris.com](mailto:mthompson@kfcris.com)

# Commentary & Analysis

The KFCRIS weekly report on the regional and international impacts of coronavirus (COVID-19) comes at a critical time. In response to the spreading pandemic, governments continue to enforce quarantines, curfews and 'lockdowns' that impact national economies and the lifestyles of millions of people. Hence, this weekly report aims to interview a diverse range of individuals including policy makers, academics and thinkers to seek their opinions on the impact of this pandemic as it relates to their area of interest. In this KFCRIS weekly report on the regional and international impacts of coronavirus Neil Quilliam, Chatham House associate fellow with the Middle East and North Africa Programme and CEO of Castlereagh Associates discusses the affect of the virus on United Kingdom (UK) government policy and how coronavirus has focused the attention of British policy makers and wider society on the issues critical to national well-being. Shiraz Maher, director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization, and lecturer at King's College London, assesses the likely socioeconomic consequences of coronavirus on the European Union (EU). The issues raised in both these articles are relevant to governments and societies globally as they attempt to mitigate the impact of Coronavirus.

## How will the pandemic influence the future behaviour of the UK

### Neil Quilliam

As with all countries, the pandemic has shaken the UK to its very core. In one sense, it has forced the government to not only draw the country together after spending so many painful years on the deeply divisive issue of Brexit, but also intervene directly in the lives of every citizen—as such, the pandemic has triggered a new era of interventionism and, for the most part, the government is pushing on an open door.

At the same time, the ideological divide over the National Health Service (NHS) has firmly closed, as practically every politician irrespective of party has come to recognize the critical role it will play in helping the country overcome the crisis. Debates over the future of the NHS, which have coloured every election since at least 1979, will likely abate for several decades as this current generation of leaders have learned its true value. Furthermore, the election of Keir Starmer as Labour leader, on 4 April, suggests that the party will engage in a new era of constructive politics, as both government and opposition tackle the national emergency. It is a truly profound moment for the UK and one that could help





it overcome the enduring hangover of Brexit, pull its (new) self together and once again find its feet on the international stage. In fact, Queen Elizabeth II's address to the nation on 5 April was intended to not only provide a moment of unity for the country, but also remind all generations and all citizens that the UK has long played a role on the world stage and will continue to do so. Drawing on echoes of the Second World War, the address aimed to reinforce the point that the current generation is no different to the one that endured the war.

The process the country is going through amounts to 'getting one's house in order' or 'learning what matters' and the country could well emerge from the crisis—having overcome its own crisis of confidence and ready to re-engage politically and diplomatically. The UK has been 'missing in action' for the past few years. Whilst the new order that emerges from the global pandemic will likely bring to a close the era of globalization and accelerate moves towards 'decoupling', at heart—and London has rediscovered its heart - the UK will remain a champion of liberal democracies and work closely with international organisations to address some of the world's most pressing issues. In fact, lessons learned from this most painful experience will give the British diplomatic service a new mission to work with partners in tackling urgent problems, such as climate change and microbial resistance that affect the whole planet. Whilst many countries turn inward and seek to insulate their economies from further contagion—and, in doing so, better manage supply chains, in post-coronavirus era, we can expect the UK to resume its role as a trading nation and firm advocate of the international order. As such, it will expect to take its seat at the table once again and demonstrate to its partners that the hangover has passed, and the country is ready to restore confidence amongst its allies.

# What affect will Coronavirus have on social tensions in Europe?

**Shiraz Maher**

Coronavirus (Covid-19) represents one of the most serious and significant social challenges to Europe since the Second World War. Its impacts will be enduring, profound and manifest in pervasive ways. Much of this will be driven by a series of economic shocks, the likes of which the developed and industrialized economies of the world's G20 nations have never seen.

Unemployment has already spiked sharply, businesses have started to collapse, and the stock market is once again subject to increased volatility. All of this will have serious knock-on effects. Pension funds will be devalued (accentuating an already acute pensions crisis across Europe) and more people will find themselves in negative equity as the housing market suffers serious blows.

Even when the pressures of Great Depression buffeted the global financial system, mostly during the 1930s, it followed a period of gradual (although, at times, steep) economic decline beginning in 1929 before reaching a crescendo in 1933. Yet, the type of instant and immediate shuttering of almost all economic activity, like the one we are currently experiencing is wholly unprecedented. The resulting social tension will be brutal.

The most vulnerable will be those employed in what is known as the 'gig economy' - typically independent contractors working for online platforms and disruptive technologies such as Uber or Deliveroo. Lacking the rights and security of traditional employees, these workers are immediately exposed if there is any disruption to their working patterns. Other sectors such as retail, restaurants and hospitality will also be acutely sensitive to marketplace disruption. Again, from the perspective of potential social tension, this is highly significant because these are sectors in which migrant workers tend to be disproportionately overrepresented. They will be hit first and hardest.

Even before the current crisis, Europe was struggling to contain the rise of nativist and populist movements. These groups espouse alarmist views about Muslims, portray Islam in essentialist terms, dehumanize immigrants, and scapegoat those they see as 'outsiders' or 'others.' Many of their arguments are built upon cultural panic, based on the suggestion that the religious, cultural, and moral identity of Europe is being replaced by something else. Immigrants are







therefore seen as 'invaders' which, in turn, has birthed a theory known as 'the great replacement.' Extremist movements and populist leaders have perpetuated this view, arguing that Europeans are being replaced by foreigners. The unspoken corollary is clear: something must be done to reverse the trend. It has inspired numerous acts terrorism and was, most recently, invoked by Brenton Tarrant who killed 51 Muslims attending Friday prayer in New Zealand.

Movements who have echoed these types of sentiments have steadily captured political ground in Europe in recent years. The *Front Nationale* in France, for example, has enjoyed a renaissance under its current leader, Marine Le Pen. The party received the largest share of votes (24.86%) in the 2014 European parliamentary elections, securing 24 seats in the process. Elsewhere, Geert Wilders and Thierry Baudet have enjoyed a degree political success by espousing similar rhetoric in the Netherlands, as has the Five Star Movement in Italy and Alternative for Deutschland in Germany.

The economic consequences of coronavirus will cascade through society as people become increasingly desperate and public services come under exceptional strain, accelerating many of the social tensions already afflicting Europe. Its contours will change the continent, perhaps indelibly, in ways that are impossible to imagine right now.