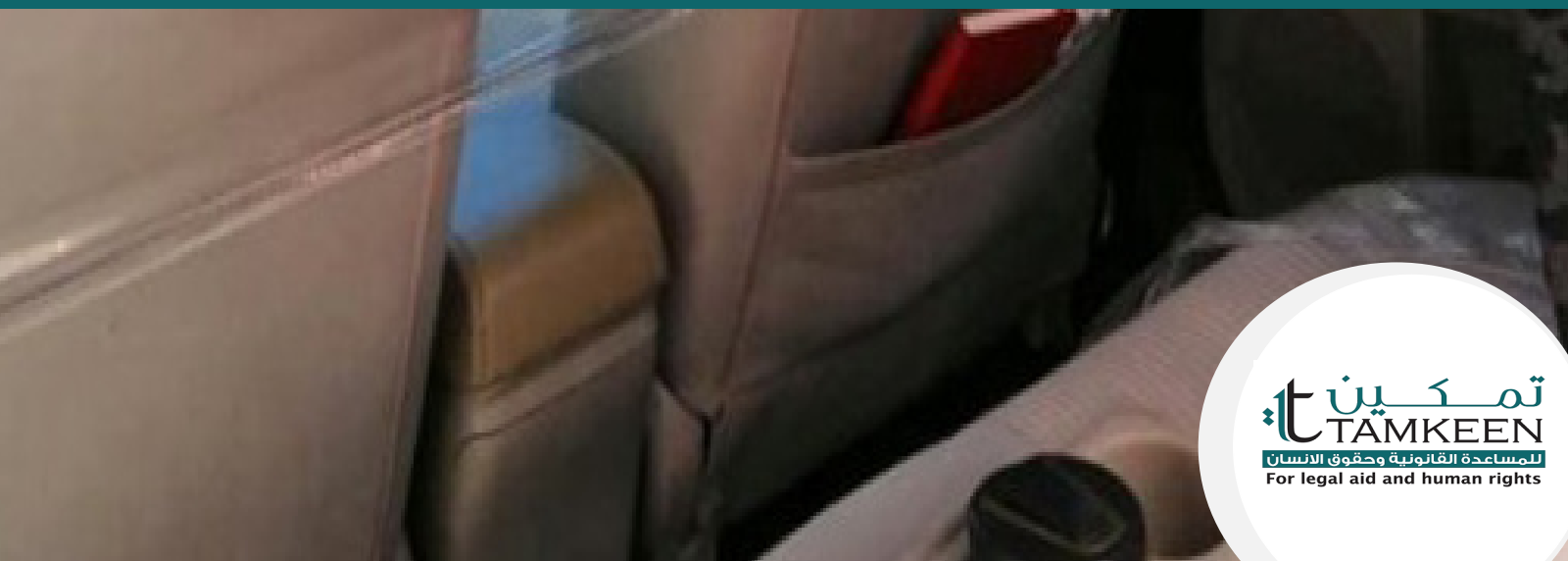
# Under Curfew 14

## The Ramifications of the Corona Crisis on the Public Transport Sector in Jordan



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للمساعدة القانونية وحقوق الانسان
For legal aid and human rights

**Amman**- Governments around the world have taken precautionary and preventive measures to curtail the emerging Corona virus epidemic. Following in the footsteps of the world, Jordan began enacting numerous precautionary measures. The most important of the decisions it took is the declaration of the Defense Law of 1992 and its amendments. Based on it, it enacted a number of decisions, including the announcement of the curfew in the Kingdom on the 21st of March,2020.

The Defence Order stopped the movement of citizens and residents, as well as the movement of vehicles, except in a very limited scope related to those working in vital sectors like the security forces and health services. All the public and private establishments were also closed, as cities were sealed off from one another and life was put on hold.

One of the sectors most affected by the crisis is the Public Transportation sector, which considered one of the vital sectors in Jordan. Following the onset of the



crisis and the resulting governmental measures, the sector faced increased challenges as its activities came to a halt. The repercussions of these decisions had negative effects on the sector that required urgent action to address them by looking for quick solutions that limit the sector's deterioration on one hand and enable the creation of new jobs to maintain its continuity.

It is hard to measure the impact of the Corona Crisis on the Public Transportation sector, because its effects will be far-reaching. Therefore, the concerned authorities must take decisive measures to reduce the impact of the Corona virus on the sector, including finding financial support mechanisms for workers and

ensuring that the sector's collapse is avoided that serves large segments of the society.

It is estimated that there are 16,000 cars working in the Kingdom, in addition to 10,000 public transport vehicles and buses (white service taxis, mini and large

buses) according to the Land Transport Regulatory Commission[1].

Tamkeen for Legal Aid and Human Rights monitored the status of public transportation workers in the period between March 18th and June 8th,2020. The monitoring was conducted through personal interviews, phone calls and as well as interviews on social media platforms like: Facebook and WhatsApp, plus field observations.

The monitoring was divided into three phases; the first of which focused on the status of the sector following the preventive governmental measures that were taken to curtail the spread of the virus. The second and third phases highlighted the status of the sector after its return to work, initially with a capacity of 50% and then in the even and odd system and then finally in its full capacity.

1 http://www.ltrc.gov.jo/



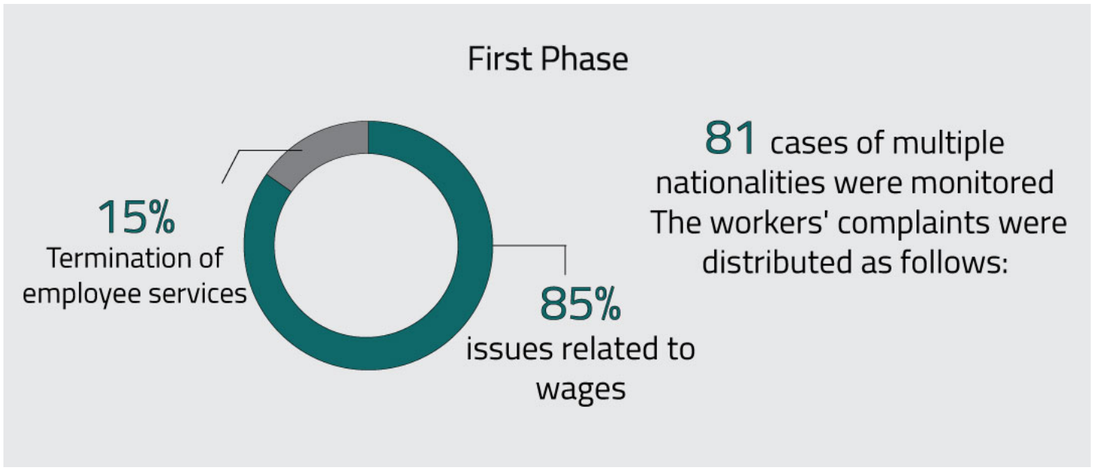
## The First Phase

The first phase covered the status of workers in the transportation sector in the period between 18/3/2020 and 18/4/2020. During that period, 81 workers were covered, who included 72 Jordanians, 8 Palestinians and 1 Syrian.

## The Impact of the Corona Crisis on the Transportation sector

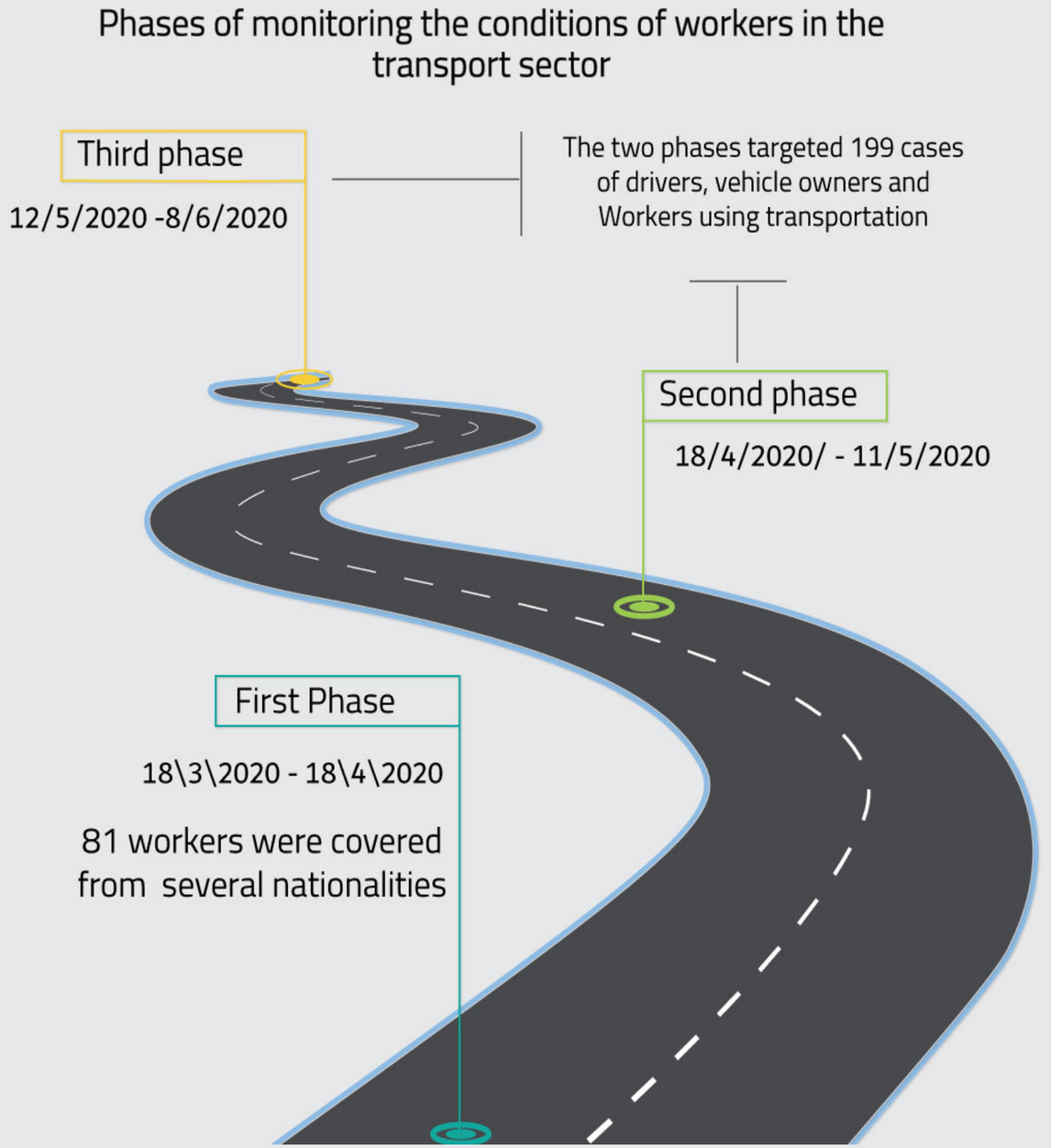
The measures related to the suspension of work in the private and public sectors, followed by the imposing of the curfew greatly impacted workers in the transportation sector who reported the following:

- 85% of the complaints focused on issues related to wages after work completely stopped as a result of the curfew which led to workers losing their income
- 15% reported that their services were terminated because of the Corona Crisis




## Second and Third Phase

The second phase covered the period between 18/4/2020 till 11/5/2020, while third covered the period between 12/5/2020 till 8/6/2020. Both phases targeted 141 self-employed drivers, as well as 22 workers who drive employers-owned cars. Moreover, 36 workers who use public transportation were interviewed to highlight the issues that they were facing.



## First and Second Phase

### First: 141 Drivers working for their own account

| Buses | Microbuses | taxis | Service Taxis | Smart Applications |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 49 | 8 | 27 | 43 Authorised<br>12 Unauthorised | 2 |

### Comments by Drivers:

## First and Second Phase

### Second: 22 Drivers working for an employer

| Buses | Microbuses | Taxis | Service Taxi | Drivers for a company that transport workers | Bus Control (collectors) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 3 | 7 |

### Comments by Drivers

There were numerous government decisions regarding the return of public transportation to work following the lift of the curfew, as many workers submitted complaints related to the difficulty of movement to and from their workplaces due to the absence of public transportation.

Initially, the governmental decisions were unclear. The decision to re-start public transports was taken and then cancelled several times due to many reasons; the most important of which is the increase in the rate of infection. On March 26th, it was decided to adopt a recommendation by the Ministry of Transportation and relevant teams to restart the sector in its various forms with a capacity of 50% in all areas of the Kingdom starting from March 29th. The decision was made to coincide with the return of workers in both the commercial and industrial sectors. It was also decided that the operational percentage will be reviewed on a weekly basis and increased if necessary, or decreased in case people were not compliant with the set regulations. Another



regulatory decision stated that public transport would follow the even and odd system, while only allowing 25% of the fleet to operate and filling only 50% of their capacity[2].

Experts and workers in the transportation sector indicated that restarting the sector with half its capacity per day within the declared safety guidelines would help revitalize the sector following its hiatus of more than a month and a half; though these percentages will not cover operational costs due to the small number of employees.

## Transportation Means: Between the absence of supervision and the aggravation of the need

Due to the ongoing concerns of passengers to use public transport, many operators are left with the choice of either not covering their operational costs or not abiding by the regulations as the operational cost would then be higher than their expenses and obligations and will

2 On April 20th, phone calls were made with experts and workers in the transportation field, included a revision of all the press releases related to public transportation.

not even cover the price of their daily fuel. Indeed, these expenses are further increased with the addition of their monthly or yearly expenses, which relate to their insurance, registration and periodic maintenance, as well as other types of loans and traffic tickets.

These public safety regulations include a number of things, including the instillation of a plastic barrier between each seat in buses, at an expense of 70 JODs, which is a sum that many drivers cannot afford.

A number of workers in the sector highlighted a number of other challenges related to the public safety procedures. In addition to their inability to continuously disinfect their vehicles[3], they also cannot always buy the other tools like gloves and masks. Drivers also cannot socially distance from the passengers, who sometimes are not abiding by the regulations either and thus could pose risk on drivers as well. Some passengers express dismay with some of the regulations, like being forced to sit on the back of the taxi. As for following

3 workers who were interviewed for the purpose of preparing this report.



safety measures, some drivers expressed difficulties following them, especially those who suffer from breathing difficulties or any other respiratory diseases. Others said that the ban on air conditioners makes their work even more difficult, especially for those suffering from chronic diseases like high blood pressure.

> By the way, us drivers are one of categories most vulnerable to be infected. Even with the plastic barrier, we are still in contact with the passengers and we exchange money with them. Do you think that the driver following this long curfew have enough money to provide for his family or cover the price of disinfectants? Believe me, we first think of feeding our families and then with disinfecting and so on.
>
> **Service Taxi Driver in Amman**

> Not everybody is abiding by the orders. If I do not allow those who do not abide to use my car then I will not work or make any money.
>
> **Taxi Driver in Tabarbour, Amman**

> Passengers argue when I ask them to sit in the back. Some of them do not accept and refuse to get in.

During field visits by the Tamkeen team, it was noted the absence of supervision on some areas like some of Amman's suburbs. This resulted in many unauthorised cars working in these areas, who pre-arrange their trips with their customers. Such a phenomena constitute an additional burden on the drivers and their work. It was also noted that these cars do not abide with the announced safety regulations and are operating in their full capacity. It should be noted that this phenomenon is not new but in fact is common in the governorates. The mean of transport used by these unauthorised drivers range from private cars to pick-up trucks or microbuses. The latter are used to reach remote places or area that public transportation cannot reach either by taxis or white service taxis.

Challenges faced by drivers working on smart applications on the other hand are restricted to the decline in the number of their daily trips, while others complained about their inability to work daily due to the application of the odd and even plate numbers' system. These



drivers said that they are unaffected either by the decision regarding the capacity or by high insurances, as their contracts with their applications are based on a percentage of revenue for each trip.

In Azraq, unauthorised drivers faced an unprecedented decline in the number of passengers, which seriously affected their income. Drivers noted that people have become accustomed to walking for long distances during the curfew, which compounded the obstacles already faced by these drivers.

In Irbid, these unauthorised drivers resulted in the emergence of internal conflicts between drivers working on the same route. The chaos was caused by the decline on demand of these services during the crisis. Additionally, white service taxis began operating on routes that are covered by taxis, where they began dropping off passengers that within a short distance of their designated routes and charging these passengers with less amounts compared to the taxis.

Due to the increase of complaints by workers in the public transport sector, the government decided to allow the sector to work in full capacity and cancel the odd and even plate numbers system starting from 12/5/2020; though it kept the condition that vehicles can only operate at 50% of their capacity.

The working and living conditions of public transport workers during the curfew period are similar to their conditions before it and even after it ended and they returned to work. These workers continue to work despite not being covered by any umbrella of social protection, including any compensations covering old age, work injuries, disability or unemployment. Moreover, these workers do not have a stable income, as their income is dependant on their daily work and is calculated only after the various deductions are made. Usually, these workers earn 5-10 JODs a day and, in some days, it could reach 20 JODs if they increased the number of their working hours. Bus drivers who work with companies on the other hand earn 350 JODs a month



and are covered under the umbrella of social security.

As for their living conditions, drivers agreed that it declined during the curfew. They all said that they accumulated debts and that they were unable to secure their livelihoods, like many workers in various affected sectors. Due to the curfew, workers were left with the need to cover their needs, from paying their rents, loan payments and bills, as well as buying their food, drinks, and disinfectants despite the lack of income.

These workers confirmed that the situation will only get worse, in case the decisions currently applied to curtail the spread of the virus remain in effect indefinitely. During interviews with the Tamkeen team, they said that the return to work did not benefit them much, due to the decrease in operational capacity, working hours, in addition to the continued closure of schools, universities and the public sector at the same, except for those working in vital ones.

Usually, two drivers work on the same vehicle and split the working hours between them. Due to the Defence Orders though, each driver is now only allowed to work for 5 hours each day. These drivers added that the curfew imposed during Ramadan, and on weekends negatively impacted them as well.

> Before Corona, we did not have that much work since people relied on smart applications. The odd and even system added to our struggles. The owners of the cars expect us to pay them for the full week but we are only working for 3 days. To make matters worse, people are still afraid to use taxis and then there are the students who no longer go to school and instead are studying online. Now, we truly have no work and cannot even cover the price of the fuel or feed our children who are waiting for us.
>
> **A group of Taxi Drivers in Nazal Neighborhood, Amman**

> We who work as service taxi drivers in Ashrafiye are now divided into shifts. The first one work from morning till 1 pm, while the second works from 1 till the siren is turned on. In both shifts, there is not enough work since we can only have 1 or 2 passengers in the car. We have been working for the past 20 years and each year in Ramadan our work is mostly after iftar. This year Corona came and destroyed us.
>
> **A group of Service Taxi Drivers in Ashrafiye**



Workers in the Public Transport Sector were not just affected by limiting their capacities, but they were also affected due to their work with workers with factory and company workers since they now have to double the number of their trips to drop off and return these workers home, but earn their previous wage at the same time.

> I drop off employees to their company. The company provided us with preventive tools and they disinfect the bus before and after the employees' board. I am not allowed to drive except while wearing a mask and gloves. In addition to this difficult situation and my fear of getting infected, the company deducted 30% of my salary after the curfew started and now, I am transporting the employees several times but receive the same salary.
>
> **Driver with a company - Amman**

Other drivers refused to resume working to avoid these expected losses. Drivers of medium and large buses were the most impacted, especially those that employ collectors. A large number of these workers lost their jobs in Amman, Zarqa, Deir Alla, and Mafraq because of the limited capacity regulation. As for line operator whose job is to regulate the movement and the turn in the parks, some of them also lost their jobs as they were no longer needed like in Jerash, which resulted in a state of chaos as these operators used to receive a wage between 1 and 2 JODs tp regulate the status of the park.

> “work on the Abdali-Zarqa route. At the moment, there is no movement between governorates. I am now at home with no other source of income. Before, my daily wage was 15 JODs and a pack of cigarettes.
>
> We used to be paid after each trip. Now, the capacity is limited to 50% so the bus drivers let us go.
>
> My burdens are increasing on a daily basis and there is no work. The driver told me he does not need me anymore because the capacity is limited to 50% and there is no need for a control.
>
> **A group of collectors tell their stories** ”



Drivers also highlighted their perspective regarding the situation of the collectors. They said that they had to let them go since their daily wage declined compared to what it was before the crisis. They are also facing challenges and possible fines as a result of the Defence Orders, which forced them to decrease their expenses as much as possible.

“Our earnings are not enough anymore. I had a collector who I gave 18 JODs a day. Now though, I barely earn enough money to cover the price of the diesel for the bus. I no longer can have an extra passenger or I will be fined 30 JODs.’’ Driver working on Zarqa-Dleil line.’’

Some drivers highlighted some positive practices though, as they said that owners of 22 buses in Irbid stopped asking for their daily fees from the drivers due to their understanding of the current situation and its impact on the drivers, especially during the curfew. Other bus owners in Mafraq and Irbid paid their drivers half their wages during the curfew period.

As for taxi drivers, some of them reported that the curfew enabled them to have clear working hours, which was not possible before the crisis when they used to work for 12 hours a day or even more.

In an attempt to share their losses, some drivers on the same line agreed that each driver can work on a designated day, as to not compete with each other and allow for each driver to earn enough money.

Workers in Public Transport were greatly impacted by the crisis as they made clear in conducted interviews. The governmental measures to curtail the spread of the virus resulted in them not going to work. While Defence Orders excluded drivers who transport and ship goods, these workers were also impacted as they work on a daily shift basis, which enabled employers to terminate the services of some of them. One of these workers said that the majority of drivers lost their jobs because of the Defence Orders. These workers either work on a daily basis or by renting a truck from its owner



on a monthly or daily basis. Others work through the taxi offices that are scattered in all the cities.

Workers highlighted that they were all impacted by the decisions, regardless of their work nature. They said that their conditions were bad before the crisis since they are extremely poor and receive low wages as a result of the increase in cars working with smart applications and the decline in the economic activities in the country.

Another category that lost its income are drivers working on their own on their private cars. These unauthorised drivers usually agree with a group of students or workers to be taken to and from work, whether these trips were made within one governorate or between governorates.

> “I do not have any skills. I only finished elementary school. My only work is as a driver. I bought a car after getting a loan of 4,000 JODs and I am still paying for it. I transport employees to and from their work and receive my payments from them on a monthly basis. Since the start of the curfew, I did not earn even 1 JOD and I am sitting at home.”
>
> **Driver on his own car- Quesma, Amman**

Even though the odd and even plate system was ended on the 7th of June and movement was allowed between governorates, passengers are still afraid from using public transport, especially in areas where infections are still being detected. This trend was noted by drivers in Irbid, Mafraq, and areas in Amman and Jerash.

> “There is still fear, and being careful is a must in such times. When they speak of infections in Zarqa, people get scared of using buses. Once, a passenger did not like that the collector was not wearing a glove and refused to pay except after he finished yelling.”
>
> **Driver on the Zarqa-Azraq line**

During the same period, workers in other sectors highlighted their experience as they were negatively impacted by the absence of public transport and the measures that were taken. These workers complained about their inability to go to work using the usual means



of transport from buses or service taxis. Instead, they had to rely on taxis or smart applications, which incurred increased expenses on the workers that were not part of their plans or even ability.

36 of these workers were interviewed who work in the sectors of: textile, health services, bakeries, factories and services to highlight their own experiences of travelling to work during the crisis. Their experiences are as follows:

### Unavailability of frequent transport means and lack of commitment in terms of pick up and drop off points

Due to the limited number of hours where people were allowed to move during the pandemic, working hours were limited. Thus, some workers resorted to walking to their workplace even if it meant walking for very long distances. 8 workers shared their experience of having to walk as their mean of transportation did not come on time, or did not commit to the agreed pick up and

drop off points. In these cases, workers were either forced to use another mean of transport or walk to their destination.

> From Istiklal to Marka, I need two means of transportation to reach my destination. In the morning, I am late to work and I am exhausted by the time I arrive in the evening because I have to be there before 7 when they turn the siren on. Neither buses nor service taxis reach the end of their usual lines, so I have to walk from my first transport to the second based on where I am dropped off.
>
> Furthermore, not everyone is abiding by the protective gear. If we passengers pose danger on the drivers, then they should also wear gloves and a mask. Some of them are working on full capacity, unlike what the government has decided, which is even a greater risk to us. But what am I supposed to do? I need to go to work.
>
> **Worker at an accessories shop in Marka**



## Increased Fare and the lack of Public Safety

Passengers who were interviews say that the absence of supervision on public transport is the biggest reason behind drivers exploiting their passengers by raising the fares of taxis and service taxis. The drivers are also not abiding by public safety guidelines or social distancing, which poses a threat to both drivers and passengers. In Azraq and Deir Alla for example, drivers who abided by the decreased capacity measures took it out on their passengers by increasing their fare.

> Honestly, I am unable to go to and back from work daily via taxi. It is extremely expensive and I would not have enough money by the end of the month. When you order cars through smart application, the fare is even more expensive. This on one hand and the people are on the other. There are passengers who use public transport but do not follow safety rules.

How can you guarantee that I will not catch the virus? I have to leave early to make sure I arrive on time because the movement is really slow and when I leave work, the same scenario is repeated. I am affected by all of this. Because of this crisis, everything is getting worse and we are losing. Hopefully, it will end soon and everything will go back to normal because we are all physically, mentally, psychologically and financially tired.

**Worker in Abdoun restaurant and lives in Wadi Al Sir**

## Violating Defence Orders

Prior to the decision that allowed people to move between governorates on June 7th, a group of workers were forced to violate the Defence Orders in terms of the even and odd system or travelling between governorates without a permit so they could go to their workplace.



One time I had to take a risk and used my car which carries an odd number license plate on a day where even licenses are allowed. Traffic Police caught me, impounded the car and fined me 250 JODs.

Once I got into a car with my friend so he could drop me off at work because there were no buses going from Zarqa to Amman. His car got impounded and now I have to give him my salary so he could pay the fine on his car.

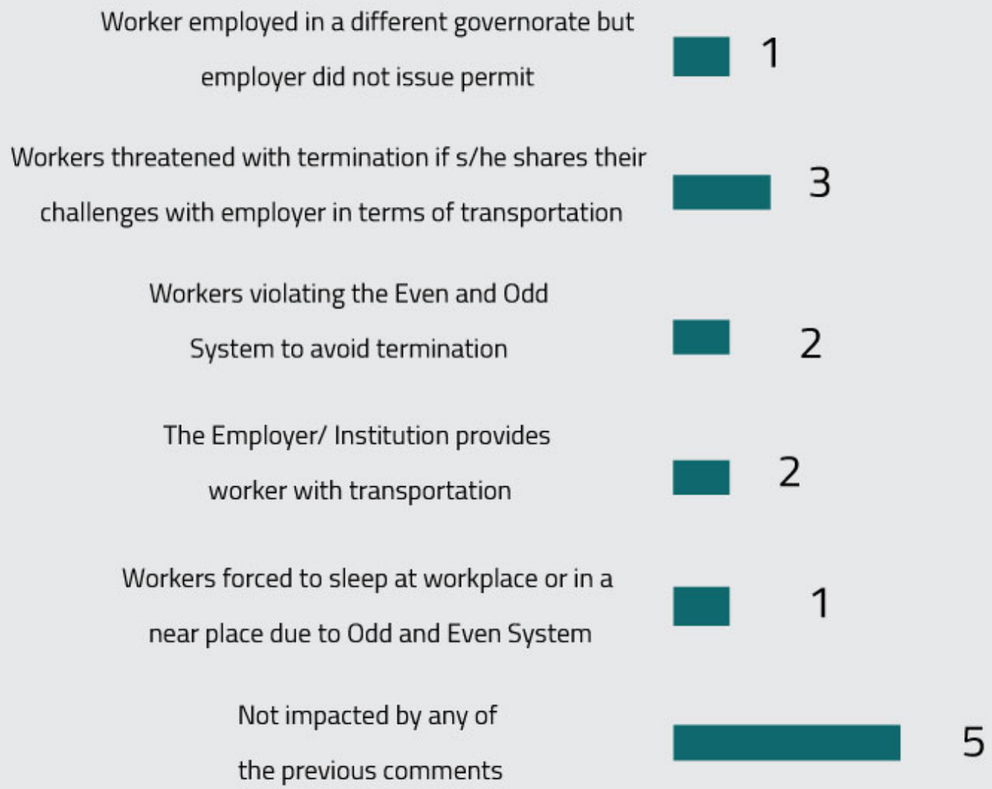
**Violations of Defence Orders by Workers who had to go to work before 7/6/2020**

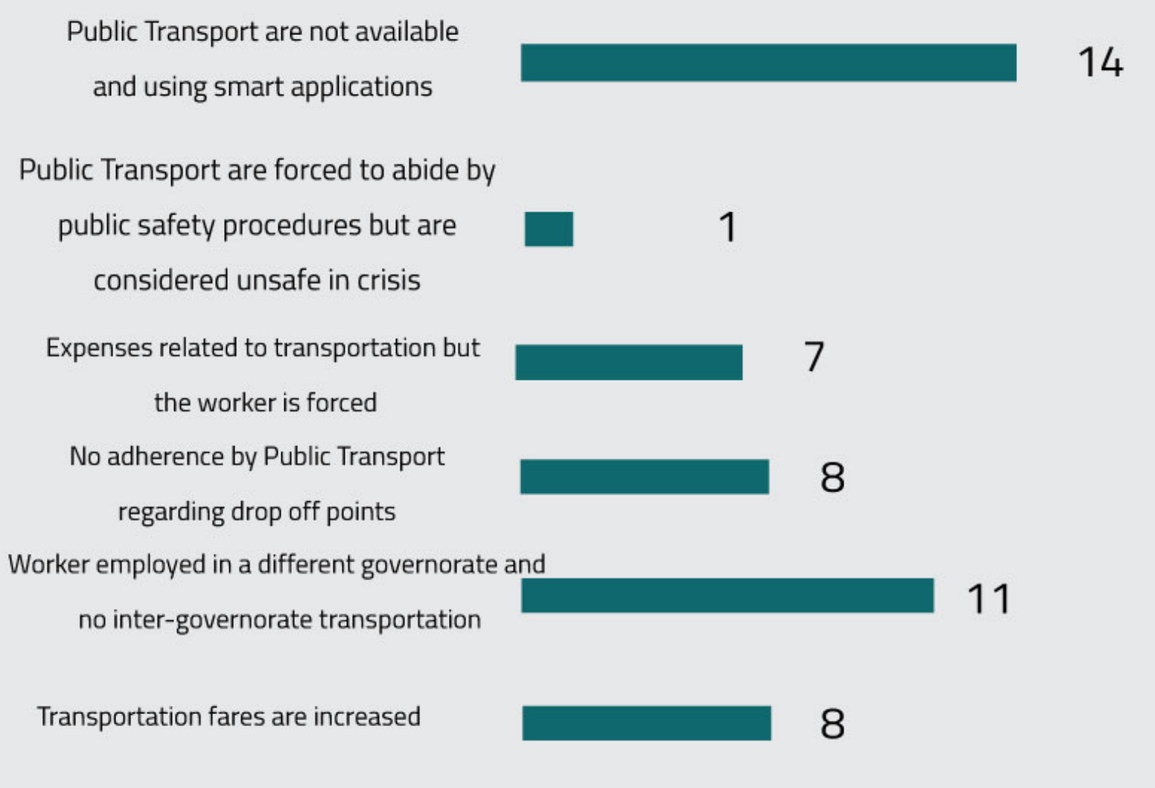
In some cases in Zarqa, workers were forced to be at their workplace at 8 am, even though the curfew was lifted at 10 am. In another case in Mafraq, workers were provided with a mean of transport in the morning but not in the evening, which forced the worker to walk a long distance of over 10 kilometers and violate the Defense Orders since he arrived home late after the sirens at 7 pm.

First and Second Phase

# Third: 36 Workers using Public Transport during the crisis

## Comments by Drivers



## Misunderstandings and Confusion at Work

In addition to the abovementioned regarding constant delays by workers in arriving to their work at the morning due to transportation challenges, the enforced measures caused some misunderstandings to occur between employers and workers due to numerous reasons. Some employers did not accept that workers were arriving late, or sometimes their inability to come to work on days that they could not use their cars because of the even and odd rule. Some workers were forced to take leaves from work or agree with the employer to deduct from their salary the wages of the days they could not go to work or on days when they arrived late.

Another way that workers were impacted related to some being asked to stay and sleep at their workplace by their employers, or being asked to rent a place near their work to be able to maintain full capacity and lessen the time and expenses of transportation. These requests were particularly made to workers living in a different



governorate to the one they work in, as alternatively, employers would have had to issue them a permit. Other workers lost their jobs after being unable to reach their workplace, including a group of workers living in Amman but work in Irbid who could not go to work since there were no buses between governorates.

## The Lockdown from 22nd till 24th of May

The Jordanian government imposed a full lockdown for a period of 3 days during the Eid Fitr holiday between May 2nd and May 24th which prevented people from leaving their homes.

Tamkeen interviewed 20 workers in the public transportation sector to check on their status during this lockdown and its impact on their work.

These workers agreed that previously, the holiday period was extremely important for them since their incomes usually increase and they work for long hours in those

days. These drivers said that they were waiting for this Eid and hoping that it would compensate some of their losses. Therefore, the lockdown decision represented a huge shock to them and stopped them from buying their and their families' needs. They hoped that their work before Eid would enable them to buy their needs and make their families feel a bit of happiness following the long days of curfew when they had no work.



**Recommendations:**

1. Conduct a study on the losses that were incurred by the public transportation sector, which focuses on finding workable solutions to compensate workers, especially with regard to compulsory insurance and other taxes that befell owners of means of transportations
2. Compliance with public safety standards on public transport.
3. Adopting policies and strategies that accelerate the overcoming of the Corona crisis, address its effects and stimulate economic growth, and take measures to provide social protection.
4. Providing drivers with public safety tools, especially preventive tools and sterilizers, to avoid the transmission and spread of infection in a manner that preserves the safety of workers and users of transportation.
5. Implement regular medical checks for drivers,

to ensure that they continue to work in light of the risks to which they are exposed.

6. Finding an umbrella for workers in the public transport sector to protect them, such as covering them under the umbrella of Social Security, and offer them compensations during times of crisis.

7. Documenting the challenges and opportunities faced by the public transportation sector during the Corona crisis and study the best practices to avoid the damage that workers in the sector faced due to the preventive measures taken from COVID-19

8. Involve workers in the process of decision-making relating to the application of polices to regulate the sector during times of crisis

9. Activate the role of relevant authorities to monitor the pricing of transportation means to avoid exploiting passengers during times of crisis.

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