



THE IMPACT OF COVID ON CONSULTING ENGINEERING IN IRAN



KAVEHHESHMATI1989@GMAIL.COM



+989128026730



KAVEH HESHMATI
STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
SANO CONSULTING ENGINEERS, TEHRAN, IRAN

As of 4 months into the Covid-19 pandemic in Iran, its impact on the consulting engineering sector is analyzed below:

THE SITUATION BEFORE THE PANDEMIC

Iran's government had faced serious financial problems before the Covid-19 pandemic initiation. In 2018, the United States withdrew from the "Iran Nuclear Deal" and put more sanctions on country's economy. Since then, the government's income has declined significantly which has had a far-reaching impact on industry, businesses, trades, and private sector.

Iran's economy is mostly controlled by the state (government). As the government is experiencing economic sanctions, it struggles with financial difficulties due to budget deficit. Consequently, the construction sector and consulting engineering industry are significantly affected in the current situation.

GOVERNMENT

As the Covid-19 was spreading to become a pandemic, the government did not executed the mandatory lock down policy officially since mid-February 2020, the beginning of pandemic. However, a part of this period coincided with "Persian New Year" holiday when most people followed "stay at home" rules. As the government could not support businesses financially, many workers came back to work and businesses have been run as usual after the holiday. Electronic tendering and digital certifications are not in practice and traditional formats are being used instead. Although a full lock down has not been implemented, many social activities that require gathering of people (e.g. religious ceremonies, sport activities, schools and universities, etc.) have been closed. Many people have also gone into voluntary quarantine, minimizing their social activities.





From medical point of view, the government established a separate organization to fight coronavirus pandemic, named “National Centre to Fight Covid-19” where the minister of “Health and Medical Education” is its chief-executive officer. National Centre to Fight Covid-19 has published coronavirus criteria and is monitoring infected people to control the spread of virus. Recently, the government declared wearing face mask is obligatory in public spaces.

PROJECTS

Economic sanctions have generated financial difficulties for construction projects for the last three years such that many industrial and infrastructural projects faced financing problems. The emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation. As a result, most construction projects are being implemented slowly. The government has issued guidelines for construction sites during the pandemic.

CONSULTING COMPANIES AND EMPLOYEES

During the Covid-19 pandemic, many companies specifically in consulting engineering sector faced financial difficulties. The economic situation caused limitations in project budgets, leading to human resources’ redundancies.

As the lockdown policy is not implemented officially, most consulting companies stick to the traditional “work from office” policy. Since the beginning of April 2020, workers came back to work environment, either the office or construction site. Office protocols have been changed to ensure workers’ safety. Issues such as decreasing maximum number of workers in the same office, social distancing rules, wearing face masks and using hand sanitizers have been taken into account. Construction site protocols have also been revised in terms of reducing working hours, providing more space and facilities for site supervisors and workers, hand washing rules and etc. Considering all these facts, employees of these consulting companies have been encountering additional challenges that cause productivity loss in work environment.

On the other hand, there are several consulting companies, especially in the private sector, that follow “work from home” policy. They use online communication devices such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, Adobe connect and Zoom to hold meetings, control the projects, and share





project information during the pandemic period. However, this policy is not applicable in construction sites.

In general, different measures have been taken by consulting engineering firms to provide a safer work environment and slow down the rate of virus transmission as the following:

- A large number of meetings are being held online.
 - Face-to-face meetings between consulting engineers and clients have been minimized.
 - Employees' travels due to projects are restricted.
 - Social network environments are being used for communication more frequent compared to the past.
 - Safety measures are being considered in work environment.
-

