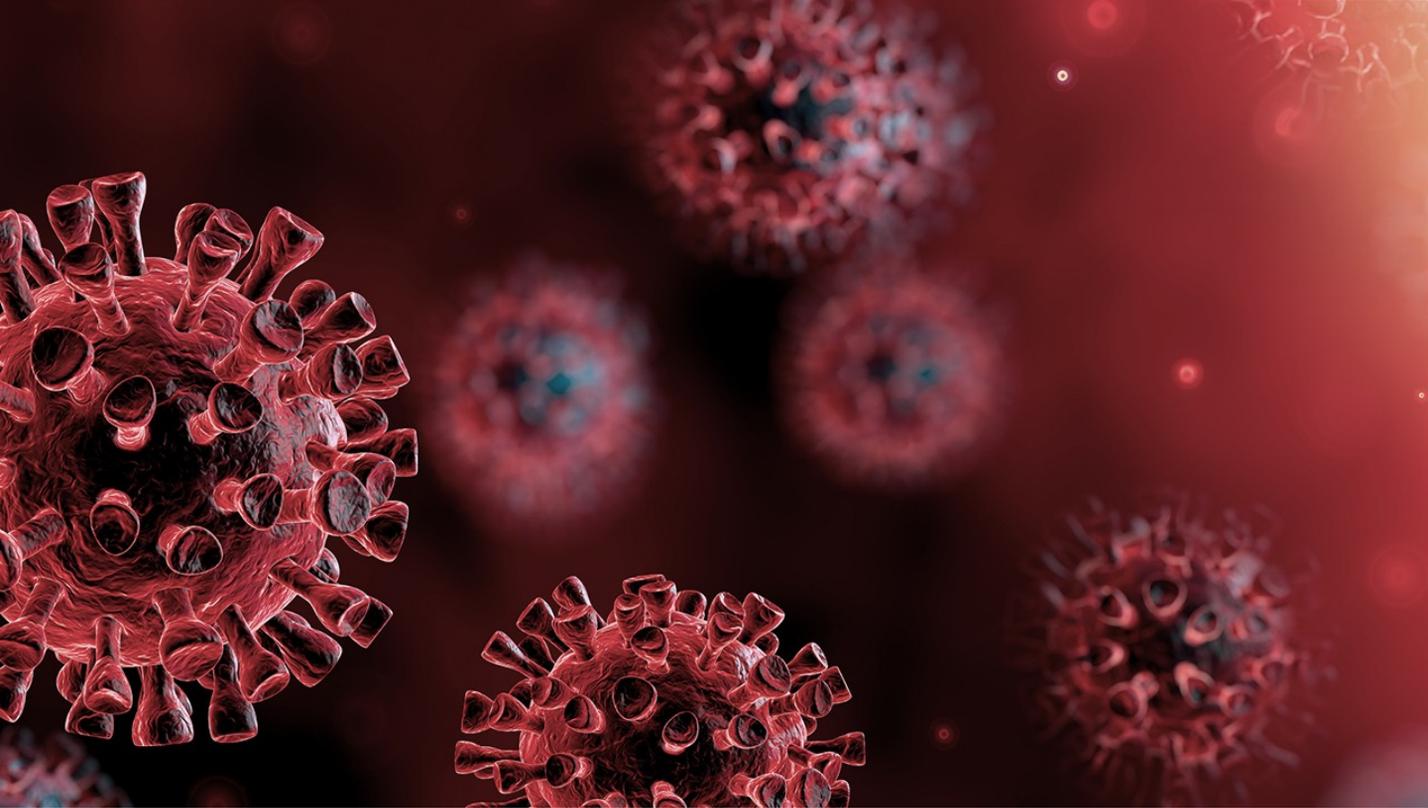


Insights and Recommendations to Mitigate Risks of COVID-19 Impacts on the Solar Industry



Interview with Antonio Jimenez

**Managing Director and Vice President
Trina Solar Middle East & Africa,**

**May 2020
Snapshot**

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Research and Content Manager**

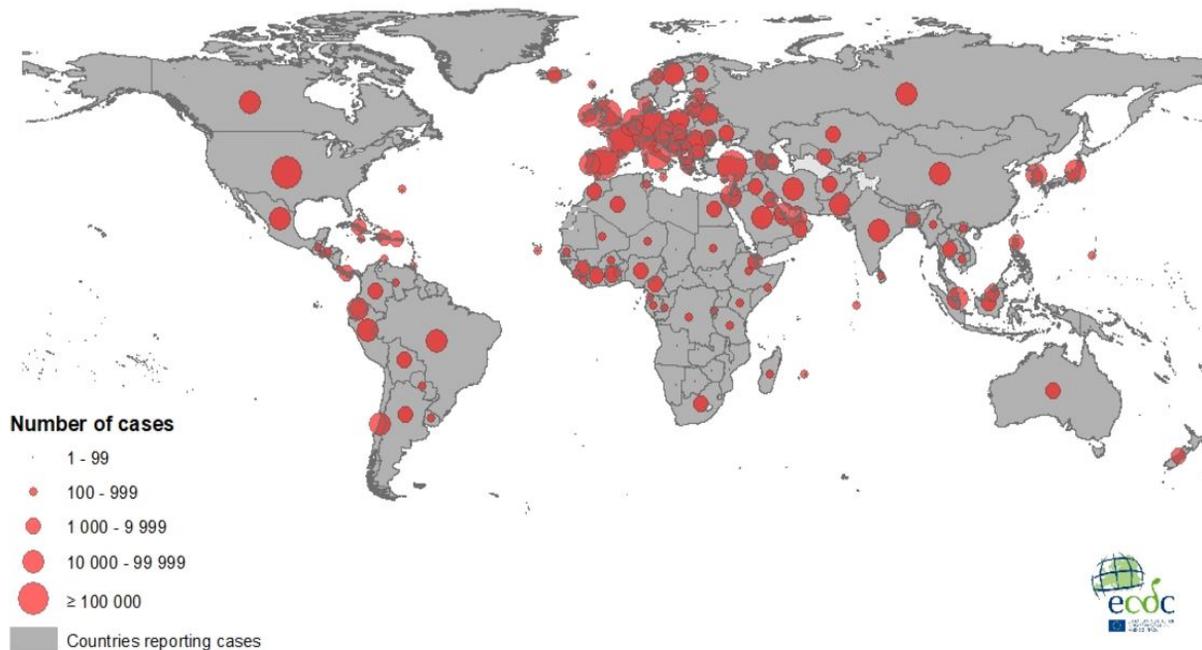
Introduction

Interim guidance on adjusting “lockdown” measures was issued by WHO in mid-April. The guidance included considerations with regards to the adjustment of public health and social measures. According to WHO, when lifting lockdowns, to minimize the risk of resurgence, countries should use six criteria.

“They should assess whether transmission is controlled; health system capacities are in place; outbreak risks in special settings like nursing homes are minimised; preventive measures are enacted in places that are essential for people to go to; importation risks can be managed and communities are fully educated, engaged and empowered to adjust to the “new norm”.” -WHO

On the other hand, WHO also issued in April the interim guidance for Ramadan to safely practice social distancing and public health advice during this holy month. The guide provides highlights on the best religious practices as well as gatherings that is applied on different national contexts.

With all the recommendations that are updated on a regular basis, businesses around the world are taking strict measures to ensure the safety of their people first and the continuation of their operations as well. To have an overview on how the MENA region reacted to COVID’s impacts and the recommendations to mitigate risks, MESIA had the pleasure to interview the Managing Director and Vice President of Trina Solar Middle East & Africa, Antonio Jimenez.



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The boundaries and names shown on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the European Union.

European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
Geographic distribution of COVID-19 cases worldwide, as of 30 March 2020

Interview with Antonio Jimenez

1- The lack of direct precedent as COVID-19 is imposing many challenges to businesses around the globe, in your opinion, what are the main challenges facing the renewable sector within the MENA region?

The COVID 19 pandemic is affecting our families, businesses, community and our way of life. This have developed over time in ways we have not expected. The pandemic has forced many countries to implement major adjustments to minimize the impacts of COVID19 on human life. On a business perspective, COVID 19 imposed a new restriction, social distancing. This constraint has greatly affected businesses around the world. We see that the normal activities that were usual before such as visiting customers, going to exhibitions and traveling around countries are now banned. We also observe that the lockdown has also affected construction sites. Therefore, due to the current situation, businesses are reducing their capacities because of the imposed restrictions and low demand.

The challenges we observe today include readjusting ourselves to new ways to serve our customers in ways that are not as usual as before, through social distancing. That also imposes a challenge on having the same relationship with customers and getting used to the new normal.

Today's challenge is unlike any challenge. The major issues today rely upon finding the most appropriate means to support customers. We see that many economies are suffering because of the reduction of demand since companies are not able to operate efficiently. As a result, this is impacting finance, cashflow, and our responsibility is to help customers through these difficult times.

From a solar perspective, the industry is very well suited for those challenges. Solar is by far the energy with the lowest cost. It is helping communities to reduce costs and business be more competitive.

Trina Solar have been pioneers in the global solar industry since we have been in this business for more than two decades. Having weathered several crises, we see that this is a not a good time, like before, but we overcame those obstacles and we shall also pass this pandemic. Currently, we focus our efforts on maintaining good relationships and serving customers in the best way possible throughout this phase.



Interview with Antonio Jimenez Cont'd

2- What do you think are the risks that are currently affecting the solar industry and are solar tenders greatly impacted by this pandemic in the MENA?

The risk we see in the market is due to the slowdown of the economy which is mostly affecting businesses rather than governments. As we can observe, the disturbance of ongoing activities in the industry were impacted. For example, C&I projects are delayed. Also, financing and funding opportunities is also slowing down but this impact is more significant in the C&I sector rather than utility scale power sector.

Large tenders in the region haven't been impacted to such extent because we have recently seen that KSA published the second-round results of the NREP tender. So, even though lockdown measures are currently in place, projects are still moving forward. As a result, we do not expect that big tenders are going to be delayed because of COVID 19.

3- What are the best practices to mitigate those risks, any recommendations?

In my point of view, there are many different recommendations that should be taken into consideration. Firstly, the most important aspect for everyone is to stay safe. Keeping yourself, your loved ones, your team as well as customers and stakeholders safe is a priority. Also, maintaining physical distancing which doesn't mean social distancing only.

At Trina Solar, a control task group was established to face this pandemic. It was followed on a global bases according to the situation in every country to make sure everyone is safe without impacting the business. As a result, reacting to changes in the market as soon as possible with all the knowledge gained regularly is the strategy that was followed. Therefore, it has been very successful to implement actions to keep the business running. Even at the worst times, in China, Trina Solar was able to keep factories operating to continue serving customers making sure everything is compliant with safety measures.

However, during this period, many companies suffered and were not able to operate. The lesson to be learned from this phase is to learn, readjust and adapt a new strategy to move forward and keep the business running. Currently, we have seen businesses moving towards digital tools to interact. Using internet, webinars are used extensively as well as new ways to serve customers are immersing. The reduction of physical meetings and interactions are not being impacted because online tools are providing high levels of communication.

Lastly, communicating with customers and delivering transparent information is key. At this time of uncertainty, explaining to customers the ways to keep things moving forward as well as offering support to help with the use of virtual tools is our duty.

Interview with Antonio Jimenez Cont'd

4- Do you believe governments in MENA acted in an extraordinary manner to deal with COVID-19's outbreak without greatly affecting solar industry?

Yes, the governments in MENA have been very responsible and acted very well to the outbreak. Even though several measures were put in place such as canceling flights, crossing borders, imposing lockdowns..etc, restrictions were imposed to the benefit of the people. Nowadays, with those efforts in place, the number of cases in the region are considered to be relatively low and the situation is under control.

On the other hand, people's awareness was very high and the reaction to those rules were proven to be successful. Recently, countries have been releasing lockdowns as situations are improving.

Those measures affected the solar industry as well. Provided that this situation was a downside for most sectors, in the next period, releasing the lockdown will slowly make businesses go back to normal. Everyone is hoping that activities will resume to ensure a better efficacy by time.



5- On a closing note, would you like to add any insights?

Our heart is with everyone that was impacted by this virus, wishing a full recovery to those affected. A major thanks to all health care representatives that are on the front line, fighting this battle. On the other hand, we hope that this journey is going to be short and everyone will go back their workplaces and work closely with their teams.

Conclusion

In such unprecedented times, risks are being evaluated by all countries, governments, businesses and all sectors that are in one way or another affected by COVID19. The challenges are inevitable. However, taking the right steps to mitigate those risks is a duty towards customers and clients. The new normal is frustrating but many companies in the solar sector are coping with change. Readjustment is key and thanks to technology, what was impossible is now possible.

From MESIA's family, Ramadan Kareem!

Antonio Jimenez's Biography

Many thanks for sharing your insights



Antonio Jimenez

Managing Director and Vice President of Trina Solar Middle East & Africa

Antonio Jimenez is the Managing Director and Vice President of Trina Solar Middle East & Africa.

He has an extensive career in the solar industry and has been involved in the power sector since 2000. Antonio joined Trina Solar in 2019 to set up the regional headquarters in the Middle East and Africa Region.

Prior to this, he worked in several multinationals as PWC, Innogy SE and Abengoa Solar where he spent a large amount of his career working in all the steps of the value chain of solar power.

His has extensive experience in solar power, IPP projects and renewable energy value chain Europe, North America and Middle East and Africa Region, with more than 8 years in the latter.

Antonio holds an engineering degree and an MBA degree from INSEAD graduate business school.