

COVID-19 in Africa

Protecting Lives
and Economies



United Nations
Economic Commission for Africa

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“This is not a financial crisis. This is a human crisis. This is not a question of just bringing liquidity to the financial systems, which, of course, is necessary. We need to support directly those that lose their jobs, those that lose their salaries, the small companies that cannot operate anymore, all those that are the fabrics of our societies, and we need to make sure that we keep thousands afloat, we keep small companies afloat, we keep all societies afloat.”

**United Nations Secretary-General,
António Guterres.**

Summary messages

People: Anywhere between 300,000 and 3.3 million African people could lose their lives as a direct result of COVID-19, depending on the intervention measures taken to stop the spread.

Africa is particularly susceptible because 56 per cent of the urban population is concentrated in overcrowded and poorly serviced slum dwellings (excluding North Africa) and only 34 per cent of the households have access to basic hand washing facilities. In all, 71 per cent of Africa's workforce is informally employed, and most of those cannot work from home. Close to 40 per cent of children under 5 years of age in Africa are undernourished. Of all the continents Africa has the highest prevalence of certain underlying conditions, like tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS. With lower ratios of hospital beds and health professionals to its population than other regions, high dependency on imports for its medicinal and pharmaceutical products, weak legal identity systems for direct benefit transfers, and weak economies that are unable to sustain health and lockdown costs, the continent is vulnerable.

Prosperity: The impact on African economies could be the slowing of growth to 1.8 per cent in the best case scenario or a contraction of 2.6 per cent in the worst case. This has the potential to push 27 million people into extreme poverty.

Even if the spread of COVID-19 is suppressed in Africa its economic damage will be unavoidable. The price of oil, which accounts for 40 per cent of Africa's exports, has halved, and major African exports such as textiles and fresh-cut flowers have crashed. Tourism – which accounts for up to 38 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of

some African countries – has effectively halted, as has the airline industry that supports it. Collapsed businesses may never recover. Without a rapid response, Governments risk losing control and facing unrest. To protect and build towards our shared prosperity at least \$100 billion is needed to immediately resource a health and social safety net response. Another \$100 billion is critical for economic emergency stimulus, including a debt standstill, the financing of a special purpose vehicle for commercial debt obligations, and provision of extra liquidity for the private sector.

Partnerships: African economies are interconnected: our response must bring us together as one. The development finance institutions must at this time play an unprecedented counter-cyclical role to protect the private sector and save jobs.

We must keep trade flowing, particularly in essential medical supplies and staple foods, by fighting the urge to impose export bans. Intellectual property on medical supplies, novel testing kits and vaccines must be shared to help the continent's private sector take its part in our response. The level of assistance that is required is unprecedented. Innovative financing facilities are needed, including a complete temporary debt standstill, enhanced access to emergency funding facilities, and the provision of liquidity lines to the private sector in Africa. We must "build back better", by ensuring that there is an abiding climate consciousness in the rebuilding and by leveraging the digital economy. And we must be firm and clear on good governance to safeguard African health systems, ensure proper use of emergency funds, hold African businesses from collapse and reduce worker lay-offs.

Abbreviations and acronyms

COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
CPIA	Africa Country Policy and Institutional Assessment
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
GDP	gross domestic product
IATA	International Air Transport Authority
ICT	information and communications technology
ICU	intensive care unit
IHME	Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITC	International Trade Centre
NDC	nationally determined contributions
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPE	personal protective equipment
PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SARS	severe acute respiratory syndrome
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNCTADstat	dissemination platform of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme

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