

Special Brief on COVID-19



COVID-19 - **Middle East** and **Africa**: Response and Impact

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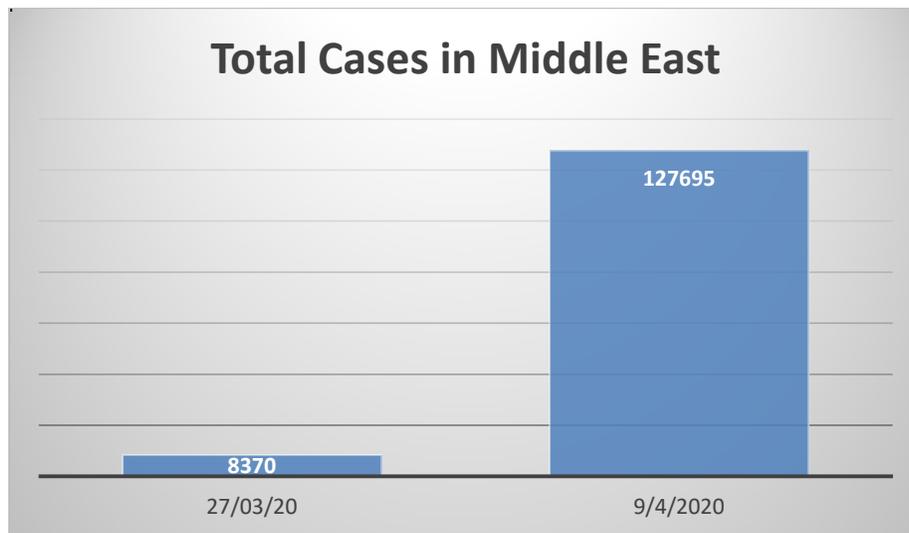
COVID-19 AND MIDDLE EAST: IMPACT AND RESPONSE

Snapshot of Region

In the world's most tumultuously conflicted region; the COVID-19 outbreak has added to the Middle East's prevalent atmosphere of chaos and uncertainty. Exact number of infected cases and casualties is difficult to determine in these countries as most authoritarian governments curb outgoing information about the impact of Covid-19. This has been echoed by the World Health Organization (WHO) which is casting a doubt on the outbreak data coming from governments in the ME_region.¹ Iran has the most cases, 66,220 followed by Turkey with 38,226 cases. No cases have been reported from Yemen.

Moreover, insufficient/non-testing implies that the number of infected people is undoubtedly higher than the official tallies. Majority of the health systems are not equipped to deal with a large outbreak.² Apart from the humanitarian impact which has been colossal, the outbreak has hit the economies of the region, particularly trade, tourism and remittances. Moreover, cut in oil prices has affected government revenues and has put public sector jobs at risk.³

The total number of cases from the region on March 27, 2020 stood at 8,730 which have risen to a staggering 127,695 cases on April 9, 2020.⁴



Source: Worldometers, <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

¹ "Middle East States Must Give More Info on Coronavirus Cases, Says WHO," *The National*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/middle-east-states-must-give-more-info-on-coronavirus-cases-says-who-1.994799>

² "How the Fragile Health Care Systems of the Middle East Are Bracing for -19," *Public Broadcasting Service*, April 6, 2020. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/how-the-fragile-health-care-systems-of-the-middle-east-are-bracing-for-covid-19>

³ "Covid-19 Growth Revisions: Larger Contractions In Economic Activity," *Fitch Solutions*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.fitchsolutions.com/country-risk-sovereigns/economics/covid-19-growth-revisions-larger-contractions-economic-activity-03-04-2020>

⁴ * Data per country has been taken from the following website and then added to get the total number of cases: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

Middle East: Impact of COVID-19

Politics & Security

Although the UN called for a global ceasefire on March 23, fighting continues in Libya, Yemen and Syria. Even though authorities in Tobruk and Tripoli have announced suspension of public transport and enforced night time curfews in their respective regions, fighting has escalated. In Syria however, the conflict is now at a much more muted pace, with the country reporting its lowest ever death toll (103) in March since 2011. Iraq continues to be a proxy-ground for the war between Iran.

Iran-US tensions continue growing despite international pressure; be it in Iraq or the US refusal to lift sanctions on Iran that hinder the country's access to much-needed medical equipment needed to combat COVID-19 which has hit the country hard. Moreover, Iran has refused US aid offer while it has requested the IMF for a \$5 bn loan for first time since the 1960s to cope with the COVID-19 outbreak.⁵

There has also been a growing pressure/realization amongst the ME states to release political prisoners across the region on humanitarian grounds. Iran has temporarily freed approximately 85,000 prisoners, including political detainees and Bahrain has released approximately 1,500 detainees, Saudi Arabia has released 250 foreign detainees held on non-violent immigration.⁶

Economic

Being a key export for the region; oil prices have been affected the most since the crisis began. Less global demand and the Russian-Saudi pricing spat has kept the price below \$30 per barrel.⁷ Due to extremely low oil prices; economic growth rates of countries like Saudi Arabia could decrease to 0.7% from 2%, Kuwait from 2.8% to 0.8%, UAE from 1.6% to 0.9%. Key projects and events such as Dubai Expo 2020 and Qatar Airways' International Cup have been either stalled or canceled.

In addition to their negative effect on regional trade, aviation and oil revenue, COVID-19-related restrictions will decimate revenues from religious tourism and could threaten food security. Saudi Arabia and UAE which receive more than 20 million and 17 million tourists respectively have been the most affected. The region's major religious sites, including Mecca and Medina (Saudi Arabia), Najaf and Karbala (Iraq), and Qom and Mashhad (Iran), have been closed. Religious tourism in the region is usually worth a cumulative USD 25 bn a year (USD 12 bn for Saudi Arabia; USD 8 bn for Iran; and USD 5 bn for Iraq).⁸ There are reports that the annual

⁵ "OPEC and Allies Fail to Reach Deal on Oil Production Cuts," *Gulf Times*, March 6, 2020. <https://www.gulf-times.com/story/657762/Opec-and-allies-fail-to-reach-deal-on-oil-producti>

⁶ John Feffer, "We Need a Coronavirus Truce", *Institute for Policy Studies*, April 1, 2020. <https://ips-dc.org/we-need-a-coronavirus-truce/>

⁷ "Oil plunges 24% for worst day since 1991, hits multi-year low after OPEC deal failure sparks price war," *CNBC*, March 8, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/08/oil-plummets-30percent-as-opec-deal-failure-sparks-price-war-fears.html>

⁸ "Low Oil Prices Drag Middle East Economies to Collapse," *Anadolu Agency*, April 9, 2020. <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/economy/low-oil-prices-drag-middle-east-economies-to-collapse/1792024>

pilgrimage, Hajj, will also be canceled this year. Iran's oil exports came under US sanctions but COVID-19 crisis has now endangered its non-oil exports and revenue generation as well.

The UAE and Qatar are also home to the region's largest long-haul flight carriers: Emirates and Etihad (UAE) and Qatar Airways. The closure of aerial routes to select international destinations by Qatari and Emirati authorities will cause significant operational disruption for these countries' airlines in particular and aviation industries more broadly. The predicted losses are \$14 bn so far and these are expected to increase. Most companies doing business in the region due to weak credit will have difficulty returning to markets especially in Bahrain and Oman.

Furthermore, since Gulf countries are all heavily dependent on the free movement of expatriate workers, any prolonged disruption will threaten Gulf economies. In Israel, the closure of occupied Palestinian territories means the cancellation of some 100,000 Palestinian work permit holders in the West Bank and another 7,000 from Gaza.⁹

Humanitarian Aspect

The immediate challenge of COVID-19 is that it is a public health crisis which, if not curbed, could see the collapse of healthcare systems in the region. This challenge will be especially daunting for fragile and conflict-torn states such as Iraq, Syria and Yemen where the difficulty of preparing weak health systems for the outbreak since due to disruptions in global trade there will be a rise in shortages of medical supplies and other goods resulting in substantial price increases. In Lebanon - a country on the verge of bankruptcy, the healthcare system is ill-prepared, as a financial crisis and dollar shortages have for months drained the economy of critical supplies.¹⁰ In Yemen 93% of the country's medical equipment is out of service.¹¹ Although Iran has one of the best healthcare systems in the region; it too has become severely overburdened. Palestinian health officials have said that there are no more testing kits in Gaza.

In the Gulf countries, there is a disparity in legal and employment rights, and access to health and social services, between their nationals and the migrant workforce. Not to mention, the large number of foreign labor forces living in cramped labor camps. The governments have been less effective in providing adequate employee protections and appropriate housing and healthcare for the migrant labor force. Recently, Qatar and Bahrain announced Corona cases amongst its labor population.¹²

As the numbers of cases rise in the Middle East, borders close and countries come under lockdown, aid agencies and humanitarian organizations are bracing for the threat the virus poses

⁹ "COVID-19 Brings Risks for Middle East Economies," *Control Risks*, April 7, 2020.

<https://www.controlrisks.com/our-thinking/insights/covid-19-brings-risks-for-middle-east-economies>

¹⁰ "In Coronavirus Lockdown, Lebanese Banks Turn off Dollar Tap for Hard-Hit Depositors," *Reuters*, March 20, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-banks-idUSKBN2172HA>

¹¹ "WHO warns Yemen of pending 'explosion' of COVID-19 cases," *Al-Monitor*, March 24, 2020. <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/03/yemen-women-face-masks-coronavirus-houthi-measures.html>

¹² "Qatar and Bahrain record jump in coronavirus cases, Kuwait bans flights," *Reuters*, March 11, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-bahrain/qatar-and-bahrain-record-jump-in-coronavirus-cases-kuwait-bans-flights-idUSKBN20Y0XO>

to vulnerable refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) across the region. At least 12 million refugees and internally displaced people live in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Turkey. Borders throughout the Middle East are porous, with refugees, economic migrants, and others often travelling along informal routes. Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine and Turkey all have confirmed cases. But while all host large refugee and IDP populations, so far no cases have been confirmed in any of the region's camps. To prevent the spread of Corona, refugee camps in Jordan were recently placed on lockdown. Moreover, Syrian refugees in Lebanon are ineligible for government health care, meaning a coronavirus outbreak would leave them without care. In Gaza only one case has been reported so far. But given that the area is a densely populated open prison, Gaza is ill-equipped to handle the pandemic if it starts to spread. The European Union has agreed a \$262 million package for countries hosting refugees and vulnerable persons from the Middle East, raising the total EU response to the refugee crisis to more than \$2.2 billion.¹³ On the ground, UNHCR, NRC and WHO have ramped up the distribution of clean water, soap and hand sanitizer to camps in Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq.

Response to COVID-19

Most countries in the Middle East, especially the GCC have enforced strict measures to curb the spread of the virus. There have been border closures, travel restrictions, lockdowns and curfews. Lebanon and Israel have enforced complete lockdowns, while Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Syria and Kuwait have opted for partial curfews. Iran has also opted for partial lockdowns while extending prison furloughs until April 19. Security forces have been deployed in Lebanon and Jordan to enforce stricter measures to rein in the outbreak.¹⁴ In the Palestinian occupied territories, there is a total closure of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The closure is being enforced on areas administered by the Palestinian Authority (PA) — Areas A and B — but not on the roughly 500,000 Israeli settlers who live in the West Bank (excluding East Jerusalem).¹⁵

Iran, the epicenter of the outbreak in the region has also been forced to take measures to prevent further devastation and casualties. Closing of shrines, schools, universities, offices and all public places, ban on intercity traveling and allocation of 20% of the annual budget to fight the virus are some of the measures taken. President Rouhani wrote letters to several global leaders asking their help to persuade US to lift sanctions against Iran; but refused the US aid offer. Europe has sent medical supplies while China has provided Iran with more than 10 million masks, 500,000 COVID-19 diagnostic test kits, 300,000 surgery and isolation gowns, 2.2 million gloves, 350 ventilators, 500 prefabricated hospital rooms, and a broad range of medicines and medical equipment.¹⁶

¹³ “EU approves \$262m aid package for Syria refugees effected by coronavirus outbreak,” *Middle East Monitor*, April 2, 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200402-eu-approves-262m-aid-package-for-syria-refugees-effected-by-coronavirus-outbreak/>

¹⁴ News Desk, “Lebanon PM orders security forces to enforce virus curbs”, *Reuters*, March 21, 2020 <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-lebanon/lebanon-pm-orders-security-forces-to-enforce-virus-curbs-idUSKBN2180XJ>

¹⁵ “COVID-19 and the Middle East,” *Middle East Institute*, March 18, 2020. <https://www.mei.edu/blog/covid-19-and-middle-east>

¹⁶ News Desk, “China Sends Iran Coronavirus Aid Shipment”, *Tasnim News Agency*, April 4, 2020. <https://www.tasnimnews.com/en/news/2020/04/05/2236638/china-sends-iran-coronavirus-aid-shipment>

In Yemen, both the government and the Houthi authorities in the north have announced steps to prevent the spread of the virus by deploying teams of medical staff to respond to an outbreak. Saudi-led military coalition has declared a two-week long ceasefire in Yemen that commenced from April 9.¹⁷

Bahrain has rolled out e-bracelets and tracking apps to monitor individuals required to self-isolate and whether they are complying with health orders. Bahrain Civil Bureau has informed that number of remote workers in government entities will be increased to 70% from April 5.¹⁸

In Syria, in areas outside regime control, volunteer groups such as the White Helmets have been working to disinfect busy areas in the north-western Idlib region. Even ISIS has issued its own health guidance utilizing Qu'ranic verses relating to washing hands, limiting travel to uninfected areas, and coughing or sneezing into a hand or clothing.¹⁹

The Saudi Kingdom has placed the holy cities of Makkah and Madinah on 24-hour curfew and has announced provision of free healthcare to anyone contracting the virus.

Israel is using phone surveillance technology to track Israeli citizens in an effort to help stop the spread of the virus.²⁰ Moreover, there appears to be high-level cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian officials, including a joint operations room to contain the spread of the virus. In Gaza, Hamas is trying to build two massive quarantine facilities.²¹

Turkey is the second worst affected country in the region. The Government has distributed protective clothing, rubber gloves, and face masks among its border units, has ordered free distribution of masks to its citizens and will build two temporary hospitals in Istanbul to accommodate 1,000 coronavirus patients each. Ankara is also stepping up aid in Northern Syria, where it has created safe zones for refugees.²²

Some Middle Eastern states have announced relief packages for their economies including the postponement of tax payments and exemptions of various government levies and fees. These include: Turkey (\$15.4 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$32 billion), Israel (\$2.9 billion), Jordan (\$22 million), Kuwait (\$1.6 billion), Iran (\$1.08 billion) and UAE (AED126.5 bn). Qatar University

¹⁷ "Riyadh-led coalition declares two-week ceasefire in Yemen over coronavirus fears," *Daily Times*, April 9, 2020.

<https://dailytimes.com.pk/592379/riyadh-led-coalition-declares-two-week-ceasefire-in-yemen-over-coronavirus-fears/>

¹⁸ "Mena Covid-19 cases reach 75,185," *Middle East Business Intelligence*, April 7, 2020.

<https://www.meed.com/covid-19-cases-confirmed-in-mena-7-april>

¹⁹ "COVID-19 and the Middle East," *Middle East Institute*, March 18, 2020. <https://www.mei.edu/blog/covid-19-and-middle-east>

²⁰ "Government okays mass surveillance of Israelis' phones to curb coronavirus," *Times of Israel*, March 15, 2020.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/government-okays-mass-surveillance-of-israelis-phones-to-curb-coronavirus/>

²¹ "Fearing Gaza Virus Spread, Hamas Preps for Mass Quarantines," *New York Times*, March 30, 2020.

<https://www.nytimes.com/aponline/2020/03/30/world/middleeast/ap-ml-virus-outbreak-gaza-on-edge.html>

²² "In pictures: Turkey supports northern Syria's response to Covid-19," *TRT*, April 8, 2020.

<https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/in-pictures-turkey-supports-northern-syria-s-response-to-covid-19-35192>

launched an emergency response grant with a budget of up to QR150,000 per research track.²³ These packages include targeted measures to defer taxes and government fees, defer loan payments, and increase concessional financing for small and medium-sized enterprises.

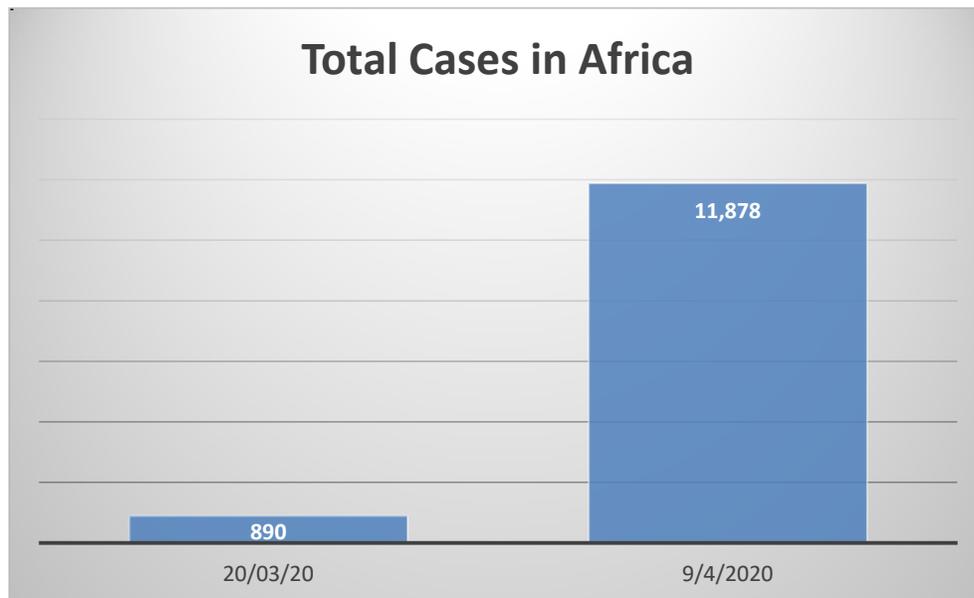
²³ “Mena Covid-19 cases reach 75,185,” *Middle East Business Intelligence*, April 7, 2020. <https://www.meed.com/covid-19-cases-confirmed-in-mena-7-april>

COVID-19 AND AFRICA: IMPACT AND RESPONSE

Introduction

While the Coronavirus outbreak has taken the world by storm; rate of its spread in the African continent has been comparatively slow. According to official figures at Coronavirus Tracker Africa, the continent is said to be the least affected region so far, with 890 cases as of March 20, 2020. However, the numbers have rapidly risen and as of April 9, 2020, the figure stands at 11,878.²⁴

South Africa and Cameroon have the highest number of cases. However, issues revolving around testing capabilities also call into question the number of cases being reported, for example, Comoros and Lesotho are two virus-free countries yet which could be due to lack of testing facilities.²⁵ Since the region is already rife with political instability, conflict, poverty, and disease, figures are expected to rise even more. Moreover, the continent is characterized by overcrowded cities, remote villages, vulnerable populations such as refugees, and fragile healthcare facilities thus, making the whole continent highly vulnerable to the coronavirus outbreak. As the world braces for an unprecedented global recession; the fragile economies of Africa are also quite susceptible to damage caused by this pandemic especially trade, tourism, foreign investments and local businesses.



Source: Coronavirus Tracker in Africa,
<https://africanarguments.org/2020/04/09/coronavirus-in-africa-tracker-how-many-cases-and-where-latest/>

²⁴ Coronavirus Tracker in Africa, April 9, 2020.

<https://africanarguments.org/2020/04/09/coronavirus-in-africa-tracker-how-many-cases-and-where-latest/>

²⁵ Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban, "Coronavirus: Lesotho, Comoros virus-free; stats of most impacted nations", *africanews*, April 8, 2020

<https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/09/africa-s-coronavirus-free-dozen/>

Humanitarian Impact

Inadequate healthcare systems in African countries combined with malnourishment and prevalent diseases among the general populace have started to come under strain due to severity of the corona outbreak. The entire African continent spends a meagre 5% of its GDP on healthcare which makes it one of the most vulnerable geographical areas in the world in times of a global pandemic.²⁶

- Most affected country of this sub-region is South Africa despite proactive preparations as its already overburdened healthcare system struggles to cope with the severity of the outbreak.²⁷ Testing capabilities also call into question the number of cases being reported.²⁸ While other South African countries are reporting far fewer cases than South Africa; the looming fear of corona is accompanied by a food shortage caused due to closing down of borders and port areas in South Africa which runs a food supply chain with the World Food Program (WFP) to feed over 20 million people in Southern Africa.²⁹
- Most impacted country of Central Africa has been Cameroon with 658 cases as of April 7, 2020 with 9 deaths and 17 recoveries, while Democratic Republic of Congo follows with 180 cases despite lockdown efforts by the government.³⁰ Central African Republic has so far only reported 9 cases but it could be due to lack of testing capabilities as the country is running critically low on medical equipment with only 3 ventilators in the entire Republic.³¹
- Total number of cases rose to 2,020 in this sub-region while healthcare systems remain neglected as varying forms of unrest prevail in most West African countries. For example, infighting among local jihadist groups in Burkina Faso since the past 12 months has shut down over 130 healthcare centers,³² while in Liberia there is severe food, hygiene and medical equipment shortage.³³ Handwashing facilities and clean water are

²⁶ News Desk, “Coronavirus travel bans force African elites to rely on local healthcare”, *France 24*, April 4, 2020. <https://www.france24.com/en/20200404-coronavirus-african-elites-who-once-flew-abroad-now-face-local-health-systems>

²⁷ * Southern Africa is the region with more than 69% of HIV infected cases in the world with most infected cases in the country of South Africa. (7.7million people living with HIV) making it most vulnerable to COVID-19 spread).

Sarah Wild, “South Africa is taking drastic steps to save its high-risk population from coronavirus”, *Quartz*, March 17, 2020.

<https://qz.com/africa/1820097/coronavirus-south-africas-hiv-positive-population-highly-vulnerable/>

²⁸ * South African Health ministry anticipates rise in infected cases as testing faces logistic delays.

Abdur Rahman Alfa Shaban, “Coronavirus: Zimbabwe beer ban U-turn, AU leaders meet, Cameroon tally booms”, *Africa News*, April 4, 2020.

<https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/04/coronavirus-hub-impact-of-outbreak-across-africa/>

²⁹ Sifiso Zulu, “Govt Names Ports of Entry and Borders To Be Closed Over COVID-19”, *EWN*, March 18, 2020.

<https://ewn.co.za/2020/03/16/govt-names-ports-of-entry-and-borders-to-be-closed-over-covid-19>

³⁰ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/country/cameroon/>

³¹ News Desk, “Coronavirus travel bans force African elites to rely on local healthcare”, *France 24*, April 4, 2020.

<https://www.france24.com/en/20200404-coronavirus-african-elites-who-once-flew-abroad-now-face-local-health-systems>

³² Sam Mednick, “Burkina Faso: Coronavirus in Crisis-Hit Burkina Faso - Healthcare Centres Close As Cases Rise”, *All Africa*, March 30, 2020. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202003310003.html>

³³ Winston W. Parley, “Liberia: Red Cross Humanitarian Aid Depleted”, *All Africa*, April 6, 2020.

<https://allafrica.com/stories/202004070531.html>

also quite scarce in most African countries as WHO reports less than half the Nigerian population for instance, has access to water and soap as is the case across the continent.

- **East Africa:** This sub region has a total of 1,295 cases till now.³⁴ This sub region is facing a dual shock from coronavirus and locust swarms. The latter, threatens the food security and livelihoods of 25 million people.³⁵ Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia, Djibouti and Sudan have all reported cases of the virus. With a new leadership struggling with a legacy of mismanagement, financial constraints and a deep economic crisis, Sudan is also hosting more than a million refugees from neighboring countries. Even though Kenya is one of the last places to be hit by the virus, there are fears that the country does not have enough resources to cope as majority of households in Kenya do not have access to running water.³⁶
- **North Africa:** North Africa has a total of 5,268 cases.³⁷ The Egyptian government is under continued pressure from the medical community to reform its COVID-19 response, after years of poor working conditions and low salaries led to a wave of qualified professionals to emigrate. WHO has ranked Libya as at a high-risk from coronavirus spread.³⁸ The government of Tunisia has asked for donations to fund 250 intensive care beds to be placed in a sports hall in the capital as it tries to ramp up medical facilities in response to the coronavirus.³⁹
- Spread of virus in crowded settlements, slums and impoverished neighborhoods is causing concern as such conditions render social distancing impossible. From townships of Johannesburg to makeshift camps of Mali, Burkina Faso and Niger, for most Africans; social distancing is considered a luxury.⁴⁰

Economic Impact

The pandemic has halted normal life necessitating isolated lifestyles and social distancing measures which have put millions out of work. Seventy per cent of the African population depends upon informal economy for survival.⁴¹ On the fate of formal African economies; a study by Mckinsey & Company has predicted that, African economies could experience a loss between

³⁴ * Data has been collected country-wise from the following source and then summed up to calculate the total amount. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

³⁵ Elliot Smith, “East Africa faces dual shock from coronavirus and locust swarms”, *CNBC*, March 23, 2020. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/23/east-africa-faces-dual-shock-from-coronavirus-and-locust-swarms.html>

³⁶ Ginger Hervey, 'Community infections could happen any time': Kenya prepares for Covid-19”, *The Guardian*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2020/mar/19/community-infections-could-happen-any-time-kenya-prepares-for-covid-19-coronavirus>

³⁷ * Data has been collected country-wise from the following source and then summed up to calculate the total amount. <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

³⁸ Sami Zaptia, “WHO ranks Libya as a Coronavirus “high risk” country”, *Libya Herald*, March, 30, 2020. <https://www.libyaherald.com/2020/03/30/who-ranks-libya-as-a-coronavirus-high-risk-country-municipalities-call-for-effective-action-while-u-s-embassy-provides-us-6-million-to-help-libya-fight-covid-19/>

³⁹ News Desk, “Tunisia seeks donations to fund coronavirus facilities”, *Reuters*, April 8, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-tunisia/tunisia-seeks-donations-to-fund-coronavirus-facilities-idUSKBN21P340>

⁴⁰ Karsten Noko, “In Africa, social distancing is a privilege few can afford”, *Al Jazeera*, March 22, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/africa-social-distancing-privilege-afford-200318151958670.html>

⁴¹ Aryn Baker, “Few Doctors, Fewer Ventilators: African Countries Fear They Are Defenseless Against Inevitable Spread of Coronavirus”, *Time*, April 7, 2020. <https://time.com/5816299/coronavirus-africa-ventilators-doctors/>

\$90 billion and \$200 billion in 2020 due to the coronavirus outbreak.⁴² Additional health spending on the pandemic is expected to reach \$10.6 billion across Africa.⁴³

- **Trade:** As demand for African exports in China has decreased during lockdown; the economic fallout of COVID-19 has already begun to affect Africa. The worst affected countries, economically, would be countries like Angola (61%), Eritrea (58%) and South Sudan (95%) who primarily sell their oil and non-oil products to China only.⁴⁴ Flower and cloth export demands from Kenya, Ethiopia, Lesotho and Ghana have also dried up.⁴⁵ Rwanda's border with Congo was closed on March 21st which also shut down small traders' businesses.⁴⁶ More than 90 per cent of Egypt's major projects have been suspended following the outbreak of the novel coronavirus.⁴⁷
- **Tourism:** Tourism industry that employs more than 24.3 million people on the continent particularly in Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Seychelles, Cape Verde and South Africa has also crashed.⁴⁸ South Africa has canceled more than 162 international and regional flights.⁴⁹ In Egypt, tourism constitutes about 20 per cent of the total GDP, and official estimates have put the number of tourist workers set to suffer from corona shutdown as three million.⁵⁰
- **Oil Crisis:** Major African oil exporting countries like Algeria, Nigeria and Angola are already feeling the pinch as oil prices have plummeted to \$30 per barrel.⁵¹
- **FDI & Remittances:** Experts predict that the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) could see significant reduction as African exports would lose their demand in global markets. Most African economies are dependent on Chinese investments, hence remittances that make

⁴² Kartik Jayaram, Acha Leke, Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, and Ying Sunny Sun, "Tackling covid-19 in Africa", *Mckinsey & Company*, April, 2020.

<https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/tackling-covid-19-in-africa>

⁴³ Landry Signe, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, "Africa Is Bracing for a Head-On Collision with Coronavirus", *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/26/africa-coronavirus-pandemic-economic-crisis/>

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Kartik Jayaram, Acha Leke, Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, and Ying Sunny Sun, "Tackling covid-19 in Africa", *Mckinsey & Company*, April, 2020. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/tackling-covid-19-in-africa>

⁴⁶ "Africa is woefully ill-equipped to cope with covid-19", *The Economist*, March 26, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/03/26/africa-is-woefully-ill-equipped-to-cope-with-covid-19>

⁴⁷ News Desk, "Egypt suspends 90% of national projects over coronavirus fears", *Middle East Monitor*, April 8, 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200408-egypt-suspends-90-of-national-projects-over-coronavirus-fears/>

⁴⁸ Landry Signe, Ameenah Gurib-Fakim, "Africa Is Bracing for a Head-On Collision With Coronavirus", *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/03/26/africa-coronavirus-pandemic-economic-crisis/>

⁴⁹ "Africa is woefully ill-equipped to cope with covid-19", *The Economist*, March 26, 2020. <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2020/03/26/africa-is-woefully-ill-equipped-to-cope-with-covid-19>

⁵⁰ "3m tourist workers in Egypt to suffer from COVID-19 shutdown", *Middle East Monitor*, April, 7, 2020. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200407-3m-tourist-workers-in-egypt-to-suffer-from-covid-19-shutdown/>

⁵¹ News Desk, "Coronavirus: The economic consequences for Africa", *African Business*, March 17, 2020. <https://africanbusinessmagazine.com/uncategorised/continental/africa-braces-for-coronavirus-shock/>

up for more than 5% of the GDP in about 13 African countries particularly in Lesotho (23%) could dry up.⁵²

- **SMEs and Local Businesses:** Most adversely affected are the local businesses, daily wage workers, laborers and small and medium enterprise owners who would need fiscal support from governments to keep businesses afloat. Weak African economies are in no position to support such small businesses.

Impact on Politics, Governance & Security

African countries are mostly characterized by political instability, poor governance, corruption and unrest. In times of a global pandemic; these fissures in state structure and functioning become even more pronounced.

- Despite calls for a global ceasefire on March 23, fighting escalated in Libya between the governments in Tobruk and Tripoli.
- Elections in Ethiopia, Malawi, Burundi and Ivory Coast have been delayed/postponed for the fear of an outbreak and this state of uncertainty in the absence of proper leadership can further exacerbate the effects of a disease outbreak in countries with fragile state structures.⁵³
- Civil-military relations and balance of power in crisis management and leadership in countries with deep political instability can further aggravate the situation. For instance, in South Africa and Kenya where the security forces have been called upon to enforce lockdowns; excessive use of force against the general public has also been reported.⁵⁴
- Impact on public forums of activism, civil rights' movements and protests is also becoming more and more pronounced as such movements have been banned in countries like Algeria. In some cases, like in Egypt; these movements have shifted online.⁵⁵
- Corruption and bribery rates in hospitals of the region was at 14 per cent according to a study published in 2018.⁵⁶ While during the Ebola outbreak in 2014-16; Sierra Leone and Guinea were both responsible for a corruption cost of more than \$6 mn.⁵⁷ Coronavirus outbreak could cause an even higher rate of corruption.

⁵² Kartik Jayaram, Acha Leke, Amandla Ooko-Ombaka, and Ying Sunny Sun, "Tackling covid-19 in Africa", *Mckinsey & Company*, April, 2020. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/middle-east-and-africa/tackling-covid-19-in-africa>

⁵³ Frances Z. Brown, Saskia Brechenmacher, Thomas Carothers, "How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?", April 6, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>

⁵⁴ News Desk, "Kenya police under fire over 'excessive force' as curfew begins", *Al Jazeera*, March 28, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/kenya-police-fire-excessive-force-curfew-begins-200328101357933.html>

⁵⁵ Frances Z. Brown, Saskia Brechenmacher, Thomas Carothers, "How Will the Coronavirus Reshape Democracy and Governance Globally?", *Carnegie Endowment*, April 6, 2020. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/04/06/how-will-coronavirus-reshape-democracy-and-governance-globally-pub-81470>

⁵⁶ "Corruption and the Coronavirus", *Transparency International*, April 3, 2020. https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_and_the_coronavirus

⁵⁷ "IFRC statement on fraud in Ebola operations", *IFRC*, October 20, 2017. <https://media.ifrc.org/ifrc/ifrc-statement-fraud-ebola-operations/>

- The outbreak is also being exploited by terror outfits and other disruptive elements in the African continent. Boko Haram has already killed 92 Chadian soldiers in a devastating attack as countries all over Africa have shifted attention from security to health concerns.⁵⁸ ISIS has encouraged its followers to keep launching attacks in these times as well while Al-Qaeda affiliate, Al-Shabab has been spreading hate by calling the virus; ‘a disease of non-believers.’⁵⁹
- Reports of possible spread of xenophobia can be a serious consequence of the pandemic as there have been cases in countries like Ethiopia where foreigners are being called names and attacked as carriers of “corona” as reported by the US embassy.⁶⁰ Similar cases of hate speech have come to light from Kenya and South Africa as well.⁶¹
- In response to a call to release prisoners across the region, Morocco has pardoned 5654 prisoners and ordered measures to protect inmates from the outbreak. Kenya on the other hand has said that it has employed measures to stop the possible entry of the virus into its prisons and has also banned prison visits.

Africa’s COVID-19 Response

- African Center for Disease Control (ACDC) under AU has been working closely with WHO since mid-February formulating a ‘continental strategy’ to combat the threat. The Bureau of the African Union Heads of State and Government held a meeting on March 26, 2020 to set up an African Coronavirus Fund to which member countries have pledged \$4 mn.⁶² AU has also taken the following steps; setting up Africa Taskforce for Coronavirus (AFTCOR), providing guidance on social distancing, expansion of testing capacity and has contributed \$12.5mn to African Coronavirus Fund.⁶³
- South Africa’s response has been by far the most aggressive in the region. The country has declared the outbreak, a national disaster, has tested more than 46,000 people while more private testing facilities are being set up, countrywide curfews are being forcefully held in place by security forces and travel ban is also in place. Other measures were: closing schools, imposing severe domestic and international travel restrictions and shutting entry points. Thirty-five of 53 land entry points have been closed, as have two out of eight seaports.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ News Desk, “Boko Haram kills 92 Chadian soldiers in seven-hour attack”, *The Guardian*, March 24, 2020. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/mar/24/boko-haram-kills-92-chadian-soldiers-in-seven-hour-attack>

⁵⁹ News Desk, “Coronavirus: Fighting al-Shabab propaganda in Somalia”, *BBC News*, April 2, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-52103799>

⁶⁰ Laura Kelly, “State warns foreigners ‘attacked’ in Ethiopia over coronavirus fears”, *The Hill*, March, 18, 2020. <https://thehill.com/policy/international/488322-state-warns-foreigners-attacked-in-ethiopia-over-coronavirus-fears>

⁶¹ Geoffery York, “Coronavirus triggers xenophobia in some African countries”, *The Globe and Mail*, March 19, 2020. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-coronavirus-triggers-xenophobia-in-some-african-countries/>

⁶² Antonia Witt, “An Island of Internationalism: The African Union’s Fight Against Corona”, *PRIF Blog*, April 7, 2020. <https://blog.prif.org/2020/04/07/an-island-of-internationalism-the-african-unions-fight-against-corona/>

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Victoria Schneider, “Tension, fear as South Africa steps up coronavirus fight”, *Al Jazeera*, March 18, 2020. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/tension-fear-south-africa-steps-coronavirus-fight-200318043032147.html>

- Kenya has imposed sweeping travel restrictions while nurses in the country have complained about scarcity of protective gear and no adequate training slowing down the isolation of infected patients, while Morocco has shut public baths or *Hamams*, cafes, restaurants, cinemas and mosques.
- Ethiopia has ordered closure of all schools and a ban on all public gatherings and sporting activities and in Ghana; a ban on all public gatherings and travel from countries with more than 200 cases of coronavirus has been placed. Mozambique has also banned all gatherings of more than 300 people.
- In North Africa, the army has been deployed in some countries. For instance, the Egyptian army, in coordination with other agencies, worked to sanitize key streets and squares in the country.
- In Tunisia, the closure of all borders and the suspension of prayers in mosques and the interior ministry is using a police robot to patrol the streets and ensure that the lockdown is being followed.⁶⁵ There is a ban on all travel to and from Europe in Algeria. Tunisia announced a lockdown and has promised to delay tax debts, postpone taxes on small- and medium-sized businesses, delay repayment of low-income employee loans, and provide financial assistance to poor families.
- In Morocco the government has put 1 billion dirhams into a special fund for its coronavirus response. In addition to this, the government has also announced that it will spend 2 billion dirhams to help support its health system. Morocco and Djibouti have suspended all international flights, while Angola has spent so far 4.5 billion Kwanzas (equivalent to USD 9 million) on expenses related to the prevention and fighting against COVID-19.⁶⁶

International Aid

WHO has taken measures including; early detection by providing thousands of corona testing kits to countries, training dozens of health workers and strengthening surveillance in communities. Forty-seven countries in the WHO African region can now test for coronavirus.⁶⁷ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has supported awareness campaigns by health educators in all 376 wards in Nigeria.

Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) on the Group of 20 countries has stepped up support to Africa in an immediate health and human response, deliver an immediate emergency economic stimulus to African governments in their efforts to respond to the coronavirus pandemic, and implement emergency measures to protect 30 million jobs immediately at risk across the continent, particularly in the tourism and airline sectors.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ News Desk, “Tunisia 'robocop' enforces coronavirus lockdown”, *MSN*, April 4, 2020.

<https://www.msn.com/en-xl/africa/africa-top-stories/tunisia-robocop-enforces-coronavirus-lockdown/ar-BB129Yrq?li=BBKxOg5>

⁶⁶ News Desk, “Angola: COVID-19 - Over Akz 4 Bln Spent On Fighting Coronavirus”, *All Africa*, April 6, 2020.

<https://allafrica.com/stories/202004070158.html>

⁶⁷ WHO, “African countries move from COVID-19 readiness to response as many confirm cases”, <https://www.afro.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus-covid-19>

⁶⁸ Department of Global Communications, “Defending Africa from COVID-19; UN and Governments brace for virus spread”, <https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/defending-africa-covid-19-un-and-governments-brace-virus-spread>

China has deployed massive humanitarian aid to Africa, starting with Ethiopia including: 5.4 million face masks, more than 1 million testing kits, 40,000 items of protective clothing and 60,000 sets of face shields through China's Alibaba Group Holding Ltd. and Jack Ma's foundation.⁶⁹ The United States announced additional foreign assistance funding of \$274 million to help 64 at-risk countries worldwide, including 14 African countries.⁷⁰

As of April 3, 2020, nearly \$370 mn have been approved by the World Bank for 10 African countries to combat COVID-19.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Samuel Gebre, "China Expands Medical Aid to Africa With First Ethiopia Shipment", *Bloomberg*, March 22, 2020.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2020-03-22/china-expands-medical-aid-to-africa-with-first-ethiopia-shipment>

⁷⁰ Nike Ching, "US Pledges Additional Foreign Aid to Battle COVID-19", *VOA*, March 26, 2020.

<https://www.voanews.com/usa/us-pledges-additional-foreign-aid-battle-covid-19>

⁷¹ Feature Story, "In the Face of Coronavirus, African Countries Apply Lessons from Ebola Response", *The World Bank*, April 3, 2020. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2020/04/03/in-the-face-of-coronavirus-african-countries-apply-lessons-from-ebola-response>