

Afghanistan	
Policy responses	
Containment	<p>24 February, first confirmed case was known, one who has returned from Iran</p> <p>Early March onwards, more than 9,000 – 11,000 Afghans are returning daily from Iran</p> <p>2 March, Afghan-Pakistan border was officially closed for 2 weeks</p> <p>12 March, Nowruz holiday (supposedly happening in 20 March) was cancelled</p> <p>14 March, public gatherings were prohibited, also announced that schools would not open until 21 April</p> <p>22 March, first confirmed death; health authorities launched a public awareness campaign to help the public understand in the prevention of the spread of the virus</p> <p>24-25 March, restrictive movements of residents in the provinces were imposed</p> <p>26 March, announced release of 10,000 prisoners</p> <p>28 March, Kabul went on lockdown for 3 weeks</p> <p>authorities held public campaigns on social distancing and washing of hands;</p> <p>Late March, 500 mosques in Herat were closed for religious services</p> <p>5 April, A fatwa was announced to restrict prayer services in mosques across the country</p> <p>11 April, Government announced that lessons would be taught online via television and radio</p> <p>7 May, Government launched a website for online learning</p> <p>Between March-April, there were temporary border closures between Afghanistan-Iran and Afghanistan-Pakistan, international flights were suspended except incoming from Pakistan and Dubai; domestic flights between Kabul and Herat (the epicenter of transmission in the country) were also suspended.</p> <p>Due to the limited number of testing kits and the testing laboratories (only 10 in the entire country), the number of infections is feared to be higher than what is being reported publicly.</p> <p>6 June, the Government of Afghanistan announced that it was extending the nationwide lockdown for three more months, issuing new health guidelines for citizens to follow. According to the new guidelines, people must wear a face mask in public places at all times, maintain a 2-metre physical distance, avoid gatherings of more than 10 people, disinfect all workplaces, and ensure older people stay at home. Additionally, all schools and educational centres, hotels, parks, sports complexes, and other public places will remain closed for three months since announcement. Public transport facilities, such as buses, carrying more than four passengers will not be allowed to travel. Restaurants and coffee shops will only be allowed to carry out service delivery and take-aways.</p>

	<p>Due to limited public health resources and testing capacity, as well as the absence of a national death register, confirmed cases and deaths from COVID-19 are likely to be under reported overall in Afghanistan.</p> <p>Hospitals and clinics continue to report challenges maintaining or expanding their facilities' capacity to treat patients with COVID-19. These challenges are related to the supply of personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits and medical supplies, as well as the limited number of trained staff – further exacerbated by the number of frontline staff falling ill.</p> <p>Early July, international commercial air travel has resumed with Turkish, Emirates Airlines, Ariana Airlines and Kam Air to/from Kabul. All passengers from Afghanistan need to carry COVID-19 negative certificated issued by a local government-approved laboratory.</p> <p>While COVID-19 cases spread across the country, misinformation about the disease spread even faster. Social media played an important role in promoting precautionary measures but was also filled with an avalanche of misconceptions and unfounded evidence. Some in rural communities resorted to taking antibiotics, while many young people in urban centers denied being infected - both because of the stigma surrounding the disease and fear of going into quarantine. To tackle the misinformation, the Ministry of Public Health, with World Bank support, implemented awareness campaigns disseminating life-saving messages, encouraging self-quarantine, social distancing, wearing face masks, frequent handwashing and advising against ineffective and harmful treatments to ward off the disease.</p> <p>In September, amidst fears and warnings of second wave of infection of the virus, the Ministry of Health assured that the government has got enough financial resources to tackle the second wave.</p> <p>After six months of lockdown, Afghans are finally relieved to have some freedom of movement. Residents can now go out to parks, swimming pools and gyms, shop in malls and celebrate marriages in wedding halls. Universities and private schools have reopened, and at government schools, the 11th and 12th grades have restarted.</p> <p>Unfortunately, the lockdown was not implemented effectively, that now that it has been lifted, people are failing to take the appropriate precautions. Given that, there are still cases of new infections on daily basis.</p> <p>7 February, Afghanistan experienced a relatively moderate second wave of infections during November-December with infections diminishing since the beginning of 2021. Schools reopened on February 28, and universities will resume in person instruction on March 5, 2021.</p>
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Fiscal	<p>The government initially allocated Af 8 billion (0.5 per cent of GDP) from contingency funds for emergency pandemic response. Allocation of Af 1.9 billion (0.1 per cent of GDP) for urgent health needs, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - establishing testing labs, including at border crossings; - setting up special wards to boost hospitalization and care capacity; - procuring the most critical medical supplies. <p>Provision of social relief package – From 29 April to end of June, free breads were provided to the poor in Kabul and later extended to other cities. Waived electricity bills of less than Afs 1,000 (US\$ 13) for a family residence in Kabul for two months and paid utility bills of the past two months for 50 per cent of households in Kabul. More than 1.5 million Kabul residents benefited.</p> <p>Tax filing deadline for the first quarter of 2020 extended by 45 days; no further extensions provided. the government offered to waive tax and customs payment penalties if taxpayers clear their due taxes before the end of the first quarter 2021.</p> <p>Through the support of the World Bank grant, the authorities rolled out a relief package, amounting to Af 21.6 billion to Afghan households with incomes of US\$2 per day or lower (twice the national poverty line).</p> <p>In 2020, the authorities spent 2.2 per cent of GDP to fight COVID including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health package amounting to Af 10.2 billion, of which Af 1.4 billion on building hospitals; - Social package worth Af 14.6 billion, of which Af 1.9 billion on the bread distribution program, and Af 12.7 billion on the World Bank supported social distribution program - Finance Covid-19 response in the provinces were around Af 1.5B - Support to agriculture and short-term jobs amounted to Af 5.2 billion and Af 1.0 billion. <p>The 2021 budget includes the following COVID-19 related spending:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health package of Af 2.4 billion; - Social package of Af 8.9 billion; <p>Others of Af 3.3 billion.</p>
Monetary	<p>Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB) has suspended administrative penalties and fees, postponed the IFRS-9 implementation to June 2021, and froze loan classifications at the pre-pandemic cutoff of end-February.</p>
Financial	<p>Investors and private sector to receive additional support from the Government if they invest in basic needs, particularly in cooking oil.</p>

	Increased the frequency of Financial Stability Committee meetings, enhanced the monitoring of early signs of liquidity stress, and reviewed banks' business continuity plans.
SME measures (last update 22 January 2021)	<p>Deferral of tax payment:¹</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government deferred taxes for all individuals and businesses for two months until 20 May 2020. <p>Other fiscal support: To ease tax compliance, the government extended filing deadlines on March 20 for individual and business taxpayers to April 3, later extended to July 5.²</p>
Other policy measures	A committee has been established to ensure price control of food items. Localizing the expenditure authority to governors for timely responses.

Source: International and local news; information compiled ILO, IMF, and OCHA humanitarian response report.

¹ <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19>

² <https://home.kpmg/xx/en/home/insights/2020/04/afghanistan-tax-developments-in-response-to-covid-19.html>