

[Updated 21/6/2020] GCC responses to tackle the Covid19 outbreak

As the GCC nations roll out various economic, financial, health and travel-related initiatives, the latest country-by-country measures is compiled below. Scroll down to see a map of the confirmed Covid-19 cases in the Middle East & North Africa region.

The list is update as of 3:00pm on 21st June, 2020.

Table: GCC responses to tackle the Covid19 outbreak

Bahrain	
Economic & Financial	Health & travel-related
<p>Will slash spending by ministries and government agencies by 30%</p> <p>BHD 4.3bn stimulus package: Doubling the Liquidity Fund to BHD 200mn + Waiver on utilities bills for 3 months + Delay in loans installments for 6 months + Supporting wages of citizens in pvt sector</p> <p>BHD 5m allocated to Bahraini families in need & individuals affected by Covid-19</p> <p>BHD 177mn (USD 470mn) will be added to this year's budget to tackle emergency expenses related to the Covid19 outbreak</p> <p>Central bank moves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Banned lenders from freezing customers' accounts in case of lost jobs or retirement - Cut overnight lending rate to 2.45% from 4% to ensure "smooth functioning of the money markets" (before Fed moves) <p>Parliament:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approved measures like reduction of commercial registration fees as well as labour & utility charges for 6 months <p>Cabinet authorised the finance minister to directly withdraw funds with a 5% ceiling from the public account</p> <p>Bahrain will not collect rents and allowance from all tenants of municipal properties for three months starting from Apr</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All non-essential medical services resume operations - Shops and industrial enterprises opened on May 7; restaurants remain closed still for dine-in customers - Plans to resume Friday prayers postponed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools scheduled to reopen in Sep - Bans public gatherings of more than 5 individuals - Bahrain will allow passengers to transit through the international airport; entry into the country will be limited to only citizens; mandatory 14-day self-isolation
Kuwait	
Economic & Financial	Health & travel-related

<p style="text-align: center;">Central bank:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced the discount rate to 1.5% (from 2.5%) a record-low <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced liquidity and capital adequacy requirements for banks & cut risk weighting for SMEs (estimated to raise bank lending by USD 16bn) - Domestic banks will defer payment of consumer & SME loans and financing, credit card instalments for six months <p>Set up a KWD 10mn (USD 33mn) fund, to be financed by Kuwaiti banks</p> <p>Government authorized additional funding of KWD 500mn (USD 1.5bn) to ministries and state agencies for fight against Covid19</p> <p>Suspended fees on point of sales devices and ATM withdrawals + increased the limit for contactless payments to KWD 25 from KWD 10</p> <p>The Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development pledged almost USD 95mn to support government efforts</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kuwait eases "total curfew" to between 7pm to 5am; lockdown on Hawally area has been lifted - Parliament suspended for 2 weeks (from Jun 18); public sector employees not be allowed to return to offices from this week (starting Jun 21) - Expiring residence permits/ visas expiring in Jun extended for 3 months - Closed schools, shopping centres, cinemas, wedding halls & children's entertainment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Halted ALL commercial passenger flights - All educational institutions in Kuwait will reopen on 4th Aug
Oman	
Economic & Financial	Health & travel-related
<p>CB announces a \$20bn incentive package</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repo rate cut by 75bps to 0.5%; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce Capital Conservation Buffers for banks to 1.25% from 2.5%; - Lending Ratio / Financing Ratio for lenders increased to 92.5% up from 87.5% - banks and financial institutions to freeze repayments of personal and housing loans for three months, effective from May <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce existing fees related to banking services + avoid introducing new fees <p>Finance ministry slashed approved budgets of civil, military and security agencies by 5%</p> <p>All government companies have to reduce approved expenditures for 2020 by 10% + no execution of new projects or capital expenditures for the year; all exceptional bonuses for state employees would be halted</p> <p>Other measures include tourism & municipality tax breaks, free government storage facilities and postponement of credit instalment payments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lockdown in Muscat ended; Dhofar Governorate in Oman closed from 12 noon of June 13 until July 3 for tourism - At least 50% of employees in government entities will work from the offices starting May 31 - Oman has closed its borders; all domestic and international flights to and from airports suspended from 12 noon of Mar 29 - Covid-19 tests and treatments will be done for free for all communities - Suspend issuance of tourist visas; will not allow cruise ships to dock at its ports during this period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools closed; all public parks closed, public gathering prohibited, Friday prayers at mosques suspended; limited staffing at estate entities - Few shops in Oman (consulting, law, audit firms, flower shops, boutiques etc) to reopen - Restrictions are still in place on gatherings (of more than 5 individuals) on beaches and other public places
Qatar	
Economic & Financial	Health & travel-related

<p>A \$23.3bn stimulus package</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - QAR 75bn (\$20.6bn) to provide financial + economic incentives for private sector - CB to put in place an appropriate mechanism to encourage banks to postpone loan installments and obligations of the private sector with a grace period of 6 months - Qatar Development Bank to postpone installments for all borrowers for 6 months - Qatar's government entities directed to reduce costs for non-Qatari employees by 30% as of Jun 1 (either pay cuts or layoffs) - Directing govt funds to increase investments in the stock exchange by QAR 10bn (\$2.75bn) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exempting food & medical goods from customs duties for 6 months - Utilities bill exemption for SMEs, affected sectors; rent exemption for 6 months 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Four-phased recovery programme planned: Mosques to reopen Jun 15th, restaurants to partially reopen (Jul 1) - All international flights suspended from Mar 18; cargo aircraft, transit flights exempt; travel ban on all travelers except Qatari nationals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Qatar Airways grounds its A380 fleet; to temporarily reduce 40% of staff (in food and beverage, retail & ground staff) at Hamad Airport - Educational institutions closed; parks and public beaches closed <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Bans social gatherings; introduces enforcement measures: checkpoints and mobile police patrols - Private sector companies instructed to have 80% of their staff work from home, effective Thurs (Apr 2) for an initial 2 weeks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public transport modes have been stopped <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 tonnes of aid sent to Iran (medical equipment & supplies); donating \$150mn in aid to Gaza
Saudi Arabia	
Economic & Financial	Health & travel-related

- **SAR 120bn worth measures** to support the pvt sector including postponement of VAT/ excise/ income tax/ Zakat payments, exemptions of govt dues etc
- **SAMA's SAR 50bn stimulus package:** financing support for SMEs (including deferred loan payments, concessional loans) and coverage of points of sale & e-commerce fees
- **SAMA's measures for supporting & financing the private sector:** adjusting or restructuring the current funds without any additional costs or fees + reviewing reassessment of interest rates and other fees on credit cards + refunding travel-related forex transfer fees
- **SAR 7bn allocated to Health Ministry in addition to the SAR 8bn package earlier** + SAR 32bn approved for healthcare facilities
 - **Government will cover 60% of private sector salaries (of Saudi citizens)** hit by Covid-19; first payment to be send on May 3.
 - Will **allow private businesses** (affected by Covid19) **to reduce working hours and permit wages to be reduced** by not more than 40%
- **Additional set of measures announced:** SAR 50bn to accelerate payment of private sector dues & provide liquidity to several sectors while a further SAR 47bn was set aside for the health sector
- **Saudi Industrial Development Fund** revealed a SAR 3.7bn (USD 3.62bn) stimulus package for industrial sector companies
- **Initiatives to reduce private sector's burdens related to manpower:** e.g. lifting halts on non-payment of fines, fines related to workers recruitment etc.
- **Saudi Arabia will cut SAR 50bn** (USD 13.32bn or less than 5%) of the 2020 budget; **cost of living allowance scrapped**
 - **VAT to be tripled to 15% starting 1st Jul**
- Land borders with UAE, KW, Bahrain closed except for commercial trucks; shipping services suspended from 50 countries; cargo traffic not affected

- **Restrictions eased across the nation: Saudi Arabia initiates the 3rd phase of its recovery plan** by opening most commercial activities from **Jun 20**. Mosques in Makkah are also set to reopen with social distancing measures in place.
- **Domestic flights resume; intl passenger flights still suspended + workplace attendance in both public and private sectors**
- **Malls reopen with multiple safety measures**
- **Mosques reopened with restrictions; Umrah pilgrimages** to Mecca & Medina under a temporary ban
- Capital Markets Authority **urged shareholders & invested in listed companies to vote electronically** in upcoming meetings; **Tadawul reduces trading hours**

United Arab Emirates

Economic & Financial

Health & travel-related

<p>UAE announces a 2-phase recovery plan: short-term gradual re-opening (include the AED 282.5bn stimulus) + focus on sectors “with high potential” in the long-term (AI, 5G, IoT, Blockchain, RE, EVs, 3D printing, robotics...)</p> <p>Central bank:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - AED100bn stimulus to facilitate temporary relief on private sector loans & promote SME lending; support also the real estate sector - 50% reduction in reserve requirements for demand deposits to 7% (releasing ~ USD 16.6bn in liquidity) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Banks to reschedule loans contracts + grant deferrals on monthly loan payments (till end-2020) + reduce fees and commissions <p>UAE Cabinet: additional AED 16bn stimulus to reduce cost of doing business, support small business, accelerate implementation of govt infrastructure projects</p> <p>Ministry of Economy reduced fees of 94 services</p> <p>Dubai: AED 1.5bn stimulus package to support businesses affected by Covid19 including 10% reduction in utilities bills</p> <p>Abu Dhabi: AED 5bn in utilities subsidies; free road tolls till end-2020, 20% rebate on rental values for restaurants + tourism & entertainment sectors (+ faster implementation of Ghadan-21 initiatives)</p> <p>Dubai Freezones launch stimulus package: rents postponed for six months; cancellation of fines; free movement of labour with temporary contracts</p> <p>Federal Tax Authority extends the Excise Tax return submission deadline for March and April 2020 to May 17, 2020</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Varied restriction across emirates: Abu Dhabi imposes movement ban from/to the emirate till Jun 23rd; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easing of restrictions: mall capacity increased; restaurants, gyms, beaches, museums reopen. - Dubai permits shopping malls and private businesses to operate at full capacity - Metro services re-open; buses and taxis are operational - 30% of federal employees return to work from May 31; full capacity in Dubai’s govt offices & 30% in Sharjah’s govt offices from Jun 14 - Curfews reduced to between 10pm-6am; in Dubai from 11pm to 6am - Entry for residents overseas to start from Jun 1; temporary ban to issue new visas <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All inbound, outbound and transit flights suspended from Mar 25; Emirates bookings are open from Jul 1 for 12 Arab nations; UAE airports welcome transit passengers. - Schools to be closed till end-Jun; distance learning extended. Schools will reopen in Sep, though discussions ongoing regarding the method of learning in the 2020-21 academic year. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mosques, churches and other places of worship remain closed - Opened, with social distancing measures: public parks, beaches, cinemas, gyms - Supporting others: Sends 2 batches critical medical aid to Iran in Mar + flew 215 people from different countries out of Wuhan to Abu Dhabi’s Emirates Humanitarian City
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Map: Number of Confirmed Covid19 cases by country (Source: Johns Hopkins University)

Middle East

North Africa

Iran & Afghanistan

