



IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND RESPONSES IN LANDLOCKED DEVELOPING COUNTRIES



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Contents

Executive Summary and Key Messages	iii
Acronyms	ix
1. Introduction	1
2. Overview of the prevalence of COVID-19, vulnerability factors and Impact on Health	2
3. Transport, cross-border transit and trade facilitation	13
4. International Trade	26
5. Overall Economic Impact	31
6. Digital connectivity and ICT	35
7. Education	42
8. Food security	50
9. Gender equality	54
10. Social protection	59
11. International support and recovery	62
12. Conclusions	68
13. References	69
14. Annexes	74

Executive Summary and Key Messages

The COVID-19 pandemic's impacts have been felt worldwide. The crisis has reshaped social-interaction, jobs, economies, trade, and the overall international order. While advanced economies have been able to somewhat address the negative impact of the pandemic with efficient social protection services and alternatives to in-person work and education, the pandemic has been less lenient on developing nations.

The impact of the pandemic on landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) has been distinct. Given the LLDCs' geographical constraints, prevention and mitigation measures such as border closures and restrictions have had resounding effects on this group of countries, such as on the timely delivery and availability of necessary goods and flow of income. The pandemic has amplified the pre-existing vulnerabilities that these group of countries experience such as: heavy reliance on transit countries for international trade; high dependency on primary commodities for exports (such as meat, soyabeans, minerals, oil etc); inadequate transport, digital and energy connectivity, and limited social protection. This report covers the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on different sectors of the LLDCs as well as identifies relevant policy recommendations to mitigate the impact and to build back better.

The overall prevalence of COVID-19 has risen significantly within LLDCs since March 2020. According to the World Health Organization's Coronavirus Disease Dashboard, LLDCs had confirmed 2.8 million cases of COVID-19 as of 9 April 2021 compared to 955 on 24 March 2020 and 55,595 deaths as of 9 April 2021 compared to 9 on 24 March 2020. COVID-19 cases and deaths in LLDCs is now accounting for 2.09% and 1.88% of the world's totals, respectively. The recent surge at the beginning of 2021 was a result of new contagious COVID-19 variants.

The report notes the distinct impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on LLDCs. The dual event of a health pandemic and global recession could prove harmful to not only future progress, but past developments in the LLDCs. Thus, further hampering progress towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations in the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024. Recovery and continuing progress in the LLDCs will require enhanced and focused support from development partners, transit countries, South-South partners, UN Development System, Multilateral Development Banks, International Monetary Fund, private sector and foundations. It is imperative that LLDCs be supported to sustain the pandemic, its impacts and in their recovery efforts, to make strides to build back better.

Key messages

The **impact of COVID-19 on health sector in LLDCs** is varied across the countries and is dependent on the country's health care capacity. Available data on existing key health care resource indicators (although not complete), shows lack of adequate necessary healthcare resources, equipment, and hospital capacities that are much lower than world average. The availability of medical supplies is further exacerbated by slowdowns in trade and cross-border transit. In terms of availability and implementation of preventative measures such as handwashing and social-distancing, there are notable disparities within the LLDCs between rural and urban areas, as certain LLDCs' rural areas lack suitable sanitation facilities. Overall, the LLDCs' access to sanitation facilities is far lower than that of the world average. They also lack capacity in testing

and tracking systems to contain community infections. Unforeseen consequences of the pandemic have included a diversion of medical equipment and supplies treating those with illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria.

At the end of March 2021, some vaccines had been delivered in some LLDCs under the COVAX initiative but in many of the LLDCs the amount of vaccines available is low. Support from the COVAX initiative should be scaled up for the LLDCs so that they are able to vaccinate all. LLDCs are encouraged to develop partnerships or prepare the logistics for vaccine distribution. It is critical that development partners, the United Nations, International Financial Institutions and other international and regional organizations support LLDCs with the resources and personnel needed to support healthcare systems; import the needed medical equipment and supplies; and ensure their rapid access to adequate supply of COVID-19 vaccines.

Impact on **transport, cross-border transit and trade facilitation** include travel restrictions and requirements which have delayed the movement of goods and services across borders. Many LLDCs and transit countries have initiated lifting some of these restrictions in favour of partial closures or certain exceptions. Regional Economic Communities have developed transport, cross-border transit and trade facilitation regulations aligned with international guidelines such as WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement and WHO health guidelines, which have allowed for intra-regional movement.

In light of the impacts of COVID-19, it is recommended that LLDCs and transit countries keep cross-border transport networks open for goods and supply chains while protecting the safety of workers and citizens; expedite cross-border trade facilitation to ensure faster passage of medical supplies; mobilize digital technologies that limit physical interactions at checkpoints; ensure transparency about information related to import, export, and transit procedures; harmonize public and safety measures at border posts, and intensify implementation of actions highlighted in the Vienna Programme of Action, amongst others.

With regard to **international trade**, the pandemic has resulted in significant slowdowns in the movement of goods and services which has affected the trade potential of LLDCs. Many LLDCs have been affected by export bans and trade restrictions on essential goods. The pandemic has also resulted in a drop in commodity prices, a sector that LLDCs have historically relied upon. Many LLDCs' balance of payments are expected to decline, as exports have dropped by both a lack of demand and restrictions, while imports have increased to sustain livelihoods of their populations.

In order to restore international trade potential of LLDCs, it is crucial that development partners, the United Nations and other international and regional organizations support LLDCs to: build their productive capacities, diversify their economies, promote value-addition to their exports and join global and regional value chains. It is crucial that the high trade costs faced by LLDCs are addressed with support from all partners of LLDCs through increased investment into all forms of connectivity – transport, digital and energy – and promotion of contactless trade facilitation. It is important that countries maintain their commitment to multilateralism and keep emergency measures transparent, targeted, proportionate and consistent with WTO rules and also exercise restraint in export restrictions and other measures that disrupt the flow of goods and services.

The **overall economic** impacts of the pandemic are reflected in the negative economic growth rates estimated for all LLDCs for the year 2020. The drastic fall of prices and demand for commodities due to the pandemic, loss in key sectors such as tourism, aviation, manufacturing and others have impacted the LLDCs' balance of payments and increased their debt vulnerability. According to UNDESA's 2021 report of the World Economic Situation and Prospects, LLDCs' economies contracted on average by 2.4 per cent in 2020. Many people were pushed into poverty, many of them women, children and people from marginalized communities. The modest recovery of 4.1 per cent that is expected in 2021 for LLDCs would not be adequate to offset the losses of 2020 and to address the goals of the VPoA and the SDGs.

Many LLDC governments have instated stimulus and policy measures to support micro, small and medium sized businesses, including tax relief, cash transfers and lowering of interest rates. More efforts are required to ensure that the rebound is achieved and sustained. Other policy measures that are required include: extending support to the informal sector; promoting self-employment by enabling micro-finance opportunities and making digital banking more accessible to the poor; enhancing social protection; boost demand and job growth through increased government spending on labour-intensive projects; relief measures targeted specifically to LLDCs' needs; and supporting the private sector.

A prominent impact of the pandemic has been the rise of importance of **digital connectivity and information communications and technology (ICT)**. This sector has lagged significantly in LLDCs in the past, where less than half of the rural population in LLDCs have access to electricity. However, impacts of the pandemic on this sector have involved government taking measures to prioritize digital connectivity infrastructure. Many telecommunication companies have provided free or discounted options for calls, SMS, and data, as well as offering services such as telemedicine and e-learning.

In order to enhance digital connectivity and ICT, LLDCs are recommended to place connectivity and digital technology at the forefront of their policy concerns; to develop the necessary digital infrastructure by implementing Priority Area 2 of the Vienna Programme of Action for ICT and energy infrastructure; continue collaboration between government, the private sector, transit countries, and regional and international partners; enhance ICT skills among their population to be able to utilize digital connectivity; develop measures to increase cybersecurity, raise awareness, and establish appropriate legislation and cross-border cooperation.

The pandemic's impact on **education** has varied in the LLDC group depending on whether schools are open and the range of available options for alternatives to in-person instruction. As of November 2020, over 50% of schools were either partially or fully closed. Estimates show that students in middle to low-income countries lost around 47 days of school on average in 2020. The distance-learning options across LLDCs that have been implemented include e-learning, mobile apps, television and radio broadcast, and e-libraries. However, it has been very difficult in some LLDCs owing to lack of digital infrastructure.

Recommendations for maintaining education systems in the LLDCs include government working to build back better with more resilient education systems to boost access to available platforms and support teachers and parents/caregivers; governments and the development partners must

continue to invest in education now and in the coming years so that children may safely resume learning; governments to mobilize/allocate additional financial resources to cover COVID-19 related costs in the education sector and support the safe reopening of schools.

The impact to **food security** in LLDCs has entailed an increase in the prevalence of undernutrition and other instances of food insecurity, which have been further exacerbated by inflation in food prices as trade and agricultural sectors have slowed down and disruptions in supply chains. Other challenges that exacerbated the impact of COVID-19 on food security in LLDCs include climate change related drought, cyclones such as Idai, high level of informal economy, insufficient transport infrastructure, low level of overall digitalization, high levels of poverty, and limited economic diversification. Poor households that spend a large part of their income on food are the hardest hit by food price inflation.

In order to prevent and suppress food insecurity in LLDCs, recommendations include support from development partners, the United Nations and other international organizations to increase humanitarian support, strengthen food supply chains and promote measures to facilitate affordable food supplies. It is also crucial to strengthen development of interventions that address the root causes of food insecurity, increase investment towards a more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and resilient food system, and to ensure that gender inequalities are addressed and the needs of elderly and young people are met. Furthermore, LLDC governments should create relief and stimulus packages to alleviate liquidity constraints on vulnerable households, small-scale food producers, rural businesses and farmers. Trading partners including transit countries should keep trade channels open to facilitate the free movement of goods and avoid unnecessary food price crisis. It is critical that donor countries ensure continued delivery of humanitarian assistance where food insecurity is already high.

In terms of **gender equality**, evidence shows that the impacts and implications of COVID-19 are exacerbating existing gender inequalities and posing an additional burden for women and girls. A greater burden on care and domestic work in the home fall on women and girls. Globally, 70% of workers in the health and social sector are women, and as such they are more likely to be exposed to the virus. Incidence of gender-based violence is increasing as many women are facing increased intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence while confined at home during lockdowns. Women are also hit harder by economic impacts caused by COVID-19 because they are more often engaged in short-term, part-time or informal employment which offers limited social security, pension and health insurance.

In order to achieve and protect gender equality, LLDCs are recommended to expand social protection programmes and strengthen safety nets with gender responsiveness and a sensitivity to vulnerable groups; provide specific programmes to support women's return to economic activity such as public works, access to training and credit, and direct provision of productive inputs to female farmers; provide programmes that ensure women access to care support to allow them to return to work; provide special attention to women's mental and physical health; provide services that address violence against women and girls, amongst others.

In terms of **social protection**, governments in LLDCs have had to find ways to sustain their citizens as many of them are out of work or affected by COVID-19. Social protection services in

LLDCs have included measures to extend the duration and reach of existing benefits, cash transfers, subsidies for wages, reducing the costs of utilities, increasing budgets, tax relief, prohibiting dismissal from work, prophylactic care/leave, amongst other measures. However, in many LLDCs effective social protection systems remain limited in coverage.

Recommendations to enhance social protection in the LLDCs include expanding social protection programmes and strengthening social safety nets to help prevent vulnerable groups from falling further into poverty, help families and businesses restore income, preserve livelihoods, and compensate for price hikes; ensuring that social protection systems and interventions are shock responsive, gender sensitive, and relevant to the needs of all vulnerable populations; allocating sufficient public funds required towards realizing social protection for all at the national level; ensuring that economic recovery programs are inclusive of all vulnerable groups and their families; developing and strengthening national data management systems and processes to facilitate the collection, management and analysis of social protection data that are accurate, relevant and timely to monitor implementation; and promoting partnerships, peer learning, knowledge exchange and the sharing of good practices among LLDCs.

The pandemic's impact on **international support, financing for development and recovery** have required governments, multilateral organizations and international financial institutions (IFIs) alike to innovate mechanisms to overcome the existing hurdles. LLDCs were low on domestic resources and capital before the onset of the pandemic. However, many LLDCs have mobilized emergency funds or reallocated funds for projects to combat the costly impacts of COVID-19. These efforts are dwarfed, however, in comparison to those in more advanced economies. Although many IFIs have structured emergency funds, the financing gap remains wide for LLDCs. Declines in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in previous years has deprived LLDCs of necessary capital, the effects of which are far more apparent now. Many advanced nations are spending to sustain the impact of the virus in their own countries, leaving very little for international support. Similarly, industrial shutdowns have left remittance flows dry.

A growing concern is of debt. The high pre-existing levels of debt in LLDCs are threats to the spending and borrowing needed to sustain lives. Many countries and multilateral organizations have called for forms of debt relief, that not only ease the burden but also allow governments to focus on saving lives and livelihoods.

Recommendations to promote and maintain the flow of international support and financing for recovery and development include: development partners increasing ODA to LLDCs and be attentive to supporting COVID-19 sustainable recovery; countries of the South striving to increase financial and technical assistance to LLDCs in the spirit of South-South Cooperation; leveraging ODA to mobilize other financing resources; LLDCs employing relevant investment policies to cushion the impact of the pandemic on FDI inflows; governments of host countries and the broader international community promoting the use of digital transfers of remittances and reducing the remittance transaction fees; lenders relaxing debt repayments for highly indebted countries; creditors considering debt swaps to enhance social investments and address the impact of COVID-19; private and commercial creditors joining debt cancellation and debt moratoriums; and developing a more coordinated effort for development finance partners to address the emerging

debt crisis through fairer and more effective mechanisms for debt crisis resolution. LLDCs also need to improve business environment to promote private sector development and attract foreign direct investment. LLDCs also need to think about greener structural transformation as an alternative to conventional industrialization. This will make them more resilient in future and adapt to climate change.

Overall, although all recommendations listed in the report are crucial to the LLDCs' resilience and sustainable recovery from the pandemic. There are however a few key recommendations that are urgent in nature and should be given priority by governments and development partners:

- Ensure that LLDCs are not left behind on access to vaccines. Vaccines should be made public goods so that LLDCs are able to access them. Efforts should be made to support enhancement of infrastructures that can ensure the smooth distribution of vaccines to LLDCs. Development partners need to work with LLDC governments to follow guidelines and strategize distribution channels.
- Intensify regional cooperation and ensure that trade and transport corridors remain open with personnel strictly following health safety precautions, to ensure the uninterrupted flow of goods and services.
- LLDCs should seek to digitalize their transit mechanisms to ensure the safe and uninterrupted processing in cross-border transit.
- Strengthening of global supply chains for LLDCs is important for ensuring adequate flow of essential goods, medicines and food.
- LLDCs should aim to sustain their populations and their survival by extending and increasing social protection programs with the support of the international community. Such programs should incorporate a gender-sensitive, elderly and disability-sensitive and childhood-preserving aspect to ensure that women, elderly, the disabled and children are not disproportionately affected by COVID-19's impacts.
- LLDCs must ensure that education is uninterrupted during the pandemic and should seek to implement distanced-learning methods that stop children from dropping out of school and into labour.
- LLDCs and development partners must enhance partnerships and programs to ensure that the number of food-insecure people does not increase, and that development gains in this field are not reversed.

Acronyms

ACT	Access to COVID-19 Tools
ASYCUDA	Automated System for Customs and Data
BCPs	Border Checkpoints
COMESA	Common Market for East and Southern Africa
COVID-19	Coronavirus 2019
DAC	Development Assistance
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
EAC	East African Community
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
ECCAS	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EU	European Union
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
IATA	International Air Transport Association
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICTs	Information, Communication Technologies
IDA	International Development Assistance
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPAs	Investment promotion agencies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
LLDCs	Land Locked Developing Countries
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PPE	Personal protective equipment
RECs	Regional Economic Communities
RECI	Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SMMEs	Small, Medium and Micro-sized Enterprises
TFA	Trade facilitation Agreement
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDCO	United Nations Development Coordination Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa

UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UN-OHRLLS	United Nations Office of the High Representative for Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
USD	United States Dollar
VPoA	Vienna Programme of Action
WCO	World Customs Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
WFP	World Food Programme
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

Landlocked Developing Countries (LLDCs) lack territorial access to the sea and face unique challenges in achieving their development goals. These challenges include remoteness and limited access to international markets, long distances from the seaports and transit problems, reliance on transit neighbouring countries for international trade, difficulties in hard and soft infrastructure, high trade and transaction costs, lack of productive capacities, high dependence on international trade and in particular, on commodities such oil, minerals, vulnerability to climate change, desertification and land degradation amongst many.

Today, COVID-19 marks a severe development challenge for LLDCs at household and at national levels. The 32 LLDCs located on four continents have a combined population of 533 million or about 6.8% of total global population (2020). Nearly 1/3 of the population of LLDCs live in extreme poverty and the average ranking of LLDCs on the Human Development Index lags behind the world average. The pandemic is much more than a health crisis as it is resulting in significant socio-economic impacts affecting the ability of the LLDCs to achieve the goals of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs for the decade 2014-2024 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Given their geographical location, heavy reliance on international trade and fragile economic and social structures, the ongoing spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout has potential devastating impacts on human health and the social and economic situation in LLDCs.

The total case count and proportion of the world's confirmed cases has risen significantly within LLDCs since April 2020. According to the World Health Organization's Coronavirus Disease Dashboard, LLDCs had confirmed 2.77 million cases of COVID-19 as of 9th April 2021 compared to 955 on 24 March 2020 and 55,595 deaths as of 9th April 2021 compared to 9 on 24 March 2020. COVID-19 cases and deaths in LLDCs is now accounting for 2.09% and 1.93% of the world's totals, respectively. The WHO database also shows a similarly bleak situation for the 34 transit countries, who have climbed from about 25.4% of confirmed cases and 16.3% of deaths around the world in late May to 30.83% of confirmed cases and 29% of deaths as of 9th April 2021. These numbers are also slightly skewed by large counts coming from a few hotspot transit countries, but the overall trend for LLDCs and transit neighbours alike has been alarming. The recent surge at the beginning of 2021 was a result of new contagious COVID-19 variants.

The inherent structural vulnerabilities that LLDCs face not only affect their abilities to combat the spread and proliferation of the virus and contain its impact, but also stand to be an obstacle in maintaining whatever progress has been made in the development journey thus far. While governments in LLDCs must respond to the immediate impacts of COVID-19, they are also confronted with threats to long-term development progress in terms of improving transit for goods and services, reducing trade costs and increasing their capacity to trade, poverty eradication, increasing food security, sustainability, etc.

The unique challenges of the LLDCs imply that specific areas that need critical consideration include addressing linkages with the issues of transport connectivity, dependency on transit neighbours, digital connectivity, transit/cross-border/trade facilitation, trade, regional integration,

and structural transformation/diversification. These challenges are in addition to broader issues such as means of implementation, employment, remittances, tourism, agriculture/food security among many others. The LLDCs have much lower fiscal capacity to support businesses and people that have been negatively affected.

Without proper assistance and actions taken from outside stakeholders and their own governments, large numbers of LLDC citizens risk falling into poverty.

The objective of this report is to review the impact of COVID-19 on LLDCs, identify the responses that have been undertaken so far and the challenges faced and propose recommendations to promote sustainable recovery for the LLDCs.

The report uses desk review to assess how LLDCs are being impacted by COVID-19. The review involved an examination of existing literature including: Reports and policy briefs of the UN Secretary General; COVID-19 Socio-economic Impact Assessments and Response Frameworks by the United Nations; National Reports and Statements on COVID-19; Reports by other UN and other international organizations; Regional Reports; and other online sources. The report benefitted from discussions and inputs made by economists from United Nations Resident Coordinators at a virtual meeting on Impact of COVID-19 and Responses in Landlocked Developing Countries held on 2 March 2021.

The paper is divided into 12 sections. Each of the thematic sections discusses the key impacts, issues and challenges experienced and offers recommendations to assist the LLDCs in their recovery efforts to build back better. The next section discusses an overview of the prevalence of COVID-19 in LLDCs and the impact on health. The report then examines the impact of COVID-19 on the areas that are critical to LLDCs including: transport, trade, other economic impacts and digital connectivity and ICT. In the following section the report considers the impact on food security, education, social protection and gender equality. This is followed by a discussion of means of implementation to support responses to COVID-19. The last section summarizes the key conclusions.

2. Overview of the prevalence of COVID-19, vulnerability factors and Impact on Health

The COVID-19 cases and deaths are increasing and consequently the demand for health care resulting in higher health sector costs. The health systems of LLDCs are weaker than those elsewhere in the world, with lower ratios of health professionals and hospital beds to their population. They are also critically dependent on imported medical and pharmaceutical products.

The number of cases and deaths in LLDCs are presented on a country-by-country basis in table 2.1. As shown, these numbers are rising in LLDCs.

Table 2.1: COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in LLDCs

Country	Total Cases (March 2020)	Total Cases (9 April 2021)	Deaths (March 2020)	Deaths (9 April 2021)	Deaths-to-Cases (%) (9 April 2021)
Afghanistan	166	56,943	4	2516	4.42
Armenia	482	200,129	3	3,675	1.84
Azerbaijan	273	276,464	4	3,780	1.37
Bhutan	4	900	0	1	0.11
Bolivia	97	276,890	5	12,366	4.47
Botswana	-	41,710	-	616	1.48
Burkina Faso	246	12,873	12	150	1.17
Burundi	-	3,027	-	6	0.20
Central African Republic	6	5,402	0	74	1.37
Chad	5	4,606	0	166	3.60
Eswatini	9	17,365	0	669	3.85
Ethiopia	23	221,544	0	3,058	1.38
Kazakhstan	312	312,558	1	3,812	1.22
Kyrgyzstan	109	89,660	0	1,516	1.69
Lao PDR	8	49	0	0	0.00
Lesotho	-	10,707	-	315	2.94
Macedonia	285	137,728	7	4,073	2.96
Malawi	-	33,718	-	1,125	3.34
Mali*	30	10,841	3	400	3.69
Mongolia	12	12,226	0	17	0.14
Nepal	5	278,768	0	3,038	1.09
Niger	20	5,052	3	188	3.72
Paraguay	64	224,736	3	4,522	1.99
Republic of Moldova	298	237,718	2	5,268	2.01
Rwanda	70	23,041	0	314	1.36
South Sudan	-	10,297	-	113	1.10
Tajikistan**	-	13,714	-	91	0.66
Uganda	33	41,046	0	337	0.82
Uzbekistan	149	84,322	2	634	0.75
Zambia	35	89,386	0	1,224	1.37
Zimbabwe	5	36,984	1	1,531	4.14
Total LLDCs	2734	2,770,404	47	55,595	2.01
LLDC % of World	0.39%	2.09%	0.14%	1.93%	-
Total World	693,282	132,730,691	33,106	2,880,726	2.17%

Total Transit Countries	144,717	40,919,642	6,340	835,317	2.04%
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Source: World Health Organization, Coronavirus Disease Dashboard

*Mali: COVID-19 Situation Report # 1 April 1, 2020

** Tajikistan: <https://eng.khovar.tj/2021/03/no-new-covid-19-cases-registered-over-the-past-day-66/>

Vulnerability factors in LLDCs

The most common methods of transmission for LLDCs according to the WHO Situation Report data are by Community Transmission or Cluster of Cases which are identified by large outbreaks of local transmission or by outbreaks clustered in time, geography, location or common exposure, respectively. One of the major contributing factors could be attributed to the overcrowding that takes place in some African LLDCs due to urbanization trends that have pushed 56% of African citizens into slums or other overcrowded living situations, making community transmission extremely easy (UNECA, 2020). Another factor could be the large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) that live in overcrowded areas, with shared facilities such as refugee camps, with inadequate water supply and general sanitation which precludes these vulnerable parts of the population from following the basic preventative measures against COVID-19. According to the IDMC 2020 Global Report on Internal Displacement, LLDCs such as Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Mali and South Sudan have high number of IDPs. Other LLDCs are facing high number of internally displaced persons due to disasters such as cyclones, droughts, floods, for example Nepal, Afghanistan, Niger, Central African Republic, Malawi, Uganda, Zimbabwe, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad, Lao PDR, Bolivia, and Paraguay (IDMC, 2020, Reliefweb, 2020).

Limitations to basic handwashing facilities can affect the ability of populations in LLDCs to protect themselves from COVID-19. Table 2.2 below indicates the access that citizens of LLDCs have to basic handwashing facilities on their premises, disaggregated by urban and rural areas. The data shows access to be lower than world average and to be worse in rural areas thus posing as an obstacle for some LLDCs in their efforts to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Table 2.2 Proportion of the population in LLDCs with Basic Handwashing Facilities on Premises (2017)

	Average	Minimum	Maximum
Urban	55.4%	5.9%	100%
Rural	24.6%	0.65%	100%
World Average	60.1%	0.59%	100%

Source: WHO/UNICEF, 2019

Furthermore, some of the LLDCs faced challenges in communicating the threat of the infections to the community. As a result, public health measures such as social distancing and lockdowns were not effectively implemented.

The LLDCs have a less well-resourced health-care sector. The Rand in 2016 analyzed and ranked 195 countries for their vulnerability to infectious disease (Moore et. Al, 2016). Fifty percent of the LLDCs are in the top 50 countries estimated to be most vulnerable to infectious diseases. The

study included various factors that determined a country's ability to prevent or contain a disease outbreak, including the demography, economy, disease dynamics, politics, health care and public health. Seven LLDCs (Central African Republic, Chad, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Niger, Mali and Burkina Faso) were ranked in the 25 most vulnerable countries. The Health Care factor included a measure of medical infrastructure, which for the seven LLDCs listed above, is not sufficient to handle an infectious virus such as COVID-19.

The availability of personal protective equipment (PPE), hospital beds, ventilators, and medical professionals varies greatly within the group of LLDCs. According to the WHO, the number of hospital beds per 10,000 members of the population varies from 1-60 in the LLDCs as shown in table 2.3. The table also shows that the number of ventilators available per LLDC varies greatly, signalling a level of unpreparedness for medium-to-high impacts of COVID-19.

Table 2.3. LLDCs Hospital Beds per 10,000 and Number of ventilators (April 2020)

Country	Hospital Beds per 10,000	Number of ventilators	National Population (millions)
Afghanistan	3.9		38.04
Armenia	41.63		2.96
Azerbaijan	48.22		10.02
Bhutan	17.4		0.76
Bolivia	12.93		11.51
Botswana	18		2.30
Burkina Faso	4	11	20.32
Burundi	7.9	12	11.53
Central African Republic	10	3	4.75
Chad	4		15.95
Eswatini	21		1.15
Ethiopia	3.3	557	112.08
Kazakhstan	60.57	3,294	18.51
Kyrgyzstan	44.13		6.46
Lao People's Democratic Rep	15		7.17
Lesotho	13		2.13
Malawi	13	17	18.63
Mali*	1		20.25
Mongolia	80		3.23
Nepal	3		28.61
Niger	3.9	20	23.31
North Macedonia	42.8		2.08
Paraguay	8.28		7.04
Republic of Moldova	56.61		2.66
Rwanda	16		12.63
Tajikistan	46.67		9.32
Turkmenistan	40.28		44.27
Uganda	5	55	33.58

Uzbekistan	39.78		17.86
Zambia	20		14.65
Zimbabwe	17	16	12.63
World	27.04		

Source: [https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/hospital-beds-\(per-10-000-population\)](https://www.who.int/data/gho/data/indicators/indicator-details/GHO/hospital-beds-(per-10-000-population))

<https://reliefweb.int/report/central-african-republic/just-three-ventilators-cope-covid-19-central-african-republic>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/18/world/africa/africa-coronavirus-ventilators.html>

UN projection, UNSD, Year 2020

LLDCs also face challenges in terms of availability of skilled human resources in the health sector as shown in table 2.4. LLDCs that have endured a heavy toll due to the virus may face a shortage of healthcare workers that can sufficiently treat COVID-19 patients.

Table 2.4: LLDC Medical Doctors per 10,000 Population, with year of record

Country	Medical doctors (per 10 000 population)	Year
Afghanistan	2.8	2016
Armenia	44.0	2017
Azerbaijan	34.5	2014
Bhutan	4.2	2018
Bolivia	15.9	2016
Botswana	5.3	2016
Burkina Faso	0.9	2017
Burundi	1.0	2017
Central African Republic	0.7	2015
Chad	0.4	2017
Eswatini	3.3	2016
Ethiopia	0.8	2018
Kazakhstan	39.8	2014
Kyrgyzstan	22.1	2014
Lao People's Democratic Republic	3.7	2017
Lesotho	0.7	2010
Malawi	0.4	2018
Mali	1.3	2018
Mongolia	28.6	2016
Nepal	7.5	2018
Niger	0.4	2016
Paraguay	13.5	2018
Republic of Moldova	32.1	2017
North Macedonia	28.7	2015
Rwanda	1.3	2018
Tajikistan	21.0	2014

Turkmenistan	22.3	2014
Uganda	1.7	2017
Uzbekistan	23.7	2014
Zambia	11.9	2018
Zimbabwe	2.1	2018
World*	10	2019
Upper Middle-Income Countries	19.4	2017
High-Income Countries	30.4	2017

Source: Global Health Observatory Data Repository, World Health Organization

*Threshold for sufficient healthcare professionals, according to WHO.

Many LLDCs that have high migrant populations have endured a lot of their citizens returning as the demand for labour dwindles abroad and border closures forced migrants (Table 2.5.) to return to their homes. This repatriation resulted in increased cases of COVID-19 and placed heightened pressures on healthcare systems that are not created for crises such as the current pandemic.

Table 2.5. Migrants from LLDCs (2019-International Migrant Stock)

Country	International migrants	International migrants as a share of total population (percentage)
Afghanistan	149,762	0.4
Armenia	190,159	6.4
Azerbaijan	253,887	2.5
Bhutan	53,254	7
Bolivia	156,114	1.4
Botswana	110,596	4.8
Burkina Faso	718,338	3.5
Burundi	321,018	2.8
Central African Republic	90,649	1.9
Chad	512,230	3.2
Eswatini	32,310	2.8
Ethiopia	1,253,083	1.1
Kazakhstan	3,705,556	20
Kyrgyzstan	200,260	3.1
Lao People's Democratic Republic	48,275	0.7
Lesotho	6,928	0.3
Malawi	247,652	1.3
Mali	468,230	2.4
Mongolia	21,128	0.7
Nepal	490,802	1.7
Niger	294,161	1.3
Paraguay	160,519	2.3
Republic of Moldova	104,713	2.6
North Macedonia	131,175	6.3

Rwanda	539,932	4.3
South Sudan	865,552	7.8
Tajikistan	274,071	2.9
Turkmenistan	195,127	3.3
Uganda	1,734,166	3.9
Uzbekistan	1,168,384	3.5
Zambia	170,249	1
Zimbabwe	411,257	2.8
TOTAL LLDCs	15,079,537	
WORLD	271,642,105	3.5

Source :

<https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/countryprofiles.asp>
<https://migrationdataportal.org>

Healthcare expenditure as a percentage of GDP in many LLDCs have been particularly low. Low government spending on healthcare has resulted in shifting of a significant proportion of the cost to households, which has had a particularly dire impact on women in rural areas (OECD, 2020). As there is a shortage of female doctors and general provision in rural areas, women are disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

Responses made by LLDCs to prevent/contain spread of COVID-19

Given the limitations of the health care systems in LLDCs, existing vulnerabilities to a pandemic, including challenges to social-distancing, and constraints to access to basic handwashing facilities and other basic sanitation needs, many LLDCs imposed temporary national lockdowns to prevent against the spread of the virus. The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker systematically collects information on several different common policy responses that governments have implemented to respond to the pandemic and has compiled the stringency index which records the strictness of ‘lockdown style’ policies that primarily restrict people’s behaviour with a range of from 0 to 100, where 100 is the strictest (Hale et. al, 2021). Table 2.6 shows that many LLDCs imposed some form of national lockdown.

Table 2.6. LLDCs Government Response Stringency Index (0 to 100, 100 = strictest)

Country	15-Mar-20	27-Mar-21	Absolute Change	Relative Change
Afghanistan	38.89	12.04 Mar 1, 2021	-26.85	-69%
Azerbaijan	52.78	70.37 Mar 26, 2021	17.59	33%
Bhutan	31.48	39.35 Mar 16, 2021	7.87	25%
Bolivia	44.44	19.44 Mar 21, 2021	-25	-56%
Botswana	13.89	62.04 Mar 15, 2021	48.15	347%
Burkina Faso	11.11	22.22 Mar 21, 2021	11.11	100%
Burundi	11.11	20.37 Mar 22, 2021	9.26	83%

Central African Republic	11.11	18.52 Mar 15, 2021	7.41	67%
Chad	16.67	22.22 Mar 22, 2021	5.55	33%
Eswatini	19.44	68.52 Mar 22, 2021	49.08	252%
Ethiopia	2.78	50.93 Mar 22, 2021	48.15	1732%
Kazakhstan	22.22	57.41	35.19	158%
Kyrgyzstan	34.26	52.31 Mar 26, 2021	18.05	53%
Laos	14.81	16.67 Mar 22, 2021	1.86	13%
Lesotho	11.11	65.74 Mar 15, 2021	54.63	492%
Malawi	11.11	48.15 Mar 21, 2021	37.04	333%
Mali	0	48.15 Mar 22, 2021	48.15	
Moldova	51.85	65.74 Mar 22, 2021	13.89	27%
Mongolia	57.41	71.76 Mar 15, 2021	14.35	25%
Nepal	22.22	16.67 Mar 22, 2021	-5.55	-25%
Niger	13.89	34.26 Mar 22, 2021	20.37	147%
Paraguay	50.93	50.00 Mar 14, 2021	-0.93	-2%
Rwanda	30.09	71.30 Mar 15, 2021	41.21	137%
South Sudan	8.33	72.22 Mar 22, 2021	63.89	767%
Tajikistan	13.89	31.48 Mar 22, 2021	17.59	127%
Turkmenistan	19.44	65.74 Mar 20, 2021	46.3	238%
Uganda	16.67	53.70 Mar 16, 2021	37.03	222%
Uzbekistan	16.67	37.04 Mar 14, 2021	20.37	122%
Zambia	16.67	36.11 Mar 22, 2021	19.44	117%
Zimbabwe	8.33	53.70 Mar 22, 2021	45.37	545%

Source: <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/covid-19-government-response-tracker>

Leveraging on experiences from Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), African LLDCs such as South Sudan, Mali, Rwanda, Burundi, Ethiopia, and Uganda, that have pre-existing mechanisms, practices and facilities implemented to combat EVD outbreaks have proved helpful as they have been able to apply them in the fight against COVID-19 (Reliefweb, 2020b, Anadolu Agency, 2020). In Uganda, for instance, prior investments to combat EVD in terms of healthcare workers' preparedness and training, disease surveillance teams and supporting applications, treatment units, infrastructure including automotive, laboratory capacity, and civilian awareness, were easily applied to combat COVID-19 (WHO, 2020). Similarly, Rwanda was able to mobilize a swift response to the pandemic, using the same communication channels for combatting EVD to address COVID-19, expanded surveillance to ensure there is no community transmission and forming well-trained response teams, too (Anadolu Agency, 2020b).

Bhutan has successfully circumvented their shortage of doctors, ventilators, and PPE. Bhutan implemented strict lock down measures, along with a community-based mobilization, in which 120 quarantine facilities were set-up, hotels offered their premises, restaurants offered food free of charge and businesses offered cash contributions (The Diplomat, 2020). Although costly, these measures, along with the strict 14-day quarantine and repatriation of only Bhutanese citizens, have resulted in only 900 cases, with 1 death as of 9 April 2021.

Support to health sector from the United Nations.

United Nations agencies are providing support towards the health sector in LLDCs. For example, the UNFPA is aiding some medical facilities particularly to aid in maternity healthcare such as PPE to national and regional reproductive health institutions, including reproductive health centers and maternity hospitals. UNDP is working with its partners to combat the spread of the disease and to support the most affected countries where health systems are weakest and people are at their most vulnerable. UNAIDS has issued guidelines on precautions that people living with HIV and key populations should follow to prevent COVID-19 infection.

WHO is working closely with global experts, governments and partners to rapidly expand scientific knowledge on COVID-19, to track the spread and virulence of the virus, and to provide advice to countries and individuals on measures to protect health and prevent the spread of the virus and to develop and deploy safe and effective vaccines. UNICEF is assisting countries with critical supplies and financial/technical support to reach children with vital health, nutrition, education, child protection, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), gender-based violence and social protection services. UN Women is bringing up-to-date information and analysis on how and why gender matters in COVID-19 response.

One externality of the pandemic has been the rise in the threat of misinformation and stigma. Many LLDCs have had to implement campaigns that inhibit the spread of misinformation about the nature of COVID-19 and its treatments and that defeat the stigma of being infected. The stigma attached to being infected with COVID-19 places social pressures on civilians in certain regions to hide their symptoms and forsake seeking medical treatment.

Diversion of resources from HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria

One worrying outcome of the pandemic has been the necessary reallocation of resources from ongoing responses to illnesses such as HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. According to Friends of the Global Fight Against AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria, 80% of HIV programs were reported to have experienced disruption in service delivery, while the ratio was 75% and 66% for Tuberculosis and Malaria respectively. Activity cancellations have been due to lockdowns; restrictions on gatherings of people; transport stoppages; COVID-related stigma; reluctance of health workers as many of the symptoms of TB and malaria are similar to those of COVID-19; and clients are not seeking health services as usual (The Global Fight, 2020). A further impact in many “high burden settings,” according to an Imperial College study, could be that HIV, TB and malaria related deaths over the next five years might increase up to 10%, 20%, and 36% respectively, compared to a scenario where there was no COVID-19 pandemic.

Access of LLDCs to COVID-19 vaccines

In the immediate term, addressing COVID-19 demands urgent availability and delivery to people of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines that can save lives. This is critical to building back better and achieving sustainable recovery. Several vaccines were approved for use to prevent COVID-19 since the last quarter of 2020. LLDCs face challenges in accessing COVID-19 vaccines that include: inadequate domestic financial resources, high debt levels and fragile health systems. The LLDCs' economies are dire in situation due to the drastic fall in commodity prices, a sector that majority of LLDCs are reliant on and this has worsened their debt situation. The health systems of LLDCs are among the weakest in the world and they are also critically dependent on imported medical and pharmaceutical products, including the vaccines.

Furthermore, inequity in access to COVID-19 vaccines is deepening further the divide between the poor and the rich countries since developing economies are struggling to access supplies. As of end of March 2021, in many LLDCs the people vaccinated account for less than 1% of the whole population of the country. No one will be safe until everyone is safe since COVID-19 knows no borders. This implies that fair and equitable access to vaccines, backed by well-planned and resourced supply chains, and distribution support, is needed to support greater access of LLDCs to vaccines.

It is essential that multilateral efforts, such as the WHO-led COVAX Facility, is adequately financed and supported so that all countries, including the most vulnerable, are protected. In April 2020, the Access to COVID-19 Tools (ACT) Accelerator was launched by WHO and partners to bring together governments, health organizations, scientists, businesses, civil society and philanthropists to accelerate the development, production and equitable access to COVID-19 tests, treatments and vaccines. COVAX is the vaccines pillar of the ACT-Accelerator, co-led by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, and the WHO. Its goal is to help end the acute phase of the global pandemic by the end of 2021 by providing access to at least 2 billion doses of safe and effective COVID-19 vaccines to the most vulnerable in all participating economies.

COVAX is a global solution for equitable access: through portfolio diversification, pooling of financial and scientific resources, and economies of scale, participating governments and regional blocs can hedge the risk of backing unsuccessful candidates, just as governments with limited or no ability to finance their own bilateral procurement can be assured access to life-saving vaccines that would otherwise have been beyond their reach. According to WHO, as of February 2021, COVAX facility, through Gavi, has secured supply arrangements for 2 billion doses of vaccine candidates to be delivered by the end of the year, including at least 1.3 billion doses to participating lower income economies. In February 2021, the ACT Accelerator partnership welcomed over US\$ 4.3 billion of new investments from G7 leaders – the USA, Germany, European Commission, Japan, and Canada – to fund the development and equitable rollout of the tests, treatments and vaccines needed to end the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVAX is planning to provide enough vaccines to immunize about 20% to 30% of people in poorer countries, while a greater proportion of the population needs to be vaccinated against COVID-19 to prevent future epidemics or achieve herd immunity. According to WHO, the

percentage of people who need to be immune in order to achieve herd immunity varies with each disease and the proportion of the population that must be vaccinated against COVID-19 to begin inducing herd immunity is not known. This is an important area of research and will likely vary by community, the vaccine, the populations prioritized for vaccination, and other factors. For example, herd immunity against measles requires about 95% of a population to be vaccinated whilst for polio, the threshold is about 80%. More is needed to assist LLDCs to raise the percentage of population of those vaccinated in vulnerable countries required to reach herd immunity.

The distribution of COVID-19 vaccines requires a foundation of strong immunization and primary health care services in order to reach the most vulnerable populations and ensure their access to critical preventive care. It is important that LLDCs should not neglect existing routine immunization programmes in the face of the pandemic.

Conclusions and recommendations

Fighting COVID-19 requires the rapid mobilization of emergency health-care resources to strengthen the healthcare systems, to purchase vaccines and medical equipment for treatment such as ventilators, oxygen concentrators, protective gear, testing kits and other medicines. It also requires recruitment of trained personnel in sufficient numbers. It further requires additional resources in order to avoid diversion of resources from pre-pandemic health care in order to circumvent a set-back in the progress that has been made on the health SDGs.

In light of this the following recommendations are proposed:

- Development partners, the United Nations, the International Financial Institutions, and other international organizations should support LLDCs with the resources to prepare and respond to the health impact of COVID-19, including for strengthening national health systems and laboratories, purchasing of required medical supplies such as personal protective equipment, ventilators and strengthening of prevention measures.
- Ensure adequate, affordable and rapid supply of vaccines and relevant drugs related to COVID-19, to LLDCs through enhanced multilateral initiatives such as COVAX.
- The COVID-19 pandemic heightens the need for reliable and affordable electricity at health facilities. There is a need to deploy renewable energy solutions to sustainably meet short- and long-run health sector energy needs.
- Provide technology, technical know-how and free license to manufacture antiretroviral drugs and vaccines for mass use after necessary controlled clinical trials.
- The international community should support the LLDCs with medical personnel or capacity building to ensure that medical personnel needs are met.
- Immediately open virtual “Tele-health and Telemedicine Vendors” where feasible, coordinated by WHO, with virologist working in developed and advanced developing countries to provide 24- hour treatment and care services for patients and doctors treating COVID-19 patients in LLDCs.
- LLDC governments should recommit their support for primary health care that is vital in maintaining comprehensive vaccination.
- Countries should aim to protect support towards prevention and treatment of HIV, TB, malaria and other diseases during the pandemic.

3. Transport, cross-border transit and trade facilitation

Due to LLDCs' geographical location and their reliance on transit countries for exports and import of goods, restrictive measures at LLDC and transit country borders aimed at curtailing the spread of COVID-19 have greatly affected the movement of goods and services to and from LLDCs. During normal circumstances, LLDCs face higher costs and travel times in the movement of goods and services, however this has been further exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. At the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, many countries introduced various restrictions to cross-border and transit freight transportation in order to contain cross-border transmission of the virus. Borders were closed to non-citizens and non-residents (e.g. through visa issuance bans or mandatory health cards/ health certificates) or imposed on those entering through extended periods of self-isolation in order to limit the spread of the virus while implementing lockdowns, strict social distancing and contact tracing measures (UNECE, 2020).

For example, table 3.1 (extracted from UNECA, 2020b) shows that some African LLDCs and transit countries announced land closures of some form during the first four months of the pandemic in the region from March 2020, and some transit countries announced maritime border closures. The restrictions were targeted at reducing the movement of people while allowing exemptions for the movement of emergency and essential freight supplies. Such regulations typically cover mandatory testing, sanitizing trucks, limiting the numbers of crew members on trucks, and designating transit resting areas (UNECA, 2020b).

Table 3.1: Travel restrictions in African LLDCs and transit countries (During March – June 2020)

	Land borders closed	Maritime borders closed
Angola		
Benin		
Burkina Faso		
Burundi		
Cameroon		
Central African Republic		
Côte d'Ivoire		
Democratic Republic of Congo		
Djibouti		
Eswatini		
Ethiopia		
Ghana		
Guinea		
Malawi		
Mali		
Mozambique		
Namibia		
Niger		
Nigeria		
Rwanda		

South Africa		
South Sudan		
Sudan		
Togo		
Uganda		

Source: UNECA, 2020b. Calculations were based on the World Food Programme COVID-19 World Travel Restrictions database (as at 7 June 2020).

In the Asia region, a review by UNESCAP of the measures on cross-border transport, introduced by the member States, as a response to COVID-19 showed that most of the introduced policy measures exempted freight flows of essential products and, in some cases, of the general freight, while introducing necessary sanitary and health requirements (UNESCAP, 2020a). UNESCAP also noted that while it was encouraging that there were waivers to freight flow, this did not necessarily mean that the freight could, indeed, flow freely across the borders, as newly and unilaterally introduced measures, such as quarantine measures for road transport operators, for instance, had a direct repercussion on the fluidity of cross-border operations.

Table 3.2. COVID-19 measures and transport in selected Asian LLDCs and transit countries

Country	Land/maritime borders closed	Exception for freight transport	Health and sanitary measures for crew
Armenia	Partially	Yes	Yes
Azerbaijan	Partially	Yes	Yes
China	Partially	Yes	Yes
Georgia	Partially	Yes	Yes
India	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iran	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lao PDR	Partially	Yes	Yes
Kazakhstan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kyrgyzstan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mongolia	Yes	Yes	Yes
Pakistan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Russian Federation	Partially	Yes	Yes
Tajikistan	Partially	Yes	Yes
Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes
Uzbekistan	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vietnam	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: UNESCAP, 2020a

Review of the UNECLAC COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean¹ reveal that LLDCs and transit countries in these regions also used border restrictions and introduced sanitary and health requirements.

The imposition of border restrictions by neighbouring transit countries in their efforts to combat the spread of the virus greatly impacted the timely delivery and access to much-needed goods,

¹ <https://www.cepal.org/en/topics/covid-19>

such as medical supplies and food to LLDCs. The additional cross-border controls and checks, introduced to deal with COVID-19 in LLDCs and their main trading and transit partners are likely to have exacerbated the already high costs of trade and transport operations in LLDCs. In all regions this resulted in many freight trucks being delayed at the borders thereby affecting the timely delivery of the much-needed essential supplies including pharmaceuticals, medical supplies, foods, and fuels. Most of the LLDCs rely heavily on imports to cover their basic needs. The relatively low level of digitalization and facilitation of cross-border transport and trade operations add up to existing challenges.

The border restrictions and lockdowns created a disruption of international supply chains and temporarily shortages in food, important supplies and medicines. UNECA 2020b highlighted that border restrictions led to an abrupt slowdown and delays in cross-border trade that caused delays in access to emergency COVID-19 supplies and increased food insecurity. It also resulted in the divergence of trade to less safe unofficial routes.

UNESCAP, 2020b reveal that COVID-19 negatively affected the North and Central Asia subregion's trade and that of its transit partners. For example, the Russian Federation, the biggest economy in North and Central Asia, experienced serious decline in road freight transport that fell by about 29% in March-April 2020 and the reduction of loading on the Russian railways in April reached 11%. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan also experienced a decrease in freight turnover between January to April 2020 (UNESCAP, 2020b). In Azerbaijan in 2020, freight turnover declined by almost 20 percent compared to 2019².

Impact of COVID-19 on the transport and logistics sector

The transport sector and logistics industry which play a crucial role in economies of many of the LLDCs and are the backbone of trade have experienced unprecedented impact from containment measures, travel restrictions, and border closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The air transport industry was hit hardest as airlines had fewer international air travellers in 2020. IATA reported a 66% drop in airline passengers compared to 2019 due to the coronavirus pandemic and the subsequent travel restrictions that resulted in a shut-down of numerous global routes. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) estimated that the drop in demand for air travel resulted in a staggering loss to the airlines of around \$370 billion, with airports and air navigation services providers losing a further \$115 billion and \$13 billion, respectively.

A decrease in road freight was reported in all regions as there was increased incidence of empty running and decline in demand. IRU estimated a decline in global road transport activity of up to 20% in 2020, depending on how long the situation continues, leading to a global loss in operator revenues of around \$800 billion (IRU, 2020). In the UNECE region rail freight transport was largely exempted from restriction measures but operators reported a reduction of freight volumes of 20-50% due to the economic slowdown. It has also been reported that some countries are diverting investment meant for transport infrastructure development towards the fight against COVID-19.

² <https://www.stat.gov.az/news/macroeconomy.php?page=3?lang=en>

The need for regional and international coordination

The pandemic also revealed that the imposing of different measures, restrictions and policies by Governments at different moments in time brought to light the absence of regional and international coordination in cross-border transport and transit sector and the need of guidelines at subregional/regional level and international levels that could be implemented during pandemics. UNECA, 2020b, highlighted that some regional economic communities in Africa including COMESA, EAC, ECOWAS and SADC have published guidelines to provide a set of standardized regulations to facilitate essential trade including of essential medical goods as identified by WCO, 2020 among their member States amid COVID-19 as shown in table 3.3, whilst other regional economic communities are in the process of developing or approving similar guidelines. Regional guidelines provide a framework to improve coordination, overcome border disputes and facilitate essential trade while protecting the safety of people at the same time.

Table 3.3: Regional Economic Communities’ guidelines to facilitate the movement of goods and services

	Date of introduction	Scope	Alignment
COMESA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 14 May 2020: Adopted by the eighth meeting of the Extra-ordinary Council of Ministers - 10 June 2020: Published and gazetted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitating cross-border movement of relief and essential supplies - Transport of goods and cross-border freight transport operations - Cross-border road passenger transport - Air transport - Other modes of cross-border transport - Regulating and controlling trucks, aircraft and vessels carrying essential goods and services - Handling of cargo at ports of entry - Movement of goods in transit/inland deliveries - Customs authorities support to the economy and sustaining of supply chain continuity - Trade in services - Monitoring and evaluation 	Aligned to COVID-19 guidelines of the African Union, EAC, SADC, WCO and WHO
EAC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 24 April 2020: Signed and published by the EAC Adhoc Regional Coordination Committee on COVID-19 Response 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Trade facilitation - Gazetted transit routes - Handling of cargo at ports of entry/ internal borders - Movement of goods in transit/inland deliveries - Priority treatment for cargo mitigating the COVID-19 pandemic - Payments and communication services 	Aligned to the COVID-19 guidelines of WCO and WHO

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Application of customs laws and interpretation - Inspection of goods for quality and safety - Exchange and sharing of information - Training and capacity building - Monitoring and evaluation 	
ECOWAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 17 June 2020: Guidelines were adopted by ECOWAS Ministerial Coordinating Committee - Scheduled to be presented to the Summit of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government for adoption 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protection for transport sector workers and passengers - Air transport - Cross-border land transport and free movement of persons - Border formalities - Transit formalities - Operation of seaports - Trade facilitation of COVID-19 goods and services - Advocacy and information sharing - Gender considerations Monitoring and evaluation 	Aligned to the COVID-19 guidelines of WHO, WCO, WTO, IOM, IMO, ICAO, African Union Commission, Africa Civil Aviation Council, IATA, UNCTAD
SADC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 6 April 2020: Adopted by Council of Ministers - Revised guidelines were published on 23 June 2020 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cross-border freight transport operations (all goods and services) - Cross-border road passenger transport - Regulation of other modes of cross-border transport - Services and facilities to be provided - Regulating and controlling trucks carrying essential goods and services - Monitoring and evaluation 	Assume member States are implementing policies and measures to combat COVID-19 recommended by WHO, WCO, ICAO and IMO

Source: UNECA, 2020b.

Best practice examples

In response to the uncertainty in transport, cross-border transit and trade facilitation caused by the pandemic, UNECE, in collaboration with other UN Regional Commissions and other international partners launched an “*Observatory on Border Crossing Status due to COVID-19.*” This initiative provides information regarding border crossing developments worldwide to inform governments on good practices being implemented, to keep the borders opened, and to facilitate decisions by providing governments and the transport market a knowledge sharing platform.

Table 3.4 shows that most LLDCs have allowed cross-border transport and trade-facilitation to continue for necessary goods, with some LLDCs even allowing foreign passengers to enter through various points of entry. Although the partial enablement of Border Checkpoints (BCPs) may allow supply chains to continue functioning as needed, limited capacities and extensive requirements in

terms of paperwork and testing make the already constrained cross-border functions for LLDCs more laborious.

Table 3.4: Border Crossings Status by Country, according to the Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19 (UNECE)

Country	Cross-Border Transit and Trade Facilitation Status	Date (2020)
Afghanistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some Border Checkpoints (BCPs) between Afghanistan and the following countries opened for commercial traffic: Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan. Normal exportation and importation are allowed at Kabul International Airport. Some BCPs with Pakistan opened for commercial and pedestrian traffic. 	14 August
Armenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per a WCO/State Revenue Committee (SRC) document, Armenia set a 0% import duty on several medical goods and basic food products through 30 June and 30 September. The SRC has ensured 24/7 operation of certain functional units of the Customs Service. 	30 April
Azerbaijan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remarks from ITU indicate that Azerbaijan's borders are open for the movement of goods, but not people. Vehicles carrying transit cargo are escorted to their destination by the State Traffic Police. 	14 September
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goods transportation with Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia, Georgia, Turkey remained open; passenger traffic, however, has remained closed except for Azerbaijani citizens. Some restrictions have been eased. Flights to Georgia, for example, are resumed http://abc.az/en/news/68718 	9 April
Bhutan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bhutan implemented a zero-contact customs clearance procedure where consignments and goods are brought into the country. 	19 June
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bhutan amended its importation procedures to include an uninterrupted supply of essential goods into the country, and that smooth cross-border business and trade transactions are maintained without hindrance. This further included fast track clearance of all essential cargo relating to COVID-19 (PPE, ventilators, hand sanitizers, medicines, etc). The government deferred the payment of customs duties and taxes by three months from April 2020 to June 2020 for identified importers for essential goods. 	7 May
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bolivia's borders were closed from 20 March through 31 March, except for Bolivian citizens, residents, international organizations, diplomatic missions, and drivers of international cargo and freight transport. 	20 March
Botswana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Botswana's prohibition of entry into the country provides for the entry of non-citizens for the provision of essential permits or the delivery of essential supplies. 	2 April

Country	Cross-Border Transit and Trade Facilitation Status	Date (2020)
Burkina Faso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bobo Dioulasso airport and Ouagadougou airport were closed for all but emergency, cargo, and humanitarian flights. 	29 May
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land borders open to the movement of freighters, at borders with Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Niger, and Togo. An accelerated procedure for issuing import licenses was established, along with a hotline at the Ministry of Health for rapid control of the import licenses. 	20 April
Central African Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land borders for the Central African Republic were open to the movement of cargo. Medical supplies could be imported through the air and land borders and be placed in private customs warehouses; however, there are no temperature-controlled facilities. There was a fast-track procedure for such supplies and equipment. A measure for the immediate release and direct removal of essential supplies was put in place. The non-collection of Value Added Taxes on medicines was added. 	24 June
Chad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The land border with Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, and the Central African Republic were open for the movement of either cargo or essential goods. However, the borders with Libya, and Sudan were closed. Essential food and medical products were exempt from import duties till 31 December, 2020. 	24 April
Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Eswatini Revenue Authority implemented measure for fast track the clearance of goods for the fight against COVID-19. It enhanced its collaboration with other stakeholders, including neighbouring countries to share information on national developments that impact the provision of goods across the border. 	3 April
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cargo flights were operational with reduced capacity. Cargo ships were operational at limited capacity due to congestion at the Djibouti port. The Djibouti-Ethiopia corridor remained open with no restrictions on cargo movement. There were restrictions at Ethiopia's borders with Kenya, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan. Land borders were closed to passengers, but rail access was operational 	19 June
Kazakhstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A ban was placed on the export of many essential medical and food items. Road transport between Russia and Kazakhstan was still operational, with a few restrictions in place. 	4 May
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some border crossing points between Kazakhstan and the following countries were temporarily closed: China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. 	4 April
Kyrgyzstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A border crossing point with China was opened up, exclusively for cargo transportation. Air, road, and rail transport between China and Kyrgyzstan had been shut off on 23 January. 	5 June

Country	Cross-Border Transit and Trade Facilitation Status	Date (2020)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A temporary ban was placed on the export of pertinent medicines and food items. 	
Lao People's Democratic Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders remained closed to individuals. • Cargo was allowed to pass through but with some restrictions. 	2 April
Lesotho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measures were put in place to prioritize and expedite the clearance of Relief and Essential supplies, with no VAT or Customs Duty placed on such items. • The inspection of goods at ports was deferred. 	8 May
Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only flights carrying medical personnel, emergency relief items, and for the purpose of repatriation were allowed. 	25 May
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Land cargo was allowed, and movement between Malawi and the following neighbours was operational: Mozambique, Tanzania, and Zambia (with extensive screening). • Duties on ventilators, oxygen concentrators, PPE, sanitizers, soaps, and other goods were waived. 	15 June
Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders were open with Algeria, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mauritania, Niger, and Senegal for the movement of freight. The border with Guinea, was closed however. • The export of certain food products was banned • The import of medical supplies was subject to high control, in order to inspect for counterfeiting. 	18 May
Mongolia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders with China were closed since January 2020 • In August 2020, Mongolia and China agreed to establish a "Green Gateway" a temporary regulation that allows greater access to both countries. • Freight transport was exempt from extended restrictions, although drivers were subject to health checks. • Only imports and exports of goods and means of transport were allowed, however, with restrictions on the drivers themselves. • Since March 2020, all commercial flights were suspended. The government regularly organized repatriation flights. According to MFA 17,730 Mongolians stranded abroad due to COVID-19 were repatriated from 50 different countries to Mongolia via charter flights (11,376 persons) and special arrangements for land border crossing (6,354). 	6 October
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medical and repatriation flights remained active. 	19 August
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Border crossings were open only for food, commodities, fuel, medical and essential supplies. However, due to floods, some road transport options were limited. 	6 May
Niger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All trade borders are open for freight traffic, except with Libya. 	11 May
Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Borders were open for the movement of food, medicine, hygiene and cleaning products, as well as logistical services, which remained unhindered with any restrictions. 	3 April
Republic of Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 out of 40 BCPs were functioning normally. 	13 April

Country	Cross-Border Transit and Trade Facilitation Status	Date (2020)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Customs clearance was prioritized for relief goods that are related to COVID-19, food, sanitation, medical equipment, etc. 	
North Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Borders were open for passengers to pass through, as well as heavy good vehicles. 	17 March
Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A dry port that functions 24/7 was established to facilitate faster clearance of essential and relief goods. The government also allowed for flexibility in duties and taxes of essential goods, by granting payments in instalments. 	9 May
Tajikistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some BCPs with China were reopened. Drivers of freight vehicles were subject to many strict guidelines, including testing for COVID-19, but can otherwise transfer goods across the border. 	30 April
Turkmenistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Any foreign freight carriers transporting goods were to transfer the freight into Turkmen carriers. As such, goods could still move across the border, but with added regulations. 	24 March
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The International Airport and land borders were now open for tourists that prove that they have a negative COVID-19 test. 	20 September
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land borders were open for commercial activity with significant delays due to lowered capacity. A tax exemption was placed on the movement of goods related to fighting COVID-19. 	30 April
Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uzbekistan opened its air, rail, and road BCPs for travellers from green zones without restrictions. 	1 October
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The movement of trucks on international road transport was limited to a few BCPs to limit the spread of COVID-19. 	1 May
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All air and road connections with third countries were closed, except for the movement of goods by road, rail, sea, river, and air. 	16 March
Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The clearance of essential goods and medical supplies were given priority. Police escorted trucks wherever a relay system cannot be used. Electronic paperwork and payment options were highly encouraged. 	8 May
Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Land borders were open for cargo movement, but drivers were subject to health screenings, and customs were operating at limited capacity. Essential cargo from Botswana, Mozambique, South Africa, and Zambia were allowed, although Zambia's truck drivers had to undergo extensive screening at the border entry. 	9 June

Source: UNECE, 2020b, Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19
<https://wiki.unece.org/display/CTRBSBC/>

A UNESCAP study reviewed the best practices that LLDCs and transit countries had introduced in the region. As shown in table 3.5, these include increased use of digitalized facilitation of transport processes; priority lines (so called ‘green lanes’) and accelerated customs procedures for essential goods; promotion of contactless processing and delivery and many other measures. The

study also revealed some best practice examples of facilitation measures that LLDCs and transit countries introduced.

Table 3.5: Examples of facilitation measures introduced to fight the COVID-19 outbreak in 2020

Country	Facilitation measures
Armenia	Agreements were reached that both Georgia and Russia will provide the green corridor for the cargo of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) countries, i.e. a separate cargo area of Armenia will be allocated across Georgia and at border crossing point Verhniy Lar.
Azerbaijan	Fast and smooth movement of goods required for COVID-19 treatment has a special priority. A transit corridor for freight vehicles was established.
Georgia	Within the frames of the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, movement of the freight vehicles through the customs checkpoint on Georgian-Azerbaijani border (including transit and rail freight traffic) is ensured according to the specially developed protocol in 24- hour regime.
China	Fast clearance of anti-epidemic supplies. For imported supplies, all local Customs are required to open exclusive counters and green lanes 24/7 to ensure fast clearance; imported pharmaceuticals, disinfection supplies, protective suits, treatment equipment and other supplies will be released without delay. For exported supplies, green lanes are provided 24/7 to minimize the clearance time. Transport facilitation measures taken include removing all road tolls (including for bridge and tunnels) across the country for all vehicles, until the pandemic ends; putting in place a no-stop, no-check, toll free policy for vehicles transporting emergency supplies and essential personnel and cutting operational costs of international air cargo, including exemptions from the civil aviation development funds as well as reduction of airport charges and air traffic control. Passenger airlines are also encouraged to turn passenger planes into all-cargo freighters for carrying out freight transportation to make up for the shortage of air freight capacity amid the escalating pandemic.
India	Special facilitation measures at main ports. To ensure smooth flow of supply chain of Essential Items during National Lockdown to fight COVID-19, clarifications were provided to ensure that stakeholders in logistics and warehousing receive necessary assistance to continue their operations.
Kazakhstan	Government is promoting green corridors for road freight movement of medical and socially significant goods.
Kyrgyzstan	A decision was made to cancel special permits for trucks and ensure their unhindered movement. A green corridor was organized for all freight vehicles that transport medicines and essential goods. In order to help in the current situation with the pandemic, Kyrgyz Temir Zholu does not charge fees or penalties for storing cargo on the container site and on the wagon located at Kyrgyz Temir Zholu railway stations. The company also reduced the cost of transportation by rail for coal exporters by 30 percent, at a distance of up to 30 km for the Southern branch of the State Enterprise “NK Kyrgyz Temir Zholu”.
Russian Federation	Launch at the customs “green corridor” for food and non-food essential goods to be procured by large trading networks and importers); a headquarters has been set up at Russian Railways to provide operational support to shippers and ensure coordination of all links in the transport chains in the context of preventing and eliminating the spread of new coronavirus infection; Temporary exemption from weight control of vehicles, carrying essential goods and temporary cancellation restrictions on the movement of such vehicles and their loading and unloading within the city limits

Uzbekistan	Government set up an operational headquarters to ensure expedited passage of goods through border customs posts, their uninterrupted customs clearance, as well as the issuance of permits for exported and imported goods. It also decided to introduce, starting from April 1, 2020, the mechanism for customs clearance of imported food products in an expedited manner, including by issuing permits before the goods arrive in the Republic of Uzbekistan. A software has been developed on the website of Uzbekistan Temir Yollari JSC for processing and providing preliminary electronic information to customs authorities on goods transported by rail.
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Source: UNESCAP 2020a, 2020b.

In the Africa region, according to UNECA 2020b, some regional economic communities and their member States have introduced practical measures and interventions to facilitate safe trade during COVID-19 pandemic that can be used to complement implementation of existing guidelines. These best-practice interventions are presented in table 3.6. Coordinated implementation of these best practices across the continent would help to contain cross-border spread of the virus, while reducing the costs and increasing the efficiency of cross-border trade.

Table 3.6: Best-practice COVID-19 border regulations and interventions across the regional economic communities

Health screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct mandatory, thorough health screening of all incoming and outgoing truck drivers and crew • Coordinate health screening when there is a functioning one-stop border post • Ensure that all border points are reinforced with requisite personnel to carry out health screening and COVID-19 testing
Testing and certification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deploy mobile laboratories and test kits to all border posts • Test all drivers and crew before the commencement of their trip • Immediately isolate persons who exhibit symptoms or test positive for COVID-19, in line with set national guidelines, and do not repatriate foreign persons • Expedite the movement and clearance of persons with a valid negative COVID-19 certificate • Develop a regional harmonized test certificate that is valid for a period of 14 days, and allows the owner to travel within the region without being subjected to retesting unless he or she is found to have COVID-19 symptoms on screening at checkpoints using the screening tool • Share COVID-19 certificates generated for drivers and crew members who have undergone tests with all respective stakeholders both at accredited designated testing points and border crossing points in the region
Hygiene and PPE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide hygiene facilities at all border posts • Provide PPE and other medical supplies and equipment for frontline personnel at border crossings and checkpoints, including public health, immigration, customs, law enforcement and other border agencies • Enforce mandatory requirement for drivers and crew to wear masks and use sanitized products during their trip • Provide facilities to disinfect cargo and trucks
Crew size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce regulation so that vehicles can only travel with one driver and an appropriate number of crew members in line with social distancing directives (e.g. 2 or 3 crew members)
Border management and cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt the latest edition of the WCO harmonized system classification reference for COVID-19 medical supplies to facilitate essential trade

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use risk management practices and strategies and perform inspections on essential food and medical supplies and relief goods only if deemed high risk • Introduce or enhance pre-clearance of goods and encourage coordination of inspections and single-window processing • Ensure that border controls are organized in a way that prevents the risk of dangerous overcrowding y Designate priority lanes for essential goods or for those truck drivers with a valid negative COVID-19 test certificate • Designate safe and secure parking facilities for cross-border road transport vehicles in transit • Scale up border patrols in order to deter people who might attempt to cross borders at unauthorized or ungazetted crossings 25 Facilitating cross-border trade through a coordinated African response to COVID-19
Digitalizing trade procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simplify and automate trade and transport facilitation processes • Create online applications and platforms for the processing and clearance of imports and exports, issuance and renewals of drivers licenses and permits, payment of fees, and information dissemination and sharing • Facilitate and encourage use of e-commerce and electronic payments platforms such as mobile money, including through reducing fees
Electronic cargo tracking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement electronic cargo tracking systems that can monitor the movement of drivers and facilitate contact tracing • Facilitate the interface and connection of the electronic cargo tracking system with designated laboratories in member States
Information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish national and regional border measures that are in place to fight COVID-19 • Provide information on measures related to COVID-19 for distribution at customs offices and border crossings • Provide recommended route maps that cross-border trucks should follow, including the location of checkpoints, quarantine and isolation centres, and designated safe and secure parking facilities
Support to small-scale traders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dispatch consignments of PPE to small-scale cross-border traders and trade information desk officers • Facilitate the bulk-buying and processing of small-scale traders' goods, in collaboration with cross-border traders' associations and suppliers on both sides of the border
Operational mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Carry out capacity building of border staff (including customs, immigration and health authorities) on COVID-19 border regulations and guidelines • Establish a body to coordinate the implementation of COVID-19 border regulations and guidelines, and resolve operational issues at borders • Mobilize resources to assist member States to implement COVID-19 guidelines • Publish revised guidelines as may be required to address new challenges or issues emanating from the pandemic curve

Source: UNECA, 2020b

Facilitating smooth movement of goods and keeping borders open is fundamental during pandemics. It is also vital that measures imposed to combat the spread of the virus are justifiable, transparent and are temporary. The full implementation of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation remains fundamental during pandemics. Regional initiatives that were mentioned to have successfully supported the LLDCs in the meeting that was held with economists from LLDC Resident Coordinator Offices include: the UNECE and UNECLAC COVID-19 Observatories that

provided interactive data; establishment of green lanes between the Central European Free Trade Agreement and European Union countries that helped to keep freight traffic flowing and helped meet food security needs; and Mongolia and China agreed to establish a green gateway, a temporary solution and regulation that allowed greater transport access to both countries. In 2020, Mongolia also acceded to the Asia-Pacific Trade Agreement and accelerated implementation of the China-Russia Economic Corridor.

In light of the foregoing discussion the following recommendations are proposed:

- LLDCs and transit countries are encouraged to keep cross-border transport networks for goods and supply chains open, while protecting the safety of transport workers and citizens, to maintain the integration of LLDCs into world trade and ensure that critical goods needed to contain and combat the pandemic such medical supplies and equipment as well as food supplies can timely reach the LLDCs. Public and private stakeholders, including border agencies need to work closely together to facilitate transport and proper functioning of supply chains in these times.
- Governments and border and customs agencies should work together to simplify, facilitate and fast-track clearance of critical essential goods such as medical equipment and basic goods such as food to LLDCs.
- Given that over 80% of international trade is transported by sea, public and private operators in coastal countries need to ensure that ports remain open and provide the necessary services for international trade while protecting public health.
- Greater use of trade facilitation standards and digital technologies that limit physical checks in transit, physical contact at borders and protect the health of workers, such as electronic exchange of information and paperless solutions – eTIR, ASYCUDA system, electronic tracking of goods and vehicles, digital freight corridors and others.
- Ensure transparency and information availability about import, export and transit procedures in order to secure the smooth flow of goods; as well as enhanced sharing of trade and transit related information between countries.
- Ensure greater coordinated and harmonized interventions between national border agencies – Member States are encouraged to consider harmonizing their measures to the extent possible; LLDCs and transit countries need to cooperate more on transit and transport along important corridors. Regional coordination and cooperation on transport connectivity needs to be strengthened as it is likely to be more cost-effective and impactful and could focus on providing guidelines. It will also enable more effective communications between parties involved in trade and transport during crisis, preserve the minimal functioning of essential cross-border corridors and border-crossings and ensure a swift and orderly return to normal trade and transport operations postcrisis.
- International cooperation is important for setting the global guidelines/framework.
- There is need for guidelines for harmonization of public health and safety measures at border posts, such as health screening, testing, quarantine and clearance policies, and their effective implementation to avoid congestion and delays at borders.
- Transit countries in particular, as well as regional organizations, should support smooth functioning of transit, transport and trade corridors and ensure freedom of transit.
- Development partners, United Nations and other international and regional organizations need to urgently step up capacity building and technical assistance to LLDCs in support of trade facilitation, transport services and logistics solutions. LLDCs should particularly be supported

to make use of digital solutions in border clearance operations such as electronic data exchange, automation, electronic payments, electronic submission of documents as much as possible to limit physical contact at borders and protect the health of workers.

- Intensify implementation of actions highlighted in VPoA.
- Greater partnerships are needed among national governments, UN system organizations, regional organizations, private sector and others.
- Efforts should be made to preserve investments towards improved transport connectivity during the course of a pandemic. There is need to develop efficient transport systems, smooth functioning transit, transport and trade corridors which are resilient to crises.
- Ensure freedom of transit in line with provisions of international framework, including the TIR Convention, WCO Revised Kyoto Convention, WTO Trade Facilitation.
- Greater sharing of experiences between and within regions.

4. International Trade

LLDCs economies are heavily reliant on international trade as demonstrated by relatively high trade-to-GDP ratio, which stood at about 66 per cent in 2018. Due to COVID-19 related dramatic supply and demand shocks in the world economy and the inevitable major disruptions to international trade, LLDCs face a relatively huge loss of foreign exchange earnings and which has serious consequences on their socio-economic development. The WTO forecast a 9.2 per cent decline in the volume of the world merchandise trade for 2020. Primarily, the LLDCs' losses in export earnings will be compounded by the sharp decline in commodity prices which is estimated to be 37 per cent in 2020 according to UNCTAD. In addition, trade in fuel and mining products, which are important commodities to many LLDCs, fell by 38%.

According to UNCTAD's 2020 Trade and Development Report, commodities have seen a mixed year globally as shown in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Percentage Change in the Price of Commodities from the Previous Year

Type of Commodity	2019	2020
All commodities	-7.4	-21.5
Non-fuel	0.1	-2.3
All food	-2.0	4.9
Mineral, ores, non-precious metal	3.4	-8.0
Precious metals	8.9	24.1
Fuel commodities	-12.6	-36.9

Source: UNCTAD, 2020

On average, the price of all commodities dropped by 21.5 per cent in 2020. Non-fuel commodities saw an average price drop of 2.3 percent, while mineral, ores, and non-precious metals saw an 8% drop in prices. Many fuel rich LLDCs suffered due to the drastic drop in fuel commodity prices, which was shaped by the drastic drop in demand due to the pandemic. As 26 of the 32 LLDCs are dependent on primary commodities for more than 60 per cent of their exports, the current slow-downs and lower-than average international trade levels are a cause for concern. For example, Botswana's mining sector, which provides one fifth of the country's GDP and 80% of foreign

exchange earnings, contracted by 24.5% in 2020, Mongolia experienced a decline of 46.4% decline in exported coal in the first seven months of 2020 and Zambia mining revenues drop 30% between February and April 2020 due to COVID-19.

The limited diversification of economic activity in many LLDCs, with greater commodity dependence, leave them more vulnerable than ever to new shocks and disturbances including COVID-19. This is not without consequences for their development needs, their structural transformation plans and the implementation of the VPoA and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The situation also further marginalizes LLDCs from global trade as well as global value chains.

Global trade in services in the second quarter of 2020 also plunged by a record 30% year-on-year, with the travel sector particularly hard hit by COVID-19 and associated restrictions. Tourism is one of the important sources of income and employment for many LLDCs and is particularly hard hit by the pandemic, with international travelers' expenditure down by 81%. Some LLDCs are also heavily reliant on trade taxes and duties and the reliance on trade taxes and duties could lead to severe COVID-19 related revenue losses in these countries. For example, UNCTAD estimates that revenue losses could reach -10.2% for Malawi. Revenue losses greatly undermine the ability to import including medical supplies, food supplies and productivity-enhancing inputs for domestic production.

According to the WTO export prohibitions or restrictions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic increased in 2020 and the products covered by these new export prohibitions and restrictions mostly focus on medical supplies (e.g. facemasks and shields), pharmaceuticals and medical equipment (e.g. ventilators) (See table 4.2). In some cases, the restrictions also extended to additional products, such as foodstuffs. Consequently, however, LLDCs lack the capacity to manufacture many of these products and therefore export prohibitions and restrictions could curtail LLDCs' efforts to deal with pandemic and threaten their food security.

According to the 2020 Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for LLDCs, the cumulative trade deficit of LLDCs for 2018 was \$33.2 billion, or 4.3 per cent of the LLDCs average GDP. As net importers, the prolonged discontinuation of exports, due to both the drop in demand for commodities and in some cases ban on exports of certain necessities, further exacerbate the trade deficit.

Table 4.2: Trade measure introduced by some LLDCs during COVID-19

Member/Observer	Measure
Azerbaijan	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain products, e.g. medical gloves, sterile shoe covers, mittens, sterile masks, respirators (effective 5 March 2020 to 1 June 2020); on raw materials for the production of medical masks (effective 5 March 2020 to 31 December 2022). Imports also exempted from VAT
	Temporary export ban on certain medical supplies and preparations (e.g. sterile gloves, splints, medical masks and goggles, disinfectants, special clothing and other necessary medical supplies and preparations).
Bolivia	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on wheat and meslin.

	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain pharmaceutical products, protective equipment and medical supplies.
Chad	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain products.
Eurasian Economic Union	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain products, e.g. organic chemicals; amine-function compounds; ationic organic surface-active agents; non-ionic organic surface-active agents; antisera; wadding, gauze, bandages and similar articles; surgical gloves; personal protective equipment; and instruments and appliances used in medical, surgical sciences/
	Temporary export ban on certain personal protective equipment (e.g. face masks).
	Temporary export ban on certain food products (e.g. bulb onions; garlic; turnips; rye; rice; buckwheat; millet; cereal groats; meal and pellets; buckwheat grains pearled; soya beans, whether or not broken; sunflower seeds, whether or not broken; prepared foods from buckwheat).
	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain food products (e.g. potatoes, onions, garlic, cabbage, carrots, peppers, rye, rice, buckwheat, buckwheat groats, baby food and raw materials for its production, juices), and medicines, pipettes, disinfection systems, endoscopes and contactless thermometers, medical substances, refrigerators and containers for medical purposes.
	Temporary simplification of the country-of-origin confirmation procedure applied to goods imported from developing and LDCs countries, including through a possibility to provide electronic or paper copy of the certificate of origin
Kazakhstan	Temporary export ban on certain personal protective equipment.
	Temporary export ban on certain products (e.g. buckwheat; white sugar; potatoes (except for seeds of heading; sunflower seeds, whether or not broken; refined sunflower-seed oil (10 litre packages or less); refined sunflower-seed oil (more than 10liter packages); and cereal groats). (originally effective 2 April 2020 to 1 September 2020)
	Temporary QRs (export quota) on certain products, e.g. wheat or meslin flour; soft wheat and meslin; seed potatoes; unrefined sunflower-seed oil (10liter packages or less); and unrefined sunflower-seed oil (more than 10liter packages) (originally effective 2 April 2020 to 1 September 2020)
	Temporary import ban on cement clinkers; Portland cement; other Portland cement; aluminous cement; and other hydraulic cements
	Temporary import ban on certain petroleum products (gasoline; other distillates- gas oils of petroleum or bituminous minerals) from the Russian Federation delivered by railway,
	Temporary export ban on certain types of timber
Kyrgyz Republic	Temporary export ban on wipes and other antibacterial products; and disinfectants
	Temporary export ban on certain food products (e.g. wheat and meslin, wheat flour, cooking oil, rice, pasta, chicken eggs, sugar, iodized table salt, feed (hay, straw, mixed feed, bran and grain feed)).
Moldova	Temporary export restriction on certain medical equipment (e.g. medical masks, medical gloves, biocide products (medical disinfectants))

	Temporary elimination of excise duties on imports of undistorted ethyl alcohol for use in antiseptic products (disinfectants, biocides and antibacterial cosmetics)
Nepal	Temporary reduction of import tariffs on certain personal protective equipment, machinery for production of face masks, non-woven fabrics, elastic ropes, medical equipment and pharmaceutical products, due to the COVID-19 pandemic
North Macedonia	Temporary export ban on wheat and meslin (HS 1001.19.00; 1001.91.00; 1001.99.00), due to the COVID-19 pandemic
Paraguay	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain personal protective equipment, pharmaceutical products, machinery and mechanical appliances, vehicles, transport equipment, medical or surgical instruments and apparatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic/
	Temporary implementation of export licensing requirements on face masks and ethyl alcohol
	Extension of the temporary reduction of import tariffs on certain products included in Paraguay's exception list to the Mercosur Common Tariff
	Temporary reduction of VAT on imports of certain personal protective equipment and pharmaceutical products
	Adjustment of fees related to the importation of goods, resulting in a 30-40% reduction in import costs, due to the COVID-19 pandemic
Uzbekistan	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on certain products, e.g. poultry meat and edible offal; fish; milk and cream; butter; eggs; vegetables; dried leguminous vegetables; wheat or meslin flour; cereal grains otherwise worked (for example, hulled, rolled, flaked, pearled, sliced or kibbled), except rice (HS 1006); germ of cereals, whole, rolled, flaked or ground; Sunflower-seed, safflower or cotton-seed oil and fractions thereof, whether or not refined, but not chemically modified; white sugar; pasta; baker's yeast; wadding, gauze, bandages and similar articles (dressings, adhesive plasters, poultices), impregnated or coated with pharmaceutical substances or put up in forms or packings for retail sale for medical, surgical, dental or veterinary purposes; preparations for oral or dental hygiene; soaps; organic surface-active agents (other than soap); surface-active preparations, washing preparations (including auxiliary washing preparations) and cleaning preparations; candles; tapers; matches; gloves, mittens and mitts of vulcanized rubber; toilet or facial tissue stock, towel or napkin stock; toilet paper and similar paper; nonwovens, whether or not impregnated, coated, covered or laminated; ozone therapy, oxygen therapy, aerosol therapy, artificial respiration or other therapeutic respiration apparatus; and napkins and napkin liners for babies, and similar articles, of any materials. Imports also exempted from excise taxes
Zimbabwe	Temporary elimination of import tariffs on undenatured ethyl alcohol; hydrogen peroxide; immunological products, put up in measured doses or in forms or packings for retail sales; thermometers and pyrometers; and medical equipment.
	Temporary export ban on medical supplies used in the treatment of COVID-19.

Source: https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/trade_related_goods_measure_e.htm

Table 4.3: Examples of Major Trading Partners and Transit Countries that Introduced Export Bans and Restrictions

Country	Measure
Australia	Amended the Customs Regulations on 30 March 2020 to temporarily prohibit the export of certain goods that contribute to controlling and preventing the spread of the COVID-19 virus. This includes PPE, alcohol wipes and hand sanitizer.
Brazil	On 18 March, a special export licensing requirement was placed temporarily on certain products.
Colombia	Prohibited the export and re-export of products necessary to fight COVID-19 on 22 March, 2020.
Czech Republic	On 5 March, 2020, the export of hand sanitizers and medicines necessary for fighting COVID-19 were banned
Estonia	A temporary export restriction was placed on medicinal products on 26 March, 2020.
Eurasian Economic Union	On 24 March, a temporary ban was introduced on the export of PPE, disinfectants and other medical supplies.
European Union	On 15 March, 2020, the EU protected the availability of PPE by requiring that exports of such equipment be subject to export authorization by member states.
Greece	A temporary export prohibition was placed on medicinal products, specifically vaccines and medicines that are or might be in shortage due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
India	Export restrictions were placed on ventilators, diagnostic kits, and export prohibitions on Hydroxychloroquine, sanitizer, PPE.
Israel	Export licensing requirements have been placed on medical equipment.
Latvia	A temporary export ban was placed on medical products, effective 9 June, 2020.
Netherlands	On 23 March, a temporary export ban was placed on PPE to third countries.
Norway	A temporary export licensing requirement was placed on PPE on 6 March, 2020.
Slovak Republic	A temporary restriction was placed on parallel exports of medicinal products, on 16 March, 2020.
South Africa	The Department of Trade Industry and Competition must be consulted prior to the export of certain goods, including face masks and hand sanitizers.
South Korea	On 9 March, South Korea prohibited the export of masks and required producers to distribute 80% of masks through official public channels.
Turkey	On 4 March, 2020, export restrictions and additional licenses were introduced in Turkey on goods including protective clothing, gas, dust and radioactive dust filter masks, medical gloves, protective glasses, disinfectants, etc.
United Kingdom	On 19 March, the export of more than 80 vital drugs was banned by ministers to prevent shortages in the NHS to fight COVID-19.
United States of America	As of 3 April, an executive order called for the preservation of respirators, surgical masks and surgical gloves for domestic use.

Source: <http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/list-of-countries-coronavirus.aspx>,

https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/covid19_e/trade_related_goods_measure_e.htm

In light of this the following recommendations are suggested:

- Development partners, the United Nations, the International Financial Institutions, and other international organizations should support LLDCs to build their productive capacities and diversify their economies.
- A strong rules-based multilateralism is critical, including a commitment to maintain open and free trade; a commitment to keep open borders, with restrictions only for clear health reasons. Emergency measures designed to tackle COVID-19 must be transparent, targeted, proportionate, and be consistent with WTO rules.
- Countries must exercise maximal restraint in the use of export restrictions and other measures that could disrupt access to medical and food supplies in particular to vulnerable countries.
- The implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement by transit countries and LLDCs is fundamental and there is therefore a need for enhance support to these countries to enhance use of ICT at the borders.
- Enhanced transparency and efficient information sharing are crucial. Economic operators and members are having to cope with a high degree of uncertainty, as it remains unclear what measures have been adopted by countries. Insufficient information makes it hard for countries, including LLDCs, to efficiently adjust their purchasing decisions and it could be particularly damaging for those seeking to procure materials needed for the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic.
- In the long-term, while implementing methods for structural economic transformation, LLDCs need to consider methods to diversify their exports and drive down the product concentration index value.

5. Overall Economic Impact

LLDCs are generally among the poorest of the developing countries with more than half of the LLDCs classified as least developed. One-third of the population of LLDCs still live in extreme poverty and the average human development index of LLDCs lags behind the world average. Inadequate domestic financial resources, high debt levels and fragile health systems present an urgent challenge for LLDCs.

The COVID-19 pandemic is having historic negative economic effects on LLDCs with lasting consequences and medium-term effects on GDP growth, trade flows, investment, commodities prices, employment, increased inequality and poverty. The pandemic is affecting both demand and supply of economic output. The main channels are the direct consequence of country lockdowns and social distancing, and indirect consequence through global lockdown effect on trade and movement of people.

At the global level IMF World Economic Outlook of October 2020 estimated 4.4 percent contraction in global GDP in 2020. Growth in the advanced economies was projected at negative 5.8 percent in 2020, while in low-income countries it was estimated at negative 1.2 percent. Over the longer horizon, the deep recession triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to leave

lasting scars through lower investment, an erosion of human capital through lost work and schooling, and fragmentation of global trade and supply linkages.

Like the rest of the world, LLDCs are experiencing a contraction in their GDP growth in 2020, as is reflected in the prevalence of negative growth rates for most LLDCs in 2020 as shown in table 5.1. The estimated impact of the crisis on national economies in LLDCs differs widely, with some economies still recording positive, though sharply reduced, growth while other countries are expected to experience contraction of 12%.

Table 5.1: Gross Domestic Product, 2019-2021 in USD Billions in Current Prices and Percentage Change from the Previous Year for 2020 (Estimates and Projections in Green)

Country	GDP (Current Prices, USD Billions)			% Change from Previous Year 2020
	2019	2020	2021	
Afghanistan	18.9	19.0	19.7	-5
Armenia	13.7	12.8	13.1	-4.5
Azerbaijan*	48.1	42.6	45.0	-4.3
Bhutan	2.5	2.6	2.6	0.6
Bolivia	41.12	38.9	43.0	-7.9
Botswana	18.5	15.9	17.3	-9.6
Burkina Faso	15.7	16.1	18.3	-2
Burundi	3.1	3.1	3.3	-3.2
Central African Republic	2.3	2.3	2.6	-1.0
Chad	10.9	10.5	12.0	-0.7
Eswatini	4.6	3.9	4.2	-3.5
Ethiopia	92.8	95.6	91.5	2.0
Kazakhstan	181.7	165.7	180.7	-2.7
Kyrgyz Republic	8.5	7.5	8.5	-12.0
Lao P.D.R.	19.1	18.7	19.3	0.2
Lesotho	2.4	1.9	2.1	-4.8
Malawi	7.7	8.3	8.5	0.6
Mali	17.3	17.7	20.1	-2.0
Moldova	12.0	11.2	11.7	-4.5
Mongolia	13.9	13.4	14.1	-2
Nepal	30.7	32.2	34.0	0.02
Niger	12.9	13.0	14.3	0.5
North Macedonia	12.7	12.5	14.4	-5.4
Paraguay	37.4	35.6	38.3	-4.0
Rwanda	10.1	10.4	10.6	2.0
South Sudan	4.9	4.2	4.6	4.1
Tajikistan	8.1	7.9	8.2	1.0

Turkmenistan	45.2	48.0	53.3	1.8
Uganda	36.5	37.7	41.2	-0.3
Uzbekistan	57.9	59.8	63.3	0.7
Zambia	24.2	18.9	19.6	-4.8
Zimbabwe	18.7	14.0	8.0	-10.4

Source: IMF, October 2020, World Economic Outlook Database

* <https://www.stat.gov.az/news/macroeconomy.php?page=3?lang=en>

A major concern about this downturn is that its impacts span a longer horizon, threatening to erase much of the progress made towards eliminating poverty in LLDCs, specifically those that are also LDCs. According to a press release by the World Bank, global extreme poverty is expected to reverse its course for the first time in over 20 years due to COVID-19, by pushing an addition 88-115 million people into extreme poverty in 2020.

Table 5.2 displays the potential growth and inequality scenarios that could affect the number of people in LLDCs and the world in extreme poverty. Given the rise in the “new poor” as a result of COVID-19, it is vital that policymakers address the factors that drive it such as inequality.

Table 5.2: 2030 Extreme Poverty-Rates for Various Economic Growth and Inequality Scenarios

Scenario	Average GDP per capita growth	Cumulative change in income inequality	Share of population in extreme poverty by 2030	
			LLDCs	World
	Developing Countries			
Baseline	3.9%	No change	28.0	7.6
Pessimistic	1.9%	+25%	38.9	12.9
Only Growth	6.9%	No change	21.7	6.1
Optimistic	6.9%	-25%	14.6	4.2
Poverty Miracle	9.9%	-50%	5.8	2.7

Source: UN DESA, 2020, World Economic Forecasting Model, based on the baseline of the *World Economic Situation and Prospects as of mid-2020*.

The social distancing necessary to stop the contagion has already led to economic shutdown affecting the already vulnerable LLDCs’ private sector which comprise mainly Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMMEs), and the informal sector, which make a larger proportion of the private sector in LLDCs and are also an important contributor to job creation are among the worst hit by the pandemic. According to OECD, the crisis has affected SMEs disproportionately, and has revealed their vulnerability to the supply and demand shocks with a serious risk that over 50% of SMMEs will not survive the next few months³. A widespread collapse of SMMEs could have a strong impact on the LLDCs’ economies including contraction of their incomes as well as falling fiscal revenues. Unemployment is expected to increase significantly. Without appropriate policy measures, workers face a high risk of falling into poverty and may experience greater challenges

³ https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/view/?ref=119_119680-di6h3qgi4x&title=Covid-19_SME_Policy_Responses

in regaining their livelihoods during the recovery period. LLDCs continue to make efforts to support their private sector, however the support remains insufficient.

UNDP's Socio-Economic Recovery Data-Insight Platform tracks the policy measures countries have instated in response to the impact of COVID-19. Information on such measures was available for 22 LLDCs and is presented in table 5.3.

Table 5.3: Policy Measures to Support MSMEs in the Aftermath of COVID-19

Country	Policy Measure
Armenia	Labour regulation
Azerbaijan	Interest rate reduction, cash liquidity, waive or reduce fees, tax concessions
Bhutan	Wage subsidies to employers against lay-offs, Loan
Bolivia	Waive or reduce fees
Botswana	Wage subsidies to employers against lay-offs, loan, waive or reduce fees
Burkina Faso	Loan, waive or reduce fees
Burundi	Wage subsidies to employers against lay-offs, waive or reduce fees
Central African Republic	Loan
Ethiopia	Waive or reduce fees
Kazakhstan	Labour regulation
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Waive or reduce fees
Lesotho	Cash assistance, cash liquidity
Malawi	Waive or reduce fees
Mali	Cash liquidity, loan
Mongolia	Decreasing policy interest rate, deferral of loan repayments, lower liquidity requirements, exemption from social insurance contributions, free limits of heating utilities, subsidized loans to businesses, increased amounts of universal cash assistance
Nepal	Loan
Niger	Loan
Paraguay	Loan
Republic of Moldova	Waive or reduce fees
Uganda	Cash liquidity
Uzbekistan	Loan
Tajikistan	Tax exemptions for MSMEs in selected sectors; utility rates unchanged in 2020; refinancing of loans

Source: Socio-Economic Recovery Data-Insight Platform, UNDP (<https://data.undp.org/covid-19/economic-recovery/vulnerable-groups/>)

In light of this the following recommendations are proposed:

- Policies to rebuild both in the short and long-term entail putting in place targeted stimulus measures to help reignite growth. Policy responses need to focus on providing immediate

relief to workers and enterprises in order to protect livelihoods and economically viable businesses, particularly for enterprises and workers operating in the informal economy.

- Extend support to the informal sector to enable workers in this sector to benefit from decent work conditions.
- Promote self-employment by enabling micro-finance opportunities and making digital banking more accessible to the poor. Extend credit support and providing interest free loans to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the self-employed.
- Enhance social protection by extending the coverage of existing schemes, including cash transfers, food aid, unemployment benefits, and paid sick leave protection plans.
- Defer individual loans and mortgages, temporarily suspending government fees, and providing tax relief to those in need.
- Support impacted businesses in order to reduce job layoffs by postponing social contribution payments for employees, extending tax exemptions, providing wage subsidies, and suspending loan repayments during the COVID-19 crisis.
- Boost demand and job creation through increased government spending on labour-intensive projects and procurement, especially expenditure on healthcare programmes and emergency response systems.
- Targeted package of international support measures for the LLDCs which takes into account their special challenges are necessary.
- LLDC Governments should support the private sector and getting money directly to people. They should aim to build private sector partnership and encourage large corporations to limit layoffs and integrate SMEs in their value chains, including by giving them preference in procurement and subcontracting, and offering them rent suspensions or waivers during the crisis. Encourage private banks to provide relief from interest payments during the crisis, and suspend collection of principals from SMEs and the self-employed.

6. Digital Connectivity and ICT

One of the pandemic's most salient impacts on countries around the world has been in the increased need for digital connectivity and Information and Communication Technology Infrastructure, as this has been one of the few mediums through which people can safely continue working and learning. Digital technologies enable the delivery of essential services while complying to social distancing protocols, including through remote learning, telemedicine, healthcare, e-commerce, news, meeting and working and accessing government services. It also displays the importance of digitalization of transit and customs procedures.

Education has moved online, providing e-learning for students from schools and universities, helped by innovative connectivity solutions, including free public WiFi, use of universal service funds for rural service provision, government subsidies and free access to learning platforms and websites.

Digital technologies have opened opportunities to online platforms that can connect entrepreneurs with potential customers around the world without the need of big investments and can allow the creation of online businesses at no cost.

Countries have fast tracked legislation and national digital transformation plans. Governments have adopted actions to support the operators including regulatory relaxations on spectrum, infrastructure sharing and licensing, as well as recognizing telecom engineers as key workers able to move around to support and maintain critical infrastructure (ITU, 2020).

These solutions to satisfy the necessity for physical-distancing is not equally achievable across all countries as there is a digital divide between the LLDCs and global averages. The lack of ICT and digital connectivity in LLDCs has been a challenge for the group of countries even before COVID-19 came to the forefront. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) data, the average percentage of the LLDC population with access to the internet in 2018 was 33.25%, which is below the world average of 53.6% and the average of developed countries of 86.6%. This includes a minimum of 2.7% in Burundi and maximum of 79.8% in Azerbaijan as shown in annex 1.

Although mobile telephony subscription rates per 100 inhabitants for LLDCs increased from since the adoption of the VPoA in 2014, the LLDCs as a group lag significantly behind both developed and global average as shown in table 6.1. Usually rural communities from remote areas, the poor and women are less connected globally and the trend is worsening (UNESCAP, 2020c).

Table 6.1. Internet usage and cellular subscription LLDCs

	Percentage of the LLDC population with access to the internet		Cellular subscribers per 100 population	
	2014	2019	2014	2019
Landlocked developing	17.4	26.1	66.7	75.6
Developed	75.8	86.6	122.0	128.9
World	39.1	53.6	96.7	108.0

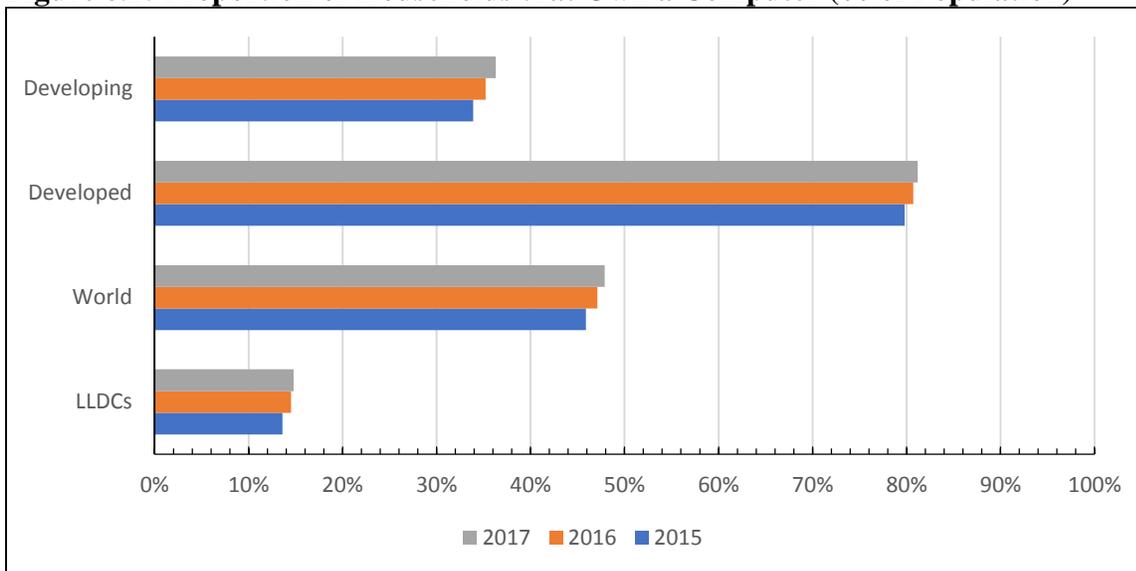
Source: ICT-Eye, ICT Data Portal, ITU

Challenges

The major constraints which prevent LLDCs from fully harnessing the developmental potential of ICT and digitalization include: infrastructural gaps, relatively high cost of ICT services, in particular broadband services, low digital literacy rates, and the high cost of accessing submarine cables. Fixed-broadband is particularly difficult for LLDCs to develop because of its relatively higher cost in LLDCs as compared to coastal areas.

Furthermore, not many people in LLDCs own ICT equipment such as computers and televisions. On average in LLDCs, only 14.8% of households owned a computer in 2017, compared to 13.6% in 2015. In developed countries, developing countries, and the world, the average computer ownership figures for 2017 were 81.2%, 36.3% and 47.9% respectively, up by 1.4%, 2.5%, and 2.0% respectively since 2015. The digital divide between LLDCs and the developed countries are substantial and have widened due to COVID-19 and need to be urgently addressed.

Figure 6.1: Proportion of Households that Own a Computer (% of Population)



Source: ITU ICT-Eye database

The digital divide is not only between LLDCs and developed countries, but also within the LLDCs there is a divide between those who have access and can benefit from digital technologies, and those who cannot. Furthermore, since most of in-person education has been substituted for either partial or fully online set-ups in the aftermath of COVID-19 around the globe, students in LLDCs need to be afforded similar options to ensure that they can gain access to educational platforms and not lose out in terms of years spent in school.

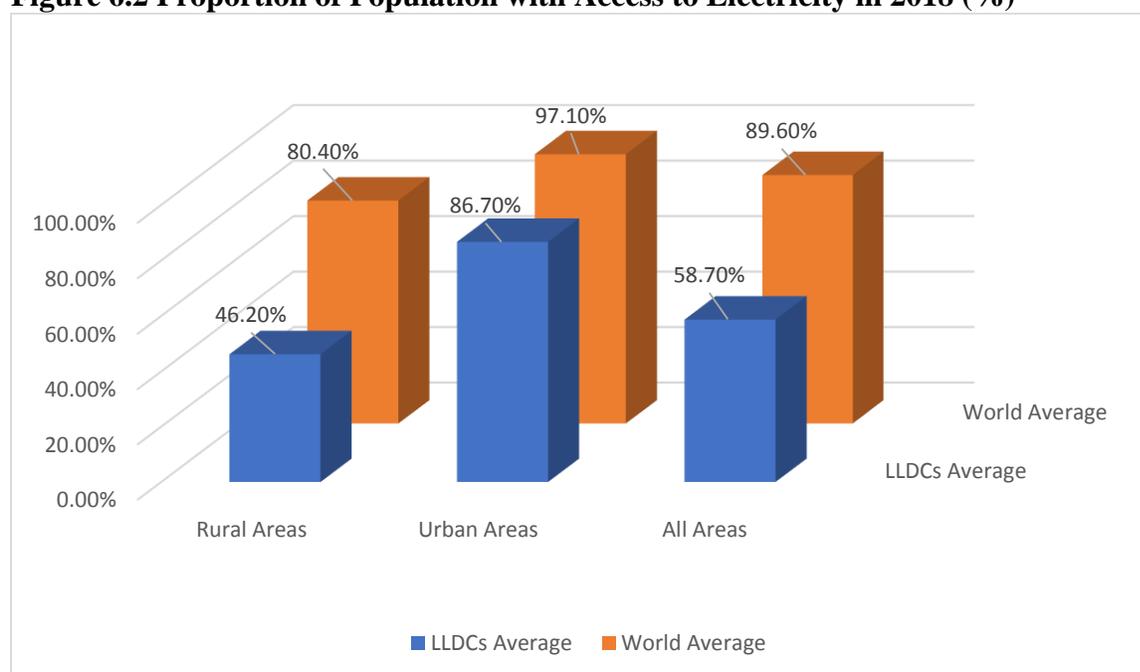
Besides the issue of access, the other major challenge is digital literacy. People need the right skillset to be able to survive and thrive in the digital world (ITU, 2020).

Cybersecurity is ever more critical—as more employees are working remotely and more key information is being disseminated via digital technology, attacks have also increased during the crisis and demand appropriate legislation and cross-border cooperation (ITU, 2020).

As the pandemic forces individuals to distance themselves and seek more isolated forms of work, many industries in the LLDCs, such as agriculture, tourism, and extractive industries that employ many individuals informally, cannot “go online” by virtue of their nature and due to the lack of ICT access in most LLDCs.

A prerequisite for ICT infrastructure is reliable energy being sourced to homes and communal areas to ensure consistent digital access and connectivity. Although access to energy has been improving in the LLDCs, there is still much more room for improvement and investment, particularly in rural areas of LLDCs. The average proportion of population with access to electricity in LLDCs increased from 49.5% in 2014 to 58.7% in 2018. However, LLDCs still lag behind the world average of 89.6% and there is still a wide rural-urban gap as shown in figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 Proportion of Population with Access to Electricity in 2018 (%)



Source: World Bank, 2020

The renewable energy sector provides an opportune window for use of stimulus packages to sustainably meet energy needs and job creation and will help in the recovery efforts from COVID-19 pandemic.

Measures undertaken to increase digital connectivity and access to ICT

In countries around the world, including in LLDCs, key players from government and industry rose to the challenge and worked to promote digital connectivity and ICT.

Sectors such as e-health, e-education, and e-commerce have boomed as a result and will continue to play important roles. According to ITU, 2020, in health terms, digital technologies have underpinned areas such as track and trace operations or assisting with remote COVID-19 diagnosis and telemedicine, as well as the prediction of patterns of contagion and outbreak using AI, big data and algorithms.

Table 6.2: ICT measures implemented by LLDCs during COVID-19

Country	Measure
Afghanistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lowering rates, introducing new packages, utilizing telecommunication networks and technology to provide free or low-cost access to education content online.
Armenia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Free calls, delayed payments to post-paid subscribers.
Azerbaijan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry and Transport, Communications and High Technologies launched a website with UNDP to provide users with online services in “education,” “delivery,” “medicine,” “food,” and “entertainment”, as well as providing information related to the pandemic. 80 foreign TV channels were added to terrestrial open broadcasting packages throughout the country.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A short number was allocated for use to allow citizens to ask permission to leave private homes.
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering low-tariff data combinations from the nation state-owned service provider.
Botswana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online classes that reach students in rural populations. • Online tools to disseminate pertinent information during the pandemic.
Burkina Faso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Onatel is allowing all cash transfers for water and electricity bills at no additional in-app cost through the <i>Mobicash app</i>. Additionally, removing all additional charges on commission payments for produce traders and increasing the overall monthly payment allowance through the app.
Chad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Regulatory Authority for Electronic Communications and Posts (ARCEP) officially installed a call centre which provides real-time information on the pandemic and has a 24/7 toll-free number.
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A platform has been developed by the Information Network Security Agency to monitor the situation of COVID-19 in Ethiopia and provide information to citizens.
Kazakhstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering free telemedicine services through “Beeline.”
Kyrgyzstan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering free telemedicine services through “Beeline.”
Lao P.D.R.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unitel is connecting the office of the Prime Minister, as well as cities and provinces across the country. It is also providing special pricing solutions to its customers and doubling the speed of home internet to provide more access to government, home and mobile information.
Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are offered 10GB data bundles for online learning and have access to over 10,000 books on Buku Digital Library through a partnership between the College of Medicine and TNM Plc. • TNM Plc, an integrated mobile network and ICT services provider has partnered with KaiOS Technologies to launch an affordable 4G phone.
Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Orange Mali and the Ministry of Health and Social Affairs have partnered to provide free data to essential workers, provide zero-rated numbers for information as well as text messages with important awareness information, provide additional data for fixed internet and lowering prices for mobile data, free data for students to access remote learning platforms, and free transactions on online payment apps.
Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering unlimited calls for select networks and subscribers. • Offering video lessons for students in primary, secondary and high school institutions.
Mongolia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science along with the Department of Communications and Information Technology is organizing a “TV Lesson” for primary and secondary school students. • Telecom operators provide free service access to www.econtent.edu.mn portal-education contents prepared by the Ministry of Education and Science. • Telecom operators provide discounted data services and flexible payment for their subscribers. • Mobile operators cut their tariff on international calls. • Telecom operators provide free WI-FI access for hospitals, as well as free data sim card for people who works in frontline. • Government back-office system along with the e-document management system is launched. • Public service integrated portal www.e-mongolia.mn to deliver public services through the internet is launched.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific for COVID-19 portal opened. www.covid19.mohs.mn • COVID-19 related hotline number 119 is launched to public and working for 24/7 hours. • Launched “Shuurkhai 119” /en trans. SOS/ mobile application. • Mobile operators send special warning and advisory SMS (specially prepared by Ministry of Health and WHO) free of charge to all their subscribers on a daily basis, since end of January.
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowered charges for data, voice, text, and international calls to keep NCell customers connected. • Free cultural, education e-banking and e-health digital services to keep people at home.
Niger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through a collaboration with Facebook Inc., the Ministry of Public Health, the National Agency for the Information Society and UNICEF have launched a “chatbot” on Whatsapp to provide users accurate and timely information on COVID-19 in Niger.
Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free text message services through service providers on warnings and recommendations of the Ministry of Health.
Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Airtel Rwanda is making all cash transfers free on its phone plans to discourage in-person cash exchanges that might expose people to COVID-19.
South Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zain, a South Sudanese telecommunications company, has donated mobile handsets to authorities and health workers.
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offering a day-time data bundle to allow Ugandans to stay online and work from home; workers receive 1 GB of data at just Ushs 2,000 from 9 am to 5 pm. • Airtel money has been allowed online payments and money transfers to avoid transactions with physical cash.
Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Ministry for Development of ICT implemented a Telegram both for online consultation of citizens with medical specialists on COVID-19. • Launch of an information system for electronic reception and registration of all applications for humanitarian aid, which keeps a complete record and manages calls for assistance through a call centre. • 5G 3.5 GHz band allocation is planned or under consideration currently.
Zambia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service provider MTN Zambia has implemented contingency plans for the surge in online usage that has arisen during the pandemic, including affordable data bundles, a free e-learning app, and troubleshooting network performance around the clock.
Zimbabwe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liquid Telecom Zimbabwe has provided financial support, expertise and technology for a dedicated national toll-free helpline and call centre to support citizens, especially the most vulnerable and isolated during the pandemic.

Sources: ITU Global Network Resiliency Platform April – September 2020

ICT development is crucial to the Disaster Risk Management (DRM) of any developing country. The readiness, quality and resilience of the ICT infrastructure are vital for the LLDCs in terms of providing early warnings, withstanding disaster events and helping in recovery as well as the condition of fibre optic connectivity networks and broadband are critical infrastructure for DRM. The universal and affordable access to the Internet for the LLDCs by highlighting the ‘digital divide’ is important. There is a need to enhance DRM knowledge and education of citizens, residents of remote areas, to initiate and take responsibility of the community, using Internet and social media to self-organize, volunteer initiatives to early warnings, create a live crisis map during

times of natural disasters, or introduce the necessary software, where the Government cannot directly reach because of geographic locations.

LLDCs face a significant lack of technologies, human capacity, training facilities and financial constraints, that are critical for LLDCs and their E-resilience. The Group of LLDCs has a strong interest in the consultations on E-resilience for further strengthened knowledge. These consultations should further progress and open opportunities and practical implementation of the ICT co-deployment with transport, energy infrastructure as well as in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs and most importantly Priorities of COVID-19 Recovery - immediate support for at-risk workers, protecting and strengthening the resilience of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises — including women-led businesses — and expanding universal social protection coverage – which were also highlighted at the virtual high-level meeting “Trends, Options and Strategies in Poverty Eradication across the World” by the Secretary-General of the UN, in New York on 30 of June, 2020.

The International Think Tank for Landlocked Developing Countries together with the UN-ESCAP’s ICT and Disaster Risk Reduction Division organized a virtual meeting on the E-resilience for Pandemic Recovery: intercountry consultations in preparation for the Third Session of ESCAP’s Committee on ICT & Science Technology and Innovation on July 3, 2020. The following key issues were highlighted at the meeting:⁴

- Participants of the webinar from three Regional Economic Cooperation and Integration (RECI) project pilot countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Mongolia reported on common key challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic. With respect to opportunities, countries observed the increased role of the digital connectivity in all aspects of peoples’ lives.
- The Member States and intergovernmental bodies - RECI project partners highlighted the urgent need to invest in digital infrastructure, as a fundamental infrastructure and foundation of a new normal built on all digital technologies and vital applications, including telemedicine, e-government services, distance work and learning.
- Speakers noted that the pandemic has highlighted the existing digital divide. In this regard, governments in close cooperation with international organizations and other development partners must take accelerated measures to address the digital divide.

In light of this the following recommendations are suggested:

- LLDCs should place connectivity and digital technology at the forefront of policy concerns. It is essential that Governments reform legislation, policies and frameworks to increase internet speed, affordability, and accessibility. A conducive environment for digital business and society, with measures such as harmonizing regulation, making available spectrum, attracting investment and creating incentives for business is also crucial. The deployment of 5G networks also offers great potential to boost connectivity and speed recovery (ITU, 2020).
- LLDCs should work towards developing the necessary digital infrastructure. LLDCs should also look to promote digital connectivity and ICTs by implementing Priority Area 2 of the Vienna Programme of Action for ICT and energy infrastructure, paying special attention to rural areas.

⁴ <https://www.unescap.org/events/e-resilience-pandemic-recovery-intercountry-consultations-preparation-cictsti>

- Furthermore, sustained efforts are needed in terms of government collaboration with key stakeholders, in particular with the private sector and non-governmental organizations. Continued collaboration and cooperation, with transit countries and with regional and international partners is critical to ensure sustainable connectivity for all in LLDCs.
- Given the limited state budget and often scarce investment resources from the private sector into energy, transport, and ICT systems, planning and implementing the infrastructure co-deployment can reduce costs in network deployments, expand coverage, reduce the rural-urban digital divide, but at the same time, it requires the high level of collaboration of ICT, Energy and/or Transport stakeholders. The Secretary General’s Roadmap on Digital Cooperation launched on 11 June 2020, highlights key collaborative actions to improve connectivity and achieve universal access to safe, affordable and reliable broadband internet by 2030.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships and involve other relevant stakeholders including marginalized communities to tackle both supply and demand side bottlenecks.
- LLDCs should look to enhance ICT skills among their population to be able to utilize digital connectivity. Thus, developing human capacity is important for increased digital literacy.
- Develop measures to increase cybersecurity, raise awareness and establish appropriate legislation and cross-border cooperation.
- Efforts to bridge the digital divide must incorporate the public sector, the international community and all players across industries, including different technology providers - satellite, mobile, fixed, 5G and emerging providers - as well as innovative SMEs.
- Governments need to develop the concept of a proposed single information portal on sectoral infrastructure projects with a goal of improved cross-sectoral, inter-ministerial information sharing and knowledge.
- International community needs to develop an instrument to monitor e-resilience, e.g. e-resilience index.
- Also, need to include the social aspect of digital preparedness (and possibly of e-resilience), in terms of people readiness and capacity for transition of their everyday activities to online.
- Governments and international community need to distribute e-resilience perception-based survey as widely as possible, with the aim of collecting as many responses as possible, and mitigating the subjectivity bias by increasing the number of responses.
- There is necessity to enhance disaster risk reduction and management and e-resilience knowledge and education of citizens and of residents of remote areas. Governments should consider investing more into ICTs used for disaster risk reduction and management and e-resilience.

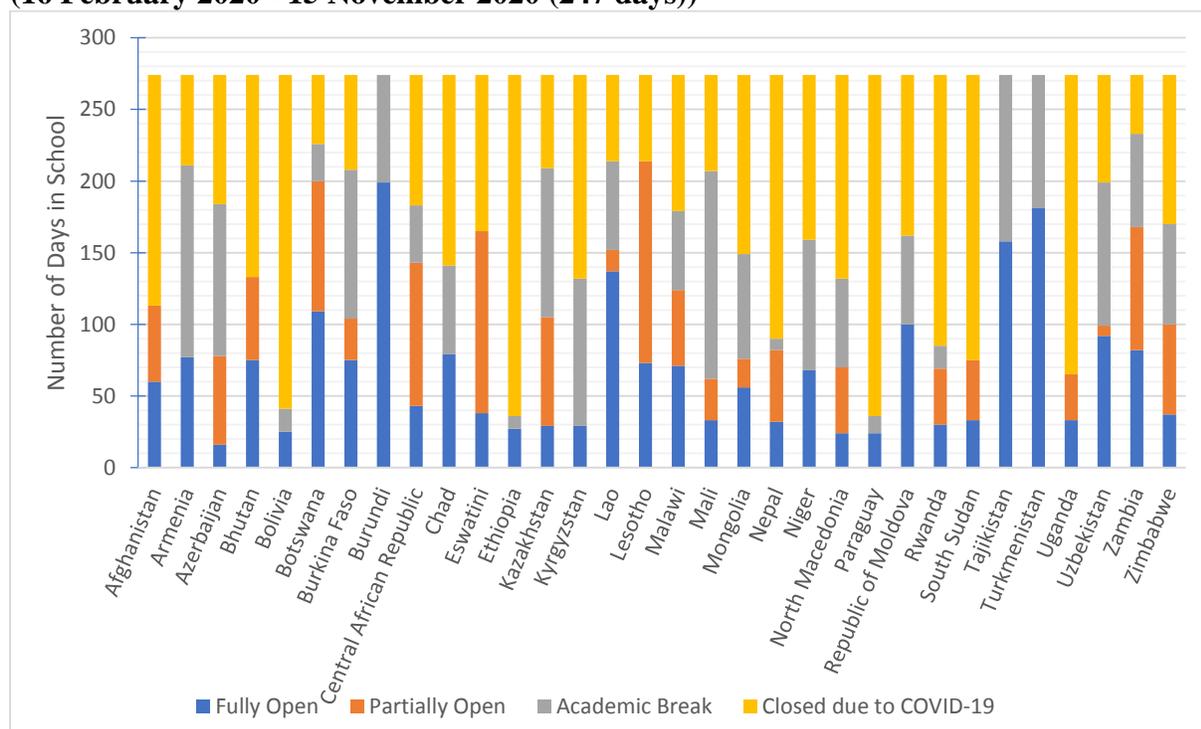
7. Education

The onset of COVID-19 pandemic and its preventative measures, such as social distancing, affected many students from pre-primary to secondary schools, technical and vocational education and training institutions, universities, adult learning, and skills development establishments needed to stop attending school or colleges in person. Closures of schools and other learning spaces have impacted, up to 99 per cent in low and lower-middle income countries (UN, 2020b).

Even before the pandemic, low and lower-middle income countries including the LLDCs were already facing formidable challenges in fulfilling the promise of education as a basic human right.

UNESCO et.al. 2020 indicates that prior to the pandemic, half of 10-year-olds in middle- and low-income countries were unable to understand a simple written sentence and more than a quarter billion children were out of school. The mean years of schooling in LLDCs in 2018 was 5.5 compared to world average of 8.7 as shown in Annex 3 indicating a wide gap between LLDCs and the world average. The pandemic has sharpened these inequities, hitting schoolchildren in poorer countries particularly hard (UNESCO et.al. 2020). Education systems in all LLDCs responded to the onset of the pandemic by closures or school breaks and re-openings as shown in figure 7.1. Factors for these variations are linked to the strictness and length of border closures and available alternatives to in-person instruction.

Figure 7.1: School Closures and Re-openings in LLDCs due to COVID-19 (16 February 2020 - 15 November 2020 (247 days))



Source: UNESCO, 2020.

Table 7.1 shows that as of November, 2020 almost 50% of the LLDCs had schools still closed or partially opened. Globally, the study by UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank compiling data from surveys on national primary and secondary education responses to COVID-19 from 149 countries between July and October 2020 showed that schoolchildren in low- and lower-middle-income countries have already lost an average of 47 days of in-person instruction due to school closures since the start of the pandemic. This has major implications to access to learning.

Table 7.1: LLDC School Status as of 1 November, 2020

Country	Status as of November 1, 2020
Afghanistan	Fully Open
Armenia	Fully Open
Azerbaijan	Partially Open

Bhutan	Fully Open
Bolivia	Closed Due to COVID-19
Botswana	Fully Open
Burkina Faso	Fully Open
Burundi	Fully Open
Central African Republic	Partially Open
Chad	Fully Open
Eswatini	Partially Open
Ethiopia	Closed Due to COVID-19
Kazakhstan	Partially Open
Kyrgyz Republic	Closed Due to COVID-19
Lao P.D.R.	Fully Open
Lesotho	Fully Open
Malawi	Fully Open
Moldova	Fully Open
Mongolia	Fully Open Schools but reclosed again in late November 2020
Nepal	Partially Open
Niger	Fully Open
North Macedonia	Partially Open
Paraguay	Closed Due to COVID-19
Rwanda	Partially Open
South Sudan	Partially Open
Tajikistan	Fully Open
Turkmenistan	Fully Open
Uganda	Partially Open
Uzbekistan	Fully Open
Zambia	Fully Open
Zimbabwe	Partially Open

Source: UNESCO, 2020

National responses to COVID-19 in education and Challenges

National responses by LLDCs to COVID-19's impact on education have involved implementation of remote learning options including utilizing available resources such as radio, online platforms, and television channels, and paper-based take-home packages. However, these options are not equally available to all students. Table 7.2 to 7.5 show by sub-regional groupings the popular interventions that LLDCs have developed whilst annex 4 shows details of interventions used by LLDCs.

Table 7.2. Impact of COVID-19 on education in selected LLDCs and measures taken to continue students' learning - Central Asian LLDCs

Country	Initial nationwide school closure	Status (as of November 2020)	Affected learners	Notable measures taken by the authority	Some of the platforms utilized in e-learning
Kazakhstan	16 March 2020	Partially open	+ 5 million	Ministry of Education and Science of Kazakhstan, the country national telecommunications operator and mobile network operators are cooperating to provide free internet access to educational resources. Launched and upgraded national open education platforms such as Kundelik and Uztaz.	Kundelik, Uztaz, Google Classroom, Moodle, Coursera, Zoom
Turkmenistan	Did not close schools	Fully open	n/a	n/a	n/a
Kyrgyz Republic	17 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 1.6 million	Students and teachers were provided with SIM-cards for free access to the education app, education web pages and to use WhatsApp for free communication.	National platforms: Bilim Bulagy, Educational resources of Kyrgyzstan, Ibilim. Matriculant RG (free app for remote training and admission test), CEATM (online lessons for admission tests)
Tajikistan	27 April 2020	Fully open	+ 2.1 million	The Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan published electronic version of all textbooks for grades 1-11, which can be read in PDF format on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science. Some lessons were also delivered through TV	n/a
Uzbekistan	16 March 2020	Fully open	+ 7.4 million	All mobile operators have provided the population with free access to the websites of educational resources	Ministry of Public Education of Uzbekistan's website uzedu.uz, Khan Academy, Online Maktab app (TV lesson app for mobile devices), Kundalik platform (online school diary)

Source: unesco.org, worldbank.org

Table 7.3. Impact of COVID-19 on education in selected LLDCs and measures taken to continue students' learning - Other Asian LLDCs

Country	Initial nationwide school closure	Status (as of November 2020)	Affected learners	Notable measures taken by the authority	Some of the platforms utilized in e-learning
Mongolia	27 January 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 990,000	3,020 tele lessons and 206 e-books were posted on the Econtent e-learning portal, and 16 TV channels broadcast nationwide tele lessons in Mongolian, Kazakh and sign languages.	Econtent app (for secondary education level students), Open edX, YouTube, Zoom
Lao PDR	19 March 2020	Partially open	+ 1.7 million	Ministry of Education of Lao PDR developed an Education COVID-19 response plan and back to school campaign with help from UNICEF.	n/a
Bhutan	6 March 2020	Fully open	+ 188,000	Ministry of Information and Communications is working with the education ministry and telecom service providers to facilitate data access for eLearning for students across the country. Telecommunications operators such as Bhutan Telecom and TashiCell are working with the government to provide additional data for students.	Google Classrooms, G Suite, YouTube, WhatsApp, WeChat
Nepal	19 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 8.7 million	A coalition of teachers, education journalists, nongovernmental organizations, local governments, and local radio stations has also launched a distance-learning radio program called Radio Schools.	Sikai Chautari e-learning platform (available in Nepali and English)

Source: unesco.org, worldbank.org

Table 7.4. Impact of COVID-19 on education in selected LLDCs and measures taken to continue students' learning - European LLDCs

Country	Initial nationwide school closure	Status (as of November 2020)	Affected learners	Notable measures taken by the authority	Some of the platforms utilized in e-learning
North Macedonia	18 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 359,000	The Government in partnership with a local telecoms provider, Makedonski Telekom, started donating mobile internet for	Eduino digital platform

				distance learning purposes to 30,000 primary and secondary school students from families at social risk. The Ministry of Education and Science of Macedonia in Cooperation with UNICEF is offering a variety of distance learning platforms for primary and secondary school students including TV-Classroom and the E-Classroom.	
Moldova	16 March	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 580,000	With the coronavirus pandemic looming, the platform had to quickly transform to meet the rising needs. Studii.md digital platform added functionalities such as the ability for teachers to upload videos, video conferencing for online lessons, e-textbooks, and automatic calculation of grades and average scores.	Studii.md e-learning platform, Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts
Azerbaijan	2 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 1.9 million	Most of the universities are using Microsoft Teams platform provided by the Ministry of Education free of charge for online teaching process.	Microsoft Teams
Armenia	16 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 540,000	Education Management Information System (EMIS), 2012 project financed by the World Bank, partially launched to operate in the secondary education level.	EMIS, Hybrid Edu television channel, Zoom, Moodle, Blackboard, Google Hangouts, Coursera, WhatsApp

Source: unesco.org, worldbank.org

Table 7.5. Impact of COVID-19 on education in selected LLDCs and measures taken to continue students' learning - South American LLDCs

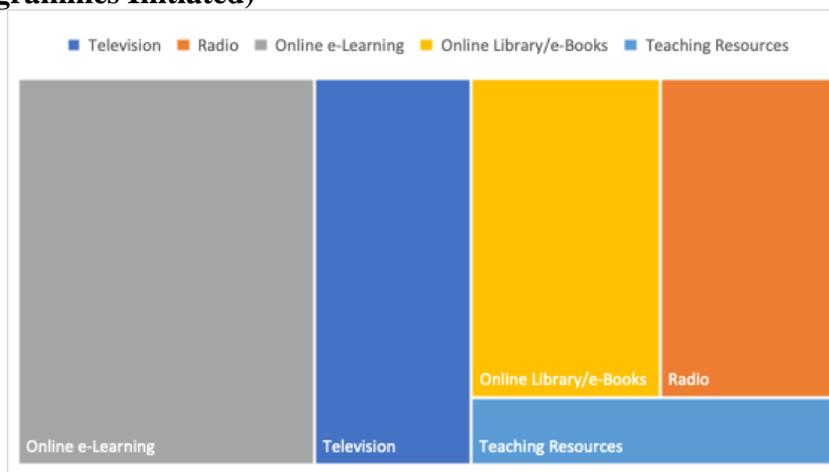
Country	Initial nationwide school closure	Status (as of November 2020)	Affected learners	Notable measures taken by the authority	Some of the platforms utilized in e-learning
Paraguay	11 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 1.7 million	The government signed an agreement with Microsoft to cover the e-learning needs of 60,000 teachers and 1,200,000 students at zero cost	Biblioteca Digital, Tu escuela en casa (Your school at home) educational platform
Bolivia	12 March 2020	Closed due to COVID-19	+ 2.9 million	A resource series called ¡Listos a Jugar!, which translates to Ready to Play!, has been developed and	n/a

				deployed in collaboration with Sesame Workshop and UNICE to provide guidance to parents/caregivers to promote healthy lifestyle habits for children	
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Source: unesco.org, worldbank.org

Based on UNESCO, 2020c, the most popular alternative educational initiatives that the LLDCs used include online e-learning, television, online library, radio and teaching resources as shown in figure 7.6.

Figure 7.6: Popularity of Alternative Educational Initiatives in LLDCs (Number of Programmes Initiated)



Source: Based on UNESCO, 2020c. National Learning Platforms and Tools

As highlighted in section 6, LLDCs have poor rates of digital connectivity and ICT infrastructure at the household and national level. ICT infrastructure is not robust, especially within households, and students are facing a drastic drop in the quality of their education and the time spent studying negatively affecting their crucial years of learning. The UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2020, report also found that schoolchildren in low- and lower-middle income countries were less likely to have access to remote learning or to be monitored on a day-to-day basis by teachers and were more likely to have delays in their schools reopening. The lost time in school will have lasting impacts on students' future and therefore have ripple effects on their families. For instance, one estimate indicated that the learning losses incurred from schools being closed for four months will cost \$10 trillion in terms of lost earnings, globally.

Furthermore, moving from school-environments to home-environments can mean more exposure to stressful situations, including fear of infection or a family-member getting infected, and

environments generally unfit for learning which in the worst case can mean mental, physical, and sexual abuse.

While online platforms and TV are the most used remote learning methods, poor households in particular in rural areas have challenges in meeting the financial needs of remote learning. Students with disabilities, an already marginalized group also face difficulties in accessing remote learning as many modes of distance-learning, such as TV, radio, and online require sensory abilities.

Providing subsidized or free access to internet is one important method of facilitating online learning. Some governments in LLDCs have subsidized programmes or mediums of education. For instance, according to the UNICEF/Innocenti Research Brief 2020-10, North Macedonia has been negotiating with telecommunication companies to subsidize connectivity; Kyrgyzstan has been providing free/low-cost SIM cards; Rwanda and Paraguay have not been charging data costs for education content. In Burundi, governments and other education actors are delivering secure digital cards for mobile phones preloaded with audio content.

However, the major challenge that LLDCs face is financing constraints to fully support remote learning. Before COVID-19, many low- and middle-income countries faced challenges of inadequate financing for education (UNESCO, 2019). The early 2020 estimate of the financing gap to reach Sustainable Development Goal 4 – quality education – in low- and lower-middle-income countries was a staggering \$148 billion annually (UN, 2020). It is estimated that the COVID-19 crisis will increase financing gap by up to one-third. The survey by UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank (2020) found that 2 in 3 high- and upper-middle-income countries provided subsidized or free internet access and devices at lower cost, while this was less common in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

Governments are also establishing new health protocols and plans for reopening and these policies vary widely based on each country's wealth. According to UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank, as of September 2020, most countries globally had fully or partially reopened their schools, and high-income countries which responded to the survey were more likely than lower income countries to have reopened as planned and they were also more likely to use a combination of remote and in-person (hybrid) learning. In most low-income countries, schools were reopening with fully in-person teaching and learning. In the beginning of 2021, many LLDC governments still had partial or full closures of schools to contain the spread of the COVID-19.

In light of this the following recommendations are suggested:

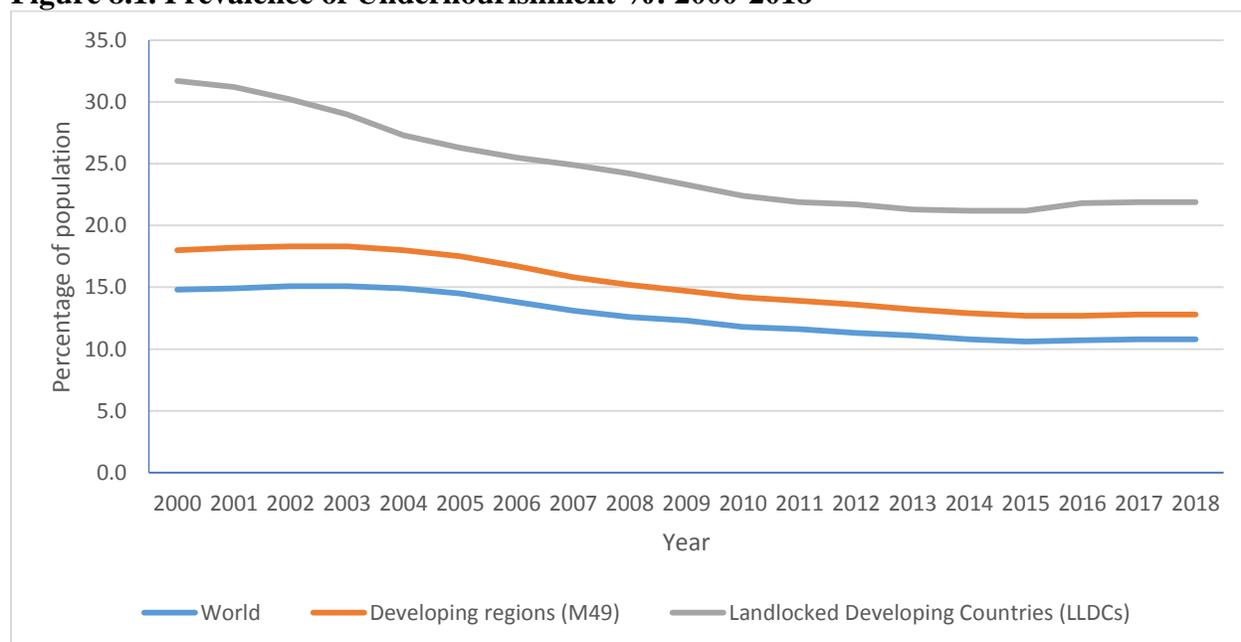
- While implementing distance-learning options through available modes of communication, governments must work on building back better and more resilient education systems, boost access to these platforms and to support teachers and parents/caregivers.
- LLDC governments should continue to invest in education now and in the coming years so that children are able to safely resume learning and no one is left behind.
- As the life-time implications of COVID-19's impact on education in LLDCs cannot yet be fully understood, it is vital that governments take it upon themselves to not only bridge the gap at present by providing education options that permit distanced-learning, but also seek to build resilient education systems.

- LLDC governments must put the safety of the children first, working to either offer safe, distanced-learning within schools or offering services and routine-checkups on children in households.
- LLDC Governments must work to deter student drop-out rates and the funnelling of students from education to child-labour.
- LLDC governments need to mobilize/allocate additional financial resources to cover COVID-19-related costs in the education sector and to support safe reopening schools including implementation of health and hygiene guidelines and measures for schools such as the promotion of physical distancing, hand-washing practices and other measures to reduce exposure contact. Development partners, United Nations organizations and other international, regional and national organizations are called upon to support LLDCs to reopen schools safely and inclusively, taking every measure to protect the health and well-being of learners, teachers and educators thereby supporting a sustainable recovery.

8. Food security

Even before the onset of COVID-19, LLDCs have higher levels of food insecurity when compared to world averages. Figure 8.1 shows that the trend of hunger, as measured by the prevalence of undernourishment in LLDCs is two times (almost 22%) higher than the world average (10.8%). The number of undernourished in LLDCs was estimated at 112 million in 2018, most of which are in Africa. According to the UN SDG database⁵ the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the adult population in LLDCs increased from 46.5% in 2015 to 50.8% in 2017 compared to world average of 25.4% in 2017.

Figure 8.1. Prevalence of Undernourishment %: 2000-2018



Source: FAOSTAT database.

⁵ <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/>

The 2020 Global Report on Food Crises (FSIN, 2020) that has an assessment of acute food insecurity situations around the world indicates that 16 LLDCs were among the 50 countries faced with food crises in 2019. Three LLDCs are among the ten countries with the worst food crises in 2019. Food insecurity is exacerbated by climate change, desertification, land degradation and drought that LLDCs are vulnerable to since the majority of their agricultural land being located in arid and semi-arid areas, with an estimated 54 per cent of their land classified as dryland. Other factors for the high level of hunger include protracted conflicts, pests and diseases.

LLDCs are also dependent on food imports. According to data from FAOSTAT database the export value index agricultural products for the period 2001-2017 for LLDCs increased two times while the import value index of agricultural products in LLDCs increased three times, implying that LLDCs import more food than they export. The costs of imported food items in LLDCs are relatively high due to high trade costs that are often passed on to consumers. Domestic foods prices in LLDCs are estimated to be three times volatile than their coastal neighbours.

Against this backdrop, the COVID-19 crisis threatens the food security and nutrition of millions of people in LLDCs. The pandemic is impacting food security through various mechanisms. Measures to control or mitigate COVID-19 outbreaks affect global food supply chains and border restrictions and lockdowns are, for example, constraining transport of food to LLDCs. Since LLDCs are highly dependent on food imports, food security and nutrition in LLDCs remain highly susceptible to disruption in global supply chains.

COVID-19 has also resulted in increases in food prices in some countries including LLDCs dependent on imported food that has to transit through other countries. A study by Nordhagen, 2020, of 10 African and Asian countries (Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, and Tanzania) examined food price changes (in percentage terms) over the 2.5-month period from 14 February (pre-pandemic) to 30 April. The study found that out of 136 country-food combinations, 118 showed an average price increase of 6.4%, with every country showing a price increase for at least eight of the 14 foods examined (apples, bananas, bread, cheese, eggs, lettuce, beef, chicken, onions, oranges, potatoes, milk, rice, and tomatoes). The greatest average price increases were seen in Rwanda with an average increase of 23.5%. The FAO Food Price Monitoring and Analysis in October 2020 provide warning of countries where prices of one or more basic food commodity are at abnormal high levels in main markets. Of the 11 countries highlighted in the warning, 4 are LLDCs⁶.

LLDCs are dependent on agricultural exports and have a large share of the population involved in agriculture and food production, processing, transportation, and distribution, making them especially vulnerable to the pandemic. COVID-19 related lockdown measures and social-distancing have resulted in high levels of unemployment, loss of income, and reduced purchasing power of people making access to food difficult for many in the face of rising prices of basic foods. With COVID-19 measures and social-distancing many farmers and agrarian workers have either had disruptions in their field-work or had to forego planting seasons altogether. For instance,

⁶ [http://www.fao.org/giews/food-prices/price-warnings/en/?page=1&ipp=10&no_cache=1&tx_dynalist_pi1\[par\]=YToxOntzOjE6IkwiO3M6MToiMCI7fQ==](http://www.fao.org/giews/food-prices/price-warnings/en/?page=1&ipp=10&no_cache=1&tx_dynalist_pi1[par]=YToxOntzOjE6IkwiO3M6MToiMCI7fQ==)

Afghanistan’ farmers were unable to sow their crops in the designated season, which adds to food shortages and therefore food price rises.

Table 8.1 shows that the prevalence of moderate to severe food insecurity in LLDCs in October 2020 as estimated by WFP as People with Insufficient Food Consumption. The data shows that in 5 LLDCs, more than fifty percent of people had insufficient food consumption whilst in 13 LLDCs it is between 20% and 43% showing high prevalence of food insecurity. The changes between September and October 2020 show some slight rebounding from severe food insecurity that was induced by the pandemic in 11 LLDCs. However, in 8 LLDCs food insecurity worsened as the people with insufficient food consumption had increased in number since September. According to FAO, prices of industrial and food products grew by 3% between January and August 2020 in North Macedonia.

Table 8.1: Hunger and COVID-19 Weekly Snapshots for the week of October 30, 2020

Country	Population (Millions)	People with Insufficient Food Consumption (October 2020) (Millions)	Prevalence of Insufficient Food Consumption (October, 2020) (%)	Change since last month (September to October 2020) (Millions)
Afghanistan	37.6	28.2	75%	-2.78
Mali	19.1	11.9	62%	-0.74
Niger	22.4	13.6	61%	0.78
South Sudan*	11	6	55%	-0.04
Burkina Faso	19.8	10.7	54%	-0.32
Zimbabwe	14.4	6.2	43%	<i>Not available</i>
Lesotho*	2.1	0.9	43%	0
Eswatini*	1.1	0.4	36%	0
Burundi*	11.2	3.9	35%	0.01
Tajikistan*	9.1	3	33%	-0.01
Ethiopia*	109.2	33.5	31%	11.45
Uganda*	42.7	13.1	31%	1.05
Central African Republic	4.7	1.4	30%	-0.19
Rwanda*	12.3	3.2	26%	-0.09
Bhutan*	0.8	0.2	25%	0
Lao People’s Democratic Republic*	7.1	1.7	24%	-0.1
Mongolia*	3.2	0.7	22%	0
Botswana*	2.3	0.5	22%	0
Malawi	18.1	3.5	19%	1.37
Nepal*	28.1	5	18%	-0.25
Kyrgyzstan*	6.3	1	16%	0.01
Bolivia*	11.4	1.8	16%	0.01

Chad	15.5	2.4	16%	-0.48
Uzbekistan*	33	5	15%	0.02
Zambia	17.4	2.5	14%	-1.93
Moldova	3.5	0.4	11%	0
Armenia*	3	0.3	10%	0
World*	7,800	930	11.9%	

Source: World Food Programme, HungerMap Live: Hunger and COVID-19 Weekly Snapshot

* Indicates monthly statistic

In light of this the following recommendations are suggested:

- Development partners, the United Nations, Multilateral Development Banks, International Financial Institutions, and other international and regional organizations should support LLDCs to:
 - increase humanitarian support to towards food security and livelihoods to vulnerable groups.
 - strengthen food supply chains and promote measures to facilitate affordable food supplies.
 - strengthen development interventions that address the root causes of food insecurity such as increased agricultural productivity through for example increased irrigation capacity, technology transfer, sharing of experiences.
 - ensure that gender inequalities are addressed and the needs of elderly and young people are met.
- Relief and stimulus packages should be targeted to alleviate liquidity constraints on vulnerable households, rural businesses and farmers including smallholder farmers to help facilitate continued production and people's access to adequate food and nutrition.
- Trading partners including transit countries are encouraged to keep trade channels/corridors open including by facilitating free movement of goods, to avoid piling an unnecessary food price crisis on the current health and to ensure the continuous functioning of the critical aspects of food systems in all countries.
- Expand food security monitoring systems to provide timely, improved and geospatially indicative data to measure the pandemic's unfolding effects and understand better who is suffering from hunger and malnutrition and where they are.
- Strengthen social protection systems for nutrition and tailor nutrition-sensitive social protection programmes and consider the potential benefits of different transfer modalities; in-kind, cash, or vouchers as well as public food distribution systems should be designed to ensure access to diverse, balanced and nutritious meals.
- Accelerate investment towards a more inclusive, environmentally sustainable and resilient food system. The agriculture sector needs to be protected and treated as a critical sector to ensure continued production of food.
- LLDCs should strengthen intra and inter-regional trade in order to stimulate income growth and enable countries to reach minimal size to develop industries in the region, generate increased trade potential, develop regional value chains that are important to support integration in global value chains, and help develop integrated markets that are more resilient to risks: e.g. weather shocks, locusts etc.

9. Gender equality

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action adopted 25 years ago at the Fourth World Conference on Women remains the most comprehensive and transformative global agenda for the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Review of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action revealed that important gains have been achieved since 1995, however, no country has fully achieved gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls and major gaps remain and challenges persist (UN, 2020d). Many women and girls continue to experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, vulnerability and marginalization throughout their life course in all areas including access to economic opportunities for both access to jobs and assets, access to health and education, and voice and capacity to make decisions and act on them. The gender gap in labour force participation has stagnated over the past 20 years, and the majority of employed women work in the informal economy. Women and girls are disproportionately responsible for unpaid care and domestic work, and women are more likely than men to live in extreme poverty. Women still hold only a quarter of seats in single or lower houses of parliament around the world, and reports of attacks on women in political and public life are increasing. Violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres remains pervasive.

Evidence shows that the impacts and implications of COVID-19 are different for women and men, and that they are exacerbating existing gender inequalities and posing an additional burden for women and girls (World Bank, 2020b). With health systems overloaded and schools closed, a greater burden is placed on care and domestic work in the home and that burden lands largely on women and girls possibly leading to reductions in working time and permanent exit from the labour market.

The provision of sexual and reproductive health services, including maternal health care is central to health, rights and well-being of women and girls. Emergency needs for COVID-19 pandemic might cause a diversion of attention and critical resources away from these provisions and may result in exacerbated maternal mortality and morbidity, increased rates of adolescent pregnancies, HIV and sexually transmitted diseases (UN, 2020d).

Women health-care workers are playing a disproportionate role in responding to COVID-19 as front-line health workers or health and elder-care facility staff. Globally, 70% of workers in the health and social sector are women, and as such they are more likely to be exposed to the virus (UN, 2020d). They may also face the added physical and psychological stress of balancing paid and unpaid work roles.

Incidence of gender-based violence is increasing, and many women are facing increased intimate partner violence and other forms of domestic violence while confined at home exacerbated by imposed movement restrictions, social distancing and the suspension of most businesses and social services. Unfortunately, less than 40 percent of women who experience violence report violent crimes or seek help of any sort, according to UN Women. Support to survivors is being disrupted or made inaccessible with overburdened health and support workers responding to COVID-19 cases.

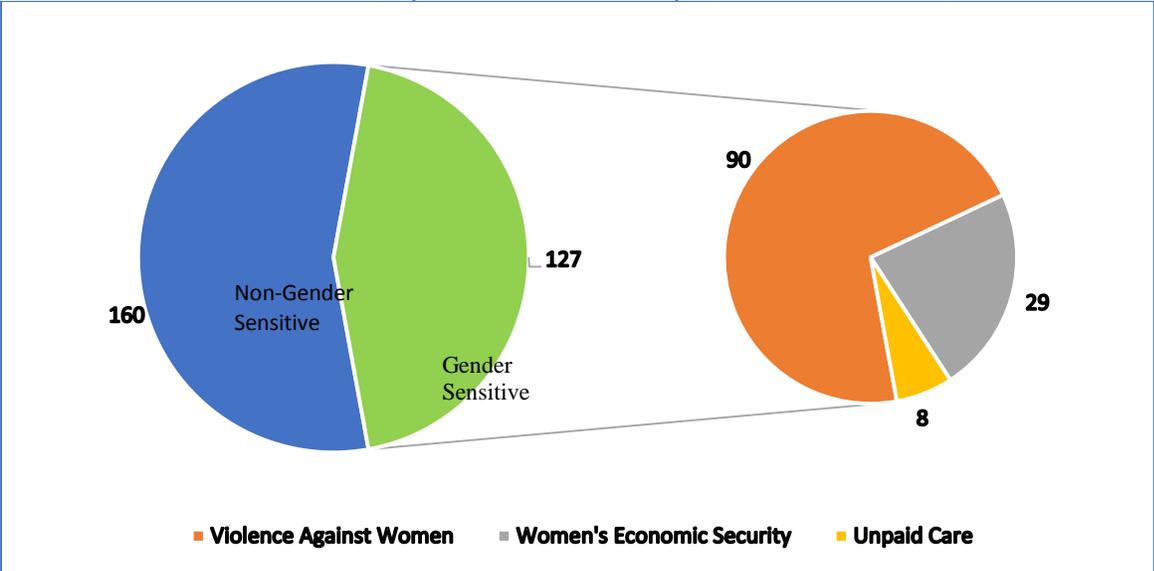
Women are hit harder by economic impacts caused by COVID-19 because they are more often engaged in short-term, part-time or informal employment which offers limited social security, pension and health insurance. They also are generally earning less, saving less, and holding insecure jobs or living close to poverty. In LLDCs, women are largely engaged in informal work and other vulnerable forms of employment (e.g. self-employment in small subsistence businesses, domestic work, cross-border trading and small-holder farming), which often leaves them out of formal social protection measures targeted to workers. Women are over-represented in some of the occupations that are hardest hit, such as retail, travel, leisure and hospitality. If exposed to COVID-19, they may face greater risks due to their limited access to critical health care

The pandemic’s crisis has highlighted the importance of sharing reliable information clearly and quickly in order to allow people to make necessary decisions and preparations for themselves and their families. However, according to UN Women, since women’s ownership of mobile phones and other information-receiving devices is lower than that of men’s, women are not just at risk of being ill-informed during the pandemic, they are also dependent on others to convey information, which fundamentally undermines their decision-making.

Given that the COVID-19 is not gender-blind, it is important that policies and interventions should be gender-responsive in order to accelerate action for the realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls. The critical role that women play in building resilience and recovery efforts in both the rapid response and the long-term of building back better should be supported.

UNDP and UN Women partnered to form a COVID-19 Global Gender Response Tracker that observes the policy measures planned or enacted by governments, and whether the policy measures have incorporated a gendered aspect.

Figure 9.1: The Number of Policy Measures Planned and Enacted by LLDCs in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic, by Gender-Sensitivity (out of 287 Policies)



Source: UNDP, UN Women, Gender Tracker

The breakdown shows that just under half of all COVID-19 response measures have incorporated gender-sensitive language, with 31.2% being dedicated to addressing violence against women, 10% addressing women’s economic security, and just 2.8% addressing unpaid care. Table 9.1 presents some examples of gender responsive initiatives or policies that LLDCs are implementing.

Table 9.1. Examples of initiatives/ measures to promote gender equality during COVID-19 outbreak

Country	Initiative/Policy
Afghanistan	The Ministry of Women’s Affairs who is overseeing the management of shelters in Afghanistan has repurposed unused spaces previously operated by Civil Society Organizations and funded by international donors, like children shelters, to host women released from prisons and some survivors of violence.
Armenia	The government approved a few actions to offset the economic and social consequences of COVID-19, including support to families with children under 14, and unemployed pregnant women whose husband is unemployed/does not have a husband in the form of lump-sum payments.
Azerbaijan	To mitigate the additional burdens on families, especially women, more than 100,000 food and hygiene kits were disseminated across the country, especially to women-headed households, internally displaced persons, refugees, and other vulnerable groups.
Bhutan	The National Commission for Women and Children implemented an awareness raising campaign via mainstream media (television, radio, newspaper and social media).
Bolivia	Policy measures have been implemented to address unpaid care that included paid leave for workers with dependent children under 5 who must meet care needs.
Burkina Faso	The government established cash transfers for informal sector workers to help those affected by COVID-19, especially women.
Burundi	In-kind transfer of food and hygiene kits to households’ victims of floods.
Ethiopia	Beneficiaries of the Urban Productive Safety Net project will receive an advance 3-months payment while on leave from their public works obligations. This partly targets female-headed households, foresees the provision of community-based childcare services and reduced working time for women with children. Before and after childbirth, it also enables women to receive direct support without work requirements.
Kazakhstan	Potential victims and owners of grocery stores, vendors and pharmacies are warned about a code phrase, the pronunciation of which signals the incidence of domestic violence and the need to inform the police immediately.
Kyrgyzstan	The government has supported 6 crisis centres country-wide under social contracting modality, and in partnership with Bishkek’s Mayor’s office for gender-based violence survivors.
Malawi	UNFPA, UNICEF, UNDP and UN Women are holding a joint initiative to ensure that adolescent girls and young women are safe from the negative impact of COVID-19, such as early marriage or teenage pregnancy, through mentorship sessions that are proving an effective model of prevention of these harmful practices.
Nepal	One stop Crisis Management Centres (OCMCs) are providing health services in 66 districts, including, free health service, coordination with safe homes, psychosocial counselling, and referral to police.
Niger	The Federal Ministry of Women’s Affairs, with the support of UN Women and UNFPA, produced jingles to be played during radio programs promoting COVID-19

	Safety and hygiene directives as well as reporting channels for survivors of sexual and gender-based violence.
North Macedonia	Maternity/paternity leave was extended until the duration of the temporary measures, which ended on 27 of September 2020.
Paraguay	Additional transfers are planned for the Tekopora social protection program for 167,000 families, which promotes and protects families in poverty and those who are vulnerable and have children between 0 – 14 years of age, pregnant women, and others. Estimates indicated that 82% of beneficiaries are women. The additional payment is 50% of the bi-monthly ordinary fee.
Republic of Moldova	UN Women partnered with the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Social Protection, to disseminate communication materials on services available for victims of domestic violence and their contact details to 1,000 female victims of domestic violence.
Rwanda	A measure has been instated to distribute food and other essential items to 20,000 families, partly targeting female-headed households.
South Sudan	The South Sudan Safety Net Project will target women and expand access to safety net and provide income security for low-income South Sudanese, while strengthening delivery tools and local level capacities. It will also provide direct grants to those who are unable to work, including people with disabilities, the elderly and pregnant or breastfeeding women, among others.
Tajikistan	The Ministry of Health continues running victim support rooms of those affected by gender-based violence at health facilities, exploring the option of increasing the number of medical facilities hosting victim support rooms.
Uganda	The “Girls Empowering Girl” urban cash transfer and mentoring programs for adolescent girls, implemented by the Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA), has transitioned to remote coordination, adopted a virtual mentoring model to ensure delivery continuity, and implemented remote enrolment for pre-registered beneficiaries.
Uzbekistan	Prohibition of termination of the employment contract for an employee who is the parent (person, substitute, guardian, trustee) of a child under the age of 14 who is infected with COVID-19 or placed in quarantine.
Zimbabwe	Gender-based violence services have been deemed ‘essential’ during the pandemic. Mobile gender-based violence services are allowed to continue operation to ease challenges due to limited public transport.

Sources: Various

Table 9.2 shows the national policy-measures implemented in response to COVID-19 in LLDCs, broken down by policy-type. As shown not all policy measures were gender sensitive. In addition, more interventions need to be made on unpaid care work.

Table 9.2: National Policy-Measures in Response to COVID-19 in LLDCs, broken down by Policy-Type (2020)

Country	All Policies	Gender-Sensitive Policy	Violence Against Women	Women's Economic Security	Unpaid Care
Afghanistan	7	3	2	1	0
Armenia	23	6	2	4	0
Azerbaijan	14	4	3	1	0
Bhutan	7	4	4	0	0
Bolivia	28	18	14	2	2
Botswana	4	0	0	0	0
Burkina Faso	14	5	0	5	0
Burundi	5	2	0	1	1
Central African Republic	0	0	0	0	0
Chad	6	0	0	0	0
Eswatini	2	0	0	0	0
Ethiopia	10	5	2	3	0
Kazakhstan	10	5	4	1	0
Kyrgyzstan	12	7	7	0	0
Lao PDR	1	0	0	0	0
Lesotho	8	0	0	0	0
Malawi	12	6	6	0	0
Mali	7	0	0	0	0
Mongolia	5	0	0	0	0
Nepal	13	7	7	0	0
Niger	7	4	1	3	0
North Macedonia	9	4	2	0	2
Paraguay	21	14	12	2	0
Republic of Moldova	8	2	2	0	0
Rwanda	9	5	3	2	0
South Sudan	2	2	1	1	0
Tajikistan	2	1	1	0	0
Turkmenistan	0	0	0	0	0
Uganda	17	11	9	2	0
Uzbekistan	14	4	0	1	3
Zambia	0	0	0	0	0
Zimbabwe	10	8	8	0	0
Total	287	127	90	29	8

Source: UNDP, UN Women, 2020, Gender Tracker

In light of this the following recommendations are suggested:

- Expand social protection programmes and strengthen social safety nets, with gender-responsiveness, to help prevent vulnerable groups from falling (deeper) into poverty and food insecurity and to help families and businesses restore income, preserve livelihoods, and compensate for price hikes. Cash transfer programs need to be targeted to the most vulnerable groups including women only households (e.g., single mothers with children, widows or female farmers) as part of the emergency response and in the longer term.
- Provide specific programs to support women's return to economic activity such as public works, access to training and credit, direct provision of productive inputs to female farmers.
- Provide programmes that ensure women's access to care support to enable them to resume work outside of the house.
- Special attention needs to be given to the health, psychosocial needs and work environment of frontline female health workers, including midwives, nurses, community health workers, as well as facility support staff and ensure that Personal Protective Equipment is the appropriate size for women.
- Make provisions for standard health services to be continued, especially for sexual and reproductive health care.
- Provide services that address violence against women and girls, including physical and mental health support and shelters that protect victims from violence. Innovative solutions to provide reporting mechanisms for women victims are necessary. Social awareness as well as engaging informal support networks and health workers is important.
- Social messaging as part of the emergency response should aim to contribute to a more balanced distribution of household responsibilities and resources.
- Ensure that women and girls have access to COVID-19 public health messages.

10. Social protection

The right to social security and the right to an adequate standard of living are fundamental human rights enshrined in 1946, in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and in 2015 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Target 1.3 of the Sustainable Development Goals calls for countries to implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all. Effective social protection schemes and policies, along with government spending on key services are crucial to safeguard the poor and vulnerable during crisis and to ensure that no one is left behind. However, in many LLDCs effective social protection systems remain limited in coverage. In 2016 which is the latest figure available, the proportion of population covered by at least one social protection benefit in LLDCs was 24.1% compared to the world average of 45.2%.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both immediate and long-term economic consequences heightening the need for social assistance to vulnerable groups including people with severe disabilities, the unemployed, the elderly, women and others. Pervasive informality in economic activities and employment and wide gaps in public health infrastructure, demand effective social protection schemes and policies, along with government spending on key services to safeguard the poor and vulnerable during crisis, and will need significant upgrading to respond to pandemic

The ILO Social Protection Monitor compiles social protection measures that were announced by countries in response to the COVID-19 crisis since 1 February 2020⁷. Responses cover all functions of social protection including: job/income protection; housing and special allowance; health; food security; children and family; access to education and pensions. Overall, most measures are of non-contributory nature, especially introduction of new programmes and benefits. Most of the LLDCs reported introduction of new programmes or benefits as the most common measure, including benefits for workers and their dependents, benefits for poor and vulnerable population, introducing subsidies or reducing costs of necessities and utilities.

Table 10.1: LLDCs' Social Protection Responses to COVID-19

Social Protection Response	Countries that have instated the measure
Introducing benefits for poor or vulnerable populations	Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Botswana, Chad, Ethiopia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Malawi, Mali, Nepal, Paraguay, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, Zambia
Extending social protection coverage	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Uzbekistan, Zambia, Tajikistan
Improving access or administration	Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho
Introducing subsidies to wage	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Botswana, Lesotho, Moldova, North Macedonia, Uzbekistan
Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Chad, Lao PDR, Moldova, Mongolia, Nepal, North Macedonia, Paraguay, Zimbabwe
Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Mali, Mongolia, Nepal, Paraguay, Tajikistan
Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Azerbaijan, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Paraguay, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tajikistan
Increasing benefit level	Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Malawi, Moldova, Mongolia, Paraguay, Uzbekistan, Zimbabwe
Increasing benefit duration	Azerbaijan, Bhutan, Bolivia, Uzbekistan
Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Azerbaijan, Burkina Faso, Chad, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Niger
Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Bolivia, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Uganda, Uzbekistan
Introducing benefit for persons/families confirmed or suspected with COVID-19	Bolivia, Mongolia, Uzbekistan
Introducing tax relief or deferral for workers or individuals	Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Mongolia, Nepal, Uzbekistan
Increasing package of services/benefits	Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan
Prohibiting dismissal of workers	Ethiopia, Uzbekistan
Introducing benefit for all citizens or residents	Ethiopia
Introducing prophylactic care/leave	Ethiopia, Uzbekistan

⁷ <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowWiki.action?id=3417>

Introducing or increasing subsidy on contribution	Nepal, North Macedonia
Relaxing or suspending eligibility criteria or conditionalities	Moldova
Advancing benefit payment	Paraguay

Source: ILO <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowWiki.action?id=3417>

International Financial Institutions have geared their work to aid vulnerable countries during the pandemic. The World Bank, for instance, approved funds for many LLDCs to be utilized as social protection in response to the pandemic's threats to national systems and public health. Annex 6 – presents details of the funds allocated for different response measures to COVID-19 in LLDCs.

In light of this the following recommendations are suggested:

To LLDCs:

- Expand social protection programmes and strengthen social safety nets to help prevent vulnerable groups from falling (deeper) into poverty and food insecurity and to help families and businesses restore income, preserve livelihoods, and compensate for price hikes.
- Ensure that social protection systems and interventions are shock responsive, gender sensitive and relevant to the needs (health, food, education, information) of all vulnerable populations including women, youth, elderly, persons with disability, children and others.
- Allocate sufficient public funds, and increase these levels where required, towards the realization of social protection for all at the national level, with due regard to social and intergenerational solidarity and the sustainability of national social protection systems.
- Ensure that economic recovery programs are inclusive of all vulnerable groups and their families.
- Develop and strengthen national data management systems and processes to facilitate the collection, management and analysis of social protection data that are accurate, relevant and timely to monitor implementation.
- Promote partnerships, peer learning, knowledge exchange and the sharing of good practices among LLDCs.
- Set up or Scale up food and nutrition surveillance systems. These systems help in identifying the scope and scale of nutrition crises especially fast-moving crises innovations in phone and web-based surveillance systems offer new tools for timely monitoring of vulnerable populations to improve targeting and programme design in a time of unparalleled uncertainty.⁸

Development partners, the United Nations, the International Financial Institutions, and other international organizations

- Support LLDCs with technical and financial assistance and ensure that the support is aligned with core national social protection priorities and corresponding technical assistance and capacity building needs.

⁸ <http://ebrary.ifpri.org/utils/getfile/collection/p15738coll2/id/133843/filename/134043.pdf>

11. International support and recovery

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the LLDCs were faced with limited domestic resources. LLDCs' average tax to GDP ratio in 2018 was 13%, rising marginally since early 2000s. Half the LLDCs for which data are available have tax to GDP ratios below 15%, which is considered to be the benchmark for effective state functioning and to promote economic development. Average gross domestic savings in LLDCs have fallen from around 27% of GDP during 2003-2013 to 25% in 2019.

Mobilization of domestic resources in LLDCs is undermined by the trade imbalances, volatile commodity prices, limited tax administration capacity, narrow tax bases, underdeveloped private sector amongst other challenges and the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these challenges is paramount to the success of the domestic revenue mobilization efforts of the LLDCs. It is also important to address illicit financial flows in LLDCs in order to enhance resource mobilization. It is important to promote measures to support LLDCs to re-establish correspondent banking relationships and to establish legal and effective PPPs for tracking and tracing transactions in LLDCs. The LLDCs also need technical assistance to build policy oriented anti-corruption and anti-money laundering solutions. LLDCs require support to strengthen national financial system frameworks in order to attain sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite limited resources, vulnerable countries have made attempts to mobilize domestic resources to address the pandemic. For example, in Afghanistan, the Government allocated 0.5% of the GDP from contingency funds for emergency pandemic response, including 0.1% to address urgent health needs. In Ethiopia, among the resources mobilized by the Government was a COVID-19 multi-sectoral preparedness and response plan amounting to US\$1.64 billion. Paraguay government made record public investment of 3.6% of GDP in 2020 into a total of 104 response measures in the housing sector, education, movement restriction, and gender in 2020, and the start of its vaccination program.⁹

While LLDCs have made national efforts to respond to the pandemic, their spending power is vastly outmatched by what advanced economies are able to mobilize. The capacity of LLDCs to respond proportionately to major crises is highly limited. They therefore require greater international support to weather the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and be able to recover effectively.

As of August 2020, the funding that had been spent so far by international partners to help tackle COVID-19 and its impacts in LLDCs was \$3.6 billion. To contrast this amount, the global response for COVID-19 has been estimated at \$20 trillion¹⁰. The international funding to LLDCs equates to around 0.5% of the combined GDP of LLDCs or roughly USD\$7 per capita. In comparison, in the United States and the European Union response was equivalent to \$4,467 and \$6,290 per capita, respectively.

⁹ <https://marketdata.com.py/noticias/nacionales/fisco-cierra-el-2020-con-record-de-inversion-publica-y-deficit-de-62-30387/> and <https://cepalstat-prod.cepal.org/forms/covid-countrysheet/index.html?country=PRY>

¹⁰ According to DevEx: <https://www.devex.com/news/interactive-who-s-funding-the-covid-19-response-and-what-are-the-priorities-96833>

Majority of international and regional multilateral organizations and financial institutions have developed emergency funding mechanisms that the LLDCs can draw upon. For example, the UN has established the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Multi-Partner Trust Fund to enable Governments in developing countries to tackle the emergency, reduce social impact and promote economic response and help countries to recover better. Many of the UN system agencies and programmes have developed their own COVID-19 response funds, focused on supporting countries in dealing with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic in line with their respective areas of work. The World Bank Group has a number of emergency funds and initiatives to provide financing to response efforts of developing countries affected by the COVID-19 crisis. This includes the Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Multi-Donor Fund, the Fast-track financing facility for World Bank Emergency COVID-19 projects, and the Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility. The Regional Development Banks have also developed COVID-19 response funds for countries in their respective regions. This includes for example the COVID-19 Response Facility of the African Development Bank, COVID-19 Response Package of the Asian Development Bank, COVID-19 Crisis Recovery Facility of the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank, or the COVID-19 Response Package Outside of the EU from the European Investment Bank. Majority of LLDCs are eligible to receive financing under many of these facilities listed above. Many development partners and South-South Cooperation partners have also instituted emergency response package for developing countries.

At the same time, the current global context risks a significant reduction in the financing available to developing countries, according to the OECD¹¹. No single source of development finance can take up the challenge of closing the COVID-19 financing gap alone. LLDCs require continued and enhanced financial assistance from the international community, from all sources, public and private, in order to ensure that sustainable development is not derailed, and effective recovery is achieved.

Official Development Assistance (ODA)

ODA to LLDCs amounted to \$28 billion in 2018, falling by 4.1% in real terms since the previous year. As a percentage of the gross national income of LLDCs, ODA decreased from 3.91% in 2017 to 3.68% in 2018. ODA flows continue to be concentrated in a few LLDCs, with five countries receiving almost half of all ODA flows to LLDCs.

Despite the recent decline, ODA will be vitally important means for LLDCs to support national responses to the COVID-19 crisis as for many of them ODA still remains a critical source of external finance. For 40% of the LLDCs (13 of the 32), ODA represented larger inflows than FDI and remittances combined in 2018. ODA is important for these countries to continue and enhance investments in health, education and social safety nets, humanitarian needs, as well as supporting productive sectors and recovery.

¹¹ <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-on-development-finance-9de00b3b/>

While it is encouraging that OECD DAC donors will “strive to protect ODA budgets”¹², it is critical that LLDCs be provided with the aid needed to prepare and respond to the threat of COVID-19. It is important to note that many donors’ ODA budgets would have been finalized before the outbreak of COVID-19 and the expected decline in ODA might therefore be lagged, rather than immediate.

Political will and global solidarity are critical to ensure that ODA flows to the most vulnerable countries, including LLDCs, do not decline further, but rather increase, to allow ODA to play an important countercyclical role during this crisis and compensate for the fall in other external finance. Increased ODA, in particular in the form of grants, and including through enhanced crisis response mechanisms, will likely be needed to support LLDCs’ response to the COVID-19 crisis.

In light of this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Development partners are encouraged to increase ODA to LLDCs and be attentive to support the COVID-19 response.
- ODA should be leveraged to mobilize other financing resources, including additional private investment through blended finance, support to strengthen domestic resource mobilization, as well as to contribute to further reducing transfer costs of remittances.
- Countries of the South should strive to increase financial and technical assistance to LLDCs, in the spirit of solidarity and South-South Cooperation.

Foreign Direct Investment

Foreign Direct Investment flows to LLDCs have been falling since the all-time high of \$35.2 billion in 2011. Between 2018 and 2019, FDI flows to LLDCs declined by 1% to \$22 billion. The share of LLDCs in global FDI inflows was 1.43% in 2019 declining from 1.49% in 2018. FDI inflows to LLDCs are also concentrated, with the top seven recipients accounting for 70% of the group’s inflows in 2019. Furthermore, the majority of FDI flows are to the extractive sectors.

Overall, the OECD has projected that in 2020, inflows of external private finance (FDI, remittances, portfolio and other investments) would drop by \$700 billion compared to 2019 levels, with all the sources of external private finance falling immediately¹³. This would present an unprecedented pressure for developing economies, exceeding the impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis by 60%.

All components of FDI are being affected by physical closures of businesses, plants and manufacturing sites, production slowdowns and other mitigation measures in response to the pandemic. Recent (January 2021) UNCTAD estimates indicate that FDI flows fell by 42% in the 2020 compared to 2019, due to the economic fallout from COVID-19¹⁴. The decline was higher in developed countries where FDI inflows decreased by 69% compared to a decline of 12% in developing

¹² See [Joint Statement by the OECD Development Assistance Committee on the Covid-19 crisis \(9 April\)](#)

¹³ <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-on-development-finance-9de00b3b/>

¹⁴ UNCTAD, Global Investment Trends Monitor, Issue 38, https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/diaeiainf2021d1_en.pdf

economies. All major forms of FDI have been affected. Greenfield announcements of FDI in developing economies fell by 46% while project finance deals fell by 7%. These investment types are crucial for productive capacity and infrastructure development and sustainable recovery prospects.

FDI remains an important source of external finance for many LLDCs. The fall in FDI is likely to accelerate the pre-existing trend of declining ODA to LLDCs in recent years. Policy responses by all Governments to support their economies will also impact the effects on global FDI. The role and preparedness of national investment promotion agencies (IPAs) in LLDCs will also be important in contributing to national COVID-19 business response efforts.

In light of this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Development partners should identify adequate means through which to support developing countries, particularly LLDCs, in attracting investment and creating additional incentives to retain investment.
- Donor and investment policy communities should coordinate to mitigate global value chain disruptions and support LLDCs in maintaining their firms' linkages with global and regional production networks and supply chains.
- LLDCs should employ relevant investment policies, as an important tool to cushion the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on FDI inflows
- Development partners and relevant international organizations should urgently provide capacity building and technical support to IPAs in LLDCs on how best to provide COVID-19 related content and services for investors.

Remittances

Remittance flows to LLDCs have stagnated and fluctuated since 2013. In 2019, total remittance flows to LLDCs were estimated at \$34.1 billion. Remittances are a vital source of income in a third of the LLDCs. Remittance inflows to LLDCs are unevenly distributed, with five countries accounting for almost 54% of the group's total in 2019 (Nepal, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Moldova). The World Bank estimated that remittances to LLDCs declined by 11% in 2020 compared to 2019 due to the impact of COVID-19 pandemic. The World Bank projects further that remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries will fall by 7.2 per cent in 2021¹⁵. The travel restrictions and border closures imposed to halt the spread of COVID-19 have created unprecedented impact on labour, mobility and migration. The decline in remittances represents a loss of a crucial financing lifeline for many vulnerable households. The impact of COVID-19 on remittances is expected to be more immediate and stronger than the decline experienced in 2009 due to the global financial crisis¹⁶. In addition, the cost of sending remittances globally remains high at 6.8%, well above the SDG target of 3%.

¹⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/29/covid-19-remittance-flows-to-shrink-14-by-2021>

¹⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-on-development-finance-9de00b3b/>

It is important that host countries stabilize the employment opportunities for the migrant workers and retain them in the host countries which can help sustain and restart economic activities and allow remittances to flow, even if at much lower levels.

In light of this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Governments of host countries and the broader international community should promote the use of digital transfers of remittances and reduce remittance transaction fees, and further consider waiving the transaction fees on remittances to LLDCs for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis.
- Policymakers in developed and developing economies should contribute by recognizing remittance agents as essential services during lockdowns and support remittance agents to manage their increased operating risks.
- Host countries should stabilize the employment opportunities of the migrant workers in their economies as much as possible.
- Development partners and international financial institutions have a role to play in supporting LLDCs in mitigating and reducing the shock of losing remittances.

Debt

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, fiscal space was limited by rising public debt levels and servicing costs in some LLDCs. External debt amounted to over 58.1% of GDP of LLDCs, compared with the average for low- and middle-income countries of 25.9%. 10 LLDCs are classified as in debt distress or at high risk of debt distress. The average total debt servicing is estimated at 28% of the export revenue of LLDCs in 2019, up from 18.4% in 2014 and 17.9% in 2000. LLDCs' debt servicing is higher than that of low- and middle-income countries, which averaged at 15.4% in 2019. Furthermore, the external debt of many LLDCs is predominantly private non-guaranteed debt, which increased from 14 per cent in 2000 to 47 per cent in 2018. The debt service on private non-guaranteed debt – owed by private entities in these countries – now accounts for nearly 80 per cent of all external debt service payments.

The current crisis and trends in financing for sustainable development are exacerbating the limited fiscal space already facing many LLDCs. LLDCs face a significant fall in government revenue as well as foreign exchange earnings as a result of the COVID-19 crisis, making it difficult to meet their own development needs and external debt obligations. The reliance of the majority of LLDCs on primary commodities for exports means that the decline in commodity exports and prices will result in a sharp deterioration of the commodity trade balance, which can lead to a current account deficit. This is expected to trigger sharp currency devaluations and thus make servicing of debts a major challenge for these countries. With rising spending needs and declining revenue, public debt is likely to increase further and sizably in many countries. These challenges pose constraints to the development endeavours of LLDCs. High debt servicing not only cripples the much-needed investment in SDGs in the LLDCs, it also hinders immediate response to COVID-19. Furthermore, given that so much of their debt is owed to private creditors, many LLDCs may find it difficult to receive moratoriums on debt servicing or meaningful debt relief.

Several calls for debt relief to ease the burden on developing countries have been made. The UN Secretary-General continues to advocate for debt relief for countries not in a position to service their debt and has called on debt moratorium to be extended to all developing countries that are unable to service their debt. In his report “Debt and COVID-19: A Global Response in Solidarity”:¹⁷ UN Secretary-General's report recommends a three-pronged approach to addressing the debt crisis: (i) a full standstill on all debt service (bilateral, multilateral and commercial) for all developing countries that request it, while ensuring that developing countries without high debt burdens still have access to credit needed to finance COVID-19 responses; (ii) additional debt relief for highly indebted developing countries to avoid defaults and create space for SDG investments; and (iii) progress in the international financial architecture, through fairer and more effective mechanisms for debt crisis resolution, as well as more responsible borrowing and lending.

Some of the efforts made so far to respond to the calls for debt relief include the partial debt service suspensions offered to low-income developing countries eligible to the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA). The IMF also offered two tranches of debt service relief for 28 countries under the Catastrophe Containment and Relief Trust, which includes 11 LLDCs. G-20 creditors have agreed to provide a moratorium of debt service payments to the poorest countries (IDA eligible and LDCs) between May and December 2020, covering 23 LLDCs. The OECD estimates that the G-20 debt moratorium will delay payments to public bilateral creditors worth \$16.5 billion¹⁷.

While welcome, these actions will not suffice to avoid defaults as multilateral and commercial debt is excluded from debt service suspension for all countries. Furthermore, several LLDCs at risk are entirely excluded from the initiative¹⁸.

In light of this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Extend debt moratorium for LLDCs that are in debt.
- Address multilateral debt, specifically for low-income countries and LLDCs
- Cancel, exchange or reprofile debt for the most vulnerable highly indebted LLDCs.
- Official creditors should consider debt swaps to enhance social investments and address the impact of COVID-19.
- Private and commercial creditors should join debt cancellation and debt moratorium to avoid the public sector bailing out private creditors. Encourage them to improve private sector participation in debt moratoria and alternatives for LLDCs.
- There is need for a more coordinated effort from development finance partners on how to address the emerging debt crisis, through fairer and more effective mechanisms for debt crisis resolution, as well as more responsible borrowing and lending.

¹⁷ OECD (2020), *A debt “standstill” for the poorest countries: How much is at stake?*, OECD Publishing, Paris, <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/a-debt-standstill-for-the-poorest-countries-how-much-is-at-stake-462eabd8/>.

¹⁸ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/publication/un-desa-policy-brief-72-covid-19-and-sovereign-debt/>

12. Conclusions

The report has noted that LLDCs are being affected by the impact of COVID-19 including: commodity price shocks, challenges in transit, disruption of supply chains, loss of export revenue, investment and remittances along with a rapid plummet in tourism, with long-term ripple economic effects.

Prioritizing vaccination in LLDCs can accelerate the economic recovery, however, for many LLDCs the COVAX facility represents a lifeline in vaccine access that has not yet materialized. As countries in special situations, LLDCs should be prioritised in vaccine deployment and their capacity for vaccine distribution should also be supported.

The impacts of a combined COVID-19 health pandemic and a global recession could be disastrous for the LLDCs and will likely halt or potentially even reverse their progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and the aspirations included in the Vienna Programme of Action for the LLDCs for the Decade 2014-2024.

Each of the sections of the report highlighted the key issues and impact and suggested recommendations for LLDCs.

It is important that development partners, transit countries, South-South partners, United Nations Development System, Multilateral Development Banks, International Monetary Fund, private sector and foundations support the LLDCs to address the impact of COVID-19 and to help LLDCs build back better in their recovery efforts.

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Annex 1: Access to Internet in LLDCs

Countries	Percentage of the Population with Access to Internet (2018)	Percentage of Households with Internet (2018)
Afghanistan	13.50	5.70
Armenia	64.74	64.7
Azerbaijan	79.80	78.2
Bhutan	48.11	44.34
Bolivia	43.83	32.16
Botswana	47.00	45.72
Burkina Faso	16.00	12.9
Burundi	2.66	0.27
Central African Rep.	4.34	3.03
Chad	6.50	3.44
Eswatini	47.00	27.00
Ethiopia	18.62	17.98
Kazakhstan	78.90	87.59
Kyrgyzstan	38.00	21.11
Lao P.D.R.	25.51	24.46
Lesotho	29.00	30.42
Malawi	13.78	11.07
Mali	13.00	17.37
Moldova	76.12	50.54
Mongolia	23.71	22.99
Nepal	34.00	17.93
Niger	5.25	9.75
North Macedonia	79.17	69.16
Paraguay	64.99	24.41
Rwanda	21.77	9.30
South Sudan	7.98	3.55
Tajikistan	21.96	11.85
Turkmenistan	21.25	11.09
Uganda	23.71	10.77
Uzbekistan	52.31	79.90
Zambia	14.30	17.70
Zimbabwe	27.06	23.99
LLDCs Average	33.25	27.95
World Average	51.4	55.18

Source: International Telecommunication Union

Annex 2: Proportion of Households that Own a Computer (% of Population)

Country	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Afghanistan	2.9	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4
Armenia	61.9	73.7	64.6	58.8	57.9
Azerbaijan	62.4	64.3	63.8	61	65
Bhutan	24.6	26.0	23.6	22.9	22.9
Bolivia	29.7	33.9	36.3	38.1	43.8
Botswana	25.3	28.5	31.2	33.3	35.8
Burkina Faso	4.8	5.8	6.4	7.4	8.3
Burundi	2.0	3.2	1.0	1.8	2.9
Central African Rep.	2.8	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.9
Chad	3.1	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.3
Eswatini	17.2	19.2	21.4	29.1	29.1
Ethiopia	4.4	5.0	4.9	5.4	5.4
Kazakhstan	73.8	75.5	76.2	77.3	80.5
Kyrgyzstan	19.5	21.4	23.3	25.1	12.4
Lao P.D.R.	11.4	12.3	13.2	14	15.8
Lesotho	7.8	8.2	8.9	13.4	13.4
Malawi	5.8	3.5	6.3	4.2	4.2
Mali	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.2	3.2
Moldova	68.0	71.0	52.3	59.5	59.5
Mongolia	33.1	32.8	32.6	29.9	29.9
Nepal	8.9	11.2	14.0	18.1	18.3
Niger	2.7	2.9	8.6	12	12
North Macedonia	68.4	69.8	67.3	69.5	69.5
Paraguay	29.1	26.0	25.9	26.2	26.2
Rwanda	4.0	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
South Sudan	4.0	4.3	4.7	5	5.3
Tajikistan	11.5	13.2	14.8	16.2	16.2
Turkmenistan	11.2	13.4	10.7	43.8	43.8
Uganda	6.7	7.6	8.5	3.5	3.5
Uzbekistan	35.4	38.3	38.5	41.2	41.2
Zambia	7.1	8.1	8.8	8.1	8.1
Zimbabwe	11.8	12.9	13.9	15.1	19.9
LLDC Average	13.6	14.5	14.8	16.1	16.8
Developed	80.2	81.5	83.3	79.2	79
Developing	35.4	38.4	41.5	35.9	36.1
World	47.1	49.6	52.4	47	47.1

Source: International Telecommunication Union

Annex. 3: Mean Years of Schooling in LLDCs, Compared to World Average (2018)

Country	Mean Years of Schooling (2018)
Afghanistan	3.9
Armenia	11.8
Azerbaijan	10.5
Bhutan	3.1
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	9
Botswana	9.3
Burkina Faso	1.6
Burundi	3.1
Central African Republic	4.3
Chad	2.4
Eswatini (Kingdom of)	6.7
Ethiopia	2.8
Kazakhstan	11.8
Kyrgyzstan	10.9
Lao People's Democratic Republic	5.2
Lesotho	6.3
Malawi	4.6
Mali	2.4
Moldova (Republic of)	11.6
Mongolia	10.2
Nepal	4.9
Niger	2
North Macedonia	9.7
Paraguay	8.4
Rwanda	4.4
South Sudan	4.8
Tajikistan	10.7
Turkmenistan	9.8
Uganda	6.1
Uzbekistan	11.5
Zambia	7.1
Zimbabwe	8.3
LLDC Average	5.5
World	8.4

Source: Human Development Index, UNDP

Annex. 4: National Responses to COVID-19's Impact on Education

Country	National Initiative	Details
Afghanistan	Education Television, RTA and private TVs	Education Television for Kabul province, Radio Television of Afghanistan in 32 provinces and private TVs cover teacher training programs.
Armenia	Dasaran	Provides free access to online encyclopedia on school subjects, e-books, contests and games to primary and secondary school students. The system was created by the joint efforts of the Ministries of Education, Science and Culture of the Republic of Armenia.
	Elearning	E-learning portal of the Ministry of Education with different online courses by subject area.
	Heravar	A comprehensive distance education resources website containing a number of online resources and tools that are constantly updated.
Azerbaijan	E-Resurs	A repository of free e-textbooks, e-tests, video lessons, and e-learning, created by the government.
	Elektron Dərslik Portalı	Electronic Textbook Portal – An e-books portal linked on the Azerbaijani Ministry of Education website.
	Video.edu.az	A collection of video lessons on all school subjects and grades. The video lessons are prepared in accordance with the general education curriculum and are recommended by the Ministry of Education to be used by learners during temporal school closure.
Botswana	Botswana Educational Television	Launched mid-April, consists of broadcasted classes through TV to assist distance learning.
Burkina Faso	Burkina Info	Broadcasting educational programs during school closures, with emphasis on mathematics, physics, chemistry, French and philosophy.
	Faso e-Educa@tion	An online platform created in collaboration with UNICEF with educational resources for teachers and students.
	RNB, Ouaga FM, Savane FM, Watt FM, Oméga FM, and national radio	Private and public radios broadcast educational contents focusing on pupils in grades ahead of examinations.
Central African Republic	Radio Ndeke Luka	Every day, at 5:05 p.m. Bangui time, numeracy and reading lessons in French and Sango, the national language, are broadcast to support the Ministry of Education's action for the affected children.
Chad	EduTchad	Official e-learning platform of Chad containing online courses and material for secondary school students, launched mi-April to facilitate learning from home. It includes classes in French and Arabic.
	Go-Class	E-learning platform for primary and secondary school students in Chad, created in April to assist continuity of learning during the COVID crisis.
Ethiopia	E-textbooks	Textbooks for teachers and students in electronic format provided by the Ministry of Education.

Kazakhstan	Kazakhstan national open education platform	An educational platform established by leading universities of Kazakhstan. Offers online courses in the basic undergraduate disciplines studied in Kazakh and Russian.
	Kundelik	A digital learning platform with tools and materials for representatives of educational institutions, as well as teachers, students, parents and administrators of educational institutions.
	Uztaz	A portal for educators, provides access to free lesson plans and online courses.
Kyrgyz Republic	Bilim Bulagy	An open educational portal endorsed by the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan with free access to online lessons with videos for secondary school students (grades 5-9) in mathematics, biology, history, physics, chemistry, geography, English language, Kyrgyz and world literature in Kyrgyz and Russian.
	Educational resources of Kyrgyzstan	Online platform created by the Ministry of Education with educational resources for students.
	Ibilim	An open educational portal endorsed by the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan with free access to online video and audio lessons for primary school students on mathematics, Kyrgyz, Russian, English languages, music and arts.
	Lib	Open library of materials (including textbooks and guides for teachers) distributed under open license.
	Kitep	Open e-library of the Ministry of Education of Kyrgyzstan.
Lesotho	LNBS	Educational programs broadcasted through the Lesotho National Broadcasting Service
Malawi	Notesmaster	Online platform for distance learning developed in cooperation with the Ministry of Education.
	MCDE	Lessons broadcasted through radio channels in collaboration with the Malawi College of Distance Education covering primary school grades.
Mali	ORTM	The national television of Mali broadcasts educational content starting from 14 April for primary and secondary levels.
Moldova	TV Moldova 1	A TV channel providing educational content for students of grades 9 and 12 to prepare them for the national examinations.
Mongolia	Econtent	Over 3020 tele-lessons and 206 e-textbooks available for learners of K12 education.
	Mongolian Television Association	16 television channels of the Mongolian Television Association are broadcasting TV lessons to students, parents and public in mongolian, kazakh, tuva and sign languages.
Nepal	Learning Portal	Online platform with educational resources for students.
	Radio Jingle	The Ministry of Education Science & Technology in collaboration with other partners introduced radio

		programs with potential learning activities for children during lockdown. (Radio Annaapurna Kaski 93.4)
Niger	Mobile Classroom	Online platform created by the Ministry of Education where students have access to a pool of video contents.
	Radio classes	Educational content broadcasted through various radio stations (Prestige FM Minna, Zuma FM Suleja, Landmark Kontagora, Crystal FM Minna and Power FM Bida) since mid-April for secondary school students.
North Macedonia	TV Classroom	The TV-Classroom is a collaboration between the Ministry, the Bureau for the Development of Education, UNICEF, children's television producers OXO and national broadcaster Macedonian Radio and Television, and provides educational programs for K12 students.
Paraguay	Biblioteca Digital	Provides a set of resources to support schools and teachers with educational materials and the possibility to design lessons directly in the platform.
	Tu escuela en casa	Provides content, activities, tools and educational resources proposed by the Ministry of Education designed to be used by teachers and students.
Rwanda	Rwanda Education Board repository	Online platform with all courses as per the national curriculum for pre-primary, primary and secondary schools.
South Sudan	Radio Miraya and SSBC Monday	The educational programs broadcasted on Radio Miraya and SSBC cover English language, mathematics and science subjects
Tajikistan	Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan	Website of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Tajikistan. It provides access to free educational materials.
	OER Portal	Portal of open educational resources and scientific materials.
Uganda	Kolibri Uganda	The National Information Technology Authority partnered with UNICEF to introduce Kolibri countrywide, a free e-Learning platform to assist children during the school shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The platform is available online and offline, with education content approved by the National Curriculum Development Centre (NCDC).
	UBC TV, CBS Radio, Star FM	The Ministry of Education and Sports arranged for broadcasting of lessons via TV and radio channels regularly during school closures.
Uzbekistan	Eduportal.uz	Free access for teachers and learners to e-textbooks, video lessons, tests, virtual laboratories, audio lessons, educational games, lesson plans, exit examination tests, etc. for primary and secondary school students, in Uzbek and Russian.
	TV Channels	Aired all days of the week in Uzbek, Russian, and English, along with sign-language translation.

	UZEDU	A collection of resources by the Ministry of Public Education to facilitate learning during school closures.
Zambia	Smart Revision	A national e-learning platform created by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with ZamTel assisting students in grades 7, 9 and 12 preparing for examinations.
	ZNBC Channel	The Zambian National Broadcasting Channel opened an educational program dedicated to the provision of classes during the closure of schools and beyond.
Zimbabwe	Ruzivo	The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, in partnership with the Higher Life Foundation offer free online educational material to learners during the ongoing lockdown.

Source: UNESCO, 2020c. National Learning Platforms and Tools, (<https://en.unesco.org/covid19/educationresponse/nationalresponses>)

Annex 5: World Bank Response Measures to COVID-19 in LLDCs

Country	Policy	Areas Covered
Afghanistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$155 million in grants to fund the COVID-19 Relief Effort for Afghan Communities and Households (REACH) Project Along with \$125 million from the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). • \$55 million grant to fund the Emergency Agriculture and Food Supply Project (EATS). Complemented by \$45 million from ARTF. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforcement of essential health care services, delivering optimum care in case of demand surge. • Supporting infected people, at-risk populations, medical and emergency personnel.
Bhutan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$5 million in financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for capacity building in disease detecting and contact tracing. • Procurement of test kits, medical goods and supplies, laboratory equipment, supporting laboratory experts. • Equipping health facilities with PPE, hygienic materials, increase diagnostic capacity. • Establish specialized unites in selected hospitals, ensure safe water and basic sanitation in health facilities, along with medical waste management.
Bolivia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$200 million loan • \$21 million non-concessional credit • \$33.3 million concessional credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce economic consequences of the pandemic. • Support households with temporary cash-transfers to poor and vulnerable households with school-aged children, people with disabilities, elderly members and informal workers.
Burkina Faso	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$10.58 million in grant • \$10.58 million in credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train approximately 2,000 frontline health workers and provide patient care equipment. • Support affected populations by distributing food and basic supplies.
Burundi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$5 million grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen coordination and a referral medical laboratory network by retraining health personnel and providing equipment to laboratories. • Prepare and equip health facilities to treat patients.
Central African Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$7.5 million grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of essential medical supplies and drugs, testing kits, personal protective equipment for frontline workers, water and hygiene supplies.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen the coordination and support for preparedness, train health workers, and carry out risk communication campaigns and community outreach.
Chad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$16.9 million grant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen capacity in prevention, epidemiological surveillance, early detection, confirmation of cases, contact tracing, and patient treatment. Complement the Regional Disease Surveillance Systems Enhancement (REDISSE IV) Project to build national and regional capacity and protect people, livestock, and the environment.
Eswatini	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$6 million in health emergency funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide technical assistance and financing for procurement of goods and equipment to strengthen disease surveillance systems and in-country testing capacity. Training health facilities' staff and front-line workers on risk-mitigation measures, providing them with PPE, water supply, sanitation and hygiene materials, and healthcare waste management.
Ethiopia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$41.3 million in grant \$41.3 million in credit \$125 million in grants, \$125 million in credit to supplement Second Ethiopia Growth and Competitiveness Programmatic Development Policy Financing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement of medical supplies, PPE, building diagnostic capacity and training. Establishing quarantine, isolation and treatment centers.
Kyrgyz Republic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$12.15 million in financing \$9 million reallocated from "Enhancing Resilience in Kyrgyzstan" Project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement of medical equipment, PPE, test kits, equipping of ICUs, including ventilators, defibrillators, x-rays, and other essential equipment. 20 ICUs and 100 isolation rooms in 24 hospitals will undergo emergency repairs, along with establishing 10 eight-bed ICUs.
Lao P.D.R.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$18 million in financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Infection prevention and control, case detection and contact tracing, case management, and risk communication.
Lesotho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$7.5 million in financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance contact tracing Procuring medical supplies and equipment, training and capacity building for frontline health workers.
Malawi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> \$7 million in immediate funding \$30 million Development Policy Loan with a Catastrophe Deferred Drawdown Option. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Detection, surveillance and response. Supporting economic policy initiatives and smooth out the macro-economic shocks expected by the pandemic.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$86 million credit to increase access to financial services and promote entrepreneurship and capabilities of MSMEs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing equipment and training to health care workers and rapid response teams.
Mali	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$12.9 million in grant • \$12.9 million in credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce REDISSE.
Moldova	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$61.94 million loan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social protection measures to help poorest and most vulnerable among the population better cope with the immediate impacts of the pandemic. • Procurement of PPE, equipment, diagnostic supplies, drugs and supplies for ICUs, and ambulances. • Train medical staff in COVID-19 care and infection prevention. • Enhance the Ministry of Health, labor and Social Protection capacity. • Scale-up the <i>Ajutor Social</i> anti-poverty program, along with important changes in its design.
Mongolia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$26.9 million in credit • \$4.2 million in retroactive financing from January 1, 2020. • \$10 million in loan • Around 23 million repurposed from the existing loans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training for healthcare workers and rehabilitation of facilities. • Support public health information campaigns. • Procurement of PPE, laboratory supplies. • Building diagnostic capacity in all provinces. • Pro-poor social protection • Support to education system
Nepal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$29 million in financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding lab capacity to diagnose diseases. • Strengthening public institutions to coordinate responses. • Setting up new intensive care units, beds, and isolation facilities. • Equipping health facilities with PPE.
Niger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$13.95 million in financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting procurement of critical medication and equipment needed for treatment. • Raising awareness on how to inhibit the spread of COVID-19. • Early screening, detection and treatment.
North Macedonia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$98.5 million in financing • \$58.5 million activated from emergency funding mechanism from the Local Roads Connectivity Project. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procurement of diagnostic kits, reagents, consumables, PPE, training on relevant protocols • Renovations to create ICU beds, medical waste management and disposal systems • Finance temporary income support to eligible individuals and households to

		<p>enable compliance with social distancing measures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting viable MSMEs impacts by public health measures and depressed demand, by enabling firms to pay salaries.
Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$20 million in loan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve laboratory equipment to have early detection tools. • Strengthen clinical care capacity in specialized hospital units by increasing bed space and intensive care medical services. • Purchase of medical supplies, personal protection equipment for health personnel and improvement of emergency networks.
Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$14.25 million credit in immediate funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financing critical interventions such as prompt diagnosis of suspected cases, contact tracing, risk assessments, and screening travellers at points of entry. • Establishing isolation capacity at some national and district hospitals.
Tajikistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$11.3 million in grant financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish around 100 new, fully equipped ICU beds across the country. • Strengthen health system's capacity to treat individuals. • Procure testing kits, laboratory reagents, PPE, and training for ICU staff. • Finance emergency cash transfers, primarily for food-insecure families with young children
Uganda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2.7 million in grant • \$12.5 million in credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the financing gap by boosting COVID prevention, detection, case management and the overall health system readiness. • Complement \$15 million support launched under the Contingency Emergency Response Component through Uganda Reproductive Maternal and Child Health Services Improvement project.
Uzbekistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$95 million in financing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen the capacity of national health systems in disease surveillance, testing, equipment, ventilators, and ICUs. • Aid governments in extending programs of low-income family allowances and provide one-off unemployment benefits.

Source: The World Bank Group's Operational Response to COVID-19, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/about/what-we-do/brief/world-bank-group-operational-response-covid-19-coronavirus-projects-list>

Annex 6: - Types of Social Measures Instated by Governments in Response to COVID-19

Country	Type of measure	Function of Social Protection	Contributory or non-contributory	Type of adjustment	Short description of the measure
Afghanistan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food distribution to population in need
Afghanistan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Afghanistan launches new COVID-19 relief package
Armenia	Extending coverage	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Extra social assistance payment to the armenian citizens
Armenia	Improving access/administration	Pensions	Contributory	Administration adjustment	Beneficiaries will receive pension at home
Armenia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food basket for elderly people
Armenia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Distribution of hygiene items
Armenia	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Wage subsidy for firms
Armenia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Several functions	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Cash payments to laid off workers and workers in leave
Armenia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Children and Family	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Assistance to families with children under 14 affected by the shrinking labor market
Armenia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Support to unemployed formal workers
Armenia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Maternity/parental	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Support to pregnant women without employment or with unemployed spouse
Armenia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Support hired workers and individual entrepreneurs in most affected sectors
Armenia	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Bans cuts of utility services
Armenia	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Support with utility payments (natural gas and electricity)
Armenia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Children and Family	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Financial assistance to parents unemployed or not receiving other
Armenia	Other	Access to education	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Assistance to university students with tuition fees payment
Armenia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Children and Family	Not specified	New programme or benefit	Cash benefit for families entitled to family and social benefits
Azerbaijan	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Health	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	creation of Fund to Support Fight Against Coronavirus
Azerbaijan	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Government grants benefit to unemployed persons

Azerbaijan	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Increase in preferential limit on the use of electricity by the population
Azerbaijan	Extending coverage	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Expanding the scope of the targeted state social assistance program
Azerbaijan	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Wage subsidies to affected enterprises
Azerbaijan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Access to education	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Government will cover students' tuition fees
Azerbaijan	Increasing benefit level	Children and Family	Not specified	Programme adjustment	Increases benefit levels for social assistance
Azerbaijan	Increasing benefit duration	Children and Family	Not specified	Programme adjustment	Extends duration of targeted state social assistance for those whose term had
Azerbaijan	Increasing benefit duration	Unemployment	Not specified	Programme adjustment	Prolongs period of unemployment insurance payments
Azerbaijan	Extending coverage	Unemployment	Not specified	Programme adjustment	Expands the coverage of unemployment insurance payments
Azerbaijan	Extending coverage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Creation of 50,000 paid public jobs
Azerbaijan	Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Health	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Frontline medical staff will receive a salary increase
Bhutan	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Assistance to financially distressed individuals
Bhutan	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Training and employment program to engage unemployed workers in
Bhutan	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	"Cash for work" program for families in the tourism sector
Bhutan	Increasing benefit duration	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Adjustment to new programme or benefit	Extends COVID-19 assistance for three months
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Children and Family	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	New allowance for primary students
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Forbids cutting basic service
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Deferring mortgage payment of affected population
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Distributing Basic food basket to 1.6 Million households
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Extending coverage	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Extends cash transfer to students with disabilities in the public education
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	Budget allocation of Bs 156 million through cash transfer
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Subsidizing home electricity and water bills

Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Extending coverage	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Extends coverage of Bono Familias to families with children in high school
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Free medical care and life insurance for all health professionals
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Establishes program to support small and medium sized companies
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Contributory	New programme or benefit	Establishes the "Emergency Plan to Support Employment and Job Stability"
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing subsidies to wage	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Establishes one-off payment of universal cash benefit (Bono Universal) for people
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Extending coverage	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Extends once more coverage of Bono Familias
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Creates a humanitarian bank account for those affected by COVID-19
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Pensions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Suspension of retirement contributions made by employers and other
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Several functions	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	New monotax contribution regime to foster new businesses
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Increasing benefit duration	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Extension of the validity of disability cards that are expired
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Introducing benefit for persons/families confirmed or suspected with COVID-19	Sickness	Not specified	New programme or benefit	New insurance for disability or death for national police
Botswana	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Wage Subsidies of 50% to affected businesses
Botswana	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Distribution of food supplies to vulnerable families
Burkina Faso	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Health	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	Increasing capacities of public hospitals (e.g. hospital beds, testing, medical
Burkina Faso	Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Several functions	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Use of electronic payment tools to enhance digital transactions
Burkina Faso	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Exemption of water and electricity bills to certain enterprises
Burkina Faso	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	In kind support for agricultural supplies to maintain production
Burundi	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	subsidized price of soap to combat covid 19
Chad	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Suspension of payments of electricity and water bills
Chad	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Establishment of a food distribution program
Chad	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Payment of medical expenses for civilian agents and defense and security forces

Chad	Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Health	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Government is hiring additional doctors to fight COVID-19
Eswatini	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Suspension of increase in the price of electricity
Ethiopia	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Health	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	the government set up aid package worth \$154 million to support the health care
Ethiopia	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Government bans evictions and reduces rent prices
Ethiopia	Prohibiting dismissal of workers	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Prohibits laying off workers
Ethiopia	Introducing benefit for all citizens or residents	Housing/basic services	Not specified	New programme or benefit	Establishment of free public transport
Ethiopia	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	\$635 million allocated for emergency food distribution
Ethiopia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food distribution to people in need
Ethiopia	Introducing prophylactic/care leave	Health	Not specified	New programme or benefit	Allows government employees at risk to stay home while receiving salaries
Kazakhstan	Improving access/administration	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Possibility to use "Telegram messenger" to apply for benefits
Kazakhstan	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Contributory	New programme or benefit	Monthly payments of 42,500 tenge for those who have lost wages
Kazakhstan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Free grocery packages for vulnerable groups
Kazakhstan	Increasing package of services/benefits	Health	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Free health insurance for all until June
Kazakhstan	Increasing benefit level	Several functions	Both	Programme adjustment	Raise all the benefits by 10% (Indexation of benefits level)
Kazakhstan	Introducing tax relief or deferral for workers or individuals	Several functions	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Exemption and deferral of taxes for self-employed and Small and medium
Kyrgyzstan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Provision of food to supplement cash transfers
Kyrgyzstan	Improving access/administration	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Cash transfer to persons with disabilities [children and adults] will be prolonged
Kyrgyzstan	Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Pensions	Contributory	Administration adjustment	Delivery of pension at home
Kyrgyzstan	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Deferral of utility payments
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Introducing tax relief or deferral for workers or individuals	Several functions	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Workers and micro enterprises are exempted from paying income tax
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Several functions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Deferral of social security contribution payment for affected businesses

Lao People's Democratic Republic	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Contributory	New programme or benefit	Financial compensation of 500,000 kip for unemployed workers
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Reduction of electricity and water tariffs
Lesotho	Improving access/administration	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	School feeding will continue for public primary school students
Lesotho	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Government will cover salaries of factory workers
Malawi	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Emergency cash transfer programme for poor
Malawi	Increasing benefit level	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Top-up payments to beneficiaries of cash transfer program
Mali	Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Several functions	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Use of electronic payment tools to enhance digital transactions
Mali	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Exemption of water and electricity bills payment for April and May
Mali	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Creation of special fund for the most vulnerable
Mali	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Free distribution of food to vulnerable populations
Mali	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Maintenance of food prices on the local market
Moldova, Republic of	Increasing benefit level	Several functions	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Government increases social assistance benefit
Moldova, Republic of	Increasing benefit level	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Government increases social assistance benefit for families with children
Moldova, Republic of	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Wage subsidies for companies that have totally or partially ceased their activities
Moldova, Republic of	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Grants unemployment benefit to "patent/licence holders" and
Moldova, Republic of	Relaxing or suspending eligibility criteria or conditionalities	Unemployment	Contributory	Programme adjustment	Persons unemployed due to covid not obliged to fulfill contribution condition
Moldova, Republic of	Introducing benefit for persons/families confirmed or suspected with COVID-19	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	One-off allowances to employees infected with COVID-19
Moldova, Republic of	Increasing benefit level	Unemployment	Contributory	Programme adjustment	Unemployment benefit increased to 2,775 lei
Mongolia	Increasing benefit level	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Increase monthly child support
Mongolia	Introducing tax relief or deferral for workers or individuals	Several functions	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Waiver for personal income taxes
Mongolia	Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Several functions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Exempts businesses and entities from paying social insurances fees

Mongolia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Not specified	New programme or benefit	Financial support to employees of companies that are having operations
Nepal	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food assistance package will be distributed to informal sector laborers and
Nepal	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Subsidy and waiver of public utility fees
Nepal	Introducing tax relief or deferral for workers or individuals	Several functions	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Waiver of VAT taxes, excise duty, income tax, and other fees
Nepal	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Access to education	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Waiver of school fees during one month
Nepal	Introducing or increasing subsidy on contribution	Several functions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Social Security Fund to be paid by government
Nepal	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Tokha municipality: allowance to workers in the health sector
Niger	Improving delivery mechanism/capacity	Several functions	Non-contributory	Administration adjustment	Use of electronic payment tools to enhance digital transactions
North Macedonia	Introducing or increasing subsidy on contribution	Several functions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Subsidizing social contributions for affected companies
North Macedonia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Not specified	New programme or benefit	Cash transfer to unemployed and informal sector workers
North Macedonia	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Unemployment	Contributory	New programme or benefit	Government will pay monthly allowance to unemployed citizens
North Macedonia	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Wage subsidies for employers of journalists and media workers
Paraguay	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Allowance of 545.000 Gs. to informal workers up to 2 times
Paraguay	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Exemption or deferral of payments for basic services
Paraguay	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Sickness	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Increasing budget to social security institution for sick leave payment
Paraguay	Introducing subsidies to or deferring or reducing cost of necessities/utilities	Housing/basic services	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Banks deferring mortgage payment for three months
Paraguay	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Monetary transfers for the purchase of food (Programa Nangareko)
Paraguay	Increasing benefit level	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Additional transfers for the Tekoporá social protection program
Paraguay	Advancing benefit payment	Pensions	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	An advance payment is set for beneficiaries of Pensión Alimentaria a
Paraguay	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Distribution of food packages
Rwanda	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food distribution for 20'000 families in the capital (Kigali)

South Sudan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Government launches new cash transfer program
Tajikistan	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Supplementary temporary cash-benefit
Uganda	Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Several functions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Deferring social contributions for affected businesses
Uganda	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food distribution to those in need
Uzbekistan	Increasing benefit level	Health	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Bonus wages for medical personnel
Uzbekistan	Extending coverage	Several functions	Not specified	Programme adjustment	Increase the number of low-income families receiving social benefits
Uzbekistan	Extending coverage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Expansion of the public works programs
Uzbekistan	Increasing benefit level	Sickness	Contributory	Programme adjustment	Increases sick leave payment rate to 100%
Uzbekistan	Introducing prophylactic/care leave	Children and Family	Not specified	New programme or benefit	Paid leave for working parents during COVID-19
Uzbekistan	Deferring, reducing or waiving social contribution	Several functions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Temporary reduction of social contributions for individual entrepreneurs
Uzbekistan	Introducing subsidies to wage	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Interest-free loans for the payment of wages to employees
Uzbekistan	Prohibiting dismissal of workers	Income/job protection	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Prohibits termination of contract for workers with children under 14 infected
Uzbekistan	Increasing package of services/benefits	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Adds extra hygiene items to goods baskets offered to the population
Uzbekistan	Increasing benefit duration	Children and Family	Not specified	Programme adjustment	Automatically extends expiring benefits to families with children
Uzbekistan	Introducing benefit for persons/families confirmed or suspected with COVID-19	Health	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Financial compensation for health workers infected by COVID or to their
Uzbekistan	Introducing tax relief or deferral for workers or individuals	Several functions	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Tax breaks and deferrals for individuals and companies
Zambia	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Pensions	Contributory	Spending adjustment	Increases budget allocation to public service pension fund
Zambia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Emergency cash transfer scheme to vulnerable communities
Zambia	Introducing benefit for poor or vulnerable populations	Food and nutrition	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	Food distribution to vulnerable communities
Zambia	Extending coverage	Children and Family	Non-contributory	Programme adjustment	Unconditional cash transfer program to poor families
Zambia	Extending coverage	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Adjustment to new programme or benefit	Cash assistance to food-insecure urban people

Zimbabwe	Increasing resources/budgetary allocation	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	Spending adjustment	Special cash transfer programme to cover one million vulnerable households
Zimbabwe	Increasing benefit level	Pensions	Contributory	Programme adjustment	Old-age pensioners will receive cash benefit in April
Zimbabwe	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	\$10m relief fund for artists
Zimbabwe	Introducing benefit for workers and/or dependents	Special allowance/grant	Non-contributory	New programme or benefit	\$17 million relief fund to support youth-led businesses

Source : ILO, <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/ShowWiki.action?id=3417>