

OVERVIEW *period from March - January 2021*

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic and urged countries to strike a **balance** between **protecting** health, **minimizing** economic and social disruption, and **respecting human rights**. As a result, countries in southern Africa imposed restrictive **measures** to contain the spread of COVID-19 characterized by lockdowns, quarantines, border closures and curfews amid high economic and social costs. Southern Africa has approximately **213** million people, more than half of which live below the poverty line. Most countries comprise of **large densely populated** urban informal settlements, with **limited access** to water and poor sanitation, **fragile** health systems, and with limited or **non-existent access to social protection**.

The region also has **high levels of inequality**. Nearly all economic sectors in the region have experienced a decline in economic activity including manufacturing, tourism, construction and transport resulting in job losses and pay cuts. **High unemployment, weakening currencies, debt burden, low export revenue** and increased import demand are also prominent features with varying degrees of Gross Domestic Product **contraction** ranging from 2 to 16% reportedly. Overall, at least **60 million jobs** were affected during the height of the lockdowns, through terminations, reduced wages and working hours, with those in the **informal economy worst affected**. A **second wave** in the pandemic and the emergence of a mutation will likely entrench the already severe impact on economic and social rights. This note seeks to highlight the **centrality of human rights** in the socio-economic response in line with the **UN framework** for immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19.

KEY INDICATORS FOR SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES

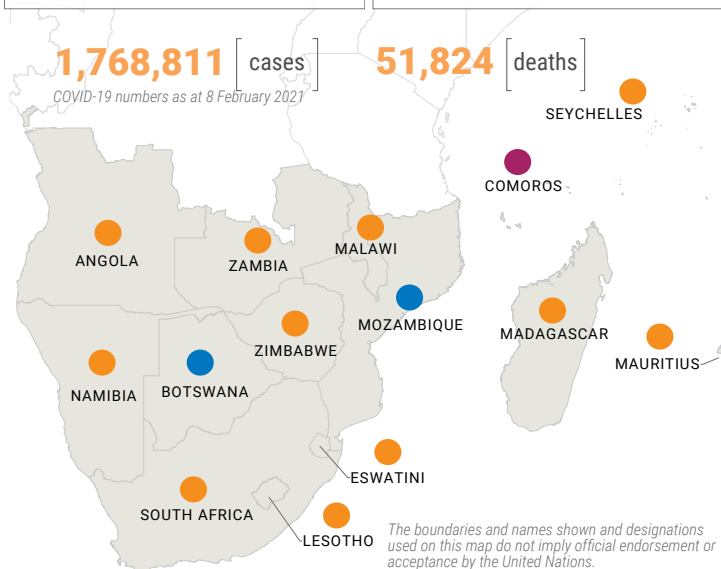
Mitigating measures

- Social emergency funds, resources for health, social protection and economic stimulus and relief packages to **alleviate the impact of the pandemic and save jobs** (e.g. Angola, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe).
- **Tax waivers and tax exemptions** for certain products (e.g. Angola, Comoros, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia).
- A **price moratorium on goods and services** and wage subsidies for affected businesses (e.g. Zimbabwe, Botswana, Namibia and Seychelles).
- **COVID-19 solidarity funds** were established in Mauritius and South Africa.
- **SADC Guidelines** on the Harmonization and Facilitation of Cross Border Transport Operations.

DESCRIPTION OF KEY INDICATORS:

1. **Real GDP Growth:** Gross domestic product is the most commonly used single measure of a country's overall economic activity. It represents the total value at constant prices of final goods and services produced within a country during a specified time period, such as one year.
2. **Gross debt (debt as % of GDP)** consists of all liabilities that require payment or payments of interest and/or principal by the debtor to the creditor at a date or dates in the future.
3. The **GINI** index measures the extent to which the distribution of income (or, in some cases, consumption expenditure) among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini index of zero represents perfect equality and 100, perfect inequality.
4. **Extreme poverty:** Estimated to be **\$1.9ppp**. (2020 estimate), for Seychelles and Mauritius **extreme poverty** is taken as ****low-middle income poverty rate (\$3.2 ppp)**.

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Angola	32.9m	1.05m (3%)	56.4%	107.5%	-4.0	51.3
Zambia	18.7m	2.33m (12%)	60.5%	119.9%	-4.0	44.3
Malawi	19.1m	2.62m (13%)	69.3%	75.1%	0.6	44.7



RATIFICATION: ICESCR AND ICCPR

- RATIFIED BOTH
- RATIFIED ICCPR
- SIGNATORY ICESCR

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Seychelles	0.1m	N/A	3.1%**	85.0%	-13.8	46.8

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Mauritius	1.3m	N/A	2.2%**	84.2%	-14.2	36.8

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Lesotho	2.3m	582k (25%)	30.5%	45.8%	-4.8	44.9

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Zimbabwe	17.7m	5.45m (30%)	50.4%	2.2%	-10.4	44.3

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Comoros	0.9m	N/A	3.1%	32.4%	-1.8	45.3

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
South Africa	59.4m	13.6m (22%)	21.9%	82.8%	-8.0	63.0

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Botswana	2.4m	38.8k (16%)	16%	24.0%	-9.6	59.1

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Madagascar	27.1m	554k (2%)	76.0%	45.0%	-3.2	42.6

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Namibia	2.7m	434k (16%)	21.8%	68.2%	-5.9	59.1

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Eswatini	1.2m	366k (30%)	29.9%	49.9%	-3.5	54.6

Country	Population	Food insecurity	Extreme Poverty	Debt (as % of GDP)	Real GDP Growth	GINI
Mozambique	30.3m	2.0m (6%)	63.7%	123.5%	-0.5	54

* Data for indicators taken on 24 January 2021

A SNAPSHOT OF TRENDS FOR THE SOUTHERN AFRICA REGION

Lack of adequate supply of personal protective equipment and resources

- Most of the countries in the region were not adequately prepared and equipped to deal with COVID-19, due to weak health systems, poor health infrastructure, limited beds and ventilators. As a result, protests by health care workers demanding better equipment and protective gear were widely reported.

The poor and vulnerable are most affected by the pandemic

- The socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 have been experienced most acutely amongst people living in poor communities and informal settlements, people who face persistent and multiple forms of discrimination, and those who are increasingly at risk of being left behind, including women and girls, refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented migrants, persons with disabilities, older persons, homeless people and persons deprived of liberty.

COVID-19 measures threaten food insecurity

- Containment measures worsened the impacts of food and nutrition insecurity and [29 million people](#) are food insecure in the region. Food became unavailable, inaccessible and unaffordable to many during lockdowns exacerbated by disruptions in employment. Markets were closed and stay at home orders prevented many traders and farmers to carry out their daily work.

Right to education severely affected as well as heightened risk of child malnutrition

- School closures were documented across the region and exacerbated existing inequalities, with children already at risk of being excluded from quality education being the most affected due to lack of water and sanitation, access to electricity, a stable internet connection and a suitable device for online learning.
- Some [58 million](#) pre-primary and primary school children automatically missed out on school meals in the SADC region and some [8.4 million](#) suffered from acute malnutrition in 2020.

Restricted access to basic health care including sexual reproductive health services

- Reports of domestic violence increased and access to day-to-day health care services were disrupted including anti-retroviral treatment, immunisations, psychosocial support and counselling. Many countries did not mainstream sexual reproductive health rights into their COVID-19 responses, leaving women and girls without vital services, including access to antenatal and postnatal care, and contraception.
- Migrants faced difficulties in accessing health care services, programmes, grants or food relief provided by different governments due to a lack of legal requirements to be in the country.

Loss of jobs in the formal and informal sector

- Containment measures have led to rising unemployment and shrinking of livelihoods. The informal sector has been particularly affected. The majority of the economies in the region are heavily dependent on the informal sector. Closure of borders and the shutting down of the tourism sector has caused additional loss of jobs and income.
- Extended border closures have had very negative consequences for traders, especially informal ones and women and youth in particular, preventing vulnerable populations to access goods and services that are essential for their economic and social recovery.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND COVID-19

The UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights noted that in most countries mitigating measures were largely **insufficient, short-term, stop-gap** measures and did not address deep **structural challenges** to protect the poor and those **most vulnerable** to the pandemic. He called for **strong social protection floors** guided by **human rights principles**, to make them more effective in eradicating poverty and in **reducing inequalities** to ensure that **no one is left behind**.

Countries that have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) must respect, protect and fulfil the right to work, social security and social protection, family life, participation in cultural life, and access to housing, food, water, health and education. **Article 2 of ICESCR requires States to:**

1. "Take steps" to the **maximum of their available resources** to progressively achieve the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights by all appropriate means, including particularly through the adoption of legislative measures.
2. Guarantee the **enjoyment of ESCR** without discrimination and to ensure the **equal right of men and women** to the enjoyment of these rights.

States must therefore:

1. Prohibit **discrimination** as an immediate obligation, for instance, in health care and education immediately on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.
2. Ensure that the lack of resources **is not used** to justify inaction or indefinite postponement of measures to implement ESCR.
3. Demonstrate that they are making **every effort** to improve the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, even when resources are scarce – either individually and through international assistance.
4. Seek to ensure, as a matter of priority and at the very least, **that everyone** has access to, minimum levels of rights, and target programmes to protect the poor and the marginalized.
5. Ensure that civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights are **universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated**.

United Nations Secretary General

"The COVID-19 pandemic is a public health emergency - but it is far more. It is an economic crisis. A social crisis. And a human crisis that is fast becoming a human rights crisis. The best approach is one that responds proportionately to immediate threats while protecting human rights and the rule of law. The message is clear: People - and their rights - must be front and centre. The virus threatens everyone. Human rights uplift everyone. A human rights lens put everyone in the picture and ensures that no one is left behind. We are all in this together."

<https://www.un.org/en/un-coronavirus-communications-team/we-are-all-together-human-rights-and-COVID-19-response-and>

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

"Policies that uphold our equality, and which deliver universal and equal access to social protections and health care. Institutions which promote respect for the views and rights of all members of society. Laws that require accountable policing and access to justice support greater social and economic resilience: these principles, in action, are the foundation of prosperity and political stability".

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=26445&LangID=E>

United Nations Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights

"The world was ill-equipped to deal with the socioeconomic impacts of this pandemic because it never recovered from the austerity measures imposed in the aftermath of the global financial crisis of 2008-2011. The legacy of austerity measures is severely underfunded public healthcare systems, undervalued and precarious care work, sustained declines in global labour income shares, and high inequality rates coupled with average decreases in statutory corporate tax rates. With public services in dire straits, one-off cash transfers are a drop in the bucket for people living in poverty, whether in developed, developing, or least developed countries."

<https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Poverty/covid19.pdf>

* The issues highlighted in this document are not limited to what has been documented in the region. Most of the issues highlighted have been captured through media monitoring and country sources.