



Status Report COVID-19 Report

Exchange Rwanda

[Abstract](#)

Report on the effects of COVID-19 in Rwanda

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The information in this volume is destined to provide a description of the COVID-19 status and its impact on social and economic life in the 5 Sub-Saharan African countries with cooperation programmes of Exchange vzw. The ambition is to give insights, based on information gathered by Exchange’s business development managers based in these countries. Exchange vzw. can not be held responsible for errors, omissions or lack of accuracy and disclaims any liability in connection with the use of this information. Feedback is welcome at info@exchangevzw.be



1. Summary of the situation in Rwanda

Since the virus first emerged in Wuhan, China in December 2019, the Rwandan government has established a multidisciplinary team to assess and strengthen preparedness and response to the pandemic. A huge screen used to detect fever among incoming passengers was installed at Kigali International Airport. Passengers undergo mandatory checks and provide information about travel history. Similar screening started at all Rwanda's borders.

The first case of COVID-19 in Rwanda was confirmed on 14 March 2020. Four other people were tested after the first case tested positive, bringing the number of cases to five.

By 16 March 2020, Rwanda confirmed two more cases in Kigali, bringing the total number of cases in the country to seven. In an attempt to stop the spread of coronavirus, the Rwandan Ministry of Health announced on 18 March, via Twitter, that all international commercial passenger flights would be suspended for 30 days, with effect from 20 March. Less than a day later, on 21 March, officials announced a two-week lockdown. Both public and private employees were to work from home, under strict measures. All borders were also to be closed, cargo and Rwandan nationals being exempt, with a mandatory 14-day quarantine.

Health and safety measures also increased to help prevent the spread of the virus, including urging citizens to avoid shaking hands and close body contact such as hugging, covering one's mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing in public and refraining from unnecessary travel. The Ministry of Health also called on citizens to ensure regular washing of hands with soap, limit unnecessary movements and avoid large gatherings.

500 health care workers, including lab technicians from hospitals across the country, were trained on the coronavirus response. All hospitals were asked to set up isolation areas where patients suspected of having COVID-19 could be attended to away from other patients. Preventive measures were also put in place to protect health care workers in the line of duty.



Generally, handshakes and hugs are a common practice in Rwanda, meaning the idea of social distancing due to COVID-19 did not initially go well. But as the number of cases grew, Rwandan people have come to understand the seriousness of the matter. Rwandan President Paul Kagame popularized the elbow bump as a safe way of greeting when he met American philanthropist Howard Buffett at a public function in the country.

Until now Rwanda has deplored 16 COVID-19 deceases and lockdown measures had been partly relaxed as from 4th of May 2020 so business could restart its activity to restore the Rwandan economy. Domestic travel had been relaxed also. On the 18th of May, the 2nd and 30th of June Cabinet meetings were held to further relax lockdown measures. International travel to Rwanda could resume as from June 16th. Unfortunately numbers of COVID-19 cases started to rise in July. Land borders were again closed on the 15th of July and as from the 26th of August all hotels and restaurants had to close again.



2. General overview and statistics

Situation 1st of September 2020 (most recent figures available)

1. Infections : total cases is 4.142 persons
2. Active Cases : 2.082
3. Recovered :2044
4. Tested :415.329 persons
5. Deaths : 16

A timeline of Rwanda’s policy response

Rwanda’s public health response to COVID-19 has been robust and rapid, and has been backed by President Kagame. Beginning in January, medical staff were already stationed at Kigali International Airport and land borders to screen for high temperatures.

In early March a taskforce was assembled and guidelines were issued on 6 March on social distancing and handwashing, and hand sanitiser was placed outside all major public buildings and shopping centres. Testing began well before the first COVID-19 case, which was verified on 14 March. Once cases emerged, systematic tracing began, with assistance from security organisations.

On 20 March, the government instituted a nationwide lockdown and all non-essential transport outside homes was banned. The Government’s priority has been containment as Rwanda’s healthcare system is underprepared for a large number of serious cases as the country has very few intensive care unit (ICU) beds.

A range of social distancing and hygiene measures were set up for the essential parts of the economy that were still permitted to function, such as hand-washing equipment at agricultural collection centres. During the lockdown, all non-essential labour and business activities, mostly urban in nature, were stopped.

By 30 April, a Cabinet decision loosened the lockdown, mandating the wearing of masks outside and instituting an 8pm to 5am curfew, while allowing free movement within each province during the day. Manufacturing and construction sectors were re-opened, and hotels and restaurants were allowed to open until 7pm. Schools and places of worship remain closed at the time of writing.

On 30 April, the Cabinet also approved a “Social Economic Recovery plan to support activities affected by COVID-19”. On 5 April, the Office of the Prime Minister announced that senior government officials had agreed to forfeit their April salary as a contribution to funds needed to fight COVID-19.

Another Cabinet decision on 18 May sustained the lockdown to the end of the month in similar form, but announced that both inter-province travel and normal moto taxi service could resume on 1 June, marking the end of ten weeks of lockdown. Unfortunately numbers started increasing in July. Measures have been reinforced as from 26th of August. See details below.



3. Current measures

The Rwanda Government approved the following measures to help contain the spread of the corona virus. Below we list the most recent decision on measures taken on the **26th of August**. These measures will be reviewed after 15 days upon a health assessment.

General preventive measures

- a. Masks must be worn in public at all times.
- b. All resumed services must continue adhering to health guidelines from health authorities (hand hygiene, mask wearing and social distancing).
- c. All traders are required to accept digital payments as an alternative form of payment.
- e. **Movements are prohibited from 7 PM to 5 AM.**

specific measures in the city of Kigali

- a. Public transport between Kigali and other districts is prohibited.
- b. Private transport between Kigali and other districts will continue but movements must be in adherence with health guidelines
- c. Public offices will remain open not exceeding 30% of existing staff while other employees continue working from home on a rotational basis.
- d. Private businesses will continue not exceeding 50% of existing staff while other employees continue working from home on a rotational basis.
- e. Malls and markets will operate at 50% capacity with vendors working on a rotational basis.
- f. Mass gatherings are prohibited except with special permission and events must not exceed 30% of venue capacity. Applications to host essential events will be granted by local authorities and RDB upon fulfilment of health requirements.
- g. **Domestic and international tourism will continue however tourists must have valid reservations and possess valid negative COVID-19 test results**

Services to continue nationwide

- a. a. Public offices will remain open not exceeding 30% of existing staff while other employees continue working from home on a rotational basis.
- b. Public and private businesses will continue not exceeding 50% of existing staff while other employees continue working from home.
- c. Event organizers including conferences and meeting must comply with all COVID-19 measures.
- d. Tourism activities will continue
- e. Passengers arriving at Kigali International airport must present a negative COVID-19 PCR test taken within 120 hours prior to departure and should comply with health guidelines
- f. Non-contact outdoor sports is permitted however gyms shall remain closed.
- g. Motos are permitted to carry passengers except in areas under lockdown. Strict hygiene must be observed and masks worn at all times.
- h. Attendance at a wake/vigil should not exceed 15 people at any one time.
- i. Places of worship shall operate upon compliance with COVID-19 preventive measures.



- j. Civil marriage ceremonies will continue but should not exceed 15 persons.
- k. Religious ceremonies for burial shall continue with no more than 30 persons. Funeral gatherings should not exceed 30 persons.

Services to remain closed nationwide

- a. Movements between Rusizi and other districts (except for goods and cargo) remains prohibited.
- b. Schools will remain closed to allow sufficient time for further health assessment and thorough preparedness for resumption of in-person classes. Remote learning is encouraged and should be strengthened.
- c. Land borders will remain closed, except for goods and cargo, as well as returning Rwandan citizens and legal residents. All returnees will be subjected to mandatory quarantine in accordance with existing health guidelines at their own cost.
- d. Gaming activities remain prohibited
- e. **All bars including restaurants and hotels will remain closed.**

4. Impact

4.1. Domestic and International travel

- Public and private transport will be operational, with strict hygiene measures such as mandatory masks, handwashing, as well as appropriate physical distancing between passengers.
- Services providers are required to use of signs, permitted passenger seats on buses. All passengers should adhere to the new rules.
- Motos are permitted to carry passengers except in Rusizi district and zones under lockdown in city of Kigali. Strict hygiene must be observed and masks worn at all times. Public and private transport between different provinces and the City of Kigali resumed on June 1st 2020

Rwanda **has announced** the reopening of tourism activities as well as the resumption of international travel for visitors arriving by charter flight, effective 17 June 2020 and for visitors arriving by scheduled commercial flights as of 1 August 2020. The well-being of all travellers is Rwanda's top priority and the country has put in place robust health and safety guidelines to ensure this.

- Passengers arriving on commercial flights from 1 August, including those in transit, will be required to present a COVID-19 PCR negative test from a certified laboratory, taken within 72 hours of arriving in Rwanda. For passengers entering Rwanda, a second PCR test will be conducted upon arrival, with results delivered within 24 hours during which time they will remain in designated hotels at their own cost.
- Currently, international visitors arriving by charter flight can visit Rwanda. There are no restrictions based on nationality or point of departure. These visitors can enter Rwanda on the condition of fulfilling the health and safety requirements.
- Together with the private sector, Visit Rwanda is offering attractive **all-inclusive tourism packages** for Rwandans and foreign residents. Visa on arrival remains available for all visitors to the country.



- All tourism activities, including primate trekking within Rwanda’s national parks, have now resumed in line with enhanced COVID-19 prevention measures.
- Cancellations/postponement policies have been updated to accommodate travellers impacted during this time.

4.2. Economic impact

Rwanda has implemented a strict lockdown for several weeks in a bid to curb the spread of coronavirus, which has forced many low-income earners and unemployed people to struggle to get food and other basic necessities.

Rwanda’s ministry of Local Government started distributing food to households and individuals most hit by the Covid19 lockdown.

Top Rwandan officials did not get their April salaries in one of the drastic measures the government has enforced to raise funds for social protection programmes aimed for the most vulnerable in the community.

In the context of the fight against Covid-19, and in solidarity with the most affected Rwandans, the Government of Rwanda has decided, over and above ongoing social protection initiatives, that all Cabinet Members, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Public Institutions and other senior officials shall forfeit one month's salary (April),

Those who did not get their April pay are 34 Cabinet members, 26 senators, 106 members of Parliament, and hundreds of heads of public institutions – who earn an average of Rwf2 million (about \$2140) per month.

This is likely to generate close to \$1 million to be used to combat effects of coronavirus on the vulnerable.

The number of those needing government assistance has been rising since the food distribution began as many have lost jobs or been unable to make a living due to the lockdown.

In Kigali alone, the number of households eligible for food distribution grew from 26,572 to more than 50,000 in a matter of days, with more people expected to be identified.

The government is providing relief to households where individuals depended on daily income such as casual jobs workers and those whose work was suspended over the lockdown measures.

The exercise is supervised by the respective local leaders and involves distribution of basic food rations. The food distribution also aims at stopping the urban poor from trying to flee the city for the villages – a move that could lead to importation of the virus from the city to the rural areas.

5.3 Consequences for private entrepreneurs

5.3.1. Hospitality & tourism

All **hospitality** establishments, restaurants and cafes with valid tourism operating license or occupational permit from districts or City of Kigali, were able to reopen as from Monday 4th of May but were closed again on the 26th of August. Home delivery of food and beverages from restaurants can continue to operate.

Tourism is one of Rwanda's revenue sources. Rwanda targets \$800 million from tourism by 2024 from \$438 million in 2017.

The country had this year projected to generate \$88 million from about 147 international conferences under the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions, and Exhibitions (MICE). About 20 meetings which had been scheduled in March and April were indefinitely postponed. These meetings were expected to generate \$8 million, about 10% of the projected revenue from MICE this year.

Following the COVID-19 outbreak, several tourists cancelled bookings, leaving tour operators and other stakeholders counting losses.

This year's Nyungwe marathon -- an annual event that gathers more than 700 participants from Africa and Europe, attracted fewer participants leading organizers to register a loss of \$200,000. Organizers handed out just 300 medals instead of 600 because they could not import from China.

In order to relaunch the tourism sector, it was recently decided that Tourism activities across the country can resume effective 17 June 2020 and that there will be promotion pricings in tourism activities (like a lower fee for gorilla trekkings until 31st of December 2020).

5.3.2 Agriculture

All food supply chain services are essential services and continued to operate during the lockdown. All agriculture construction projects resumed and in accordance with the Ministry of Health measures to prevent COVID-19 transmission.

All industries, farmers and exporters in the agriculture sector who travel to and from Kigali for work were required to write to the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal resources to obtain special clearance.

More info on www.minagri.gov.rw



5.3.3 Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector is experiencing big losses because of customers spending less and due to supply chain problems. Production in most workshops has fallen down up to 50% of the normal production.

5.3.4. Services, industry, and loans

A National Bank of Rwanda report from 30 April states that there has been a significant slowdown in the services and industry sectors, and that demand for loans is down 10.6% in the first quarter of 2020.

5.3.5. Imports and exports

Disruptions to trade and critical supply chain networks are already taking effect: Rwanda's imports from China decreased 23% from January to February and are highly likely to have decreased further (TradeMark East Africa unpublished report, 2020). This will affect Rwandan industry, which will have reduced critical inputs. This will also affect exports as over 70% of Rwandan exporters are themselves importers.

5. Government support to local economy

Supporting workers and vulnerable people

The Government is providing food relief to at least 20,000 hard-hit households living in Kigali, followed by other urban centres. It also instituted zero charges on mobile money transfers and lifted the maximum transactions possible using this means of payment. Other social protection measures may be in the pipeline as part of the Economic Recovery Plan.

Supporting businesses

The National Bank of Rwanda (BNR) instructed commercial banks to ease loan repayment conditions to borrowers, introduced an Extended Loan Facility to banks of RWF 50 billion, and instituted other measures aimed at commercial banks.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a credit of USD 109.4 million to Rwanda to cushion the impact of lost foreign earnings from trade and tourism, and bolster foreign exchange reserves.

On 4 April, the Ministry of Finance reportedly began working on a fund to support access to capital for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and facilitate recovery of the economy, and on 12 May the New Times reported the imminent launch of a USD 200 million fund. The Rwanda Revenue Authority also extended the deadline for businesses to file and pay income taxes from the end of March to the end of April, and relaxed other administrative requirements.

Sanctioning businesses for malpractice

The Government has worked to enforce measures to clamp down on exploitative business practices, such as price gouging, using unapproved weighing scales, and issuing illegal or no invoices. Many businesses have been fined for not adhering to these laws at the time of writing.



5.1. Rwanda COVID-19 Emergency Response Project

The Rwanda COVID-19 Emergency Response Project is designed to help the government prevent, detect and respond to the threat posed by the coronavirus and strengthen national systems for public health preparedness. It will support the COVID-19 National Preparedness and Response Plan by financing critical interventions, such as prompt diagnosis of suspected coronavirus cases; contact tracing to minimize risk of transmission; risk assessments to identify hot spot areas; and screening travellers at ports of entry. The emergency project will also bolster clinical care capacity and establish isolation capacity at a selected number of national and district hospitals responsible for triaging and treating COVID-19 cases.

The Rwanda COVID-19 Emergency Response project also focuses on harnessing digital solutions and data analytical tools that will improve the management and containment of the COVID-19 response. Building on the country's strong track record on digital solutions, several innovations will be explored, including digital maps that allow to visualize the spread of the disease in real time; mobile apps for sending health messages; and telemedicine capability to allow for suspected cases to be assessed without the need for physical movements by patients.

5.2. Financial support for Rwanda's response to COVID-19

On the 7th of April 2020 the **World Bank Group** approved \$14.25 million International Development Association (IDA) credit in immediate funding to support Rwanda's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic under the Rwanda COVID-19 Emergency Response project.

On the 2nd of April 2020 The Executive Board of the **International Monetary Fund** (IMF) approved the disbursement of about US\$109.4 million to be drawn under the Rapid Credit Facility (RCF). This will serve to meet Rwanda's urgent balance of payment needs stemming from the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other forms of support have also been coming in from different private sector entities like the **big corporate firms** that have donated money and supplies to be used by the national task force charged with stopping the spread of coronavirus in the country. Some of the big donors include the major banks.

On 5 April, a statement from the office of the prime minister announced that senior government officials had agreed to forfeit their April salary as a contribution to the funds needed in the fight against COVID-19.

In solidarity with the most affected Rwandans, the Government of Rwanda has decided, over and above ongoing social protection initiatives, that all Cabinet Members, Permanent Secretaries, Heads of Public Institutions, and other senior officials shall forfeit one month's salary (April).

Due to the lockdown in place to slow the spread of the virus, Rwandans were for the first time compelled to commemorate the 1994 Genocide from their homes without any gatherings allowed.



5.3. Support to the private sector and entrepreneurs

The Private Sector Federation on Monday, May 4, signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Access to Finance Rwanda in a new initiative aimed at supporting entrepreneurs in Rwanda to adjust to economic realities of COVID-19.

Both parties, seek to share their respective strengths, experiences, technologies, including technical assistance to facilitate Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) during the COVID-19 pandemic.

SME Response Clinic as its termed, is a digital platform that will translate new policies and financial advisory services and access to finance related information in a clear and straightforward language in English and Kinyarwanda.

The SME Response Clinic will provide and collect needed information that will enable key stakeholders to support resilience of the MSME Sector in this period of Covid-19.

The Rwandan Government and financial sector have taken several significant measures to support MSMEs during this challenging period, reads part of the joint statement.

The SME Response Clinic will ensure that these important measures are communicated to MSMEs in an accessible and timely manner.

5.4. Medium and long term economic recovery and resilience plan

The government of Rwanda is working on a medium and long term economic recovery and resilience plan. Latest discussion on this plan were held on the 2nd of June during the last cabinet meeting. We expect to have more news on this plan in the following COVID-19 status report.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated the effectiveness of the Government of Rwanda in mobilising the population in a decisive and effective public health response. Even so, a number of very serious economic challenges lie ahead as the global economy braces itself for a recession. Consequently, Rwanda faces intensifying demand and supply-side shocks both in the domestic and external sectors.

Employment and operations

Continuing solvency of many businesses is a concern, as is the need to maintain the connection between businesses, workers, and customers. However, keeping workers on and maintaining essential operating costs is important. The crisis will undoubtedly increase private indebtedness.

Key challenges going forward

Fiscal space



Rwanda urgently needs both scaling up and expanding of support to include digital cash-based social protection measures. According to the IMF, the lockdown and deepening global recession has created an “urgent balance of payments need” in Rwanda. The national government faces significant losses in expected VAT and income tax revenue, while local government also faces a loss in revenue from various fees.

Congestion and sanitation in unplanned settlements

COVID-19 will continue to be a predominantly Kigali-based, or at least urban, phenomenon in Rwanda. Seventy-seven percent of Kigali households live in unplanned settlements that have narrow access pathways. 10% of houses in these settlements are seriously overcrowded. A quarter of Kigali households use shared toilets and only have access to shared, unimproved water sources. Even the improved water sources, such as public standpipes that serve 41% of Kigali households, are shared. This renders frequent handwashing a challenge. Queues for public or shared facilities may also pose challenges for social distancing.

Perhaps the greatest challenge the government faces is the need for enormous public resources to prevent COVID-19-related death, minimise rupturing of the economic fabric, and protect the vulnerable. Ongoing tracing and testing efforts are thus vital to isolate those with the virus, to stop the disease spreading.
