

Common Market for
Eastern and Southern Africa



COVID-19

in **COMESA**

Situational Update N° 15

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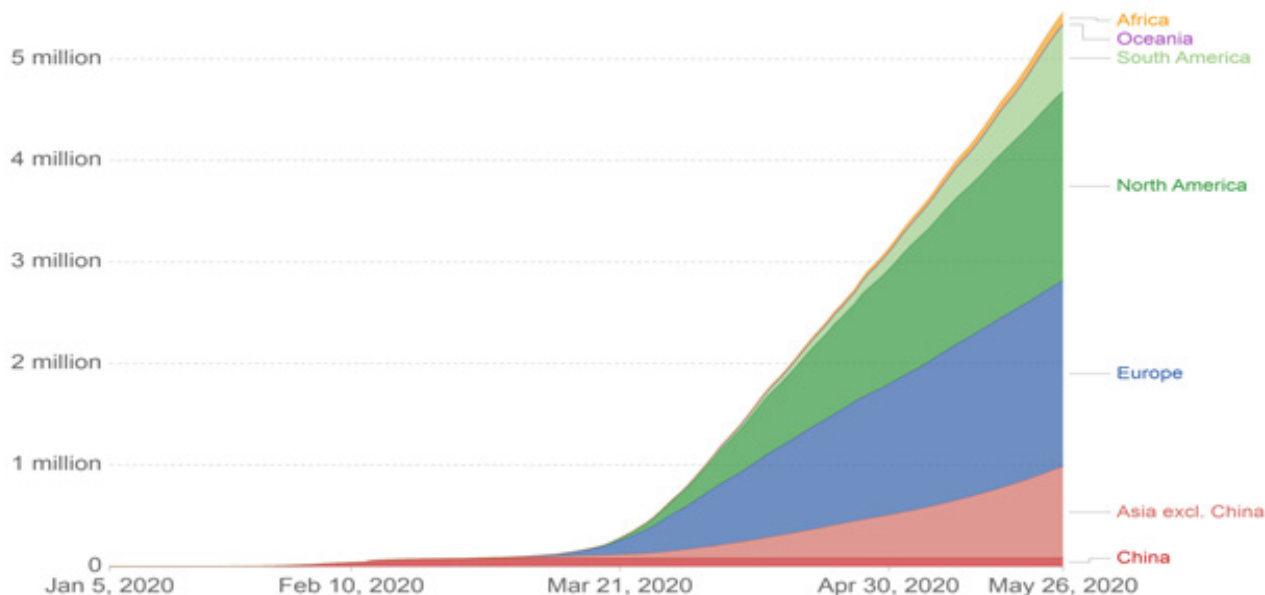
THREE MONTHS OF COVID-19 IN THE COMESA REGION: WHAT ARE THE KEY LESSONS?

Continental Overview

Since COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation, the African region in comparison to other regions is the least affected in the number of reported COVID-19 cases. To date, (26 May 2020) the continent has recorded 2.11% (118,535) of the world reported cases (5,617,094) and 1% (3,511) of related fatalities deaths (348,528).

Total confirmed COVID-19 cases

The number of confirmed cases is lower than the number of total cases. The main reason for this is limited testing.



Source: European CDC – Situation Update Worldwide – Last updated 26th May, 11:00 (London time) OurWorldInData.org/coronavirus • CC BY

While Africa reported the first cases much later compared to other regions, the toll has remained comparatively low to other regions, which, in contrast, experienced a surge in the first few months when the initial cases were reported. What is it that Africa is doing differently?

For many years the African region has experienced different kinds of epidemics ranging from Polio, Measles, Yellow Fever, Influenza, Cholera, Malaria, HIV/ AIDS, Ebola, among others. These epidemics have over time tested the resilience of the continent. In many instances, the continent has been able to weather the severe impact of the various epidemics. For example Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, DR Congo, Gabon, among others, established different health measures to contain the spread of Ebola. The lessons learnt from the experiences of dealing with these earlier pandemics have shaped the current policy response measures that the countries in the continent have put in place to deal with the spread of COVID-19.

Secondly, the continent, through the Africa Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) was quick to respond in helping countries to respond to the virus. The state of preparedness at the continental level ensured that specific preventive measures were established to slow down the transmission of the virus. The Africa CDC deployed experienced disease experts to support the fight against COVID-19 at Member State level, mobilised resources to support African countries, provided guidelines and conducted education and awareness campaigns, among other measures.

COMESA Region: Lessons From Eritrea, Mauritius And Seychelles

The COMESA region represents 29.19% (34,606) of the total cases reported in Africa (118,535). While some of the Member States reported a surge in the number of new cases in the earlier stages, these numbers have reduced and in some cases such as Eritrea, Mauritius and Seychelles have reported zero active cases for a while. How have these countries dealt with the pandemic?

Early Response

When the scale of the pandemic escalated in other parts of the world, these countries from the onset established restrictive measures to minimize the spread of the virus. In Mauritius, for example, flights from China and Europe, were restricted. Mandatory screening at airports and other public places was introduced. These measures and the strict adherence to guidelines by citizens ensured that the spread of the virus was contained and, in addition, prevented community transmission.

In Seychelles, all citizens and residents were not allowed to travel outside the country, all travel to the country by foreigners was stopped from 10th March 2020 and no cruise ships were allowed entry in its waters. These early measures limited the spread of additional infections from outside the country.

Eritrea on its part enforced a total lockdown. It should also be noted that the relatively low population and the geographical positioning of Mauritius and Seychelles gave them a comparative advantage in containing the spread of the virus as it was also easier for them to close their borders. The strict adherence especially in Mauritius and Seychelles has been supported by a highly literate population.

The early response in these countries was also supported by enacting appropriate legal framework to support the implementation of some of the measures. In Mauritius, a COVID-19 Bill was passed to guide the enforcement of social distancing, wearing of masks in public spaces, restriction of movement, among others.

Tracing, Testing and Treatment

Tracing, Testing and Treatment has emerged as one of the most effective ways of managing the spread of COVID-19 among the population. From the onset Mauritius, prioritized mass testing. The aim was to isolate infected persons and provide specialized treatment and care. As of 26th May 2020, Mauritius had conducted 104,639 tests that is equivalent to 82,292, the highest attained so far in the region. The tracing and testing has ensured that contacts are identified, listed and followed up promptly.

Proper Coordination

Coordination during the pandemic is very important in ensuring that policy pronouncements are well executed between and among the various key stakeholders. Coordination ensures that there is a proper channel of communication, planning and implementation. It further ensures that merging challenges are addressed before they escalate. In the case of containing the spread of COVID-19, Eritrea, Mauritius and Seychelles established national COVID-19 coordination mechanisms to implement preventive measures and government policy initiatives.

In Eritrea, a National Task Force on COVID-19 was established at national and local levels to provide guidelines and ensure preventive measures were implemented. In Mauritius, the Prime Minister established a high level multi-sectoral Inter-Ministerial Committee consisting of the Ministers of Health, Finance, Infrastructure and Commerce. This Inter-Ministerial Committee has been very instrumental in shaping, coordinating, implementing and evaluating the various measures put in place to contain the pandemic. The establishment of various coordination mechanisms underscore the importance of having centralized, high level leadership in dealing with pandemics of this nature. Through the centralized mechanism, data and information is easily shared, therefore, decisions are in most cases driven by evidence based on the information gathered and shared among stakeholders. This has enabled the government to deal with misinformation and bureaucratic red tape mostly associated with such outbreaks.

Strong Health Institutions

A strong health system provides the best defence against pandemics. Data from the COMESA Early warning System (COMWARN) indicates that over the years Mauritius and Seychelles have built strong health institutions through adequate budgetary allocations, prioritized training of healthcare workers and established adequate health facilities. The investments in the health sector have enabled these countries to build resilience to such shocks and ensured that Mauritius and Seychelles are able to adequately trace, test and treat.

Summary of regional figures

Country	Total Cases	New Cases	Total Tests	Tests/ 1M pop	Total cases/ 1M pop	Deaths	Deaths/ 1M pop	Recoveries	Total Active Cases
Burundi	42	0	284	24	4	1	0.08	20	21
Comoros	87	76	-	-	100	1	1	21	65
Djibouti	2,468	950	23140	23456	2502	14	14	1079	1375
DR Congo	2,403	865	-	-	27	68	0.8	340	1995
Egypt	17,967	5,203	135000	1322	176	783	8	4900	12284
Eritrea	39	0	-	-	11	0		39	0
Eswatini	256	51	4994	4309	221	2	2	158	96
Ethiopia	701	349	87264	761	6	6	0.05	167	528
Kenya	1,286	374	61971	1155	24	52	1	402	832
Libya	75	10	5154	751	11	3	0.4	40	32
Madagascar	586	264	9340	338	21	2	0.07	147	437
Malawi	101	31	2411	126	5	4	0.2	37	60
Mauritius	334	2	104639	82292	263	10	8	322	2
Rwanda	336	39	59369	4596	26	0		238	98
Seychelles	11	0	-	-	112	0		11	0
Somalia	1,689	234	-	-	107	66	4	235	1388
Sudan	3,976	1,385	401	9	91	170	4	503	3303
Tunisia	1,051	8	48476	4106	89	48	4	919	84
Uganda	222	-26	86714	1903	5	0		69	153
Zambia	920	159	20011	1092	50	7	0.4	336	577
Zimbabwe	56	10	37039	2496	4	4	0.3	25	27
TOTALS	34,606	9,984	685,923			1,241		10,008	23,357

Source: World Health Organisation, Worldometer, Johns Hopkins University (compiled by COMWARN)



COMESA SECRETARIAT
COMESA Center
Ben Bella Road
P.O. Box 30051



+260 211 229 725



www.comesa.int



info@comesa.int



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