

# COVID-19 LOCKDOWN **EXIT STRATEGIES** FOR AFRICA



**COVID-19  
RESPONSE**



United Nations  
Economic Commission for Africa



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In the current context of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, policymakers are confronted with decisions that may prove to be among the most difficult of their careers. To contain the COVID-19 pandemic, unprecedented measures are being taken globally. In Africa, at least 42 countries have imposed partial or full lockdowns on the movements and activities of their people. Experience around the world suggests that such interventions effectively suppress the spread of COVID-19.

The lockdowns, however, pose considerable economic costs that, in turn, threaten lives, put livelihoods at risk and exacerbate poverty.

Consequently, there is great interest in exit strategies for the COVID-19 lockdowns that preserve lives while protecting livelihoods. The challenge is that critical decision-making in these times is fraught with uncertainty.

The present report sets out some of the exit strategies being proposed and tried around the world and outlines the risks involved for African countries.



United Nations  
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# Key messages

<p><b>Excruciating trade-offs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Lockdowns impose extremely high costs on business and people:</b> up to 2.5 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Africa is at risk every month. Firms surveyed by ECA report to be operating at only 43 per cent; 70 per cent of slum dwellers report that they are missing meals or eating less as a result of COVID-19.</li> <li>» <b>Lockdowns forestall severe vulnerabilities:</b> only 1.8 hospital beds are available per 1,000 people; regionally, the risk of the spread of the infection is high because only 34 per cent of the population in Africa has access to household facilities for washing hands with soap and water.</li> </ul>
<p><b>No one-size-fits-all solution to lockdowns</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Testing and contact tracing</b> while easing restrictions may be possible for countries with sufficient public health systems and that have contained COVID-19 transmission, put in place preventive measures, engaged and educated communities, and minimized risks to vulnerable groups.</li> <li>» <b>Gradual segmented reopening</b> is being tested in some countries where containment has failed but the disease is nevertheless sufficiently under control; however, this is a higher risk strategy.</li> <li>» <b>Further measures to suppress the spread of the disease</b> may be required where the virus is still spreading; in many African countries, the spread of the virus is still accelerating. Spread is growing on average at 30 per cent every week in Africa.</li> <li>» <b>Active learning</b> and data collection can help policymakers ascertain risks across the breadth of policy unknowns as they consider recommendations to ease lockdowns and move towards a “new normal”.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Timing is everything</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>» <b>Take advantage of being behind the curve:</b> the infection trajectories of most African countries lag behind those of others. This may be an opportunity to learn from the experiences of other regions and their experiments in reopening.</li> <li>» <b>Use the “extra time” afforded by the lockdowns</b> to rapidly put in place testing, treatment systems, preventive measures, and carefully design lockdown exit strategies in collaboration with communities and vulnerable groups.</li> </ul>

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