

# REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND COOPERATION OF PAKISTAN IN HEALTH-RELATED SECTORS



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# **REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND COOPERATION OF PAKISTAN IN HEALTH- RELATED SECTORS**

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## **Acknowledgements**

This report is part of the 11th Tranche of the Development Account on Measuring, monitoring and improving performance in regional integration within ECA, ESCWA and ESCAP regions. Under overall guidance of Yann Duval, Officer-in-Charge, Trade, Investment and Innovation Division of ESCAP, and section Chief, Trade Policy and Facilitation Section, and supervision of Witada Anukoonwattaka, Economic Affairs Officer and project manager, this report was prepared by Dr. Adil Nakhoda. The report is also benefited from inputs and comments received from national consultation meetings with several governments and non-government entities and experts in Pakistan. Comments provided on an earlier version of this report by Dr. Vaqar Ahmed, Joint Executive Director of the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) are also kindly acknowledged.

## Executive summary

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in significant challenges for the Government of Pakistan. However, the pandemic has also provided opportunities for the Government to enhance trading linkages in medical products, particularly within the Asia-Pacific region. With the onset of the pandemic, the demand for diagnostic test kits, ventilators, protective outfits and equipment, and disinfectants and sterilization products increased not only in Pakistan but across the world. In addition, greater demand for the services of health-care workers increased the scope for migrant workers to serve their country of origin. Finally, the role of digital technologies to increase the quality of health service delivery has become evident.

The report offers a comprehensive review of issues that have affected the effectiveness of Pakistan's policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic. It includes an analysis of the trading patterns of health-related goods and professional services between Pakistan and its regional trading partners in Asia and the Pacific, as well as the role of tariffs and the non-tariff measures before the pandemic and of measures taken by the Government to meet the surging demand for medical products during the pandemic. It examines various government measures to alleviate the adverse impact of the pandemic, including the nationwide lockdown at the onset of the pandemic in Pakistan, and the handouts and economic relief programmes to affected citizens and businesses. The analysis concludes with a proposed action plan for policymakers. The action plan includes specific actions related to the following:

- *Recommended actions on trade-related measures:* improving trading relationships for health-related products and services, reducing tariff rates on imports, and adopting non-tariff measures to ensure poor quality products are neither imported nor produced in Pakistan. Other measures include: taking advantage of tariff concessions provided by China to Pakistani exporters on medical products; removing certificate requirements and other procedures that delay exports; reconsidering the minimum export price restriction on exports of surgical instruments; and on-time implementation of the National Single Window (NSW) led by Pakistan Customs.
- *Actions on foreign flow of health services:* facilitating foreign-trained health workers to practice in Pakistan; increasing scholarship opportunities in foreign medical colleges for Pakistani medical students; increasing the flow of medical tourists into Pakistan; and improving data collection on the flow of services.
- *Actions on improving government response to the COVID-19 pandemic:* better adherence to standard operating procedures (SOPs) and using contact-tracing apps to collect information on COVID-19 patients.
- *Actions regarding the national telehealth programme:* increasing the number of doctors, reducing the number of fake doctors, raising concerns regarding the protection of data privacy and ensuring participation of foreign-trained medical doctors in the programme.
- *Actions on ensuring the use of digital technologies to improve the delivery of health-sector services:* better communication between hospitals and emergency medical responders as well as digitally mapping areas in order to cater for those areas that are most in need of medical services.



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