



## IFRC – EMERGENCY DECREES IN RELATION TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### Country Update: Guinea-Bissau (containing measures adopted until 14 April 2020 inclusive)

For queries, please contact Francesco Romani at [fr358@cam.ac.uk](mailto:fr358@cam.ac.uk)

#### Overview

The first two cases of COVID-19 in Guinea-Bissau were confirmed on 25 March 2020.<sup>1</sup> As of April 14<sup>th</sup>, the authorities of Guinea-Bissau have counted a total of 43 cases in three regions of the country (SAB, Biombo and Cacheu).<sup>2</sup> The Government started adopting measures to stop the virus from entering and spreading in the country in late January, soon after the WHO encouraged States to reinforce surveillance and prevention measures.<sup>3</sup> According to some reports, the political crisis in late February/early March (resulting from the contested vote in the elections of 29 December 2019) appears to have temporarily obstructed at least some of those precautionary measures.<sup>4</sup> In the following weeks, however, the national response to COVID-19 seems to have been coordinated by the new President of the Republic Umaro Sissoco Embaló and the new government under the premiership of Nuno Gomes Nabiam. A range of progressive measures eventually led to the declaration of the state of emergency on March 27<sup>th</sup>,<sup>5</sup> which was further extended until April 26<sup>th</sup> two weeks later.<sup>6</sup>

Documents relied on to draft this paper are mainly drawn from publications on social media channels by several authorities of Guinea-Bissau. Access to the original decrees and measures has

---

<sup>1</sup> See President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Declaration of State of Emergency, 27 March 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/presidentesissoco/posts/117123136588322> (last accessed 15 April 2020). See also the post on Facebook by the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau Umaro Sissoco Embaló, 25 March 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/presidentesissoco/posts/115595743407728> (last accessed 15 April 2020).

<sup>2</sup> See Operations Centre for Health Emergency, Ministry of Public Health of Guinea-Bissau, 14 April 2020, available at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=121558256163384&id=111698593816017](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=121558256163384&id=111698593816017) (last accessed 15 April 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Public Health of Guinea-Bissau, 26 January 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/176824423669728> (last accessed 15 April 2020).

<sup>4</sup> In a Facebook post dated 1 March 2020, the Ministry of Public Health lamented that a military party had stormed its premises and forced the team in charge of COVID-19 to leave the building, thus compromising a range of activities (including the daily screening at the international airport of passengers entering the country from infected countries, the elaboration of data, the training of health operators and the supply of medical equipment). The post is available at the following address: <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/201006134584890>. On the following day, the Ministry issued an appeal to regain access to its facilities (see post on FB available here: <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/201942341157936>).

<sup>5</sup> See *supra*, footnote 1.

<sup>6</sup> See President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, post FB, 11 April 2020, available at [https://www.facebook.com/presidentesissoco/posts/124721279161841?\\_tn\\_ =K-R](https://www.facebook.com/presidentesissoco/posts/124721279161841?_tn_ =K-R) (last accessed 15 April 2020).

proved possible only seldom. This calls for the necessary *caveat* that the information provided in this sheet might be partial and could not cover the full extent of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Guinea-Bissau.

Question 1. Is there co-ordination between state and non-state actors, e.g. through a national emergency response mechanism?

Yes, there is. Early on in the response to the crisis, the Government of Guinea-Bissau established a Centro de Operações de Emergência em Saúde (COES – Operations Centre for Health Emergency). The Centre, which was already active as of January 29<sup>th</sup>, operates under the presidency of the Ministry of Public Health, and representatives from the WHO, IOM, UNICEF, Médecins Sans Frontières, NADEL (National Society for Local and Urban Development, another ONG) as well as officials from different departments in the Ministry have participated in at least one of its meetings.<sup>7</sup> COES has the mandate to coordinate actions taken by the Government and its partners as regards preparation and response to the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, on February 5<sup>th</sup>, COES was part of the decision-making process leading to the approval of the first contingency plan to address COVID-19.<sup>9</sup>

Question 2. Is there mention of the role of the Red Cross/Red Crescent (RC) [national and/or international] or humanitarian actors? In what areas/sectors? What responsibilities are ascribed to the RC?

Yes, there is. As mentioned with regard to Question 1 above, humanitarian organizations have been involved in the framework of COES. Moreover, confirmation that humanitarian organizations do have a role can be inferred from those provisions that exempt them from the restrictions on movement and the limitations on personnel enshrined in Order 08/MI/2020, emanated by the Ministry of Interior on March 25<sup>th</sup> (on which, see *infra* Question 4).<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, no document has been found providing in detail for the responsibilities that humanitarian organizations have been tasked with.

Question 3. Are there exceptions to travel restrictions that will facilitate the movement of RC/humanitarian relief teams and/or aid across borders? What (if any) quarantine requirements or other conditions are attached?

There are no apparent exceptions to travel restrictions for RC/humanitarian relief teams. Authorities in Guinea-Bissau first announced that they would close the frontiers and cancel all

---

<sup>7</sup> See Ministry of Public Health of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 29 January 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/178671220151715> (last accessed 15 April 2020).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> See Ministry of Public Health of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 6 February 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/183963109622526> (last accessed 15 April 2020).

<sup>10</sup> See Minister of the Interior of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 25 March 2020, available at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=117347333233086&id=113711653596654](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=117347333233086&id=113711653596654) (last accessed 15 April 2020).

international flights on March 17<sup>th</sup>, with effect from 00.00 of the following day.<sup>11</sup> Similar measures were announced one week later, when the Minister of the Interior communicated the cancellation of all international flights and the closing of land borders with Senegal and Guinea Conakri.<sup>12</sup> In these posts, no reference is made to exceptions for the Red Cross or other humanitarian organizations; at the same time, it is well possible that some exceptions are contained in the official documents, which have unfortunately proved inaccessible. Furthermore, the right to international travel is one of the rights the exercise of which has been temporarily suspended by the declaration of the state of emergency, promulgated on March 27<sup>th</sup> and extended for another two weeks on April 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>13</sup> The declaration also imposes an obligation, for all those entering Guinea-Bissau by air, land and sea, to provide information for a mandatory health check and, in case of suspect, to quarantine for at least 14 days.<sup>14</sup> The declaration does not provide on its terms for any explicit exceptions for Red Cross and humanitarian organizations.

Question 4. Are there exceptions to quarantines, curfews and other restrictions on movement that allow RC/humanitarian organizations access to vulnerable populations (including for psychosocial or non-medical aid)?

Yes, there are. Order 08/MI/2020, emanated by the Minister of the Interior on March 25<sup>th</sup>, contains certain restrictions on the freedom of movement on public routes as well as limitations on personnel operating in governmental and other institutions.<sup>15</sup> The Order expressly states that those restrictions and limitations do not apply to a range of actors, including national and foreign entities providing humanitarian assistance.<sup>16</sup> The following declaration of the state of emergency, promulgated on March 27<sup>th</sup> and extended for another two weeks on April 11<sup>th</sup>, mentions the temporary suspension of the exercise of the right to free movement and settlement in any point of the national territory, but does not provide for any exception of the type included in the previous order.<sup>17</sup> However, the declaration only aims at providing a juridical and constitutional basis for restrictive measures previously taken in the fight against COVID-19.<sup>18</sup> It could therefore be argued that existing exceptions to those measures have not been cancelled by the declaration of the state of emergency – if anything, they seem to have been upheld by it.

---

<sup>11</sup> See President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 17 March 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/presidentesissoco/posts/113758886924747> (last accessed 16 April 2020).

<sup>12</sup> See Minister of the Interior of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 24 March 2020, available at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=115309033436916&id=113711653596654](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=115309033436916&id=113711653596654) (last accessed 16 April 2020), as well as Post FB, 24 March 2020, available at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=115315340102952&id=113711653596654](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=115315340102952&id=113711653596654) (last accessed 16 April 2020).

<sup>13</sup> See *supra*, footnotes 1 and 6.

<sup>14</sup> See *supra*, footnote 1.

<sup>15</sup> See *supra*, footnote 10.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, Art. 3.

<sup>17</sup> See *supra*, footnotes 1 and 6.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem.*

Question 5. Have any special legal facilities or exemptions been put in place for the importation of medical aid or other relief items or personnel (International Disaster Response Law)? What (if any) quarantine requirements or other conditions are attached?

No such special legal facilities or exemptions appear in the documents analysed.

Question 6. Is the RC (or humanitarian organizations) categorised as 'essential' or 'emergency' services, for the purposes of exemptions to restrictions on business operations and opening hours?

The Red Cross and other humanitarian organizations are not categorized as such in explicit terms. At the same time, they are exempted (together with agents and officials operating in the field of health, defence, security, commerce, finance, media, petrol pump, drugstores and banks) from applicable restrictions on movement and personnel that are otherwise applicable (see above, Question 4).<sup>19</sup>

Question 7. What other measures are provided in the emergency decrees? (for governmental actors, for communities, for health workers, etc).

Building on the Overview above, here is a list of measures taken by the authorities in Guinea-Bissau to address the COVID-19 pandemic, in chronological order:

- 28.01.2020: a sanitary checkpoint with a team of rapid response professionals is activated at Osvaldo Vieira International Airport.<sup>20</sup>
- 31.01.2020: Measures of health security are strengthened at the international airport and at the main land borders of the country.<sup>21</sup>
- 02.02.2020: The Ministry of Public Health announces that a mechanism to check on a daily basis people coming from countries with COVID-19 cases is being put in place.<sup>22</sup>
- 05.02.2020: The Government of Guinea-Bissau and its partners within COES approve a contingency plan to prevent COVID-19 from entering and spreading in the national territory.<sup>23</sup>
- 06.02.2020: The Ministry of Public Health announces it is taking measures to ensure that students who have recently returned from China observe a 14-day isolation period.<sup>24</sup>
- 27.02.2020: *General Úmaro Sissoco Embaló is sworn in as President of the Republic.*

---

<sup>19</sup> See *supra*, footnote 10.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Public Health of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 31 January 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/180159373336233> (last accessed 16 April 2020).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>22</sup> Ministry of Public Health of Guinea-Bissau, Post FB, 2 February 2020, available at <https://www.facebook.com/minsapgw/posts/181726019846235> (last accessed 16 April 2020).

<sup>23</sup> See *supra*, footnote 9.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*.

- 28.02.2020: *Former First Vice-President of the Popular National Assembly, Nuno Gomes Nabiam, is sworn in as Prime Minister.*
- 02.03.2020: *The new Government is sworn in.*
- 17.03.2020: The Government of Guinea-Bissau decides to implement measures of prevention and control to stop COVID-19 from entering the country. These include: prohibition to attend crowded places until the adoption of further guidelines; reducing to the minimum the participation in social gatherings, including weddings and funerals, and limit it to members of the family; encouragement for public spaces that remain open to provide water, soap and disinfectants and to ensure that their facilities be regularly cleaned and disinfected; closing frontiers and cancelling international flights from 00.00 of March 18<sup>th</sup>.<sup>25</sup>
- 24.03.2020: Cancellation of all flights coming from every country and closure of land borders with Senegal and Guinea Conakri.<sup>26</sup>
- 25.03.2020: Prohibition of circulation for public transports in Bissau.<sup>27</sup>
- 25.03.2020: First two cases of COVID-19 in Guinea-Bissau confirmed.<sup>28</sup>
- 25.03.2020: The Ministry of the Interior of Guinea-Bissau adopts Order 08/MI/2020, which provides inter alia: restriction on the freedom of movement in public routes, out of the period between 7 and 11 am, only for the selling and buying of essential goods in markets and supermarkets at the national level; limitation on personnel working at government's departments and other institutions (i.e. the Supreme Court of Justice, the Attorney General, the Tribunal de Contas and others); prohibition for taxis and motorcycles to circulate at any moment, and for private transports above three passengers; prohibition for mixed inter-urban vehicles to circulate as of 11.00 pm of Fridays. Restrictions on movement and personnel do not apply to agents and officials operating in the field of health, defence, security, commerce, finance, media, petrol pump, drugstores, banks, national and foreign entities operating humanitarian assistance, and in case of urgent care at hospitals.<sup>29</sup>
- 27.03.2020: The President of the Republic promulgates the declaration of the state of emergency for 15 days (renewable), starting at 00.00 of March 28<sup>th</sup> until 24.00 of April 11<sup>th</sup>, covering the whole national territory. It provides, inter alia, for: the temporary suspension of the exercise of certain rights (including right to free movement and settlement in the national territory, the right to international travel, the right to reunion and demonstration); the

---

<sup>25</sup> See *supra*, footnote 11.

<sup>26</sup> See *supra*, footnote 12.

<sup>27</sup> Minister of the Interior, Press release, 24 March 2020, available at [https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=116186143349205&id=113711653596654](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=116186143349205&id=113711653596654) (last accessed 16 April 2020).

<sup>28</sup> See *supra*, footnote 1.

<sup>29</sup> See *supra*, footnote 10.

obligation, for all those entering Guinea-Bissau by air, land and sea, to provide information for a mandatory health check and, in case of suspect, to quarantine for at least 14 days.<sup>30</sup>

- 28.03.2020: Prohibition of circulation for public transports on all national territory.<sup>31</sup>
- 11.04.2020: The President of the Republic extends the state of emergency for another fifteen days, until April 26<sup>th</sup>.<sup>32</sup>

Question 8. Have restrictions been adopted or put in place that ban the export of protective medical equipment?

- No such restrictions appear in the documents analysed.

---

<sup>30</sup> See *supra*, footnote 1.

<sup>31</sup> See *supra*, footnote 27.

<sup>32</sup> See *supra*, footnote 6.