

IFRC Review of Emergency Decrees: Mauritania

Overview

This document is based on research carried out until 5 April inclusive.

To date, 67 COVID-19 tests have been run, 6 of which were positive.¹ Out of these 6 cases, there has been one death and two recoveries, whilst the other three cases remain in stable condition.² No new case has been declared since 30 March.³ The Government has placed 1254 people suspected of having been in contact with one of the confirmed patients in quarantine for fourteen days.⁴ It announced on 31 March that all people placed in quarantine would be tested for the virus.⁵

The Government has put in place an inter-ministerial Committee on 11 March presided by the Prime Minister to manage the response to the pandemic.⁶ The committee has appointed a number of sub-committees, all of which are responsible for dealing with specific aspects of the pandemic.⁷ The committee is tasked with the monitoring of the spread of the virus nationally and internationally, and coordinating the appropriate response.⁸ It opened a hospital with 100 beds on 31 March, used for the isolation of suspected COVID-19 patients.⁹ The Committee assigned a multidisciplinary medical team to monitor persons placed in sanitary confinement.¹⁰

On 5 April, the Justice Interior and Defense Committee of the National Assembly (*La commission de la justice, de l'intérieur et de la défense à l'Assemblée Nationale*) discussed the adoption of an Act which would authorise the government, pursuant to Article 60 of the Constitution, to take all necessary measures to respond to the pandemic. The President would hence have the power to take all necessary and appropriate measures by ordinance, during a defined period of time to manage the response to COVID-19. The

¹ Ministry of Health, "Covid-19 Rapport de Situation", 3 April 2020, available at <http://www.sante.gov.mr/?lang=fr>

² *Ibid.*

³ African News, "COVID-19 Situation report", 3 April 2020, available at <https://fr.africanews.com/2020/04/03/coronavirus-mauritanie-covid-19-rapport-de-situation-11/>

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Chezlane, "Testing of people placed in confinement is now Systematic", 31 March 2020, available at https://www.chezlane.com/Coronavirus-Test-desormais-systematique-pour-les-confines_a18687.html

⁶ Maghrebmergent, Coronavirus, Mauritania: The inter-ministerial committee learns about the conditions of isolation, 31 March 2020, available at <https://maghrebmergent.info/coronavirus-mauritanie-le-comite-interministeriel-sinforme-sur-les-conditions-disolement-sanitaire/>

⁷ AMI, "Mauritania has a sufficient stock of essential food products and medicines", 20 March 2020, available at <http://fr.a Mauritania has a sufficient stock of essential food products and medicines mi.mr/Depeche-52945.html>

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Prime Minister, "Inter-ministerial committee: opening of a new hospital for the confinement of patients suspected of having COVID-19", 31 March 2020, available at <http://primature.gov.mr/comite-interministeriel-ouverture-d-un-nouvel-hopital-destine-au-confinement-des-cas-suspects-de-covid-19>

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Committee explained that the adoption of this act would strengthen the government's efforts to fight the current pandemic.¹¹

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

To date, there is no specific coordination mechanism between the state and non-state actors. The Government has mentioned the role of non-state actors in the context of raising awareness about the virus. On 31 March, The inter-ministerial committee mentioned “The active involvement of civil society, political parties and trade unions in awareness-raising activities” as part of the general strategy to manage the pandemic.¹² The inter-ministerial committee also mentioned the necessity to “strengthen coordination between all institutions and existing structures playing a part in the fight against the virus.”¹³

Since 3 April, Oxfam has launched a campaign informing people of the dangers of the virus in several cities, including Aioun, Egjert, Dweyrare, Kobeni, Hassi, Gogui and Medbougou.¹⁴ They have also partnered with public bodies to contain the threat of the virus and are helping with the distribution of hygiene products in health centres, as well as contributing to the care of people in quarantine.¹⁵

The distribution of humanitarian relief is handled through government bodies and institutions. The Government announced the setting up of a Solidarity Fund to help the most vulnerable parts of the population during the confinement period.¹⁶ It is open to contributions from public and private bodies, as well as voluntary donations by individuals. There have however been allegations about the lack of transparency in the selection of the beneficiaries of the Fund.¹⁷ Several groups of vulnerable people, including in the Garage Kamara neighbourhood, have expressed their concerns regarding the fair distribution of resources by government authorities.¹⁸

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Prime Minister, “Inter-ministerial committee: opening of a new hospital for the confinement of patients suspected of having COVID-19”, 31 March 2020.

¹³ Mauriweb, “The inter-ministerial committee for COVID-19 makes 8 new announcements”, 4 April 2020 available at <http://mauriweb.info/node/8070>

¹⁴ Chezvlane, “Oxfam raises awareness about COVID-19”, 4 April 2020, available at https://www.chezvlane.com/Aioun-Oxfam-sensibilise-sur-le-Coronavirus_a18765.html

¹⁵ *Ibid*

¹⁶ AMI, “Inter-ministerial committee’, “Creation of a Solidarity and fight against the COVID-19 Fund’, 26 March 2020, available at <http://fr.ami.mr/Depeche-53015.html>

¹⁷ Le Calame, “Solidarity Fund COVID-19: Who will benefit from it?”, 2 April 2020, available at <http://www.lecalame.info/?q=node/10108>

¹⁸ *Ibid*

2. Is there mention of the role of Red Cross (RC) or humanitarian actors? In what areas/sectors? What responsibilities are ascribed to RC?

As mentioned above, the role of humanitarian organisations in the response to COVID-19 has only been mentioned in the context of helping authorities spread awareness about the virus to the population.¹⁹ The Red Crescent Society has already deployed a number of volunteers to sensitise local populations and inform them of the precautionary measures which must be taken to combat the virus.²⁰ These include appropriate and frequent hand washing, and respecting the recommended social distancing. This campaign is being carried out in cooperation with local authorities.²¹

Despite the lack of Government mention of the role of humanitarian organisations, there have been local involvements of non-state actors in dealing with the prevention phase of the pandemic. IOM is providing training and donating medical and protective equipment to police and custom officers in partnership with the WHO to strengthen the government's management of the virus.²²

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?

The Government has imposed a series of travel restrictions across the country in an attempt to limit the spread of the virus. There is no express mention of exceptions to travel restrictions for humanitarian organisations or the RC in particular. Most border crossing have been closed, though eight crossings remain active to ensure transport of goods and food.²³

It should be noted that custom duties for the import of basic foods have been lifted by the Ministry of Commerce and Tourism on 4 April, in order to ensure that their supply continues during the pandemic.²⁴ There are no quarantine requirements to date for the entry of food in the territory.

¹⁹ Prime Minister, Inter-ministerial committee: "opening of a new hospital for the confinement of patients suspected of having COVID-19", 31 March 2020.

²⁰ Alakhbarinfo, "The Red Crescent raises awareness about the COVID-19, 25 March 2020, available at <http://fr.alakhbar.info/15444-0-Nouakchott-Le-croissant-rouge-sensibilise-sur-le-Covid-19.html>

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Africa-Newsroom, "Mauritania holding the line border officials mobilize against CVODI19 with international organizations for migrations IOM Support", available at <https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/01/coronavirus-mauritania-holding-the-line-border-officials-mobilize-against-covid-19-with-international-organization-for-migrations-iom-support/>

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Futuraefrique, "The market price of oil and vegetables fixed", 4 April 2020, available at <http://futuraefrique.net/node/8462>

Even though all flights to Mauritania have been suspended, on 4 April, a plane transporting medical equipment donations from the company Arise was given permission to land in Nouakchott.²⁵

Travel restrictions

The Government has closed all maritime and land borders to prevent the spread of COVID-19.²⁶ There are only a eight points of entry into the country to date.²⁷ Consequently, the national institution responsible for transports (Société Responsable des Mouvements et des Transports) has suspended all commercial flights until 14 April.²⁸ The army has been called to patrol the Northern land border, in an effort to avoid potentially infected people to enter the country illegally.²⁹

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)?

The Government has taken action to restrict movement across its territory, whilst also adopting more stringent measures on certain parts of its territory – as described below. There is no express mention of exceptions to these measures for humanitarian personnel or the RC in particular. However, there are clear exceptions for the transport medical equipment, cargo trucks and basic services missions across the country.

Because of the nature of the services provided by the RC, and its official role as auxiliary to the Government, it is likely that it would fall under the category of “essential services”, and hence escape the restrictions.

Lockdown measures

National level

The Government has declared a national curfew from 8pm to 6am, applicable to the entirety of its territory.³⁰

²⁵ Kassataya, “Fight against the coronavirus, Arise’s cargo plane”, 4 April 2020, available at <https://kassataya.com/2020/04/04/lutte-contre-le-coronavirus-lavion-cargo-darise/>

²⁶ AMI, “Marine riflemen, on the front lines to face the coronavirus”, available at 4 April 2020, <http://fr.ami.mr/Depeche-53136.html>

²⁷ Senaouline, “Mauritania: Closure of 26 points of entry”, 15 March 2020 available at <https://senalioune.com/mauritanie-coronavirus-fermeture-de-26-points-de-passages-frontaliers/>

²⁸ Senaouline, “Mauritania deployed the army in the north of the country”, 2 April 2020, available at <https://senalioune.com/mauritanie-larmee-deployee-au-nord-du-pays/>

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ Ministry of Health, “COVID-19: Situation report”, 28 March 2020.

The Minister of the Interior declared a national ban on all movement of people and public transport from ‘wilayas’ within the country, excluding the three ‘wilayas’ which constitute Nouakchott.³¹ The Minister expressly provided for an exception for the transport of medical teams, cargo trucks and basic services missions (water, electricity, communications etc...)³²

All travellers who have travelled to an affected country have been placed in quarantine.³³

Regional level

The city of Kaédi has been placed in complete lockdown, after one person tested positive for the virus on 29 March.³⁴ All movement within the city is banned, except for medical personnel and the transport of goods.³⁵ Local authorities have however reported that people in Kaédi are suffering from a lack of food caused by the prolonged lockdown.³⁶

In Nouakchott, all means of transport in the city are prohibited apart for transports of food delivery. All shops are closed apart from the ones providing essential services.³⁷ People have been encouraged to limit their movement, as the city prepares for a general confinement.³⁸ The President also announced the designation of a special location for the isolation of people suspected to have contracted the virus.³⁹

Restaurants and Bars

All restaurants and bars are closed since 19 March 2020.⁴⁰ Markets have also all been closed, with the exception of those selling food.⁴¹

Schools, churches, other gatherings

³¹ Sahamedias, “Mauritania suspends travel between Wilayas except for the capital, available at 31 March 2020, available at <https://www.sahamedias.net/fr/mauritanie-suspension-des-deplacements-entre-les-wilayas-du-pays-a-lexception-de-celles-de-la-capitale/>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ <https://kassataya.com/2020/03/30/pandemie-covid-19-mauritanie-nouakchott-durcit-les-mesures-de-confinement/>

³⁵ Kassayata, “Nouakchott tightens lockdown measures”, 30 March 2020, available at <https://kassataya.com/2020/03/30/pandemie-covid-19-mauritanie-nouakchott-durcit-les-mesures-de-confinement/>

³⁶ Senalioune, “Kaedi’s population suffers according to deputy”, 1 April 2020, available at <https://senalioune.com/mauritanie-a-kaedi-la-population-souffre-selon-le-depute/>

³⁷ Kassayata, “Nouakchott tightens lockdown measures”, 30 March 2020

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ministry of Health, “COVID-19: Situation report”, 28 March 2020.

⁴¹ Chezvlane, “Mauritania Closure of all Markets”, 29 March 2020, available at https://www.chezvlane.com/Mauritanie-coronavirus-fermeture-des-marches_a18645.html

Schools and universities have been closed since the 16 March. The Government has decided to prolong the closure of schools, which were initially set to reopen on the 5th of this month, to the 30 April.⁴² During the closure of the schools, an initiative to provide distance education had been launched in order to enable students to follow the courses given through national television.⁴³

The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and Original Teaching declared that Friday prayers are suspended until further notice.⁴⁴

More generally, all public gatherings have been prohibited.⁴⁵ Festivals and cultural events have been cancelled until further notice.⁴⁶

Work place

Outside of the lockdown areas, most people are still permitted to go to work, though the government has issued a series of instructions for the workplace in order to contain the spread of the virus. These include avoiding gatherings in the offices, and taking the necessary precautions issued by the state.⁴⁷

Essential goods and services

As noted above, there is no official list of essential goods and services. However, the inter-ministerial committee stated that one of its objectives was ensuring the flow of food, medical equipment, and fuel throughout the country amidst the restrictions.⁴⁸

There are also exceptions to travel restrictions for the transport of medical teams, cargo trucks and basic services missions (water, electricity, communications etc...)⁴⁹

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

⁴² Senalioune, "<https://senalioune.com/mauritanie-coronavirus-le-calendrier-scolaire-pourrait-etre-bouleverse/>

⁴³ FutureAfrique, "closure of schools prolonged until 30 April", 4 April 2020, available at <http://futureafrique.net/node/8454>

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Prime Minister, Inter-ministerial committee: "opening of a new hospital for the confinement of patients suspected of having COVID-19", 31 March 2020.

⁴⁶ 16 March 2020, "prohibition of all cultural and artistic activities in prevention of VIDOC-19", available at http://french.xinhuanet.com/2020-03/16/c_138880942.htm

⁴⁷ Minister of Civil Service, "Civil Service Minister urges regional labour inspectors to comply with measures taken to prevent the spread of the Corona virus COVID 19", 23 March 2020, available at <http://www.fonctionpublique.gov.mr/?Circulaire-adressee-aux>

⁴⁸ AMI, "Mauritania has a sufficient stock of essential food products and medicines (President of the Interministerial Economic Monitoring Committee)", 20 March 2020, available at <http://fr.ami.mr/Depeche-52945.html>

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

Response Law)? What (if any) quarantine requirements or other conditions are attached?

As noted above, no specific legal facilities have yet been put into place for the importation of medical aid or other relief items. Donations received from abroad have so far not been subject to quarantine requirements.⁵⁰

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

As noted above, there is no explicit mention of the RC, or humanitarian organisations as “essential” services. However, the exceptions to travel restrictions would seem to include categories of work which the RC/ humanitarian organisations would undertake.

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

Economic measures

- The Minister of Agriculture and Trade has issued a price-freeze on basic necessities.⁵¹
- The President announced on 26 March the setting up of a national social solidarity fund "to combat coronavirus and its consequences".⁵² This fund, already endowed with nearly 60 million USD from public resources, is open to voluntary contributions. The National Union of Mauritanian Employers (Union Nationale du Patronat Mauritanien) is conducting a campaign to raise funds to contribute to the national effort.⁵³ The Solidarity fund is intended to finance actions including the acquisition of medicines to support 30,000 poor families, the assumption by the State of customs duties, for the rest of the year, all taxes and customs duties on imports of wheat, oil, milk powder, vegetables and fruit⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ Kassataya, “Fight against the coronavirus, Arise’s cargo plane”, 4 April 2020.

⁵¹ Cridem, “The Ministry of Commerce Reassures the public on food availability, 4 April 2020, available at http://cridem.org/C_Info.php?article=734538

⁵² French Xinhuanet, “creation of a fund "to fight against the coronavirus and its consequences”, 26 March 2020, available at http://french.xinhuanet.com/afrique/2020-03/26/c_138920676.htm

⁵³ Chezvlane, “The National Union of Mauritanian Employees continues the campaign to contribute to the national fund for social solidarity and the fight against coronavirus”, 31 March 2020, available at https://www.chezvlane.com/L-Union-Nationale-du-Patronat-Mauritanien-poursuit-la-campagne-de-contribution-au-fonds-national-de-solidarite-sociale_a18683.html

⁵⁴ French Xinhuanet, “creation of a fund "to fight against the coronavirus and its consequences”, 26 March 2020.

- China has donated medical equipment to help the fight against the virus, including 20,000 testing kits, 100,000 masks and 1,000 protective medical clothing.⁵⁵ BP has also donated medical equipment.⁵⁶
- The World Bank Board of Executive Directors approved a \$5.2 million grant from the International Development Association (IDA) to support Mauritania in strengthening the national public health preparedness to the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁷
- The Ministry of Commerce and Tourism has imposed a price-freeze on some vegetables and oils. Tariffs for import of foods have also been lifted.

Tracking

- The Ministry reported in its daily bulletin that the toll-free number 1155 assigned for reporting suspicious cases received 8,578 calls as of 31 March.⁵⁸

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

To date, no restrictions have been put into place banning the export of medical equipment.

However, On 20 March 2020 the Prime Minister mentioned that a “precautionary approach” could be adopted in the future by Mauritania towards “exporting certain commodities to neighbouring countries”, because of the COVID-19 crisis.⁵⁹ This has however not yet been translated into any concrete measures.

⁵⁵ Journal du Cameroun, “Mauritania receives sanitary help from China”, 29 March 2020, available at <https://www.journalducameroun.com/covid-19-la-mauritanie-recoit-une-aide-sanitaire-de-la-chine/>

⁵⁶ Chezvlane, “BP Offers medical equipment in efforts to fight coronavirus”, 1 April 2020, available at https://www.chezvlane.com/BP-offre-des-equipements-medicaux-en-contribution-aux-efforts-de-lutte-contre-le-coronavirus_a18705.html

⁵⁷ World Bank Press, “World Bank supports Mauritania COVID-19 Response”, available at <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/04/02/world-bank-supports-mauritanias-covid-19-response>

⁵⁸ FutureAfrique, “Mauritania, 1178 People placed in quarantine, 4 April 2020, available at <http://futureafrique.net/node/8450>

⁵⁹ AMI, “Mauritania has a sufficient stock of essential food products and medicines (President of the Interministerial Economic Monitoring Committee)”, 20 March 2020, available at <http://fr.ami.mr/Depeche-52945.html>