**COVID-19 response measures in the Republic of Azerbaijan**

1. **General information**

Azerbaijan adopted the robust strategy to fight the COVİD-19 and to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the population. The national authorities have implemented several containment measures to halt the spread of COVID-19 with people-centered approach.

On 30 January 2020 the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan issued an Action Plan to prevent the spread of novel coronavirus in the country. The Government of Azerbaijan established Task Force under the Cabinet of Ministers on February 27, 2020, consisting of senior officials of the relevant competent authorities to coordinate the measures taken by Azerbaijan in response to the spread of the coronavirus in the country.

On March 19, 2020, the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed a Decree on measures to protect public health in Azerbaijan and strengthen the counter measures against the coronavirus infection. According to the Decree, a Special Coronavirus Response Fund was established to provide financial assistance to the country`s response measures. Around 12 million US dollars was allocated to the Fund from the President`s Contingency Fund.

Presidential Order, dated 19 March 2020 regulates a number of measures to reduce the negative impact of the coronavirus pandemic for the economy of Azerbaijan, macroeconomic stability, employment and entrepreneurship. The Action Plan aimed at implementing the Presidential Decree, includes large-scale, effective and efficient measures. 2 billion US dollars have been allocated for these purposes.

Today, over 20 state-owned hospitals serve COVID-19 patients in Azerbaijan. One of the largest and most modern hospitals in the country, the New Clinic was launched shortly after the outbreak of the COVID-19.

Following Order signed by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan on 7 April 2020, four modular hospitals have been constructed within a short period of time in and around capital city-Baku, as a part of additional measures. It is planned to build six additional modular hospitals in the regions of Azerbaijan. The modular hospitals will provide additional 2000 hospital beds.

The local production of face masks has been launched by the Government of Azerbaijan as the next step to fight the global coronavirus pandemic. Along with medical masks, disposable protective clothing, disinfectants, sanitizers, etc. are also produced locally.

In its global efforts to fight against COVID-19 pandemic and expressing its solidarity with states affected by the virus the Government of Azerbaijan has donated 5 million US dollars to the World Health Organization (WHO). Additional 5 million US dollars were donated to WHO to support the most affected Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) countries. World Health Organization expressed appreciation to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan for Azerbaijan’s contribution to the global response to COVID-19 and for the measures taken in Azerbaijan to combat the pandemic. Azerbaijan has also provided urgent aid to 14 affected countries on bilateral basis, including sending technical and financial assistance, airplanes, transport airplanes, etc.

The Summit of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-Speaking States and the Summit of the NAM dedicated to the fight against COVID-19 were held at the initiative of Azerbaijan, which serves as a chair of the Council and the Movement. UN Secretary General, the President of the UN General Assembly, the Chairman of the African Union and for the first time in the history of the NAM the Vice President of the European Commission sent greetings to the NAM Summit.

1. **Measures across different areas**
2. **Social protection**
3. Prevention of unjustified dismissals or reductions in the number of workers;
4. Continuation of paying salaries to the employees working from home;
5. Creation of an additional 50,000 paid public jobs in 2020;
6. Provision of a lump-sum payment for 600 000 unemployed persons;
7. Simplification of the application procedure for a lump-sum payment on the portal e-sosial.az;
8. Involvement to a self-employment programme;
9. Expansion of the unemployment insurance coverage to 20,000 persons;
10. Scholarships for those who have had breaks in vocational training courses;
11. Use of reserves of 2019 of the State Social Protection Fund (SSPF) for the period from April until December 2020 to ensure the sustainability of social payments (pensions and benefits) to the population;
12. Extension of the payment of targeted state social assistance to low-income families until the 1st day of the month following the end of the quarantine regime;
13. Expansion of the coverage of the targeted state social assistance program;
14. Payment of annual tuition fees of the students from socially vulnerable families from the state budget (24 million US dollars);
15. Allocation of funds from the State budget to meet the needs of citizens for medical masks (2,7 million US dollars);
16. Temporary increase of existing discount limits on electricity use (5.9 million US dollars).
17. **Economy**
18. Adoption and successful implementation of a comprehensive Action Plan to ensure sustainable development, including reducing the negative impact of the pandemic on the country's economy and employment;
19. Increase in the economic growth rate (0,2%) due to the economic reforms implemented in the past years and the created potential, despite the impacts of the coronavirus on economy;
20. The support program (estimated at 1,47 billion US dollars – 3,1 percent of GDP), which can be seen not only as anti-crisis measures, but also as a program of economic expansion, credit expansion and stimulation of aggregate demand. This wide range support package adopted by government serves sustainable development goals, including the preservation of social balance and economic development in the post-pandemic period;
21. Direct financial support to 300 thousand individual entrepreneurs in the affected areas of economic activity (47 million US dollars);
22. Payment of a portion of the salaries of 300 thousand employees in these areas (127 million US dollars);
23. Temporary exemptions from taxes, insurance and customs payments on affected economic activities (68 million US dollars);
24. Providing financial support to vital passenger transport (165 million US dollars);
25. Issuance of state guarantees and subsidizing interest rates on bank loans to businesses operating in pandemic-affected areas (0.3 billion US dollars);
26. Subsidizing part of the interest rate on existing bank loans without state guarantees (0.6 billion US dollars);
27. Non-periodic calculation of rents on State property and State land fund;
28. Exemption from temporary customs duties of products necessary for food and medical needs of the population;
29. Continuation of state support measures and promotion of private investments in the areas identified as the main priorities of the state's economic policy in the medium term;
30. Salary increase by 3 times the reference wage for frontline medical staff during the period of the pandemic.
31. **Education**
32. Temporary closure of all educational institutions in Azerbaijan since March 2, 2020 to slow the spread of the COVID-19;
33. Broadcasting TV Lessons on national TV channel, which enables all students to have access to education. All recorded TV programs are also available online on learning platform video.edu.az of the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
34. Broadcasting live interactive sessions weekly in addition to the TV lessons;
35. Launch of the National Platform for Tasks for school students aimed at providing feedback and monitoring the students’ engagement across country.
36. Supporting local teachers, as well as the local educational authorities in launching online classes for different student groups and providing trainings for other teachers;
37. Provision of technical support and guidance for all local educational authorities in terms of capacity building for teachers, adjusting content, increasing student motivation. More than 1000 teachers will be covered by online trainings on distant education;
38. Launch of the campaign “Stay at home, create at home” which is a virtual competition (STEAM classes) among school students and aims to keep students motivated, while promoting creativity among them;
39. Broadcasting TV-classes on national TV channel for the children enrolled in various types of pre-school institutions;
40. Providing various online extracurricular activities for the schoolchildren, such as online chess tournament, online arts competitions (painting, singing, playing musical instruments) as well as “Scientist of the day” in cooperation with NASA;
41. Preparation of the video content for vocational education by the State Agency on Vocational Education (SAVE) and with the support of such organizations, as UNDP and GIZ.
42. Providing distant education for the higher education students. Most of the universities are using the Microsoft TEAMS platform provided by the Ministry of Education free of charge for the online teaching process, as well through other virtual platforms. Students who are not able to follow the online lectures, have the opportunity to watch the uploaded video recordings of those lectures, as well as to access to the reading materials via the online tool of their respective university.
43. **Vulnerable groups**

***Women and children***

1. Women-centered programs to address socio-economic impact of COVID-19;
2. Strengthening of the activities of 11 Child and Family Support Centers by the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SCFWCA);
3. Prevention by the staff of the Child and Family Support Centers cases of domestic violence during the special quarantine period and providing psychological assistance to the victims. In total, 7000 families from the regions got different kind of necessary assistance;
4. Providing psychological assistance online to women, children and older persons by the Child and Family Support Center and launch of “Online psychological Assistance” project. 2300 people have already benefited from this project;
5. Visiting vulnerable families for the assessment of their needs and wishes, as well as provision of food, psychological assistance and medical masks;
6. Launch of the special campaign “From Family to Family” to decrease the impact of the pandemic with regard to social isolation. As part of this campaign 75 families assisted to 594 vulnerable families;
7. Focus of Women Resource Centers on vulnerable and socially excluded group of women and providing them with necessary support and launch of local campaigns to help low income families to cope with the pandemic. During this period over 100 women from remote parts of the country have been participating in online business development trainings;
8. Involving women’s networks, civil society and women entrepreneurs. The SCFWCA, Women Resource Centers and UNDP helped 340 rural families by providing food. Most contents of these packages, including the eco-packaging itself, was purchased from women entrepreneurs, which also helped them sustain their small businesses;
9. The project involved women entrepreneurs, which also helped them sustain their small businesses;
10. Conducting surveys (441 surveys) by 11 Child and Family Support Centers with the aim to study the situation of families during the special quarantine regime in the country with regard to the COVID-19 pandemic;
11. Provision of crisis centers and shelters run by nongovernmental organizations with personal protection equipment and disinfectants by SCWFCA, Women Resource Centers and volunteers jointly with international organizations to protect survivors, as well as employees; switching online those services that could be provided on distance;
12. Ensuring access by women and girls to COVID-19 related public health information by the SCFWCA, Family and Children Support Centers and Women Resource Centers;
13. Awareness raising campaign to combat gender-based violence in the context of the COVID-19 crisis;
14. Awareness raising among families in remote and rural areas through the “Call to Families” (3300 families) and distribution of special informative booklets (around 600 families);
15. Special awareness raising sessions for women with disabilities, such as project “Addressing the rights and well-being of women with disabilities” funded by the Ministry of Social Protection of the Population and implemented by the UNDP, UNFPA and the SCFWCA;
16. Holding special online trainings, webinars, campaigns:
* Psychological problems in families during the pandemic and ways to address them,
* How to talk about the pandemic with children,
* How to manage mental health and education in self-isolation period,
* Legal aid to the victims of domestic violence,
* Role of social workers in preventing gender-based violence during the pandemic,
* Prevention of gender-based discrimination and increasing the value of girls in the society,
* Psychological pressure and problems in the families during the period of COVID-19 and social distancing,
* Psychological rehabilitation of children with special needs in the period of quarantine,
* Importance of successful communication and joint activities with children in the family,
* Guidance on how to be protected from the virus,
* Access to services for the victims of Domestic Violence during COVID-19,
* Gender and reproductive health,
* “Stay at home with your kids” campaign,
* Encouraging men to support their spouses through sharing their daily household duties,
* Internet safety of children and ways to ensure it,
* TV programs on family relationships, violence, children’s rights, women’s rights, ending violence, etc.
1. Special attention to the issues of reproductive health during the COVID-19 and self-isolation. Communication materials for pregnant women and health workers on COVID-19 response have been developed and distributed among prenatal centers and antenatal clinics in the partnership of UNFPA with Azerbaijan Association for supporting development of Gynecology and Perinatology and Scientific Research Institute of Obstetrics and Gynecology:
* Materials on Reproductive and Sexual health in the period of COVID-19;
* Maternal and new born health in times of COVID-19;
* Hand book for pregnant women and lactating mothers on COVID-19
1. Assistance to single and older women, as well as bedridden persons with limited access to leave home by the Child and Family Support Centers in cooperation with the State Customs Committee and volunteers of ASAN State Agency of Public Service.

***Internally displaced persons***

1. Ban on all mass gatherings in the IDP settlements from the early stages of the virus spreading;
2. Awareness-raising activities among the displaced population on how to protect communities from the COVID-19;
3. Full access by IDPs to the health services;
4. Conducting online consultations, using modern ICTs in interaction with the displaced people to address their needs;
5. Launch by the State Committee on Refugees and IDPs Affairs the Republic of Azerbaijan of the project “Virtual reception” which enables displaced persons to interact with the State Committee’s officials in online interactive format. Each session of this online platform has the capacity to simultaneously involve around 200 displaced persons;
6. Identifying the most vulnerable segments of the IDP community who seeks the social assistance;
7. Provision of food assistance to IDPs. Since the start of the lockdown measures in Azerbaijan, 3387 IDPs have received the food assistance;
8. Provision of food assistance to the older persons, lonely people and low-income families in the IDP community. Until now, 444 IDP families have received the food assistance.

***Older persons and persons with disabilities***

1. Extension of the term of disability of persons, including children with disabilities (around 14000 persons) that expired on 1 March 2020, until the 1st day of the month following the end of the quarantine regime;
2. Provision of rehabilitation services for persons with disabilities in their homes;
3. Provision of social service at home to persons with disabilities;
4. Providing 500 persons with disabilities with training and equipment to start their small businesses in cooperation with UNDP;
5. Provision of social service at home for lonely people older than 65;
6. Provision of the services in social care facilities for persons who need special care.

***Migrants***

1. Extension of temporary staying period of the foreigners and stateless persons who have been registered upon place of stay in the Republic of Azerbaijan;
2. Electronic provision of services such as extension of temporary staying, permission for temporary and permanent residence, work permission, etc.;
3. Consultations through 24 hours call center, “Online guide” and mobile application MIGAZ;
4. Compliance of immigration detention centers to the recommendations and requirements of WHO and the Operational Headquarters under the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Azerbaijan;
5. Putting in place all necessary measures to protect the health of immigrants in immigration centers;
6. Temporary suspension of forced return of immigrants;
7. Cooperation between State Migration Service and the offices of the relevant International Organisations in Azerbaijan in order to prevent violation of the migration legislation of Azerbaijan by the foreigners held in quarantine, and consequently to prevent imposing administrative punishments upon them;
8. Electronic acceptance of applications for refugee status;
9. Provision of food assistance to person with refugee status or who have applied for refugee status in Azerbaijan.
10. **Justice system**
11. Pardoning of 176 prisoners aged over 65 in need of special care due to their age and state of health, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic by the Presidential Decree issued on April 6, 2020;
12. Granting early releases to 624 prisoners;
13. Granting home confinement or other alternatives to 310 inmates;
14. Implementation of court proceedings related to civil cases and commercial disputes through “Electronic court” information system;
15. Continuing all necessary preventive measures to curb the spread of coronavirus;
16. Regular examinations by monitoring groups consisting of employees of the Ministry of Justice and civil society representatives.
17. **Internet**
18. Use ICTs in our national response to cope with the impact of the COVID-19 from the early stages of the pandemic;
19. Launch by the Operational Headquarters has created of an interactive informational portal ([www.koronavirusinfo.az](http://www.koronavirusinfo.az)) to ensure access to COVID-19 related information for all, as well as awareness-raising on measures taken to combat the virus, operational news about the rules, instructions and recommendations of the Azerbaijani Government on protecting public health;
20. Providing relevant important information through SMS system;
21. Launch of a one-stop digital platform “Stay Home” ([www.evdeqal.az](http://www.evdeqal.az)) by the Ministry of Transport, Communications and High Technologies and UNDP, which makes e-services available to everyone during the pandemic. The platform allows the visitors to find links to online stores, e-education, e-health, e-entertainment, e-food, e-delivery, provides advise on social distancing and staying at home and offers numerous e-learning resources including information on ways of setting up and running digital businesses from home;
22. Launch of a special e-platform enabling people to get permissions to leave their homes during the quarantine regime or the employers to get permissions for their staff to go their offices;
23. Launch of a new video-conferencing system (VCaaS) for the first time in Azerbaijan based on Azcloud;
24. Creation of a self-checker bot “Shefa” (meaning health and recovery) by the Public Health and Reforms Centre of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan in partnership with the UNDP, available at [www.isim.az](http://www.isim.az). This coronavirus self-checker is intended to help the health authorities answer more queries, enabling medical professionals to look after patients who need critical care;
25. Creation of whatsapp bot by the Regional Medical Division TABIB in partnership with UNDP to answer questions from the public about Coronavirus and give prompt, reliable and official information 24 hours a day;
26. Launch of a mobile application by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Azerbaijan in partnership with the UNDP to help healthcare professionals make more informed decisions based on latest research findings and data.
27. **Volunteering**

It is also important to highlight the important role of volunteerism during the crisis. Volunteers are among the first responders to the COVID-19 outbreak and they create social bonds and give a voice to marginalized and vulnerable groups. Due to the fact that the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has declared 2020 the "Year of Volunteers", a specialized volunteer teams were created due. The Coordination Center for Azerbaijan Volunteers was established at the initiative of volunteer movements and organizations in order to contribute to prevention of the spread of coronavirus and its possible consequences, especially to educate the population and provide social services to people in need. Essential hygiene and sanitation items (e.g. medical masks, sanitary pads, hand sanitizers, etc.), medicine, and food supplies were distributed in order to ensure continuity of care for older persons, persons with disabilities and single parents, including in rural and remote areas.

In a time of a global pandemic due to the condition of social distancing a new form of online volunteering contributed to society. School closures, working remote – all of these challenged parents. Teachers, social workers voluntarily created different online groups and pages for parents and caregivers with a set of handy tips to help manage during the COVID-19. Via social networks a lot of necessary information is being shared, online teaching courses and trainings for children are introduced free of charge.

A distant webinars have also been organized as part of the project implemented by UNICEF Azerbaijan and the Regional Development Public Union with financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to train the volunteers on how to protect oneself against coronavirus, hygienic rules, the importance of social distance, psychological support during quarantine, useful tips for parents and children, as well as sharing various awareness raising materials on internet resources and distributing them to the citizens throughout the country. A special digital communication platform has been created to provide continuous support to people aged over 65 who live alone, low income families and other groups of vulnerable families during the quarantine regime. Through this platform volunteers are in constant touch with this group of population and provide them with various social services:

* Tips for teachers to provide digital support for children with difficulties on learning during pandemic,
* Protect Yourself from COVID-19 (for people older than 60 years and with chronic disease,
* How to protect mental health during COVID-19 pandemic – practical tips for people staying at home in quarantine,
* Parenting tips for parents during COVID-19 outbreak,
* How teenagers can protect their mental health during COVID-19.