
Online consultation with Member States

Survey response 1

Information details

Name of the State:
The State of Mauritius
The institution responding to the survey:
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Human Rights Division)

Questions

1. What innovative practices did authorities in your state adopt to facilitate civil society's input to decision-making during the COVID-19 crisis, including through online channels? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)
<p>The Citizen Support Portal is a platform to address individual requests of citizens; it provides the Citizen Support Unit with a broader picture of the needs of the population. It therefore enables the Government to allocate resources more efficiently based of the different categories of complaints received in the different regions. In the context of COVID-19, citizens are availing of this platform to submit their suggestions on the Citizen Support Portal in respect of services provided.</p> <p>Moreover, "Be Safe Moris," a digital platform was put in place to raise awareness for the citizens for a safer Mauritius. Regular updates pertaining to the COVID-19 situation and vaccination programmes are available including vaccination pass. It is also to be noted that stakeholders' consultation meetings sector wise were held to provide assistance to those who were directly affected by COVID-19 pandemic such as the tourism, agricultural, fishing sector and in the context of Budget consultation as well as for the salary compensation.</p>
2. Are there innovative practices that authorities in your country used to enable safe and inclusive online participation, which encourages a diversity of participation, with a particular emphasis on underrepresented parts of civil society? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)
<p>The resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic has, once again, disrupted our way of living. Being fully aware of the impact that this pandemic has had on our citizens, especially on the youngsters, the Ministry Youth Empowerment, Sports and Recreation has devised a series of online activities for them. These activities were meant to keep them active, focused, and entertained. The list of activities are as follows:- online mimicry games, picture games and quiz, comedy interaction and scrabble competition, online DIY (Do It Yourself), Tiktok Funny Video Challenge, online poster competition and online First Aid.</p> <p>Concerning Elderly abuse during COVID-19, dedicated hotlines were put in place where cases of violence were reported. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare had implemented an online service through the mobile application Lespwar to assist and help victims of domestic violence during the lockdown.</p> <p>The Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity (Social Integration Division) provide tablets and internet facilities to children registered under the Social Register of Mauritius.</p>

3. Do you have examples of good practice in including civil society in designing and implementing strategies to respond to the pandemic? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

A Digital Vaccination Pass has been developed to provide the population with the opportunity to download and store their digital vaccination pass for verification as and when required by relevant authorities. The vaccination pass has a QR code containing the vaccination details of the individual which may be scanned by authorised institutions seeking the vaccination status of the person. The vaccination pass may be accessed on <https://besafemoris.mu/> by registering the Identity Number and a valid mobile number or through the beSafeMoris mobile application and the MoKloud platform on <https://mokloud.govmu.org/>

Mauritius remains one of the very rare examples where the first episode of viral circulation of the coronavirus was successfully managed and contained. A National Response and Contingency Plan was prepared by the Ministry of Health and Wellness as early as September 2020 to deal with the second wave of the COVID-19. The Plan takes into account international recommendations and guidelines, including those formulated by the WHO, and all the best practices developed and acquired locally following our experiences in responding to the first infection wave registered in Mauritius.

Government Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-Employed Assistance Scheme:

To alleviate the financial difficulties of employers and employees that were directly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of the Republic of Mauritius provided financial assistance under the Government Wage Assistance Scheme (GWAS) and the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme (SEAS) during the confinement period until the borders were open for the tourism sector. It was applicable to the tourism sector and other sectors such as fitness centres, religious body, leisure parks, restaurants, training institutions, self-employed individuals.

It is to be noted that Government extended on 07 January 2022 the Wage Assistance Scheme and the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme to workers and self-employed individuals of the tourism sector in for an additional period of three months after the opening of its borders.

The Wage Assistance Scheme to employees of bus operators providing public transport for the months of November and December 2021 has also been extended.

COVID-19 Solidarity Fund:

A COVID-19 Solidarity Fund was also established to contribute to funding of projects, programmes and schemes related to COVID-19 and other related public health issues and provide support to citizens and organisations affected by COVID-19.

Following the resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic leading to a second lockdown, the COVID 19 Solidarity Fund provided financial assistance to organisations/NGOs/NPOs, with a view to assisting vulnerable households facing hardship and in need of food, sanitary and health support.

Financial Support

- Bank of Mauritius Special Relief Programme (Banking)

The Bank of Mauritius introduced a Special Relief Amount of Rs 5 billion through commercial banks to meet cash flow and working capital requirements of economic operators which are being directly impacted by COVID-19.

- Reduction of Cash Reserve Ratio

The Cash Reserve Ratio applicable to commercial banks has been reduced from 9% to 8%. It aims at supporting commercial banks to further assist businesses, which are being directly impacted by COVID-19.

- 2020 Savings Bond

The Bank of Mauritius is introducing a 2.5% Two-Year Bank of Mauritius 2020 Savings Bond for an amount of Rs 5 billion from 23rd of March 2020 Process.

Other Financial Support are the following:

- Equity Participation Scheme
- Investment Support Programme Limited (ISP)

- Leasing Equipment Modernisation Scheme - Enterprises with annual turnover ranging between Rs 50 million and Rs 1.5 billion will benefit from a reduced interest rate ranging between 2.5% and 3.35% per annum.

- Corporate Guarantees to banks: ISP Ltd will issue corporate guarantee to banks to enable them to grant loans to companies affected by COVID-19, on a case to case basis.

- SME Equity Fund Ltd

• Enterprise Modernisation Scheme (EMS)

• Revolving Credit Fund: A Revolving Credit Fund of Rs 200 million was established at the Development Bank of Mauritius Ltd to help companies with turnover of up to Rs 10 million to ease cash flow difficulties up to Rs 1 million with repayment over 2 years. Interest will not be payable if loan is repaid within 9 months. Otherwise, interest will be at a rate of 6% per annum.

4. Do you have examples of innovative steps taken to minimise the impact of measures imposed during the pandemic, including emergency measures, on the free and safe functioning of civil society and on public freedoms (of expression, access to information, assembly, and association) as well as on the protection of personal data and privacy? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

The COVID-19 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act was passed in 2020, amending a number of enactments to cater for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and for matters connected, consequential or related thereto. The purpose of the legislative changes was mainly to address economic issues and extend time limitations under different legislations and did not, therefore, impact specifically on the safety and work of journalists and media workers as such.

The Prevention of Resurgence and Further Spread of Epidemic Disease (COVID-19) Regulations 2020 (Government Notice No. 92 of 2020) were made under the Public Health Act and imposed a number of sanitary measures, such as wearing of protective masks, social and physical distancing rules and good hygiene practices, with a view to preventing a resurgence and further spread of Covid-19. These measures apply to the public at large, including journalists and media workers.

For the education sector, after an assessment of the situation with regard to the evolution of the COVID-19 pandemic and taking into consideration the safety of the youngsters in schools and the need to ensure a continuity in teaching as well as learning, decision was taken for schools to be closed and for classes to be held online at all levels.

Educational programs for students of Grades 1 to 9 were broadcasted on MBC channels and MBC TV website. Lower secondary students, Grades 7 to 9, have been provided with logins to have access to educational resources available on the Student Support Portal. Moreover, all students in Grades 10 to 13 and the Educators have been provided with logins and have access to Microsoft Teams for them to connect online to ensure continuity in learning. Educators also use other platforms such as WhatsApp, Zoom and Google Classroom.

The Work-From-Home scheme is encouraged for both public and private sectors to combat the spread of COVID-19. In the public sector, a well-established protocol was put in place in a pilot basis in the first instance and roll out thereafter. Moreover, with the current prevailing situation arising due to the COVID-19 pandemic and with a view to reducing the number of bus commuters during peak hours while also enhancing sanitary measures on board public buses, a Flexible Working Arrangement consisting of two slots is being adopted in the public service.

5. Did authorities in your state implement any innovative measures to protect and facilitate civil society access to resources in the COVID-19 context? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

The Government has given priority and fast-track Work Access Permits for supermarkets, distributors and specialised logistics organisations. Within the second day of the national confinement, all supermarkets were opened and implementing all shopping guidelines, including the alphabetical order for shopping and ensuring enforcement of all safety measures. All supermarkets and hypermarkets have been operating as per their normal working hours and have been allowed to start operation as from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. This decision has helped to prevent long queues and ensure that consumers shop at their own convenience. The officers of the Consumer Affairs Unit of the Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Protection have ensured that distributors were providing regular supplies of goods throughout the island.

All supermarkets were requested to take necessary measures to ensure that stocks of basic commodities were regularly replenished.

Many supermarkets, Retailers, Shopping Centres adopted the e-commerce by providing facilities for online shopping and home delivery.

Citizens were encouraged to use the online application for vaccination as from 2020 and to effect their utility bills online through the My-t money, mobile banking facilities were provided by several banks. Payment of pension was also encouraged to be effected through the banks.

With a view to alleviating the financial difficulties of the taxi operators due to COVID-19 pandemic, a Taxi Operators Welfare Fund was set up and one of its functions is to develop schemes, including loan schemes and other forms of financial assistance, for taxi operators and their families.

6. Has your state identified any good practices to identify, and protect civil society from, online intimidation and attacks (e.g. online threats, harassment, organized smear campaigns etc.)? (Maximum limit: approximately 5,000 characters with spaces)

In Mauritius, legislative measures have been put in place to alleviate the issue of online harassment, be it against men or women alike. Section 46 of the Information and Communication Technologies Act 2001 (as amended) regulates the use of telecommunication equipment and transmission or reception of a message that might cause inconvenience to any person is liable to an offence for which penalties are applied i.e fine up to Rs 1 Million and penal servitude not exceeding 10 years.

Moreover, the Mauritian Cybercrime Online Reporting System (MAUCORS) is a national online system that allows the public to report cybercrimes occurring on social media securely. It also provide advice to help in recognizing and avoid common types of cybercrime which takes place on social media websites.

MAUCORS is a key initiative under the Cybercrime Strategy and supports the National Cyber Security Strategy, which sets out the Government approach to combat cybercrime in Mauritius. MAUCORS is designed to facilitate cybercrime reporting and develop a better understanding of the cybercrime affecting the Mauritian citizens.