

Background

The Republic of Cape Verde is an island state located in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of West Africa. It is an archipelago of ten volcanic islands with an area of 4033 km². The country is currently at a crossroads and is finding it difficult to develop a more sustainable growth model that is not dependent on its service sector, which is known for its strong concentration on tourism but oriented towards greater diversification of the production base. Cape Verde, whose tourism accounts for 20 per cent of GDP, is among the destinations most likely to suffer from travel restrictions related to the pandemic.

Early measures and response plan for civil protection

On 16th March, 2020, the Government announced a number of contingency measures throughout the national territory including:

- (a) Activation of the National Council for Civil Protection, as the national coordinating body for civil protection;
- (b) Improvement of the state of preparedness of the security forces and services and of all civil protection agents, with the strengthening of the means for possible support operations in the field of public health ;
- (c) Activation of the National Emergency Fund, with a view to financing prevention and response actions within the framework of civil protection and the national health system;
- (d) Creation of a national stockpile of personal protective equipment for the fire brigade, police and armed forces;
- (e) Strengthening of the reception and deployment capacity of the Green Line 8001112, with the installation of more service stations, as well as the assignment of health professionals to serve the population during the day;
- (f) Restriction to public events that bring together a significant number of participants in open or closed spaces, regardless of their nature;
- (g) Restrictions on the operation of gastronomic shops until 9 p.m., including bars, restaurants and terraces, with a total ban on consumption in open spaces, with the operating capacity being reduced by one third;
- (l) Determination of the setting of frequency limits and the organisation of public assistance services, in particular with regard to the organisation of queues and the imposition of a minimum safety distance.

Exceptions applied to emergencies such as the movement of technicians and maritime connections for the transport of goods, normal supply of the market by commercial and fishing vessels.

Due to the disaster risk situation in the country, the Government ordered the closure, from 27 March to 17 April, of all public services and businesses in order to strengthen measures to combat COVID-19. **On 28 March 2020, a state of emergency was declared in Cape Verde for the first time ever** to allow for the implementation measures that would help reduce social contacts.

It is instructive that the range of initial measures were taken prior to the confirmation of the first case of COVID-19 in Cape Verde which occurred on March 20, 2020. As of May 26, 2020 390 cases had been confirmed with 155 recoveries and 4 deaths.

The new emergency measures included:

- The closure of external, internal, air and sea borders and the ban on passenger transport in Cape Verde.
- The suspension of flights between the islands and of maritime connections, with the exception of flights and maritime connections carried out for health, civil protection and emergency purposes.
- People arriving in the city of Praia, the capital, are placed in mandatory quarantine.
- Schools were closed until April 17.
- All public services and public enterprises on the national territory were closed; depending on the circumstances, distance working and working from home could be used.

However, these measures did not apply to public health, security, civil protection, ports and airports, national identification registry and court emergency services.

Urban and interurban public passenger transport were cut in half in terms of traffic frequency and capacity. Municipal markets were allowed to operate with a minimum number of employees and customers.

Social support measures

The Government gave a guarantee that ***under no circumstances will workers be prejudiced in their employment and wages.***

The Government further announced a package of measures for families that are economically dependent on informal work and had lost their livelihoods and had alternative to daily income because of the crisis.

The measures included:

1. The allocation of the Social Inclusion Income to 8,000 families in extreme poverty. 68% of these families live in rural areas. This represents a monthly investment of 44,000 escudos. The implementation of a solidarity income scheme for workers in the REMPE scheme and self-employed workers in the informal sector, including informal trade vendors and municipal markets. These workers are guaranteed 10,000 escudos for one month. With this measure, 30,000 workers should benefit. The investment value is 300,000 escudos for a period of one month.
2. Immediate food aid is also guaranteed to 22,500 families, corresponding to approximately 90,000 people whose income is below the minimum wage or who have no source of income. This represents an investment of 21 billion escudos and food security for approximately 30,000 children attending the education system and belonging to the most vulnerable households.
3. Home care measures for the elderly and dependent persons living in isolation will also be stepped up, with the recruitment of social workers, caregivers and volunteers to guarantee assistance in liaison with the services of the Town Halls, Civil Protection and Health. This covers 712 elderly people in care facilities, who will begin to receive home care.
4. The measures announced are in effect for a period of one month, with the hope that after this period the restrictions imposed as part of the prevention of COVID-19 will be lifted. If the situation does not improve significantly, measures to protect families and income will continue. Decisions will be taken in advance.

5. As regards families and businesses with loans from banks, a three-month moratorium will be granted on the payment of debt maturities until June this year.

- *N.B 100 Cape Verdean Escudos is equivalent to 0.99 US dollars*

The Role of Trade Unions

While there is not much information on union role during the period, unions are called upon to:

- Strengthen their unity of action in the face of COVID-19;
- be involved in all awareness-raising and support actions for vulnerable and precarious workers;
- in particular, unions should actively demand personal protective equipment for workers and negotiate to secure the safety of workplaces and safeguard the health of workers;
- become actively involved in the management mechanism of the COVID-19 Fund so that they can promote transparency of the measures and play the role of a watchdog and whistleblower;
- participate in the framework of social dialogue for the maintenance and creation of massive and decent jobs. Trade union demands and negotiations should focus initially on preserving the wages and benefits of workers affected by short-time working;
- become involved in the post-COVID-19 economic recovery policy, with emphasis on the strengthening of social protection systems, the health sectors, the reinforcement of health infrastructures, education, the environment and tourism.