

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



This report summarises the major changes in the region for the Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker's [Containment and Health Index](#), providing a high level overview of shifts in government policies.

OxCGRT is created by the Blavatnik School of Government, University of Oxford. For more information visit www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/covidtracker.

REGION	Middle East and North Africa
Date range	1- 31 October, 2020
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Brief summary of major changes:

October saw a blend of policy changes. In some countries, restrictions were carried forward from September, while in other countries, restrictions were either tightened or eased. In most of the countries, schools continue to remain closed and distance learning has been prioritised. In Saudi Arabia, distance learning has been extended through October owing to the success of virtual teaching in September.

While countries like Djibouti, Lebanon and Tunisia tightened restrictions for workplaces, gatherings and public events, exempting only essential businesses, other countries eased restrictions with mandated precautionary measures to contain COVID-19. Public transport remains operational in most countries, though some countries have mandated restrictions reducing the operational capacity of public transport to keep the internal movement minimal. Algeria and Libya, however, have suspended the use of public transport altogether in October. Algeria has also suspended international air travel along with two other countries in the region. In addition, Iraq banned flights to and from Bahrain and Kuwait.

Previous COVID-19 testing policies were carried forward in most countries. In early October, Yemen went from observing no testing policy to testing symptomatic and eligible cases. With increased restrictions, countries including Algeria, Iran and Lebanon also became more stringent in regards to the facial mask policy measures. Most countries have not seen an update in contract tracing policy measures, however, comprehensive examples of contact tracing have been observed in Bahrain.

C1: School Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria: More than 5 million students returned to primary schools on 21 October. • Bahrain: School administrators, teachers and technicians on 4 October went to their public schools marking the start of the 2020-2021 academic year. • Djibouti: On 17 October, it was reported that some schools remain closed. • Egypt: On 17 October, The academic year for public schools and universities began. • Iran: As per the government of Iran's announcement, following 26 October occupation groups 2,3 and 4 will be shut down. Occupation group 3 includes "universities, schools, seminaries, vocational schools, language institutes, libraries, kindergartens, indoor swimming pools, cinemas, theatres, museums, reception halls, hairdressing salons, mosques, public transportation (with limited activity), and in-person exams." • Iraq: Schools and universities remain closed. Medical schools were allowed to commence classes from 20 October. • Israel: As of 16 October, Israel decided to ease lockdown as cases declined. Nurseries reopened from 18 October. • Lebanon: A phased reopening of schools commenced on 12 October. In the first stage, only senior students have been allowed to return to school, however, those residing in areas which are still under a lockdown due to COVID-19 will not be able to return within October. • Libya: By 20 October most high schools reopened in Libya with precautionary measures against COVID-19. The Education Ministry has also declared that returning to schools is optional for students. • Saudi Arabia: On 8 October, the Ministry of Education decided to extend distance learning to the end of the first semester after observing the success of online classes for the first five weeks post 31 August. • Syria: The month of October observed ad hoc suspension of schools where students or teachers were confirmed to have contracted COVID-19. However, after taking necessary precautionary measures schools reopened. • Tunisia: New measures were announced on 29 October to contain the rapidly spreading COVID-19. Among the measures it stated that education in primary, middle schools
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Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<p>and institutes will be suspended until 8 November, as well as the suspension of classes in universities for two weeks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Arab Emirates: October observed school closures in some targeted areas due to COVID-19 outbreaks. • West Bank and Gaza: As of 19 October, schools registering COVID-19 cases among pupils or staff will be either partially or fully closed for various periods.
C2: Workplace Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bahrain: As of 24 October, indoor dining for restaurants has resumed, allowing restaurant workers to carry out their duties. • Djibouti: On 9 October, non-essential businesses were mandated to be closed. • Iran: As per the government of Iran's announcement, following 26 October only half of the government employees will be at work. • Israel: As of 16 October, Israel decided to ease lockdown as cases declined. Restaurants allowed to serve takeaway orders from 18 October. • Lebanon: On 11 October the Interior Ministry shut down bars and nightclubs until further notice and enforced local lockdowns on 169 villages and districts across the country. • Libya: The total lockdown in Tripoli ended on 8 October. Mosques reopened in and around the Libyan capital on 9 October after almost seven months. • Morocco: On 10 October a change to the closure hours of shops was recorded and work hours were reduced, due to the state of health emergency. • Oman: Post 18 October, restaurants opened but people less than 12 years old or more than 60 are not yet authorised to eat in. • Syria: The Government of Syria continues to maintain a widespread easing of COVID-19 restrictions that were introduced in May. Throughout October, most of the public places including markets, restaurants, cafes, gyms, parks, theatres, cinemas and most leisure activities opened with mandated precautionary measures. • Tunisia: Tunisia has tightened precautionary measures amid a rapid spread of COVID-19 across the country, issuing a series of measures on 29 October. Open spaces, restaurants and cafes can operate at 50 percent of their capacities and will have to close down by 4 p.m.

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● West Bank and Gaza: Post 19 October, the authorities further eased restrictions. Movement between governorates continues and mosques, shops, supermarkets, barbershops and other facilities were allowed to reopen except for areas with high infection rates.
C3: Cancel Public Events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Algeria: On 14 October, Friday prayers in mosques were allowed. ● Iran: As per the government of Iran's announcement, following 26 October, occupation groups 2,3 and 4 will be shut down. Occupation group 4 includes "social, cultural and religious events, sports such as wrestling, karate, and judo, holy shrines, dorms, cafes, teahouses, zoos, fun fairs, indoor sports, and aqua recreational centres." ● Israel: As of 16 October, Israel decided to ease lockdown as cases declined. Beaches, nature reserves and national parks reopened for visitors on 18 October. ● Lebanon: On 2 October, Lebanon put 111 towns in lockdown. All social events and gatherings will be cancelled and the ministry will coordinate with local religious officials over the closure of places of worship and religious events. ● Libya: On 11 October, the capital Tripoli reopened its mosques. ● Saudi Arabia: Although public events still appear to be cancelled, the Saudi Government announced the phased resumption of pilgrimage (Umrah) beginning Sunday, 4 October. The pilgrimage is currently allowed for nationals and will be resumed at 30% capacity. ● Syria: Post 3 October, local authorities lifted the ban on mass gatherings. However, in case of large gatherings, mandated precautionary measures need to be observed. ● Tunisia: On 29 October, authorities announced that public and private demonstrations, access to places of worship and gatherings of more than four people in public will be prohibited.
C4: Restrictions on Gatherings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bahrain: As of 9 October, gatherings of more than five people on roads, yards, public beaches, parks and other public places are prohibited.

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Iran: As per the government of Iran's announcement, following 26 October, occupation groups 2,3 and 4 will be shut down, restricting gatherings altogether. • Morocco: On 8 October the Government Council decided to extend the state of health emergency until 10 November, thereby ensuring restrictions on gatherings above 10 people. • Oman: In October, all forms of family and social gatherings remained prohibited, thereby ensuring a restriction on gatherings of 10 people or less. • Syria: On 3 October, local authorities lifted the ban on mass gatherings, however, ad-hoc suspension of prayers in some locations as well as closure of wedding halls was observed. • Tunisia: On 4 October, the Tunisian authorities announced that a total ban has been implemented across the country and working hours have been reduced for public sector employees. On 29 October, further restrictions specified that gatherings of more than four people in public will be prohibited.
C5: Close Public Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria: As of 26 October, public transport may be suspended in 29 provinces of Algeria where there is a curfew. • Iran: As per the government of Iran's announcement, following 26 October, occupation groups 2,3 and 4 will be shut down, restricting gatherings altogether. Occupation 3 includes "universities, schools, seminaries, vocational schools, language institutes, libraries, kindergartens, indoor swimming pools, cinemas, theatres, museums, reception halls, hairdressing salons, mosques, public transportation (with limited activity), and in-person exams." • Libya: As of 4 October, a warning alert on COVID-19 was issued and implemented in Libya until 16 November. Among the numerous restrictions, the use of public transport will remain prohibited. • Oman: Oman reintroduced an overnight curfew (8pm-5am) in an attempt to curb COVID-19 cases from 11-24 October. "Only select vehicles will be allowed to move during these hours. These include emergency, medical and service transport vehicles, vehicles carrying passengers to and from the airport or trucks carrying supplies", while bus services within Muscat, the capital of Oman, operate only till 6pm during this period (bus services outside Muscat have not resumed yet).

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Qatar: In line with the country's last opening phase, from 11 October bus services like Mowasalat resumed services in compliance with MOPH directives. • Tunisia: On 8 October it was recorded that while public transport was open, it was operating at 50% of its capacity.
C6: Stay at Home requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria: As of 26 October, a curfew remains in 29 provinces confining people to their homes from 11:00 am to 6:00 pm • Bahrain: On 3 October, the Ministry of Health announced to leave the house only when necessary. • Iran: The Government announced tougher restrictions following 26 October, requiring citizens to stay at home with exceptions to "jobs related to daily life and essential needs of the people" • Israel: On 16 October, the Prime Minister announced that the exit strategy will be "gradual, responsible, careful and controlled". Citizens are still recommended to stay at home. • Lebanon: From 12 October, Lebanese authorities imposed night time curfews from midnight until 6 a.m. in targeted areas throughout Lebanon. • Libya: Libya's Tripoli-based internationally recognized Government of National Accord (GNA) has regularly imposed a complete four-day to week-long lockdown in the capital city due to a rise in COVID-19 cases. Authorities have also ordered the closure of stores, except those that provide essential goods and services. When a complete lockdown is not in place, officials impose a daily 2100-0600 curfew, with a 24-hour curfew on Fridays and Saturdays. Individuals and businesses that violate the edict may face fines under the warning alert on COVID-19 restrictions issued on 4 October. • Oman: The country reimposed a national curfew, from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m., from 11-24 October, in an attempt to curb the rising COVID-19 cases. • Syria According to the COVID-19 Response Update No.11, issued on 7 October, the daily curfew remains lifted, as does the travel ban between and within governorates. Public places, including markets, restaurants, cafes, gyms, parks, theaters, cinemas and most leisure facilities remain open, with mandated precautionary measures. Mosques and churches are open, with physical distancing requirements.

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tunisia: On 29 October, a government statement said measures would be implemented until 15 November and will include a nighttime curfew in all provinces from Monday to Friday, between 8 p.m.- 5 a.m. local time (1900GMT - 0400GMT).The curfew will continue Saturdays and Sundays from 7 p.m. and 5 a.m. (1600GMT and 0400GMT). • West Bank and Gaza: In Israel, the general lockdown, applicable also to annexed East Jerusalem, was eased from midnight 17 October, allowing for the reopening of kindergartens and certain workplaces, among other relaxations. In Gaza, the authorities have further eased the lockdown measures imposed in August, although a night curfew still remains in place.
C7: Restrictions on Internal movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Djibouti: On 20 October, the Government of Djibouti announced the closing of all land border crossings to travelers for 15 days to prevent the spread of COVID-19. • Iran: On 14 October, travel restrictions were imposed in " the capital Tehran as well as in Karaj, Mashhad, Isfahan and Urmia" • Lebanon: From 4-12 October, the Ministry of Interior restricted movement and activities in several villages in the country. • Libya: While domestic flights are resuming in eastern cities of the country, Western Tripoli government is restricting travel between cities post 4 October. • Oman: Public transport services within the capital region-Muscat started from 4 October and within Salalah from 18 October. The precautionary measures to be followed for the safety of employees and passengers are the sterilisation of buses before the start of the trip and after its completion, measuring the temperature of passengers for trips between cities, wearing masks all the time while using the bus, and providing hand sanitizers inside the buses. • Tunisia: Among the precautionary measures announced by the government on 29 October, it was decided to ban travel and inter-provincial traffic, "except for absolute and exceptional emergencies". Also, movement between provinces will be prohibited, except for work, students and exceptional cases that can be justified.

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yemen: The local authorities of Yemen declared a nationwide health emergency, and introduced measures restricting movement countrywide on 22 October.
C8: International Travel Controls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria: As of 26 October, non-cargo international air and maritime travel remains suspended • Djibouti: On 20 October, the Government of Djibouti announced the closing of all land border crossings to travelers for 15 days to prevent the spread of COVID-19. • Iraq: As of 26 October, direct flights to and from Kuwait and Bahrain are banned. • Oman: On 11 October, the updated travel advisory by Oman Air stated that flights to Oman are suspended with the exception of humanitarian and repatriation flights arriving from specified regions.
H2: Testing Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria: To date, tests are conducted based on proper documentation, making them available for symptomatic and eligible • Djibouti: As of 9 October, testing has been made available for anyone symptomatic. • Oman: On 13 October it was noted that testing policy changed from testing of anyone showing COVID-19 symptoms to private tests being generally available as well as drive through tests available at the airports. • Yemen: In early October, Yemen went from observing no testing policy to testing symptomatic and eligible cases. Authorities in Aden set up a new specialized field hospital in Al Mualla district for patients with fever. On 4 October, a COVID-19 examination unit opened at the isolation center in Ataq, Shabwah Governorate. Since the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, the Yemeni authorities have put additional preventive measures and health screenings for people passing through transit points, specifically at points located in Taizz and Al-Bayda. Authorities at Al'Wadeeah entry point have established and installed a PCR testing facility at the entry point for travelers who arrive without a PCR test report.
H3: Contact Tracing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Algeria: In October, epidemiological surveillance continues to be strengthened by conducting in-depth investigations for contact tracing

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bahrain: Comprehensive examples for contact tracing was recorded for 1 October.• Yemen: The civil war has made contact tracing difficult but with the restriction of movement and the testing at transit points, limited contact tracing has been initiated since early October. The Yemeni authorities have put additional preventive measures and health screenings for people passing through these transit points, specifically at points located in Taizz and Al-Bayda.
H6: Facial Coverings	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Algeria: As of October, Fines up to 10,000 Algerian Dinars can be levied if masks aren't worn in public• Iran: Face masks became compulsory in Tehran on 10 October.• Lebanon: The facial mask policy became more stringent in October, and by mid October it became mandatory to wear a mask at all times outdoors.• Morocco: As of 9 October, the facial mask policy became less stringent, mandating the use of masks in all public spaces as opposed to wearing masks at all times outdoors.

Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker

Regional report - Middle East and North Africa

Cases vs Government Response Index:

