**Policies during the pandemic**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has placed enormous stress on governments, health authorities and individuals across the world, with the total global death count estimated at 4.16 million people, and an infection burden of 194 million. Pakistan, located in South Asia, bordering India, Afghanistan, China, and Iran having a population of over 200 million people, got its first COVID-19 cases from pilgrims returning from Iran. Pakistan’s National Security Council established the National Coordination Committee(NCC), which opened up an operational arm known as the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC) in March 2020. The NCOC was an essential factor in curbing the impact of COVID-19 in Pakistan.

The effect of COVID-19 on the economy has been considerable. While Pakistan’s economy has been steadily growing over the past two decades, due to the COVID-19 containment measures enforced, GDP growth in Pakistan is estimated to have contracted by 1.5 percent in FY 2020. Over half the working population suffered either job loss or income cuts, and poverty incidence increased from 4.4 percent to 5.4 percent, leaving over 2 million people in poverty.

[Ruet-e-Hilal Committee meets today for Rabiul Awwal moon sighting](https://nation.com.pk/07-Oct-2021/ruet-e-hilal-committee-meets-today-for-rabiul-awwal-moon-sighting)

Low-skilled workers however faced the greatest loss in livelihood. As cases continued to rise, despite mounting pressure from citizens, particularly the wealthier economic classes, Imran Khan’s government refused to implement a nationwide lockdown, stating it would be detrimental to let the economy stall completely and leave daily-income earners, of which there are an estimated 67 million, without a job and no livelihood to sustain themselves . As part of a $940 million economic stimulus package to mitigate the adverse socioeconomic effects of the pandemic, the government gave out 12,000PKR equivalent to approximately $75, to low-income earners.

As COVID-19 cases began to decline by June 2020, the government decided to abandon city-wide lockdowns, and instead imposed what they termed ‘smart lockdowns’ as a measure to stop the economy from completely stalling. In a ‘smart lockdown’, an area or street identified by an infected person, their family or hospital data as their residential address, would be shut down immediately, with all residents unable to leave.

[PTI Senator Saifullah Abro’s close aide joins PPP](https://nation.com.pk/07-Oct-2021/pti-senator-saifullah-abro-s-close-aide-joins-ppp)

A national contact tracing system was established to identify individuals who may have been in contact with those who tested positive. The government also tracked and checked recent journeys of infected persons, in order to minimise the infection spreading from contact with other people across land and air transport. The National Command and Control Centre was crucial to this, coordinating the entire apparatus but there were several other factors that greatly helped the government in halting the spread of the virus.

It must however be mentioned that Pakistan’s population on average is a lot younger than other countries where COVID struck. Research shows that people 60+ are more vulnerable to the virus, while younger people are less susceptible to it. The average age in Pakistan is 22 years, compared to 38.1 years in the United States, and a global average of 29.6. According to a leading Pakistani epidemiologist Dr Rana Jawad Asghar, Pakistan’s younger population is the reason there were less deaths from Covid in the country.

[Pakistan’s ‘tallest man’ Muhammad Ijaz passes away](https://nation.com.pk/07-Oct-2021/pakistan-s-tallest-man-muhammad-ijaz-passes-away)

From a social perspective, what is success? It’s letting people have as much freedom as possible, whilst ensuring their safety and ability to earn money. And from that perspective, Pakistan has performed well. The poorest income workers were able to continue to sustain themselves and although large gatherings were banned, people were still able to meet each other which was important in cementing the social capital of individuals and communities in unusual circumstances like a global pandemic. In sum, the formula of staying open and imposing ‘smart lockdowns’ played a crucial role in curbing the transmission of COVID-19 and prevented Pakistan’s economy from completely stalling and keeping economic losses relatively minimal.

Like many developing nations, Pakistan spends painfully very little on public health. The WHO sponsored a Joint External Evaluation in 2016 for Pakistan which looked at areas including pandemic preparation and made comprehensive suggestions to improve national health emergency infrastructure but not a lot of progress has been made in that regard. The current pandemic has indicated that public health is a global good whose costs and benefits spill out into the global arena. While intrinsic actions must be taken at the national level, the spillover effects of these externalities need to be dealt with by all countries and all at once. The global indivisibility of public health has shown us that coordinated multilateral action for people and the planet has never been needed more and we need to act in the here and now for a COVID-free future. The example of Pakistan may point to a model for other governments to emulate in the future.