

Parliamentary Responses to COVID-19

Parliamentarians are at the forefront of the fight to prevent, slow the spread, and mitigate the effects of the coronavirus COVID-19 on societies and economies. Parliaments around the world are responding in varying measures, according to their mandates, with stimulus packages, boosted health and social services, relaxed regulations for aid dispersal, and emergency special powers granted to governments. The below document shines light on the various actions being taken in parliaments across the globe in response to this unprecedented global health crisis. Responses are based on news reports and parliamentary testimony.*

Table of Contents

[Donor Countries](#)

[Recipient Countries](#)

[Africa Region](#)

[East Asia and the Pacific Region](#)

[Europe and Central Asia Region](#)

[Latin America and the Caribbean Region](#)

[Middle East and North Africa](#)

[South Asia Region](#)

*Please note that this is a thorough, but not exhaustive, account of action being taken by parliaments as the situation is evolving rapidly in countries on a daily and even hourly basis.

Donor Countries

Australia

Parliament will only be at 40% capacity during its sitting the week of March 23 after three MPs tested positive for the virus. The sitting is crucial to pass a \$17.6 billion stimulus package, \$11 billion of which is likely to be dispersed in less than three months to students, retirees and the unemployed.

Austria

Parliament voted to limit gatherings of more than five people on March 15, which will be enforced by police.

Belgium

Parliament is closed to visitors and Members of Parliament are requested to limit staff.

Canada

Parliament was suspended on March 13 until April 20 with the possibility of being extended. They will return only to vote on a COVID Economic Response Plan of \$27 billion in direct support to Canadian workers and businesses.

Denmark

Essential parliamentary work continues although the building is closed to visitors. On Thursday, March 12, parliament passed a Coronavirus law giving authorities powers to force testing, treatment and quarantine with the backing of the police, valid until March 2021.

European Parliament

The European Parliament is holding an extraordinary plenary session on March 26 to implement special measures in response to COVID-19. Measures include a Coronavirus Response Investment Initiative, releasing €37 billion of Cohesion funds to member states; expanding the EU Solidarity Fund to cover public health emergencies; and a proposal to stop “ghost flights” being flown. Other measures of the EU coordinated response laid out by the European Commission to counter the impact of the coronavirus include ensuring health supplies, supporting people and businesses to reduce financial burden, and relaxing rules on state aid and support.

Finland

Parliament voted on an emergency powers act, which allows the central government to make decisions on issues such as school closures and closing foreign borders, on March 17. Parliament was also asked to approve a 100 million euros supplementary budget to cover social and health care costs as well as support to businesses on March 20.

France

All parliamentary work has been suspended aside from two laws concerning the coronavirus: 1. Parliament will vote on a law allowing the government to quickly transform orders related to crisis management into law; 2. The second round of municipal elections, scheduled for March 22, will be postponed to mid or late June. As of March 17, 18 Members of Parliament had tested positive for the coronavirus, therefore parliament met in a restricted manner to deliberate the new laws. Only 30

members were present, representing proportionally the eight political groups and seated at a distance from one another.

March 16 - *"We have reached phase 3 of the pandemic. Several parliamentarians and members of the government have tested positive. We do not know when we will return to work. Schools, daycares, universities and non-essential shops are closed until further notice. Companies are assigning their employees to home-based work to limit movement.*

For the moment, all employees unable to work will receive financial compensation in order to maintain income and companies can postpone payments due. Banks are accepting to delay loan payments from companies by 6 months."

Aina Kuric MP and Member of the Foreign Affairs Committee

Germany

The Bundestag approved a new law that enables the government to make access to short-time work easier and reduce costs for companies. Parliament will continue to meet next week.

Greece

The Greek Parliament will only vote on one draft bill per week, with priority given to bills related to the management of the coronavirus outbreak.

Italy

The government approved a €25 billion decree on March 16 called "Cura Italia" to strengthen the national health service and provide economic support to families, workers and businesses. There will be a second decree in April that includes EU funding. Parliament will meet in a reduced state, with equal party representation.

Japan

Parliament passed legislation on Friday, March 13 allowing the government to declare a state of emergency.

Luxembourg

Parliament approved a State of Emergency granting the government special powers for the next three months.

Netherlands

Parliament is in debate about whether to enforce a full lockdown. All schools, restaurants, and bars are closed.

March 17 - *"In the Netherlands we have over 1400 confirmed cases with numbers rising fast. As of this week, all schools, universities, restaurants, bars, hotels, gyms and sports facilities are closed, until April 6 at the earliest. Currently, schools are working hard to ensure that distance learning programs are made available to all kids, including computers for lower income families. Children whose parents work in a vital sector, such as health care or police, have access to free day care facilities.*

Most parliamentary debates have been postponed. Only urgent debates (for example on coronavirus measures) are taking place with fewer MPs. Staff is asked to work from home.

What warms the heart in these scary times, is that there are a lot of community initiatives coming up, for example, to help the elderly with groceries or to collect food for the needy.”

Kirsten van den Hul MP and Member of the Foreign Trade and Development Committee and the Social Affairs and Employment Committee

New Zealand

Parliament will operate with a “skeleton group” of MPs that vote by proxy, while at least 30% of parliament works from home at any given time. Select committee meetings and oral questions will be managed electronically

Norway

The Finance Committee approved two fiscal packages to reduce payroll taxes, give money to municipalities, expand unemployment benefits, and provide other emergency funding.

The government negotiated with parliament to pass a temporary coronavirus law that allows it to sidestep existing laws and issue new regulations without parliamentary debate. Parliament will have the power to intervene and question any of these new measures if a third of MPs come to oppose it. The law automatically expires on December 31.

Portugal

Parliament approved a €9.2 billion stimulus package to support workers and provide liquidity to companies. It also cleared the way for a state of emergency, granting the government special powers for 15-days, renewable for additional 15-day increments at a time.

Spain

The government approved the largest stimulus package in the country’s history for €200 billion to grant greater liquidity for Spanish companies, a moratorium on mortgage and utilities bills, and funds to help the most vulnerable and those dependent on social services.

Sweden

Economic measures worth \$30 billion were made available to protect companies and workers.

Switzerland

The Swiss Parliament has interrupted its spring session due to the coronavirus. The government offered \$10 billion in aid to help businesses.

United Kingdom

Parliament is passing fast-track coronavirus legislation with measures to increase the health and social care workforce, ease the burden on frontline staff, contain and slow the virus, manage the deceased, and support people through more flexible paid sick leave and support to the food industry. Parliament is still meeting, but both houses are becoming increasingly deserted.

United States

Congress passed a multibillion-dollar coronavirus relief package on March 18 with provisions for free emergency testing, emergency paid sick leave coverage, and support to those with sick family members. The following day, the Senate released a \$1 trillion stimulus bill to help industries and workers, including direct cash payments to citizens. The bill still has to be debated in the House of Representatives.

Recipient Countries

Africa Region

Burkina Faso

On Monday 16 March, Burkina Faso suspended all parliamentary plenary sessions until April 1. General Committees of under 50 people will continue to meet. All guided visits in parliament are suspended. The Second Vice-President of Parliament in Burkina Faso died from coronavirus on Wednesday, March 18, marking the first death from the virus in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Cabo Verde

On March 18, a communiqué was adopted in parliament limiting any travel and official missions of a parliamentary, civic or cultural nature in the National Assembly, until 31 May 2020, forbidding any visit to the National Assembly building, cancelling any international parliamentary events, and engagements from parliamentarians outside of parliament. Plenary Sessions and parliamentary sessions are to go ahead, without public participation.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Following a hearing with Doctor Jean-Jacques Muyembe, Coordinator of the Ebola response and Head of the main biomedical laboratory of the DRC, who expressed deep concerns about the nation's capacity to fight the pandemic, both the Senate and National Assembly of the DRC decided on March 18 to suspend all sessions for the month of March due to COVID-19.

Cote d'Ivoire

Ivory Coast is voting in a new constitutional law that would strengthen the executive and safeguard the role of parliament. Due to COVID-19, this change in the constitution will be voted by ordonnance.

Gabon

The Senate created a unit for awareness and prevention of COVID-19 on Friday March 20 in order to protect senators and supply them with masks, gloves and disinfectants, as well as to be readily available for advice on how to tackle the proliferation of this virus.

The Gambia

Parliament was suspended due to COVID-19 until further notice, as of Wednesday March 18.

Ghana

The Parliament of Ghana was presented the Imposition of Restrictions Bill, on March 19, which grants full powers to the government to impose restrictions in case of emergencies, within the framework of COVID-19. The bill is being referred to for consideration and passage, under a Certificate of Urgency. This bill however is being contested by the National Democratic Congress of Ghana, and it is therefore unclear whether it will pass.

Kenya

Both houses of parliament (National Assembly and Senate) suspended sittings on March 17 due to the coronavirus. The Senate announced it will not convene again until April 14 at the earliest.

Morning of March 17 - *"We have three confirmed cases so far and a few people in isolation. All our schools and universities are now closed and we may adjourn parliament. The Ministry of Health is doing a good*

job to ensure citizens get the right information and curb the spread. A multi-agency group was formed by the Head of State for consultations and effective communication to the public and we pray all will be well.”
Sabina Chege MP and Chair of the Departmental Committee on Education, Research and Technology

Malawi

The Speaker of Parliament, Honorable Catherine Gotani Hara, has urged Members of Parliament to self-isolate for a period of 14 days if they are traveling back from COVID-19 affected countries.

Mozambique

The government of Mozambique is currently amending the 2020 plan and budget to reflect the macroeconomic impact of the coronavirus, to be voted upon by parliament.

Namibia

Parliament has passed a resolution confirming a state of emergency in Namibia on March 20 for a period of 6 months, within the context of COVID-19 as a public health emergency. As of yet, there are no official measures announced following the passing of this resolution.

Nigeria

Nigeria has suspended a \$22.7bn borrowing plan despite Senate approval, amidst the fall in price of crude oil to its lowest since 2016. The lower house of parliament has yet to approve the borrowing plan, yet the Minister of Finance, Budget and National Planning, Zainab Ahmed, announced that the government would not be inclined to proceed even with the National Assembly's approval. Expenditure will instead be redirected to job creation and enhancing ease of doing business in Nigeria.

Senegal

The National Assembly asked for the postponement of all religious gatherings and implemented a travel ban as measures against the spread of COVID-19. Furthermore, inside the Parliament MPs are asked to avoid physical contact and are not allowed to travel.

Seychelles

The LDS party has decided not to take non-essential business, but the National Assembly will convene to consider any emergency matters of national importance that may arise.

South Africa

The coronavirus pandemic has caused Parliament to suspend all of its activities. On March 18, the last few bills and legislations of the term will be signed into law.

Tanzania

Parliamentary activities are postponed to March 31. A 30-day ban on public gatherings has been instated as well as a travel ban from Italy following detection of the first cases.

Uganda

On March 18th, Parliament suspended all foreign travel for legislators and staff to stem the spread of the deadly coronavirus.

Zambia

Parliament was adjourned sine die on March 19 as the first two cases were identified in Zambia.

Zimbabwe

Parliament is suspended two months until May 6 in line with the government's ban on gatherings of more than 100 people.

East Asia and the Pacific

China

China postponed its National People's Congress on Monday, 24 February, until further notice, amidst an estimated 77,150 cases at the time of postponement.

Fiji

Fiji's parliament will be presented a new budget on March 26 that will include a response budget to address COVID-19.

Republic of Korea

The parliament of the Republic of South Korea shut on February 24, and re-opened two days later when a suspected case in parliament was found negative. The government has allocated 20 trillion Won (\$16.11 billion) to fight the spread of COVID-19, and Parliament approved an additional budget of 11.7 trillion Won (\$9.43 billion) on March 17 to combat the epidemic, of which 10.9 trillion will be used for additional fiscal injection, and 0.8 trillion to make up for revenue deficit. Parliamentary elections set to occur on April 15th are still to be held.

Malaysia

Malaysia's next parliament sitting has been postponed two months to May 18, originally scheduled for March 9. A new coalition has recently been formed following the appointment of the King as Malaysia's eighth prime minister.

Papua New Guinea

Opposition in Parliament have called for a recall of parliament and a supplementary budget to be introduced to deal with COVID-19. There is a 60-day ban on overseas travel by public servants. There are no reported cases of the virus in Papua New Guinea as of yet.

Singapore

Members of Parliament are taking a one-month pay cut to their allowances.

Europe and Central Asia

Armenia

On March 16, the government presented a motion to declare a state of emergency at a special session of parliament.

Azerbaijan

The Chairperson of the Azerbaijani Parliament Sahiba Gafarova signed an order on March 18 with measures to fight against COVID-19. Committee and commission meetings, the Office and the Department of Parliamentary Affairs are temporarily suspended while management is carried out virtually. All business trips and trips abroad of MPs and employees of the Azerbaijani parliament are temporarily suspended.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria's Parliament declared a state of emergency until April 13. Under the emergency rules schools, universities and kindergartens will remain closed until March 29 and visits to gyms, cinemas, bars, restaurants and shops except for supermarkets and pharmacies will be banned. Businesses are encouraged to allow employees to work remotely while students will take classes online.

Czech Republic

Elections to the Czech Republic's Senate (upper house of parliament) will be postponed due to the novel coronavirus outbreak and quarantine.

Estonia

The Riigikogu will resolve only time-critical issues until May 1.

Georgia

March 17 - *"The government is working around the clock and doing indeed an amazing job to contain the disease. Schools and universities are closed. As of March 18, foreign citizens will not be allowed to enter the country for at least two weeks. Cafes and restaurants will also be closed. The number of those infected is 30. Communication with the public has been extensive throughout the weeks to keep the public in the loop. This is a whole-of-government effort, including parliament."*

Sophie Katsarava, Former MP

Kosovo

Kosovar President Hashim Thaci asked parliament to declare a state of emergency. According to Kosovo's constitution, a state of emergency is declared by the president and approved by the Assembly. A partner in Kosovo's ruling coalition says it will seek a no-confidence vote in parliament against the government, potentially engulfing the nation in a political crisis as it tries to curtail the coronavirus.

Latvia

On March 16, the Saeima held an extraordinary sitting and adopted the decision by the Cabinet of Ministers to extend the precautionary measures taken during the emergency situation to limit the spread of COVID-19.

Lithuania

On March 17, the Parliament decided that people who lose at least a third of their income due to coronavirus crisis will be able to defer their loan payments.

Moldova

On March 17, Moldova's parliament voted to impose a state of emergency in a bid to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Montenegro

The Parliament scheduled a meeting of the Collegium for March 20 in order to agree on the required activities and further contribution to maintaining institutional stability.

North Macedonia

North Macedonia's political parties have decided to postpone parliamentary elections scheduled for April 12 due to the coronavirus outbreak.

Poland

On March 17, public tours of the house and all foreign missions involving MPs will be suspended as a precaution against the coronavirus. The Sejm will also halt all conferences; however regular Sejm sittings will continue.

Romania

On March 14, MPs gave Prime Minister Ludovic Orban's interim cabinet a vote of confidence granting it full powers to address the crisis - following a speedy appointment and teleconferenced hearings. Romanian regulations do not allow for remote voting, yet measures were taken so that future exceptional situations will permit an online vote.

Slovakia

As of March 20, all MPs have to wear masks and gloves, and have their temperature taken before they enter parliament's plenary hall as part of strict hygiene measures.

Turkey

Parliament barred visitors to help stem the virus' spread, and weekly group meetings were cancelled.

Latin America and the Caribbean

Argentina

Preventive measures have been implemented to avoid the spread of COVID-19, including the suspension of extra parliamentary events during the rest of March and meetings held without the presence of the parliamentary staff. Parliamentarians and staff over 65 and with pre-existing conditions will be dismissed.

Chile

The President of the Chamber of Deputies, Ivan Flores, confirmed on March 15 that only high authorities and the press will be able to enter Parliament. Activities of permanent committees will be reduced to negotiate only the most urgent bills, with the possibility of holding the meetings online.

Colombia

The President of the Congress of the Republic, Lidio Garcia, confirmed the suspension of legislative activities due to the spread of COVID-19. Sessions are suspended until April 12 and the Administration of the Parliament is going to provide tools to facilitate online work and meetings. Congress will present a bill to implement technological means of facilitating and modernizing the work of parliament.

Ecuador

The National Assembly of Ecuador established mechanisms through the Unit of Labor Security and Health to prevent the spread of coronavirus and to protect the health of functionaries and citizens.

El Salvador

On March 15, the Legislative Assembly of El Salvador approved a state of national emergency in order to facilitate the implementation of circulation and entry restrictions, and provide the Executive with a larger margin of power to deal with the crisis.

Guatemala

On March 12, Congress approved a bill declaring a national state of emergency to minimize the risks of contagion and control speculation and the rise in prices of health products. The Congress of Guatemala is restricting access to visitors and requiring the use of masks and gloves for security personnel inside the building. Personnel will check the temperature of every entrant and report cases of fever immediately to the Health Ministry. Parliamentarians are highly advised to attend meetings without staff.

Honduras

On March 16, Parliament was asked to approve a Presidential decree suspending work in the private and public sectors, canceling events as well as religious celebrations and public transport, and closing borders.

Mexico

The Mexican Lower House of Parliament approved an emergency fund that releases 181 billion pesos (\$7.5 billion) for use in emergencies such as combatting the coronavirus. It will now be passed to the Senate.

Paraguay

Both Chambers of Congress suspended their activities until March 25 in accordance with the government's action plan to avoid the spread of the COVID-19. The Senate will only hold plenaries in the case of urgent affairs and the work of staff will be limited to indispensable matters. The Lower Chamber suspended all

activities related to plenaries, committee sessions, public hearings, and other previously scheduled activities. The Senate also passed a law forbidding health product speculation.

Peru

On March 16, the 130 newly elected Members of the Peruvian Congress took oath in a private session for the first time in nearly two centuries due to the coronavirus. After the appointment of the Speaker and Vice-Speakers this week, Congress will be put in quarantine for 15 days according to Executive measures.

Uruguay

On March 18, Parliament banned external visits and set a strict working schedule for parliamentarians and staff members. The high-risk population is asked to suspend their work.

Middle East and North Africa

Algeria

The People's National Assembly decided on March 12 to postpone its activities as a preventive measure against coronavirus.

Egypt

Half the staff at the House of Representatives went on leave for two weeks starting March 17. Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee will postpone its meeting to discuss the possibility of Egypt boycotting companies participating in the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam (GERD).

Iran

As of March 17, 8% of Iran's parliament was infected with the virus. Parliament was suspended indefinitely and lawmakers have been asked to stop meeting with the public.

Iraq

The First Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of Iran, Hassan Karim Al-Kaabi and the Minister of Interior formed a committee headed by the latter to track and halt speculation practices on food and necessities.

Jordan

On March 15, the Parliamentary Health and Environmental Committee called on private sector hospitals to serve the public interest and on economic actors to implement a flexible working system.

Lebanon

On March 10, parliament was shut for a minimum of a week with no developments since. On March 15 a national state of emergency was declared.

Morocco

Both Chambers of the Parliament decided to give away their monthly salary in order to finance a special fund for fighting the spread of coronavirus. After this decision was made, the members of the government decided to do the same.

Tunisia

On March 16, the Assembly of Representatives asked the government to close all borders to stop the spread of COVID-19.

South Asia

India

The Parliamentary Standing Committee for Urban Development discussed plans to increase private labs for private hospitals to diagnose coronavirus samples. As of now, there are total 65 labs across the country that can test 2,000 samples in a day. The Speaker of Lok Sabha held a meeting with relevant officials to monitor and control the spread of the virus, but no official outcomes have been reported.

Maldives

The Parliament of Maldives has temporarily halted sittings over the pandemic effective March 19.

Pakistan

On March 14, all parliamentary proceedings in the Senate were postponed for at least two weeks.