

Managing the Pandemic:

Turkey's Multi-Pronged Response to Covid-19



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As the world continues to deal with the immediate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Turkey provides an interesting model for how the outbreak can be handled both domestically and internationally. This Policy Outlook examines various facets of Turkey's response to the pandemic, including: mitigation efforts, economic stimulus and the resiliency of the country's national healthcare system. Turkey's active diplomacy in the time of the coronavirus is contextualised within the country's general foreign policy outlook that prioritises humanitarian diplomacy and multilateral cooperation. Furthermore, Turkey's long-term preparedness is discussed along with potential openings for Turkish industry as discussions about supply chains and vaccines heat up.

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Overview - Turkey as a Pandemic-Response Case Study

Introduction

As the world continues to deal with the immediate impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, Turkey provides an interesting model of how the outbreak can be handled both domestically and internationally. Although the number of confirmed Covid-19 cases in Turkey puts the country in the top 10 in terms of caseload, the death rate is lower, and the recovery rate remains higher than most of the other countries on this unfortunate list. Perhaps most importantly in terms of the human cost, the death rate increase is half of what it is the United States, the country most hard-hit pandemic. Moreover, the country has now reached a testing capacity of nearly 40,000 per day according to the Health Ministry, putting Turkey into the top 10 countries in terms of the testing rate, as well as the total number of tests carried out. Increased testing capacity has allowed health authorities to take necessary measures to identify, isolate and treat Covid-19 infected patients which seems to be bearing fruit as the daily [confirmed infection rate](#) in the country is reportedly down from 15 to 9 per cent among people tested, according to official statistics. With early signs pointing to relative success in managing the pandemic, this report presents a detailed overview of Turkey's response and preparedness in several key areas, including healthcare, international cooperation and the economy.

A quick response

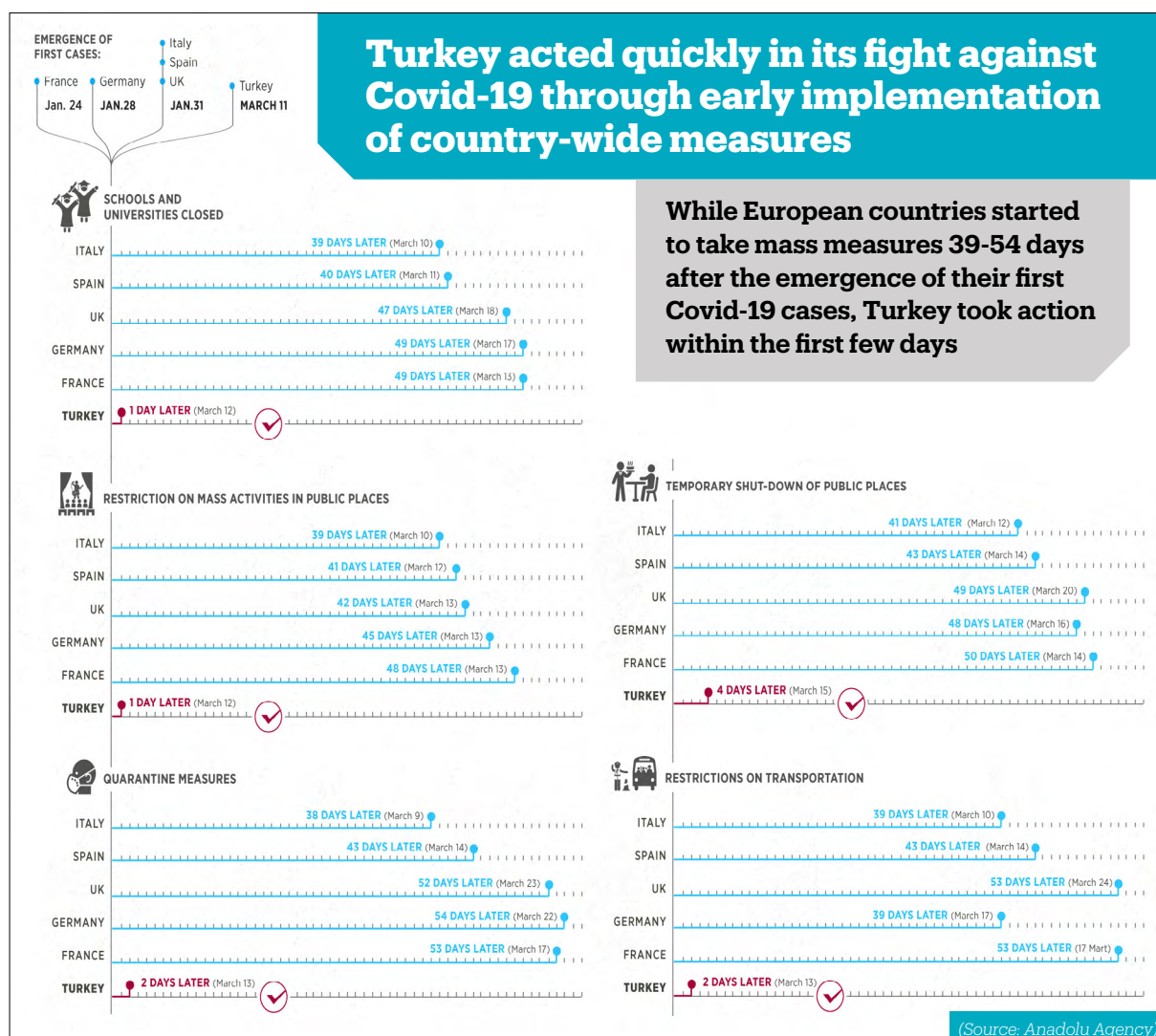
Early measures taken by Turkish authorities following the first confirmed cases of Covid-19 on March 11th included the closing of schools and universities, most cafes and tea houses, targeted curfews (initially for citizens 65 years of age and up and then extended to those under 20), promotion of social [distancing practices](#), and the quarantining of over 10,000 pilgrims returning from Arabia, all of which significantly helped Turkey avoid an Italy, Spain or US-like disaster. Measures taken in response to the first confirmed cases only tell part of the story, and despite some setbacks and what could have been missed opportunities early on, Turkey's overall preparedness has given it a fighting chance and effectively managing the pandemic many other countries have not had.

In early January, as the potential global threat from the virus was becoming abundantly clear, the Turkish Ministry of Health established the Coronavirus Scientific Advisory Board, consisting of experts in numerous fields including infectious diseases, virology and intensive care medicine. Later on, in January, thermal cameras were installed at airports and passengers



Ten coronavirus patients from the same family are being discharged from the hospital accompanied by flowers and applause of doctors and nurses after treatment of the family is completed in Ercis district of Van, Turkey on April 20, 2020. (Necmettin Karaca - Anadolu Agency)

arriving from China were subject to additional screening and possible quarantine. By February, as the virus was spreading rapidly through Iran, Turkey's neighbour, border crossings were closed, and flights to and from China were suspended. International travel was severely restricted by mid-March, and although critics have been quick to argue that the government did not suspend international travel early enough, the timing of Turkey's decision largely coincided with other countries that have not faced the same criticism that Turkey has.



Institutional preparedness

Turkey's longer-term level of preparedness is perhaps the most notable element that has become apparent, as the virus spread throughout the country. As discussed in more detail in the following sections, heavy investment in the health sector over the last two decades at a time when many advanced economies were retreating from investing in publicly funded social welfare programmes, resulted in a universally-accessible health care system but has also provided a bulwark against the potential overwhelming of the system witnessed in Europe and the US. The construction of 'city' hospitals in Turkey's major metropolitan areas are also now proving their worth.

Most recently, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan opened the Basaksehir City Hospital with a capacity of 2,686 hospital beds. Speaking at the event, Turkey's Health Minister, Fahrettin Koca [said](#) that, "just as all city hospitals in Turkey, all the beds at Basaksehir City Hospital – 2,686 beds – have intensive care equipment, and all can be used for intensive care when necessary." This is a critical point that should not be overlooked. While many countries continue to struggle with ICU capacity issues, Turkey's 47 ICU beds per 100,000 people have put such anxieties to rest barring a massive surge in the hospitalisation rates. Significant investment in health care infrastructure has put Turkey ahead of the curve when it comes to dealing with some of the more difficult challenges the pandemic has posed to health care capacity in other countries, which will be examined more thoroughly in the sections below.

Steps taken by countries to fight the COVID-19 pandemic

As the challenges posed by Covid-19 have become more apparent, states have taken a variety of measures in many areas, including: healthcare services, work arrangements, the economy and educational institutions.

COUNTRIES WORST HIT BY PANDEMIC

● No
 ● Yes
 ● Partially
 — No data

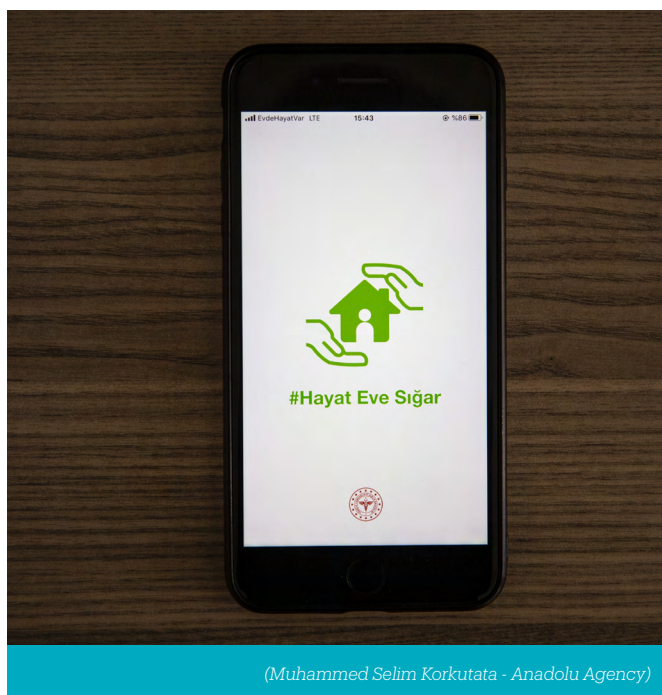
	TURKEY	US	SPAIN	ITALY	FRANCE	GERMANY	UK	CHINA	IRAN	BELGIUM	BRAZIL	RUSSIA	CANADA	NETHERLANDS	SWITZERLAND	PORTUGAL	AUSTRIA	INDIA	IRELAND	ISRAEL
Are border gates closed?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are international flights suspended?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are domestic flights suspended?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are there restrictions on domestic travel?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are there curfews or other restrictions?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are layoffs banned?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Did retirees get a raise in pensions?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are coronavirus tests free?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Is coronavirus treatment free?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are masks available for free?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are there enough respirator masks?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Is there enough medical equipment?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Is wearing masks outdoors mandatory?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are healthcare workers getting additional financial support?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are there enough hospital beds?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are there enough intensive care units?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Do hospitals have enough medicine?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Are there enough coronavirus test kits?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
How many citizens were evacuated from other countries?	25 K	63 K	24 K	60 K	148 K	240 K	75 K	146 K	—	6 K	13 K	150 K	5 K	5 K	2.7 K	7.5 K	7.5 K	1.25 K	250	—
How many countries did they supply medical aid to?	30	VERY FEW	—	3	●	5	1	120	●	●	●	10	●	1	5	—	1	31	●	1
Was the private sector offered tax deferments?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Do public banks provide credit support to companies in need?	●	●	●	●	●	●	—	●	●	—	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	—	●
Are people in need provided financial support?	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

(Source: Anadolu Agency)

International cooperation and leadership

One of the most notable aspects of the pandemic has been the stark demonstration of the level of interconnectedness that rapid globalisation has brought us over the last few decades, the good, the bad and the ugly of it. Today, largely unprecedented challenges have been put not only to national governments but also to international organisations on how cooperation can be maintained or even enhanced in a time of crisis. These challenges present both unique opportunities to foster global solidarity as well as the potential of being exploited by authoritarian and populist leaders. Recent [measures](#) taken by Hungary's Viktor Orban as part of his 'Enabling Act' have served to stifle the free flow of information that is so crucial to successfully manage the Covid-19 pandemic. While critics of Turkey's government have been quick to [accuse](#) its leadership of prioritising political survival over the health of its citizens, the facts unequivocally do not lend support to this arguably exaggerated perspective. Not only has the Health Minister been providing detailed daily updates on the situation, but tools have also been developed – such as the creation of a coronavirus [contact-tracing mobile app](#) – to keep Turkish citizens up-to-date on the latest information, ensuring their ability to take measures to protect their own health.

Despite facing one of the highest confirmed case-loads of Covid-19 in the world, Turkey has demonstrated a high level of international cooperation amid this ongoing global crisis. As discussed below in the section on International Responsibility, the country has responded to numerous requests for assistance, particularly with regards to filling supply gaps in medical equipment, from around the world. Some notable examples include the UK, Spain and Italy – all NATO allies – as well as regional partners in the Balkans and even rivals such as Israel. Despite the [often-negative rhetoric often directed at Turkey](#) regarding its approach to international diplomacy and politics, as will be discussed below, the country has maintained consistency in its geopolitical worldview and diplomatic outlook, which reserves a significant place for 'humanitarian diplomacy'.



Mobilising industry and managing the economic impact

The economic consequences of the pandemic are only beginning to be understood. In a recent [report](#) published by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the global economy is set to contract by as much as 3 per cent in 2020 as a result of the pandemic. This would be worse than during the 2008-2009 financial crisis. Recovery is not predicated upon wishing-away the pandemic, but on:

"Substantial targeted fiscal, monetary, and financial market measures to support affected households and businesses domestically. And internationally, strong multilateral cooperation is essential to overcome the effects of the pandemic, including to help financially constrained countries facing twin health and funding shocks, and for channelling aid to countries with weak health care systems."

As discussed in detail in the section on Turkey's economic response to the pandemic, the country faces a significant risk from a global recession, particularly as it comes off the back of Turkey's recent recovery from its own recession and ongoing issues with current account balances. According to the [Moody's rating agency](#), the pandemic could make the economic situation in Turkey even worse: "the risk of an acute balance-of-payments crisis has been magnified by the coronavirus outbreak, as illustrated by an acceleration in capital outflows and dwindling foreign exchange reserves." In response, Turkish authorities have announced measures (discussed in detail below) to provide relief to both affected households and businesses across the country by deploying both monetary and fiscal measures designed, among other things, to provide emergency credit to industry and relief to families impacted by the economic slowdown. Maintaining consistency with regards to the policy of preferring alternatives to dealing with the IMF, Turkey has instead sought credit swaps amongst G20



Turkish Industry and Technology Minister Mustafa Varank (Front C), wearing a face mask as a preventive measure against the coronavirus (COVID-19), poses for a photo with the Turkish engineers of the domestic respiratory devices at the opening of the first phase of the Basaksehir City Hospital in Istanbul, Turkey on April 20, 2020. (Raşid Necati Aslım - Anadolu Agency)

member-states and other means of alleviating its financial burdens without having to succumb to an IMF bailout, with the inevitably difficult conditions that would accompany it.

Furthermore, Turkish industrial power has been maintained despite the economic slowdown and has shown its strength at meeting immediate needs medical equipment and adapting to newly emerging supply-chain conditions. A case in point is the manufacturing of ventilators discussed by President Erdogan at the opening of the Basaksehir City Hospital on April 20th. According to the President, Turkey will produce [5,000 medical ventilators](#) by the end of May.

This demonstrated capacity of Turkish industry also holds huge potential, as the world moves into a post-pandemic phase. As the IMF estimates a 7.5 per cent reduction of GDP in the Eurozone in 2020 and 6.5 per cent in the UK, Turkey's main export market and source of tourists, Turkey can potentially reap the benefits of what will undoubtedly be increased investment in health infrastructure by supplying badly-needed equipment via its innovative manufacturing capacity, and its geographical proximity to the Euro-zone. As a reliable and stable trading partner to the EU, Turkey has massive potential to take advantage of what will likely be a reconsideration of the dependency of supply chains from China, and may itself become a manufacturing hub not only for the health sector, but also for high-tech industries in the Eurozone. .

While there are lessons to be learned, both in terms of the response to the pandemic itself and its potential aftermath, Turkey's approach thus far has demonstrated a high level of preparedness and sophistication. This particularly relates to Turkey in contrast with other emerging economies, but also increasingly when compared to Europe and the United States, particularly in terms of cooperation and regional leadership. The following report provides a detailed outline of Turkey's response thus far and seeks to assess future opportunities and lessons learned so far accompanied by an understanding that the situation remains fluid. For Turkey as for much of the rest of the world, the next weeks will prove critical in terms of the human toll taken by the pandemic, as well as the effectiveness of measures taken.

Turkey's Healthcare System

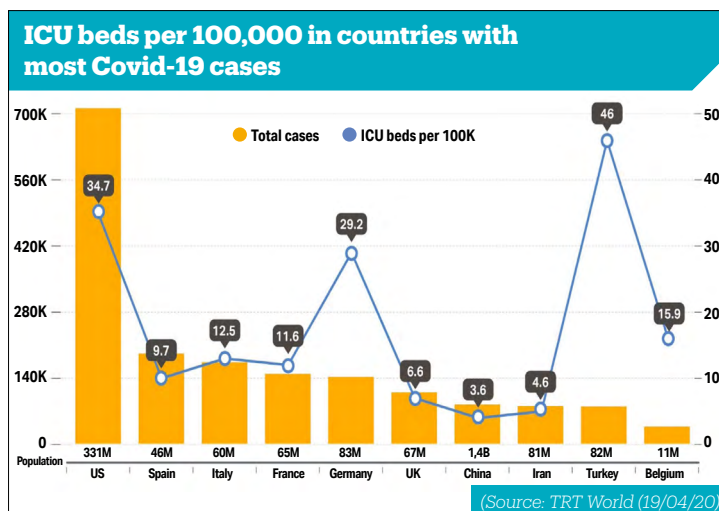
Responsive healthcare

Ever since news of the pandemic broke worldwide, with Turkey's first confirmed case registered on [March 11th](#), the country has been introducing and enforcing a number of public healthcare measures, escalating curfew and lockdown measures on the most vulnerable, combined with [various social assistance programmes](#), to combat the outbreak. The Government had, for example, [stockpiled the medicines](#) hydroxychloroquine and favipiravir a month and a half before the first confirmed case emerged. Only a day after the first case was registered, [schools and universities](#) were closed in favour of online education. But it is the country's overall advanced public healthcare system that has been the backbone of a comparatively successful campaign thus far against Covid-19, with [a mortality rate of 2.15%](#) as of April 18th.

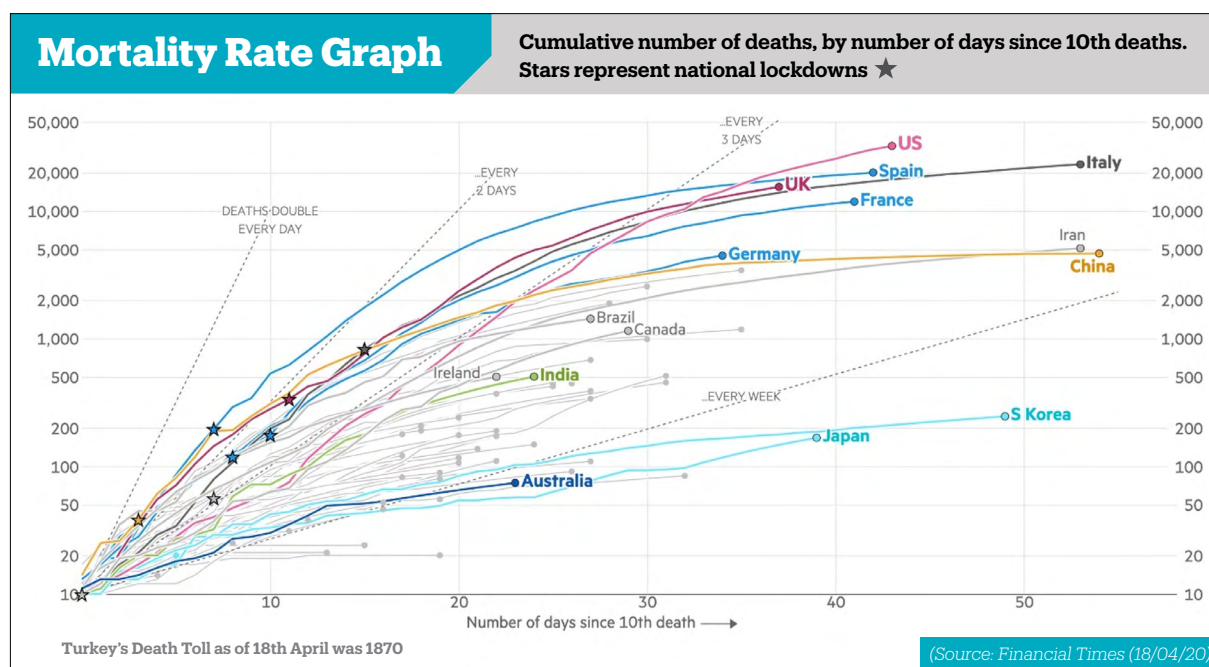
As the Turkish Health Minister Fahrettin Koca has publicly stated, the country does not rank as high as other countries in terms of [doctors per 1000 people](#) or general health capacity (ranking below the OECD and European average – though [no shortages of beds](#) have been reported or are envisioned to occur). A major strength of the Turkish public healthcare system amidst the pandemic is the number of intensive care units (ICU's) in the country, which at a figure of 40 ICU's per 100,00 people, surpasses that of other countries such as Germany, France, the U.K., the U.S.A, and China. In addition to existing capacity, the first stage of [a 2,682-bed hospital](#) is set to enter service in Istanbul's Ikitelli district on April 20th, whilst [two 1000-bed field hospitals](#) are being built over a period of 45 days to add further capacity in a city that has thus-far reported the largest share of the country's confirmed cases. Turkey is also one of several counties in pursuit of a vaccine against Covid-19. Though human trials have indeed started elsewhere, Turkey hopes to join the effort as soon as possible, having on the [14th of April](#) completed the first phase of laboratory antigen tests.

As explored [here](#) by TRT World on a piece on the state of the U.S. healthcare system, the mere number of doctors is an inadequate measure to understand the effectiveness of a particular state's healthcare system, with issues of access and affordability (amongst other factors), clearing being significant factors essential to consider. The Turkish Health Minister expressed that the country was fortunate with regards to ICU capacity, but that [Turkey was also ready](#) for "every possible scenario in terms of physical or technologic infrastructure". In total, Turkey's 'healthcare army' as it has been referred to, comprises of around 500,000 medical staff combined with 360,000 support personal. On April 14th, by Presidential decree, the Turkish government extended its universal [free access to healthcare](#) to Turkish citizens (but also [refugees and residents](#)), in need of treatment against Covid-19, regardless of social insurance coverage. The country is also now distributing a weekly quota of free face masks to be delivered either through the country's postal system or collected in person at a local pharmacy. A Coronavirus Social Sciences Board has also been established to help reduce what has been termed as the sociological and psychological detriments of the pandemic upon society.

The WHO praised the initial batch of preventative measures Ankara took in the early days of the outbreak, saying that Turkey had been "[very lucky, vigilant and cautious](#)". The country's first confirmed case was reported on March 11th, after most of its neighbours had reported outbreaks, allowing the country to be relatively behind the epidemic curve when compared with its near neighbours, and therefore being afforded a window of opportunity to prepare. The country was quick to introduce travel bans alongside quarantines for those returning from abroad. Rumours that the country had hidden cases of the outbreak were quickly [quashed by the off-ten-critical Turkish Medical Association](#) (TBB).



It is flawed to compare and contrast the spread of the novel coronavirus between states by the number of confirmed cases, largely due to the differences in the number of tests that have been conducted (largely limited to symptomatic cases rather than asymptomatic), and the possible suppression of figures attributed often to states such as [China](#) and Iran. There also seems to be [a divergence](#) in terms of death rate calculations. In the U.K., for example, Covid-19 [deaths in residential and nursing homes](#) may not be reflected in official figures dispensed by the Government. Turkey's total number of fatalities thus far pales in comparison to that of the more affluent nations of the world such as the U.S., as well as European states such as Germany, France, Italy, Spain, and the U.K. In terms of mere testing, Turkey currently ranks 7th in the world with around 600,000 conducted. Beyond confirmed cases, death rates and recovery rates must undoubtedly also be considered, Turkey's performance by these measures being comparatively better. In contrast to [statements made elsewhere](#), Turkey is certainly not "like Italy and the United States". A [more insightful comparison](#) may be made between the number of patients in intensive care and those who go on to be intubated.



Prior healthcare sector reforms

Turkey's healthcare system has come to be highly valued by the government. As expressed by Turkish President Erdogan, Turkey's healthcare sector [ranks only second](#) to the defence industry in terms of its overall importance to the country. At a time when austerity measures in the U.K. have arguably [rendered the health sector ill-prepared](#) to deal with a global pandemic, the [major reforms](#) that the Turkish public healthcare sector has undergone over the years has unquestionably strengthened the country's healthcare sector (though more remains to be done); a development that has fortuitously coincided with the pandemic. More so, the nature of the healthcare reforms introduced has been such that Turkey has come to have the capacity to send large quantities of healthcare-related equipment abroad. The process to reform the Turkish healthcare sector is often dated back to the year 2003, when the country introduced its Health Transition Programme (HTP), with the support of the [World Bank Group](#), in order to scale-up access to high-quality, effective, and efficient healthcare. The Turkey of old seems unrecognisable today with, for example, infant mortality rates that were as high as 26.1 per 1000 live births now a thing of the past, the current infant mortality rate being 8.2. With what some critics had formerly lamented as vain '[mega projects](#)', the emergence of large-scale '[city hospitals](#)' as part and parcel of this transformation has turned out to be [a key advantage](#) for the capacity and effectiveness of the Turkish healthcare system. A [public-private partnership model](#) has been prevalent in the construction and operation of these facilities. [10 new hospitals](#) in some of the densest urban areas were on the government's agenda and presumably will go on to be completed.

Beyond these developments, Turkey's healthcare system is comparatively well-advanced such that the country has begun to emerge as a [medical tourism hub](#), with around [760,000 patients](#) recorded under this category for 2019, and plans to extend this figure to 1.5 million by 2023. Turkey has also put the lessons it has learned in public healthcare transformation to good use abroad, with 12 Turkish hospitals having now been [constructed](#) in countries such as Niger, Sudan, Somalia, Bangladesh, Palestine, Syria, Kyrgyzstan, and Libya, combined with various cooperative agreements sealed with other states. The field hospital in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar established in 2018, for example, has served Rohingya refugees who have had to flee ethnic persecution in Myanmar. The divergence in performance between various healthcare systems around the



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends the opening of the first phase of the Basaksehir City Hospital via video conference in Istanbul, Turkey on April 20, 2020. (Murat Kula / Anadolu Agency)

world should be compared and contrasted so as to highlight best practice, and to enhance the preparedness and prudence of any particular country's public healthcare system for future. Differences in effective healthcare response should signal where appropriate aid and support should go; a sentiment encapsulated well by Turkey's drive to send medical aid to several countries around the world.

The issue of refugees is also pertinent to consider. Refugees around the world are in a particularly precarious state, vulnerable for many reasons to the spread of Covid-19; be it in cramped, overcrowded, makeshift tent villages or as undocumented individuals, fearful of seeking medical aid and financial support. Turkey's universal healthcare system has for many years now offered free healthcare to all registered refugees hosted in the country. In numbers, there are [180 health centres](#) dedicated entirely to refugees. 410,000 Syrian children were born in Turkey over the last eight years, and around a million surgeries and 1.5 million general medical services dispensed. Expatriates in certain countries such as Turkey, but also [Lebanon](#) and others, who are by no means as generally affluent as developed Western nations, have voiced [satisfaction and a feeling of greater safety](#) than many of their compatriots in their home countries where health systems have at times been overwhelmed and feelings of confidence in government responses are lacking.

A novel treatment protocol

As of mid-April, the number of Covid-19 tests has steadily increased to around 40,000 per day, although the number is lower than the total number of tests carried out in major developed countries such as the USA and Germany. Each country's testing approach, as well as the reporting of official figures, have shown divergences worldwide. On the former, it should be kept in mind from the outset that the number of tests administered is not the be-all and end-all of the subject. The number of tests conducted by each government will undoubtedly produce a clearer and useful picture of just how widespread the outbreak has been. With a greater handle on the magnitude, intensity, and distribution, of the pandemic, governments can then make [better-informed decisions](#) as to when lockdown conditions can gradually be eased. However, to state an obvious point that sometimes seems to go amiss, to test negative once is no guarantee of immunity. More so, the reversal of lockdown measures would have to be combined with prudent measures, such as enhanced monitoring and the maintenance of social distancing, as well greater care for the elderly and those with existing medical conditions. Complicating the outlook further are fears of a second wave of infections, as well as reports that have emerged from [South Korea](#), for example, indicating patients who have previously cleared of Covid-19 have gone on to test positive at a later stage. The Turkish Health Minister has attributed Turkey's relatively lower mortality rate to healthcare capacity and a variety of treatment protocols. The country emphasises contact-tracing instead of wide scale testing and has come to prefer delayed intubation with, as reported by [CNN](#), the use of high-frequency oxygen for extended periods, as well as the use of the experimental anti-viral drugs earlier than other countries. On contact tracing, the Ministry of Health launched on the 19th of April [a new smartphone application](#) so that people can detect and monitor local outbreaks.

There is a wider discussion to be had about the exact method employed to calculate [death and mortality rates](#), as well as confirmed infections; the former being understandably a function of the sheer number of tests conducted. On the latter, the [TBB](#) has voiced concern that the official mortality statistics may not include cases that indicate Covid-19 by other means, but only where the standard application of polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests used to detect the coronavirus' RNA test positive. This relates to the distinction between case fatality rates and infection fatality rates. The Turkish Health Minister [countered](#) that PCR testing is the preferred approach for countries that possess the ability to do so, and Turkey uses the recommended international coding mechanism associated with this capability; one that has been standardised across the country in both private and public healthcare facilities, in line with the newly-established Coronavirus Science Committee of the Ministry of Health. The Health Minister himself explained further that all individuals with symptoms associated with Covid-19, as well as those who have interacted with said individuals, are considered as possible cases, all of whom are then subjected to the PCR test (which Turkey [also manufactures](#)), as well as the [early administration](#) of hydroxychloroquine. With a [possible peak](#) expected in the upcoming week or so, it remains the case that the point in time in which the most will be known about the novel coronavirus will be at the end of the pandemic.

Turkey's 'Humanitarian Diplomacy'

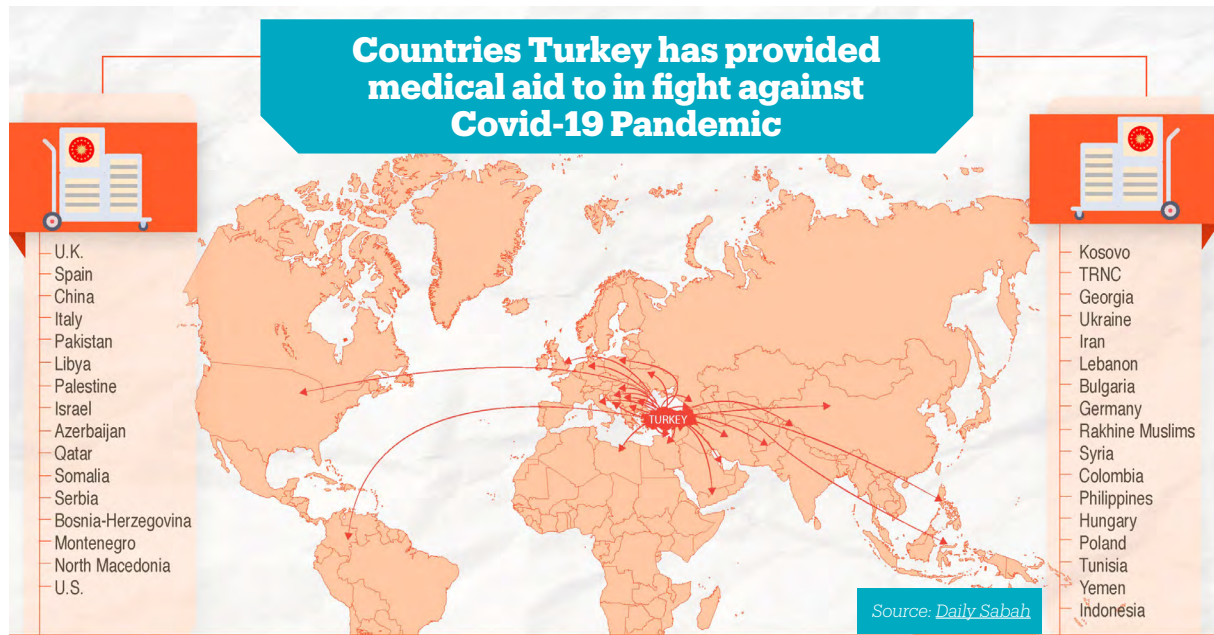
With most worldwide diplomatic events being cancelled this year due to the coronavirus pandemic, and New York, the global centre of diplomacy, becoming the hotbed of the disease in the US, the [coronavirus pandemic has dramatically altered international diplomacy](#). In an unprecedented time such as the coronavirus pandemic, many countries are utilising soft power and humanitarian aid as a means of conducting diplomacy. As US President Donald Trump [cut funding to the World Health Organisation](#) (WHO), accusing the international organisation of mismanaging the response to the pandemic, highlighting a lack of global leadership and coordination. Indeed, the response even within the European Union was disjointed, with each nation seemingly taking action considering its own priorities only, even when it comes to [post-pandemic economic plans](#).

Amidst this apparent lack of cohesion in a time when perhaps all countries need help in one form or another, Turkey has responded to 34 of the more than 90 countries' requests for medical equipment, and has consulted many more regarding effective management of the coronavirus outbreak. This is due to two reasons specific to these requests. Firstly, Turkey has been relatively successful in managing the outbreak in the country. Secondly, because Turkey has the capacity to be able to respond positively to requests for help.

As discussed above, the country has been introducing and enforcing a number of public healthcare measures, escalating curfew requirements on the most vulnerable, combined with various social assistance programmes, to combat the outbreak. These included stockpiling of required medicines, early closure of schools and universities, and fortifying an already advanced healthcare system. As a result, Turkey finds itself in the position of being able to deliver humanitarian and medical aid, as well as consultation by sharing experiences and lessons learned with countries that request help. According to [Daily Sabah](#), Turkey has provided medical support to Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, China, Colombia, Georgia, Germany, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Lebanon, Libya, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Pakistan, Palestine, the Philippines, Poland, Qatar, Serbia, Somalia, Spain, Tunisia, the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC), the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (US), Yemen, and the Rohingya Muslims, since the pandemic began,



Turkish military cargo plane carrying medical aid packages to support the fight against the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic arrives in Podgorica, Montenegro on April 08, 2020. (Sasa Matic/Montenegrin Government - Anadolu Agency)



Humanity over all

Even though the purpose of diplomacy is to [‘secure the goals of national interest as defined and specified by the foreign policy of the nation’](#), it is important to note that Turkey’s humanitarian aid efforts have not been limited to countries that are usually aligned with Turkey and include countries that have historically been at odds with it. To illustrate this, as Turkey provided [much-needed aid to Palestine](#) while President Erdogan himself assured his Palestinian counterpart of Turkey’s staunch support, it also helped Israel - a country Turkey has had strained relations and a long history of disagreement and misalignment with. According to Presidential Spokesman Mr Ibrahim Kalin, “We didn’t differentiate between countries or regions, and we won’t. This is independent from our political relations,” while stressing that the coronavirus pandemic was an emergency.

Another example is Turkey’s aid reaching NATO countries such as the UK, USA, Spain and Italy. Even though NATO-Turkey relations have been affected negatively by political and security issues such as NATO’s reticence when it came to Turkey’s purchase of Russian S-400 missiles, Turkish aid to NATO countries did not seem to be affected. Two Turkish cargo planes carried medical supplies to the badly impacted UK in early April, followed by deliveries to Italy and Spain, both ravaged by the pandemic. Memorably, medical and protective equipment sent to the UK was accompanied by a quote by Sufi mystic Rumi: [‘After hopelessness, there is much hope and after darkness, there is the much brighter sun’](#).

According to the Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, Turkey’s help in the coronavirus pandemic was very important to Italy and his country was very grateful for the solidarity displayed by Turkey’s leaders and the Turkish people. Michael Ryan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for European and NATO policy at the Pentagon highlighting cooperation amongst NATO countries, also added that “Spain and Italy were grateful for this help. I do not know whether Turkey has helped another country in Europe, but if it has, I would not be surprised. [Turkey is a very generous country](#)”. On the other hand, an Italian politician Matteo Salvini complained that [“Italy needed help as it has been given a slap in the face”](#), as Europe did nothing but watch the [Italian] stock exchange collapse.

This is reminiscent of Turkey’s response to the Syrian refugee crisis. Turkey’s open-door policy for Syrian refugees earned Turkey the title of the [world’s largest refugee-hosting country](#). Since 2011, the Syrian civil war has left almost 4 million Syrians dispersed throughout Turkey. According to international experts, [Turkey did a ‘remarkable job’ and showed ‘great resilience’](#) by absorbing a total number of refugees that equals the entire population of Croatia, constituting almost five per cent of Turkey’s population, providing for Syrian refugees when it came to accessing food security, employment, health and education.

According to Amnesty International, while Turks make up only one per cent of the global population, Turkey hosts 15 per cent of the global refugee population. This is especially poignant given that many EU countries have not taken up the responsibility of hosting refugees. According to The Guardian, [“the Mediterranean is the theatre where tensions between Europe’s ideas of human rights do battle with continental politicians’ anxiety”](#) about migration. Recently, Greece, being a passageway for refugees on their way to the EU, was heavily criticised in particular for [refugee camps in deplorable conditions as well as increasingly anti-refugee policies](#).

Turkey's history of humanitarian diplomacy

Turkey has a long tradition and history of providing humanitarian assistance to countries facing difficulties regardless of political considerations. For example, in 1941 Turkey provided medical aid to the Greek army upon Greece's request despite having fought against it only two decades prior during Turkey's 'war of liberation'. Having provided humanitarian assistance to many countries since Turkey is now recognised as one of the [largest humanitarian assistance providers in terms of percentage of gross national income](#).

One of the cornerstones of the ruling AK Party's approach to foreign affairs involved a need for a humanitarian foreign policy with the collapse the post-WWII 'west-centred' world order and the emergence of a multipolar world with new regional players such as Turkey. Ibrahim Kalin, spokesperson for the Turkish Presidency, wrote that the Turkish leadership has emphasized that ["the current global order has to be based on principles of justice and equality as a precondition to finding sustainable long-term solutions to current conflicts"](#). Such focus on humanitarian diplomacy from the highest levels of government has led to Turkey branding itself as an actor that ["advocates justice, conscience, and fairness"](#) around the world, approaching foreign policy with a touch of humanitarianism. To implement this foreign policy approach, Turkey has focused on humanitarian diplomacy via demand-driven aid policy, [expanding both development assistance and humanitarian aid with respect to geographic location as well as the scope of activity](#). Since 2002, when the AK Party came to power, Turkey has become internationally recognized for its approach to international humanitarian assistance.

Humanitarian diplomacy as an aspect of Turkey's foreign policy includes humanitarian aid and cooperation in the context of the present coronavirus pandemic, but in the past it has also been a [combination of aid, peace-building, development projects and business development while engaging many Turkish and local stakeholders](#), creating opportunities for [both state-to-public and public-to-public diplomacy efforts](#). Turkey also insists that it is an 'apolitical' party for the countries it helps and that [its aid is given with no political conditions attached](#). Turkey does not expect receiver countries to meet conditions attached to the aid or development assistance. Compared to other countries' development assistance, such as the US Kerry Lugar Bill, an Act of Congress that was signed into law that authorised the conditional release of \$1.5 billion per year in non-military aid to Pakistan between 2010-2014, Turkish aid is not designed to make vulnerable countries make difficult choices or sacrifice priorities in order to access much-needed help. The significance of this is not lost on receiver countries, and the resulting goodwill is potentially the difference between effective and possibly destructive public diplomacy efforts.

Post-pandemic Turkish diplomacy

Given Turkey's historical appreciation for, and current implementation of, humanitarian diplomacy as a foreign policy approach, what does that mean for Turkish diplomacy in a post-pandemic world? There are two aspects to consider: the first consideration is how the pandemic may change diplomacy and the second consideration is whether humanitarian diplomacy will become more [recognised for its merits](#) that include building status of and creating or consolidating the provider country's identity as well as promoting its interests in the world.

Given that Turkey had already recognized the need and value of humanitarian diplomacy consisting of aid, development assistance, business opportunities and peace-building efforts as a successful foreign policy approach, the global pandemic has presented Turkey with an opportunity to implement its vision of being a regional leader and reliable provider of equipment and expertise. That translates to the validation of humanitarian diplomacy as a successful foreign policy approach given the recognition of Turkey's efforts and the resulting goodwill for Turkey, which may last well into the post-pandemic period. Essentially, providing much-needed help and assistance during the global pandemic is only going to strengthen Turkey's claim and position as a global humanitarian and diplomatic leader. In terms of whether humanitarian diplomacy will gather importance as a practice, the ["importance of "soft power" in diplomacy will increase, and above all, the scientific and technological potential"](#) of countries will matter. Again, Turkey's focus on humanitarian and medical aid, as well as efforts to deliver a vaccine and ability to contain the death rate from the coronavirus relatively well compared to other more developed nations are going to be considered markers of leadership in a post-corona world.

Additionally, given that Turkish humanitarian aid does not have any political strings attached by design, either now or before, the potential impact on international relations is likely to be positive as receiving countries are likely to appreciate the fact that they are not required to meet any political or economic conditions now or in the future to qualify for help, conditions that may be particularly exploitative in the middle of a pandemic. According to Naomi Leight-Give'on, while writing for the University of Southern California's Center for Public Diplomacy on the impact of ["aid diplomacy"](#) on how countries are perceived:

POLICY OUTLOOK

“The global public is watching to see which nations step up in times of crisis—and which are absent. The countries that are deemed the most altruistic—ones with no apparent ulterior agendas—stand to gain the most.”

It is clear then that humanitarian diplomacy is an effective soft power tool and is not necessarily linked with economic power. In the case of Turkey providing humanitarian assistance to countries all around the world, while [shouldering the responsibility](#) of more than 85,000 confirmed cases of Covid-19 amongst its own citizens [without seeking the help](#) of international organisations such as the IMF, Turkey is emerging as a global leader.



Turkey's Economic Response to Covid-19

Covid-19 continues to cause major challenges for economies around the world, rich and poor. Some economic activities have been suspended entirely while others affected directly or indirectly by travel bans, social distancing measures, and curfews. Health experts still cannot say for how long the pandemic, as well as the strict measures taken to contain it, will continue. Uncertainty has exacerbated the economic impact and has forced governments to act in aggressive and sometimes novel ways in order to slow the pandemic while trying to limit the economic shock caused by the measures.

As discussed above, Turkey's government has acted quickly to curb the spread of the virus. The country adopted a partial, goal-oriented approach to shutdown measures. Certain aspects of the economy, as well as schools, were promptly closed, but most of the production is still operative. Stay-at-home orders are imposed on vulnerable segments of society, but many working-age adults still attend work, particularly for those who are unable to work from home.

So far the country's health system seems to have been very successful in limiting the human damage of the pandemic, which allows the current strategy to continue. Nevertheless, the pandemic has still taken its toll on Turkey's economy as many businesses and households have already been significantly impacted. To take the pressure off of affected sectors and mitigate the economic impact, the government has enacted a rescue plan, which utilises fiscal and monetary channels. The fact that Turkey had been recovering from a recession before the Covid-19 outbreak makes the government's job harder but Turkey's young and vibrant population and strong health system stands as an advantage.

Turkey's economic stability package designed to lessen Covid-19 impact

The economic stability package introduced in Turkey to soften the economic and social impact of the Covid-19 pandemic includes measures to help families and private firms

TAX AND OTHER PAYMENTS



- Over two million taxpayers' value-added tax and premium payments, which totaled some 53.6 billion Turkish liras (\$7.9 billion), were postponed for six months
- The income tax payments of 1.9 million additional taxpayers were postponed, as they were counted as facing Force Majeure
- Taxpayers aged 65 or above, were allowed to make tax payments and declarations at postponed dates
- Payments of accommodation taxes, previously scheduled for this Summer, were postponed to January 2021
- Easement and revenue sharing payments for renting hotel rooms were postponed for six months
- Cuts in municipality budgets were postponed for three months, allowing access to 3 billion (\$445 million) Turkish liras in additional funding
- Flexibility was allowed for rent payments of properties owned by special provincial administrations, municipalities and their subsidiaries

BANKING



- Banks will postpone the principal and interest repayments of firms facing cash flow disruptions
- State lenders announced a low-interest credit package of up to 10,000 Turkish liras (\$1,478) for families with monthly incomes under 5,000 Turkish liras (\$743).
- Companies will be provided with loans on the condition that they retain employees.
- The country's banking watchdog provided flexibility for late loan repayment.
- Exporting firms will receive support funds from banks for their stocks to protect their capacity utilization rate.
- The Credit Guarantee Fund limit was doubled.
- The maximum credit viability for house loans was raised from 80% to 90%.
- Companies failing to meet financial obligations in April, May and June, were included under Force Majeure conditions.
- The government-backed credit insurance limit was raised from 25 million Turkish liras (\$3.7 million) to 125 million Turkish liras (\$18.5 million)

EMPLOYEES AND PENSIONERS



- Minimum wage support -- 75 Turkish liras (\$11) per personnel -- will continue for 12 months for around 7.8 million people.
- The public and private sectors began instituting flexible and remote working schedules
- The government will pay 60% of staff salaries for three months for firms forced to reduce or suspend operations due to the pandemic.
- Untenured teachers and qualified instructors will continue to receive additional lesson fees.
- The minimum pension increased to 1,500 Turkish liras (\$221)
- 1,000-lira payments (\$148) will be provided to 4.4 million families in need.
- The current two-month compensation work period was extended to four months.
- Health care employees will receive maximum performance payments for three months and the country will employ 32,000 new health care staff

(Source: Anadolu Agency)

Fine-tuning the shutdown

Turkey's government has followed [a calculated approach](#) to shutdown measures. While being one of the countries in terms of having taken early measures to curb the spread of the disease, the government did not shut down the entire economy but instead adopted a gradual and partial approach. The government [closed all schools](#) only one day after the first positive case was identified in the country, and travel bans and social distancing rules were enacted much faster than most other countries, however but production and most businesses remain active.

Many retail businesses where people gather in small places (e.g. restaurants, cafes, barbers etc.) have been closed. The government also announced a stay-at-home order for those who are over 65, which was later extended to those below 20. Moreover, a travel ban has been imposed on 31 metropolitan municipalities, which accounts for three-quarters of Turkey's population, meaning that Turkey's major cities are effectively cut off from the rest of the country and each other, significantly

limiting the flow of people. Recently, the government has also started implementing 48-hour curfews in metropolitan cities over weekends.

Despite these measures, large parts of the Turkish economy are still open. Construction, manufacturing, and agriculture are fully operative. Government offices are open although they adopted a more 'relaxed' work schedule with non-essential officers working in rotations or shorter hours. Provided that they observe social distancing rules, those between 20 and 65 years of age can still go to work as usual, except for some white-collar jobs which have switched to working from home. Arguably, this partial and calculated approach gives the government the advantage of limiting the rise in unemployment and damage to the economy in general.

Despite this partial approach, so far Turkey seems to have been very [successful in its fight against the disease](#). Death per case statistic is comparatively much lower than European countries and the US, and the health system is far from reaching its capacity. Perhaps, this success in the containment of the virus allowed a more relaxed approach to the economic measures. If the situation deteriorated, we would probably have seen stricter measures.

One major source of concern for Turkey is [tourism](#). In 2019, 51.8 million people visited Turkey, making Turkey one of the most popular destinations globally. The sector accounts for [12% of Turkey's GDP](#) and a big share of its foreign currency inflows. This is crucial considering Turkey's foreign currency holdings have already been in decline since the economic turbulence in the summer of 2018. Although the country has swiftly improved its current account balance, its short-term debt obligations are still quite high compared to its reserve currency holdings.

To limit the economic damage of the pandemic, the government has announced an Economic Stability Package. Measures in the package can be divided into two broad categories. First, the fiscal response includes spending for vulnerable households, fragile businesses, and capacity building in the health system. Second, the monetary response, which involves regulations that maintain credit flow to the private sector.

The fiscal response

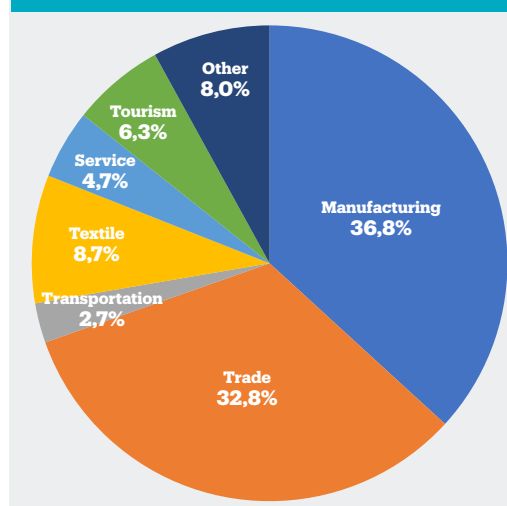
At the first instance, the government announced [a 100 billion TL \(\\$14.5 billion\) fiscal rescue package](#), which amounts to around 3% of Turkey's GDP. A quarter of this amount is allocated for doubling the credit guarantee fund to support credit flow to companies. The rest is being spent on several key support channels, including cash assistance to households in need, subsidy for workers on unpaid leave, preferential credit for affected businesses, and postponement of tax payments by individuals and companies, among other measures.

As part of [the social assistance program](#), 4.4 million families in need will receive a 1,000 TL payment from the Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Services. The first round of the payments has started, and 2.3 million families already received their payments. These payments are likely to continue next month unless there is a quick return to normalcy. Furthermore, the lowest pension pay for the retired has been raised to 1,500 TL from 1,000 TL.

In a radical move, Parliament has banned lay-offs for 3 months to stop the surge in unemployment. For firms that reduced working hours, the government has activated a [short-term work allowance](#). So far, 700,000 workers, out of more than 2 million applicants, have benefitted from the program within the range of 1,752 TL to 4,381 TL. Workers who are sent on unpaid leave and do not qualify for the allowance will receive 1,170 TL monthly payments from the government. Those who have already been laid-off before the legislation will receive benefits from the Unemployment Assistance Fund. The exact amount of assistance depends on the recipients' salary in their last job.

A key measure is low-interest, long-term [credit support for affected businesses](#). So far, more than [67,000 businesses](#), out of 92,000 applicants, have received preferential credits. The total amount has reached 59 billion TL (\$8.5 billion). Almost all the firms benefitting from the program are small and medium-sized businesses. 36.8% operate in manufacturing, 32.8% in trade, 8.7% in textile and the rest in transportation, services and tourism (See figure 1).

Figure 1: Sectorial Composition of Government Credit Support



Credit support with favourable conditions has also been extended to small shop owners. So far, [335,000 small shop owners](#), out of more than half a million applicants, have benefitted from preferential government credit. Total credit payment to small shops has reached over than 8 billion TL (\$1.16 billion). On top of that, around 2.7 billion TL (\$388 million) has been distributed to 126,000 shop owners through debit cards (Paraf) from state-owned Halkbank.

Households are also entitled to personal credit support. Families with a monthly income of less than 5,000 TL qualify for a consumer credit of either 5,000 TL, 7,500 TL, or 10,000 TL depending on their circumstances. Recipients of the credit will not be obligated to start paying back the credit for six months and payments will be made in 36 instalments. As of mid-April, 2.1 million applicants have received a total of 12.1 billion TL (\$1.75 billion).

As part of the package, the government has also made some quick investments in the health system during the limited time it had to prepare for the pandemic. Specifically, 32,000 additional medical personnel have been hired, and performance payments for existing staff have been raised to the maximum limit for 3 months. [Two hospitals](#) specifically designed to deal with Covid-19 patients are currently being built in Istanbul.

Last but not least, the government has postponed value-added tax, payroll tax and social security premium payments of affected companies as well as personal and corporate income taxes of 1.9 million individuals for 6 months. Total tax revenue that is postponed accordingly reaches [53.6 billion TL \(\\$7.9 billion\)](#).

The monetary response

In an emergency meeting on March 17th, Turkey's central bank [lowered its policy rate by 1 per cent to 9.75 per cent](#). After a sharp decline in domestic and foreign demand for commodities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, fears that lower rates may lead to higher inflation seem to have faded. In fact, in the wake of the swift recovery of inflation rates in 2019, the bank had already realised some dramatic reductions in its rates. Prior to the pandemic, real rates were already close to negative territory.

Early April, in an attempt to boost liquidity, the [Central Bank purchased 9.3 billion TL](#) (\$1.5 billion) of government bonds in the derivative market. More than half of this amount (5 billion TL) has been channelled to the country's Unemployment Insurance Fund, which is understandable considering the fund is expected to come under strain in the weeks to come. The Central Bank has also lowered the [foreign currency reserve requirements by 5%](#) for banks meeting real credit growth targets. The Central Bank will be providing these banks with [\\$5.1 billion worth of foreign currency and gold](#). As mentioned above, public banks have already extended low-interest loans to various critical sectors at their maximum capacity. Furthermore, they postponed all loan payments (principal and interest) by firms for a 3-month period.

The Central Bank has enacted a new support channel for [inventory financing of exporters](#) whose surpluses started piling up in warehouses after the pandemic hit Turkey's main export, most notably in Europe. The bank will backstop exporters by postponing up to \$76 billion worth of rediscount credit repayments for a maximum of 90 days. The support fund is hoped to preserve capacity utilisation and employment retention by exporting firms.

There has been criticism directed towards the country's private for not contributing enough to the credit flow since the Covid-19 crisis began, choosing instead to channel their deposits to money markets or foreign derivatives. Most recently, Turkey's Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK) [announced a new regulation](#), which, beginning from 1 May, obliges private banks to provide more credit to the private sector. In particular, a weighted average of new loans, new purchases of securities, and central bank swaps are supposed to equal the banks' deposits on a monthly basis.

[Other regulatory changes](#) include an easing of regulation in the mortgage market. Specifically, BDDK has lowered the legally required down payments for mortgage credits from 20% to 10%. Additionally, minimum payments for individual credit cards have been lowered to 20% while all repayments on loans for housing, vehicle purchases, and consumer spending have been postponed. Furthermore, all bankruptcy proceedings have been suspended, and dividend distributions by firms have been limited to 25% of 2019 profits.



(Mehmet Emin Mengüarslan - Anadolu Agency)

Most recently, Turkey's Central Bank Governor has been in talks with other central banks for [new swap agreements](#). Most other developing economies have applied to the IMF in order to meet their growing foreign currency needs in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. Considering Turkey's [cautious approach to the IMF](#), due in large part to the conditionalities of funding by the agency, [other arrangements](#), such as a swap line from the US Fed or the Bank of England, may indeed be reasonable for keeping country's options open. In fact, there was an expectation for an enlarged swap agreement between G20 countries, including Turkey. [Fahretting Altun, President Erdogan's head of communications, suggested on Twitter](#) recently that all central banks of the G20 group should be included in a generalised swap arrangement. Another possibility is that Turkey could secure financing from the World Bank.

Cautious optimism

There are a lot of uncertainties ahead. A pandemic creates an economic situation which many economists are not experienced to deal with. Furthermore, no one, including health experts, knows how the pandemic will unfold in the coming weeks and months. The novel character of the crisis requires equally innovative and subtle economic interventions from governments and monetary authorities. Covid-19 is causing considerable economic damage, and governments have a duty to alleviate their citizens' hardships. Businesses need help to survive the perfect storm ahead so they can continue employing people and swiftly recover production afterwards.

Arguably, thanks to its demographic advantage and strong health care system, Turkey have more space for manoeuvring under these extraordinary conditions. The government has enacted fiscal and monetary stimulus channels to mitigate the economic impact of the pandemic. The measures provide businesses and vulnerable individuals with cheap credit and subsidy support as well as postponing tax and loan payments. The Central Bank is deploying its entire arsenal to provide the markets with enough liquidity. A specific source of concern for Turkey is foreign exchange holdings. Accordingly, authorities are trying to meet the country's foreign exchange requirements via new swap lines and financial arrangements.

All in all, there is every reason for cautious optimism in Turkey's fight against the Covid-19 Pandemic. The country's strong health system enables the government to follow partial and calculated measures without having to shut down the entire economy for a prolonged period, which will probably limit the economic damage. The country's production remains partially active and an overwhelming majority of the population is still engaged in creating economic value. In this respect, Turkey holds an advantage over many other countries that have been heavily impacted by Covid-19.

Moving Forward

A positive balance sheet

While international responses were often late and disjointed, the Turkish authorities put forward a strategy that was adequate to the realities of the country. The goal consists of striking a balance between protecting public health, preserving the economy, and safeguarding national security. All the steps undertaken were designed to reach this multifaceted balance.

Turkey could have become one of the global epicentres for Covid-19, as it is a global hub for tourism and air transportation, as well as sharing a long border with Iran (a regional hotbed for Covid-19). However, the Turkish leadership adopted a resolute approach, undertaking a series of effective actions, which were designed to absorb the shock of the pandemic and mitigate its devastating effects economically, socially and health-wise.

The Covid-19 outbreak exposed the frailties of health systems around the world, not least from several Western nations. The latter have witnessed severe shortages of protective masks and respiratory equipment, as well as lack of testing. Turkey has not yet faced such issues. Over the course of the last decade, Turkish authorities have invested substantially in the health sector and upgraded the country's hospital facilities. For instance, [statistics](#) put forward by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reveal that Turkey has more hospital beds per 1000 inhabitants than the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Also, with 46 ICU beds per 100,000 people, Turkey has the highest ICU capacity ratio among the most affected countries, surpassing the US, Germany and other European countries.

The strategy of the Turkish leadership was not reactive but proactive. Entire medical cities were built over the last five years around the country under the impetus of the Turkish President. This drive is exemplified by the Basaksehir City Hospital in Istanbul, whose first phase was officially opened by President Erdogan on April 20. This hospital city is the biggest of its kind in Europe, can cater to some 30,000 patients per day, and all its beds can be converted into ICU units.

First phase of the 'Başakşehir City Hospital' opens in Istanbul

City hospitals have a vital role in fighting Covid-19 with their high-tech equipment, physical infrastructure and bed capacity. Başakşehir İkitelli Şehir Hospital will assume a vital role in combatting the disease



2,682



BED CAPACITY

90



OPERATING ROOM

725



EXAMINATION ROOMS

456

INTENSIVE CARE
UNITS

28



DELIVERY ROOMS

16



BURN UNITS

8,134

CAR PARK
CAPACITY

**OVER 1 MILLION
SQUARE METER**
INDOOR AREA

5 labs to serve on
5,608 square meter
(some 60,000 square
feet) indoor space

It is planned to become
operational with **full
capacity on May 20**

The hospital **have an
important role in
Turkey's fight with the
pandemic**

It houses **8 different
hospitals**

All hospital beds are
equipped **to be used in
intensive care units**

With 2,068 seismic
isolators, it will **the
hospital with 'the highest
number of seismic
isolators in the world'**



(Source: Anadolu Agency)

Other decisions also reveal the level of Turkey's relatively high-level of preparedness. Turkey [stockpiled](#) one million units of the medicines hydroxychloroquine and [favipiravir](#). This was done one-and-a-half months before any cases were confirmed in the country. Even the medical protocol followed in Turkey for the use of hydroxychloroquine was innovative, as this medicine is dispensed at the beginning of the treatment because Turkish doctors observed this drug is more efficient in the early phases of exposure to the virus. Therefore, Turkey's health infrastructure, combined with a competent and abundant medical personnel gave a positive impetus to the country's fight against Covid-19.

Turkey was not only able to confront the pandemic, but also engaged in fervent international humanitarian diplomacy, assisting about [30 nations](#) around the world, including Spain, Italy, the UK, and the US. By playing this role at such a critical juncture, Turkey reinforced its status as a force for good and a key international player. This positive stance contrasts with questionable tactics used by some other countries to obtain stocks of medical supplies and respirators, which were deemed by Germany's interior minister as modern [piracy acts](#). Ankara's constructive engagement contrasts with Brussels' inability to assist even the EU's founding members, let alone other nations in Europe.

New frontlines

While the accomplishments outlined are indeed admirable and put Turkey in a good position in comparison with other nations, there are at least two critical frontlines that need utmost consideration moving forward:

The vaccine battle

The next key fight is the vaccine battle. Turkey must work towards producing a Covid-19 vaccine. Firstly, the Turkish public will not feel safe entirely, and the wheels of the economy will not turn completely until there is an efficient treatment, whether a vaccine or antiviral. A vaccine will allow the protection of a large number of people, including those who are in the frontlines of the fight against the coronavirus, such as medical personnel, agents of public safety or supply chain employees. In this case, even if the virus [re-emerges](#) or mutates, Turkey would be able to confront it with relative ease. This, of course, would be the case with an effective vaccine no matter where it is produced and would be of tremendous benefit to the entire world. However, there have been questions raised regarding the ability to mass-produce a vaccine [fairly](#).

Secondly, vaccine production is paramount for health security. It is well known that four multinational pharmaceutical corporations, namely GSK, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer and Sanofi, control nearly all the vaccine manufacturing industry worldwide. These firms largely avoid [developing vaccines for pandemics](#) because of their limited profitability. While some of these companies have expressed interest in manufacturing a Covid-19 vaccine, there are many questions about their ability to produce efficient vaccines quickly. Moreover, there are growing concerns about the vested interests that some philanthropist foundations have in global health, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Some authors have expressed scepticism towards what they consider [philanthrocapitalism](#). This view is derived from the track record of these organisations and their ruthless [monopolistic business practices](#). Such criticism is also grounded in the [belief](#) that "the corporation from which the philanthrocapitalist's foundation wealth was derived may not have paid the federal statutory income tax rate or state taxes, and the tax rate paid may have included deductions for expenses related to morally or legally questionable management practices".

In this context, the connection between the World Bank, the World Health Organisation (WHO), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, its vaccine partner The Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation (Gavi), and the vaccine production process for Covid-19 presents potential conflicts of interest. Some international NGOs, such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Oxfam, have criticised the work of Gavi, arguing that the latter pushes the agenda of big pharmaceutical companies. An article published in the Guardian [stated](#) that "MSF and Oxfam also believe the decisions made by Gavi are skewed by the presence on its board of pharma companies – GSK-Bio has just been replaced by Crucell, which earns more than a third of its income from the pentavalent vaccine for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, hepatitis B and Hib, which is bought by Gavi".

The fact that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is [a founding partner](#) of Gavi, and has made several commitments to Gavi totalling USD 4.1 billion to-date, speaks volumes to its ability to drive Gavi's agenda. The fact that the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has become the WHO's second-biggest donor over the past decade says a lot about its lobbying power within this international organisation. Critics [argue](#) that "Gates priorities have become the WHO's. Rather than focusing on strengthening health care in poor countries — that would help, in their view, to contain future outbreaks like the Ebola epidemic — the agency spends a disproportionate amount of its resources on projects with the measurable outcomes Gates Foundation prefers, such as the effort to eradicate polio". By influencing the direction of global health and transforming Gavi into a major customer for drugs and vaccines in poor nations, while partnering with the World Bank on several projects, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation has established a complex web of interests that does not seem to align with philanthropic

endeavours. Therefore, if an anti-coronavirus vaccine were to be produced under this scenario, one of the problematic aspects that would potentially emerge would be [price gouging](#). This means that Turkey (and numerous other countries) would be paying a hefty financial price while being subjected to other conditions concerning quantities, delivery timeframes etc.

Thirdly, if the Turkish pharmaceutical industry manages to produce a Covid-19 vaccine, this will be a huge feather in the cap of the country and will raise its profile internationally. Turkey faces a razor-sharp global competition. US pharmaceutical companies are racing to produce a vaccine, while China's Academy of Military Medical Sciences has [approved](#) an initial vaccine for phase II trials. In the meantime, other European firms are also stepping up their efforts. In fact, the US president tried to get the Germany-based company CureVac to move its research wing to the United States and [develop the vaccine](#) "for the US only."



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan attends AK Party Central Executive Committee meeting on coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic measures via video conference in Istanbul, Turkey on April 21, 2020. (Murat Kula - Anadolu Agency)

The post-coronavirus new economic order

The Turkish leadership has been sensible as to finding the right balance between protecting public health, preserving the economy, and safeguarding national security. The fact that the Turkish authorities did not consider a full lockdown for a long period is in line with the conclusion reached by Norway's Covid-19 [task force](#) in its report published on April 7. The report compared a long-term hard lockdown with a 'slowdown' and concluded that the long-term cost of a full lockdown would be devastating.

Turkey is in a race against time to contain the pandemic. As the crisis passes and the curve begins to flatten, the focus will be on accelerating the wheels of the economy again. The faster this transition is done, the better for the country to stay competitive. In the interim, the crisis has forced the US and Europe to have second thoughts about relocating their industries to China. Many multinational firms are thinking to rebuild their supply chains, make them shorter, and closer to their markets. Thus, doing business with China, which is increasingly being perceived as a competitor rather than a partner, is going to be more challenging than in the past. Additionally, trade wars between the US and China have driven a wedge between both sides. Turkey is projected to capture a share of these markets given all the incentives it presents, including its geographical location, the advanced level of its industrialisation, and the reliability of its workforce.

Furthermore, Turkey needs to preserve and enhance its position as a hub for key industries and the global supply chain. Ankara has already pursued a policy of investment in public transport and has considerably increased its capacity in this area. The country has also developed its medical infrastructure, its food industry and various other service sector industries, which are expected to be the major winners of the post-Covid economic order. Finally, the government should also support pioneering technologies, whose importance has been revealed by the Covid-19 crisis, namely delivery drones, long-haul driverless trucks, and automated production for critical industries.

While many people around the world, particularly in the US and Europe, have lost trust in their national leadership, Turkish people have reportedly become more [confident](#) in theirs as the fight against Covid-19 continues to be rolled out. Each nation's journey is indeed different, however, the road to success for all will depend decisively on responses to a complex combination of medical, social and economic questions.