

**FOR  
INFORMATION**

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## COVID-19 UPDATE ON INTERNAL OPERATIONS

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This paper provides a brief update on the ongoing efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Fund staff and internal operations. Since the last update to the Board was issued on April 1<sup>1</sup> the Crisis Management Team <sup>2</sup>(CMT) has continued to coordinate the Fund's response to COVID-19. The CMT continues to provide frequent updates to Fund management, including in the context of regular Department Head's meetings chaired by the Managing Director, and to staff via regular Fundalls, videos and other channels. The current status of the COVID-19 challenges, along with CMT's responses, is outlined below.

### **1. The pandemic continues to spread around the world<sup>3</sup>.**

There are now more than 3 million confirmed cases and 211,000 deaths globally as of April 29. The U.S. continues to lead the world in reported cases, with more than 1 million total cases and about 57,000 deaths. Each day, around 20-30 thousand new cases are diagnosed in the US.

In the DMV area (Washington, D.C., Maryland and Virginia) there are about 40,000 positive cases and 1,800 deaths (reported on April 29)—the region is among the most heavily affected areas in the US. There is no evidence as of yet that

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<sup>1</sup> COVID-19—Update on Internal Operations, April 1, 2020 (EBAP/20/33).

<sup>2</sup> The Crisis Management Team is chaired by the Director of CSF and includes representatives of key departments and teams, including COM, CSF, FIN, HRD, ITD, LEG, SEC, SPR, and the WBG-IMF Health & Safety Directorate (HSD). CMU, ORM and SAC are observers

<sup>3</sup> Sources: Global data, *World Health Organization*, United States data, *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*.

transmissions have peaked and testing is improving, but generally insufficient to fully assess the spread of the virus.

To date, the CMT has been notified of five COVID-positive staff members—two have fully recovered and three are recovering at home. Seven vendor employees have also been confirmed positive, of whom one is fully recovered. The CMT is working with the Health and Safety Directorate (HSD) and departments to track reported COVID-19 cases among staff and vendor colleagues and is listing those employees who report positive test results on the COVID-19 intranet page. In the meantime, the Fund's HQ buildings remain closed to all but exceptional needs and travel is suspended.

Regular engagement with field office staff continues, and an operational resilience survey is being deployed for each office to evaluate their current status of preparedness. Masks are being provided to field-based staff as needed, and the CMT continues to support staff and long-term experts who wish to leave their current duty station.

## **2. Staff sentiment survey**

In an effort to monitor staff wellbeing and ensure operational issues were being addressed, the CMT conducted a sentiment survey for all staff, contractual, vendor employees and OED staff during the period April 2-6. In total, 2,559 staff, or 43 percent responded to the survey.

The results showed that staff have adjusted relatively well to the prolonged work from home period. However, six percent of respondents (or some 350 staff, if extrapolated) indicated that they had adjusted poorly or very poorly.

Broadly speaking, staff are able to effectively carry out most work functions, although 42 percent of staff normally based in HQ stated that their ability to manage work-life balance is poor or very poor.

Staff are finding some issues particularly troubling, with concern about loved ones and others living elsewhere and about limited social interaction featuring prominently. Other topics of concern raised by staff include stress, home working equipment and the number and length of meetings. 80 percent of respondents

stated that the Fund's technologies and remote working tools support them well or very well in working efficiently.

A number of resources have been made available to staff to help mitigate these factors and the CMT is working to implement a range of responses to the survey results, including measures to address work-life balance and stress, communication regarding the home equipment policy, and encouraging continued social interaction using the many different communication tools available to staff. Some of these actions are detailed in this update.

### **3. Responding to staff work-life balance pressures**

It was clear from the survey that frontline departments in particular are facing severe pressures. Staff in area departments thought managing work-life balance was poor or very poor (47 percent), compared to 38 percent in functional departments and 34 percent in support departments. For the Fund to be agile during this period, it is important to avoid burnout and that staff resources are reallocated swiftly to respond to evolving member needs.

HRD has taken some immediate steps to address this through two principal initiatives, the first of which is the establishment of a resource sharing exchange to match short-term project assignment needs of departments with Fund employee volunteers. The second initiative is the rehiring of Fund retirees on contractual appointments. Together, these initiatives create a potential resource pool with institutional experience that can help scale the Fund's crisis response capabilities relatively quickly. In addition, work has begun to canvass the resource needs of frontline departments.

### **4. Prioritizing work**

While the Fund is increasing its capacity to respond to current member needs through the measures outlined above, steps have been taken to deprioritize other less urgent work. Immediate actions already implemented include the deferral of Art IVs and non-crisis work, while review and approval procedures for financial

operations have been streamlined. Additionally, the Fund's performance management process for the current year has been simplified.

Several other initiatives are also underway to identify opportunities for streamlining at the departmental, project and Fund-wide level, including through an interdepartmental taskforce chaired by OBP to identify streamlining opportunities in business and operational processes and also through an iLab-led crowdsourcing initiative.

## **5. Contractual employee extensions**

Given the current travel restrictions that may impede their resettlement, contractual employees reaching the four-year rule between April and June 2020 will have their contracts extended on humanitarian grounds, for up to a maximum six-month period, as approved by the Executive Board.

Arrangements with contractual employees whose appointments expire after June 2020 may be reviewed in the future, depending on the changing circumstances related to COVID-19.

## **6. Forward guidance to HQ staff on the work from home status**

Previous guidance provided to HQ-based staff was for work from home (WFH) to continue until end-April in line with local stay-at-home directives. However, restrictions in D.C., Maryland and Virginia have since been extended, with public school systems remaining closed or only offering distance learning.

Of the international organizations in the area, the World Bank and the IDB offices remain closed indefinitely, while PAHO has extended its WFH status through the end of May. The US Federal government remains open for mission-critical activities with maximum telework flexibilities to all eligible employees. The Federal government has taken steps to begin ramping back up operations. However, the timeline for moving to normal operations is geographically dependent and generally to be guided by states and local government decisions—85 percent of the Federal workforce is outside the D.C. metro area.

Following a review of these, and other external safety considerations, the CMT has concluded that the premature easing of restrictions could put staff safety and operations at risk. Recognizing that the Fund has a low risk acceptance for issues related to staff safety and business continuity, the forward guidance on WFH status was extended to the end of May.

Throughout this period the CMT will continue to monitor and assess the circumstances and will provide ample advance notice including to staff and vendor employees before proposing changes to the Fund's operating status.

## **7. Contractual arrangements with vendor companies**

To ensure business continuity during this time and in preparation for the eventual return to normal operating status, contractual arrangements have been adjusted with key vendor companies affected by the Fund's WFH status. This allows the companies to retain hourly workers who would otherwise be laid off or furloughed and gives the most vulnerable vendor employees some security. Additionally, keeping these workers on the payroll will enable swift resumption of operations when appropriate. These arrangements run through end-June and may be terminated early should normal Fund operations resume before then.

## **Looking ahead**

The CMT will continue to closely monitor, coordinate and take necessary action to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on Fund staff and internal operations. The Team is also actively working on a framework that will help decide when and how to resume normal operating status, closely coordinating with other international organizations in the area.

The CMT will plan to provide an update to the Executive Board in end-May or when developments warrant. The next update will include information on the framework being prepared for resumption of normal operations.