

# Emergency tax policy responses to the Covid-19 pandemic

Limiting damage to productive potential and protecting the vulnerable

20 March 2020

Detected cases of Covid-19 are quickly rising in many countries, with major adverse effects on health and mortality. To fight the outbreak and spread of the virus, countries are imposing unprecedented measures. The result is that economic activity has decreased sharply in many countries and greater uncertainty has eroded confidence. In the face of this crisis, the immediate priority is to respond quickly to support households and improve liquidity for businesses to keep the productive capacity of economies intact as much as possible. A range of tax policy and tax administration measures could be considered by governments. These potential measures, which are not recommendations but are intended to assist policymakers as they respond in their own national context, include:



**Temporarily provide more generous welfare payments and income support**, including through benefits provided through the tax system, to individuals and workers, including those that are normally not entitled to such payments. This could include broader access to unemployment benefits, sick leave or family leave, also for self-employed workers; and increasing standard cash benefits delivered through the tax system to offset short-term impacts on lower income households.

**Waiving or deferring employer and self-employed social security contributions, as well as payroll related taxes.** Hard-hit sectors that have been part of a shutdown or that have suffered significant economic consequences could benefit from the waiver of payroll related taxes and social security contributions that are paid by the employer or the self-employed, to immediately reduce labour costs. The sectors covered could be expanded as the economic consequences become more widespread.



**Providing tax concessions for workers in health and other emergency-related sectors.** In order to reward people for working extra hours and in potentially dangerous conditions, governments could partially exempt labour incomes (e.g. income from overtime) from personal income taxation and social security contributions. In addition, governments could incentivise some retired workers to temporarily re-enter the workforce during the crisis by ensuring that such work does not affect eligibility to their pension entitlements.

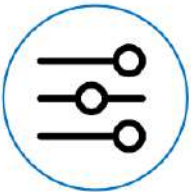
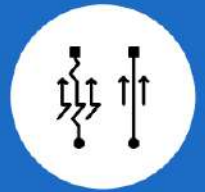
**Deferring payments of VAT, customs or excise duties for imported items** (e.g. food, medicine, capital goods), avoiding abuse through careful administration.





**Speeding up refunds of excess input VAT**, accompanied by targeted measures to limit fraud risks.

**Simplifying procedures for claiming relief from VAT on bad debts**, including by reducing the minimum period of payment delay that is required for VAT on issued invoices in order to be eligible to obtain relief.



**Adjusting the required advance payments on the basis of a revised expected tax liability** that more closely approximates the taxpayer's likely final tax liability, taking into account the expected impact on business turnover (instead of using last year's sales or profits as a proxy).

**Deferring or waiving taxes that are levied on a tax base that does not vary with the immediate economic cycle**, e.g. recurrent business property taxes or business turnover taxes.



**Increasing the generosity of loss carry-forward provisions.** One option is to turn loss-carry forward provisions into a loss-carry backward provision, where businesses could opt to receive a one-off cash payment that equals their accumulated tax losses multiplied by the statutory corporate income tax rate.

**Preparing for recovery including through tax policy.** While the immediate focus is on maintaining liquidity and providing income support, governments need to prepare for a careful balance of fiscal stimulus and fiscal consolidation once the pandemic subsides.



If the outbreak is prolonged and the economic impacts deep, as increasingly appears to be the case for many countries, then policies to keep the economy on standby become more costly and less effective. In this context, the focus has already begun to shift to more traditional stimulus policies that seek to repair confidence and stimulate economic activity.

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