

# Reimagining the World We Need

Businesses of all sizes are feeling the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the unprecedented measures to contain it. As orders are cancelled and export barriers and movement restrictions cut-off supply chains, millions of businesses worldwide, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), are at risk.

As these businesses are affected, so are their employees. In communities worldwide, SMEs represent 80% of global employment. They are an economic engine for local and national economies alike. Under COVID-19, this powerful engine could grind to a halt.

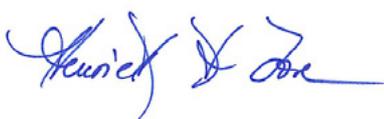
According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), approximately 400 million full-time jobs were lost globally between April and June 2020. These job losses have direct impacts not only on economies, but on children—on their health, their nutrition, their wellbeing and their education. The economic fallout could push up to 86 million more children into household poverty by the end of 2020. With the poorest and most vulnerable people at the greatest risk, the impact of COVID-19 could have devastating and lasting repercussions on children and societies alike, making the poor poorer, and pushing millions more into lives of lasting deprivation.

The International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the institutional representative of over 45 million businesses, and UNICEF, the United Nations agency responsible for providing humanitarian and developmental aid to children worldwide, are calling on businesses, governments and civil society to gather behind these urgent needs.

We must work together to keep economies afloat, avoid permanent damage to business operations and employment pipelines, and support children, families and communities through, and beyond, this global emergency.

At the same time, this is also an opportunity to re-imagine and re-build systems and economies that benefit all people, including the poorest and most vulnerable. Now is the time to “build back better,” by putting prosperity and opportunity for **all** at the heart of our response.

As representatives of children and businesses, UNICEF and ICC are launching a joint call to action to the public and private sectors to help ensure that any recovery benefits families and economies alike, and brings us closer to the better, fairer, healthier and more prosperous world we all need.



**Henrietta Fore**  
Executive Director, UNICEF



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ICC and UNICEF are calling for greater collaboration on the following measures:



## 1. Making diagnostics, treatments and vaccines available for everyone, everywhere.

COVID-19 has hampered the availability and accessibility of life-saving supplies such as medicines, vaccines, water facilities and sanitation, and education supplies. The pandemic has also applied pressure on manufacturer production capacities and global supply chains, making international and in-country cooperation essential to enable increased production and distribution of essential goods.

Some estimates suggest that 70% of the world's population will need to be inoculated to establish herd immunity to COVID-19, and—given the interconnected nature of our societies and supply chains—equity must be foundational to the global public health response. If developing countries, the poor or marginalised groups do not have access to essential resources to combat the spread of the virus, we risk subsequent waves of infection and reinfection and further damage to the economy.

Increased investment is needed for the development of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines and—once they are developed—governments must ensure that lack of funds or access to healthcare are not barriers to receiving essential preventative or curative care. Cooperation is needed to expedite development pathways, the review of treatments and vaccines, and the free flow of essential medical supplies.

Businesses should advocate for open markets and—where appropriate—consider making donations to public institutions to support the production and deployment of diagnostics, treatments and vaccines, as well as ensuring that access to, and high quality of, routine health services for children and women are maintained. When it is possible, they can also consider retrofitting machinery within their supply chains to enable the production of personal protective equipment, cleaning products, pharmaceuticals and other items needed to bolster public health.

## 2. Supporting industries that produce and deliver critical goods and services, with particular focus on strengthening supply chains and enhancing preparedness for and resilience to future shocks.



COVID-19 is causing significant disruption to industries providing essential services (health, education, social work, water and sanitation, food and essential goods, energy, ICT, road repair, banks, payroll, childcare) which depend on access to proper protective equipment, healthcare, and psychosocial and mental health support.

Governments can [speed up the health response](#) to COVID by eliminating tariffs and export curbs on all goods required to fight COVID, including test kits, protective garments (such as face masks and gloves), thermometers, disinfectants and sterilisation products, soap, relevant pharmaceuticals, medical devices (such as scanners and ventilators) and general hospital equipment.

Businesses can also disseminate the latest health guidance to their workers, customers and supply chains. To guard against future shocks, supply chain leaders should promote the adoption of business continuity planning to SME suppliers and distributors. When considering the adoption of processes to verify the health of employees, contacts or customers, measures should be secure and compliant with strict privacy standards to ensure that personal medical information is not exposed.



### 3. Scaling up family-friendly policies and other good workplace practices in the context of COVID-19.

Ensuring that [family-friendly](#) policies are part of the immediate and longer-term recovery plans is critical to support working parents, caregivers, children and families. Businesses can support working parents by providing the time, information, resources and services they need to cope with—and recover from—the crisis. In accordance with [recommendations](#) by UNICEF, the ILO and UN Women, these provisions may include flexible working arrangements, paid parental and care leave, childcare and continued breastfeeding support, and others.

As the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 is being felt hardest by the world's most marginalised, businesses should focus specifically on women, low-income workers and those in precarious employment, while striving to extend support measures to informal workers.

As parents and caregivers struggle to maintain their livelihoods, governments must scale up social protection measures by providing social safety nets and cash transfers, protecting jobs, working with employers to support working parents and implementing policies that connect families to life-saving health care, nutrition and education.

Governments should also prioritise a safe and orderly reopening of schools, day-care centres, and camps ensuring that all providers are trained to combat the spread of COVID-19 and other communicable diseases.



### 4. Advocating for the implementation of stimulus measures that channel support to the real economy.

While stimulus measures and aid funding have been provided to business in the wake of extensive and widespread job loss around the world, it is imperative that this support is channeled to those that need it most—including small businesses, unemployed workers and the most vulnerable.

Micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) accounting for upward of 80% of employment in many countries will be the hardest hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19. Estimates place the average MSME's operating capital at around 30 days, but lockdowns in many countries have already extended beyond that. Measures from the [public](#) and [private](#) sectors to increase MSME liquidity and avoid further layoffs are imperative to ensure that small businesses which comprise up to 80% of employment in some countries are able to weather this crisis.

Governments can act by requesting funding earmarked for small business support programmes in their proposals to international financial institutions, as has already been done by the Governments of Mozambique and Paraguay. They can also provide no- or low-interest bridging loans; tax, rent and debt relief; wage subsidies for MSMEs to keep their workers on the payroll; and subsidise or provide tax credits for apprenticeships for young people who are out of school and work.



### 5. Keep children learning, reimagine education and accelerate digital learning for every child and every school.

Pre-COVID, an estimated 22.4% of young people were not in any kind of employment, education or training and almost one-third of the world's young people were digitally excluded. Now the pandemic has shone a fresh light on deep inequalities in access to school, learning outcomes and digital connectivity. At the height of the crisis, 91% of learners across 194 countries were out of school due to nationwide closures. More than two-thirds of countries introduced a national distance learning platform in response, but among low-income countries the share was only 30%.

Experience from national and global crises has shown that economic uncertainty and social disruption can have long-standing impacts on students' education and futures. For the most

marginalised, particularly girls, missing out on school—even if only for a couple of weeks—can lead to negative outcomes that last a lifetime. And the longer children are out of school, the less likely they are to return.

Many countries have adopted digital learning programmes as one important way to help students keep learning. However, with 50% of the world still without access to broadband internet, the digital gap prevents all children from having equal access to education and to quality learning. It remains a barrier to children and youth learning the foundational, transferable, digital, entrepreneurial and job-specific skills they need to realise their potential and contribute to their communities and economies. Business and governments can collaborate to support efforts to connect every school and every child to the internet, to also enable high-quality, flexible learning from home.

Strategic collaboration between the public sector and businesses is critical during this crisis, to help address critical gaps and ensure no one is left behind. As a recent World Bank report found, without effective policy responses when students return to school, around \$10 trillion of lifecycle earnings could be lost for this cohort of learners, due to lower levels of learning, lost months of education, and the potential for dropping out of school. This is more than 15% of total government investments in these students' basic education. As more and more countries prepare to ease their lockdowns, they must prioritise schools in their reopening plans and protect education budgets—for the sake of children and for the sake of the economy.

## 6. Preparing the next generation of employees, employers and entrepreneurs through peer-to-peer learning, skilling and apprenticeships.



COVID-19 has caused significant disruption to myriad industries and will lead companies to take new measures to consolidate or shift their operations to guard against future risks. Notably, COVID-19 will be an opportunity to accelerate the shift to digital tools and operations. While supporting these changes, governments and companies need to ensure that those entering or re-entering the workforce are prepared for these shifts with sufficient skills and resources to weather these changes.

Crucially, support services are needed to prepare young people for the transition from school to work—especially for those who need to make this transition prematurely to support ill or unemployed family members.

Because employment recruitment processes are often tied to education qualification and achievement, people who experience disruption or premature ends to their education are [disproportionately disadvantaged](#) in the labour market, suffering from fewer opportunities and lower wages.

Developing job-readiness programmes, supporting the development of online skills, enabling mentorship opportunities and providing wage subsidies for employees who are new to the workforce can help to build the employment pipeline and reduce barriers to job attainment. Companies can provide apprenticeship opportunities for young people and those in low-skilled positions who are at risk of being eliminated due to digitalisation or changes in supply chains. They can also work with education systems to help align curricula with a changing global landscape and to ensure that businesses are able to take full advantage of local labour forces. Where cooperation with a formal education system is not possible, community leaders can work with businesses, trade associations and other stakeholders to identify and address skills gaps affecting citizens' ability to attain meaningful work.

## **7. Bolstering and adapting coping and protection mechanisms to address mental health and vulnerability to abuse, and to combat stigma, xenophobia and discrimination for employees and their families.**



The constant fear, worry and acute stressors experienced by families and communities during the COVID-19 crisis can lead to long-term consequences, such as the deterioration of social networks, local dynamics and economies; and stigma and discrimination towards surviving patients (in particular, children from marginalised groups or children with special needs) resulting in rejection by communities. Guarding against significant degradation of quality of life and mental health related to the loss of work, friends or family is an essential measure to enable productivity when life returns to the new normal.

In addition, when left without access to the protective environment of school, the risk of children being neglected, abused or exploited increases substantially. There is a need for enhanced coping and protection mechanisms, including though the provision of peer-to-peer learning and information sharing among young people.

Governments and businesses must ensure that adequate mental health support is available for employees and citizens, including through expanded support of health hotlines and family support programmes. Actions should be taken to inform the general public of the risks and resources available to combat degradation of mental health. First responders and those in essential industries must also be provided with enhanced sensitivity training to manage and respond to mental health emergencies and have access to dedicated support for their own wellbeing.

When considering support services for employees, businesses should also plan to extend coverage to immediate family members whenever possible. Regular check ins with managers and peers can also help to combat feelings of isolation and alert the company of any risks to physical or mental health.

## **8. Ensuring affordable, continuous and high-quality water, hygiene and sanitation services and products everywhere.**



There is an urgent need to scale up hand hygiene in homes, schools, health care facilities and public places. Currently, three billion people do not have a handwashing facility with water and soap at home.

As communities and countries shift from their COVID-19 response towards recovery and start to go back to school and return to work, they are faced with the challenge of maintaining safe infection prevention practices outside their homes and systematised hand hygiene.

Evidence-based behaviour change interventions should be at the heart of responses, but these need to be complemented with investments in markets, product innovations, and supply chains that ensure the availability of hand hygiene supplies when and where needed to enable practicing the recommended hygiene behaviours. Significant gaps exist regarding the availability and affordability of attractive, convenient-to-install-and-use hand washing facilities for households. The private sector can support the development of innovations in the design, business models and supply chains for hand hygiene products and services that meet people's needs and preferences as well as to rally supply chains to make them work for all.

Employers across a broad range of private industries, businesses and agriculture, and those who run other public institutions can show their commitment to the health of their employees by putting in place both workplace policies and facilities for hand hygiene.

Service providers should take every possible effort to mitigate any disruptions in their supply chains, including movement of goods and production capacity. Providers can also work with governments to restructure payment schedules and reduce immediate financial burdens when faced with a citizen's inability to pay.

**The International Chamber of Commerce** (ICC) is the institutional representative of 45 million businesses in more than 100 countries with a mission to make business work for everyone, every day, everywhere. Visit [www.covid.iccwbo.org](http://www.covid.iccwbo.org) to access ICC's COVID response portal. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#)



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**UNICEF** works in some of the world's toughest places, to reach the world's most disadvantaged children. Across more than 190 countries and territories, we work for every child, everywhere, to build a better world for everyone. For more information about UNICEF's COVID-19 response: [www.unicef.org/coronavirus/Covid-19](http://www.unicef.org/coronavirus/Covid-19). Follow us on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and at [www.unicef.org](http://www.unicef.org)



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