



# The Impact and Contributions of ICT during a time of Global Crisis: Embracing Digital Technology in the New Normal

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# Table of Contents

Overview	3
The Economy	4
eCommerce	5
Workplace Adaptations	6
Business and Digital Transformation	7
SME Challenges	8
eGovernment	9
Healthcare	10
ICTs Critical Role in Spreading Information	11
Education and Distance Learning	12
Entertainment	12
Economic Fallout will long Outlive the Health Crisis	13
Inequalities and the Digital Divide	13
Recommended Actions	14
Conclusion	15

## Overview

In 2020, industry is facing several significant challenges, which requires vigilance and action. The COVID-19 crisis is first and foremost a health crisis which has forced governments to take unprecedented measures to protect people's lives. The unavoidable declines in trade and output have painful consequences for households and businesses, on top of the human suffering caused by the disease itself. The enforcement of social distancing, lockdowns and other measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic has led consumers to ramp up online shopping, social media use, internet telephony and teleconferencing, and streaming of videos and films.

However, e-commerce for goods and services trade has been adversely impacted by the same factors that have caused disruption in supply and demand overall. The COVID-19 pandemic has also hit global markets hard, undermining international trade and cooperation, fueling already existing tendencies of protectionism and nationalism. Governments have adopted new measures, and the private sector has also acted, to respond to and ensure that e-commerce can help to alleviate some of the challenges faced in combatting the virus.

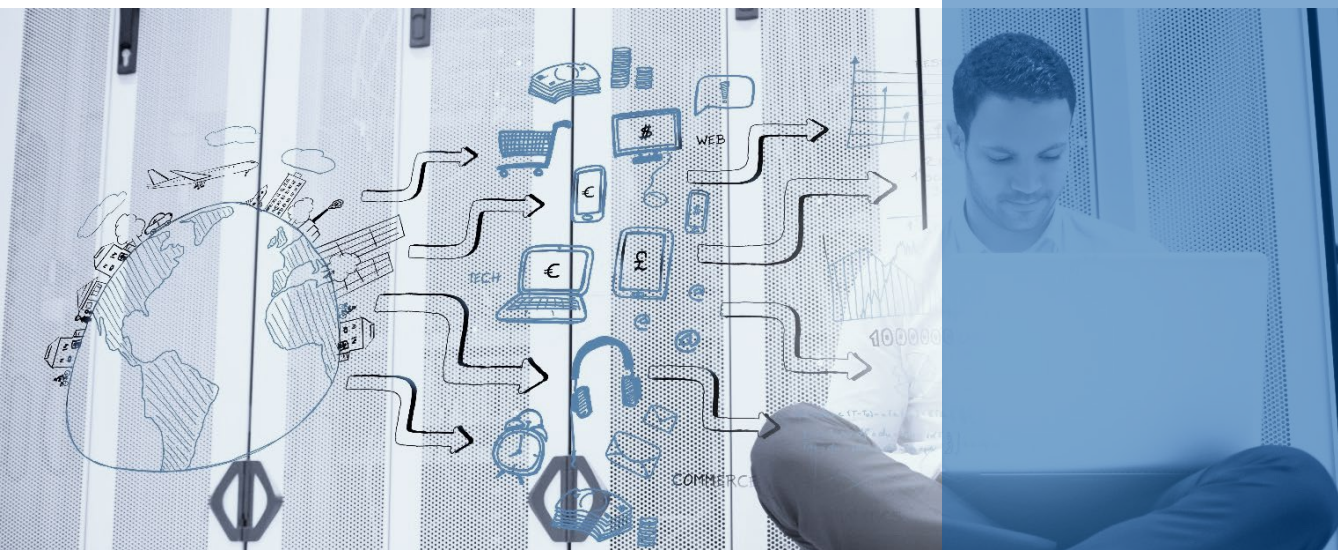
These have included increasing network capacity, offering expanded data services at little or no cost, lowering or scrapping transaction costs on digital payments and mobile money transfers, improving delivery services and other logistics, using digital tools to enforce measures and disseminate information, promoting telehealth services, and leveraging ICT for surveillance.

The global nature of COVID-19 and its impact on e-commerce may encourage strengthened international cooperation and the further development of policies for online purchases and supply. The pandemic has made it clear that e-commerce can be an important tool for consumers. E-commerce can also support small businesses and, by making economies more competitive, be an economic driver for both domestic growth and international trade. The pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital technologies in general, but also several vulnerabilities across the world.

Electronic commerce could benefit from looking at greater international cooperation to facilitate the cross-border movement of goods and services, narrow the digital divide, and level the playing field for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

Key industries, including manufacturing, healthcare, public services, retails, transportation, food supply, tourism, media and entertainment are hit hard by the pandemic and are calling for undivided information and interconnected communications technology. Below are some examples of how ICT has stepped up during this time of crisis.

**The pandemic has highlighted the importance of digital technologies in general, but also, several vulnerabilities across the world**



## The Economy

Digital ecosystems could account for more than \$60 trillion in revenue by 2025 - more than 30% of all global corporate revenue

In part due the COVID-19 pandemic, businesses have adopted new processes and technologies, and there are signs that they may pay off. Throughout history, crises are often followed by periods of rapid growth and increased productivity, such as seen following the brutal years of the 1930s - the most impressive economic boom in history. Then followed, beginning in the 1950s, the third industrial revolution brought semiconductors, mainframe computing, personal computing, and the Internet-the digital revolution.

Now there are signs that the post-COVID-19 era will once again witness a new period of economic dynamism rooted in accelerated digital transformation. A survey of global firms earlier this year by the World Economic Forum found that 80 percent of employers plan to accelerate the digitization of their business processes as well as allowing for more opportunities for teleworking<sup>1</sup>.

50 percent plan to speed up automation of production tasks. Emerging digital ecosystems could account for more than \$60 trillion in revenue by 2025 - more than 30% of all global corporate revenue. Companies must reimagine how they create value in the face of digital disruption, which has been accelerated by COVID-19.

Making the most of new private sector investments, however, depends on governments ability to produce a rapid recovery in demand and to make beneficial investments in public goods such as broadband, as well as to remedy the educational shortfalls faced by countless students due to school closures.

<sup>1</sup> [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_Annual\\_Report\\_2019\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Annual_Report_2019_2020.pdf)



## eCommerce

The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the growth of e-commerce, disrupting the retail industry in favor of new firms, customers and types of products. It has provided customers with access to a greater variety of products and services and has made it possible for businesses to continue operations despite the contact and confinement restrictions enacted around the world. The pandemic has also enhanced dynamism in e-commerce across countries as well as expanding its scope, such as the emergence of new businesses and consumer segments (for example, the elderly) and products (such as food and household supplies). It is likely that some of these changes are here to stay, as new purchasing habits have formed and the possibility of new epidemics will be a long-term concern.

The crisis has heightened the digital divide, as countries that have not adopted regulations beneficial to e-commerce create barriers to businesses that want to make their products and service available online<sup>2</sup>.

While many of these policy challenges existed before the pandemic, the global health crisis has demonstrated the heightened need for government action to enact market enabling reforms. Key challenges for consumers include connectivity, financial inclusion, skills, consumer protection, privacy and digital security. For businesses to innovate and grow, regulatory uncertainty must be eliminated. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are particularly vulnerable in times of crisis and depend on a competitive and enabling environment for e-commerce.

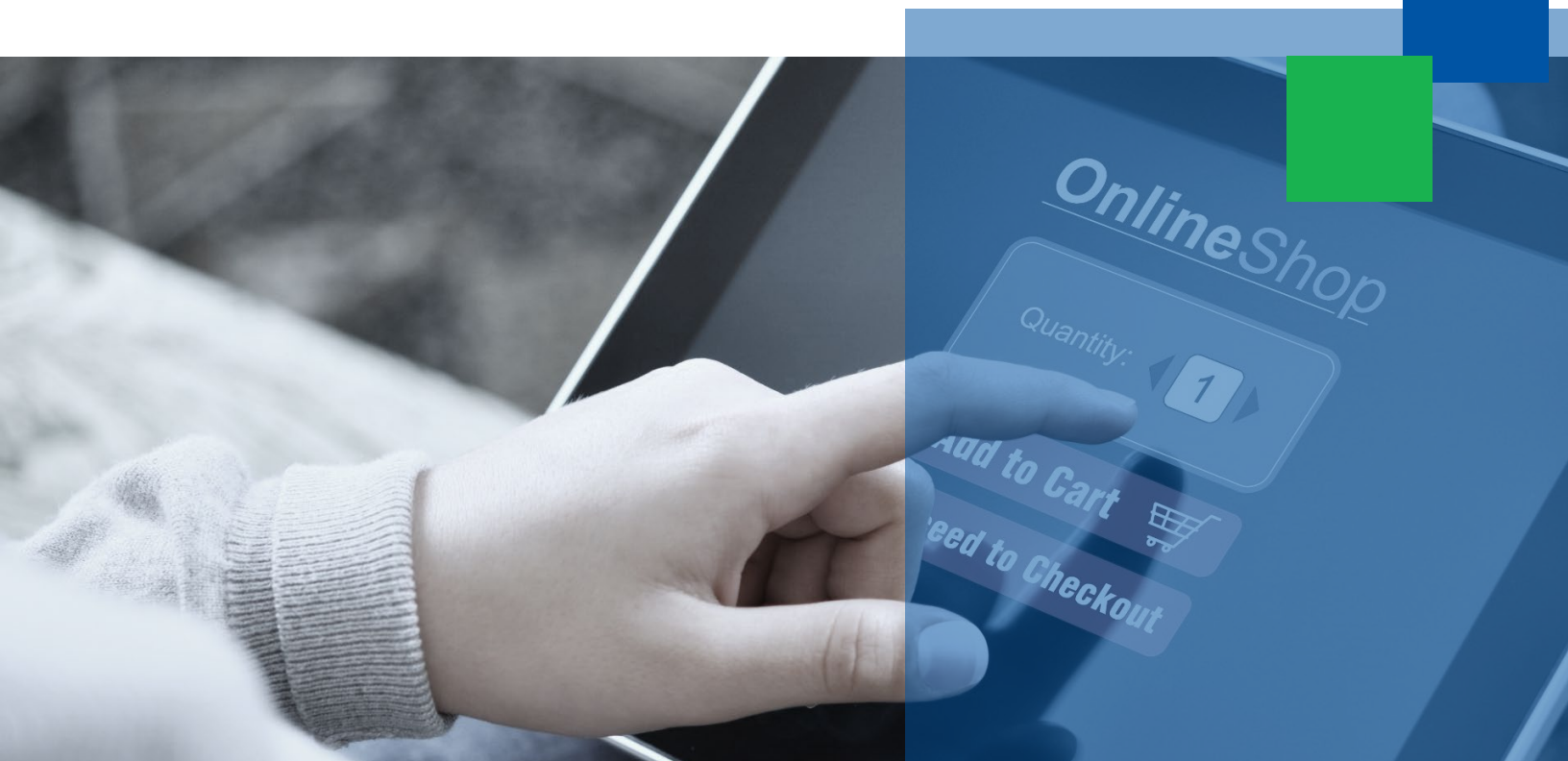
A recent poll undertaken by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD<sup>3</sup>) found that emerging economies have made the greatest shift to online shopping during the pandemic<sup>4</sup>. The acceleration of online shopping globally underscores the urgency of ensuring all countries can seize the opportunities offered by digitalization as the world moves from pandemic response to recovery.

**The acceleration of online shopping globally underscores the urgency of ensuring all countries can seize the opportunities offered by digitalization**

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/e-commerce-in-the-time-of-covid-19-3a2b78e8/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://unctad.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://unctad.org/news/covid-19-has-changed-online-shopping-forever-survey-shows>



## Workplace Adaptations

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the business world and companies have had no choice but to review their strategies to overcome the crisis.

Traditionally, most businesses have been unwilling to switch wholesale to remote-working technologies. Covid-19 has upended all this. Before the pandemic only 3% of Americans worked from home regularly; now a very substantial number have tried it. As a result, the pandemic has become a windfall for video conferencing platforms.


The ban on travel has limited the reach of the enterprises in the foreign market, which in turn, has increased the adoption of video conferencing software as enterprises and government organizations are considering video conferencing as an ultimate solution to connect with remote workers, customers, and employees.

As more people adopt remote-working technologies there is a powerful network effect, with each new customer making the service more useful. Together Microsoft Teams, Zoom, Google Meet and Cisco WebEx now have well over 300m users. Bureaucratic hurdles to remote work have been eliminated at record speeds. Civil courts are operating remotely. have gone online and some banks have eliminated the need for new customers to enter a branch to confirm their identity and open an account.

Remote work has emerged during the pandemic but is here to stay. Experts and business leaders agree that companies around the world will keep supporting remote work long after this crisis is over.



# Business and Digital Transformation

A close-up photograph of a person's hand pointing at a tablet screen. The screen displays various business charts, including a bar chart and a pie chart. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a meeting or office setting. The overall color palette is dominated by blues and greens.

Most business leaders have decided to launch digital transformation initiatives to keep businesses running as smoothly as possible during the COVID-19 outbreak and to better prepare for the recovery phase. More than ever, the private sector finds itself depending on ICTs to keep critical operations and ventures running without interruption. COVID-19 has impacted everything from supply chains to human resources, forcing businesses to become creative to maintain business continuity.

Even before this pandemic, 70% of companies had a digital transformation in place or were working on one<sup>5</sup>. But COVID-19 is forcing companies to speed up and implement new digital transformation initiatives. By embracing digital transformation, businesses can maintain their ability to ensure essential functions during and after the pandemic. According to McKinsey<sup>6</sup>, recent data show that we have vaulted five years forward in consumer and business digital adoption in a matter of weeks. Banks have transitioned to remote sales and service teams and launched digital outreach to customers to make flexible payment arrangements for loans and mortgages. Grocery stores have shifted to online ordering and delivery as their primary business.

Companies will need to ensure that their digital channels are on par with or better than those of their competition to succeed in this new environment.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.zdnet.com/article/survey-despite-steady-growth-in-digital-transformation-initiatives-companies-face-budget-and-buy-in/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/marketing-and-sales/our-insights/global-surveys-of-consumer-sentiment-during-the-coronavirus-crisis>

## SMEs Challenges

**SMEs help drive innovation, create jobs, make countries self-reliant, and also aid in effective use of resources**

The impact of the pandemic can be seen across the sectors. The vulnerable sectors such as small and medium enterprises are facing greater challenges than larger, often more mature businesses. SMEs are characterized by limited financial and non-financial resources, which makes SMEs more prone to the negative effects of environmental factors such as COVID-19. SMEs often have to adjust to the change in the business environment factors rather than directing them and, occasionally, such environmental factors become very adverse in such a way that it becomes difficult for this vulnerable group to remain robust. COVID-19 has created a major challenge for the small and medium enterprises<sup>7</sup>. This is highly problematic as SMEs contribute in significant ways to the development and growth of economies across the globe; SMEs help drive innovation, create jobs, make countries self-reliant, and also aid in effective use of resources<sup>8</sup>.

According to a recent report by the OECD<sup>9</sup>, evidence of the COVID-19 impact on SMEs from business surveys indicates severe disruptions and concerns among small businesses. SME surveys conducted world-wide on the impact of COVID-19 shows that more than half of SMEs face severe losses in revenues and one third fear to be out of business without further support in the near term, and up to 50% within the next few months.

Government responses that can help SMEs endure the pandemic and aid in their eventual recovery include:

- Easing liquidity constraints: deferral of tax, social security payments, debt payments and rent and utility payments.
- Introducing, extending or simplifying the provision of loan guarantees, to enable commercial banks to expand lending to SMEs.
- Direct lending to SMEs through public institutions
- Providing grants and subsidies to SMEs and other companies to bridge the drop in revenues
- Using non-banking financial support and intermediaries in their policy support
- Putting in place structural policies to help SMEs adopt new working methods such as teleworking and digital technologies and to find new markets and sales channels.
- Initiatives to monitor the impact of the crisis on SMEs and enhance the governance of SME related policy response.

<sup>7</sup> ILO (2020), ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work, *ILO*, <https://gisanddata.maps.arcgis.com/apps/opsdashboard/index.html#/bda7594740fd40299423467b48e9ecf6> (accessed on 7 May 2020).

<sup>8</sup> [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3650473](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3650473)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/coronavirus-covid-19-sme-policy-responses-04440101/>





## eGovernment

The COVID-19 crisis has spurred a faster than ever digitization of government and has accelerated the adoption of online services for everything from federal aid, public-works and public assistance, to driver's licenses and weddings. Governments that have embraced the transformation towards digital services and invested accordingly, have performed much better than countries that have not<sup>10</sup>.

One such country is Estonia, which is among the most advanced nations with regards to digital government services, providing online voting and national electronic ID. Due to the national ID system, Estonia was able to quickly provide benefits to the furloughed. Another digital success story is Taiwan, which was able to quickly adapt its health insurance system to put in action an economic stimulus to help retail businesses by allowing consumers to use their insurance cards to withdraw cash from ATMs after having visited a restaurant or other qualifying businesses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also induced many other countries to accelerate their plans towards providing their citizens digital identities. To date, more than 1 billion people have no proof of identity, with over 80 of them living in sub-Saharan Africa and in South East Asia<sup>11</sup>. As such, more than half of all children born in Africa have no birth certificates. Well-designed national ID systems, such as MOSIP - an open-source platform originated in India, will play a critical role in creating trust in both public and private sector services, which are both important vectors of social and economic development.

Such national ID schemes will also play an important role in a post-pandemic world by making it easier to create vaccination registries of citizens who have been inoculated around the world.

**The COVID-19 crisis has spurred a faster than ever digitization of government and has accelerated the adoption of online services**

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.economist.com/international/2020/09/01/covid-19-is-spurring-the-digitisation-of-government>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.economist.com/international/2020/12/07/covid-19-spurs-national-plans-to-give-citizens-digital-identities>



## Healthcare

Digital technologies are being harnessed to support the public-health response to COVID-19 worldwide, including population surveillance, case identification, contact tracing and evaluation of interventions on the basis of mobility data and communication with the public

One of the biggest fields that aided by ICTs during the pandemic is health care. Technology has played a major part in improving standards health organizations around the world, hospitals, testing facilities and laboratories. Digital health has become an essential part of the medical sector and plays a key role during the current health crisis. COVID-19 has given impetus for countries to accelerate the adoption of digital health. Digital adoption had to be done at an unprecedented speed - telemedicine for the delivery of healthcare really got scaled up.

Digital technologies are being harnessed to support the public-health response to COVID-19 worldwide, including population surveillance, case identification, contact tracing and evaluation of interventions on the basis of mobility data and communication with the public. These rapid responses leverage billions of mobile phones, large online datasets, connected devices, relatively low-cost computing resources and advances in machine learning and natural language processing. According to the JAMA Internal Medicine journal, the use of telemedicine in the U.S. increased 30-fold from January to June 2020<sup>12</sup>.

ICT is also proving very useful in helping to optimize essential health resources in a time when clinical resources are scarce and treating COVID-19 patients have become increasingly difficult due to the uncontrollable surge in infections. The pandemic has seen a dramatic growth in investment in the health care sector, with McKinsey forecasting that global digital health revenues, ranging from telemedicine, online pharmacies, wearable devices and more, to increase from \$350 billion in 2019 to \$600 billion in 2024<sup>13</sup>.

Similarly, major digital transformations are expected in the U.S. \$3.6 trillion health care market. Digital makeovers are also accelerating elsewhere, from China to Europe and beyond. In November 2020, at the Global ICT Excellence Awards<sup>14</sup>, WITSA recognized technologies and solutions for their positive impact in the fight against COVID-19:

- **PEMANDU Associates Sdn Bhd** (for their Global COVID-19 Index - GCI)<sup>15</sup> - Category: Chairman's Award.
- **Keelung City Government & Industrial Technology Research Institute**<sup>16</sup>: For AI-LiDAR Based People Flow Management System for Prevention of COVID-19 - Category: COVID-19 Tech Solutions for Cities and Localities.
- **Taiwan Ministry of Health and Welfare**<sup>17</sup>: For a pandemic preventive system from border to community: Taiwan model (Department of Information Management, Ministry of Health and Welfare, Taiwan) - Category: COVID-19 Tech Solutions for Countries and Regions.
- **Acer: AEB (Acer e-enabling Service Business Inc.) and the Taiwan healthcare Associated Infection and Antimicrobial Resistance Surveillance System (THAS)**: For iPLATO<sup>18</sup> - Category: COVID-19 Best Industry Solutions.
- **Fujitsu**<sup>19</sup> for its Quantum-inspired Optimization Services with AI/ML software to accelerate the early stages of the drug discovery process - Category: Innovative E-Health Solutions Award.

<sup>12</sup> <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamainternalmedicine>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.economist.com/business/2020/12/02/the-dawn-of-digital-medicine>

<sup>14</sup> <https://witsa.org/witsa-announces-2020-global-ict-excellence-award-winners/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://covid19.pemandu.org/>

<sup>16</sup> [https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CISA-Keelung-City-Government-\\_-Industrial-Technology-Research-Institute.pdf](https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CISA-Keelung-City-Government-_-Industrial-Technology-Research-Institute.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CISA-Ministry-of-Health-and-Welfare.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/CISA-Acer.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> [https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/tecUK-7\\_Fujitsu.docx](https://witsa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/tecUK-7_Fujitsu.docx)

# ICTs Critical Role in Spreading Information

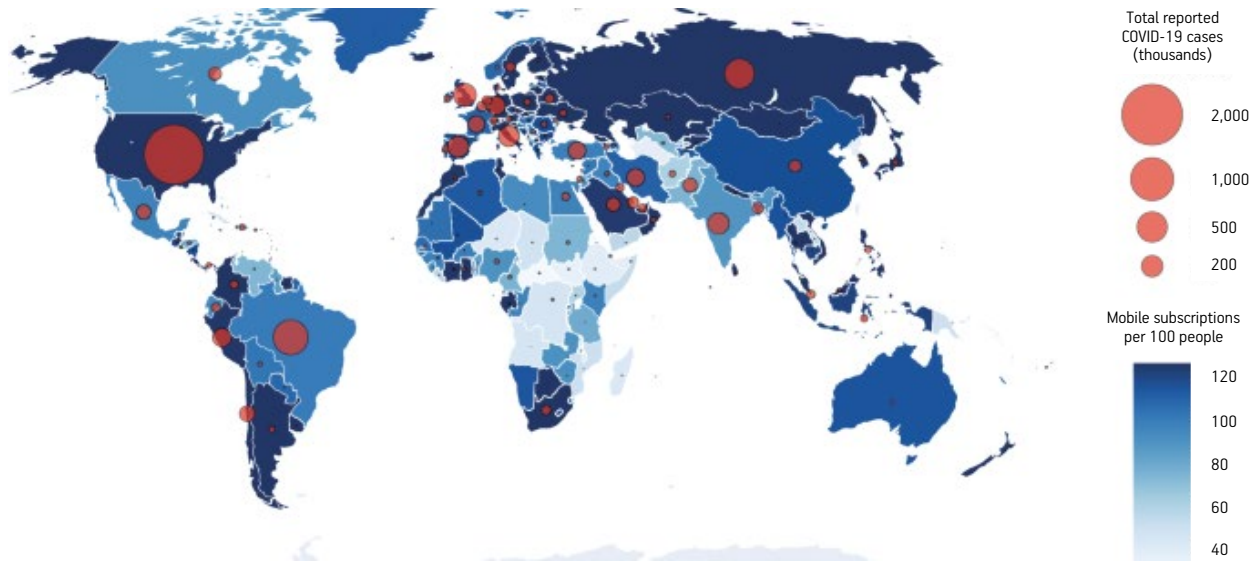
ICT has helped people to share information easily and instantaneously during the pandemic. Healthcare organizations and public authorities are taking advantage of information and digital technologies to fight COVID-19 by communicate important announcements related to the SARS-CoV-2 virus to people all around the world. With 4.1 billion people connected to the Internet<sup>20</sup> and 5.2 billion mobile phone users<sup>21</sup>, public announcements over digital platforms have unprecedented reach.

Effective implementation of communication campaigns, however, depends on accurate information and public trust. The rise of harmful misinformation and digital inequalities are major challenges that need to be addressed. Thankfully, public health organizations and technology companies are stepping up efforts to counter the spread of misinformation on

digital platforms and to prioritize trusted news sites in search results and newsfeed rankings. Digital communication platforms are also supporting social-distancing compliance measures and are enabling community mobilization initiatives that assist those in need. However, with the good comes also concerns over security and privacy, especially as regards confidential healthcare information.

The COVID-19 pandemic has confirmed not only the need for data sharing but also the need for rigorous evaluation and ethical frameworks with community participation to evolve alongside the emerging field of mobile and digital healthcare. Building public trust through strong communication strategies across all digital channels and demonstrating a commitment to proportionate privacy are imperative.

**The COVID-19 crisis has spurred a faster than ever digitization of government and has accelerated the adoption of online services**



World Health Organization. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) dashboard. <https://covid19.who.int/>

<sup>20</sup> International Telecommunication Union. Measuring digital development: facts and figures 2019. ITU Publications. <https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx> (2019).

<sup>21</sup> GSMA. The mobile economy 2020. <https://www.gsma.com/mobileeconomy/> (2020).

## Education and Distance Learning

Educational institutions are taking advantage of ICT resources to create alternative learning methods through digital technologies

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in many schools all over the world closing their doors to students. However, large-scale, national efforts to utilize technology in support of remote learning, distance education and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic are emerging and evolving quickly. Educational institutions are taking advantage of ICT resources to create alternative learning methods through digital technologies and online resources.

Video calls, file sharing, remote access to a learning center, and platforms enable students and teachers of all age groups to cooperate and ensure that interruption to education is as limited as possible. With many different approaches being taken by countries worldwide, the COVID-19 crisis is, also an opportunity for policy makers to learn from each other and cooperate to mitigate the effects of the pandemic and maybe even “build back better”.

## Entertainment

New entertainment trends have emerged and favorite pastimes have resurged as people seek distractions and adapt to the doldrums of social distancing

Faced with an unparalleled situation and widespread closure of brick-and-mortar operations around the world, the entertainment industry has been compelled to adapt and innovate in order to survive. The pandemic has accelerated a paradigm shift that was already in the works prior to the health crisis, such as partnerships between theaters and studios to share video on-demand revenue and experimentation by movie theater businesses in e-gaming, e-sports, luxury experiences and corporate seminars to take advantage of underutilized space. In the video-on-demand industry, companies such as Netflix and Disney+ each have added upwards of 30 million new subscribers in 2020<sup>22</sup>.

Sequestered at home during the coronavirus crisis, people are using digital tools to seek out new ways to alleviate boredom, connect with their communities and enhance their lives. New entertainment trends have emerged and favorite pastimes have resurged as people seek distractions and adapt to the doldrums of social distancing. Among some of the favorite digital entertainment activities undertaken during the COVID-19 quarantine are: Virtual tours (such as museums, tourist destinations and much more), movie streaming watch parties (on Netflix, Amazon Prime and other VOD platforms), virtual fitness activities (such as online workouts, virtual marathons), online concerts, online classes, gaming, video chats, and online yoga classes.

<sup>22</sup> <https://observer.com/2020/10/merger-acquisition-entertainment-amazon-apple-netflix-disney-movie-theaters/>



# Economic Fallout will long Outlive the Health Crisis

Global markets and optimism are on the rise now that several COVID-19 vaccines are close to approval and distribution. However, a viable vaccine will not stop the economic damage, which will persist long into the future, adversely impacting the poorest and most vulnerable<sup>23</sup>. According to a report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Trade and Development:

Transition to a New Normal, the global economy will contract 4.3% in 2020 and warning that the crisis could send an additional 130 million people into extreme poverty.<sup>24</sup> According to this report, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) will be unattainable unless urgent government policy measures are undertaken immediately. The pandemic has simply accelerated the shift away from traditional legacy media.

The crisis could send an additional 130 million people into extreme poverty

## Inequalities and the Digital Divide

The pandemic has highlighted the glaring need to bridge the digital divide, both within and across countries, given the central role the digital economy has played during the crisis. Many traditional obstacles have been accentuated and have continued to hamper greater participation in e-commerce activities by small producers, sellers and consumers in developing countries, particularly in least-developed countries (LDCs). This has underscored the need for efficient and affordable ICT services, such as telecommunication, computer and other IT services and emerging technologies.

Globally, the disruption of the pandemic is illustrating how important supply chain resilience is and if businesses are connected and digitized, their ability to respond in real-time to disruption is vastly improved. Most importantly, the post-pandemic recovery will further disrupt existing chains to reconfigure them for greater resilience.

The increased use of e-commerce necessitated by consumers adapting to lockdowns and social distancing measures draws attention to several challenges, such as the need to bridge the digital divide within and across countries.

With connectivity now a prerequisite for national competitiveness in a digitalized world economy, how can the less connected countries substantially improve access to affordable connectivity at the same time as they divert resources to deal with a major economic and health crisis? This reality presents an existential public policy challenge for the least connected countries across the world. It also creates a once in a generation opportunity to produce policy-based action plans to grow back stronger through improved connectivity and increased digital competitiveness.

Whereas the pandemic has accelerated trends towards the digitalization of economies, as evidenced by digitally enabled businesses often thriving amidst the pandemic, countries where the fundamentals underpinning digital economic activities are not affordable, such as connectivity and ICT infrastructure, must review their legal and regulatory functions that negatively impact digitalization. Access to affordable telecommunication services is essential for participation in the increasingly digital global economy. Governments must therefore adopt regulatory approaches to telecommunications which results in more affordable access.

Countries where the fundamentals underpinning digital economic activities are not affordable, such as connectivity and ICT infrastructure, must review their legal and regulatory functions that negatively impact digitalization

<sup>23</sup> <https://unctad.org/news/covid-19s-economic-fallout-will-long-outlive-health-crisis-report-warns>

<sup>24</sup> [https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osg2020d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osg2020d1_en.pdf)

## Recommended Actions

It is imperative that government leaders, in cooperation and partnership with the private sector embraces and employees the use of Digital technologies. ICT must be at the core all of decision made by government leaders.

In a Digitally driven world economy, the need to fully join the Digital Age is no longer just a smart thing to do, -it is required for a nations' future. It is up to governments, in partnership with industry and other stakeholders to shape e-commerce and the digital economy by adopting rules that favor the adoption of ICTs and economic growth. In many developing countries, this is an enormous challenge that will involve reforming existing policies, laws and regulations in many areas. Unfortunately, the digital economy is still relatively uncharted territory in many emerging countries around the world, and policies and regulations are failing to keep pace with the ever-accelerating digital transformations taking place.

National policies and ICT strategies are crucial in preparing countries to ICTs to develop electronic commerce and prosperity. A whole-of-government response to these challenges is necessary to establish the policies necessary to achieve the benefits and address challenges related to connecting populations and building a sustainable economy that benefits all.

WITSA highly recommends that nations take the follow actions immediately, if they have not already:

- Public health has long been under-funded in many countries compared other sectors. Long-term changes will require investment in public-private partnerships such as national and international digital centers of excellence, with a broad range of partners and access to digital datasets.
- A substantial investment in workforce education and skills is essential for growing digital public-health leadership.
- Governments should develop a long-term National Agenda or Plan protected from political change and whims.
- Governments should commit to fully digitalizing their nations-to include long-term financing and funding.
- Governments should commit to providing affordable and reliable broadband connectivity for all of their citizens.
- Governments should continue to liberalize trade and adopt enabling polices and laws: Trade rules must take into account the constantly evolving and inherently international nature of digital commerce and business, and any *changes should be implemented only after a thorough discussion* with all stakeholders and governments should support business-led rules development where possible.
- Nations benefit the most where there is an ecosystem that encourages entrepreneurship, innovation and protection of intellectual property. Economic reforms will succeed where grounded in a commitment to free market principles, including the rule of law, respect for private property, open trade and investment, competitive markets, and efficient, effectively regulated financial systems. These principles are essential to economic growth and prosperity and have lifted millions out of poverty, while significantly raising the global living standards.
- Whenever government regulation is necessary, these must be internationally coordinated if possible. Incompatible national laws create a fragmented global market with significant uncertainty as to the rules that apply. Uncertainty means risk, and risk defeats investment and innovation.
- Regulatory schemes affecting global commerce must be non-discriminatory, and in accordance with WTO agreements.

## Conclusion

For many businesses, customers are already digitally focused. Workers are already comfortable working fully remotely and remaining productive in doing so. Many businesses have implemented analytics and AI solutions in their operations, with their IT teams demonstrating their worth by delivering at never-before seen speeds. To succeed in a post-pandemic world, however, businesses must continue to embrace digital transformation by accelerating digital investments to match changing customer needs, improve business operation through use of data and AI, modernizing technology capabilities selectively to boost growth, and enhancing organizational agility to adapt quicker to market changes.

The future of public health is likely to be increasingly digital and recognizing the importance of digital technology in this field and in pandemic preparedness planning has become urgent. Key stakeholders in the digital field, such as technology companies, should be long-term partners in preparedness rather than being partners only when emergencies are ongoing. Viruses know no borders and, increasingly, neither do digital technologies and data. There is an urgent need for alignment of international strategies for the regulation, evaluation and use of digital technologies to strengthen pandemic management and future preparedness for COVID-19 and other infectious diseases.

## About WITSA

WITSA is a global consortium of leading ICT industry association members from over 80 countries - economies.

WITSA members represents over 90% of the ICT industry.



As the leading recognized voice of the global ICT industry, WITSA aims to drive transformation and expand the use of ICT globally; given that ICT is the key driver of the global economy.

WITSA's members and stakeholders comprise national associations, multinational corporations, institutions and organizations, researchers, developers, manufacturers, software developers, telecommunication companies, suppliers, trainers and integrators of ICT goods and services.

As such, they represent a large and obviously vital constituent group for whom the effective balancing of concerns and rights affecting the security, privacy and information capability provided by ICT products and services underpins business development and economic activity.

WITSA is a founding partner of the Digital Trade Network (DTN), a new initiative providing a permanent private sector resource for digital trade policy makers in Geneva. Through DTN, WITSA works with a number of other partner organizations to build an impartial, broad base of international supporters to work with the WTO, the UN Conference for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the International Trade Centre (ITC), and related economic policy agencies in Geneva with a focus on the networked economy.





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