BUSINESS AND COVID-19: REBUILD BETTER FRAMEWORK
CREATING A MORE INCLUSIVE AND RESILIENT FUTURE FOR THOSE MOST IMPACTED BY COVID-19

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THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS HAD, AND WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE, DEVASTATING IMPACTS ON THE LIVES, LIVELIHOODS AND LEARNING OF MILLIONS OF PEOPLE, PARTICULARLY THE MOST VULNERABLE. WHILE EFFORTS ARE RIGHTLY FOCUSED ON MITIGATING THE IMMEDIATE IMPACTS, WE NEED TO START THINKING ABOUT HOW TO RECOVER AND REBUILD, BECAUSE ACTION TAKEN NOW WILL HAVE LONG-LASTING EFFECTS ON PEOPLE’S WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE. THIS IS AN EFFORT THAT MUST BE LED BY GOVERNMENT, BUT BUSINESS, ALONG WITH CIVIL SOCIETY, HAS A CRITICAL ROLE TO PLAY.

In March, we published a Business and COVID-19 Response Framework that sets out guidance for how businesses can support the most vulnerable across three areas of impact: in their lives (health and safety), livelihoods (jobs and incomes) and learning (education and skills) (see box). The Response Framework sets out actions that businesses can take through their core business capabilities and activities, philanthropic donations and volunteering, and policy engagement, advocacy, and support for institution strengthening (see figure).

We separately published an online Action Mapping Tool that sets out over 300 examples and a range of deep-dive Action Toolkits to provide advice on specific topics, including supporting micro and small businesses and vulnerable workers, tackling gender-based violence, promoting handwashing and preventative measures, partnering with NGOs, and investing in rapid innovation partnerships, with more in development.

This paper adds a third dimension to our framework: time, and as part of that, ambition. Beyond the immediate “respond” phase, we look at what actions business can take next in the near term to help individuals, enterprises and communities “recover” - to get back on their feet - and ultimately to “rebuild better.” With this final phase comes the opportunity to be ambitious and enable those people who have faced the most severe social and economic impacts to thrive, and at a deeper level, to create a future that is more inclusive and resilient. In many respects, the pandemic has exposed and aggravated deep-seated inequalities and vulnerabilities that were already there. Rather than build back to the old normal, what could a new normal be? How can we embrace the best values that have been demonstrated during this crisis: selfless bravery, compassion, and a sense of community that might enable us to accelerate progress towards the world envisioned in the internationally-agreed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for people and planet? In short, how can we build back better?
THE IMPACT ON THE MOST VULNERABLE

As we highlighted in our original Response Framework, there are three main areas where the pandemic’s impacts on people will be most felt. In each, there will be short-term personal, family and community crises and loss, but also long-term scarring effects that could last generations without public and private support to increase resilience.

LIVES: HEALTH AND SAFETY

The EIU estimates that “the virus will infect around 50% of the world population; 20% of the cases will be severe, and 1-3% will result in deaths.” Most at risk are older adults and those with an underlying health condition such as lung disease, diabetes or heart disease.

There are substantial health and safety risks for healthcare workers, first responders and other workers providing food, transportation and essential services, many of whom are working exhausting long hours in stressful circumstances and with limited personal protection equipment.

There are social and psychological impacts, from social stigma to the sense of community disconnection due to forced isolation and social distancing measures. This is likely to have a direct effect on mental health issues, and will be felt hardest by those who do not have the technology to stay connected to friends and family. The elderly are at particular risk of isolation, given the higher risks to them of social contact.

LIVELIHOODS: JOBS AND INCOMES

There will be widespread economic and business disruption. With national lockdowns and international and domestic travel restrictions, hundreds of millions of livelihoods have been impacted. This has hit all businesses, though some industries, such as hospitality, aviation, tourism, and insurance are particularly affected. Small businesses, that typically face high cash flow risks, are facing very real threats of collapse.

This has implications for all workers, especially those who cannot work remotely, by virtue of the nature of their work or through lack of access to the digital technology to do so. Hourly, gig economy and other independent workers, with no employment security or access to paid sick leave, have been severely impacted. We are also seeing devastating impacts on migrant workers.

LEARNING: EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Governments around the world have implemented school closures nationwide, leaving more than a billion students out of school.

While remote education is an option for those with digital access, even for these students online learning may be classified as “enrichment” rather than be a graded part of the curriculum. This will have direct impacts on children’s learning and well-being, as well as on their parents’ ability to work.

Universities have also been closed, with disruptions to the nature and quality of learning and research. Meanwhile, restrictions on gathering size have forced large meetings, conferences and training events to be cancelled, with knock on effects for professional training and networking.

THE GENDER DIMENSION

Across all three areas, there will be a disproportionate impact on women. Women make up 70% of workers in the health and social care sector, exposing them to greater risk. Reproductive health resources are likely to be diverted towards emergency response.

In the wake of a sustained emergency and ‘stay at home’ regulations, intimate partner violence is expected to rise. Workers in the garment industry, 80% of whom are women, in countries like Bangladesh, Cambodia and Vietnam, are facing destitution as factories close in the face of collapsing demand.

Closing schools has meant working parents have had no other choice than to take time off or try to work while caring for their children. This affects women in particular as they still bear much of the responsibility for childcare.

Women carry out three times more unpaid care work than men. As the main carers of family relatives that may fall ill, women are placed “at higher risk of exposure as well as sacrificing their time.”
THE FOUNDATIONS FOR REBUILDING BETTER

In thinking through how we rebuild better, there are three themes that have emerged over the past few months from 16 online events we have hosted that brought together over 13,000 people, including practitioners from 95 companies, civil society and government. These should serve as the foundation of our collective efforts to build back better.

PRINCIPLES

As the American novelist, James Lane Allen, famously said, “adversity does not build character, it reveals it.” In the manner and speed of their response to protecting the most vulnerable from the impacts of COVID-19, many leading companies are clearly revealing their deep-seated values and principles, framing an impression of who they are and what they stand for in a way that will stay in the minds of stakeholders for a long time to come.

This is the moment for responsible business - embedding and spreading responsible business practices and standards as well as measuring, reporting and accounting for performance. The 10 Principles of the UN Global Compact, which call on companies to behave in ways that meet universally agreed upon responsibilities on human rights, labour, the environment and anti-corruption, are more relevant than ever. Likewise, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and a variety of industry or issue-specific standards need to be implemented by more companies in more countries.

Right now, this translates into protecting the immediate health, safety and livelihoods of direct employees and supporting the company’s most vulnerable stakeholders among its customers, workers and small business partners in its value chain and its communities.

We have all witnessed the critical role that low-paid, front line workers have played in the pandemic, many of whom don’t earn a living or even minimum wage and lack access to paid sick leave. We have also seen the fragility and inequalities across our global supply chains, with workers in the garment and agriculture sectors as two stark examples. Looking ahead, this means thinking fundamentally about human dignity and the issue of fairness in the way economic gains are shared across a value chain and among different types of employees and workers. It means looking deeply at gender inequality. The concept of a living wage and conversations about a universal basic income and access to universal healthcare are on the table and need to be given higher priority and collective support from business going forward.

REBUILDING BETTER AND GENDER

As we highlighted in our Response Framework, and explored in more detail in the Action Toolkit on tackling gender-based violence, the pandemic is having a disproportionately negative impact on women.

In building back better, we must incorporate gender assessments into our relief packages, support programmes and strategies. We should also take the opportunity to tackle gender inequality and the social norms that COVID-19 has highlighted. For example:

- Shifting the distribution of global caring roles to achieve greater gender equality, including encouraging more men to participate in caring jobs, including health and education, and enabling more men to share household care through improved paternity policies.
- Engaging men and boys in gender-transformative approaches to ending violence against women, including, for example, education and campaigns on tackling unhealthy and harmful masculinities.
- Tackling the disproportionate barriers that women-owned entrepreneurs face in accessing finance and growing their business, and the persistent pay gap that women face in the workforce.

PURPOSE

Prior to the pandemic, there was much talk about corporate purpose. During 2019, Business Fights Poverty ran a programme around embedding purpose authentically into business, setting out a 5-part framework for what this should mean in practice (see box). The common ground between those who genuinely believe in the impact of purposeful business and those who question it, is a desire...
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For authentic action; the recognition that we need to move beyond words and into impact, beyond the rhetoric of purpose towards embedding it meaningfully and consistently across business.

In 2020, building on the stakeholder concept outlined in its original 1973 “Davos Manifesto,” the World Economic Forum stated that “The purpose of a company is to engage all its stakeholders in shared and sustained value creation.” In August 2019, the Business Roundtable, a group of 181 CEOs of major U.S. corporations, published a new “Statement of Purpose of a Corporation” in which they committed to lead their companies for the benefit of all their stakeholders - customers, employees, suppliers, communities and shareholders.

In the context of COVID-19, many companies have demonstrated their purpose in practice through the ways they have taken rapid action to support workers, suppliers and their broader communities. There are many inspiring examples in our Action Mapping Tool.

It is those companies who have put the well-being of their workers, customers and other partners at the heart of their response - in contrast to those who have engaged in superficial public relations exercises or not at all - that will be remembered and rewarded through deeper levels of trust among employees, customers and wider stakeholders.

Looking forward, how can we build on this so that actions taken in this emergency inspire more businesses to embed purpose at their core and collaborate with others to build back better?

With the likelihood of serious economic recession and financial challenges, those businesses with purpose and principles at their core will be more resilient and better able to manage future risks and maintain trust with customers and employees.

Partnerships

If we have learnt anything over the first few months of the pandemic, it is that we are deeply connected and inter-dependent. Despite the physical distancing measures that have kept us apart, in many cases we need to work together more closely than ever. The good news is that there are numerous examples of rapid innovation partnerships springing up in a variety of areas - for example, traditional competitors cooperating in search of a vaccine and treatments, and government and companies partnering to promote preventative measures and mitigate negative impacts in the meantime.

An Action Toolkit, developed as part of our Business and COVID-19 response platform, looks at how this rapid, collaborative innovation has been possible and what the practical lessons are for others. One thing has become clear: a shared focus and sense of urgency can dramatically accelerate the creation of partnerships, and that should give us hope for how we tackle future crises. This ability to act fast will also remain a source of competitive advantage for businesses themselves.

Partnerships will be central to defining and implementing a “better” reality than the one that faced many individuals before COVID-19. Governments will need to take a lead in stimulating the economy and providing the safety nets to protect the most vulnerable, but business has an important role to play too - as a voice at the table shaping what “better” can look like, as an advocate for the policies needed to deliver this, as innovators and delivery partners in the wider ecosystem, and as tax-payers, philanthropists and investors.

For their own part, businesses should reframe their relationships with NGO partners from transactional delivery partnerships towards transformational ones that work towards a shared vision for the
They also need to engage more effectively with workers, suppliers, distributors, customers and peer companies to make global value chains more resilient, equitable and sustainable.

At a very practical level, businesses will need to prioritise, focusing on what they can do themselves where they have the most influence, and where, as they get further away from core operations, they should look to engage, leverage and partner with others that bring complementary skills and resources to fill governance gaps and address systemic market failures.

Drawing on the inputs of diverse partners will be important for effective scenario planning that takes into account issues related to lives, livelihoods, learning and other material social impacts. Having robust, trust-based partnerships will also help with future crisis response and recovery.

Lessons learned from the pandemic response will be valuable for tackling climate change, inequality and other systemic challenges.

Ultimately, rebuilding better will require system-level changes - from strengthened health systems and food systems to more effective and inclusive business models and financial ecosystems - and this will require a new and more ambitious level of partnership.

A FRAMEWORK FOR BUSINESS ACTION

Businesses can mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on their stakeholders in multiple ways. The following tables provide a high-level summary across three phases: RESPOND, RECOVER and REBUILD BETTER. What works and is appropriate will vary considerably from company to company and depends on the industry sector, country and other contextual factors, but it is hoped that the actions outlined in these tables will have relevance for many companies.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

The simplifying framework we present in this paper should not be taken to imply that the journey ahead will be linear or easy. Until a vaccine is found and is accessible to all, it is likely that COVID-19 will recur and we will have to move back and forth between an emergency response and renewed efforts to recover and rebuild across different geographies and segments of the population. For global companies, this might mean having to simultaneously run response, recovery and rebuilding efforts in different parts of the world and in the same geography over time.

Respecting human rights, tackling corruption and implementing other responsible business standards, embedding purpose and building transformational partnerships are all complex journeys. They require concerted and continued effort even at the best of times. COVID-19 has exposed some deep-seated inequalities and fault lines in our current systems, and change will require ambitious collaborative action and complex system-level interventions. As well, dealing collectively with COVID-19 does not necessarily mean we will be better at dealing with future crises; as a society, we tend to prepare best for those crises that we have recently and directly experienced, and we prepare less well for other critical threats with which we are less familiar.

Many in our field of business and social impact are, by their nature, optimists (including the authors) and we are drawing on indications from the first few months of the pandemic that awareness and willingness to take action towards a fairer and environmentally sustainable future are gaining momentum. There are some positive signs, such as the continued and even increased focus of investors on environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues, and their relevance to business resilience, risk management and long-term performance. However, there are strong counter currents. Too many large companies, for example, are taking advantage of government relief packages intended for small businesses, and there are growing examples of corruption in emergency procurement and support programmes. With increased levels of economic distress for businesses, individuals, governments and the global recession, there is also risk that many companies may turn inwards and be less willing to make changes that have positive social and environmental impacts. History suggests that the positive environmental side effects of reduced economic activity during this pandemic may be short-lived once economies bounce back. And experience also tells us that where companies’ sustainability commitments sit off to the side as nice-to-do public relations or philanthropy projects, rather than being embedded into the core business, they are very often the first budget lines to be cut during times of crisis. In short, a more inclusive and resilient path forward is not going to be easy and will require sustained leadership by individual business leaders, companies and business associations.
**BUSINESS AND COVID-19: REBUILD BETTER FRAMEWORK**

## RESPOND

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACTIONS</th>
<th>LIVES: HEALTH &amp; SAFETY</th>
<th>LIVELIHOODS: JOBS &amp; INCOMES</th>
<th>LEARNING: EDUCATION &amp; SKILLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CORE BUSINESS</strong></td>
<td>Put people first. Identify vulnerable stakeholders in the company’s operations, value chain and communities. Identify the most salient human rights and economic risks they face and develop plans to address these through enhanced policies, processes, products, services, technologies, financing mechanisms and business models.</td>
<td>Ensure health and safety of employees and other stakeholders directly impacted by the business, and regularly share health information among employees, customers, communities, suppliers and distributors more broadly. Increase existing or surge production and/or repurpose manufacturing facilities to produce essential health supplies such as face masks, hand sanitizer and ventilators. Leverage and repurpose other corporate capabilities and assets such as laboratories and logistics/distribution networks. Convert hotels and restaurants to produce and deliver essential products and services. Use brands and marketing to spread public health messages that promote consumer awareness of preventative measures such as handwashing and physical distancing, and provide accurate and up-to-date health information.</td>
<td>Extend access to paid sick leave, support remote working, and support hourly employees, contractors and factory workers financially. Support small-scale suppliers by, for example, changing payment terms and conditions to address short-term cash flow issues. Increase accessibility to essential products and services that impact livelihoods by reducing prices, loosening usage or financing terms, offering flexible refund policies and waiving late fees. Maintain rigorous ethics and compliance systems to limit increases in price gouging, counterfeiting, corruption and other unethical activities that damage smaller businesses and low-income consumers the most.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHILANTHROPY</strong></td>
<td>Explore ways to leverage corporate philanthropy, employee engagement and social investment to support the most vulnerable and ensure that community voices are heard.</td>
<td>Provide flexible, emergency or unrestricted support grants to nonprofit organizations working on the health crisis and other social challenges at the community level such as food banks and shelters. Provide free products and services to hospitals and health workers. Support employees who have medical expertise and other relevant skills to volunteer. Explore support for employee giving programs and online funding platforms.</td>
<td>Provide cash grants or emergency loans to small businesses or workers. Provide funding to organizations supporting small businesses. Provide grants to organizations supporting low-income and at-risk populations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>POLICY ENGAGEMENT</strong></td>
<td>Engage in policy dialogue, awareness raising and institution-strengthening partnerships to support those who are most vulnerable.</td>
<td>Support government efforts to collect data and disseminate evidence-based information on health. Contribute directly or assist in financing essential health R&amp;D. Engage with governments to understand and mitigate food security risks alongside health risks.</td>
<td>Advocate for governments to support better workers’ protection, small businesses and social safety nets as part of economic support packages. Advocate for continued trade and open borders for essential products and services.</td>
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Access more resources and get involved at [SnipTfp.org/C19_Reg](http://SnipTfp.org/C19_Reg)
## ACTIONS

### LIVES: HEALTH & SAFETY
- Put people first. Identify vulnerable stakeholders in the company’s operations, value chain and communities. Identify the most salient human rights and economic risks they face and develop plans to address these through enhanced policies, processes, products, services, technologies, financing mechanisms and business models.
- In line with official advice, provide physical distancing and hygiene guidance and infrastructure to reassure employees and the public.
- Ensure revised hygiene practices are incorporated permanently into business health & safety training practices.
- Give returning employees access to mental health and wellbeing tools.
- Through brands and marketing, help disseminate evidence-based information on health and tackle the spread of misinformation on COVID-19 and vaccine use.
- Tackle impact of growth in single-use face-masks, gloves and other equipment on the environment.

### LIVELIHOODS: JOBS & INCOMES
- Continue cash flow and payment terms support to suppliers, distributors and customers.
- Provide your small business suppliers or retailers with health information and resources to use with their employees and/or customers to help them safely reopen.
- Support new working patterns such as staggered work times, flexible working and remote working to ease transition back to work and ease pressure on public transport.
- Promote awareness of the enterprises that are reopening in your value chain and community to help them communicate that they are open for business.

### LEARNING: EDUCATION & SKILLS
- Help employees with training, new digital skills and opportunities as work patterns shift.
- Provide advice and learning resources to small businesses and sign-post them to third-party resources.

## CORE BUSINESS

- Explore ways to leverage corporate philanthropy, employee engagement and social investment to support the most vulnerable and ensure that community voices are heard.
- Support WHO and other funding efforts to find a COVID-19 vaccine.
- Continue to provide flexible and unrestricted funding support to NGOs partners as they rebuild their wider funding support base.
- Support workers’ and wider community access to COVID-19 testing and to the vaccine when it becomes available, especially for those who are most vulnerable.
- Focus on priority gaps such as food security, shelter and health access.

## PHILANTHROPY

- Engage in policy dialogue, awareness raising and institution-strengthening partnerships to support those who are most vulnerable.
- Work with governments to support the science-based phased easing of lockdown measures.
- Support government efforts to reduce post-lockdown risks via, for example, extended testing and contact tracing.
- Work with governments to review required hygiene and other occupational health and safety measures and procedures in different sectors to enable safe options for return to work.

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT

- Make the case for governments to incentivise new working patterns such as staggered work times, flexible working and remote working to ease transition back to work and reduce pressure on public transport.
- Ensure that ongoing economic relief packages support the most vulnerable households and small businesses.
- Seek to bring governments into partnerships on digital inclusion, encouraging governments to co-fund or host learning content and learning platforms for the most vulnerable.
### ACTIONS

#### CORE BUSINESS

*Put people first. Identify vulnerable stakeholders in the company’s operations, value chain and communities. Identify the most salient human rights and economic risks they face and develop plans to address these through enhanced policies, processes, products, services, technologies, financing mechanisms and business models.*

- **Plan ahead for how worker health and workplace hygiene will be permanently improved. For example, ensure permanent hygiene infrastructure in workplaces to develop long-term handwashing behaviour change and introduce new routines such as a “clean desk day” employee call to action.**
- **Redraft existing policies on sexual harassment and domestic violence to account for remote working and digital threats.**
- **Broaden focus on health and safety to establish corporate wellbeing programmes.**
- **Seize opportunities created by COVID-19 to set and embed environment and health targets into business strategies.**

#### LIVES: HEALTH & SAFETY

- **Adopt a living wage strategy with a yearly plan for progress.**
- **Amend working practices to extend remote working and flexible working.**
- **Provide support to small enterprises to adapt to new market realities such as a shift in consumer buying habits to online, or long-term disruptions to global supply chains.**
- **Build the longer-term resilience of supply and distribution chains, and scenario plan the risks to small business suppliers and workers.**

#### LIVELIHOODS: JOBS & INCOMES

- **Support the growth and evolution of online conferences and events to replace the traditional model of large in-person gatherings.**
- **Invest in content and digital platforms to support effective life-long learning for workers and enterprises.**
- **Document and share what the crisis teaches us about effective partnership working. Agree how to adjust partnership and business practices in the future in response to this learning.**

#### LEARNING: EDUCATION & SKILLS

- **Fund initiatives to train and empower teachers.**
- **Support local civil society reskilling and retraining schemes.**

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#### PHILANTHROPY

*Explore ways to leverage corporate philanthropy, employee engagement and social investment to support the most vulnerable and ensure that community voices are heard.*

- **Build on the COVID-19 experience to enhance employee volunteering programs.**
- **Support workers’ access to a vaccine when it becomes available.**

#### POLICY ENGAGEMENT

*Engage in policy dialogue, awareness raising and institution-strengthening partnerships to support those who are most vulnerable.*

- **Through products, services, brands and marketing, prepare for / mitigate risks of a resurgence of COVID-19 and other public health crises and support hygiene behaviour change.**
- **Partner with governments and civil society to strengthen health systems, food systems, infrastructure and access for the most vulnerable.**
- **Partner with governments and civil society to accelerate action on climate change.**

- **Advocate for governments to support better workers’ protection, small businesses and social safety nets as part of support packages.**
- **Advocate for continued trade and open borders for essential products and services, especially food and medicines.**
- **Work in partnership with other companies, governments, donors and civil society to build a supportive ecosystem for small businesses and workers to help them better withstand future shocks.**
- **Continue to recognise and improve livelihoods for essential workers and first responders.**
ENDNOTES

1 https://businessfightspoverty.org/articles/covid-19-response-centre/#o7459ff0829a2
2 The Business and COVID-19 Response Framework presented in this paper on opportunities for business engagement on supporting vulnerable stakeholders was developed by Business Fights Poverty and Jane Nelson, Director, Corporate Responsibility Initiative, Harvard Kennedy School as part of the Business Fights Poverty Business and COVID-19 Response (https://snipbfp.org/coronavirus) and is based on the original framework developed by Jane Nelson.
3 https://businessfightspoverty.org/business-and-covid-19/
4 https://businessfightspoverty.org/articles/covid-19-response-centre/#oaf3d0e0e2815
5 https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300
6 https://www.unglobalcompact.org/what-is-gc/mission/principles
7 https://www.ft.com/content/2b34269a-73f8-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca
8 https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/may/03/universal-basic-income-coronavirus-shocks
12 In a forthcoming report, Business Fights Poverty explores in more detail what the role of investors might be in supporting this journey.
14 https://snipbfp.org/BusinessRoundtable01
21 https://businessfightspoverty.org/articles/five-golden-rules-of-successful-partnerships/
22 See the NGO Action Toolkit: https://businessfightspoverty.org/articles/covid-19-response-centre/#oaf3d0e0e2815
28 http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/news/building-back-better-a-net-zero-emissions-recovery/
29 See for example this article in the Wall Street Journal: https://www.wsj.com/articles/sustainability-was-corporate-americas-buzzword-this-crisis-changes-that-11588352181?shareToken=stda12ee4307e61495095a69cd5c2863208 and the thread it generated on LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/susamchpseren_sustainability-was-corporate-americas-buzzword-activity-6662135674197557249-z1cO
30 This box summarises the points made in our original Response Framework.
31 https://www.eiu.com/n Novel-Coronavirus-oubreak/
39 https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-closed-for-coronavirus-online-work-wont-count-11584643049
43 https://cleanclothes.org/issues/identity
45 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/the-coronavirus-fallout-may-be-worse-for-women-than-men-heres-why/
46 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/the-coronavirus-fallout-may-be-worse-for-women-than-men-heres-why/