

Safely back to work in the new normal



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A disciplined return to work will be key to economic recovery in the wake of the pandemic

The COVID-19 health crisis and continued lockdown in many markets is posing unparalleled challenges to people and economies around the world. Governments are setting up unprecedented economic support measures to assist businesses and workers alike. Nevertheless, as businesses of all sizes in many different sectors are struggling to survive, huge numbers of people are losing their jobs and facing serious financial uncertainty. With this pandemic far from over, and its impact likely to be felt for years to come, one thing is certain: the world of work is never going to be the same.

To limit the economic downturn and impact on people's ability to earn a living, the labor market and all its stakeholders must quickly adjust to this new reality – a new normal where physical distancing (synonymous with social distancing for the purposes of this report) and other strict measures will be an integral part of all workplace processes for a considerable time to come. This will include carving a clear path for greater workforce flexibility, which includes working remotely.

Urgent action is therefore needed today to be fully prepared to get people quickly back to work safely when the moment is right. At the time of release of this paper some European countries have announced steps to actively open up sectors for economic activity again.

Getting that timing right is crucial for the economy; an estimation for the German economy indicates that an extra week of lockdown results in ~0.5% additional loss of annual GDP, translating into further falls in employment and large income losses for workers. Timing will differ per country and sector, and relies on learnings from the waves and stages of the pandemic across the world.

Organizing and implementing a safe return to work amidst the disruption of the pandemic poses significant challenges. Avoiding a second wave of infection is an important consideration. Unparalleled collaboration and coordination by diverse stakeholder groups – ranging from employers and governments to labor unions, institutions and, of course, workers themselves - is needed to prepare for the new normal in the workplace. To provide the greatest measure of certainty, it is critical that best practices be shared across countries and industries, and that new channels are created to scale effective protocols at speed. Without clear processes and guidelines, individuals may fear for their health when returning to work and businesses may be reticent to reopen.

Given the sense of urgency, the HR services industry has formed an alliance spearheaded by Randstad NV, the Adecco Group and ManpowerGroup. Together, the industry – as the world's largest private sector employer and labor market expert* – endeavors to make a vital contribution to the process of preparing for the new normal, and expedite getting people safely back to work and

businesses and economies running again. Employers, trade unions, and NGOs will all be invited to collaborate. At the same time, the alliance will reach out to governments to support, stimulate and endorse these efforts.

The longer the current situation continues, the greater the impact will be on the economy, and the rate of job losses will continue to increase. The time to join together and take action is now. The HR services industry is calling on other stakeholders to join forces to enable companies and workers to return to work quickly in a way that is both safe and productive, ensuring security for all.

A snapshot of the economic impact of the corona crisis so far

- 3.3 million Americans applied for unemployment benefits in the week ending on March 21. The following week, 6.9 million applied, followed by another 6.6 million in the week ending April 4. Prior to this crisis, the highest number of unemployment applications ever received in one week was 695,000 (in 1982).
- Full or partial lockdown measures are now affecting almost 2.7 billion workers, representing around 81% of the world's workforce. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is expecting 195 million job losses worldwide in Q2, and 12 million in Europe alone.
- Many countries have responded with extraordinary levels of both fiscal and monetary stimulus to soften the economic impact of the crisis. For example, the United States recently passed a \$2 trillion stimulus package.
- While it is incredibly hard to predict the impact of the virus on the global economy for the time to come, there are several scenarios developed by McKinsey in collaboration with Oxford Economics. 40% to 50% of discretionary consumer spending might not occur; this drop in discretionary spending translates into a roughly 10% reduction in GDP in affected regions.
- In the scenario 'Virus contained; growth rebound', most countries are expected to experience sharp GDP decline in Q2, which would be unheard of in the post-WWII era. The annualized GDP drop would be -8%.
- In another scenario, 'Virus resurgence; slow long-term growth' indicates a 2020 GDP drop of 13%. The United States and Europe would face a GDP decline of 35% to 40% at an annualized rate in Q2. Most countries would take more than two years to recover to pre-virus levels of GDP.

Source: McKinsey/ILO

* See Box 2

Organizing a safe return to work

Amid the first cautious signs that the worst of the pandemic may have passed in some countries, initiatives focused on helping people return to work are beginning to appear. Governments, however, have made it clear that it will be a cautious, step-by-step process.

We will be dealing with a new normal, in which physical distancing, extra hygiene measures, regular testing, and other solutions that have yet to be decided upon will be crucial for the foreseeable future. To optimize people's safety as they return to work, clear guidelines, processes and protocols must therefore be in place to support both employees and employers. This will need to be organized per country, per sector, and ultimately per company.

Health and safety protocols will need to be updated for the temporary 'economy driven by physical distancing'. Rather than reinventing the wheel, countries, sectors and companies should be able to build on existing best practices and share these globally. The HR services industry is ready to help organize and implement this.

How the HR services industry can help

The added value of the global HR services industry is significant in the current situation. Specifically, players in the HR services industry:

- are active across nations and sectors, work for both large enterprises and SMEs, and can thus leverage best practices of countries that are ahead of the curve and sectors that remained open;
- have in-depth knowledge of labor market processes in various sectors and companies;
- work as intermediaries between employers and employees – as such, they understand the problems/challenges faced by each and serve both interests;
- have large global networks covering all relevant stakeholders;
- have proven agility with changing circumstances, and in helping clients and talent to prepare for the future – it is their core business.
- have extensive experience with the organization and implementation of health and safety protocols, working closely with local and company OH&S experts;

- are seasoned advisors in flexible workforce management – crucial in the context of having to implement and comply with physical distancing requirements;
- have millions of people on the ground.

The HR services industry pledges to help apply their collective experience, fostering connection between the various stakeholder groups and supporting the sharing of best practices. In addition, the industry will help address the concerns of workers, so they do not feel that they have to sacrifice their health and safety for their financial security. And finally, the industry will support employers, giving them confidence that the protocols and policies they have in place are up to date and in line with best practices across the globe.

The HR services industry in key facts and figures

- In 2018, 160,000 agencies in the organized HR services industry placed approx. 58 million people in jobs across a great variety of sectors, supported by 2.4 million own staff/consultants.
- Yearly placements totaled 11 million in Europe, 16.8 million in the US, and 3.8 million in Japan.
- Sectoral distribution in Europe: 40% manufacturing, 40% services, 10% construction, 5% public administration, 1% agriculture (and 4% others).
- On a global average, around 40% of individuals are either unemployed or inactive prior to starting out in agency work.
- On a global average, 74% of agency workers are still employed 12 months after their initial assignment (in a variety of contracts).
- On a global average, more than 50% of agency workers are younger than 30 and the share of women is often also higher than the average employed population.
- The HR services industry gives millions of agency workers access to training. For example, the FAFTT (French social fund for agency workers, governed by agencies and trade unions in the sector) provided almost 60,000 training courses to agency workers in 2018. Such shared training funds also exist in the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, and Switzerland.

Source: WEC Economic Report and WEC Social Impact report

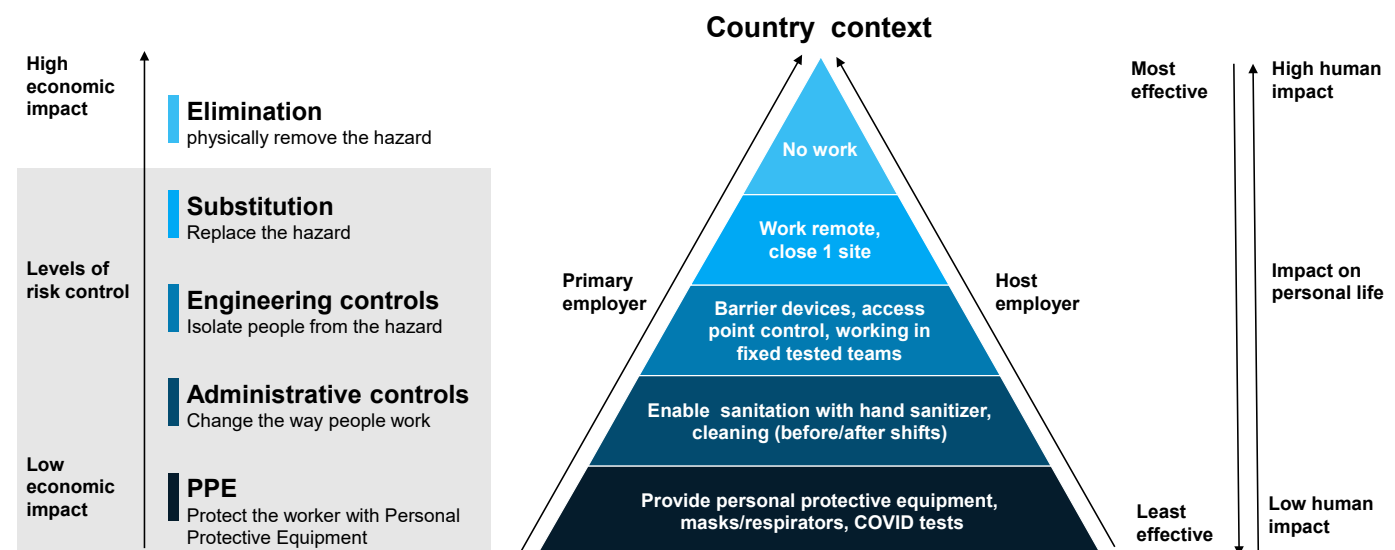
Enabling a safe return to work

In close collaboration with employers and placed workers, HR services providers have long embraced and integrated the required health and safety measures, such as governmental and sector regulations. This is part of the sector's regular activities when placing workers on site. The added value of players in the HR services industry lies in their ability to share knowledge and expertise about existing best practices in the different Health & Safety approaches across sectors and countries. They will be able to help coalesce the sector's combined knowledge and expertise.

- Experts in the sector can provide access to company cases to learn from peers in the same or different sectors.
- They can unlock existing material and possible approaches based on individual challenges.
- They can help employers navigate the plans to restart their business based on best practices and connect them to the right contacts (locally or internationally).
- They can offer practical support in terms of flexible supply of labor, workforce management, implementing remote working, transitioning, training and skills development, and more.

How can COVID-19 be integrated in this existing H&S approach?

As part of various governmental Health & Safety intervention strategies (e.g. OSHA and NIOSH, in the US), the same approach that is rooted in safety management systems can be adapted to integrate other critical areas of influence, such as COVID-19 prevention and strategic recovery. To define the levels of risk and the right approach in specific circumstances, use can be made of an adapted version of NIOSH's (National Institute for Occupational Safety / Health) Hierarchy of Controls:



Share sector/ country practices: achieving acceptable levels of risk as well as limiting economic impact

How does this help companies?

The pyramid provides employers with insight into how they can restart their company in a safe and balanced way, while mitigating the COVID-19 challenges. Recommendations are advisory in nature, informational in content, and intended to assist employers in providing a safe and healthy workplace, thus minimizing the economic impact posed by the corona crisis and enabling access to livelihoods for many workers again.

How can the HR services industry help individual businesses?

Many organizations are now at a critical period, as they try to rebalance responsible health and safety and their duty of care as an employer with the economic impact of the lockdown. How can a business restart responsibly? As we want to achieve acceptable levels of safety and security as well as limiting economic impact, we will first need to find the right balance in the order of controls. There are examples of sectors that are still (partly) operational under specific conditions (e.g., construction, food distribution centers, health care, cargo transport, supermarkets, etc.). We can learn from these sectors to help other businesses adapt to the new normal.

Next steps

The HR services industry is issuing a call to action and reaching out to all relevant stakeholders and asking them to play their part. To start with, the initiators of the alliance will ask more players in the HR industry to get on board. Employers, trade unions, and NGOs invited to collaborate. At the same time, the alliance reaches out to governments to support, stimulate and endorse these efforts.

The initial focus will be on companies in five sectors and ten countries/regions. The coalition will liaise with stakeholders on a country-by-country level in the coming weeks.

Sectors:	Countries/regions:
Transport & Logistics	Belgium
Automotive	France
Manufacturing & Life Sciences	Germany
Construction	Italy
Food	Japan
	Netherlands
	Nordics; Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark
	Spain
	United Kingdom
	United States

Get in touch

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Appendix

Safely back to work COVID protocols

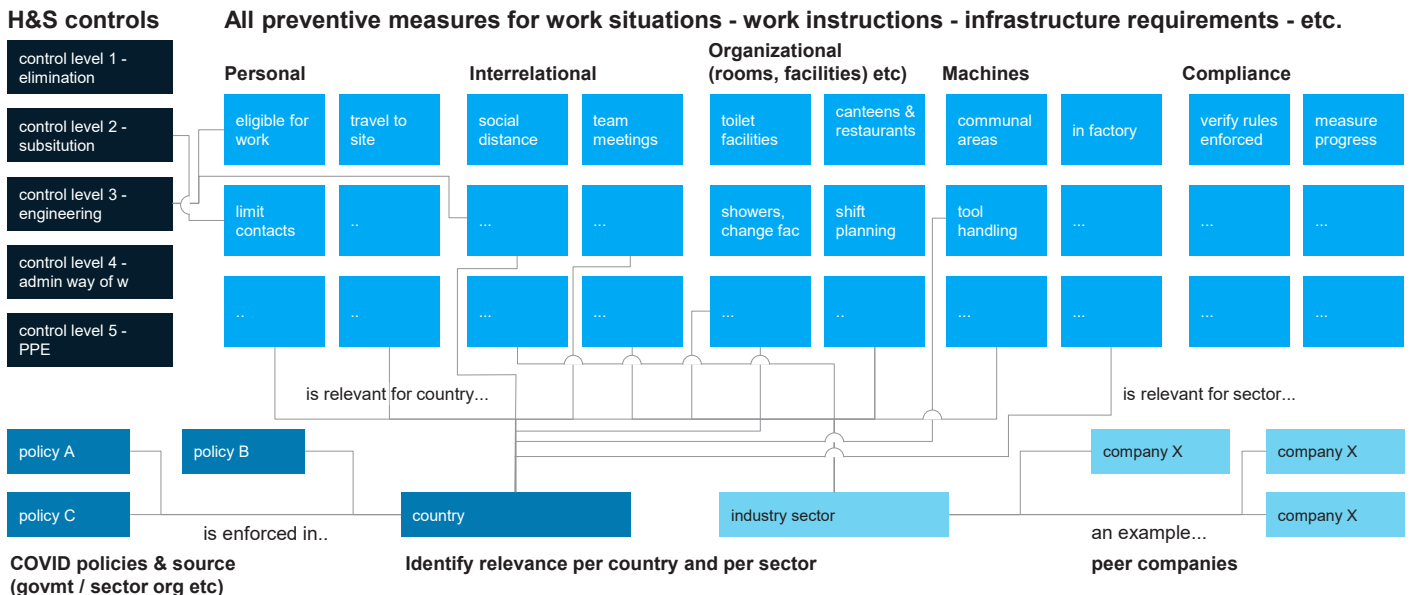
Example of template

COVID-19 PROTOCOL	PROTOCOL				
	WORK SITUATION	PREVENTATIVE MEASURES	WORK INSTRUCTIONS	REQUIREMENTS	
GENERAL FOR COUNTRY: NETHERLANDS					
PERSONAL	Eligible to work	Before going to work	Do not go to work by employee at Corona infection of yourself or a family member. Don't go to work if you have a cold. Don't go to work when a family member has a fever. Do not go back to work until the employee or family member has at least 24 hours without complaints.	Communicate to employees instructions when to stay home	When available, provide COVID test to employees
PERSONAL	Personal hygiene	At work	Don't shake hands. Regularly wash your hands and/or use disinfectant hand gel with at least 70% alcohol. Wash your hands at least 6 times a day, according to the instruction. In any case before eating, after visiting the toilet, after travelling by public transport, after cleaning. Do not touch the face or as little as possible, sneeze / cough in the elbow, bring your own paper handkerchiefs. And throw them away after using them once. Then wash your hands.	Communicate to employees personal hygiene instructions at work	Provide soap & hand sanitizers
INTERRELATIONAL	Remote work	When at work from home	Organize homework if the function allows it.	Enable online access to documents and organize virtual meetings	
INTERRELATIONAL	Social distance	When travelling to work	Keep a distance of 1.5 metres as much as possible, when transporting to and from the workplace	Consider other travel options instead of public transportation e.g. cycling to work	
INTERRELATIONAL	Social distance	When at work at business site	Keep a distance of 1.5 metres as much as possible at the workplace itself.	Adjust the work accordingly and design the workplace accordingly. If less than 1.5 meters is unavoidable, follow strict RDM hygiene rules 3&4 Work as much as possible in permanent	

Column names

- Dimension (personal, interrelational, organizational, machine or compliance)
- Topic name (e.g. access the entrance)
- Measure (e.g., e.g., measure staff temperatures at the access gate)
- Work situation (what is the challenge in the work situation)
- Effect measurement (what is the aspired effect and how to measure this)
- Work instructions (what and how to implement)
- Infrastructural requirements (needed means of support)
- Addressed risk control level

Template that is developed to collect protocols related to COVID-19

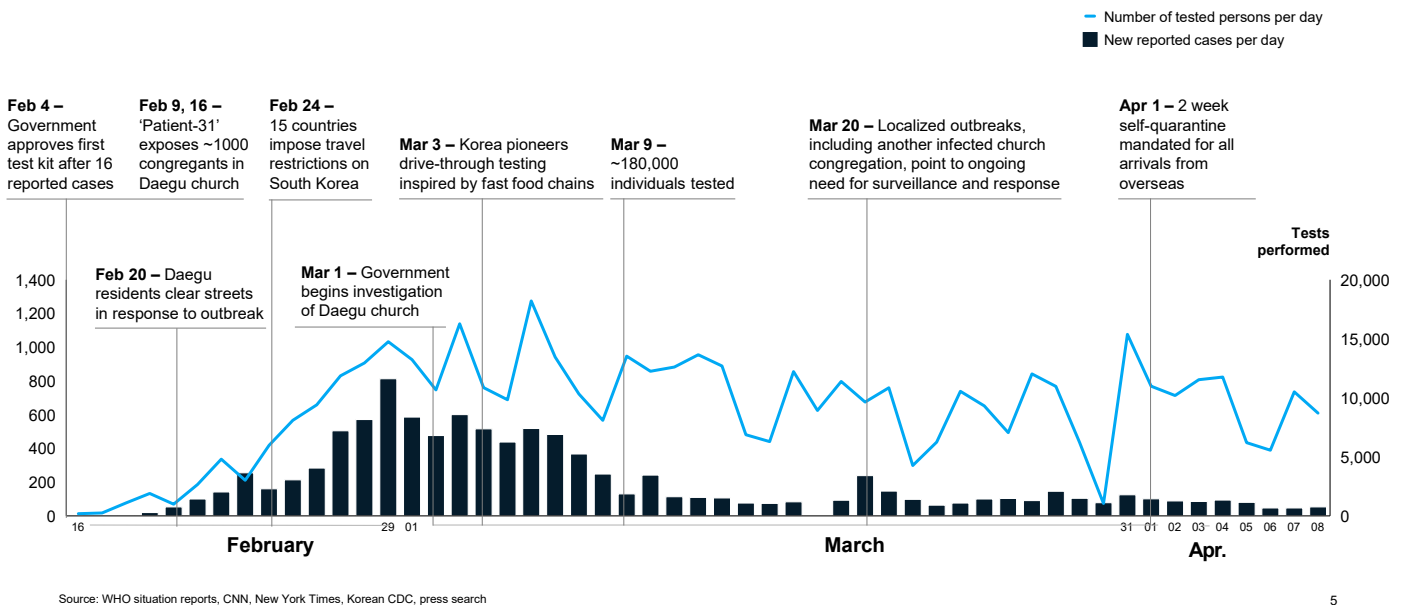


Global grid - safely back to work COVID protocols ontology explained

From shutdowns to the reopening of economies: a continuous balancing act

Case example South Korea

CURRENT AS OF APRIL 8 2020

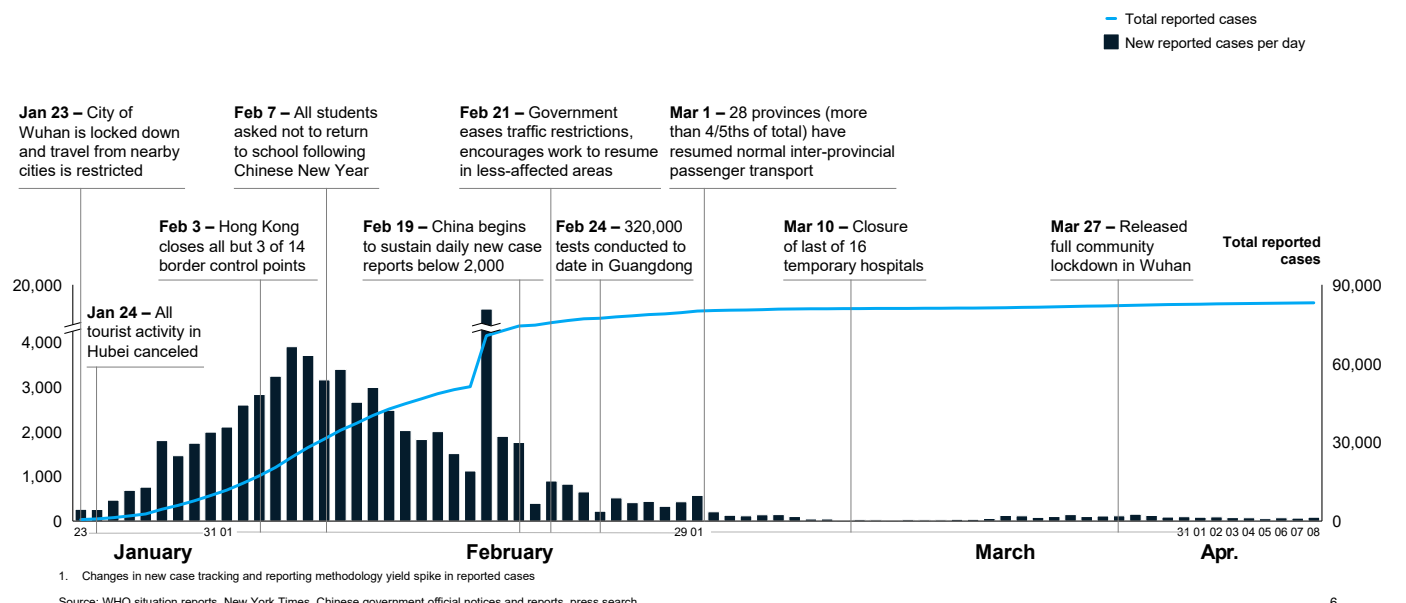


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Number of reported cases and tested persons in South Korea per day

Case example China

CURRENT AS OF APRIL 8 2020



6

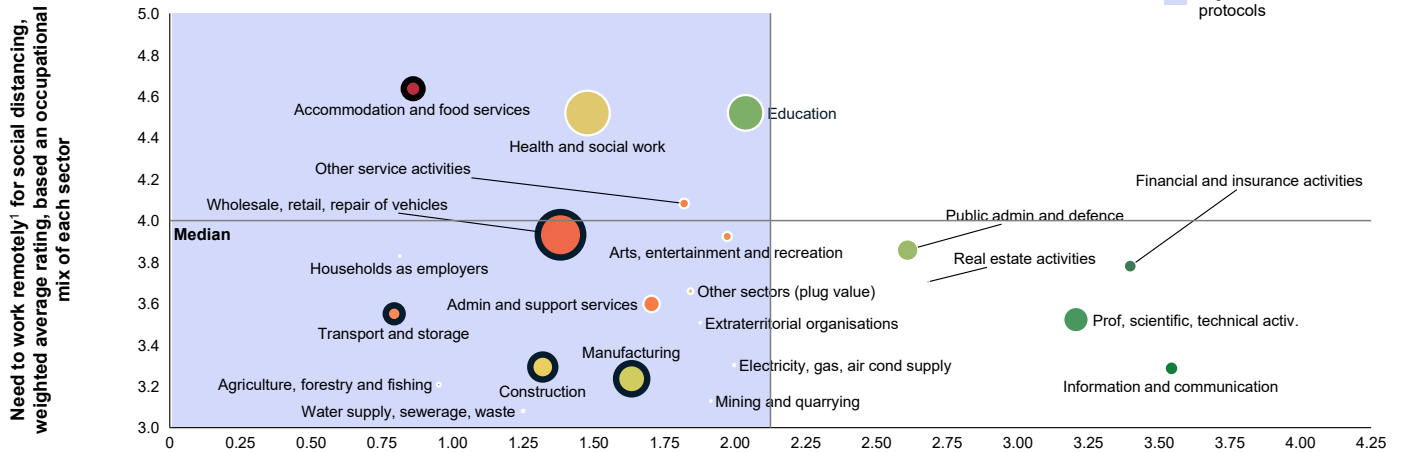
Number of reported and tested persons in China per day

Preparing to get back to work - safely

UK job market analysis

Bubble size and number = total employees in 2016/17, thousands;

Bubble color = Weighted average median hourly wage: **dark red** = £9.5; **dark green** = £19.5



Possible to work remotely, weighted average rating, based on occupational mix of each sector

1. Based on whether occupation requires face-to-face interactions with a large number of people or whether normal place of work typically has a high density

Source: ONS; TA analysis

Certain industries seem in higher need for protocols due to lower possibility to work remotely (UK economy analysis)

Safety and health protocols



Access control and quarantine

- Set clear policies for workplace access
- Measure body temperature at building entry
- Conduct random visual and temperature checks during workday
- Request employee quarantine when slightest COVID-19 symptom shows up
- Track and document all building entries and exits



Remote working

- Encourage remote work in all roles that do not require physical presence
- Provide webinars on remote-working and - leadership best practices



Work and shift planning

- Create differentiated shift plans and break times for minimum congestion on work premises
- Split shifts and disperse work- places/desks to ensure minimum distance
- Identify and isolate critical employee groups
- Define contingency plans for work- place closures



Hygiene and health

- Set clear policies for physical distancing in workplace
- Establish daily disinfection procedures
- Promote mandatory health and hygiene protocols (e.g., hand washing, mask use, glove use) for employees
- Stop elevator use whenever possible
- Discontinue use of shared items (e.g., pens, phones)
- Provide critical supplies



Compliance and communication

- Communicate at least once per day about purpose and changes on measures in effect
- Perform random checks in all departments on full list of measures
- Report COVID-19 symptoms to relevant health authorities
- Clear all protocols with local authorities

European companies are developing a range of safety and health protocols for COVID-19

References

“[Europe needs to prepare now to get back to work—safely](#),” McKinsey & Company, April 2020

“[How to restart national economies during the coronavirus crisis](#),” McKinsey & Company, April 2020

“[Safeguarding our lives and our livelihoods: The imperative of our time](#),” McKinsey & Company, March 2020