



Ensuring Resilience of Global Supply of Essential Services in Combating COVID-19 1 April 2020

As the world continues to grapple with the global COVID-19 pandemic, the members of the Global Services Coalition wish to express solidarity with the work of governments and international institutions to combat its spread. As associations representing all segments of the services industry, we call on governments to take a range of critical measures to maintain resilience in the supply of essential services during this time of crisis.

Financial services, ICT services, retail and distribution, and transportation and logistics services are all examples, though not exhaustive, of critical enablers of trade in goods and agri-food products, as well as services that enhance social welfare. As governments curtail commercial activity and social interaction to fight the global pandemic, it is critical for them to allow for continuation of these and other essential services, while of course ensuring the health and safety of the personnel involved.

- Cargo flights must be able to continue in order to move critical life-saving medical equipment and supplies, as well as other goods that consumers rely for daily sustenance. It is crucial that governments work together to develop standards that ensure – within reasonable safeguards – that cargo pilots are not subject to mandatory 14-day quarantine periods. Government should also consult about facilitating greater use of passenger aircraft for essential deliveries of critical supplies.
- Sophisticated medical equipment and therapies cannot be put in place without key medical services. For instance, the work of individual service suppliers, such as technicians that service (e.g. maintenance & repair services) critical medical equipment, is also crucial to fighting the pandemic. Governments should therefore ensure that travel restrictions justifiably put in place do not have unintended consequences that inhibit the cross-border movement of critical services.
- Banks, insurers, reinsurers, electronic payment service suppliers, mutual funds and pensions, and related professions supporting them, including call centre and in-person customer support functions, must be allowed to facilitate the purchase and delivery of those goods and food supplies. These are services that citizens and businesses rely on and ensure stability in global financial markets. Proposals in some markets to retroactively add coverage for pandemics and other causes of loss not included in existing insurance policies – and therefore not funded by premium payments – risk the stability of the insurance industry and should be avoided.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) services are crucial and must remain available so that essential supply chains can continue to function and “digital” options can help governments and citizens to overcome the challenges of “lock-downs” and

“social distancing”, It is these business services that will allow continuous access to the goods and services that are needed to protect against COVID-19.

- Some ICT services are especially critical. They include: remote exchanges among research teams to fight against the virus and look for medicines and vaccines; e-health services to allow daily medical services be delivered to millions of patients; e-learning services to allow teachers to continue the education of millions of pupils and students; teleworking facilities to allow workers to stay at home but continue to sustain economic activity; and connectivity services that minimize the adverse affects of social distancing. Free flow of anonymous medical/health data among trusted partners should be ensured in this context.

It is therefore vital that countries cooperate multilaterally to avoid constricting the global supply of these essential enabling services through an uncoordinated patchwork of country lockdowns. There have been public statements highlighting the need for international cooperation in facilitating delivery of essential goods. But governments need to focus equally on the critical role of essential enabling services. The evolution of the crisis has demonstrated the resilience and innovative capacity of the global services sector, which has made rapid shifts in work practices and supply-chain adaptation. Governments must broaden their approach to recognise essential services as systemically critical to the smooth functioning of the global economy at this time.

Lastly, the necessary measures to respond to COVID-19 cannot become cover for countries to introduce unjustifiable protectionist measures further disrupting the global economy. This is the time for building bridges, not barriers. We wholly support the World Trade Organization Director-General in his appeal of 24 March for governments to be transparent about the measures that they are taking nationally to respond to COVID-19, including in services sectors. We also support the G20 Summit statement of 26 March. An open, coordinated and transparent approach can only reinforce the spirit of global collaboration that is essential to combat this pandemic.