

LOOKING AFTER EACH OTHER BETTER

**How public health and
well-being can be put before
short-term economic interests**

Re  **set**

**lessons from
lockdown**

LOOKING AFTER EACH OTHER BETTER

Even as the human world paused in the path of a pandemic it was obvious that people – whether in power or members of the public – were on a steep learning curve. Lessons are everywhere – about past mistakes leaving communities vulnerable and divided – but also of humanity’s extraordinary ability to work together and solve problems. This is one of three briefings that look at a special time when there was almost universal acceptance that public health, and the public interest must come before short term economic concerns.

They seek to capture some of those lessons from lockdown – insights that might help to reset how societies organise themselves and build back better from the crisis. The pandemic hit at a time when chronic inequality and the climate emergency equally demand action. This briefing looks at the rapid introduction of steps to look after each other better. The other briefings look at measures to make more space for people and nature and, given that ecological decline creates conditions for pandemics, how especially in relatively wealthy countries, better lives are possible with less ‘stuff’.

What are some of the lessons for looking after each other better?



Money can be found to support incomes and livelihoods

Street homelessness can be ended



Involving people in the delivery of important public services can be effective and empowering

Special provision can be quickly made by wider society to meet the particular needs of groups like, often low paid, ‘key workers’, and those who are more vulnerable like elderly people



People’s behaviour can change overnight to help protect others

Working hours, places and practices can be rapidly adapted to meet new needs



Communities can come together to look after each other



The global community has been through a wide range of trauma during the Covid19 pandemic. It has been a time of fear, about incomes and food, as well as fear of infection and danger for the people we love. For every weak or late government response there has been another swift, comprehensive reaction that showed it's possible to rip up rule books when the need is there. Paradoxically there have also been many positive experiences at individual, community and societal levels during this enforced hiatus. For those in the Global North in particular, most of whom are consuming well beyond current planetary limits, being shut inside has meant doing more with less. Millions have spent time at home with family or walking outside, grateful for the internet to enable communication but also returning to homemade activities. Many have delighted in clear skies and clean air – even in cities – without airplanes and traffic jams, communities have emerged from nowhere to support each other with mutual aid groups, and the return of nature was startling in its speed and variety. There are many potential lessons that could be sifted from the tragedy about how we might run the world differently – with more kindness, less waste and a greater awareness of our place in the natural world.

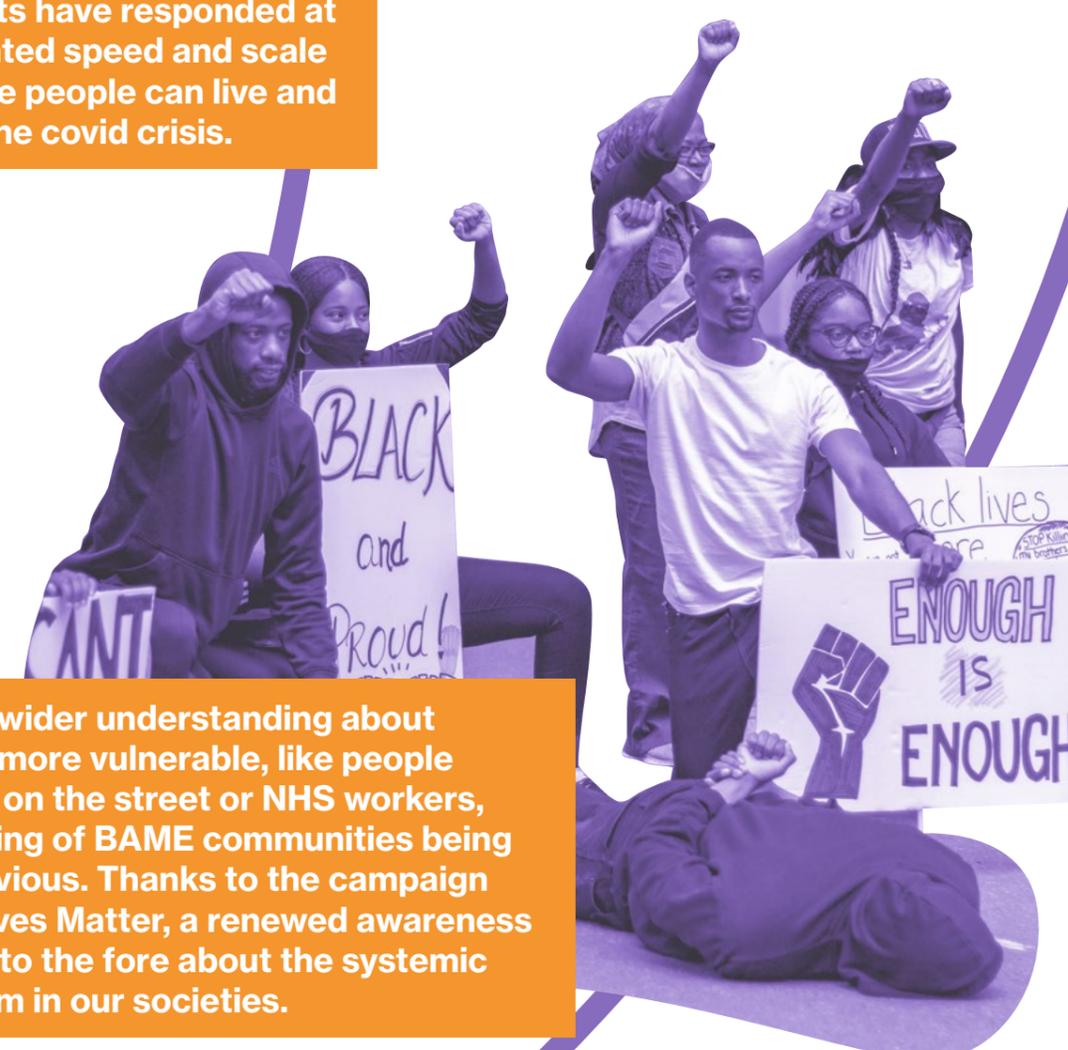
After months of self-isolation, it is clear that – in moments of crisis – people are often a great deal kinder to each other than we might have been led to believe. In particular, this briefing is about how:

People around the world have flocked to sign up for volunteering and mutual aid schemes.

Governments have responded at unprecedented speed and scale to make sure people can live and eat during the covid crisis.

There is much wider understanding about those who are more vulnerable, like people in care homes, on the street or NHS workers, with the suffering of BAME communities being particularly obvious. Thanks to the campaign group Black Lives Matter, a renewed awareness has also come to the fore about the systemic nature of racism in our societies.

This briefing looks at some possible policy responses that might make sure we can keep the benefits of the crisis once the virus itself is no longer a daily threat.



EVIDENCE-BASED HOPE

Responses around the world have been varied and at the same time revealed a common humanity. With and without government leadership, people have risen to the challenge of taking care of those they love and the communities in which they live. In Belarus, president Aleksandr Lukashenko dismissed the pandemic, describing fears of the virus as a “psychosis”, and prescribed vodka and a sauna instead of social distancing. But some Belarusians took matters into their own hands and implemented a “[people’s quarantine](#)”. Volunteers worked to crowdfund, source, and deliver protective equipment to front-line hospital workers. Other grassroots efforts have seen people volunteering to sew and deliver masks, make meals for health care workers, and look after the pets of people in hospital with the virus. The people of Belarus were not alone.

People’s behaviour can change overnight to help protect others

One of the most common measures introduced to control the spread of Covid19 was the ‘stay at home’ order. Known as ‘lockdown’ instructions have been policed differently, with varying exemptions for ‘key workers’ and degrees of compulsion around the world. But, to an extraordinary degree, people complied. In the United States, by the end of March 2020, [stay-at-home orders](#)² covered 94% of the population, 308 million people. From Italy to France in Europe, and New Zealand in the southern hemisphere, lockdowns changed people’s lives overnight. Even in Donald Trump’s America, in spite of cases of high profile, organised non-compliance, polling showed large-scale public support for lockdown measures in the cause of public safety. [One study](#)³ showed majority public support for all of eight proposed policies including bans on movement outside of homes and even, where necessary, taking control of businesses. Another study showed [bipartisan support](#)⁴, 95% from Democrats, and 87% from Republicans, for the cancellation of major public events.

Wide ranging national circumstances make precise comparisons of responses difficult. Great differences were reported also within countries, for example, where poorer households were compelled by economic necessity, and by being disproportionately represented in ‘key worker’ categories, to keep leaving home. Nevertheless changes in response to lockdown were rapid and on a huge scale. Anonymised data from Google’s [mobility tracker](#)⁵ showed a big drop in visits by Americans to retail and recreational venues (places like restaurants, cafes, shopping centres, theme parks, museums, libraries, and movie theatres), against a baseline, up to the 9th May 2020. Figures for many European countries were much higher with France showing a 76% fall, the UK 78%, Spain 84%, Italy 63%, and less badly hit Germany still on 40%. In New Zealand, before the more recent easing of restrictions the figure was down 71%. In spite of sometimes conflicting official advice, in the US, even by mid July 2020, people’s travel to do with work was still down by 37% and use of transport hubs was down by around one third.

Money can be found to support incomes and livelihoods

The global pandemic has forced governments into action much more rapidly, faced with vast numbers of people who could not go to work and had no savings to rely on. Some have offered cash handouts, others replacement for wages at a lower rate, with other assistance such as loans and support for small businesses. These income support schemes pioneered by so many governments at breakneck speed in March 2020 include the UK furlough scheme and the more flexible German [Kurzarbeit system](#)⁶.

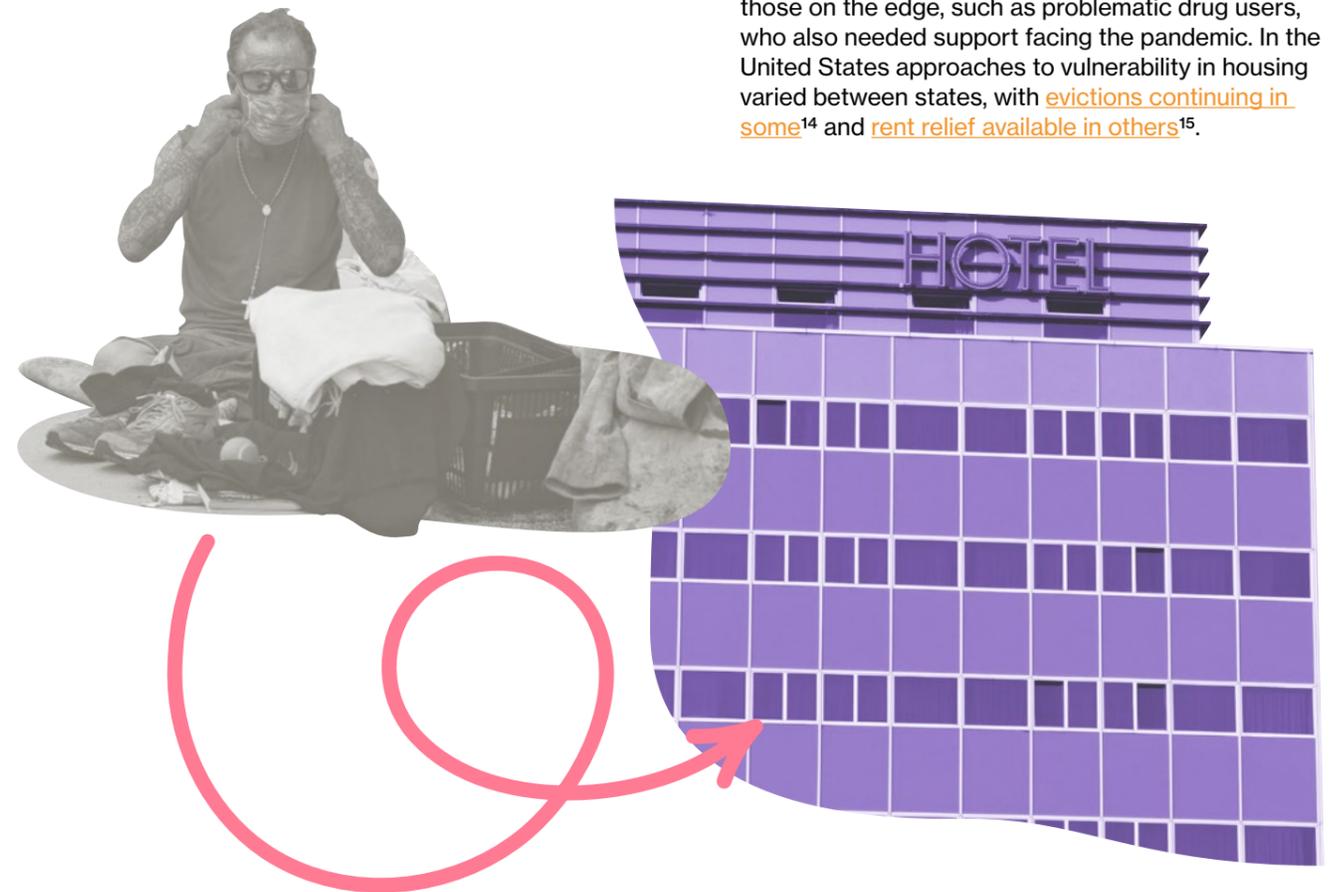
[Hong Kong](#)⁷ gave a one-off payment of HK\$10,000 (£985) and [Japan](#)⁸ made a one-off ¥100,000 (£930) to every citizen in response to the covid crisis. [Togo](#)⁹ introduced a new unconditional, mobile phone based cash transfer scheme for workers in the informal sector (about 85 per cent of the workforce) at around 30 per cent of the minimum wage.

Many governments expanded or introduced job retention schemes, protecting workers’ incomes and jobs, with the [OECD country tracker](#)¹⁰ keeping a comprehensive list. Despite several issues with the way these schemes were rolled out, it took courage for governments around the world to reject decades of flawed economic assumptions to make it happen.

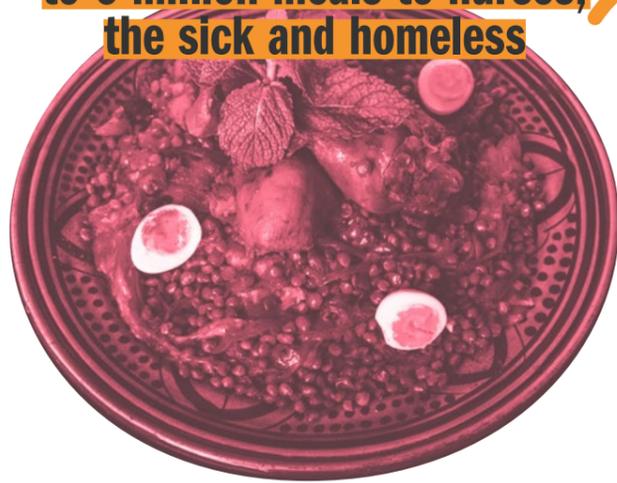
Street homelessness can be eliminated

Far from being an ‘unfortunate fact of life’, the Covid19 crisis showed that even with long-standing problems like street homelessness, tackling seemingly impossible issues can quickly become possible. In Belgium, in the city of Brussels, local authorities found 700 places in 11 hotels to [provide shelter](#)¹¹ for homeless people. In France, the government acted quickly to house vulnerable homeless people by requisitioning hotels and guest houses, with 170 opened in Paris alone in the first week of the crisis. The UK has a weakly regulated housing market where a high proportion of income goes towards rent. As a result the [threat of evictions](#)¹² is high, and temporary measures to protect against eviction were introduced, extended in the summer of 2020 in response to public pressure, which could be made longer term.

As part of an ‘Everyone In’ initiative during lockdown, street homelessness was almost ended overnight, when the government promised it would [house the homeless](#)¹³ within two days. One long-standing homelessness campaign group, Crisis, called it ‘extraordinary’ after decades of prevarication. Unfortunately, of course, those who were supposed to do the housing – the cash-strapped local authorities – found this difficult. But even so, a principle was understood that nobody should be left out in the cold. This also raised issues about how our societies treat those on the edge, such as problematic drug users, who also needed support facing the pandemic. In the United States approaches to vulnerability in housing varied between states, with [evictions continuing in some](#)¹⁴ and [rent relief available in others](#)¹⁵.



World Central Kitchen, which is now supplying up to 6 million meals to nurses, the sick and homeless



Communities can come together to look after each other

Helping out

In France people rushed to sign up as volunteers on local or national websites, and with other local support networks like [Solidarites](#)¹⁶, which opened their coronavirus food handout service on the very first day of the French lockdown on March 17. Eight days before the government finally announced new rules for lockdown in the UK, it was clear that nearly [250 mutual aid support groups](#)¹⁷ had already sprung up in every corner of the nation – and done so spontaneously. Something unexpected was going on. There are now around 4,000 of these in the UK alone, and that is not including the thousands of street and village level informal Whatsapp groups and the already existing community groups and charities – or brand new charities, like Eugene Pelzer's [Isolation Help Bexley](#)¹⁸ – that have shifted priorities to carry on the great task of caring for each other. Not only did 750,000 people volunteer via the UK government's website on its first day of operation – with many more doing so through local councils – but 60 percent of the entire UK population offered to help others at this time of crisis, and – by May – 47 per cent had already received help.

Nor is this just a European phenomenon. In the US, volunteers have signed up to support people online who feel isolated, and psychologists and therapists have come forward after an appeal by New York governor Andrew Cuomo to help people living alone with mental health problems. More than [50,000 Canadians also signed up](#)¹⁹ to help health authorities trace any contacts of people who found they were covid-positive.

The positive stitch-up

Nor does it include all those new groups or shifted objectives that are supporting public services in other ways. In Spain, [600 volunteer sewers](#)²⁰ produced 80,000 face masks in the first two months of the crisis. In the Pandau district of Berlin, a new website called [Newcomer Gegen Corona](#)²¹ (Newcomers against Corona) recruited refugees to do the same work.

In New York City, the founders of apron manufacturers Tilit, Jenny Goodman and Alex McCrery, supplied their seamstresses with machines and materials to create an entirely separate mask-making factory. In the UK, Becky Malby and her team of amateur sewers in Keighley, made scarce face masks for their local surgery. Harrogate Grammar School, a comprehensive in North Yorkshire, repurposed its design department as a PPE production line, and made more than 1,000 visors.

Cooking for each other

The hot meals problem has been tackled particularly successfully in community kitchens across the US, from Collective Fare in Brooklyn preparing over 6,000 meals for local family shelters, care homes and dialysis centres, to World Central Kitchen, which is now supplying up to 6 million meals to nurses, the sick and homeless. Meadowfield Primary School in Leeds, UK, where almost half the students are entitled to free school meals, provided hot meals for families to collect each day, and sent out 145 food parcels containing enough supplies for two weeks.

Involving people in the delivery of important public services can be effective and empowering

In the UK, medical students supported NHS workers by babysitting for children, buying groceries, or driving them to work. Their [National Health Supporters group](#)²² was soon getting up to 100 babysitting requests every day. In the US, the National and Community Service issued [a list of ways](#)²³ in which citizens could help support services by volunteering to check schools, run libraries, deliver meals to elderly people, donate blood and clean up the neighbourhoods. A charity in France called The association Resto des Zanimos, based in Toulouse, which usually cares for stray dogs – brought together volunteers offering to care for the pets of people providing frontline services and of people who have been hospitalised due to the virus and have no existing backup for pet care. In Spain, local people moved from fire fighting and looking after national parks to [cleaning care homes](#)²⁴ ready for the return of the elderly, using their skills to best effect while also gaining an appreciation for a sector about which they previously knew little.

This last aspect is an important element known as co-production, when people work alongside professional carers, teachers or doctors – not only as volunteers, but as part of their own recovery. Activities might include tutoring children, running support systems, organising singing or walking groups through a local doctor's surgery, and of course emergency short term mask and scrubs-set production. This has been made much more possible thanks to the generous response of people who appreciate the dangerous work being done by health and care home workers. Many – but by no means all – have been able to afford the time thanks to government support.

Special provision can be quickly made by wider society to meet the particular needs of groups such as often low paid, 'key workers', and those who are more vulnerable like elderly people

The pandemic popularised the terms 'essential' and 'key' workers. People who keep transport and health systems running and those who provide access also to essential goods. Working in these professions can often mean low pay and, in normal times, low recognition. But the pandemic revealed how important such roles in society were. As a result, special measures were widely introduced to ensure such people could travel, themselves shop for things they needed, and access child and health care. But it wasn't just key or 'essential' workers. Special arrangements were also widely introduced for more vulnerable social groups like the elderly, for whom protected opening hours were brought in so that they could shop safely.

Working hours, places and practices can be rapidly adapted to meet new needs

In May 2020 New Zealand's prime minister Jacinda Ardern proposed introducing a [four-day working week](#)²⁵ in the post-covid period, to enable people to ease back into work and also to boost domestic tourism, which accounts for 60% of the country's tourism income. They will join countries such as France and the Netherlands, which already have reduced working hours compared to the norm. During the pandemic, many countries changed the rules for sick pay to enable those in need to get access to funds more quickly. Portugal [waived the waiting period](#)²⁶ for self-employed workers on sickness benefit, while the UK abolished its three-day waiting period for employer-provided statutory pay as well as the one-week waiting period for allowances to low earners and the self-employed.

As offices gradually re-open after coronavirus lockdown around the world, many employers are considering new ways of working, with less travel and better use of video conferencing, and more working from home for those who can. These include Facebook, whose founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg told staff it was "aggressively opening up remote hiring" in July. He expects half of its workforce to do their jobs outside Facebook's offices over the next five to ten years. This follows moves by other tech firms in Silicon Valley, including Twitter, which said that their employees can work from home "forever" if they want to. After all, according to [McKinsey research](#)²⁷, 80 percent of people questioned report that they enjoy working from home. Forty-one percent say that they are more productive than they had been before and 28 percent that they are as productive. In Japan, firms can now receive a subsidy of 50% (up to JPY 1 million) towards the cost of installing telework facilities. It will be important also to ensure that change is not used to weaken employers' responsibilities to their workforces.

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WHAT NOW: HOW CAN LESSONS FROM LOCKDOWN BE LOCKED-IN?

With so much energy, and so many examples of people and communities showing the best of humanity, how can the lessons from lockdown be locked-in? How can the financial support for caring, wellbeing and health that has suddenly become a priority for governments or other donors be maintained as the crisis changes shape and moves down the news agenda? Could the objectives be pursued of the [#HarrysPledge](#)²⁸ campaign, for example, launched on [National Carers Week](#)²⁹ in the UK, to “make policies carer-friendly, with flexible working so people can fit paid work around caring responsibilities”.

Health workers across Europe from Italy and Spain to the UK, were routinely applauded during the peak of the crisis in spontaneous outpourings of public gratitude and support. Delivery drivers and front-line care workers in so many countries suddenly found their social status far above that of hedge-fund managers. Governments across the globe have – to varying degrees – paid the wages of millions of working people. It has been an extraordinary transformation to tackle a major threat, and the real issue now is how we might keep these life-enhancing elements while the world goes back towards normal.

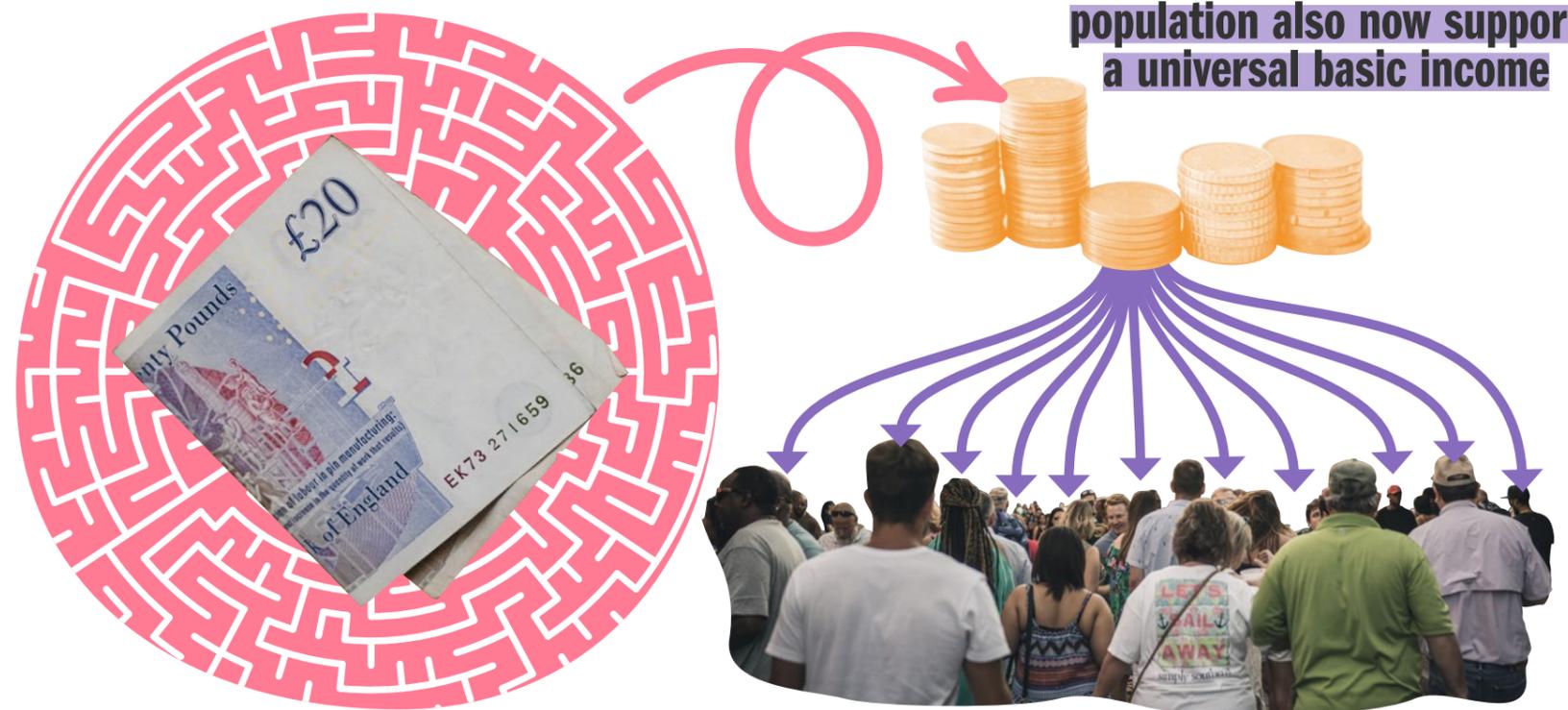
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Giving everyone a basic income and/or access to services

The idea of a Universal Basic Income of some kind has been a point of discussion for many years. Spain has already introduced a basic monthly income for struggling families amid the growing hardship caused by the outbreak of the new coronavirus as part of last year’s coalition agreement between socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez and Pablo Iglesias, the head of the left-wing alliance Unidas Podemos (UP). In the UK, a YouGov poll also found that more than half the UK population also [now support a universal basic income](#)³⁰, “where the government makes sure everyone has an income, without a means test or requirement to work”.

The experience of lockdown – and seeing what suddenly became possible in a crisis – made more people raise the possibility of a basic income to replace some of the labyrinth of confusing and often unfair state benefits that make up our existing welfare systems. As many as 46 per cent of people across Europe support a universal income, according to [an opinion poll](#)³¹ conducted during the lockdown period, rising to nearly two thirds in Germany. Also, if the objective is to guarantee basic livelihood security, it’s important to note that a range of approaches are available which are not necessarily exclusive, from basic incomes, to [minimum income guarantees](#)³², and the provision of [universal basic services](#)³³.

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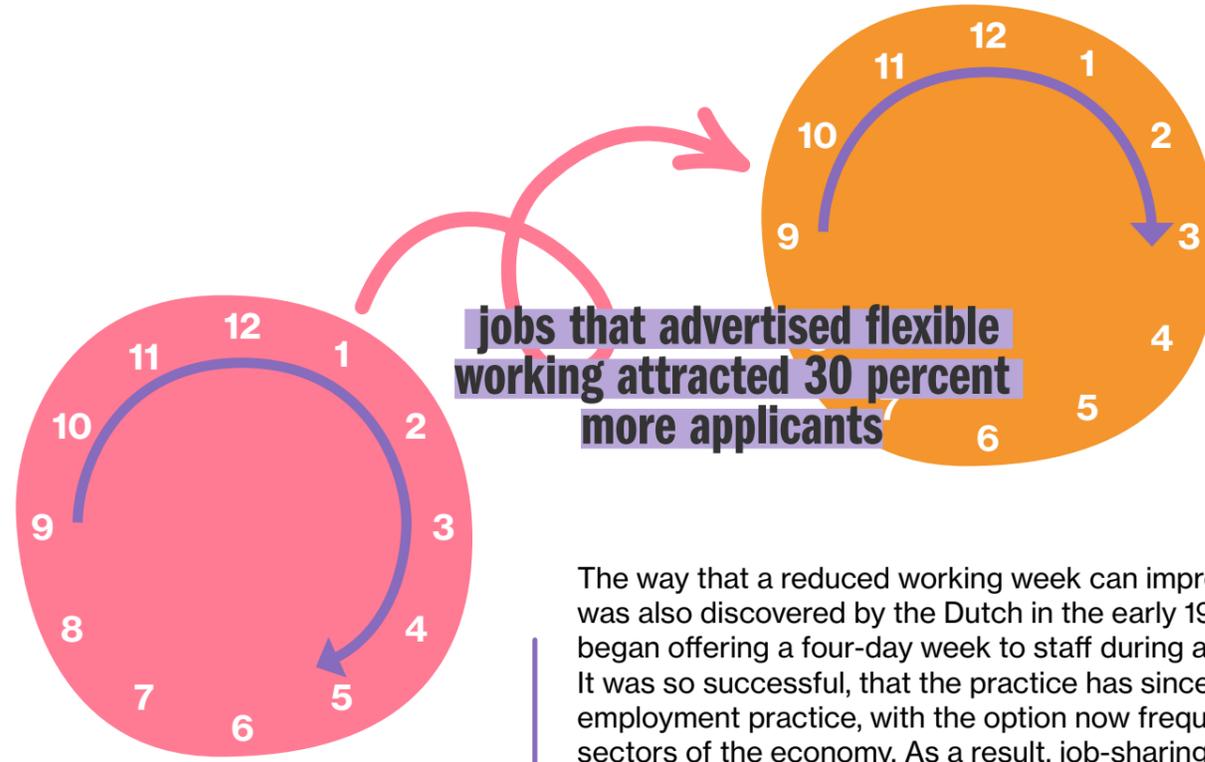
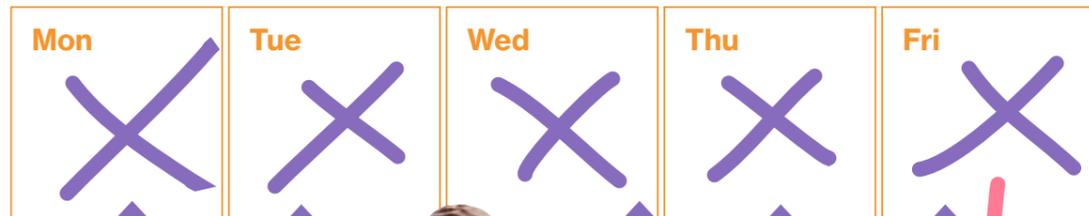


2

Working more flexibly and shorter hours

People's work during the covid crisis has faced a massive upheaval. Those who were able to carry on working from home did so, while many employers created ways in which their business might continue at some level to provide employment. Of course many fell outside the support system and some will have used their own savings or personal support systems to keep going. There is now a widespread consensus by employers that working from home is not to be feared. In fact, people working from home are often more productive, although they may miss the bustle and collaborative nature of an office environment. Part-time home working may become the norm to ensure better wellbeing.

There is also a chance that the covid experience may help to permanently shorten the working week. As it turns out, four-day weeks have huge benefits for employers as well as employees. At the time of the 2008 financial crisis, the US state of Utah found its trial of a four-day week saved money, boosted staff morale, cut carbon emissions and led to around a third of the public saying services improved. Even the UK's much maligned three-day emergency week in 1973-4 resulted in huge energy savings, saw minimal falls in productivity, and confirmed other cases which suggest that the benefits of working fewer hours can easily outweigh the challenges of making the transition

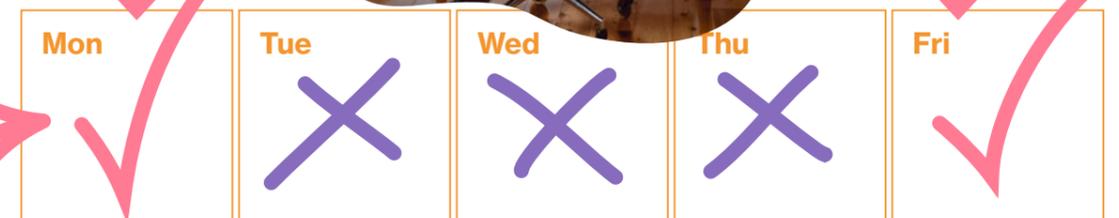
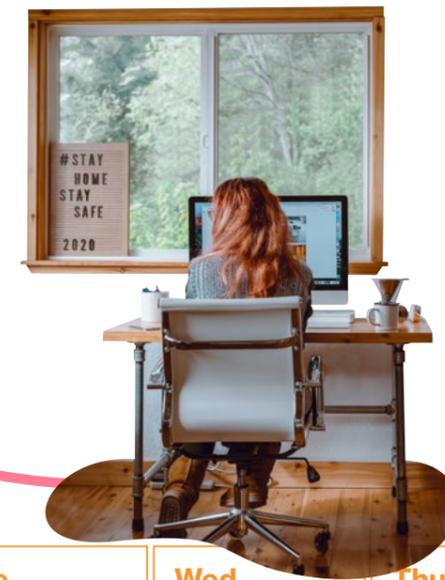


jobs that advertised flexible working attracted 30 percent more applicants

The way that a reduced working week can improve staff morale and wellbeing, was also discovered by the Dutch in the early 1990s, when the public sector began offering a four-day week to staff during a time of recession to save money. It was so successful, that the practice has since spread and become common employment practice, with the option now frequently offered to workers in all sectors of the economy. As a result, job-sharing has become the norm in the health and education sectors. It is also common to have part-time surgeons, engineers and bankers, which makes a work-life balance a practical reality.

There seems to be a trend towards flexible working, breaking the traditional link between external work and income, which has been exacerbated for many by their experience during this pandemic. New Zealand recently announced that it may re-organise toward a four-day working week. One study showed jobs that advertised flexible working attracted 30 percent more applicants, revealing the demand for flexibility. It will be important, however, to realise that working from home or part time is not an option for many on lower wages or living in smaller, shared spaces.

Part-time home working may become the norm to ensure better wellbeing



3

People taking a more active part in public services

The enormous influx of supportive volunteers wanting to ensure that public services were maintained during the pandemic show there is scope for a new kind of relationship between the public and professionals, particularly in fields such as healthcare. Backup volunteers have been driving patients, delivering supplies, designing and making equipment, feeding key-workers and providing them with domestic help. People will have gained enormous insights into how public services function – and even have fresh perspectives on how they might be improved – that could be of use in improving things in future. There is already practice in place that tries to encourage participation by service users in the design and delivery of services, sometimes referred to as [co-production](#)³⁴. This is defined in a variety of ways, but tends to involve people, family members, carers, organisations and commissioners working together in an equal way, sharing influence, skills and experience to design, deliver and monitor services and projects. Practically it might mean something as simple as a patient ‘buddy’ system at a doctor’s practice, whereby elderly, isolated patients might receive calls to avert loneliness, bringing health benefits too. If this could be expanded and given a wider remit across other public services, perhaps we could lock in some of the levels of participation recently seen and extend them successfully into the future.

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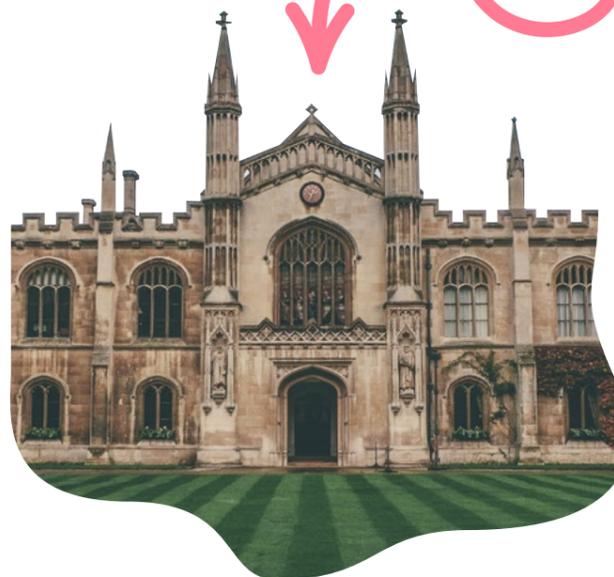


4

Better ways of enabling volunteers

Millions of people in many countries have started giving their time for free to support local services during the pandemic, and now form part of an informal but important civic social fabric that works as a preventive layer in crises. These people will need support from governments in return if the benefits they bring are to be continued. For some people, this might mean paying them – for example via a basic income. It is economically easier for people from wealthier and more educated socio economic groups to volunteer – 44% had done so according to the [UK’s national survey](#)³⁵ on volunteering 2019, but in spite of greater obstacles nearly one third (30%) of people from poorer, so-called C2DE socio-economic groups also gave their time substantially. People with fewer resources, less flexible work, and less domestic support will find it harder to volunteer outside the home, but many more might do so if such assistance were available.

Higher education courses could count the time spent as credits or fees towards courses that might give them real qualifications



Large charities that are dependent on volunteers such as the UK’s National Trust (a large membership-based heritage charity), operate a support team to look after their welfare, training and administration. Its 12,000 volunteers are vital to the organisation’s effective functioning. The sudden flourishing of community-based mutual aid groups suggests, however, much great potential for volunteering. But their continued success is likely to need more imaginative and comprehensive support, ideally underwritten by, for example, the time availability and income security of shorter working weeks and a basic income. But volunteer support could immediately extend more effectively to things like free travel vouchers, creches or childcare facilities, and could even include new uses of infrastructure, such as free use of empty high street properties as volunteer support hubs. This might take the form of personnel support, showing appreciation informally, training and the opportunity to earn qualifications and other benefits. Higher education courses could, for example, count the time spent by people supporting services in this way as credits or fees towards courses that might give them real qualifications and increase their options for paid work, should they need it. Some of these steps might help hold together the myriad of mutual aid groups brought into being by the coronavirus pandemic. [Lists](#)³⁶ of these groups are impressive, there is a danger they may wither without future nourishment such as a coordinating body or a more recognised and supported remit.



5

Reform banks and promote those that support the real and local economy

The crisis has given us a glimpse of what it could be like if local institutions were effectively on the side of ordinary people – even financial institutions. Some countries have a strong independent regional or local banking network, cooperative financial options and/mutual societies offering finance outside the main commercial banking system. These smaller banks tend to know their local people and their businesses better and may offer more favourable terms, being less dependent on shareholder value as the primary driver. In regions where these are less strong, such as the UK, new types of banking could be encouraged that put community rather than shareholders first.



This briefing has demonstrated some of the ways in which people around the world have looked after each other in response to a global pandemic, quickly and sometimes with minimal resources. The way in which individuals, organisations and governments have responded to the benefit of the wider community point the way toward a world where this way of working could be the new norm. It also suggests a number of policy shifts that would help to keep this element going as the world returns to health.

**Rapid Transition Alliance
September 2020**

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Re→set

lessons from lockdown

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