RETURN TO WORK
DURING COVID-19

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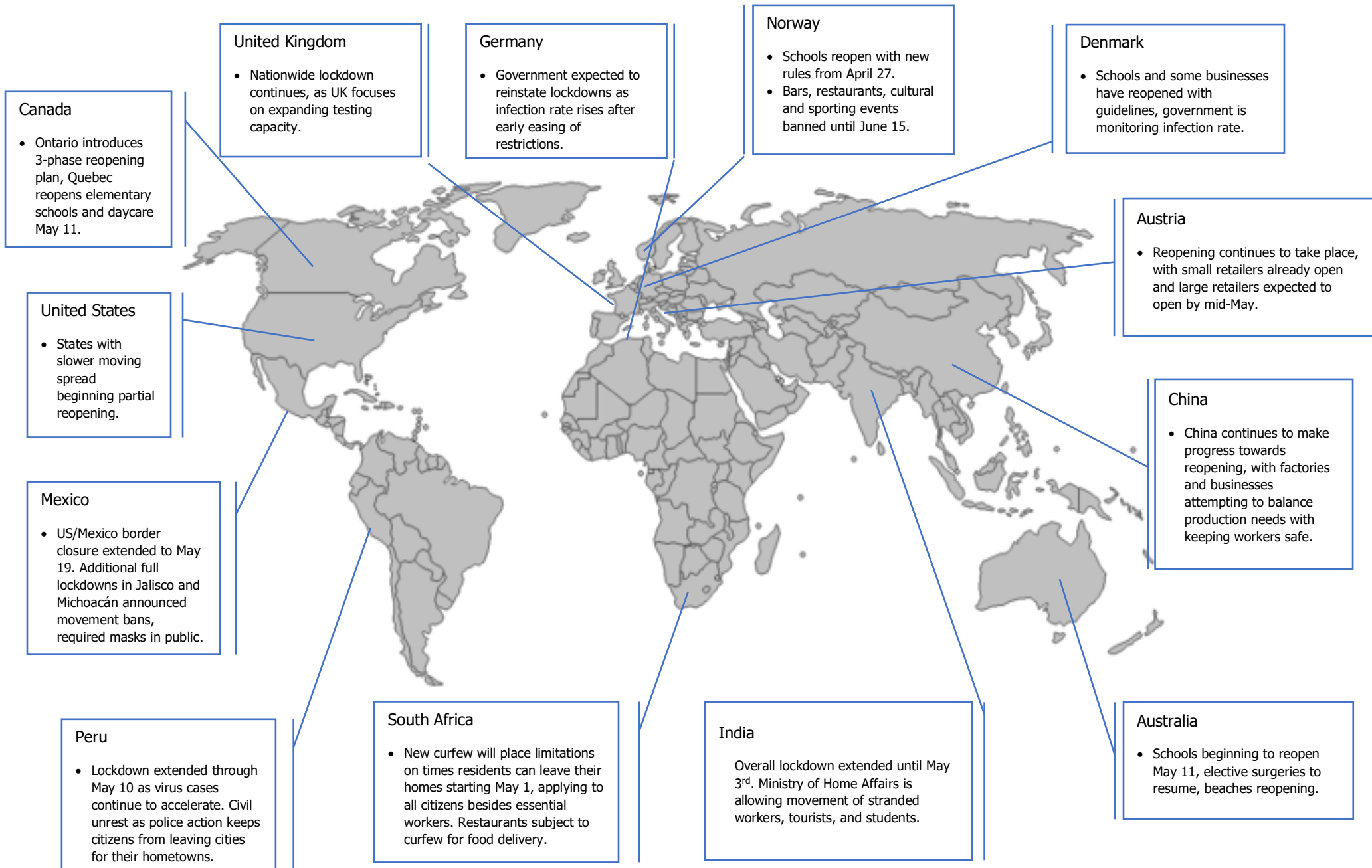BETTER WORLD™

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following Covid-19, employers are asking themselves a major question: What does a return to work look like and how will businesses operate? We have learned much from various nations and their plans to re-open businesses during the pandemic. Moreover, we have used the varied lessons to establish a general checklist of considerations when supporting the return to work. This checklist is a guide for employers and Employer Organisations (EOs) on the broad implications of re-opening business operations while still ensuring the safety of people.

The guide is structured to account for major thematic considerations along with key questions and resources to be considered when implementing a return-to-work plan. The core elements include the following:

- The decision to return to work
- Implementation and execution of return to work
- Coping with after-effects
- Sustaining the right culture post-Covid-19
- Embracing the new realities of work
- Support and guidance from your employers' organisation

In the next section, we highlight some core global examples of cultures returning to work and how organizations are approaching these efforts. More and up-to-date information can be found in International Organisation of Employers' (IOE) dedicated Platform on COVID-19 Business action and the SHRM Navigating COVID-19 Platform.

Global Examples of Return to Work Strategy

Canada
- Ontario introduces 3-phase reopening plan, Quebec reopens elementary schools and daycare May 11.

United States
- States with slower moving spread beginning partial reopening.

Mexico
- US/Mexico border closure extended to May 19. Additional full lockdowns in Jalisco and Michoacán announced movement bans, required masks in public.

United Kingdom
- Nationwide lockdown continues, as UK focuses on expanding testing capacity.

Germany
- Government expected to reinstate lockdowns as infection rate rises after early easing of restrictions.

Norway
- Schools reopen with new rules from April 27.
- Bars, restaurants, cultural and sporting events banned until June 15.

Denmark
- Schools and some businesses have reopened with guidelines, government is monitoring infection rate.

Austria
- Reopening continues to take place, with small retailers already open and large retailers expected to open by mid-May.

China
- China continues to make progress towards reopening, with factories and businesses attempting to balance production needs with keeping workers safe.

Peru
- Lockdown extended through May 10 as virus cases continue to accelerate. Civil unrest as police action keeps citizens from leaving cities for their hometowns.

South Africa
- New curfew will place limitations on times residents can leave their homes starting May 1, applying to all citizens besides essential workers. Restaurants subject to curfew for food delivery.

India

Overall lockdown extended until May 3rd. Ministry of Home Affairs is allowing movement of stranded workers, tourists, and students.

Australia
- Schools beginning to reopen May 11, elective surgeries to resume, beaches reopening.

Checklist Guide to Managing Return to Work

CONSIDERATION THEME	KEY ASPECTS	RELEVANT RESOURCES
The Role of Employers Organisations	EOs are at the forefront of Business response in the context of the emergency situation EOs stand up for Business support and advocacy. EOs engage into policy debates in the best interest of their members EOs advocate on business support and relief measures to be implemented by the government. EOs can provide advice and share best practices on business responses at the global level EOs can guide its members on their engagement with the trade unions in the context of the crisis	EOs are constantly advocating on policy and economic relief for business. It is in this context that communication between business and EOs is key to assess the needs for each specific business/sector. EOs can constitute also a platform for the sharing of experience and best practices, not just at the national level but also in other countries where global supply chains operate. This also includes information and technical advice on how business can engage effectively with trade unions. Engagement from diverse sectors can strengthen and nourish the resources available to the business community to look at what works and what has not worked. Also, the voice of EOs can spread good practices implemented by Business within its network. Connecting business for a peer to peer learning can also be facilitated by EOs. EOs also have access to international organisations such as IOE, which has a large network of experts and links to other organisations such as the International Monetary Fund, the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development and the United Nations.

CONSIDERATION THEME	KEY QUESTIONS	RELEVANT RESOURCES
The Decision to Return to Work	1) What data is available? 2) Do I have a small team of people leading a back to work initiative? 3) Should we incorporate a staggered approach? 4) Who qualifies as essential in my staffing plan? 5) Is my sector/business fit for teleworking? 6) Would an extended teleworking policy be feasible? 7) What should I do about non-essential business personnel? 8) Is my desired approach in compliance with regulatory bodies? 9) Is my desired approach in the best interests of my business? 10) How should I communicate the return to work? 11) What expectations should I set with our Board of Directors and other stakeholders, such as clients? 12) What are my civic responsibilities to the community at large? 13) What analyses have I run to ensure good decision making? 14) Would a return to work trigger any benefits from the government?	When making the decision to return to work, there are several factors to consider such as compliance with any federal, state, country or locality orders, as well as observance of recommendations by the World Health Organization (WHO). For example, an employer may not be able to open due to shelter-in-place orders. Employers who can re-open may want to identify a small team of people who can follow the developments on the business impact of this virus and propose various practical recommendations for management to consider. Employers who decide to re-open may want to incorporate a staggered approach. Depending on the area and industry, employers may want to bring in a limited number of people to the worksite at a time, especially after a pandemic, where practices such as social distancing may still be encouraged by regulatory bodies. An extended teleworking policy may be useful to implement a staggered strategy, where part of the workforce remains teleworking or groups or teams split to alternate presence at the workplace. Understanding who should return may be based on area orders, worker profiles and personal aspects, such as vulnerability, exposure, commute, etc. For instance, some Business may require only essential employees to work. Noted in SHRM's toolkit *Essential Personnel,* employees should understand who or which positions are considered essential during an emergency situation. Essential personnel are typically those individuals required to report to work regardless of conditions, such as health care and public safety workers.

		Communicating with employees during a crisis is key from beginning to end to help employees remain engaged and come back positive and productive.
		Staying informed about policies and measures taken by the government on return to work is very important. Your Employer Organisation is not only following the governmental action but also advocating in the best interest of business. Thus, regular communication and exchange of information with your Business Organisation is key.

CONSIDERATION THEME	KEY QUESTIONS	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Implementation & Execution	1) How do I implement a safe phased approach to return to work? 2) Have I provided the proper precautions to ensure workplace safety? 3) How do I manage several different approaches to execution depending upon those working and those not working? 4) What should I do to reintroduce furloughed or laid-off staff? 5) What is my communication strategy for engaging in key processes (human and financial)? 6) How can I help employees who will not be returning after being laid off? 7) How do I manage development of business continuity planning including infectious disease protocols? 8) Where do I source new talent? 9) How do I reimagine our business operations with the available talent pool? 10) What reskilling investments can my organization make for sustainability and resilience?	Bringing employees back to work may be challenging if an employer does not consider certain aspects such as how to communicate when some employees are returning, and others are not. Having an established Layoff and Recall Policy will help employees understand the process and the reasons behind an employer's decisions. When many businesses in the area close and employees are laid off, there is a chance of losing those employees when it's time to re-open. In those cases, there is more competition for workers and employers may need to get creative in sourcing new talent. It may include recruiting internally and externally. Employers may need to seek 'passive candidates', focus on creating or improving their company's brand, or assessing current employees' skills and abilities to determine if a change of position would help fill some gaps. If an employer did not have a business continuity plan, including infectious disease control, prior to the crisis, one should be established upon return to work. For events management companies, for instance, this may also include reviewing existing company insurance policies for profits lost due to pandemics. Moreover, skilling and reskilling strategies can help overcome the challenges of workforce restructurings during the emergency. This will help the employer adopt sustainability and resilient options through future emergency situations.

CONSIDERATION THEME	KEY QUESTIONS	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Coping with After-Effects	1) How do I design the sustainability plan for my organization's future state? 2) How do I provide the appropriate mix of wellbeing and mental health support to my workforce? 3) What are the critical components of an effective trauma-infused training program for my staff? 4) Am I ready for potential spikes in Covid-19 infections? 5) How do I forge partnerships with local healthcare providers to ensure effective return to work? 6) How do I deal with potential fears of workers? 7) What key factors should I monitor for continuous information about threats to the business? 8) Where can I find recovery resources for my managers and workforce?	The employees who are returning and those being hired will want to know that they are working in a place that is free from hazards. It will be important to reassure employees that measures have been taken to provide safety and security in the workplace. This may include such actions as sanitary protocols, installing more security systems or cleaning the facilities. As part of a business continuity plan, employers will want to include information on where employers and employees can go for the latest information on potential threats to the business, for example, visiting reliable web pages, listening to a specific radio station or reviewing the company's intranet. Many employers outline in their plans who will be notified of potential threats, when and how. Your Employer Organisation can help providing up-to-date information and guidance.

CONSIDERATION THEME	KEY QUESTIONS	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Sustaining the Right Culture Post-Covid-19	1) Are my organisation's values and guiding principles the same? 2) Do we have the right person-culture fit among all staff? 3) Are we, the leaders of the organisation, applying the principle of transparent communication? 4) What are the new workplace rules and implementation strategy? 5) How do I support the families of our staff for effective return to work? 6) How does our organisation re-engage customers and stakeholders? 7) Have we provided proper tools to enhance the employment experience for those teleworking permanently? 9) Do I have the right assessment tools to capture the state of our culture? 10) Are there any training opportunities I can tap into to reskill my employees?	Aside from getting the facilities operational and employees back to work, an employer must think about how the workplace culture will or should change as a result of the events. Should your company's core values and guiding principles remain the same? If your values included "Commitment to Customers", for example, should you also now include "Commitment to Employees"? In a crisis, what did or will your company do in the future to help your employees? Reinforce Occupational, Safety and Health measures. For "Commitment to Customers", what does that look like now? Ensuring that delivery will be available and operating hours more flexible, ability to purchase items online, or hold store credits for longer periods of time during a crisis. There may be some training opportunities available to help employees manage the after-effects of Covid-19. Training providers offer some online courses for free (such as SHRM Education Programs and eLearning Platform). Work-based learning can also be developed virtually or physically, to encourage a culture of continuous learning at the enterprise level.

CONSIDERATION THEME	KEY QUESTIONS	RELEVANT RESOURCES
Embracing the New Realities of Work	1) What are the lessons learned from the crisis? 2) How can I ensure employees are not contributing to the issue (e.g. sick, spreading communicable diseases)? 3) Can I institute testing such as temperature taking, as a precautionary measure for communicable diseases? 4) How do I leverage existing workplace flexibility technologies for teleworking and virtual teamwork? 5) What can I do to assess the return on workforce investment of human capital programs? 6) What is the right ratio of onsite versus teleworking? How can I then restructure the rental arrangements? 7) How can I equip my managers with tools for dealing with generational differences? 8) How can I ensure knowledge transfer through situations like a pandemic? 9) What are the best tools for enhancing coordination and collaboration in a teleworking strategy? 10) How do I hire for virtually diverse workforce? 11) How do I design and cultivate a collaborative and productive teleworking culture?	In a pandemic, employers and employees may be concerned about re-occurrence and exposure to communicable diseases. Employers will want to have policies and procedures in place to determine how to handle communicable diseases in the workplace so everyone can feel at ease and able to respond accordingly. This will also include reflecting on the crisis and coming up with practical recommendations on the lessons learned. To keep businesses operational, they should consider whether work can continue with employees Teleworking. Working from home has its challenges, and rewards if done right. Employers need to ensure employees have the proper equipment and software to work from home. Other considerations are the ability to communicate easily and without disruption. Employers should ensure they have telecommuting policies and procedures in place and ability to manage other flexible work arrangements. On the financial aspect, teleworking may also offer some savings to Employers because the space can be better utilized for other purposes. Furthermore, employers may wish to take the opportunity to form strategic partners with new allies such thought leaders, academia and think tanks. This not only shows stakeholders and clients that employers are resourceful, it also can be a way to enrich the repository of knowledge and information for business sustainability and resilience. Enterprises would need to anticipate the changing preferences and consumption behavior of various stakeholders including clients. Clients want convenience, and technology and social media used by enterprises should work towards this end. Areas which are less affected by Covid-19 also provide better business prospects,

12) How can I form strategic partnerships with thought leaders, academia and think tanks to constantly update and build on internal repository of knowledge and information?	compared to areas or sectors which need more time to recover.

Small and medium sized enterprises (which may traditionally compete with one another) may opt to join forces, to attain more visibility of their work and business offerings. This may also mean changing the way services are being offered or changing the packaging of existing products. For instance, some companies changed their business models to offer more PPEs or hygiene products. |
13) How can I better understand the changing behaviour of stakeholders and clients post-Covid-19?	
14) How can I make it more convenient for my clients to access information and purchase goods/services?	
15) Have I maximised the use of technology and social media?	
16) Can I identify through research, which areas/sectors are less affected by Covid-19 so I can expand my goods/services where business prospects are better?	

Conclusion

There is no one generic solution to resolve all the problems which companies or employers' organisations face, in what appears as a highly evolving situation. These key questions are aimed to help companies and employers' organisations in their journey towards a safe and effective return to work policy. We are all learning how to deal with the crisis. A 'learning and active' organisation is key to coming out of the pandemic stronger.