



# Impacts of COVID-19 on Informal Workers in the Caribbean

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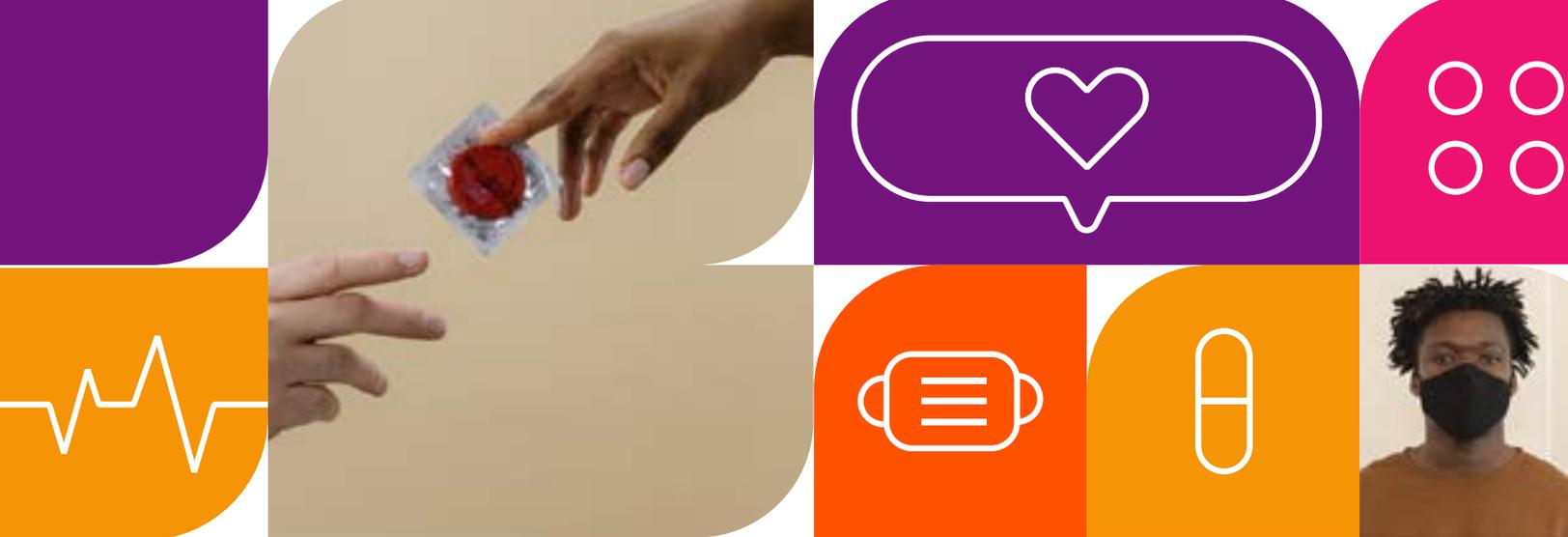
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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>BVI</b>	British Virgin Islands
<b>CARPHA</b>	The Caribbean Public Health Agency
<b>CIT</b>	Corporate Income Tax
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus
<b>DR</b>	Dominican Republic
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>ICLS</b>	International Conference of Labour Statisticians
<b>IDB</b>	Inter- American Development Bank
<b>ILO</b>	International Labour Organization
<b>IMF</b>	International Monetary Fund
<b>KP</b>	Key Populations
<b>LAC</b>	Latin America and the Caribbean
<b>NPI</b>	Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions
<b>OECD</b>	The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
<b>PLHIV</b>	Persons Living with HIV
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Micro Enterprises
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNFWP</b>	United Nations World Food Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children’s Fund
<b>USA</b>	The United States of America

# BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES

The COVID-19 virus was first identified in Wuhan China in December 2019, and officially identified as a pandemic on March 11. As of the end of May, 2020, over 6 million cases of COVID-19 and just over 360,000 deaths have been recorded globally. COVID-19 has negatively impacted the Global Economy in a manner not seen since the Great Depression. The COVID-19 pandemic is the first health crisis in the Caribbean, the impact of which has been felt before the first case was recorded, due to the immediate impact of the virus on global supply and demand chains. The global economy is therefore projected to contract by 4.9%, in 2020 (IMF 2020), while GDP for the Caribbean region expected to fall by an average of just over 6% in 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in a major economic and labour market shock with persons employed in the informal sector likely to be more affected by this fallout. This group of workers typically includes women, youth, children, indigenous people, and migrant workers. In this light, the primary objective of this paper is to evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 on informal workers in the Caribbean basin. Specifically,

- To identify available studies and key policy documents referring to informal workers in the Caribbean.
- To identify the key impacts of COVID-19 on informal workers by industry, type of worker and country, and the policy responses devised to address such.
- To identify mechanisms to extend coverage of social protection programmes to informal workers.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach for this paper consists of a mix of primary and secondary approaches which are aligned with the objectives of the paper. Secondary data collection involved a comprehensive review of the literature on the Informal Sector/

Economy in general with particular focus on the Caribbean Basin. This included reports from State and non-state agencies, technical reports from local, regional and International Agencies that specifically address COVID-19 and its impact as well as the policy and programmatic responses to the needs of those who comprise the Informal sector.

This secondary data was supplemented by Primary data through the use of key informant interviews utilizing online tools (Zoom, Skype, etc.) These interviews targeted persons at the policy level on one end as well as persons from the informal sector. The completed interviewees included representatives from:

- The Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO);
- The International Labour Organization;
- The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB)
- The University of the West Indies;
- The National HIV Response Programmes;
- The Caribbean Forum for Liberation & Acceptance of Genders & Sexualities (CariFLAGS)
- The Joint Trade Union Movement (JTUM), Trinidad and Tobago;
- United Caribbean Transgender Network (UC Trans) and
- The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Regional Coordination Mechanism (OESC RCM).

This approach provided insights into the policies and programmes in place, the successes and challenges achieved, and the factors that have facilitated their successes as well as hindered progress. This approach provided an indication of the needs and challenges faced by those who work in the informal sector. The information obtained was evaluated against the stated policy environment in the Region.

# Limitations

The following limitations of the study are noted:

1. This assessment is being conducted with COVID-19 restrictions preventing the sampling of persons employed in the informal sector and therefore heavy reliance was placed on virtual key informant interviews and secondary data.
2. The upsurge in cases during the course of the study also made it difficult to get key informants to confirm to be interviewed within the timelines of this study. As a result of this, a number of carded interviews were not conducted due to the unavailability of the respondents.
3. While the informal sector contributes a great deal to employment in the countries of the Caribbean, data on the composition of this sector is lacking. In most cases, data on employment is reflective of socially insured workers which essentially excludes informally employed workers.
4. The situation with COVID-19 is still evolving. This fluid situation meant that policy positions were being formulated or revisited, in some instances, as this report was being compiled.

## OVERVIEW OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR

In reviewing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on informal workers it is important to understand its composition, the drivers of its various components and its linkages with the formal economy. Within the context of informal workers, there is the need to clearly distinguish what constitutes the informal sector, informal employment and the informal economy. In much of the literature, these terms tend to be used interchangeably and some level of ambiguity in definitions surrounding the informal economy (Gomez 2013). However, according to Chen (2012),

...“the informal sector refers to the production and employment that takes place in unincorporated small or unregistered enterprises (1993 ICLS); informal employment refers to employment without legal and social protection—both inside and outside the informal sector (2003 ICLS); and the informal economy refers to all units, activities, and workers so defined and the output from them.”

The term informal employment should not be limited to employment within the informal enterprises, as such, it is important to distinguish between informal self-employment and informal wage employment. The former includes employers in informal enterprises, self-employed workers in informal enterprises and contributing family workers in informal and formal enterprises. The latter includes casual or day workers, part-time workers, domestic workers, contract workers, unregistered workers, homeworkers or employees in informal enterprises. It is noted that whilst the underground economy forms a subset of the informal economy in most studies of the informal economy, it is excluded (Losby et al. 2002).

According to the literature, while the informal economy is more likely to be wage employment rather than self-employed, the presence of microenterprises warrants an examination since these tend to operate within the informal economy. Microenterprises, by virtue of size, allows for cost minimization in their operations which lends itself to operating and thriving in the informal economy. The informal sector is characterized by four (4) key characteristics (Losby et al. 2002, Gomez 2013):

1. Activities may be legal or illegal. Some activities may be operating with legal or in some cases unregulated arrangements.
2. Cash payments are the most common medium of exchange. Cash payments are common in lieu of payroll checks or direct bank deposits.

3. Unreported income or wages. There is no record of transaction or no taxation reporting. Important to note that some activities in the informal economy may be measurable but not taxable and vice versa.
4. Conditions under which workers are employed. The conditions of employments in the informal sector is different and usually considered substandard compared to the formal sectors in different aspects, for example, earnings and security.

Some of the features common the informal employment include, no protection against unpaid wages, compulsory over-time or extra shifts, lay-offs without notice or compensation, unsafe working conditions and no social benefits (Gomez 2013). Further to this, the dialogue on the informal economy can be classified into four schools of thought regarding its nature, reasons, compositions and solutions for addressing. These schools, namely, dualist, structuralist, legalist and voluntarist are distinct from the formal economy (Chen 2012) (Figure 1.1).

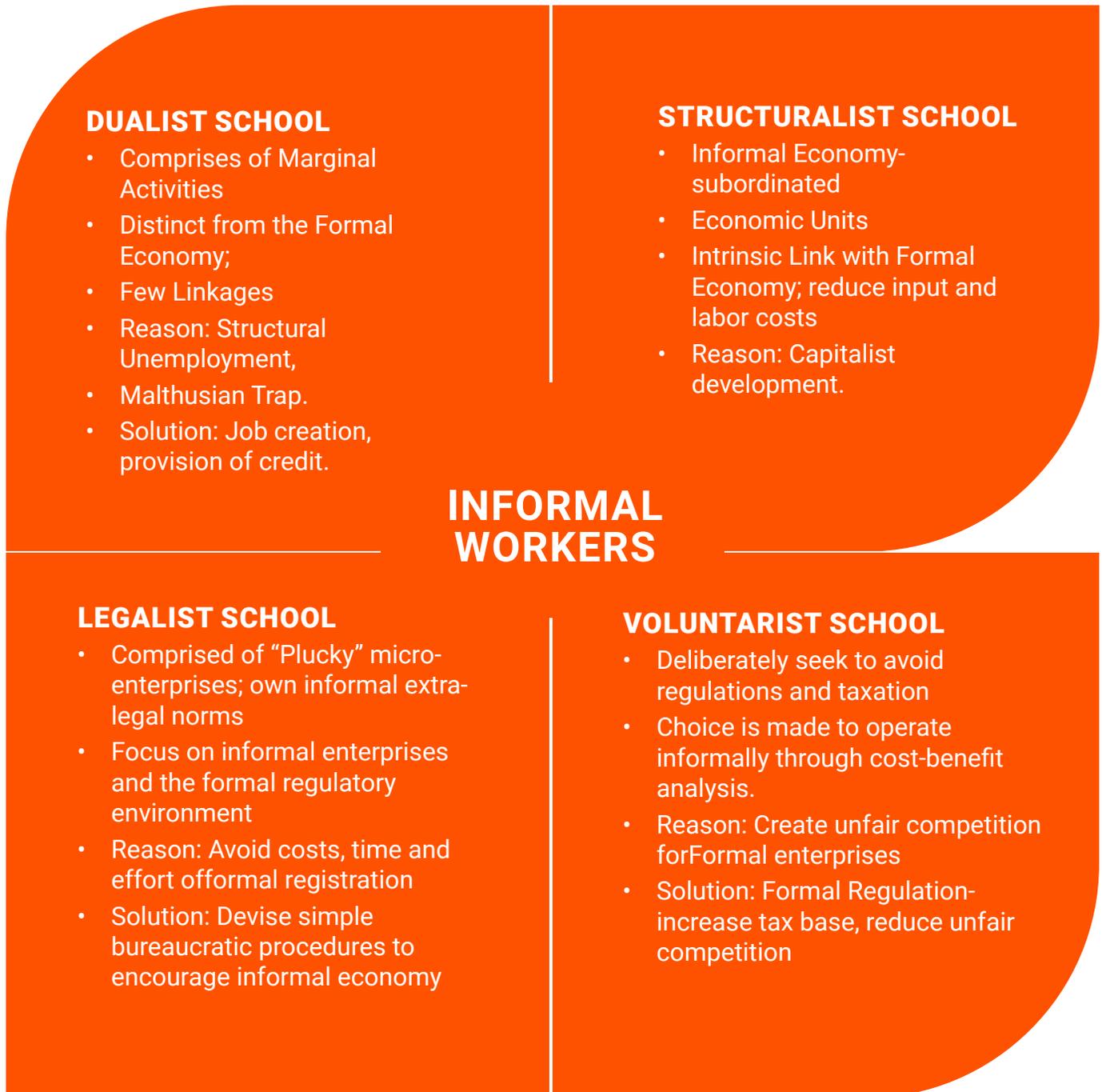


Figure 1. 1 Schools of Thought Governing Informal Workers | Source: Adapted from Chen 2012

The informal economy can be seen as the product of, and in many instances, a combination of these schools of thought. As highlighted in Figure 1.1, involvement in the informal economy can happen for several reasons; necessity (social obligation) and/or choice (economic gain). While some theorists see the informal economy as temporary and a response to unemployment and poverty, in others it is an inherent and important part of the economy needed to address social ills.

Losby et al. 2020 highlighted that the informal economy has been described by some theorist as “disguised unemployment” as a result of cost cutting/containment measures. In this light, Chen (2012) posited that in developing countries, employment in the informal sectors increases during periods of economic crisis. It may be a “social safety net for the poor and an additional economic opportunity for those already employed in the formal sector” (Losby et al. 2002). Issues of downsizing, business shutdowns and workers layoffs give rise to the informal economy. Essentially, in instances where unemployment is not an option, individuals faced with these circumstances turn to the informal economy for employment opportunities particularly with inflationary pressures.

The many and varied interpretations of what is and constitutes the informal economy makes its size estimation a difficult one. Peters (2017) in his study, estimated the size of the Informal Sectors to be 20–30 percent in The Bahamas, 30–40 percent in Barbados, 29–33 percent in Guyana, 35– 44 percent in Jamaica, 35–45 percent in Suriname, and 26–33 percent in Trinidad and Tobago. This represents one of the most recent estimates of the size of the informal sector for countries in the Caribbean

In the literature on informal economy, scholars have highlighted that the informal economy is usually dominated by female workers and migrants. Female workers, as a result of their household responsibilities and their role as primary caregivers, tend to be employed in the informal economy. Limited childcare options also increase the likelihood of women seeking employment in the informal sector . In addition, immigrants tend to gravitate towards the informal sector given the less structured and less rigid arrangements in this sector (Losby et al. 2002). It is however important to note that even within countries, the informal economy is

highly segmented by sector of the economy, place of work, and status of employment and, within these segments, by education, social group and gender. According to Chen (2012), however, those who work informally have one thing in common- lack of legal and social protection and absence of job security through contracts and other forms of protection.

The dialogue on the informal economy and its contribution to the economy in general has often led to discussions on policy in order to incorporate its positive aspects and extinguish its negative effects. This dialogue has extended to finding ways to transition positive informal activities to formal status. However, the challenge of estimating the size and composition of the informal economy remains and the data needed to accomplish such is in most cases lacking, particularly in developing countries. Therefore, an examination of the dynamic for different countries may present a different concentration of informal workers by industry. Consequently, the evaluation of informal workers needs to be country specific.



# SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

## Profile of Informal Sector: Pre-COVID

The informal sector is an invaluable contributor to an economy in terms of employment and output. In many cases, entry into informal employment is easier than the formal economy particularly for youth and women. Mansoor et al. 2018 posted that the informal sector “provides an important contribution not only to total economic growth, but to inclusive growth.” However, efforts to support the contribution of the informal economy requires disaggregated data much of which is unavailable in the Caribbean. Despite this limitation, the informal economy is often described as the backbone of the economy in which migrant workers, youth and women form the majority. As such, by its nature in times of crisis access to social safety net programmes may be challenging.

Globally, as many as 4 billion people, 55% of the world’s population are not covered with social insurance nor eligible for social assistance. Additionally, 20% of all unemployed persons are covered by unemployment benefits with this figure being lower in some regions. In many countries, social protection is extended mainly to salaried workers which inadvertently excludes a large portion of informal workers.

Despite falling continuously since 1991, the LAC region accounts for the largest share of what constitutes the informal economy, averaging 40% between 2010 and 2014. This compares with an average of 38% in Sub-Saharan Africa and 34% in South Asia (OECD, 2019). In Latin America and Caribbean countries, there is an estimates 130 million informal workers comprising the most vulnerable in society, of which at least 27 million are young persons, and approximately 54% of the informal workforce is made up or women, low income earners with no access to formal means of finance/social security (ILO 2013, Vanek et al. 2014). In LAC, informal employment accounts for approximately 53.1% (2014) of total employment

with variations from country to country with higher concentration in certain sectors of the economy (Table 1.1). For the youth, it is estimated that 6 out of 10 are employed in the informal sector. In the area of domestic employment, 93% are women of which 80% are informal workers (ILO FORLAC 2013).

Table 1. 1 Concentration of Informal Workers by Sectors, LAC

Sector	Informal Employment (%)
Construction	69%
Trade, Restaurants and Hotels	56%
Mining and Quarrying	35%
Manufacturing	38%

Source: ILO FORLAC, 2013

In the Dominican Republic (DR), for example, there are high levels of informal employment accounting for an estimated 55.2% of total employment (UNDP, 2020). Informality in the public sector is minimal, however, in other sectors such as agriculture, commerce, hotels, transportation, informal workers account for more than half of the workforce. In the DR, informality was highest amongst women and workers with low educational attainment.

Table 1. 2 Households Distribution by Poverty/Vulnerability, Informality Status, DR

Total Households	3,284,332	100%
Poor or vulnerable households	1,338,599	41%
At least one Informal Worker	658,142	49%
All employed members are informal	525,644	39%
Non Poor or Vulnerable Households	1,945,733	59%
At least one Informal Worker	1,043,720	54%
All employed members are informal	676,317	35%

Source: UNDP (2020)

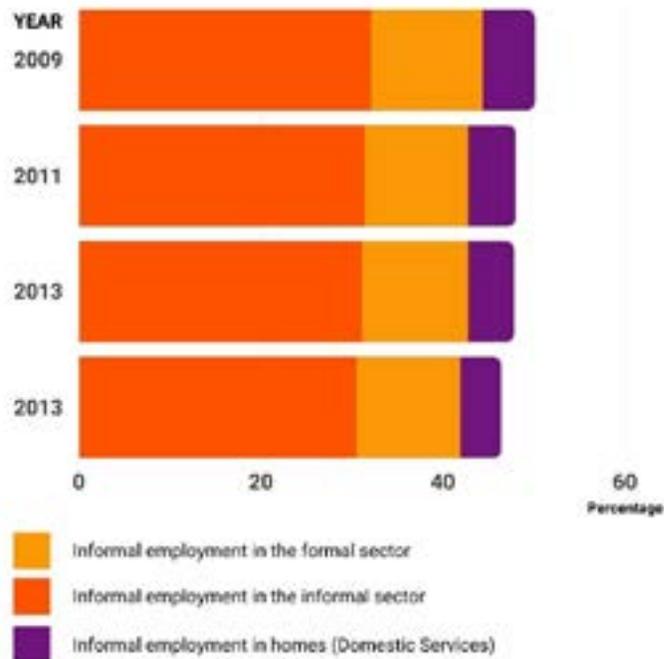


Figure 1. 2 Non- Agricultural Informal employment  
Source: ILO (2013)

Informal workers in the Dominican Republic are found in both poor/vulnerable and non-poor/vulnerable households. In 39% of poor households all members are employed in the informal economy, with 35% in non-poor households. This data indicates that informal workers are heavily concentrated in this economy (Table 1. 2).

According to Figure 1.2, the share of non-agricultural informality in LAC showed a slight decrease from 50.1% (2009) to 46.8% (2013) and was mostly concentrated in the informal sector. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2020) posited that informality in the Caribbean is particularly concentrated in the agriculture and rural sectors with over 80% of self-employed being informal workers. According to ILO (2018), “over 90% of agricultural workers are informal in developing countries.” In a gender perspective, women informal workers are of critical concern particularly given their roles as primary caregivers especially in rural communities. According to FAO (2020), rural women account for 41% of the world’s agricultural labour force and in Southeast Asia and Africa account for more than 60% in the agricultural sector.

Informality in LAC has been characterized by “low incomes, job instability, lack of social protection and discouragement and violation of rights” (ILO

FORLAC 2013). Formal systems designed to provide social protection for categories of informal workers in the Caribbean are

lacking. Self-employed persons, for example, represent a growing category of informal employment in developing countries. As of 2013, many countries in LAC have made steps towards reducing informality through a mix of specific policies and strategies aimed at providing decent work, ensuring productivity and promoting sustainable economic growth.

For many of these countries, the focus has been on improving the quality of jobs and more so encouraging the transition from informal to formal employment. Substantial progress in formalisation has also been observed in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. Notably, Jamaica during the period 2002- 2013, experienced a 3.10% decline in informal employment. In some countries, although strides have been made to provide social protection for informal workers and their families, to regulate informal activities, improve employability and increase social awareness of informality issues, much more needs to be done in ensuring all-inclusive support and protection to workers in the sector. The current COVID-19 pandemic has also undermined his progress for many of these countries.

## COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean

Figures 1.3 and Table 1.3 presents an overview of the pandemic in the Caribbean Basin over a five-month period, April to September 6th, 2020. At the onset of the pandemic in the Caribbean, most countries reported sporadic cases of the virus which were mitigated with lock-down and quarantine measures. However, following the re-opening of many countries

there has been an upsurge in cases particularly for Aruba, Bahamas, Belize, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago (Figure 1.3).

Approximately, 56% of the countries are now reporting community transmission across Latin America and the Caribbean with cluster cases reported in 26% of the countries and sporadic 11%. Only 7% has reported no cases as of September 6th, 2020

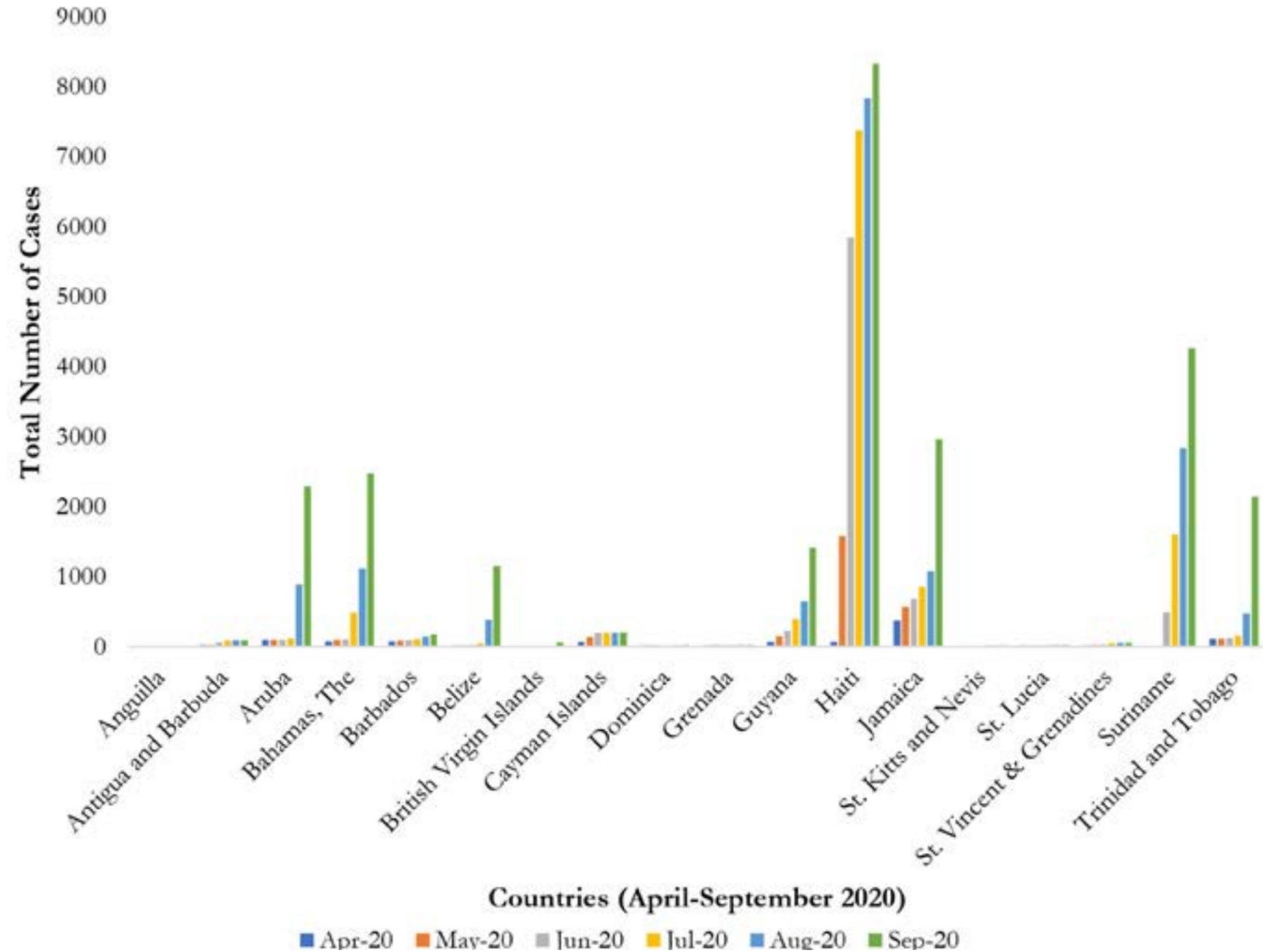


Figure 1.3 COVID-19 Cases for Selected Caribbean Countries, April to September, 2020  
Source: WHO (2020), Situational Reports and Weekly Epidemiological Update<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Data for August is as of August 16th, 2020 and September as of September 6th, 2020

Table 1. 3 COVID-19 Cases, Transmission Classification for Selected LAC Countries

COUNTRIES	APR-20	MAY-20	JUN-20	JUL-20	AUG-20	SEP-20	TRANSMISSION CLASSIFICATION SEPT- 2020
Anguilla	3	3	3	3	3	3	No cases
Antigua and Barbuda	24	25	65	91	93	95	Clusters of cases
Aruba	100	101	101	119	894	2,292	Community transmission
Bahamas, The	80	101	104	484	1119	2,476	Community transmission
Barbados	80	92	97	110	148	178	Clusters of cases
Belize	18	18	24	48	388	1,152	Community transmission
British Virgin Islands	6	8	8	8	9	63	Clusters of cases
Cayman Islands	73	141	196	203	203	205	Sporadic Cases
Chile	14885	94858	275999	353536	383902	420,434	Community transmission
Colombia	5949	26688	91769	276055	445111	650,062	Community transmission
Costa Rica	705	1022	3130	16800	26931	45,680	Community transmission
Dominica	16	16	18	18	18	22	Clusters of cases
Dominican Republic	6652	16908	31816	67915	85545	98,776	Community transmission
El Salvador	377	2395	6173	16230	22619	26,206	Community transmission
Grenada	19	23	23	24	24	24	Clusters of cases
Guatemala	557	4607	16930	48826	62313	77,481	Community transmission
Guyana	75	150	230	398	649	1,416	Clusters of cases
Haiti	76	1584	5847	7378	7831	8,326	Community transmission
Jamaica	381	575	686	856	1082	2,964	Community transmission
Nicaragua	13	885	2014	3080	3413	3,773	Community transmission
Panama	6200	12531	31686	63269	79402	95,596	Community transmission
St. Kitts and Nevis	15	15	15	17	17	17	No cases
St. Lucia	17	18	19	25	25	26	Sporadic Cases
St. Vincent & Grenadines	16	25	29	52	57	61	Sporadic Cases
Suriname	10	12	492	1607	2838	4,262	Community transmission
Trinidad and Tobago	116	116	126	157	474	2,142	Community transmission
Venezuela, RB	329	1370	5297	17159	31381	50,973	Community transmission

Source: WHO (2020), Situational Reports and Weekly Epidemiological Update

# Impact of COVID-19 on Informal Workers in the Caribbean Basin

The COVID-19 pandemic is having a multi-pronged effect in countries, their sectors, spheres of life and generally threatens the wellbeing of persons and economies financially and socially. Globally, the focus has been on containing the spread of the pandemic and protecting people which has inevitably affected the lives and livelihoods of persons. Given the already high levels of informal employment, the longer the duration of the pandemic, the higher will be the expectation of a rise in informal unemployment. (ILO, 2020) The pandemic has therefore brought to fore issues of unemployment and underemployment for informal workers and exposed the vulnerabilities of informal workers to economic and labour market shocks.

The containment and prevention measures for COVID-19 comes with significantly high economic and social costs across the world. Social distancing, quarantine and lockdowns have hampered economic activity, causing a multiplied effect on production and consumption activities which has led to closures of businesses and layoffs. For LAC, this has led to projections of -3% to -4% decline in economic activity with an estimate of 30 million persons falling into poverty (Hevia and Neumeyer (2020)). Mera (2020, 4) described the labour market as being “quarantined in most sectors of the economy” due to the non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) alongside inadequate social protection coverage to persons particularly those employed in the informal economy (United Nations, 2020). In fact, the sectors most affected by the pandemic are the ones with the highest levels of informality, which means these workers are most disadvantaged.

According to the ILO (2020), as of April 2020, an estimated 1.6 billion informal workers has lost 60% of their income with no savings and access to social protection as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In LAC, this amounts to 89% informal workers significantly impacted by the pandemic. The reality becomes one in which persons employed in the informal sector become easily dispensable as a result of firm closures and down-sizing. As such, the impact of COVID-19 has been evidenced

in rising made quick strides to provide support to employers and employees to mitigate the effects of the pandemic.

Provision of paid sick leave has been a critical tool in cushioning the effects, particularly for households/ persons who are required to quarantine or self-isolate. However, in many countries, particularly those with a large informal sector, paid sick leave is limited and, in many cases, non-existent. This is particularly concerning since in most cases these workers are unable to access social safety net programs and cope with this unexpected dynamic. As such, in many cases, the need to secure livelihoods and that of family members has led to informal workers exposing themselves and families to risk by continuing to work without taking adequate precautions due to lack of alternative livelihood strategies. In the case of migrant workers, the result has been that many are being subjected to deplorable working conditions and exploitation, due to the fear of income losses. A similar perspective is presented for youth who are more likely to be employed in temporary, non-contract jobs and therefore prime for termination. Informal workers such as migrants, youth, women are therefore left without access to recovery measures put in place by governments as a result of the pandemic.

## Tourism

In the Caribbean, the tourism sector is the major source of revenue and jobs and has been the industry most impacted by COVID-19. On average, tourism export receipts account for 52.9% in the Caribbean. The sector's contribution to GDP on average is 33.5% (direct 13.3% and indirect 20.2%) with direct employment in the industry being approximately 413, 000 workers (ILO 2020). Direct and indirect employment in the tourism industry accounts on average for 18.1% and 25%, respectively, with an overall average of 43.1%.<sup>2</sup>

The extent of the region's dependence on Tourism is illustrated in a recent Global Tourism Dependency Index, where Caribbean countries were among the top 20 countries with the highest index as shown in the table below. This sector was also found to be a significant contributor in both GDP and employment to Latin American countries including Uruguay, Argentina and Chile Table 1. 4) (Mooney, Zeegarra, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> Lowest for Suriname, Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, accounting for 2.8%, 4.7% and 9.9% of total employment respectively.

Table 1. 4 Indicators of Tourism Dependence for LAC Countries

	Tourism Dependency Index (TDI) (2018)	Tourism Dependency Index (TDI): Rank out of 166 countries globally (2018)	Total Contribution to GDP (percent of total GDP) Ave. (2014-18)	Total contribution to Employment (percent of total employment) Ave. (2014-18)
Aruba	84.7	1	87.9	89.3
Antigua and Barbuda	61.4	4	54.5	48.8
Bahamas, The	59.4	5	47.5	55.6
St. Lucia	56.4	6	40.1	48.4
Dominica	48.3	9	36.3	32.9
Grenada	42.4	11	29.9	21.4
Barbados	39.4	14	39.0	38.9
St. Vincent & Grenadines	39.3	15	23.2	21.4
St. Kitts and Nevis	38.8	16	27.1	26.6
Jamaica	38.4	17	31.6	28.7
Belize	38.4	14	40.1	35.6
Cayman Islands	25.8	28	28.3	30.1
Dominican Republic	22.9	33	16.9	15.6
Haiti	17.0	44	9.6	8.4
Panama	16.8	46	13.9	14.1
Costa Rica	14.7	52	12.5	12.2
El Salvador	12.5	62	10.5	9.4
Nicaragua	10.6	78	11.3	9.4
Guatemala	9.3	85	8.3	7.4
Chile	8.3	99	10.2	9.9
Trinidad and Tobago	8.1	100	7.8	10.3
Colombia	7.5	103	5.7	5.6
Guyana	6.5	120	7.1	7.5
Venezuela, RB	5.5	134	8.1	7.0
Suriname	3.2	160	3.0	2.8

Source: Mooney, H and Zegarra, M.A, (2020)

Notes: The Tourism Dependency Index (TDI) is calculated using 5-year averages (2014-2018) for the total contribution of tourism to total export receipts, GDP, and employment for each country. The range is from zero to 100, with 100 representing total dependence.

According to the ILO (2020), employment in the tourism industry is concentrated predominately among females (50-60%) and youth (10-20%) and due to the seasonality of the industry, part-time and fixed-term employment is common. It was highlighted that while data is scarce, the use of migrants in this sector is a common feature and informal employment accounts for over 40% of total employment with migrants falling outside of pre-existing social safety net programs with little to no representation by any workers associations.

The probability of job losses, reduction in working hours, and loss of incomes is therefore highest in this sector.

A report on the Economic and Social Effects of COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean's tourism sector by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) projected the impact of a 10% and 30% drop in revenue in the Tourism sector due to COVID-19 on Gross Domestic Product (Table 1.5).

Table 1. 5 The Projected Impact of a Drop in Tourism Revenue due to COVID-19

Impact of GDP				
Scenario	Projected Drop in Revenue	Caribbean	Mexico & Central America	South America
1	10%	-0.8	-0.3	-0.1
2	30%	-2.5	-0.8	-0.3

Source: ECLAC (2020)

Based on the table above, the Caribbean islands stand to be more significantly affected by the impact of the pandemic on the region's Tourism sector than other countries in the Caribbean Basin. This supports the high dependency of the region on this sector, as earlier illustrated. Additionally, as of April 2020, it was reported that over 50% of hotel staff had either suffered layoff, reduced working hours or salary cuts (Table 1. 6). The duration and uncertainty with the pandemic will lead to a worsening of these figures particularly as the number of cases continue to rise.

important to identify the sub-sectors of the tourism industry most affected since about "30% are likely to fall outside the pre-existing social safety net" (ILO, 2020). This situation is further exacerbated in islands such as the Cayman Islands and British Virgin Islands where migrants account for the majority of the labour force accounting for 57.6% and 68% respectively.<sup>3</sup>

## Poverty and Unemployment

Based on the estimates of the UNDP, unemployment and poverty figures in the region are projected to rise with the magnitude dependent on the duration of the pandemic and the effectiveness of Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs). Table 1. 7 and Figure 1. 3 highlights unemployment scenarios for selected Caribbean countries. With a November reopening of the economy pushing unemployment figures upward ranging from 17% BVI to 34% Anguilla with recovery estimated in 2021. However, if country reopens and operates without the tourism sector, these unemployment figures would be pushed even higher, with Anguilla projecting a 46% unemployment rate.

Table 1. 6 Employees Affected by COVID-19 in the Hotel Industry (%)

COVID Measures (Hotel Industry)	Employees Affected (%)
Layoffs	71%
Reduced Hours/Days	66%
Salary Cuts	53%

Source: ILO (2020) (April 2020)

The consideration of informal workers in the tourism is critical however, data is limited for the sector. It is

<sup>3</sup> Includes permanent residents and those on work permits.

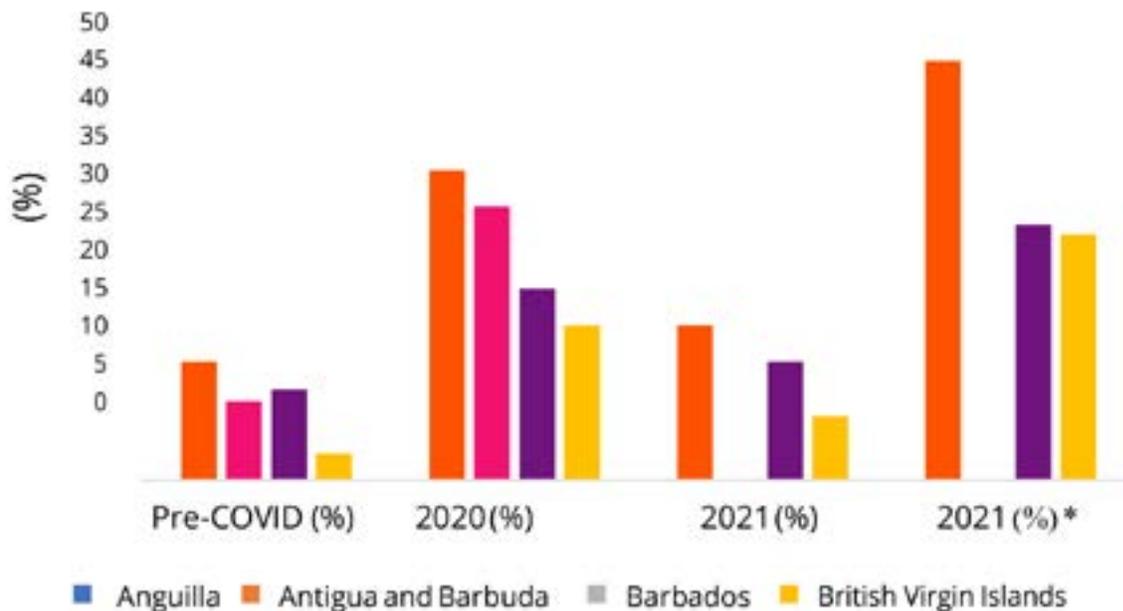
Table 1. 7 Macroeconomic Unemployment Projections, Tourism Reopening Scenarios

Country	Pre-COVID (%)	November 2020 (%)	November 2021 (%)	2021 (%) *
Anguilla	13	34	17	46
Antigua and Barbuda	8.7	30	NA	NA
Barbados	10	21	13	28
British Virgin Islands	2.9	17	7	27

Source: UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women Eastern Caribbean COVID-19 Heat Reports (2020)

In the British Virgin Islands, for example, there is a high migrant workforce of which 63% is employed in the tourism industry. Migrants with permanent status are more secured in this crisis than those on work permits facing the possibility of having to return to their home countries. Further, migrants in the BVI earn 17% less than nationals and between

55%-78% of persons unemployed are likely to be migrant workers on work permits- this has poverty implications (UNDP, 2020). Of course, since women and children constitute a disproportionate share of those unemployed, the effects for these groups will tend to be higher.



Source: UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women Eastern Caribbean COVID-19 Heat Reports (2020)

Unemployment and poverty are known as the “Terrible Twins” because of the symbiotic relationship which exists between them. Declining incomes particularly in the tourism industry are expected to affect poverty rates. These rates are estimated to increase by 5 percentage points in Anguilla and between 0.6 to 1 percentage point in Barbados (Table 1. 8). As is expected, these figures can be exacerbated for workers in other sectors.

Table 1. 8 Poverty and Decline in Incomes in Tourism, Selected Caribbean Countries (%)

Country	Poverty (%)	Decline in Incomes in Tourism (%)
Anguilla	5.8	34-56
Barbados	17	13-32
British Virgin Islands	9.9	37-60

Source: UNDP, UNICEF and UN Women Eastern Caribbean COVID-19 Heat Reports (2020)

According to Sumner et al. 2020, even with small contractions in per capita income, the incidence of income-based poverty is expected to increase (Table 1. 9). In extreme cases, a 20 percent contraction can lead to an increase in poverty in the range of 6-8 percentage points depending

on the poverty line. Essentially, this means the number of persons living in poverty will increase with an exacerbated effect for less developed economies in response to income contractions related to COVID-19.

Table 1. 9 Poverty Incidence (Percentage Points) Due to Economic Contractions

Contraction (%)	Increase in Poverty Incidence (percentage points)
5	1
10	2-4
20	6-8

Source: Sumner et al. 2020

In the Dominican Republic, for example, informal workers living in a poor/vulnerable household is estimated at 39%, 13 percentage points higher than the percentage among formal workers. Additionally, the average monthly income for a formal worker is 67% higher than that of an informal worker (UNDP 2020). This clearly illustrates the wage gap between workers in the informal and formal sector and reinforces the point that declining incomes will have a greater impact on persons employed in the informal economy.



## Nutritional Impact

The prevalence of undernourished people in the Caribbean between 2011 and 2016 was estimated to be just under 20%. (FAO, 2015). Preliminary analysis conducted by IDB (2020), highlighted that there is a nutritional impact of the virus across all income categories, where households recorded having gone hungry or are resorting to less healthier food options. This nutritional impact has had its greatest

impact on low income households in the form of changes in diet and increased incidence of hunger during a specific period. For middle and high income groups, the nutritional impact has been changes in diet.(Figure 1. 5). For informal workers who tend to fall within the low income bracket with low levels of savings larger segments reported going hungry, this may be exacerbated due to job losses and business closure/shut-downs and reduced likelihood of social and financial state sponsored support.

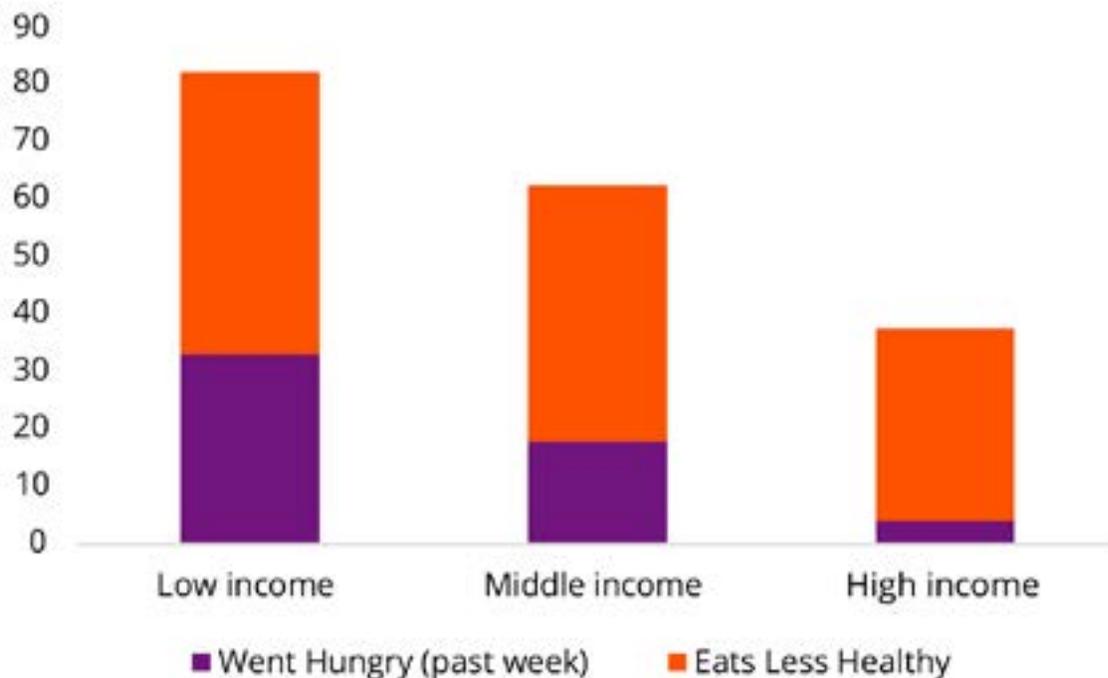


Figure 1. 5 Nutritional Impact of COVID-19 in the Caribbean (%)  
Source: IDB Caribbean Quarterly (2020)

The study conducted by IDB also highlighted a gender impact/perspective as it relates to nutrition. While both males and females reported eating less healthy and even going hungry in the lower income brackets, the impact was greatest for women accounting for 47% and 41% respectively (IDB, 2020). According to UN World Food Programme, results from the Caribbean COVID-19 Food Security & Livelihoods Impact Survey showed 20% of respondents ate less preferred foods at some point during the pandemic with varying degrees for selected Caribbean countries (Table 1. 10). Respondents indicating that they had eaten less preferred meals over a 7-day period ranged from 14% (Jamaica and Barbados) to 33% (Belize). Respondents reporting that they had skipped meals or had eaten less than usual ranged from 8% (British Virgin Islands) to 24% (Belize). Similar to the IDB report, there was no reported segregation of this information into formal and informal sectors. One can however infer that these rates would be significantly higher for those in the Informal Sector.

## COVID-19 and Key Marginalized Populations

Table 1. 10 Nutritional Impact of COVID-19 Selected Caribbean Countries

Country	Ate less preferred food over past 7 days	Skipped meals or ate less than usual
Barbados	14%	14%
Belize	33%	24%
British Virgin Islands	16%	8%
Dominica	25%	20%
Grenada	21%	19%
Guyana	17%	15%
Jamaica	14%	11%
St Kitts and Nevis	18%	15%
St Lucia	28%	21%
Trinidad and Tobago	19%	11%

Source: United Nations World Food Programme Country Reports April/May 2020

Poor or reduced food intake can adversely affect the health of those who have been forced to engage in such practices. Compromised nutritional intake, in terms of either a reduction in the quality and/or quantity of food, exacerbates existing health challenges and further exposes individuals to new challenges, which puts them at further risk of contracting other diseases. Additionally, this practice minimizes the survival chances of persons who have been infected by COVID-19. Individuals and household in the informal sector who are more likely to be negatively impacted on by the economic effects of the pandemic, therefore find themselves at greater risk of contracting COVID-1 and a reduced chance of surviving its effects due to their compromised immune system.

Marginalized populations include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer/questioning, and other forms (LGBTQ plus) as well as persons who engage in transactional sex, migrants, prisoners, persons who use drugs, women and girls. The high degree of vulnerability to HIV, is another feature of this group. Members of the LGBTQ plus are largely classified as gender non-conforming<sup>4</sup>. The relevance of this classification is seen in terms of the occupations that are available for this group. Most of the persons who fall into this classification are employed in the Informal sector. The challenge of this classification was explained by a member of the Transgendered community.

“Most KPs find work in the service industry. They usually work in Casinos, Bars, Restaurants, Hotels, etc. For Trans who are transitioning (made the decision to live according to their gender identity, rather than the gender they were thought to be at birth.), they find it a bit more difficult to find standard jobs and so are usually self-employed, as hairdressers, in cosmetology, or in sex work.”

Because of the heavy presence of marginalized population in the informal sector in general and the service-related jobs in particular, they are at greatest risk of exposure to COVID-19 and these been identified as areas that are considered “COVID-19 hot spots” for transmission and contracting of the virus. Additionally, from the perspective of livelihood, these jobs are also among the first to be targeted for closure in response measures that are meant to minimize risk of community spread. Large cross sections of members of the key populations have therefore found themselves on the “breadline” due to

<sup>4</sup> LGBTQ plus are largely classified as gender non-conforming, implying that members do not conform to the standard gender stereotypes.

COVID-19. Mindful of the fact that included among this group are persons living with HIV (PLHIV), their ability to address their health and related social support needs therefore becomes a major issue.

While there is significant literature on the COVID-19 pandemic on marginalized populations in general, is limited literature that speaks specifically to the Caribbean experience. This may be a result of that fact that for many Caribbean countries it is either illegal or not considered as part of formal employment. Additionally, for example, due to the illegality and informality of sex work, persons employed in this sector may have no access to social support programmes and as such may continue working to earn income. However, while bearing this in mind, the Caribbean Public LGBTQ plus are largely classified as gender non-conforming, implying that members do not conform to the standard gender stereotypes.

Health Agency (CARPHA) has provided guidelines for containing and preventing the spread of COVID-19 within the Informal sector particularly for sex workers. The reality is that due to the nature of some jobs in the informal sector, sick leaves and access to insurance is not an option which has led to trade-offs being made between “endangering personal and public health and paying bills” (Razavi 2020).

## Policy Response: COVID-19 and Informal Workers

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical links which exists between all aspects of the economy. It is unconventional in many ways and as such requires unconventional responses to address its impacts. While the pandemic is still ongoing and as such the magnitude of the impact cannot be fully predicted, current trends suggest catastrophic damage to socio-economic structures. In efforts of mitigating the effects of COVID-19, the IDB (2020) under the pillar of “Safety Nets for Vulnerable Populations” highlighted the need for targeted intervention to informal workers, which included the provision of “extraordinary transfers to workers in the informal sector.”

The issue of sustainability of these programmes is critical, particularly with the ongoing nature of the pandemic. However, it is recognized that the economic impact of COVID-19 increases the number of workers in the informal economy. As such, governments, as well as local and international organizations have committed to the provision of financial and technical resources to the mitigation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This assistance has been provided along four broad headings:

- Public health response;
- Social safety nets for vulnerable populations;
- Economic productivity and employment;
- Fiscal policies to address the economic impact.

In the Caribbean region, the response to COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to social safety nets have focused on easing access to benefits targeted to low-income families and those suffering from job losses or cut-backs generally. The Caribbean region has focused on social protection through traditional measures, which essentially comprises of targeted cash transfers, food vouchers food distribution packages and in-kind contributions. In the case of food distribution packages, etc. these programmes have been implemented by the state or through Non-Governmental Organizations. These programmes, in many cases, are directed to the general population and workers in particular affected sectors of the economy with little to no mention of informal workers. However, it is recognized that, in some cases, programmes designed for the general population with little to no eligibility criteria can be assessed by persons engaged in informal work. In a situation where there is limited access to social protection, persons employed in the informal sector will have difficulty with “stay at home orders” and as such increase their chances of contagion (UNDP, 2020).

The stimulus package for the Caribbean countries has taken the form of an expansionary fiscal policy with reduction/waivers in tax measures and significant increases in government spending on support measures to sectors of the economy. Several countries have introduced measures

targeting workers in the tourism sector, self-employed, employees and businesses alike alongside general

Customs Service Charge on sanitation products and in some cases food items which were directed to the entire population. The reality is that persons in the informal market, Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs), along with newly unemployed, self-employed and independent workers will constitute the core recipients of these relief measures. (Hevia and Neumeyer (2020)).

Measures targeting households, self-employed and employees were mainly targeted to the general population with a few specific measures targeted to the tourism sector (Tables 1.11 and 1.13). In a sample of countries, the main relief measures were direct cash transfers (95% of the countries), food assistance (85%) and utility assistance (85%) (ILO 2020) with 35% of countries providing direct cash transfers and 5% tax relief to the tourism sector. Other forms of assistance included skills training (20%) of which 75% was to the tourism sector, pension withdrawals and home refurbishment.

Table 1. 11 Summary of Support for Households

Relief	% Caribbean Countries (Sample of 20)	Targeted to Tourism (% Caribbean Countries)
Direct Cash Transfers	95%	35%
Food Assistance	85%	-
Utility Assistance	85%	-
Waiver on Loans etc.	75%	-
Tax Relief (Import Duty, GCT)	65%	5%

Source: ILO (2020)

Businesses in the Caribbean, as drivers of the economy, had a range of measures directed to them which mainly included grants/loans (78%), tax relief (81%) and waiver of loans (74%) with 37%, 27% and 13% respectively were specific to the tourism sector (Table 1. 12). In nine (9) countries these measures were implemented with accompanying employment retention conditionalities (Table 1.14). The actual percentage of workers to be retained, however, varies from country to country, ranging from 50 to 100 per cent. For example, in St Kitts and Nevis, businesses could benefit from a reduction in Corporate Income Tax (CIT) from 33% to 25% if they retain at least 75% of their employees. In the case of Jamaica, as part of the Business Employee Support and Transfer of Cash (BEST) Cash programmes, this conditionality was specific to tourism workers. In 37% of the countries, waivers in social security contributions were granted with 14% targeted to businesses in the tourism sector. Other forms of assistance included salary subsidies (utility assistance and business coaching or technical assistance. It is observed that for the businesses most of their relief measures were targeted to both general population and tourism sector (Table 1.14).

Table 1. 12 Summary of Support Measures to Businesses Selected LAC

Relief	% Caribbean Countries	Targeted to Tourism (% Caribbean Countries)
Grants/Loans	78%	37%
Tax Relief	81%	15%
Waiver on Loans etc.	74%	15%
Waiver/Deferral of Social Security Contributions	37%	4%
Employment Retention Conditionality	33%	4%

Table 1. 13 COVID-19 Government Relief Measures to Employees, Self-employed and Household Selected Caribbean Countries

Country	Tax relief (waiver or deferral of payments)	Waiver or Deferral of other fees and penalties and loan payments	Direct Cash Transfers	Food Assistance	Utility Assistance	Skills Training	Pension Withdrawals/ Holidays	Home Refurbishment/ Home ownership loans
Anguilla	x	x	x	x	x			
Antigua and Barbuda	x	x	x	x	x	o		
Aruba	x		x	x	x			
Bahamas		x	xo	x	x			
Barbados	x	x	xo	x	x	o		x
Belize		x	xo	x	x			
Bermuda		x	x		x		x	
British Virgin Islands		x	x	x	x			
Cayman Islands			o	x	x		x	
Curacao			x					
Dominica	x	x	x	x				
Grenada	x		xo	x	x			

Customs Service Charge on sanitation products and in some cases food items which were directed to the entire population. The reality is that persons in the informal market, Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs), along with newly unemployed, self-employed and independent workers will constitute the core recipients of these relief measures. (Hevia and Neumeyer (2020)).

Measures targeting households, self-employed and employees were mainly targeted to the general population with a few specific measures targeted to the tourism sector (Tables 1.11 and 1.13). In a sample of countries, the main relief measures were direct cash transfers (95% of the countries), food assistance (85%) and utility assistance (85%) (ILO 2020) with 35% of countries providing direct cash transfers and 5% tax relief to the tourism sector. Other forms of assistance included skills training (20%) of which 75% was to the tourism sector, pension withdrawals and home refurbishment.

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1. 9). These have been implemented alongside traditional measures such as cash transfers and food support Mahajan (2020).

While in many cases informal workers have not been clearly stated as beneficiaries of policies and programmes be, due to the general nature of some of the measure outlined, they can be accessed by persons adversely affected in the informal sector. For example, tax relief measures in the countries were focused on removal of VAT, Import Duty and Customs Service Charge on sanitation products and in some cases food items which were directed to the entire population. The reality is that persons in the informal market, Small and Micro Enterprises (SMEs), along with newly unemployed, self-employed and independent workers will constitute the core recipients of these relief measures. (Hevia and Neumeyer (2020)).

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Antigua and Barbuda	x	x	x	x	x	o		
Aruba	x		x	x	x			
Bahamas		x	xo	x	x			
Barbados	x	x	xo	x	x	o		x
Belize		x	xo	x	x			
Bermuda		x	x		x		x	
British Virgin Islands		x	x	x	x			
Cayman Islands			o	x	x		x	
Curacao			x					
Dominica	x	x	x	x				
Grenada	x		xo	x	x			
Guyana	x	x		x	x			
Jamaica	x	x	x		x	o		
Montserrat	x	x	x	x	x			
Saint Kitts and Nevis	x	x	x	x	x			
Saint Lucia	x	x	xo	x	x	x		
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	xo	x	xo	x	x			
Suriname			x	x				x
Trinidad and Tobago	x	x	x	x	x			
	x- measures targeting general population		o- measures specifically targeting the tourism sector					

Source: ILO (2020)

Table 1. 14 COVID-19 Government Relief Measures to Businesses Selected countries of the Caribbean Basin

Country	Grants or loans, loan guarantees	Salary subsidies	Utility assistance	Tax relief (credits, waivers or deferrals)	Waiver/ deferral of other fees and penalties, loan moratoria	Waiver/ deferral of social security contributions	Business coaching or technical assistance	Employment retention conditionality
Anguilla	x			x	x	x		
Antigua and Barbuda	x			x	x			
Aruba	x	x		xo		o		x
Bahamas	x			x	x			x
Barbados Belize	xo x	x				x x	ox	x
Bermuda	x			x	x	x		
British Virgin Islands	xo		x					
Cayman Islands	xo			o	x	x	x	
Colombia	x			x	x	x		x
Costa Rica	x	x	x	xo	x		x	
Cuba		x		x				
Curacao	xo	x						x
Dominica	x			x	xo			x
Dominican Republic	x	x	x	x	x	x		
El Salvador		x	x	xo	x	x	x	
Grenada	xo	o		x	x			
Guatemala		x	x	x	x	x		
Guyana				x	x			
Jamaica	xo			x	xo		x	xo
Montserrat	xo	xo		x	x			
Panama		x		x				

x- measures targeting general population o- measures specifically targeting the tourism sector

Source: ILO (2020)

Table 1.14 cont'd COVID-19 Relief Measures taken by Government in countries of the Caribbean Basin to Support Businesses

Country	Grants or loans, loan guarantees	Salary subsidies	Utility assistance	Tax relief (credits, waivers or deferrals)	Waiver/ deferral of other fees and penalties, loan moratoria	Waiver/ deferral of social security contributions	Business coaching or technical assistance	Employment retention conditionality
Saint Kitts and Nevis	x		x	x	x			x
Saint Lucia	o			x	xo			x
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	x		o		xo			
Suriname	xo			x	x			
Trinidad and Tobago	xo			x	x			
	x- measures targeting general population	o- measures specifically targeting the tourism sector						

Source: ILO (2020)

Table 1. 15 Measures Specific to Informal Workers, Selected Countries in the Caribbean Basin

Country	Relief Measure	Conditionality
Anguilla	Adaptation of Social Security Schemes through the introduction of an unemployment or underemployment assistance benefit.	Registering with the Anguilla Social Security Board as a contributor.
Antigua and Barbuda	COVID-19 Government Assistance Food Voucher Programme- cash assistance. Government Assistance Food Voucher Programme	Persons with children unemployed by the pandemic. Unemployed with children who can prove unemployment from January 31st, 2020 as a result of COVID-19.
Bahamas	Expansion of unemployment benefit to general self-employed. Expansion of unemployment benefit to self-employed in the tourism sector.	Registered with NIB and with a valid business license. Proof that they are self-employed in the tourism sector.
Barbados	Expansion of unemployment benefits to self-employed workers at \$1500 BDS for two months. Vertical Expansion National Assistance Payments. Broadening of horizontal coverage under the National Assistance Programme.	Registered Businesses
British Virgin Islands	Discretionary Unemployment Assistance under the Public Assistance Act No 14 of 2013.	Support reviewed on a case by case basis.
Colombia	Support to dependents or Self-Employed workers who become unemployed. This amount is in line with the minimum wage.	
Costa Rica	Three (3) months of financial aid provided to those affected. Social protection measures introduced for the vulnerable and the poor.	
Cuba	Support provided up to Minimum Wage. Tax payments are suspended for self-employed. Temporary Social Assistance is provided.	
Dominican Republic	"Quedate en casa" Temporary Subsidy	Those persons above the poverty line who are vulnerable or belong to the informal sector. Informal- \$1445 Formal- \$ 1270
Grenada	Unemployment Benefits. Income support to self-employed tourism workers and other groups of self-employed, hairdressers, barbers, market vendors and aviation service employees.	Must be a registered contributor to Social Security.  Hoteliers must be registered with the Grenada Tourism Authority (GTA)

Jamaica	COVID-19 Compassionate Grants- one-time grant \$10,000. COVID-19 Small Business Grants- one-time grant \$10,000. COVID-19 General Grants (barbers, hairdressers, beauty therapists, cosmetologists, market vendors, taxi and bus operators; bar and night club operators; craft vendors, JUTA, MAXI, and JCAL operators.	Anyone in need not formally employed.  Sales of J\$50 million or less with registered employees. Registered contributors
St Lucia	Self-employed subsistence allowance to non-contributors.  Income Support Programme.	Taxi drivers, vendors, small business and creative industry who lost income and employment.  Targeting persons or entities who generated income as off- shoot service providers of the Tourism Industry: Taxi drivers, Jet Ski Operators, Vendors (Beach, Craft and Provision Market), Farmers (Agro-processors), Tour Guide operators, Dive instructors, Hairdressers, Small bar/restaurant owners, artistes and entertainers.
St Vincent and the Grenadines	Interim Assistance Benefit0 ECD 300 informally employed persons; one-time payment of XCD 300 to handcart operators. Displacement Supplementary Income	Displaced workers in hotel and tourism sector, minibus operators. Taxis, water taxis and tour buses registered with the SVG Tourism Authority.

While unemployment and other cash transfer benefits have been a crucial measure in cushioning income losses, not all persons who lost their jobs have access to this support for various reasons or conditions attached to qualifying (Table 1. 14).<sup>5</sup>This has been the case for Anguilla, Barbados, Belize, Grenada and St Lucia in which persons qualifying had to be contributors to the Social Security Board (SSB) whether formally or informally employed. For example, in Belize a new unemployment benefit was established to cater to laid-off persons, SMEs and self-employed, however, these businesses had to have been established more than one year, operating in specific industries and impacted by the pandemic.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, food support was provided to affected persons without conditions. However, in Antigua and Barbuda and The Bahamas, to access these programmes affected persons were required to present a copy of their Social Security Benefit (SSB) card.

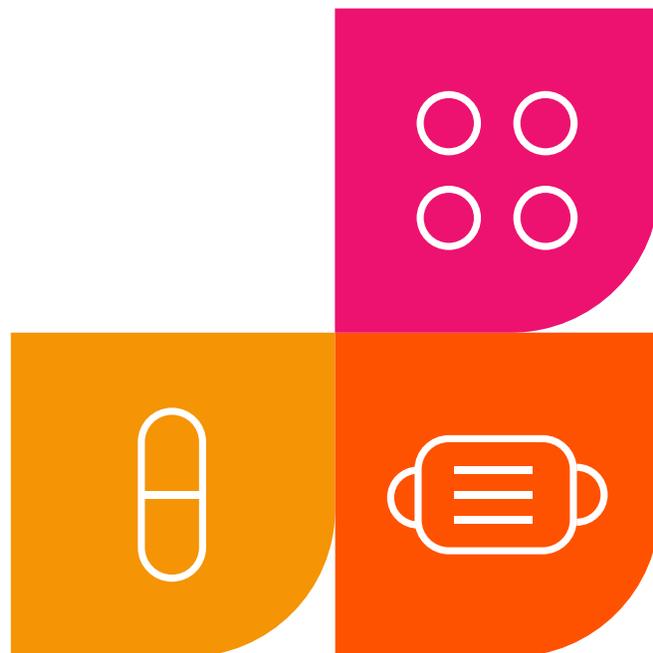
In some cases, for example, Saint Lucia and Grenada, provisions were made for self-employed workers, small farmers and SMEs however other informal workers operating outside of these classes were not mentioned. In Jamaica, for example, while informal workers can access relief under the COVID Allocation of Resources for Employees (CARE) programme, these programmes are specific to workers who are registered contributors to the country's social security programme (UNDP 2020). Other programmes identified included assistance to small farmers, homeless assistance and constituency development fund. However, the extent of the benefit to informal workers was unclear.

In Dominica, an employee assistance grant and self-employed individual grant assistance was established. However, it was clearly stated that informal workers and businesses were not eligible to receive support from these programmes. Furthermore, to access the self-employed individual grant assistance, applicants were required to provide their social security number, tax ID and registration documents (ILO 2020). This further highlight that workers in non-standard employment which includes those in the informal sector are not very well protected and are therefore less likely (50%)

to receive income support during job cuts/layoffs (OECD 2020).

Traditionally, in some countries, for example Barbados, BVI and Saint Lucia, social assistance is provided to poor households below the poverty line, monetary and in-kind assistance to people with HIV/AIDS, food vouchers.<sup>7</sup> In Saint Lucia, the HIV grant was increased to ECD200 (ILO 2020). However, there is a recognized need to extend these programmes to other vulnerable workers, particularly those employed in the informal sector. Fewer resources are aimed at this poorest quintile of the populations.

As identified above, social safety net measures are implemented alongside financial measures for micro and medium-sized enterprises aimed at financial recovery and sustaining jobs. In the Dominican Republic it was highlighted that without the social safety net programmes, poverty rates can increase up to 33.2%, however, with these programmes, poverty rates can go from 23.1% to 28.3% and (UNDP, 2020).



<sup>5</sup> Belize, St. Lucia similar dynamic with unemployment benefits afforded to contributors of social security.

<sup>6</sup> In St Kitts and Nevis, a special emergency fund was established which can be accessed by self-employed persons registered with the SSB.

<sup>7</sup> Other programmes informally employed persons can benefit from in Barbados are the Household Survival Programme for Needy Families, Adopt a Family Programme and Welfare Support

# CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE COVID-19 POLICY RESPONSE FOR INFORMAL WORKERS

The policy response geared towards addressing the impact of COVID-19 has been, for the most part, inadequate in addressing informal workers. However, much of the measures designed for the general population and some categories of vulnerable groups are inclusive of informal workers. In many cases, the containment and prevention methods adopted by many countries have resulted in an increase in informal employment, that is, persons seeking alternative sources of income due to layoffs and reduced working hours/days. There is, however, the need for more targeted interventions which go beyond in-kind, conditional cash transfers and one-time payment. Some of the shortcomings in the relief measures outlined to address those affected in the informal economy are as follows:

- Lack of up-to-date information on the informal economy and its composition in many countries. This also includes the absence of mechanisms to identify and address informal workers within the formal economy. The need for adequate real-time information regarding the impact in the informal sector highlights the difficulty in identifying and targeting this group.
- Identification of strategies to protect essential informal workers during the pandemic. Response measures to the pandemic were mainly targeted to the general population and specific sectors. However, in some cases there is the need to reduce exclusions due to eligibility criteria. The Administrative costs of these programmes managed by the state can be high and a challenge for low income countries experiencing fiscal constraints.
- Keeping the fiscal burden on the government as low as possible while avoiding corruption is important, particularly in resource constraint

settings, a comprehensive policy approach is therefore critical particularly in minimizing duplication of efforts.

- While measure make reference to vulnerable populations, there is no discussion on key populations within the informal sector. In many cases they are required to access support from social programmes targeting the broader population. For segments of key populations there is a general reluctance to accessing support through the programmes outlined above. This reluctance stems from the stigma and discrimination that characterises the environment in which they live, work and socialize. This is also very present in the programmes that are geared towards reaching those affected by the pandemic and in need of support This was captured by a Transgendered key informant.

“Members of the LGBTIQ plus community have problems accessing the grants. They are subjected to strange looks and other acts of discrimination when going through the process of completing the form and getting interviewed. Very often I accompany them to support them through it all. When it comes to Trans that are transitioning, it is a real problem, because they are required to show their ID cards and they often look nothing like their ID. So that is a major problem. In the absence of support, they turn to sex work to make a living.” (LGBTQI plus Activist)

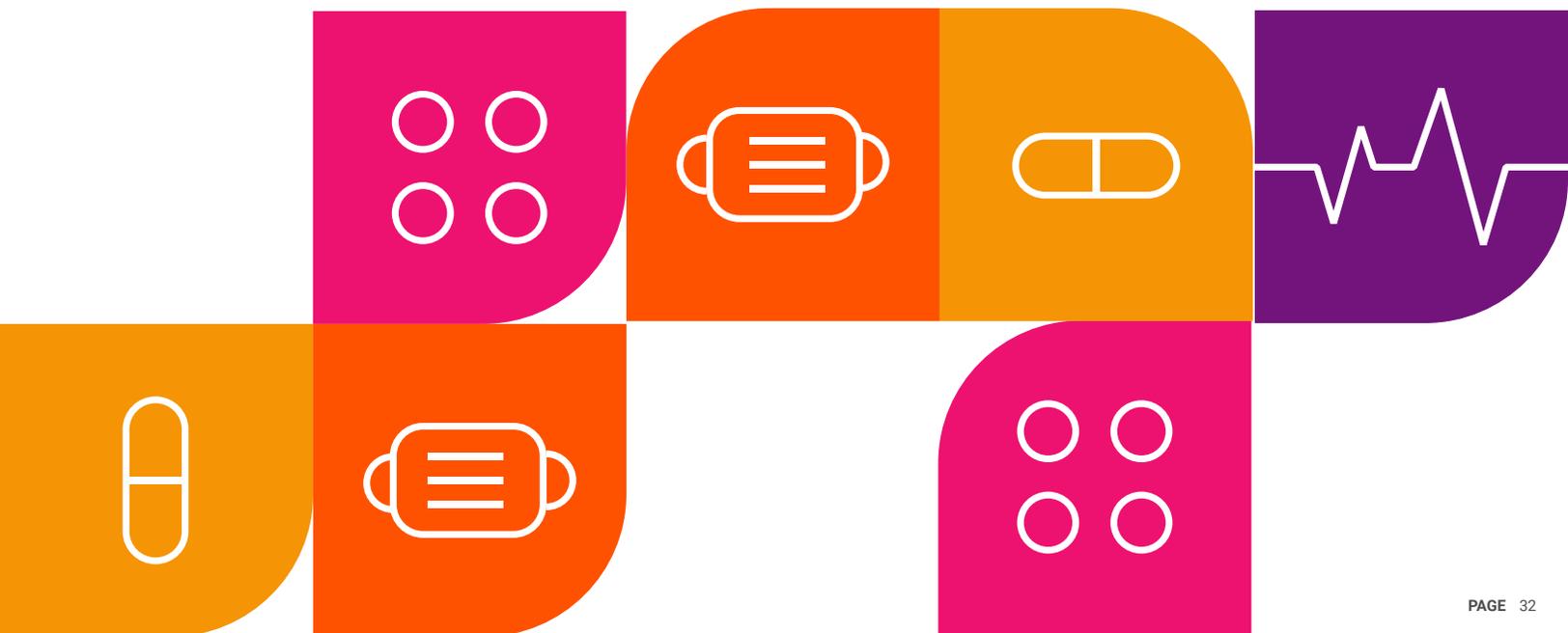
For members of this sub population, which includes persons living with HIV, they often rely on support from Civil Society Organizations (CSO) at the local, regional or international level for the provision of services and other forms of support to address their health and related socio- economic needs. The Global Fund for AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) has,

in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, provided the opportunity for additional grant funding to assist country HIV response programmes in addressing and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes accessing prevention, testing and treatment options that are available to the countries. The Global Fund support is also geared towards ensuring that the HIV services are not compromised to those persons who are living with the virus, and their families. For many of these programmes, the resources that are essential for their delivery to PLHIV has been re-routed towards addressing COVID-19, this includes both human resources as well as materials and supplies. In the case of Suriname, this has manifested itself, for example, in reduced access to HIV testing, access to condoms, access to mental help or counselling, access to nutritional and financial support, as well as access to treatment for tuberculosis. (UNAIDS, 2020)

Additionally, the presence of COVID-19 has resulted in a reluctance on the part of PLHIV in accessing treatment at medical facilities for fear that they will contract the virus. Given that this group stand among those most at risk of contracting and dying from the virus, this reluctance adds an additional layer to what is already a less than enabling environment for PLHIV for accessing the treatment and support services.

As stated above, the sources of funds for HIV response programmes are typically through grants from international aid and multilateral agencies. This source of funding and its sustainability has also been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is clearly seen when one considers the countries that are, and continues to be, most adversely impacted on by the COVID-19 pandemic. These countries (The USA, China, European countries, Japan) are not only the centres for the global supply chain for essential goods and services, they are also the centres that provide support to the international CSOs, international aid agencies and multilateral agencies. With the projected negative impact on the global economy and specifically the economic wealth of these countries as a direct result of the pandemic, one can expect a significant reduction in funding support from these countries, on which the local CSOs depend to reach those segments of the population under their remit.

Generally, the lack of data on informal workers in the informal economy prevents concrete assessment and efficient roll out of programmes to this sector. The systems in place to reach the different categories of workers in the informal economy are lacking due to deficient information systems. Further to this, the dialogue on informal employment needs to extend to the situation of the working poor, women informal workers with children at home, informal essential workers and migration in more details.



## Link to Sustainable Development Agenda

According to Razavi (2020), following the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the International Labour Organization adopted a “Social Protection Floors Recommendation” which set the stage for the establishment of minimal levels of protection for all as part of a comprehensive social security system. The intent of the Social Protection Floors Recommendation was “to assist member States in covering the unprotected, the poor and the most vulnerable, including workers in the informal economy and their families” thereby “ensuring that all members of society enjoy at least a basic level of social security throughout their lives” (ILO 2012). This is linked to the Sustainable Development Goals and its target which advocate for improvements in the social-protection dialogue specifically Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Target 3.8, 1.3 and 10.4. However, while these regulations and goals are in place, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for much more to be accomplished as it relates to providing social protection to all in need. Of course, governments will have to prioritize and find ways to fund these initiatives within the context of the limited fiscal space they presently operate, which in itself may be challenging. While many governments have indeed increased support to persons and businesses affected by the pandemic, the sustainability of the response given limited fiscal space is of concern.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed inequalities within labour markets which disproportionately affecting workers in the informal sector. In the spirit of resilience and sustainability, key stakeholders and policymakers in the Caribbean Basin should ensure systems are in place to respond to crisis by strengthening social protection systems and promoting decent work which includes support for persons employed in the informal economy and transitions from the informal to the formal economy. This may include developing institutional mechanisms to reach informal workers such as non-contributory and contributory schemes and facilitating their transition to the formal economy in the longer term.



# WAY FORWARD

## Post COVID-19: Recommendations and Conclusions

The severity of the effects of COVID-19 is dependent on the duration and measures for containment and prevention by all stakeholders. However, in defining “new normal” post COVID, there is a need to rethink, reposition and refocus the response to the informal economy, and more specifically, the role of the informal economy in the Caribbean Basin. With job losses, salary cuts and reduction in working hours, the move to informal employment provides a viable option for many. Interventions developed and implemented in addressing the role of the informal economy, types of workers in the informal economy, and the impact of crisis on the informal economy must be environment specific and well-targeted. While there are areas of commonality as it relates to the impact of COVID-19 in the formal and informal sectors, policy measures to address the impact of COVID-19 affect these sectors differently.

COVID-19 has shown the potential to reproduce or perpetuate practices, practices that can manifest themselves in a reluctance in accessing health and support services that are available due to an environment that is characterised by stigma and discrimination on one hand, and the share inability to access these services due to an environment that is characterised by violence and abuse. According to Chen 2012, COVID-19 has also presented an opportunity for a “a new economic paradigm- a hybrid economy” which represents changes, one in which informal workers can bargain with “dominant players in those chains for their rightful share of value added.”

The policy prescriptions that have been applied across countries have concentrated on improving the livelihood of those worst affected by the fallout associated with the COVID-19 pandemic but has, in so doing, failed to address the social determinants, the factors that determine the conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn,

work, play, that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. A greater understanding of the social determinants will ensure that the policy responses are better targeted to reach those most in need of support to mitigate the impact of any crisis. For COVID-19 and the Informal sector, this speaks to the marginalized populations, inclusive of members of the LGBTQI plus community.

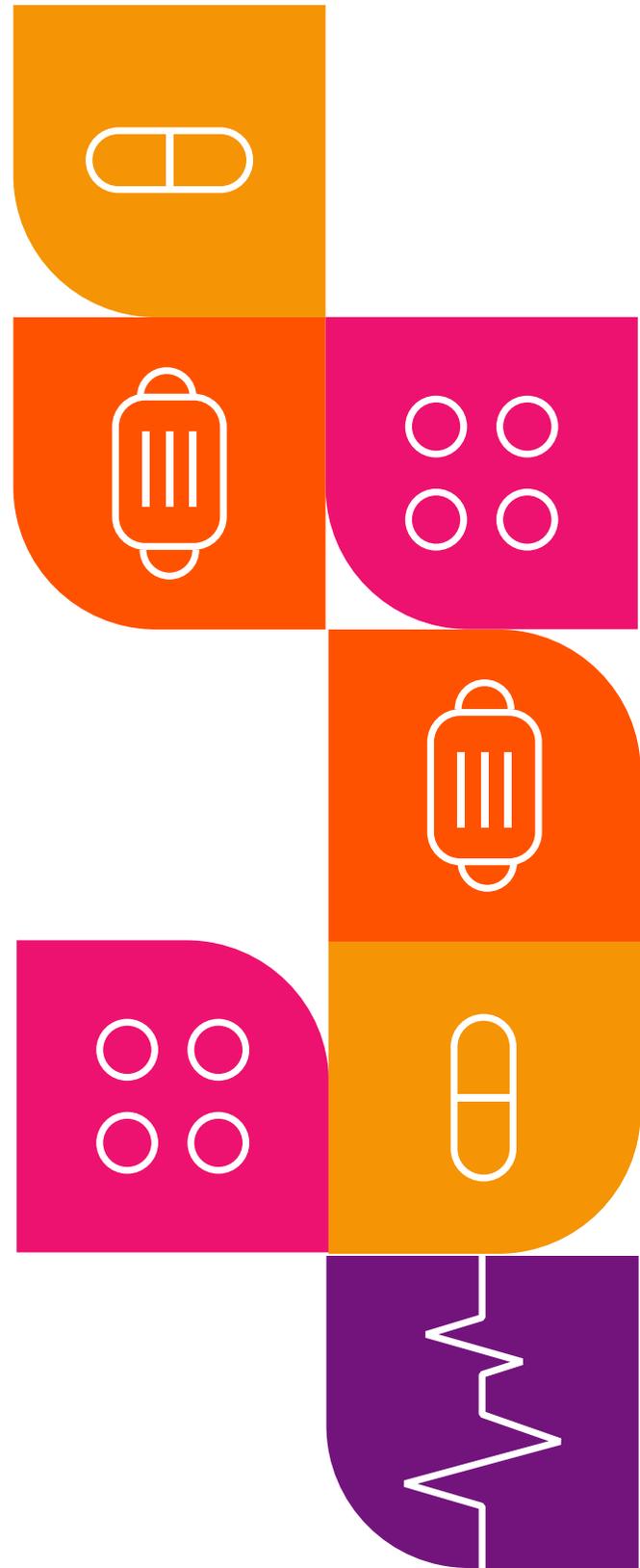
The situation with COVID -19 presents an opportunity for governments to make progress and effect permanent change with respect to the operations of social-protection systems. More so, it presents an opportunity for embracing the informal economy and thereby seek solutions which will enhance, via increased social protection, the productivity and incomes for the informal workforce. This requires a strong institutional framework which comprises a supportive policy environment that is mindful of the challenges but committed to solutions.

### **In this light the following are recommended:**

- Data and policy needs assessment of the informal sector. Official statistics for the informal sector are in most cases limited or lacking. The absence of disaggregated and reliable statistics on the sector in the region implies a lack of understanding of the sector and how it works.
- Institutional support through representative voices of informal workers alongside a strong information base will provide the foundation for evidence-based planning. This approach allows for access to social safety net programmes through partnership, for example; unions for self-employed, group health insurance through collective registration agreements.
- A multi- disciplinary approach is critical in cushioning the effects for persons employed in the informal economy over the medium-long term. This approach will also help in reducing duplication of efforts across key stakeholders given the current economic climate.
- Reform of social safety net programs. This should be a priority so as to extend legal coverage,

identify specific programmes and/or adapt existing schemes to include informal workers. This includes revising/developing contribution eligibility and the procedure for claiming benefits suitable to the sector in which persons operate.

- Dialogue with the private sector, including the need to engage insurance companies to revisit their eligibility criteria for accessing support so as to better incorporate informal workers.
- It is important that Civil Society Organizations be resourced to reach those segments of the population that are hard to reach, including members of KPs. At present, these groups are denied access to the services due to a less than enabling environment that creates a disincentive and negatively impacts on their demand for support, while on the other hand, the donor agencies are themselves compromised in their ability to fulfil their commitments to supporting these CSOs. Well-resourced Civil Society Organizations are best placed to ensure that marginalized population are effectively and efficiently reached and their needs addressed in a holistic manner, through the ability of these organizations to address the social determinants. A case can be made for a greater role for civil society in the COVID- 19 response, to ensure that the resources are most effectively spent. The CSOs are also best placed to advance the advocacy efforts that are needed to address the challenges linked to access by the marginalized populations that comprised the informal sector including stigma and discrimination and other human rights violations.



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