

Nations reopen yet struggle to define 'a new normal'

May 20 2020, by Nicole Winfield and Mike Corder



A mother wearing a face mask travels with her son on a train in Lahore, Pakistan, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. Authorities resumed railway service after a two month suspension, as the government relaxed the weeks-long lockdown that was enforced to help curb the spread of the coronavirus. (AP Photo/K.M. Chaudhary)

As nations around the world loosen coronavirus restrictions, people are discovering that the return to normal is anything but.

Schools, offices, public transportation, bars and restaurants are now on the front lines of post-lockdown life—back in business, in many cases, but not business as usual.

How each of those key sectors manages [social distancing](#) and tamps down expected new outbreaks will determine the shape of daily life for millions as researchers race to develop a vaccine that is still probably months, if not years, away from being available to all.

What a return to normal looks like varies widely. For hungry migrant workers in India, it was finally being able to catch trains back to their home villages to farm while city jobs dried up. For hundreds of cruise ship workers stranded at sea for months, it was finally reaching shore Wednesday in Croatia. For wealthy shoppers, it was returning to the newly reopened boutiques of America's Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, California.

In Britain, the leader of the House of Commons said members of Parliament should return to London to work in person on June 2 after weeks of remote working. Jacob Rees-Mogg said the decision recognizes "the need for business to continue." Authorities are likely to limit the number of people allowed into the small chamber, where lawmakers sit shoulder to shoulder on long benches.



Senior students wait for class to begin with plastic boards placed on their desks at Jeonmin High School in Daejeon, South Korea, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. South Korean students began returning to schools Wednesday as their country prepares for a new normal amid the coronavirus pandemic. (Kim Jun-beom/Yonhap via AP)

In Italy, where good food is an essential part of life, once-packed restaurants and cafes are facing a huge financial hit as they reopen with strict social distancing rules. The losses are forecast to pile up to 30 billion euros (\$32 billion) this year.

"We have to turn upside down all the activity that we did before," lamented chef Raffaele di Cristo, who now must wear a mask and latex gloves as he prepares food at the popular Corsi Trattoria in Rome.

"Everything is changed. Slowly, slowly, we will try to understand and to adapt to this coronavirus."

Corsi reopened for business Monday with half its tables removed to ensure the mandated 1-meter (3-foot) spacing between tables. Hand sanitizing gel was placed at the entrance, and a new ordering system was installed so customers could read the menu on their phones.



Passengers wearing face masks stand in close proximity as they ride a canal boat during the evening rush hour in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. The Thai government continues to ease restrictions related to running businesses in the capital Bangkok that were imposed weeks ago to combat the spread of COVID-19. (AP Photo/Gemunu Amarasinghe)

Some shops in Italy have complained about a shortage of gloves keeping away customers. Veneto Gov. Luca Zaia said Wednesday he would change the rules on wearing gloves in clothing stores and shoe shops and substitute sanitizing gel instead.

Slovakia reopened theaters, cinemas and shopping malls on Wednesday, all with new restrictions on visitor numbers, even though it has had only 28 deaths from COVID-19.

The head of the Dutch hospitality industry welcomed a decision to allow bars and restaurants to reopen on June 1 but warned about the impact of mandatory social distancing rules.

"The restrictions are unfortunately unworkable" for many businesses, said Rober Willemsen of Royal Hospitality Netherlands, adding that more [government support](#) is needed to ensure the survival of many bars and restaurants.



Police officers ask people to not sit while patrolling at the beach in Barcelona, Spain, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. On Wednesday, Barcelona permitted people to walk on its beaches for the first time since the start of the coronavirus lockdown over two months ago. Sunbathing and recreational swimming are still not allowed. (AP Photo/Emilio Morenatti)

Education is also facing a radical rethink.

Cambridge became the first university in Britain to cancel all face-to-face lectures for the upcoming school year, saying they will be held virtually and streamed online until summer 2021. Other institutions have taken different tacks. The University of Notre Dame in Indiana will bring students back to campus but redesigned its calendar to start the semester early in August and end before Thanksgiving, along with

ordering masks, testing and contact tracing.

In South Korea, hundreds of thousands of [high school seniors](#) had their temperatures checked and used hand sanitizers as they returned Wednesday, many for the first time since late last year. Students and teachers were required wear masks, and some schools installed plastic partitions around desks.



Indonesian youths walk past a banner that calls for people to always wear face mask as a precaution against the new coronavirus outbreak, in Jakarta, Indonesia, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Dita Alangkara)

France is limiting spaces in its primary schools, giving priority to the

children of essential workers and those in need. Some younger students even go on alternating days, while high schools remain closed.

In the new normal, people's gratitude at being able to shop or eat out again is mingling with worries about job security.

Business was slow Wednesday at a Paris farmer's market with a mixed mood among the masked, gloved vendors. A man selling peonies and petunias said he was glad to get out and see shoppers again, while a woman selling asparagus and tomatoes behind a makeshift plastic screen grumbled that her customers were buying less than usual.

Aircraft engine maker Rolls-Royce announced plans Wednesday to cut 9,000 workers as it grapples with the collapse in air travel. In general, those jobs come with good pay and benefits, and losing them is a sharp blow to local communities.



Workers use tape to block off seats as they prepare for a large high school graduation ceremony at Hoover Metropolitan Stadium in Hoover, Ala., Tuesday, May 19, 2020. Two of Alabama's largest public high schools, Spain Park and Hoover, will hold commencement exercises on back-to-back nights at the venue, with rules about seating and face masks in place to lessen the spread of the new coronavirus that causes COVID-19. (AP Photo/Jay Reeves)

Some businesses are adapting quickly to new realities. In Kenya, safari operators have resorted to sharing live broadcasts on social media in hopes that attention to endangered and other species doesn't fade.

Many governments, including those in scores of U.S. states, are in fierce disagreement over what the new normal should even be.

As beaches reopened in Barcelona, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez asked lawmakers to back a plan to extend the nation's state of emergency by another two weeks until June 7. Spain's main opposition, the conservative Popular Party, rejected the move.

"You are like a headless chicken running around not knowing what to do," Popular Party leader Pablo Casado told Sánchez. "To endorse your extension would be irresponsible."

While infection rates have been falling in Asia and much of Europe, the pandemic is still spiking in Latin America. Brazil this week became the world's third worst-hit country with more than 250,000 confirmed cases despite limited testing. In Lima, the capital of Peru, coronavirus patients are filling up the city's intensive care beds.



Indian migrant workers along with their family members wait outside a railway station to catch a train to return to their home states, in Mumbai, India, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. The pandemic has exposed India's deep economic divide as millions of migrant workers have left Indian cities with luggage bags perched on their heads and children in their arms, walking down highways in desperate attempts to reach the countryside. (AP Photo/Rafiq Maqbool)



Ponder High School graduates march out of the garage area and onto the front stretch to participate in their graduation ceremony at Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth, Texas, Tuesday, May 19, 2020. Texas Motor Speedway is hosting 30 socially-distanced high school graduation ceremonies over the next few weeks. The first two were Monday night. Students receive their diplomas on the front stretch of the track with family and friends in their cars parked on the infield watching the ceremony on the track's massive "Big Hoss" TV screen. (AP Photo/Tony Gutierrez)



People affected by the coronavirus economic downturn, line up to receive food donations at the Iterileng informal settlement near Laudium, southwest of Pretoria, South Africa, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Themba Hadebe)



A health worker wearing a protective suit arranges papers as they conduct a random rapid testing for COVID-19 inside a columbarium at the Immaculate Conception Cathedral of Cubao complex in Metro Manila, Philippines on Wednesday, May 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Aaron Favila)



A shopkeeper dusts footwear after opening his shop after weeks, at a market area in Jammu, India, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. Small shops and other businesses were reopened in several states. E-commerce companies started to deliver goods, including those considered nonessential, to places outside containment zones. (AP Photo/Channi Anand)



A woman wearing a face mask to help curb the spread of the coronavirus walks through a dimly lit market in Bangkok, Thailand, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Sakchai Lalit)



Health workers prepare to move 89-year-old COVID-19 patient Sildomar Castelo Branco into an aircraft as he is transferred from Santo Antonio do Içá to a hospital in Manaus, Brazil, Tuesday, May 19, 2020. (AP Photo/Felipe Dana)



South African National Defense Forces check the temperature near the Pan Africa taxi rank in Johannesburg's Alexandra township Wednesday May 20, 2020, where a massive sanitization effort as well as Cover-19 screening and testing campaign was taking place. South Africa has the continent's highest number of confirmed cases and has eased its restrictions to allow an estimated 1.6 million people to return to work in selected mines, factories and businesses. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)



A Kashmiri shopkeeper wearing a mask waits for customers ahead of Eid al-Fitr during a nationwide lockdown to control the spread of coronavirus, in Srinagar, Indian controlled Kashmir, Wednesday, May 20, 2020. (AP Photo/Mukhtar Khan)

"We're in bad shape," said Pilar Mazzetti, head of the Peruvian government's COVID-19 task force. "This is war."

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned that the pandemic could push millions into extreme poverty in Africa, where the virus has reached every country. Guterres said Africa needs more than \$200 billion and "an across-the-board debt standstill" for struggling nations.

More than 4.9 million people worldwide have been confirmed infected by the virus, and over 320,000 deaths have been recorded, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University that experts believe is too low for reasons that differ country by country. The United States has seen about 92,000 deaths and Europe has had around 165,000.

Russia and Brazil are now behind only the United States in the number of reported infections, and cases are also spiking in India, South Africa and Mexico. Russia announced Wednesday that its [coronavirus](#) caseload has surpassed 300,000, with the death toll reaching almost 3,000.

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