

of infection. Meat-packing plants provide favourable conditions for viral transmission, given their low temperature, metallic surfaces, dense production of aerosols, noise levels requiring workers to shout, crowded working conditions and, often, limited access by employees to sick leave.

The nature of the front line and the degree of risk to workers reflects an income gradient, both between and within countries. While those who could, and could afford to, have worked from home during the crisis, others, largely lower-income workers, kept food supplies, transportation and deliveries functioning, risking infection themselves.

The economic impact of COVID-19 has depended on the interplay of pre-existing structural conditions in economies, the amount of fiscal and governance space made available for mitigation measures, and the nature and timing of decisions made in response to the pandemic. Prior conditions mattered – there was much more freedom to act and more choices were available in those places where a robust and resilient health system existed, where social and economic protections were solid, and where governments, scientists and citizens trusted each other to do their best.

An analysis of more than 80 countries shows that, where there were high levels of informal employment, mobility restrictions did not reduce the number of cases – leading to the conclusion that stay-at-home orders can only be successful when three conditions are met: households have enough income to make ends meet through the lockdown period; workers have digital access to enable them to work remotely; and there is a level of trust in government sufficient for orders to be complied with⁽⁵⁰⁾.

Many have lost their jobs and, in some cases, also their health insurance, creating a negative spiral of disease spread and severity. Social protection floors – the set of guarantees for all of the population that every country should have in place, with

