

We Must Be Ready

David Israel Caluna Pilamunga

BEFORE YOU READ: Look at the subheadings in the article. What do you think this article will be about?

Living as an Immigrant

I am an immigrant. I live day to day, week to week. I don't have a social security number, and that makes life very difficult. I applied for a Green Card three years ago, but the government has not responded to my request. When the pandemic started, I was working in a restaurant. I had been there for four years. With my income, I supported my family in Ecuador, including my eight-year-old son. Since they closed the restaurant, I have gotten another job where I am making less than half of what I used to earn.

The Pandemic Hits

The first two weeks of the pandemic were the worst. I was depressed and worried. I even got fever and indigestion. I decided to make a new routine at home. I began to fix things. I built a fire pit in my backyard. Now my new routine includes more cleaning, exercising longer, and reading, which has helped me tremendously. I also have been practicing my English through apps on my phone. I set a goal of improving and developing my English to the next level, so the day I get my Green Card I can get more opportunities.

I miss going to the adult school where I studied English. It gave me a way to forget about my problems and money worries. When I am at school I feel great, I know I'm learning. I know I'm building toward something that will be worthwhile. My teachers are amazing. They are patient and don't give up on us.

My school is now providing classes online, so we can keep learning and practicing English. Nevertheless, I'm not going to lie. I prefer the human contact of being in class, talking to my classmates

and my teacher Miss Wendy. She cares for her students so much. She is always looking for a way to help us. Miss Wendy is always checking on us. We have a messages group that she uses to send us homework or just to be in touch with us.

Demanding Change from our Leaders

Everyone has made adjustments during the pandemic. Maybe the government could make some adjustments, too. (And I am talking about more than a stimulus package.) Based on what's been happening in the last months, we know there has to be a change in the system of the United States. We've let the wealthy take control over our lives. We have to remember and make them remember that the government has to work for every single person in this country. Not just for the very few who have accumulated more than the 76% wealth of the United States (according to the Congressional Budget Office).

We need to demand our leaders change how they spend our taxes. We should be more ready for this kind of catastrophe. A doctor is more important than 100 politicians. A mask and gloves are more important than a gun. It is possible. It can be done. If we can prepare and be ready for war, we could also prepare and be ready to protect peoples' lives.

David Israel Caluna Pilamunga is a student at Minneapolis ABE in Minneapolis, MN. He is from Ecuador. He comes from a native family, and he speaks Kichwa, the mother language of the Kichwa people.



This Is How We Survive

Patricia Olivier

BEFORE YOU READ: How have you been surviving the pandemic?

This pandemic made us feel panic and despair. My husband Jorge had to go to work. He works in the fields where the apple orchards are. He takes care of the young apple trees. He prunes and cuts the older trees. He harvests the apples when they are ripe. We worried he would get the coronavirus and bring it home.

Surviving at Home

I am a diabetic. I was so afraid of catching the virus that I would not open the windows and doors. This is how I led my daughter Luz to have anxiety. She would eat, sleep, and watch television every day. I knew that I had to help my family, so I started looking for solutions.

First, I remembered my faith in God. He gave us this treasure of life, so we have to live it the best way we can. I also began to do more fun activities inside the house with Luz and Jorge.

Surviving in Our Community

Then we took another important step. We decided to try to help more people. Maybe you are wondering how we did it. We started by speaking with friends, family, and the people in our church. We met other enthusiastic women “warriors.” These women have big hearts. Together, we help families in need due to the pandemic. We deliver food to families that can’t shop or cook. We hear about undocumented families that need financial help, and we collect money for them. The money helps if they have a death or illness in their family due to the coronavirus. We may be in quarantine, but we are also in a network of people helping each other.



Surviving at Work

As for Jorge, he still works in the fields. His employers gave him information about the coronavirus. They told the workers to keep distance from each other and to wash their hands. They gave workers gloves and facemasks, but then they took money out of his paycheck. He and the other farmworkers make sure that the apple trees grow well and produce plenty of fruit. They are essential workers making sure we all have enough food. The owners should provide the masks and gloves for free.

When he comes home from work, he has to go through the whole process of cleaning and washing before he greets us. Then we sit down and enjoy every second together as a family.

This pandemic has been a great lesson in our lives, so we can be better human beings and be humble. I give thanks to God who allows me to live one more day and help the families in my community.

AFTER YOU READ: Who are the warriors in Patricia Olivier’s essay? Describe the warriors who have emerged in your community during this pandemic.

Patricia Olivier is a Spanish GED and ESOL student at New Britain Adult Education in New Britain, CT. She is from Nezahualcoyotl, a city in Mexico. She is an independent business owner and she wants to be a role model for her family. Her message to everyone is, “Let us not forget to be grateful every day because we are constantly being blessed! No matter how dark life may seem, the light always shines through!”



Undocumented

We Are Invisible When We Are in Need

Yolanda M.

BEFORE YOU READ: What is an unsung hero? Who are the unsung heroes in your life?

A Time of Stress

The pandemic is very difficult for my family. My husband does not have a job due to the coronavirus. My husband works in construction, but during this pandemic, the company is closed. We have no income during this time. We are a family of five who lives with a lot of stress.

My husband and I talk about the economy, and we are very worried. The government will not give us stimulus checks or unemployment. We feel helpless. We think that we are not able to do anything about the government's decisions.

No Help for Our Children

As parents, we are concerned about our children. The government provides citizens and residents with help. However, our children, who are U.S. citizens, are not getting help. This is because their dad and I are undocumented. This makes us feel very sad. We are constantly worried about money. I am worried about my family's safety.

For the government, we are invisible when we are in need. But when it is time to pay our taxes, we are very responsible. I never thought I would live through 2020, the year of the coronavirus.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what is stressful about this time?
2. Read the article on the next page. What is similar and what is different about these two stories?
3. Read about Cosecha in the box on the right and then research the group and find at least one news article that discusses their work.



Yolanda M. is a student at Family Start Learning and Support at the Center for Literacy at the University of Illinois in Chicago, IL. Yolanda is a Hispanic mother of three sons. She is eager to learn English. She wants to be an example for many other people but especially for her three sons. Despite difficult circumstances, it is never too late to keep learning.

Immigrants Take Action

Cosecha is an immigrant-led organization that runs campaigns to support immigrants in the U.S. During the pandemic, for example, they are raising money to help undocumented immigrants buy food and pay the rent. They have also been fighting for the right of undocumented immigrants to get drivers' licenses. Find out more at <https://www.lahuelga.com/>.



We Do Our Part as Workers

In the End, Nobody Will Sing Our Names

Norman Robles

BEFORE YOU READ: What is an unsung hero? Who are the unsung heroes in your life?

What about Us?

Every five minutes, Abuela walks into the room where I am studying. She gives me updates on the news that has touched the world.

“Dicen que van a dar \$1,200 a cada persona,” she says. [They say they are going to give \$1,200 to each person.]

“It’s not for us,” I reply.

“No pueden correr a la gente,” Abuela replies.

“Yes, it’s correct,” I respond sadly. “They can’t run us away, but we still have to pay the rent.”

We Keep Showing Up

“Y nosotros, que?” I ask myself. [What about us?]

We are always the afterthought. We proudly continue to do our part as the workers in the fields, the custodians, the store clerks, the construction workers, and the nurses. But in the end, we won’t receive praise for being the unsung heroes. We expose ourselves for a country that doesn’t acknowledge us.

Yes, there is something noble and miraculous about the way we show up for work – no matter how much the world is falling apart around us. But I wish in these moments that we were selfish. I wish we could simply stop and let everything fall apart.

In the end, nobody will sing our names. In the end, my people are still undocumented.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. What is the main point the author is making in this article?
2. Write a story using dialogue. Use the author’s dialogue as a model.



Norman Robles is a recent HiSET graduate through the FRAN Family Literacy Program in Lafayette, LA. He was born into an immigrant family, and that dictated a lot of his life. He married an immigrant, so his perspective is based on that. He says, “This story is based on a friend’s experience. I just wanted to bring this story to light.”

Support During the Pandemic

Undocumented immigrants did not receive the stimulus check, nor unemployment benefits during the pandemic. Click below and browse by state to find sources of support for immigrants during the pandemic:

<https://www.informedimmigrant.com/guides/coronavirus/>

A Seamstress During the Pandemic

There Have Been Many Changes

Alida Madzou

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. The word seamstress comes from the old English word “seamster,” a tailor or person who sews seams. The suffix “ess” makes it feminine. (Other examples: waitress or actress.)
2. How do you think a seamstress’s work would be affected by the pandemic?

I started to work as a seamstress at American Roots two years ago, in 2018. American Roots is a company that makes jackets, hoodies, t-shirts, and many other types of clothing. Before the coronavi-



Alida Madzou at her workstation.

rus, everything was working smoothly. For example, I worked a regular schedule, from 8:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m., and I sewed clothing. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, there have been many changes in my workplace.

First, the biggest change is that we don’t sew clothing anymore. Now we sew only masks for nurses, medical workers, and doctors. For me, it is good that the company decided to use our skills to help other people.

The company is using its resources to take care of other people, not just to make clothing to sell.

Another change is that management changed our workspace. We have plastic walls that divide the seam-

stresses into three groups. Now we cannot see the others who are right next to us. We are working in isolation and without talking. It is lonely because before the pandemic we used to have an open room where we could hear and see each other.

Also, we now have fewer exits and entrances at work. Before the pandemic, there were three doors for exiting and entering the workroom. Now, we have just one door that we use to exit and enter. We have to do this for many reasons. We need to put a distance of six feet between the seamstresses as we enter our workspace. Only one person at a time comes in.

Finally, there is one more big change. Before work, everyone has their temperature checked, and they need to get clean gloves and put them on before they enter the workplace. I think it is good that they are checking everyone because some-

Now we cannot see the others who are right next to us. We are working in isolation and without talking.

times I worry about going to work. I have a small son, and I don't want him to get sick.

Although there are a lot of changes at my workplace, the changes are not too bad. And there is one good part. People who work now make more money because they work more hours, and they work more overtime hours. I wasn't sure in the beginning if I was going to have work, so I am happy to have a job making masks for people who need them.

Alida Madzou is a student at Portland Adult Education in Portland, ME. She lives and works in Westbrook, Maine. She is from Congo Brazzaville (what many people call Small Congo). She has been living in Maine since 2016. She has one son. Her dream is to learn more so she can be a dress designer someday.

AFTER YOU READ: Look back over the essay. How does the author organize her thoughts? Make an outline that shows the structure of this essay.



Alida Madzou hopes to become a dress designer someday.



Plastic sheets divide the workspace at American Roots.

What Is Different about Your Workplace?

Write your own essay about what is different in your workplace. Follow these steps:

1. Brainstorm a list of things that are different in your workplace.
2. Organize the items on your list so that similar items are in a group.
3. Write an outline.
4. Write a first draft and get feedback.
5. Write a second draft and get more feedback.

If you aren't working, write about what is different in a workplace that you know about.

I Work in a Dangerous Place

Kyra Fuentes

BEFORE YOU READ:

1. The word “cocky” means proud or over-confident. It comes from the word cock or rooster – a male chicken.
2. What are some of the more dangerous jobs during the pandemic? What makes them dangerous?

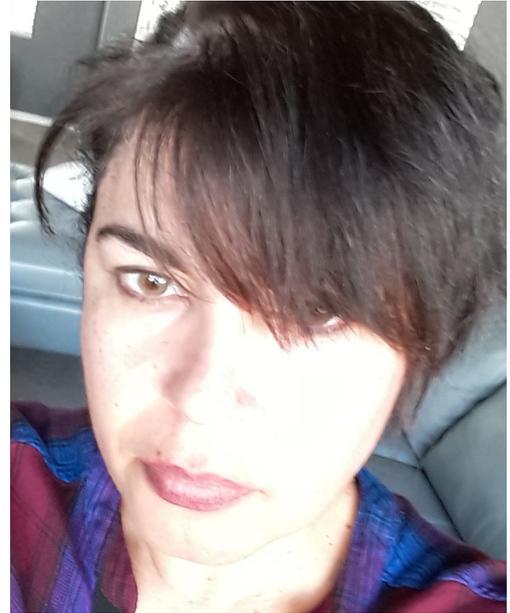
The pandemic has been a roller coaster for me. If I made a graph of my emotions, it would show an erratic pattern. One steady presence in my life has been my husband. I should nominate him to be “husband of the year.” (Please, do not tell my husband I said that because he will become cocky.) You might be wondering: What is so great about my husband? I will tell you: He has supported me while I work in a dangerous place!

Did I mention that I work in a supermarket?

A supermarket is a place where many different people come together. During the first couple of weeks of the shutdown, I felt very scared about everything. How was I going to be safe in an enclosed space with so many people?

Every day, I plan how I should do things at my job. After I clock in, I wash my hands and my ID, and then I put on my mask and gloves. As I work, I regularly check to see if my gloves are tearing. I check that the customers are not too close to me. Even if I put baskets or barriers around me while I am working, they just move them so they can get what they want. It seems like they do not care if they – or I – get sick!

The whole day consists of running away from customers and washing my hands many times. During my lunch break, I cannot rest. I wash my hands, and then all the surfaces in the break room – handles of the refrigerator, microwave, my table, etc. Yes, I clean the kitchen at my job! During my lunch break! Before clocking out, I wash my hands again and with my soapy hands, I clean my walkie-talkie and my PDT. (A PDT is a



Kyra Fuentes is a student in the Conversational ESL class at the Bazan branch of the San Antonio Public Library in San Antonio, TX. She was born in Panama, Central America, but she has been living in the United States of America since 2014. One of her dreams is to speak English like a native speaker.

portable data terminal that we use to scan items in the store.) You should see my co-workers’ faces! I do not want to get sick or make my husband or anyone sick! I know, I know! This is too much, but at the end of the day, I believe it is better to be safe than sorry.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what makes working in a supermarket dangerous?
2. Make a graph of your emotions. What would you put on the x axis? And the y axis?
3. Do you notice people have different needs around staying safe? How do you respect people’s different needs?

How Covid-19 Affected My Job

Pendar Tsang

My Job at the Airport

Before the coronavirus pandemic season, I worked full-time at Logan International Airport in Boston. I work at the ABM Company as an assembler. I took orders and put all the sodas, liquor, water, milk, lemon, and ice in the cart. I also put the food in the meal cart. When everything was ready, I put them onto the truck and then went to the airport and delivered the food to the airplane.

In the past, I worked overtime every day for at least two hours, so I used to work at least 50 hours per week. Now, I lost my hours due to Covid-19. My shift began slowly to go down from ten hours to six hours to four hours per day until it finally went down to zero. All the international flights were shut down, and there were only a few local flights per day. I got laid off in mid-March.

Dangerous Work

I felt very upset about losing my job because I always did a great job preparing supplies for the flight attendants. But it is better for everyone that they stopped the flights. The coronavirus has spread all around the world. This makes my work very dangerous. When the plane stops at the airport, all of the passengers come out, and I need to go inside the plane to refill the cart. There is no fresh air inside the plane. I could easily catch the coronavirus.

How We Fight the Virus

If I go back to work, I will wear a facemask at all times and follow social distancing and health guidelines. The company will probably provide free protective equipment like facemasks, hand sanitizer, and alcohol wipes. Work will be different now, but we don't know yet exactly how it will be different.

Now, millions of people around the world



Pendar Tsang is a student at the BEST Hospitality Training Center in Boston, MA. He was born in Hong Kong and moved to the United States. He wants to improve his English so he will be able to find a better job in the future.

have caught the coronavirus. Almost a million have died. I think this is very serious and people are feeling panic. I do my best to fight back against the virus. I continue to stay home and only go outside to buy groceries. I wash my hands, and I make sure not to touch my eyes, nose, or mouth when I go outside. When my family and I stay safe, we are helping to stop the spread of the virus.

AFTER YOU READ:

1. According to the author, what makes working on a plane dangerous?
2. What steps will the author take to stop the spread of the virus?

My Wife Works in a Covid Hotspot

César Carela Vázquez

BEFORE YOU READ: What is a Covid hotspot? Describe a Covid hotspot you're familiar with.

Feeling the Terror

Since the beginning of February when the news about this pandemic started, we were scared because my wife is a nurse. She has a very high risk in a situation like this. Every day we saw the news of what was happening in Wuhan, China. The government put a blockade on the city, and no one could leave or enter the city. We saw stories of people who had no place to sleep. They had to sleep in the subway trains because they could not get out of Wuhan and back to their homes before Wuhan closed.

Imagine the psychological terror that we were feeling during those days. From that moment, we began to take precautions. We stayed home as much as possible, but we still had to go to work each day. My wife is a nurse at the Soldiers' Home in Holyoke, Massachusetts. This home for veterans turned out to be a Covid-19 hotspot. Every day, two or three patients died. As of June 24, 2020, 76 veterans have died of the virus, 84 more were infected, and more than 80 staff members were also infected. How could so many people die in such a short time? We were terrified. Every night, we prayed that God would protect us and help us control our fears in this situation.

Co-workers Test Positive

One by one, my wife's co-workers tested positive. This led the National Guard to intervene in the hospital because there was practically no one who could care for the patients. It was a very severe crisis. I myself did not know what to do because my wife came home crying every day from the hospital. She was nervous and super scared by everything that she was experiencing in there. So many people died! For her, the most difficult



César Carela Vázquez and his wife.

thing was to see people who had been strong, but then the virus ended their life in a ruthless way. In just days, they went from being well, walking around, and playing cards, to a coffin.

What I am expressing is a little strong, but this is what we were going through. Sometimes, I asked myself how a person could be consoled at a time like this. I just started talking to God to ask for strength and to give support to my wife. Weekly, she took the test and always got a negative result, until just a few days ago.

Getting Tested

About nine days ago, my wife began to feel symptoms such as tiredness and pain in her face and decided to go to the doctor to have the test. But her doctor would not give her the test. He said she didn't have enough symptoms, despite the fact that she informed him that she worked at the Soldiers' Home. She had to find another doctor who performed the test, and she tested positive.

When she told me the news, my head began to hurt. Since then, we have been in extreme quarantine at home. We are afraid to go out shopping

for fear of infecting other people. My mother-in-law helped us to do shopping the first few days so we wouldn't have to leave the house. She brought food and left it at the door. Also, our friends from church helped us by bringing us food and other supplies. My adult education program donated food as well, and one of my classmates, Ms. Medeya, made a mask for me. It has been very useful. I wash it every day with alcohol and hot water, and I use it again.

My wife's symptoms have been coughing, body pain, and chest pain. She has not had a fever. As for me, I have not felt any type of symptoms. I keep drinking natural fruit juices and eating well to raise my body's defenses against the virus. My wife and I keep distance between the two of us. We sleep in separate rooms. As I write this composition, I am wearing gloves and a mask, since my wife also uses this computer to talk to the doctor, among other things.

God Has a Purpose

My wife consults with the doctor twice a week by video call. He advised that I take the test, so yesterday, I did. I am now waiting for the results. I know inside my heart that this pandemic will end someday and that God has a purpose for this whole situation. It is to make us more aware of our neighbors and our environment, and to see life in a different way — more beautiful every day.

César Carela Vázquez is a student at the Valley Opportunity Council in Chicopee, MA. His wife has recovered from Covid, and he has so far tested negative. César says, "After a few days, my wife returned to the battlefield to work and to give everything she could. I hope this article will give you hope that they can survive this situation and trust that God is with you at all times."

AFTER YOU READ: What stands out to you about César's story? Write a letter to César and say what you appreciate about how he has handled the situation. Refer to details from the text.

Healthcare Workers' Union Leads the Fight for More Resources for Frontline Workers



Kwesi Ablordeppey has worked as a Certified Nursing Assistant at the Soldiers' Home for 20 years.

Workers have more power if they are organized together in a group, so sometimes they form unions. Unions help workers negotiate for better pay and job conditions. In late March 2020, union member Kwesi Ablordeppey alerted his union president that many people at the Soldiers' Home were dying. She alerted the Massachusetts Health and Human Services Secretary Marylou Sudders. On April 1, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker called for an independent investigation of the deaths at the Soldiers' Home. Kwesi and other union members have also advocated for new laws that will protect them as frontline workers.



He is also a member of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) 888 and the president of his chapter.

Source: <https://www.wbur.org/commonhealth/2020/06/10/holyoke-soldiers-home-sudders-union-timeline>

Water Treatment is Essential Work

Two Adult Education Students Discuss the Program that Led to a Good (and Essential) Job

Garry Johnson Interviews Tom Connelly



Garry Johnson is a hardworking individual and wants to help others do well so those he helped can go on to help others. He is also a student at X-Cel in Boston, MA.



Tom Connelly works as a wastewater operator. He is a graduate of X-Cel Conservation Corps in Boston, MA. He is also a musician.

Has the pandemic affected your work?

If this were a year ago, I would be out of work. I used to work in restaurants, but most of them closed due to the coronavirus. I didn't like working those type of jobs because my real goal in life was to help the environment. A friend told me about the X-Cel Conservation Corps, and that's how I got a job working for a private company called Linden Ponds Water Treatment Facility in Hingham, Massachusetts.

How did X-Cel prepare you for this work?

X-Cel Conservation Corps is a career readiness program for young adults, ages 18-29, that focuses on the environment and prepares you for careers in the water industry. I worked as part of a work crew on water conservation projects for 10 weeks. Then I was hired for a paid internship in a wastewater treatment plant for 14 weeks. During

this time, I studied for my Wastewater Operator's license and I passed the exam in December 2019. Right before the coronavirus hit, I was hired as a full-time wastewater operator with a level 4 license. That is an essential job and I have been working full-time right through the pandemic.

Why did you choose this path?

Ever since I was a kid, I've wanted to do something to help the environment. Working in wastewater treatment, I am helping to keep the environment clean. We make sure that the water we use gets cleaned and treated before being returned to the environment.

What advice do you have for others who might be interested in this path?

If you want to become a wastewater operator, you will need to do research, study a lot, and take online practice tests. There are a lot of jobs available

in this field today. Many wastewater operators are going to retire soon, so if we can get young adults into the field then that would be great for them. It does provide a good and stable income and the benefits include health, dental, vision insurance, retirement plans, and paid vacations

Are you happy with your job?

Yes, it's better to have a job you love for a long time rather than going from job to job. I'm glad

I took the time to get training and pursue a career. Now I have time and energy after work to make music. If you are interested in a career, you should go chase it, no matter what obstacles you face! I am lucky to be in a much better place during this pandemic because I chased my career interest.

AFTER YOU READ: According to the author, what makes his job good?

What Makes a Job a Good Job?

In this essay, Garry Johnson asks Tom Connelly about his job — how he trained for it and what he likes about it. Work in pairs and interview each other about your jobs. Ask questions like: What training did you need for this job? How did you get it? What do you like and not like about it? How has your job been affected by the pandemic? What advice do you have for someone else who is interested in this job?

Share your interviews with other classmates. From the interviews, create a list of qualities that make a job good. Group the qualities into four categories:

1. **The current context:** For example, is this job essential work? What is its projected growth? Can the work be outsourced (to people or computers)?
2. **The day-to-day nature of the work:** For example, does this job involve working with people? Working at a desk? Working outdoors?
3. **How the job aligns with your career goals:** For example, does this job give you room to grow? Will you be represented by a union? Does it pay well enough to support you and your family? Does it provide benefits?
4. **How the job aligns with your values:** For example, are you doing work that makes you feel fulfilled?

Organize these qualities onto a chart with responses along a spectrum. Yes or no is not always the best response to a question. Rather, the answer may fall along a spectrum:

Is this job essential work?

definitely mostly somewhat minimally not at all

Choose a career or job you are interested in and fill out the chart. Use this as a guide to help you think about what kind of work you want to pursue.

See “Good Jobs, Not Just Any Jobs” issue of TCA for more ways to explore this topic. See the “Integrating Career Awareness into the ABE and ESOL Classroom: Curriculum Guide” <https://www.collegetransition.org/student-supporters/publications/integrating-career-awareness/>

Covid-19 Changes Work

Andy Nash

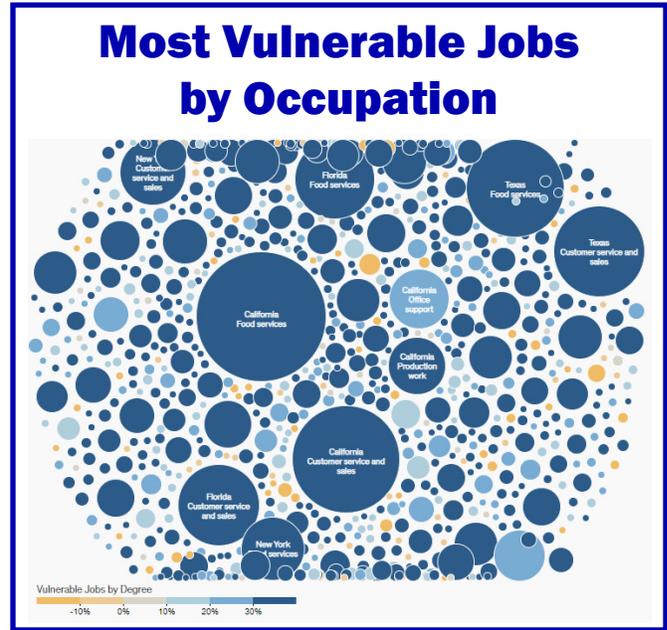
BEFORE YOU READ: The articles on pp. 50-57 talk about how work has changed for individuals in different industries. This article looks at macro changes in the economy and workforce. What is the value of looking at both micro- and macro-level changes?

Our nation’s slow and inconsistent response to the coronavirus has had a devastating impact on the workforce. As everything was eventually forced to close and people reduced their spending and traveling, many jobs dried up. Between mid-March and the end of May 2020, workers filed more than 40 million claims for unemployment benefits (that’s one in four workers), according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Although 2.5 million jobs returned in May (mostly for workers who had been temporarily laid off from service jobs in bars and restaurants, hair salons, medical offices, etc.), many of those jobs may be lost again as the pandemic worsens. Small businesses that do not have enough money in reserve will not survive. Researchers estimate that four out of ten jobs will not come back.

The Job Gap

According to reporting in *Time Magazine*, the pandemic is exposing a growing gap between “college-educated workers, whose jobs can be done from anywhere on a computer, and less-educated workers who increasingly find themselves in jobs that require human contact or that can’t be automated or outsourced.” Many are essential service workers employed in health care, food supply, warehouse and delivery, transportation, grocery, or eldercare. These hourly and low-wage workers are the least likely to have paid sick days or the opportunity to work from home. They are reluctant to skip work if they are sick because they need the money.



Explore this interactive map showing the most vulnerable jobs by occupation and by state. <https://covid-tracker.mckinsey.com/vulnerable-jobs/industry-occupation>

The jobs most likely to be lost are in non-essential services (retail, restaurants, arts and entertainment, travel, etc.), although, amazingly, even nursing jobs continue to disappear as hospitals face budget cuts. Childcare jobs are also getting cut. Another area taking the brunt of the losses is public sector jobs (teachers, public health workers, public transportation workers, and construction labor). Well over 500,000 of these jobs were lost in April alone.

Who’s most impacted

Most of the newly unemployed are young people, people of color, and women. Race is a strong predictor of job vulnerability in large cities where the people working in retail, bars, restaurants, and government (public service) jobs are disproportionately nonwhite. Age is another predictor, as

younger workers are more likely to work part-time and lack seniority. And women are vulnerable because they make up about two-thirds of the workers in the hardest hit industries. All of these workers face not only lay-offs, but reduced hours, pay cuts, and temporary unpaid leave (furlough).

What does the future hold?

Many of the changes in the ways we are living during the pandemic are likely to be permanent. The increase in remote work and the many learning and shopping activities that have moved online will, for example, create a great need for online systems and support jobs. Similarly, the shift toward more automation in areas such as manufacturing, warehouse work, and transportation, will lead to jobs in robotics and technical engineering. Training for these new jobs will need to be a priority.

But the majority of jobs will continue to be in the sectors that cannot be replaced by technology – where humans are required to help or care for others. Especially during the pandemic, these jobs need to have safe working conditions and many workers are starting to organize around this issue.

- Truck drivers have fought for sick-pay.
- City bus drivers have won the safety precaution of allowing riders to enter and leave through the back door (and therefore riding for free).
- Amazon workers have organized for safety precautions and paid time off for Covid-related needs.
- The union representing grocery store workers (the United Food and Commercial Workers) negotiated temporary pay increases – “hazard pay” – for the first few months of the pandemic and then fought to maintain “hero pay.”
- Health care workers who are on the front lines of the crisis are organizing around the idea that they can’t keep their patients healthy if they, themselves, do not have healthy working conditions.



Workers and members of UFCW Local 21 protest the Fred Meyer supermarket (owned by Kroger) in Bellingham, Washington, after Kroger decided to eliminate the \$2 per hour bonus pay in May 2020. Read more about it here: <https://www.ufcw21.org/news/tag/hero+pay>

What Can We Do?

The only way to get the economy back on its feet is for people to have safe work and an income to pay for their basic needs. This will require government investment in jobs (in health care, for example), training programs, and unemployment supports. It will also require creative organizing by workers to make sure that all jobs are safe and support workers through these uncertain times.

Andy Nash works at World Education and frequently writes for The Change Agent.

This article drew information for the following sources: <https://www.workforce.com/news/impact-of-Covid-19-on-hourly-low-wage-workers>; <https://www.umass.edu/employmentequity/Covid-19-recession-opportunity-reform-our-low-wage-economy>; <https://time.com/5795651/coronavirus-workers-economy-inequality/>; <https://www.marketplace.org/2020/06/17/which-jobs-are-coming-back-first-which-may-never-return/>; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/05/28/unemployment-claims-coronavirus/>

AFTER YOU READ: Note one thing you already knew and one thing you learned from this article.