



Highlights

▶ Employer and business membership organizations: Leading enterprises in times of the COVID-19 crisis

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The COVID-19 crisis has been a seismic shock to the way we live, the way we work and to the way we view the world. Employer and business membership organizations (EBMOs) across the globe have been at the forefront of helping the businesses they represent to weather the storm.¹

EBMOs around the world have helped to lead the policy response by working in partnership with national governments to raise awareness, manage immediate risks to health and wellbeing, save businesses and safeguard jobs.

EBMOs have also stepped up to deliver crucial services and amplify the business voice amidst the sheer enormity of the COVID-19 crisis. With the external environment evolving on a daily basis and millions of jobs, livelihoods and businesses on the line, EBMOs had to reconfigure their support to members and communication channels into government almost overnight.

▶▶ We are not going to be returning to a new normal; we will be confronting a new reality. The private sector will be an essential driver of economic recovery. We must ensure that we join hands across borders and work together in a multilateral way on an economic recovery that is inclusive and that acknowledges the importance of maintaining the viability of vulnerable economies as well as stronger ones.

▶ **Peter Robinson**, President and CEO, United States Council for International Business (USCIB)

¹ The infographic summary is based on the findings of two ILO reports – [A global survey of employer and business membership organizations: Inside impacts and responses to COVID-19](#) (ILO-IOE, 2020) and [Leading business in times of COVID crisis: Analysis of the activities of employer and business membership organizations in the COVID-19 pandemic and what comes next](#) (ILO, 2021). The figures presented in this infographic are from the 2020 report which is based on a global survey of 127 EBMOs in 127 countries conducted between May and June 2020.

COVID-19's impact on the operating capacity of EBMOs



36% Operating at 100% capacity



31% Operating above 75% capacity



26% Operating at 50% capacity

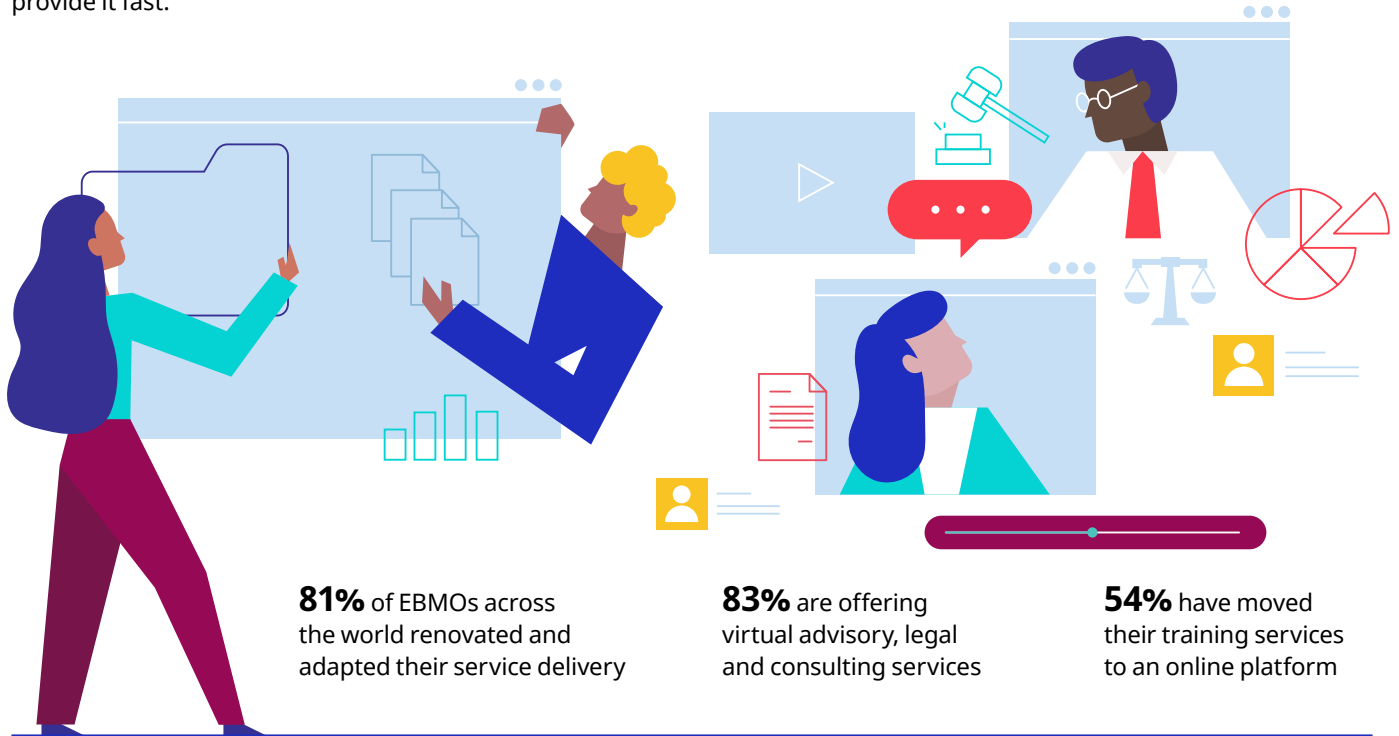


7% Operating below 25% capacity

▶ Taking stock: How have EBMOs responded to the crisis?

Support for members

EBMOs have demonstrated absolute member-centricity at a time of extreme crisis. The priority was clear: provide practical support and provide it fast.



EBMOs have harnessed digital channels during the pandemic:



Virtual meetings



Member engagement and data collection



Remote working



'Open' webinars



Video briefings and pod-casts



60%

of EBMOs offered various incentives to members despite the financial strains on their own organizations

Types of incentives offered include:

58% Provision of new/additional services free of charge

51% Postponement of deadlines for payment of membership fees

29% Temporary reduction of member fees

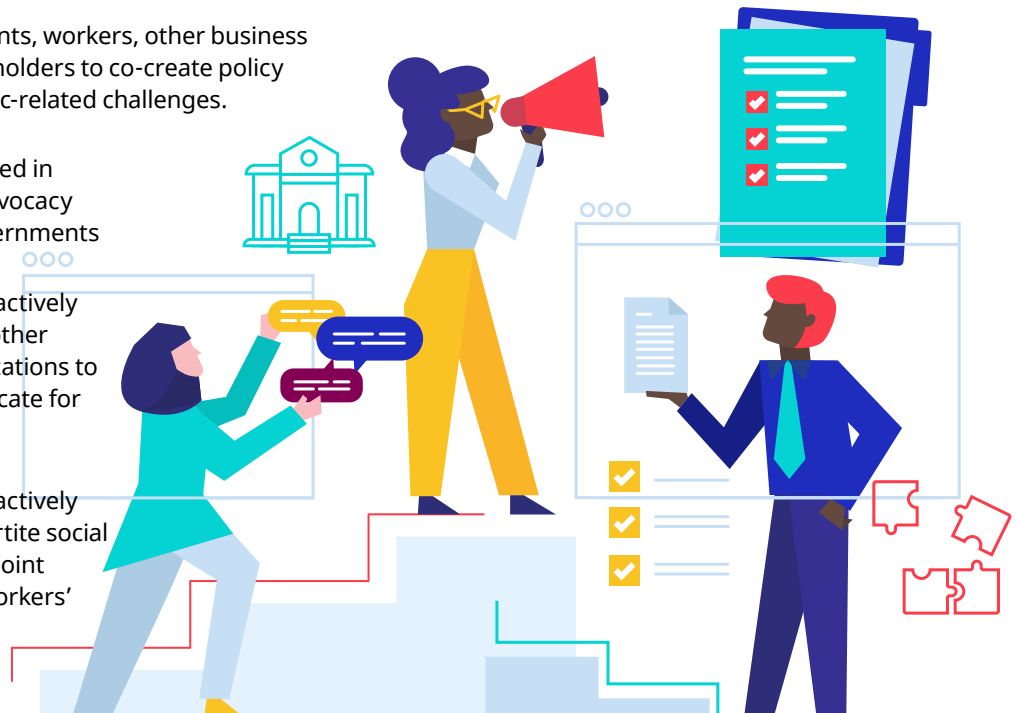
Harnessing a collective voice

EBMOs worked with governments, workers, other business organizations and broad stakeholders to co-create policy responses to evolving pandemic-related challenges.

97% of EBMOs engaged in multi-layered advocacy efforts with governments

92% of EBMOs more actively partnered with other business organizations to collectively advocate for business needs

91% of EBMOs more actively engaged in bipartite social dialogue to find joint solutions with workers' organizations



Highlights of how and where input from EBMOs is being provided at different stages of the COVID-19 crisis include:



Phase 1 Survival

EBMOs worked closely with governments and workers' organizations to urgently co-create policy responses to avert the immediate risk of thousands of business closures and millions of job losses



Phase 2 Stabilization

EBMOs were at the forefront of ensuring a safe return to workplaces, with a specific focus on occupational safety & health (OSH) at work



Phase 3 Recovery

EBMOs built on relationships nurtured with governments to help drive sustainable re-booting of national economies and jobs markets

EBMOs took the initiative in presenting solutions for supporting wages, safeguarding jobs and for ensuring loans for employers. The crisis has provided a good example of tripartite relationships not being a tick in the box, but helping a country to move forward.

► **Oliver Bastienne**, Chair, Seychelles Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI)

Analysis, research and thought leadership

Business surveys, bespoke research and sector specific insight produced by EBMOs helped to position the voice of business at the forefront of many of the COVID-19 debates across the world.

How has research and data helped EBMOs to make an impact during the crisis?

The ability to survey members at short notice enabled EBMOs to get a clear idea of the situation member enterprises were facing and to prioritise key asks to government and support provisions.



Based on such close communication with member companies and a survey on the impact of COVID-19 on the economy and businesses, we delivered business opinions and proposals to address enterprises difficulties and to overcome the economic crisis to the National Assembly and policy makers.

► **A global survey of EBMOs: Inside impacts and responses to COVID-19, ILO (2020)**

How have EBMOs taken a leadership role on specific COVID-19 developments?

1. Through good practice guidance on managing a remote workforce and investing in digital infrastructure
2. Being at the forefront of ensuring that the right regulatory responses were implemented
3. Managing the return to work process in a way that has benefited member businesses, workers and policy makers



Showcasing the response from business

EBMOs engaged policy makers and the wider population on a more emotional and anecdotal level by promoting tangible examples of the business community going the extra mile to help at a time of crisis. Specific examples include:



Redeployment of people into high-demand sectors such as logistics and food production and distribution



Support to families in hardship through coordinated calls for solidarity action, including bespoke funds established to collect contributions from businesses



Facilitating remote working on a massive scale and putting the health and wellbeing of staff front and centre



Provision of critical supplies through the manufacture and distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical equipment

► Taking a lead: How will the role, services and impact of EBMOs evolve?

Taking a lead on economic and labour market recovery

As the health crisis has morphed into a full-blown economic and employment crisis, EBMOs will need to be at the forefront of helping national economies and labour markets to reboot and adapt to the post-COVID world.

Looking beyond immediate responses to the crisis, EBMOs have developed a range of initiatives aimed at the longer term and at 'future-proofing' competitiveness.

► Supporting enterprises to return people to work is the most crucial and important action governments need to take. Any outcome short of a clear strategy to help enterprises recover and return people to work will not help in the much anticipated recovery.

► **Jacqueline Mugo**, CEO, Federation of Kenya Employers (FKE)

How can EBMOs support national governments to meet the looming unemployment challenge?



Working with governments to develop the right incentives for employers to retain existing staff



Identifying short and longer term skills needs



Take a proactive stance on equality and inclusion and youth employment



Providing flexible working opportunities



Driving public/private sector partnerships



Taking a lead on intensifying policy challenges

EBMOs have the opportunity to reinvigorate the collective power of business and shape the future and find innovative solutions to emerging issues affecting the workplace and national economies.

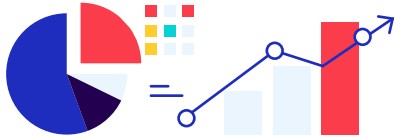
National governments and international institutions have identified a range of intensifying challenges:

- enhancing productivity growth
- improving youth employment
- transitioning to low carbon economies
- promoting equality and inclusion
- formalizing the informal economy
- implementing long-term approaches to health and safety and worker wellbeing

Taking a lead on the future of work

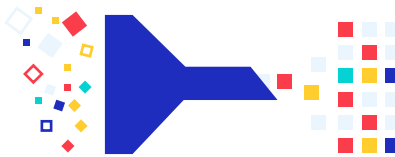
Pre-empting evolving business models and new skills needs will be more important than ever for businesses and economies to thrive in post-pandemic world.

Where can EBMOs add the most value?



Unique data:

The ability of EBMOs to generate timely data will play a pivotal role in influencing public policy, public opinion and business practices linked to the future of work and emerging workforce challenges.



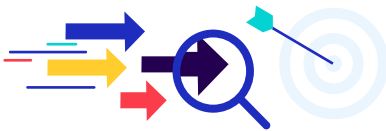
Making sense of what is out there:

With so many organizations and individuals driving activities around the future of work, EBMOs have a key curation and filtering role to play; they can help businesses and policy makers make sense of the 'wall of sound'.



Peer-to-peer exchanges:

EBMOs can facilitate peer-to-peer exchanges and access to experts in areas such as harnessing new technology, implementing new working patterns, anticipating evolving employee expectations and pre-empting future skills needs.



Identifying what works:

EBMOs can capture examples of innovative future-focused initiatives being taken by employers and using this to add a practical edge to future of work discussions.



Taking a lead of reputation and risk management

There has never been a more important time to take a pro-active stance on reputation and crisis management. World-class strategic communication is needed more than ever to build trust and position the business community as a force for good.

Pre-empting and managing risk will become an increasingly important part of the EBMO playbook.



69%² of enterprises recognise that increasing environmental risks have considerable impact on their operations and reputation



51% of enterprises said that policymakers are increasingly demanding compliance with environmental targets



40% and 45% of enterprises from high-income and upper-middle-income countries respectively reported that their workforce is demanding more sustainable working environments and corporate values

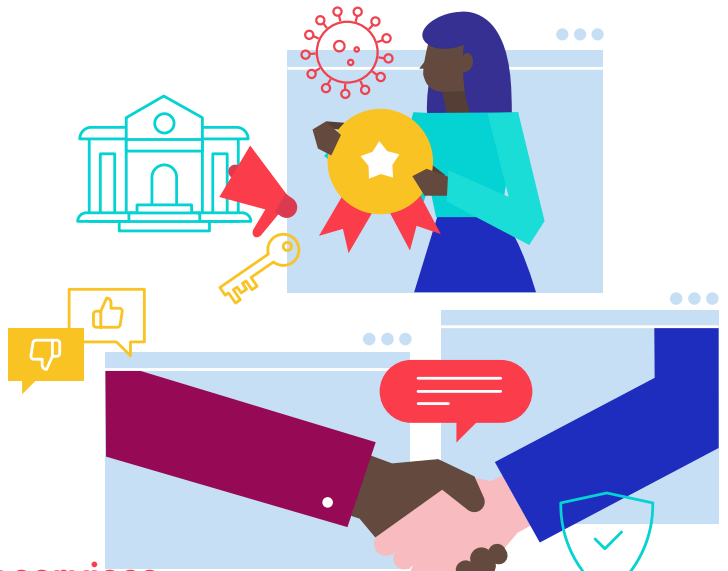
² The ILO-IOE Changing Business and Opportunities for EBMOs report can be accessed at the following link: https://www.ilo.org/actemp/areas-of-work/WCMS_679582/lang--en/index.htm

▶ 56% of people believe that capitalism in its current form is now doing more harm than good in the world³

Influencing wider public opinion holds the key to influencing national governments.

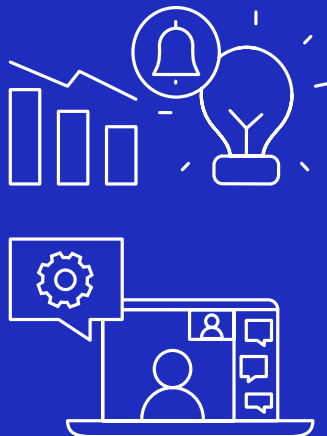
The key barrier that needs to be overcome is trust.

Showcasing the positive contribution of the business community during the course of the COVID-19 crisis has been a good example of EBMOs working to overcome this barrier.



Taking a lead on new services

What does the 'new normal' mean for the role, advocacy voice and member services delivered by EBMOs? In a disrupted and volatile economic, social and business landscape, now is the time to innovate and seize new opportunities.



There is an urgency to innovate services with EBMOs globally reporting:

- ▶ **80%** experienced a drop in income, linked not only to membership fees but also from declining revenue from training, events and from legal and advisory services
- ▶ Looking ahead: **77%** expect membership reduction in 2021

Changes in EBMO service delivery as a result of COVID-19 include:

- ▶ **83%** are offering virtual (remote) advisory, legal and consultancy services
- ▶ **54%** are offering virtual (remote) training

Based on feedback from EBMOs and the businesses within their membership, five identified factors of change are:

- 1** Accelerated moves to digital delivery of services and member engagement
- 2** Support on new working patterns specifically the pace at which companies are transitioning to digital
- 3** Access to unique data to help industry leaders make strategic decisions for the future of their business
- 4** Access to external expertise in a wide variety of areas including advanced technology, occupational health, recruitment and risk management
- 5** A platform for industry leaders to engage with policy makers to take forward their views and demonstrate their own thought leadership

³ Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer

► Taking action: Immediate and longer term priorities for EBMOs

What existing EBMO initiatives can be scaled up to help reboot national economies and labour markets?



1 Maintaining and refreshing business support measures

While many sectors remain in survival mode, the priority for EBMOs is to help their members weather the storm and protect jobs.

SMEs need support more than ever



From the outset of the crisis, EBMOs were at the forefront of negotiating financial packages, wage subsidies and credit schemes.

A priority area for action for EBMOs is to make the case for ongoing support measures, including those aimed at sectors such as hospitality and tourism where the impact of the crisis is likely to be longer lasting.

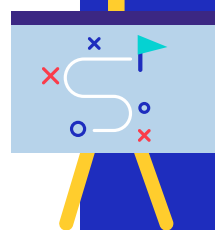
Looking ahead, the recovery of national economies and labour markets is dependent on creating an environment in which existing businesses can go from surviving to thriving and in which new enterprises can flourish and create new jobs.



2 A new approach to advocacy, campaigning and political engagement

The work of EBMOs during the height of the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted what can be achieved in terms of making an impact on the policy agenda and ensuring fast and effective collective responses to emerging challenges.

How can this be built into the next phase of the crisis and to a post-COVID world?



Review and renew EBMO advocacy strategies:

What does a COVID-impacted public policy ecosystem look like for the way EBMOs engage with national governments?



Prioritising high-impact issues:

What are the issues that matter most to members and where EBMOs can make the most impact?



Re-imagining the political engagement process:

How can EBMOs and industry leaders help with effective modelling and pilot schemes that trial innovative approaches?



Measuring impact:

Developing new 'impact indicators' will help EBMOs to identify what works and what doesn't and to play increasing influence back to existing and potential members as a means of enhance retention and member acquisition.



3 Driving a proactive approach to enhancing the reputation of business

EBMOs can take action by not only focusing on the communication challenge inherent in boosting the reputation of business, but also by focusing of the substance of how businesses behave and comply with regulatory obligations and ethical norms.

The fact that 92%⁴ of employees believe that business leaders should speak out on big issues of the day underlines the importance of being at the forefront of pressing social as well as economic debates.

EBMOs can take action by:



Dialling up the good through innovative ways of showcasing the role of the private sector in driving social progress and taking action on the post-COVID-19 policy priorities



Focusing on the 'how' through the review of channels, messages, media strategies and internal skills and create a further step-change in external communication capability



Focusing on the 'what' by championing transparent contracting and effective enforcement, promoting ethical supply chains and addressing corruption



4 Harnessing practical tools to boost EBMOs impact and performance

How can EBMOs influence a burgeoning policy agenda, whilst also leading proactive campaigns and ramping up member support?

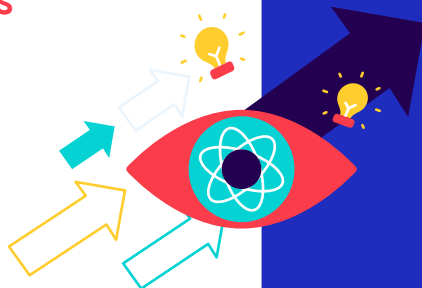
Making step-change within this context relies on harnessing external support and practical tools in a way that enhances capacity and impact in a cost-effective and time-efficient way. EBMOs will need to:

- ▶ Use practical research and data tools to generate bespoke data in a way that maximises impact whilst saving significant time and budget for the EBMO
- ▶ Take a view on how tech-driven innovation can benefit their own service delivery
- ▶ Use peer-to-peer networks and provide access to global experts

⁴ Edelman 2020 Trust Barometer

► Conclusion

7 traits for a transition towards a sustainable and successful future



Nurturing a future-focused mindset:

For EBMOs this means being prepared to challenge existing models, re-imagining and diversifying services to members, accelerating digitalization and being at the forefront of building a vision and platform for inclusive post-pandemic economies and labour markets.



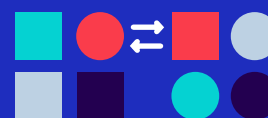
Taking a breath:

While EBMOs are responding to the evolving landscape with absolute urgency, it will be vital to take a breath, to reflect and to assess the impact and legacies of the crisis.



Learning to live with uncertainty:

EBMOs will continue to play a pivotal role in helping businesses and policy makers manage urgent responses to the evolving health crisis and its impact on national economies and employment.



Making trade-offs:

Delivering progressive solutions to evolving public policy priorities and responsive services to members with finite resources will require EBMOs to make trade-offs and prioritize the right areas.



Spreading the word:

It is a priority to learn from what has worked, to showcase specific examples and to use this to reaffirm the positive role that EBMOs play.



Harnessing external support:

The challenge is to do more with less. This will require resilience and astute resource mobilization strategies within EBMOs, drawing on external guidance and support.



Unleashing the power of purpose:

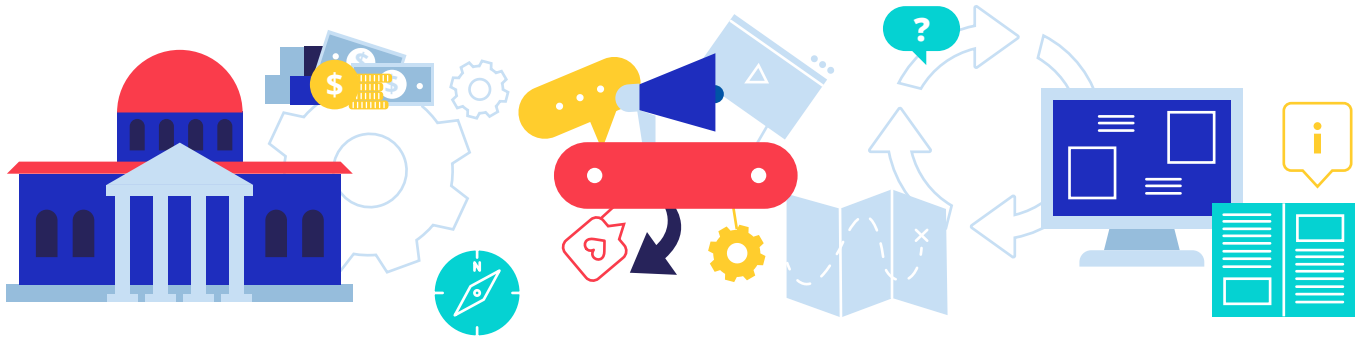
The opportunity is there for EBMOs to evolve from being the voice of business to being the soul of business. Clarity of purpose will lead EBMOs through the crisis and towards a sustainable future.

► Preserving citizens' health must be solved in parallel to sustaining the economy. In order to protect health and lives, we must save the economy.

► Predrag Mitrovic, President, Montenegro Employers Federation (MEF)

EBMOs' top priorities for a resilient recovery is improving their abilities to support enterprises in this crisis.

The three most pressing needs are:



62% strengthening their ability to shape government support for enterprises

46% guidance and tools to communicate the role of the private sector in economic and social resilience, growth and prosperity

40% information on business continuity

EBMOs predict changes to their business models and internal structure to meet medium and long term needs stemming from the crisis. These include:



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