



# UPU Guide to **POSTAL SOCIAL SERVICES**



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**AUTHOR:** James Hale, Susan Alexander

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**DESIGN:** Sonja Denovski, UPU graphic arts unit

**CONTACT:** [info@upu.int](mailto:info@upu.int)

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## Disclaimer

This guide contains numerous examples and case studies of postal social services, sourced via publications and social media, or supplied directly by UPU member countries. However, their inclusion does not imply official endorsement by the UPU or national governments. The views expressed in this guide reflect the opinions of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Universal Postal Union or its development partners. While the International Bureau has endeavoured to provide detailed and accurate information on these services, the main goal is to reveal the broad variety of social services delivered by Posts. Readers are therefore encouraged to approach Posts directly for more information about specific social services. In addition, this guide does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis or to define best practice.

## **Acknowledgements**

This guide was written by James Hale and Susan Alexander, under the overall direction of Siva Somasundram, from the UPU's Policy, Regulation and Markets Directorate, with sponsorship from the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan, and considerable support from the International Labour Organization and UNI Global Union. The authors wish to thank the 113 member countries that completed the questionnaire, and those that provided further case studies and interviews.

We would also like to thank all International Bureau teams for their comments during the preparation of the questionnaire and their help in coordinating with member countries, as well as Sonja Denovski for the final layout. Lastly, this guide benefited from valuable feedback from reviewers.

## Abbreviations

<b>CSR</b>	Corporate social responsibility
<b>DO</b>	Designated operator
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organization
<b>PPE</b>	Personal protective equipment
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goal
<b>UPU</b>	Universal Postal Union
<b>USO</b>	Universal service obligation

## Glossary

<b>Corporate social responsibility (CSR)</b>	Commitments made by the private sector to socially responsible, or ethical, behaviour (including marketing, purchasing choices, employment policy and philanthropy). Sometimes the definition of CSR is broadened to include environmental aspects.
<b>Designated operator (DO)</b>	Any governmental or non-governmental entity officially designated by the UPU member country to operate postal services and to fulfil the related obligations arising out of the Acts of the Union on its territory.
<b>E-commerce</b>	The buying and selling of goods or services using the Internet, and the transfer of money and data to execute these transactions.
<b>Reverse logistics</b>	Sending materials in the opposite direction to that for which a supply chain was typically designed. This can include the returning of goods that were delivered to customers, or the reuse and recycling of materials.
<b>Social development actors</b>	Organizations that are involved in developing and implementing policies and initiatives that seek to improve people's quality of life. These include governments and their agencies, multilateral agencies (e.g. development banks, UN organizations), the private sector, and civil society groups (e.g. non-governmental organizations, charitable organizations and labour unions).
<b>Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)</b>	In 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations agreed upon the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledging to implement 17 SDGs and 169 targets by 2030.

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If governments, international agencies, civil society and businesses are seeking ways to improve people's quality of life, they should look no further than the Post. This guide maps out what many of us know instinctively – the postal system plays a central role in human well-being. Its 656,000 post offices and 5.23 million staff can help to bridge the gap between the people in need and the organizations trying to reach them, yet the world's largest physical distribution network is still underutilized for social development.

The global postal system has a proud history of supporting public health, education and social welfare. It also has huge potential to address some of the world's greatest social challenges. Many of the services detailed in this guide directly support progress towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably those relating to poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10). There is no better example of Posts' strategic importance than their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Designated operators were among the first national institutions to help society react and adapt – confirming their place as an essential service provider. Now, through the Post4Health facility, the UPU is supporting its members in taking an active role in vaccination campaigns.

The pandemic is not the first time that Posts have worked with social development partners to improve people's lives, and it will not be the last. Looking to the future, it is clear that Posts are well placed to confront the persistent problems of poverty and inequality, as well as the challenges of supporting an ageing and increasingly mobile society. The keys to unlocking this potential are an openness to dialogue, partnership, innovation and investment. This guide shines a light on the variety of social services that Posts already offer, while establishing a clear rationale for a greater social role for the Post in the future. This publication is not an end point, but a call for those committed to social development to make use of the considerable experience and resources offered by the global postal system.

I wish in particular to thank the Japanese Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (MIC) for sponsoring this project. It began with a vision to understand the extent of social services being offered by Posts worldwide and, thanks to the support of the MIC, led to the discovery that there is still much more the UPU can accomplish in this area. We have only scratched the surface of the opportunities for Posts to become broad social service providers and to help achieve many of the UN SDGs.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Hussein', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Mr Bishar A. Hussein**

Director General of the International Bureau  
of the Universal Postal Union



Postal networks are an irreplaceable resource and an essential basic infrastructure for supporting social and economic well-being throughout the world. Each country has a unique postal system, reflecting its history and culture. It is therefore impressive that such diverse postal networks have been integrated into a single postal territory through UPU membership. I suppose this is because, while postal services have historical and cultural uniqueness, they are also universal and indispensable to us all.

In many places, postal networks are used not only for the delivery of postal items, but also for social purposes, such as financial inclusion, health promotion and community development. For example, Japan's "watch over" or Mimamori service involves mail carriers checking on the elderly or people with disabilities, and connecting them to emergency services and support networks as necessary. This type of service also exists in other countries, such as France, and is showcased within this guide.

The postal social services project collected and studied numerous examples from multiple sectors (health, education, etc.), so as to provide the practical recommendations found in this guide. Japan highly values the objectives and outcomes of this project and was happy to provide sponsorship. I would like to express my sincere respect for and gratitude to the governments and designated operators around the world for sharing their experiences, as well as the International Bureau for its dedication and leadership in implementing this meaningful project.

In the 21st century, social services have become an indispensable component of postal business. I am hopeful that this guide will be broadly read and utilized, helping countries to meet the pressing needs of society by making the most of their postal network. I also believe this guide will encourage social development stakeholders to use the full potential of the postal network to help society flourish.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ryota Takeda". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a period at the end.

**Mr TAKEDA Ryota**

Minister for Internal Affairs  
and Communications of Japan



# Executive summary

**The global postal system is strategically well placed to tackle many of society's greatest challenges, yet Posts are still underutilized as a social development partner.**

The global postal system is strategically well placed to tackle many of society's greatest challenges, yet Posts are still underutilized as a social development partner. The evidence summarized in this guide reveals the wide variety of social services that Posts currently offer and outlines the case for further diversification, innovation, investment and partnership.

Posts are already fighting poverty and inequality, leveraging their vast physical distribution network and commitments to a universal service to help people meet their basic needs. Through historic connections to government and regular interactions with customers, Posts have also established a unique position of trust within many communities. This reputation provides the foundation for offering more sensitive services, such as managing personal health data, or checking on vulnerable people in their home.

Government and corporate commitments to sustainability give Posts a clear mandate to support social development, while opportunities for increasing revenue and customer satisfaction help to build a strong business case. Many Posts are therefore transforming into broad social service providers, acting as an essential partner for governments, NGOs and multilateral agencies seeking ways to achieve their social development goals.

## What are postal social services and why are they important?

This guide defines postal social services as services that are explicitly designed to convey direct benefits to society, and that are implemented regularly and reliably and broadly accessible. Key sustainable development challenges for the next 20 years include reducing poverty and inequality, meeting the needs of an ageing population, supporting an increasingly mobile society, and recovering from the broad impacts of COVID-19. The Post can offer solutions, helping people to meet their needs in areas such as health, education, community connection, access to government services, utilities and technology. Many Posts already have the capacity and ambition to provide these solutions: 79% of Posts (89 out of 113 responding to our survey) currently offer some type of social service, and 59% intend to offer new services in the future.

## Opportunities and actions for designated operators

For Posts to successfully diversify into offering social services, it is important to recognize that every Post, and the community it serves, is unique. In addition, some services are relatively simple to implement, while others will require high levels of investment and commitment. The examples and recommendations in this guide are therefore not presented as fixed templates or prescriptions, but rather aim to support Posts in developing social services that fit their local context, and that can be sustained over time. Key conclusions are summarized below:

**Recognize multiple benefits.** Social services can generate revenue for the Post, deliver social impact, and create value for development actors. These benefits should be explicitly stated as strategic objectives within the business case, communicated to stakeholders, and paired with appropriate performance indicators.

**Partner with social development actors.** Posts should actively engage with government ministries, NGOs, multilateral agencies and the private sector to better understand their needs, and to encourage the use of postal infrastructure for achieving their social development goals. This guide provides numerous examples of public/private partnerships, which bring additional perspectives and knowledge, helping to reduce risks and access new funding streams.

**Review existing capacity.** Posts should explore how their existing infrastructure, products, services, expertise and partnerships could be leveraged to offer new social services, while identifying strategically important gaps in capacity.

**Legitimize and promote postal social services.** Expanding the traditional range of postal services may require significant internal and external communication efforts, to ensure strong customer awareness, and to embed the principle that the Post is a legitimate social service provider. This can include using the *term community services* instead of *non-postal services*, and marketing bundles of services to particular segments of society, under headings such as *services for families or senior services*.

**Leverage digital technology.** Posts are well placed to help people connect to the Internet, to offer hybrid physical-digital services, and to create new social services that are entirely digital. Postal strategies for digital transformation should therefore explicitly consider ways to support social services.

**Retain and build trust in the Post.**

The reputation of the Post as a trusted intermediary for private information is a valuable asset, helping to establish new social services that involve managing sensitive information, distributing social payments, or working with vulnerable people. However, trust in the Post should not be taken for granted and is not universal; it is important that Posts' core delivery capabilities are sound and secure before any expansion into social services. As Posts diversify, it is inevitable that new risks will need to be managed. These include, but are not limited to, risks to the public, postal staff, partners, revenue, reputation, social impact, legal liability, and the viability of the service itself. Investing in the security of personal data is particularly important for reducing risks, and for building trust in social services.

**Co-create new services with postal workers.** Social services are inherently personal and often involve face-to-face interactions with the public. Their success is intimately linked to the safety, motivation, training and goodwill of mail carriers and post office staff. Proposals for new social services should therefore be developed and reviewed in consultation with postal workers and their representatives, to ensure buy-in and commitment to service provision.

**Remain relevant to the public and future-focused.**

A customer-centred approach is essential to the success of social services; priority should be given to understanding the needs of local communities and key user groups. Posts should promote a culture of adapting services to the changing needs of society, while embracing new technology, innovation and experimentation.

## Opportunities for social development actors

The postal system is a resource that should be used in creative ways by governments, NGOs and multilateral agencies. Posts offer extensive social, physical and digital infrastructures that operate as entry points for the public to access social services. This strategic social role of the Post should be recognized by development actors when preparing investment plans for public health, well-being and community development, yet this is not always the case. The COVID-19 pandemic has, nevertheless, improved awareness of how the Post can function as an essential social service provider and partner. This guide has identified the following opportunities for social development actors to make greater use of the Post to improve people's quality of life.

### **Use the Post to increase efficiency.**

There is a clear synergy between the needs of social development actors to connect with the poorest and most isolated in society, and the commitment of Posts to serve the entire population. The Post offers an efficient system for managing welfare payments, delivering social and humanitarian aid, and communicating public health and safety messages. Outsourcing these tasks to the Post can help charities or government ministries to focus on their core areas of expertise. In addition, renting space within post offices may be more cost-effective than operating stand-alone facilities, helping to bring services closer to the end users.

### **Invest in the Post to achieve your social development goals.**

Governments, NGOs and multilateral agencies should consider making strategic investments in postal infrastructure, as a means for achieving their development goals (e.g. universal access to vaccinations). Governments could also fund designated operators to develop innovation programmes that focus on key social policy objectives.

### **Include the Post within your strategies, policies and frameworks.**

The Post can be strategically important to the success of diverse initiatives, from generating national statistics on well-being, to establishing comprehensive recycling systems. Social development actors should explicitly acknowledge the value of the Post to these initiatives, identify specific roles for the Post, and seek to support synergies between these different roles.

### **Share and collect more data.**

Postal networks are ideally structured for increasing people's access to reliable information. Community hubs and digital kiosks can be located within post offices, while advice materials can be delivered directly to people's homes. Conversely, these networks can be used for collecting data to better understand people's needs (e.g. through household surveys), and for monitoring pollutants and weather extremes that are relevant to public health and safety.



UPU Guide to  
**POSTAL  
SOCIAL  
SERVICES**



# Introduction

**“Postal offices figure among the oldest institutions on a nation state’s territory, they are historically among the biggest domestic employers, and they have often provided critical social services.”**

Eckert, S. (2009). Postal reform around the globe: Comparing the Asian and European experience. *Policy and Society*, 27(3): 261–272.

# The purpose of this guide

The Post is recognized as a broad provider of products and services that improve people's quality of life, for example, by connecting communities, enabling e-commerce, and supporting access to social payments. In some cases, social benefits are a by-product of the Post's core letter and parcel business. In others, postal services are designed to deliver direct social benefits. These social services generate value for citizens, Posts and governments, and there is considerable scope for their expansion. This guide aims to make the variety of existing postal social services more visible, and to support greater diversification and innovation in this area.

Recognizing the deep connections between the Post and people's quality of life, as well as the broad business case for offering social services, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan sponsored the UPU International Bureau to undertake a research project on postal social services. This project included a survey of UPU members, desktop research, case studies and the publication of this guide. It is the first attempt to provide a detailed description of the variety of social services offered by Posts, and to explore key dimensions that are of interest to stakeholders. This guide offers some initial recommendations but does not claim to be an exhaustive analysis or to define best practice. The target audience for this guide includes Posts, regulators and governments, as well as other stakeholders such as the public, postal workers and their representatives, multilateral agencies, and NGOs.

**Chapter 1** identifies five global societal challenges that are driving demand for social services.

**Chapter 2** provides an overview of the social services currently offered by Posts, organized into six broad categories, covering themes such as health, education, community cohesion, government services, utilities and technology.

**Chapter 3** focuses on Mauritius Post and Swiss Post, two particularly experienced social service providers. It combines interviews and examples to illustrate how these Posts have committed to offering a wide variety of social services, and to explore their motivations for diversifying in this way.

**Chapter 4** explores a range of strategic considerations, including how social services are framed within postal strategies, the different business cases and partnership models, workers' perspectives, and implications for risk management.

**Chapter 5** presents key opportunities for Posts to identify and develop new social services.

Examples are included throughout this guide, with particular reference to a set of case studies in Annex 1.

# The Post as a broad social service provider

Early Posts were established with a mission to facilitate communication, and they ultimately formed a global union of designated postal operators committed to a universal postal service. Article 3 of the UPU Convention states that all users/customers should have access to “quality basic postal services at all points in their territory, at affordable prices”; the sending and receiving of postal items should be possible even in the most remote communities. This broad commitment to equality and communication should be regarded as a major global contribution to social development by the postal sector. Posts have also increased their social value by offering a range of governmental, financial, commercial, trade and digital services, in addition to those outlined in chapter 2.

Many of the indirect social benefits of postal operations are well known.<sup>1,2</sup> For example, by providing motivation and support to help governments establish comprehensive and high-quality national addressing systems, significant positive externalities are generated, including improved response times for the emergency services. In addition, for people who are isolated, mail carriers may provide the only opportunity for daily social interaction, and post offices can serve a similar function as a location for social connection. However, it is important to note that, although welcome, these social benefits are often incidental. For example, the presence of mail carriers in a residential neighbourhood may well give the public a greater sense of security, but the goal of mail carriers is not to increase community safety. In other cases, a subset of social benefits are generated directly and intentionally by Posts; such services can be broadly thought of as postal social services.

**A subset of social benefits are generated directly and intentionally by Posts; such services can be broadly thought of as postal social services.**

Posts often provide administrative services on behalf of government, such as managing social security payments or processing requests for passport renewal. Some have been mobilized to help implement specific social development policies, from delivering food parcels to undernourished children, to promoting awareness campaigns about communicable diseases. Posts have also taken the initiative to establish stand-alone services in sectors such as social care, health and education. Many Posts are therefore transitioning into broad social service providers, acting as key partners for governments, multilateral agencies, the private sector and NGOs seeking to implement their social development goals.

1 Pindus, N., Brash, R., Franks, K., & Morley, E. (2010). A framework for considering the social value of postal services. Postal Regulatory Commission.

2 Borsenberger, C. (2020). The Economic and Social Utility of the Postal Infrastructure: Above and Beyond Postal Items Delivery. *The Changing Postal Environment* (pp. 321–333). Springer, Cham.

## Social services as an opportunity for postal businesses

Multiple justifications exist for Posts to offer social services, which can create value for the Post, its customers, national government and other social development stakeholders. The UPU supports the diversification of Posts as a response to well-documented changes in the postal sector,<sup>3</sup> such as declining letter volumes, greater competition and new digital technologies.<sup>4</sup> Some social services generate direct revenue for Posts, while others present an opportunity to implement their corporate social responsibility (CSR) commitments or to improve visibility and brand recognition. For customers, an expanded postal service portfolio can improve their quality of life, translating into an increased customer base, greater customer loyalty, and more opportunities for the cross-selling of postal services. Many postal social services have been designed to support governments in implementing their social obligations and policies. Strengthening relationships with government in this way helps to ensure the Post remains relevant, and to secure future subsidies, investments and contract revenue. The interviews with postal managers in chapter 3 explore some of their motivations for offering social services, and the business case is considered in more detail in chapter 4.

## Definitions, inclusions and exclusions

### What is a postal social service?

As explored above, many postal activities convey broad benefits to society. Some are direct, and others occur indirectly. While all are valuable, it is not the purpose of this guide to map all of the social benefits generated by the Post. Instead, the goal is to explore postal services that have been explicitly designed to convey direct benefits to society, and that are implemented regularly and reliably and broadly accessible. These social services include those that respond to customer demand, as well as services provided to (or on behalf of) national government in order to implement a particular socially oriented policy. These services may generate revenue or have other strategic benefits for the Post; yet for inclusion in this guide, they must still offer direct social benefits to the public.

Similarly, Posts are often engaged in socially beneficial activities as part of their CSR work. Some of these fall within the above definition of social services, while others may not, owing to their small scale, short duration, restricted accessibility, or dependence upon volunteers. For example, the employment of people with disabilities and adaptation of the workplace to accommodate their needs are socially responsible actions, but for the purpose of this guide are not considered to be postal social services.

<sup>3</sup> Postal Reform Guide (2019), Universal Postal Union.

<sup>4</sup> Istanbul World Postal Strategy 2017–2020.

## Exclusions

### Mail and parcel delivery service improvements

Initiatives that simply make core mail and parcel delivery services more efficient or convenient for the general public are not included in this guide. The focus of this guide is on the development of new social services.

### Staff volunteers, staff beneficiaries and charities

Initiatives that depend upon staff volunteers are not considered to be postal social services; reliance upon volunteers may make them difficult to implement at scale or to sustain over time. There is also the concern that postal workers may be placed under pressure to work without full compensation, should these initiatives be recognized as formal services. Social initiatives undertaken by the Post to benefit postal staff and their families are also excluded, as these services are not broadly accessible to the public or to particular disadvantaged groups. Collaborations with charities have been included in this guide in cases where the role of the Post is extensive and sustained. Many Posts also offer discounted postage tariffs for charities, but as the social impact of these charities is not always clear, these examples have been excluded from the guide.

### Disaster risk management and response

Posts provide a variety of critical social services during the aftermath of disasters such as floods and earthquakes. The UPU is active in the field of disaster risk management,<sup>5</sup> publishing a DRM guide and offering technical assistance and training materials. Postal services that are explicitly designed to address disasters have therefore been excluded, although other broadly relevant services such as medicine delivery and the checking of elderly residents have been included.

### Financial services and financial inclusion

Many postal financial services have direct benefits for people's quality of life, including remittances, insurance and banking. The UPU is active in the field of financial services and financial inclusion, undertaking research and offering technical assistance.<sup>6</sup> To avoid duplication, financial services are generally excluded from this guide, with the exception of bill payments, social security and welfare.

<sup>5</sup> Disaster risk management section of the UPU website, [www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/Capacity-Building/Development-Cooperation/Disaster-Risk-Management](http://www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/Capacity-Building/Development-Cooperation/Disaster-Risk-Management).

<sup>6</sup> Financial services section of the UPU website, [www.upu.int/en/Universal-Postal-Union/Activities/Financial-Services](http://www.upu.int/en/Universal-Postal-Union/Activities/Financial-Services).

## Digital services

This guide broadly avoids digital postal services, as these are covered by existing UPU research and publications on the digital economy and digital postal activities.<sup>7</sup> Digital innovations that primarily aim to improve existing postal services or to generate revenue have therefore been excluded. However, services that explicitly address issues of social development (e.g. providing access to the Internet) have been included.

## Environmental sustainability

Postal initiatives that support the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (and other pollutants) have obvious connections to human well-being. However, these have generally been excluded from this guide because the motivations for Posts to undertake this work are typically environmental, rather than social. Despite this, some environmental services (such as collection of recyclables, or offering home energy efficiency advice) have been included on account of their direct social benefits, including supporting people with reduced mobility, increased thermal comfort, and reduced risks to public health and safety.

## Non-designated operators

Designated operators (DOs) are defined within article 2 of the UPU Convention as “the operator or operators officially designated to operate postal services and to fulfil the obligations arising from the Acts of the Union on their territory”. Our analysis is restricted to DOs, although it is recognized that social services are also offered by non-designated operators. The scope of this analysis has been restricted to DOs for practical reasons – UPU members can be consulted relatively quickly, while no comprehensive global database of non-designated operators exists.

## Staffing policies

Posts are often one of the largest national employers and may therefore be well placed to advance social development goals. In general, examples related to the staffing policies of the Post have been excluded, unless these are offered as a service to help employ people at risk of social exclusion.

# Evidence base

This is the first attempt to provide a broad and detailed description of the variety of social services offered by Posts, and to explore key dimensions that are of interest to stakeholders. The evidence base for this guide includes a survey of UPU members, desktop research, and interviews with Posts and postal stakeholders. Inevitably, some services may be underreported, particularly those that are so common that Posts may not recognize them as social services.

This guide draws heavily on a postal social services questionnaire completed by UPU member countries between December 2019 and February 2020. The questionnaire included basic qualitative questions about social service provision and invited members to submit examples of current services. Although it included a

working definition of postal social services, no definitive list of services was provided; the aim was to encourage broad reporting, ensuring no major service categories would be missed. A total of 113 UPU members provided responses, with 89 (79%) reporting that the Post offered some type of social service. The results are summarized in Annex 3. In parallel to this questionnaire, a desktop study was undertaken to identify additional examples of social services offered by Posts. This included searches of academic and practitioner publications, keyword searches of websites and social media connected to the postal sector, and the use of other data collected by the International Bureau. With the combined information from the questionnaire and the desktop study, 435 examples of postal social services from 160 member countries and territories have been identified. These are presented as a set of tables in Annex 2.

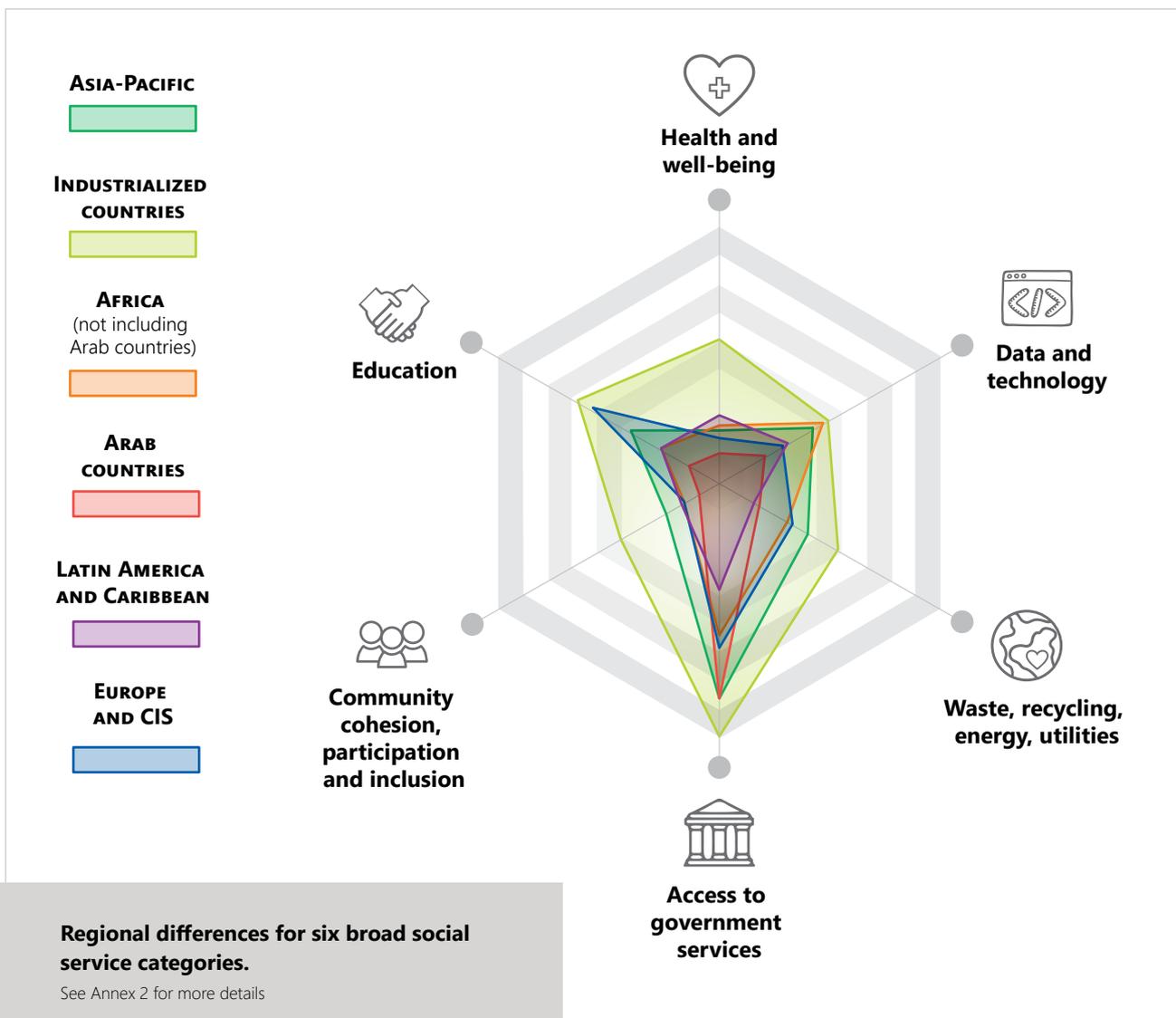




Image credit: La Poste

1

# The Post as a solution to societal challenges

**In 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations agreed upon the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledging to implement 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets by 2030.**

The actions of both national governments and the private sector are central to people's ability to meet their basic needs and to enjoy a high quality of life. In 2015, the 193 member states of the United Nations agreed upon the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, pledging to implement 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets by 2030. Many Posts operating as government agencies are bound to meet these international commitments, as well as to implement national policies on social development. Posts may have also made sustainability commitments via their CSR policies. Posts therefore have an explicit mandate to make use of their resources to address societal challenges. Despite these commitments, the potential for the postal sector to support social progress is often untapped and poorly recognized.<sup>8</sup> Although priorities vary regionally, key global societal challenges and trends are summarized below.

## 1.1

## Poverty



The first of the UN SDGs is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere, acknowledged by the 2030 Agenda as the greatest global sustainability challenge. The most recent official global poverty estimates (2017) demonstrate the scale of this challenge: 47% of the world population live on less than 5.50 USD/day, 24% live on less than 3.20 USD/day, and 9% live below the international poverty line.<sup>9</sup> In 2016, 55% of the world's population did not benefit from any form of social protection,<sup>10</sup> and in 2019, 26% were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity.<sup>11</sup>

During the past decade, extreme poverty fell from 15.7% in 2010 to an estimated 8.2% in 2019. However, the COVID-19 pandemic appears to be reversing this trend (figure 1). Posts are already involved in initiatives aimed at reducing poverty. For example, SDG target 1.3 calls for nationally appropriate social protection systems; many post offices are responsible for issuing pensions and other social payments, and some Posts deliver these directly to residences. This experience and reach positions the Post as a valuable partner for governments seeking to improve public welfare, and to reduce poverty in particular.

8 Postal Reform Guide (2019), Universal Postal Union.

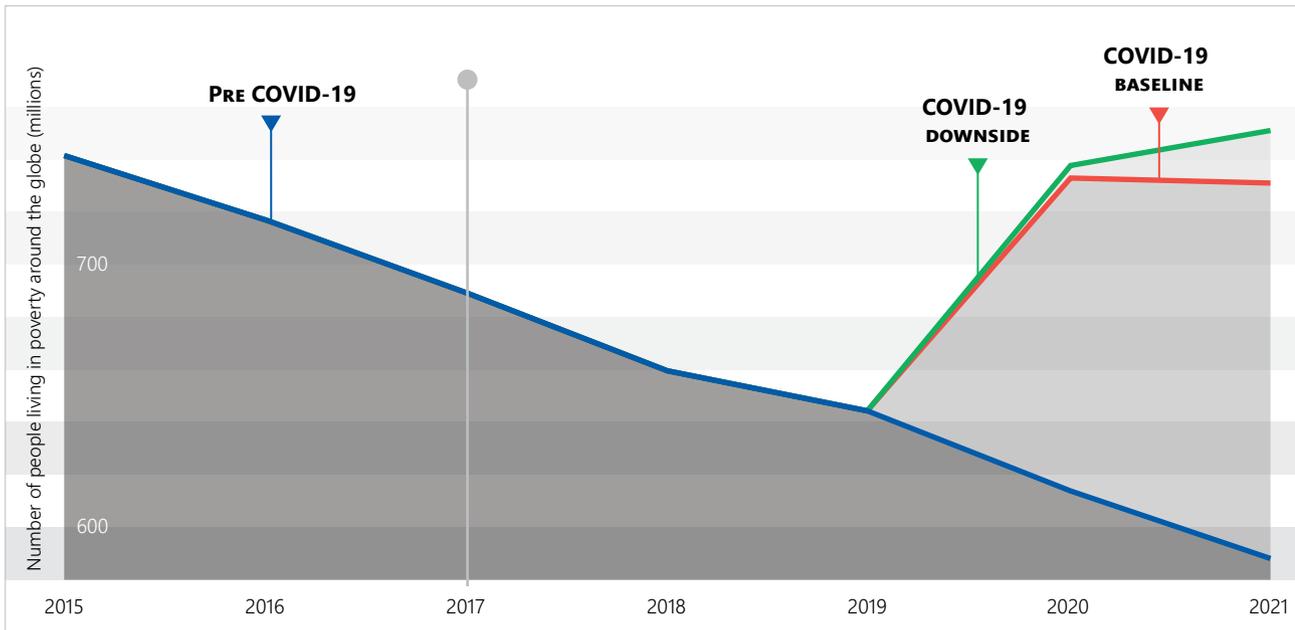
9 Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune, World Bank.

10 World Social Protection Report: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (2017), International Labour Organization.

11 The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World: Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets (2020), FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO.

FIGURE 1 – Number of people living on less than 1.90 USD/day, with pre- and post-COVID-19 projections

(Data: World Bank (2021), sourced from Lakner et al (2020) (updated), PovcalNet, Global Economic Prospects) Global Economic Prospects). 2017 is the last year with official global poverty estimates.



## 1.2

# Inequality



"The role of the postal sector as a driver of social, commercial, financial, and digital inclusion has been recognized in many international forums ... Governments must take notice of the important role the Post can play in meeting their inclusive development goals."<sup>12</sup>

High and increasing inequality is a major obstacle to sustainable development, generating economic, social and political impacts. Inequality can be broadly defined as unequal access to opportunities, particularly in areas such as income, health and education. It is a cross-cutting issue in social sustainability but is addressed directly by SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries) and

SDG 5 (Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls). High inequality is associated with slow rates of poverty reduction and can also undermine social cohesion and trust in public institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Reducing inequality is at the heart of the UPU's organizational mission. DOs of UPU member countries are required to offer a universal postal service, giving the earth's population the opportunity to communicate by post.<sup>14</sup> The UPU's vision statement emphasizes this social role: "The postal sector is seen as an enabler of inclusive development and an essential component of the global economy".<sup>15</sup> The broad reach of postal networks is particularly important for reducing social isolation (e.g. in rural areas) and is being leveraged by governments to increase levels of financial and digital inclusion.<sup>16</sup> The potential for Posts to address inequality extends into areas such as health, education and government services, with examples included throughout this guide.

<sup>12</sup> Speech by UPU Director General (2015), [www.upu.int/en/Speeches/2015/8th-International-Postal-Symposium](http://www.upu.int/en/Speeches/2015/8th-International-Postal-Symposium).

<sup>13</sup> World Social Report 2020, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>14</sup> Universal Postal Service and Postal Regulation – A Global Panorama (2021), Universal Postal Union (draft).

<sup>15</sup> Istanbul World Postal Strategy 2017–2020, Universal Postal Union.

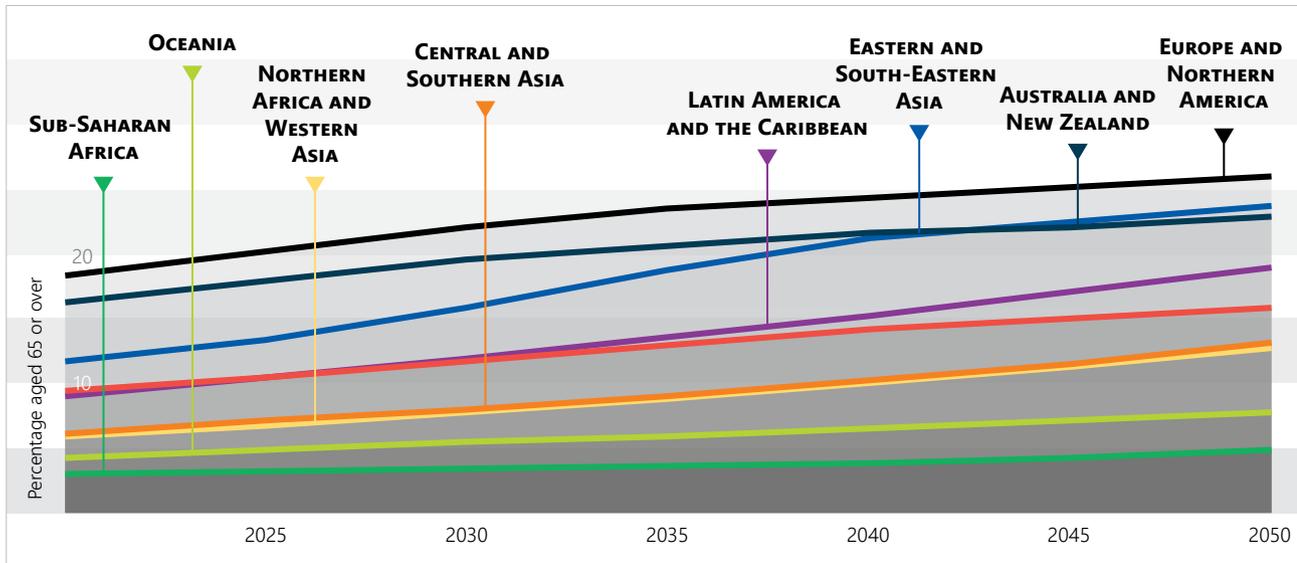
<sup>16</sup> Financial Inclusion Technical Assistance Facility section of the UPU website, [www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/Capacity-Building/Financial-Inclusion-Technical-Assistance-Facility](http://www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/Capacity-Building/Financial-Inclusion-Technical-Assistance-Facility).



**In Azerbaijan, the Post was a key delivery partner for social assistance initiatives during COVID-19.**

Image credit: Azerpost

FIGURE 2 – Estimates of the percentage of populations over 65 years in age, projected until 2050 (Data: UN DESA, 2019)



## 1.3

## Ageing



In its most recent analysis,<sup>17</sup> the UN estimates that the number of people over 65 years in age will double from 703 million in 2019 to 1.5 billion by 2050. In most countries, the proportion of older people is also increasing: globally, the share of the population aged 65 years and over is expected to increase from 9% in 2019 to 16% in 2050. These global megatrends are the result of both increasing levels of life expectancy and decreasing levels of fertility,<sup>18</sup> which are underpinned by advances in health care, nutrition, education and economic well-being. While the current percentage of older people within the population varies strongly by region, increases are expected in all regions (figure 2), albeit at different rates.

Meeting the needs of an ageing population is relevant to a variety of the UN SDGs.<sup>19</sup> The most direct connection is to SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages), yet this topic also has a tangible nexus with eliminating poverty (SDG 1), eliminating hunger (SDG 2) and reducing inequality (SDG 10). Posts are already offering services that are particularly relevant to some older people, such as medicine returns, meal delivery, care services and home checking. There is also evidence that Posts are developing and marketing new service bundles that specifically meet the needs of older people. The ageing population therefore presents a significant opportunity for Posts to offer new social services, strengthen partnerships with government, and generate revenue.

<sup>17</sup> World Population Ageing 2019, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

<sup>18</sup> Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time (2020), United Nations.

<sup>19</sup> Ageing, Older Persons and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2017), United Nations Development Programme.

1.4

## Migrants, refugees or otherwise forcibly displaced people



The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines a migrant as “a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons”.<sup>20</sup> This broad definition includes multiple classes, such as migrant workers, expats, international students and forcibly displaced people. However, there is no universal legal definition of a migrant. It should be noted that, while the IOM definition could include refugees, other organizations exclude refugees from the category of migrant.<sup>21</sup> Refugees are defined and protected under international law; the 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion”. There is a long-term trend for an increase in the number of international migrants, both in absolute number and as a proportion of the global population (figure 3A). In 2019, it was estimated that there were almost 272 million international migrants, with nearly two thirds being labour migrants.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, it was estimated that 79.5 million people (1% of all humanity) could be classed as forcibly displaced,<sup>23</sup> a trend that is increasing (figure 3B).

**Migrant** – a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.

**Refugee** – someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion

Migration is directly addressed under SDG target 10.7, which calls on countries to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”. Although the term migrant covers people living in a wide variety of situations, some experiences are common. These include engaging with unfamiliar administrative processes, languages and local cultures. Posts are already offering services that help to meet the needs of migrants, refugees, and forcibly displaced people, such as official registration and document translation. Posts also have extensive experience in the area of remittances, including innovating to reduce costs for customers and collaborating with the IOM.<sup>24</sup> However, there is potential for Posts to offer a much broader range of services for migrants, refugees and forcibly displaced people, particularly in areas such as community integration and employment (section 2.3).

20 Glossary on Migration (2019), International Organization for Migration.

21 UNHCR web article on use of term “refugee” or “migrant” (11.07.2016), [www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html](http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2016/7/55df0e556/unhcr-viewpoint-refugee-migrant-right.html).

22 World Migration Report 2020, International Organization for Migration.

23 Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2019, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

24 IOM press release: IOM, UPU and Burundi Post Launch “Migration and Development” Integrated Postal Project (18.09.2015), [www.iom.int/news/iom-upu-and-burundi-post-launch-migration-and-development-integrated-postal-project](http://www.iom.int/news/iom-upu-and-burundi-post-launch-migration-and-development-integrated-postal-project).

FIGURE 3A – **Estimates of international migrants** (Data: DESA, 2008 & 2019)

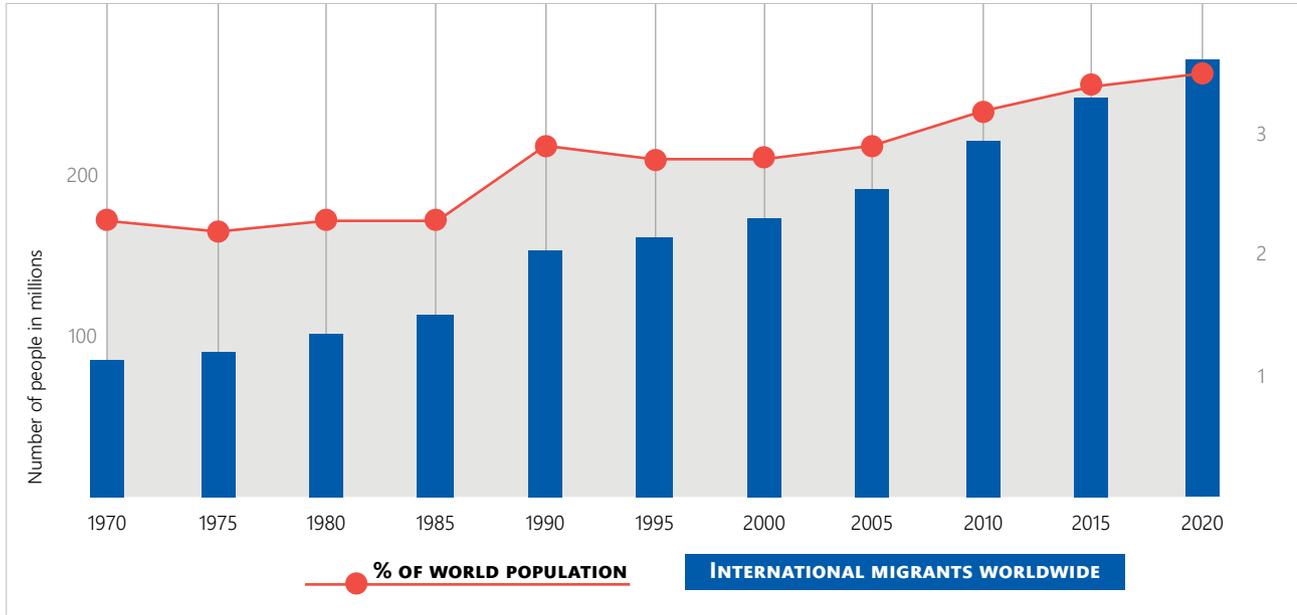
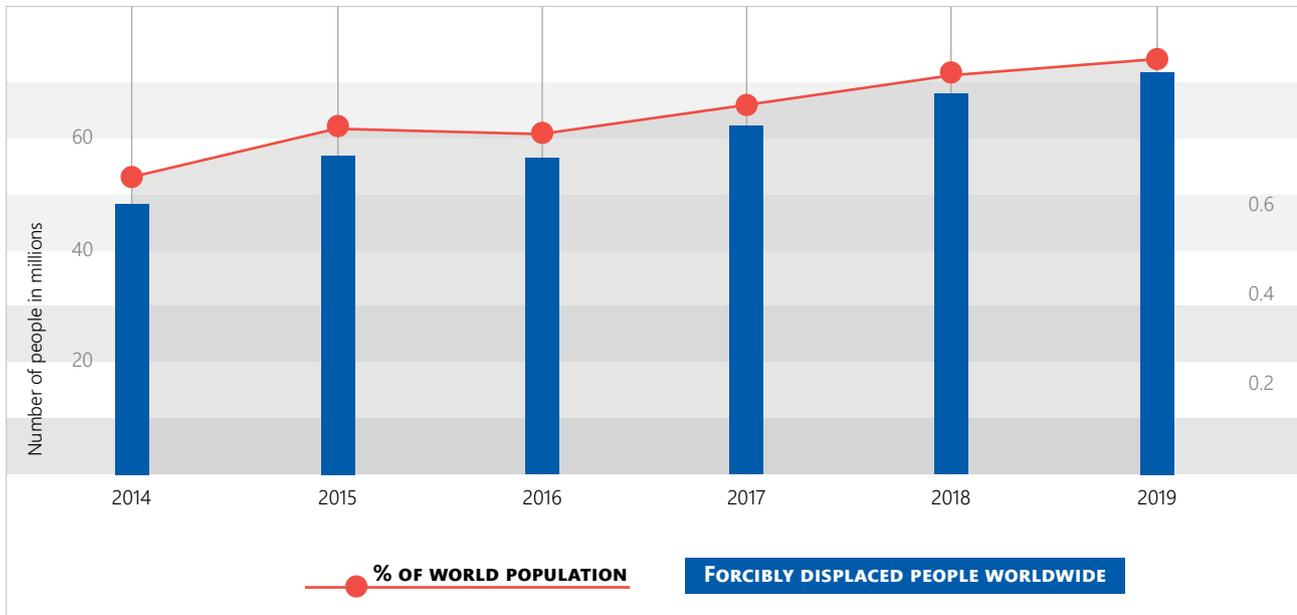


FIGURE 3B – **Estimates of forcibly displaced people worldwide** (Data: UNHCR, 2020)



1.5

## The COVID-19 pandemic



"The [COVID-19] pandemic abruptly disrupted implementation towards many of the SDGs and, in some cases, turned back decades of progress."<sup>25</sup>

Recent evaluations confirm the broad extent of social impacts arising from the pandemic.<sup>26</sup> In addition to its direct threat to human health, cascading social disruptions have occurred in areas such as poverty, education, and access to basic goods and services. The pandemic has drawn attention to the essential role of the Post in supporting the poorest and most vulnerable members of society (e.g. the elderly, people with disabilities and those suffering from poor health). Existing postal services took on greater significance, as high numbers of people reduced non-essential travel and social contact. While Posts worked to mitigate impacts on their core letter and parcel business (e.g. owing to reductions in international shipments)<sup>27</sup> and to manage changes to working practices, they also developed a variety of new or adapted social services. Some, such as the distribution of test kits, personal protective equipment (PPE) and vaccines, are aimed directly at reducing infection rates (section 2.1). Others, such as the supply of laptops to students in lockdown (section 2.2.3) and the home delivery of medicines, are intended to reduce the broader impacts of the pandemic on society. Examples of social services related to COVID-19 are included throughout this guide, and many have been brought together on a dedicated UPU webpage.<sup>28</sup>



**The Universal Postal Union's Post4Health facility, launched in March 2021, aims to catalyze the capacity of postal operators to deliver health products, policies and services to people everywhere.**

The most urgent global objective of the UPU Post4Health initiative is to leverage and mobilize the postal network for the last-mile delivery of COVID-19 vaccines and related medical equipment and materials, wherever possible and feasible, and also for advocacy and public information campaigns. With COVID-19 vaccination under way, Posts are well placed to directly contribute to its success by providing delivery and storage solutions for the vaccines where possible, and for the medical equipment and supplies needed for the vaccination process.

<sup>25</sup> Liu Zhenmin, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs in: The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>26</sup> World Social Report 2020, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>27</sup> The COVID-19 crisis and the postal sector: Impact, scenarios and perspectives for the way forward (2020), Universal Postal Union.

<sup>28</sup> UPU webpage on postal social, financial and trade services during COVID-19, [www.upu.int/Postal-social-and-financial-services-during-COVID-19](http://www.upu.int/Postal-social-and-financial-services-during-COVID-19).

# Postal social service types

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate the variety of social services offered by Posts, and to highlight some of the practical considerations for operators, ministries and regulators. The chapter is split into six sections, with each representing a broad service category (e.g. health and well-being, or education). It should be noted that for some services, the choice of category is subjective; services have been assigned to one category only, although their connections to multiple categories are highlighted. References are made to case studies, which can be found in Annex 1. An overview of the 40 service types offered by UPU members between 2018 and 2020 can be found in Annex 2.

## 2.1

## Health and well-being



Postal health and well-being services are extremely widespread, with Posts in 50 UPU member countries and territories identified as offering these services. Health and well-being services are particularly relevant to SDG 3 (Ensure healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages). Associated targets cover themes such as maternal and child mortality, communicable and non-communicable diseases, universal health coverage, and access to affordable essential medicines and vaccines.

Posts have been active in this sector for over a century, increasing awareness of public health threats and raising funds for health campaigns, on behalf of charities, governments and international agencies.<sup>29</sup> Examples include supporting the WHO antimalarial campaign (1960s) and the UNICEF campaign for child survival (1985). Posts have also engaged in health campaigns in other ways. In 2009, numerous Posts cooperated with UNAIDS, the ILO, UNI Global Union and the UPU to develop guidance and an awareness campaign about HIV and AIDS. Additional examples include initiatives to address the Chikungunya (2014) and Zika (2016) viruses (figure 4), and to reduce the smuggling of opioids.<sup>30</sup> Most recently, Posts have offered services to support people and governments during the COVID-19 pandemic.

FIGURE 4 – INFORMATION DISTRIBUTED BY POSTS DURING THE 2016 ZIKA VIRUS AWARENESS CAMPAIGN



This section only considers services that Posts have developed to bring direct improvements to people's physical health, mental health and well-being. The term well-being has been included to capture services that have positive impacts on citizens' happiness and life-satisfaction. Postal services that are used solely by commercial businesses are excluded, although it is recognized that many Posts provide logistics services to the pharmaceutical industry that may ultimately benefit citizens' health and well-being (e.g. in China (People's Rep.), Switzerland and Uruguay). Services involving pharmacies and hospitals are included in cases where the public derive direct benefits. In addition, while several Posts sell medical insurance (e.g. in Mauritius and Zimbabwe), this service type is not included in the guide; it was not always possible to differentiate between essential basic health insurance and additional commercial health products.

Common or innovative examples of postal health and well-being services are explored below. The number of member countries and territories offering these service types is given in parentheses.

29 Davies, M. K. (1989). Health promotion with the help of the world's postal services. *World Health Forum* 1989, 10(2): 169–80.

30 UPU web article: UPU/INCB act to help stem tide of deadly opioids (19.04.2018), [www.upu.int/en/News/2018/4/UPU-INCB-act-to-help-stem-tide-of-deadly-opioids](http://www.upu.int/en/News/2018/4/UPU-INCB-act-to-help-stem-tide-of-deadly-opioids).

## 2.1.1

## Delivery/collection of medical materials (36)

The transport of medical materials is the most common type of health and well-being service.

Numerous Posts offer customers the opportunity to request the delivery of prescription and over-the-counter medicines to their home (e.g. in India, Mauritius and Qatar). The main benefit for customers is convenience, saving time and money associated with travelling to a pharmacy or hospital. However, for people with limited mobility, this service may also be essential to their well-being. In addition, because of the need to increase social distancing for vulnerable people during the COVID-19 pandemic, many Posts have expanded existing medicine home delivery services, or created completely new services (e.g. in Rwanda and Ukraine). In the United States of America, the Post delivers 1.2 billion prescription items a year, and demand has grown during the pandemic. In Australia, the Post implemented a next-day pharmacy home delivery service for vulnerable citizens (according to certain qualifying criteria), reducing their potential exposure to COVID-19 by helping them stay at home.<sup>31</sup> The Post worked with pharmacies to adapt its existing Express Post system and MyPost Business digital platform. The Australian Government and Department of Health budgeted 25 million AUD to cover the postage costs during the pandemic. A similar service was developed in Costa Rica, adapting an existing revenue-generating doorstep medicine delivery service (Annex 1.10). The Post took the unusual step of working with private car rental companies to increase its fleet of delivery vehicles and drivers.<sup>32</sup>

Other examples include the delivery of COVID-19 testing kits (e.g. in Bangladesh, the United Kingdom and the United States) and the transport of medicines to hospitals (e.g. in India and the Netherlands). The Post in Switzerland has partnered with a drone manufacturer to offer transport services for laboratory samples; patients benefit from faster delivery, and if implemented at large scale, this could help to reduce particulate air pollution associated with traditional road delivery vehicles. In Uruguay, the

Post is responsible for the immediate transport of blood samples from newborn babies to a laboratory for neonatal screening. In the Netherlands, the Post supports patients in anonymously sending blood, urine and other samples from their home to the laboratory. The main benefit for customers is convenience, but this service also helps people who might avoid attending a clinic due to embarrassment or mobility problems.

In the United States, the Post has established a process for medical clinics to offer a medicine mail-back service for their patients. Safe disposal of expired or unwanted prescriptions and over-the-counter drugs reduces the chance of accidental poisoning (e.g. because children have found unwanted medicines) or environmental contamination. The collection of unwanted medicines appears to be a relatively straightforward service, building upon processes established for medicine home delivery. However, this service places greater responsibility on the public to follow rules about what can be posted (e.g. no syringes). In addition, the businesses that receive and destroy these unwanted medicines have to be approved by both the US Drug Enforcement Administration and the Post, and must also provide customers with ready-made packaging that meets a range of specifications.

Several Posts reported involvement in the delivery of vaccines (e.g. in Albania, Argentina and Chad). In Albania the Post worked with an NGO to distribute a canine rabies vaccine to reduce the transmission of fox rabies. In Argentina, the Post delivered 1.4 million doses of influenza vaccines on behalf of the Ministry of Health. However, the involvement of Posts in last-mile vaccine delivery appears to be rare, despite their extensive distribution capabilities. This may be due to strict supply-chain requirements related to security, temperature control and validation. One notable exception is Deutsche Post DHL Group, which in 2017 announced a global partnership to help improve vaccine supply chains, and in 2020 published a white paper on securing supply chains for vaccines and medical goods during health emergencies.<sup>33</sup> More recently, Posts have started to provide support for national COVID-19 vaccination campaigns (section 1.5), in terms of last-mile delivery, distributing public information, and helping to register people for their vaccinations.

31 Australia Post offers a pharmacy home delivery service for vulnerable citizens (2020), Universal Postal Union, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/ytm3QcPSTb5cR/>.

32 Partnerships against the pandemic (2020), Universal Postal Union, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/ZwPVKfOwas7VT/>.

33 DHL White Paper: Delivering Pandemic Resilience (2020), DHL Research and Innovation GmbH.



**Correos de Costa Rica expanded the capacity of its existing doorstep medicine delivery service to reduce the need for high-risk people to visit medical centres.**

Image credit: Correos de Costa Rica

Services supporting the supply of personal protective equipment and alcohol handwash have become relatively common during the COVID-19 pandemic. In France, the Post has used its existing e-commerce website to make a broad range of these products easy to purchase. In Costa Rica, the Post reacted to the public demand for alcohol handwash by securing a supply directly from the manufacturer and then selling it to the public from a dedicated website (Annex 1.10). By controlling the sourcing, sale and delivery of the product, the Post was able to keep prices low. It also limited the number of bottles per customer to two per month, in order to reduce hoarding or speculation/resale. Posts in Portugal and Thailand formed partnerships with producers of masks and alcohol handwash (respectively), in order to secure a supply for key workers.

### 2.1.2

## Operating or hosting medical facilities, health administration and medical checks (5), and blood donation at post offices (4)

Thanks to their centralized location, relative security and trusted status, post offices are sometimes used as sites for medical checks and blood donation, e.g. in Mauritius (section 3.2) and the United Arab Emirates. Post offices might therefore be suitable locations for storing or administering COVID-19 vaccines, given sufficient investment in training and equipment to ensure worker safety and the integrity of the cold chain.<sup>34</sup> In the Russian Federation, the Post is providing administrative support to government agencies, to ensure citizens receive regular health checks. The Post sends a reminder to citizens one month before their scheduled examination, visits them to collect basic health information, and then sends them the results of the examination, along with health advice.

### 2.1.3

## Health data management (5) and medical certificate/test results delivery (4)

Posts in several countries have expanded further into medical administration. Some deliver confidential medical certificates to the homes of citizens (e.g. in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Qatar and Russia). Others (e.g. in France and Switzerland) offer e-health services that build on the trusted position of the Post in society, managing medical data for patients and healthcare professionals. In Switzerland, the Post E-Health platform allows patients to access their electronic patient record, book a vaccination, or register for an inpatient stay at hospital (section 3.3).

### 2.1.4

## Broad social care provision at home (including home check) (5)

In response to the trend for an ageing population in many countries, greater numbers of people living alone, and evidence that home-based health care can benefit patient well-being, Posts are starting to offer a range of care services at citizens' place of residence. These include the checking of vulnerable people (e.g. in Ireland, Japan and Jersey) and the delivery and installation of health and safety equipment (e.g. in France, Japan and the Netherlands). However, these services are uncommon. The examples identified in this research are exclusively from Posts in industrialized countries, although it is likely that mail carriers in many countries provide some home checking services informally. The potential benefits of offering these services include reduced loneliness, peace of mind for relatives, cost savings for government health ministries and insurance companies, and an additional source of revenue for the Post.

In Japan, the Post offers seniors an extensive home checking service. For a fee of 2,500 JPY per month, mail carriers visit elderly people in their home once a month for 30 minutes to check on their well-being. After visiting, the mail carrier provides an update by e-mail or letter to a designated family member (Annex 1.1). Additional services include a daily telephone call, and emergency checking of seniors by a security company. The capacity for Posts to check on the health of older and vulnerable people is particularly important during disasters or health emergencies, such as a pandemic. The Post in Ireland has also established a weekly home checking service as a direct response to COVID-19. In France, a cluster of services are marketed directly at elderly customers, including home checking by mail carriers (up to six times a week), home and garden maintenance, meal delivery and the purchase of a tablet and bespoke software.

### 2.1.5

## Delivery of purchased food and essential items (7)

For many decades, some Posts have delivered food and other essential items directly to the public. With the growth of e-commerce and increased demand during the COVID-19 pandemic, Posts are becoming more involved in the sourcing, sale and delivery of essential items. These services have broad benefits for people's health and well-being, but are distinct from social aid, where Posts collaborate with NGOs and government ministries to supply food and essential items to people experiencing poverty. The role of the Post in delivering social aid is explored in section 2.3.

Posts in Australia, Cuba and Norway have developed partnerships with supermarkets to help citizens stay at home during the pandemic. In Australia, the Post collaborated with food retailers to enable vulnerable people to order a standard box of essential items. Boxes contained meals, snacks and essential items and cost 80 AUD including delivery. In Norway, the Post partnered with the Coop grocery chain to enable same/next day doorstep deliveries. Within five weeks, the Post was able to implement a grocery delivery network, matching grocery stores with distribution centres to efficiently cover 91% of the population. Through the Coop webpage, customers place their order. It is then transmitted to the nearest Coop supermarket, where employees prepare the orders and add cool packs so that they are ready for the Post to collect and deliver to residences. Similarly, the Post in Kenya is offering at-cost last-mile delivery for essential products ordered via Jumia (an online shop).

Posts in Finland, France and Switzerland offer meal-delivery services that may be important to some people's well-being, e.g. those with reduced mobility. These for-profit services typically involve delivering cooked meals that are re-heated by the customers at home. In France, the Post offers personalized meal delivery to older people, designed to lower the risks of undernutrition and illness. In Switzerland, the Post has partnered with the Migros supermarket to offer over 40 meal options to all of its customers, using the Post's priority delivery service. In addition, a new Swiss Post initiative enables people to order daily deliveries of regionally produced bread.

### 2.1.6

## Other innovative health and well-being services

In Sri Lanka, appointments to visit a doctor can be made via the post office, in partnership with an online booking company. Building on an existing partnership with the charity Beyond Blue, Australia Post has distributed coronavirus mental well-being support information to 120,000 households and made materials available at over 400 post offices. The Post in Jordan also uses its infrastructure to support public well-being via the Hareer Initiative, which helps children who have lost their hair as a result of cancer treatment. The Post provides a national delivery service for wigs and distributes leaflets to encourage financial donations.

Posts in Belgium, the United Kingdom and the United States participate in searches for missing people. Taking advantage of their extensive delivery network and local knowledge, mail carriers are encouraged to report sightings and are provided with photographs and descriptions. Two Posts offer services aimed at helping the victims of domestic violence. In the Czech Republic, the Post has partnered with a charity to provide its workers with training on how to recognize signs of domestic violence and how to help potential victims. This service was launched in response to reports of increases in domestic violence during the pandemic. In Australia, the Post provides access to free mail redirections (for one year) for victims of domestic violence, as well as the option of a free P.O. box (for 22 months). Key to the success of this service is careful and secure data management, protecting the new address of the domestic violence survivor, while still enabling the redirection of their mail. In Bulgaria (Rep.), the Post collaborated with a national charity to inform people of the health and safety risks of human trafficking (Annex 1.4). Posts are also in a position to address the causes of various illnesses, for example, by reducing air pollution through switching to electric vehicles, by supporting the monitoring of air quality (section 2.6.1), and by promoting public health initiatives (section 2.6.1). In Belgium, postal delivery vehicles have been equipped with air quality sensors, as part of a research collaboration on smart cities. This highlights the potential for collecting real-time information on pollutants and temperature extremes over large areas.

## 2.1.7

## Key considerations

While Posts already provide numerous health and well-being services, there is strong potential for expansion in this sector. The demand for health and well-being services and the capacity of Posts to offer them will vary by country, yet certain services stand out given their popularity, impact and ease of implementation. Medicine delivery and disposal, social care at home, and health data management services all build upon the existing strengths of many Posts in areas such as parcel delivery, customer trust and data management. Growth in digital health services would also be expected, as more people gain access to the Internet and seek convenient ways to order medicines, book appointments, and videoconference with medical professionals.<sup>35</sup> Several Posts have initiated pilot projects as a way to test demand and build experience in these areas, an approach that others are urged to replicate.

Case studies of new services developed during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate how Posts can implement health and well-being services rapidly, given sufficient resources and support for staff.<sup>36</sup> Key success factors for establishing a service quickly include designing a service that is simple, making use of existing postal products and systems, listening to the needs of customers, and cultivating good working relationships with key stakeholders. The social value of many postal health and well-being services has increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the general public have sought to minimize travel and social contact. Some of these services could be considered essential for vulnerable groups such as the elderly or people with disabilities. Given the trend in most countries for an ageing population, along with the likelihood of more pandemics in the future, it is reasonable for Posts to establish bespoke services for vulnerable groups, and to develop capacity for their rapid expansion. Posts are also well placed to support governments through the distribution of a future COVID-19 vaccine, as well as providing venues for citizens to be vaccinated.<sup>37</sup> Posts should therefore work to identify opportunities for new COVID-related services, and to resolve any technical or regulatory challenges.

35 Telemedicine: Opportunities and developments in Member States. Report on the second global survey on eHealth (2010), World Health Organization.

36 UPU webpage on postal social, financial and trade services during COVID-19 – commentaries, [www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/COVID-19/Postal-social-financial-and-trade-services-during-COVID-19/Commentaries](http://www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/COVID-19/Postal-social-financial-and-trade-services-during-COVID-19/Commentaries).

37 Partnering for Health: Potential Postal Service Roles in Health and Wellness (2021), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

## 2.1.8

Many of these services also have the potential to generate revenue, which may be essential for their long-term viability. Sources of income include the direct sale of health and well-being products and services, delivery charges, and government subsidies/contracts (where legally permitted). Posts should consider marketing clusters of health and well-being services in order to meet the needs of groups such as the elderly. Grouping relevant services improves customer convenience and helps Posts market services more effectively.

The Post is an obvious partner for government health and social care ministries to target persistent problems (e.g. dental health in children).<sup>38</sup> Other key stakeholders include health and environmental regulators, private sector actors (e.g. pharmacies), academic researchers, and NGOs. Posts should also work with regional and global partners – many health and well-being problems transcend boundaries, and this potentially gives Posts access to new sources of funding. Posts should therefore be proactive, consulting with health and well-being stakeholders to identify priorities and opportunities for service development.

Although risks are discussed in section 4.6.3, it should be noted that health and well-being services are associated with particular safety considerations. Attention should be given to protecting postal workers from exposure to medicines and medical samples/swabs, ensuring sufficient time to provide these services, and securing appropriate PPE and training. In addition, extra care must be taken to ensure medicines are delivered on time, to the correct customer and in good condition. To manage these risks, Posts should make use of technological solutions to maintain, monitor and validate the security and environmental parameters of the medicine supply chain.

## Recommendations

Posts should:

**Review** how to leverage their existing infrastructure and expertise to deliver new health and well-being services, and consult with health and well-being stakeholders on their needs.

**Build** on their existing strengths. Many Posts are well placed to offer services such as medicine delivery and disposal, social care, and health data management given their expertise in distribution logistics, the public's trust in the confidentiality of letters, their extensive digital infrastructure, and the regular face-to-face contact with customers.

**Consider** establishing bespoke services for vulnerable groups, particularly doorstep services for those with reduced mobility.

**Market** clusters of health and well-being services directly to groups such as older people.

**Explore** opportunities for using reverse logistics, e.g. for the public to send medical samples/swabs for testing, or to return unwanted medicines.

**Develop** and implement upskilling and reskilling programmes in collaboration with workers and their representatives, with a particular focus on risk management.

38 Davies, G. M., Worthington, H. V., Ellwood, R. P., Blinkhorn, A. S., Taylor, G. O., Davies, R. M., & Considine, J. (2003). An assessment of the cost effectiveness of a postal toothpaste programme to prevent caries among five-year-old children in the North West of England. *Community Dental Health*, 20(4): 207–10.



## 2.2

## Education

Education services are extremely widespread, with Posts in 64 UPU member countries and territories identified as being involved in this sector. Quality education is the fourth of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and supports broad socioeconomic progress. Targets for this goal cover themes such as free and equitable access for children to primary and secondary education; affordable access for adults to technical, vocational and tertiary education; and eliminating education disparities in relation to gender and disability.

Posts have a variety of connections to the topic of education. Historically, there has been a strong business case to support public literacy and numeracy as essential skills for using the postal system. Posts have long been involved in promoting pen pal clubs, encouraging stamp collecting, and supporting letter-writing competitions. Posts in Macao (China) and Switzerland sponsor communication museums, and the Post in New Zealand sponsors book awards/competitions for authors and illustrators. These activities are often presented as a component of postal CSR, although some may be extensive and accessible enough to be considered a social service. In addition, from the 1840s, the postal system played a key role in the development of distance education; correspondence education via the Post remains popular.<sup>39</sup>

This section only considers services that Posts have developed to bring direct improvements to the education of the public. Common or innovative examples of education services are explored below. The number of member countries and territories offering these service types is given in parentheses.

## 2.2.1

### Reduced price/free delivery of materials for the visually impaired (32)

Postage of items to or from blind or visually impaired people is the most common type of education service offered by Posts, and it is likely that this service was underreported in the 2019 UPU survey on social services. In a 2017 UPU survey,<sup>40</sup> 118 members reported that items for the blind are included in their universal postal service definition, with 46 confirming a lower tariff obligation for these items. This service is important for supporting education, with broader and cascading benefits such as improved access to government services, social inclusion, etc.

Materials that qualify for reduced postage tariffs typically include braille newspapers, magazines, books and documents, but also large print publications, audio recordings, and other relevant supportive equipment or materials (e.g. in Albania and Ireland). Moreover, Posts have established partnerships to support the visually impaired; in Mexico, the Post worked with the National Commission for Free Textbooks to distribute braille and large type books.

Some Posts have offered this service for many decades – Canada Post has allowed the free postage of materials for the use of the blind since 1898. However, the UPU has worked to promote free postage of materials for the blind in all member countries. Article 16 (Exemption from postal charges) of the Universal Postal Convention states, “Any item for the blind sent to or by an organization for the blind or sent to or by a blind person shall be exempt from all postal charges, with the exception of air surcharges, to the extent that these items are admissible as such in the internal service of the sending designated operator.” Article 16 also defines *blind person and items for the blind*. Article 17 defines an upper weight limit of 7 kg. Note that in the Final Protocol to the Universal Postal Convention, article V lists some exceptions to the exemption of items for the blind from postal charges.

39 Rumble, G. (2001). Re-inventing distance education, 1971–2001. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 20(1–2): 31–43.

40 UPU Council of Administration document CA C 2 2018.1–Doc 7.

Potential areas for innovation include the reading of letters for customers; the automated transcription of letters into braille, large print and audio formats; the sale of audiobooks; and other digital services for the visually impaired.

### 2.2.2

## Subscription service and delivery of newspapers (16), reduced price postage for reading materials (6)

Access to a wide variety of written materials is an important factor in the ability of people to remain literate for their entire lives.<sup>41</sup> Subscription and newspaper delivery services therefore support people's education and may be one of the few regular sources of reading material for people living in isolated locations or with reduced mobility. Discounting of extensive subscription services (e.g. in Russia) further increases accessibility, while still offering a source of postal revenue. Some Posts offer reduced tariffs for the postage of general reading materials (e.g. in Bangladesh) or discounted postage rates for students (e.g. in Uruguay), both relatively practical ways to support public literacy.



### 2.2.3

## Library/school books and teaching materials delivery (20), distribution of computers to students (8)

Posts are also explicitly contributing to educational improvement through the delivery of books and other teaching materials to schools and libraries (e.g. in Nepal and Qatar). This includes the delivery of books donated by the public (e.g. in Colombia and Myanmar). As referenced above, certain communities may have a particular need for these services; the Post in Australia delivers educational parcels to remote areas and, in partnership with the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, helps children in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities get better access to quality, culturally relevant reading materials. In Colombia, the Post is also involved in delivering school books to underprivileged children, while the Post in Cameroon sells school textbooks via post offices at the government-approved prices (Annex 1.5).

**In Myanmar, the Post provides a free service, accepting books donated by members of the public and delivering them to libraries. This is driven by both the Post's social responsibility to promote literacy and its commitment to support government educational policy.**

Image credit: Myanmar Post

As schools increasingly adopt digital and online learning, Posts are participating in the delivery of computers to schools and students. In Venezuela (Bolivarian Rep.), the Post partnered with the national government to deliver laptops to students and teachers of state-subsidized schools. Several Posts responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by working with education partners to deliver laptops to students in lockdown (e.g. in Portugal, the US and Viet Nam). In France, the Post recognized that with schools closed, not all children would have access to online learning materials. In partnership with the Ministry of Education, the Post was able to fast-track a project already in the development stage: delivering spare school computer equipment to children in need (Annex 1.3).

#### 2.2.4

## Delivery of homework, student reports and exam papers (4)

Public education is associated with numerous administrative activities. Some Posts are leveraging their position of trust, broad distribution networks and data management experience to offer a range of services in this area. Although these services are not common, they could be replicated or adapted by other Posts. For example, in the State of Libya, the Post is responsible for the secure delivery of exam papers. In Tunisia, the School-Webtelegram service supports the delivery of correspondence between educational institutions and parents, and the distribution of school reports to tutors. In France, the Post developed a homework delivery and return service for students without Internet access, which was fast-tracked because of COVID-19 (Annex 1.3). Schools e-mail homework assignments to the Post, which are then printed and delivered to the student. Completed homework is sent back to the Post at no charge, scanned and e-mailed to the school.

#### 2.2.5

## Educational courses and bespoke teaching materials (17)

Many Posts provide educational materials for schools, focusing on how to write and address a letter, or providing information about how their national postal operator functions. These support national literacy (and also mathematics, geography and history), while also helping to future-proof the core business model of the Post. Posts in the UK and US provide free education materials for teachers, and in Belarus and Croatia, postal staff visit schools to teach students directly about the postal system. In Cape Verde, the Post is even more heavily involved in providing education services, offering courses for young unemployed people in partnership with the Ministry of Public Health. The potential for using postal buildings to support education is illustrated by the provision of e-learning services at several post offices in Tanzania (United Rep.).

More recently, Posts have begun to support the digital and financial literacy of the public. These educational services may be offered with the goal of increasing the capacity of the public to access postal products and services. However, these services may also be offered to support government ministries in improving public literacy, and to increase trust in the Post.<sup>42</sup> For example, the Post in Italy partnered with the Italian Ministry of Education, Universities and Research to hold approximately 500 events aimed at promoting financial literacy. Japan Post Bank also offers financial education seminars throughout the country. In India, the India Post Payments Bank is training postal workers to provide customers in rural areas with basic financial information. In Ireland, the Post is also providing practical financial education, offering a household budgeting service in partnership with the government Department of Social Protection.

## 2.2.6

## Other innovative education services

Other examples that do not easily fit into the above categories are listed below.

The Post offers services for delivering university registrations (Iran (Islamic Rep.), Tunisia) and applications (Saudi Arabia), and paying school fees (Nigeria, Yemen) and examination bills (Sri Lanka). In Kenya, the Post also offers low-cost luggage transport for students travelling between campus and home.

Educational services are also mentioned elsewhere in this guide. Several Posts act as a payment agency for social security allowances that help families to send their children to school.<sup>43</sup> For example, the Post in Morocco delivers direct payments to children who are at risk of dropping out of education. In addition, large numbers of aid parcels are delivered to underprivileged school children in China (Annex 1.2). Posts are also responsible for managing public education campaigns in areas such as communicable diseases or human trafficking (Annex 1.4).

Internships and the sale of books and stationery in post offices were commonly reported by Posts and have clear benefits for public education. However, whether these should be considered as postal social services depends upon the extent of their availability to the public and their social impact.

## 2.2.7

## Key considerations

Postal education services range from those that broadly encourage literacy, to services that explicitly support training and education. Despite this variety, there is still considerable potential for Posts to expand and diversify service provision in this area. Improving public education is a stated priority for many multilateral organizations, governments and NGOs. By promoting themselves as a service delivery partner for public education stakeholders, Posts have the potential to strengthen their position as an essential service and to secure additional sources of revenue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn greater attention to the role of the Post in supporting education. In 2020, a majority of countries announced the temporary closure of schools, impacting over 91% of students; by April, almost 1.6 billion children and young people were absent from school.<sup>44</sup> One result was an increased demand for distance education, much of which has been offered online. While this shift is part of a broader digital threat to print media services, it also offers Posts an opportunity to generate revenue through the sale of mobile phones and Internet subscriptions (section 2.5.2). Posts could also exploit their experience in this sector to develop digital education service platforms, offering online sale and delivery of both digital and printed textbooks (and other school supplies), online newspaper subscriptions, digital services for the visually impaired, digitization of student homework, exam registration, and the payment of teaching fees.

## 2.2.8

## Recommendations

Posts should:

**Review** how to leverage their existing infrastructure and skills to deliver new education services, consult with education stakeholders on their needs, and promote themselves as an educational service delivery partner.

**Consider reducing** tariffs for items that have clear and direct educational benefits.

**Consider developing** hybrid physical-digital education services and platforms, building on their historic connections with the education sector, their existing strengths in distribution logistics, and the trend for increasing public access to the Internet.

<sup>43</sup> Postal Reform Guide (2019), Universal Postal Union.

<sup>44</sup> Policy Brief: Education during COVID-19 and beyond (2020), United Nations.

## 2.3



## Community cohesion, participation and inclusion

Posts in 48 UPU member countries and territories were identified as offering services aimed at strengthening communities. Community participation is regarded as particularly important for achieving several SDG targets (e.g. for gender equality – SDG 5.5, and urban planning – SDG 11.3), and inclusion is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. People can be excluded from full participation in political, civil and cultural life owing to factors such as social or physical isolation, poverty, discrimination, or their migration status.<sup>45</sup> Building upon their historically important role in facilitating global communication, and their trusted position in society, Posts have established a variety of services that support active and inclusive communities. Common or innovative examples are explored below, with the number of member countries and territories offering these service types given in parentheses.

## 2.3.1

### Social isolation and mobility (28)

The role of the Post in enhancing mobility supports social contact, as well as expanding people's access to goods, services and employment opportunities. Twenty-four Posts were identified as offering public transport services, in addition to other services that support the use of private vehicles (section 2.4.5). Several Posts operate regional or nationwide bus routes (e.g. in Bhutan, Switzerland and Tanzania), building on their expertise in managing a vehicle fleet. Tickets for public transport are often sold within post offices, reinforcing their role as community service centres.

Posts are also explicitly tackling the impacts of social isolation through befriending, connection and home maintenance services. For example, in some Belgian municipalities, the Post has partnered with social care service providers to better integrate people into community life. The mail carrier helps to assess whether older adults are socially isolated; with their permission, postal staff undertake home visits to collect information on their needs. This has strong similarities to the home checking services offered in France and Japan (section 2.1.4), but places greater emphasis on community integration. In 2016, the Post in Finland experimented with several services for isolated people, including home maintenance and befriending services. In France, the Post has also established home maintenance services such as cleaning, gardening and DIY. While these offer greater convenience for customers, they may have particular value for vulnerable people by helping them to remain in their homes and communities. In response to increased levels of physical isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Post in Ireland established a variety of services designed to maintain people's social contact with families and friends. Particularly notable is the free postage of letters and parcels (weighing up to 2 kg) to people in care/nursing homes. Although this is a temporary service, it illustrates how the Post can respond to the needs of people who are experiencing high levels of isolation. In Australia, the Post trialled a Neighbourhood Welcome Service within the city of Melbourne, designed to tackle isolation and loneliness. Recognizing that an increasingly diverse population poses challenges for some people to engage with their local communities, the Post collaborated with 35 community organizations to develop opportunities for people to connect with others and engage in local activities.

## 2.3.2

### Poverty and integration (27)

Services that support low-income, homeless or otherwise disadvantaged people have clear and direct benefits for people's quality of life, as well as strengthening their ability to participate in the community. In addition to issuing social security payments (section 2.4.1), Posts offer other services that help to direct aid towards the neediest in society.

45 Leaving no one behind: the imperative of inclusive development – Report on the World Social Situation 2016, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.



**In Australia, the Post has established personal mailboxes at a facility that supports homeless people.**

Image credit: Australia Post

Fifteen Posts were identified as offering services to support the delivery of poverty reduction parcels (and in some cases collect associated donations), building on their core strengths in distribution and logistics. For example, the Post in China has established an extensive system for collecting financial donations (via post offices and online) to fund the purchase and delivery of parcels to the poorest members of society (Annex 1.2). In partnership with the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation and the China Women's Development Foundation, the Post delivers parcels containing items that help to meet the daily needs of rural elementary school students and mothers living in poverty. Posts also participated in the delivery of food parcels during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. in Colombia, Costa Rica and Oman). Several Posts schedule the delivery of poverty reduction parcels to coincide with national festivals or celebrations, recognizing the connection between poverty and social exclusion. For example, in the Netherlands, the Post works with the Jarige Job foundation to collect donated birthday presents and deliver them to children from low-income families. In Italy, the Post has partnered with the charity Caritas to re-gift undeliverable parcels to the needy at Christmas.

In a survey conducted by the United Kingdom communications services regulator in 2019, 62% of adults reported that they would feel cut off from society if they could not send or receive post.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, a survey in April 2020 by the United States Postal Service Market Research & Insights Team revealed that 55% of respondents feel less isolated when receiving a card or letter in the mail.<sup>47</sup> These statistics reflect the importance of mail in connecting people with friends and family, but also in accessing essential services. For example, people who lack an address or move frequently may fail to receive important correspondence from public agencies, resulting in missed social welfare payments and fewer opportunities to access health care, housing and employment.<sup>48</sup>

46 Ofcom, Residential Postal Tracker (2019), Q3, p. 156.

47 COVID Mail Attitudes: Understanding & Impact (2020), USPS Market Research & Insights.

48 Millions without mail (2020), National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Several Posts offer services that are designed to support the connection and integration of people who are homeless or living in temporary accommodation. In Sydney, Australia, homeless people can register for a free P.O. box service at a participating post office, providing a secure way for people to receive important documents and maintain social connections. In the United States, people without a fixed address can also submit an application for a P.O. box, or register to collect their post from post offices that accept General Delivery mail. A similar address and collection service was introduced in Ireland, where people can register for a free personal postal address that links to their local post office. Importantly, if people move to a new location, they can quickly generate a new address.<sup>49</sup> In Melbourne, Australia, the Post has participated in an alternative approach, collaborating with the local government and NGOs to establish personal mailboxes at a facility that supports homeless people.

A variety of services offered by Posts explicitly aim to support the integration of migrants, refugees or otherwise forcibly displaced people. In both Lebanon and New Zealand, the Post offers document translation services for non-native speakers; documents that prove identity, birth and marital status are often critical for accessing basic health, education or housing services. In Italy, the Post has established 27 multi-ethnic post offices to promote social inclusion. These are located in districts with a high percentage of foreign residents, or in areas with high foot traffic such as railway stations. In addition to helping with administrative tasks, Posts have the opportunity to support the integration of migrants or refugees via direct employment. In Sweden, the Post has collaborated with the Swedish Public Employment Agency to recruit and train immigrants as drivers, and to improve their language skills. This benefits the Post by improving the long-term supply of drivers, while supporting the integration of immigrants into the Swedish job market. Similarly, the Post in Finland has established a recruitment hub for employing immigrants, and in Switzerland the Post collaborated with the government to offer refugees and temporarily admitted people an integration pre-apprenticeship. Posts seeking to offer employment services for refugees and forcibly displaced people are encouraged to consult the guiding principles published by the International Labour

Organization in 2016.<sup>50</sup> Whether these employment examples meet this guide's definition of a postal social service is debatable, yet they still provide a basis for developing more formal or extensive service agreements between the Post and government ministries to support community integration. Posts could also engage with public employment agencies and business development services to identify opportunities for new social services.

### 2.3.3

## Other innovative community services

Digital inclusion is a major global challenge, and enabling universal access to and use of the Internet would make a significant contribution towards achieving the UN SDGs.<sup>51</sup> For example, digital inclusion can help to tackle inequalities in access to health and education, by enabling telemedicine<sup>52</sup> and distance education (section 2.2.4). Posts can encourage greater use of the Internet by supporting their customers in installing and paying for landline and mobile broadband (section 2.5.2), and by providing Internet access within post offices (section 2.6.2). They can also offer bespoke digital products and services to parts of the community at greater risk of isolation, such as the elderly (section 2.6.2). Digital inclusion is enhanced by improving digital literacy; several Posts offer free training in digital skills. Posts are also well placed to create digital platforms that support local community interaction, as illustrated by the Virtual Village Square app developed by Swiss Post (section 3.4.2).

The Post in Nepal reports that mail carriers have offered letter-reading services to their customers for many decades. This is an informal and free service, offered nationally, and is considered to be part of the traditional role of the Post. In the mountainous landscape that dominates the country, many villages are physically isolated. For elderly people who may be illiterate or visually disabled, this letter-reading service can be essential for maintaining contact with relatives who have left their village to find work. Nepal Post emphasizes that trust is critical to the delivery of this service; it is understood by both customers and mail carriers that the contents of these letters are private.

49 An Post web article: An Post launches new Address Point Service (05.04.2019), [www.anpost.com/Media-Centre/News/An-Post-launches-new-Address-Point-Service](http://www.anpost.com/Media-Centre/News/An-Post-launches-new-Address-Point-Service).

50 Guiding principles: Access of refugees and other forcibly displaced persons to the labour market (2016), International Labour Organization.

51 Backgrounder on ITU website: Digital inclusion of all (Last update: April 2020), [www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/digital-inclusion-of-all.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/digital-inclusion-of-all.aspx).

52 The Postal Service's Role in Delivering Wellness Services and Supplies (2015), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

In addition to the innovative solutions developed to enable people with no fixed address to access their mail (section 2.3.2), Posts offer other services to support homeless people. For example, in Ireland, the Post (which operates a mobile Internet network) has developed a new initiative that enables the Post and its customers to donate mobile data to homeless people, helping them to connect with friends, family and support services (section 2.5.2). In Australia, the Post also provides support for The Big Issue – an NGO dedicated to supporting and creating work opportunities for homeless people. People who are homeless, in temporary accommodation, or facing financial crisis can register to sell The Big Issue magazine. Australia Post offers a magazine resupply service to vendors via selected urban post offices. The Post reports that there is little cost associated with providing this social service.

Posts also often own extensive real estate that is offered for sale or rent (e.g. in Mozambique, Slovenia and Uganda). This presents an opportunity to make this space available to community organizations at reduced rates, or to offer free temporary use of unoccupied buildings. The Post in Italy provides a model for this approach and has a strategic objective to make company-owned spaces available for community use/social activities (section 4.1.1).

2.3.4

## Key considerations

These examples illustrate why the postal system can be strategically important for supporting communities. The broad reach of postal networks means they can efficiently deliver assistance to the neediest in society, often at little cost. Digital technology plays a key supporting role for many of these services, enabling people to connect with social networks and to access resources that enhance their ability to participate in the community.

People who have been forcibly displaced and people who are homeless often face similar challenges, including difficulties accessing their mail. A range of existing services could be adapted to support people with no fixed address, including dedicated P.O. boxes or other collection facilities and reduced or free postage rates. Strong potential exists for innovation in this area, particularly in the use of secure digital and hybrid mail services.

Managing the impacts of poverty and social exclusion can be expensive for governments; the postal system offers social development actors an efficient way to deliver social aid and many other community support services. However, while some Posts have established more permanent service agreements with governments seeking to support and integrate the poorest in society, these services are more commonly initiated by the Post itself, or in partnership with NGOs.

2.3.5

## Recommendations

Posts should:

**Leverage** expertise in transport to offer new public mobility services.

**Develop** services that help vulnerable people to remain in their homes and communities.

**Ensure** appropriate worker training and risk assessment for home-based services.

**Offer** free or reduced postal tariffs for people at greatest risk of isolation.

**Consider** developing translation and letter-reading services for non-native speakers, people who are illiterate, or people who have visual disabilities.

**Explore** new ways for people with no fixed address to access their mail.

**Promote** public access to the Internet.

**Review** whether postal buildings and other assets could be mobilized for community use.

**Propose** extensive service agreements between the Post and government ministries to help them meet their targets with respect to community integration, digital inclusion, poverty, nutrition, homelessness and employment.

## 2.4



## Access to government services

Government services are the type of social service most frequently offered by Posts, with 102 UPU member countries and territories identified as being involved in this sector. Given the historically close relationship between government and the Post, this number is likely to be an underestimate.

Government services (or public services) have been defined in a variety of ways, but the term broadly refers to activities that meet the needs of the general public, which cannot be offered by the open market without support from government.<sup>53</sup> These activities are a key mechanism by which governments deliver on political commitments or obligations to the public. Some definitions of government services include activities related to health, education, transport and utilities. However, these services are considered elsewhere in chapter 2. This section focuses more narrowly on government administration, including a variety of services that are essential to the basic functioning of society, and which typically require the management of personal or confidential information.

The ability of people to receive social security payments, pay taxes, apply for licences or vote may be essential to their full participation in society, and is central to the delivery of many UN SDGs. Ensuring access to government services supports the first of the UN SDGs (End poverty in all its forms everywhere), as well as SDG 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels). Targets for SDG 16 cover themes such as legal identity for all, participatory decision making and public access to information.

Despite trends for corporatization, Posts have retained a variety of connections with national government.<sup>54</sup> Many governments retain full or partial ownership of the Post, as well as the responsibility for its regulation. This existing connection to government, along with their extensive distribution networks and high density of public access points, places Posts in a unique and strong position to offer government services. The key benefits for Posts are increased and diversified revenue, greater recognition and value by government, and enhanced customer satisfaction.

Common or innovative examples of government services are explored below. The number of member countries and territories offering these service types is given in parentheses.

## 2.4.1

### Social security and pension payments (60)

A high number of Posts are responsible for delivering social payments to citizens, demonstrating their important role in people's economic security. Most of these payments are made via the post office, with some taking place at the doorstep of customers' homes (e.g. in Algeria and Viet Nam). Some Posts have introduced or expanded home delivery of payments during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in April/May 2020, the Post in Armenia switched to home delivery of pensions for almost 90% of its vulnerable customers.<sup>55</sup> Other types of social payment illustrate the role of the Post in supporting government action on poverty. In Senegal, the Post is responsible for distributing funds from the National Family Security Scholarship Programme to female heads of household. The key purpose of these payments is to support expenses related to schooling and health care of children, and to improve broader family well-being (Annex 1.8).

53 Jackson, E. A. (2020). Importance of the Public Service in achieving the UN SDGs.

54 Partnering with Government (2016), The Postal Industry, Innovation & Opportunities Report, Vol. 1.

55 UPU webpage: HayPost digital response to COVID-19 crisis (2020), <https://spark.adobe.com/page/9Ng5Tg16XDtPP/>.

2.4.2

## Online/physical locations for requesting ID or licences (36) and delivery of official documents to residences (26)

Large numbers of Posts provide entry points for citizens to request identity documents or licences, and many also complete the service loop by offering secure delivery of these documents to residences (e.g. in Ireland, and Trinidad and Tobago). Some Posts have a digital presence on government administration platforms, where they can be selected as a document delivery partner (e.g. in Burkina Faso, Qatar and Tunisia).

2.4.3

## Postal voting and maintenance of electoral register (9)

Nine Posts were identified as offering voting services, illustrating the potential of this sector for realizing civic liberties and political freedom. In the case of postal voting, this is likely to be an underestimate: a recent summary by the Pew Research Center reported that 40 countries used postal ballots in their latest national election, referencing data collected before the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>56</sup> Voting services present a strong opportunity for Posts, building upon core competencies in the secure delivery of sensitive information. Since the onset of COVID-19, many states in the US have expanded their vote-by-mail options.<sup>57</sup> Innovations by the Post in Switzerland demonstrate the digital opportunities in this area: e-voting services are being developed to allow citizens to cast their vote via computer, smartphone or tablet.<sup>58</sup> In Chad, Mauritius and New Zealand, the Post also plays a role in voter registration.

2.4.4

## Local government centres/ counter within the post office (10)

While many Posts offer access to selected government services via post offices or their website, a few are more heavily involved in the service value chain. This includes providing space within the postal building for a government administration office, or providing a dedicated service counter that offers government services directly (e.g. in Cyprus and Tanzania). Posts included in this category offered strong evidence for a significant devolution of government service provision to the level of post offices. A novel variation on this theme is the installation of computer terminals in post offices. In Mongolia, citizens use these terminals to access personal information such as their social insurance history, authorized by their unique personal fingerprints. The Posts in Brazil and Uruguay emphasize the benefits of including government service centres within post offices, to address inequality. In remote areas, citizens would otherwise incur considerable costs associated with travelling long distances to visit regional government administration centres.

2.4.5

## Payment of fines or government taxes (25), vehicle registration, insurance and driving tests (16), and police/criminal record background checks (11)

Several other government administration services involve managing confidential or sensitive information about members of the public. In Greece, the public can pay road tax, income tax and national insurance contributions through the post office. For a fee, the Post in Switzerland offers citizens the opportunity to request extracts from their criminal record. In an unusual example from France, the public can complete a written driving theory test at their local post office.<sup>59</sup>

56 Pew Research Center web article: From voter registration to mail-in ballots, how do countries around the world run their elections? (30.10.2020), [www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/30/from-voter-registration-to-mail-in-ballots-how-do-countries-around-the-world-run-their-elections/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/10/30/from-voter-registration-to-mail-in-ballots-how-do-countries-around-the-world-run-their-elections/).

57 The U.S. Postal Service and Emergency Response: A History of Delivering for the American Public (2020), RISC Report No. RISC-WP-20-006, USPS Office of Inspector General.

58 E-voting section of the Swiss Post website, [www.post.ch/en/business-solutions/e-voting/the-e-voting-solution-for-cantons](http://www.post.ch/en/business-solutions/e-voting/the-e-voting-solution-for-cantons).

59 French Post webpage on the service, [www.laposte.fr/tous-les-services/conseils-pratiques/passer-le-code-de-la-route](http://www.laposte.fr/tous-les-services/conseils-pratiques/passer-le-code-de-la-route) (French only).

2.4.6

## Other innovative government services

Other examples include support for citizens to submit travel visa applications (e.g. in Grenada and Israel), extracts from property or commercial registers (Slovakia), and the secure delivery/return of census documents to/from residences (US).

2.4.7

## Key considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic elevated the role of the Post in supporting people's economic security and their ability to participate in democratic processes. Some of these services may retain a broad appeal for customers following the pandemic given their convenience, offering the Post additional sources of revenue.

Many government services depend upon a high-quality digital infrastructure. Establishing an effective interface between postal and government IT systems was highlighted by several member countries as critical, yet challenging. Similarly, some services require integration of the physical postal network with digital systems. Combining direct contact with the public (via post offices and at the doorstep) with digital processes (document order requests, database queries, money transfers) increases the variety of social services that Posts can offer.

Trust plays a particularly important role in the provision of government services. Through their core letter and parcel business, many Posts have established themselves as a trusted intermediary for the transfer of private data and property. These Posts are therefore well placed to manage confidential or sensitive information about members of the public. However, expansion into government services also presents a reputational risk for the Post, should the security of this information be compromised.<sup>60</sup>

2.4.8

## Recommendations

Posts should engage with a range of government ministries to better understand their needs.

Posts should critically review how their social, physical and digital infrastructures could be used to offer new government services, and identify strategically important gaps in capacity.

Posts should consider including capacity for offering government services within their digital transformation strategies.

Governments should periodically review opportunities to make use of the Post for efficiently increasing public access to administrative services, particularly those that reduce poverty and inequality.

Governments are encouraged to formally position the Post within their broad public service delivery framework, establishing policies that recognize and identify specific roles for Posts within this framework.

Governments should endeavour to ensure alignment of socially oriented policies dealing with welfare, health, education, etc., to foster coordinated action between the Post and other actors.

Governments may further consider contracting Posts to offer specific social services, as a more sustainable alternative to resourcing these services through core funding mechanisms.

2.5



## Waste, recycling, energy and utilities

Posts in 73 UPU member countries and territories were identified as offering services aimed at reducing waste, increasing recycling, improving energy efficiency and supporting connection to utilities. Common or innovative examples of these services are explored below. The number of member countries and territories offering these service types is given in parentheses.

2.5.1

### Waste and recycling (7)

The UN SDGs promote the sound management of all wastes throughout their life cycle (target 12.4), and the minimization of waste production via prevention, reduction, recycling and reuse (target 12.5). Waste management, recycling and reuse are typically framed as *environmental services*, yet the social values created within a more circular economy can be considerable.<sup>61</sup> For example, as people increasingly choose (or are obliged) to recycle, some may struggle to participate owing to limited storage space at their home, no doorstep collection by the municipality/private contractor, or a lack of local public recycling facilities. Keeping valuable resources circulating in the economy also has the potential to satisfy consumer demand for more sustainable lifestyles, as well as helping to address skill gaps in labour markets and reduce regional unemployment. Posts are well positioned to support this demand by offering (or acting as partners in) repair services and sharing initiatives.

General collection of larger items for recycling, such as plastic, glass and cardboard, is a convenient service offered by some Posts. It may also be considered as an essential service for people living in isolated locations, or with reduced mobility. For example, in Australia, post offices in some states act as drop-off points for plastic and glass containers. As part of a government-established scheme, these post offices generate income based upon the number of containers collected, as well as benefiting from increased foot traffic. The Post in Switzerland is also piloting a range of recycling and reuse services, as part of a broader initiative to promote the transition to a circular economy. These services include collecting used coffee capsules and plastic bottles directly from people's homes, and transporting items rented via the Sharely platform. Some types of waste pose particularly high health and safety risks to the public if not disposed of correctly. For example, batteries contain toxic or corrosive materials that are potentially harmful when punctured, and some can explode or cause fires if damaged. Other waste such as unwanted prescription medicines (2.1.1) can result in accidental poisoning if inadequately disposed of. These impacts are not just limited to the homes and other premises where the waste is generated; people may also be exposed to risks at general waste processing locations, landfill sites and unofficial dumps. Examples of battery collection at post offices (for subsequent recycling) can be found in section 3.2.2 (Mauritius) and Annex 1.7 (Macao, China). Posts are well placed to offer collection services for recyclable items, given their broad reach and increasing capacity in reverse logistics (thanks to e-commerce).<sup>62</sup>

61 Padilla-Rivera, A., Russo-Garrido, S., & Merveille, N. (2020). Addressing the Social Aspects of a Circular Economy: A Systematic Literature Review. *Sustainability*, 12(19): 7912.

62 Riding the Returns Wave: Reverse Logistics and the U.S. Postal Service (2018), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

## 2.5.2

## Utilities and energy efficiency (72)

The UN SDGs promote universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services (target 7.1); greater access to information and communications technology (target 9.c); and universal and equitable access to safe and affordable drinking water (target 6.1). Posts offer a variety of services that support progress towards these targets, including registering customers with utility providers, meter reading, invoicing and bill payment. For example, many Posts are involved in the sale of smartphones and mobile Internet subscriptions (e.g. in Luxembourg and Viet Nam). Supporting public access to the Internet is an important social service that Posts are well positioned to offer, enabling people to access information and support that is directly beneficial to their quality of life. Despite steady growth, just 53.1% of individuals were estimated to have used the Internet in 2019, falling to 19% of people in least developed countries.<sup>63</sup> In addition to facilitating broad access to the Internet, Posts can help to connect people who are most in need of support. For example, in Ireland, the Post offers a service that allows users of its mobile Internet network (An Post Mobile) to donate mobile data to homeless people, helping them to connect with friends, family and support services. Through focus groups, the Post identified that while the majority of homeless people own smartphones, few have the finances to buy credit. At the same time, it recognized that many of its An Post Mobile customers did not use their full data allowance each month. The solution was The Shared Network, a service that allows customers to donate their unused data to people who are homeless or living in temporary emergency accommodation.<sup>64</sup> People are able to gain access to this data via SIM cards, distributed by charities working in the area of homelessness.

Increasing access to renewable energy, and improving the energy efficiency of homes and products, has multiple social benefits. These include greater energy security (for individuals), reduced costs, and improved thermal comfort. A small number of Posts have started to offer services in this sector. For example, the Post in Benin sells a range of solar energy products, including solar-powered LED lamps and mobile phone chargers. Importantly, there is an emphasis on ensuring broad public access to these products: wholesale purchases for resale are banned, multiple payment options are offered, and deliveries can be made throughout the country. In Ireland, the Post has developed an online portal to support people seeking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes (Annex 1.9). This resource, named *Green Hub*, provides free information on retrofit measures, costs and associated grants, as well as offering access to contractors and low-cost financing.<sup>65</sup> As international pressure to reduce greenhouse gas emissions increases, Posts will have more opportunities to act on behalf of sustainable development actors to raise awareness about these technologies and practices, and to make key products and funding available.

## 2.5.3

## Key considerations

Where public recycling opportunities are limited, the Post may be in a strong position to offer such services on behalf of the municipality. However, this will depend upon the capacity of mail carriers to collect these items, and on the presence of regional facilities for recycling. A reasonable strategy is for Posts to first develop recycling services for smaller items (e.g. batteries or unwanted medicines). However, this raises a range of health, safety and legal issues that will need to be considered carefully; the well-being of postal workers should never be compromised.

The broad benefits derived from increased public connectivity to the Internet, and the role of the Post in the rollout of 5G (fifth generation cellular wireless) technology, are outlined in a recent report by the United States Postal Service.<sup>66</sup> Opportunities for the Post include the colocation of 5G infrastructure and postal buildings, development of post offices as digital hubs for Wi-Fi access, and use of postal vehicles to collect high resolution spatial data on connection quality.

63 Measuring digital development: Facts and figures (2019), International Telecommunication Union.

64 An Post web article: An Post launches The Shared Network, [www.anpost.com/Media-Centre/News/An-Post-launches-The-Shared-Network](http://www.anpost.com/Media-Centre/News/An-Post-launches-The-Shared-Network).

65 Green Hub portal on An Post website, [www.anpost.com/Green-Hub](http://www.anpost.com/Green-Hub).

66 Next Generation Connectivity: Postal Service Roles in 5G and Broadband Deployment (2020), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.



## The Shared Network

Reconnecting Ireland's Homeless

**In Ireland, the Post has established a service that allows people to donate mobile Internet data to homeless people, helping them to connect with friends, family and support services.**

Image credit: An Post

2.5.4

## Recommendations

Posts should:

**Consult** with municipalities on their recycling and broader circular economy needs, and encourage them to use and invest in postal infrastructure for collection of recyclable materials.

**Explore** opportunities to satisfy consumer demand for more sustainable lifestyles, including the collection of items for repair and redistribution.

**Include** capacity for doorstep recycling when developing reverse logistics solutions for e-commerce.

**Consult** with utility providers on their needs, and encourage them to consider using the Post for sales, meter reading, invoicing and bill payments.

**Review** opportunities to support increased connectivity of the public to the Internet.

**Explore** opportunities to raise awareness about energy efficiency technologies and practices, and to offer related services that promote positive social outcomes.

2.6



## Data and technology

Posts in 78 UPU member countries and territories were identified as offering social services that focus on data and technology (in addition to those listed in sections 2.1, 2.4 and 2.5). Common or innovative examples of data and technology services are explored below. The number of member countries and territories offering these service types is given in parentheses.

2.6.1

### Data collection and provision (27)

“For many people, the Post is the only channel for vital education, health and security information.”<sup>67</sup>

Regular contact between postal staff and the public provides an opportunity for disseminating information that is relevant to people’s quality of life, and also for collecting data on behalf of social development partners.

Improving access to information held by public authorities (SDG target 16.10) can support a range of sustainability goals, such as greater social inclusion and more accountable institutions. Many Posts are trusted sources of government information, acting as social, physical and digital interfaces with the public (section 4.3). Twenty-two member countries and territories were identified as supporting awareness campaigns related to specific social issues, disseminating information about elections, or acting as a broad public information hub (section 3.2.3). For example, the Post in Saudi Arabia provides extensive support services for people participating in the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages (Annex 1.6). Posts also disseminate information on behalf of NGOs: Bulgarian post offices displayed posters to raise awareness about the risks of human trafficking, on behalf of the Animus Association Foundation (Annex 1.4). The COVID-19 pandemic has increased demand for Posts to support government communication, typically through the delivery of advice materials to people’s homes (e.g. in Bangladesh, Finland and the United Kingdom).

**“For many people, the Post is the only channel for vital education, health and security information.”**

UPU Director General Bishar A. Hussein

The current role of the Post in data collection to support social development is relatively limited, with the exception of certain government administration or health services (sections 2.1 and 2.4). Public safety reporting is a formal service identified for just four Posts, yet where residential mail delivery services are extensive, there is considerable potential for mail carriers to report observations of crimes, accidents, etc. However, it is important to recognize that any surveillance of people risks undermining the trusted and neutral reputation of the Post within the community. More generally, in countries with high densities of delivery vehicles, post boxes, parcel lockers and post offices, there are numerous opportunities for collecting real-time environmental data that is relevant to public health and safety. A report by the United States Postal Service in 2016<sup>68</sup> outlines how sensors and other devices can be mounted on postal infrastructure and used to collect information on road weather (e.g. in Finland), the physical condition of roads (e.g. in France) and air pollution (e.g. in Belgium). The data collected by such services can be used by health and safety actors to reduce the risk of personal injuries or disease. Such data also has commercial value, as illustrated by Geoptis – a survey subsidiary of La Poste Group (France).<sup>69</sup> In addition, Posts can be mobilized to collect survey data on public well-being and changing social needs. For example, a 2015 report on the requirements for monitoring national progress towards implementing the UN SDGs identified a need for significant investment in activities such as household surveys and geospatial data collection.<sup>70</sup> Posts should therefore seek to support the implementation of national statistics strategies, and to benefit from any associated funding (e.g. via official development assistance).

67 Statement by UPU Director General Bishar A. Hussein on the occasion of World Post Day, 9 October 2018.

68 The Postal Service and Cities: A “Smart” Partnership (2016), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

69 Geoptis site, <https://geoptis.fr/> (French only).

70 Data for Development: A Needs Assessment for SDG Monitoring and Statistical Capacity Development (2015), Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

2.6.2

## Technology (65)

Information and communication technologies have been identified as a key opportunity for implementing the UN SDGs.<sup>71</sup> Technology has featured in several of the social services explored in chapter 2, from the sale of mobile Internet subscriptions (section 2.5.2), to digitizing school reports (section 2.2.4). This section focuses on social services where technology is central, and that the Post provides directly. Of these, the most common are services offered within post offices, such as public access to the Internet and the use of computing and printing facilities. For example, the Post in Mauritius provides considerable support to help the public use the web (section 3.1), while in Venezuela the Post offers extensive printshop services.

Health and digital inclusion are notable as two areas where Posts are starting to offer bespoke technological social services. For example, the Post in Viet Nam developed a digital mapping application to support the campaign to prevent and control COVID-19 infections. The app helps citizens to avoid high-risk regions, to assess whether they may have already been exposed to the virus, and to find locations where they can be tested. It was developed for the COVID-19 National Steering Committee (which receives summary data on the health status, age and travel history of users), in partnership with the country's Ministry of Information and Communications, Ministry of Health, and the Hanoi University of Engineering and Technology.<sup>72</sup>

In France, the Post offers a tablet computer and associated services designed to help older people use the Internet and connect with family and friends. A simplified interface, helpdesk and tutorials are included within a monthly subscription service. In Japan, the Post is also keen to explore the role of technology in supporting older people. For example, the potential for supplying seniors with iPads and bespoke software applications was tested extensively in 2015. Difficulties were identified in how older people used the hardware and the software; the Post is currently evaluating the use of AI and voice recognition technologies to improve the user experience.

2.6.3

## Key considerations

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the essential nature of the Post in a variety of ways, including its potential to disseminate public safety information and to collect data from the public. Fine-resolution data is proving critical for managing and mitigating the social effects of the pandemic, and will be central to designing new services that accelerate progress towards achieving the SDGs.<sup>73</sup> Despite these recent successes, Posts still need to make a stronger case to stakeholders for offering social data services. This includes emphasizing the extent, regularity and density of opportunities for data collection; the high levels of public trust and connection to the Post; and the potential value of any data collected and analyzed.

There is also considerable potential for Posts to develop new data and technology services that support people who have low incomes, are homeless, or have no fixed residence. For example, Posts could engage with platforms seeking to improve digital connectivity for refugees.<sup>74</sup> In addition, advances in digital addressing and biometric ID present opportunities for new services that could allow people to access postal social services in a more flexible and secure manner. Where Posts hold and maintain address information, this data and any standardization tools could be shared with social development actors, e.g. to help health services update medical records<sup>75</sup> and to support emergency services with efficient routing.

71 Backgrounder on ITU website: ICTs to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Last update: February 2019), [www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/icts-to-achieve-the-united-nations-sustainable-development-goals.aspx](http://www.itu.int/en/mediacentre/backgrounders/Pages/icts-to-achieve-the-united-nations-sustainable-development-goals.aspx).

72 Partnerships against the pandemic (2020), Universal Postal Union, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/ZwPVKfOwas7VT/>.

73 The Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

74 UNHCR site on connectivity for refugees, [www.unhcr.org/innovation/connectivity-for-refugees/](http://www.unhcr.org/innovation/connectivity-for-refugees/).

75 Partnering for Health: Potential Postal Service Roles in Health and Wellness (2021), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.



Image credit: An Post (Ireland)

2.6.4

## Recommendations

Posts should:

**Consult** social development actors on their needs, and encourage them to use and invest in postal infrastructure for information collection and dissemination.

**Make** full use of their communication channels to deliver key public health and safety messages.

**Prioritize** data protection and security for all social services involving data collection or management.

Explicitly **include** capacity building for social services within digital transformation strategies.

**Leverage** existing capacity in data collection and management (e.g. in mapping and routing).

**Review** opportunities related to health and digital inclusion in particular.

**Consider** including environmental sensors when upgrading both fixed (e.g. parcel lockers) and mobile (e.g. bikes, vans) infrastructure.

**Seek** to support the implementation of national statistics strategies through social and environmental data collection, and to benefit from any associated funding.

**Engage** with national digital initiatives, particularly those that aim to use information and communication technologies to advance the SDGs.

# Special focus on experienced service providers

Some Posts are particularly experienced in offering social services, having offered multiple service types for decades. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how Posts have embraced the principle of offering a wide variety of social services, and to explore their motivations. Examples are presented in more detail than those given in chapter 2. In addition, interviews with senior postal managers provide insight into key strategy, policy and practical considerations.

The following pages focus on Mauritius Post and Swiss Post. However, it should be noted that many other Posts are experienced providers of social services (e.g. in Australia, Bangladesh, France, Ireland, Lebanon and Russia).

## 3.1

## Mauritius Post interview: Mr Giandev Moteea, Chief Executive Officer

### Basic motivation for offering social services

"The social services offered by Mauritius Post (MP) are the result of numerous cultural, historic and strategic factors. First, MP is an old and respected institution; in 2022 it will celebrate its 250th anniversary. Providing a universal service has long been a priority, and post offices in rural areas have traditionally held a high status within their community. Secondly, in 2003, MP became a private company (government owned), and it recognizes that maintaining strong connections with the community is crucial to its commercial success. On one hand, the privatization of MP gave postal managers greater flexibility; new social services and initiatives could be presented to the board and implemented quickly. On the other hand, there is a greater need to provide a business motivation and justification for any corporate social responsibility type activities, as the operational surplus gets impacted due to challenges on our postal sector."

### Business case, strategy and funding

"These services can be categorized as either revenue generating or loss making. For those that generate direct revenue, the business case is relatively clear; they contribute to the growth and diversification of postal income. For social services that appear to be loss making, it is important to consider the bigger picture. In the short term these services may support the cross selling of other revenue generating services. In the longer term, these services can help MP to connect and build trust with a new generation of young customers. For example, our Digital Service Centres offer public Internet access and computing facilities, helping to attract younger people to the post office, and to develop an enduring relationship.



**"Trust is very important. MP surfs on the trust and confidence that citizens have in the Post."**

**Mr Giandev Moteea, Chief Executive Officer**

Image credit: Mauritius Post

"Key elements of our strategy include branding post offices as community hubs and developing strong partnerships; we have excellent connections with government ministries, charities, NGOs and private businesses. In addition, each year a budget is allocated for CSR activities, some of which is used to support social services through various channels.

"MP does not receive any government subsidy, but it does generate income from contracts with government ministries to deliver social services on their behalf (e.g. pension payments). As previously mentioned, some social services generate revenue directly that may be used to support other services. Another important source of funding for social initiatives comes from a reduction in government taxes. MP can reduce taxes on its profits from 17% to 15%, as long as it invests this 2% of profits on CSR projects."

## Practical challenges

“We secure feedback directly from MP staff and our customers, including reactions from social media. In some cases, we are able to collect statistics, e.g. the number of participants in community events, blood donations, etc. However, because the impacts of some social services can be less tangible, setting measurable targets is challenging. Ideas for new services often come from our network of partners. For example, the government has been promoting policies to bridge the digital divide that led to a project to establish public Internet access via our post offices (Digital Service Centres). We also receive regular requests for sponsorship, and depending upon the year’s surplus, we accommodate the requests accordingly.

“Trust is very important. MP surfs on the trust and confidence that citizens have in the Post, and we continue to offer basic financial services which also enable financial inclusion. Offering social services continues our tradition of providing close support to the community, and plays an important role in sustaining the image of the Post as a trusted institution. Building customer trust this way generates benefits for a range of other postal and non-postal services offered by MP.

“Budgets have to be respected; we have taken care not to grow our social services too quickly, to ensure they can be sustained – regularly and in the long term. Some of our services involve working with customers who are exposed to diseases, and risks to the health and safety of our workers must be taken seriously. Similarly, during a two-month COVID-19 lockdown, the delivery of cash pension payments to citizens’ homes could have put our mail carriers and officers at risk. Our response has been to maintain social distancing and work with the police to increase security, although the Post was charged for this support.”

## Key success factors

“An important starting point for many services has been to build genuine relationships and partnerships, maintain the Post’s historical reputation, and secure long-term commitments (e.g. from blood donation and other stakeholders, for hardware maintenance and contribution to operational costs).”

“Building on our existing strengths of customer trust, postal infrastructure and partners has been particularly important.”

“MP staff are already very customer-focused, yet there is still the need to keep them motivated. Actions include promoting humanitarian values as part of our working culture, and seeking feedback from team leaders and trade union leaders.”

### 3.2

## Mauritius Post: social service examples

Mauritius Post offers a large number of social services; twelve are listed in Annex 2, including medical checks, recycling, public information campaigns, social payments, bill payments and delivering materials for the blind.



**Mauritius Post offers a large number of social services including medical checks, recycling, public information campaigns, social payments, bill payments and delivering materials for the blind.**

Image credit: Mauritius Post



3.2.1

## Blood donation by the public

Since 2008, Mauritius Post has offered its post offices for free as venues for the public to donate blood. These events take place several times a year and in multiple regions, in conjunction with the Ministry of Health and Wellness and the Blood Donors Association. The Post also provides logistic support and promotes the events in its post offices and via television advertising and online/social media. The motivations for offering this service include supporting the government, increasing customer satisfaction, improving public image, and fulfilling corporate social responsibility commitments.

3.2.2

## Small/specialized materials for recycling

Mauritius Post offers a service for collecting small items such as batteries, old/damaged mobile phones, envelopes, and used bras. Some of these items require specialized disposal processes to avoid harm to people and the environment. Mauritius Telecom initiated the collection service for batteries and old mobile phones, choosing to partner with the Post thanks to its large number of secure, and high footfall, locations throughout Mauritius. The costs for the Post to offer this service were minimal – collection boxes were placed in post offices, with Mauritius Telecom removing their contents for safe disposal.

3.2.3

## The post office as a public information hub

Post offices are used both for providing government information to the public, and for the collection of information on behalf of the government. Information and awareness campaigns have included health topics such as AIDS/HIV, and combatting corruption. The Post also helps organizations such as the Electoral Supervisory Commission to update the electoral register, by maintaining a record of residents who have moved to a new address. The costs for these services are generally relatively low (e.g. providing space for posters within post offices, marketing activities). In cases where the Post is supporting a national campaign related to public well-being, Mauritius Post typically covers the costs. In contrast, some services are offered to government ministries at a charge.

## 3.3

## Swiss Post interview: Mr Martin Fuchs, Head of Digital Health

### Basic motivation for offering digital health services

"In 2014 the Swiss Post (SP) Innovation Business Unit identified an opportunity to support its customers by providing them with digital access to their medical records. The outcome was the Post E-Health platform, which aims to both improve customer satisfaction and generate revenue. Since then, Digital Health has been strengthened to the extent that it now constitutes a new business unit at SP as of 1 January 2021. The business unit has the aim to offer services that guarantee the established principle of mail secrecy in the digital world, too. In addition to managing the E-Health platform, the Digital Health unit is developing a variety of associated project management, data security and customer support services."

### Post E-Health platform – an overview

"A Federal Act in 2017 created the right for citizens to access their medical records in a digital format, also allowing them to authorize access by healthcare professionals. This standardized electronic patient record (EPR) is intended to increase the sharing of data between healthcare actors, improving health outcomes for patients. For example, hospitals, rehabilitation clinics, laboratories, retirement and care centres, medical practices, and pharmacies generate millions of documents each year that contain valuable information about patient treatments, test results and medications. Swiss Post has created a web-based e-portal where both citizens and authorized healthcare providers can access the information held within the EPR and upload new data.



**"Ultimately, the Post might transition into a broad provider of lifestyle support services. In this scenario, SP could play a central role in helping customers to manage all types of sensitive data."**

**Mr Martin Fuchs, Head of Digital Health**

Image credit: Swiss Post

"This patient-centred approach reflects a broader shift in public healthcare strategy towards greater involvement of citizens in decisions about their health. The idea is that when patients take responsibility for adopting healthier lifestyles and for sharing medical information, costs tend to reduce and health outcomes improve."

## Value proposition and business case

“The Swiss Federal System has contributed to the fragmentation of health infrastructure, and SP has positioned itself as a neutral service provider for data transmission. SP identified an opportunity for generating revenue, offering managed services to regional health organizations that are responsible for ensuring people have access to their health data.

“SP’s E-Health platform offers numerous opportunities to improve the value chain, capturing the increasing volume of data resulting from technological advances in the healthcare sector. For example, records could include the serial number of a prosthetic implant. The Post’s solutions and services could confidently and inalterably capture and associate this serial number with the implant. The goal is to add further services that build on the core health data management. A key opportunity to add value lies in SP increasing the interoperability between its E-Health platform, medical devices (e.g. wearable health tech), and the databases of different health actors. Currently, half of the regions in Switzerland have registered for this service.”

## Strategic considerations

“Swiss Post guarantees the established principle of mail secrecy in the digital world, too. It is building on its extensive experience as a trustworthy carrier of sensitive information, providing new digital solutions for companies, authorities and private citizens and enabling them to exchange confidential data via a reliable Swiss provider. Health data management is therefore a logical area for SP to diversify into, building on the existing high levels of customer trust in the security of postal deliveries, and on our in-house digital expertise. However, recognizing the need to bring in expert knowledge from the health sector, SP secured exclusive Swiss-wide access to health data management software from Siemens Healthineers.

“The 2017 Federal Act on EPRs was strategically important for establishing this service, giving SP the confidence to invest in developing a secure online health platform. SP also has a business unit dedicated to innovation, with over 100 employees supporting the development of new products and services. This team was essential to the establishment of the digital health platform.”

## Future developments

“Public health systems include both physical and digital components that increasingly need to integrate. Posts can support this integration by leveraging their competencies and experience in bringing together information and physical services and offering new resources. For example, post offices could serve as a focal point for registering new users of the platform, and for helping citizens digitize their paper health records.

“Demographic and technology trends indicate that demand for digital health services will increase in the future. As the number of older people increases, and more people are able to connect to the Internet, remote access to health care is becoming both practical and convenient. Comprehensive digital health records are important for efficient and safe telemedicine. In addition, the growth in the use of medical sensors and health apps is increasing the volume of health data that needs to be managed.

“As its capacity in health data management grows, SP could offer this service to the health ministries of other countries. Ultimately, the Post might transition into a broad provider of lifestyle support services. In this scenario, SP could play a central role in helping customers to manage all types of sensitive data.”

## Practical considerations and reflections

“Supporting innovation and experimentation was a very practical way to identify and grow this service.”

“The fragmentation of the Swiss healthcare system created a demand for a system that could integrate multiple data sources. However, this also meant that the platform developed by SP was technologically challenging to implement. For other countries with more centralized health care, implementing digital access to health records would probably be much easier.”

“SP started this project from a position of high public trust. This is an advantage, but it is still essential to demonstrate that we can also be trusted to maintain the privacy and security of customer property in the digital world.”

### 3.4

## Swiss Post: social service examples

Swiss Post offers a large number of social services; fifteen are listed in the table in Annex 2, and include bicycle and bus transport, apprenticeships for refugees, and local food delivery. Together, these illustrate the commitment of Swiss Post to its customers, and the variety of ways that Posts can act to improve citizens' quality of life. This strong social commitment is perhaps reflected in the fact that Swiss Post has consistently secured the highest-ranking score in the UPU Integrated Index for Postal Development (2IPD). Services such as passenger transport have been offered for decades. Others – such as its digital health platform – are relatively new and are supported through a dedicated Development & Innovation Group (see interview in section 3.3).

### 3.4.1

## Post E-Health – digital health data management and platform

The ability for people to access their own medical records on demand, and to share these with health professionals, has a variety of social benefits. For example, people might wish to check their vaccination records when planning a holiday, or to ensure a pharmacist is aware of their allergies. In Switzerland, the 2017 Federal Act on the Electronic Patient Record has driven an increase in the sharing of standardized data among health organizations. Patients can establish access to their electronic patient record, upload data, and control who can access it. As part of its Post E-Health platform, Swiss Post offers customers access to their EPR via a secure web-based e-portal. The Post has also added value to this basic service, creating a portal for healthcare professionals to share patient-related treatment information efficiently, and enabling patients to register for an inpatient stay at hospital. These services build upon the core competencies of Swiss Post in the areas of secure information transfer and digital infrastructure. Managing interfaces between the IT systems used by different healthcare partners appears to have been vital to establishing this initiative. A basic Swiss Post health app is under development that would enable patients to have mobile access to their EPR, and to upload data from third-party apps.

3.4.2

## My Local Services – promoting local community interactions and resilience

Increasing the awareness of local services and community events can bring a range of social benefits. It creates opportunities for people to meet and befriend their neighbours, and strengthens the resilience of local service providers. The COVID-19 pandemic has drawn attention to the value of neighbourhoods where residents support each other, and where they can shop or seek advice without travelling large distances. Swiss Post has developed a digital platform that acts as a virtual village square, connecting the population with regional merchants, institutions, the municipal administration and the post office. This platform has been designed for municipalities that are seeking to boost community interaction and enhance their local economy. It is possible to select different modules to offer residents, with the Post providing training, support and promotional packages to municipalities. The fee for municipalities varies depending on the number of residents. When promoting this service, Swiss Post emphasizes its commitment to data protection and security.

3.4.3

## Postal e-voting

In Switzerland, the public can vote several times a year in referendums, popular initiatives and elections. The Post is already heavily involved in the delivery and return of paper voting forms, but it is now expanding this service to enable people to vote online. Swiss Post offered an e-voting system to four cantons in 2019, and a revised system will be trialled from 2021. The primary benefit for customers is convenience – they can vote from any location via computer, smartphone or tablet. Few government services require as much trust and respect for privacy as voting, and Swiss Post provides high levels of assurance to customers regarding the security of their information. The Post handles the physical dispatch of documents and individual security codes. Voters can then log in to the e-voting platform using their electronic identity and security code. All information submitted by voters is protected with end-to-end encryption, and only the relevant canton can decrypt and analyze the anonymized information.

3.5

## Key considerations

The strategic perspectives and examples presented for Mauritius and Switzerland were chosen to illustrate the commitment of Posts to social services at two contrasting scales. First, a holistic view is presented for Mauritius Post, referencing the historic and trusted role of the Post, and its broad involvement in public life. Following this, a narrower view is presented for Swiss Post, focusing on a subset of its digital social services. Despite these different scales, common themes can be identified:

The need for a customer-centred approach

The importance of maintaining trust

The value of meaningful partnerships

The pressure to establish a clear business case for social services

The opportunity to generate direct revenue

The supporting role of digital technology

The examples presented for Mauritius illustrate how services such as recycling of small items and promotion of public health campaigns can be offered at a very low cost, while also demonstrating the Post's commitment to human well-being and environmental health. As well, they show how postal buildings can be used in innovative ways to support social policy goals.

The digital service examples from Swiss Post illustrate how technology platforms provide new opportunities for social services. Moreover, they underline a broader point made repeatedly in this guide: that Posts are well positioned to act as a neutral and trusted bridge between the public, government and private sector. The Post E-Health platform also demonstrates the benefit of supporting innovation and experimentation, and illustrates how to grow and add value to a core service.



Image credit: Correos de Costa Rica

# Strategic considerations for developing social services

This chapter offers a strategic perspective, considering the broad question of how to establish social services that meet the needs of the public, the Post and its stakeholders, and that can be sustained into the future. It explores themes such as the framing of postal social services within policy and strategy and the establishment of the business case for these new services, and also delves into different models for revenue generation, the role of the Post, and partnerships with social actors.

## 4.1

## The role of policy and strategy

## 4.1.1

### Postal policy and strategy

Diversification of postal businesses to include social services can bring a variety of strategic benefits to the Post. Perhaps most notable is the opportunity for new sources of revenue, which have the potential to offset some of the impacts from declining letter volumes and greater competition. Several UPU members reported that revenue generation was not their primary concern, and that the levels of income generated by social services were relatively small. However, other members reported revenue generation as the primary goal, notably for some health and social care services (section 2.1). In addition to direct revenue, motivations reported by Posts include helping the national government to implement its development policies, increasing customer satisfaction, meeting CSR commitments, and improving competitiveness and visibility (chapter 3). These reveal the broader strategic value of social services for the Post; they can help to secure long-term support for the Post as an essential service provider, by increasing its relevance and importance to the functioning of government, and to the lives of its customers.

Posts have made various high-level commitments to supporting social development. For example, these statements by Japan Post about its management philosophy place human well-being at the forefront:

“Japan Post Co., Ltd. will fully utilize its resources that include its post office and delivery networks covering every corner of the country to provide safe, reliable and fast services tailored to the needs of each community while contributing to the realization of a society with an abundance of human contact by supporting people’s lifestyles throughout their entire lives ... We will take on the challenge of providing innovative services that respond accurately to changes in society and enrich people’s lives.”<sup>76</sup>

Forty-six member countries reported that social services are directly mentioned within their DO’s strategy documents. In some cases, these references are restricted to the CSR strategy, but social services do feature as a key component of some corporate strategies. For example, a key pillar of Swiss Post’s new strategy includes opening the Post’s network to public authorities, to strengthen the role of post offices as local service centres.<sup>77</sup>

Some Posts also have dedicated policies and commitments related to social services. For example, the Post in Italy published a policy on community initiatives in 2019.<sup>78</sup> This policy affirms the commitment of the Post to using its resources to support social progress and the well-being of local communities. It then identifies three broad priority areas: accessibility and inclusion, culture and education, and economic sustainability and social connection. Importantly, the policy commits the Post to reporting on the objectives, targets and performance of its community initiatives, using specific indicators.

<sup>76</sup> Japan Post webpage on management philosophy, [www.japanpost.jp/en/group/map/index03.html](http://www.japanpost.jp/en/group/map/index03.html).

<sup>77</sup> Swiss Post press release: “Swiss Post of tomorrow” to combine realignment with a focus on traditional strengths (14.05.2020), [www.post.ch/en/about-us/news/news/2020/swiss-post-of-tomorrow-to-combine-realignment-with-a-focus-on-traditional-strengths](http://www.post.ch/en/about-us/news/news/2020/swiss-post-of-tomorrow-to-combine-realignment-with-a-focus-on-traditional-strengths).

<sup>78</sup> Italian Post webpage on the Community Initiatives Policy, [www.posteitaliane.it/en/politica-iniziativa-comunita.html](http://www.posteitaliane.it/en/politica-iniziativa-comunita.html).

## 4.1.2

## Government policy and strategy

Governments are also well placed to support the development of postal social services through dedicated legislation and policies, or by implementing policy objectives via the Post, in areas such as health or education. The most direct connection between government policy and the Post is perhaps through national commitments of UPU member countries to a universal postal service. Most countries (160 of 177) that have responded to UPU surveys since 2005 have defined a universal service, typically within a legal document.<sup>79</sup> While these commitments are largely oriented towards letter post, many also specify items for the blind, books, newspapers and periodicals. A small number include financial services with direct social benefits, such as pension payments. Thirty-five percent of members that reported offering social services in response to the 2019 questionnaire also confirmed that some type of social service was included in their universal service obligation. Given that USOs are defined by national governments, there is flexibility for their expansion to include more types of social services. While this could be particularly beneficial for people living in more remote communities, it would also bring the risk that Posts would become obligated to deliver more services without a corresponding increase in compensation for the financial burden. Several member countries reported developing postal social services at the request of their government, typically through contact with ministries of health, education and social security. Other examples include the policy of devolving responsibility for many types of government administration to the Post (section 2.4), and tax policy that encourages the Post to invest some of its profits into CSR projects (section 3.1).

As highlighted in section 2.4, the Post can be strategically important to governments for implementing their social policy objectives. However, the diverse and interconnected social roles of the Post are not always well recognized. Governments are encouraged to pay careful attention to the business case for Posts taking on a more active role in social service provision (section 4.2.1), formally position the Post within their broad public service delivery framework, as well as defining roles for the Post within strategies and policies covering areas such as poverty, inequality, health or education. In addition, governments should seek to support coherence and synergies between the multiple social roles of the Post.

## 4.2

## Making the business case

## 4.2.1

### A compelling case for new social services

The justifications for the Post to expand into social service provision fall into two broad categories: 1) benefits for the Post itself (more revenue, increased support from stakeholders, stronger customer base, etc.), and 2) the opportunity to advance social development (as mandated by the Post's CSR commitments as a commercial organization, or its obligations as a government agency). In addition, Posts may wish to highlight potential cost savings for government or government agencies. Member countries typically reported multiple strategic objectives for each service, and these should be clearly outlined within the business case. Although references to the broad pressures on the postal system and global societal challenges provide useful context (chapter 1), it is important to demonstrate a clear connection between the new service, the needs and capacity of the Post, and national social development priorities.

For example, while most of the world's poor live in rural areas, and the share of the rural population is especially high in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia,<sup>80</sup> it cannot be assumed that postal services to support the rural poor will be a priority for all Posts in these regions. It is therefore recommended that Posts consult with local NGOs, government agencies, multilateral agencies and other regional experts (e.g. restricted unions), to ensure that a strong case can be made for the social impact of proposed new services.

79 Universal Postal Service and Postal Regulation – A Global Panorama (2021), Universal Postal Union (draft).

80 Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune, World Bank.

## 4.2.2

## Return on investment

The process for making the financial case for a new social service is similar to that for other postal services. Setup and operational costs need to be estimated, along with the expected revenue (if any); competition and the size and value of the market should be researched; and assumptions tested via pilot projects. However, social services are unusual in that they also aim to deliver some form of social return on investment. Posts should include basic metrics for service delivery (e.g. number of users). However, more sophisticated indicators of social impact may be needed, especially for services funded by government agencies or other social development actors.

## 4.2.3

## Business models

Much of the advice for Posts on appropriate models for government,<sup>81</sup> digital,<sup>82</sup> financial<sup>83</sup> and wellness<sup>84</sup> services is applicable to other postal services with strong social goals; key publications are listed as footnotes below. The following sections consider business models from two perspectives: revenue sources, and the role and responsibility of the Post.

## 4.2.3.1

## Revenue sources

Examples of potential revenue sources from social services are presented in table 1 and represent a gradient from direct to indirect income. This table expands and adapts the categories used in the United States Postal Service brief on wellness services published in 2015,<sup>85</sup> notably by including the value of social services as stepping stones towards further diversification. For example, several UPU members reported that developing a particular social service had helped to convince stakeholders that the Post could be trusted with more lucrative services. These categories are not meant to imply that each type of social service is bound to a single source of revenue. In some cases, the revenue source can vary depending on the end user, or with changes to government policy. For example, while numerous health and social care services have been established by Posts in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and offered free to the public,<sup>86</sup> some might be retained and charged for in the future. Similarly, the home delivery of groceries and meals, offered by Posts to the public as a convenient service (section 2.1.5), could also be subsidized by governments or health insurers for people considered at risk of malnutrition.

TABLE 1 – Potential revenue sources from postal social services

Charges for service end users	Charges for social development actors	Rental of postal infrastructure	Spill-over to other for-profit services	Stepping stone to other for-profit services
People are charged for each use of the service	A fixed fee per registered user, or per target achieved	Public/private rental of postal vehicles	Cross-selling and advertising through enhanced footfall/digital traffic	Building trust with development actors to secure more lucrative contracts
Subscription	Service contracts	Under-used postal buildings or land rented by social actors	Customer satisfaction that increases loyalty, brand strength, and broader market share	Digital social services build capacity of the Post to offer other digital services
Included within the charge for a service bundle	Partnership fees	Rental of space on postal vehicles for pollution sensors	Basic social services as a platform for offering additional for-profit options	Success inspires confidence within the Post to develop new services

81 Partnering with Government (2016), The Postal Industry, Innovation & Opportunities Report, Vol. 1.

82 The digital economy and digital postal activities – A global panorama (2019), Universal Postal Union.

83 Global Panorama on Postal Financial Inclusion 2016, Universal Postal Union.

84 The Postal Service's Role in Delivering Wellness Services and Supplies (2015), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

85 The Postal Service's Role in Delivering Wellness Services and Supplies (2015), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

86 UPU webpage on postal social, financial and trade services during COVID-19, [www.upu.int/Postal-social-and-financial-services-during-COVID-19](http://www.upu.int/Postal-social-and-financial-services-during-COVID-19).

One category that might have been included in the table is the sale of anonymized data held by the Post (e.g. on public health). However, while this data has value for the commercial health and insurance sectors, its sale is also associated with considerable legal and reputational risks around privacy and security.

## 4.2.3.2

## Postal roles and responsibility

The social services identified during the research for this guide fall along a broad gradient of responsibility, with examples given in table 2. In many cases, the role of the Post is largely passive and involves providing the opportunity for the public to discover or connect to an existing service offered by the government or other social actor. This does not imply that these services are less important – post offices can be key locations for communicating safety messages to isolated communities (Annex 1.4). At the other extreme, the Post may take responsibility for the sourcing, warehousing, sale and delivery of essential products (e.g. alcohol handwash), or for an entire government service, such as issuing identity documents. Deciding on the level of responsibility and involvement in the value chain is an important strategic decision for Posts seeking to diversify into social services; this decision is influenced by the level of profit being sought, existing capacity, and willingness to manage additional risk.

## 4.2.4

## Implementation approach

An important question to address within the business case is whether the Post has the capacity to implement the new service using existing resources. Gaps can be met via innovation and training, hiring of new specialist staff, new software (section 3.3), or the purchase of existing social service providers (e.g. in France and the Netherlands). Many UPU members also report the use of pilot studies to test demand and improve efficiency (e.g. in Australia, Jordan and Ukraine) before rolling out a nationwide service.

Although many social services can be implemented quickly and in isolation, any structural reorganization of the Post (digital transformation, corporatization, etc.) provides an opportunity for diversification. Much of the extensive guidance within the UPU Postal Reform Guide (2019) is relevant to the implementation of new social services; and integrated postal reform and development plans are promoted as a tool for expanding the variety of services offered by the Post.<sup>87</sup>

A series of UPU case studies on the response of Posts to the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate a variety of implementation approaches for social services.<sup>88</sup> These are particularly relevant, as they reveal how Posts found creative ways to quickly establish a business case and launch the service. For example, the Post in Australia implemented a next-day pharmacy home delivery service within a week of gaining project approval. The Post emphasizes the importance of empowering a diverse project team to take decisions quickly, simplifying information-sharing processes,

TABLE 2 – Examples of roles and responsibilities for Posts offering social services

Connection	Interface	Logistics	Shared responsibility	Full responsibility
Government administration forms within the post office	Registering customers and forwarding requests	Delivery of renewed identification documents	Government services counter located within the post office	Identity documents requested, printed and issued by the post office
Autonomous digital kiosk for government administration present within the post office	Collecting and providing basic data from/to the public on behalf of government	Reverse logistics for unused medicines, batteries, etc.	Database hosting and management for social actors, e.g. electoral register, health records	Home checking and home maintenance for vulnerable or isolated people
Digital links to social services offered by partner organizations	Platforms for supporting community cohesion	Social payments at residences	Sale of tablets, smartphones and Internet subscriptions	Public transport, e.g. operating bus services

87 Postal Reform Guide (2019), Universal Postal Union.

88 UPU webpage on postal social, financial and trade services during COVID-19 – commentaries, [www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/COVID-19/Postal-social-financial-and-trade-services-during-COVID-19/Commentaries](http://www.upu.int/en/Postal-Solutions/COVID-19/Postal-social-financial-and-trade-services-during-COVID-19/Commentaries).

designing a service that was as simple as possible, and making use of existing products and systems. Similarly, the Post in Ireland was able to rapidly implement six new social services to support communities. It reported several key success factors, including sourcing ideas from customers, staff, unions and the national government; being willing to adopt new working relationships; and working closely with its communications team.

### 4.3

## The Post as a strategic social development partner

The postal system is uniquely well placed to support large-scale social development, thanks to its broad reach, its trusted status within many communities, and the regular face-to-face contact between its staff and the public. A key barrier to overcoming some of the world's most pressing social challenges is the inability to provide support directly to all of those in need; development initiatives may not realize their full potential because they cannot reach their intended recipients. The Post has been described as a trusted intermediary between the public and governments,<sup>89</sup> in part because of its extensive physical, social and digital network. In many countries, the Post issues social security payments and supports government campaigns on public health and safety (chapter 2). However, despite operating the largest physical distribution network in the world, the Post remains underutilized by many social development actors. Its 656,000 post offices and 5.23 million staff could help to bridge the gap between people and the NGOs, multilateral agencies and private enterprises that are seeking to reach them. A strong case for the extensive involvement of the Post in social development could be made simply on the grounds of efficiency. For example, an analysis by the United States Postal Service in 2015 identified a variety of reasons for wellness actors from the public, private and civil society sectors to collaborate with the Post,<sup>90</sup> including more effective outreach to customers and the use of postal buildings to offer in-person services.

Examples of partnerships between the Post and social development actors include:

LibanPost coordinating with the World Food Programme to verify identities of refugees<sup>91</sup>

Pharmacies working with the Post to deliver medicines to residences (section 2.1.1)

Working with charities to establish secure access to postal services for homeless people (section 2.3.2)

Despite these positive signs, there is a need to raise awareness among key social development actors about the potential role for Posts in tackling global social challenges, and also to increase ambition among Posts themselves. In addition to making better use of the existing postal system, development actors should consider making strategic investments in postal infrastructure, in order to expand capacity in areas that support their core activities (e.g. to facilitate a step change in the distribution of food aid or vaccines).

A recent UPU case study examined the importance of partnerships with government agencies, NGOs and the private sector when developing new social services.<sup>92</sup> Examples include the Costa Rican Post joining forces with car rental companies to deliver medicines, Vietnam Post using its mapping expertise to help the government keep track of COVID-19 infections, and Azerpost (Azerbaijan) working with charities and private businesses to deliver food parcels. While these new services were developed quickly in response to the pandemic, they serve to illustrate the speed at which social services can be implemented. The development of partnerships can help to reduce and spread risks, and open up access to new knowledge and other resources. The case study identifies four key success factors for these partnerships, which have broader relevance to other postal social services:

89 Partnering with Government (2016), The Postal Industry, Innovation & Opportunities Report, Vol. 1.

90 The Postal Service's Role in Delivering Wellness Services and Supplies (2015), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

91 UPU web article: UPU Review 2020: Discussing Postal Challenges (19.02.2021), [www.upu.int/en/News/2021/2/UPU-Review-2020-Discussing-Postal-Challenges](http://www.upu.int/en/News/2021/2/UPU-Review-2020-Discussing-Postal-Challenges).

92 Partnerships against the pandemic (2020), Universal Postal Union, <https://spark.adobe.com/page/ZwPVkFOwas7VT/>.

Leverage existing services and relationships

Communicate that the Post is open to partnering, including with private businesses

Work to understand the needs of key stakeholders

Establish clear responsibilities, channels of coordination and operating procedures

#### 4.4

## The importance of trust

“Diversification of services can be a means of generating new revenue, but the new services will be viable only if the designated operator enjoys a good reputation as a provider of quality basic services.”<sup>93</sup>

The importance of trust is a recurring theme in the social service case studies and interviews provided by UPU member countries; the trusted position of the Post in society is a key strength that can translate into market advantage.<sup>94</sup> Several UPU members report that an existing level of trust was a prerequisite for implementing social services that involve managing sensitive or personal information, distributing funds, or working with vulnerable people. In addition, for some social services the role of trust is implicit, such as the destruction of sensitive documents for customers (Japan), the delivery of exam papers to schools (Libya), and the operation of lost and found desks (Zimbabwe). UPU publications on financial inclusion<sup>95</sup> and digital services<sup>96</sup> also emphasize trust as a key success factor. Posts should therefore not simply rely on the trust earned through their core letter and parcel business, but should seek to protect and build on this trust as new social services are developed (section 3.3).

However, it is important to note that trust in the Post is not universal; some operators may have low baseline levels of public trust owing to their poor quality of service or low density of infrastructure. Despite this, opportunities still exist for Posts to build trust with the public and other stakeholders. For example, a recent UPU case study on digital financial services suggests that trust can be enhanced through face-to-face contact with the public, use of the latest security tools and technologies, and adherence to data protection and customer privacy regulations, and by offering financial, numerical and digital literacy training to the public.<sup>97</sup> Educational services could therefore be used to increase trust in the Post, although it is essential that these services be well within the capacity of the organization.

#### 4.5

## Employee perspectives

Postal workers are essential to the delivery of many social services, leveraging the trust and skills built through regular face-to-face interaction with the public, the respect shown for customer privacy, and their extensive local knowledge. While the introduction of new social services offers a variety of potential benefits for postal workers, the

**“Diversification of services can be a means of generating new revenue, but the new services will be viable only if the designated operator enjoys a good reputation as a provider of quality basic services.”**

93 Postal Reform Guide (2019), Universal Postal Union.

94 Partnering with Government (2016), The Postal Industry, Innovation & Opportunities Report, Vol. 1.

95 Global Panorama on Postal Financial Inclusion 2016, Universal Postal Union.

96 The digital economy and digital postal activities – A global panorama (2019), Universal Postal Union.

97 In Post We Trust – Role of the Post in expanding access to digital finance (2019), Universal Postal Union.

associated risks need to be recognized and mitigated. In addition to consulting with UPU members, the International Bureau has sought feedback from postal trade unions on the potential impacts of offering social services. The responses were mixed, with both positive and negative consequences identified for postal staff. Potential benefits include offsetting job losses associated with increased automation of postal operations, and more opportunities to strengthen relationships with customers. However, a variety of concerns were raised regarding the safety of mail carriers and other staff, changes to their working conditions, and sufficient compensation and training for any additional tasks performed. The early inclusion of workers and their representatives is paramount to the deployment of new social services, helping to generate staff buy-in and commitment. Posts should be particularly mindful of impacts on employment conditions, and mitigating any new health and safety risks.

#### 4.5.1

## Financial stability and monetizing of social services

The postal market is facing a broad decline in letter volumes and an expansion of e-commerce and parcel delivery; postal diversification is promoted by the UPU to increase the financial sustainability of postal activities in the face of these broad changes. While postal social services can form part of these revenue diversification strategies, this may also create tensions with workers. One designated operator observed that government compensation had been decreasing for many socially important services that the Post was obliged to offer, and another questioned whether revenue from new social services would be used to increase the financial sustainability of core postal activities. This points to the need for Posts to be transparent about how any new services, and changes to working conditions, will contribute to the stability of other core postal services. Postal social services themselves may be vulnerable to closure, for example, because profits are less than expected. One way of increasing their resilience, and employment security, would be to include such services in the definition of the universal service obligation. This comes with the caveat that any additional obligations should be supported by a strong business case (section 4.2) and matched with sufficient funding commitments to ensure their long term viability (section 4.1.2).

Another concern is that the formalization and commodification of the mail carrier's traditional community role could result in reduced access to services for people on low income, and could also erode the public service culture among postal workers. The best approach to mitigate these risks will vary depending upon the service type but could include eliminating any charges for people on low income; and co-creating new services in collaboration with postal workers and their representatives. Social contact with the public is a key part of daily life for many postal workers and can increase the degree of trust customers place in the Post. Expanding the provision of social services could be an effective way to build this staff–customer relationship. However, care should be taken that formalizing and charging for services does not end up reducing levels of public contact, for example, because of an increased workload or performance monitoring of mail carriers.

#### 4.5.2

## Employment conditions

While the opportunities for staff, and any impacts on their employment, will vary depending on the type of social service being introduced, concerns have been raised about increased workloads,<sup>98</sup> performance targets for existing staff, and the recruitment of new postal workers. However, Posts are broadly encouraged to review potential impacts on workers' terms and conditions, to engage in dialogue with workers and their representatives, and to seek to ensure fair compensation/outcomes.

#### 4.5.3

## Training and skills

Another important concern is the quality of training provided to workers who perform tasks in support of social services; new skills may be needed, and new risks must be managed. For example, staff providing home checking services for the elderly would benefit from dementia awareness training and should receive support to identify and minimize any risks to their safety. These risks need to be assessed regularly, and postal workers should be given access to reskilling and upskilling schemes. However, it should be acknowledged that it may not always be possible to retrain staff for new tasks that require specific technical skills. The introduction of postal social services should therefore be carefully considered, especially where there is no reskilling and upskilling capacity at the level of the postal operator.

98 UNI Global Union Post and Logistics (an organization representing 2.5 million post and logistics workers worldwide) provided the following statement to the International Bureau (March 2021): "To date, we see little evidence that the introduction of postal social services has led to new hires on decent terms and conditions. On the contrary, it seems that they are typically performed by the existing postal workers, increasing their workload, without necessarily a clear link to their remuneration levels."

## 4.6

## Other strategic issues

## 4.6.1

### Legislation and regulation

By diversifying into social services, Posts may be obliged to engage with new legal and regulatory frameworks. Responsibilities around privacy and data protection are well known, but regulations covering food safety or the transport of medicines may be entirely new considerations for the Post. For example, in order for the Post to deliver temperature-sensitive medicines, the government health or medicine regulator may need to certify that an appropriate cold chain system has been established, including validation systems. In the case of food deliveries, hygiene and health certificates may be required for both drivers and their vehicles. In addition, some social services may have an explicit connection to a piece of legislation. For example, the 2017 Federal Act on the Electronic Patient Record forms the legal basis for the main service offered via Swiss Post's E-Health platform. At the national or regional level, Posts may also face legal restrictions to profiting from non-postal services,<sup>99</sup> or need to ensure that state aid to compensate for any costs is consistent with competition law.<sup>100</sup> Posts should therefore scope the legal and regulatory implications of offering social services at an early stage, and establish contact with the relevant regulators.

## 4.6.2

### Marketing and communication

The desktop study undertaken to support this guide identified striking differences in how social services are portrayed by Posts. Information on social services is typically dispersed throughout a designated operator's website, or presented under the heading of non-postal services. This can give the impression that such services are unimportant; alternative terms should be considered, such as social or community services. In contrast, some Posts create bundles of social services that have similar types of end users, marketing them to groups such as families or older people (e.g. in France and Japan). This market segmentation approach has obvious benefits for customer convenience and supports the selling of related services – but also communicates an important message to postal staff and external stakeholders that these are legitimate services for the Post to offer.

## 4.6.3

### Risk management

As Posts diversify and expand their provision of social services, it is inevitable that new types of risk will need to be managed. These include, but are not limited to, risks to the public, postal staff, partners, revenue, reputation, social impact, and the viability of the service itself.

From the perspective of the public, some social services pose risks to people's health, safety and privacy. Mitigation actions include investing in staff training, technology (e.g. data encryption) and standard operating procedures (e.g. to ensure the safe transport of medicines to the correct recipient). For postal staff, it is particularly important to identify and manage new health and safety risks, as well as to guard against increased or uncompensated workload. For the Post as an organization, the risks of service failure and reputational damage can be managed by diversifying slowly, consulting staff, respecting capacity limits, and questioning whether partnerships and other agreements are fair and contain sufficient compensation. Considering how demand for these services may change over time can be a useful part of risk management. For example, the rapid pace of change in mobile technology creates the risk that demand for Internet access via post offices may quickly decrease.

99 Partnering for Health: Potential Postal Service Roles in Health and Wellness (2021), United States Postal Service Office of Inspector General.

100 Competition policy brief: State aid control in the postal sector; Issue 6 (May 2014), European Union.

While the wide variety of postal social services precludes an extensive risk analysis within this guide, some suggestions for Posts are offered as follows:

Accept that risks are synonymous with service diversification.

Consult staff, trade unions and partners at an early stage in development of proposals, and ensure they can provide feedback on risks once new services are active.

Regularly update risk assessments for social services to account for changes in demand, regulations and technology.

Promote a culture of innovation, experimentation, controlled risk-taking, and learning from failures.

## 4.7

# Key recommendations

The main conclusions from this chapter are that Posts should consider how to make full use of their existing resources; expand these through new strategic partnerships; and take a broad view of the context, opportunities, risks and impacts associated with new social services. Specific recommendations are summarized as follows:

## Planning and service introduction

For social services with multiple strategic objectives, each should be clearly outlined within the business case.

The business case should also be clear on the role and responsibility of the Post and the expected revenue sources, and how these might change over time.

Posts seeking to quickly implement new social services should leverage existing services and relationships, design simple services, and support project teams with clear communication and decision making.

Pilot studies should be used by Posts to test demand for social services, improve their efficiency and identify risks.

Posts should consider avoiding references to *non-postal* services, using alternatives such as *social* or *community services*.

Posts should explore marketing bundles of services to distinct user groups such as families or older people, reinforcing the customer-centred focus of the Post.

## Stakeholders and partnerships

Posts should be proactive in engaging with local NGOs, government ministries, worker representatives, multilateral agencies and other regional experts, to promote their role as a social development partner, to share resources, to maximize social impact, and to help develop appropriate indicators.

Governments are encouraged to formally position the Post within their broad public service delivery framework, as well as defining roles for the Post within strategies and policies covering areas such as poverty, inequality, health or education.

Social development actors should consider making strategic investments in postal infrastructure, as a means for achieving their own development targets.

Posts should explore novel and diverse forms of partnerships, to secure additional resources and reduce risks.

## Risk management

Proposals for new social services should be developed and reviewed in consultation with postal workers and their representatives, to minimize impacts on working conditions, and to ensure buy-in and commitment to service provision.

Posts should use social services as an opportunity to build trust, while also accounting for potential reputational risks.

Posts should review the broad risks from offering social services, and regularly update assessments to account for changing context.

Posts should be cautious about developing new social services if the quality of their existing core services is poor.

Governments and Posts should promote a culture of innovation, experimentation, controlled risk-taking, and learning.

Posts should review the legal and regulatory implications of offering social services at an early stage, and establish contact with the relevant regulators.



# Future opportunities for postal social services

This chapter considers how future demand for services may vary by geographical region or by the type of end user; it identifies digital technology as a cross-cutting opportunity and outlines approaches for identifying new social services. Fifty-nine percent of UPU members that responded to the 2019 social services questionnaire confirmed that they planned to offer new social services in the future. A key question for Posts is how to identify and prioritize these potential services. A reasonable starting point is to review the variety of social services already offered by other Posts, as outlined in chapter 2 and in the tables and case studies in Annexes 1 and 2. However, it is also important for Posts to consider national social priorities and conditions, to build on their existing strengths and resources, and to engage with the broader innovation community.

## 5.1

## Future demands for social services

As stated in section 4.2, it is important for Posts to identify national or regional social development priorities when making the case for offering a new social service. In addition, it helps to identify the segments of society that are most in need, or that have particular service demands. This section examines the five global development priority areas introduced in chapter 1, highlighting broad geographical and demographic differences and identifying specific service types of relevance.

## 5.1.1

### Poverty

According to a 2020 report by the World Bank,<sup>101</sup> globally the population living in poverty is disproportionately rural, young and undereducated. Four out of five people below the international poverty line still live in rural areas, and the share of the rural population is especially high in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. Half of the world's poor are children, and a third of poor adults living in rural areas report having no education, with the greatest percentages in the Middle East and North Africa, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Women are also over-represented in the global poor, particularly in East Asia and the Pacific, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Despite this baseline, the profile of the world's poor is diversifying. Although most of the poor will continue to be rural, young and undereducated, the pandemic is estimated to have created 72 million newly poor people, typically urban and from middle-income countries. In the medium term, conflict and climate change are likely to become increasingly important drivers of poverty. The countries with the highest poverty rates are all either located in Sub-Saharan Africa or included in the World Bank's list of fragile conflict-affected situations. Climate change is also expected to threaten efforts to reduce poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia – the regions where most of the global poor are currently living.

Postal social services that are particularly relevant to combatting poverty include:

Direct delivery of social security and aid, targeted at rural children and women living in poverty (Annexes 1.2 and 1.8)

Supporting access to education and health services in isolated areas (Annexes 1.5 and 1.10)

Increasing connection to the Internet and digital literacy; opening up access to distance education and remote health and government services (section 5.2)

## 5.1.2

### Inequality

Trends in inequality vary by country, social group and the indicator used. Inequality can also vary greatly among countries with similar levels of development, demonstrating the importance of national policy and local institutions,<sup>102</sup> and the need for Posts to respond to national social priorities. Many forms of inequality are strongly linked to poverty but emphasize relative differences in income/wealth within and between countries. No clear relationships have been identified between economic inequality and development status, either by region or over time. However, income inequality increased in most high-income countries, and some middle-income countries (e.g. China and India), between 1990 and 2016. Postal services that support the poor are therefore likely to be valuable in all countries, irrespective of their economic or development status. In addition, despite considerable data gaps, reduced opportunities in some countries are strongly associated with factors such as race, ethnicity and religion. Urban populations also tend to be more unequal than populations in rural areas,<sup>103</sup> and the greatest increases in the world's urban population over the next 30 years are expected to occur in China, India and Nigeria.<sup>104</sup> The World Social Report published by the UN in 2020 identifies key building blocks for reducing inequality within countries, including the following: promoting equal access to opportunities (particularly to quality education); universal access to effective social protection; and promoting the participation of disadvantaged groups in economic, social and political life.

<sup>101</sup> Poverty and Shared Prosperity 2020: Reversals of Fortune, World Bank.

<sup>102</sup> World Social Report 2020, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>103</sup> World Social Report 2020, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>104</sup> World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

The following types of postal social services may therefore be particularly relevant for tackling inequality:

Supporting access to education and health services (sections 2.1 and 2.2)

Direct delivery of social security and aid (sections 2.3 and 2.4)

The devolution of government services to local post offices

Reducing the digital divide – increasing connection to the Internet and digital literacy (section 5.2)

Increasing inclusion through document translation and letter reading (section 2.3.2)

Use of postal buildings to support community cohesion

Access to mail and other postal services for people with no fixed address (section 2.3.2)

Discounted mail and other services (e.g. post bus transport)

Data collection on inequality for governments (e.g. by supporting a census)

### 5.1.3

## Ageing population

As outlined in chapter 1, ageing is an emerging global megatrend, with the number of older people projected to double by 2050. The number of persons aged 65 years or over is currently highest in Eastern and South-Eastern Asia, Europe, and Northern America; and the highest percentages are found in Europe, Northern America, Australia and New Zealand. However, over the next 30 years, most of the highest rates of growth in the number of older people are projected to take place in Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa, Western Asia, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand).<sup>105</sup>

A recent report by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs draws attention to several key ageing trends that have implications for service providers:<sup>106</sup>

Women comprise a majority of older people, with this bias increasing by age.

Older women living alone are more likely to live in poverty compared to older men.

Globally, the proportion of older people living alone or with a spouse only is increasing and is the most common living arrangement in Europe, North America and Australia.

In some regions, older people are often the primary caregivers for their grandchildren, owing to the migration or death of the parents.

These trends have a range of implications for older people's quality of life, and population ageing is reported by governments as a major policy concern for the next 20 to 30 years in all regions.<sup>107</sup> Commonly adopted policy measures aim to promote active and healthy ageing, expand assisted living, increase opportunities for lifelong learning and employment, encourage private savings, prevent abuse and violence, prevent discrimination in the workplace, and create schemes for long-term and institutional care.

<sup>105</sup> World Population Ageing 2019, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

<sup>106</sup> World Population Ageing 2020 Highlights, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

<sup>107</sup> Population Facts No. 2020/1 – Government policies to address population ageing (October 2020), United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division.

The following types of postal social services may therefore be particularly relevant for older people:

Doorstep services specifically for people with reduced mobility

Medicine delivery and disposal (section 2.1.1)

Health data management (section 2.1.3)

Home-based social care (section 2.1.4)

Social security payments (section 2.4.1)

Government services via the post office (section 2.4)

Discounted mail and other postal services, e.g. tariff-free postage to retirement homes

#### 5.1.4

## Migrants, refugees or otherwise forcibly displaced people

“For refugees, staying connected is not only a matter of survival. It provides a route to self-reliance and independence, boosting their own well-being and of the communities that host them.”<sup>108</sup>

Section 1.4 presents data on historic global trends for an increasing number of both international migrants and forcibly displaced people. Future populations are expected to be increasingly mobile, with people moving by choice (e.g. for work), to avoid persecution, or for other reasons such as the impact of climate change. Given this variety of drivers, the demographic composition of migrants is very sensitive to context and definition. For example, a recent report by the International Organization for Migration found that in 2018, 74% of all international migrants were of working age (20–64 years), while just 48% of the global refugee population were over 18 years of age.<sup>109</sup>

**“For refugees, staying connected is not only a matter of survival. It provides a route to self-reliance and independence, boosting their own well-being and of the communities that host them.”**

Broad geographical patterns are also evident. In 2018, the largest number of migrants living abroad were from China, India and Mexico. In addition, the main migration corridors connected developing countries to high-income countries such as France, Russia, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the United States. In 2018, the Syrian Arab Republic was the source of the largest number of refugees, followed by Afghanistan and South Sudan. Turkey hosted the largest number of refugees, followed by Pakistan and Uganda. As an example of postal involvement in this area, the Turkish Post Corporation (PTT) and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees collaborated to provide financial aid to refugees and asylum seekers in Turkey between 2017 and 2019.<sup>110</sup> Despite these statistics, rapid changes in movement patterns may result from a new conflict or natural disaster; this reinforces the need for Posts to review the emerging national and regional priorities when developing new social services.

<sup>108</sup> Filippo Grandi, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 19 Jan 2017.

<sup>109</sup> World Migration Report 2020, International Organization for Migration.

<sup>110</sup> Recalling the social nature of Turkish postal services (26.04.2019), Mehmet Şükrü Yaman, Daily Sabah.

The following types of postal social services may be particularly relevant for supporting international migrants:

Data collection services for governments to improve broader planning and support (section 2.6.1)

Document translation and support for government administration (section 2.3.2)

Community events

The following types of postal social services may be particularly relevant for supporting refugees or otherwise forcibly displaced people:

Access to basic mail services

Letter reading and translation (section 2.3.2)

Affordable mobile phones and Internet access (section 2.6.3)

Delivery of humanitarian aid

Education support (reading materials, distance learning, etc.)

## 5.1.5

# The COVID-19 pandemic

Posts have established a variety of social services in response to the pandemic, many of which would be expected to continue in the short term.<sup>111</sup> These include services aimed directly at reducing infection rates, as well as education services designed to ensure students in lockdown can still complete their studies. A major recent development is the UPU Post4Health facility.<sup>112</sup> This seeks to encourage the use of the postal system to support public health. Its first project is to support the global COVID-19 vaccination efforts, encouraging the involvement of Posts in public health advocacy and awareness campaigns, and the distribution of vaccines (and associated materials). Ensuring the global population has access to a vaccine is arguably the greatest logistical challenge ever faced by humankind, and the postal system provides an opportunity for many countries to significantly increase their vaccination capacity. While the medium-term social impacts of COVID-19 are difficult to predict, it is plausible that as the virus becomes endemic, some Posts will continue to play an important role in supporting routine vaccination (and booster vaccines), as well as tackling some of the long-term legacy impacts on poverty and inequality.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>111</sup> UPU webpage on postal social, financial and trade services during COVID-19, [www.upu.int/Postal-social-and-financial-services-during-COVID-19](http://www.upu.int/Postal-social-and-financial-services-during-COVID-19).

<sup>112</sup> UPU Post4Health webpage, [www.upu.int/en/Partner-with-us/Where-we-need-your-support/Post4Health](http://www.upu.int/en/Partner-with-us/Where-we-need-your-support/Post4Health).

<sup>113</sup> COVID-19, Inequalities and Building Back Better: Policy brief by the HLCF Inequalities Task Team (2020), United Nations.

## 5.2

## Digital technology as a cross-cutting opportunity

Digitalization is a global megatrend, offering numerous social benefits, while also potentially exacerbating existing inequalities.<sup>114</sup> Digital technologies play a role in a wide variety of postal social services and are referred to throughout this guide. Four key themes are prominent:

- 1 Postal services that reduce digital inequality. These include the sale of tablets, mobile devices and Internet subscriptions, as well as services supporting digital literacy.
- 2 Digital transformation and diversification of postal operations. The postal industry has experienced several waves of digital innovation,<sup>115</sup> each increasing the capacity of Posts to offer new social services.
- 3 New social services with a digital component. Many services combine physical and digital elements, such as government service counters in post offices, where postal workers can upload or request information from government databases.<sup>116</sup>
- 4 New social services that are largely digital. These typically function with minimal direct interaction between postal workers and the public. Examples include digital government information kiosks located in post offices, operating e-government portals, and e-health platforms (section 3.3).

In addition to their distinction from one another, these themes are also interconnected. For example, supporting public access to the Internet and digital literacy has broad benefits for people's well-being, while also increasing the potential market for digital social services.

The use of biometric technology opens up a particularly interesting opportunity for Posts to offer social services to people who are illiterate, have no fixed address, or lack physical ID. Posts are already using fingerprint identification as a simple and secure way to offer services (e.g. in Mongolia). In addition, the Post in India is helping the government to implement a biometric ID system (Aadhaar), which connects an individual's facial image, fingerprints and iris patterns to a unique identity number. People can register to participate in this system at Post Office Aadhaar Centres, where they can also provide updated information. The potential for using biometric data to support social services is illustrated by the collaboration between the Post in Lebanon and the World Food Programme; in that collaboration, the Post used iris scanners to verify people's identities before processing food vouchers. Such systems could be expanded and adapted by Posts to offer new services, for example, enabling people to more easily access their medical records or other personal data. However, the incorporation of biometric ID into social services brings a range of challenges for Posts, notably ensuring that any digital personal data held by the Post is secure and remains private.

114 Report of the UN Economist Network for the UN 75th Anniversary: Shaping the Trends of Our Time (2020), United Nations.

115 The digital economy and digital postal activities: A global panorama (2019), Universal Postal Union.

116 Burhan, M. (2014). Postal operators as viable e-government partners: A case study of three major postal operators. Postal Services in the Digital Age.

## 5.3

## Identifying new opportunities for postal social services

“We should think beyond traditional postal or logistics services, and with the COVID challenges, postal players can reinvent themselves and think of all the adjacent services and business lines they can develop.”<sup>117</sup>

A variety of approaches for identifying potential new social services are suggested below. The underlying principles are for Posts to be open to broad consultation and collaboration, and to be willing to review and adapt their service offers.

## 5.3.1

### Formalizing and rewarding informal services

Some mail carriers regularly check on vulnerable people or read letters for illiterate customers; yet if these services are informal, they risk going unrecognized by key decision makers. The principle of formalizing these services presents a dilemma. Potential advantages include greater visibility for the variety of social benefits that mail carriers can offer, and the opportunity for these benefits to be supported, protected and rewarded. However, formal recognition raises the prospect of charges for end users, potentially excluding those who could benefit the most. In addition, some postal unions have raised concerns that this might undermine workers’ sense of public service (section 4.5). In any case, reviewing the variety of informal services offered by staff may still be beneficial for supporting the broader advocacy work of Posts (e.g. in their negotiations with government).

**“We should think beyond traditional postal or logistics services, and with the COVID challenges, postal players can reinvent themselves and think of all the adjacent services and business lines they can develop.”**

## 5.3.2

### Adapting existing voluntary and CSR activities

Posts reported a wide range of voluntary and CSR activities with clear social benefits, but which did not fall within the definition of social services used in this guide. The predominant reason for excluding these activities from the guide was that their social benefits were vulnerable to loss over time, should fewer staff decide to volunteer or the CSR budget be reduced. However, it must be recognized that these activities not only have value to the end users, but also to social actors such as government agencies. Reviewing these activities could reveal opportunities for securing revenue and improving their impact and resilience. For example, a one-off distribution of free postcards to reduce social isolation could be developed into a regular service, funded by the health ministry.

## 5.3.3

## Leveraging commercial services to deliver social goals

Similarly, the commercial services currently offered by the Post could be reviewed to identify opportunities for generating social value. For example, several Posts offer services to the medical/pharmaceutical sector involving temperature-controlled supply chains (cold chain).<sup>118</sup> Posts could lever their experience in this sector to develop new meal or medicine home-delivery services.

## 5.3.4

## Reinstating social services that have been lost

Twenty-five percent of the UPU members that responded to the social services questionnaire reported that some social services had been discontinued. These may have been removed owing to low user demand, poor quality of service or lack of support within the Post (or from government). Over time, these factors may have changed, and previously discontinued social services could now be viable again.

## 5.3.5

## Broad consultation and crowd sourcing

The importance of regularly consulting with staff, customers and social development actors was repeatedly emphasized in the responses of UPU members to the 2019 social services questionnaire. Engagement with stakeholders can be particularly useful for the early identification of changing social needs. In addition, Posts could take a more proactive role in identifying opportunities for new social services, supporting innovation within the organization, as well as engaging with innovation hubs and creative industries to crowdsource ideas (e.g. via competitions such as hackathons).

## 5.3.6

## Horizon scanning

New technologies and changing social practices have the potential both to undermine existing social services, and to enable further innovation in this area. Periodic horizon scanning exercises offer a practical way to identify and evaluate emerging issues that are relevant to postal social services, including technological trends and changing social practices. A related strategy is for Posts to review developments and innovations within the postal sector to explore their potential applications for new social services. For example, multifunctional parcel lockers could potentially be used to offer secure postal services to people who have no fixed address. Similarly, the growth in parcel delivery (and return) volumes is increasing the capacity of many Posts in the area of reverse logistics, creating more opportunities for the safe disposal of unused medicines, the returning of medical self-tests for analysis, and the recycling of batteries.

## 5.4

## Key messages and recommendations

The main conclusions from this chapter are that Posts should invest in understanding their national social development priorities and the needs of particular user groups, and how these might change in the future. The digital transformation of Posts and increasing levels of Internet use are creating significant opportunities for offering social services. Posts should encourage creativity within the organization, while also engaging with the broader innovation community. Specific considerations and recommendations are summarized as follows:

When seeking to diversify into offering social services, Posts should reflect on national social priorities and the needs of particular segments of society.

People who are young, female, undereducated or living in rural areas may be particularly in need of services aimed at reducing poverty, including social security and aid, remote education and health services, and connection to the Internet.

Inequality has been increasing in most high-income countries and can be particularly pronounced in urban areas. Key social services include those listed for tackling poverty, as well as others that promote community integration and access to government administration (e.g. document translation and government services via post offices).

Older people have particular needs that can be met by the Post, with the highest growth rates in the number of older people predicted for Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa and Western Asia, and Oceania (excluding Australia and New Zealand). A majority of older people are women, and the proportion of older people living alone or with a spouse is increasing. Key social services include doorstep and home-based services, social security payments, medicine delivery, and other services that reduce social isolation.

Future populations are expected to be increasingly mobile. The drivers for movement are diverse and are reflected in the demographics of different groups. For international migrants, support with government administration (including document translation) may be particularly important. For refugees or otherwise forcibly displaced people, Posts should consider offering services that enable secure access to basic mail services, affordable mobile phones and Internet access, delivery of humanitarian aid, and educational support.

Posts have established a variety of new social services in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of which could be retained. Posts, governments and other social development stakeholders should explore opportunities for Posts to support COVID-19 vaccination efforts, and to mitigate some of the pandemic's long-term legacy impacts on poverty and inequality.

Digital technologies offer a wide variety of opportunities for Posts to deliver new social services. Posts should therefore explicitly consider including capacity building for social services within their digital transformation strategies.

Posts seeking to diversify into social services should aim to be open to broad consultation and collaboration, and to be willing to review and adapt their service offers. Strategies for identifying potential new services include reviewing any informal, voluntary or commercial services, in addition to horizon scanning for new technologies and changing social practices.



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# Conclusion – the Post as an essential social service provider

**Posts already provide many services that are essential to the functioning of society; with sufficient investment and ambition, they have the potential to build on this role to become key social development actors.**

The research undertaken to support this guide was intended to be broad and comprehensive. In all, 435 examples of postal social services from 160 UPU member countries and territories were identified. However, it is inevitable that, in some cases, Posts may not have reported all relevant social services (perhaps because they were focusing on maintaining their core services during the COVID-19 crisis). In addition, social services such as government administration may be so well integrated within the operations and culture of some Posts that they were not perceived as novel enough to be worth reporting. This means that the examples and statistics presented in this guide probably represent an underestimate of the involvement of Posts in this area. Despite this caveat, it is clear that postal social services are ubiquitous and generate multiple benefits for people, Posts and their partners. The tables in Annex 2 illustrate how widespread these services are, while also drawing attention to the potential for further diversification. A recurring theme within this guide is that expanding the provision of postal social services presents an opportunity and justification for securing greater investment and revitalization of postal infrastructure.

A set of conclusions are presented below, bringing together key recommendations and discussion points from each chapter. These conclusions form two distinct groups: those that are directed towards designated operators, and those that are more relevant for social development stakeholders.

## Opportunities and actions for designated operators

For Posts to successfully diversify into offering social services, it is important to recognize that every Post, and the community it serves, is unique. The following opportunities and suggestions are broadly relevant for guiding Posts to develop social services that fit their local context, and that can be sustained over time.

**Recognize multiple benefits.** Social services can generate revenue for the Post, deliver social impact, and create value for development actors. These benefits should be explicitly stated as strategic objectives within the business case, communicated to stakeholders, and paired with appropriate performance indicators.

**Partner with social development actors.** Posts should actively engage with government ministries, NGOs, multilateral agencies and the private sector to better understand their needs, and to encourage the use of postal infrastructure for achieving their social development goals. This guide provides numerous examples of public/private partnerships, which bring additional perspectives and knowledge, helping to reduce risks and access new funding streams.

**Review existing capacity.** Posts should explore how their existing infrastructure, products, services, expertise and partnerships could be leveraged to offer new social services, while identifying strategically important gaps in capacity.

**Legitimize and promote postal social services.**

Expanding the traditional range of postal services may require significant internal and external communication efforts, to ensure strong customer awareness, and to embed the principle that the Post is a legitimate social service provider. This can include using the term *community services* instead of *non-postal services*, and marketing bundles of services to particular segments of society, under headings such as services for families or senior services.

**Leverage digital technology.**

Posts are well placed to help people connect to the Internet, to offer hybrid physical-digital services, and to create new social services that are entirely digital. Postal strategies for digital transformation should therefore explicitly consider ways to support social services.

**Retain and build trust in the Post.**

The reputation of the Post as a trusted intermediary for private information is a valuable asset, helping to establish new social services that involve managing sensitive information, distributing social payments, or working with vulnerable people. However, trust in the Post should not be taken for granted and is not universal; it is important that Posts' core delivery capabilities are sound and secure before any expansion into social services. As Posts diversify, it is inevitable that new risks will need to be managed. These include, but are not limited to, risks to the public, postal staff, partners, revenue, reputation, social impact, legal liability, and the viability of the service itself. Investing in the security of personal data is particularly important for reducing risks, and for building trust in social services.

**Co-create new services with postal workers.**

Social services are inherently personal and often involve face-to-face interactions with the public. Their success is intimately linked to the safety, motivation, training and goodwill of mail carriers and post office staff. Proposals for new social services should therefore be developed and reviewed in consultation with postal workers and their representatives, to ensure buy-in and commitment to service provision.

**Remain relevant to the public and future-focused.**

A customer-centred approach is essential to the success of social services; priority should be given to understanding the needs of local communities and key user groups. Posts should promote a culture of adapting services to the changing needs of society, while embracing new technology, innovation and experimentation.

## Opportunities for social development actors

The postal system is a resource that should be used in creative ways by social development actors such as governments, NGOs and multilateral agencies. This guide has identified the following opportunities for making greater use of the Post to improve people's quality of life.

### **Use the Post to increase efficiency.**

There is a clear synergy between the needs of social development actors to connect with the poorest and most isolated in society, and the commitment of Posts to serve the entire population. The Post offers an efficient system for managing welfare payments, delivering social and humanitarian aid, and communicating public health and safety messages. Outsourcing these tasks to the Post can help charities or government ministries to focus on their core areas of expertise. In addition, renting space within post offices may be more cost-effective than operating stand-alone facilities, helping to bring services closer to the end users.

### **Invest in the Post to achieve your social development goals.**

Governments, NGOs and multilateral agencies should consider making strategic investments in postal infrastructure, as a means for achieving their development goals (e.g. universal access to vaccinations). Governments could also fund designated operators to develop innovation programmes that focus on key social policy objectives.

### **Include the Post within your strategies, policies and frameworks.**

The Post can be strategically important to the success of diverse initiatives, from generating national statistics on well-being, to establishing comprehensive recycling systems. Social development actors should explicitly acknowledge the value of the Post to these initiatives, identify specific roles for the Post, and seek to support synergies between these different roles.

### **Share and collect more data.**

Postal networks are ideally structured for increasing people's access to reliable information. Community hubs and digital kiosks can be located within post offices, while advice materials can be delivered directly to people's homes. Conversely, these networks can be used for collecting data to better understand people's needs (e.g. through household surveys), and for monitoring pollutants and weather extremes that are relevant to public health and safety.



# Annexes

## Annex 1

# Case studies

1.1

## Japan – Home checking (Mimamori)

Japan Post offers numerous social services, such as luggage storage and the sale of bus tickets. Perhaps the most notable is the extensive service offered to older people and their families.

Japan Post initiated a new national service in 2017 for the home checking of seniors, primarily to increase customer satisfaction. In 2019 the Watch Over Service was offered by 20,000 post offices nationwide. For a monthly fee of 2,500 JPY, mail carriers visit elderly people in their home for 30 minutes once a month, to check on their well-being.

Ageing is an emerging global megatrend and is particularly pronounced in industrialized countries, with the number of older people projected to double by 2050. Providing services for older people is a practical way for the Post to support the third of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Good health and well-being). Japan's super-ageing society presents a range of public health and well-being challenges. Social isolation and loneliness among older people are a major concern, being associated with both mental and physical health impacts. For people that live far from their elderly parents, regular visits may be impractical, leading to demand for a range of home checking services.

Two distinct types of customers can be identified: older people and their younger relatives. Both types of customers can register and pay for the service. The benefits of the home checking service for seniors include regular basic human contact, a safety check, and the ability to communicate their needs. For relatives this can bring peace of mind, along with practical information on further support that they could provide.

**Japan Post offers numerous social services, such as luggage storage and the sale of bus tickets. Perhaps the most notable is the extensive service offered to older people and their families.**

Image credit: Japan Post



The core service involves a monthly visit by a post office employee to the customer's home, at a convenient time. During the visit, they are asked a total of 10 questions. These include seven standard questions, such as do you eat regularly, are you sleeping well, and do you have any problems in your daily life? An additional three questions can be selected from a longer list, to adapt the service to the needs of the individual. For example, several questions provide the opportunity for the senior to discuss a specific health problem or their social interests.

After visiting, the mail carrier provides an update by e-mail or letter to up to three designated people, typically family members or local government employees.

Japan Post adds value to this service by including bespoke injury insurance and publishing a magazine for its senior customers each month, with relaxing content, puzzles and even exercises designed for elderly people. Additional (optional) services include emergency checking of seniors by a security company and a daily (automated) telephone call. Elderly people can provide responses to this call via the telephone keypad, which are then automatically transmitted and sent to the customer's relatives by e-mail.

## Reflections and key considerations

Home checking has multiple benefits. In addition to customer satisfaction and revenue generation, Japan Post Group promotes this service as an example of its support for the UN SDGs.

Japan Post reports that having a high level of public trust and an extensive network of post offices were critical to the success of this service.

Careful design of the interface of the computer tablet used by post office employees has helped to reduce the operational costs of visiting residents.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlights the broader value of home checking services for older or vulnerable people. Interestingly, Japan Post reports that while some customers were particularly concerned about their relatives and keen to use this service, others requested that staff not undertake home visits for fear of infection. This reveals one of the difficulties of providing face-to-face services for older people, and indicates the value of having both in-person and remote checking options.

1.2

## China (People's Rep.) – Charity parcels

Reducing poverty is a priority for the Chinese government and is viewed by China Post as one of its social responsibility obligations. Taking full advantage of its network across the country, especially in poor rural areas, China Post is actively participating in the charity sector by initiating several charity parcel projects, such as Love Parcel and Mother Parcel.

These projects are directly relevant to ending poverty in all its forms everywhere, the first of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Globally, 79% of poor people live in rural areas, and 46% of extremely poor people are children under 14 years of age.

The public can donate funds through China Post's network of 36,000 post office outlets and via Internet platforms. The funds cover the purchase of items for Love Parcels and Mother Parcels, as well as the broader delivery service costs. Charitable foundations purchase goods for the parcels; they are then collected by China Post, which takes

responsibility for information processing, warehousing, transportation and delivery. Six dedicated warehouse distribution centres were established to provide nationwide coverage, along with an information system to support data gathering, address printing, information tracking and checking, etc. China Post charges the delivery cost for parcels at the universal service price.

### Love Parcel initiative

The Love Parcel project was jointly launched in 2009 with the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation. It is committed to improving the comprehensive development and living conditions of poor rural elementary school students. There are two types of Love Parcels. The first is called the art parcel, which mainly includes basic stationery and art supplies. The second type, the warm parcel, contains winter clothes, and is donated and delivered during the fourth quarter of each year.

According to statistics provided by China Post, the Love Parcel project has collected 780 million yuan in donations and supported more than 7.12 million students, covering 892 counties in 31 provinces.

**The Love Parcel project was jointly launched in 2009 with the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation. It is committed to improving the comprehensive development and living conditions of poor rural elementary school students.**

Image credit: China Post





**The Mother Parcel project key aim is to enable citizens to make donations that support the daily needs of mothers living in poverty.**

Image credit: China Post

## Mother Parcel initiative

The Mother Parcel project was jointly launched in 2012 with the China Women's Development Foundation. Its key aim is to enable citizens to make donations that support the daily needs of mothers living in poverty. Three parcel types are offered: care parcel, warm parcel and family health parcel. Parcels mainly include feminine hygiene products, toothpaste, towels, gloves, laundry powder, an electronic blood pressure monitor, a family medicine box and other necessities for winter.

Since 2012, this national service has delivered parcels to 980,000 mothers, with donations worth approximately 170 million yuan. In addition, the project also helps to raise public awareness and empathy for this vulnerable group.

## Reflections and key considerations

China Post was well placed to partner with the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation and China Women's Development Foundation, leveraging its national delivery network (particularly in poor rural areas), and making full use of its post offices as donation centres.

China Post reports that the development of a bespoke information management system improved project management efficiency, the monitoring of parcel delivery time and service quality.

This case study could potentially be used as a template for other Posts seeking to offer services for NGOs or government ministries that directly address poverty reduction.

1.3

## France – Home education during COVID-19 lockdown

Schools in France were closed for many weeks as part of the French government's broader social distancing policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation presented a challenge shared by many other countries – how to support the continued education of children during lockdown. In response to this challenge, La Poste implemented two initiatives that recognized that not all children have access to online learning materials. The first project helped to deliver spare school computer equipment to children in need, while in the second La Poste facilitated the free delivery and return of homework assignments by post.

Quality education is the fourth of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and supports broad socioeconomic progress. Targets for this goal cover themes such as free and equitable access for children to primary and secondary education; affordable access for adults to technical, vocational and tertiary education; and eliminating education disparities in relation to gender and disability.

La Poste already had extensive experience in delivering public and social services, motivated by both its corporate social responsibility commitments and a desire to expand revenue streams. For example, it is heavily involved in the provision of social care and e-health services, and had already committed to reducing the digital divide well before the pandemic. The principle that Posts should play a broad role in supporting public well-being appears to be embedded within the organization. La Poste's current strategic plan prioritizes its public service missions and identifies the provision of social services as a business opportunity.

**La Poste implemented two initiatives that recognized that not all children have access to online learning materials. The first project helped to deliver spare school computer equipment to children in need, while in the second La Poste facilitated the free delivery and return of homework assignments by post.**

Image credit: La Poste



The idea for this project began in the New Services Business Unit of the Services-Mail-Parcels Division. This unit specializes in the research, implementation and evaluation of projects involving domiciliary care services. The two education projects were already in the development stages, and the COVID-19 crisis led to their being fast-tracked for implementation.

On the topic of resourcing, these projects were piloted in partnership with the Ministry of Education, which also provided the funding. No significant changes were needed to staff working methods as the project teams were already in place. The Homework at Home project was implemented by a team of 20 people in under two weeks. Three hundred employees across two desktop publishing and two digitization offices printed, posted, received and scanned an average of 1,300 assignments per day. The IT Equipment Delivery project also had a dedicated team comprising experts in e-education issues and production.

## Reflections and key considerations

La Poste was keen to emphasize that a diverse team and the facilitation of good communication between actors were key factors in the swift and efficient launch of the project.

This approach is a practical way of addressing digital and educational inclusion that utilizes the postal network to meet the immediate needs of families and national government.

This example illustrates the value of investing in innovation and of developing partnerships with educational stakeholders.

The Homework at Home project is one of several postal social services that combine physical and digital elements.

1.4

## Bulgaria (Rep.) – Preventing human trafficking

Bulgarian Posts Plc was an official partner for the entire duration of a national campaign to prevent human trafficking, led by the Animus Association Foundation, from 2015 to 2017.

Human trafficking is a global problem; countries may be sources of origin, transit or destination. The International Labour Organization estimates that at any time during 2016, 40.3 million people were victims of forced labour or forced marriage (although obtaining precise trafficking figures is challenging). Human trafficking is explicitly referred to in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal target 8.7, and it has been defined as “the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation”.<sup>119</sup>

The aim of this initiative was to inform Bulgarians looking for job opportunities abroad about the risk of becoming victims of human trafficking and labour exploitation. The Foundation emphasizes the importance of prevention for reducing the number of victims from countries such as Bulgaria. The broad reach of the Post, its trusted position in society, and its perception as a secure and reliable communication channel were cited by the Foundation as key reasons for partnering with the Post.

<sup>119</sup> A/RES/55/25, United Nations General Assembly, United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime; Annex II: Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, 8 January 2001.

The Post played a key role in disseminating awareness materials, with posters placed in over 900 post offices nationwide (without charge). This was particularly important for raising awareness in small villages and towns – places where people are particularly vulnerable to trafficking, but that are typically difficult for the Animus Association Foundation to reach. The Post also raised public awareness via traditional advertising and social media channels.

There were no costs to the Post for participating, as the awareness materials were provided by the Foundation. The Animus Association Foundation received funding for this project from the Bulgarian-Swiss Cooperation Programme, created to reduce economic and social disparities in the enlarged EU. A survey following the 2017 campaign revealed that approximately half of post office visitors were aware of this initiative, which received the PostEurop Coup de Coeur (Society) CSR prize in 2018.

“The social responsibility of the company turns it into a natural partner to this campaign. Bulgarian Posts, with a

network of 3,000 post offices, is close to people throughout Bulgaria, and at the same time it is one of the biggest employers. Therefore, we believe that it is important to support initiatives that prevent labour exploitation of Bulgarians abroad. Bulgarian Posts’ clients are numerous and of various target groups. Thus, the campaign reached a large number of people.”<sup>120</sup>

## Reflections and key considerations

This case study illustrates how Posts can offer communication services at little or no cost, with clear and direct benefits for people’s well-being.

**Poster campaign (2016). Translation:  
Work abroad may turn out to be a trap.**

Image credit: Animus Association Foundation



1.5

## Cameroon – School textbooks at an affordable price

In Cameroon, the prices of standard school textbooks are regulated by the government; they should be the same in all parts of the country. However, these books were not always easy to purchase for students living in remote areas and were often sold at inflated prices. Clearly this situation placed students at a disadvantage and was at odds with the fourth of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all).

The solution was for CAMPOST to sell school textbooks via post offices at the government-approved prices, leveraging the Post's broad reach and position of trust within the community. Affordability was further enhanced by offering giro account customers a payment option of three instalments (with a very low interest rate), and also offering a 5% to 10% refund for cash payments.

The main benefits to the Post for offering this service have been additional revenue, increased customer satisfaction, and a strengthened role in implementing government policies.

**CAMPOST sells school textbooks via post offices at the government-approved prices, leveraging the Post's broad reach and position of trust within the community.**

Image credit: CAMPOST



The commercial margin for distributors was fixed at 25%. This margin was enough for CAMPOST to cover the cost of distribution to post offices and to make a profit, meaning that no government subsidy was needed to implement this service.

The Post reports two remaining challenges:

- 1 implementing a digital application for improved management of stock flows, and
- 2 being fully accepted by stakeholders (e.g. families) as a normal participant in the textbook value chain.

Critical to the success of this service was the establishment of a single book policy by the government; schools now use only one book per subject at each level, in both the public and the private system.

## Reflections and key considerations

This example illustrates how the Post can play an important role in ensuring equal access to limited resources, and in preventing speculation/price inflation.

The role of government policy appears to have been particularly important for establishing a viable service.



**Pilgrims using a mobile support office**

Image credit: Saudi Post

1.6

## Saudi Arabia – Pilgrim support services

Each year, millions of international visitors travel to Mecca, the holy sites and Medina to perform the Hajj (an Islamic pilgrimage) and Umrah (a pilgrimage taken outside the normal Hajj period). Saudi Post has developed a range of services to support pilgrims, including parcel sending, fund transfers, the sale of documents for certain religious rites, SIM cards, and a dedicated app.

The large number of pilgrims (both international and domestic) that perform the Hajj during a small number of days each year presents a particular set of challenges for the Post, including the need to communicate in multiple languages and to temporarily increase staff numbers. In 2018, Saudi Post set up a pilgrimage business centre to coordinate its activities, which include liaising with postal operators around the world, developing a smartphone application with location information for Hajj and Umrah sites (in 16 languages), managing over 800 dedicated employees, and operating temporary offices and mobile sales points.

While the Post reports that generating income from pilgrims is not the goal, some products are charged for at prices considered to be affordable. However, the broad costs of these services are covered by the core state funding provided to Saudi Post, and services are offered in partnership with the Ministry of Hajj and Umrah.

## Reflections and key considerations

Although these services are somewhat unique to the Hajj and Umrah, some aspects will be relevant to Posts supporting other religious festivals or large international events.

Saudi Post highlights the importance of designing products and services around the needs of pilgrims, and also emphasizes the importance of appropriate marketing and communication.

1.7

## Macao, China – Battery recycling

In Macao, the Post is active in the recycling of batteries and other small items. In addition to the clear environmental benefits, this service offers convenience for customers and reduces health and safety risks to the public and refuse workers. For example, batteries that are improperly disposed of can expose people to toxic and corrosive substances, as well as causing explosions and fires. This service therefore directly supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to good health and well-being (SDG 3) and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12).

The battery recycling service was initiated by the Environmental Protection Bureau, a local government department. The Macao Post and Telecommunications Bureau has supported this service as a partner since 2017, installing boxes at designated post offices to act as collection points. The Environmental Protection Bureau is responsible for the collection of batteries and other items from post offices, and for their subsequent recycling.

### Reflections and key considerations

This case study illustrates how Posts can offer services that protect human health and safety at minimal cost, making use of existing infrastructure to support government partners.

#### Battery collection boxes within a post office

Image credit: Macao Post





**Payments being made in the Fatick region,  
175 km from Dakar, Senegal**

Image credit: Postefinances (Senegal)

1.8

## Senegal – Social security payment to female heads of households

In Senegal, the Post is responsible for distributing funds from the National Family Security Scholarship Programme. This programme was initiated in 2013 to support poor and marginalized families with expenses related to the schooling and health care of children, and to improve broader family well-being.

The national government initiated this payment programme in partnership with the office of Social Protection and National Solidarity. Funds are transferred from the government to the Post through an existing electronic payment platform. Quarterly payments are then made in cash to eligible families, via offices of Postefinances (the Post's financial services subsidiary).

Globally, the population living in poverty is disproportionately rural, young and undereducated.<sup>121</sup> This service therefore directly supports United Nations Sustainable Development Goals related to education (SDG 4), poverty (SDG 1) and inequality (SDG 10). Women are also over-represented in the global poor, and a particularly interesting feature of this service is that funds are paid directly to the female head of the household. The Post reports that women are targeted for these payments because they are considered to have a more direct understanding and responsibility in meeting the needs of their children.

The Post was chosen as an implementation partner given its broad network, particularly its strong presence in rural areas where most of the scholarship recipients are located. In addition, the 300,000 beneficiaries are already familiar with the Post, which is broadly regarded as a trusted institution. By offering this service, the Post benefits from additional revenue and increased customer satisfaction.



Image credit: Postefinances (Senegal)

## Reflections and key considerations

This case study illustrates the value of building on the Post's strengths, in terms of both leveraging public trust and making use of existing payment platforms.

The Post reported that maintaining a good working relationship with national government has been key to the success of this service.

This example raises the broader question of how Posts should account for the role of gender in the success of social services.

1.9

## Ireland – Energy efficiency support

In Ireland, An Post (the designated operator) has developed a service to support people seeking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. This resource, named Green Hub, provides free information on retrofit measures, costs and associated grants, as well as offering access to low-cost finance options and a one-stop-shop service that assigns a project manager to coordinate the entire home upgrade project.

As national governments set stronger targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, more grants and subsidized loans are being offered to people who are seeking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. However, it can be difficult for the public to identify the most cost-effective solutions and to access up-to-date information on government-supported schemes. An Post's Green Hub enables people to access clear information on energy efficiency measures, costs and associated grants; low-cost finance options via An Post; and a one-stop-shop service that manages the whole home upgrade project from start to finish on behalf of the customer.



While the environmental benefits of improving the energy efficiency of housing are clear, these services may also generate considerable social value. For example, in addition to help navigating a potentially stressful process, customers can benefit from increased thermal comfort and reduced home energy bills. For An Post, this service helps to reinforce its sustainability commitments, to improve customer satisfaction, and to generate revenue.

### Reflections and key considerations

Because this is a new category of business for An Post, it relies heavily on strategic partnerships (e.g. with the energy services provider SSE Airtricity).

An Post reports that meeting customer demands for bespoke and precise information on retrofit specifications, costs and savings remains a challenge.

Climate solutions marketed at individuals and homeowners are expected to become more common over the next 20 years. The Green Hub developed by An Post offers a model for how Posts could act as a trusted portal for the public to access sustainability information, products and services.

**In Ireland, An Post (the designated operator) has developed a service named Green Hub to support people seeking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes.**

Image credit: An Post (Ireland)



**In Costa Rica, the Post reacted quickly by implementing two key initiatives: doorstep delivery of medicines and supply of antiseptic alcohol handwash to the public.**

Image credit: Correos de Costa Rica

1.10

## Costa Rica – Delivery of medicines and antiseptic handwash

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many Posts have offered new or expanded social services to help reduce infection rates, and to support people in limiting non-essential travel and social contact. In Costa Rica, the Post reacted quickly by implementing two key initiatives: doorstep delivery of medicines and supply of antiseptic alcohol handwash to the public.

“We are making our national network available so as to join this extraordinary effort by institutions to strengthen prevention.”<sup>122</sup>

### Medicine home delivery

Correos de Costa Rica expanded the capacity of its existing doorstep medicine delivery service to reduce the need for high-risk people to visit medical centres. However, the Post took the unusual step of working with private car rental companies to increase the capacity of its delivery vehicle fleet. These companies provided the vehicles, gasoline and drivers for free. The Post managed the logistics by collecting the drugs at the medical centre, classifying the packages, and organizing the routes for the new distribution team to deliver to patients at their doorstep.

The idea originated from Correos de Costa Rica and the Costa Rican Social Security Fund, and partners included the National Emergency Commission; private car rental companies Economy, Enterprise and Budget Rent a Car; Topofarma; and the Veinsa car sales company.

122 José Alexis Jiménez, Chairman of the Board at Correos de Costa Rica, in a press release on the launch of the platform to supply antiseptic handwash throughout the country (14.03.2020), [www.presidencia.go.cr/comunicados/2020/03/correos-lanza-plataforma-en-linea-para-llevar-alcohol-antiseptico-de-fanal-a-to-do-el-pais/](http://www.presidencia.go.cr/comunicados/2020/03/correos-lanza-plataforma-en-linea-para-llevar-alcohol-antiseptico-de-fanal-a-to-do-el-pais/) (Spanish only).

Challenges included persuading the heads of the pharmacies to participate; defining working relationships with each pharmacy; and implementing clear procedures, controls, coordination and communication channels. Some flexibility was also required in order to satisfy citizens' demands and expectations, especially as the volume of orders grew. New drivers were trained in the agreed delivery procedures, and the heads of each distribution centre were made responsible for the safety and security of medicines.

## Antiseptic handwash sales

Correos de Costa Rica also developed an initiative to make antiseptic alcohol handwash available to the entire population, partnering with the National Liquor Factory. Its aims were to meet the huge demand for this important safety product and to ensure its equitable distribution. In coordination with the National Economic Council, an agreement was signed with the Ministry of Public Health and the National Production Council, following which the Post created an online sales platform.

The Post was responsible for the entire fulfilment process, including the management of product inventories, the orders generated through the online platform, and product distribution. Key challenges reported by the Post included sourcing sufficient supplies of the product during the first few days, securing regulatory permits for the transportation of an alcohol-based solution, and organizing order-processing locations.

## Reflections and key considerations

For Posts responding to the social impacts of COVID-19, working across sectors at speed can be particularly challenging and risky. The development of partnerships can reduce this stress and open up access to new knowledge and other resources.

For the medicine home delivery service, it is notable that priority was given to ensuring the safety of staff and security of medicines.

The handwash service highlights how Posts can intervene to address inequality, expanding their traditional role within the value chain to include sourcing and sales.

Both examples illustrate how Posts can find creative ways to work with private businesses to establish new social services.

Correos de Costa Rica emphasizes the importance of understanding the needs of stakeholders, establishing responsibilities and channels of communications and coordination, and developing clear operational and administrative controls.

## Annex 2

# Social service types offered by member countries or territories

Tables 3 to 8 list the types of social services identified for individual member countries or territories, combining information from the questionnaire, desktop studies and social media posts during the COVID-19 pandemic. These tables present a summary of the social service types identified through the research for the guide, although it is likely that the majority of Posts provide some type of social service. The tables are followed by figure 5, which presents a regional breakdown for six broad social service categories.

TABLE 3– TYPES OF SOCIAL SERVICES IDENTIFIED IN AFRICA (NOT INCLUDING ARAB COUNTRIES)		Angola	Benin	Botswana	Burkina Faso	Burundi	Cameroon	Cape Verde	Chad	Côte d'Ivoire (Rep.)	Eswatini	Ethiopia	Ghana	Guyana	Kenya	Lesotho	Madagascar	Malawi	Mali	Mali	Mauritius	Mozambique	Namibia	Nigeria	Rwanda	Senegal	South Africa	Tanzania (United Rep.)	Togo	Uganda	Zambia	Zimbabwe
Health and well-being	Medical materials to/from homes and hospitals							X																X				X		X	X	
	Delivery of purchased food and essential items														X										X							
	Medical facilities, health info and checks											X									X											
	Broad social care provision at home																															
	Health data management																															
	Supporting searches for missing people																															
	Blood donation at post offices																					X										
	Medical certificate/test results delivery																															
Education	Materials for the visually impaired																				X			X				X				
	Book delivery and teaching materials					X	X														X										X	
	Reduced price postage for reading materials																X															
	Subscription service and delivery of newspapers																X															
	Distribution of computers to students																															
	Homework, student reports and exam papers																															
	Educational courses and teaching materials							X													X								X			















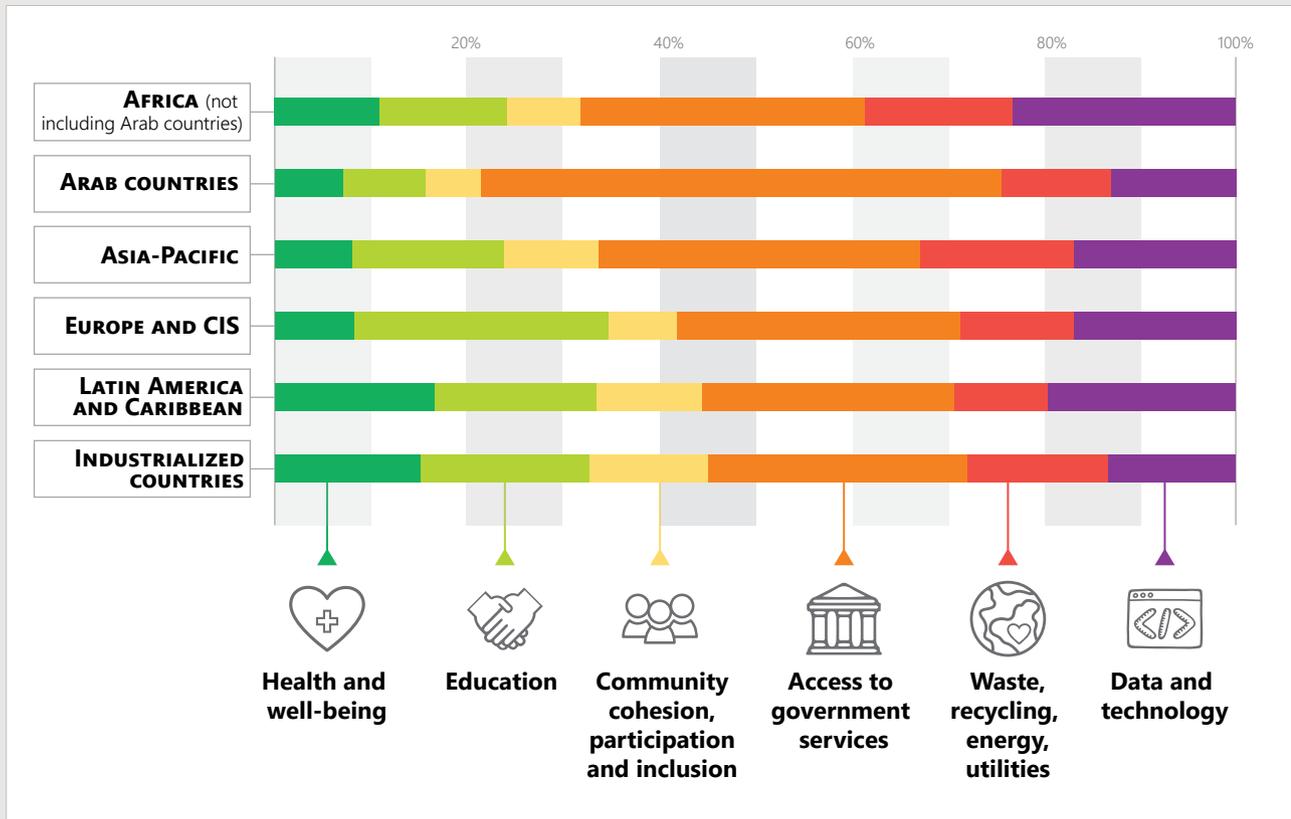








FIGURE 5 – A regional breakdown for six broad social service categories



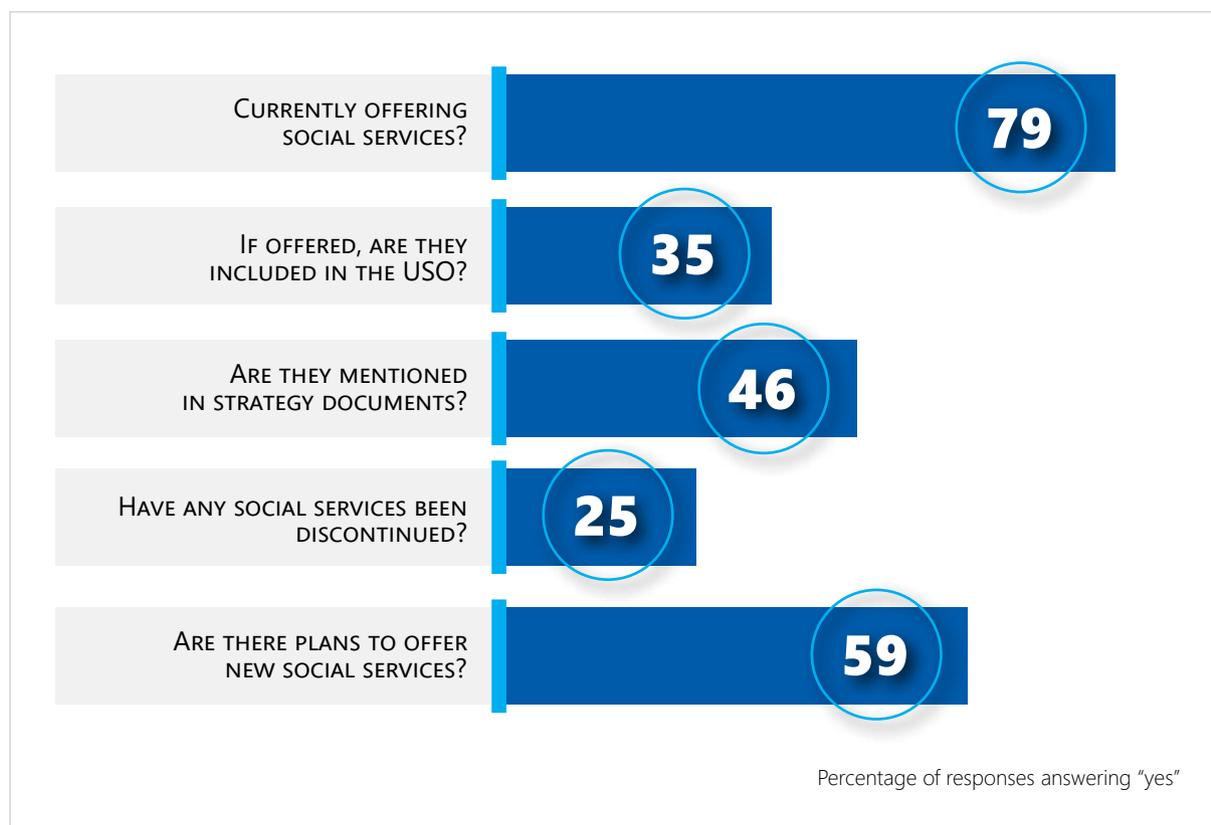
## Annex 3

# Questionnaire results

The following questions were included in the questionnaire sent to all UPU members in December 2019. In total, 113 UPU members provided responses, which are summarized in figure 6.

- 1 **Is your designated operator currently providing social services as defined above?**
- 2 **If yes, are any of these included in the universal service obligation?**
- 3 **Are social services directly mentioned in the designated operator's strategy documents?**
- 4 **Have social services been provided in the past, but since been discontinued?**
- 5 **Are there plans to diversify designated operator activities to include new social services?**

FIGURE 6 – Summary of the responses to the postal social services questionnaire (2019)







**UNIVERSAL POSTAL UNION**

International bureau  
Weltpoststrasse 4  
3015 BERNE  
SWITZERLAND

Tel: +41 31 350 31 11  
E-mail: [info@upu.int](mailto:info@upu.int)



**UPU** | UNIVERSAL  
POSTAL  
UNION