



# THE IPA OBSERVER

INVESTMENT PROMOTION AND FACILITATION MONITOR



## INVESTMENT PROMOTION AGENCIES: STRIVING TO OVERCOME THE COVID-19 CHALLENGE

### H I G H L I G H T S

### Advisory report

- ❖ The COVID-19 pandemic has generated important challenges for investment promotion agencies (IPAs) forcing them to shift focus from routine investment promotion and facilitation towards crisis management, notification of investors of government emergency and economic relief measures, provision of crisis support services, and contribution to national COVID-19 business response efforts. All this is done while agencies have closed offices, moved functions online and asked staff to work from home.
- ❖ The majority of IPAs (64%) have had a rapid response to the pandemic and have taken measures to continue to service the investor community online. Nevertheless, only 19% are taking their online facilitator role to a new level through the provision of comprehensive online COVID-19 related content and services for investors.
- ❖ African IPAs and low-income countries are lagging in their response, in part due to lack of resources and experience, but also in some cases because their countries were among the last affected.
- ❖ While significant differences exist between IPAs – in terms of both timing and quality of response – many are catching up quickly, e.g., on 31 March almost half of the agencies (49%) still had no online reference to COVID-19 while 3 days later, on 3 April, nearly two-thirds of IPAs had an online reference.
- ❖ The post-COVID-19 era will likely bring permanent changes, including accelerated digitalization of IPA operations, more attention to investment facilitation and aftercare, and for many a shift in target sectors with more health, agriculture and digital industries in the mix.
- ❖ During this time of crisis, IPAs see great value in collaboration and exchange of IPA best practices facilitated by international organizations, including UNCTAD and IPA associations.

UNCTAD will continue to monitor the impact of COVID-19 and update this report to facilitate the exchange of best practices among IPAs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

**The COVID-19 pandemic will cause a dramatic drop in foreign direct investment (FDI) flows.** Multinational enterprises (MNEs), local businesses, and investment have been severely affected with far-reaching social and economic repercussions. Economic impact estimates and earnings revisions of the largest MNEs suggest that downward pressures on FDI could be in the range of -30% to -40% during the period 2020-2021.

**The top 5000 MNEs have seen downward earning revisions for 2020 of 30% due to the crisis.** Sectors hardest hit include energy and basic materials industries (-208% for energy), airlines (-116%), and the automotive industry (-47%). Other sectors that are hit by the decline in demand will be next. The pandemic is affecting all components of FDI. Greenfield investment and expansions as well as cross-border mergers and acquisitions are being delayed and, in some cases, may be cancelled. The crisis may also have lasting effects on foreign investment with MNEs reshoring part of their business to make their supply chains more resilient.<sup>1</sup>

**Policy responses to the COVID-19 crisis vary between countries with many implementing or planning support measures for investors and their wider economies.** Some countries are also taking measures to protect domestic infrastructure and certain industries, particularly in the health sector. International investment agreement negotiations may also be affected. The G20, G7 and other groupings have issued statements in support of investment and global value chains. These developments will have a lasting influence on future policy making.<sup>2</sup>

**The support and preparedness of IPAs throughout the crisis and recovery may have a lasting effect on their relations with investors.** IPAs are on the frontline of supporting investors and the wider business community. In the past few weeks, agencies all over the world have been changing their *modus operandi*, quickly responding to the fast-changing needs of their clients and reassuring investors that they are there to support them. Many IPAs have had to close their offices and staff are working from home. Client services have moved online, and websites and social media have become the main platforms of communication. UNCTAD monitored this response through a survey of 174 national IPA websites<sup>3</sup> in the critical period between 23 March and 3 April 2020. Section 2 includes an overview of the survey's findings.

**Actions by IPAs vary widely and there are lessons to be learned.** On 7 April 2020, UNCTAD organized an online brainstorming session with heads of national IPAs and IPA associations on COVID-19 related challenges and early actions that IPAs have taken. Investment promotion executives shared their experiences, insights and prospect assessments for the short and longer term. A summary of that discussion is included in section 3 of this report.

## 2. FIRST IPA RESPONSES TO COVID-19

**Most IPAs (64%) responded rapidly to the pandemic related challenge.** The UNCTAD IPA website survey on the COVID-19 response found significant differences between the online service offerings of agencies (figure 1). Nearly two-thirds had COVID-19 related references on their website, while 36% did not mention COVID-19 and did not provide any information on how the IPA's day-to-day operations were affected during the government's lockdown.

<sup>1</sup> UNCTAD (2020). Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Global FDI and GVCs, Investment Trends Monitor, March 2020. Available here: [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/diaeiainf2020d3\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/diaeiainf2020d3_en.pdf)

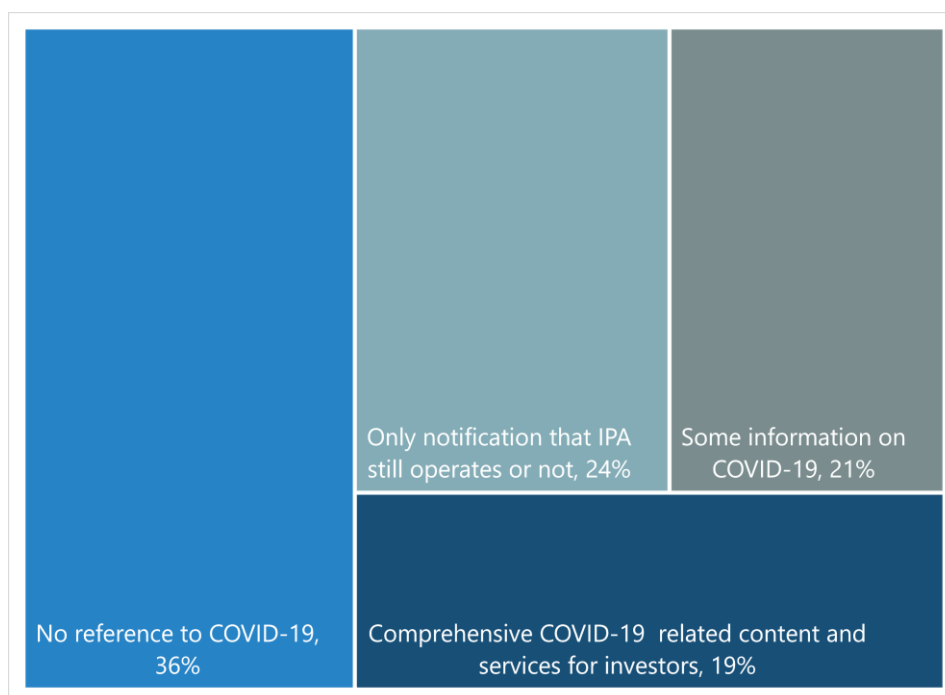
<sup>2</sup> UNCTAD (2020). Investment Policy Monitor, Issue 23, April 2020. Available here: [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/diaepcbinf2020d1\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/diaepcbinf2020d1_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The websites of 186 national IPAs were surveyed during the period from 23 March to 3 April 2020. For 12 agencies, the websites were not functioning during this period and they are not included in this analysis. Of the 174 IPAs monitored, 48 were from Africa, 32 from the Americas, 50 from the Asia and Pacific regions and 44 from Europe.

### IPAs are quickly catching up and are developing innovative means and tools to service their clients.

While significant differences exist between how IPAs have responded during this critical time, many are catching up quickly. On 31 March 2020, just over half of national IPAs surveyed worldwide (51%) referred to COVID-19 on their websites. Three days later, 64% had done so and 40% had gone beyond a mere notification of how IPA operations were affected and had provided COVID-related information relevant for investors (figure 2). In addition, by 3 April 2020, more than a dozen agencies had developed special platforms with a wide service offering to investors. These include dedicated COVID-19 investor response lines, COVID-19 economic updates, business continuity guides, online market intelligence tools to measure the impact of the crisis, webinars for businesses affected, and incentives for enterprises to help fight COVID-19 by transforming production lines to manufacture goods for the health sector (see annex 1).

**Figure 1. 64 % of IPAs surveyed by UNCTAD had rapid online responses to the COVID-19 pandemic**  
(174 national IPA websites surveyed, 3 April 2020).

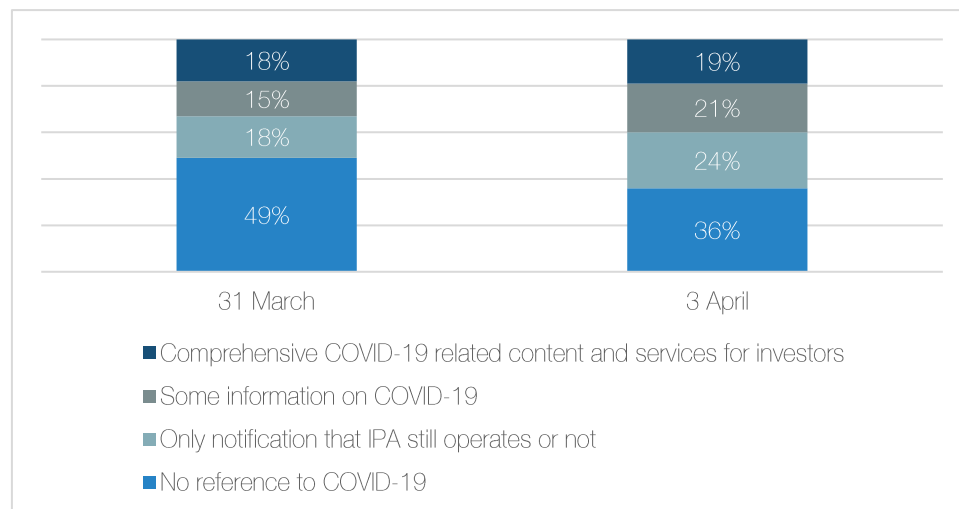


Source: UNCTAD

**Looking at different regions, European IPAs are ahead of the curve (figure 3).** Four out of ten are providing wide-ranging coverage of COVID-19 related business information, measures taken by governments to support businesses and online services. This includes IPAs from the bigger economies as well as smaller ones. For example, *Germany Trade and Invest* has developed a COVID-19 special window with information on economic developments, updates on government measures for business and industry, and offers online seminars on new developments like a webinar on the novel “Fast Track Program” for medical apps. The IPA of the Principality of Andorra, *Actua*, has organized a series of webinars on the impact of the pandemic on strategic sectors like sports and tourism and on ways for businesses to get access to emergency government support measures. *Invest in Estonia* has created a chat box for businesses and investors, provides information on aid packages and offers cooperation with businesses to combat COVID-19 related challenges.

**In Africa, many IPAs are still struggling to move their services online and 56% have no reference to COVID-19 on their websites.** This is partly caused by the limited internal digital capacities of a number of IPAs, but perhaps also because of the novelty of working from home. Some African regions were also affected later by the COVID-19 pandemic than other parts of the world. At the same time, a number of African agencies were among the first to provide COVID-19 related information on their websites and reassure clients that they were continuing their services online, including through social media. These include the *Economic Development Board* of Mauritius, the *Foreign Investment Promotion Agency* of Tunisia and Kenya’s *KenInvest*.

**Figure 2. IPAs worldwide are reacting quickly to the pandemic**  
(comparison of 174 national IPA websites surveyed between 31 March and 3 April 2020).



Source: UNCTAD

**The Asia and Pacific regions, the first to be affected by COVID-19, show a contrasted IPA response with both examples of best practice and a relatively large number of agencies with an inadequate response.** There are clear frontrunners, with agencies like *Invest India* which created a comprehensive Business Immunity Platform that offers a range of services, including 24/7 helplines, market reports and daily updates on COVID-related developments, including at the state level. The *Ministry of Investment of Saudi Arabia* set-up a COVID-19 Response Centre with a frequently asked questions window and an online COVID-19 business continuity guide. The Australian agency *Austrade* was among the first to offer webinars for export companies affected by the crisis. Despite several examples of good practices across the region, two-thirds of agencies in the Asia-Pacific region have no or little COVID-19 related information on their websites.

**Figure 3. Varied online response by IPAs to the COVID-19 pandemic across regions**  
(174 national IPA websites surveyed, 3 April 2020).

| Region        | No reference to COVID-19 | Only notification that the IPA still operates or not | Some information on COVID-19 | Comprehensive COVID-19 related content and services for investors |
|---------------|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Africa        | 56%                      | 19%                                                  | 17%                          | 8%                                                                |
| Americas      | 25%                      | 28%                                                  | 41%                          | 6%                                                                |
| Asia- Pacific | 38%                      | 28%                                                  | 14%                          | 20%                                                               |
| Europe        | 20.5%                    | 20.5%                                                | 20.5%                        | 38.5%                                                             |

Source: UNCTAD

**North, Central and South America and the Caribbean were the last regions to be affected by the pandemic, but many IPAs have reacted quickly and 47% have some or comprehensive coverage of COVID-19 related information online.** *APEX Brazil*, an agency that promotes investment and trade, has set-up a dedicated COVID-19 platform with useful tools, including a model action plan for businesses in crisis management, a support guide for suppliers and checklists for exporters. The *Centre for Export and Investment of the Dominican Republic* also has a dedicated webpage with information on government measures to support the economy and COVID-19 related news. The agency also provides information on specific measures that have been taken in the country's main export markets.

### 3. IPA CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS: AN EXECUTIVE VIEW

**UNCTAD brought together investment promotion executives for a high-level virtual brainstorming session to share experiences, insights and prospect assessments amidst this unprecedented crisis.** The meeting focused on *Investment Facilitation and Promotion: Challenges and Actions in Times of Pandemic Crisis* and took place on 7 April 2020. Heads of IPAs and IPA associations as well as Deputy Ministers of Investment from over 20 countries<sup>4</sup> participated in this first webinar of a series that will be organized by UNCTAD's Division on Investment and Enterprise in efforts to support the global IPA community. This section provides a summary of the main observations raised during the brainstorming.

#### *Main challenges raised by IPAs*

**IPAs are seeing a significant decrease in new investor enquiries and lead generation.** This is due to the crisis, but also to a scaling down of their outreach activities, as the resources of foreign embassies and overseas IPA networks have been reallocated towards emergency priorities. Certain sectors have been particularly hard-hit including aviation, travel, tourism and hospitality, consumer goods, and automobiles, among others.

**Some IPAs are struggling to redefine how their daily activities can be conducted virtually and have difficulties in establishing a dynamic online presence.** Working remotely is a challenge for IPAs operating in regions where the culture of teleworking has not yet been well established and many do not have the technological capacity to be able to work efficiently from home. This is particularly the case in some developing countries.

**Increased focus by IPAs on investment facilitation and aftercare requires them to keep abreast of policy developments while at the same time understanding the evolving needs of investors.** As both are constantly evolving, and policy measures may differ at the sub-national level, ensuring reliable and up to date information requires significant resources. In some countries, IPAs are part of national COVID-19 business response efforts that facilitate coordination and synergies between government entities for facilitating access to government support measures.

**In the face of emergency national challenges, IPAs are being called upon to support efforts to reallocate resources towards new priority target sectors.** With shortages of medical supplies to combat the pandemic and increasing food security concerns in many countries, IPAs are being called upon to quickly shift strategic focus towards these sectors, including health and agribusiness.

#### *The immediate response to the pandemic*

**IPAs are being proactive in finding ways to continue to service investors during these challenging times.** By and large, IPAs have reallocated resources towards helping existing investors to continue to operate as well as ensuring that pipeline investment projects are realised. Based on the increase in the number of queries reported by many IPAs, foreign and domestic investors are dealing with a lot of uncertainty. They require information about a range of topics including access to government business support measures, logistics, plant shut-downs, supply of essential goods and services and customs issues, among others. IPAs

<sup>4</sup> UNCTAD thanks all participants in the high-level brainstorming session for their insights and observations. The following institutions were represented during the meeting (also see annex 2): Invest Barbados (Barbados), Apex-Brasil (Brazil), Invest Chile (Chile), China Council for International Investment Promotion, CCIIP (China), Invest Hong Kong (China), General Authority for Investment and Free Zones, GAFI (Egypt), Ethiopian Investment Commission (Ethiopia), Centre for Facilitation of Investments, CFI (Haiti), Invest India (India), JAMPRO (Jamaica), Japan External Trade Organization, JETRO (Japan), KenInvest (Kenya), Investment Development Authority of Lebanon (Lebanon), Economic Development Board (Mauritius), Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency (Netherlands), Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (Nigeria), Ministry of Investment (Saudi Arabia), InvestSA (South Africa), Switzerland Global Enterprise (Switzerland), Dubai Investment Development Agency (United Arab Emirates), Department of International Trade (United Kingdom), Select USA (United States of America), Caribbean Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (CAIPA), World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA).

are stepping up to this demand by providing reliable and updated information online either through their websites or social media or through dedicated communications channels, some of which are available 24/7.

**IPAs are also proactively reaching out to investors to understand their needs, including through surveys, and starting to develop digital tools for their clients.** Outward investment agencies and institutions (OIAs) are also active in seeking to better gauge the needs of their clients, many of whom require assistance to diversify and rebuild supply chains. A better understanding of constituents' needs by IPAs and OIAs allows them to better tailor support measures. Digital tools including online business continuity handbooks, crisis management action plans, virtual market intelligence platforms and information webinars are some examples of what IPAs have started to develop as a response to the pandemic.

**The policy advocacy role of some IPAs has been reinforced during the pandemic crisis.** As IPAs are in close contact with the business community, they are serving as intermediaries between investors and the government. In some countries, they are relaying the needs of the private sector and feeding into government response measures and policies.

**IPAs and MNEs have been key players in national efforts to source equipment and materials in support of combatting COVID-19.** IPAs have been at the forefront of efforts to shift production lines of existing investors towards health equipment and materials in support of the pandemic including hand sanitizers, medical masks and ventilators. This has been done through incentives for enterprises to extend or temporarily transform their production, as well as innovative partnership initiatives that promote cooperation and innovation between stakeholders. MNEs have taken the lead in a number of countries by shifting production towards essential products for COVID-19 containment.

### *Preparing for the post-pandemic “new normal”*

**While overwhelmed with investor needs and a situation that is still fluid, some IPAs are starting to plan for the post-pandemic period.** IPAs are preparing themselves to be able to keep up with the accelerated digital transformation that the pandemic has reinforced by launching innovation and digital partnership programmes and investing in digital capacity building. Others are beginning to analyze what the needs of investors will be during the post-pandemic recovery, re-evaluating core activities, including major investment forums.

**IPAs are reviewing their value propositions and target sectors for investment.** Certain sectors may become more strategic not only because the pandemic has reinforced some trends such as digitalization but also because it has surfaced countries' weaknesses and the need to be more prepared for future similar crises. There has been a marked surge in some sectors that may be key in the post-pandemic period such as e-commerce and digital health, among others. The pandemic has also brought to light the need for strengthened cross-border cooperation in sectors including health, the environment and research and development. In line with this, IPAs' strategies may also need to evolve and be aligned with broader efforts to promote international cooperation in these sectors.

**IPAs share some common concerns, including increased protectionism, restrictive investment measures by countries and intensified competition for FDI.** In addition, there are worries that if many small and medium-sized enterprises fail during or after the pandemic, MNEs will have a limited pool of local suppliers and partners, and this will have an impact on the attractiveness of certain locations. There is also uncertainty with regards to what a post pandemic global investment climate will look like and how development-related sectors and the Sustainable Development Goals will be impacted.

**Going forward, IPAs stress the importance of collaboration, and global exchange of best practices and experiences.** They call for the international community and organizations such as UNCTAD, the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA), the Caribbean Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (CAIPA) and others to facilitate information exchange on best practices, cooperation, dialogue and partnerships for investment facilitation and promotion.

## Annex 1. Selection of innovative and proactive measures taken by IPAs in response to the COVID-19 outbreak.

| Country            | Description of measure                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Source                                                                        |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Andorra            | The IPA, <i>Actua</i> , has organized a series of webinars on the impact of the pandemic on strategic sectors of the country, including sports and sports tourism. It also organizes facilitation webinars to support businesses affected by COVID-19 to get access to government support measures and on enhancing their digital performance.                                                                                                                                                                                   | <a href="http://www.actua.ad">www.actua.ad</a>                                |
| Australia          | As part of "Team Australia", the country's IPA <i>Austrade</i> is working closely with the network of government departments to help Australian businesses overcome COVID-19 related challenges. <i>Austrade</i> 's website contains detailed information about support measures for business as well as market insight analysis. The IPA has organized a series of targeted webinars, including on the impact of the Coronavirus in Australia and China, as well as consequences on specific sectors such as health and mining. | <a href="http://www.austrade.gov.au">www.austrade.gov.au</a>                  |
| Austria            | <i>ABA Invest in Austria</i> has a dedicated section which provides regular updates on COVID-19 news that are relevant for the business community and investors. It includes explanations of measures taken by the Government, including "Short-time work". Online events have also been organized by the IPA, such as "Online Corporate Day" and "Business Breakfast Virtual Conference" offering free investment consulting services for foreign companies and private investors.                                              | <a href="https://investinaustria.at/">https://investinaustria.at/</a>         |
| Brazil             | <i>APEX</i> is Brazil's trade and investment promotion agency. It has developed a comprehensive platform with tools to support exporters and investors. For example, it developed an online market intelligence tool that provides economic and trade updates by sector and has organized a special webinar to familiarize users with it. Other useful tools include a model action plan for businesses in crisis management, a support guide for suppliers and checklists for exporters.                                        | <a href="https://portal.apexbras.com.br/">https://portal.apexbras.com.br/</a> |
| Dominican Republic | The <i>Centre for Export and Investment of the Dominican Republic, CEI-RD</i> , has a dedicated webpage with summary documents on government measures to support the economy and latest news. The agency has produced documents to facilitate information exchange with the business community and exporters in particular, including on specific measures that have been taken in the country's main export partner countries.                                                                                                  | <a href="http://www.ceird.gob.do">www.ceird.gob.do</a>                        |
| Estonia            | An emergency situation chat box can be found on the website of Estonia's IPA, <i>Invest in Estonia</i> . The IPA also posts regular news updates on the pandemic that                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | <a href="http://www.investinestonia.com">www.investinestonia.com</a>          |

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