

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

COVID-19 AND MARITIME TRANSPORT

**NAVIGATING THE CRISIS
AND LESSONS LEARNED**



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**

Geneva, 2022

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Abbreviations

AIS	automatic identification system
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
IAPH	International Association of Ports and Harbors
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMO	International Maritime Organization
KPA	Kenya Ports Authority
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
LDC	least developed country
LNG	liquified natural gas
LPG	liquified petroleum gas
LSCI	Liner Shipping Connectivity Index
MPA	Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore
MSC	Mediterranean Shipping Company
NPA	Nigeria Ports Authority
NSC	Nigerian Shippers' Council
ONE	Ocean Network Express
Ro-Ro	roll-on/roll-off
SIDS	small island developing States
TEU	twenty-foot equivalent unit
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNESCAP	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
WHO	World Health Organization
WPSP	World Ports Sustainability Program

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PART I: NAVIGATING THE CRISIS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Introduction

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, global maritime transport and trade were severely affected. Amid supply-chain disruptions, global demand contraction and economic uncertainty, the world economy suffered both supply and demand shocks. The onset of new variants of the virus and a surge in infections being reported across regions continued to disrupt economies, trade and global logistics. The rapid recovery in containerized trade, supported by stimulus packages, and increased consumption and ecommerce stretched maritime supply chains.

The pandemic exposed the high level of global interdependency. With supply chains and international maritime transport acting as transmission channels, disruptions at local level entailed far reaching global impacts including crippling port congestion, soaring freight rates, and plummeting service reliability. As the disruption hit, shipping and ports have had to respond and manage not only the immediate concerns raised by the pandemic, but also the longer-term considerations, notably potential shifts in supply-chain design, globalization patterns, consumption and spending habits and, in general, a growing focus on risk assessment and vulnerability reduction, sustainability and decarbonization.

To manage capacity in the face of reduced demand, shipping carriers revisited their strategies. They reconsidered the frequency of their services and adjusted the levels of maritime connectivity between countries¹ and regions. Ports worldwide and other logistics-sector stakeholders all sought to address challenges to business and operational continuity while maintaining safety and the well-being of workers and the broader population. Commercial ships of different types managed to secure continued access to ports all over the world and deliver the world's food, energy, raw materials, and manufactured goods and components – including vital medical supplies.

Recognizing the magnitude of the challenge, the international community called on governments and relevant stakeholders to support the maritime transport sector and help shipping and ports navigate through the crisis. For example, as part of its response to the pandemic, UNCTAD issued a call for action to keep shipping and ports operational.² The Secretaries-General of UNCTAD and the International Maritime Organization (IMO) issued a joint statement in support of keeping ships moving, ports open and cross-border trade flowing during the pandemic.³ Furthermore, and jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO), IMO and the World Health Organization (WHO), UNCTAD called upon stakeholders to take action to support the world's 1.9 million seafarers from being unduly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions.⁴

This report has been prepared under the framework of the United Nations Development Account project on “[Transport and trade connectivity in the age of pandemics: Contactless, seamless and collaborative UN solutions](#)”. It describes how the COVID-19 pandemic has shocked the global maritime transport system and sets out some of the key effects on the sector. It builds on the [UNCTAD preliminary impact assessment](#)

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