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## Borders Re-opening? Migrant Mobility in Southeast Asia



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In 2020, global mobility was dramatically and abruptly halted in its tracks by COVID-19. By March 2020, over [43,000 travel measures](#) had been put into place by various local and national authorities worldwide. Despite [WHO's advice](#) that travel bans have little effect as a long-term measure, most countries have instituted travel measures as part of their COVID-19 response – [most of which still remain, though in less restrictive forms](#).

Labour migration, in particular, has been deeply affected. During the first few months of the pandemic, Asian countries were some of the first to put in place travel restrictions as part of their COVID-19 response. These included visa issuance restrictions and border closures, all of which curtailed migrant arrival in key destination countries such as Malaysia, Japan and South Korea. For example, the number of foreigners entering Japan on

work visas dropped significantly from 123,000 for the period April-August 2019 to merely 627 in 2020 (April - August).

### Unequal Impacts of Travel Measures

Even now with borders re-opening and travel restrictions easing, migration levels are still low. This is in part due to the unequal impacts of these mobility restrictions and travel measures on migrants, exacerbating the inequalities between who can travel and who cannot.

The financial costs of potential travel are becoming increasingly prohibitive as not only has airfare increased, but [potential COVID-19 testing requirements](#) – particularly for a PCR test – and quarantine requirements can all add up. While some migrants may be

able to absorb these costs, the socio-economic gap between migrants is still likely to widen further.

Vaccine access – or the lack thereof – is also likely to be another marker of global mobility. To highlight this disparity, over 70 per cent of people living in high-income countries have been vaccinated as compared to 20 per cent in low-income countries as of 13 July 2022.

Even in Southeast Asia where there is relative vaccine coverage, there exists disparity [with Brunei](#) having vaccinated 94 per cent of their population compared [to Myanmar's](#) 39.2 per cent. After all, vaccines may not always be available considering the financial burden placed on low-income countries.

Moreover, even where populations have been vaccinated, [particular brands of vaccine such as Covaxin and Sinovac](#) may not consistently be recognised

by [other countries](#). With the need to be fully vaccinated a requirement to enter most countries, this places an undue burden on less affluent migrants.

### Migration Initiatives in Southeast Asia

In Southeast Asia, where around 70 per cent of its estimated 10.6 million resident migrants are from the region, the disproportionate effects of these measures on them have been especially noticeable. In an effort to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on these migrants, ASEAN has been developing certain initiatives including the [ASEAN Travel Corridor Arrangement Framework](#).

Although this framework has been in discussion since 2020, there have been [recent calls to renew and prioritise these efforts](#) in order to accelerate the economic recovery of the region – a large part of which depends on free regional mobility.

While some states have already negotiated travel arrangements bilaterally, this framework could also aid in the creation of ASEAN-wide vaccine certification system, enabling mutual recognition and simplifying regional travel arrangements.

Whether as a result of travel restrictions, lack of financial capabilities or unequal access to vaccines, global mobility is unlikely to return to pre-pandemic levels in the near future, exacerbating already existing inequalities between migrants. As such, the need to address these inequalities, such as via regional arrangements, is only likely to increase as borders continue to re-open, shaping Southeast Asia's opportunities for a resilient recovery in the long-run.

### Suggested Readings

- ADBI, OECD, and ILO, "Labor Migration in Asia: Impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis and the Post-Pandemic Future", 2021, <[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms\\_784823.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/publication/wcms_784823.pdf)>.
- Meghan Benton et al, *COVID-19 and the State of Global Mobility in 2021*, Geneva: International Organisation for Migration, 2021, <<https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/MPI-COVID19-Impact-Global-Mobility.pdf>>.
- M. McAuliffe and A. Triandafyllidou (eds.), *World Migration Report 2022*, Geneva: International Organisation for Migration, 2022, <[https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022\\_0.pdf](https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/WMR-2022_0.pdf)>.
- Jhinuk Mukhopadhyay and Gauri Thampi, "Persistent COVID-19 Vaccine Inequity Has Significant Implications for Refugees and Other Vulnerable Migrants", Migration Policy Institute, 19 April 2022 <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-access-covid-19-vaccine-inequity>>.
- Kiki Siregar, "Indonesia calls for ASEAN travel corridor to be expedited to accelerate regional economic recovery", *Channel News Asia*, 17 February 2022, <<https://www.channelnewsasia.com/asia/covid-19-indonesia-asean-travel-corridor-economy-2504461>>.

## CLIMATE CHANGE

## NEWS &amp; COMMENTARIES

**Asia's largest cities lack water security**

*Efficient and effective management of water resources through improved understanding of specific city water-needs, innovative tools and technologies to forecast disasters will all be essential to the survival of our cities.*

**Kaushal Chapagain, Mukand S. Babel and Hassan Tolba**

**Aboelnga**

**The Jakarta Post**

26 June 2022

**With marine pollution at 'alarming' levels, speakers at ocean conference dialogue demand urgent action to clean world's seas, call for political will**

*While many organisations around the world are addressing marine pollution and its related effects, continued acidification and plastic pollution demonstrate the need to tackle all societal systems affecting the ocean.*

**The United Nations**

27 June 2022

**G-7 leaders reaffirm climate change goals but stress need for energy security: Statement**

*The G-7 countries have sought ways to plug energy shortages and tackle soaring prices while sticking to their climate commitments. The leaders agreed to work together to accelerate a clean and just transition towards climate neutrality, while ensuring energy security.*

**The Straits Times**

27 June 2022

**Climate change is driving 2022 extreme heat and flooding**

*In the last three months, monsoon rains unleashed disastrous flooding in Bangladesh, and brutal heatwaves seared parts of South Asia and Europe. Meanwhile, prolonged drought has left millions on the brink of famine in East Africa.*

**Reuters**

**Channels News Asia**

28 June 2022

**Government policies will not get UK to net zero, warns damning report**

*The UK government had set strong targets on cutting emissions but policy to achieve them was lacking. The greatest failure was the insulation policy. Heating costs are high but the government has no plans to help most people insulate their homes.*

**Fiona Harvey**

**The Guardian**

29 June 2022

**Hydropower systems in high mountain areas need to be better adapted to climate change: NUS study**

*Many new hydropower projects are planned near glaciers or glacial lakes at high altitudes - which are vulnerable to global warming. Better adaptation measures and more robust planning and monitoring systems are urgently needed.*

**Cheryl Tan**

**The Straits Times**

4 July 2022

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

**Declining tropical cyclone frequency under global warming**

*The frequency of tropical cyclones had declined by approximately 13 per cent during the 20th century, a trend that has been accelerating since the 1950s. It is a likely consequence of climate change.*

**Savin S. Chand, et al.,**

**Nature Climate Change (12): 655-661**

2022

**White House action plan on global water security**

*The White House plan, which gives critical importance to protecting water supplies and elevates water security as an international priority, is designed to prevent conflict between nations and promote equity and economic growth.*

**The White House**

2022

## EVENTS &amp; ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Ocean and Climate Change Dialogue 2022**

*The dialogue considered how to strengthen and integrate national ocean climate action under the Paris Agreement, and how to enable ocean climate solutions and optimise institutional connections.*

**Bonn, Germany (Recorded)**

15 June 2022

**Cairo Water Week**

*The event aims to formulate water-scarce countries' messages to be submitted to the U.N. Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Water Action Decade in March 2023.*

**Cairo, Egypt**

16-19 October 2022

## ENERGY SECURITY

### NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

#### ASEAN needs to work together on green energy

ASEAN countries can match extensive solar energy resources with advanced manufacturing capability for battery energy storage and electric vehicles, making them prime candidates to lead the global transition to clean energy.

**Noah Kittner**

**East Asia Forum**

21 June 2022

#### Majority of Filipinos more likely to support nuclear power plant construction — survey

According to a 2022 survey, 59% of respondents said they “approve” or “strongly approve” of “allowing the construction of a nuclear power plant in the Philippines.” Meanwhile, 22% said they “disapprove” or “strongly disapprove” of the construction of a nuclear plant.

**Ellalyn De Vera-Ruiz**

**Manila Bulletin**

1 July 2022

#### Japan hopes to restart four more nuclear reactors by winter

A nuclear restart requires an extensive approval process overseen by regulators, as well as approval from local communities. Flaring tensions with Russia have also put Japan on edge.

**Sakura Murakami**

**Reuters**

15 July 2022

#### Singapore, US express interest in feasibility study to enhance energy connectivity in Southeast Asia

A joint ministerial statement underscored the importance of energy cooperation between both countries and affirmed the importance of strengthened cooperation on energy security, clean energy transitions and regional energy interconnectivity.

**Channel News Asia**

15 July 2022

#### Economic disparities, differing policies holding back Asean’s energy transition plans

The various challenges ASEAN member states face in energy transition have resulted in a lack of investment in renewable energy projects in the region. Investment in clean energy in ASEAN has never exceeded US\$30 billion annually, and the amount needed to meet the countries’ climate aspirations is five times of that.

**Janice Lim**

**The Business Times**

18 July 2022

#### Bilateral projects in solar and wind energy likely to take off in Asean in the near-term

Investments into solar and wind energy projects in the near future, however, would be based on bilateral projects, instead of multilateral ones involving several

**Janice Lim**

**The Business Times**

18 July 2022

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

#### Model academic curriculum in nuclear security

This publication provides a model academic curriculum covering the entire spectrum of nuclear security topics for a master’s degree programme or for an academic certificate programme in nuclear security.

**IAEA Nuclear Security Series No. 12-T (Rev.1)**

**Vienna: International Atomic Energy Agency**

2021

#### Renewable energy statistics 2022

This report provides datasets on power-generation capacity for 2012-2021, actual power generation for 2012-2020 and renewable energy balances for over 150 countries and areas for 2019-2020.

**IRENA**

**Abu Dhabi: International Renewable Energy Agency**

2022

### EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### RSIS Book Launch Seminar of “Nuclear Governance in the Asia-Pacific”

The book explores approaches to building a framework for nuclear governance in the Asia-Pacific – encompassing nuclear safety, security, and safeguards/non-proliferation.

**Singapore**

3 August 2022

#### 2nd ASEAN International Conference on Energy and Environment (AICEE)

In this conference, researchers, energy practitioners and environmental scientists will share findings from their research studies on various issues affecting both energy security and environmental security.

**Phnom Penh, Cambodia (Hybrid)**

14-15 September 2022

## FOOD SECURITY

### NEWS & COMMENTARIES

#### G7 Statement on Global Food Security

In response to a report by the UN Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance (UN GCRG), G-7 member countries have recognised the multidimensional nature of today's food crisis. They have also collectively committed to a Global Alliance on Food Security, which includes an additional US\$4.5 billion contribution to addressing hunger and malnutrition, among others.

**G7 Press Release**

**Relief.Web**

28 June 2022

#### Food chamber calling on Marcos to declare state of calamity for food sufficiency

The Philippine Chamber of Agriculture and Food Inc. has called on newly elected President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. to consider declaring a state of calamity for food sufficiency. This is to allow him to mandate cities to allocate 10% of their internal revenue allotments to subsidising agricultural production.

**Paige Javier**

**CNN Philippines**

9 July 2022

#### G20: FAO says global threats to agrifood systems need complex approach

In his speech during the G20 meeting, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UN FAO) Director General, Mr. Qu Dongyu, has stressed the need for a "package of measures" which should ideally integrate resource use efficiency, investments in productivity, and digitalisation in agriculture, among others.

**UN FAO**

10 July 2022

#### Ukraine, Russia to hold grain talks as war sends food prices soaring

Ukraine estimates that up to 25 million tonnes of grain are currently blocked in its ports as a result of the conflict. The talks are expected to focus on unblocking these stalled grain stockpiles, among others.

**Agence France-Presse**

**Channel News Asia**

13 July 2022

#### Rising food and energy prices threaten Indonesia's political stability

With 275 million people to feed and 255.1 terawatt hours of electricity to supply each year, rising food and energy prices pose a threat to Indonesia's national security. The failure to ensure food availability and affordability has led to political stability in previous presidential administrations.

**Asmiati Malik**

**Nikkei Asia**

14 July 2022

#### Commentary: 'Weaponising' food amid Ukraine war might be Putin's real trump card

The food security impacts of Russia's current invasion of Ukraine should be seen as a deliberate "weaponisation" of food on the part of Russia, against the West. Russia's blockade of grains in Ukraine's ports is indirectly leading food prices to rise "uncomfortably" in US and Europe.

**Stefan Wolff**

**Channel News Asia**

14 July 2022

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

#### The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2022: Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable.

This report suggests repurposing policies to prioritise food consumers, to make healthy diets more affordable for all.

**FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO**

**Rome: UN FAO.**

2022

#### The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine

This information note dissects the mechanisms through which the war in Ukraine are causing global instability, including heightening risks from the perspectives of trade, prices, logistics, production, humanitarian needs, energy and exchange rates.

**UN FAO Information Note**

**Rome: UN FAO**

10 June 2022

### EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Global Food Security Symposium 2022

During the event, speakers discussed measures for achieving inclusive agricultural development through localised solutions that promote food and nutrition security, in various aspects including infrastructure, investments, and partnerships.

**Recorded Webinar**

23 June 2022

#### Launch of the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) 2022

During the launch, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus emphasised WHO's support for countries to improve food systems through taxing unhealthy foods, subsidising healthy options, protecting children from harmful marketing, and ensuring clear nutrition labels, among others.

**Recorded Webinar**

6 July 2022

## HEALTH SECURITY

## NEWS &amp; COMMENTARIES

**The worst virus variant just arrived. The pandemic is not over.**

*The arrival of subvariant BA.5 should be a reminder that the finish line in this race is nowhere to be seen.*

**The Washington Post**

7 July 2022

**NIH launches clinical trial of mRNA Nipah virus vaccine**

*The National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID), part of the National Institutes of Health, has launched an early-stage clinical trial evaluating an investigational vaccine to prevent infection with Nipah virus.*

**National Institutes of Health**

11 July 2022

**Moderna founder launches Apriori with \$50M to stay ahead of virus variants**

*Flagship Pioneering, a creator of new biotech companies and founder of COVID-19 vaccine maker Moderna, announced the launch of an infectious disease startup called Apriori Bio.*

**Delilah Alvarado**

**BioPharmaDive**

11 July 2022

**US health department says doctors must offer abortion if mother's life is at risk**

*The Biden administration said that healthcare providers must offer abortion services if the life of a mother is at risk and that procedures conducted under such circumstances would be protected under federal law regardless of various state bans.*

**Reuters**

**Channel News Asia**

12 July 2022

**Tan Tock Seng Hospital develops AI support tool for blood disease diagnosis with ASUS**

*The Tan Tock Seng Hospital in Singapore and Taiwan-based ASUS Intelligent Cloud Services have co-developed an AI-powered software that automates the identification of peripheral blood cells in laboratories.*

**Adam Ang**

**Healthcare IT News**

12 July 2022

**COVID-19 pandemic is 'nowhere near over': WHO**

*Fresh waves of COVID-19 infections show the pandemic is "nowhere near over", the World Health Organization's chief warned, voicing concern the virus is "running freely".*

**AFP**

**Channel News Asia**

12 July 2022

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

**Global impact of the first year of COVID-19 vaccination: a mathematical modelling study**

*This article quantifies the global impact of the first year of COVID-19 vaccination and estimated the number of deaths from COVID-19 averted in 185 countries and territories.*

**Oliver J Watson et al.**

**The Lancet**

2022

**Rapid diagnostic tests versus RT-PCR for Ebola virus infections: A systematic review and meta-analysis**

*This study evaluates the clinical accuracy of rapid diagnostic tests for the detection of Ebola virus.*

**Basilua Andre Muzembo et al.**

**Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 100, No. 7**

2022

## EVENTS &amp; ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Australia-Thailand COVID-19 Pandemic Response in Comparative Perspective**

*This webinar took a closer look at Australia and Thailand's respective COVID-19 responses.*

**Recorded Webinar**

14 June 2022

**Monkeypox: Is it a New Human Threat?**

*International experts provided the latest information on the epidemiology, transmission, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of monkeypox at ISAC's recent webinar which was organised by the Viral Infections Working Group.*

**Recorded Webinar**

15 June 2022

## HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

### NEWS & COMMENTARIES

#### S'pore launches three new satellites into space for security, climate, disaster monitoring

The Republic made further strides in space with the launch of three new satellites for national, research and commercial uses. The two larger satellites will act as eyes on the region for various uses such as enhancing maritime security, detecting oil spills and monitoring disasters for humanitarian aid.

**Shabana Begum**

**The Straits Times**

2 July 2022

#### Digital tools deepen the power imbalance in aid. Here's how to fix that

Digitisation may be useful for donors and humanitarian organisations, but their application can look very different from the perspective of people in crises.

**John Bryant**

**The New Humanitarian**

4 July 2022

#### Advancing the use of humanitarian cat bonds

Volcano risk assessment has become a major global geoscience research enterprise, and there are now risk models available for most parts of the world that are threatened by active volcanoes. These new models will expedite the issuance of further volcano catastrophe bonds by the humanitarian sector.

**Gordon Woo**

**RMS**

6 July 2022

#### How the focus on Ukraine is hurting other humanitarian responses

In the more than 4 months since Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, aid workers say attention, resources, and expertise have been diverted away from crises elsewhere, forcing cuts to life-saving services and interrupting the distribution of vital supplies.

**Corinne Redfern**

**The New Humanitarian**

7 July 2022

#### Why disasters are getting more severe but killing fewer people

Two main factors have saved lives even among increasingly dangerous disasters and growing populations: better forecasting and a greater ability to cope with storms, floods, fires, and heat waves when they do occur.

**Umair Irfan**

**Vox**

10 July 2022

### SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

#### Strengthening partnerships to counter non-traditional security threats in the Indo-Pacific

This report analyses the respective strengths and weaknesses of the existing multilateral mechanisms in the Indo-Pacific in facilitating and mobilising collective disaster response.

**Lina Gong and S. Nanthini**

**RSIS Policy Report**

2022

#### Footing the bill: Fair finance for loss and damage in an era of escalating climate impacts

This report looks the need for countries with high carbon emissions to help those with low emissions as the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events places more pressure on an already over-stretched and underfunded humanitarian system.

**Tracy Carty and Lyndsay Walsh**

**Oxfam**

2022

### EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### Rethinking Humanitarianism | Weapons as aid?

This podcast discussed the questions surrounding the provision of weapons as humanitarian aid. It tackled whether providing weapons go against the hallmark humanitarian principle of neutrality.

**Recorded Podcast**

12 July 2022

#### IEDC's Equitable Economic Development Playbook: Disaster Preparedness, Recovery, and Climate Resilience

This webinar will discuss community-based approaches that can ensure equitable and successful access to re-building resources. It will also highlight the necessity of understanding how pre-existing systemic inequities can impact the recovery and resilience process.

**Webinar**

5 September 2022

## MIGRATION

## NEWS &amp; COMMENTARIES

**Call for next head of UN refugee agency to have lived experience as a refugee**

*There is a need for more senior positions in UNHCR to be staffed by those with lived experiences as refugees. After all, meaningful inclusion in the system is the best form of protection.*

**Megha Kaveri**

**The New Humanitarian**

27 June 2022

**Uproar over Britain's Rwanda Asylum Plan overlooks nagging issues in illegal migration**

*The standoff between the UK and refugee rights advocates encapsulates the dilemma - balancing the need for states to control their borders with the protection of the security and dignity of refugees.*

**Ebenezer Obadare and Reina Patel**

**Council on Foreign Relations**

29 June 2022

**With focus on refugees, no end in sight for Ukraine's internally displaced**

*With over 7.1 million refugees and internally displaced people in Ukraine, more attention needs to be paid to those still in the country, and not just refugees. As the war is slowly turning into a protracted conflict, medium and long-term goals need to be articulated.*

**Sam Mednick**

**The New Humanitarian**

30 June 2022

**Member states must tackle inequality to harness the benefits of migration**

*There has been too little reflection on the types of policy interventions that would be needed to address the inequalities associated with migration. The new challenge is to reaffirm the commitments of the Member States to the Global Compact on Migration.*

**Heaven Crawley**

**United Nations University**

5 July 2022

**New WHO Global Evidence Review on Health and Migration underscores how the implementation of inclusive immunization plans is critical for Member States to achieve universal health coverage**

*The variation in existing policies on the inclusion of refugees and migrants in national vaccine plans is a barrier for health security.*

**World Health Organization**

12 July 2022

**The missing link: Promoting refugees' skills-based mobility within Europe**

*With recent policies softening the EU's strict stance on the rights of intra-EU mobility for refugees, it may be time for them to use their skills for their benefit and that of receiving countries.*

**Martin Wagner et al**

**Transnational Figurations of Displacement**

13 July 2022

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

**The United Nations Secretary-General's action agenda on internal displacement**

*Following up to the Report of the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on Internal Displacement, this report aims to address the current migration crisis by laying out new ways to improve action in the migration sphere.*

**United Nations**

2022

**Regional consultation on COVID -19 and its ramifications on migrants' return and sustainable reintegration policy**

*This report pulls together a set of recommendations for countries to ensure safe and dignified return, readmission, and reintegration mechanisms for migrants that can be applied to crises beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**United Nations**

2022

## EVENTS &amp; ANNOUNCEMENTS

**Is it possible to predict future forced displacement?**

*This podcast explores if aid responses could be improved if the forced displacements of the future were more accurately predicted.*

**Recorded Podcast**

5 May 2022

**Roundtable on Protecting the Rights of Irregular Migrants: Policy Dilemmas and Strategies**

*This webinar discussed the wide range of conditions and vulnerabilities experienced by irregular migrants, and how to provide more effective protections of the rights of irregular migrants while taking into account the laws and policies of their host countries.*

**Recorded Webinar**

24 May 2022