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Technology in Migration Policy and Practice

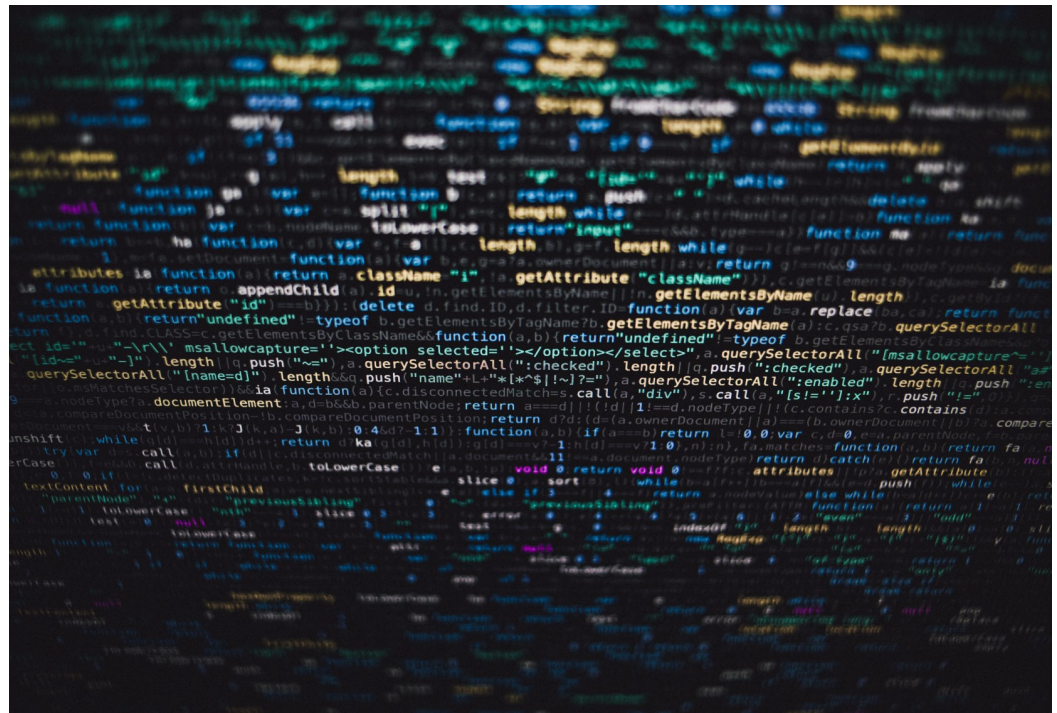


Photo Credits: Markus Spiske via Pexel

The technological changes that have heralded the 4th Industrial Revolution are continuously reshaping almost every part of human life, from society to politics and the economy. The area of international migration, increasingly described as one of the defining areas of interest and study of the 21st century, is no exception. According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there were over 271 million recorded international migrants with more than 28 million refugees globally in 2019. Even in the ASEAN region, there were over 662,000 recorded international migrants, a third of whom are refugees. As such the nature of technological advances in the field of migration, including irregular migration, should be of particular interest to those who work in policy-making and practice.

In an effort to better manage irregular migration and its effects on society,

governments have been increasingly turning to the use of technology in their migration policy and practices. For example, in 2018, the Swiss State Secretariat for Migration started a pilot programme to place 1,000 asylum seekers using an algorithm, rather than a random [allocation of living areas as is the usual policy](#). In efforts to increase chances of social integration, the algorithm considers the background of individuals (including personal data such as area of residence, training and employment, age, countries of origin and arrival dates) in assigning them to areas where they have the highest probability of employment.

With increasing access to sophisticated technologies at lower costs, refugees themselves are also turning to technological solutions to their problems. Blockchain technology in particular is being used to solve the problem of refugees lacking legal identification docu-

ments. Based in Malaysia, the Rohingya Project is working on creating digital identities for Rohingya refugees to solve a key problem facing the diaspora in their host countries – financial exclusion. As the Rohingya are effectively stateless, they lack recognised identity documentation, which tends to restrict them to the ‘shadow economy’, further increasing their vulnerability to exploitation. Having digital identities would enable them to potentially access public services including education, healthcare and banking.

However, these technologies can also work against those they intend to help. As digital identities are likely to contain sensitive information, they could also be used to keep track of and/or further increase surveillance and control of these vulnerable communities in the hands of corporations and governments. This is already happening elsewhere as seen in the case of [private data analytics company Palantir Technologies](#) which develops technologies that are being used to track and enforce deportations of irregular migrants in the US.

COVID-19 has also exposed the potential abuses of the use of technology in migration policies. In the case of the UK, their contact tracing application uses [a centralised model for the data it collects](#), meaning a significant amount of data including proximity data can be shared with [outsourced private companies](#). The data of users who test positive for COVID-19 will also be kept on the system for 20 years. Although the UK’s National Health Service has said that this information will not be used for non-COVID-19 related purposes, the UK government has previously made [data useful for immigration enforcement purposes exempt from these data protection laws](#). This exemption could very well come into effect, post-pandemic as well.

Some countries have gone one step further in the discussion, with “immunity passports”. For example, Estonia has created an “immunity passport” app to allow individuals to show proof of their COVID-19 antibodies and/or vaccination records to others. However, scientific consensus around the accuracy of antibody tests is still pending; moreover, this can unnecessarily

heighten discrimination against vulnerable communities. Individuals from countries that do not implement such immunity passport programmes could be barred from travelling to countries that enforce them, further marginalising vulnerable refugees who may have limited access to such programmes and/or documentation.

The reshaping of migration policies and practices due to technology has intensified in the 21st century. While advances in technology have clear benefits to both policy-makers and migrants themselves, there are also drawbacks. As seen during this current COVID-19 pandemic, while useful as a tool for contact-tracing, the normalisation of surveillance technologies can also quickly turn these tools into symbols of oppression, denying already vulnerable refugee communities agency and dignity. As technology continues to grow and provide solutions to certain problems, they should not be regarded as *the* cure, but only as part of a cure with political, economic and social dimensions needed as well.

Suggested Readings

- Bansak, K et. al., 2018, “Improving refugee integration through data-driven algorithmic assessment”, *Science*, Vol 359, no. 6373, pp. 325-329, <<https://science.sciencemag.org/content/359/6373/325?rss=1>>.
- Gelb, S and Krishnan, A, 2018, “Technology, migration and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”, ODI, <<https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/resource-documents/12395.pdf>>.
- Greenfield, C 2020, “As governments build advanced surveillance systems to push borders out, will travel and migration become unequal for some groups”, *Migration Policy Institute*, <<https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/governments-build-advanced-surveillance-systems>>.
- Molnar, P, “COVID-19: Can technology become a tool of oppression and surveillance”, *Open Democracy*, 1 May 2020, <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/pandemic-border/covid-19-can-technology-become-tool-oppression-and-surveillance/>>.
- Whitelaw, S et al., 2020, “Applications of digital technology in COVID-19 pandemic planning and response”, *The Lancet*, <[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500\(20\)30142-4/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/landig/article/PIIS2589-7500(20)30142-4/fulltext)>.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate change will make world too hot for 60 percent of fish species

A study found that up to 60 percent of fish species around the world would be unable to cope with temperatures in their geographical range by 2100, when different stages of their lives are taken into consideration.

Adam Vaughan

New Scientist

2 July 2020

Curb climate change, protect environment to prevent future pandemics, countries told

Key trends responsible for coronavirus type diseases, known as zoonotic diseases, include rising demand for animal protein, extraction of natural resources, urbanisation, intensive and unsustainable farming, exploitation of wildlife, increased travel and transportation, food supply changes and climate change.

Nita Bhalla

Thomson Reuters Foundation

The Jakarta Post

7 July 2020

Even if we start to fix climate change, the proof may not show up for 30 years

Even if humans sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions now — cutting carbon dioxide, methane and other pollutants by at least 5 per cent or more a year — it could still take decades before it is clear those actions are beginning to slow the rate of the Earth's warming.

Chris Mooney and Brady Dennis

The Washington Post

8 July 2020

Global Acceleration Framework to speed up water and sanitation access for all

The UN launched a new mechanism that outlines more efficient and coordinated support to countries to ensure global availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by the end of the decade.

UN News

9 July 2020

Global temperatures could exceed crucial 1.5 C target in the next five years

There is an increasing chance that annual global temperatures could exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels over the next five years, new climate predictions from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) say.

Amy Woodyatt

CNN

9 July 2020

ICRC report: Climate change and conflict are a cruel combination stalking the world's most vulnerable

Countries affected by conflict are also disproportionately impacted by climate change, a double threat that pushes people out of their homes, disrupts food production, cuts off supplies, amplifies diseases and weakens health-care services. This has revealed the vulnerability of global systems to protect the environment, health and economy.

Climate Centre

9 July 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Gender and climate change in the context of COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has reminded us that responses to global problems need to be founded on sustainability and inclusivity. Therefore, while designing the recovery, we need to ensure that a sustainable response provides benefits to all — women, men, girls, boys, vulnerable, marginalized, those living with disabilities, aging population and others.

EMPower, UNEP and UN Women

2020

The global e-waste monitor 2020: Quantities, flows and the circular economy potential

The world dumped a record 53.6 million tons of e-waste last year. Just 17.4 percent was recycled. Even countries with a formal e-waste management system in place are confronted with relatively low collection and recycling rates.

Vanessa Forti, Cornelis Peter Baldé, Ruediger Kuehr and Garam Bel

Bonn/Geneva/Rotterdam: UNU/UNITAR - co-hosted SCYCLE Programme, ITU & ISWA

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

8th Dialogue on Action for Climate Empowerment - Asia and the Pacific

The Dialogue is to provide a forum for Parties and other non-Party stakeholders to advance the discussions on recommendations and views on future work to enhance implementation of Action for Climate Empowerment.

Bonn, Germany (Virtual)

26 August 2020

XVII World Water Congress

The objective of the World Water Congress is to provide a meeting place to share experiences, promote discussion, and to present new knowledge, research results and new developments in the field of water sciences around the world.

Daegu, Republic of Korea

13-17 September 2021

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Column: IEA sees a post-coronavirus renewable future, Asia may not

Despite the weight of evidence falling on the side of switching to renewables, the one advantage fossils fuels have is that they are well-entrenched in Asian economies and have the ears of decision makers in governments.

Clyde Russell

Reuters

18 June 2020

Southeast Asia energy buyers grab chance to lock in green deals

Investment in renewable energy in Southeast Asia is holding up despite the economic pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many business buyers seizing chances to lock in low-cost power supplies for the long term.

Akane Okutsu

Nikkei Asian Review

21 June 2020

Cusi still pushes for nuclear program

The Philippine Energy Department continues to invite investors in the power sector, including nuclear energy, to attain energy security given the anticipated increase in future demand.

Alena Mae Flores

Manila Standard

24 June 2020

End of an era? Series of US setbacks bodes ill for big oil, gas pipeline projects

The latest setbacks have increased the difficulty for developers of billions of dollars worth of pipeline projects in getting needed permits and community support. Environmental activists and landowners opposed to projects have become good at blocking them in court.

Valerie Volcovici and Stephanie Kelly

Channel News Asia

8 July 2020

COVID-19 and low carbon electricity: Lessons for the future

The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the operation of power systems across the globe and offered a glimpse of a future electricity mix dominated by low carbon sources.

Bertrand Magné, Hal Turton, and Henri Pailere

International Atomic Energy Agency

9 July 2020

China's era of mega-dams is ending as solar and wind power rise

As China's dam builders pack up their tools at home, they are expanding overseas. Chinese hydro companies are investing heavily in other countries in South Asia, South East Asia, Africa and Latin America.

Bloomberg

The Straits Times

4 July 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Building a culture of prevention for occupational safety and health in the face of a pandemic: Lessons from the nuclear safety culture

This NTS Insight examines how best practices and policies in promoting a nuclear safety culture can be applied in integrating a culture of prevention with occupational health and safety management in Southeast Asia.

Julius Cesar Trajano

Singapore: RSIS Centre for Non-Traditional Security Studies

2020

Nuclear safety and security during a pandemic

This paper provides an overview of country specific reactions and draws preliminary conclusions about the safety and security of nuclear facilities worldwide.

Christoph Pistner, et al.

Vienna: International Nuclear Risk Assessment

Group

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Future of Nuclear Energy

This webinar discussed how nuclear-based power will struggle to maintain its market share as solar and wind energy grow exponentially.

Recorded Webinar

1 July 2020

COVID-19 and Global Energy Security

This webinar explored the fundamentals and changes in the energy market, and covered physical security of energy infrastructure and cyber security.

Recorded Webinar

22 June 2020

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

China faces a rice bowl dilemma after Covid

Because of exposed food system vulnerabilities amid the COVID-19 pandemic, China has pushed for strengthening the 'national rice bowl' of self-production. This does not come without challenges, though.

Clara Ferreira Marques

Bloomberg Opinion

22 June 2020

US rebuffs China, rejecting links between Covid-19 and food

China has asked that overseas suppliers sign a document complying with food safety standards in order to prevent COVID-19 transmission. US officials are contesting this, arguing for lack of evidence of food-related transmissions.

Mike Dorning

Bloomberg

25 June 2020

Covid-induced food insecurity has exposed under-investment in food tech, says sustainability entrepreneur

COVID 19's disruptions on global food supply chains are revealing opportunities for investments in new technologies for local production, like bio-engineered and plant-based meat substitutes.

Robin Hicks

Eco-Business

9 July 2020

UAE agricultural firm uses technology to help with food security

The firm, SmartAcres, is leveraging Korea-made vertical farming technology to help boost the UAE's food security.

Kateryna Kadabashy

Arab News

13 July 2020

Why sustainable food systems are needed in a post-COVID world

The post-COVID 19 world offers an opportunity for an 'economic-reset', where more investments can be drawn into making the food system more resilient to future shocks.

Nicoletta Batini, James Lomax and Divya Mehra

UN Environment Programme

14 July 2020

FAO launches the new COVID-19 Response and Recovery Programme outlining seven key priority areas

The FAO's new program is set to prevent the occurrence of a global food emergency during and after the COVID-19 pandemic while working on medium to long-term development response for food security and nutrition.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

14 July 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2020: Sustainability in action

With less than 10 years to go, this June 2020 report shows that significant acceleration is needed in securing healthy and productive oceans, if the 2030 SDG targets are to be met.

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

Rome: UN FAO

2020

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2020. Transforming food systems for affordable healthy diets

Apart from the annual updates on nutritional and food security indicators, this 2020 report also highlights the negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on vulnerable groups.

FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO

Rome: UN FAO

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webinar: Implications of the COVID-19 Pandemic for Food Security and Resilience in Africa

The speaker assessed the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security in Africa, and what can be done to prevent a food security emergency.

Recorded Webinar

23 April 2020

Financing Agriculture and Food Innovations in South East Asia Post-COVID 19

In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, this forum identified shifts in agricultural and food trade in the region; ways to finance new technology innovations and scale up existing ones; collaborations to future-proof food and agricultural ecosystems in Southeast Asia; and the role of digital technologies.

Recorded Webinar

6 July 2020

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Early warning systems: Stumbling blocks post-pandemic

Countries will need to address challenges around risk perception gaps and 'warning fatigue' in order to raise their early warning systems' effectiveness. Doing so will help them avoid strategic surprise from a future pandemic.

Manoj Harjani

RSIS Commentaries

16 June 2020

'Infodemic': More than a public health crisis

COVID-19 demonstrates that a pandemic is more than just a public health crisis – it is also a communications emergency. With clear, effective policy planning and implementation, public messaging can be a highly effective way of mobilising citizens to tackle COVID-19 together.

Dymples Leong

RSIS Commentaries

17 June 2020

Pandemic and the ethics of care

States and agencies have responded in different ways to the COVID-19 global pandemic. In view of the dynamic evolution of this virus, the Ethics of Care (EoC) theory can be applied to manage the effect of this crisis on cross-sections of populations.

Sabariah Binte Mohamad Hussin

RSIS Commentaries

24 June 2020

Hyper-surveillance under COVID-19

Modern medicine requires the surveillance of a large concentration of patients so that, with careful nurturing, their self-regulated behaviour begins to model the intentions of authorities. But it is important that the general public becomes aware of the implications of the intrusive climate of hyper-surveillance that is advancing stealthily in the name of tackling a global emergency.

Tamara Nair and Alan Chong

East Asia Forum

4 July 2020

Immunity to COVID-19 could be lost in months, UK study suggests

According to a study, people who have recovered from COVID-19 may lose their immunity to the disease within months, suggesting the virus could reinfect people year after year, like common colds.

Ian Sample

The Guardian

12 July 2020

COVID-19 crisis may get 'worse and worse and worse', warns WHO

The WHO warned that the raging coronavirus pandemic has the potential to get far worse if all nations do not adhere to basic healthcare precautions.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

13 July 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Modelling the effects of Wuhan's lockdown during COVID-19, China

This study presents a simple model based on online data on population movements and confirmed numbers of people infected to quantify the consequences of the control measures in Wuhan on the ongoing spread of COVID-19 across mainland China. It aims to make a preliminary assessment of the efforts of the public health authorities in 29 provinces and 44 prefecture-level cities during the epidemic.

Zheming Yuan et al.,

Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, Vol. 98, No. 7

2020

Lockdown timing and efficacy in controlling COVID-19 using mobile phone tracking

This study used processed mobile phone tracking data to measure mobility restriction. It did this by relating mobile phone data to the number of new SARS-CoV-2 positive cases, detected daily in the three most affected Italian regions, Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna. This was over the period of 1 February to 6 April 2020, when two subsequent lockdowns with increasing intensity were implemented by the Italian government.

Marco Vinceti et al.

EClinicalMedicine,

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclim.2020.100457>

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Developing and Accomplishing COVID-19 Exit Strategy Plan

This webinar discussed actions that different countries are starting to take as they ease out of their lockdowns, and the implications of these exit strategies.

Recorded Webinar

16 June 2020

Current Global Efforts on COVID-19 Research and Development

This webinar shed light on where we are now with global efforts on R&D, equitable access to new COVID-19 health technologies and what is needed as societies learn to live with the virus.

Recorded Webinar

2 July 2020

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Coronavirus forces disaster planning rethink as storm threats rise

The dual threats of severe storms and COVID-19 have strained disaster preparedness efforts globally and forced communities to rethink how they prepare.

Catherine Davison

The New Humanitarian

16 June 2020

A 'natural disaster' on top of a pandemic - preparedness in the face of cascading uncertainties

COVID-19 responses need to take into account not just epidemiological issues concerning how to reduce the spread of infection but also how to address food and livelihood insecurities of vulnerable populations when these intersect with the impacts of seasonal uncertainties and vagaries in different parts of the world.

Shilpi Srivastava, Lyla Mehta and Shibaji Bose

Institute of Development Studies

25 June 2020

Establishing humanitarian lanes during COVID-19

Humanitarian crises create a temporary spike in the demand for certain relief items. Such demand has already been exacerbated by the disruption of supply chains and travel routes resulting in inadequate relief to affected populations. The establishment of 'humanitarian lanes' to facilitate the quick transfer and distribution of humanitarian relief must be prioritised.

Alistair D. B. Cook and Christopher Chen

East Asia Forum

30 June 2020

The language of humanitarian action

In recent decades, the humanitarian sector has become more attuned to the importance of language in reflecting power dynamics. Accordingly, there has been an attempt to use language that focuses on the engagement of those affected by crisis. As we reconsider the role of international organisations and their staff, the language of international surge capacity also warrants reconsideration.

Melanie Book

Centre for Humanitarian Leadership

6 July 2020

Japan city training for foreigners to be leaders in time of disasters

The Sendai Tourism, Convention and International Association hopes foreign residents with good Japanese language skills will convey information, such as evacuation instructions from government entities, to those who do not understand Japanese well.

Kyodo News

11 July 2020

Decolonising aid, again

This year, calls for reform of the humanitarian system are proliferating. What is unusual is that they are not just calls for technocratic fixes but for urgent engagement with real world issues: a new model for humanitarian aid that puts anti-racism at its centre.

Paul Curran

The New Humanitarian

13 July 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Communities getting involved: Supporting community leadership in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic

This piece provides an overview of UNHCR's approach to engaging local communities to participate in prevention and preparation measures related to COVID-19.

UNHCR

2020

Strengthening the capacity of ASEAN Member States to design and implement risk-informed and shock responsive social protection systems for resilience - Lao PDR Case Study

This report presents the findings of a study conducted on Lao PDR's capacity in developing risk-informed and shock responsive social protection measures to increase national resilience. It is part of an ASEAN-wide study.

WFP, European Union and Oxford Policy Management

2019

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic: Building Resilience to Cascading Disasters through Regional Cooperation in South Asia

South Asia is facing a situation in which the impacts of COVID-19 are being compounded by the disasters caused by the current monsoon season. This webinar looks at the various digital and analytical innovations that can support the region's response to these cascading disasters.

Webinar

22 July 2020

5th World Congress on Disaster Management

The World Congress on Disaster Management (WCDM) is a unique initiative of the Delhi and Disaster Management Initiatives and Convergence Society (DMICS) to bring researchers, policy makers and practitioners from around the world in the same platform to discuss various challenging issues of disaster risk management.

New Delhi, India

9-12 December 2020

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Traffickers demand ransoms for Rohingya held at sea in Southeast Asia

Human traffickers are holding Rohingya refugees hostage while demanding money from their families to stop their relatives from being abandoned, killed or harmed. The current impasse between countries who are no longer accepting Rohingya refugees, and the refugees that attempt to reach them by boat, may have contributed to these ransom demands.

Naimul Karim
Reuters

15 June 2020

Remittances and beyond: Covid-19 impacts all forms of migrant contributions to development

COVID-19 has led to a significant drop in migrant remittances this year, which will affect not just their families, but also the GDP of their home countries. Mobility restrictions in particular will cost them jobs in the present, and the ability to travel for work in the future.

Deepali Fernandes
IOM

15 June 2020

In limbo in ASEAN: Pandemic and irregular migration

COVID-19 has led to stricter border control measures around the world. These measures have had a particularly harsh impact on irregular migrants.

S.Nanthini
RSIS Commentaries

25 June 2020

Lost in translation: Language barriers and the Rohingya response

Communication has proven to be a key challenge in aid response for the Rohingya. This is particularly important when it comes to healthcare where mistranslations can mean the difference between life or death, especially during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Verena Hölzl
The New Humanitarian

25 June 2020

Despite COVID-19 setbacks, displaced Kachin women keep their families afloat

As COVID-19 continues to spread in the region, Kachin women living in displacement camps face ever-increasing restrictions on their livelihood options.

Ring Nu Awng et.al
The New Humanitarian

2 July 2020

Nearly 600 Nepali workers in Malaysia to get refunds for their recruitment fees

A leading gloves making company in Malaysia has agreed to reimburse the money its workers paid to local sub-agents and recruiting agencies to secure jobs in the company. With widespread forced labour in the industry, this remediation programme is a breakthrough.

Chandan Kumar Mandal
The Kathmandu Post

13 July 2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Fertility, mortality, migration, and population scenarios for 195 countries and territories from 2017 to 2100: A forecasting analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study

Anticipating potential patterns in future populations levels is crucial for governments and other stakeholders to plan for the future. This article looks at various factors such as migration and fertility levels that might affect populations sizes and age structures.

Stein Emil Vollset et. al

2020

Policy brief: COVID-19 and people on the move

The impact of the COVID-19 has been disproportionately hard on groups who were already vulnerable, including irregular migrants. This brief presents COVID-19's threefold impact on these groups, as a health crisis, a socio-economic crisis and a protection crisis.

United Nations

2020

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

MPC Webinar: Gender-Based Violence and Migration in Times of Covid-19. Perspectives from across the globe

This webinar brought to fore how the current health crisis has affected the exposure of female migrants and refugees to sexual and gender-based violence.

Recorded Webinar

1 July 2020

Migration Methodologies: Challenges, Innovations and Conceptual Implications for Asian Migrations

This workshop focuses on innovative methodological approaches to migration flows within as well as into and out of Asia.

Singapore

30 November 2020 – 1 December 2020