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Through the Cracks: How Migrants Cope during the Pandemic



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Since its emergence in December 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted almost every part of modern life – from the way we work to travelling - severely affecting already vulnerable communities. With pandemic responses significantly disrupting human mobility in particular, migrants have been one of the hardest-hit communities. Although vaccines against COVID-19 have been made available, not everyone has equal access to COVID-19 vaccines, thereby making any protection incomplete at best.

Travel (or the lack of) during the pandemic

Worldwide travel has since slowed to a trickle with [228 countries, territories and areas](#) still with various forms of restriction and/or conditions for entry. This has affected the ability of migrants to travel, with some estimates suggesting that the pandemic may have slowed the growth of the number of international migrants by

[around two million by mid-2020](#), 27 per cent less than expected since mid-2019.

The restrictions and conditions placed on travel and entry have particularly affected labour migrants, irregular or otherwise, with their ability to earn limited. A major fear during the beginning of the pandemic was its effect on remittances, with [33 per cent of migrant workers in 2019](#) and [three of the top five remittance recipient countries](#) are from the Asia-Pacific. Any significant decrease in remittances could be disastrous – especially to poor households. With most migrants in the region being temporary migrant workers, the [loss of jobs and wages among them have been particularly high](#). This will further endanger progress made in poverty reduction. According to [World Bank estimates](#), the global extreme poverty rate has increased for the first time since 1998 due to the likelihood of between 71 million and 100 million people being

pushed into extreme poverty in 2020.

Access to healthcare

Another troubling issue facing migrants is their access – or lack of – to vaccines. Although migrants face the same health threats from COVID-19 as their host populations, they are particularly vulnerable due to potential discriminatory measures. This is further heightened for low-skilled, low-paid migrants. With most of them drawn to urban centres in search of work, they also tend to live in overcrowded facilities with poor sanitation – making them more vulnerable to the spread of disease.

While these migrant workers are vital to the overall infrastructure of the countries in which they work, their low status among the community, language barrier and high costs limit their ability to access services such as legal services and especially, healthcare.

As such, equitable vaccine distribution is especially vital to these communities. Although there has been constant emphasis to vaccinate the entire population in a jurisdiction in order to avoid a [small cluster of non-vaccinated people undermining herd immunity](#), not all countries are including regular migrants in their national vaccination campaigns – let alone refugees, asylum seekers or irregular migrants. Moreover, even in countries which grant migrants access to vaccines, [in-practice inclusion may differ from official policy](#). This could be due to a number of reasons including a lack of clarity in national vaccine deployment plans, policymakers avoiding xenophobic reactions from the public, and the inability of migrants to have the required documents.

However, in some countries, migrants – particularly those working in front-line, high-risk areas – have been prioritised.

For example, in 2020, Singapore experienced a sudden massive surge in COVID-19 cases among its migrant worker population. In order to prevent another similar situation, Singapore included [migrant workers in the early parts of its national campaign](#) along with other workers in critical functions.

COVID-19 has exposed the gaps in our system. It has highlighted the critical role of migrant workers in the region as well as the vulnerabilities they are subject to. While the creation of effective vaccines has offered us a cautious glimpse of the light at the end of the tunnel – of finally emerging from this pandemic - it is important to keep in mind the need for equity in any response to the pandemic. After all, COVID-19 has taught us that until *all* people – including those most vulnerable – are well-protected, the journey towards a ‘New Normal’ will be slow and frustrating.

Suggested Readings

- Dilip Ratha, Eung Ju Kim, Sonia Plaza, and Ganesh Seshan, 2021, *Migration and Development Brief 34: Resilience: COVID-19 Crisis through a Migration Lens*, KNOMAD-World Bank, Washington, DC, <https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Migration%20and%20Development%20Brief%2034_1.pdf>.
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, 2020, *International Migration 2020 Highlights*, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/pd/sites/www.un.org.development.desa.pd/files/undesa_pd_2020_international_migration_highlights.pdf>.
- United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), 2020, *Asia-Pacific Migration Report 2020: Assessing Implementation of the Global Compact for Migration*, <<https://www.unescap.org/sites/default/d8files/knowledge-products/APMR2020-Report-v18-3-E.pdf>>.
- World Bank, 2020, *Projected Poverty Impacts of COVID-19 (coronavirus)*, <<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/461601591649316722-0090022020/original/ProjectedpovertyimpactsofCOVID19.pdf>>.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Sri Lanka minister blames marine life deaths on chemical leak from burnt ship

A large number of sea creatures like dolphins and sea turtles have perished due to the fire aboard a container ship carrying hazardous chemicals. It eventually sank off Sri Lanka's coast.

The Times of India

24 June 2021

Climate change has gotten deadly. It will get worse

Researchers who specialise in the science of attribution say they are "virtually certain" that warming from human greenhouse gas emissions played a pivotal role in heatwave that hit Washington state and western Canada.

Sarah Kaplan

The Washington Post

3 July 2021

This zero-energy device collects water from the air

Researchers have developed a condenser for countries where water is in short supply. Theirs is the first zero-energy solution for harvesting water from the atmosphere throughout the 24-hour daily cycle.

Fabio Bergamin

World Economic Forum

4 July 2021

Sixty years of climate change warnings: The signs that were missed (and ignored)

The effects of 'weird weather' were already being felt in the 1960s, but scientists linking fossil fuels with climate change were dismissed as prophets of doom.

Alice Bell

The Guardian

5 July 2021

Climate change: Media leaders' bigger test beyond Covid-19

Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change will emerge as an even bigger challenge for newsroom leaders to cover well, across various domains ranging from environmental to political impact.

Calvin Yang

The Straits Times

6 July 2021

French senate blocks referendum on climate change

The French Senate has voted to block a referendum promised by President Emmanuel Macron on whether to enshrine the fight against climate change in the French constitution. The Senate is dominated by the opposition conservatives.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

6 July 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Making peace with nature

Environmental changes are undermining hard-won development gains. They are impeding progress towards ending poverty and hunger, reducing inequalities and promoting sustainable economic growth, work for all and peaceful and inclusive societies.

United Nations Environment Programme

2021

World Bank Group climate change action plan 2021–2025: Supporting green, resilient, and inclusive development

The World Bank will support countries and private sector clients to maximise the impact of climate finance, consider the vital importance of natural capital, biodiversity, and ecosystems services, and increase support for nature-based solutions.

World Bank Group

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RSIS Webinar on "Climate Change and Communities – a Human Security Perspective"

This webinar aims to bring together a panel of experts to discuss how the issue of climate change can be viewed through a human security lens. It seeks to investigate how an alternative framing, in addition to the current narratives around climate change, might ensure the security and stability of communities in a new climate future.

Webinar

28 July 2021

XVII World Water Congress

The World Water Congress provides 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

29 November - 3 December 2021

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

North Korea hackers target South Korea nuclear think tank

The breach of the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute (KAERI) took place on 14 May involving 13 Internet addresses including one traced to Kimsuky, a North Korean hacking group.

Reuters

Channel News Asia

18 June 2021

Bangladesh scraps 10 coal-fired power plants

According to an energy ministry official, the decision was taken in the light of technological changes and as dozens of countries suspended new coal-fired power projects due to their impact on the environment.

AFP

The Straits Times

27 June 2021

Asia's new coal plant plans jeopardise climate targets, report says

China, India, Indonesia, Japan and Vietnam plan to build more than 600 new coal-fired power projects, with a combined capacity of more than 300 gigawatts.

Reuters

The Straits Times

30 June 2021

How Singapore and Asia's tech sector can lead in renewable energy adoption

With the growing importance of clean energy, there is an urgency for the region's Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector to seek sustainable alternatives, to ensure continued economic growth in an increasingly environmentally-conscious Asia.

Myriam Akhoun

The Business Times

28 June 2021

Carbon capture technology an important pillar for Southeast Asia to tackle climate change, say experts

The region would need to fast accelerate its collective investment in carbon capture technologies, to the tune of an average of US\$1 billion per year between 2025 and 2030, in order to meet Paris Agreement's temperature targets.

Jack Board

Channel News Asia

5 July 2021

IAEA to review and monitor the safety of water release at Fukushima Daiichi

The Agency's involvement before, during and after the water disposal will provide confidence – in Japan and beyond – that it takes place in line with the international safety standards which aim to protect people and the environment from radiological hazards.

International Atomic Energy Agency

8 July 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Review of policies and measures for energy efficiency in Indonesia's industrial sector

This policy brief aims to capture better the potential benefit of implementing the energy efficiency programme in Indonesian industrial sector, government, industry players, and financial intermediaries to improve industrial energy efficiency and strengthen the economy.

Diana Vitonia and Rio Jon Piter Silitonga

Jakarta: ASEAN Centre for Energy

2021

Effects of electricity demand reductions under a carbon pricing regime on emissions: lessons from COVID-19

This article reveals the importance of a carbon price, so that a demand reduction can offset large amounts of emissions by displacing coal at the margin. Authors derive several policy implications to draw lessons from the pandemic.

Adhurim Haxhimusa and Mario Liebensteiner

Energy Policy, Vol. 156

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

RSIS Webinar on "Nuclear Security Governance in the Asia-Pacific: Pathways to Cooperation"

This webinar will explore national and regional pathways towards building a robust framework for nuclear security governance in the Asia Pacific. It will feature nuclear security experts to discuss sustaining commitments and actions from Southeast Asia, the United States, Japan, South Korea, China and other key regional nuclear cooperation networks in the Asia-Pacific.

Webinar

29 July 2021

Launching of ASEAN Nuclear Energy Portal

This event, organised by the ASEAN Centre for Energy, was used to launch the portal which aims to increase understanding of civilian nuclear energy. Several speakers highlighted the potential of nuclear energy for power generation in the region.

Recorded Webinar

3 June 2021

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Japan's farm ministry sets up new bureau to expand food exports

Japan's declining population is causing a shrinking market for its agricultural products. This has prompted its agricultural ministry to launch a new bureau that will negotiate and coordinate with export-destination countries in order to expand Japanese food trade sector's reach.

Kyodo News
The Mainichi
1 July 2021

Why ASEAN needs to reduce its non-tariff measures on agri-food imports

The authors offer evidence on why non-tariff barriers such as sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures need to be removed, citing price-raising effects on food imports, and the significant exposure by agri-food exporters in the region to these measures.

Sithanoxay Suvannaphakdy and Neo Guo Wei Kevin
The Diplomat
2 July 2021

Explaining North Korea's food crises in the context of food security and sustainable food systems

The author argues that the food insecurity situation in North Korea is brought about primarily by poor governance including "improper incentivisation, poor markets and export-import policies".

Preeti Kapuria
Observer Research Foundation
2 July 2021

Can millets ensure future food security in a warming world?

This article proposes that given millets' climate-resilient characteristics, they have the potential to solve global nutritional security challenges, as a sustainable alternative to major cereals today.

Mahima Jain
Devex
6 July 2021

Explainer: What's at stake in WTO talks on fishing rules?

Fisheries require a moderated rate of fishing to regenerate; however, countries are engaging in a "race to bottom" in providing fuel subsidies so that fishing fleets can travel farther to capture more fish. There are doubts, however, whether the WTO talks this month can draw this issue to a close.

Emma Farge
Reuters
9 July 2021

China's first 'space rice' that made round trip to moon yields grain

To enrich China's food security, scientists at the South China Agricultural University (Guangdong Province) are exploring "space rice", which can have potentially higher productivity levels as a result of cosmic radiation.

Fan Anqi
Global Times
11 July 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Food systems at risk: Transformative adaptation for long-term food security

This report provides bold "transformative" approaches to boosting food security, including shifting the locations of where specific crops are produced according to shifting climate conditions, and transitions from fisheries towards aquaculture in certain cases.

Rebecca Carter et al.
Washington D.C.: World Resources Institute.
2021

The impact of Covid-19 on livelihoods and food security

This publication highlights COVID-19's impacts on food security across sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and South Asia (Pakistan), and presents ongoing projects to develop adaptive, evidence-based policy responses to the pandemic.

John Thompson et al.
Covid-19 Responses for Equity (CORE) Research for Policy and Practice Report, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

World Food Convention 2021

Themed "Science for Society: How to secure food in a sustainable way", the convention highlighted the role of technologies such as digital agriculture and carbon-farming, in ensuring the food sector is equipped for 21st century challenges.

Recorded Webinar
24 June 2021

Food Systems at Risk: Transformative Adaptation for Long-Term Food Security

This webinar discussed the need for strategic investments in resilient food systems to feed a growing global population amid climate change, shifting from "incremental" to "transformative" adaptation.

Recorded Webinar
29 June 2021

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Opinion: Global health security must be tied to health systems

Global health security aims to prevent, detect, and respond to infectious disease threats. When it comes to public health crises, global health security efforts — while essential — will fall short unless concretely tied to broader health systems' strengthening initiatives.

Arush Lal

Devex

17 June 2021

Call for steps to transform global healthcare and financing system

More resources and enhanced mandates for global institutions, as well as a new way of funding, are needed to transform the global healthcare and financing system, a committee of leading global experts has said.

Grace Ho

The Straits Times

10 July 2021

Machine learning model from the largest US COVID-19 dataset predicts disease severity

The new study looked at risk factors for severe cases of COVID-19 and traced the progression of the disease over time. The authors built machine learning models to predict which hospitalized patients would develop severe disease based on information collected on their first day in a hospital.

Nicole Wetsman

The Verge

13 July 2021

Battle for oxygen as coup-hit Myanmar faces its most severe Covid outbreak

The outbreak could not have come at a worse time, after the military coup caused hospitals to collapse and threw the vaccination campaign into chaos.

Rebecca Ratcliffe

The Guardian

14 July 2021

Covid-19 rules: How six countries fared after easing Covid rules

Several countries around the world have already tried easing their coronavirus restrictions this year - with mixed results.

BBC

15 July 2021

Covid: What do we know about China's coronavirus vaccines?

Chinese vaccine producers Sinovac and Sinopharm have signed on to global vaccine sharing scheme Covax, which aims to distribute vaccines to poorer countries.

BBC

15 July 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Emergency care with lay responders in underserved populations: A systematic review

This study assesses the individual and community health effects of task shifting for emergency care in low-resource settings and underserved populations worldwide.

Aaron M Orkin et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 7
2021

Public health challenges and opportunities after COVID-19

This article argues that much more complex socioeconomic modelling needs to be considered when designing and evaluating possible public health interventions that have major behavioral implications.

Pier Luigi Sacco and Manlio De Domenico

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 99, No. 7
2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

COVID-19 Updates from Singapore

Returning for a second season, the "COVID-19: Updates from Singapore" webinar series gathered the world's leading clinicians, scientists, public health officials and policy makers to discuss the latest medical and scientific findings concerning COVID-19.

Recorded Webinar

25 June 2021

Management of COVID-19 risks in immigration detention

This webinar, presented by Edward Santow, Human Rights Commissioner, and a panel of experts, focused on the management of COVID-19 in Australia's immigration detention network. It banked on the Commission's 'Management of COVID-19 risks in immigration detention' review, released in June 2021.

Recorded Webinar

5 July 2021

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Indian cities prepare for floods with predictive technology

Floods in India's urban areas have caused significant damage to people and property over the years. Now, these cities are investing in high-tech tools in an attempt to better model and forecast these natural hazards.

Deepa Padmanaban

EOS

15 June 2021

Humanitarian 'Do No Harm': plugging gaps in data governance

Humanitarian actors must extend their principle of "do no harm" to their protection of data. After all, while data are useful for humanitarians to help people in need, these same data can also be used to harm them.

S. Nanthini

RSIS Commentary

18 June 2021

Q&A: how COVID-19 response plans sideline women

Women are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 but are often excluded from the planning of humanitarian activities. Not only do these exclusions undermine organisations who work with women, these also result in responses that fail to address the needs of half the population.

Irwin Loy

The New Humanitarian

22 June 2021

COVID-19 and climate change top the agenda at UN humanitarian talks

The top issues being discussed at this year's UN Economic and Social Council meeting include ethical data management, climate change and COVID-19. This meeting comes after an extremely eventful year – one where humanitarian needs peaked while aid financing dipped.

Jessica Alexander

The New Humanitarian

22 June 2021

AI bolsters human-centric disaster risk reduction

As disasters increase in intensity and frequency, the impact of these disasters is likely to worsen as well. In an attempt to manage these worsening impacts, the popularity of artificial intelligence has risen among states looking to manage and respond to their growing risks.

ITU News

7 July 2021

Four strategies to reduce disaster risk in fragile and conflict-affected contexts

Although the UN Sendai Framework emphasises the need to "leave no one behind", states are often unable, and sometimes unwilling, to provide the public services to prevent that. However, there are ways for communities to reduce their disaster risk and build resilience.

Aaron Clark-Ginsberg, Ronak B. Patel, and Bernard McCaul

DRR Voices Blog

8 July 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Interrogating the evidence base on humanitarian localisation: A literature study

This report presents the findings of a review of the literature on localisation. It has two research questions: what added-value does localisation bring in the pursuit of Dutch policy objectives?; and what are the effective ways for the Netherlands as a donor and diplomatic actor to promote localisation?

Veronique Barbelet et al.

London: Overseas Development Institute

2021

Sharing experience by residents of past disaster sites: Effects of time from disasters and types of experience

Sharing past disaster experience among the community is an important method of disaster risk reduction. This study compares knowledge levels regarding local disasters, content of experience to be shared, and methods of sharing across groups in Kobe and Sanriku, Japan, which both suffered from devastating quakes in the past.

Takaaki Kato

International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction, Vol.

61

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Disaster Risk Governance: Where Are We Headed?

This webinar analysed the main findings of the issue "The Politics of Disaster Governance", published in the journal *Politics and Governance*.

Recorded Webinar

25 June 2021

Climate Change and Humanitarian Action

This webinar discussed the impact of climate change on communities in crisis areas and innovative strategies to reduce the environmental impact of medical humanitarian care.

Recorded Webinar

13 July 2021

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Climate refugees – the world's forgotten victims

With climate change-induced crises worsen the plight of refugees, there is an urgent need to gather data on such climate change 'refugees'. However, this issue does not seem to be taken as seriously as it should be on the international stage.

Tetsuji Ida

World Economic Forum

18 June 2021

The UN's refugee data shame

A fear long held by humanitarian actors has just happened with UNHCR's database containing biometric data of the Rohingya refugees has been handed over to the Myanmar government. Currently run by the military, this government now consists of those who were accused of attempted genocide against them in 2017.

Zara Rahman

The New Humanitarian

21 June 2021

Will climate-friendly cities be friendly to climate migrants?

A growing number of cities are making climate-resilience a priority, including the welcoming of climate refugees. For these cities, national and local coordination, emergency funding and job-training programmes will be key in re-settling these climate migrants.

Claire Elise Thompson

Fix Solutions Lab

25 June 2021

New primary healthcare plan for migrant workers can mitigate risk of disease outbreaks

After last year's COVID-19 outbreak among the migrant worker communities in the dormitories, the Singapore government has now moved towards establishing a new, more proactive primary care network.

Chia Hui Xiang & Tan Si Ying

Channel News Asia

6 July 2021

Q&A: South-South migration has long been overlooked. Why?

Despite the evidence that more people migrate within the Global South than to the Global North, there is little public focus given to the issue. There is thus a need to decolonise the story of migration to better reflect and identify the narratives on the ground.

Eric Reidy

The New Humanitarian

8 July 2021

Indefinite hosting of Rohingya refugees a growing concern for Bangladesh

Bangladesh has recently intensified its calls for repatriations of the Rohingya refugees to Myanmar. Worried about the security implications of continuing this indefinite stalemate, the government is seeking a clear roadmap from the UN.

Indrajit Sharma

The Diplomat

9 July 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Social protection provisions to refugees during the Covid-19 pandemic

This paper examines COVID-19 social protection responses for refugees. By investigating their effectiveness, the paper identifies emerging lessons and the potential for a longer-term shift in social protection and humanitarian support to refugees.

Jessica Hagen-Zanker and Nathalie Both
Overseas Development Institute

2021

Global trends in forced displacement – 2020

This report examines the global refugee situation in the world. It looks at the various global trends, including refugees inflows and outflows, and potential drivers like COVID-19.

UNHCR

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Implications for Policy of a (Post-?) COVID-19 World

This webinar discussed the effects of crises, such as COVID-19, storms and droughts, on the processes of human mobility including migration, displacement as well as immobility.

Recorded Webinar

17 March 2021

Safeguarding Humanitarian Action in Counter-terrorism Contexts: Addressing the Challenges of the Next Decade

This event brought together experts in the field to discuss the role of UN member states and of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact in promoting respect for principled humanitarian activities against a backdrop of counter-terrorism.

Recorded Webinar

24 June 2021