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Addressing Security and Sustainable Development Challenges in ASEAN Towards Building Back Better

Top Risks among ASEAN Member States in World Risk Index Report



Source: Adapted from World Economic Forum, "Executive Opinion Survey: National Risk Perceptions," [World Risk Index 2022](#) (World Economic Forum, 2022), pp.96-108. Generated through [MonkeyLearn Wordcloud Generator](#).

As the COVID-19 pandemic approaches its third year and amid the ebb and flow in the spread of the virus globally, it is useful to reflect on the key challenges moving forward. We turn to the World Economic Forum's 2022 World Risk Index (WRI) report as a "temperature check", which has highlighted social/economic security and environmental challenges among the key risks globally. We further explore what these global concerns mean for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member states.

Key Challenges: Social/Economic Security and Environment

In the near-term, social concerns emerging from economic insecurity were among the key challenges cited in the WRI report, which have worsened amid the pandemic. These include "social cohesion erosion", "livelihood crises" and "mental health deterioration". Among ASEAN member states (AMS), these concerns ring loudly in light of the pandemic's impacts as a hybrid health and economic crisis.

Economies continue to be fatigued by the constant threat of renewed lockdowns. Business expectations remain either negative or reflecting worry, with only 12% of those surveyed reflecting optimistic prospects. “Prolonged economic stagnation” remains among the top 5 risks in Brunei, Cambodia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Within Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines and Thailand, “employment and livelihood crises” likewise figured among the top 5 perceived risks in each country.

In both the near-term and long-term (>10 year-horizon), environmental concerns surrounding the failure of global climate action reflect the other key challenge in the 2022 WRI. ASEAN countries’ views mirror this, with similar concerns reflected in all AMS surveyed, whether in the form of “human-made environmental damage” (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Thai-

land), “climate action failure” (Singapore), “extreme weather events” (Philippines and Vietnam) or “Biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse” (Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam).

Balancing to Building Back Better?

It seems ironic that even as the COVID-19 situation worsens, including declining efficacy of existing vaccines against the new Omicron Variant, there is more push for societies to “build back better.” The call for states to step-up their approaches to address these interrelated challenges has become even more important.

Amid the prolonged slowdowns in world economies relative to the pre-COVID era, a looming challenge lies in how governments can prudently balance between health security (i.e., lockdowns) and social and economic security. While states allocate budgets for providing for the food and economic secu-

rity of individuals, they should be equally mindful of a looming “debt crisis in large economies” as viewed by Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand.

Another important pivot in governments’ attention, is on technology, which can contribute to both climate adaptation (e.g., digital applications in agriculture) and the social/economic security (e.g., digital approaches to work). However, countries continue to be concerned about failures in technology governance and cybersecurity measures, and the potential digital divide surrounding their accessibility (i.e., Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Singapore and Thailand).

A key priority to building back better, therefore, is for states to balance their attention across these social/economic security and environmental issues, while creating a more conducive atmosphere that allows technology to play a more prominent role moving forward.

Suggested Readings

- Belesova, Kristine, David L. Heymann, and Andy Haines. "Integrating climate action for health into covid-19 recovery plans." *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* 370 (2020).
- Gaspar, Vitor, Paulo Medas and Roberto Perrelli. "Global Debt Reaches a Record \$226 Trillion." *International Monetary Fund (IMF) Blog*. 15 December 2021.
- Harjani, Manoj and Teo Yi-Ling. "The Paradox of Scaling AI: New Age or Future Winter?" *RSIS Commentary CO21178*. 14 December 2021.
- Jibiki, Koya . "ASEAN finances eroded by pandemic, stoking risk of currency slump." *Nikkei Asia*. 22 September 2021.
- World Economic Forum. *Global Risks Report 2022* 17th Edition. World Economic Forum, 2022.

CLIMATE CHANGE

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

India put climate change at the centre of its environmental policies in 2021

From pledging to become net zero emitter of carbon by 2070 to achieving 500 gigawatts non-fossil energy capacity by 2030, India led from the front on environmental issues this year.

Press Trust India (PTI)

The Economic Times

28 December 2021

2021 was the fifth-hottest year on record as emissions surge

After a temporary dip in 2020 at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, provisional data suggest global CO2 emissions rebounded by 4.9% in 2021. Global levels of CO2 and methane hit record highs in 2021.

News Agencies, AlJazeera

10 January 2022

Ocean warmth sets record high in 2021 as a result of greenhouse gas emissions

The warmth of the world's oceans hit a record again. Oceans contained the most heat energy in 2021 since measurements began six decades ago — accelerating at a rate only possible because of human-emitted greenhouse gases.

Kasha Patel

The Washington Post

11 January 2022

China unveils plan to safeguard water security

By 2025, China's capacity for flood control and drought relief, utilisation of water resources, optimal allocation of water resources, and ecological protection of water will have been significantly improved, per the plan.

Hua Xia

Xinhua Net

12 January 2022

Singapore to equip workers with relevant skills so they can benefit from green economy: Gan Kim Yong

A traditional car mechanic will need to learn how to repair an electric vehicle, while a power engineer will need to learn about hydrogen, solar and other renewable energies. Likewise, an investment manager will need to learn about sustainability standards and green financing.

Cheryl Tan

The Straits Times

12 January 2022

Leaning on innovation to combat plastic pollution in oceans

Firms in the plastic recycling industry, which create ecosystems using blockchain technology, have the potential to generate environmental impact and reduce local poverty while being financially sustainable.

CUHK Business School

South China Morning Post

14 January 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The trade and climate change nexus: The urgency and opportunities for developing countries

While trade contributes to climate change, it is also a central part of the solution— enhancing both mitigation and adaptation. This report focuses on the impacts of, and adjustments to, climate change in low- and middle-income countries. It also explores how both the changing climate, and the policy responses to address it, will affect future trade opportunities.

Paul Brenton and Vicky Chemutai

Washington, DC: The World Bank

2021

Advancing the green development of the Belt and Road Initiative: Harnessing finance and technology to scale up low-carbon infrastructure

Green finance mechanisms to support infrastructure financing, such as green bonds or green loans, have grown rapidly over the past decade but remain at a nascent stage. While governments and regulators continue to work on the alignment of standards and taxonomies, instruments such as blue bonds and transition bonds are emerging to address thematic areas.

World Economic Forum

2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

World Wetlands Day

A call to take action for wetlands is the focus of this years' campaign. It is an appeal to invest financial, human and political capital to save the world's wetlands from disappearing and to restore those we have degraded.

Worldwide

2 February 2022

International Day of Forests

The restoration and sustainable management of forests help address the climate change and biodiversity crises. These also produce goods and services for sustainable development, fostering an economic activity that creates jobs and improves lives.

Worldwide

21 March 2022

ENERGY SECURITY

NEWS AND COMMENTARIES

Vietnam poised to resume nuclear project a decade after Fukushima

Vietnam will proceed with a project to build a 10-megawatt nuclear research reactor with Russian assistance, a move seen as a new step toward reviving plans to build nuclear power plants in the future.

Tomoya Onishi
Nikkei Asia

19 December 2021

Indonesia bans coal exports in January on domestic supply worries

Indonesia has banned coal exports in January due to concerns that low supplies at domestic power plants could lead to widespread blackouts. Indonesia is among the top 10 global greenhouse gas emitters and coal makes up approximately 60% of its energy sources.

Reuters
The Straits Times

1 January 2022

EU plans to class nuclear power and natural gas as green energy sources

The proposal aims to support the 27-nation bloc's shift towards a carbon-neutral future and to boost its credentials as a global standard-setter for fighting climate change.

AFP
France24

1 January 2022

Coal-dependent Indonesia starts tapping huge solar power potential

Indonesia has the potential for 400,000 MW of solar power, according to its energy ministry. Falling prices for Chinese PV cells have driven the rise in private installations.

Reuters
Channel News Asia

6 January 2022

How Indonesia, the world's top thermal coal exporter, hit a supply crunch

Coal makes up around 60% of Indonesia's energy mix and its energy ministry said that by the start of 2022, only 35,000 tonnes of coal had been delivered to state power firm PLN.

Reuters
Channel News Asia

7 January 2022

Japan and Thailand to launch new energy initiative for decarbonization

Under the dialogue framework, a comprehensive long-term program will be launched along with joint projects. These will be carried out through cooperation in green technology and human resources to help promote investment in the energy sector.

Japan Times
13 January 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

World nuclear performance report 2021

This is a special edition of the World Nuclear Performance Report, released for COP26, taking place in Glasgow between 31 October - 12 November 2021. It claims that since 1970 nuclear reactors have avoided the emission of 72 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide, compared to the emissions that would have arisen had coal-fired generation been used instead.

London: WNA
2021

World energy outlook 2021

Against the backdrop of turbulent markets and a crucial meeting of the COP26 conference, this report offers an indispensable guide to the opportunities, benefits and risks ahead at this vital moment for clean energy transitions.

International Energy Agency
Paris: IEA

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

ASEAN Energy Outlook Forum

Speakers examined the potential dynamics in 2022 that will shape energy development in ASEAN; the challenges in translating the commitments at COP26; and the opportunity from RCEP in supporting the region to build back better and greener amidst the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recorded Event
11 January 2022

Call for Papers: International Conference on Nuclear Knowledge Management and Human Resources Development

The conference will provide participants with practical solutions for developing and maintaining the human resources needed to support safe, secure and sustainable nuclear power programmes.

Moscow, Russia
13-16 June 2022

FOOD SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

China hoards over half the world's grain, pushing up global prices

China is holding "historically high" food stockpiles that are sufficient for "one and a half years" of normal consumption. In fact, it is holding 69% of global corn stocks, 60% of global rice and 51% of global wheat stocks. The authors argue this behaviour is likely given China's deteriorating relations with the U.S. and Australia, which could "drastically alter" its food imports.

Shin Watanabe and Aiko Munakata

Nikkei Asia

23 December 2021

China food security: Vow to boost 2022 soybean output sets stage for leap in GM seed tech

China is now focusing on improving productivity in domestic grains including soybeans, and is becoming more open to commercialising genetically modified varieties as well. It is even linking grain production levels to local officials' job performance appraisals from 2022 onwards.

Frank Tang

South China Morning Post

27 December 2021

Jurin puts brakes on pig exports

Thailand's Commerce Minister has announced a ban on live pig exports until 5 April 2022 in order to meet domestic consumption needs. This is owing to a shortfall of 5 million swine or live pigs. This represents more than a third of Thailand's normal pig supplies of 18 million swine.

Phusadee Arunmas and Apinya Wipatayotin

Bangkok Post

6 January 2022

Food fortification is the key to solving India's nutritional security problem

In his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Modi announced the government's new approach of fortifying staples like rice, with a focus on women and children. This is aimed at tackling nutritional insecurity by 2024, given that more than two-thirds of India's population consumes less than half of the daily recommended dietary allowance of micronutrients.

Shridhar Venkat

News18

9 January 2022

Thailand detects first official case of African swine fever

A report from Kasetsart University reflected a positive swab test result for African Swine Fever (ASF) in a miniature pet pig. This represents the first official case of the disease in Thailand. With pork prices on the rise even before the positive ASF result, some residents suspect a potential "cover-up" of the disease.

Masayuki Yuda

Nikkei Asia

11 January 2022

FSA looking into risks from online food sales

Food deliveries are the smallest but fastest growing sub-sector of the United Kingdom's food services market. Yet, in many instances, companies have not registered themselves as food business even if they deliver food, thereby avoiding inspection by local authorities. The country's Food Standards Agency (FSA) is beginning to up its monitoring standards in this sub-sector.

Joe Whitworth

Food Safety News

13 January 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

The U.S.-China trade war: Is food China's most powerful weapon?

The author argues that while China used to be a victim of embargoes of US food exports to the country, it has become more resilient in recent years owing to agricultural investment and import diversification strategies. It has even tipped the balance, with threats to ban or place tariffs on US food exports like soybeans and beef. This can be costly, however, if it leads to trade instability.

Zhang Hongzhou

Asia Policy, Vol. 15, No. 3, July 2020, pp. 59-86

2020

The "Internet of Things" in agriculture: Pitfalls and opportunities

Agriculture and food security have suffered from shortfalls in investments in the past decades, in spite of growth in investible global and regional (Asian) capital. The author argues a solution lies in finding the "sweet spot" that addresses the policy interests across multiple sectors, including food affordability, taxation, and optimising tax revenues from the sector.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros

THINK, Issue 9 (December)

Singapore: Head Foundation

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Food Tech Innovations for Circular Economy and Sustainable Food Security

Prof William Chen discussed the potential for "platform technologies" in achieving a "food circular economy" with minimal food and ecological waste. Examples include the use of sustainable natural food preservatives to extend the shelf-life of food; nutrient recovery from food waste; and biodegradable packaging materials to reduce long-term plastic waste reduction.

Recorded Webinar

16 August 2021

High-Level Discussion on Food Security amid the Pandemic

High-level panellists from Asia, Africa and Europe looked at how food security can be sustained in the event of a global shock. They also assessed which policies have the greatest impact on boosting resilience, and preparedness can be strengthened against future crises.

Recorded Webinar

25 November 2021

HEALTH SECURITY

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Evolution ‘landscapes’ predict what’s next for COVID virus

Studies that map the adaptive value of viral mutations hint at how the COVID-19 pandemic might progress next. This can potentially allow for developing better and “more enduring” vaccines.

Carrie Arnold

Qaunta Magazine

11 January 2022

Endemic Covid: Is the pandemic entering its end-game?

While the UK is ahead of most of the world due to a combination of vaccines and a large number of infections, the planet is not remotely close to seeing the end of the pandemic.

James Gallagher

BBC

15 January 2021

COVID-19 programme delivers 1 billion doses to poorer countries

The World Health Organization said on Sunday (16 January) that the COVAX programme has now delivered 1 billion doses, but that milestone is only a reminder of the work that remains after hoarding and stockpiling in rich countries.

Associated Press

Channel News Asia

16 January 2021

As nations decide to live with the virus, some disease experts warn of surrendering too soon

The coronavirus is not going away, but that does not mean resistance is futile, scientists say. There is a fine line between “giving up” and COVID-19 as an “endemic” (i.e., living with the virus), which governments should be careful to tread.

Joel Achenbach

The Washington Post

16 January 2021

Why has WHO warned countries not to treat Covid-19 as endemic?

The WHO fears countries deciding to emulate this posture and lift most of the social and community measures before the vaccination uptake and hospital resources can be readied for it, will lead to more infections and more deaths.

Linette Lai

The Straits Times

17 January 2021

Life in S'pore will never go back to the way it was before Covid-19, say experts

285 of respondents in an online survey of 1,000 people shared the view of Singaporean health experts that life will never return to exactly the way it was before the pandemic.

Timothy Goh

The Straits Times

17 January 2021

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Achieving sustainable health equity

To achieve sustainable health equity, we need to address two intertwined challenges: social inequality and the climate crisis.

Arachu Castro et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 100, No. 1
2022

Unequal coverage of nutrition and health interventions for women and children in seven countries

This study aims to examine inequalities and opportunity gaps in coverage of health and nutrition interventions in seven countries.

Phuong Hong Nguyen et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization, Vol. 100, No. 1
2022

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Webinar on Covid-19 Vaccination for Children aged 5 to 11

The Singapore Ministry of Education, in collaboration with Ministry of Health and Early Childhood Development Agency, held a webinar for parents and guardians to address concerns and queries on COVID-19 vaccination for children aged 5 to 11.

Recorded Webinar

5 January 2022

UNICEF-UNESCO Webinar Series on Learning Recovery Beyond COVID-19

As schools reopen across the Asia-Pacific region, UNESCO and UNICEF have joined hands to organise a series of webinars to inform, engage and provide tools for government and sector experts to support their COVID-19 education recovery efforts. The first webinar in the series is on the Critical Role of Formative Assessment for Learning Recovery.

Webinar

25 January 2022

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE AND DISASTER RELIEF

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Future-ready humanitarian action: strategic resilience in a post-Covid world

Asia-Pacific countries must deal with the overlapping effects of a pandemic and natural hazards. This new “riskscape” has generated a focus on safe movement measures, securing supply chains, and building stronger relations with community leaders in order for governments and militaries to withstand shocks. Strategic resilience has emerged as a “package” which encapsulates these components by which countries may calibrate responses to future crises.

Christopher Chen

IDSS Paper

16 December 2021

The danger of digitalizing aid

The humanitarian aid sector faces growing pressure to innovate and adopt digital technologies, reflecting the urgent need to make such assistance more effective. But the world's most vulnerable communities must not be forced to make themselves visible to governments that may not have their best interests at heart.

Becky Faith

Project Syndicate

20 December 2021

Ten humanitarian crises and trends to watch in 2022

The 10 crises and trends listed in this article should demand our attention in 2022, notably, “the pandemic’s poverty and equality hangover,” “social media’s hate problem,” and political upheaval in Afghanistan, Haiti and Myanmar, among others.

The New Humanitarian

29 December 2021

Aid policy trends to watch in 2022

Familiar humanitarian issues are taking on more urgency heading into 2022 as the emergency aid sector grapples with the fallouts of COVID-19 and climate change, and the continued reverberations of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Jessica Alexander

The New Humanitarian

3 January 2022

Enhancing warnings to stop disasters

A new report offers advice and direction on doing better with warnings based on what is already known about people’s understandings for, perceptions of, and responses to disaster risks.

Ilan Kelman

Psychology Today

8 January 2022

In Haiti, disaster risks linger as another earthquake anniversary passes

“Build back better” became a guiding mantra after the 12 January 2010 earthquake, but 12 years on, Haiti has struggled to learn the lessons and prepare for future disasters even as it remains one of the world’s most vulnerable countries when it comes to natural hazards.

Dumas Macon and Jessica Alexander

The New Humanitarian

12 January 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

About doughnut economics, technology and humanitarian crises

This report discusses the “doughnut model” of economics in its relation to humanitarian crises. With the number of disasters increasing, this model could prove to be useful even as the topic of sustainability increasingly becomes a priority in the field.

Sarah Jabbar and Andrej Verity

Digital Humanitarian Network

2021

Learning from Tropical Cyclone Seroja: Building disaster and climate resilience in Timor-Leste

This report assesses the damages to Timor-Leste caused by Tropical Cyclone Seroja. It further looks at the longer-term implications for disaster risk management for the country.

The World Bank

2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Rethinking Humanitarianism: Are volunteers the new face of humanitarian border aid response?

This podcast discussed the growing role of volunteers in providing humanitarian aid, and the effect this is having on the role of the traditional aid agencies in humanitarian crises.

Podcast

22 December 2021

Practical tools and initiatives for reducing environmental impact in humanitarian action

This webinar will focus on practical tools and initiatives undertaken by organisations to reduce their environmental impact in humanitarian action.

Webinar

3 February 2022

MIGRATION

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Can Omicron finally get the world to cooperate on pandemic mobility management?

With the world once again closing borders and restricting entry into their countries with the emergence of the Omicron variant, the unsustainability of a public-health response focused on travel restrictions alone is becoming evident.

Meghan Benton
Migration Policy Institute
 2 December 2021

2021 in review: Migration and forced displacement

COVID-19 continues to affect global mobility in unprecedented ways, with cross-border travel not expected to return to normal until 2024, and the number of forcibly displaced people continuing to climb.

The New Humanitarian
 22 December 2021

Following outcry, Indonesia allows Rohingya refugee boat to land

Although the 2016 presidential regulation about the handling of refugees has filled in some of the gaps, it only creates a state of "permanent temporariness" for refugees in Indonesia.

Sebastian Strangio
The Diplomat
 30 December 2021

Uneven refugee protections across Southeast Asia put migrants at risk

Although Southeast Asia hosts large numbers of forced migrants, most Southeast Asian countries are not signatories of international refugee treaties. This ad hoc approach to refugee populations has led to the marginalisation of refugees in the region.

Estey Chan
The Diplomat
 30 December 2021

How Denmark's hard line on Syrian refugees is an aid group's ethical dilemma

The 2019 DRC report being used by the Danish government to justify revoking residency permits for Syrian refugees in Denmark shows the dilemmas that arise when the mission of an NGO and the politics of its government-partner diverges.

Charlotte Alfred and Benjamin Holst
The New Humanitarian
 11 January 2022

UK Borders Bill increases risks of discrimination, human rights violations

A new bill being debated by lawmakers in the United Kingdom increases the risk of discrimination and human rights violations, breaching the country's obligations under international law.

UN News
 14 January 2022

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Big (crisis) data for predictive models: A literature review and outline of opportunities for UNHCR

This report discusses the advantages and disadvantages of using different big data sources within various contexts and gives suggestions for their usage in predicting migration flows.

UNHCR Global Data Service
 2021

Global Migration Indicators 2021

This report summarizes recent migration trends by providing a snapshot of international data and their relevance to highlighting the gaps in response. These gaps include migrants who have been "left behind" due to the many challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Julia Black
International Organization for Migration
 2021

EVENTS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Immigrants' Political Attitudes: Assimilation or Divergence?

This webinar will examine the assimilation of immigrants in their host societies by looking at political preferences, with a focus on attitudes towards immigration amongst immigrants themselves.

Webinar
 26 January 2022

Southeast Asia and the State Governance of Migrant Domestic Workers

This webinar examines the migration of Filipino domestic workers. In particular, it explores the ways in which the state legitimizes the promotion of migration by infusing care in their disciplining of domestic workers to be subservient workers.

Webinar
 8 February 2022