Singapore Monitoring Report

### Abbreviations and Acronyms

**COVID-19 Government Response**
- Circuit Breaker: CB
- DORSCON: Disease Outbreak Response System Condition
- MTF: Multi-Ministry Task Force
- SHN: Stay Home Notice

**COVID-19 Support Schemes**
- CSG: Covid-19 Support Grant
- TRF: Temporary Relief Fund
- SIRS: Self-Employed Person Income Relief Scheme (SIRS)

**Ministry or Government Department**
- ELD: Election Department
- EBRC: Electoral Boundaries Review Committee
- MCI: Ministry of Communications and Information
- MOH: Ministry of Health
- MOM: Ministry of Manpower
- MTI: Ministry of Trade and Industry
- PMO: Prime Minister’s Office

**Legislation**
- FEDA: Foreign Employee Dormitories Act
- POFMA: Protection from Online Falsehoods and Manipulation Act
- POA: Public Order Act

**Organisations**
- APHR: ASEAN Parliamentarians for Human Rights
- AWARE: Association of Women for Action and Research
- TC: Think Centre

**Others**
- FAF: Family Assistance Fund
- LBTQ+: Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and any other sexual identity
- MDW: Migrant Domestic Worker
- MP: Member of the Parliament
- NCMP: Non-Constituency Member of the Parliament
- NMP: Nominated Member of the Parliament
- PWD: Person with Disabilities
- PCR: Polymerase Chain Reaction
- SNDGO: Smart Nation and Digital Government Office
A. State Institutions and Governments

- Parliament: https://www.parliament.gov.sg/
- President: https://www.istana.gov.sg/
- Prime Minister’s Office: https://www.pmo.gov.sg/The-Government

B. Websites on SDGs

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Singapore Statistics
  https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/sdg/goal-16

C. National Websites on Human Rights

- UN OHCHR
  https://www.ohchr.org/EN/countries/AsiaRegion/Pages/SGIndex.aspx
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs

A. Websites on COVID-19

- Ministry of Health
  https://CovidSitrep.moh.gov.sg/ (Tables and Charts)

E. Civil Society Organizations on COVID-19, SDGs and Human Rights

- Think Centre www.thinkcentre.org | https://www.facebook.com/ThinkCentreSingapore

F. Other Useful Websites

- Our World in Data - https://ourworldindata.org/coronavirus/country/singapore?country=~SGP
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Date of Publication:

May 2021
A. Data and Trends about COVID-19

Trend of daily COVID-19 Cases in Singapore - January 2020 and January 2021

Total COVID-19 Cases in Singapore between January 2020 and January 2021
As of 1 February 2021, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Singapore stands at 59,565. In terms of recovered cases, 59,271 were considered recovered. Out of which 56,228 have completed isolation and 3,043 were discharged from the hospital. An additional two deaths were reported after 30 September, occurring on October 12 and November 28 respectively, bringing the total fatality officially attributed to COVID-19 to 29 (as of 1 February 2021).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confirmed Case</th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>100th</th>
<th>1,000th</th>
<th>10,000th</th>
<th>50,000th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Jan 23</td>
<td>Mar 17</td>
<td>Apr 14</td>
<td>Apr 24</td>
<td>Jul 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirmed Death</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>10th</td>
<td>20th</td>
<td>29th</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Mar 21</td>
<td>Apr 15</td>
<td>May 7</td>
<td>Nov 28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From October 2020 onwards till most of January 2021, Singapore enjoyed a period of zero cases within both the community and migrant workers dormitories with the exception of some very low single digit occurrences. Out of the additional 1,781 confirmed cases occurring between 1 October 2020 and 1 February 2021, a four-month period, imported cases constituted 1,663 cases (i.e., 93.4%). Infections in the community for this same period constituted 3.5% while cases occurring in migrant workers dormitories made up 3.1%. The rise in imported cases is correlated with the relaxation of travel restrictions announced in 30 September. 152794/157854

_Infections in migrant workers dormitories_

According to a joint statement issued by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Ministry of Health (MOH) on 14 December 2020, results from serology tests (i.e., blood test) confirmed that 98,289 migrant workers were found to have been infected previously from COVID-19\(^1\). This is on top of the 54,505 migrant workers who were tested positive for COVID-19 through the use of PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test. This meant that a total of 152,794 workers or half of the total migrant worker population residing in dormitories had been infected by COVID-19. This result does not change the official tally of COVID-19 infections in Singapore as only those confirmed through PCR tests are counted based on the World Health Organisation's criterion. The serology tests are used to aid epidemiological investigations and to assess the overall prevalence of infections within the migrant worker population residing in dormitories.
B. Chronology of key events from 1 Oct 2020 to 1 Feb 2021

Table 2: Chronology of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Singapore Chronology</th>
<th>Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept 30</td>
<td>Government announced that the country will lift border restrictions for some visitors from Australia, excluding Victoria state, and Vietnam effective from 1 Oct.</td>
<td>Relaxation of travel restriction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 December</td>
<td>Phase 3 of re-opening from 28 Dec 2020</td>
<td>Relaxing of control measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 December</td>
<td>PM Lee Hsien Loong announces that Singapore approved Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for pandemic use.</td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 December</td>
<td>Singapore receives 1st batch of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine.</td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 December</td>
<td>Health workers received 1st dose of vaccine.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 January 2021</td>
<td>Parliamentary proceedings livestreamed on the Ministry of Communications and Information’s (MCI) YouTube channel.</td>
<td>Parliament</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 January 2021</td>
<td>Government admits in Parliament thatTraceTogether data can be used in police investigations.</td>
<td>Parliament/Control Measure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 &amp; 13 Jan 2021</td>
<td>PM Lee, Minister of Health Gan Kim Yong, and Co-Chair of Multi-Ministry Task Force Lawrence Wong, received 1st injection of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to assure public on vaccine safety.</td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 February 2021</td>
<td>Health Sciences Authority approves preliminary use of Moderna vaccine.</td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 February 2021</td>
<td>More than 250,000 people received first dose of COVID-19 vaccines.</td>
<td>Vaccination</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Re-opening

After six months since Singapore exited the Circuit Breaker in June, the government announced in mid-December further relaxation of the control measures\(^2\). Three criteria were listed as pre-conditions for this move:

a) Adherence to safe management measures
b) Sufficient testing capabilities for early detection and public health action: Singapore ramped up Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) test capacity significantly to be able to run over 50,000 tests a day. Antigen rapid tests were also introduced for larger and higher-risk events.
c) High adoption of TraceTogether (TT) for quick and effective contact tracing: As at 13 Dec 2020, around 65% of Singapore residents are on the TT Programme, and it is expected that 70% of the population would have adopted it by end-2020.

The further re-opening of the economy meant that group size for social gatherings, including dining, are lifted from the previous cap of 5 persons to 8 persons, capacity limits of tourist attractions, malls, and religious congregations are increased. Live performances are allowed in limited settings while entertainment activities such as karaoke, nightlife and live performances are still deemed to be high-risk and are limited to pilot projects to test the feasibility of resuming these activities safely on a larger scale. This move was in all likelihood made on the backdrop of the very low number of community transmission and the need to prop up the domestic economic activity.

C. Impact on people in particular vulnerable groups with reference to SDGs and human rights

To recap from the previous report written for the Kathmandu Democracy Forum, issues affecting the following groups of vulnerable people were highlighted:

- Homeless people
- Persons with disabilities
- Women – including migrant spouses, LBTQ+ women, migrant domestic workers, and women sex workers
- Migrant workers – those residing in dedicated dormitories
- Mental well-being
In general, the economic impact combined with the accompanying government’s control measures were the primary factors that contributed to the (unintentional) deterioration of the well-being and rights of the highlighted groups. For this follow up report, the focus will be on economically vulnerable people with some additional comment on the situation of migrant workers.

Table 3: Summary of SDGs and Human Rights Affected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDGs</th>
<th>Lives and health</th>
<th>(As of 1 Feb 2021) 59,565 cases, 91.5% migrant workers, increase from imported cases, 29 fatalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.3 (Social Protection)</td>
<td>Livelihood</td>
<td>• -5.8% GDP for 2020 (first annual contraction since 2001, and Singapore’s worst recession since independence), 172,200 employment loss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2 (Gender violence)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• Economically/socially vulnerable hit hard – low-income families more likely to see drastic reduction of income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.8 (Labour rights)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SDG 16+</th>
<th>Human rights Democracy</th>
<th>• Parliament – Livestreaming over YouTube introduced 4 Jan (govt. agreed to adopt in-principle in Sept. 2020)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16.6 (Accountable institutions)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• TraceTogether controversy – validating previous privacy concerns raised over govt using data for purposes beyond COVID-19 contact tracing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.7 (Participatory decision making)</td>
<td></td>
<td>• COVID-19 vaccine exercise rolled out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Economically Vulnerable

In early February 2021, Beyond Social Services, a welfare organisation, published a report, “Mind the Chasm: COVID-19 & Deepening Inequalities in Singapore”, that revealed the impact of the pandemic had on the economically vulnerable families under their care. The organisation undertook a study of the beneficiaries of its COVID-19 Family Assistance Fund (FAF) rolled out between April and September 2020. The FAF is a S$3 million program set up during the pandemic to meet increased needs of over 1,900 families that the organisation serves. The study covered a total of 1,231 applicants that applied for assistance under this scheme.
Table 4: Impact of COVID-19 on low-income households

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pre-COVID</th>
<th>During COVID</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Median household income</td>
<td>S$1,600 (US$1,212)</td>
<td>S$500 ▼ (US$379)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median per capita income (PCI)* in a household</td>
<td>S$425 (US$322)</td>
<td>S$113 ▼ (US$86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent as percentage of household income</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>19% ▲</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(PCI)—calculated by taking total household income from work and dividing it by the number of persons in the household

Taking US$1 = S$1.32, annual average for 2020

Out of the over 1,200 applicants studied, 35% of them or approximately 430 saw their household incomes drop to S$0. Whereas the majority of the studied group saw their income drop precipitously by nearly 70% during the pandemic. Although the study was limited to the families that the organisation served, it would without a doubt reflect the experience of most low-income households during the pandemic.

The income loss takes place in the context of Singapore suffering a negative 5.8% contraction in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2020. Without the S$100 Billon COVID measures rolled out by the government, the economy would have contracted by 12.4% instead. This is its first negative growth since 2001 and is considered the worst recession ever faced since Singapore’s independence in 1965. Figures released by the MOM indicated that there was a nett 172,200 employment loss in 2020.

The drastic income drop contributed to a worsening of inequality among the Singapore residents. For comparison, the nominal median wage of Singaporeans and Permanent Residents, i.e., income of a typical worker, was measured at S$4,534 for 2020\(^4\). This was a drop from the S$4,563 reported in 2019, and was cited as the first time that the median income declined since 2004\(^5\). The disparity between the income earned by the poor and that of the “typical” worker is great. It is worse when Singapore is a costly place to live in. The *Economist*’s bi-annual survey on worldwide cost of living rated Singapore in 2020 as the most expensive city (in joint first position together with Osaka and Hong Kong)\(^6\).
Furthermore, the income drop meant that low-income families found it difficult to cope with the increased pressures arising from the multiple forms of insecurities—housing, health, food—that they were already faced before the pandemic. This include a worsening of work-care gaps which especially impacted women with caregiving responsibilities to either children or the infirmed elderly, and also household indebtedness in addition to rental arrears.

The Beyond report made three key recommendations: they first urged for the need to strengthen employment rights and social protections in view of the current precarious or casualised jobs that many low-income workers engaged in during the pandemic; the second recommendation calls for the government’s housing agency, the Housing and Development Board, to extend broader and deeper rental fee waivers to reflect the significant declines in income; and thirdly, to extend debt relief programmes to prevent low-income families from further spiralling into debt.

Assessment

The Beyond report is a valuable contribution that reveals how the poor in Singapore experienced the pandemic and how inequality is worsened during a major crisis. The recommendations are evidently well-grounded and tailored to deal with the issues in the short and medium term and finally in the long term at a structural level. However, they conflict with the current approach adopted by the government with regard to social protection and more generally labour policies.

A key challenge when addressing socio-economic issues in Singapore is the government’s adherence to an ideology of meritocracy, combined with a flexible labour market policy, that asserts that work is the best form of welfare. An additional challenge is the absence of an official poverty line. The government does not adopt an internationally accepted definition of poverty. Instead, it prefers a more broadly definition of what it considers are vulnerable group, and uses an “targeted approach” to address their needs. Singapore’s social welfare support programmes are subject to means-testing and premised on the (unemployed) individual’s effort to seek employment.

This is further compounded by the absence of a minimum wage which the report also recommended. Singapore belongs to the minority of countries in the world (i.e., 8%) which do not have a minimum wage applied to all or part of the private sector. Government leaders have often rejected the idea of a minimum wage. They consider a minimum wage would be counter
to the pro-business environment providing jobs and that would ultimately undermine welfare for workers. Given the prevailing social welfare approach, the short- and medium-term recommendations may receive some traction but it is unlikely the call for structural change to strengthen employment protection would be heeded any time soon. Notwithstanding the government aid disbursed during the pandemic, the current lack of institutional social protection measures mean low wage and insecure gig economy type of jobs remains the most, and in many cases, the only viable option for low-income earners. Thus, further exacerbating the gap between them and those who could cope better.

**Migrant Workers**

According to the figures released by the authorities in December 2020, serology tests on the migrant workers residing in dormitories confirmed that nearly 100,000 of them had been infected previously. Due to Singapore adopting the WHO’s statistics criteria to include only infections confirmed through the PCR tests, the official tally therefore remains at 59,565 cases (including recovered cases and deaths). However, if including the serology figures, the total tally for Singapore would actually be 152,794 cases, with migrant workers constituting 97 percent of the total COVID-19 cases in Singapore.\(^1\)

**Assessment**

It is without a doubt that migrant workers were the biggest victims of the pandemic in Singapore. In particular, those residing in purpose-built dormitories were most susceptible due to the conditions enabling the virus to spread quickly. In the previous Kathmandu report, it was noted that the government had taken swift steps to attempt to prevent infection rate from worsening among this group. Part of this include frequent use of mass quarantine, intensive rostered testing of migrant workers, and controlled movements. What remains concerning is that while the rest of the society had been able to enjoy more freedoms post-Circuit Breaker, a significant proportion of the migrant workers remained under strict control living in prison-like conditions.\(^1\)

**D. Democracy and Civic Space**

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\(^1\) Calculation: 152,794 (Migrant workers confirmed through serology test and PCR test) divided by 157,854 (Sum of infected migrant workers, deaths, community and imported cases)
The state of democracy and civic space in Singapore remains largely flawed and constrained as previously reported in the Kathmandu forum. However, the improved showing of the political opposition taking more seats in the last election and the Parliament starting to livestream the sittings mean that Singapore inched slightly forward. Civic space took a tumble due to the extensive use of POFMA (anti-fake news law) in 2020. Public demonstrations remained prohibited. At least three LBTQ+ activists were arrested for staging a rare protest in front of the Ministry of Education building in January 2021\textsuperscript{12}. They were protesting in response to an incident that circulated on social media in mid-January of an 18-year-old who alleged the ministry had actively obstructed her from obtaining a doctor’s referral to begin hormone-therapy. The police had also warned Myanmar nationals working or residing in Singapore from organising any public activity to protest against the coup that took place in Myanmar on 1 February\textsuperscript{13}.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index</th>
<th>Rankings</th>
<th>Ratings</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Economist Intelligence Unit’s Democracy Index (2020 update) | 75/165 (2019) 74/165 (2020) | Flawed democracy | The slight increase in rank was attributed to the improved showing of the opposition during the July 2020 Election. The EIU said that the results was “a positive development for political contestation”.
| Freedom House | 50/100 (2019) | Partly free | |
| World Justice Project | 12/120 (2020) | SCORED high on order/security, lower on constraints on govt. power and fundamental rights | |
| Civicus International | NA | Obstructed (2020) | |

\textit{Parliamentary Streaming}
The Singapore Parliament started livestreaming its entire proceedings starting on January 4, 2021. This came after the Minister for Communications and Information agreed that the Government agreed “in principle” back in September 2020 to livestream the sessions. The move represents an about turn from the government’s longstanding position that there was no need to provide a “live” broadcast of the parliament proceedings due to lack of relative demand for such a service and that there were other avenues for people to access the sessions. These include viewing the sessions in person at the “Strangers Gallery” situated above the main Parliament chamber, written record of the proceedings on the Hansard system of the Parliament, as well as the recorded videos available both on the Channel News Asia’s Parliament online microsite.

Previously, selected parts of the proceedings were aired during dedicated segments of the news broadcast hour. However, these are curated by the government-backed Channel News Asia and may not necessarily reflect all the exchange or speeches made during the sitting. The issue of providing a live feed has been brought up as early as since 1994. Usually by the very few opposition members of the parliament. The independent social media news site, The Online Citizen, has also in recent years brought up the issue on the necessity of providing a live feed to the public on account of transparency and to balance the unfair access of the government backed mainstream media have over alternative independent media.

TraceTogether Controversy

Contact tracing is an important tool to control the pandemic. Singapore’s existing digital infrastructure and engineering capabilities enabled the government to quickly roll out an impressive list of digital tools to launch a rapid response. Out of these digital tools, “SafeEntry” and “TraceTogether” have the greatest impact on public life. The tools have been accepted largely by the public. However, developments later proved privacy concerns raised earlier regarding TraceTogether, of possible abuse of the technology beyond its stated purpose, were valid. The government’s response also raises questions over the issue of accountability of the State.

To recap, the TraceTogether is a mobile application first launched on 20 March 2020. It uses the Bluetooth function of the phone and works when two or more phones with the installed app are within a 6-foot radius and sustained contact for a duration of at least 30 minutes. Anonymised data are stored on phone in encrypted form for 25 days before it is deleted automatically. Due to technical problems with the app being unable to operate smoothly across different types of phones and operating system, a wearable Trace Together (TT) token was soon developed. It goes further in that it will reach out to those who do not own a smartphone. Similar to the app,
it utilises BlueTooth to exchange signals with other TraceTogether Tokens or mobile app but it does not have GPS capability. It is powered by a battery lasting up to six months that can be replaced. Distribution of the tokens started in September 2020 at 38 community centres and was progressively rolled out to 108 community centres island wide.

The app and the token are to be used in conjunction with the “SafeEntry” tool which at first requires people to scan a QR code and fill in personal details at points of entry at high traffic locations e.g., shops/malls/buildings. The app or the token cut down on the time taken to complete the procedures as personal details are registered in the app or when collecting the token. Authorities forecasted that at least 3 quarters of the population must use the TraceTogether actively for it to be effective (Singapore’s population = 5.8 million). As of January 2021, it was reported that more than 4.2 million people, or about 78 per cent of the residents are using TraceTogether\textsuperscript{16}. Out of which, two million are using the mobile application, while more than 2.6 million tokens have been collected. The disparity in the figures can be attributed to people who uses the app are also collecting the token. Demand for the tokens spiked when the government announced that TraceTogether would be made mandatory to enter places such as restaurants and shopping malls. This caused a shortage and distribution had to be halted in some places. Migrant workers especially those staying in dormitories and school going children are required to carry a token in lieu of varying/limited access to smartphones.

The roll out of TraceTogether was not unmet without concerns. Initial worries over whether the app tracks or records a person’s detailed movements, and whether there is sufficient security over the use of personal data, have deterred many from downloading and using the app\textsuperscript{17}. The government tried to provide assurances over such concerns. Most notably, the Minister-in-charge of the Smart Nation Initiative, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan had in a media briefing on 8 June 2020, said that data logs from the TraceTogether app and token would be used for contact tracing purposes only. A petition appeared online soon after Dr. Vivian’s speech. The petition raised alarm over the use of the TraceTogether token in particular, as blatant infringements upon rights to privacy, personal space, and freedom of movement\textsuperscript{18}.

The concerns raised however did not appear to have dented substantially the take up of the TraceTogether app and the token. Anxiety over the tool simmered in the background until seven months later, when during a Parliamentary sitting on 4 Jan 2021, the Minister of State for Home Affairs Desmond Tan, in response to parliamentary question from his party colleague, MP Christopher De Souza, revealed that the police was allowed to invoke powers under the
Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) to access the TraceTogether data for criminal investigations. Dr. Vivian confirmed a day later that he had not thought about the implications of the Criminal Procedure Code (CPC) when he made the assurance in June 2020\(^\text{19}\). He also revealed that the police has actually used the data during a murder investigation in as early as May 2020, and that he was made aware of the possibility that the data can be used for non-contact tracing purposes after a member of the public enquired with him in end October. On the same day, the TraceTogether website amended its Data Privacy terms on how the Criminal Procedure Code applies to all data under Singapore’s jurisdiction\(^\text{20}\). In addition, it also said that Transparency Reports would be published every six months about data requests for law enforcement purposes\(^\text{21}\).

Public criticism quickly mounted following the revelations. At least 350 people have requested their contact tracing data to be deleted from the government servers\(^\text{22}\), and an unspecified number of people opted to delete or disable the TraceTogether app on their phones while some chose to leave the TraceTogether tokens at home\(^\text{23}\). The government in a bid to quell the public backlash, convened a closed-door consultation on 8 January 2021, chaired by Minister-in-charge of the Smart Nation Initiative, Dr Vivian Balakrishnan and Minister for Law and Home Affairs, Mr K Shanmugam. The consultation was attended by members of the press, the legal fraternity, technology experts, and academia. Later in the same evening, the Smart Nation and Digital Government Office released a statement reporting on the results of the consultation\(^\text{24}\). The statement apologized for the “error in not stating that data from TraceTogether is not exempt from the Criminal Procedure Code”, and that the government will pass legislation to formalize the restriction of SafeEntry and TraceTogether data to contact tracing with the exception of seven categories of serious offences. The expected legislation will be introduced in the February Parliament’s sitting on a Certificate of Urgency. This meant the bill will be put through all three readings in one sitting and the Certificate must be authorised by the President of Singapore\(^\text{25}\).

On February 2, Dr. Vivian introduced the Covid-19 (Temporary Measures) (Amendment) Bill in Parliament. It specified that data from TraceTogether and SafeEntry, including the private sector's BluePass programme, which contributes data to TraceTogether, would be exempt from uses other than contact tracing, except only in cases involving seven categories of serious crimes\(^\text{26}\). These seven offences are: offences involving the use or possession of corrosive substances and dangerous weapons, terrorism-related offences under the Terrorism (Suppression of Bombings) Act, Terrorism (Suppression of Financing) Act, and Terrorism (Suppression of
Misuse of Radioactive Material), crimes against persons where the victim is seriously hurt or killed (e.g., murder), drug trafficking offences that attract the death penalty, escape from legal custody where there is reasonable belief that the subject will cause imminent harm to others, kidnapping, and serious sexual offences\textsuperscript{27}. In addition, the amended law require police officers who are inspectors or higher to request for access to the TraceTogether or SafeEntry data.

**Assessment**

This unfortunate episode confirms that past assessment of Singapore as a flawed democracy with lesser regard for civil liberties and political rights is well-grounded, with implications for SDG 16.6 (effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels), and SDG 16.10 (ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms).

Concerns raised over the possibility of the TraceTogether technology could be abused for purposes beyond the stated contact tracing efforts were proven valid. Although the government did acknowledge its error with Dr. Vivian expressing his regrets over the misleading assurance made and offering to take “full responsibility” for the mistake\textsuperscript{28}, it is however difficult to see any clear consequences for the officials involved. What remains especially concerning was that the police exercised their powers in May but the revelation was only made in Parliament at least eight months after the fact, and more notably after the July 2020 election. The attention gap could be attributed to the overwhelming focus on the lifting of Circuit Breaker in June in preparation for the 13\textsuperscript{th} Parliamentary Election held on 10 July 2020. The episode also showed that the Parliament remains an important platform that provides some form of oversight. Nonetheless, it does not detract from the fact that Singapore lacks an independent human rights or oversight body to review the policies that may violate human rights.

Overall, even as the government remains determined to push ahead with the TraceTogether technologies due to its role in combating the pandemic spread, the controversy have inevitably undermined public trust in the government. It also raises the question of how efficient is the actual state of coordination underpinning the whole-of-government approach that first characterised Singapore’s efforts against the pandemic. Despite the amendments in the law, it essentially still meant TraceTogether could be used for other (specified) purposes other than contact tracing. And though the police can only access the data, by requiring a person involved in or assisting in criminal investigation to produce either the mobile smartphone or the token\textsuperscript{29}. It is quite implausible that anyone would be able to decline such requests without fear of adverse
inference. The trust fallout from the error could also flow over to cast doubt on the government’s assurances it has put out over the vaccination exercise that is taking off.

**Vaccination Exercise**

The global effort to develop a vaccine against the COVID-19 has seen biotechnology and pharmaceutical companies adopting either a new mRNA technology or the traditional attenuated vaccine approach. A collaboration between US-based Pfizer and German-based BioNTech lead the race. The United Kingdom was the first country in the world to approve and distribute the vaccine in early December. The United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) gave its stamp of approval on 11 December 2020\(^3\). Singapore followed shortly and issued its own approval on 14 December 2020 becoming the first Asian country in the region to do so. Two weeks later, the WHO issued its first emergency use validation for the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine\(^3\). The first batch of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine arrived in Singapore on 21 December 2020. The number of doses received was not revealed in any press release or reporting. This would mark the start of the massive vaccination exercise which the government aimed to get all Singaporeans and long-term residents to be able to get vaccinated by end-2021.

Based on the recommendations of the Expert Committee on COVID-19 Vaccination convened by the MOH in October 2020, the government identified priority groups to first receive the approved vaccine\(^3\). This includes frontline healthcare workers who are most at risk of being infected, and the elderly aged 70 and above. Health workers received their first dose on 30 December 2020. In mid-January 2021, PM Lee Hsien Loong and two other senior Ministers in charge of the Multi-Ministry Task Force coordinating the mitigating measures against COVID-19 in Singapore took their first jab in a bid to set an example to assure people of the vaccine’s safety. Nonetheless, the public were slow to warm to the idea. A YouGov survey of 1,000 respondents in Singapore showed that 47% likely to take vaccine, 34% undecided, 19% unlikely to take the vaccine\(^3\). Whereas a local news outlet’s own polls of over 120 respondents show that 60 percent were hesitant or unwilling to take the vaccine\(^3\). While 36.7 percent were ready to receive it.

In response to the hesitant attitudes, the government took a slightly hard line when they warned that the vaccines will not be reserved for people who wavered when offered the vaccine. It will be offered on a first-come-first serve basis\(^3\). The MTF, while acknowledging the current lack of complete data or information on the vaccine’s efficacy in reducing the transmission of the virus, still urge people to get vaccinated to aid Singapore in further re-opening the economy.
They also dangled some potential incentives that vaccinated people might receive such as reduced or eliminated Stay-Home-Notice, reducing frequency of rostered testing for workers, and some current safe management measures might be further relaxed.

The government’s overall strategy for the vaccination exercise is to offer vaccines when available on a free basis to all residents. The rollout first targets frontline and vulnerable groups of people who may be more susceptible to the serious effects of COVID-19. The government also pledged to offer the vaccine for free to migrant workers who constituted the greatest number of infections in Singapore\textsuperscript{36}. Vaccination will not be made compulsory but efforts to persuade the public of the necessity and the safety of the vaccines are underway through public education and mass media propaganda. To further assure the public, the government announced the creation of a Vaccine Injury Financial Assistance Programme for COVID-19 vaccination (VI-FAP)\textsuperscript{37}. This programme will payout S$10,000 for those who suffered medical injury as result from receiving vaccine and requiring hospitalisation in the High Dependency or Intensive Care Unit. For cases involving death or receiving permanent disabilities, S$225,000 would be paid. To qualify for the pay outs, such cases would need to be verified by an independent panel of medical experts convened by the MOH. The patient would also need to be a citizen or long-term resident or pass holder who received the approved vaccine in Singapore.

As of 11 February 2021, more than 250,000 have received at least the first dose of the vaccine\textsuperscript{38}. A second vaccine developed by the American pharmaceutical firm, Moderna, using the same mRNA technology have received approval for preliminary use from the Health Sciences Authority in Singapore in early February\textsuperscript{39}. The first shipment of the Moderna vaccine is expected to arrive in mid-February. The use of this vaccine is approved for use in persons aged 18 and above which differs from the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine which is approved for use on persons aged 16 onwards. At the moment, the vaccines are not recommended for pregnant women and immuno-compromised people, and those who have a previous history of anaphylaxis (severe allergic reaction).

**Assessment**

The development of a vaccine against the COVID-19 has spurred hopes that normal activities can resume. Thus, the government is expending great efforts to encourage people to take the vaccine when available to them. However, due to the speed and unfamiliarity with the new technology used in developing the new vaccine, levels of public acceptance was probably lower than hoped for by the government. To assuage concerns over the potential side effects which
may result due to receiving this new type of vaccine, the government tried to provide further insurance in the form of additional payout. It is not certain as to how people can actually benefit from the insurance as several cases of adverse reactions have surfaced but the authorities have swiftly dismissed the link between the vaccine and the reported reactions. The government’s main message remains that the benefits of receiving the vaccine outweighs the risk.

The government’s moves to promote the take up of the approved vaccines could be better served if it enhances the transparency and the tone it adopts when conveying the message. Although qualitatively a different matter, the public trust eroded from the TraceTogether controversy may have affected trust in the current assurance of vaccine safety and eventually affecting vaccine uptake. The government could put in place more transparent processes that enhance the public’s confidence in the way the authorities assess adverse reaction from vaccines. In addition, an underlying coercive tone in the government’s messages needs to be dial back to avoid inciting people’s anxiety. Messages suggesting incentives or preferential treatment for those who received the vaccine are essentially discriminating. It causes stress to those who are not able to receive vaccination due to pre-existing conditions or pregnancy as well as the current age limit recommended by the manufacturers or national health science authorities. Observations on social media and even the mainstream media already indicate the emergence of an attitude to attribute blame on eligible individuals who may have chosen not to receive a vaccine as being selfish, mis-informed or being an “anti-vaxxer”. This trend may contribute to rising tensions when differential treatment of those vaccinated and those who remain unvaccinated becomes starker and more divisive.

E. Proposals and Recommendations to:

- Singapore Government
- CSOs at the national level
- CSOs at the international level
- International Organizations

To the Singapore Government:

- Adopt a people-centred approach to address socio-economic inequality including expanding current institutional arrangements to strengthen social protection to adequately cover more people who are affected by the pandemic’s economic fallout.
- Draw lessons from pandemic, implement measures to enhance migrant workers’ autonomy, including domestic workers, in addressing their issues and concerns related to
income and job security, conditions at work, and easy access to physical and mental health care.

To the Regional/International Organisations:

- Encourage Singapore to take into account international human rights standards when developing its measures.
- Encourage Singapore to develop a national SDG framework and indicators, with civil society inputs and perspective, to measure the progress on impact of the inequalities exposed during the pandemic.

To the Singapore CSOs:

- Continue monitoring the human rights impact of the pandemic and highlighting it to the public and the government.
- Understand and adapt the SDG framework to the issues each group is working or concerned about.

To the Regional/International CSOs:

- Help the national CSOs amplify concerns or findings on the ground by creating platforms for them and highlighting their issues.
- Develop an easy-to-use SDG based framework for national CSOs to adapt, in line with the current COVID realities.

4 See table “Median Gross Monthly Income From Work (Including Employer CPF Contributions) of Full-Time Employed Residents”, https://stats.mom.gov.sg/Pages/Income-Summary-Table.aspx; and “

8 See for example the explanation note provided for SDG Target 1.1, Indicator 1.1.1 | Proportion of population living below the international poverty line by sex, age, employment status and geographic location (urban/rural), [https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/sdg/goal-1](https://www.singstat.gov.sg/find-data/sdg/goal-1)


16 “Over 4.2 million, or 78% of residents, using TraceTogether”, THAM Yuen-C, Straits Times, 5 Jan 2021, [https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/over-42-million-or-78-of-residents-using-tracetogether](https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/politics/over-42-million-or-78-of-residents-using-tracetogether)


21 See under section, “Data that is shared with MOH will be used for contact tracing”, [https://www.tracetogether.gov.sg/common/privacystatement](https://www.tracetogether.gov.sg/common/privacystatement)


40 Benefits of jab outweigh risks - 4 who had severe allergic reactions have recovered”, Fabian KOH, Straits Times, 2 Feb 2021, https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/benefits-of-jab-outweigh-risks-4-who-had-severe-allergic-reactions-have-recovered