COVID-19 Policy Response in East Asia

User Guide

April 2022

About the Social Inclusion Project

The Social Inclusion Project (SIP) is a research programme dedicated to analysing the role of public policies in creating an open, diverse and inclusive society, where people have opportunities for participation. Our activities aim to influence policy development, promote policy literacy and enable engagement. The SIP is committed to independent and transparent research on overlooked and emerging social problems, with a focus on empirical work with practical impact.

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Citation

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Contents

Introduction

This policy tracker, *COVID-19 Policy Response in East Asia*, is a resource to inform research and promote public understanding of public policy responses to COVID-19 in four East Asian countries or regions – Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan.

Historically, under the framework of developmental states, these four places have been subject to intense comparative analyses in the study of politics, economics, public administration, and policy fields such as social welfare. Developmental states are characterised by their focus on economic growth and transformation, strategies of systematic and selective market intervention, and rule by powerful and relatively autonomous political and bureaucratic elites (Woo-Cumings, 1999; World Bank, 1993). In comparative social policy, they are also known as productivist welfare states where social objectives are often dominated by economic priorities (Holliday, 2000, 2005). Although circumstances have changed in the last two decades, such as democratisation and other developments that are thought to be the consequences of developmental state interventions, these conceptual foundations remain influential and provide the intellectual context for this current project.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, interest to compare these four cases with references to their historical and bureaucratic contexts has re-emerged (see Pepinsky, 2020; Woo, 2021; Yen, 2020). From a public health perspective, their relative success at containing the pandemic – despite adopting different policy strategies – may offer important lessons for countries beyond this region. For instance, Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan have been lauded for rigorous detection and effective public communication during the initial outbreaks (Barron, 2020), while South Korea managed to bend the curve of daily cases fairly quickly after the peak of the first wave (Thompson, 2020). For researchers, policymakers and anyone interested to learn about public policy responses to COVID-19 and compare the four places in a detailed and empirical manner, this interactive policy tracker provides a rich base of information.

As may be expected for a public health crisis of this scale, research to study various dimensions of the pandemic has been extensive, including using policy trackers. To take in the global scale of COVID-19, currently available policy trackers tend to prioritise case counts and geographical coverage over policy detail. *COVID-19 Policy Response in East Asia* is unique in focusing on four chosen countries or regions with a similar historical context. This allows the tracker to show key metrics for understanding the severity of COVID-19 (i.e. daily and cumulative cases and deaths) alongside the timing of policy interventions and concise policy descriptions spanning major policy domains such as health, travel, closures, businesses, individuals, education and social services. Organising the data in this way enables comparison of policy type, extent and timing relative to the public health situation. These comparisons can be across policy domains as well as between countries or regions. The database starts from January 2020 and will be updated as the COVID-19 situation evolves.

Data

This policy tracker contains two types of data – COVID-19 case counts and descriptions of policy responses. Most of the data are obtained from official, publicly accessible sources such as government press releases, budget announcements and ministry websites (see list of official information sources in **Appendix A**). These are gathered through internet searches by a team of researchers who are fluent in the official languages in the four countries or regions. For Singapore and Hong Kong, almost all written policy documents are available in English, but oral presentations in Hong Kong are mostly in Chinese (Cantonese). Policy documents for South Korea and Taiwan are often in Korean and Traditional Chinese, respectively. For non-English data sources, the policy descriptions that appear in the tracker are the researchers' translations. The information sources in their original languages are indicated in the dashboard to allow independent verification.

Case counts

   <u>Hong Kong</u>

Data on the numbers of COVID-19 cases and deaths in Hong Kong are obtained from the Centre for Health Protection of the Department of Health, Hong Kong SAR. The Centre issues the *Latest Situation of Cases of COVID-19 Report* on a daily basis (Centre for Health Protection, Hong Kong SAR, 2021), which records the total number of confirmed cases, probable cases, discharged cases, fatal cases, as well as hospitalised or pending admission cases since December 31, 2019. A confirmed case is classified as imported, local, possibly local, epidemiologically linked with an imported case, epidemiologically linked with a local case, or epidemiologically linked with a possibly local case. Most of the confirmed COVID-19 cases in Hong Kong are classified as epidemiologically linked with local cases. In Hong Kong, there is no official definition of a COVID-19 death. But internationally it has been reported that Hong Kong counts any death of a patient who has COVID-19 as a death caused by COVID-19 (Henriques, 2020).

   <u>Singapore</u>

All data on COVID-19 cases and deaths in Singapore are taken from the Ministry of Health's website, which publishes the *COVID-19 Situation Report* on a daily basis. This report contains information on COVID-19 cases for the past fourteen days (Ministry of Health, Singapore, 2021). The number of cases is separated into imported and non-imported cases. Non-imported cases are further divided into community cases and cases among dormitory residents, where dormitory refers to facilities for migrant workers. The majority of cases in Singapore have been among migrant workers employed in sectors such as construction and cleaning. Case counts in the tracker take all of these case types into account – community, dormitory, and imported. The Ministry of Health has stated that the COVID-19 death count is based on cases where the attending doctor or pathologist attributes the primary or

underlying cause of death as COVID-19 infection (Yong, 2020). Deaths unrelated to COVID-19 complications are excluded.[1]

<u>South Korea</u>

The data for South Korea's COVID-19 cases and deaths come from press releases by the Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (formerly the Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention). These press releases include a detailed breakdown of the daily and cumulative number of confirmed cases, cases in and released from quarantine, deaths, cases under testing, and the number of people who tested negative. Cases are further categorised by whether they are domestic or imported, their region of origin, whether the patient is a foreigner or Korean, and whether the infections were confirmed at the screening stage or in the community. There is also information on the province and type of facility in which mass outbreaks recently occurred. As of January 2021, mass outbreaks accounted for nearly half of all infections and occurred mostly in religious institutions followed by nursing facilities (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Republic of Korea, 2021). There have been several occasions of case count correction due to misreporting by municipalities or testing error at border quarantine. There is no publicly accessible official definition of what counts as a COVID-19 death.

<u>Taiwan</u>

Data on COVID-19 cases and deaths in Taiwan are based on press releases from the Central Epidemic Command Center issued via the Taiwan Centers for Disease Control and the Ministry of Health and Welfare when new cases emerge. These releases provide information on the country of origin of the confirmed case, whether it is imported or domestic, a brief description of the places that the patient visited, and when the infection was confirmed. They also contain a detailed breakdown of the cumulative number of reported and confirmed cases, whether the confirmed cases are imported or indigenous, the number of isolated and discharged patients, and the number of deaths. A COVID-19 death is defined as the death of a person who had tested positive for the disease. Not all Chinese press releases have official English translations. When both versions of the press release are available, the wording of the English version is followed.

Policy responses

In general, policies that are announced as responses to COVID-19 are included in the tracker. Policy content – such as objectives, target group and budget – is also reviewed to ascertain that the policies are related to COVID-19. Only new policies or existing policies that have changed in response to the crisis are included. Otherwise, pre-existing policies that continued during this period are omitted.

<u>Hong Kong</u>

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[1] From 6 December, 2021, the daily death count in Singapore includes only the deaths among local cases.

Policy information for Hong Kong comes from official government websites, such as the official online news platform *news.gov.hk*, press releases from various departments and the government's dedicated COVID-19 website.

<u>Singapore</u>

Information on policy responses in Singapore is taken from official government websites and ministry press releases. In a small number of instances where official information is unavailable or incomplete, media reports are used.

<u>South Korea</u>

Information on policy responses by the Korean government is taken from ministry websites and supplemented by other news media outlets where necessary. English press releases are provided by some of the ministries but are often not as detailed as the Korean versions. Where both Korean and English versions are available, the wording of the English version is adopted.

Policies at the subnational level are generally excluded. While Korean provinces were increasingly given discretion on the implementation of social distancing and other infection control measures, they followed the central government's directives on major policy initiatives due to its jurisdiction over budget. But subnational policies related to the management of mass outbreaks are included due to their significance in the overall management of COVID-19, such as in Daegu and Gyeongbuk (Shincheonji outbreak). Policies in the Seoul Metropolitan Area (Gyeonggido, Seoul and Incheon) are only included when they are mentioned in ministry press releases.

<u>Taiwan</u>

Information on policy responses in Taiwan is obtained from various ministry websites and supplemented by other news media outlets where necessary.

Policy domains

The development of this policy tracker required the construction of a large database of policy information. Each entry in the policy database is assigned two tags – policy date, and policy domain and type.

Policy dates are based on when policies come into effect rather than when they are announced. Some official press releases do not mention implementation dates – the dates of announcements are used only in these cases.

The policy responses are categorised into eight policy domains: Health; Travel; Closure; Businesses; Individuals; Education; Social service; and Others. Each domain is further divided into policy types. Altogether, the tracker distinguishes between 72 different types of policy. The definitions of these policy types are in **Table 1** below.

The policy categories were developed using an inductive approach. As policy information was gathered, the research team classified the entries based on policy content. This classification expanded as governments' responses intensified in response to the pandemic. After a point, notwithstanding variation in policy details, no new policy types could be identified. The research team conducted a final round of review to ensure that the policy types were mutually exclusive and consistently applied to the four countries or regions before finalising the categorisation.

Table 1. Definitions of policy types

Policy Domain	Policy Type		Definition
Health	1	Detection	Detection of cases, e.g. guidelines to healthcare providers, temperature screening (not travel-related).
	2	Quarantine	Domestic quarantine requirements, procedures and facilities (not travel-related).
	3	Testing	Testing for COVID-19 (except in social services)
	4	Tracing	Tracing of contacts with COVID-19 cases
	5	Outbreak containment	Intensive containment measures targeted at localities with serious outbreaks
	6	Treatment	Treatment and enhancement of treatment capacity for COVID-19 cases
	7	Vaccination	Arrangements for COVID-19 vaccination (except research)
	8	Cleaning and inspection	Cleaning and inspection of public and commercial spaces
	9	Equipment	Measures related to protective equipment, e.g. procurement, production, restriction, distribution.
	10	Behaviour	Advice and regulations on safe practices, e.g. social gatherings, distancing, wearing masks, handwashing, recognising symptoms.
	11	Information	Public health communication services and measures
	12	Healthcare capacity	Measures to expand or secure general healthcare capacity, e.g. new hospitals, staff recruitment, separation within hospitals.
	13	Research	Research and promotion of research on COVID-19
Travel	14	Entry controls	Restrictions on inbound travel, temperature screening, monitoring, testing and quarantine upon entry.
	15	Exit controls	Advice and restrictions on outbound travel to other countries.

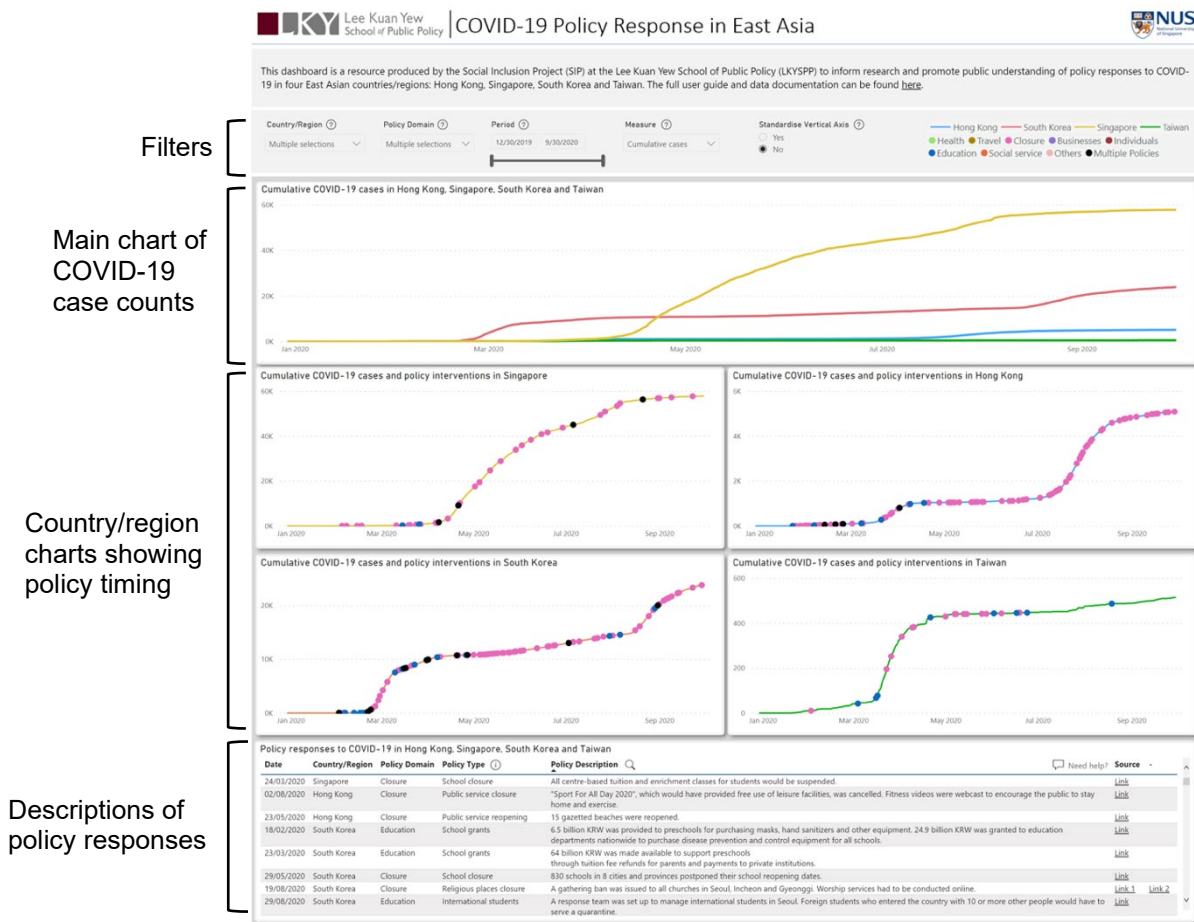| Policy Domain	Policy Type		Definition
	16	Overseas citizens	Advice, services and return travel arrangements for overseas citizens.
	17	Travel bubble	Partnership with other countries to set up travel corridors
	18	Cruise vessels	Measures related to cruise vessels, e.g. screening, quarantine, docking restrictions.
Closure	19	School closure	Reduction of school, tuition or childcare hours, restrictions, closure, delay in opening.
	20	Public service closure	Reduction or closure of public and social services, work from home arrangements.
	21	Religious places closure	Restrictions on religious activities, closure of religious places.
	22	Business closure	Restrictions, closure of commercial and private facilities, work from home arrangements.
	23	School reopening	Resumption of school or childcare hours, reopening of schools.
	24	Public service reopening	Resumption or reopening of public and social services
	25	Religious places reopening	Resumption of religious activities, reopening of religious places.
	26	Business reopening	Lifting of restrictions, reopening of commercial and private facilities.
Businesses	27	Business grants	Cash grants for businesses, e.g. for protective equipment.
	28	Financing	Measures to increase lending capacity, provide loans, reduce interests, defer payments, support insurance premium payments.
	29	Wage support	Wage subsidies for employers
	30	Rent	Rent reduction or deferment for government properties
	31	Business taxes	Reduction or deferment of corporate income and property taxes
	32	Contracts	Flexible handling of contracts, e.g. schedule, payments.
	33	Reporting and regulation	Lightening of corporate reporting and business regulation
	34	Training	Training grants for companies, grants for training providers.
	35	Sector support	Coordinated measures targeted at a specific industry
	36	Self-employed	Cash allowance for self-employed persons

Policy Domain	Policy Type		Definition
	37	Public sector spending	Public sector purchasing to support domestic businesses
	38	Promotion	Services and funds to promote businesses
	39	Advice and services	Consultancy and support services for individual businesses and employers
	40	Technology	Funding for technology adoption and development of online businesses
	41	Other business concessions	Reduction or deferment of government charges other than rent and taxes, e.g. statutory fees, utilities.
Individuals	42	Cash transfers	Cash transfers to individuals and households
	43	Vouchers	Vouchers for food and other items and services
	44	Loans	Loan schemes for individuals
	45	Mortgage support	Deferment of payments, suspension of penalties for arrears.
	46	Individual taxes	Reduction or deferment of personal income and property taxes
	47	Training and jobs	Training schemes and allowance, job creation measures.
	48	Care leave	Promotion of and changes to care leave
	49	Social insurance	Expansion of social insurance schemes, help with premium payments.
	50	Other individual concessions	Reduction of other fees, e.g. professional registration fees, public transport fares.
Education	51	School grants	Cash grants to schools
	52	Exams	Delay, cancellation, or special arrangements for exams.
	53	Fees and loans	Fee reductions or subsidies, deferment of student loan interests or repayments.
	54	Student travel	Restrictions on student and staff travel, support for students unable to commence overseas studies, return arrangements for citizens studying overseas.
	55	Online learning	Measures to support online learning
	56	International students	Assistance for international students
Social service	57	Social service grants	Cash grants to social service operators
	58	Social service testing	Testing for COVID-19 in social service facilities

Policy Domain	Policy Type		Definition
	59	Safety	Safety practices in social service facilities, e.g. suspension of group activities, staff quarantine.
	60	Social service equipment	Provision of protective equipment for social service organisations
	61	New services	New social services, social service information for vulnerable groups.
Others	62	National response level	Changes to national emergency response level
	63	Emergency budget	National budget to fund responses to the crisis
	64	Leadership and coordination	Appointment of national committees, formation of task forces.
	65	Misinformation	Measures to address misinformation or 'fake news'
	66	Migrant workers	Measures targeting migrant workers, e.g. extensions to employment visas and contracts, employment rights, safe practices, quarantine, testing, outbreak containment.
	67	Community mobilisation	Public volunteerism and donation campaigns
	68	Public consultation	Gathering of public opinion on the crisis and related policy measures
	69	International cooperation	Cooperation with other countries in health, travel, trade and other crisis measures.
	70	New economic plan	Plans for post-pandemic economic reforms and strategies
	71	Election	Holding local or national elections
	72	Politician salaries	Donation or foregoing of salaries by politicians and senior public servants

Dashboard

The policy tracker dashboard is made up of three panels (**Figure 1**): (i) the main chart of COVID-19 case counts over time, (ii) four country or region charts showing the timing of policy responses, and (iii) descriptions of policy responses in table form. The information displayed in these panels can be customised using the filters at the top of the dashboard.

Figure 1. Dashboard layout for *COVID-19 Policy Response in East Asia*

Main chart of case counts

The main chart enables cross-regional comparisons of the severity of COVID-19 over time. Users may select up to four countries or regions to display at the same time using the Country/Region filter and control the timeline in the horizontal axis using the Period filter. The Measure filter allows users to choose to view either daily or cumulative counts for cases or deaths. Hovering the mouse pointer over the line will display the name of the country or region, the date and the count for that day.

Country/region charts of policy timing

These charts enable users to compare the timing and frequency of policy responses across various policy domains, as well as between countries or regions, relative to the severity of the COVID-19 situation. Each dot represents the introduction of a policy in response to COVID-19.

Read against the horizontal axis, the dots show the dates on which the policies came into effect. The density of the dots therefore gives an indication of the frequency of policy intervention. The dots also lie on a line showing the daily or cumulative case or death count, which can be toggled using the Measure filter. The vertical axis applies to these counts. So read against the vertical axis and case count lines, the dots indicate the timing of the policies in relation to the severity of the COVID-19 situation.

The dots are colour-coded according to policy domain. The legend is at the top right corner of the dashboard. On days when policies from more than one domain were introduced, the dots are black. Users may control the timeline in the horizontal axis using the Period filter, and choose which policy domains to view using the Policy Domain filter. Readability may be improved by selecting fewer policy domain options or shortening the time period.

As the total case counts vary significantly between the four countries or regions, users may opt to improve the comparability of the four charts by choosing Yes in the Standardise Vertical Axis filter, or to improve the readability of the charts with lower case counts by choosing No.

Similar to the main chart of case counts, hovering the mouse pointer over the lines in the country/region charts will display the name of the country or region, the date and the case count for that day.

Descriptions of policy responses

By default, the table in the bottom panel shows descriptions of the policy responses in the selected countries or regions and for the specified policy domains, as well as the date, policy domain and type, and information sources for each entry. The table is refreshed when users toggle the filters. The information may be read by scrolling through the table. Alternatively, to quickly find the descriptions of policies introduced on a specific day in a particular country or region, users may click on a dot in the country/region charts of policy timing. Note that clicking on a dot will only select a policy to display in the table if that particular country or region is already selected in the Country/Region filter at the top of the dashboard.

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Appendix A. Information Sources

Below is a list of the major official information sources for this policy tracker.

Country/ Region	Agency (Website)
Hong Kong	• Centre for Health Protection, HKSAR (www.chp.gov.hk/en/index.html) • HKSAR COVID-19 Thematic Website (www.coronavirus.gov.hk/eng/index.html) • news.gov.hk (www.news.gov.hk/eng/index.html) • The Government of HKSAR, Press Releases (www.info.gov.hk/gia/ISD_public_Calendar_en.html) • Agricultural, Fisheries and Conservation Department (www.afcd.gov.hk) • Airport Authority (www.hongkongairport.com) • Construction Industry Council (www.cic.hk) • Department of Health (www.dh.gov.hk/eindex.html) • Development Bureau (www.devb.gov.hk) • Education Bureau (www.edb.gov.hk) • Employment Support Scheme (www.ess.gov.hk) • Food and Health Bureau (www.fhb.gov.hk/en/index.html) • Health Authority (www.ha.org.hk) • Home Affairs Bureau (www.hab.gov.hk) • Hong Kong Arts Development Council (www.hkadc.org.hk) • Hong Kong Productivity Council (www.hkpc.org) • Hong Kong Securities and Investment institute (www.hksi.org) • Hongkong Post (www.hongkongpost.hk) • Legislative Council (www.legco.gov.hk) • Leisure and Cultural Department (www.lcsd.gov.hk) • Office of Communication Authority (www.ofca.gov.hk) • Security and Futures Commission (www.sfc.hk) • Social Welfare Department (www.swd.gov.hk) • Transport Department (www.td.gov.hk)
Singapore	• Ministry of Health (www.moh.gov.sg) • Ministry of Finance (www.mof.gov.sg) • Ministry of Education (www.moe.gov.sg) • Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mfa.gov.sg) • Ministry of Social and Family Development (www.msf.gov.sg) • Land Transport Authority (www.lta.gov.sg) • Housing and Development Board (www.hdb.gov.sg) • Singapore Budget Website (www.singaporebudget.gov.sg/budget_2020/home) • Ministry of Communication and Information (www.mci.gov.sg) • Ministry of Law (www.mlaw.gov.sg) • Ministry of Trade and Industry (www.mti.gov.sg)

Country/ Region	Agency (Website)
	● Ministry of Manpower (www.mom.gov.sg)
	● Ministry of Transport (www.mot.gov.sg)
South Korea	● Ministry of Health and Welfare (www.mohw.go.kr) ● Korea Disease Control and Prevention Agency (formerly Korea Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) (www.cdc.go.kr) ● Ministry of Foreign Affairs (www.mofa.go.kr) ● Ministry of Justice (www.moj.go.kr) ● Ministry of Education (www.moe.go.kr) ● Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (www.mcst.go.kr) ● Ministry of Employment and Labor (www.moel.go.kr) ● Ministry of the Interior and Safety (www.mois.go.kr) ● Ministry of Economy and Finance (www.moef.go.kr) ● Ministry of Food and Drug Safety (www.mfds.go.kr)
Taiwan	● Executive Yuan (www.ey.gov.tw) ● Ministry of Interior (www.moi.gov.tw) ● Ministry of Finance (www.mof.gov.tw) ● Ministry of Education (www.edu.tw) ● Ministry of Economic Affairs (www.moea.gov.tw) ● Ministry of Transportation and Communications (www. motc.gov.tw) ● Ministry of Labour (www.mol.gov.tw) ● Council of Agriculture (coa.gov.tw) ● Ministry of Health and Welfare (www.mohw.gov.tw) ● Overseas Community Affairs Council (ocac.gov.tw) ● Council of Indigenous Peoples (cip.gov.tw) ● Directorate-General of Budget, Accounting and Statistics (dbgas.gov.tw)

Appendix B. Notes

This document may be updated from time to time. Check for the most recent version at: https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/social-inclusion-project

In the policy tracker, monetary values are reported in local currencies, i.e. HKD, SGD, KRW and TWD for Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, respectively. One USD equals 7.75 HKD, 1.33 SGD, 1,103.50 KRW and 28.03 TWD as at 19 January 2021.

The numbers of cases and deaths are reported according to local times. Hong Kong, Singapore and Taiwan share the same time zone of UTC+8 while South Korea's time zone is UTC+9.

Building an up-to-date policy tracker requires ongoing work. If you have a question about the tracker, please contact us at lkyspp-sip@nus.edu.sg. You may also report any errors to the same email address with "Reporting an error" in the subject line.