Policy Reponses to Covid-19

Transport connectivity in Asia and the Pacific

DECADE OF ACTION

UNITED NATIONS
ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific

OVERVIEW

One of the early lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic is the importance of maintaining transport connectivity and the cross-border movement of essential goods, such as basic commodities, agricultural products, foodstuff and medical supplies. Preserving transport connectivity is indispensable not only for the immediate response to the pandemic, but also for the subsequent recovery efforts rooted in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and for building resilience to future pandemics and crises.

Summary

The current policy brief reviews countries' initial responses to the outbreak and suggests some key takeaways that can inform current and future policy responses. The lessons from the COVID-19 experience, highlighted in this brief, provide valuable insights on how regional cooperation could help with coordinated and timely responses to disruptions like the current pandemic. This will be instrumental not only to deal with future pandemics but also with large-scale disruptive events of any nature, including the climate related disasters which are increasing in frequency and intensity.

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While the international movement of people and, to some extent, of freight transport has undoubtedly enabled the COVID-19 spread, the role of transport connectivity in dealing with the crisis and post-crisis recovery is even more critical than its role in the initial spread of the pandemic. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 led to uncoordinated boarder closures, controls and restrictions on international freight transport operations. While many of the policy measures have exempted freight flows of essential commodities, this has not necessarily meant that freight transport has been able to flow freely across borders.

The fragmented policy responses immediately following the outbreak suggest that there may not be sufficient cooperation mechanisms in place in Asia and the Pacific to ensure that cross-border trade and transport take place as smoothly as possible in times of pandemic or other similar cross-border emergencies. The COVID-19 experience provides valuable lessons on how regional cooperation could help with coordinated and timely responses to disruptions like the current pandemic. This will be instrumental not only to deal with future pandemics but also with large-scale disruptive events of any nature, including the climate related disasters which are increasing in frequency and intensity.

The current policy brief on transport connectivity and COVID-19, draws lessons from countries' initial responses to the outbreak and suggests some key takeaways that can inform current and future policy responses including:

- Regional transport connectivity provides the most effective means of response in the course of a pandemic and in its aftermath and needs to be preserved; protectionist solutions reduce efficiencies and are vulnerable to future shocks.
- More effective use of existing regional transport cooperation would make the response to such pandemics and emergency or disaster more effective.
- Countries can seize upon the opportunity that the current pandemic provides for a decisive shift towards digitizing the processes involved in exchange of information to complete operational and regulatory transport controls.
- In the aftermath of the crisis, the initiatives which contributed to making freight operations more sustainable, especially in environmental and social terms, should be retained, helping countries to build back better and make a quality leap in their sustainable transport connectivity.

I. The role of transport connectivity in the COVID-19 pandemic

The international movement of people has, undoubtedly, enabled the COVID-19 spread with international transport acting as a pandemic vector directly influencing the velocity and extent of the COVID-19 outbreak. Air transport contributed to a more rapid spread of pandemics due to ever shortening travel times, exceedingly increasing the incubation period for most of the diseases. The linkage between transport and pandemics is a well-known and increasingly documented phenomenon, best illustrated, prior to COVID-19, by the notable case of the Spanish Flu, which spread quickly and extensively by infected crews and passengers of ships and trains with severe epidemics occurred in shipyards and railway personnel (Rodrigue and al., 2020).

Freight transport also contributed to the spread of the pandemic, as cargo usually does not move without the associated crew. The role of transport workers, and, notably long-distance truck drivers, but also port and railways workers, has been highlighted in the case of other diseases, such as HIV/AIDs, prompting the Governments and transport industry to elaborate codes of conduct and other tools to protect the transport workers and contain the spread of the disease.[1] Understandably, therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic also put transport workers at the forefront, as part of the critical personnel in dealing with the crisis, but also as a particularly vulnerable group of people to protect. [2]

The role of transport connectivity in dealing with the crisis and post-crisis recovery is even more critical than its role in the initial spread of the pandemic. Once a pandemic takes place or immediately thereafter, the major concerns shift to freight distribution.[]. Disruptions in the continuity of distribution are potentially much more damaging than the pandemic itself."[3] The COVID-19 outbreak showed several examples of disruptions in food supply chains, some of which had very little slack to begin with, which led to empty store shelves and, thus, heightened panic in some communities.[4] Therefore, even during the peak of a pandemic, there is a need to ensure that that the food and medical supply chains and humanitarian logistics functions effectively to minimize social disruptions. The production and delivery of medical supplies and eventual vaccines or other medical treatments also closely depend on the state of the global and regional supply chains and freight logistics.

Faced with the COVID-19 outbreak, the nature of contemporary supply chains were exposed for their major limitations. The established practices of freight consolidation, using economies of scale, limited inventory and just-in-time delivery limited the resilience of global and regional supply chains when some of the links in the chains broke and resulted in shortages of some critical goods or disbalances in inventories or freight delivery.[5] Likewise, the pandemic revealed a hidden precarity of

[1] International Labour Organization, (ILO), "Driving for change: A training toolkit on HIV/AIDS for the road transport sector" https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_dialogue/---sector/documents/instructionalmaterial/wcms_159266.pdf

[2] International Workers Federation (ITF), "COVID-19", https://www.itfglobal.org/en/focus/covid-19; IMO (2020), "Tackling COVID-19 – a voyage together",http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/Pages/08-IMO-SG-message.aspx; International Road Transport Union (IRU)/ITF," IRU/ITF: support for road transport essential to safeguarding a healthy global economy", https://www.iru.org/resources/newsroom/iruitf-support-road-transport-essential-safeguarding-healthy-global-economy.

[3] Jean-Paul Rodrigue, Thomas Luke (Department of Virology, Naval Medical Research Center) and Michael Osterholm (Director of the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy (CIDRAP), University of Minnesota), (2020), "Transportation and Pandemics", accessible at https://transportgeography.org/?page_id=8869

[4] https://montreal.ctvnews.ca/covid-19-empty-shelves-as-montrealers-rush-to-grocery-stores-1.4851552 ; https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2020/03/573631/empty-shelves-penang-supermarkets-amid-covid-19

[5] Jean-Paul Rodrigue (2020), "Coronavirus Impacts on Trade and Supply Chains", Dept. of Global Studies & Geography, Hofstra University, New York, USA.

the transport sector, as its entire segments, such as aviation sector[6], small and medium transport operators, freight forwarders[7] and many others, started crumbling faced with the reduced demand, increasing operational restrictions and many other challenges arising from the pandemic. Fracturing of global and regional supply chains and weakening transport and logistics capabilities will have a direct negative impact on the countries' capacity to recover and pursue the achievement of the SDGs.

This highlights the crucial linkage between international freight transport and COVID-19, expressed in the cross-border movement of freight and of transport workers. **Closing borders to international freight or border controls for truck drivers, seafarers and other participants of international freight transport operations are likely to bring limited results in terms of preventing or containing the outbreaks, while coming certainly at a high cost to the countries' ability to deal with the crises and its immediate aftermath**.

II. Countries' response and cross-border transport connectivity

As the COVID-19 crisis unfolded, **it became increasingly difficult to track and monitor national responses, affecting freight distribution**, prompting several international agencies, including the World Trade Organization (WTO), World Customs Organization (WCO) and the United Nations (UN) System and many others, to set up *ad hoc* monitoring mechanisms for sharing this information.[8]

During the crisis, countries, sometimes part of a same economic union or regional free trade arrangement, have issued new policies on trade and transport regulations without warning or consulting their integration partners. Some countries implemented partial or complete lock down of border crossing points or introducing new requirements at the borders, with the potential to increase cross-border transport waiting time and costs, making transported goods less affordable. Rapidly changing new restrictions, new requirements, as well as lack of clarity and limited information compounded the already difficult position of trade and transport operators, already under the strain from the declining demand and uncertain economic climate.

The following table shows the results of a preliminary review of the measures on cross-border transport, introduced by the selected ESCAP member States, as a response to the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic. The review was carried out by UNESCAP through desktop research, using official national sources.

Table 1: COVID-19 measures and transport in selected ESCAP countries

Country	Land/maritime borders closed	Exception for freight transport	Health and sanitary measures for crew	Facilitation measures
Armenia	Partially	Yes	Yes	N/A
Australia	No	-	Yes	Yes
Azerbaijan	Partially	Yes	Yes	N/A
Brunei Darussalam	Partially	N/A	Yes	N/A
China	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Georgia	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hong Kong, China	Partially	Yes	Yes	N/A
India	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

[6] Airports Council International (ACI), "Global traffic figures show COVID-19 impact on aviation was rapid" 25 March, 2020, https://aci.aero/news/2020/03/25/global-traffic-figures-show-covid-19-impact-on-aviation-was-rapid/ .

[7] FIATA (2020), "Maintaining the flow of essential goods during the COVID-19 crisis", Glattbrugg.

[8] See annex 1.

Country	Land/maritime borders closed	Exception for freight transport	Health and sanitary measures for crew	Facilitation measures
Islamic Republic of Iran	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Japan	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lao PDR	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kazakhstan	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Kyrgyzstan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Malaysia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mongolia	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
New Zealand	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Pakistan	Yes	Yes*	Yes	N/A
Philippines (The)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Republic of Korea	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Russian Federation	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Singapore	Partially	Yes	Yes	Yes
Tajikistan	Partially	Yes	Yes	N/A
Thailand	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
Uzbekistan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Vietnam	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

Source: ESCAP Transport Division, 15 April 2020, based on the national sources.

Most of the **introduced policy measures have exempted freight flows of essential commodities and, in some cases, the general freight movement**, while introducing necessary sanitary and health requirements. This has **not necessarily meant that freight transport has been able to flow freely across borders**. Road transport industry and region's press reported cases of severe bottlenecks at the borders including in Central and North Asia and South-East Asia.[9] In a number of cases, this was caused by new controls or quarantine measures on the transport crew, and, notably, the truck drivers, sea crews and other transport personnel. Cargo congestions at ports and airports were also reported due to many consignees and cargo owners extensive delay in claiming their cargos, as a result of the national lockdown.[10]

In this context, it is unsurprising that **the pandemic also prompted the acceleration of innovation and digitalized facilitation of transport processes**. Several countries introduced priority lines (so called 'green lanes') and accelerated customs procedures for essential goods, started accepting electronic documents, piloted new automated and digital technologies, promoted contactless processing and delivery and many other measures (Table 2).

Table 2: Examples of facilitation measures introduced to fight the COVID-19 outbreak

Country	Special Facilitation Measures
Georgia	Within the frames of the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, movement of the freight vehicles through the customs checkpoint on Georgian-Azerbaijani border (including transit and rail freight traffic) is ensured according to the specially developed protocol in 24-hour regime.

[9] IRU, « Coronavirus (COVID-19) information hub», https://www.iru.org/covid19 ;

[10] For example, cargo congestions impacted the operation of the ports in Manila as many consignees and cargo owners delayed claiming their cargos, due to the lockdown. https://www.ppa.com.ph/content/manila-ports-fear-shut-down-due-continued-cargo-congestion-slow-pull-out.

Country	Special Facilitation Measures
China[11]	Fast clearance of anti-epidemic supplies. For imported supplies, all local Customs are required to open exclusive counters and green lanes 24/7 to ensure fast clearance; imported pharmaceuticals, disinfection supplies, protective suits, treatment equipment and other supplies will be released without delay. For exported supplies, green lanes are provided 24/7 to minimize the clearance time. Transport facilitation measures taken include removing all road tolls (including for bridge and tunnels) across the country for all vehicles, until the pandemic ends; putting in place a no-stop, no-check, toll free policy for vehicles transporting emergency supplies and essential personnel and cutting operational costs of international air cargo, including exemptions from the civil aviation development funds as well as reduction of airport charges and air traffic control. Passenger airlines are also encouraged to turn passenger planes into all-cargo freighters for carrying out freight transportation to make up for the shortage of air freight capacity amid the escalating pandemic.
India	Special facilitation measures at main ports. To ensure smooth flow of supply chain of Essential Items during National Lockdown to fight COVID-19, clarifications were provided to ensure that stakeholders in logistics and warehousing receive necessary assistance to continue their operations.
Japan	As of 4 March, Japan prioritized customs clearance for relief supplies, water and fuel.
Kazakhstan	Government is promoting green corridors for road freight movement of medical and socially-significant goods.
Malaysia	Special measures are introduced for essential services, or supplies (e.g. lorry drivers, vegetable supply truckers, frozen supply truckers) via land and sea crossings.
Republic of Korea	Customs Clearance Support Centers for COVID-19 at major Customs offices across the country; A 24/7customs clearance system for speedy clearance of sanitary products, medical devices/equipment and raw materials imports; Temporarily designated support teams for emergency clearance of raw materials at several Customs offices (including Incheon International Airport, Incheon Port and Pyeongtaek Customs) in preparation for a temporary surge in the amount of raw materials imported; To address delays at airports and seaports, allowing cargo to be transported directly to manufacturing plants without entry into the terminal after arrival in order to solve the problems of delayed unloading and shortage of storage space at airports and seaports driven by the concentration of imports.
Russian Federation	Launch at the customs "green corridor" for food and non-food essential goods to be procured by large trading networks and importers); a headquarters has been set up at Russian Railways to provide operational support to shippers and ensure coordination of all links in the transport chains in the context of preventing and eliminating the spread of new coronavirus infection; Temporary exemption from weight control of vehicles, carrying essential goods and temporary cancellation restrictions on the movement of such vehicles and their loading and unloading within the city limits
Singapore	The Singapore-Malaysia Special Working Committee has agreed that the transport of all types of goods between Malaysia and Singapore will be facilitated during the duration of Malaysia's Movement Control Order. As such, those conveying essential services, or supplies (e.g. lorry drivers, vegetable supply truckers, frozen supply truckers) via land and sea crossings will be exempted from the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) entry approval and quarantine ("Stay Home Notice" (SHN)) requirements.
Uzbekistan	Government set up create an operational headquarters to ensure expedited passage of goods through border customs posts, their uninterrupted customs clearance, as well as the issuance of permits for exported and imported goods. It also decided to introduce, starting

[11] A review of China's Trade Facilitation responses to the COVID-19 Pandemic is available from UNCTAD, Article No. 52, "UNCTAD Transport and Trade Facilitation Newsletter N°86 - Second Quarter 2020", https://unctad.org/en/Pages/DTL/TTL/Transport-Newsletter.aspx

Country	Special Facilitation Measures
	from April 1, 2020, the mechanism for customs clearance of imported food products in an expedited manner, including by issuing permits before the goods arrive in the Republic of Uzbekistan. A software has been developed on the website of Uzbekistan Temir Yollari JSC for processing and providing preliminary electronic information to customs authorities on goods transported by rail.

Source: ESCAP Transport Division, 15 April 2020, based on national sources.

T**he transport industry itself has also showed an impressive agility in adjusting its contribution to fighting the outbreak,** with passenger airplanes repurposed to transport medical supplies and other cargo[12], passenger rail wagons transformed into temporary hospitals[13] and other unorthodox solutions in support of containing and fighting the outbreak. Another good example is the responsiveness of maritime ports, documented by UNCTAD,[14] showing numerous best practices and effective transport protocols piloted while dealing with the outbreak.

Finally, as increasingly observed, **the transport-related response to the outbreak has a very strong environmental component.** Dramatic drop of the nitrogen dioxide (NO_2) and carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions in China and around the world demonstrated how much drastically reducing transport and industrial activity can impact emissions[15] and how the sector is still very much dependent upon the use of fossil fuels. Another shift towards greater sustainability is the momentum gained by international rail transport, which, in addition to its traditional advantages in terms of its lower environmental impact than road transport, has been proving to be the "most shock-proof modality".[16] Likewise, automated and "smart" transport and logistics practices, which tend to bring environmental benefits by optimizing transport and logistics' operations, have gained another competitive notch by allowing the reduction of "compromised" human interventions.[17]

In summary, the policy responses immediately following the outbreak were fragmented and lacked coherence partially as a result of limited use of regional cooperation mechanisms. The unilateral measures and the scale of these responses prompted WTO and WCO to issue a joint statement, pledging joint efforts to facilitate trade in essential goods, calling for transparency and pleading with members to refrain from restrictive policies and practices.[18] Prior to that, several international organizations working in transport field, including International Maritime Organization (IMO) and UNCTAD, and G20 have voiced their concerns with the COVID-19 response and its impact on transport.[19]

[12] https://www.aircargonews.net/airlines/airlines-fill-passenger-seats-with-cargo-to-meet-demand/.

[13] https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/05/asia/indian-railways-coronavirus-hospitals-intl-hnk/index.html

[14] https://tft.unctad.org/ports-covid-19/

[15] https://transportpolicymatters.org/2020/03/06/global-pandemics-and-transport-systems-in-an-age-of-disruptions/

[16] https://www.railfreight.com/specials/2020/03/03/rail-freight-china-proves-most-shock-proof-modality/

[17] https://www.transportjournal.com/de/home/news/artikeldetail/covid-19-hupac-relies-on-contactless-terminal-management.html

[18] https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news20_e/igo_06apr20_e.htm

[19] IMO/WHO: http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/HotTopics/Documents/Joint%20Statement_COVID-19.pdf ; UNCTAD: https://unctad.org/en/pages/newsdetails.aspx?OriginalVersionID=2311, G20: https://twitter.com/shippingics/status/1245362142037016577

Green Lanes Border-Crossings and COVID-19

To ensure that EU-wide supply chains continue to operate, Member States are requested to designate, without delay, all the relevant internal border-crossing points on the trans-European transport network (TEN-T) as 'green lane' border crossings. The green lane border crossings:

- Should be open to all freight vehicles, whatever goods they are carrying.
- Procedures at green lane border crossings should be minimized and streamlined to what is strictly necessary.
- Checks and screening should be carried out without drivers having to leave their vehicles, and drivers themselves should undergo only minimal checks.
- Drivers of freight vehicles should not be asked to produce any document other than their identification and driving license and, if necessary, a letter from the employer. The electronic submission/display of documents should be accepted.
- No freight vehicle or driver should face discrimination, irrespective of origin and destination, the driver's nationality or the vehicle's country of registration.

Source: European Commission, 2020.

The responses to COVID-19 pandemic suggest that there may not be sufficient cooperation mechanisms in place in Asia and the Pacific to ensure that cross-border trade and transport take place as smoothly as possible in times of pandemic or other similar cross-border emergencies. It demonstrated that essentially none of the hundreds of regional trade, transport or transit cooperation mechanisms, which in practice should be regulating cross-border trade and transport, offered sufficient guidance on the matter or provided a mechanism for risk sharing and coordination of emergency measures. By the same token, the global legal framework for land transport, set out by the global transport agreements, appears to not have been robust enough to withhold the shock of the COVID-19 impact.

Evidence of how regional action can alleviate the cross-border transport complications arising from the COVID-19 response can be found in other regions of the world, for example the **"green lanes"** in Europe (see box)[20] and the joint statement by the Ministers responsible for health and East African Community Affairs with several transport-related actions, including facilitation of free movement of goods and services, coordinated measures for enhanced controls of trucks and vehicles carrying goods and surveillance systems for monitoring the health of transport crew and enable contact tracing.[21]

III. Lessons learned and ways forward

The COVID-19 experience provides valuable lessons on how **regional cooperation could help with coordinated and timely responses to disruptions, similar to the current pandemic**. This will be instrumental not only to deal with future pandemics but also with large-scale disruptive events of any nature, as both the likelihood and the detrimental impact of such events will continue to increase steadily due to the impact of climate change, unintended consequences of new technologies, environmental impacts of rapid economic growth, urbanization and many other factors.

Even under the current scenario of temporary lock downs within countries, sealing of borders and restricted travel to minimize people-to-people contact, there is need to keep food and medical supply chains in operation to meet basic needs. Border closures, if required, need to ensure that transport of essential items, including medical supplies, is not adversely affected. This requires an

[20] https://ec.europa.eu/transport/news/2020-03-18-covid-19-keep-priority-traffic-moving_en

[21] https://www.eac.int/statements/1705-joint-statement-by-the-ministers-responsible-for-health-and-east-african-community-affairs-issued-on-25th-march-2020-on-covid-19-preparedness-and-response-in-east-african-community-region

appropriate sub-regional or regional mechanism for sharing information and coordinating response to opening or closure of borders and maintaining required levels of transport connectivity.

In the event of prolonged closures and recession, the case for a regional cooperation is even stronger. Countries would need to ensure that the closure of borders, temporary lock downs and cross-border and transit transport restrictions do not cause even greater social and economic disruptions. Regional coordination on issues related to transport connectivity would be crucial to minimize damage to the social and economic fabric. Economic well-being is particularly crucial for the landlocked developing countries and Small Island developing States of the region, which already suffer from high transport and transit costs.

What could be the role of transport connectivity in mitigating the impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak and building resilience in the medium- to long- term to deal more effectively with pandemics and similar crises? Even though the situation is still evolving, the initial analysis suggests some key takeaways, informing current and future policy responses and the transition to the new normal.

First, all efforts should be made to preserve transport connectivity in the course of a pandemic and in its aftermath. Protectionist solutions and profound changes to production and delivery lines may reduce not only energy efficiency, opportunities for economies of scale and other benefits of globalized production, but also diminish greater resilience, as the national system is also susceptible to shocks. Initiatives such as the Observatory on Border Crossings Status due to COVID-19, led by UNECE and supported by ESCAP, other UN Regional Commissions and specialized transport organizations, could help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on cross-border transport and trade.

Second, greater use of existing regional transport cooperation could make the response to pandemics, emergencies and disasters more effective. While preliminary evidence suggests that most countries managed to maintain the critical mass of freight flows, a coordinated regional, sub-regional or even bilateral response is likely to be more cost-effective and impactful. Regional coordination and cooperation could focus on the *risk sharing*, *early responses* and *rapid alerts* mechanism, which will help enhance the predictability of trade and transport of key supplies in times of crisis, enable more effective communications between parties involved in trade and transport during crisis, preserve the minimal functioning of essential cross-border corridors and border-crossings and ensure a swift and orderly return to “normal” trade and transport operations post-crisis. At the global level, there is a need for an updated framework that can effectively address future disruptions and offer an innovative way of international cooperation in the field of transport, with a view to preserve the necessary operation of global and regional logistics and supply chains. At the regional level in Asia and the Pacific, the existing intergovernmental agreements on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-Asian Railway network and Dry ports of international importance could be used to form a basis for preserving the minimum connectivity during major disruptions by introducing “green lanes”, identifying critical border crossings to remain open and coordinating health and safety controls.

Preserving connectivity through regional cooperation in Asia and the Pacific

The regional transport infrastructure network in Asia and the Pacific is formalized by intergovernmental agreements on the Asian Highway Network, the Trans-Asian Railway Network and dry ports of international importance. The list of the transport routes is continuously updated to reflect the evolution of the region’s progress in linking its economies. With appropriate actions, this could form the basis for identifying the critical transport infrastructure to remain open in times of disruptions while ensuring adequate health and safety controls.

In scaling up regional cooperation, the opportunity for a decisive shift towards digitizing the processes involved in exchanging information required to complete operational and regulatory transport controls should be harnessed. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the vulnerability and precarity of the global and regional supply chains, but also gave rise to new innovative solutions and

risk management strategies. It provided a renewed opportunity for leveraging digital technologies and facilitating electronic exchange of information among involved stakeholders. Most countries in Asia and the Pacific have already undertaken concrete work in this direction. The time is ripe to take this work to its logical conclusion. Existing solutions, including e-transit regimes like the eTIR international system, electronic tracking of goods and vehicles, digital freight corridors and many others, should be promoted as part of a consolidated response to the pandemic and its fallouts.

Finally, in the aftermath of the crisis, the initiatives which contributed to making freight operations more sustainable, especially in environmental and social terms, should be retained, helping countries to build back better and make a quality leap in their transport connectivity. The close linkage between the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate change challenge has already been signaled[22] (ESCAP, 2020) and lessons learned from COVID-19 policy responses should inform future policies on more sustainable and inclusive transport. As the pandemic recedes, the numerous "avoid-shift-improve" techniques, a greater use of more environmental modes of transport and a greater use of new technologies should be retained as much as possible, avoiding the return to the unsustainable status quo. By the same token, the COVID-19 crisis should help achieve greater social protection and higher awareness of the health hazards, to which all transport workers at the forefront of the COVID-19 crisis, were exposed.[23] This transformation of transport connectivity should come at a continuous but gradual pace, as many countries, in particular developing countries, may experience reduced appetite or in any case, greatly diminished implementation capabilities to pursue ambitious environmental or social agendas in the aftermath of the crisis. Still, it will also be a good opportunity to incorporate environmental and social agendas to the new policies that will shape future freight transport and connectivity.

It may be too soon to tell what the COVID-19 pandemic really means for the world and for transport connectivity more specifically. A thorough understanding may take years, if not, decades. Information and data analysis, as well as detailed assessments will remain key activities for the most foreseeable future, guiding and informing our policy responses. Yet, the transport world cannot afford to stand still and should move forward, while keeping its eyes on the prize, a sustainable and inclusive Asia and the Pacific, capable of withholding great shocks without leaving anyone behind.

[22] ESCAP, "The Impact and Policy Responses for COVID-19 in Asia and the Pacific", 26 March 2020, available at: https://www.unescap.org/resources/impact-and-policy-responses-covid-19-asia-and-pacific

[23] https://www.itfglobal.org/en/focus/covid-19

Annex 1

SELECTED RESOUCRES FOR TRACKING NATIONAL RESPONSES

Focus	Organization	Link
General	UNCTAD, Repositories of measures on cross-border movement of goods and persons	https://unctad.org/en/Pages/Coronavirus/measures-affecting-cross-border-movement-of-goods-and-persons.aspx
Border-crossings world-wide	Observatory on Border Crossings UNECE, UNESCAP, other UN regional commissions, IRU, ECO and others	https://wiki.unece.org/display/CTRBSBC/Observatory+on+Border+Crossings+Status+due+to+COVID-19+Home
Border-crossings in the EU	Border crossing points (TEN-T Road Network)	https://europa.eu/!BU44hm
Aviation	Aviation: Daily Traffic Variation (EUROCONTROL)	https://www.eurocontrol.int/Economics/DailyTrafficVariation-States.html
	International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)	https://www.icao.int/Security/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx
	International Air Transport Association (IATA)	https://www.iata.org/en/programs/safety/health/diseases/
	Airports Council International (ACI)	https://aci.aero/about-aci/priorities/health/covid-19/
Road	Truck border crossing times (SixFold)	https://covid-19.sixfold.com/
	International Transport Forum (ITF)	https://www.itf-oecd.org/covid-19-road-group
	International Road Transport Union (IRU)	https://www.iru.org/coronavirus-covid-19-information
	Temporary relaxation of drivers' hours rules	https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/temporary-relaxation-drivers-covid.pdf
Maritime	European Maritime Safety Agency (EMSA)	http://emsa.europa.eu/news-a-press-centre/covid19.html
	International Maritime Organisation (IMO)	http://www.imo.org/en/MediaCentre/PressBriefings/Pages/08-IMO-SG-message.aspx
	Advice for health authorities and ship operators who have decided to suspend sailings (EU Healthy Gateways Joint action)	https://www.healthygateways.eu/Portals/0/plcdocs/EU_HEALTHY_GATEWAYS_COVID-19_Stationed_ships_18_3_2020_F.pdf?ver=2020-03-20-183254-500
	Central Commission for the Navigation of the Rhine (CCNR)	https://www.ccr-zkr.org/13070000-en.html
	Danube Commission	https://www.danubecommission.org/dc/en/2020/03/24/information-regarding-the-

Focus	Organization	Link
		status-of-all-national-covid-19-restrictions-for-danube/
Customs	WCO	http://www.wcoomd.org/en/topics/facilitation/activities-and-programmes/natural-disaster/coronavirus.aspx
Sub-regional	COVID-19 ASEAN Digital Dashboard	https://covid19.usasean.org/

Source: based on [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/coronavirus-response_en] and expanded by the author.