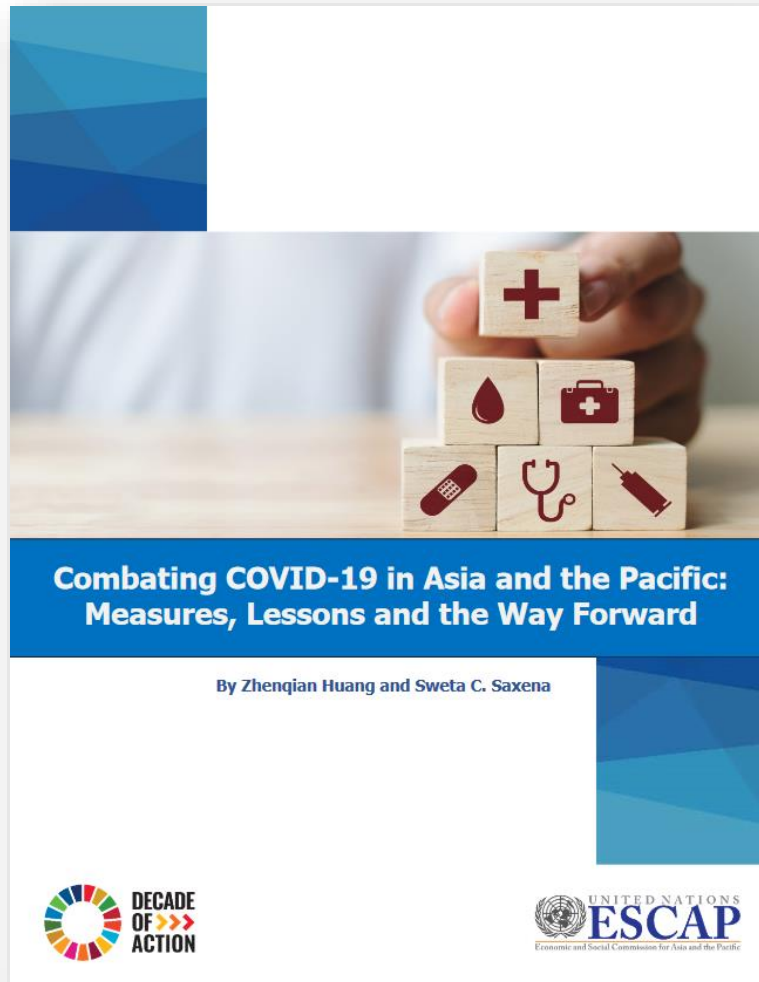


COVID-19 Policy Responses Tracker

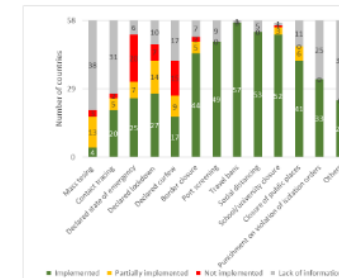
Dayyan Shayani

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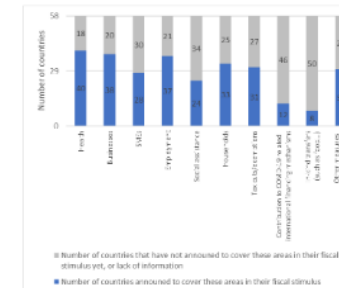
It was early May this year, I got an email saying that a Policy Brief was published by the ESCAP Division responsible for Macroeconomic analysis. They had put together a neat database showing how countries in the region were responding to the pandemic. However, they didn't know how to make this data available online.

Figure 1
COVID-19 containment and mitigation measures in Asia and the Pacific



Source: ESCAP, based on IMF Policy Responses to COVID-19, ILO COVID-19 Country Policy Responses, Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, and various national sources.
Note: The figure is based on information available up to 1 May 2020.
Implemented = implemented nationwide; Partially implemented = implemented in selected locations.

Figure 2
Areas that fiscal stimuli cover in Asia and the Pacific



Source: ESCAP, based on information available up to 1 May 2020 from IMF Policy Responses to COVID-19, ILO COVID-19 Country Policy Responses, OECD Country Policy Tracker, Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker, and various national sources.
Note: Fiscal support includes the following components: health sector: increased spending on public health services, such as epidemic prevention and control and acquisition of medical supplies; businesses: sectoral-specific financial support, tax exemption or deferral, utility or rental payment exemption or deferral, etc.; SMEs: SME-specific business support measures, employment, wage subsidies, employment retention and employment training; social assistance: child allowance, elderly care, unemployment benefits, pension payments, suspension of social insurance payments; households: direct cash transfers, reduction in utility bill payments, house rental subsidies, and reduction grants for vulnerable households. Tax cuts or exemptions cover both businesses and households. Other measures include budget saving or infrastructure investment. Some of the categories may overlap. For example, a tax cut for SMEs will be recorded in the "businesses", "SMEs" and "Tax cuts/exemptions" categories.

that did, they did so by imposing fines, public humiliation and imprisonment. For instance, *Singapore* would penalize those who flout social distancing regulations with a fine of up to S\$10,000 or six months imprisonment.

In comparison, only a quarter of the countries have started mass testing and contact tracing, which have been identified as effective measures to contain COVID-19.²

B. MACROECONOMIC STIMULUS Saving lives and livelihoods

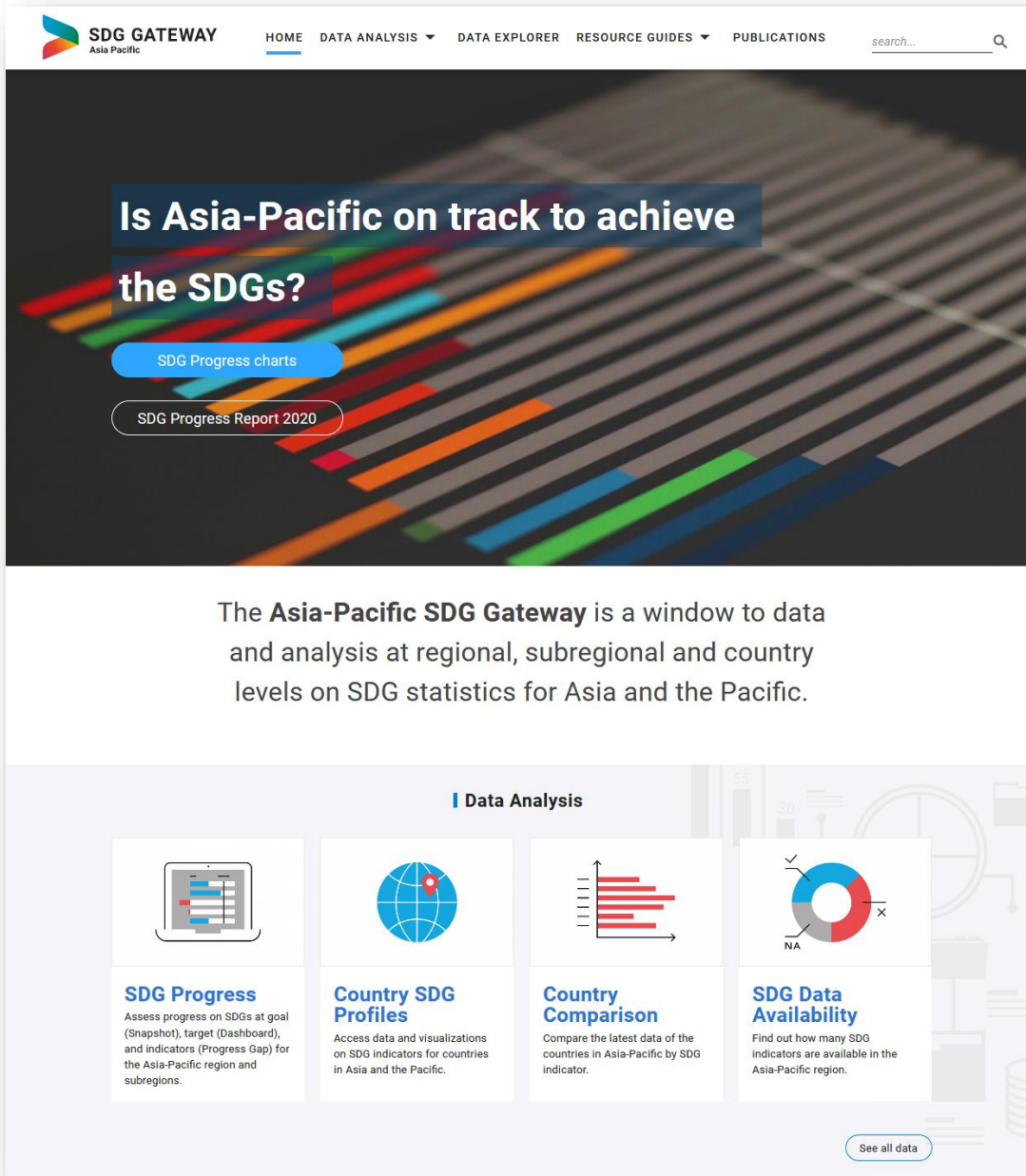
Fiscal measures: *Saving lives and livelihoods through stimulus packages to reduce the adverse socioeconomic impact*

Large and well-targeted emergency fiscal policy measures are critical to help affected businesses and households due to collapse in aggregate demand and productive activities. Of the 49 countries that have announced stimulus packages in the region, the majority are:

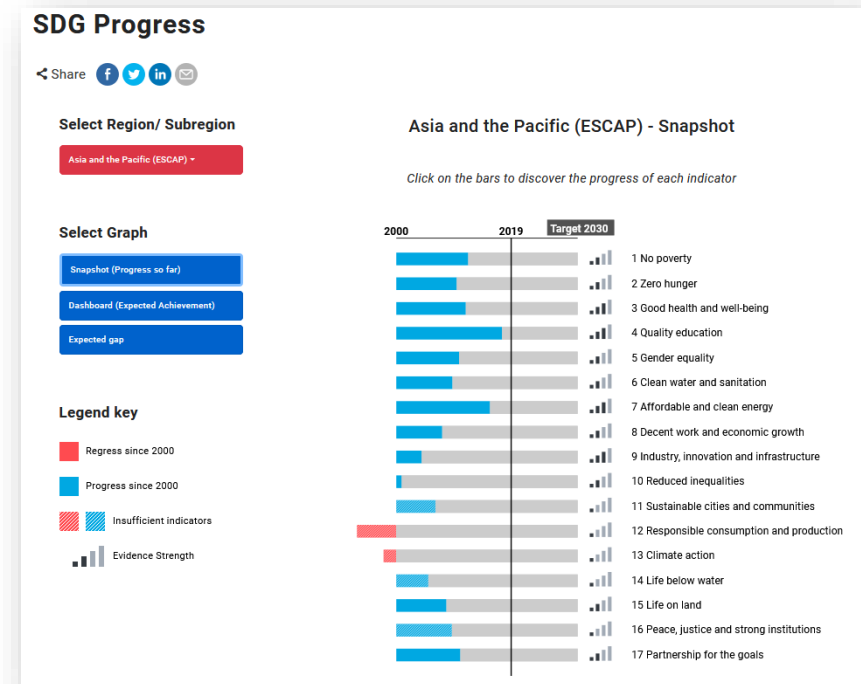
- o *Prioritizing support to the health responders to fight COVID-19 [40].³*
The ones that have not announced doing so do not yet have too many

² Early in 2020, the Republic of Korea experienced one of the world's largest initial outbreaks of COVID-19 outside China. However, the country has been able to contain and reduce the spread of the virus, at least so far, without imposing a nationwide lockdown. Mass testing and contact tracing at an early stage of the outbreak helped (Kim, 2020). Mass testing and contact tracing are also at the core of the European Union COVID-19 exit plan (Kelly, 2020).

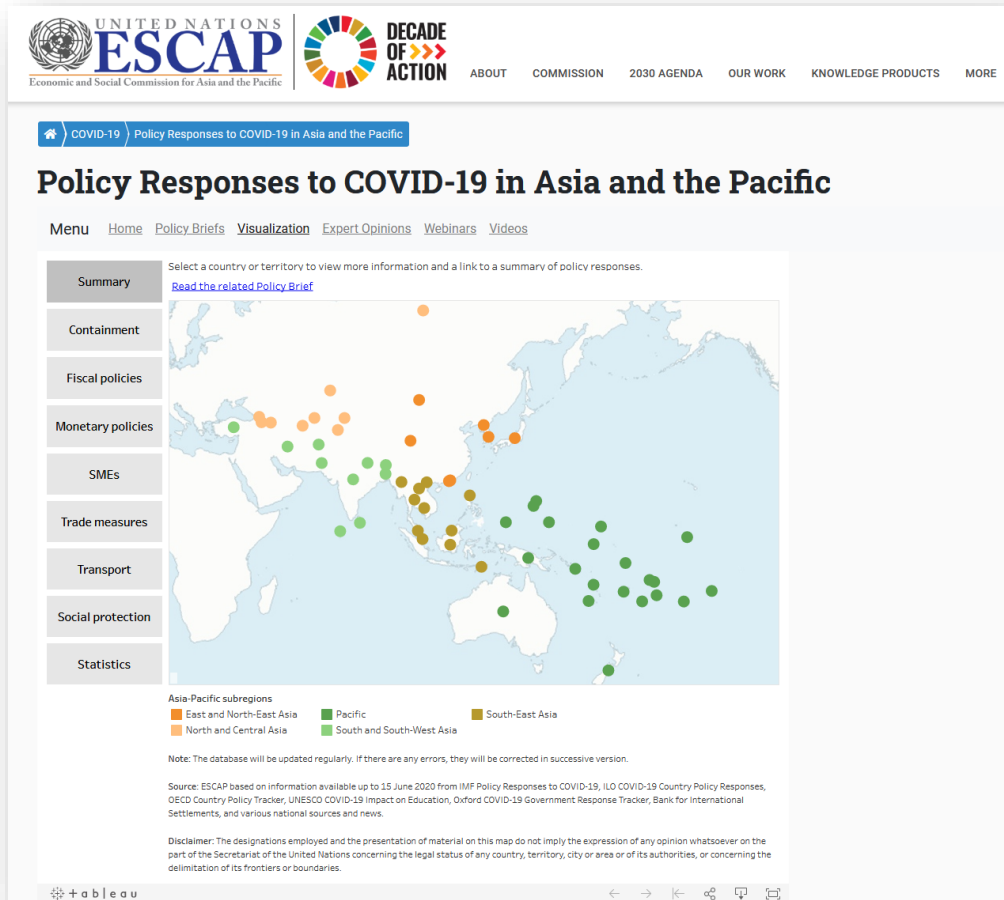
³ The figures inside the brackets represent the number of countries that have implemented the measures indicated.



data.unescap.org



Since my team had recently launched the redesigned data portal on the SDGs, the Asia-Pacific SDG Gateway, and had improved our skills to create data visualizations for the web, I told them: alright, let's work together and build something.



The first dashboard was published with containment measures and macroeconomic policies. Then colleagues from across ESCAP approached me with the data on their own subject-matters and asked if it would be possible to integrate them into the Tracker. Now we have a collection of national policy responses from across Asia-Pacific, all in one place. It is one of the most visited pages in the ESCAP website. This was a rewarding experience for me because the Tracker was put together within days and tapped into the expertise of several specialists across the organization.



Lessons Learned



Start small and expand gradually

First, we started small and gradually added more content. We didn't wait to have all charts ready before we launched the tracker



Build bridges across domains and teams

Second, the multidisciplinary work has built bridges and opened doors for collaboration with other teams at ESCAP. We even started an interest group on data and visualization



Develop capacity to react to new scenarios

Third, once you build the first data portal, as we did with the SDG Gateway, it becomes easier to create new ones for specific purposes. Data and visualization skills allow you to quickly respond to new scenarios



COVID-19 Policy Responses Tracker

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