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THE ECONOMIC GROWTH OF COUNTRIES IN THE SOUTH EAST ASIA REGION IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA

A Comparative Descriptive Analysis of Economic Performance, Policy Responses, and Recovery

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic generated an unprecedented economic shock across Southeast Asia through public-health restrictions, disruptions to production and logistics, declining international travel, weaker household demand, financial uncertainty, and interruptions to global and regional value chains. This article examines the economic growth performance of Southeast Asian countries during the pandemic era, with particular attention to the contraction in 2020 and the initial recovery in 2021–2022. The study uses a comparative descriptive approach based exclusively on secondary sources published between 2020 and 2022, including peer-reviewed journal articles and contemporaneous reports from international and regional institutions. The analysis indicates substantial heterogeneity across countries. The Philippines, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia experienced sharp contractions in 2020, while Vietnam maintained positive growth. The ASEAN-10 average contracted by approximately 3.2 percent in 2020 before recovering to about 3.0 percent in 2021 and an estimated 5.2 percent in 2022. The results suggest that differences in economic performance were associated with the intensity and duration of containment measures, tourism and service-sector exposure, domestic-market size, international production networks, fiscal and monetary policy capacity, and the speed of vaccination and reopening. The evidence also indicates that the pandemic temporarily weakened the convergence process among ASEAN economies because less developed members were often more vulnerable to the shock. The article concludes that economic resilience in Southeast Asia requires coordinated health and economic policy, stronger social protection, digital transformation, diversified production networks, and deeper regional cooperation.

Keywords*: COVID-19; economic growth; Southeast Asia; ASEAN; GDP; pandemic; economic recovery; trade; policy response; resilience.*

INTRODUCTION

Southeast Asia entered the COVID-19 pandemic after two decades of comparatively strong economic expansion and deeper regional integration. The ASEAN economies had developed increasingly dense trade, investment, tourism, manufacturing, and production networks. This integration supported growth but also meant that a health crisis originating outside most member states could rapidly become an economic crisis through international trade, tourism, finance, and supply-chain channels. Chong, Li, and Yip (2021) argue that the pandemic represented a major shock to ASEAN economies because the region's economic integration transmitted both demand and supply disturbances across borders.

The pandemic affected economic growth through several mechanisms. Restrictions on movement reduced household consumption and contact-intensive services; factory closures interrupted production; border restrictions reduced tourism and transportation; and uncertainty weakened investment and employment. Ahmad and Chahal (2022) show that the pandemic affected ASEAN economic integration through stringency measures, bilateral exports, and tourist arrivals, while firm-level effects differed across ASEAN-6 countries. Their findings demonstrate that the economic