

BRIDGING COMMERCE AND RIGHTS ADVOCACY

**International Business Associations
in the Indo-Pacific and How They
Engaged on Behalf of Human Rights
Amid the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Morgan Hughes, APAC GATES
Seth Hays, APAC GATES

Authors:

Seth Hays, Managing Director, APAC GATES

Morgan Hughes, Director of Research, APAC GATES

Asia-Pacific Associations to Empower Sustainability (APAC GATES), LLC

No. 92, Section 2, Anhe Road, B1

Taipei, Taiwan 106

亞太蓋茲管理顧問有限公司

台灣台北市大安區安和路二段92號B1

 www.apacgates.com

 [@apacgates](https://twitter.com/apacgates)

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1. KEY FINDINGS



- 1. International Business Associations (IBAs) active in the Indo-Pacific did advocate narrowly on certain human rights, including civic freedoms, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic to governments in the region.** This research identified three rights advocated by IBAs: freedom of movement, access to information, and equal treatment or nondiscrimination.
- 2. IBAs emerged during the pandemic as force multipliers for civil society development.** Through initiatives such as committees focused on Corporate Social Responsibility, or Environmental Social and Governance committees and activities, IBAs around the Indo-Pacific region focused resources on civil society organizations (CSOs) and their activities through various channels, such as by aggregating member company activity, communicating and promoting this activity to local governments, or through fundraising and resource allocation. The attention to civil society issues has been growing over the last decade and predates the pandemic. The research notes that direct cooperation with CSOs is limited, and could grow further where interests are aligned.
- 3. Amidst the infringements to various areas of human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic, many IBAs leveraged their unique, nonpartisan role at the nexus between business and commercial interests to advance the discourse based on rights-based principles.**

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International business associations¹ (IBAs) in the Indo-Pacific region played a unique, though limited, role in advocating for certain rights and civic freedoms during the COVID-19 pandemic, even across the diverse range of political systems present within the region. They did this in part by leveraging their unique role as representatives for international business interests, and by acting as a force multiplier at the intersection of the members' interests and human rights concerns. As nonpartisan entities, IBAs are well-suited to act as intermediaries between governments and civil society organization (CSOs), enabling collaboration and communication with a focus on impartial outcomes.

While IBAs operate as non-profit entities and serve their membership constituents as associations, the predominant interests of these members represent the commercial concerns of primarily for-profit firms from specific "home" countries or regions (such as the United States or European Union). The orientation of these IBAs towards the economic priorities of their corporate memberships manifests in policy recommendations and advocacy to governments, often through white papers or in-person meetings and forums. Therefore, while IBAs are not generally inclined to advocate on human rights, such engagement does exist in instances where the business interests align with rights-based principles. Although the interaction of IBAs in relation to CSOs is limited, this report documents clear instances where these interests do overlap.

This report recommends that CSOs and IBAs should be aware of the potential for further cooperation and collaboration where interests converge, resulting in more robust and dynamic interactions between these non-profit entities, bolstering the legitimacy of human rights across the Indo-Pacific region, as well as benefitting both parties.

CSO and IBAs have a growing overlap in activity, as demonstrated by growing attention to activities in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Environment, Social and Governance (ESG), or ethical supply chain. Examining the unique crisis brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates the ability of IBAs as a type of non-profit entity to be valuable to larger rights objectives with implications for addressing future crises.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous IBAs in the Indo-Pacific region actively addressed human rights, focusing specifically on three issue areas that overlapped: 1) the right to access information, 2) nondiscrimination and equal treatment by government policy, and 3) freedom of movement. These issues intersected with the broader interests and advocacy priorities addressed by many IBAs.

Through interviews with leaders at IBAs in the region, surveys of these organizations across the Indo-Pacific region, and in-depth examination of advocacy material, this study highlights specific case studies of IBAs advocating for human rights

¹ International Business Associations (IBAs) for the purposes of this research refer to non-profit membership organizations that represent the interests of international businesses operating in foreign countries. This can include, but is not limited to, American Chambers of Commerce (AmChams), European Chambers of Commerce (EuroChams), or Business Councils.



and identifies several best practices for cooperation between IBAs and CSOs.

IBA advocacy related to human rights and civic freedoms focused on three issue areas: 1) access to information, 2) freedom of assembly, and 3) equal treatment. IBAs tackled nationality-based discrimination with a dual focus: safeguarding the interests of their members, many of whom are foreign nationals. Regarding the issue of access to information, IBAs grappled with challenging issues from misinformation and disinformation, to issues around translation of government policies. They championed the cause of expanded digital access where internet access may have been limited due to government policy and served as conduits for public-health-related information during the pandemic, ensuring not only the dissemination of crucial information to their members, but also for the benefit of the public more generally. Finally, amidst global shutdowns, imposed quarantines,

and restricted travel, chambers addressed concerns related to freedom of movement in a range of situations, as pertinent in fostering the sustainability and growth of their member businesses during a time of constrained mobility. Advocacy efforts were focused not only on economic freedoms, but also individual freedoms as aligned with the business and strategic interests of the association.

Throughout the pandemic, many IBAs in the region cooperated with CSOs, and undertook new service offerings aligned with civil society interests. This research finds that greater cooperation between IBAs and CSOs could promote faster and more effective revitalization of some rights in the Indo-Pacific region following the COVID-19 pandemic, and foster more robust and resilient civic space in response to future crises.

3. SCOPE

This research explores the role of IBAs in advocating for certain rights and civic freedoms in response to COVID-19 pandemic government policies across the Indo-Pacific region. The types of business associations included in the research include IBAs, such as, but not limited to, American Chambers of Commerce (AmChams) and European Chambers of Commerce (EuroChams) based in the Indo-Pacific region.² Findings are based on a combination of interviews, surveys, and research, and examine common policy advocacy practices common across these IBAs.

This report limits its research to advocacy during the COVID-19 pandemic time period – roughly March 2020 when the WHO first declared the outbreak of COVID-19 as a pandemic to May 2023 when the WHO downgraded the spread of the disease from pandemic proportions – because of the rapid and unprecedented policymaking that occurred during this time. Examining the response by IBAs to government policy making during this period is useful in learning how to address future crises.

Experts have identified a global decline in the perceived legitimacy of human rights in recent years, with COVID-19 pandemic policies playing a substantial role in this trend. Given the diversity of political environments in the Indo-Pacific region, a closer examination of human rights and how business associations approach these potentially politically sensitive topics can bring further nuance to the global discussion around human rights.

BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS AS THE ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS

IBAs are unique in the context of other non-profit organizations. Because these associations represent the interests of for-profit entities, they are often perceived as distinct from non-profit motivations and interests typically associated with other non-profit organizations, such as charities, philanthropies, and social advocacy organizations – i.e. CSOs. However, the interests of civil society and business associations can, and do, overlap, as has been well-documented by academic research³.

This research focuses on IBAs as a specific subset of business and industry associations. Given the international nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impact on international travel and trade, this subset of non-profit organizations provides a useful and uniform set of organizations to compare and contrast among the diverse jurisdictions of the Indo-Pacific region.

Although IBAs collectively have common interests in advancing the business interests of their members, and because many share the same transnational corporate members, all are run independently and little research currently exists at the global, regional, or comparative cross-border level that analyzes the activities of IBAs focused on policy advocacy.

2 The Indo-Pacific region's political, economic, and cultural diversity is integral to global economic, social and security issues. By not limiting the scope to smaller subregions or a national-level focus, the research is able to produce productive assessments in a cross-border context. Furthermore, the region is highly integrated into the international trading order and exhibits varying levels of protection for civic freedoms and civic space. Given this diversity, identifying practical guidance and recommendations for non-profit organizations, whether IBAs or CSOs, and opportunities for further research is important.

3 Tans, Ryan. Business Associations and Civil Society in Southeast Asia. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/oa-edit/10.4324/9780367422080-22/business-associations-civil-society-southeast-asia-ryan-tans>.

4. ADVOCACY AND INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS



The dynamics of how IBAs in the Indo-Pacific region identified, prioritized, and addressed rights in pandemic policy is a multi-faceted process that reveals the intersection of business interests and civil society interests.

FUNCTION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATION

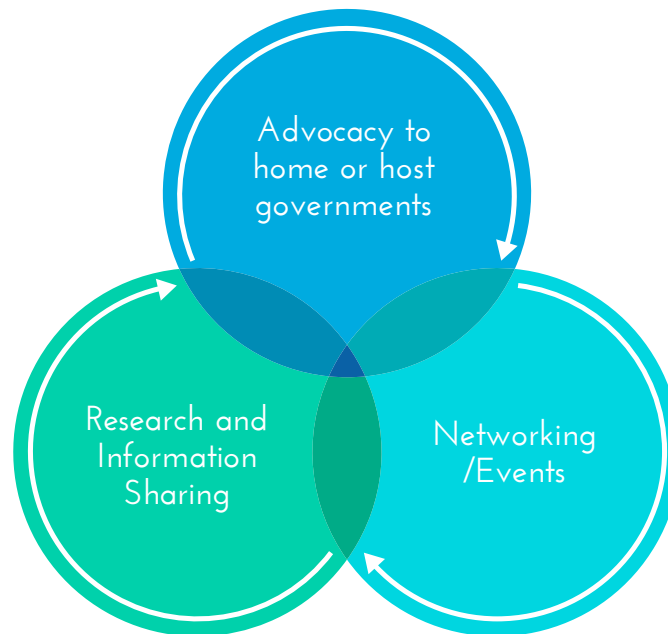
The Indo-Pacific region's attractiveness as an investment destination and the overall diversity in regulatory burdens are key reasons why many IBAs choose to establish themselves in the region. While no overall statistics exists on exactly how many IBAs currently operate in the Indo-Pacific region, it is safe to say that associations, as a subset of non-profits, are an integral part of the non-profit landscape in the region. In China, for example, business and trade associations make up roughly half of all registered foreign NGOs operating in the country, according to data collected by ChinaFile's China NGO Project.⁴

It is within this business environment that numerous IBAs function as proponents and intermediaries between the private sector and government, contributing to the region's economic policy development. This includes both policy advocacy to the local government in the Indo-Pacific region, and in the reverse direction to the "home" government – such as an American IBA lobbying in Washington, DC, or a European IBA lobbying in Europe on behalf of the members situated in Asia.

The nature of an IBA is unique and many non-profit laws in Asia bring special attention to the status of the IBA. Myanmar, for example, has special exceptions for IBAs in its foreign visa regime whereby invitees from these organizations can apply for business visas electronically – the only non-profit organizations that are allowed to do so (other non-profit invitees need to apply at Myanmar embassies in person).

4 "The Major Questions About China's Foreign NGO Law Are Now Settled." *ChinaFile*, 8 Aug. 2022, www.chinafile.com/ngo/latest/major-questions-about-chinas-foreign-ngo-law-are-now-settled.

FIGURE 1: FUNCTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS



Although most IBAs are privately funded via membership fees from their corporate members and individuals, in some circumstances, an IBA may be initially funded by a foreign government, for the purposes of facilitating trade and influence on behalf of the companies coming from abroad. For example, USAID provided funding support to establish an American Chamber of Commerce among several countries in the South Pacific in 2022. The chamber came to be known as AmCham Coral Sea, and is based in Papua New Guinea.⁵

IBAs promote the interests of and consolidate the interests of the sectors and industries that comprise their memberships. While the memberships of most IBAs consist predominantly of corporations (including MNCs, local corporations, and SMEs, but sometimes also individuals), many also have special membership categories for other non-

profit organizations such as academic institutions or charities, subject to the specific membership qualifications dictated by each chamber. For example, of AmCham Cambodia's over 200 member companies, eight are humanitarian organizations.⁶ These organizations represent a fairly diverse array of non-profits working in areas of relief, advocacy, and development issues. While not comprising a particularly large percentage of the total membership, some of these organizations are represented within the chamber in influential roles such as the CSR Committee leadership.⁷

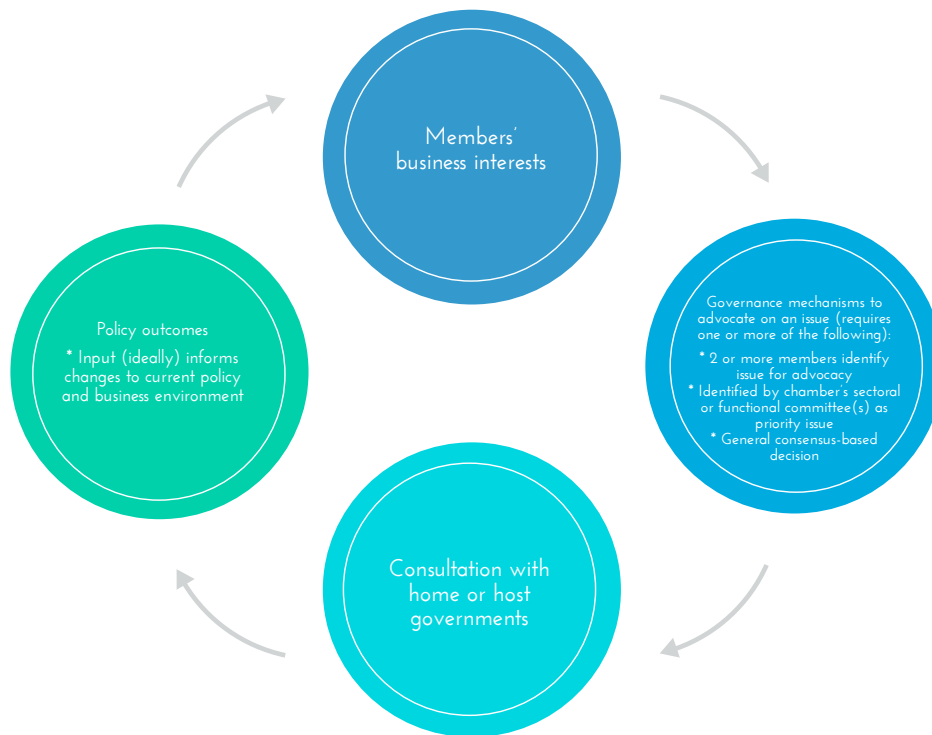
IBAs provide their services via one more of the following channels: advocacy to home and host governments, acting as networking platforms, and as hubs for research and information sharing (see Figure 1: Functions of International Business Associations).

5 U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). "Papua New Guinea Country Profile." *U.S. Agency For International Development*, 2023, www.usaid.gov/pacific-islands/papua-new-guinea.

6 "Member Sector: Humanitarian Organizations." *AmCham Cambodia*. amchamcambodia.net/member-sector/humanitarian-organizations/?post_types=member. Those classified under AmCham Cambodia's humanitarian organization membership category are: Golden West Humanitarian Foundation, SOS Children's Villages Cambodia, Wildlife Alliance, The Asia Foundation, Samaritan's Purse, Habitat for Humanity in Cambodia, Gender and Development for Cambodia, and Cambodia Children's Fund.

7 "CSR Committee." *AmCham Cambodia*. amchamcambodia.net/advocacy-committees/csr-committee/.

FIGURE 2: INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS AND ADVOCACY GOVERNANCE



As Steven Okun, Chair of AmChams of Asia Pacific (AAP) and Senior Advisor to the Global Private Capital Association, explains, “every business association, whether a sector association or country-focused, does three things at its core for its members: provides insights, advocates on their behalf, and facilitates networking amongst its members and stakeholders.”⁸ For example, EU-ASEAN Business Council (EU-ABC) Executive Director Chris Humphrey reported that the sole *raison d'être* of his chamber was policy advocacy⁹ and European Chamber of Commerce Taiwan (ECCT) CEO Freddie Höglund noted that producing position papers to advance and communicate advocacy objectives was strategically important for the chamber.¹⁰

Furthermore, while COVID-19 social distancing played out – prohibiting many traditional social

networking functions of business associations – policy advocacy played an even greater strategic place in the overall activity of business associations. At least one IBA leader admitted that their focus on advocacy had likely driven an increase their membership over the course of the pandemic.

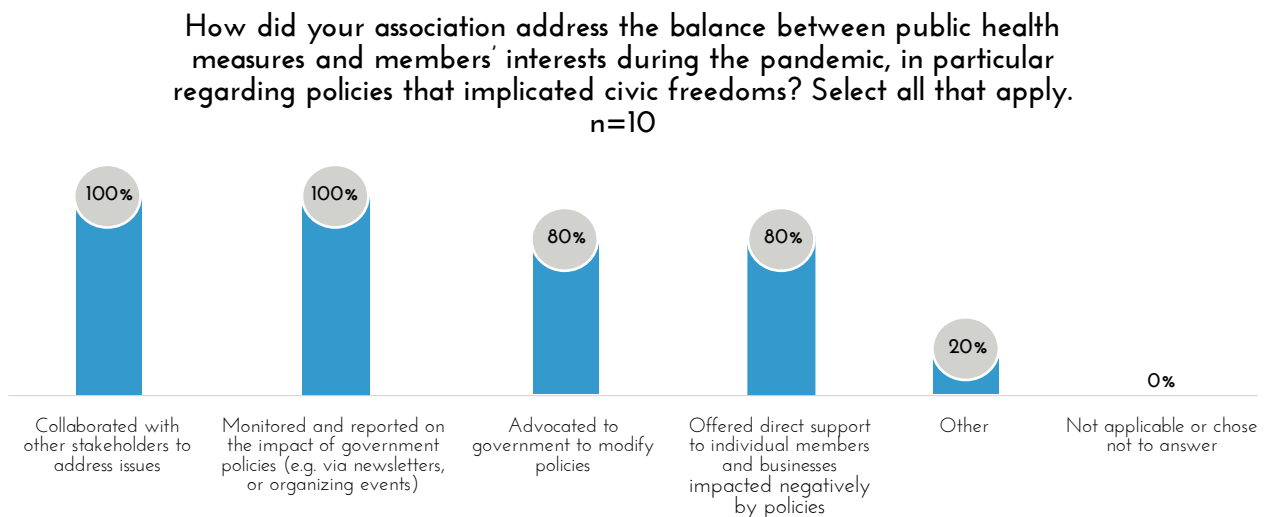
The identity of IBAs is complex, and although they are described as “foreign” organizations, most do in fact represent substantial domestic constituents. This can be either through local corporations or SMEs that comprise their membership base, or via the individual employees of the member businesses. Thus, while IBAs by definition will have an international nexus, it is important to note that many are comprised of members with substantial commercial, economic, or political interests in the local economy where the IBA resides.

8 Okun, Steven. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 6, 2023.

9 Humphrey, Chris. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 10, 2023.

10 Höglund, Freddie. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 9, 2023.

FIGURE 3: SURVEY QUESTION: PUBLIC HEALTH AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES DURING PANDEMIC



Many associations in the region have access to leading policy makers, and as a result have a unique avenue to advocate for their members. This can be observed in the annual white papers issued by these organizations and other in-person meetings at the highest levels of government. IBAs have access to government due to the convergence of interests shared by host governments, including the interest to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), stimulate economic growth, promote employment, and foster innovation. These shared concerns are fundamentally rooted in economic imperatives, aligning with the interests of both the governments and the diverse array of local and international companies comprising the membership of international business associations. Consequently, advocacy on civil society issues such as human rights or civic freedom is often tangential to the economic or commercial interests of an IBA. That said, the diverse memberships of IBAs and the particular constitution of certain associations such as AmChams and EuroChams often mean that their members are multinational organizations (either private or non-profit) that have significant reputational and legal motivations for complying with general rights-based principles. Therefore,

some IBAs may actually serve as a moderating or progressive voice, particularly in more authoritarian governance contexts.

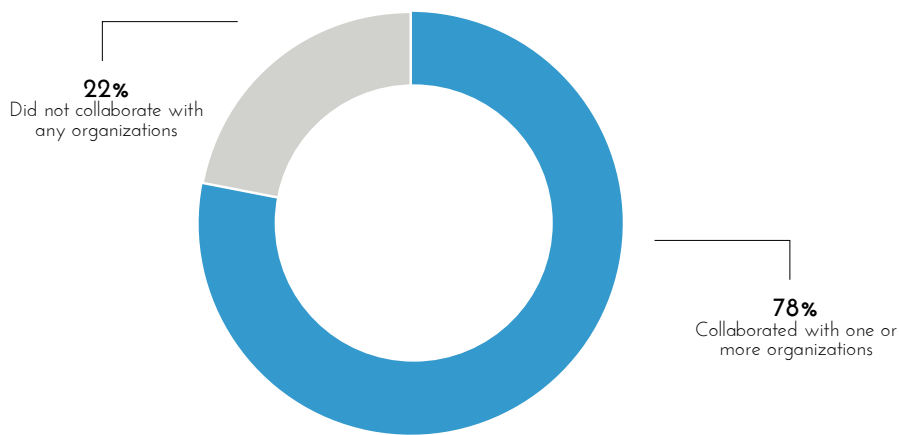
IBAs position themselves apolitically in order to have access to governments in closed political environments, and nonpartisan in situations where competitive political environments exist in more open polities. Most importantly, such neutrality enhances their credibility as intermediaries, promoting constructive dialogue between governments and businesses.

What drives an IBA's advocacy governance structure varies from association to association but always follows a consensus-driven approach (see Figure 2: International Business Associations and Advocacy Governance). While some chambers only advocate on behalf of an issue only after reaching close to unanimity amongst their constituent members, others have a threshold of at least two member companies which must consent to have their issue brought forward. Still other IBAs will mobilize around an issue for advocacy once identified by one of their sectoral or functional committees.

**FIGURE 4: SURVEY QUESTION: INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS
AND COLLABORATION WITH CSOS**

Were there any instances where your association collaborated with other nonprofit organizations or civil society groups to collectively advocate for civic freedoms in the pandemic context?

n=9



The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic introduced a new dimension to advocacy priorities by emphasizing the balance of public health imperatives with economic interests. To that end, a survey of Asia-based IBAs finds that respondents most commonly tackled these issues by expanding collaboration with relevant stakeholders and leveraging their roles as hubs for research and information sharing (see Figure 3: Survey Question: Public Health and Advocacy Priorities During Pandemic).

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS ASSOCIATIONS, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND CIVIC FREEDOMS

The relevance of rights protection for IBAs do not only result from direct business interests of their members but arise through the extension of values

and ethics of the home country or region. For example, an MNC may have made commitments to human rights, labor rights, or environmental rights in their supply chain integrity or as part of a socially responsible investing (SRI) program. In other countries, laws may impose conditions for civic freedom and human rights.¹¹ Additionally, countries with commitments to providing a business-friendly landscape will want to be perceived as having low corruption and correspondingly higher rule of law.

IBAs as a result may have CSR and ESG committees or activities to address these company interests. Several leaders of IBAs in the region note that their CSR activities often act as a force multiplier for working with NGOs in host countries, bringing new attention, funding, and resources to CSR programs.

¹¹ See the 2023 German law “The Act on Corporate Due Diligence Obligations in Supply Chain.”

FIGURE 5: SURVEY QUESTION: ASSOCIATIONS AND CRITERIA FOR SELECTING CIVIL SOCIETY PARTNERS

What criteria or factors are most influential in the selection of civil society partners by your association? Select all that apply.
n=7 (those of who reported collaboration with one or more organizations)

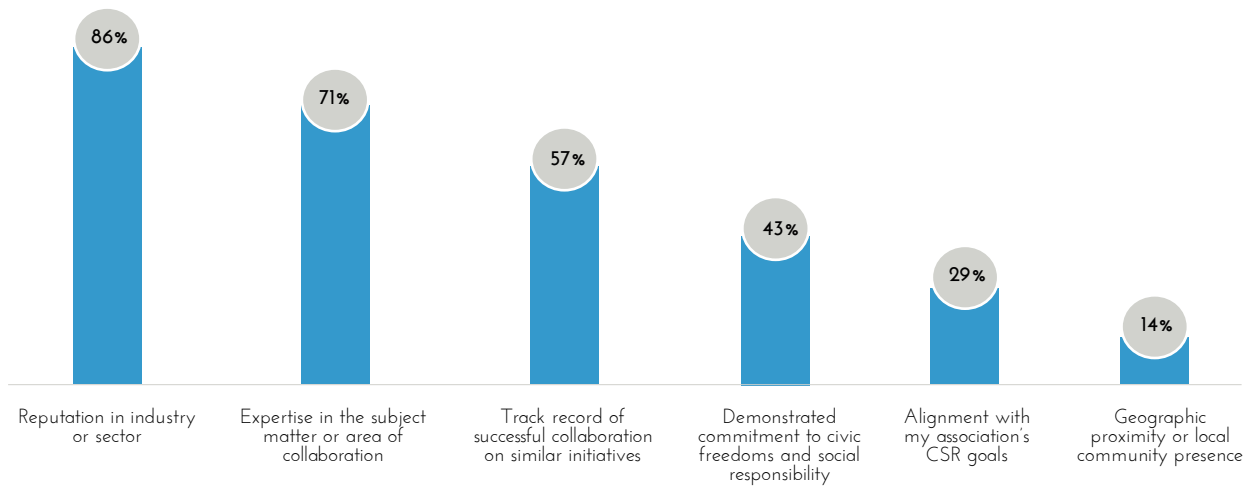
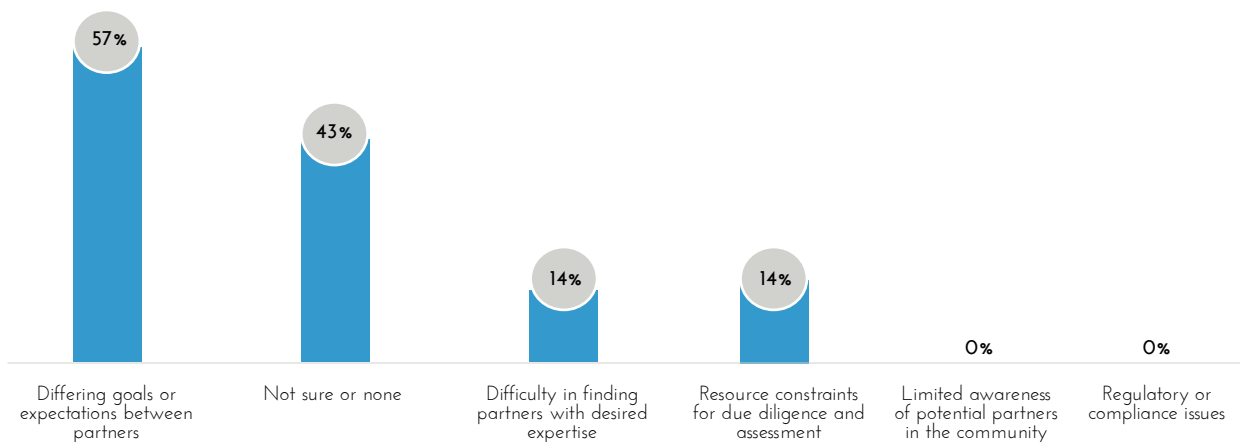


FIGURE 6: SURVEY QUESTION: CHALLENGES FACED BY IBAS WHEN SELECTING CSO PARTNERS

Are there any specific challenges or barriers your association faces when selecting civil society partners for collaborative initiatives? Select all that apply.
n=7 (those of who reported collaboration with one or more organizations)





IBAs, as nonpartisan entities, are especially effective to serve as intermediaries between local governments and CSOs, facilitating collaborative engagement and communication for impartial outcomes. In some cases, autocratic governments which may typically be resistant to fostering civil society, can be open to engaging with CSOs on “non-controversial” topics, such as education, access to clean water, or the environment.¹²

A survey of Asia-based IBAs confirmed engagement with civil society groups and other relevant non-profits during the pandemic (see Figure 4: Survey Question: International Business Associations and Collaboration with CSOs). Most respondents indicate that reputation and expertise are the primary criteria by which IBAs select their CSO partners (see Figure 5: Survey Question: Associations and Criteria for Selecting Civil Society Partners). Of respondents who report collaboration with civil society partners, credibility within the industry is the biggest factor in how IBAs identify partners (see Figure 6: Survey Question: Challenges Faced by IBAs When Selecting CSO Partners). One of the biggest hurdles to greater collaboration between CSOs and chambers lies in a divergence of objectives. However, by fostering increased engagement and communication, this misalignment can be addressed, paving the way for more extensive collaboration and utilization of

existing resources to address growing civic space challenges that affect both parties. Generally, lack of awareness of CSOs is not a concern, nor are regulatory or compliance hurdles.

SUMMARY

IBAs are unique non-profit organizations in the Indo-Pacific region with specific mandates to promote the interests of international businesses, which can, in a limited way, align with the interests of certain rights-based principles. Business associations have dedicated advocacy channels to policy makers in their host and home governments given the shared interests in economic development, increased trade, and investment. However, there is a growing convergence of business interests and CSR, ESG, and SRI activities.

In the next section, we will take this framework of interest alignment, and examine specifically how IBAs came to advocate for certain rights and civic freedoms during COVID-19. Three principles are of particular importance to IBAs and their functions as related to the pandemic. They are:

- Access to information,
- Freedom of movement, and
- Equal treatment.

¹² Anonymous, Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 2023.

5. ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Freedom of opinion and expression, which encompasses access to information is fundamental, as enshrined in Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, access to information is of particular importance as it relates to fostering transparency of law and policy, enabling an informed citizenry, and in more recent discourse, addressing misinformation and disinformation. The United Nations General Assembly, in a report of the Special Rapporteur, recognizes that "...the pandemic is also a crisis of free expression...individuals and their communities cannot protect themselves against disease when information is denied to them, when they have diminished trust in sources of information, and when propaganda and disinformation dominate the statements of public authorities.¹³" Our research found that IBAs took up important roles in advocating for greater access to information regarding government COVID-19 policies during the pandemic. Some organizations played active roles, while other acted as platforms and conduits. In interviews, we found that leaders of IBAs devoted considerable resources to information sharing and access initiatives.

INFORMATION SHARING

Many IBAs, our research shows, actively contributed to information dissemination during the pandemic, playing a crucial role in facilitating communication between local government entities and not only their business constituents, but also the broader public. Utilizing various platforms such as websites, newsletters, and social media channels,

IBAs disseminated timely information regarding the pandemic, government guidelines, and available resources for businesses. They organized webinars and workshops featuring public health experts, government officials, and business leaders, providing forums for contributing to the ongoing discourse around pandemic policies, and disseminated best practices. They also promptly translated rapidly changing policy and regulatory directives that were not easily accessible to foreign business communities, or they advocated for the governments to provide official translations rapidly for the benefit of these communities.

Additionally, IBAs served as centralized hubs for businesses and other stakeholders to access guidelines and safety protocols, and connected those who could provide services or goods with those in need. By fostering networking and collaboration among businesses and supporting clear communication from government agencies, chambers played a multifaceted role in facilitating information sharing. Chief Executive Officer of the American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce (AmCham Malaysia) Siobhan Das describes her chamber's role in this respect: "what we did as a chamber was try to coordinate between the government [and industry] ...it showed the effectiveness of what a chamber can do and who it can reach across government segments."¹⁴

One Asia-based IBA, reporting via an anonymous survey, wrote that "we were seen as a mechanism to disseminate important information from the

13 ---. "Disease Pandemics and the Freedom of Opinion and Expression: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression." *Human Rights Council*, vol. A/HRC/44/49, Apr. 2020, p. 9. documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/O97/82/PDF/G2009782.pdf?OpenElement.

14 Das, Siobhan. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 20, 2023.

government. They listened as well when we provided updates from members.”¹⁵ Another, in the same survey, reported “we principally helped [the] government to keep information flowing about regulations, problems, actions, etc. on an almost daily basis. Our members and the government seemed to appreciate it and it made us more aware of the power of our own information efforts.”¹⁶

In particularly unusual circumstances, AmCham Malaysia, quickly realizing the unprecedented demand for timely, accurate information as the virus spread, was successfully able to achieve a rapid, strategic pivot for their organization. The chamber’s Corporate Citizenship Committee implemented a data management system via an online spreadsheet accessible to their members and the public, allowing hospitals and other entities to systematically input details regarding essential supplies and services required amid the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷ Simultaneously, corporate entities and CSOs could also contribute by providing information on the services or products within their capacity to offer. The spreadsheet was actively managed by AmCham Malaysia staff, and if a request was not fulfilled within three days or so, chamber staff would actively step in to connect potential partners.

The urgent need for timely information regarding ever-changing COVID policies also became rapidly evident. Multiple instances have been documented of this type of information sharing or the translation of government regulations pertaining to COVID-19 policy, including in Cambodia, Laos, Malaysia, and Singapore. At AmCham Malaysia, for example, chamber leadership redirected staff at the beginning

of the pandemic to undertake the complex task of translating pertinent documents or regulations issued by the Malaysian government – originally composed in Malay – into English for the foreign business and broader expat communities.

The European Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia (EuroCham Cambodia) created a “Lockdown Telegram Group”¹⁸ of member companies to facilitate timely information sharing. The American Chamber of Commerce in the People’s Republic of China (AmCham China) coordinated an information portal to keep businesses – not just member companies – updated on the quickly evolving COVID-19 situation, including vaccination policy, quarantine and testing requirements, and travel procedures.

DIGITAL ACCESS

Access to information relies on digital platforms, including mobile telecom and fixed internet connections, which played a pivotal role in disseminating crucial information throughout the COVID-19 pandemic crisis. This encompasses the distribution of public health information, government directives, and prompt updates on evolving situations. The United Nations’ Human Rights Council, in report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression, states that “in a moment of global pandemic, the right of access to the Internet should be restated and seen for what it is: a critical element of health-care policy and practice, public information and even the right to life.”¹⁹

15 *Business Associations and Civil Society During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Survey of Indo-Pacific International Chambers of Commerce*. APAC GATES, Nov. 2023.

16 *Business Associations and Civil Society During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Survey of Indo-Pacific International Chambers of Commerce*. APAC GATES, Nov. 2023.

17 Das, Siobhan. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 20, 2023.

18 European Chamber of Commerce (EuroCham Cambodia). *Advocacy Briefs: Newsletter of EuroCham Cambodia’s Advocacy Department*. May 2021, www.eurocham-cambodia.org/images/pages/May%20Advocacy%20Briefs.pdf.

19 United Nations. “Disease Pandemics and the Freedom of Opinion and Expression: Report of the Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of the Right to Freedom of Opinion and Expression.” *Human Rights Council*, vol. A/HRC/44/49, Apr. 2020, p. 9. documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G20/097/82/PDF/G2009782.pdf?OpenElement.



Amidst disruptions in trade and supply chains, many governments implemented measures that permitted designated “essential” services and goods exempt from pandemic-related lockdown policies. The European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (EuroCham Myanmar) advocated for the government to designate telecoms as an essential service in 2020, declaring that “telecoms infrastructure is essential during the COVID-19 pandemic - customers need it for making emergency outgoing calls, for accessing vital health information and instructions from the government’s digital communication channels. In light of national lockdowns, access to telecoms infrastructure is challenging, causing network outages in some areas.”²⁰ When telecom access is not available, EuroCham Myanmar argued

the internet and website shutdowns are a challenge not only for customers [who] have lost access, but also for responsible European businesses in Myanmar [...]

caught between their obligations to promote responsible business practices as per international human rights law, OECD and UN guidelines, and their obligations to follow national laws²¹

Early in the pandemic in 2020, the Myanmar government had regulations regarding SIM card identity verification.²² EuroCham Myanmar highlighted this issue to the government of Myanmar, noting that many consumers did not have the appropriate or requisite identity materials and advocated for an extension of the SIM registration deadline considering the COVID-19 situation, stressing the need for continued access to essential services and information, especially for vulnerable populations. Moreover, the requirement would disproportionately affect vulnerable populations in Northern Rakhine and Southern Chin states where ongoing controversies around citizenship and statelessness make the availability of identity documents virtually impossible.

20 European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (EuroCham Myanmar). *COVID-19 European Industry Updates Paper*. 1 May 2020, eurocham-myanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COVID-19-European-Industry-Updates-Paper.pdf.

21 European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (EuroCham Myanmar). *COVID-19 European Industry Updates Paper*. 1 May 2020, eurocham-myanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COVID-19-European-Industry-Updates-Paper.pdf.

22 European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar (EuroCham Myanmar). *COVID-19 European Industry Updates Paper*. 1 May 2020, eurocham-myanmar.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/COVID-19-European-Industry-Updates-Paper.pdf.



MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION

Addressing misinformation and disinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic was of paramount importance for several reasons. Foremost among these concerns was the imperative to safeguard public health and safety, given that inaccurate information about the virus could potentially result in adverse health consequences.

In Singapore, the European Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (EuroCham Singapore) tackled the problem of vaccine misinformation in the country by publishing an e-book, available to the public, called “Covid-19 Vaccination: Facts and Fiction,” based on a webinar of the same topic.²³

In an advocacy brief in May 2021, EuroCham Cambodia acknowledged that “as the number of COVID-19 cases in Cambodia continues to rise, it is essential that people have access to accurate and evidence-based information to understand this crisis and how to appropriately respond.”²⁴ To that end, in an example of successful collaboration between an IBA, inter-governmental organization, and government agency, EuroCham Cambodia was approached by UNICEF, WHO, and other

development partners approved by the Cambodian Ministry of Health to assist with dissemination of pandemic-related information to the business community, their customers, and suppliers.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

IBAs played a crucial and dynamic role in information dissemination during the pandemic in a variety of information settings and political environments, but many more partnerships and synergies could be developed between IBAs, CSOs, and governments in this area. As noted in the survey of Asia-based IBAs mentioned previously, many IBAs do feel well-heard by local governments on certain issues and are pleased that governments can be open to consultation with member companies – a process which CSOs could potentially also benefit from to raise awareness of their own issues, if greater cooperation between IBAs and CSOs can be realized. Benchmarking and best practices should be shared by IBAs on the role they played in information sharing, to better hone messaging and communications in future crises. Special attention can be paid to the importance of access to information, as an essential characteristic and benefit of IBAs to their members, regardless of the political context.

²³ European Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (EuroCham Singapore). *Covid-19 Vaccination: Facts and Fiction*. 15 June 2021, eurocham.org.sg/publication/covid-19-vaccination-facts-and-fiction-ebook.

²⁴ European Chamber of Commerce (EuroCham Cambodia). *Advocacy Briefs: Newsletter of EuroCham Cambodia's Advocacy Department*. May 2021, www.eurocham-cambodia.org/images/pages/May%20Advocacy%20Briefs.pdf.

6. FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

In the context of the pandemic, both the domestic and cross-border movement of people became a priority issue for not only businesses, but also individuals. Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights preserves the right to freedom of movement, including the right to leave any country and return to one's own – a concept which came under contention during pandemic restrictions in the name of public health. Cutting across all industries and sectors – and with potentially global repercussions – the issue became crucial for many businesses as staff were left stranded due to sudden border closures, business travel ceased, and supply chains were disrupted. The relationship between restrictions of movement hinges on the balance between public health measures and the preservation of civil liberties. Such policies targeted not only individual freedoms, but also had significant economic impacts, especially for Small and Medium

Enterprises (SMEs) which can be more vulnerable to economic shocks.

Our survey indicates that travel restrictions and border controls for both people and goods was an important advocacy issue for surveyed IBAs in the Indo-Pacific region prior to the pandemic; and a priority for even more as a *result of the pandemic* (see Figure 7: Survey Question: Priority of Travel Restrictions and Border Controls as a Result of the COVID-19 Pandemic). (No respondents reported the issue was not applicable to their association).

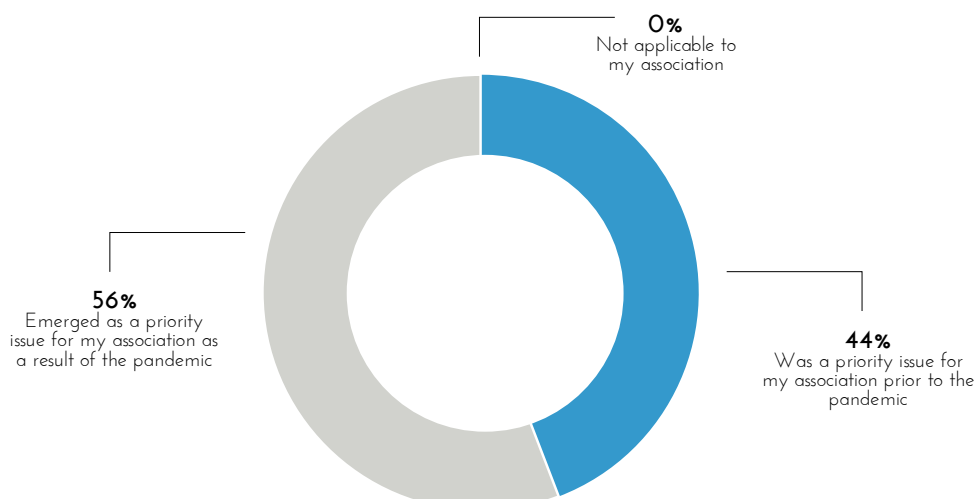
CROSS-BORDER MOVEMENT

Travel restrictions, aimed at controlling the virus's spread, significantly impeded the right to free movement across national borders. For individuals,

FIGURE 7: SURVEY QUESTION: PRIORITY OF TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND BORDER CONTROLS AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Both prior to and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, what are some priority issues for your association (respondents who answered "travel restrictions and border controls for both people and goods")

n=9



this meant reduced access to international travel for work, education, and family reunification, curbing fundamental freedoms associated with global mobility. Restrictions on the import of foreign workers or local employees who were not able to return to their home countries became a significant issue on which IBAs advocated for.

In some situations, IBAs report some of their member companies adapting to such restrictions on talent acquisition and the wellbeing of their existing employees by shifting their business models. For example, the European Chamber study notes “given the difficulties that travel restrictions have had on companies’ abilities to attract and retain international talent, it is not surprising that firms have already localised many functions, all the way from junior staff up to board level.”²⁵

The American Chamber of Commerce in Mongolia (AmCham Mongolia) released a position paper in the early months of the pandemic (May 2020), urging the Mongolian government to loosen movement restrictions to “allow key foreign workers to enter Mongolia in April and May on a well-controlled and restricted basis,” and “since there is no local transmission of COVID-19 in Mongolia, allow the gradual re-opening of the hospitality industry and lift restrictions on public gatherings that maintain social distancing measures recommended by the WHO.”²⁶

In a white paper, The European Business Council in Japan (EBC) articulated concerns regarding constraints on cross-border travel, which had notably affected the business sector. In summary, the paper states that “European firms, as well as Japanese and other non-Japanese firms, have been suffering for

months, because they have not been able to bring in essential personnel from overseas. This is true both for specialists – such as engineers, researchers, and medical personnel – and for those in top management positions.”²⁷ The EBC’s advocacy efforts resulted in a successful outcome when the Japanese government relaxed its entry restrictions soon after; quarantine became no longer required for vaccinated travelers and non-residents did not require vaccination to enter Japan.

MOVEMENT CONTROL ORDERS

The pandemic emphasized the importance of cross-border movement for market access, flow of goods, and availability of skilled labor. Some Movement Control Orders (MCOs) during the pandemic exhibited deficiencies, characterized by blanket directives that did not accurately identify essential industries, sectors, or reasons such as humanitarian appeals as exceptions. In some cases, permission for activities to resume were granted initially on a case-by-case basis.

During the pandemic, the implications of movement restrictions extended beyond the financial performance of businesses and economic rights. Some IBAs addressed the humanitarian aspect of these restrictions by advocating for more accessible medical supplies. The EU-ABC, for example, lobbied for the facilitation of smoother transportation and distribution of medications across the Philippines,²⁸ underscoring their commitment to addressing the broader health-related challenges posed by these limitations.

In many countries across the Indo-Pacific, migrant workers comprise a substantial component of the labor market. Issues around discrimination and

25 European Union Chamber of Commerce in China (European Chamber). *European Chamber Flash Survey: COVID-19 and the War in Ukraine: The Impact on European Business in China*. Apr. 2022, [european-chamber.com/upload/documents/documents/European_Chamber_Flash_Survey_2022_EN\[973\].pdf](https://european-chamber.com/upload/documents/documents/European_Chamber_Flash_Survey_2022_EN[973].pdf).

26 American Chamber of Commerce in Mongolia (AmCham Mongolia). *Position Paper on the Economic Impact of COVID-19 on Businesses and Ways Forward*. May 2020, www.amcham.mn/storage/uploads/2020/05/30.pdf.

27 European Business Council in Japan (EBC). *Travel Restrictions*. 28 Oct. 2022, ebc-jp.com/digital-white-paper/issues/business-fundamentals/cross-committee-issues/travel-restrictions.

28 Humphrey, Chris. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 10, 2023.



xenophobia existed prior to the pandemic, but the implementation of measures such as mandatory quarantines and restrictions on cross-border movement added an additional layer to these existing issues, sometimes fused with discriminatory motives. Amid fears that, because they were living in densely populated dormitories and were high-risk because of frequent travel between their country of work and home country, many migrant workers were subjected to draconian isolation measures. Some IBAs, such as the American Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan (AmCham Taiwan) and the American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (AmCham Singapore) addressed these issues in a limited way, for example by acknowledging the discrimination faced by such populations²⁹ or by encouraging businesses to work with NGOs involved on these issues.³⁰

QUARANTINE

The balance of health priorities and civic freedom around quarantine can be hotly contested, but generally the principle of proportionality and necessity, mandating that any impingement on individual freedoms, such as forced quarantine, must be essential, proportionate, and the least restrictive means to achieve a legitimate public health objective, has been a general principle. A report from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights reports that, during the pandemic, "...violations of human rights commonly reported included arbitrary or discriminatory restrictions relating to assemblies, privacy and association in the context of physical distancing and movement restrictions."³¹ For businesses, in some cases, excessive quarantine requirements, or at times, just the threat of forced

29 American Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan (AmCham Taiwan). *Taoyuan Mayor Cheng Wen-tsan and Colleagues Address AmCham Webinar*. 30 June 2021, amcham.com.tw/2021/06/taoyuan-mayor-cheng-wen-tsan-and-colleagues-address-amcham-webinar.

30 American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore (AmCham Singapore). *AmCham Updates*. 4 May 2020, amcham.com.sg/donations-to-support-migrant-workers.

31 United Nations. "Civil Society Space: COVID-19: The Road to Recovery and the Essential Role of Civil Society: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights." *Human Rights Council*, vol. A/HRC/51/13, June 2022, p. 15. documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G22/394/42/PDF/G2239442.pdf?OpenElement.



quarantine in case of a positive COVID test, was enough to weigh into decisions limiting business travel or other operational choices.

In one instance, quarantine policies of children and accompanying adults were addressed by the AmCham Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong (AmCham Hong Kong). It conducted a survey of its members on March 2021, regarding the quarantine of children to government-run quarantine facilities upon testing positive for COVID-19. The outcomes of the study in part concluded that the issue was significant and far-reaching enough as to affect the business climate in Hong Kong, as “just over half of those surveyed said that if this policy became routine it would factor into their decision about staying in Hong Kong.”³² Additionally, the chamber used the study to inform their advocacy stance, believing that while “the policy is unjustified when

it comes to the health of children,” they also called for the Hong Kong government to provide “more clarity and transparency of information around quarantine arrangement for minors.”³³

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

The policies affecting freedom of movement were particularly impactful to the international business community, and therefore one of the highest priority issue areas on which IBAs advocated on. However, as revealed by the case studies above, this advocacy did not simply relate to the economic interests suffered by multinational companies, but extended into the realm of individual rights.

32 American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong (AmCham Hong Kong). *A Temperature Testing Survey on the Government Quarantine of Children in Hong Kong*. 16 Mar. 2021, www.amcham.org.hk/news/temperature-testing-survey-government-quarantine-children-hong-kong.

33 American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong (AmCham Hong Kong). *A Temperature Testing Survey on the Government Quarantine of Children in Hong Kong*. 16 Mar. 2021, www.amcham.org.hk/news/temperature-testing-survey-government-quarantine-children-hong-kong.

7. EQUAL TREATMENT

Article 2 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits discrimination based on national origin. While the spread of COVID-19 impacted international movement of people, many public health policies focused on the classification of individuals as either citizens or foreign nationals for various purposes, including for testing, vaccines, economic relief, cross-border travel, and repatriation.

IBAs addressed discrimination based on nationality during the COVID-19 pandemic and did so within the context of safeguarding the interests of their members and broader economic interests and to bolster bilateral and regional trade relationships. Given the composition of their memberships (often comprising of a substantial percentage of foreign nationals), IBAs have a vested interest in advocating for equal treatment regardless of national origin or citizen status.

Specifically, in the context of the pandemic, policies whereby national origin is used as a discriminatory factor exist within three domains: testing requirements, vaccination, and receipt of economic relief. Individuals with permanent residency status at times found themselves in an ambiguous category, often classified together with foreigners for the purposes of COVID-19 public health policies, even though they are residents – and taxpayers – of their respective countries. Interestingly, some IBAs, such as the ECCT, had been in discussion with local government agencies about the equal treatment

of foreign residents even prior to the pandemic, although the urgency and relevance of these issues heightened significantly during the pandemic. In the following sections, we share specific instances where IBAs advocated for equal treatment and non-discrimination based on national origin around COVID-19 policies.

TESTING REQUIREMENTS

In early 2021, the Seoul Metropolitan Government proposed a policy of mandatory testing for all foreigners and employees at foreign-owned businesses, regardless of travel history or exposure risk, which, as noted by some commentators, potentially reflected political prejudices rather than medical evidence. The American Chamber of Commerce in Korea (AmCham Korea), on behalf of its members, condemned the proposal as prejudicial against foreign workers and foreign business owners in Seoul, and advocated with the government to reverse the requirement.³⁴

In another instance, the government of Taiwan, early in the pandemic, required all foreign nationals, including permanent residents, or Alien Resident Certificate (ARC) holders, but not citizens, to show a negative COVID-19 test prior to boarding any flight to Taiwan. The ECCT, after consultation with members, denounced the testing requirement as it “...discriminated against foreign residents.”³⁵ After a general consultation period – which included ECCT

34 American Chamber of Commerce in Korea (AmCham Korea). “Seoul Corrects Mandatory Testing Order – Mission Accomplished!” *Advocacy Updates*, 19 Mar, 2021, www.amchamkorea.org/bbs/board.php?bo_table=advocacy&wr_id28.

35 European Chamber of Commerce Taiwan (ECCT). *Foreign Residents Allowed to Enter Taiwan Without Covid-19 Tests*. 6 July 2020, www.ecct.com.tw/foreign-residents-allowed-to-enter-taiwan-without-covid-19-tests.



representation in direct meetings with Taiwan's Minister of Health and Welfare Dr. Chen Shih-chung – the Taiwanese government announced by July 2020 that it would discontinue the discriminatory testing requirement for foreign nationals.

VACCINE ACCESS

Initial vaccine shortages made vaccine access and equity a hotly contested and politicized area of public health policy across the Indo-Pacific region. Many IBAs in Asia subsequently addressed discrimination based on national origin and citizenship status with regards to vaccine access as one of their advocacy priorities.

In Taiwan, initial vaccine policies prioritized citizens, but eventually expanded to include non-citizens. As Freddie Höglund, CEO of the ECCT, observed, "COVID doesn't distinguish between a foreigner and a local...therefore, everyone in Taiwan should be vaccinated equally in order to prevent the further spread of the virus."³⁶ ECCT ultimately advocated for foreigners to have equal access to vaccines, and by mid-2021, Taiwan had expanded its nationwide COVID-19 vaccination program to

include all foreign nationals legally in Taiwan, even those without residence permits or national health insurance.

Advocacy for vaccine access was also directed at the home governments on behalf of citizens living abroad. A survey from the American Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi (AmCham Hanoi) in May 2020 identified lack of vaccine access as the biggest concern for their members with regards to business operations during the pandemic.³⁷ The survey also notes that 98% of respondents surveyed (all American citizens living in Vietnam) believed the U.S. government should do more to increase vaccine access for its citizens living in Vietnam.

RELIEF ASSISTANCE

Many governments in the region provided economic relief to businesses or individuals to address economic downturn. Receipt of this relief also implicated equal treatment based on citizenship and nationality.

In Taiwan, economic stimulus payments were initially limited to citizens, but were eventually extended to foreign residents based on their

³⁶ Höglund, Freddie. Interview. Conducted by Seth Hays and Morgan Hughes. November 9, 2023.

³⁷ American Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi (AmCham Hanoi). *Member Survey on the COVID-19 Outbreak and Vaccine Availability*. May 2021, www.amchamhanoi.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Survey-Results-Coronavirus-May-2021.pdf.



economic participation in the community. By November 2020, all permanent foreign residents holding Alien Permanent Residence Cards (APRCs) and diplomats would become eligible for the government's "triple stimulus" consumer vouchers as part of a pandemic economic relief package. The move was welcomed by the ECCT as a positive step toward equal treatment for foreign residents, addressing the concerns raised by the ECCT's Better Living Committee regarding the exclusion of foreign residents from government benefits despite paying the same tax rate as citizens.³⁸

Novel partnerships emerged from initiatives around expanding economic relief to non-citizens. For instance, the European Chamber of Commerce in Korea (ECCK) interacted with the South Korean Human Rights Commission regarding economic relief for foreign residents, advocating for equal treatment based on their role as taxpayers and community contributors.³⁹

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Infringement of the right to nondiscrimination and equal treatment regardless of national origin is important to highlight and examine, particularly in liberal democracies, given the general openness of these countries to human rights related arguments.

Work by CSR groups within IBAs in the region exemplifies potential opportunities for CSOs working with marginalized workers. Efforts focusing on supply chain ethics and labor conditions demonstrate that while members of these IBAs may not represent the same constituent voices, their unique perspectives and access to governmental channels, coupled with a shared condition of different national origins, enable meaningful alliances to be formed to address foreign worker rights, whether white collar or blue collar.

38 European Chamber of Commerce Taiwan (ECCT). *APRC Holders to Qualify for Triple Stimulus Vouchers*. 13 Nov. 2020, www.ecct.com.tw/aprc-holders-to-qualify-for-triple-stimulus-vouchers.

39 European Chamber of Commerce in Korea (ECCK). *ECCK President Visits National Human Rights Commission Korea*. 24 Aug. 2023, ecck.or.kr/ecck-president-visits-national-human-rights-commission-korea.

8. CONCLUSION



Despite the unexpected role of IBAs in advocating for rights protection and civic freedoms during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is evident that they possess a unique perspective and the ability to engage the business community and act as a force multiplier to connect with government in a way that civil society on its own often cannot. When aligned with broader business objectives and commercial interests of their members, engagement on issues around rights protection unlocks funding, connections, and resources, making them valuable contributors to the discourse on certain rights and civic freedoms.

In conclusion, IBAs will likely continue to address issues outside conventional business interests, in a limited fashion, as evidenced by their advocacy on

civic freedoms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research indicates that these issues are addressed in both open political systems, and closed ones, and across jurisdictions. Overall, the advocacy undertaken by IBAs had a positive effect on civic space in the Indo-Pacific during the COVID-19 pandemic, across multiple jurisdictions.

The research also identified instances where IBAs helped facilitate CSO activity, which is part of a longer-term trend of international businesses focusing on CSR, ESG, and SRI. However, the research also indicates that cooperation with CSOs is relatively limited and indicates an opportunity for increased engagement between IBAs and CSOs in areas of shared interest.

Overall, further research should be undertaken on the role of IBAs in the policy making processes across the region and globally, particularly on issue areas such as human rights and civic freedoms. On a practical level for advocacy practitioners, both IBAs and CSOs should increase mutual awareness about the other's priorities and issue areas. Regional sharing of engagement strategies and issue advocacy could be a beneficial means for the spreading of best practices, and improving civic space in general in the Indo-Pacific region.

BEST PRACTICES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report identifies several best practices for advocacy to improve civic space for a wide spectrum of not-for-profit organizations in the Indo-Pacific region, from IBAs to CSOs.

- 1. Further study the intersection of CSOs and IBAs.** There is a lack of sufficient research regarding the impact and practices of business associations in the not-for-profit community in the Indo-Pacific region, in particular how these organizations impact civil society initiatives. Further research will help practitioners at both IBAs and CSOs undertake advocacy more effectively.
- 2. Build awareness between IBA and CSO about their respective advocacy issues.** This research reveals that IBA and CSO cooperation is at a nascent stage, and limited. Building awareness about shared issue areas is a crucial step in being more effective, reducing reduplication of efforts, and improving resource allocation for shared goals.
- 3. Regularize CSO and IBA interaction.** Given the relative lack of cooperation between IBAs and CSO, it is recommended that a regular forum be developed for professionals from IBAs and CSOs to network, share best practices and case studies. Ideally, this can occur on a regional level to find synergies on issue areas shared across jurisdictions.



- 4. Build practical toolkits for resource allocation.** As exemplified by the AmCham Malaysia example, it would be useful to devise a simple shared platform that can act as a matchmaking forum for businesses and CSOs to communicate what services/goods they can provide and what is needed. Connecting the pro bono, CSR, and ESG resources within IBAs to the demand of civil society could be a practical outcome of regular interactions.

9. APPENDICES

METHODOLOGY:

In addition to desk-based research including a literature review and policy tracking, the research was complemented by an online survey disseminated to executives of IBAs in the Indo-Pacific region, and interviews with select, senior chamber leaders to provide in-depth, first-person accounts.

Survey: The survey was web-based and self-administered, with no enforcement on participation. Respondents were senior leaders from international business associations with a presence in the Indo-Pacific region, representing business interests from both North American and Europe.

Response Location	Number of Responses	Association (if provided)
Australia	1	American Chamber of Commerce in Australia (AmCham Australia)
Cambodia	1	American Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia (AmCham Cambodia)
Indonesia	1	American Chamber of Commerce in Indonesia (AmCham Indonesia)
Japan	2	American Chamber of Commerce in Japan (ACCJ)
Malaysia	1	American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce (AmCham Malaysia)
Myanmar	1	British Chamber of Commerce Myanmar
Philippines	1	American Chamber of Commerce in the Philippines (AmCham Philippines)
Singapore	1	EU-ASEAN Business Council
Taiwan	3	
Thailand	1	American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand (AmCham Thailand)
TOTAL	13	

Interviews: Interviews were conducted with five (5) top executives of international business associations representing both North American and European business interests, based in Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Taiwan.

Response Location	Association
Cambodia	American Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia (AmCham Cambodia)
Malaysia	American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce (AmCham Malaysia)
Singapore	AmChams of Asia Pacific (AAP)
Singapore	EU-ASEAN Business Council (EU-ABC)
Taiwan	European Chamber of Commerce Taiwan (ECCT)

ORGANIZATION ACRONYMS

Acronym	Longform
AAP	AmChams of Asia Pacific
AmCham China	American Chamber of Commerce in the People's Republic of China
AmCham Hanoi	American Chamber of Commerce in Hanoi
AmCham Hong Kong	American Chamber of Commerce in Hong Kong
AmCham Korea	American Chamber of Commerce in Korea
AmCham Malaysia	American Malaysian Chamber of Commerce
AmCham Mongolia	American Chamber of Commerce in Mongolia
AmCham Singapore	American Chamber of Commerce in Singapore
AmCham Taiwan	American Chamber of Commerce in Taiwan
APAC GATES	Asia-Pacific Associations to Empower Sustainability
ECCK	European Chamber of Commerce in Korea
ECCT	European Chamber of Commerce Taiwan
EU-ABC	EU-ASEAN Business Council
EuroCham Cambodia	European Chamber of Commerce in Cambodia
EuroCham Myanmar	European Chamber of Commerce in Myanmar
EuroCham Singapore	European Chamber of Commerce in Singapore
European Chamber	European Union Chamber of Commerce in China
ICNL	International Center for Not-for-Profit Law

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



SETH HAYS

Seth Hays is Managing Director and Co-Founder of APAC GATES, an Indo-Pacific based not-for-profit management consultancy. He brings over two decades of experience in the not-for-profit sector in Asia, including work with governments, leading universities, associations, and civil society organizations across the region. Most recently he was Chief Representative for a large not-for-profit association in the Indo-Pacific Region working on innovation policy, in which he established and operated association offices in Shanghai, Beijing, and Singapore.

He has testified before the Hong Kong Legislative Council on innovation policy, and contributed to briefs before the Supreme Courts of India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. In 2021, Seth was a visiting scholar at the East-West Center and Korea Foundation researching US and Korea cooperation on innovation policy and economic security in Southeast Asia. Seth continues to lead regional discussions on illicit trade, civic freedom, and innovation issues as a member of the Inter-Pacific Bar Association’s Anticorruption and Rule of Law Committee, and at numerous conferences and summits.

He has recently authored thought leadership including “US-ROK Cooperation Can Improve IP Protection in Southeast Asia” (East-West Center, 2022), “Building Trust In Asia’s Digital Trade Revolution” (Eurasia Review, 2022), and “Asia falling behind the AI regulation race” (Asia Times, 2023).

Seth is a member of the New York State Bar and studied not-for-profit management at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. He has an M.A. in Pacific and Asian Studies from the University of Hawai’i, and a B.A in science, technology, and society from Vassar College.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



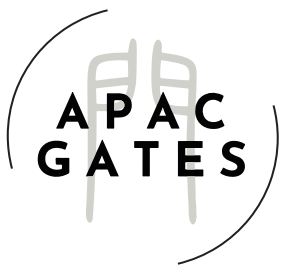
MORGAN HUGHES

Morgan Hughes is Director of Research and Co-Founder of APAC GATES and an experienced policy researcher with a strong focus on trade association research and insights. She brings with her over 15 years of experience in project management, on-the-ground fieldwork for humanitarian not-for-profits and business associations, and practical policy advocacy having led policy briefings for governments across the Asia-Pacific region.

Morgan has worked for leading chambers of commerce in Asia, including with AmCham Taiwan and as Head of AmCham Singapore's Insights division, where she led multi-country research projects and represented the Chamber's research at regional forums such as the annual ASEAN Economic Minister's Meeting. Additionally, she has worked with the National Bureau of Asian Research, Humanitarian Outcomes, and the Center on International Cooperation across a wide spectrum of research and publications on regional security, humanitarian affairs, and economic policy.

She has authored and co-authored studies including "Towards a Resilient Digital Future" (AmCham Taiwan, 2023), "Digital Leadership Readiness: Lessons from Singapore" (AmCham Singapore, 2021), and "Aid Worker Security Report 2012: Host states and their impact on security for humanitarian operations" (Humanitarian Outcomes, 2012).

Morgan holds an M.A. in Politics (International Relations) from New York University and a B.A. in East Asian Studies (China) and History from Oberlin College. She has also studied at Columbia University and National Cheng Kung University in Taiwan. Morgan was nominated for the Rising Star of the Year Award at the 2019 APAC Association Awards.



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