



## NEWS RELEASE

### ANNUAL STATISTICS 2020

#### Traveller Volume Decreased; Cargo Volume Increased

In 2020, the Immigration & Checkpoints Authority (ICA) cleared over 42 million travellers and 11.7 million consignments, containers and parcels. This is about 175 million fewer travellers and 400,000 more cargoes compared to 2019. ICA also cleared over 21 million low-value goods<sup>1</sup> through the air cargo checkpoints in 2020, double the 10.5 million cleared in 2019.

2. Traveller volume declined significantly in 2020 as demand for air travel came to a halt, with many countries imposing strict border control measures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On the other hand, the Circuit Breaker measures along with travel restrictions, provided impetus for consumers to turn towards e-commerce and online shopping for their daily essentials, leisure, and entertainment needs. This led to the surge in low-value goods volume.

Travellers			
	2019	2020	
Number of travellers cleared	217,398,000	42,190,000	80.6% ▼

*[Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand]*

<sup>1</sup> Low-value goods are subjected to GST relief when they are imported by air/post. They do not require permits and have a total Cost, Insurance and Freight (CIF) not exceeding \$400. This is not applicable to intoxicating liquors and tobacco.



Cargoes			
	2019	2020	
Containers	1,018,000	1,167,000	
Consignments	3,840,000	4,462,000	
Parcels	6,493,000	6,131,000	
<b>Total Cargoes cleared</b>	<b>11,351,000</b>	<b>11,760,000</b>	<b>(3.6%) ▲</b>

*[Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand]*

Low-Value Goods			
	2019	2020	
<b>Low-value goods cleared</b>	<b>10,505,000</b>	<b>21,236,000</b>	<b>(102.2%) ▲</b>

*[Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand]*

### Drop in Number of Immigration Offenders (IO), Harbourers and Employers (H/E) of Immigration Offenders, and Marriage of Convenience (MOC)-Related Offences

3. The decline in traveller volume due to the COVID-19 pandemic, coupled with ICA's continued in-land enforcement efforts, has resulted in a sharp fall in the number of IO, H/E and MOC, as shown in the following tables.

#### *Drop in Number of Immigration Offenders (IO), Harbourers and Employers (H/E) of Immigration Offenders*

	2019	2020	
<b>Illegal immigrants arrested</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>(55.5%) ▼</b>
<b>Overstayers arrested</b>	<b>804</b>	<b>416</b>	<b>(48.3%) ▼</b>



<b>Total immigration offenders (IOs) arrested</b>	932	473	(49.2%) ▼
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	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	
<b>Harbourers of IOs arrested</b>	248	223	(10%) ▼
<b>Employers of IOs arrested</b>	86	56	(34.9%) ▼
<b>Total</b>	334	279	(16.5%) ▼

4. ICA continues to keep the IO situation under control through a combination of enforcement and technology. The use of multi-modal biometric screening for immigration clearance at the checkpoints has enabled ICA officers to more effectively detect IOs who misuse someone else's identity or a false identity. As ICA explores new technologies to enhance immigration clearance, we are reskilling and upskilling our officers so that they are equipped with the necessary competencies and knowledge. We also take a tough enforcement stance – IOs arrested are repatriated and barred from re-entering Singapore.

5. IOs may pose a security risk if they turn to crime in Singapore. In 2020, most IOs employed by errant employers were working in the maintenance and F&B industries. The majority of the harbourers and employers arrested had failed to exercise due diligence, to conduct the necessary checks on the foreigners' immigration status, before employing them or renting out their premises. We seek the public and employers' cooperation to deny IOs shelter and jobs, and to report suspected cases quickly to ICA at [<http://eservices.ica.gov.sg/feedbackio>]. We will continue to work closely with other enforcement agencies to conduct operations against IOs hiding in non-residential premises like forested areas or farms. Refer to Appendix A for related cases and the mandatory checks to conduct when renting out premises.



### *Decrease in Number of Persons Convicted of Marriage of Convenience-Related Offences*

	2019	2020
Persons convicted of MOC-related offences	15	6

(60%) ▼

6. The number of marriage of convenience (MOC) offenders has been decreasing steadily over the years since the criminalisation of arranging or entering into a MOC in 2012. Compared to 2019, MOC cases fell sharply with only six persons convicted in 2020 compared to 15 the year before. ICA takes a serious view of foreigners engaging in MOCs with Singaporeans to obtain immigration facilities in Singapore. The penalties are a fine of up to S\$10,000 or an imprisonment term up to 10 years, or both. Immigration facilities obtained through MOCs are also liable to be revoked.

7. We will continue our enforcement efforts against such offenders and the middlemen who facilitate MOCs. Members of the public should report any suspected cases of MOCs, as well as any other immigration-related offences at [<https://eservices.ica.gov.sg/feedbackio>]. All information provided will be treated with the strictest confidence. Refer to Appendix B for a related case.

### **Decline in Overall Contraband Cases Detected on Travellers; Rise in Contraband Cases through Low-Value Goods**

8. The fall in contraband cases was attributed to the travel restrictions worldwide resulting in a drop in inbound travellers and conveyances passing through the checkpoints.

9. However, ICA noted an upward trend in the number of attempts to smuggle controlled items into Singapore through low-value goods in 2020. Contraband cases detected through low-value goods increased by more than five times from 610 in 2019 to 4,000 in 2020. ICA is monitoring this trend closely, given the increasing volume of low-value goods with the rise of e-commerce.



	2019	2020	
<b>Total number of contraband cases detected</b>	92,000	41,000	(55.4%) ▼

*[Rounded to the nearest thousand]*

10. Despite the decrease in contraband cases, ICA continued to detect huge consignments of contraband cigarettes and drugs hidden within legitimate consignments at the checkpoints. In some of these cases, the offenders had used sophisticated methods of concealment. These included hiding the cigarettes in metal cabinets, household items, cardboard boxes and in various modified compartments of vehicles. ICA will continue to watch these trends closely, as such smuggling modus operandi can similarly be used by terrorists to smuggle security sensitive items such as weapons or explosives into Singapore. Refer to Appendix C for related cases.

### **ICA's Ongoing Efforts & Expanded Roles During COVID-19 Pandemic**

#### *Enhancing Systems and Processes to Support COVID-19 Response*

11. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit Singapore, ICA moved quickly to tighten border control measures. ICA developed new systems and fine-tuned existing systems within a short span of time to support evolving border control measures and COVID-19 enforcement operations. Some of these initiatives included:

- Enhancing the online service platform to cater to the increased number of applications for Short-Term Visit Pass (STVP) extension. As a result of travel restrictions in other countries and reduced flight connectivity, many foreigners found themselves unable to return home and needed to seek an extension of stay in Singapore.



- Enhancing the SG Arrival Card to enable the submission of electronic Health Declaration and issuance of electronic Stay-Home Notice advisories for arriving travellers.<sup>2</sup> This has improved the integrity of contact tracing efforts and reduced the time needed to administer the SHN to arriving travellers.
- Setting up the Safe Travel Office (STO) in August 2020 to have better oversight of travel applications under the various Safe Travel Lanes, such as the Reciprocal Green Lanes and Periodic Commuting Arrangement with Malaysia. Apart from improving operational efficiency, the STO developed a SafeTravel portal which provides greater convenience to travellers seeking entry into Singapore by serving as a single touch point for them, regardless of their travel scheme and purpose of entry.
- Developing a new Entry Assessment Unit and an online form on FormSG to handle enquiries and process applications for the Approval Letter of Entry (ALE).<sup>3</sup> The number of such applications rose as Singapore extended travel restriction to more countries when the global COVID-19 situation worsened. To regulate the flow of arrivals, an e-booking module was developed for successful applicants to select their date of travel to Singapore. Applications for ALE were subsequently automated via the SafeTravel portal.

#### *Undertaking SHN Enforcement to Support the Extended Crisis*

12. With the onset of the pandemic, ICA expanded beyond its core responsibilities of border security, immigration control and registration services (i.e. issuance of passports, identity cards, immigration passes, etc.) in order to support the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, both inland and at our borders. This includes the enforcement of the SHN regime. ICA monitored more than 40,000 persons placed on SHN at its peak in April 2020. ICA also ramped up its resources to conduct about 1,000 visits and 8,000 surveillance calls daily to ensure SHN compliance. As of 31 December 2020, ICA had issued over 280,000 SHNs.

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<sup>2</sup> ICA's news release, "All travellers arriving in Singapore from 27 March 2020, 0900 hours, must submit health declaration via the SG Arrival Card e-Service" was issued on 23 March 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Applicable for travellers who needed to enter Singapore due to compassionate reasons.





House visits performed by ICA  
Photo: ICA

13. ICA set up the SHN Investigation Taskforce on 31 March 2020 to investigate SHN breaches. As of 31 December 2020, 22 people had been charged under the Infectious Diseases Act (IDA) or Infectious Diseases (COVID-19 – Stay Orders Regulations 2020) for breaching SHN requirements. Refer to Appendix D for related cases.

14. To further tighten the SHN regime, ICA introduced the electronic tamper-proof wristband (e-wristband) for arriving travellers who are serving their SHN outside of SHN dedicated facilities.<sup>4</sup> This has allowed ICA to monitor this group of travellers in a more effective and efficient manner, thereby helping reduce the risk to the local community should they breach their SHN. This is important as Singapore progressively reopens its borders and the number of travellers served with SHNs is expected to rise. As of 31 December 2020, more than 16,000 e-wristbands had been issued.

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<sup>4</sup> ICA's news release, "All incoming travellers, including returning residents, Long-Term Pass holders, work pass holders and their dependents, serving their stay-home notice outside of dedicated facilities to don electronic monitoring device", was issued on 3 August 2020.





Electronic wristband and gateway device  
Photo: HTX

## Doubling Up on Transformation Amidst COVID-19 Pandemic

### *New Clearance Concept (NCC)*

15. ICA continues to use technology to transform Singapore's checkpoints and provide travellers with a safer, more secure and more efficient immigration experience.

16. At the checkpoints, **all immigration lanes (automated and manual) at the passenger halls have been equipped with iris and facial scanners since July 2020.**<sup>5</sup> The use of iris patterns and facial features to replace fingerprints as the primary identifiers for immigration clearance provides a more robust and reliable identity authentication of travellers. It also offers more hygienic, convenient and efficient immigration clearance.

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<sup>5</sup> ICA's news release, "Use of iris and facial biometrics as the primary identifiers for immigration clearance at all checkpoints", was issued on 28 October 2020.





Automated lanes with iris and facial scanners at Marina Bay Cruise Centre and Woodlands Checkpoint  
Photo: ICA

17. ICA is on track in the implementation of the New Clearance Concept<sup>6</sup> (NCC) at our checkpoints. The NCC aims to provide a seamless and efficient immigration clearance experience for all travellers progressively from 2022. Singapore residents will be able to clear immigration at our checkpoints without the need to present a passport. The majority of foreign visitors, including first-time visitors, will be able to clear immigration at the automated lanes on arrival, without the need for prior enrolment of their biometrics.

#### *Services Centre Next Generation*

18. ICA has also made good progress towards realising its '3N' vision of Services Centre Next Generation (SCNG), namely "No Fuss; No Visit; No Waiting" for customers.<sup>7</sup> ICA will use a combination of technology, biometrics and customer-friendly processes to achieve the SCNG vision. Through these initiatives, customers can transact on-the-go anytime, anywhere instead of having to transact face to face, over the counter.

19. **By 2020, ICA had already implemented 15 e-Services that cover 99% of public transactions,<sup>8</sup>** reducing the need for members of the public to make physical trips to the ICA Building. One of the more recent initiatives is the **e-Service to allow Identity Card (IC) holders**

<sup>6</sup> Announced in May 2019, New Clearance Concept (NCC) is a suite of initiatives that will be rolled out progressively by ICA to transform the immigration clearance experience. The NCC will leverage advance arrival information, data analytics and biometrics to allow contactless and hassle-free immigration clearance experience for eligible travellers.

<sup>7</sup> ICA's media factsheet, "ICA's vision of 'services centre next generation'; Transforming service delivery and enhancing customer experience", was shared with the media on 22 December 2020.

<sup>8</sup> The remaining 1% are services which are seldom used, used only on an exceptional basis, applicable to a very small number of people, or requires a physical interview.



**to report online a change of their residential address, rather than having to go down physically to a Police station or ICA Building.**<sup>9</sup> ICA is also working to digitalise ICA-issued documents so that residents will be able to access and retrieve them, as and when needed, via a secure digital platform, for example if they need the documents for identification or verification purposes. The first in line will be birth and death certificates, followed by long-term passes.

20. To further encourage online transactions, ICA is progressively introducing push notifications via the SingPass mobile application or SMS to proactively inform or remind our customers of the transactions they may need to undertake. For example, ICA implemented **on 1 September 2020, a digital notification service to notify members of the public who need to renew their Identity Card or Passport.**<sup>10</sup>

21. Lastly, the SCNG vision of 'No Waiting' is embodied in the operations concept of the new integrated Services Centre on which we started construction in October 2020. This new Services Centre will provide a seamless, one-stop service to members of the public. It will have self-service kiosks where customers can transact services without making a prior appointment.

22. Even as ICA works towards re-opening our borders progressively and safely, it will press on with its transformation efforts.

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<sup>9</sup> ICA's news release, "Online change of residential address from 1 October 2020", was issued on 28 September 2020.

<sup>10</sup> ICA's news release, "Singapore residents to receive digital push notifications on identity card and passport-related matters", was issued on 28 August 2020.



## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### ***Case #1– Four Bangladeshis And One Singaporean Arrested for Immigration-Related Offences***

1. On 13 August 2020, four Bangladeshi nationals and one Singaporean aged between 25 and 57 years old were arrested for immigration related offences – overstaying, working without a valid work pass and employment and harbouring of immigration offenders.<sup>11</sup> The operations covered Moulmein, Novena, Geylang and River Valley. The four Bangladeshi nationals were found to be engaging in cleaning services work.

2. On 19 August 2020, two out of the four Bangladeshis were sentenced to between six to 20 weeks' imprisonment and three strokes of the cane for overstaying while the remaining two were issued with a stern warning for working without a valid work pass. On 7 January 2021, the Singaporean was sentenced to six months' imprisonment for harbouring and employing the four Bangladeshis. He was also fined \$9,000 by the Ministry of Manpower in default for three weeks' imprisonment.

#### ***Case #2– Seven Myanmar Nationals Arrested for Immigration-Related Offences***

3. On 9 November 2020, seven Myanmar nationals aged between 30 and 42, were arrested in an operation jointly conducted with the Singapore Police Force.<sup>12</sup> Officers found them staying in six illegally constructed shelters on a vegetable farm along Sungei Tengah Road, which were dismantled following the operation.

4. On 18 November 2020, six of the Myanmar nationals were sentenced to between 14 weeks and six months' imprisonment and between three and four strokes of the cane for

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<sup>11</sup> ICA's news release, "Four Bangladeshis and one Singaporean arrested for immigration-related offences in an ICA enforcement operation", was issued on 17 August 2020.

<sup>12</sup> ICA's news release, "Seven Myanmar nationals arrested for immigration-related offences in an ICA-led enforcement operation", was issued on 12 November 2020.



overstaying while the other was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and four strokes of the cane for entering Singapore illegally. Investigations against two Singaporeans are ongoing for offences related to illegal employment and harbouring of immigration offenders.

**Three mandatory checks to conduct when you rent your premises out:**

- (a) Check the tenant's original immigration/work pass;
- (b) Cross check the particulars on his/her pass against the particulars on his/her original passport; and
- (c) Verify the validity of his/her pass by checking with the issuing authority (i.e. Ministry of Manpower for work passes at [checkwpstatus.mom.gov.sg](http://checkwpstatus.mom.gov.sg) or download the SGWorkPass mobile application; and ICA for Student's Pass and Long-Term Visit Pass at (<http://eservices.ica.gov.sg/ipienquiry/web/verifi/landing>).



## **Appendix B**

### ***Case #3 – Singaporean Man and People’s Republic of China National jailed for entering into a marriage of convenience***

1. A 54-year-old male Singaporean, Tan Kok Wah (“Tan”), and a 52-year-old PRC National, Wang Ban (“Wang”), were arrested on 17 April 2019 by ICA officers for entering into a sham marriage on 6 May 2018.
2. Investigations revealed that in August 2016, Wang visited Singapore for a holiday and got acquainted with Tan. They continued to maintain contact even after Wang returned to China. Whilst in China, Wang offered to enter into a MOC with Tan and in return, Wang would reward Tan with a sum of money as she had planned to return and stay in Singapore to start a business.
3. In 2017, Wang paid a sum of \$2,000 to Tan as a form of gratification for him to enter into a MOC with her. On 6 May 2018, Wang and Tan solemnised their marriage in Singapore and parted ways. After their marriage, Tan acted as the sponsor and managed to obtain extensions of stay for Wang on three separate occasions. In the applications, the couple falsely declared that Wang was staying at Tan’s place of residence.
4. Tan and Wang were each sentenced to six months’ imprisonment on 5 February 2020 for entering into a MOC and making false declarations to seek extensions of stay for Wang.



## Appendix C

### ***Case #4– Detection of 15kg of controlled drugs that led to the arrest of seven suspected drug offenders***

1. On 18 December 2020, officers at Woodlands Checkpoint referred a Malaysia-registered lorry transporting a consignment of beansprouts for further checks.<sup>13</sup> During the course of checks, seven bundles of controlled drugs, containing about 4,622g of heroin and 521g of ‘Ice’, were found (see photo below). The 38-year-old male Malaysian driver and the 24-year-old male passenger were arrested.



Heroin and ‘Ice’ seized on 18 December (Photo: CNB)

2. On 21 December 2020, a Malaysia-registered lorry, transporting furniture and spare vehicle parts, was directed for further checks at Woodlands Checkpoint. The officers’ suspicions were aroused when they noticed anomalies in the scanned x-ray images of the consignment declared as “personal effects”. During the checks, officers uncovered packages containing a total of 4,368g of ‘Ice’, 5,110g of cannabis, 4,900 ‘Ecstasy’ tablets and 4,750 Erimin-5 tablets, concealed in the furniture (see photo below).

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<sup>13</sup> Joint CNB-ICA’s news release, “Close to 15kg of drugs seized at Woodlands Checkpoint”, was issued on 23 December 2020





Cannabis, 'Ice' and 'Ecstasy' seized on 21 December 2020 (Photo: CNB)

3. In a follow-up operation conducted on the same day, Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) officers raided a residential unit in the vicinity of Bedok North Street. CNB officers found 215g of cannabis and arrested a 20-year-old male Singaporean. Following up from this raid, CNB officers then arrested a 22-year-old male Singaporean and 22-year-old female Singaporean in the vicinity of Geylang Lorong 26. A search was conducted in the couple's hideout in the same vicinity, and a total of about 504g of 'Ice', 157g of cannabis, 247g of ketamine, 211 'Ecstasy' tablets and 633 Erimin-5 tablets were seized. The drugs seized from both cases are estimated to be worth close to \$2.3 million. Investigations by CNB are ongoing.

#### ***Case #5 – Detection of the largest haul of duty-unpaid cigarettes in 2020***

4. On 27 May 2020, a prime mover attached with a container was referred for further checks after vigilant officers at Pasir Panjang Scanning Station noticed anomalies in the scanned images of the consignment.<sup>14</sup> The officers subsequently uncovered duty-unpaid cigarettes concealed inside metal cabinets.

5. Following this detection, Singapore Customs conducted an operation at an industrial building in Yishun Street 23. During the operation, officers observed three men removing 16

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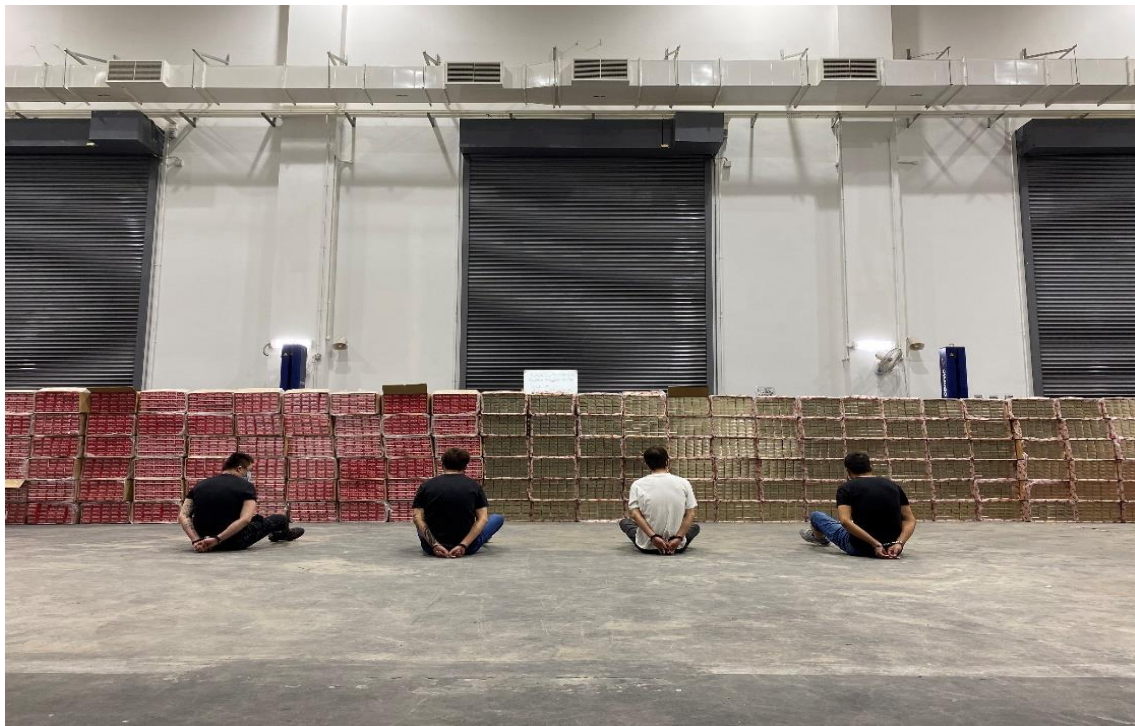
<sup>14</sup> Joint SC-ICA's news release, "Four men arrested in single largest haul of duty-unpaid cigarettes seized in 2020", was issued on 1 June 2020.



metal cabinets carrying carton boxes containing duty-unpaid cigarettes from the container. A total of 17,250 cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes were seized and a total of four men were arrested for their involvement in the case. They were sentenced to between 36 and 39 months of imprisonment. This was the largest haul of duty-unpaid cigarettes uncovered by ICA since 2015.



Duty-unpaid cigarettes retrieved from metal cabinets  
Photo: SC



Four subjects arrested and 17,250 cartons of duty-unpaid cigarettes retrieved  
Photo: SC



### ***Case #6 – Detection of e-vaporisers and refill pods***

6. On 16 October 2020, officers at Changi Airfreight Centre noticed anomalies in the scanned images of a consignment from overseas. Upon further checks, officers uncovered 1,000 e-vaporisers and 24,400 e-vaporiser refill pods. The consignment was declared as “bags and clothes” and “clothes and toys”. The case was referred to the Health Sciences Authority.



e-vaporiser and refill pods uncovered  
Photo: ICA



## **Appendix D**

### **Case #7 – Singaporean Man who Flouted SHN Requirements to Eat Ba Ku Teh**

1. A 34-year-old Singaporean man, Alan Tham Xiang Sheng, had arrived from Myanmar and was served with an SHN for a 14-day period between 23 March 2020 and 6 April 2020. Instead of proceeding back to his residence, he had visited several public places on the same day. After posting photos on social media of his meal, his breach was brought to the attention of the authorities.

2. On 23 April 2020, Alan was sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment and was the first person convicted of exposing others to the risk of COVID-19 by breaching SHN requirements.

### **Case #8 – Singaporean Woman who Breached SHN Requirements and Contracted COVID-19**

3. A 22-year-old Singaporean woman, Nurul Afiqah Mohammed, had arrived from Australia and was served with an SHN for a 14-day period between 21 March 2020 and 4 April 2020. On 23 March 2020, she left her place of residence to visit several public spaces.

4. On 2 and 3 April 2020, she again left her residence to Punggol Field to assist her friend in wedding preparations. On both occasions, family members of her friend's household were present. On 12 April 2020, Nurul visited Khoo Teck Puat Hospital as she was feeling unwell and subsequently tested positive for COVID-19.

5. Nurul was sentenced to seven weeks' imprisonment for her irresponsible behaviour of failing to stay at her residence and coming into contact with her members of the public, friend's family members and friends, showing the real risk that breaching of SHN requirements can pose to the community.



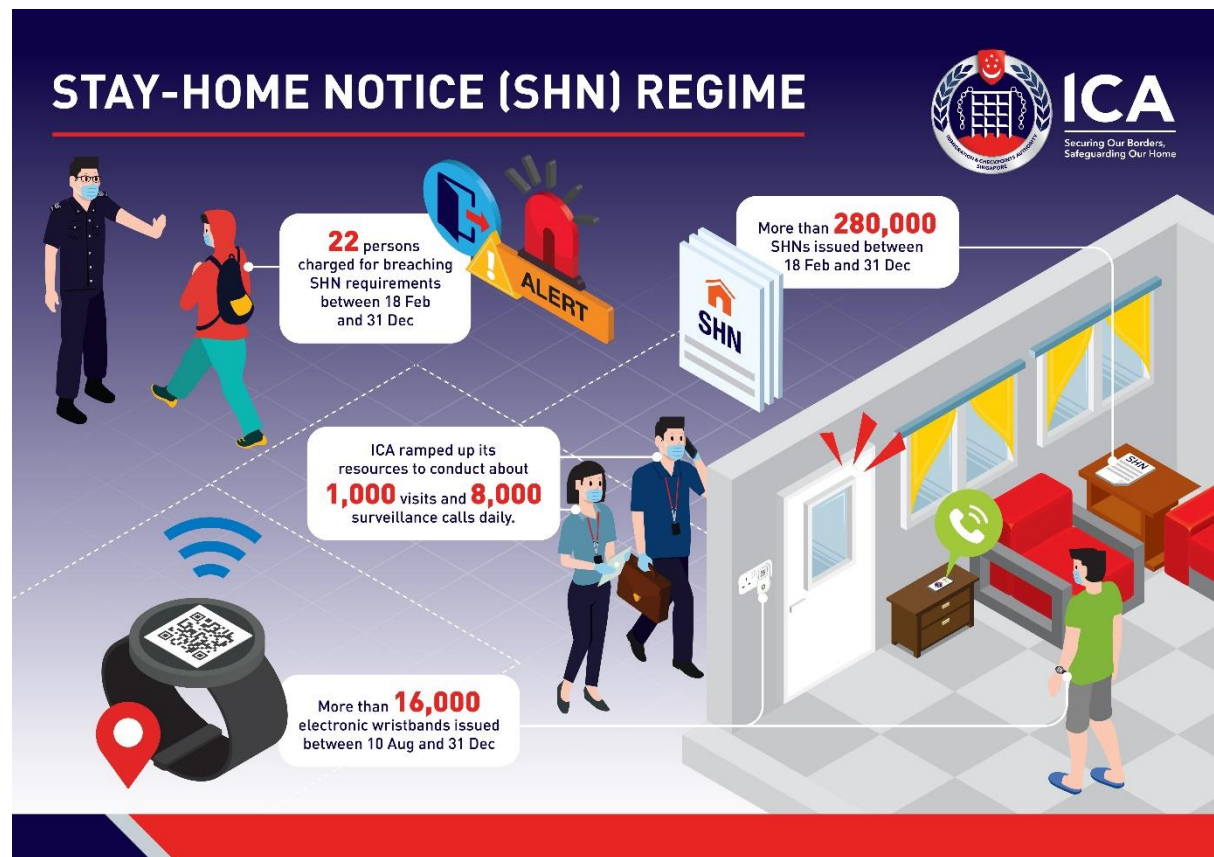
## NUMBER OF TRAVELLERS AND CARGOES CLEARED AT THE CHECKPOINTS IN 2020



## ICA'S ENFORCEMENT EFFORTS INLAND AND AT THE CHECKPOINTS 2020







IMMIGRATION & CHECKPOINTS AUTHORITY

8 FEBRUARY 2021