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Citizens' Opinions of and Experiences with Government Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic in Viet Nam

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Abstract

This study explores the impact of COVID-19 and how Vietnamese citizens perceived and experienced measures adopted by central and local governments to contain the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021. In general, the COVID-19 pandemic had a more severe impact in 2021 than in 2020. Citizens showed great concern about their children's education (76 percent) and their personal health (68 percent). COVID-19 negatively impacted employment and income, with 77 percent of the respondents reporting income reduction due to the pandemic. The poor, ethnic minorities, unskilled, non-farm workers, and those working in the service sector or living in provinces with longer lockdowns were the most likely to suffer. Compared with 2020, in 2021, respondents showed a high but declining positive assessment of government performance in dealing with the pandemic, with 84 percent of the respondents rating the responses from the Central Government as good or very good (97 percent in 2020), 89 percent rating the response from their provincial governments' responses as good or very good (94 percent in 2020). Only 13 percent of the respondents received support from the Government's package. However, ethnic minorities, female, poorer and rural respondents were less likely to receive the support. For the support recipients, delivery was regarded as timely and transparent, but administrative procedures to get access to the package were not simple. Meanwhile, support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social organizations, charity foundations, and individuals was distributed more efficiently, with 25 percent of the respondents receiving support from these sources.

Keywords: COVID-19, government policy, citizens' opinions, aid package, Vietnam

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Introduction

Viet Nam's response to COVID-19 in 2020 was recognized by both citizens and the international development community as swift and effective. Evidence from the decade-long Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) with survey findings in 2020 reveals that improved governance and responsiveness of central and local governments contributed to the country's effective responses to the global COVID-19 pandemic (CECODES et al., 2021; Nguyen and Malesky, 2020). Demonstrated progresses in the performance in transparency and control of corruption in the public sector might have increased the trust in citizens, who in return might have been willing to comply with extensive contact tracing, quarantine and lockdown measures. Findings from the first-round survey entitled "Citizens' Opinions of and Experiences with Government Responses to COVID-19 Pandemic in Viet Nam" in late 2020 showed high support for government policy and actions to contain the pandemic (Do et al., 2021).

However, the arrival of the fourth wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Viet Nam, with the Delta variant spreading fast across different provinces since May 2021,¹ has been very detrimental to the Vietnamese population and the country's socio-economic development. The country's economic growth in the third quarter of 2021 declined 6.17 percent, the first decline after more than two decades of high growth. A one-month national lock down in April 2020 caused strong and negative impacts on the labor market (Dang and Nguyen, 2020). Additionally, 2021 saw longer lockdowns in many provinces such as HCM city, Binh Duong, Dong Nai and Long An. At the time of writing, more than nearly 37,000 lives were claimed in 2021 due to COVID-19. The low levels of COVID-19 vaccinations early in 2021 coupled with confusing and fragmented responses at all government levels made the pandemic's impact much worse than in 2020. In addition to economic outcomes, COVID-19 also negatively impacted social outcomes such as psychology and education (e.g., Tran et al., 2020; Vu and Bosmans, 2021; Gan et al., 2021).

Therefore, it is important to undertake the second-round study on how the Vietnamese citizens have perceived and experienced the measures to contain the coronavirus adopted by central and local governments from governance and public service provision angles. Citizen views, experiences and expectations are important because they help inform central and local governments of what has worked and what has not as well as their preference and suggestions moving forward. Additionally, their suggestions remain relevant given the continued presence of COVID-19 in the form of the Omicron variant.

To capture how citizens experienced central and local government responses during the 4th wave, the results of the second phone-based survey contained in this report was conducted from mid-September to mid-October 2021—about two months after major lockdowns in Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, the Mekong Delta provinces, and Ha Noi. Restrictive measures were also applied in localities with community transmissions in more than 50 provinces. Through this survey, a randomly selected population of 1,501 respondents from the age of 18 years old to 70 years old across all 63 provinces and municipalities, including 1,142 respondents from Round 1, reflected on COVID-19's impact on 1) their well-being; 2) the accessibility and effectiveness of the Government's relief packages, 3) healthcare, 4) public confidence, and 5) trust in the Government's responses to the pandemic. The survey raised policy suggestions based on citizens' expectations for central and local governments in response to possible additional waves of COVID-19 or another pandemic.

This report presents key findings from the second-round survey. It zooms in two main matters concerning: (i) COVID-19 impact on citizens' well-being and (ii) citizens' assessment of government responses to the COVID-19 Wave 4. It closes with suggestions for the central and local governments moving forward as the pandemic continues.

¹ See updates at the Ministry of Health's website at <https://ncov.moh.gov.vn/trang-chu>.

Methodology

The data used in this report comes from a nationally-representative, intensive telephone survey conducted from 17 September to 15 October 2021. It included the participation of 1,501 respondents randomly selected from the 2019 sample of the Viet Nam Provincial Governance and Public Administration performance Index (PAPI). The aim was also to compare the views and experiences of permanent residents in all 63 provinces in 2021 with those surveyed in the first round of the survey in 2020 to understand changes in attitudes during the two years of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this report, the survey is referred to as the 2021 COVID-19 survey or the second round of the COVID-19 survey.

The 2021 COVID-19 survey applied a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) method to collect data. Specifically, callers conducted phone interviews via a voice API and recorded the responses into tablets. A questionnaire was developed and programmed for the tablet, which incorporated some questions in the PAPI 2019 and the 2020 COVID-19 surveys.

Similar to the approach applied in the first round, the sampling frame of the second round of the COVID-19 survey was taken from the 2019 PAPI survey. In 2020, the first round of the COVID-19 survey (also known as the 2020 COVID-19 survey) was conducted to investigate citizens' assessment of government responses to COVID-19. At that time, among 9,982 respondents provided phone numbers in the PAPI survey, 1,337 individuals were randomly selected, and 1,335 were successfully interviewed². In the second round, we re-contacted those 1,335 people, and randomly selected an additional 165 people in three provinces – Ho Chi Minh City, Dong Nai, and Binh Duong to increase the sample in areas heavily hit by COVID-19 in 2021. The phone survey ended up with 1,501 respondents from all 63 provinces, including 1,142 who had participated in the first round. The average duration of an interview was around 30 minutes. The collected data includes respondents' perceptions of and experience with the pandemic and their assessment of government responses and the VND 26 trillion aid package provided in 2021.

Appendix 1 reports the distribution of respondents by different demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Sampling weights were calculated and used to ensure that the surveyed sample is representative at the national level for urban and rural areas and with male and female, Kinh majority and non-Kinh majority respondents.

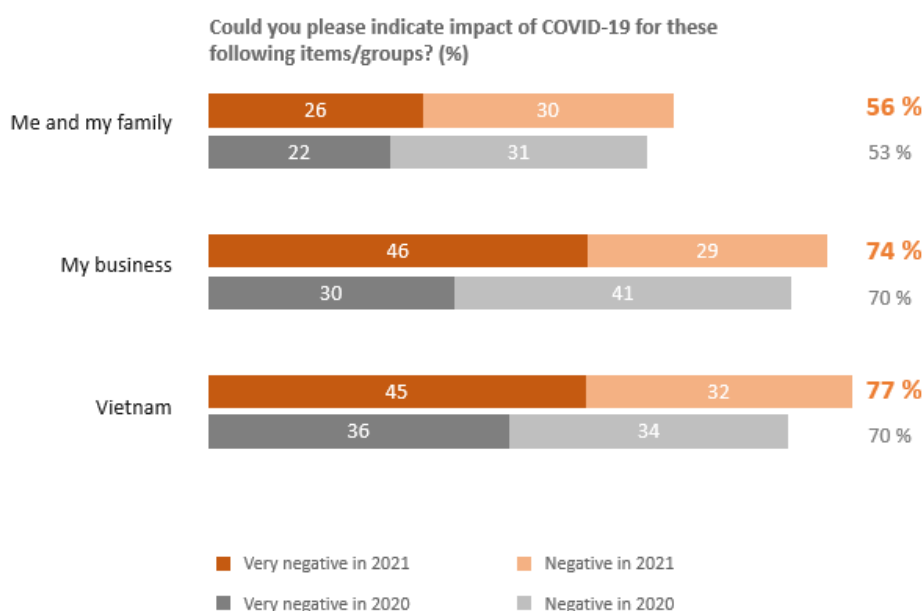
² For a more detailed description of the 2020 COVID-19 survey see Do et al., 2021.

Key Findings

COVID-19 impact on citizens' well-being

The year 2021 witnessed the most serious and prolonged wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in Viet Nam since the pandemic began. Figure 1 shows that the impact of the pandemic was more severe in 2021 than in 2020. The 2021 COVID-19 survey results show that, the proportion of the respondents who saw negative and very negative impacts of COVID-19 on themselves and their families, their business, and the whole country was relatively higher. To be specific, 56 percent of the respondents said that the pandemic negatively affected themselves and their families, and 74 percent of the respondents reported that COVID-19 adversely impacted their businesses.³ Meanwhile, the corresponding figures in 2020 are 53 percent and 70 percent, respectively. Data from this round also reveals a higher proportion of the respondents who perceived that the pandemic had negative impacts on the whole country (77 percent versus 70 percent).

Figure 1. The overall impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

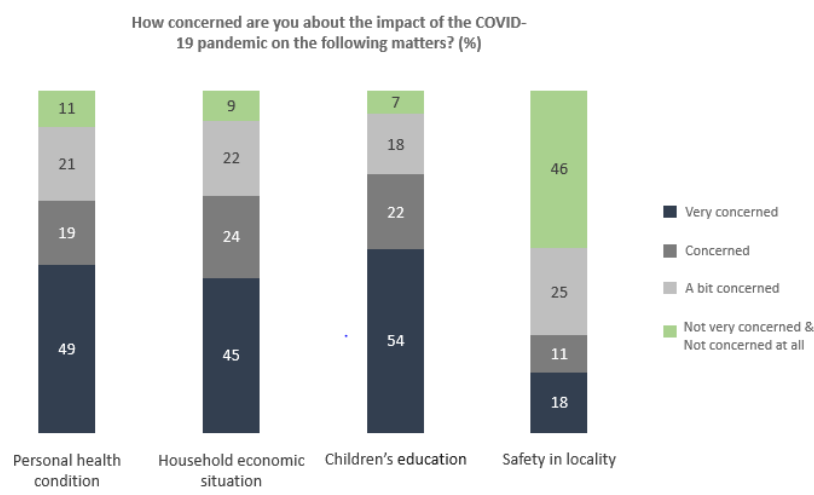


A closer look into issues of the greatest concern in the second-round survey shows that respondents, regardless of their demographic characteristics, seem to be most concerned about their children's education. As depicted in Figure 2, 76 percent of the respondents explicitly expressed such concern. The 4th Wave led to the mass closure of schools in 62 out of 63 provinces, affecting nearly 20 million students nationwide.⁴ The Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) promoted distance learning to cope with the situation. According to UNICEF (2020), about 51 percent of children studied less than required or did not study during the pandemic. Online learning compounded inequalities in education, especially for the most disadvantaged groups, such as children from ethnic minority or poor households, due to their poorer access to the Internet, digital devices, and other learning materials at home.

³ The proportion of respondents spotting very negative impact of the pandemic on their business in 2021 is higher than in 2020, with 46 percent compared with 30 percent respectively.

⁴ <https://www.qdnd.vn/giao-duc-khoa-hoc/cac-van-de/khong-duoc-toi-truong-hoc-sinh-kho-phat-trien-day-du-675196>. Accessed on January 22, 2022.

Figure 2. Citizens' concern about the COVID-19 impact



COVID-19 impacts on household economic situation and personal health are the next issues of greatest concern the respondents had. In particular, nearly 70 percent expressed their grave concern about these. Meanwhile, safety in the locality seems least concerning, with one out of three respondents having such worries. Disaggregated data shows that female respondents tended to be more concerned about COVID-19 impacts than men. However, no difference existed between other population groups.

Alongside the finding on the respondents' worries about COVID-19 economic impact, the survey results show that the pandemic had a great impact on employment and income in 2021 as in 2020. The proportion of the respondents (24 percent) reporting job loss in 2021 was equal to that in 2020; however, the percentage of those who experienced an income reduction due to the pandemic increased considerably, from 65 percent in 2020 to 77 percent in 2021 (see Figure 3). Similar to what was found in 2020, laborers working in service and agricultural sectors, unskilled workers, non-farm workers, and the poor were more prone to job loss and income reduction. Additionally, as shown in Figure 4, respondents from the Central Highlands and the Southeast regions as well as from areas with higher rates of COVID-19 patients or longer lockdowns were more likely to have their job and income negatively impacted.

Figure 3. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and income

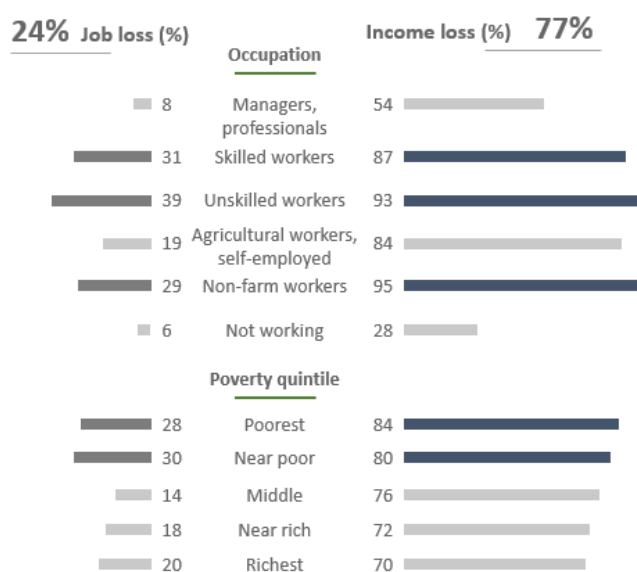
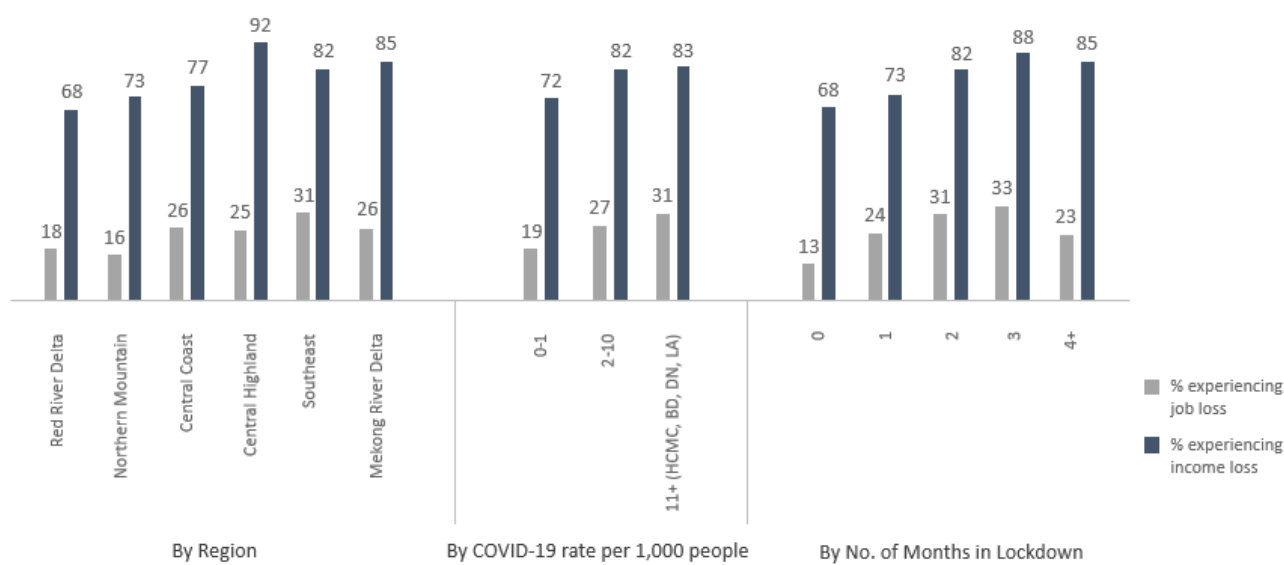


Figure 4. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on employment and income by regions (%)



When asked about the magnitude of income reduction, nearly half of the respondents said they lost at least 51 percent of their income (see Figure 5). Noticeably, in 2021, the proportion of the respondents who claimed to lose all their income due to the pandemic was much higher than that in 2020, with 19 percent compared with 4 percent. The pandemic and its detrimental economic impacts pushed some households into hunger. As shown in Figure 6, about 4 percent of the respondents had to skip meals due to the lack of money during the peak time of the 4th Wave from August to October 2021. The respondents from poor and ethnic minority households and those living in the Southeast, Mekong River Delta regions and areas with higher rates of COVID-19 or longer lockdowns were more affected.

Figure 5. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on income

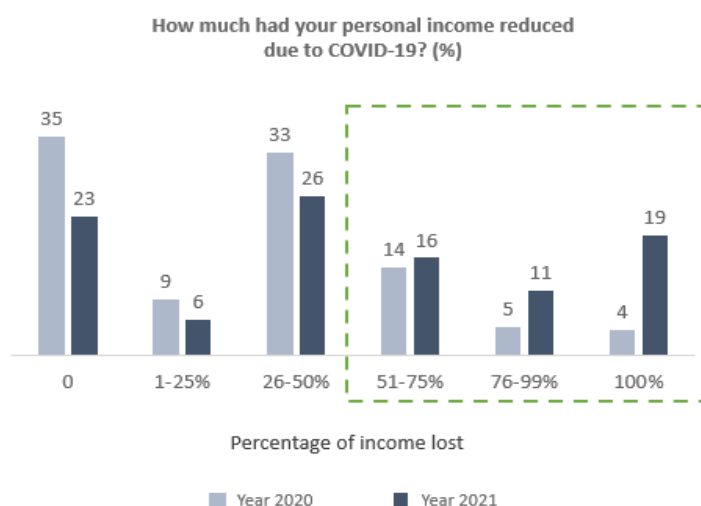
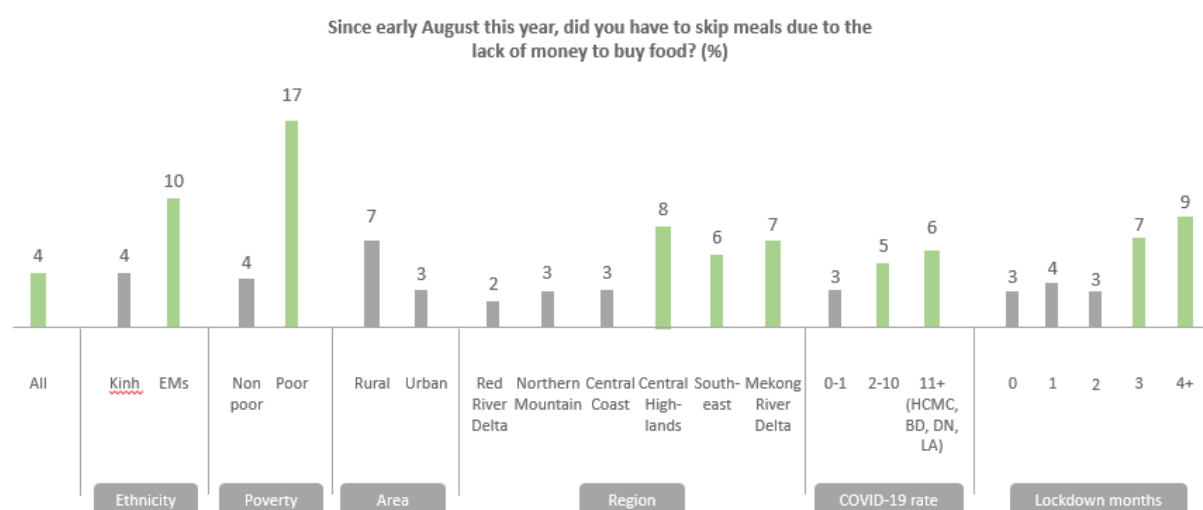
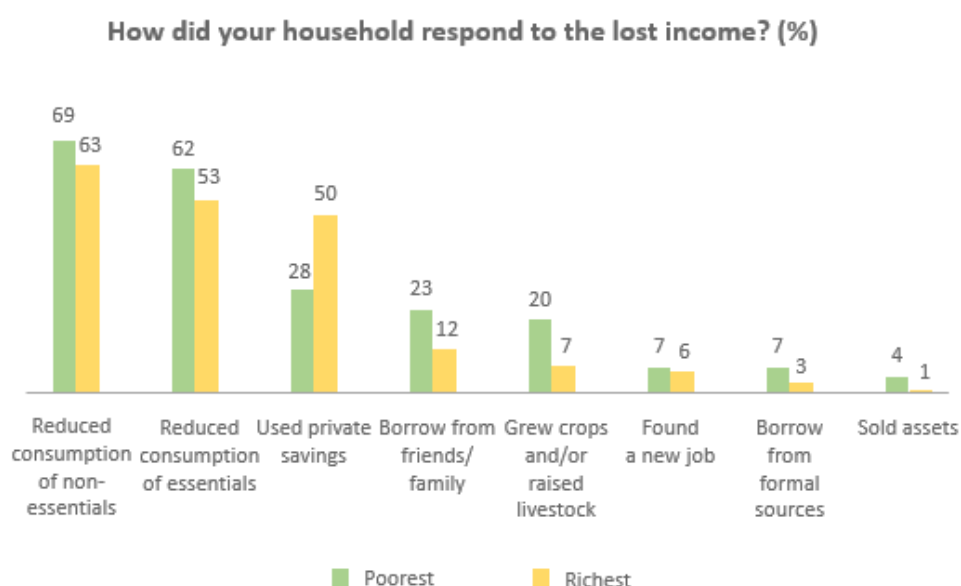


Figure 6. Impacts of the COVID-18 on meal skipping



To cope with the income reduction caused by the pandemic, two-thirds of the respondents opted to reduce their consumption of non-essentials, while 59 percent spent less on essentials. Indeed, reducing consumption was the coping strategy most favored by both the poorest and the richest (Figure 7). In addition, 30 percent said they used private savings and another 20 percent reported borrowing from friends and families. While the richest were more likely to count on their private savings, the poorest—who normally had no or little savings—tended to go for help from their friends and families. Furthermore, compared to their counterparts, the poorest favored growing crops and/or raising livestock to cope with the income reduction.

Figure 7. Coping to the COVID-19 pandemic

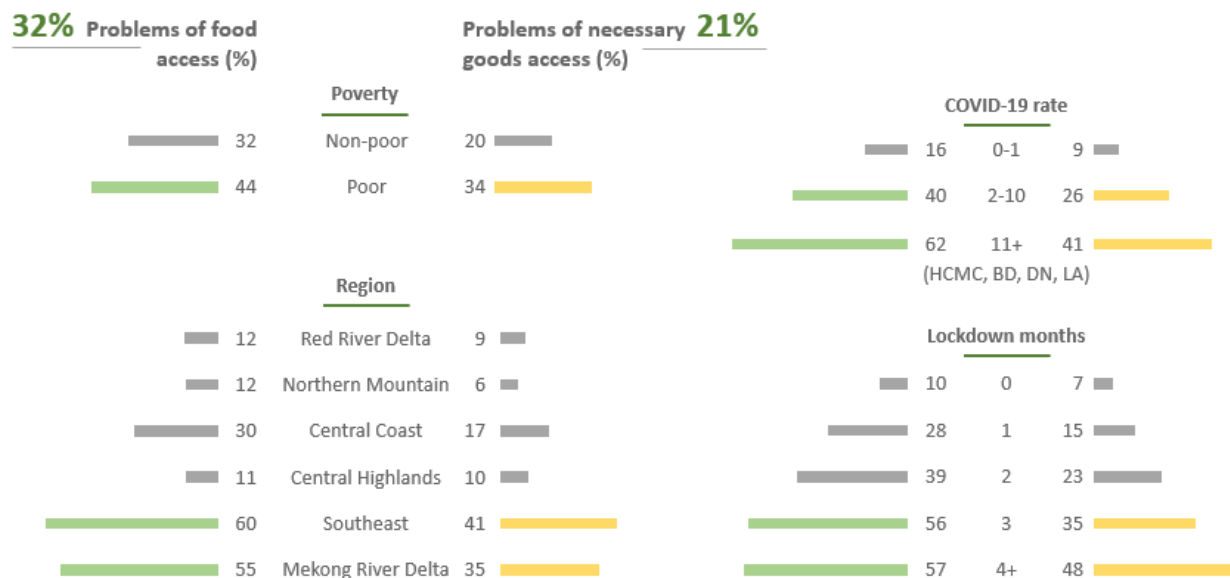


Note: The poorest and the richest are defined as those in the 20 percent lowest and 20 percent highest income quintiles.

The 4th Wave has also affected respondents' access to food, necessary goods, and public service usage. Around one-third of the respondents said they could not access food while one-fifth of the respondents faced same difficulties in accessing necessities during this wave. Inconsistencies in travel restriction measures and definition of necessary goods between provinces and municipalities were blamed for hindering the value chains of goods transportation to coordinate and function properly. On 27 August 2021, the Ministry of

Transport (MOT) had to issue an urgent dispatch to all provincial and municipal authorities to coordinate policies with the general direction of the Prime Minister to ensure timely and smooth transportation of goods⁵.

Figure 8. Lockdown impact on access to food and necessary goods



The negative COVID-19 impact on the respondents' access to food and necessary goods was more common for the poor or those living in heavily hit areas, such as the Southeast and Mekong River Delta regions. In fact, during the peak time of the 4th Wave, the citizens in Ho Chi Minh City were even not allowed to leave their houses for food or necessities. Instead, those goods would be delivered to households by authorized forces, such as the military, police, public servants, and volunteers. Despite joint efforts of the authorities, the government-led food delivery received complaints about the timeliness of the delivery and quality of delivered goods⁶.

Concerning the use of healthcare services, one-third of the respondents reported using such services during the Wave 4⁷. As Figure 9 shows, among these users, 40 percent were required to submit COVID-19 test results to be admitted to healthcare facilities, while 7 percent had to apply for travel permits from commune authorities before traveling. The requirements not only caused healthcare facilities and local authorities to be overwhelmed with paperwork but have also reduced health-seeking behaviors and access to the healthcare services of the citizens. Indeed, among those who had a disease requiring treatment, 5 percent said they could not attend hospitals or clinics due to the strict travel restrictions.

The 4th Wave also negatively impacted citizens' usage of public administrative services as the use of these services was much less common in the hardest hit epicenters or in the areas with longer lockdowns (Figure 10). In addition, although the 4th Wave witnessed the strictest lockdown orders ever applied in many provinces, public service e-portals were not utilized. Specifically, among 23 percent of respondents using administrative services from May to October 2021, a mere 3 percent accessed services, while 66 percent and 17 percent still carried out the work via one-stop shops at commune and district levels. The low utilization of

⁵ <https://vov.vn/xa-hoi/bo-gtvt-hoa-toc-yeu-cau-bai-bo-quy-dinh-gay-can-tro-luu-thong-hang-hoa-886024.vov>. Accessed on January 22, 2022.

⁶ <https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Coronavirus/Viet-Nam-faces-food-delivery-crisis-in-Ho-Chi-Minh-City>. Accessed on January 22, 2022.

⁷ Eighty percent of the healthcare service users went to public hospitals or clinics.

the e-portals during the 4th Wave is also demonstrated by the fact that, in many provinces, during strict lockdown period in particular, citizens or businesses were still required to apply for travel permits in person from commune or relevant authorities⁸. This requirement was blamed for creating unnecessary administrative burdens on citizens and businesses while severely affecting daily lives of the citizens and supply chains of the whole economy⁹. E-services, therefore, need to be re-assessed and better developed for Viet Nam to cope with the on-going pandemic and similar crises.

Figure 9. The proportion of respondents and their family members using health care service

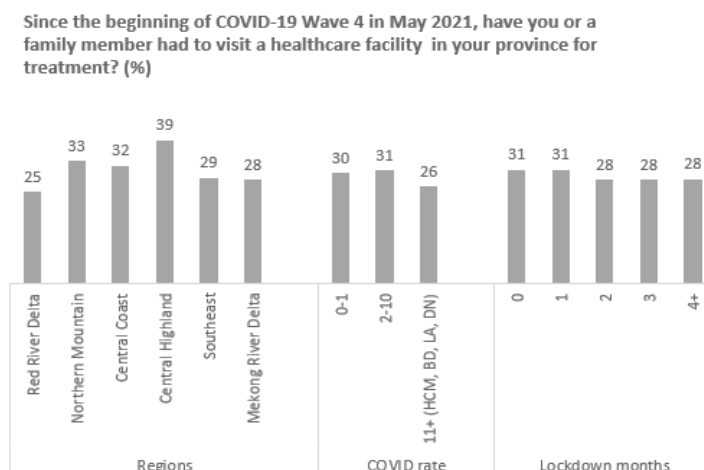
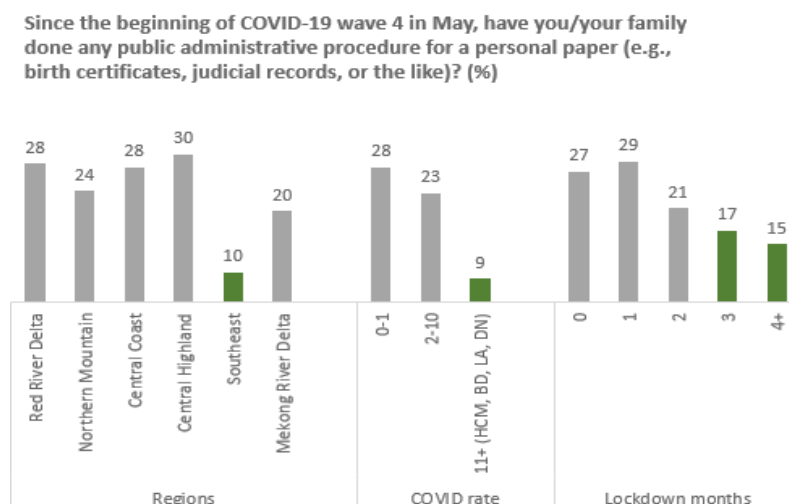


Figure 10. The proportion of respondents using public administrative procedure



Citizens' assessment of government responses to COVID-19 Wave 4

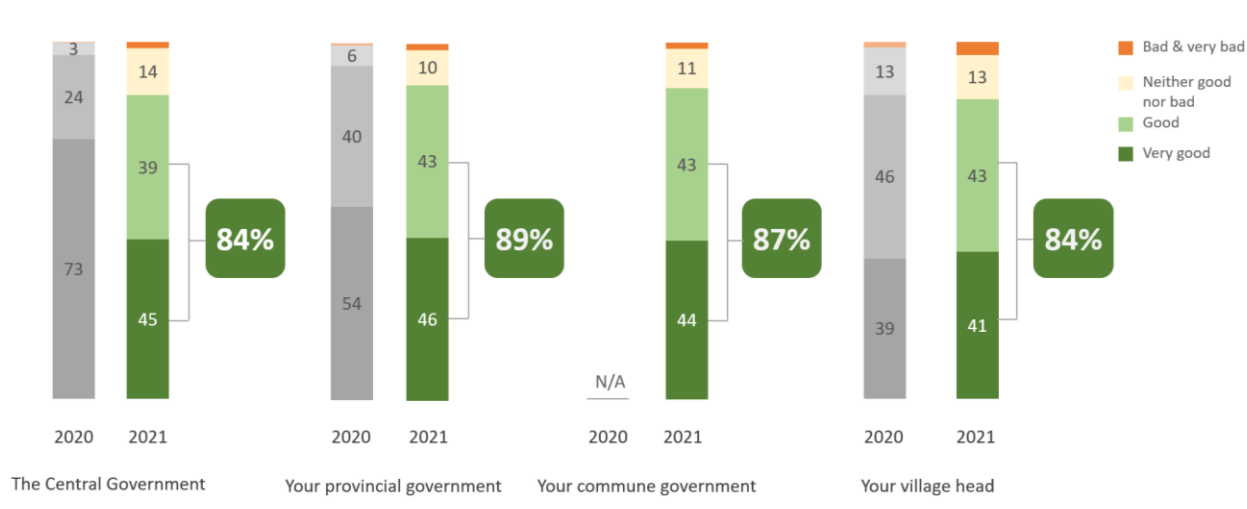
The 2021 survey asked the respondents to assess the government responses to the 4th Wave. In general, compared with findings from the previous round, the respondents showed high but declining positive assessment of government performance, especially for those at central and provincial levels. While 73 percent of the respondents rated the performance of the central government as “very good” in 2020, this

⁸ There were cases when the citizens or businesses could apply the documents via a number of applications. However, the inconsistency in approval of online declaration among different authorities forced the citizens and businesses to go to one-stop shops to redo the work.

⁹ <https://ncov.vnanet.vn/tin-tuc/dich-covid-19-can-chuan-hoa-mau-giay-di-duong-khong-dat-ra-giay-phep-con-lam-ach-tac-viec-luu-thong-hang-hoa/286f72e0-06ad-4f3f-861f-9466d9924a10>. Accessed on January 14, 2022.

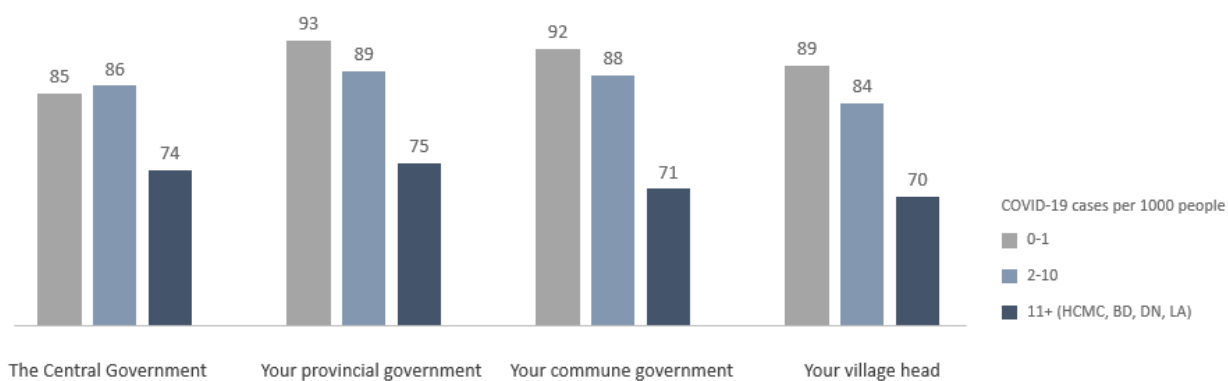
proportion dropped to 45 percent in 2021. Similarly, in 2021, satisfaction with the performance of the provincial government declined with the proportion of the respondents rating the performance as “very good” falling by 9 percent.

Figure 11. Assessment of COVID-19 response by levels of government (%)



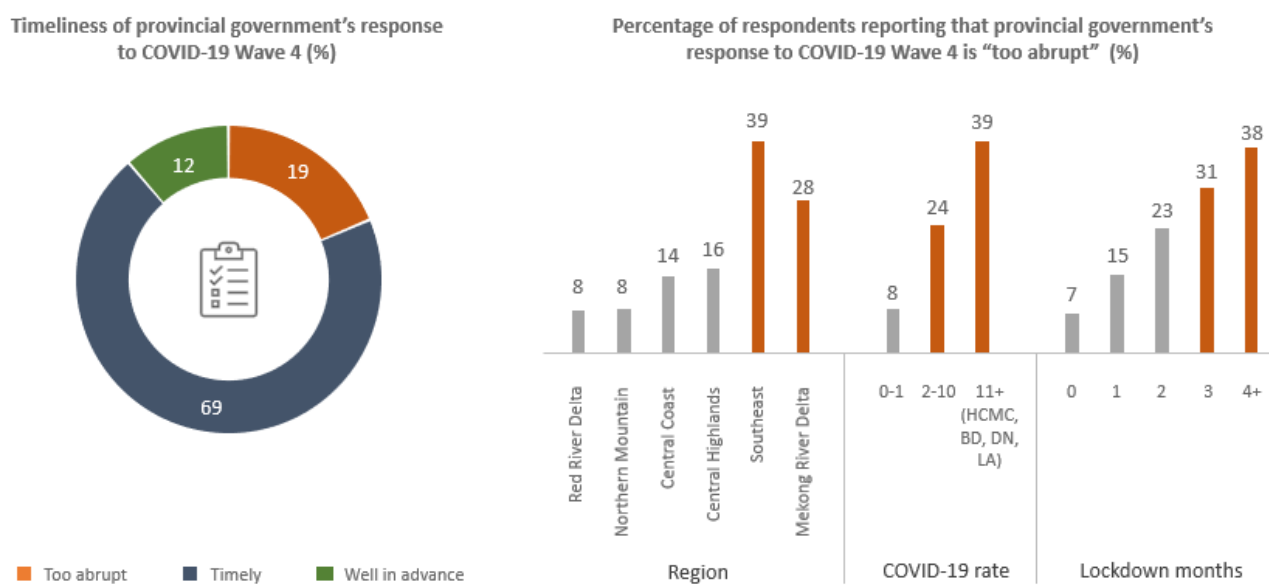
As shown in Figure 12, the respondents’ positive assessment of the government performance varied across different geographical regions. To be specific, there was less positive feedback in the heavily hit epicenters in the Southeast, with the proportion of the respondents giving positive feedback ranging from 70 percent for village heads to 74 percent for the central government.

Figure 12. The proportion of respondents having positive assessment of the government performance by the COVID-19 rate of provinces (%)



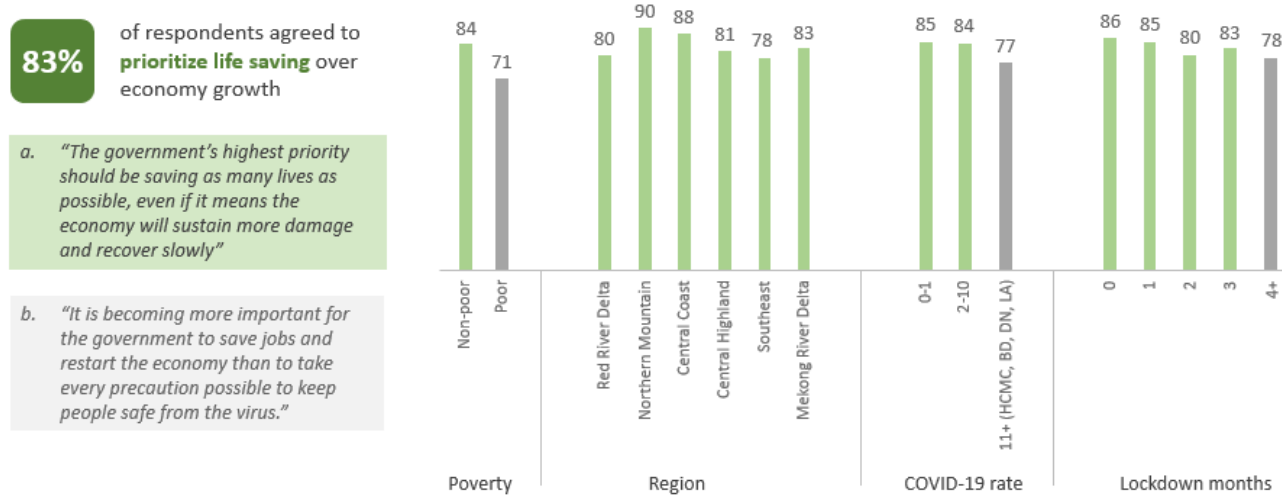
The respondents’ support for the provincial government might relate to how the governments responded to the fast-moving situation of the pandemic. Although most of the respondents agreed that the responses were timely, 19 percent said that actions adopted by their provinces were too abrupt or sudden to the point that they would not have enough time to prepare (Figure 13). More respondents living in provinces that had higher rates of COVID-19 or longer lockdowns had this view, with nearly 40 percent of the respondents living there making such complaints.

Figure 13. Assessment on timeliness of provincial governments' responses to COVID-19 Wave 4



At the same time, the survey results show that citizens' preference for how central and local governments should respond to the pandemic did not change much since the first round. As shown in Figure 14, despite severe socio-economic impact of Wave 4, most respondents clearly prioritized health over economy. As many as 83 percent of the respondents agreed that *"The government's highest priority should be saving as many lives as possible, even if it means the economy will sustain more damage and recover slowly"*. This figure is slightly smaller than that of the first round (89 percent). This could result from the change of mind of respondents from the poor group and from the heavily hit epicenters.

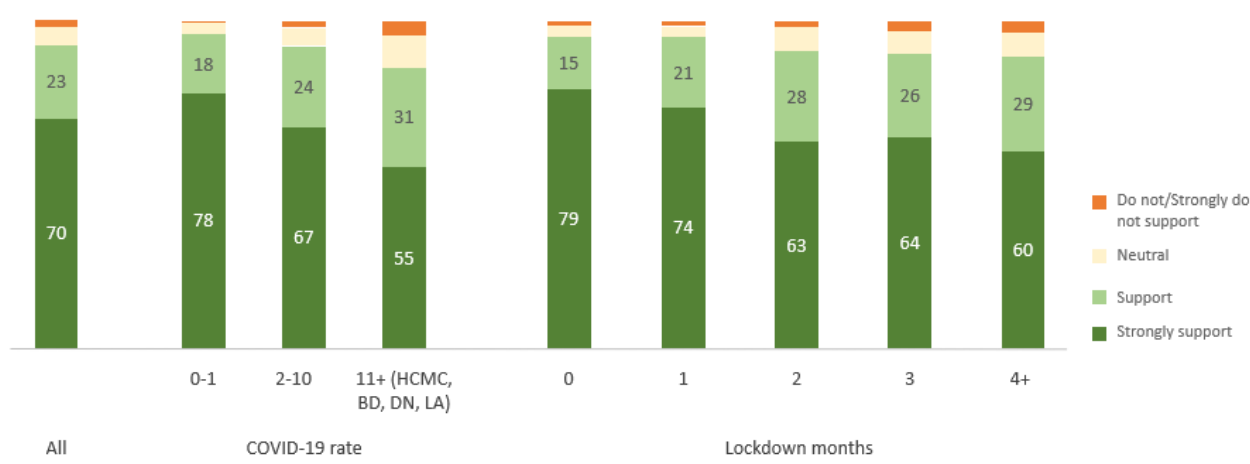
Figure 14. Share of respondents who agreeing with giving priority to healthcare over economy growth when asked to choose between two given statements (%)



Given the strong concern about health, it comes as no surprise that many respondents highly supported the GoV's stringent COVID-19 containment measures, even though these measures could worsen their economic situation (Figure 15). The list of measures undertaken by the GoV included mask mandates, curfews, mobility restrictions, open/wet market closures, restriction of market access through the provision of appointment

slips, involvement of the police and military forces, and school closures depending on the localities. The survey reveals that almost every respondent supported the application of such stringent measures, should there be future outbreaks. All respondents supported mask mandates (100 percent). Other containment and closure policies also receive support from more than 90 percent of the respondents. Schools closure and closure of wet markets are least favored, at 84 percent and 77 percent respectively. This could explain why Viet Nam's COVID-19 stringency index¹⁰, a composite index based on nine response indicators including school closures, workplace closures, and travel bans, was among the highest in the world during the Wave 4. Besides, a significant majority (93 percent) expressed their strong support for strict measures like full lockdowns and curfews that were applied in heavily hit epicenters. However, lower consensus is found in provinces with a high number of COVID-19 cases and longer lockdowns (Figure 15).

Figure 15. The proportion of respondents supporting strict restrictions (full lockdowns & curfews) applied in heavily hit epicenters (%)



When asked at which scale full and strict lockdowns should have been implemented during Wave 4, most respondents clearly preferred lockdowns to be limited to a narrower area where cases are spotted, which is similar to Round 1's findings. The preference shifted towards narrow area of lockdowns as 59 percent of respondents preferred lockdowns to be constrained to communities with COVID-19 cases, compared to just 46 percent of Round 1's respondents. A national lockdown, on another hand, was supported by one-fifth of the sample in 2020. This number now decreases to less than one-tenth.

In fact, lockdowns were implemented at the provincial level in many provinces, especially in epicenters such as HCMC, Dong Nai, Binh Duong and Long An. The prolonged lockdowns caused crowds of migrants to return to their hometown as they were no longer able to afford a living during lockdowns. As many as 1.3 million migrants fled the epicenters within just 2.5 months from July to mid-September 2021¹¹. However, the masses faced difficulties while trying to migrate back to their hometown as GoV as well as provincial governments tried to stop the spread of coronavirus¹². This policy is not aligned with citizen's wishes as many respondents

¹⁰ <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/research-projects/covid-19-government-response-tracker>. Accessed on January 14, 2022.

¹¹ <https://vnexpress.net/khoang-1-3-trieu-nguoi-da-roi-thanh-pho-ve-que-4370652.html>. Accessed on January 24, 2022.

¹² <https://www.baobaclieu.vn/308/nguoi-ve-tu-vung-dich-o-at-gay-qua-tai-bac-lieu-de-nghi-tp-ho-chi-minh-va-cac-tinh-siet-chat-quan-ly-khong-de-nguoi-dan-tu-y-ra-khoi-dia-ban-73420.html>. Accessed on January 24, 2022.
<https://nld.com.vn/thoi-su/thanh-hoa-tam-dung-don-cong-dan-tu-vung-co-dich-covid-19-ve-que-20210801112001676.htm>. Accessed on January 24, 2022.

(57 percent) were of opinion that migrants should be allowed to return to their home provinces during the outbreak. The respondents made this statement even with the assumption that there could be migrants returning to their own neighborhoods¹³.

Figure 16. Share of respondents by the support levels of strict lockdowns by Directive 16 (%)

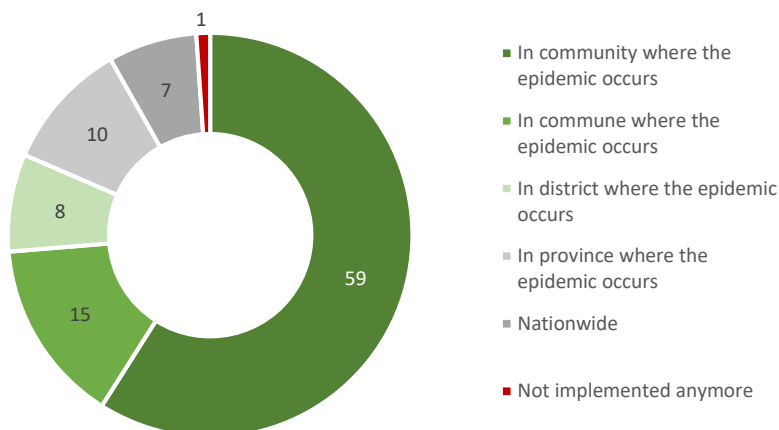
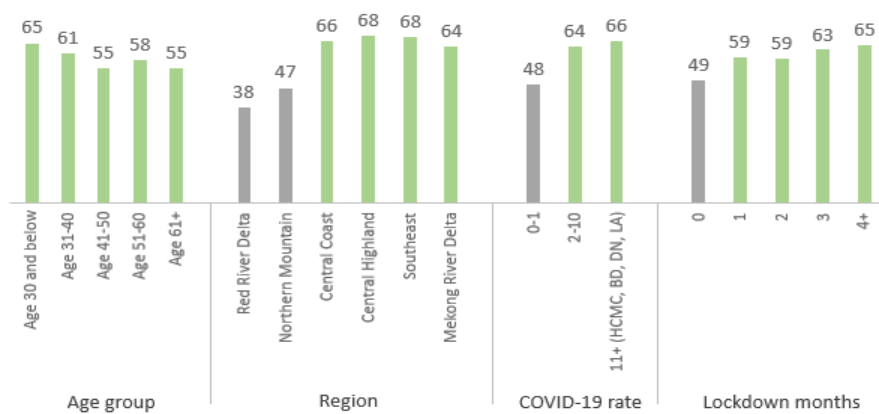


Figure 17 shows that younger respondents were particularly more supportive in this matter (65 percent). People in provinces with higher rates of COVID-19 and those with a long period of lockdowns were more likely to support the ideas of letting migrants from epicenters to travel to their home provinces as well. These respondent groups tend to empathize with migrants as they may share certain demographic characteristics, and more importantly, share an understanding of the situation in epicenters after months of lockdowns. However, this is not the case in the Red River and Northern Mountain provinces or provinces with fewer cases or without any lockdown because the share of respondents that support migrants going back home close to their neighborhoods was lower in these regions.

Figure 17. Share of respondents who supported migrants returning to home province (%)



https://moh.gov.vn/tin-lien-quan/-/asset_publisher/vjYyM7O9aWnX/content/cam-di-chuyen-tu-vung-dich-phan-ung-chinh-sach-can-thiet. Accessed on January 24, 2022.

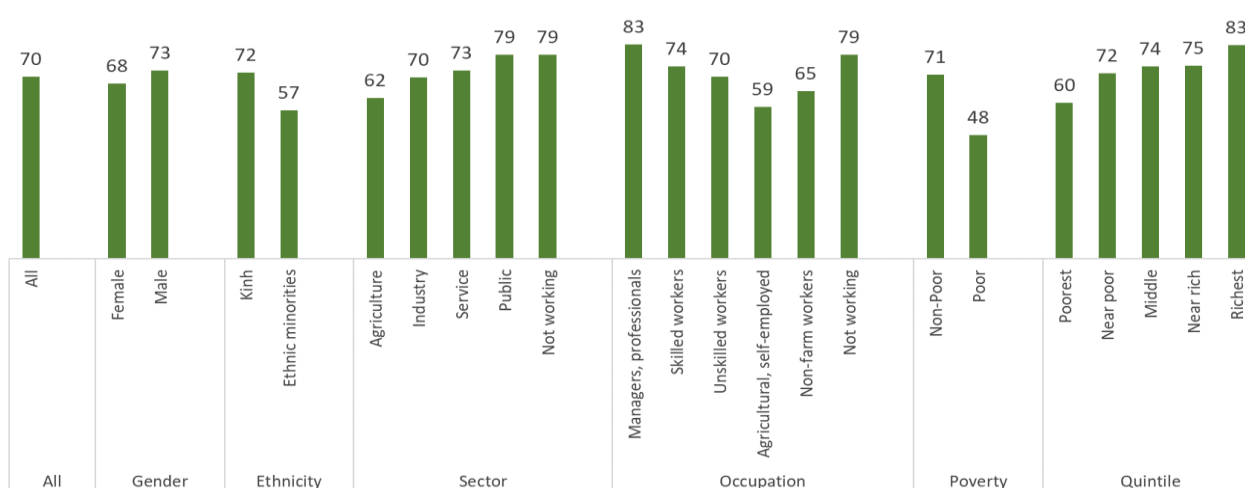
<https://dangcongsan.vn/cung-ban-luan/nguoi-dan-tu-vung-dich-khong-tu-y-di-chuyen-ve-que-592619.html>. Accessed on January 24, 2022.

¹³ The total sample of 1,501 respondents were those with permanent residency status.

As Viet Nam’s strong containment and closure policies exerted adverse impacts on the economy as a whole and affected a large proportion of the population, the government had to commit another aid package to support those in needs. The 2021 package was of VND 26 trillion (equivalent to USD1.2 billion, hereinafter referred as the “VND 26 trillion aid package”)¹⁴, following the 62 trillion aid package committed in 2020. The new aid package intended to cover a larger number of target groups, including citizens and businesses falling into difficulties because of the pandemic¹⁵.

Regarding the publicity and accessibility of the GoV’s VND 26 trillion aid package, the survey findings showed that people’s awareness of the aid package was lower than expected. Only 70 percent of the respondents said they had heard about the aid package, lower than the 2020 finding that 87 percent had heard about the GoV’s VND 62 trillion package. Awareness varied across population groups. Respondents from ethnic minorities, those in lower income quintile and those from rural areas were less informed about the aid package than their Kinh, richer or urban counterparts.

Figure 18. Citizens’ awareness of the VND 26 trillion aid package by gender, ethnicity, sector, occupation, poverty status and income quintile (%)



When disaggregated by geographic areas, the results show that people living in epicenters were quite aware of the 2021 aid package. As high as 83 percent of those living in epicenters heard about the package, while only 62 percent of those living in provinces with fewer than 1,000 COVID-19 cases were aware of it. In other words, where there was a higher the number of COVID-19 positive cases, there were more people being aware of the aid package (Figure 19). Similar findings could be observed when disaggregating by the number of months in lockdowns and by regions.

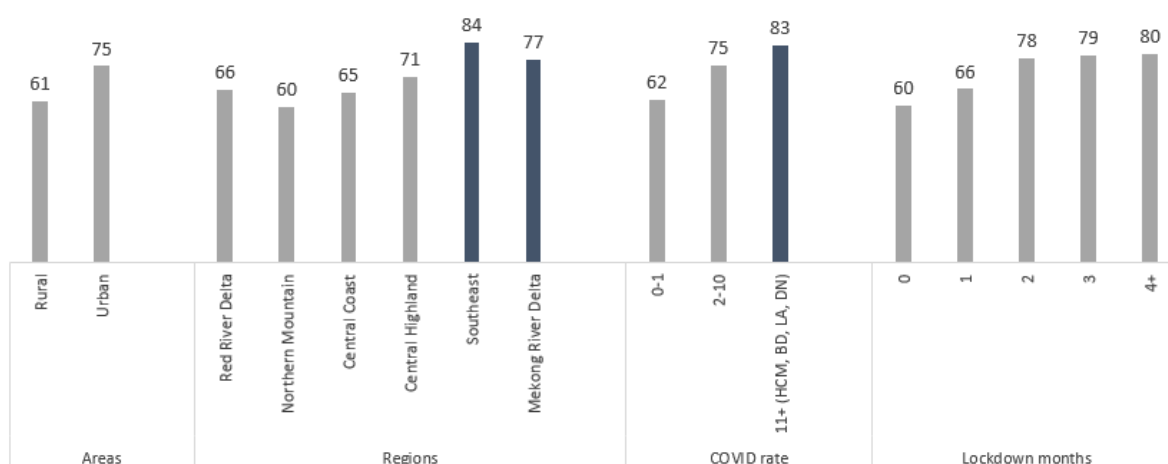
¹⁴ <https://www.antv.gov.vn/tin-tuc/kinh-te/goi-ho-tro-26-nghin-ty-dong-tiep-suc-nguoi-dan-doanh-nghiep-356002.html>. Accessed on January 23, 2022.

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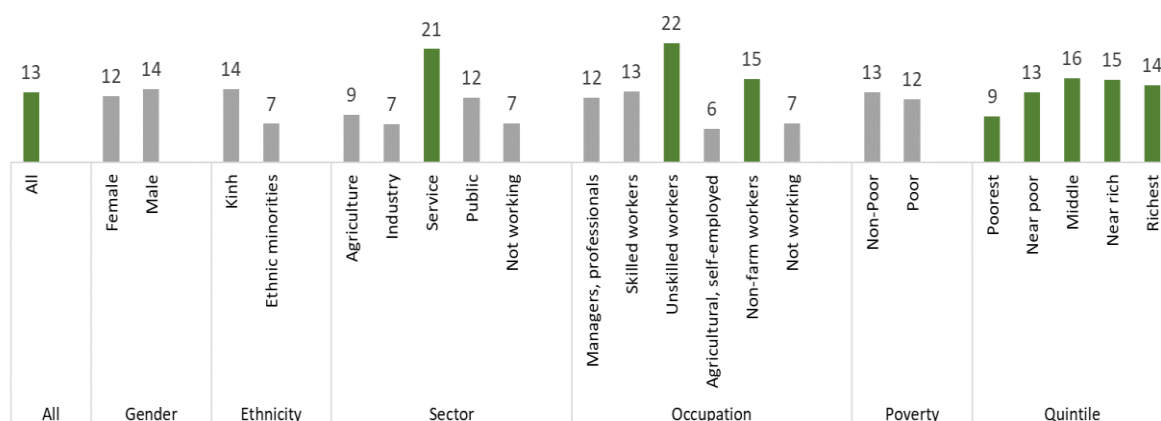
¹⁵ <https://vnexpress.net/diem-moi-cua-goi-ho-tro-26-000-ty-dong-4302756.html>. Accessed on January 23, 2022.

Figure 19. Citizen awareness of the VND 26 trillion aid package by geographic areas (%)



In terms of actual access to the aid package, only 13 percent of survey respondents reported that their households received support from the GoV's VND 26 trillion aid package. This figure was just about half of the reported figure in 2020 for the VND 62 trillion aid package (21 percent). Figure 20 also shows that the proportion of vulnerable population groups such as ethnic minority people and people in the lowest income quintile receiving support from the government is much lower than their Kinh and wealthier counterparts. Only 7 percent of ethnic minorities reported that they received support from the VND 26 trillion aid package, while the corresponding figure of Kinh people was twice as high. Similarly, wealthier people by income quintiles accessed the aid package more easily than the poor. The poorest people, who have been most heavily affected by the pandemic, had the most limited access to the aid package. This suggests that the distribution of the VND 26 trillion aid package did not reach the people most in need.

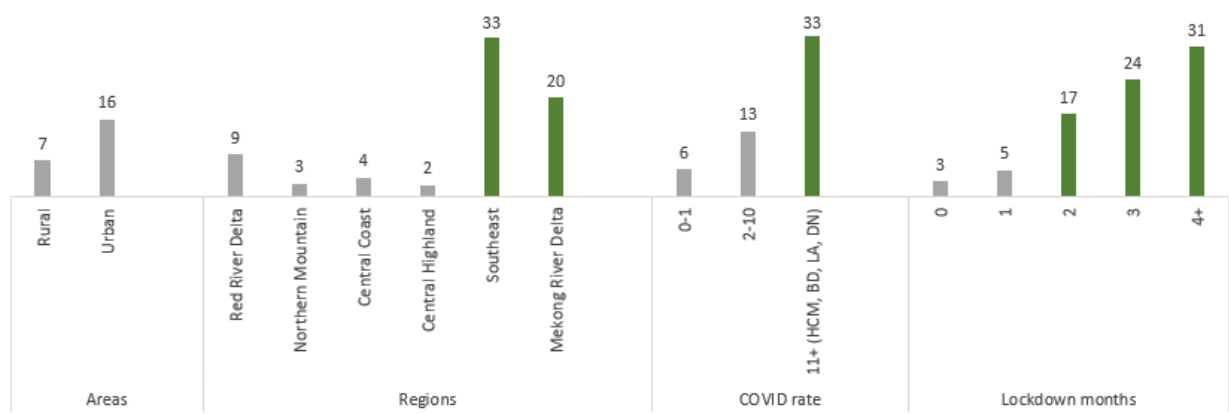
Figure 20. Recipients of the VND 26 trillion aid package by gender, ethnicity, sector, occupation, poverty status and income quintile (%)



The above survey results could somewhat be explained through disaggregation by geographic areas. The low proportion of the poor receiving the aid package could result from the unevenly distribution between regions. Figure 21 shows that many among the 33 percent of respondents reporting their households having received the aid package were living in provinces with more COVID-19 positive cases or provinces with a longer period of lockdown such as HCMC, Binh Duong, Long An and Dong Nai. Similarly, 33 percent of respondents in Southeast reported that their families had received the aid package, while the proportion was lower in other

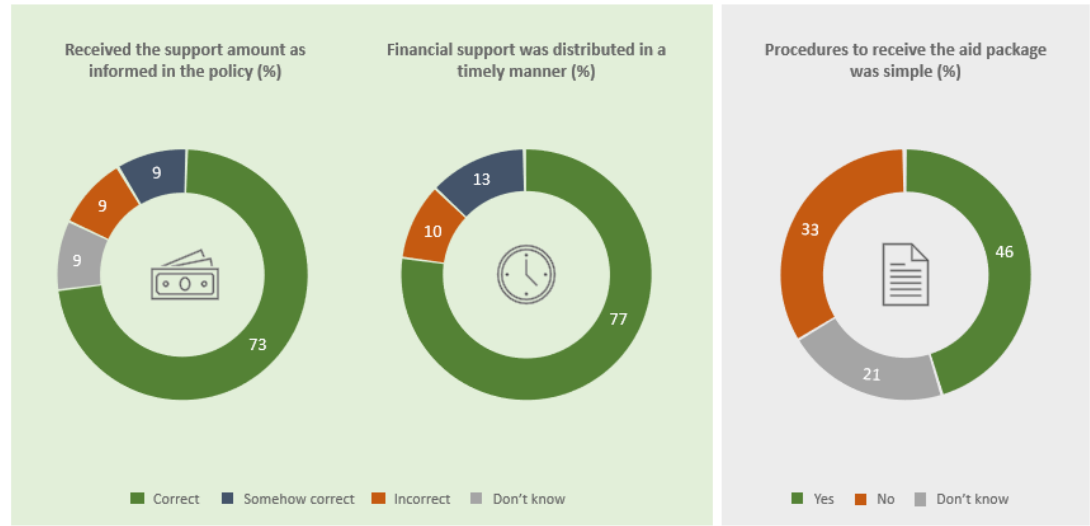
regions such as Northern Mountain, Central Coast and Central Highlands. It also makes sense that citizens in provinces with longer lockdown periods would have more access to aid packages.

Figure 21. Recipients of the VND 26 trillion aid package by geographic areas, 2021 (%)



Overall, many of those who had received the aid positively assessed the aid package. However, the proportion of respondents with positive assessment decreased in 2021 when compared with similar findings from the 2020 survey. The proportion of respondents who said they had received the correct amount of the aid transfers decreased from 88 percent in 2020 to 73 percent in 2021 (Figure 22). In 2021, 77 percent of recipients agreed to the statement that “the financial support was distributed in a timely manner” while this rate was 83 percent in 2020. In addition, the proportion of respondents agreeing to the statement “the application procedures for the financial support were simple” dropped substantially from 85 percent in 2020 to only 46 percent in 2021. This implies that the GoV’s effort to simplify the application and disbursement procedure did not paid off.

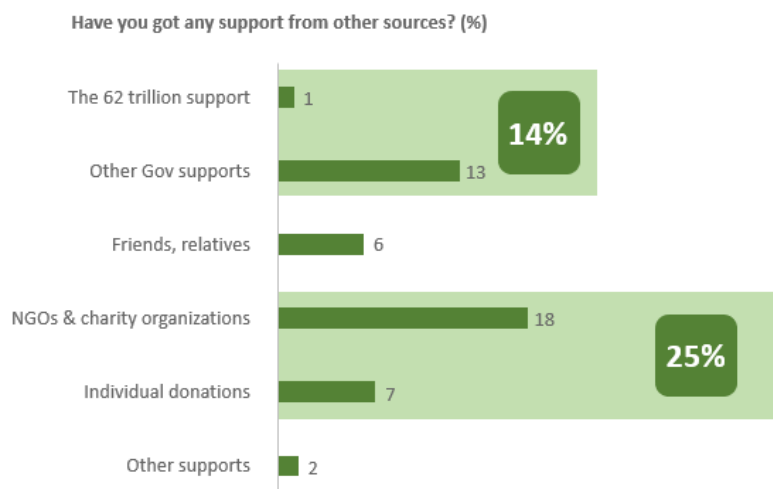
Figure 22. Assessment of delivery of Government’s 26 trillion VND aid package



While government support was relatively hard to reach for a sub-group of the population, it is very important to note that citizens were able to seek other support and that the government was not the only available source of support. As this survey round finds, support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social organizations, charity foundations, and individual donations was remarkable for the affected population. Figure 23 shows that about 25 percent of the total sample said they got support from NGOs, charity groups

and individual donations. In-kind support from the Government was a significant source of support as 13 percent of the respondents reported that they received government support of other kinds.

Figure 23. Other sources of support during Wave 4



Conclusions and Implications

The 2021 COVID-19 survey revealed how citizens experienced and perceived COVID-19 impacts and government responses to the pandemic upon the arrival of the Delta variant and the emergence of the Wave 4 from May to October 2021. The findings also suggest important policy implications for central and local governments to take into consideration.

Specifically, survey results show that in 2021 the citizens were generally more concerned about the pandemic's impacts, especially those on their children's education and their personal health. Indeed, the pandemic affected Viet Nam's socio-economic outcomes more severely in 2021 than in 2020. Though the proportion of the respondents who reported income reduction due to the pandemic was much higher in 2021, the poor, ethnic minorities, unskilled, non-farm workers, and those working in the service sector remain more vulnerable. Additionally, the pandemic has also negatively affected respondents' access to food and necessary goods. In the meantime, electronic public administrative services were not yet utilized during the 4th wave. Many still had to submit COVID-19 test results to be admitted to healthcare facilities.

The survey results also show that citizen assessments of the government response remained at a high level, but lower than in 2020. The positive responses to the government's performance decreased in the heavily hit epicenters such as provinces in the Southeast. Despite the 4th Wave's huge socio-economic impacts, almost every respondent supported strict restrictions at the community level. Nonetheless, more than half of the respondents who are permanent residents in their own provinces supported migrants' return from epicenters.

During the Wave 4, several support packages were made available to the respondents to help them to weather the impact of COVID-19. However, only one in ten respondents reported having received support from 2021's VND 26 trillion aid package. Ethnic minorities, women, poorer and rural respondents were less likely to receive the aid. Meanwhile, about one fourth of the respondents said they received support from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social organizations, charity foundations, and individual donations.

The survey findings also provided important insights into citizens' preference and suggestions to address the pandemic and its severe impact. A majority of respondents preferred lockdowns to be constrained to communities with COVID-cases only and most respondents still prioritized health over economic growth.

The findings from this Round 2 survey hint at important implications and suggestions moving forward, especially when the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve in Viet Nam with the emergence of the new variant, Omicron. Below are four key take-away points this report offers:

- Citizens' feedback and preferences on crisis responses are important for the Government to review solutions moving forward.
- Aid packages should target the poor, the unskilled and seasonal laborers, those working in the service and tourism sectors.
- Support from non-governmental actors such as community groups, NGOs, social organizations, charity groups and individuals during the pandemic should be acknowledged formally. With regard to governmental aid, administrative procedures for cash aid packages should be streamlined to ensure timelier and more widespread delivery.
- E-public services should be reassessed and upgraded to be more user-friendly for higher utility of contactless means to interact with the Government.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Demographic characteristics of the respondents (percent)

