

**ROSA
LUXEMBURG
STIFTUNG**
SOUTHEAST ASIA
HANOI OFFICE

THE IMPACT OF COVID

ON SOCIAL SECURITY ISSUES OF FEMALE MIGRANT

WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR IN BIG CITIES IN VIETNAM

PREPARED BY

DR. LE PHUONG HOA
MA. DUONG THI NGA
MA. BUI HAI YEN

Updated: December 2020 Ha Noi, Viet Nam



Contents

1. Summary.....	1
2. Background.....	3
2.1. Rationale	3
2.2. Research Objective.....	4
2.3 Methodology	6
2. COVID-19 and its impacts on Vietnam.....	9
3. Characteristics of female migrant workers	12
4. Finding	16
4.1. COVID-19 World on female migrant workers in informal sector.....	16
4.2. Support from the Government and social organization/community to female migrant workers.....	26
4.3. Employee adaptation to COVID-19 impact.....	31
5. Conclusions.....	35
6. Recommendation	38
ANNEX: CASE STUDIES.....	40

Acknowledgments

The research team would like to thank all individual workers who spent the time to participate in interviews with us and generously provided honest views during the research processes.

We would like to express appreciation to the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Southeast Asia – Hanoi Office (RLS SEA) for giving us the chance to conduct this research with their financial support. We also express special thanks to Mr. Nguyen Van Huan, Project Manager at RLS SEA – Hanoi Office for his excellent support in research coordination and commenting on the report.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 : Age structure distribution of respondents.....	12
Table 2: Professional qualifications of female migrant workers in the informal sector.....	12
Table 3: Marital status of female migrant workers in the informal sector	13
Table 4: Current place of female migrant workers in the informal sector.....	13
Table 5: Reported temporary status in the destination	14
Table 6: Occupation of female migrant workers in the informal sector.....	14
Table 7: Means used at destination.....	15
Table 8: Assessment of employment status at the time of COVID-19 (<i>from January 23, 2020 - May 1, 2020</i>) 2020	16
Table 9: Level of income change before and after the pandemic.....	17
Table 10: Reasons for less or no income.....	18
Table 11: Changes in meal costs before and after the pandemic.....	20
Table 12: Diet of labour under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic	20
Table 13: Difficulty in accommodation is that female migrant workers in the informal sector are faced with the pandemic.....	21
Table 14: Current water source used	22
Table 15: Current conditions of electricity use.....	22
Table 16: The measure of choice among female migrant workers in the informal sector when suffering from a flu	24
Table 17: Measures to prevent pandemics at peak times of workers	25
Table 18: Sources of information about COVID's disease (percent)	26
Table 19: Support from the government during and after the COVID-19 outbreak	28
Table 20: Statistics on the frequency of respondents who received support from sponsors and social organizations.....	29
Table 21: The reason for not getting support from the local authorities	30
Table 22: The reason for not receiving the sponsorship of sponsors and social organizations	30
Table 23: Difficulties workers face when choosing to stay in the city.....	31
Table 24: Assess the degree of difficulty in job change.....	33
Table 25: Employee choice when income is reduced due to COVID-19 pandemic	33
Table 26: Response of respondents if disease outbreaks resume	34
Table 27: Option to stay or go home if there is another outbreak.....	35

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Graph of the total number of confirmed, undergoing, and recovering cases	9
Figure 2: Income of female migrant workers in the informal sector before and after the pandemic	18
Figure 3: Changes in health concerns among female migrant workers in the informal sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic	23
Figure 4: The employee's mood when the pandemic takes place	24

1. SUMMARY

With financial support from RLS SEA – Hanoi Office, the research team assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the group of migrant female workers in the informal sector in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. With the desire to have a concrete and comprehensive assessment of COVID's impacts on this target group, the research team used a participatory approach with a sociological survey method to survey over 600 qualified samples and 12 case studies in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city.

Key findings:

- The employment of female migrant workers in the informal sector has been severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 81.33 percent of interviewed workers affected. The impact on employment leads to 93.17 percent of workers having income reduced, of which 48.33 percent have no income during the lock down period. It means that these people were ultimately prone to loss of livelihood because of the knock-down measures disrupting their street-based livelihoods (accounting for 80.3 percent of the reasons leading to income reduction).
- Informal workers' meals are affected in many ways, but most importantly, because income is reduced, workers have to cut spending on food, with 75.8 percent said that they have to cut spending due to the impact of COVID-19.
- Concerning accommodation, electricity and water use do not seem to have any changes in the expense of the migrant workers because this cost group is linked with the accommodation cost, which have been at the lowest possible spending portion of the migrant workers. By the time the pandemic broke out, it was almost impossible to reduce because the expenses they paid were minimal for the minimum conditions. Thus, one of the biggest accommodation difficulties is that, most workers could not afford to pay even the minimum renting charges while their income was severely declining or even unavailable.
- COVID-19 pandemic also made the workers more concerned about health issues, with 86.33 percent saying that they paid closer attention to their health. Vietnam is one of the countries that has proven effective measures against the COVID-19 pandemic, which was reflected in the attitude of this group of migrant workers involved in pandemic prevention. 99.67 percent said they wore a mask when going out.
- The main factor affecting female migrant workers' well-being in the short-term is the social distancing order which temporarily caused them to lose or reduce their income.
- Faced with the complicated and challenging developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the workers chose to stay in the city to wait for the pandemic to get over, partially relying on the government's limited relief fund but mainly due to their livelihood opportunity tied to the locality and their current job. The final choice for the majority is to cut back, use savings and loans to get by.
- In the actual situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were negative impacts on all aspects of socio-economic life, especially for vulnerable groups and informal sector workers. The Government adopted measures and issued policies timely. However, in reality, these policies didn't reach female migrant workers in the informal sector in an adequate manner. In Hanoi, only 10.67 percent, and in Ho Chi Minh City, 17.67 percent of the respondents received support from the local government by the time this survey was conducted (July 2020).
- Besides the government's support, the support from sponsors and social organizations was reported, with 23.67 percent of respondents receiving this type of support and mainly in kind (rice, noodles, cooking oil...).
- COVID-19 will gradually deprive the female migrant workers of life subsistence, from economic to health. Therefore. The social security policies for this target group have to consider immediate solutions and long-term solutions.
 - ❖ In the short term, the Government should promptly reach these people, including using local collaborators and approving citizenship identification for payment receipt regardless of the original/hometown location of residence; The support payment needs to be public and transparent. There have been many investigative reports showing that the payment for supporting COVID-19

- pandemic go to the wrong people. Mobilizing other social resources to support the people while propagating pandemic prevention are necessary to support migrant workers better prepared for the pandemic.
- ❖ In the long term: the solution for economic recovery, job creation, and stimulus is a long-term and holistic one; The solution for employers and migrant workers needs a specific strategy. The street economy is a solution to employment and livelihoods for a majority of rural unskilled and uneducated labours who migrate to the city, requiring, on the one hand, planning and management to ensure stability, security and order, and on the other ensures health safety and well-being for workers.
 - ❖ For each specific locality such as Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, there is also a need for specific policies of major cities, in which two groups of solutions need to be considered: continuing to promote propaganda, raising awareness to migrant residents, and at the same time do well in the demographics management and provide flexible, timely support to these people.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. Rationale

The Covid-19 pandemic has been extremely serious on the global scale and is almost impossible to tell when the pandemic can be controlled. As of 4 October 2020, there are 34,804,348 confirmed cases and 1,030,738 deaths recorded in 210 countries and territories¹.

According to current observations and assessments of international and Vietnamese experts, Covid-19 has exerted a negative impact on worldwide as well as for Vietnamese socio-economic activities. The pandemic has caused the largest global recession in history affecting more than a third of the world population (McFall-Johnsen, Juliana Kaplan, Lauren Frias, Morgan, Business Insider Australia. Retrieved 15 April 2020). Economic growth of China is forecast to fall to 2.3 percent and even to 1.3 percent under the lower-case scenario in 2020, compared to 6.1 percent in 2019, according to a recent report by the World Bank (April 2020). Growth in other developing countries in the East Asia and Pacific region under the basic scenario is forecast to be 1.3 percent and even negative 2.8 percent under the lower-case scenario in 2020, compared with an estimate of 4.7 percent in 2019. Based on the fundamental scenario of Citi Research (published on 07 April 2020), the world economy will decline by 2.3 percent in 2020 (compared to 2.6 percent growth in 2019, lower than negative 1.7 percent growth in following the 2008 financial crisis), of which China's GDP growth is only about 2.4 percent (compared to 6.1 percent growth in 2019), in the U.S is negative 2.6 percent (compared to 2.3 percent growth in 2019), in Japan is negative 1.9 percent (compared to the 0.7 percent growth in 2019) and the Eurozone is even down to negative 8.4 percent (compared with 1.2 percent growth in 2019).

The economic downturn has a direct influence on workers in all groups, from formal to informal. For workers in the informal sector, a reduction in working hours due to the pandemic means a loss of income without unemployment benefits. An initial assessment report of the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), "Covid-19 and the world of work: Impacts and solutions" says that the economic and labour crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic could result in an additional 25 million unemployed people globally of the 188 million already unemployed people in 2019. Millions of workers will be unemployed, have their working hours and wages reduced, and dragged below the poverty line. The group of informal sector workers in developing countries, which often serve as a buffer to soften the impulse of the effects of sudden changes, will no longer work because of travel restrictions of people and goods. Given the fact that the number of jobs is reduced, workers will lose a large source of income, which is estimated to be from \$ 860 billion to \$ 3.4 trillion in 2020. The ILO estimates there will be **8.8 to 35** more million workers falling into poverty over the world², compared to previous 2020 estimates of a decrease of 14 million people. In addition, the impact of the employment crisis on some labour groups will be uneven and intensify inequality. The most affected people are those who have less protection and do low-paid jobs, especially young and elderly workers, including women and migrant workers. Migrant workers are vulnerable because they often do not enjoy full labour rights and social security. Meanwhile, women often make up the majority of low-wage jobs and the economic sectors affected by the pandemic.

The government has issued an emergency assistance package in which one of the beneficiaries are workers in the informal sector, but stipulating that they show their official residence registration in their current living place. Nonetheless, female migrant workers in big cities often belong to the group that is not eligible for this support because their residence registrations are usually in their hometown in the country sides.

Female migrant workers are considered to be the most affected group by the COVID-19 pandemic but have met with difficulty in receiving government support. Furthermore, emergency assistance packages are only

¹ WTO, Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), as of 04 October 2020, 10 am CEST <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/coronaviruse/situation-reports/20201005-weekly-epi-update-8.pdf>

² [https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_738742/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=Falls%20in%20employment%20also%20mean%20large%20income%20losses%20for%20worker s.&text=The%20ILO%20estimates%20that%20between,decline%20of%2014%20million%20worldwide\).](https://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_738742/lang-en/index.htm#:~:text=Falls%20in%20employment%20also%20mean%20large%20income%20losses%20for%20worker s.&text=The%20ILO%20estimates%20that%20between,decline%20of%2014%20million%20worldwide).)

temporary. Social benefits for workers in the informal sector, especially migrant women, need to be addressed because losing their jobs means the complete loss of income to support themselves and their families.

2.2. Research Objective

The objective of the research is to assess the impact of COVID-19 on social security issues of female migrant workers on jobs, income, quality of life (accommodation, health care, social connection, etc.) in the informal sector in major cities of Vietnam.

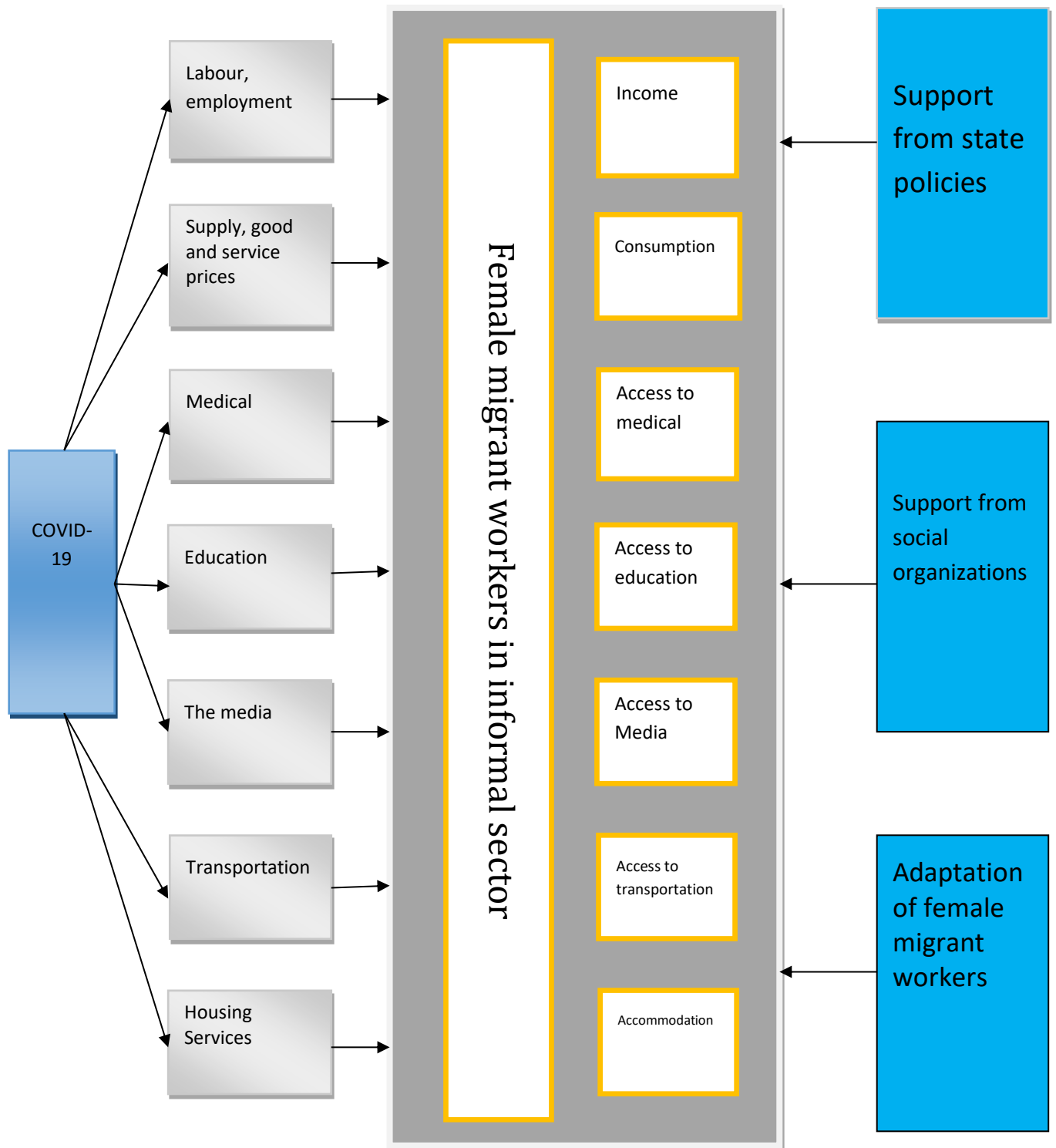
Target audiences: Female migrant workers in the informal sector (without permanent residence in the workplace, maybe from rural areas to cities of the same province or from other provinces)

Research scope: Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh city, Vietnam

Research questions:

- How does Covid-19 impact the social security aspects of female migrant workers?
- What support do the government, social organizations and community provide for female migrant workers?
- How did female migrant workers adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What are policy recommendations to improve the social security of female migrant workers?

Research framework



2.3 Methodology

Secondary data

This method is particularly important to evaluating the COVID-19 pandemic situation and its impacts. In this respect, the document analysis method will focus on the following types of materials:

- Reports on disease situation by the Ministry of Health
- Labour, employment and social security reports by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
- Statistics of the General Statistics Office
- Articles on newspapers and the official sources from the internet reflect updates on the disease situation and the impact of the pandemic on workers
- Reports on activities of social organizations specializing in supporting workers and communities during the lockdown period

The above-mentioned documents are categorized under specific content themes associated with impact assessment, including documents for: (i) development of toolkits; (ii) developing an impact assessment report.

Primary data:

Quantitative survey:

Quantitative sample:

Sampling and Data Collection: 600 participants in Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh city from the 10 wards randomly selected from each city according to the pre-determined criteria of the survey.

Criteria of the survey sample selection: The sample ensures the following criteria: Be a female from 18 to 80 years old, migrant (urban-to-urban migration; rural to urban; and overnight stay in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh city) and presently working in the informal sector.

The random sampling method is used in the study, first selecting 10 wards with features of stratified economic conditions and then sampling: Select random 30 samples for 1 ward. This is the minimum random sample size in social science, which provides for an objective measurement of the whole. This method is usually applied on small-scale project assessments, and often gives objective results.

The tool of this method is quantitative questionnaire. The questionnaire was built with content relevant to the objectives of the study: General information about the respondents; income and living habits, spending habits, health, and the effects of COVID-19 on them. The questions are constructed to be easily understandable to help the research get accurate results. In addition, the questionnaire has several qualitative questions, extracting more insights from the respondents.

Qualitative survey: In-depth interviews with 12 relevant people such as workers. Based on the In-depth interviews, 12 case studies are developed as evidence.

Case studies are always important in impact assessment reports, especially for projects with large-scale impacts on a wide range of socio-economic issues. A typical case was exploited during field survey for those with special circumstances in the process of migration, self-employment, and COVID-19 impacts on their lives.

How to conduct survey:

Because the respondents have many job characteristics, almost all interview were conducted in the afternoons or/and evenings when the workers take off work.

Using the snow ball method to find suitable interviewees matching sample criteria: Interviewer conducted one or two interviewees who match with the sample criteria and they in turn introduced his/her friends meeting the sample criteria.

Due to the characteristics of the group of respondents they mainly do work that involves freely moving, not being fixed in place and time. The work they usually do includes selling scrap goods, selling junk goods, shining shoes, lottery tickets, selling vegetables, etc.

This survey was conducted on the July 2020 but the report was updated by December 2020

Data analysis:

Quantitative data have been processed by the SPSS software, in addition to frequency data_statistics. The software allows for the processing of correlation variables.

SPSS software (short for Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a computer software for statistical analysis and processing of collected data. This software is commonly used for sociological and econometric studies. The strengths of SPSS software are regression analyses such as non-parametric test, descriptive statistics, reliability test by Cronbach Alpha scale, counteraction analysis, linear regression, average test, analysis of variance. Test with dummy variables or binomial regression...

The main commands to use for analysis in research are Frequency; Crosstab, etc. Using SPSS software to analyse the current situation and contribute to finding the factors that affect the subject. To help identify the problem accurately and solve the problem quickly and effectively, SPSS software includes rich and varied content from simple tasks such as designing tables, diagrams, descriptive statistics, comparing samples using parametric and non-parametric standards, and linear geometry, univariate and multivariate regression models.

In this study, SPSS software was used in data entry and cleaning; variable processing and data management; summarizing and presenting data in the form of graphs, tables and maps; analysing data, calculating statistical parameters and interpret results.

Processing the data of the two provinces after the survey is meant visualize the characteristics of migrant women, informal sector workers; what are the similarities and differences between the two study areas; what is the impact of COVID-19 on this group of migrant and informal sector women through an analysis of factors in terms of income, expenditure and living habits.

The use of SPSS software in the study also helps the authors build an analytical view to assessing the correlation between regions and age groups of informal sector migrant women to see what is the main impact of COVID-19 to the life of this research group.

From the collection of data from 600 questionnaires, SPSS software also helps to analyse the group of key results as well as the needs and aspirations of the respondents to the government. Thereby helping the research team come up with the proposed solutions to support the group of informal sector migrant women in the two surveyed areas in particular and for the group of informal sector migrant women in general.

Limitations of the research:

The ending point of the COVID-19 pandemic has not yet been foreseen; at the time of the July 2020 survey, data collected only reflect the impact of COVID's pandemic on female migrant workers after the 1st lockdown measure being lifted in Vietnam.

In the study design assessing the impact of COVID-19 on aspects of well-being, however, the data collected did not reflect the education level due to the specifics of the study subjects (this section is clarified in research points).

In addition, due to limited budget and time, the study has only been conducted in two areas, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The research results only reflect the group of female migrant workers in the big cities but not the group of female migrant workers who migrate to other areas. It can be one of the next studies' directions to draw up a whole female informal sector workers' picture.

2. COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACTS ON VIETNAM

COVID-19 development in Vietnam

According to medical report, the first confirmed COVID-19 infection in Vietnam on 23 January 2020, were two Chinese patients. The 66-year-old father travelled from Wuhan to Ho Chi Minh city to visit his son. On 01 February 2020, the first case of domestic infectious disease was a Khanh Hoa's clinical staff, who came into contact with the two above patients. After this case on 01 February 2020, Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc issued Decision 173/QĐ-TTg on the declaration of acute respiratory infections caused by a new strain of Coronavirus, setting up a national steering committee and anti-pandemic measures. From 21 January 2020 to 25 February 2020, Vietnam had 16 cases that had been successfully cured.

On the evening of 6 March, Hanoi announced the first case of COVID-19 virus. This was the 17th infection in Vietnam, ending the chain of 22 consecutive days in Vietnam without adding new cases. By the end of 19 March, the total number of patients nationwide had reached 85 people. On the afternoon of 20 March The Ministry of Health announced that the 86th and 87th COVID-19 patients were two female nurses at Bach Mai Hospital with an epidemiological history that did not show the transmission source as both had no history of exposure to COVID-19 patient. On 21 March, Vietnam suspended entry for all foreigners from 0:00 on March 22 and implemented 14-day centralized quarantine for all entry cases. From 0:00 on 1 April, Vietnam implemented a social distancing order for 15 days on a national scale. On the same day. The Prime Minister signed Decision 447/QĐ-TTg on the publication of COVID-19 nationwide, replacing the earlier decision on 1 February 2020.

From 23 April, the country stopped social isolation but continued to ensure pandemic prevention rules. On 25 April, the Prime Minister issued Directive 19 aimed at continuing measures to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic "in the new normal."

After 100 days of no infection in the community. The Ministry of Health announced the 416th case in Da Nang but could not trace its source, and new cases followed. On 28 July Da Nang City started implementing a social distancing order. On 13 and 14 August, domestic tourists stranded in Da Nang were returned to their localities. Cases in Quang Nam, Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi, Dak Lak, etc were also detected, all of which had epidemiological history related to Da Nang. From 31 July 2020, Vietnam confirmed the first death case.

By 2 September, the pandemic was gradually controlled, but the Ministry of Health continued to advise people not to be nonchalant as pathogens might be in the community.

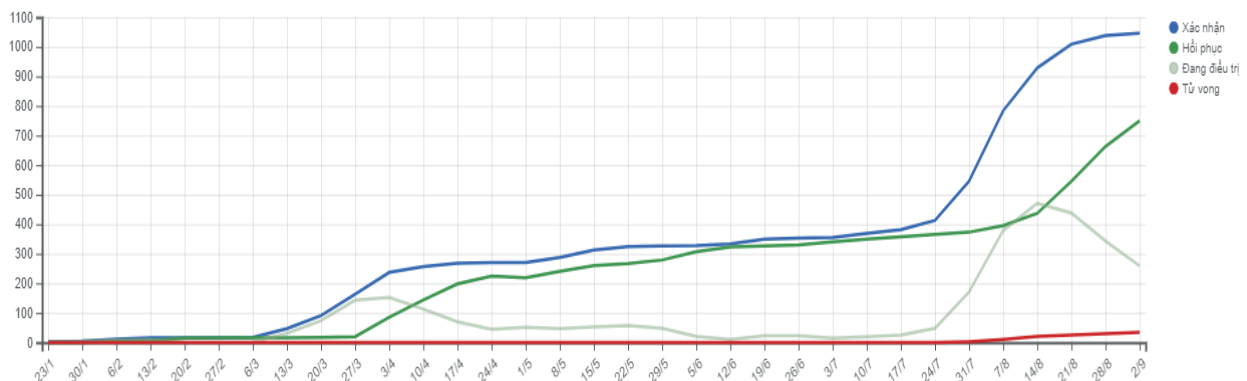


Figure 1: Graph of the total number of confirmed, undergoing, and recovering cases

Source: Ministry of Health, 2020

The Impact of COVID-19

Vietnam is one of the few countries that have been successful in containing the COVID-19 pandemic with strict measures since the early 2020. Until mid-September 2020 the pandemic was relatively controlled

nationwide after the second outbreak occurred in Da Nang in mid-July. The socio-economic activities of people and businesses have gradually returned to an average pace with prudent control measures. Although we have made outstanding achievements in disease prevention, there are significant impacts recorded on all aspects of socio-economic situations. In the context of the global economic downturn, economic structures, and disruption, the world has been changed profoundly. We cannot avoid negative impacts on the economy or society in general, and people's life in particular.

Impact on the economy

In the gloomy global economic context, Vietnam was considered one of the bright spots thanks to active and effective pandemic prevention measures. Compared to other countries, Vietnam is less affected, but in general, COVID's impact on the Vietnam's economy is still tremendous. GDP continued to grow in the first six months of 2020, reaching 1.8 percent, the lowest in the past three decades. For the first eight months of 2020, the whole country had 88.7 thousand newly registered enterprises, down 2 percent from the same period last year. The average registered capital per enterprise was 13.8 billion VND, up 8.7 percent. The number of enterprises returning to operation increased by 27.9 percent. Enterprises suspending operations pending dissolution procedures decreased by 5.9 percent, and enterprises completing dissolution procedures decreased by 1.9 percent³.

The pandemic has bogged almost all economic sectors, including services, industry, and construction, down to unprecedented levels; these are the key economic sectors of Vietnam. In the first 6 months of the year, the agriculture - forestry - fishery sector had a growth rate of 1.2 percent, contributed 11.9 percent to the overall economic growth. The industry grew by 3.0 percent (equivalent to the contribution of 73.1 percent). In comparison, the service sector only grew by 0.6 percent (equivalent to the contribution of 15.0 percent). Compared to the recent average levels. The service sector was affected more negatively, with a 6.3 percent contribution compared to the previous year⁴. In contrast, the agricultural sector has been relatively immune, with the share of GDP growth unchanged over time.

In August, transportation activity was directly affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, and got even worse when the pandemic came back again at the end of July with a 19.3 percent decrease in passengers transported and a 3.4 percent decrease in freight delivered compared to last month's. Generally, in the eight months of 2020, passenger transportation will decrease by 29.3 percent, and cargo transport will decrease by 7.3 percent compared to the same period last year. International visitors coming to our country in August reached 16.3 thousand, up by 16.9 percent versus in the previous month but still down 98.9 percent given the same period in 2019 as Vietnam continues to implement measures to prevent and control the COVID-19 pandemic, not opening up international tourism. In August this year, international visitors to our country only reached nearly 3.8 million, down 66.6 percent compared to the same period in the year before⁵.

Impact on social problems

- Labour, employment

According to the General Statistics Office, in the second quarter of 2020. The labour force (aged 15 and over) is 53.1 million people, a decrease of 2.2 million people from the previous quarter, and 2.4 million people versus the same period last year. By the end of June 2020, up to 30.8 million people aged 15 and over were negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic⁶, specifically job loss, reduced working hours and income ... This year has recorded the most profound decrease of the labour force ever. Moreover, the labour market participation rate fell deeper in rural areas and among the female workforce ... The second quarter also saw the highest unemployment rate in the past ten years, at 2.73 percent. In particular, the unemployment rate is highest in the group of low-skilled workers.

³General Statistics Office, *Report on socio-economic situation in the first 8 months of 2020*, August 2020

⁴General Statistics Office, *Report on socio-economic situation in the first 6 months of 2020*, June 2020

⁵General Statistics Office, August 2020

⁶ General Statistics Office, *The Employment and Situation in the second quarter and the first six months of the year*, published on the morning of 10 July 2020

According to the General Statistics Office, as of June 2020. There are 30.8 million people aged 15 years and over that have been negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, including those who lost their jobs or had to quit their jobs/take the rotating leave, had their working hours and income reduced, ... The impact of income reduction accounts for the highest proportion with 57.3 percent of the number of affected people (equivalent to 17.6 million people). Of the total of 30.8 million affected, there are 28.7 million employed; 897.5 thousand people are unemployed and 1.2 million people are outside of the labour force (not participating in economic activities).

More than 80 percent of workers are in the informal sector, most of them are disadvantaged groups without a job because businesses had to suspend their business activities to comply with social distancing regulations. Social disparity occurs among demographic of poor people, street vendors, disabled people, workers, and migrant workers. The elderly and children selling lottery tickets became unemployed and ultimately lost their income for their families' livelihoods.

- Income

The impact of income reduction accounts for the highest proportion with 57.3 percent of the total affected people (equivalent to 17.6 million people). The service sector is most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic with 72.0 percent of workers affected. Next are the industry and construction sector, with 67.8 percent of workers affected; The rate of affected workers in the agriculture, forestry and fishery sector is 25.1 percent.

Statistics⁷ shows that 2020 is the first time in the period 2015 - 2020 that the average monthly income of workers in the second quarter has decreased compared to the same period last year. Average monthly income of workers was 5.2 million VND, down 5.1 percent versus the same period last year. The most vulnerable in the labour market are suffering the worst economic effects of the pandemic, with informal workers experiencing more declines in income than formal workers, at levels of 8.4 percent and 4.7 percent reductions given the same period last year. The more qualifications and skills a worker has, the less their income are reduced.

- Education, medical

The COVID-19 pandemic also affected the educational sector, causing schools to close temporarily, affecting the attendance of 20 million students; After the Lunar New Year holiday, before the pandemic situation, some provinces started to order schools to keep students at home. As of February 8, 62 out of 63 provinces and cities of the country continued to apply lockdown measures until the end of February 16 to prevent the spread of the pandemic. On February 14, before the pandemic, Education Minister Phung Xuan Nha sent a letter to the provinces, asking their leaders to consider allowing students and teachers to continue to stay at home until the end of February to prevent transmissions. After this notice, on February 15, a series of provinces issued decisions to suspend schooling until the end of February. On March 13, many provinces and cities extended the stay-home order until the end of March, with Ho Chi Minh City allowing students to stay home until April 5. Also, on that day, the Ministry of Education and Training sent instructions to the localities on the adjustment of the 2019-2020 school year timeline plan. Taking students out of school for a long time, on the one hand, ensures the safety requirements for their children, but caused interruptions in their parents' activities and work.

COVID-19 has prompted many schools to switch to online teaching, especially for high school and university, who on the one hand encountered difficulties in infrastructure transformation, and on the other were well-pressure to adopt and improve teaching technology and distance learning. After the first round of COVID-19, it seemed that schools and students and parents had gradually become familiar with this arrangement with the main form of teaching through Zoom and Microsoft Team video calls.

For the health sector, the frontlines of pandemic prevention have made great efforts in pandemic control and attained great achievements, affirming Vietnam's status in the international health community. However, during the pandemic, access to health services is limited, leading to difficulties in treatment for other diseases.

⁷ General Statistics Office, August 2020

Furthermore, there were the two cases of community infection originating from two hospitals of Bach Mai and other Da Nang hospitals in July and August in the last COVID-19 wave.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

The target of this study are female migrant workers in the informal sector with the following characteristics

Age

The working-age for female migrant workers is about 30-55 years old, accounting for 66.9 percent of the surveyed population, with female workers aged 55 and over accounting for 25 percent. The latter group as prescribed in Vietnam's law is retirement age group, but apparently with the informal sector, there is no age limit. It is worth mentioning that the age group 19-29 accounts for a small proportion of the informal sector female migrant workers, although it is reported that this group accounts for a high proportion of female migrants⁸. Although more comprehensive statistics is needed, this hints that it is harder for female migrants over the age of 30 to find stable jobs.

Table 1 Age structure distribution of respondents

Age	Amount	Percent
From 19 to 29 years old	49	8.1
From 30 to 45 years old	199	33.2
From 45 to 55 years old	202	33.7
Over 55 years old	150	25.0
Total number of respondents	600	100.0

Source: Survey results of the research team

Education level

The majority of female migrant workers in the informal sector have low education levels, mostly below lower secondary education, with only 14.17 percent having graduated from upper secondary school and 2.77 percent qualifying above the intermediate level. This is consistent with previous studies on migration that have confirmed education levels being one of the barriers for migrants in choosing a career. Due to a lack of qualifications, they can only take up non-specialization jobs when migrating to urban areas.

Table 2 : Professional qualifications of female migrant workers in the informal sector

Academic level	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Not in school/illiterate	1	0.3	20	6.6	21	3.5
Primary school	62	20.7	126	42.0	188	31.3
Junior high school	165	55.0	122	40.7	287	47.8
High school	57	19.0	28	9.3	85	14.2

⁸ Migrant workers from rural are usually young workers (aged 18-35), the proportion of women is higher, accounting for about 60%, the rate of men is about 40%. Results of the 2015 National Internal Migration Survey of the General Statistics Office

Intermediate college	12	4.0	4	1.3	16	2.7
College and graduate	3	1.0	0	0	3	0.5
Total	300	100	300	100	600	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

Marital status

Most of the workers (80%) are married and have children. Their children are often stay at their hometown. Migrant workers go to cities to work to earn a living and send money back home. Living alone in the big city is much more difficult as they have to simultaneously work to support themselves and send money to support their families back home.

Table 3 : Marital status of female migrant workers in the informal sector

Marital status	Hanoi City		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Not married	23	7.7	12	4.0	35	5.8
Being married	240	80.0	240	80.0	480	80.0
Widowed	26	8.6	18	6.0	44	7.3
Separation/Divorce	11	3.7	30	10.0	41	6.9
Total	300	100	300	100	600	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

Migration characteristics of origin and destination

Of the 600 respondents who were mainly from different provinces (from other provinces to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city), only 50 in Hanoi migrated from rural areas in Hanoi to the Hanoi central city areas. It can be seen that the migration trend of this group is from rural areas to cities or from less developed places to more developed places with the goal of finding jobs and income. Most migrant workers rent accommodation on a monthly basis and often live together in small, poorly equipped rooms. A very small number of female migrant workers are accommodated by relatives.

Table 4 : Current place of female migrant workers in the informal sector

Current accommodation status	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Rent a motel by month	265	88.3	274	91.3	539	89.9
Rent a motel by day	3	1.0	2	0.7	5	0.8
Stay with the relatives	5	1.7	10	3.3	15	2.5
Stay at their work place	26	8.7	10	3.3	36	6.0
Other	1	0.3	4	1.3	5	0.8
Total	300	100	300	100	600	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

Among those surveyed, more than two-thirds have temporary residence registration with the locality, the numbers in Ho Chi Minh City is 81.33 percent while in Hanoi it is only nearly 60 percent. This is an issue of urban management, making it difficult for workers to access public social security services without an official temporary residence declaration.

Table 5 : Reported temporary residence status in the destination

Plan	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Yes	176	59.9	244	81.3	420	70.7
Not	118	40.1	56	18.7	174	29.3
Total number of respondents	294	100	300	100	594	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

Causes of migration

Regarding the causes of migration, through the interviews and case studies, the causes mainly entails to income and employment. It is difficult to find a job in the countryside with sufficient living income, or they only have some seasonal jobs (farming). Another prominent feature of this migrant group is that people from the same village often help each other to migrate to the city to find jobs. This is consistent with the cultural characteristics of the villages that is still preserved in rural area of Vietnam.

Job characteristics

The main occupation of the migrant group is street vendors (selling fruits, vegetables, and household goods), accounting for 53.0 percent of the respondents. Of which, the proportion of street vendors in Hanoi is 41 percent and 65 percent in Ho Chi Minh City. The next most popular occupation group is scrap collection with 37.17 percent, of which 43 percent in Hanoi and 31.33 percent in Ho Chi Minh City. Domestic workers account for 6.83 percent and is quite more popular in Hanoi. Some other jobs such as selling lottery tickets (only in Ho Chi Minh City), online sellers, and sewing on the roadside account for a small proportion. Informal sector female workers' occupation is characterized as simple jobs that require no skills. Except for a few domestic workers and sales staff, most of them have flexible working time and arrangements.

Table 6 : Occupation of female migrant workers in the informal sector

Job	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Street vendors	123	41.0	195	65.0	318	53.0
Collection and purchase of scrap	129	43.0	94	31.3	223	37.2
Domestic workers (Maid, salesman ...)	37	12.3	4	1.3	41	6.8
Lottery tickets seller	0	0.0	5	1.7	5	0.8
Online sellers	3	1.0	0	0.0	3	0.5
Nail	3	1.0	0	0.0	3	0.5
Hair dresser	3	1.0	0	0.0	3	0.5

Looking for a job	2	0.7	0	0.0	2	0.3
Roadside sewing	0	0.0	2	0.6	2	0.3
Total	300	100	300	100	600	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

With informal work, access to the job is easy but very risky. For example, street vendors often encroach on occupation-banned sidewalks, so when the order patrols come, they have to run carrying their goods; they are also prone to robbery and traffic accidents. For scrap collectors and scavengers, they often have get exposed to a lot of waste, facing health risks. Other jobs such as hired labour are proceeded without labour contract, so workers are prone to accidents and lay-offs without any protection.

The most common transportation means used by this group are bicycles, followed by walking and motorbikes. In Ho Chi Minh City, the number of walkers accounts for 41 percent, the number in Hanoi is only 13.3 percent. In Hanoi, where there's more scrap collectors, bicycles are more common with 61.7 percent compared to 28.7 percent in Ho Chi Minh City. Because the workers often choose to live near their work place, the transportation means are also mainly for their respective livelihood purposes. The number of people with motorbikes is relatively small.

Table 7 : Means used at destination

Vehicle	Hanoi City		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Bus	3	1.0	2	0.7	5	0.8
Motorcycle	71	23.7	87	29.0	158	26.3
Bike	185	61.7	86	28.7	271	45.2
Walk	40	13.3	123	41.0	163	27.2
Other	1	0.3	2	0.7	3	0.5
Total number of respondents	300	100	300	100	600	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

4. FINDING

4.1. COVID-19 World on female migrant workers in informal sector

4.1.1. Income, employment

Due to the nature of the informal sector, the COVID-19 outbreak had a heavy impact on the employment of this worker group. Only 18.67 percent said that their work remained unchanged as most of them are domestic workers. The Government's travel restriction and lock-down affected 27.17 percent of these workers' employment. The degree of impacts differs greatly between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in which 49 percent said their work was affected by the lockdown. These are usually street vendors and lottery tickets sellers. More than a quarter of workers said that during the pandemic they were temporarily out of work or laid off. This rate in Hanoi was much higher than in Ho Chi Minh City, with 83.4 percent compared to 18.7 percent. The survey data shows that the level of employment impact on workers in Hanoi is much more severe than Ho Chi Minh City. Two main reasons explained this number are lock-down restrictions by the local government and occupation characteristics

Table 8: Assessment of employment status at the time of COVID-19 (from 23 January to 1 May 2020)

Content rated	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Happened normally, nothing changed	22	7.3	90	30.0	112	18.67
Travel/lock-down restrictions by the government	16	5.3	147	49.0	163	27.17
Temporarily out of work during the pandemic	164	54.7	24	8.0	188	31.33
Must change to another job	9	3.0	7	2.3	16	2.67
Lost work	86	28.7	32	10.7	118	19.67
Other	3	1.0	0	0.0	3	0.50
Total	300	100.0	300.0	100.0	600.0	100.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

The income of female migrant workers in the informal sector has been significantly reduced due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. 38.5 percent of workers in this group said they saw a lot of income reduction, while 48.33 percent had no income during the pandemic period with a large number of Hanoi workers accounting for 84.33 percent. These figures show that COVID-19 has had a tremendous shock on the income of female migrant workers in the informal sector. The group most affected are street vendors, garbage collectors because during the COVID-19, they could only work a little, and people went out to the streets less than normal to buy things.

“... Before the pandemic, my average income was 10,000,000 VND/month. But that, plus my husband's monthly income, was only enough to send back to our grandparents to look after the two oldest children in the countryside, to hire a babysitter up here, plus rent, diapers, milk expenses... some months enough, some other barely.

But when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out: The bakery factory was also closed, and street vendors were forbidden to sell, and I could not return to my hometown in the midst of a pandemic in Hanoi. It is not safe to take a passenger car with a small child. Going back home, I am afraid that I may be a source of transmission to my children and family.

The whole day, we just wandered around in the motel room, looking after the child and cooking meals. I only know the way from home to the market and from the market to home”; “Going home is to close the door, not interacting with anyone, including our neighbours”; “My savings are gradually running out, but I still have to eat, spend, pay rent; my child still needs milk to drink and diapers to clean, but I don't know when I can continue to go to work like the normal days”.

(In-depth interview, female, 31 years old, Selling bread, Hanoi)

"The most difficult challenge during the pandemic was to have no income to support our lives

(In-depth interview, female, 35 years old, fruit street vendor, Hanoi)

Table 9 : Level of income change before and after the pandemic

Change	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Income increased even more	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00
Income increased slightly	4	1.33	2	0.67	6	1.00
Constant	14	4.67	21	7.00	35	5.83
Income decreased slightly	6	2.00	32	10.67	38	6.33
Income dropped much	23	7.67	208	69.33	231	38.50
No income	253	84.33	37	12.33	290	48.33
Total	300	100.00	300	100.00	600	100.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

Looking at the chart of average income before and after the COVID-19 pandemic, we can see that the average income has fallen sharply, especially in Hanoi, from 4,556,677 to 1,686,306 VND/person/month, less than the national minimum wage (4,420,000 VND/month). The decline in the income had a strong impact on the social security of workers, especially when they are among the most vulnerable group in the labour force. The main reason for the reduction or loss of income was because of the implementation of social and physical distancing measures.

Before COVID-19, her monthly income was about 6-7 million, plus her husband's earning from motorbike taxi, which was enough to make ends meet and send their children to school. The pandemic has hit her family hard, cutting half of total family income. She had to take a part-time job as garment worker.

(In-depth interview, female, 44 years old, selling vegetables, Ho Chi Minh City)

"Before the pandemic, my income was about 200,000 VND per day, the earnings mainly come from manual processing that I did by myself. I also took of 1-2 hours of housework per day which also helped me earn 300-400 thousand VND per week.

But when COVID-19 broke out, all income was no longer due to social distancing and people not going out. People stayed at home, so no one hired maid by the hour, and so in those days I just stayed at home. Everywhere you go, you are worried about the pandemic. If you contract and spread the disease, it's dangerous. More than one month without income was hard but I dared not to go out"

(In-depth interview, female, 52 years old, street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City)

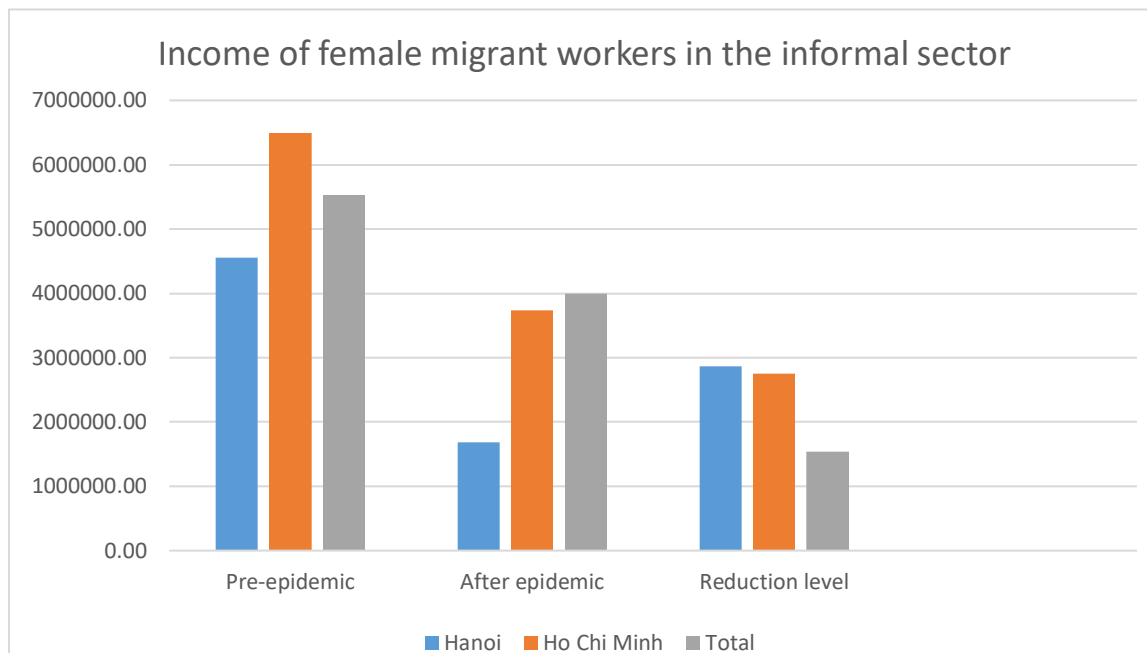


Figure 2: Income of female migrant workers in the informal sector before and after the epidemic

Survey results of the research team

The main reason why female migrant workers in the informal sector bore reduction or loss of income is social distance. This is also consistent with the characteristic of this group, when the lockdown measures and travel restrictions are in place.

Table 10 : Reasons for reduced or no income

Content	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent

Loss of job due to closed workplace	29	10.3	31	11.2	60	10.0
Reduced working time due to closed workplace	14	5.0	16	5.8	30	5.0
Reduced opportunities for part-time jobs due to social distance	21	7.4	68	24.5	89	14.8
Reduced work time due to more family care	2	0.7	6	2.2	89	14.8
Due to social distance	241	85.5	241	87.0	482	80.3
Other reason	6	2.1	92	33.2	98	16.3

Note: The total number of responses for each reason was not 100 percent due to some not answering for certain reasons

Source: Survey results of the research team

"... Before the COVID-19, my average income was about 5 million/month/ day, but the pandemic cut my income by a large margin. During the social distancing period, there was no income at all because we could not sell goods and no one would buy goods. Everyone was afraid so they would usually stay in the house. After the social distancing ended up to now, the average income has decreased by more than 1 million/month. We faced multiple difficulties including food shortage, access to health services, and sharp shrinking of income. Street vendors found it difficult to sell foods as people are afraid of the disease and refrain from buying street foods.

(In-depth interview, female, 24 years old, street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City)

"Normally, life is difficult, COVID-19 only adds fuel to the fire. After returning to work, I find that customers gone, business slumped, plus the need to pause work and come back to my hometown every 1-2 weeks to look after my sick child, which make my life miserable.

(In-depth interview, female, 52 years old, street vendor, Hanoi)

4.1.2. Expenditure and quality of life

In reality, cutting expenses seems to be an option and as a result their quality of life and living went down, their well-being was not guaranteed, which is reflected in the following aspects of social security:

The majority of workers said that their spending for eating and drinking was reduced, of which more than one third of the respondents said that they had to cut down many food costs. The 75.8 percent who made reduction in food expenses said that the spending cut was due to COVID's difficulties, 50.4 percent of the respondents said they could not afford to buy enough food. The inability to afford normal eating and drinking needs shows the extremely difficult situation of workers, even with the basic daily need of eating and drinking, was barely being satisfactorily addressed.

"No income, but still have to spend on food so I have no choice but to choose to cut down on food expenses and buy only necessary things ..."

(In-depth interview, female, 24 years old, street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City)

Table 11 : Changes in meal costs before and after the pandemic

Change eating before and after pandemic	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
The cost of eating and drinking has increased much	16	5.3	0	0.0	16	2.7
Food costs increased slightly	15	5.0	0	0.0	15	2.5
The cost of eating and drinking remains unchanged	68	22.7	37	12.3	105	17.5
The cost of eating and drinking is reduced slightly	85	28.3	152	50.7	237	39.5
The cost of eating and drinking is much reduced	116	38.7	111	37.0	227	37.8
Total	300	100	300	100	600	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

Adjustments related to eating and drinking of workers in which the option to reduce meat was the most selected choice (72.33 percent) in the context of rising pork prices⁹ and to save costs. Eating more vegetables or eating more instant noodles were the next options. Even as many as 30 workers said they had to reduce meals, the number of people who received food from their countryside is not much. Even in the first outbreak period, the number of people who hoard food due to fear of deficiency is not much (35.67 percent). This is partly because of the thinking that food shortage is not much of a concern compared to limited finance and poor preservation conditions at their hired accommodation.

Table 12 : Diet of labour under the influence of COVID-19 pandemic

⁹ The live hog price across the country continued to increase during the first 5 months of 2020, always above 90,000 VND/kg, at the end of May 2020 the price increased to over 100,000 VND/kg (see also <http://vinanet.vn/thi-truong1/tom-luoc-market-thit-lon-6-month-first-year-2020-732280.htm>)

Solution	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Reduce meals, combine meals	127	42.3	56	18.7	183	30.5
Eat more junk food	18	6.0	6	2.0	24	4.0
Meat reduction due to high meat prices/cost savings	220	73.3	214	71.3	434	72.3
Eat more green vegetables	141	47.0	105	35.0	246	41.0
Eat more instant noodles	121	40.3	166	55.3	287	47.8
Storing a lot of food due to lack of fear	76	25.3	138	46.0	214	35.7
Mainly using food, food provided by relatives and support (from hometown ...)	46	15.3	62	20.7	108	18.0
No answer	13	4.3	22	7.3	35	5.8

Source: Survey results of the research team

In terms of accommodation, very few people changed their accommodation due to the pandemic (9.7 percent) because they choose their accommodation nearby their working area and the migrant workers often live in clusters, and they share the cost so change of residence often occurs rarely except under special conditions. According to the survey data, most workers said that they did not have accommodation problems. If any, the hardships are mainly associated with lower income or even zero income while still having to pay rent.

Table 13: Difficulty in accommodation of female migrant workers in the informal sector are faced with the pandemic

Selection force	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Costs increase	27	9.00	4	1.33	31	5.17
Difficult to find a place to rent	18	6.00	2	0.67	20	3.33
The owner does not allow stay	7	2.33	0	0.00	7	1.17
Other	250	83.33	296	98.67	546	91.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

As for the water and electricity sources, according to the survey data, there are insignificant changes in electricity and water sources before and after the pandemic, which is consistent with the fact that workers faced almost no displacement.

Regarding the sanitation of water, 72.67 percent of respondents used clean water (compared with 73 percent before the pandemic, the change is very small with 2 cases of relocation in Ho Chi Minh City). This rate in Ha Noi city reached 78.67 percent, higher than Ho Chi Minh City with 67.33 percent. Other water sources which 20.17 percent of the respondents said they were using are mainly dug wells, rainwater, pond water, lake water...

With great implication towards the quality of life of the workers, access to clean water is one of the basic criteria of well-being, and hence multidimensional poverty reduction has not been guaranteed for 100 percent of the population in the big cities.

Table 14 : Current water source used

Water source	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Clean water	236	78.67	200	66.67	436	72.67
The broth of unknown origin	2	0.67	6	2.00	8	1.33
There is no fixed water source	29	9.67	6	2.00	35	5.83
Other	33	11.00	88	29.33	121	20.17
Total	300	100.00	300	100.00	600	100.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

There is also a slight change in electricity use behaviour before and after the pandemic, with the number of on-demand users falling from 68 percent to 63 percent, the similar decrease of electricity use due to the economic reason was observed, with 35.8 percent after the pandemic compared with 30.8 percent before the pandemic. This change seemed to be more prominent in Hanoi than in Ho Chi Minh City, see in table 15 below.

Table 15 : Current conditions of electricity use (percent)

Current Status	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		total	
	Pre-pandemic	After pandemic	Pre-pandemic	After pandemic	Pre-pandemic	After pandemic
Use on demand	48.0	40.7	88.0	85.3	68.0	63.0
Limited use due to economic conditions	51.7	59.0	10.0	12.7	30.8	35.8
Difficult to access power source	0.3	0.3	2.0	2.0	1.2	1.2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic has made workers more concerned with health issues when 86.33 percent said they were more conscious of health issues, especially those in Ho Chi Minh City. 96 percent say COVID-19, with its contagiousness and severe negative effects, compelled people to change their health concerns.

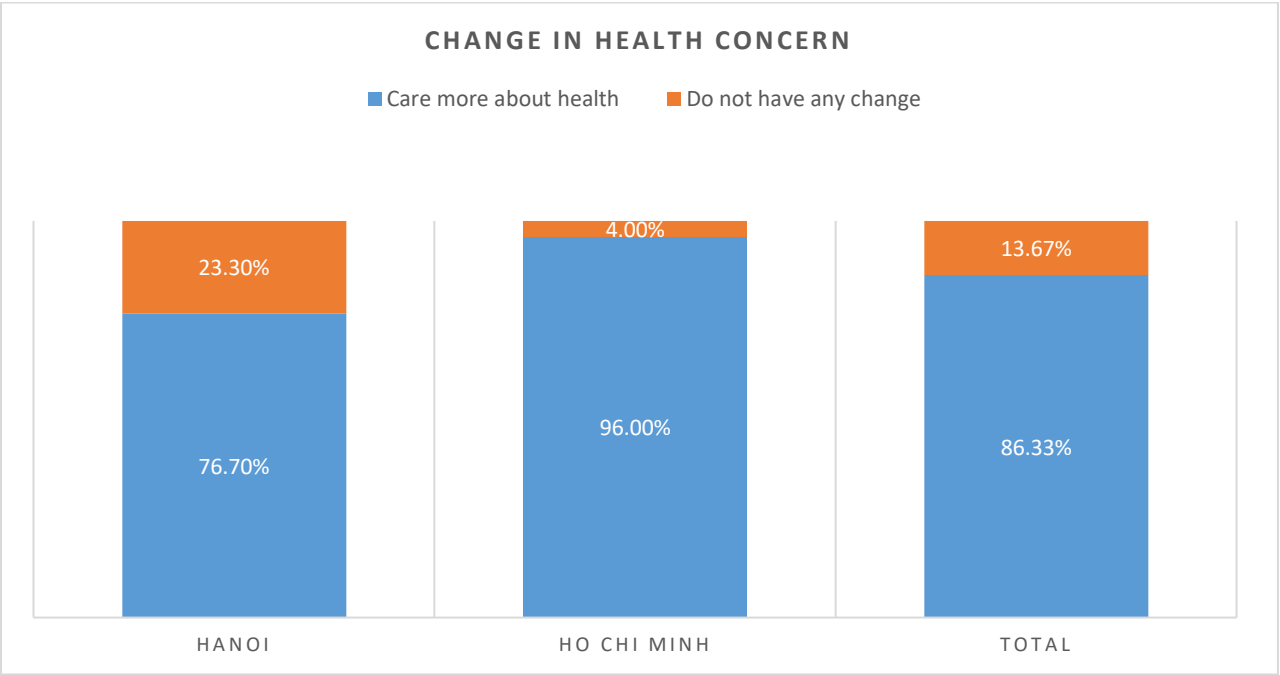


Figure 3: Changes in health concerns among female migrant workers in the informal sector due to the COVID-19 pandemic

Source: Survey results of the research team

In order to adapt to the pandemic-fighting life my family actively isolated themselves at home, avoid attending crowded gatherings, only went out when shopping for food and necessary supplies. When going out, wear a mask, and when having come home, wash your hands with soap as recommended on the television

(In-depth interview, female, 42 years old, Collecting scrap metal, Hanoi)

“Previously, I was never aware of personal hygiene, but after the pandemic had taken place, I became self-aware and followed the government's recommendations to limit travel, wear a mask when going out, and wash hands. ... ”

(In-depth interview, female, 44 years old, selling vegetables, Ho Chi Minh City)

This change is quite evident in reactions of respondents if they get a mild illness such as flu, a sickness similar to the symptoms of COVID-19 infection. Before the pandemic, only 10 percent chose to go to medical facilities if they contracted flu. After the pandemic, this number increased to 17 percent with a high increase in Hanoi from 14 to 22.6 percent. This number increases in proportion with the decrease in the number of people who buy medicines arbitrarily according to their own experiences. However, most respondents still choose to go to pharmacies to consult with over-the-counter sellers. This is a common characteristic and practice in Vietnam. If there is a need for medical information, people often choose to arbitrarily buy medicines with the advice of pharmacy’s sellers.

Table 16 : The measure of choice among female migrant workers in the informal sector when suffering from a flu (percent)

Measure	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Pre-pandemic	After pandemic	Pre-pandemic	After pandemic	Pre-pandemic	After pandemic
Visit a medical facility	14.00	22.67	6.00	11.33	10.00	17.00
Consult with experienced people	2.33	2.33	1.33	3.33	1.83	2.83
Ask the pharmacy to consult the seller	67.33	64.00	71.00	68.33	69.17	66.17
Self-buying drugs according to experience	15.33	10.00	20.33	15.67	17.83	12.83
Other	1.00	1.00	1.33	1.33	1.17	1.17
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

When the pandemic broke out, the majority of workers were worried, with only 7 percent said they were not. 30.67 percent said they were a little bit worried but believe they are not infected. For those who felt anxious and needed help, most of them rely on family members or relatives. Interestingly, 18.8 percent of respondents in Ho Chi Minh City said they sought help from employers while this figure in Hanoi is 0 percent. On the other side, none of the workers in Ho Chi Minh City sought help from the authorities while 22.2 percent of the workers surveyed in Hanoi did. Social organizations are also more resorted to in Ho Chi Minh City with 6.3 percent of respondents choosing it while the figure in Hanoi is 0 percent. This shows a unique characteristic of the social support activities of the authorities and social organizations for people in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi.

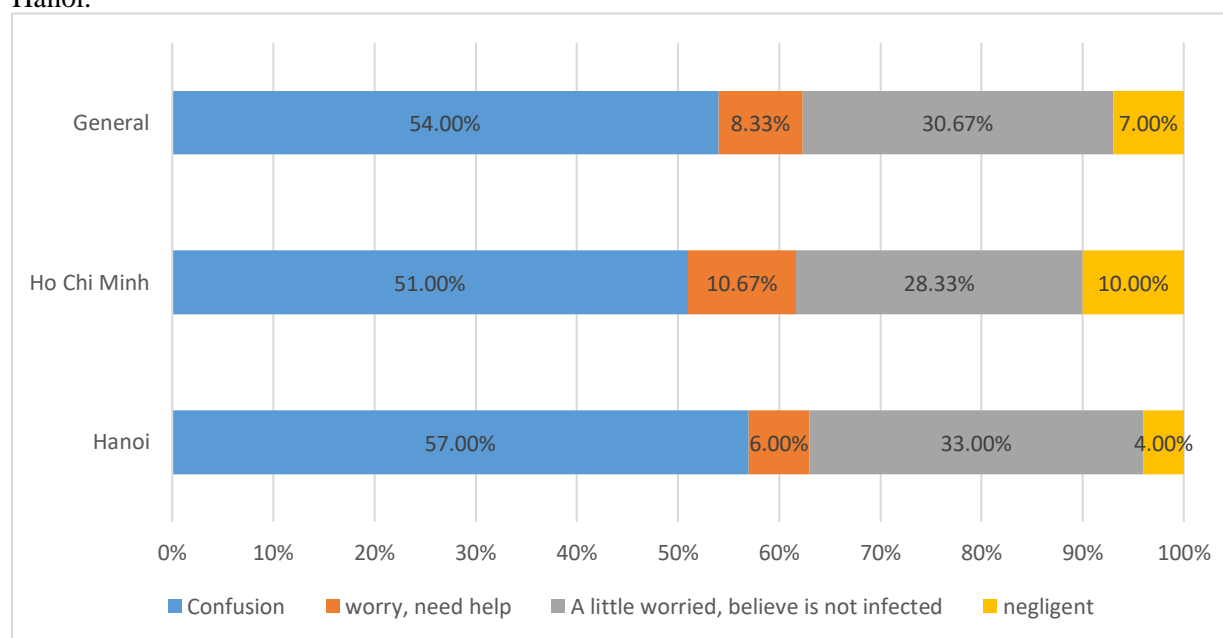


Figure 4: The worker's mood when the pandemic takes place

“...since the pandemic broke out, everyone implemented social distancing to close the door and limit the travel, I and my husband had no work to do. Without the money to pay the rent, we returned home with our children. Back home with so many worries, and there is no work to do. We just staying around at home, all daily expenses must be calculated, scrutinized, and limited as much as possible. All activities also changed. The more we stayed at home, the more we became anxious, worried about the spread of the pandemic and when we can return to a normal life to earn money and raise children ...”

(In-depth interview, female, 42 years old, Collecting scrap metal, Hanoi)

During the pandemic peak period, workers were aware of preventive measures very well thanks to mainstream communication. 99.67 percent said they wore masks when going out, but due to economic conditions, 73.83 percent said that they used cloth masks instead of medical ones. Nearly 90 percent said they regularly washed their hands with soap and refrained from touching their eyes, nose or mouth. Other measures such as mouthwash, throatwash, and limited contacts in crowded places are also practiced by nearly 70 percent of respondents. This reaffirms the success of the government's anti-pandemic propaganda and the unity of the people in COVID-19 pandemic prevention.

Table 17 : Measures to prevent pandemics at peak times of workers

Solution	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Saving medical masks for several times	116	38.7	57	19.0	173	28.83
Self-monitoring at home, do not rush to the medical authority when the first sign of illness	103	34.3	111	37.0	214	35.67
Bring personal hand sanitizer	116	38.7	143	47.7	259	43.17
Open the door, keep the air in the accommodation well ventilated	162	54.0	101	33.7	263	43.83
Do not come into close contact with domestic or wild animals	173	57.7	142	47.3	315	52.50
Stay warm, exercise, eat cooked, drink cooked	167	55.7	168	56.0	335	55.83
Change/do not wear street clothes indoors	177	59.0	192	64.0	369	61.50
Wash hands after removing the mask	215	71.7	177	59.0	392	65.33
Limit community exposure	272	90.7	129	43.0	401	66.83
Rinse mouth and rinse regularly	188	62.7	228	76.0	416	69.33
Cover your mouth when you cough or sneeze	209	69.7	224	74.7	433	72.17
Use a fabric mask because there is no medical mask	233	77.7	210	70.0	443	73.83

Wash your hands often with soap and do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth	286	95.3	250	83.3	536	89.33
Wear a mask when going out	300	100.0	298	99.3	598	99.67
Total number of respondents	300		300		600	

Source: Survey results of the research team

Access to information

The majority of workers in the informal sector have access to information via television, government loud speakers and people around them. These are the two main channels that female migrant workers access information about the pandemic, followed by information through public loudspeakers that also account for more than one-third of the selected information channels. This provides a lot of thinking to communicate for this target group. It seems surprising that in the age of technology revolution 4.0, communication channels rely heavily on internet and digital technology, the migrant workers are still quite loyal to the traditional channels of television, word of mouth and loudspeaker radio.

Table 18 : Sources of information about COVID's disease (percent)

The information channel	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh City	Total
Newspapers	7.0	0.7	3.8
From the social workers	19.0	2.0	10.5
Pano, poster	22.7	2.0	12.3
Other (phone messages)	18.7	50.0	34.3
Government loudspeaker	62.7	8.7	35.7
People who around me	49.7	58.7	54.2
Television	78.3	59.3	68.8

Source: Survey results of the research team

4.2. Support from the Government and social organization/community to female migrant workers

Regarding the state's support policy towards people affected by COVID-19. The Government promptly issued important decisions to support people severely affected, particularly the Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP dated April 9, 2020 on measures to support people facing difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and Decision No. 15/2020/QĐ-TT dated April 24, 2020 of the Prime Minister stipulating the implementation of policies to support people facing difficulties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

*** Those who receive money from the social security support package of more than 62 trillion Vietnamese dong according to the supporting policy includes**

- Persons with meritorious service to the Revolution and social allowance beneficiaries: 4,315 million people, with 6,470 billion dong (benefit rate: 500 thousand VND/month, for three months 4,5,6)

- Poor and near-poor households by the national standard until December 31, 2019 according to the local list: 2,244 million households, with 6,730 billion VND (the rate of enjoying 250 thousand VND/person/month, one-time payment for three months 4,5,6)
- Employee whose labour contract was postponed: 1.8 million VND/person/month (budget 5,400 billion VND, number of beneficiaries: 1 million people)
- Employers with financial difficulties have paid at least 50 percent of the salary to their employee in advance are eligible to the zero-interest loan (total loan amount: 16.2 trillion VND, support: 3 million workers)
- An individual household business with a tax return of less than 100 million VND/year whose business was suspended from 1-4-2020: support 1 million/household/month, not more than three months (funding: 2,280 billion VND, support: 760 thousand households)
- Employee not eligible for unemployment insurance: support 1 million/person/month, not more than three months (funding: 15 trillion VND, support: 5 million workers)

Source: Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs

However, to enjoy the social security policy package worth 62,000 trillion VND of the Government, the needy must follow the guidance from central and local ministries. According to the Minister of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs Dao Ngoc Dung, the development of guiding documents to concretize the selection of beneficiaries still faces many difficulties, especially for the informal sectors. It is easy to verify for the workers who lost their jobs, stopped working at enterprises that were suspended or dissolved due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Determining support for informal sector workers is very difficult in quantifying the criteria and jobs, but this is the most affected population group in the pandemic.

For example, on May 20, 2020, Hanoi issued a decision to make payments to 915 cases out of 82,504 applications, in which 333 cases were in the group of workers who did not sign labour contracts and lost their jobs.¹⁰ As of July 29, 2020, the payment for four target groups, including people with meritorious services to the revolution, social security beneficiaries, poor and near-poor households, has been completed. The number of recipients belonging to the 4 above groups is 385,515 people with a budget of 474.2 billion VND¹¹. The very limited implementation reflects the difficulty in accessing informal sector workers in the city, despite the early issuance of the policy from the city (Decision No. 1757/QD-UBND dated April 29, 2020, Decision 1955/QD-UBND dated May 12, 2020 on the implementation of policies to support people facing difficulties due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Hanoi City).

In Ho Chi Minh City, as of July 20, 2020, nearly 32,500 people with meritorious services to the revolution have been supported by monthly subsidies, at the rate of 500,000 VND/person/month, reaching the rate of nearly 100 percent coverage of this group. 124,000 people under social security received support, reaching the rate of 99 percent; 110,900 people from poor and near-poor households have all received support with the amount of more than 83 billion dong, reaching 100 percent coverage of this group; 181,000 people in the informal sector do not have labour contracts or lost their jobs were supported with the amount of nearly 181 billion dong, reaching more than 99.4 percent; more than 53,000 workers whose labour contracts were postponed or didn't receive due salary were supported with the amount of nearly 55 billion dong, reaching the rate of 99.4 percent; more than 20,500 street lottery sellers were assisted with the amount of more than 20

¹⁰ Ministry of Labor, *Hanoi urgently needs to pay support to freelance workers*, Junr 2020 <http://www.molisa.gov.vn/Pages/tintuc/chitiet.aspx?tintucID=222701>

¹¹ Vietnam Social Insurance: *Hà Nội hỗ trợ hơn 385.000 người khó khăn do đại dịch Covid-19*, July 2020 <http://baobaohiemxahoi.vn/en/tin-chi-tiet-ha-noi-ho-tro-hon-385000-nguoi-kho-khan-do-dai-dich-covid19-611e07b4.aspx>

billion VND, reaching 96 percent; 12,803 preschool teachers, nannies were supported, reaching the rate of 99.9 percent coverage of this group¹².

The above facts are also clearly reflected in the research team's findings below. Asked about the government's support for migrant workers in the two cities of Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, the female migrant workers in two big cities' answers show that only 32 people in Hanoi (10.67 percent) and 53 people in HCMC (17.67 percent) received support from local authorities. In Ho Chi Minh City, the average support amount is 911,111 VND, while in Hanoi it is 786,111 VND. 84.9 percent of people in HCMC received cash support and 56.2 percent did in Hanoi. This well resonates with the fact that the rate of temporary registration possession of female migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh City is higher than that in Hanoi, so their ability to access official state support is higher. Some people said that they received support, but were asked to return to their hometown to get the money, where their residency is registered.

Table 19 : Support from the government during and after the COVID-19 outbreak

Selection force	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Yes	32	10.67	53	17.67	85	14.17
No	268	89.33	247	82.33	515	85.83
Total number of respondents	300	100.00	300	100.00	600	100.00
<i>Types of assistance among those receiving assistance</i>						
Money	18	56.2	45	84.9	63	74.12
Non-money	14	43.8	12	22.6	26	30.59

Note: Percentage to total recipients > 100 percent because someone has both received money and in kind, as of July 2020

Source: Survey results of the research team

Among the respondents who received support from the authorities in Ho Chi Minh City, about 84.9 percent were supported in cash, while this rate in Hanoi was 56.2 percent.

“Thanks to the care and help of the state, Ms. Thom also receives money from the government’s COVID-19 pandemic relieve fund. The amount received was 250,000 VND/month for 3 months. This money also helped a part to cover expenses in this difficult pandemic period.

The procedures to receive support are also quite simple because the family is also a poor household in the locality, so just declare and bring the household registration book to the commune. After about 1 month, we receive the support money.

(In-depth interview, female, 51 years old, House maid, Hanoi)

“During the support for people affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, my husband also received support with a total amount of 1,500,000 VND/3 months. All procedures to receive support were also quite easy, my family is also part of a policy-priority family. Although the amount is not big,

¹² Communist Party of Vietnam online newspaper, *Ho Chi Minh City completed payments to support people affected by COVID-19*, July 2020 <http://dangcongsan.vn/xa-hoi/tp-ho-chi-minh-hoan-thanh-chi-tra-ho-tro-nguoi-bi-anh-huong-boi-covid-19-559694.html>

it is a motivation for us to try to join hands with the community to repel the disease and return to a normal life.

(In-depth interview, female, 30 years old, fruit street vendor, Hanoi)

“Having received support for rice, necessary supplies and also received more than 1 million for 3 months from the government, I feel very happy, to get the attention of the state so I am also very excited. The procedure is easy, I just need to provide information fully to the landlord where I stay, and he worked to help until I received the money very quickly. It feels so heart-warming, more or less I'm happy. ”

(In-depth interview, female, 54 years old, street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City)

Regarding the support of sponsors and social organizations, notably, 12 percent of respondents received information from social organizations in Hanoi, while in Ho Chi Minh City, it is only 2 percent. However, the rate of receiving material support in the HCM City is significantly higher than in Hanoi, with a rate of one-third of the respondents. compared with a cumulative rate of only 14 percent in Hanoi.

Table 20 : Statistics on the frequency of respondents who received support from sponsors and social organizations

Answer	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Yes	42	14.00	100	33.33	142	23.67
No	258	86.00	200	66.67	458	76.33
Total number of respondents	300	100.00	300	100.00	600	100.00
<i>Types of assistance among those receiving assistance</i>						
Money	4	9.5	0	0.0	4	2.82
Relief goods	38	90.5	100	100.0	138	97.18

Note: Percentage to total recipients > 100 percent because someone has both received money and in kind, as of July 2020

Source: Survey results of the research team

Regarding the form of support (money or in supplies), in HCM city we recognized 100 percent of respondents who received support from sponsors and social organizations in supplies (food, necessities, medical masks), while in Hanoi, there were 9.5 percent of cases supported by money. All those who were asked and received support expressed satisfaction with the support of sponsors and social organizations.

Through surveys and in-depth interviews in some cases, it can be seen that in HCM City, community supplies support for the vulnerable undertakes many creative forms, is flexible and close to the essential needs of the target audience. The initiators of these activities come from social organizations, charity organizations, clubs, groups and individuals and entrepreneurs who actively contribute to the community. Such examples are:

The foundation that supports preschool teachers who lost their jobs due to the COVID-19 is the H.A.T group. The foundation's initiative is to provide small financial aid grants to preschool teachers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Through these financial aids the foundation also creates a bridge for teachers to commit to “Paying it forward” by joining to build the "HAT Library" for the community, creating toys for preschool children, offering online "One-to-One" lessons for children of font liner families such as nurses, doctors and volunteers forces in the pandemic-fighting force. A month after launching, with 1,320 domestic and foreign business and individual sponsors, H.A.T had raised an impressive 2.6 billion VND, sponsored 301 teachers (with a support amount of 8,400,000 VND/teacher) out of a total of 1,700 applications received.

The Rice ATM program of the Community Hands group of the Association of Volunteers Join Hands for the Community received strong support from large enterprises such as: TH True milk, Coopmart system, Da Lat

Farm, etc. The program ended on 05/05/2020 with: 164 turns of rice donated; 43,529 Kg of rice awarded; 25 donated other goods (very diverse food); 17,540 times people came to ATMs; 128,396,000 VND in cash to support necessities other than rice; 24,500 eggs; 2,000 bottles of cooking oil; 3,000 bottles of soy sauce; 6 open shelters received donations from the Rice ATM.

Reasons for not accessing support

When the research team investigated the reasons why migrant workers did not receive support from local authorities and social organizations and sponsors, we were given the following answers: in Hanoi, 23.51 percent of people surveyed believe that they are ineligible for assistance; Proving the eligibility through the application procedures is hard, accounting for a high proportion (18.28 percent and 24.25 percent respectively, the total of these two criteria is approximately 42.4 percent). While the number of people who said that because they did not know enough information, they didn't receive support is nearly 17 percent in Hanoi, while in HCM city this figure is up to 70.04 percent. Nearly 26 percent of migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh City said that they did not access support due to difficulties in completing the procedures to receive the support. In Ho Chi Minh City, the migrant workers are those who sell lottery tickets, street vendors or restaurants' dish washers.... Their working hour is until midnight has prevented them from accessing information about their eligibility. Another reason related to temporary residence registration of the informal sector workers, which in Ho Chi Minh City only 5.67% stated that they could not prove the qualifications for assistance while this number in Hanoi is 18.28%. This ratio also resonates with the high rate of residence registration in HCM City compare with that of Hanoi.. The residency status is the main reason that makes them pay little attention to information about government assistance packages, thinking that having no temporary residence registration would disqualify them to receive assistance.

Table 21 : The reason for not getting support from the local authorities

Reason	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Don't know the information	45	16.79	173	70.04	218	36.33
Not eligible for support	63	23.51	23	9.31	86	14.33
Can't prove the qualifications for assistance	49	18.28	14	5.67	63	10.50
Difficulty in procedures due to the authorities	65	24.25	64	25.91	129	21.50
Difficulty due to his/her subjectivity	18	6.72	0	0.00	18	3.00
Other	66	24.63	12	4.86	78	13.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

As for the support of sponsors and social organizations, the trend is in stark contrast to the above rates. Nearly 86 percent of respondents in Hanoi didn't know information about these assistances, while this figure in HCMC is 36.0 percent. While proving eligibility for support is not a barrier at all (both cities have 0 percent results), it is worth noting that the reason that they did not seek for the support was that they are hesitant to do so, with the rate of respondent of 61% in HCMC and 9.3% in Hanoi. The hesitant to reach out for support could be interpreted as they are self-reliant, or some thought that they are not qualified because of their lack of permanent residence registration.

Table 22 : The reason for not receiving the sponsorship of sponsors and social organizations

Reason	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Don't know the information	221	85.7	72	36.0	293	63.97
Not eligible for support	13	5.0	4	2.0	17	3.71
Can't prove I qualify for assistance	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.00
Difficulty in procedures due to the authorities	3	1.2	0	0.0	3	0.66
Difficulty due to his/her subjectivity	24	9.3	122	61.0	146	31, 88
Other	7	2.7	12	6.0	19	4.15

Source: Survey results of the research team

The above figures once again confirm the inadequacy of the implementation of the assistance policy to support the COVID's affected; the issuance procedures should be simpler but still go to the right beneficiaries, especially for migrant workers. This is even more difficult because this is a group that often has less permanent registered address, even with some having no identification documents and a fixed address.

Mobilizing the community's cooperation in pandemic prevention and control has been a great success of the Vietnam Communist Party and State, especially inculcating the spirit of sharing difficulties, community solidarity, mutual love, has brought about positive effects in the fight against the pandemic. In the context of the pandemic, economic decline, rising unemployment and emerging social problems, promoting that spirit further through facilitating community organizations is essential. These organizations not only have the role of crowd funding to support those in need, but also the active backbone in promoting mutual love, mutual support and creating change together to change and restore livelihoods for the vulnerable after the pandemic passes.

4.3. Migrant worker adaptation to COVID-19 impact

Choose to stay or go home

When asked whether they were to stay or return to their hometowns during the pandemic, 55.67 percent of respondents chose to stay in the city, but there is a large difference between the two big cities. If 70.67 percent of workers in Hanoi chose to go home, only 18 percent of workers in Ho Chi Minh City chose this option. The relationship between workers in Ho Chi Minh City and their working place appears to be stronger, as is evidenced by the higher rate of temporary registration of female migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh City than that in Hanoi. For those who stay, the most difficult thing they encountered was mobility restriction. For street vendors, lottery tickets or junk-food sellers, this directly affected employment and income. About 30.5 percent of respondents confirmed they had difficulties due to lack of food, while the level of difficulty in Hanoi is higher than in Ho Chi Minh City. This is also one of the reasons why more people who moved to Hanoi chose to return to their hometown than those in Ho Chi Minh City.

Table 23 : Difficulties of workers to choose staying in the city

Contents	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh	General
Lack of food	37.5	28.0	30.5
Restricted travel	96.6	88.6	90.7
Difficulty in finding accommodation	3.4	0.8	1.5

Difficulty in accessing information and communicating with family	5.7	4.1	4.5
Difficulty in accessing support from family	12.5	1.6	4.5
Others	10.2	5.7	6.9

Source: Survey results of the research team

“... The COVID-19 pandemic broke out. The parents and children who worked freelance in the poor and small village did not have any income during that period of time. Some people have left, but their parents and children do not dare to return because they do not know what will happen next and are also afraid of stigma against people who come back from the covid-affected zone. Parents and children in a rented room of less than 10 square meters, including all cooking and sleeping activities. Because there is no income, daily living must be minimized and unnecessary expenses cut, even many meals have to be replaced with instant noodles ...

(P deeply broken, female, 24 years old, informal sector, Hanoi)

“The whole family also chooses to stay in the city rather than going back to the hometown because they obey the government travel restriction recommendation, stay in one place to avoid the spread of the disease. In addition, there is no job back home, and transportation costs are expensive, so I try to stick.

(In-depth interview, female, 48 years old, Street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City)

“I chose to go back to my hometown to avoid pandemic because I could not earn money here while still having to spend a lot of money. In the hometown, I have neighbours around to be able to ask for support....”

(In-depth interview, female, 31 years old, street vendor, Hanoi)

"When the pandemic broke out, the whole country implemented social distancing and students stopped go to school. The school was closed, so I went home to avoid the pandemic, it meant that there was no income."

(In-depth interview, female, 51 years old, non-permanent maid at a kindergarten, Hanoi)

Choose to change jobs

The number of workers changing jobs due to the impact of COVID's pandemic is not high, and for those who changed job, they only switched to other simple jobs under the informal sector. Evaluating the degree of difficulty in job changing, 88.23 percent said they had difficulty in changing to another job, of which 11.76 percent rated it as very difficult. It seems that it is easier to find or switch to new job in Hanoi compared with in Ho Chi Minh City, as shown in the table below.

Table 24 : Assess the degree of difficulty in job change

Level of difficulty	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Easy to find a job	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.00
Easier to find a job	2	22.4	0	0.0	2	5.88
Normal	0	0.0	2	8.0	2	5.88
Difficult to find a job	5	55.2	21	84.0	26	76.47
Hard to find a job	2	22.4	2	8.0	4	11.76
Total	9	100.0	25	100.0	34	100.00

Source: Survey results of the research team

“The pandemic resulted in me having to find another job to generate income. In addition to selling bread in the morning and evening, I also sell groceries: cigarettes, drinking water, extra income to cover the already difficult life. The pandemic has made it even more difficult, ”

(In-depth interview, female, 48 years old, Street vendor, Ho Chi Minh City

Choose to cut spending

Due to declining income and unstable jobs these workers are forced to adapt to new living conditions. Up to 51,33 percent said they had to use their savings, but in fact for people with low incomes, it is not easy to have money to save, 45,83 percent had to borrow from banks and relatives. People in Hanoi has higher rate of borrowing from bank or relatives (62%) compared with Ho Chi Minh City (29.7%), while the rate of using savings in Hanoi is lower than that of Ho Chi Minh City, 40.7% and 62% respectively. The number of people who applied for local/agency benefits is very small, only 3,33 percent, less than 12% of cases of using free community donations. This number implies that in times of crisis and emergency the actions from community to support the needed are fast and timely. The other strategies of people to deal with the income cut is reduce spending (15.83%).

Table 25 : Employee choice when income is reduced due to COVID-19 pandemic

Plan	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent	Amount	Percent
Must use savings	122	40.7	186	62.0	308	51.33
Instalment payment	15	5.0	2	0.7	17	2.83
Must borrow from relatives/banks	186	62.0	89	29.7	275	45.83
High-interest loans (black credit)	0	0.0	2	0.7	2	0.33
Must apply for local/agency benefits	16	5.3	4	1.3	20	3.33
Use donations, donations, and free donations	12	4.0	58	19.3	70	11.67
No answer	57	19.0	38	12.7	95	15.83

Source: Survey results of the research team

“When there was no pandemic, she worked 2 shifts a day, in the morning she sold sticky rice, and in the afternoon, she sold potatoes at the hospital gate. Counting carefully every penny of spending to save for loan interest and medicine for her children, “Each pill receipt is 200,000 dong, each time in the hospital costs a million, sometimes tens of millions, not to mention having to hire the head of the health centre to check, monitor and inject drugs every week.” Caring for her child so attentively, but very little for herself. The whole spending on room rental with electricity and water is only 700,000 per month. The room is small, cramped, only enough for 1 bed and 1 wardrobe. The metal roof in Hanoi’s summer is like a frying pan, but she accepted all, sacrificing everything for her children.

COVID-19 was like a whirlwind that rushed in and took away all the little she had: jobs to sustain lives, savings to pay off debts, her children’s health and most importantly: In the calmness to cope with her inherent difficulties.

Unable to work, no income. The eldest son was hospitalized because of drug resistance symptoms. Everything seemed to pull her down into the depths of despair. The only thing she could do to maintain her life at that time was to borrow money from the bank and relatives.

(In-depth interview, female, 52 years old, street vendor, Hanoi)

Future choices when back to life from the pandemic

At the time of the survey at the end of July, the COVID-19 pandemic was under control for 2 months with no new cases. However, when asked whether the pandemic would continue to break out, more than 60 percent of respondents believed pandemic outbreak would return. When comparing between the two cities, this number is very different, 65,33 percent of the respondents in Hanoi said that the pandemic would not return while 85,67 percent of the respondents in Ho Chi Minh City said that the pandemic would return. This is also the difference related to regional characteristics and political and cultural conditions.

“The pandemic is still going on all over the world, but seeing the government doing very well, I don’t think the pandemic will return in our country, Anyway, we still have to trust the government and will try our best to make up for the difficulties caused by the pandemic before...”

(In-depth interview, female, 48 years old, Street vendor, Hanoi)

When asked how the pandemic returning affects their level of anxiety, nearly a quarter of respondents were worried about their safety and their family’s safety, compared to only 17,7 percent, saying they have had previous experience so no more worries. However, when asked whether to stay or return to the hometown, most of the respondents chose to stay because it is difficult to find other jobs if they return to their hometowns. Some said if they return to their hometown, they would temporarily stop migrating back to the city.

Table 26 : Response of respondents if disease outbreaks resume (percent)

Level	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh	General
Worry for the safety of yourself and your family	33.7	53.7	47.9
Experienced so no worry	10.6	20.6	17.7
No answer	55.7	25.7	34.4
Total	100	100	100

Table 27 : Option to stay or go home if there is another outbreak (percent)

Selection	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh	General
Will return home	50.0	10.9	22.2
Will stay in place and comply with medical regulations	40.4	66.5	59.0
No answer	9.6	22.6	18.8
Total	100	100	100

Source: Survey results of the research team

5. CONCLUSIONS

Through the literature review and field surveys in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, some conclusions can be drawn about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on female migrant workers in the informal sector as follows:

1. *Characteristics:* Female migrant workers in the informal sector in large urban areas come mainly from rural areas with a majority at the middle age group. Because most of them have low education and are unskilled, when migrating to urban areas, they are likely to find labour-intensive jobs. The main occupation of this group is heavily associated with the streets including peddling, selling lottery tickets and scrap. Migrant workers' livelihoods are generally difficult, except for domestic workers who live with their employers, most of them live in accommodation with capricious living conditions.
2. *The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many difficulties for* female migrant workers working in the informal sector. It can be said that this is the group of workers that are most severely and immediately affected when the pandemic broke out because their livelihoods being strongly bonded with the street.
 - a. The travel restriction during the outbreak forced these workers to take off work, resulting in a decrease or loss of income. Many people who are still trying to sell goods are facing a decrease in the number of buyers. In freelance occupations, only homecare groups are able to keep their jobs, or even more, when the demand for living at home increases, this appears to be a rare group least affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. The majority of migrant workers live in rented house, all aspects of social security are affected due to reduced income and travel restrictions. In basic welfare dimensions, food is affected first when workers do not have or partially lost their income, so they are forced to cut down on food spending. Through survey data and field observations, the daily meals of this group are of low nutritional content and the food quality is not guaranteed. Because the workers themselves usually have minimal living expenses, it becomes even more difficult when the outbreak occurred.
 - c. Other aspects of well-being including accommodation, electricity and water do not seem to have any changes in the expense of the migrant workers because this cost group is linked with the accommodation cost, which have been at the lowest possible spending portion of the migrant workers. Most workers even chose to come back to their old renting place upon their return to cities from their hometown right after the lockdown measures have been lifted. The main reason for this is the feeling of belonging and bonding with the former place.

“Making a living on a regular basis is difficult. Since the pandemic broke out, people stayed home and I didn't have work to do. We had no job and could not afford the renting fee, so I and my husband returned home with our children. Back home with so many worries and worries, no work to do, just stay home, all daily expenses must be calculated, scrutinized, and limited spending as much as possible. All activities also changed. The level of anxiety increased day by day, we were so much worried that the spread of pandemic would never end, and never know when we can actually to return to a normal life to make ends meet and raise our children.”

(In-depth interview, female, 42 years old, Collecting scrap metal, Hanoi)

d. COVID-19 has made migrant workers pay more attention to health issues and change their behaviour in health problems. However, most workers still consult with medicine sellers when they have a flu or feel sick instead of going to health facilities to have proper examination and consultation from doctors. Vietnam's universal health insurance has covered nearly 90 percent of the population¹³. Most of the interviewed migrant workers are covered by the health insurance. Nevertheless, they rarely would get benefit from the health insurance program due to the decentralized policy of insurance that requires them to register with the permanent address (their hometown) and could not access the insurance system at central level in big cities. This is also one of the difficulties of migrant workers in general and female migrant workers in particular.

e. The survey also shows that the informal sector female migrant workers have strictly followed the government's medical recommendations during the pandemic. Although travel restrictions directly affected their livelihoods, they followed the authority's order and guidance to refrain from gathering or going out, always wear masks in the public space and wash hand more often.

f. Female migrant workers in the informal sector get updated information about the pandemic mainly via traditional communication channel such as television and word of mouth. This is related to the limited access to information technology and the living habits of female migrant workers. Most workers have telephones, so texting from authorities during pandemic peak times is also a good channel for bringing information to migrant workers.

3. *The main factor affecting* the well-being of female migrant workers in the short-term comes from the social and physical distancing policy, causing them to lose income temporarily. However, in the long run, along with the overall effects on the socio-economic life of the country the economic downturn, the decreasing purchasing power of the market will wreak havoc on the livelihoods of informal sector workers. In addition, the overall employment of the country is affected. By June 2020, there are more than 30 million workers nationwide¹⁴ affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Thus, creating pressure on job competition as unemployed workers in the formal sector move to look for jobs in the informal sector.

4. *Female migrant workers adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic*

a. Despite many impacts on their lives and well-being, female migrant workers in the informal sector still chose to stay in the city to work instead of going back to their hometowns. If they go back to their hometown, they don't know what to do. It seems to them that their livelihoods have been attached to these big cities.

b. Even if there is a new outbreak, fully aware of its impact, they would still choose to stay in the city to make a living. The other thing is that they are calmer despite having anxiety and asserting their compliance with government's health regulations.

¹³ Tuấn Vũ, *About 90 percent of Vietnam population are covered by health insurance*, 2020 <https://vnexpress.net/gan-90-nguoi-viet-tham-gia-bao-hiem-y-te-4176870.html>

¹⁴General Statistics Office, *Labor and employment report for the first 6 months of the year*, June 2020

c. With the limited job availability, changing jobs is very difficult for them. Although most of them cannot work during the pandemic time, they still patiently wait and hope for the pandemic to be over so they could return to their old jobs. For the majority of these groups, whether they either return to their hometown or work in existing jobs, the chances of successfully changing jobs are extremely low.

d. The most commonly applied alleviation measure by female migrant workers is saving. To be able to save money, they have to cut down even basic needs spending such as food. Borrowing money to survive through the difficult times has also become quite popular, which on the one hand shows the severe poverty levels of workers, on the other hand also shows the good tradition of peer support in the community and relatives of the Vietnamese people.

e. Vietnam's success story in the prevention of COVID-19 over the past time requires not only reasonable government decisions but also the will and joint efforts of everyone. The migrant worker in the informal sector group is the most severely affected group by the pandemic, and they have demonstrated a spirit of consensus and adherence to the public medical guidelines.

5. *Support from the government, social organization and community to female migrant workers in informal sector*

a. Central and local governments at all levels have made great efforts to step in to support those severely affected by COVID. Policies and funding have been promptly enacted and prioritized. However, direct support can only be implemented quickly and relatively favourable for the policy beneficiaries who are already in a government book at the local level such as pensioners, the poor, and near poor households. While other targets such as workers in the informal sector still face many difficulties and bigger challenges, even life-threatening risks.

b. Properly and promptly promulgated policies are not enough. There should be a synchronized and effective implementation measure, minimizing administrative procedures, especially in the implementation of the policy of payment to support the group of migrant workers. It is necessary to have a simpler administrative procedure that still ensure the right targets and the right regime for migrant workers. This is even more difficult because this is a group that often has less permanent registered address, even not having identification documents and a fixed address.

c. Support from social organizations, philanthropists and sponsors have played an important part in the joint effort to support the vulnerable. These supports are very timely, flexible and creative that are closely aligned with the essential needs of the targets. The procedure for getting support from this source almost does not cause any hindrance to the recipient. The initiators of these activities come from social organizations, charity organizations, clubs, groups that have been active in the past or arise according to situations, often by active individuals and entrepreneurs, have boosted the spirit of sharing and giving to support community in need.

d. To apply for the state support it is time-consuming for workers. People are required to prepare the necessary documents, and they may need to travel back to their hometowns to apply at their communes. There is a complementary source of support, the immediate contributions and support from social organizations, sponsors can help provide small but timely assistance to the people in need.

6. RECOMMENDATION

As stated at the outset of the report, COVID-19 has been impacting all subjects of society but the most affected group is female migrant workers in informal sector. The immediate impacts have been seen clearly, however, given the unpredictability about the ending time of the Covid-19 the long-term impacts of the pandemic on this target group are likely to increase. COVID-19 will gradually erode the economy as well as the health in general, and consequently all aspects of life of female migrant workers are affected. Therefore, the social security policies for this target group should include both the immediate and the long-term measures.

In short-term:

- The disbursement of the emergency assistance package issued by the Government has extended to cover the informal sector. However, in reality, due to the procedural requirements, migrant workers in informal area have not been able to access the support. The government should take immediate measures to reach these target groups, including the use of local collaborators and making payment based on citizenship identification regardless of location of residence. This helps the support reaching those in need, while, at the same time, could avoid overlapping and duplicating of payment. This is possible as the current technology infrastructure can allow entry and payment checks on a unified interface.
- The support payment to COVID-19 pandemic needs to be public and transparent. There have been some reports showing that this payment has gone to the wrong beneficiaries. This causes injustice and discontent in society especially during the time of the pandemic. Although workers in the informal sector lacks necessary information and ability to control, the support payment should be supervised by social organizations and citizen.
- Create conditions for social organizations and individuals to participate in assistance activities. The role of local government should be promoted as this agency clearly grasps specific information about those in need of support. There is need of socializing the support through providing official information while facilitating assistance from social organizations and volunteer supporters. Some localities still have doubts about the support activities of non-state organizations.
- In terms of public health, continue to promote propaganda about pandemic prevention to remind migrant workers of prudent preventive measures. As this is a group of people whose livelihood is associated with the street, it is inevitable that they have to go out to make a living. This is also the most vulnerable group, so the propaganda on hygiene and fitness enhancement as well as the prevention of viruses and harmful agents needs to be continuously deployed. It is worth mentioning that they often access information through traditional channels such as television, word of mouth, thus it is necessary to choose a corresponding form of communication.

In long term:

- The solution to economic recovery, job creation and stimulus is a long-term, holistic measure. Currently, the Government has introduced fiscal and financial solutions to support production and stimulate demand, but being a country with very high economic openness in the world, COVID-19's influence on production and domestic consumption is significantly dependent on situation outside the national borders. In the context of limited domestic resources, the first priority is to efficiently use available resources, and avoid loss and waste. Losing and wasting not only lead to stagnation of development but also to the decrease of the people's trust. The biggest lessons learned since the COVID-19 pandemic happened are the people's consensus and trust in the Government's decisions, so the central and local governments need to act to maintain this trust.
- The employment solution for migrant workers needs a specific strategy. On the one hand, the street economy is a solution to jobs and livelihoods for a majority of rural unskilled labours who migrate to the big cities. However, it is necessary to have holistic planning and management to maintain stabilized society of security and order, while ensuring a safe livelihood for workers. On the other hand, in rural areas, it is necessary to have an appropriate vocational training strategy for local workers. This requires the rural vocational training program to calculate and evaluate the number of

workers who want to migrate to provide appropriate advice and orientation. Vocational training should not only focus on job content, but also equip fundamental skills such as survival skills and career change in the city.

- Currently, according to state regulations, informal workers especially those without temporary residence registration, are not entitled to social security services. The case studies in this current research also raised the problem of not having synchronous management of residence declaration in provinces and cities, where the origin and destination cannot be linked to manage migrants. The project of removing household registration and registering chip-mounted identity cards has been approved, but with a 5-year roadmap to build infrastructure, the current management still places heavy emphasis on the destination authority. Thus, the destination authority needs to pay close attention to assisting migrants in stabilizing their lives and providing support in emergencies. Local health stations should open their doors to those who are not registered temporary residence and absence from medical counselling. At the same time, it is necessary to increase propaganda so that workers know how to care for and protect their health, encouraging them to seek for public health services in the local destination.
- It can be said that mobilizing the community's cooperation in pandemic prevention and control is a great success of the Party and State. Especially raising the spirit of sharing difficulties, community solidarity and love has been proved to have positive effects on fighting against the pandemic. In the context of the pandemic, economic decline, rising unemployment and emerging social problems, it is crucial to continue promoting this spirit through facilitating community organizations. These organizations not only have the role of community money-raising activities to support those in need, but also play as active nuclei in promoting love, support and creating change together to restore livelihoods for the vulnerable people when the pandemic passes.

Based on the survey results, the research team proposes some recommendations for the two cities as follows:

For Hanoi City:

Firstly, it is necessary to strengthen communication, dissemination and specific policies to support female migrants. Because informal jobs are flexible and mainly based on the streets, it is crucial to enrich propaganda content through posters, bill tables and leaflets. This approach is helpful as migrant women often work as street vendors and collectors, and they mainly move on the streets every day.

Secondly, as most of migrant workers live in a concentrated rented residency, it is possible to set up a small group to support them with knowledge and the procedures to receive support from the government, community organizations and sponsors.

Thirdly, it is recommended that environmental sanitation in the inns and residential areas of migrant workers should be promoted to provide a healthy environment and ensure good health of the community.

Fourthly, the city should consider a stronger management scheme for residency registration to support migrant workers in stabilizing their lives in the city as well as supporting the smooth evacuation program of municipal authority to this group of population in times of pandemic.

For Ho Chi Minh City:

First, it is necessary to promote propaganda as well as provide information about the support packages of organizations and sponsors through the distribution of leaflets, bill tables or loudspeakers.

Second, it is to strengthen the grassroots management system to raise awareness of reporting temporary resident as well as medical reporting among informal female migrants. This would help reduce the situation of lack of support information or subjective awareness of not receiving support from social organizations or sponsors of this target group.

Case story 1.

Ms. Cao Thi Phuong Thao, came from Quang Binh, she was born in 1983 and got married with 2 children. The main income generating job in her family is from selling vegetables in the market.

Ms. Thao shared: Because her parents were very poor, after graduating from junior high school, she dropped out of school and worked to earn money to help her family. After a few years working in the hometown with low income, she decided to go to Saigon to do small own business to help her family. When going to Saigon, she has experienced many jobs, working as hired labour, selling street vendors, selling lottery tickets, or fruits at the market. Although they are hard works, she has to do to support the family. “Working in Saigon, I just came back to visit my family once per year on Tet holiday. I get used to it forever and consider this place as my hometown” - she smiled and said. At her early time in Saigon, she had earned about 5 million per month. She had sent her family 1 million and used 4 million to spend on her own life.



(Photograph: At the place where she sells vegetables, in a small alley)

By the age of 24, she also knew and had feelings for her current husband. Both of them come from other places to make a living in Saigon, so they sympathize and share with each other and decided to get married. Her family has rented a small room of about 15 square meters. Every day, the couple go to the wholesale market to pick up goods and sell along street. They used a motorbike as a means of transportation.

Before COVID-19, her monthly income was about 6-7 million. Along with her husband income from motorbike taxi job, total income was enough to pay for the family’s life cost. That can cover for the children to go to school. She had satisfied with a peaceful life. Covid-19 pandemic has upset her family’s life. She has been not able to go to the market; her husband cannot get any passengers. The family situation was getting more difficult. The family expenses must be more economical, they only buy the necessary things and have to use the savings.

With the question “how to deal with COVID”, she said she had to change her job. Before COVID-19, she sold vegetables at the market, in the social distance time, it was difficult to sell because people mainly bought vegetables at supermarkets. She had to find another job as a seasonal garment worker for more than a month before returning to sell vegetables and fruit when the disease was controlled. “At the beginning of the new wave of pandemic, I also felt very worried especially about not earning money to take care of my children to study, and about everyone’s health. But after that, I also got balance, following the government's recommendations to restrict travel, wear a mask when going out, and wash hands”. The pandemic was quickly controlled. The couple's daily livelihoods comeback on the motorbike with small trading fruits and vegetables. Although her income is lower than before, she shares: “Even though income is lower, we are happy that the disease is under control and can work again”.

When the disease was announced, her family decided to stay in Ho Chi Minh and not move back to her hometown because: “coming back home I don't have a job, I still have to pay rent here and traveling costs are expensive”. And another reason is that she is aware of the danger of the spread of disease, so her family chooses to stay in a place and does not move around too much to avoid spreading the disease.

During this outbreak, her family also received support of 1 million VND from the government. She said “it is not difficult to receive, just write down enough information to tell where I am living. The staffs are very enthusiastically supportive. In addition, I also receive support of rice from the sponsors ... I feel very happy, very heart-warming. I believe: Vietnam will win over the pandemic, and everything will be all right again”.

Case story 2

“Waiting is not scary. The scary thing is not knowing how long to wait” - That was the mood of Ms Pham Thi Tam from Phu Tho province during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Tam was born in 1989 in Ba Vi, Hanoi. After finishing secondary school, she left home for Hanoi to find a job. Introduced by an acquaintance, she joined a famous chunk cake factory, got married, and gave birth. Her husband is from Phu Tho, working as a motorbike taxi driver. Over 10 years rolling around in Hanoi city, the couple struggled to raise their three small children. The oldest is only ten, the second child is seven, and the youngest is just ten months old.

Both Tam’s paternal and maternal families are not well off, so she and her husband have to rely on their own labour. She said that, previously, she had only worked at the factory for eight hours a day, earning about 5,000,000 VND/month, but it was fine because she was fed and sheltered. Getting married, giving birth, renting a private house, etc. are among the few with increasing cost, forcing her to pick up more goods from the factory to sell for every bit of penny. In the morning, she took the goods early from 5:00 am, and after selling them all out, she went back to the factory and worked until 7:00 pm. The salary was also better, with an average of 10,000,000 VND/month. However, this combined with her husband’s income was just enough to support the grandparents looking after the older children in the countryside, hire a babysitter here, rent, diapers, milk.... Yet, she still felt fortunate to have a job to pay for her children’s schooling, without having to borrow from anyone. “Health and strength put hunger at bay” - she confided.

Tam never bothered worrying about the word “Hungry” when she was still healthy to work. That was when COVID-19 struck, and the order of social distancing was implemented.

The chunk cake factory closed to prevent pandemic spread, street vending was forbidden. Tam could not return to her hometown amid a pandemic in Hanoi. It is not safe to ride a bus with a child, and there was the risk of transmitting the disease to her family. They chose to stay. “The entire day, my husband and I just bustled around in the room, from looking after our children to cooking meals. I remembered me only going to the market from home and back,” “Going home is to close the door, not communicate with anyone, even neighbours,” “My savings are running out, but I still have to eat, pay rent, milk and diapers for my child, but I don’t know when I can go back to work as normal.”

The only thing she could do was listen to the daily news, following rising daily cases, how many severe prognoses, how many to be discharged, and longing day by day for the removal of social distancing. Ms Tam knows too well that her not going to work is for the common good, something that everyone SHOULD do and MUST do.

However, the fear of not knowing how long to live in such uncertainty always made her uneasy. If it lasted forever, where would we find the money to get by? Old parents in the countryside and her children, how are they going to live? Questions arose continuously, but the answers don't depend on her. Sometimes, because she was too stressed-out. Tam fell out with her husband in angry disputes. The difficult situation confounded her mind; a life surrounding the four walls made her feel suffocated and frustrated.

When asked about the State's relief aid for the unemployed in the COVID-19 period, Tam raised her eyes with a yes. She completed the procedures but got tangled up in the local government settlement, and so far has received no support from the state. "When I registered here. They rejected and said I didn't have a permanent residence in the city. I would have to register in my hometown. When I returned after the disease had stalled. They said I needed to apply for the benefits at my workplace. I was clueless, so I just gave up".

In Hanoi, Tam knows about places that distribute free staples to people in need, but she and her husband told each other to hold out, sparing the supplies for people who need them more. If deprivation left her with no choice, she would have to go there. But as an adult with health and strength, Tam felt embarrassed to ask for charity.

Tam, like many other informer sector workers, was directly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. There is anxiety, fear, and panic. But, in the end, I still see in her the calmness and resilience against the turmoil.



(Photograph: At the place where she sells Banh Gio and Banh Khuc (chunk cake))

When COVID-19 wind down, Tam had to sit further in the sidewalk. It was more difficult to sell the cake this way.

The chunk cake factory reopened, production was limited. Again, Tam started taking and selling goods early, although the number of customers had declined by half and the selling spot was pushed back from the main street. Earnings are also less... Tough as it is, I still see her joy being able to go back to work, with the belief that things will be fine, if not then it is not the end. Simply put, if there was a job, Tam would exert herself to earn money for her children and their grandparents. Just as she said: as long as she is healthy and strong, she can earn money and not worry about empty stomachs.

REFERENCES

General Statistics Office, Report on socio-economic situation in the first 8 months of 2020

General Statistics Office, Report on socio-economic situation in the first 6 months of 2020

General Statistics Office, Labor and employment report for the first 6 months of the year 2020

<https://www.worldbank.org/vi/country/vietnam>

<https://www.ilo.org/hanoi/lang--en/index.htm>

<https://www.undp.org/>

<http://vinanet.vn>

<http://www.molisa.gov.vn>

<http://baobaohiemxahoi.vn>

<http://dangcongsan.vn>