

RESEARCH ON THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ISSUE OF SOCIAL SECURITY OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR IN HANOI AND HO CHI MINH CITY AFTER THE 2ND AND 4 TH OUTBREAKS

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On behalf of the research team

Team leader

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1.ABSTRACT

After two surveying rounds on the same target group, the research team has had a relatively comprehensive perspective of the impacts of the Covid-19 on different life aspects of women migrant workers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. The findings about the impacts of the pandemic on the research target groups through 2 outbreaks is quite consistent with an upward trend in terms of intensity for the 4th outbreak. Compared to the 2nd outbreak, only a few life aspects are significantly affected (a decline in income leads to a tightened budget for food, while in reality the worker group is already at the bare minimum standards of living, even without Covid-19).

The Covid-19 outbreak is still developing unpredictably and is showing no signs of ending. For the women migrant workers in informal sector, the impacts on their social security aspects are only getting more severe:

- In terms of employment, all kinds of works were affected. Street-related jobs were more severely impacted and the severity tends to increase throughout the outbreaks. Data showed that the impact from the 4th outbreak is significant, with 26% of respondents falling into the “Unemployed” category, compared to the 1.5% of the 2nd outbreak. On the other hand, workers appear to have familiarized themselves with the situation and prepared themselves more actively.
- In terms of income, as the later outbreak proves to be more severe than the previous ones, 78.5% of respondents claimed that they received no income in November 2021, compared to the 48.3% of July 2020. The decline in income due to the 4th outbreak is also greater than previous ones. On average, income fell by more than half, from 5,905,000 VND/month to 2,586,000 VND/month.
- Due to reduced income, workers had to cut down on their expenses significantly. Measurements with basic indicators showed that the percentage of food expense cut due to the 4th outbreak is as high as 87.5%, compared to 77.3% of the 2nd outbreak.
- In terms of residence, 68% of workers still remained in the city despite the severity of the Covid-19 outbreak, whereas the figure in July 2020 was 55.67%. While only 9.0% of respondents changed residence in July 2020, by November 2021 this number doubled, mostly due to financial hardship.
- Covid-19 also changed workers’ perspective on health issues. The percentage of workers seeking assistance at medical facilities rose from 10% in the 2nd outbreak to 17% in the third and 22.5% in the fourth. However, when they are actually ill, workers tend to choose the least expensive option: buying medicine on their own or consulting pharmacists, rather than getting a check-up at medical facilities.
- The respondents are also more responsible with disease prevention and containment, with 93.0% of respondents choosing to “Limit social contact”, an increase from 66.8% of July 2020.
- The most common information channel through which people can access new regarding the pandemic is through those around them, with the figure jumping from 54.2% to 71%

through 2 surveying rounds. This insight showed the great confidence and dependence people have on word-of-mouth.

The informal female migrant worker group also received assistance from local authorities and donors, but these assistances are still limited. About 14.2% of women migrant workers in the two major cities responded that they received assistance as of July 2021. By November 2021, this number increased to 54%, but it is still lower than the Government's social security policy objectives. The primary reason why workers were unable to receive assistance was that they were unaware of the information. This percentage did show a decrease in November 2021 compared to July 2020 but the difference is insignificant. In addition to the right direction and policies of the Party, the Government and local authorities on mobilizing all resources towards disease prevention and containment, agencies, organizations and groups of individuals are also voluntarily established to contribute in disease prevention and containment, as well as helping marginalized parts of the population. The assistance from donors and social organizations of the 4th wave have also doubled to 42.5% from 23.7% of the 2 wave's surveying rounds. This proved to be an effective assistance channel, joining efforts with the government in minimizing the impact of the pandemic.

From the analyses, judgement and the result of the surveying rounds, the research team put forward some recommendations and experiences, contributing to better quality and implementation of social security policies for marginalized groups, improving the medical and social security support system in the context of a pandemic and other emergency situations.

2. GENERAL INFORMATION

2.1. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed serious challenges and left society with unprecedented consequences to face and solve in the next few decades, including issues in public health, the readiness and response of the medical and social security systems, changing modes of production, recovering broken supply chains, maintaining employment and post-pandemic economic recovery. Among which, the social security issues and maintaining employment of different population groups (especially the vulnerable population group) are always receiving attention from the Party, the Government and authorities, with constant up-to-date policies and measures. Moreover, an invaluable factor at play when society falls into hardship is the love and support that the people give each other. It is a beautiful cultural and humane value that has been preserved by the Vietnamese people for thousands of years.

At the time of this research's design and development (September 2021), the Covid-19 pandemic's development was still extremely serious and complicated on a global scale, with no end in the foreseeable future. In Vietnam, the 4th Covid-19 outbreak began on April 27, 2021, inflicting unprecedented levels of damage with 500 thousand infected cases and 12 thousand deaths due to Covid¹. Ho Chi Minh City has gone into lockdown for months, but the situation has shown no sign of improving any time soon.

The declining economy has directly impacted workers from all groups, both official and informal. The situation is particularly dire for informal migrant workers, as millions of people find ways to return to their hometowns. Unemployment and homelessness were rising at a rapid pace.

Ever since the 2nd Covid outbreak, the Government has issued emergency aid packages. Among those receiving these packages were informal workers as long as they have an official registered residence, a requirement that women migrant workers often lack in order to receive these packages. It appears that women migrant workers suffered the most from Covid-19, yet they have the most difficulty in receiving assistance from the Government. Furthermore, aid packages are only temporary, the issue of social security for informal workers - women migrant workers in particular - needs to be thoroughly discussed, as them losing their jobs equate to a complete loss of income for themselves and their families.

So far, aid packages have been offered with more relaxed requirements, a wider range of recipients, including multiple groups of informal workers. These changes represented the fact that suggestions were received and the government are responsive to opinions, in order to provide better assistance to the people. However, with the pandemic rapidly worsening in scale and severity, migrant workers are even more negatively impacted compared to previous outbreaks and require more up-to-date research as well as recommendations.

The research team selected women migrant workers in informal sector in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in the 2nd and 4th Covid-19 outbreak as the subjects to explore the impacts made to their means of living and social security due to Covid-19, the assistance they received and their ability to access aid packages from local authorities. From these findings, the group indirectly assessed and made suggestions on deploying social security policies in the context of the pandemic. Furthermore, the support from the community, the donors and social organizations were also studied to better illustrate the role, method and impact that these groups have on women migrant workers in informal sector in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in the 2nd and 4th outbreaks.

¹ <https://vnexpress.net/covid-19/covid-19-viet-nam> visited on September 4, 2021

2.2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Objective: Compare the impacts of Covid-19 on social security issues of women migrant workers in informal sector in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in the 2nd and 4th Covid-19 outbreaks.

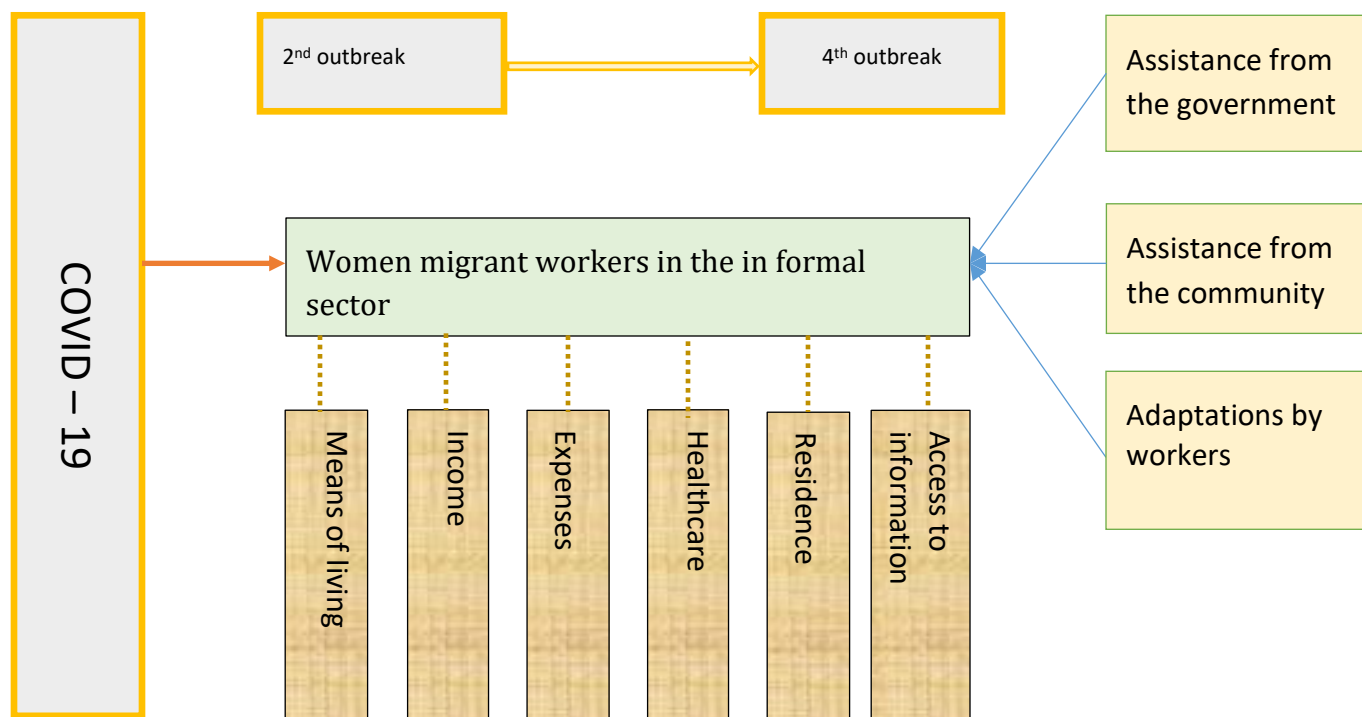
Subject: Women migrant workers in informal sector (without permanent residence in the city, possibly migrated from the countryside to cities in the same province or from other provinces)

Location: Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City

Research Questions:

- How did Covid-19 impact the social security aspect of women migrant workers in informal sector in major cities in Vietnam (Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City) in the 2nd and 4th outbreaks?
- What kind of assistance was offered by the government, social organizations and the community to women migrant workers in informal sector in major cities in Vietnam in the 2nd and 4th outbreaks?
- How did women migrant workers in informal sector adapt to the Covid-19 pandemic in the 2nd and 4th outbreaks?
- What recommendations can be made to improve the social security of women migrant workers in informal sector in major cities in Vietnam?

Research framework



2.3. METHODOLOGY

Data sources:

The data used in this research was collected from 2 surveying rounds. The first round was conducted in July 2020 and the second round was conducted in November 2021. The data used includes:

Secondary data sources:

This method is particularly important in considering the wider context of the Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts. In this research, document analysis was used on the following documents:

- Report on the 2nd Covid-19 outbreak on 600 samples of the same subject group by the group of authors, completed in December 2021
- Pandemic report by the Ministry of Health
- Report on employment, work and social security by the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs
- Statistics from the General Statistics Office of Vietnam
- Articles from conventional news outlet on the pandemic and its impacts on workers
- Reports on activities from social organizations related to assisting workers and the community during translation

These documents are categorized according to their relevance to impact assessment, including: (i) developing toolsets; and (ii) developing impact assessment report.

Primary data sources:

The first surveying round in July 2020:

Quantitative sample: 600 individuals in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City were randomly selected and directly surveyed.

Sample selection and data collection:

Selection criteria: Female, aged 18 to under 80, migrant (migrated from the countryside to urban areas and remained overnight)

The random selection method used in this research: 10 clusters were selected in cities, then 30 random samples were selected for each cluster. This is the minimum random sample size in social science, allowing for comprehensive and objective measurements. This method is usually used for small scale project assessments and usually return unbiased results.

The tool for this method is the quantitative questionnaire. The questionnaire is constructed with the information relevant to the research objective, including: General information of the respondent; income level and living habits, expenses, healthcare and the impacts Covid-19 had on them. The questions are constructed straightforwardly to allow for accurate results. Besides, the questionnaire also contains some qualitative questions, in order to collect more information from the respondent.

Qualitative survey: Thorough interview of 12 workers, from which 12 typical stories are constructed as evidence.

Typical stories are important in impact assessment reports, especially with projects that can significantly influence many socioeconomic issues. A particular case story was used during field research.

Content is extracted and compiled into typical stories, painting an accurate picture of women migrant workers in informal sector, informal laborers and the impacts of Covid-19 on their lives.

The second surveying round in November 2021:

Quantitative sample: 200 individuals in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City were randomly selected by phone number in the catalogue of the 600 individuals of the first surveying round and interviewed by phone.

The basic interview questions followed the structure of the first surveying round to ensure comparability. However, the research team added several questions to collect new information based on the development of the pandemic.

Some typical cases were explored through questionnaire-based interview when issues were found or to collect typical information.

When conducting the survey via phone call, the Research team has taken into account the case that there are phone numbers in the old list that cannot be reached, a random replacement method should be used to ensure that the sample structure is preserved.

Characteristics of the research target groups

The selected subjects for this research are women migrant workers in informal sector with the following characteristics:

Most of the respondents fall into the 30-55 age group - the group with a high probability for migration and high adaptability to new work environments, thanks to good health and rich experience. However, the numbers also showed that the percentage of workers above 55 years old is still high (over ¼ of total respondents). This age group is not part of the workforce so it is difficult for them to find employment in the formal sector. Despite this, they still migrate to major cities to find an income source. While migrating workers tend to be young (18-35 years old) with a higher percentage of female workers (60%) according to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam², workers in the informal sector tend to be much older. According to the research team, the percentage of people in the 19-29 age group slightly decreased, while the 55 and above age group saw a slight increase.

Table 1. Age distribution of respondents (%)

Age group	Data in July 2020	Data in November 2021
From 19 to 29 years old	8.1	7.5
From 30 to 45 years old	33.2	33.5
From 45 to 55 years old	33.7	32.5
55 years old and above	25.0	26.5
Total	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

² General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2015), *The 2015 National Internal Migration Survey*

The survey was conducted on the same group of subjects, which meant data regarding education level and marital status of the subjects remained unchanged. Most women migrant workers in informal sector have a low education level: they are mainly below Middle school level, only 14.17% graduated high school and 2.77% studied higher education. Most workers are married and have children, but the majority didn't bring their families with them - they send their money back to the countryside.

Data analysis

Quantitative data was processed using the SPSS software. Besides data frequency statistics, the software also allows for variable correlation processing.

The SPSS software (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) is a computer software used to analyze statistics and process collected data. This software is often used for social sciences research and econometrics. The advantages of the SPSS software are its ability to perform regression analysis such as nonparametric tests, descriptive statistics, validity assessment with the Cronbach's Alpha scale, co-integration analysis, linear regression, average assessment, analysis of variance, assessment with dummy variables or binomial regression...

The main commands used for analysis in this research are: Frequencies, Custom tables. SPSS is used to analyze the findings and assist in finding the factors that influenced the subjects, helping researchers correctly identify the problems and solve them effectively. The functions of the SPSS software are also diverse, ranging from simple tasks such as designing tables, charts, descriptive statistics, sample comparison using parametric and nonparametric standards, linear geometry, single-variable and multiple variables regression models.

In this research, the SPSS software was used to: input and cleanse data; process variables and manage data; compile and present data in the form of curves, tables, map; analyze data, calculate parameters and describe results.

The data is processed to investigate the characteristics of female migrants and informal workers, find the similarities and differences between the two areas of research, how Covid-19 affected female migrants and informal workers by analyzing factors such as income, expenses and living habits.

Utilizing the SPSS software in this research also helped the research team analyze and assess the correlation between the regions and age groups of the female migrants to find the main effect Covid-19 had on the lives of this subject group.

With the data from 600 responses in the first surveying round and 200 from the second, the SPSS software also helped with analyzing the main group of results, as well as the demands and wishes the respondents have for the government. From these results, the research team made recommendations on how to assist women migrant workers in informal sector.

Limitations: The Covid-19 pandemic is still showing no signs of ending. At the time of survey, the collected data can only reflect the impact of the pandemic on women migrant workers in informal sector after social distancing of the 2nd and 4th outbreaks were lifted.

Furthermore, due to limitation in time and budget, the survey can only be conducted in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city. The results of the research can only reflect the women migrant workers in major cities and not women migrant workers in other areas. This research can serve as orientation for future research teams to paint a clearer picture of women migrant workers in general.

3. GENERAL INFORMATION ON COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT

3.1. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM

Vietnam is currently combating the country's 4th Covid-19 outbreak. The pandemic is still developing unpredictably, despite the outbreak being gradually contained and daily death numbers going down. As of December 14, 2021, the 4th outbreak accounts for 1.423.217 infected cases with 27.678 deaths.

Table 2. Stages of Covid-19 development in Vietnam

Stage	Time	Total infected	Total death	Description
1	January 1 - July 24, 2020	415	0	First confirmed case in Ho Chi Minh City, originated in Wuhan
2	July 25, 2020 - January 27, 2021	1,136	35	The outbreak peaked in Da Nang for 36 days
3	January 28 - April 26, 2021	1,301	0	Outbreak originated and occurred primarily in Hai Duong (80% of all cases)
4	April 27, 2021 - December 14, 2021	The emergence of the Delta variant, outbreaks occurred in multiple locations and became widespread in Ho Chi Minh City and neighboring provinces		
	Nation total	1,423,217	27,678	
	Hanoi	18,837	0	
	HCMC	486,162	18,566	

Source: Ministry of Health

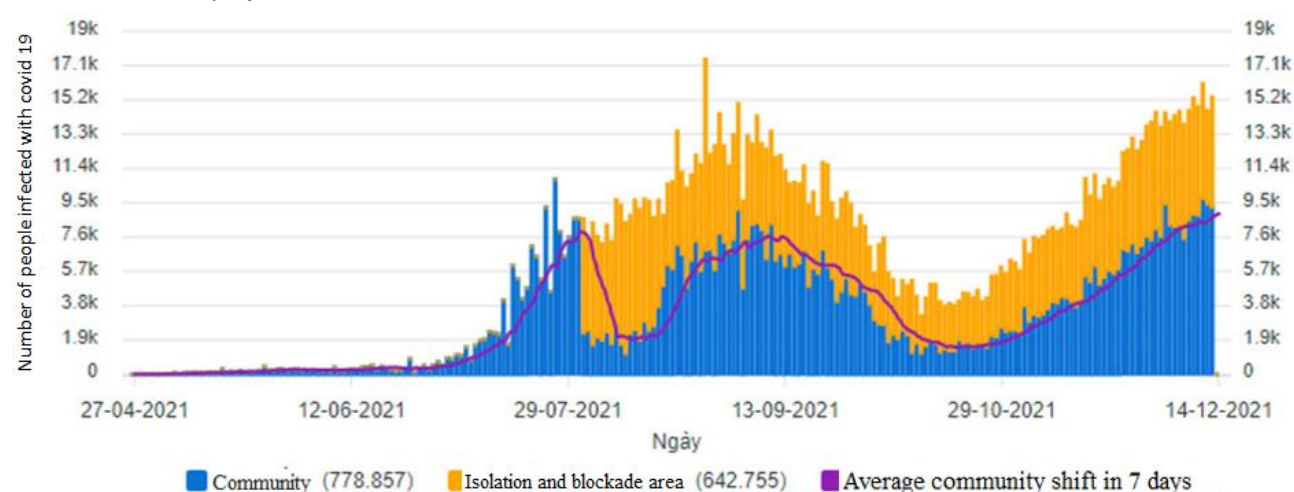


Figure 1 Covid-19 infection distribution in Vietnam from 27 April 2021 to 14 December 2021

Source: Ministry of Health³

³ [DỮ LIỆU COVID-19 TẠI VIỆT NAM \(CẬP NHẬT: 14/12/2021\) \(vncdc.gov.vn\)](https://vncdc.gov.vn)

3.2 THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19

According to statistics from the General Statistics of Vietnam, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the Vietnamese economy. More specifically, the 4th outbreak which began in July has caused Southeast, Southwest provinces and Hanoi to go in lockdown in accordance with Directive 16. The severe damage inflicted to economic centers has dragged the nation's 3rd quarter GDP of 2021 down by 6.17%⁴ compared to that of the same period last year. Despite this, the GDP of the first 9 months of 2021 still achieved a 1.42% growth compared the that of the 9 months of 2020. The service sector suffered the greatest, especially accommodation and food & beverages (down by 54.8% in the 3rd quarter of 2021), followed by transportation & warehousing, and wholesale & retail (21.1% and 20% respectively). Services that experienced growth are related to health, finances and media.

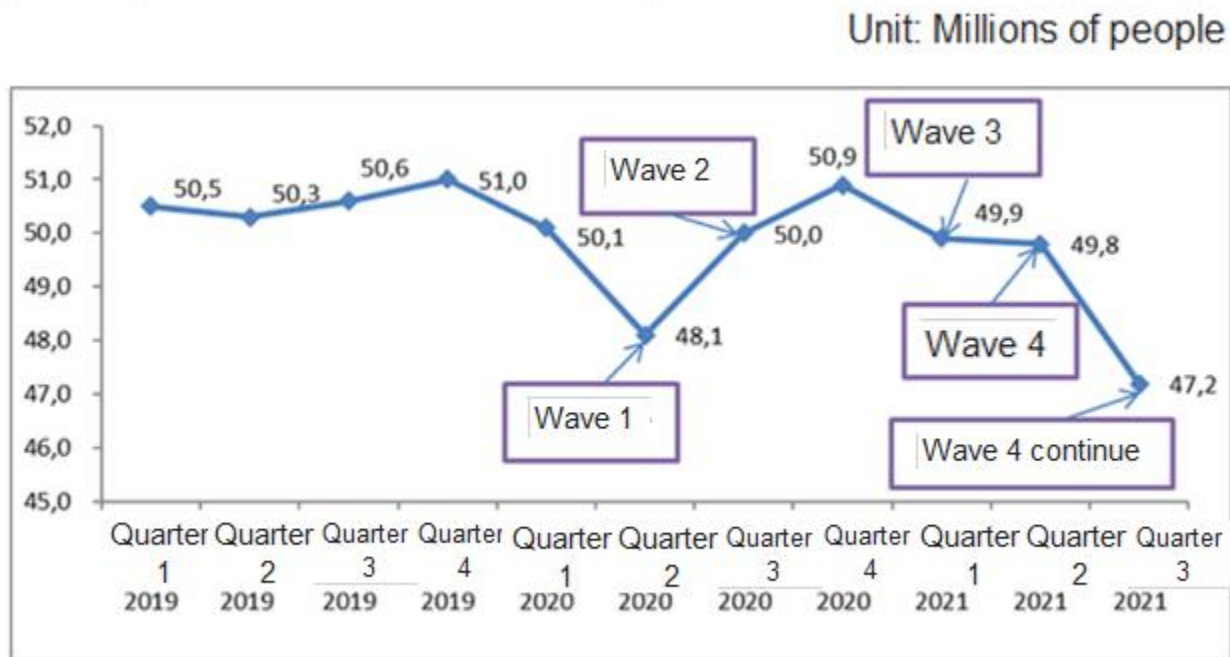


Figure 2 Employment by quarter, 2019 - 2021 period

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2021)

The economic decline correlated to the rise of unemployment in many areas. According to Covid-19: ILO Monitor - 8th edition, the impacts the pandemic had was worse than expected⁵. The Delta variant of the Coronavirus had inflicted severe damage to the Vietnamese labor market in the 3rd quarter of 2021. The Southeast region suffered the most serious consequences. In the 3rd quarter alone, the country recorded over 28.2 million individuals above 15 years old negatively affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, resulting in them losing their jobs, reduced work hours, reduced income. Of these 28.2 individuals, 4.7 million people lost their jobs, accounting for 16.5%; 14.7 million people had to go on hiatus, accounting for 51.1%; 12.0 million people had reduced work hours accounting for 42.7%; and 18.9 million people received reduced income, accounting for 67.2%⁶. The complex development of

⁴ <https://www.gso.gov.vn/du-lieu-va-so-lieu-thong-ke/2021/10/tac-dong-cua-dich-covid-19-den-tang-truong-cac-khu-vuc-kinh-te-quy-iii-nam-2021/> Last updated: December 14, 2021

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/hanoi/Informationresources/Publicinformation/Pressreleases/WCMS_824912/lang--vi/index.htm Last updated: December 14, 2021

⁶ <http://consosukien.vn/bao-cao-tac-dong-cua-dich-covid-19-den-tinh-hinh-lao-dong-viec-lam-quy-iii-nam-2021.htm> Last updated: December 14, 2021

the 4th Covid-19 outbreak has led to a significant drop in the work force. The size of the work force is at its lowest in the past 10 years.

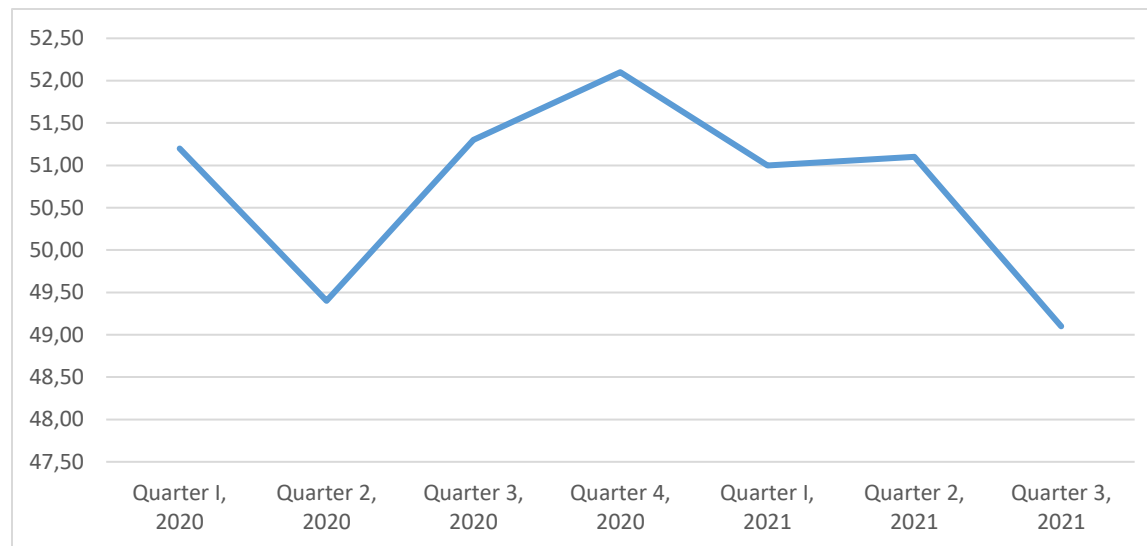


Figure 3 Work force by quarter in 2020 and 2021 (Unit: million people)

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2021)

The Covid-19 pandemic not only affected the formal sector, dropping its work force number but also spread to the informal sector, rendering workers unable to find employment like usual. The percentage of workers in the informal sector in the 3rd quarter of 2021 is 54.5%, a 2.9% decrease compared to the previous quarter and a 2.3% decrease compared to the same period last year. The percentage of informal workers in urban areas is 46.2%, a 2.4% decrease compared to the previous quarter and a 3.0% decrease compared to the same period last year. The percentage of informal workers in rural areas is 61.8%, a 2.9% decrease compared to the previous quarter and a 1.0% drop compared to the same period last year⁷.

4. PRIMARY FINDINGS

4.1. THE IMPACTS OF COVID-19 AFTER 2 OUTBREAKS AND THE RESPONSE OF WORKERS

Employment

The most basic reason for migration, as discovered by the research team and researches made by the Ministry of Labor, the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, stems from the issues of livelihood, employment and income. It is relatively easier for informal workers to seek low-skill employment in cities than in their hometowns. The characteristics of women migrant workers are that they usually do straightforward jobs that do not require skills. Except for those working as housekeepers or salesperson, most workers are in control of their work hours and organization. Due to the impacts of Covid-19, street-related jobs are severely affected: the percentage for street vendors dropped from 53.0% in July 2020 down to 45.0% by July 2021 and 28.5% in November 2021. The trend holds true for other groups when comparing figures before and after the 4th outbreak: lottery ticket vendors went

⁷ <http://consosukien.vn/bao-cao-tac-dong-cua-dich-covid-19-den-tinh-hinh-lao-dong-viec-lam-quy-iii-nam-2021.htm>

Last updated: December 14, 2021

from 11.5% down to 5.0%, stevedores dropped from 1.5% to 0.5%. The changes happened not because workers are moving to other jobs, but rather they just simply do not have jobs. While the subject group in July 2020 are all employed, by the beginning of the 4th outbreak about 1.5% are unemployed, and this figure jumped drastically to 26% after the outbreak. The high employment rate due to the 4th Covid-19 outbreak has led to numerous social security consequences on workers and society.

Table 3. Occupation of women migrant workers in informal sector before and after the 4th Covid-19 outbreak

Occupation	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Before July 2021	November 2021	Before July 2021	November 2021	Before July 2021	November 2021
Street vendors	33.0	18.0	57.0	39.0	45.0	28.5
Garbage collectors	16.0	11.0	2.0	1.0	9.0	6.0
Stevedores	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.0	1.5	0.5
Housekeepers	8.0	10.0	5.0	4.0	6.5	7.0
Lottery ticket vendors	2.0	1.0	21.0	9.0	11.5	5.0
Workers at food service, accommodation, tourism and healthcare facilities	8.0	6.0	3.0	4.0	5.5	5.0
Scrap collectors	26.0	23.0	7.0	4.0	16.5	13.5
Unemployed	2.0	23.0	1.0	29.0	1.5	26.0
Other	3.0	7.0	3.0	10.0	3.0	8.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

A surprising fact when comparing working conditions of workers is that the indicators for November 2021 are better than July 2020. 32.5% of respondents claimed that their work was happening as usual, whereas the figure for after the 2nd outbreak was 18.6%. This difference shows that workers and areas have prepared themselves and adapted better to the impact of the pandemic on employment. However, statistics also shows that the impact was significant, as 26.0% of respondents fell into the “Unemployed” category, compared to the 1.5% of the 2nd outbreak. Being unemployed means that workers were unable to cover their daily expenses. This reaffirms the fact that the population group most severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic is the informal migrant workers. As such, policies must be made to support this group in order to maintain social security.

The number for the group in the “Work terminated” category in the 4th outbreak was higher in Ho Chi Minh City than in Hanoi, 19.0% compared to 12.0%, respectively. This fact can also be seen through the impact assessment report of the 4th outbreak, as the pandemic was more severe in Ho Chi Minh City, significantly affecting its people in general and the informal migrant workers in particular. According to the Ministry of Health, from July 24, 2021 to 18:30, December 10, 2021, the number of

infected cases and deaths in Hanoi were 16.271 and 62, respectively, while the figures for Ho Chi Minh City were 484.602 infected cases and 18.632 deaths.

Table 4. Work status at the time of research

Assessment	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Work as usual, unchanged	7.3	42.0	30.0	23.0	18.6	32.5
Work at reduced capacity	5.3	15.0	49.0	37.0	27.2	26.0
Work temporarily stopped	54.7	18.0	8.0	19.0	31.3	18.5
Change to another job	3.0	5.0	2.3	2.0	2.8	3.5
Work is terminated	28.7	12.0	10.7	19.0	19.6	15.5
Other	1.0	8.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	4.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

However, the number of workers changing line of work due to Covid-19 is not high, and for those that did change, they moved to another simple, straightforward job and can still be classified as informal workers. In terms of difficulty in changing jobs, 88.3% of respondents in July 2020 and 85.7% of respondents in November 2021 claimed that they experienced difficulty, among which the percentage of respondents claiming extreme difficulty jumped from 11.8% to 57.1%. It appears that changing jobs in Hanoi is relatively less difficult compared to Ho Chi Minh City, as 20% of the respondents in Hanoi claimed it was easy to find jobs, while 100% of the respondents in Ho Chi Minh City found it difficult.

Table 5. Difficulty assessment in changing occupation

Difficulty	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Extremely easy	0.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	14.3
Easy	22.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.9	0.0
Normal	0.0	0.0	8.0	0.0	5.9	0.0
Hard	55.2	20.0	84.0	50.0	76.5	28.6
Extremely hard	22.4	60.0	8.0	50.0	11.8	57.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

Income

Along with difficulties in employment is the issue of income: almost all of the respondents claimed that their income was affected. The severity of the change was higher than the previous outbreak, with 78.5% of respondents claiming that they had no income in November 2021, compared to 48.3% of July 2020. The November 2021 figure includes workers affected by the 4th outbreak: those working at reduced capacity; those changing to another job, those losing their jobs and those whose work is terminated, leading to no income. The most severely affected group is still workers with street-related occupations like street vendors, lottery ticket vendors and scrap collectors.

Table 6. Changes in income before and after the pandemic

Changes	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Significantly increased	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Slightly increased	1.3	1.0	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.0
Unchanged	4.7	0.0	7.0	0.0	5.8	0.0
Slightly decreased	2.0	5.0	10.7	9.0	6.3	7.0
Significantly decreased	7.7	11.0	69.3	11.0	38.5	11.0
Unstable income	-	4.0	-	1.0	-	2.5
No income	84.3	79.0	12.3	78.0	48.3	78.5
Total	100	100.0	100	100.0	100	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

The drop in income due to the 4th Covid-19 outbreak is also more severe than previous outbreaks. On average, income was reduced to less than half, from 5,905,000 VND/month to 2,586,000 VND/month. While the drop in average income was drastic, particularly in Hanoi (from 4,556,677 VND/month to 1,686,306 VND/month), the drop in Ho Chi Minh City in the 4th outbreak was even more significant. The average monthly income for women migrant workers in Ho Chi Minh City dove by 3,723,000 VND/month, compared to Hanoi's figure of 2,915,000 VND/month. In reality, this level of income is too low to maintain the living standards in a municipality.

Table 7. Income of women migrant workers in informal sector before and after the pandemic

Changes	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Current income	1,686,306	2,926,000	3,739,048	2,246,000	5,525,738	2,586,000
Pre-pandemic income	4,556,676	5,841,000	6,494,800	5,969,000	3,991,416	5,905,000
Difference	2,873,037	2,915,000	2,755,752	3,723,000	1,534,321	3,319,000

Source: Survey result from the research team

According to the workers, the primary reason why they lost their income was due to social distancing. This is consistent with the fact that their occupations depend on the streets and attracting customers, and without doing this they had no livelihood.

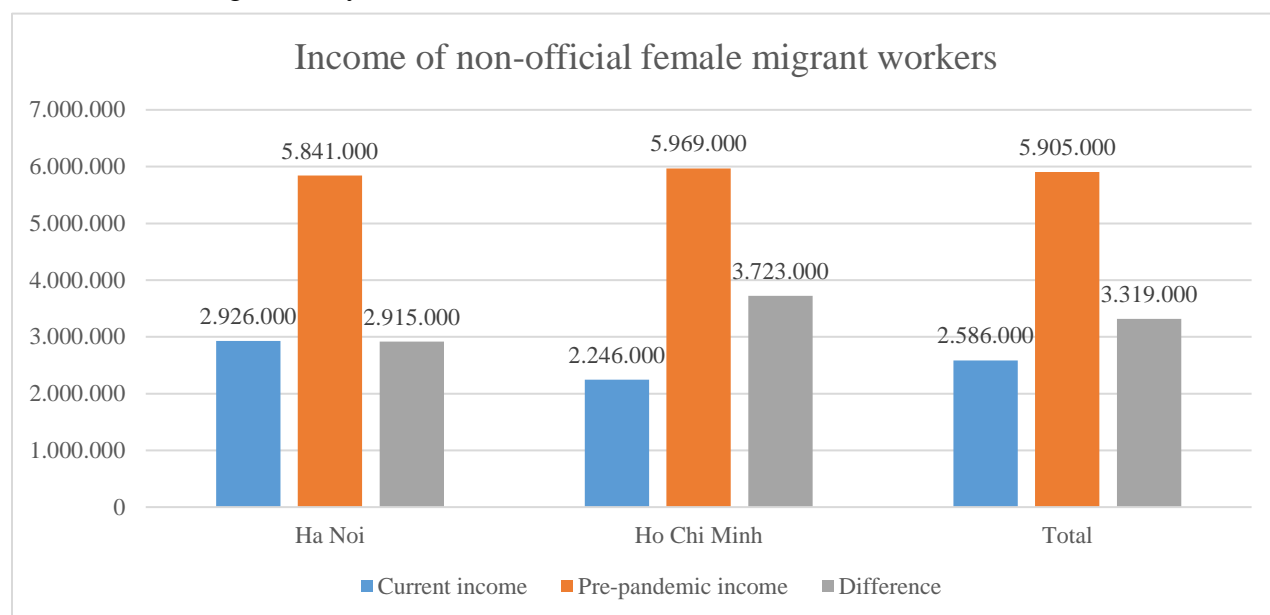


Figure 4 Informal female migrant worker income at the time of research - November 2021

Source: Survey result from the research team

As their income is severely affected, women migrant workers had to turn to other sources of money to cover their daily expenses. The most common 4 ways are: spending their savings money; borrowing money from relatives or banks; asking for local aid and using donated goods. While the percentage of workers spending their savings money is higher in Hanoi, workers in Ho Chi Minh City favored local aid and donated goods. This fact is consistent with the spending and saving habits of people in each region: Northern people tend to save more, while Southerners are more relaxed in spending and more dependent on the community.

Table 8. Financing methods of workers before the 4th outbreak of Covid-19

Financing methods	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Spending their savings money	57	57.0	46	46.0	103	51.5
Installment plans	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Borrowing from relatives or banks	50	50.0	40	40.0	90	45.0
Borrowing from loan sharks/Selling their insurance books	0	0.0	2	2.0	2	1.0
Asking for local aid	28	28.0	69	69.0	97	48.5
Using donated goods	33	33.0	56	56.0	89	44.5

Source: Survey result from the research team

Expenses

Surveys from both periods indicated that the common choice for workers in response of the pandemic is to reduce expenses, the first of which is food expense. The percentage of expenses cut for food due to the 4th outbreak is as high as 87.5%, compared to 77.3% of the 2nd outbreak. The respondents claimed that they had to reduce their spending on food just to cover their daily expenses. The inability to cover normal food expenses is an indicator of the hardship the workers were going through: they could not even cover such a basic human need at a regular level.

Table 9. Changes in food expenses before and after the pandemic

Changes in food expenses	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Significantly increased	5.3	1.0	0.0	11.0	2.7	6.0
Slightly increased	5.0	2.0	0.0	3.0	2.5	2.5
Unchanged	22.7	7.0	12.3	1.0	17.5	4.0
Slightly decreased	28.3	13.0	50.7	17.0	39.5	15.0
Significantly decreased	38.7	77.0	37.0	68.0	37.8	72.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

The main adjustments made to their food spending habits is buying less meat: this option was selected by 57.0% of the respondents, but this figure is still much lower than the 72.3% of the 2nd outbreak. Another reason for cutting down on meat in July 2020 was the high price of meat⁸, but by November 2021 the price had stabilized to a lower level, cheaper than normal price. There is, however, a notable difference when comparing the two cities in November 2021: 75% of the respondents in Hanoi chose cutting down on meat, while the figure for Ho Chi Minh City is 41%. Another difference is that workers in Ho Chi Minh City tend to hoard more food in fear of shortages and use food provided by relatives. The percentage of people having to eat instant noodles also dropped from 47.85% to 9.5% after 2 outbreaks, since they were more experienced and well-prepared. However, in general women migrant workers were still in hardship, as the rate of people reducing or combining meals reached 49%, compared to the 30.5% figure of the 2nd outbreak. This is a wake-up call on the issue of basic social security of women migrant workers in informal sector.

⁸ Pork prices rapidly increase for the first 5 months of 2020, constantly staying above 90,000 VND/kg, reaching 100,000 VND/kg at the end of May 2020 (<http://vinanet.vn/thi-truong1/tom-luoc-thi-truong-thit-lon-6-thang-dau-nam-2020-732280.html>)

Table 10. Diet solutions of workers due to the impacts of Covid-19

Solutions	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Reduce or combine meals	42.3	49.0	18.7	49.0	30.5	49.0
Eat more snacks	6.0	6.0	2.0	3.0	4.0	4.5
Eat less meat due to high prices/to save money	73.3	73.0	71.3	41.0	72.3	57.0
Eat more vegetables	47.0	27.0	35.0	30.0	41.0	28.5
Eat more instant noodles	40.3	10.0	55.3	9.0	47.8	9.5
Hoard food in fear of shortages	25.3	3.0	46.0	24.0	35.8	13.5
Use food provided by relatives	15.3	18.0	20.7	28.0	18.0	23.0
Other	4.3	2.0	7.3	2.0	5.8	2.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

Residence

Most migrants came from rural areas of other provinces to central Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City in search of employment. Despite suffering severely due to the 4th Covid-19 outbreak, 68% of the respondents still chose to remain in the cities, with the figure in July 2020 being 55.67%. Like the 2nd outbreak, the percentage of those staying in Ho Chi Minh City was 78%, 20% higher than that in Hanoi. For the few who did return to their hometowns from Ho Chi Minh City, even fewer returned to the city. In contrast, the percentage of people leaving and returning to Hanoi was 21%, half of the total of number of people leaving due to the pandemic. These figures illustrate the fact that Northern migrants had a more difficult time finding employment in their hometowns than their Southern counterparts. Of the 21% of women migrant workers that left Ho Chi Minh City, only 3% returned to the city.

Table 11. Residence status of respondents as of November 2021

Residence	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh City	Total
Remained in the city	58.0	78.0	68.0
Left then returned to the city	21.0	3.0	12.0
Left the city and currently staying at their hometown	21.0	19.0	20.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

As for residence, the two surveying rounds showed that the Covid-19 pandemic had an impact on the residence of women migrant workers. If in July 2020 only 9.0% had changes in residence, by November 2021 this figure doubled to 18%. Numerous factors leading to changes of residence were given: wanting to move to a better home (80.6%); Inability to afford current rent (86.1%); wanting to cut down on housing expenses (97.2%). Besides these reasons, there are also cases where workers were offered a place to stay.

For people who remained in the cities, the most common inconvenience was movement restrictions, with 90% of responses after 2 surveying rounds. For street vendors, lottery ticket vendors or scrap collectors, this directly impact their work and income. In July 2020 30,5% of the workers found it difficult to find food, but in November 2021 this number jumped to 74.6%. While the situation was direr for Hanoi in the 2nd outbreak, Ho Chi Minh City suffered more hardship in the 4th outbreak.

Table 12. Difficulties faced by workers remaining in cities

Difficulties	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Movement restrictions	96.6	96.5	88.6	92.2	90.7	94.0
Lack of food	37.5	68.4	28.0	79.2	30.5	74.6
Difficulties in accessing assistance from families	12.5	12.3	1.6	24.7	4.5	19.4
Other	10.2	14.0	5.7	6.5	6.9	9.7
Difficulties in finding housing	3.4	3.5	0.8	2.6	1.5	3.0
Difficulties in staying in contact with families	5.7	0.0	4.1	5.2	4.5	3.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

Most workers pay their rent by the month and they commonly share rooms with less-than-ideal conveniences. However, because of the pandemic, this practice decreased from 89.9% down to 71%, with the drop in Ho Chi Minh City being greater than that in Hanoi. For the former, up to 18% stopped renting and returned to their hometowns while the figure was half for the latter. This difference occurred because the pandemic was more severe and complex in Ho Chi Minh City than in Hanoi. The percentage of Hanoi workers staying at others' homes rose by 4.3% more than that of Ho Chi Minh City, implying a greater degree of community cohesion in Hanoi than in Ho Chi Minh City.

Table 13. Current residence of women migrant workers in informal sector (%)

Current residence	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Rent by month	88.3	70.1	91.3	72.0	89.9	71.0
Rent by day	1.0	1.0	0.7	0	0.8	0.5
Returned and currently staying at hometown	-	9.0	-	18.0	-	13.5
Staying at another's home	1.7	6.0	3.3	3.0	2.5	4.5
Staying at work	8.7	9.0	3.3	0	6.0	4.5
Other	0.3	5.0	1.3	7.0	0.8	6.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

The act of not declaring temporary residence was still common, and the frequency of this phenomenon was higher in November 2021 than in July 2020. This number correlated with the number of workers returning to their hometowns, but it also presents the fact that there wasn't much cohesion between the cohesion where workers work and the workers themselves. This continues to raise the question of urban planning, while simultaneously hinders workers from accessing social services without having declared temporary residence at the arrival residency.

Table 14. Temporary residence declaration status in arrival residency

Declaration	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Yes	59.9	52.0	81.3	64.0	70.7	58.0
No	40.1	48.0	18.7	36.0	29.3	42.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

Healthcare

The Covid-19 pandemic also change the workers' perspective on healthcare. In the first surveying round, 86.33% claimed that they are more aware of health issues, especially with workers in Ho Chi Minh City whose figures were 96%. The choice of treatment methods in the case of influenza changed with time. However, the most common choice they made was also the most affordable one: buying medicine themselves or consulting a pharmacist, rather than doing a proper check-up at a medical

facility. That being said, the percentage of respondents getting a check-up has gone from 10% before the 2nd outbreak to 17% after and 22.5% after the 4th outbreak. In November 2021, the percentage of people buying their medicine according to personal experiences tripled, while that of those consulting pharmacists was cut in half. These figures mean 2 things: first, people have been more aware of the healthcare system but financial hardship is still preventing them from accessing medical facilities; second, people are more experienced and confident in responding to Covid-19 symptoms.

Table 15. How women migrant workers in informal sector treat influenza-like symptoms

Methods	Hanoi			Ho Chi Minh City			Total		
	Before the 2 nd outbreak	After the 2 nd outbreak	After the 4 th social distancing period	Before the 2 nd outbreak	After the 2 nd outbreak	After the 4 th social distancing period	Before the 2 nd outbreak	After the 2 nd outbreak	After the 4 th social distancing period
Check-up at a medical facility	14.0	22.8	22.0	6.0	11.3	23.0	10.0	17.0	22.5
Consult experienced individuals	2.3	2.3	0.0	1.3	3.3	0.0	1.8	2.8	0.0
Consult pharmacists	67.3	64.0	21.0	71.0	68.3	42.0	69.2	66.2	31.5
Buy medicine according to personal experience	15.3	10.0	55.0	20.3	15.7	34.0	17.8	12.8	44.5
Other	1.00	1.0	2.0	1.3	1.3	1.0	1.2	1.2	1.5
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

In general, workers have had better awareness about disease prevention and containment. 93.0% of the respondents chose to “Limit social contacts”, a jump from 66.8% of July 2020. What is worth noting here is that this number was doubled in Ho Chi Minh City (from 43% to 93%) due to the consequences of the 4th outbreak. 83% of the workers claimed that they regular wear masks when travelling, but those in Hanoi appear to be less careful: 100% of the respondents in Hanoi wore masks when travelling in July 2020, but this figure declined to 70% in November 2021. This problem should be noted in preventing and containing the pandemic, as the impacts of Covid-19 in Hanoi are still less severe than in Ho Chi Minh City at the time of survey.

Table 16. Disease prevention methods of workers during peak times of the pandemic

Methods	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Limit social contacts	90.7	93.0	43.0	93.0	66.8	93.0
Wash hands with soap regularly; avoid touching eyes, nose and mouth	95.3	80.0	83.3	90.0	89.3	85.0
Wear masks when travelling	100.0	70.0	99.3	96.0	99.7	83.0
Use mouthwash regularly	62.7	64.0	76.0	52.0	69.3	58.0
Self-monitor at home, not rushing to medical facilities when early symptoms are found	34.3	49.0	37.0	34.0	35.7	41.5
Cover mouth when coughing or sneezing	69.7	54.0	74.7	27.0	72.2	40.5
Keep home well-ventilated	54.0	41.0	33.7	21.0	43.8	31.0
Keep self-warm, exercise, eat healthily	55.7	32.0	56.0	23.0	55.8	27.5
Wash hands after removing masks	71.7	30.0	59.0	25.0	65.3	27.5
Use fabric masks due to lack of medical masks	77.7	30.0	70.0	17.0	73.8	23.5
Avoid contact with pets or wild animals	57.7	28.0	47.3	9.0	52.5	18.5
Avoid wearing outside clothes inside the home	59.0	23.0	64.0	12.0	61.5	17.5
Reuse medical masks	38.7	27.0	19.0	6.0	28.8	16.5
Carry dry hand wash	38.7	15.0	47.7	14.0	43.2	14.5

Source: Survey result from the research team

When asked about the level of concern one would be in in the case of another outbreak, the percentage of workers worrying for the safety of themselves and their families went from 47.9% in July 2020 to 69.7% in November 2021. Interestingly, this trend correlates with that of respondents unconcerned thanks to having experience - a drop from 17.7% to 3.4%. This indicates that the impact Covid-19 had on the mentality of workers was significant. Even though they were concerned about their wellbeing, when asked about whether to return to their hometowns, they chose to either stay for fear of being unemployed or only return temporarily and come back when the outbreak is contained. 87.5% of those surveyed believed that there would be another outbreak, with the figures being 94% in Hanoi and 81% in Ho Chi Minh City, specifically.

Table 17. Response of workers in the case of an outbreak in November 2021 (%)

Responses	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh City	Total
Worried about the safety of themselves and their families	62.8	77.8	69.7
Unconcerned, having had experiences	2.1	4.9	3.4
Returning to their hometowns	13.8	9.9	12.0
Staying and complying to medical regulations	18.1	7.4	13.1
Other	3.2	0.0	1.7
Total	100	100	100

Source: Survey result from the research team

Of the surveyed workers in November 2021, there were 14% in Ho Chi Minh City that were infected with Covid-19. This percentage is alarmingly high and shows how infectious the virus can be among this population group. The main culprit is the fact that their jobs were tied to the streets, meaning a high risk of contracting the disease, coupled with their crowded housing situation and low awareness of preventive health. Of the infected workers in Ho Chi Minh City, only 42.9% seek for treatment at medical facilities, 35.7% informed their local health agencies and treat themselves according to health procedures, and 21.4% treat themselves according to recommendations by friends and the Internet. The number of workers treating themselves when infected is quite high. About 35.7% of the infected workers had to pay extra for Covid-19 treatment, which is inappropriate with the Government guidelines on Covid-19 treatment.

Table 18. Covid-19 infection and treatment status of workers

Questions	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh City	Total
Have you ever been infected with Covid-19?	1.0	14.0	7.5
If infected, what did you do?			
Nothing	0	0	
Treat themselves according to recommendations from friends and the Internet	0	21.4	20.0
Inform local health agencies and treat themselves according to health procedures	0	35.7	33.3
Seek treatment at health facilities	100.0	42.9	46.7
Did you have to pay extra for Covid-19 treatment?	0	35.7	33.3
If yes, how did this expense affect your financial situation?			
Extremely significantly	0	0	0
Significantly	0	0	0
Significantly but tolerable	0	100.0	0
Slightly	0	0	0
Unaffected	100	0	100

Source: Survey result from the research team

Information accessibility

The primary channel through which workers were informed about the pandemic was through people around them, with figures rising from 54.2% to 71% after 2 surveying rounds. This illustrates the credibility and dependability of word of mouth. Local loudspeakers also served as an information source about the pandemic, besides more modern means such as social media and television. It appears that after the 4th outbreak, the importance of social workers was even more emphasized: the percentage of people accessing information through social workers tripled from 10.5% to 30.5%. Information from paper newspaper, banners and posters were no longer appropriate.

Table 19. Covid-19 information source (%) as of November 2021

Information sources	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Television	80	80.0	66	66.0	146	73.0
Loudspeakers	52	52.0	56	56.0	108	54.0
Social media	52	52.0	56	56.0	108	54.0
Word of mouth	64	64.0	52	52.0	116	58.0
Banners, posters	13	13.0	6	6.0	19	9.5
Others	0	.0	2	2.0	2	1.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

In general, the most common difficulty faced by women migrant workers due to the 4th Covid-19 outbreak was unstable income, followed by employment. It should be noted that these two problems are closely correlated.

Table 20. Difficulties faced by women migrant workers due to the 4th Covid-19 outbreak (%)

Difficulties	Hanoi	Ho Chi Minh City	Both
Unstable income	83.0	93.0	88.0
Unstable employment	64.0	74.0	69.0
Access to healthcare	3.0	17.0	10.0
Access to information	4.0	14.0	9.0
Housing	9.0	3.0	6.0
Other	5.0	4.0	4.5
Transportation	6.0	2.0	4.0
Clean water	2.0	3.0	2.5
Electricity	1.0	1.0	1.0

Note: Other: “Bad business and unemployed husband”, “Small children”; “No income”; Furthermore, 1 respondent claimed not having any difficulties, despite having low income.

Source: Survey result from the research team

4.2. ASSISTANCE FROM AUTHORITIES, THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

Regarding the assistance policy for people affected by Covid-19, The Government has enacted crucial decisions in assisting those severely affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Amidst the complex development of the 2nd outbreak, the Government released Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP dated April 9, 2020 on measures to assist people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, and Decision No. 15/2020/QĐ-TTg dated April 24, 2020 on regulating the implementation of policies to support people affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The 4th Covid-19 outbreak and its development calls for considerable amendments to existing policies. The Government has received recommendations and opinions from the people, from first responders and from experts, from which they have released Resolution No. 68/NQ-CP dated July 1, 2021 on policies to assist workers and employers affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Clause 12, Article II states:

"For individuals working without labour contracts (informal workers) and other particular individuals: Depending on specific conditions and budgetary capabilities of the provinces/cities, they are entitled to allowance of no less than 1,500,000 VND per person per time or 50,000 VND per person per day based on the actual number of cessation days."

Furthermore, Clause 8, Article III of Resolution No. 68/NQ-CP on defining the responsibilities of provincial and municipal People's Committees in implementing local assisting policies, including assisting workers not under labour contracts. To be more specific:

"Actively utilize local resources and implement policies defined at Article III of the Resolution; report assistance progress to the Ministry of Finance for compilation and submit to authorities".

"Identify and approve the list of subjects benefiting from the policies defined in clause 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 of Article II; ensure timely, efficient, transparent and accurate execution, avoid corruption and budget exploitation".

"Depending on specific conditions of the provinces/cities, assistance policies will be enacted according to clause 2 of Article II using local budgets and other legally raised capital".

These regulations are sufficient in base, protocol and authority for provinces/cities to implement, depending on their budgets and other legally raised capital.

Aid Package of Hanoi

In the middle of July, Hanoi passed Resolution 15 on specific policies to assist affected individuals due to Covid-19 with an estimate of about 345 billion VND. Hanoi has already made the procedure for Covid-19 affected individuals public, including informal workers.

Assistance for workers who lost their job and not under labour contracts has a process deadline of 10 business days, which is calculated from when documents are received by the processing department. The Commune's People's Committee will review the documents within 5 business days (including the 2 publicly listed days); The District's People's Committee will

*approve the submitted list and budget within 2 business days; The Commune's People's Committee will return the documents within 3 business days.*⁹

Aid Package of Ho Chi Minh City

Ho Chi Minh City managed to pass decisions on assisting groups of people that are severely affected by Covid-19 based on each stage of movement restrictions or lockdown. To be more specific, the first round of aid packages was given in accordance with Resolution No. 09/2021 dated June 25, 2021 by the People's Council during lockdown in accordance with Directive 15/CT-CP, in which the assisted subject are informal workers whose jobs were terminated due to Covid-19 (also the subject of this research). The second round of aid packages was implemented from the beginning of August 2021, when the city was under lockdown in accordance with Directive 16/CT-CP, continuing to assist workers whose jobs were terminated, with the addition of poor and near poor households in hardship. Finally, the third round of aid packages was implemented in accordance with Resolution No. 97/NQ-HĐND dated September 22, 2021 for 4 main groups of people: (1) Member of poor and near poor households; individuals under social welfare subsidies in hardship; (2) Workers in hardship whose jobs were terminated, have no income during lockdown and currently present in the city (including those in quarantine or in treatment at medical facilities and not present in the city); (3) Dependents of group (2) including: parents; spouses and children staying at home or lacking work capacities, living in the city at the time of survey (including those in quarantine or in treatment at medical facilities and not present in the city); (4) Temporary residents in hostels, shelters, impoverished neighborhoods in hardship during lockdown and currently present in the city¹⁰.

This reality is also clearly reflected in the findings of the research team. When asked about the assistance from the authorities to migrant workers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, only 14.2% of women migrant workers responded that they received assistance in the 2nd outbreak, and this number rose to 54% in the 4th outbreak. It should be noted that the percentage of workers receiving assistance in Ho Chi Minh City is twice as much as that in Hanoi. Despite extensive efforts of accessing and supporting Covid-19 affected individuals, the rate of women migrant workers in informal sector having access to aid packages was still low. The policies exist, but highly inefficient, which poses the question of implementation and policy deployment.

Most workers received assistance in cash, but there was a slight dip from 74.12% in July 2020 to 69.4% in November 2021. There appears to be an inverse correlation in the proportion of cash recipients in the two cities across the two time periods: While the percentage of people receiving cash decreased in Hanoi, this figure actually increased in Ho Chi Minh City as more people chose to receive cash instead of goods. This phenomenon is consistent with the temporary residence declaration rate and the outbreak characteristics at each city. The average aid amount in Ho Chi Minh City is 911,111 VND for the 2nd outbreak and then increased to 2,744,262 VND

⁹ <https://vncdc.gov.vn/ha-noi-cong-bo-5-thu-tuc-ho-tro-doi-tuong-anh-huong-covid-19-nd15792.html>

¹⁰ <https://hcmcpv.org.vn/tin-tuc/infographic-ve-ba-goi-ho-tro-cua-tp-1491884575>

by the 4th one, while the assistance for Hanoi for the two outbreaks were 786,111 VND and 1,235,714 VND, respectively.

Table 21. Assistance from authorities during and after Covid-19 outbreak

Choice	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Yes	10.7	39.0	17.7	69.0	14.2	54.0
No	89.3	61.0	82.3	31.0	85.8	46.0
Total of respondents	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Means of assistance among recipients</i>						
Cash	56.2	35.9	84.9	88.4	74.12	69.4
Goods	43.8	64.1	22.6	11.6	30.59	30.6

Note: total percentage of recipients exceed 100% due to some receiving both money and goods, as of July 2020

Source: Survey result from the research team

Regarding the reason why workers were unable to receive assistance from the authorities, the primary reason was being unaware - the percentage of this response in November 2021 actually declined compared to July 2020, but the difference was insignificant. In hindsight, the low education level of this group of workers meant that they were not quick in receiving information regarding assistance policies. A positive fact when analyzing Ho Chi Minh City statistics was that the fraction of unaware individuals was reduced to less than half, while in Hanoi this number actually doubled. Hanoi needs to reconsider its method of information outreach to this particular group of the population.

“Extremely frustrated that there is still no support from authorities - there were no support lists to follow...operator was called to help but is still not processed”.

Source: female respondent, 1982, Ho Chi Minh City (November 2021)

The second most common difficulty was the procedures. About 22.8% of workers claimed that they were unable to receive assistance due to the procedures in working with the authorities, and the statistics were similar across the 2 surveying rounds. This poses an issue: no matter the central government’s efforts to deliver assistance to the people, these workers still have difficulty working with authorities to receive assistance. Another problem is that workers were still unqualified for assistance - 14.3% of the group in July 2020 and 20.7% in November 2021 - even though the government and the Ministry of Labour - Invalids and Social Affairs have loosened the criteria and procedures required for informal workers to receive assistance.

Table 22. Reasons for workers' inability to receive assistance from local authorities

Reasons	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
Unaware	16.8	32.8	70.0	32.3	36.3	32.6
Unqualified for assistance	23.5	14.8	9.3	32.3	14.3	20.7
Unable to prove that they are qualified	18.3	1.6	5.7	22.6	10.5	8.7
Difficulties in working with authorities	24.2	24.6	25.9	19.4	21.5	22.8
Personal problems	6.7	16.4	0.0	6.5	3.0	13
Other*	24.6	32.8	4.7	25.8	13.0	30.4

*Other: Of the 200 respondents, 28 people did not receive assistance, taking up 30.4%. The main causes were: Authorities notified but have not received assistance; No assistance policy at their hometowns; Incomplete documents; there are also those who did not receive assistance, believing that there are less fortunate people that deserve the help more.

Source: Survey result from the research team

The assistance from donors and social organizations almost doubled across the two surveying rounds (from 23.7% to 42.5%), with 58% and 27% of the respondents in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi, respectively, claiming that they received assistance from donors and social organizations in the 4th Covid-19 outbreak. Aside from governmental assistance, this support was invaluable for workers in this difficult time.

Assistance from this group was often more goods (83.5%) than cash (16.5%), which is a common characteristic of voluntary groups. In comparison of the two outbreaks, cash assistance jumped from 2.8% to 16.5% with a significant increase in Hanoi, where the impacts of the 4th outbreak were less severe than that of Ho Chi Minh City. All respondents and assistance recipients were satisfied with the assistance from donors and social organizations.

Table 23. Responses on whether assistance from donors and social organizations was received

Choice	Ha Noi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Yes	14.0	27.0	33.3	58.0	23.7	42.5
No	86.0	73.0	66.7	42.0	76.3	57.5
Total of respondents	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
<i>Means of assistance among recipients</i>						
Cash	9.5	37.0	0.0	6.9	2.8	16.5
Goods	90.5	63.0	100.0	93.1	97.2	83.5

Source: Survey result from the research team

When asked why they were unable to receive assistance from donors and social organizations, most respondents replied that they were unaware and they had their own personal problems. The percentage of this response in Ho Chi Minh City was 100%, which meant had they been aware and weren't preoccupied with personal problems, they would have had access to this source of support. "Personal problems" is defined as the workers themselves being careless, believing that they will have difficulties with the procedures or that they were unqualified. Another problem is that they did not declare temporary residence, and returning to their hometowns to start the procedure would be a hassle. Their own beliefs led to them not receiving assistance from donors and social organizations.

As for those that did receive assistance, there were considerable differences between Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. There were up to 66.7% of respondents in Hanoi claiming that they were unqualified, a drastic increase compared to that of July 2020. The differences in the outbreak situations and in the donation values of the two cities also led to different methods in approaching subjects.

Table 24. Reasons for worker's inability to receive assistance from donors and local authorities

Reasons	Hanoi		Ho Chi Minh City		Total	
	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021	July 2020	November 2021
Unaware	85.7	66.7	36.0	100.0	63.8	97.8
Unqualified for assistance	5.0	66.7	2.0	0.0	3.7	4.4
Unable to prove that they are qualified	0.0	33.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.2
Difficulties in working with authorities	1.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	0.0
Personal problems	9.3	33.3	61.0	100.0	31.9	95.6
Other	2.7	0.0	6.0	0.0	4.1	0.0

Source: Survey result from the research team

The second round of surveying also showed that, also timely adjustments were made to policies, there still exists problems in implementing policies on assisting individuals affected by Covid-19. Authorities have implemented information campaigns, policy awareness campaigns, streamlined procedures to make it easier for people to access. However, more reviews and adjustments are required to make procedures simple yet accurate. For migrant workers, these procedures are even more complex due to the lack of temporary residence, or even personal documents and an address.

5. CONCLUSION

From the results of the two surveying rounds on the same group of subjects, the research team has created a comprehensive comparison of the impacts of Covid-19 on different aspects of life and social security for women migrant workers in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. Findings showed that the impacts of the pandemic on the subjects were consistent across two outbreaks and appeared to be more severe

in the 4th outbreak, with only some aspects being less affected compared to the 2nd outbreak for objective reasons. An example would be the increase in pork consumption in the 4th outbreak compared to the 2nd outbreak due to prices in the former returning to normal levels, while prices in the latter were inflated due to the African swine fever virus. Other aspects saw significant increases in severity, such as reduced income leading to spending savings money, increased loans and drastic cut to food expenses, despite migrant workers having already lived at minimum living standards without the pandemic.

As for the tendency of returning to cities after the outbreak, despite suffering severely due to the 4th Covid-19 outbreak, 68% of the respondents still chose to remain in the cities, with the figure in July 2020 being 55.67%. Like the 2nd outbreak, the percentage of those staying in Ho Chi Minh City was 78%, 20% higher than that in Hanoi. For the few who did return to their hometowns from Ho Chi Minh City, even fewer returned to the city. In contrast, the percentage of people leaving and returning to Hanoi was 21%, half of the total of number of people leaving due to the pandemic. These figures illustrate the fact that Northern migrants had more difficulty finding employment in their hometowns than their Southern counterparts. Of the 21% of women migrant workers that left Ho Chi Minh City, only 3% returned to the city.

Interestingly, in the 4th outbreak, local policies regarding social aid packages for population groups were improved considerably, with the percentage of workers having access to assistance doubling compared to the surveying round after the 2nd outbreak. This reflects the timely amendments made and the implementation of the assistance policies from local authorities. More specifically, of the 3 rounds of aid packages in Ho Chi Minh City, migrant workers were always one of the qualified groups. Regulations regarding receiving aid packages were widely distributed and publicized on multiple information channels, making them easier to access. Nevertheless, there were still issues in policy implementation, as some subject groups were unable to access assistance due to insufficient information and qualifications.

The role of social groups, organizations and donors was reaffirmed in the 4th outbreak. Innovative ideas and methods were implemented by voluntary groups and individuals. Official and spontaneous support networks were established based on the needs of the community. It can be said that the support of the community in emergency situations (calamities, diseases...) is always invaluable and carries human values and traditions of our country's long history.

6. SUGGESTIONS

The Covid-19 is still developing on a global scale. In Viet Nam, at the time of finalizing this research report, the numbers of infected cases and deaths have tripled, with 1.5 million infected cases and 29,791 deaths¹¹. The number of daily infected cases in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi are always extremely high, with Hanoi beginning to have more daily cases than Ho Chi Minh City, posing great challenges for the healthcare systems at the two cities and national level.

¹¹ [Cập nhật số ca nhiễm Covid-19 hôm nay mới nhất trên VnExpress](#) accessed December 21, 2021

The Government has enacted a new strategy called “safe adaptation”, whereas strict lockdowns are no longer implemented. The rate of fully vaccinated individuals is relatively high, which helps most people return to their daily lives in a “new normal” condition. However, this research also points out that better preparation is needed in the case of another dangerous outbreak that might require lockdown. Preparing first responders, logistics, social workers and spontaneous voluntary groups needs to be coordinated so that resources can be mobilized to where they are needed, especially for vulnerable groups and informal migrant workers.

Provinces/cities receiving returning migrant workers from big cities need to create measures to help them find work and settle down. For workers returning to cities for work, residence registration needs to take place to help manage and assist workers in the case of lockdown due to new outbreaks.

There needs to have a regulation on the operation of community support groups. This is an efficient force of first responders in assisting with disease containment and helping people in hardship. Recently, the Decree No. 93/2021 by the Government on raising, receiving, distributing and using voluntary donations to help combat calamities, diseases and other issues; to assist patients with life-threatening illnesses was passed, which was an important step in institutionalizing the operations of these groups.

Finally, long-term measures for social security aid packages for migrant workers need to be considered, such as mechanisms that minimize their insurance costs, help them register an address with a permanent province/city to entitle them to subsidies according to governmental policies.

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