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# RAPID ASSESSMENT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM

UNDP Viet Nam  
May 2020



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research was conducted under the framework of two ongoing UNDP Viet Nam projects, namely the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) and the Korea-Viet Nam Mine Action Project (KVMAP). PAPI promotes citizen participation and feedback in policy-making, including from persons with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> KVMAP includes a component on victims assistance and this survey covers a large number of PWDs/UXO survivors in Quang Binh province.<sup>2</sup>

This report would not have been possible without the support of the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), the Embassy of Ireland in Viet Nam and the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA).

The rapid assessment was initiated and led by Ms. Dao Thu Huong, UN Volunteer and UNDP Disability Officer, together with a team of UNDP Viet Nam colleagues who are all strongly committed to the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in Viet Nam.

The team is grateful to the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs for their inputs to the survey questionnaire. The survey could never have been completed without the involvement of many Organisations of Persons with Disabilities (OPDs) to which the team is also extremely grateful.

Finally, UNDP would like to express our deepest gratitude to all the respondents who took the time to complete the survey and contribute to our assessment.

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://papi.org.vn/>

<sup>2</sup> See <http://en.kvmap.vnmac.gov.vn/>

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic affects different groups of people differently. As recently recalled by the UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, “people with disabilities are among the hardest hit by COVID-19”.<sup>3</sup> In Viet Nam, as in other countries, many people with disabilities often feel vulnerable and sometimes experience multiple health problems, in particular those suffering from underlying health conditions. This is why many of them had already restricted their movements as early as January of this year, for fear of getting infected. Persons with disabilities may not have easy and prompt access to updated information about the virus and how to protect themselves, or be able to receive information in accessible formats. Many require ongoing medical and rehabilitation services that they can no longer access. Those who have serious forms of disabilities rely on support from carers, family members and other persons who may no longer be able to help, or who may be distancing themselves to avoid infecting the ones they care for.

Many persons with disabilities have lost their job or seen their income reduced dramatically as a result of COVID-19. Social enterprises often employ and provide services for persons with disabilities. However, a recent study has shown that a large proportion of these social enterprises may suspend operations and go bankrupt if the COVID-19 scenario lasts until Autumn.<sup>4</sup> This will have a substantial impact on persons with disabilities. Finally, 80% of persons with disabilities live in rural areas and may face even greater difficulties in

accessing essential medical and social services, or continuing in employment. Many of the challenges faced by persons with disabilities are exacerbated due to COVID-19.

Access to information is crucial during this time to avoid infection. Like everybody else, persons with disabilities need to understand how to protect themselves, which latest advice has been issued and what latest measures have been put in place by the authorities. The Ministry of Health has deployed great efforts to disseminate information to citizens on how to protect themselves from COVID-19 or how to wash their hands, and UNDP has supported these efforts by helping to translate important messages into sign language. As the situation changes daily, persons with disabilities need to be able to understand news updates. One of the main communication channels is of course television. UNDP has supported VTV1 to expand sign language interpretation during their main news bulletins.

In order to promote a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19, one of the first steps is to better understand the health and socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities. In line with the recent UN Secretary-General’s Policy Brief on a disability-inclusive response to COVID-19,<sup>5</sup> the present rapid assessment seeks to meaningfully engage with persons with disabilities in highlighting the challenges which they currently face. The results of this rapid assessment will provide useful data to inform targeted support and responses for persons with disabilities, including increased access to social assistance and healthcare.

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<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.un.org/en/coronavirus/we-have-unique-opportunity-design-and-implement-more-inclusive-and-accessible-societies>

<sup>4</sup> See <https://en.vietnamplus.vn/social-enterprises-need-specific-govt-support-policies-survey/171834.vnp>

<sup>5</sup> See [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_persons\\_with\\_disabilities\\_final.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/sg_policy_brief_on_persons_with_disabilities_final.pdf)

## 2. CONTEXT

COVID-19 was first reported in Viet Nam at the end of January 2020. Since then, the Government has taken decisive steps to curb the disease, including prevention, detection, tracing, isolation of confirmed and potential cases. On 1 April, the Prime Minister officially declared COVID-19 a national epidemic and issued strict nationwide social distancing rules. As a result of these measures, the number of confirmed cases has remained relatively small – under 300 cases as of mid-May 2020 – and no deaths. On 23 April, Viet Nam moved to a new phase of COVID-fight – continued implementation of measures to prevent and control the epidemic, while restarting and stimulating the economy.

The impact of the crisis on the economy and businesses has been significant. The Government's Statistics Office reports that GDP growth in Q1 of 2020 is 3.82%, which has been the lowest since 2010. It is estimated that COVID-19 has affected nearly 5 million workers and almost 85% of enterprises in Viet Nam as of mid-April.<sup>6</sup> Among these workers, 13% of them have lost their jobs, 28% are taking turns to work, and 59% have been temporarily out of work.<sup>7</sup> In early April 2020, the Government announced, among other measures, a support package of US\$2.6 billion for those affected by COVID-19.<sup>8</sup>

According to the 2016 National Survey on Persons with Disabilities,<sup>9</sup> 7% of the population in Viet Nam has a disability. The number of persons with disabilities was estimated to be around 6.2 million

people and has increased due to the ageing population and traffic accidents. The same survey indicated that households with persons with disabilities are twice as likely to be poor as other households. In fact, almost 18% of persons with disabilities live in multidimensional poor households in Viet Nam.

As mentioned above, persons with disabilities face several challenges during COVID-19. Many suffer from underlying health conditions and are at increased risk of serious consequences from COVID-19. They are disproportionately represented among older populations who are more vulnerable to infection. They may be prevented from accessing necessary medical care and supplies. They have lower levels of financial or job security. They may face difficulties in receiving essential information in accessible formats. They may also have difficulties in adopting recommended public health strategies, such as social distancing and washing hands.

Viet Nam was one of the first countries in the world to sign the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). It ratified the Convention on 5 February 2015. The present rapid assessment will also provide information on where support is most needed to further implement the rights enshrined in the CRPD, and identify key areas for strengthening the Law on Persons with Disabilities in line with the CRPD.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See <https://tuoitrenews.vn/news/business/20200425/five-million-workers-848-of-companies-affected-by-covid19-pandemic-in-vietnam-gso/54223.html>

<sup>7</sup> See <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/business/data-speaks/five-million-vietnamese-workers-lose-jobs-to-covid-19-4089701.html>

<sup>8</sup> See <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/business/economy/vietnam-ap-proves-2-6-billion-support-package-for-covid-19-crisis-victims-4082541.html>

<sup>9</sup> See [https://www.gso.gov.vn/default\\_en.aspx?tabid=515&idmid=5&ItemID=19055](https://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=515&idmid=5&ItemID=19055)

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Disability/>

### 3. METHODOLOGY



The objectives of the rapid assessment are to identify health and socio-economic challenges faced by persons with disabilities and their families during COVID-19 and formulate recommendations to the Government on COVID-19 disability-inclusive response and recovery. The rapid assessment was carried through a survey of persons with disabilities. A questionnaire was designed with inputs from OPDs, the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and other UN agencies.

The questionnaire included 29 questions, covering personal status, changes in personal income before and during COVID-19, employment situation, main challenges during COVID-19 including on health and socio-economic issues, coping mechanisms and main needs. The full questionnaire is reproduced in the Annex at the end of the present report.

The questionnaire was posted online on the Survey Monkey and Google Form platforms for two weeks between 14 and 28 April. Phone and face-to-face interviews were also organized for those who live in remote areas or had difficulties in completing the survey online. In total, 986 responses were received to the questionnaire.

Within the survey sample, there was an equal number of male and female respondents. All types of disabilities were represented with respondents with physical disabilities, hearing and speech impairments, visual impairments and psychosocial disabilities. Thanks to proactive outreach, there was a good balance among rural and urban respondents. Over 4% of the respondents were from ethnic minority groups, including Tay, H'mong and Nung.

This rapid assessment comes with a number of caveats. Because of the time limitations, the survey sample may not be as representative as it should be. Nonetheless, as demonstrated above, all efforts were made to gather responses from varied groups and locations. Moreover, the assessment only gives a snapshot of the situation and needs of persons with disabilities in April 2020.



## 4. MAIN FINDINGS

The results of the rapid assessment reveal that 82% of respondents express concern about protecting their health during COVID-19. In particular, 70% of respondents find it challenging to access medical care, including for check-ups, medicines, assistive devices and rehabilitation services. 25% of respondents also experience difficulties in getting hold of masks and hand sanitizer. 22% of respondents suffer from an underlying medical condition, potentially putting them at heightened risk from COVID-19. 41% of this group with underlying medical conditions are over 60 years of age. 24% of respondents do not have a Disability Certificate, which might limit their access to the services and assistance they need.

Many persons with disabilities are among the poorest in society. The 2016 national survey mentioned above had already indicated that “households with PWDs are twice as likely to be poor as non-disabled households”.<sup>11</sup> In the current survey, the overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) express concern for their financial security. 28% of respondents saw their income decrease in March 2020. As a result, 72% of PWDs have a monthly income of less than 1 million VND, which is 21% more people in this income range than the previous period (February 2019 to February 2020). More persons with disabilities are therefore falling into poverty. 28% of respondents are using their savings during this difficult time.



**I'm blind since I was born. I have a weak immune system and am in poor health condition. I have been regularly sick since I was little. I am having unpaid leave during this outbreak, so I have no money for medicine and treatment.**



<sup>11</sup> See page 17, [https://www.gso.gov.vn/default\\_en.aspx?tabid=515&idmid=5&ItemID=19055](https://www.gso.gov.vn/default_en.aspx?tabid=515&idmid=5&ItemID=19055).



Looking at employment, an astonishing 30% of respondents were made unemployed due to COVID-19. Another 49% saw their working hours reduced. Among those who work, 59% received a pay cut. Only 3% of respondents are actively looking for another job, and 19% exploring additional ways to generate income. 71% of the respondents who were working had seasonal/informal jobs or were informal business owners, thus at risk of being ineligible to receive allowances from the social welfare package announced by the Government. Currently, only persons certified as with severe and extremely severe disabilities are automatically entitled to receive from the package, leaving out those with mild disabilities. As Government interventions are being rolled out throughout the country, it is expected that many more persons with disabilities will receive support in the coming weeks.

When asked about their immediate needs, respondents focused on food, cash allowance or other financial support. This shows the significance of immediate disability-inclusive response because they are already the poorest of the poor, have now lost their job and cannot find alternative sources of income.

The assessment outcomes also indicate that response efforts to date are not fully disability inclusive. One encouraging finding is that the awareness levels of persons with disabilities of COVID-19 are high with 67% of respondents feeling well informed about the general response, with updated and real time information. Nonetheless, only 16% of respondents have been supported with food and 13% with different forms of financial support. 20% have received PPE (masks and hand sanitizers) and only 3% have received relevant training on public health responses such as handwashing, which is very low for a group at high risk.

**“ It is difficult for me to respect social distancing and hygiene rules because people with visual impairments always need a sighted guide when going to a new place and have to touch to identify objects and orient themselves ”**

**“ My regular means of transport is public bus. There is no bus during the social distancing period. I have to go to the market on foot. I am entitled for some allowance, but I have to stay at home and can't go out to receive it. ”**



# 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the rapid assessment, the following recommendations have been formulated:

## **(1) Provide emergency relief for the urgent needs of persons with disabilities:**

- Prioritize support for persons with disabilities in urgent need of medical care and services, providing telehealth services where appropriate to facilitate home health monitoring;
- Provide food, PPE, financial allowances, reduced house rent and utility bills to ensure the financial security of persons with disabilities.

## **(2) Ensure that the Government's support package is Disability-Inclusive,**

by ensuring coverage to include persons with disabilities working in the informal sector and providing information on the package in accessible formats with simple and transparent procedures.

## **(3) Ensure PWDs' financial security and education continuation, including through:**

- Developing new skillsets for persons with disabilities to explore new employment opportunities in the industry 4.0 working environment, including working from home and adapting to new online business practices;
- Provide accessible online employment and education platforms;
- Promote new online employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the private sector.

## **(4) Extend coverage of the Disability Certificate to include the wider population with disabilities.**

## **(5) Conduct a comprehensive assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on PWDs, with the full participation of PWDs, to design and implement the response and recovery programmes.**

To achieve this goal, accessible formats of information to accommodate the participation of different types of disabilities are highly recommended. Moreover, key organizations of persons with disabilities and other national partners, including those in rural and isolated areas, should fully engage in the assessment; face-to-face interviews should be conducted for those without internet access. The outcome of the in-depth assessment should be valuable evidence to inform the revision of the Law on Persons with Disabilities.

# ANNEX

## TEXT OF THE SURVEY

### SURVEY ABOUT DISABILITY-INCLUSIVE COVID-19 RESPONSE

This survey is developed by UNDP Viet Nam to identify the key challenges faced by you, people with disabilities (PWDs), and your families in the context of COVID-19. The survey focuses on assessing both the health and socio-economic impacts of both COVID-19 and the responses taken thus far. While all of society will have to make certain sacrifices during this time, COVID-19 will have a disproportionate impact on the health and socio-economic interests of PwDs. Please kindly spend 15 minutes to fill out this questionnaire by 28 April 2020. Your guardians can fill it out on your behalf with your consent. Your responses are valuable data for UNDP's advocacy work with the Government for improved inclusion of PWDs in crisis situations and ensuring you get the necessary supports. All your answers are kept anonymous and confidential. We are very grateful for your contributions to our work for PWDs.

Notes for those who fill out this questionnaire in Word or the hard copy format:

- Questions with the star “\*” require your answers.
- With multiple-choice questions, please tick “v” before your choices.
- With open questions, please write your responses in the blanks provided.

# I. Demographic Information

1. What is your gender: \*
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Others
  - d. Prefer not to answer
2. What is your age group? \*
  - a. 0-5
  - b. 6-18
  - c. 19-25
  - d. 26-40
  - e. 41-50
  - f. 51-60
  - g. Over 60
3. What is your ethnic group? \*
  - a. Kinh
  - b. Tay
  - c. Nung
  - d. H'mong
  - e. E-de
  - f. Khmer
  - g. Other. Please specify: .....
4. Where are you based? \*
  - a. Central city (Hanoi, HCMC, Danang etc.)
  - b. Province-level city
  - c. Small town
  - d. Rural
  - e. Mountainous
5. Do you hold the disability certificate? \*
  - a. Yes
  - b. No. Please explain why: .....
6. What is /are your form of disability(ies)? (Multiple choices are allowed) \*
  - a. Physical
  - b. Hearing and speech
  - c. Visual
  - d. Intellectual
  - e. Mental and psychiatric
  - f. Others. Please specify: .....
7. What is the degree of your disability(ies)? \*
  - a. Extremely severe
  - b. Severe
  - c. Mild....
  - d. Not determined. Please explain why: .....
8. What is the cause for your disability (ies)?
  - a. At birth
  - b. Due to disease/illness
  - c. Occupational accident
  - d. Accident in daily life
  - e. Traffic accident
  - f. Landmine/UXO accident
  - g. Wars
  - h. Others. Please specify: .....
9. What is the average income level of your family in the past 12 months before Feb 2020? \* (total earnings per household/family divided by total number of household/family members)
  - a. <1,000,000 /per person /month;
  - b. From 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 /per person /month;
  - c. >2,000,000 /per person /month.
10. What is the average income level of your family in Mar 2020? \* (total earnings per household/family divided by total number of household/family members)
  - a. <1,000,000/per person /month;
  - b. From 1,000,000 to 2,000,000 /per person /month;
  - c. >2,000,000 /per person /month.
11. What is your current job status? \*
  - a. Employed
  - b. Employed and also in education
  - c. Unemployed, still in education
  - d. Unemployed and not in education
  - e. Retired
  - f. Others. Please specify: .....(If you select a or b, go to Question 12 and 13)
12. If you are employed, which sector are you working in now?
  - a. In the formal sector (with a contract)
  - b. In the informal sector (without a contract)
  - c. Freelancer
  - d. Own a formal business
  - e. Own an informal business

13. In which industry do you work?
- a. Tourism and hospitality (restaurant /hotel etc.)
  - b. Manufacturing
  - c. Trading (including selling goods online etc.)
  - d. Agriculture /forestry /fishery /salt production
  - e. Transportation
  - f. Healthcare & Therapy (massage, hairdressing, nail salon etc.)
  - g. Information, Communication Technology (ICT)
  - h. Others. Please specify: ...

14. Do you have a non-communicable disease (E.g.: cancer, diabetes, cardio-vascular diseases)? \*
- a. Yes
  - b. No

15. Do you have health insurance? \*
- a. Yes
  - b. No

16. Have you been diagnosed with COVID-19? \*
- a. Yes
  - b. No

17. Are you in quarantine? \*
- a. Yes. Official or centralised MoH.
  - b. Yes. Self-quarantine
  - c. No, I am not quarantined.

18. Has anyone in your family been diagnosed with COVID-19? \*
- a. Yes (go to Question 19)
  - b. No

19. Is yes, is this person your primary caregiver?
- a. Yes
  - b. No

## II. Challenges In the COVID-19 Pandemic

20. On the scale from 1 to 5, how would you rate your level of awareness of official information on COVID-19 regarding infection mitigating tips, public restriction plans, and the support services offered etc.: \*
- a. Not informed at all (completely dependent on care giver/family members)
  - b. Basic information on general response
  - c. Well informed on general response
  - d. Well informed of general response, with updated and real time information
  - e. Well informed of general response, updated real time information and aware of measures and advice specifically for protecting PwDs.

21. Where do you get information from regarding SARS-CoV-2 infection mitigating tips, public restriction plans, and the support services offered? \*
- a. Government website
  - b. Online newspapers
  - c. Television
  - d. Radio
  - e. Printed newspaper
  - f. Audio file
  - g. Braille
  - h. Word of mouth
  - i. SMS
  - j. Official COVID-19 Mobile App
  - k. Social Media (Facebook/Zalo/WhatsApp)
  - l. Others. Please specify: .....

## Health Challenges

22. What key challenges in terms of protecting your health do you face during the COVID-19 response (you can choose up to five (05) challenges)? \*

- a. Accessing correct official information about health responses to COVID-19
- b. Being excluded from local healthcare preparedness and response of my community (E.g.: the health information is not available in sign language)
- c. Lack of accessible facilities, and disability and gender-sensitive support in quarantine areas (inaccessible restroom, no sign language interpretation, no sighted guide etc.)
- d. Access to health clinic and checkup services
- e. Access to rehabilitation and physiotherapy
- f. Access to medicines and drugs
- g. Access to medical supplies and assistive devices
- h. Access to necessities, including personal protective equipment (mask, hand sanitizer, clean water, soap...) and food
- i. Access to appropriate training (handwashing, mask usage, social distancing etc.)
- j. No challenges at all
- k. Others (please specify): .....

23. On a scale from 1-5 how concerned are you about your health? \*

- a. Not concerned at all
- b. Mildly concerned
- c. Concerned
- d. Very concerned

## Socio-Economic Challenges

24. What challenges in terms of socio-economic protection do you face during the COVID-19 response (you can choose up to three challenges)? \*

- a. Accessing correct official information about social responses to COVID-19 (no information about quarantine areas or appropriate forms of quarantine...)
- b. Being excluded from local preparedness and response of my community (E.g.: no priority hour for PWDs in the local market)
- c. Lack of accessible facilities, and disability and gender-sensitive support in quarantine areas (staff in the quarantine areas are not skilled enough to assist PWDs)
- d. Access to necessities, such as food, medicines and PPE
- e. Access to psychosocial support
- f. Double workload because of working and taking care of children at the same time while schools are closed
- g. Temporarily unemployed because of COVID-19

If so, since when? .....

- h. Reduced work hours
- i. Reduced income
- j. Not enough money to purchase essentials
- k. Feeling more dependent and insecure when family income is severely affected
- l. Increased discrimination due to COVID-19 response.

If so, please explain: .....

- m. Access to ongoing education
- n. No challenges at all
- o. Others (please specify): .....

25. On a scale from 1-5 how concerned are you about your finances? \*

- a. Not concerned at all
- b. Mildly concerned
- c. Concerned
- d. Very concerned
- e. Urgently concerned (I need immediate support)

If concerned, please specify your concern: .....

### III. Responses and Coping Strategies to COVID-19

26. How are you and your family coping with the COVID-19? \*

- a. Stay at home and try to limit going out as much as possible
- b. Store food and PPE
- c. Looking for another job
- d. Finding other ways to generate (additional) income
- e. Using savings
- f. Asking help from relatives/neighbors/friends (for taking care of your children, for example)
- g. Using online/home delivery services to buy essential goods
- h. Receive allowance and support from the social welfare system of the Government and social organizations
- i. Do nothing
- j. Others (specify): .....

27. Have you received any of the following support from the Government, as well as organizations of /for people with disabilities, as part of the COVID-19 response? \*

- a. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, hand sanitizer, clean water and soap, etc.
- b. Appropriate training (Handwashing, mask usage, social distancing etc.)
- c. Priority for people with disabilities in accessing essential goods (such as priority hour in local markets /supermarket)
- d. Psychosocial support
- e. Medical supplies and devices
- f. Medicines and drugs
- g. Food
- h. Cash allowance or other financial supports (tax deference, reduction, loan with lower interest,...)
- i. Information about COVID-19 in different channels /accessible formats



28. What support do you need more to help you better cope with the COVID-19? On the scale from 1 to 5, please rank: \*

- (1) Needed the least
- (2) Somewhat needed
- (3) Needed
- (4) Much needed
- (5) Needed the most

No.	Items	1	2	3	4	5
1	Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as masks, hand sanitizer, clean water and soap etc.					
2	Appropriate training (Handwashing, mask usage, social distancing etc.)					
3	Priority for people with disabilities in local services (priority hour in local markets /supermarket, priority in transportation...)					
4	Psychosocial support					
5	Medical supplies					
6	Medicines and drugs					
7	Food					
8	Cash allowance or other financial support (more tax reduction, loan with lower interest)					

29 Apart from the needs suggested in question 28, do you have any other requests for support?

.....

.....

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Thank you for your cooperation. We will share with you the survey results when the data is analyzed.



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