

The Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 in Mauritius



ABOUT THE REPORT

This assessment is a joint effort of the United Nations System in Mauritius. It was prepared under the leadership of UNDP as part of the broader development support to national response to Covid-19.

Drafted by:

Ewelina Pusz
Riad Sultan
Aveeraj Peedoly
Monica Pudaruth (Research Assistant)

UNDP Team Lead:

Tony Muhumuza
Renooka Beejan
Anjalee Dabee

Editing:

George Outa

Design, Layout & Production:

Ricardo Cuenca B.

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Acronyms

CTSP	Confederation Travayere Secteur Prive
CPI	Consumer Price Index
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GDFC	Gross Domestic Fixed Capital
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GGI	Global Gender Gap Index
GIS	Government Information Service
GVA	Gross Value Added
HBS	Household Budget Survey
HDI	Human Development Index
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IO	Input-output
MGEFW	Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare
NCD	Non-communicable Diseases
NHS	National Household Survey
PHS	Poor Household Survey
RCMPHS	Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SEIA	Socio-Economic Impact Assessment
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WAP	Work Access Permit
WAS	Wage Assistance Scheme
WB	World Bank
WHO	World Health Organisation
WTO	World Trade Organisation



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The report was guided by a core technical team that was nominated by the United Nations Country Team and chaired by the UNDP Senior Economist and the Head of the Socio-Economic Development Unit of UNDP in Mauritius. The core technical team included representation from the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UNDP, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), UN Women, World Bank and the World Health Organisation (WHO). The comprehensive household survey that informed the report was designed and analysed with technical support from the UNDP's Crisis Bureau in New York in order to enable comparability with surveys conducted globally for assessing the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The preparation process was widely consultative, including the participation of several ministries and institutions, namely: the Ministry of Finance, Economic Planning and Development; Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development and Family Welfare; Ministry of Social Integration, Social Security and National Solidarity; Ministry of Labour, Human Resource Development and Training; the National Empowerment Foundation (NEF); Mauritius Police Force; Statistics Mauritius; University of Mauritius; Mauritius Council of Social Services (MACOSS); FoodWise Mauritius; Lovebridge Mauritius; Rainbow Foundation; Prevention Information Et Lutte Contre Le Sida (PILS); Aides, Infos, Liberté, Espoir, Solidarité (AILES); Collectif Urgence Toxida (CUT); Association Kinouétél; WE Empower; Women in Networking (WIN); Mauritius Co-operative Agricultural Federation Ltd; Fact Sheet; and Mauritius Export Association.

Special appreciation goes to the citizens of Mauritius for their unconditional participation in the household survey amidst pressures to cope with the pandemic.



Christine N. Umutoni
UN Resident Coordinator
Mauritius and Seychelles



Amanda K. Serumaga
UNDP Resident Representative
Mauritius and Seychelles

Executive summary

This report provides an initial assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Mauritius.

It was undertaken as part of the efforts to respond to the UN Secretary General's call on the UN system to support countries in responding to the pandemic. The report utilizes a combination of household survey data collected by UNDP during the aftermath of the lockdown, with historical data on macro-economic and sectoral aggregates, and key informant interviews with sector experts. The novelty of this report, in part, pertains to the effort to capture household behaviour and their assessment of the efficacy of immediate recovery support, during and after lockdown, and assessing the impacts on the poorest of the poor - a segment of the population often not captured in national surveys. The assessment captures the short-term, medium-term and long-term impacts of the pandemic at macro, sectoral and household levels.

At the macro level, declining exports and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) will continue to affect the growth in the long term.

The World Bank and IMF project that the main trading partners of Mauritius will record negative growth in 2020 which will likely result in further fall in exports and FDI. Real GDP declined by 33% during the second quarter of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019. The negative impact on GDP would have been worse, at around 40%, had the Government not intervened with relief measures. The unemployment rate, that has been stable during the past five years at an average of 7.1% reached 10.3% in July. The largest effect was felt in the informal sector where employment during the lockdown fell by 89,200 compared to 40,200 in the formal sector.

At the sectoral level, high levels of vulnerability were observed in manufacturing, accommodation and food, construction, entertainment and recreation sectors. These sectors registered a fall of 43.6, 98.1, 89.4 and 85% in the second quarter

of 2020 relative to 2019, respectively. Real estate activities (-1.2%), financial and insurance activities (0.2%), and public administration (-6.7%) were less impacted. Without the Government's financial support, the impact on the output could have been even worse. The fall in tourism would have led to an additional fall in GDP of around 9% in 2020 relative to 2019 corresponding to 51,000 jobs at risk. Similarly, a fall in manufacturing exports (excluding food and beverages) of 10% relative to 2019 would have led to a fall in GDP by 0.5%, while a fall by 30% would lead to a fall in GDP by 1.5% , associated to 4,000 and 12,000 jobs at risk respectively. The sectors such as public administration, education, health and transport, where the Government is directly involved, are more resilient and will likely play a critical role in sustaining a significant proportion of domestic consumption demand.

At the household level, Government recovery measures were instrumental in cushioning the population from the severe impacts of the pandemic.

Households are highly satisfied with the measures introduced by the Government such as social distancing, mask wearing, hygiene increase, wage assistance scheme, food pack distribution, and the debt repayment moratorium, among others. No major disruption in food supply was observed after the lockdown, although poor households reported some difficulties in accessing basic provisions. Widespread and timely support from the Government, civil society and communities to vulnerable groups have contributed not only towards building resilience but also to the maintenance of social peace and harmony.

Nevertheless, there is a need to monitor the situation, particularly among the poorest and the most disadvantaged groups. Overall, households registered a 25% fall in income with the worst impact felt in households that largely depended on the tourism sector – 70% of which survived on less

than half of their usual incomes. People adjusted to decreasing purchasing power by various means. Households relied on less and cheaper food, used savings, and reduced proportion of meals. However, the poor households responded to lower income differently by purchasing food on credit or seeking assistance from relatives and/or friends. An attempt to capture the coping strategies of the poor households, often not enrolled in the Social Register, revealed that close to 97% of the households spent all their income on necessities during the lockdown while about 40% sold assets and 27% purchased food on credit. Children in 62% of these households were not able to access online classes in contrast to 85% attendance recorded in the National Household Survey (NHS); thus, posing significant challenge in closing the gap in access to education to break the poverty cycle among the vulnerable. As part of efforts to close this gap, free internet services and 2,570 tablets are being provided to families in the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM) by the Government. **The period also registered an increase in incidents of domestic violence by 33%, with 93% of the cases perpetrated against women.** Unfortunately, most of these cases were not reported to authorities, with 37.5% of victims having kept it to themselves and 62.5% preferring to confide in other people. Among the poorest of the poor, the incidence of domestic violence was 9% being twice as high as among the respondents in the NHS.

Amidst its challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity for the population and decision-makers to reflect on the functioning of the Mauritian society, to identify its strengths and weaknesses and to build back better. The complexity of these COVID-19-induced new social dynamics would require more attention in the coming months. The risk of job losses and falling income streams are essentially the main concern of the majority of the population and precarity can adversely affect social

cohesion. To this end, sustaining domestic demand and social support will be the key towards recovery. Continuous efforts to dynamise the economy, in particular the manufacturing and services sectors, remain crucial at the moment. In this respect, the use of innovations in ICTs and digital technologies such as tele and online medical care, online education, online shopping and innovative delivery systems, among many others, could bring new competitive edge to the industries and improve efficiency of access to consumers. Businesses, especially SMEs and women owned enterprises, would also benefit from acceleration in digital transformation. An investment into value chain and smart and sustainable agriculture that would eventually lead to the transition into sustainable and green agro-industry should also be considered.

It is essential to observe the impact on women, vulnerable groups, and households at different strata of the society as the economic systems respond to the new normal, and to ensure that no one, especially the poor, is left behind. Protection of jobs in affected sectors, assistance to struggling enterprises, employability, reskilling and redeployment of retrenched workers are likely to grow in importance. The implementation of the National Training and Reskilling Scheme (NTRS) by the Government targeting 9,000 unemployed citizens is therefore in line to protecting jobs and creating new ones. A national contingency or response plan could be formulated, with emphasis on the poor and most vulnerable groups, building on the experience of the pandemic. The on-going collaboration between the Government of Mauritius and the United Nations on the COVID-19 Socio-Economic Recovery Plan (SERP) provides a good starting point for conversation on multi-sectoral response to crises.

1

Introduction



The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented global health crisis that has had far reaching economic and social implications worldwide.

The inevitable stringent lockdown measures, coupled with the dynamics at the global scale, have resulted in several constraints in many countries affecting sectors across the board. The Republic of Mauritius is not spared. The impacts of the pandemic in Mauritius are clearly visible on individuals, communities, and the economy, most of which are synonymous with the experiences of other countries globally.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Mauritian economy was on a steady growth trajectory,

with Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate estimated at 3% in 2019 supported by sustained household consumption growth, a significant rise in public investment and net external demand. Within a well-diversified economy, the construction and services sector were the main contributors of GDP. The positive trajectory of structural transformation of the economy had helped maintain the downward trend of the unemployment rate from 6.9% in 2018 to 6.7% in 2019. The Balance of Payments recorded a surplus of Rs 32.8billion in 2019. Higher exports of goods and gross international reserves coupled with a lower gross external debt contributed to the easing of the external vulnerabilities of the economy.

Being a small island economy, whose outward looking development trajectory has bound itself to the global economy, Mauritius bears the brunt of shocks

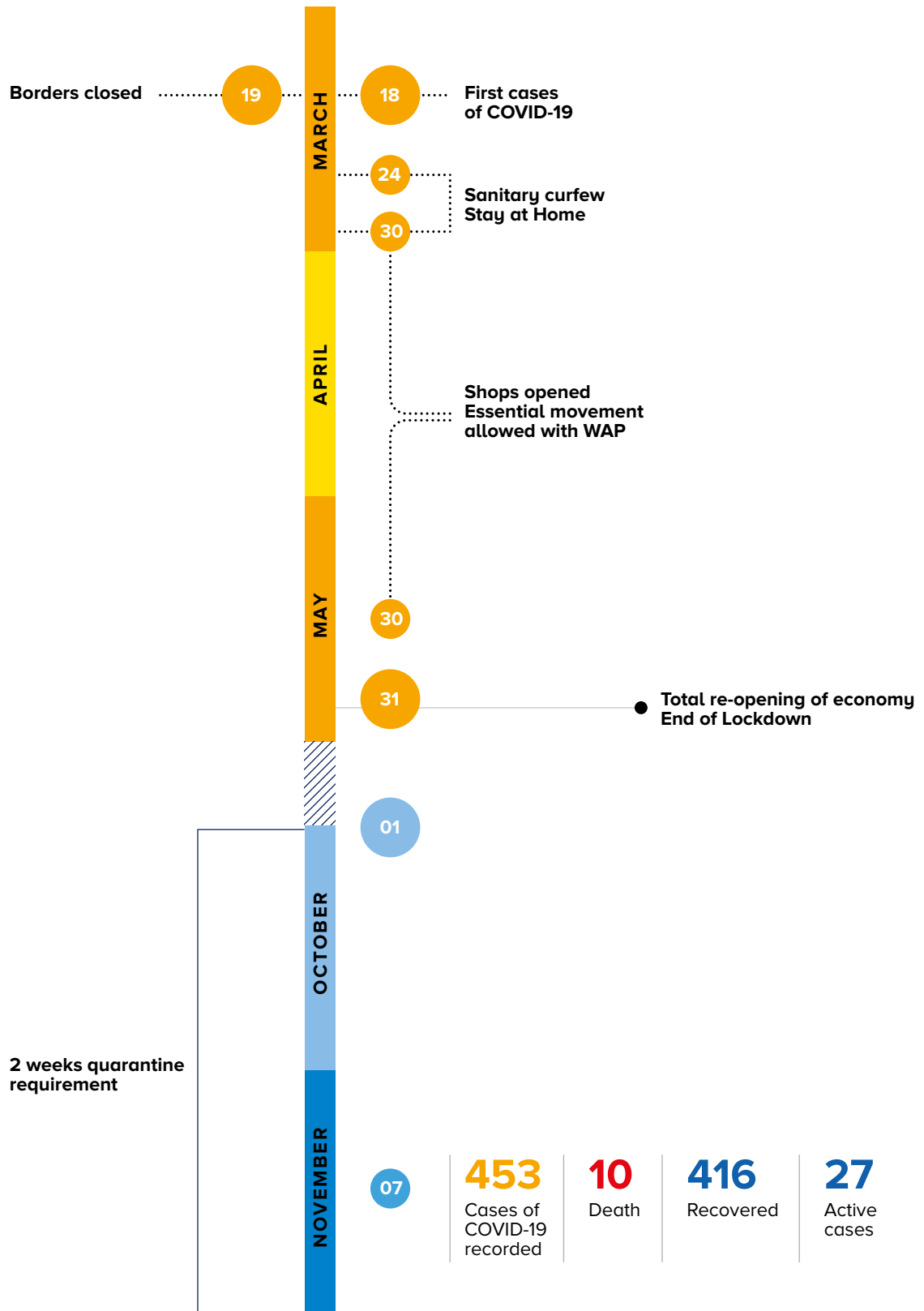
whose impact can be far reaching on society. While it is clear that the pandemic changed the entire landscape, with: closure of international travels and global economic activity including tourism on which the Mauritian economy is largely dependent; restrictions on public, private and household activities, there is still limited evidence on the short-term, medium-term and long-term impacts that this pandemic may have posed across sectors.

Following the global directive of the UN Secretary General to support countries to effectively respond and recover to the pandemic, this report assesses the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 in Mauritius.

The novelty of this report pertains to 1) analysis undertaken at two levels including the first tier that captures the impact of the pandemic on the macro-economic aggregates, select sectors of the economy, and households, and the second that assesses the resilience of households through articulation of coping mechanisms in the face of the pandemic; 2) the use of a household COVID-19 study collected 4 months after lock down that captured household behavior, impact, resilience and effectiveness of government interventions during and after the lockdown; and 3) an assessment of conditions of other vulnerable individuals not enrolled in the Social Register of Mauritius. The selection of these groups was based on the geographic locations and was assisted by NGOs. Given the complexity of the issues, and the collection of survey data, the report has exceeded the expected timeline. However, the findings are based on data collected specifically for this study and provide an assessment which can inform decision makers.

The report is structured as follows. In [section 2](#), an assessment of the shocks (during and post-lockdown) from the COVID-19 pandemic is conducted on the economy, applying both a macroeconomic and sectoral analysis. It ends with an impact on the labour market and employment. This section uses the IO model and secondary statistics where applicable. [Section 3](#) focuses on the impact at household level using the NHS and PHS as well as qualitative interviews. [Section 4](#) details the responses and coping strategies of the pandemic at household level and provides a concise analysis of Government measures. [Section 5](#) elaborates on pertinent issues at the level of the community, including an assessment of the impact of vulnerable groups (children, elderly, people living with HIV and migrant workers).

Timelines of the COVID-19 outbreak



2

Impact on Economy



Summary:

A

- The disruption of economic activities due to the lockdown had significant impact on output.

B

- Without the Government stimulus, the fall in GDP the first quarter of 2020 relative to 2019 would have been 40% lower instead of the reported 33%, and almost 51,000 jobs would have been at risk.

C

- The shock had a direct effect on accommodation and food services, textile and other manufacturing sectors, while the vulnerability of agriculture, wholesale and retail trade was due to the indirect linkages to the hard-hit sectors.

D

- Some sectors such as construction were hit because of the interruptions; the main effects of pandemic are likely to be felt in coming months as the investment take a downward trend

E

- Short-term stabilization, stimulating domestic demand and social support is essential to sustain the economy during the difficult economic situation.

F

- New sectors such as the ocean economy could be considered strongly to drive the economy in the longer term.

2.1. Macro-economic aggregates

The immediate economic impacts are demonstrated by indicators for the first quarter of 2020 which mainly reflected the disruption in activities for the end of March, for nearly 11 days. Compared to the 1st quarter of 2019, GDP at basic prices for the 1st quarter of 2020 recorded a negative growth of 2.6%, a fall in taxes on products net of subsidies by 6.7% and a fall in Export-Oriented Enterprises by 6%. The impact was greater in the second quarter that registered a 32.9% of real GDP at basic prices compared from the same period in 2019. This was associated with a fall in taxes on products net of subsidies by 29.8%.

This impact could have been worse without the austerity measures that were introduced by the Government to cushion the economy (see box 2.2 and appendix 5). Assuming the financial support was fully spent by household consumption, the consumption patterns from the Household Budget Survey (HBS) conducted in 2017 by the Statistics Mauritius can be used to infer how the injecting of Rs11.4 billion into the economy from end of March to June 2020 may have directly or indirectly helped to sustain economic activities following the immediate economic shock (see figure 2.1)¹.

This support helped drive demand of goods and services to the tune of Rs16 billion, corresponding to a multiplier effect of 1.4, creating a value-added of Rs7.8 billion during this period. It also cushioned the economy from a further 7.2 percentage point decline in real GDP at basic prices.

Box 2.1. Methodology

This section utilises the input-output (IO) model to estimate the inter-sectoral linkages in an economy.

The model allows for analysis of the direct and indirect effects on output, income, and employment, when final demand for sectoral output changes. An overview of this method is provided in **Appendix 2**.

Box 2.2. Selective government support measures

Wage Assistance Scheme: Rs1821m from 16 March - 31 March; Rs3,343m in April, Rs2797m in May and Rs549m in June. The total amount disbursed as of June 2020 was Rs8,626m.

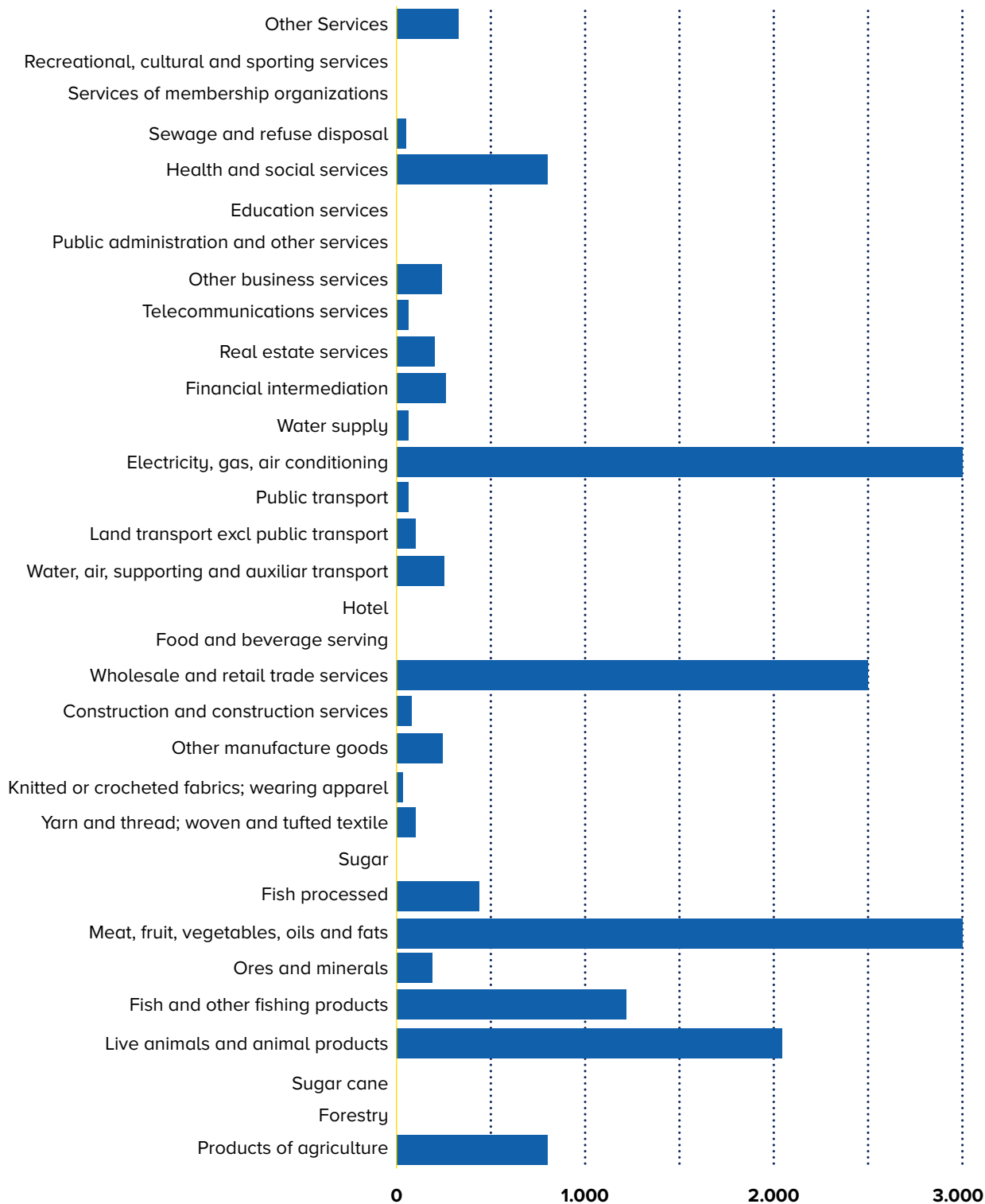
Self-Employed Assistance Scheme: Rs 5,100 per month paid out to self-employed people who suffered a loss of revenue. From 16 March to 15 April amounted to Rs1035m, Rs477m from 16 to 30 April, Rs942m in May, and Rs9m in June. The total amounted to 2.415m by end of June.

Food distribution: Distribution of basic food commodities to vulnerable groups: Rs38million (averaged Rs1,001 per beneficiary). A total of 17,936 food packs were distributed to 7900 households in the Social Register of Mauritius, while 19,779 food packs were distributed to beneficiaries of Carer's Allowance.

Note: With effect from January 2021, until borders are fully opened, the government has committed to pay an allowance under the Wage Assistance Scheme and the Self Employment Scheme in the Tourism sector.

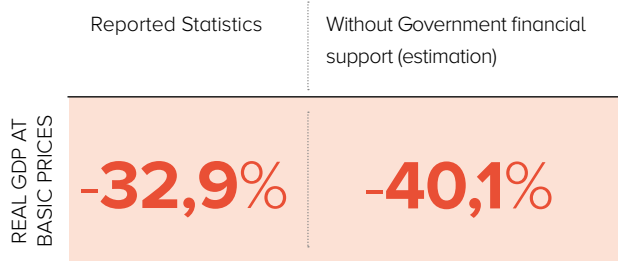
¹ – The Household Budget Survey (2017) shows that food and beverages, housing, water, electricity, gas and fuels, and health-related expenditure amounts to 52% of household consumption expenditure on a monthly basis. Using this allocation, the assessment assumes that the Wage Assistance Scheme and the Self-Employed Assistance Scheme are mainly spent on these items with the following percentages: 71.1% on food and beverages, 21.5% on housing, electricity, water, gas and fuels and 7.4% on health-related items. Food and beverages are further allocated to farming, processed foods, and wholesale and retail trade.

FIGURE 2.1.
Economy-wide impact from Government financial support



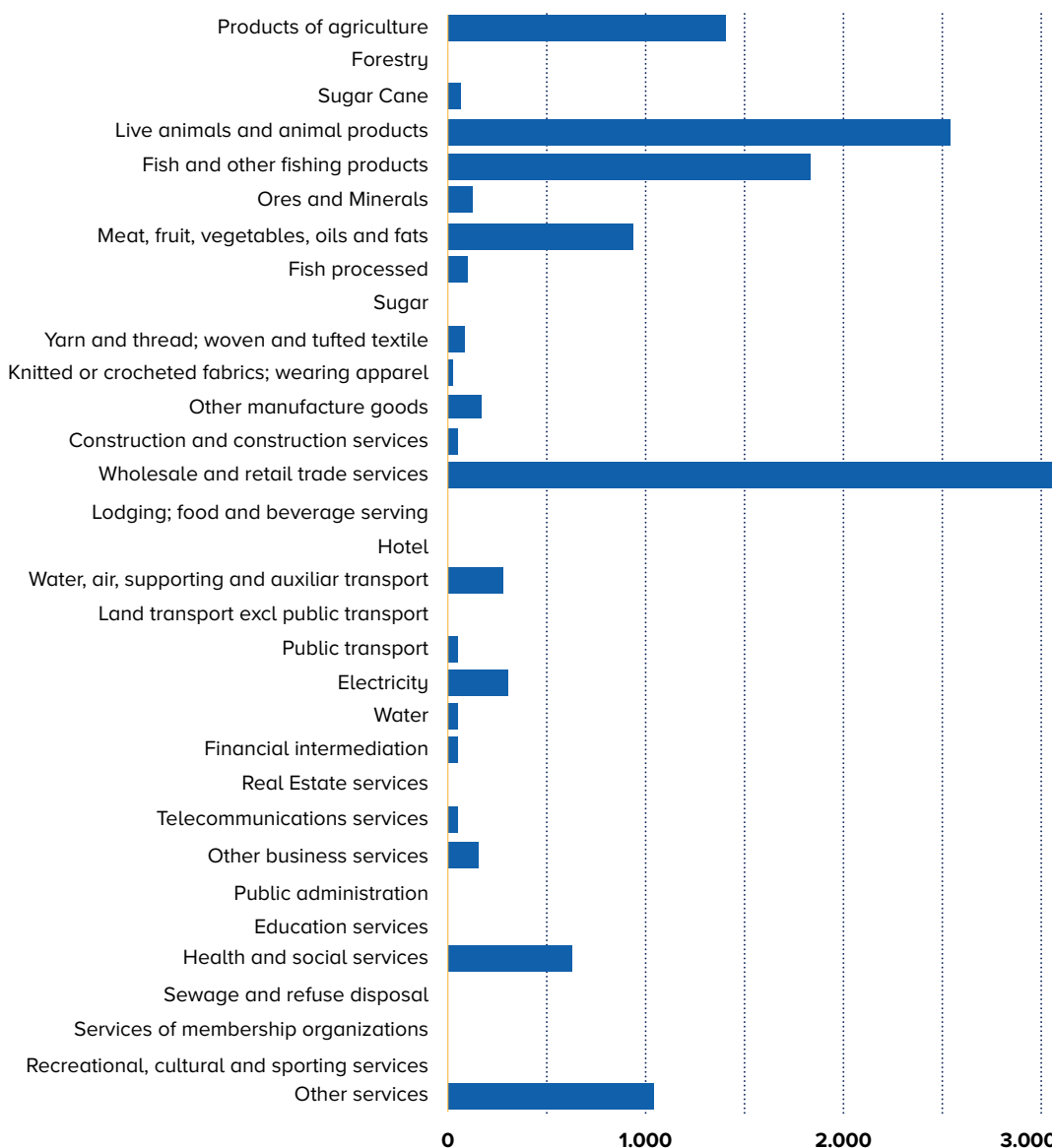
Source: IO model

Comparison 2nd quarter 2019 and 2nd quarter 2020



The largest relief of Government support on employment was registered as farming, retail and trade services; livestock industry; fisheries, and agriculture livestock. Overall the stimulus was indirectly sustaining around 13,000 jobs.

Figure 2.2. Linkages between employment and Government financial support during the lockdown



Source: IO model

Appendix 1 shows the inflation rates from 2017 to 2020. The headline inflation rate was 0.8% in February and has since increased to 2.1% in October.

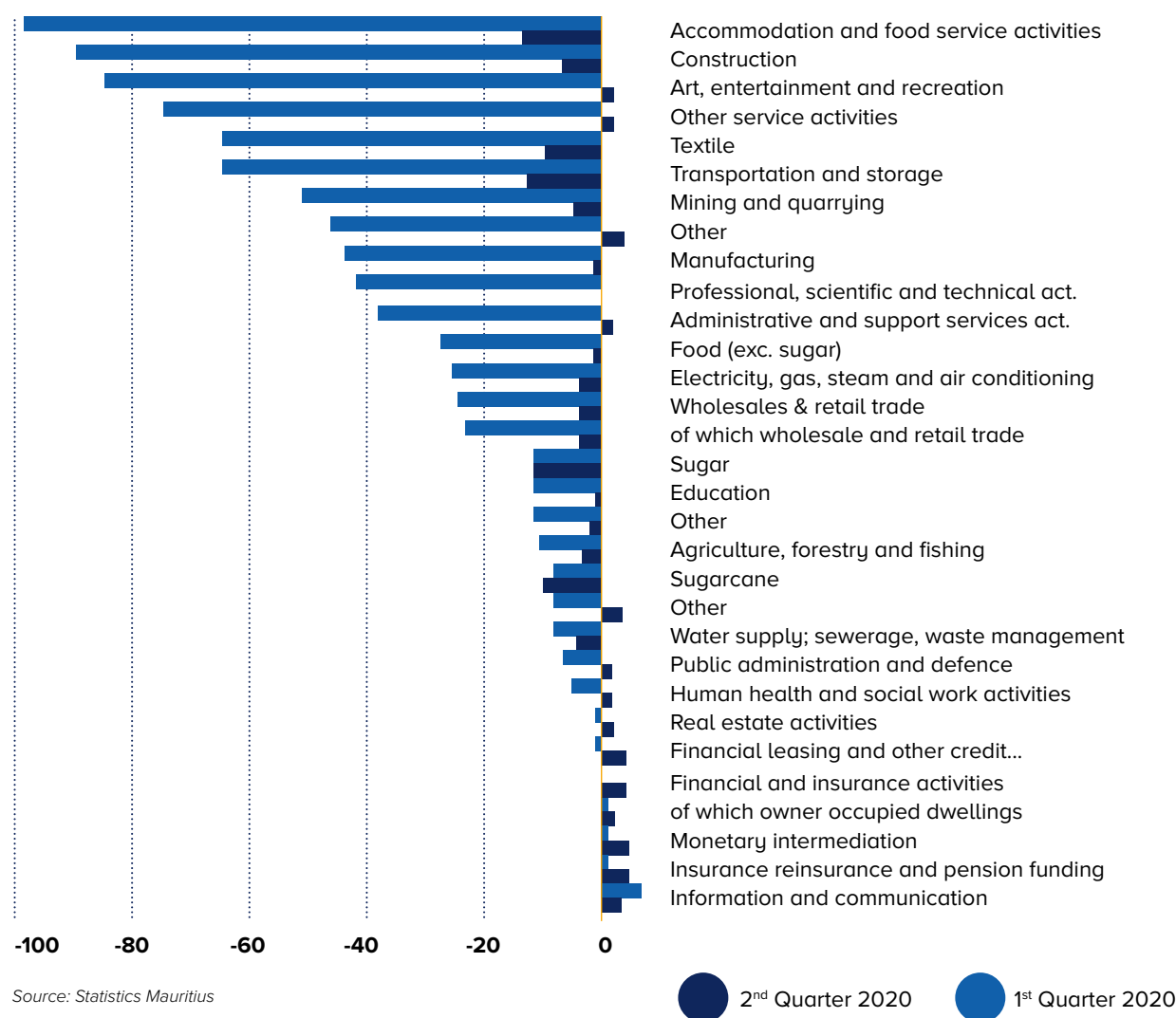
2.2. Sectoral performance

While the lockdown has wide ranging economic effects which extend beyond the devastating health effects, the economic impacts in the post-lockdown period reflects multiple shocks to the economy from both the supply and demand side. The impact depends on the degree of integration with the world markets and the inter-industry linkages of the Mauritian economy. This report identified three main external shocks, including: 1) the immediate impact on the tourism sector is very visible with a fall in tourist arrivals and earnings; 2) Mauritius, having strong trade and investment linkages, is likely to be affected significantly through a reduction in the production of export-oriented enterprises; and 3) a decline in FDI is an inevitable shock from pandemic.

Figure 2.3 compares the quarter-to-quarter percentage change in value-added from 2019 to 2020. The lockdown led to a fall of 2.9% in agricultural value-added in the 1st quarter, followed by a further fall of 11% in the 2nd quarter. This was driven by a decline in sugarcane and food crops production that recorded a reduction of 8.5 and 11.4% in the 2nd quarter, respectively. The food crops sector is of high interest given its contribution to food security especially at a time of crisis. Some sectors such as manufacturing, accommodation and food, construction, entertainment, and recreation, showed high vulnerability. These sectors recorded respectively a fall of 43.6, 98.1, 89.4 and 85% in the second quarter 2020 relative to 2019. Others, including real estate activities (-1.2%), financial and insurance activities (0.2%), and public administration (-6.7%), were less impacted.

Figure 2.3.

Quarter-to-quarter (1st & 2nd) percentage change 2019-2020 in Value-Added



However, the real estate activities and financial and insurance activities may exhibit a different trend when the external shocks of the pandemic are fully internalised in the future months.

The future trends (post-lockdown period) would depend on aggregate domestic demand and the latter be

2.2.1. Industrial sector

The industrial sector is made of the manufacturing, electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, and water supply and waste management, with a value-added of Rs 64.4 billion in 2019, accounted for 15.7% of GDP. The manufacturing sector accounts for 12.5% of GDP and employed 20.4% of labour force. Export-oriented enterprises, mainly textile products, account for 34.3% of the value-added of manufacturing sector and 29% of the industrial sector. Industrial activity mainly focused on food processing (36%) and textiles and apparel (29%), while sectors such as pharmaceuticals and high-end jewellery and precision engineering were expected to grow in the future with a push towards smart manufacturing. In 2019, 52.7% of exports were destined to Europe; UK, France and Italy represented, respectively, 13.9, 10 and 6.9%. Exports to US and South Africa stood at 11.8% and 11.5% respectively. Key import sources on the other hand were India (18%) and China (17%).

The pandemic resulted in overall decline in industrial output in the 1st and 2nd quarter of 2020 (figure 2.3), mostly by 65% in textiles, 27.6% in food processing, and 46.4% in manufacturing. The impact was greater for export-oriented output that declined by 54.2% compared to 39.1% for non-export-oriented output². It is noted that export-oriented enterprises employed 42,651 in June 2020 and 47.8% were women. The shock on manufacturing originated from outside the domestic economy and would depend on the economic situation of the major trading partners of Mauritius. The World Bank and IMF project that countries like France, UK, Italy and Spain would record a negative growth in 2020 which could result in the significant decline in exports in 2021. Similarly, the tourism sector will be impacted as France and Reunion Islands, UK and Germany constituted more than 50% of the arrivals in 2019³.

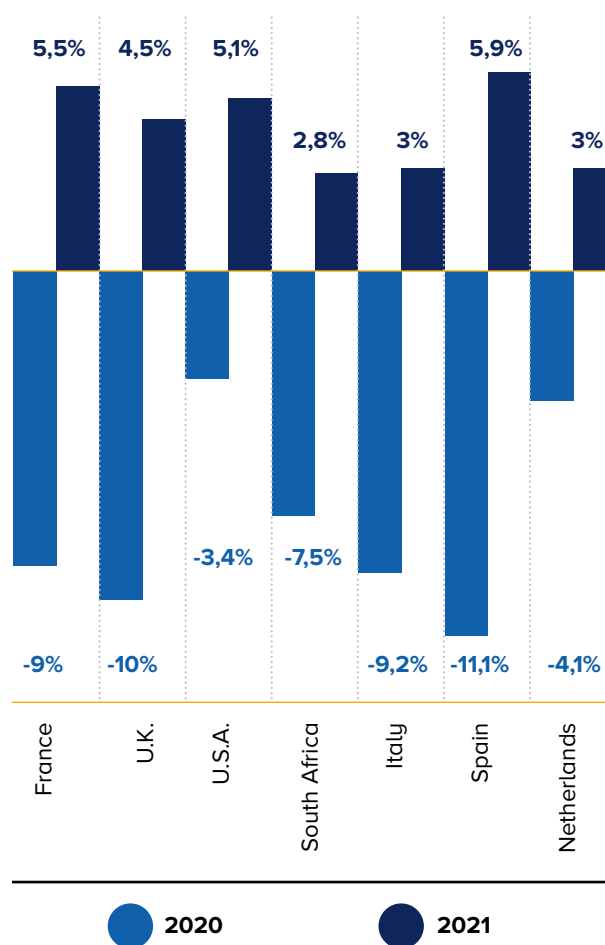
An attempt is made to estimate the total economic impact of the fall in merchandise exports (excluding food and beverages)⁴, which stood at 52.3% of total exports in 2019 on the economy. This reduction in exports will

stimulated through Government financial support.

However, several sectors such as the accommodation and food service and export-oriented sectors are subject to external shocks which are likely to continue in the post-lockdown period.

FIGURE 2.4.

Projected growth in trading countries



Source: IMF World Economic Outlook January 2021

impact not only on the gross output and value-added of the manufacturing sector, but also on other economic sectors. As the percentage reduction over the period is still uncertain, the IO model is used to simulate the impact ranging from -10 to -80%. Figure 2.5. shows the outcome. For instance, in case there is a fall of 30% in manufacturing exports, GDP will reduce by 1.5% relative to 2019 and taxes of products (net of subsidies) will decrease by 0.8%.

Figure 2.5 and 2.6 show the economic consequences of a fall in manufacturing exports from 10 to 80%.

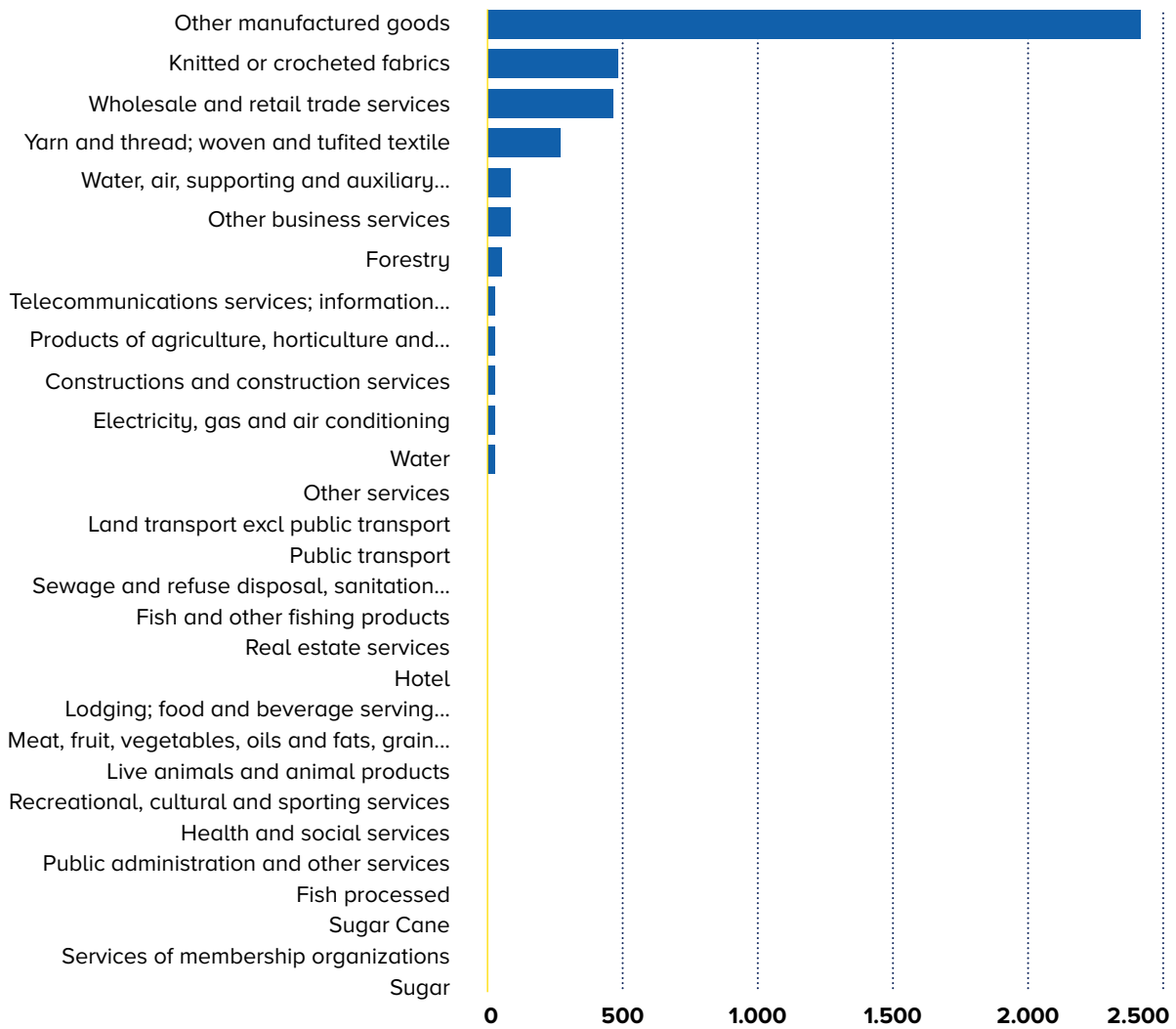
2 – Digest of Industrial Statistics

3 – Statistics Mauritius, Oct 2019

4 – This corresponds to SITC section 6 Manufacturing goods classified by materials and section 8 Miscellaneous manufacturing articles

Figure 2.5.

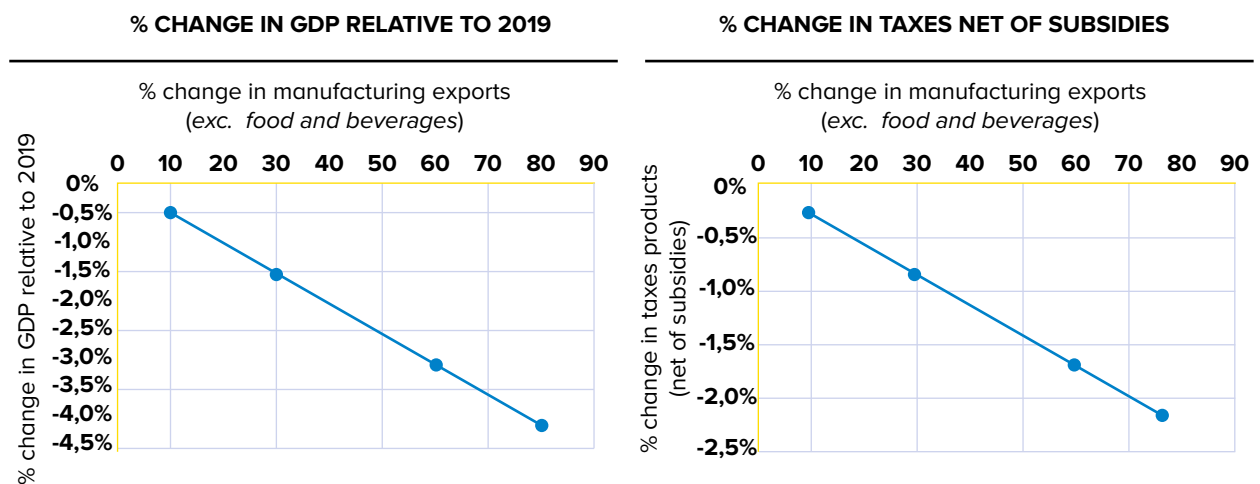
Employment impact on a 10% fall in manufacturing exports (exc. food and beverages)



Source: IO model

Figure 2.6.

Total economic impact of a fall in manufacturing exports on GDP and taxes



Source: IO model

2.2.2. Tourism

The tourism sector contributed 8.2% of GDP in 2019 directly and 23.8% indirectly⁵. It accounted for 22 % of employment, 60.3% of services exports and 35% of total exports. Mauritius is extremely vulnerable given its high dependency on tourism and the sector is the most affected one. The total tourist arrivals for the year 2019 stood at 1383,488 with earnings of Rs63,107 million. The Bank of Mauritius had forecasted Rs65 billion for the year 2020 without the pandemic. The fall in foreign earnings from the loss of tourism arrivals remains a major concern for the economy. Travel bans meant no tourist earnings from April to October 2020 until the air travel was eased, yet easing of travel will still not guarantee recovery in the short to medium term (figure 2.7) given the second wave of infections in major markets or Mauritius as well as the mandatory quarantine requirements for inbound travellers.

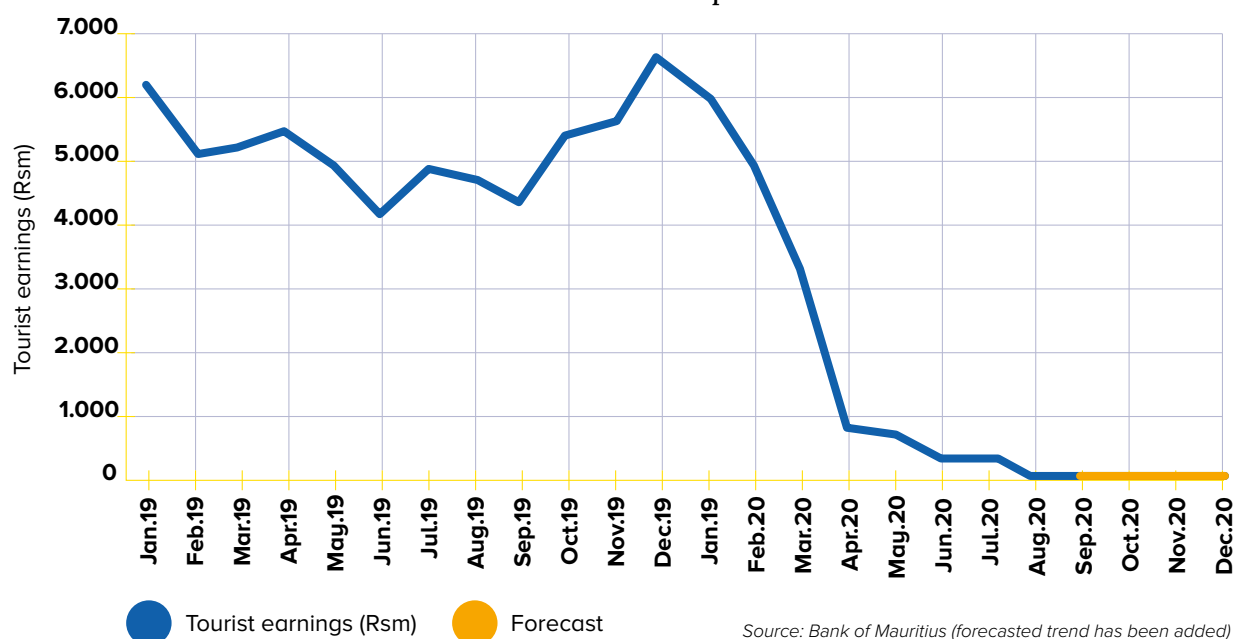
In 2019, 34.5% of tourist arrivals originated from Europe, 34.4% from Africa and 28.7% from Asia. The main countries of origin are United Arab Emirates (19%), Reunion Island (17.7%), France (15.3%), South Africa (12.3%), United Kingdom (6.1%), India (4.7%) and Germany (4.6%)⁷.

With the fall in tourism from April 2020, the total arrivals for the year would stand at 310,000 and tourism earnings would fall to around Rs18 billion in 2019. The direct impact would be felt in sectors where tourist expenditure was normally distributed. These were accommodation services (55.1%), followed by air and sea passenger transport services (12.5%), food and beverages (8%), land transport services (5.6%), recreational-based activities (4.4%) and other tourism-related consumption goods and services⁸, where indirect impacts will be felt in these sectors as well.

The fall in tourism expenditure would impact indirectly on other economic sectors as their demand would also decrease, thereby creating multiple round of decreasing output. The value-added of the accommodation services sector would fall by 77%, air and water services sector by 30%, food and beverages by 27%, entertainment and recreational sector by 9% and land transport services by 9%. The main indirect impacts were felt in the agricultural sector (-16%), food processing (-14%), water (-12%), electricity (-11%), business activities (-8%). The total economic impact of the pandemic from the tourism sector for 2020 is estimated at 9% of GDP.

Figure 2.7.

Tourist earnings January 2019 to September 2020⁶



Source: Bank of Mauritius (forecasted trend has been added)

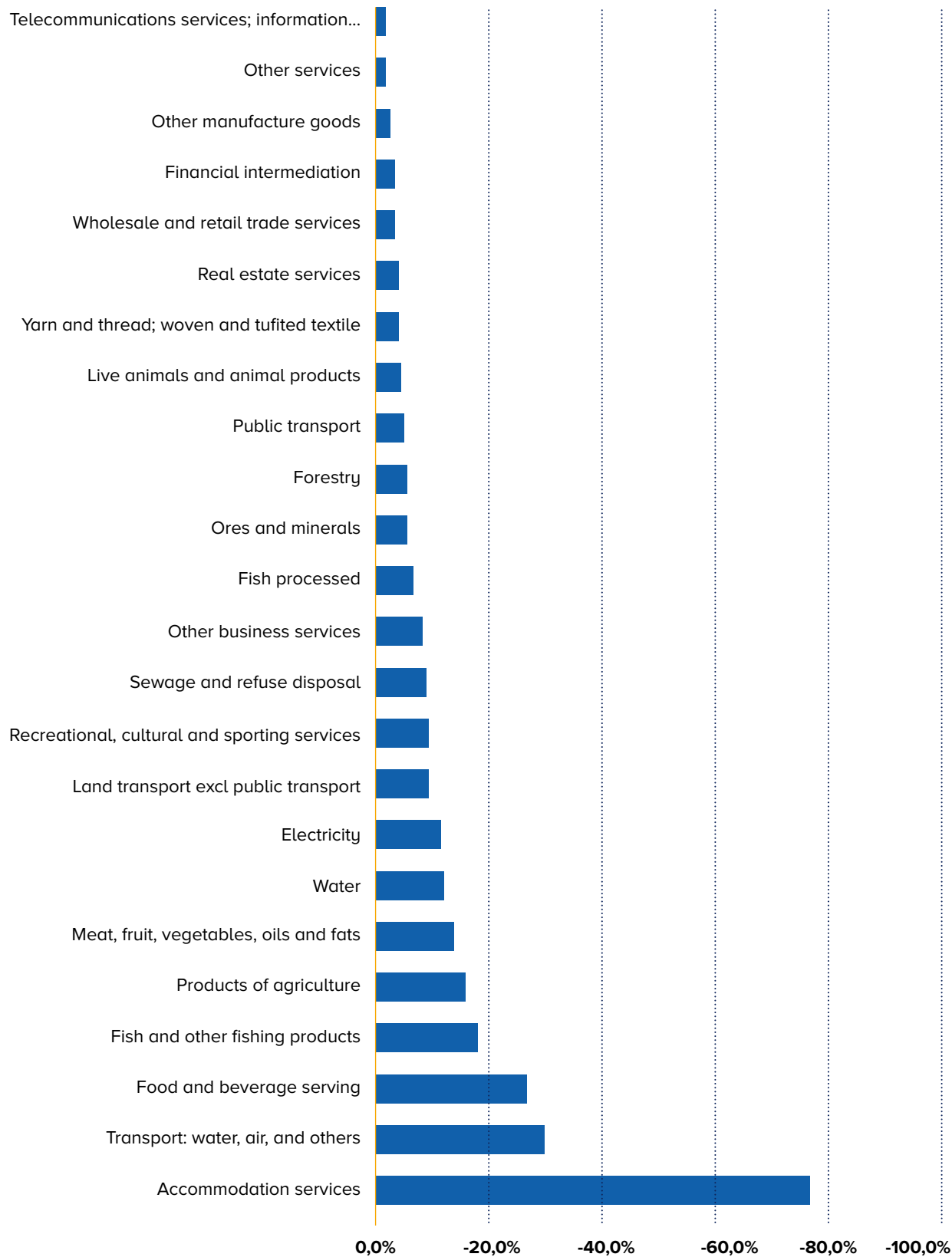
⁵ – Statistics Mauritius (2019) National Accounts. Statistics Mauritius, Port-Louis.

⁶ – Figures are deflated using Consumer Price Index using December 2019 as the base.

⁷ – Digest of International Travel and Tourism

⁸ – Statistics Mauritius 2018. Tourism Satellite Account.

Figure 2.8.
Economic impacts of tourism across economic sectors



Source: IO model

2.2.3. Labour market

The employment situation has been stable during the past years although marked by some persistent gender and age disparities in employment and earnings. The unemployment rate averaged around 7.1% over the last 5 years, with a modest improved rate to 6.9% in 2019. However, disruptions in the labour market have expanded due to the impact that the pandemic has imposed on productive sectors of the economy.

Figure 2.9 depicts the number of men vs. women employed in each economic sector in 2019. It provides the basis for estimating the impact on women and the vulnerability vis a vis COVID-19.

By May, employment fell by 129,400 i.e. by slightly above 24% compared to the situation in the first quarter of 2020. In parallel, the unemployment rate shot up by 3% points from 7.2% to 10.2% by May 2020. Likewise, activity rates declined sharply by 16.4 % over

the same period. In fact, according to Statistics Mauritius and World Bank's first round of the RCMPHS in May 2020, the inactive population increased substantially by 64% from 205,100 to 336,900 of which 1 in 5 reported to have worked before the lockdown and to have stopped working because of the lockdown. This work consists mainly of non-continuous or temporary employment generally in the informal economy. The main sectors in which they were employed include manufacturing (19.2%), wholesale and retail trade (14.6%); construction (13.6%) and private households (10.4%), which generally constitute informal occupations. As the following chart indicates, during the lockdown period, the fall in informal sector employment was more pronounced as compared to formal employment. While formal employment fell by 40,200, informal sector employment declined by 89,200 (above 59%).

TABLE 2.1.

Employment, Unemployment and economic activity (both sexes) in population aged 16-64 and not in full-time education.

	Employed	Unemployed	Labour Force	Unemployment Rate (%)	Activity Rate (%)
Q1-20	534, 800	41,300	576,100	7.2	73.7
May 20	405, 400	45,800	451,200	10.2	57.3
June 20	473, 100	66,000	539,100	12.2	70.0
Jul-20	498, 000	57,300	555,300	10.3	72.0

Adapted from Statistics Mauritius and World Bank RCMPHS Oct 2020

TABLE 2.2.

Impact on employment from employee grievances

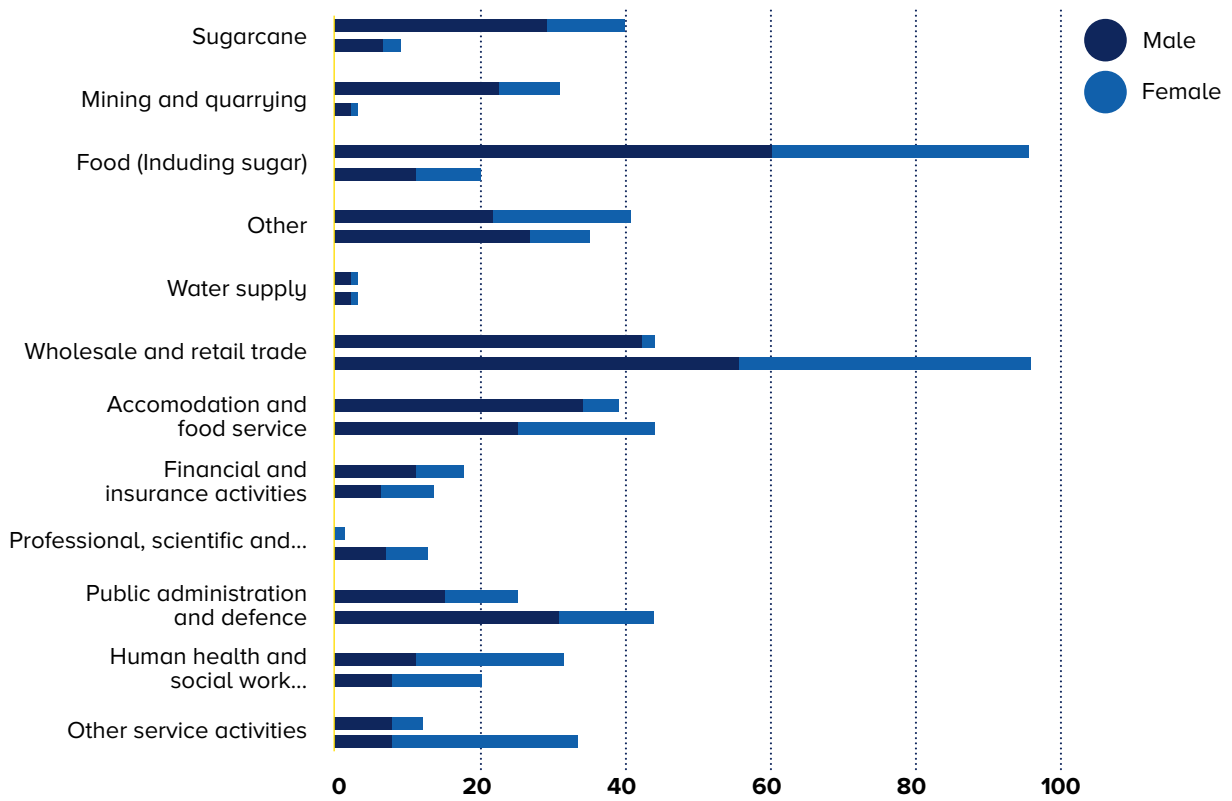
	Apr-20	May-20	June 20	Total
Termination of employment	448	534	3283	4265
Non-payment of wages	191	628	565	1384
Reduced payment of wages	101	186	191	478

Source: Statistics Mauritius

After the lockdown was lifted, the employment situation has evolved rather rapidly. By June employment rose to 366,600 in the formal and 106,500 in the informal sector. Some further improvement was noted by July (figure 2.10) with formal employment falling short of Q1-20 by 12,200. Despite a recovery in informal sector employment there was still a noticeable shortfall of 31,600 compared to the pre-COVID-19 period. By July, the unemployment rate was estimated at 10.3%. In spite of the rise in numbers of employment-related grievances as a result of the pandemic (table 2.2), the government should be acclaimed for designing effective recovery schemes mentioned in chapter 1, that ensured the living standards were maintained and employment safeguarded. Overall, the Mauritian economy has been resilient enough to avert an unemployment crisis thus far.

Figure 2.9.

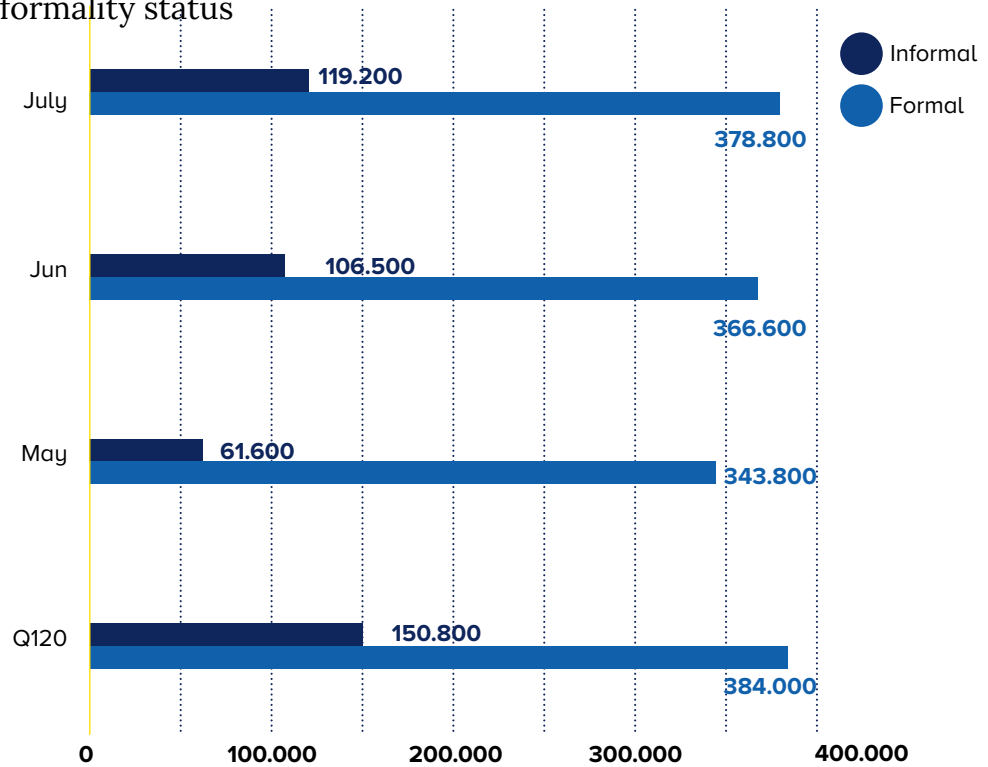
Distribution of employment across sectors in 2019 male vs. female



Source: Digest of Labour Statistics, Statistics Mauritius

Figure 2.10.

Employment by formality status



Source: IO model

According to Trade Union officials interviewed in the context of this study, there have been many abusive dismissals and/or non-payment of wages than what have been registered at the Ministry of Labour, as some employers found it hard to manage their overhead costs with their labour costs. The first to have lost their jobs accordingly were those whose employment was already precarious and with no formal contracts. Tourism-related occupations which have disproportionately been affected by travel restrictions and absence of tourists, wholesale and retail, construction and, cleaning and security services are some of the main sectors where representations had been made with trade unions. Employees on short-term contracts, mainly women and youth, had been particularly vulnerable to these abusive practices.

In the public discourse on the New Normal brought about by the pandemic, there were many predictions amongst decision makers and observers that the country could potentially hit the 100,000 mark in terms of unemployment (See e.g. Le Mauricien 01 May 2020; L'express Jul 6 2020) which was estimated as an unemployment rate of above 19%. The fact that the unemployment rate has thus far been contained to 10.3% is an illustration that the impacts have at least thus far been contained. However, the sustainability of business and the preservation of employment in some of the occupational sectors which have been the hardest hit in the medium term are open to question. Supporting enterprises, jobs and income are particularly necessary in order to avert a downward spiral which can affect the economy and society alike.

The impact of a decline in manufacturing exports

In the worst-case scenario (without the wage assistance scheme), 30% decline in manufacturing exports could have led to about 12,000 jobs at risk while a decline of 60% could have resulted in an additional 11,000 jobs at risk (Figure 2.11).

The impact of a decline in tourism

The employment impact on the tourism sector (without the wage assistance scheme) is likely to be felt mostly in the accommodation services (22,000), air and water transport services (9,700) and food and beverages (4,300) sector. The total employment (direct and indirect) at risk without the Government measures is likely to be 51,000 in 2020 (using 2019 as baseline).

Gender dimensions of Covid-19 in the labour market

In Mauritius, an overview of the trends across the lockdown and in its aftermath reveals a nuanced picture. At first sight, during the lockdown period, female employment, did reveal an even more important decline than male employment as of May 2020. From 215,100 women employed in the first quarter of 2020, this figure fell sharply to 157,000 by May 2020 as a direct consequence of the lockdown. However, subsequently, female employment level increased considerably by 27% between May and June and modestly between June and July. The number of women employed as of July was about 6.5% lower (-13,900) compared with pre-crisis levels.

In comparison with men, where the unemployment rate has risen from 5.6% (Q1 20) to 8.8% by July 2020, female unemployment rate has increased but less significantly. In this unprecedented crisis, perhaps in contrast to other economic downturns where women tend to be over-representative of the first casualties to make way for men, it can be argued that women have (at least at this stage – short to medium term) not been disproportionately affected. While unemployment has affected both women and men, the change in male unemployment rate over first quarter 2020 to July

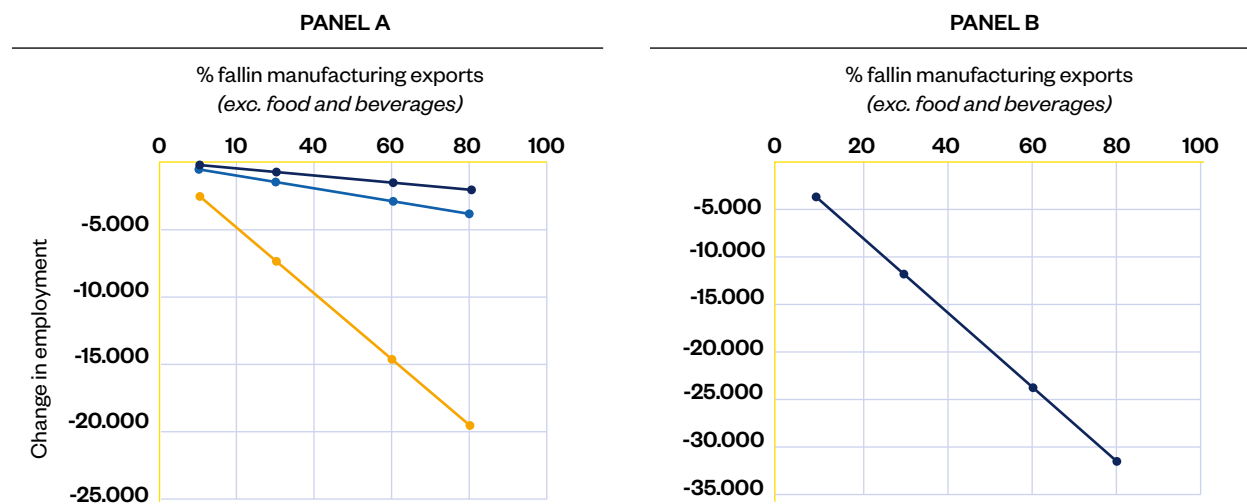
2020 is nearly fourfold that of the change in female unemployment rate for the same period. With the exception of the teaching profession where women have traditionally been predominant and which has not been affected in terms of job losses, thus far, the main activity sectors where the employment of both women and men have been particularly affected are in the service activities, accommodation and food service activities, wholesale and retail trade. These services deemed non-essential and where working from home is not possible have been particularly vulnerable to the economic downturn.

Although Mauritius has, since the mid-1980s espoused a dual-breadwinner model and the aspiration and access to a job contributed significantly to women's financial and social empowerment within the household as in the wider economy, it remains a fact that when jobs are lost, the burden of getting back into employment generally weighs more on male retrenched workers. Although, at this stage of unveiling the impacts, it might be premature to come to any conclusions, there are some emerging evidence that more women than men have slipped out of the labour force. Between Q1-20 and July 20, there was a net

Figure 2.11.

Employment at risk due to declining manufacturing exports

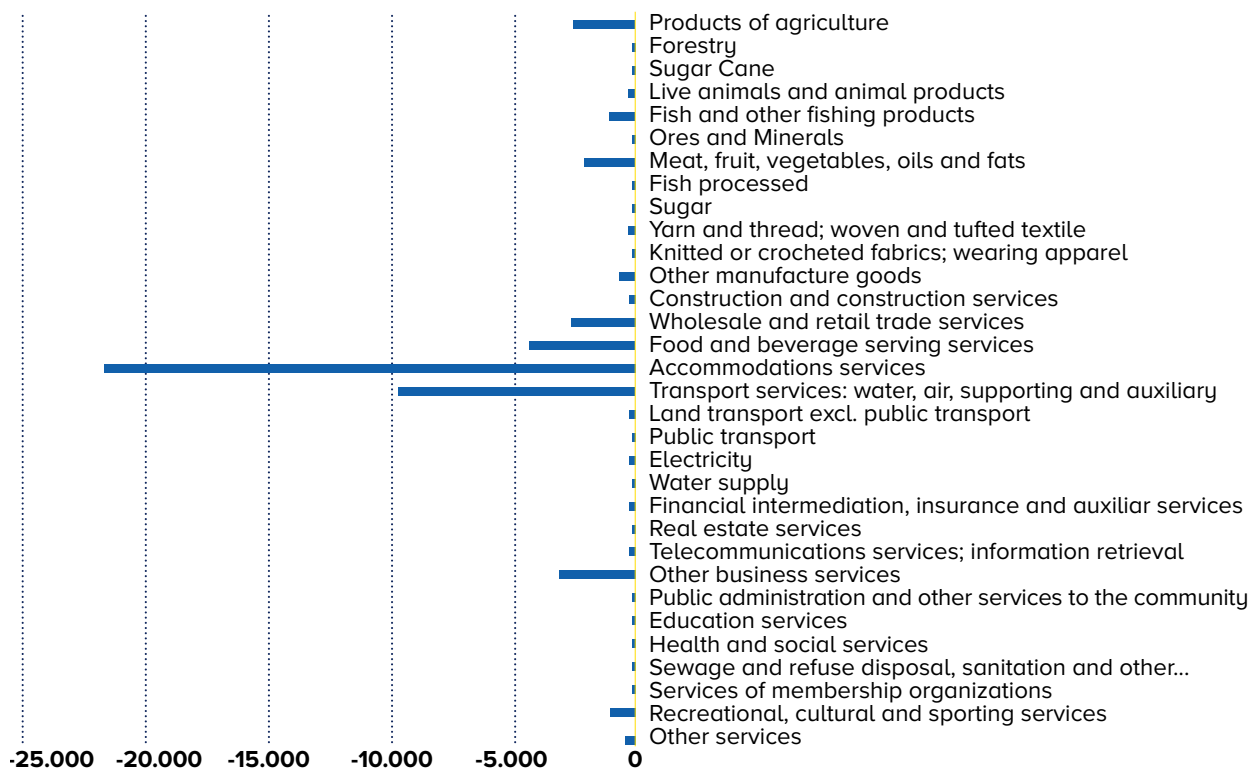
- Other manufactured goods
- Knitted or crocheted fabrics; wearing apparel
- Yarn and thread; woven and tufted extile fabrics



change of (-12,500) in the labour force in contrast to men (-8,300) over the same period. The number of inactive employees has also increased by 9,400 for women in contrast to 1,300 for men. One interpretation of this trend – which remains to be confirmed with more up to date data – based on interviews with key informants who work with women casual workers in informal subcontracting networks is that, unless women are the main breadwinners or have dire financial commitments and limited resources to draw from, they have the options to delay their search for employment and to take up informal and non-continuous jobs as and when required.

Figure 2.12.

Employment impacts of declining tourism sector



Source: IO model

An aerial photograph of a city, likely Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago. The background shows a busy port with several large gantry cranes and ships docked. The middle ground features a mix of urban buildings, including a prominent tall grey and red tower and a white domed structure. The foreground is dominated by dense residential housing with various roof colors and styles, interspersed with green trees. A road with a yellow taxi is visible in the lower part of the frame.

3

Impact on Households



Summary:

A

- There was no major disruption in food supply after the lockdown although the poorest households still reported a difficulty to buy basic provisions; food and water, and housing remain priority for this category.

B

- Psychological effects such as anxiety, depression and sleeping disorder were reported to all segment of the population, but mostly among poor households.

C

- The model of delivery of education services was effective among households that received it, but the poor still require significant support to access online services.

D

- Domestic violence increased during the lockdown period, but female victims did not report incidences.

E

- Intra-household time location to domestic activity increased but the overall burden was still faced by women.



3.1. Household income and debt

The average fall in monthly income for the period stood at 25%, but as expected, the reduction varies across economic activities. The most vulnerable sectors whose households experienced more than 50% fall in income were tourism (-60%), construction (-44.3%), food processing (-38.3%), manufacturing (-33.9%) and textile related products (-32.7%), while household in sectors such as financial and insurance, administrative and support service, public administration, and education have been significantly affected. This corresponds with the previous observation that the significant falls were registered in sectors like manufacturing, accommodation and food, construction, entertainment and recreation. The vulnerable sectors from the NHS are consistent with the data from Statistics Mauritius on quarter-to-quarter change in value added by economic sectors (figure 2.3). While sectors have been hit because of the interruption of activities during the lockdown, some sectors such as accommodation and food services, and manufacturing exports were impacted because of external shocks, while other sectors were affected because of their indirect linkages to those hard-hit sectors. For instance, the fall in income in the construction sector was mainly due to the interruption of activities during the lockdown and to a lesser extent by external shocks. Qualitative interviews with key informants revealed that the sector continued after the lockdown following projects in the pipelines. Accordingly, the effect on the construction sector, most likely, are to be severely felt by June 2021 as FDI will be impacted.

Women witnessed relatively higher negative change in income than men in the wholesale and retail trade, food service, and accommodation and hotel sector (Figure 3.1). Further analysis on vulnerable sectors, including women, are provided in section 6.

The impact on purchasing power will be mostly felt by households whose members have lost their jobs because of the COVID-19. As such, the NHS has a specific question on the number of households who have lost their jobs because of the COVID-19. The survey reveals that 6% of the households have at least a male member who has lost a job and is still unemployed while 5% has one female member in this category. The NHS is not within the scope to estimate the unemployment rate in neither of its objectives nor in its sample design. The figures are an indication of the employment impacts at the household level. Nevertheless, a rough comparison can be made; from total number of household members between 16 and 64 (excluding full time students) from the survey⁹ and total number of members who have lost their jobs and are still unemployed¹⁰, the NHS shows that 5.2%

Box. 3.1. Approach

This section was informed by a comprehensive **National Household Survey (NHS)** conducted purposely for this study. The survey was conducted approximately four months (23 September to 28 September 2020) after the lockdown was lifted. The Survey had a sample frame of 400 households proportionally distributed to the number of households per district from Census. In order to cater for the gender dimension, the sample was divided into 200 women and 200 men, by household headship. The survey was supplemented by an additional survey- the Poorest of the Poor Survey of 70 respondents, following the same sampling process as the NHS. However, the specific geographical areas (also well-known over the island as the poverty pockets) were indicated by NGOs and the National Empowerment Foundation. See [Appendix 3](#) for additional information.

of those in employment have lost their jobs because of the pandemic at the time of survey (September). According to the WBSM survey (phase 3)¹¹, the unemployment rate was 10.2% in May, 12.2% in July and 10.3 in July and when compared to the unemployment rate in the 4th quarter of 2019 at 6.4% , the figure is statistically consistent within some margin of confidence with the WBSM.

TABLE 3.1.

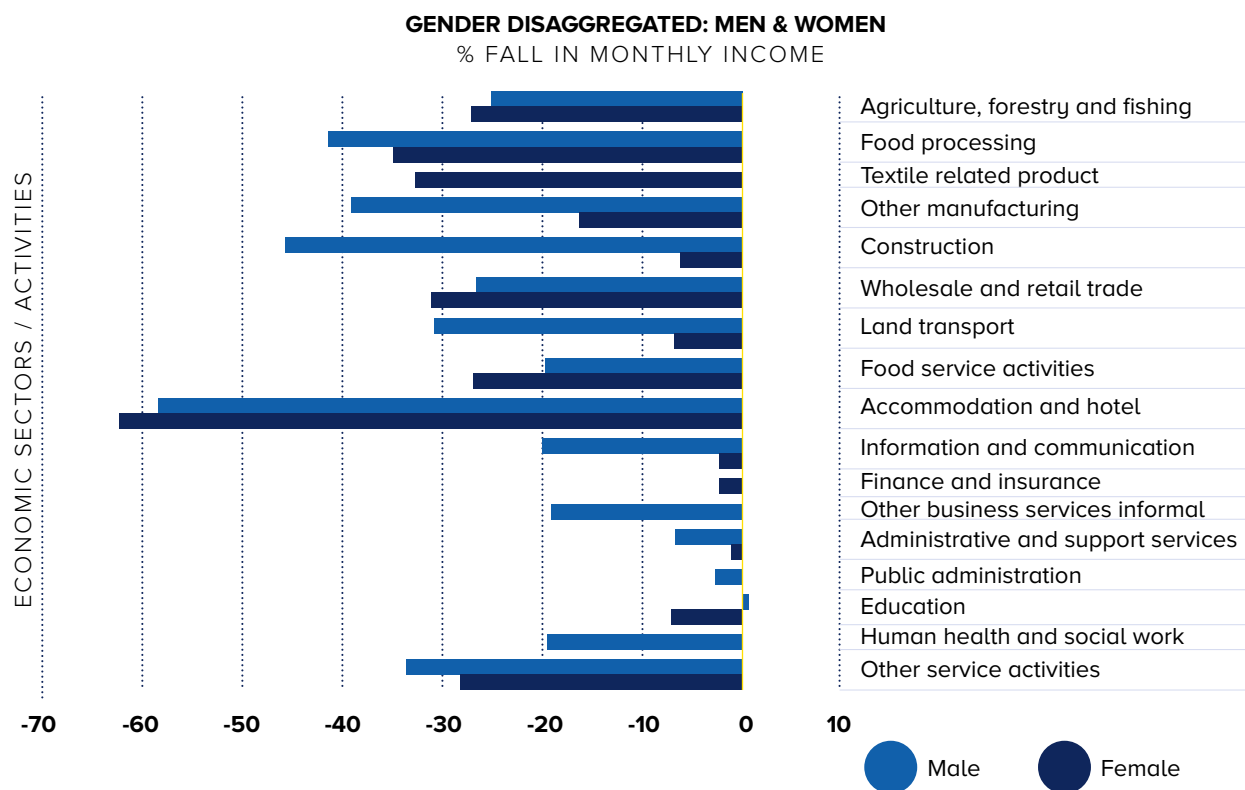
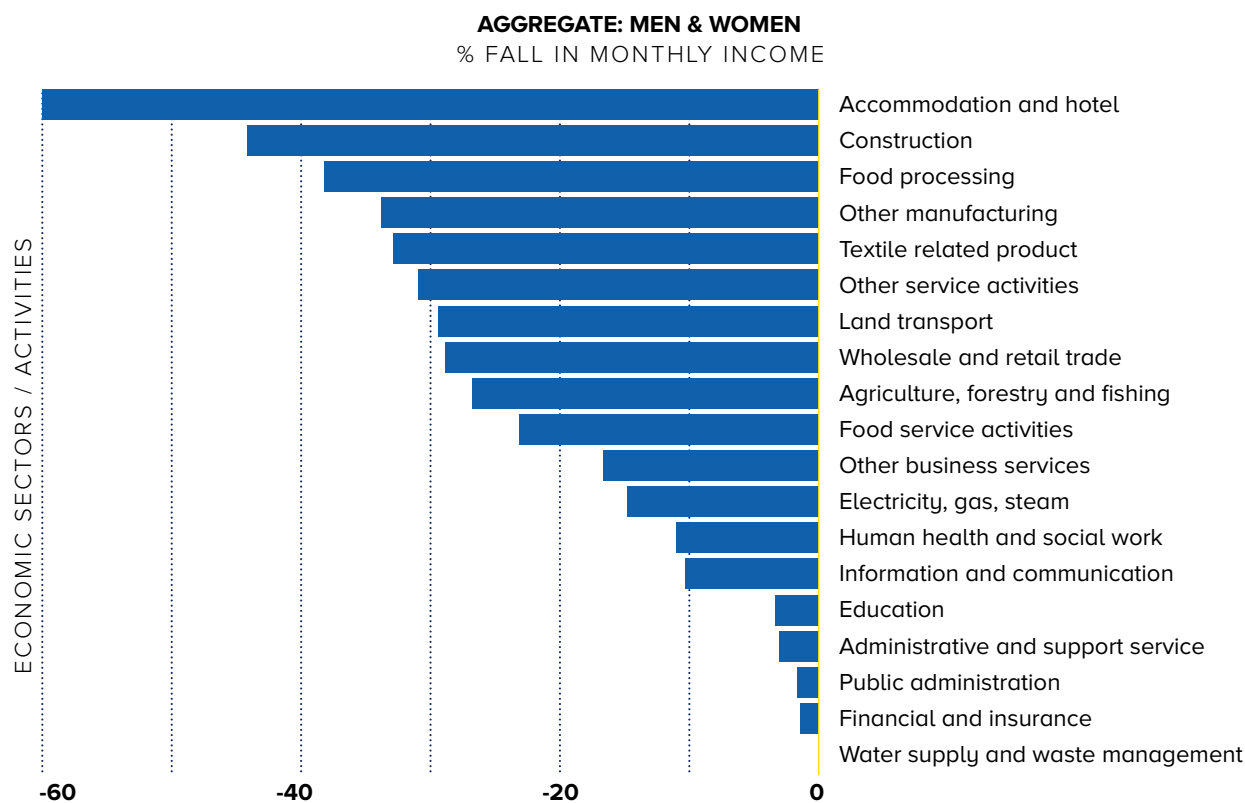
Employment impacts of COVID-19 at household level

	Male	Female
Employment status during COVID-19	6.07	4.61
Lost the job and still unemployed	7.15	5.09
Lost the job temporarily but has returned to the same job by now	2.18	0.97
Lost the job temporarily but has found a new job by now	8.25	4.37
Didn't lose the job but has been working from home since the lockdown (still now works form home)	0.49	1.21

Source: IO model

Figure 3.1.

Fall in household income across economic sectors



9 – The total number stands at 883

10 – The total number stands at 46

11 – https://statsmauritius.govmu.org/Documents/Statistics/ESI/2020/EI1553/RCMPHS_May-July%2020.pdf

Households have tried to find other sources of income.

In December 2019, 61% of households had their income from a paid job; the percentage decreased to 55.5% in August 2020. In turn, 3.1% of households received their main income from farming and fishing and this figure increased to 4.1% in August 2020. Similarly, it appears that more households had their income in August from a household business activities (basically informal), selling of foodstuff produced by the households or support from other households.

TABLE 3.2.

Sources of income (December 2019–August 2020)

	Sources of Income	Dec-19	Aug-20	t-statistics for mean difference
1	Income from household farming or fishing	3.16	4.14	-2.00**
2	Income from a household business (other than farming or fishing)	11.44	12.17	-1.13
3	Income from a paid job (held by a household member or yourself)	61.31	55.47	4.33***
4	Foodstuff produced by the household from farming, raising animals or fishing	0.24	0.73	-1.41*
5	Support from other households in the country	1.95	2.68	-1.34*
6	Income from properties, investments or savings	5.84	6.08	-0.33
7	Private pension	4.62	5.11	-1.41
8	State pension or other Government support	25.79	26.52	1.00
9	Charity from NGOs or other charitable organizations	0.49	0.24	-0.09

Source: SEIA household survey

Close to 39% of households had debt, 20.4% of which were unable to finance them in the coming months due to COVID-19, while only 40% could only sustain debt servicing for the next 1 to 2 months. A larger proportion of female heads of households reported significant challenges in servicing debt compared to their male counterparts. It is expected that this effect combined with other structural and systemic barriers to women's participation in paid labour markets may result in an increased feminisation of poverty in the country.

Figure 3.2.

Ability to service household debts by gender

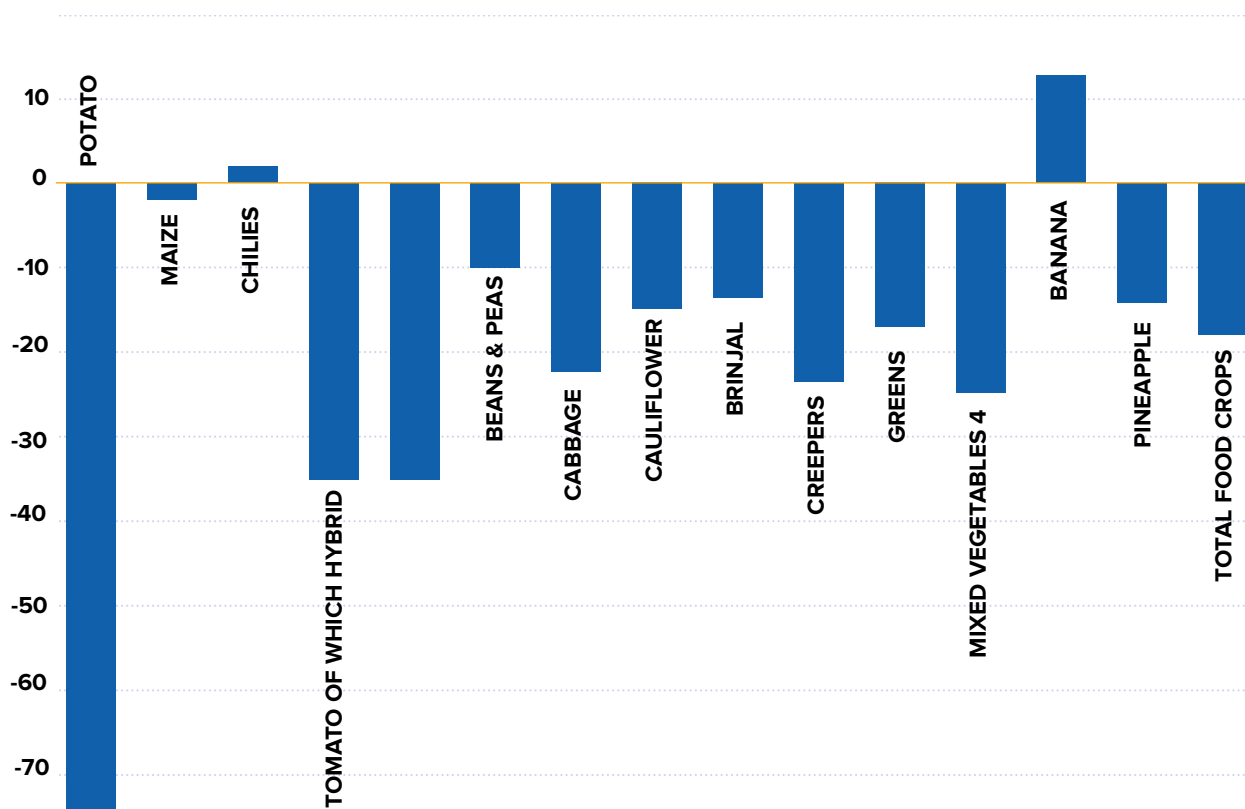
Source: IO model

3.2. Food security and basic provisions

Mauritius produces a wide range of crops and livestock but most of its staples such as rice, wheat, edible oils, meats and dairy products are imported. Only 23% of local food consumption requirements are met by the agricultural and food sector. However, the island is self-sufficient in fresh vegetables, local fruits, chicken and eggs. The lockdown affected food production. A comparison between production in January-June 2019 and January-June 2020 shows a drop of 17.8%. Almost all major foodcrops have experienced a decline. Similarly, the lockdown has caused a decline in the production of livestock for the period of January-June 2019 to January-June 2020.

Figure 3.3.

Percentage changes in food production: Jan-Jun 2019 - Jan-Jun 2020



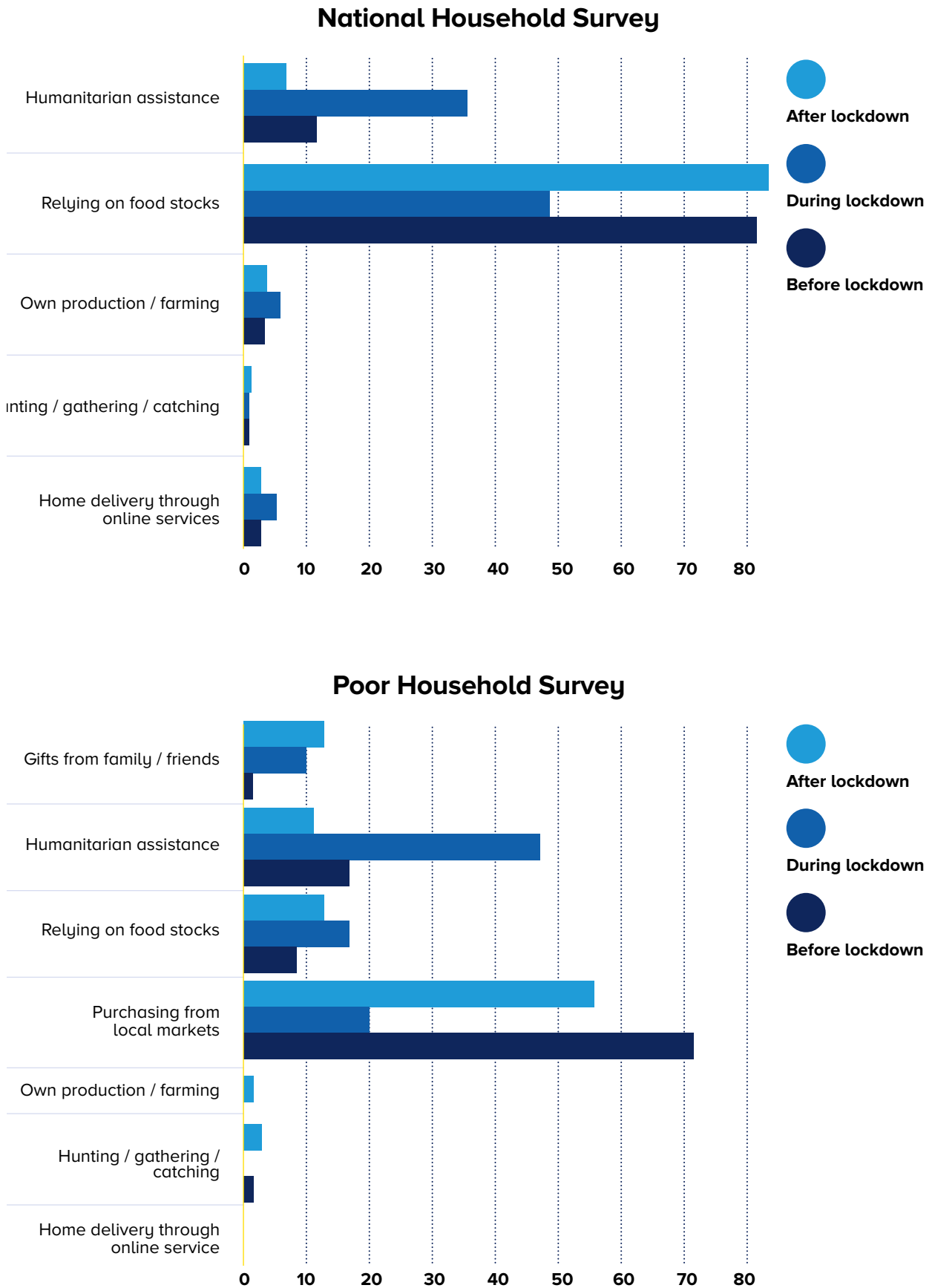
Source: SEIA household survey

The above situation may have impacted on access to food by households during and after the lockdown.

From the NHS, it is observed that the percentage of households who purchased food from local stores and markets has declined from 81.6% before the lockdown to 48.8% during the lockdown (figure 3.4). The figure rose to 83.5% after the lockdown (i.e. survey time in September), showing a positive sign of no major issue as far as food access is concerned.

Figure 3.4.

Access to food before, during and after the lockdown



Source: SEIA household survey

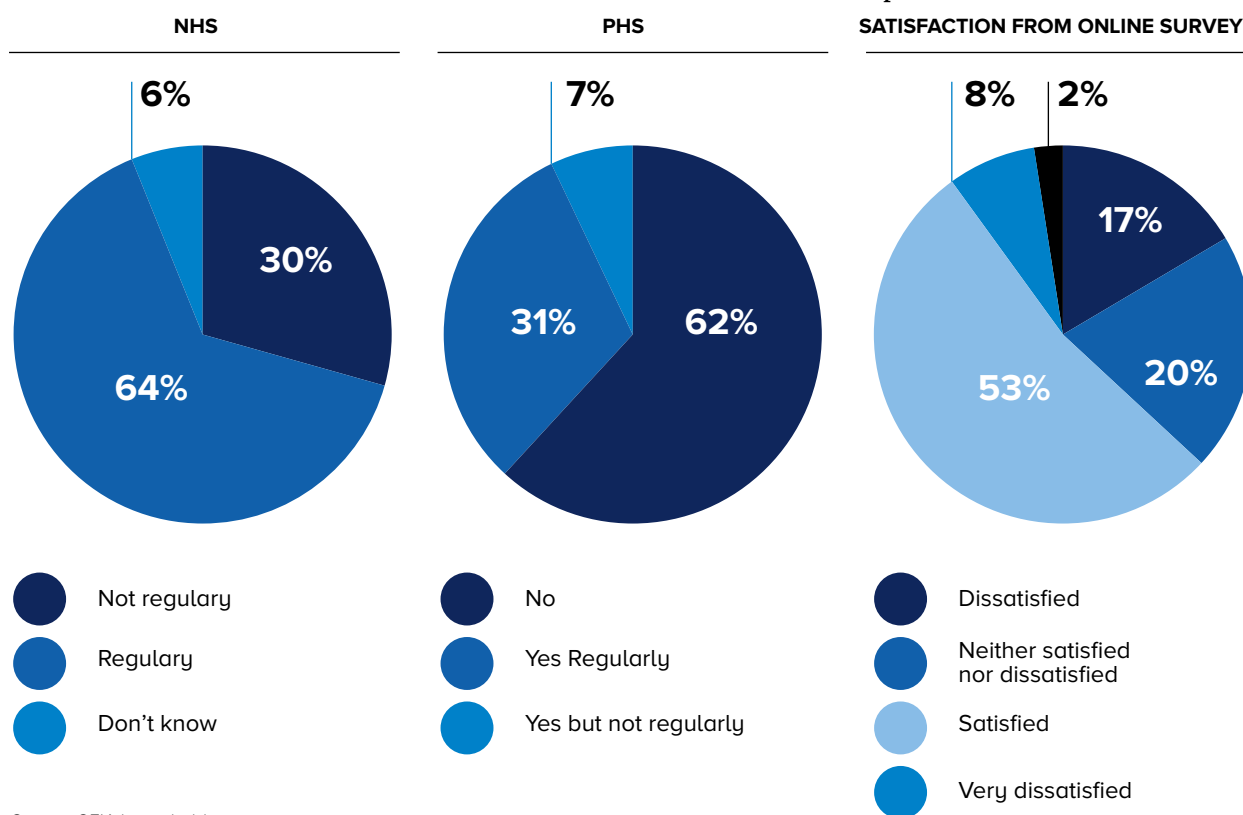
3.3. Education service delivery

COVID-19 has severely disrupted the education sector from pre-primary, secondary to tertiary education.

For the majority of Mauritian students, school, college and university closures during the lockdown signified a move of about 94% of households with at least one student, to remote learning through computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones, which is consistent with 85% revealed in the October 2020 SM/WB RCMPHS (Oct

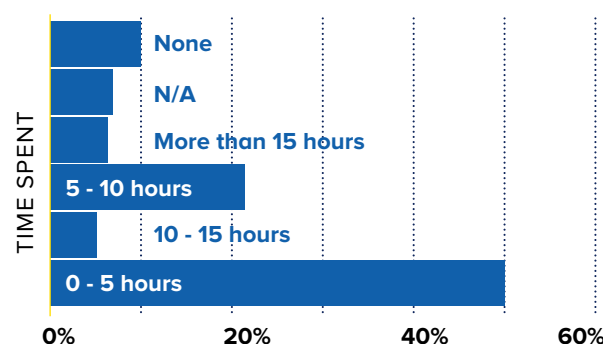
2020) result. Overall, close to 90% of the households were satisfied with the new mode of delivery. However only 38% among the poorest of the poor households accessed these services. Although these results must be interpreted with caution given the small sample involved, this result mirrors a critical gap in the design and delivery of educational programmes that reached poor children.

Figure 3.5. Households' responses on education



Source: SEIA household survey

Figure 3.6. Time spent by households facilitating child's education



Parents were unable to devote adequate time to online education, evidenced in close to 50% allocating 5 hours or less each week facilitating children learning.

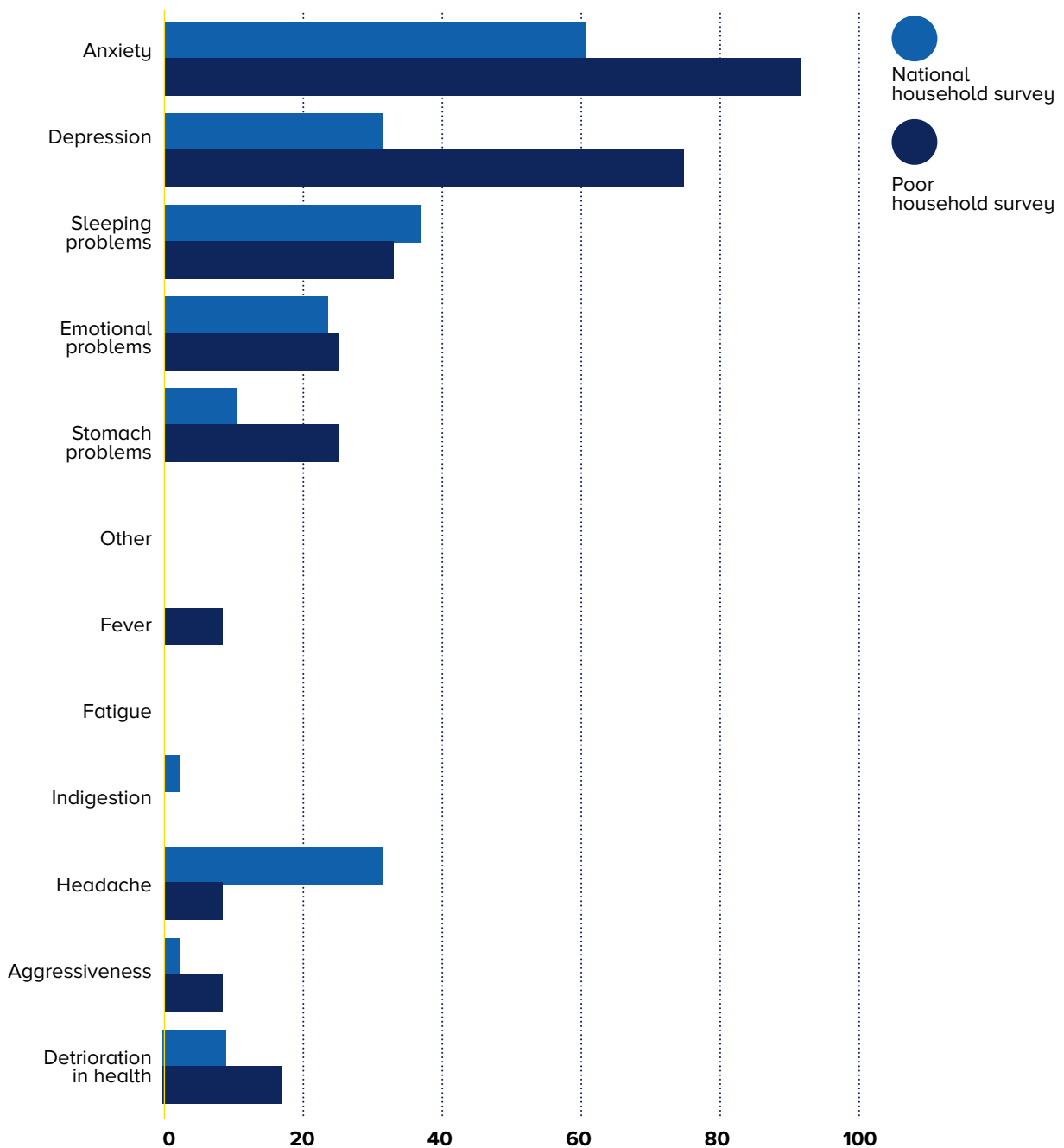
This can be partly attributed to capacity challenges and the combination of remote working with other household activities.

Source: SEIA household survey

3.4. Health

About 9% of households experienced a deterioration in their health conditions during the lockdown. The figure is significantly higher for the PHS at 17%. The NHS reports that the main health problems relate to anxiety (61%), sleeping (37%), depression (32%), headache (32%), emotion (24%) and stomach (11%). The figures are significantly higher for the poor households, especially for anxiety and depression.

Figure 3.7.
Impact on health



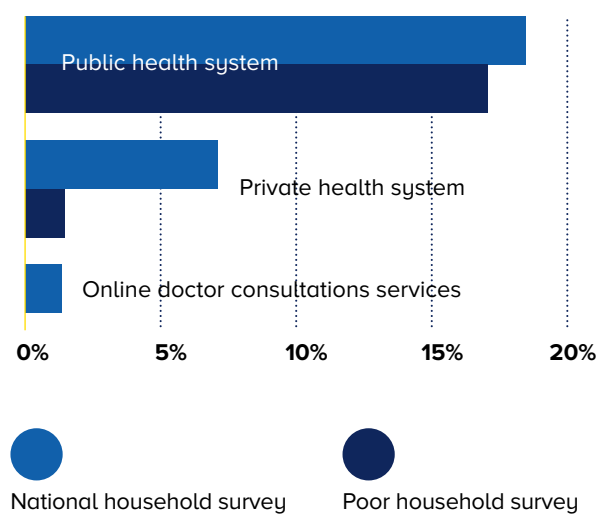
Source: SEIA household survey

The pandemic has highlighted inequalities in health care, especially in the lockdown. About 77% of the households required the services of pharmacies during the lockdown, 16% of whom could not get access to pharmacies. The support of relatives and friends were sought for the necessary medication. Furthermore, 27% sought services from the health system: 18.5% visited the public health service, 7% had recourse to the private health system and 1.2% had online doctor consultation service.

There is a worldwide concern that resources may be allocated to fight the COVID-19 to the detriment of other treatment services. A recent survey of the WHO in 155 countries during a 3-week period in May, finds that the COVID-19 pandemic could seriously disrupt the prevention and treatment services for non-communicable diseases (NCDs)¹². The WHO warns that this situation is of significant concern because people living with NCDs are at higher risk of severe COVID-19-related illness and death. The NHS reveals that households had difficulties in accessing services related to mental health, immunization, NCDs, and to a lower extent, infectious diseases and child health treatments.

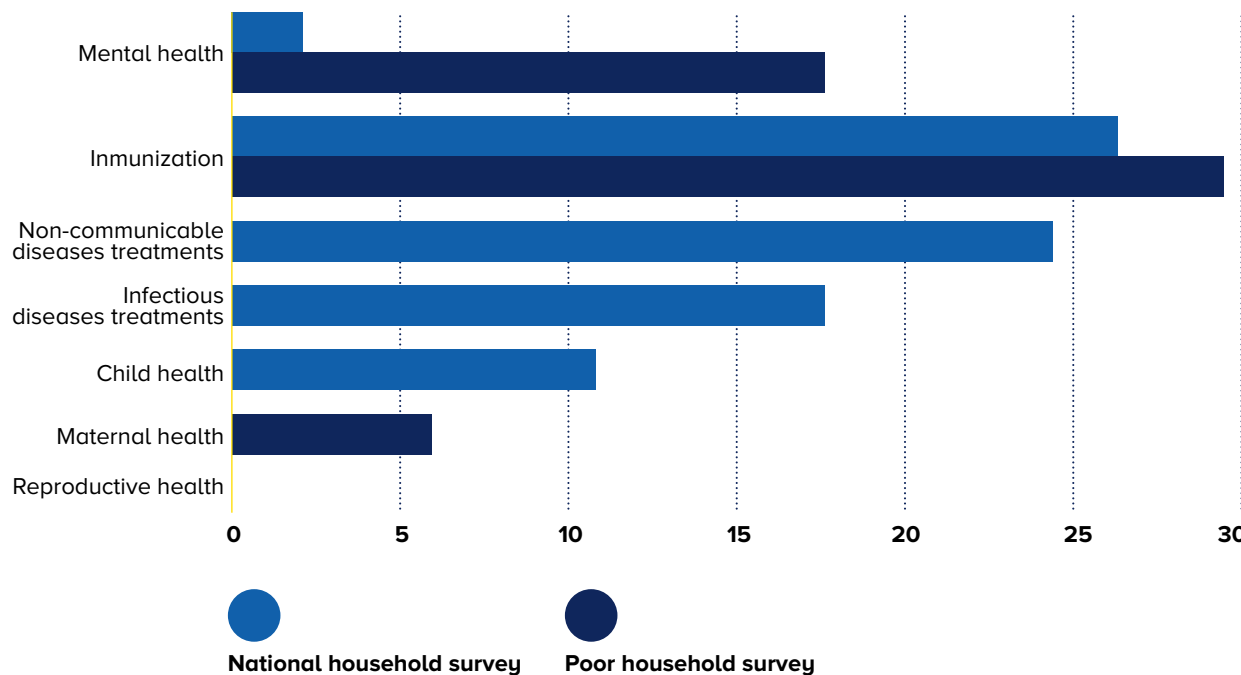
It is vital to find innovative ways to ensure that essential services continue, even as resources are committed to fight COVID-19.

Figure 3.8. Access to health services



Source: SEIA household survey

Figure 3.9. Health problems due to COVID-19



Source: SEIA household survey

12 – WHO COVID-19 significantly impacts health services for noncommunicable diseases <https://www.who.int/news/item/01-06-2020-covid-19-significantly-impacts-health-services-for-noncommunicable-diseases>.

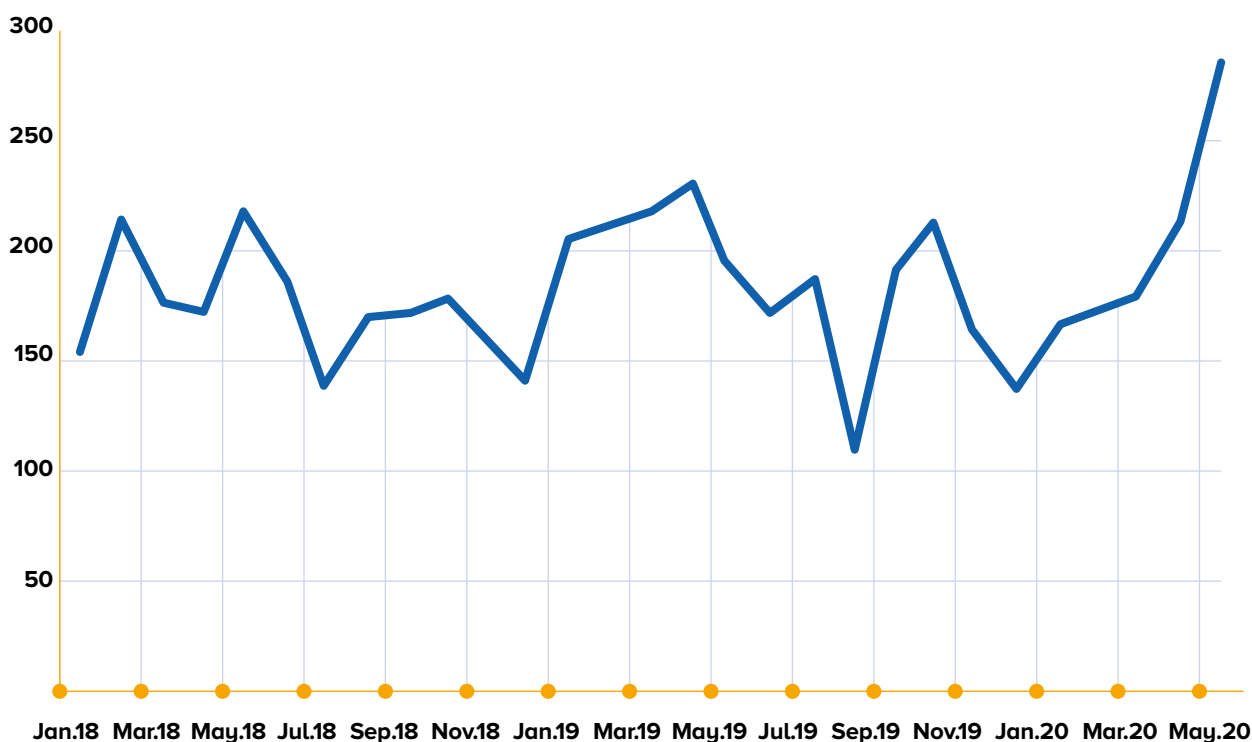
3.5. Intra-household dynamics during the lockdown

Domestic violence

Confinement has significantly impacted on domestic violence as noted from the significant increase in the number of cases reported at the Family Support Bureau of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare. During the lockdown period 20 March to 30 May 2020, 520 cases were officially reported of which some 93% were female victims, of which 111 female survivors left the conjugal roof during the lockdown.

Figure 3.10.

Domestic violence reported cases



Source: SEIA household survey

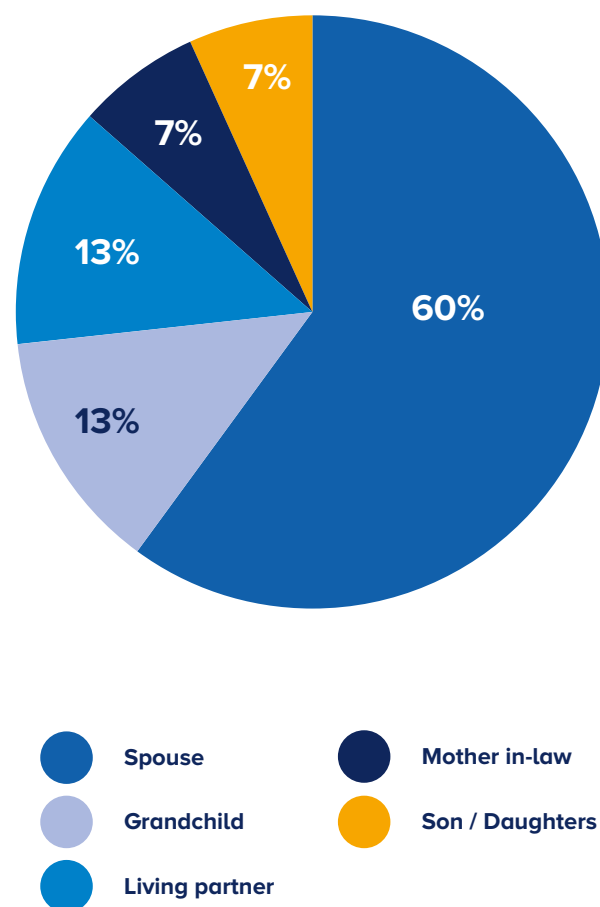
On average, out of the daily number of cases brought to the attention of the authorities over period January 2018 to May 2020 and contrasted with the daily average number of cases recorded for the 2 months of April and May 2020 when confinement was stretching emotional, economic and social coping abilities, there was an increase of 33% in the cases recorded daily – that is from an estimated average of 6 cases recorded daily under normal times to an average of 8 cases recorded daily during last two months of confinement. These have only been reported cases, while the international literature suggests that reported cases are only the tip of the iceberg.

Data from the NHS reveal that some 4.5% of the sample have experienced some sort of violence during the lockdown, women being disproportionately represented. 7.4% respondents experienced violence at home during the lockdown. Among the poorest of the poor, evidence from the survey data indicates that nearly 9% of respondents experienced some sort of violence at home during the lockdown. The incidence of domestic violence in this socio-economic category appears to be two-fold that of the mainstream population. The Chart below shows a breakdown of the perpetrators of violence against the female respondents from the NHS, highlighting that while Intimate Partner Violence accounted for 73% of domestic violence as a classic gender-based phenomenon, in no less than 27% of cases, violence has been perpetrated by grand-children (13%); children (7%); mother-in-law (7%).

In contrast, 1.5% of male respondents have been victims of violence at home during the lockdown. Given the small size of this group, further disaggregation is not suggested. However, for the few records, the perpetrators were their children and spouse. Verbal assault was the most common form of violence recorded (6.1%), followed by economic forms of violence including denial of money and resources. Physical and sexual assault were slightly less in the sample but as the adage goes, each case is one too many. Victims, particularly most female victims, did not report to the authorities, in part due to the feeling of shame and fear of reprisals from the abuser. The majority (62.5%) informed other people within the community, and 37.5% did not inform anyone.

Figure 3.11.

Violence onto female respondent by her relationship with perpetrator



Source: SEIA household survey

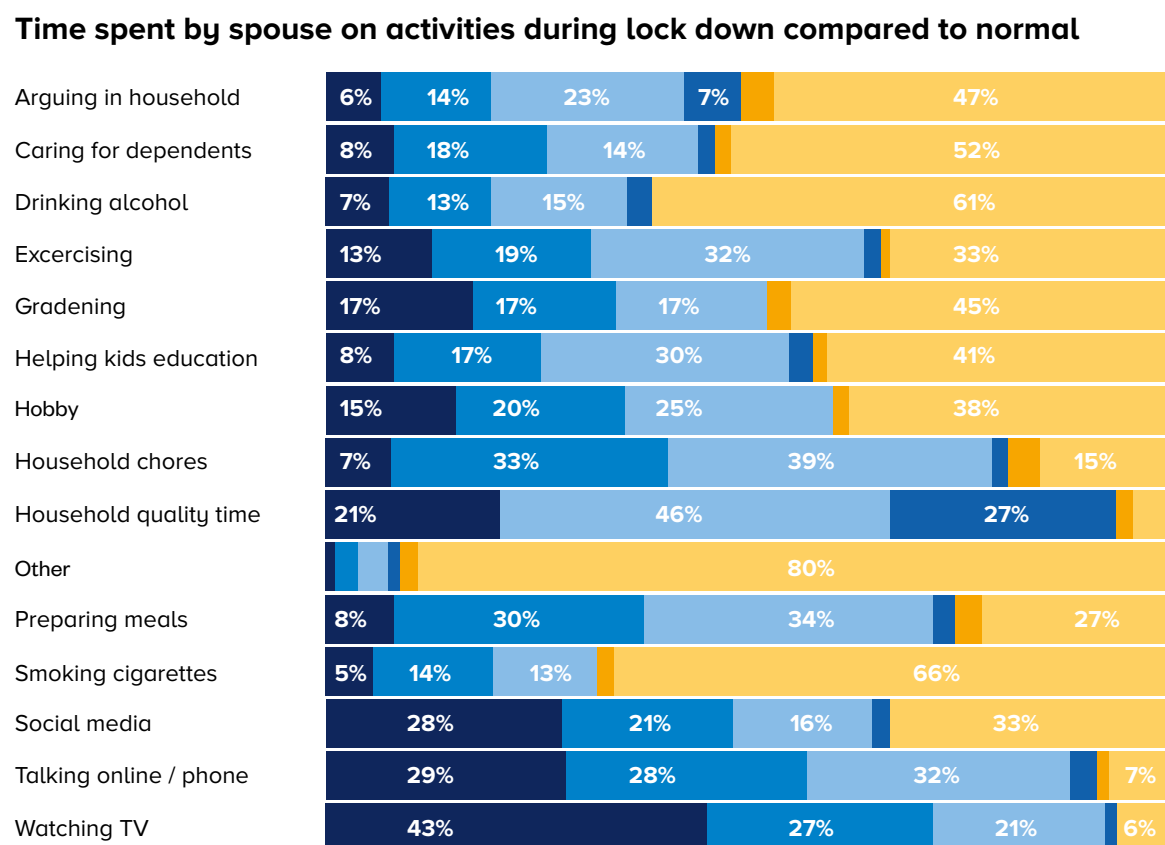
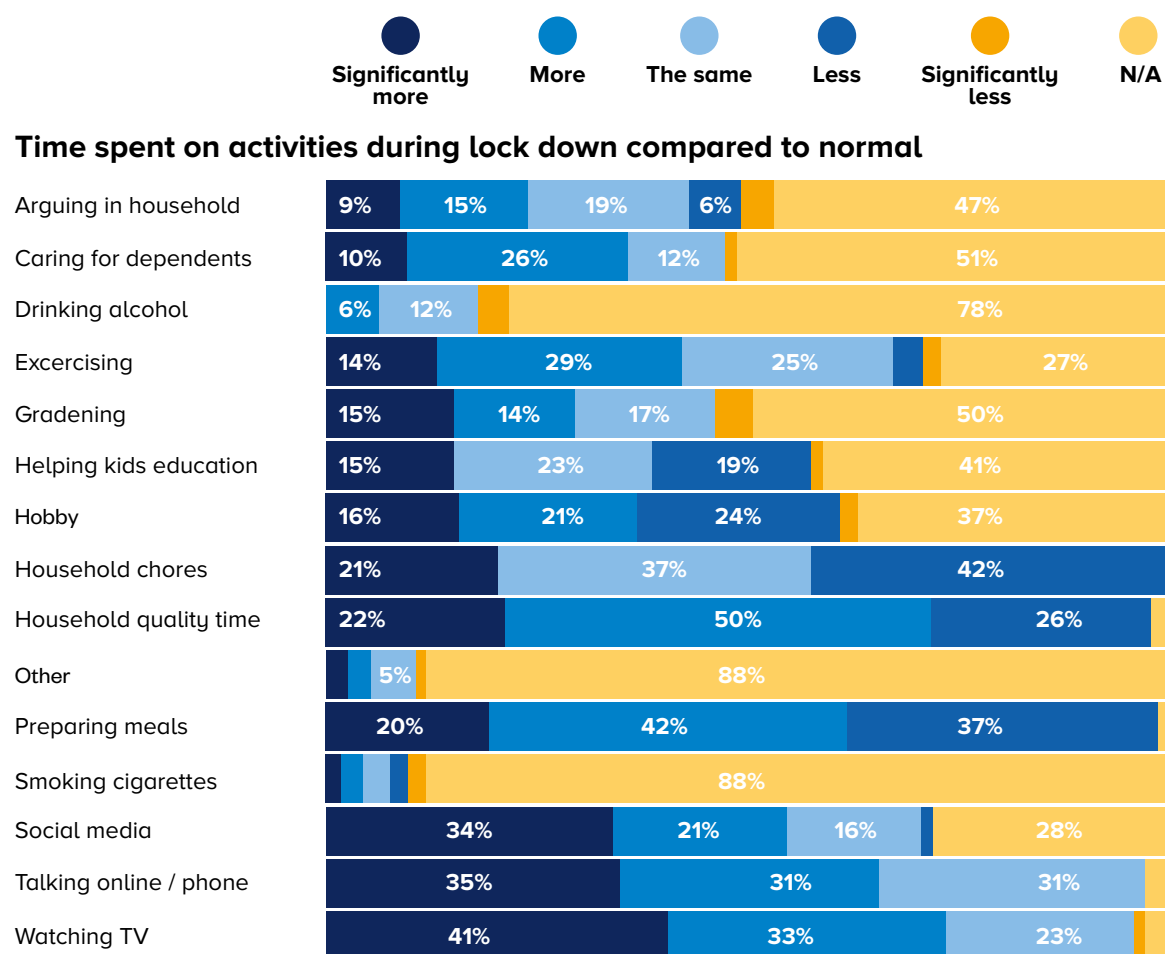
Distribution of household activities

The lockdown set in motion several transitional behaviours and practices to adjust to confinement. Generally, both women and men spent more time than usual on domestic and care responsibilities, leisure and personal and/or household activities. Majority of respondents (an average of some 72% for both males and females) spent more household quality time. There was also an increased use of social media, talking online/phone, watching TV, indulging in hobby shows across gender. Overall, women (43%) engaged more in exercises compared to men, while unhealthy practices such as drinking alcohol and smoking cigarettes were pronounced among men.

However, several traditional gendered roles, mainly domestic chores, remained skewed towards women. 58% of married female respondents state that they

have spent more time (37%) or significantly more time (21%) on household chores as compared to 40% for their husbands. Only 8% of husbands spent 'significantly more' time preparing meals. The same trend was observable for childcare and education.

Figure 3.12.
Distribution of household activities by Gender



4

Responding to COVID-19: the quest for resilience





Summary:

A

- Households rely on less and cheaper food, using savings, reduced proportion of means, to adjust to decreasing purchasing power, but poor households have adjusted differently by purchasing food on credit, seeking assistance from relatives, friends, etc.

B

- Households are highly satisfied with the measures introduced by the Government such as social distancing, wearing of mask and increasing hygiene.

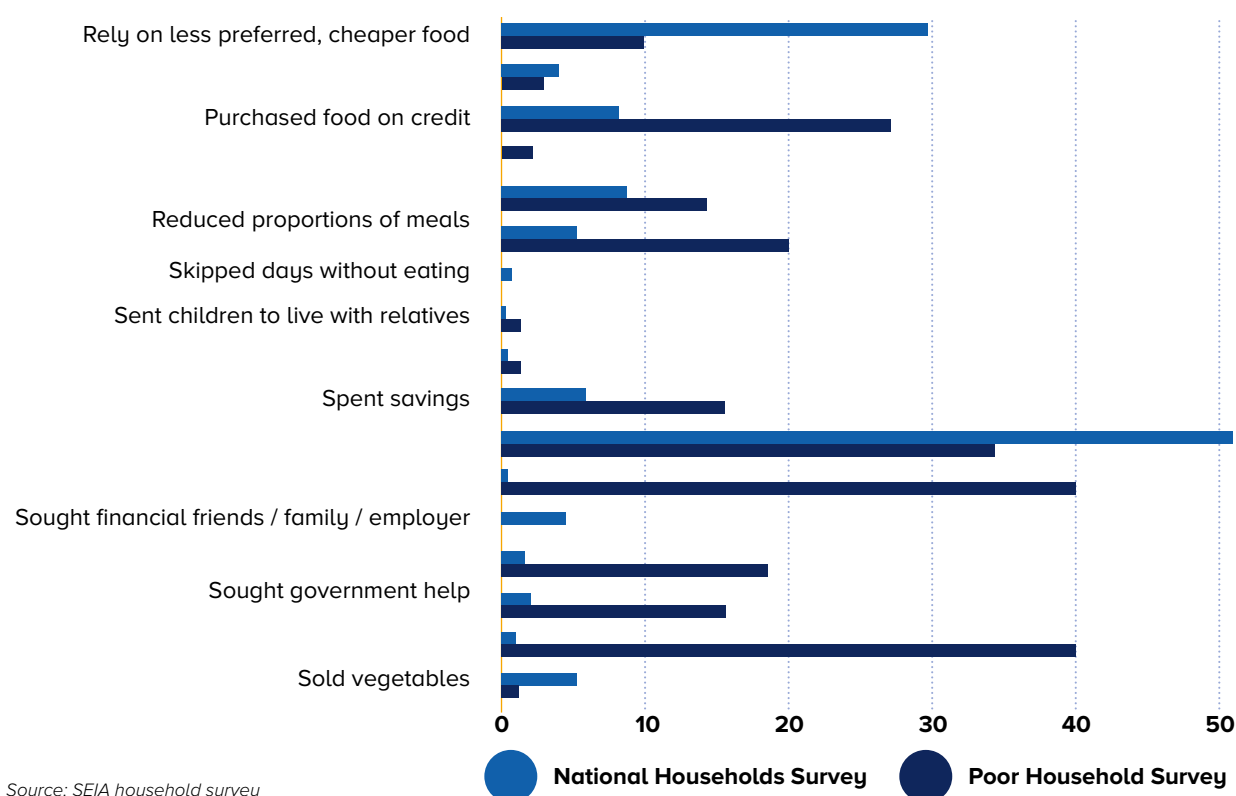
C

- Government recovery measures such as wage assistance schemes and food packs have also been highly effective and efficient. Almost all respondents in the random survey of the poor households have received food packs and they were highly satisfied with both the quantity and variety.

4.1. Coping strategies since the outbreak of COVID-19

Households compensated for income losses in several ways including drawing down on savings among 50% of households in the NHS, compared to 34% of households in the PHS. The low share in the PHS reflects the lack of savings among the poor. Around 10% from the NHS reported to rely on less preferred and cheaper food while 9% reduced expenditure on health and education, and 8% to purchase on credit and selling vegetables. Among the poor households, the strategy involved sale of assets (40%), purchase food on credit (27%), reduction in the number of meals per day (20%) and or the amount consumed (14%).

Figure 4.1.
Responding to the fall in income



Source: SEIA household survey

4.2. Risk communication and sources of information

The nature of a pandemic such as the COVID-19 can trigger fear or put the population at risk if they are not aware of the situation. Misinformation and rumours regarding COVID-19 can mask healthy behaviours (such as hand washing, social distancing etc.) and promoting

erroneous practices that increase the spread of the virus and ultimately result in poor physical and mental health outcomes among individuals¹³. In Mauritius, rumours have led to panic buying of groceries and stationeries, which disrupted the supply chain. Such a situation exacerbated demand-supply gaps and food insecurities among individuals with low socioeconomic status and other vulnerable populations. Risk communication is therefore critical for developing effective health preparedness strategies and eradicating unhealthy social perceptions, in the event of an outbreak. An effective risk communication, in general, means that all related risk

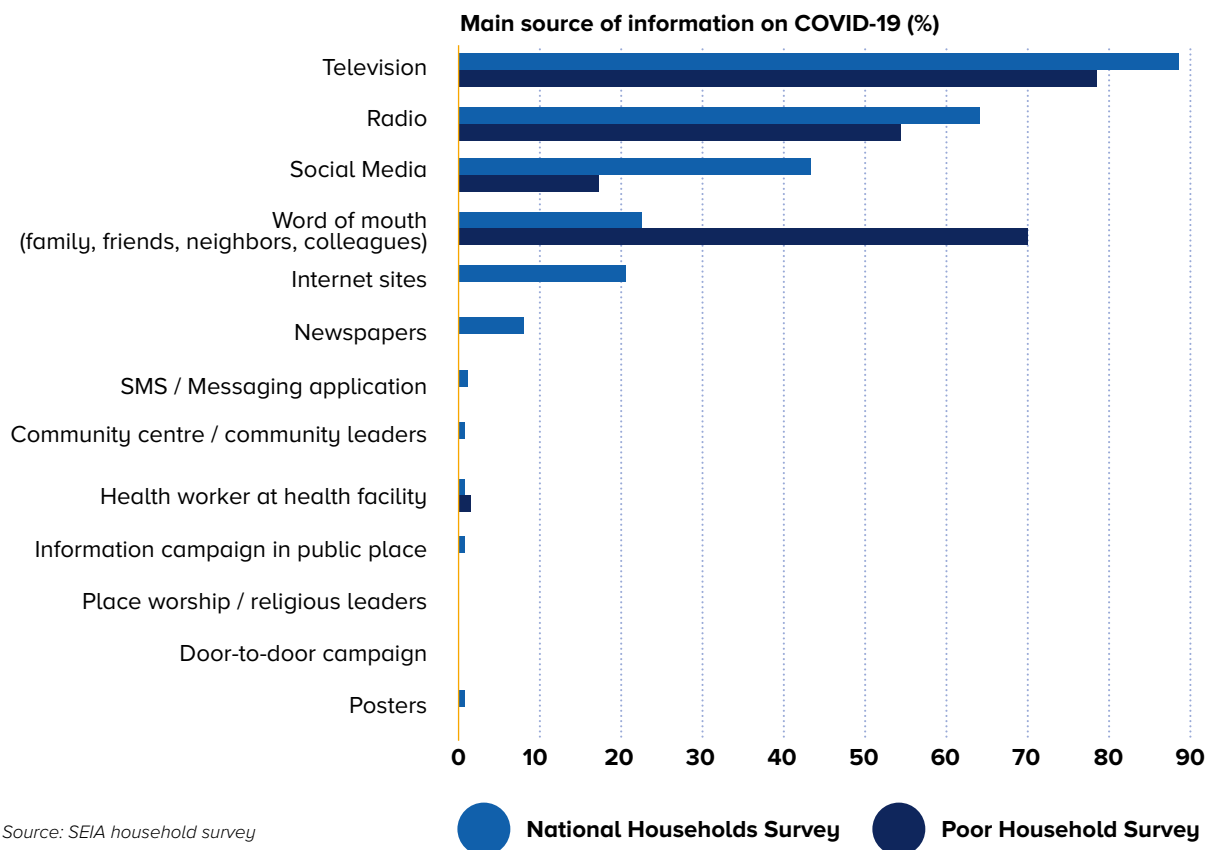
messages can be presented and shared to participants in a risk communication process openly and timely, aiming to rectify the knowledge gap between the originators of information and those receiving the information, and adjust the public’s behaviour to cope with the risk proactively¹⁴. In Mauritius, a Committee was set by the PMO to inform the population on a timely basis, while the Ministry of Health had a website and a dedicated line to respond to queries.

The NHS and the PHS reveals that the main source of information during the lockdown was television (88% of NHS and 79% for PHS) and radio (64% for NHS and 54% for PHS). A high percentage of the respondents from NHS (43%) also reported social media (43%) and internet sites (21%) as main source of information. A

concern is related to the high percentage of the PHS who rely on ‘word of mouth’ for information (70%). Still, 23% of households from NHS also relies on word of mouth. Word of mouth was defined in the questionnaire to respondents as information, which being communicated through relatives, friends, neighbours and colleagues. While the use of social media and internet sites have proven effective during the lockdown¹⁵, word of mouth, especially for the poor households increases the risk of misinformation. A need is felt to develop an effective risk communication strategy for Mauritius on COVID-19 measures, especially during a lockdown, which could reach all areas and segments of the population. Dedicating outreach to women and more specifically to female headed households is deemed useful.

Figure 4.2.

Main Source of information during lockdown



Source: SEIA household survey

13 – Tasnim, S., Mazumder, H., Hossain, M. M. 2020. Impact of rumors or misinformation on coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in social media. *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Public Health* 53(3):1-5.

14 – Zhang, L., Li, H., Chen, K. 2020. Effective Risk Communication for Public Health Emergency: Reflection on the COVID-19 (2019-nCoV) outbreak in Wuhan, China. *Healthcare MDPI*, vol. 8 (64); doi:10.3390/healthcare8010064.

15 – Yasir, A., Hu, X., Ahmad, M., Rauf, A., Shi, J., and Nasir, S. A. Modeling Impact of Word of Mouth and E-Government on Online Social Presence during COVID-19 Outbreak: A Multi-Mediation Approach. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. Vol. 17, no. 2954, pp. 1-21.

4.3. Risky behaviour during lockdown

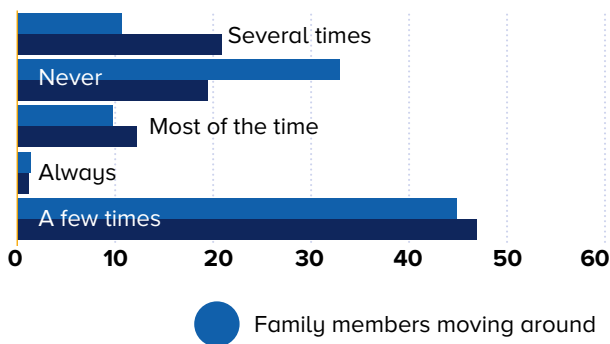
Almost 10% of households have members moving around during the lockdown most of the time, and around 56% reported going out a few times. The high percentage still prevails for the poor households (44%).

The main reasons advanced by respondents were the need for supplies, seeking medical assistance and assistance to others. However, the survey reveals that almost 17% from the NHS reported that they did not have sufficient information while 15% believe it was not the right measure. Almost 31% revealed that they found it too difficult to be confined.

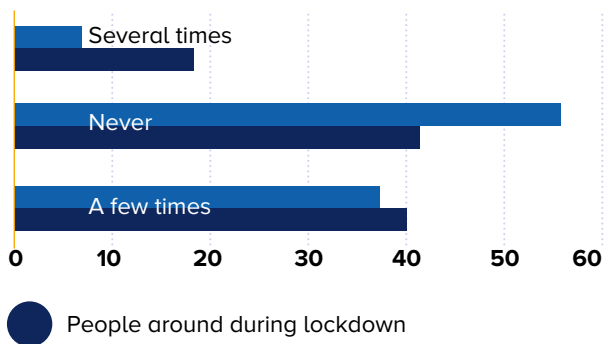
Figure 4.3.

Risky behaviour

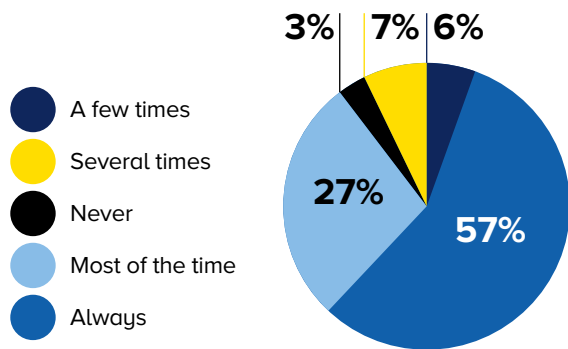
NATIONAL HOUSEHOLDS SURVEY
People moving around during lockdown



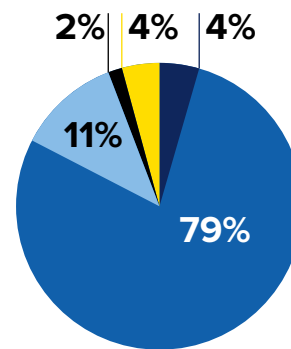
POOR HOUSEHOLDS SURVEY
People moving around during lockdown



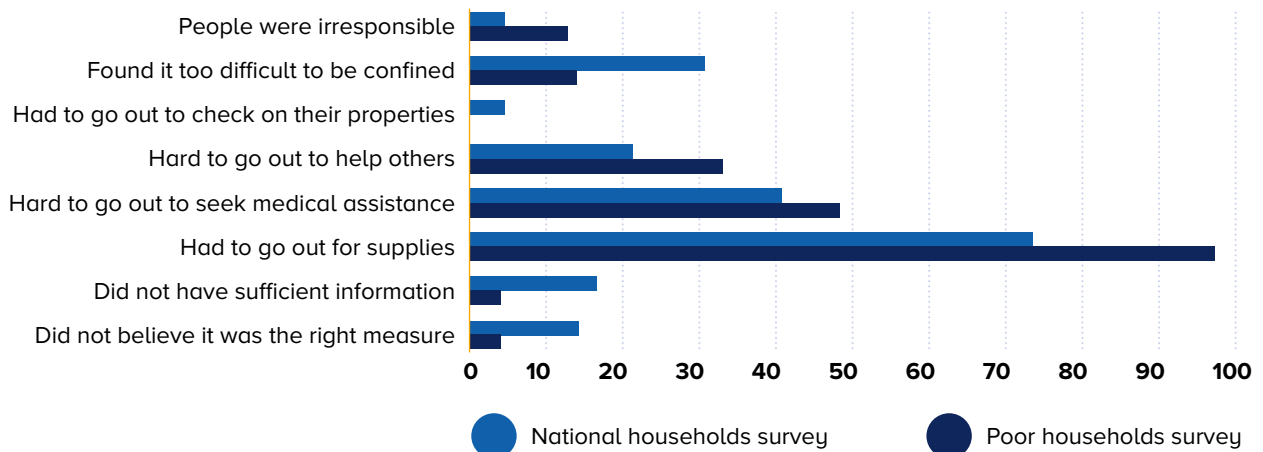
Social distancing during lockdown



Social distancing during lockdown



REASONS FOR NOT COMPLYING LOCKDOWN RULES



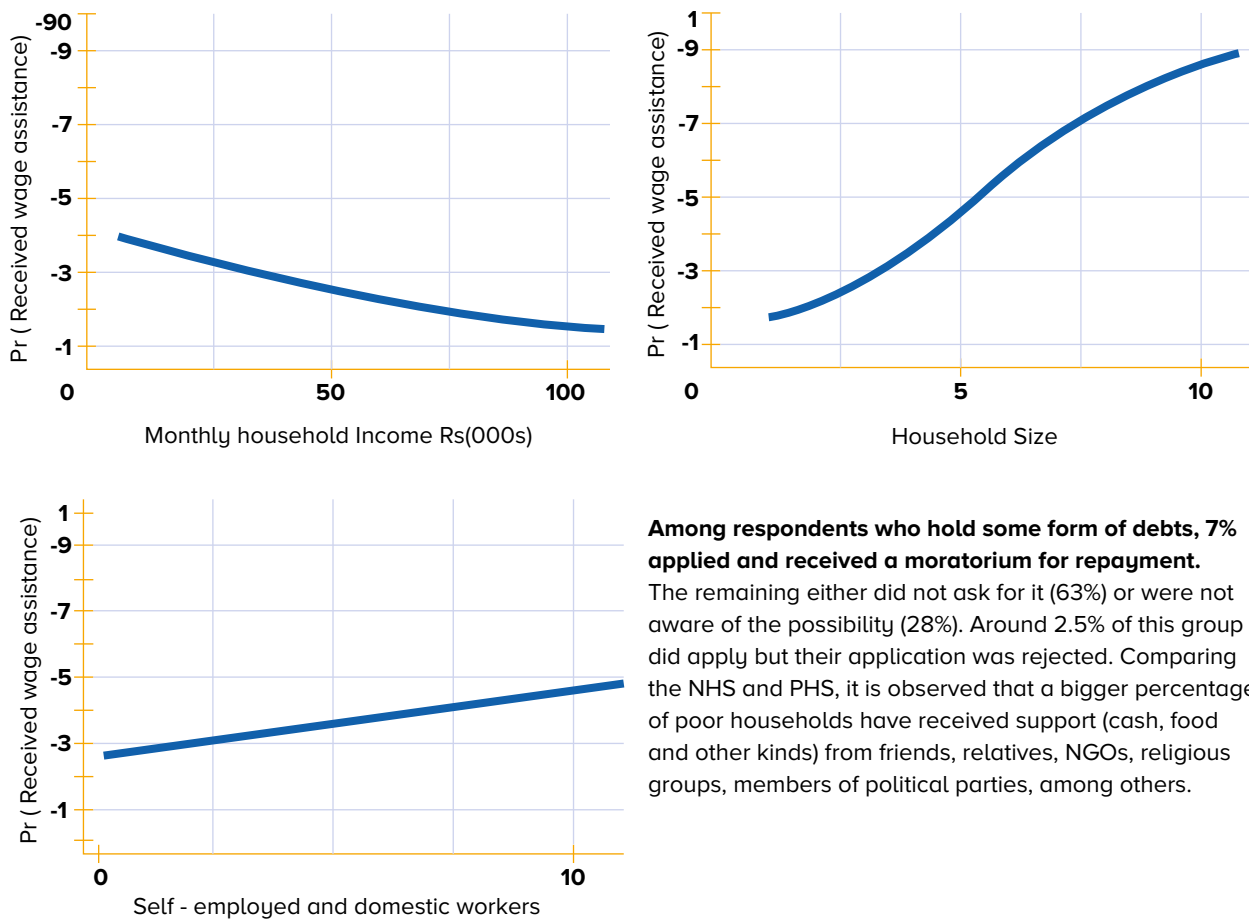
4.4. Efficacy of institutional arrangements

An assessment of the distribution of food packs during the lockdown

About 86% of respondents in the NHS were satisfied with the measures instituted by government to combat the pandemic, namely: total lockdown, social distancing, disinfecting, and planned scheduled shopping time. Only 10% remained neutral. The Wage assistance scheme was highly acclaimed by households given its comprehensive coverage. 29% of households from the NHS, and 84% in the PHS applied the self-employed wage assistance scheme and over 90% were successful. In order to conduct a crude analysis on the effectiveness of the self-employed assistance scheme, the following

graphs show the association between the ‘likelihood’ that a household member would receive assistance and the characteristics of his/her household. The finding shows that the wage assistance was particularly provided to the applicant who was privately or self-employed (for e.g. domestic workers), whose households’ members were relatively larger, and his/her total household monthly income was lower. This means that those in need were more entitled for the wage assistance scheme¹⁶.

Figure 4.4. Household characteristics receiving Wage Assistance Schemes



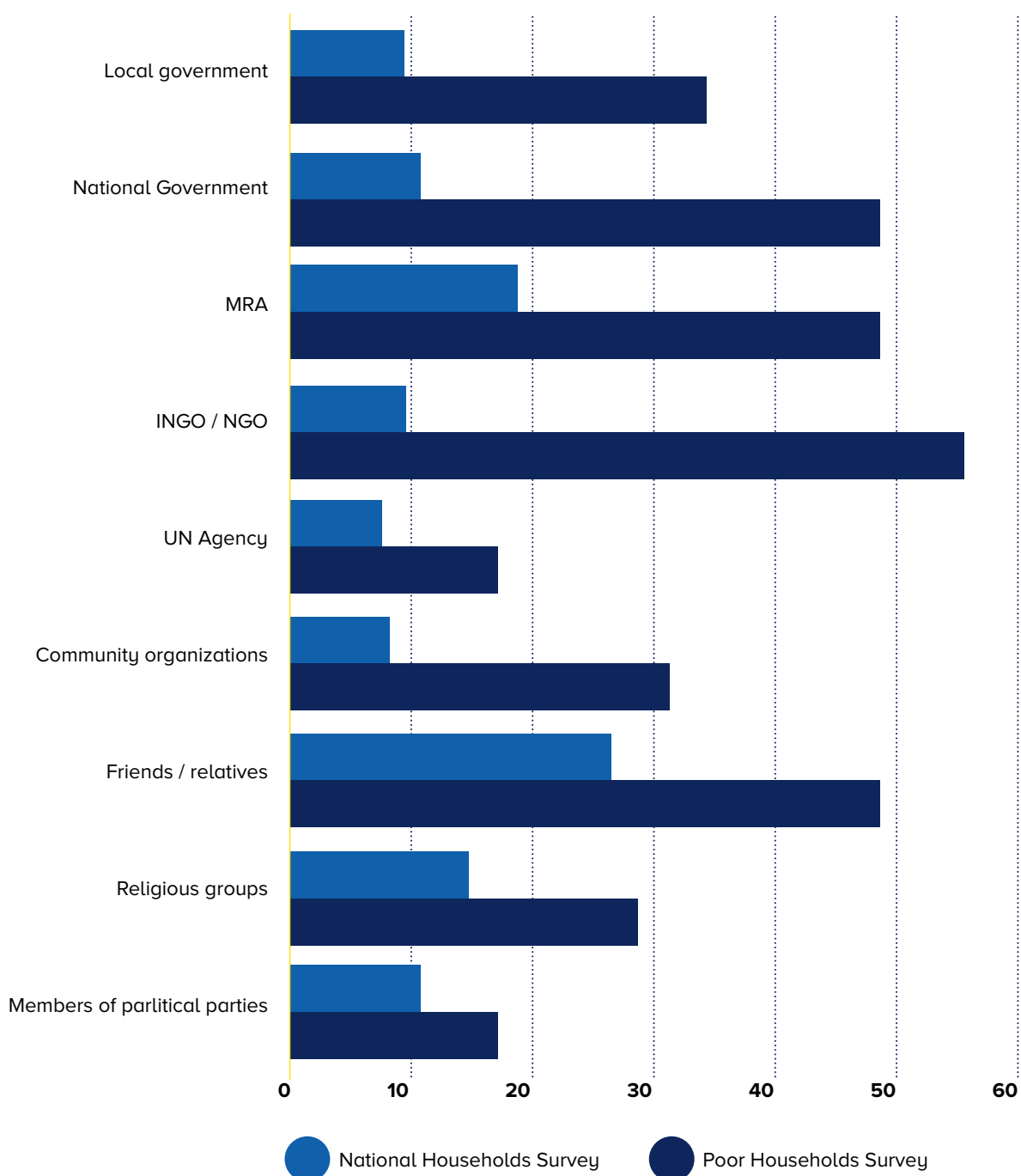
Among respondents who hold some form of debts, 7% applied and received a moratorium for repayment. The remaining either did not ask for it (63%) or were not aware of the possibility (28%). Around 2.5% of this group did apply but their application was rejected. Comparing the NHS and PHS, it is observed that a bigger percentage of poor households have received support (cash, food and other kinds) from friends, relatives, NGOs, religious groups, members of political parties, among others.

16 – Logit regression

Receive Wage Assistance	-2.14 (0.368)	- 0.03 Monthly Income (0.010)***	+ 0.57 (Household Size) (0.093)***	+ 0.87 (Private employment) 0.035***
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Pseudo R2=0.12, n=412; LR chi square 57.03

Figure 4.5.
Support during lockdown



Priorities and assistance to households

Restoring key sectors of the economy is a priority for the households in general. Safety and dignity is a second priority from respondents in the NHS but is the priority for the PHS. Maternal and child nutrition is one area which requires support for the poor segment of the population. Health is also a priority according to responses.

There is a general tendency among poor households to seek assistance on housing rent, workfare programme and training for new skills. The initiative by the Government to accelerate housing programmes for both low- and middle-income families, with special focus on the needy and vulnerable is therefore commendable. The NHS, in turn, reveals that households would be better off if tax payments and loan repayments were deferred, together with workfare programme and training for new skills.

Figure 4.6.
Recovery needs by households

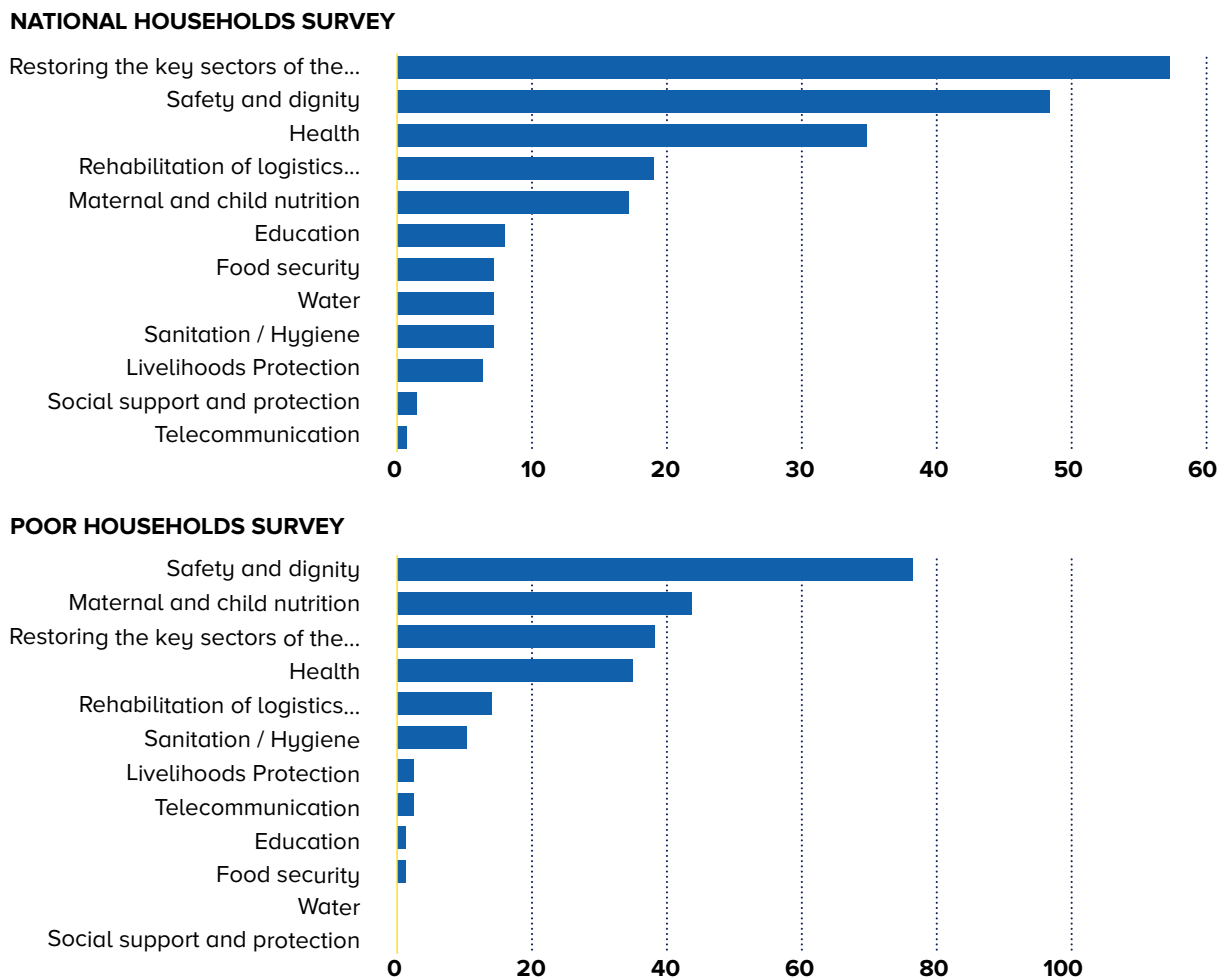
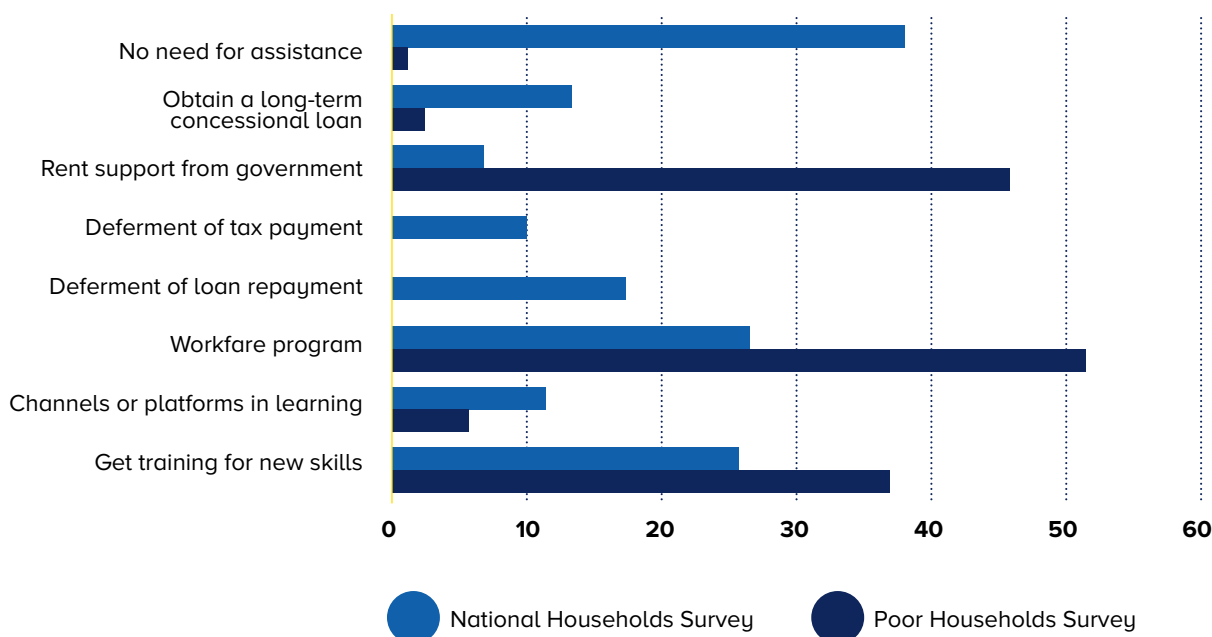


Figure 4.7.
Assistance required by households



5

Impact on the community



Summary:

A

- Widespread support from Government and civil society to vulnerable groups have contributed to building resilience and maintenance of social peace and harmony.

B

- There is a need to monitor the situation particularly among those who face social exclusion as precarity can be a threat to social stability.

C

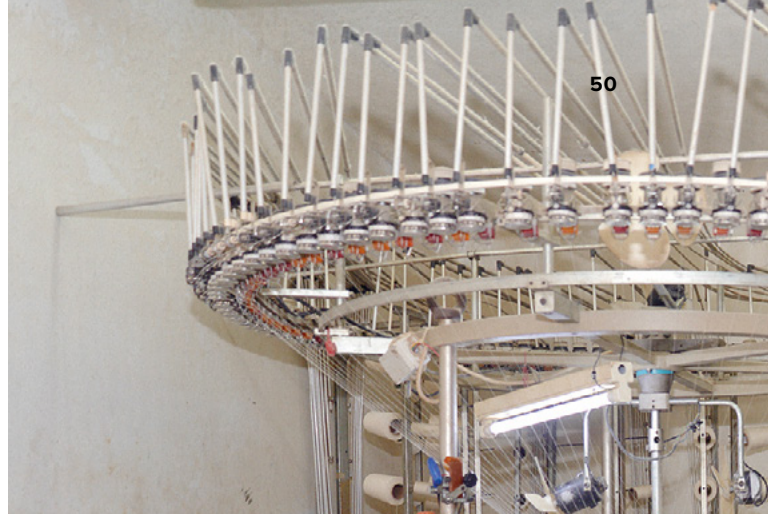
- Confinement has brought about significant increases in interpersonal violence including domestic violence and certain forms of crime such as thefts and burglaries.

5.1. A collective account of common lived experiences of the pandemic in Mauritius

The build-up to the sanitary curfew: Fear of the unknown bordering on psychosis and panic-buying.

The early stages, since the official detection of the first cases on 18 March followed by the closure of the borders on 19 March were generally marked by a growing acknowledgement that something serious and sinister was happening. Popular perceptions prevailing beforehand that this ‘pandemic lies elsewhere but not in Mauritius’ and the limited awareness - at the time - of the pace and dramatic impacts it would subsequently have globally, started changing fast. Panic-buying not only in hypermarkets but also in small corner shops accelerated while pharmacies and filling stations were also charged upon for not only fuel but also gas cylinders. The long queues and fast disappearance of essential commodities on the stalls fed even more panic. The occurrence of 3 deaths within this same stride further accentuated the growing panic. With the sanitary curfew eventually imposed on 24 March, some of the older participants interviewed even evoked a psychosis, never experienced in the Mauritian collective memory. In fact, as one participant argues, Mauritius has been largely spared of natural or man-made catastrophes in general and even the worst cyclones in history had some element of predictability – that they would go away in a matter of days and even their damages would eventually be repaired. The fear and anxiety caused by the curfew imposed during the ethnic strife of February 1999 following the death of popular singer Kaya, in spite of its fundamentally different reasons and short duration, were the closest comparable feelings of disarray and incomprehension evoked, although here the danger did not have a human face but was a minute and invisible virus which was increasingly being felt to wreak havoc.

With the explosion of attention of the coronavirus in the mass media and on social networking sites, there was a further amplification of the fear of this unknown. The viral circulation of videos and messages on social media often fed by unfounded rumours have brought about several confusions in the minds of people although Government regularly and systematically gave clear updates on latest developments. Among some of the most spread rumours which disinform and fuelled further angst and fear were for instance that discovered cases of Dengue were outbreaks of Coronavirus or that cases discovered in the community through contact tracing had contaminated multiple others by having done shopping in such and such hypermarket or partaken in religious ceremonies; or that there would be an outright food crisis.



The complete lockdown – Forced adjustments to the new Mauritian normal

The complete lockdown at first further fed the growing fear of a situation getting out of control. The fear of self or relatives being infected, in a context where society was bombarded with images of the toll it has on people’s health across the mass media was rife. The number of deaths in Italy which were skyrocketing during this period, the vivid and often crude display of patients under reanimation and the intervention of the military were powerful images affecting the social psyche. As emerged in a Focus Group Discussion in the region of Camp Pave in Vacoas, neighbours overnight wanted to stay away from each other although no less than a week before they were all on the streets in their usual pre-occupations. Families who had frontline professionals called to duty were particularly fearful both for the latter and for themselves. The anxiety and concerns were far worse for those whose families had members that were stranded overseas or those chronically sick and undergoing regular treatment.

With the need to adjust to the lockdown, this fear of the disease was soon turning to practical concerns of survival. Concerns over food and essentials, prior financial commitments and debts, running of the household, especially for those with limited savings and resources were becoming at this stage equally high. The realization that people who passed away (not only those who contracted the disease) during this period would not have the customary funeral rites and the absence of close relatives to provide psychological support further added to the gloomy nature of this period. Apart from the continuation of rumours on the spread of the disease on social networks, there were also the emergence of messages of disapprobation towards the lockdown, in certain quarters often with an ethnic undertone. There were even claims of brewing unrest and organized attempts to raid a hypermarket. The intervention of police deterred this from happening.

Marginalized groups who were cash strapped and whose livelihoods involved day to day jobs including fishing and construction work, were concerned about



their difficulties to meet their basic needs in the absence of opportunities to go to work. Having not been able to shop and stock, the situation was dire. In parallel, people who were seen outside their homes were severely reprimanded by police. However, with odd exceptions particularly in the early days of the complete lockdown, the population was generally very responsive to the instructions established.

The organization and distribution of food-packs in the community to people at the lowest rungs of society as well as the design and implementation of the Wage Assistance and Self-employed schemes with the assistance of the Mauritius Revenue Authority are widely seen as crucial measures which have cushioned in many ways the disruptions brought about by the economic standstill. Many employers and particularly the self-employed were unprepared for this cease of business activities. Some interviews with self-employed people evoke a drastic reduction in their salary often down to merely 10% of their regular earnings through the Self-employed assistance scheme. With the need to service overhead fees without generating revenue, many employers have found it extremely hard to cope and were forced to cease their activities. A building contractor who employs masons and pays them wages on a fortnightly basis reports that he had to dig into his own savings to pay his workers as they were totally reliant on this income for them and their families to survive. He had to wait for over 6 weeks to recover his money from his employer.

In the agricultural sector, many farmers also experienced important setbacks. For example, one interviewee who runs a hydroponic farm explains that she experienced important losses as her whole production was coinciding with the lockdown and the Work-Access Permit which subsequently allowed circulation was not yet available. She could not rely on her employees and had to do the harvesting herself and marketed it over the phone with people in the area. While normally she has niche markets in terms of local restaurants and one hotel group, she could no longer tap into these markets and had to compromise with the price that customers in the neighbourhood proposed. She had to deliver on the doorsteps of her customers and come back later to pick up money wrapped in plastic to minimize the risks of contamination.

Interviewees employed by the Government, generally, felt more secure in terms of their jobs and income than employees from the private sector or the self-employed. For private sector workers, the Wage Assistance Scheme and Self-employed Scheme contributed to the protection of jobs and enabled employees to keep earning an income. However, by this stage, many employers in some of the non-essential sectors which were particularly exposed to the effects of the lockdown were starting to lay off employees.

Online platforms for the sale and distribution of food and essential commodities were also a novelty although there were soon criticisms that there were severe stock ruptures that orders were not being met in a timely manner or still that the prices were over-inflated. Also, pre-packed items despite being rather costly as compared to pre-covid prices, did not always meet the requirements of people, for instance not all households needed nappies.

The opening of shops and pharmacies for people to buy essentials is an important milestone which many participants highlighted compounded the spread of the disease. Initially planned to be organised with strict social distancing measures, wearing of masks, temperature checks and hand decontamination, the first day of shop's opening uncovered a lack of discipline. In spite of the Government's assurance that provisions and stock were available, the fear that commodities would run out lead to panic buying and forms of indiscipline that had to be addressed. Subsequently, access to shops by alphabetical order with more rigid disciplinary measures contributed to salvage the situation – the ability to meet the basic needs of the population while rigidly containing the spread of the disease was beginning to work. An important point which has surfaced has been the resurgence of the popularity of small corner-shops which had been largely downplayed in recent times with the advent of hypermarkets and shopping malls. Often allowing credit-purchases, these corner shops have played an important role in facilitating access to commodities within the local community.

Salient elements of a new lifestyle

Confinement brought about a range of disruptions in social life some more radical than others and which people had to learn to contend with. The qualitative data obtained indicates that far from being a homogeneous experience, there are important variations in terms of how people according to social class, occupational group, gender, age, region have experienced it. An important segment of the population had to juggle with reductions in income and adopt strict austerity measures in order to make both ends meet. Some participants from lower income backgrounds for instance mentioned that rationing, contenting with minimum and ensuring that food is not wasted were common during the time. In the same vein, one participant explained that in her household, during the lockdown “it was only on Sunday that they would make a special meal with chicken or meat as they could not afford it.” Not many low-income households could save up based on their earnings as these barely matched the household living expenses. However, those who lived in the rural regions could more easily draw from backyard gardens, and poultry rearing than those from the urban regions – due to limitations of space.

Employees in some of the worst-hit sectors as well as workers operating in the informal sector who used to work as masons, domestic workers, etc. found it particularly hard to cope and were among those who were eagerly awaiting a denouement in order to restart their activities. Coping strategies such as gardening and mutual assistance with close kins and neighbours became common.

In fact, in relation to the evolution of the number of cases in the community and the gradual stability which Government measures and public cooperation were bringing, an important coping strategy which began to emerge particularly in the rural regions, was a renewal of the spirit of solidarity. In fact, even within the stages of the lockdown where the spread was under control, there were in many places concerns that people had started engaging back in small business activities such as vegetable, eggs and fruit selling. Farmers were back in the fields. Some participants even argued that the quality and variety of the vegetables and even local fruits like pineapples that they were getting were of much better quality and taste than under normal times. In fact, one explanation for this is that under normal times, these are meant for export or for hotels and restaurants. Some

participants were also critical of the exploitive prices which farmers were putting on their vegetables in some regions.

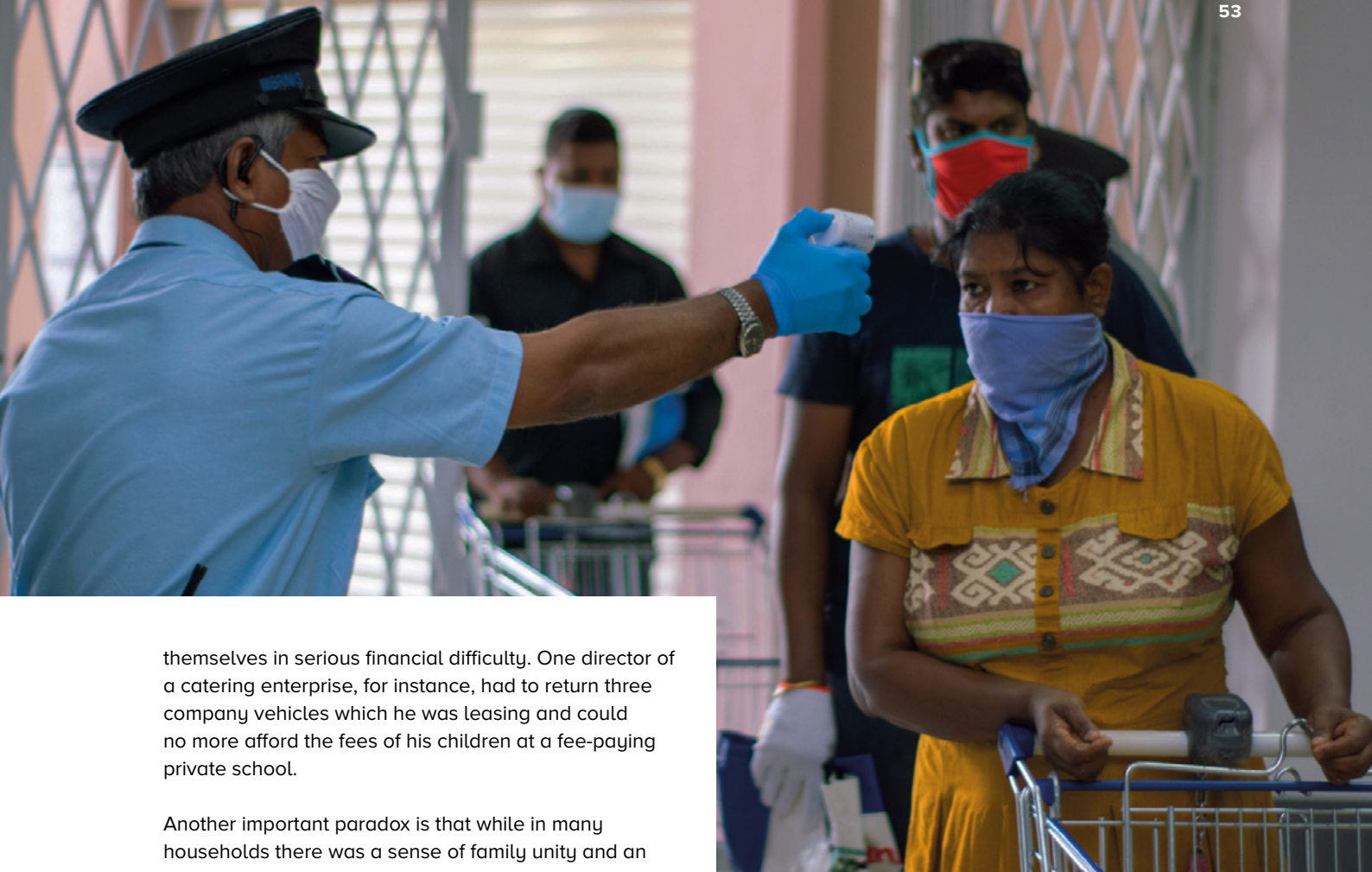
Food vendors of local comfort fast-foods (rotis and dhollpuris; Chinese noodles and dumplings) which had, in the words of one participant “**almost become delicacies since confinement**” were also gradually getting back in business albeit in clandestine manners.

In one Focus Group Discussion, one participant highlighted that in his neighbourhood, a hairdresser living close by would take appointments on Whatsapp and go to people’s places for his services. Likewise, another informant highlights other covert micro-entrepreneurial activities around food-making and vending through informal support networks.

These coping strategies were in some ways supporting a timid but gradual recovery of sustaining livelihoods.

Those on the social register of Mauritius who live in extreme poverty were provided with food-packs and the role of NGOs, faith-based organisations and benefactors in providing further assistance has helped to mitigate the impacts.

These perspectives contrast sharply with those from a more comfortable socio-economic background who had been able to store provisions, and who did not have immediate financial concerns due to professional and financial stability. In fact, some interviewees from this background would allude to life in confinement ‘as the best days of their lives’ being similar to be on leave from work. For this social group, the end of the lockdown was not particularly welcomed. The extensive social networks of this social group enabled the mutual sourcing and assistance of fresh vegetables and diary from farmers who could no longer supply to closed hotels and restaurants at a rebated price. The experience of going shopping was not one of taking strict necessities or of counting their money at the counter to ensure they have enough to pay – but rather one of abundance and which as one participant states – “the highlight of the day was to showcase on Facebook and boast about the meal we learnt to make following recipes on the internet.” However, it is also worthwhile to note that many entrepreneurs and family businesses who were doing well for themselves had due to lack of orders found



themselves in serious financial difficulty. One director of a catering enterprise, for instance, had to return three company vehicles which he was leasing and could no more afford the fees of his children at a fee-paying private school.

Another important paradox is that while in many households there was a sense of family unity and an unprecedented opportunity to spend quality time, in others, tensions and conflicts often compounded by stress over financial matters and close proximity brought about important divisions as testified by increases in cases of domestic violence. In fact, across the interviews there have been anecdotes of how some participants' colleagues who had not been able to conceive after more than 14 years of marriage finally fell pregnant during confinement and that generally a COVID-baby boom is expected. Yet, on the other extreme, there have also been anecdotal evidence of violence and separation, of how divorced parents were barred by their partners to meet their children during confinement and that the law was not being equipped to respond quickly to these issues. There was also a common consensus across different interviews and FGDs that domestic violence also took the form of violence against children and elderly abuse and these tally with the official statistics which are gradually emerging.

Another general theme which rallied consensus among the study participants was that in spite of being physically isolated in their own homes, the level of connection with the outside world with internet access was very high even among the lowest rungs of society as internet penetration and ownership of smartphones are high in the country. Many people including those above 50s and more particularly the elderly who owned smartphones but did not use them for social networking started to make use of these functionalities. They could also partake in the circulation of information in real time on social networking sites.

Likewise, as in many other parts of the world, there was also the adoption of remote working and online meetings transforming the informality of the home environment into a more formal space. Households where both husbands and wife had to work online had to contend with the difficulties to reconcile household with domestic tasks and childcare – particularly when extended family support is not available.

Leisure during this period was severely constrained. Typical leisure activities of the average Mauritians revolve around attending the plethora of religious festivals, wedding ceremonies, get-togethers, concerts, window-shopping at shopping malls, participating or watching sports – football, horseracing, restaurants and pubs, beaches and increasingly gyms and physical exercise classes. The lockdown constrained people to TV and internet as the main leisure although concerns were expressed that drinking was more common than usual. Exercising at home, and as the situation eased up, on the streets, gradually became common.

Many individuals particularly those of faith have also used this episode of their lives as a time to introspect on the deeper meaning of life, of not taking things for granted as the assumed linearity of life had been radically put into question.

5.2. Preservation of social cohesion

The multi-ethnic fabric of Mauritian society has thus far come out of the pandemic largely unscathed. It is widely known that, generally, in the wake of crises, many countries must contend with racial, ethnic or communitarian tensions as social groups dispute inequities in entitlements or access to limited resources. However, with the exception of a few isolated cases of outcry from marginalized communities which at the beginning of the lockdown were using the social media as a platform to vent their anger and disapprobation, and which were even followed by police interventions, there have been no consequential incidents to report.

Interviews with key informants including officials from NGOs and social workers who have been particularly active at reaching out to poor communities around the island in order to ensure that they do not lack any essential material commodities, are unanimous about the spirit of solidarity and connectedness which prevailed. Although faith-based organisations were active at collecting and distributing food supplies, their support was extended to all members of the community, beyond their affiliation. As summed up by a Muslim social worker and activist from an NGO based in the South of the island, "...at this moment in time when we were going on the field for food packs and vegetable distribution, it was Mauritianism which came first, hunger has no religion, we strived to help all those who needed help... In some regions, there were mainly creoles, in others there were Muslims or Hindus, we distributed whatever we could without discrimination." Likewise, intra and inter-community mutual help has contributed to mitigate the disruptions caused, particularly during the lockdown.



“ ”

...at this moment in time when we were going on the field for food packs and vegetable distribution, it was Mauritianism which came first, hunger has no religion, we strived to help all those who needed help... In some regions, there were mainly creoles, in others there were Muslims or Hindus, we distributed whatever we could without discrimination.

Rural vs. Urban Solidarity

Solidarity and mutual assistance were argued to be pronounced not only in rural regions but even in urban localities despite the generally more impersonal relationships which prevail in the towns. There is much anecdotal evidence of how kinship or friendship-based networks across the island, centred around the social media, enabled the swift supply and distribution of fresh produce and dairy products from the villages to the towns.

One interviewee who resides in a Flat in Vieux Quatre-Bornes, for example, explains how the entire community of residents used their personal networks across the island to obtain and distribute fresh vegetables and commodities which were scarce to find as a result of panic buying. **“Many of my neighbours are just acquaintances, we bump into each other in the lift or in the car park, we were not very close, each one for himself...But during the confinement, it was something else, we all came together... I knew someone who could provide eggs or freshly baked bread, another one knew where to get hydroponic products (lettuce, English cucumber, pepper), another one had contacts at the filling station for those who needed gas...So by communicating our needs and helping each other we never felt like we were in short supply of anything...”**

Support to the most needy

Complementing the extensive support of the Government through the distribution of food-packs to those on the SRM, persons with severe disabilities and inmates of Residential Care Homes and Shelters, some NGOs focused more specifically on their client-base. For instance, Lovebridge focused on its beneficiaries which involved some 350 families (1500 individuals including more than 800 children) in some 65 localities across the 9 districts of Mauritius).

However, there were many other NGOs (including faith-based organisations) and social workers which worked relentlessly across the whole Island braving administrative challenges particularly obtaining of WAPs and liaison with local forces-vives and community leaders; practical and logistical concerns including sourcing of supplies and transportation; while also ensuring that their volunteers and employees are adequately equipped to distribute food supplies and masks. However, there have been criticisms from some local community leaders that some pockets of poverty have received more supplies than others. Some NGOs have in fact acknowledged that based on their locus of activities, the pockets of poverty which were more accessible have indeed been treated more favourably than those which were geographically or road-access-wise more remote. A more centralized dashboard with the relevant coordination across well-intended NGOs is acknowledged to have circumvented this problem and allows for a more equitable voluntary distribution of supplies to the needy.



5.3. Crime during lockdown

Nonetheless, in spite of the attempts to support the community and the needy through the difficult phase of the lockdown, there were inevitably some people who resorted to illicit and illegal coping strategies. It emerged from FGDs and across many interviews, for instance, that in many places across the Island, vegetable plantations were being looted. Some interviewees from the urban regions of Rose-Hill and Beau-Bassin reported that during the lockdown, there were many cases of people outside the neighbourhood loitering and neighbours had experienced the disappearance of different items in their yards from gas cylinders to bicycles and even fruit trees and flower pots which they suspect could have been resold. In the words of a participant, **“...At first there were people we have never seen in the region...They must be from ‘Cite B...’, and with their masks, even if they are captured on camera, it is not easy to recognize them...If you come out and ask what they want they ask for help...their children do not have food, anything**

that can be given they would take...Some of us have helped...but they would come back...We don’t want to encourage this...When we don’t give, they come in the yard and they take...We didn’t want to get into trouble... They have nothing to lose, we do...We called the police and they come for patrol but many of us have already lost stuff which are not necessarily valuable...”

Similar testimonies can be found in other regions of the Island. In fact, some videos of people stealing construction materials in houses under construction or renovation went viral on social media during the lockdown. However, while many of these cases have not been officially reported in the words of a participant “given the hassle to deal with the police and the more so during this period”, there have been cases which have been officially recorded as discussed below:

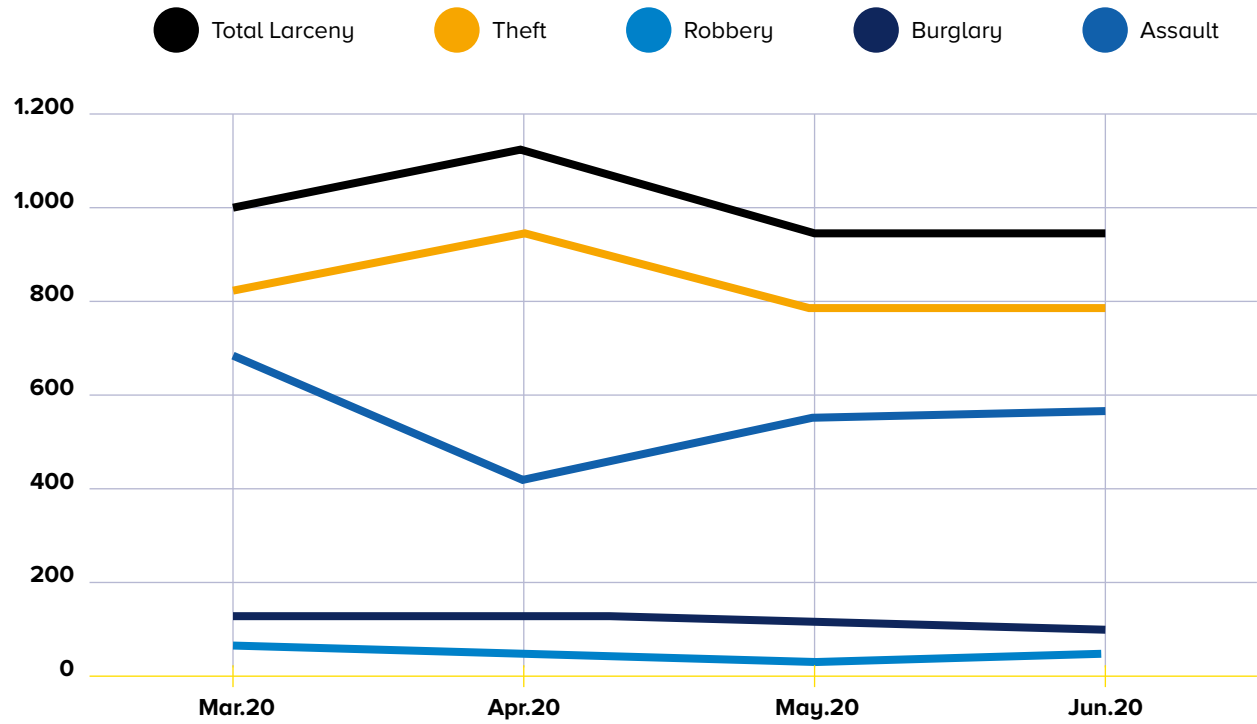
Official records

Officially recorded cases of various forms of crime by the Police, as shown in the Chart below, indicate that during confinement there was an increase in the number of thefts and burglaries recorded which subsequently decreased after the lockdown was relaxed. Conversely, the number of cases of robberies reported, noted a decrease during that period and picked up after as the lockdown was lifted. The number of reported assault cases also dipped during confinement to subsequently note an increase over the months of May and June.

It is useful to highlight that while the above-mentioned trends in these categories of crime during the specific context of confinement seem rather pronounced, nonetheless when located in longer trends – for instance within available time series data from police records over the last 2 years – these trends do not reveal an unusually higher incidence of crime. In fact, as the Chart below shows it is only on the case of assaults that there has been an all-time low which is evident in the sense that when the mass of the population is confined there is less risk of assault.

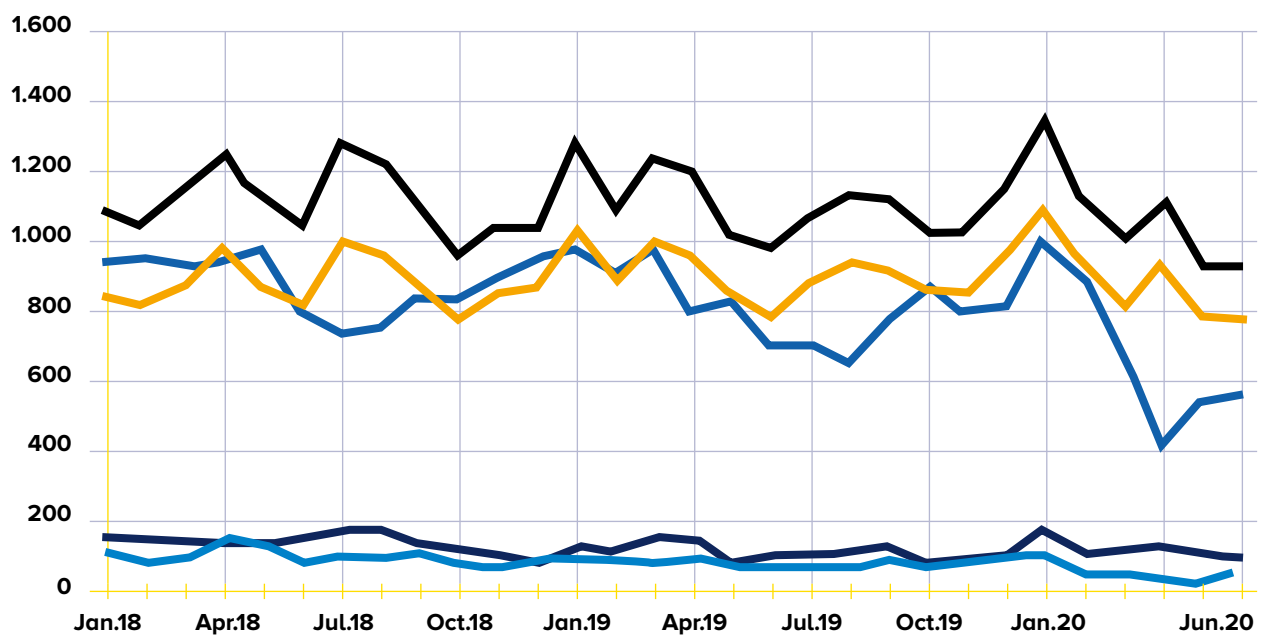


Figure 5.1.
Larceny and Assault over confinement period



Source: Statistics Mauritius

Figure 5.2.
Official records of crime January 2018-June 2020

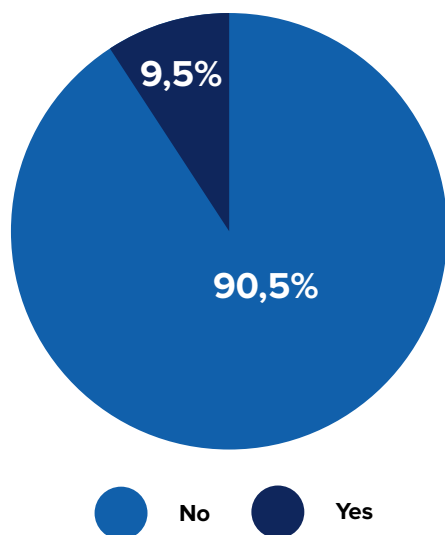


Source: Statistics Mauritius

Survey data

The picture emerging from the nationally representative household survey indicates that 9.5% of the sample have reported affirmatively to the question as to whether there 'have been any crimes in your neighbourhood' (Figure

(A) Have there been any crimes in your neighbourhood



Crime among the poorest of the poor

From the small-scale survey of those in extreme poverty, it has also come to the fore that as compared to the wider population, the feeling of safety is much less as the Table below indicates. In fact, although caution needs to be exercised in the inferring from these figures from a small sample, the indicative picture which it provides, complemented with insights from the field from qualitative data suggests that the emerging picture is a matter of concern.

TABLE 5.1.

Feeling of safety in your neighbourhood since COVID-19

Feeling of safety in your neighborhood since COVID-19	Freq.	Percent
Safe	27	38.57
Same	27	38.57
Unsafe	15	21.43
Very Unsafe	1	1.43
Total	70	100

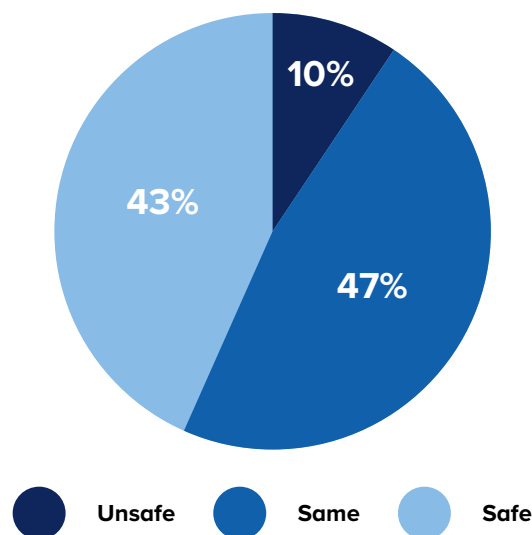
Source: SEIA household survey

5.3 a), while 10% feel unsafe in their neighbourhood after COVID-19 (Figure 5.3b) indicating the impact of these crimes on their feeling of safety.

Figure 5.3.

Crimes and safety

(B) Feeling of safety since COVID-19

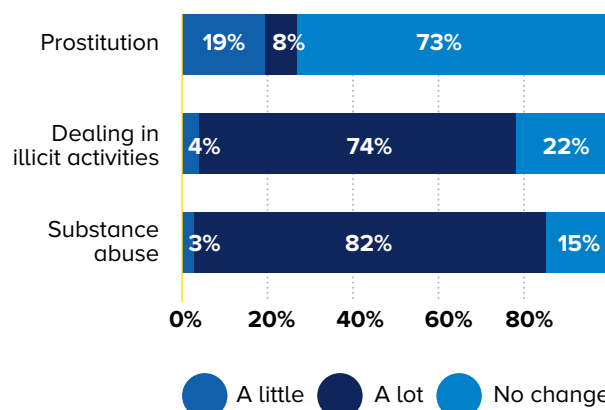


Source: SEIA household survey

A host of social problems have worsened as shown in the Chart below which corroborates the lower than average feeling of unsafety. It also indicates that risks of exacerbating social exclusion and being trapped into chronic poverty are high.

Figure 5.4.

Perceived change in illicit activities



Source: SEIA household survey

5.4. Vulnerable groups

Although there are certainly common experiences of confinement, it is also clear that the impacts of confinement are far from homogeneous but rather different social groups have been impacted differently

according to pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities. This section outlines some of the main ways in which the following vulnerable groups have been impacted.

The Poor

While it is estimated that 10% of Mauritian households or roughly 33,600 households live below the relative poverty line (Lovebridge 2020) those living in extreme poverty in Mauritius (which is the focus of the Survey of the Poorest of the Poor) are estimated at 1.2% of the population. As of April 2020, this social group of roughly 10,300 households comprising some 40,000 beneficiaries were registered on the Social Register of Mauritius (SRM). The Social Register is a vital element of the Marshall Plan against poverty established in 2016 to scale up efforts to eradicate poverty.

A snapshot of the impacts of COVID-19 on this segment of the population has been provided by the survey of the poorest of the poor. Some key highlights are provided below:

Box 5.2. Some key highlights from the Survey of the Poorest of the Poor

Selected areas	Baie du Tombeau, Benares, Centre de Flacq, Chemin Grenier, La Gaulette, Pamplemousses, Port-Louis Ward1, Poste de Flacq, Richelieu, Terre Rouge, Triolet
Typical Profile	Predominantly Female-Headed Households (67%), Low educational level – Incomplete Primary; Primary Education; Incomplete Secondary (89%) Occupational status: unemployed (16%) Casual workers (41%); Unable or unwilling to work (18%) SRM (70%) – Not registered (30%)
Of your monthly income, how much would you say you spend on your necessities?	Freq. Percent
	All of it 68 97.14
	More than half 1 1.43
	Other 1 1.43
How prepared financially would you be should there be another lock-down?	Freq. Percent
	Not prepared at all 67 95.71
	Quite prepared 3 4.29
Have you ever had to go to bed on an empty stomach because of lack of money to buy food?	Freq. Percent
	Never 29 41.43
	Sometimes 34 48.57
	Very often 7 10

Source: SEIA household survey

The above revealing statistics confirm that those in extreme poverty were ill-equipped to confront the effects of the lockdown. Although, as shown earlier, assistance has been provided by Government and NGOs to mitigate the impacts of the lockdown on this social group, limited access to secure employment and in particular the inability to save up for times of need make this group particularly vulnerable to shocks like confinement. The relatively short spell of the confinement may not have fundamentally affected the progress made in terms of poverty alleviation since 2016. However, the challenges for the social and financial empowerment of this vulnerable group and their upliftment from the social exclusion remain high, given the fact that this group is disproportionately female-headed with limited opportunities for sustainable wage-employment in the formal sector. It is noted that due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Social Contracts with SRM families which were to expire in June 2020 were

extended up to Dec 2020. Considering the prevailing socio-economic situation, Government has approved the extension of the social contracts of eligible families up to June 2021 depending on their monthly derived or assessed income.

Concerns over how far education is valued among this social group as well as the resort to illicit and illegal activities which appear to have increased further from survey findings reported earlier point towards the need for more efforts to avoid a worsening of the situation of this community.

Another important concern is the sensitive issue of the ethnic dimension which extreme poverty and social exclusion have historically taken which has the potential to affect social cohesion of a multi-ethnic social fabric if not properly managed.

Women

Across the world, it is widely acknowledged that the pandemic has brought about differential gender impacts with a general tendency that women are being hit harder (See e.g. OECD 2020; UNDP 2020).

In countries where deep-seated patriarchal beliefs and practices continue to prevail, where gender continues to be an important mediator in occupational segregation or job tenure and security, with a bearing on income inequalities; where domestic roles and responsibilities, or authority patterns and agency continue to be more favourable to males; women and girls shoulder a disproportionate brunt of the pandemic. Even worse, when gender as a structure of disadvantage intersects with other characteristics such as unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, ethnic minority status, age, disability, among others, this exacerbates both gender disparities and intra-women inequalities making the challenge to address these inequalities even more colossal.

In Mauritius although the female population is higher than the male population – albeit slightly – and although girls systematically outperform boys at primary, secondary and tertiary educational levels, there is an underrepresentation of women in the labour force, an overrepresentation of women among the unemployed – in spite of being relatively more qualified – as well as inequalities of pay and access to positions of power. Some stylised facts about women and economic participation are provided in Appendix 3.

The gendered implications of the pandemic have been treated across this report looking mainly at the differential impacts on unemployment, gender dynamics within the household including gender-based violence and the distribution of domestic tasks and the care economy. A summary of the main impacts is provided in the following explanations:

As evidence from this study indicates, the severity of the impacts known to be happening elsewhere appear to have been mitigated in Mauritius. As mentioned before, the successful handling of the crisis and the relatively short stalling of economic activities and the recovery which Mauritius has subsequently witnessed has to a large extent cushioned the impacts in terms of female unemployment with the exception of some sectors which have been particularly vulnerable to the lockdown such as retail and tourism-related activities.

However, there are important challenges ahead as women who have lost their jobs or who have chosen to put job-seeking on hold may find it increasingly hard to get back into paid employment as they will have to compete with a larger number of unemployed men.

The older female workforce, particularly in blue-collar work, is widely known to be averse to reskilling and are at best condemned to compete for menial occupations often under precarious conditions. The encouragement of micro-enterprises has tended to lead to a mushrooming of low-end products such as handicrafts, pickles and foodstuffs and with the return from these activities being unlikely to sustain a decent livelihood. Limited access to collaterals including finance and assets have thus far accounted for important gender inequalities in self-employment. Sectors of employment which are unaffected, and which are even likely to expand, including in the Science Technology and Innovation Sectors, tend to attract male graduates rather than female graduates. All these limitations require appropriate social and mindset engineering as well as relevant technical and financial support in order to prevent a deterioration of existing gender inequalities in the labour market.



The lockdown period also sheds light on the persistence of gender inequalities in the distribution of power and authority as well as care and domestic chores in the household. In particular, the gross abuse of basic human rights in terms of domestic violence which many women have suffered during confinement shows that there is still much progress to be made in society to curb this scourge.

Children

Another important aspect of this study has been to examine the experiences of children through the episode of lockdown. Confinement has inevitably affected children in many ways which remain to be thoroughly investigated as a multidisciplinary research exercise of its own. As summed up by the Global status report on preventing violence against children, 'The COVID-19 pandemic and the physical distancing measures imposed in response to it have greatly increased the risk of intra-family violence and online abuse. School closures have impacted more than 1.5 billion children and youth. Movement restrictions, loss of income, isolation, and overcrowding have heightened levels of stress and anxiety in parents, caregivers and children, and cut families and individuals off from their usual sources of support. Reports of child abuse and of

children witnessing violence between their parents and caregivers have increased'¹⁷.

The salient features of how children have gone through COVID have been identified through informant interviews complemented by secondary data including official statistics and reports. The informant interviews were done with children themselves, primary and secondary school teachers, police officials, officials of Resident Care institutions, Government officials and social workers, while the secondary data statistics and reports included the recently launched Ombudsman for Children's Office which has a detailed section on its initiatives for ensuring that the rights of children are protected during the lockdown. The findings of the combined sources of information are as outlined below.

Violence against children

According to official sources (MGEFW; Government Information Service [GIS], 2020), there have been 463 cases of child abuse over the period 20 March to 13 May 2020. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family Welfare in collaboration with the Mauritius Police Force intervened in all reported cases to provide relevant support and protection to the victims (GIS, 2020). Accordingly, 37 children required placement into residential care institutions over this period and COVID-19 testing was carried out prior to their placement. While more in-depth research is required on issues such as the nature, profile, causes and consequences of abuse against child-victims, in general, key informants report that reported cases are generally from families where there are a host of problems including broken families, mal adjustment or rebellion of children against step-parents and often exacerbated by economic hardships which have been further compounded by the impacts of the lockdown as described earlier.

Children in Residential Care Institutions and Youth Centres

Considerable efforts were also made by all actors, including the Ombudsperson for Children's Office, the Ministry of Gender Equality through the Child Development Unit, the police through the Brigade pour la Protection des Mineurs, as well as NGOs in order to ensure that children in situations of conflict with the law or who are in Residential Care Institutions did not lack material, educational and emotional support during the confinement period. An important challenge in the early days of the total lockdown was to obtain WAPs for RCI Managers and staff in order to ensure that the children were properly attended to. Some RCIs had some problems to control older children who were not receptive to the new lockdown arrangements and the sanitary measures. However, with the intervention of the OCO through site visits, these situations were resolved.

Children with Disabilities

An important area of concern during confinement pertained to a gap in terms of support for children with conditions like autism where the effects of confinement were particularly harsh. Some representations were also made to the Ministry of Education, regarding the exclusion faced by hearing or sight-impaired students while most students could assist the educational programmes essentially designed for the mainstream.

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Children required placement into residential care institutions and **COVID-19** testing was carried out prior to their placement.

Elderly

Given the lack of quantitative data, specifically on the socioeconomic impacts of the lockdown on the elderly, interviews with opinion leaders and 3 FGDs with different senior citizens associations in different towns and villages of the island have been conducted in order to obtain an indicative picture. Among the key themes which emerged was the overall sense of fear of catching the disease, particularly in the early stages of the lockdown, as educational and sensitization campaigns emphasised that the elderly were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19.

While socio-economic background determined the level of economic preparedness and ability to cope with the effects of lockdown and of getting regular supplies of necessities, there was an overall consensus that the efforts made by Government to physically bring the old age pensions in the community and even dispense seasonal flu vaccines at their doorsteps were invaluable in limiting their exposure to risks of infection. Access to care which is so important for elderly dependents has been a major concern during the confinement. In some cases, it is reported that households who employ elderly-care givers to stay with chronically ill elderly members in the household have had to do without their services until the confinement was lifted often not having the required skills and ability to perform this task. Those elderly people who relied on support from relatives or kins for access to basic supplies such as gas cylinders or food items on account of limited mobility have been particularly helpless during the total lockdown period. Given that the nuclear family set up is the norm, many elders have faced isolation from their close ones. As one participant argues "The worst for me was to be away from my grand-daughter... I used to go to her place to drive her to school and back...talking on the phone is not the same".



“ ”

The worst for me was to be away from my grand-daughter... I used to go to her place to drive her to school and back...talking on the phone is not the same.

The elderly people who were not conversant with technology were particularly excluded from the sense of community which social media and social networking sites provided during these difficult moments. Furthermore, it was also a missed opportunity for the elderly to engage in online shopping at their convenience without needing to take risks of leaving the house.

The FGDs also revealed that many elderly people who have smartphones have seen an opportunity to learn and maximise the potential and functionalities of these devices for being in touch with what is happening. In particular, elderly people from middle class backgrounds upwards who tend to be more IT-literate or educated have been able to stay connected throughout the confinement thus drawing on the benefits which ICTS have – information, entertainment, communication as well as online transactions.

However, it was also highlighted that many elderly people were unable to engage in their usual routine which disrupted their physical and emotional balance. For instance, some elderly women in one of the FGDs mentioned that for years they used to meet for religious chanting and that attending and cleaning a nearby Kovil- temple was a central feature of their lives but the inability to do so left them with a void. For senior citizens who used to go out for footing or other physical activities, again, confinement was a major problem, some highlighting the concern that during confinement they struggled to control their medical conditions such as diabetes and Hypertension.

There was also a bleak picture for elders, men and women who were confronted with chronic health issues. In addition, there have been reports of abuse from the part of their family members as a result of compatibility issues. There have been anecdotal reports of tension and conflicts over trivial matters as confinement over such a lengthy period of time-tested relationships, particularly among elderly people and their in-laws, sapping morale and psychology of the elderly. Another dark side of the picture pertains to the different categories of elderly people with the oldest old being even more vulnerable and dependent on others for care and support. More particularly, given that the life expectancy of women is higher than of men, there have been many elderly widows who have arguably been particularly isolated and dependent on others for meeting their practical if not psychological needs.

People living with HIV and key populations

(Sex workers, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs and transgenders)

Efforts were also made by sector NGOs (PILS, AILES, Association Kinouété, etc) and Government agencies to ensure that people living with HIV and key populations were not deprived of the usual support systems during confinement.

Interviews with key officials from the above organisations reveal that in spite of challenges in obtaining Work Access Permits, there was a strong sense of cooperation among different NGOs working in this area to liaise and provide support to this vulnerable group. With the guidance and assistance of the COVID-Task Force, there was a continuation in the support services provided. Apart from food and material support, Methadone Substitution Therapy and the distribution of medicines were continued with drug addicts and people on Anti-Retroviral Treatment.

These initiatives have no doubt helped in limiting the spread of the disease among this social group while at the same time exercising a form of social control. It also shows that no-one was indeed left behind in this fight.

Migrant workers

There is limited data on how the population of migrant workers have gone through the confinement period and this warrants a specific study of its own. Migrant workers have become a quintessential element of the labour force over the last 20 years. Estimated at 12,100 in 2007, this figure has reached 48,000 in March 2020 according to the Ministry of Labour. Garment manufacturing and Construction are the main employers of foreign labour –



12.100

MIGRANT WORKERS IN 2007:

48.000

MIGRANT WORKERS IN 2020:



Bangladesh, India, China and Madagascar are the main countries from which most of these workers come from. A trend which has been noted recently has been a gradual defeminization of the expatriate workforce – women making only 6200 workers compared to 10,000 in 2014.

Preliminary data from one FGD with Bangladeshi workers employed in construction reveal that during confinement, they spent their time in their dormitories. They received their basic salaries and arrangements for their food supplies were made by their employers. While they could not send remittances home at the end of the month of March, they could do so towards the end of April and May. These remittances are quintessential for the survival of their families back home.

From the perspective of the participants in this FGD there were no complaints from themselves or their fellow workers in their respective companies. However, they argue that they are aware of other companies where due to lack of business, their employers have delayed in giving them their wages. One participant also stated that Bangladeshi workers have been told to be cautious of taking food items from volunteers during confinement because this has in some occasions been used against the employers as argument that they were not treating their employees correctly.

However, it is also noteworthy that in an interview with Trade Union Leaders Reaz Chuttoo and Jane Ragoo from the CTSP (Confederation Travayere Secteur Prive) it surfaced that the treatment of foreign labour was uneven. Complaints received at their office, as well as their own inquiries, indicate that in some companies employing Bangladeshi workers, there have been some gross disrespect of these workers' rights including giving them just a percentage of their salary. According to the CTSP, as compared to (francophone) Malagasy workers who can read and understand French newspapers which are more commonly available locally than English newspapers, Bangladeshi workers are not adequately literate and therefore could not interpret what their entitlements were.

This has allegedly led to abuse by some unscrupulous employers. CTSP further adds that the decline in orders in some factories which employ Bangladeshis and the limited revenue in terms of overtime which Bangladeshi workers rely on to make both ends meet, explain the need for them to also seek extra work in bakeries, shops or in domestic work after office hours in the aftermath of the confinement period.

6

Conclusions



Mauritius has performed impressively in managing the spread and impacts of the pandemic. By rapidly containing the virus through closing our border and implementing a lockdown response, it has prevented widespread infection, and an overburdened health system. Strong and immediate government relief measures have cushioned the economy and enabled a swift return to normalcy. Overall, the strategy of putting people first through a prompt and multi-pronged approach together with the cooperation of the civil society has also ensured social cohesion. Further, the confinement heavily impacted individuals who lost jobs and business, although the impacts would have been worse without Government recovery support which has been acknowledged by this report for its effectiveness.

As the country advances its efforts to manage the impacts of the pandemic, this report recommends additional reflections in the following areas:

1. **A national contingency or crisis response plan could be formulated in a participatory and inclusive manner, with emphasis on the poor and most vulnerable groups, and building on the experience of the recent pandemic.** Better outreach strategies for the poor in case of another emergency or crisis, improving access to the most needy aid coordination including work and movement permits for aid delivery agencies, setting up a food bank, facilitating access to online education for the poorest households and building capacity for women to support their kids' learning, in line with online medical consultations and e-prescriptions are some of the contingency planning elements revealed by the study.
2. **The continued efforts to dynamize existing economic sectors, especially manufacturing and services, remain crucial.** The use of ICT and digital technologies across sectors is the momentum to bring new competitive edge to the economy. Businesses, especially, SMEs and women entrepreneurs, among others, would require acceleration in digital transformation. The need to encourage and harness Science Technology and Innovation in areas such as telemedicine, online education, online shopping and innovative delivery systems should be further developed.
3. **The Government should continue with efforts in the development of sustainable value chain and smart agriculture models which will eventually lead to a sustainable and green industry.** In this respect a well-structured training and awareness programme may be envisaged with time-bound targets that could involve all strata of society. While grass root initiatives are important, innovative agricultural practices such as community and backyard gardening could improve food self-sufficiency especially for the poorest.
4. **Promoting the social economy is also vital:** While there are several NGOs, philanthropic organisations and volunteers that provided support and extended the outreach work of social services to the most needy, there are clear avenues for the development of social enterprises, with the twin objectives of wealth creation and sustainable development, with a focus to generate opportunities to SMEs, women, and youth in the supply chain. It is observed that a COVID-19 Solidarity Fund has been set up with objective to assist those affected by the pandemic and financial support are provided to programmes, projects and schemes related to COVID-19 including social entrepreneurship and associated public health issues.
5. **Gender Responsiveness:** The response should be gender-responsive while addressing the protection of workers, reinforcing social protection measures towards the poor and vulnerable, addressing deepening social inequalities and social exclusion.
6. **To protect households in extreme poverty, it is important to develop a real-time monitoring system that ensures the inclusion of vulnerable people in planning and response.** Building better data is important for better policy advice. Multidimensional poverty and poverty mapping are critical to assist in proper intervention policies in social protection. Additionally, regular food insecurity evaluations and mapping of real-time vulnerability are important to monitor changes and target the most vulnerable households. In the last Government budget speech, it was announced that a National Database for Vulnerable Groups will be set-up to cover both absolute and relative poverty cases. This will help in enhancing policy effectiveness in the fight against poverty.

In conclusion, it is important to note that this study has provided a snapshot over a limited reference period. Given the dynamic and evolving nature of this phenomenon, more particularly the prevailing second waves in Mauritius' foreign markets, there is a need for a close monitoring of the situation and the repercussions on the local economy. It is also imperative to frequently monitor the welfare dynamics imposed by the pandemic to safeguard the population against possible exclusions.

Annex 1: Economic Indicators and baseline for 2019

Macroeconomic indicators			
Economic indicators	2017	2018	2019
GDP at market prices (RsM) ¹	457201	481255	498274
Real annual growth rate of GDP (%) ¹	3.8	3.8	3
GDFCF (RsM) ¹	79499	90242	99643
Real annual growth rate of GDFCF (%) ¹	4.7	10.9	8.2
Rate of inflation (%) ¹	3.7	3.2	0.5
Per capita GDP at current market prices ¹	361534	380344	397429
Per capita GDP growth constant prices ²	3.7	3.7	3.0
Current Account Balance (% of GDP)	-4.6	-3.9	-5.4

Source: ¹Digest of National Accounts (Statistics Mauritius, various issues), ²World Bank Indicators (World Bank)

Employment trends 2017-2019			
Employment trends	2017	2018	2019
Labour force ('000)	615.3	613.2	621.7
Employment ('000)	573.5	573.1	582
Unemployment rate (%)	7.1	6.9	6.7
Youth unemployment (16 - 24 years) ('000)	19.3	19.7	17.1

Source: Digest of Labour Statistics (Statistics Mauritius, various issues)

Contribution of economic sectors to GDP 2010-2019			
Economic sectors	2017	2018	2019
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	3.5	3.2	3.3
<i>Sugarcane</i>	0.6	0.4	0.4
<i>Other</i>	2.9	2.7	2.9
Mining and quarrying	0.2	0.2	0.2
Manufacturing	13.4	12.9	12.6
<i>Sugar</i>	0.1	0.1	0.1
<i>Food exc Sugar</i>	4.8	4.6	4.5
<i>Textiles</i>	3.9	3.6	3.4
<i>Other</i>	4.6	4.6	4.5
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	1.7	1.7	1.6
Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities	0.4	0.4	0.4
Construction	4.3	4.7	5.0
Wholesale & retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	12.2	12.4	12.5
Transportation and storage	6.4	6.4	6.6
Accommodation and food service activities	7.2	7.3	6.9
Information and communication	4.2	4.2	4.3
Financial and insurance activities	12.0	11.7	11.8
Real estate activities	5.9	5.9	5.9
Professional, scientific and technical activities	4.9	5.0	5.1
Administrative and support service activities	3.0	3.1	3.2
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	6.3	6.2	6.2
Education	4.9	4.9	4.7
Human health and social work activities	4.4	4.5	4.6
Arts, entertainment and recreation	3.5	3.7	3.7
Other service activities	1.6	1.6	1.6
Gross Value Added at current basic prices	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Digest of National Accounts (Statistics Mauritius, various issues),

Annex 2: Input-Output Model

Output and employment multiplier – an input-output approach

Suppose x_i represents the output of industry i , which can either be sold to consumers as final consumption, or be used as 'intermediate inputs' to produce other products or services. The proportion which is consumed by consumers is called 'final demand' and, for simplicity, it is denoted by Y_i . There are also a number of industries which will use x_i as inputs in their production. The part which is consumed by a particular industry, industry 1 (or which is sold to industry 1) may be represented by X_{i1} ; similarly industry 2 will use X_{i2} , and industry 'n' will consume X_{in} . Hence, in mathematical terms, industry i output is consumed as follows:

$$X_i = X_{i1} + X_{i2} + \dots + X_{in} + Y_i \quad (1)$$

This can be written as follows:

$$X_i = \sum_{j=1}^n x_{ij} + Y_i \quad (2)$$

Each industry ($j=1\dots n$) which uses x_i as input is assumed to employ a production technology such that the quantity consumed, x_{ij} , is proportional to that industry 's output'¹⁷, x_j , with a technological coefficient a_{xj} . This can be written as:

$$X_{ij} = a_{ij} x_j \quad (3)$$

Hence, replacing (3) in (2), we have

$$X_i = \sum_{j=1}^n a_{ij} x_j + Y_i \quad (4)$$

Equation 4 is an economy-wide production system involving n number of industries. When there is a rise in demand for a product in a industry, output in that industry will rise. This is called the 'direct effect'. It also leads to a rise in demand in inputs used in its production; this in turn, leads to an increase in demand for output in other industries which will generate successive round rises in demand for other products and employment, creating a multiplier effect of input and output requirements. This is referred to as the 'indirect effect'. Equation 4 can be used to estimate the output and employment multiplier effect. Using matrix terminology, equation (4) can be written as:

$$x = Ax + y \quad (5)$$

if A is the technological matrix such as

$$\begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & \dots & a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & \dots & a_{2n} \\ \dots & \dots & \dots & \dots \\ a_{n1} & a_{n2} & \dots & a_{nn} \end{bmatrix} x = \begin{bmatrix} x_1 \\ x_2 \\ \dots \\ x_n \end{bmatrix} \quad \text{and} \quad y = \begin{bmatrix} y_1 \\ y_2 \\ \dots \\ y_n \end{bmatrix}$$

then Equation (5) can be rearranged as follows:

$$x = (I - A)^{-1} y \quad (6)$$

The elements of $(I - A)^{-1}$ provides the direct and indirect effects on output from a unit change in sectoral final demand in a particular sector. Based on equation (8), the output impact analysis can be calculated:

$$\Delta x = (I - A)^{-1} \Delta y \quad (7)$$

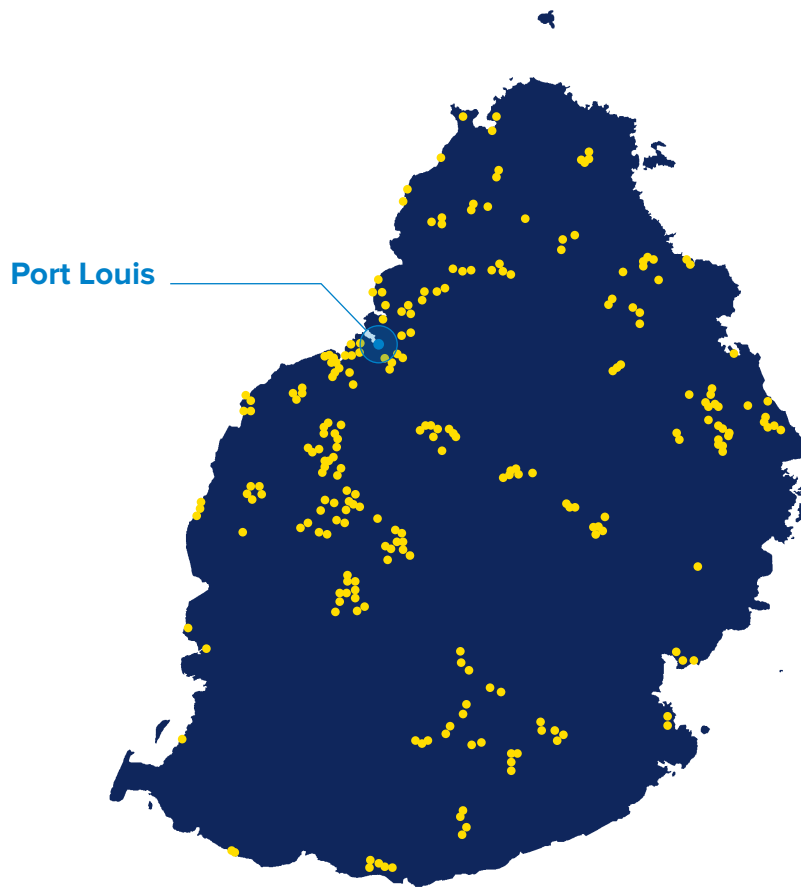
The direct and indirect change in employment potential due to a unit change in a sectoral final demand would be L is vector of employment coefficients. Given by:

$$\Delta e = L(I - A)^{-1} \Delta y \quad (8)$$

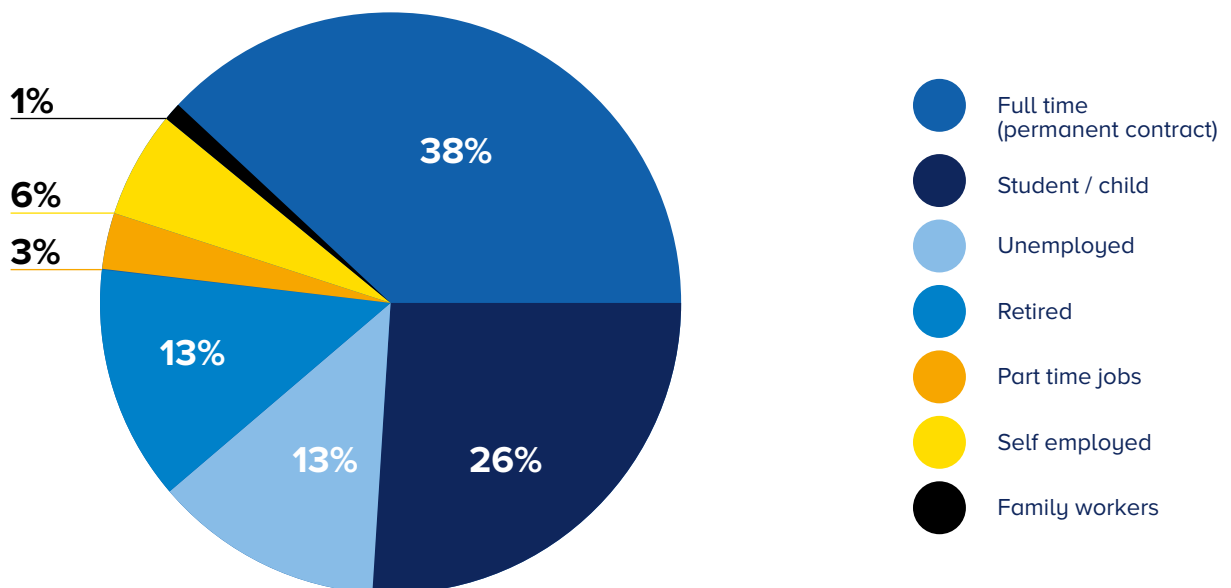
L is vector of employment coefficients

Annex 3: Survey method and statistics

Geographical location of the respondents



Employment status National Households Survey



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- [25] The Chi2 statistics is 0.29 with prob. of 0.59; being statistically not significant, the null hypothesis (no relationship) is not rejected.
- [26] The Chi2 statistics is 12.9 with prob. of 0.00; being statistically significant, the null hypothesis (no relationship) is rejected.
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- [30] Logit regression
- | | | | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| Receive Wage Assistance | -2.14
(0.368) | - 0.03 Monthly Income
(0.010)*** | + 0.57 (Household Size)
(0.093)*** | + 0.87 (Private employment)
0.035*** |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
- Pseudo R2=0.12, n=412; LR chi square 57.03
- [31] WHO, 2020,p.v5
- [32] http://budget.mof.govmu.org/budget2020-21/2020_21budgetspeechEng.pdf
- [33] This type of production technology assumes 'constant returns to scale'.



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