# **Fact Sheet 1: Most Concerning Issues and the COVID-19 Response**

## **Main Concerns in 2021**

As with previous years, the 2021 PAPI Report continued the tradition of shedding light on key issues of concern to citizens. Gaining these insights was especially critical in 2021—a year that witnessed tremendous social and economic losses for Viet Nam and its citizens as COVID-19 swept across the country after an internationally-acclaimed defence against the virus in 2020. These findings are important to understand the impacts of the pandemic on governance and help provinces prepare for future economic and health crises.

Indicative of a year when Viet Nam was hit hardest by the pandemic, there was a dramatic spike in concern regarding health and the economy and correspondingly diminished worries about the environment, as Figure 1 shows. This is reflected in **health** and **health insurance** jumping to become the issues of greatest concern for citizens, the first time there has been a change at the top of the list since PAPI has asked this question. **Poverty** and **hunger,** which topped this list for the past five years, fell to second with **national economic growth** and **jobs** coming in at third. Indeed, pandemic-driven concerns about health and health insurance saw the category spike from 2 to 23 percent in just two years, while the emergence of short-term economic worries are reflected in economic growth and employment comprising two of the top-four concerns in 2021. Interestingly, women were more concerned about job security than men, while non-Kinh groups still considered poverty and poverty reduction their biggest worry.

**Figure 1: Change in Issues of Greatest Concern, 2015-2021**



These finance-related uncertainties are further evident in respondents’ down-beat attitude towards Viet Nam’s economic situation in 2021. Up to one-fourth of respondents perceived the country’s economy to be “bad”, while those who believed it was in a good shape fell below 50 percent. Likewise, nearly one-third of respondents thought their household economic situation was worse than before, a 11 percent jump from 2020. This contrasts starkly with the trend since 2011 until the emergence of COVID-19, which featured a steady increase in optimism about people’s household economic situation. When asked about household security in the next five years, the number of respondents who thought the situation would either get worse or be unpredictable was higher in 2021 than in previous years.

## **COVID-19: Job Losses**

To follow up on the large share of citizens concerned about their household economy, the 2021 PAPI Report looks at the job losses reported by respondents.

Indeed, the pandemic exerted larger negative impacts on citizens’ employment and income in 2021 than in 2020. The proportion of respondents reporting job and income losses jumped by 10 percent over the past two years. Impacts were more widespread in 2021 than in 2020, especially in key economic hubs in and surrounding Ha Noi, Da Nang and Ho Chi Minh City, which encountered long-term lockdowns. These job and income losses are symptomatic of the restrictive measures which led to Viet Nam’s first economic downturn in two decades and a 6.17 percent contraction in national economic growth by the end of the third quarter of 2021. However, as was the case in 2020, the predominantly ethnic minority-populated provinces located in the far north and northwest largely escaped severe COVID-19 impacts on jobs and incomes.

## **COVID-19: Government Response Evaluated by Citizens**

The 2021 PAPI survey included a battery of questions about government responses to the pandemic, a generational event that had a substantial impact on many indicators in 2021. The aim was to capture how citizens perceived and experienced government responses to the health crisis in 2021, and how citizens were impacted at personal and household levels. This has generated evidence to inform the State sector on citizens’ needs and expectations in relation to the pandemic and strengthen the State’s responsiveness, readiness and agility to provide necessities as COVID-19 continues and to weather similar health emergencies.

Overall, the percentage of interviewees satisfied with the government response to the pandemic declined from 89 percent in 2020 to 84 percent in 2021. This shift could be a result of increasingly challenging conditions and the emergence of the Delta variant from May 2021.

As reflected by the top issue of primary concern to citizens in 2021, the pandemic triggered more critical attitudes towards the health sector, with declining levels of satisfaction with services provided by public district hospitals. Also, there was a slight increase in the number of citizens who revealed that bribes were necessary to realize better care at hospitals. Moreover, the Vertical Accountability Towards Citizens dimension witnessed a sharp fall in performance compared to 2019 and 2020 – potentially a result of local governments’ failures in handling the overwhelming numbers of citizen requests for pandemic-related response and support policies in 2021. While lockdowns necessitated many aspects of citizens’ lives to move to the online realm, a large divide in access to e-government portals for e-services was evident. This was reflected in poor performances in e-government services during 2021.

Nevertheless, some bright spots were visible. Similar to 2020’s findings, lower corruption and heightened transparency correlated strongly with higher satisfaction with government responses to the multi-faceted challenges posed by pandemic. Other positives included the sub-dimension on Public Primary Education bouncing back after an anomalous dip in 2020 when schools were not ready to cope with new COVID-19 challenges, higher scores in the Law and Order sub-dimension with citizens feeling safer from four types of crime possibly due to restricted travel in most provinces and steady improvements in basic infrastructure, especially in citizens’ access to roads, electricity and rubbish collection.

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| *The Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) is a policy monitoring tool that assesses citizen experiences and satisfaction with government performance at the national and sub-national levels in governance, public administration and public service delivery. Following the initial pilot in 2009 and a larger survey in 2010, the PAPI survey has been implemented nationwide each year since 2011. For the 2021 PAPI Report, 15,833 randomly selected citizens were surveyed. In total, 162,066 Vietnamese citizens nationwide have been directly interviewed for PAPI since 2009.*  *PAPI measures eight dimensions: participation at local levels, transparency, vertical accountability, control of corruption, public administrative procedures, public service delivery, environmental governance and e-government.*  *PAPI is the result of collaboration between the Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES), the Centre for Research and Training of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front (VFF-CRT), Real-Time Analytics and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).*  *During its 13 years in existence, PAPI has been generously funded by the Government of Spain from 2009 to 2010; the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SDC) from 2011 to 2017; the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) of Australia from 2018 to 2025; the Embassy of Ireland from 2018 to 2022; and the United Nations and UNDP in Viet Nam since 2009.*  *The full 2021 PAPI Report and more in-depth analysis of the findings are available at:* [*www.papi.org.vn*](http://www.papi.org.vn)  *Scan the QR code to download the 2021 PAPI Report to your smartphone:*  **#PAPIvn #PAPI2021**  For more information, contact:  Nguyen Viet Lan UN Communications Team Tel: (+84 4) 38 500 158 Mob: (+84) 91 4436 769 Email: nguyen.viet.lan@undp.org |