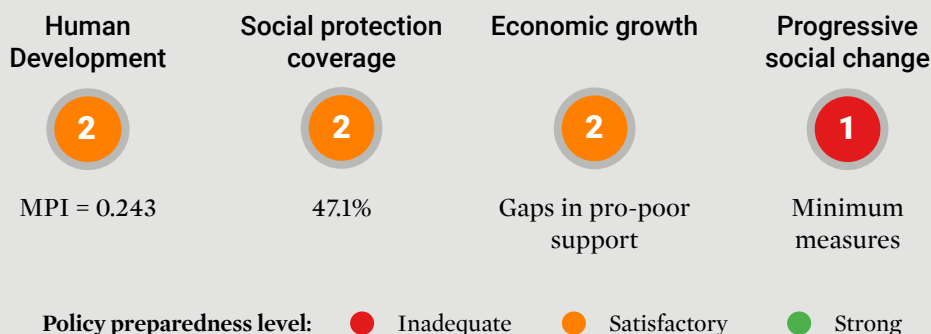




## To what extent are countries prepared to minimise the impacts of Covid-19 on the poorest and to prevent impoverishment?<sup>1</sup>



## Areas of concern

There are no positive significant changes in the lives and livelihoods of the respondents since the second round of interviews carried out in June 2021, where respondents identified support for jobs, livelihoods, and financial assistance were key areas that needed attention to mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Among respondents, there was no expectation that the government or other sectors would provide assistance in the short or medium term. Respondents seem to be ambivalent about what the government can do for them in these difficult circumstances.

## \$ Economic

Income from micro-livelihoods has yet to regain pre-pandemic levels according to respondents who operate neighbourhood stores, eateries and transport services (mainly tricycles). Also complicating the situation is the long lockdown from August to September 2021 in Metro Manila that affected the transport of goods and services to and from the regions. Lockdowns at the village level in the provinces also had an economic impact on residents.

*"We experienced another Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) this October (2021). My tricycle service was limited to alternate days with only two passengers for every trip. It has never been like the pre-pandemic time."* Male respondent, Bicol region

*"My family was struck twice by the Covid-19 virus. During the second bout of the illness, my wife's absences from work, under the 'no work, no pay' policy of a Job Order from the local government, put us in debt to relatives and friends so that we could buy medicines for three of us who fell ill. To make matters worse, the practice of delayed salaries at the LGU (local government) necessitated that we borrow money again from another party to pay the first party we promised to pay on a particular date. We were doubly indebted."* Male respondent, Bicol

*"I'm lucky that I have my pension from the government to help us with our everyday needs. My son now only earns PHP100 or less a day from his tricycle service. He used to earn at least PHP300 (\$1.99)<sup>3</sup> a day before the pandemic. Our small store also helps us but not that much, maybe PHP500 (\$9.97) as income on a good week. The last time I received money from my other children was last December 2020, where I got PHP2,000 (\$39.89). I understand because they too have their families to feed. But that's how we get by here."* Male respondent, Bicol region

*"I haven't seen my siblings and cousins in the other town. I used to go there during harvest time and trade their harvest of rice or corn with fresh or dried fish that I get here from my son who works in the fish port. That trade was a great help for us in our everyday food expenditure. Since I am no longer able to do that because of the lockdowns, I feel now how difficult it is to lose additional sources of income."* Female respondent, Soccsksargen region, Mindanao



## Covid-19 in the Philippines:<sup>2</sup>

**2,820,494**  
Reported cases

**46,117**  
Reported deaths

## Groups at risk



### Daily wage earners and small business owners

Many yet to recover livelihoods sources a year after lockdown



### Households vulnerable to climate change

Face double shock of pandemic and natural disasters



### Female-headed households

Divorced/separated women were among the hardest hit by livelihood losses and caring responsibilities

## Education

Issues that were raised around education in January 2021 remain a concern, particularly on the needs of high school students for gadgets to support their participation in online classes. The distribution of gadgets, such as tablets or laptops, and internet support for students has mainly been supplied by the local government and is therefore dependent on available financial resources. The national government has tried to address the digital divide by distributing laptops to teachers and school personnel.

Schools are yet to open across the country and according to UNICEF, the Philippines and Venezuela are the only countries yet to resume basic education classes since the declaration of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020. The only classes in tertiary education allowed to conduct face-to-face sessions on limited occasions are in the medical field. Starting 15 November 2021, 90 schools from the Visayas and Mindanao provinces will be reopened as a pilot to test the resumption of face-to-face classes in basic education. The effects of almost 20 months of modular or online classes in terms of learning outcomes and mental health have yet to be determined.

*“Online classes at the college level incurs additional costs because sharing of materials for tasks previously assigned to groups in a face-to-face set-up is not possible online. For instance, each student needs to provide for all the materials required for laboratory work in electronics.”* Female respondent, Bicol region

*“Our children in high school need gadgets for their online education, but we cannot afford them.”* Male respondent, Bicol region

**“During our second bout of [Covid-19], my wife’s absences from work, under the ‘no work, no pay’ policy of a Job Order from the local government, put us in debt to relatives and friends so that we could buy medicines for three of us who fell ill.”**

Male respondent, Bicol region

**“We still limit our food intake. We don’t know what is going on tomorrow or the next day. Each day for us now is a day for survival. We are simple people, with simple wants but I don’t want us to be dependent on government support.”**

Female respondent, Soccsksargen region, Mindanao

**Table 1: Philippines’ Covid-19 alert levels system<sup>4</sup>**

Level of community transmission	Alert level	Measures in place
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cases are ‘alarming’</li> <li>Healthcare utilisation is at critical levels</li> </ul>	<b>5</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Restrictions are identical to Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) (see previous bulletin)</li> <li>Strict social distancing and limited mobility</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case counts are high and or increasing</li> <li>Healthcare capacity at high to critical risk</li> </ul>	<b>4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited mobility: People except for, a) under 18 years old, b) over 65 years old, c) with health risks, and d) pregnant women are allowed to travel and enter essential establishments</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case counts are high and/or increasing but with healthcare at low to moderate capacity</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gradual relaxation of restrictions</li> <li>Select establishments and activities are allowed to operate at a maximum of 30% indoor venue capacity for fully vaccinated individuals only and 50% outdoor venue capacity</li> <li>Face-to-face or in-person classes for basic education are not allowed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Low and increasing case transmission; or</li> <li>Low but increasing case counts; or</li> <li>Low and decreasing case counts but healthcare capacity is increasing</li> </ul>	<b>2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select establishments and activities are allowed to operate at a maximum of 50% indoor capacity for fully vaccinated individuals only and those under 18 (even if unvaccinated), and 70% outdoor capacity. This includes limited face-to-face or in-person classes at all levels</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case transmission low and not increasing significantly</li> <li>Healthcare is not under strain</li> <li>70% of senior citizens, people with comorbidities and eligible population have been vaccinated</li> </ul>	<b>1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Minimal social distancing wherein all establishments, persons, or activities, are allowed to operate, work, or be undertaken at full on-site or venue/seating capacity provided it is consistent with minimum public health standards</li> </ul>

## Health

Getting help from healthcare centres continues to be curtailed by fake news on Covid-19 and the fear of (i) getting the virus from the health facility, and (ii) being required to stay in the quarantine facility. Interviewees who had symptoms of the Covid-19 virus infection (flu, loss of sense of taste and smell) practised home quarantine and remedies. These cases went unreported.

*"I do not believe in the Covid-19 virus. Some say the vaccination can result in fatal illnesses as a way of curbing the world population growth."* Female respondent, Bicol region

On the vaccination program, some sectors require their members to be vaccinated to be able to participate in their trade. This was the case of a Tricycle Operators and Drivers Association (TODA) in a province.

*"Our vaccination is scheduled at the end of October. You will not be allowed to bring out your tricycle for service if you are not vaccinated."* Male respondent, Bicol region

Most respondents are vaccinated, and they encourage their peers, families and friends to get vaccinated. One respondent working alongside the local government's programme on senior citizens' welfare expressed how it has been difficult to convince senior citizens living in the uplands to get vaccinated. He shared that disinformation about the Covid-19 vaccines spread quickly in his town and that it stayed in the upland communities where government services are not easily accessible.

Since nearly all respondents have experienced reductions in household incomes at different levels, they have adhered to health protocols to avoid getting sick and which can leave them with a huge debt from hospitalisation costs. Incurring health expenses from Covid-19 is an important concern among households as further financial burdens would lead them to chronic poverty.

*"I tell my sons not to meet their friends. They are still unvaccinated, plus the wife and adult kids of one of my sons. If they contract the virus, we will all surely die because there is no way that we can afford the hospital costs."* Female respondent, Soccsksargen region

Given the limited financial resources of the state health insurer [Philhealth](#), which is mandated to implement the country's Universal Health Care (UHC), patients confirmed with Covid-19 can be covered with PHP 43,997 (\$878) for mild pneumonia; PHP 143,267 (\$2,858) for moderate pneumonia; PHP 333,519 (\$6,653) for severe pneumonia and PHP 786,384 (\$15,685) for critical pneumonia. Beyond these amounts, patients are expected to pay the balance of their hospitalisation bills.

## Social

Taking relatives into one's household was reported as a form of support to families experiencing economic difficulties amid the pandemic. This can mean migration to another location.

*"My 20-year-old son lives with my sister-in-law who has a general merchandising store in another province. My son gets paid for assisting in the store. This is helpful to me because he is one mouth less to feed in our household."* Male respondent, Bicol region

## Long-term impacts of Covid-19 pandemic and forecast on future threats

With the recurring lockdowns, a common issue among respondents is their inability to earn enough income and is their main concern if the pandemic lingers. Many fear food insecurity if the pandemic gets worse, as their food budgets are reduced. Respondents' inability to socialise with their family and friends for almost 20 months has also emerged as a key concern among respondents.

*"Community lockdowns and health protocols limited my mobility and opportunities for extra earnings to augment our family income. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, I used to be able to earn extra money on construction work during weekends besides my regular income as an*

*"The elementary modules consist mostly of worksheets and not of lessons. How do I teach my Grade 2 child how to read? How do I teach my other child how to solve problems in trigonometry? When the exercises in the worksheets are in the form of multiple choice, we give chance answers because I do not know how to answer them."* Female respondent, Bicol region

Male respondent, Bicol region

*"My daughter got a scholarship for her college education; however, we cannot afford to buy gadgets and get an internet connection which she will need for online classes."*

Male respondent, Bicol region

*"The biggest burden this pandemic has brought upon us is our inability to see our family and friends. I haven't seen my daughters for 20 months because travel is expensive, with the plane fare, swab tests and that they need to quarantine in a facility when they get here. I also haven't seen my siblings in the next province because there are strict border controls. I also haven't been to church which is my source of joy because our pastor disallows any form of meetings or congregation."*

Female respondent, Soccsksargen region

*"We live in a mountainous area. Support for a livelihood in livestock will be most helpful to us - chickens, pigs, feeds. Households in lowlands will need support in other forms of livelihood."*

Male respondent, Bicol region

LGU employee. Besides the limited mobility, there are also fewer opportunities in construction work because some homeowners are also anxious about the possible spread of the virus from construction workers while others have limited financial capacity for non-essentials like house repairs.” Male respondent, Bicol region

“If the pandemic continues to linger, families and their community will surely be affected. If there’s a Covid-19 case in the area, there will be another lockdown and work will stop again.” Female Respondent, Bicol Region

Social distancing will have a lasting impact on the income of those with a transportation livelihood, such as tricycle and jeepney drivers, according to interviewees. One respondent expressed hope that with the vaccination programme, the pandemic will cease to be a threat and living conditions will get better.

## Policy recommendations to mitigate the impact of Covid-19

Most of the respondents expressed the need for seed capital to enable them to start their own micro-enterprise but only a few could describe the type of enterprise they will establish. Employment was a key concern, and they hope the government can create jobs as most households in the sample have one or two members who have lost their jobs within the past 20 months. Lastly, the issue of high food prices was a prevalent and recurring concern since the first round of interviews. Respondents expressed that the government could take action to ease financial burdens, such as lowering the prices of food.

“A loan facility with easy terms intended for livelihood capital for a community store.” Male respondent, Bicol region

Households with children in high school suggested the government should support the provision of gadgets and internet connection to help them cope with online education. One interviewee suggested there should be a public area with free Wi-Fi to enable high school students to get online for education.

Based on the response of one of the interviewees, political ‘colours’ or affiliations triggered, for instance, by the upcoming 2022 elections, can provide the basis for the distribution of government assistance depending on who wins and who loses. Therefore, integrity in the selection for government assistance such as scholarships, cash transfers and relief goods should be guarded and preserved. This perspective comes from previous experience where villages receive public resources during and after the elections if their village political leaders can deliver votes for a specific political candidate. In addition, one interviewee from the Bicol region proposed the extension of the [4Ps programme](#) or the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme which, according to him, is already closed to new members.

One respondent reported the need to get the Covid-19 health crisis under control as overseas Filipino workers are adversely affected by the Philippines ‘red zone’ health categorisation, impacting incomes.

“My daughter’s former easy access to overseas employment has been curtailed because of restrictions on flights and entry from the Philippines to other countries.” Female respondent, Bicol region

Some respondents also emphasised the need to improve the country’s vaccination roll-out programme. The Philippines is ranked at the bottom of all countries surveyed by [Bloomberg’s Covid Resilience Ranking](#). The vaccination rollout has been low with about 26% of the total population fully vaccinated as of October 2021. Moreover, vaccine hesitancy remains a problem in some areas. One respondent shared that she has encountered people who are wary of being vaccinated since they fear the side effects.

“I want to go back to my village. We can’t continue living here in the city because our incomes as store workers in this grocery are not enough. I will resume charcoal making. I don’t care if the government says it’s illegal. I still can’t do any farming since the rats are still there, and worse than before. They can’t let us die of starvation.”

Male respondent,  
Soccsksargen region

## End notes

1. Read more on CPAN’s Poverty Eradication Policy Preparedness Index adapted for Covid-19: <http://www.chronicpovertynetwork.org/covid19-methodology>.
2. Johns Hopkins Covid 19 Dashboard. As of 15 November 2021.
3. All currency conversion as of 7 July 2021 from [www.xe.com](http://www.xe.com).
4. Table 1 shows the new alert system which replaced the ECQ, MECQ, GCQ and MGCQ quarantine classification for lockdowns. It was implemented on 7 October 2021. See more for [guidelines of alert level systems](#).

Supported by the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), the Covid Collective is based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). The Collective brings together the expertise of, UK and Southern based research partner organisations and offers a rapid social science research response to inform decision-making on some of the most pressing Covid-19 related development challenges.



Find out more at [www.chronicpovertynetwork.org/covid-19](http://www.chronicpovertynetwork.org/covid-19)