Survey Report on the TVSEP Covid-19 Special Survey in Thailand 2020/21: Village Head, Household and Migrant Member Interviews

Highlights

- Special Covid-19 Survey in 2141 (out of 2200) TVSEP panel households was conducted during November/December 2020 by personal interviews in presence
- Complementary survey of 634 migrants (out of 2149) of the TVSEP households via telephone interviews carried out during April – June 2021
- Not a single Covid-19 infection case was observed in the household survey until December 2020; satisfaction in rural villages with the Government's handling of the Crisis was high.
- Income of TVSEP households declined only slightly during the 1st lockdown, March – May 2020, and recovered quickly thereafter; 85,5 % of households had received Government support.
- During the lock-down, rural households considerably reduced consumption of meat, fruits and vegetables as well as alcohol and spend less on gambling; about one fourth increased expenditures for health, by 156 % on average.
- Less than 15 % of migrants returned to their natal villages during the 1st lock down; about the same share was reported in the migrant survey.
- About one third of the migrants interviewed reduced remittances to their natal households during the pandemic; the share increased only slightly as the crisis went on.
- Migrant's rating of the Government's handling of the crisis is more critical than those of rural households and the approval ratings declined as the rate of infections exploded in early/mid 2021.

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1. Background

The 9th TVSEP panel wave in Thailand was planned for July 2020[1]. Preparations had taken place already in February. However, the pandemic and along with that a three-month lock-down made this plan obsolete. Therefore, a TVSEP Covid-19 special survey was conducted in the in the third quarter of 2020 (village and household survey) and the second quarter of 2021 (migrant survey). A village head-and household survey using the "replenished"[2] full sample of 2200 households in 220 villages of the three TVSEP provinces Buri Ram, Ubon Ratchathani and Nakhon Phanom was carried out. A complementary survey of some 2000 migrants was carried out from April to June 2021. While the household survey had to be undertaken via distant (online) supervision by LUH staff (make link to earlier report) in the migrant survey, enumerator training was carried out with LUH supervisors in presence. The need for a special Covid-19 survey was driven by course of the pandemic and the corresponding reactions in Thailand. The Thai government already in early February imposed strict measures to contain the pandemic which was successful initially.

For example, by February 2021, one year after the start of the pandemic, the number of confirmed Covid-19 infections was still below 20,000 for a Nation of 70 million people. However, the rates of infections have exploded and reached over 1,000,000 by September 2021 (Figure 1).
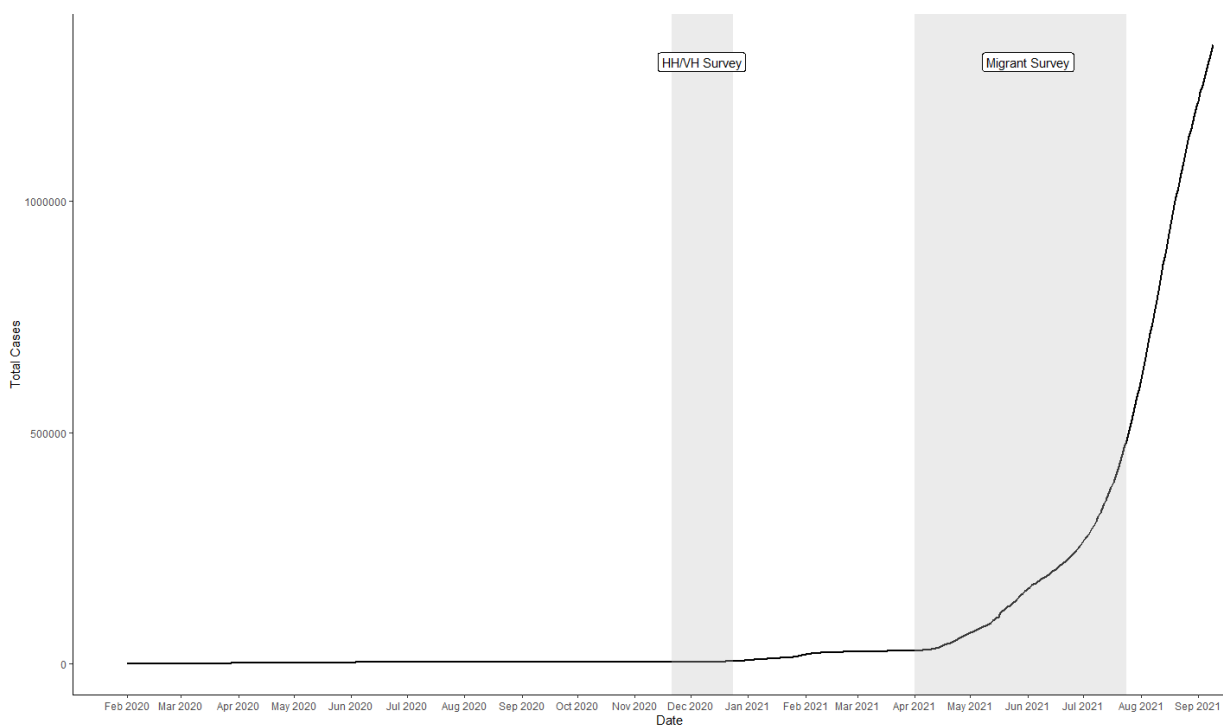
Figure 1: Total Covid-19 infections in Thailand

Regardless of the low rates of infections at the start of the pandemic, it was expected to have profound impact on the TVSEP households due to government interventions. Hence, a special

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[1] In Vietnam, this survey could not be performed as a result of existing government regulations.
[2] For more details, please refer to the survey report on: *https://www.tvsep.de/en/data/survey-documents/*

Covid-19 survey was a due activity of TVSEP to collect data that can capture the impact from the onset of the pandemic and serve as baseline for later post-Covid-19 panel waves. A special survey also became necessary, as regular survey activities were interrupted during in 2020 thus, widening the gap to the last full household survey in 2019.

The 2020 special survey was conducted in a regular format with enumerators interviewing panel households in the village. However, the migrant survey was carried via telephone interviews. The questionnaires of the special Covid-19 survey were designed to capture information on village and household level, including on individual household members, and from migrant members, in order to explore the economic and other effects of Covid-19 until mid-2021.

In the following report, the objectives, the procedure, key observations and some selected results are presented. The report concludes with the major lessons learned and an outlook for future panel waves during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

2. Objectives

The TVSEP Covid-19 special survey aims to capture the impact of the pandemic on the households in the panel until October 2020 and their migrant members until June 2021. The purpose is, to establish a seamless integration of the Covid 19 event into the main panel dataset. The reference period therefore consisted of three parts, namely: (1) 05/2019 (end of past wave) till 02/2029 (begin of Covid-19); (2) 03 – 05/2020 (lock-down) and (3) 06 – 10/2020 (post-lockdown)

Since the survey as planned for the 1st half of 2020 were not permitted due to the pandemic, the special Covid-19 survey is contributing to a better understanding of the pandemic as it continues to unfold. In this way memory bias is avoided.

The questionnaires for this survey[3] are designed to capture economic effects and behavioural aspects of the pandemic, to facilitate the use of the data for a wide range of research topics.

A further objective is to go collect numerical data, e.g. financial losses that can be related to household income and wealth data, collected in previous panel waves. In this way, the TVSEP special Covid-19 survey is unique, as it goes beyond the scope of many other Covid-19 surveys that mainly rely on qualitative statements such as "income was reduced".

3. Structure of the questionnaires

3.1 Household Questionnaire

The TVSEP Covid-19 Survey questionnaire comprises of seven sections designed to cover all elements relating to the pandemic. As stated before, the objective was to link with the main panel dataset. This link is established in section 1, that contains household information and

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[3] The questionnaires are available in PDF-format under: *https://www.tvsep.de/en/data/survey-documents/*

section 2, that contains member information. Detailed descriptions of the sections are listed below:

Section 2. Members:

In this section, information on the individual members of the household is collected. As TVSEP uses proxy-interviews, the respondent is providing information about other household members. The respondent is asked more questions as in the main panel survey. These are marked in the questionnaire file at the applicable questions under "E" (enabling condition).

Section 2 contains questions regarding the behaviour of household members during the pandemic, establish a basis for filtering migrants, as well as record the effects on the education of pupil/student members of the household.

Section 3. General Effects of Covid-19:

This section contains four subsections, aimed to record the impact of Covid-19 on the (subjectively assessed) household income, the use of the tracking application, the overall compliance with the Covid-19 measures imposed by the government and the access to and availability of masks. Note, that the indicated household income includes the public transfers. To calculate the income without public transfers, the values from section 6 need to be subtracted.

Section 4. Migration:

Section 4 is designed to capture the effect on the migrant members of the household from the perspective of the household respondent. It is split into three sub-sections, categorizing the migrants into groups and asking slightly different questions for each group. The first group are migrants that returned back to the household, even temporarily, the second group are migrants that intended to return, but could not and the third group being migrants, that did not have any intention to return to the household. Apart from migration decisions, impacts on remittances are also asked in this section.

Section 5. Financial impact of Covid-19:

This section contains all the quantifiable effects that Covid-19 may have had on the households' financial situation. This includes transfers from and to the household, losses and profits in agriculture, off-farm employment and self-employments, natural resource extraction, investments, disinvestments, savings and assets.

Section 6. Public Transfers:

During the Covid-19 crisis as captured in the survey, the Thai government implemented several schemes to provide support to the citizens. Support was transferred to households and individuals. This section allows for the precise tracking of all individual transfers and a link to the member section, where applicable.

Section 7. Perceptions, Satisfaction and Psychological Impacts of Covid-19:

In this section, the opinions, feelings and psychological impacts of Covid-19 were asked for. This includes questions, that are commonly used in other panels as well, allowing for a combination of several surveys.

3.2 Village Head Questionnaire

The village head Questionnaire is designed to complement the household questionnaire and add context to the households. For most questions, the reporting period is identical with the household survey. The village head reports on village characteristics, general impact of Covid-19 on the village, crisis management, economic impacts and migrants. In particular, the section on the economic impacts offers deeper insights, as the questions to the village head are open-ended. The questionnaire is structured as shown below:

Section 2. General Information:

This section contains information about the village head, such as age, gender, educational attainment, etc., as well as information on the village, such as the number of households and inhabitants.

Section 3. General Impact on the Village:

In this section, we ask for the effects, that Covid-19 may have had on the village, such as lockdown measures, income, poverty. All values are asked in comparison to before Covid-19 and although subjective estimates, provide a valuable insight into how the village was impacted.

Section 4. Management of the crisis:

This section is asking for all the actions taken by the village administration, but also for potential support that was received from the government or NGOs. In addition, the village head indicates his/her satisfaction with the support received and his own performance in managing the crisis.

Section 5. Economic impacts:

Apart from a rostered structure, this section almost no coded questions were given and the respondent was encouraged to answer openly. Since the answers were given in local language, non-Thai data users might have to use a translator to make use of the answers.

Section 6. Migrants:

Complementing the household and migrant questionnaires, this section asks for details on the migrants in the village. Questions include number of migrants, their behavior during Covid-19 and also potential effects on village life.

3.3 Migrant Questionnaire

The migrant questionnaire is complementary to the special Covid-19 household survey and covers the reference period starting with 05/2019 until the date of the interview, i.e. mid July 2021.

Section 1. Start of the questionnaire:

In this section, basic information on the migrant is collected. This includes demographic information as well as information on living conditions and the financial situation. Note, that financial information excludes any money received from public transfers.

Section 2. Impact of Covid-19:

In this section, all impacts of Covid-19 are reported. It includes information on occupations, education, migration, remittances and dynamics, living conditions, loans, disinvestment, savings, consumption as well as smokers and/or consumers of alcohol. In the subsection on occupations the migrants provide a timeline of their occupations, allowing for a detailed assessment of all the Covid-19 related effects.

Section 3. Compliance:

This section includes impacts of Covid-19 on the migrant's health as well as information on the behaviour and use of the tracking application.

Section 4. Public Transfers:

During the Covid-19 crisis, the Thai government implemented several schemes to provide support to the citizens. Support was transferred to households and individuals. This section allows for the precise tracking of all the transfers the migrant may have received.

Section 5. Perceptions, Satisfaction and Psychological Impacts of Covid-19:

In this section, the opinions, feelings and psychological impacts of Covid-19 were asked for. This includes questions, that are commonly used in other panels as well, allowing for a combination of several surveys. The section also includes questions on expectations of the migrant regarding future government measures and inflation.

4. Survey Implementation

This section briefly describes the implementation of the household and village head survey conducted in presence as well as the migrant survey carried out as telephone interviews.

The household/village head survey was conducted just like the ordinary TVSEP surveys[4]. An enumerator visits the household at her/his residence and conducts the interview using a tablet, running the World Bank software "Survey Solutions". Since all TVSEP households and village heads were interviewed, the sample for the Covid-19 household-/village head survey is equivalent to the "regular" waves. Short questionnaires with specific relation of all questions to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic were designed[5]. Expected time of interview was 45 minutes for the household questionnaire and 20 minutes for the village head questionnaire.

The migrant survey was conducted using phone interviews. The member section of the household questionnaire was used to identify members fulfilling the TVSEP migrant definition:

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[4] See www.tvsep.de for more information

[5] The questionnaires are available in PDF-format under: *https://www.tvsep.de/en/data/survey-documents/*

"Absent from the household for more than 30 days during the reference period and between 15 and 65 years old". To arrange for an interview, the household was called first to inform the migrant of the interviewer calling. The purpose-built migrant questionnaire was not supposed to take any longer than 20-30 minutes in order to keep up the attention of the migrant on the phone.

During both surveys, all submitted questionnaires were checked by data checking assistants and after this check, run through an automated checking procedure again, to identify further issues.

The survey was implemented in November and December 2020 for the household and village head survey and April to July 2021 for the migrant survey. In the context of the pandemic in Thailand, this means, that the household and village head interviews were conducted after the first wave and a few months after the initial lockdown and the migrant interviews were conducted after the second wave and going into the third wave. Since the household survey served to identify the migrants for further interviews, the surveys had to be conducted successively.

Both surveys started with a thorough training of the enumerators and survey staff. Since due to travel restrictions, it was not possible for the LUH Data Collection and Management team[6] to visit Thailand and conduct the training in person, the household- and village head surveys were administrated and facilitated through online meetings. However, the training for the migrant survey was implemented on location and the first weeks of the survey could be supervised on the spot, followed by weekly online meetings.

For the household and village head survey, all 220 TVSEP villages in Thailand were to be visited, with an attempt to be made to interview all TVSEP households. After the survey, a total of 2149 household members fulfilling the criteria to be considered migrants were identified. These 2149 migrants formed the target group for the migrant survey, the goal being to interview all of them.

After the online training a total of 20 enumerators qualified as the survey team for the household/village head survey, led by two provincial team leaders. Initially 9 enumerators were sent to Buriram, the remaining 11 surveying Ubon Ratchathani. After the completion of the first two provinces, both teams relocated to Nakhon Phanom, to conclude the survey there. In the beginning, most interviews took longer than the aforementioned 45- and 20-minute timeframes, however, as routine settled in for the enumerators, average interview durations of ~45 minutes for the household questionnaire and 20 minutes for the village head questionnaire were achieved.

For the migrant survey, of the five initially selected enumerators, only two enumerators proved to be qualified after training which proved to be sufficient. Just like in the household survey, the first few interviews took longer than anticipated, but also due to their training, the enumerators quickly managed to find a routine and conduct the interviews in the allocated time.

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5. Selected Results from the Covid-19 household survey[7]

Income

N=2141
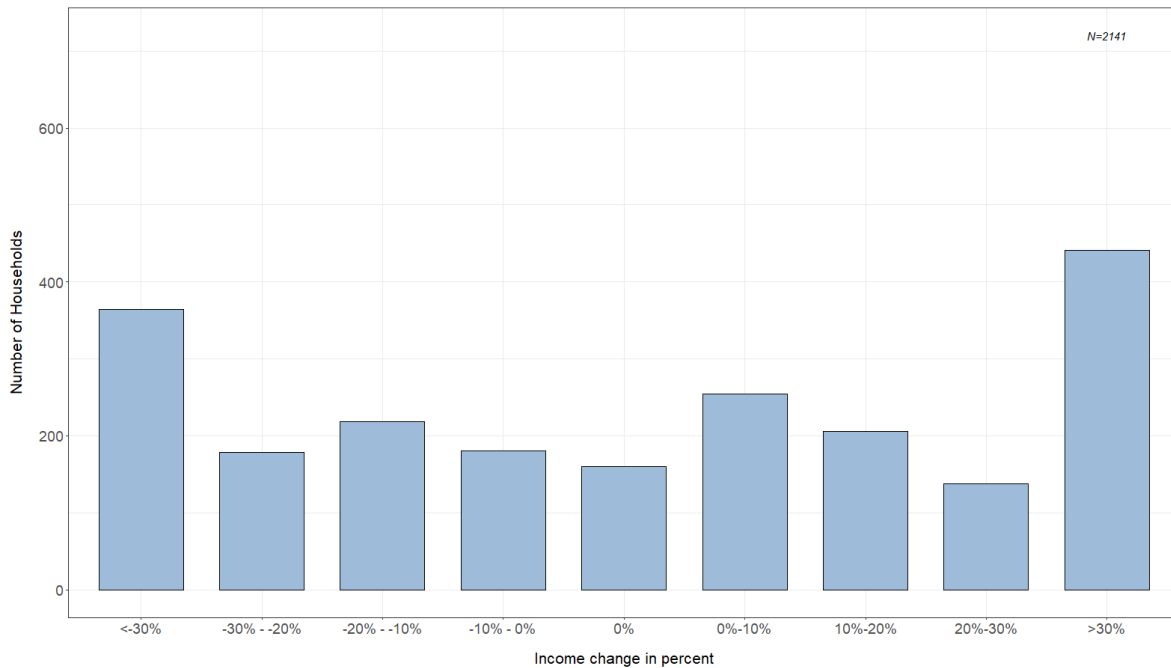
Figure 2: Household income change during the lockdown compared to before (incl. support)

Perceived Financial Impact of Covid-19

N=2141
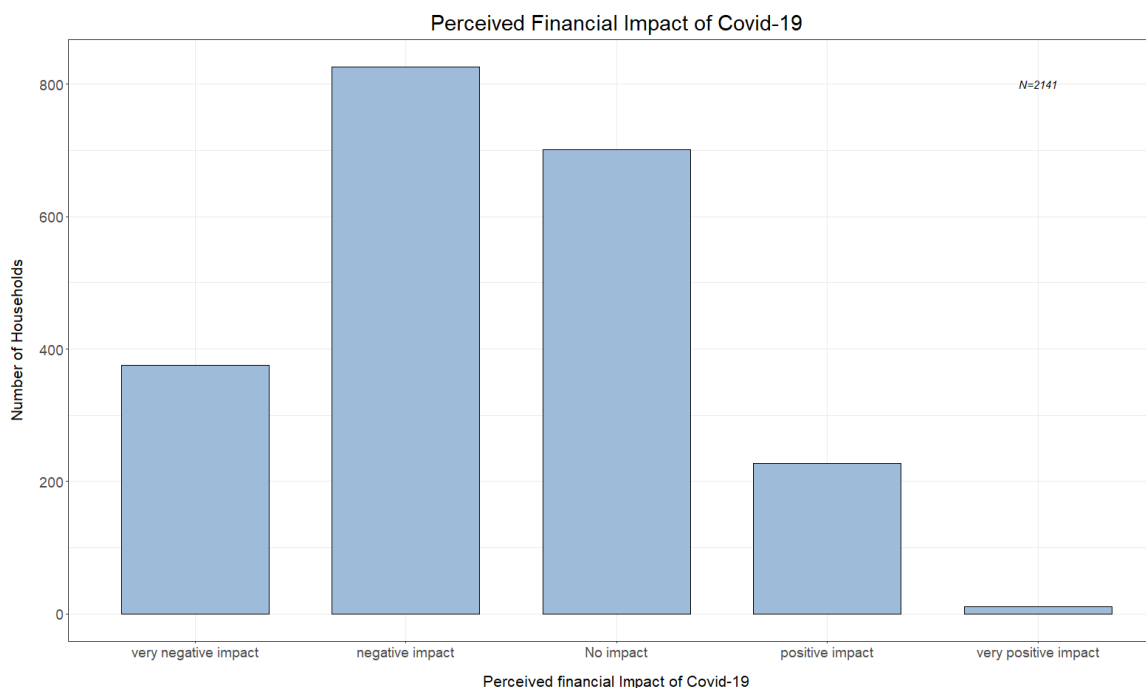
Figure 3: Perceived Financial Impact of Covid-19

Figures 2 and 3 show the estimated income effect of during the lockdown and the perceived financial impact. A large portion of households reports an income increase, due to the support, given by the Thai government while reporting a perceived negative impact at the same time.

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[7] Please also refer to the earlier report on this survey under: *https://www.tvsep.de/en/overview/events-tvsep/2021/covid-19-survey-completed/*

Behavioural aspects

Out of 2141 households, only 305 have members actively using the tracing application.

123 households consumed substances; 63 households stopped drinking or eating something which was believed to be associated with the virus in order to protect themselves from Covid-19.

Generally, the precautionary measures propagated by the Government against the spread of Covid-19, were followed the rural households. Most frequently reported were wearing masks, washing and disinfecting hands as well as keeping distance in public (see table 1)

Table 1: Frequency of Covid-19 protection measures

Measure	n
Wash hands more frequently	2083
Use hand disinfectant (e.g. alcohol gel) more frequently	1928
Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands	1140
Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces daily	962
Avoid social gatherings and meeting people	1472
Cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing	1898
Stand at least 1.5 meter or more away from people in public	1930
Use a face mask when in public	2127

Consumption

Table 2 show the changes in household consumption in response to Covid-19. Both, increase and decrease of certain consumption items was observed. Generally, in food items and alcohol was reduced, e.g. the 252 households who reported decrease in alcohol reduced by 77.9 % (see table 2). Purchase of alcohol was restricted in some areas during the lock-down. On the other hand, smoking behaviour did not change that much. The 362 households who increased health expenditures, both for preventive and curative items, spend 156 % more than before Covid-19. It is also interesting to observe that almost 25 % of the households reduced gambling while only few spend more on lottery tickets.

Table 2: Effect of Covid-19 on consumption expenditures

Expenditures	Decrease		Increase	
	n	Mean (%)	n	Mean (%)
Carbohydrate (rice, noodle, root crops)	124	-46.1	120	74.2
Protein (meat, fish, milk products,..)	367	-48.6	164	64.2
Vitamins (vegetables, fruits)	191	-51.3	57	84.2
Milk powder for baby (age < 5 years)	22	-45.4	46	65.6
Alcohol	252	-77.9	8	66.8
Non- Food Expenditures (Care supplies, energy cost, transportation)	447	-46.4	333	61.8
Lottery and gambling	496	-72.8	36	137
Health (preventive and curative)	17	-34.3	362	156
Smoking	111	-50	13	91.4

Education

For pupil and student household members, the TVSEP Covid-19 household questionnaire contains a section on the impact of Covid-19 on education. This section includes questions on the extent of school/university closures, the measures implemented to facilitate tuition both online and offline and a rating thereof as well as the impact on the students' abilities to follow the classes and potential effects, such as the student having to repeat a class or leave the school.

Data on the impacts of Covid-19 on education shows, that 83% of the students in the panel were affected by closed schools and universities. Table 3 shows the ranking of the measures implemented to continue the education. Classes being taught online, homework and/or exercise sheets (offline) were the most frequently reported.

Table 3: Ranking of Covid-19 Coping Measures in Schools/Universities

Measure	Rank
Class was taught online	1
Homework	2
Exercise sheets	3
Writing essays	4
Educational Videos were uploaded	5
Follow a learning and exercise book	6
Read books	7
Assignments for self-learning were sent to students	8
Do self-study/research on certain topics	9
Exams were held online	10

Note: Ranking was conducted according to frequency of reporting

Debt and Savings

In terms of loans, the number of households paying back late (17) or defaulting loans (11) due to Covid-19 is low. 11% of the households took up new loans due to Covid-19 however, with a mean sum of 21,500 THB.
A larger portion of households (22%) used their savings to cope with the effects of Covid-19, using an average amount of 23,500THB.

Remittances (as reported by households)
In total, 715 migrants that send home money were reported in the household survey. 291 of these sent less during the lockdown and 221 during the post lockdown.

Public Transfers

Table 4 reveals that a total of 85.5% (1830 out of 2141) of the households have received public transfers. Associating Government support with the reported change in income shows a significant r Chi² value. This suggest that government cash support was effective in minimizing losses in income. As shown in table 4, more households even reported an increase in income of greater than 30 % as those reporting income decline.

Table 4: Cross Table of Change in Household Income and Received Support

Received Support	Income Change in Percent									
	<-30	-30 - -20	-20 - -10	-10 - 0	0	0 - 10	10 - 20	20 - 30	>30	Total
Yes	297	151	178	159	36	243	200	136	430	1830
No	67	28	40	22	124	11	6	2	11	311
Total	364	179	218	181	160	254	206	138	441	2141

Note: Chi² = 633.097 d.f. = 8 $p = 1.786679e^{-131}$

Other selected results

In the following table (X), some other selected results are compiled. As can be seen, very few Covid-19 infection cases were witnessed by the households until December 2020. Overall, the satisfaction in rural villages with the Government's handling of the Crisis was rather high.

Table 5: Selected Parameters of Covid-19 Survey 2020

Parameter	Unit	Value
HH Member was infected or know someone who became infected with Covid-19	No.	24
Average Amount of Covid-19 assistance received	THB/HH	21,166
Households completely satisfied with National Government during crisis 1)	%	31
Households completely satisfied with Provincial Government during crisis 1)	%	35.6
Households completely satisfied with Village Administration during crisis 1)	%	41.2

Note: on a scale from zero to 10, with 10 = completely satisfied

6. Selected Results from the Covid-19 Migrant Survey

Location of Migrants

As can be seen from the figures 4 and 5, most migrants concentrate around the Greater Bangkok area. The significance of domestic migration can also be observed, although data about domestic migrants can be noisy, as for many, there is no clear cut between residing in the household or somewhere else in the province.
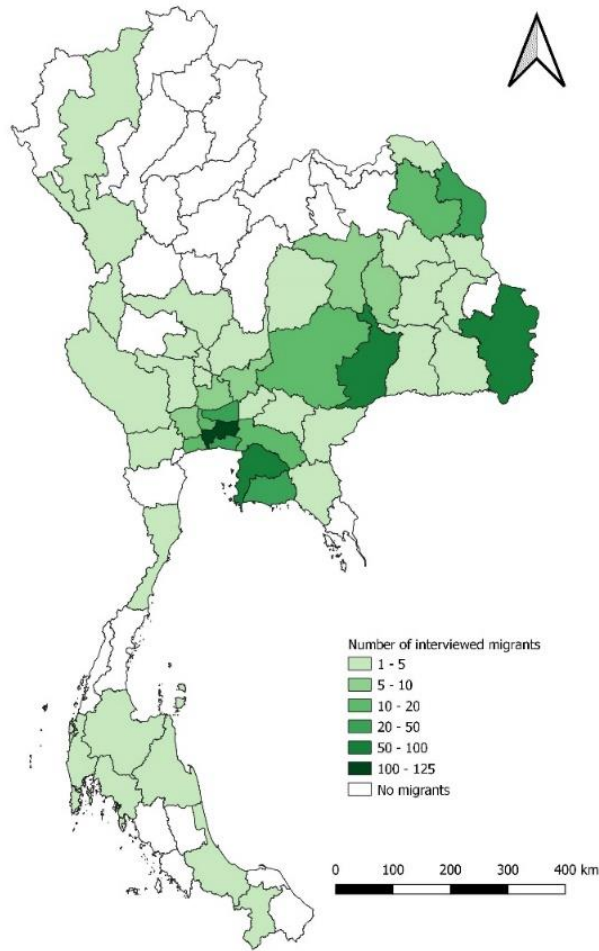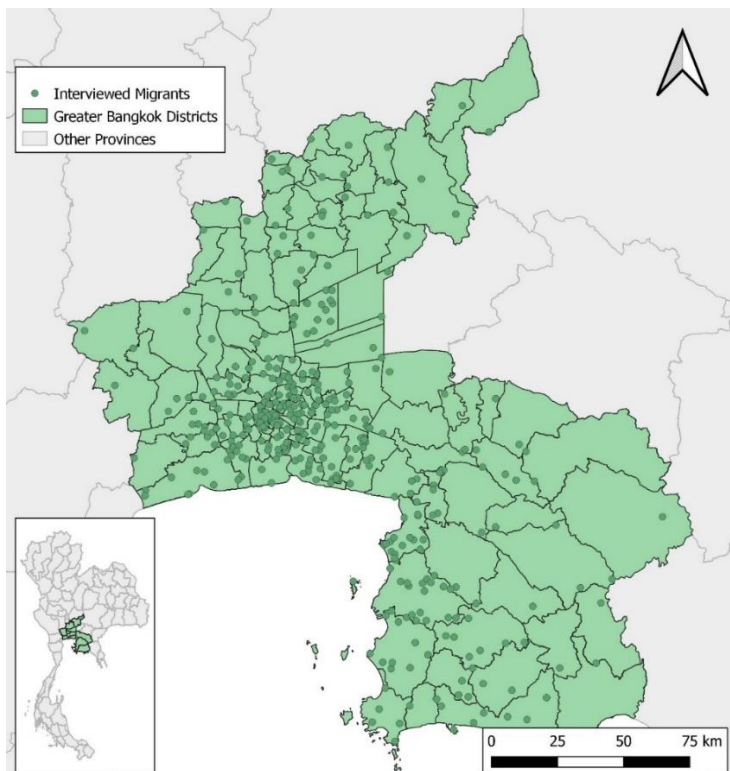
Figure 4: Location of Migrants in Thailand

Figure 5: Location of Migrants in Greater Bangkok (by Subdistrict)

Respondent Demographics (Migrant Survey)

Figure 6 shows, age and gender profile of respondents in the migrant survey. Majority of them are females and the vast majority of both sexes is between 20 and 35 years old. Only a small share of migrants is older than 45 years and most of these are male. The age of migrant respondents is thus much lower than those of the household survey where primarily household heads were interviewed, most of them older than 50 years of age.
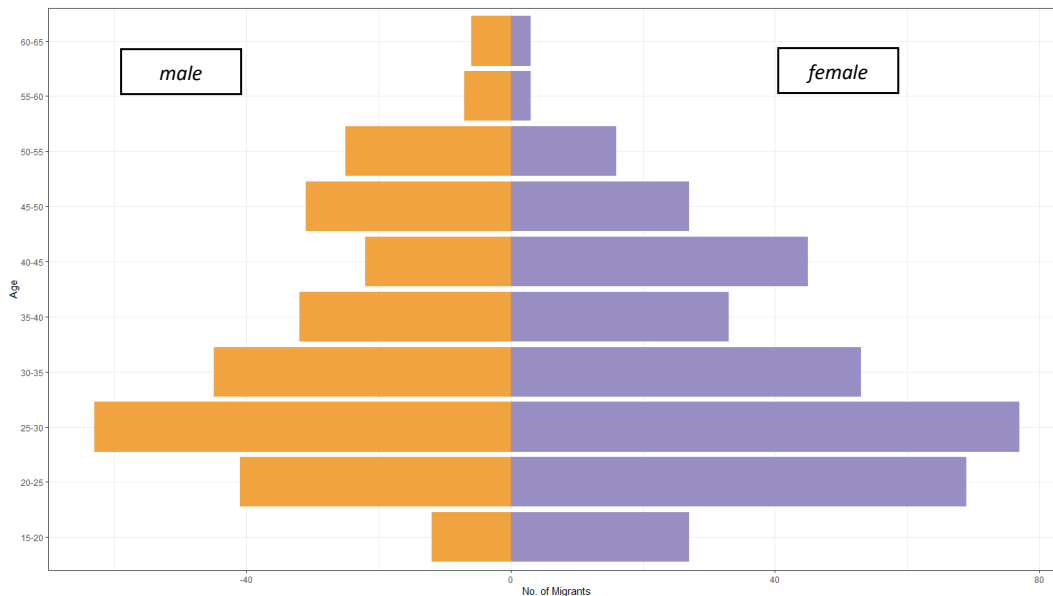

Figure 6: Age Pyramid of migrants successfully interviewed

Migrant Typology

Table 5 illustrates that only a small share during the pandemic there was very low permanent relocations of migrants. Even when disturbed by the crisis, migrants return home temporarily and then go back to their original place of migration or stay put entirely.

Table 6: Migrant Behavior

Migrant Type	n	%
Permanently returned home	78	12.1
Temporarily returned home and went back to the same place of migration	231	36
Temporarily returned home and migrated elsewhere	10	1.56
Became migrant during crisis	2	0.312
Remained at place of migration the whole time	317	49.4
Migrated elsewhere	4	0.623

Low migrant response rate

In total, 634 out of the 2149 migrants identified from the household survey were interviewed. As shown in table 6, the reasons for this quite low response rate are varied, yet they all contribute to the success rate of 30%. A major constraint was that it proved to be difficult to

reach the households and acquire the migrant phone number. In some cases, help was given by the village head. Even when households could be reached, household members in the village may have been unable or unwilling to provide the migrants phone number. If migrant numbers were available, 19 % of migrants could not be reached (see table 6) because they did not pick up their phone, despite repeated attempts and previous announcements either by SMS or call by their natal household. A further 5% refused the interview entirely.

Table 7: Shares of Reasons why Interviews could not be conducted

No.	Indicator	% of total
1	No. of interviews conducted (n= 642)	29.5
2	Household could not be reached	24.5
3	Household did not provide migrant number	17.5
4	Migrant could not be reached	19
5	Migrant rejected interview	5.5
6	Migrant interrupted Interview	0,3
7	Other reasons	4,7
8	Total migrants	2149
9	HH with migrants (n=1276)	58,2%
10	Average No. of migrants per HH	1,68

In conclusion, the data collection method of phone interviews was found to be challenging, perhaps especially also due to the pandemic situation. Possible future remedies to the problem of notoriously low response in phone interviews could be establishing a better contact data base which must be frequently updated.

Remittances (as recorded in migrant survey)

201 migrants have reduced their remittance transfers during all reference periods. During the lockdown period 228 migrants reduced their remittances, during the post-lockdown period 231 and during the post survey period 232. This goes to show that the impact on remittances seems to be rather long-term.

Rating of the performance of the national government over time

Overall, the ratings of the national government deviate a lot. When calculating a daily weighted survey average and correlating it with the day of the survey, a correlation coefficient of -0.47? was calculated, significant at the 0,1 % level. This suggests that as the survey was going and the numbers of infections kept going up (see Figure 1), satisfaction with the national government tended to decline (Figure 7).
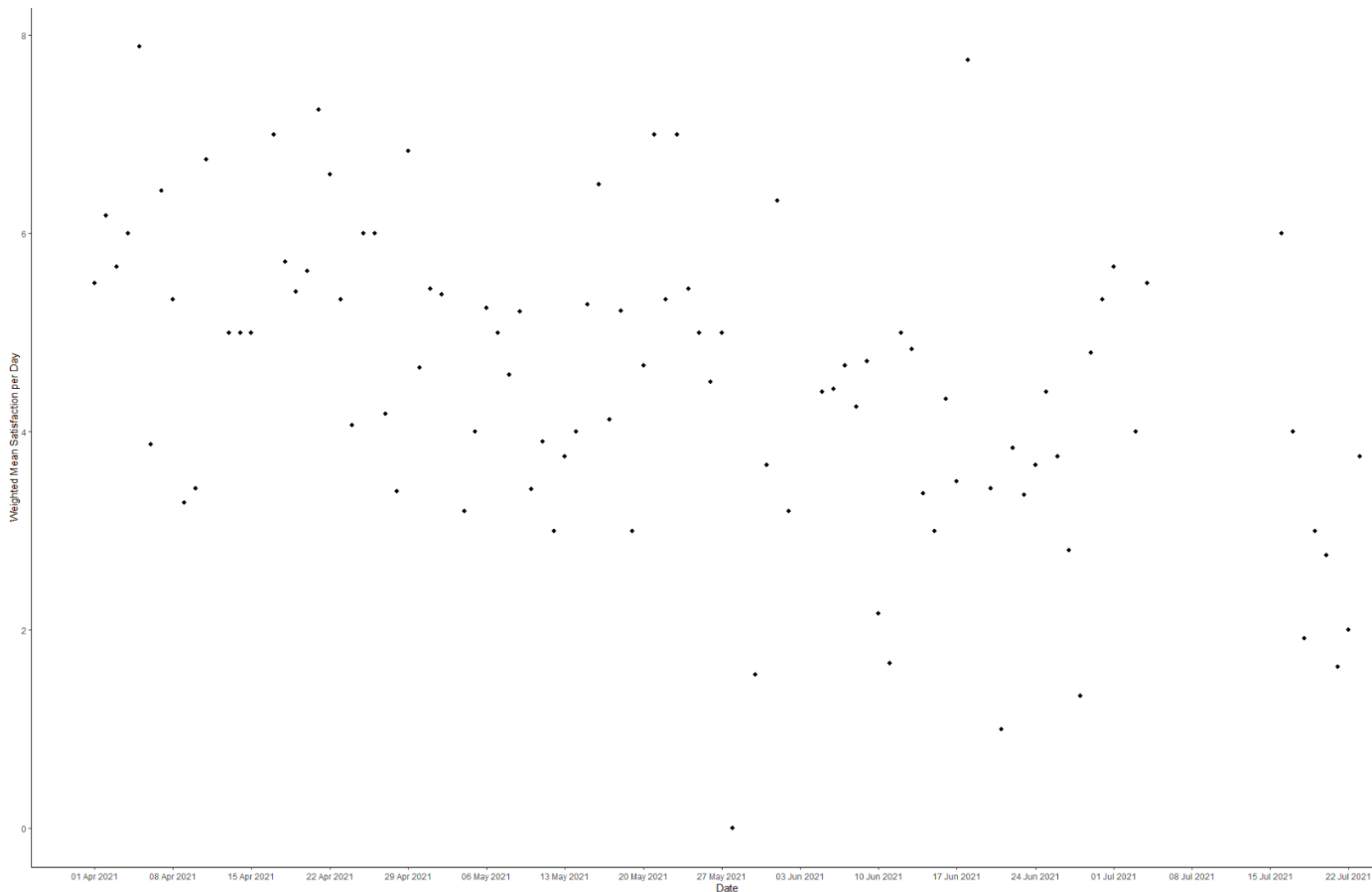
Figure 7: Correlation of Mean Weighted Satisfaction with the national Government and Survey Day

Migrant occupation

Most migrants are only pursuing only one occupation, the majority (443) being wage-employed. Only a small number (56) is unemployed. 10 additional migrants were at least temporarily unemployed during the Covid-19 crisis.

Table 7 shows that most of the migrants either work in service or industry related jobs. This could be i.e. jobs such as service personnel in hotels or factory workers. Those in agriculture are working as agricultural wage labourers and may move from location to location to work as harvest labourer for example. The category "others" (36 cases) includes any job that does not clearly fit in either category or is further specified via comments. "

Table 8: Migrant Occupation

Type of occupation	n
Agriculture	21
Industry	166
Service	179
Public Sector	41
Other	36

17

7. Lessons learned and conclusions/outlook for the future surveys

The main challenge for the household and village head survey during the pandemic was posed by the travel restrictions into and within Thailand. While domestic Covid-19 case numbers were low at onset of the pandemic, Thailand remained closed to almost all foreign visitors, making it impossible for the German survey staff to travel there and implement the survey as during regular TVSEP waves. It was thus decided to train and supervise the enumerators remotely, using WebEx and similar tools. For that, all enumerators were assembled in a meeting room, mimicking a "normal" training environment, with the German staff being broadcasted via projectors and speakers in the room, even being able to interact with enumerators through microphones in the room. While overall a very high level of data quality could be upheld and the result is not in any way different from the usual quality delivered by TVSEP, it came at the cost of great efforts, especially since Thailand was 6 hours ahead of the German time-zone at the time.

It was also observed that remote training proves to be a lot less effective than on-site training. Much more efforts were needed through intensified monitoring, refresher trainings, frequent online meetings with question-and-answer sessions, as well as personalized feedback to the enumerators. The lessons learned from "this exercise" are nevertheless useful for the next "regular" survey to further enhance data quality.

Other than these organizational challenges, no unusual events during the surveys were observed.

All in all, both the migrant and household/village head surveys have been completed successfully and without major issues. The new tools and procedures developed and used to facilitate these surveys under Covid-19 conditions will benefit future survey waves.

8. Structure of the dataset (information for data users)

The dataset is structured in accordance with the survey solutions output. Each questionnaire is located in a separate folder with all sections being present. For the initial familiarization, it is recommended to the data user, to simultaneously look at the questionnaires and the dataset. All questions on the household level are located in the main questionnaire file, with all rosters receiving their own files. Note, that in some cases, the questionnaire uses nested rosters, e.g. in "public transfers". Multi-select questions have again been used to great extent. Survey solutions processes these as binary variables for each answer option, the variable being labelled with the question code and the answer code.

The special Covid-19 data base allows cross-referencing with the main panel. In the household level questions and the member section, ample variables are thus provided to establish such a link.