

MONITORING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EFFECTS OF COVID-19 ON MAURITIAN HOUSEHOLDS

**BASED ON THE 1ST ROUND OF THE RAPID
CONTINUOUS MULTI-PURPOSE HOUSEHOLD SURVEY
(RCMPHS - MAY 2020)**

HIGHLIGHTS

- About 1 in 5 Mauritian households report to have not been able to purchase basic food items between the start of the lockdown and the month of May.
- About 17 percent of Mauritian households have skipped a meal since the lockdown started and only about 3 percent of households where at least one member had to skip once all the meals of a day.
- Over 71 percent of Mauritian households who require medical treatment have been able to access it since the lockdown started.
- About 85 percent of Mauritian households with children in school age have been able to access home based education since schools were closed.
- Over 1 in 3 Mauritian households posted a reduction in income compared with the 12 months before the lockdown.
- Relative to the first quarter of 2020, the number of employed declined by almost 129,400 units or about 24 percent. As of May, 2020, the number of employed is estimated at 405,400. This refers to individuals ages 16-64 who worked for pay or profit for at least 1 hour in the reference week or were temporarily absent from a job and maintained a job attachment.
- The decline in employment is largely ascribable to informal employment (-69 percent).
- The unemployment rate (based on a labor force comprising individuals ages 16-64 not in full time education) is estimated at 10.2 percent relative to 7.2 percent in the first quarter of 2020.
- The number of inactive individuals (ages 16-64 not in full time education) increased to 336,900 in May from about 205,100 in the first quarter of 2020.

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INTRODUCTION

In a few weeks, COVID-19 has changed the way we live, brought about human suffering and deaths unknown to virtually all generations, and taken a huge toll on the global economy. As of July 7, 2020, about 11,6 million cases have been confirmed worldwide, with over half a million deaths (based on data collected by John Hopkins University, coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html accessed on July 7, 2020 at 9:35am EST).

In addition to strained health systems in many countries around the globe, the new pandemic is having unprecedented negative socioeconomic effects on the lives of millions of people, particularly on the most disadvantaged and vulnerable populations. The immediate negative consequences of COVID-19 range from lack of access to food and basic services, to destruction of jobs, loss of income, and deterioration of progress made over the past decades in terms of living standards.

Statistics Mauritius and the World Bank have launched a series of rapid phone household surveys, known as Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey (RCMPHS), to monitor the socio-economic effects of COVID-19 on the lives of Mauritian households over the period May-July 2020. Following the outbreak of COVID-19 and lockdown measures introduced by the Government of Mauritius, field activities related to face-to-face data collection have been suspended since March 20, 2020. The three rounds of Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey capture key information, representative at the national level, typically collected by Statistics Mauritius through face-to-face interviews. The first round covered a sample of 924 households.¹

The questionnaire of the RCMPHS consists of 7 modules soliciting information about economic activity of individuals aged 16 to 64 years not in full-time education, access to basic goods and services, food insecurity, household income, shocks and coping strategies.

¹ The reference week to monitor economic activities was the week of May 18-24.

ACCESS TO GOODS AND SERVICES AND FOOD SECURITY

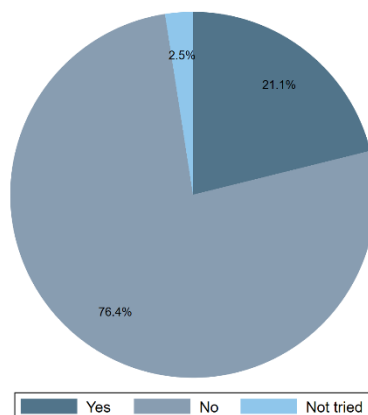
ACCESS TO FOOD AND FOOD SECURITY

According to the World Food Programme, the COVID-19 pandemic could cause a 50 percent increase in the number of people facing acute food insecurity to 265 million in 2020.² The pandemic can have negative effects of food security through different channels, including income loss, particularly, disruption of supply chains due to lockdowns and curfews, and food imports in countries that heavily rely on them.

About 1 in 5 households report to have not been able to purchase basic food items between the start of the sanitary curfew and the survey time (Figure 1 - panel a). In Rodrigues, the share of households unable to access basic food items is significantly larger at about 36 percent. Financial problems (36 percent), movements' restrictions (25 percent), closure of local markets (22 percent) are among the most commonly cited reasons that impeded households from buying food (Figure 1 - panel b). This is followed by unavailability of food items, lack of transportation, and increase in prices.

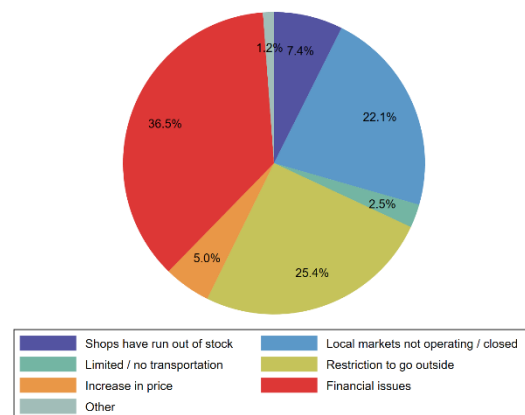
Figure 1. Access to food

a. Households unable to buy basic food items since lockdown



b. Reasons for not being able to buy basic food items

(among households who were not able to buy)



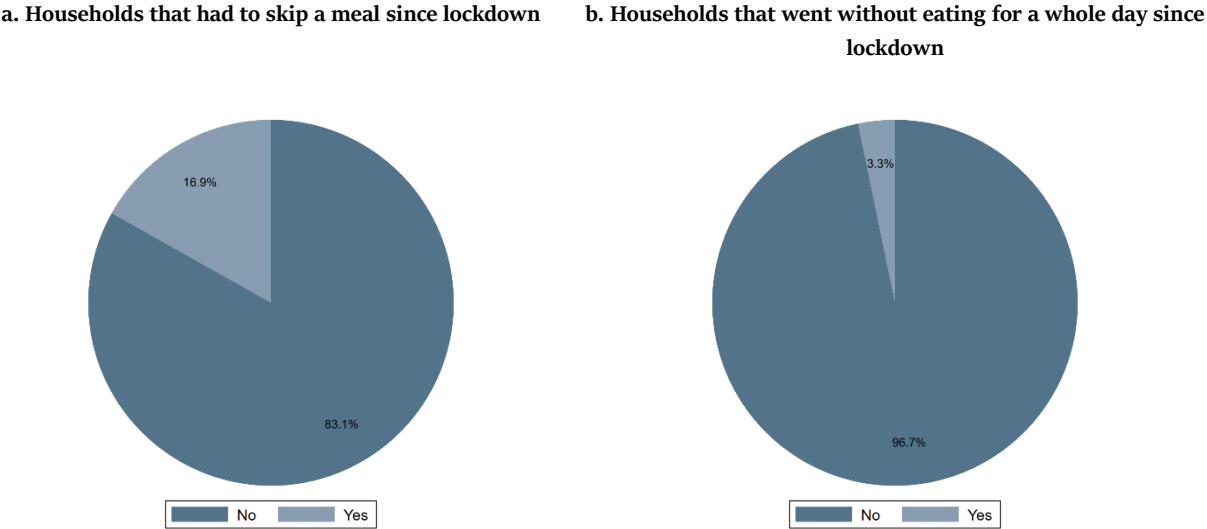
Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

Many people have been unable to work, initially due to lockdown measures and afterwards because of the economic crisis. To face food needs, households might adopt negative coping strategies,

² The estimate was announced alongside the release of the Global Report on Food Crises: <https://www.wfp.org/news/covid-19-will-double-number-people-facing-food-crises-unless-swift-action-taken>.

whereby they skip a meal or go without eating for an entire day. In Mauritius, the government distributed food packages in the early stage of the lockdown to the most vulnerable households. About 17 percent of Mauritian households report to have skipped a meal since the lockdown started and only about 3 percent of households where at least one member had to skip once all the meals of a day (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Food insecurity



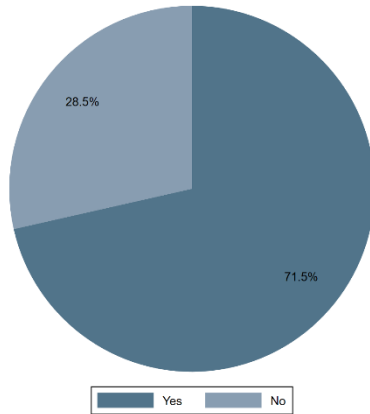
Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

ACCESS TO MEDICINES AND TO MEDICAL TREATMENT

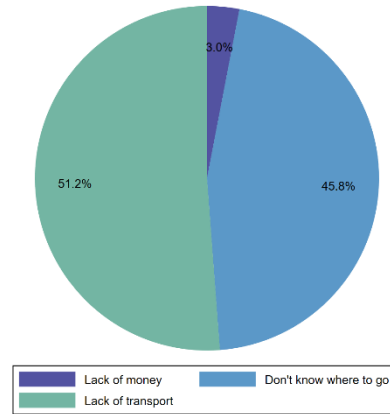
About 11 percent of households mention to have not been able to buy medicines since the start of the lockdown. About 16 percent of Mauritian household have required medical treatment since the lockdown and over 71 percent of them have been able to access it (Figure 3 – panel a). Less than 1 in 3 households who required medical attention have not been able to get access to it largely because of lack of transport or because they did not know where to go (Figure 3 – panel b). This could be ascribable to the fact that restrictions to movements have impeded households to travel to their physician.

Figure 3. Access to medical treatment

**a. Households able to get medical treatment
(among households who needed it)**



**b. Reasons for not being able to access medical treatment
(among households who were not able to access it)**



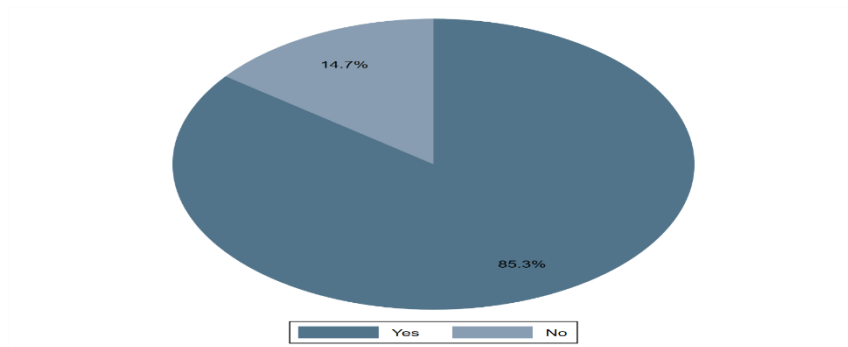
Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

ACCESS TO DISTANCE LEARNING

Lockdown measures and school closures have caused disruptions in the delivery of services, including education. In many countries with fast and reliable Internet connection, students have been able to get access to remote learning through computers, laptops, tablets, and smartphones. In Mauritius, about 85 percent of households with children in school age report to have been able to access home based education since schools were closed on March 20 (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Access to home-based education

Households with children in school age able to access home-based education since schools' closure



Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

EMPLOYMENT, UNEMPLOYMENT AND INACTIVITY

As of May, 2020, the number of employed individuals aged 16-64 years not in full time education is estimated at 405,400. The pandemic caused a decline in the number of employed of almost 129,400 or about 24 percent relative to the first quarter of 2020, down from an estimated employed population of 534,800 (Table 1).

The employed population consists of Mauritians ages 16-64 not in full time education who have worked for pay, profit or family gain for at least one hour during the third week of May. It includes individuals who are temporarily absent from work for reasons such as working time arrangements, nature of their work, public holidays, annual leave, sick leave, maternity/paternity leave. However, individuals absent for other reasons, including the Covid-19 lockdown, are classified as employed only if at least one of the following two conditions hold:

- total expected duration of absence is three months or less,
- a worker continues to receive a remuneration (full or partial) paid by the employer.

First, many workers, and particularly the self-employed, are unlikely to have clarity regarding the exact date when they will be able to resume work in the context of a pandemic and lockdown.⁴ Second, While the second criterion applied to most formal employees during the lockdown, it often did not apply to informal workers.

Therefore, in order to correctly interpret the figures, it is key to look at the breakdown of the employed population by status in employment and by formality status (Table 2). A first important stylized fact concerns the distinction between (i) wage employment, which includes all individuals employed as paid employees (either in the public or private sector), and (ii) nonwage employment, which comprises employers, own-account workers, and contributing family workers. Between the first quarter of 2020 and May, 2020, the largest decline in employment in relative terms occurs within the group of nonwage employment.

³ All estimates given here for the first quarter of 2020 have been re-computed to be in line with the reference population of the May survey, i.e. all individuals from 16 to 64 years of age not in full-time education. Previously published estimates refer to all individuals aged 16 and above.

⁴ Annex B illustrates the exact definition of employment.

Table 1. Employed, unemployed and inactive in population ages 16-64 and not in fulltime education, by sex and for youth (16-24)

	Q1 - 2020	May-20	Change May, 2020 - Q1, 2020
Men			
Employed	319,700	248,400	-71,300
Unemployed	17,600	28,600	+ 11,000
Inactive	52,500	111,600	+ 59,100
Population	389,800	388,600	-1,200
Labor force	337,300	277,000	-60,300
Activity Rate (%)	86.5	71.3	-15.2
Unemployment Rate (%)	5.2	10.3	+ 5.1
Women			
Employed	215,100	157,000	-58,100
Unemployed	23,700	17,200	-6,500
Inactive	152,600	225,300	+ 72,700
Population	391,400	399,500	+ 8,100
Labor force	238,800	174,200	-64,600
Activity Rate (%)	61	43.6	-17.4
Unemployment Rate (%)	9.9	9.9	0
Both Sexes			
Employed	534,800	405,400	-129,400
Unemployed	41,300	45,800	+ 4,500
Inactive	205,100	336,900	+ 131,800
Population	781,200	788,100	+ 6,900
Labor force	576,100	451,200	-124,900
Activity Rate (%)	73.7	57.3	-16.4
Unemployment Rate (%)	7.2	10.2	+ 3.0
Youth (16 - 24)			
Employed	54,000	40,600	-13,400
Unemployed	18,100	9,800	-8,300
Inactive	28,900	53,700	+ 24,800
Population	101,000	104,100	+ 3,100
Labor force	72,100	50,400	-21,700
Activity Rate (%)	71.4	48.4	-23.0
Unemployment Rate (%)	25.1	19.4	-5.7
<p><i>Source</i> : Based on data from the quarter 1-2020 of the Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey and from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.</p> <p><i>Note</i> : Activity rate = labor force over population; Unemployment rate = unemployed over labor force.</p>			

Precisely, wage employment declined by about 84,400 units or 19 percent from 434,200 to 349,800. Over the same period of time, non-wage employment declined by about 45,000 units or 45 percent. A second key stylized fact concerns the formality status of employed individuals. Between the first quarter of 2020 and May, 2020, over 2 in 3 jobs' losses concern informal employment. Informal employment accounts for over 65 percent of the decline in wage employment and for about 76 percent of the decline in non-wage employment⁵ (Table 2).

Most of the individuals who lost their job exited the labor market and only a few looked for a job in May. The number of unemployed increased by about 11 percent from 41,300 in the first quarter of 2020 to 45,800 in May, 2020. The labor force comprising individuals ages 16-64 not in full time education works out to 451,200 in May compared to 576,100 in the first quarter of 2020 and the unemployment rate is estimated at 10.2 percent relative to 7.2 percent estimated in the first quarter of 2020. By contrast, the number of inactive increased to 336,900 in May, 2020 from 205,100 in the first quarter of 2020, an increase of over 64 percent.

A final key statistics concerns the increase in the number of inactive individuals. Out of an inactive population of 336,900 as of May 2020, about 68,800 (or 20 percent) report to have worked before the lockdown and to have stopped working because of business closure due to the lockdown or furlough. They used to be employed in agriculture (5.3 percent), construction (13.6 percent), manufacturing (19.2 percent), wholesale and retail trade (14.6 percent), accommodation and food service activities (7.9 percent), private households (10.4 percent), and other services (26.4 percent).

Table 2. Employment in population ages 16-64 years and not in fulltime education, by type of employment and formality status

	Q1 - 2020			May-20			Change May, 2020 - Q1, 2020		
	Formal	Informal	Total	Formal	Informal	Total	Formal	Informal	Total
Wage Employment	350,300	83,900	434,200	320,700	29,100	349,800	-29,600	-54,800	-84,400
Non-Wage Employment	33,700	66,900	100,600	23,100	32,500	55,600	-10,600	-34,400	-45,000
Total	384,000	150,800	534,800	343,800	61,600	405,400	-40,200	-89,200	-129,400

Source: Based on data from the quarter 1-2020 of the Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey and from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

⁵ In this note, a paid employee is classified as in informal wage employment if he/she reports his/her employer does not pay contributions to the national pension scheme. In addition to informal wage employment, the informal sector includes household unincorporated market enterprises that do not have a complete set of accounts. First, the household market enterprise is considered as an 'unincorporated enterprise' if assets used are not separate from those of the owner, that is, same assets were used for household purposes and for running the business. Second, a household unincorporated market enterprise constitutes an informal unit if the enterprise does not have a complete set of accounts with balance sheets.

Differences by sex. The number of women employed dropped by 27 percent or 58,100 units. Women who lost their job did not to look for a new one and withdrew from the labor market. The number of unemployed women declined by about 6,500, whereas inactivity jumped up by 72,700 compared with first quarter 2020 estimates (+48 percent). Different is the case of men . Employment declined by 71,300 units, and both unemployment and inactivity increased. The number of unemployed men increased by about 11,000 (+62%) and the number of inactive men increased by nearly 59,100 (+113%) (Table 1).

Youth. Young persons aged 16-24 years, have been severely hit by the crisis (Table 1). Compared to the first quarter of 2020, the number of employed youth declined by 25 percent from about 54,000 to 40,600 in May, 2020. In addition, discouraged by the lockdown and the economic crisis, about 8,300 youth stopped looking for a job, thus contributing to the expansion of the pool of inactive that increased by about 86% from 28,900 to 53,700.

Employment by sector. The services sector posted the largest decline in employment levels compared to the first quarter of 2020 (Table 3). As of May, 2020, almost 79,800 jobs were lost in the tertiary sector due to the pandemic and consequent economic crisis. This is a reduction of about 21 percent, which is significantly smaller compared with the percentage reduction of about 46 and 28 percent observed in the primary and secondary sectors, respectively. Within the secondary sector, the largest number of jobs lost is in construction (-21,600 relative to first quarter of 2020), followed by manufacturing that posted a loss of about 13,000 jobs. In the services sector, employment increased in information and communication, professional, scientific and technical activities, and human health services. By contrast, it declined considerably in wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, administrative and support service activities, accommodation and food service activities, and activities of households as employers.

Table 3. Employment by industrial activity in population ages 16-64 years and not in fulltime education

	Q1 - 2020	May - 2020	Change May, 2020 - Q1, 2020
Primary sector	35,400	19,100	-16,300
Secondary sector	120,400	87,100	-33,300
Tertiary sector	379,000	299,200	-79,800
Total	534,800	405,400	-129,400

Source: Based on data from the quarter 1-2020 of the Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey and from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

INDIVIDUAL EARNINGS

Employees who kept their job worked shorter hours (23 percent) because of lockdown measures, lack of work, or rotation of staff decided by the employer. About 28 percent of employees, who reported to have worked shorter hours, have received only part of their normal salary.

Average monthly salaries declined by about 15 percent compared with first quarter of 2020. Employees in the primary and tertiary sectors suffered the largest reduction in their monthly earnings (-16.4 and -17.3 percent, respectively), whereas those in the secondary sector posted a decline of 7.8 percent (Table 4).

Table 4. Monthly salary of employees ages 16-64 not in full-time education, overall and by sector, First quarter 2020 and May 2020

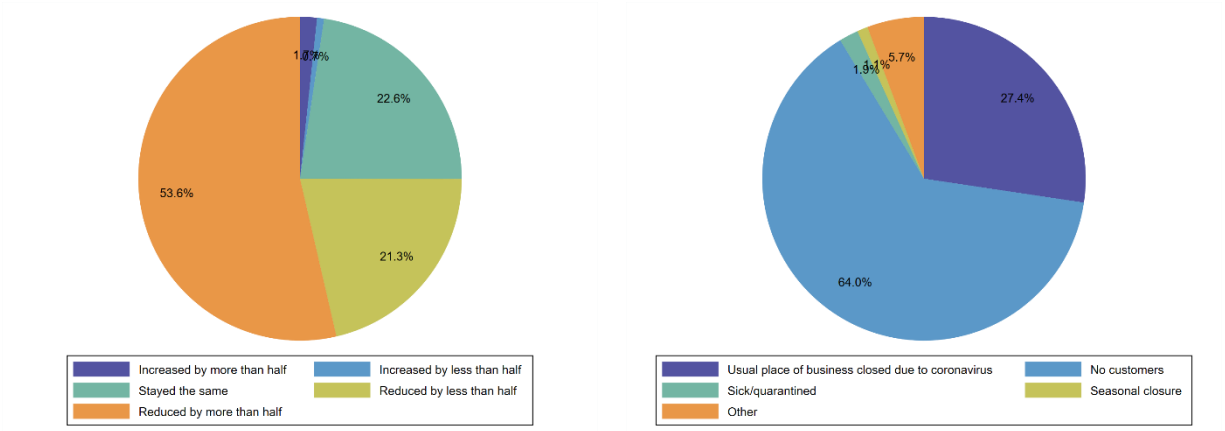
	Q1 - 2020	May - 2020	Change May - Q1 2020 (percentage)
All Sectors			
Average Value	23,500	19,900	-15.3
Median Value	18,000	15,000	-16.7
By sector (Average Value)			
Primary	16,500	13,800	-16.4
Secondary	18,000	16,600	-7.8
Tertiary	25,500	21,100	-17.3

Source: Based on data from the quarter 1-2020 of the Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey and from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey.

About 75 percent of self-employed/employers reported a decline in their business income, and over 1 in 2 declared a reduction of over 50 percent (Figure 5 - panel a). The main reasons for the decline in income are lack of customers (64 percent) and closure of the business location due to COVID-19 (27 percent) (Figure 5 - panel b).

Figure 5. Changes in business income among the self-employed since lockdown

a. Distribution of self-employed by degree of change in their business income **b. Distribution of self-employed by reasons for reporting a decline in business income**

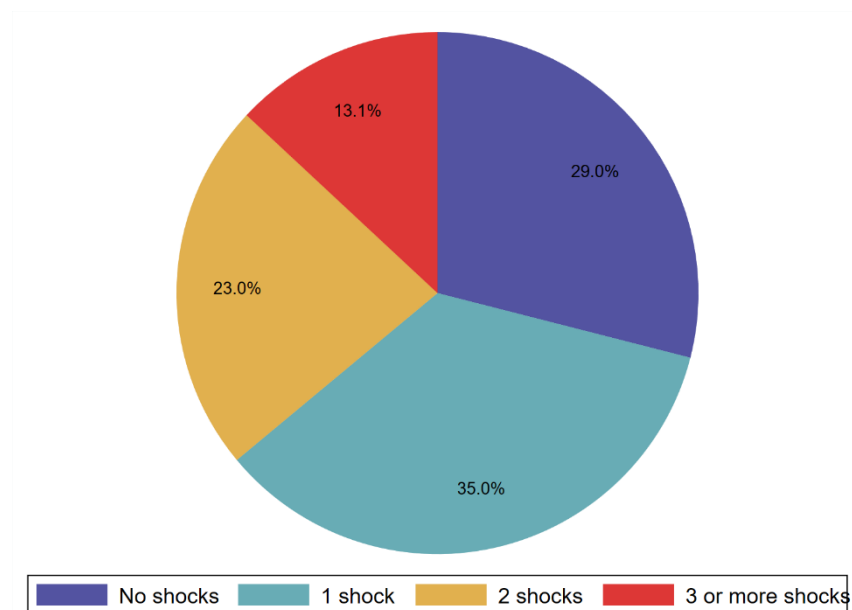


Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

HOUSEHOLD SHOCKS AND COPING STRATEGIES

Since the start of the lockdown, 65 percent of Mauritian households have been affected by a shock as a consequence of the pandemic and of the necessary lockdown measures. About 35 percent of households report one shock, 23 percent mention 2 shocks, and about 13 percent declare three or more shocks (Figure 6). The primary shocks more commonly reported are a reduction in salary or in income from business followed by an increase in prices.

Figure 6. Distribution of households by number of shocks since lockdown

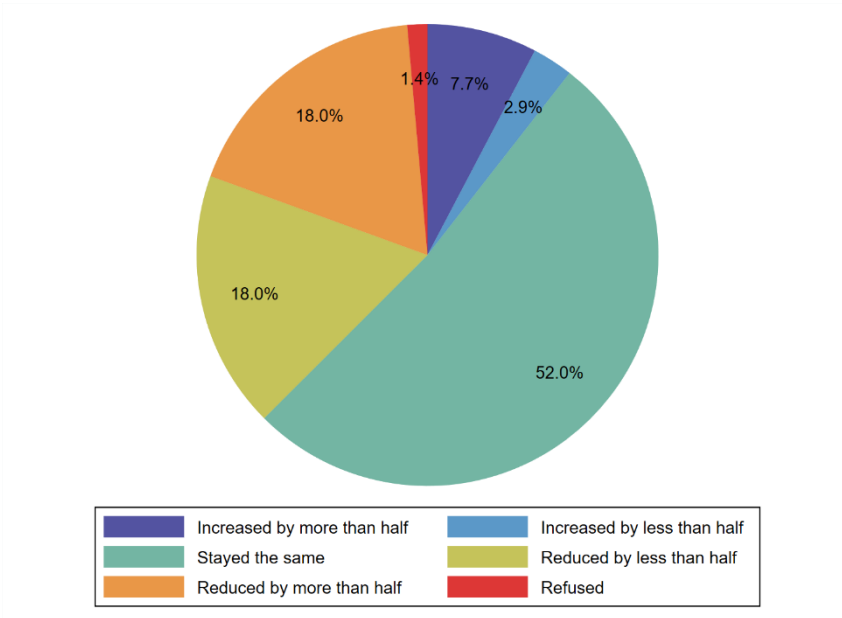


Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

Shocks translate into large changes in household income if coping strategies adopted by households are not effective in mitigating their negative consequences. About 1 in 2 households report no change in household income (Figure 7). However, over 1 in 3 households report a reduction in income compared with the 12 months before the lockdown, and among these households 1 in 2 households declare a reduction of over 50 percent.

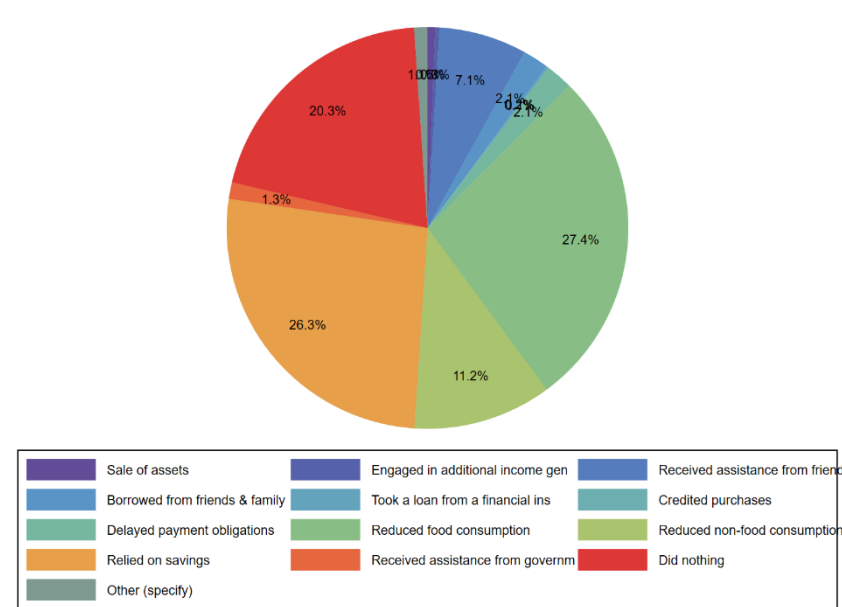
Households hit by shocks have reduced their food consumption (27 percent), resorted to their savings (26 percent), reduced nonfood consumption (11 percent), and received assistance from family and friends (7 percent) About 1 in 5 did not adopt any strategies to mitigate the negative effect of the shocks (Figure 8).

Figure 7. Changes in household income since lockdown



Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

Figure 8. Strategy adopted by households to cope with main shock since lockdown



Source: Based on data from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY

Data collection: Telephone interviews of household members. The observation unit is the household head or a knowledgeable person, except for the employment module where each individual is asked to respond personally to the extent he is available to do so at the time of the interview (response by proxy is otherwise accepted).

Frequency of data collection: Monthly. The reference period for data on labor force is the third week of the survey month.

Scope and coverage of collection: Mauritian households in the islands of Mauritius and Rodrigues.

Sampling methodology: A Stratified two-stage sampling design is used. At the first stage, Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) are selected in proportion to square root of the total number of households in the geographical district and at the second stage a fixed number of households is selected from each selected PSU. The Relative Development Index (RDI) is used as the spatial stratification factor. This index is based on 12 variables encompassing housing and living conditions, literacy and education, and employment derived from the 2011 Housing and Population Census to rank PSUs. A set of RDIs for administrative regions has been published in the series "Economic and Social Indicators" - Issue No. 977. The second stage stratification criteria are community, household size and average monthly expenditure of the household.

Sample size: The response rate stands at 97 percent, with a total of 924 households that completed the interview.

Questionnaire: The questionnaire comprises seven modules. Module 1 covers the general characteristics of the population. Module 2 solicits information about economic activities on every household member ages 16 to 64 not in full time education. Module 3 covers access to basic food and services including health and education. Module 4 captures information on food security. Module 5 covers information regarding changes in household income, module 6 captures information regarding the type of strategies adopted by households to cope with shocks, and module 7 covers safety nets since the lockdown.

Reliability of estimates: Estimates from the May survey were based on a smaller sample (924 households) compared to those from the regular CMPHS data for the first quarter of 2020 (about 2,600 households). Hence the May estimates are subject to a higher margin of error (Table C 1).

ANNEX B: DEFINITIONS

Labor Market Status	
<i>Employment</i>	<p>The employed population consists of Mauritians ages 16-64 not in full time education who have worked for pay, profit or family gain for at least one hour during the reference week of a month.⁶ It includes individuals who are <u>temporarily absent</u> from work for reasons such as working time arrangements, nature of their work, public holidays, annual leave, sick leave, maternity/paternity leave.</p> <p>Individuals <u>absent for other reasons</u> such as parental leave, education leave, other personal leave, furlough, layoff, temporary disorganization or suspension of work, lack of clients, capital or materials, strike, government lockdown, quarantine, disaster, etc. are classified as employed if one of the following two conditions hold:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. total expected duration of absence is three months or less, 2. a worker continues to receive a remuneration (full or partial) paid by the employer.
<i>Unemployment</i>	The unemployed population comprises all Mauritians ages 16-64 not in full time education who were not employed and looked for work and were available for work during the reference week.
<i>Inactivity</i>	The inactive population includes persons who were neither employed nor unemployed during the reference week. This includes individuals who during the reference week were not employed because of the lockdown, did not have any job attachment, were not available for work and did not look for work.
Employment Type	
<i>Employer</i>	An employer is a person who operates his/her own business or trade and hires one or more employees.
<i>Own-account worker</i>	An own-account worker is a person who operates his/her own business or trade and does not hire employees. He/She may be working alone or with the help of contributing family workers.
<i>Employee</i>	An employee is a person who works for pay for someone else, even in a temporary capacity.
<i>Apprentice</i>	An apprentice is a person being trained for a job or trade. He/She may be paid or may receive some pocket money; a paid apprentice is considered in-employment.
<i>Contributing family worker</i>	A contributing family worker is a person who works without pay in a market-oriented enterprise operated by a family member.

⁶ Previously published estimates refer to all individuals aged 16 and above.

ANNEX C: TABLES

Table C 1. Reliability of labor statistics estimates - First quarter 2020 and May 2020

	Estimates	Standard Error	Coefficient of variation (Standard Error/Estimate) %
Both Sexes			
Labor force			
2020 Q1	576,100	11,900	2.1
May-20	451,200	31,265	6.9
Employment			
2020 Q1	534,800	11,300	2.1
May-20	405,400	28,265	7.0
Unemployment			
2020 Q1	41,300	2,700	6.5
May-20	45,800	5,643	12.3
Unemployment rate, %			
2020 Q1	7.2	0.4	6.1
May-20	10.2	1.0	9.9
Activity rate, %			
2020 Q1	73.7	0.6	0.8
May-20	57.3	1.3	2.3
Men			
Labor force			
2020 Q1	337,300	7,500	2.2
May-20	277,000	19,743	7.1
Employment			
2020 Q1	319,700	7,100	2.2
May-20	248,400	17,236	6.9
Unemployment			
2020 Q1	17,600	1,900	10.8
May-20	28,600	4,567	16.0
Unemployment rate, %			
2020 Q1	5.2	0.5	10.5
May-20	10.3	1.3	12.8
Activity rate, %			
2020 Q1	86.5	0.7	0.8
May-20	71.3	1.6	2.3

Women

Labor force			
2020 Q1	238,800	6,400	2.7
May-20	174,200	13,953	8.0
Employment			
2020 Q1	215,100	6,100	2.8
May-20	157,000	13,512	8.6
Unemployment			
2020 Q1	23,700	2,000	8.4
May-20	17,200	3,278	19.1
Unemployment rate, %			
2020 Q1	9.9	0.8	8.0
May-20	9.9	1.9	18.7
Activity rate, %			
2020 Q1	61.0	1.0	1.6
May-20	43.6	1.7	3.9

Source: Based on data from the quarter 1-2020 of the Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey and from the Rapid Continuous Multi-Purpose Household Survey, Statistics Mauritius and World Bank.

Note: Reliability of estimates based on coefficient of variation: below 7.5 percent **high reliability**; between 7.5 and 15 percent **medium reliability**; above 15 percent **low reliability**.