SOMALIA

COVID-19 HIGH FREQUENCY PHONE SURVEY WAVE 2 BRIEF

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1. KEY MESSAGES

01 Satisfaction with the government’s response and awareness of its COVID-19 measures remain high; however, the adoption of preventative measures was less widespread in Wave 2 than in Wave 1.

02 Somalis are receptive to testing and vaccination, with over 90 percent expressing interest in receiving testing and vaccines, if provided without cost.

03 The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect the well-being of the people of Somalia. In January 2021, 79 percent of households reported further reductions in sources of income while assistance appears to have reduced since July 2020. This reduction has resulted in a rise in food insecurity including situations where hungry adults fail to eat.

04 Natural disasters such as floods, droughts and desert locust infestations have further strained the resilience of the Somali population, while fewer households could rely on key coping mechanisms.
2. INTRODUCTION

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has touched every corner of the globe but the impact on each country and household has been varied. As evidenced by the current global asymmetry in vaccine rollout, the ability of populations to cope with the pandemic varies dramatically. Moreover, the effects of COVID-19 are not uniformly experienced and require nuanced data to evaluate. The Somali High-Frequency Phone Surveys (SHFPS) of nationally representative households were conducted to elicit such data.

The first round of the SHFPS was carried out in June and July 2020 covering 2,811 households and yielded several noteworthy findings. First, although awareness of the virus and its associated symptoms and preventative measures was high, many Somalis tended not to practice behaviors they knew to be useful in curbing its spread. Second, the more vulnerable the populations (Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs), nomads and rural households), the more adversely affected they were by the strains of the pandemic. Third, the COVID-19 outbreak had profound economic consequences resulting in reduced employment and household incomes.

In January 2021, the second wave of the SHFPS was administered. Between the two waves, in August 2020, the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) made the move to reopen schools nationwide, relax the stay-at-home measures by lifting/extending the curfew notice, and reopen the transport sector along with other businesses.

This brief will explore the insights from Wave 2. To track progress over time, the questions were largely the same but, given the developments around a vaccine and testing, several questions were added on these topics. The sample size for this round was 1,756, with 518 households belonging to the urban, 516 to rural, 413 to IDPs¹ and 309 to nomad populations. Most of this sample (91 percent) overlapped with that of Wave 1, with the remaining 9 percent being new respondents who were contacted through Random Digit Dialing (RDD). Moreover, the survey covered all areas of the country.

1 Here IDPs include both those living inside and outside IDP sites. IDPs were identified based on the question “Have you had to leave your home in the last three years due to conflicts or natural disasters (i.e., drought, flooding)?”
3. COVID-19 KNOWLEDGE AND BEHAVIOUR

On a positive note, respondents sensed an increased effort by the Somali government to disseminate information regarding the virus, 32 percent in Wave 2 compared to 27 percent in Wave 1. Respondents are still highly satisfied with the government’s response to the pandemic, at 87 percent, in Wave 2.

FIGURE 1: SHARE OF POPULATION AWARE OF GOVERNMENT COVID-19 MEASURES

PREVENTATIVE BEHAVIOUR

In Wave 2, the adoption of preventive measures is even less widespread. There is a notable reduction in the proportion of Somalis who wash their hands with soap more often than usual:

- Wash their hands with soap more often: 89% to 77%
- Avoid unnecessary physical greetings: 78% to 64%
- Avoid unnecessary physical gatherings: 74% to 53%
- Wear masks regularly while in public spaces: 44% to 41%
4. TESTING AND VACCINATION

Given the importance of widespread testing, it is reassuring to see that an overwhelming majority (91 percent) of Somalis expressed interest in free testing for COVID-19. This sentiment is remarkably high across all subgroups. In terms of vaccination, Somalis are similarly receptive (91 percent) to the potential provision of free vaccines. The attitude toward vaccination is similar across all genders, population types and areas. However, the majority (65 percent) would be unwilling to pay for the vaccine themselves while 30 percent would pay for vaccination and the remaining 5 percent are unsure. Those who would refuse to get vaccinated, whether for free or at a cost, generally mistrust vaccines (38 percent) or doubt the safety (17 percent) and effectiveness (19 percent) of the COVID-19 vaccine.
5. EMPLOYMENT, REMITTANCES AND INCOMES

EMPLOYMENT

The economic impacts of COVID-19 are still profound and widespread, while a notable improvement has been observed especially in urban, rural and IDP populations. The overall employment rate grew to 49 percent in Wave 2 compared to 39 percent in Wave 1. Figure 4 shows the employment rate in both surveys filtered by different population type. The employment rate increased from 38 to 60 percent in urban areas and from 35 to 54 percent in rural areas. The employment rate for IDPs also improved from 41 to 43 percent. On the other hand, employment rate for nomad has worsened from 40 to 34 percent.

**FIGURE 4: EMPLOYMENT RATE IN WAVES 1 AND 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Wave 1</th>
<th>Wave 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nomad</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
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INCOME

Looking at all income sources, we find that 79 percent of surveyed households report a decline in income from all key sources compared to 80 percent in Wave 1. These data are corroborated by the survey conducted by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) in August and September 2020, revealing that “the majority of the interviewed households (73 percent) reported that their overall income from their main income sources had decreased” (pg. 26).

The situation is worse compared to the pre-COVID pandemic period for those with nonfarm family businesses. Of the Somalia households

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2 Key sources of household income are wage employment (39 percent), farming, livestock, or fishing (30 percent), and non-farm family business (13 percent). Other sources include assistance from NGOs and family members living inside and outside the country.
owning a family business, 89 percent reported fewer or no sales since the outbreak of COVID-19 in January 2021, up from 83 percent in July 2020. The most commonly cited reasons for business sales reduction were business closure due to COVID-19 restrictions (38 percent) and fewer or no customers (51 percent). The sectors most affected by business closure were trading (34 percent) and mining (17 percent).

This finding is consistent with data from Round 2 of the Enterprise Survey, which found that about half of the firms experienced a decline in sales in December 2020 compared to the same months in 2019. For an average firm, sales in December were 10 percent lower than in the same months in 2019 (Coronavirus and the private sector in Somalia: Results from Round 2 of COVID-19-focused Enterprise Survey, March 2021). On a positive note, Round 2 of the Enterprise Survey found that cuts to workforce and working hours have been waning and almost all surveyed firms are optimistic about returning to full capacity.

Similarly, those working in the agricultural sector have not witnessed improvement. Wave 2 SHFPS found that 78 percent of households working in farming, fishing or livestock-rearing had reduced incomes compared to 93 percent of households that had nonfarm family businesses. This is in contrast to Wave 1, when 80 percent of households working in farming, fishing or livestock-rearing reported declining incomes compared to 89 percent of those running nonfarm family businesses.

The COVID19 outbreak continues to adversely affect remittances flow, reducing income for Somali households. In July 2020, 10 percent of households answered that they have received remittances from abroad in the last 12 months, and among them, 50 percent and 31 percent of households reported the reduction of frequency and amount of remittances respectively since the outbreak of COVID19. Since then, remittance flows decreased further with the frequency and amount declining for 56 percent and 62 percent of households, respectively. The 31-percentage point increase in the share of households reporting lower remittance amounts received from abroad likely reflects the adverse effect of COVID19 on many economies around the world and the financial capabilities of the Somali diaspora. Sub-Saharan Africa is the worst affected region, with a decline of 12.5 percent in remittances through formal means (World Bank, May 2021). It is important to note that the data we present are those that households experience at home and thereby include formal and informal channels.

While the livelihood situation has not improved, assistance appears to be greatly reduced compared to July 2020. Comparing Wave 2 with Wave 1, the most prominent reductions in income are seen in the form of government assistance (78 percent versus 48 percent), nongovernmental organization (NGO) assistance (70 percent versus 59 percent), and nonfamily assistance (98 percent versus 66 percent). The numbers indicate that, as the effects of the pandemic prolong, there is less appetite and fewer resources to support households in their efforts to cope with the economic ramifications. This is particularly problematic given that most Somalis now experience reduction across all types of incomes.
6. ACCESS TO BASIC NECESSITIES AND SERVICES

FOOD STAPLES

The situation in terms of availability of food in the market has improved, compared to July 2020. 82 percent of Somali households that tried to buy food had access to all three key staple foods in Wave 2. Despite the improved access to food staples, the reduction in incomes and assistance has resulted in a rise in food insecurity scenarios including situations where hungry adults fail to eat (from 47 to 49 percent), adults go without food the entire day (from 34 to 37 percent), and households run out of food (from 64 to 68 percent), between Wave 1 and Wave 2.
The socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 are among some of the many drivers of acute food insecurity in Somalia. Deteriorating livelihoods and incomes have exacerbated food insecurity across the country. Other drivers of food insecurity include poor and erratic rainfall, flooding, desert locust infestations, and conflict (FEWS NET, February 4, 2021). Higher cost of living due to price increases of basic necessities, farm and business inputs has led to a significant proportion of Somali households lacking food and drinking water, with some households going without food the entire day or skipping some meals.

The FAO (January 2021) report on food security found that, “74.3 percent of households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, while 53.5 percent experienced severe food insecurity” (pg. 36). The good news is that the pandemic did not cause an increase in the price of locally produced food staples. The main price change observed was a temporary increase in imported rice prices during April and May 2020.

**HEALTH**

The reduction in household financial resources also affects their health. A greater proportion of households needed medical services in Wave 2 (61 percent) than in Wave 1 (51 percent). However, despite the higher demand for medical services, only 57 percent of households was able to access medical services in Wave 2. The majority of Somalis (83 percent) cite lack of money as the reason for their inability to access medical services, while another 10 percent quotes the unavailability of medical personnel.

![FIGURE 8: SHARE OF POPULATION NEEDING AND ABLE TO ACCESS MEDICAL SERVICES](image)

**EDUCATION**

Following the reopening of schools in August 2020, the share of the Somali population with access to schooling in Wave 2 has more than doubled compared to Wave 1. Unsurprisingly, those living in rural areas (61 percent), IDPs (65 percent) and nomads (65 percent) still have below average access to schooling compared with those from urban areas (76 percent).
7. SHOCKS AND COPING MECHANISMS

SHOCKS

Given the aforementioned data, it is perhaps unsurprising that more than half of the Somali population reported experiencing food price and economic shocks in both waves of the survey. Yet, fewer respondents reported facing food price shocks (65 percent versus 76 percent) and economic shocks (70 percent versus 75 percent) in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1. In this regard, IDPs and nomads were the most likely to have experienced an economic shock: 74 percent of IDPs and 78 percent of nomads compared to 64 percent in rural areas and 65 percent in urban areas.

On the other hand, respondents also reported an increase in shocks from natural disasters (from 46 percent in Wave 1 to 64 percent in Wave 2). This increase can also be attributed to flooding, erratic rainfall and desert locust infestations, which are the worst the country has experienced in 25 years (FAO 2021). Indeed, rural households were the most susceptible group to natural disaster shocks (83 percent) compared to 68 percent of nomads, 69 percent of IDPs, and 47 percent of urban households.

COPING MECHANISMS

Fewer households could rely on key coping mechanisms in Wave 2 compared to Wave 1. For example, assistance from family and friends declined to 45 percent from 46 percent and loans from family and friends decreased to 39 percent from 46 percent.

On the other hand, coping mechanism that was more heavily relied on in Wave 2 was humanitarian

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3 Economic shocks include: (i) job loss, (ii) nonfarm business closure, (iii) disruption of farming activities, (iv) lack of availability of business/farming inputs, (v) increased price of farming/business inputs, and (vi) reduced price of farming/business output. Food price shocks include: (i) increase in price of major food items. Natural disasters include: (i) flooding, (ii) drought, and (iii) locust invasion. Security threats include: (i) theft/looting of cash and other property and (ii) conflict or community violence.
The data gathered from SHFPS Wave 2 provide reasons for optimism and concern. On the positive side, Somalis are still highly aware of the preventative measures that they need to follow, are satisfied with the government’s response, and are keen to avail of free testing and vaccination. Moreover, the reopening of schools has meant that Somalis have witnessed a remarkable increase in educational access reaching almost pre-pandemic levels.

Nonetheless, the data reveal several concerning signs. First, preventive behavior is becoming less widespread, which means that another spike in COVID-19 rates may occur as Somalis grow restless with pandemic protocols. Second, while government support and humanitarian assistance have helped to bolster their resilience, Somalis are still highly susceptible to food insecurity, poverty, and poor health. Finally, the presence of concurrent shocks, primarily climate-related ones such as erratic rainfall and desert locust infestation, makes the situation even more challenging.
The SHFPS sample captures households with access to mobile phones. Mobile phone penetration rates in Somalia are high even among nomads and rural dwellers. According to the Somali Health and Demographic Survey, around 74 percent of households own mobile phones. Sixty-seven percent of rural dwellings and 59 percent of nomadic households own simple mobile telephones with access to FM radio.

However, despite high phone penetration rates across Somalia, reaching rural and nomadic respondents proved difficult. Relative to urban settings, phone penetration is lower for these households; lifestyle considerations and access to energy makes mobile phone usage irregular.

To ensure the representativeness of the distribution of Somali households by state and population type, each household observation was adjusted by a sampling weight. Two sets of weights were calculated. Panel weights were applied when variables appeared both in Wave 1 and in Wave 2, while cross-sectional weights were applied in the household profile section as well as for variables new to Wave 2.

The weighting procedure accounts for the potential selection bias generated in phone surveys. This is achieved using a Propensity Score Weighting (PSW) procedure to correct for the under-coverage of households that do not have access to a mobile phone. PSW allows the computation of weights based on households’ probability of being included in the phone survey. To calculate the PSW weights, we needed to pool our phone survey with a representative household survey: the SHFPS Wave 2.

The probability of being included in the phone survey is estimated based on selected variables which are common to the two surveys. After running the PSW, weights were assigned to all observations of our phone survey such that the observations with the lowest probability of being included in a phone survey are given more weight in the sample. After PSW, the ranking procedure has been conducted to render the sample representative at either the population type level or the state level.

- **Data collection period:** January 2021
- **Completed interviews:** 1,756 households (518 urban, 516 rural, 413 IDPs and 309 nomadic population)
- **Average duration of interview:** 32 minutes

### Demographics of Respondents

- **Area:** Banadir 108, South West 351, Hirshabelle 267, Jubaland 224, Galmudug 261, Puntland 173, Somaliland 372
- **Gender:** There is an equal representation of women and men.
- **Age:** The study participants in Wave 2 were aged between 18 years and 97 years with an average age of 38 years. The respondents are young as the majority (62 percent) are aged below 40 years while only 12 percent are aged over 60 years.
- **Household size:** varies between one and 25 members with an average membership of six persons.
- **Education:** The majority (60 percent) of respondents, most of whom are women (72 percent), has not complete primary school education. The remaining proportion of respondents comprises those who completed...
primary (11 percent), completed secondary school (7 percent) or attended tertiary institutions (14 percent), and completed Quranic school (8 percent).

REFERENCES


FSNAU and FEWS NET (February 2021). Up to 2.7 million people in Somalia face acute food insecurity Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes through mid-2021.


Somali Chamber of Commerce (draft as of March 2021). Coronavirus and the private sector in Somalia: Results from Round 2 of COVID-19 focused Enterprise Survey.

Old African man of Islamic religion pulling down his mask during the covid 19 epidemic.  

(Last accessed 15 November 2021)


