

BACKGROUND

This brief presents findings of the **fourth round of the Malawi High-Frequency Phone Survey on COVID-19 (HFPS COVID-19) conducted in September 2020**. In May 2020, the National Statistical Office (NSO), with support from the World Bank, launched the HFPS COVID-19; a monthly survey of a nationally representative sample of households previously interviewed as part of the Malawi Integrated Household Panel Survey to **monitor the economic impact of the pandemic and other shocks**. The first round (baseline) of the survey was conducted in May/June 2020, the second round was conducted between July 2-16, 2020, the third round between August 12-27, 2020, and the fourth round between September 14-29, 2020.

KNOWLEDGE, BEHAVIOR AND CONCERNS OF COVID-19 TRANSMISSION

In the fourth round of the survey, respondents reported a significantly lower level of concern over COVID-19. 84% of respondents are **very worried or somewhat worried** about themselves or their immediate family member(s) becoming **seriously ill from COVID-19** in comparison to 93% in Rounds 2 and 3, and 94% in Round 1. About 95% of respondents consider this crisis as a **substantial or moderate threat** to their **household's finance** and this has

stayed consistent across Rounds but in Round 4 a significant number of respondents reduced from reporting it was a substantial threat to only a moderate threat.

In Round 4, **6% of respondents that experienced any of the common COVID-19 symptoms called the Government Provided Toll Free Number** or any other line designated by the Ministry, this is an increase from 2% reported in Round 3.

Figure 1. Degree of worry about self/immediate family becoming seriously ill from COVID-19

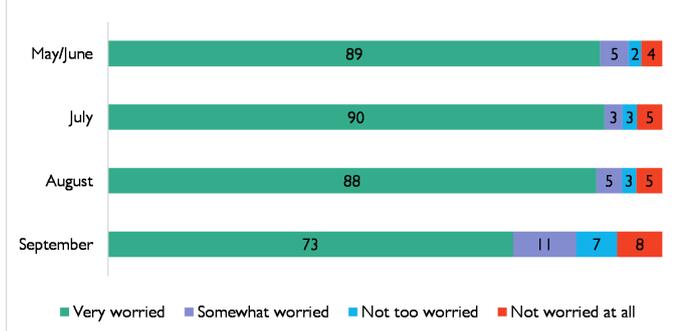
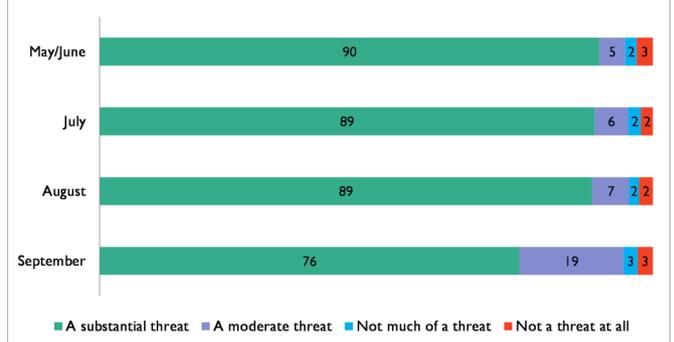


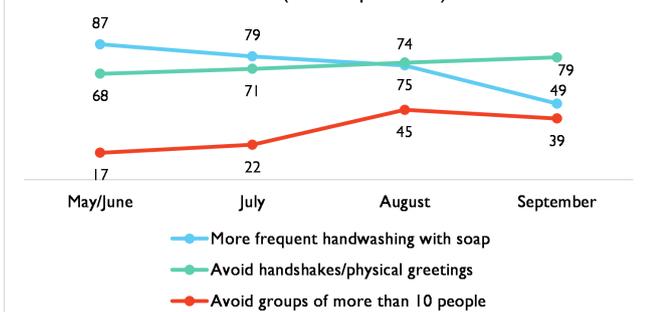
Figure 2. Degree of perception of threat to household finances caused by COVID-19



In Round 4, there is a drastic drop in the prevalence of respondents **washing hands with soap** frequently from 75% in Round 3 to around 49% in Round 4.

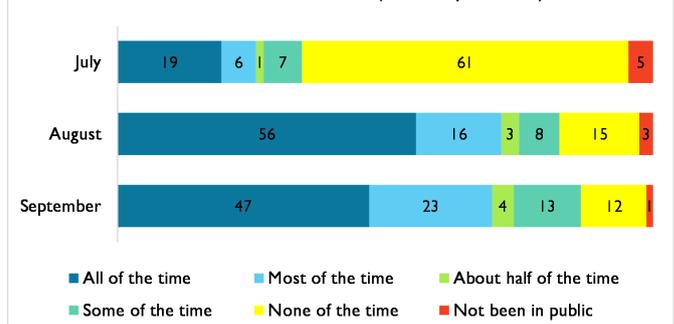
However, **more respondents are practicing the avoidance of handshakes/physical greetings**, 74% in Round 3 to 79% in Round 4. This is promising especially given cultural practices especially in rural areas. Over time, the least adopted preventive measure against COVID-19 remains **avoiding of groups of people** which has consistently stayed below 50% across rounds as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Prevalence of Safe Practices Across Survey Rounds (% of respondents)



In the 7 days leading to the interview, although only **47% of respondents wore a mask all of the time** as shown in Figure 4, this is a decrease in mask wearing between August and September. However, there is also a decrease in respondents reporting that they **never wear a mask**, 12% in September in comparison to 15% in August. Overall, the trends suggest that Malawians are now putting on masks as a preventive measure against COVID-19 but are not strict in regard to how often they wear the masks whenever they go out in public as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Prevalence of Wearing a Mask Last 7 Days Across Rounds 2, 3, and 4 (% of respondents)



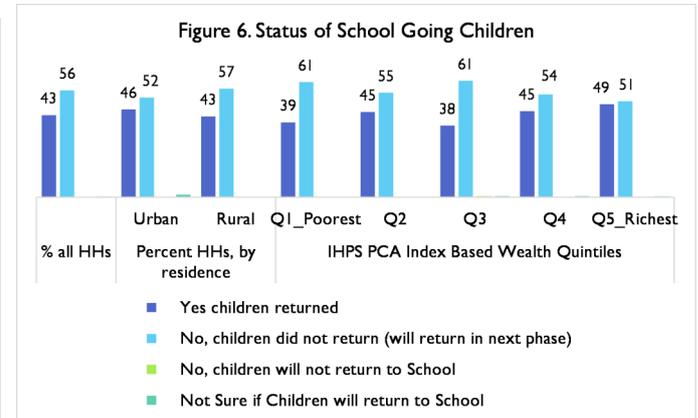
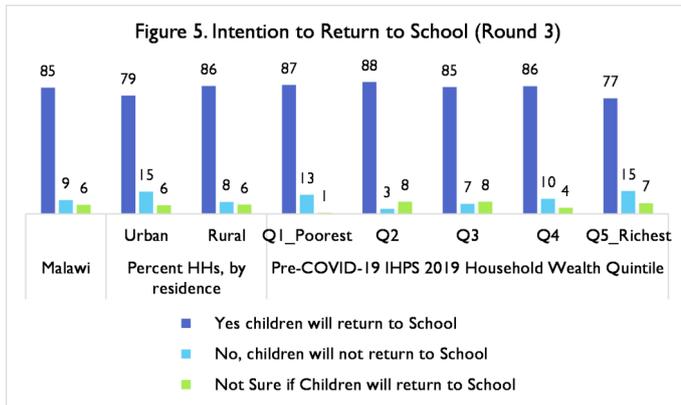


EDUCATION

Schools across Malawi reopened for the new school year in September, however the government only allowed candidate classes to resume in-person studies while the other classes were scheduled to reopen in October. In Round 3 (August), the survey asked respondents about their intention for their children to return to school. **85% of respondents indicated that their children would return to school**, 9% re-

ported that they would not, and 6% remained unsure as shown in Figure 5.

In Round 4 (September), 43% of respondents indicated that their children **had returned to school**, 56% indicated that their children **would return in another phase of the school opening**. Less than 1% indicated that their children **would not return to school or were uncertain**.

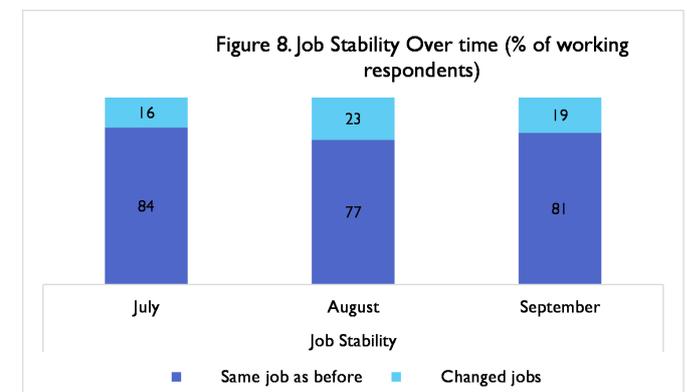
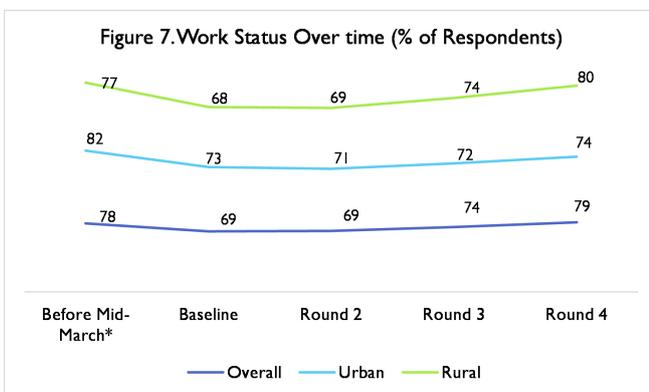


EMPLOYMENT

Employment decreased during the first months of the pandemic, but the proportion of working population is similar to the pre-COVID levels. Overall, the proportion of respondents working has continued to rise and is slightly higher than the proportion of people who were working in mid-March at the time of the COVID-19 outbreak. Over 79% of respondents reported that they were working in September in comparison to approximately 74% in August, 70% in July and 69% in May/June. In September, while the share of the working population has increased, it has stagnated in urban areas where 75% were working last week compared to 82% before the pandemic. The proportion of the working population has been steadily improving across the last 4 rounds. The increase in the rural areas could be attributed to the crop farming activities in the dry season that rural households might be engaged in.

While there are more people working, there is evidence that people have changed jobs which could suggest volatility in the job market. Between August and September about 19% respondents that were working changed jobs, between July and August about 23% respondents changed jobs, between July and May/June around 16% of workers changed jobs.

The proportions of wage workers reporting the ability to work as usual at either their place of employment or remotely has increased. In September, 92% of wage workers were able to work as usual in the last week, in comparison with the 80% reported in between July and May.



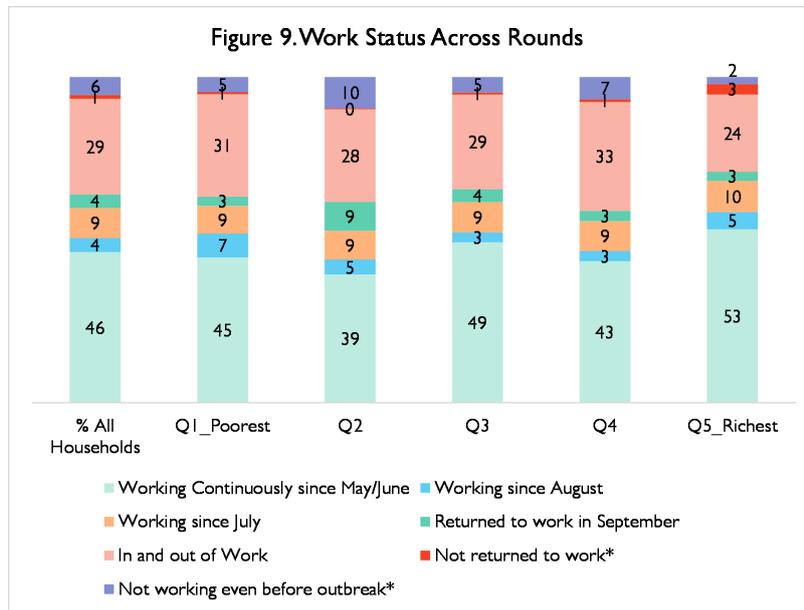
Note: In the figure it is assumed that all those who were working at baseline were also working before mid-March.



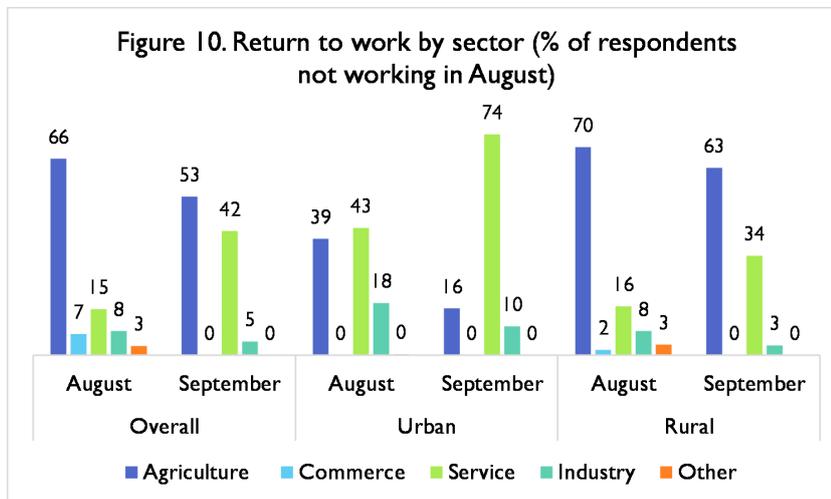


Even though the overall share of respondents who are working is improving, there continues to be some evidence of people moving in and out of work.

About 46% of respondents have been **working continuously since the COVID-19 outbreak**. 4% of respondents started working between August and September, 9% started working between July and August and 4% just returned to work. 29% have not returned to work since the outbreak, 1% were not working even before the outbreak and 6% have been in and out of work.



As shown in Figure 10, the service sector experienced the largest recovery in the share of respondents returning to work; 15% to 42% in August and September respectively. Agriculture remains the biggest sector Malawian households are employed in and while the trends show an overall drop, it is in line with the pre COVID-19 period where not many households engage in crop farming during the dry season.



INCOME CHANGES AND LIVELIHOOD SOURCES

Most of the households reported to experience an income drop. 69% of respondents reported that their household's total income decreased over the last one month, and this decrease was evident across the three main sources of income (agriculture, non-farm enterprises, and wage employment). The sources of income differ across households, 42% of reported income is from **farming, livestock or fishing**, 23% from **non-farm family business**

and 18% from **wage employment of household members**. However, the share of households experiencing a decline in income was highest for **non-farm family business activities at 67% of households**, compared to **60% for agriculture** (household farming, livestock or fishing), and **48% for wage employment**, as shown in Figure 12.





Figure 11. Sources of livelihood (% of reported sources)

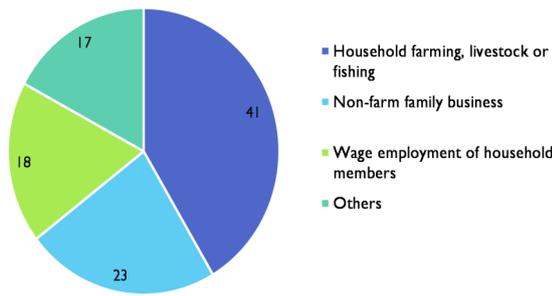
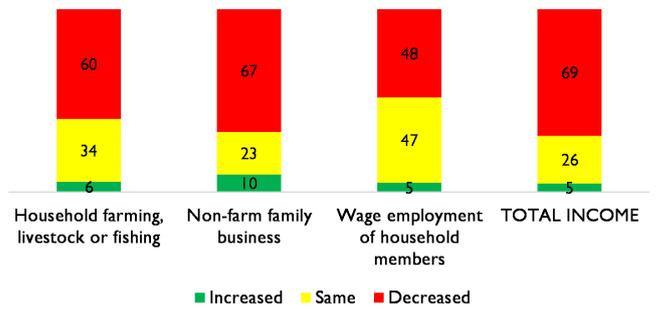


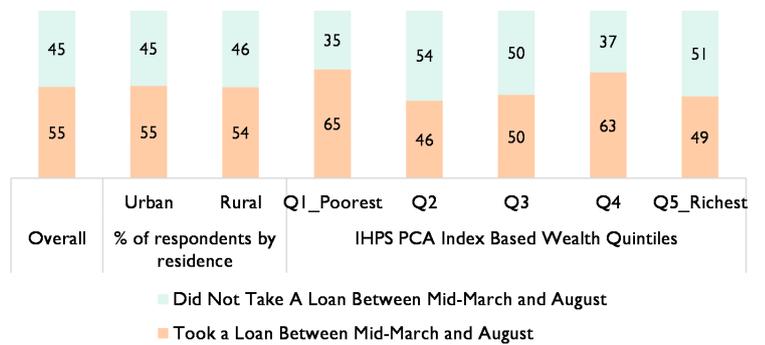
Figure 12. Change in income by source compared to August 2020 (% of households with income from source)



CREDIT

Between the mid-march (the outbreak of COVID-19) and August, 40% of all respondents needed to access credit; of these, 55% were able to get it and 45% of could not get it. This could suggest that much of the population remained vulnerable since they could not fulfill their obligations. Respondents in urban areas were just as likely as respondents in rural areas to fail to acquire credit if they needed it.

Figure 13. Incidence of Respondents that were able to get a loan between Mid-March and August (% of Respondents that needed credit)



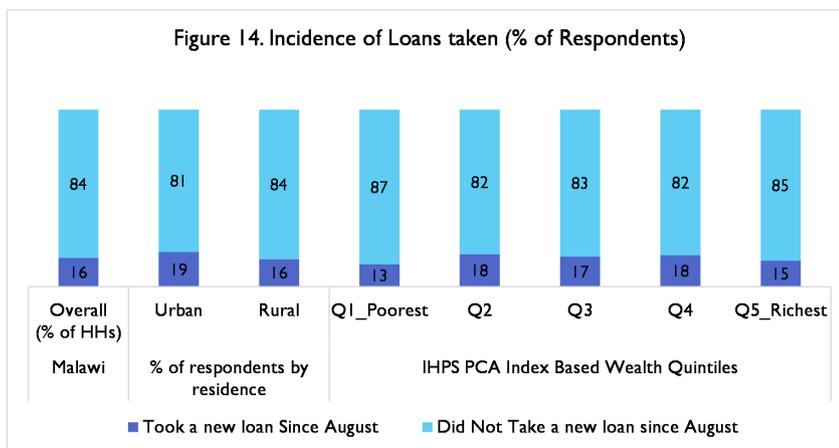
In Round 3, the survey asked respondents if they needed to borrow money or take a loan since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak in mid-March. **40% of households responded affirmatively.**

still had outstanding loans taken before the COVID-19 Outbreak.

In Round 4, **16% of households reported that they took a new loan since Round 3** and, of these, about 34%

Of the 84% that did not take a new loan since August, about 23% still have outstanding loans taken before the COVID-19 outbreak as shown in Figure 14.

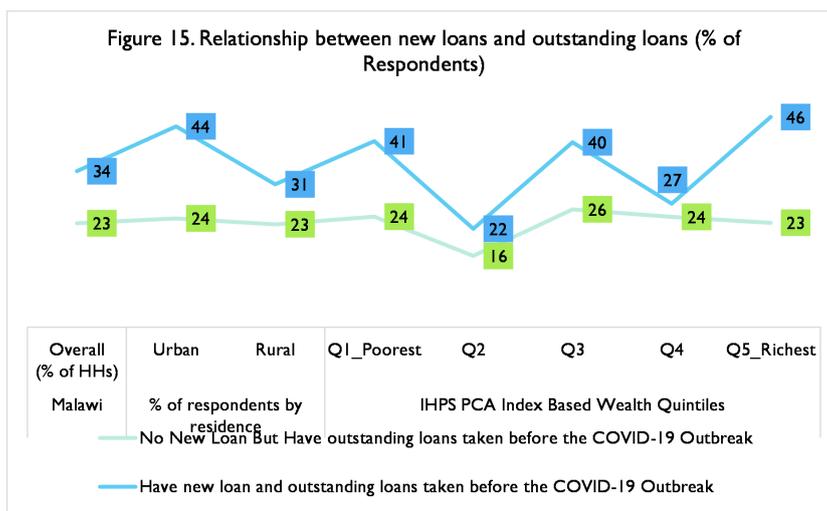
Figure 14. Incidence of Loans taken (% of Respondents)



Poorer households were just as likely as richer households to still have outstanding loans taken before the start of the pandemic. The same relationship is observed for newer loans taken since August.

This shows that the pandemic has impacted the finances (and livelihoods) of households across the whole income distribution, and not only the most vulnerable.

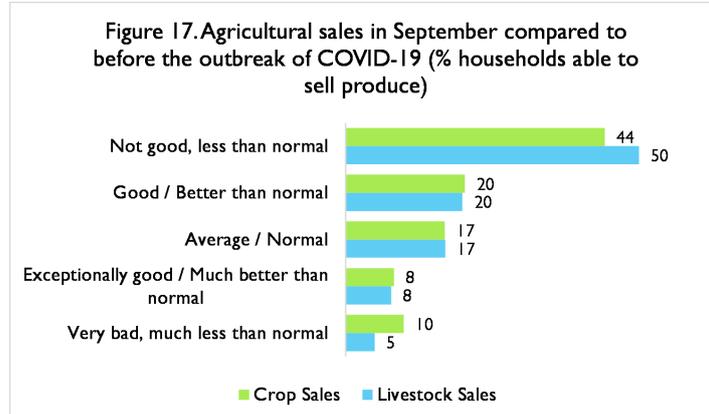
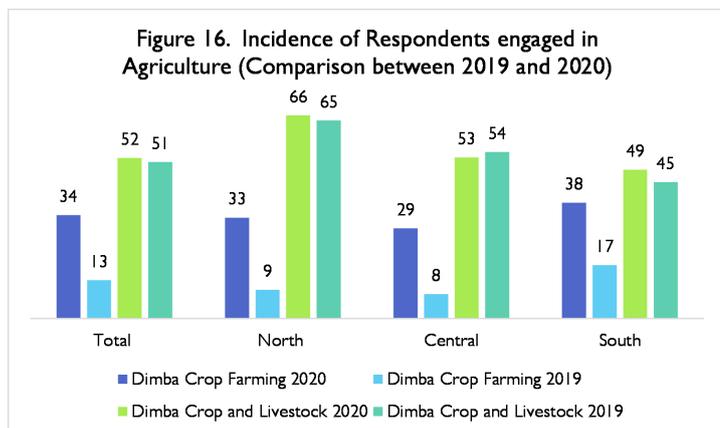




AGRICULTURE

Overall the proportion of households that engaged in crop farming increased from 13 percent in 2019 Dimba season to 34 percent in 2020 Dimba season. The highest increase in the proportion of households engaged in farming was in North(24%), Central(21%) and South(21%) as shown in Figure 16. Also, the proportion of non agricultural households during the Dimba season declined from 44 percent in 2019 Dimba season to 35 percent in 2020 Dimba season. The decline in non agricultural households was highest in South (12), Central(8%), and North (4%). The proportion of livestock keeping households overall increased by one percent suggesting that COVID-19 affected cropping farming most

compared to livestock. The proportion of livestock keeping households increased in South and North but declined in Central Malawi. **Agricultural households were also asked if COVID 19 lead to better, normal or less than normal sales of crop and livestock.** Most of the crop and livestock households report COVID 19 to have led to the less than normal sales in crops and livestock. Livestock sales were affected most compared to crop sales. Over 50% and 44% for livestock and crops, respectively as shown in figure 17.



Data Notes: Malawi High-Frequency Phone Survey COVID-19 (HFPS COVID-19) is implemented by the National Statistical Office (NSO) on a monthly basis during the period of May 2020 and June 2021. The survey is part of a World Bank-supported global effort to support countries in their data collection efforts to monitor the impacts of COVID-19. The financing for data collection and technical assistance in support of the Malawi HFPS COVID-19 is provided by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank. The technical assistance to the Malawi HFPS COVID-19 is provided by a World Bank team composed of staff from the Development Data Group—Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) program and the Poverty and Equity Global Practice. In Round 1, 2,337 households that had been previously interviewed during the 2019 round of the Integrated Household Panel Survey (IHPS) were contacted, and 1,729 households were successfully interviewed, with the goal of re-interviewing them in the subsequent monthly HFPS COVID-19 rounds. 1,646 of these households were successfully interviewed in Round 2, 1,624 in Round 3 and 1,618 in Round 4. The 2019 IHPS data are representative at the national- and urban/rural-levels and phone survey weights were calculated (i) to counteract selection bias associated with not being able to call IHPS households without phone numbers, and (ii) to mitigate against non-response bias associated with not being able to interview all target IHPS households with phone numbers. For further details on the data, please visit <https://www.worldbank.org/lsmc-covid19> and email enquiries@statistics.gov.mw.