

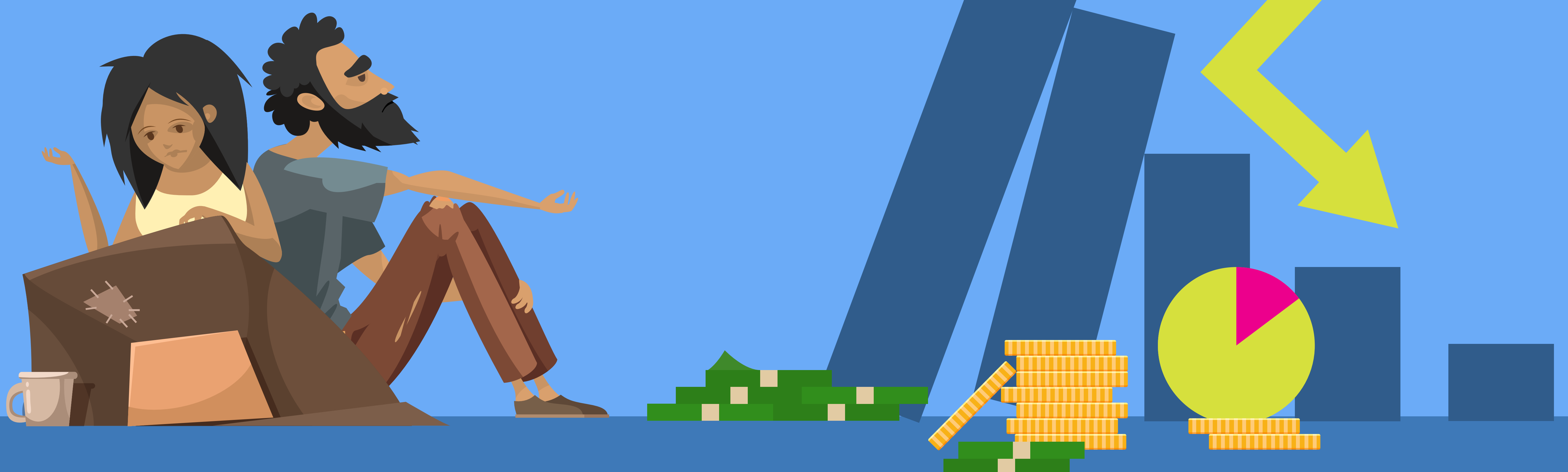


Rapid perception survey on

COVID19 Awareness and Economic Impact

BRAC

April, 2020



Executive summary

BRAC conducted this rapid perception survey to get an overall sense of the general awareness level among the less-economically fortunate section of the population and to get a snapshot of their economic distress. BRAC staff from Microfinance, Urban Development Programme, and Partnership Strengthening Unit have collected over **3,000** filled-in questionnaires purely based on convenience. After cleaning, we took **2,675** responses for this analysis. Though all districts of Bangladesh were covered, no strict sampling frame was followed.

Almost all respondents (99.6%) said that they are aware of the disease, and two-thirds (66%) first learned about the virus through television.

The level of understanding varied - more than half (**56%**) of the respondents in urban areas said they had no idea about how to prevent the spread of the disease. Two-thirds (**65%**) of respondents in rural areas, and some of the respondents in urban areas, had doubts about treatment options.

Decentralisation of testing and treatment may reduce such concerns in rural areas, while awareness campaigns for urban inhabitants should be strengthened. Awareness campaigns should focus more on treatment and management, rather than the disease itself, dispelling misconceptions and misgivings about treatment options.

The economic impact seems to have affected almost all respondents (93%).

Wage labourers in the non-agricultural sector reported the most significant loss (**77%**) compared to those in the agricultural sector (**65%**). **14%** of total respondents reported having no food in their homes. In urban areas, the rate was **18%**. Overall, **29%** reported having **1-3 days** worth of food in their homes.

It is critical to start food assistance as quickly as possible to avoid a humanitarian disaster that could potentially force people to ignore health advice and exacerbate the outbreak. People who have returned to their villages are not enrolled in any social safety net programmes, and may be missed through traditional distribution mechanisms.

The net income loss of those who are living in urban areas is less (69%) than those now in rural areas (80%).

The mass migration of people from urban to rural areas because of sudden unemployment partially explains the higher impact in rural areas. The excess supply of returnee labourers has significantly lowered the wage rates. Prices of agricultural products, mostly milk and dairy products, vegetables and fruits, have plummeted. Additionally, closure of rural businesses, weekly haats (open marketplaces) and big bazaars have also had a negative impact on rural communities.



Special attention is required to keep the agricultural value chain from stalling. The harvest of Boro rice (a special type of rice cultivation on residual or stored water in low-lying areas) will start in two weeks in some parts of Bangladesh and continue till the end of May. An injection of liquidity may be required to stabilise demand. Rural businesses, which are mostly unbanked, need to have access to finance to restart their businesses. The Honourable Prime Minister has assured subsidised bank credit for these businesses, but we may have to think of out-of-the-box solutions to bridge the gap between the banks and micro-enterprises.

About two-thirds (68%) of the respondents generally support the declaration of a public holiday.

A slightly lesser proportion (64%) are satisfied with the government's overall response so far to contain the spread of the disease. Only **one in 25** respondents (4%) have received the emergency relief needed to survive the shock. Around half of the respondents (47%) think food rations would be better than cash-based support from the government.

It is encouraging to see that there is general appreciation for government measures, which will help the government to ensure the control which will be crucial in tackling the crisis.

There is general awareness that the pandemic may be prolonged by as many as 22 days. More than a third (36%) of the respondents do not have a specific plan on how to cope.

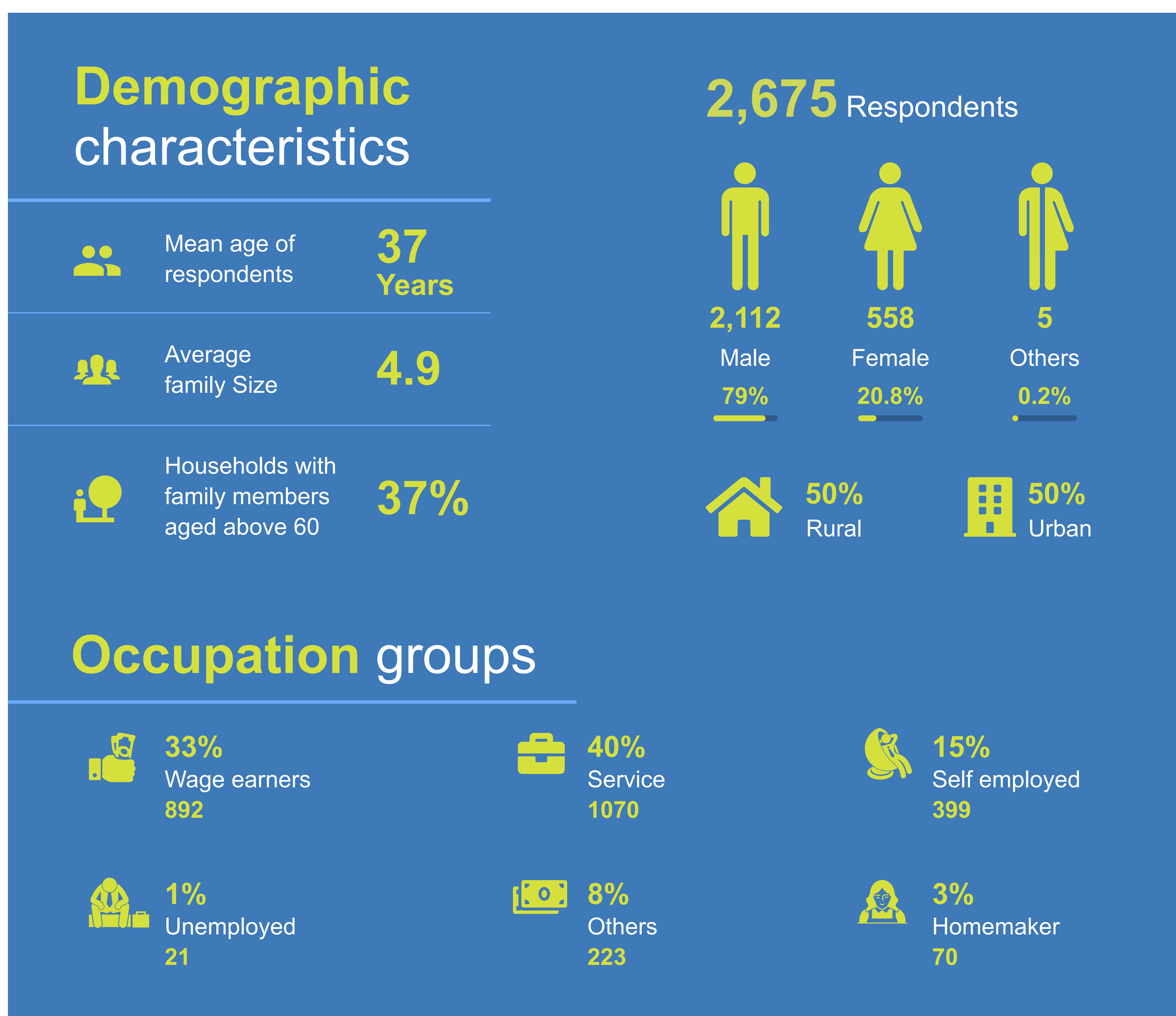
There is a general expectation among one-fourth of the respondents (23%) that public relief will be available. Approximately one-fifth of respondents plan to rely on credit facilities.

It is encouraging to see that people are generally ready to obey measures and stay inside for a longer period. If we can quickly ensure supply of food and essentials during 'lockdown', communities may be willing to identify and put peer pressure on violators.



Introduction

The rapid perception survey was conducted by BRAC staff in **64 districts** between **March 31 to April 5, 2020** among mostly low-income population. The total number of responses used for this report is **2,675**. The survey followed a convenience sampling method as our staff interviewed random people on the streets and houses. Hence, the survey is not strictly representative but does reflect a general picture of the economic hardship of common male/female. Please see the demographic characteristics of the respondents.



It should be noted here that the respondents from the rural areas include people who have recently returned to their villages after the government declared a public holiday- so represent a mixture of people who usually reside in the town and the locals.



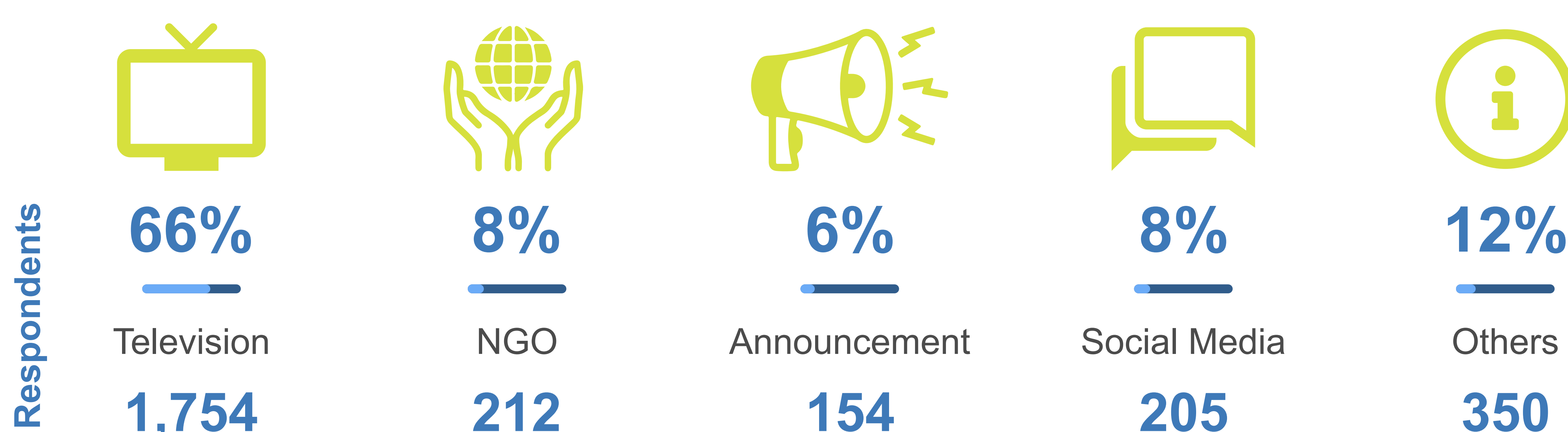
Awareness of the disease

99.6% of the respondents have heard about the disease, and most (**66%**) have first heard about it from television.

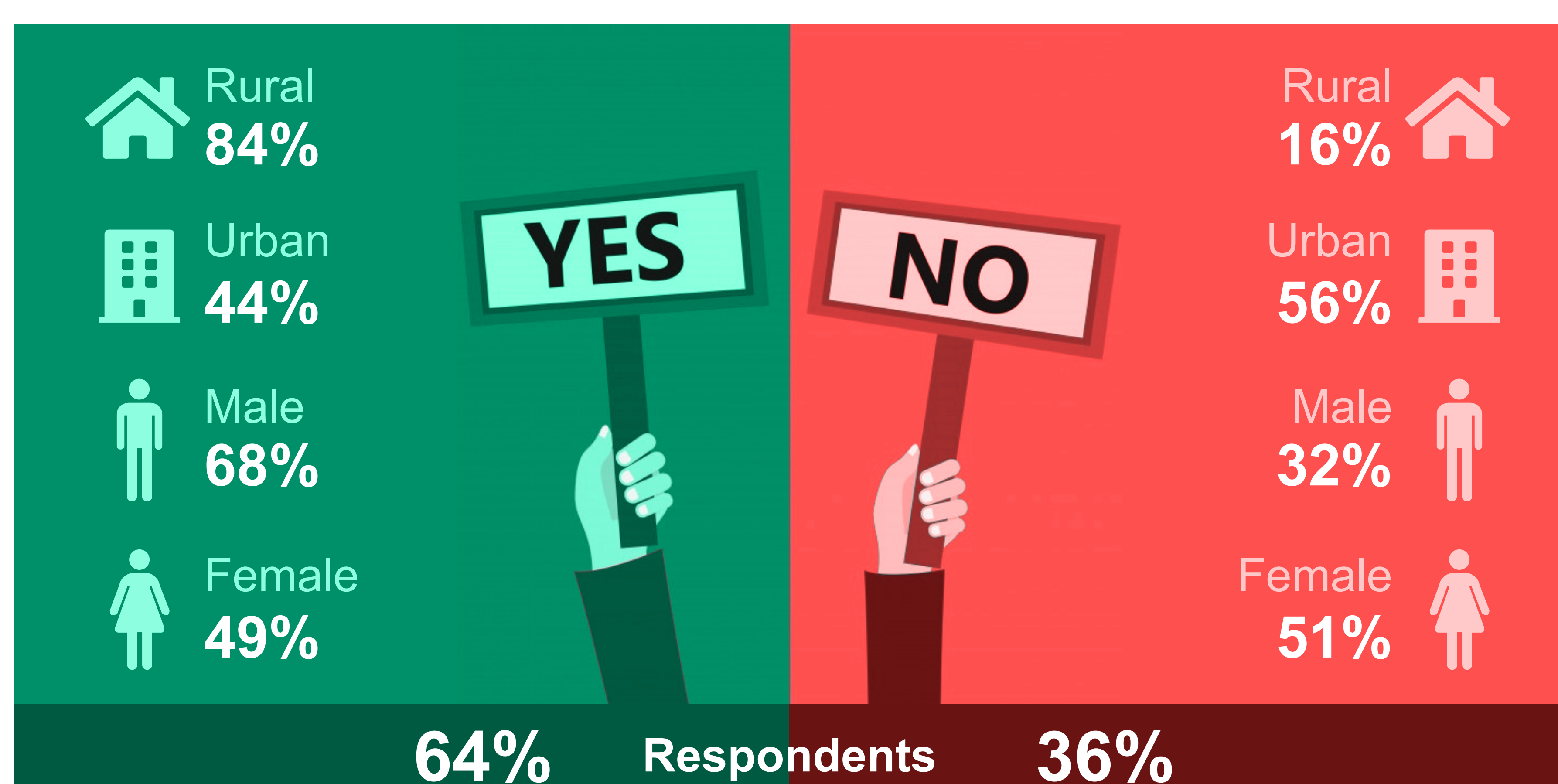
“Do you know about Corona?”



“Where did you first hear about it?”



“Do you know how to prevent this Corona?”



However, overall **36%** of the respondents (**16%** in rural areas and **56%** in urban) have no idea about how to prevent getting infected with the virus. Male (**68%**) are more aware than female (**49%**).



“What is your perception regarding the treatment of Corona?”

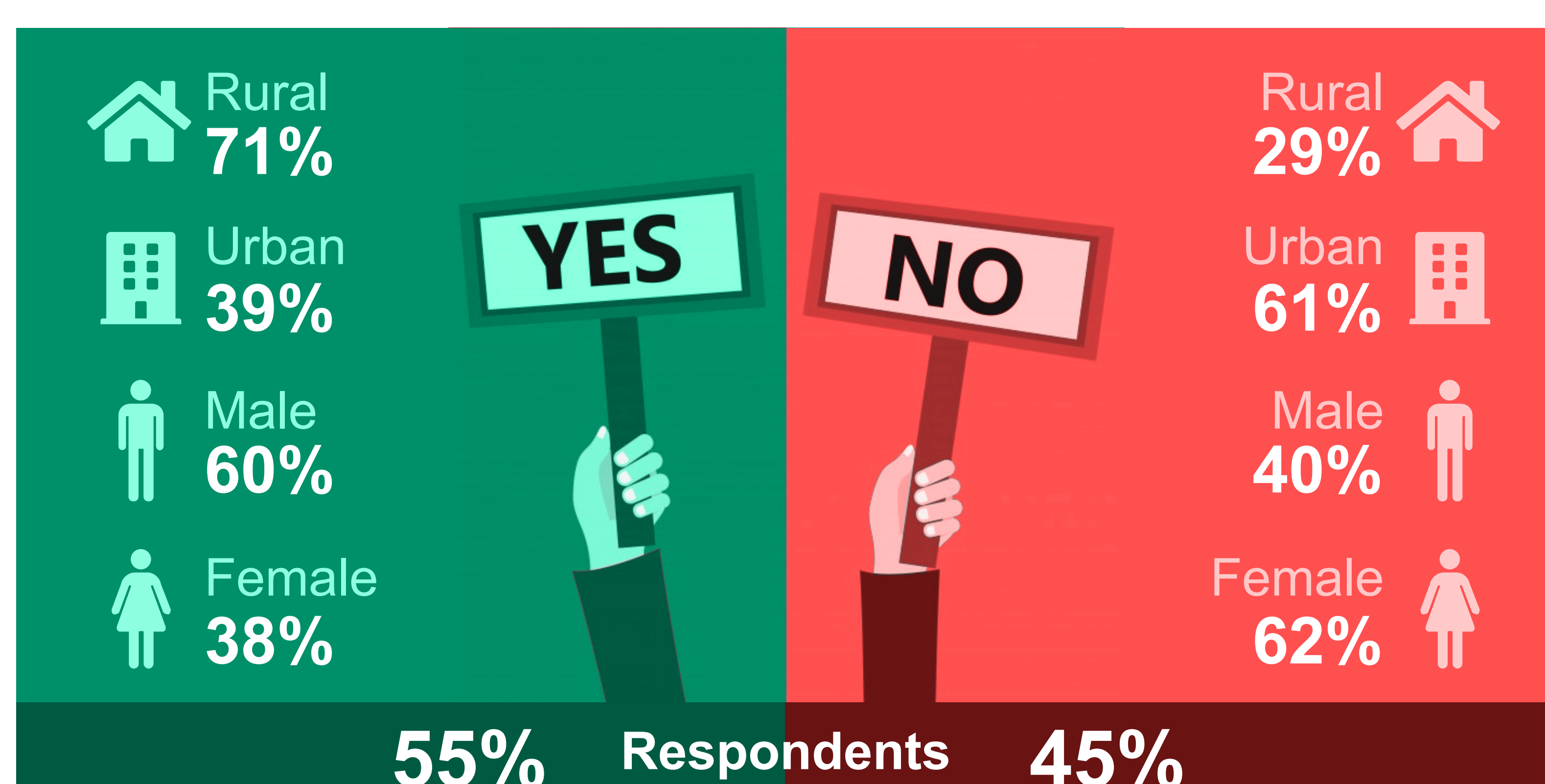
Only **40%** of the respondents (**35% in rural**) mentioned isolation/quarantine as a possible treatment option. Rest had various degrees of misinformation including **5.2%** (**3.8% in rural, 6.6% in urban**) thought that infection means certain death and **2.1%** (**1.7% in rural; 2.5% in urban**) believed that the government detains the infected.



Perception regarding treatment



“Do you know where to contact if you get infected?”



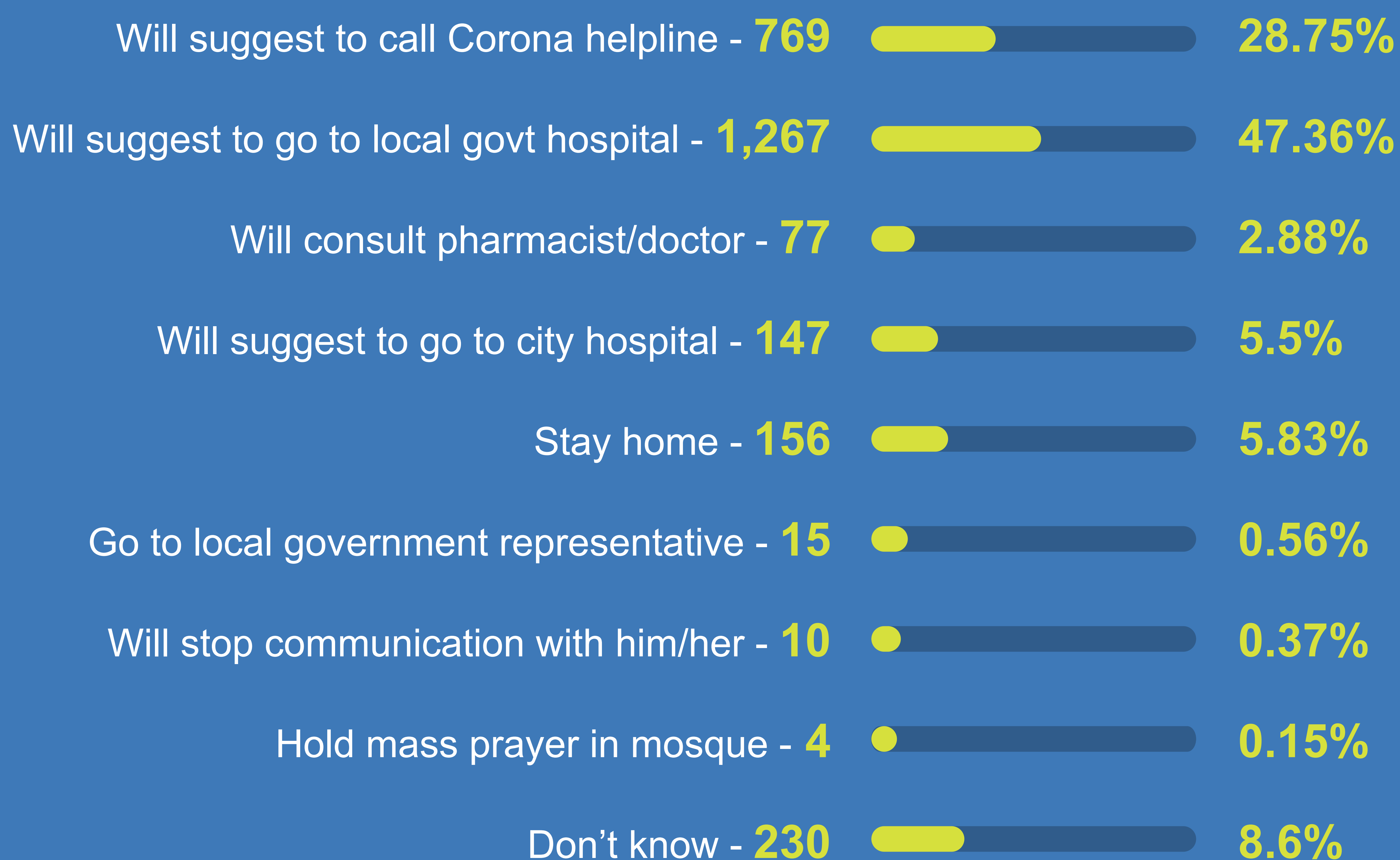
Nationwide **55%** of the respondents have an idea about where to go or whom to contact if the virus infected them. The number of respondents who had no idea are mostly residing in the urban areas (**61% urban areas vs 28% in rural areas**). Men are more informed (**60%**) about whom to contact or where to do if one gets infected by coronavirus compared to women (**38%**).

“Do you think treatments are available in the government hospitals?”



48% of the respondents (**50% in Rural areas**) think that government hospitals do not treat COVID19 patients. When asked, what would they suggest to his/her neighbour who shows COVID19 symptoms (fever, cough, breathing problem), **53%** respondent said that they would recommend them to go to a city hospital/local public hospital. **29%** respondent (**second highest**) would suggest their neighbour to call the COVID19 helpline, while **9%** had no idea what to suggest.

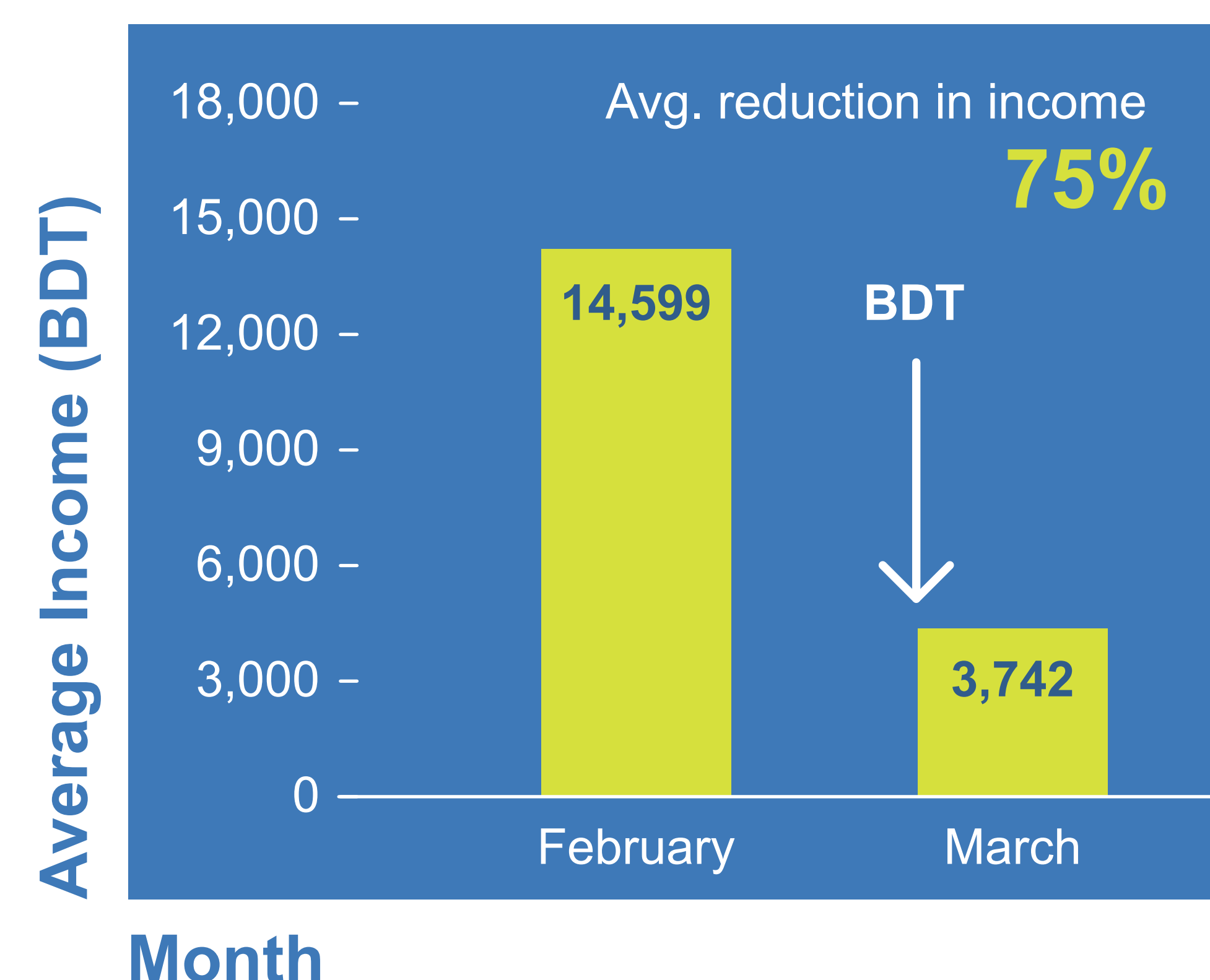
“What will you suggest to your neighbour who exhibits symptoms of Corona virus infection?”



Impact on income and food security

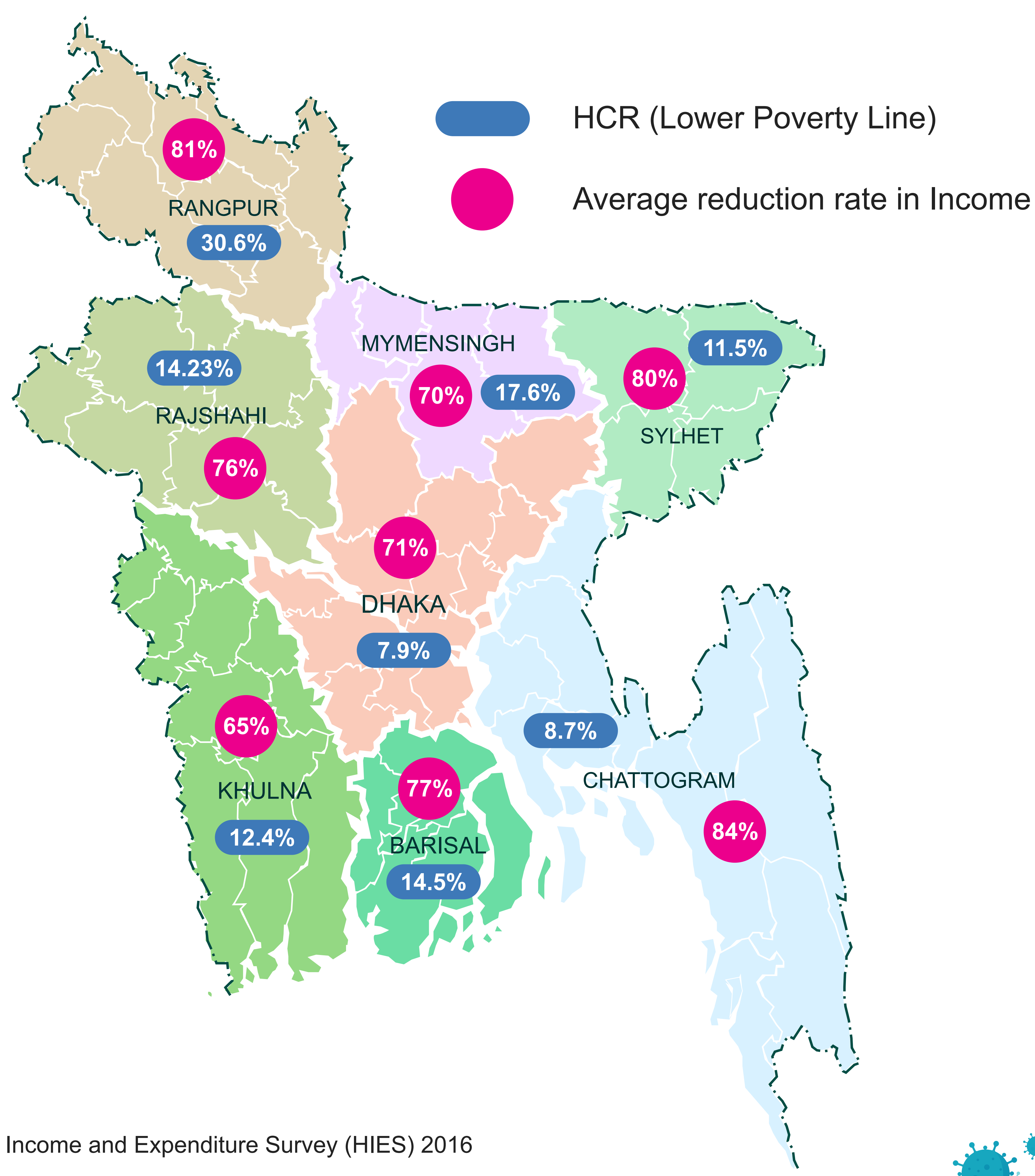
“What was your income in the previous and current month?”

The average household income of the **2,675** respondents was **BDT 14,599** before the COVID19 epidemic. Of them, **93%** of the respondents reported a decline in income due to the outbreak. During March 2020, their average income stood at **BDT 3,742**, which represents an average **75%** decline from their family income of last month.



Change in income by division

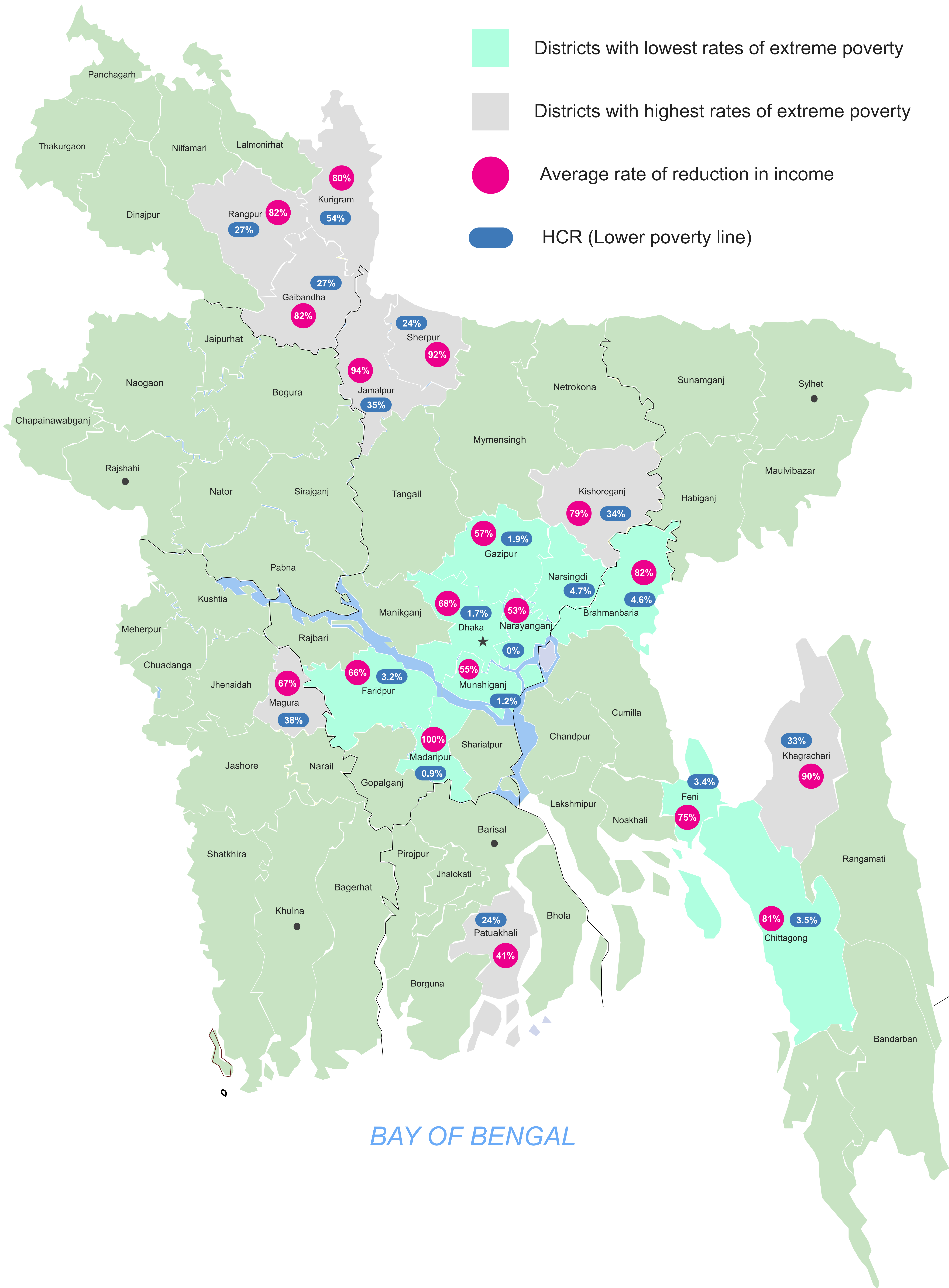
People in Chattogram (**84%**), Rangpur (**81%**) and Sylhet (**80%**) division reported higher decline in income. Among the districts, Madaripur (**100%**), Jamalpur (**94%**), Sherpur (**92%**), Kharachori (**90%**), Brahmanbaria (**82%**), and Chattogram (**81%**) reported higher loss of income. Average income reduction in top five extreme poor districts (with highest rates of extreme poverty reported in HIES 2016) is **84%**, whereas the bottom five districts (with lowest rates of extreme poverty) had **67%** income reduction on average.



*Source: Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016



Change in income by districts



BAY OF BENGAL

*Source: Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016

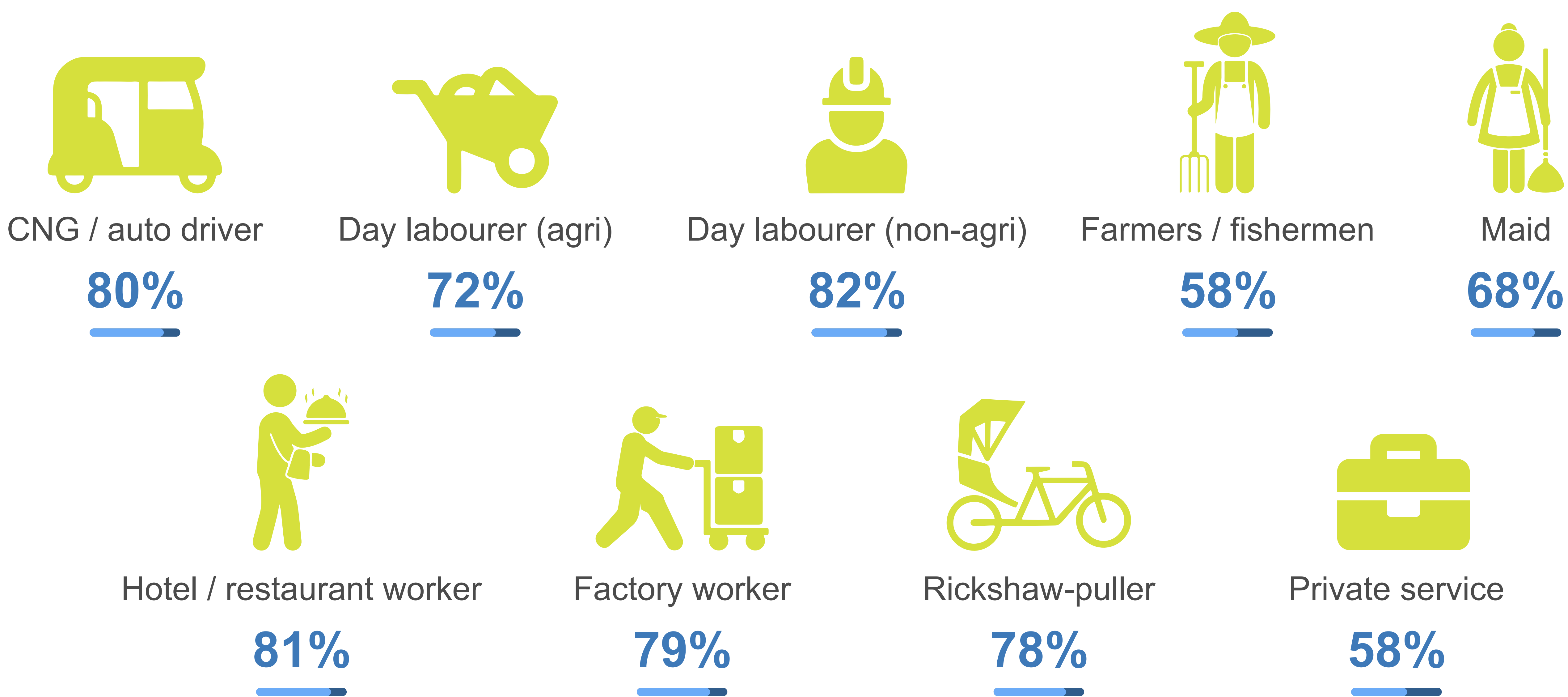


“What have you been doing since the public holiday?”



Due to the public holiday/blockades and reduced economic activities, around three-quarter (72%) of the respondents (79.5% rural) reported job-loss or reduced work opportunities. 8% of the respondents, who are still employed, have not received their payment.

Average reduction in income by occupation

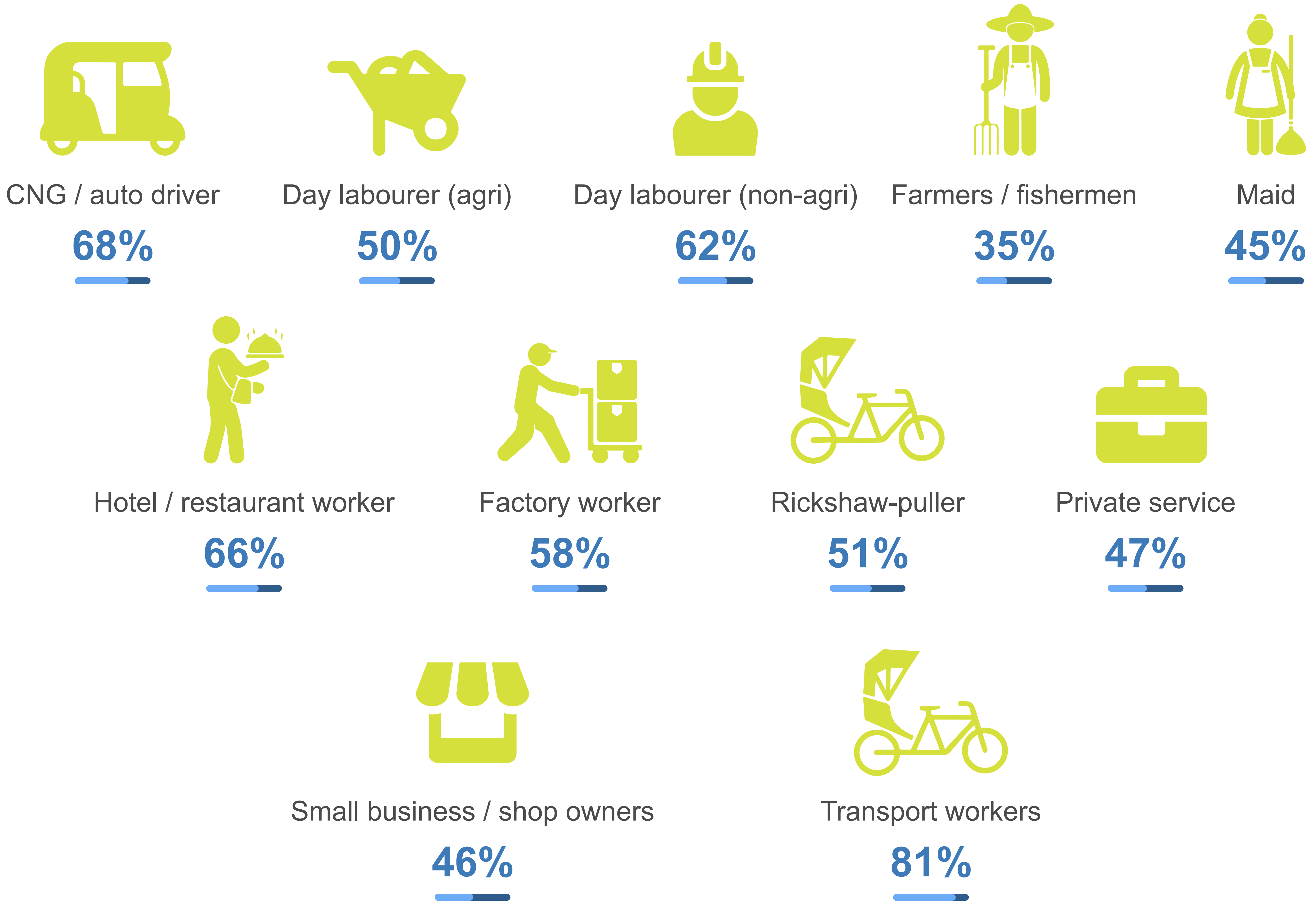


Those who were engaged in non-agricultural activities experienced 77% loss of income, while people involved in agriculture experienced a loss of 65%. 54% of respondents reported their income has reduced to zero in the current month.



This percentage is even higher among rural people (66%). 51% of rickshaw pullers, 58% factory workers, 66% hotel/restaurant workers, and 62% day labourers in non-agricultural sectors reported their incomes reduced to zero in the current month.

Respondents' income reduced to zero



The net income loss of those who are living in urban areas are less (69%) than those who are now in rural areas (80%). The mass migration of jobless urbanites to the rural regions partially explains the higher impact in rural areas. The excess supply of returnee labourers also pushed the wage rate down significantly. Prices of agricultural products, mostly milk and milk products, vegetables and fruits, have plummeted. Besides, closure of rural business, weekly haats and big bazaars also caused woes to the rural people.

Income group (BDT)	Average reduction in income			No. of sample households
Below 10,000	68%	Rural	76%	724
		Urban	66%	
10,000 - 24,999	78%	Rural	82%	1,649
		Urban	72%	
25,000 and above	70%	Rural	73%	299
		Urban	61%	
Total	75%	Rural	80%	1,331
		Urban	69%	



The net impact of this reduction of income is catastrophic for the community surveyed. Before the pandemic started, the per capita income of **24%** of the respondents were below the national lower poverty line, and **35%** were below the national upper poverty line. Following the loss of income, the same share has increased to **84%** and **89%** respectively. That is, the incidence of extreme poverty has risen by **60** percentage points and poverty by **54** percentage points among the respondents.

Incidence of poverty

Per capita income of respondents	Based on the income of the previous month	Based on the income of the current month (March 2020)
Below lower poverty line	633  24%	2,251  84%
Below Upper poverty line	946  35%	2,368  89%

“How many days’ food do you have reserved at home?”

Days	Rural	Urban	Total Avg.
0 Days	10%	18%	14%
1-3 Days	21%	37%	29%

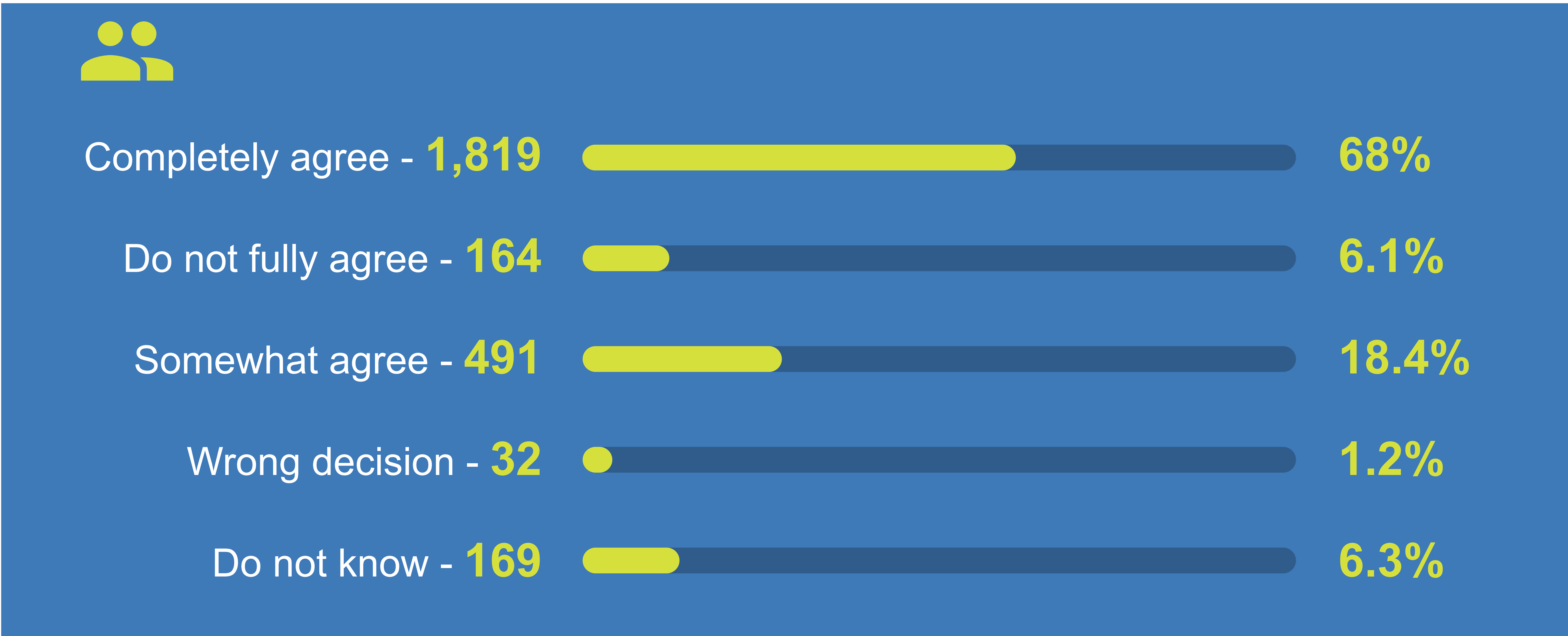
On an average, people have eight days’ food stored at home. **14%** have no food reserved at home, while **29%** have **1-3 days’** food reserved (**21% rural, 37% urban**). Comparatively, a higher percentage of people (**18%**) living in urban areas have no food items stored.



Reaction on the public response

68% of the people supported the government measure, that is, declaration of the public holiday to prevent the spread of COVID19. Only about 7% disagreed.

“Do you agree with the government’s decision of declaring public holiday / leave?”



“For how many days you think the public holidays to prevent Corona transmission will be extended?”

There is a general agreement among the respondents that the government may increase the public holiday by on an average of 22 days. Though there are differences of opinion but the majority (64%) respondents believed that the holiday might increase by more than 14 days.

Days	Respondents	Percentage
0-14	965	36%
15-30	1,457	55%
More Than 30	253	9%

“Do you think the government’s initiatives to prevent Corona are adequate?”



“Are you receiving any support from the government?”

Majority (**64%**) of the respondents felt that the government is doing enough to tackle the epidemic, though **31%** in rural areas and **40%** of respondents in urban areas disagreed. However, only **4%** of the respondents, almost exclusively in urban areas, have received any emergency relief support as of **5 April 2020**.



“What else can the government do?”



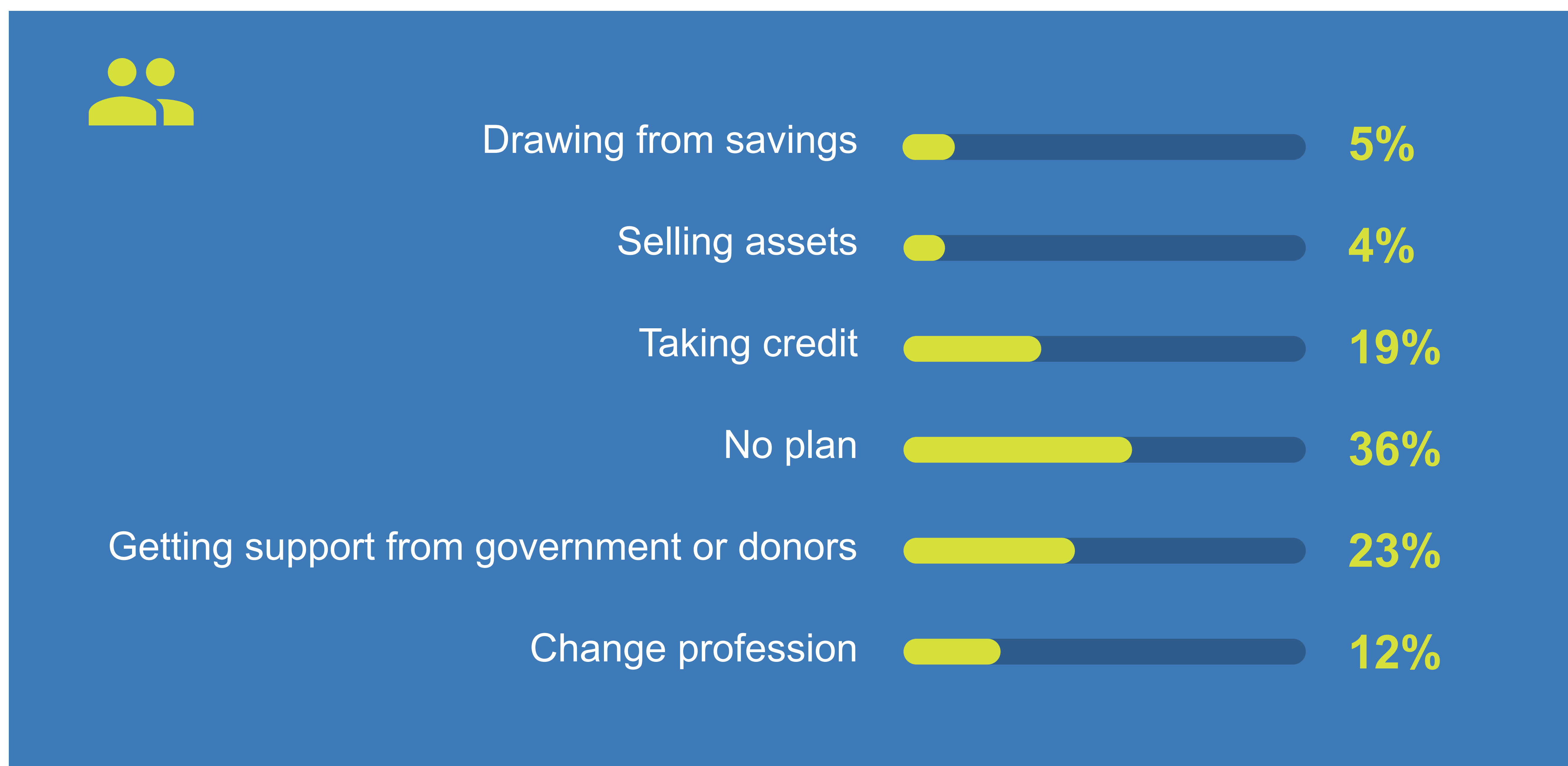
When asked about the best way the government can support the people in need, **47%** of the respondents preferred food, while **20%** (19% in rural, 20% in urban) wanted cash support. Rural respondents are more interested in receiving food (50% in rural, 44% in urban) support.



Coping mechanism

A high percentage of the respondents (**36%**) do not know how they may cope with the impending economic crisis and loss of jobs/income.

“What is your future plan if this situation continues?”



23% of the total respondents (**38% among women**) hope that the government will support them in case the disaster is prolonged. Urban residents are more hopeful about government support than the rural inhabitants (**27% vs 20%**). **19%** of respondents are planning to take some credit to support the prolonged crisis.



Recommendations

It is vital that the awareness campaigns now focus more on disease management and treatment options. **TV and social media campaigns and informative shows can increase awareness about how to prevent the spread and help reduce misgivings about the treatment options.**

We need to be able to address the debate over prioritising live and livelihood comprehensively. If the livelihood needs are not addressed, it will be impossible to restrain people in their homes; which in turn will defeat the live-saving strategy. Hence, to enforce the social distancing regime, the system should be in place quickly to ensure that the people have alternative access to food and other necessities. **Notably, the food relief should be expanded immediately to all affected people.**

People who have returned to village areas are not enrolled in any social safety net programmes. Hence, traditional distribution mechanism may miss these people. New lists and preferably new delivery mechanisms should be in place for all people.

Special attention is needed to keep the agricultural value chain from stalling. Plummeting prices of agricultural products and costly transportation cost can increase rural poverty and create social unrest.

The harvesting of 'Boro' rice will start in 2 weeks in some parts of Bangladesh and will continue till the end of May. Injection of liquidity to stabilise demand may be required. Advance purchase of crops by the government can ensure the required money for the farmers to start the harvesting.

Already, local administration of some districts has banned agricultural labours from outside. While the excess labour who have returned from the urban area can compensate for the supply shortage created by the ban, the issue need close attention.

After the crisis is over, rural businesses, which are mostly unbanked, need to have access to finance a reboot. While the honourable Prime Minister assured subsidised bank credit for these businesses, **we might have to think of out of the box ways to bridge between these micro-enterprises and banks.**

