

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment of workers in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

¹Le Thi Thuy Linh, ²Nguyen Thi Thuy Hieu

^{1,2}Political Academy Region II, Vietnam

ABSTRACT

Ho Chi Minh City, the largest socio-economic center in Vietnam, is home to many industrial parks, export processing zones and millions of workers who come to live and work. From the past 4 waves of COVID-19 epidemic, the evolution of the COVID-19 epidemic and its impact in all aspects of socio-economic life shows that COVID-19 is not simply an epidemic but a combination of natural disasters and economic decline happen at the same time. All industries, seemingly without exception, are affected: healthcare, education, road transport, air transport, hotels, restaurants, travel services, entertainment, business textile, footwear, wood processing, agricultural export, manufacturing, processing consumer goods such as beer, wine, beverage, etc... Therefore, the number of workers whose working hours have been reduced, furloughed, annual leave, unpaid leave waiting for work and laid off are some of the response solutions that many businesses have taken during the covid-19 pandemic. It is this process that significantly affects employment income, indirectly affects the lives of millions of workers in recent times, making the family life of many workers fall into a difficult situation, rely on state policies to overcome the difficulties of the pandemic.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, employment, income, workers.

1. MAKE A PROBLEM

Appearing since December 2019 in Wuhan, China, the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) outbreak has posed one of the greatest challenges facing humanity in the 75 years since the Second World War (UNDP, 2020). The pandemic has had a significant impact on the daily lives of many people around the world. This is a crisis to public health, development problems and exacerbates many socio-economic problems in countries around the world. In Vietnam, the 4th wave of the pandemic broke out from the end of April 2021 due to new strains of COVID-19 that have complicated impacts on most social groups, especially disadvantaged groups (Lancet, 2020). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on social groups is different, not the same, compared to those with economic conditions and stable accommodation, immigrants and workers in industrial zones tend to be negatively affected and affected more.

Ho Chi Minh City is the most important economic - political - social center of Vietnam. With 14 Export Processing Zones - Industrial Parks in operation with more than 1000 businesses, is the locality with the highest number of COVID-19 infections in the country with about 150,000 new infections, accounting for more than 1/2 of the country's infections, (Ministry of Health, 2021). The rapid spread and dangerous level of new strains forced the city to take a series of measures including shutting down a series of companies and factories with high risk of infection, shutting down facilities, etc... public facilities, parks, schools, strict medical quarantine, disinfection management of public spaces and urban communities. This has seriously affected the lives of more than 13 million people, of which about 1.6 million workers are working and living in Ho Chi Minh City. Therefore, studying the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment and income of workers in this area will show us the impacts of the pandemic on income, employment and psychology of workers in industrial zones in recent times. From there, propose solutions to minimize the unexpected impacts of the pandemic on the lives of workers in general and jobs and incomes in particular.

2. IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME OF WORKERS

2.1. Employment and income of workers before the COVID-19 epidemic

Before the 4th epidemic in May 2021, the total number of employees in 2020 managed by Hepza was 276,698 people, an increase of 8,484 people compared to 2019, of which 159,617 female employees (a rate of 57.69 people) % of the total number of employees; the province's labor is 174,971 people, accounting for 60% of the total number of employees; the labor force in domestic-invested enterprises is 75,521 people, accounting for 26.24% of the total number of employees, 216,098 people working in foreign-invested enterprises, accounting for 73.76% of the total number of employees (Thai Phuong et al, 2018)

Compared to the regional minimum wage, the average income of industrial park workers is 60.29% higher in 2019, and 49.32% higher in 2020 and 2021 (Government, 2017, 2019).

In 2019, the average basic salary (working full hours as prescribed) of employees is 4,180,000 VND/month, the average income (excluding shifts) is 6,700,000 VND/month. The monthly salary of the average worker working in the industrial park usually accounts for about 62.38% of the total income, the remaining 37.61% is income other than salary such as housing support, money. shift meals, travel expenses, due diligence, monthly bonuses, child support under 36 months old... (Hepza, 2022)

In 2021, the average total income of workers (excluding shift meals) will reach VND 6,600,000/month, of which basic salary accounts for 62.39%. But the types of costs and prices for living needs are constantly increasing. With a living income in HCMC of 7,560,000 VND/person/month, this salary only meets 86.27% of basic spending needs such as food, clothing, and rent. accommodation, transportation and some other essential needs (Hoang Khanh, Le Tuyet, 2022).

Thus, this salary of workers is not enough to meet the minimum needs, workers have to spend frugally and miserable. Most workers have to work outside to earn extra money or send back home to support their families and raise children.

According to the survey, before being affected by the COVID-19 epidemic, in addition to the average income from working in the industrial park, most workers worked as a "side-hand". If female workers often choose professions such as haircuts, manicures, online sales, etc... to work part-time, male workers often choose a job as a motorbike taxi driver, and shipper (delivery) is a "left hand" job.

Main part-time jobs of workers

Technology motorbike taxi driver: Technology motorbike taxi driver is chosen by many male workers. After the official working hours at the company, these workers will turn on the application to find customers, the income for workers is about 1-2 million VND/month. This is a profession that can face dangers in health and life, but for a living, workers understand and accept it, and are more careful when carrying passengers.

Table 1: Part-time jobs of workers

Numerical order	Male	Female
Overtime	101	165
Online selling	0	35
Haircut, shampoo, manicure	0	20
Ride a motorbike taxi	115	5

(Source: Survey data)

Online sales: This is a job often chosen by female workers, they can earn 1-2 million VND/month. However, this source of income is not stable, sometimes there are no customers for a whole month. Products sold online by workers are very diverse: From shoes, cosmetics, to homemade food...

Beauty profession (cutting hair, washing hair, doing nails...): This is a field that is pursued by many female workers (especially young). However, for the profession of "nail" (beautifying nails and pedicures), workers have to spend quite a lot of money to buy tools. Therefore, not everyone can follow this profession.

Also according to the report of the Trade Union of Export Processing and Industrial Zones of Ho Chi Minh City in 2019, when surveying 11 FDI enterprises in Linh Trung I Industrial Park, where there are many workers in

the fields of footwear, seafood processing, furniture and mechanics, with 37,600 employees, the average basic salary is 4.78 million VND/person/month; average income 6.2 million VND/person/month.

Comparing income and expenditure, single households can save an average of 1.2 million VND/month; households have one child, the income of the couple is enough to temporarily cover their living expenses, the amount of money saved is small, only 300,000 VND/month, but up to 9.1% have no savings and 3, 1% have difficulties and shortages. For households with two children, the income is not enough to cover daily living expenses.

Regarding the general situation of income and expenditure of employees and their families, the survey results of the Institute of Workers and Trade Unions (Vietnam General Confederation of Labor) showed that only 17.4% of workers said they had a surplus and accumulate; 43.7% said that it is enough to cover living expenses; 26.5% have to spend frugally and austerly; 12.5% said their income is not enough to live on (Hepza, 2022).

The survey also found that the main cause of labor disputes and strikes in enterprises is the low wages and incomes of workers, which do not meet the minimum standard of living.

Because the low minimum wage is a concern for workers in the industrial zone today, they are not assured of long-term work and have not yet attached to the enterprise, the situation of labor migration is common.

There are textile, garment, shoe and leather enterprises... that move workers up to 15% - 20% annually (Phan Anh, 2022), causing serious instability in labor; a part of workers lack of understanding of the law, their rights and interests; unsettled ideological stance, low self-esteem, free and undisciplined habits; easily agitated, drawn to participate in bad deeds, even living loosely, pragmatically and entangled in social evils; the marital status and family happiness of workers in many places have painful consequences; Most female workers can't take care of their children, have to send them back to their hometown or quit their jobs to look after their children.

Thus, before being affected by the 4th wave of COVID-19, workers working in industrial zones in the city mostly registered to work overtime at their businesses, many of them had just worked overtime, while doing other jobs and spending tight to maintain a minimum life in HCMC.

2.2. Employment and income of workers in the period of COVID-19

Distance milestones in the 4th epidemic and business situation of enterprises in the industrial park

On May 18, 2021, when the first patient with COVID-19 in the community in Ho Chi Minh City was recorded, it was also the beginning of the 4th epidemic wave in the city. Along with the outbreak of the Phuc Hung missionary group, from the beginning of June 2021, many other infection chains in the community appeared in the area, spreading to many people, and large infection chains at enterprises in the industrial zone. These chains of infection amount to hundreds or even thousands of related cases. Notably, from here, the infections have moved to many provinces and cities in the southern region.

The City's 4 phases of distancing

Phase 1 from 0:00 on May 31 to June 18, 2021: implementing city-wide social distancing according to Directive 15; In particular, Go Vap and Thanh Loc wards, District 12 will implement Directive 16. During this period, the Minister of Health has decided to establish a special standing division of the Ministry of Health to support the fight against the epidemic in Ho Chi Minh City. Ho Chi Minh City.

Phase 2 from June 19 to August 14, 2021: recognizing that the epidemic situation is likely to spread, on June 19, 2021, the Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee issued Directive No. 10 on tightening Tighten and strengthen epidemic prevention and control measures in the area in the spirit of applying the measures of Directive 16 throughout the city, at the same time preparing scenarios for higher situations and reporting for opinions. meeting with the Prime Minister.

Faced with the rapid and complicated development of the epidemic in key economic provinces in the region such as Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Long An and the North Central and Southwestern provinces, the Prime Minister requested the implementation of the extension. Social distancing in 19 provinces and cities within 14 days from July 19, 2021.

On July 20, 2021, the Prime Minister set up a special working group of the Government to carry out epidemic prevention and control in Ho Chi Minh City and other provinces and cities.

On August 6, 2021, the Government issued Resolution 86 on urgent solutions to prevent and control the epidemic, assigning the task to “Ho Chi Minh City strives to control the epidemic before September 15, 2021”.

Phase 3 from August 15 to September 30, 2021

Implementing Resolution 86, Ho Chi Minh City's Steering Committee for COVID-19 Prevention and Control issued Plan 2715 to implement urgent measures to prevent and control the epidemic.

On August 22, 2021, the Government issued Official Letter 1099, in which wards, communes and towns were considered “fortresses”, people were “soldiers” in epidemic prevention and control, and assigned Ho Chi Minh City to quickly test. large area to detect the earliest cases of F0.

On August 23, 2021, the Government continued to issue Official Letter 1102, according to which, social distancing is the decisive factor to minimize disease transmission.

Implementing Publication 1099 and Dispatch 1102, the Chairman of Ho Chi Minh City People's Committee issued Ms. 11 on strengthening social distancing and measures to prevent and control the COVID-19 epidemic in the area.

From August 23, 2021, Ho Chi Minh City has organized a peak period to strengthen the implementation of a number of social distancing measures in the spirit of Directive 16.

On September 15, 2021, before the epidemic situation was still complicated, the Standing Board of the Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee decided to extend the distance until September 30, 2021. The city continues to implement social distancing under Directive 16 at the strictest level.

The 4th phase after October 1, 2021

From a close assessment of the epidemic situation in the area associated with the control criteria of the health sector, on September 30, 2021, the Chairman of the People's Committee of Ho Chi Minh City issued Directive 18 on continuing to control and adjust measures to prevent and control the epidemic and gradually restore and develop socio-economic in the area, bringing people's activities to a new normal state.

On October 11, the Government issued Resolution 128/NQ-CP to “adapt safely, flexibly and effectively control the COVID-19 epidemic”, replacing Directives 15, 16 and 19 (Hepza, 2021).

Before these quarantines of the City, in order to realize the dual goals of socio-economic development and ensure epidemic prevention and control, businesses in the City are allowed to operate when they meet one of two conditions: : the enterprise can ensure both production and isolation of workers on the spot with the motto “3 on the spot” including production on the spot - eat on the spot - rest on the spot or the business can ensure that the motto “1 route - 2 locations”, only 1 route to transport workers from the production place to the worker's place of residence (can choose dormitory, hotel, concentrated accommodation for workers).

Employment status and income of industrial park workers in the 4th epidemic wave

Before October 1, 2021, in the city's 19 industrial zones, about 48.23% of enterprises (with 682/1,412 enterprises) were eligible to maintain operations under the plan of both isolation and production. 3 on-site” or “1 route, 2 destinations” with 57,507/276,698 employees (accounting for only 20.78% of workers in 17 industrial zones under normal conditions).

Table 2: Number of enterprises in the Industrial Park operating during the 4th epidemic

Numerical order	Enterprise in operation	Enterprise ceased	Total number of enterprises
1	682	730	1412
2	48,3%	51.7%	100%

(Source: Hepza's report processing team)

Thus, there are 730/1,412 enterprises (accounting for 51.7% of total enterprises) stopping production and business activities and 219,191/276,698 employees (accounting for 79.22% of the total number of employees) have been suspended, leave before October 1, 2021 (table 2). In 48.23% of enterprises maintaining the above business activities:

Arrange for employees to take time off/rotate leave: nearly 40.03% of enterprises (272 enterprises);
 Reducing the number of employees: 19.06% of enterprises (130 enterprises);
 Arrangement of employees on unpaid leave: 20.97% of enterprises (143 enterprises);
 Labor reduction: 28.01% of enterprises (191 enterprises);

There are 1.31% enterprises reducing labor and arranging employees to take unpaid leave (09 enterprises) (Hepza, 2021).

Thus, the COVID-19 epidemic has significantly reduced the number of workers in general and the number of workers in particular. A survey of 183 workers who stayed in the city during the 4th peak epidemic showed that: about 52% of workers lost their income (95 workers), about 17.48% of workers lost their jobs (32 workers lost their jobs). employees) for a period of 2 months, remaining 56 workers were not affected (30.6%).

2.3. Employment and income of workers in the post-COVID-19 period

From October 1, 2021, when the City adjusts epidemic prevention and control measures and gradually recovers and develops socio-economic, loosens social distancing according to Directive No. 18/CT-UBND, to As of December 31, 2021, the total number of enterprises operating was 1,408/1,412 enterprises, reaching the rate of 99.7% (to 0.3%, equivalent to 4 enterprises having ceased operations due to the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic), with a total number of employees estimated at 273,000 people (Hepza, 2021) . If the labor force in the 4th epidemic wave sharply decreased by 219,191 employees (accounting for 79.22% of the total number of employees in normal conditions), then after the COVID-19 epidemic is controlled, workers in industrial zones, up to by the end of 2021, an increase of 215,493 employees, an increase of 3,726 people in the first 6 months (table 3). Thus, after 4 months of implementing the distance, with timely regulations from Resolution 128/NQ-CP and Directive No. 18/CT-UBND, the city's economic activities are gradually returning.

As of June 30, 2022, the total number of employees in EPZs is 276,126 people. In which, female employees are 156,157 people, accounting for 56.43% (Marketing and Communication Department UEH, 2021)

Table 3: Changes in the number of workers in the Industrial Park in the period of 2020-2022

Numerical order	The number of workers
2020 vs 2019	8,484
4 months of translation compared to 2020	-219,191
The end of 2021 compared to 4 months of translation	215,493
The first 6 months of 2022 compared to the end of 2021	3,726

(Source: Hepza's report processing team)

Out of 400 samples of workers surveyed, occupations and lines of workers are: Garment, leather and footwear, mechanics, plastic chemistry, electronics, and packaging. In which, 254 female workers, accounting for 63.5%; Among 63.5% female workers, there are 178 female workers in the garment and footwear industry with the rate of 70.08%. 146 male workers accounted for 36.5%, of which, there were 90 male workers in the mechanical, electronic and petrochemical industry, accounting for 61.64% of the total number of male workers (table 4). Thus, the number of workers is mainly engaged in labor-intensive occupations.

Table 4: Occupation, gender in industrial zones in Ho Chi Minh City

industrial area	Career	Male workers	Female workers
Tan Thuan	Garment	-	58
	Mechanical	24	-
Vinh Loc	Packaging	14	44
Linh Trung 2	Electronic	34	10
	Garment	-	58
Tan Tao	Chemical plastic, rubber	32	22
Binh Chieu	Mechanical	30	-
	Leather shoes	12	62
Total	400	146	254

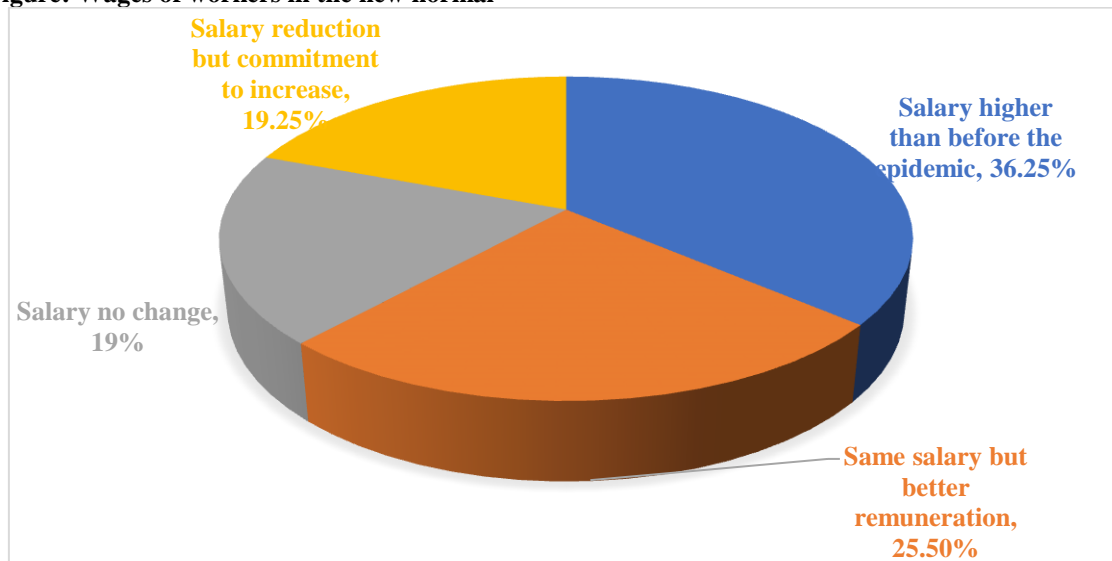
(Source: Survey data)

According to the survey data of workers returning to Ho Chi Minh City (217 workers), they have the same answer as “have contacted and have available job positions in the city, coming back to the city is going to work right away”. Among these, 143/217 workers, accounting for 65.9%, do not work at the old company; in which 52.45% (75/143) workers did not work in the old industrial park but moved to another industrial zone.

According to a report by the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI) (Marketing and Communication Department UEH, 2021), businesses face rising production costs of which labor-related costs are an important source. The source of the increase in production costs comes from an increase in (i) import prices and transportation costs; (ii) labor costs (social benefits, paid leave workers, applying the “3-on-the-spot” working plan), ... and (iii) occupational safety and health costs (elimination) bacteria, means of epidemic prevention, distance, testing).

There have been many government policies to support businesses in the context of the epidemic; However, the access rate is still low and the policy effectiveness is not high. Three main groups of policies include: (i) tax support (CIT reduction, VAT, PIT, land rent, ...); (ii) capital and credit support (restructuring debt repayment term; exemption and reduction of interest and fees; keeping debt groups unchanged, ...) and (iii) social security support (reducing insurance contributions) accident insurance, pension funds, loans to businesses to pay wages, etc.). The access rate of enterprises in each policy group is only about 25-35% and only 10% (Cao Van Sam, 2021) of them rate the policy effectiveness as high. This directly affects the salary increase for employees.

Figure: Wages of workers in the new normal



(Source: Survey data)

400 workers participated in the survey (Figure: Wages of workers in the new normal)

145 workers, accounting for 36.25% of the total survey sample, show that the salary is paid higher than the old salary and the registration of overtime hours is more flexible. In which, the group of workers who returned to the city after the epidemic and worked in a new company/new industrial park accounted for 103/143, the remaining 42 workers who stayed in the city confirmed that their wages had increased compared to before the epidemic.

102 workers, accounting for 25.5%, said that the salary is the same as before the epidemic, but they are supported with housing, lunch and overtime.

76 workers, accounting for 19%, answered that there was no change in salary compared to before the epidemic. 77 workers, with a rate of 19.25%, they have their salary reduced compared to before the epidemic, but the company promises to increase their salary after July 2022.

However, when asked, even though the income is higher, they are still willing to work overtime. And now, they say that they actively work overtime, run technology motorbike taxis, sell online, work as shippers, do hair washing services, massage...

Thus, it can be seen that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the employment and income of workers in Ho Chi Minh City is clear and undeniable. These impacts have caused difficult conditions for their lives in recent times. Therefore, it is necessary to find solutions to minimize the impact of the pandemic on the jobs and income of workers in this area so that they can return to normal soon to stabilize their lives after the pandemic. Best translation.

3. SOLUTIONS TO MINIMIZE THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON JOBS AND INCOMES OF WORKERS IN HO CHI MINH CITY

In fact, when an epidemic event occurs, low-skilled or unskilled workers are quickly removed from the labor market. In addition, many businesses have to restructure, transform, or even dissolve, affecting production and business, leading to workers who may lose their old jobs and want to find new jobs. Not only that, the needs of the industrial economy require the development of a workforce with knowledge, high professional skills, and the ability to master the means, machines, and technology. The process of industrialization is long or short, in addition to the factors of mechanisms, policies and institutions, it also depends a lot on the capacity of this technical workforce. This can be said to be the objective demand of the economy. Therefore, the need for training and retraining to be flexible with the labor market is present in three subjects: employees, employers, and governments.

Training and fostering for job change to meet the demand for quantity and quality of the labor market; raise the level and competitiveness of our country's human resources to a level equivalent to that of advanced countries in the region. The training and retraining should focus on: knowledge, vocational skills, digital skills, adaptive skills, integration skills to meet the requirements of new, productive and effective jobs in the digital era, integration, it is necessary to actively implement both immediate and long-term solutions associated with the following practices:

Firstly, the state management agency in charge of labor and training needs to actively propose, with the participation of enterprises and training institutions, to develop legal policies on training and job change for workers to promptly solve the pressing needs of workers and employees about the need for vocational training and skill improvement, contributing to building a harmonious, stable and progressive labor relationship at the enterprise.

Second, on the basis of demand for job-changing workers, vocational education institutions associated with appropriate enterprises plan to organize training and retraining in an open and flexible manner in terms of vocational knowledge and skills, digital skills, adaptive skills, integration skills, professional attitudes, focusing on performance ability so that after training and fostering workers can change careers with higher labor productivity (Cao Van Sam, 2021).

Third, research and develop policies to support and encourage enterprises to employ older workers. Develop employment programs for the elderly. Developing a labor market information system to link training and employment; improve the quality of labor market forecasts in order to provide information on job opportunities, job vacancies, training and retraining courses.

Fourth, improve the capacity of vocational training and education institutions to train and foster effective career change for employees.

Strengthening vocational training facilities and equipment for vocational education institutions: Invest in construction to ensure the standards of physical facilities and list of vocational training equipment as prescribed for the teaching of key national occupations; invest in construction to ensure the standards of facilities, the list of minimum vocational training equipment as prescribed by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs for the teaching of occupations not on the list of key occupations.

To develop the contingent of cadres, lecturers and vocational teachers: To adopt preferential policies to attract and encourage the development of cadres, lecturers and vocational teachers to enter vocational training institutions with a guaranteed quantity, organic payroll according to regulations, training and retraining in order to improve the qualifications and professionalism of the contingent of vocational management staff; standardize the teaching staff, vocational teachers corresponding to the standards and requirements of teaching each specific profession, including key occupations at the national, regional and world levels.

Development of vocational training programs and curricula: For key occupations at the ASEAN and international levels: Follow the vocational training programs and textbooks received by the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs. cooperation of advanced countries in the ASEAN region and internationally in accordance with the Vietnamese labor market.

International integration: Expand linkages and cooperation with foreign vocational education institutions and international organizations in vocational training to improve training quality; raise the level of teachers; organize the management of vocational training institutions according to international standards; students, graduates are recognized regional and international level; Strengthen cooperation with reputable foreign vocational education institutions in receiving and transferring programs, textbooks, learning materials, teaching and learning methods; Implement and sign cooperation programs with foreign-invested enterprises operating in Vietnam in supporting vocational education institutions and students to improve career skills.

Renovate the financial mechanism and operation mechanism of vocational education institutions: Vocational education institutions step by step fully calculate the cost of vocational training according to the roadmap prescribed by the State; mobilize resources for socialization to invest in vocational education institutions in order to ensure the quantity and quality of vocational training of the labor market and the requirements of socio-economic development in each period. encourage and create favorable conditions for vocational education institutions to access investment capital and funding from international organizations for vocational training activities; Vocational education institutions actively cooperate with enterprises to train and develop vocational skills for employees.

4. CONCLUSION

Ho Chi Minh City has overcome the most difficult, difficult, arduous and fierce period, but the COVID-19 epidemic situation in the city still has many potential risks. The evolution of the epidemic in the past time has had enough levels of stalemate and pain. But at the most difficult time, the government and people of Ho Chi Minh City have identified this as a “war” to confront and gradually overcome the epidemic. One year after that “historic” day, the gloomy shadow of the epidemic was gradually replaced by the green of hope; Every corner of the street, restaurants, eateries, and commercial centers were as bustling as before, which is a signal of a city that has really revived... The lives of workers affected by the pandemic have been step by step improved, jobs are consolidated after the pandemic, making their lives more and more prosperous in the new context.

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