Available on: https://jsshrs.ep-journals.org/ E-ISSN: 3051-3561, P-ISSN: 3051-3553

Journal of Social Science and Human Research Studies

Volume : 02 Issue : 11 November-2026

Employment and Coping Strategies of Young Intellectuals in Vietnam During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Nguyen Thi Ngoc Ha

Institute of Sociology and Psychology - Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences

Published Date: November 17, 2026 **Article DOI: 10.65150/EP-jsshrs/V2E11/2026-21**

ABSTRACT: The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant disruptions to Vietnam's labour market, affecting the employment and incomes of various groups of workers, including young intellectuals. Drawing on an analysis of data from the 2019 and 2020 Labour Force Surveys conducted by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam, complemented by a review of relevant studies, this article examines the employment situation, income, and coping strategies of young intellectuals in Vietnam during the pandemic. The findings indicate that, in addition to job losses, temporary work suspensions, and declining incomes, some young intellectuals chose to wait for work until they were able to resume their employment. This pattern was more pronounced among younger individuals and those who were unmarried. Other coping strategies included seeking alternative employment, transitioning to remote work, and undertaking training to acquire or upgrade skills. However, their capacity to adapt was also shaped by employment conditions, employers' orientations, and access to training opportunities. These findings contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by young intellectuals and the strategies they adopted in response to labour market disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEYWORDS: COVID-19, employment, income, young intellectuals, coping strategies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic emerged in late 2019 and rapidly spread worldwide, causing far-reaching impacts on the economy, society, and people's everyday lives. In Vietnam, the first case of infection was confirmed on 22 January 2020 (Nguyen Minh Duc et al., 2020). Public health measures to prevent and control the pandemic, particularly social distancing and restrictions on production and business activities, helped contain the spread of the virus but also caused considerable disruptions to the labour market.

According to the United Nations (2020) and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020), the pandemic led to increased job losses, underemployment, and declining incomes, particularly in sectors directly affected by restrictions on travel and public gatherings, such as tourism, aviation, and hospitality. These impacts were not confined to low-skilled workers and the informal sector; they also affected workers with professional qualifications, including intellectuals.

In Vietnam, alongside the ongoing shift in employment from the state sector to the private sector, intellectual workers have increasingly become involved in a wider range of organizational settings and occupational fields (Nguyen Quang Tuan, 2021). During the pandemic, business contractions, temporary closures, and adjustments to work arrangements directly affected employment opportunities and income among this group. In addition to facing challenges common to the wider workforce, young intellectuals encountered specific difficulties associated with their occupational status, work experience, and capacity to adapt to changes in the labour market.

Against this background, this article addresses two main research questions: (1) How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect the employment situation and incomes of young intellectuals in Vietnam? (2) What strategies did this group of workers adopt to cope with employment-related disruptions during the pandemic? Drawing on a sociological approach, the article contributes to identifying the challenges faced by young intellectuals and examining their capacity to adapt to labour market disruptions.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH APPROACH

2.1. Conceptualisation

The concept of intellectuals has been approached from various perspectives. According to the Vietnamese Dictionary, an intellectual is "a person whose occupation primarily involves intellectual labour and who possesses the specialised knowledge required for their professional activities" (Hoang Phe, 2003, p. 1034). Similarly, the Oxford Dictionary uses the term intellectual to refer to individuals with a high level of education who engage in activities requiring in-depth thinking and reflection (Hornby, 2000).

Building on these definitions, this article defines young intellectuals as individuals aged 18 to 35 who have attained at least a college-level qualification. Within the scope of this study on employment, the analytical population comprises members of this group who participate in the labour market, including those working in both the state and non-state sectors.

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Defining the study population on the basis of age and educational attainment serves to delimit the scope of the research and establish consistent criteria for data extraction and analysis. Accordingly, the article focuses on three main aspects: the employment situation and incomes of young intellectuals before and during the pandemic; changes in their employment situation in the context of COVID-19; and the coping strategies adopted by this group of workers in response to these changes.

2.2. Research Approach

This article draws on secondary data from the 2019 and 2020 Labour Force Surveys conducted by the General Statistics Office of Vietnam to analyse and compare the employment situation and incomes of young intellectuals before and during the COVID19 pandemic. In addition, publications and research studies released between 2020 and May 2022 are reviewed to identify the coping strategies adopted by young intellectuals in response to the impacts of the pandemic.

The study population was identified through data filtering and extraction, selecting individuals aged 18–35 with educational qualifications at college level or above. Based on these criteria, the number of young intellectuals represented in the 2020 dataset was 4,713,063. Of this population, 32.4% had college-level qualifications, 64.8% held university degrees, and 2.8% had postgraduate qualifications.

To assess employment status, the article examines whether respondents had worked for at least one hour during the seven days preceding the survey in return for wages or salaries. It also considers the reasons why respondents had not worked or had been temporarily absent from work. Income is analysed on the basis of wages, salaries, and other work-related earnings from respondents' main jobs during the month preceding the survey. Comparing the 2019 and 2020 data makes it possible to identify changes in employment status and income during the pandemic.

With regard to coping strategies, the article examines the choices made by young intellectuals when they were out of work or temporarily absent from their jobs, including waiting to resume work, seeking alternative employment, and adapting to new working arrangements. Coping strategies that are not adequately captured by the Labour Force Survey data are further examined through a review of studies published during the research period.

3. THE EMPLOYMENT SITUATION OF YOUNG INTELLECTUALS IN VIETNAM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

3.1. Employment Patterns among Young Intellectuals

The COVID-19 pandemic caused considerable disruptions to production and business activities, thereby affecting labour supply and demand as well as employment opportunities. Analysis of the 2020 Labour Force Survey data shows that, among the 4,713,063 young intellectuals, 77.3% had worked for at least one hour during the seven days preceding the survey, while 22.7% had not worked during this reference period. Among those who were employed, 2.5% held more than one job. Compared with 2019, the employment rate declined from 79.6% to 77.3%, while the proportion of those who had not worked increased from 20.4% to 22.7%.

As shown in Table 1, employment rates varied across individual and social groups. Men had a higher employment rate than women. The 31–35 age group had a higher employment rate than the younger age groups, indicating differences in labour market participation across age groups. Similarly, those with university and postgraduate qualifications had higher employment rates than those with college-level qualifications. By contrast, the difference in employment rates between young intellectuals living in rural and urban areas was negligible.

Table 1. Employment rates by sociology-demographic characteristics of young intellectuals

		%
Gender	Male	80,0
	Female	75,2
Age group	18-25	70,8
	26-30	77,9
	31-35	80,7
Educational attainment	College	71,9
	University	80,0
	Postgraduate	90,5
Area of residence	Rural	77,2
	Urban	77,4
Socio-economic region	Northern Midlands and Mountains	75,4
	Red River Delta	81,1
	North Central and South Central Coast	70,5
	Central Highlands	64,5
	Southeast	81,0
	Mekong River Delta	75,9
Total (persons)		**4.713.063**

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the 2020 Labour Force Survey.

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

According to socio-economic regions, the Red River Delta and the Southeast had the highest employment rates among young intellectuals, whereas the Central Highlands recorded the lowest rate. These differences indicate that employment opportunities for young intellectuals vary geographically and are associated with regional differences in economic development and the spatial distribution of production and business activities.

3.2. Unemployment and Job-seeking Activities

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated difficulties in the labour market, with unemployment emerging as one of the major concerns. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2021), Vietnam had more than 1.2 million unemployed people in 2020, of whom young people accounted for 35.4%. Among young intellectuals, data from the 2020 Labour Force Survey indicate a tendency towards longer periods of unemployment. Of the 232,588 individuals for whom the duration of unemployment was recorded, 27.8% had been unemployed for six to less than twelve months, 19.5% for one to less than three months, and 16.9% for three to less than six months. Notably, the proportion unemployed for six to less than twelve months was higher in 2020 than in 2019 (27.8% compared with 19.1%). This finding suggests that some young intellectuals experienced prolonged difficulties in finding employment during the pandemic.

Regarding job-seeking activities, 464,088 young intellectuals who were not working were recorded as having engaged in job-seeking activities. Of these, 310,951 had actively sought employment during the 30 days preceding the survey. The most common job-search methods were submitting job applications directly (29.8%) and seeking referrals through friends and family members (12.3%). Compared with 2019, the proportion of young intellectuals actively seeking employment increased from 47.4% to 67.0% in 2020. This suggests that demand for new employment opportunities among young intellectuals tended to increase during the pandemic.

As shown in Table 2, job-seeking activities also varied across individual and social groups. Men had a higher rate of active job seeking than women, while younger age groups tended to engage more actively in job seeking than those aged 31–35. In terms of educational attainment, university graduates had a higher rate of active job seeking than those with college-level or postgraduate qualifications. Young intellectuals living in rural areas also tended to seek employment more actively than their urban counterparts.

Across socio-economic regions, the Mekong River Delta, the Central Highlands, and the North Central and South Central Coast recorded higher rates of active job seeking than the other regions.

Table 2. Percentage of young intellectuals actively seeking employment, by demographic and social characteristics

		%
Gender	Male	70,8
	Female	65,4
Age group	18-25	69,6
	26-30	69,7
	31-35	57,8
Educational attainment	College	62,7
	University	69,4
	Postgraduate	62,6
Area of residence	Rural	73,1
	Urban	64,2
Socio-economic region	Northern Midlands and Mountains Red River Delta	52,6 67,2
	North Central and South-Central Coast	71,6
	Central Highlands	71,5
	Southeast	63,0
	Mekong River Delta	76,6
Total (persons)		**464.088**

Source: Author's calculations based on data from the 2020 Labour Force Survey.

Overall, these differences indicate that young intellectuals' capacity and level of initiative in seeking employment varied across social groups. However, actively seeking employment does not necessarily translate into access to, or success in securing, suitable jobs, particularly when the labour market is constrained by measures implemented to prevent and control the pandemic.

3.3. Working Hours of Young Intellectuals

In addition to employment status, working hours provide another indication of labour market changes during the pandemic. The 2020 survey results show that the median working time among young intellectuals was 6.8 hours per day. Compared with 2019, the average number of working hours decreased from 43 hours per week to 42 hours per week. Although the difference was relatively small, this finding reflects a downward trend in the working hours of young intellectuals in 2020.

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

This trend is consistent with the assessment of the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2020) regarding the global decline in working hours. According to the ILO, the number of working hours in 2020 decreased by 8.8% compared with the fourth quarter of 2019. This indicates that pandemic-related disruptions affected not only workers' ability to maintain employment but also the amount of time worked by those who remained employed.

3.4. Income of Young Intellectuals

Changes in employment and working hours were also reflected in the incomes of young intellectuals. Analysis of the 2020 Labour Force Survey data shows that the median monthly income from the main job in the month preceding the survey was VND 6.85 million. Compared with 2019, median income decreased from VND 7 million to VND
6.85 million.

In terms of average monthly income, young intellectuals earned VND 7.401 million in 2020, down from VND 7.786 million in 2019. Thus, both median and average incomes recorded a downward trend in 2020. This change indicates that the incomes of young intellectuals experienced certain fluctuations during the pandemic, potentially associated with reduced working hours, disruptions to production and business activities, and adjustments to wages and salaries by organizations and enterprises.

Overall, the data indicate that young intellectuals in Vietnam faced greater employment and income-related difficulties in 2020 than in 2019. The most notable changes included an increase in the proportion of those who had not worked, a tendency towards longer periods of unemployment, and declines in both working hours and income. These changes not only reflect the disruptions experienced by the labour market during the pandemic but also highlight the need for young intellectuals to adapt and identify appropriate coping strategies. This provides the basis for further examining the ways in which this group of workers sought to maintain or secure employment opportunities during the pandemic.

4. COPING STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY YOUNG INTELLECTUALS IN VIETNAM IN RESPONSE TO THE IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ON EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about major disruptions to the labour market, compelling workers to adjust how they sought, maintained, and performed their jobs. For young intellectuals, despite their advantages in educational attainment and access to technology, job losses, temporary work suspensions, and declining incomes also created a need to adapt to changes in their occupational environment.

Drawing on the analysis of the 2020 Labour Force Survey and relevant studies, four main coping strategies adopted by young intellectuals can be identified: waiting to resume work, seeking alternative employment, transitioning to remote work, and undertaking training and skills development.

First, waiting to resume work was a common option among workers who had been temporarily suspended or were unable to return to work.

The analysis shows that, among the 6,006 young intellectuals who were waiting to resume work due to contractions in production and business activities, the proportions of men and women were relatively similar, at 49.1% and 50.9%, respectively. However, more pronounced differences emerged across age groups. Those aged 18–25 accounted for 63.8% of all individuals waiting to resume work, considerably higher than the proportions for the 26–30 age group (20.7%) and the 31–35 age group (15.5%).

Regarding marital status, those who were unmarried accounted for 74.5%, while those who were married accounted for 25.5%.

In terms of area of residence, young intellectuals living in urban areas accounted for 53.4% of all those waiting to resume work, compared with 46.6% in rural areas. Across socio-economic regions, the North Central and South Central Coast accounted for the largest proportion (34.9%), followed by the Southeast (19.1%). The Mekong River Delta recorded the smallest proportion (7.7%).

These findings indicate that waiting to resume work was more concentrated among younger intellectuals and those who were unmarried. This may reflect differences in occupational status, family responsibilities, and the ability to maintain employment across groups. However, the figures describe the composition of the group waiting to resume work and do not provide sufficient evidence to establish that individual characteristics caused this particular response.

Second, seeking alternative employment was a proactive coping strategy, although access to employment opportunities remained limited for some workers.

Alongside waiting to resume work, some young intellectuals sought to change jobs in order to maintain their incomes. However, the data indicate that some individuals experienced difficulties in identifying where or how to look for employment.

Among young intellectuals who did not know where or how to seek employment, women accounted for 65.5%, compared with 34.5% for men. By age group, those aged 18–25 represented the largest proportion (58.5%), followed by the 26–30 age group (40.5%), while those aged 31–35 accounted for only 1.0%. In terms of area of residence, young intellectuals living in rural areas accounted for 51.8%, a higher proportion than their urban counterparts (48.2%).

Differences were also observed across socio-economic regions. The North Central and South Central Coast accounted for the largest proportion (25.6%), followed by the Northern Midlands and Mountains (22.6%). The Southeast recorded the smallest proportion (2.8%). The corresponding proportions for the Red River Delta, the Mekong River Delta, and the Central Highlands were 19.3%, 15.2%, and 14.5%, respectively.

These findings suggest that, in addition to the need to find employment, some young intellectuals lacked information or had not identified appropriate ways to access occupational opportunities. This challenge highlights the need to strengthen labour market information provision, career counselling, and employment-matching services, particularly for young workers who are new to the labour market.

Third, remote work emerged as an adaptive response to changes in work organisation.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital technologies and transformed work organisation across many organisations and enterprises. According to Nguyen Le Thanh Huyen (2021), data from the Ministry of Industry and Trade indicated that 83% of enterprises had shifted to remote working arrangements, 84% had accelerated or were accelerating digital transformation, and 50% had increased automation. Nguyen Quang Tuan (2020) likewise observed that the pandemic had stimulated the development of online activities, including sales, meetings, and working from home.

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

In this context, remote work became a means of enabling workers to continue their occupational activities when travel and face-to-face interactions were restricted. With their professional qualifications and access to technology, young intellectuals were relatively well positioned to engage in this form of work in occupations where it was feasible. However, the transition to remote work did not depend solely on workers themselves; it was also shaped by the nature of their jobs, technological infrastructure, and the organisational policies of employers and enterprises.

Fourth, training and skills development were adaptive strategies aimed at maintaining competitiveness in the labour market.

Beyond immediate coping measures, acquiring additional knowledge and developing occupational skills are important for the long-term adaptability of young intellectuals. Changes in production and business arrangements, together with the digital transformation process, have increased demand for technological skills, digital competencies, and the ability to adapt to new working environments.

According to Balachew et al. (2020), the World Economic Forum estimated that at least 54% of workers would need reskilling or upskilling to meet changing job requirements. In this context, participating in training programmes, engaging in self-directed learning, and acquiring new skills are necessary avenues for adaptation. These activities can help young intellectuals strengthen their professional capabilities, expand their opportunities for occupational mobility, and maintain their competitiveness in the labour market.

Overall, the coping strategies adopted by young intellectuals during the COVID-19 pandemic extended beyond waiting to resume work or seeking alternative employment to include adjustments to working arrangements and investment in professional development. However, the capacity to pursue these strategies varied across groups of workers and depended substantially on employment conditions, access to information and technology, and the availability of training opportunities.

5. CONCLUSION

The COVID-19 pandemic brought about significant changes in the employment and incomes of young intellectuals in Vietnam. Compared with 2019, 2020 saw an increase in the proportion of those who had not worked, a tendency towards longer periods of unemployment, and declines in working hours and income. These changes reflect the difficulties faced by professionally qualified workers when production and business activities were disrupted and the labour market contracted.

In response to these impacts, young intellectuals adopted a range of coping strategies, including waiting to resume work, seeking alternative employment, transitioning to remote work, and undertaking training and skills development. While waiting to resume work and seeking employment represented immediate responses, remote working and skills development reflected efforts to adapt to longer-term changes in the occupational environment. Nevertheless, the fact that some young intellectuals were unable to identify where or how to seek employment points to limitations in their access to labour market information and occupational opportunities.

In light of these findings, greater attention should be paid to improving labour market information systems, strengthening career counselling and employment-matching services, and expanding access to reskilling programmes and digital skills development for young workers. At the same time, enterprises should be encouraged to adopt more flexible working arrangements, thereby enabling young intellectuals to maintain employment and adapt to labour market fluctuations. These measures are important for strengthening the adaptive capacity of young intellectuals and supporting sustainable employment opportunities amid digital transformation and broader economic changes.

REFERENCES

1) Balachew, T., & Surkin, R. (2020). This is the new skills gap for young people in the age of COVID-19. World Economic Forum. https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/youth-employment-skills-gap-covid-19/
2) Bostan, S., Erdem, R., Öztürk, Y. E., Kılıç, T., & Yılmaz, A. (2020). The effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the Turkish society. Electronic Journal of General Medicine, 17(6), Article em237. https://doi.org/10.29333/ejgm/7944
3) International Labour Organization. (2020a). COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses.
4) International Labour Organization. (2020b). COVID-19 has severely impacted employment and working hours. https://www.ilo.org/hanoi/Informationresources/Publicinformation/Pressreleases/WCM S_740943/lang--vi/index.htm
5) Maureen, W. (2020). COVID-19 and socioeconomic impact in Africa: The case of Kenya.
6) Nguyen, L. T. H. (2021). Youth employment amid the COVID-19 pandemic: Impacts, challenges, and solutions. Thanh Nien Viet. http://thanhnienviet.vn/2021/08/19/vieclam-cua-thanh-nien-trong-boi-canh-dai-dich-covid-19-tac-dong-thach-thuc-va-giaiphap/
7) Nguyen, M. D., Hoang, D. H., Tran, A. T., Mai, T. L. B., Pham, H. D., & Pham, M. T. (2020). From first COVID-19 case to current outbreak: A Vietnamese report. Electronic Journal of General Medicine, 17(4), Article em208.
8) Nguyen, Q. T. (2020). The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and policy solutions for Vietnam in the coming period. Communist Review.https://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/kinh-te/-/2018/819611/tac-dong-cua-dai-dich-covid19%C2%A0va-mot-so-giai-phap-chinh-sach-cho-viet-nam-trong-giai-doan-toi.aspx
9) Nguyen, Q. T. (2020). COVID-19: Awareness, prevention, and social impacts on Vietnam. In Proceedings of the Scientific Conference "COVID-19, the Pandemic, and Issues for Sustainable Development". Social Sciences Publishing House.
10) Nguyen, Q. T. (2021). Intellectual labour and employment of intellectual workers in Vietnam. Social Sciences Information Review, (4). General Statistics Office. (2021). Labour force and employment survey report 2020. Statistical Publishing House.
11) United Nations. (2020). Shared responsibility, global solidarity: Responding to the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19. https://wtocenter.vn/an-pham/15332-reportshared-responsibility-global-solidarity-responding-to-the-socio-economic-impacts-ofcovid-19

License: This is an open access article under the CC BY 4.0 license: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Corresponding Author: Nguyen Thi Ngoc Ha