



**StopCoV.ge**

PREVENTION OF CORONAVIRUS SPREAD  
IN GEORGIA

# HUMAN RIGHTS PROTECTION DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS

*MEASURES TAKEN BY THE  
GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA*

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კორონავირუსის საქართველოში  
გავრცელების პრევენცია



## Abbreviations

<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease-19
<b>CDC</b>	American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<b>COE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>ECDC</b>	European Center for Disease Prevention and Control
<b>EDF</b>	European Disability Forum
<b>NCDC</b>	L. Sakvarelidze National Center For Disease Control and Public Health LEPL
<b>OHCHR</b>	The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>PwDs</b>	People with Disabilities
<b>SARS-CoV-2</b>	Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (Novel Coronavirus)
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

## Introduction

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**“Success in any direction would be worthless if we do not maintain  
The standard of human rights protection.”**

Giorgi Gakharia  
The Prime Minister of Georgia

Everything that the world is doing in response to the global pandemic ultimately aims to protect human beings and their rights. This unprecedented global crisis jeopardized a number of human rights achievements exposing socio-economic challenges amid COVID-19.

**The inviolable right to life and its protection remains to be a central part and a core value in response to the COVID-19 crisis.**

The global crisis of public health, coupled with the economic and social hardships, will have a long-term impact on the world economies, individuals, and societies. Therefore, in addition to saving the economy, it is of immense importance to protect human rights both during and after the crisis.

Particular emphasis, in the process, ought to be made to protect the rights of vulnerable groups, especially those who were vulnerable before the crisis; global evidence suggests that the socio-economic conditions of these groups were further risked or worsened during the crisis.

**The presented activity-based report presents descriptive analysis of the measures taken by the Government of Georgia to protect Human Rights during the COVID-19 crisis. Additional analysis of measures taken by the Government of Georgia to manage COVID-19 crisis are also presented in the state report "Measures implemented by the Government of Georgia to against COVID-19." <sup>1</sup>**

From the very first days of the COVID-19 outbreak in the world, the Georgian government began the fight in two directions protecting the health and lives of the citizens and saving the economy. Therefore, all of the measures taken by the Government of Georgia were aimed primarily at protecting the essential right to life and the right to health, as well as social and economic rights.

It should be noted that not all derogations guaranteed by Article 15 of the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms were utilized by Georgia. According to the Presidential Decree, in the duration of the state of emergency, **only those Constitutional rights were restricted, that were directly correlated with the epidemiological situation in the country.**

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<sup>1</sup> State Report: Measures implemented by the Government of Georgia against COVID-19, (2020), retrieved from [bit.ly/2Nfkunz](https://bit.ly/2Nfkunz)

**Furthermore, the principle of proportionality was adhered while imposing restrictions.** Namely, on the one hand, the legitimate objective given the epidemiological situation, and on the other hand, the proportionality between the legitimate objective and the means used to achieve it was taken into consideration while imposing specific human rights restrictions.

**Since the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Georgia has been taking proactive measures to ensure the protection of social, civil and economic rights of vulnerable and minority groups** ensuring access to information, access to services, access to basic subsistence support, access to health and education. That included:

- Provision of COVID-19 related information in Abkhazian, Ossetian, English, Armenian and Azerbaijani languages;
- Streaming of daily government briefings with sign language interpretation;
- Regular consultations with the civil society and international organizations;
- Dissegregated data collection and analysis on COVID-19 confirmed cases;
- Personal data protection;
- Implementing zero-tolerance policy and taking special measures to combat violence against women and domestic violence during the COVID-19 crisis;
- Ensuring non-stop access to state-provided services for domestic violence survivors, including shelters and crisis centers;
- Coordination and cooperation with Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs), community organizations and representatives;
- Protection of children's rights;
- Ensuring access to basic subsistence support for ethnic, religious, sexual, and other minorities;
- Expansion of homecare services for older people;
- Protection of the rights of persons living in the occupied territories;
- Protection of the rights of Georgian citizens abroad; and
- Protection of the rights of refugees and asylum seekers in Georgia.

**A significant part of the Government's anti-crisis plan was dedicated to the care for citizens and their financial support.**

Currently, in partnership with international and local organizations, the work on short- and long-term social and economic programmes continues. **An in-depth study of human rights protection during the COVID-19 crisis is in a pipeline.**

## The COVID-19 Crisis in Georgia: A Brief Overview

From December 2019, the novel COVID-19 virus started to spread rapidly across the world after the first cases of infection had emerged in the city of Wuhan, Hubei province, in the People's Republic of China (hereinafter referred to as China). On 30 January 2020, WHO declared an international public health emergency<sup>2</sup>. Soon after, on March 11, the disease was declared a pandemic.

Since the beginning of the virus, more than 7,273,958 cases of infection have been reported<sup>3</sup> worldwide in 213 countries, in which more than 413,372 have been fatal. Although COVID-19 is highly contagious, the course of the disease in confirmed cases, depending on its severity, varies distinctly - from asymptomatic to fatal.

On 6 January 2020, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs reported to the Government of Georgia the outbreak of a still unknown epidemic in China. From the very early days of the pandemic, the Georgian authorities directed their efforts in two directions, **aiming to save both the health and lives of the people, as well as the national economy.**

Therefore, all the steps taken by the government primarily aimed to protect the fundamental rights to live and right to health. Moreover, the government put special measures in place to save the economy, encompassing the protection of citizens' social and economic rights in the short- and a long-term.

Since the first reported cases of infection in Georgia, experts have been continuously monitoring the viral replication rate and other epidemiological parameters. As of June 11, 2020, Georgia counts 828 COVID-19 cases have been reported (population of Georgia is 3.7 mln), with 121 patients undergoing treatment and 694 patients having recovered, 13 patients have died. The lethality index stands at 1.57%.

Apart from taking preventive measures protecting citizens from the spread of the virus, the government is taking measures to mitigate the social and economic consequences of the pandemic through social assistance to citizens, support to entrepreneurs, boosting the economy, and intensive cooperation with the international partners to attract necessary financial flows.

**Since the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Georgia has been taking proactive measures to ensure the protection of social, civil and economic rights of vulnerable and minority groups** - including persons with disabilities, large families, single parents, older people, ethnic, sexual, religious and other minorities - **through access to information, access to services, access to basic subsistence support, access to health and education.**

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<sup>2</sup> Public Health Emergency International Concern

<sup>3</sup> Data provided as of June 11, 2020

## International Guidelines

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During the pandemic, international organizations such as the Council of Europe and the United Nations (UN) issued principles and guidelines for member states to better protect human rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, on April 8, 2020, the Council of Europe (CoE) published the guidance - **"Coronavirus: guidance to governments on respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law."**<sup>4</sup>

First and foremost, the document imposes a positive obligation on states to protect citizens from fatal diseases in accordance with the principles of the rule of law. **Regardless of the crisis, rights such as the right to life and prohibition of torture cannot be restricted.**<sup>5</sup>

The document also clarifies that **all measures taken by the state should be subject to the principles of proportionality and be defined in time.** Following these principles, **it is possible to adopt new, non-existent laws to deal with pandemics. Social activities, such as weddings and funerals, may also be restricted.** In such cases, the States should detail the reasons for the restriction and ensure that the limitations are proportionate.<sup>6</sup>

The guideline also refers to the role of the **media and journalists, especially the public broadcaster,** in disseminating information about the pandemic and in averting any possible misinformation. The protection of personal data during the pandemic is also underscored. In addition, the document calls on states to ensure protection from gender-based and domestic violence during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

Lastly, according to the CoE guidelines, all of the imposed restrictions and obligations should **serve the purpose of preventing the spread of the virus and create a balance between liberties and prevention/response.** Discrimination of any kind is unacceptable, and no one should be left behind, particularly vulnerable groups and ethnic minorities.<sup>8</sup>

In April 2020, **the United Nations released a framework document for the immediate socio-economic response to COVID-19<sup>9</sup> and the report, "We are all in this together: Human Rights and COVID-19."<sup>10</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup> Council of Europe (COE), Respecting Democracy, Rule of Law and Human Rights in the framework of the COVID-19 sanitary Crisis: A Toolkit for Member States (7 April 2020), Council of Europe Information Document SG / Inf (2020) 11, Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/3foZveb>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> The United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19, (April 2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37lPZFS>

<sup>10</sup> The United Nations, We are all in this together: Human Rights and COVID-19; (April 2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2BNyDpo>

The document discerns the principles and rights necessary for the member states to elaborate immediate socio-economic responses to the COVID-19 crisis.

Similar to the Council of Europe's guidelines, the UN Framework calls on member states to allocate all possible resources **to protect the right to life and to ensure equal access to health, including the provision of COVID-19 treatment services to the population without discrimination.**<sup>11</sup>

The framework document also calls on member states to pay special attention to the needs of **women and girls** and leave no one behind, including vulnerable groups. Among the **vulnerable and high-risk groups**, the document identifies older people, children, persons with disabilities, migrants, refugees, IDPs, stateless and homeless people, people in prisons and large state institutions, minorities, LGBTQ community members, pregnant women, and girls or those who gave birth during the pandemic.<sup>12</sup>

The document emphasizes the importance of **access to timely and reliable information** at all stages of the crisis as well as **access to education** at all stages of learning.

The framework document refers to the principles of socio-economic protection and calls on member states to **focus on those who have lost their jobs during the crisis and other vulnerable groups**. It also underscores that **protection of labor rights and access to justice should also be ensured.**<sup>13</sup>

Lastly, the document touches on the member states' authority to declare a state of emergency outlining that since the state of emergency leads to derogations of human rights, it must be exceptional, temporary, and only proclaimed when the situation amounts to a public emergency threatening the life of the nation. **Such extraordinary measures must meet the tests of proportionality and non-discrimination.**<sup>14</sup>

As for other international principles, **the Council of Europe's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms**<sup>15</sup> provides a possibility for the derogation from the Convention and the restriction of certain rights to manage the state of emergency. Namely, the first part of Article 15 of the Convention stipulates that "in time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation any High Contracting Party may take measures derogating from its obligations under this Convention to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with its other obligations under international law."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> The United Nations Framework for the Immediate Socio-Economic Response to COVID-19, (April 2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37IPZFS>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

<sup>15</sup> Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Council of Europe, (1999), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37iKeZr>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

**The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights**,<sup>17</sup> adopted by the UN General Assembly, also provides a deviation from a similar obligation under the Covenant. In particular, "in time of public emergency which threatens the life of the nation and the existence of which is officially proclaimed, the States Parties to the present Covenant may take measures derogating from their obligations under the present Covenant to the extent strictly required by the exigencies of the situation, provided that such measures are not inconsistent with their other obligations under international law and do not involve discrimination solely on the ground of race, colour, sex, language, religion or social origin."

The amalgam of the documents mentioned above is what creates the area of action for [member] states during the COVID-19 crisis. The measures taken by the Government of Georgia to manage the crisis are in line with the above-mentioned international principles and obligations.

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<sup>17</sup> The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; United Nations, (1994), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37qApbR>

## Legal Aspects and Restriction of Constitutional Rights during the State of Emergency

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The state of emergency was declared on the basis of a decree issued by the President of Georgia on March 21, 2020,<sup>18</sup> and certain rights and freedoms stated in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of Georgia ("Fundamental Human Rights") were restricted. The decree encompassed the restriction of only the rights and freedoms that were critical to the management of the epidemiological situation. The Government of Georgia was granted by the decree the authority to regulate a number of issues, though the scale, the objectives, and the scope of the government's regulatory authority was elaborately defined by the decree itself.

By the decree of the President, the following rights enshrined in the Constitution of Georgia were restricted for the duration of the state of emergency throughout Georgia:

- **Human liberty** (Article 13 of the Constitution of Georgia), granting the relevant authorities the right to compulsorily transfer a person to an appropriate facility for violation of the rules of isolation or quarantine established by the government.
- **Freedom of movement** (Article 14 of the Constitution of Georgia), granting the government the right to establish rules of isolation and quarantine; Led to the suspension of international air, land, and sea passenger traffic (with exceptions envisaged by the ordinance of the government); granted the government the right to regulate the transportation of passengers on the territory of Georgia and the transportation of cargo that differ from the current legislation.
- **Rights to personal and family privacy, personal space, and privacy of communication** (Article 15 of the Constitution of Georgia) suspending the right of visitation in penitentiary institutions, as provided in the Penitentiary Code.
- **Rights to fair administrative proceedings, access to public information, informational self-determination, and compensation for damage inflicted by a public authority** (Article 18 of the Constitution of Georgia), granting the government the right to establish, by ordinance, the rules of public services and administrative proceedings that differ from the current legislation.

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<sup>18</sup> Decree of the President of Georgia "On the measures to be implemented in connection with the declaration of a state of emergency in the whole territory of Georgia", (March 2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3haRiff>

- **Right to property** (Article 19 of the Constitution of Georgia), granting the government the authority to restrict the right to property for quarantine, isolation, and medical purposes if necessary, and to use the property and material assets of private persons and legal entities.
- **Freedom of assembly** (Article 21 of the Constitution of Georgia), which restricted any type of assembly, demonstration, or the gathering of people, with the exceptions being determined by an ordinance of government.
- **Freedom of labor, freedom of trade unions, right to strike and freedom of enterprise (Article 26 of the Constitution of Georgia), as a result of which:** Entities under private law envisaged by the ordinance of government were prohibited, restricted, or obligated to carry out individual activities in accordance with the rules provided for by the same ordinance; The ordinance of government defined special rules for the observance of sanitary-hygienic norms by private persons, legal entities, and public institutions. The government was granted the right to establish rules and conditions that are different from those envisaged by the laws of Georgia on Early and Preschool Education, on General Education, on Vocational Education, and on Higher Education. The government was granted the right to mobilize people with appropriate medical education and authority.

Furthermore, the decree authorized the Minister of Justice of Georgia to regulate the obligation of the probationer and the persons released on parole, as well as to announce the time and place established by the probation officer, in a manner that is different from the current legislation.

The decree also regulated conducting court hearings under the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia remotely via electronic means of communication. In such circumstances, the right to refuse to hold the session remotely on the grounds of the desire to attend the session in person was suspended for all participants.

In accordance with the decree issued by the President of Georgia and similar to a number of other countries (Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, Romania, Armenia), Georgia enacted Article 15 of CoE's Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms during the State of Emergency. The article entails the restriction of certain rights in order to manage the state of emergency.

It should be noted that not all derogations provided by Article 15 were utilized by the Georgian state. According to the Presidential decree, in the duration of the state of emergency, **only those Constitutional rights were restricted that directly correlated with managing the epidemiological situation in the country.**

Furthermore, the principle of proportionality was also adhered to in all circumstances. Namely, in accordance with international principles and documents, **the imposition of**

any specific restriction regarded, on the one hand, the legitimate aim based on the epidemiological situation and, on the other hand, the proportionality between the legitimate aim and the means used to achieve it.

It should be noted that regardless of the state of emergency, the protection and promotion of social and economic rights remained a top priority for the government. **Thus, a number of the restrictions - especially those related to the generating income and ability to carry out relevant economic activities, entailed necessary exemptions.** For example, although the government has imposed strict quarantine measures in Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities, these municipalities, in a similar manner to others, were allowed to carry out agricultural work and livestock/poultry activities (in accordance with the recommendations of the Ministry of Health), given that these activities constitute to the income generation for the local population.

## Access to COVID-19 related Information

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Article 17 of the Constitution of Georgia (Rights to freedom of opinion, information, mass media, and the internet) protects the right of all people to freely receive and disseminate information. Article 19 of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights shares a similar spirit. In addition, access to COVID-19 related information is a positive obligation of the state.

The Government of Georgia has taken the following measures to ensure equal access to COVID-19 related timely and reliable information and the participation of all groups of the Georgia society:

- Since the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Georgia guaranteed the provision of timely and reliable information to the population. With this goal, **daily government briefings were held**, in which the Prime Minister, other Ministers and experts provided COVID-19 related updates for all. At the briefings, a wide range of journalists had an opportunity to ask questions and solicit information on a live broadcast.
- In order to provide timely access to information on pandemics to the citizens with disabilities, **the Government briefings are broadcasted in sign language**. For those citizens with hearing impairments who do not know sign language, transcripts of briefings are uploaded to the Governmental social media page (in agreement with the PwD community) immediately after briefings. In collaboration with the Public Broadcaster, the information is also translated into the ethnic minority languages.
- Government informational website **www.StopCov.ge on COVID-19 is fully accessible in six languages - Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, English, Armenian and Azerbaijani**. The portal has come to be the primary source of statistics on the COVID-19 confirmed cases in Georgia. In addition, the website regularly publishes comprehensive and reliable information on COVID-19 as well as the recommendations by the World Health Organization and the National Center for Disease Control. The informative videos posted on the platform are accompanied by a sign language translation.
- The critical information during the crisis was provided to the population using the SMS system, also translated in ethnic minority languages. **In addition to Georgian, short text messages were sent in Armenian and Azerbaijani.**
- **The Government continuously ensures that the information is translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani and is distributed widely**. Recommendation videos on COVID-19 are also disseminated in these languages. **Since March, a variety of printed materials have been translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani and distributed door-to-door, amounting to a total of 529,100 units.**

- **Georgian citizens living abroad were regularly updated with COVID-19 related information and distance medical consultations.** As a result of the joint efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the National Center for Disease Control, online consultations were held for Georgian citizens living abroad. During such consultations, public health experts and infectious disease specialists provided recommendations on COVID-19 related issues.
- **In order to consult with representatives of the civil society, international organizations, and communities, several consultation platforms have been established, including under the auspices of the Inter-Agency Human Rights Council.** During these discussions, the Government officials provided detailed information on the decision-making process and future plans. They also responded to the questions asked by the community members and proactively provided information on Covid-19. Opinions and recommendations of civil society, international organizations, PwDs, ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities, as well as specific restrictions on human rights and socio-economic issues, were taken into account and acted upon.

As a result, an independent survey on COVID-19, conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC) in May 2020<sup>19</sup>, showed that **93% of respondents believe the social distance to slow down the spread of the virus, 87% agree that the older people constitute the higher risk and are more likely to get infected, 83% supported the restriction of freedom of movement during the curfew hours (21:00 - 06:00); and 78% supported the extension of the state of emergency until May 22, 2020.**

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<sup>19</sup> COVID-19 Monitor: Wave 1, (2020), Caucasus Research Resource Center (CRRC), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2XONB74>

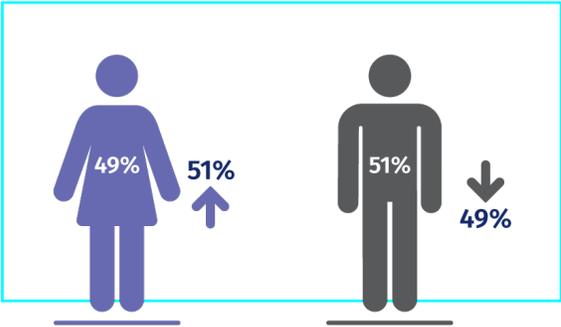
# Collection of Disaggregated Data on COVID-19 and Personal Data Protection

The total population of Georgia is 3.7 million<sup>20</sup> - women constituting 52% of it (1.9 million). More than 700,000 citizens receive an age pension.<sup>21</sup> Five regions of Georgia are inhabited by ethnic minorities, amounting to about 13% of the population. The number of persons with disabilities visible to the system (officially registered) amounts to 125,000. As for the religious minorities, the largest groups are Muslims (10%), the Armenian Apostolic Church (2%), the Catholic Church (0.5%), and atheists (0.5%).<sup>22</sup>

**As a part of the response to the COVID-19 crisis, the National Center for Disease Control collects and analyzes disaggregated data on a daily basis.** Through data collection, evidence-based decision-making is ensured. Furthermore, this stipulates the protection of the rights of vulnerable or at-risk groups and guarantees a more comprehensive situational analysis for further action.

**At all stages, the number of confirmed cases was almost equally distributed among women and men.** By June 11, 2020, of the 800 analyzed cases, 410 (51%) were female and 390 (49%) male.<sup>23</sup> However, prior to the first 270 cases, a slightly different percentage distribution was observed. In particular, women constituted 49% of the cases vis-a-vis to 51% of men. Approximately after the 270th case, the percentages changed.<sup>24</sup>

Chart 1. Percentage distribution of COVID-19 confirmed cases by sex at an earlier stage of the crisis and as of June 11, 2020



As for the COVID-19 confirmed case distribution by age, by June 11, 2020, COVID-19 confirmed cases of in terms of age were distributed as follows:

<sup>20</sup> Geostat, <https://bit.ly/2UydLcf>  
<sup>21</sup> Social Service Agency, <https://bit.ly/2UydLcf>  
<sup>22</sup> Geostat, <https://bit.ly/2UydLcf>  
<sup>23</sup> National Center for Disease Control (NCDC), <https://www.ncdc.ge>  
<sup>24</sup> Ibid

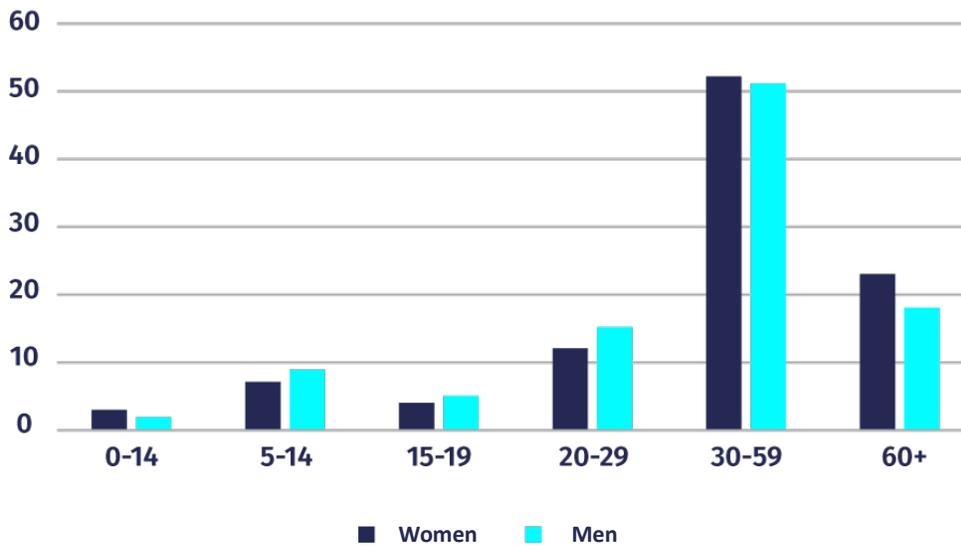
Table 1. Distribution of COVID-19 confirmed cases by age (n = 800)

Age Group	Number of Cases	Percentage (%)
0-4	19	2.4%
5-14	61	7.6%
15-19	38	4.7%
20-29	106	13.2%
30-59	412	51.5%
60-69	89	11.1%
70-79	53	6.6%
80+	22	2.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>800</b>	<b>100%</b>

By June 11, 2020, the total number of fatal cases is 13. Among them, 8 (67%) are women, and 5 (33%) are men. The average age of the deceased is 74 - the eldest 86, and the youngest 45.

As for the data distribution by sex in age groups, at all stages of the crisis, **COVID-19 confirmed cases were almost equally distributed between women and men in all age groups**. As of June 11, 2020, percentages of men and women in age groups were distributed as follows:

Chart 2. Percentage distribution of COVID-19 confirmed cases by sex and age groups as of June 11, 2020 (n=800)





Apart from the disaggregated data collection, **the State Inspector's Office continued to implementing measures on protecting personal data during the crisis. The work was carried out in directions of prevention, response, and monitoring.**

**Recommendations on personal data protection during the COVID-19** pandemic have been elaborated and published.

A new awareness-raising project was launched that entitled **online lectures on data processing in the health sector.**

The Inspector's office and the Ministry of Labor, Health, and Social Affairs of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories of Georgia had active collaborations on **data processing through COVID-19 app.**

**Numerous consultations on COVID-19 related issues** have been held for public and private agencies.

**Reception and consideration of the citizens' applications continued throughout the crisis.** Citizens' questions were related to data collection during the crisis, personal data protection during the crisis, and so forth.

# Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence

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**Despite the crisis, the Government of Georgia continued to pursue and enforce rigorous policies and measures against gender-based and domestic violence.** As demonstrated in numerous countries (France, Spain), the COVID-19 crisis constituted to increasing risks of violence against women (VAW) and domestic violence (DV). To mitigate such risks, the Inter-agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence elaborated a Communication Strategy on Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Crisis. Together with line ministries, international and national partners, the Inter-Agency Commission was proactively implementing the strategy throughout the crisis.

The strategy and the ongoing communication campaign are, on the one hand, aimed at amplifying intolerance against VAW and DV by deepening knowledge and raising awareness on the matter. On the other hand, they serve to **provide information to domestic violence victims/survivors on alternate ways of reporting violence.**

It should be noted that at no stage of the crisis did Georgia utilize a full lockdown measure. The curfew that was in force from March 31 to May 22 limited the freedom of movement from 09:00 PM to 06:00 AM. However, citizens were able to leave their homes if necessary during the day following recommendations by the World Health Organization and the National Center for Disease Control.

Nevertheless, in a time of the crisis, reporting domestic violence to law enforcement could have been linked to complications for women. **Therefore, throughout the crisis, the state intensively disseminated information on the alternative ways of reporting VAW and DV.** For example, the mobile application 112 (Emergency Services) incorporates chatbox and silent SOS signal options.

Information on alternate ways of reporting violence was disseminated through a **state-wide SMS system - also translated into ethnic minority languages. Additionally, the information posters were displayed in pharmacy (GPC, PSP) and grocery store chains (Carrefour, "Two Steps") across the country.** Along with Georgian, the information was disseminated in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages. **Relevant information videos were made for television and social media.**

**Information on state-provided services for VAW and DV survivors was displayed in quarantine hotels for citizens returning to the country.** By June 11, 2020, more than 13,000 citizens returned to the country.

Throughout the crisis, the Ministry of Internal Affairs rapidly responded to VAW and DV cases. Although the number of such reports did not significantly increase compared to last years' data (see Table 2), **the Ministry took special measures for identifying and responding to domestic violence.** As part of the tailored policy solutions, the police were instructed not to fine persons who violated the curfew to escape domestic violence.

Moreover, 112 Georgia - Public Safety Management Center staff were instructed to share this information with all the VAW and DV victims/survivors who reported the cases of violence during the curfew hours.

**Table N2. Data on reporting and responding to VAW and DV cases during the crisis in comparison to the same period of 2019<sup>25</sup>**

	2019	2020
<b>112 Data on Domestic Conflict/Violence</b>		
January	1807	1591
February	1579	1373
March	1668	1594
April	1497	1566
<b>Investigations initiated on the grounds of domestic violence and domestic crime</b>		
January	632	521
February	612	513
March	581	517
April	447	419
<b>Restraining orders issued on the grounds of domestic violence</b>		
January	876	947
February	868	836
March	953	924
April	818	786

**Throughout the crisis, the state continuously provided free services for victims of VAW and DV.** The Agency of State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia) re-structured service models for ten shelters and crisis centers as soon as the crisis began. In order to avert the possible spread of the virus, new models ensure to temporarily place newcomers separately. A special questionnaire has also been elaborated for receiving a new beneficiary at the shelter/daycare facility. In addition, some parts of the services are carried out remotely.

<sup>25</sup> Information-Analytical Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia

The personnel is consistently provided with the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE).

**Throughout the crisis, emergency assistance and consultation hotlines continued to work non-stop.** Hotline and consultation services were provided through the Public Security Management Center under the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia -112, Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking hotline - 116 006, Public Defender’s Office hotline - 1481.

It should be noted that **the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking hotline - 116 006 provides citizens with legal, psychological, and social consultations in 8 languages.** Namely, Georgian, English, Armenian, Azerbaijani, Arabic, Farsi, Turkish and Russian languages.

In comparison to the previous year, January, February, and March saw a slight decrease in demand for hotlines, and a slight increase in April (see Table N2 and Table N3).

**Table 3. Data on calls received through the consultation hotline (116) during the crisis in comparison to the same period of 2019**

	2019	2020
<b>Calls received through the consultation hotline (116)</b>		
January	97	133
February	131	135
March	122	108
April	100	110

Despite the crisis, the state continues to combating VAW and DV through **strict policy solutions, rapid response, prevention, state-provided services, and awareness-raising.**

## Rights of Persons with Disabilities

According to the World Health Organization, the COVID-19 crisis could increase risks for persons with disabilities (PwDs) and create additional barriers in their social everyday lives.<sup>26</sup> A number of international recommendations for various actors have been issued in order to ensure the protection of PwD rights during the pandemic. These recommendations include the European Disability Forum (EDF),<sup>27</sup> The WHO Guideline "Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak", and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' guidance "COVID-19 and the rights of persons with disabilities".<sup>28</sup>

In order to implement the recommendations mentioned above and support people with disabilities, the Government of Georgia focused on **access to the information, socio-economic support, and guaranteeing the representation of DPOs and PwDs in decision-making processes following the principle of "nothing about us without us."**

In accordance with the recommendations issued by WHO, EDF, and OHCHR and - in order to provide timely access to information on pandemics to the citizens with disabilities, from March 20, 2020, the Government briefings are broadcasted in sign language. For those citizens with hearing impairments who do not know sign language, transcripts of briefings are uploaded to the Governmental social media page (in agreement with the PwD community) immediately after briefings. The COVID-19 related information is additionally disseminated through video sources and information hotlines. Noteworthy that the 112 hotline is disability friendly and includes video call and SMS functions. The informative guidelines on the webpage [www.StopCov.ge](http://www.StopCov.ge) are also uploaded in a disability-friendly format.

In order to disseminate information and identify existing needs, the representatives of the Government regularly **cooperated with DPOs, PwD organizations, and community members**. Within the scope of the Human Rights Council, a communication platform was set up to hold regular meetings, with the active participation of PwDs, community and international organizations, as well as PwD rights activists. During these meetings, the government officials (Deputy Ministers, the Prime Minister's Office, representatives of the Ministries), together with the participants, analyzed the current situation, challenges, and possible solutions. (WHO and OHCHR recommendation)

In order to **ensure access to healthcare** for persons with disabilities, in accordance with the recommendations of the EDF and OHCHR, access to COVID-19 treatment is provided without any prioritization of patients or any discrimination.

In order to ensure a **feasible and safe delivery of mental health services** during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied

<sup>26</sup> "Disability considerations during the COVID-19 outbreak", (March 2020), World Health Organization, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2BWE31x>

<sup>27</sup> European Disability Forum (EDF), (2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2zq6W5m>

<sup>28</sup> "COVID-19 and the rights of the persons with disabilities: Guidance", (March 2020), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/2Uyf7nl>

Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, developed a set of guidelines and protocols "**Mental health and COVID-19: National Recommendation for Clinical Practice (Guideline)**".<sup>29</sup> The protocol encompasses safe patient management standards for both state mental health inpatient and outpatient services during the COVID-19 crisis.

**Throughout the crisis, large-scale state institutions for persons with disabilities continued to operate uninterruptedly.** The Agency of State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons From The Occupied Territories, Labor, Health, and Social Affairs) restructured the service model for three large state institutions in the country. Some services are provided remotely. Personnel is constantly provided with personal protective equipment (recommended by EDF and WHO). In addition, to protect the beneficiaries and minimize the entry of outsiders into large-scale state institutions, respective long-term staff duty (for a period of 7 to 14 calendar days) was imposed (OHCHR recommendation).

During the crisis, the Agency of State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking (Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons From The Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs) was not able to provide some of the specific services offered to children with disabilities, such as daycare centers, due to the nature of services (frequent physical contact). The services, however, continued to operate remotely (in a limited manner). In order to maintain regular contact with children, social workers employed in the agency's regional/district centers were given special instructions on how to perform their functions remotely. In addition, food vouchers were distributed to the beneficiaries of the daycare centers. A total of 4,400 vouchers were issued to support 2,200 beneficiaries during the crisis. In addition, partial funding has been extended to early childhood development, habilitation/rehabilitation, daycare centers, and other sub-programme providers (WHO Recommendation). In cooperation with international partners (Georgian Red Cross, United Nations Development Programme), **home care programmes have been expanded, and the participation of PwDs increased.**

The Government's anti-crisis plan was built on human rights approaches. Consequently, the fundamental approach of **the anti-crisis plan entailed to maximize the existing limited resources and cover as many people affected by the crisis and possible.**

One of the **primary target groups of the anti-crisis plan were persons with severe disabilities and children with disabilities.** In particular, according to the Government's anti-crisis plan, persons with severe disabilities, as well as children with disabilities, will receive a total of 600 GEL of monetary support in 6 months. **Up to 40,000 people will benefit from the support. The budget of the component is 25 million GEL.**

In addition to the direct targeted support, PwDs who have lost their jobs during the crisis or have been on unpaid leave will receive **1,200 GEL in compensation in a duration of**

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<sup>29</sup> "Mental Health and COVID-19: National Recommendation for Clinical Practice (Guideline)", (2020), the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs <https://bit.ly/2UwAaHG>

**six months - 200 GEL per month.** In cases of self-employment, the support amounts to one time amount of **300 GEL.**

## Children's Rights

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To protect children's rights during the crisis, **the right to education and the mitigation of the socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 were prioritized. In addition, special attention was paid to children living and working on the streets and their protection from the virus.**

The Government of Georgia continues diligent work to reduce and eradicate child poverty. In 2019, **the Government of Georgia increased financial assistance to children living in families with a social rating score of 100,000 or lower (under the Targeted Social Assistance programme) five times: from 10 GEL to 50 GEL.**

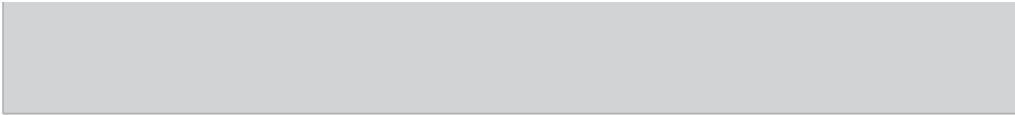
**Children also constitute one of the primary target groups of the anti-crisis plan.** In particular, families with a social rating score from 65,000 to 100,000 will receive approximately 600 GEL of monthly support for six months. It is noteworthy that these families currently receive social support only for children under 16. The number of beneficiaries under this component to more than 190 000 individuals (70 000 families). The budget for this component is 50 million GEL.

In addition, families with a social rating score of up to 100,000 with three or more children under 16 will receive, on average, 600 GEL of monthly support for six months. The number of beneficiaries under this component amounts to more than 130 000 individuals (22 000 families). The budget for this component is 13 million GEL.

The anti-crisis plan helps to meet the socio-economic needs of children in a timely manner, which, in turn, might have an impact on child poverty.

Moreover, **socio-economic support for children contributes to the economic empowerment of women and parents in general. During the pandemic, numerous activities were conducted aimed at supporting the parents.** Among them is a weekly TV programme, "Parent's Hour." The programme aims to support parents of children with disabilities sharing practical advice on how to deal with the pandemic. It represents a result of cooperation between the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sport of Georgia, Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, Public Broadcaster, and UNICEF.

**Special measures were put in place in order to protect children living and working on the streets and to avert the possible spread of COVID-19.** Namely, a designated quarantine space has been established in Tbilisi that accommodated beneficiaries under the state care who were outside the service for some time, and their contacts were unidentifiable (for epidemiological purposes). In addition, children, caregivers, and



foster parents under state care were provided with psychological support services to deal with stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis. Throughout the crisis, small family-type homes were regularly equipped with appropriate protective supplies, disinfectants, and medical supplies.

As the COVID-19 crisis began, all educational institutions were closed since March 4, 2020. **The remote education process was restarted on March 14. From March 30, the educational process completely switched to distance learning.**

**To ensure access to education for all while access to computer devices and the internet remained to be a challenge, a project "Teleskola" was launched on March 30.** It was a result of the joint efforts of the Government of Georgia and the Georgian Public Broadcaster. **The project offered TV lessons to school students, adhering to the standards and programme defined by the national curriculum.**

At the beginning of May, the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Georgia also launched an education project "web school," **offering webinars to the 12th graders preparing them for the national exams.**

**Higher education institutions also switched to e-learning, using a variety of synchronous and asynchronous methods.** Universities have developed individual curricula for some of the students. Curricula have been modified accordingly, teaching methods and evaluation systems have been revised. In addition, to guarantee access to education for all, universities identified students who have been left out of e-learning due to a lack of access to the internet and computer devices. **Most of the universities provided students with internet and computer devices.**

In order to ensure **access to education for minors placed in penitentiary institutions**, in cooperation with the Penitentiary Institutions and the Ministry of Education, alternative ways of e-learning were established.

## Rights of ethnic, religious, sexual minorities

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During the crisis, cooperation with ethnic and religious minorities, as well as the LGBTQI+ community, focused on ensuring **access to information and basic subsistence support for all to protect social and economic rights and mitigate the socio-economic impact of the crisis.**

With the joint efforts of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia, the Administration of Government and local municipalities, **information on protection and prevention of COVID-19 was regularly and consistently disseminated to ethnic minority settlements.** This is especially so since strict quarantine measures were imposed in Bolnisi and Marneuli municipalities (see “Access to Information” above).

It should be noted that regardless of the state of emergency, **the protection and promotion of social and economic rights remained a top priority for the government. Thus, a number of the restrictions - especially those related to the generating income and ability to carry out relevant economic activities, entailed necessary exemptions.** For example, although the government has imposed strict quarantine measures in Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities, these municipalities, in a similar manner to others, were allowed to carry out agricultural work and livestock/poultry activities (in accordance with the recommendations of the Ministry of Health), given that these activities constitute to the income generation for the local population.

As a result, with joint efforts of the Operational Headquarters on the Management of the State of Emergency, local municipalities, and relevant agencies, **more than 6,000 tons of harvest was purchased from Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities and distributed to various markets.**

In order to disseminate information and to identify the needs, - following the principle of “nothing about us without us” - **the Government of Georgia regularly conducted consultations with minority organizations and activists.** Within the scope of the Human Rights Council, a communication platform was set up to hold regular meetings with LGBTQI+ activists, community and international organizations. Regular meetings and consultations with representatives of ethnic and religious minorities were also conducted in cooperation with the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and the Administration of Government.

**In order to ensure access to basic subsistence support, regular support of food and hygiene supplies were distributed in the capital and regions** as a result of a joint effort of the Administration of the Government, state ministries, international organizations, local municipalities, the private sector, and the Georgian Red Cross Society. **Support campaigns were focused on the members of minorities, including the Roma community, IDP settlements, ethnic minorities, and the LGBTQI+ community. Community organizations also participated in the support distribution.**

In the absence of systematic support to the LGBTQI+ community prior to the crisis, **each request for support was responded individually, ensuring that no one is left behind.** As a result, all requests for access to basic subsistence support (food and hygiene supplies) were met alongside setting the rapid response mechanism.

## Rights of Older People

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The World Health Organization (WHO) has named older people to be at increased risk<sup>30</sup> of COVID-19 infection. Therefore, **special attention was paid to ensure that older citizens are able to stay at home.**

On March 31, citizens over the age of 70 were prohibited from leaving their homes, except for emergencies or when going to a nearby grocery store, pharmacy, or medical facility. With joint efforts of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs, local municipalities, and the Georgian Red Cross Society, **a programme supporting single older people was launched. Apart from ensuring access to basic subsistence support (delivering groceries to houses), the programme encompassed home care assistance service as well.**

In addition, medications were delivered to people enrolled in universal healthcare programmes operated by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs. Namely, people in specific drug-treatment programmes, insulin-dependent individuals, those over 70 enrolled in the state's chronic drug treatment programme and persons with disabilities.

During the crisis, the Ministry of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health, and Social Affairs prepared and approved **recommendations (guidelines) for the older people during the spread of a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) infection (COVID-19).**<sup>31</sup>

**The older citizens were one of the primary target groups of the government's anti-crisis plan.** In particular, according to the plan, from July 1, 2020, pensions for over 410 000 pensioners aged 70 and above will increase by 30 GEL. Moreover, from January 2021 pension indexation will also be introduced, meaning:

- Pensions will increase at least by an amount corresponding to the inflation rate, i.e., the proportion between rising prices and pension amount will remain the same;

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<sup>30</sup> Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for Long-Term Care Facilities in the context of COVID-19, Interim Guidance, (2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/37m1c9h>

<sup>31</sup> "Recommendations for the older people during the spread of a new coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) infection (COVID-19)", (2020), retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3dSDp3f>

- For pensioners aged 70 and over, 80% of the actual economic growth will be added to the inflation rate, i.e., the annual pension increase will surpass the inflation rate;
- Regardless of the inflation and economic growth, pensions will increase by at least 20 GEL and 25 GEL for pensioners aged 70 and over 70, respectively.

**In addition to direct targeted support, the government's anti-crisis plan supported citizens by a three-month utility bill benefiting** those whose monthly electricity consumption is less than 200 kW, and whose monthly natural gas consumption is less than 200 m<sup>3</sup>. The package included cleaning and water bills as well. The average number of beneficiaries of electricity benefits amounted to approximately **1.2 million consumers** and the number of recipients of the natural gas consumption support to more than **670 000 consumers**. The budget for this component programme is 170 million GEL.

## Rights of Persons placed in Penitentiary Institution

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To protect the rights of persons placed in penitentiary institutions during the COVID19 crisis, **decisions were made considering the country's epidemiological situation and the minimal restrictions of rights.**

In a number of countries, penitentiary institutions became centers of COVID-19 outbreak (the United States, Venezuela). In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the Georgian penitentiary system, **special conditions have been introduced as of March 5, 2020.** During this period, convicts were denied the right to a meeting, a departure from the penitentiary institution for a short period of time, as well as departure from the penitentiary institution temporarily due to exceptional personal circumstances. To mitigate this limitation, phone call time was added to each prisoner's balance with some free minutes to talk.

**In addition, field hospitals were assembled at so-called receiving prisons at which COVID-19 related checks are conducted until admitting to prison.** Upon detection of COVID-19 symptoms, the prisoner is not admitted to the facility and is placed in the clinic.

**Temporary medical checkpoints at the entrances to penitentiary facilities also provided medical check-ups, such as thermal screening,** for the staff and all other entrants to the institutions.

Soon after the beginning of the pandemic, the penitentiary system moved to a so-called closed model. Namely, in order to avert external sources carrying the virus into the facilities, 780 employees of the system moved and stayed in penitentiary institutions without leaving during the pic of the crisis.

From March 12, 2020, **probationers were temporarily relieved of their duty to report to the probation bureau.** Meetings of the Standing Committee on Revocation of Conditional Sentence on the revocation of conditional sentences, expungement, or restoration of the rights revoked by the court were held remotely via video conference. As a result of assessment of the epidemiological situation, on 18 May, 2020, reporting at the probation bureaus resumed for those convicts accused of domestic violence.

**As a result, to this day, penitentiary institutions remain free of COVID-19 cases.**

## Rights of Persons Living in the Occupied Territories

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Since the first days of the crisis, the Government has unequivocally expressed its readiness to assist all people living in the occupied territories of Georgia. **Protection of the right to live and health, as well as access to information, access to COVID-19 related healthcare were prioritized to ensure better protection of people living in occupied territories** — namely, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. The support included but was limited to promptly delivering information, sharing expertise, providing with medical equipment, and treating transferred patients.

In order to ensure **access to information**, the Government information web-portal [www.StopCov.ge](http://www.StopCov.ge) is translated into Abkhazian and Ossetian languages. Moreover, in cooperation with the Public Broadcaster, the Government briefings on COVID-19 are also translated in Abkhazian and Ossetian languages. Informational videos in Abkhazian and Ossetian were frequently produced and disseminated widely throughout the crisis.

In order to protect **the right to health**, public health experts, and infectious disease specialists provided recommendations on COVID-19 related issues through online consultations with local doctors. In addition, the Abkhazia region has repeatedly been equipped with personal protective equipment (PPE), medical supplies, and hygiene kits. This process continues to this day.

A so-called occupation lines were closed (most of the time) during the COVID-19 crisis with both, Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. **A field hospital was opened near the Enguri Bridge**. People who managed to cross the so-called occupation line from the occupied Abkhazia region were tested for fever and were transferred to medical facilities.

Rukhi Hospital (near the occupation line) was equipped and began to operate in the shortest time during the pandemic. **The hospital was built for long-term purposes, including simplifying access to medical care for people living in the occupied territories.**

In order to ensure **access to basic subsistence support** during the crisis, in cooperation with the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia and international partners, assistance was provided to all socially vulnerable families living across the occupation line.

In all the above-mentioned processes, the hotline mechanism operating within the framework of the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) was actively utilized.

## Rights of Georgian Citizens Residing Abroad

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As a result of the challenging circumstances due to the COVID-19 global crisis, numerous countries worldwide had to imply rapid and radical measures: declaration of a state of the emergency, imposing curfews, full lockdowns, and so forth. Air traffic, as well as maritime and land transportation, was restricted in an unprecedented manner. Pandemic had an impact on all aspects of social and economic lives.

**Georgian citizens residing abroad often found themselves in a difficult economic situation facing numerous social challenges on a daily basis.** Therefore, from the beginning of the crisis, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia ensured the protection of social and economic rights of citizens residing abroad.

**Georgian embassies ensured the support of 21 237 citizens with shelter and access to basic subsistence support (food and hygiene supplies).** The food voucher distribution system (SPAR) was also enacted. **Access to medication and medical care** were regularly ensured for people with special medical needs - such needs were identified continuously. Moreover, the individual needs of citizens were assessed and assisted through remote consultations.

Due to a lack of access to medical care at some locations, Georgian citizens living abroad were regularly updated with COVID-19 related information and distance medical consultations. As a result of the joint efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and the National Center for Disease Control, **online consultations were held for Georgian citizens living abroad. During such consultations, public health experts and infectious disease specialists provided recommendations on COVID-19 related issues.**

As of June 11, 2020, 118 Georgian citizens abroad were infected with COVID-19, mostly with its less severe forms. During the crisis period, 16 cases of Georgian citizen COVID-19 cases were fatal (1 in Austria, 4 in Spain, 1 in Turkey, 2 in Great Britain, 5 in the US, 2 in France, and 1 in Latvia).

**In order to support the return of vulnerable citizens, criteria were established that included such vulnerable groups** as persons with disabilities, people with chronic respiratory diseases, pregnant women, children under 18, older people (65+), and students left without a stipend/financial support.

**Overall, by June 11, 2020, the state repatriated 12 720 Georgian citizens,** including 7,107 by means of air transport, 5,223 by means of land transport, and 390 by means of maritime transport.

The repatriates include 483 persons with chronic respiratory diseases, 34 persons with disabilities, 259 senior citizens, 102 pregnant women, 435 underage children, 173 oncology patients, 1,118 transit travelers, 29 sailors, and 90 persons with special needs, also 794 students left with no residence and stipends - **a total of 3,517 vulnerable citizens with special needs.**

## Rights of Refugees and Asylum Seekers Residing in Georgia

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Ensuring **access to information, socio-economic support and COVID-19 healthcare** was prioritized for refugees and asylum seekers residing in Georgia during the COVID-19 crisis.

During the crisis, the Integration Center under the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs **maintained support to refugees and asylum seekers residing in Georgia.**

From the beginning of the state of emergency, the Integration Centre resume work remotely and provided support through online services. Apart from on-going activities (such as Georgian language and social culture awareness workshops), the Integration Center was actively disseminating information in multiple languages on COVID-19. Namely, regarding preventive measures, imposed restrictions, and healthcare recommendations.

**Furthermore, distant (via phone), online consultations, and Q&A sessions were held regularly for refugees and asylum seekers residing in Georgia.**

**Refugees and asylum seekers residing in Georgia benefited from utility bill subsidies** provided by the Government under the anti-crisis plan and other benefits imposed at the first stage of the socio-economic support.

International partners actively participated and supported the Integration Center under the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs to create access to information, as well as social and economic support to refugees and asylum seekers residing in Georgia.

## Conclusion

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The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the lives of millions of people and the development of the countries throughout the world. The pandemic is still in an active phase. Alongside the governments, combatting the virus is a responsibility of all citizens and requires the active involvement of all.

**Today, Georgia is among the success cases in fight against COVID-19, as evidenced by numerous international assessments.<sup>32</sup> Along with the efforts of the state, this is the result of the high sense of responsibility and involvement of our citizens.**

Based on currently existing expertise and in view of local and national experts, the probability of the "second wave" of the virus is high. Infection is characterized by a wavy course, with occasional increases and decreases, as evidenced by the examples of other countries.

The vital task for the Government of Georgia today is to maintain positive outcomes in preventing the spread of the virus and avoiding or minimizing the "second wave." To achieve this common goal, it is critical to continue the engagement of citizens, maintaining a high sense of responsibility, and ensuring that rules and recommendations are followed thoroughly by all.

**Furthermore, the in-depth research on the impact of the pandemic on human rights, social and political lives, economy, and crisis management is underway to ensure that, on the one hand, the country comes out of the crisis with minimal losses for people and economy. On the other hand, to create evidence on how to better protect human rights, strengthen socio-economic support systems, ensure effective crisis management, and be better prepared for a potential future crisis.**

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<sup>32</sup> "Telegraph" about Georgia's experience is available at <https://bit.ly/2W0cwTT>; Fox News about Georgia is available at <https://fxn.ws/3iM3jZp>; The Washington Times, A Successful History of Georgia, is available at <https://bit.ly/38Fr6oZ>; The Foreign Policy, countries that successfully deal with the pandemic, is available at <https://bit.ly/2W3aRgB>; The Intelli news about Georgia is available at <https://bit.ly/3fpPwppn>; The EURACTIV's Reporting, Georgia's Successful Struggle with COVID-19, is available at <https://bit.ly/3fghkMO>; The Emerging Europe - Georgia's success in fighting the virus is available at <https://bit.ly/3gKBkHH>; The Daily Signal, Georgia - America's Faithful Partner in Fighting Common Challenges, is available at <https://dailysign.al/3eaKYS7>; The assessment of the leading American epidemiologist about Georgia is available at <https://bit.ly/3gSgiuP>; WHO Head's Assessment of Georgia is available at <https://bit.ly/2AL533S>; WHO Assessment - Georgia, available at <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/656>; Additionally – at <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/1505>; The Washington Post on the successful experience of small countries is available at <https://wapo.st/3iIT5bX>.

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