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PREVENTION OF CORONAVIRUS SPREAD
IN GEORGIA

**MEASURES IMPLEMENTED
BY THE GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA
AGAINST COVID-19**

REPORT



GOVERNMENT OF GEORGIA

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Abbreviations

COVID-19	The coronavirus disease 19
SARS CoV-2	Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (Novel Coronavirus)
RT-PCR	Reverse Transcription Polymerase Chain Reaction
WHO	World Health Organization
CDC	American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
ECDC	European Center for Disease Prevention and Control
NCDC	L. Sakvarelidze National Center For Disease Control and Public Health LEPL
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AFD	French Development Agency
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
EU	European Union
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WB	World Bank
VAT	Value Added Tax
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

Introduction

On 31 December 2019, 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), COVID-19 – the disease caused by a new SARS-CoV-2 virus – started spreading rapidly across the world. Over **190 countries** had been affected by early March 2020. **On 30 January 2020**, WHO declared an international public health emergency¹, while on 11 March, it was assessed as a pandemic.

As of today, there have been over 6,452,391 reported cases of infection in 213 countries. The death toll has exceeded 382,479, while more than 3,066,698 people have recovered. Although COVID-19 is highly contagious, in terms of severity it may range 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. The Georgian Government responded by developing immediate and specific measures, as well as by initiating the investigation and continuous monitoring of relevant international practice.

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 have been determined by the obligation assumed by the government to protect the health and lives of the people and the motivation to save the economy.

Correspondingly, in parallel to the prevention of the spread of the virus, the Government of Georgia has provided citizens with social support while also ensuring the provision of support to entrepreneurs and the economy in order to mitigate the effects of the pandemic. The government is also working intensively with international partners to attract funding, in order to alleviate the results of the crisis to the greatest possible extent.

Since the first reported cases of infection in Georgia, experts have been continuously monitoring the viral replication rate and other epidemiological parameters. So far, **800 COVID-19 cases** have been reported in **30.01.2020 - 03.06.2020**, with **147** patients undergoing treatment and **640** patients having recovered, **13** patients have died. The lethality index stands at **1.63%**. Biological samples of **60,273** people have been RT-PCR tested. As of today, COVID-19 viral replication rate in Georgia is below 1, which testifies to the reduction of the intensity of transmission ^[1] (**see Annex 1: Current Statistics**).

The Government of Georgia is thankful to all the citizens for the remarkable sense of responsibility displayed in closely following the recommendations, which made it possible to deter the spread of the virus. Georgia has been internationally acclaimed as a success story in terms of the fight against COVID-19, which is evidenced by numerous international assessments.²

¹ Public Health Emergency International Concern

^[1] The Novel Coronavirus in Georgia: An Analysis by the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health <https://www.ncdc.ge/Handlers/GetFile.ashx?ID=4c07b687-7268-4ae8-9978-821e5e5ac4b6>

² *The Telegraph* on the Georgian experience can be viewed [here](#); *Fox News* on Georgia can be viewed [here](#); *The Washington Times*, Georgia's success story can be viewed [here](#); *Foreign Policy*, The Countries That Are Succeeding at Flattening the Curve can be viewed [here](#); *The Intelli News* on Georgia can be viewed [here](#); *EURACTIV's Reporting* on Georgia's successful fight against COVID-19 can be viewed [here](#); *Emerging Europe* on Georgia's success in the fight against the virus can be found [here](#); *The Daily Signal* – Georgia Is America's Proven Ally in Fighting Common Challenges can be found [here](#); the assessment of Georgia by America's leading epidemiologist can be found [here](#); the assessment of Georgia by the head of the World Health Organization

Experts say that a second wave of the disease is highly probable. The infection curve peaks or flattens periodically as has been the case in various countries. The preservation of positive results in terms of deterrence of the infection is an important objective for the government, so that lifting some of the restrictions does not bring about a second wave of the disease. In this respect, citizens' consistent observance of the recommendations and the regulations is extremely important.

1. The Fight against the Pandemic³

1.1 Stage One – Preventing the Spread of the Virus

The first stage of the fight against the pandemic in Georgia started one month before the first case of the virus was confirmed in the country. The aforementioned phase involved the implementation of the appropriate coordinated measures through multi-sectoral cooperation, with the aim of ensuring the maximum prevention of the entry and spread of the virus.

Namely, the **Interagency Coordination Council** (hereinafter referred to as the Council) was founded on 28 January in order to ensure an effective and coordinated fight against the coronavirus. The Council was founded as the main decision-making platform on issues pertaining to the coronavirus. It consists of members of the government, members of Parliament, the Administration of the President of Georgia and medical representatives.

After the first session of the Council, the authorities presented to the public the **four priority directions in the fight against COVID-19 and the persons responsible for each area:**

1. **Healthcare** – The protection of the health and lives of the population;
2. **The economy** – The management and recovery of the Georgian economy in the face of the global economic crisis;
3. **Safety** – The protection of citizens;
4. **Supplies and logistics** – The management of an uninterrupted supply of food to the population.

A series of measures were taken as part of the first stage of the fight against the pandemic, in order to ensure the maximal prevention of the importation of the virus before the first case of COVID-19 was reported in Georgia. These measures included the following:

- **28 January:**
 - The implementation of the norms of compulsory isolation was imposed first on persons returning from **China**, and subsequently on persons returning from other high-risk countries (**the Italian Republic, the German Federal Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Kingdom of Norway, the Swiss Confederation, the Republic of Austria, the Republic of France, the Kingdom of Spain, the Republic of Korea**).
 - The Government of Georgia approved an **Emergency Response Plan**⁴ concerning the measures aimed at preventing the possible spread of the novel coronavirus and ensuring a prompt response to cases of

can be found [here](#); the World Health Organization's assessment of Georgia can be found [here](#); additionally – [here](#); *The Washington Post* on the successful experience of small countries can be found [here](#).

³ For the purposes of the presented document, the reporting period is defined between January and 22 May 2020. Correspondingly, all figures in the document are presented for the reporting period, unless specified otherwise.

⁴ <https://matsne.gov.ge/document/view/4821121?publication=31>

infection. The plan has determined the response measures at the national level, as well as the responsibilities and duties of the relevant structures.

- **29 January**
 - Thermal screening was started at the airports. Gradually, all border checkpoints were duly equipped. Information booklets were prepared to inform passengers.
 - Flights to China were suspended.
- **30 January:** It became possible to conduct laboratory research on COVID-19 at the NCDC's **Lugar Laboratory (hereinafter referred to as the Lugar Laboratory). The retrospective testing of materials that have existed since November for the presence of the novel coronavirus began in the epidemiological oversight monitoring databases of samples of influenza and influenza-like diseases.** This process is ongoing to this day.
- **31 January:** The definition of COVID-19 cases has been approved and expanded several times, in accordance with the definition provided by WHO. Also, an algorithm for the management of COVID-19 cases and their contacts was developed and the country switched to the regime of active oversight; an emergency operations center was set up at NCDC.
- **6-14 February:** Various methodological recommendations and protocols pertaining to COVID-19 were developed and approved; the dissemination of video lectures and educational materials began.
- **12 February:** Various methodological recommendations and protocols were developed at the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health, and Social Affairs of Georgia. They are constantly being updated, as needed.
- **21 February:** The gradual return of Georgian citizens to their homeland from various foreign countries began. **The first special flight was carried out from China.**
- **24 February:** Traffic with Iran was suspended on the basis of the analysis of the epidemiological situation.

1.2 Stage Two – Slowing the Spread of the Virus

The first case of the coronavirus in Georgia was reported on 26 February 2020. A Georgian citizen entered the country from Iran via Azerbaijan, using the Red Bridge border checkpoint. As a result of a prompt and coordinated response, the aforementioned citizen was transferred from the border to the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center (hereinafter referred to as the Infectious Diseases Hospital).

By this time, the World Health Organization had already declared an international public health emergency. The situation in terms of the spread of the virus was becoming increasingly complicated throughout the world, including in European countries and Georgia's neighbor states. The **region of Europe (Italy, Spain, France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Belgium, and others)** had the highest figures in the world in terms of deaths and damage incurred.⁵

During this period, WHO, CDC, ECDC and other leading international organizations developed a set of recommendations, according to which social (physical) distancing was deemed an effective means of deterring and managing the virus, which had not been fully studied.⁶

⁵ WHO, international situation reports on the status of COVID-19 in various countries

<https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/situation-reports>

⁶ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/advice-for-public>

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prevent-getting-sick/social-distancing.html>

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-social-distancing-and-self-quarantine>

<https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/preventing-the-spread-of-the-coronavirus>

https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/novel-coronavirus-guidelines-non-pharmaceutical-measures_0.pdf

Based on the recommendations issued and the experience available so far, countries began implementing a number of **non-pharmaceutical measures** in response to the spread of COVID-19, such as: closing educational institutions and transitioning the educational process to a remote mode of operation, banning mass and public gatherings, restricting individual economic activities, physical distancing, and declaring a state of emergency throughout the country, which included the implementation of strict quarantine measures and a curfew.

After the first case of infection was reported in Georgia, new cases, clusters, and associated contacts were identified, and their epidemiological oversight, isolation, quarantine, diagnosis, and treatment was ensured. At the same time, the population was systematically provided with information concerning the recommendations developed at the international level. Despite these measures, however, the intensity of the spread of the virus in the country progressed at an increasing rate. **From the first confirmed case (26 February) until 16 March**, there already were **33** confirmed cases in Georgia, of which **two persons were linked to traveling to Iran, one person to Spain, and 12 persons had a history of travelling in Italy. Ten cases were related to contact with confirmed cases of infection, while two cases were confirmed from quarantine.** A total of **637** persons were in quarantine at the time.

The country initiated the **second stage** of the fight against the pandemic, which aimed at **slowing the spread of the virus** via the implementation of active measures and tightening epidemiological oversight in order to avoid overloading of the healthcare system and causing it to collapse. A series of measures were implemented throughout the country in order to slow the spread of the virus, **including the following:**

- **2-4 March**
 - The education process was suspended in educational institutions;
 - Creative activities were suspended in cultural institutions and all planned events were cancelled;
 - Georgian embassies abroad began to operate round the clock;
 - Field tents were set up at Georgian land border checkpoints and all three airports in order to carry out the medical examination of arriving passengers prior to transferring them to special facilities;
 - A special information website (**www.StopCov.ge**) was created, and all available information pertaining to the coronavirus was uploaded there. The website became established as the primary source for the statistics concerning the persons infected with the coronavirus;
 - The preparation of quarantine zones for the placement of persons suspected of being infected, or carrying a high risk of infection with the coronavirus began in order to screen persons and ensure the early detection of cases of infection;
 - All activities associated with populous gatherings were suspended;
 - Disinfection works were started.
- **5 March:** Special conditions were introduced in penitentiary institutions;
- **6 March:** Air traffic with the Italian Republic was suspended.
- **12 March:** A part of government employees switched to a remote mode of operation. The recommendation to transition to a remote mode of operation was also issued to the private sector.
- **13 March:** Headquarters were set up under the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture in connection with supply management and food security, which ensured the daily monitoring of the prices and supplies of basic food products.
- **14-16 March:** Traffic with neighboring countries was gradually suspended.

It is noteworthy that during the second stage of the fight against the pandemic, **the government was mainly limited to recommendatory measures.** Information campaigns that aimed to provide the population with information on the

threats pertaining to the virus, the implementation of preventive measures, and the importance of following recommendations were actively utilized during this period.

1.3 Stage Three – Managing the Spread of the Virus

Almost one month after the first confirmed case of the novel coronavirus was reported in Georgia, the country faced a new challenge. A new threat had emerged in parallel to the intensive cluster spread of the infection – the threat of the uncontrolled internal spread of the virus, during which it is impossible to trace the source of infection and, correspondingly, to take the necessary preventive measures of isolating persons, as well as identifying and locating their existing and potential contacts.

Given the nature of the virus, to the extent that it was studied, in case of internal transmission the virus reproduction index varies between **2.5 and 3** on average, while the number of existing cases are doubled **every four or five days**, which amounts to approximately **400 cases of infection** in 30 days. By this time, based on the corresponding calculations and the observation of the experience of other countries, Georgia was facing serious risks. This was indicated by the various **models/scenarios** developed by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs and NCDC, as well as partner organizations, which were prepared on the basis of the analysis of mathematical approaches⁷ by leading international universities (see Chapter 1.5 for detailed information). Various independent studies also included similar figures.

From a scientific perspective, given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which it has been studied thus far, as well as the massive scale of the damage incurred by numerous states, the government started preparing for **the maximum spread and large-scale epidemic scenario**.⁸

Additionally, observation revealed that the degree of compliance with the non-mandatory recommendations was low at the time. According to the epidemiologists' forecasts, in the event of the severe scenario unfolding, the country was facing the risk of thousands of persons becoming infected and the healthcare system collapsing.

The situation that was emerging in the context of national security and the possibility of declaring a state of emergency were discussed at the **sessions of the National Security Council** that were held on **16 and 19 March**. At the same time, the Office of the National Security Council and the National Situation Room of State Security and Crisis Management that operates under it moved to an emergency mode of operation.

A state of emergency was declared in the country on 21 March due to the need to restrict numerous areas of public life simultaneously; the state of emergency was subsequently extended until 22 May. Thus began the **third stage** of the fight against the pandemic, which **implied the management of the spread of the virus**.

An **Operational Headquarters on the Management of the State of Emergency** was created with the participation of the representatives of all relevant agencies in order to ensure the effective coordination of the enforcement of the measures envisaged by the state of emergency. Within the framework of the Operational Headquarters, the Office of the National Security Council was tasked with the development of a management scheme for the management of the state of emergency on central and regional levels. According to the developed scheme, headquarters operating on a local level were established in ten regions of Georgia. They were headed by state representatives (governors) in the region.

⁷ Oxford, Imperial College London, Institute for Health Measurement and Evaluation, Bristol, etc.

⁸ According to modeling, by 21 March the number of real active cases registered in the country was about 2.5 times higher than the number that the country could have had, had it implemented medium-strength restrictive measures, and 2.7 times higher given the implementation of strict restrictive measures.

It should be noted that **the danger of an uncontrolled spread of the virus became real on 22 March**, when the first case of internal transmission was reported in Georgia and the daily figure for the number of new cases of infection exceeded **10**. All actions taken within the framework of the management of the state of emergency were based on internationally recommended non-pharmaceutical measures that countries had to implement in order to effectively manage the spread of the virus at the time. Thus, the government implemented the following measures under the state of emergency:

- **21 March:** International passenger traffic was completely suspended.
- **23 March:**
 - Strict quarantine restrictions were imposed under the state of emergency in Marneuli and Bolnisi due to high epidemiological risks and in order to prevent the spread of the virus to the greatest possible extent;
 - Intercity passenger traffic (buses and fixed route taxis) was suspended;
 - The transportation of passengers by fixed route taxis on the territories of self-governing cities and municipalities was suspended.
- **26 March:** Medical facilities (so-called COVID clinics) were mobilized to prevent the spread of the possible cases of infection with the novel coronavirus and to ensure prompt responses to suspected and/or confirmed cases of infection.
- **30 March:** The creation of so-called fever clinics began.
- **31 March**
 - A curfew was imposed and travel on foot and by vehicle was banned **from 21:00 to 06:00**;
 - The number of persons allowed to gather in public spaces was reduced from 10 to 3;
 - An age restriction was imposed on movement; namely, persons aged 70 and over were prohibited from leaving their place of residence (with exceptions);
 - The transportation of passengers by M3 category vehicles and public transport, (including the metro) within the administrative boundaries of the municipality was suspended;
 - The transportation of more than three persons (including the driver) by vehicle was prohibited. Furthermore, it became mandatory for passengers to make use of the vehicle's rear seats behind the driver, in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Healthcare;
 - Various types of economic activities were gradually suspended, with some exceptions (previously, restrictions only applied to trade).
 - A unified government hotline (144) was created.
- **10 April:** Strict quarantine was established in Lentekhi Municipality
- **12 April:** Strict quarantine was established in the administrative units of Kobuleti (Gvara, Mukhaestate, Leghva, and Tskavroka).
- **13 April:** Strict quarantine was established in the village of Khidiskuri in Khashuri Municipality.
- **15 April:** Entering or leaving the municipalities of the cities of Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, and Batumi became prohibited.
- **17 April:** Travel by mechanical modes of transportation (other than motorcycles) and entering cemeteries became prohibited. Also, wearing face masks in enclosed public spaces became mandatory.

It should be noted that the following activities were allowed to be carried out unhindered under the state of emergency, in compliance with the relevant mandatory rules:

- Agricultural works, including in the municipalities where strict quarantine was in force;
- The transportation of agricultural products for sale;

- Freight transportation (including transit);
- The production and sale of vital goods and services (foodstuffs, medicine, electricity, gas, water, communications, fuel);
- The operation of critical infrastructure and enterprises (refrigeration and greenhouse enterprises; the construction of irrigation/amelioration systems; the operation of systemic enterprises).

The rules necessary to ensure safe operation, as well as the safe transportation of employees were developed for the aforementioned facilities in a short period of time. Correspondingly, business entities had the opportunity to transport employees using fixed route taxis and busses despite the restrictions, in coordination with the Operational Headquarters.

In total, **more than 63,000 economic entities** were able to operate unhindered under the state of emergency. **Tens of thousands of jobs** were retained as a result.

1.4 Stage Four – The Gradual Lifting of Restrictions and Adaptation

As soon as the epidemiological situation became manageable and the number of daily cases began to decrease, a decision was made to gradually lift the restrictions and allow individual economic activities to resume operation. On 20-26 April, the number of new cases of infection per day dropped below 30, while the number of new cases per week dropped below 100. Also, the virus reproduction number **dropped below 1 since the first half of May**, and the corresponding dynamics reflected a trend of stabilization. The epidemiological analysis of disease control, which was consistent with other data, unequivocally demonstrated the effectiveness of the measures, as a result of which **mobility had decreased and social distancing had increased**. This was also demonstrated by the assessment of social distancing, which was based on **Google's** geolocation data.

Table 1: Google data – COVID-19 Community Mobility Report

Date	Residential	Workplaces	Transit stations	Parks	Grocery & pharmacy	Retail & recreation
16.05.2020	+8%	-32%	-44%	-7%	-27%	-52%
26.04.2020	+18%	-51%	-70%	-33%	-59%	-78%
20.04.2020	+31%	-81%	-78%	-37%	-72%	-85%
29.03.2020	+12%	-38%	-53%	-24%	-36%	-67%

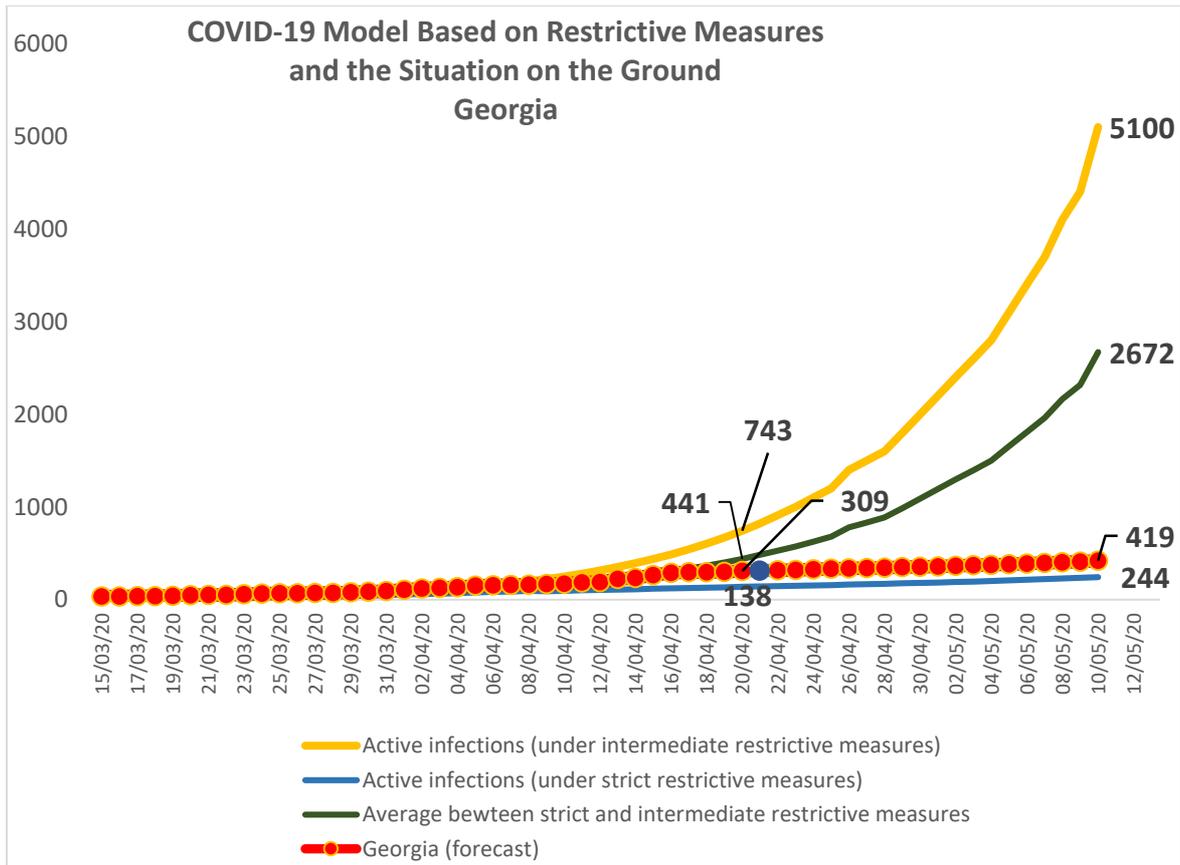
The figures obtained by the NCDC's COVID-19 Analytical Response Team by adapting **the model developed by the Swiss Basel Institute** to the Georgian epidemiological situation, in turn, confirms the effectiveness of the measures implemented and provides an opportunity to analyze the epidemiological situation in a unified context.

The given model presents a daily increase based on predicted absolute numbers, which correspond to restrictions of different strengths. The model shows the curve that corresponds to real numbers (red), and three levels of restrictions:

- Intermediate (the yellow curve);
- Average between first and second levels (the green curve);
- Strict (the blue curve).

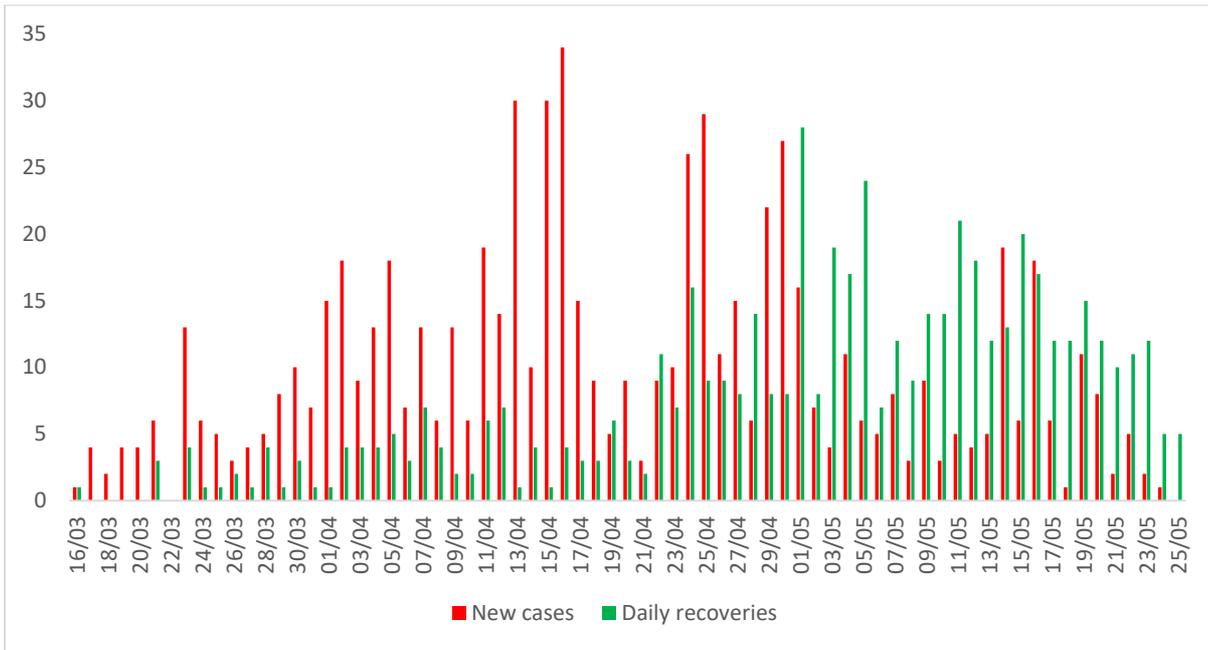
According to the presented model, the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic in the country responds to the measures implemented and is manageable.

Figure 1: March-May 2020 projection; NCDC's COVID-19 Response Analytical Group



In addition to the convergence in the model of the **real** results and **those envisaged by the scenario**, the ratio of the **number of new cases detected and the number of recovered patients** pointed at the positive results of the country's management of the epidemic. It is particularly noteworthy that the first case of recovery was reported on **16 March**, while already after **1 May** this figure almost always (14 and 26 May being the exceptions) exceeded the daily number of new cases of infection, with the largest differences being recorded on **11 May (21 recoveries)** and **15 May (20 recoveries; see Figure 2).**

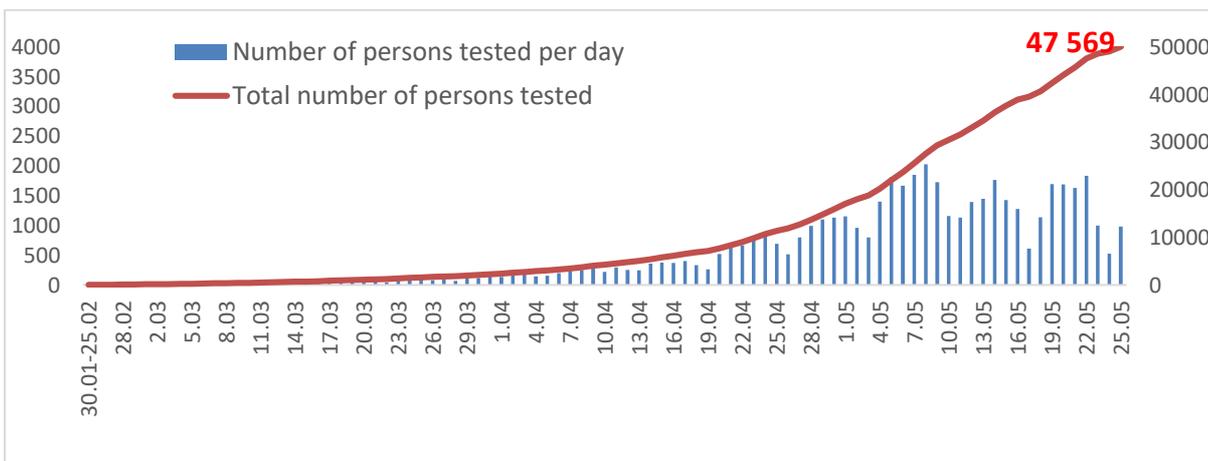
Figure 2: The ratio of new cases and recovered patients



It is important to strengthen the country's COVID-19 laboratory research capabilities at the stage of the lifting of restrictions. In this regard, the Government of Georgia has decided to ensure systemic testing and screening, which is a prerequisite for the management of the adaptation phase. Targeted testing and detection ensures the proper management of the achieved results and the maximum prevention of the renewed tightening of restrictions.

At the initial stage, only the Lugar Laboratory was conducting RT-PCR testing, in accordance with the "gold standard" of the detection of cases of COVID-19 infection; gradually, it became possible to conduct such testing at other laboratories (including private ones) throughout the country. **The electronic module for COVID-19 research data, which interactively collects information on testing, indicates a growing trend.** Namely, the daily number of persons tested for infection increased significantly since the month of April, and **the average daily testing rate for May amounts to 1,500.** As of 22 May, the total number of persons who have undergone RT-PCR testing amounted to **47,569** (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: The number of persons who have undergone RT-PCR testing for COVID-19 in Georgia, 22.05.2020



Thus, given the epidemiological situation and the trends in this regard, the country began to gradually lift the restrictions and to reactivate the economy from the end of April. International practice must also be considered. During this period, many countries had already begun to move toward the easing of restrictions (e.g. France, Albania,

Germany, Austria, Norway, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Italy, Spain, Finland, and Croatia). Accordingly, on 24 April 2020, the Government of Georgia presented the public with a plan for **the gradual lifting of restrictions and reactivating the economy** (detailed information is presented in Chapter 4 of the report).

Accordingly, given the manageable situation and the assumption that the virus had not disappeared, the country moved to the **fourth stage** of the fight against the pandemic, which is the stage of the **gradual lifting of restrictions and adaptation**. The following restrictions were progressively lifted during this stage:

- **27 April: The following became permitted:**
 - Travel by mechanical modes of transportation;
 - The operation of open agrarian markets and open-air markets;
 - Delivery services for all types of products;
 - Remote (online) trade (on the condition that no more than five people are present in the workplace/warehouse).
- **28 April:** Strict quarantine was lifted in Lentekhi and the village of Khidiskuri.
- **5 May:**
 - The municipalities of Batumi and Kutaisi were opened;
 - The following became permitted: The operation of facilities providing technical services to vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, and bicycles, including the operation of car washes, as well as the sale of necessary parts/accessories/materials on the spot by the same entities in order to provide repair services; construction and renovation activities, as well as activities related to construction supervision; the production of construction materials and glass and wood products that are related to construction.
- **8 May:** Strict quarantine was lifted in the administrative units of Kobuleti Municipality (Gvara, Leghva, Mukhaestate, Tskavroka).
- **11 May**
 - Tbilisi Municipality was opened;
 - The following became permitted: All types of production and extraction; the operation of lending entities; the operation of repair service providers for household appliances, including computers and communications equipment; the operation of open-type rest and recreation zones; the operation of those retail and wholesale facilities (shops) that have an independent entrance from the street, with the exception of clothing and footwear shops and shopping malls (shopping malls and all other types of markets remained restricted).
- **14 May:** Rustavi Municipality was opened.
- **18 May:**
 - The operation of beauty salons and aesthetic medical centers became permitted;
 - The number of people allowed to gather in public spaces was increased to 10.
- **23 May:**

The state of emergency was concluded and:

 - Restrictions on the transportation of more than three people by car was lifted (with the restriction still applying to travel by taxi);
 - The curfew was lifted;
 - All types of economic activities became permitted, with the following exceptions
 - Providing customers with on-site catering services in restaurants, bars, cafes, or diners of any type;
 - Trading in clothes and shoes (permitted online);

- The operation of trade centers (shopping malls) and open-air markets (with the exception of open agrarian markets);
- Organizing or holding sporting, cultural, or entertainment activities;
- The operation of currency exchange points.
- Assemblies and demonstrations provided by the Law of Georgia on Assemblies and Demonstrations became permitted;
- Conducting practical/laboratory work or holding examinations in universities non-remotely (while physically present) became permitted, in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Healthcare;
- The age restriction on the movement of persons aged 70 and over was lifted and retained as a recommendation;
- The ban on entering cemeteries was lifted.

1.5 The Assessment of the Healthcare System

The analysis of the events taking place across the world clearly demonstrated that even the healthcare systems of developed countries faced major challenges during the pandemic. Therefore, **preparing the Georgian healthcare system and avoiding its possible collapse due to the system being overloaded** was identified as a priority of critical importance by the government at an early stage. In order to achieve the aforementioned, it became necessary to transition the healthcare system to **a mode of operation that targeted the pandemic**.

The attainment of this objective was a major challenge for the entire world. Even the states that are rich in terms of economies and resources faced difficult obstacles in achieving it. The timely and correct mobilization of human and material resources was a universal challenge in this regard.

The planning of COVID-19 response measures was based on the analysis of the existing strengths of the healthcare system, as well as of the scenarios prepared by the modeling tool for the spread of the epidemic.

The aforementioned scenarios clearly indicated that the Georgian healthcare system would not have been able to cope with the daily flow of 2,000 or 3,000 infected persons simultaneously, as was the case with the highly developed European states.

The ministry – in cooperation with the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health and a team of experts – analyzed three forecasts that were developed using different methods, which yielded the following predictions, given the absence of social distancing and restrictive measures: 1) According to the Pennsylvania COVID-19 Hospital Impact Model for Epidemics method, the epidemic would have peaked in 12-13 weeks after the first case was detected, with approximately 5,950 cases of hospitalization during the peak phase; 2) According to the scenario of mathematical modeling of trends, developed by the University of Basel (Switzerland), the epidemic would have peaked in 13-14 weeks, with 5,100 cases of hospitalization; 3) According to the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Flu Surge 2.0 methodology, which is used for influenza pandemics, the peak would have been reached in 5-7 weeks, with 2,381 cases of hospitalization. In all three cases, the rate of hospitalization refers **to the hospitalization of patients in severe condition**, which means that **the total number of infected persons would have been significantly higher**.

Modeling also showed that a 20% tightening of social distancing and restrictions would have led to the peak being shifted to the 17th week, while also causing the number of hospitalizations to decrease **from 4,174 cases to 2,656 cases**. **A 30% tightening of social distancing and restrictions would have led to the peak being shifted to the 22nd week, with 1,418 cases of hospitalization**.

According to the analysis of the Georgian healthcare system, a total of **297** inpatient facilities (86% of them private) are operating in the country, with a total of **17,514 beds** being available. Furthermore, slightly **more than 10,000** beds remain once oncological, psychiatric, maternity, and other specialized clinics have been subtracted from the list. Of these, **2,290 beds** are designed for intensive care and emergency services, while **1,749 ventilators** have been approved for the management of respiratory distress syndrome. The beds and ventilators are designed for patients hospitalized due all types of relevant diagnoses; therefore, half of them are in use at any given time.

Moreover, a total of **488 reanimatologists and 256 infectious disease specialists** are employed in Georgia. The aforementioned medical personnel can treat **1,200 and 853 patients per day**, respectively; these numbers include all types of patients.

Considering the aforementioned, **maximum social distancing and the restriction of mobility** was identified as the only effective solution in terms of an appropriate response to COVID-19.

It was precisely this evidence and these predictions that formed the basis for the country's policy of dealing with the cases of COVID-19 infection, which led to an unprecedentedly low prevalence of the virus and fewer losses of human life.

2. The State of Emergency and the Restrictions

2.1 Purpose

Today, the experience accumulated around the world shows that in the absence of direct treatment or a vaccine, **social distancing is the most effective and realistic mechanism in the fight against the novel coronavirus. Restrictions and their strict enforcement become necessary to ensure social distancing.** The non-mandatory nature of the recommendations and the late imposition of restrictions precipitated the collapse of healthcare systems and thousands of deaths in a number of countries.⁹

When analyzing the need for the restrictions, it is worth noting that **the countries that chose passive measures in response to the virus faced 500 cases of infection in 5-8 days after the first 100 cases.**¹⁰ On the other hand, **the first 100 cases were reported after 20-36 days** in the Asian countries that took **strict and timely measures** (South Korea, China, Hong Kong).¹¹ Global statistics clearly demonstrate **Georgia's success as the first 100 cases were detected 30-35 days after the start of the epidemic as a result of the measures taken.**¹²

The analysis of the structure of the country's population is important in the process of managing the epidemiological situation. According to the latest census, the population of Georgia (except for the occupied territories) amounts to **3,716,658**, of which **762,621 persons (20.5% of the entire population)** are of retirement age. Therefore, one fifth of the country's population can be considered to be high or medium risk in terms of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also worth considering that the share of morbidity with regard to the **four main chronic diseases among** COVID-19 risk factors in the country is quite high, amounting to 80%, of which : 1) cardiovascular diseases – **40%**; 2) chronic respiratory diseases – **22%**; 3) tumors – **15%**; and 4) diabetes – **3%**.¹³

⁹ https://cpb-apse2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.auckland.ac.nz/dist/d/75/files/2020/04/InternationalReffReview_FullReport_21Apr_FINAL2.pdf

¹⁰ Detailed statistics are available: [Italy](#); [France](#); [Germany](#); [Great Britain](#); [Switzerland](#); [Spain](#); [the United States of America](#)

¹¹ The COVID-19 Epidemic in Georgia: Projections and Policy Options, *Curatio International Foundation*, 27 March 2020, p.6

¹² Detailed statistics available [here](#).

¹³ <https://www.moh.gov.ge/uploads/files/2019/Failebi/16.08.2019.pdf>

It should be noted that given the problems associated with the imposition of restrictions on the country's economy, the Government of Georgia initially chose the path of **mainly issuing recommendations and conducting information campaigns**. The imposition of strict mandatory restrictions was avoided as much as possible at this stage. Accordingly, during almost one month after the first reported case of the novel coronavirus (**26 February to 21 March**), the government conducted active information campaigns and issued recommendations, which included the "stay at home" universal recommendation policy and social distancing; the observance of personal and public sanitary-hygienic norms; the transitioning of the employees of public and private institutions to remote work; refraining from going to public places, cafes and restaurants, entertainment venues, gyms, swimming pools, casinos, and slot clubs, and subsequently calling for the closure of cafes and restaurants, entertainment venues, gyms, swimming pools, casinos, and slot clubs.

However, the detailed observation of the implementation of these recommendations and the resulting epidemiological situation revealed that the recommendations were not sufficient, as a large part of the public, for the most part, continued to live their lives without making any changes (see Annex 2: Comparative Data on the Flow of Vehicular Traffic Before and After the Imposition of Restrictions), which increased the risks of virus transmission, the infection of the majority of citizens, and the collapse of the country's healthcare system. Consequently, **in the 2nd half of March 2020**, when the country entered a more active phase of the spread of the virus and faced a high risk of the uncontrolled internal transmission of the virus, while the bodies of state were deprived of the ability to exercise their authority properly, it became necessary to implement stricter/mandatory measures and to declare a state of emergency.

In view of the aforementioned, the introduction of **mandatory restrictions** in order to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus in Georgia was determined by **three main factors**:

1. **The degree of the transmissibility of the virus and the preparedness of the healthcare system** – Given the high degree of the transmissibility and the rapid spread of the virus, the objective was not to allow the mass infection of persons, which would have caused the healthcare system to be overwhelmed, subsequently leading to its collapse.
2. **The sociocultural peculiarities of the social environment** – Considering the specifics of the social environment in the country (which is based on the tradition of the cohabitation of persons belonging to several generations), the separation and isolation of risk groups (the elderly, as well as people with chronic diseases) was practically unthinkable.
3. **The degree of acceptance of recommendations by the social environment** – The analysis of the implementation of the recommendations issued at the initial stage of the fight against the pandemic revealed the actual weakness of this method. Therefore, in order to achieve the desired results, it became necessary to impose mandatory restrictions.

It should be noted that every imposed restriction aimed to restrict the mobility of citizens and to ensure adherence to sanitary-hygienic norms and social distancing rules, which prevented the rapid spread of the virus while also slowing down the spread of the virus and rendering it manageable.

2.1.1 Legal Aspects

A state of emergency was declared on the basis of the decree issued by the president of Georgia on 21 March 2020 and certain rights and freedoms provided for in Chapter 2 of the Constitution of Georgia were restricted. Moreover, the decree included only those rights and freedoms, the restriction of which was critical to the management of the epidemiological situation. The decree also caused the authority to regulate certain issued to be delegated to the Government of Georgia, **though the scale, objectives, and scope of the authority delegated to the government were defined by the decree itself.**

Since the need for the imposition of specific restrictions or different regulations depended on the epidemiological situation in the country or in a specific part of it, which was in fact variable (on a daily basis, in some cases), it was important for the government to have flexibility in the imposition of specific restriction(s), in order for it to be able to respond to the challenges created by the epidemiological situation – which changed on a daily basis – in a timely and effective manner.

It should be stressed that 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 during the imposition of specific restrictions.

It is noteworthy that the main part of the restrictions (especially those that pertained to people's basic needs and the corresponding economic activities) envisaged some necessary exceptions. For example, even though the government utilized strict quarantine measures in the municipalities of Marneuli and Bolnisi, these municipalities (like all other municipalities) were allowed to carry out agricultural works, as well as works related to animal husbandry/poultry farming (in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Healthcare), as considering the specifics of these municipalities, these activities comprised an important source of income for the local population.

By decree of the president, the following rights provided for by 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), which gave the relevant bodies the right to forcibly transfer persons to the appropriate facility for the violation of isolation or quarantine rules established by the government.
- **Freedom of movement** (Article 14 of the Constitution of Georgia), which:
 - Granted the government the right to establish rules on 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 and freight on the territory of Georgia in a way that is different from the current legislation.
- **Rights to personal and family privacy, personal space and privacy of communication** (Article 15 of the Constitution of Georgia), which led to the suspension of visitation rights in penitentiary institutions, as provided for in the Penitentiary Code.
- **Rights to fair administrative proceedings, access to public information, informational self-determination, and compensation for damage inflicted by public authority** (Article 18 of the Constitution of Georgia), which gave the government the right to establish, by ordinance, the rules of public services and administrative proceedings that differ from the current legislation.
- **The right to property** (Article 19 of the Constitution of Georgia), which gave the government the right, if necessary, to restrict the right to property for quarantine, isolation, or medical purposes and to make use of the property and material assets of private persons and legal entities.
- **The 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.
- **The 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, by the same decree:

- The minister of justice of Georgia was granted the right to regulate the obligation to fulfill the conditions established by law for conditionally convicted persons or persons released on parole, as well as the obligation to appear at the time and place determined by the probation officer, in a manner that is different from the current legislation.
- It became possible to hold court hearings envisaged by the Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia remotely, via electronic means of communication. When sessions were held in this manner, 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.

2.2 Restrictions

As already mentioned, the management of restrictions (their introduction and cancellation) was carried out on the basis of observing global trends, in accordance with international recommendations, and taking into account the analysis of the epidemiological situation and possible risks in the country. Information concerning **significant restrictions and regulations**, as well as **the corresponding aims and consequences are listed below**.

2.2.1 The Suspension of Air and Land Traffic

29 January	Direct air traffic between Georgia and the People's Republic of China was suspended
24 February	Direct air traffic between Georgia and the Islamic Republic of Iran was suspended
26 February	Citizens of the Islamic Republic of Iran were restricted from movement on Georgia's land borders
6 March	Direct air traffic between Georgia and the Italian Republic was suspended
14 March	The movement of citizens on the border between Georgia and the Republic of Armenia, and Georgia and the Republic of Azerbaijan was suspended
15 March	The movement of citizens on the border between Georgia and the Republic of Turkey was suspended
16 March	The movement of citizens between the Russian Federation and Georgia was suspended
21 March	The entry of foreign citizens was banned in Georgia; land traffic was gradually restricted as well

The Aim of the Restriction

In accordance with the global epidemiological situation, the government took immediate action and suspended flights from the countries where the rapid spread of the virus was reported. **In the context of the fight against the virus, the aforementioned restriction is the method proven to work best in the world;** it allows countries to reduce the risk of the virus entering the country on the one hand, while allowing countries to take some time to adequately prepare the healthcare system and to carry out the controlled management of the epidemic on the other.

Georgia was one of the first countries in the world to suspend direct air traffic with China with the aim of preventing the spread of the coronavirus. Three flights per week were carried out from China to Georgia, i.e., the traffic between the two countries was quite high, which significantly increased the risk of the rapid spread of the virus.

On 20 February 2020, following the detection of the first case of the coronavirus in Italy, the rapid internal transmission of the epidemic began and, as a result, Italy became the highest-risk country in Europe. The Government of Georgia took immediate action and took preventive measures at all international airports until the full closure of borders.¹⁴ The aforementioned measures were gradually tightened in accordance with the epidemiological situation and, prior to the full closure of borders, mandatory 14-day quarantine was imposed on citizens arriving from high-risk countries.

Additionally, the premature closure of borders with Italy would have further complicated the management of the epidemic as Georgian citizens in Italy may have returned to their homeland via low-risk countries while concealing their travel history in order to avoid quarantine. This would have significantly increased the risk of the internal spread of the virus.

Due to the severe epidemiological situation in Iran, the Georgian Government made a timely decision to suspend air traffic. It should be noted that the first case of coronavirus infection in Georgia was reported on 26 February, when a Georgian citizen returning from Iran via Azerbaijan was found to have been infected with the virus. **According to statistics for January 2020, the number of visitors entering Georgia from Iran had increased by 12%.** In parallel with

¹⁴ Upon entering the country, all passengers were examined by medical professionals on the spot and, in case of the presence of symptomatic characteristics of the virus, the passengers were transferred to quarantine, while the remaining citizens were given the recommendation to remain in self-isolation.

the worsening of the epidemiological situation in Iran, Georgia tightened measures and made the decision to restrict the movement of Iranian citizens on land borders.

The decision to close air and land borders with neighboring countries was made on the basis of recommendations issued by epidemiologists and healthcare experts, which was related to the rapid spread of the pandemic and an increase in the number of cases of internal transmission in the aforementioned countries.

Following the declaration of the outbreak of the novel coronavirus as a pandemic by the World Health Organization and the significant worsening of the epidemiological situation on various continents, Georgia imposed a temporary restriction preventing foreign citizens from crossing the country's borders. At the same time, the country organized the gradual return of Georgian citizens from various foreign states via special flights.

The Result of the Restriction

With the gradual restriction of air and land traffic, Georgia avoided the rapid and mass importation of the coronavirus infection in the country. Additionally, the timely detection of imported cases of the virus and the effective implementation of preventive measures was ensured as a result of the imposition of mandatory 14-day quarantine.

2.2.2 The Suspension of the Educational Process and the Transition to a Remote Mode of Operation

Due to the given situation, the holidays, **which had been declared from 4 March to 15 March, were extended from 16 March to 1 April**. Subsequently, schools transitioned to a remote mode of operation once the state of emergency had been declared to deal with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The Aim of the Restrictions

Preschool, general, vocational, and higher educational institutions are characterized by **a high degree of social interaction and, in general, they lead to a significant increase in the mobility of the population**, which contributes to the rapid spread of the virus.

After the first cases of the coronavirus were detected in Georgia, the authorities immediately took preventive measures and suspended the educational process in educational institutions throughout the country. As a result of consultation with the Ministry of Healthcare, the Ministry of Education, and epidemiologists, the two-week holiday that was declared initially was extended.

In parallel with the restrictions, **the country's educational system transitioned to a remote learning model in a relatively short period of time**.

The innovative project Teleschool (Teleskola), which was named among the most successful models of remote education by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),¹⁵ was developed in a short period of time for students and teachers with limited internet access, in order to ensure equal engagement in the remote educational process.

The temporary suspension of the educational process and the transition to a remote model of education is one of the most proven preventive methods in the world in the context of the spread of the novel coronavirus. In the case of Georgia, the specifics of the social environment had to be taken into consideration. This refers to the tradition of the

¹⁵ A Framework to Guide an Education Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) can be viewed [here](#).

cohabitation of persons belonging to different generations in families, which, given the specific characteristics of this particular disease, would have put the health and lives of the elderly at risk.

The Result of the Restriction

As a result of the implementation of timely preventive measures, cases of coronavirus infection have not been reported in educational institutions; and the educational semester was not suspended due to the option of transitioning to remote learning.

2.2.3 The Prohibition of Travel by Car

Travelling by car was prohibited from 17 April to 27 April.

The Aim of the Restriction

The growing dynamics of detected cases of the virus were observed during the Easter holidays. For example:

- **133 cases** were reported during the week of 13-19 April, which is **the highest number of cases detected per week**. Additionally,
- **The highest daily number of confirmed cases of infection – i.e., 34 cases –** was detected on 17 April.

As the holidays are accompanied by a high degree of mobility of the population, as well as the tradition of a high degree of social interaction, an additional restriction was imposed on travel by car in order to maximize the observance of the rules of social distancing and to reduce the risk of spreading the virus.

With the same aim in mind, entering cemeteries was prohibited on 17 April, which was also related to the tradition of visiting cemeteries during the same period.

European countries also decided to restrict the movement of citizens during the holidays.

The Result of the Restriction

The analysis of the three-week indicators following the Easter holiday makes it clear that there was no increase in the number of cases of infection. Moreover, declining dynamics were reported during the week of 4 May.¹⁶ Also, no "holiday" cluster was detected in the country. Therefore, **the measures implemented were important and effective. Information on the flow of vehicles shows a decrease in mobility. Namely, restrictions imposed on three big cities – Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi – led to tenfold or greater (on average) reduction of traffic** (see Annex 2: Comparative Data on the Flow of Vehicular Traffic Before and After the Imposition of Restrictions).

2.2.4 Strict Quarantine in Individual Municipalities

Strict quarantine was imposed on:

¹⁶ The week of 20 April – 97 cases of infection were reported; the week of 27 April – 97 cases; the week of 4 May – a decrease in the number of cases per day.

23 March	Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities
10 April	Lentekhi Municipality
12 April	Separate administrative units belonging to Kobuleti Municipality
13 April	The village of Khidiskuri in Khashuri Municipality
26 April	Tetrtskaro Municipality

The Aim of the Restrictions

The imposition of quarantine restrictions on cities and municipalities, as hotbeds of the epidemic, takes place on the basis of risk assessment and in accordance with the specific situation on the ground. Correspondingly, entire municipalities were put on lockdown in some cases, while the lockdown affected only specific towns or villages in others.

The closure of Bolnisi and Marneuli municipalities was carried out for the following reasons:

- The internal transmission of the novel coronavirus in Marneuli occurred during a ritual event that was attended by several dozen people (including residents of Bolnisi). Correspondingly, epidemiologists **identified up to 90 direct contacts** in this chain, which increased the risk of spreading the virus;
- The aforementioned municipalities are quite active economically. A significant part of their population migrates daily to the capital, as well as other municipalities. Therefore, there **existed a high risk of the rapid spread of the Marneuli and Bolnisi clusters throughout the entire country;**
- Due to the specifics of the municipalities (domestic economy, high density, the number of family members), the aforementioned municipalities were assessed as high-risk in terms of the possibility of the mass spread of the virus.

We faced a similar situation in Lentekhi Municipality, when an infected person who had arrived there from Tbilisi had had contact with a large number of people (approximately 50 persons). The situation was assessed as critical due to the large number of direct contacts with the infected person; therefore, the aforementioned municipalities were put on lockdown to avoid the massive spread of the virus.

The Result of the Restriction

The government was able to localize the clusters that had appeared in the municipalities. By 22 May, approximately 118 cases (including 22 in Marneuli and 5 in Lentekhi) were detected in these municipalities. Not a single cluster had expanded outside the municipalities as a result of the government's actions. **There have been no new cases of infection.**

2.2.5 The Restriction of Public Transport

18 March	Travel by minibus was restricted within the municipality
23 March	Passenger travel by railway and intercity passenger travel by bus and minibus was suspended
31 March	Travel by any type of public transport (including the metro) was suspended both within and between the cities and municipalities

The Purpose of the Restriction

Public transport is a source of the rapid mass transmission of the virus. Correspondingly, the movement of fixed-route taxis was restricted **before the start of internal transmission (until 22 March)**, as the minibus is a high-risk vehicle in terms of the spread of the virus due to its small size.

Also, the detection of the source of infection and the people who have come into contact with it becomes significantly more difficult in case of infection while making use of public transport.

After the detection of instances of fourth-order transmission (**22 March**), travel by other forms of transportation was prohibited as well in order to limit the population's inter-city, municipal, and local mobility and interaction to the greatest possible extent.

The Result of the Restriction

The aim of restricting the operation of (intercity, as well as municipal) public transport was to reduce the mobility of the population and to ensure that **the virus did not spread en masse (from an unidentified source) over a brief period of time**. Several indicators point to the effectiveness of the measures implemented:

- **The rapid spread of the epidemic was avoided** – since 26 February, more than 20 cases of infection per day were **detected for the first time on 13 April (30 cases)**. The largest number of cases detected in one day **was reported on 16 April (34 cases)**;
- **The clusters of the sources of infection did not expand** outside the municipalities as a result of the reduction of mobility.

2.2.6 Restrictions in Penitentiary Facilities

From 21 March	Visitation rights provided for by the Penitentiary Code were suspended in penitentiary insitutions
From 30 March	Strict quarantine was imposed on penitentiary institutions across Georgia (780 employees did not leave the territory of the penitentiaries)

The Aim of the Restriction

Given the beginning of the internal transmission of the virus in the country, the decision to impose the aforementioned restriction aimed at preventing the spread of the coronavirus to the penitentiary institutions from outside, as the introduction of the virus in the enclosed spaces of the penitentiaries posed a significant risk of its rapid spread.

The Result of the Restriction

To this day, penitentiary institutions remain free of the coronavirus infection.

2.2.7 The Curfew

The curfew (21:00-06:00) was imposed from 31 March and the measures provided for by the state of emergency were tightened.

The Aim of the Restriction

It became necessary to impose additional restrictions in Georgia from 22 March, together with the beginning of the internal transmission of the coronavirus in the country, when the threat of the uncontrolled, maximum spread of the virus became real and there was a risk of the epidemic becoming large-scale, leading to the disruption and collapse of the healthcare system. The mechanisms of the fight against the coronavirus across the world included the imposition of curfews (e.g. Spain, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Greece), which restrict the mobility of the population to a specified period of time.

The imposition of the curfew, i.e., the restriction of the mobility and social interaction of the population, led to the drastic decrease in the number of gatherings for social purposes, which usually take place in the evening.

Various countries made use of the aforementioned measure during the management of COVID-19. In Spain, for example, leaving home was permitted for one hour, between 6 and 10 o'clock in the morning and between 8 and 11 o'clock in the evening. For the elderly, leaving home was permitted between 10 and 12 o'clock in the morning and between 7 and 8 o'clock in the evening. Furthermore, movement was permitted only within 1 km from the place of residence. In Italy and France, movement was only permitted with a form/document that was filled out in advance. The same practice existed in Armenia, while Azerbaijan made use of the practice of sending short text messages in advance.

The Result of the Restriction

The imposition of the curfew led to the reduction of the population's mobility and prolonged social interaction. The analysis of traffic flow in the central streets of Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi clearly demonstrated the effectiveness of this measure. Namely, the flow of traffic at the given locations decreased at least threefold on average over a 24-hour period (see Annex 2: Comparative Data on the Flow of Vehicular Traffic Before and After the Imposition of Restrictions).

2.2.8 The Restriction of the Gathering of More Than 10 / 3 People

23 March	The gathering of more than 10 people in public spaces was prohibited
31 March	The maximum number of individuals allowed to gather in public spaces was reduced to three
31 March	It was determined that no more than three people (including the driver and two passengers occupying the rear seat) can travel by car at the same time

The Aim of the Restriction

Social distancing remains the only effective way to prevent the spread of the infection so far. Correspondingly, it was necessary to limit public gatherings as much as possible.

The restriction was adjusted according to the situation at the time. During the first stage, **the gathering of 10 people** was permitted. Subsequently, due to the developing epidemiological situation (**the internal transmission of the virus began in the country in late March**), the restriction was tightened and the gathering of **more than three people** became prohibited.

As regards the redistribution of passengers in transport vehicles – this is an international recommendation that is aimed at the reduction of the risk of spreading the virus in enclosed spaces.¹⁷

The imposition of this restriction in Georgia primarily aimed to reduce mobility, as the restriction became a kind of deterrent that prevented families from using transport for nonessential travel. At the same time, the aim of the restriction was to ensure the maintaining of distance between non-family member drivers and passengers, which is an important prerequisite for the prevention of the spread of the virus, especially in enclosed spaces.

Other countries, including the United States,¹⁸ Australia,¹⁹ Spain,²⁰ Canada,²¹ and the United Arab Emirates²² have resorted to the practice of imposing certain restrictions on travel by car (such as the number of passengers, the prohibition of the use of the front passenger seat, etc.). In Spain, for example, the number of passengers in private cars was limited under the state of emergency – only one person was allowed to travel by car.²³

This restriction was stricter in some countries. In Poland and Israel, for example, no more than two people could gather in public spaces. Correspondingly, it was forbidden for more than two people to travel by car in Israel.

The Result of the Restriction

As a result of the timely and combined action of these and other restrictions, it became possible to prevent the mass spread of the coronavirus in Georgia. By 22 May, the rate of infection was 183 per million citizens, while the death rate stood at 1.65%, or 3 per million citizens, which is significantly lower than the global data (722/45), as well as the data from neighboring countries (Turkey – 1,873/52; Ukraine – 493/15; Azerbaijan – 422/5; Armenia – 2,498/31).²⁴

2.2.9 The Restriction on Entering or Leaving Big Cities

Entering or leaving the municipalities of the cities of **Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, and Batumi** was prohibited on **15 April**.

The Aim of the Restriction

¹⁷ World Health Organization (WHO) – Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public can be viewed [here](#); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention of the United States of America – Limiting face-to-face contact with others is the best way to reduce the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) can be viewed [here](#); Public Health England (PHE) – Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) can be viewed [here](#).

¹⁸ What Rideshare, Taxi, Limo, and other Passenger Drivers-for-Hire Need to Know about COVID-19, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can be viewed [here](#).

¹⁹ Coronavirus (COVID-19) FAQs for CPV passengers and drivers can be viewed [here](#).

²⁰ Orden TMA/384/2020, de 3 de mayo, por la que se dictan instrucciones sobre la utilización de mascarillas en los distintos medios de transporte y se fijan requisitos para garantizar una movilidad segura de conformidad con el plan para la transición hacia una nueva normalidad can be viewed [here](#).

²¹ New COVID-19 rules limit Edmonton taxis, ride-hailing vehicles to 1 passenger or household group can be viewed [here](#).

²² Coronavirus: Three persons to a car still in Dubai can be viewed [here](#).

²³ What you need to know about driving during Spain's coronavirus lockdown can be viewed [here](#).

²⁴ <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/>

Tbilisi is home to 34% of the population of Georgia,²⁵ and 43.5% of the population of the country is distributed among the four aforementioned cities (Tbilisi – 1,184,800; Kutaisi – 135,200; Batumi – 169,100; Rustavi – 128,700).²⁶ Correspondingly, it was important to focus on these cities in order to reduce the mobility of the population. Maintaining the rate of population movement from urban to rural areas and vice versa increased the risk of spreading the virus and made it difficult to determine the contacts of infected persons. Also – and most importantly – the intensity of movement increased the risk of the geographic spread of the virus over a brief period of time.

The imposition of the restriction was preceded by a significant increase in the rate of infection (**30 new cases per day**).²⁷ Additionally, it was important to significantly decrease the mobility of the population during the Easter week, when, traditionally, people move en masse from cities to villages and back.

The Result of the Restriction

The analysis of traffic flows shows that instances of entering or leaving these cities were reduced fourfold on average (see Annex 3 – Statistics on Vehicles Entering and Exiting the Cities on Lockdown). In addition, no cases/clusters related to holidays were reported in the country.

The practice of enacting lockdowns in cities/regions was used in other countries as well – for example in Germany (in Bavaria²⁸ and Saarland²⁹), Israel,³⁰ and Brazil (Santa Catarina³¹ and Sao Paulo³²), as well as in some US states.³³

2.2.10 The Restriction of Economic Activity

23 March	Virtually all retail outlets were closed, with the exception of grocery stores and pharmacies
23 March	All permitted economic activities became obligated to operate in accordance with the recommendations issued by the Ministry of Healthcare
31 March	Various economic activities were suspended, with the exception of predetermined essential activities, enterprises, and facilities

The Aim of the Restriction

Any type of economic activity is tied to social interaction and the mobility of the population, therefore proportionally increasing the risk of spreading the virus. With the transition to the internal transmission of the virus, it was decided to temporarily restrict economic activity, with the exception of vital sectors.

During the first stage, online trade and delivery services pertaining to groceries, food, and medicine were permitted to operate. Even though the aforementioned form of trade implies less social interaction, online trade and delivery services are created by a value chain. Correspondingly, making it fully permissible with regard to all sectors would have

²⁵ Detailed statistics can be viewed [here](#).

²⁶ National Statistics Office of Georgia, data can be viewed [here](#).

²⁷ <https://ourworldindata.org/covid-cases>

²⁸ German state of Bavaria heads for full coronavirus lockdown can be viewed [here](#).

²⁹ Bavaria and Saarland become first German states to impose lockdowns can be viewed [here](#).

³⁰ Cabinet declares Bnei Brak ‘restricted zone,’ will do same for other epicenters can be viewed [here](#).

³¹ Governo de SC decreta situação de emergência por causa do coronavirus can be viewed [here](#).

³² Quarentena começa a valer nesta terça-feira em todo o estado de SP can be viewed [here](#).

³³ Lockdowns, closures: How is each US state handling coronavirus? can be viewed [here](#).

significantly increased human mobility and social interaction in the so-called back end, which was not advisable during the first stage, given the epidemiological situation.

Together with the stabilization of the epidemiological situation, during the first stage, online shopping became fully permitted (with the restriction of no more than five persons being permitted at the workplace / in the warehouse) together with delivery services for all types of products, while from 11 May all types of enterprises and shops (with specific exceptions) were opened.

The Result of the Restriction

The mass spread of the infection was not detected in the country as a result of reduced mobility and the timely implementation of social distancing measures. Correspondingly, the government continues to gradually lift economic restrictions.

2.3 State of Emergency Management

2.3.1 Operational Headquarters on the Management of the State of Emergency

Established on March 30, 2020, the Operational Headquarters on the Management of the State of Emergency (hereinafter Operational Headquarters) was put in charge of coordinating the enforcement of state of emergency restrictions and monitoring the implementation of instructions from the Interagency Council. These functions were fulfilled by the Operational Headquarters through local operations headquarters.

The main purpose of the Operational Headquarters' establishment was, on one hand, to ensure effective and coordinated work and awareness on the part of agencies working under the state of emergency and, on the other, to facilitate the continuous operation of essential areas/directions in this process.

The Operational Headquarter was engaged in the process of coordinating sectoral agencies, ensuring as part of this function the efficient resolution of critically important problematic issues. With direct engagement from state institutions, the Headquarters developed proposals/recommendations for the Interagency Council, including on matters such as movement regulation, solving issues identified through hotlines, support for agriculture, healthcare, and economy, monitoring international cargo transport drivers, and coordinating regional command centers.

Under the state of emergency, Operational Headquarter, based on the epidemiological situation, and in full coordination with state institutions, provided recommendations to the Interagency Council on both tightening and lifting restrictions.

At the Operational Headquarter the sectoral support groups were established to bring together representatives of various agencies. Among them, healthcare, economic, movement, cargo shipment, and agricultural directions operated to analyze problems under the state of emergency and, in line with the Operational Headquarters' mandate, issue recommendations. In addition, locally identified problems were addressed through regional headquarters.

Movement Issue Regulation

- Throughout the curfew (9 PM to 6 AM), lockdown in four major cities (Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi, and Kutaisi), and ban on passenger car movement, the Operational Headquarter was actively engaged in the process of regulating movement-related issues.
- The Headquarter, in active coordination with other agencies, discussed issues related to unimpeded movement for the staff of essential public institutions and qualified entities involved in economic activities.
- Recommendations were issued and numerous draft regulations were developed in this direction.

Agricultural Direction

- One of the key directions of the Operational Headquarter under the state of emergency was to identify problems within the agricultural sector and develop recommendations for their elimination. One of the challenges lay in selling agricultural goods accumulated in the quarantine zone of the Marneuli Municipality which could potentially have a negative impact on the economic conditions of the local population, also triggering, in some way, food shortage in the country.
- Through effective coordination between the Operational Headquarter and other agencies, the goods were distributed and sold at various marketplaces. For example, about 6,000 tons of fruits and vegetables from the Municipalities of Marneuli and Bolnisi were sold. In addition, distribution vehicles were able to move throughout municipal territories in compliance with applicable rules. Joint coordinated work ensured against food shortage in the quarantine zones.
- Active work was undertaken towards ensuring farmer's market's compliance with recommendations by the Ministries of Healthcare and Agriculture. As regional farmer's markets were closed, regional headquarters developed recommendations for reopening such markets after relevant requirements were met.

Coordinating Regional Operational Headquarters

- During the state of emergency period, local (regional) headquarters were established in ten regions³⁴ and the capital under the leadership of state representatives (governors) in respective regions.
- The regional command centers were accountable to the Operational Headquarter and ensured the coordination of the local-level enforcement with the restrictions/measures applicable under the state of emergency. As a result of 24/7 communication between the Operational Headquarter and regional ones, ways for rapid response to problematic issues were identified.
- Based on the regional headquarters' assessment of the epidemiological situation on the ground, and their recommendations, also in coordination with the Operational Headquarter, Government made efficient decisions on locking down and further reopening particular villages and regional centers. The local headquarters organized thermal screenings and, in alarming cases, lab diagnostics for the populations of villages and municipalities under lockdown and high-risk zones.
- Throughout the enforcement period of the ban on passenger car movement (**April 17-26**), local municipalities, in coordination with the regional headquarters, issued movement permits to entities implementing economic activities (including individual entrepreneurs and farmers).
- On the decision of the regional operational headquarters, food products were distributed among rural populations³⁵ via so-called markets on wheels.

2.3.2 Governmental Hotline 144

In terms of ensuring proper epidemiological management and public awareness, an important role was played by several hotline methods introduced in the country.

Throughout the state of emergency, **the governmental hotline 114** was developed on the basis of the Public Safety Management Center 112 (hereinafter 112). The hotline was launched within record-breaking deadlines on March 30, 2020.

On April 17, an additional line, 114-1, was launched for issuing vehicle movement permits in emergency cases. **On April 25, the regional hotline 144-2 was also launched.**

The hotline 144, throughout the state of emergency, issued **15,527** one-time movement permits. These permits were issued after processing and verifying relevant information, only for activities allowed by the Government and for

³⁴ Local operations Command Centers of the Autonomous republic of Adjara, Kakheti, Guria, Racha-Lechkhumi-Kvemo Svaneti, Shida Kartli, Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, Imereti, and Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

³⁵ Meaning villages where no marketplaces operated.

movement with legitimate purposes. For example, emergency cases included pharmacy visits, doctor's appointments, emergency visits to parents suffering from unexpectedly worsening health conditions, agricultural activities due to unforeseen events, etc.

2.3.3 Quarantine Zone Management

To protect the population's health and mitigate risks of the spread of the infection, the Government created quarantine spaces which continue to provide risk groups with means for temporary isolation.

Since the launch of the quarantine zones project, the Government maintained active negotiations with small, medium-sized, and large hotels. **In all, negotiations were held with more than 300 hotels in the capital and the country's several regions.** In the process of selecting hotels for quarantine zones, the Government relied on the criteria established by the World Health Organization and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, including:

- **The hotel's readiness** to engage in the project and cooperate throughout this period. Some of the hotels withdrew in the working process.
- **The hotel's location**, with priority given to hospitality facilities near airports and border checkpoints, also to those located at a distance from tightly populated areas. Along with the subsequent growth of persons to be accommodated, however, the area for hotels to serve as quarantine zones expanded beyond the criteria defined by abovementioned priorities.
- **Ventilation system:** Based on the recommendation of the World Health Organization, all hotel rooms were required to have central and/or individual air conditioning/heating systems not involving air circulation between rooms.
- **Necessary infrastructure and services** (including three meals a day).
- **Human resources mobilized on the spot** to ensure necessary services at quarantine spaces.

Booking of hotels to be used as quarantine spaces started on March 10, 2020, before the declaration of a state of emergency in the country. Transportation from the border to the hotel was provided for citizens by the Government. Onboard meals were provided for long-distance travel. Hotel staff were also equipped with necessary medical gear, and other useful activities were implemented.

Prior to the declaration of a state of emergency, rates of hotel room to be used as quarantine spaces were subject to individual negotiation. As of March 21, 2020, flat rates were established all hotels engaged in the project. The rates were set at 59 GEL (including VAT), of which 25 GEL is defined as a fixed price for 3-time daily meal.

By May 22, a total of 84 hotels throughout the country made up the quarantine zone, with more than 6,500 rooms in all, and **19,002 persons completing mandatory quarantine. In addition, an average of 4,500-5,000 rooms were constantly occupied in the course of two months.** This project benefited the operations of 23 small (5 to 40 rooms), 42 medium-sized (41 to 100 rooms), and 18 large-sized (101 and more rooms) hotels, this way enabling the sector's representatives and those employed in it to keep their incomes.

Notably, the quarantine zones project, besides contributing to the fight against COVID-19, also fostered financial assistance for representatives of such areas as transport services, catering, food distribution, local agricultural goods production, and others.

32.5 million GEL was spent from the state budget to cover quarantine zone expenses.

2.3.4. Healthcare System Management

As mentioned earlier, Georgia, after the information on the virus first spread globally, took active steps, especially to ensure the readiness of the healthcare system.

At an early stage, the healthcare system, hospital sector, the availability of hospital beds, and other important parameters were evaluated. In addition, COVID-19-related protocols, recommendations, and methodical instructions were elaborated and updated depending on the epidemiological situation.

To ensure the optimal distribution of resources and quality medical services, also to flatten the curve, **starting in February 2020**, fever and COVID-19 management clinics were identified in Tbilisi and the regions (COVID-19 clinics). To ensure coronavirus diagnostics, treatment, and management, the COVID-19 **Clinical Management Group** was created on **March 16**. The group developed **The National COVID-19 Treatment Guidelines**.

Starting on March 26, hospitals throughout Georgia were selected and cleared, also, wherever necessary, the number of available hospital beds was increased, including in intensive care units. These clinics were prepared for possible medical supervision and management of suspected and/or confirmed coronavirus cases.

At the initial stage, clinics specializing in infectious diseases were selected, including in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, and Batumi. A total of **29 COVID-19 clinics**, both public and private, were selected in Tbilisi and the regions to engage in the process gradually, based on the increase of cases. At the same time, **24-hour, 48-hour, 72-hour, and 96-hour periods** were defined for clearing these hospitals, depending on their sizes. A total of **3,279 COVID-19 beds** and **1,050 (across 16 fever clinics)** for fever patients were prepared. **In addition, new clinics in Rukhi and Batumi were equipped to meet basic needs and put into operation in early May.**

Selected fever/COVID-19 beds	Number of beds	Intensive care beds	Ventilators
Fever clinics	1050	162	61
COVID-19 clinics	3279	878	525

COVID-19 clinics and so-called fever clinics were mobilized in stages, as needed. Since the beginning of the 1st stage of mobilization, nine clinics with 826 beds were mobilized. At the 2nd stage of mobilization, 12 clinics (1,247 beds) were cleared in stages along with the increase of patients: 4 clinics on March 1, 3 clinics on April 18, and one clinic on April 29. Initially, it was planned to mobilize additional clinics if the number of infection cases increase to 800 or more, as needed. In May of 2020, the threshold of engaging new clinics in the program increased to 1,600 active cases. In addition, clinics are enabled to safely continue providing other services, with hotspots duly defined.

Alongside preparing the hospital sector, to prevent overusing ambulance services with feverish patients, and to ensure the effective engagement of the primary healthcare network in COVID-19 management, a service was established for redirecting 112 calls from feverish patients or those with respiratory symptoms to general practitioners. This model was experienced during the 2018 flu outbreak and the number of flu cases in 2019-2020. 25 primary healthcare facilities joined the program in Tbilisi and the regions to cover the country's population in full. **Of the 16,176** 112 hotline calls placed in relation to a fever and respiratory symptoms **from April 2 through May 22**, only **7%** of the calls were returned to 122 for response and, on the decision of ambulance crews, eventually led to hospitalization. **15,089** citizens received supervision under the online consultation service.

Contact Tracing and Clusters

Identifying contacts during the epidemic of the COVID-19 infection caused by the novel coronavirus is essential for flattening the curve. The process of contact tracing involves contact with whom a given confirmed case patient has had interaction.

The contact-tracing group of NCDC and municipal public health centers bring together infectious diseases and epidemiology specialists. The group seeks to map the patient's contact history within 24 hours from diagnosing, and to find everyone believed to have had contact with the confirmed case.

Contacts who exhibit coronavirus symptoms are treated as potential cases and are hospitalized to be tested for coronavirus. Asymptomatic contacts are given a choice: remain in self-isolation at home for 14 days since the last contact with the confirmed case (as long as they comply with isolation rules) or be transferred to a quarantine facility by the Emergency Situations Coordination and Urgent Assistance Center. The enforcement of decision regarding a given person is ensured by relevant units of the Interior Ministry of Georgia.

Almost 3,400 contacts were identified through the nationwide epidemiological study of confirmed cases. To monitor contacts, they volunteered to self-isolate or transferred to special quarantine zones and placed under observation.

Information about clusters: About **15 clusters** were identified throughout the reporting period. The maximal number of cases (**40**) was identified within one cluster. Given the large number of cases, **the Tetrtskaro, Bolnisi, and Kobuleti clusters were singled out.**

On April 16, 2020, a new **application** became available in Georgia. Developed jointly by Austrian NGO NOVID20 and Austrian Dolphin Technologies, this application is an important tool for tracing contacts of coronavirus-infected persons and for preventing the further spread of the virus, enabling its users to find out whether or not they have been in contact with COVID-19-infected persons.

COVID-19 Testing

On January 30, 2020, RT-PCR testing for COVID-19—the gold standard in COVID-19 diagnostics—became available at the NCDC Lugar Laboratory. Its strong points include high sensitivity and specificity, with patients provided with results concerning their immune system with 99.9% precision just 5 hours after the test.

Rapid antibody and antigen tests are used only for supplementary purposes based on the algorithm approved by the Ministry of Health. The number of tests received so far: RT-PCR—122,548, extraction—76,532, rapid antigen—54,000, rapid antibody—26,000. **Throughout the reporting period**, a total of primary samples of **47,569** possible cases were tested. The laboratory's workload in the same period was **50,253 samples** (potential and followup samples). The test's positivity rate is below 2%.

From January 30 to March 1, 2020, only the NCDC Lugar Laboratory conducted RT-PCR tests. After March 1, other laboratories gradually joined the process of testing. **By May 22, 12 laboratories throughout the country conducted RT-PCR testing.**

Medical Personnel Mobilization, Retraining, and Infection Prevention

Since the beginning of response to COVID-19, the mobilization of qualified medical personnel in sufficient numbers was the main challenge facing the healthcare system. To respond to COVID-19, the Ministry of Health, from February to April, carried out training programs for medical personnel in priority areas such as infection prevention and control, online consultations for fever cases, advance and critical COVID-19 case management, and sampling techniques for expanding testing capabilities. With assistance from the World Health Organization, the US Disease Control and Prevention Centers, USAID, the Czech Government (through Caritas), Open Society—Georgia, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, 1,245 employees of all COVID-19 and fever clinics engaged in the program

completed infection control trainings from February to April, 2020. 75% of the rural physicians (974 rural physicians) and 90% of the urban physicians, a total of 2,500 doctors, were trained in early COVID-19 diagnostics and infection control.

With support from Open Society—Georgia, the personnel of the 29 COVID-19 clinics engaged in the program were trained in critical cases management. In May, the Health Ministry launched trainings on the ground and supportive supervision in 29 COVID-19 and 16 fever clinics.

One of the key policies of COVID-19 outbreak management is the protection of healthcare workers and prevention of infection among them. Medical personnel often play a key role in the chain of infection. The source of infection among healthcare representatives throughout the world is not only a patient—in which shortage of personal protection equipment means is an important infection risk factor—but also family and social contacts. According to various sources, the frequency of infection among healthcare personnel fluctuates between 5 and 20%. In the study period, healthcare representatives were infected in 13% of all confirmed COVID-19 cases.

To mitigate infection rates among medical personnel, the Ministry of Health, besides organizing infection prevention trainings and putting in place personal protection equipment, introduced, together with the managers of COVID-19 and fever clinics, a 2-week rotation scheme for personnel.

To ensure against the spread of infection within the medical network, personnel's employment in medical facilities continuing providing standard services—those other than COVID-19 and fever clinics—was restricted.

The medical facilities involved in the COVID-19 program introduced adequate rest periods for personnel during 2-week rotation periods. Since April, in compliance with the testing algorithm approved by the Health Ministry, rapid tests for COVID-19 antibodies were performed on the medical personnel of COVID-19 and fever clinics and all paramedics. Since May, medical personnel undergo regular RT-PCR testing to ensure with maximal diagnostic precision.

For the purpose of ongoing medical supervision in quarantine spaces, the Ministry of Health has mobilized 405 doctors and nurses. A special mentioning deserves the hotel serving as a triage facility for feverish patients where up to 95 patients stay under the medical team's supervision, those who are given the lightness of their clinical cases, do not require hospital treatment, though are unable to self-isolate at home due to household conditions. The medical team employed at the hotel is equipped with first-aid gear and pharmaceuticals, including pulse oximeters allowing for rapid condition severity assessment.

To mobilize students, the primary healthcare facility #25 invited 5th- and 6th-year students to engage in the administration of the online consultations model. The process of student mobilization and training will continue to prepare for a possible second wave.

2.3.5 Food Supply Management, Logistics and Price Monitoring

To prevent novel coronavirus from spreading in the country, the Interagency Coordination Council led by the Prime Minister put the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture in charge of food supply management and logistics and transport supervision. An emergency command center was created at the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture, main food products were defined to be monitored on a daily basis—in particular, import indicators, available supplies in the country, and prices were monitored—to prevent illicit behavior and to ensure the population's social protection.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture periodically monitors basic food product and expendable medical (facemasks, disposable medical gloves, disposable scrubs, disinfectants) supplies, with large importers and traders interviewed as part of this process.

Quantitative inventory is conducted on a daily basis to list agricultural products delivered for sale from the Marneuli and Bolnisi Municipalities, Kvemo Kartli Region.

Since the beginning of the crisis, prices were monitored at larger retail outlets. In particular, price monitoring in Tbilisi and the regions started on March 17 and March 28, respectively, in line with the product specifications defined by the Government.

As part of the plan for ensuring food safety, a program for maintaining basic food product prices was implemented. The program was designed to secure, through subsidizing, against price changes on predefined products caused by currency exchange fluctuations.

In addition, on April 17, the state program for subsidizing grain import was approved. Under the program, to maintain sales prices of bread and wheat flour, the import of 40,000 tons of grain was subsidized in order to replenish supplies diminishing because of growing grain prices. Under the program for grain subsidizing, additional supplies were put in place and, in line with the program's terms, a maximal flour price was defined, this way enabling bread makers to keep bread prices from growing.

Immediately upon the evaluation of risks related to global export restrictions, additional supplies of granulated sugar, vegetable oil, and pasta were put in place. Consequently, supplies of basic food products were secured in the country and, despite the situation in the regions, food provision in Georgia carried on without delays. Under the grain subsidy program, additional supplies were ensured in the country. These measures, on the one hand, secured sufficient supplies in the country, and, on the other hand, protected the market from speculative price growth.

Agricultural problems were identified on a daily basis. Consequently, the hotline of the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture received **39,774 calls** and **5,750 online communications**.

2.3.6 State of Emergency and Safety Control

In order to identify persons violating the state of emergency and curfew-related restrictions, the police responded efficiently to every legal violation. More than 10,000 employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs were engaged in the process of enforcing restrictions under the state of emergency.

Based on joint monitoring, the police, together with representatives of the National Center for Disease Control and local self-government, ensured contact tracing, and monitored the compliance with applicable rules on the part of means of transport (and their crews) entering the territory of Georgia from abroad and posing high risks of the spread of coronavirus. During the state of emergency, up to **130 checkpoints were installed throughout the country**. Those in self-isolation were periodically monitored.

Under the state of emergency, the police, besides enforcing applicable restrictions, also fulfilled their main duty of maintaining public order. The number of registered offences decreased in comparison to previous year, including life and health-threatening crimes and those related to property, transport, and illegal drugs. The decrease is due to both, the state of emergency and the highest degree mobilization of police forces/greater visibility throughout the state of emergency.

State of Emergency Violations

The Interior Ministry identified **8,737** administrative offenses, for which **8,716** individuals and **21** legal entities were fined, including:

- **Leaving self-isolation or quarantine space premises:**
382 persons were transferred to quarantine spaces, and 144 were fined.
- **Violation of passenger transportation or travel rules:**
1,406 individuals were fined.
- **Passenger car movement:**
430 individuals were fined.
- **Violation of the ban on gatherings of more than 3 persons/failure to keep a 2-meter distance or failure to use a facemask:**
1,850 individuals were fined.
- **Curfew violation:**
4,820 individuals were fined.
- **Movement without ID:**
27 individuals were fined.
- **Legal entities conducting activities prohibited under the state of emergency:**
21 legal entities were fined.
- **Individual entrepreneurs conducting activities prohibited under the state of emergency:**
39 individuals (individual entrepreneurs) were fined.

Under the Government's Decree #181, the Monitoring Department of the Ministry of Finance filed **202 violation reports**.

Country's Defense Forces

The Defense Forces of Georgia (4,800 service members) were actively engaged in preventive measures against the spread of the novel coronavirus since the initial stage. They made effective use of the vital theoretical and practical knowledge acquired within the scope of special NATO standard training.

On March 21, the Defense Forces were confined to barracks, with restricted access to military bases.

The tightened restrictions throughout Georgia were controlled 24/7 jointly by the Defense Forces and the Interior Ministry.

Emergency management centers were created in Eastern and Western Commands to conduct planning and summarize implemented action on a daily basis. Effective measures were taken toward ensuring the health and safety of service members and strengthening the capacities of the healthcare system. Safety norms defined by the National Center for Disease Control remain in force in every military unit of the Defense Forces.

Throughout the state of emergency, the Defense Forces, together with the employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, maintained control over citizens' movement and their primary health assessment at **85 checkpoints out of 130**. **From March 22 through May 22**, the Georgian Defense Forces units disinfected 1,718,016 automobiles throughout the country and examined 2,532,937 persons with thermal screening. 161 persons tested positive for high temperatures during thermal screening. They were reported to management centers and the medical assistance center. Consequently, the movement of said persons was restricted and the spread of the disease was prevented in a timely manner.

2.3.7 Assisting and Repatriating Citizens Residing Abroad

In light of the difficult global situation developing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, it became necessary to repatriate and provide with assistance Georgian citizens stranded abroad because of restrictions enforced in their respective host countries.

Overall, by May 22, 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 citizens** with special needs).

Notably, a special flight was organized in cooperation with the US Government to repatriate 79 Georgian high school and college students and 35 underage Armenian citizens.

In addition, assistance was provided locally to **21,190** citizens abroad, including through providing shelter, food, medicines, and other primary and basic products and services to those left with no residence.

Also, citizens were exempt from consular fees for certifying their return to Georgia.

A total of **74 flights** were organized from **27 countries**, including from China, Iran, Italy, Germany, Greece, and others. Of the total number of flights, **33 direct flights** were carried out by Georgian Airways.

By May 22, 118 Georgian citizens abroad were infected with coronavirus, mostly with its less severe forms. 16 Georgian citizens passed away abroad (1 in Austria, 4 in Spain, 1 in Turkey, 2 in Great Britain, 5 in the US, 2 in France, and 1 in Latvia).

2.3.8 Assisting Persons Residing in the Occupied Territories

Since the beginning of the spread of coronavirus, the Government clearly voiced its commitment to assisting every person living in the occupied territories. Since the beginning of March, the populations residing in the occupied territories were provided with assistance in several directions, such as timely information delivery, expertise sharing, delivery of medical supplies on the ground, and treatment of transferred patients.

Relevant materials were translated in the Abkhazian and Ossetian languages and distributed in a timely manner. As needed, infectious disease specialists provided remote consultations and information-sharing.

Through various channels, the Region of Abkhazia was supplied with different medical supplies, gear, and hygiene items to protect from coronavirus. This process continues to this day.

Similar assistance was provided to the socially vulnerable populations living along the border lines, including large families and children with disabilities, an ongoing campaign.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, dozens of people from the occupied territories traveled to the central government-controlled area on a daily basis. Although the mobility on the occupation line has significantly decreased after the spread of the virus, almost daily flow of people in need of both, scheduled and emergency medical care has been detected.

The State Security Service and relevant agencies jointly developed a patient management plan, and a field hospital staffed with medical doctors opened near the Enguri Bridge. Each patient crossing from the occupied territory was tested for a fever and, based on health-related complaints, transferred to various medical facilities.

To treat infected patients, the Rukhi Hospital was equipped and launched operations. The hospital was built for long-term goals, including to simplify access to medical services for the population living in the occupied territory.

The Government of Abkhazia and the Health Ministry conducted daily consultations with various clinics with a view to providing each person traveling from occupied Abkhazia with medical examination and, if necessary, hospitalization. Overall, **in a period between March 22 and May 22**, the spread of coronavirus caused **233 persons** from Georgia's occupied territories to enter the territory controlled by the Central Government. Of them, only **one case of infection was confirmed**.

As necessary, all processes listed above involved the active use of the hotline mechanism operating within the framework of the EU Monitoring Mission. In the direction of occupied Abkhazia, the hotline was actively employed for transferring patients, with a view to sharing information about their health.

2.4. Adaptation of the State Machinery to the Emergency Situation

Transition to the state of emergency made an impact on nearly all the State machinery, the adequate operation of which is vital to the Georgian public. Therefore, **adaptation of all the systems, was planned.**

2.4.1. Distance Teaching

Because of the emergency situation, **on 4 March, teaching was stopped at all the educational institutions and distance teaching has started:** the Microsoft Office 365 user profiles (**528 327 pupils and 52 124 teachers**) were created for the public schools across Georgia and stage 1 distance teaching was launched **on 14 March**. Since **30 March**, online teaching has been in place at all the educational institutions. The total of **56 327 teachers** got engaged in the distance teaching.

In order to ensure the uninterrupted online educational process:

- And to make education accessible to all and, also, given the fact that access to the Internet and computer is still a challenge, the Georgian Government and the Public Broadcaster launched the “TV School” educational project to broadcast the national curriculum standard lessons;
- Since May, the “Webschool” project supported by the Ministry of Education of Georgia has offered webinars to the final grade pupils in the key subjects for national examinations;
- A portal which gives pupils and parents direct access to the pupils’ profiles without the school Administration or teachers’ involvement was created;
- Spaces for virtual consultations were created across Georgia. The volunteer “New School Model” IT experts are assisting teachers in introduction of the distance teaching;
- The first Georgian Feedc Edu alternative platform for online instruction was introduced at schools;
- Simultaneous and non simultaneous methods are being applied in online education at the higher educational institutions. To this end, various platforms, mainly Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Moodle, Google classroom are being used. The Guides and video instructions were developed and the student and staff trainings staged. The curricula were modified and the teaching methods and assessment systems revised;
- The universities identified the students with no access to online learning and made sure that the Internet and computer hardware were available. For some students, the universities developed the individual curricula;
- Jointly with the staff of the detention facilities, the alternative ways of e-learning, including the “TV School” were developed for juveniles.

2.4.2. Adaptation of the Detention Facilities

Since 5 March, special conditions have been in place in jails. The right of the accused and the convicts to have visitors, short visits outside prisons and taking a leave for extraordinary reasons has been suspended.

Besides, on 12 March, the persons serving the suspended sentence were released from the obligation of regular visits to the probation bureaus and a certain mode of conduct for the term of one month. Meetings of the Standing Commission, which deals with the issues such as cancellation of the conditional sentence and lifting conviction, as well as restoration of the rights stripped off by the Court have been taking place by way of video-conferences.

Since 13 March, medical examination of the accused/convicts at the detention centers has been taking place at the makeshift medical stations outside the facility. In case of suspicious symptoms, an accused is taken to a civilian clinic.

Since 20 March, the staff and all the visitors to the detention centers have been given medical checkup involving thermal screening and a general epidemiological anamnesis.

Since 24 March, prisoners have not been taken to court. Online court trials have been in place instead.

After the first reported cases of internal transmission of the virus, in order to prevent the spread of the infection from outside, on 29 March, confinement to barracks was declared at the detention places. In the reporting period, 780 staff stayed at work around the clock.

From 16 April to late May, all the visitors to the detention centers had to go through a specially set up disinfectant corridor.

On 17 April, it was decided to prolong the term during which the persons serving the suspended sentence were not obliged to report at the probation bureau.

As a result of assessment of the epidemiological situation, on 18 May, reporting at the probation bureaus resumed with those accused of family violence.

2.4.3. Business Safety Monitoring

For the purpose of safe resumption of the economic activities permitted in Georgia during the emergency situation, the detailed industry-by-industry recommendations for prevention of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) were developed. The Labor Inspection Department of the Georgian Ministry of the IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs is in charge of their enforcement.

The inspection aims at safe renewal of the economic activities and, also, reporting recommendations to the businesses. Intensive consultations with the business associations and interest groups have been underway. The companies registered on the Health Ministry website are being inspected in order to ensure their compliance with the safety recommendations.

In 1-22 May 2020, 10 479 enterprises were inspected. As of 22 May 2020, 19 977 companies/enterprises lodged requests for resumption of business in the Health Ministry database.

2.4.4. Production of the Facemasks and Disinfectants

The global shortage of facemasks and the cloth they are made from called for finding solution to the problem in terms of: 1) regular supply; 2) minimal dependence on outside factors; 3) meeting the increasing demand.

Multiple use gauze facemasks had to be locally produced. After the approval of the manufacture and design by Lugar Laboratory, the local gauze stock was purchased and the rest of the required material was imported from the partner States and the face masks were contracted to the local garment factories and sewing workshops. The total of 14 companies and over 900 people produced the facemasks. Production of the multiple use gauze facemasks made it possible to meet the demand in a relatively short time. The Georgian Embassies abroad worked intensively to ensure availability of the required gauze stock, which resulted in unhampered production of the facemasks.

2,761,990 were distributed out of **4,787,111** facemasks produced in the reporting period. **1,828,850** out of those were provided to the retailers; **474,300** supplied to the regions, **80,500** to pensioners, **35,300** the Georgian embassies and **85,650** to the private sector (stores, distribution network, and communications). **13 sewing facilities** are engaged now.

Production of disinfectants was backed up as well. Given the potential of the relevant Georgian companies, the export restriction was lifted. Since March, the number of the incorporated enterprises and registered products has increased significantly. **56** companies seeking for registration of the product mix of **60** disinfectants approached Lugar Laboratory. Until March, merely **10** companies had been producing the registered disinfectants. Approx. **4,000 t** of those are now manufactured per month.

2.4.5. Regular Supply of the Public Services

Healthcare Services

- In order to ensure uninterrupted medical services, recommendations for tighter infection control were developed and published for mental, reproduction, perinatal, dental and outpatient clinics.

- The medicines were delivered at home to the beneficiaries of the specific medicine programs (including insulin-dependents) and, also the over 70 persons and the disabled involved in the State program for the chronic disease patients (including those taking Insulin),
- For antenatal services- pregnant women were registered online.
- The relevant medicines were regularly supplied to the beneficiaries registered at the mental clinics in Tbilisi and elsewhere in the country, especially in the Kvemo Kartli region.
- Due to the ban on the public transport, the Social Service Agency transported the patients involved in the hemodialysis program to the medical institutions and back free of charge.
- The “Georgian Post” delivered medicines to the patients involved in the hepatitis C elimination program, who, were unable to visit the medical institutions because of the emergency situation and temporary restriction on the interurban traffic.

Social Services

- Pensions, compensations, allowances were regularly paid to the target groups.
- The pensions/compensations/allowances were set/renewed electronically without a visit to the Social Service Agency. An eligible person had to email the relevant application and send a softcopy document to the Agency.
- The below poverty line households of less than **100 001 rating points** were regularly provided the subsistence level allowance regardless of the contrary information supplied by the Social Service Agency or the legal status determined by the relevant acts etc. Sources, save the cases where a household requested re-assessment of its socio-economic status. **The subsection applies to suspension of subsistence level allowance in force since 1 January 2020. 3 000 households (8500 persons) came under the regulation.**
- Under the State program for improvement of the demographic situation in the country, the families residing in the Georgian regions, where the child birth rates have been falling have been and are still given the monthly allowance for the third etc. child of 200 GEL (mountainous regions) and 150 GEL elsewhere. The Social Service Agency **did not reinspect their actual places of residence** to confirm presence of the beneficiaries. The monetary allowance, which had been given to the households until March was resumed in April and the families were given the compensation for the one they did not receive in March. **Therefore, approx. 7000 families received the allowance without a visit to the Agency.**
- Funding of the service organizations acting under various sub-programs, such as **Early Child Development, Child Habilitation/Rehabilitation Daycare Centers continued. The Daycare Center beneficiaries were given the food vouchers and remote services were rendered under various sub-programs.**

Public Service Hall/Public Centers

- On 30 March, all the Public Service Halls and Public Centers **terminated operation and the public was informed about the possibility to receive services online.**
- At an early stage, Public Service Hall in the capital Tbilisi issued documents “just drive”.
- From 5 May, the visitors to all the Public Service Halls and Public Centers had to reserve their visits on my.gov.ge portal.

Notary Services

In order to ensure regular notary services:

- From 1 to 27 April (through) makeshift notary bureaus opened in Tbilisi and the rest of Georgia;
- Since 5 May, a visit to the notary has to be reserved on my.gov.ge portal.

National Bureau of Enforcement

- From 23 March, the National Bureau of Enforcement terminated foreclosures and forced demolition, seize and collection of the borrower’ assets, the service of the statement of facts (renewed on 28 April) and auctions;
- Since 6 April, the National Bureau of Enforcement has been carrying out enforcement proceedings online and rendering etc. services (save a few) on the grounds of an online application.

National Agency of Public Registry

- Since 9 April, the National Agency of Public Registry has been rendering approximately 150 online services available on My.gov.ge portal. Request and receipt procedures of some of those have been simplified; 29 services can be received by e-mail.
- On 10 April, the Public Registry opened ad hoc registration offices at 3 locations in Tbilisi, where by prior registration at its hotline (2 405-405) you can submit hardcopy documents. The 70 and over citizens of Georgia can get services at home.
- All the 23 branches of the Public Registry started operation on 27 April. However, the visit has to be reserved.

Public Services Development Agency

- On 9 April, Public Services Development Agency resumed stage-by-stage the most requested services online and on the spot. The documents have been delivered by post. The Agency services can be received at 10 locations across the country.
- Given the situation, the service fee has been halved while the groups below have been rendered services free of charge:
 - Members of the socially vulnerable households registered in the uniform database, whose rating point does not exceed 70 001;
 - The disabled persons;
 - The 70 and over persons.
- Since 13 April, all pre-crisis online services have been restored and the new most requested ones enabled on a broader scale: the online services, which until then had been rendered only to the persons abroad became accessible to anyone in Georgia.
- On 4 May, territorial services of the Agency resumed operation.

The Interior Ministry Services

- Since 14 March, the uniform service center has been rendering up to 50 services.
- Since 26 March, there have been online trials by means of a video link set up in a special space inside the preliminary detention facility.

The Finance Ministry Services

- Both the persons and legal entities can get the Revenue Service online services by means of video call.
- Voice (Voice.rs.ge) website of the Revenue Service is the unique software in Georgia. It allows the persons with impaired vision to hear by headphones a text on the screen in the Georgian language and, also, get various services, including the information as to how to minimize the coronavirus risks, create a safe environment, get compensations and tax breaks envisaged by the Georgian Government crisis-combat plan.

The Education, Science, Culture and Sports Ministry Services

Education:

- The accreditation expert groups have been assessing educational programs, and the Accreditation Board has been discussing them at its **online** meetings.
- The only exception are the educational programs (engineering, natural sciences, medicine, dentistry etc.) defined by the Director of the Center, which due to their specific nature cannot be assessed online.
- Transitional programs have been offered to the pupils with no access to formal schooling.
- Due to the pandemic-related quarantine at the penitentiary facilities, the beneficiaries have been regularly getting alternative education.
- A special teacher/psychologist service has been rendered to the pupils with special needs and their parents.
- The Office of the Resource Officers have been rendering 24h psychological service to pupils, their parents, teachers and Administration members.

Culture:

- A Campaign “**#Culture for You #Stay Home**” has been launched through which various State-funded cultural organizations offered:
 - Free exciting online cultural programs (plays, concerts, films, trips to the museums, cognitive and entertainment activities) to the people in the lockdown;
 - **Over 800** online activities;
 - At least **4** online cultural activities per day.

Despite of the challenges, the Ministry preserved all the **12 sectoral competitions announced earlier**. The application receipt terms were prolonged and the competition terms adapted to the challenges in place. The competition applications have been received online. The competition grants due to the cultural organizations range from **5 000 – 25 000 GEL**. The staffs of over **150** cultural organizations are the beneficiaries.

The Tbilisi Municipality Services

The Tbilisi City Hall has been rendering online services. Up to 10 000 citizens have used online services by my.municipal.gov.ge portal and up to 300 000 people contacted the City Hall by hotline.

2.4.7 STOPCOV Fund

Some of the companies operating in Georgia expressed their desire to collaborate with the Government and financially contribute to combating COVID-19.

For the purpose of the initiative derived from the private sector, a special **STOPCOV Fund** platform was created, where companies and persons can contribute to COVID combat at the Georgian Business Ombudsman’s Office.

The StopCoV funds will be spent on the critical needs. The distribution of the funds is going to be transparent and in accordance with the Laws of Georgia.

As of 1 June 2020, **133 121 907 GEL** had been donated to StopCov Fund by 6 968 entities: 1 673 by natural persons, 1 410 private companies, 660 public institutions and Public Law entities; 125 non-profit organizations and 3 100 by the other contributors. The donations of 1 or more million GEL have been made by: 1. Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili - 100 million GEL; 2. Magticom – 3 million GEL; 3. Silknet – 1.4 million GEL; 4. Mr. David Khidasheli - 1,2 million GEL; 5. RMG - 1 million GEL; 6. Caucasus Online – 1 million GEL; 7. Mr. Irakli Gilauri – 1 million GEL; 8. Mr. Shota Shalashvili – 1 million GEL.

2.5 The Emergency Situation and Accountability

2.5.1 Public Communication

The Government of Georgia and **Interagency Coordination Council** declared provision of detailed information to the public as a priority:

- From the very first day of its formation, the Council held **daily briefings** during which industry experts, ministers and the PM answered reporters’ questions in live. The public was regularly informed about each stage of restrictions and planned measures;
- A wide range of information on the coronavirus was posted on a special **www.StopCov.ge website**, which became the key source on the Covid patients. Also, the WHO and the Disease Control National Center recommendations, FAQ and the detailed answers have been published on the website. StopCov.ge is accessible in the Georgian, Abkhazian Ossetian, English, Armenian and Azeri languages;
- The Georgian Government’s unified hotline – 144 provided information 24/7;
- The Government of Georgia regularly supports creation and proliferation of the CDC, WHO etc. international evidence - **based educational/information materials** (including commercials). The materials translated into the **Abkhazian, Ossetian, English, Armenian and Azeri languages** have been distributed to public in various

ways. The relevant information is available to minorities in their native languages. The educational posters, informational graphics and video materials are regularly posted in the social networks;

- The Legislative Herald of Georgia makes accessible to public all legal acts relevant to Covid-19. They are posted in a special StopCov block at the platform Stop.gov.ge.
- Population have been informed with SMSs, including in the ethnic minority languages;
- A formal communication channel in the Georgian and English languages was created on the “Telegram” platform to accelerate proactivity;
- In order to ensure efficient, coordinated and regular information sharing with Media, each agency appointed a press speaker (including the personnel of the clinics involved in the Covid combat);
- Owing to the joint efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia and National Center for Disease Control, the Georgian citizens abroad regularly get the online consultations from infectiologists;
- For efficient **communication with NGOs and International Organizations**, the Government of Georgia set up several coordination platforms, enabling these organisations to pose their views, recommendations and questions. They were provided detailed information on the Georgian Governmental decisions and plans. In order to exchange the Georgian Government’s visions on economic recovery during and in the post-crisis period, meetings were held with **economic consultative organizations**. Their views and recommendations were included into the anti-crisis economic plan;
- **The anti-crisis economic plan, as well as the exit plan (plan for lifting restrictions) has been presented to wider public by the PM** in a live stream. The same format has been offered to public when presenting the tourism, agriculture, education and construction support action plans.

2.5.2 Public Procurement

From March 1, 2020, to May 22, 2020, the State Procurement Agency (SPA) received 1,646 applications from various government agencies and organizations for procurements through a simplified public procurement procedure, of which 1,477 were approved.

Notably, taking into account the urgent needs, 90% of the total applications were made in the framework of the measures to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus disease - COVID-19 and concerned the purchase of relevant goods and services (face masks, disinfectant solutions, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), equipment for thermo-screening, medications, building disinfection services, rental services for transportation to the quarantine spaces, catering, etc. - total cost **94 562 594 GEL**).

In order to get reliable and objective information on simplified procurement from procuring organizations, the State Procurement Agency through various tools, including using an integrated questionnaire on the electronic platform (SMP module) created by the SPA, ensured that each procurement was targeted, focused on the necessary needs and non-essential procurements were virtually eliminated.

It is also noteworthy that the above-mentioned platform ensures full transparency of the procurement process and provides an opportunity for any interested person to publicly express remarks and opinions regarding any simplified procurement.

After the approval of the SPA, the procuring organisations themselves ensure the selection of relevant suppliers, as well as the rational spending of the required funds.

2.6 Emergency Situation and Humans Rights

As a result of the global pandemic, alongside several other countries (Estonia, Latvia, Moldova, Romania, Armenia), Georgia enacted article 15 of the European Convention for Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. Article 15 envisions derogation from the obligations of the Convention "in time of war or other public emergency threatening the life of the nation."

It is important to notice that while enacting Article 15 of the Convention, Georgia did not restrict all the rights envisioned by the Article. Therefore, The Presidential Decree restrained only those rights that were essential for responding to the crisis and directly correlated with the country's epidemiological situation.

From the beginning of the crisis, the Georgian Government took proactive measures to protect the social, civil and economic rights of the vulnerable groups and minorities, including through access to information, services, subsistence support, healthcare and education for the persons with disabilities, large families, single parents, older people, ethnic, religious, sexual and other minorities.

Despite the crisis, prevention and combating violence against women and domestic violence remained the Government's priority. The practical experience of numerous countries (France, Spain) demonstrated an increase in cases of violence against women and domestic violence. To mitigate increased risks of violence against women and domestic violence, the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence at the Human Rights Council adopted the Communication Strategy on Violence against Women and Domestic Violence during the COVID-19 Crisis. The strategy was developed in partnership with local and international partners and implemented through the crisis to ensure access to information and alternative ways of reporting domestic violence.

The Ministry of Internal Affairs continued regular and proactive response to the cases of violence against women and domestic violence. Although the number of such cases did not increase during the crisis, the Ministry of Internal Affairs took special measures to develop a new methodology for detecting and responding to domestic violence cases.

Moreover, the state ensured non-stop access to free services for survivors of domestic violence, such as crisis centers and shelters. From the beginning of the crisis, the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking, restructured the model of service provision for all ten state-run crisis centers and shelters. In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19, the new beneficiaries are temporarily accommodated in separate spaces. Some of the services are being provided remotely, and the staff is regularly supplied with hygiene and personal protective equipment.

The same model was applied to the large state institutions across the country. For the better protection of beneficiaries, in some shelters (for example, state institutions for disabled persons), staff moved to prolonged shifts (7 to 14 days) to minimize the entry from outside.

To mitigate the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis and for the protection of social and economic rights, in cooperation with international organizations, local municipalities, and private organizations, the Government of Georgia ensured access to basic subsistence support to vulnerable social groups across the country.

The Government prioritized support to ethnic minorities at all stages of the crisis. Access to information was especially crucial to proactively prevent the spread of misinformation. Therefore, the Government of Georgia ensured that the information materials related to COVID-19 are timely translated into and disseminated online in Armenian and Azeri languages. Alongside the information material, videos and recommendations were also translated into ethnic minority languages. Since March 2020, over 529 100 units of the relevant materials have been translated into the Armenian and Azeri languages and handed out to households during the door-to-door information campaign. Governmental informational webpage www.StopCov.ge is also available in ethnic minority languages.

Access to timely and reliable information for persons with disabilities was also among Government priorities. Therefore, Government briefings are accompanied by sign language. For those citizens with hearing impairments who do not know the sign language, the text of the briefings is uploaded to Governmental social pages immediately after.

To ensure a high level of participation, during the crisis, the Human Rights Council regularly hosted closed and open (online) meetings with NGOs, vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities, ethnic, sexual, and religious minorities.

To mitigate the socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 crisis and for the protection of social and economic rights, a large portion of the Government's anti-crisis plan includes socio-economic support to socially vulnerable groups. Continuous efforts are being taken by the Government to develop additional programmes in cooperation with international organizations to better protect the rights of especially vulnerable groups.

3. The Pandemic's Impact on the Country's Economy

The coronavirus pandemic has dealt a devastating blow to the world economy: industries, such as tourism, trade etc., have shrunk significantly. The shock affected both demand and supply. According to IMF's basic scenario, **the global economy in 2020 will drop by 3%, while in case of the worst-case scenario, a 5% decrease is anticipated.**

Notably, the economic crisis/shock caused by the pandemic differs remarkably from previous economic crises caused largely by an economic factor or a shock in an individual economic sector. Accordingly, in this particular case, states give top priority to the protection of human lives and health.

Needless to say, **the coronavirus shock has made a negative impact on the Georgian economy**, which depends largely on external factors. The virus impeded the positive economic trends emerging last year. Namely, in 2019, there was an unanticipated high economic growth of 5.1%. Tourism revenues amounted to 3.3 billion USD (18.4% of GDP), export revenues to 3.8 billion USD (21.2% of GDP), and net remittances to 15 billion USD (8.4% of GDP). Consequently, the national current account deficit hit the historical minimum: 5.1% of GDP. The unexpected economic growth and improved export resulted in greater budget incomes to allow the state capital investments to hit a record 8% of GDP. The foreign debt remained stable, the credit portfolio grew, and the numbers of overdue loans dropped.

Despite said positive economic indicators, however, the coronavirus shock significantly worsened Georgia's economic prospects in 2020. Slower economic growth in partner states is likely to make a negative impact on Georgia's export and remittances, and continued global uncertainty about the pandemic is expected to result in the reduction of the capital influx or/and planned investments. **The International Monetary Fund forecasts that, due to the economic slowdown, Georgia's economy in 2020 will drop by 4%. However, as a result of a positive trend in the 4th quarter of 2020, it is likely to grow by the same 4% in 2021.**

Tourism is the primary area through which the pandemic's negative consequences affect the country's economy. According to statistics for the 1st quarter of 2020, revenues from international visitors decreased by **26% YOY**. Overall, service export in 2020 is likely to drop by 55%, which includes a **70%** drop in revenues from international visitors. The situation in the tourism industry affects other economic sectors as well, including construction and real estate.

Globally, foreign trade is in decline, and as early as April of 2020, Georgian export decreased by 28% and import by 39%. Apart from a smaller demand due to the pandemic, the oil prices slump also affected our export due to our trade partners' smaller revenues and, consequently, lower demand. For its part, diminishing export put pressure on the exchange rate. According to the IMF, in 2020, export will drop by 24.2% and import by 21.1%.

Also, the global shrink of the foreign demand and the economic crises in other countries affect the volume of remittances, a significant component of the internal demand and, accordingly, their decrease affects domestic

consumption. According to the statistical data issued in April of 2020, overall remittances dropped by 42.3%, namely from Russia by 61.8%, from Italy by 27.5%, from Greece by 37.9%, from the US by 33.6%, and from Israel by 48.4%.

Reduced incomes from external factors affect domestic demand, significantly decreasing demand on non-staple goods and services. Also, during a shock, investment activities slow down significantly.

Recession and growing pandemic management costs reflect directly on budget incomes, especially those from taxes and cost volume. In 2020, prospected aggregate budget incomes, besides international grants and credits, amounted to 13.7 billion GEL, which will drop by 1.8 billion GEL, according to an updated forecast. For the partial funding of the budget deficit, since March of 2020, the budget expenditure has been cut; the aggregate budget expenditure will drop by 600 M GEL.

The pandemic has affected both the private sector and individuals, which called for finding extra resources for their direct support, as well as for the prevention of the pandemic and treatment of patients. All these calls for over 3 billion GEL in additional expenses.

The uncertainty as to how long the pandemic will last aggravates the economic situation. Therefore, budget reserves have to be created to ensure against problems related to financing budget costs in the most pessimistic, worst-case scenario.

In light of the foregoing, the Government of Georgia held intensive negotiations with international partners. Georgia was the first country amid the pandemic to receive increased IMF funding within the frameworks of an ongoing program. Successful negotiations with the IMF resulted in significant monetary resources attracted from other donors. Overall, **1.5 billion USD budget support has been attracted, including:**

- IMF – 200.0 M USD;
- ADB – 400.0 M USD;
- WB – 250.0 M USD;
- AFD - 200.0 M USD;
- KfW – 250.0 M USD;
- EU – 200.0 M USD;
- AIIB – 100.0 M USD.

In addition, 1.5 billion USD worth of financial resources has been made available to the private sector.

Notably, the implemented reforms and fiscal discipline have been mandatory preconditions for attracting support from international partners for minimizing the negative pandemic-related impact.

3.1 The Georgian Government's Anti-Crisis Policy

From the onset of the pandemic, the Georgian Government's decisions have been directed toward flattening the curve and ensuring compliance of economic activities with the highest safety standards, on the one hand, and toward mitigating the negative impact of the virus and, to that end, supporting the private sector and citizens. Therefore, striking a balance between protecting human lives and health and reducing the negative economic impact has been key.

Meeting the needs of as many people and businesses as possible with limited resources is the axis of the Georgian Government's anti-crisis plan, to reach out to a maximally possible number of those affected by the pandemic.

As the situation has affected many citizens and companies, the Government of Georgia developed the anti-crisis package maximally targeting said challenges, with relevant measures implemented in 2 stages. The 1st stage, involving emergency assistance, started in March, prior to the state of emergency, and the next stage started in April to involve broader activities.

Apart from so-called horizontal measures, plans for the recovery of agriculture, tourism, and construction—involving significant Governmental support to companies operating in the industries—were developed and presented to the public. Certain measures to support the area of education were also presented (Annex 6).

The Government's efficient anti- and post-crisis actions are designed to foster rapid economic recovery in Georgian. According to the IMF forecast, as a result of the Government's effective actions, Georgia's economic growth in 2021 will reach 4%.

3.1.1 Supporting Citizens

Stage 1

The 1st stage involved emergency assistance measures of sorts aimed at mitigating the initial effects of the pandemic, such as:

- **3 months' utility bills were funded** for subscribers whose monthly consumption of power was less than 200 kW and that of the natural gas below 200m³. The funding included waste management and water supply. This subsidizing mechanism is considered fairer and better targeted, compared to other alternatives. Within 3 months, on average, the number of beneficiaries of power funding made up **over 1.2 million subscribers**, while those of the natural gas reached **over 670 000 subscribers**. Program budget: **170 M GEL**.
- **The Government of Georgia insured prices against 9 basic food products caused by exchange rate fluctuations to secure that there is no significant rise:** in order to mitigate the devaluation effects of the national currency, a program was developed that proved to be conducive to the stability of prices on staple food products at the 1st stage of the crisis when inflation risks increased significantly. On certain conditions, the State subsidized currency exchange difference for importer companies purchasing 9 basic food products from March 15 through May 15. **Program budget: 14 M GEL**.
- **Citizens were given a 3 month credit repayment deferral:** in order to avoid repayment problems and penalties, all personal loan repayments were deferred by 3 months. **Approx. 600 000 debtors** took advantage of the opportunity.

Stage 2

Stage 2 of the anti-crisis plan involves direct support for various categories of citizens, such as employees, self-employed persons, vulnerable social groups etc., namely:

- **Employees**, who have lost their jobs or are on unpaid leave, **will receive 1200 GEL assistance for 6 months, i.e. 200 GEL per month**. About 350 000 people will qualify. **Program budget: approx. 450 M GEL**.
- **Various categories of self-employed persons** will be given one-time assistance in the amount of **300 GEL**. To qualify, information confirming incomes enjoyed prior to the pandemic must be submitted. **Program budget: 75 M GEL**.
- **To keep jobs available, employers will receive various tax cuts:** for 6 months, salaries not exceeding 750 GEL will be exempt from income taxes. 750 GEL out of the salary of 1500 GEL will also be exempt from income taxes. **Program budget: 250 M GEL**.
- In addition:

- **Households whose social rating is between 65 000 and 100 000** will receive 600 GEL assistance for 6 months. Notably, such families presently enjoy this assistance only for 3 or more children under 16 children. **Over 190 000 individuals (70 000 families) are the beneficiaries of the program; the budget is 50 M GEL.**
- **Families whose social rating is between 0 and 100 000 and have 3 or more children under 16** will receive a total of 600 GEL in the course of 6 months. **Over 130 000 individuals (22 000 families) are the beneficiaries of this 13 M GEL program.**
- **Persons with evident disabilities and children with disabilities** will receive a total of 600 GEL in the course of 6 months. **The number of the beneficiaries is approx. 40 000 and the program budget is 25 M GEL.**
- **Besides, from 1 July, approx. over 410 000 pensioners aged 70 and over** will receive 30 GEL in addition to their pensions.

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. increasing prices will not affect the actual pension;
- 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.

After the pandemic, the system of social assistance will be revised for point-awarding and financial assistance's volume calculation.

3.1.2 Support for Business

Stage 1

Similar to the 1st stage in the support plan for citizens, business support involves emergency measures to mitigate the pandemic effects, namely:

- **4 months' property and income taxes of the companies were deferred** until November 1, 2020. Program budget: 171 M GEL. **Said taxes have already been deferred for more than 6000 companies.**
- **6 months' credit interest payments will be co-funded for small hotels:** since April 1, 2020, 6 month credit interests of 4 to 50 room hotels has been co-funded. **Program budget: 14 M GEL.**
- **90-day customs clearance term for imported cars** is extended to September 1. **Program budget: 50 M GEL. 38 000 importers have benefited.**
- **Legal entities with difficulties servicing loans were offered simplified restructuring. 7 000 legal entities used the opportunity.**

Stage 2

- **Automatic VAT return will be enacted and VAT surplus will double:** this year, businesses will receive **600 M GEL** extra.
- **330 M GEL will be allocated as credit collateral:** this is used as a counter-cycle tool for bettering access to financial resources and improved liquidity management, also ensuring adequate risk distribution between the State, commercial banks and borrowers in crisis, in light of banks' reduced tolerance toward risk. This collateral scheme is mainly designed for easier access to financial resources by small and medium-sized businesses in terms of restructuring their previous loans or taking out new ones, including funding for floating assets. Within the frameworks of the program, industries directly affected by the crisis, which have potential for a relatively rapid resumption of operation in the medium-term perspective, will be funded. The operating conditions of the private sector will improve significantly due to a larger guarantee coverage for both individual loans and portfolios, smaller credit guarantee commissions, higher credit cap and a larger scale use of the guarantee for funding floating assets. **The guarantee sum allocated in 2020 within the frameworks of the scheme amounts to 330 M GEL, which actually secures approx. 2 billion credit portfolio State guarantee.**
- **Enterprise Georgia State program has been amended and introduces:**
 - Increase of the loan (lease) co-funding period from **24 to 36 months;**
 - An amended mechanism for co-funding interests;

- Broader range of activities;
- Lowering the minimal loan (lease) limit;
- Funding up to 80% of floating assets.
- **Changes to small business development grants:** the maximal grant will increase from 20 000 GEL to 30 000 GEL, while the scope of funding by a beneficiary will drop from 20% to 10%.
- To solve the liquidity problem, **commercial banks will be provided with a 600 M GEL long-term resource.** To this end, the Ministry of Finance will issue extra 600 M GEL securities and the derived sum will be deposited in the commercial banks as a long-term deposits.

Overall, the 2020 budget of stages 1 and 2 of the COVID-19 anti-crisis plan includes:

- Care for citizens and their financial support: **1.04 billion GEL;**
- Caring for the economy and assistance for entrepreneurs: **1.76 billion GEL;**
- Empowerment of the healthcare system and the fight against the pandemic: **350 M GEL.**

As mentioned earlier, along with horizontal measures under the anti-crisis plan, the 2020 and 2021 budget envisages target programs for individual industries, including tourism (**Annex 4**), agriculture (**Annex 5**) and construction development (**Annex 7**). These measures are designed to foster the rapid recovery of mentioned industries from the crisis, and support for companies engaged in these industries, and their employees.

In addition, for the purpose of mitigating the negative effects of the pandemic on the economy, including the financial sector, and with a view to boosting the national economy, **the National Bank of Georgia developed an *ad hoc* supervision plan and implemented significant monetary and credit measures** in full compliance with the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and other key financial organizations (**see Annex 8**).

3. Lifting Restrictions and Resumption of the Economic Activities (Exit Plan)

Based on the epidemiological situation in the country, apart from the anti-crisis plan, the Government of Georgia developed a plan for lifting restrictions and the gradual resumption of the economy.

The 6-stage plan envisages lifting restrictions on a roughly bi-weekly basis, with the epidemiological situation as the main criteria to that end. According to the plan's rationale, a positive epidemiological situation will allow for restrictions to be lifted faster. But, if the situation worsens after a given stage, restrictions may be re-introduced or transition to the next stage may be delayed.

At each stage, the lifting of restrictions depends on several factors, most notably on the prevention of the virus spread. Accordingly, at the initial stage, restrictions will be lifted from lower virus-related risk activities, such as open-air operations.

Apart from that factor, such social and economic aspects as industry employment rates, social sensitivity of a business (e.g. agricultural markets) and the share of an industry in the national economy will be taken into account.

The 6-stage restrictions lifting plan involves:

- 1. At the 1st stage, passenger car and taxi movement/operations will be allowed; and so will be all types of retail and wholesale online commerce, delivery services of all kinds, and open-air farmer's markets completing an inspection and meeting the Health Ministry and Food Safety Service requirements;**
- 2. The 2nd stage envisages resumption of construction, construction supervision and production of the building materials, operation of car wash and automobile repair shops, also computer and personal and home appliances repair shop, and recreation facilities;**

3. The 3rd stage involves reopening all type of retail and wholesale stores (save malls) that have access from streets, all types of fairs, and all types of production and publishing businesses;
4. At the 4th stage, malls, open-air cafes and restaurants with dine-in services will resume operation; also all types of financial services, beauty salons and aesthetic medicine centers;
5. The 5th stage involves reopening indoor markets and fairs, all types of restaurants and cafes with dine-in services;
6. The final 6th stage envisages the resumption of all types of recreational, sports, rehabilitation/creative activities/facilities, including cinemas, theaters, concert halls, museums, night clubs, gyms, swimming pools, entertainment and children’s centers, gambling etc. hotels, educational institutions and all other direct contact activities.

The plan was launched on **April 27**. Notably, due to the beneficial epidemiological situation, some restrictions have been lifted earlier than planned, and timeframes for particular stages have been amended for expedited implementation.

Despite the lifting of particular restrictions, virus prevention and spread-related risk mitigation measures, such as social distancing and facemasks in public areas, remain in force. All reopening legal entities must comply with the Health Ministry guidelines (see the detailed restriction-lifting schedule in Chapter 1.4).

4. Annexes

Annex 1: Current Statistics: as of 01-03 June 2020

1. COVID-19 – Updated data

COVID-19	A new confirmed case	4
	Deceased	13
	Total confirmed cases	800
	Including those recovered	640
	In the hospital	304
	In quarantine	2 650
	Discharged from quarantine on 2 June	250
	Total discharges from the quarantine	21 997

2. The displacement of the persons from the occupied territories of Georgia as of 2 June

	Confirmed COVID-19	Hospitalized	Over the last 24h	In self-isolation	Over the last 24h	Transferred to the quarantine zone	Over the last 24h
Abkhazia	1	97	2	42	1	127	4
Tskhinvali region	0	15	0	1	0	10	0
Total	1	112	2	43	1	137	4

3. COVID-19 cases confirmed in the quarantine and at the border as of 3 June morning

Quarantine	Number	The infected persons transferred from the border to hospital
The returnees to Georgia ³⁶	98	10
Domestic cases	79	
Total:	177	
Over the last 24h	4	0

4. Statistics of the citizens returned to Georgia as of June 2³⁷

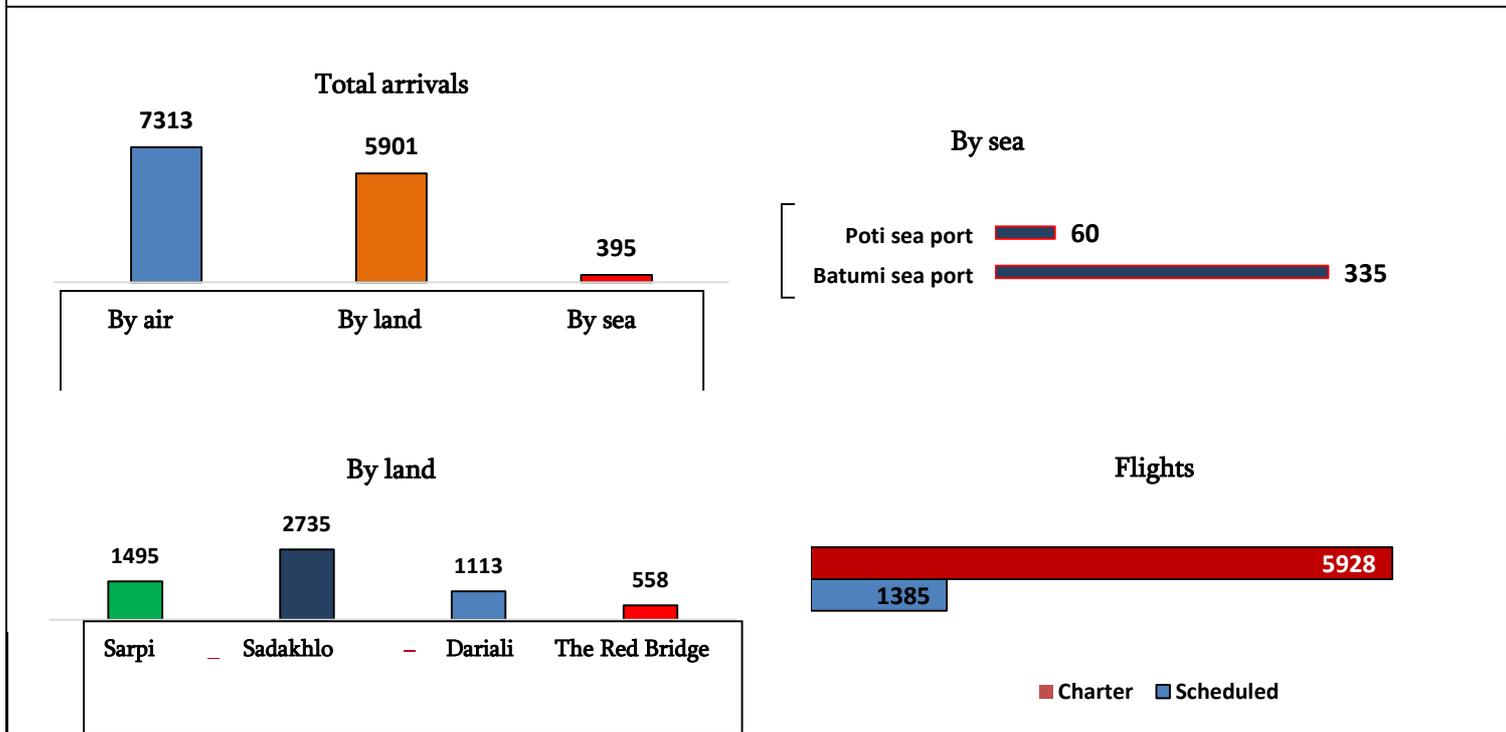
Type of entry to Georgia	Total arrivals	Checkpoint	Number of citizens	Note		
				Scheduled Flight	Charter Flight	Airline
By air	7 313	Tbilisi Airport	6 151	1 218	4933	„Airzena“ „LOT“
		Batumi Airport	1 162	167	995	„Airzena“
				1 385	5928	
By land	5 901	Sarpi checkpoint	1 495	With assistance of the Georgian embassies/ consulates abroad		
		Sadakhlo checkpoint	2 735	In coordination with the relevant embassies and consulates, citizens are first transferred to Minsk from where they travel to Yerevan with “Belavia” Airline and arrive in Georgia by bus through the corridor agreed with the Republic of Armenia.		

³⁶ The persons transferred from border to the quarantine for the prevention purposes, who were later diagnosed with COVID-19

³⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs

		Dariali checkpoint	1 113	With assistance of Georgia's Interest Section /the Consular Department
		Tsiteli Khidi (the Red Bridge) checkpoint	558	With assistance of the Georgian embassies/consulates abroad
By Sea	395	The Batumi sea port	335	With assistance of the Georgian embassies/consulates abroad
		The Poti sea port	60	With assistance of the Georgian embassies/consulates abroad

Total: 13 609 citizens



5. Stock available in Georgia as of June 1 morning

Distribution of the facemasks manufactured in Georgia		
Total	4 787 111	
Distributed	2 761 990	
	Pensioners	80 500
	Retail	1 828 850
	Regions	474 300
	Abroad	35 300
	Private sector	85 650
Remaining	2 025 121	

6. Hotline (144) calls as of June 2

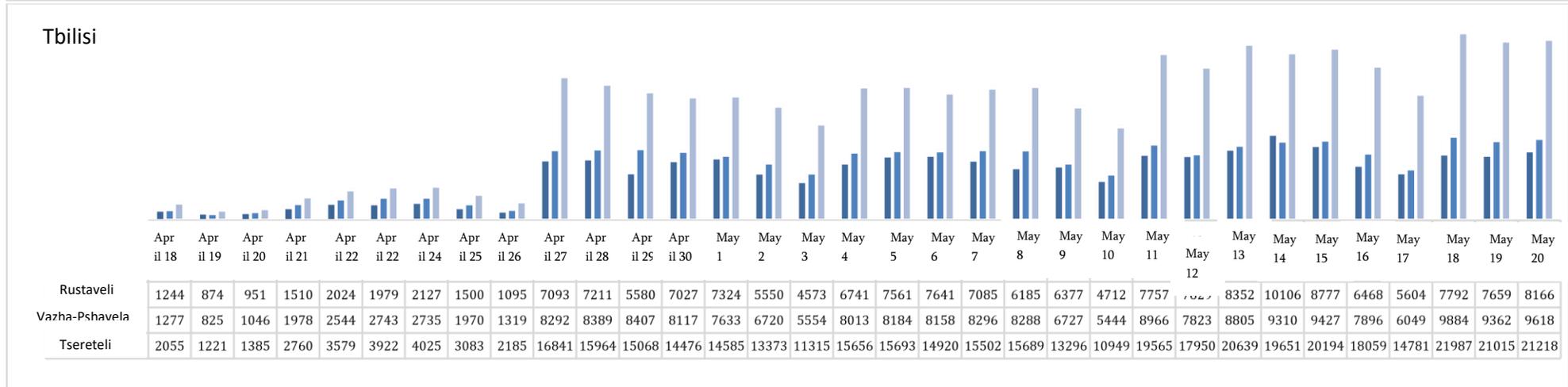
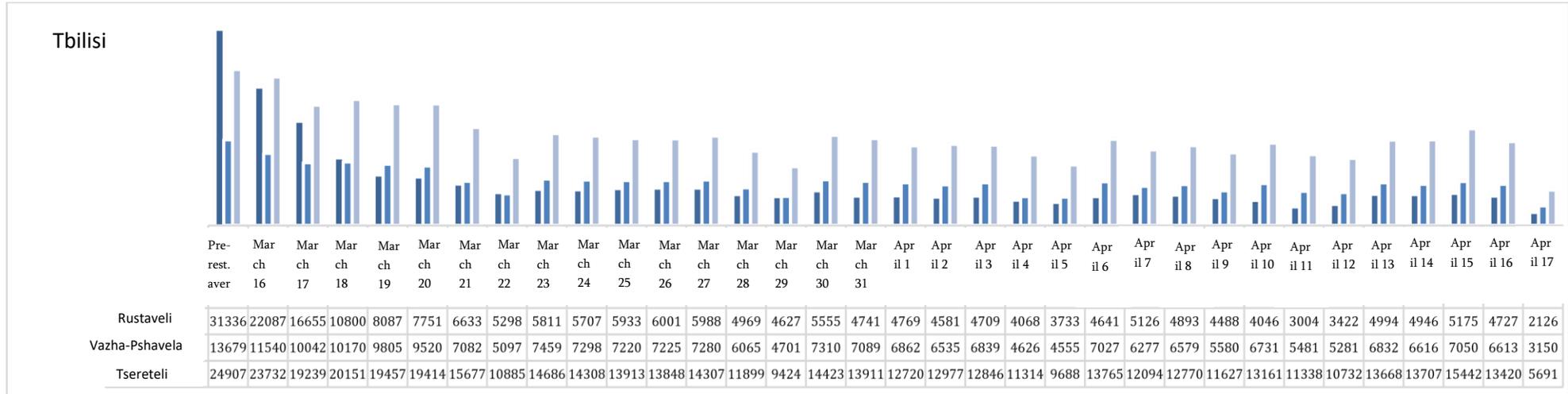
144	Incoming calls	Responded
Consultation	3798	3736
Regions	689	620
Total:	4 487	4 356

7. Number of persons referred to the family doctors by 112 as of June 2, 14:00

Number of persons referred to the family doctors by 112	Cases requiring medical attention		Monitored by the family doctor		Not requiring the family doctor monitoring		
	Ambulance sent	Hospitalized		Number of persons	Of which aged 70 and over	Number of persons	Of which aged 70 and over
		< 70	70 >				
156	15	10		134	12	12	4
		10	0				

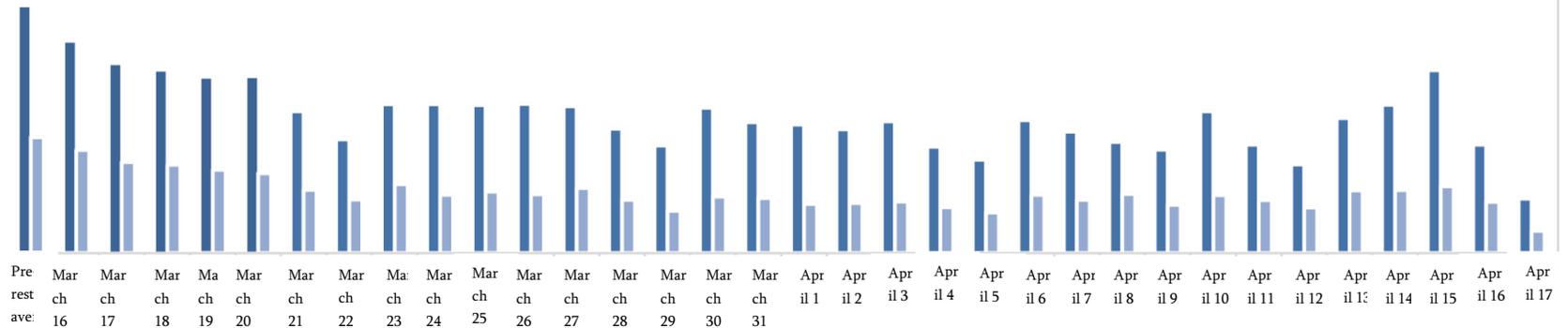
Annex 2: Comparative Data on the Pre- and Post-Restriction Vehicle Traffic

Round-the-clock information on the vehicle traffic



Round-the-clock information on the vehicle traffic II

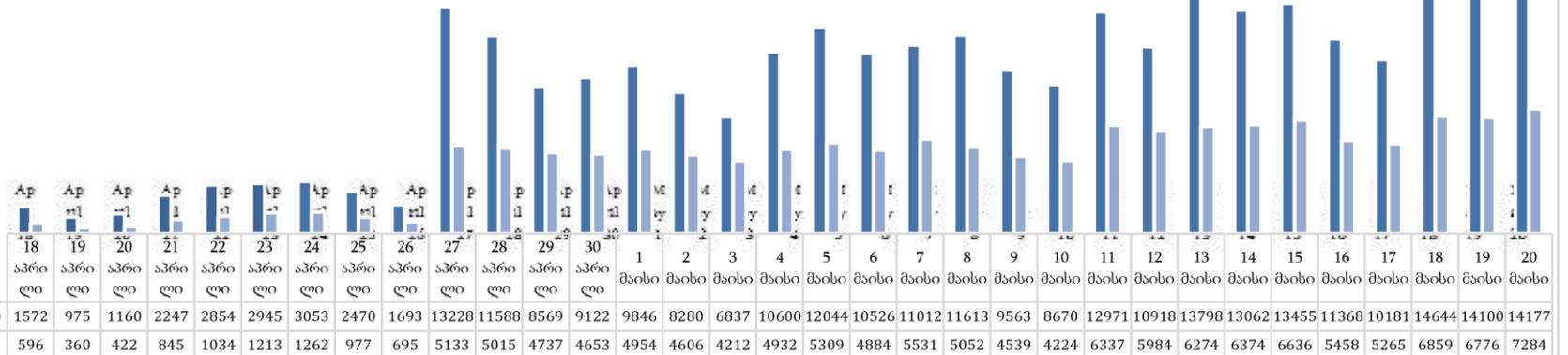
Kutaisi/Batumi



Kutaisi (Rustaveli Ave.)
Batumi (Gorgiladze St.)

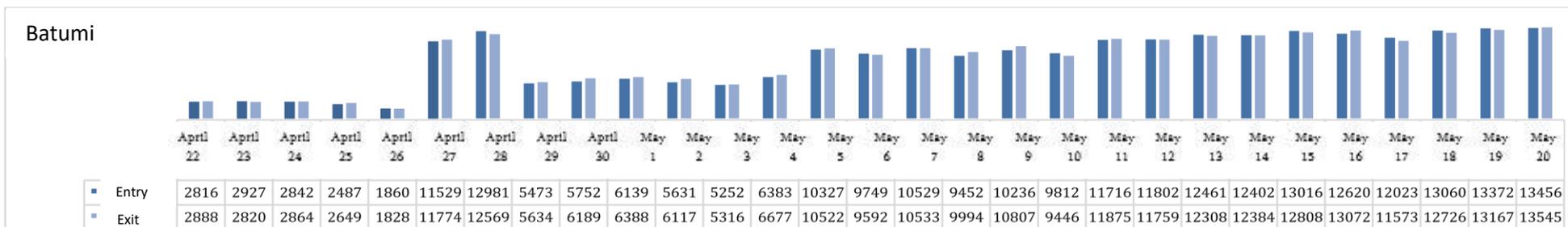
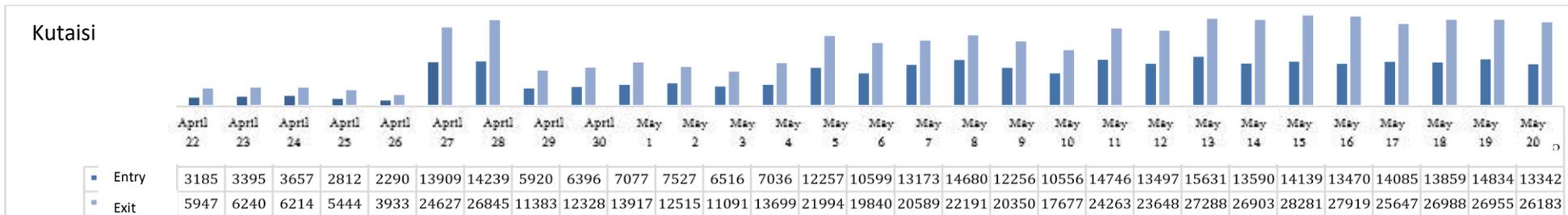
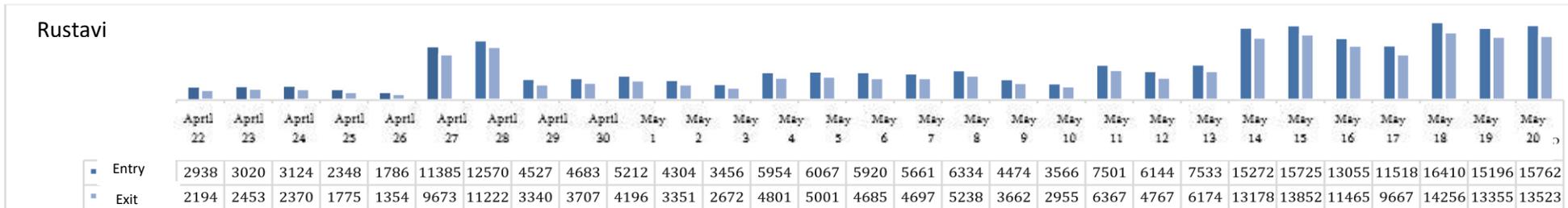
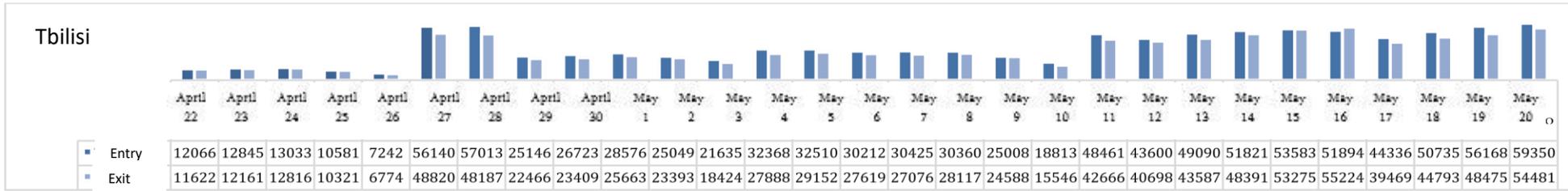
Kutaisi (Rustaveli Ave.)	17194	14721	13193	12737	12231	12278	9843	7896	10325	10324	10270	10350	10182	8630	7468	10083	9076	8922	8600	9149	7384	6493	9237	8429	7721	7191	9837	7523	6162	9372	10281	12692	7537	3789
Batumi (Gorgiladze St.)	8036	7155	6328	6142	5798	5546	4405	3731	4783	4052	4285	4098	4514	3698	2949	3930	3832	3417	3480	3584	3191	2827	4062	3702	4119	3367	4022	3683	3169	4359	4388	4650	3562	1562

ქუთაისი / ბათუმი
Kutaisi/Batumi

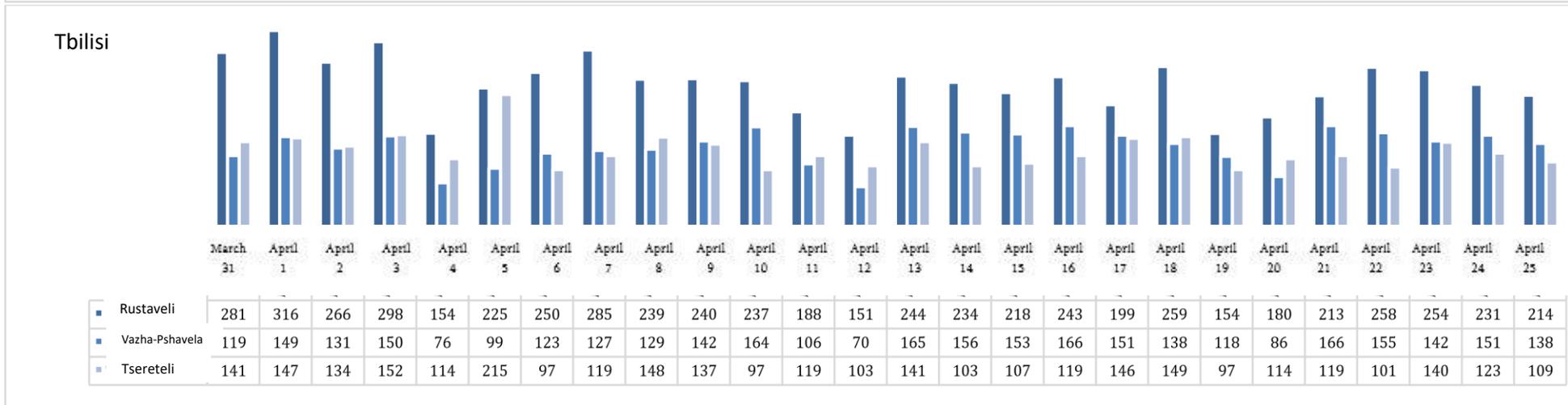
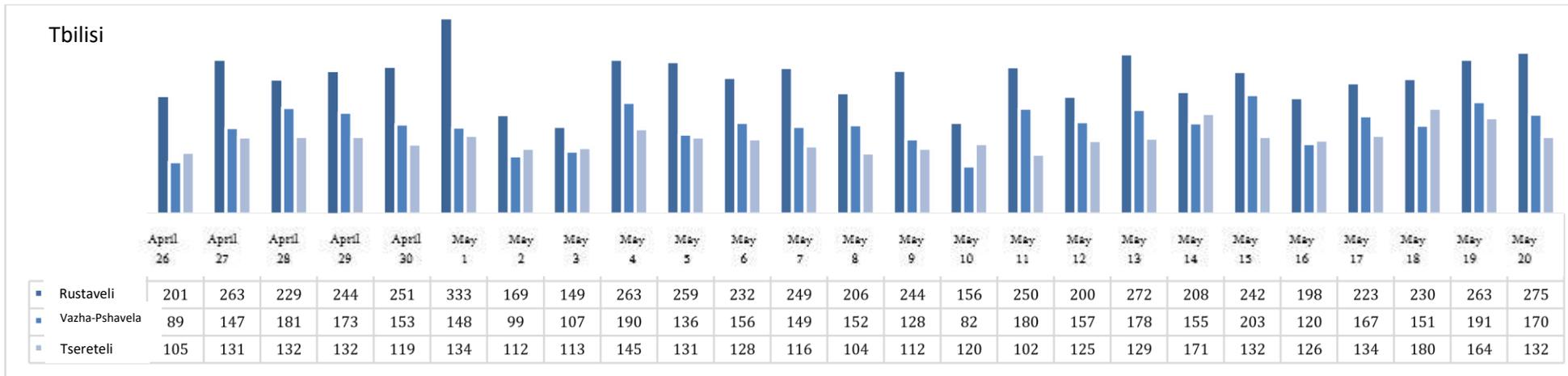


ქუთაისი (რუსთაველის გამზ.)
ბათუმი (გორგილადის ქუჩა)

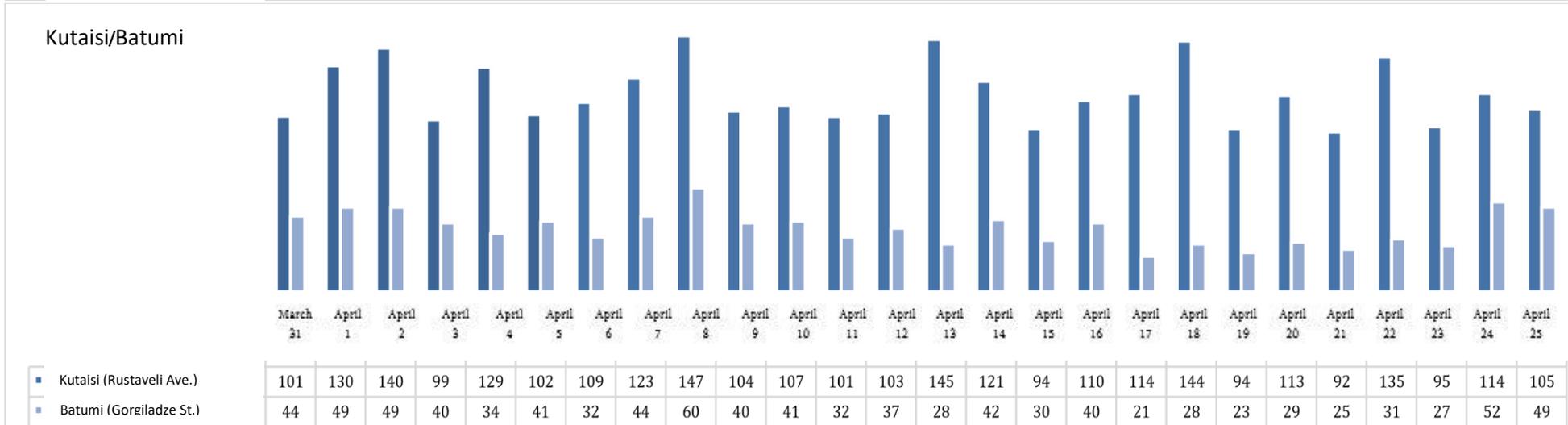
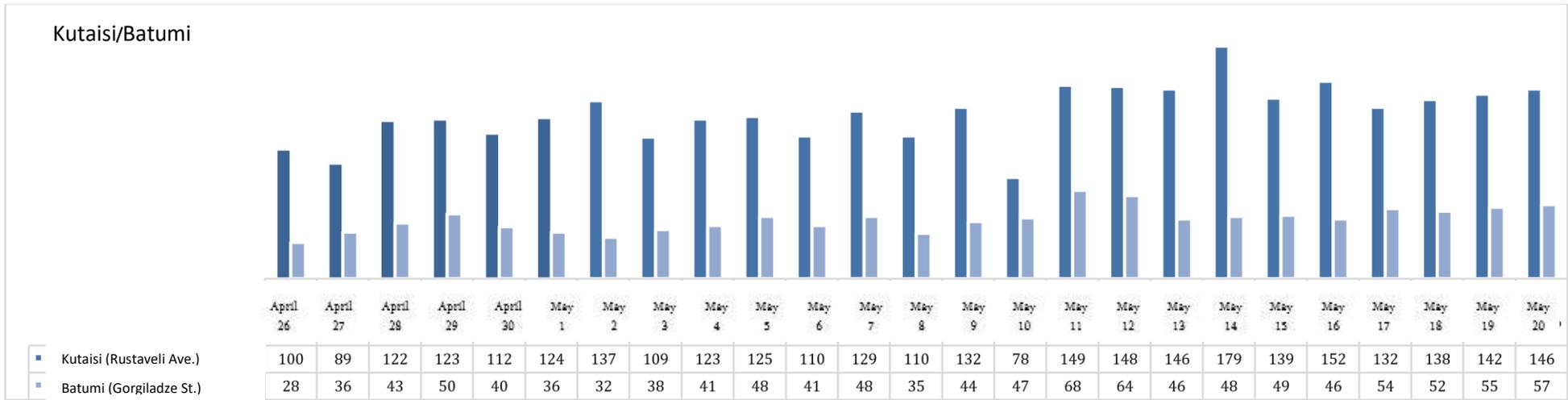
Statistics on the vehicle entry /exit in the cities under lockdown



Information on the vehicle traffic during the curfew I



Information on the vehicle traffic during the curfew II



Annex 3: Statistics on the Vehicle Entry/Exit in the Urban Areas

Statistics on the Vehicle Entry/Exit in the Urban Areas				
City	On average in 24 h prior to the lockdown		On average in 24 h after the lockdown	
	Entry	Exit	Entry	Exit
Tbilisi	54521	55400	12185	11250
Rustavi	17550	12750	2830	2199
Kutaisi	13477	14420	3288	3150
Batumi	7700	7520	2780	2777

Information on the Vehicle Traffic in Central Streets of Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Batumi					
Period	Tbilisi			Kutaisi	Batumi
	Rustaveli	Vazha-Pshavela	Tsereteli	Rustaveli Ave	Gorgiladze St.
Prior to the emergency situation	31336	13679	24907	17194	8036
During the emergency situation (Curfew)	5267	6455	13113	8923	4180
17-27 April (on average)	1543	1959	2991	2276	897

Annex 4: Anti-Crisis Plan on Tourism Revival

Before the pandemic, tourism used to be a rapidly growing industry with its GDP share of 11.5% and the number of the employees over 150 000 (Data from 2019).

Tourism sector suffered the most due to pandemics. Therefore, in order to help it overcome the crisis and restart operation, the Government developed special target measures, namely:

- In 2020, the tourism businesses are released from the property tax, while the income tax is postponed until the end of the year. For this aim, 45 M GEL has been allotted for the property tax release, while 90 M GEL for the postponed release from the income tax envisaged by the 2nd stage of the anti-crisis plan.
- For 6 months, the Government will subsidize 80% of the loan interest of the hotels of less than 20 M GEL turnover (a bigger part of the hotel industry). 3 000 hotels are eligible for the 60 M GEL budget program.
- In order to solve their liquidity problems and finance the operational costs, the public catering facilities will be involved in the credit-guarantee scheme.
- For 6 months, the Government will subsidize the bank guarantee interest of the travel agencies /tour-operators.
- The Government will also implement special measures to put the guides etc. tourism services back on track. The Government of Georgia will co-fund their participation in the tourism expos. 5 M GEL has been allotted to support the travel agencies and guides.

The total budget for the above-mentioned events: 200 M GEL.

The 3-stage tourism restoration plan involves preparation of the industry for operating in new conditions. The local tourism is going to be launched on June 15 while the international one from July 1.

Annex 5: Anti-Crisis Plan on Agriculture

Agriculture is crucial to Georgia. It employs 39% of the country's workforce (2018). Therefore, supporting the industry in meeting the pandemic-related challenges is a must.

Responding to the pandemic, the Government developed the crisis combat plan: an unprecedented farmer support program within the framework of which all the components of the agricultural value chain will get financial and technical support. The Government strives to minimize the damage done to the country by the global crisis.

To this end, a 300 M GEL package was developed (see below 50 M GEL issued by the banking sector along with the credit portfolio) to aid farmers caught up in the crisis; namely:

- 37 M GEL has been allotted for the farmers to purchase fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, seeds and seedlings and pay for tillage.
- "The Agricultural Land Owners Stimulus" State-run program envisaging subsidizing the costs of the agricultural goods and land cultivation is going to be launched. In order to be eligible, the natural persons and legal entities have to own agricultural lands registered at the Public Registry. The subsidy per 1 ha land: 200 GEL (200 points charged to the agricultural card). The maximal subsidy for up to 10 ha land is 2000 GEL. Approx. 200 000 farmers are going to get involved in the 37 M GEL program.
- The State subsidy also envisages support to the owners of 0.25-10.0 ha agricultural lands registered/to be registered with the Public Registry by December 21, 2020.
- A new agricultural production incentive State-run project envisages purchase at a favorable price of diesel by owners (the natural persons and legal entities) of 0.25-100 ha agricultural land registered with the National Agency of Public Registry. The fuel limit per 1 ha: 150 l. Up to 200 000 farmers eligible for the program are going to save up to 40 M GEL.
- The farmers' debts of 8 M GEL caused by failed payment for the land improvement service in 2012-2019, will be written off. This year, the State will subsidize up to 75 GEL per ha land improvement service fee of the total of 5 M GEL.
- The agriculture incentive programs envisage increased State share in co-funding. Since in a crisis, finances are hardly available, the new components have been added to the State-run "Preferential Agricultural Credit" program:
 - Loans of 5000-100 000 GEL are going to be issued **for crop farming floating assets and the State will fully subsidize the 6 month interest rate of the secured credits**, while that of the unsecured credits will be subsidized by the annual 17%. It is likely to stimulate farmers to cultivate land and grow the annual crops. **The total loans to be provided to the farmers within the frameworks of the program are going to make up 50 M GEL. The annual interest rate co-funding budget amounts to 4.5 M GEL. 5 000 potential beneficiaries are expected to get involved in the program.**
 - Co-funding of the fixed assets is going to increase from **8% to 11%** for the term of 48 months. As to leasing, instead of the present **9%**, the co-funding will be **12%**. Also, the bank interest cap for the fixed assets component and all its sub-components is going to be **18%** instead of **15%**. The total approximate amount of the loans issued to farmers will make up **25 M GEL**. For 2 years, the annual interest co-funding budget amounts to **4 M GEL**.

- **Secondary collateral was created for the credits issued for the acquisition of floating assets for the meat production, cattle breeding and hazelnut cultivation.** For 18 months after issuance of a State loan or its first tranche, not over 50% of the principal of each newly issued credit is going to be secured by the State secondary collateral.
- **Food industry funding.** For 24 months, the State will co-finance the annual 10% interest rate of 1 500 001 - 5 000 000 GEL credit. Apart from the funding targets in place, the grape processing plants, bread, grain product and pasta production are going to be co-funded. As to the food industry, for 24 months, the State will be co-funding 12% of the credit taken out by the food manufacturing businesses. The approximate total of the loans to be issued to farmers under the program will amount to **20 M GEL**. The secondary collateral budget: **0.5 M GEL**.
- For the purpose of support to the primary production, the “Agricultural Production Incentive” program envisaging co-funding the purchase of the agricultural equipment and acquisition/installation of the annual crop irrigation system, as well as purchase of the fixed assets required for setting up/upgrading/expanding the hothouse facilities is going to be resumed. The total State co-funding per a beneficiary is 50% but not over 50 000 GEL. The total co-funding program budget amounts to 10 M GEL. 200 tractors, 80 000m² hothouses are going to be funded and the irrigation system to be installed on 400 ha land.
- A technical support program for the beneficiaries of the State-run agricultural program is going to be launched. The program is targeted at the increased national agricultural potential. The program budget: 1.5 M GEL. The program beneficiaries will get co-funding in terms of the introduction of international food safety management system/standards and branding.
- The term of the agricultural insurance program has been prolonged up to 3 years. Therefore, in case of insurance of the perennial plants, the farmers would be able to ensure their harvest for 3 calendar years. The insurance policy covers the risks, such as hail, floods, hurricane, and autumn frost. The 2020 program budget: 9 M GEL. Over 15 000 insurance policies are going to be issued this year and over 12,000 ha agricultural land is going to be insured.
- The State “Dairy Industry Upgrading and Market Access” program is being launched. The initiative aims at the diversified and sustainable dairy industry by way of upgrading the equipment and infrastructure. The program also aims at stimulating small dairies, introduction of the international standards and practice; the dairy farms are going to be co-funded by 40-80%, i.e. 8000 GEL-195 000 GEL. The aggregate budget of the program: 42 M GEL.
- Support for the agricultural cooperatives is becoming a priority. The implemented program involves funding the equipment of the agricultural cooperatives so that the produce meets the market demand. Also, the program will help the cooperatives introduce international food safety standards and branding.
- For the purpose of support to the agricultural market and progress of the industry, in 2020-2022, the property right to 1.2 M land lots is going to be formally registered across Georgia.

Annex 6: Anti-Crisis Plan on Education

The global education is facing big challenges created by the pandemic. The same is true for Georgia, where the COVID-19 crisis could have long-term effects. Georgia is one of the first countries to have made a rapid response and stopped the instruction on the very first stage.

The Government made universal accessibility of education a priority and for the purpose of uninterrupted instruction, introduced online teaching. Consequently, the pupils completed the semester and can get over to the next grades.

The online education measures:

- For the purpose of universal access to education, on 30 March, the Government and the Public Broadcaster of Georgia launched the “TV School” project. **Lessons for pupils from all the grades (I-XII grades) have been televised.** The national curriculum classes are led by experienced public and private school teachers. As recommended by the teacher-therapists and psychologists, the interests of the pupils of special needs have been considered, as well;
- Within The New School Model“, **600 000** Microsoft Office 365 user accounts were created for the **Georgian public school pupils, teachers, and School Administrations.** A virtual classroom created on the platform allows the pupils of all the schools and classes to participate in the instruction;
- The Georgian “Feedc Edu” platform was introduced at the public schools as an alternative communication channel;
- In terms of vocational education, 17 sectoral networks (agricultural, tourism, civil engineering, etc.), online platforms joining together teachers of similar subjects were created. They analyze the program components, which can be provided online;
- For the purpose of online instruction, the curricula, instruction and assessment methods and systems were revised for the higher educational institutions;
- **Simultaneous and non-simultaneous methods are being applied in online teaching at the higher educational institutions,** which rely on the recommendations of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement.

The Government considers online teaching as a tool for uninterrupted instruction. To this end, in 2019-2020 academic year, a new assessment model was developed, which involves individual approach to each pupil and due attention to maintaining the relevant standard. The pupils’ progress will be assessed and the annual score defined on the grounds of the model.

The Administrations of vocational colleges are bracing for admission of students in autumn. The curricula are being developed and the collages registered online by means of the tool created by the National Center for Educational Quality Enhancement.

Admission of students to long-term vocational programs started on May 20 and the instruction will be launched on October 12. For improved access to vocational instruction, the Government changed the admission regulation, with the interests of the vulnerable groups considered. There are approximately 8 700 places to be offered.

In view of the situation and in the interests of the applicants, **the registration term of the National, Masters and Students' Grant Examinations was prolonged until April 30.**

The Government is working on the examination safety plan. The date of the national examinations depends on the epidemiological situation in the country. In case of offline finals at the universities, the examination spaces will be adapted to the recommendations of the Ministry of Health.

Licensing the higher educational institutions and accreditation of the curricula were postponed.

The universities developed relevant guides and video regulations for students and professors. Also, relying on recommendations of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports of Georgia, they defined the mid-term and final assessment tool.

The higher educational institutions were recommended to develop the policy for preferential payment of the instruction fee, which may be delayed or paid by a flexible student-by-student schedule. **The Government will fully sponsor the grants, scholarships, and programs for the 2019-2020 academic year spring semester.**

The Government's activities in terms of uninterrupted and accessible education during the pandemic have been acclaimed by the Microsoft's Vice-President for education and the UNICEF mission in Georgia. **The OECD assesses the Georgian Government's efforts targeted at meeting the COVID-19 challenges as a role model.**

In a prompt response to the crisis, the research institutions and the scientific organizations got engaged in the production of Personal Protective Equipment. Namely, by employing the resources of the former "Analytical Device" enterprise, the Technical University of Georgia created the infrastructure, installed the relevant technological line, and launched the production of facemasks. Various research institutes and universities are conducting studies, which involve the supply of the initial medical and hygienic accessories, efficient disinfectants, and generally, the virus destruction. A group of the Georgian researchers got engaged in the project ("**The Georgian Reality: Sustainable Scholarly Studies during the COVID-19 Pandemic**") targeted at support to joint trans-disciplinary studies on the international level.

Annex 7: Anti-Crisis Plan on Development Sector

The construction industry is a rapidly growing economic sector, with its **9%** direct and indirect GDP share and the number of the employed of over 120 000 people (2019). Also, the construction industry crosses over with the other economic sectors.

The loan portfolio of the industry amounts to 1.2 bn GEL and that of the bank loans secured with the residential property is approx. 5 bn GEL. As to its total credit and mortgage loan portfolio, it makes up 9.2 bn GEL (18% of GDP).

The pandemic-caused economic slowdown and deteriorated economic growth targets resulted in significant reduction of advance sales due to customers' smaller purchasing power; completion of construction projects faced a risk and accessibility to the capital worsened too because of smaller sales and bigger credit risks. The real property price fluctuations risks are bigger now. All these may significantly deteriorate the bank credit portfolio quality, which, due to its volume is hazardous to the financial sector.

Therefore, jointly with the National Bank and private sector, the Georgian Government developed the construction industry support measures to stimulate demand for residential real property and also, ensure availability of finances in the crisis, namely:

- **The State subsidizes not over 4% of the nominal interest rate under the mortgage contract** – the State subsidy will diminish pro rata the refinancing rate. Subsidizing will continue for 5 years upon execution of the contract and may terminate in case of smaller than 5% of the refinancing rate.
- **The State guarantee of the mortgage credit portfolio for mortgage loans issued in 01/06/2020 – 01/01/2021** -the credit default guarantee is set at 20% of the volume of the credit and will be effective for the term of 5 years. The guarantee will apply to the loans where the borrower's participation is not less than 10%. Incidentally, in case of the sale of the collateral of the default credit, the commercial Bank's claim towards the creditor, natural person, will be satisfied. Only in case of the difference between the sales prices and the liability shall the claim under the State guarantee contract be satisfied.
- **Bulk purchase of real property by the State**, which means the purchase of the residential real property worth 150 M GEL in 01/06/2020 – 01/01/2021. The property will be auctioned. The State purchased property will be employed for the accommodation of IDPs within the frameworks of the relevant program.
- **Creation of the State guarantee scheme for completion of a residential property project**, which means the implementation of a special 200 M GEL budget program in order to ensure completion of the currently implemented construction projects.

Annex 8: Ad Hoc Regulatory Plan and Monetary Measures

1. Capital (Increase Postponement; Reduction of Pillar 2)

The National Bank of Georgia (hereinafter “NBG”) temporarily postponed increase of the initial capital for the banking system planned for March (for the credit portfolio concentration risk and the net GRAPE buffer), which implied growth of the initial capital by 274 M GEL.

Besides, under the NBG regulatory plan, the commercial banks’ capital requirements are now smaller, which means the cancelation of the capital conservation buffer (by 2.5% of the risk weighted assets) and a part of pillar 2 buffer (2/3 of the unhedged credit risk buffer). As a result, the banking sector was given 1.6 bn GEL free capital, which may be employed for neutralization of the potential losses or crediting the economy by 16 bn GEL.

Today, on top of the minimal requirements, a total of 3.4 bn GEL capital buffer is available to the banking sector, which, if required may be fully released.

Smaller capital requirements set by the NBG may be employed for neutralization of the anticipated loss and, also, crediting the economy. The banks cannot use the capital to pay dividends, redeem stocks, equity investments, larger Management bonuses or etc. payments, which may reduce the bank capital.

2. Postponement of High-Risk Computation Limit on Tier 1

Enactment of the regulation for “**The Risk Position Concentration and High Risks**” to have been made effective in June 2020 was postponed by 1 year. This will allow the banks to continue crediting the actual economy by applying stringent limits and work according to the regulations in place. It should be said that the enactment of the Regulation in June would have resulted in the computation of the limits against the initial, instead of the regulatory capital and the 25% limit, i.e. the total of 109 M GEL of 5 banks’ top 1 borrowers’ group would have been violated.

3. Simplified Retail Crediting

Changes to the Retail Crediting Regulation planned prior COVID-19 are now even more important in terms of meeting the challenges in place. In view of the COVID-19 shock, several other changes were made.

Objective of the Changes

- Simpler requirements for the purpose of more efficient operation of the credit organizations;
- Smaller red tape;
- The transition from the regulation-based to the guideline-based requirements. Limited interference with the micromanagement of the credit organizations, which is likely to make them more flexible, improve the risk management, and make the funds more accessible to the customers.

Key Changes

- Investigation of the borrower’s income is still obligatory but no longer a formal practice (e.g. on the spot visit to informally employed borrowers) and a credit organization will be allowed to determine the borrower’s income by means of its internal procedures to be monitored by the NBG.

- Limits of the credit servicing coefficient (PTI) were halved and they are now 2 instead of 4. Instead of computation of the PTI limits against the maximal and contract terms, the PTI will be computed against the contract or the maximal term the credit may be prolonged by under the contract.
- The maximal term of 15 years for all the mortgage loans issued in GEL is now 20 years. The same is true for the mortgage loans where the borrower's income and loan are in the same currency; Also, in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, the maximal term of the mortgage loans was prolonged by 12 months and that of the other retail loans by 6 months.
- In case of the income from abroad, the LTV requirement in the acquisition of an apartment is now 70% instead of 60%.
- The Regulation no longer applies to over 1 M GEL loans (instead of 2 M GEL) or a borrower is an informed investor;
- The regulation for the definition of the loan grace period is now more stringent: although the maximum grace period is still 6 months, but only in the cases where the borrower's costs have to be planned. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the grace period for consumer loans was prolonged by 3 months.
- Corporate management guidelines were added to the new edition of the Regulation. It makes the Regulation easier to enforce and the components responsible for its enforcement are simpler to define. The banks and microfinance organizations can now follow the guidelines, such as the adequate internal policy and procedures, involvement of the risk management component, internal audit service, staff training, development of a new product in line with the Regulation, etc.

4. Stimulation of the Grace Period

COVID-19 made a negative impact on the borrowers' solvency, which prompted the commercial banks to delay the credit payment by 3 months. Since corona virus has affected nearly all the borrowers, the banks started offering temporary grace period to most of them. Under the "Regulation for Categorization of the Assets and Formation of the Loss Reserves and Employment" thereof, if restructured, such a credit is categorized as negative and calls for the reserve costs. Given the situation in the country, the National Bank of Georgia decided not to categorize such credits as negative and in case of due repayment, they would be assigned to the standard category. It makes the banks' regulatory burden much smaller. In order to make the approach clearer, the NBG published the anticipated credit loss manual.

Besides, the National Bank of Georgia allowed the commercial banks:

- to prolong the maximal term prescribed by the Regulation by 12 and the maximal grace period by 6 months;
- not to deem a violation a breach of the PTI maximal limit, which results from the delay;
- not to reevaluate the real property for the loans with the grace period defined;
- not to insect the real property on the spot;
- to meet certain requirements of "The Rule on Consumer Protection for Financial Organizations" in a different way;
- not to classify the said grace period as default on term at the Credit info Bureau.

5. Ensuring GEL Liquidity to Banks and Microfinance Organizations by Swap

- Within the currency swaps, the banks and **microfinance organizations** will be supplied with 200 M USD (respectively). For the next 1 year, they will be able to take 1-month swaps on the condition of monthly refinancing. Also, a standing unlimited swap instrument was enacted, which, if required, will allow the banks extra GEL liquidity by the interest rate (0.75% at present).
- The National Bank of Georgia will affect a 200 M USD currency swap with EBRD, which will increase the NBG currency reserves, while with the received sums in GEL, the EBRD will finance various projects. The GEL financing will prevent the currency risk of the EBRD beneficiaries.
- For the sake of increased liquidity of GEL:
 - a. The NBG canceled the LCR requirement in GEL; however, the aggregate requirement remains the same;
 - b. The collateral of the refinancing loans was increased by the loan portfolio of the small and medium-sized businesses and the microfinance organizations.

6. Support of Online Service (including POS cashing, remote identification etc.)

- A new regulation allowing consumers to cash sums not only by ATM but POS terminals at outlets (pharmacies, groceries) was approved.
- The NBG started issuing approvals for remote identification of customers by banks. As yet, for the purpose of various products, the approvals have been given to three banks.
- Communication has been established with several banks and financial technology companies regarding the digitalization of some of the products. Special attention is being paid to the cyber - (audit of the information systems, penetration testing) and traditional operational risks.

7. Negotiations with the International Monetary Fund

- Another IMF revision completed successfully and an agreement with the IMF mission was achieved on significant increase of funding within the frameworks of the program in place.
- The said agreement with the IMF mission involves increase of funding by approx. **375 M USD** to support the macroeconomic stability and meet the country's socioeconomic requirements.

8. Delayed Reporting. Providing more time

- The stress tests submission deadline was delayed by 3 months and will be no later than June 15, 2020.
- The transparency report regarding the pillar 3 credit risks, which the banks were obliged to submit from April, was delayed by 6 months.
- The credit issuing institutions, credit unions, and currency exchange stations may submit reports until April 20.

9. Suspension of the on the Spot Inspections

The NBG suspended on the spot inspection of the institutions subject to supervision (except the inspection in terms of money laundering, which are now carried out online).

10. The Online Crediting Support

The crediting procedures are now simpler: On the spot assessment of the real property will not be required for a while. The requirement concerning updating the financial statements is now laxer.

11. Moratorium on the Regulatory Reforms

For the banks to be able to amass as much resources as possible to meet the challenges in place, moratorium was declared on the development and introduction of new regulatory requirements.

12. Revision of the Prudential Requirements for the Microfinance Organizations

The capital and liquidity ratios of the microfinance organizations will be revised on a case-by-case basis. It especially concerns the organizations involved in the 3-month postponement action without suspending loan issuance.

13. Moratorium on Penalties

The NBG will not impose sanctions if the economic limits are breached due to the current shock (e.g. exchange rate devaluation, reserves/loss). It concerns violation of the economic limits (coefficients) solely and not the other type legislative breaches.

14. Readiness for Liquidity Supply

The NBG declared its readiness to fully support the financial sector in terms of liquidity. Several steps have already been made (e.g. GEL/USD swaps). Besides, from June, the commercial banks will be able to get extra liquidity from the NBG by pledging the loans issued by the microfinance organizations and business loans of the small and medium-size businesses, which will intensify crediting of the sector. However, if required, the NBG will provide the market with actually limitless liquidity in GEL, while with due regard to the international reserves in foreign currency, it will provide the market with the liquidity it may request.

15. Bmatch Platform

The NBG initiated the Bloomberg Bmatch platform, a new currency trade tool where interbank trade operations are effected at the first stage. The non-bank institutions will get engaged before long. It will give them direct access to currency resources. The platform is going to make the market more diversified, competitive, and liquid. The activities on the Bmatch platform have become increasingly intensive since March, with more and more microfinance organizations and companies showing interest. A non-resident financial company is also on the platform.

16. Intensification of the Currency Market

To support liquidity and avoid unwelcome fluctuations, besides the traditional currency auction and with relatively minor interventions, the NBG got directly engaged in the Bmatch platform, which regardless of the minor volumes, got the market players' relatively positive response.