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ECONOMICS

Police, first-aid personnel, social workers and others to receive increased salaries



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BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

At the extraordinary session held on July 1st, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the amendments to the Electoral Code at the first reading. The changes were initiated by the Speaker of the Parliament, Archil Talakvadze, and other members of the Georgian Dream - Irakli Kobakhidze, Anri Okhanashvili and Davit Matikashvili.

Prior to the vote, Archil Talakvadze said at the bureau meeting that the amendments to the Electoral Code included 'tangible and very progressive' changes, including campaigning, party funding, media and advertising time, and other important topics.

Ruling party MPs say that the amendments they have proposed include "most of the OSCE/ODIHR recommendations."

According to the amendments, non-partisan members of lower-level election commissions will be elected with the support of the majority of non-partisan members of the relevant district election commissions which will ensure that the process is conducted impartially and free from party interests.

Family members will not be employed in the same precinct election commission to prevent conflicts of interests and the Individuals appointed by a party to precinct election commissions during previous elections will not be able to become non-partisan members of the commissions

Amendments to electoral code passed at the first reading include gender quotas, party funding



► MP and author of changes in the electoral code, Irakli Kobakhidze said that the introduction of gender quotas doesn't contradict the Constitution of Georgia.

during the 2020 elections. One party/bloc will not be able to use its commercial time for the interests of other political parties or blocs. Unproved income will be considered an illegal contribution.

As for campaigns, giving more than the specified free or paid TV time for parties or blocs will be considered an illegal contribution. Posting of campaign materials within 25 meters from the polling station will be banned. Public school teachers, members of religious organisations and the bar association will

be banned from election campaigning. Ministries and other state bodies will be banned from placing commercials on implemented projects two months before election day.

Regarding the quotas, before the 2028 parliamentary elections, parties and election blocs must present party lists in which one-fourth of candidates will be a woman. Otherwise the party will not be registered. For the 2028 parliamentary elections themselves, one-third of party lists must consist of women, while this

proposition will increase for the 2032 race.

According to the bill, the funding of the parties will change accordingly: If a party receives 50,000 votes in the elections (three per cent of the total vote) the party will receive €15 for a single vote in state funding – a total of €750,000. For each vote after 50,000 votes, the party will receive €5. Parties with more gender-balanced election lists will receive additional state funding.

Before the voting, the amendments to the Electoral Code were responded to by the non-governmental organization Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) and it was clarified that the bill needs to be improved to comply with OSCE/ODIHR recommendations.

The organization says that the distance for restricting the placement of agitation material should be increased from 25 to 100 meters and the presence of any 'unauthorized' person within the same radius should be prohibited.

GYLA believes that the concept of electoral agitation should be specified. It should also be noted that agitation involves the dissemination of political appeals through the personal page of the social network and attendance at pre-election events.

The organization also draws attention to the 'period of silence', according to which, agitation is prohibited at polling stations on election day (violation is punishable by €2,000) and states that it should be extended to the day before the election.



► The amendments need the support of at least 76 MPs in the 150-member parliament.

UNICEF to provide psychological support for young people and their parents

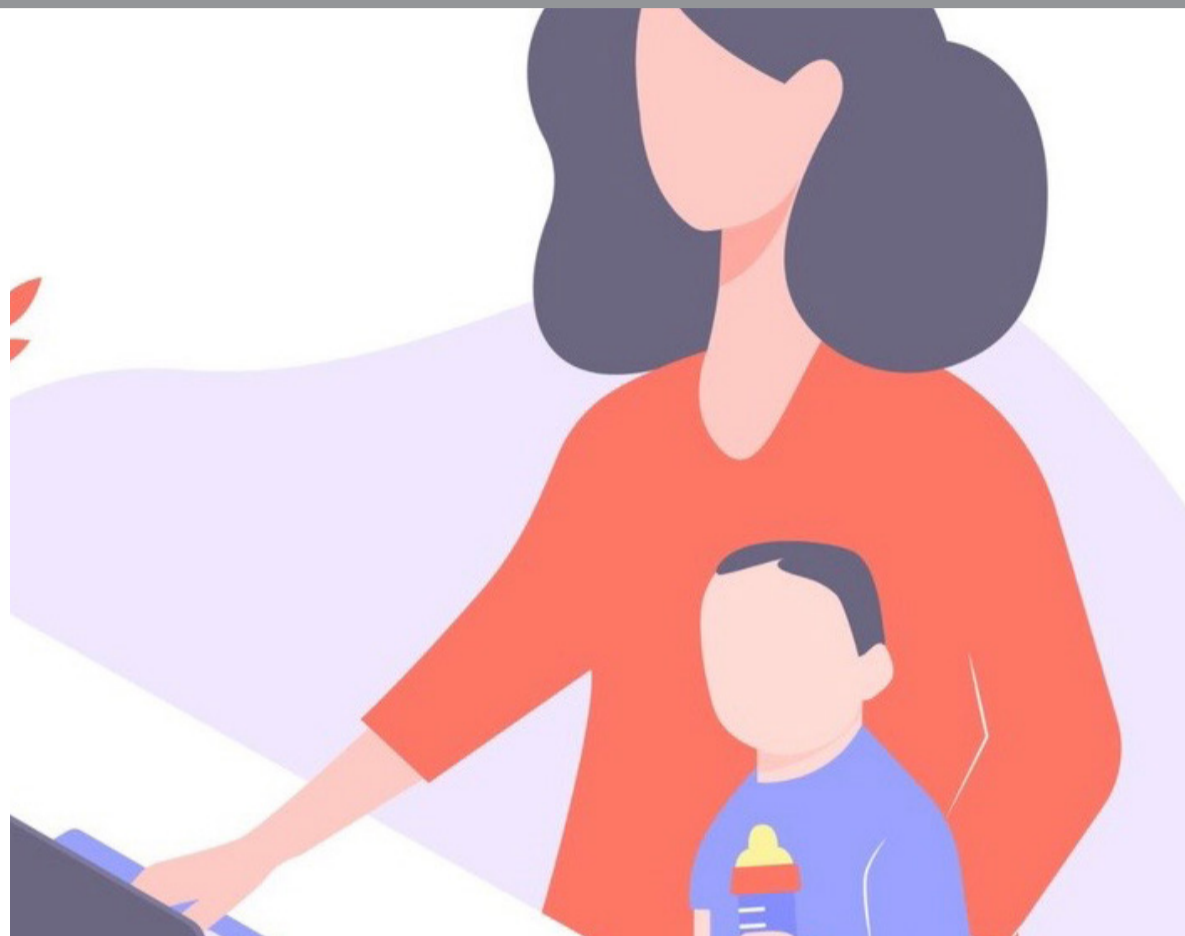
TO PREVENT MENTAL HEALTH AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ISSUES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

BY ANASTASIA SOKHADZE

More than 6,000 young people and 2,000 parents will receive support under the new initiative, which was launched by the United Nations Children's Fund in partnership with the organization Global Psychiatry.

The program will provide online sessions for teenagers on managing their psychosocial and emotional stability, ways to deal with stress, behavioral disorders, and other issues.

"In the current crisis, young people are at particular risk for mental health and psychosocial problems. The fear and anxiety caused by the virus is exacerbated by the fact that young people do not have access to schools, peer relationships and have to adjust to the new reality when interacting with friends and parents. Creating mental health services for young people is especially important



► Support for children and parents



► UNICEF's upcoming program

during this time. Structures and services will form the basis of long-term services for teens and their parents," stated Ghasan Khalil, the spokesman for the United Nations Children's Fund in Georgia.

The project envisages awareness-raising activities for young people aged 14 to 18 in Tbilisi, Gori and Adjara region. It will also help parents achieve effective communication with young people through a positive parenting program. The project also provides the necessary support for remote psychosocial and mental health in Tbilisi and Batumi.

The project will last until the end of 2020.

Boosting Georgia's public healthcare with digital solutions

NEW LEARNING SYSTEM WILL ENABLE THOUSANDS OF MEDICAL STAFF TO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS IN TREATING INFECTIOUS DISEASES

TBILISI. 2 July 2020 – Building on a successful response to the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Georgia is taking urgent steps to ensure that its frontline medical personnel are prepared to respond to any potential second wave and other future health emergencies. As part of this effort, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is joining hands with the Government of Sweden to support the National Center for Disease Control and

Public Health (NCDC), the lead agency in Georgia's pandemic response, in training 4,000 medical personnel across the country in enhanced infection prevention and control. The initiative relies on USD 150,000 in Swedish funding.

"Georgia has managed the first wave of the pandemic well, but the crisis is far from over," said NCDC Head Amiran Gankrelidze. "We must spare no effort to improve public healthcare and increase the professionalism of our medical staff to ensure full preparedness for future health emergencies. Not only will this new initiative enable us to continue coping with COVID-19; it will also benefit our disease prevention and control system well beyond the current crisis."

The first wave of the pandemic showed that public health systems around the world need

to be better prepared for health emergencies and more efficient in crisis response. In Georgia, the NCDC has taken a lead in educating medical personnel and staff throughout the country, drawing on the experience gained during the crisis.

With Swedish funding, UNDP will assist the NCDC in establishing an e-learning platform to provide doctors, nurses and administrative staff with an opportunity to attend training courses and certification programmes, communicate, exchange experience and receive practical advice from NCDC experts.

"Georgian doctors deserve respect and admiration for their professionalism and dedication during the pandemic," said UNDP Head Louisa Vinton. "The new learning system will improve their ability to respond

to health emergencies and also help close the gap between big cities and rural areas, where medical staff tend to have fewer resources."

The new initiative covers 37 medical institutions and the NCDC's 60 regional centres across Georgia. 3,000 medical workers from the clinics designated for COVID-19 treatment and 1,000 medical staff from regular healthcare institutions will be trained in health emergency response. The training will also extend to the operators of a specialised hotline for medical professionals who will be trained in infection prevention and control. The e-learning platform will operate through desktop and mobile applications, with a built-in chatbot and search engine, allowing for real-time consultations and exchange.

In addition, the NCDC will develop guidelines and manuals covering critical areas of public healthcare, such as infection prevention and control in medical institutions and everyday life, the environment and health, and the prevention and control of non-communicable diseases.

"Investments in public health are investments in development," said Eric Illes, Head of Development Cooperation and Deputy Head of Mission at the Embassy of Sweden to Georgia. "We are proud to support the Georgian Government and enhance public healthcare in very tangible ways that will save lives in emergencies." Assistance to the NCDC is just one component of a broader six-year programme of governance reforms in Georgia that UNDP is implementing with USD 5 million in funding from Sweden.

FRIDAY		JULY 3	
Day		Sunny	
		High: 33°C	
Night		Partly Cloudy	
		Low: 20°C	
SATURDAY		JULY 4	
Day		Sunny	
		High: 34°C	
Night		Mostly Cloudy	
		Low: 21°C	

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EXCHANGE RATES: US DOLLAR - 3.0567 | EURO - 3.4247 | GBP - 3.7928 | 100 RUSSIAN RUBLE - 4.3017 | SWISS FRANC - 3.2264 |

Police, first-aid personnel, social workers and others to receive increased salaries

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

Salaries of police, first-aid personnel, village physicians, nurses and social workers increased in Georgia, starting 1st of July, Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia announced.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the salary of police officers will increase by ₾125 from this month. According to the agency, the increase in salaries serves to improve the functioning of the agency, improve the conditions of employees and increase motivation.

“It is important to establish an effective human resource management system to ensure law and order and public safety,” the Interior Ministry said in a statement.

According to the 2020 budget, salaries will be increased for soldiers, firefighters, police and equals, which is ₾50 million from the budget. The salary will be increased for more than 30 thousand employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Remuneration of social agents increased by ₾150. The terms of the employment contract will also be extended.

Social agents demanded an improvement in working conditions a few days ago. If the demand was not met, they planned a strike.

Until now, the salary of social workers was fixed at ₾80, which was ₾4.80 for each family surveyed. According to social workers, they would earn an average of ₾300-500 per month.

This time, the fixed salary



► Georgian citizens above 70 will receive an increased pension starting July 1st with monthly pensions increasing by ₾30.

of senior social agents has also increased by ₾100. Instead of 450, they will receive ₾550.

According to the decision of the government, the terms of the labor contract of social agents have been increased to

6 months. According to Giorgi Tsotskolauri, Deputy Minister of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs, based on work experience, some social agents will sign one-year contracts

and some will have permanent contracts from the end of the year.

The changes also affected and increased the amount of leave for social agents, forced waiting and incentives. In this

case, the social agents will receive an average salary for the last 3 months.

Social agent Giorgi Aptsiauri says the increase in salaries has not exhausted the problems of social workers. They also want to talk to representatives of the Social Services Agency about the cost of visits to families and the cost of transportation.

Georgian citizens above 70 years will receive an increased pension starting July with monthly pensions increasing by ₾30 to ₾250, announced the Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Affairs of Georgia. As for pensioners above 70 living in the highland areas, their pensions have increased to ₾300.

Moreover, pensions for individuals with category I disabilities and children with disabilities will increase to ₾250 as well.

“An increase in pensions for people less than 70 years old will be adjusted based on the inflation rate, while an increase of pensions for people above 70 will be adjusted based on 80% of economic growth as well as the inflation rate,” Finance Minister Ivane Matchavariani said back in April.

In January, 2020 pensions increased for all pensioners by ₾20. As for retirees (women above 60 and men above 65) living in highland villages, they began receiving an additional 20% on their monthly state pension in 2016.



► Pensions increase to ₾250 for people above 70.