

## NGOs call on the government of Georgia to strengthen humanitarian and medical assistance to Abkhazia



► Border of Russian occupied Abkhazia.

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

NGOs have addressed a statement to the government of Georgia, asking to further strengthen medical and humanitarian assistance to Abkhazia, on the background of the virus outbreak in the region. The De Facto Ministry of Healthcare of Abkhazia has made a public statement and called on the community to volunteer, since there is a lack of medical staff in the healthcare system, the majority of the physicians are fatigued and some are infected.

According to the statement, tourism is the main source of income for the majority of Abkhaz people and the pandemic has created severe social conditions for the region which is already on the verge of economic crisis. As the statement reads, against the background of social protest, on August 1st, the de facto government of Abkhazia had to open the border to Russia completely unexpectedly and unpreparedly. The opening of the border to the tourists led to the distinct outbreak of the virus in Abkhazia. As of August 19th, there have been 197 confirmed cases, out of which 77 patients have recovered and 3 have died. The statement reads that despite the criticism from the medical circles of the decision to open borders, the political establishment did not consider the concerns of the Ministry of Health on the insufficiency of the medical resources and still opened the borders.

The public organizations believe that in response to the crisis in Abkhazia, it is important the government of Georgia and Georgian community show steps of solidarity in support of the Abkhazian region. They also note that besides the original purpose of expressing humanism and the supremacy of human life, these steps also have a significant political potential of reconciliation and conflict transformation.

The organizations state that even

though they acknowledge that the government of Georgia has already taken steps to support the occupied regions in response to the created humanitarian situation, the process demands strengthening and more publicity. Therefore, the organizations believe that the government of Georgia should provide additional medical resource assistance to the Abkhaz community.

The organizations believe that open support to the locals during the time of

crisis will be a significant and historical step taken on the way to reconciliation and rebuilding of trust.

The statement is signed by the following organizations: Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center-EMC; Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA); Caucasian House; Center for Peace and Civil Development (CPCD); Institute for the Study of Nationalism and Conflicts (ISNC); Democracy Research Institute (DRI).



► As of August 19th, there have been 197 confirmed coronavirus cases in Abkhazia. 77 patients have recovered and 3 have died.

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### ECONOMICS

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# Epidemiological situation in the tourist zones

By KHATIA BZHALAVA

The head of the National Center for Disease Control, Amiran Gamkrelidze stated at the briefing, which was held after the inter-agency coordination council that the visitors, as well as locals in Batumi, will be able to test for COVID-19 for free. Tents will be put up in Batumi Boulevard and voluntary testing will be available in order to determine whether the virus has spread around the Adjara region or not. Gamkrelidze also noted that the COVID testing scale expands and from now on, the staff of tourist zone cafes, clubs, restaurants, and hotels will also be included in the testing organized for target groups.

On August 15th, an employee of Club Havana in Kobuleti tested positive for COVID-19. In the following two days, 4 of the infected person's contacts also tested positive for the coronavirus. However, there is also a new case reported in Kobuleti which is not linked to the previous cases.

23 contacts of the new case have been quarantined and 40 samples have been taken. Epidemiological research is being implemented in order to determine the source.

According to the head of NCDC, a seroprevalence study is being carried out in 4 of Georgia's regions. The study started on August 17th in Kobuleti, Khelvachauri, Mrtvili, and Borjomi Municipalities. As a result of the testing of 1200 people, researchers will determine if the tested people have already had coronavirus infection in the past. Gamkrelidze said that such studies reveal how the infection circulates.

As Gamrelidze states, there have not been any new coronavirus cases in the last 4 days in Mestia Municipality. Soon it will be 12 days since a quarantine was declared in Mestia, up to 700 people who are under quarantine or self-isolation will be tested for COVID-19. Zemo Svaneti was placed on lockdown on August 10th. The coordination council members have decided to open most of the administrative units



► Employees of cafes, clubs, restaurants, and hotels in the tourist zones will be included in the target group testing.

of Zemo Svaneti on August 21st, however, Lendgeri and Mestia will still remain under lockdown.

According to Gamkrelidze, apart from Mestia, there are 3 more hotspots of the coronavirus infection. Kazbegi, Kobuleti, and Gardabani-Karajalari.

Out of 10 new coronavirus cases, 1 has been recorded in Lendjeri, 4 are contacts of the confirmed cases, 2 are imported and the source of 3 cases is unknown. There have been up to 10 cases since August 3, when the source of infection could not be identified. As of August 19th, there were a total of 1361 confirmed cases, 1098 have recovered, and 17 have died.



► The head of the National Center for disease control, Amiran Gamkrelidze.

<b>THURSDAY</b> AUGUST 20	
Day	Sunny High: 33°C
Night	Clear skies Low: 20°C
<b>FRIDAY</b> AUGUST 21	
Day	Mainly sunny High: 32°C
Night	Partly cloudy Low: 19°C



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**თბილისი TBILISI**

SEPTEMBER 2,4 სეპტემბერი



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## Georgia's exports fell by 16.8%

BY NATALIA KOCHIASHVILI

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, Georgia's exports fell by 16.8% to \$ 1.76 billion. According to a report released by the National Statistics Office (Geostat), exports of 6 of the country's 10 largest export products fell. Among them, the sharpest decline is observed in exports of automobiles (-42.2%) and exports of pharmaceuticals (57.7%).

Rating of the 10 largest export goods of Georgia in the first 7 months of 2020 is as follows: Copper ores and concentrates - \$ 391.3 million, an increase of 7.5% over the previous year; Cars - \$ 198.5 million, a decrease of -42.2% over the previous year; Ferroalloys - \$ 130 million, a decrease of -33.5% over the previous year; Natural grape wines - \$ 107.3 million, a decrease of -5.6% over the previous year; Precious metal ores and concentrates - \$ 70.3 (no exports of these goods were registered in the previous year); Mineral and freshwater - \$ 59.5 million, a decrease of -22.9% over the previous year; Medicines - \$ 52.8 million, a decrease of -57.7% over the previous year;

Nitrogen Fertilizers - \$ 52 million, decrease compared to the previous year - 9.6%. Other goods - a total of \$ 581 million, a decrease of 21.3% over the previous year. The export of alcoholic beverages and gold has increased over the previous year - \$ 64 million, an increase of 10% for alcohol and \$ 50.8 million, an increase of 29.4% for gold.

In total, Georgia's trade turnover in January-June amounted to \$ 6 billion, which is 17.6% less than the previous year. Of this, exports were \$ 1.76 billion (down 16.8%) and imports were \$ 4.27 billion (down 17.9%).

The re-export of automobiles is an industry that has been hit hard by the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. According to Geostat, in July 2020, only \$ 14.45 million worth of cars were exported from Georgia abroad, which is \$ 45.8 million, or 76% less than in the same period of 2019.

The decrease by individual countries is as follows: Azerbaijan - exports \$ 8 million, a decrease of 63% over the previous year; Ukraine - exports \$ 211 thousand, a decrease of 97%; Armenia - exports \$200 thousand, a decrease of 99%.

In total, in the period January-July, \$ 198 million cars were exported from Georgia during this period, which is 42.2% less than in 2019.

Re-export of cars from Georgia has increased at a high rate in the last few years. During 2019, the export of passenger cars from Georgia increased by 68% and reached \$ 686.7 million.

Domestic exports (\$ 1.08 billion) accounted for 61.6% of total exports and decreased by



► In July, the re-export of cars from Georgia decreased by 76%.

2% compared to January-July last year.

According to the Geostat report, in January-July 2020, the share of the ten largest countries in the total domestic exports of Georgia amounted to 77.7%. The largest exporters are Russia (\$ 206.9 million), Bulgaria (\$ 142.8 million) and China (\$ 118.3 million).

In the first 7 months of this year, the largest amount of exports of goods produced in Georgia - 19.1% (\$ 206.9 million) went to Russia, which is 19.8% less than in the same period last year.

The top 5 domestic exports to

the Russian Federation are as follows: Alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and vinegar - \$ 111.0 million; Ferrous metals - \$ 57.7 million; Edible fruits and nuts - \$ 18.4 million; Vegetables and some edible roots and tubers - \$ 4.5 million; Coffee, Tea, Mate, and Spices - \$ 2.9 million.

According to Geostat, in 2020 goods worth \$ 229.1 million were exported to the Russian Federation, of which 90.3% were export goods produced in Georgia.

Geostat has also published indicators of the economic activity of the population. According to statistics, the unemployment

rate increased by 0.9% compared to the same period last year and equaled 12.3 %.

The share of employees in the second quarter of 2020 is 48.6 % of the total number of employees, which is 1.6% less than in the second quarter of last year. Accordingly, 51.4% of the total number of employees are self-employed.

Unemployment rates in rural areas are much lower than in urban areas. In the second quarter of 2020, compared to the same period last year, the unemployment rate in urban areas increased by 2.3%, while in rural areas decreased by 0.3%.

In April, May, and June of this year, an average of 114.6 thousand citizens benefited from €200 assistance (to compensate for job loss), but according to Geostat, in the second quarter of 2020, the number of employees was reduced by only 31.5 thousand compared to the first quarter.

It is noteworthy that the 12.3 % unemployment rate is due to the rather large number of self-employed, most of whom live in rural areas and are engaged in their farms. Geostat considers self-employed all people who work in their enterprise or on their farm and have an income. According to the methodology of the International Labor Organization, for a person to be considered employed, it is not necessary for him to have a long-term employment contract or to be hired by anyone. Agricultural workers, tutors, babysitters, private taxi owners, retailers, etc., if they worked for at least one hour during the first 7 days of the survey to earn income (salary, natural income, profit, etc.) are considered employees according to the International Labor Organization and accordingly the Geostat methodology. Employees are those who have a job but do not work temporarily for various reasons. Also, persons who work in their family enterprise without any remuneration (free of charge).

Geostat plans to move to a new labor force survey methodology that excludes those who use the bulk of their products for personal consumption.



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