



## Cultural-Humanitarian Fund "Sukhumi"

### Gender Dimension of COVID-19 pandemic and its Impact on Human Security

(The results of the rapid assessment conducted by the Fund "Sukhumi"  
in its target regions)



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# Rapid Assessment Analysis Gender Dimension of Covid-19 Pandemic and its impact on Human Security”

## Introduction

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a profound impact on people's lives and has created numerous challenges for all of us: people's normal lifestyle has been changed, a lot of social and economic problems have been emerged, social and gender inequality in the society and families has been increased. The experience shows that the scale and degree of the impact of the pandemic is different for different social groups. Therefore, it is necessary to study the effects and impact of the virus on different groups of the population, which will increase the efficiency of response to the virus and will contribute to the mitigation of the negative impacts.

The rapid assessment conducted by the Fund "Sukhumi" is focused on the gender dimension of COVID-19 impact and on the challenges faced by our beneficiaries, especially by women and girls. The rapid assessment aimed at exploring and studying the main problems and gender needs caused by the COVID-19 virus in the lives of the organization's beneficiaries and developing an appropriate and timely response strategy.

Given that the impact and effects of the COVID-19 virus on humans are not gender-blind, the response to it must be gender-sensitive. The study of the effects of the restrictions caused by the pandemic on our beneficiaries life is on-going and therefore, the present document does not give a full and conclusive picture of the problems. However, the data already received clearly shows the gender-specific challenges that require appropriate attention and intervention.

The Fund "Sukhumi" has already begun to inform the representatives of local self-governments about the gender needs of the population in 11 target municipalities and to advocate the solutions of identified acute problems. Fortunately, a number of problems were resolved by the joint efforts of our organization and the municipalities, which include:

- ❖ Supplying foodstuff packages to 390 vulnerable and socially disadvantaged families in 11 municipalities by the Fund "Sukhumi"<sup>1</sup>;
- ❖ Providing women with psychological services by telephone and online individual and group sessions (62 women received Fund "Sukhumi" psychologist's consultation in the period of the assessment (04.04-05.05.20));
- ❖ Actively informing the population through the consultations with a lawyer about the rules and regulations introduced due to the state of emergency. In the rapid assessment period 45 of women received group and individual legal consultations;
- ❖ According to the memorandum signed with Fund "Sukhumi" and Medical Center "Bichvinta" (in Kutaisi), 600 reusable facemasks have been sewn by the "Day Center for the Women Victims of Violence" operating at the Fund "Sukhumi" and provided to the medical center. Along with the medical staff, the facemasks are to be delivered to vulnerable patients, including IDPs, women, the socially disadvantaged population, children, people with disability, elderly etc.);

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<sup>1</sup>Fund "Sukhumi" supplied food to vulnerable families in the following municipalities: Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Terjola, Khoni, Senaki, Poti, Zugdidi (Koki, Khurcha, Shamgona, Kakhati), Tsalenjikha (Pakhulani), Lanchkhuti, Ozurgeti, Kobuleti.

- ❖ With the support of Zugdidi Municipality, ensuring the transportation of the medical doctor twice a week to the villages adjacent to the dividing line (Khurcha, Koki) and carrying out ambulatory examinations and medical consultations;
- ❖ Providing assistance to the villages adjacent to the dividing line in seeking alternatives to insurance of agricultural products (harvest), informing the population on possible options and negotiating with insurance companies about possible concessions;
- ❖ Providing assistance in drafting and sending an official letter addressed to Zugdidi municipality with the request to provide an additional tractor and fuel for timely cultivation of arable land. Due to adequate response and with the active involvement of the Mayor's representatives in the villages, organizing provision of an additional tractor for timely completion of spring agricultural activities.
- ❖ Providing unlimited Internet packages for mobile telephones for 11 families from the village of Saberio on the other side of the Enguri River for ensuring uninterrupted access of children to the educational process.

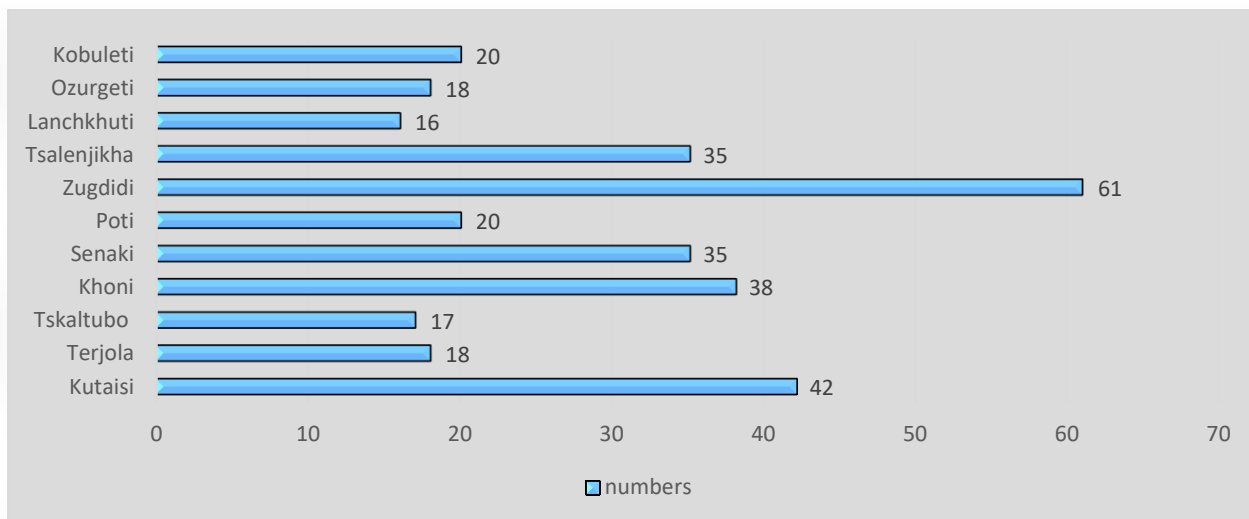
Although certain problems facing the population have been resolved, the list of acute problems caused by the pandemic is much longer and requires a proactive, consistent and targeted response.

The present document offers the generalized and combined list of identified problems and needs, and gives specific recommendations that are important to consider for mitigating and overcoming the negative effects of the pandemic and quarantine on the population.

## 1. Methodology and Demographics

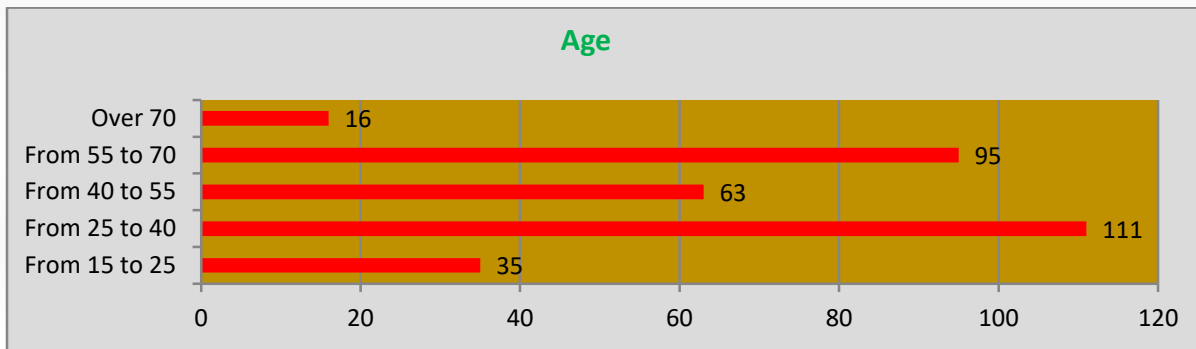
The rapid assessment was conducted in 11 municipalities by the Fund "Sukhumi" through online surveys and online meetings with the beneficiaries from 04.04.20 to 04.05.20 (see Diagram #1).

Diagram #1



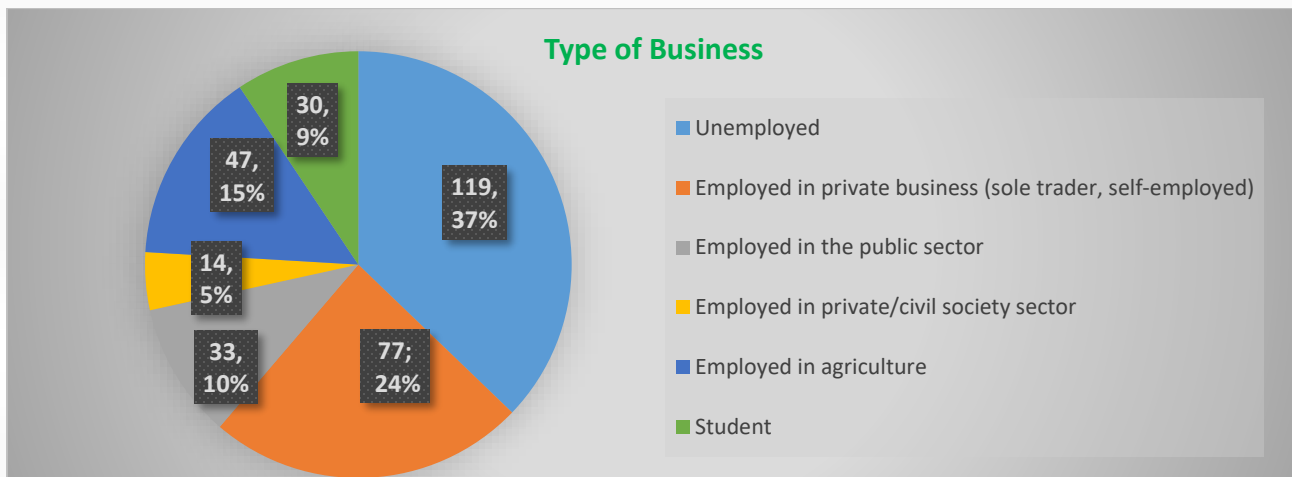
43 women were involved in online meetings and 320 persons participated in the survey, including 221 women and 99 men. A big number of the surveyed women suggest that the problems and needs identified by the assessment are especially relevant and topical for the female part of the population. The age of the surveyed varied from 15 to 70 and above. The age breawon is provided below (see Diagram # 2):

Diagram #2



The survey involved 112 IDPs, 124 locals and 84 persons living close to the "dividing line". The majority of them (36%) are unemployed and 24% are self-employed or employed in the private sector (for the detail see Diagram #3).

Diagram #3

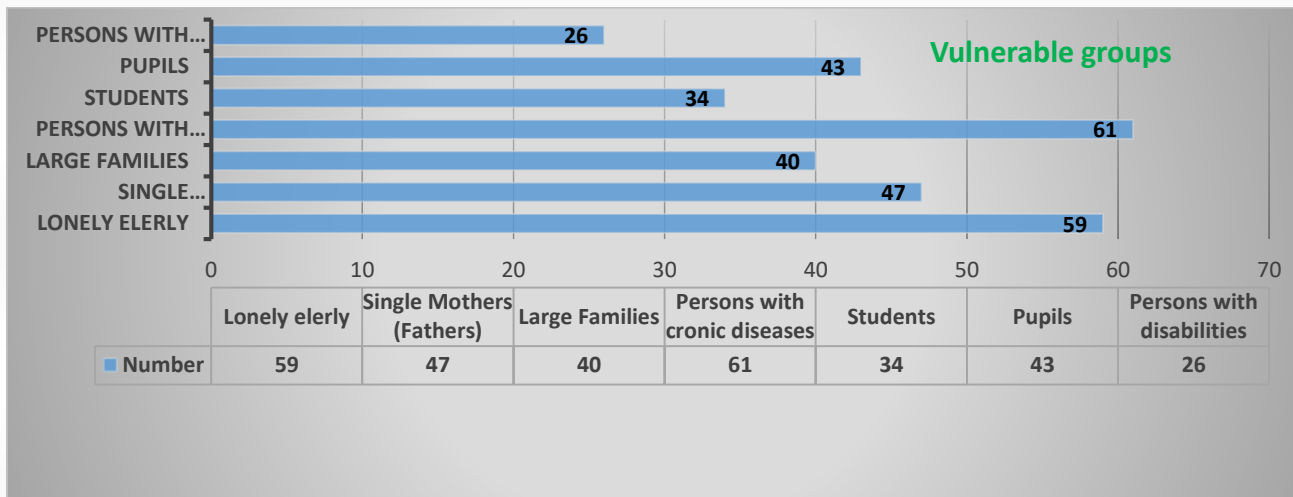


## 2. Key Findings

### 2.1. Negative Impact of Covid-19 on the People's Lives

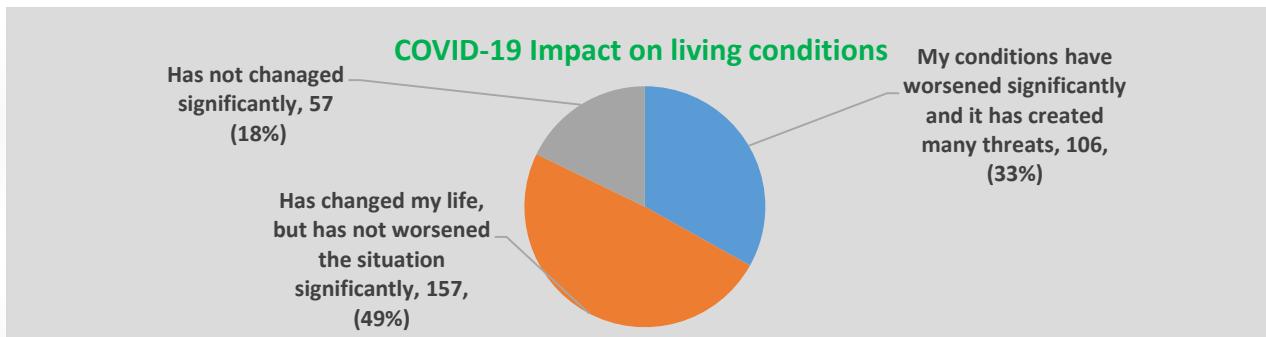
According to the surveyed, the people with chronic diseases, lonely seniors, single mothers and large families are among the most vulnerable groups who are the most affected by the state of emergency and Covid-19 (see Diagram #4)

Diagram #4



According to 157 surveyed persons (49%), as a result of COVID-19 and related restrictions. **"Although their lives have changed, the situation has not worsened significantly"**. 106 (33%) persons stated that their **"conditions have worsened dramatically which created threats to their livelihood"** (see Diagram #5). It is worth mentioning, that this answer is most often underlined by the rural population living close to the "dividing line" (41 out of 61 respondents in Zugdidi municipality mentioned that their conditions have worsened). For 19% of the Fund "Sukhumi" target group **"the situation has not changed significantly"** which can be interpreted in two ways – either the population is dealing with the situation with more or less success or the already difficult situation remains unchanged for them.

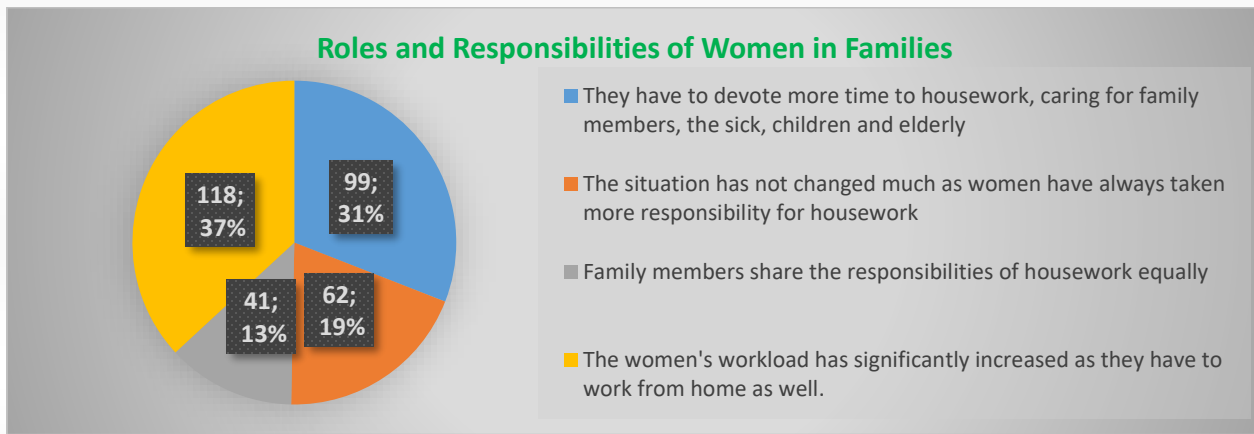
Diagram #5



## 2.2. Covid-19 Impact on Gender Roles – Unequal Distribution of the Household Responsibilities

The study revealed the clear gender inequality caused by the COVID-19 crisis, which is reflected in the unequal distribution in housework and women's workload. The largest percentage of the surveyed – **37%** believes that **"women's workload has significantly increased as they have to work online from home and do housework at the same time"**, **31%** noted that **"they have to devote more time to housework, taking care of family members, the sick, children and elderly"**. Only **13%** stressed that **"the family members share the responsibilities of housework equally"**. **19%** believe that the situation of women **"has not changed much since they always took more responsibility for housework"** (See Diagram #6).

Diagram #6



Increased responsibility for caring for children and other family members and the need to help the children in the distance learning process combined with their own work responsibilities triggered psycho-emotional stress in women and created tense atmosphere in families which has a negative impact on their health and psychological condition. This is evidenced by the fact that to the question - "What is the main problem in your life caused by the COVID-19 outbreak?" 99.7% of the surveyed (319 out of 320) gave the following answer: "**Stress and psychological problems**", which is considered to be one of the most dramatic and negative consequences of the epidemic for the absolute majority of the respondents.

*"Now I am exhausted, I have a feeling that I have never had any rest. This is all nerves, I am tense and nervous and that is where this exhaustion comes from" (M.D. vill. Orsantia 02.04.20.)*

*"I have worked as a teacher for 27 years and now I give online lessons. This is the hardest experience of my life. I would have preferred to take unpaid leave and relax. It is really terrible to work like this. You have to accommodate everyone. Women are in the hardest situation now... I have lessons every day and at the same time I have to do the housework. No one makes allowances for me in anything. My family members wait for me to finish my online classes and prepare and serve the dinner and this is repeated every day..." (S.S. a woman from Shamgona. 02.04.20.)*

*"Mothers of school students are going crazy. One kid, the second one, the third one, then their lessons and their homework. I am a teacher but I hardly remember any fathers involved in this process. Its only mothers who try and work hard. They are not familiar with technologies and have no computers, but they still manage to do something. Now all the fathers are at home, but all these stuff fell upon the mothers' shoulders..." (P.S. Pakhulani. 04.04.20.)*

### 2.3. Covid-19 Impact on Economic Security.

The restrictions imposed by the crisis have had a painful and severe impact on citizens' **economic security**. A considerable number of people have lost their jobs and as a result, their families have lost the only source of income and livelihood. This situation has been especially painful for the families involved in private and family-run businesses and for those involved in "informal" (undeclared) businesses, such as family agricultural activities, street trade, and working with individuals in homes (as babysitters, domestic workers, maintenance and repair workers). The crisis has led not only to the loss of jobs by people involved in unofficial work but also to the fact that a large part of the people in this category have been overlooked by the state and left without any help or support. These people, left in despair and hopelessness, have a vague and uncertain prospect of returning to their previous jobs.

*"I traded with second-hand goods in Zugdidi. I used to sell the goods in salons and markets. I have had my clients for so many years and I used to earn my living by doing this. Now I have so many unsold goods, the goods bought in credit are lying around in my house, I did not manage to sell them in time. They are out of season now, but I still have to pay my*

*debts, and no one will write off my debts. I've suffered a serious financial loss. Even if I start working, I will have to work a month just to pay off my debts." (K.G. Orsantia 05.04.20.)*

*"My husband used to work in Tbilisi as a repair worker with individuals... the owner of the house dismissed him. He said: "I don't know how my business will go, I'm afraid I won't be able to pay the money for your work" and sent him home. Now my husband is at home. He used to be the breadwinner for the family... My two children are students and they are also at home now. I have to care for everyone. My workload has increased but still no one is grateful." (V.D. Pakhulani 05.04.20.)*

*"... Even earlier entire burden was on women. Women worked abroad, women traded in markets, women worked and the majority of men were inactive. The current situation has deprived women of these jobs, reduced self-employment and inspired fear in the future. They are afraid of the future and are desperate. The worst part is that no one knows how long this will last. (G.S. Kutaisi 19.04.20.)*

For **67%** of the persons surveyed, the restriction of movement **"threatened their economic activity"**, while **47%** directly stated that the crisis caused them to **"lose their source of employment and income."** According to the majority of women beneficiaries of the Fund "Sukhumi", the aggravated economic background has not only increased stress and complicated the women's situation in families, but also provoked facts of domestic conflicts and violence.

Paradoxical as it may seem, on the one hand, the current pandemic has caused a great stress and insecurity to the population caused by the loss of the jobs and income, but on the other hand, it has put the greatest public stigma and psychological pressure on those who retained their jobs and opportunity to work. Due to the nature of their professional obligations, they became the source of additional danger and the object of domestic violence. This category includes doctors, nurses, shop sellers and pharmacists, who, in addition to constant threats to their health, feel very responsible for their families and always worry about bringing the virus home, plus they are under psychological pressure from the society. The people around them try to protect themselves, do not communicate with them and ignore them, which, of course, negatively affects their psychological state.

*"There was a case involving a woman medical doctor who had been in contact with COVID-19 positive patient and her husband put forward an ultimatum - "either your profession or your family!". The husband told her that he had heard on TV that the doctors are in a risk group and she could bring the virus home. This was followed by a conflict and it was very hard for this woman to accept such an attitude because of her professional responsibility and sense of collegiality. The husband did not want to hear about it at all. After that, the man told her directly: "Then you have to leave the home!!" [at the moment] she is staying overnight with her colleague. This was a very hard psychological experience for her. One can imagine how stressful her work is, plus burdened with such a psychological condition that the one who should stand by you the most - turns his back and accuses you of harming your family. (Civil activist, Kobuleti, 01.05.20)*

*"I had telephone communication with a girl who worked as a shop manager and was in a permanent conflict with her family members. Her husband constantly argued with her and insulted her saying "don't bring the virus, or...". The woman used all the means to protect herself and did not leave her job. After the last conflict her husband took the child with him to the village. The woman is now left alone with her fears and crushed due to the absence of her family members and missing her child (an abstract from the interview of the Fund "Sukhumi" psychologist with the victim, 03.05.20)*

*"The woman, who had divorced her husband due to domestic conflicts and violence and had a 9-year-old child, moved to her father's house after her separation from her husband, where her mother, brother, daughter-in-law and her nephews lived. The woman worked in a supermarket. Due to the panic and fears related to the coronavirus her relations with his brother and sister-in-law became very tense. Her brother demanded from her either to leave her work or to leave the house. The sister-in-law was trying to turn her husband against his sister as if she was dangerous to their children and them. Constant psychological pressure and verbal abuse escalated into physical violence and the girl was forced to take her child and take refuge in a friend's family. Later she found an apartment for rent and moved there with her child... Of course,*



*with wages in the supermarket, it is hard for her to pay the rent and support the child." (An abstract from the interview of the Fund "Sukhumi" psychologist with the victim, 03.05.20).*

In many cases **loss of the source of income** is connected with not only the loss of their jobs but also with the loss of jobs of **their family members who emigrated abroad**. It is well-known that most of the labor migrants from Georgia went to work abroad due to the extreme necessity, difficult social and economic situation of their families and till today, remittances from them remain as the main source of income for many families. Today the COVID-19 pandemic created many problems and challenges for labor migrants. They are engaged in the informal sector of the economy and often they work without formal employment contract and legal protection, which makes them the most vulnerable segment. In interviews with the Fund "Sukhumi" the women note that their family members who have gone abroad for work have either lost their jobs or are at great risk of losing their jobs, and that the conditions of their family members, who are completely dependent on them, is becoming harder.

*"My sister is in Italy and takes care of an elderly person. Her landlord worked as a medical doctor. He has contracted the virus and was treated in the intensive care unit. During the whole of this period my sister was under stress. They all also had to be tested. She tested negative but had the landlord died, she would have lost her job. My sister was really worried and we were worried too. Thank God, everything ended well. But had he died, my sister would be left without a job. This scares emigrants the most." (P.Z. Shamgona, 14.04.20.)*

Part of the surveyed, namely, 71 people (23.7 %) noted that by the time of the spread of COVID-19 their family member was abroad, most of whom were women (58 out of 71 say that their family member who is abroad is a woman). The impact of the pandemic on their families is very negative, since according to 40% of them, they experienced great emotional stress as they worried about the health and safety of their relatives; according to 29.7% due to considerable dependence on the support from outside, their condition is rapidly deteriorating. Only 19% of the surveyed persons mentioned that they can deal with the problems without support from outside.

For the people living in the villages along the 'dividing line', it has become difficult to collect their pensions which is an only source of income for the seniors. -

*"My mother-in-law does not have a bank card and cannot get the cash from ATMs; now I have no idea how she can get her pension as Liberty Bank cars do not enter the village"(Kh. G. Orsantia, 16.04.20.)*

## **2.4. Covid-19 Impact on the Possibility to Receive Education**

The spread of COVID-19 and the introduction of online education in public and private schools created many technical and emotional problems in families. People who were not prepared for online education, in particular, **67** out of 320 respondents (22%) noted that they do not have the capability to fully ensure the involvement of their children in distance/online education. The residents of Zugdidi Municipality who live in the villages adjacent to the dividing line emphasized this problem the most. (This problem is topical for 67 out of 320 respondents, out of which 41 are the residents of Zugdidi Municipality, who live in the villages adjacent to the dividing line).

According to the surveyed population, lack of computers and smartphones is a major obstacle **to the full involvement of children in the learning process**. The second main obstacle is that in families with several children one computer and smartphone is not enough for their simultaneous participation in the academic process. Other additional obstacles for the involvement of children in the education process that have been listed include: weak Internet signal at their living areas, high costs of Internet services, insufficient space or number of rooms where the children could study separately from other family members, low technical skills.

*"The children desperately need the Internet. No one was prepared for that, I am very worried as it creates problems for the children" (M.S. Orsantia, 16.04.20.)*

*"My child is a student and studies well. I don't know how to support her as villages have serious problems with the Internet" (M.L. Koki, 16.04.20.)*

*"We have serious problems with the Internet in our village and this is especially challenging for pupils and students. They try to join the lessons using mobiles but many fail. Then they go to each other's houses to find out about the homework." (I.S. Pakhulani, 16.04.20.)*

*"Even if we had the Internet, the children do not have computers, neither do the parents have the telephones with needed technical parameters and so, there are always problems." (R.J. Tskoushi, 16.04.20.)*

*"We mainly use mobile phones. This is all connected with some expenses. We do not have a computer or money to buy Internet services." (M.Z. Pakhulani, 18.04.20.)*

Unpreparedness for distance learning led to many emotional problems in the families which are often manifested in aggression towards women. The aggravation of a woman's psycho-emotional state often leads to conflicts and domestic violence.

*"The school lessons are killing me. When one child finishes a lesson, the other starts. If we had normal Internet, I would not say a word; we use our telephone which is a cheap one and does not have enough storage to run so many applications... when both children have lessons at the same time, they fight with each other... they connect to the Internet one after the other, this really worries me and when I am upset, I start screaming at the children... there is a real mess in my house." (Kh.Z. Shamgona, 18.04.20)*

*"I live with my husband, 2 children and my mother-in-law. The children are involved in the distance learning process and this annoys my husband and his mother. All claims are always addressed to me... children are noisy, they argue with each other and, of course, I, as a mother, should be blamed for everything. My husband constantly complains about me, and his mother always sets him against me... This has radically changed my life... Our life has worsened, my relations with my spouse have become very tense, I am under constant psychological stress and I have to endure a lot of insults, physical abuse has also become my husband's habit" (M.K. Kutaisi, 19.04.20.)*

## **2.5. Covid-19 Impact on the Physical Safety of Women – Increased Domestic Violence**

The pandemic-related crisis, the numerous restrictions imposed by the state of emergency, the constant fear of being infected, the deteriorating economic situation in families, increased responsibilities and obligations in the lives of women and related stress and psychological problems definitely have a negative impact on the daily lives of women. Women experience constant psychological stress and they have become the victims of domestic violence. One-third of the surveyed respondents, 110 persons (34%), claim that the situation with the epidemic **"has increased the cases of domestic conflicts and violence"**.

*"This situation created huge problems for families and couples. Relations between them have become strained. Although the present environment has led to reuniting families, the problem of relationships between couples, children and other family members has also been raised." (From the interview with the psychologist of the Fund "Sukhumi", 03.05.20)*

*"Due to the state of emergency which prohibits leaving home, the whole family has to stay home; It affects psychological state, therefore the tensions, cases of conflicts and violence have increased" (D.Ch. Koki, 03.05.20).*

*"We hear the sounds of tense arguments from the families which we thought were ideal. The closed environment revealed problems in many families" (I.N. Khoni, 02.05.20)*

It should be noted that the situation is made more alarming by the fact that increased cases of domestic violence are characterized with more secrecy and silence. The Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) have not published yet the statistics of cases of domestic violence in the period of novel coronavirus pandemic. However, according to the

official information published by the Ministry of Internal Affairs<sup>2</sup>, under the conditions created by the spreading virus, no increase in reports of domestic violence was observed; the same is confirmed by the managers of shelters run by the state and NGOs. However, the number and content of the calls from women requiring assistance and advice from the psychologist of the Fund "Sukhumi" clearly show the opposite.

*"In the recent period [one month] I had contact with about 20 victims of domestic violence, among them 7 consultations specifically with the victims of physical violence. I have to note that the majority of the victims of violence were women and then their children. The majority of abusers were the husbands and also there were some cases when a divorced woman lived with her brother or father and she was physically abused by her brother or father. The number of calls related to psychological problems, panic and fear have also increased (an abstract from the interview with the psychologist of the Fund "Sukhumi", 03.05.20)*

The interviews in the process of research revealed that the women locked in the same space with an abuser, with limited social ties, were left completely alone with their problems and tragedies, and could not count on any support.

*"It was difficult for them [the victims] to talk openly even before, and they needed several meetings to open up. Now it has become even more difficult. Only a few have the opportunity and comfort to communicate with someone on the Internet, since it is difficult to ensure privacy in a common space. (An abstract from the interview with the psychologist of the Fund "Sukhumi", 03.05.20)*

*"They always had constant turmoil in the family. Sister-in-law from the one side, mother-in-law from the other and the husband... all of them harassed her... [The case of a victim narrated by a relative of the victim of violence]... Soon the lockdown was declared. You probably remember the first days with so many worries and problems and the first two weeks passed. One day, I called her just to find out how she was doing and I expected her to tell me something disturbing, but she responded with a calm and sweet voice: "We are doing well, very well, we have enough food, we have everything. We are all fine". It somehow calmed me down, I was pleased... Full of joy I called her mother, and I told her all this but she screamed in response: "What could she say to you? The "hyenas" are sitting next to her and what else could she say?" As I learned later they forbid her to talk on the phone, telling her – "You must not take your family business out!" When someone calls her, all of them listen to her; she is not allowed to talk with her mother in private. Can you imagine her situation? (M.S. vil. Khurcha 17.04.20.)*

Limited or no access to the Internet and telephone, on the one hand, and unawareness of women about available services of assistance and support (especially in villages) on the other cause the women victims of violence to keep silent and refrain from addressing law enforcement bodies even through online applications or applying for appropriate services supporting the victims.

*"It is only in a critical situation when they manage or dare to call and communicate with others. Besides, another problem is that the Internet is not available for many of them" (N.B. Khurcha, 02.05.20)*

*"As you know, in Adjara, in settlements, on the outskirts, there are such poor families, there are no conditions to use the Internet, download the application and log in or use it as necessary." (A representative of NGO "Sdek!" („სდეკი“ in Georgian ) Batumi, 08.05.20).*

*"We heard from the Fund "Sukhumi" about the shelters. Many do not know this. I didn't know that it was possible to stay in the shelter for six months or more" (M.K. Tskoushi, 06.05.20.).*

As it was revealed, victims avoid advertising their problems, because, in the current situation, they consider it a shame to talk about their problems and believe that this issue is not a priority for the society, the police, and the state in general.

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<sup>2</sup>Ministry of Internal Affairs "The Ministry of Internal Affairs continues effectively combating domestic violence", 03.04.2020, available at <https://police.ge/ge/shinagan-saqmeta-saministro-agrdzelebs-odjakhshi-dzaladobis-tsinaagmdeg-efeqtian-brdzolas/13440>

*"Who will talk now about the violence when coronavirus is attacking us from everywhere and no woman will raise her voice even if she is attacked [abused] every day... or who will listen to her, there are other problems that concern everyone more than violence" (K.E. Khurcha, 06.05.20)*

*"Of course, women face problems... The majority of victims believe that the society will rebuke them for advertising their problems in this period. They comment to me - "no one has time for me now..." and they prefer to talk about their problems anonymously with me rather than with anyone else as they are afraid of being rebuked by the society" (An abstract from the interview with the psychologist of the Fund "Sukhumi", 03.05.20)*

Based on the above, there is a clear need for proactive action by the state to prevent, identify the cases of violence against women and support the victims.

Conducted interviews revealed numerous reasons for the increase of domestic violence cases and the concealment of acts of violence by victims, which include: distrust of the state and the police to support the victim; a weak mechanism of identifying conflicting families and the cases of violence; weak response to family conflicts from the social service; inadequate government's attention to gender-based violence issues, etc. The Fund "Sukhumi" continues to study the increasing number of cases of domestic violence against women and the reasons for the reduced number of complaints by female victims in its target regions. Fund "Sukhumi" plans to publish and share a separate report on these issues with stakeholders in the near future.

## 2.6. Covid-19 Impact on Food Security

The loss of jobs by the population, stopping economic activities and travel between cities, the introduction of numerous restrictions led to the emergence of numerous fears, and especially in terms of food security. During the survey, 68% of respondents (218 out of 320) believed that **"the limited access to food and other household goods"** is the biggest threat related to the situation with the virus. This issue was especially emphasized by the rural population. During the online information meetings with the Fund "Sukhumi" it was noted that **"a sharp decline and shortage of food and household goods in grocery stores can be observed in villages"**. This problem is especially topical in the villages adjacent to the dividing line (Khurcha, Pakhulani, Tskoushi), where the population lacks the opportunity to travel to Zugdidi where they usually buy grocery and household goods. As for the village grocery stores, they are almost empty.

*"Today I was in the grocery shop and it was almost empty. The shop assistant told me that he is going to close the shop in one or two days as he cannot bring goods and distributors do not arrive in the village. This made me very concerned" (M.K. Pakhulani, 14.04.20).*

People from villages also talk about the need to timely cultivation of the land with tractors and treatment of plants with special chemicals. The people who are left without sources of income cannot afford to buy **special chemicals** which are quite expensive and they ask the municipality administration to support them in buying these items during the state of emergency.

*"You have to have fuel for the tractor in order to cultivate the land. Many did not manage to buy the fuel in time and who will bring it to you now? It would be good if the government took care of this and helped the people to buy fuel." (Z.L. Kakhatj, 18.04.20.).*

*"If we are late with sowing maize, we are dead... no hazelnut, no flour, what will we live on? No one has raised this issue, I have not heard that anyone is going to help the rural population." (Ts. E. Orsantia 18.04.20.).*

*"I will not be able to treat my hazelnut trees with chemicals as I don't have 500 Laris for that... Last year I bought them in credit and paid in installments, but who will give them in credit now? We lost all hope... What can we do if we don't manage to sell hazelnut? Everyone in this area is depending on hazelnut". (Khurcha, 18.04.20.).*

Realization of harvested crops is also topical for the rural population:

*“Many families have greenhouses, they used to grow seedlings in the greenhouses and sell them at the market every day... How can they sell them now or who will buy them?!... This is a single source of income for them... Some families grow flowers in the greenhouses and they face the same problem” (M.I. Pakhulani, 18.05.20).*

*“In the village some people have small greenhouses, some grow cucumbers and others grow strawberries. No one knows how they will manage to sell them. We know nothing about online shopping, so they will lose the results of so much work” (V.K. Orsantia, 19.04.20.).*

## 2.7. Covid-19 Impact on Health Security

The constant psychological stress caused by the pandemic has a serious and negative impact on the health of the population, as evidenced by the response of 28% of surveyed population – **“the pandemic has significantly worsened my health”**.

The study has also revealed the infrastructural problems at one of the IDP’s settlement in Kakhati village, that has severe impact on the health of the population there. Specifically, it is depreciated toilet, with damaged sewer system, located outside of the residential building, in the yard. Unsanitary conditions caused by the damaged toilet and the horrible smell spread in the area constitutes a direct source of many infections and disease and creates serious psychological stress for the population. According to the IDPs interviewed, in the situation when the observation of the hygienic norms becomes crucially important, they unable to observe even basic hygienic norms, which puts their health at a constant risk. The problem is of special concern of elderly persons, the sick people, women, girls and mothers of minors. The residents have repeatedly raised the issue of renovation of the toilet with the local authorities, however, have been numerously refused by the reason that this IDP settlement is being listed under the durable housing solution program for IDPs and the residents are expected to be resettled. However, nobody says when is the exact date of resettlement and how long the IDPs will live in such unbearable conditions.

*“The problem of the toilet is not a new, we wrote numerous letters to all relevant authorities every year, but nothing has changed so far. Usually, people are working and outside of the settlement... but now, it is unbearable when all families aee at home... We are ashamed to talk about it, is there a worse problem than that? There are so many small children in the settlement, especially mothers with minors in agrave situation.” (S.D. Kakhati, 13.05.20)*

*“There is always unsanitary conditions here... We can’t get out of the smell of sewage. Normal people can’t stand living here, but we do not have place to go” – (M.K. Kakhati 13.05.20)*

*„We have been promised to be resettled from this building for many years now, and we stand this in hope to be moved out.... But we don’t know how long is that going to take... you can’t sit in the yard... in such unsanitary conditions, thoudand deseases can be spread, nobody cares about our lives...” – (T.E. Kakhati, 13.05.20)*

*“Once the City Hall helped us, they call a special car and cleaned the toilet. But even then everything was done very poorly. Half was cleaned, and half was left... they said that we will be soon resettled and it’s enough until then... Can you imagine that?! In a few months we faced the same situation again” – (Z.G. Kakhati, 13.05.20)*

## 2.8. Covid-19 Impact on the Population in the Villages Adjacent to the Conflict Dividing Line in Gali district

Although the severe effects of the Covid-19 virus have been painful for the entire population of Georgia, the situation is even more devastating and dramatic for the population living close to dividing line in Gali district. Talking to a representative of the Fund "Sukhumi", women living in the village of Saberio expressed their despair that they were left alone in the face of many challenges, without any attention, support or help. According to them, the situation of Gali district population concerns neither Georgian nor Abkhazian authorities, which has become a common reality of their existence:

*"We were in the same situation with all governments, none of the governments mentioned us. The same thing is happening now. Have you heard anyone mention these days what people are doing and how they live across the "border"? No one cares about us. If I worked on a private hazelnut plantation and the owner paid me the wages, now I am unemployed... who will give me the official certificate that I was employed? No one... So we should starve... Why was this allowance not provided equally to everyone? What was my fault? Some people who do not need this allowance will receive it and we are dying here" (I.G. dividing line – vill. Saberio. 09.05.20)*

*"We are very angry with the government. We are left without any support... They declared about this Anti-Crisis Program and they boast of it. Can you imagine? So many assistances are distributed and these poor people who need them most do not fall into any category. (I.G. dividing line – vill. Saberio. 09.05.20).*

*"There is so much noise about the coronavirus all over the world, but nothing has changed here. No assistance has reached us: we do not even know what we should do, who we have to address, who will help us. We pray to be healthy. We are especially afraid of fever. When we learn that someone is sick, first of all we ask: "does he/she have a fever?" We count only on God. No one else cares about us." (K.K. dividing line – vill. Saberio. 09.05.20).*

The conditions of the elderly have become especially dire, since they have no opportunity to buy medicines necessary for their health, food or other basic necessities due to the lack of pharmacies and shops nearby. Their children who live in Georgia proper used to provide them with these products and now due to the closure of the check-point they can no longer help their parents.

*"I have elderly parents and they live in Gali, both of them suffer from hypertension. They called me and told me that they try to spare hypertension medications, since they do not know what to do if they run out of them. These medications should be taken every day. I am very worried about them. I bought the medications but I do not know how to get it to them, who will take them to my parents" (S.M. Shamgona, 12.04.20.)*

*"Of course, problems are everywhere, but you cannot compare your problems with ours. You have more opportunities to get anything that you miss; if you cannot get it you can borrow it from your neighbor or manage somehow. Here you cannot get anything even with money, there's nowhere you can buy products if you haven't stocked on them..." (M.G. dividing line – vill. Saberio. 09.05.20).*

**The problem of receiving pensions** is topical for the elderly people due to the closure of the checkpoint and restriction of travel:

*"My mother-in-law and father-in-law are both pensioners and they used to get their pension in Pakhulani... A car from Liberty Bank used to arrive there. After closing the roads we did not manage to receive pensions. Even one Lari is so important for us. We all depended on this money. There are a lot of families in the same situation. We do not know what to do. (M.L. Saberio, 09.05.20).*

It has become very difficult to provide education for the children who used to travel to schools to Georgia proper from the other side of the Enguri River. The specific features of online education have created many obstacles for these children: lack of computers and mobile phones with proper parameters and/or inability to cover the Internet service costs create major barriers for them to get involved in the process of education –

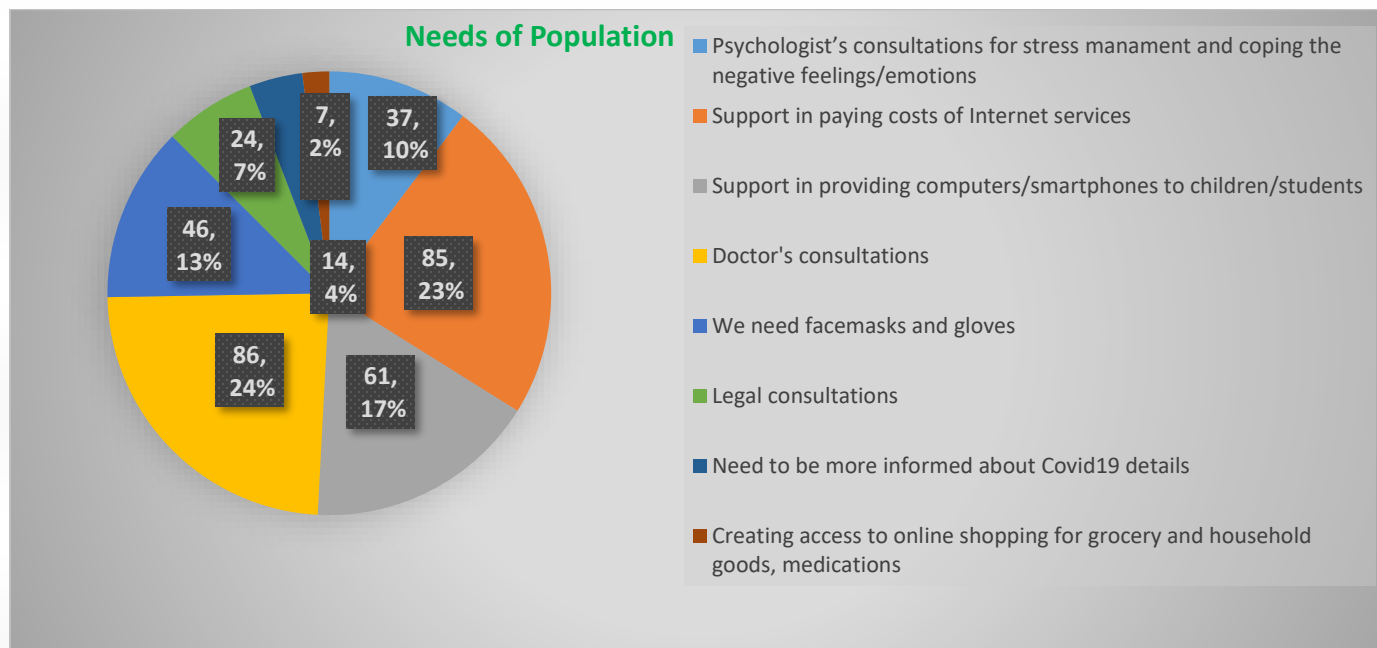
*"Children left in Saberio cannot be involved in the education programs. They do not have money to top up mobile balance. Even if you have the money, how do you pay for it? Some of them ask the relatives to pay for them and this is how they live" (M. A. Tskoushi. 12.04.20)*

## 2.9. Priority Needs of Population

During the study most of the surveyed, namely, 86 out of 320, gave the highest priority to the need for medical checkups and consultations among the listed needs; 85 emphasized support in paying Internet service costs; 61 persons prioritized the need to provide children/students with computers/smartphones to ensure their involvement

in the process of distance learning; the need of provision of facemasks and gloves was emphasized by 46 and providing psychologist's consultations for managing stress and negative feelings/emotions by 37. (See Diagram #7 for the details).

During the information meetings it was mentioned several times that there is a need for **more awareness of the population**, in particular the information about self-government programs should be shared. People believe that today, there is no any needs assessment of different specific and vulnerable groups of the population is undertaken (for example, women, children/school pupils, elderly people, persons with disabilities, women victims of violence, large families etc.) and the local population is not adequately informed about response plans offered by central and local government for the specific problems.



### 3. Response Strategies to Existing Problems - Recommendations

- ❖ **To central and local authorities: To collect gender and age segregated data on the impact of the Covid-19:** To undertake a systematic study of the problems caused by the pandemic and the needs of different vulnerable groups segregated by gender and age (for example, needs assessment of women, men, children/school pupils, seniors, persons with disabilities, women victims of violence, large families, conflict-affected people, population living close to the dividing line through gender analysis, etc.) and developing and implementing response strategies built on evidence-based data;
- ❖ **To central and local authorities: To conduct active consultations with the representatives of civil society.** Government agencies (Council of Human Rights, Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence; Gender Equality Council at Parliament, the Gender Equality Council at City Assemblies etc.) to consult and involve the civil society organizations working with specific vulnerable groups (especially those working in different regions of Georgia) in the process of developing response strategies to the crises;
- ❖ **To central and local authorities, civil society organizations: To support individuals who are stigmatized by the society and are under psychological pressure** due to their professional duties (professionals working in the field of medicine and services) and condemning publicly their marginalization in the society and families;

- ❖ **To central and local authorities:** To provide information on state support programs and assistance to vulnerable groups of people, including conflict affected population living in the both sides of Administrative Boundary Line (ABL);
- ❖ **To central and local authorities:** Public condemnation of the increased facts of domestic violence and declaration of uncompromising and robust response to domestic abuse, and encouragement of the police and all relevant governmental structures to actively and efficiently respond to the facts of domestic violence;
- ❖ **To central and local authorities, civil society organizations, and media:** Actively undertake awareness-raising campaign and promote zero-tolerance toward gender inequality and increased violence, with the active involvement of celebrities, politicians, sportsmen, artists etc. highlighting their negative attitude towards gender stereotypes rooted in the society, condemning increased cases of domestic violence against women and promoting positive changes.
- ❖ **To government of Georgia:** The Georgian authorities should pay more attention to the needs of the Georgian conflict affected population living along the dividing line, in the uncontrolled territory of Georgia (in the Gali district), and consider them in Covid-19 emergency state assistance program;
- ❖ **To central and local authorities:** To provide timely assistance to the rural population in cultivation of the agricultural land and treating agricultural products with special chemicals;
- ❖ **To government of Georgia, international organizations, civil society organizations:** To support vulnerable groups of people in paying costs of internet services and provide children/students with computers/smartphones to ensure their full and uninterrupted involvement in the process of distance learning;
- ❖ **To international Organizations:** To launch flexible and rapid response grant scheme to address the emergency needs of the most vulnerable and people at-risk (grants for the following priority directions: development of small business, job creation, prevention of violence and gender inequality, conducting the needs assessment and involvement of vulnerable groups in decision-making process and in elaboration of crisis response strategy etc.).





## **Cultural-Humanitaria Fund “Sukhumi”**

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