



# THE WORK OF EMC DURING THE PANDEMIC

EMC  
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# Pandemic and Crisis



**Lina Ghvinianidze**  
Executive Director

The Covid-19 pandemic, along with a significant global healthcare challenge, has turned into a major economic and humanitarian crisis for the entire world. International financial institutions are predicting the deepest global recession since World War II, which will critically deepen the already severe rates of inequality and push millions of people back into poverty. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that 400 million (full-time) jobs have been abolished worldwide in the first half of 2020, and the forecast for mitigating the worst consequences of unemployment and workers' social insecurity is vague and hardly reliable.

The severe crisis caused by the pandemic affected Georgia and other countries and it is suggested that the pandemic has created even more difficult short-term or long-term social and economic challenges in economically developing countries. The first case of coronavirus in Georgia was confirmed on February 26th, and was followed by a nationwide state of emergency on March 21st. Prior to the declaration of the state of emergency and at the same time with the aim of reducing the virus, the Georgian government took a number of radical measures. They include restricting international traffic, closing borders, closing public places, suspending classroom education and public transport, and shutting down sectors of the economy, except those facilities necessary for life and basic functioning. Public health risks were significantly reduced due to the unprecedented efforts on the part of the management of the National Centre for Disease Control and the staff of the healthcare sector, by the government's consideration of medical and scientific opinion and the implementation of key recommendations by the population. Therefore, lower rates of the spread of the virus and of subsequent death rates have been reported in Georgia in contrast with those of neighbouring countries.

However, the pandemic created an exceptional crisis in terms of the social and economic security of the population in the country. From the very beginning of the pandemic, it became clear that the economic shock had left thousands of Georgian citizens without minimum income and social security guarantees.

The pandemic highlighted the grave consequences of the privatization of the health sector and encouraged public sentiment about the importance of taking into account the public interest in managing the health sector. At the same time, the pandemic showed us with all intensity the fragility of our country's social and labour policies and the consequences of the absence of social security mechanisms. A significant number of companies chose to dismiss their employees or send them on unpaid leave, leaving large groups of the working population without compensation and social security guarantees and thus facing serious financial challenges. The vast majority of citizens involved in the informal sector and agriculture have instantly lost their only source of income. The situation of households dependent on financial support from outside the country has significantly worsened. During the state of emergency, workers in the public service sector (supermarkets, pharmacies, health and public safety), manufacturing (e.g. clothing industry) and heavy industry sectors continued to work, whose hard and cheap labour proved crucial and vital to the functioning of the country and to creating minimum household and safety guarantees.

It was clear that the country's weak social and labour policy, which even under normal circumstances could hardly provide the basic social security for the population, was completely incapable of protecting the unemployed and incomeless, the elderly, the homeless, children, people with disabilities, students

(especially from outlying regions and occupied territories) and other vulnerable social groups. In response to the urgent needs of the most vulnerable groups of the population, unique practices and precedents of citizens' self-organization and solidarity were established, which played a special role at the initial stage in meeting the vital needs of elderly citizens and those living in extreme poverty.

The anti-crisis economic plan presented by the Georgian government a month after the acute phase of the crisis, which was supposed to distribute the 3.5 billion GEL received from donors and international partners towards the needs of the population, included immediate monetary aid for those in the formal and informal sectors, as well as for social workers in financial hardship. However, the plan instantly raised important questions as to whether the existing plan would be able to meet the real needs of 800,000 self-employed or hired people left with no income. Since the acute phase of the pandemic, the public has been informed about the protests of a number of social groups who were not supported by the government's anti-crisis plan or whose basic demands remained beyond the government's response.

The declaration of a state of emergency has substantially increased the government's authority and significantly reduced the chances for exercising parliamentary control over the ongoing processes in the country. The rise of government's authority, which on the one hand enabled effective and rapid decision-making during the pandemic, jeopardized the proper functioning of democratic institutions. At the same time, public control over the necessity of the state-imposed restrictions, their duration and extent was complicated by the government's exclusive knowledge and research data on epidemics, leaving the process beyond any real democratic control and political discussion. Such a dominance of the ruling power in the political field was based on their attempt to regain legitimacy, which may have played an important role in the pre-election context.

The state of emergency has also significantly increased the intensity of police work, engendering and increased risk of exceeding their powers. The state responded to the protests against the opening of local markets and other social demands in the regions, as well as the protest by the local population in Marneuli due to the difficult social situation, by applying police control rather than providing measures of social support. In addition, Marneuli and Bolnisi, which soon became focal points of the epidemic outbreak and subject to special state restrictions, faced a particularly severe economic crisis, while its Azerbai-

jani-speaking population had to deal with the waves of hate speech coming from ultra-right and radical groups. The pandemic has once again exposed the weakness of state institutions in the face of the Orthodox Church, which, unlike other religious groups, has not ceased gathering in churches and holding public services despite the high risks of spreading the epidemic.

The economic and social consequences of the pandemic crisis are expanding and their long-term negative impact on the well-being of the population and the development of the country is becoming increasingly apparent. According to international financial institutions, by the end of the year, Georgia should expect, in a positive scenario, almost zero economic growth, and a decline in the economy in a negative one. It is important that our global or local experience, at the mitigation of the pandemic's most severe consequences, head towards the radical transformation of the country's economic, health and social systems based on the importance of the ideas of sustainable development, equitable redistribution, affordable health and social security.

During the pandemic, the EMC team used all its resources to provide direct support and legal advice to help people who had been illegally dismissed from their jobs and were left without income. They were also actively involved in identifying the needs of the most vulnerable social groups of the population and suggesting to the state the means of dealing with them.

In addition, EMC used significant resources to assess the scale of the pandemic crisis, to identify and evaluate its consequences, through the preparation of analytical documents or to organize public discussions.

## Labour Policy

The vast majority of employers ceased their work during the pandemic once the restrictions and prohibitions were applied.

The economic crisis, restrictions and prohibitions were followed by gross violations of workers' rights. The refusals to pay salaries became more frequent and so were the cases of applying "forced unpaid leave", reduction of salary, and illegal terminations of employment contracts. However, the workers who continued to work under the pandemic were exposed to higher risks. The miners in Chiatura and Tkibuli, female tailors, sales assistants in shops and pharmacies, nurses and others continued to work even when the disease was spreading the fastest.

In response to violations and increased risks, EMC has launched a hotline and legal advice program. These services were available free of charge to all those who lost their jobs or incomes either fully or partially during the pandemic, to those whose labour rights were violated, and to those whose had to work under dangerous conditions during the epidemic. Up to two hundred people have benefited so far from the hotline and consultations. In addition, EMC responded to isolated cases of gross violations of workers' rights. For example, EMC reacted against the decision of the retail chain "Spar", which forced the employees to stay in the shops during non-working hours and during curfew hours, and called on the Georgian Labour

Inspection to investigate these and other similar cases.

In the situation of crisis, many questions arose, both regarding the responsibilities of employers and the rights of employees. In response to these questions the available resources on workers' rights and employment contracts were prepared. For example, a short guide prepared by EMC clarified whether in an epidemic situation an employer has the right to either send an employee on unpaid leave or terminate an employment contract.

At the same time, EMC launched an information campaign aimed at highlighting the standing of key workers. For example, as part of this initiative, a graphic poster was produced about women tailors who were producing the medical masks a product necessary for public health during the pandemic and they did it under conditions of overtime and low-paid, hard physical labour. -

Due to the unpredictability of the political and media agenda and the centrality to them of the epidemic, the struggle for workers' rights and a fair social policy has become considerably more complex.

A few days before the declaration of the state of emergency, following the poisoning of three miners with carbon monoxide in the tunnel connect-

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**306 შრომობს,  
როცა ყველაფერი ჩერდება?**

შრომობს ტექსტილის ფაბრიკის მკერავი ქალი!

ღირსების შემლახავი დისციპლინის ქვეშ,  
შრომობს ზეგანაკვეთურად!

**თვეში 300-450 ლარად!**










**ის ასრულებს აუცილებელ სამუშაოს:  
კერავს პირბადეებს.**

#სამართალიმშრომელს

ing the coal mines in Tkibuli, the miners refused to continue working until their safety was ensured, and they held a rally. EMC actively participated in this action, both in terms of supporting the development of miners' requirements and due to the wider public interest in the issue. Last May, EMC filed a class action lawsuit against Evolution Gaming, in which it represents the 14 employees sacked during probation. EMC continues to participate in the ongoing process of the Adjara Public Broadcasting Service, where the newly formed trade union continues to fight for employees' rights and editorial independence.

**In this respect the following were also prepared:**

-  **Statement - EMC calls the Georgian Labour Inspection for an immediate inspection of "Spar"**
-  **Statement - The coal miners poisoned by carbon monoxide in Tkibuli - response**
-  **Statement – EMC filed formal collective complaints against Evolution Gaming**
-  **Statement – EMC appealed to the Court regarding the cases of journalists at Adjara TV**
-  **Video - May 1st – International Labour Day**
-  **Video – The chronicle of three months of persecution of journalists at the Adjara Public Broadcasting Service**
-  **The series of videos - COVID-19 and labour rights**
-  **Analytical document - Coronavirus and labour rights**
-  **Analytical document - Coronavirus and labour rights – frequently asked questions**
-  **Series of infographics - justice for workers**



 **Video – May 1<sup>st</sup> – International Labour Day**

## Social and economic policy

Since the degree and gravity of the economic crisis caused by COVID 19 was revealed, various states have introduced anti-crisis programs. The Government of Georgia started submitting its anti-crisis plan in stages from April 24th. Both business support and social assistance programmes for various vulnerable groups were proposed, which included both the employed and self-employed, the socially vulnerable population, farmers and others.

on the study of the legal rights of workers during the pandemic, the other one on the study of the most vulnerable parts of the labour market - the self-employed and the casual sector. The studies identified the main challenges in these sectors, the severity of which was exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as the main risks faced by some employees due to the epidemic.

Media products adapted for the wider public were prepared regarding the existing challenges and risks. One summarizes the social consequences of the pandemic crisis, while the other summarizes the impact of the crisis on women. In addition, an animated poster was prepared regarding the minimum wage.

EMC researchers dedicated several analytical papers to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and its socio-economic effects. One of them focused





 **Economic policy in times of crisis: Interviews with researchers in economics**

















The acknowledgment of the responsibility of the state towards various vulnerable groups of the population and their direct assistance is an important step forward. It is also noteworthy that anti-crisis programs also address the needs of groups - such as the self-employed, the informal workers, and others - who typically remain outside the attention of the state. Nevertheless, the limitations identified in anti-crisis programs call into question their social justice and sustainability.

EMC monitored and evaluated the elaboration of anti-crisis programs and their administration. Since its release, EMC has been assessing the potential long-term effects of the plan and pointing out the shortcomings and failures of the anti-crisis plan, informing the wider public about the situation of various vulnerable groups and emerging social risks, including topics such as traders' and employers' banking problems and the social impact of the gambling industry, which deserve more attention but are often left out of the agenda.

The pandemic has hit the existing healthcare and social service systems especially hard. Two interviews with a specialist in the field of healthcare were published ("Health Policy in Crisis" - interviews with Nino Khelaia and Tengiz Verulava). Statements about the failures of the existing social protection system, which were particularly evident during the pandemic and a possible response to them were published. The links between social and repressive politics in a pandemic situation also became the topic of the online public discussion.

In the context of the crisis, interviews with economic researchers on economic policy were published. The interviews addressed the coronavirus-induced labour market transformation, the National Bank anti-crisis policy, and other relevant issues.

**In this respect the following were also prepared:**

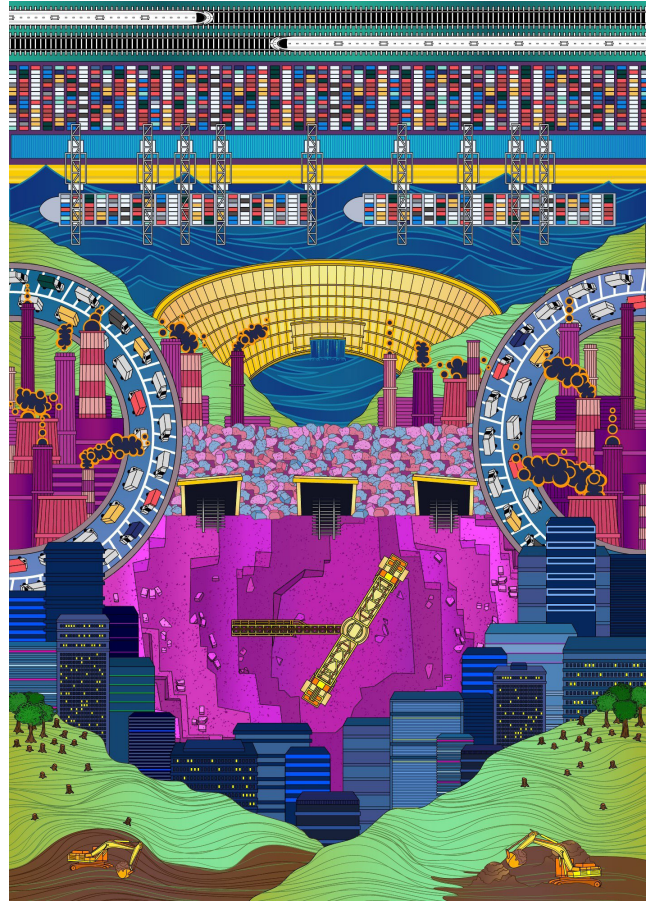
-  Statement – EMC evaluates the government’s anti-crisis plan
-  Statement - Significant deficiencies and risks are identified in anti-crisis programmes
-  Statement - EMC calls the government to protect the vulnerable groups from potential starvation
-  Statement - EMC: The government should consider the needs of all vulnerable groups within the anti-crisis plan
-  Statement - EMC requires the government to help traders and the self-employed in restructuring loans
-  Statement - EMC requires child protection from the gambling industry
-  Statement - Coronavirus and the need for a temporary allowance
-  Statement – EMC calls the government to instruct employers to provide their employees with transportation
-  Statement – EMC requests the suspension of auctions, seizures of bank accounts and deduction procedures
-  Statement – EMC demands the government assist traders and self-employed in restructuring their loans
-  Interview – Healthcare policy in time of crisis – interview with Nino Khelaia
-  Interview - Healthcare policy in time of crisis – interview with Tengiz Verulava
-  Interview - Economic policy in time of crisis: interviews with economic researchers
-  Blog – Corona is only a beginning: the economics of needs and the economics of solidarity
-  Discussion - Repressive and social policy in time of crisis
-  Video – Unemployment reflected in numbers and statistics








## Green policy

Pandemic conditions have dramatically increased the risk of neglecting a natural resource policy review, environmental regulations, and environmental impact assessment procedures. EMC responded to the forced regime of hydropower development and the construction of hydropower plants, legally assessed the decisions made in the pandemic situation regarding several hydropower plants and applied to the court to declare the environmental decision issued over the “Bakhvi 2” hydroelectric power plant as illegal.

Two perspectives on the role of natural resources in crisis situations have been published - the first (“Financial landscape, natural capital”) on the new wave of privatization of natural resources and public spaces; the second is about the history of Tkibuli coal and the current state of the city (“Tkibuli, pandemic and extractivism”).



### In this respect the following were also prepared:

-  [Statement - EMC: building of hydroelectric power plants in a forced regime is impermissible](#)
-  [Statement – The environmental permission given for “Bakhvi 2” HPP is illegal – EMC applies to the Court](#)
-  [Blog - Financial landscape, natural capital](#)
-  [Blog - Tkibuli, pandemic and extractivism](#)
-  [Blog - The gold rush and global pandemic](#)

## The right to adequate housing

The absence / insufficiency of legislation, policies, and services in the housing sector became even more acute during the pandemic - with proactive and effective state intervention in this area becoming vital for various homeless groups. Despite the challenges, the Georgian government's anti-crisis plan has left homeless people out of sight.

During the pandemic, the organization sought to address the need for providing accommodation for homeless groups in a variety of ways. In particular, EMC has drawn up several applications and multimedia products based on the studies of international standards and the country's experience.



EMC responses mainly focused on the challenges that homeless groups had to face during the pandemic - including the lack of a safe environment, inadequate access to water, and lack of relevant information. Given the challenges, EMC called on central and local governments to identify proactively homeless groups as soon as possible and provide them with safe shelter as well as other conditions necessary for living. The recommendations also highlighted the need to support individuals in a state of extreme social vulnerability, including providing social packages and benefits tailored to their needs.





The organization also advocated the support of those at risk of eviction and called for a moratorium on evictions, at least until the spread of virus reaches a certain equilibrium in the country. In addition to this requirement, EMC stressed the need to suspend auctions, seizure of bank accounts and deductions, as well as provide adequate support for evicted persons.



EMC მოაკრებს მოწყვლადი ჯგუფების უიმეილისგან დასაცავის მოთხოვნებს

In addition to important aspects of combating homelessness, the organization also emphasized the need for providing adequate food to the socially vulnerable. Given the facts of complete or partial loss of income for many people, EMC called on the government to proactively identify socially vulnerable groups, provide them with food and allocate relevant financial resources for this purpose as soon as possible. The organization's recommendations also included the long term perspectives on the development of a unified, systematic policy for the provision of food to vulnerable populations, taking international experience into account.

### In this respect the following were also prepared:

-  **Statement - EMC calls the government to provide special protection for the homeless amid the spread of the coronavirus**
-  **Statement - EMC demands the suspension of auctions, seizures of bank accounts and deductions procedures**
-  **Statement - EMC calls the government to protect the vulnerable groups from starvation**
-  **Infographics - COVID-19 and homelessness – what are the obligations of the state**

## Rights of persons with disabilities

During the pandemic, the legal status and social welfare of persons with disabilities faced significant challenges. It is noteworthy that the government’s anti-crisis plan covered certain groups of people with disabilities - namely, severely disabled people and children with disabilities. However, it left hundreds out of sight and did not take into account the needs of severely and moderately disabled people and those children who, according to the existing regulations, are not granted the status of a person with disabilities.

stressed the need for the government to provide effective and unhindered information to persons with disabilities, to maintain and modify support mechanisms / services, to provide additional social services, and to provide them with continuous access to education and employment. The organization focused on the need to protect the beneficiaries of large institutions, given the high risk of their infection on the one hand, and the weakness of state monitoring mechanisms on the other.

At the same time, EMC, together with a number of organizations and representatives of the disabled community, addressed the Parliament with recommendations to consider the risks of COVID-19 infection and the vulnerability of persons with disabilities during the discussion of the draft law on the rights of persons with disabilities. It also called upon the Parliament to come up with alternative effective mechanisms for involving community representatives in the process, including remote communication.

EMC’s responses during the pandemic aimed to focus on the content of the commitment of the state to support effectively persons with disabilities. In addition to various important aspects, the organization

7 ღონისძიება, რომელიც კორონავირუსის პირთა შიშს  
სახელმწიფო შშმ პირთა უფლებების დასაცავად უნდა უზრუნველყოს

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 <p>შექმნილი ვითარების შესახებ ინფორმირება</p>	 <p>მხარდაჭერის პროგრამების შენარჩუნება და შექმნილ გარემოებებთან ადაპტირება</p>	 <p>დამატებითი მხარდაჭერა სოციალური დაცვისა და ჯანდაცვის სფეროებში</p>	 <p>ფინანსური დახმარება</p>	 <p>საგანმანათლებლო რესურსებზე თანაბარი წვდომა</p>	 <p>ინსტიტუციების მაცხოვრებლების უფლებებისა და უსაფრთხოების დაცვა</p>	 <p>ფსიქიკური ჯანმრთელობის დამატებითი სერვისები</p>
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**In this respect the following were also prepared:**

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**Statement - COVID-19 and the special need for protecting the rights of the persons with disabilities**
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**Statement - Persons with disabilities assess the discussion of the draft law on “the rights of the persons with disabilities”**
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**Infographics - COVID-19 and the persons with disabilities – what measures should the state take**

## State of emergency during COVID 19

The pandemic and the measures taken by the state to deal with it have created significant challenges for the proper functioning of democratic institutions, and also in terms of the use of excessive force by the police.

A state of emergency was declared in the country using a faulty procedure. The President of Georgia has fully delegated her powers to the Government and the Cabinet of Ministers, while the specific restrictions and prohibitions set by

the latter have remained beyond parliamentary control.

Restrictions and sanctions imposed under the state of emergency, in their turn, showed a sense of injustice and disproportion; At the same time, the state did not have effective communication with specific sections of the population over the content of specific restrictions. Therefore, the main mechanisms for enforcing the restrictions imposed for public health purposes were strict sanctions and coercive measures by the police.










Among other rights, access to public information was restricted under the state of emergency. Thus, certain agencies used the restrictions unscrupulously and did not provide such important information to the citizens as would help to inform them about the activities of these agencies and the situation in the country.

In parallel with the end of the state of emergency in the country, the parliament made amendments to the Law on Public Health, and to the Codes of Administrative Offences and Criminal Law. Legislative changes have introduced blanket and disproportionately severe sanctions for violating the requirements / restrictions established during the pandemic; at the same time, the executive has been over equipped with excessive power to restrict constitutional human rights in a similar situation by bypassing parliamentary and judicial control.

EMC has prepared several analytical documents and statements about these issues, focusing on the dangers of the law enforcement officers exceeding their power, the importance of access to public information, especially in situations where citizens' freedom of movement, assembly and expression, and other constitutional rights are restricted. EMC also prepared a special report on the legal settlement of the state of emergency and its political significance. The document analyses the Georgian experience of fighting the pandemic, in particular the constitutional-legal framework, within which the government acted to deal with the pandemic. The report critically assesses the concentration of excessive power in the hands of the government and the ineffective control of the executive branch of government by the parliament.



- In this respect the following were also prepared:**
-  **Statement - EMC responds to the potential cases of violence on the part of police**
  -  **Statement - EMC responds to the removal of traders' counters in different cities**
  -  **Statement - EMC: Agencies are expected to release public information in a timely and complete manner in case of emergency**
  -  **Statement - EMC: Planned changes to the Health Law contain risks of human rights violations**
  -  **Analytical document - Legal and political content of the state of emergency - analysis of existing experience**
  -  **Article - The state of emergency and a new reality**
  -  **Discussion - The legal and political content of the state of emergency**

## Locked-down Marneuli and Bolnisi face to face with a humanitarian crisis and hate speech

In the wake of the quarantine in the Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities during the pandemic, the weakness of integration policies and the difficult social life of the regions were once again strongly reflected in the development of the events.

In the very first phase of the pandemic, a particularly high rate (35%) of those infected with the virus was observed in the Kvemo Kartli region, which once again raised the issue of the informational isolation of minorities. The analysis of the work of state agencies in the Kvemo Kartli region shows that self-governments and territorial bodies of state agencies have not provided important minority language translations (e.g. websites, social networks, policy documents, regulations, social services, and budget) to minorities. Due to the fact that the knowledge of the state language is a problem for a large part of the local Azerbaijani and Armenian-speaking population, such approaches increase the political alienation and isolation of the community. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the Public Broadcasting Service does not broadcast information on television in a minority language or it does so in extremely restricted and unstable formats. It is not enough to distribute materials translated into minority languages on the Internet platform, since the Internet is not available to a large part of the population in these regions. Although some government agencies attempted to translate information related to the pandemic, its prevention, and measures taken by government agencies during the pandemic, the practice was

fragmented, unsustainable, and un-institutionalized.

As soon as the quarantine was applied, it became clear that the Marneuli and Bolnisi self-governments did not have sufficient experience and social support policies to meet adequately the humanitarian needs of the people living in the locked-down region.

More than one hundred families called our hotline. Their main concerns were the loss of daily income due to the quarantine, and the problem of providing for children and the elderly. However, by the end of the pandemic, not even 10% of our beneficiaries had received self-sufficient humanitarian support, which was already scarce and unfairly distributed. This challenge should have provided an important motivation for gaining an understanding of the practice of social support within self-governments, and for developing the anti-crisis social plan. However, policy planning efforts in this direction by the agencies have not so far been evident.

Under the conditions of strict quarantine, the local population was worried about the risks of exporting and deteriorating agricultural products, which is why several protest marches were held in Marneuli during the quarantine. The cycle of rallies once again showed the alienation and distrust of the population towards self-governments and state institutions. At the same time, it became clear that, despite the high contribution and labour of the Kvemo Kartli region in agricultural production, the agricultural infrastructure in this municipality is not sufficiently developed and supported by the state; It stands largely on the hard work and





 **Blog – The Quarantine Diaries – Aytaj Khalili**

self-organization of the local workers. Unfortunately, the anti-crisis plan to support agriculture, which was published by the government, did not adequately address the interests and needs of small farmers. The plan does not meet the challenges facing local farmers.

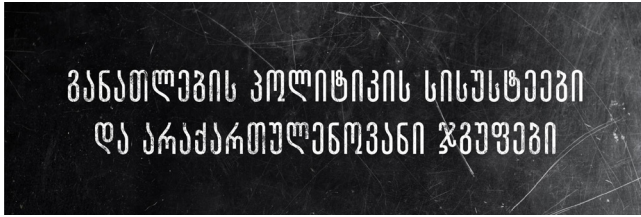
The practice of aggressive penalties imposed by the police further aggravated the local social situation in quarantine conditions. Linguistic barriers in police activities, ignorance of the local social context and arbitrariness have made the population even more vulnerable. It is noteworthy that in response to the social unrest, the rally organized by the locals was followed by the brutal intervention of the State Security Service and the launch of an investigation into sabotage, during which the Chair of the Supreme Religious Administration of All Georgia’s Muslims, Mirtag Asadov was summoned for questioning.

The announcement of quarantine was followed by a wave of hate speech against Georgian Azerbaijanis, which dramatically radicalized and marginalized this community. A public official, who did not get

an appropriate response from the state authorities, also made such discriminatory statements. It is noteworthy that ultra-right and radical groups organized racist and xenophobic attacks on the social network. Activation of these groups was also observed during the pandemic and afterwards, and was particularly tense after the Marneuli Mayor renovated the Nariman Narimanov’s monument, which was openly opposed by the Marneuli and Hujab diocese. Against this background, the State Security Service launched an investigation into racial discrimination and summoned a number of Azerbaijani activists and human rights activists, including Tamta Mikeladze, the director of the EMC Equality Policy Program. The investigation launched by SSG manifested elements of control of freedom of expression over civil activists and their activities. In recent years, there has been an interesting experience of emancipation and civic activism in the Azerbaijani community of Georgia, which seeks to achieve social change in the community through criticism and self-organization. Examining the public positions and criticism of activists as part of the investigation may have the effect of weakening freedom of expression and social activism. This investigation once again demonstrates the problem of looking at minorities through the eyes of the State Security. Although the discussion of the monument and the radicalization of the processes by ultra-conservative groups required a timely political solution, none of the political agencies, including the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, even appeared throughout the process. High-ranking state officials never responded to the aggressive waves of chauvinistic and racist language; nor did they bother to take the responsibility of transforming the escalation of aggression into the format of democratic discussions.



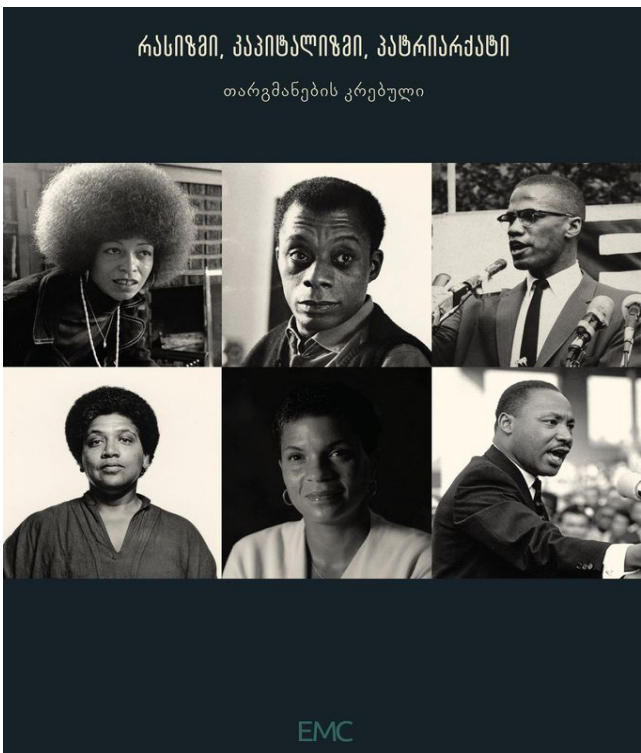
Photograph: Salome Latsabidze



**Article – The weaknesses of education policy and non-Georgian speaking groups**

The pandemic has also exposed education challenges in ethnic minority communities as well as the fact that schools in the region have not been properly prepared for online teaching. Due to the problems related to Internet access, relevant devices, technological knowledge and social challenges, only a very small number of students attended online classes. It is clear that in the light of the general difficulties in accessing proper education in non-Georgian language schools, the current crisis will have an even greater impact on the education of schoolchildren. It is noteworthy that in the context of the pandemic created in our country and also because of the racist practices in the United States, in the wake of the ongoing mass protests in America, EMC sought to translate and disseminate the speeches and texts of black authors and activists on racism, capitalism, and patriarchy.

In response to the challenges, EMC has organized several public discussions involving researchers and community members.



In addition, EMC provided relevant government agencies with daily information on the problems identified on the spot, sharing recommendations and visions.

**In this respect the following were also prepared:**

-  Statement - EMC addresses the Georgian Public Broadcasting Service
-  Statement - EMC evaluates the process of interrogation of Mirtag Asadov and its legal and social context
-  Statement - EMC responds to the social crisis in Marneuli and Bolnisi
-  Statement - EMC: the agricultural anti-crisis plan is unfair
-  Statement - EMC responds to the investigation carried out by SSG and Tamta Mikeladze's interrogation process
-  Statement – Social organizations call the government to create a political process regarding the Narimanov's monument
-  Blog – The Quarantine Diaries – Aitaj Khalili
-  Article - The weaknesses of the education policy and non-Georgian speaking groups
-  Article - Online teaching in the region: the experience of Kvemo Kartli
-  Translation - Racism, Capitalism, Patriarchy – a collection of translated works
-  Research - Consultation mechanisms of ethnic minorities – Georgian reality and international experience
-  Research - The needs of ethnic minorities, the Public Broadcasting Service and the pandemic
-  Discussion - Lockdown in Marneuli and Blonisi - face to face with social crisis and racism
-  Discussion – “Us” and “others”? – cultural policy in Kvemo Kartli



## The ongoing processes in Adjara TV

Despite the high interest in accessing relevant information during the pandemic, the new management of the Adjara Public Broadcasting Service shut down some important social programs and continued the policy of dismissing employees and disciplinary persecution during this period. The new management sacked almost all critically minded and independent journalists and editors, which ultimately had a severe impact on the content and editorial policy produced by the broadcasting service.



**▶ Video - The three months chronicle of the persecution of journalists at Adjara Public Broadcasting Service**

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დისკუსია:  
**აჭარის გაუწყობელი - პოლიტიკური და მედია კონტექსტი**



**მალხაზ რეხვიაშვილი**  
აჭარის საზოგადოებრივი მაუწყებლის  
ალტერნატიული პროფესიული  
გაერთიანების თავმჯდომარე;



**გოგი გვახარია**  
კინომცოდნე



**ლაშა ქავთარაძე**  
მედიის მკვლევარი







**თამთა მიქელაძე**  
EMC (დისკუსიის მოდერატორი)



**🗣️ Discussion - Adjara Public Broadcasting Service – political and media context**

**In this respect the following were also prepared:**

-  **Statement - EMC is launching an investigation against the director of Adjara Broadcasting Service**
-  **Statement – EMC has appealed to the court regarding the cases of Adjara TV journalists**
-  **Video – The three months chronicle of the persecution of journalists at Adjara Public Broadcasting Service**
-  **Discussion – Adjara Public Broadcasting Service – political and media context**

## The pandemic situation and relevant challenges in the occupied territories

The de facto authorities of the occupied regions found themselves unprepared for responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Given the difficult situation, it was fundamentally important that the Georgian government should assist the people living in these areas and use the crisis for transforming the conflict.









### Blog – The dawn seems different across Enguri

EMC repeatedly addressed the Government of Georgia with this request. Among their requests, EMC strongly stressed the need to address the social needs (accommodation fees, food, tuition fees, etc.) of Georgian university students from regions of conflict. Eventually, some of the students received financial support from the state.



### Blog - Walking on a steep cliff or on the edge between recognition and non-recognition

#### In this respect the following were also prepared:

-  Statement - EMC requests special social assistance for students
-  Blog – Akhlagori in lockdown and face to face with Coronavirus
-  Blog - Walking on a steep cliff or on the edge between recognition and non-recognition
-  Blog – The dawn seems different across Enguri
-  Blog – Graveyard of the fireflies
-  Discussion - Isolation within the isolation – challenges in conflict regions

## Pandemic and the Church

In the conditions of the pandemic, the problem of the high loyalty of the government to the notion of ecclesiastical assemblies was patently obvious, despite the high risk of domination by the Orthodox Church and the threat it posed to life and health. Clearly, it is important that the government use the path of negotiation and persuasion with the Church, however, it was quite evident that the Patriarchate commanded the excessive loyalty of state officials.



Apart from the fact that the state did not have the resources to endorse appropriate legal regulations restricting the freedom of religion during the pandemic, the state did not respond appropriately to obvious cases of violation of the requirements of the current law. The conditions of the pandemic coincided with the enactment of a new rule on the exclusive transfer of large-scale forest masses to the Georgian Patriarchate under the new Forest Code, which was another indication of political loyalty to the Patriarchate.

During this period, EMC actively disseminated information on pandemics, religion, and Church issues. To

### 📡 Pandemic and the idea of solidarity – The views of clergy and theologians

this end, a number of analytical articles and blogs have been published.

It should be noted that a large part of our population did not come to Church during the Easter liturgies and instead favoured the protection of life. This public approach is also reflected in a recent report published by NDI.



📡 Blog –Pandemic and the Church – Zurab Jashi



📡 Blog - Pandemic and the Church – Irakli Jinjolava

### In this respect the following were also prepared:

- 📄 Article – Plague, part one: the state of emergency
- 📡 Blog - Pandemic and the Church – Zurab Jashi
- 📡 Blog - Pandemic and the Church – Irakli Jinjolava
- 📡 Blog - Pandemic and the Church – Shota Kintsurashvili
- 📡 Blog - Pandemic and the Church – Giorgi Maisuradze
- 📡 Blog - Pandemic and the Church – Mirian Gamrekelashvili
- 📡 Blog - Pandemic and the idea of solidarity – the views of clergy and theologians
- 🗣️ Discussion - Pandemic and the Church



APRIL 15<sup>TH</sup>  
 PANDEMIC AND THE CHURCH

Within the framework of the online discussion with Georgian theologians Basil Kobakhidze and Zurab Jashi we discussed issues such as: the political and social aspects of the relationship between Church and state; the political and theological dimensions of the decision made by the Georgian Patriarchate; The weak social service and practice of solidarity performed by the Georgian Patriarchate; the systemic reasons and the potential ways out of the crisis created at the Patriarchate.



APRIL 22<sup>ND</sup>  
 MARNEULI AND BOLNISI IN LOCKDOWN –  
 FACE TO FACE WITH SOCIAL CRISIS AND RACIST ATTITUDES

The purpose of the discussion was to assess critically the social needs of the local population and the social policy of the state in the context of the declaration of quarantine in the municipalities of Marneuli and Bolnisi.



APRIL 24<sup>TH</sup>  
 THE EXCESSIVE POWER OF SSG AND THE LOW  
 LEVEL OF ACCOUNTABILITY

The discussion aimed to analyse critically the activities of the State Security Service of Georgia and its unrestrained power as well as the existing mechanisms of its accountability.



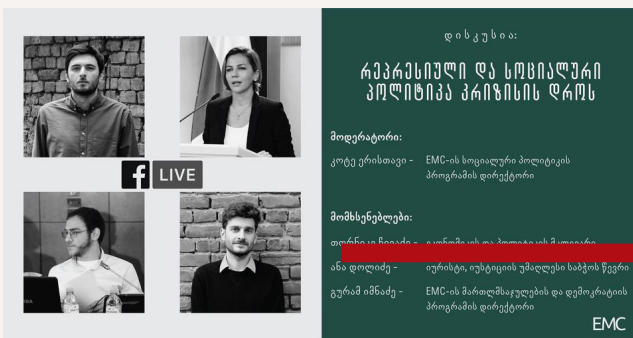
APRIL 29<sup>TH</sup>  
ISOLATION WITHIN THE ISOLATION -  
CHALLENGES OF CONFLICT REGIONS DURING A PANDEMIC

During the discussion, the speakers discussed the systemic social and humanitarian challenges in Gali and Akhalkgori and the crisis prevailing during the pandemic. Also, about the extent to which similar crises have resources for conflict transformation, and the elucidation of our context in this regard.



MAY 2<sup>ND</sup>  
ADJARA PUBLIC BROADCASTING SERVICE -  
POLITICAL AND MEDIA CONTEXT

Within the discussion framework the presenters discussed the media environment in Georgia on the whole and the role and potentials of the Public Broadcasting Service within the existing polarized atmosphere.



MAY 6<sup>TH</sup>  
REPRESSIVE AND SOCIAL POLICIES IN TIME OF CRISIS

The purpose of the discussion was to assess the relationship between the repressive machine of the state and social challenges from different perspectives in the light of the situation during the pandemic. In particular, the identification and analysis of the mechanisms the state uses to manage the crisis, of the balance between repressive and welfare mechanisms, and to what extent the economic policy of the state determines the viability of violent practices.

# ONLINE DISCUSSIONS DURING THE PANDEMIC

ლგბტპი აღაზიანთა მდგომარეობის სოციალ-ეკონომიკური ასპექტები პანდემიის დროს

დავით კახაბერი  
თანასწორობის მოძრაობა (Equality Movement)

ბედა გაბადაძე  
სოციალური მუშაკი

ნათია მჭედლიშვილი  
ქალთა ინოვაციების მხარდაჭერი ცენტრი (WISG)

სოლო ბაილაძე  
იდენტობა იუს (Identity Youth)

ლიკა ჯალაღანია  
მიდევრატორი (EMC)

13 მაისი, 17:00  
EMC

MAY 13<sup>TH</sup>  
THE STATE OF LGBTQ PERSONS IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

The economic and social crises caused by the New Coronavirus presented the Georgian population with critical challenges and showed it the degree of inequality which affected the most vulnerable population in particularly acute forms. The aim of the discussion was to identify the grave and most urgent needs of LGBTQ persons and to put them on the state agenda within a critical perspective.

დისკუსია: სავანებო მდგომარეობის სამართლებრივი და პოლიტიკური შინაარსი არსებული გამოცდილების ანალიზი

თორნიკე გვერდიანი

თამარ სამხარაძე

გიორგი ბურჯანაძე

ბალა ანდრონიკაშვილი

გურამ იწაძე

22 მაისი, 17:00  
EMC

MAY 22<sup>ND</sup>  
LEGAL AND POLITICAL CONTENT OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY -  
ANALYSIS OF EXISTING EXPERIENCE

The purpose of the discussion was to understand the Georgian experience of the state of emergency and the risks associated with fighting the pandemic in legal and political terms.

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ქალთა შრომა და შინშრომა

თამარ ცხადაძე

ალუქსანდრა აროშვილი

მარიამ ჭანჭალაშვილი

ანა ილურიძე

ლიკა ჯალაღანია

17 ივნისი, 17:00 სთ  
EMC

JUNE 17<sup>TH</sup>  
WOMEN'S LABOUR AND DOMESTIC LABOUR

The discussion focused on women's labour and unpaid domestic labour in the face of the pandemic, which has expanded the scope of this labour and placed a particularly heavy burden on women. The discussion reviewed existing feminist theoretical approaches to labour and focused on those forms of labour that are rarely on the feminist agenda, namely care and emotional labour issues, and focused on rethinking current approaches and creating new political agendas, which will reconsider the women's labour in new forms and highlight the role of the state.

## Legal support for labour and social rights violations under Covid-19

In the context of the pandemic, due to the increased risk of labour rights violations, EMC launched a 24-hour hotline and remote consultation mechanisms, where the interested people had access to legal assistance on labour and social rights violations through consultations, the preparation of legal documents and help with court proceedings.

In the process of giving legal advice, it was revealed that the violation of labour rights during the pandemic manifested in illegal and unjustified dismissals, violations of labour safety norms, the compulsion to use unpaid leave for an indefinite period, the reduction of remuneration, unjustified dismissals during the probation, violations of the rules of maternity leave, etc. The consultations clearly demonstrated the weakness of national legislation and the need for effective labour inspections.

### BY EMC'S SUPPORT:

MORE THAN 200 PEOPLE BENEFITED FROM THE LEGAL ADVICE

ABOUT 20 LEGAL DOCUMENTS WERE PRODUCED

THE ORGANIZATION APPLIED TO THE COURT ABOUT THE 11 CASES OF THEIR BENEFICIARIES LABOUR RIGHTS' VIOLATIONS

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## Legal assistance to citizens living in Kvemo Kartli during a pandemic

As soon as the quarantine was announced, it became clear that the Marneuli and Bolnisi self-governments did not have sufficient experience and social support policies to meet adequately the humanitarian needs of the people living in the lockdown region.

need for assistance. 19 cases concerned legal issues, in particular the state of emergency, cases of its violation and dismissals during the pandemic. We have selected the 6 ongoing cases of the violation of the state of emergency. Out of this, we won one case and the Ministry of Internal Affairs satisfied our complaint: the fine imposed on the citizen was cancelled. The other 5 cases are still pending.

During the pandemic, we provided consultations to citizens living in Marneuli, Gardabani and Bolnisi - up to 150 consultations in total. The vast majority of these concerned social issues, in particular the

In other consultations, we redirected the citizens to the City Hall, the government administration and monitored whether the agencies were helping them or not.

### BY EMC'S SUPPORT:

MORE THAN 150 PEOPLE RECEIVED LEGAL ADVICE

6 CASES OF VIOLATION OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY WERE PURSUED

THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS SATISFIED ONE COMPLAINT ABOUT THE CASE OF VIOLATION OF THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

# DONOR ORGANIZATIONS AND PROJECTS THAT ENABLE EMC TO CARRY OUT THE ACTIVITIES LISTED IN THIS REPORT

EAST • WEST  
MANAGEMENT  
INSTITUTE  
*Promoting Rule of Law  
in Georgia (PROLoG)*

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra  
  
Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia



 HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG  
TBILISI  
South Caucasus Region



## EWMI-PROLOG

**Project:** Improving Human Rights Conditions for Marginalized Groups through Strategic Litigation

## EMBASSY OF SWITZERLAND IN GEORGIA

**Project:** Strengthening ethnic minority integration and rights protection via research, education, advocacy, and confidence-building activities

## UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME (UNDP)

**Project:** Self-employment and Covid-19

## OPEN SOCIETY GEORGIA FOUNDATION (OSGF)

**Project:** Labour rights during the pandemic

## HEINRICH BÖLL FOUNDATION TBILISI OFFICE - SOUTH CAUCASUS REGION

**Project:** Mining Industries and related social-ecological aspects

## OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

**Project:** To support policy advocacy and new practice on the right to the legal capacity for the persons with disabilities

## SWEDISH ASSOCIATION FOR SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RFSU)

**Project:** Strengthen the human rights situation of LGBT persons, advocate SRHR issues and support the queer activists



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