CRRC GEORGIA

REPORT

COVID-19 MONITOR: WAVE 4

Tbilisi, Georgia

May, 2020

ABOUT CRRC GEORGIA

CRRC-Georgia is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization, which collects, analyzes and publishes policy relevant data on social, economic and political trends to strengthen social science research and public policy analysis in the South Caucasus.

RIGHTS AND PERMISSIONS

SUPPORT FOR THIS PROJECT

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Kingdom of the Netherlands

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KEY FINDINGS

INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE

- Attitudes towards overall institutional performance aside from Corona specific performance have increased across the board since before the crisis. The largest increase in approval of performance was for the Prime Minister. Other institutions with particularly low performance assessments prior to the crisis have also experienced large gains.

POLICY APPROVAL

- The public continues to be highly supportive of most policies, with the least approved of policy being opening outdoor recreational areas (80%) approval;
- The vast majority of the public would support providing aid to South Ossetia and Abkhazia;
- The public tends towards a mix of approval and uncertainty over the usage of contact tracing applications.

ECONOMY

- The data provide both signs of intensive economic strain and some positive signs in terms of recovery: while 29% of people in the country report losing a job at some point during the crisis, 8% report they have gone back to work. Median and average income halved during the crisis, but there are signs that incomes have begun to recover, albeit very slightly.
- Food security remains a significant challenge, with no declines in either the share reporting a food security issue or the frequency with which they experienced it.

SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

- The vast majority of households are worried about both their financial situation and potentially being infected with Coronavirus. Yet, a plurality thinks their household will be better off 12 months from now.

PRACTICES

- The share of people who report going out of the home to socialize remains similar to in past weeks, with a third of the population leaving the home to socialize.

HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

- There is generally high levels of access to distance based learning.
- One in six students are aware of financial concessions from their universities, but uncertainty is high with regard to whether or not these are available and most respondents report they are not.

INTRODUCTION

Covid-19 has led to wide ranging changes in societies around the world. The response in Georgia has been particularly effective to date. In order to provide the Government of Georgia and the international community with an evidence base to support decision making, CRRC Georgia is conducting the Covid-19 Monitoring Project. The project is supported by the Embassy of the Netherlands in Tbilisi. Within the project CRRC will carry out six nationally representative telephone surveys focused on knowledge, attitudes, and practices surrounding the crisis. This document provides the results of the second wave of the survey.

The survey was conducted over cell phone between May 21 and 23. The results are nationally representative, with a margin of error of 3.1%. Overall 1,002 individuals responded to the survey. Respondents were selected using random digit dialing to ensure that a representative sample was taken. The response rate was 38.8%. The data was then weighted to population characteristics using census data. The details of the survey methodology are provided in Annex 1 of this report.

The data analysis below uses frequencies and cross tabulations. Cross tabulations provide differences between different groups and a chi-square test or t-test is used to test for statistical significance of apparent differences. Tests for differences between the following groups were conducted within the study:

- Settlement types (Tbilisi, other urban, rural);
- Age groups (18-34, 35-54, 55+);
- Education levels (Secondary or vocational, tertiary);
- Sex (Male versus female);

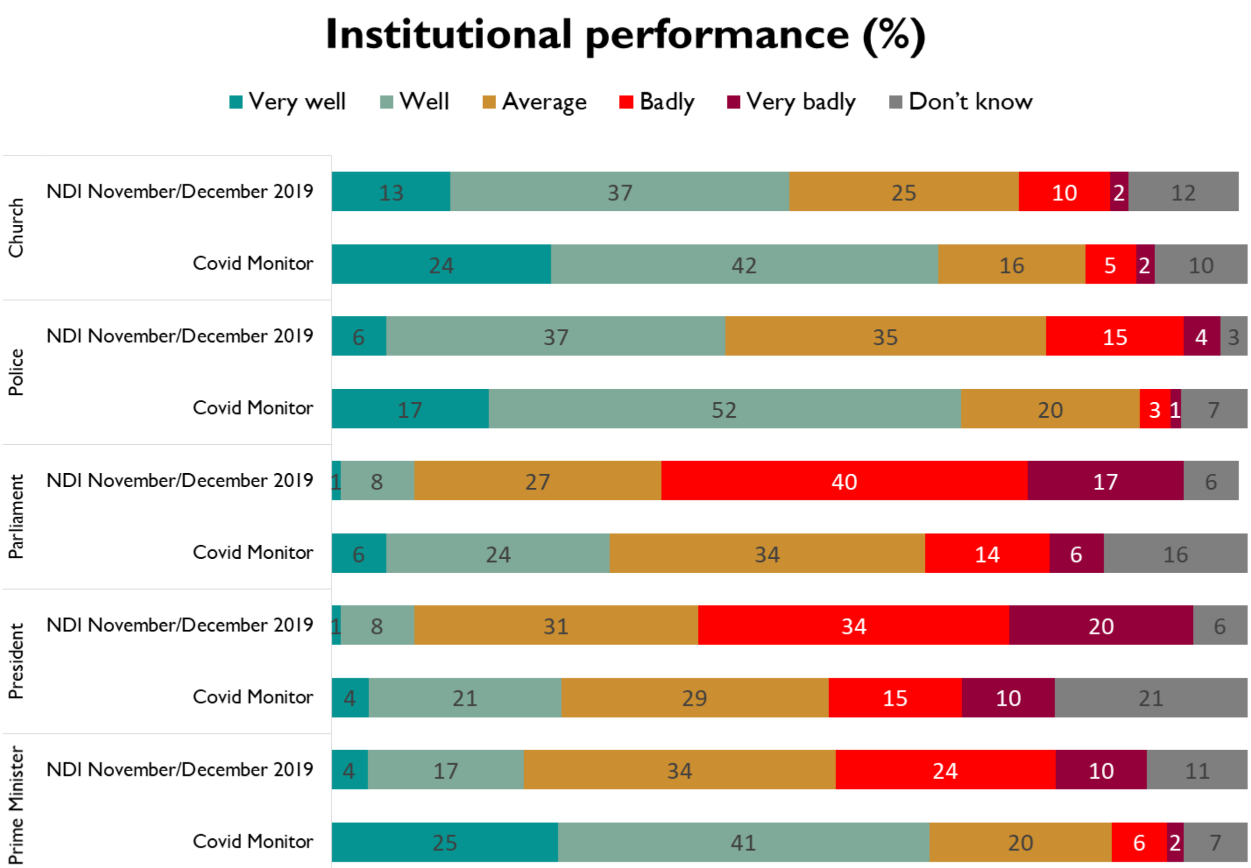
In some cases, the sum of percentages presented does not equal 100%. This stems from rounding error.

This document proceeds as follows. In the next section, the results of the survey are presented, first discussing institutional performance assessments before and after the crisis. In the subsequent section, approval of many of the policies recently implemented is discussed. Next, data is put on the economic impact of the crisis. Thereafter, subjective well-being and practices are discussed. The final findings section provides attitudes towards higher and vocational education policy during the crisis. The report finishes with conclusions based on the data. In Annex to the report, the study methodology is provided.

INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE

The three previous waves of this study have demonstrated that the general public strongly approves of the performance of medical and governmental institutions on responding to the Coronavirus, although there have been slight fluctuations in performance assessments in a number of institutions. This week, the study asked about general institutional performance, using the same question wording as on the November to December CRRC and NDI survey. The results suggest that institutional performance overall has climbed dramatically, suggesting a rally round the flag effect.[1]

The data suggest that the share of the population reporting a positive performance assessment (well or very well) has increased for all of the institutions and actors asked about. The total share of positive assessments increased from 50% for the Church in November/December 2019 to 66% in May. The share of positive assessments increased from 43% to 69% for the police, and from 21% to 66% for the Prime Minister. There was a three-fold increase in positive performance assessment for the parliament and president, moving from 9% to 30% and 9% to 25%, respectively.



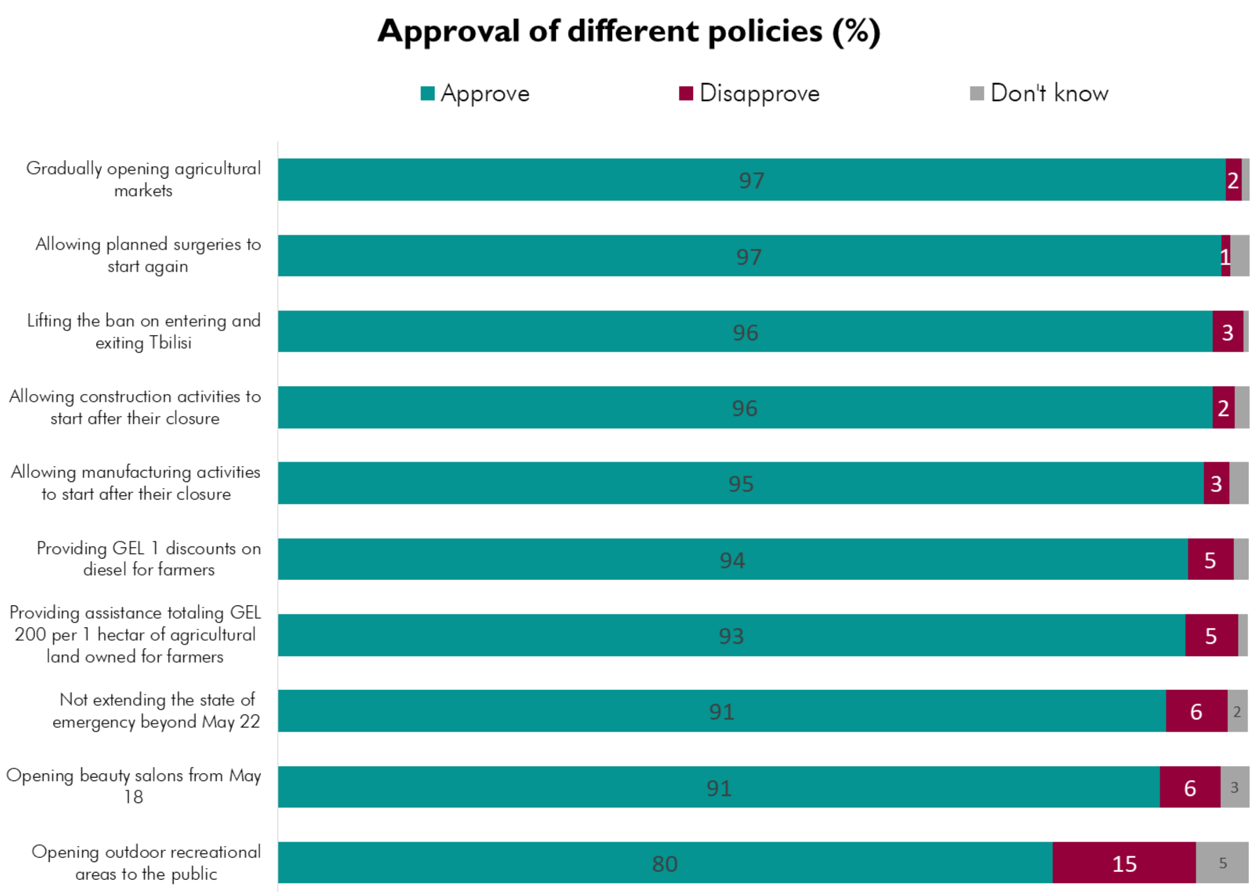
The above suggests that there has indeed been a rallying effect around the authorities in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

[1] In times of crisis, public opinion is known to shift in favor of the governing party. For example, see Oneal and Bryan, 1995, available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/586592

POLICY APPROVAL

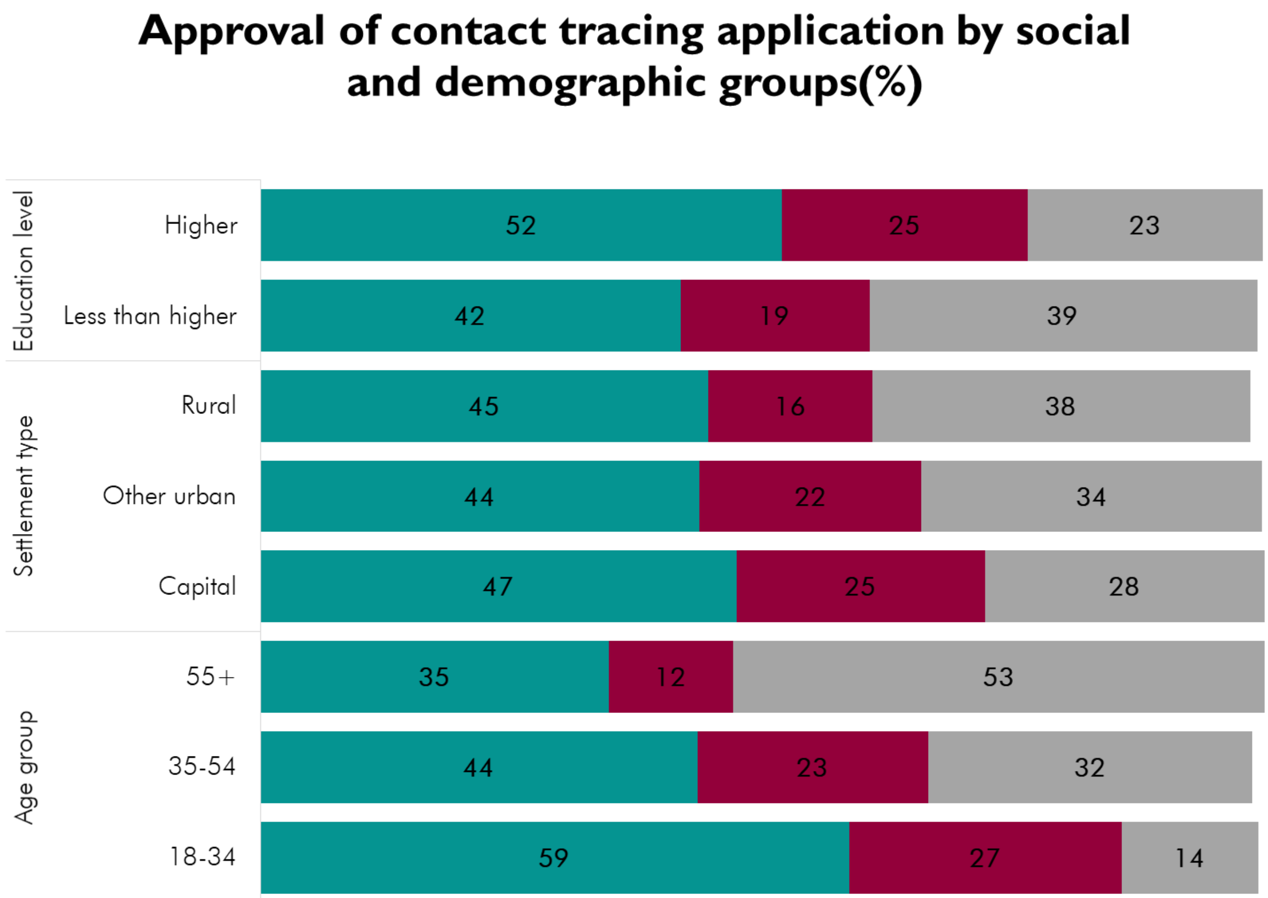
As in the past waves of the survey, there have been numerous policies implemented and discussed during the past week. As with past waves, the public is also generally approving of policy measures.

The data indicate a high level of approval for most policies. Over 90% of the public approve of all of the policies asked about on this wave of the study, with one exception. Four in five Georgians approve of opening outdoor recreational areas to the public. Younger people (18-34: 76% approve), women (76% approve), and those with lower levels of education (76% approve) are less approving of opening recreational areas than older people (35-54: 83%, 55+: 81% approve), men (84%), and those with higher levels of education (86%).



Aside from asking about actually implemented policies, the study asked about two hypothetical ones: the use of a contact tracing application on mobile phones and provision of aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in support of the Covid-19 crisis. The data suggest that 45% of people would approve of the use of a contact tracing application and 90% would approve of providing aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Uncertainty is greater about the contact tracing application for people in rural areas, older people, and those with lower levels of education. Men and women’s attitudes do not vary significantly on this issue.

There are no significant differences between groups when it comes to attitudes towards providing aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia.



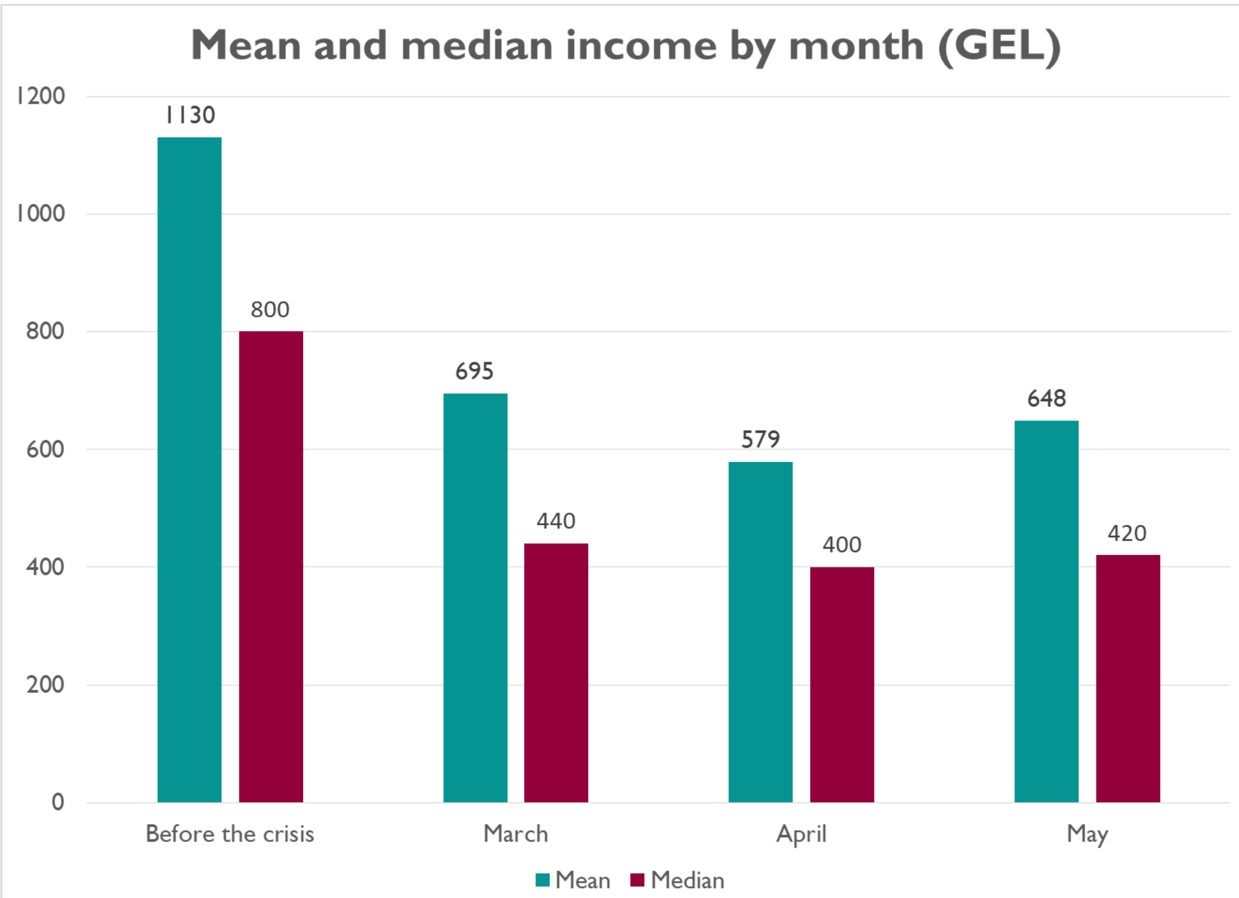
ECONOMY

The key secondary impact of the Covid-19 crisis have been economic, with the world having entered recession and Georgians being hard hit. Georgia's economy was particularly hard hit, with 18% of the population reporting they had lost a job and 14% of households reporting no income in April. The current wave of the survey suggests that since then, there have been further job losses as well as some recovery.

Respondents were asked whether they had lost a job at any time during the Covid-19 Crisis and whether they started working again. The data suggest that to date 29% of individuals lost a job, however, 8% also started working again. This suggests that 27% of jobs lost have been recovered.

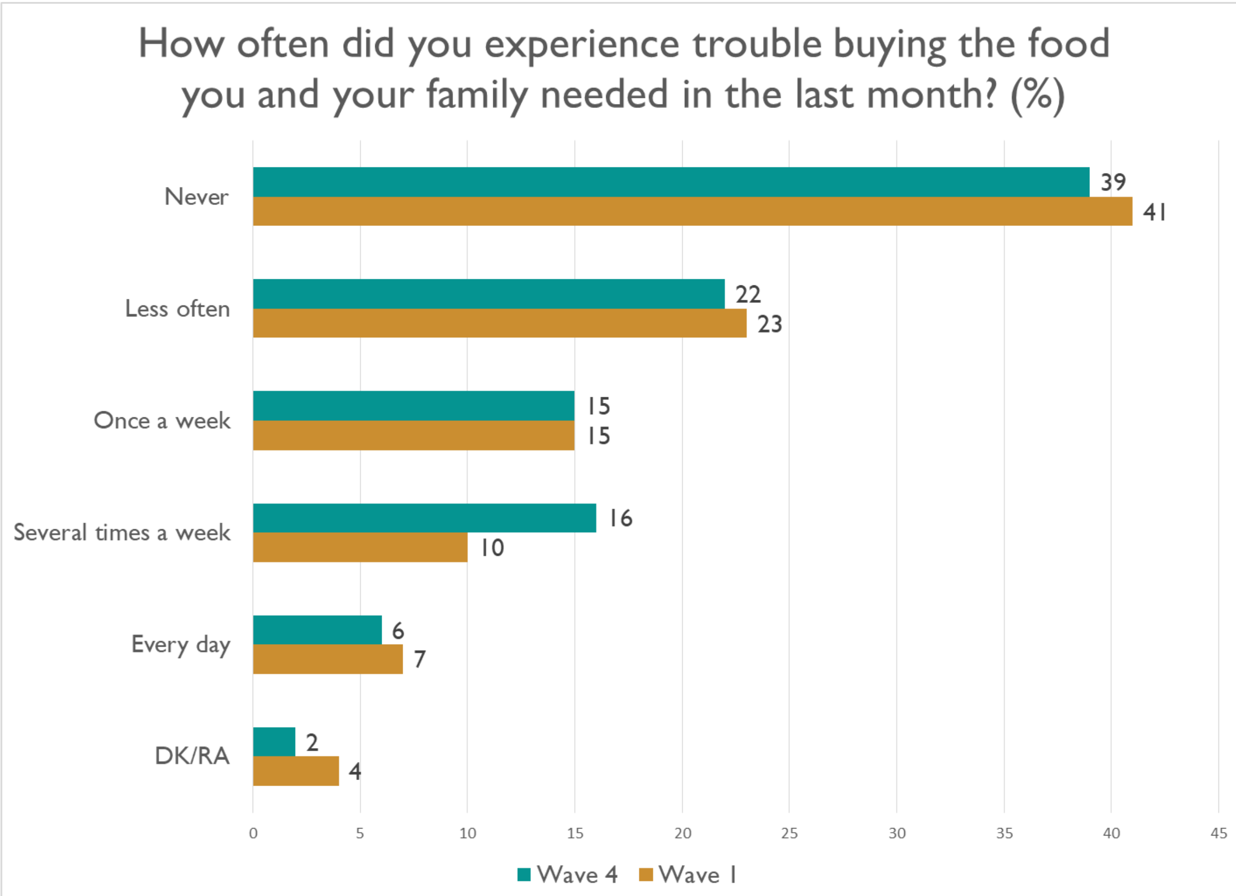
The survey also asked about income prior to the crisis, in March, April, and expectations for May. The data suggest that 0.5% of households had no income prior to the crisis, 11% did in March, 15% did in April, and 13% anticipate having no income in May. While this difference is not large, it is indicative that some households are starting to earn incomes again after having lost them.

Aside from the large shares of households that report no income, a large share continues to report that their income is lower than it was prior to the crisis. Among the 67% of respondents that answered both how much income they made prior to the crisis and how much income they expected to make in May 54% report lower incomes and 46% the same or higher. The mean reported income for households after taxes was GEL 1130 prior to the outbreak (median: GEL 800). In March, the average reported income was GEL 695 (median GEL 440). In April, the average reported income was GEL 579 (median GEL 400). In May, the average expected income was GEL 648 (median GEL 420). This re-confirms the analysis presented in the first wave of this report, which suggested median incomes had essentially halved as a result of the crisis and one in seven households became incomeless as a result of the crisis. It also suggests that incomes have begun to recover, albeit slightly.



To understand which groups were more or less likely to have lost incomes as a result of the crisis, respondents were coded into two groups – lower expected income in May than before the crisis and did not lose income. The results suggest that younger people (18-34: 74%) are significantly more likely to report having lost incomes than older people (35-54: 61% and 55+: 31%).

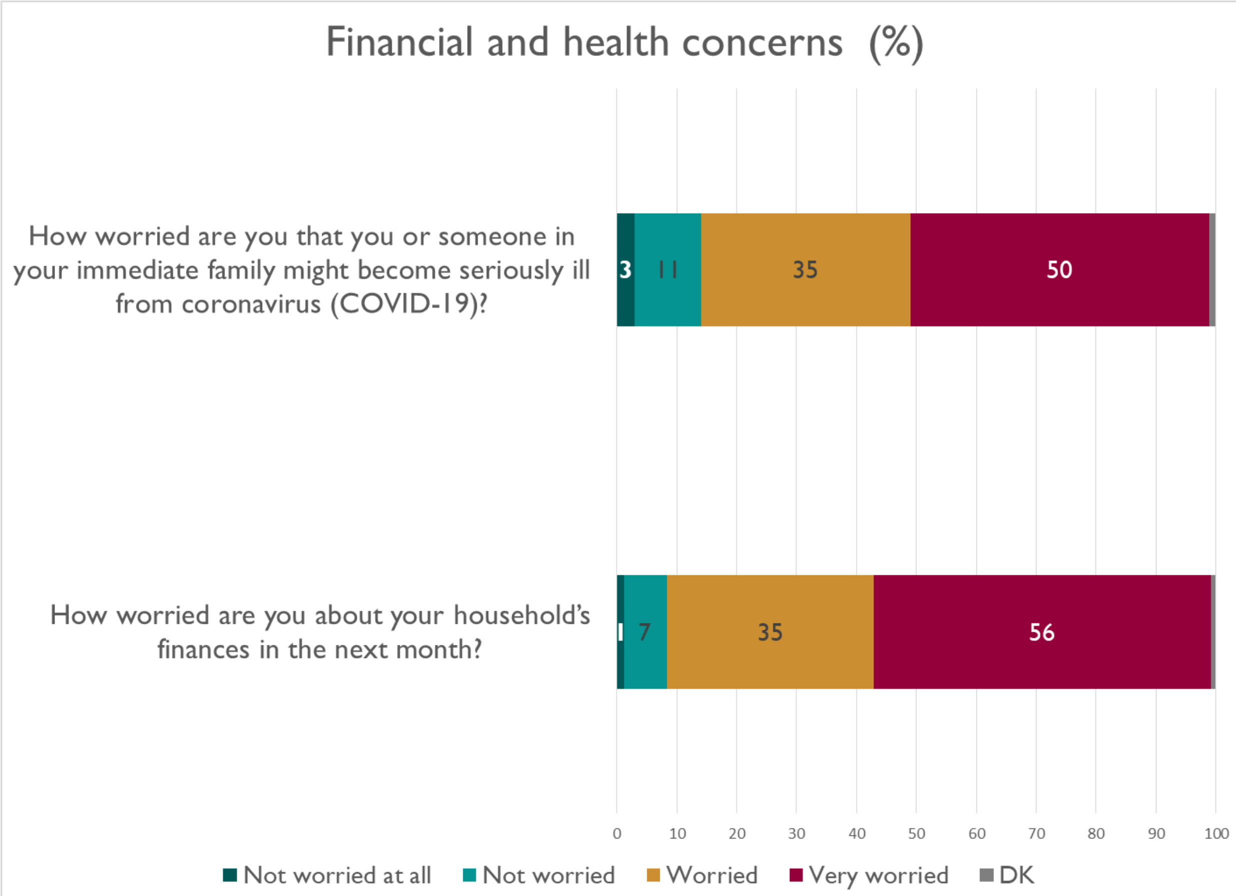
The survey also looked at food security in the month prior to the survey, using the same question used in the first wave of the study. The data indicate that the potential food security crisis remains, with no significant changes in the share of the public reporting they have experienced food security issues in the last month.



SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

Aside from the immediate epidemiological and economic impacts of the crisis, a tertiary concern has been the well-being of individuals in relative isolation compared to normal. To provide data on this issue, respondents were asked about their general life satisfaction, how worried people are about their household's finances, that someone in their household would get the virus, and whether 12 months from now people expect their household's finance to be better or worse off. The data suggest people are more concerned about the financial fallout of the crisis than the immediate medical issues.

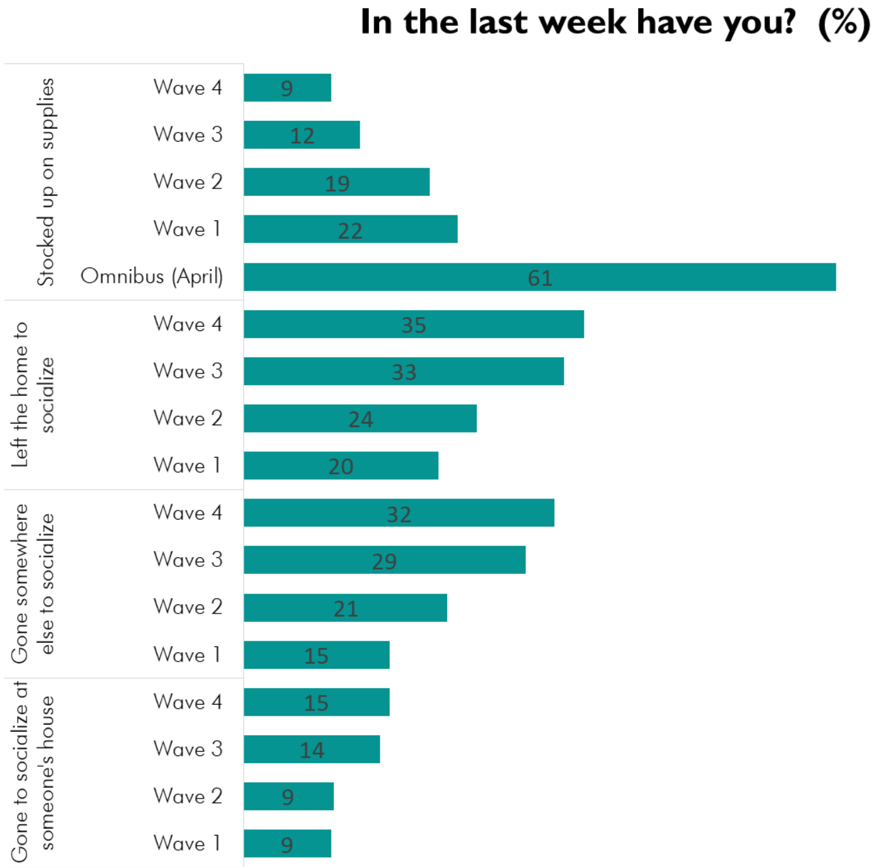
Overall, 91% of households are worried about their household's finances and 85% are worried about their household's financial situation in the next month. Despite the high level of worry, attitudes are relatively positive about their households' financial futures. 28% think they will be living better twelve months from now, 27% the same as present and 18% worse than now. A large share (28%) are also uncertain.



PRACTICES

The study has also looked at a number of behaviors over the course of the survey, including socializing and hoarding. The data suggest a clear increase in the level of socializing and decline in hoarding since the survey first started collecting data on these issues. However, there have been no significant changes since the last wave of the survey.

In total, 15% of people have gone to someone's house to socialize and 32% have gone somewhere else to socialize. In the first wave of the survey, the same figures stood at 9% and 15%. Although the percentage change over the course of the survey is relatively small, this translates into significant numbers of people nationally. Men (45% versus 26% of women), younger people (18-34: 44%, 35-54: 38%, and 55+ 24%), and those with higher levels of education (41% versus 32% of those without higher education) report going to socialize at higher rates than others.



The study also asked about whether people were purchasing more food and supplies than normal. Overall, 9% report they have in the last wave of the survey. This is down from April and the start of May when 61% and 22% reported hoarding activity.

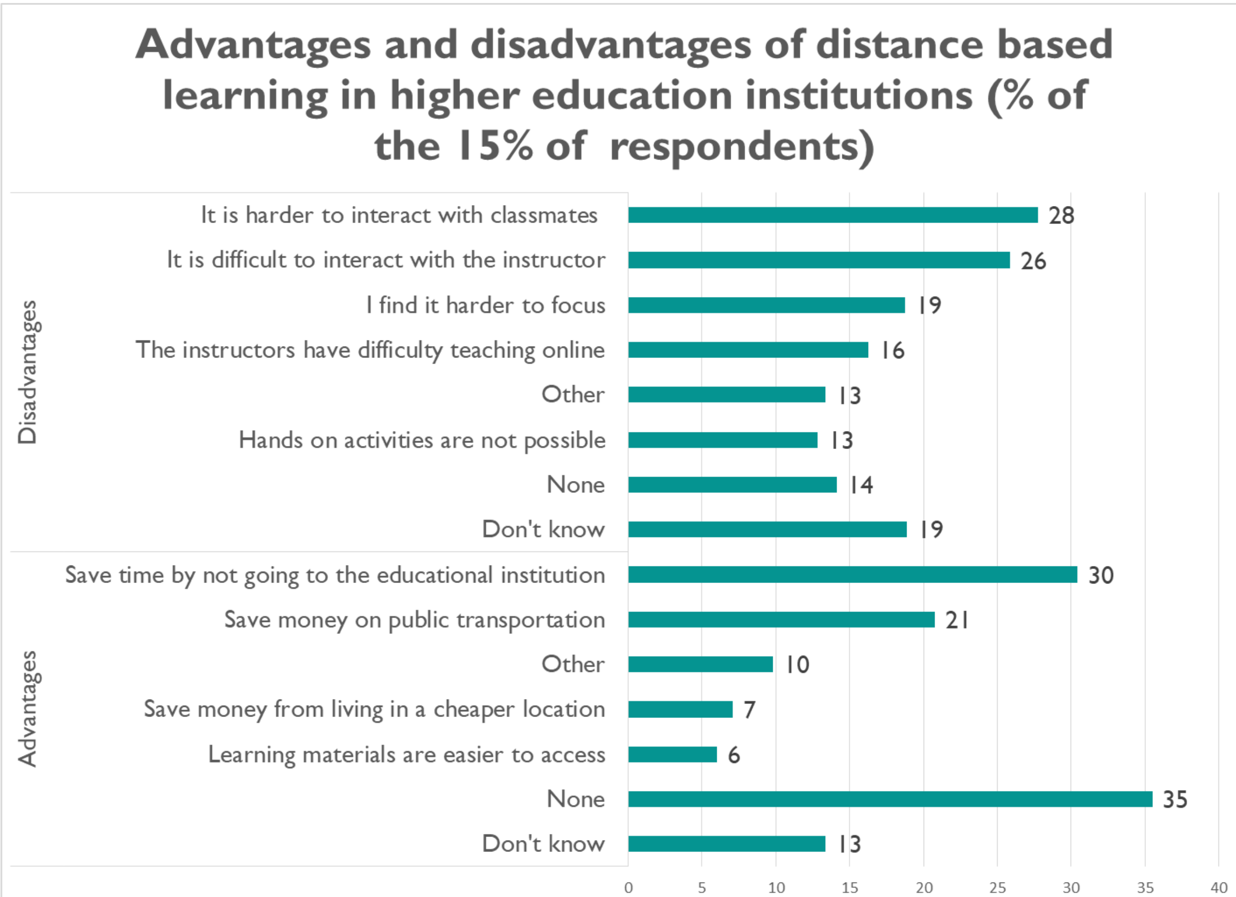
HIGHER AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY

Educational institutions have generally moved to distance based learning around the world. Georgia is no exception to this general pattern. As the second wave of this report demonstrated, the Ministry of Education's efforts in this regard are generally approved of. With regard to higher education the data indicate a similar picture.

Overall, 1% of respondents report that they or a family member were studying in a vocational education institution, and 15% that they or a family member were studying in higher education. Due to the low number of respondents engaged in vocational education, these individuals are not included in the remaining analysis, which focuses solely on higher education unless otherwise noted.

Among the 15% of respondents that were in or had a family member in higher education, most (92%) report that the institution is providing a distance learning option. Among those attending an institution with distance based learning, 98% are able to access these options. Those with access are generally satisfied with the distance learning options (63%). Between a quarter and a third (29%) are unsatisfied, and 9% are uncertain. Among those that are not able to access these options, a difficulty understanding the lectures in Georgian and work are the reasons noted for difficulty with access.

The survey also asked respondents for the relative advantages and disadvantages of distance based learning options. The most common responses for advantages were none (35%), save time by not going to the educational institution (30%), and save money on public transportation (21%). The most commonly named disadvantages included it is harder to interact with classmates (28%), it is difficult to interact with the instructor (26%), and finding it hard to focus (19%).



Respondents were also asked whether their university had made some form of financial concession in terms of postponing payments or reducing fees during the crisis. The data indicate that 16% of students say the institutions has, 62% say it has not, and 21% are uncertain. The high level of uncertainty suggests that awareness of available financial concessions may need to be raised.

CONCLUSIONS

The above data leads to a number of conclusions.

The data on performance indicate a likely rally around the flag effect. Using the same question as asked on the NDI November/December 2019 survey, the data suggest that performance assessments have increased for all institutions asked about on both surveys. The largest increase was for the Prime Minister, whose performance assessment increased from 21% positive to 66% positive. Other, relatively unpopular institutions such as Parliament and the President also received large bumps in positive performance assessments.

On the policy front, the public continues to be highly supportive of all of the policies asked about. The least approved of policy, opening outdoor recreational areas, was approved of by 80% of the public. With regard to the hypothetical policy of providing aid to South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the vast majority of the public would support the policy. If a contract tracing application were to be introduced, most in the public would likely support it. However, there is a relatively high degree of uncertainty surrounding the potential use of a contact tracing application.

The economic data collected within this wave provides some positive and many negative signs. Food insecurity has remained constant for most of the public over the last two months. Almost a third of the public reports losing a job (29%) during the crisis. However, 8% of the public reports having returned to their job and household incomes are expected to be slightly higher in May than in April.

With regard to subjective well-being, the overwhelming majority of the population is worried about their financial situation as well as household members gaining contracting Coronavirus. Yet, the share of people going out of the house to socialize remains constant at around one third of the adult population.

The data on higher education policy lead to two conclusions. First, most students have access to distance based learning options. Second, there is a lack of awareness over whether universities are providing financial concessions.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: METHODOLOGY

The survey was a nationally-representative cell phone survey covering the adult population of Georgia (except the areas of Abkhazia and South Ossetia). Respondents are selected using the random-digit-dial (RDD) method and were interviewed through live interviewing.

The present wave of the survey was conducted between May 21 and 23, 2020. Overall, 1,002 completed interviews were collected, with a minimum response rate of 38.8%.[2] Respondents were interviewed in Georgian, Armenian, Russian, or Azerbaijani.

Results are weighted. CRRC-Georgia used demographic information from the 2014 Georgian National Census for adjusting results based on respondents' gender, age, ethnic identity, education, and residence. This helps balance the proportions of those groups which might be underrepresented in the raw data. Overall, the theoretical margin of error for proportions does not exceed 3.1%.

[2] According to the standards of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) minimum response rate is the ratio of the number of complete interviews and all interview attempts. This excludes non-existing phone numbers dialed as a part of the RDD process.