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**Institute of Social Studies and Analysis**

# Assessing the Socio-Economic Impact of COVID-19 on PoCs

**Tbilisi, December, 2020**

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## **Study Methodology**

The ongoing epidemic in the country mainly refers to the socio-economic crisis, which manifested itself in the reduction/loss of jobs, the reduction of household incomes, the suspension of various services. Managing a crisis situation caused by coronavirus in municipalities is extremely important in terms of mitigating the negative social consequences of the crisis (in some cases, removing it) and, consequently, preventing the crisis from deepening.

Thus, the **goal** of the research was to assess the relevance and coverage of the anti-crisis measures taken by the Government of Georgia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic for Persons of Concern (PoC) – asylumseekers, refugees, humanitarian status holders and stateless persons in Georgia.

In order to achieve research goal the following objectives were determined:

- Study the response to the social needs and the process of their delivery for PoCs caused by coronavirus in Tbilisi, Kutaisi, Batumi and Rustavi
- To understand whether and how the COVID prevention and response measures undertaken by the Government in Georgia have changed the protection and socio-economic situation of PoCs
- To understand the specific consequences for access to public services including healthcare, education, and for sustaining a livelihood

- To understand more about the networks, coping mechanisms and capacities within refugee communities
- To understand whether PoC are and feel safe and whether this has changed during the COVID response

In accordance with the objectives, the research methodology involved both – qualitative and quantitative – methods of sociological research. Within the **quantitative** research above listed beneficiaries in Tbilisi (Martkopi, Rustavi) , Kutaisi, Batumi and Rustavi were interviewed by mixed methods (face-to-face and telephone survey methods). The survey allowed us to analyze: a) how municipal services in above mentioned 4 locations have worked in relation to the PoCs and their prospects, b) how the PoCs evaluate the practice of local government communication with them; c) whether information about the need of the PoCs was collected and responded to in a timely manner; d) what challenges and shortcomings have been identified in this regard, etc. Respondents were selected using a **stratified sampling** method. With the cooperation between World Vision Georgia and UNHCR a list of PoCs was developed and provided to ISSA. This information was grouped by the status. Each group was a stratum for selection. A total of 4 groups/stratums were allocated: asylumseekers, refugees, humanitarian status holders and stateless persons. According to the proportion of each group in the list, their share in the sampling was determined. Totally 212 individuals were surveyed, including 112 asylum-seekers, 52 refugees, 45 humanitarian status holders and 3 stateless persons.

Within the **qualitative** research focus group method was used. The focus groups were conducted in three large cities of Georgia: Tbilisi, Batumi and Kutaisi. The cities were selected to ensure coverage of PoCs depending on the allocation size in this geographical area. The respondents for the focus groups were recruited by regional supervisors of the Institute for Social Studies and Analysis.

Each focus group consisted of discussion for about 2 hours, involving 8 participants, led by a moderator. The discussion followed a discussion plan/guideline agreed in advance with the respondent. Due to the condition created by the COVID-19 infection, focus groups were conducted remotely. Target groups were connected via the online platform Zoom. It should be noted that remote survey of target groups did not have negative impact on the quality of the study. Focus groups were recorded in audio-visual format, about which the survey respondents were warned in advance.

Within the qualitative study, 11 focus groups were conducted in three big cities of Georgia – Tbilisi (9), Kutaisi (1) and Batumi (1). According to the target groups, the focus groups were distributed as follows (See Table #1):

Table #1

| #     | Target group                           | Number of focus groups | City                                 |
|-------|--|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1     | Humanitarian status holders            | 1                      | Tbilisi                              |
| 2     | Asylum-seekers                         | 2                      | Tbilisi                              |
| 3     | Refugees                               | 2                      | Tbilisi                              |
| 4     | Mixed group (With all statuses, mixed) | 6                      | Tbilisi (4), Kutaisi (1), Batumi (1) |
| Total |  | 11                     |                                      |

A total of 84 respondents participated in the study, 61 of them male and 23 female. Persons of concern from 23 countries participated in the focus groups, of which 8 were from Africa, 7 from Asia, 6 from the Middle East, and 2 from Europe (Ukraine, Russia). According to the countries, most respondents arrived in Georgia from

Iraq (15), Iran (10), Yemen (9) and India (6). Among focus group participants, asylum seekers have the highest number - 35, 29 respondents are humanitarian status holders, stateless persons -2, and 18 have refugee status.

Based on the obtained results from both qualitative and quantitative research methods, recommendations were developed, which will aim to improve the needs of Persons of concern (PoC) to UNHCR, and provide equal access to social services.

## **I. Quantitative Part of the Study**

### **Executive Summary**

According to the respondents, they mainly obtain information on responses against COVID-19 through informal sources such as: social media, family members, friends, neighbours/community members. Only a small portion of the respondents use formal/official sources (websites of public offices, as well as local NGOs and international organisations) as a means to obtain information.

During the pandemic, respondents have reported a lack of information on the accessibility of medical care for the most part (16.5%), followed by: free legal aid (13.1%), residence permits (12.6%) and humanitarian aid (12%). Information on medical assistance is mostly required by refugees; information on legal aid is also rather important for the latter. Information on residence permits along with that on medical services is important for asylum seekers.

As for the information exclusively related to COVID-19, respondents have expressed most interest in the progress scientists are making in the development of the COVID-19 vaccine (13.6%) and methods of treatment (9.8%).

Around 80% of the respondents state that they have not encountered any obstacles in receiving services during the pandemic (in the past six months). For those respondents who had delayed or avoided services (21.2%), difficulties with the accessibility of medical care proved to be of foremost importance (30.6%); they have also emphasized problems with social assistance (21%), status related services (16.1%), legal aid (11.3%) and public services (10%).

Respondents who have reported on having delayed or avoided services (21.2%), have not received or have experienced delays in receiving the following benefits associated with social assistance: universal health care programme (20.1%) and financial aid (18.8%). Individual respondents stated that they have encountered difficulties in accessing the following services: vocational training and retraining of job seekers, alternative housing and free legal aid.

22.2% of the respondents, men more than women, say they require legal aid. The need for legal aid is mainly in regards to status related issues. It is primarily the asylum seekers followed by refugees who require this type of legal aid. Humanitarian status holders emphasize the need for legal aid in financial matters.

Approximately 12% of PoCs say they suffer from chronic diseases. 12.7% state they require special medical care due to certain diseases or disabilities. The latter are mostly adults (35 years and above). The majority of these respondents (59.3%) confirm they received appropriate medical care before the spread of COVID-19. However, the respondents claim the situation has drastically changed during the pandemic: only a quarter of the respondents (25.9%) requiring special care have received appropriate medical service. 12.7% have needed emergency medical service during the pandemic. The majority of the latter respondents (85.2%) have not experienced any problems in receiving the service. Only around 15% have encountered certain obstacles, such as: late arrival of an emergency service group (ambulance), high prices of emergency medical services, etc.

29% of the respondents have school-age children (mainly 1 or 2) in the family; 9% of the families have preschool-age children (aged between 3 and 6), while 14.2% of the families - students of higher education institutions.

3 respondents have noted that their school-age children do not attend a school, while 5 respondents say that preschool-age children in their families are not enrolled in a kindergarten.

Almost half of the families with school-age children (48.3%) are satisfied with the educational services offered by schools as part of the distance learning. One fifth of the respondents are dissatisfied, while 16.7% offer neutral assessment (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied).

46.2% of the respondents who have preschool-age children in the families state that kindergartens do not offer distance learning. In those cases where distance learning is offered (9 families), respondents are mainly satisfied.

The majority of respondents (53.3%) who have students in the families, are satisfied with the distance learning services offered by higher education institutions for the most part.

In general, the majority of the respondents (82.1%) have not encountered any problems in the field of education. Those who have reported following problems: decrease of the level of education, delays in the registration process at educational institutions, children being unable to handle the tasks independently, etc.

The frequency of cooperation with NGOs, international institutions and governmental bodies working on migration related issues has not been high during the pandemic: PoCs cooperated with World Vision most frequently (44.3%); 18.8% of the respondents used the hotline of the Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice; 10.9% used the UNHCR hotline; 5.1% - hotline of the Division of International Protection Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and 4.3% - hotline of the Legal Aid Service.

Asylum seekers and refugees have used services offered by World Vision and humanitarian status holders have used the hotline of the PSDA most frequently.

The issues that respondents have approached various organisations/offices about during the pandemic are as follows: obtaining/renewing ID cards, obtaining/renewing the certificate of an asylum seeker, obtaining/renewing medical insurance paper, obtaining/renewing residence permits, financial, health and employment matters, ect. Respondents are satisfied with the services they have received for the most part.

The vast majority of the respondents (87.7%) state that their rights have not been violated in Georgia due to coronavirus. 94.3% feel safe in Georgia. 11.3% of the respondents report on violations of certain rights such as: freedom of movement, receiving social assistance, accessibility of educational and health care services, etc. A quarter of the respondents believe they have not been included in the measures and efforts developed to fight and prevent COVID-19 in the same way as Georgian citizens have. In addition, every third respondent (32.5%) also states that their conditions differ from those of their neighbours. This feeling is mostly present among asylum seekers (34.8%) followed by refugees (30.8%) and humanitarian status holders (24.4%). This supposedly means that the integration of asylum seekers into the local community (neighbourhood) is stalled by the fact that the prospects of remaining in Georgia for this subgroup are not clear. It should be noted that in general during the pandemic, a part of PoCs (at least a quarter) are facing problems with adapting to the Georgian society.

96.7% of the respondents have not contracted the novel coronavirus, while about 90% have neither been quarantined nor isolated due to suspected infection. 75.5% do not have anyone in their immediate social circle who has been infected with COVID-19. Furthermore, 73.1% state no one in their close social environment has been quarantined or isolated. Only 2.4% of the respondents have had confirmed or suspected infection, while 16.5% say such cases have occurred in their immediate social circles.

Respondents express cautious optimism in relation to a) probability of them contracting coronavirus (Mean = 2.51 on a 5-point rating scale where 1 correlates to 'very low' and 5 - to 'very high') ; b) their susceptibility to severe forms of COVID-19 (Mean = 2.93 on a five-point scale: 1 - 'not susceptible', 5 - 'very susceptible') and c) their susceptibility to getting infected with the virus (Mean = 2.56 on a 5-point rating scale: 1 - 'totally susceptible', 5 - 'not at all susceptible').

The majority of the respondents (72.6%) do not currently have a job/run a business. 27.4% are employed. Main line of respondents' work includes: hospitality industry (restaurant, hotel), mixed professions, construction works, etc. 11.3% say they own businesses. The majority of the employed respondents (58.6%) have official job contracts. 36.2% are employed unofficially. The majority of the employed respondents (69%) say their jobs require workplace attendance.

31% of the employed respondents have a yearly contract; the same number (31%) are contracted by month. Just over a quarter (25.9%) are contracted by day.

The majority of the employed respondents (84.5%) had paid jobs before the spread of the novel coronavirus. As per the majority of the unemployed respondents (70.8%), they also had paid jobs before the pandemic (27.3% say they did not have paid jobs before the spread of coronavirus). This means that 51.4% of PoCs lost their paid jobs during the pandemic.

55.3% of female respondents from the group of the unemployed did not have jobs before the spread of coronavirus either, while the majority of male respondents (80.2%) did. Therefore, more men lost their jobs due to the spread of the virus as compared to women.

Refugees have been affected the most by the pandemic in terms of employment: 82.1% of currently unemployed refugees had paid jobs before the pandemic. 76% of asylum seekers, followed by 52.6% of humanitarian status holders were also employed before the spread of the virus.

Currently unemployed respondents have identified the main reasons for unemployment: a) inability to work remotely due to the specific nature of their jobs; b) shutting down of the place/company of employment; c) dismissal from a job. For 9.1% of the respondents, employment is not a priority mainly due to household responsibilities and/or student status.

The vast majority of PoCs (89.6%) believe that employment opportunities have declined due to the spread of coronavirus. Considerable portion of unemployed respondents (37%) obtain information on job opportunities from informal sources (such as friends, acquaintances, etc). 11.7% of the respondents seek employment opportunities via formal sources (jobs.ge and similar websites). It should be noted that 28.6% of the jobless respondents are not currently seeking employment (the majority of them are women).

Income range of respondents' families are rather diverse, however, the general background reveals poor economic conditions. About a third of PoCs' families are economically vulnerable. Namely, around 15% of the families live in poverty since their monthly income ranges between 0 and 300 GEL; 8% of the families can hardly overcome poverty (301-500 GEL per month), while 12.3% say their families have no income at all. The share of relatively well-off families (2001-2005GEL, 2501-3000 GEL and more than 3000 GEL per month) is not greater than 6%. The share of the families living in poverty is the greatest among the refugees (17.5%). A fifth of refugees (20.2%) who come from Asia/Africa, say their families currently have no income at all.

The majority of the respondents (66%) find it hard to cover monthly living costs. Conditions of refugees are more difficult in this respect as well, as compared to other groups: 75% of the refugees say it is very difficult to cover monthly expenses. Only the smallest share of this group (3.8%) can easily do so. Humanitarian status holders seem to be faring better than others in this respect: 22.2% of them say they can easily afford monthly expenses, while 40% state it is more or less manageable.

The majority of the respondents (85.4%) rent their houses/apartments. The majority of the latter category (64.6%) say that they find it hard to pay rent. A considerable portion of the respondents (47.5%) pay a monthly rent of 301-600 GEL, while 30.4% - 300 GEL or less. Refugees (75%) as well as asylum seekers (75%) find it rather hard to pay rent, while humanitarian status holders are least affected by this problem (22.2% pay their rent easily, while it is manageable for 50%).

Over a half of the respondents (51.9%) say their families and themselves have no savings and/or they do not receive any financial support from relatives residing in Tbilisi or outside.

PoCs communicate with *people from the same national/ethnic groups* most frequently: the majority (74.6%) meet member(s) of the same national group several times a month (30.2%), several times a week (25.5%) or almost every day (18.9%). PoCs also tend to have frequent communications with their *Georgian friends/acquaintances*. A quarter (25%) do so several times a week, while about one fifth (19.3%) - almost on a daily basis. The majority of the respondents (56.1%) also frequently communicate with their *neighbours*. Approximately 19% have daily communications, about 15% - several times a week and 22.6% - several times a month. *Frequency of communication with people with similar PoC status and with PoCs in general, is considerably less.*

## 1. Respondents' personal profile

212 respondents took part in the study, 23.1% of which are women and 76.9% - men. Three different age groups have been identified in the study: 18-29 years of age, 30-45 years and 46 years and above. The majority of respondents (50.5%) are of median (30-40) age, 35.8% - belong to the young generation (18-29), while 13.7% are 46 years old or above.

As for the country of origin, almost half of the respondents have come from the Middle East (48.6%), while the 37.2% - from different Asian countries. Most of the respondents fall into these two categories. Over one tenth of the respondents (11.8%) have arrived from African countries, while Russians and Ukrainians are represented by the lowest indicator - 1.9% (N=4). You can find the data disaggregated by country in detail in [Annex #1](#).

The vast majority of respondents (36.8%) are Arabic speakers, almost one third - English speakers (31.6%). 14.2% of the respondents speak Persian (see Table #1.1).

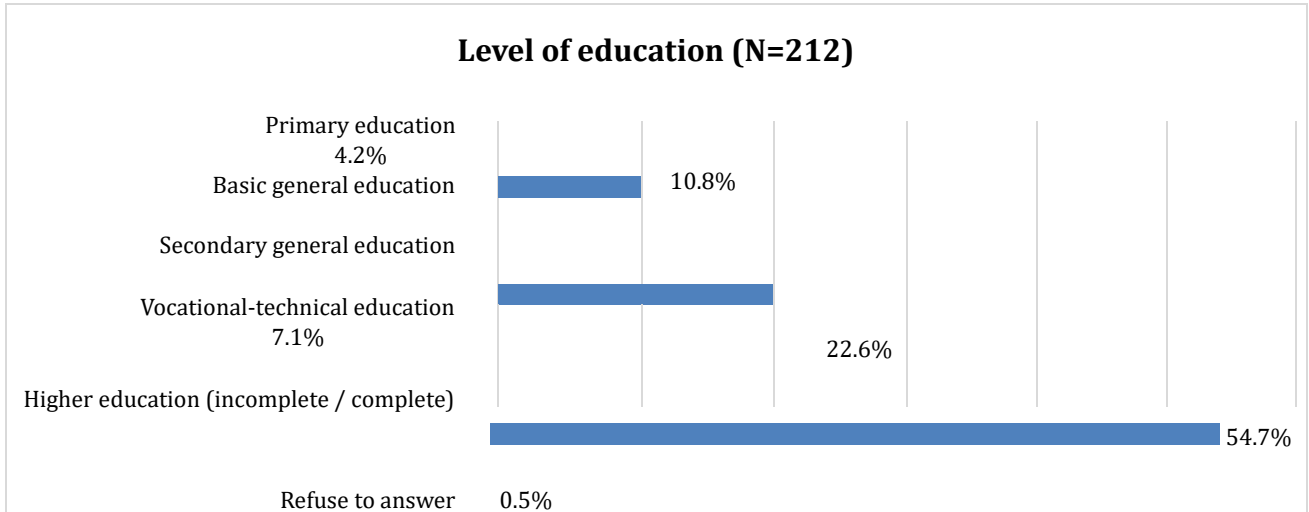
**Table #1.1**

| Languages spoken  | Share of respondents (%) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Arabic            | 36.8                     |
| English           | 31.6                     |
| French            | 0.9                      |
| Hindi             | 2.4                      |
| Persian           | 14.2                     |
| Russian           | 2.8                      |
| Azeri             | 0.5                      |
| Bangla            | 2.8                      |
| Bengali           | 3.8                      |
| Kordish           | 0.5                      |
| Somalian          | 0.9                      |
| Urdu              | 1.4                      |
| Arabic, Georgian  | 1                        |
| Georgian, Persian | 0.5                      |
|                   |                          |

Assessment of the levels of education revealed that the majority of the respondents (54.7%) fall into the category of higher education (complete/incomplete degrees) while over one fifth (22.6%) have completed secondary education level. Only 4.2% (N=9) of the participants have only received primary education (see Diagram #1.1).



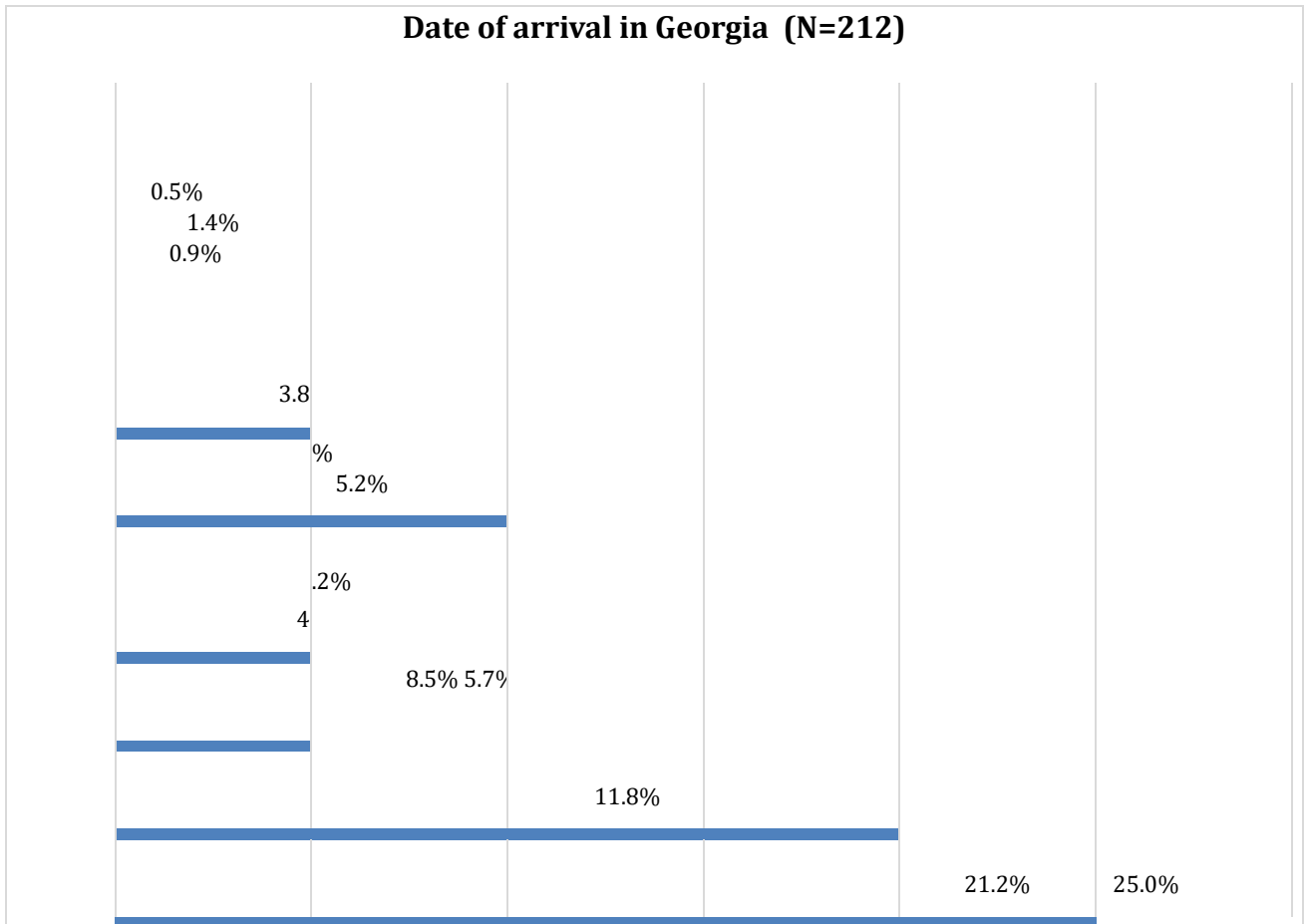
**Diagram #1.1**

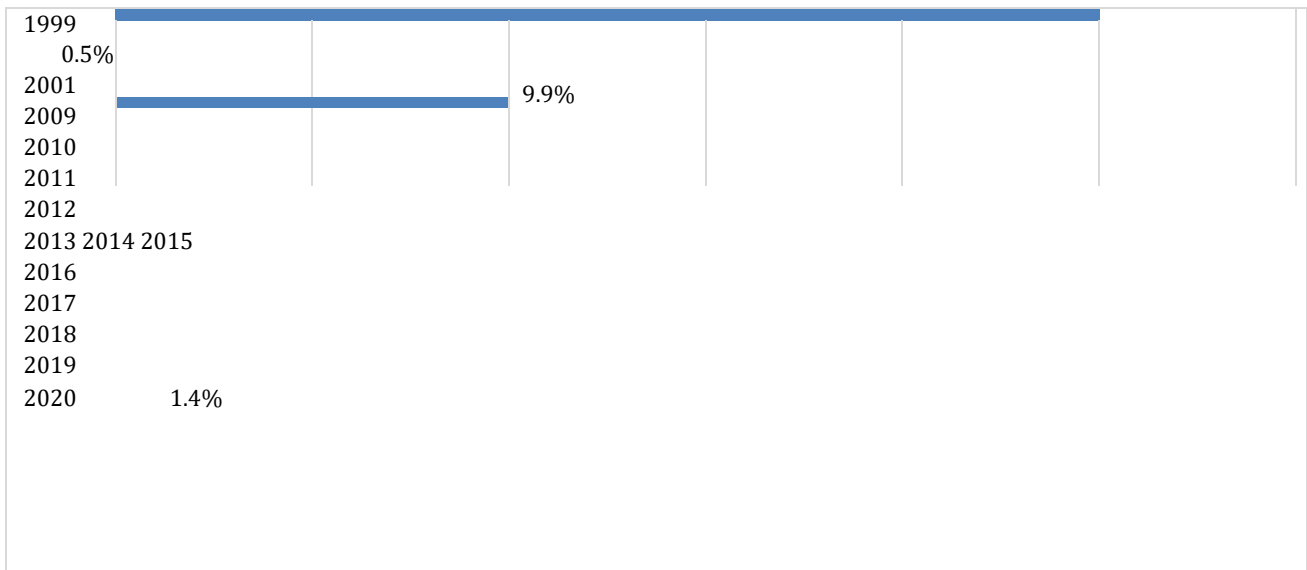


Assessment of the respondents' marital status showed that 47.2% are single and 44.3% are married. Almost 5% of the participants are divorced (4.7%); an equal percentage of the participants - 1.9% and 1.9% respectively, fall into the categories of widow(er)s and those living with partners.

The survey has revealed that a quarter (25%) of the respondents arrived in Georgia in 2018, just over one fifth of the participants - in 2017 (21.2%); over one tenth of the respondents say they moved in 2013 (11.8%). All other categories are below 10% (see Diagram #1.2)

**Diagram #1.2**





The majority of respondents (81.6%) name Tbilisi as their place of residence. Over one tenth (13.7%) reside in other municipal towns/cities; consequently, 4.7% of the respondents live in villages.

Kutaisi (N=16) and Batumi (N=10) have been singled out among other municipal cities. Gori and Telavi have one resident each from the respondents. As for the rural areas, 4 respondents live in Martkopi and 3 - in Mukhrani. Other settlements had only one respondent each living there (see Table #1.2).

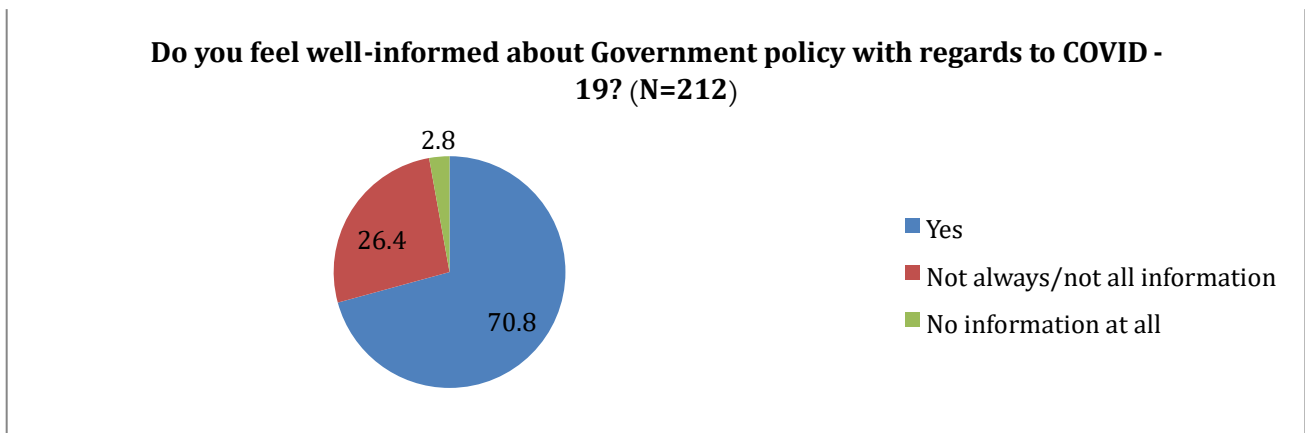
**Table #1.2**

| Village    | Number of respondents |
|------------|-----------------------|
| Gardabani  | 1                     |
| Ksani      | 1                     |
| Marneuli   | 1                     |
| Martkopi   | 4                     |
| Mukhrani   | 3                     |
| Sartichala | 1                     |

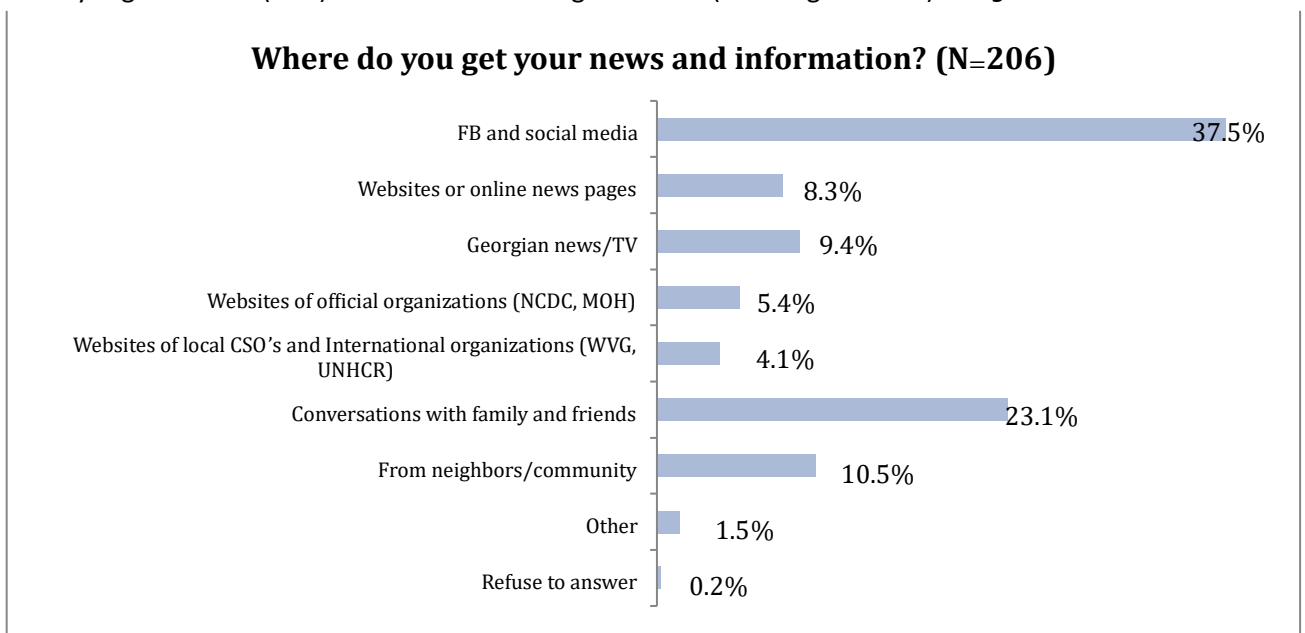
As for the legal status of the respondents, the majority (52.8%) are asylum seekers, almost quarter (24.5%) - refugees, while the share of humanitarian status holders exceeds one-fifth (21.2%) of the participants. A total of 3 stateless persons took part in the study.

## 2. Awareness around COVID-19; Sources of Information and Information Needed

Statistical analysis of the collected data show that the majority of the respondents (70.8%) consider themselves well-informed on the government’s policy responses to fight COVID-19. At least every fourth respondent (26.4%) has stated they do not have enough information on the issue (see Diagram #2.1) **Diagram #2.1**



A relatively large number of respondents (37.5%) name **Facebook and other social media** as main sources of information and news on policy responses against COVID-19. Family members and friends represent the main sources of information for about a quarter of the respondents (23.1%), neighbours/community members - for 10.5%. Certain number of respondents (varies between 4% and 10%) obtain information on government’s policy responses to fight COVID-19 from formal/official news sources such as: websites/online news media outlets, TV media, websites of official organisations/offices (for example, WHO) as well as those of local civil society organisations (CSO) and international organisations (see Diagram #2.2) **Diagram #2.2**

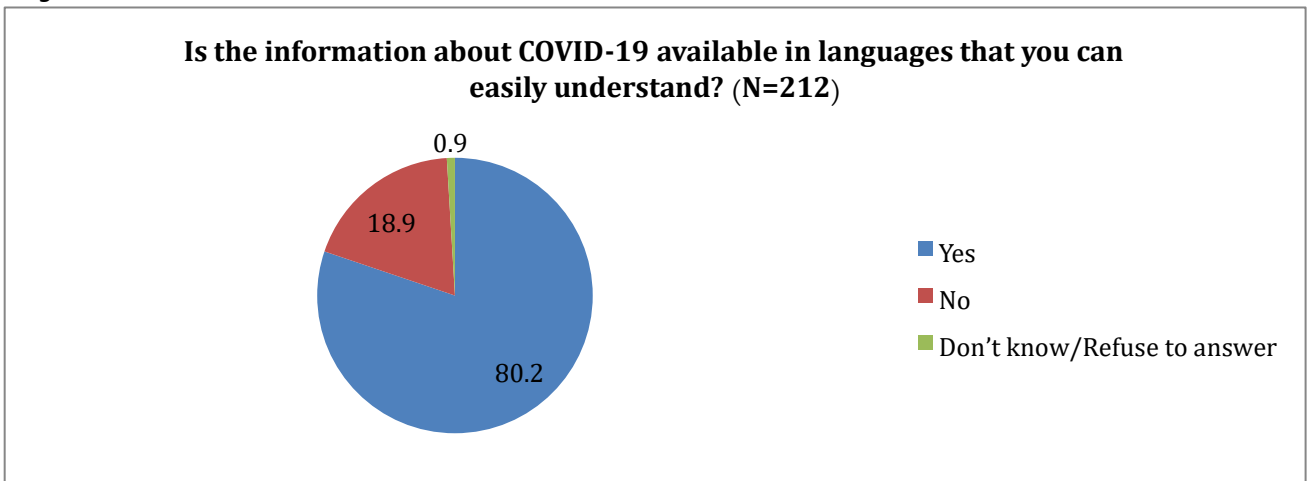


The usage of sources to obtain information on COVID-19 correlates to the **respondents’ age**. Statistical data suggests that both age categories (<35; ≥35) use facebook and other social media as their main sources of information. Young people use social media far more actively (43.1%) than non-young (30.8%). There is a difference in terms of using the websites of official organisations - in general, few respondents trust the websites of NDC and the Ministry of Health; however, older respondents tend to use them more (7.1%) than their young counterparts (4%). (Data are statistically reliable  $X^2=24.329$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #2.1). **Table #2.1**

| Where do you get your news and information? (By age) (N=206)   | Younger than 35 | 35 or older |
|--|-----------------|-------------|
| FB and social media  | 43.1%           | 30.8%       |
| Websites or online news pages  | 8.1%            | 8.5%        |
| Georgian news/TV   | 8.1%            | 10.9%       |
| Websites of official organizations (National Center for Disease Control and Public Health, Ministry of Health) | 4.0%            | 7.1%        |
| Websites of local CSO's and International organizations (World Vision, UNHCR, etc                              | 4.0%            | 4.3%        |
| Conversations with family and friends  | 21.4%           | 25.1%       |
| From neighbors/community   | 10.1%           | 10.9%       |
| Other  | 1.2%            | 1.9%        |
| Refuse to answer   | 0.0%            | 0.5%        |

Statistical data revealed that current information on COVID-19 is available in a language that a vast majority of respondents (80.2%) can understand, while one fifth states the opposite (see Diagram #2.3).

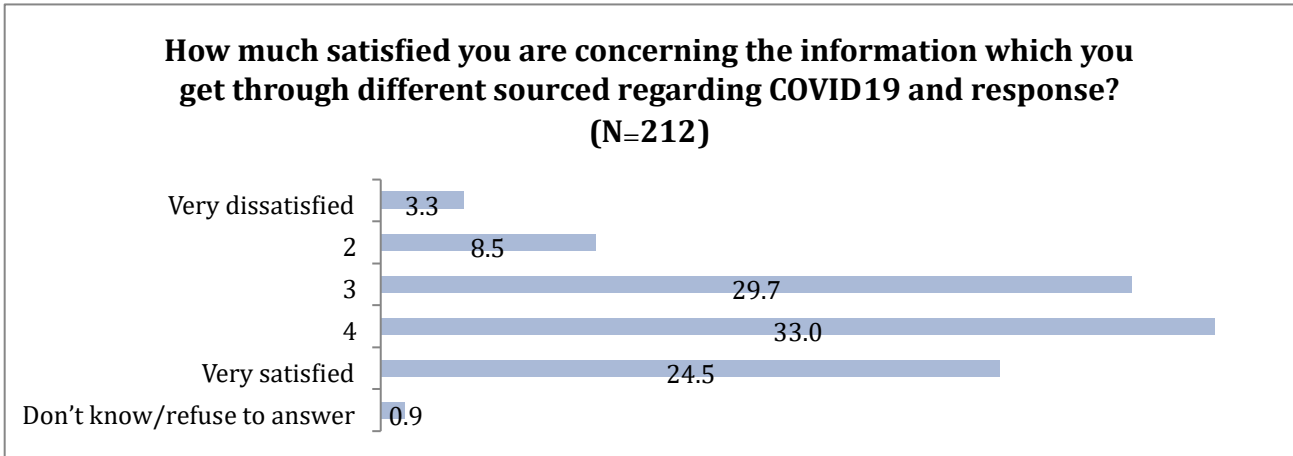
**Diagram #2.3**



Respondents assessed their levels of satisfaction about the information obtained from different sources on COVID-19 and responses developed against it on a 5-point rating scale, where 1 ('**very dissatisfied**') correlates to an extremely negative assessment and 5 to - extremely positive assessment ('**very satisfied**').

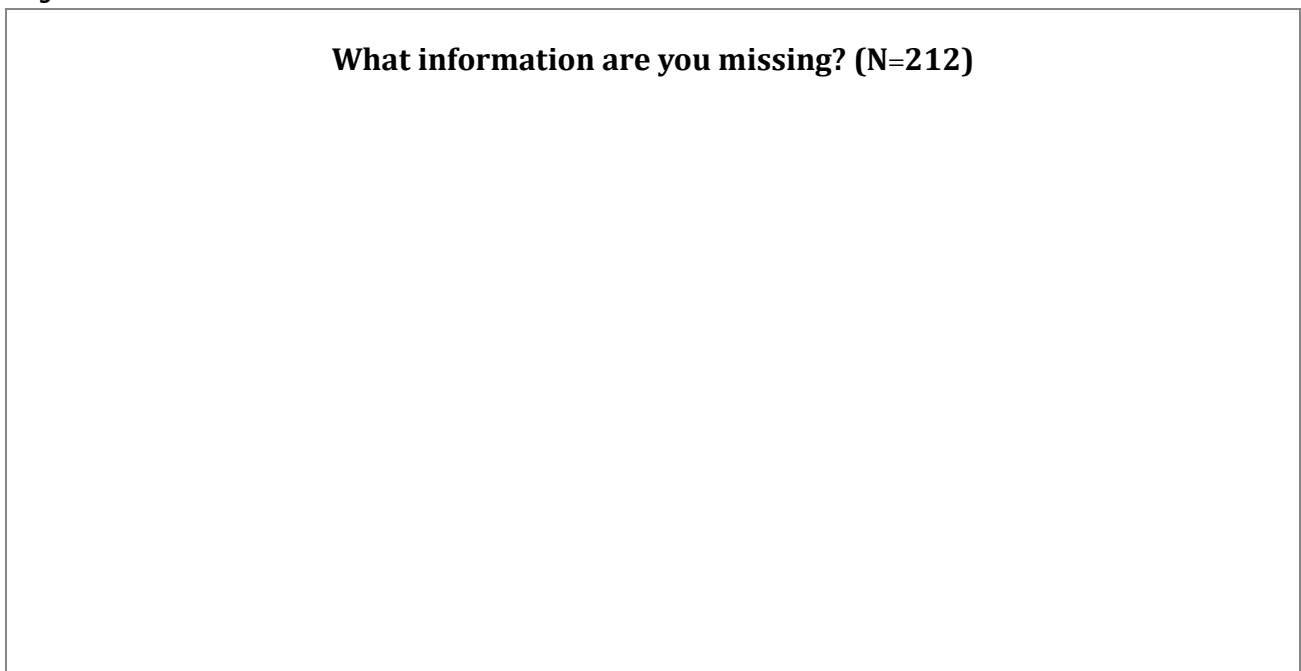
The majority of the respondents - 57.5% (**24.5% very satisfied and 33% more satisfied than dissatisfied among them**) rate their satisfaction as generally positive; 29.7% offer neutral assessment. The share of dissatisfied respondents equals about 12% (see Diagram #2.4).

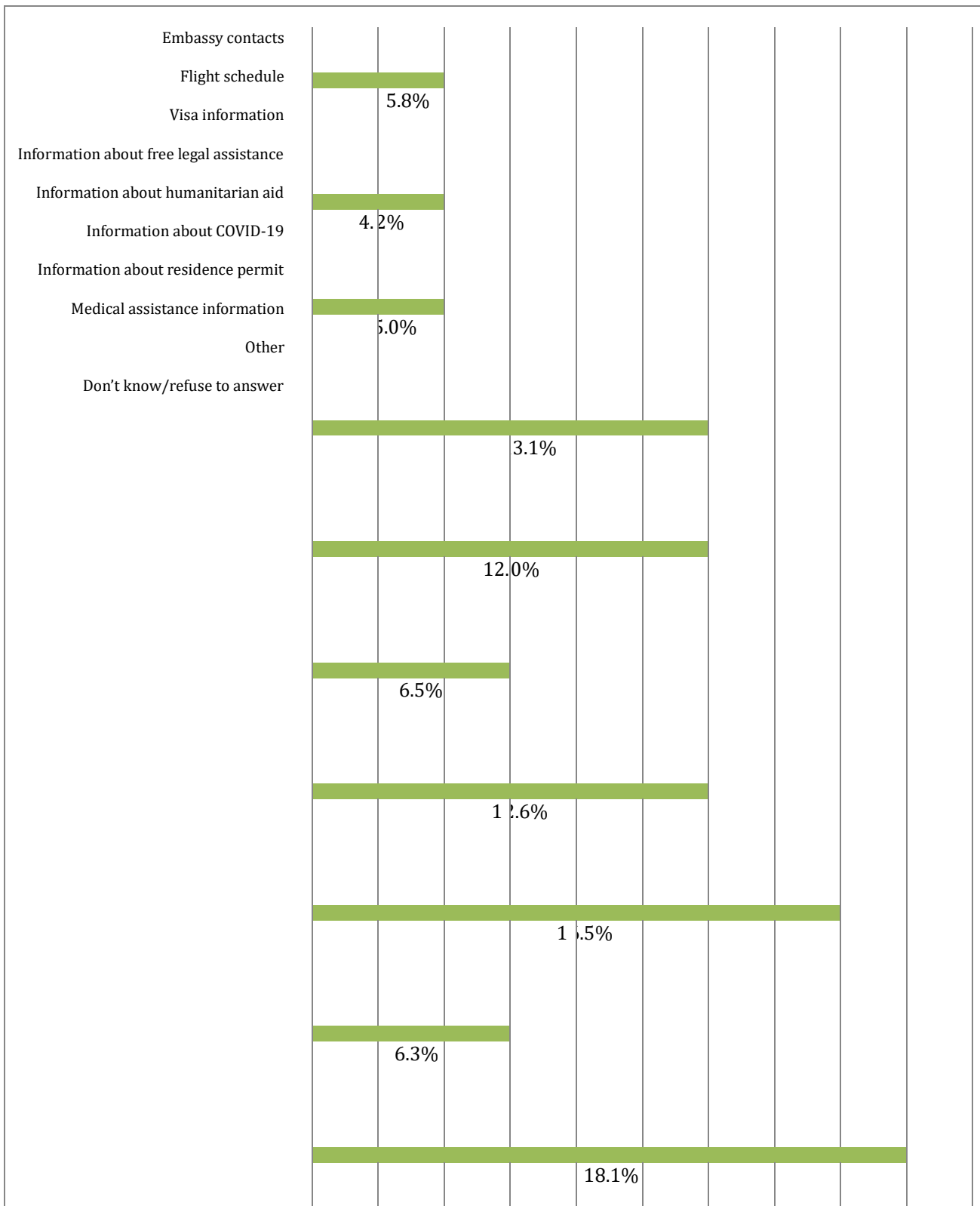
**Diagram #2.4**



Study participants named the types of information they **lack the most during the pandemic**. According to 16.5% it is the information on medical services, 13.1% would like to have more information on free legal services, 12.6% - on residence permits, while 12% - on humanitarian aid (see #2.5).

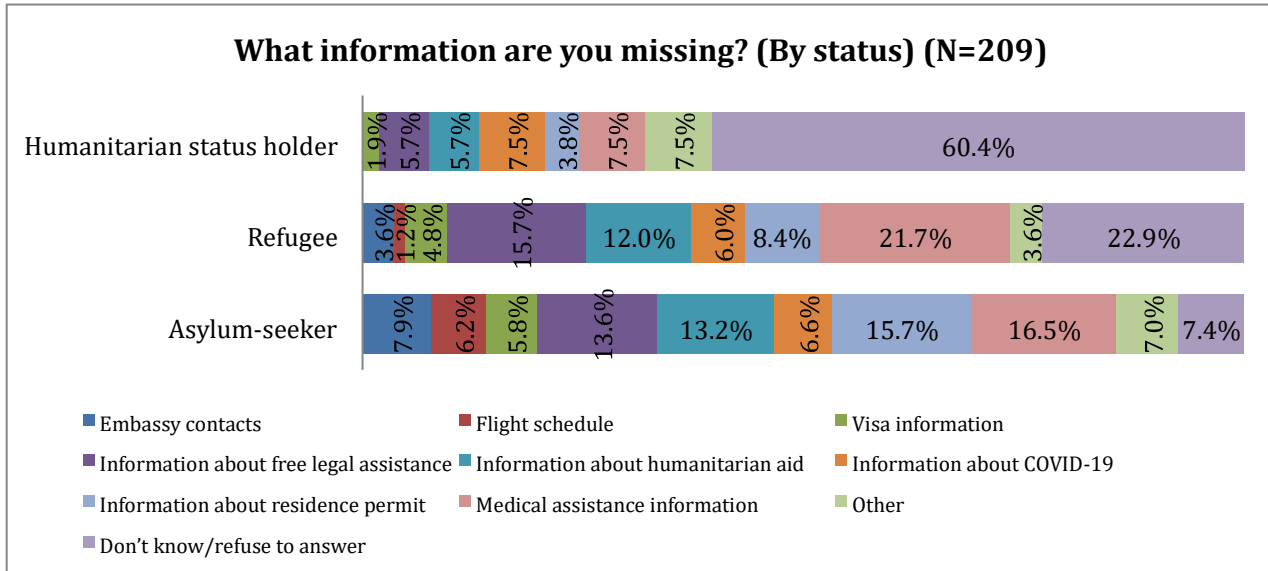
**Diagram #2.5**





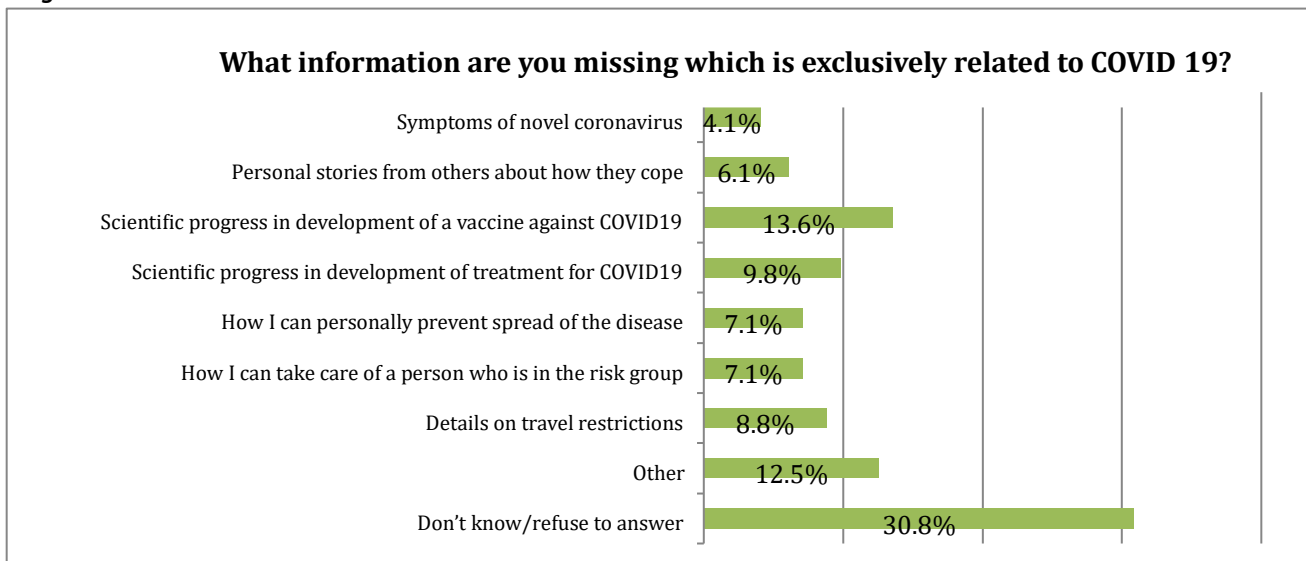
Statistical analysis of the data revealed that the respondents with refugee status (21.7%) require information on **medical services** the most. The latter proved to be important for asylum seekers as well (16.5%) who also need information on residence permits (15.7%). Part of refugees (15.7%) and asylum seekers (13.6%) need information on legal aid. The share of humanitarian status holders who lack information on medical services, residence permits and humanitarian aid ranges between 5% and 8% (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=126.040$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram 32.6).

**Diagram #2.6**



As for the **information exclusively related to COVID-19**, 13.6% of the respondents say they are mostly interested in the scientific progress made in the development of OVID-19 vaccine, while 9.8% would like to have more information on the progress made in developing COVID-19 treatments. A certain number of respondents (8.8%) lack information on travel restrictions as well as how to care for people in the risk groups (7.1%), etc. (see Diagram #2.7).

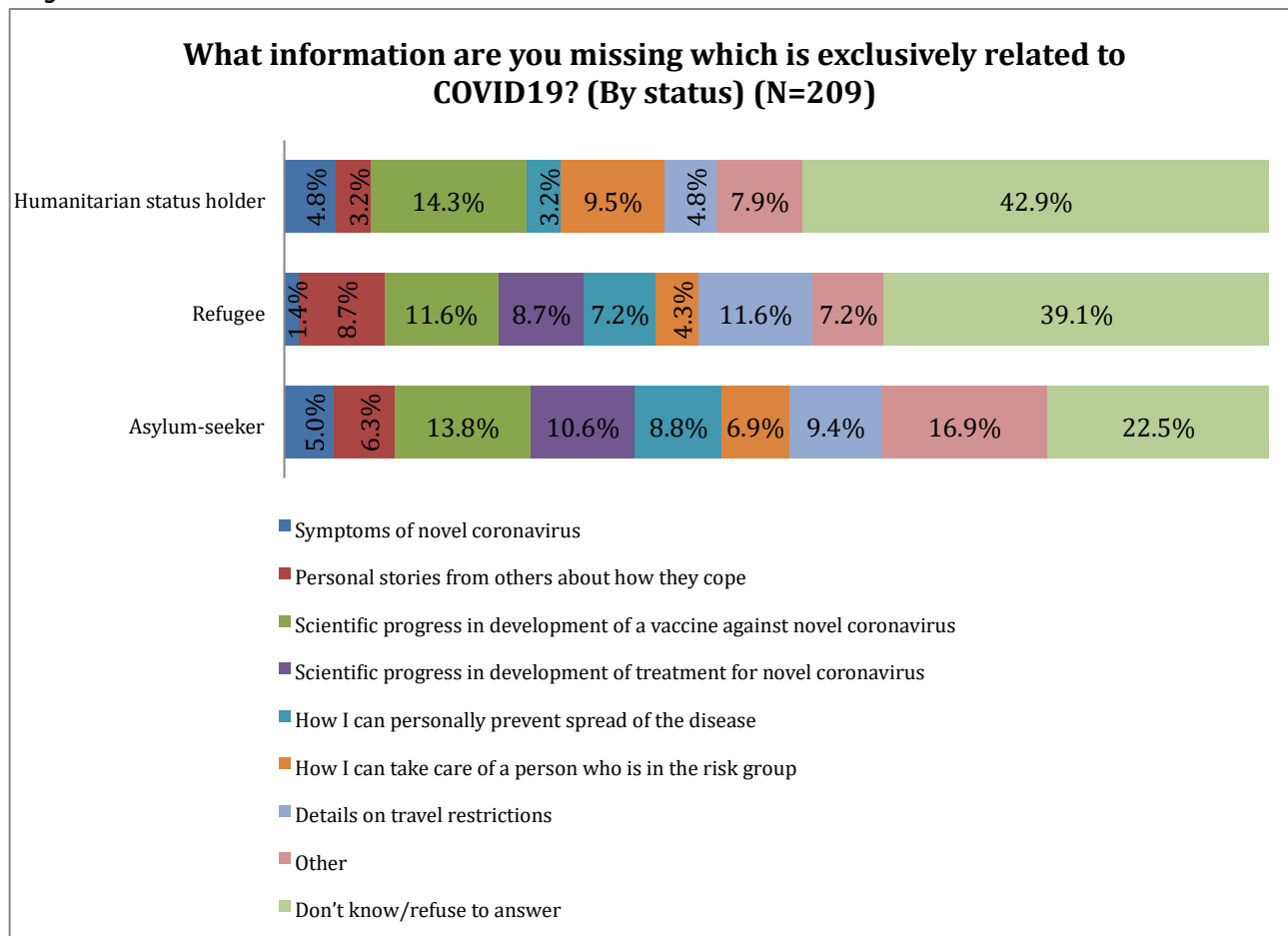
**Diagram #2.7**



Reviewing this issue **in terms of respondents' status** revealed the following: members of all three groups mostly lack information on the scientific progress made in the development of COVID-19 vaccine; however, it is the humanitarian status holders who seem to be the recipients of this type information most frequently. The

latter group lacks information on how to care for someone in the risk group. Refugees, as compared to other groups, are more concerned about the lack of information on travel restrictions, while asylum seekers - about the progress in the development of COVID-19 treatment (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=29.374$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram #2.8).

**Diagram #2.8**



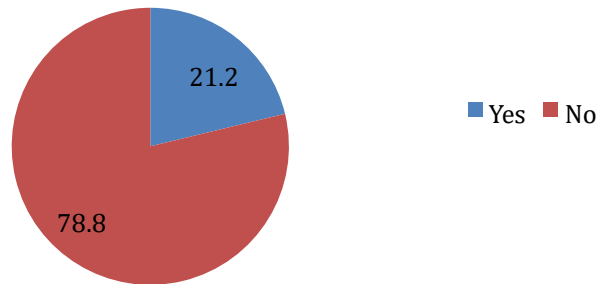
### 3. Accessibility of Services

The majority of respondents (78.8%) say that neither them nor their family members have had any issues with **accessing various services** in the last six months. Around one fifth of the respondents - 21.2% have had an opposite experience (see Diagram #3.1).



**Diagram #3.1**

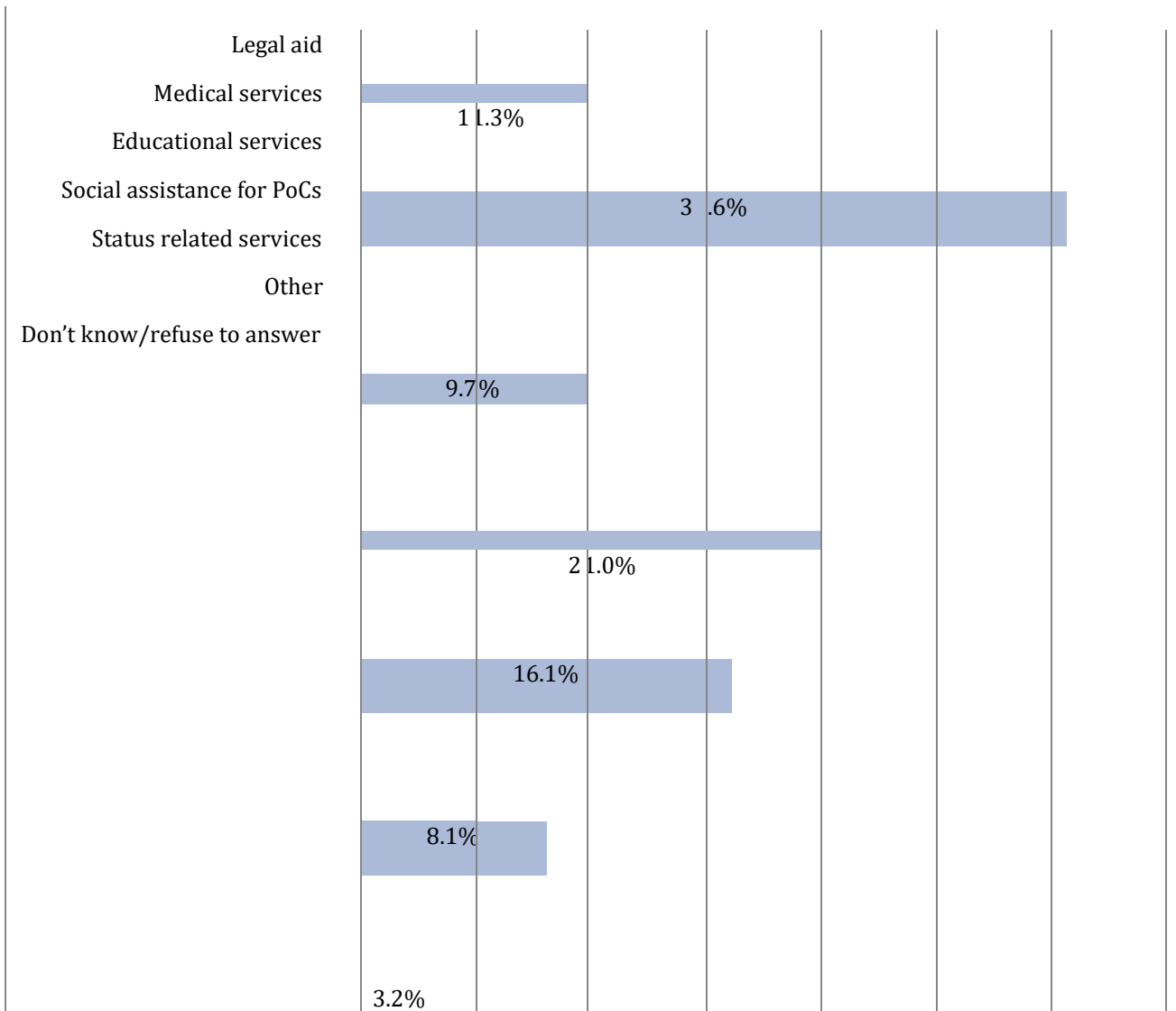
**Have you or your family experiences specific difficulties in accessing various services in the last 6 months? (N=212)**



Those respondents who have encountered **difficulties with accessing various services, pointed out the following issues:** 30.6% state that they have not received/received delayed medical services. Receiving social assistance for PoCs has been problematic for 21%, while status related services - for 16.1%. 11.3% of the respondents have had issues with obtaining legal services, while around 10% - with educational services. Apart from the above-mentioned, individual respondents also mentioned other problems such as contacting and receiving required services from the Justice Department, bringing family members to the country, etc (see Diagram #3.2).

**Diagram #3.2**

**Please indicate which services you could not receive/or received with delay in the last 6 months? (N=45)**



Those services that respondents have not received/received with delays in the past six months have been analysed through the prism of the respondents **countries of origin**. Namely, PoCs from Asia/Africa state they have encountered problems in receiving medical services (28.9%) and social assistance for PoCs (28.9%). Apart from the obstacles in obtaining medical services, respondents originating from the Middle Eastern point out the difficulties they have had in dealing with status related issues (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=23.911$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #3.1).

**Table #3.1**

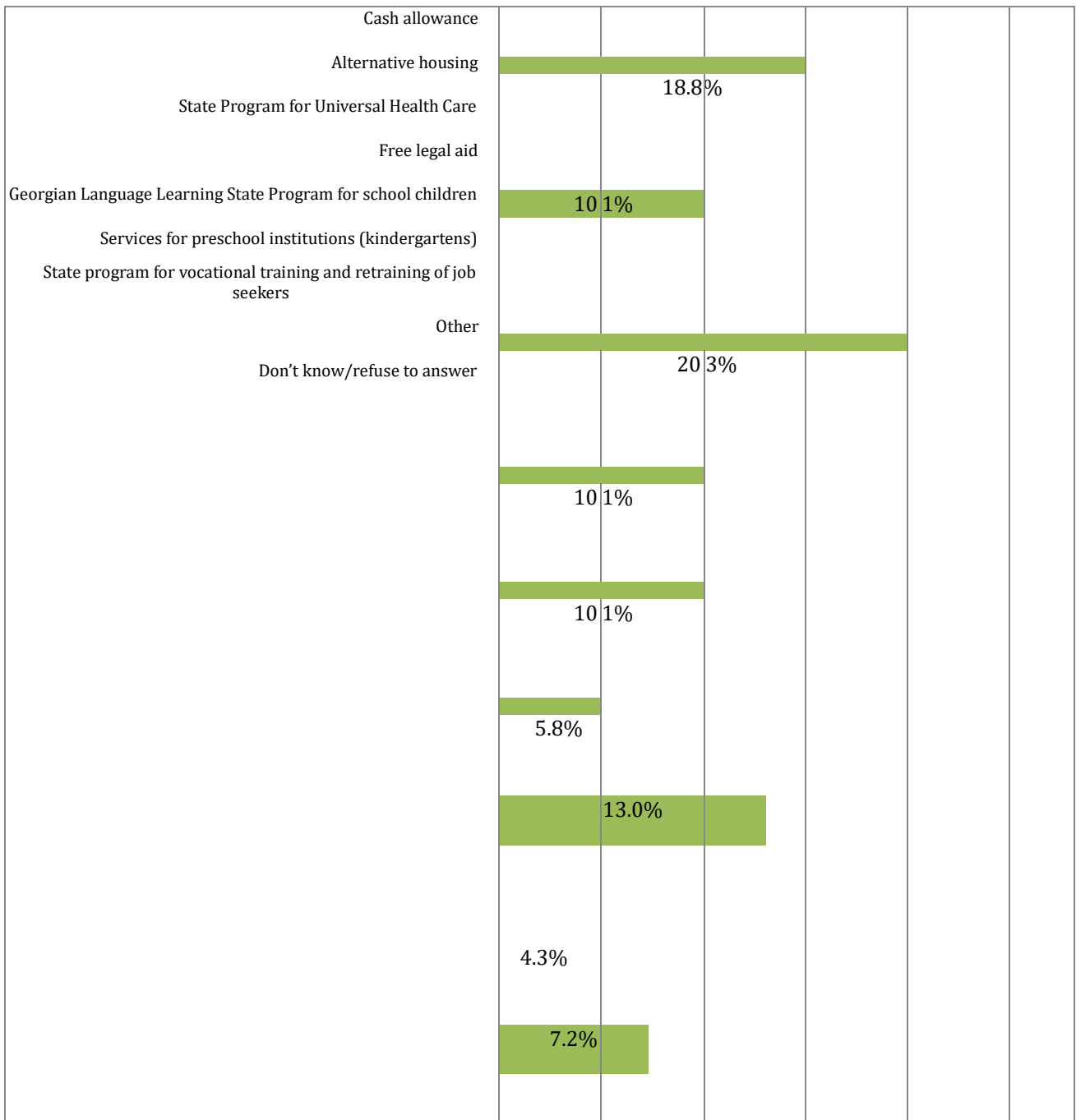
| Please indicate which services you could not receive/or received with delay in the last 6 months? (by countries of origin) (N=60) |                              |                                |
|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
|   | The countries of Asia/Africa | The countries of the Near East |
| Legal aid   | 13.2%                        | 9.1%                           |
| Medical services  | 28.9%                        | 31.8%                          |
| Educational services  | 13.2%                        | 4.5%                           |
| Social assistance for PoCs  | 28.9%                        | 4.5%                           |

|                             |       |       |
|-----------------------------|-------|-------|
| Status related services     | 15.8% | 18.2% |
| Other                       | 0%    | 22.7% |
| Don't know/refuse to answer | 0%    | 9.1%  |

Those respondents who have encountered difficulties in obtaining certain services, have also named the main **benefits they are eligible for under the State Social Assistance Programme but have not received or received with delay in the last six month**. One fifth of the respondents (20.1%) identify Universal Health Care Programme as such, 18.8% - financial assistance. The share of those respondents who have not received or received with delays the following benefits ranges between 6% and 13%: state programme for vocational training and retraining of job seekers, alternative housing, free legal aid, Georgian language classes for school children and services provided by kindergartens (see Diagram #3.3).

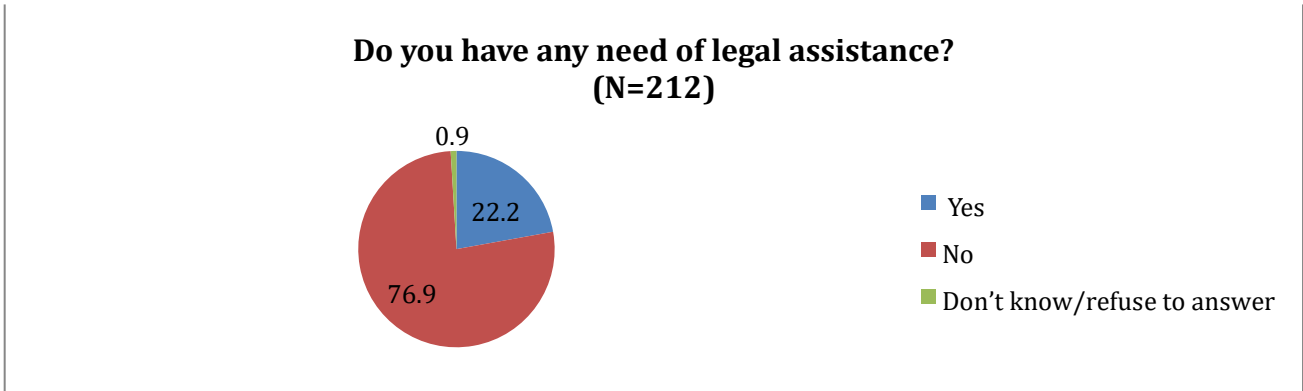
**Diagram #3.3**

**Please indicate, what specific benefits did you not receive/or received with delay under the State Social Assistance Program**



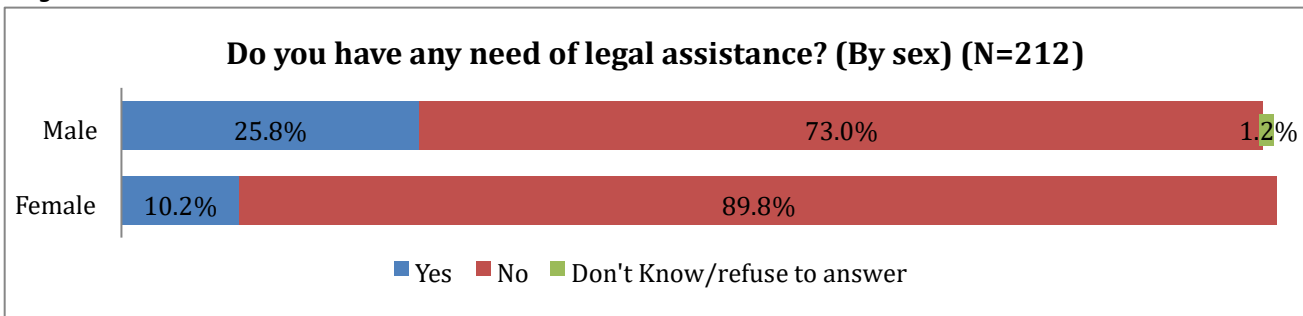
76.9% of PoCs participating in the study stated they do not require **legal assistance**, while over one fifth of the respondents said they do (22.2%) (see Diagram #3.4).

**Diagram #3.4**



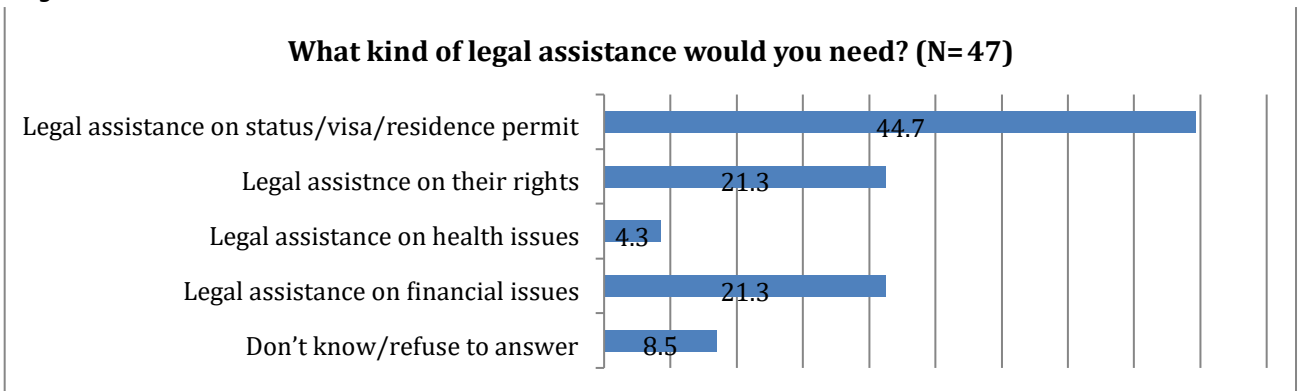
Analysing the need of legal assistance through the **gender prism** revealed that a larger number of male respondents (25.8%) require legal counselling as compared to their female counterparts (10.2%). (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=6.098$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram #3.5).

**Diagram #3.5**



44.7% of the respondents who emphasize the need of legal assistance (47 individuals) require this service mainly for status, visa and residence permit related issues. The need for legal counseling on their rights (21.3%) and financial issues (21.3%) has also been identified by the participants. (see Diagram #3.6). PoCs name the financial issues on which they frequently need legal assistance. Those are problems with receiving / withdrawals of money from bank, unemployment (finding a job, helping to start a business), non-payment of rent due to job loss and financial machinations carried out by hired lawyers.

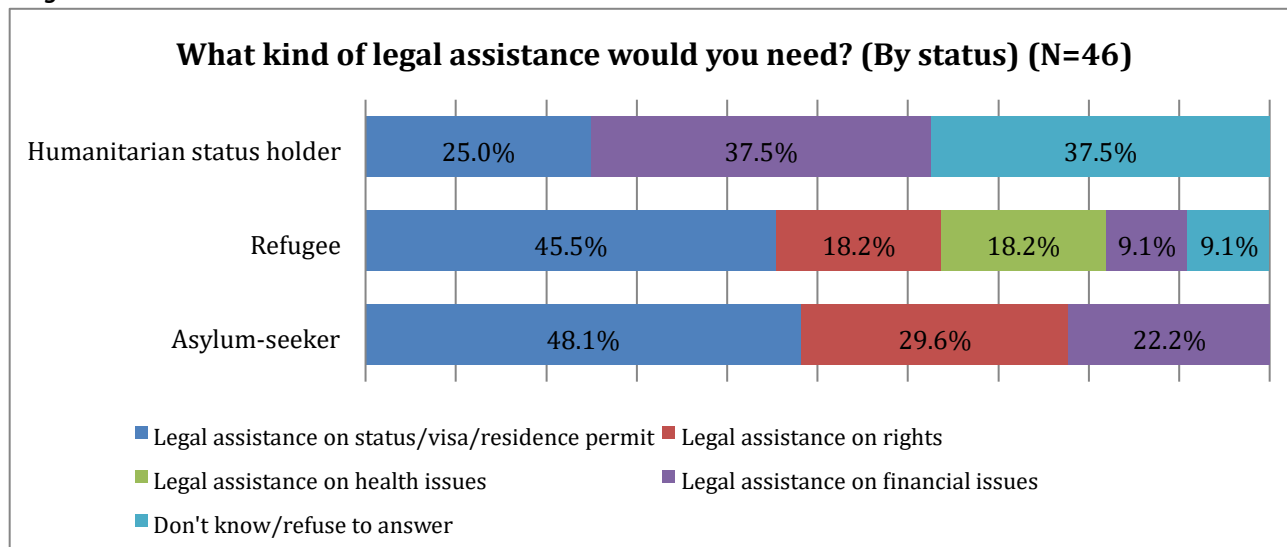
**Diagram #3.6**



By analysing the need of legal assistance in terms of **respondents' status**, we can conclude that the vast majority of interviewed asylum seekers (48.1%) and refugees (45.5%) require legal assistance in the process of obtaining status, while a large number of humanitarian status holders (37.5%) - in dealing with financial

matters. It should be noted that asylum seekers are more interested in obtaining legal counselling on their rights as compared to other groups (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=21.423$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram #3.7).

**Diagram #3.7**



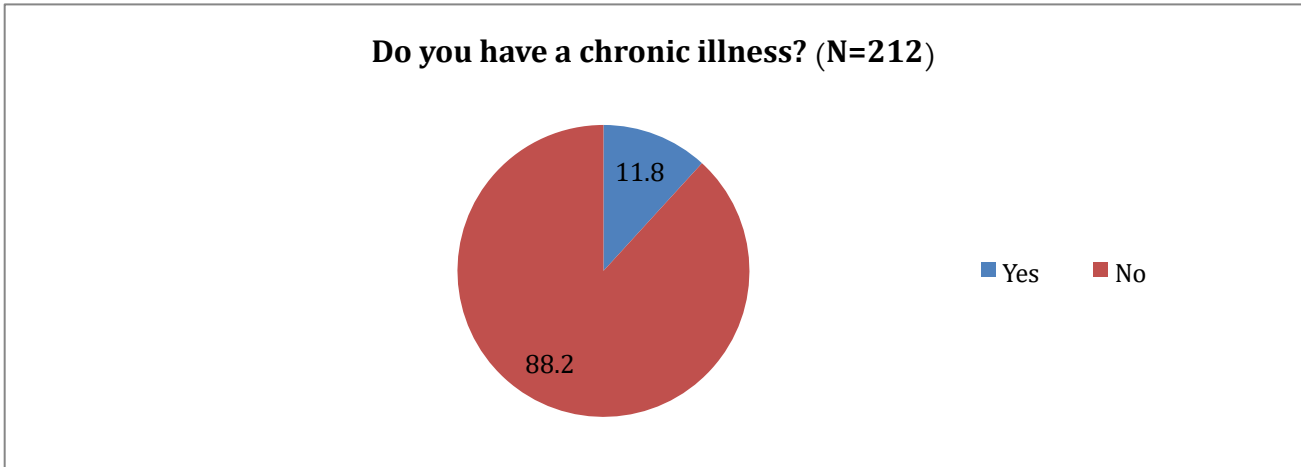
Analysing the same issue through the prism of respondents' **country of origin** revealed that 48.1% of PoCs coming from Asian/African countries require legal assistance on status related issues. Respondents from these countries also deem it important to receive legal assistance on their rights (29.6%). Every third respondent from the Middle Eastern countries emphasize the need of legal assistance on financial matters and status related issues (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=11.228$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #3.2). **Table #3.2**

|  | The countries of Asia/Africa | The countries of the Near East |
|--|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Legal assistance on status/visa/residence permit | 48.1%                        | 33.3%                          |
| legal assistance on their rights                 | 29.6%                        | 11.1%                          |
| legal assistance on health issues                | 7.4%                         | 0.0%                           |
| Legal assistance on financial issues             | 14.8%                        | 33.3%                          |
| Don't know/refuse to answer                      | 0.0%                         | 22.2%                          |

#### 4. State of Health and Access to Healthcare Services

Respondents answered questions on the state of their health. The survey revealed that the vast majority of respondents - 88.2% do not suffer from any chronic diseases as opposed to 11.8% who do (see Diagram #4.1).

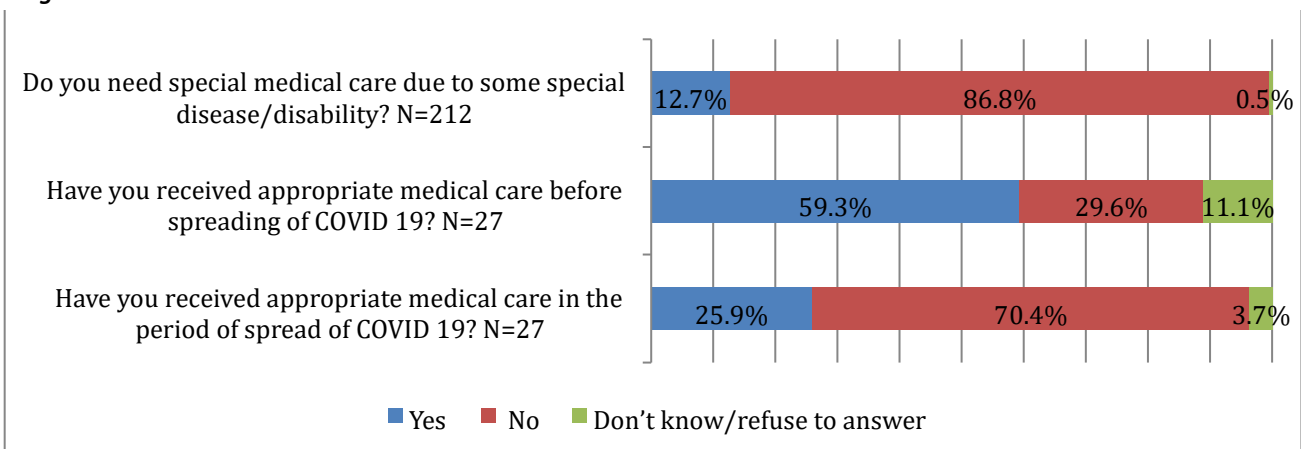
**Diagram #4.1**



The study also revealed that the majority of respondents do not require special medical care due to a certain disease or disability. Only 12.7% of the respondents need this type of care.

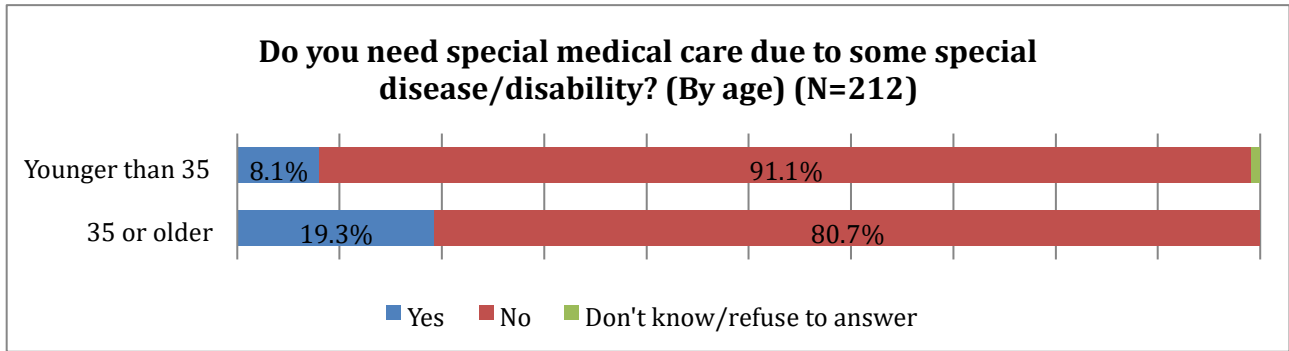
59.3% of those respondents who stated that they require special care due to their state of health, have received appropriate medical care before the spread of COVID-19. Over a quarter say they have not received such service. The study has also revealed that **the situation has drastically changed during the spread of COVID-19** in terms of the accessibility of medical services. Only quarter of the respondents (25.9%) requiring special care have received medical service during the spread of coronavirus. The share of those who failed to do so is much higher (70.4%) (see Diagram #4.2).

**Diagram #4.2**

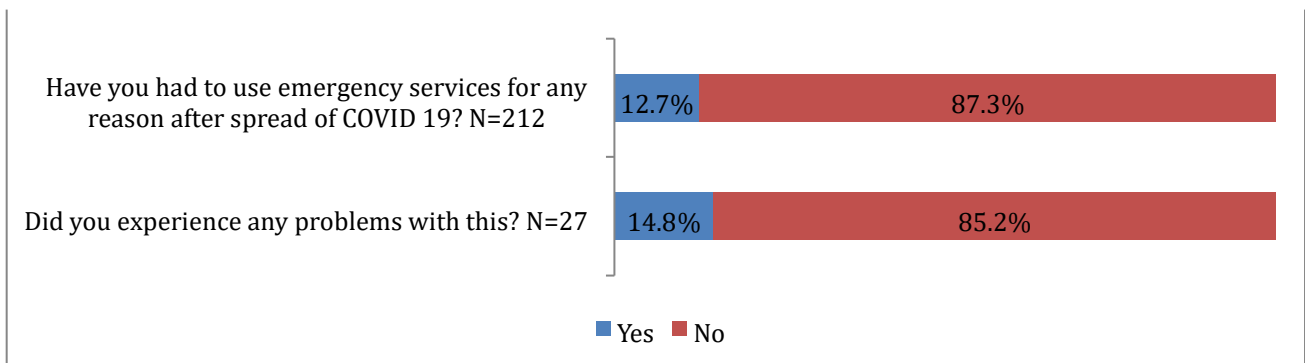


Analysing the study data **in terms of age** revealed that individuals of or over age 35 require special medical care due to underlying diseases or disabilities more frequently than those under 35 (8.1%) (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=6.475$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram #4.3).

**Diagram #4.3**



As it turned out, emergency medical services were needed by only 12.7% of the respondents after the spread of COVID-19. The majority of them (85.2%) have not had any difficulties in accessing the services. Only 14.8% of the patients have encountered certain obstacles. The **obstacles** include: late arrival of an emergency service (ambulance), high prices<sup>1</sup> of medical services, etc. (see Diagram #4.4). **Diagram #4.4**



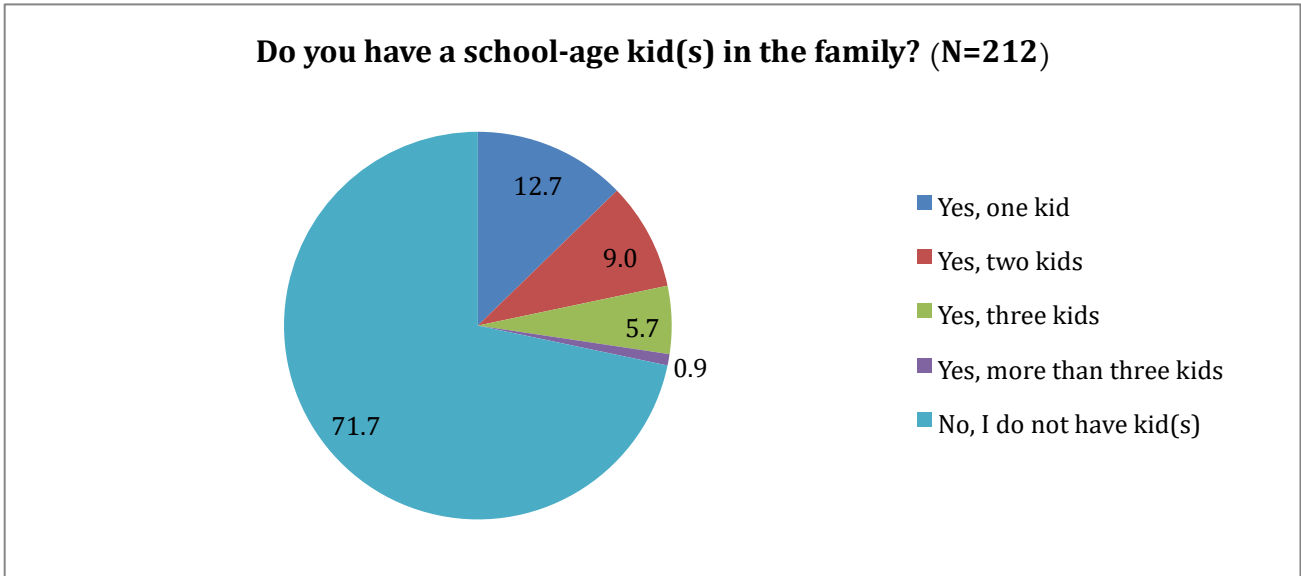
### 5. Access to Educational Services

The study shows that 71.1% of the respondents' families do not have **school-age children**. The share of those with at least one or more than three school-age children is 29% among which 12.7% has only one, 9% has two and 5.7% - 3. Very few have more than three school-age children (N=2) (see Diagram #5.1).

<sup>1</sup> Respondents who have named these obstacles are asylum seekers (N=3)

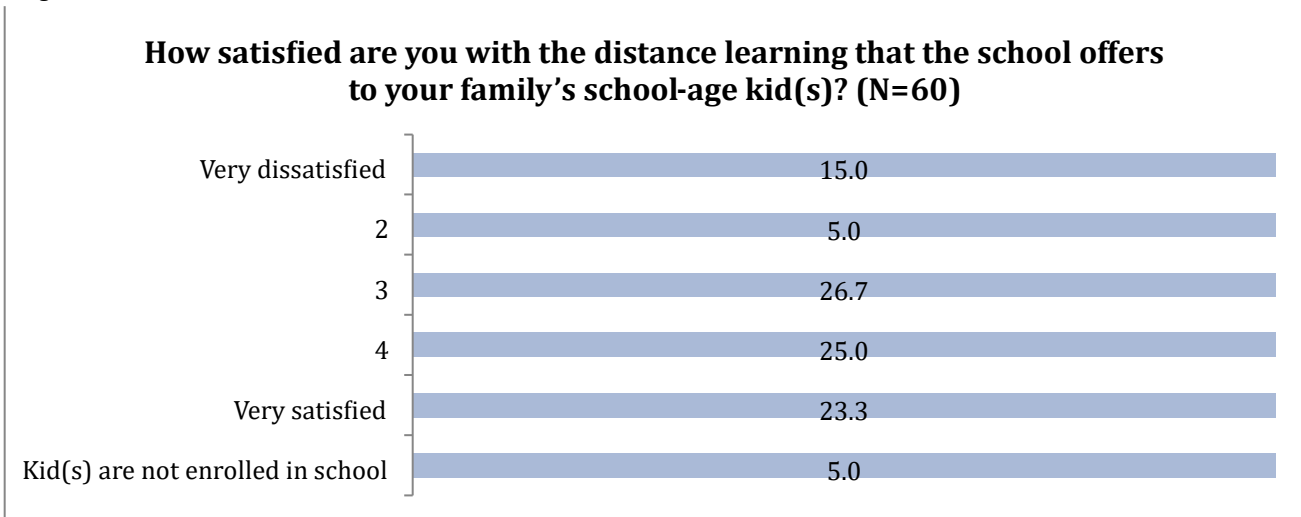


**Diagram #5.1**



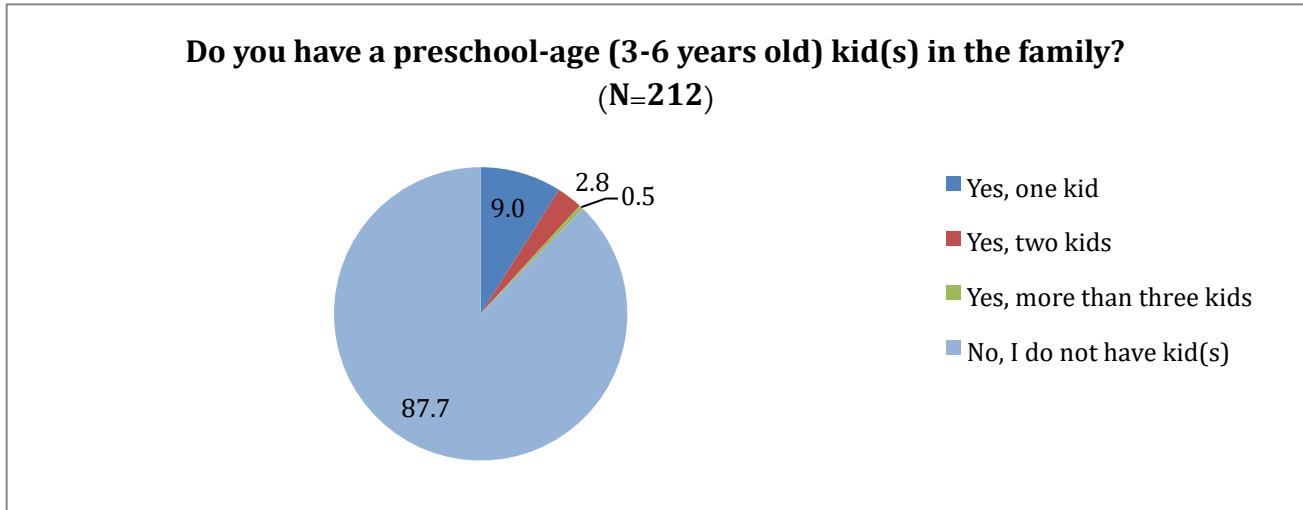
Respondents rated their satisfaction with education services offered by schools after they switched to distance learning on a 5-point rating scale (1 point correlates to 'very dissatisfied', while 5 - to 'very satisfied'). One fifth of the respondents say they are not satisfied with the provided distance learning (1 and 2 points) among which 15% assess it as extremely negative (1 point). 16.7% offer neutral assessment of the distance learning (3 points: 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'). The share of satisfied respondents (5 and 4 points) (48.3%) considerably exceeds that of the dissatisfied ones. Only three respondents have noted that their children are not enrolled in any educational institution (see Diagram #5.2).

**Diagram #5.2**



Statistical analysis of the data revealed that 9% of the respondents have one **preschool-age** (aged 3-6) child. Only 7 respondents have noted that they have 2 (N=6) or more than 3 (N=1) children from this age category. The majority of respondents (87.7%) do not have preschool-age children (see Diagram #5.3).

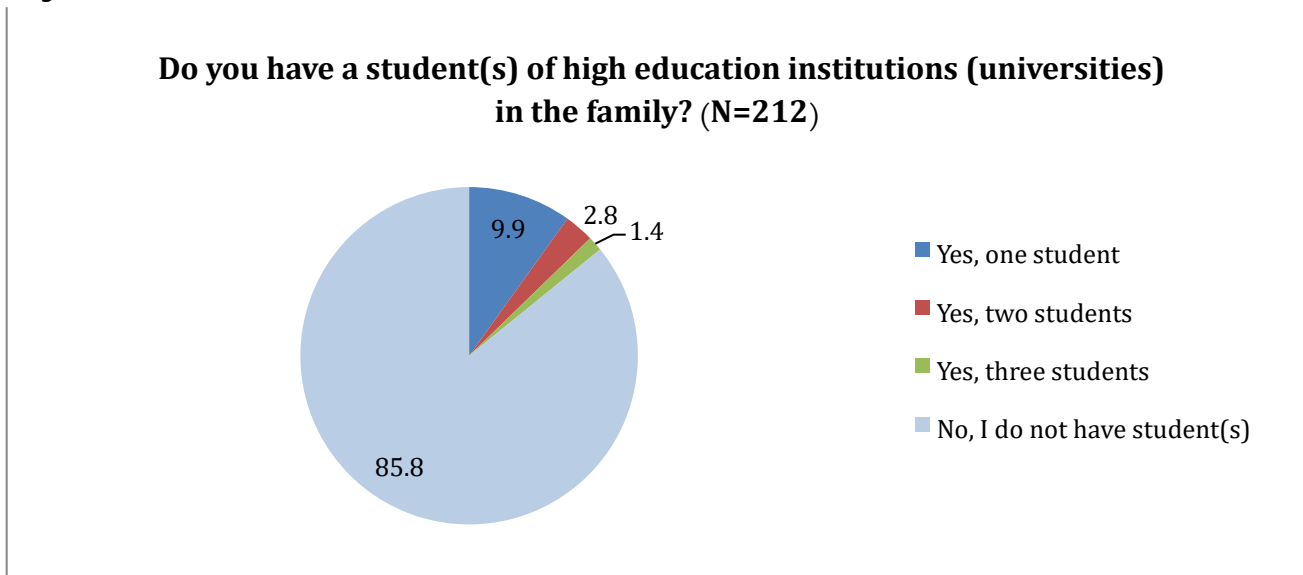
Diagram #5.3



A larger number of respondents - 46.2% (N=12) who have preschool-age children in their families note that the relevant educational institutions do not offer distance learning. According to 5 respondents, their children are not enrolled in any such institution. 9 respondents say their preschool-age children take part in remote learning classes. 7 of the respondents are satisfied with the latter service (5 and 4 points). Two respondents have offered one neutral and one negative assessment each.

14.2% of the respondents have family members who attend higher education institutions. 9.9% of the latter category have only 1 student in the family. The vast majority of the respondents (85.8%) do not have any students in the family (see Diagram #5.4).

Diagram #5.4

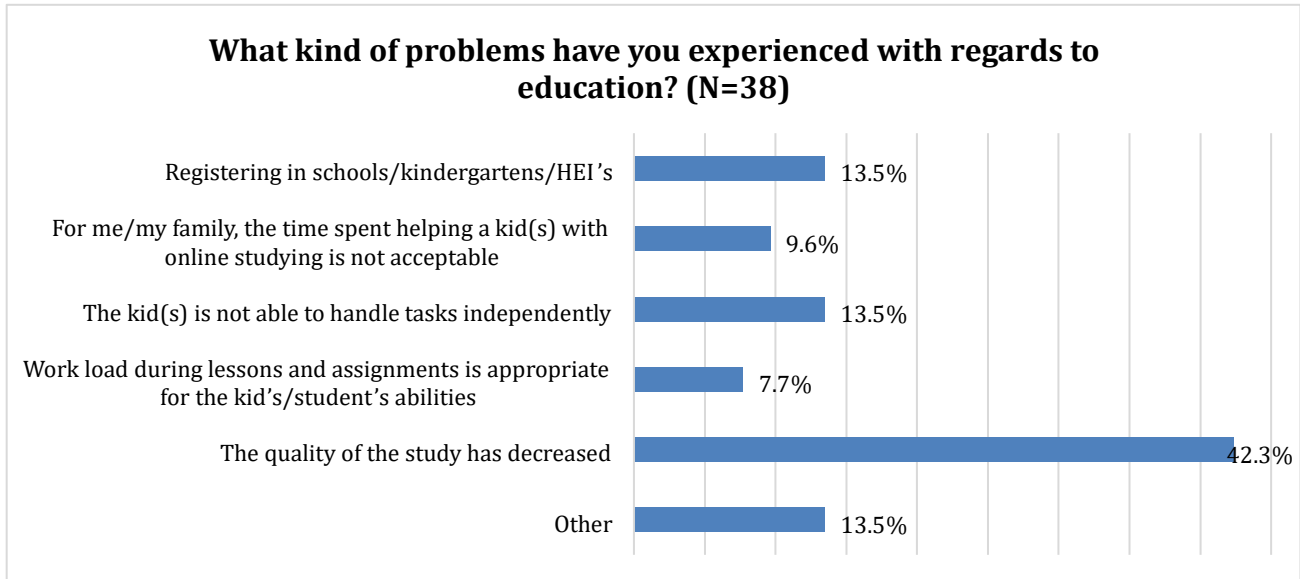


16 respondents (53.3%) among the study participants are satisfied (5 and 4 points on a 5-point rating scale) with distance learning services offered by higher education institutions. Only 5 respondents (16.6%) view the process of distance learning as negative (1 and 2 points on a 5-point rating scale). 3 respondents assess their levels of satisfaction with a neutral (3) point.

As it turned out, the majority of respondents (82.1%) have not encountered any problems in the **field of education**. Those who have faced certain obstacles (42.3%), say the main problem lies in the decrease of the

**level of education.** Other problems that were put forth include registering at educational institutions and the fact that children are unable to do their homework independently (equal - 13.5%-13.5%) (see Diagram #5.5).

**Diagram #5.5**



The study revealed that **women** (32.7%) have encountered more problems in the field of education as compared to **men** (13.5%) due to the spread of novel coronavirus (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=9.397$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Analysing the data through the prism of status showed that humanitarian status holders (33.3%) have faced more problems with regards to education as compared to asylum seekers (11.6%) and refugees (19.2%) (Data are statistically reliable  $X^2=10.237$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

### 6. Communication with Governmental Bodies and Non-Governmental Organisation

The next stage of the study analysed the scope of respondents approaching and receiving adequate counselling from the following non-governmental organisations, governmental bodies and international organisations working on the issues of migration in the last 6 months:

- World Vision
- Division of International Protection Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia Hotline
- Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice hotline
- Legal Aid Service hotline
- UNHCR hotline

The majority of the respondents state that they have not used the services offered by the above mentioned organisations in the last 6 months (1 point on a 5-point rating scale where 1 point correlates to 'never' and 5 points - to 'very often'):

- World Vision – 53.3%
- Division of International Protection Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia hotline - 92.5%
- Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice hotline - 77.4%
- Legal Aid Service hotline - 92.9%
- UNHCR hotline - 85.8%

Based on the study data, PoCs cooperate with World Vision most frequently (MEAN=2.02) followed by the respondents using the hotlines at Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice (MEAN=1.43) and UNHCR (MEAN=1.24);

See the detailed desegregation of the data in Table #6.1:

**Table #6.1**

| Have you sought and received advice, counselling, used a hotline or other assistance in the past 6 months of the following institutions/organizations? | Never | 2     | 3     | 4    | Very often | Refuse to answer |
|--|-------|-------|-------|------|------------|------------------|
| World Vision   | 53.3% | 12.3% | 17.5% | 6.1% | 8.5%       | 2.4%             |
| Hotlines of the Division of International Protection Issues at the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia   | 92.5% | 0.5%  | 2.8%  | 1.4% | 0.5%       | 2.4%             |
| Hotlines of the Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice   | 77.4% | 7.1%  | 3.8%  | 5.2% | 2.8%       | 3.8%             |
| Hotlines of the Legal Aid Service  | 92.9% | 1.4%  | 0.9%  | 1.9% | -          | 2.8%             |
| Hotlines of the UNHCR  | 85.8% | 2.8%  | 4.2%  | 3.3% | 0.5%       | 3.3%             |

Analysing the issue through the **prism of status** has revealed statistically reliable differences. While it is true that the level of approaching various institutions is mostly low, asylum seekers (15.2%) and refugees (15.4%) seek assistance from World Vision more frequently as compared to humanitarian status holders (6.7%) (4 and 5 points on a 5 point rating scale) (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=19.673$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). On the other hand, humanitarian status holders (22.2%) have used the hotline of the Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice more frequently in the last 6 months as compared to asylum seekers (5.4%) or refugees (1.9%) (4 and 5 points on a 5 point rating scale) (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=30.619$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #6.2).

**Table #6.2**

|  |                                   | Never | 2     | 3     | 4     | Very often | Refuse to answer |
|--|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------------|------------------|
| Have you sought and received advice, counselling or other assistance from World Vision in the last 6 months?           | Asylum-seeker (N=112)             | 42.9% | 18.8% | 21.4% | 5.4%  | 9.8%       | 1.8%             |
|  | Refugee (N=52)                    | 61.5% | 5.8%  | 15.4% | 7.7%  | 7.7%       | 1.9%             |
|  | Humanitarian status holder (N=45) | 73.3% | 4.4%  | 11.1% | 2.2%  | 4.4%       | 4.4%             |
| Have you had to use hotlines in the past 6 months of the Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice? | Asylum-seeker (N=112)             | 77.7% | 9.8%  | 2.7%  | 4.5%  | 0.9%       | 4.5%             |
|  | Refugee (N=52)                    | 92.3% | 1.9%  | -     | 1.9%  | -          | 3.8%             |
|  | Humanitarian status holder (N=45) | 60%   | 6.7%  | 8.9%  | 11.1% | 11.1%      | 2.2%             |

Those respondents who in any degree of frequency have used the above-mentioned services in the last six months were asked the next questions.

**World Vision:** The majority (62.8%) of the respondents (total of 44.3%) cooperating with this organisation are satisfied<sup>2</sup> with counseling and support provided (4 and 5 points on a 5 point rating scale), while 18.1% is dissatisfied (1 and 2 points). Accordingly, almost one fifth is neutral.

**Hotline of the Division of International Protection Issues of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia:** Only 11 respondents (5.1%) had to use this hotline with varying degrees of frequency. They have approached the agency regarding various documents, among them 3 respondents - regarding ID cards and 1 - regarding the status of an asylum seeker. One of the respondents has noted that contacting the agency is part of his/her job, another one has approached them because of medical insurance related issues. 4 of the respondents are dissatisfied with the assistance they have received, while 3 of them assess the services offered by the **Division of International Protection Issues** positively (see Table #6.3).

**Table #6.3**

| How satisfied are you with the service provided by the DIPI? | Number of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|
| Very dissatisfied  | 3                     |
| 2  | 1                     |
| 3  | 4                     |
| 4  | 1                     |
| Very satisfied   | 2                     |

**Hotline of the Public Service Development Agency at the Ministry of Justice:** 40% of the participants (18.8%) have used the hotline in the past six months. The majority of them (31 individuals) have contacted the PSDA regarding ID cards, while the other 3 - regarding residence permits. According to one of the respondents, contacting the agency is part of his/her job. 2 individuals have used the hotline regarding the status related issues and due to the need to renew the asylum seeker certificate. 70% (28 individuals) of the respondents are satisfied with the services they have received (among them 50% is 'totally satisfied'); 8 respondents have offered negative assessments of the services (see Table #6.4). **Table #6.4**

| How satisfied are you with the service provided by the PSDA? | Number of respondents |
|--|-----------------------|
| Very dissatisfied  | 3                     |
| 2  | 5                     |
| 3  | 4                     |
| 4  | 8                     |
| Very satisfied   | 20                    |

After analysing the data through the **prism of PoCs status**, we can conclude that among the 17 asylum seekers (compared to other groups) there is a bigger number of respondents satisfied with the services provided by this agency (5 and 4 points on a 5 point rating scale); (Data are statistically reliable :  $X^2=20.131$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #6.5).

<sup>2</sup> Respondents' satisfaction was assessed on a 5-point rating scale, where 1 point correlates to the category 'totally dissatisfied' and 5 - to the category 'totally satisfied'

**Table #6.5**

| How satisfied are you with the service provided by the PSDA? | Very dissatisfied | 2       | 3       | 4       | Very satisfied |
|--|-------------------|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Asylum-seeker  | -                 | 1 resp. | 2 resp. | 4 resp. | 13 resp.       |
| Refugee  | -                 | 2 resp. | -       | -       | -              |
| Humanitarian status holder                                   | 3 resp.           | 2 resp. | 2 resp. | 4 resp. | 6 resp.        |

**Hotline of the Legal Aid Agency:** 9 respondents (4.3%) have used this hotline during the pandemic mainly in regards to the lawyer related issues (N=4). 2 respondents have approached the agency each with finance and health related issues. One individual has contacted the Legal Aid Agency due to the expiration of his/her ID card. 4 respondents are satisfied with the services provided, while 1 is dissatisfied and 4 feel neutral.

**Hotline of the UNHCR:** 22 respondents (10.9%) have used this hotline in the last six months; the main reason for approaching the organisation has been identified as document related issues (N=10) - obtaining/renewing of ID cards on the one hand and of residence permits and asylum seeker certificates on the other. 5 respondents have approached the UNHCR regarding their financial conditions and employment, while 2 respondents - regarding assistance during the pandemic. The vast majority of the respondents (N=10) are satisfied with the services they have received (5 and 4 points on a 5 point scale) (see Table #6.6). **Table #6.6**

| How satisfied are you with the service provided by the UNHCR? | Number of respondents |
|---|-----------------------|
| Very dissatisfied   | 6                     |
| 2   | 2                     |
| 3   | 5                     |
| 4   | 6                     |
| Very satisfied  | 4                     |

## 7. Rights and Safety of PoCs

On the next stage of the survey respondents' **rights and safety** have been assessed.

As per the majority of the respondents (87.7%), their rights have not been violated due to the coronavirus, while 11.3% (N=24) state the opposite. As it turned out, for the most part the following rights were violated: freedom of movement (12 responses), access to social aid (9 responses), access to health care and educational services, etc. (see Table 7.1).

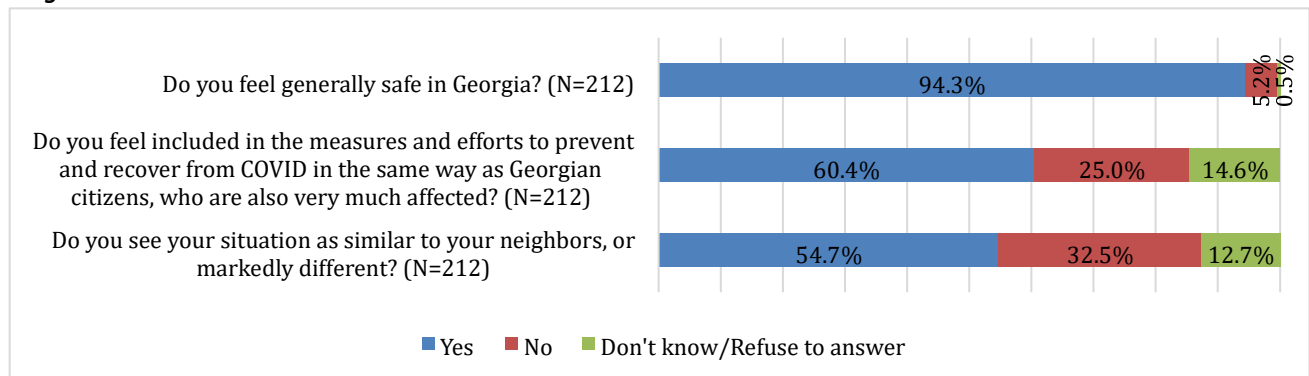
**Table #7.1**

| Which rights of you have been violated because of COVID 19? | Number of responses |
|---|---------------------|
| Access to social benefits                                   | 9                   |
| Freedom of movement   | 12                  |
| Freedom of expression                                       | 2                   |
| Access to COVID19 testing                                   | 1                   |
| Access to healthcare  | 3                   |
| Access to education   | 4                   |
| Access to trainings   | 4                   |
| Access to legal aid   | 2                   |
| Other   | 2                   |

As for the feeling of **safety**, the survey shows that the majority of the respondents (94.3%) feel safe in Georgia; only 5.2% feel the opposite. At the same time, 60.4% of the respondents believe they have been included in the measures and efforts developed to prevent and fight against COVID-19 as much as the Georgian citizens have. A quarter of the respondents disagree with the above statement.

In terms of the current situation, the majority of the respondents believe that their situation is identical to that of their neighbours (54.7%), while almost one third feel different (see Diagram #7.1).

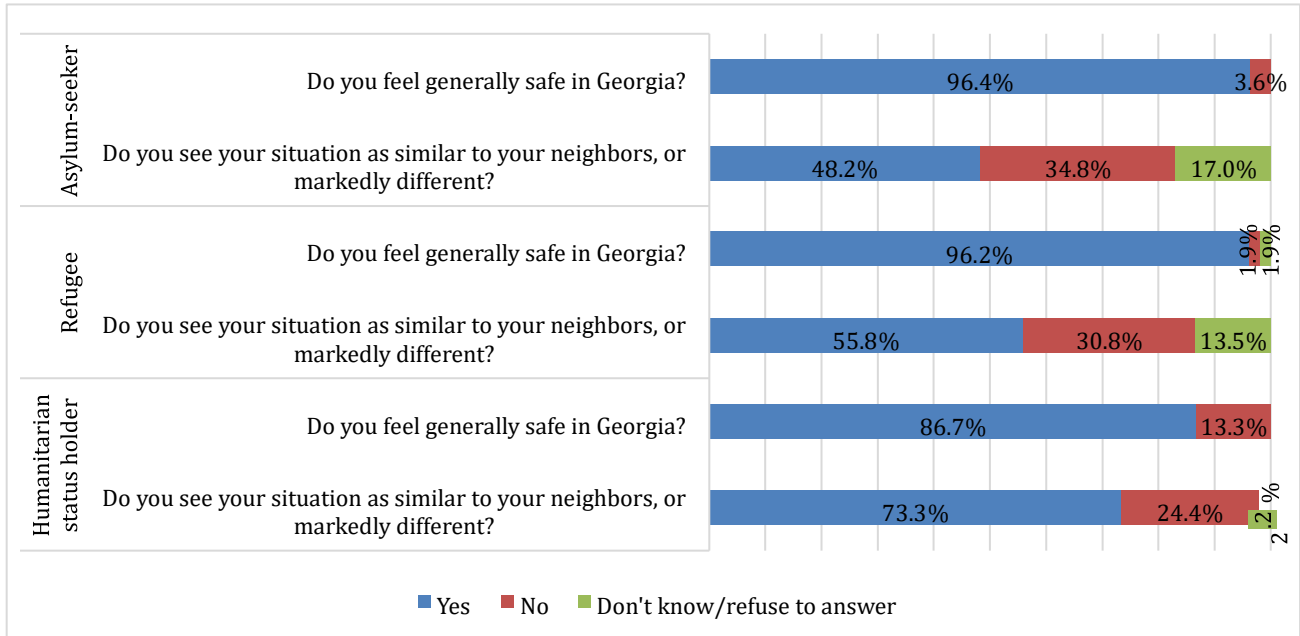
**Diagram #7.1**



As it turns out, holders of the three **status** categories feel safe in Georgia; however, asylum seekers (96.4%) and refugees (96.2%) are more self confident than humanitarian status holders (86.7%) (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=10.650$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

Interestingly enough, asylum seekers feel their situation to be different from that of their neighbours (34.8%) more than refugees (30.8%) and especially, humanitarian status holders (24.4%). The share of those hesitating or refusing to answer (17% and 13.5% respectively) questions regarding the above mentioned issue is also higher among asylum seekers and refugees (as compared to humanitarian status holders). (Data are statistically correct:  $X^2=10.176$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). This supposedly means that **the integration of asylum seekers into the local community (neighbourhood) is stalled by the fact that the prospects of remaining in Georgia for this subgroup are not clear** (see Diagram #7.2).

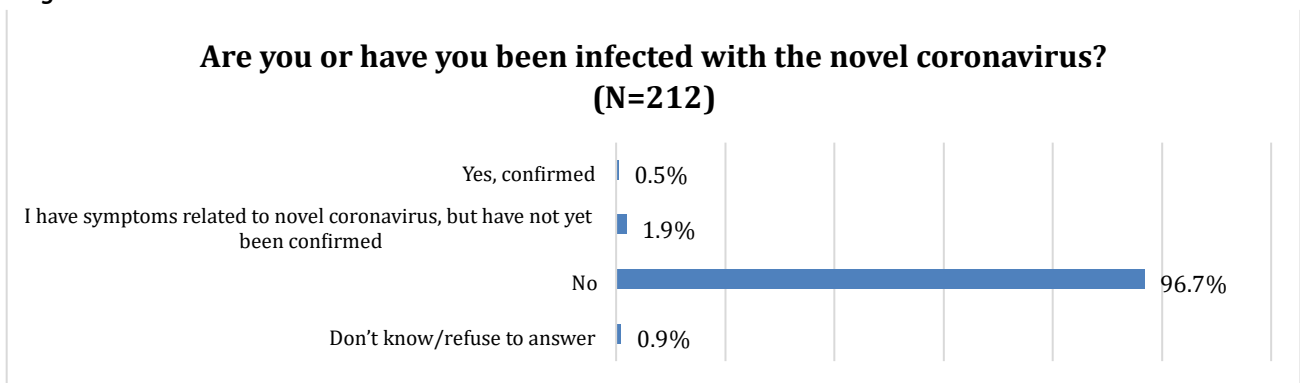
**Diagram #7.2**



**8. Respondents’ Experience with Novel Coronavirus**

Next stage of the survey examined the instances of the respondents **contracting the novel coronavirus**. As it turned out, almost an absolute majority (96.75) have not been infected; only 2.4% (N=5) report on either confirmed or suspected cases of the virus (see Diagram #8.1).

**Diagram #8.1**



89.6% of the respondents stated that they have neither been isolated nor quarantined due the suspected coronavirus infection. Accordingly, 2.8% of the respondents (N=6) have undergone quarantine, while 6.6% (N=14) have self-isolated.

Respondents were asked **if they know someone from their immediate social circles who has had or has confirmed COVID-19**. The majority of the respondents, 75.5% say there is no one in their close social environment infected with the virus. 16.5% confirm they know of such people. 3.3% (N=7) say they know a person in their immediate social circle who has the novel coronavirus symptoms but the infection has not yet been confirmed.

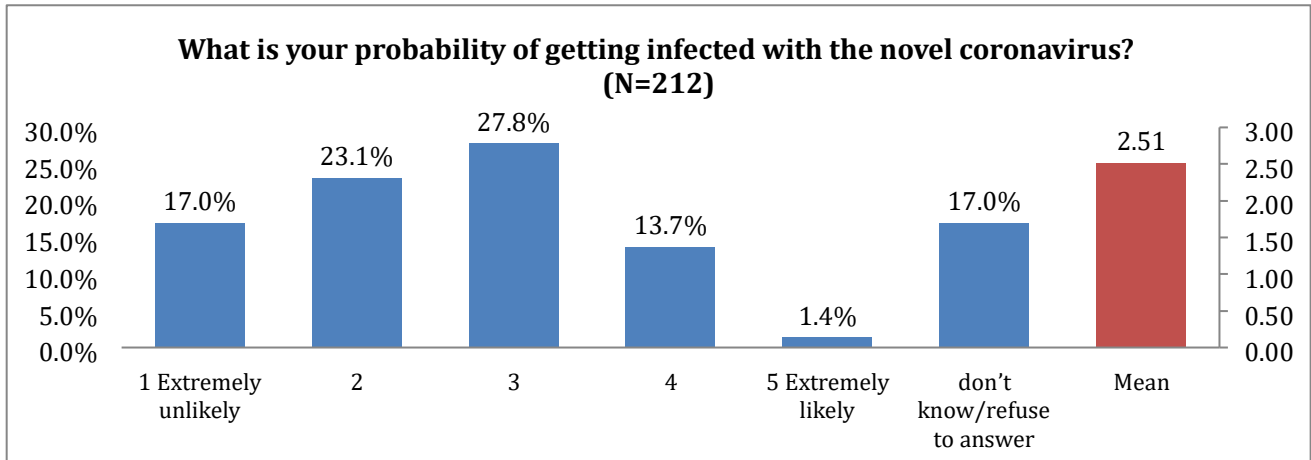
73.1% of the respondents deny they have a person in their immediate social circle who has been quarantined or isolated due to suspected novel coronavirus. 22.6% confirm they do.

Respondents assessed **the probability of contracting the novel coronavirus** on a 5 point rating scale where 1 correlates to ‘very low’ and 5 - to ‘very high’. According to 40.1% of the respondents, the probability of them



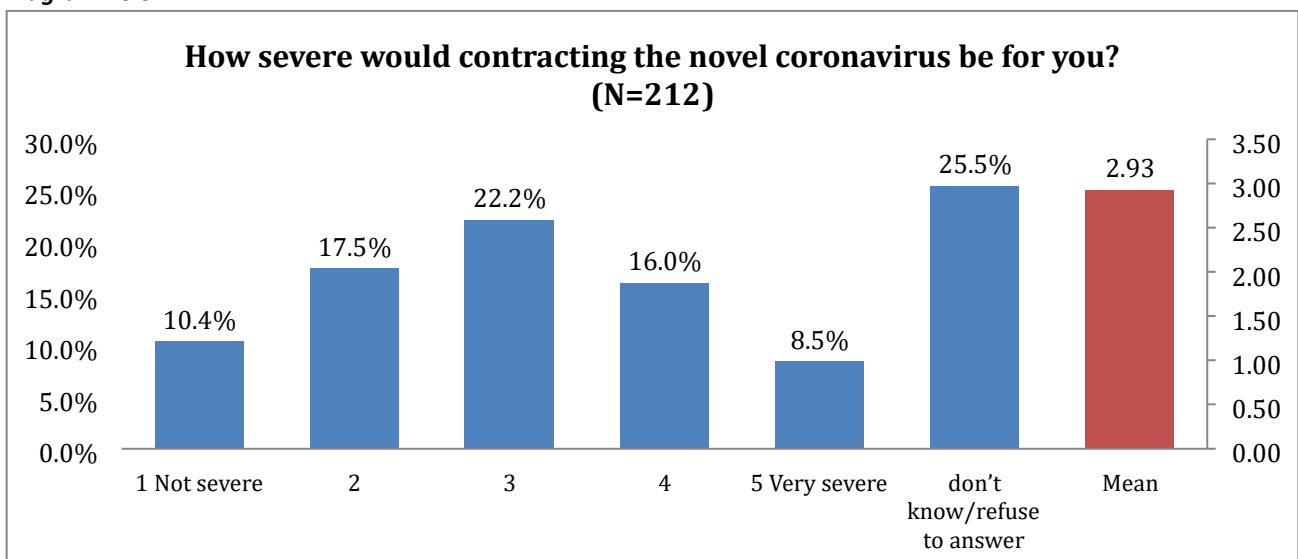
getting infected is low (1 or 2 points). 15.1% believe the probability of getting infected is high (5 and 4 points). The Mean of the date on the scale is 2.51. This confirms that **respondents place the chances of contracting the coronavirus in the low probability field** (see Diagram #8.2).

**Diagram #8.2**



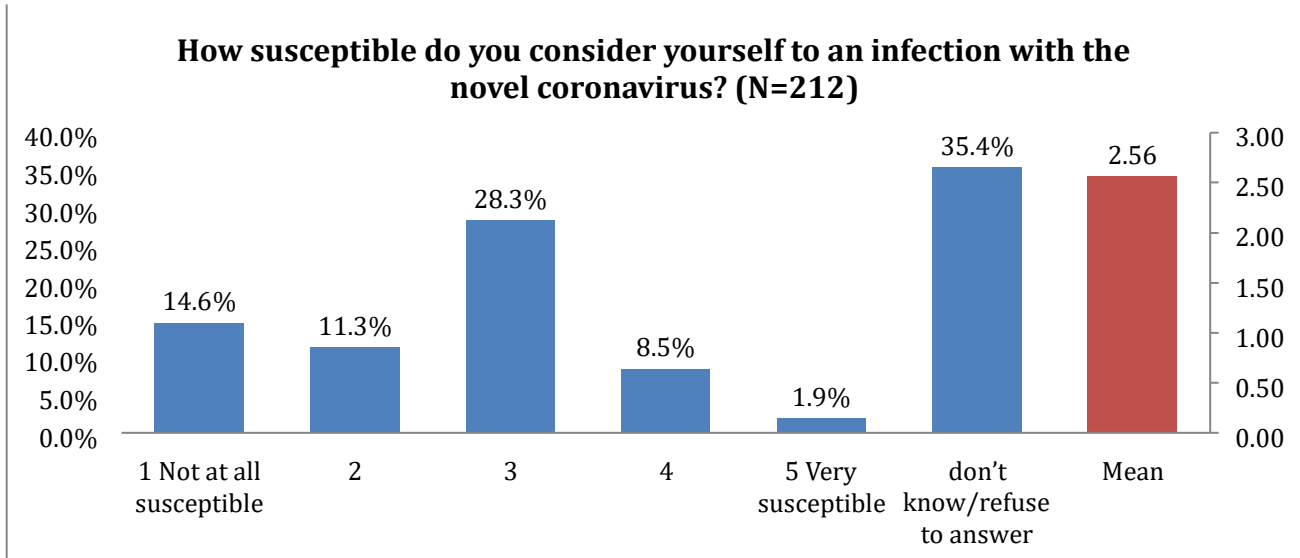
Respondents assessed on a 5 point rating scale as to **how severe the novel coronavirus will be for them** in case of contracting it, in their opinion (1 point correlates to 'not severe' and 5 - to 'very severe'). As it turned out, the respondents (27.9%) mostly tend to believe they will not have severe coronavirus symptoms (1 and 2 points). This is confirmed by the average indicator (Mean=2.93, which is in the 'not severe' field; however, it is close to the neutral (3 points) indicator) (see Diagram #8.3).

**Diagram #8.3**



Respondents also assessed **how susceptible they consider themselves to contracting the novel coronavirus** on a 5 point rating scale (1 point on the scale correlates to 'very susceptible' and 5 - to 'not at all susceptible'). A relatively large number of the respondents (28.3%) rate their susceptibility to the coronavirus with 3 points. It should be noted that over one third of the respondents (35.4%) refused to answer the question. The average indicator (Mean) on the scale is 2.56 which shows that respondents' assessments are mostly accumulated in the 'susceptible' field. (see Diagram #8.4).

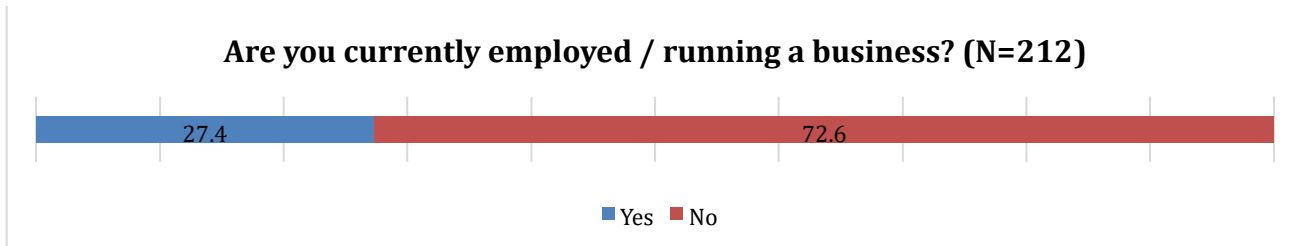
Diagram #8.4



### 9. Employment during the Pandemic

The majority of the respondents (72.6%) state **they are currently unemployed and/or do not run a business**. As it turned out, 27.4% of the respondents were employed or were running a business during the survey period (see Diagram #9.1).

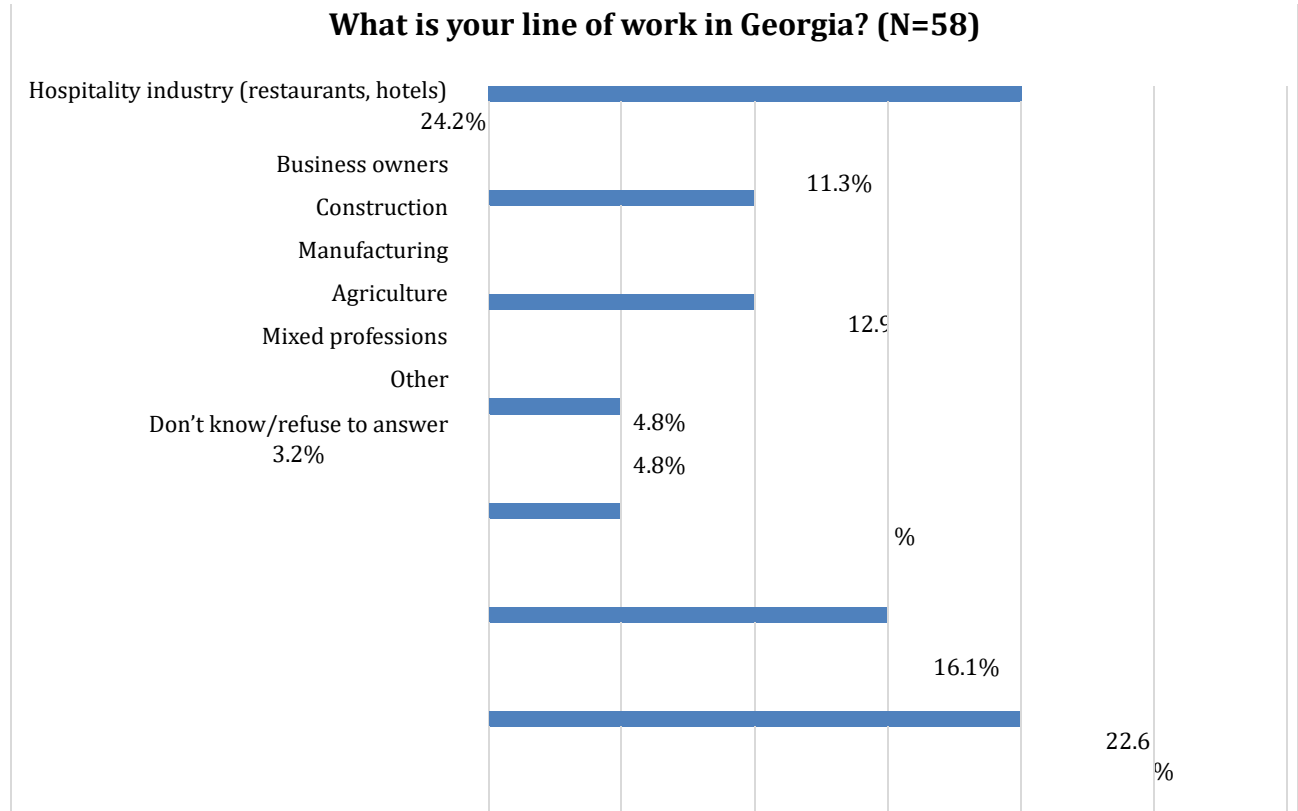
Diagram #9.1



Those who said they were employed or were running a business were asked a question about **their line of work**. As it turned out, almost a quarter of employed/business-owner respondents (24.25) work in the hospitality industry (restaurant, hotel). 16.1% are employed with mixed professions. 12.2% are employed in the construction industry. 11.3% of the respondents run their own businesses.

Those respondents with mixed professions have specified their lines of work: 5 respondents work at nongovernmental organisations; 2 respondents are freelance teachers and other 2 respondents are day labourers. Each other respondent is a sales manager, community facilitator or works in the real estate (see Diagram 9.2).

**Diagram #9.2**



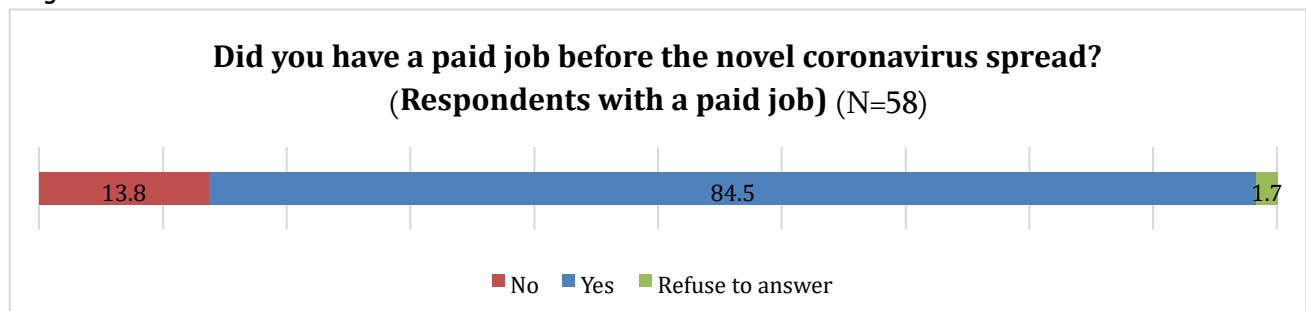
The majority of those (58.6%) who were employed or were running a business at the time of the survey are **officially employed (with a contract)**. 32.2% are employed unofficially. 5.2% (N=3) say they either do not know or refuse to answer.

The majority of the employed respondents (69%) say their jobs require **workplace attendance**. Almost one fifth (19%) say their employers require **distance working**. While 12.1% state their employers have adopted a **mixed form of working**.

Respondents who are officially employed were asked a question about the **length of their contracts**. As it turned out, 31% of the respondents work on a yearly contract; the share of those respondents who are contracted by month is also 31%. Around a quarter of the respondents (25.9%) are contracted by day. 6 respondents run their own businesses and have no contracts. Only 1 respondent is contracted by week.

Those respondents who have stated they were employed at the time of the survey, were asked if they **had a paid job before the spread of the novel coronavirus**. As it turned out, the majority of the respondents (84.5%) did have jobs. 13.8% (N=8) did not have a paid job before the spread of the virus. (see Diagram #9.3). **These data show that a small portion of the PoCs - 3.8% found a paid job during the pandemic.**

**Diagram #9.3**



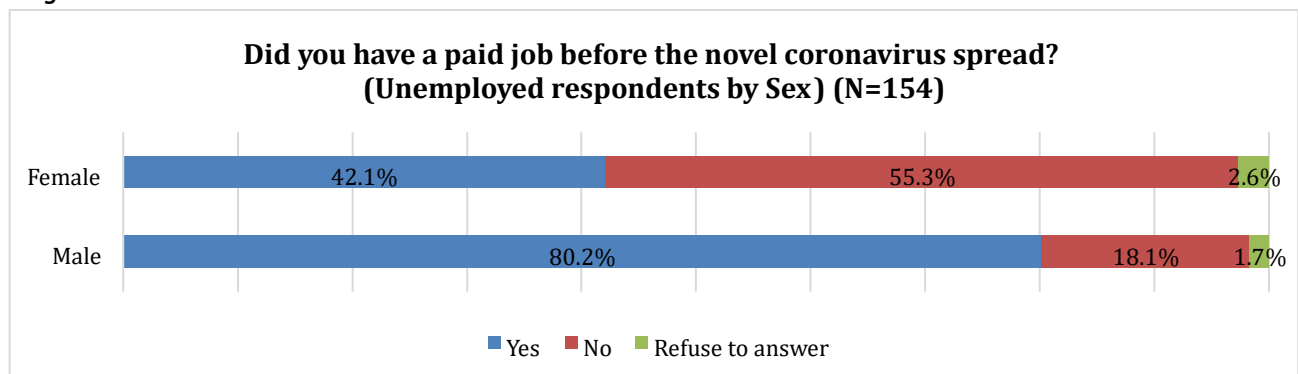
Those respondents who are currently unemployed specified as to **how long they have had this status**. Respondents gave answers in terms of months which was later merged with the answers from several groups and resulted in the period between 0 months and 5 years. As it turned out, the majority of the respondents (60.4%) have been jobless for 7-12 months. 29.2% say that they have been jobless for 6 months or less. 5 respondents have been jobless for 13-14 months. 4 respondents say it has been 36 months (3 years) and 60 months (5 years) respectively since they have been out of work.

Those respondents who were unemployed during the survey period were asked if they had a **paid job before the spread of the novel coronavirus**. As it turned out, the majority of the currently unemployed respondents (70.8%) used to have a paid job. Over a quarter of these respondents (27.3%) say they did not have a paid job even before the spread of the novel coronavirus. **This data reveals that 51.4% of PoCs lost paid jobs during the pandemic.**

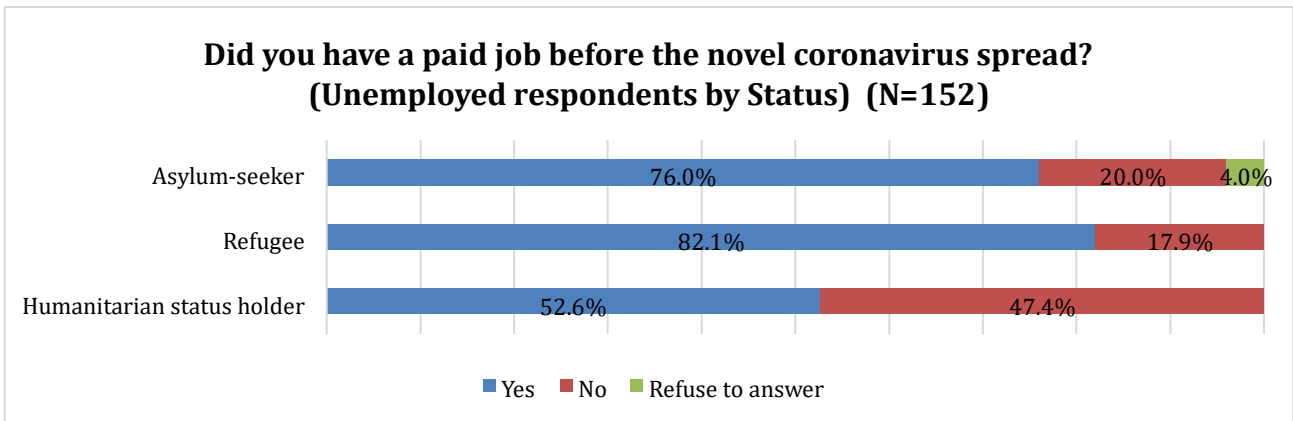
The majority of currently unemployed respondents (75.2%) who had paid jobs before the spread of the novel coronavirus have been out of work for 7-12 months. Over one fifth of them (22%) have been jobless for 0-6 months. According to two respondents, they lost their paid jobs 13-24 months ago. One respondent refused to answer.

Statistical analysis of the data through the **prism of gender** revealed that over half of the female respondents (55.3%) among currently unemployed respondents were jobless even before the spread of the novel coronavirus, while the vast majority of male respondents (80.2%) say they were employed before the spread of the coronavirus. Therefore, we can conclude that **more men lost their jobs due to the novel coronavirus spread than women** (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=20.474$ ,  $p=0$ ) (see Diagram #9.4).

**Diagram #9.4**

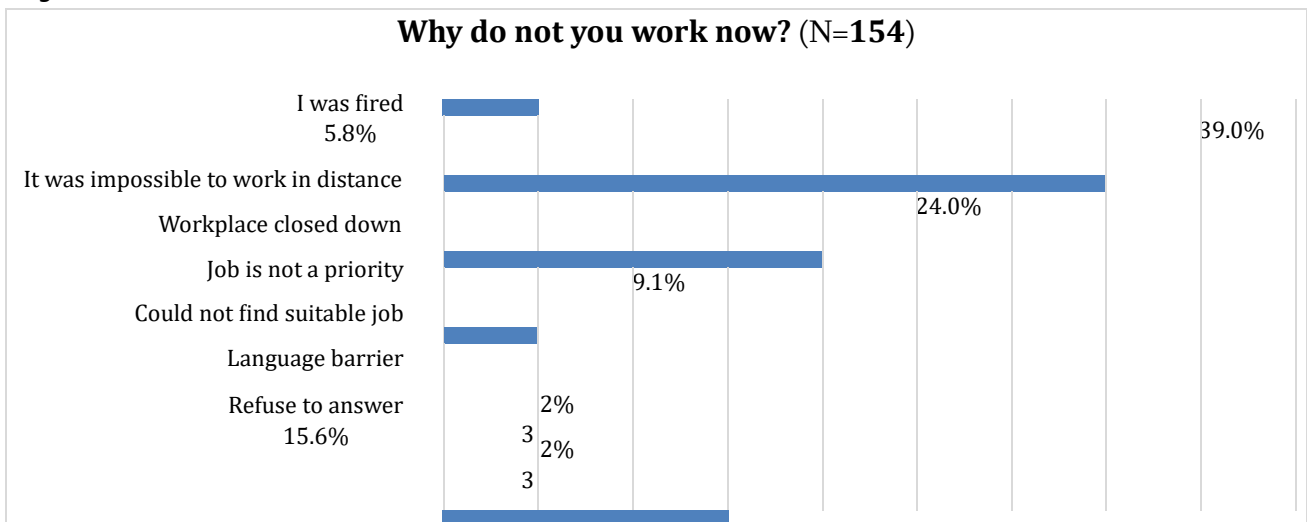


Reviewing the responses of the currently employed respondents through the **prism of immigration status** revealed that the majority of refugees - 82.1% were employed before the spread of the coronavirus. This share is less among asylum seekers and equals 76%. Around half of humanitarian status holders - 52.6% used to be employed. (Data is statistically reliable  $X^2=14.757$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram #9.5) **Diagram #9.5**



Currently jobless respondents have identified **the reasons for unemployment**: a relatively large portion (39%) says that it was impossible to work remotely due to the specific nature of their jobs. Almost a quarter (24%) say the company they were employed at closed down. It should be noted that employment is not a priority for 9.1% (N=14) of the respondents.<sup>3</sup> In some cases this is due to household responsibilities and/or student status. 5.8% (N=9) say they were made redundant (see Diagram #9.6).

**Diagram #9.6**

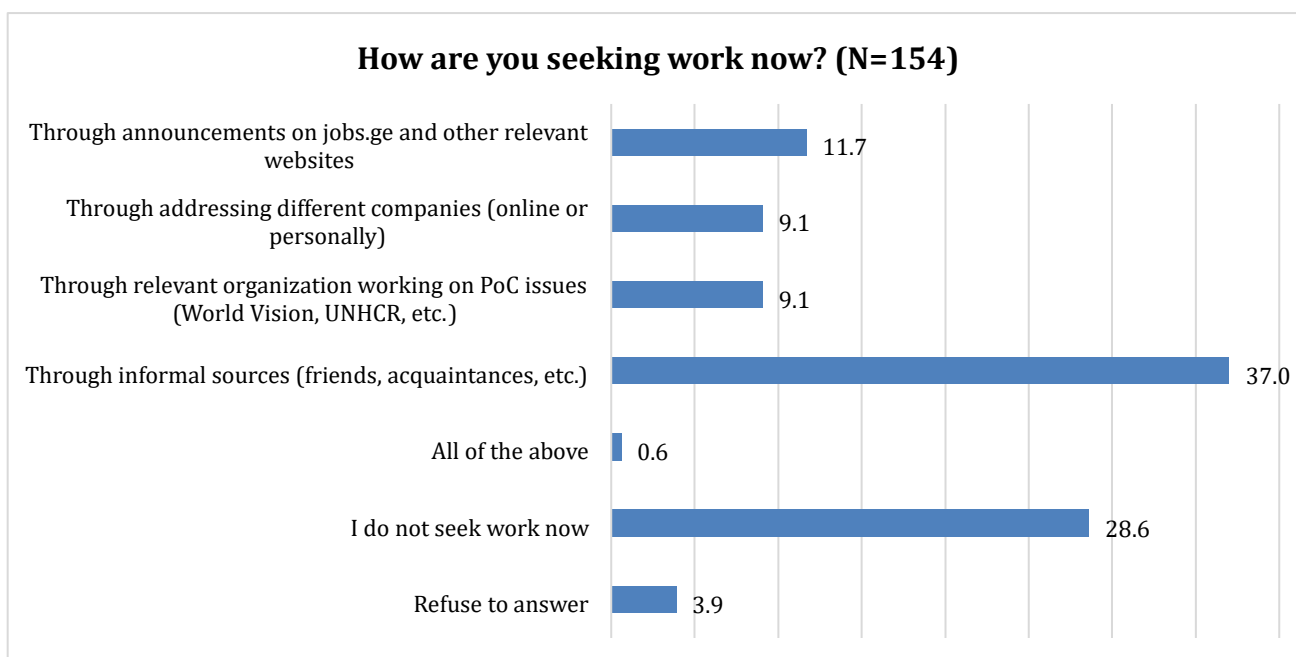


Those respondents who are currently unemployed, **expressed their opinions on changes in employment opportunities**. The vast majority (89.6%) think that employment opportunities have deteriorated due to COVID-19. Only 3 respondents believe the opportunities have remained the same, while 1 thinks it has become easier to find a job (7.8% (N=12) refused to answer).

A considerable portion of unemployed respondents (37%) obtain **information on job opportunities** from informal sources such as friends, acquaintances, etc. It should be noted that 28.6% of the jobless respondents are not currently seeking employment. 11.7% of the respondents seek employment opportunities via formal sources (jobs.ge and similar websites). 9.1% obtain information by directly contacting the companies either online or in person. Another 9.1% state that they receive information on employment opportunities from organisations working with PoCs (Persons of Concern) (such as World Vision, UNHCR, etc.) (see Diagram #9.7).

**Diagram #9.7**

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the group that does not prioritise employment is mainly comprised of women.



Analysing the data through the **gender prism** revealed that over half of female respondents (52.6%) and 20.7% of male respondents do not seek employment. Female respondents use relevant websites (23.7%) in search of employment more frequently than other sources, while for men the main sources are friends and acquaintances (45.7%) (Data is statistically reliable:  $X^2=31.330$ ,  $p=0$ ) (see Table 9.1) **Table #9.1**

| How are you seeking work now? (By Sex) (N=154)                                 | Female | Male  |
|--|--------|-------|
| Through announcements on jobs.ge and other relevant websites                   | 23.7%  | 7,8%  |
| Through addressing different companies (online or personally)                  | 5.3%   | 10,3% |
| Through relevant organization working on POC issues (World Vision, UNHCT, etc) | 2.6%   | 11,2% |
| Through informal sources (friends, acquaintances, etc)                         | 10.5%  | 45,7% |
| All of the above   | 0.0%   | 0.9%  |
| I do not seek work now   | 52.6%  | 20.7% |
| Refuse to answer   | 5.3%   | 3.4%  |

Interestingly enough, the majority of the unemployed humanitarian status holders (60.5%) do not seek employment which exceeds the same indicator among asylum seekers (16%) and refugees (32.1%) by far (Data is statistically reliable:  $X^2=34.212$ ,  $p<0.05$ ).

## 10. Monthly Incomes of Families and their Living Costs

Respondents answered a question on the **monthly incomes of their families** considering all sources of income. Family incomes turned out to be rather diverse, however, the general background indicates poor financial conditions of PoCs. More specifically: monthly incomes of 13.7% of the families range from 0 to 300 GEL which means that these families live in poverty.<sup>4</sup> 8% of the respondents' families hardly manage to overcome poverty

<sup>4</sup> According to the data provided by the National Statistics Office of Georgia, the subsistence minimum level for a medium-sized family (4 members) is 332.5 GEL.

(301-500 GEL per month), while 12.3% claim their families have no income at all. This means that around one third of PoCs' families are financially vulnerable. The share of relatively well-off families (2001-2500 GEL, 2501-3000 GEL and over 3000 GEL per month) is not more than 5.6%. It should be noted that over one fifth of the respondents (21.7%) do not know or refuse to answer (see Table #10.1).

**Table #10.1**

| Family income per month      | Total (N=212) |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| 0-300 GEL                    | 13.7%         |
| 301-500 GEL                  | 8%            |
| 501-700 GEL                  | 12.7%         |
| 701-900 GEL                  | 7.5%          |
| 901-1100 GEL                 | 4.2% (N=9)    |
| 1101-1500 GEL                | 9.4%          |
| 1501-2000 GEL                | 4.7%          |
| 2001-2500 GEL                | 1.4% (N=3)    |
| 2501-3000 GEL                | 1.4% (N=3)    |
| More than 3000 GEL           | 2.8% (N=6)    |
| I do not have income at all  | 12.3%         |
| Do not know/refuse to answer | 21.7%         |

It is interesting to analyse family incomes in terms of the respondents' **status**: every fifth respondent among the asylum seekers (19.6%) have named 501-700-GEL as their family income per month. Refugees have mostly said (17.3%) their incomes to be 0-300 GEL. As for the humanitarian status holders, no specific income range has been identified in this group (Data is statistically reliable:  $X^2=50.209$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #10.2). **Table #10.2**

| Family income per month (By Status) (N=209) | Asylum-seeker | Refugee    | Humanitarian status holder |
|---|---------------|------------|----------------------------|
| 0-300 GEL                                   | 13,4%         | 17,3%      | 8,9% (N=4)                 |
| 301-500 GEL                                 | 10,7%         | 5,8% (N=3) | 4,4% (N=2)                 |
| 501-700 GEL                                 | 19,6%         | 5,8% (N=3) | 4,4% (N=2)                 |
| 701-900 GEL                                 | 8,9%          | 9,6% (N=5) | 2,2% (N=1)                 |
| 901-1100 GEL                                | 5,4% (N=6)    | 1,9% (N=1) | 2,2% (N=1)                 |
| 1101-1500 GEL                               | 8,9%          | 13,5%      | 6,7% (N=3)                 |
| 1501-2000 GEL                               | 3,6% (N=4)    | 3,8% (N=2) | 8,9% (N=4)                 |
| 2001-2500 GEL                               | ,9% (N=1)     | 1,9% (N=1) | 2,2% (N=1)                 |
| 2501-3000 GEL                               | 0,0%          | 1,9% (N=1) | 4,4% (N=2)                 |
| More than 3000 GEL                          | 1,8% (N=2)    | 7,7% (N=4) | 0,0%                       |
| I do not have income at all                 | 13,4%         | 13,5%      | 6,7% (N=3)                 |
| Do not know/refuse to answer                | 13,4%         | 17,3%      | 48,9%                      |

Reviewing the issue in terms of the **respondents' countries of origin** revealed differences among the groups. One fifth of the respondents (20.2%) who come from Asian/African countries say that their families have no income at all at this stage (4.9% of Middle Eastern respondents state the same). Furthermore, a considerable portion of responses (37.5%) fall into the first three income categories (0-300; 301-500; 501-700). The Middle Eastern Pocs' incomes are more diverse and fall into different categories. Namely, 501-700 GEL and 1101-1500 GEL incomes have been named with equal frequency (12.6%-12.6%). A considerable portion of the

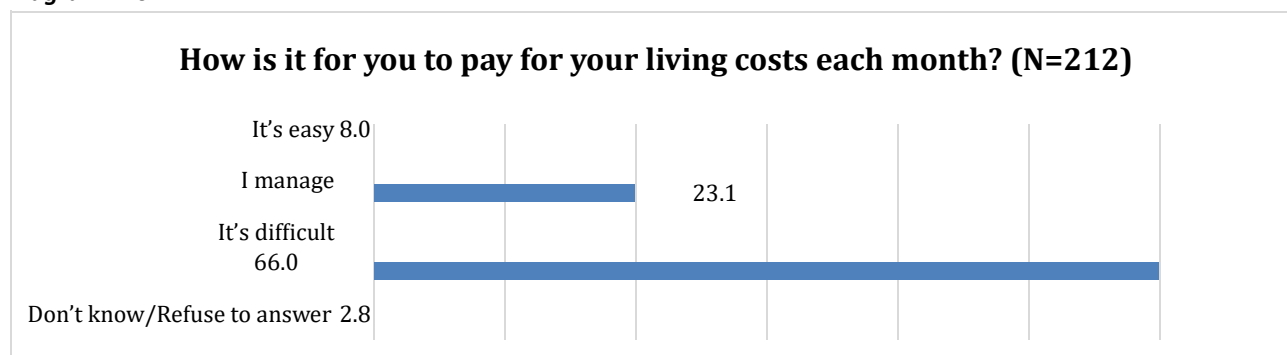
respondents (11.7%) say that they have an income of 0-300 GEL (Data is statistically reliable:  $X^2=24.256$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Table #10.3).

**Table #10.3**

| Family income per month (By Nationality) (N=207) | Asia/Africa | Middle East |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| 0-300 GEL  | 13,5%       | 11,7%       |
| 301-500 GEL                                      | 11,5%       | 4,9% (N=5)  |
| 501-700 GEL                                      | 12,5%       | 12,6%       |
| 701-900 GEL                                      | 5,8% (N=6)  | 9,7%        |
| 901-1100 GEL                                     | 1,9% (N=2)  | 6,8%        |
| 1101-1500 GEL                                    | 6,7% (N=7)  | 12,6%       |
| 1501-2000 GEL                                    | 4,8% (N=5)  | 4,9% (N=5)  |
| 2001-2500 GEL                                    | 2,9% (N=3)  | 0,0%        |
| 2501-3000 GEL                                    | 1,0% (N=1)  | 1,9% (N=2)  |
| More than 3000 GEL                               | 1,9% (N=2)  | 3,9% (N=4)  |
| I do not have income at all                      | 20,2%       | 4,9% (N=5)  |
| Do not know/refuse to answer                     | 17,3%       | 26,2%       |

As it turned out, the majority of the respondents (66%) find it difficult to **cover monthly living costs**. Almost a quarter (23.1%) say that they manage to cover the costs. 8% of the respondents easily cover the costs. (see Diagram #10.1).

**Diagram #10.1**



There are certain differences among the groups in terms of **PoCs' status**. The main share of asylum seekers (75%) say they find it hard to cover the living costs. The same goes for refugees - 75% of which can hardly pay for the living costs. A relatively large portion of humanitarian status holders (40%) claim they manage to cover the costs, while over one fifth (22.2%) do so easily (Data is statistically reliable  $X^2=32.317$ ,  $p=0$ ) (see Table #10.4

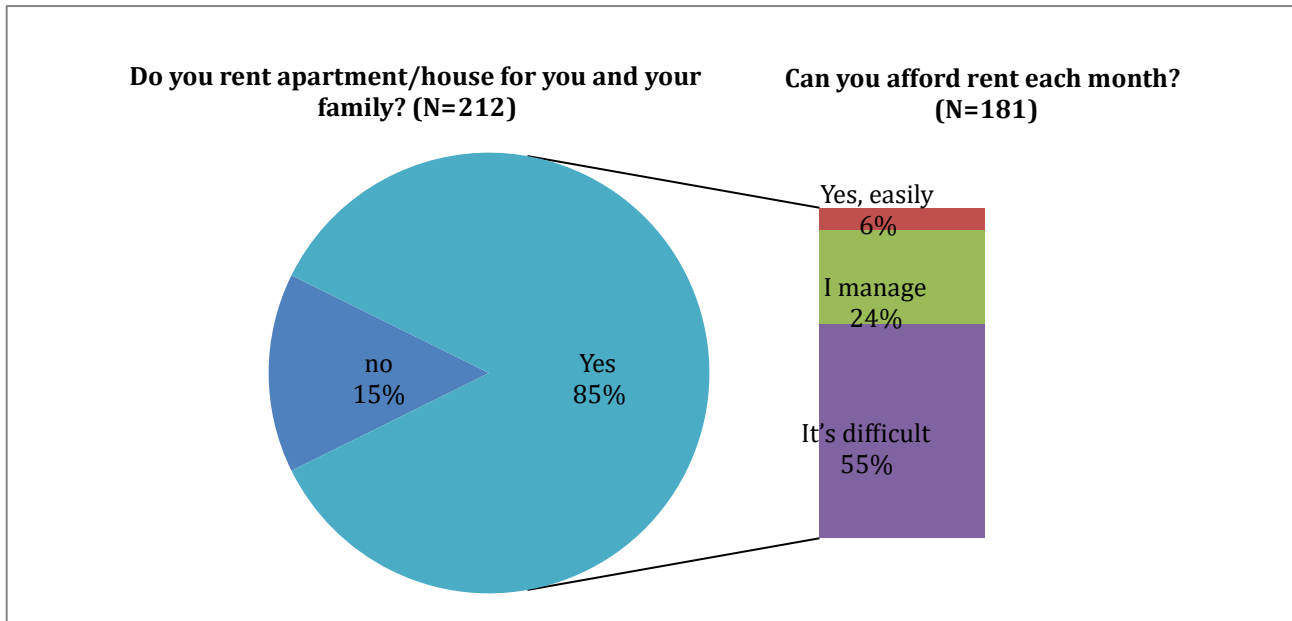
**Table #10.4**

| How is it for you to pay for your living costs each month? (By Status) (N=209) | Asylum-seeker | Refugee | Humanitarian status holder |
|--|---------------|---------|----------------------------|
| It is easy   | 4.5%          | 3.8%    | 22.2%                      |
| I manage   | 18.8%         | 15.4%   | 40.0%                      |
| It is difficult  | 75.0%         | 75.0%   | 35.6%                      |
| Do not know/ Refuse to answer  | 1.8%          | 5.8%    | 2.2%                       |



The survey revealed that the majority of the respondents (85.4%) **rent their houses/apartments**. 14.6% of the respondents say they do not rent. The majority of those who rent (64.6%) say that they find it hard to pay rent. Over a quarter (28.7%) state they manage to pay rent while 6.6% do so easily (see Diagram #10.2).

**Diagram #10.2**



According to the assessments reviewed in terms of the **respondents' status**, the majority of asylum seekers (74%) and refugees (71.4%) confirm that it is difficult for them to pay rent. Unlike these two groups, half of humanitarian status holders (50%) state they can afford to pay rent (Data is statistically reliable:  $X^2=21.635$ ,  $p=0$ ) (see Table #10.5)

**Table #10.5**

| Can you afford rent each month? (By Status) (N=180) | Asylum-seeker | Refugee | Humanitarian status holder |
|---|---------------|---------|----------------------------|
| It is easy  | 5,0%          | 2,4%    | 15,8%                      |
| I manage  | 21,0%         | 26,2%   | 50,0%                      |
| It is difficult                                     | 74,0%         | 71,4%   | 34,2%                      |

Almost half of the tenants (47.5%) pay a monthly rent of 301-600 GEL. 30.4% say their rent is 300 GEL or less, while for 15.5% it is 601-900 GEL. 5.5% (N=10) rent their houses/apartments for 901-1200 GEL. 1 respondent says his/her rent is 1500 GEL while another one states it is 1600 GEL.

Over half of the respondents (51.9%) say their families and themselves have no savings and/or do not receive any financial support from relatives residing either in Tbilisi or outside. At the same time, 46.2% state they have savings and/or receive financial support from relatives. 4 respondents do not know or refuse to answer.

Differences among groups have emerged as a result of analysing the issue through the prism of respondents' **status**. The majority of asylum seekers (56.3%) and humanitarian status holders (60%) state they do not have savings and/or do not receive financial support from relatives residing either in Tbilisi or outside. At the same time, the majority of refugees (65.4%) state they have some savings and/or receive support (Data are statistically reliable:  $X^2=12.248$ ,  $p<005$ ) (see Table #10.6).

**Table #10.6**

| <b>Do you or your family have any savings and/or any support from relatives, either in Tbilisi or outside? (By Status) (N=209)</b> | <b>Asylumseeker</b> | <b>Refugee</b> | <b>Humanitarian status holder</b> |
|--|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Yes  | 42.9%               | 65.4%          | 35.6%                             |
| No   | 56.3%               | 32.7%          | 60.0%                             |
| Do not know/Refuse to answer   | 0.9%                | 1.9%           | 4.4%                              |

### **11. Relations with Other Groups**

Other questions were concerned with the **frequency at which respondents communicate with other social groups**.

As it turned out, respondents communicate with *people from the same national/ethnic groups* most frequently. 30.2% say they communicate with people of the same national origin several times a month. A quarter (25.5%) do so several times a week, while almost a fifth (18.9%) have daily communication.

PoCs also have rather frequent communication with *Georgian friends/acquaintances*. Namely, a quarter of the respondents (25%) say they communicate several times a week with this category of people, while around one fifth (19.3%) have almost daily communications with their Georgian friends/acquaintances.

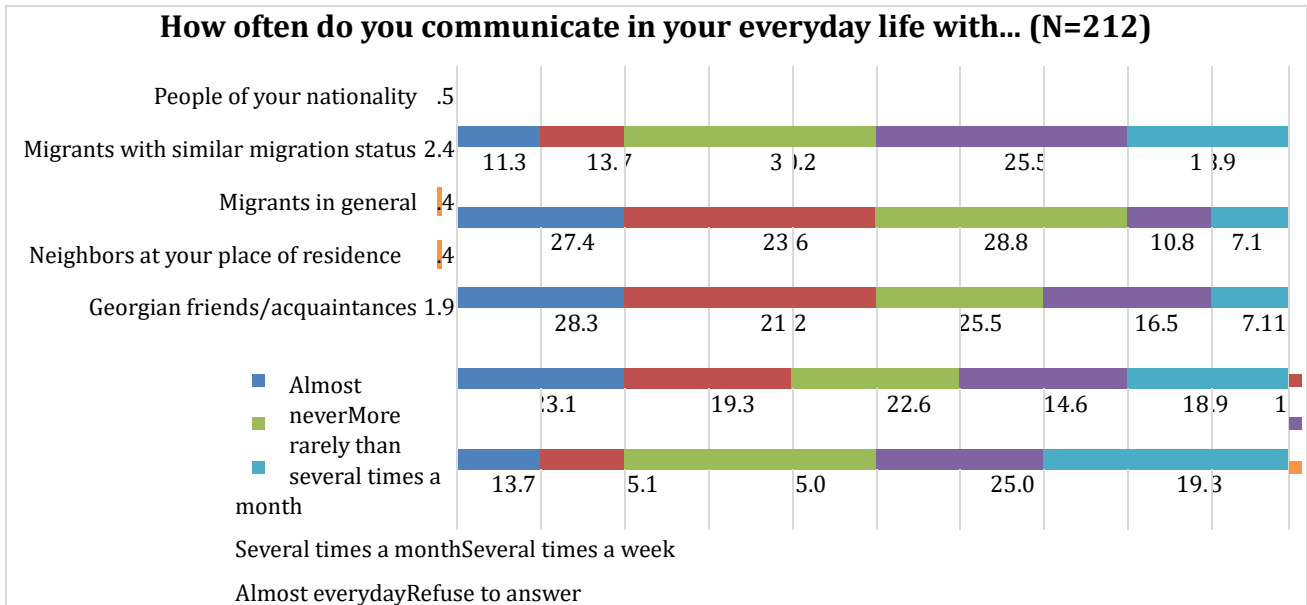
Majority of the respondents (56.1%) also actively communicate with *neighbours at their place of residence*: approximately 19% have daily communications, approximately 15% - several times a week, while 22.6% - several times a month.

As for communicating with *people with similar migration status*, the category of 'several times a month' has been selected most frequently (28.8%). However, the frequency is much less in comparison to that of communicating with people of the same nationality, Georgian friends/acquaintances and neighbours. Namely, 27.4% say they almost never communicate with PoCs with similar migration status, while 23.6% do so less than several times a month.

Respondents have the least frequent communication with PoCs *in general*: almost every other respondent either never communicates (28.3%) or does so less than several times a month (21.2%) with this group.

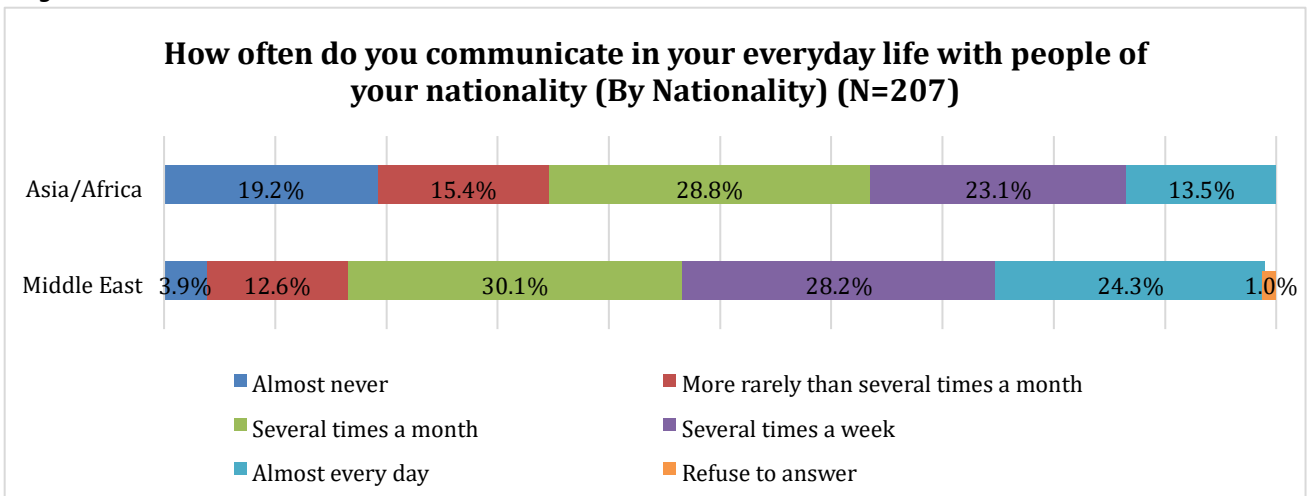
See the detailed survey data in Diagram #11.1.

**Diagram #11.1**



The frequency of respondents' communication with people of the same nationality correlates to the respondents' **country of origin**. The majority of the Middle Eastern PoCs (52.5%) either meet each other on a daily basis (24.3%) or several times a week (28.2%). Only 36.6% of PoCs from Asia/Africa communicate with each other at this frequency. Almost every fifth respondent from the latter region states they almost never meet each other (Data is statistically reliable  $X^2=15.563$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) (see Diagram #11.2).

**Diagram #11.2**



## II. Qualitative Part of the Study

### Executive Summary

#### **Impact of COVID 19 on target groups**

PoCsliving in Georgia (asylum seekers, humanitarian status holders, stateless persons and refugees), first of all, became vulnerable socio-economically due to the situation created by the coronavirus. Prior to the pandemic, mostPoCs were employed in the tourism sector. Most of them were tour guides, and some of them worked in service sectors such as restaurant services, trade (stores), etc. It is noteworthy that only a small proportion of respondents managed to keep their jobs. Their areas of employment are education (foreign language teacher), service sector (cleaner) and construction (worker).

The deteriorated economic situation has significantly complicated the payment of rent, which, at this stage, is one of the most important challenges for PoCs. A very small share of respondents manage to pay the rent mainly through financial transfers from relatives living abroad.

During the pandemic, large families became especially socio-economically vulnerable. In addition to lack of income, distance education is also difficult due to insufficient equipment (computer, laptop, tablet, etc.). According to PoCs'parents, because Georgian is not a native language for their children, it is more difficult for them to get a distance education than for locals (Georgians). Dissatisfaction with distance learning is also expressed by university students, especially those students whose specialty includes laboratory and practical training (e.g., medical specialties). Due to the pandemic, Georgian and English language courses provided by World Vision with the support of UNHCR have been suspended.

During the pandemic, the psycho-emotional state of PoCsdeteriorated, which was caused by unemployment, income termination, fear of contracting Covid-19, and the need to take preventive measures. Fear of being infected with the coronavirus is exacerbated by the fact that PoCsdo not know whether they will receive adequate medical care if they become infected - especially when there are not enough beds for locals (Georgians) in medical facilities. There is fear among the respondents that, in case of infection, due to lack of funds, they will face the problem of access to medication.

Expectations of inadequate service in a medical facility are based on the experience of some PoCsin dealing with Georgian medical staff. The main problem when communicating with the staff is the language barrier. The inability to fully share information (e.g., complaints, health history, treatment, etc.), on the one hand, creates fear of unsafety among PoCsand, on the other hand, causes tension among medical staff and, in some cases, dissatisfaction with the foreigners seeking medical care.

Although PoCstry their best to protect themselves from Covid-19 infection, they still think that they are not protected from infection because public spaces and especially public transport (bus, subway) are constantly crowded with people. Respondents feel helpless primarily because they lost their jobs due to the spread of the coronavirus. In addition to the loss of income, social relationships have diminished, which are essential for a person's normal social functioning. During pandemic, PoCs social activity is limited to grocery shopping, taking a walk outside, and visiting institutions (such as a bank) when necessary. Due to the pandemic, PoCs became more psycho-emotionally vulnerable.

Another negative impact that the pandemic has had on PoCs is the delay in receiving timely information and various services from the relevant structures (mainly the Department of Migration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Justice). According toPoCs, the Department of Migration receives a limited number of emails due to server malfunctions. The fact is that the gmail domain / account used by the Department of

Migration to receive mail, can receive a certain number of emails. PoCs, with the help of UNHCR, have repeatedly addressed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to resolve this shortcoming, but the problem has not been eliminated so far.

The pandemic also affected the court processes. The process of resolving issues that are vital to PoCs (granting status, appealing a decision, using an anti-crisis program, etc.) has also been protracted.

### **Awareness of COVID-19 infection**

Respondents state that they have high awareness of Covid-19 infection, including preventive measures. Respondents receive information about the coronavirus in their native language through the Internet. They find news related to Covid-19 in Georgia on the social network Facebook (Arabic-language page - Hala Georgia). Among the English-language sources are agenda.ge and the English-language news website of Rustavi 2 TV. Russian speakers visit Sputnik Georgia's website to learn about Covid-19. Another means of obtaining information were the community facilitators of the international organization "World Vision", who actively disseminate the necessary information to the target groups.

It is noteworthy that only a few focus group participants named the special information web-portal - stop.cov.ge<sup>5</sup> as a source of information on Covid-19, created by the Government of Georgia, which aims to prevent coronavirus in Georgia and which is available in several foreign languages (including English). PoCs are dissatisfied with the fact that information about the restrictions and recommendations developed by the government regarding coronavirus is sent only in the form of short text messages in Georgian language.

### **Government Policy with regard to COVID 19**

Given that PoCs are cautious of being infected with the coronavirus, imposing and tightening the restrictions is acceptable to them. Still, it is difficult for them to understand some of the restrictions. For example, it is unclear why restricting movement from 10pm to 5am prevents coronavirus from spreading, when public transport is operational during the day, and is always crowded.

One part of the respondents learned about the existence of the government's anti-crisis plan during the focus groups, the other part had information, although it was unknown whether the aid was extended to PoCs. Another part of the respondents had information and even applied to the relevant agencies for assistance, some of them received funding, and others were denied the use of the anti-crisis program. There were two reasons for receiving a refusal for using the anti-crisis program: 1. Failure to submit relevant documents and 2) PoCs status - asylum seekers could not benefit from an anti-crisis plan, while refugees and humanitarian status holders, can.

Out of the assistances envisaged by the anti-crisis plan, PoCs most often benefited from subsidized utility bills. It is important to note that those seeking assistance (including PoCs) are not required to be aware of the program and to be active (i.e. preparing an application, applying to the relevant organization, etc.). The use of the electricity and gas subsidy program is determined by the rate of energy consumption, which is administered by the relevant organizations.

Another assistance provided under the government's anti-crisis plan, which benefited the target groups, is the GEL 200 assistance program for children under 18 years of age. The use of this program proved to be especially important for large families of PoCs. It is noteworthy that part of the respondents was denied to use the program for the reason that they could not present the child's birth certificate. Additionally, an important factor hindering the use of government's anti-crisis program is the expiration of the document proving the PoCs stay

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<sup>5</sup> Web-page – prevention of coronavirus spread in Georgia - <https://stopcov.ge/en>

in Georgia, the renewal of which is complicated by the pandemic. Once again, asylum seekers were excluded from this support scheme.

In focus groups the respondents spoke about assistances received from various international organizations during the pandemic. These include both material and financial assistances by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The financial aid is one-time and its amount ranges from 400 to 1200 GEL. Material assistance implies providing the means necessary for subsistence (food, medicine, hygiene items, etc.).

### **Cases of discrimination and harassment during pandemic**

One part of the respondents mentioned specific examples while receiving services, when the employees of state structures showed indifference, and in some cases - abusive attitude. Respondents note that noncooperative and negative communication with employees of various state organizations (Court, Ministry of Justice, MIA) is caused by the language barrier. Lack of knowledge of Georgian language becomes the source of discrimination especially for PoCs who have been in Georgia for years. Racism was also named as the reason for the negative attitude in the focus groups. It is noteworthy that the most polite attitude towards PoCs is shown by patrol police officers.

Respondents also focus on problems that did not arise directly as a result of the pandemic. Such is the difficulty of using banking services. Some PoCs have limited right to use the dollar account, the official reason for which is unknown to them. Respondents also point out that bank employees cannot recognize a PoCs ID and there are cases when they think it is fake.

During the pandemic, a stereotype emerged among the locals that all foreigners living in Georgia are highly likely to be carriers of coronavirus infection. For this reason, not only have there been instances of avoidance of PoCs in public spaces, but PoCs have also repeatedly become victims of discriminatory treatment. Victims of discriminatory attitudes are mainly members of a race, different from Georgians, as they can easily be identified as foreigners. However, there have been cases where locals have expressed aggression after the PoCs have spoken their native language. Respondents spoke about the difficulties encountered during renting an apartment. Often there are cases when apartment owners do not want to rent an apartment to PoCs. Women wearing hijabs also become the victims of aggression.

### **1. Impact of COVID-19 on PoCs**

Analyzing the results of the focus groups revealed that the situation created by the spread of Covid-19 infection among the PoCs with all three statuses - refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian status holders – primarily had a negative impact on their **social and economic status**. Many employed respondents were left **unemployed**: Prior to the pandemic, most PoCs were employed as tour guides in the tourism sector. A small part of the respondents, apart from the tourism sector, operated in the service sector (restaurants, cafes, shops, etc.), and its users were mainly tourists from the home countries of the PoCs. The closing of the borders was followed by the suspension of their activities.

*„I have a travel agency here in Georgia. It was a very good business, many PoCs worked as tourist guides, but now because of coronavirus the airport is closed since last march. No any work, no any chance” (50 years-old, humanitarian status holder from Iraq).*

The deteriorating economic situation of PoCs has significantly complicated the **payment of rent**, which, according to respondents, is one of the most important challenges for them at this stage. They are able to pay the rent through financial remittances from relatives living abroad. In some cases, due to the current situation,

the amount of rent has been reduced by the apartment owners, however, due to the lack of income, it is difficult for PoCs to pay the reduced rent as well.

It should be noted that only a small proportion of respondents are currently employed. Areas of employment are education (foreign language teacher), construction (worker) and service (cleaner). Several focus group participants work as World Vision community facilitators. Some of the PoCs received one-time financial assistance from various organizations during the pandemic, which proved to be one of the most important sources of income during the pandemic.

*„UNHCR called me, we had conversation and after this they sent money. This organization helped us once, but not after that“. (47 years-old man, asylum-seeker from Jordan, Tbilisi group.)*

Respondents named different amounts of one-time financial assistance provided by UNHCR and World Vision, ranging from GEL 400 to GEL 1,200. Despite the one-time assistance received, PoCs, especially asylum seekers, expect to receive assistance from the Georgian government and the UNHCR. In addition to financial support, by assistance the respondents also mean support in finding a job, even temporary employment, to be able to meet basic needs during the pandemic. Thus, it is necessary to identify the most economically vulnerable PoCs and support their appropriate employment based on their skills, knowledge and qualifications.

*“Some of us have skills and profession: engineers, technicians, doctors, some countries they take asylum seekers where they can do something“ (40 years-old man, asylum-seeker from Ghana, Tbilisi group)*

One part of the respondents is pessimistic about the prospect of employment in a sector other than the tourism sector due to the fact that most of the PoCs speak very little or no Georgian.

In the context of pandemic, large families are especially socio-economically vulnerable. In addition to the fact that due to lack of funds it has become difficult to provide for the basic needs of the family (food, medicine, etc.), the distance **school education** is also a problem. For online learning, large families either do not have any equipment at all, or the number of devices is not enough. (computer, laptop, tablet, etc.). Internet access is also problematic.

*“We have difficulties in accessing it [distant learning] due to lack of internet or not enough phones and PC's in the family“ (40 years-old woman, asylum-seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

According to some respondents, PoC school students find it more difficult to get distance education than locals (Georgians), because Georgian is not their native language. This creates difficulties in terms of learning school subjects.

Dissatisfaction with distance learning is also expressed by university students, especially students whose specialty includes laboratory and practical training (e.g., medical specialties). Students also had problems paying tuition fees. Due to the pandemic, Georgian and English language courses provided by World Vision with the support of UNHCR have been suspended.

*“Before covid-19, World Vision started providing Georgian and English courses, it was very good and useful for a lot of people. They used it and covered 1st level and they are waiting for new level and a lot of new people are waiting for new course“ (32 years-old woman asylum-seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

Out of preventive measures against coronavirus infection, keeping social distance and being in self-isolation, is difficult for children in the first place.

*„All day long I keep watching TV and they(kids) are playing computer games. Currently, the kid can only do two things: either go out and get infected, or stay home and play computer games“(40 years-old woman, refugee from Sudan, Batumi group)*

Respondents estimate that PoCs' financial expenses have increased since the onset of the pandemic. The reason for this is that they have to buy personal protection and hygiene products (towels, antiseptic solutions, wet wipes, soap, etc.), which, given their unfavorable economic situation, represents a significant expense.

*„We have been using a lot of sanitizers a lot of liquids to keep ourselves safe and all of them are expensive“ (A 39-year-old woman, asylum seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

Another significant negative impact that the pandemic has had on PoCs is the deteriorating psycho-emotional state, which was caused by unemployment / termination of income, fear of being infected with Covid-19, and the need to take preventive measures.

*„You can not stay at home for 5-6 months – jobless, looking your kids crying“ (35 years-old man, asylumseeker from Eritrea, Tbilisi group)*

The feeling of an uncertain future in PoCs further aggravates their psycho-emotional state. Additionally, it is impossible for family members and relatives to visit because of closed borders, intensifying the negative effect. Furthermore, the respondents are concerned that there is a danger of their relatives and friends getting infected in their home countries, as today, the coronavirus is a global problem in the world. Fear of being infected with the coronavirus is especially prevalent among respondents with health problems.

*„My husband is very nervous about Coronavirus, because he is at home all day, he is diabetic and has heart problem“ (40 years-old woman, refugee from Sudan, Batumi group)*

Fear of contracting the coronavirus is aggravated by the fact that PoCs do not know whether they will receive adequate medical care if they become infected, especially when there are not enough beds for locals (Georgians) in medical facilities.

*„What will happen if I get infected with corona virus? Every day I have been thinking about it“ (40 yearsold woman, asylum-seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

Respondents expressed the view that migrants from Eastern countries and Iran have weak immunity because both sexes wear headscarves and therefore suffer from vitamin D deficiency. Consequently, they think they are more vulnerable to the coronavirus than others.

*„Iranians have really weak body, because we are suffering from lack of vitamin D, because in our country everyone – man or woman should cover themselves“ (40 years-old woman, asylum-seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

PoCs think that in case of infection, due to lack of funds, they will face the problem of access to medicines. Knowledge of what PoCs should expect in case of infection will significantly alleviate the psycho-emotional state of the respondents. Respondents want to get comprehensive information on what procedures to go through in case of infection, whether the state will pay for their treatment, whether medication will be available, and whether they will be under constant supervision during treatment. All foreigners participating in the study are interested to receive this information.

Among some of the PoCs, the expectation of receiving inadequate services in a medical facility is based on their experience of communication with Georgian medical staff. The main problem in communicating with staff is the language barrier. The inability to fully share information (e.g., complaints, health history, treatment, etc.), on the one hand, creates fear of uncertainty among PoCs, and, on the other hand, causes tension among medical staff and, in some cases, dissatisfaction with foreigners seeking medical care.

Another negative impact that the pandemic has had on PoCs is the delay in receiving timely information and various services from the relevant structures (mainly the Department of Migration of the Ministry of Internal



Affairs and the Ministry of Justice). During pandemic, part of the respondents had to wait or wait for at least a few months to solve various issues (for example, to renew their ID or obtain other necessary documents).

*„When it comes to MIA, or Houses of Justice, it was difficult to access because sometimes migrant’s ID was expired and they wanted to get the documents from the MIA but due to restrictions they could not go directly and Migrants. Because of the busy schedule organizations are unable to respond to all emails or they answer with delay“ (35 years-old man, asylum-seeker from Eritrea)*

According to PoCs, the Department of Migration receives a limited number of emails due to server malfunctions. The fact is that the gmail domain / account used by the Department of Migration to receive mail, can receive a certain number of emails. PoCs, with the help of UNHCR, have repeatedly addressed the Ministry of Internal Affairs to resolve this shortcoming, but the problem has not been eliminated so far. Part of the respondents who are not able to update the documents in time, refrain from going outside in order not to have problems with the law enforcers. This circumstance causes additional stress to the target groups. Respondents also note that the frequency of contact with lawyers is reduced during the pandemic. Consequently, the processes of resolving issues that are vital to PoCs (granting status, appealing decisions, etc.) are being delayed as well.

*„I don’t want to mention any of the organization, but for example when you need some paper, you go to the organization, they send you to the other organization, when you get there, they tell you: Due to pandemic we cannot receive your paper, send it to us. When you send it, it takes long time. In the end you lose time for your passport, your health. If your passport expires what can you do? The organizations cannot help you to extend passport, they do not give you ID“ (33 years-old man, sylum-seeker from Eritrea)*

## 2. Awareness of Covid-19 infection

According to the respondents’ assessment they have high awareness of Covid-19 infection, including preventive measures. PoCs named the preventive measures (wearing a facemask, frequent hand washing, keeping the social distance, etc.), the implementation of which is important to protect oneself from infection. Respondents receive information about the coronavirus in their native language through the Internet and name several main sources of receiving news (regulations, recommendations, etc.) related to Covid-19 in Georgia. Among them, the most popular are some of the Facebook pages. Arab-speaking respondents follow the news in the country through the Facebook page - Hala Georgia<sup>6</sup>, the page provides information about Georgia, which is interesting to PoCs, including information about Covid-19. PoCs actively use Google Translate<sup>7</sup> Online Service. The text published on Georgian news pages is transferred to Google Translate, which translates the Georgian language text into the PoCs’ preferred language. English-speaking PoCs receive Georgian news mainly through agenda.ge<sup>7</sup>, and the English-language website of Rustavi-2 is also popular. It should be noted that Russian-speaking PoCs use the Sputnik Georgia<sup>8</sup> website for information. The source of information for Georgian-speaking PoCs is local television (Rustavi-2, Imedi, etc.). Other sources of information include social connections (friends, neighbors, etc.). Another source of information were The World Vision’s community facilitators - *“I got the information from World Vision before the pandemic started, they gave us a lot of directions and also some brochures” (40 years-old woman, asylum- seeker from Iran)*. A small proportion of respondents also use the UNHCR hotline for information.

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<sup>6</sup> Facebook page - Hala Georgia - <https://www.facebook.com/HalaGeorgiaAr/> <sup>7</sup>

Google translate - <https://translate.google.com/>

<sup>7</sup> Web-page - agenda.ge - <https://agenda.ge/>

<sup>8</sup> Web-page – sputnik gruzia - <https://sputnik-georgia.ru/>

It is noteworthy that only a few focus group participants named the special information web-portal - stop.cov.ge<sup>9</sup> as a source of information on Covid-19, created by the Government of Georgia, which aims to prevent coronavirus in Georgia and which is available in several foreign languages (including English). PoCs are dissatisfied with the fact that information about the restrictions and recommendations developed by the government regarding coronavirus is sent only in the form of short text messages in Georgian. It is desirable that the information be sent in English as well.

A small proportion of respondents expressed the opinion that the media coverage of Covid-19 infection was exaggerated. According to those having this position, journalists have a superficial knowledge of the coronavirus. Thus, the information they disseminate is sometimes exaggerated, sometimes false. Additionally, the media tries to deliberately unsettle the readers, or viewers, in order to have as many users as possible.

*„When you are sitting in front of the TV and watch news you are afraid to go outside but when you go outside you see people living normal life. Like they lived before corona. So the news is manipulated“ (32 years-old man, asylum-seeker from Saudi Arabia, Tbilisi group)*

On the other hand, most of the participants in the study believe that the coronavirus is a significant threat to humanity and it is necessary for the media to actively cover news related to the infection. In addition, they note that the virus is new and knowledge about it is already insufficient, so the misinformation, sometimes spread by the media should not come as a surprise. Respondents have received information about the coronavirus, the accuracy of which they have doubted. This information is mainly about the cure of Covid-19 infection, the dangers associated with vaccination, etc. Respondents try to find different information sources to get the right information.

*„I don't trust them for 100%. There's always a different side of the story. It is therefore always necessary to check the information (23 years-old man, refugee from Iraq, Tbilisi group)*

### 3. Attitudes towards COVID 19

As already mentioned, PoCs try their best to protect the existing preventive measures against Covid-19 infection. However, they still think that they are not protected from infection. The fact is that PoCs, even in case of urgent need, have to travel by public transport, which is always crowded with commuters. PoCs cite examples of celebrities who became infected with the coronavirus.

*“I do not feel 100% protected there are still chances. Even the president of USA is affected“ (32 yearsold man, humanitarian status holder from Iran, Tbilisi group).*

Respondents feel helpless primarily because they lost their jobs due to the spread of the coronavirus. In addition to losing income, their social relationships diminished, which are essential for a person's normal social functioning. During pandemic, PoCs' social activity is limited to grocery shopping, taking a walk outside, and visiting institutions (such as a bank) when necessary.

PoCs try to encourage each other, however, they do not have a variety of opportunities to do so. They communicate with each other mainly by phone and social networks. Of course, PoCs also remotely receive emotional support from relatives and friends who are in their home countries. However, some of the respondents believe that PoCs need professional psychological support, which, as one of the respondents mentioned, is provided by World Vision.

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<sup>9</sup> Web-page – prevention of coronavirus spread in Georgia - <https://stopcov.ge/en>

*„This therapy is provided by World Vision. Everybody needs therapy, it doesn't mean that you are mad or something. For example, I am away from my family, I miss everybody, I try to manage with psychologist“ (32 years-old woman, asylum seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

#### 4. Government Policy with regard to COVID 19

The focus group participants assessed the restrictions imposed by the Georgian government to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Given that PoCs are cautious of being infected with coronavirus, imposing and tightening the restrictions is acceptable to them. Respondents note that locals (Georgians) are indifferent to the imposed restrictions and often do not observe them (do not wear facemasks, do not keep social distance, etc.), which, in their opinion, is unacceptable. Although PoCs agree with the restrictions, it is difficult for them to understand some of them. For example, it is unclear why restricting movement from 10pm to 5am prevents coronavirus from spreading, when public transport is operational and crowded during the day. For this reason, they would like to know more about the importance of the imposed restrictions.

It was important for the study to find out whether the PoCs benefited from all three phases of the anti-crisis plan developed by the government. As the study results show, one part of the respondents learned about the existence of an anti-crisis plan during the focus groups, the other part had information, although it was unknown whether the aid was extended to PoCs or not. Another part of the respondents had the information and even applied to the relevant agencies for assistance, some of them received funding, and some of them were denied the use of the program. Asylum seekers were most frustrated because the anti-crisis plan did not provide them with financial assistance due to their lack of status.

The study found that from the assistance provided under the anti-crisis plan, PoCs most often benefited from subsidized utility bills. It is important to note that those seeking assistance (including PoCs) are not required to be informed and active (for example, preparing an application, applying to the relevant organization, etc.). The use of the electricity and gas subsidy program is determined by its consumption rate, which is administered by the relevant organizations<sup>10</sup>.

*“There is one anti-crisis measure that help me, I do not pay utility bills. This gave me big benefit because I save about 100 GEL every month” (22 years-old man, humanitarian status holder from Russia, Tbilisi group)*

Another assistance provided under the government's anti-crisis plan, which the target groups have used so far is the GEL 200 assistance program for children under 18 years of age. The use of this program proved to be especially important for large families of PoCs. It is noteworthy that part of the respondents was denied to use the program for the reason that they could not present the child's birth certificate.

*„We were asked to bring our kids' birth certificates. Some of the refugees are from Syria, so they lost these birth certificates and could not get 200 lari without these birth certificates“ (40 years-old woman, refugee from Sudan, Batumi group)*

An important factor hindering the use of government's anti-crisis program is the expiration of the document proving the PoCs' stay in Georgia, the renewal of which, as already mentioned, is complicated by the pandemic.

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<sup>10</sup> According to the government's anti-crisis plan, a subsidy program is being implemented, which will cover utility bills for 4 months from November 1, 2020. Electricity bill will be subsidized for the family that consumes up to 200 kw/h. of electricity, as well as gas up to 200 cubic meters. Source: agenda.ge - <https://agenda.ge/en/news/2020/2471>

*„Most of the people who were rejected had ID issues – expired IDs. PoCs were angry that government do not help them to extend their IDs and they undergo some crisis but they can not get any benefits from government programs because of expired ID“(25 years-old man, Aylum- seeker from Eritrea, Tbilisi group)*

It is noteworthy that in terms of informing PoCs about both governmental and international assistance programs, World Vision community facilitators make a significant contribution.

In focus groups the respondents spoke about assistances received from various international organizations during the pandemic. These include both material and financial assistances by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). The financial aid as already mentioned, is one-time and its amount ranges from 400 to 1200 GEL. Material assistance implies providing the means necessary for subsistence (food, medicine, hygiene items, etc.). When talking about receiving aid in focus groups, part of PoCs who did not receive assistance during the pandemic, had questions about the criteria by which PoCs receive assistance. Respondents want assistance information to be as transparent and accessible as possible to all PoCs with all statuses.

## **5. Cases of discrimination and harassment during a pandemic**

When asked whether the PoCs feel respected by the Georgian government or not, the participants gave different answers. A small number of respondents refrained from expressing their opinions, some have only positive assessment, while most spoke about the problems that PoCs face in various state structures. Part of the respondents mentioned specific examples while receiving services, when employees showed indifference and in some cases discriminatory attitude. Respondents note that the difficulty of communication with employees of various state organizations (Court, Ministry of Justice, MIA) is created by the language barrier. In addition, other reasons for the negative attitude towards PoCs by the employees were named. One of them is racism.

*„Before the pandemic, when we used to go MIA and tell them we are Eritrean, they would put on gloves to take passport from you. Employee would take passport from you with gloves and close the window, they even do not talk to you nicely“(33 years-old man asylum-seeker from Eritrea, Tbilisi group)*

Discriminatory attitudes are particularly prevalent against PoCs of African-American descent. Another reason for the negative attitude is the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language by PoCs, especially those who have lived in Georgia for years.

*“They (employees) are blaming me that I have been to Georgia for three years and I didn’t learn Georgian language. it’s not my fault, because there are no sources on the internet. I always prefer to have Georgian translator, if you have one, they provide good service” (36 Years-old woman, refugee from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

It is noteworthy that the most polite attitude towards PoCs is shown by most of the patrol police officers, who usually follow the rules of professional conduct.

*„Police guys or the guys at the petrol stations are very respectful, even those, who check the IDs in the street, they treat you very well, they ask you nicely and they explain who they are and why they are doing this” (35 years-old man asylum-seeker from Somalia, Tbilisi group)*

Respondents also stress on the problems that did not arise directly as a result of the pandemic, such as the difficulty of using banking services.

*“As a refugee, now I am here for more than 8 years and till now, I still have a problem with my bank account and to get money in USD from abroad” (40 years-old woman, refugee from Sudan, Batumi group)*

Some PoCs have limited right to use the dollar account, the official reason for which is unknown to them. Respondents also point out that bank employees cannot recognize their ID and think it is fake.

In focus groups the PoCs talked about discriminative attitude from the population. During the pandemic, a **stigma/stereotype** emerged among the locals that all foreigners living in Georgia are highly likely to be carriers of coronavirus infection. For this reason, not only have there been instances of avoidance of PoCs in public spaces, but PoCs have also repeatedly become victims of discriminatory treatment. During focus groups the respondents recalled specific examples.

*„Sometimes we think that we are the corona virus. When we are riding on a bus or something they go far away. When on the bus, there is a sit, they see you, they do not sit, they go away from you“. (25 years-old man, asylum-seeker from Somalia)*

*„It is really hard when you walk in the street, because you are the foreigner, you are supposed to be the one who carries the virus” (25 years-old man, asylum-seeker from Eritrea)*

*„Whenever I walk in streets Georgians say “it’s bad smell”, they make some bad gestures as if we PoC students are spreading the corona and they just running away. I felt discriminated this time, maybe it’s because of my skin color“ (22 years-old man, humanitarian status holder from India, Kutaisi group)*

Victims of discriminatory attitudes are mainly members of a **race**, different from Georgians, as they can easily be identified as foreigners. However, there have been cases where locals have expressed aggression after the PoCs have spoken their native language. Respondents spoke about the difficulties encountered during renting an apartment. Often there are cases when apartment owners do not want to rent an apartment to PoCs.

*“When I tried to find an apartment to rent, my friend called to a lot of landlords and almost all of them refused, some of them said we do not let foreigners in, Face to face they(Georgians) are nice, but they do not want Iranians to rent their properties” (40 years-old woman, asylum-seeker from Iran, Tbilisi group)*

Women wearing hijabs become the victims of aggression.

*„I am wearing hijab, some people were telling me to take it off as I am in a different country“ (40 yearsold woman, refugee from Sudan, Batumi group)*

*“Bus driver sometimes doesn’t stop for them. Once, in Varketili my mom and my aunt were waiting for the bus and when the bus driver saw that the foreigners were standing, he didn’t stop. Imagine, they had a class and bus didn’t stop. All of them were wearing hijab, there were no Georgians among them, and bus didn’t stop, though it was a bus stop” (33 years-old man asylum-seeker from Eritrea, Tbilisi group).*

## Recommendations

1. A strategy that will enable PoCs to use various formal sources to obtain information on policies aimed at preventing and fighting COVID-19 more actively needs to be developed;
2. It is necessary to provide PoCs with regular updates on medical services, free legal assistance, residence permits and humanitarian aid. It is also important to provide them with information on the progress scientists are making in the development of COVID-19 vaccine and treatments. Considering

that PoCs actively use social media as a means to obtain information, it is recommended that the requested information be disseminated through these networks ;

3. It is advisable to identify the most financially vulnerable PoCs and help them find employment, even temporary in accordance with their skills, knowledge and experience;
4. It is advisable that PoCs have access to free products of personal care and hygiene considering the harsh socio-economic situation they find themselves in;
5. Large families who do not have financial and technical resources required for remote learning should be supported;
6. Considering that the pandemic has left the PoCs in a more vulnerable position psychologically and emotionally, it is advisable that a module is created that will offer PoCs free and regular psycho-social support;
7. Since a certain portion of respondents (one fifth) report on receiving delayed or avoided medical services, it is advisable to develop a targeted medical service package specifically for PoCs. It is essential to provide PoCs with the information on those medical services that are free for them as well as on the procedures they have to undergo in case of contracting COVID-19;
8. A strict monitoring should be carried out to ensure PoCs from various groups receive their due financial aid in a timely manner;
9. It is necessary to improve legal aid for PoCs on the status related issues. Asylum seekers as well as refugees, should be the primary beneficiaries. Humanitarian status holders should be offered improved legal counselling on financial matters;
10. It is recommended that government bodies improve online services so that PoCs can renew their residence permits and enroll in different programmes (for example, receive compensations within the government's anti-crisis plan, use medical services, etc.);
11. PoCs should be provided with more exhaustive information on restrictions imposed due to COVID-19 and relevant recommendations. To achieve this, the special web-portal created by the Georgian government - [stop.cov.ge](http://stop.cov.ge) should be more widely publicized;
12. Information messages (SMS) detailing restrictions and recommendations sent by the Georgian government to the country's population should be available in English as well;
13. It is recommended that information that is useful for PoCs, including that on COVID-19, should be available on those websites that PoCs actively use (such as: [agenda.ge](http://agenda.ge), [rustavi2.com](http://rustavi2.com), [sputnikgeorgia.com](http://sputnikgeorgia.com), etc.). The same websites should also provide information on those programmes within the anti-crisis plan that PoCs are eligible for; information should be as transparent and accessible as possible for PoCs of every status;
14. It is advisable that governments' anti-crisis plan eligibility criteria is reviewed and tailored to PoCs as much as possible (for example, large families should be permitted to submit a document other than a birth certificate in order to receive financial aid for children under the age 18);
15. Various bodies working on migration issues (public as well as non-governmental and international organisations) should ensure that PoCs use their services more frequently. This should become an integral part of the communication strategy that official bodies have developed for PoCs;
16. It is essential that government bodies strictly adhere to professional and ethical standards of communication when dealing with PoCs;
17. Employees of those departments that deal with foreigners should speak English at least at an intermediate level;



## Annex #1

| Country of origin | Share of respondents |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| Afghanistan       | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Azerbaijan        | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Bangladesh        | 9.9% (N=21)          |
| Cameroon          | 1.9% (N=4)           |
| Egypt             | 1.9% (N=4)           |
| Eritrea           | 2.4% (N=5)           |
| Ethiopia          | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| India             | 5.2% (N=11)          |
| Iran              | 23.1% (N=49)         |
| Iraq              | 17.5% (N=37)         |
| Jordan            | 2.8% (N=6)           |
| Pakistan          | 5.7% (N=12)          |
| Palestine         | 0.9% (N=2)           |
| Russia            | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Somalia           | 1.9% (N=4)           |
| South Africa      | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Syria             | 7.1% (N=15)          |
| Ukraine           | 1.4% (N=3)           |
| Yemen             | 8% (N=17)            |
| Zimbabwe          | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Tunisia           | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Sudan             | 0.9% (N=2)           |
| Saudi Arabian     | 1.4% (N=3)           |
| Nigeria           | 1.9% (N=4)           |
| Kazakhstan        | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Ghana             | 0.9% (N=2)           |
| Congo             | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Cameron           | 0.5% (N=1)           |
| Refuse to answer  | 0.5% (N=1)           |