

Government allocates GEL 2 billion to assist economy

By Natalia Kochiashvili

Thursday, April 2



The government of Georgia has decided to allocate GEL 2 billion in direct aid to the economy, the Prime Minister of Georgia Giorgi Gakharia announced yesterday. The total budget of Georgia for 2020 is GEL 14 billion.

PM spoke about the main directions of the Economic Support Plan at the session of the Interagency Coordination Council on the coronavirus. According to him, this is the amount that will be used for maintenance of jobs, as well as for ongoing production of companies, maintenance of current businesses.

The government will identify those without jobs and will allocate financial support for them. The program has been announced for several days now, but the government still has to formulate specific measures.

The PM has called on the government to spend its budgets as rationally as possible. “We understand that after some time we may find ourselves in a position to increase this assistance,” Gakharia added.

According to the PM, additional GEL 351 million is allocated additionally to do the utmost to prevent the rapid increase in both the scale and geographical spread of the infection.

The government has decided to fund utility bills for the next 3 months (March, April, May). Each citizen who uses less than 200 kWh of electricity and 200 cubic meters of natural gas per month, will be funded for the next 3 months. Funding includes cleaning and water bills.

“We understand that this aid is not enough. We should identify those who lost their jobs, after that we

will provide direct assistance as well,” the PM said.

Vice Prime Minister Tskitishvili informed the public yesterday that the measure of temporarily suspending pension contributions, that has been advised by opposition parties and Galt & Taggart, is not envisaged at this stage.

As Tskitishvili explained, the government offered a package of GEL 1.2 billion to the citizens and businesses so that they could maintain their jobs.

According to her, it was a 3-month deferral of bank loans, as well as loans in microfinance institutions; some packages were offered for the entire complex of tourism businesses, with approximately 18,000 companies able to benefit from a 4-month deferral of property and income taxes; For small, 50-seat hotels, the government offered a 6-month loan subsidy, interest co-financing, and a customs clearance for auto importers; 38,000 importers have already benefited from these offers.

Tskitishvili also said that it is difficult to say how many people will be out of work and therefore cannot say what measures the state will take in the future.

“That's why today we offer the public a 3-month deferral period for additional individuals in banking and missions, as well as 3-months of utility bills. This temporary measure will reduce their costs.”

According to her, as of today, electricity bills will be financed for 1,200,000 households and natural gas - for 671,000 families.

The medical uses for the import of goods from value added tax (VAT) was released- the medical outfit identified for the prevention of the COVID-19, including masks, medical shields and other items, is discussed.

Besides, the ministry of Health reported on April 1st that the suspended living allowance has already been restored in January and February. According to the social service agency, families receiving social assistance will be fully compensated for the period during which they were suspended.

For families with less than 100 001 rating points registered in the database, the Agency will continuously continue to provide cash social assistance - subsistence allowance. This also applies to the suspension of the living allowance on January 1, 2020.

Within the period of emergency, the agency will not verify the socio-economic status of the families

registered in the unified database of socially vulnerable families unless directly requested by the family.

The government plans to create a tracker application to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. Deputy Health Minister Tamar Gabunia stated about it, adding that similar apps have been introduced in many countries and in coordination with Austrian side, Georgia will develop one as well.

She also stated that the algorithm has identified the groups that will perform quick tests. Gabunia said the required number of tests is already in place (4,000 antibody tests as well as 2000 rapid and antigen-based tests).

“The golden rule of the algorithm remains to be tested by PCR, although the location of rapid tests is also clearly defined, both for antigen-based and antibody-based tests,” she said.

Schemes are defined for the 3 categories of patients, these being primarily symptomatic patients who fully meet the category of suspicious occurrence. The algorithm also identifies groups at high risk, including contacts, medical staff, and organized institutional groups.

According to Gabunia, online clinics have been set up on the basis of 24 primary care facilities across Georgia, 15 of which are located in Tbilisi.

Laboratory readiness assessment is also underway and about 7 laboratories have been identified, where it is possible to disseminate gold standard PCR testing.

As the Deputy Minister noted, the price for the coronavirus test is not fixed and some work still needs to be done.

Gabunia explained that there are 3 councils working on technical issues in the country and in addition, Georgia follows the guidelines set by the World Health Organization (WHO) and protocols and algorithms will not change unless WHO recommends so. She added that the mechanisms include the clinical condition management guidelines and protocol, as well as the first triage and referral of suspicious cases in healthcare, and the third is an algorithm that has already been approved this morning by the order of the Minister of Health specifically for diagnostic testing.

Deputy head of the National Center for Disease Control, Paata Imnadze also made a comment to reporters on a new protocol that would allow patients to be managed remotely at home for possible light cases of coronavirus, saying that even though protocols are not 100%, without having the

common system, nothing will work.

“Mild patients are treated at home in all developed countries around the world,” he said.