

# OCUPATIONAL SAFETY CHALLENGIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

**Nana Zazadze**

Affiliated Associate Professor  
at International Caucasus University

## Abstract

The present paper discusses the consequences of the global crisis of 2020, which is related to the pandemic caused by the Covid-19 virus, the negative impact of the coronavirus on the world economy and obviously on the Georgian economy. In a given situation it is difficult to make a choice between public health and economic factors. For countries with strong economies, public health is a top priority, while developing countries are trying to choose between politics, economics and public health interests. The necessity required for the pandemic to be regulated by international labor and health safety regulations.

The factors that have had the greatest impact on key macroeconomic indicators in the context of the global pandemic are discussed, thereby threatening the country's economic development.

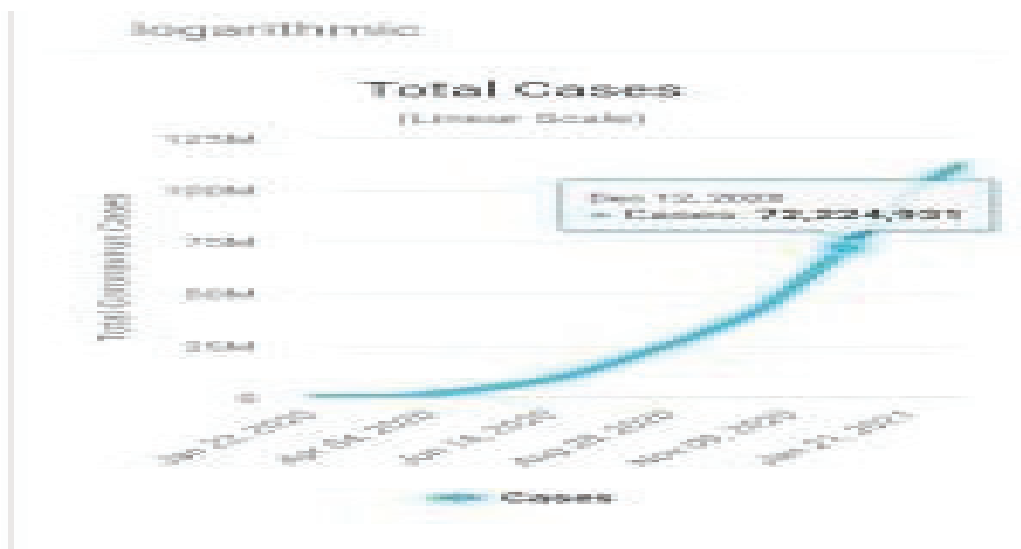
**Key words:** Covid-19 pandemic, global crisis, labor safety, social security, macroeconomic indicators.

## 1. Introduction

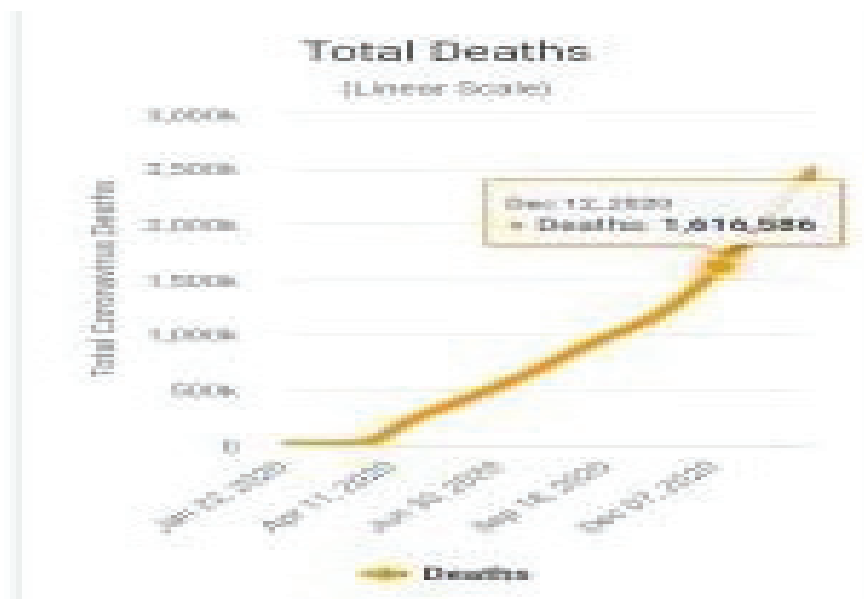
In 2020, the World Health Organization declared a pandemic on March 11 in connection with the outbreak of COVID-19, the same coronavirus. This fact has caused a great deal of consternation around the world, and it is no wonder that the world today is fighting against COVID-19. The COVID-19 pandemic has become a new, the most difficult and important challenge in public life around the world. The rapid spread of the unknown, aggressive viral infection and the daily increase in confirmed cases have caused global problems in all areas of public life. Thousands of people die every day, land and air borders are closed, flights are canceled, factories and enterprises are closed, millions are left unemployed. This is an incomplete list of the realities of COVID-19 in today's world.

## 2. Analysis of the main research material

Today, the Covid-19 pandemic has become the new and most challenging event in public life around the world. The rapid spread of an unknown aggressive viral infection, the daily increase in the number of confirmed cases have caused global problems in all spheres of public life. The acute effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19 ) are illustrated by statistics presented at [www.worldometer.info](http://www.worldometer.info) and charts (see diagrams 1, 2), that show the acute effects of the deadly virus over a short period of time. [1] This is evidenced by the statistics provided by [www.worldometers.info](http://www.worldometers.info) and the diagrams that show the acute consequences caused by the deadly virus in a short period of time.

**Diagram 1. Worldwide confirmed cases of Covid-19**

Source: *worldometers.info*

**Diagram 2. Total number of people who died from Covid-19 worldwide (by days)**

/Source: *worldometers.info*/

The rapid spread of the virus has caused global problems in all areas of human life, particularly in the economy.

Statistics show that the primary challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic was the crisis in the health sector, which clearly demonstrated the need for occupational safety and hence the need for urgent preventive measures. One way to prevent coronavirus infection, according to instructions of international organi-

zations was social isolation. Restrictions on preventing the spread of the coronavirus worldwide have affected almost every country, most of the economic sphere, and completely changed public life. The pandemic stopped the whole world, made people stay home, slowed down industrial activities, causing global economic losses and put the economic crisis in many countries around the world, Georgia is no exception among them.

In the context of the fight against viral infection, the need for urgent action by the World Health Organization and the governments of the country to assist its citizens and the public health system has become clear.

The international organization ILO has published the guide „COVID-19 pandemic“, which describes the measures of occupational safety, health, emergency risk management and defense in the pandemic conditions.

Georgia has taken a number of preventive and emergency measures in terms of occupational safety and health. Issued the order „Approving Recommendations to Prevent the Spread of the New Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the Workplace“, which sets out preventive measures for occupational safety at work, as well as employer and employee obligations to Covid-19. [3] (See Ministerial Order № 01-149 / O, 04 April 2020).

The Organic Law of Georgia defines the term occupational safety in detail, namely „Occupational safety is a system of protection of the life, health and functional abilities of the employee and other persons in the workplace, which creates healthy and safe working conditions and includes legal, socio-economic, organizational – technical, sanitary-hygienic, medical-prophylactic, rehabilitation and other measures; „[4]

In the pandemic conditions, countries found themselves in an unequal position mobilizing the necessary financial and labor resources, which brought their economy to a standstill and the threat of a global economic crisis. The pandemic has caused economic crisis in all countries of the world, however, depending on the economic structure and the current socio-economic situation, the fluctuations were stronger in some countries than in others. In Georgia, the crisis was felt with particular severity by a large part of the population, which was caused by declining revenues due to dependence on the tourism service sector and remittances.

Here, I should note that the severity of economic fluctuations, along with the socio-economic situation of the country, is determined by how this country was ready for a pandemic of a similar scale, although occupational safety and health are equally important for all countries. It is desirable to consider the current challenges in the field of labour protection and make decisive measures in both foreign countries and Georgia.

Current processes have shown that fighting the pandemic has proved to be quite difficult for developed countries as well. In Italy, for example, medical staff in violation of occupational safety standards, in particular without personal protective equipment, had to fight the virus, causing some medical staff to become infected with the corona virus and some of them died.

The UK has faced a similar problem. The government, their advisers, health insurance and social security agencies ignored the warning signs of the COVID-19 pandemic, they missed the combination of opportunities that led to the illness and death of the largest number of employees across the UK. Analyzing information available in the UK, it is important during a pandemic to protect the safety of people working in the medical and social security sectors who are at risk of Covid = 19. The safety of these people was forgotten at an early stage of the pandemic, despite warnings from South Korea, China and Italy about the impending danger to the health and safety of British workers. And prevention methods such as (WHO, ILO) \* and chose to meet the pandemic without any preparation. [5]

\* WHO (World Health Organisation)

\* ILO(International Labour Organisation)

The diagram below shows the UK example of the total number of medical staff infected with the Covid-19 virus in the total number of infected people on 15.04.2020. Condition. (See Diagram 3)

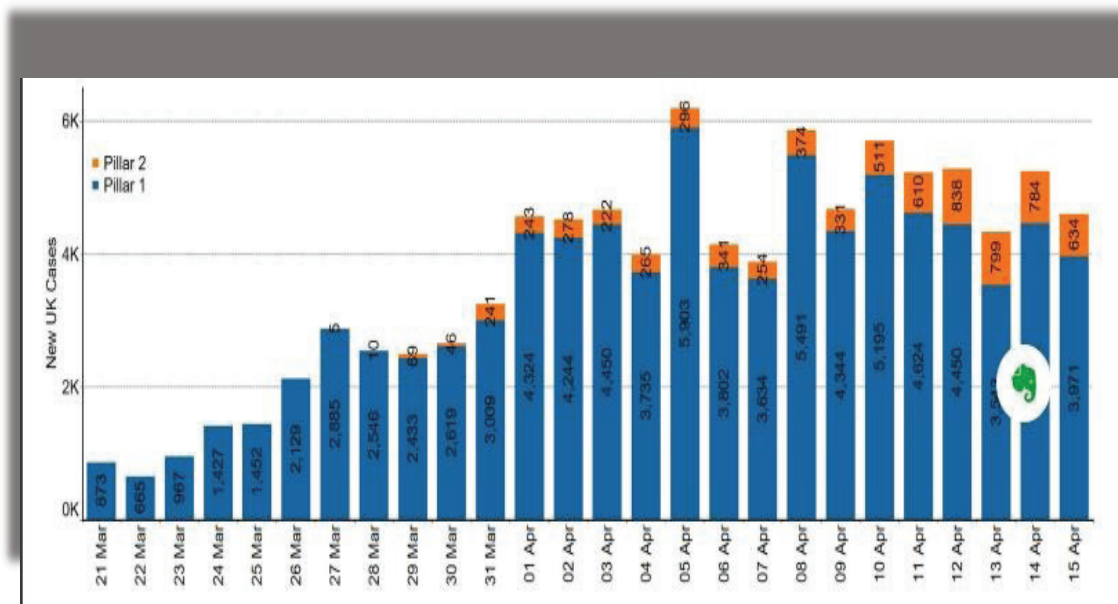


Diagram 3. What is the number of medical staff infected with the virus in the UK

/ Source: UK, Department of Occupational Safety and Health /

I should mention that due to the current processes, Georgia managed the pandemic by

centralizing emergency management, which saved the country from collapse. Even countries that have run pandemics in a decentralized manner, with different approaches from different levels of government, find themselves in a difficult situation.

Despite the measures implemented in Georgia, the pandemic made it clear that compliance with labour safety norms was a major challenge in the workplace, with employers largely avoiding compliance with safety standards. For example, 144 miners were infected, 39 social agents, respondents, more than 4000 medical personnel cases in the country were detected. According to the data of October 14 of the current year the number of infected employees increased to 116, and the Carrefour, Wilmart, Yalchin and other markets were fined by the Labor Inspectorate. [7]

By 2020, the Georgian government had forecast a 5% economic decline, which is 1.1% lower than the preliminary figure published today. The Georgian government forecasts 4.3% economic growth by 2021. [6] (See Schedule 1.)

Schedule 1. Georgia's economic growth indicators for 2020



მონაცემთა წყარო: სტატისტიკის ეროვნული სამსახური

The measure of social exclusion by workers in the workplace has caused huge losses. According to the data of December 4, 2020, the total number of people with COVID-19 infection worldwide was 65,964,393, among which 45,659,637 (69%) recovered and 1,519,448 (2.3%) died.

The number of dead is very distorted, if we consider the situation in some parts of the world. In the United States, for example, the number of deaths from COVID-19 infection was 283,958, or 1.9% of the population, and in Russia, 42,176, or 1.7%, of those infected. Infections are rare in some countries and there are no deaths (Vatican, Mongolia, Faroe Islands, Greenland, etc.) [1].

According to studies conducted in Georgia, by the end of 2020, revenues from tourism will decrease by 83%, revenues from the service sector – by 19% and remittances – by 10%. [8] which led to the precondition for finding additional foreign debt. In the second quarter of 2020, compared to the second quarter of 2019, the number of unemployed increased by 15,600 people, which means a 0.9% increase in unemployment, among which 89% were women. According to the ILO, by the end of 2020, about 284 to 360 thousand people will remain unemployed in Georgia, and by 2021 this figure will reach 363.8 thousand people. [9]. The ILO estimates that by 2021, 100,000 self-employed people will lose their jobs and, consequently, their income [10] approximately similar predictions are made by a study prepared by ISET, which is based on sub-sectoral employment data. According to this study, 30% of those hired as a result of COVID 19 were at high risk of losing their job, while 15% of those who were self-employed were at risk. This equates to a total of about 380 thousand employees. According to a study conducted by UNICEF, due to the economic crisis caused by COVID 19, child poverty in Georgia will increase to 31% at best and to 38% at worst. According to the same study, „As a result of the shock associated with the coronavirus pandemic, the poverty level of the population (166 GEL per adult per month) is expected to increase from 21.7% to 24% in case of low shock, up to 26% in case of moderate shock and 30.9% in case of severe shock. -till.

The sharp and instantaneous increase in poverty was not unexpected given that 88% of the population surveyed did not have savings, while 65% in a July 2020 survey indicated that money was needed to provide food for a family for a maximum of one month. Unfortunately, the existing social protection system was not ready for preparing and responding effectively to meet the challenges. [7]

### 3. Conclusion

The global spread of COVID-19 to more than 200 countries has had a significant negative effect on individual countries' and world economy. It is clear that the restrictive measures imposed by the government on business activities, relocations, border and business closures are causing great economic damage to different countries and therefore it is expected that the recessionary process related to the pandemic will continue for a long time. [11] The security measures taken, which included the social distance of workers to the workplace, resulted in huge losses. This has been particularly acute in the service sector. Employers have been forced to reduce their costs and maintain their workforce in line with social distance, while in the industrial sector, workers here face a higher risk of losing their jobs. It is also difficult to determine exactly all the possible risks and expected consequences of a global pandemic, even what will be the reaction of people in the future?

The pandemic has stopped the whole world, made all people stay home, caused a global crisis but however, the question still remains: has the current model of the world economy become obsolete and unable to meet the challenges of the 21st century?

### References

1. Worldometers 2020. URL: <https://www.worldometers.info/coronavirus/#countries> (Verified: 05.12.2020).
2. Ana Diakonidze, Labor and Social Security during the New Coronavirus Pandemic, a package of recommendations for the Government of Georgia, 04.04.2020. /<https://osgf.ge/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Labor-and-Social-Security-during-COVID19-Policy-Brief-OSGF.pdf>
3. 2019 Activity Report of Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour Inspection Department of the Ministry of Refugees from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia. <https://www.moh.gov.ge/ka/> (verified: 04.12. 2020)
4. Organic Law of Georgia on Labor Safety – Article 3, paragraph f– 19/02/2019
5. Watterson, A. COVID-19 in the UK and occupational health and safety – predictable but not inevitable failures: what can we do now? Technical Report, University of Stirling, Number 29, April 7, <https://bit.ly/Covid-2y0pWGk> (2020, accessed 14 May 2020).
6. National Statistics Service of Georgia <https://www.geostat.ge/ka> (verified: 4 December 2020)
7. Labor Relations and Social Protection during a Pandemic, Georgia Report, Center for Human Rights Education and Monitoring (EMC), pp.19-20., 2020. /<https://osgf.ge/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Labor-Relations-geo-10-12-2020.pdf>
8. Macro Insights: Fiscal Bridging to Further Recovery. TBC. August 2020
9. World Employment and Social Outlook, Trends 2020, ILO
10. World Employment and Social Outlook, Trends 2020, ILO Baker S. R., et al. (2020). The unprecedented stock market reaction to COVID-19 // The Review of Asset Pricing Studies, raa008. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rapstu/raaa008>