

Entrepreneurship Development Foundation

**Project: Improving the adequacy of government and civil society policies to
the needs of persons over 65**

COMMENTARY on:

**Report on results of the survey, conducted amongst 1000
respondents above age 65 on their conditions during the
Coronavirus pandemic.**

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic, which paralyzed the whole world by causing a crisis in many spheres, had a serious impact on people's social conditions. Due to the challenges caused by the pandemic, it became necessary for relevant state bodies to reconsider the current social policy and apply fundamental changes in some of the spheres. In this regard, state care and public support becomes vital towards people above age 65 who are a vulnerable part of the population and are under a higher risk of developing more serious complications.

A specific approach aimed at protecting population above age 65 from possible threats, was applied in the Republic of Azerbaijan within the framework of control measures, after the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 virus a global pandemic on March 11, 2020. On March 23, 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers declared a special quarantine regime set to start from March 24 and last until April 20, 2020. As a part of the government-imposed restrictions on movement, people from the above mentioned group of population were not allowed to leave their homes. It was also mentioned that people from this category who lived alone should be provided with home-based social services in accordance with the law.

At the same time, on April 4, 2020, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the "Action Plan" on implementation of paragraph 10.2 of the act number 1950, of president of the Republic of Azerbaijan "on a number of measures to reduce the negative impact of Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and consequently, sharp fluctuations in world energy and stock markets, on the economy of the Republic of Azerbaijan, macroeconomic stability, employment and entrepreneurship", dated March 19, 2020. One of the measures of this "Action Plan" in regard of strengthening social protection of population's vulnerable part, is "providing home-based social services to lonely people above age 65 and providing services to those who are in need of a special care in service institutions". Implementation of this action was entrusted to MLSPP and its date was set to April – May, 2020.

Starting from December 14, 2020, based on gained experience and comparative analysis of indicators, the government this time did not set restrictions for citizens over 65 to leave their houses but instead, they were simply advised to stay away from crowded places, as a part of strict quarantine rules active in Azerbaijan.

At the first stage of mass Coronavirus vaccination, implemented in the country from the beginning of this year, citizens aged 65 and over were given a preference, which is also an indicator of state care towards this vulnerable category of population.

According to the State Statistics Committee, as of January 1, 2021, the number of people of age 65 and above was 719,9 thousand. 306,8 thousand of them were men and 413,1 women. This groups makes up about 6.7 percent of the whole country's population and it is indeed important to study, analyze and solve the problems they are faced with during the long-lasting COVID-19 pandemic. In this report, the socio-financial

condition of people of age 65 and above is analyzed based on the survey, as well as certain recommendations are given. It is mainly focused on socio-financial (pensions and other sources of income, food, medical care, etc.) and emotional (care, support, etc.) aspects in the survey.

The nationwide selection is not carried out completely. The entire west of Azerbaijan was left outside, including cities of Ganja and Sumgait, the latter being the most industrial city. However, it was inevitable as a result of pandemic conditions and quarantine restrictions on travelling across the country.

COMMENTS ON THE ANSWERS

1. Do you receive a pension?

Commentary: In Azerbaijan, those who never had any work experience at all, receive old-age benefits. It is less than the minimum pension, about 130 manats. At the moment probably slightly more.

2. During the coronavirus pandemic, did you receive your pension timely each month?

Commentary: There is nothing to comment on

3. Did you receive your pension timely each month before the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: From the distribution of respondents' answers to questions number 2 and 3, it turns out that in general there were no problems of timely transfers and deliveries of pensions in Azerbaijan during the pandemic. However, it is not a result of special actions. It was ensured during the previous period.

4. What kind of other source of income did you have before the Coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: It can be noticed that despite the retirement age, every ninth respondent continues to work on a personal plot, earning an additional income.

5. Which source of income did you lose (partly or completely) during the Coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Despite the fact that the proportion of people engaged in private entrepreneurship activities is not big, almost half of them lost their income during the pandemic due to quarantine-related restrictions.

6. Whose patronage are you under?

Commentary: More than 70 percent of respondents note that they receive and benefit from financial support provided by their family members (spouse, children). It is natural in cases of living together. Almost 30 percent of them receive no support at all from their relatives or friends. Nevertheless, we cannot draw a conclusion about financial self-sufficiency of the people of retirement age, which is the case in rich and developed countries.

7. Is there anybody under your patronage?

Commentary: Two out of five respondents noted that there are other people under their patronage. Apparently, they mean family members, spouses and children. However, it is hard to imagine that a pension with its rather average amount in the country, can be enough to support not only the pensioner but also his relatives. It can be assumed that a significantly larger number of people have additional income sources, despite what appears from respondents' answers to this question (where it is only about 12 percent of them).

8. Did you register by calling 142 – the call center of the Ministry of Labor and Social Protection, during coronavirus pandemic's strict quarantine regime, in order to benefit from government's social services (home-related issues, purchase of first need products and medicine, utilities' payments and etc.)?

Commentary: If we take into account that 12 percent of the respondents noted that they have a private household, but in reality this percentage may be even higher, the fact of applying and registering with government agencies (which as a result of coronavirus pandemic are obliged to provide support to the population in difficult situations) indicates both a lack of awareness among senior citizens and possibly a distrust of citizens of retirement age towards possibilities of receiving any kind of assistance.

9. What is the reason of not being registered?

Commentary: The distribution of respondents' answers about the reason for not applying to government agencies for help related to the pandemic, confirms that three quarters of those who needed such help did not have information on how to do it and what exactly to expect.

10. Which social services did you receive by the government during Coronavirus pandemic and how do you rate them (excellent, good, average, bad)?

Commentary: The number of respondents who answered this question is very small in order to make any assessments or conclusions. Therefore, we can state that the majority of the appeals were mostly related to utilities and receipt of medicine.

11. Do you get any support from your children or relatives?

Commentary: Three quarters of the respondents indicated that they were supported by their children and relatives during the pandemic, which once again proves the strength of mutual assistance within a family, traditional for Azerbaijan. Earlier, almost a third of the respondents indicated that even now, having reached old age, they still help their own children and other family members.

12. Is this support moral, physical or financial?

Commentary: The respondents indicated that support provided by their children and close relatives is mainly financial and moral at the same time, whereas only a third of them mentioned physical assistance too. It appears that there is not so much of a need for physical assistance and in cases of living separately, it becomes harder to provide it on a systematic basis.

13. Are you registered at any state medical institution?

Commentary: Half of the respondents indicated that they are not registered in any state-owned medical institutions. This is something to be worried about. Because financial situation of pensioners hardly allows a significant part of them to use services of private clinics. If we consider the fact that the majority of the survey participants are elderly citizens, there is no doubt that most of them have various chronic diseases and staying away from medical control in general should be an alarming case, especially during the coronavirus pandemic.

14. Were you provided with medical services on time during the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Distribution of the answers confirms that due to the fact that almost half of the people of retirement age dropped out of the public health care system, two out of every five in need of medical care, were deprived of the opportunity of receiving it.

15. Please rate the quality of medical services you were provided with on a scale from one to five.

Commentary: Distribution of survey participants' answers contradicts with the widespread opinion about the failure of the health care system, since three quarters of respondents rated it as excellent and good in terms of medical care they personally received.

16. Did you make any payments for the medical services you were provided with?

Commentary: Distribution of respondents' answers doesn't confirm the widespread opinion about total corruption of the state healthcare system. If we consider the fact that a certain number of survey participants could be provided with medical services in private clinics, then the percentage of those who paid in state-owned medical institutions would be less than a quarter, which is still a high and unacceptable indicator.

17. Was the amount of goods you were provided with, during the coronavirus pandemic enough for you?

Commentary: Judging by the distribution of respondents' answers, every fifth participant indicated that he (or she) was not provided with enough amount of food during the pandemic. It is likely that they had similar needs even before it. Nevertheless, it is obvious that additional income opportunities for better nutrition significantly decreased during the pandemic and food aid from public and state organizations must be organized in a targeted way.

18. Did you buy goods from stores during the coronavirus pandemic yourself and do you still buy them yourself?

Commentary: Distribution of survey participants' answers doesn't allow to make any conclusions, as the majority of pensioners live with their families and shopping could have been carried out by their spouses or children who live with them. A question addressed directly to pensioners who live alone, could be more informative.

19. Did you prepare meals yourself during the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Apparently the majority of respondents were men and traditionally women are more likely to be engaged in food preparation process in Azerbaijan. It could be more informative to address in this case retired men who live alone or have limitations due to a certain disease.

20. Did you apply to any government institutions with personal problems during the Coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Actually, this question is about nothing.

21. Please rate your relations with government institutions during the coronavirus pandemic on a five-point scale.

Commentary: Making analysis based on such a small sample as 54 respondents and their answers' differentiation is pointless.

22. Did you get any assistance by volunteers during the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Based on the answers provided by survey participants, we can make a simple conclusion that volunteering is not developed in Azerbaijan at all. People who are in need of volunteers' assistance are poorly informed about them and have to rely more on their neighbors' and relatives' support.

23. Was this assistance moral, physical or financial?

Commentary: The extremely small number of respondents who dealt with volunteers, won't give us an opportunity to analyze and make conclusions about the content and effectiveness of this public institution during pandemic.

24. Did you get support by any business institutions during the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: The extremely small percentage of survey participants who responded this question won't mean that businesses are far from supporting retired people who are in need. Because in most cases, businesses support through an individual or various funds (for example: Heydar Aliyev Foundation) or local executive and municipal bodies.

25. Was this assistance moral, physical or financial?

Commentary: Since the sociological base is very insignificant, it becomes pointless to analyze and make conclusions based on it.

26. Did you notice any difference between support provided to older men and women during the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Majority of the respondents note on the absence of any preferences in receiving assistance based on gender differences. The fact that about 10 percent of the survey participants highlighted a possible fact in favor of women can be explained, as there are more women of age 65+ living alone compared to men and therefore it is natural that more of them are provided with assistance.

27. A "Law on Social Service" was adopted on December 30, 2011. Do you know anything about it?

Commentary: Despite the fact that the majority of the survey respondents never heard about the “Law on Social Services” adopted by the parliament almost ten years ago, it is still a positive case that almost every fifth respondent is aware of it.

30. Which rights for the elderly citizens you benefit from based on this law?

Commentary: Distribution of respondents’ answers points on the lack of their awareness of opportunities and guarantees they can be provided with based on the law on elderly persons. Among the options noted, they ranked confidentiality of provided social services in the first place and the right to choose social institutions and provided social services in the second.

31. A “State Program of Strengthening Social Protection of Elderly citizens” was adopted on April 17, 2006. Do you know anything about it?

Commentary: Judging by the distribution of respondents’ answers, awareness of elderly citizens of adoption and realization of a special program related to this category adopted by state institutions, is on a very low level.

More than three quarters of those who responded to this question, gave a negative answer, and in case we relate it to all survey participants, then the proportion of those who lack necessary information will reach 90 percent.

32. Which difficulties in general did you have during the coronavirus pandemic?

Commentary: Among all difficulties caused by coronavirus pandemic and its consequent quarantine measures, stress was noted by more than half of the respondents. Apparently there was a lack of explanatory works and psychologists’ TV appearances were not enough at all and thus, formation of public mood was mostly left to social networks, rumors and exaggerations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. From the distribution of respondents’ answers, it turns out that in general there were no problems of timely transfers and deliveries of pensions in Azerbaijan during the pandemic.
2. Despite the fact that the proportion of people engaged in private entrepreneurship activities is not big, almost half of them lost their income during the pandemic due to quarantine-related restrictions.
3. More than 70 percent of respondents note that they receive and benefit from financial support provided by their family members (spouse, children). At the same time, two out of five respondents noted that there are other people under their patronage.

Tradition of living together is still widespread in Azerbaijan and this is our significant difference from developed countries. Government must consider this moment in social policy;

4. Retired people in Azerbaijan quite rarely apply to state agencies with their problems. Distribution of respondents' answers about the reason for not applying to government agencies for help during the pandemic, confirms that three quarters of those who needed such help did not have information on how to do it and what exactly to expect. Therefore, it is important to deliver necessary information towards elderly people in a broader way, perhaps not only through television, but also by sending messages to their cell phone numbers.

5. Half of the respondents indicated that they are not registered in any state-owned medical institutions. This is something to be worried about. Because financial situation of pensioners hardly allows a significant part of them to use services of private clinics. If we consider the fact that the majority of the survey participants are elderly citizens, there is no doubt that most of them have various chronic diseases and staying away from medical control in general should be an alarming case, especially during the coronavirus pandemic. Distribution of the answers confirms that due to the fact that almost half of the people of retirement age dropped out of the public health care system, two out of every five in need of medical care, were deprived of the opportunity of receiving it. By the way, distribution of survey participants' answers contradicts with the widespread opinion about the failure of the health care system, since three quarters of respondents rated it as excellent and good in terms of medical care they personally received. Besides, the widespread opinion about total corruption of the state healthcare system is not confirmed either.

6. Judging by the distribution of respondents' answers, every fifth participant indicated that he (or she) was not provided with enough amount of food during the pandemic. It is likely that they had similar needs even before it. Nevertheless, it is obvious that additional income opportunities for better nutrition significantly decreased during the pandemic and food aid from public and state organizations must be organized in a targeted way.

7. Based on the answers provided by survey participants, we can make a simple conclusion that volunteering is not developed in Azerbaijan at all. Despite the fact that a relevant law, aimed at activating and stimulating volunteering in Azerbaijan was adopted several years ago, it is necessary for both state bodies and civil society to take measures in order to implement the adopted laws and solutions related to this sphere. People who are in need of volunteers' assistance are poorly informed about them and have to rely more on their neighbors' and relatives' support.

8. Majority of the respondents note on the absence of any preferences in receiving assistance based on gender differences. The fact that about 10 percent of the survey participants highlighted a possible fact in favor of women can be explained, as there are more women of age 65+ living alone compared to men and therefore it is natural that more of them are provided with assistance.

9. The majority of survey respondents never heard about the “Law on Social Services” adopted by the parliament almost ten years ago. The awareness level of the elderly citizens on the adoption and realization of a special program by state bodies, aimed at this category of citizens is not satisfying either.

10. Among all difficulties caused by coronavirus pandemic and its consequent quarantine measures, stress was noted by more than half of the respondents. Apparently there was a lack of explanatory works and psychologists’ TV appearances were not enough at all and thus, formation of public mood was mostly left to social networks, rumors and exaggerations.