

# UNHCR GEORGIA

## Participatory Assessment 2013 Report

### *Becoming part of Society:*

### *Local Integration of Refugees in Pankisi*



UNHCR  
The UN  
Refugee Agency

Georgia



## I. INTRODUCTION

### Background

The annual registration exercise carried out by asylum authorities in Georgia in 2013 recorded **284 refugees** and **34 humanitarian status holders**. The majority (78 per cent or 249 persons) are refugees from the Russian Federation. 233 are of Chechen origin and fled to Georgia in 1999-2001. They reside in the Pankisi valley. Most have been refugees in Georgia for over 10 years. Pankisi valley was chosen by the Government of Georgia as the main place for settlement of refugees who fled from Chechnya as this location is predominantly populated by ethnic Kists, who share the same language, and have common religious and cultural practices and ethnic affiliations with Chechens.

Between 2009 and 2012, the Government of Georgia naturalized **536 refugees from Chechnya**. Only 31 refugees (6 per cent) were rejected during this period. However, in 2013, all 54 applications for Georgian citizenship submitted by Chechen refugees were rejected without any explanation.

An initial participatory assessment among Chechen refugees in 2009 indicated that lack of adequate housing and livelihoods were the main obstacles to local integration of refugees living in Pankisi valley. In response, UNHCR and partners implemented a local integration

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programme, consisting of individual livelihood assistance and integration grants for housing with a value of up to US\$12,500 per family, to address identified needs, enable families to purchase a house and land, and to realize a durable solution for themselves. In addition, projects to address the occurrence of sexual and gender based violence and to empower women and educate youth were initiated. While the integration and livelihood projects were conditioned upon prior naturalization the other projects were extended to all refugees and other populations in Pankisi valley.

In 2012, UNHCR phased out individual livelihood assistance programming and closed its office in Akhmeta. At the same time a joint livelihood project with UNDP was initiated, targeting refugee and other families living in the area.

### Current Situation

Monitoring of the distribution and use of the integration grant indicated that prices of property in Pankisi valley significantly increased over time, and that the integration grant was not sufficient to purchase property in good condition. At the same time refugee families who received the housing grant were not willing to move to other areas where houses are more affordable. This led to families purchasing houses that were in need of rehabilitation, and then having no means to pay for repairs or servicing debts. The Standard Operating Procedures under which integration grants were allocated stipulated that the so called 'housing grant' be paid to naturalized refugees, and can only be used to purchase housing which cannot then be sold for five years after procurement. Monitoring also identified refugee families who are not in need of housing and would prefer other types of integration assistance.

As all applications of refugees seeking naturalization in Georgia were rejected in 2013, none qualified for integration assistance under the criteria then in place. In order to ensure equitable access to integration assistance for all refugees who are willing and making efforts to integrate, UNHCR delinked integration assistance from the legal process of naturalization. To determine and verify population needs and desires of the refugee population regarding assistance provision, UNHCR undertakes periodic Participatory Assessments. Building on the prior Participatory Assessment of 2009, UNHCR devoted the current 2013 Participatory Assessment to assessing and discussing integration needs and problems of the refugees in Pankisi valley. UNHCR staff together with governmental and non-governmental partners conducted meetings with persons of concern in different villages in Pankisi on 13-14 November 2013.

As this Participatory Assessment was an opportunity for refugees to share their problems and concerns, this report focuses on the issues refugees think should be addressed, rather than success stories.

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## **II. OBJECTIVES**

The overall objective of this assessment is to revise and adjust integration assistance to be provided Chechen/Kist refugees as of 2014, rendering assistance towards realizing durable solutions to all 233 eligible refugees, namely:

- Link assistance to UNHCR vulnerability criteria rather than a set of predefined criteria that may place an unreasonable burden of proof on the refugee e.g. residence in a collective centre or application for residence therein.
- Assess main integration obstacles and appropriate types of assistance.
- Re-evaluate the current strategy, and impact of the current housing grant.
- Assess whether information sharing on rights and entitlements of refugees and naturalized refugees is useful and may be extended beyond current practice.
- Ensure that assistance is provided based on needs of the household or family, and not on needs of an individual member. Hence, men and women and children of households should be interviewed separately.

### **III. METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPATION**

The Multi-Functional Team (MFT) that prepared and carried out the assessment comprised 27 colleagues (see Annex I) representing the Ministry of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia (MRA), the Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF), Innovation and Reforms Center (IRC), UN Association of Georgia (UNAG) and UNHCR.

Before conducting the participatory assessment, the MFT met twice to review existing information, discuss methodology and objectives of the exercise, and develop key questions to be used during facilitation of the different focus groups (see Annex II).

All refugees to be interviewed reside in nine villages in Pankisi valley. However, meetings were organized in three settlements that could easily be reached by everyone. Transportation was arranged for those who had no means or were not able to organize their own transport:

- 1) Duisi (covering Akhmeta/Akhalsheni, Telavi, and partially Koreti);
- 2) Tsinubani (covering partially Koreti);
- 3) Jokolo (covering Birkiani, Dumasturi, Khalatsani, Omalo).

The eleven teams, each comprising two representatives from different organizations, carried out 20 focus group discussions (12 female and 8 male groups) with persons of concern of different ages (starting from 12 years old), gender and status in Georgia.

The focus group meetings were conducted mainly with recognized refugees. There were also four groups (17 female and 11 male) with former refugees who have been recently granted Georgian citizenship, and their relatives (mainly children), whose refugee status was suspended due to the naturalization of the principle applicant(s).

No-shows of some refugees could be explained by a movie being produced in Duisi, which coincided with the assessment. In addition, the skeptical attitude of some refugees, who have high expectations and are not happy with the outcome of such exercises, could also have resulted in non-participation by some.

In general, the level of participation by refugees in the Participatory Assessment was high, 71 per cent of the invitees for the meetings (135 persons out of 189 invited) attended. People were interested to share their concerns with the interview teams.

### Age/gender breakdown of the participants:

Age Group	Male		Female		Total	
	in numbers	in %	in numbers	in %	in numbers	in %
12-17	11	8	23	17	34	25
18-59	30	23	69	51	99	74
60 and >	2	1	0	0	2	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>100</b>

## V. MAIN FINDINGS AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

### A) Loosing hope for Georgian citizenship

All refugees, who applied for Georgian citizenship in 2013 were rejected without any explanation. Although they may reapply after six months, the rejected refugees have little hope of being granted citizenship. This prompted other refugees who have not applied for citizenship yet, but were interested in doing so, to express their frustration with this practise. They consider it a waste of time and effort to collect the necessary documents for requesting Georgian citizenship, as they now assume that in the end the result will be negative.

Refugees with suspended status due to the naturalization of the principle applicant(s) in their families, most of whom are children, and their relatives are not aware of the reason for the decision to suspend their refugee status. As a result of the suspension of refugee status, their rights to education and medical care are violated. School age children can only attend school as so-called “*listeners*”, which will prevent them from obtaining a school certificate confirming their graduation. They cannot continue their studies further without proper documentation from the school. In a legal limbo, they have problems linked to accessing social and medical assistance.



Refugee children see the benefit of receiving Georgian citizenship, as it opens the door to higher education and better employment opportunities. Most of them were born and grew up in Georgia, and consider it their homeland. The refugee children are fluent in the Georgian language and would like to integrate in Georgian society.

### B) Suffering due to lack of a decent or adequate housing

The lack of adequate living conditions was a concern mentioned by all refugees. In most cases, absent alternatives refugees reside in houses provided by their relatives, friends, acquaintances, and the local population, or they live in the state run collective centers. They cannot afford their own decent accommodation and do not enjoy a sense of stability despite having lived for many years in Georgia.

*“We are in a worse situation than those who are in a collective center. I live in someone else’s house. Today, if he tells us to leave where will we go?”*

Refugees stated that the current allocation of housing grants by UNHCR is not fair, and that no distinction linked to the allowance amount provided should be made between refugees who live in collective centers and those who reside in private accommodation. A refugee-woman living in private accommodation complained that it is unfair to provide higher local integration grants to refugees who live in collective centers, thus

discounting needs and vulnerabilities of refugees who live in houses provided by relatives, friends and acquaintances, as the situation and living conditions of the latter may be even worse. The amount of housing assistance is not enough to buy a proper house and refugees do not have enough income to solve such issues on their own.

### **C) Limited employment opportunities are an obstacle for successful integration**

Pankisi valley is a remote rural area and employment opportunities are limited, especially for women. Refugees are not able to earn a living. They noted that the state allowance (28 GEL/16 USD per month for refugees living in private accommodation; 22 GEL/13 USD for refugees living in collective centers) is a substantial part of their income, but it is not enough to sustain a dignified life, and the amount has not been increased since their recognition as refugees.

Refugee men considered that in the existing difficult social situation in Pankisi, micro grants or no interest loan programmes would help them with the development of their own small businesses. They suggested creation of small fruit and vegetable preservation enterprises and support for the development of farming in Pankisi, as this would provide opportunity to have a sustainable income.

*“Everybody needs a job, but there is nothing available. Even local Kists are unemployed”.*

### **D) Access to education and absence of leisure activities**

Refugees have limited access to vocational training and higher education. The existing state programmes include Georgian citizens only and refugees do not have the opportunity to receive free of charge or partially covered higher education. Education opportunities are even more crucial for the youth.

*“My daughter would like to continue her education, but it is against our mentality, it’s not nice to send the daughter alone to study somewhere”.*

Refugee-women stated that they do not have formal education and skills that would allow them to work and have stable employment. At the same time, parents are not willing to allow their daughters to continue their education elsewhere, such as in Tbilisi, as this is not in line with cultural norms and practices. They would prefer to support higher education of their sons, but some male adolescents are reluctant to continue their education.

Refugee teachers stated that they had not been able to complete their higher education due to their flight from their country of origin and this negatively affects their salary rates. They state that Georgian teachers have more opportunities to upgrade their knowledge and qualification through available state training programmes.

Refugees expressed an interest in accounting courses, which are useful for managing integration grants and especially for those who plan to use part of these for business start up, to be able to run their small businesses and farms.

Refugee children expressed extreme disappointment that in some cases due to absence of teachers and limited classroom space they have to study together with children of different grades in one classroom, which disturbs their schoolwork and negatively affects the quality of education. Refugee children wish to continue their education, but they are not sure that their families will be able to afford it.



Refugee girls were reluctant to discuss their problems. They told the teams that their parents do not allow them to participate in recreational activities, such as sports or music lessons, drama and art classes at school. They are also not allowed to take part in social events and the girls consider such events inappropriate for their religion.

Children and youth expressed dissatisfaction regarding the lack of leisure and sports activities, facilities and equipment at schools. Parents expressed their fears that this might lead to their sons turning to radical Muslim groups or departing to Syria to fight in the war there or that they might experiment with drugs or alcohol.

### **E) Importance of learning Georgian and knowing about rights**

Refugees understand the importance of the Georgian language. Refugee women believe that the Georgian language classes should be available not only for children, but for adults as well. More attention should be paid to villages (Dumastury, Tsinubani) with a high concentration of refugees, which are located far from the Pankisi valley center, Duisi. Refugees, including refugee-children, from these remote villages feel abandoned and due to a lack of transportation, are not able to attend courses in Duisi, especially during the winter season.

Some refugee children indicated that teachers, especially their Georgian language teachers, speak the Kist/Chechen language instead of using Georgian. This affects the level of their knowledge of Georgian for the continuation of their education. Children are not happy in general with the level of the language classes in their schools.

*“We have become confused on what rights we do have”.*

Refugees are not aware of their rights, entitlements and existing administrative procedures. Therefore, they do not know what type of assistance from the State they are entitled to and where to go to receive it. A refugee-woman from Dumastury said that *“we have become confused on what rights we do have”*.

#### **F) Access to health services**

Some refugees reported problems accessing medical facilities. They are not aware of the services covered by their insurance package, and when they seek counselling at the Akhmeta hospital, they do not receive proper answers. In addition, some medical services, such as hormone tests and tomography, are not available in Akhmeta and as a result refugees had to travel to Telavi or Tbilisi unassisted. Refugees expressed concern that some medical services are not included in their insurance package, and that the limited 100 GEL amount in the insurance package for medicines is not sufficient to cover all needs. They noted that there are only three outpatient clinics in Pankisi covering 17 villages, which is not enough to provide the population with proper medical care.

#### **G) Perception that Convention Travel Documents (CTDs) do not help to travel abroad**

Refugees continue to express concerns about difficulties with travelling abroad using CTDs. Although the MFT teams were not able to identify a refugee among the participants who had a personal experience travelling with CTDs, refugees believe that there are challenges with obtaining visas and other required entry permits.

#### **H) Bridge for populations from Dumastury and Tsinubani**

Refugees residing on the other side of Alazania river, in Dumastury and Tsinubani villages, requested construction of a pedestrian bridge, to be able to access other parts of the Pankisi valley. The only bridge currently existing is too distant for their use, and without regular transportation people are stranded in their villages. The situation is worse during the winter period when transport is not able to reach these villages due to ice and snow, and wolves are coming closer to residential areas. As a result, children cannot go to school as walking along that road is dangerous. It was noted that the construction of a bridge requires substantial financial resources, as the river is wide and local authorities lack funds.

## VI. RECOMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are suggested by the MFT based on a prioritization exercise considering feasibility, impact and cost effectiveness:

### Status and Citizenship

- **Government of Georgia:** carefully consider the enhancement of national legislation and its implementation to facilitate the naturalization of refugees in Georgia;
- **UNHCR and partners:** provide refugees with information and legal counselling on naturalization procedures and requirements, and assist them in submitting documents for acquisition of Georgian citizenship;
- **MRA:** revoke the suspension of refugee status of family members of naturalized former refugees to ensure that the principle of family unity is respected;
- **UNHCR and partners:** revise the UNHCR local integration strategy to delink assistance from naturalization and type of accommodation requirements, and link assistance to vulnerability criteria and prioritized family needs (already approved by UNHCR Headquarters and implemented);
- **UNHCR and partners:** unify assistance under a common local integration package without differentiation between collective and private accommodation residents and without a specification with regard to the purpose of use being implemented;
- **UNHCR in coordination with KRDF and other partners:** conduct individual needs assessments;
- **UNHCR in coordination with KRDF:** offer counselling for beneficiaries of integration grants to ensure the appropriate use of funds, including assistance in the development of an individual action plan for each family with regard to integration, financial, social and legal counselling;
- **Government of Georgia:** as IDP allowance provided by the Government of Georgia will be increased significantly from 1 March 2014 (when the new IDP Law will come into force) to 45 GEL, the Government of Georgia should grant the same increase for refugees;
- **UNHCR and partners:** develop a work plan to finalize integration assistance for the remaining 233 families, based on priorities for the coming two years, and evaluate the strategy after six months to adjust, if required.

### Education

- **KRDF:** expand the scope of the persons receiving Georgian language classes to focus not only on youth and children but also on adults, especially women;
- **KRDF:** expand existing computer classes for adults who wish to learn new technologies, including Skype, to enable them to use new communication tools;

- ***KRDF***: provide accounting training, for managing integration grants, and especially for those who plan to use funds for business start up.

### **Health**

- ***Ministry of Health, MRA, UNHCR and partners***: after the recent announcement by the Government of Georgia regarding inclusion of refugees and humanitarian status holders in the state health insurance plan, conduct an information campaign for beneficiaries regarding their entitlements and to whom they can address their queries.

### **Children**

- ***KRDF***: identify sports coaches locally and provide youths with sport training;
- ***Department of sport of the Ministry of Education, UNHCR and partners***: promote and arrange access to sport infrastructure, equipment and coaching for the community.

***UNHCR Georgia  
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## Annex I

# UNHCR Georgia Multi-Functional Team

N°	Full Name	Title
<b><i>Innovations and Reforms Center (IRC)</i></b>		
1	Nato Gagnidze	Project Director
2	Nino Rtveladze	Lawyer
<b><i>Kakheti Regional Development Foundation (KRDF)</i></b>		
3	Tamar Bekauri	Executive Director
4	Ana Imedashvili	Legal Assistant
5	Fatima Borchashvili	Administrative Assistant/Translator
6	Beso Khokhobashvili	Finance Manager
7	Nata Baghakashvili	Community Center Coordinator
8	Guliko Khangoshvili	Teacher
9	Natela Aldamovi	Teacher
10	Iveri (Murad) Kavtarashvili	Legal Assistant
<b><i>Ministry of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia (MRA)</i></b>		
11	Gogi Meshveliani	Project Manager
<b><i>United Nations Associations of Georgia (UNAG)</i></b>		
12	Aleksandre Svanidze	Refugee and Migration Project Director
13	Giorgi Maruashvili	Legal Officer
<b><i>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)</i></b>		
14	Simone Wolken	Representative
15	Anne Garbe	Senior Programme Officer
16	Anjela Guzova	Associate Programme Officer
17	Ketevan Kamashidze	Assistant Protection Officer
18	Inna Borisevich	Associate Field Officer (Protection)
19	Tamar Magradze	Senior Protection Assistant
20	Eka Valishvili	Assistant Programme Officer
21	Nino Kuchukhidze	Programme Associate
22	Nino Kajaia	External Relations Associate
23	Jumber Grdzlishvili	Admin Assistant
24	Vakhtang Sidamonidze	Telecom Associate
25	Goga Gunia	Field Safety Associate
26	Bakur Bakuradze	Driver
27	Nodar Mamagulishvili	Driver

## *Annex II*

### List of Key Questions

#### **1. Questions to facilitate the general discussion:**

- How is your life in Georgia as of today?
- What are your plans for the future?
- Would you like to get Georgian citizenship?
- Are you informed about the rights of the Georgian citizens?
- What is the difference between the rights of citizens and rights of refugees in Georgia?
- What changes do you expect to happen in this regard (or what has changed? – if already naturalized)?
- What do you think about the ongoing integration program implemented by UNHCR? What would you propose to change?
- What would you do, if you were given an opportunity to implement your goals?

#### **2. Specific questions for women:**

- Can you take your own decisions in the family?
- Can you implement your plans by your own means (independently)?

#### **3. Specific questions for children:**

- What do you need to fulfill your plans?
- How adults are influencing your decision?

#### **4. Specific questions for deregistered and recently naturalized refugees:**

- What changed after naturalization?
- What kind of problems did you face after the suspension/cancellation of the statuses of you or your family members?