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Georgia

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Introduction

1. This report is the national report of Georgia within the third cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). In 2015, during the second cycle of the UPR, Georgia accepted 191 recommendations. At the same time, Georgia undertook the voluntary obligation to submit a midterm report on the process of the implementation of recommendations accepted by the country, and this was submitted in March 2019. The present report includes updated information on the implementation status of the recommendations accepted by the State.
2. All relevant state agencies from executive, legislative and judicial branches participated in the preparation of the present report.
3. The report was submitted to the Public Defender of Georgia, international and non-governmental organisations. Their suggestions and comments were considered and accepted during the report preparation.
4. It is noteworthy that the Parliament of Georgia reviewed this report in line with the Rules of Procedures of the Parliament as amended in 2016.

I. Human rights protection – Achievements and challenges

A. Major institutional and legislative reforms

5. After 2015 the Government of Georgia (GoG) implemented significant reforms aiming at improved standards of human rights protection.
6. Georgia is a Member State of all major international human rights treaties. According to the Constitution of Georgia, an international treaty of Georgia shall take precedence over national normative acts unless it comes into conflict with the Constitution or the Constitutional Agreement of Georgia (Article 4.5).
7. The constitutional amendments introduced in 2017-2018 consolidated the standards of human rights protection. The constitutional amendments specifically focus on social rights, rights of persons with disabilities (PwDs), child rights, and gender equality.
8. National Human Rights Strategy (2014-2020) and relevant governmental action plans (2014-2015, 2016-2017, 2018-2020) represent crucial documents for the protection of human rights in Georgia.
9. The Human Rights Inter-Agency Council chaired by the Prime Minister and the Human Rights Secretariat of the Administration of the Government supervises the effective implementation of the Action Plans. The Inter-Agency Council consists of the Ministers and top officials of different state agencies. Representatives of the local civil society organisations and international organisations participate in the work of the Interagency Council. They have consultative status at the Council. The Interagency Council reviews the submitted annual reports on the status implementation of the Action Plans and presents it to the GoG. The GOG submits these reports to the Parliament for review.
10. The 2020 amendments to the regulatory framework increased the composition and mandate of the Interagency Council. Now the Council is the national mechanism for monitoring, evaluation and reporting in the field of human rights. A consultative group composing of the representatives of non-governmental organisations was created under the Council.
11. In March 2020 the GoG created an interagency working group to develop the second human rights strategy and the fourth human rights action plan.
12. The Prime Minister's Advisor on Human Rights and Gender Equality coordinates activities of state agencies and officials for improving the human rights situation in Georgia.

13. The Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee of the Parliament of Georgia has a broad and robust mandate to evaluate and supervise the human rights situation in the country.

14. The Office of Public Defender (PDO) is a crucial constitutional body for the protection of human rights. It supervises the protection of human rights in Georgia.

15. On November 1, 2019, an independent state agency – the State Inspector’s Service (SIS) (legal successor of the Personal Data Inspector Office) was created. It is an institutionally independent body responsible for independent and effective investigation of specific crimes committed by law enforcement officers and civil servants.

16. Georgian fundamental anti-corruption reforms are the most successful among Eastern European states and Georgia has one of the lowest rates of corruption among the European States, as evidenced by many international studies.¹

B. Human rights situation in Georgia’s occupied territories

17. The human rights situation in the occupied regions deteriorates gradually. The policy of occupation, steps towards factual annexation, increasing militarization, installation of barbed wires and other artificial barriers along the occupation line and other illegal actions by the Russian Federation result in grave violation of human rights.

18. Hundreds of thousand internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees who were forced to flee as a result of several waves of ethnic cleansing are deprived of the right to return to their places of residence in safety and dignity.

19. The right to life of Georgian citizens has been continuously violated in the occupied territories as clearly manifested by deprivation of life of Davit Basharuli in 2014, Giga Otkhozoria in 2016 and Archil Tatunashvili in 2018. The representatives of the occupation regime directly participated in these murders. In 2019, the Russian occupation forces illegally detained the national of Georgia Irakli Kvaratskhelia who died at the Russian military base illegally deployed in the occupied Abkhazia region. Ethnic Ossetian Inal Djabiev was another victim of torture and murder by the Tskhinvali occupation regime in August 2020.

20. The Russian occupation regimes constantly close so-called crossing points to restrict the freedom of movement. In 2016-2017 four so-called crossing points were closed in Abkhazia regions. The occupation regimes often close the remaining so-called crossing points based on different artificial reasons. The occupation line of Tskhinvali region has been closed since September 2019 for unknown term, which has resulted in the full-scale isolation of the region and has driven local community to the edge of the humanitarian crisis, especially in Akhagori district mainly resided by ethnic Georgians. Denial of medical evacuation from Akhagori district on the basis of ethnicity led to 15 cases of death since September 2019.

21. Illegal detentions and kidnappings are permanent at the occupation line. Since 2016 the Russian occupation regime in Sokhumi detained 311 persons and the Russian occupation regime in Tskhinvali detailed 485 persons, including women, elderly, children, doctors and clergy.

22. The Georgians living in the occupied territories are subject to ethnic discrimination. Since 2016 the occupation regime in Sokhumi coerces ethnic Georgians to register as “foreigners”. Through this illegal process the Georgian population is deprived of right to residence, work, property and freedom of movement. Education in the Georgian language is prohibited in occupied Abkhazia region since 2015 and in occupied Tskhinvali Region –

¹ According to the 2019 report of the World Justice Project, Georgia has leading position and ranks on the first position in the East Europe and Central Asian region. According to 2017 data of the Open Budget Index, Georgia ranks on the 5th position for the transparency of the budgetary process.

since 2017. Teaching in Georgian kindergartens and schools is conducted in Russian language since then.

23. The locals living near the occupation line do not have an opportunity to visit their families. They do not have access to their property, agricultural lands, religious sites and cemeteries. They have also been deprived of the opportunity to access healthcare and education services offered by the GoG.

24. Property rights of ethnic Georgians are gravely violated in the occupied territories. Hundreds of houses of ethnic Georgians were intentionally burned down and destroyed.

25. The case of Ms. Tamar Mearakishvili, civil society activist in Akhagori district, remains a very vivid demonstration of blatant human rights violations in the Russian-occupied Tskhinvali region of Georgia. During the reporting period, Ms. Mearakishvili has remained the subject of grave ethnic discrimination, oppression, persecution and restrictions of her basic rights and freedoms by the Russian occupation regime in Tskhinvali. For more than three years, she has been deprived of the possibility of freedom of movement and crossing the occupation line to visit her family members and get basic services, including medical treatment on the Georgian Government controlled territory. Her conditions have been further aggravated since the full closure of the occupation line in Tskhinvali region in September 2019. The Russian occupation regime has been using every effort to force Ms. Mearakishvili to leave her home and become the IDP.

26. The Russian Federation does not allow international human rights mechanisms to access the occupied territories. Moreover, Russia deprives the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) of access to both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions, although the Mission's mandate covers the entire territory of Georgia. Even more so, on October 24, 2019, the occupation forces detained EUMM monitors who were patrolling near the occupation line on Georgian-government controlled territory.

27. The Russian Federation bears the responsibility for the human rights violations in the occupied territories as the power exercising effective control over the regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

28. It is noteworthy that the GoG unwaveringly implements the policy of peaceful resolution of conflict and effectively uses all available diplomatic, political, legal and other tools for the protection of human rights in the occupied territories. The GoG actively uses the negotiation formats such as Geneva International Discussions (GID) and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) under the GID. This issue of peaceful resolution of Russia-Georgia conflict is part of all relevant bilateral and multilateral platforms and is reflected in various documents adopted by different countries and international organisations.

29. Besides, the GOG makes all efforts to improve the humanitarian and social-economic conditions of the population living in the occupied regions and adjacent territories.

C. Review of the comprehensive policy on international humanitarian law

30. In 2017 the Parliament adopted the Law on the Use and Protection of the Emblem and the Name of the Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Crystal developed by the Interagency Commission of International Humanitarian Law.

31. In 2019, the Interagency Commission to Search for and Transfer the Bodies of Persons Missing after Armed Conflicts was created. The Commission aims to search and organize the transfer of bodies of persons missing after the armed conflict on the territory of Georgia.

32. In 2019, Georgia took voluntary pledges at the 33-rd International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent. The pledges dealt with various issues related to the implementation of International Humanitarian Law.

D. Review of anti-discrimination legislation

33. Amendments to the Law of Georgia on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination dated from May 2, 2014, increased the mandate of the Public Defender concerning the elimination of discrimination and ensuring equality.

34. To implement the functions under the anti-discrimination legislation, the PDO created the Equality Department. The 2019 amendments further increased the mandate of the PDO. The Public Defender is entitled to file a complaint before the court if a legal person or any subject of private law does not reply to or does not consider the PDO recommendation.

35. To ensure effective implementation of statutory functions, the budget of PDO increased by 268% compared to 2014, namely: in 2014 the PDO budget was 2.38 mln GEL, in 2015 – 4 mln GEL, in 2016 – 4.5 mln GEL, in 2017 – 4.8 mln GEL, in 2018 – 5.5 mln and 2019 – 6.4 mln GEL.

36. In 2017 article 53¹ was added to the Criminal Code of Georgia (CCG). This article provides that discrimination motive is an aggravating circumstance and introduces at least 1-year imprisonment.

37. On February 19, 2019, the amendments to the Law of Georgia on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination introduced the definition of sexual harassment. The 2019 amendments to the labour legislation regulated sexual harassment in labour relations. Besides, 2019 amendments defined that sexual harassment was an administrative violation and introduced relevant sanction.

E. Fight against crimes committed with discrimination/hatred motive

38. In January 2018, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia (MIA) established the Human Rights Protection Department (later transformed to Human Rights Protection and Quality Monitoring Department). Its primary function is monitoring the quality of investigation of crimes committed based on discrimination and hate crimes and administrative proceedings on administrative violations.

39. Fight against hate crimes is one of the priorities of the Prosecutor's Office, according to its 2017-2021 Strategy and Action Plan. In 2018-2019 the Prosecutor's Office selected and trained prosecutors who work on hate crimes. By the end of 2019, there were 71 specialized prosecutors/investigators in the system.

40. A recommendation for prosecutors and investigators of the Prosecutor's Office on practical implications of article 53¹ of the CCG - aggravating factors for punishment - was adopted. The recommendation addresses the effective investigation of hate crimes, identification of motive, etc.

41. A specialized questionnaire for prosecutors was drafted that specified rules of interview/examination of victims, accused, and witnesses.

42. The undertaken measures resulted in increased identification of discriminatory motive in criminal cases. In 2016 criminal prosecution was undertaken against 44 persons, while in 2019 – against 183 persons.

43. The educational/training courses on identification and effective investigation of hate crimes for the personnel of the Prosecutor's Office and MIA are conducted permanently.

44. In February 2020, Chapter 15 of the National Human Rights Action Plan (for 2018-2020) "Introduction of Equality Policy and Fight Against Discrimination" was adopted. This chapter aims to fight against crimes with discrimination motive and hate crimes.

F. Gender equality

45. In 2018 amendments to the Constitution entered into force. The new wording of the Constitution provides a provision concerning the equality of women and men (article 11).

According to the amendments, the State shall take special measures to ensure the essential equality of men and women and to eliminate inequality.

46. Amendments to the Rules of Procedures of the Parliament transformed the Gender Equality Council into the standing consultative body of the Parliament. The Parliament Speaker or with his/her assignment one of the Council members chairs the Council.

47. In 2017 the GoG Resolution created the Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Its members are deputy ministers, the co-chairs of the Commission are deputy minister of justice and the Prime Minister's Advisor on Human Rights and Gender Equality.

48. In 2018, the GoG approved National Action Plan of Georgia for Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security for 2018-2020 and National Human Rights Action Plan for 2018-2020 that includes a dedicated chapter "Gender Equality and Women Empowerment".

49. The 2018 amendments to CCG introduced gender discrimination as an aggravating circumstance of a crime.

50. Since 2013 the Gender Equality Department operates at the PDO. It aims at supervising human rights situation from the gender equality perspective.

51. At every ministry, a person or a department working on gender equality were identified. At the local self-government level, gender equality councils were created, and gender advisors are appointed in municipalities. Since 2015, gender equality advisor has been appointed in the Tbilisi Mayor's Office.

52. In March 2020, the Parliament appointed a woman as the President of the Supreme Court for a 10-year tenure. In 2018, the first female president was elected. In 2017, the Parliament appointed a woman as the Public Defender and in 2018 the female chairperson of the Central Election Commission was re-elected for the second term.

53. As of March 2020, 5 out of 11 members of the GoG are women; out of them, 2 are vice-Prime Ministers. However, women are not duly represented at decision-making positions and legislative body. Accordingly, since 2015 many steps were undertaken to introduce mandatory quota in the Parliament and party lists. In 2017 the Parliament did not support the legislation on mandatory gender quota. The work continues in this direction.

54. The Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture works actively for economic empowerment of women, including women in rural areas. To that end, 58 women's cooperatives were created; women are residing in 157 cooperatives; 22 successful women entrepreneurs operate in the wine sector whose wines got recognition and won various prizes.

G. Elimination of violence against women and domestic violence

55. Fight against violence against women and domestic violence (DV) is one of the priorities of the GoG.

56. In 2017 Georgia adhered to the CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention). To ensure compliance of national legislation with the Istanbul Convention, the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) led the process of development and adoption of amendments to up to 30 legislative acts. New crimes, such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation, stalking and sterilisation without consent, were introduced in the CCG.

57. Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence represents a coordination body as provided by the Istanbul Convention.

58. In 2018 the GoG approved National Action Plan for 2018-2020 on the Measures to be Implemented for Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims/Survivors.

59. The legislative amendments were developed that provided more severe sanctions for perpetrators of sexual abuse, including deprivation of several rights (including the right to be employed in educational institutions) and creation of a database of persons tried for sexual abuse.

60. MIA Human Rights Protection and Quality Monitoring Department, monitors, inter alia, the quality of investigation of domestic violence and violence against women and administrative proceedings on administrative violations.

61. Information on available legal mechanisms against DV and the MIA hotline 112 (works 24/7) is available on the website of the MIA. The Ministry responds immediately to each fact, and a crew is sent to every location of the crime.

62. According to the 2017 amendments, restraining order enters into force immediately and does not require court approval. Violation of the conditions of the restraining order shall result in criminal responsibility.

63. In 2018 the MIA approved an evaluation instrument for the risks of violence against women and DV. The monitoring mechanism for evaluation of violence risks (high, medium and low risk) and execution of the conditions of the restraining order became operational. Thanks to this mechanism, restraining order became a useful protection tool of victims, and the number of violations of orders decreased. In 2019, 376 persons (only 4%) violated conditions of the restraining order, while in 2018 6% violated the conditions. In 2018-2019 there were no cases of homicide during the validity of the restraining orders. The number of restraining orders was increased quadruple, namely, in 2015 2,722 restraining orders were issued, while in 2019 – 10,266.

64. The number of femicide as a result of DV decreased, namely: 14 women died as a result of DV in 2016, 14 – in 2017, 7 – in 2018 and 8-in 2019.

65. The number of convicted persons for incitement of women to suicide or attempted suicide increased, namely: in 2018, 3 persons were convicted and in 2019 – 9 persons.

66. Since 2018, only specialised prosecutors and investigators of the Prosecutor's Office have authority to participate in the DV crimes. By the end of 2019, there were 193 specialised personnel. The implemented reforms resulted in the increase of prosecution concerning facts of DV. Namely, in 2014 criminal proceedings were initiated against 550 persons, in 2018, 3,955 persons were convicted and in 2019 – 4,579 persons.

67. Since 2016, Legal Entity of Public Law (LEPL) State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking (further – the State Fund) provides services to the alleged victims of DV.

68. Since 2017, victims/alleged victims of violence against women and their dependents have access to the services of the State Fund. After the legislative amendments, since February 1, 2020, the LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human trafficking was established that is the successor of the State Fund. Five shelters and five crisis centres operate under the Agency.

69. LEPL Agency for State Care and Assistance for the (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking operates a hotline 116 006. Consultations concerning DV, violence against women, trafficking in human beings and sexual abuse are available via the hotline that is accessible 24/7. In addition to Georgian language, consultations are available in 7 additional languages (English, Russian, Turkish, Azerbaijan, Armenian, Arab and Parsi). The hotline is free.

70. Since 2018, free legal aid is available for the victims of violence or DV. Victims of these crimes have access to state-funded free legal aid for criminal, civil and administrative proceedings irrespective of their social status.

71. The Interagency Commission developed the National Communication Strategy and Action Plan for the Issues related to Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence. These documents facilitate the implementation of a unified policy on the prevention of violence against women and DV.

72. Since 2015, the Prosecutor's Office analysis criminal cases related to femicide annually. The Prosecutor's Office implements strict policy for femicide if the crime is committed as a part of DV. Since 2014, there were no cases of acquittal of persons charged with femicide.

73. The 2019 legislative amendments strengthened preventive mechanisms to avoid repeated violence, increased sanctions against abusers and procedural rights of victims. The Parliament has adopted the legislative amendments concerning the introduction of electronic monitoring of abusers.

H. Child rights

74. In 2016 Interagency Governmental Commission on Implementation of UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and on Rights of Child was created to coordinate and monitor unified policy on the protection of child rights. High officials of ministries and other state agencies are members of the Commission. Local NGOs and international organisations have consultative status and participate in the work of the Commission.

75. On September 20, 2019, the Parliament adopted the Code on the Rights of the Child. The Code is based on the best interest of a child and recognized all rights enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, created state systems for protection and support of children, introduced state responsibility to develop and offer to children educational, healthcare and social security Programmes.

76. On January 1, 2020, a Juvenile Referral Centre was created in the LEPL National Agency for Crime Prevention, Execution of Non-Custodial Penalties and Probation under the MOJ. The Centre aims at socialization, re-socialization, rehabilitation, crime prevention through institutional and comprehensive approaches of juveniles under 14 years.

77. On June 12, 2015, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Juvenile Code of Georgia. One of the major purposes of this Code is to protect the best interests of minors in decision-making and give priority to the use of an alternative mechanism of criminal prosecution. Adoption of the Code changed the application of imprisonment as the sanction of juveniles decreased. In 2016, only 31.5% and in 2017-2018 only 24% of convicted juveniles were sentenced to imprisonment.

78. Since 2020, any juveniles may use services of the Legal Aid Service (LAS) in all categories of criminal, civil and administrative proceedings.

79. The Parliamentary Standing Council for the Protection of Child Rights became operational. Its primary purpose is to ensure systematic and coordinated work on issues related to child rights protection and oversight execution of decisions concerning child rights.

80. To protect children from any form of abuse, in 2016 the GoG adopted Child Referral Procedures that increased the number of agencies participating in the mechanism (included all institutions that work with children). Administrative liability was introduced if an institution that participates in the mechanism violates an obligation to submit information to the relevant body concerning child abuse.

81. The role of a social worker was also increased. S/he is entitled to decide on the separation of a child from an abused in case of necessity.

82. In 2019 the GoG set up a working group. Its purpose is to develop a concept on psychosocial services for children who were victims of abuse and implement a pilot project. A child-oriented, multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral approach was created that will deliver psychosocial rehabilitation service using single-window principle.

83. On January 1, 2017, all reservations that allowed the marriage of persons under 18 years were cancelled. Now marriage is permitted only for persons older than 18 years.

84. The State takes care of children working and living in the street. The legislation introduced the definition of "a street child". Besides, under the Law, the State may issue identification documents to such children that would allow them to access healthcare,

education, social protection and other services. Street children receive identification documents free of charge. The GoG is working on the Strategy on Protection of Children Living or Working in the Street from all Forms of Abuse.

85. The State is implementing the Programme on Providing Shelter for Street Children that is aimed at rehabilitation and integration of street children, including children living and working in the street. Within the framework of this Programme, services were delivered to 214 beneficiaries in 2016, 270 beneficiaries – in 2017, 188 beneficiaries – in 2018, 259 beneficiaries - in 2019 and 194 beneficiaries – in 2020 (1st quarter).

86. In 2016 a new Law on Adoption and Foster Care was adopted that is more oriented on child protection. Children deprived the family environment shall be placed in relevant alternative services respecting their best interest.

87. It is also noteworthy that the Law on Civil Status Acts provides mandatory registration of all children born on the territory of Georgia.

I. Right to fair trial

88. In 2014-2019 so-called “third” and “fourth” waves of judicial reforms resulted in increased safeguards of independence, accountability, effectiveness, transparency and accessibility of judiciary.

89. The legislation specified detailed criteria for selection of judges, improved procedures for selection and appointment of candidates. Every candidate shall be appointed as a judge only through the competition.

90. To increase independence and effectiveness of the judiciary, and improve trust in the judicial system, in 2018 the electronic system of case distribution at courts was launched; in 2019 unified database of court decisions was also launched.

91. The reform resulted in increased independence and accountability of the High Council of Justice, as well as the independence of the High School of Justice. It is mandatory to justify and publish decisions on the life-long appointment of judges and appointment of court chairpersons; rules on conflict of interest were also developed.

92. To ensure an objective, unbiased and comprehensive examination of alleged disciplinary misconducts of judges, a position of an independent inspector was introduced who operates independently from the High Council of Justice. Disciplinary proceedings were also upgraded.

93. In 2019 the Parliament adopted the legislative initiative on mediation that institutionalized court-attached and private mediation. Mediation allows parties to resolve conflict with support of qualified mediators enlisted in the Unified List of Mediators. Mediation is faster and cheaper compared to court proceedings.

94. On August 7, 2019, Georgia signed the United Nations Convention on International Settlement Agreements Resulting from Mediation.

95. In order to upgrade the jury trial system and ensure its compliance with international standards, legislative amendments were adopted aiming to:

- change selection procedures of jurors to ensure completion of the selection process in a reasonable time;
- redefine conflict of interest of jurors;
- introduce additional guarantees for impartiality and security of jurors;
- change rules for challenging jurors and voting of jurors to eliminate the practice of abuse of unjustified challenging and ensure more organized process.

96. Since 2015 the mandate of Legal Aid Service was significantly expanded: legal aid service, including in cases related to family, inheritance and social protection legislation, is now available for persons who are socially vulnerable and if the case is complex and significant. Before, free legal aid was available only in criminal cases.

J. State policy on fight against torture

97. The Inter-agency Coordinating Council against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment chaired by the Minister of Justice is a central institution responsible for policymaking in this field. The action plans for 2008-2009, 2011-2013, 2015-2016, 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 were developed within the framework of the activities of the Interagency Council as a result of collaborated work of governmental institutions, PDO, non-governmental organisations and international organisations.

98. New Action Plan on Fight Against Torture for 2019-2020 includes four main directions that aim at strengthening legal, procedural and institutional mechanisms; enhancing measures for effective detection of acts of ill-treatment and prompt, impartial and effective investigation of all complaints; intensifying measures for protection, rehabilitation, and compensation for the victims of torture and ill-treatment; enhancing learning on ill-treatment and implementation of awareness-raising activities.

99. It is legitimate to state that torture and ill-treatment are eliminated at the closed establishments. This problem does not constitute an issue in the Georgian context as stated in many international reports (e.g. the report (dated December 1, 2015) on Georgia by Juan Mendez, Special Rapporteur on Torture, 2019 report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)).

100. As mentioned above, on November 1, 2019, institutionally independent investigative body, the State Inspector's Service became operational. Its mandate covers the investigation of crimes related to torture, degrading or inhuman treatment, crimes of the abuse of power or exceeding official powers if committed using violence or a weapon or by offending personal dignity of a victim.

K. Reforms in the penitentiary system

101. Since 2018 the penitentiary and probation systems operate under the umbrella of the MOJ. In 2019 Strategy on Development of Penitentiary and Crime Prevention Systems and 2019-2020 Action Plan was approved.

102. To prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, in 2018 a Monitoring Department was created in the Special Penitentiary Service. The Department carries out systematic examination and monitoring of the human rights situation. In addition to the upgraded internal control mechanisms, the mandate of the PDO was also expanded. Namely, representatives of PDO and National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) are entitled to take photos at penitentiary establishments.

103. Since 2016, rules on registration of injuries of accused/convicted persons caused by torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment is operational at penitentiary establishments.

104. Since 2015, the maximum limits of inmates are defined to avoid overcrowding at penitentiary establishments. The standards are in full compliance with national and international regulations.

105. In 2018, an independent structural unit Department for Resocialization and Rehabilitation of Convicts was created in the Special Penitentiary Service. Social workers and psychologists became under the supervision of this Department and got tasked to conduct the real social work.

106. Within the framework of resocialization and rehabilitation Programmes, the systems and infrastructure for employment, vocational training, education and relaxation for convicts is under development. In January 2020, LEPL Vocational Education and Training Centre for Inmates was created. Cooperation with employers is ongoing to create production zones at penitentiary establishments.

107. In 2019 the following concept papers were developed: A concept paper on encouragement of convicted at the penitentiary establishments and prevention of violence against inmates; this document aims to encourage constructive behaviour among inmates

through granting and deprivation of privileges. Concept paper on decreasing the influence of organized crime in penitentiary establishments. Concept paper on the preparation of inmates for release. Concept paper on the development of parole mechanism.

108. Besides, the MOJ is actively working on the creation of the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangement (MAPPA).

109. Hepatitis B and C, HIV/AIDS, syphilis and TB screening and tests are available at all penitentiary establishments. The necessary tests and materials are provided.

110. The 2017 legislative amendments upgraded and improved the parole mechanism; in 2018, 904 inmates were early released, in 2019 – 1522 and in 2020 (January to August) – 657. According to the 2017 legal amendments, a convicted woman, whose child above the age of three left a special facility for women, may, during a year after the child has left the facility, leave the facility on rest days and public holidays provided for by the legislation of Georgia. In 2018, a new form of sanction – house arrest became operational; its use increases (in 2018 and 2019, there were 67 and 194 cases respectively, in 2020 (8 months) – 312).

L. State policy on fights against trafficking in human beings

111. The State policy on the fight against trafficking in human beings is based on so-called 4P principle (Prevention, Protection, Prosecution, Partnership). It aims to prevent and proactively investigate crimes, strengthen criminal prosecution and cooperation measures and protect the victims.

112. Since 2006, the Inter-Agency Coordination Council for Implementation of Measures against Trafficking in Human Beings chaired by the Minister of Justice has been operational. It developed 2007-2008, 2009-2010, 2011-2012, 2013-2014, 2015-2016, 2017-2018 and 2019-2020 Action Plans.

113. The 2018 legislative amendments introduced a new crime – inducing a person to prostitution and/or conducting any such other nonviolent act that promotes the involvement of a person in prostitution – so called pimping.

114. Since 2013, 4 special mobile groups are operational at the MIA. The purpose of these groups is to proactively expose the cases of trafficking in human beings and punish the perpetrators. The number of groups increased up to 6 in 2019. Since 2014, a Task Force consisting of specialized prosecutors and investigators is operational in Adjara. Its primary objective is to identify the places with increased risk of trafficking in human beings on the whole territory of the country and investigate the crimes. Since 2016, the number of criminal initiated criminal prosecutions increased 5-times.

115. In 2019, groups of specialized investigators were created in the territorial units of Tbilisi Police Department that investigate sexual abuse against juveniles.

116. The MIA Human Rights Protection and Quality Monitoring Department monitors the quality of the investigation process of crimes related to trafficking in human beings.

117. According to the 2016 Trafficking in Persons Report of the USA, Georgia is in Tier 1 of the leading countries together with some EU Member States. Georgia maintains the same position in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

118. According to the 2018 Global Slavery Index Report, Georgia was promoted to the 15th position among 167 countries (in 2016, Georgia was on the 17th position) for implemented effective State response against trafficking and modern slavery.

119. Georgia positioned on the 18th place among 183 states in the 2019 report Measurement, Action, Freedom prepared by an international organisation Walk Free Foundation. The latter annually prepares Global Slavery index.

120. Protection of and support to the victims of the trafficking is a high priority. The victim of trafficking may use different state services (psychological and medical support, legal aid, compensation in the amount of 1,000 GEL, shelter in Tbilisi and Batumi and

support in social reintegration). Alleged victims of trafficking (before the status is granted) also have access to the crisis centres.

M. Right to privacy and personal data protection

121. Control of legality of personal data processing is one of the primary objectives of the SIS, the successor of the Office of the Personal Data Inspector. Since 2015, the Office of the Inspector is entitled to oversee covert investigative actions. Information on covert investigative actions should be submitted to the Inspector's Service. The State of the Inspector's Service may conduct inspections of organisations based on the citizen's applications and its own decision. Information on alleged violations may be communicated to the Office via a 24-hour hotline.

<i>Year</i>	<i># of Inspections</i>	<i># of violations identified during inspections</i>
2015	54	65
2016		221
2017	114	274
2017	148	266
2019	158	141

122. Considering the expanded mandate and the increased number of applications, the budget and number of personnel of the Inspector's Office grew. In 2017 the budget of the Office was 2.0 mln GEL and the number of employees – 43; in 2018 the budget was 2.8 mln GEL and the number of employees – 53; in 2019, the budget was 4.4 mln GEL and the number of employees – 87. The financing of the Office doubled in 2020 and is 8.0 mln GEL.

N. Freedom of religion, expression, freedom of assembly and unions

123. Freedom of religion and belief is recognized and protected by the Constitution, international treaties in force for Georgia and the Law of Georgia on Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination.

124. Creation and registration of religious organisations in Georgia is free. Based on their own choice, they can be registered as a legal entity of public law as well as a legal entity of private law, or they can operate as unregistered unions.

125. The State Agency of Religious Issues cooperates closely with all religious organisations existing in Georgia and promotes their dialogue, implements different projects and campaigns aiming at prevention of discrimination and fostering tolerance.

126. Inter-religious Council was established and is operating at the State Agency of Religious Issues, with the participation of almost all religious associations of Georgia.

127. Even though Georgia is not a legal successor of the Soviet Union, the State gradually returns the cult buildings to the religious organisations, which have become the State property after the independence was restored and symbolically and partially compensated for the damage caused during the Soviet regime.

128. Since 2014 until today 212 Mosques were returned to the Muslim community, 20 Synagogues to the Jewish community, two churches to the Evangelical Protestant Church, 1 – to the Evangelical Lutheran Church. In 2015 the State purchased two four-storey buildings. It transferred them with the right to use to the LEPL Supreme Religious Administration of Georgia's All Muslims (a total value of 5 million Gel). The land with the right to use was transferred to the Yezidi community, where they build a cult building and cultural centre. The process of returning cult buildings continues. In 2014-2019 the Muslim community was given 14 300 000 GEL in 2014-2019, Roman Catholic Community – 2,800 mln GEL, Armenian Apostolic Community – 4.1 mln GEL, Jewish Community – 2.05 mln GEL.

129. The Georgian authorities provide safeguards for the independence of media and pluralism. The Georgian regulatory framework on media broadcasting is one of the most liberal in Europe.

130. Any physical or legal person can launch broadcasting within ten days based on a simple authorization process. Subsequently, there are 101 broadcasters in Georgia.

131. According to the 2019 World Press Freedom Index, the freedom of expression in Georgia ranks as 60th worldwide that is a significant improvement from 104th position in 2012.

132. The GoG vigorously protects the rights of participants of gatherings and manifestations, as well as focuses on consideration and implementation of the State's positive obligations to ensure their safety. The MIA structural units safeguard freedom of expression for every citizen and prevent and effectively respond to violence.

133. The Constitution of Georgia guarantees the freedom of association, the right to establish and join trade unions, right to strike. Citizens of Georgia shall have the right to form a political party and participate in its activities under the organic law.

134. Registration of a legal person is possible in 1 day based on simplified procedures.

O. Healthcare and social protection

135. Enactment of the universal healthcare programme in 2013 was a significant step towards safeguarding the right to health. In 2017, a new criterion (based on the income of beneficiaries) for the universal healthcare programme beneficiaries was developed. The rationale of the new standards is the introduction of the social justice principle and provision of needs-oriented services.

136. In 2017 the State Programme for providing medicines for chronic diseases became operational for the citizens with chronic illnesses. Through the program, medication for the following chronic diseases is available: cardiovascular diseases, chronic diseases of the lung, thyroid gland disease and diabetes Type 2.

137. Since 2019, the State reimburses costs for treatment medicines for citizens who reached the retirement age and persons with disabilities; the State also reimburses 75% of the expenses on drugs for Parkinson's disease and epilepsy treatment.

138. In 2015 the GoG launched unique Hepatitis C Elimination Programme. Patients have access to pre-treatment diagnostics and check-ups necessary for treatment monitoring, as well as Hepatitis C treatment medicines. After 2019, the GoG provides full financing for pre-treatment diagnostics and check-ups necessary for treatment monitoring. Approximately 65,000 patients began treatment since the launch of the Programme. 60,000 patients completed the treatment, and the recovery rate is 98.7%.

139. In 2017, the GoG approved the National Maternal and Newborn Health Strategy for 2017-2030 and 2017-2019 Action Plan that aimed to decrease maternal and new-born morbidity and mortality, and improvement of access to the reproductive services.

140. Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live birth) decreased from 32.2 (in 2015) to 27.4 (in 2018). New-born mortality rate (1,000 live birth) also reduced from 8.6 (in 2015) to 8.1 (in 2018).

141. In 2015, a new methodology for evaluation of the family social-economic situation was approved. Social benefits are issues based on a gradual system - the higher the family need, the more is the received support. Introduced child benefit increased to 50 GEL from 10 GEL in 2019.

142. The GoG efforts to increase state pension and social benefits are noteworthy. Age-based pension gradually increased up to 200 GEL. Social benefits for persons with profound disability and children with disability increased to 200 GEL, while the persons with considerable disability receive 120 GEL.

143. Since 2016, according to the increased retirement pension and social package, pensioners and social assistance beneficiaries who permanently reside in the mountainous regions receive pension/social benefits with 20% surplus.

144. Beneficiaries who were born after January 1, 2016, and whose at least one parent has the status of a permanent resident in the mountainous region, are also entitled to monetary social benefits. The benefit for the first and second child amounts to 100 GEL for one year and for the third and consequent child – 200 GEL for two years.

P. Labour and employment

145. During 2015-2016 there was no labour safety supervision body in Georgia that caused the demolition of labour safety standards and systematic problems. The non-existence of a regulatory body also resulted in the deterioration of safety conditions.

146. In 2015, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (further - the Ministry of Healthcare) created a Labour Conditions Inspection Department that is responsible for state supervision of realization of labour standards. In 2018, the Law of Georgia on Occupational Safety was adopted that became organic law in 2019. The new Law improved occupational safety standards and increased the responsibility of employers. After 2019, the law applies to every sector of economic activities, and an inspection authority is entitled to inspect any working space subject to inspection procedures and conduct inspections of occupational safety any time without the court permission and prior notification.

147. Since 2016 the Labour Inspection conducts recommendatory inspections for checking observance of labour rights. In February 2020, by-laws prescribed by the Law of Georgia on Occupational Safety were adopted that defined fundamental issues related to occupational safety and its implementation. During March 24-May 15, 2020, the Ministry of Healthcare approved 19 general and sectoral recommendations in response to the new coronavirus (COVID-19) and to prevent biological threats at the workplace.

148. Since 2013, registration of vacancies and job seekers in the Electronic System of Labour Market Management (www.worknet.gov.ge) is actively ongoing.

149. In 2019, the LEPL Employment Support Agency was created. Its objective is to facilitate labour and employment of the population, implement active labour market policy, including creating employment opportunities abroad.

150. In 2015 the Law on Labour Migration was adopted that regulates labour emigration from Georgia through regulation of intermediary companies and raising awareness of potential emigrants.

151. In 2020 the Parliament adopted the Law of Georgia on Labour Assistance which aims to support the citizens of Georgia in finding the jobs.

Q. Rights of persons with disabilities

152. The State annually implements Social Rehabilitation and Child Care Programme aimed at persons with disabilities (PwDs). The Programme budget increased by 9% in 2020 and by 27% in 2019 compared to the budget of the previous year.

153. The increased budget targets promotion of deinstitutionalization process and prevention of institutionalization, provision and upgrade of services for children with disabilities and PwDs, development of “families like” alternative services.

154. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport implements Inclusive Education Programme aimed at creation of an educational environment equally accessible for pupils with different abilities.

155. In 2016, the Parliament adopted the Law of Georgia on Early and Preschool Education that incorporated inclusive approaches. In 2018 the Rules on introduction,

development and monitoring of inclusive education at schools, as well as Mechanism for identification of pupils with special educational needs were adopted.

156. The State implements the Programme on the Second Opportunity at Receiving Education through Social Inclusion. It targets street children, Roma, repatriates and Meskhs who do not have Georgian citizenship, children/youth and pupils with disabilities and special educational needs, and pupils who belong to other vulnerable groups.

157. The higher education institutions must ensure special conditions for PwDs and persons with special needs to provide access to education.

158. To ensure participation of PwDs in the election, the following services were introduced:

159. During the elections in 2015-2019, the Central Election Commission's informational videos included sign language translation to ensure access to information for PwD voters.

160. Political/pre-election videos of political parties were broadcasted with sign language translation on the Public Broadcaster.

161. In 2015-2019, 28 projects of NGOs were financed with the total budget 830,576 GEL to ensure the participation of PwDs in the elections.

162. In 2015-2018, 42 PwDs were employed in the Central Election Commission. The abovementioned supported PwDs to upgrade their qualifications for the relevant positions.

163. The LEPL House of Justice (HoJ) that is the state service provider introduced standards for the provision of services to PwDs. The HoJ branches have special ramps. New signs for 400 terms were invented to facilitate access to HoJ services for the deaf and persons with hearing impairment. Ninety-three employees of HoJ learned sign language and can provide services to the deaf and persons with hearing impairment without the assistance of sign language interpreters. HoJ in Tbilisi is adapted to the needs of blind and persons with visual impairment. The websites of the HoJ, Community Centres and Public Service Delivery Agency were also adapted to the needs of blind and persons with visual impairment.

164. According to the 2015 legislative amendments, socially vulnerable PwDs have access to free legal aid in civil and administrative cases provided the case is complex and significant. Access to free legal aid in criminal cases was guaranteed even before the amendments.

165. According to the 2015 amendments, the appointment of a lawyer for a person in need of psychosocial support is mandatory during the court proceedings on granting the status of a beneficiary of support. The Legal Aid Service provides free legal aid to them.

166. PwDs, disabled persons' organisations, their establishments, educational-entrepreneurial organisations and unions are exempted from any state court fees.

167. Since 2015 the Department for the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities operates at the PDO. A Consultative Council with representatives of PDO, PwDs, organisations working on rights of PwDs and international organisations also operates under the PDO.

168. Coordination Councils working on PwDs related issues were also created at the local self-governments (municipalities).

169. In 2016 Georgia submitted the Initial Report on the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

170. In July 2020 the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities that ensures effective incorporation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities into the Georgian legislation.

171. The Law provides creation of a national mechanism that will ensure the realisation of healthcare, educational, employment, social, political and economic rights of PwDs, as well as issues related to civil integration, full integration of and full access to all services for PwDs based on the universal principle of equality.

R. Internally displaced persons

172. The GoG committed to protecting the rights of internally displaced persons (IDPs) during the whole duration of their displacement, also facilitate their integration and long-term solution of their needs/problems.

173. Since 2015 the State Strategy and Action Plan on IDPs were updated several times. The changes addressed the programmes on long-term solutions for the housing of IDPs, and 9,973 IDP families received accommodation. The spaces lawfully owned by 15,608 IDP families were legalised. The IDPs were able to choose their housing locations in the administrative entities where they already lived and were adapted to the environment.

174. Since 2015 the GoG launched Programme for providing temporary housing for IDP families. The beneficiaries receive financial support for accommodation rent. 4,500 IDP families benefited from this Programme. Besides, more than 600 buildings inhabited by IDPs were rehabilitated.

175. Since 2015, the IDP families who purchased houses with a mortgage receive one-time financial aid if the purchase is their only property. In 2019 two new Programmes were launched: transfer of apartments in Tbilisi to IDP veterans' families and co-financing of housing for IDP families registered in Tbilisi.

176. At this stage, the State has already provided housing to 45% of the IDP population.

177. To protect the IDPs' property rights, around 70,000 immovable property was registered on the occupied territories. Now IDPs have the documents certifying their right on the property.

178. The LEPL Livelihood Agency financed 2,000 IDP families since 2016.

179. In 2015-2019, the budget of grants/subsidies Programme targeting the needs of IDPs was 2,300,000 GEL.

180. It is voluntary to acquire the status of IDP, and they have full rights granted to the citizens of Georgia.

S. Rights of ethnic minorities

181. The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020 are essential tools for ensuring civic integration of the representatives of ethnic minorities. These documents aimed at creating an equal environment, ensuring equal and full participation of ethnic minorities in civic and political life and protecting their cultural identity.

182. Since 2015, the native languages of ethnic minorities (Ossetian, Chechen, Avar, Kurdish, Udi, and Assyrian) are introduced at some public schools upon request.

183. Ethnic minority representatives have access to all levels of education (pre-school, secondary, higher, and vocational) also in their native language. There are 207 non-Georgian public schools and 84 non-Georgian sectors functioning in Georgia. The Georgian language teaching programmes and courses have been expanded.

184. The State implements "1+4" Programme that implies simplified enrolment procedures at higher education institutions for representatives of ethnic minorities; the Program is very popular among ethnic minority youth. The number of students has been increased 6-times. (Statistics: in 2010, 299 non-Georgian entrants were enrolled at higher education institutions, in 2011 – 429, in 2012 – 584, in 2013 – 890, in 2014 – 673 and in 2015 – 741, in 2016 – 960, in 2017 – 1047; in 2018 – 1231; in 2019 – 1335). A special internship program (with simplified internship procedures) for ethnic minority students, beneficiaries of "1+4" program in public institutions, is operational. The program implies recruitment of ethnic minority students for enhancing their knowledge and skills twice a year. The program contributes to their employment opportunities. As of January 2020, 294 students have been enrolled in the internship program; The Programme facilitates

engagement and civil integration of youth. As of February 2020, 294 young people participated in the internship Programme.

185. In 2010 247 non-Georgian entrants were enrolled at HEIs, in 2011 – 430, in 2012 – 589, while the number for 2013 equalled to 890 students, in 2014 – 673 and 2015 – 741, in 2016 – 960; in 2017 – 1047; in 2018 – 1231.

186. Since 2016, representatives of ethnic minorities have a possibility to pass vocational education tests in their native language (Armenian, Russian, or Azerbaijan languages) to get enrolled in the courses at vocational educational institutions that are fully funded by the State. Upon enrolment, the students attend the course of Georgian language (module) which serves as a prerequisite for them to study the professional subjects afterwards.

187. THE LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration continues implementation of both short and long term vocational and educational trainings for civil servants who are representatives of ethnic minorities. Georgian language teaching, as well as civic education, is the part of the training courses. In 2015-2018, 688 public servants attended these training courses.

188. The CEC, aiming to inform the Armenian and Azerbaijan population, disseminated election documentation, information brochures and videos concerning, inter alia, the available services, in the regions densely populated by ethnic minorities. Besides, the CEC financed 55 projects with a total budget of 1,524,545 GEL.

189. In 2015–2019, the representatives of ethnic minorities participated in all elections held in Georgia equal to other citizens and without any barriers.

190. Eleven members of the Parliament are the representatives of ethnic minorities. Proportional representation of ethnic minorities in the local self-governments to the population composition is ensured in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minority representatives.

191. Live re-broadcasting of Georgian version news program with simultaneous translation in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages on daily basis through regional TV channels is operational. Seven-language (Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, English, and Russian) web-portal has been launched under the umbrella of the Public Broadcaster. The state continues further financial support of Armenian and Azerbaijani language newspapers.

192. The state supports activities aimed at promoting and popularizing cultures of ethnic minority groups, as well as inter-cultural dialogue. The Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection of Georgia supports ethnic minorities theaters, museums, cultural centers, also it has been implementing various cultural activities, programs and projects.

T. Ecomigrants, reintegration of returned migrants, integration of persons with humanitarian status

193. Improvement of social-economic conditions of ecomigrants is one of the priorities of the GoG. The Ministry of Healthcare is implementing a housing Programme for them. The decision on ecomigrant families' housing is made transparently, engaging representatives of international and non-governmental organisations and the PDO.

194. The immovable property purchased in 2004–2009 was re-registered. Transfer of these properties to ecomigrants began in 2016.

195. Since 2015, the Ministry of Healthcare implements the Programme on Reintegration of Returned Migrants that provides the following services: provision of medical services and medicines, financing of social projects, provision of temporary accommodation and vocational education and training for job seekers. The annual budget of the Programme is 650,000 GEL.

196. In 2016 Law of Georgia on International Protection was adopted. The Law defines the legal status of asylum seekers, refugee and humanitarian status holders, and persons under temporary protection, the grounds and procedures for granting, terminating, revoking

and withdrawing the relevant status. Since 2017, the Ministry has been implementing the Programme on Integration of Persons under International Protection that covers all relevant persons.

197. The Centre for Integration of the Persons under International Protection provides the following services: Georgian language courses, courses on raising social and cultural awareness, civil integration course, engagement of the beneficiaries in the activities of the Youth National Palace, consultation on available state Programmes, financing the project targeting to the needs of beneficiaries.

198. During the court review of granting asylum or humanitarian status, asylum seekers have access to free legal aid.

U. Right to safe and healthy environment

199. The GoG implements relevant measures for safeguarding the right to live in a safe and healthy environment.

200. In 2016 the GoG approved the National Waste Management Strategy 2016-2030 and an Action Plan 2016-2020. The objective of the Strategy is to prevent waste and facilitate increased re-utilization of waste and environmentally safe treatment of waste.

201. In order to protect human health and the environment from the harmful impacts of persistent organic pollutants and create effective chemical safety system, in 2018, the GoG approved National Action Plan on Persistent Organic Pollutants for 2018-2022.

202. Since 2018, vehicle periodic technical inspections became mandatory for all cars. During the last years, the petrol quality was improved to bring it in line with modern European standards, the amount of sulphur in diesel fuel decreased gradually, in 2016 tax concessions for import on hybrid and electronic cars were introduced.

203. Information on the air quality is accessible on portal www.air.gov.ge in a reliable, timely and straightforward form. Recommendations on healthcare and air protection, emissions, implemented and planned measures and monitoring network is also available on the platform.

204. On January 1, 2018, the Environmental Assessment Code entered into force. The Code regulates, *inter alia*, public participation in environmental impact assessment and strategic environmental assessment.

II. Human rights during the COVID-19 crisis

205. From the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the GoG undertook measures in two directions – to save the health and life of citizens and to protect the economy.

206. The GoG proactively took steps to protect social, civil and economic rights of vulnerable groups and minorities and ensure access to information, services, livelihood, healthcare and education for PwDs, children, elderly, families with many children, single parents, ethnic, religious, sexual and minorities.

207. The GOG, *inter alia*, ensured: Provision of information on COVID-19 in Georgian, Abkhaz, Ossetian, English, Armenian and Azerbaijan languages; Broadcasting daily governmental briefings with sign language translation; Protection of rights of persons living on the occupied territories; Protection of rights of Georgian citizens living abroad; Protection of rights of refugees and asylum seekers living in Georgia.

208. The daily governmental briefings were held to provide information to the population. The specialists of the field, ministers and the Prime Minister participated in these briefings.

209. To ensure that PwDs have timely access to information on the pandemic, the governmental briefings were broadcasted with sign language translation. The information was translated into minority languages as well.

210. The special governmental portal on COVID-19 – www.StopCov.ge – is fully accessible in 6 languages, namely in Georgian, Abkhaz, Ossetian, English, Armenian and Azerbaijan languages. The information videos published on the website also have sign language translation.

211. Several coordination platforms were created to ensure efficient platforms for consultations with civil society, international organisations and representatives of the community.

212. Treatment of COVID-10 is accessible for any person on the territory of Georgia without segregation and discrimination.

213. Beneficiaries of day centres received food vouchers. The home-care programmes were expanded, increasing the engagement of PwDs.

214. In order to protect children living and working in the street from COVID-19 during the crisis, a quarantine facility was opened in Tbilisi. The beneficiaries under the State care are placed there if they are beyond the services, and their contacts cannot be identified.

215. The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport launched an educational project "Online School" that offers webinars on major disciplines of the national exams for higher education institutions. The higher education institutions also offer online learning.

216. The information materials on prevention and protection from COVID-19 were regularly translated and disseminated in the regions inhabited by the ethnic minorities.

217. Special conditions were introduced in the penitentiary establishments. During the crisis, 780 employees of the penitentiary system stayed and were living at the establishments. As a result of the measures, there are no cases of COVID-19 in the penitentiary establishments.

218. The probationers were temporarily released from the duty to appear at the Probation Bureau. The Standing Commission responsible for reviewing the issues related to release on parole, removal of the conviction, restoration of rights deprived by the court conducted its sessions via videoconferencing.

219. From the outset of the pandemic, the GoG expressly stated its readiness to support any person on the occupied territories. To ensure access to information, the governmental website was available in Abkhaz and Ossetian languages, the COVID-related briefings, as well as information materials, were also translated in Abkhaz and Ossetian languages.

220. Various personal protective means, equipment and hygiene items were transferred to the Abkhazian region using different channels. This process continues.

221. From the very beginning of the crisis, the MFA of Georgia provided protection of social and economic rights of Georgian living abroad.

222. The Georgian embassies provided shelter and essential livelihood items (food and hygiene items) for citizens abroad. They also ensured medicines and access to medical services for persons with special needs and health problems. Telephone and online consultations were also used to address individual needs of citizens.

223. Repatriation of persons in vulnerable situation became a priority. Therefore, PwDs, persons with severe chronic diseases, pregnant women, minors, elderly (+65) and students without scholarship were given priority in the repatriation process.

224. The Aliens' Integration Centre worked online. The Centre proactively published information on COVID-19 prevention, introduced restrictions and mitigation measures. The refugees and asylum seekers present in Georgia had access to telephone and online consultations.

225. The introduced restrictions were based on the proportionality principle. Namely, according to the international principles and instruments, the Georgian authorities, while introducing the restrictions, considered the legitimate aim related to the pandemic, as well as proportionality between the legitimate aim and the measures employed to achieve this goal.

226. The authorities managed (introduction and cancellation) the restrictions based on the world trends, considering international recommendations, analysis of epidemiological situation and risks in Georgia.

227. It is noteworthy that every restriction aimed at limitation of population's mobility, observance of sanitary-hygiene norms and social distancing rules that were necessary for the prevention of the fast-spreading of the virus, slowing down and controlling this process.

III. Implementation of commitments

228. Georgia attaches great importance to human rights protection and cooperation with UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies. According to its commitments, the GoG continued fruitful collaboration with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office, as well as with UN Human Rights Treaty Bodies and UN Human Rights Council via, inter alia, active participation in sessions and co-sponsoring humanitarian resolutions.

229. Based on a standing invitation extended to all UN HRC Special Procedures mandate holders in 2010, since 2015 Georgia has hosted: the UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons (2016), the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (2016), the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (2016), Independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older persons (2018), the Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity (2018) and the UN Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises (2019).

230. In line with its commitment to supporting the UN HRC and its mechanisms, as well as promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, Georgia was elected and served as a member of the HRC for the term 2016–2018.

231. Georgia presents periodic national reports to the UN treaty bodies and pays attention to the implementation of recommendations received during the UPR cycle. These recommendations are incorporated into the national human rights action plans for their practical realisation.

IV. Expectation and support

232. Georgia expresses readiness to continue international cooperation to promote human rights and strengthen human rights protection systems, as well as share experience of interested partners.

233. Since 2017 within the UN HRC (under item 10), Georgia has been annually submitting the resolution on “Cooperation with Georgia”. In the resolutions, the Council has been expressing serious concern over the human rights and humanitarian situation in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia occupied by the Russian Federation and has called for immediate and unimpeded access to be given to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and international and regional human rights mechanisms to these regions.

234. To ensure human rights protection in the territories occupied by the Russian Federation, Georgia expects more large-scale international cooperation.

235. Georgia expects to receive technical cooperation for preparation of state reports under international treaties, namely sharing experience of other States in using IT technologies for drafting State reports. With this regard, Georgia cooperates closely with the Office of the OHCHR in Tbilisi. Georgia also expresses its readiness to share its experience in preparing UPR with interested States.

V. Conclusion

236. As the information presented in the report manifests, Georgia continuously undertakes measures aimed at improved protection of human rights. However, there are some challenges. The Government will continue steady efforts to increase human rights protection in all directions. The GoG considers the UPR process and recommendations as an essential instrument and guidance to further implement comprehensive reforms for human rights protection, with the engagement of all interested parties.
