

# Addressing political exclusion of ethnic minorities, IDP's, and refugees in the Eastern Neighbourhood

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## Question

*What are the donor intervention approaches and lessons learned aimed at addressing the political exclusion of ethnic minorities, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the Eastern Neighbourhood (Armenia, Georgia and Moldova)?*

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# 1. Summary

The quality of political inclusion of ethnic minorities<sup>1</sup> in the Eastern Neighbourhood remains a significant challenge, despite institutions in place to promote the rights of national minorities and various programming designed to foster inclusion. This rapid review surveys donor, academic and NGO literature in this field. Literature on addressing the political exclusion of ethnic minorities is limited, with discussion of donor interventions even more sparse. The report thus draws on government initiatives; and on recommendations based on the country situation and international experience, which are not necessarily based on specific programming. There was greater information on Georgia and Moldova, than on Armenia (reflected in the sub-section country titles). In addition, there is limited discussion of programming to address the political exclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in the region. As such the report relies in part on general research and guidance on IDPs and refugees from a global perspective, including discussion of a few examples of initiatives outside of the Eastern Neighbourhood.

**Legislation and institutional framework:** Georgia, Moldova and Armenia all have legal frameworks and institutions in place to protect and promote the rights of national minorities; and to foster equality of opportunity. Only Armenia has also implemented guaranteed parliamentary representation to its minority communities. There is research that reveals support among minority groups in Georgia for quotas for national minorities in party lists and in the legislature; and financial incentives for political parties to include national minorities in their lists (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017).

This report should be read alongside its companion K4D report: *Exclusion of ethnic minorities in the Eastern Neighbourhood*

**Electoral processes:** In all three countries, it is recommended that all political and electoral programmes and brochures are translated into minority languages (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017; Mateu, 2016). The Central Election Commission (CEC) in Georgia is responsible for translating electoral and voting materials into national minority languages and supports trainings for the national minority members of the district election commissions. A survey of experts working on minority issues in Georgia indicate a positive assessment of the work of the CEC; however, some believe that the delivery of professional development trainings is inadequate. Efforts to improve IDP electoral participation in the Eastern Neighbourhood and elsewhere include: addressing restrictive residency requirements; planning for absentee voting; flexibility with documentation and registration; and voter education in the languages spoken by IDPs.

**Political representation:** Research conducted in Georgia finds that there are no political parties that pay sufficient attention to the issues important to ethnic minorities in their programmes (Open Society, 2019). The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) has facilitated meetings to connect political parties and political leaders with ethnic minority groups in Georgia. Donor programming has also focused on providing internships to young people from ethnic minority groups at political parties (CDADI, 2019).

**Civic education:** The CEC in Georgia has conducted informational, awareness-raising and civic education campaigns for ethnic minority populations (Open Society, 2019). The UNDP has also worked with the CEC Moldova to implement voter information and civic education programmes

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “ethnic minorities” and “national minorities” will be used interchangeably in this report.

that target ethnic minorities, diaspora, women and other vulnerable groups. They have used innovative civic engagement tools that have achieved high recall among the targeted audience (Robertson, 2020). Programming in the region also centres on general teaching of democratic processes. In Armenia, refugees have also been the target of education on rights, in order to promote integration. Creating and relying on a network of lawyers to implement this programming has resulted in its sustainability after the project's conclusion (ME&A, 2021).

**Civic action and civic engagement:** Youth from ethnic minority groups have been targeted in various programming to promote civic action in Georgia and Moldova, such as through youth councils and youth centres that promote participation in inclusive decision-making processes (CDADI, 2019). The “Promoting Integration, Tolerance & Awareness” (PITA) programme in Georgia has been effective in its youth-led activities, evident in findings that PITA members are more engaged in civic activism than their peers; and have a stronger belief that they can affect change (UNAG & USAID, 2021). The PITA programme has also helped to develop a better working relationship between the government and national minority groups by facilitating direct meetings. This has contributed to minority issues gaining more attention on the government's agenda (UNAG & USAID, 2021). A key challenge with the promotion of civic engagement is the lack of sustainability of ethnic minority organisations and community associations after the termination of donor funding (Open Society, 2019). In some cases, the creation of networks (e.g. IDP networks; lawyer networks) has increased the possibility of sustainable outcomes.

In the case of refugees, they are often constrained in formal political participation, thus requiring more attention to non-formal mechanisms of participation, such as consultative bodies and civil society organisations (CSOs) (Bekaj & Antara, 2018). Consultative bodies are considered to be an effective way for settlement authorities to maintain communication with refugees; to create a unifying platform for refugees to advocate for needs; and to facilitate their participation in political life (Bekaj & Antara, 2018). Participation in camp management is also a way in which to engage refugees in decision-making. However, research finds that such consultation-led humanitarian programme models may result only in “superficial” forms of inclusion (Lough et al., 2021).

**Language:** Inadequate knowledge of the state language remains a structural problem for minorities to be actively involved in politics (Kakhishvili, 2017; Mateu, 2016). Although various language programmes have been implemented in Georgia and Moldova, the success rates of these projects are considered quite low – and they have been ineffective in integrating ethnic communities into political life (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021; Groza et al., 2018). An exception is the Government of Georgia (GoG)'s affirmative action policy, whereby a quota is allocated for non-Georgian-language students, who study the Georgian language for one year and then their desired four-year undergraduate programmes without exams (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). This programme has contributed to a significant increase in the number of ethnic minority students at higher education institutions. This positive discrimination approach is unique to the field of education and has not been used in other areas related to the civic inclusion and integration of ethnic minorities (Open Society, 2019).

**Civil service:** Alongside language initiatives, the GoG has sought to promote the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the public sector through more direct civil service-related initiatives. This includes internships for youth in the public sector and training and adult learning programmes for civil servants for whom Georgian is not their first language (Dumbadze & Davies, 2021; Open Society, 2019).

## 2. Background

Georgia's ethnic minorities are diverse, including Russians, Greeks, Kurds, Yezidis, Assyrians, Jews, and Ukrainians (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). According to the 2014 census, approximately 13.2% of the total population belongs to an ethnic minority with the largest groups being Azeris (6.2%) and Armenians (4.5%). The Armenian minority is present in different places in Georgia, but lives compactly in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, where they account for 54.6% of the region's population (Mateu, 2016). Although national minorities make up a substantial portion of the entire population of Georgia, their participation in social and political life is limited (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017). There are also over 286,000 displaced people registered in Georgia (Lomsadze, 2022). Georgian governments have done little to promote the participation of IDPs in politics, instead encouraging the displaced to believe they will soon return (Lomsadze, 2022).

Moldovans make up 75.1% of the total population in Moldova, according to the 2014 census (Groza et al., 2018). Ethnic communities are not territorially divided and are interspersed across Moldova, except for the Gagauz people, who live in the South of Moldova (Groza et al., 2018). Only the majority ethnic Moldovans are satisfied with their representation in State institutions. Substantive representation is considered unsatisfactory among all other ethnic groups, including Romanians (CIVIS Centre, 2021). Moldova, which borders Ukraine, has been receiving refugees from the Ukraine in the recent conflict. The UN reports 371,104 refugees have entered Moldova as of 22 March 2022.<sup>2</sup>

Armenia is the most ethnically homogeneous of all the post-Soviet states (Edwards, 2017). According to the 2011 census, ethnic Armenians constitute over 98% of the population. In contrast to Georgia, minorities do not form local majorities in any region and are scattered across the country (de los Fayos, 2014). As of December 2018, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, approximately 8,400 IDPs of the estimated 65,000 households evacuated in the First Nagorno-Karabakh War (1988-94) were still living in displacement (USDOS, 2021).

For further information about IDPs and refugees, and the breakdown of ethnic minorities, in Georgia, Moldova and Armenia, please see the companion report: *Exclusion of ethnic minorities in the Eastern Neighbourhood*.

## 3. Legislation and institutional framework

### Georgia

The **European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities**, ratified by the Government of Georgia (GoG) in 2005—and the GoG's subsequent adoption of the **National Strategy and Action Plan for Civic Equality and Integration**—provide the foundation to **ensure the equality of opportunities for nationals minorities** (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017). The key bodies—the Council of National Minorities (CNM), Council of Religions (CR), and the State Minister's Office for Civic Integration were also established for the protection of minorities (UNAG & USAID, 2021). The CNM unites public organisations of ethnic minorities;

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60555472>

voices any problems related to ethnic minorities; develops political recommendations; and monitors the implementation of the Action Plan (Open Society, 2019). The Central Election Commission (CEC) has the key responsibility for dealing with issues related to the participation of national minorities in political decision-making, such as protecting the voting rights of national minorities and attracting national minority representatives to political parties (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017).

The USAID-funded programming has contributed to creating this foundation for collaborative policymaking between the government and organised minority representatives (UNAG & USAID, 2021). **The “Promoting Integration, Tolerance & Awareness” (PITA) programme (2015-2021) has assisted the GoG in managing the full cycle of the National Strategy and Action Plan for Civic Equality and Integration** for 2015-2020, from assistance in drafting the strategy to ensuring the constituency-driven monitoring of implementation; and in upgrading to the 2021–2030 Plan (UNAG & USAID, 2021).

Despite positive trends towards sustainability and effectiveness at the institutional level in Georgia, the **declared priority of the protection and civic integration of ethnic minorities is not reflected financially at the budgetary level** (Open Society, 2019). Implementation of state obligations remains largely dependent on international support (Open Society, 2019). Other research also finds that **despite the legal framework, the quality of minority participation in political decision-making remains a great challenge** (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017). There are also no legislative requirements for political parties that would encourage actions to increase the representation of ethnic minorities (Open Society, 2019). The Constitutional prohibition of ethnically based parties is also seen by a number of minority representatives as an obstacle to better representation, given their inadequate representation by mainstream parties (MRGI, n.d.).

## Moldova

**Moldova’s three human rights institutions**—the Agency for Interethnic Relations, the Ombudsman’s Office, and the Council for Preventing and Eliminating Discrimination and Ensuring Equality—signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in 2018 to **work together on protecting and promoting the rights of national minorities in the country**. The MOU places a specific focus on the national minorities’ right to education, access to information, public participation and other cultural, religious and linguistic rights, which are reflected in the National Strategy for the Consolidation of Interethnic Relations till 2027, adopted by the Moldovan Government in 2017 (OSCE, 2018).

**Moldova also does not have any legislative incentives that promote the representation of ethnic minority communities** in government institutions or politics. According to current regulations, vacancies in government institutions are filled solely through competition, without any proportional representation mechanisms for ethno-cultural communities who speak the state language (Groza et al., 2018).

## Armenia

**A number of institutions have been established for the legal protection of minorities; however, their efficacy is constrained by the poor economic situation** in the country. The Division for Ethnic Minorities and Religious Affairs drafts legislation on relevant minority issues, in consultation with representatives of minority communities. However, according to various

surveys, it does not always take into consideration the concerns voiced by minority representatives (de los Fayos, 2014). The Coordination Council of Ethnic Minorities is a consultative and advisory body, comprising 22 members from eleven national minority groups. The Council prepares recommendations to the government and parliament on minority issues, primarily in the fields of culture and education. Yet, its influence on the decision-making process remains limited (de los Fayos, 2014).

**Armenia is the first country though in the Caucasus region to offer guaranteed parliamentary representation to its minority communities.** Following the April 2017 elections, Armenia now has four ethnic minority members of parliament – one each from the country’s Yezidi, Assyrian, Kurdish, and Russian communities – among its 105-seats (Edwards, 2017; MRGI, n.d.). The process by which they were elected, however, which required them to ally with one of Armenia’s existing political parties, could undermine the extent to which they can effectively represent minority interests (Edwards, 2017; MRGI, n.d.).

## **IDPs and refugees**

**IDPs are usually citizens of the country where they are displaced, and thus have voting rights** as provided for in human rights instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; and in national legislation (COE, 2019; Shujaat et al., 2016). Further, Principle 22(1)(d) of the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement states that IDPs, whether living in camps or not, should not face discrimination with regard to the right to vote and to participate in governmental and public affairs. In the Eastern Neighbourhood, IDPs are allowed access to public service as national versus non-national refugees (Brunarska & Weinar, 2013).

The UNHCR Zero Draft on Refugees calls on states and other relevant stakeholders to “include refugees, particularly women and youth, in key fora, institutions, and decision-making processes” and to “support consultative processes that enable refugees and host communities to assess their own needs and help to design appropriate responses” (UNHCR 2018; cited in Bekaj & Antara, 2018). The UNHCR has also advocated for and provided extensive capacity building and training to partners and government institutions to put in place an asylum system that aligns with international standards. According to the UNHCR, much progress has been made in Georgia, working with lawyers, judges, ministries, and asylum authorities, to adopt an asylum system that aligns with international standards. **Asylum seekers and refugees in Georgia now have nearly all rights held by Georgians, except the right to vote and purchase agricultural land** (ME&A, 2021). **Similarly, refugees and asylum seekers in Armenia have extensive rights,** including rights to work and property; access to education, social security, and medical care (ME&A, 2021).

Relatively low numbers of people seek asylum in Eastern Partnership (EaP) states<sup>3</sup>, however, with EaP countries tending to produce refugees rather than receive them (Brunarska & Weinar, 2013). Moldova, despite its vulnerable economic standing, is the only EaP country with a separate law and programme for the integration of foreigners (Brunarska & Weinar, 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine.



## 4. Electoral processes and political representation

### Electoral processes

#### Georgia

**Factors that constrain the participation of ethnic minorities in elections and political processes include: limited knowledge of the state language; lack of awareness of electoral rights; and inadequate information on the electoral programmes of political parties and candidates** (Mateu, 2016). Compared to other minority groups in Georgia, Armenians tend to have high turnouts. Participation is thus not an issue in the Samtskhe-Javakheti region, where Armenians live compactly; rather, the concerning issue is that the population usually votes for the party in power (Mateu, 2016).

A recent Open Society study on political participation of ethnic minorities in Georgia finds that **people with greater knowledge of the Georgian language are more likely to perceive elections to be fair** (Open Society, 2019). Efforts are thus necessary to reach out to minority populations with less knowledge of the state language. The printing and distribution of information materials and electoral bulletins in the main minority languages, Armenian, Azeri and Russian, for the first time in local self-governance elections in 2006, is considered to be responsible for almost half of the elected councillors in districts from larger minority populations coming from minority communities themselves (MRGI, n.d.).

**It is recommended that all political and electoral programmes and brochures are translated into minority languages** and distributed in municipal centres and villages on a regular basis and in adequate time for elections (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017; Mateu, 2016). The CEC, based on its obligations under the Action Plan, is responsible for translating electoral and voting materials into national minority languages; disseminating information in audio and video formats in minority languages; and awarding small grants to different non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for professional development activities (e.g. trainings for the national minority members of the district election commissions, in their local languages) (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017). A survey of experts working on minority issues in Georgia indicate a positive assessment of the work of the CEC. However, some believe that the CEC's efforts in terms of the delivery of professional development trainings is inadequate and that the district election commission members often lack the knowledge of procedures to be followed on the election day (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017).

#### Moldova

**A survey of ethnic minority groups in Moldova finds that they exhibit a high level of voting activity**, with more people voting in the local elections than in the Parliamentary elections. Roma are relatively less active voters than all of the other groups, but still indicate a 70% commitment to vote in the next election (CIVIS Centre, 2021).

## IDPs

There is a general lack of data and research on IDP electoral participation in the Eastern Neighbourhood, but what is available indicates under-participation (Shujaat et al., 2016). Key issues with regard to the participation of IDPs in elections more generally include:

- **Addressing restrictive residency requirements:** Since IDPs may still be registered in their constituency of origin, **changing constituencies may involve practical obstacles** (Shujaat et al., 2016; GPC, n.d.). Armenia and Azerbaijan, for example, make it extremely difficult for displaced populations to register as voters in their current place of residence even after two decades of displacement (Shujaat et al., 2016). In Georgia, IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who were initially disenfranchised, were later granted full voting rights in local elections (in 2001) and in majoritarian parliamentary races (in 2003) due to an IDP legal challenge to the Constitutional Court as well as international criticism (Shujaat et al., 2016).
- **Absentee voting:** Voting in person in a constituency of origin can be highly problematic for IDPs, as it involves travel to districts from which they have fled, which can result in security issues and financial costs (Shujaat et al., 2016). Voting can be made more accessible through absentee voting arrangements that allow electors to vote at a location other than the one where they are registered. These measures are more administratively complex for the election management body, however, and increase the risk of fraud. They thus **require more lead time, careful planning and financial resources** (Shujaat et al., 2016; GPC, n.d.).
- **Flexibility with documentation and registration:** Providing the necessary documentation is often extremely difficult for IDPs as their documents are frequently destroyed, confiscated or lost during displacement. (Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska & Palaguta, 2017; Shujaat et al., 2016). Ideally new civil and/or electoral identification documentation is provided promptly to IDPs, or alternative solutions are allowed, such as affidavits, reliance on a census, or “social verification”<sup>4</sup>. **Mobile registration can also help provide access to IDPs and refugees**, who may have conditions that restrict their access to public areas (GDR, 2019).
- **Voter information:** IDPs and refugees, in particular those residing in camps or settlements, often lack information about political processes in a language they understand, which impedes participation in elections (GDR, 2019; Shujaat et al., 2016). **Voters’ education campaigns should specifically target IDPs in their languages;** paying special attention to explain the particular procedural technicalities for IDPs and to promote their participation in the elections (COE, 2019; Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska & Palaguta, 2017).

## Refugees

The successful implementation of out of country voting (OCV) requires that the country of origin’s electoral management body has the necessary resources and capacities to supervise the conduct of free and fair elections abroad (Bekaj & Antara, 2018). Electoral rolls also need to be updated on an ongoing basis. Once registered, refugee voters must be given appropriate access to the ballot through a voting method that must be convenient enough not to impede the exercise of their voting rights, but also able to protect against potential fraud or security concerns (Bekaj & Antara, 2018). In order to encourage OCV, research published by International IDEA examining

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<sup>4</sup> This is when eligibility and/or identity can be attested to by, for example, a notable community figure or a specified number of voters (Shujaat et al., 2016).



refugee situations in various parts of the world recommends that those involved in electoral processes **collaborate with civil society organisations (CSOs) and diaspora groups to implement civic education and voter information programmes**; and offer means for the diaspora to get involved (Bekaj & Antara, 2018).

## Political representation

### Georgia

The Open Society study finds that there are **no political parties that pay sufficient attention to the issues important to ethnic minorities** in their programmes (Open Society, 2019). The Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) worked with political parties in 2014-2016, with funding from the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, to enhance the representation of national minorities; increase their interest in politics; and reflect these interests or needs in political party programmes. **NIMD hosted meetings of political leaders in Tbilisi, Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti to better connect political parties with the local population.** It also facilitated a one-month **internship programme for young ethnic Armenian and Azerbaijani citizens of Georgia at political parties** (Tsutskiridze, 2017). Similarly, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, in cooperation with the NGO, Centre for the Studies of Ethnicity and Multiculturalism, implemented a project in 2017-2018, whereby it selected 20 young persons from the regions compactly populated by ethnic minority representatives for training and subsequently for internships at political parties. The aim was to engage ethnic minority young people in political processes (CDADI, 2019).

A policy paper that explores the concerns of Armenian and Azeri minorities with regard to political inclusion finds that **additional mechanisms that could be successfully implemented in Georgia include: quotas for national minorities in party lists and in the legislature; and financial incentives for political parties to include national minorities in their lists** (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017). Other research also recommends that political parties establish special mechanisms to include women, particularly minority women, in their membership—including through mentorships; skills-based trainings; and outreach organisations that recruit females in minority populated regions (Kakhishvili, 2017).

### Moldova

The U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor (DRL) is active in the country, promoting projects with the objective of increasing civic and political participation of ethnic minorities in Moldova. Activities of relevance in its 2018 call for funding included: training minority civic leaders and NGOs to effectively engage in political advocacy and to participate in the decision-making process; providing opportunities for participants to network with other minority leaders within Moldova and through regional civil society networks; and training for civic leaders and NGOs on advocacy skills, legal rights and enforcement, organisational management, community organizing, or communication skills.<sup>5</sup> Further information about these programmes is not yet available.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://researchfunding.duke.edu/increasing-civil-and-political-participation-ethnic-minorities-moldova> [accessed 21 March 2022]

## 5. Civic education

### Georgia

The CEC has successfully developed informational and promotional videos in Armenian and Azeri languages, broadcasting them via the Public Broadcaster and the regional television channel; and implemented **educational programmes for the electors from ethnic minorities** (Open Society, 2019). It is recommended that the GoG raise further the civic education level in regions compactly settled by national minorities through specially designed educational programmes (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017). An awareness raising campaign is also carried out on regular basis for minorities in their native languages by minority young people, covering information on human rights, civic integration policy, education, social benefits and services, women's rights, domestic violence, and European integration (CDADI, 2019).

The National Endowment for Democracy is currently funding projects directed at the civic education of national minorities in Georgia. They include<sup>6</sup>:

- **“Democratic Education for Ethnic Minorities”**: the creation of an eight-month educational programme for ethnic minority students to enhance participants' understanding of democratic processes, local and national politics, and administrative procedures.
- **“Promoting Civic Engagement and Interethnic Tolerance”**: the promotion of civic participation in Kvemo Kartli through the Marneuli-based community radio station, providing a reliable source of information on local and national political developments for members of the Azerbaijani and Armenian ethnic minority communities in their local language.

### Moldova

The “Enhancing democracy in Moldova through inclusive and transparent elections” (EDMITE) project, supported by the UNDP, has worked with the CEC in Moldova to: enhance political participation of citizens by setting up and implementing inclusive voters' information and civic education programmes that target ethnic-linguistic minorities, diaspora, women and other vulnerable groups (Robertson, 2020). The programmes reached over 340,000 direct (186,557 women) and 1,720,000 indirect beneficiaries in 2018 (Robertson, 2020). They used **innovative and inclusive civic engagement tools**, such as elections simulations; mobile information activities; door-to-door campaigns; electoral information sessions; electoral cafes for young voters; interactive electoral quizzes; and specialised radio broadcasts in Romani and Gagauz languages. The campaign had high rates of recall among Moldovan citizens, indicating that the civic and voter education had reached and had an impact on them (Robertson, 2020).

**In order to promote sustainability, UNDP and EDMITE staff noted that all of the promotional materials have been kept general so that they can be reused** and are not limited to a single election. The participatory way in which the project worked with the CEC, centre for continuous electoral training (CCET), and CSOs was also seen as promoting sustainability, by supporting the capacity development of outreach partners and particular minority groups (Robertson, 2020).

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.ned.org/region/eurasia/georgia-2021/> [accessed 21 March 2022]

## Armenia and refugees

A donor funded project, “Sustainable Solutions for Integration of Displaced and Conflict-Affected Persons”, completed in 2021, aimed to help Syrian-Armenians, categorised as living in a “refugee-like” situation, with **targeted assistance for integration**. This included **education on rights**, with the publication of the “Know Your Rights” Handbook and distribution among the refugees and asylum seekers; and support in the litigation of court cases (ME&A, 2021). **Key success factors of the project are effective cooperation with various partners; the development of a network of legal students to support the beneficiaries; and the hiring of Syrian-Armenian lawyers** (ME&A, 2021). The project achieved sustainability, with the network, including the lawyers, continuing to support the community even after the project’s conclusion (ME&A, 2021).

## 6. Civic action and civic engagement

### Georgia

Recent research finds that ethnic minorities in Georgia have adequate opportunities for participation in civic processes, with an enabling institutional framework (Open Society, 2019). **The main challenge remains the lack of sustainability of ethnic minority organisations and community associations:** without external funding and support, such organisations are often unable to self-mobilise and engage in civic activism (advocacy, monitoring and lobbying) (Open Society, 2019). This has been exhibited, for example, with the dissolution of the consultation network for ethnic minorities in Javakheti. Community mobilisation of ethnic minorities began in 2005, developing into a consultation forum for citizens, where they could voice and advocate for local problems and engage in the protection of the rights of minorities. However, the forum stopped functioning in 2012, after international donor funding dissipated (Open Society, 2019). Such lack of stability is also characteristic to the Council of Ethnic Minorities, whose activities are also largely funded by international donors, running the risk that its **effectiveness and impact may significantly decrease once donor funding concludes** (Open Society, 2019).

**Young people in Georgia have been targeted for support in civic activism.** Public Advisory Councils have been operating at local governments in the Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions of Georgia, since 2017, with the purpose of improving participation of ethnic minority representatives—including youth—in decision-making processes (CDADI, 2019). The NGO, Umbrella, based in Georgia, promotes opportunities for young people from minorities groups. Following capacity building within the organisation in 2019, they set up three youth centres in regions inhabited by minorities, where young people can discuss matters of concern to them and make decisions. The organisation also facilitates dialogue with local authorities and promotes the participation of minority youth in international youth networks. The centres are open for majority and minorities and thus also serve as a platform for intercultural learning (CDADI, 2019).

The PITA programme seeks to work with Georgia's minorities, youth, civil society and the GoG, combining institutional resources with grassroots activism (UNAG & USAID, 2021). It focuses on different avenues for change: policy development; media advocacy; minority capacity building and youth activism, with the overall goal of advancing the inclusion of minorities (UNAG & USAID, 2021). **One of the key objectives of PITA is to promote direct interaction and dialogue**

**between GoG and ethnic minorities of Georgia.** It has contributed to this by (UNAG & USAID, 2021):

- Encouraging better accountability of the GoG, through improved public reporting, direct dialogue with minority constituencies, policy improvements, and inclusive decision-making.
- Assisting the CNM, CR, and other organisations involved in national minority issues to gather information about challenges experienced by minority communities; and to manage minority issues more effectively and inclusively.
- Facilitating participatory interaction between the GoG, civil society, and ethnic minority communities—including 46 meetings between CNM/CR and government representatives.

The final programme report states that **these direct meetings and encounters resulted in** (UNAG & USAID, 2021):

- **An increase in the number of persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities having formally interacted with local and central governments.**
- The establishment of a **working relationship between the government and the CNM/CR**, eventually leading to cooperation on an agreed set of common objectives.
- The **space for CNM/CR to put diverse challenges and issues high on the agenda** of the Government and to advocate for solutions, including the state language barriers; low representation of ethnic minorities in public, political and decision-making processes; and limited employment opportunities.

**Another key objective of PITA is to increase the level of civic engagement among youth of diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds**, transforming them into agents of change (UNAG & USAID, 2021). It has sought to achieve this by facilitating over 6,000 youth-led activities (which have engaged over 5,000 young people) across different issues and areas in various cities; and developing the capacity of CSOs to actively engage in the promotion of diversity. Research finds that PITA has been effective in achieving this objective (UNAG & USAID, 2021):

- **PITA members are significantly more active and engaged, compared to their peers** across the country: participation in civic activism increased among project participants from 60% in 2016 to 80% in 2021.
- PITA members are **more confident and have stronger belief that they can influence positive changes** in their communities.
- PITA members appreciate diversity more, with acceptance of inter-ethnic relations increasing from 73% in 2016 to 83.5% in 2021.
- Ethnic, religious and issue-based CSOs supported by PITA have become trusted and strong organisations and advocates for civic integration, diversity, youth participation and activism.

**Key enabling factors in PITA's successful outcomes include: a strong partnership with the GoG; and the use of international human rights reports and instruments** to place pressure on the GoG to be more responsive toward the protection of minority rights (UNAG & USAID, 2021).

Lessons learned and recommendations include (UNAG & USAID, 2021):

- **Legislative and policy incentives should be developed to encourage political parties to give greater attention to minority issues** in their political programmes; and to encourage higher minority representation.
- Additional strategies need to be developed to enhance youth integration, including through the provision of economic opportunities for youth in partnership with the private sector.
- More resources should be invested in remote areas, including through addressing barriers to participation (including transportation, lack of Georgian language skills, and social stigma that may impede participation).
- It is essential to ensure the sustainable functioning of the youth centres, which promote grass-root and local civic activism.
- It is important to adopt diversified and tailored strategies and approaches in various minority communities, which may experience different barriers.

## Moldova

Ethnic minorities in Moldova are more likely to take part in civic organisations than in political parties (CIVIS Centre, 2021). The Ministry of Education, Culture and Research of the Republic of Moldova has since 2015 run a national programme that supports the development of youth councils that allow youth from minority groups to participate in the local decision-making process (CDADI, 2019). There is a priority to expand the programme to areas where minorities represent a significant proportion of the local population (CDADI, 2019).

## IDPs and refugees

Since opportunities for formal participation in the decision-making institutions and processes of their host countries are usually restricted, **refugees often resort to non-formal mechanisms of political participation, including engagement with civic associations, consultative bodies, and CSOs** (Bekaj & Antara, 2018).

**Engagement with CSOs:** In Georgia, the Danish Refugee Council has supported the training of a Legal Aid Service (LAS) on IDP-specific issues; and training of IDP grassroots organisations on participatory proposal development, advocacy and policy influencing, gender mainstreaming, and fundraising (ME&A, 2021). **Key success factors include** (ME&A, 2021):

- **Building the capacity of lawyers and the municipal staff in LAS, which has contributed to greater likelihood of project sustainability** after the conclusion of donor support;
- The longstanding and **effective relationships with key government agencies** working on policy, legislation, and integration issues.

UN Women and its partners (a coalition of three local women's NGOs) has also provided technical support to local government in selected municipalities of Samegrelo and Shida Kartli regions to increase their understanding and implementation of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda (ME&A, 2021). UN Women engaged directly with the municipalities, community leaders, and women to seek change, which has allowed for the effective design of policies based on the needs of the local community and women. UN Women has also helped institutionalise CSO participation as part of the process, with regular meetings with CSOs (ME&A, 2021). An evaluation of the project and survey of local partners finds that the project helped mobilise IDP

women and prepared them and other women for the working groups; and to voice their concerns in discussions (ME&A, 2021). An interview with a local municipality official in Zugdidi also confirmed a positive collaboration with UN Women, including the ability to hand over the pilot project to the local municipality, which increases the likelihood of its sustainability (ME&A, 2021).

The UNHCR in Georgia, in partnership with World Vision, has also set up multiservice centres to help refugees and asylum seekers navigate the services available to them and better understand their rights (ME&A, 2021). **UNHCR has supported the establishment of a network of community facilitators, including IDP volunteers, across the country to represent IDPs,** giving them a voice in integration initiatives by connecting them to services and authorities (ME&A, 2021). This has been helpful not only for the beneficiaries but also to UNHCR as they have been able to learn about local issues, needs and opportunities (ME&A, 2021).

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration–funded programmes for refugees and IDPs in the Caucasus, including those discussed above in Georgia, reveals the following lessons learned (ME&A, 2021):

- All actors and parties must be involved for activities to be successful and that it takes years to build relationships. UNHCR Georgia indicated a key challenge was the sudden loss of its counterpart (former Ministry for Refugee Affairs and IDPs) in 2018, which derailed progress. Other partners have also reported that this **reshuffling of ministries and frequent change in local government made coordination more challenging.**
- Partner organisations reported communication and coordination gaps between central and local authorities and felt that more involvement from local government officials is needed.
- **CSOs must be given adequate time and resources to develop their capacity,** such that they can operate effectively and not be considered a “weak link” for the initiatives.

**Consultative bodies:** The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities recommends that governments and donors foster and **facilitate IDPs’ participation in public and political life by establishing consultative bodies and/or by creating spaces for associations of IDPs to communicate with councillors and CSOs** (COE, 2019). Consultative bodies (e.g. migrant advisory committees and integration or migration councils) were initially introduced in Europe to compensate for the absence of formal means of political participation for the general population of resident non-citizens (Bekaj & Antara, 2018). They also exist in varying forms in the Middle East and North Africa region and in sub-Saharan Africa. In Uganda, for example, Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs) are made up of directly elected representatives in refugee settlements who serve as liaisons between the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), international donors, NGO service delivery partners and refugee communities (Bekaj & Antara, 2018). RWCs are often invited by the local councils to participate in district planning meetings by the OPM and local government offices (Mooney et al., 2021). Research published by International IDEA finds that there are various benefits to such consultative bodies (Bekaj & Antara, 2018):

- They have proven to be an **effective way for settlement authorities to maintain communication with refugees.**
- They can serve as a **unifying platform for refugees** to advocate for the issues most prevalent in their communities.



- They can **facilitate refugees' participation in political life** and enhance their sense of belonging in the society of their host country, despite their lack of formal electoral and citizenship rights.

There are also, however, various weaknesses to the approach (Bekaj & Antara, 2018):

- They are not established by law and confine refugees to settlement-specific issues.
- The roles and decision-making powers of consultative bodies are often rather limited.
- It is not a method of governance that is initiated or driven by refugees themselves: **refugees often viewed their role as symbolic rather than operational.**

**Camp management:** Informal participatory processes in refugee camps is another way in which refugees can engage in political participation, given their limited options. In the Kakuma camp in Kenya, for example, periodic elections of camp leaders at the block, zone and camp levels are held every three years. Refugees held the view, however, that political power and decision-making remained with host community populations (Bekaj & Antara, 2018).

In the case of the Rohingya, who experienced political exclusion in Myanmar and now as refugees in Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi government has appointed Camp-in-Charges (CiCs), responsible for the day-to-day management of each of Cox's Bazar's 34 camps. They have wide discretion to approve or block activities. Refugees are able to interact directly with CiCs, but their ability to influence CiC decisions is heavily constrained by unequal power dynamics. Thus, refugees continue to feel alienated from the decision-making process (Lough et al., 2021). Intermediaries, known as Mahjis, have also been appointed by the Bangladeshi military to serve as points of liaison with refugee communities. They are considered however to be upwardly accountable to CiCs – rather than downward to the communities they serve (Lough et al., 2021).

Other forms of refugee participation in decision-making at the camps include sector committees, convened to support activities such as water, sanitation and hygiene, health and protection; and block committees, which create spaces for more open-ended interaction and information exchange between refugees and humanitarians. As elsewhere, they are constituted with the aim of ensuring inclusion for women, youth and people with disabilities (Lough et al., 2021).

Findings from this study on refugee participation in Cox's Bazaar, which are applicable to other refugee settings, include (Lough et al., 2021):

- **In protracted crisis settings, deepening participation will require more sustained forms of engagement and power transfer that go far beyond the current, consultation-led humanitarian programme models**, deemed by many refugees to be a “superficial” form of inclusion.
- **The language of rights and empowerment, which has been largely absent from humanitarian discourses on participation, needs to be adopted by humanitarians.** Reframing participation as a right could help to ensure that it is considered a key component of all activities rather than an optional extra or separate technical process.
- Multi-year, flexible funding is needed to deepen relationships with refugee communities and groups, and provide the necessary time and space for learning and co-creation.
- Development resources should be channelled towards support for emancipatory aspects of participation – e.g. developing leadership, building solidarity, or strengthening civil society.

- Development resources should also be channelled towards strengthening participation of women and girls, and other marginalised groups.

## 7. Language

### Georgia

**Inadequate knowledge of the state language remains a structural problem for minorities to be actively involved in politics**, hindering access to key positions at all levels of government (Kakhishvili, 2017; Mateu, 2016). It can also hinder civic engagement, due to lack of awareness of opportunities to get involved (Margvelashvili & Tsiklauri, 2017).

While the **promotion of the Georgian language among minorities has been a key concern of the GoG in recent years**, language education still requires much more government attention, (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021; Mateu, 2016). The Ministry of Education and Science has been implementing various projects to support the teaching of Georgian as a second language in non-Georgian-language schools since 2006; however, the success rates of these projects are quite low (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). A notable exception is the GoG's affirmative action policy (also known as the 1+4 programme), whereby a quota is allocated for non-Georgian-language students, who study the Georgian language for one year and then their desired four-year undergraduate programmes (Amirejibi & Gabunia, 2021). This **positive discrimination approach is unique to the field of education and has not been used in other areas related to the civic inclusion and integration of ethnic minorities** (Open Society, 2019). **This programme has contributed to a significant increase in the number of ethnic minority students at higher education institutions.**<sup>7</sup> Experts on minority issues in Georgia have also identified gaps in this approach, however: in particular, the one-year preparatory course is insufficient to fully study the Georgian language; and the programme does not ensure interaction with Georgian students and the public in general (Open Society, 2019).

The **Ministry's priorities also include professional re-training of teachers**. "Teach Georgian as a Second Language" was a programme that aimed at improving the professional development of the Georgian language teachers who teach the state language at non-Georgian schools. After various trainings, teachers were assigned to 15 schools in Akhalkalaki. Results were poor however: during 2009-2013, over 1,000 candidates participated in the selection process, but only 92 of them passed the exams and interview (Mateu, 2016). The programme "Georgian Language for Future Success" aimed to improve the quality of teaching of Georgian in areas populated by minorities. These two programmes were subsequently merged into one programme (Mateu, 2016). The "Professional Development and Career Advancement Support Programme", approved in 2015, for teachers at the general educational schools in regions densely populated by national minorities has also trained thousands of Azeri, Armenian and Russian-speaking

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<sup>7</sup> For example, on the basis of the results of Azeri and Armenian-language general aptitude tests administered in 2015 as part of the general national exams, 522 applicants gained the right to study at a higher educational institution in Georgia by passing Azeri-language tests and 219 applicants gained the same right by passing Armenian-language tests (Open Society, 2019).

teachers (Open Society, 2019). Evaluations of these language programmes are not readily available.

## Moldova

Poor knowledge of the state language among ethnic minorities in Moldova is also considered to be a major obstacle for their upward social mobility, especially in terms of government positions and employment in the public sector (CIVIS Centre, 2021; Groza et al., 2018). A survey of ethnic groups in Moldova finds that **educational and language policies have not been effective in integrating ethnic communities into mainstream social, political and economic life** (Groza et al., 2018). The Ministry of Education implemented a pilot project, “Educational integration of students who speak other languages by expanding the number of study subjects studied in Romanian”, whereby 8 subjects in 32 schools with minority language teaching are taught in the state language (Groza et al., 2018). Over 3,000 students are the beneficiaries of this project; however, the project has not been implemented at a national level (Groza et al., 2018). In 2015, the Government approved the “National Programme to improve the quality of learning of Romanian language in educational institutions with languages of national minorities” (2016-2020). The budget for the programme was inadequate, however, and the programme actions were achieved only in part (Groza et al., 2018).

## 8. Civil service

### Georgia

Alongside language initiatives, the government has sought to promote the inclusion of ethnic minorities in the public sector through more direct civil service-related initiatives. The State Minister on Reconciliation and Civic Equality has implemented a programme of internships, for example, for **young people from national minorities to be employed as interns in various public institutions** (e.g. ministries, local regional offices, Public Defender’s Offices) on a competitive basis (Open Society, 2019). The project “Raising Awareness of Public Administration Reform and Capacity Building in Local Self-Government Units Densely Populated by National Minorities”, as part of the USAID Good Governance Initiative in Georgia, has supported a government-certified training provider: the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration. The school provides **training and adult learning programmes for civil servants for whom Georgian is not their first language** (Dumbadze & Davies, 2021). Modules have been developed and adapted considering the needs of ethnic minorities. In addition to providing training on public governance, the **project is considered to have helped its beneficiaries to feel more self-confident** (Dumbadze & Davies, 2021).

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