



Georgian Farmers' Association
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UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

UN WOMEN
United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

Khatuna Pareulidze, 48, Birkiani

A charming, affable lady with wide blue eyes welcomes me into her lovely home in Birkiani. The smell of fresh food and the trace of flour on her dress tell me she has prepared for this interview in the most hospitable way possible. She politely asks me to taste her homemade khachapuri as we sit down to exchange thoughts.

"Where does my story begin? Here, in Birkiani," Khatuna says. "I am from Birkiani. My family and I left Georgia and moved to Grozny around 1993. I worked at a street market for a little while and then started working in a small sewing shop as a tailor. Life in Grozny was drastically different. The most remarkable difference between Georgia and Grozny was the level of income. [In Grozny], if a person was motivated to work, she would get a solid income. We had small children, but we were somewhat financially stable. Still, I always had a feeling that I could somehow contribute to my family's well-being."

Khatuna takes a deep breath, hinting that she is about to get to the hardest part of her story in Grozny. As she nervously starts to rearrange food on the table, she goes on to talk about the obstacles her children had to face in terms of cultural adaptation. "My son was born ill. Since his birth, we were constantly struggling to afford various treatments and medications. His condition was critical until he turned 16 years old. It got a little easier after that. Now, thank God, he is stable."

Khatuna and her family returned to Georgia several times as refugees and decided to stay after the war ended. After she restored her citizenship, she decided to move to her hometown of Birkiani. Coming back to her childhood home brought up a lot of memories. "My mother had six children. I was the youngest. I think the youngest kids in a family always feel an added responsibility to do well in life," she reflects. "Our family was poor and constantly in need of financial stability. I felt that [struggle] every step of the way. So, from a young age, I was quite motivated and worked hard to provide for myself and my family."

One profound quality that continues to drive her towards positive change is her curiosity. She has attended various trainings and workshops to expand her knowledge in childcare, as well as fine hand sewing. Because of her boundless love for children, she started working as a childcarer at the local kindergarten.

"I love children. I have a really good relationship with them. When it comes to the process of raising and educating children, it is most important to be detail-oriented and to be highly aware of their needs. It is crucial to have coherent communication with parents about their children's safety as well as their nutrition patterns," she says.

Apart from taking care of children, Khatuna spends her time carefully crafting and sewing various pieces of clothing, as well as curtains and duvet covers.

"I have always loved sewing. I would take my grandmother's old sewing machine and play with it. I used to dream about having my own sewing machine and other materials," she recalls. "I never had the opportunity until I read about the training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the proj-

ect implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] on Facebook. For the first time ever, I had the opportunity to make my dreams come true."

Khatuna vividly remembers the training sessions. Every single lesson, lecture, session and word stood out to her. She and the other participants stress the importance of the professionalism of their instructor, who did not hold back with giving them all the necessary information and valuable experience.

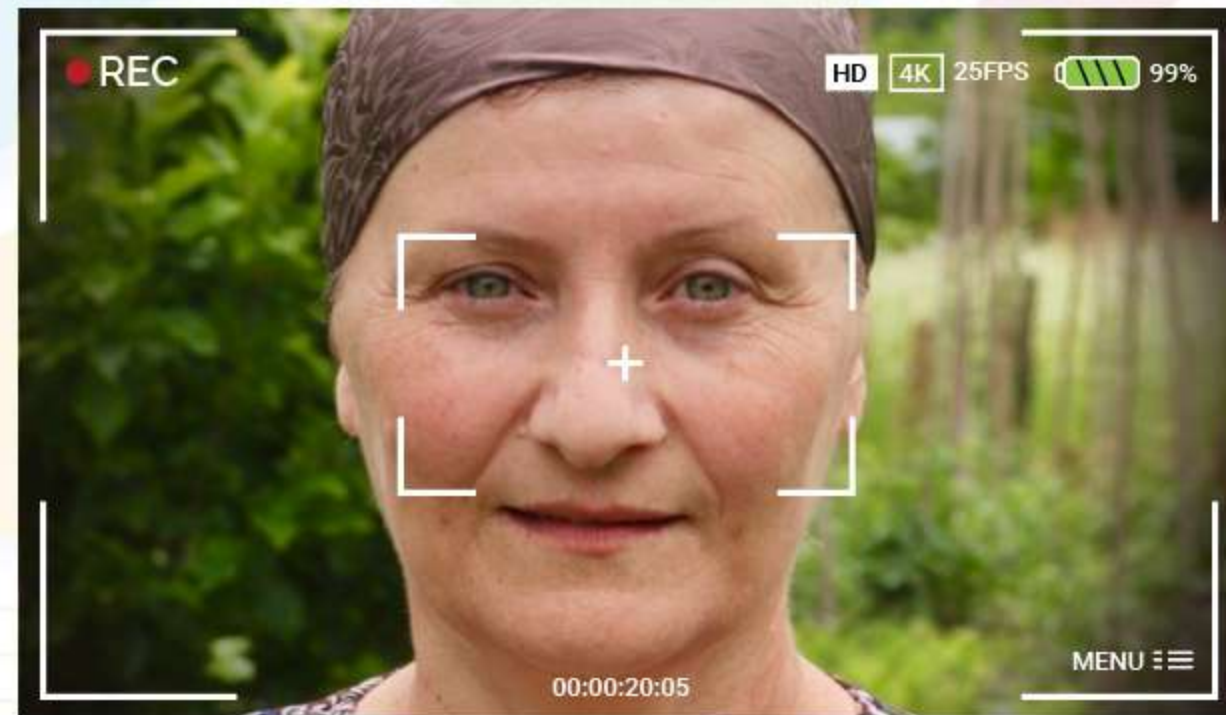
She takes me to another room to show me all the supplies she bought with the grant she received. The sparkle in her eye and pride in her voice capture my attention.

"See, I have everything in order. As I said, with the money I received, I bought two sewing machines, as well as other materials and fabric. I bought everything I needed to get started. I have already been selling the products I've created. Even today, I had two [new] clients and told them to come back this evening," she shares proudly.

When asked about her future plans, she smiles, as though she has it all thought out.

"You know that big room I showed you? I'd like to expand it. I want to take on one or two apprentices, whom I would train. Then they would help me. My husband has severe allergies and my son still has to continue treatments for his health condition, so my family is dependent on me. I need more financial stability. So I'll try to expand it all."

As we were finishing up our interview, Khatuna thanked me, UN Women, UNHCR and the Georgian Farmers' Association from the bottom of her heart. She kept saying how this project gave her the chance of a lifetime. "I never thought I would receive such a gift from strangers who want to show kindness. I hope I can pay it back somehow."



Fatima Margoshvili, 20, Akhmeta

A young, amiable Fatima sat down with me to talk about her family business and discuss how the project helped its development.

"I was born in Russia and lived there for three years," she says. "Then we moved back to Georgia. I do not remember much about Russia, or Georgia. I just remember Georgia was quite developed when I moved back. I sensed the contrast."

Even though she moved around at a young age, cultural shifts did not seem to affect her childhood that much. "My childhood was pretty standard. I went to school, studied well and spent time with my friends. I loved maths and science. I decided to go to medical school to study dentistry, which is what I'm doing right now."

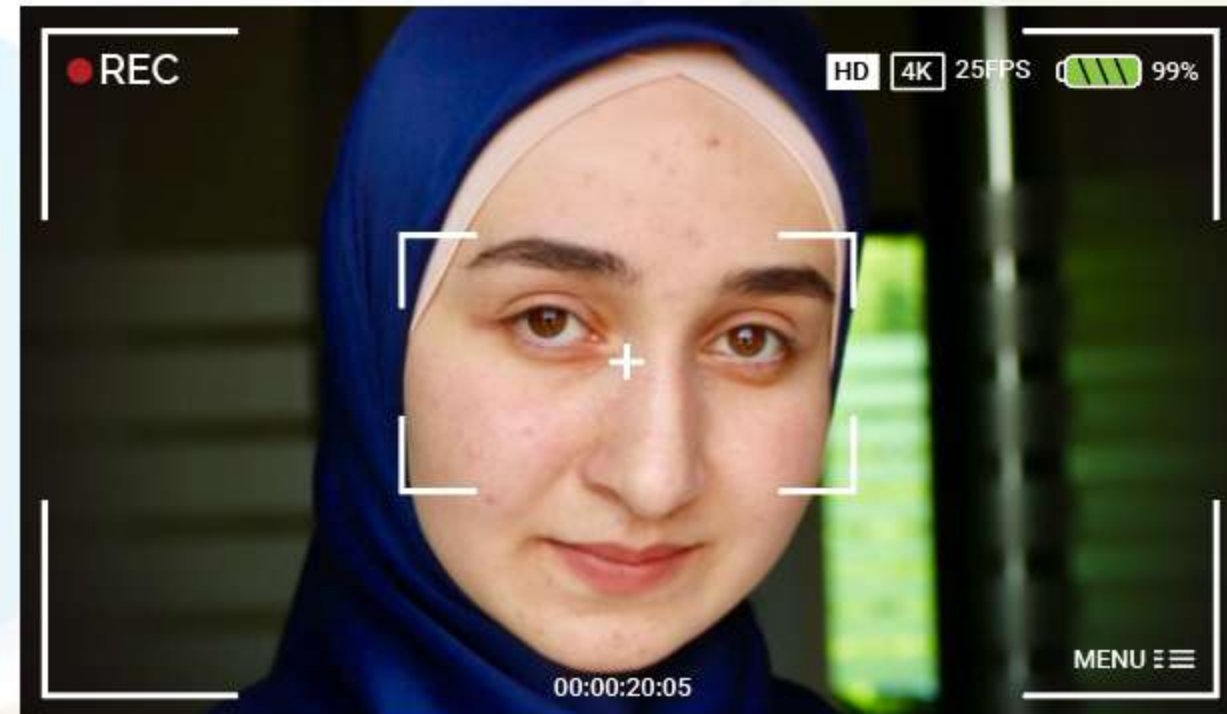
She agrees that life in Tbilisi is quite different. She is impressed that there are a lot of shops, restaurants and services here. "We do not have this sort of variety in our village," she notes. "If one wants to buy something unusual, one has to go far from the village. The accessibility and variety of things here makes life easier."

Apart from studying dentistry, Fatima is interested in helping her family grow their business.

"We own a cafe in the village, called 'Khadija'. We had it before the project and were selling Halal khinkali. However, we had difficulties with inventory. We wanted to expand our business, but it was impossible without more supplies," she explains. "My mom found out about this project. I did not know anything about it before then. We had a long talk; she explained why this was a wonderful opportunity, so I decided to apply. After taking the training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association], we had the opportunity to expand the variety of our products. We cook different dishes, and we also bake cakes."

Due to her busy schedule at university, Fatima only gets to catch up with the business during the weekends, mostly in the summer. She is sure that this cafe carries an important cultural value for the village. The cafe is quite unique because of the types and tastes of the products offered. One would not find a cafe like it anywhere else in the region. People like the idea of this type of cafe existing in the village.

When asked about the ways this project helped Fatima and her family business, she reflects: "The financial grant solved our problems. The project overall has helped me become more informed about how businesses work. Therefore, I now have the opportunity to be more involved and engaged in making Khadija more successful."



Lia Khangoshvili, 48, Duisi

Funky clothing always stands out. That is the case with Lia Khangoshvili. The colourful patterns and carefully crafted stitches on her skirt really do tell a story. As soon as I mentioned the word "childhood", she did not even let me finish the question and enthusiastically began to tell her story.

"As a child, I adored the process of sewing," she recalls. "I sometimes say I have it in my genes. My aunt used to make different dresses and skirts. I picked up her skills and used to make skirts of my own. I would confidently put them on and go to school. I was a very normal, typical child. I especially loved maths, chemistry and biology. What I did not like about school was the absence of free time; I never had enough time to sew."

After high school, Lia decided to study economics at Tbilisi State University. She graduated in 1994 and has worked as an accountant ever since. She currently holds that position at a school in Duisi.

"The happy moments in my life are somehow always connected to school, education and success," she reflects. "When I think of my youth, I remember that one time I got a high grade on a maths exam. No one, including myself, thought I could do it because it was hard – or at least that's how I remember it – but I did it. I overcame the obstacle, and that is pretty much what my life has been about since then – overcoming obstacles."

She talks about overcoming obstacles as though it is a habit she has learned through years of hard work, as though her life's wisdom consists of just a few fundamental notions and overcoming obstacles is quite high up on that list.

When asked about the rest of the list, she replies: "I love helping others. That is one of the qualities I like about myself. For instance, I love helping people in my school with their computers. It is not my primary profession, but I have taken on the role of an IT person. I help teachers learn how to sort through their documents and their files. I even give ICT lessons at school. I did not study computer science at university, but I taught myself with the help of various sources, trainings and online tutorials. There came a time when I realized that I could not fully engage with the world until I joined the age of the Internet."

For Lia, a down-to-earth, giving person who has prioritized being in sync with the world's technological developments, working with kids has been a blessing.

"The kids at my school are great. I love them. Having a profound, meaningful relationship with them is quite hard. Teachers need to be able to identify children's needs and generate effective ways of communicating. Schools lack entertainment spaces, which would give children more opportunities to have fun and study more effectively in an informal environment."

Apart from systematic developments in the education system, Lia thinks every teacher – and generally, everyone – should pursue some serious self-development.

And that is exactly what she did.

The principal at her school told her about the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association]. "The principal already knew that I was planning on writing a project proposal and applying for funding somewhere. Everyone around me has known that having a sewing machine has been my dream for a really long time. Remember when I mentioned the happiest day of my life, when I got a high grade on a maths exam? The day I found out my project was successful, and I got funding was the second happiest day of my life. I have always wanted to create personalized bed sheets, covers, duvets and other accessories. With the help of this grant, I managed to buy sewing and embroidery machines, as well as some fabric. I have a mini-office in my home where I do my work. As I said, I mainly sew bedcovers and sheets, but I also receive offers to make clothes."

Lia's business idea was to sew individualized material for every customer and generate material that they could personally identify with. She saw the beauty of this idea in that customers would get to choose elements like their names, nicknames, initials, favourite numbers and other attributes. The inspiration for this individualistic approach, which became key to her business, came from the training sessions.

"The training course was incredibly helpful. The whole project increased my motivation and pushed me to pursue my interest and invest in myself. Having a primary job is good but loving what you do in your free time helps you to not only relax but also create products that other people will use. This project gave me strength and convinced me that anything is possible. All we have to do is create goals and work hard for them."



Mariam Duishvili, 24, Duisi

As I opened the door to the hallway of my office, looking for the next respondent, I saw Mariam Duishvili, who had arrived an hour early. Our first words made me sense how much of a responsibility she felt to do well in this interview. Her style of communication – brief, clear, direct and informative – was quite impressive.

"I have lived in Duisi my whole life," she begins. "I moved to Rustavi six years ago. I graduated from Tbilisi State University. I studied the humanities, specifically the English language."

After a 10-second silence, she nostalgically goes on to revisit the fun and happy days of her childhood. "It was a different time, a time without social media and the Internet. I would hang out with my friends in the yard, play different games, be in touch with nature. It felt more alive."

Mariam enjoyed learning from the very beginning. She was an excellent student in school, and she dedicated a lot of time towards self-directed learning and hyperfocusing on different subjects, especially languages. In her free time, she likes to write and spends a lot of time practicing. She also adores communication sciences and always pursues the art of conversation with people, especially her closest friends.

"During my student years, I worked as a tourist guide, which helped me practice languages. I liked meeting and learning about people from various cultures. As a local, I used to show them around the cities and give them information about the various sights. Exchanging information with people from all over the world helped me widen my impressions of different cultures. They learned from me, but I learned from them too," she reflects.

Even though she gained a lot of experience and knowledge as a tourist guide, she always knew she had different, more profound and creative goals in life.

"After graduating, I went back to my hometown. I had a couple of job offers. However, I wanted to start something of my own. My friend and I were thinking about creative ideas we could pursue together. Then my friend found out about the project from social media. After reading the terms and conditions of the training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association], we thought it was the perfect fit for us. At first, we did not know there was a funding opportunity; we only knew about the training sessions.

After we found out there was a chance to get financial support, we became even more motivated. We knew we had to take this opportunity."

Like many other enthusiastic, motivated women in Georgia, Mariam could not afford starting a business without having enough practical knowledge or financial support. Therefore, the combination of the course and funding was a godsend for her.

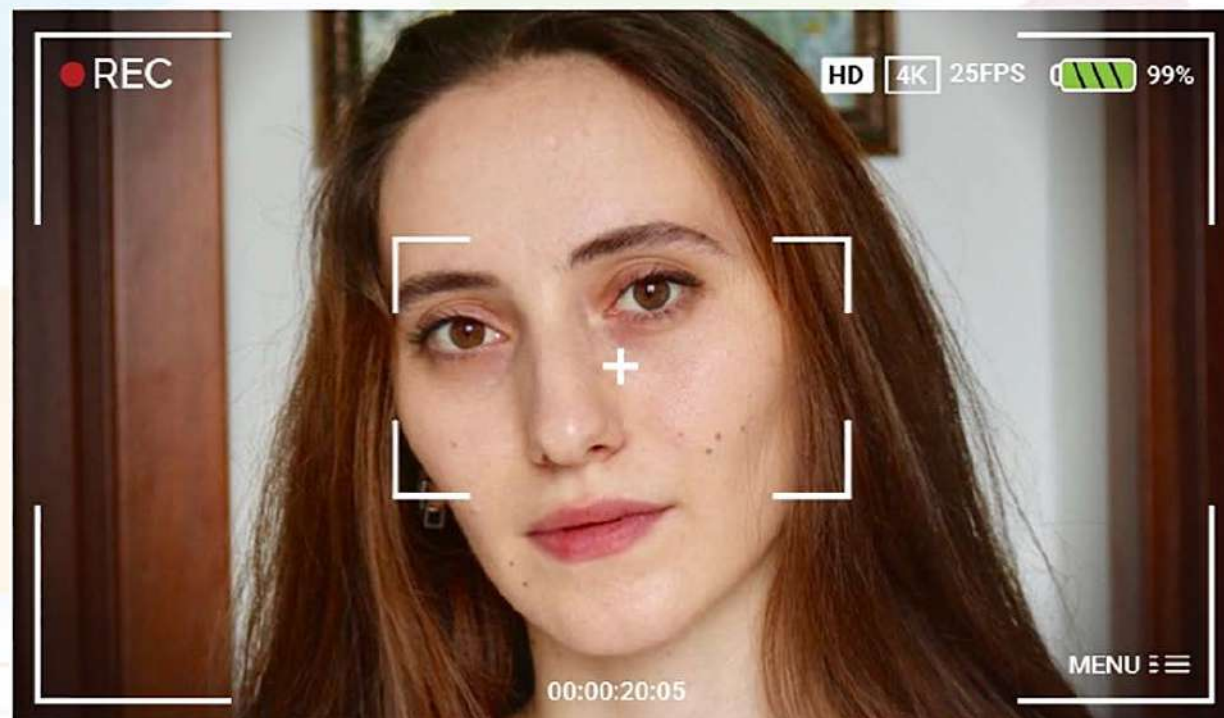
"We started our business at my friend's place in Akhmeta," Mariam recalls. "Even though we had space, we did not have the necessary equipment. The financial aid helped us buy what we needed to open our pizza restaurant, which we named 'Friends'. We bought a fridge, a gas stove, a blender

and small tables and chairs."

Mariam's and her friend's drive for progress is vividly visible from their quick action to get started. "We started our business the day after we got the funding. We worked very hard for the first month, and we received good feedback thanks to our initiative. The second month, unfortunately, coincided with the fasting period, so we did not succeed as much. However, we are slowly progressing. At first, we did not offer dine-in space at the restaurant. We just had a delivery service, which fell through due to logistical issues, but we are planning to revive that. As I mentioned before, we bought a couple of tables and chairs, so we are now able to offer service at the location. Whoever is willing to enjoy the place is welcome to eat there."

These young women with vision have very precise, well-thought-out future plans that include strengthening the delivery service and finding a separate place for the restaurant. Mariam and her friend are intensely researching more funding sources and other opportunities for the development of their business.

Mariam reflects on what she has learned. "The most important lesson I remember from the training sessions is that a huge amount of seed capital is not absolutely necessary for a start-up. One can perfectly manage to start a business with a small amount of money. The crucial factor is having a clear, concise business plan of how the business will be focused on the needs of consumers. One has to identify what the business produces and to whom it offers the service. Apart from knowledge about how to start up a business, the training sessions gave me more self-confidence. I had irrational fears, insecurities and questions. However, the training sessions made me believe in my abilities and capacities. It made me believe that I would be able to succeed, as long as I had faith in myself."



Mariam Sharif, 31, Tbilisi

Mariam was born in Tehran, Iran. She had lived her whole life in Iran, up until one and a half years ago, when she came to Georgia. As Mariam asserts, she did not love her high school and university experience in Tehran. She studied graphic design and music, which she adored. However, there were obligatory rules, the necessity of which she never understood. She was constantly told to wear a hijab and save her body for her husband by teachers and school administrators.

The internal protest Mariam felt turned into an external one.

Mariam's story starts with a viral video that was shared across the Internet. She shot a video explaining why she does not want to wear a hijab. She was a member of a campaign against hijabs that was active on social media, distributing their material under the hashtag #nohijab. There were times she was judged by society and even attacked by the police for not wearing a hijab. On her way home from work one day, a male stranger started to verbally abuse her, criticizing her for not wearing a hijab. Mariam started to record the fight and sent the video to a journalist in London. After a month, her video was shared on social media.

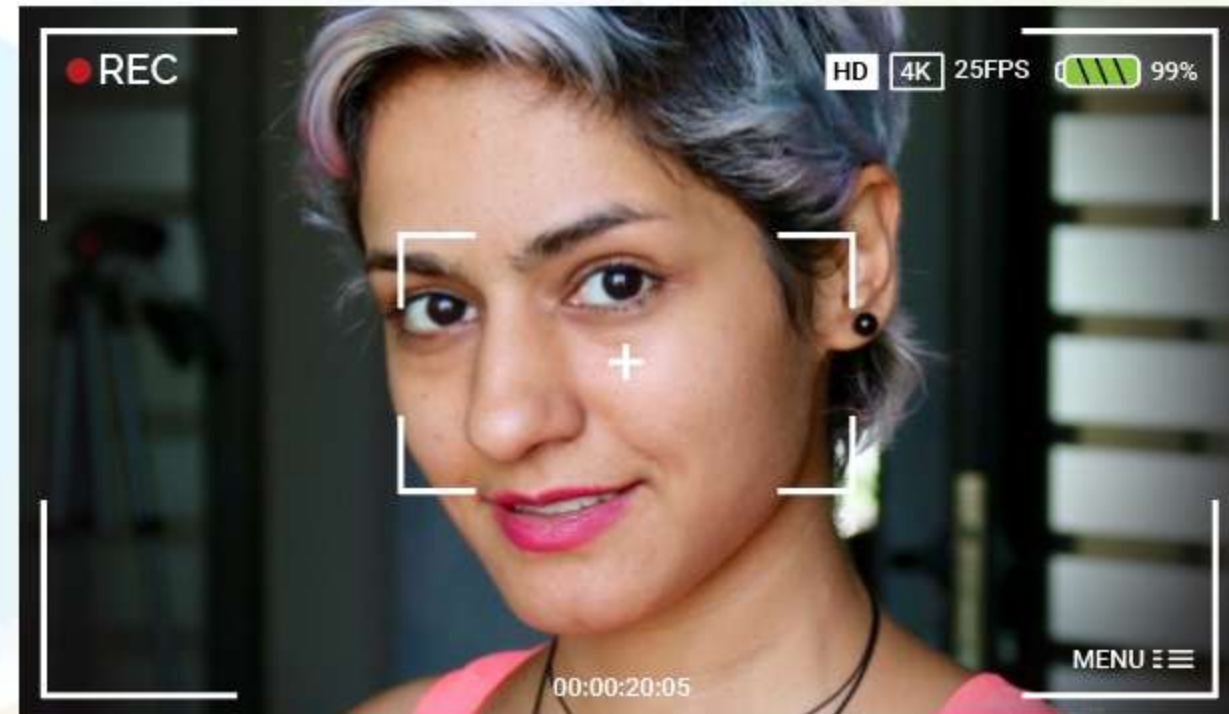
"That video created a lot of problems for me," she reflects. "Once it was circulated, I had issues with the public, the police and other members of society on a daily basis. I was bullied and verbally abused. I was scared for myself and for the safety of my family. This is why I decided to leave. I moved to Georgia, hoping that I could maybe return to Iran one day. But nothing changed. Everything became worse. My mom, who lives close to a military base, gets approached by various government officials. They ask about me and create problems for my mother. She told me to never come back because I might be attacked."

Mariam asserts that a couple of girls with similar cases have been arrested and taken to prison. Terrified by the political regime of her country, Mariam ran away for good. She had to choose another place to live. She tried out living in Turkey and Armenia, but she did not feel safe in either country. Georgia seemed like the least dangerous place for her. She found a community in Tbilisi and gained Georgian and Iranian friends. However, she is struggling to find work because she does not speak Georgian.

"I am trained in photography and videography. The financial grant provided by UN Women and the Georgian Farmers' Association helped me pursue photography and start working on some projects. I bought a camera, a memory card and a tablet, which has helped me set up my self-employment strategy. Everything is better now," she says.

Mariam is now able to market herself and her skills and make art projects that will help her stay financially stable. This opportunity has also allowed her to commit to doing something she loves and to exercise a completely new degree of freedom of expression.

"I have been researching the topic of religion and feminism, and all I can say is that no one can give me freedom. I must give freedom to myself. I hope more women realize that in the future. I know I will do everything I can to contribute to this [awareness-raising] process."



Marina Khujadze, 38, Tbilisi

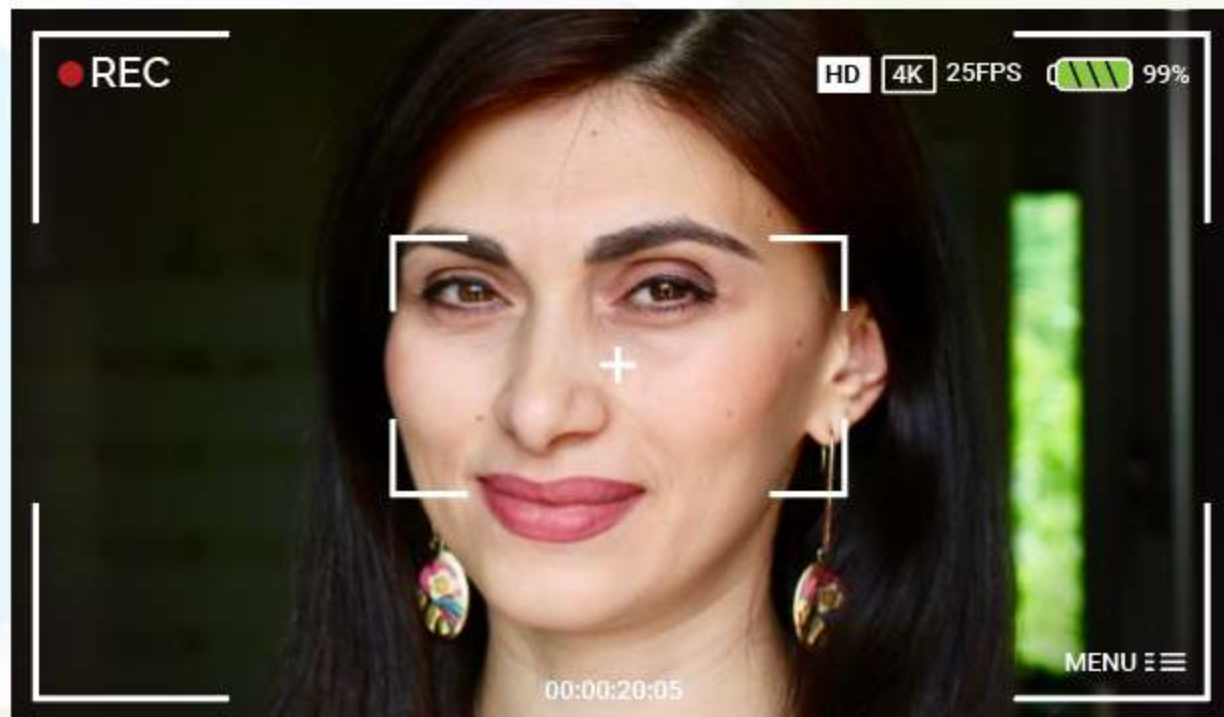
Marina Khujadze was born and raised in Kutaisi, where she grew up and finished school. From a young age, she has always been interested in medicine. The first thing that she found attractive was the uniform, the white coat that seemed so professional and elegant. As she grew up, Marina immersed herself more into the world of medicine. During her second year of university, she had to move to Donetsk, Ukraine. There, she attended the Faculty of Medicine at Donetsk National Medical University and did an internship at the Institute of Skin and Venereal Diseases. After graduating, she took cosmetology courses in Donetsk, after which she started working. She worked in Donetsk for over a decade.

"We had to leave Ukraine in 2014 due to the tense political situation. I returned to Georgia. I participated in various projects sponsored by the United Nations, including English language courses and trainings on other topics. I was informed by Open House that there was a financial grant being offered for small and medium-sized businesses. Even though I had never participated in a project like this, I tested my fortitude and abilities and got extremely lucky. Since I am a dermatologist and a cosmetologist, I decided to write a project proposal about a biorevitalization device, which is an essential part of a very popular injection procedure around the world. This procedure targets skin moisturization and is one of the scalable procedures that helps fight against ageing, for rejuvenation," she explains.

Led by instructor Nato Chakvetadze, the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] gave Marina a lot of practical and theoretical knowledge about how to turn an idea into a business. With the help of the financial grant received, she bought this device and the pharmaceutical samples that come along with it.

"I never expected to win," she says of the grant. "I guess I did not believe in myself. The whole process – training, getting information, exchanging experiences and communicating with people – has made me a different person. I have gained emotional and professional drive, self-confidence and motivation."

Marina, who is enthusiastic about improving her skills, has future plans for her professional development. "I want to acquire new skills, including working with new devices in order to stay up-to-date in my field. I want to broaden my abilities and work with various methods, especially considering the fact that cosmetology is a very fast-developing specialty."



Medea Borshashvili, 43, Birkiani

Medea Borshashvili was born in the region of Akhmeta. Her childhood was not great, as the painful 1990s left an unimaginable scar on everyone who had to live through the fear of hunger and death. Medea, like every other child, attended school. She loved to study. Her love for education transformed into her becoming a Georgian language teacher. At the time that she graduated from school, the political situation was tough. There was corruption and a lack of financial stability, among other difficulties. All she ever dreamed of was to become a teacher. Her dream finally came true when she started attending Telavi State University to study the Georgian language. She has been working as a Georgian language teacher for more than 20 years now.

Loyalty to her homeland and culture is of great importance to Medea. She has never left Georgia. Her family always wanted to leave; they even had an apartment in Grozny, where her husband studied, but Medea never wanted to leave. And she never did. Her love of Georgian culture can also be seen in Medea's pedagogical practice. Apart from her students at school, she tutors more than 21 pre-university students.

"I love my students," she declares. "I love coming up with individual strategies and approaches to get the best results. I always try to be friendly and caring, and I always try to meet their needs. Students need to know that their teachers support them and have their backs."

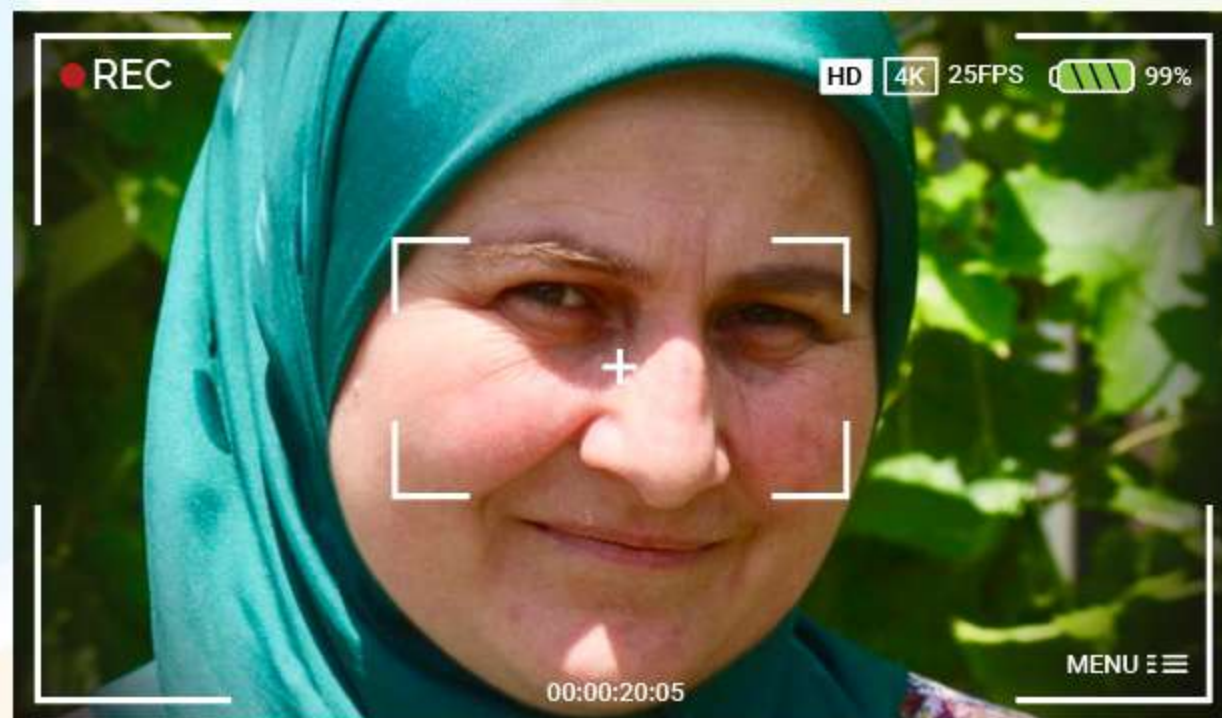
Medea continuously strives for self-improvement and tests herself in new fields. As a teacher, the importance of getting out of one's comfort zone and engaging in new activities is very well known to her.

"In general, I am interested in any training sessions and workshops I can get my hands on, including those on pedagogical developments as well as on social businesses," she explains. "When I found out about the training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] on Facebook, I immediately decided to apply. My favorite activity has been producing agricultural and dairy products, as our family is constantly engaged in such work. In this regard, in 2010, the Danish Refugee Council made a statement announcing a competition about stockbreeding, which we won. We bought 10 cows. In the framework of this [UN Women] project, we have been preparing everything. I wanted to make a sour cream that would not have any additives and would be completely natural. I tried and it worked."

After getting the financial grant provided by UN Women and the Georgian Farmers' Association, Medea bought all the necessary equipment, including refrigerators, special plastic cups, a boiler and a mixer, to fulfil her goal more effectively.

Medea has four cows and receives an endless stream of orders. She plans to expand her business by exporting her products to different shops in Tbilisi and figuring out the regulations in regard to proper packaging. She wants to buy more cows and equipment to make her workflow easier and more productive. She also hopes to include her children, who have expressed interest in joining the family business of making organic, natural products.

When asked about one profound lesson she took away from this training experience, she replies: "Even though I have taken many training sessions before, this one was outstandingly special. Our instructor, Nato Chakvetadze, put in all the effort in the world to explain complex concepts and teach us how the business world works. Everything was explained in detail, and the knowledge imparted was thorough and productive. I will forever be grateful for that."



Nada Abdulkareem Ahmed al-Kaisi, 36, Tbilisi

Nada was born in Iraq.

Her reason for coming to Georgia is shared with other refugee women – the tense political situation in her home country. In order to live a peaceful life and have guaranteed safety, she moved to Georgia, a place where she could find freedom. She has lived in Georgia for the past seven years.

Nada's childhood was full of happiness and joy. She wishes she could turn back time and give that same upbringing to her children. She wishes her children did not have to move away from their homeland.

"My childhood was full of pink," she recalls. "I associate my childhood with this colour because, for me, it represents peace, safety and joy. I trusted everyone and everything around me so much, I wouldn't even lock the doors at night. I did not fear anything. I remember the smell of freedom."

After moving to Georgia, Nada started to think about continuing her and her husband's work. Nada and her husband together have more than 25 years of combined experience in sewing. They have already signed a contract with three Georgian schools to design their school uniforms.

She learned about the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] from Open House, and she immediately decided to apply.

Nada found the training sessions very inspiring. "This experience has shaped our way of thinking. Our instructor made sure we gained important organizational skills and developed a business mindset. The grant provided gave us the confidence to do our work and aim higher. With the help of this funding, we bought electric scissors and ironing presses."

Nada and her husband want to expand their business. Back in Iraq, they operated from their own sewing shop. Now they need more funding to open a shop in Georgia.

Nada hopes to continue attending training sessions related to developing business ideas. "I value information and experience-sharing practices. I think it gives newcomers the ability to improve their skill sets and, thus, their lives. This project has helped a lot of women, and I hope it continues to do so."



Natalia Gabrielashvili, 53, Tbilisi

Natalia Gabrielashvili was born in Donetsk, Ukraine in the town of Torsi, where she grew up, spent her childhood years and graduated from school. As she began to tell her story, she started to emphasize the variety of her interests and how they shifted from one culture to another, from one field to another. Some of the hardships and obstacles that she had to overcome in her life made her who she is today. Therefore, she appreciates every part of this strange experience called existence because, as she says, there has been constant movement in her life.

"I was a good student, especially after the fifth grade," she recalls. "I loved algebra, geometry and literature. I was also a very active child; I loved singing and dancing. After school, I wanted to learn choreography. I especially loved folk dancing. However, my parents thought being a choreographer was not an appropriate profession. Therefore, I went on to study sewing and embroidering."

She further reflects on her adult life. "I have a Georgian husband. We got married in Ukraine, where I gave birth to our daughter. After a while, my husband returned to Georgia. I did not want to come back here, so we broke up. After that, I visited Georgia once, with my daughter. That is when the war in Ukraine began, so I could not go back. This is why I stayed in Georgia. My husband and I got back together. We lived in a village and worked in agriculture."

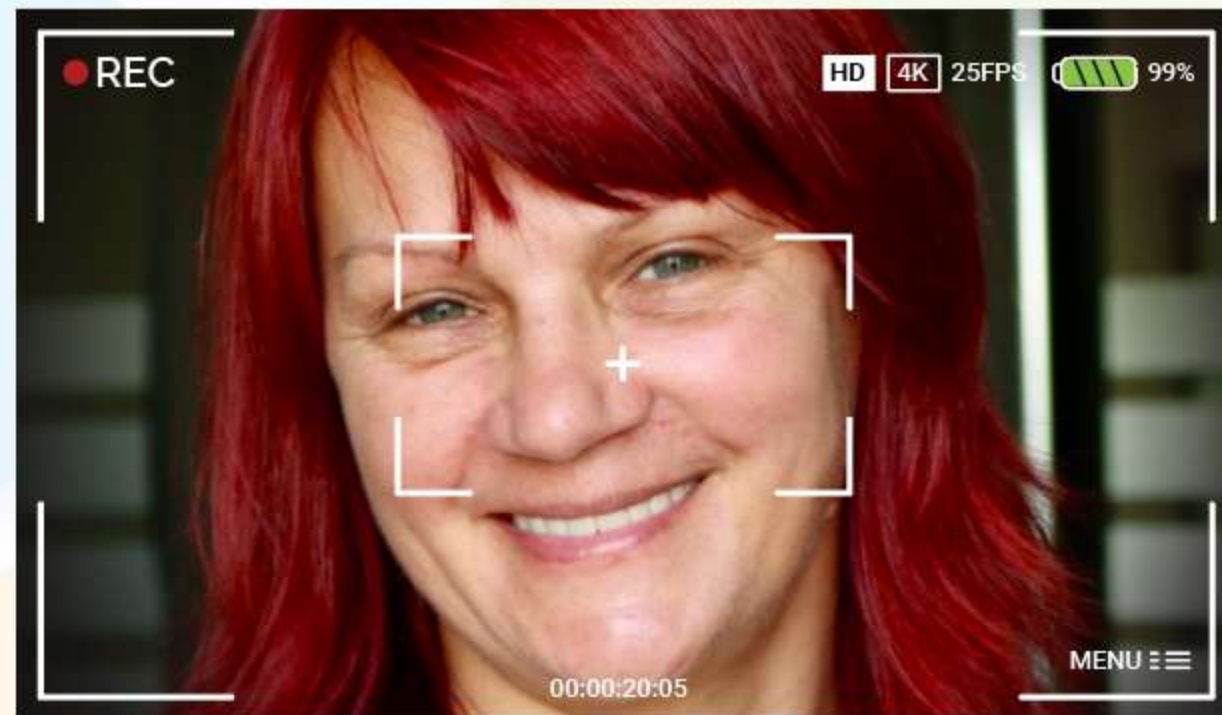
Georgia is close to Natalia's heart. She thinks people here are warmer and more empathetic. Her heart was won over the minute she realized how Georgians support refugees and welcome them into their homes. Thanks to Georgian hospitality, Natalia has gained many true friends while living here.

"I was pretty unlucky back in Ukraine," she recalls. "Every attempt to start a new life ended in crisis. Life forced me to start everything from scratch over and over again. Even when I did not have a cent in my pocket, I still managed to succeed. The training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] changed my perspective and outlook on life. This project made me realize that I could start a new life with little capital and that if I want something bad enough, I can achieve it. It also helped me discover a new part of myself, a completely new spectrum of abilities and capacities."

As mentioned before, Natalia has engaged in a variety of work-related activities. Her work experience includes sewing, event planning and even accounting. After winning the grant, she started to think about which of her interests was worth investing in.

"Even though my first business idea was sewing-related, it would have been quite costly, so I decided to go for another idea," she explains. "I decided to open a small shop where I would sell coffee, tea and sweets. With the financial help provided, I bought a coffee machine and a teapot. I found a really good space to open the shop, but I did not have enough money to pay for rent. The financial grant was a small amount of money, so my business plan has not been put into action yet. However, I am planning on opening the shop in November."

Motivated and determined, Natalia has extensively planned out her future. "The long-term plan is to have the coffee and tea business as a source of extra income. The thing I lack the most on a daily basis is financial stability, so the shop will serve that purpose. However, my future plans are bigger than that. Since I'm a creative person, I am definitely thinking of opening an art studio in the future. I want to give young people who are interested in sewing an opportunity to explore working with different materials and discovering new techniques. I want to take an educational approach and help young enthusiasts create various products."



Natela Tsiskarishvili, 52, Jokolo

Natela Tsiskarishvili was born and raised in Jokolo. As a child, she had a curious mind. She used to sit down and explore nature and the textures and materials around her. This is where her love for design and sewing comes from. Whenever she got her hands on a piece of cloth, she turned it into clothing. She also loved to draw. Natela had many other interests, including becoming a doctor.

Coming from a traditional family, though, her father's words were influential to her. He advised her to become an accountant and study economics, which is what Natela did. She graduated from Tbilisi State University.

After spending most of her young adulthood in Georgia, she lived in Grozny, Russia for four years. This is how she begins her story, by depicting vivid memories and emotions of how she could not adjust to the culture there. She eventually sold all of her property, quit her job (with a moderately good income) at a sewing shop and decided to dedicate her life to working and living in her homeland. She returned to Georgia after the war and never had the desire to go back to Grozny.

She now works as an accountant at a school in Jokolo. "I work at a school while working in agriculture at the same time. I have animals, birds, a vegetable garden,... I love what I do. It brings me enormous joy and happiness," she says.

Natela, like many others, found out about the week-long training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] on Facebook, and she immediately decided to apply. The length of the training sessions, as well as the professionalism of the instructor, impressed and, indeed, helped Natela. "These sessions created a safe, educational environment where no one was ashamed to ask questions. The conditions for studying were great. Our instructor made sure we were trained on topics like writing a project proposal, developing a business plan and acting wisely in our business relationships. I could not be more thankful for the overall experience."

Natela's business idea included developing and expanding her greenhouse, where she plants cucumbers, tomatoes, greens and other vegetables. The grant provided has helped her purchase necessary equipment, such as shelves for her strawberry planters and appropriate pipes and a water pump for irrigation.

Natela is motivated to expand her business and acknowledges this project as the perfect starting point. "With the help of this grant, I improved the conditions of my greenhouse, which will eventually result in more natural produce that I will sell and distribute. In the future, I want to expand my greenhouse, make it larger and claim more space for more produce. As I learned during the training sessions, nothing is impossible if I set my mind to it. So, I am currently developing plans and looking for other financial opportunities to make my once-impossible dream come even truer!"



Neli Ghanishashvili, 58, Birkiani

Neli Ghanishashvili welcomed me into her home in Birkiani. She did not like that I was rushing to start the interview. Compassionate and considerate, Neli was worried about how tired I was from the road and told me to relax, offered me her homemade khachapuri and said we could get to the task a little later. I did not even notice how a casual conversation turned into "the interview of her lifetime", as she called it. Thank God, I remembered to turn on the recorder.

"Oh... my childhood. I always loved physical work. I was never lazy. I was very active – hyperactive, even. I still am all of those things, but age does create some obstacles," she admitted. "I used to go to school. I loved the humanities. After eighth grade, my father decided to send me to a vocational college. I got in, but after two months, he passed away. I could not graduate. Life got tougher. I wanted to go to an art school to study painting, but I could not manage to do it. My mom is a very strong, independent, energetic woman. After my dad's passing, she did not let me and my siblings feel any weaker for it. She was alone, financially and morally supporting three children. After a while, I started working in a private sewing shop in Duisi. Then I got married. My family and I moved to Kazakhstan, where we lived for eight years. We moved to Kazakhstan because there was nothing in Georgia. We needed financial stability; we needed to have a home. So, we moved there. We mainly worked at stockbreeding, specifically sheep farming. We had a higher income there. But at some point, we decided to come back to Georgia. It was the 1990s..." she said, in one breath.

She paused. It felt like our conversation took a natural, expected break. It felt wrong to interrupt her. After 20 seconds of silence, she continued.

"We began to build a house in the autumn, and then inflation hit the country in 1991. Part of our money remained in the bank, so we lived in a very basic home. I've built it up now. It is a nice space. I would like to have my business here. My husband, my children and I – we are all working towards that. My children are in Poland; they have a work visa. They help me with my small business. Small businesses are very profitable and valuable for villages like ours," she remarked.

It seemed like Neli was ready to move on to telling me how she turned the hardships in her life into motivation and progress. She began to talk about the origins of her business idea and the source of inspiration that has been under her nose for more than two decades.

"I live next to a school. I have worked at this school as an accountant for more than 24 years. This job is my primary source of income. However, I watch children who struggle to get food during the breaks every single day. Analyzing their problem has helped me develop my business idea. I wanted to create a small bakery in my house, next to the school, where children could get khachapuri, lobiani, fruit and other foods to snack on. These children have to run to the shop in the centre of town to get something to eat. If they can't or don't have time to, they have to stay hungry until school dismisses every single day," she explained.

"Children need to eat, energize and stay fresh. With that in mind, I found out about this project through social media. I have applied to other projects before; for instance, we wanted to build a hostel, but we never got lucky. The training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the project

implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] and the financial grant provided were of great help. So, I used the financial grant to buy an electric oven, a meat grinder and a juicer. I finally established a small business, and it is working successfully. Apart from financial help, this project has given me inspiration and vision on how to expand my business so that it helps my income and, more importantly, helps other people get the service they need. In the future, I want to decorate my yard and add tables and chairs so that tourists can hang out, eat and drink there – and, of course, enjoy our wonderful nature."

As a person who knows the value of good education, Neli emphasized the significance of the lessons learned during the training sessions. "I received several life-changing pieces of advice from the training sessions. One can apparently start a business with just 1 lari. I never thought that was possible. Of course, the start-up capital that the financial grant provided for me was crucial, but the knowledge I gained about business and life throughout these sessions was way more important."



Nino Toronjadze, 48, Samtredia

Nino Toronjadze was born and raised in Samtredia, where she graduated from middle school. She clearly remembers her first day of school, and when asked if she liked it, little Nino answered, "Yes, I want to become a teacher."

She did end up becoming a teacher. She had other ideas of how her life might turn out; she was thinking of pursuing medicine, music or another field, but pedagogy won. She enrolled at the Gorlivka State Pedagogical Institute of Foreign Languages, so the whole family moved to live in Ukraine.

Nino points out the differences between Ukraine and Georgia quite poetically. "Georgia has a different smell and taste. Throughout my years of living away from my homeland, I missed the specific smell of Georgia."

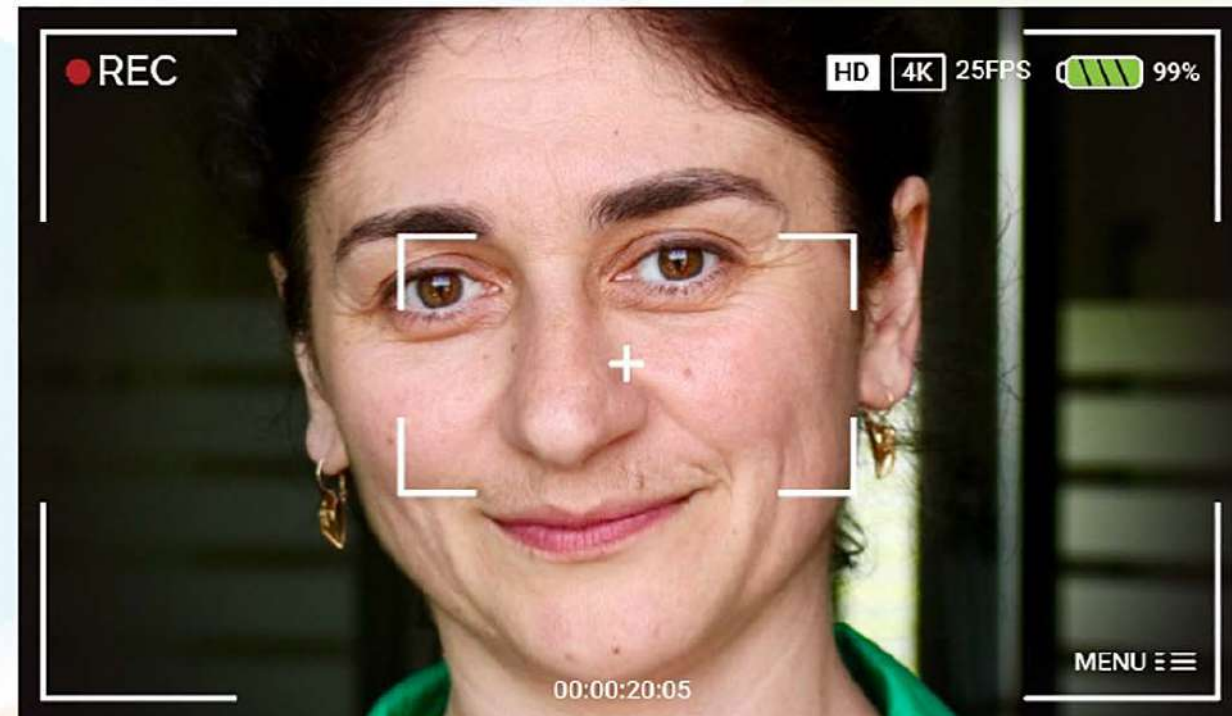
Nino worked as a linguist in Ukraine. She opened two Georgian schools in Donetsk, running them over the weekends at the Georgian Embassy. She taught the Georgian language to a variety of people between the ages of 5 and 65. After a difficult number of years missing her homeland, Nino returned to Georgia, where she had to start a new life from scratch.

"It took me a year, after moving back, to mentally readjust," she admits. "I was a person with a full-time job back in Ukraine, and now I had nothing. I started by teaching Russian to one student. Slowly, the number of students increased, and I now teach Russian, English and French. After searching for both financial and moral support for a long time, I heard about the training course 'How to Start up a Business' [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] and decided to apply. I have never needed a business mindset before now; I have always been in fields related to culture and education, but life has come to a point where I need to know how to do business."

Nino, as a true educator, cares about how her students keep up with developments in today's world. She wants to make sure her students have access to the tools necessary for studying and maximizing their results.

"I am tired of making my students write on paper. I have been using the computer and the Internet since 1997. We can't allow children in the twenty-first century to use paper. Therefore, with the financial support I got from, I bought chairs, a board, a projector, a printer and a laptop."

The language center that Nino wants to establish in Samtredia will be called "Hope". Her space can handle 25 students now, but she plans to find a larger place so she can take on more students. She hopes to inspire her students the same way this project inspired her.



Riffat Noor Ahmad, 31, Tbilisi

Riffat is from Pakistan but has never lived there. She was born and raised in Saudi Arabia. As a child, she loved biology. She also loved helping people, so she combined her two main interests and decided to study nursing. To follow this dream, she moved to Australia, where she found the love of her life. She got married to an Indian man. Their love is forbidden in their homelands, due to the cultural and political rivalry between Pakistan and India. After being unable to overcome issues connected to their visas, they moved around a lot and finally decided to come to Georgia. They have been living here for the past two years.

"I love living in Georgia. I love the green environment, the nature, the people," she says. "As a woman, I did not have any rights in Saudi Arabia. I couldn't travel or do business without involving either my husband, my father or another male figure. I love the freedom that women have in Georgia. I think women should be able to do anything they want."

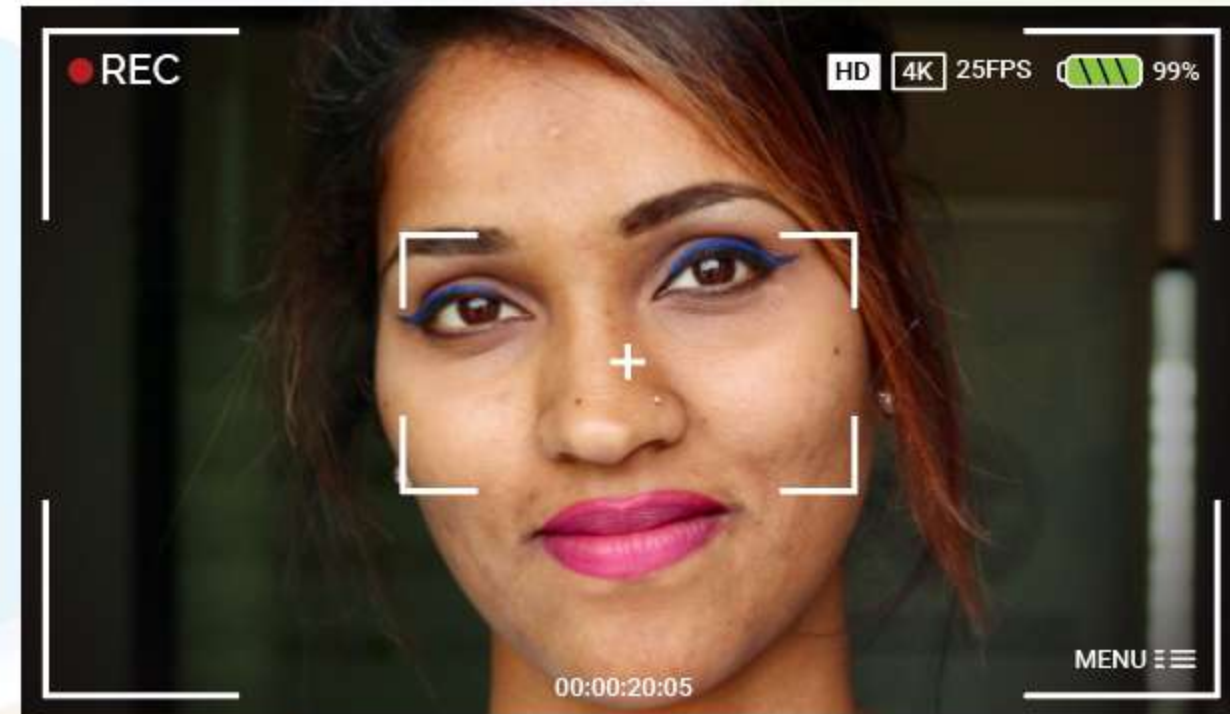
Riffat wants to open a restaurant because she loves cooking. She wants to become a chef. She is constantly told by people that she has a unique talent when it comes to cooking. The spectrum of her cooking abilities is quite wide. As a self-taught chef, she can cook many types of cuisine, including Arabic, Chinese, Indian and Japanese, among others.

As a refugee, Riffat does not have a job in Georgia. Apart from fulfilling her interests, Riffat has to provide for her kids and family. Therefore, it is crucial to her that she has a business that will help her financially. Riffat's father gave her a piece of land, where she can build a restaurant and start her business. However, she needs start-up capital to launch her pizzeria, so she has been looking for any financial support she can get her hands on.

When she found out about the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association, she immediately decided to apply. With the help of the financial grant provided, she bought a fireproof oven, furniture and other small pieces of equipment.

"I have big plans for my pizzeria. While living in Australia, I got to observe the sorts of preferences people from different cultures have in terms of pizza toppings. Some people, for instance, love their pizza with pineapple. This knowledge inspired me to create a variety of options for my future customers that will give them the freedom to customize their pizzas to their tastes."

This project helped Riffat gain the motivation and determination to start and expand her business. "My dream already came true – I got started. Continuing to rise – that is my next challenge now."



Tina Pareulidze, 24, Birkiani

A radiant, smiling girl walks into the room and sits down calmly as she prepares to talk about herself and her work. She knows she only has a limited amount of time. She's nervous. Her voice starts to crack as she's about to tell a stranger about the story of her life. She shakes her head, in an attempt to get rid of her nervousness before she begins.

"I was born in a small, beautiful village in the region of Akhmeta called Birkiani," Tina recalls. "My family and I have moved around quite a lot. I spent about 10 years of my childhood in Russia. I don't recall much, yet living there felt different."

In the wake of moving to Georgia in fifth grade, she started to learn the Georgian language at public school. Absolutely immersed in learning about the sociopolitical and cultural underpinnings of the Caucasus, particularly Georgia, 18-year-old Tina moved to Tbilisi to pursue history and Caucasian studies at Tbilisi State University.

"The year is 2012. I tell my family that I want to explore our region. My mother, who is a historian herself, was quite skeptical of my decision. She did not want me to pursue this degree, as she thinks being a historian does not really meet the demands of the current job market."

Regardless of many family-related obstacles, Tina managed to continue exploring, discovering and studying what she always loved, even as a child – the humanities. She started to participate in subject-related conferences, mainly focused on her homeland, the Pankisi Gorge. The volume of research opportunities and the problematic core of Pankisi-related topics of discussion are what pushed her to acknowledge that studying the Caucasus region is what has fulfilled her life.

"Apart from in-depth knowledge and detailed information about my field, the university has taught me how to pursue self-development," she remarks. "For years, I lived in the Pankisi Gorge, in an isolated area. After moving to Tbilisi, I got to meet more interesting people, and I became more independent and confident. My worldview on issues of global importance, as well as my understanding of humanity, has drastically changed."

As Tina implies, there are many problems in the Pankisi Gorge, including those that one might encounter in any other region of Georgia. Even though the Pankisi Gorge is usually considered to be a peculiar region, Tina, as a true local, does not seem to agree with this perception. It is noteworthy that people of different religious and ethnic origins live in the region. She highlights the importance of feedback from those who visit and explore the Pankisi Gorge, emphasizing that the region's inhabitants are diverse, different and difficult to stereotype.

"The people of Pankisi are the same as everyone else. We are all humans. Just like every other microculture, we are distinguished by our unique ethnic elements. Depicting the Pankisi Gorge as problematic is more an external issue than a local one."

As Tina continues to talk passionately about her region and culture, one easily notices that she has thought immensely about monetizing her knowledge in a way that is productive for both her and

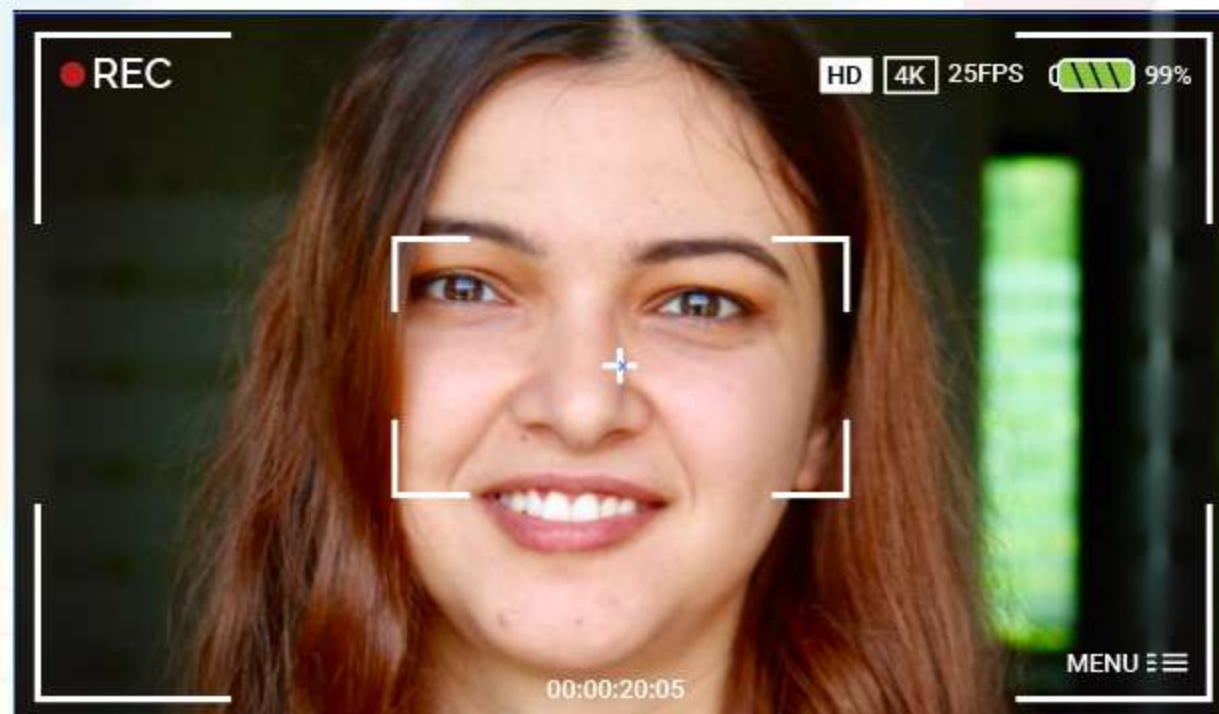
the region. She read about the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] on Facebook, and she immediately decided to apply.

"I was motivated to write a proposal and apply for the project. I am always trying to do various activities outside the domain of my expertise. I have had a number of project ideas, for instance, about opening a guesthouse, but I never received any funding, so I thought I was doing something wrong. [Through the course,] I was interested in what the trainers would advise about establishing a business correctly."

After gaining appropriate information, knowledge and experience about how to start a business through the course, Tina re-evaluated her ideas and came up with a new one – a souvenir shop in her hometown of Birkiani called "Memory". As a local, she understands the interests of Pankisi's society; she knows what they like, what they appreciate and what they want to buy. After winning the grant, Tina started to identify the consumer needs of the locals and combined the available funds with other necessary resources.

"With the help of the financial grant received, I decorated my shop space and bought shelves, a table, chairs, a heat press machine, a printer, transfer papers, T-shirts and small souvenirs. So far the biggest part of my business has been printing images and other designs onto T-shirts. The exam period at university has kept me from fully completing these processes, but I have already started working on the first T-shirt order from a non-governmental organization. I also have other offers that I am excited to work on in the future."

Tina is one of the many who were lucky enough to get financial support to help make their dreams come true. She briefly summed up her experience at the end of the interview: "This project has given me both financial and moral support. At the time, I did not have any start-up capital because I am a student and could not have gotten started on my own. This project has helped me in both my personal and professional development. After all, now I know how to expand my business. I am forever grateful for this opportunity."



Viyan Kurtan Biro, 24, Tbilisi

Viyan was born and raised in Iraq. Her childhood was not easy or enjoyable. As an orphan, she felt unprotected. As a teenager, she was oppressed in school. She did not get the education or student experience she desired. Her basic human rights were undermined all the time. After graduating from high school, she wanted to go to university but decided against it. People who had applied for university before her had ended up being shot and killed during warfare by armed forces. Her right to education was restricted, and her journey was decided for her.

She moved to Georgia in 2014.

Her reason for moving to Georgia was to escape violence, oppression and war. "Life back home was tough," Viyan recalls. "As a woman, I was discriminated against all the time. I wanted to have a normal life. I wanted to pursue a career, have a job, have a family – without having to think about surviving all the time."

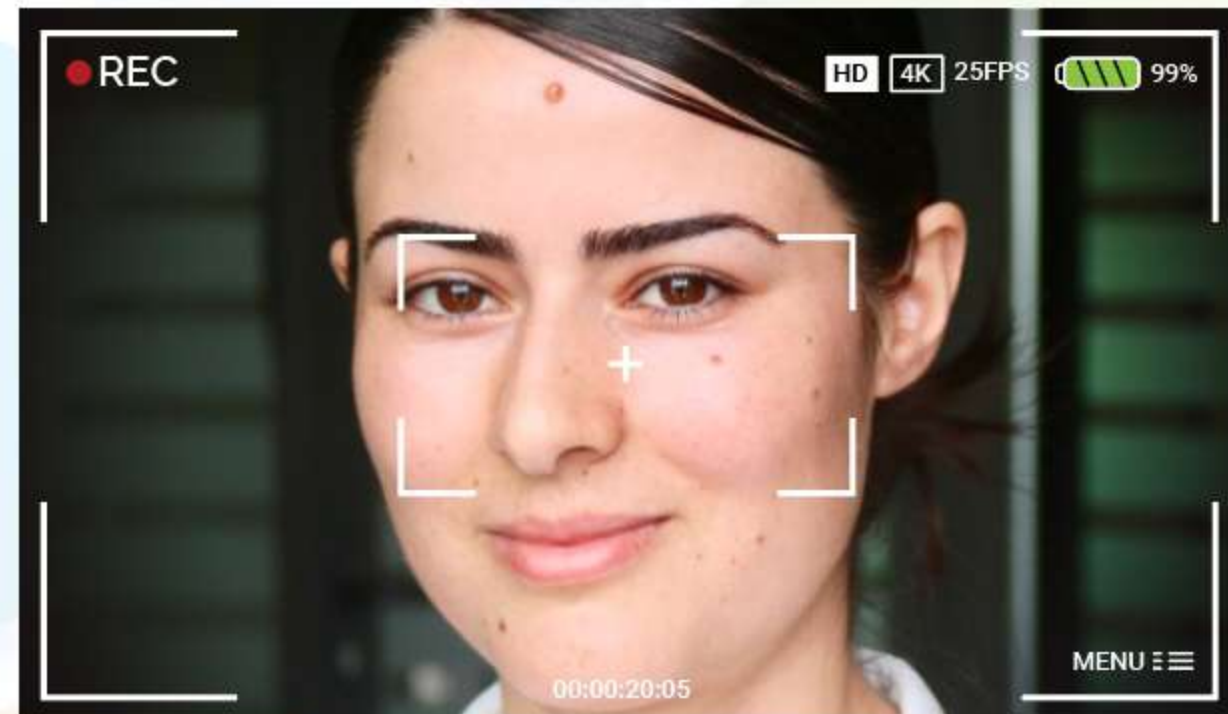
Viyan finds Georgia to be a safe place for people of all religions. She thinks Georgian culture and the sociopolitical atmosphere is tolerant towards people of all ethnicities and nationalities. She managed to find a community in her neighbourhood, where she feels safe and happy to communicate with people and have friends.

At the age of 15, Viyan became interested in the beauty world, mostly make-up and hair, and she taught herself everything she knows. Being self-taught, she always wanted to test herself in the real world and see how her abilities would play out in practice.

Viyan found out about the training course "How to Start up a Business [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] from Open House, and she immediately decided to apply. The training sessions inspired her to diversify the services she would offer.

"I decided that it would be good to have a salon in a physical space, but even though the financial grant received helped me a lot, it wasn't enough to open a full-service beauty salon. However, I used the funding to buy the must-have tools, such as scissors, a hairdryer, brushes and tweezers. I decided to take orders from clients who want their hair and make-up done at their homes. I love doing what I do. It brings me satisfaction, joy and a sense of productivity."

Apart from gaining practical knowledge and useful tips about how to start a business through the training, Viyan also learned an important lesson that she thinks everyone should take into consideration. "We learned about a concept called 'blue ocean', which expresses a basic rule: Do not open your business where there are a lot of similar businesses. I think this highlights the importance of uniqueness, which is valuable to every person and is something we should all keep in mind."



Zairama Tsintsalashvili, 26, Birkiani

Zairama Tsintsalashvili is from Birkiani but was born in Russia, where she and her family lived for eight years. However, due to some personal reasons, her family decided to return to Georgia. She and her siblings continued their studies in Georgia. Her childhood was pretty normal. Growing up in a traditional family, the importance of education was emphasized to her. She was an active, motivated and somewhat complicated child. She loved Georgian literature, foreign languages and maths.

Her activities went beyond school, though. She participated in contests like "Who's the Smartest" and "What, When, Where". She used to win most of the time, which turned her into a maximalist and motivated her to become a leader and a winner. Unfortunately, her opportunities for professional growth were not that great in Pankisi.

She moved to Tbilisi in 2010 and graduated from Tbilisi State University, where she studied computer science. She is currently taking a one-year course at Business and Technology University. This is where her motivation to spread knowledge and exchange experiences comes from.

"There are no opportunities for professional development or education in the Pankisi region," she notes. "This is why it is necessary to go to a big city, where you can grow and develop and then go back. I always say that I will return to Pankisi, no matter what. I want to be employed there; I want to have my own business and job there. I want to give young people the opportunity to have access to information I never had."

Zairama also wants to encourage self-determination and hard work among her age group, as she herself appears to have those skills. Two years ago, she applied for various projects and funding but never got them because she was quite confused about which business idea to pursue. She lacked clarity in her decisions and needed guidance. This is exactly where the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association] came in. When she found out about the course on Facebook, she immediately decided to apply.

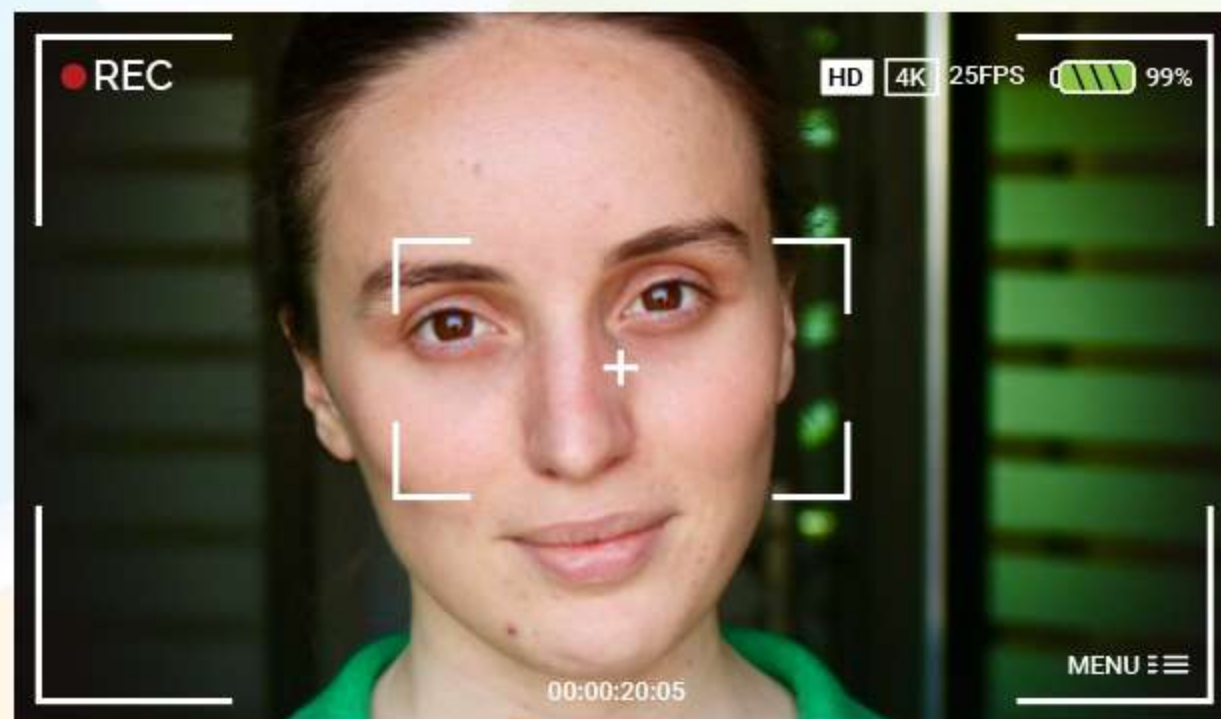
"One important lesson I remember from those wonderful sessions is the practical skill of writing a business plan. I also learned about identifying the right ways to approach a business idea, generate the right attitude and remain true to internal motives."

With the help of the financial grant received, Zairama managed to take one step closer towards making her creative business idea come true.

"This is just a small part of my big pool of business ideas: I want to take old photographs that people have at home and digitize them. My aim is to create a virtual visual fabric of memories that people can keep forever. We all have old photographs that we do not want to lose, so that's where the idea came from. With the financial grant provided by UN Women, I bought a photo scanner. Unfortunately, due to personal reasons, I have not been able to put my business idea into action yet, but I am planning to launch it in the summer."

Zairama knows that this particular idea might come to an end because at some point, everyone in her region will have already digitized their photo albums. However, as she mentioned, this is only a small portion of her future plans.

"I mostly want to work with young people and help them develop their skills and gain more knowledge. I want to create training sessions and workshops within the domain of my expertise. I want to motivate youth, just like this project motivated me."



Zarikha Khangoshvili, 26, Akhmeta

Zarikha Khangoshvili was my last respondent during the trip to Akhmeta. She kindly invited me to her office, where she displayed a truly unique sense of hospitality by offering me all the creature comforts she could. I was about to sit down and talk to a very technologically adept woman who did not hesitate to open up about her childhood, her current work and her future plans.

"As a child, I loved reading interesting books, watching films and spending time with friends," she reflects. "I loved adventures, so that affected my preferences in art. I was pretty successful at school. I loved the Georgian language and literature. Then I moved to Tbilisi, to study business at Caucasus University. I was always interested in business. I have always wanted to have something of my own. Self-employment seems like a really attractive way of life."

Moving to Tbilisi was a big step for Zarikha. Living in Tbilisi represented a different type of freedom and independence. With independence came a great deal of responsibility. She solved every issue on her own. The happiest moments of her student life were the times spent with her college buddies, going to picnics and having fun. However, she did more than that to broaden her worldview and experience of true adulthood. She participated in various events, youth summits mostly, and also studied Arabic, which she found overwhelmingly interesting and the culture breathtaking.

Now a financial manager for a hospital in Duisi, which for her is a multidimensional experience, 24-year-old Zarikha wants to take on every opportunity to move forward in life.

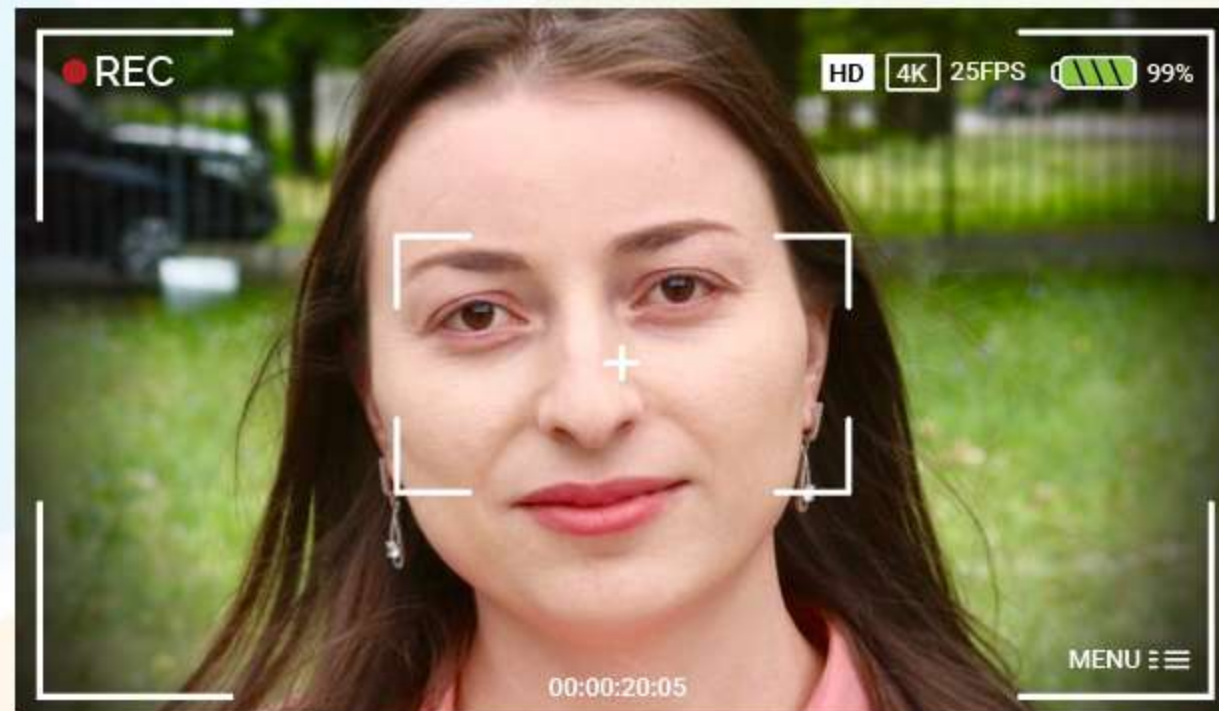
"I would like to be more of a risk-taker than I am. I always try to not give up on things, but I get scared quite easily," she admits. "Up to this point, I have achieved most of the goals I had when I was a child. I always wanted to go to university and get a degree. Never in a hundred years would I imagine that I would be working. But I am. I am slowly progressing, but sometimes it is not enough."

Zarikha found out about the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association]. She was extremely happy to know that a newcomer like her could be given the opportunity of a lifetime.

"My business idea is to unite all travel agencies in one digital space, to create a platform that allows users to plan their trips," she explains. "They can fill out their preferences – such as the dates, location, price range and other details – to figure out the best travel deals for their trip. This platform would serve as an alternative to websites like Booking.com; it would be the Georgian equivalent. I used the financial grant to buy a laptop. My cousin and I are currently working on designing the concept of the platform, as well as creating a design and identifying the exact features for the website. We are planning on completing the project in the summer."

Zarikha wants to move to an Arabic-speaking country at some point. When asked what knowledge she gained from this experience, she replies: "The training course was a profound experience. I wanted to uncover common practices of building a business, and I did. I learned a lot. The training

sessions taught me about the importance of overcoming obstacles and taking risks. I was a victim of prejudice, being told that starting a business would be extremely hard for a person like me. But now I know that if you encourage yourself to take risks and get out of your comfort zone, anything is possible."



Zoya Manaeva, 49, Karajala

Zoya Manaeva was born in Ukraine's Khmelnytskyi Oblast, then lived in Donbas, in the region of Lugansk. She now resides in Georgia. Although I realized it later, it is not surprising that this courageous woman, who has extensive knowledge in her field, has broad cultural experience.

"I moved to Georgia before the war. I was going to return to Ukraine, but the beginning of the war broke out, so I could not. I had a very good childhood, mainly in Lugansk district. I had a much better childhood than today's children. During my childhood, we did not have Coca-Cola, the sausages sold in stores had a shelf life of only three days, and the milk had no additives. Life was good."

Zoya never had any problems with learning, but due to some personal reasons, she could not get into university. After failing the entrance exam, she struggled to find motivation and regain the strength to continue her professional development in the field of trade. However, she still managed to start working within her specialty and then worked at a shoe shop. During this period, the collapse of the Soviet Union occurred, resulting in more opportunities to earn money in the shop.

"I have lived in Georgia for a long time now, and I think we have more opportunities here than in Ukraine – and definitely better laws. It's very easy to start your own business here; for example, there is a soft tax policy. This is why I decided to start my own business. My idea is to open a mini-farm with goats, mainly because I love their milk," she says with an enthusiastic smile on her face.

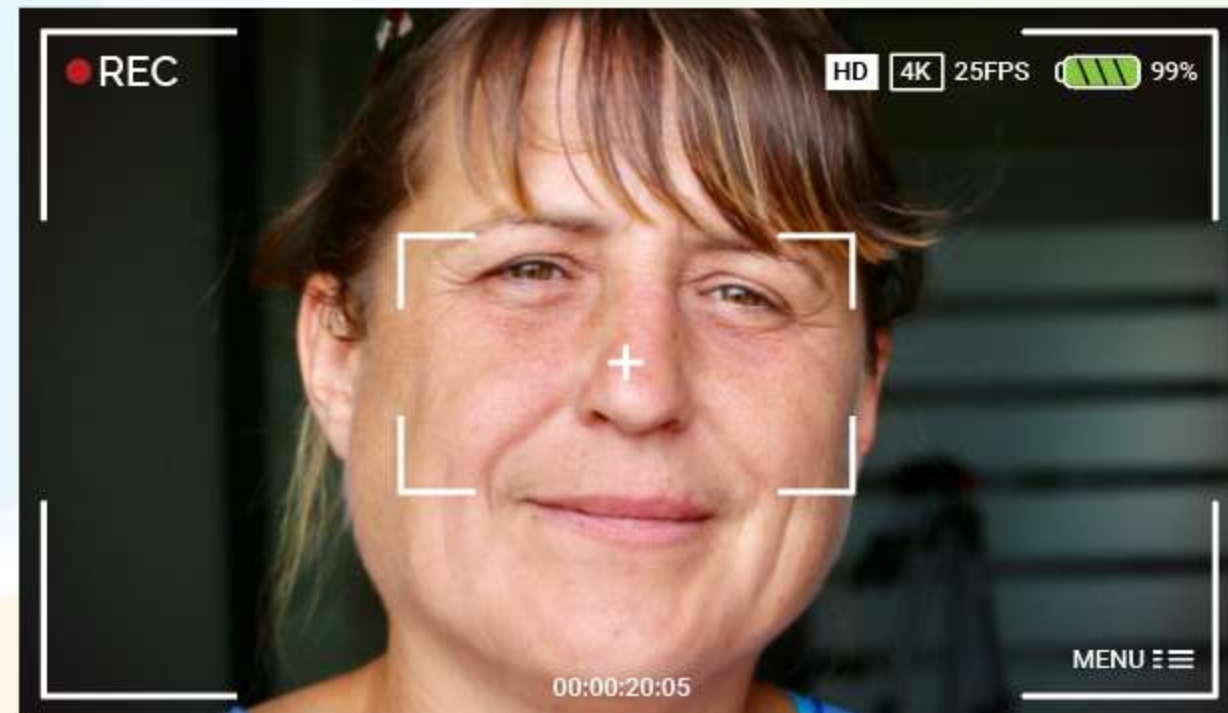
Everything started by accident. Originally, Zoya wanted to buy a goat for herself. Once she got one, she learned that goats were not so hard to take care of, and she realized this is what she wanted to do. "Goats are very cute, clean animals, as loyal as dogs. Taking care of them is relatively easy," she says.

Zoya knew that her unconditional love for animals, specifically goats, was not enough to start a business. Therefore, as soon as she found out about the training course "How to Start up a Business" [part of the project implemented by UN Women in partnership with UNHCR, grant component administered by the Georgian Farmers' Association], she immediately decided to apply.

"I was informed about the project as a refugee. There were three groups, in Arabic, Georgian and Russian, with about 50 people participating in total and 23 grants awarded. A few years ago, a similar project was financed, but only three business ideas were successful. So, this year, we were invited to take courses at the Academy of the Ministry of Finances of Georgia first. Very good training sessions were conducted, and most importantly, they were free of charge. I liked them so much that I would have paid for them. We focused on issues that I had not prioritized at all before then. As for the financial grant received, I am forever grateful for the opportunity it has given me. However, in order to fulfil my project, this funding is not enough. I only have five goats so far, and one would agree that isn't very many. After my goats breed, though, that problem will solve itself. I also own several birds, one family of ducks and a couple of chickens. The amount of financial grant I received was very helpful, and the free training was very much appreciated. I realized that the milk production niche is almost unoccupied, that goat farms worked well in Ukraine, and that goat

cheese is very beneficial to children. In the future, I will need more money to expand my production and buy special equipment."

After describing her future plans, Zoya generously shared some wisdom gained through the training sessions. "Any business requires time. When you start your business, you need to be prepared that for the first three or six months, you are not going to make a profit. In a few months, the goats will start producing milk, the birds will grow, and my business will progress."





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