

2019 RC/UNCT Report – DRAFT

Brief description of major development or political and economic events that have influenced the work of the UNCT.

Georgia lived through a politically turbulent year. The country experienced major political protests, the dismissal of the cabinet, splits in the legislative majority, resignation of the Speaker and Vice Speaker of Parliament and further polarization of the political scene. At the same time, the ruling Georgian Dream party remained in control of the situation, enjoying a constitutional majority in the parliament for most of the year and reshuffling the executive government as it found fit. By the end of the year the pressure on the government by the opposition has significantly increased, further highlighting uncertainty about its short- and medium-term prospects. Georgia also experienced heightened tensions and a worsening of the situation around Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The country remained firmly on its course of seeking deeper integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. EU and NATO membership aspirations were highly prominent in official and societal discourses. The government's attempts to further the prospects of normalizing relations with Russia were set back after the eruption of political protests in Tbilisi and some other locations in June 2019. As the year ends, the Russian ban on flights from/to Georgia, which was introduced in June, remains in place and contacts between high level representatives of the two countries that do not have diplomatic relations have remained at a minimum.

2019 was also the first year that Georgia applied the new constitutional arrangement that strengthened the powers of cabinet and parliament at the expense of the president. President Zurabishvili, who was elected in December 2018, remained an important public figure but the political process became more centered on the parliament and cabinet. Parliamentary institutions were further strengthened over the course of the year to enable them to meet their increased control and oversight functions. The progress with judicial and law enforcement reforms was less substantial and the government continued to draw civil society criticism for not fully delivering on these important institutional changes.

The parliament was also at the center of two major waves of political protests. As mentioned above, the first one took place in June and was a reaction to the incident with a Russian MP chairing the session of the Inter-parliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy (IAO) in the Georgian parliament. The Georgian government's permission for the Russian MP to take the prominent seat of the parliamentary speaker mobilized large portions of Georgian society that considered what happened as a direct affront to their dignity. The second wave of protests took place in mid November after the Parliament failed to vote with the necessary majority to implement one of the key promises made to the protesters in June – the introduction of a proportional electoral system for the 2020 parliamentary elections. The parliament failed to adopt the relevant bill, thus leaving the current mixed electoral system, which is widely perceived as benefitting the incumbent, in place for next year's parliamentary elections.

In-between the two waves of protests a new cabinet was put in office by the ruling Georgian Dream party. Giorgi Gakharia, who was previously Minister of Interior, was appointed Prime Minister at the beginning of September. As a candidate for the Prime Minister's job, Gakharia faced strong opposition from several political parties and various segments of civil society for his handling of the June protests and other actions as Interior Minister. In the weeks that followed, confirmation of the new (again single party) cabinet, Gakharia managed to improve his standing somewhat with different societal and international stakeholders and ensure coherent management of government affairs. The mid November

protests again raised questions about the government's ability to secure a high level of public support for the cabinet and, more generally, for the continuation of the Georgian Dream party's political course. The party and its leader, Ivanishvili, face the need to re-engage with broad segments of Georgian society after the failed November parliamentary vote.

Georgia also faced considerable difficulties in dealing with its protracted conflicts. The so-called process of borderization – demarcation, fencing, and re-enforcement of lines that de-facto Abkhaz and South Ossetian authorities consider to be borders of the breakaway regions – resulted in a major escalation of tensions along the administrative boundary line (ABL) between Tbilisi-controlled territory and South Ossetia. According to the EU Monitoring Mission, this is the largest escalation of tensions since 2008. The escalation took place on one of the disputed segments of the ABL; the existence of a large number of such disputed sections along the ABL constitutes fertile ground for exploiting the situation and periodically escalating tensions. Frequent closures of the crossing points on the ABLs to Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been another source of tensions and uncertainty that adversely affected the general situation, as well as freedom of movement and the socio-economic and humanitarian plight of the conflict-affected population.

The country's economic outlook remained generally positive in 2019. The economy continued to grow, although the World Bank's forecasts show that the real GDP growth of Georgia in 2019 will decline to 4.4 per cent while it hit 4.7 per cent in 2018. In 2020, growth will further dip to 4.3 per cent, but will recover in 2021, reaching 4.5 per cent. Georgia's decline in growth rate, the World Bank report states, will largely be a result of the Russian flight ban.

In the first half of 2019, net exports improved as a result of decreased imports and increased re-exports of used cars and copper ore, according to the World Bank. The World Bank also notes that investment contracted as infrastructure projects were completed and foreign direct investment declined. The decline in GDP rate and the contraction of investments might negatively affect the situation with employment. The last available figure is for 2018. During that year the unemployment rate decreased to 12.7 per cent; this decrease was reflected in a lowering of the poverty rate to 20.1 per cent in 2018.

Annual inflation in Georgia accelerated to 4.9 percent in July due to the weakening of the Georgia Lari (GEL) and higher tobacco excise taxes. In response, the authorities tightened the interest rate in early September by 50 basis points to 7 percent, notes the report. The National Bank of Georgia also increased refinancing rate to 7.5%.

In November, S&P upgraded Georgia's sovereign credit rating by one notch, leaving the country just two notches from investment-grade status. Moody's upgraded Georgia's credit rating to this level in 2017, followed by Fitch in February 2019.

Progress on the reform

Summarize any change in the Government's response towards the UNCT in response to the reform environment during this year.

UNDS reform is well received and understood by the Government that is further confirmed by their positive feedback during UNPSD annual review meeting of 1 May 2019. Another indication was the visit of President to the UN House during the UN Week in October 2019. She was only the second President

(after President Eduard Shevardnadze who was at the UN House when it opened in 1996) to visit the UN in Georgia. Throughout the year the President, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Head of the Administration of the Government of Georgia as well as all the line ministries were always accessible and Georgia has on many occasions voiced its support to the multilateral systems, in particular to the UN.

Summarize any change perceived by international development partners/donors towards the UNCT in response to the UN reform during this year.

Donor attitude has clearly changed during the last year in favor of the UN system in Georgia that is confirmed by the preliminary results of the ongoing UNPSD evaluation. An indication of that is the increased engagement of RC and UNCT with donors and especially the IFIs (WB, IMF, IFC, EBRD, EIB, ADB) which were previously not so much engaged. As a result of RC's efforts, EIB, EBRD and WB agreed to co-chair some of the government led 6 thematic coordination groups. The WB has also participated in the first CCA workshop and is actively contributing to the CCA process. Continuous engagement with the UN RC-led Development Partner coordination group has culminated in securing the Government's agreement to hold long awaited High-level Development Partnership Forum in December 2019. The forum is co-chaired by the Prime Minister and the UN RC and is the main venue of coordinating and regulating partnerships between the Government and the Development Partners.

Summarize any change in the UNCT's work in response to the new reform environment during this year.

Absolute majority of UNCT members supports the independent, neutral and empowered status of the RC and RCO. UNCT also moves to more coherent and collaborative approach in addressing the development challenges of the country and their proper reflection in UNSDCF. One of the examples is the joint programme of six agencies on transforming social protection for people living with disabilities, which received joint SDG funding and is covered in more details under joint initiatives section of the report. At present the UNCT in Georgia is finalizing its Common Country Analysis and UNCT GTG works on Country Gender Profile (Annex to CCA). In addition, it should be pointed out the Georgia was successful in applying to the Fund 2030 with a joint programme of six agencies on transforming social protection for people living with disabilities.

Summarize any new modalities of engagement with the DCO regional team? In what ways have you been supported? Please specify positive aspects as well as challenges.

RC and UNCT in Georgia were supported by a very professional and well-positioned Regional Team in Istanbul. UNCT and RCO colleagues participated in UNSDCF and BOS 2.0 regional workshops in Istanbul that proved to be extremely useful and informative. DCO Istanbul team has also been very efficient in providing quality ad-hoc support via e-mail and Skype.

Highlights on progress on joined up work

Summarize the three most significant achievements in delivering together for the 2030 Agenda.

1. In the Framework Convention of Tobacco Control (FCTC), WHO continues to provide support for implementation of a new Tobacco control law in Georgia, since its enforcement in May 2018. UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA are involved in the process. As a result, prices on cut tobacco products

have been increased, tax administrative mechanisms improved, and definition of e-cigarettes harmonized with an EU directive.

2. UNICEF supported the National Statistics Office (GeoStat) in finalizing implementation of the Multi Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS – round 6) which covered 48% of the SDG indicators. Throughout 2019 GeoStat and UNICEF’s Country and regional Offices developed and verified the data sets, prepared the report and – on 20 November – launched the results. The MICS was a joint undertaking to support the Government of Georgia in receiving most updated data for evidence-based policy and decision making in its efforts to achieve the SDGs. UNFPA, WHO, UNDP and the WB contributed financially to the MICS, as did SIDA, USAID, AFD, SDC, the Italian National Health Institute and the Georgian National Center for Disease Control (NCDC).
3. UNJP on Gender (supported by SiDA and implemented by UN Women, UNDP and UNFPA) has significantly contributed to the implementation of SDGs 5 and 8. The project has produced important (and missing) data and evidence to create baselines, set up indicators and targets for relevant SDGs.

Support to national government in the advancing the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and activities related on the 2030 Agenda.

Georgia’s progress in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was discussed on 22 January 2019 at the annual meeting of the national Council on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Chaired by the Administration of the Government of Georgia and the United Nations, the SDG Council brought together over 130 representatives of the Georgian Government, United Nations, civil society, private sector, academic institutions and international organisations. The SDG Council focused on Georgia’s national goals related to climate change and environment, education and economic growth and SDG tracker, a new electronic system to keep monitor progress on more than 200 national SDG indicators.

The MAPS validation workshop organized by the United Nations and the Georgian government on 7-8 May 2019 identified “bottlenecks” and “accelerators” in the country’s progress towards the SDGs. Workshop participants provided their feedbacks and policy recommendations, as well as validated the outcomes of the alignment exercise that scanned about 55 national and subnational strategies and analyzed the extent of coverage and policy gaps in these documents. The findings in terms of strategic alignment were broadly positive. Concluding document of the workshop “Addressing SDG Acceleration and Policy Support: Drivers for Sustainable Development in Georgia” was produced.

Thousands of Georgians gathered in the town of Ambrolauri, Racha, on 7 June to take part in the country’s second national Sustainable Development Goals Festival, organized by the United Nations in Georgia. Festival goers learned how the SDGs are making a difference in people’s lives. There was also a focus on efforts in the Racha region to achieve the SDGs, especially in agriculture, the green economy, energy, and urban development. Combining art exhibitions, films screenings, sports, interactive seminars and workshops, and speeches by academics, artists, authors, business leaders, and government officials, the SDG Festival has become a cultural event.

About 3,000 young people took part in the SDG Scientific Picnic, SDG briefings organized in public schools and universities, the Youth forum on SDGs and the Model UN conferences on SDGs in Tbilisi and Batumi organized by the United Nations in Georgia together with NGOs and educational institutions.

The United Nations in Georgia marked the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence this year under the theme: "Every Woman has a Story!" to put the spotlight on the voices of survivors and activists. The UN agencies also joined forces and produced a joint video address to raise public awareness and mobilise people to end violence against women and girls. UN (and EU Delegation) supported the government of Georgia to plan and launch the governmental campaign during 16 Days of Activism.

The United Nations Office in Georgia teamed up with Tbilisi and Kutaisi municipalities, NGOs and young volunteers to organize eco-friendly activities that will further motivate young people and public institutions to reduce their carbon footprint. 570 trees were planted in celebration of United Nations Day that will soon be enduring additions to the Kutaisi and Tbilisi landscapes.

Support to government and other stakeholders in building national capacity to implement human rights and other universal UN norms and standards, and progress in advocacy of human rights and other UN system values, standards, and principles.

Chaired by the then Prime Minister of Georgia, Mr. Mamuka Bakhtadze held the first meeting in five years to consider main human rights challenges in the country and the state of the implementation of the National Human Rights Action Plan . UN presented its work on capacity building of the Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to investigate allegations of torture by law enforcement agencies, and also pointed out the need for Georgia to urgently submit late reports on the implementation of International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the UN CAT.

On 19 June, UN presented a public report mentions steps taken to create the new Office of the State Inspector of Georgia which has the mandate for investigating allegations of serious human rights abuses by law enforcement agencies. The creation of the Office was the result of over 5 years of advocacy by NGOs, NHRI, UN and a number of embassies.

The investigative mandate of the State Inspector's Service was launched on November 1. The Prime Minister, the State Inspector of Georgia Londa Toloraia, the then First Deputy Chairperson of the Parliament, Minister of Justice, EU Ambassador to Georgia and the UN RC opened the event dedicated to the launch.

UN in Georgia engaged in advocacy on rights of LGBTQI+ persons, including in the context of combatting discrimination against the LGBTQI+ persons and promotion and protection of the right to peaceful assembly of LGBTQI+ persons. UN (RC a.i., UNDP, OHCHR) participated in a number of meetings involving the diplomatic community and the Ministry of Internal Affairs to advocate for adequate protection of assemblies of LGBTQI+ persons, including a planned "Tbilisi Pride" in light of the opposition to such gatherings the Orthodox Church and extremist homophobic groups. UN coordinated a statement by the diplomatic community on the occasion of the IDAHOT day calling for the end of violence and discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons in Georgia (http://www.ungeorgia.ge/eng/news_center/media_releases?info_id=680#.XdROP1czaUk) A small Pride parade took place in Tbilisi on July 8.

UN continued to support the right to a fair trial by continuing capacity building of the Georgian Bar Association (GBA). In 5 total 88 defence lawyers (36 of whom are female) were trained in international human rights standards including prohibition of torture and discrimination.

In January 2019 UN finalized a 180-page Human Rights Module for the Police Academy. The Module developed at the request of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) of Georgia. The Police Academy plans to use the Module to train all 1100 investigators in the Ministry. In March UN delivered training on the Module to the 23 police trainers (3 female) who will be training the cadre of investigators on human rights using the Module.

Progress on preparedness, crisis and Post-crisis transition results achieved in cooperation with UN peacekeeping, peace building, political, and humanitarian actors.

Georgia is entering the important endeavor in the humanitarian arena - on 25 – 28 June the country was hosting the INSARAG (International Search and Rescue Advisory Group) capacity assessment mission. The mission produced a 2-year roadmap for Georgia articulating steps and milestones required to fulfill before INSARAG classification. Following the endorsement of the roadmap, the Government requested classification from INSARAG in June 2021. The respective capacity development activities led by the German Government (which is Georgia's tutor) are underway in line with the roadmap timelines.

The DMCT Technical Group (TG) and Steering Group (SG) meetings were held on a regular basis targeting on implementation of Minimum and Advanced Preparedness Actions (MPA/APA), as well as comprising informative and educational component. The DMCT risk assessment and analysis was revisited and updated every 6 months. The extensive inter-agency work resulted in the finalization of the contingency plans (IACP) for the water-caused hazards and Tbilisi earthquake.

The DMCT Crisis Communication training was carried out in February, 2019 and resulted in the development of the 2-year roadmap for DMCT aimed at crisis communication capacity development in Georgia.

To support the work of the humanitarian and development community overall in Abkhazia, the UN RC leads the Abkhazia Strategic Partnership (ASP) which coordinates the work of all agencies active on the territory.

Highlight key challenges in your joint work collaborating so countries can achieve the SDGs.

Key challenge in this area is insufficient SDG ownership by the Government. It has to be strengthened so that SDGs are incorporated in the Government strategic planning at all levels. Another challenge is lack of quality data to measure progress in certain areas as well as analysis of available data. Understanding of SDGs also needs strengthening beyond the Government with the civil society, academia and private business as well as the public at large.

Results of joint approaches

To illustrate the impact of joint work, describe the results of joint approaches by the UNCT.

FAO and UNDP collaborated to support the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture in the development of Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy of Georgia 2021-2027. The strategy was prepared under the European Neighbourhood Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (ENPARD), with the engagement of all the relevant state agencies and other stakeholders.

During 2019, UNDP, UNICEF, OHCHR and ILO finalized their UNJP Human Rights for All funded by the EU which supported the Government of Georgia in the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan for the Protection of Human Rights.

Joint WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA efforts resulted in WHO mission to Abkhazia for the rapid assessment of Health Systems. Mission report is finalized and available.

Joint UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women under UNJP on gender efforts helped to improve legislative and policy frameworks in areas such as education, violence against women and domestic violence and labor rights.

Highlight new partnerships formed in the last year.

FAO, UNDP, UNIDO and IOM formed a new partnership under the initiative of the European Union - “EU Innovative Action for Private Sector Competitiveness in Georgia”. The overall objective of this UNJP is to enhance entrepreneurship and business sophistication by strengthening the capacities of government and local entities to develop and operate clusters and supporting companies directly with strategic investments and better connecting to diaspora groups.

Most of the new partnerships in the Gender Equality area have been created with the private sector: 35 companies have been implementing Women’ Economic Principles: Equality Means Business, aimed at empowering women at work place, market place and in the community. Work with the private sector has been contributing to the implementation of the Human Rights Strategy and Action Plan (2018-2020) as well as to nationalized SDGs, especially SDGs 3,4,5, 8 and 11.

Another new partnership was formed between UNICEF, UNDP, OHCHR, UNFPA, UN Women and WHO within the framework of a joint programme funded by the Joint SDG Fund. The details of this new JP are provided in the section below on resource mobilization.

The UN Coordination Group on Youth has been created with participation of UNFPA, UNDP, UNICEF, ILO and UNIDO to support implementation of the UN Strategy on Youth and coordinate programming in this area; the coordination group has launched a new partnership with the Parliament Committee on Youth and Sport Issues and the newly established Youth Agency under the Prime Minister of Georgia and has been supporting the elaboration of the updated National Youth Policy 2030, as well as recommendations for establishing the sustainable platform for structured dialogue with youth, through a participatory process and consultations with youth.

Highlight results of joint resource mobilization where possible.

Led by UNICEF a new multi-donor partnership for implementation of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) in Georgia included USAID, WHO, AFD, SDC, UNFPA, the WB, UNDP, Sida, the Italian National Health Institute, and the National Center for Diseases Control and Public Health at a national level. UNFPA also provided technical support in terms of integrating SRHR related indicators in the MICS questionnaire.

UNICEF, UNDP, OHCHR, UNFPA, UN Women and WHO jointly elaborated a programme proposal for the Joint SDG Fund aiming at transforming the situation people with disabilities in Georgia, who remain one of the most excluded population groups in Georgian society. Implementation period of this UNJP is January 2020 to January 2022. UNICEF will serve as the convening agent.

UN Women and UNFPA joined forces within the framework of a joint regional programme on ending violence against women, which has been submitted for a possible funding by EU/ DG NEAR.

Highlight innovations in programme and operations to address key development challenges.

UN Women has been continuing its innovative work using behavioral insight/science, to understand and change attitudes and perceptions of teachers. The study conducted by Georgian think-tank CRRC has been completed in 4Q/2019 and will serve to identify entry points to influence positive changes in teachers behavior, aimed at reporting the cases of domestic violence to relevant laws enforcement agencies/ services.

UNICEF's work with religious leaders of all denominations in Georgia is an innovative approach to the promotion and protection of child rights in the country. Priests, imams and leaders of other religious denominations are trained by UNICEF in child rights with the aim to mobilize them as agents of social change and to work with parents and other stakeholders in their communities to address key child rights issues in Georgia, e.g. to end violence against children and to complete deinstitutionalization, including remaining institutions for children run by religious communities.

UNFPA continued its collaboration with the Inter-Religious Council uniting all religious confessions in Georgia for strengthening prevention of child/forced/early marriage and domestic violence. A series of information sharing and advocacy meetings held with religious leaders resulted in mobilizing support of religious confessions for prevention of harmful practices and domestic violence against women and girls and elaboration of the resource package for clerics to help them in communication with their parish.

UNFPA has been promoting gender equality through partnership with Sports - the Georgian Football Federation and FC Locomotive Tbilisi; through various activities and advocacy and communication events the partners have been supporting engagement of men as non-violent and caring partners and fathers and empowerment of adolescent girls.

UNFPA organized the innovative *What's Changed* regional conversation on **Fertility, families and women's empowerment** – as part of a series of thought leadership conversations on ICPD, organized by UNFPA globally, leading to the Nairobi Summit in November, 2019. This conversation has generated unique knowledge base drawing on the insights of government and civils society representatives from Armenia and Georgia and the leading experts in the field, on delivering the ICPD agenda, as well as creating a new understanding of how ICPD commitments must be fully realized and also adapted to current realities.

The Common Position was written by WHO/Europe and experts from FAO, ILO, IOM, OHCHR, UNAIDS, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHABITAT, UNHCR, UNICEF, UNOPS, UNODC, UNWOMEN, UNECE, and the Stop TB Partnership. The goal is to identify innovative ways to provide support to the country teams and partners to address HIV, TB and viral hepatitis and their social, economic and environmental determinants, across Europe and central Asia. The document is a resource for planning, implementing and monitoring intersectoral collaboration in this regard. Georgia is one of the four pilot countries for operationalization of the Position, and the first mission has been conducted by an international consultant in May 2019.

Upcoming opportunities in the next year

Indicate potential opportunities for the UN Country Team to support national partners in integrated development policy and programme development.

The SDGs will continue to constitute an extremely important area for UNCT to support national partners in integrated development policy and programme development. In late 2019, the process of nationalization of SDGs was finalized after a break of over a year. Also, the thematic SDG working groups under the SDG Council were revived and their co-chairs reconfirmed. It is expected that among other things, the UNCT will support the Government in the Acceleration and Policy Support as well as the preparing for the next Voluntary National Review (VNR).

Human Rights Plan for 2021 and beyond is a great opportunity to join forces and provide integrated policy support to national partners; the UNCT has created a HR group in August 2019.

The UNCT will continue to promote effective and coordinated measures on women's political and economic empowerment, combatting violence against women and domestic violence and in the field of women, peace and security.

Implementation of the Decentralization Strategy (to be adopted) is another opportunity how to support for local planning and budgeting in a coordinated/ integrated manner;

Also, UNICEF and its governmental and non-governmental partners will join efforts to support the Government and Parliament of Georgia in developing policies and programmes aiming at implementation of the new Code on the Rights of the Child.

Potential challenges

Potential challenges include shrinking donor funding, frequent staff changes within the Government and upcoming 2020 parliamentary elections. Also, access to the conflict affected regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are expected to remain problematic, with no access to South Ossetia for international organizations, and limitations in access to Abkhazia through unilateral measures of the de facto authorities.