

# COVID-19

## GNWP Mitigation and Adaptation Strategy and Appeal

October 2020

### Country Update

# Georgia

#### Context and government response:

Georgia remains the country with the fewest COVID-19 cases in the region, and one of the countries with the fewest cases globally. As of October 20, 2020, Georgia has registered 18,633 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 143 deaths. The country has been praised for its swift and decisive restriction measures, as well as its approach to COVID-19 treatment. Special measures, including restrictions of movement, group gatherings and a curfew were introduced on March 30, 2020 the Prime Minister. Citizens aged 70 and over have been banned from leaving their houses, and checkpoints for thermal screenings have been set up in different parts of the country. This contributed to a slower spread of the disease which allowed for better care. All patients diagnosed with COVID-19 received in-hospital treatment, which may have contributed to the reduced death rate. In April 2020, Georgia began to gradually lift the lockdown measures, and the state of emergency was lifted on May 23, 2020. Most businesses have reopened and all outdoor activities and gatherings have been allowed to resume. However, requirements for wearing face masks in all enclosed public spaces, and restrictions on indoors event persist.

#### Impact on women and on peace and security:

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, there has been no significant increase in domestic violence reports during the pandemic. However, the civil society is concerned that the numbers have increased under lockdown, but may be underreported. Activists are also concerned that women in the breakaway regions may be more exposed to cases of domestic violence. However, since Abkhazia does not have a law that prohibits such violence, they would be unable to seek redress.

According to GNWP partners, hate-speech is also on the rise: whenever a foreign citizen or representative of ethnic minority tests positive for the virus, the hate-speech intensifies.

The pandemic has also had an impact on the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. A checkpoint between Georgia and South Ossetia was closed in September 2019, which has made access to information, medical supplies and food challenging, especially for the elderly. When the first cases of COVID-19 were announced, all other checkpoints were also closed, making the flow of aid and information impossible. In Gali, Abkhazia, doctors do not have access to sufficient protective equipment and hygiene products. The Georgian government opened a hospital dedicated to COVID-19 patients from Abkhazia in the neighboring Zugdidi municipality, however GNWP partners report that civil society has expressed concerns over guaranteeing safe transport of patients through the checkpoints. GNWP and its partners have also received reports of pregnant women being turned away from the checkpoints when they tried to cross to give birth in larger and better equipped hospitals, raising concerns that the pandemic might negatively affect women's maternal health in Abkhazia.

Women in Abkhazia have also been affected economically. Since many of them relied on export of agricultural products (mostly citrus) and tourism industry for their income, the closure of the borders with both Georgia and Russia has seriously impeded their livelihoods. Activists are also concerned that women may be more exposed to cases of domestic violence; however, since Abkhazia does not have a law that prohibits such violence, they would be unable to seek redress.

#### Response by women peacebuilders:

IDP Women's Association "Consent" is leading an advocacy campaign targeted at the Government to ensure that IDP needs and vulnerabilities are adequately addressed amid the COVID-19 crisis. The advocacy is based on the IASC Guidance on Scaling-up COVID-19 Outbreak in Readiness and Response Operations in Camps and Camp-like Settings.

“Consent” has also started a disinfection campaign in IDP collective centres in Shida Kartli – providing large containers of disinfectants and raising awareness about the importance of disinfecting hands and surfaces. “Consent” volunteers are also distributing information booklets among IDPs, and delivering medicine and food to the elderly. “Consent” also supplies women’s groups with materials to sew protective masks for distribution in IDP centers in Shavshvebi, Zeda Etseri and Zugdidi.

The Women’s Information Center (WIC) has begun campaigns to raise awareness about domestic violence and the available services for victims and survivors, in particular among ethnic minorities, as they often do not have access to information due to a linguistic barrier. WIC is also leading advocacy efforts targeting the co-chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, other international actors, as well as the Prime Minister of Georgia to raise awareness about the COVID-19 situation in Gali, Abkhazia and Akhgori, South Ossetia/Tskhinvali regions. These regions tend to live in double isolation because of the closure of the checkpoints that separate them from the rest of Georgia in September 2019. When the first cases of COVID-19 were announced, all checkpoints between Georgia and South Ossetia were closed, making the flow of aid and information impossible.

GNWP and its partner - Women’s Information Center – also conducted a 4-day online training for journalists on gender-responsive and conflict-sensitive reporting on COVID-19. Following the training, a media competition was launched. This led to an increase in COVID-19 reporting that addresses women’s specific needs, and documents women-led responses to the pandemic.