



**OFFICE OF THE STATE MINISTER
OF GEORGIA FOR RECONCILIATION
AND CIVIC EQUALITY**

Report on the Implementation of Activities in 2017

January, 2017

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Introduction

The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia covers two main directions: promoting/implementing reconciliation, confidence-building, and engagement policy in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and peaceful resolution of the conflicts, on one hand, and fostering the protection of the rights of the ethnic minorities living in Georgia, and ensuring their equality and civic integration, on the other one. The purpose of the Office of the State Minister is to elaborate, coordinate, and implement state policy in the above-mentioned directions. The Office of the State Minister, due to its specific character, carries out its activities in close cooperation with other state agencies, international intergovernmental organizations, and international or local nongovernmental organizations.

Creating a beneficial environment for reconciliation, confidence-building, and greater engagement of the population in the occupied territories is one of the key priorities of the Office of the State Minister. For this purpose, the Government of Georgia pursues a peaceful, open, pragmatic, and constructive course of action.

Creating a favorable environment for reconciliation, confidence-building, and greater engagement of the population in the occupied territories is one of the key priorities

In 2017, the Office of the State Minister developed a vision based on eight objectives of the policy of peace. The main directions of this policy are: maintaining and ensuring peace; de-occupation of the occupied territories, and de-escalation with regard to Russia; also direct dialogue, confidence-building and reconciliation with regard to Abkhazian and Ossetian communities; cooperation based on mutual interests, status-neutral and humanitarian formats of problem solving; taking care of the conflict-affected people, population living adjacent to the occupation lines, residents of the occupied territories, and IDPs; offering more services and opportunities in the state space of Georgia/easing access for residents of the occupied territories to these services and opportunities; sharing the new opportunities and benefits stemming from the formats of cooperation and rapprochement with EU and other partners; mobilization of international support to the peace policy objectives, effective cooperation with the international community and partners, and the effective use/activation of international mechanisms.

Protecting the rights of ethnic minorities, ensuring their full and decent participation in the country's development, and fostering creation and further strengthening of a tolerant environment is the country's key priority. The State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020 serves to achieve those goals. The strategy is an important instrument of the civic equality and integration policy which was approved on August 17, 2015 by Decree #1740 of the Government of Georgia. The strategy is based on the principle of equality and *more diversity, more integration* approach which aims at ensuring equality, the full-fledged participation of ethnic minorities in every sphere of public life as well as protection of the culture and identity.

Protecting the rights of ethnic minorities, ensuring their full and decent participation in the country's development, and fostering the introduction and empowerment of a tolerant environment is the strategic goal of civic integration policy

I. Occupied Territories

1. Current State of Affairs

20% of Georgia's territory remains occupied by Russia's armed forces. The process of installation of barbwire and other artificial barriers along the occupation lines and ongoing occupation as well as de facto annexation of Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia by Russian Federation is continued through deepening its relations with these regions, including their full integration into Russia.

Since 2008, more than 250 different illegal agreements were signed between the Russian Federation and Sokhumi and Tskhinvali, among them so-called Treaty on alliance and integration signed with Tskhinvali on March 18, 2015, and the so-called Treaty on alliance and strategic partnership signed with Sokhumi on November 24, 2014; all of them violate the fundamental principles of international law and demonstrates the *de-facto* annexation of Georgian territories by Russia. Also, so-called coordination centers of the interior ministries were created in both regions. Illegal treaties were also signed on "*Inclusion of Certain Units of the Armed Forces of South Ossetia in the Russian Armed Forces*" and on the "*Creation of a Joint group of armed forces of the Russian Federation and Republic of Abkhazia*."

The Russian Federation continues the intense militarization of Georgia's occupied territories. Illegal military drills are conducted regularly in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia; South Ossetian group of armed forces participates in the drills conducted by Russia's 58th Army.

In March 2017 the occupation regime shut down two crossing points in the direction of Abkhazia: Khurcha-Nabakevi and Otobaia-Orsantia. Consequently, Enguri Bridge remains the only crossing point (except of Saberio-Pakhulani crossing point which is for technical and transport use by “Enguri HPP employees.”). The closure of these crossing points has further complicated freedom of movement, trade contacts, and access to education and other public services, and deteriorated the conditions of the local population.

Humanitarian issues: Situation in Gali district, where ethnic discrimination continues and education in Georgian language is restricted, is especially grave. Since 2016-2017 academic year, teaching of the Georgian language up to 6th grade has been prohibited in the remaining 10 schools in Gali District which hold the status of a Georgian school (this year, the school in the village of Tagiloni was closed down, and the schoolchildren and teachers were forced to move to Nabakevi School). That is a continuation of the so-called Russification policy. In addition, no Georgian-language kindergartens operate in the Gali District, which is a gross violation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international legal instruments. These restrictions have dramatically diminished the number of students crossing the occupation line to receive education in Georgia-controlled territories. This Russification policy was replicated in Akhagori District as well. This year, all schools moved to the so-called unified educational system of South Ossetia with all primary school grades (through 4th grade) delivered in the Russian language (until September 2017, six of the eleven schools were Georgian). A similar process is underway in the secondary schools of the village of Sinaguri in the occupied section of Sachkhere District and the village of Akhalsheni in the occupied section of Kareli District. The occupation regime’s policy toward population in Gali District is not limited to close down crossing points and prohibit teaching in the Georgian language. There are attempts to make ethnic Georgians to denounce their national identity. De facto authorities force the population of Gali District to denounce their Georgian last names and assume Abkhazian ones, calling it “a return to historical roots (Samurzakano Abkhazians).” According to the latest statistics for 2017 provided by the Council of the Samurzakano Abkhazians NGO, 300 applications to change last names and nationality were filed in Gali District.

Situation in Gali District is grave where ethnic discrimination is continued

De facto regime is trying to obliterate the Georgian trace from the occupied territory of Abkhazia. These steps are being taken purposefully not only to change people’s identity, but also to change the names of cities, villages, and streets.

Along with the process of identity change imposed on the population of Gali District, which relates to the issue of claiming so-called Abkhazian passports, the population is called upon to obtain “temporary residence permits” (came into force on April 1, 2016) along with the so-called Law on the Legal Status of Foreign Citizens in the Republic of Abkhazia.

The so-called residence permit may be obtained by those who reside on the territory of Abkhazia for 10 years at least since 1999. The holders of this “document” are deprived of right to leave the territory of Abkhazia for a period longer than 6 months, also of participating in elections and political processes, and of exercising property rights in Abkhazia. In addition, the absence of the so-called residence permit restricts freedom of movement for Gali population. Until now 4054 applications have been filed, and 968 have been upheld.

Under these circumstances, it is a foremost priority to protect the rights of those living in the occupied territories, and to solve their everyday and humanitarian concerns. Equally important task is to find ways to solve the issues of access to agricultural lands and medical and other services, of ensuring contact between relatives and people living on either side of the dividing lines, along with humanitarian problems, all of which has been caused by restrictions to freedom of movement, barbed wires, and other artificial barriers. This, in turn, is part of the complex strategy seeking to ensure de-occupation and peaceful conflict-resolution.

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Support of the UNGA Resolution on the Status of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and Tskhinvali Region/ South Ossetia, Georgia is vitally important. The Government of Georgia spares no effort to enforce the fulfilment of the requirements listed in the resolution and ensure a safe and dignified return of refugees and IDPs to their homes.

1.1. Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) Meetings

The state of affairs in the occupied territories and other problematic issues, are regularly discussed within different international formats and forums. Consultations with international partners and organizations are held on a regular basis, including with the EU, the US, the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, and the international community.

The second working group under the Geneva International Discussions, which considers the issue of a safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees to their homes and other humanitarian issues, is led by

the First Deputy Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality of Georgia. Four rounds under the Geneva Discussions were held in 2017 (in total 42 rounds of negotiations have been held).

Under the Geneva International Discussions, the Georgian side proposed the following issues for discussion:

- Non-use of force, ensuring the population's safety and a safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees;
- Situation in Georgia's occupied territories and human rights violations;
- Close down of the so-called crossing points;
- Problems stemming from the installation of barbed wires and other barriers;
- Illegal militarization;
- Murders, kidnappings, racketeering, and other criminal offenses;
- Prohibition of education in native language;
- Protection of property rights;
- Protection of cultural heritage;
- Protection of children's rights.

At recent rounds within humanitarian group's meetings special priority has been given to the consideration of situation in the areas populated by ethnic Georgians in the occupied territories. In this regard, situation in Gali and Akhgori districts are under special focus. In particular, the issue of limitations to education in native language in Gali remains one of the most alarming topics. All necessary steps will be taken to inform the international community and mobilize support. With support of international partners active work is continued to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights.

The Geneva International Discussions propose debates on such issues as cooperation on archives, environment protection, provision of potable and irrigation water, putting in place infrastructure, and others related to the local population's everyday needs. Relevant work, and cooperation to some extent, is underway and will continue and develop with the Georgian side's constructive and humanitarian approaches and active support from international partners. In order to develop effective mechanisms to protect box trees in Abkhazia and eradicate different pests, a meeting between Georgian and Abkhazian specialists, who discussed the situation, challenges, and future steps was held in Vienna, Austria in April 2017.

The Office of the State Minister is actively engaged in the work of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM). The Office's representative, once a month, participate in meetings in Ergneti and Gali, during which different human rights violations in Georgia's occupied territories are discussed on a regular basis. In this context, we should mention unlawful arrests and detentions of local residents for "illegally" crossing the dividing line. In addition, IPRM meetings invariably discuss

such issues as bringing to justice the murderer of Giga Otkhozoria, violence, coerced labor, kidnaping for ransom, murder, and property appropriation, and installation of barbed wires and other artificial barriers. With the efforts of the Georgian side, Giorgi Giunashvili was released from illegal detention on November 26, 2017.

1.2. New Peace Policy Initiatives

The Georgian Government prioritizes confidence-building and direct dialogue with the Abkhazian and Ossetian communities, so that the years-long alienation may be replaced by confidence-building and the population living on either side of the dividing lines may enjoy concrete ways to solve problems.

In 2017, the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, in cooperation with other state institutions, developed a new peace policy initiative based on the interests and needs of the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, while also serving the purpose of dialogue, reconciliation, and confidence-building between above-mentioned communities. The initiative seeks to use humanitarian and status-neutral approaches to encourage trade relations, so that the economic relations along the dividing lines may expand, to offer the population in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region new ways and opportunities to enjoy economic benefits. Status-neutral approaches imply de-politicization of issues while implementing concrete humanitarian tasks. These initiatives seek to improve significantly the social and economic conditions of the population on both sides of the dividing lines, also to have a positive impact on freedom of movement and to deepen people-to-people contacts.

The Office of the State Minister in cooperation with other state institutions developed a new peace policy initiative

The peace initiative also aims at expanding and easing education in the state education space for the populations of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, ensuring access to every level of education, and access to quality education and international education.

One of the most important direction of the peace initiative is to protect and preserve the Abkhazian language. On October 27, 2017 the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia signed a memorandum of cooperation, under which the parties will join efforts to protect, preserve, develop, and promote the Abkhazian language, foster cooperation between Georgian and Abkhazian specialists and professional groups working on relevant issues and encourage the implementation of confidence-building projects. In addition, the Ministry of Education and Science will develop the state program for the protection and development

One of the most important directions of peace initiative is to protect and preserve the Abkhazian language

of the Abkhazian language, under which scholars and other stakeholders will be able to propose initiatives and receive financing for studying, protecting, and developing the Abkhazian language.

One of the key objectives of the Office of the State Minister is to make the benefits of Georgia's European integration, including the Association Agreement, available in the long run to the population of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. In this regard, visa waiver in the EU member states is yet another tangible benefit that must be equally accessible to the populations of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. To ensure access of visa-free travel, the Office of the State Minister, under the peace initiative, developed legislative amendments aimed at easing the procedures of Georgian passport issuance to persons living in the occupied territories.

1.3. Implementation of the Engagement Action Plan

The Government of Georgia is committed to provide the population of the occupied territories of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia with all rights and privileges enjoyed by every citizen of Georgia. To this end, the activities under the engagement strategy continue.

1.3.1. Healthcare

Free healthcare services is one of the most successful directions of the engagement strategy. Those living in the occupied territories enjoy a variety of state-run programs, most importantly the Referral Service State Program. For participation in this program, residents of the occupied territories apply to the Office of the State Minister, which serves as a mediator between them and the Ministry of Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia. The state takes steps to keep the program bureaucracy-free. Since 2017, the residents of Gali District have also been able to use the Referral Program.

Free healthcare service is one of the most successful directions of the engagement strategy

Despite the barbed wires and extremely complicated movement across the dividing line, the numbers of Tskhinvali Region's residents seeking treatment have grown tremendously compared to 2012. 70% of those seeking medical treatment come to the rest of Georgia through the Larsi Crossing Point, though in some cases they risk their lives bypassing barbed wires and the occupation regime to enter Georgia-controlled territories. In addition, the numbers of the patients from Abkhazia engaged in the Referral Program have grown several times. Lately, growing overall dynamics have been recorded in this context. The Universal Healthcare Program launched by the Government of Georgia in February 2013 covers all age groups of neutral passport holders from the occupied regions.

The Hepatitis C Elimination Program, launched in April 2015 under the initiative of the central authorities covers citizens living in the occupied territories. It is an additional benefit involving expensive medical treatment free of charge, which aims at saving human lives. This issue is especially urgent for the population of both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. In March 2017 the Hepatitis C Management Center was opened in Zugdidi serving persons living in the occupied territories and enabling them to participate in the Hepatitis C Elimination Program based on status-neutral documents.

Through the Coordination Mechanism created as part of the Action Plan of the State Strategy for Engagement and operating under the UNDP, citizens living in the Region of Abkhazia regularly receive different medications and vaccines, the annual value of which exceeds 500,000 GEL. Throughout 2017, Abkhazia received immunization vaccines, hepatitis B vaccines, hepatitis C tests, diabetes medicines, and TB and AIDS medications.

Thanks to the Coordination Mechanism, Abkhazia received ambulances, medical devices, equipment, tools, and other medical items.

In 2017, the Government spent about 4,000,000 GEL (in 2013-2016 more than 18,000,000 GEL) on healthcare services for the population of the occupied territories.

For easing the use of healthcare services, a multi-profile university clinic with 220 rooms and a dorm was built in the village of Rukhi, near Zugdidi, near the occupation line, to serve, among others, the residents of the occupied regions. Currently, the clinic is being furnished with modern equipment.

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1.3.2. Education

On January 11, 2017, amendments were made to the December 1, 2009 Decree of the Minister of Education and Science of Georgia on the Approval of the Recognition of Higher Education Received in the Occupied Territories. According to these amendments, persons living in the occupied territories can file applications online or through international organizations for the recognition of their higher education, including in the Abkhazian language. International organizations can become involved in the recognition procedures and submit on behalf of stakeholders documents on higher education received in the occupied territories, which will allow for education recognition without having to travel in the rest of Georgia and producing witnesses. In addition, the requirement was abolished to provide Georgian IDs. These changes reduce technical obstacles for recognition of education in the occupied territories and gives an opportunity to persons living in the occupied territories to continue their education in the rest of Georgia and/or abroad.

In order to encourage the population of the occupied territories to make use of education opportunities in the rest of Georgia, the Government of Georgia continues implementing special “1+4 Program”, which enables persons living in the occupied territories to enroll in higher education institutions operating in the country based on simplified procedures.

In 2016-2017 academic year, the state financed education for 91 students from the occupied territory of Abkhazia (Gali District and the Kodori Gorge), as well as for students from the villages adjacent to the dividing line.

1.3.3. Cultural Heritage

Georgian cultural, historical, and religious monuments in the occupied territories worsens on a daily basis. The process of purposeful destruction of ancient, mostly Georgian monuments and replacement of centuries-old Georgian churches and monasteries with new, non-Georgian style churches continues.

The interagency working group, established under the Office of the State Minister, prepared a document on the Georgian monuments of cultural, historical, and religious heritage in the occupied territories and illegal archeology in Abkhazia. These materials were referred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A list of monuments of cultural heritage was defined by the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection, and negotiations with UNESCO were led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Office of the State Minister has repeatedly reported to Georgia’s Parliamentary Committees the situation with destroy of the monuments of cultural heritage in the occupied territories. The Office’s representatives are also actively participating in the meetings of the State Inter-agency Commission established by the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection.

1.3.4. Communication between Divided Communities

The Government of Georgia continues implementation of projects for establishing effective communication between divided communities and for ensuring confidence-building, along with promoting citizen diplomacy. The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality uses every opportunity to establish communication with the Abkhazian and Ossetian communities, and actively works on the creation of new dialogue and confidence-building opportunities. The representatives of the Office of the State Minister consistently participate in different projects supported by international organizations seeking to ensure confidence-building and thematic dialogue between the communities divided by conflict. One of the meetings was held in July 2017, in Berlin, with the participation of representatives of the Georgian and Abkhazian communities, including politicians, experts, and representatives of international organizations. Also, the representatives of the

Office of the State Minister also participated in 13 Georgian-Abkhazian and one Georgian-Ossetian meeting facilitated by international and non-governmental organizations both in Georgia-controlled territories and abroad. The goal of these meetings was to facilitate dialogue and confidence-building between the communities divided by conflict, along with participation in joint study- visits, discussions on education, healthcare, trade, environment, current challenges, etc.

1.3.5. Projects by the Council of Europe

In close cooperation with the Office of the State Minister, and with involvement of the Coordination Mechanism, various confidence-building projects of the Council of Europe were implemented in 2017, seeking to facilitate meetings in neutral territories between different professional groups living on either side of the dividing lines.

- Presentations (in Tbilisi and Sokhumi) of a joint Georgian-Abkhazian publication on Soviet repressions.
- A meeting of Georgian and Abkhazian archive experts in Venice, Italy to define ways of further cooperation.
- A study-visit of Georgian and Abkhazian doctors to Lisbon, Portugal to discuss prevention of substance dependence and treatment, also a joint training of Georgian and Abkhazian experts in Israel.
- A meeting on human rights violations in Budapest, Hungary, with the participation of the Georgian and Abkhazian Ombudsmen and representatives of civil society.
- A simultaneous translation training in Budapest, Hungary for Georgian specialists of the Abkhazian language and Abkhazian professionals.
- Georgian, Abkhazian, and Ossetian youths participating in a peace camp in Strasbourg, France.
- A study- visit of Georgian and Abkhazian education experts and teachers to the Basque region, Spain to discuss bilingual education issues.
- A study-visit of Georgian and Abkhazian museum experts to Rome, Italy to discuss museum management.
- A training for Georgian and Abkhazian psychologists in Venice, Italy to discuss the issues of violence against children.

1.4. EU Engagement and European Integration

In order to support and advance the peace policy, the Office of the State Minister is actively cooperating with the European Union and other international partners. In this context, the Office of the State Minister plays an important role in different international formats in which it participates on a regular basis.

The Office of the State Minister takes effective steps to make the benefits arising from European integration available to the population of the occupied territories

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In terms of conflict-resolution, the Association Agenda defines the creation of joint EU-Georgia mechanisms for conflict-resolution and engagement and the facilitation of consultations on ways to engage Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia in the process of deepening EU-Georgia relations. The EU supports confidence-building projects, promotion of deeper people-to-people contacts, and encouragement of local initiatives.

In December of the reporting year, a regular meeting of the Association Committee was held to discuss the situation in Georgia's occupied territories, current challenges, and problematic issues, as well as the implementation of the reconciliation policy and the state strategy for engagement, namely the Georgian Government's peace initiatives, assistance provided and offered to the population of the occupied territories.

Given the existing challenges in the occupied territories, the Office of the State Minister gives priority to promote the EU's continuous presence on the ground under the unified umbrella policy of non-recognition.

The Office of the State Minister on a daily basis, held consultations with international organizations in order to maintain and cement their presence despite the enormous pressure and restrictions imposed on them in terms of access and working in these territories. Notably, during the last four years international organizations initiated 266 projects involving the occupied territories.

To ensure the awareness of the population of the occupied territories about the process of Georgia's European integration, the Office of the State Minister was actively involved in the implementation of 2017-2020 Communication Strategy of the Government of Georgia on Georgia's EU and NATO Membership. In parallel with visa-free travel opportunity to the EU/Schengen Area states, the Office of the State Minister disseminated a video reflecting procedures and rules for visa-free travel to the EU/Schengen Area countries for the population of the occupied territories.

1.5. Women's Engagement in Peace Processes

The Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality continues to promote women's engagement in peace processes. Although women and children suffer most during armed conflicts,

women are more active in the process of peace-building and reconciliation. Their potential in conflict prevention and building trust is vitally important.

The Office of the State Minister is actively involved in the development and implementation of Georgia's National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security. The UN Security Council Resolution #1325, and related resolutions, seek to empower women's role in conflict prevention and peace-building as well as in decision-making process. The resolution emphasizes the necessity to observe the international humanitarian, human rights, and legal norms that protect the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts. Under the 2016-2017 National Action Plan, the Office of the State Minister in cooperation with UN Women held 12 exchange information meeting on the Geneva International Discussions and Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms with the participation of women affected by conflicts and representatives of NGOs. Recommendations proposed under the regular dialogue mechanism, including the protection of the rights of women and children, proper response to their needs, and support of peace initiatives proposed by women's organizations in the process of confidence-building have been considered. The Office of the State Minister actively cooperates with civil society and donor organizations.

1.6. Needs Assessment of the Population affected by the Installation of Barbed

Wires Fences and other Barriers along the Dividing Lines and Donor Support

Since 2013 the Office of the State Minister, under the temporary Commission Responding to the Needs of Affected Population from the Villages located on the Territories adjacent to the Dividing Lines in cooperation with the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure has been coordinating the implementation of activities and programs by Government and non-governmental organizations for the population living adjacent to the dividing lines. Since 2013 a number of social, infrastructural, healthcare, educational, agricultural, and other activities have been carried out in the above-mentioned villages. The following activities were implemented in the reporting period:

- On November 4, 2016, the temporary Commission responding to the needs of affected population from the villages located on the territories adjacent to the dividing lines launched reconstruction of natural gas system for winter period 2016-2017 (20 GEL per household). A total of 2,378,800 GEL was allocated to 11,894 households, namely:
 - ✓ To deposit 200 (two hundred) GEL in the accounts of each subscriber in the case of households registered as natural gas subscribers, the Ministry of Energy of Georgia allocated 2,333,200 (two million, three hundred thirty-three thousand, two hundred) GEL.

- ✓ To deposit 200 (two hundred) GEL in the account of each subscriber in the case of households not registered as natural gas subscribers, the Ministry of Energy of Georgia allocated 145,600 (one hundred forty-five thousand, six hundred) GEL to the municipalities, in particular to:
 - **Kareli Municipality**—67,400 (sixty-seven thousand, four hundred) GEL.
 - **Oni Municipality**—28,400 (twenty-eight thousand, four hundred) GEL.
 - **Gori Municipality**—24,800 (twenty-four thousand, eight hundred) GEL.
 - **Kaspi Municipality**—16,400 (sixteen thousand, four hundred) GEL.
 - **Sachkhere Municipality**—8,600 (eight thousand, six hundred) GEL.

- Upon the decision of the commission, the Ministry of Finance allocated 2,435,600 (two million, four hundred thirty-five thousand, six hundred) GEL in order to provide heating to the families living in the villages along the dividing lines in winter 2018. Households registered as natural gas subscribers received 200 (two hundred) GEL deposited on their accounts, while those not registered as natural gas subscribers received 200 (two hundred) GEL in cash. A total of 12, 178 beneficiaries received this assistance, including:
 - ✓ 7909 in **Gori Municipality**
 - ✓ 194 in **Khashuri Municipality**
 - ✓ 527 in **Kaspi Municipality**
 - ✓ 2,875 in **Kareli Municipality**
 - ✓ 366 in **Sachkhere Municipality**
 - ✓ 138 in **Oni Municipality**
 - ✓ 169 in **Dusheti Municipality**.

- Gas supply installation was completed in 62 villages, along with connection to the gas network and registration as subscribers of the population of the villages along the dividing lines (a total of 13,913 gas supply subscribers).
- 20 drinking water wells were installed in the villages of Kareli, Khashuri, Kaspi, and Gori municipalities.
- In 2017, the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Agriculture of Georgia implemented various programs and projects (like in other regions), including programs implemented by the LEPL “Produce in Georgia”, those under the “Plant the Future Agricultural Project” implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture as well as Agro Insurance, the Program for Fostering Agricultural Production, the Project for Processing and Storage Production, Affordable Agro Credit, and others for the affected population of the villages along the dividing lines. These projects and programs imply the needs and opportunities of the local communities.
- Tuitions were financed in 2016-2017 academic year for 846 bachelor’s and master’s degree program students from affected families in the villages along the dividing lines. 1.7 million

GEL was allocated to finance their tuition. In the first semester of the 2017-2018 academic year, tuition financing was allocated to 1,168 students residing in the villages adjacent to the dividing lines (989 bachelor's and 179 master's degree students), with 1,221,650 GEL allocated in the first semester.

- Schools were rehabilitated and furnished with communications equipment, and libraries were opened. More than 2015 schoolchildren were provided with school transport.

II. Civic Equality and Integration

In the reporting period, the Office of the State Minister implemented various projects and activities to promote civic integration, which served the purpose of enhancing/improving ethnic minorities' engagement in every sphere of public life, of supporting their cultures, and ensuring a tolerant environment.

Above-mentioned activities were implemented in close cooperation with various state institutions. The Office of the State Minister continued coordination of the work of the State Inter-agency State Commission established to effectively implement the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020. In particular, the Commission held wider-format meetings and thematic meetings considering the issues of knowledge of state language as well as access to learn native languages of ethnic minorities with relevant suggestions and recommendations developed.

Throughout the reporting period, the implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration continued, with programs, projects, and activities carried out to reach the priority objectives under the strategy:

- Equal and full participation in public and political life
- Creation of equal social and economic conditions and opportunities
- Ensure access to quality education and improve knowledge of state language
- Preserve the culture of ethnic minorities and ensure a tolerant environment.

2. Civic and Political Participation

The state policy seeks to ensure the engagement of ethnic minority representatives in political life,

Ethnic minorities in municipalities of their compact settlement are represented in self-government bodies proportionally to the population

which involves enhancing their representation at both central and local levels. Notably, the ethnic minorities in

municipalities of their compact settlement are represented in self-government bodies proportionally to the population.

Ahead of 2017 local self-government elections, it was necessary to ensure the equal and active participation of ethnic minority representatives. The Central Election Commission (CEC) implemented the following activities in this direction:

- Translation and publication of different electoral documents in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages.¹
- 15 Armenian- and Azerbaijani-language informative videos were produced by the CEC and broadcasted by TV channels.
- Ethnic minority members of the Election Administration were retrained, with trainings delivered to 47,259 members of district election commissions throughout Georgia, including 2,782 ethnic minority representatives.
- The CEC's Learning Center financed 8 projects by local NGOs, with a total budget of 181,568 GEL.

To raise voter awareness for 2017 elections, "Talk to Voters" project was implemented for the first time. At the initial stage of the project, 347 meetings were held in public areas, and 103 Voter's Day public meetings at 73 district electoral commissions. "Find Yourself—Find Your Polling Station" was the second phase of the project implemented during the voting period, when voters were able to use modern technology (CEC website voters.cec.gov.ge, Android and iOS operating systems, fast pay boxes, such as NOVA and TBC, and tablets) to verify their data with the unified voter list.

In 2017, the Election Administration and the CEC's Learning Center implemented the following educational projects: School of Electoral Development, Elections and Young Voters, and Election Administration Courses.

Throughout the year, special attention was given to the communication with political parties. The Office of the State Minister actively cooperated with NIMD (Netherlands Institution for Multiparty Democracy), a non-governmental organization. With support from the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and under cooperation with NIMD, meetings, seminars, and workshops were held with political parties' representatives to discuss the state policy on civic integration, and other issues. In addition, with support from the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, young representatives of ethnic minorities were able to undergo internships in political parties.

¹ Election bulletins, unified voter lists (to be pinned to the wall and desktop), memos for voters: "Procedures reflecting voting", a manual for electoral commissions at polling stations, memos for electoral commission chairpersons, functions of commission members in charge of regulating voter flows, duties and rights of polling station secretaries on election day, functions of commissions in charge of movable ballot boxes, Election Day Procedures, an educational film (captioned) for polling station election commission members, address by CEC Chairperson, and various informative fliers.

To encourage the engagement of young representatives of ethnic minorities, the Office of the State Minister supported the Public Advisory Board established under the Administrations of the State Attorney-Governor in Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions. Notably, the board brings together representatives of local self-governments, the Office of the Public Defender, NGOs, and ethnic minorities' representatives. In the reporting period, the board held meetings and discussed identified needs of ethnic minorities and ways to solve them.

In order to ensure access of ethnic minority young people to the public administration through enhancing their knowledge and skills. The Office of the State Minister in cooperation with the UN Association of Georgia initiated an internship pilot program for “1+4 Program” beneficiaries.

Under the program, young ethnic minorities' young people participated in a competition. A commission, established for this purpose ensured the selection of candidates based on criteria defined. The member agencies of the Inter-agency State Commission, created in order to ensure the effective implementation of the State Strategy for Civic Equality and Integration and Action Plan for 2015-2020, expressed good will and recruited 65 successful applicants for three-month internship in 20 agencies, including public institutions, local self-government bodies, and legal entities of public law.

Under the initiative of the Office of the State Minister, in December 2017, amendments were adopted to the June 18, 2014 Decree #410 of the Government of Georgia on the Approval of the State Program on the Rules and Terms for Internship in Public Institutions. In particular, internship procedures in public institutions were defined for ethnic minority representatives. According to the adopted amendments, ethnic minority students, who have passed the Special Education Program for Studying the Georgian Language (“1+4 Program”), are able to undergo an internship in public institutions that will provide them with sufficient experience and develop professional skills; it will encourage their engagement and contribute to civic integration processes.

Procedures for internship program in public institutions were defined for ethnic minority representatives

2.1. Supporting Smaller and Vulnerable Ethnic Minority Groups

Protecting the rights of small and vulnerable ethnic minorities, and promoting their full-fledged integration, is a top priority of the state civic integration policy. In order to support their engagement, a working group for studying the problems of small and vulnerable ethnic groups has been established under the State Inter-agency Commission to develop concrete recommendations and activities.

In the reporting period, integration of Roma living in Georgia was under special focus. Under the *Sub-Program for Promoting Social Inclusion*, a number of activities aimed at establishing relevant

conditions for inclusive study and favorable environment for Roma, improving the knowledge of state language, supporting involvement of Roma children in educational system. As a result of the program nowadays around 300 Roma attend public schools.

Under this sub-program, meetings were planned and conference presentations were prepared. To raise public awareness and socialization, various projects were implemented (*Favorable Environment for Equal Opportunities, Spending Free Time Meaningfully*, and others); as a result of these programs three Roma persons were employed. Informal education promoted the engagement of Romani people in the educational environment.

In 2017, the Ministry of Justice continued the process of registration of Roma with relevant procedures implemented to regulate issues pertaining to birth registration, citizenship, and ID issuance.

Study of languages of smaller ethnic minorities was continued

2.2. Gender Mainstreaming

In the reporting period, the Office of the State Minister carried out an information/awareness raising campaign on the issues of gender equality. Meetings were held with special emphasis on respect for the rights of ethnic minority women, identifying their needs, and search for ways to solve existing problems.

Under a joint initiative of the Office of the State Minister, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and of the Promoting Integration, Tolerance and Awareness Program of the UN Association of Georgia, and in partnership with the State Fund for Protection and Assistance of (Statutory) Victims of Human Trafficking and the Ministry of Justice of Georgia, the *Youth for Gender Equality* project was implemented. The project's goal was to raise public awareness about the consequences of early marriage and domestic violence.

At the initial stage, volunteer peer educators held 103 meetings on domestic violence in 61 villages of Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti, and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions. At the second stage, 66 meetings on early marriage were held in 33 villages of the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities. Meetings were also held with different target groups, such as students, teachers, parents, and community leaders. Notably, the meetings were held in the state language, with the use of native languages of ethnic minorities when necessary. Relevant information materials were prepared and disseminated in the languages of ethnic minorities.

2.3. Access to Media and Information

The Public Broadcaster of Georgia plays a vital role in ensuring access to information for the representatives of ethnic minorities.

To overcome challenges related to the access to media and information for representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, in the reporting period, the Public Broadcaster developed the 2017-2020 Media Strategy and the Action Plan. This strategic document implies to deal with the existing challenges through concrete initiatives, events, and activities. The strategy consists of several key directions that will be implemented with active participation of the representatives of ethnic and religious minorities.

TV Broadcasting: In the reporting period news program “*Moambe*” was re-broadcasted with simultaneous translation in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages through regional channels at 6 pm and 8 pm. This project (Improving Access to Information for Ethnic Minorities in the Languages they understand), is a joint initiative of the Association of Regional Broadcasters and the Georgian Public Broadcaster which is supported by the US Embassy in Georgia.

Until July 2017, daily news programs in three languages were aired (in Abkhazian language - at 11 pm, in Ossetian language- at 11:30 pm, and in Russian language - at midnight [duration 26 minutes]).

In September, a seven-language (Georgian, Abkhazian, Ossetian, Armenian, Azerbaijani, English, and Russian) web portal (www.1tv.ge) was launched under the umbrella of the Public Broadcaster. The web portal enables the audience to get information upon their interest, watch stories and reports in a language they prefer. An online radio/TV station based on the web-portal is planned to be introduced.

A seven-language web portal was launched under the umbrella of the Public Broadcaster

Notably, the Ministry of Corrections of Georgia, within technically possible limits (15 channels), offers all defendants/convicts in penitentiaries access to interesting TV channels. In addition, the Ministry also provides free access to satellite broadcasting TV channels.

Radio Broadcasting: Throughout 2017, the daily radio show *Chveni Sakartvelo* (Our Georgia) (duration 40 minutes) was on Radio 1 which covers the issues of civic integration, Georgia’s ethnic and religious diversity, challenges, and unique characteristics of different ethnicities.

Newsprogram “*Moambe*” translated in Armenian and Azerbaijani languages were recorded in the studio and aired on Radio 1. Similarly, Radio 2 continued to air a Kurdish-language weekly news/educational/entertainment show.

Printed Media: Throughout the year, the Armenian weekly newspaper “*Vrastan*” (102 issues, circulation 3,500) and the Azerbaijani weekly “*Gurjistan*” newspaper (93 issues, circulation 2,000) were published with support from the state. The newspapers were disseminated in Tbilisi as well as in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities, also in the facilities of the Ministry of Corrections.

2.4. Ensuring Access to Quality Education and Improving Knowledge of State Language

Special attention was given to ensuring access to quality education and improving knowledge of the state language, as an important tool of civic integration.

Each educational level is available to representatives of ethnic minorities. Education is also available in the native languages of ethnic minorities (Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Russian).

There are 211 non-Georgian language public schools and 76 non-Georgian language sectors in Georgia, including 82 Azerbaijani, 118 Armenian, and 11 Russian-language schools, along with 32 Georgian-Azerbaijani sectors, 29 Georgian-Russian sectors, 10 Georgian-Armenian sectors, one Georgian-Azerbaijani-Russian sector, and one Georgian-Russian-Armenian sector. The Ministry of Education and Science has taken numerous steps in this direction, namely:

- National standards for early and preschool education were developed to include in educational resources ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, to spur Georgian language teaching by teachers in the regions populated by ethnic minorities, to encourage in each student respect for the different, and so on.
- Standards were developed for the elementary level (7th-9th grades) in the languages of ethnic minorities (Armenian, Azerbaijani, and Russian).
- Native language standard for the elementary level (1st-4th grades) for translated into Armenian and Azerbaijani.
- Due attention was paid to enhancing the qualifications of teachers in non-Georgian schools.
- In the reporting period, the Program for Providing Public Schoolchildren with Transport continued and expanded.
- Under the Summer School Program *Spending School Break and Learning Together*, in 2017, summer camps were organized for the students of small regional public schools of Georgia, with a total of 1,045 young representatives of ethnic minorities participating.

To facilitate access to higher education for ethnic minorities, the Educational Program for Studying the Georgian Language has been operating since 2010, enrolling students based on the results of Abkhazian, Ossetian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian-language National Aptitude Test.

The number of ethnic minority students in Georgia's higher educational institutions has grown significantly. In 2015, 741 applicants were enrolled, 960 in 2016, and 1,047

The number of ethnic minority students in Georgia's schools of higher education has grown significantly

applicants passed Azerbaijani and Armenian-language National Aptitude Test to enroll:

- 673 applicants based on Azerbaijani-language National Aptitude Test.
- 373 applicants based on Armenian-language National Aptitude Test.
- One applicant based on Ossetian-language National Aptitude Test was enrolled

State educational grants were awarded to 179 applicants based on the results of Azerbaijani, Armenian, and Ossetian-language National Aptitude Test under the 2017 unified national exams.

- 83 applicants based on Azerbaijani-language National Aptitude Test.
- 95 applicants based on Armenian-language National Aptitude Test.
- One applicant based on Ossetian-language National Aptitude Test.

To provide representatives of ethnic minorities living in Georgia with equal access to higher education, the social program which operates under the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia implies financial support of those students, who in the course of the last three years, have remained in school and have received general education diplomas from Azerbaijani or Armenian-language schools. The social program also involves financial support of students from Akhmeta Municipality (graduating from schools in the Pankisi Gorge densely populated by the Kists). Four-years of education on bachelor's degree programs is covered.

In the reporting period, representatives of ethnic minorities were provided with an access to professional education. In this context, active work was implemented by LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration. The goal of this school is to manage with the lack of qualified public servants in Georgia's mountainous areas and regions of compact settlement of ethnic minorities through enhancing the qualifications of public servants as well as providing all interested persons with the knowledge of state language.

In the reporting year, the Public Administration School implemented the Public Governance and Administration Program consisting of six discipline directions: state procurements, public organization management, human resources management and records-keeping in the public sector, public finances management, public relations and communications, and technical supervision of infrastructural projects. In 2017 the program was completed by 89 students.

2.4.1. Improving Knowledge of State Language

Lack of knowledge of the state language is a significant challenge in the process of civic integration. The programs and projects seeking to enhance knowledge of the official language continued at every level of education.

The Program for the Professional Development of Teachers in Non-Georgian Language Schools was implemented in non-Georgian language schools. The program's goal is to foster the professional development of teachers in non-Georgian language schools/sectors and to enhance the quality of teaching/learning through strengthening the teaching of the state language. The program (for 2016-2019) is focused on the preparation of local teachers of non-Georgian language schools for subject exams and on teaching the state language

Under the program a Georgian language course was delivered for two groups of local teachers from non-Georgian language schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti regions (a total of 1,080 participants).

Teachers, who verified knowledge of the state language at least at A2 level, became able to attend the following professional development training modules under the program:

- Planning, Management, and Evaluation of the Learning Process—284 participants
- Inclusive Teaching in Non-Georgian Schools—126 participants.

The Program for the Professional Development of Teachers in Non-Georgian Language Schools also aims at overcome the lack of human resources in the non-Georgian language schools of Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti regions. The teachers were deployed at schools:

- 118 consultants/teachers of Georgian as a second language
- 116 teachers of Georgian as a second language and social sciences assistant teachers
- 51 bilingual assistant teachers in various subject directions defined in the national curriculum.

LEPL Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration continued its work on improving the level of knowledge of the state language, implementing the Program for Teaching the State Language. Under the program, representatives of ethnic minorities employed in the public sector, local self-government bodies, regional administrations, the resource centers of the Ministry of Education, employees of public schools, and all other stakeholders have a possibility to study the state language at 10 regional learning centers² and mobile groups run by the School of Public Administration. In the course of 2017, the Program for Studying the State Language was attended by 3,247 beneficiaries.

Also, the state language courses were conducted by different state agencies.

² Akhalkalaki, Ninotzinda, Tzalka, Bolnisi, Dmanisi, Marneuli, Gardabani, Sagarejo, Akhmeta, and Lagodekhi.

Through close cooperation between the Office of the State Minister and the Ministry of Education and Science, since February 2017, the Abkhazian language course is introduced in Batumi Public School and #14 Public School in the village of Peria. Since August, Georgian language learning courses were launched in Akhalkalaki Diocese of the Armenian Apostolic Church.

The Abkhazian language is introduced in public schools of Adjara

The Department of Social Affairs at the Ministry of Corrections ensures the involvement of non-Georgian-speaking inmates in the study program of the Georgian language. In 2017, 74 non-Georgian-speaking inmates participated in the courses.

The Learning Center at the Ministry of Justice of Georgia introduced free Georgian language courses to Georgia's non-Georgian-speaking citizens. In 2017, state language learning courses were delivered at the community centers of the village of Sadakhlo, Marneuli Municipality and the village of Iormughanlo, Sagarejo Municipality.

2.5. Social and Regional Integration

The Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure of Georgia continued to implement projects aimed to rehabilitate and carry out other relevant, including internal roads, drinking and irrigation water systems, street lighting, preschool educational facilities, and others.

Samtskhe-Javakheti Region

- Under the fund for projects to be implemented in the Samtskhe-Javakheti Region, 64 projects were financed (total value: 14,442,594 GEL).
- Under the LEPL Municipal Development Fund of Georgia, two projects were financed in the Akhaltsikhe and Akhalkalaki Municipalities (total value: 2,345,665 GEL).
- Under the Fund for the Development of High-Mountainous Settlements, six projects were financed (total value: 1,771,635 GEL).

Kvemo Kartli Region

- Under the fund for projects to be implemented in the Kvemo Kartli region, 67 projects were financed (total value: 20,714,746 GEL).
- Under the LEPL Municipal Development Fund of Georgia, two projects were financed in the Dmanisi and Tetritzkaro Municipalities (total value: 279,597 GEL).
- Under the Fund for the Development of High-Mountainous Settlements, four projects were financed (total value: 1,004,787 GEL).

Kakheti Region

- Under the fund for projects to be implemented in the Kakheti region, 118 projects were financed (total value: 26,276,117 GEL).
- Under the LEPL Municipal Development Fund of Georgia, one project was financed in the Akhmeta Municipality (total value: 339,460 GEL).
- Under the Fund for the Development of High-Mountainous Settlements, five projects were financed (total value: 1,223,313 GEL).

2.6. Culture and Preservation of Identity

During the reporting period implementation of various programs/projects and activities was continued in order to protect, develop, and promote the culture of ethnic minorities. Further promotion and support of museums and theaters through financial assistance was a very important undertaking which aimed to encourage cultural expression and integration. For the purpose to preserve the cultural uniqueness of ethnic minorities, the priority “Supporting Ethnic Minorities” which implies promotion of exhibitions, performances, meetings, and other cultural events featuring representatives of ethnic minority cultures was implemented. 14 projects were supported under the priority.

Throughout the year, special attention was given to the protection of ethnic minorities’ cultural heritage, tangible and intangible cultural treasures.

To promote cross-cultural dialogue and civic integration, the Office of the State Minister, in cooperation with relevant agencies, implemented the following activities:

- ***Pankisoba 2017***: With involvement of the Office of the State Minister, the large-scale *Pankisoba* Festival was held in the village of Duisi. Under the activity, different ministries arranged exhibitions reflecting their works. As part of the folk festival, cultural, athletic, and educational activities were held, and prominent, honorable citizens were awarded.
- ***Week of Vainakh Culture***: As part of cooperation between the Office of the State Minister and the Gori State Teaching University, a diverse program was carried out, including a concert, public lectures, an exhibition of Kist folklore and artworks, a presentation of Vainakh-themed books, a presentation of videos featuring the Pankisi Gorge and Kist women from Pankisi, introduction of the works of Kist poets, a play performed by children’s theater, athletic events, and others.
- ***Festival of Multiethnic Festival Under One Sky—Dialogue of Cultures***: Through financial support from the UN Association of Georgia, and in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Monument Protection and the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs a festival of multiethnic culture was held with the participation of Georgian youths and young

representatives of ethnic minorities living in Georgia. In 2017, two concerts were held under the festival (in Akhaltsikhe and Rustavi).

- The Office of the State Minister organized a folk concert celebrating Georgia's Independence Day which was held in Mtskheta. Representatives of ethnic minorities recited passages from *The Knight in the Panther's Skin* in Georgian and their native languages. During the same performances, the winners of the competition "Georgian Language—Path to My Success" which was announced by the Office of the State Minister, were awarded.
- During the week dedicated to International Day of Tolerance, numerous events were held. As part of cooperation with the UN Association of Georgia, a formal reception was held to award the winners of the media competition "Georgia's Ethnic Diversity".
- An event commemorating the 73rd anniversary of the deportation of the Chechen and Ingush peoples was held at the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia. Members of different scientific communities, public figures, students of Georgia's schools of higher education, and guests from the Pankisi Gorge participated in the event.
- The Office of the State Minister and the Georgian Parliament organized an activity celebrating Georgian- Ossetian relations at Shota Rustaveli Parliamentary Hall. The event, which aimed to promote Ossetian culture, featured music and dance performances by the Nartebi Dance Group at the Administration of South Ossetia, the Liakhvi Vocal Group, and Tskhinvali Theater.

2.7. Information/Awareness Campaign

With direct involvement and facilitation of the Office of the State Minister, information/awareness raising campaign was conducted on various issues in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities:

- Representatives of the Office of the State Minister organized information meetings in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities (Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti, and Kakheti). The activities implemented in 2016 and those planned for 2017 were considered and discussed; representatives of the local self-government, NGOs, media as well as students participated in the meetings.
- The Office of the State Minister gives special attention to information/awareness raising campaign on higher education opportunities for ethnic minorities. Information meetings were held on educational innovations and 1+4 Program were held in Bolnisi, Akhalkalaki, and Lagodekhi Municipalities).
- The Office of the State Minister in cooperation with the Association of Regional Broadcasters held information meeting in Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda municipalities and delivered information on the digital broadcasting of Parvana TV and ATV 12 to representatives of local

self-governments, NGOs, media outlets, and youths. Set-top boxes were delivered free of charge to some socially vulnerable families.

- Information meetings and discussions on Georgia’s European integration were organized in cooperation with the representatives of the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development and the Ministry of Agriculture. The issues of a visa-free travel, the opportunities, benefits, and prospects related to free trade with the EU and stemming from the EU Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area Agreement were considered at the meetings in Samtskhe-Javakheti, Kvemo Kartli, and Kakheti regions. The meetings were attended by the representatives of local self-governments, NGOs, media as well as farmers and entrepreneurs.
- Implementation of the project “Young European Ambassadors” was especially important. The project’s goal was to provide ethnic minority representatives (in Kvemo Kartli, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Kakheti regions) with information on Georgia’s integration into NATO and the EU in the languages they understand. Under the project, a mobile group of young graduates of a special thematic school held 8 information meetings in 5 villages of Kakheti and Samtskhe-Javakheti regions delivering relevant materials. The project was implemented by the Information Center on NATO and the EU and the Promoting Integration, Tolerance and Awareness Program (PITA) under the initiative of the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, and with financial support of USAID.

2.8. Fulfilment of International Obligations

Georgia is fulfilling various international obligations in regard to the protection of ethnic minorities. Georgia is a signatory to the European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Consequently, the country has assumed responsibilities for protecting the rights of ethnic minorities and ensuring their honorable participation in the country’s development. Based on the above-mentioned mechanism, the Office of the State Minister coordinated and prepared the development of the State Report under the 3rd Monitoring Cycle which was submitted to the Council of Europe in July 2017. The report reflects the activities implemented in 2012-2017 and the general state of affairs in terms of equality, respect for the rights of ethnic minorities and civic integration.

Georgia is fulfilling various international obligations in regard to the protection of ethnic minorities

In the process of implementing 2017 Action Plan the Office of the State Minister actively cooperated with the civil sector, international organizations, the diplomatic corps accredited in the country, local and international experts, the Council for National Minorities at the Office of the Public Defender. Also, the Office of the State Minister keeps regular communication with the ethnic minority representatives in the regions of their compact settlement, representatives of local self-governments and NGOs. At the same time, representatives of the Office of the State Minister coordinated the Office’s

activities in the regions compactly populated by ethnic minorities (Kvemo Kartli and Samtskhe-Javakheti).

Activities, events and projects carried out by the Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Equality under the 2017 Action Plan were supported by the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the United Nations Association of Georgia's (UNAG) under the project "Promoting Integration, Tolerance and Awareness" (PITA).