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Challenges & Aspirations: A Detailed Look at Refugee Needs in Georgia

February 2024

Estonian Refugee Council (ERC) is a value-driven non-governmental EU-certified humanitarian organization.

Established in 2000, ERC currently provides humanitarian assistance to displaced and vulnerable individuals across five crisis-affected countries: Ukraine, Georgia, Jordan, Armenia, and Türkiye.

Additionally, it offers various support services to beneficiaries of international protection living in Estonia

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KEY FINDINGS

- There are currently **27,330 Ukrainian** refugees and asylum seekers living in Georgia. As well as **1330 refugees from other countries** of origin, **896 asylum seekers**, **526 stateless** persons and **962 humanitarian status holders**.
- After displaced Ukrainians, the **five largest groups of asylum seekers and refugees** are from **Syria, Russia, Iran, Iraq, and Türkiye**.
- Among **humanitarian status holders**, the top five countries of origin in this group are **Ukraine – 470, Iraq – 290, Syria – 98, Yemen – 61, Afghanistan – 41**.
- **Housing affordability** is one of the most **pressing needs for Ukrainian** refugees, worsened by inflation. As approximately a **quarter** of surveyed participants spend **70 to 80% of their income on rent**.
- **Scarcity** of well-paying **job opportunities**, lack of **language skills**, and **limited remote work** options have contributed to poverty, which is a major challenge **especially for female-headed households**.
- Ukrainians **lack clarity on state assistance**, especially **cash aid** and **healthcare access**.
- There is a critical need for **infant and children's food** due to limited inclusion in food assistance programs.
- **High demand** for **women's hygiene products** and practical **shoes for both children and adults**.
- **Asylum seekers do not receive financial assistance** from the state but have the **right to work**. Finding employment remains a formidable challenge, however, due to factors such as remoteness.

Introduction

In late 2023, the Estonian Refugee Council (ERC) conducted a comprehensive secondary data review (SDR) regarding the current situation of crisis-affected groups in the Republic of Georgia. The SDR included examination of a wide variety of independent sources resulting from application of diverse research methodologies such as census data collection, geospatial mapping of displacement events, surveys, focus groups, open-ended interviews, etc.

The main objectives of this data triangulation exercise were:

1. To collate available information regarding the needs of displaced people living in Georgia;
2. To identify gaps in existing knowledge and evaluate whether further collection of primary data is required;
3. To use the gathered knowledge for designing future ERC interventions in Georgia, while avoiding duplication of efforts being carried out by other actors on the field.

Methodology

Sources:

Beyond reports and datasets collected manually via platforms like Reliefweb, HDX, UNHCR Data Warehouse, GEOSTAT, etc., alongside a few others flagged by digital tools such as DEEP, this SDR draws extensively from insights gained through direct collaboration with our local implementing partners - [Mtskheta-Mtianeti Regional Hub \(MMRH\)](#) - a highly specialized local NGO focusing on the unique needs of displaced persons arriving in Ukraine. To ensure robust triangulation, the document also incorporates research conducted by other local actors such as World Vision International and UNHCR.

Comprehensive research carried out by MMRH¹ employed a hybrid approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Geographically, their research focused on Tbilisi, Rustavi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, and Gori, involving both displaced individuals and members of organizations that work with IDPs.

The quantitative component comprised 50 interviews. Respondents aged 18 and above were chosen using the snowball sampling technique. Following the fieldwork phase, the collected data was analysed using the SPSS. Final analyses can be found [here](#).

MMRH's qualitative research, on the other hand, encompassed 2 focus groups and 10 in-depth interviews, designed in order to provide more nuanced insights. These included 4 interviews with representatives of organizations mainly involved in addressing the needs of the Ukrainian refugees, and 6 in-depth interviews with Ukrainian refugees themselves. The average duration of a focus group session was determined to be 1.5 hours, while the average duration for in-depth interviews ranged between 60 and 80 minutes. The qualitative research was conducted remotely through a distance-based approach, utilizing online research methodologies.

Majority of the Ukrainian citizens participating in the MMRH research came from the eastern part of Ukraine, specifically from the occupied territories, front lines, and active combat zones. Many of

¹ Mtskheta-Mtianeti Regional Hub, & Estonian Refugee Council. (2023, December). [Needs of Ukrainian Refugees Living in Georgia](#).

them entered Georgia through the Dariali (Larsi) border point (82%), through Kutaisi (10%), Tbilisi international airports (5%), and (3%) crossed the borders with Armenia and Türkiye.

Tools and Frameworks Used:

The secondary research presented herein utilized an internally developed [spreadsheet](#), which served as space to collate various resources, organize readings, and cross-reference information from multiple sources, enabling proper triangulation of data. This method was further substantiated by online and in-person discussions with humanitarian actors actively operating in Georgia. Said discussions not only played a crucial role in validating and confirming the data obtained from secondary sources, but also presented opportunities for questions and clarifications, thereby enhancing the depth and credibility of the research findings.

Challenges

Barriers encountered during the data triangulation included limited or outdated data on humanitarian needs (especially needs of non-Ukrainian refugees), accessibility limitations due to lack of English language materials, disparities in data collection and presentation methodologies among different organizations, hampering direct comparisons.

This paper expresses a medium level of confidence in the information gathered, largely due to the quickly changing migration landscape of Georgia. Although the comprehensive primary data collected by MMRH regarding Ukrainian refugees proved helpful in the review, resources regarding the needs of refugees from other countries of origin are almost completely absent.

Global Situation Overview

Forced displacement remains a formidable challenge facing our society today, as a staggering 126 million² people have been forced to leave the safety and sanctity of their homes. Whether displacement is caused by conflict or disaster, the urgent needs of affected populations continue to grow at an unprecedented pace. In fact, the number of displaced people is expected to rise to 130.8 million by the close of 2024 alone. As the High Commissioner for refugees, Filippo Grandi, puts it:

“[T]he system is under pressure like never before. 2023 has brought a devastating new conflict in Sudan, continued misery in Ukraine, a string of coups in the Sahel region, more violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, displacement in Myanmar, and a renewed conflict in Gaza that has raised risks across the region.”³

While a large portion (48%) of the displaced population remains internally displaced, i.e. forcibly displaced to a location within the internationally recognized borders of their country of origin, over half are forced to flee abroad. According to the UNHCR planning figures, the number of people who are forced to flee their country is projected to reach 67.8 million people in 2024.

² As per figures reported in the [UNHCR Global Appeal 2024](#).

³ UNHCR. (2023, November 23). [Global Appeal 2024](#), page 4.

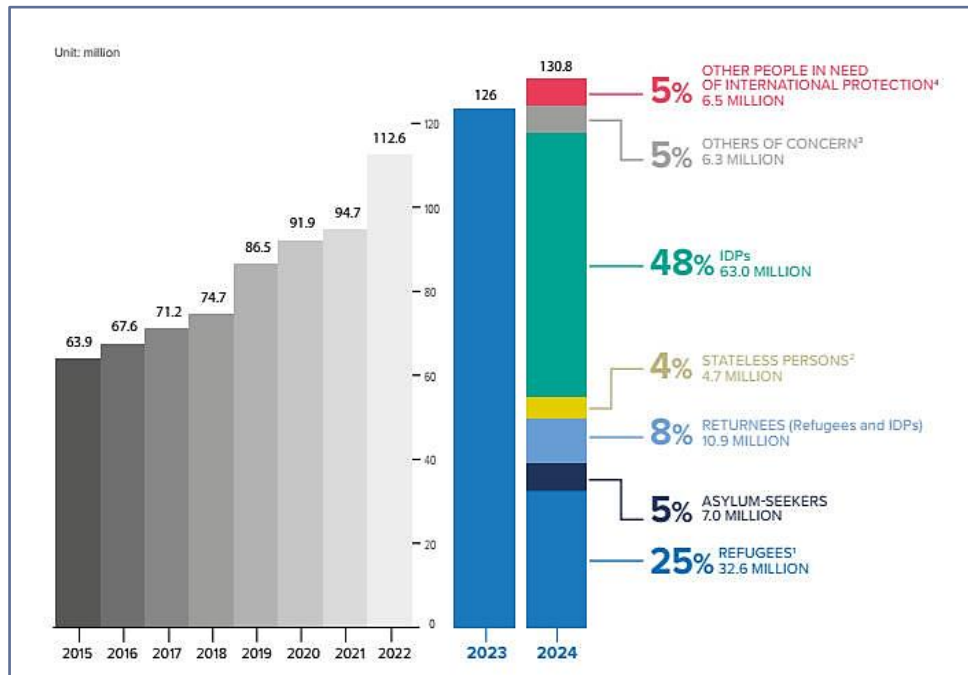


Figure 1 [Source: UNHCR Global Appeal 2024]

When people leave, they have to find themselves and their families a new home. Sometimes these new homes are simply a stop gap, a place to rest before returning home or a pit stop from where to move onward to other destinations. Though when people are unable to go home or move on, these temporary homes, or spaces of protection, can become their permanent community. Therefore, it is our goal to focus on both short- and long-term needs and aspirations of refugees in Georgia.

Georgian Context: What are the numbers?

Often referred to as sitting at the transcontinental crossroads between Europe and Asia, Georgia's unique location and sociocultural context has made it an accessible destination for people fleeing nearby conflicts. This trend, like for many other smaller countries in Europe, is rather new, influenced by major geopolitical changes in the region.

At the end of 2021, for example, UNHCR reported that 3,577 non-citizens residing in Georgia were in need of protection⁴. However, following the start of the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on Feb 24, 2022, the numbers of refugees and those in refugee-like situations, saw a sharp uptick. According to UNHCR's end-year population totals⁵, the number of people in this target group had surged from 3,577 in 2021 to 27,553 in 2023, signifying a more than seven-fold increase in under two years.

This upswing is primarily attributed to those seeking refuge from Ukraine where, as of 2024, instability persists - claiming countless lives, inflicting continued suffering, and generating grave humanitarian needs. As we approach the tenth anniversary of the war which started in the east of

⁴ This figure does not include internally displaced people and the affected host communities. The figure does, however, include stateless people residing in Georgia.

⁵ Latest available update at the time of writing - 31 October 2023.

Ukraine in 2014, Georgia along with the rest of Europe, continues to witness a general upward trajectory in the number of displaced people arriving from Ukraine.

According to the abovementioned dataset, 481 Ukrainians sought protection in Georgia in 2021, a figure that skyrockets to 26,498 in 2022. At the end of October 2023, there appeared to be a small dip when the number stood at 24,801 but has since surged back up to 27,330 according to the latest available data⁶.

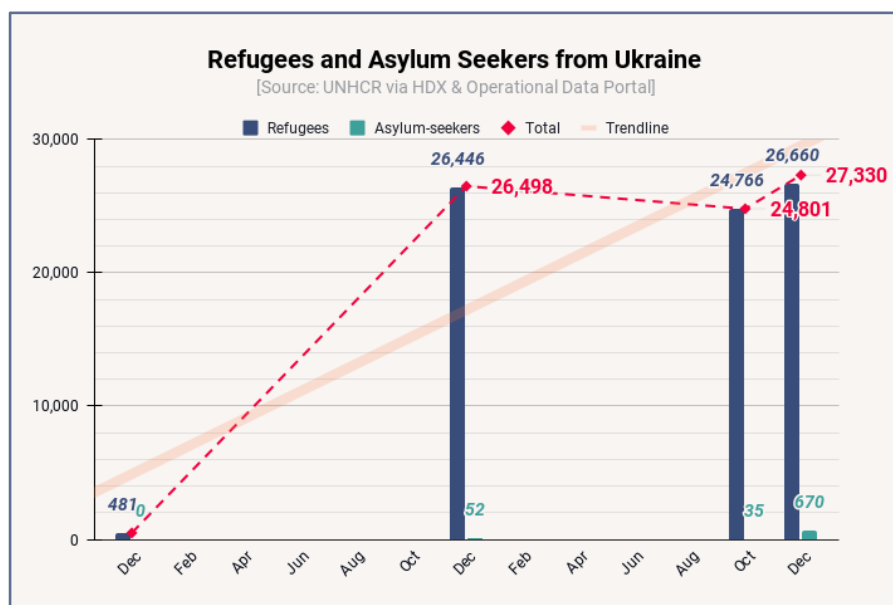


Figure 2 [Source: UNHCR via HDX & Operational Data Portal]

A layer that adds further complexity to aid provision in Georgia is the diversity in needs of refugees and asylum seekers from countries other than Ukraine. Riddled with the challenges of its own internal displacement and geopolitical tensions, Georgia has limited capacity to interact with crises taking place elsewhere. As such, the increased influx of displaced people arriving from Ukraine has put a strain on existing migration management systems in Georgia, and ultimately resulted in little attention being paid to the needs of the displaced people of ‘other’ nationalities, i.e., non-Ukrainians.

Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has also had an adverse effect on the lives of Russian citizens. This group includes those who have not claimed asylum or humanitarian assistance but have moved to Georgia as expats or emigrants due to fears and anxiety related to the war. Reports^{7 8} indicate that as many as 110,000 Russians had fled to Georgia by the end of 2022. In fact, September 2022 marked a particularly busy period for Russian citizens crossing into Georgia. In a single month, 222,274 crossings were recorded, marking a 511% increase over the number of crossings from September 2021. This surge prompted the Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs to issue a statement

⁶ [Ukraine Refugee Situation Dashboard](#). UNHCR Operational Data Portal. Accessed on 9 February 2024. Latest available update at the time of writing - 30 December 2023. Figures include refugees from Ukraine who were granted refugee status, temporary asylum status, temporary protection, or statuses through similar national protection schemes, as well as those recorded in the country under other forms of stay (from 24 February 2022), as relevant/applicable.

⁷ Cordell, J. (2022, October 10). ["I Don't Want to Shoot Anybody": War-averse Russians Seek Sanctuary in Georgia.](#) Reuters.

⁸ Boffey, D. (2022, September 28). ["We didn't want to be part of the war": Russians at the Georgia border flee Putin's call-up.](#) The Guardian.

addressing the "increased influx from the Russian Federation" and public concerns regarding these border crossings.⁹

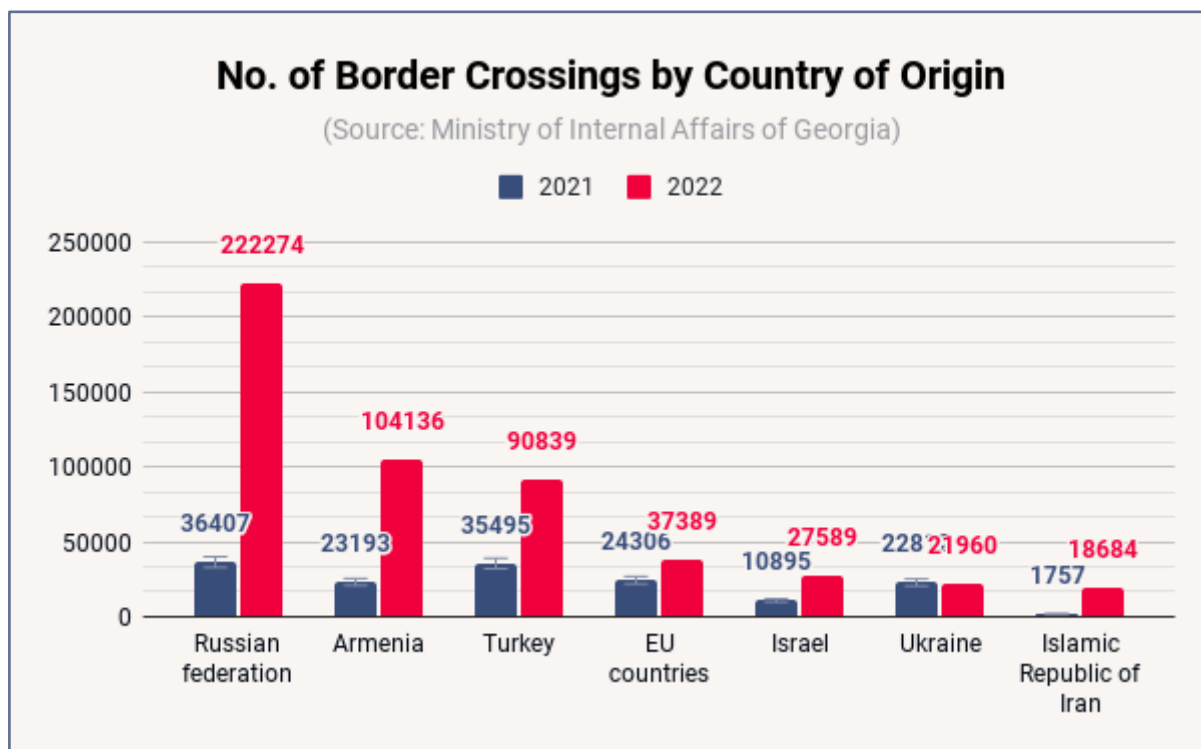


Figure 3 [Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia]

Views on this mass movement have been mixed. Some bankers and economists saw the influx of Russians as a unique opportunity bolstering the economy of Georgia, possibly boosting economic output enough to put it in the race for one of the world's fastest growing economies alongside Vietnam and Kuwait¹⁰. Among others the movement prompted demographic fears, and economic and social difficulties. On the one hand, GEOSTAT estimated a significant rise in the 2022 year-on-year real GDP growth rate at about 10 percent. On the other hand, the influx of Russians was also fraught with more cultural and historical baggage than perhaps anywhere else.

As time has passed attitudes towards Russian migrants have continued to veer more towards negativity, as the stellar economic growth is not benefiting everyone. Many of the Russians arriving in Georgia are tech professionals often with remote jobs and plenty of cash. Their arrival has disrupted local housing markets, driving up prices, even leading some Georgians to face eviction as rents skyrocket, sometimes doubling or tripling¹¹.

The inflation, therefore, has created economic difficulties not only for the local Georgians but also for the most vulnerable migrants and internally displaced people. Additionally, cultural factors have led to the creation of an added layer of hostility towards Russians living in Georgia, including those who are in need of humanitarian protection.

⁹ Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs. (2022, September 29). [Statement of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.](#)

¹⁰ Cordell, J. (2022, November 8). [Insight: From Russia with cash: Georgia booms as Russians flee Putin's war.](#) Reuters.

¹¹ Seturidze, G. (2023, June 1). [Georgians Struggle with High Prices Amid War in Ukraine.](#) Institute for War & Peace Reporting.

Those who can leave, are leaving - often in large numbers. Official statistics indicate that more than 30,000 Russians left Georgia in 2023, the majority in the past six months, slashing the number of wartime Russian immigrants by almost one-third from its peak the year before.

Demography

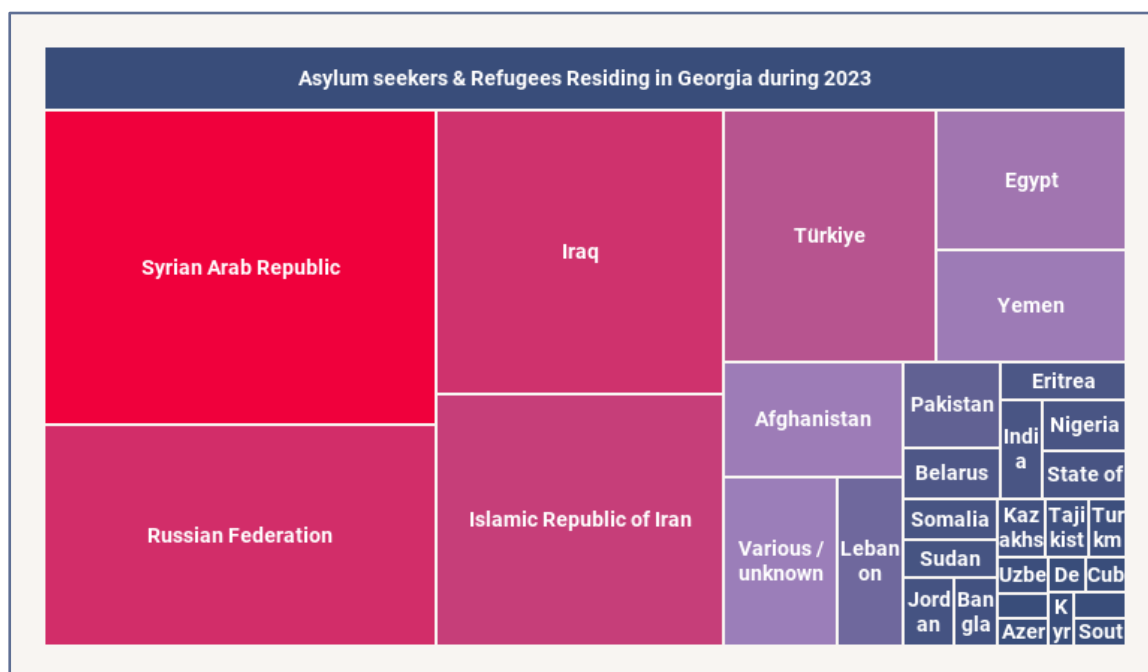


Figure 4 [Source: UNHCR via HDX]

After displaced Ukrainians, the five largest groups of asylum seekers and refugees are from:

- Syria = 476 (450 refugees and 26 asylum seekers);
- Russia = 332 (205 refugees and 127 asylum seekers);
- Iraq = 317 (302 refugees and 15 asylum seekers);
- Iran = 278 (49 refugees and 229 asylum seekers);
- Türkiye = 206 refugees.

Additionally, there are 962 humanitarian status holders in Georgia, according to the UNHCR. The top five countries of origin in this group are Ukraine – 470, Iraq – 290, Syria – 98, Yemen – 61, Afghanistan – 41.

According to the 2018 Law of Georgia on International Protection, a 'humanitarian status holder' is a person who does not meet the conditions for being granted refugee status, but for whom there is a real risk that upon returning to the country of origin or country of habitual residence he/she may face death penalty or a threat of such punishment, torture or inhumane or

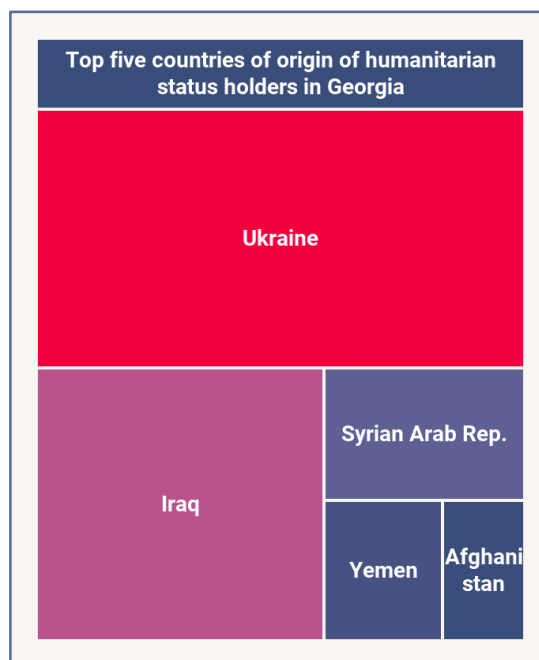


Figure 5 [Source: UNHCR Georgia]

degrading treatment or punishment, or a serious individual threat to life due to indiscriminate violence, international or internal armed conflict or mass violation of human rights.¹²

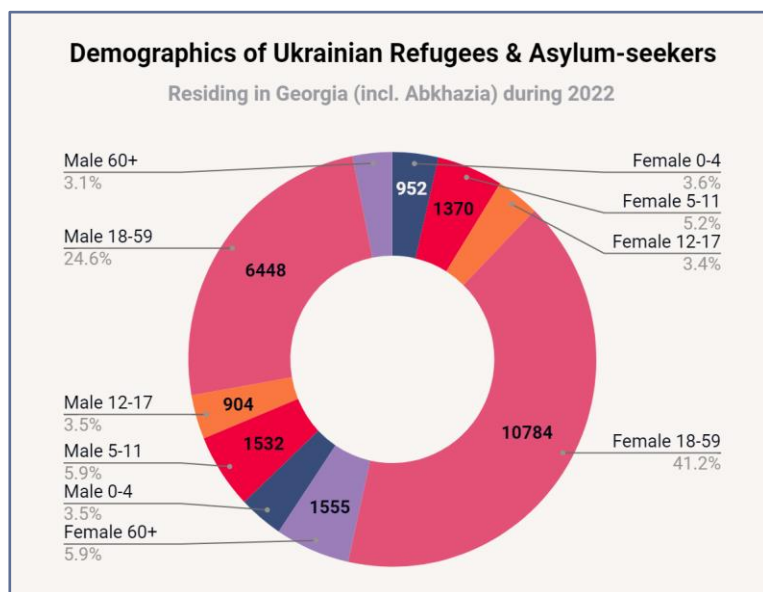


Figure 6 [Source: UNHCR]

In terms of assessing intersectional needs based on age, gender, and location; disaggregation figures from 2023 are not yet available. However, according to 2022 population data, a substantial proportion - over 41% - of displaced Ukrainians in Georgia, including Abkhazia, are women of working age. Additionally, 21% are children, and 9% fall into the elderly demographic.

This information is particularly significant in light of evolving gender roles among Ukrainian refugees in Moldova and Georgia.

A noticeable shift has been observed as many men face unemployment or are predominantly involved in the armed forces, prompting women to take on new roles and multiple jobs to compensate for the lost family income.¹³ The demographic dynamic within other major displaced groups was not as clear or stark, however.

This complexity of needs and the fluctuating nature of various migrant populations in Georgia pose significant challenges. It can be tough to decide how to approach these issues and craft sustainable solutions for target beneficiaries. At the same time, urgency is mounting as people's needs grow exponentially every day.

Looking forward, governments and humanitarian agencies are keen to find the most suitable and sustainable methods for providing aid. Research conducted by MMRH and other local actors, may provide a way out.

What is next?

Before attempting to resolve potential issues, it is crucial to first consider the timeline for implementing the necessary interventions. While varying timelines may be applicable for different refugee groups, the immediacy of the ongoing escalations in Ukraine significantly influences the plans of Ukrainian refugees.

The current instability in their homeland has left many Ukrainians afraid or unsure about returning. According to the fourth round of surveys conducted for the regional report 'Lives on Hold',¹⁴ only about 1 in 7 refugees express immediate intentions to return to Ukraine. Notably, a substantial

¹² UNHCR. [Asylum Seekers - Help Georgia](#). Accessed on 9 February 2024.

¹³ World Vision International. (2022, December 10). [Out in the Cold](#).

¹⁴ UNHCR. (2023, July 6). [Lives on hold: Intentions and Perspectives of Refugees and IDPs from Ukraine #4](#).

majority (62%) expresses the hope of returning to Ukraine someday, with 18% remaining undecided and 6% feeling they have no prospects of returning.

Among those aspiring to return, only 16% were able to articulate a timeframe for their return, while a significant 73% expressed the desire to return 'when the situation allows.' Despite the modest sample size in this study, the findings carry weight, with 86% of respondents affirming their intention to stay in the host country, 12% remaining undecided, and only 2% contemplating relocation to a third country. The evolving situation in Ukraine will undeniably shape the needs and aspirations of Ukrainians.

Given this complex scenario, a multifaceted approach is imperative to understand and address the needs of diverse migrant groups residing in Georgia.

Needs of Ukrainians

The Basics: Cash, Food and Hygiene

MMRH reveals that some individuals face a **lack of clarity regarding the state assistance program, particularly cash assistance**. Instances have been reported where individuals meet the eligibility criteria but do not receive the assistance to which they are entitled. The respondents highlighted that many of these cases were resolved with the assistance of the Agency for Internally Displaced Persons; however, not everyone is aware of where to seek help.

With regard to food, one of the most critical needs is nourishment for infants and children. Respondents mentioned that they **periodically receive food assistance with dry products; however, children's nutrition is seldom included in these programs**.¹⁵ The issue is particularly pertinent in certain regions such as Kutaisi.

According to MMRH results, respondents currently receive hygiene items; however, the provision is insufficient, forcing those in need to purchase them privately. **Women's hygiene products are, particularly in demand**. Additionally, elderly people and individuals with disabilities have specific unfulfilled needs, including crutches, mobility aids, orthopaedic braces (such as "Khadulka"), blood pressure measuring devices, glasses, etc.

Respondents noted that in Georgia, adult clothes and household items are often provided through various charity events. However, there is a **shortage of shoes for both children and adults**. One respondent mentioned the need for practical shoes, stating that while shoes are collected voluntarily, the offerings often lean towards 'academic style' or heeled shoes, and practical footwear is in short supply.

During MMRH focus group discussions, it was highlighted that adults and children with disabilities often do not receive adequate public services, while private services may not be accessible. Consequently, these families may find themselves having to independently address the specific needs of their family members with disabilities.

Housing and Inflation

Despite difficulties, a **consistent sense of gratitude and satisfaction towards life in Georgia was noted among Ukrainian respondents** who participated in MMRH needs assessment research.

¹⁵ MMRH & ERC. (2023, December). page 27.

Respondents expressed appreciation for the hospitality of Georgians, deeming it more significant than the fulfilment of their material needs. While they generally adopted a reserved stance when expressing dissatisfaction, in-depth discussions highlighted **housing affordability as the most pressing need** among Ukrainian refugees in Georgia, further exacerbated by inflation.

As discussed earlier, the influx of both Ukrainian and Russian citizens into Georgia, driven by the ongoing conflict, has heightened demand for apartments in the real estate market. This surge, particularly in major cities like the capital, has led to escalating prices, rendering the state aid of 300 GEL insufficient to cover rental costs.

Respondents shared instances of facing refusals from apartment owners due to their perceived inability to timely pay rent.¹⁶ It is important to note that respondents empathize with local concerns regarding tenant reliability, but the situation is less than ideal for them. **Approximately a quarter of those renting apartments mentioned that a large portion - 70-80% - of their income is spent on covering rental expenses.**

To alleviate some of the pressures related to rental prices, “Dopomoga Ukraini - Team for Ukraine” a local organization is actively disseminating information about real estate. Their website consolidates comprehensive information regarding rental options and shelters. Additionally, it provides details about volunteer organizations in Georgia that assist Ukrainian citizens in settling.

Income and Work

MMRH's research revealed that 88% of participants were employed in Ukraine, but only 48% have managed to secure employment in Georgia. The participants work in diverse areas such as the public sector (56%), farming (15%), and the private sector (18%). Approximately 46% are currently unemployed. An additional 7% lack income as 3% are students and 4% are retired pensioners.

Among the unemployed respondents, 58% indicated that they are actively looking for work and trying to enter the labour market. However, this leaves over 40% of individuals not actively pursuing work, despite facing financial constraints. When asked about their reasons for this, participants cited several challenges¹⁷:

- **Language barrier:**

Despite possessing substantial professional knowledge, many Ukrainians do not yet have the required languages required to effectively engage in Georgia's job market. Younger participants, particularly, perceive the language barrier as a significant obstacle to accessing well-paying positions. While there is eagerness to learn languages, respondents were surprised to find that proficiency in Georgian alone may not suffice in terms of securing qualified employment. They express greater interest in learning English, arguing that acquiring proficiency in both languages demands substantial resources.

This said, there is still a notable demand for Georgian language courses, particularly outside the capital region in cities like Kutaisi and Batumi. Respondents also prefer in-person teaching over online courses, expressing scepticism about the effectiveness of online education.

¹⁶ MMRH & ERC. (2023, December). page 16-17.

¹⁷ MMRH & ERC. (2023, December). pages 18-19.

- **Lower wages:**

Wage discrepancies between the Ukrainian and Georgian job markets are evident across all employment tiers. Respondents noted that wages for low-skilled positions in Georgia are at least two times lower than equivalent roles in Ukraine. Despite this disparity, a considerable number of individuals from the community have accepted such positions due to their dire financial circumstances.

- **Lack of information:**

In general, beneficiaries say that there is insufficient information regarding job opportunities and potential employment venues. While some information is shared through volunteer or organizational platforms aimed at assisting Ukrainian communities, the job postings predominantly feature low-skilled vacancies, including positions like cleaners, couriers, waiters, consultants, babysitters, prevention assistants, and gas station operators. The respondents exhibit limited interest in such roles. Instead, a majority of respondents try to seek better employment through personal connections, acquaintances, and through assistance from aid donors or non-governmental organizations.

- **Uncertainty about the future:**

For certain respondents, the anticipation of returning to Ukraine diminished their motivation to overcome barriers such as language acquisition or job searches. Activities aimed at self-improvement were viewed as temporary and unworthy of investment.

- **Time management**

Managing time poses a significant challenge for some respondents, particularly those responsible for caring for children or family members with special needs. The absence of free care services in Georgia exacerbates this challenge, hindering their ability to seek employment.

Intersectional Challenges for Female-Headed Households

The outcomes of the 2023 MMRH interviews closely parallel those of an earlier assessment report from December 2022, indicating little has changed over the past year.

The Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA)¹⁸, focusing specifically on Ukrainian Female-headed Households (FHHs) in Georgia, revealed significant challenges. Notably, 100% of these households had not been able to secure employment ahead of the approaching harsh winter.

Despite being eligible for various assistance, including cash assistance, from the government, NGOs, and INGOs, including cash aid, the MSNA underscored the persisting difficulties. 9% of households were unable to meet their food needs, and 12% struggled to meet clothing requirements, especially when confronted with high rent and limited financial resources. In sharing practical concerns, women said:

“The rent price starts [at] US\$500-600 and often increases after [a] few months”

“The support provided by many aid programmes is already over and the cost of living is high. I am anxious about the upcoming winter.”

When inquired further, regarding the barriers to acquiring income, it was found that many women lack local language or English skills (49%), 18% struggled to find decent, well-paid jobs matching

¹⁸ Cited in [Out in the Cold](#). (2022, December 10). World Vision International.

their skill sets, and 8% could not leave their young children to seek employment. Two women who participated in the MSNA focus groups said:

“My children go to a Georgian school only 2-3 hours per day and it is not enough for me to search for a job.”

“It is hard to find a job. I need to speak either Georgian or English.”

The MSNA also predicted a relatively widespread use of coping strategies among female heads of households to cover for the lack of cash especially during winter, including reaching into their savings and buying on credit. Women participating in the discussions said:

“We do not know what will happen for us, the food price is going up, the fuel price is increasing. We will have to borrow money from someone else, how else can we do?”

“We need to buy less clothes and reduce the outgoings related to kids’ entertainment.”

In fact, the MSNA in Georgia showed that 85% of the households surveyed secure their basic needs by using their hard-earned savings in addition to the aid provided, 6% have asked for loans and credit, while 3% are resorting to begging, and 1% are reducing their food consumption.

These firsthand accounts emphasize the specific consequences women have faced as gender dynamics within households changed rapidly and underscore the urgent need for targeted support and solutions.

Education

In line with the Government of Georgia's decision, students affected by hostilities in Ukraine, desiring to continue their education in Georgia, benefit from simplified enrolment procedures. The Georgian Ministry of Education and Science reported that by the end of 2022, over 2300 students of various age groups had successfully enrolled in schools through this initiative. Additionally, UNHCR, UNICEF, and World Vision are actively involved in ensuring comprehensive school services for children affected by displacement.

Despite the locally available options, a vast majority of Ukrainian children are continuing their school education online through Ukrainian schools. This is a result of the limited number of schools offering a 'Ukrainian sector' and textbooks in the Ukrainian language. The absence of sports and cultural activities in schools is also a noteworthy concern. In-depth interviews conducted by MMRH uncovered further specific challenges related to access to education, which need attention¹⁹:

- Children of refugee families from Kyiv are expected to see restrictions on online schooling in the future, as physical attendance is preferred. Consequently, refugees from Kyiv in particular may need help in getting registered in local schools.
- Some families reported encountering difficulties in registering their children in state kindergartens without having obtained full refugee status.
- Parents also expressed a desire for accessible Georgian language courses for their children. While they acknowledged the availability of non-governmental organizations offering

¹⁹ MMRH & ERC. (2023, December). pages 20-21.

language classes, they emphasized that these programs were often temporary and did not align with the school curriculum, creating a barrier to enrolment in local schools.

Healthcare

Ukrainian citizens who find themselves in Georgia due to the war have access to various complimentary medical services from both state and private clinics.

Citizens who entered Georgia between February 1, 2022, and May 1, 2023, and remained continuously in the country are eligible for services provided by the state healthcare program. No prior registration or affiliation with any agency is necessary to access state medical services. These services encompass a wide range of medical care, including emergency care, immunization, treatment for tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS, maternal and child health services such as antenatal care and newborn screening, mental health support, diabetes management, dialysis, treatment for rare diseases, and COVID-19 management including testing, vaccination, as well as both outpatient and inpatient care. Referral services, including emergency medical services and delivery, are also included.

Private clinics in Georgia extend complimentary services to Ukrainian citizens, covering emergency dental, surgical, ophthalmological, and other medical services. The Dopomoga Ukraini team regularly updates information about these offerings on their website.

While some respondents are aware of the option to access free medical services within the “Evex” network, a few highlighted shortages in various specialties, such as dermatologists and paediatric neurologists in Kutaisi, leading them to seek medical attention in Tbilisi.

According to information from World Vision in Georgia²⁰, individuals who entered Georgia from Ukraine after the onset of the war (excluding those with asylum seeker status in Georgia) have the option to request financial assistance for medical expenses. Additionally, individuals can apply for funding for medications, covering conditions such as chronic diseases, epilepsy, and Parkinson’s disease, among others. The Caritas of Georgia health care program offers medical services as part of the home care project, catering to Ukrainian beneficiaries. Citizens of Ukraine can also avail themselves of services provided by medical-rehabilitation and chronic wound treatment centres.

In light of this wide medical coverage, the primary concern revolves around the lack of information. Many Ukrainians are unaware of the available medical services they can access and what the procedures are in order to get the access. Although Ukrainian refugees theoretically have access to basic medical programs available to Georgian citizens, the lack of information about specific state programs results in respondents having to pay high prices for almost all services.

“I am facing significant financial challenges related to medical services. Procedures such as consultations, ultrasounds, and load tests, including the potential need for a CAT scan, come with substantial financial implications. Another issue I’ve encountered is the high cost of purchasing effective medicines, with an expense of 98 GEL for a single box. In cases where I need multiple medications, the financial strain becomes more pronounced. I’m aware that programs generally do not cover expenses related to heart diseases, unless specific clinics announce campaigns.”

²⁰ As cited in MMRH & ERC. (2023, December). page 24.

Obtaining information about these clinics is challenging due to time limitations and frequent changes.” (MMRH Research Participant, Male, 57, Donetsk)

Dentistry services, for example, are marked by high prices and strong demand, emphasizing the need for more accessible information about qualified doctors with specific specialties. Respondents also highlighted the issue of high prices for medical services, particularly affecting families with elderly members, children, or individuals with chronic diseases such as heart diseases or asthma, and especially during times of the year when resources are already limited. A woman participating in the 2022 MSNA said:

“My son is asthmatic and I am not sure I can buy the medicines during winter,”

Mental and Psychosocial Health

Many Ukrainians in Georgia have experienced severe trauma and loss. The war in Ukraine is taking a heavy toll on the mental health of those who have had to flee to safety and on children who have had to endure violence and displacement.

The MSNA conducted in Georgia showed that the main stressors for caregivers are the lack of income and job opportunities (58%), the uncertainty about the displacement (53%), and the inability to meet their basic needs (24%). The main stressors for children are war-related and survival trauma (32%).

As of Dec 2022, more than half of the households surveyed were not aware of available mental health services. UN Women and CARE International indicated that more attention needs to be paid to the gender specific needs of women impacted by the crisis in Ukraine, such as psychological support and sexual and reproductive health.²¹

Disaggregated information on awareness of women regarding health services is not available for 2023. However, according to MMRH, general awareness regarding psychosocial services among respondents was notably high in comparison to other health services. Respondents expressed being aware of numerous civil organizations extending psychosocial support to Ukrainians, as well as initiatives on online platforms, including in Batumi.

The predominant psychological challenges reported by Ukrainian participants in the MMRH research stem from the pervasive sense of uncertainty linked to the anticipation of the war's conclusion and the prospect of returning home. It is important to note that during the research, participants found it challenging to focus on the present and the future. Their primary focus was on meeting their immediate basic needs. Respondents expressed a lack of a clear plan, even for the near future, as a significant part of the refugee population eagerly await the stabilization of the situation in Ukraine, anticipating a swift return to their homes.

Respondents from Kutaisi, however, reported specific challenges related to the available services being short-term, and there being limited information about alternative services. Notably, there is a recognized need for socialized psychologists experienced in addressing trauma and the effects of war.

²¹ UN Women and CARE International, as cited in [Out in the Cold](#). (2022, December 10). World Vision International.

"The ongoing uncertainty regarding the end of the war and the lack of clarity about where and when they can establish a stable life exacerbate the situation. Some individuals have lost everything they built over their lifetimes and are left without a place to go. I am acquainted with a family where two members experience periodic panic attacks and intense fear. Some individuals exhibit frequent shifts in their demeanor. Consequently, managing the trauma becomes an impossible task without the assistance of a professional neurologist or psychotherapist." (MMRH Research Participant)

"You know, my niece has been living in Sweden for a long time. I raised her, and her mother died. Not long ago, she informed me that she won a cash prize in some social competition and wanted me to congratulate her, 'I'll send you some money too.' Money is not the main thing; she is a student and won the competition—I still struggled to express my joy. We are alive, and sometimes we have very happy days, but I realize that I do not have the feeling of joy. A one-week meeting with a psychologist who does not have proper practice cannot help in such a situation." (MMRH Research Participant, Female, 60, Donetsk)

Specifically, with regard to children, online education and challenges of isolation have raised concerns among parents. Some report that their children are experiencing psychological issues during the current period of online education. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that the war comes after a period of online education necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Legal aid

The lack of information concerning services also extends to the necessary documents for accessing these services. According to the findings of the MMRH research²², there has been a significant increase in the demand for legal services over the past year. This surge is attributed to the confusion and chaos among the people, coupled with the challenges of navigating a new environment that requires the organization of documents.

Only 42% of research participants indicated having all the required documents. Among those lacking the necessary documentation, the majority mentioned the need for an international passport²³, child's birth certificate, health certificate, school certificate, diploma, and various professional certificates.

MMRH findings also reveal a low level of interest among respondents in obtaining refugee status. Several factors contribute to this phenomenon: firstly, there was initial optimism until the summer period about the possibility of a swift return to Ukraine. Secondly, there is incomplete awareness about the privileges and benefits linked to refugee status. Lastly, limited information about the procedures required to obtain refugee status has further discouraged applicants. Some believe it might be too late, assuming that the application should have been submitted immediately after crossing the border.

Furthermore, there is a high demand for driver's licenses, as many individuals require them for employment. Some respondents believe that citizens of foreign countries in Georgia can exchange their driver's licenses for a Georgian one. However, this option is not feasible for Ukrainian citizens

²² MMRH & ERC. (2023, December). page 26.

²³ Passports are issued by the Embassy of Ukraine in Tbilisi, but challenges persist with registration procedures and extended processing times, sometimes lasting up to three months.

due to additional documentation requirements, such as a notice of confirmation of the driver's license, original seal, medical form 100, and registration certificate, which respondents currently do not possess.

Refugees from other countries of origin

In conversations with various actors carrying out humanitarian operations in Georgia, an often-overlooked segment of beneficiaries surfaced, i.e., individuals identified as asylum seekers, refugees, or holders of humanitarian protection status, except those originating from Ukraine. While many Ukrainians in Georgia have been met with hospitable, if materially difficult, circumstances, this is not true for other migrants in refugee-like conditions. A possible reason for this disparity may be the relatively small numbers of non-Ukrainian refugee groups. According to UNHCR's September 2023 advocacy note on the situation of refugees in Georgia, the country hosts "493 refugees and 962 humanitarian status holders."²⁴

Top five countries of origin of refugees in Georgia:

Russia – 207, Iraq – 93, Egypt – 67, Iran – 46, Afghanistan – 16.

Top five countries of origin of humanitarian status holders:

Ukraine – 470, Iraq – 290, Syria – 98, Yemen – 61, Afghanistan – 41.

The note also informs that "very few refugees have obtained Georgian citizenship despite several years of residence and reasonably successful social and economic integration," and argues that "facilitated access to citizenship for recognized refugees is an important next step for Georgia in implementing the 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 34)."

Beyond decreased visibility and legal challenges, asylum seekers are also faced with the challenge of having to be self-reliant amidst materially tough conditions and a competitive labour market. Asylum seekers **do not currently receive any financial assistance from the Georgian government**. However, they **do have a right to work** and thus the opportunity to be self-reliant if they can find jobs.

The Government's Reception Centre in Martkopi, situated outside Tbilisi, offers shelter to some vulnerable asylum seekers. However, the lack of livelihood prospects in this area, coupled with high transportation costs to Tbilisi mean that this is very much a last resort for asylum-seekers.

Finding gainful employment remains a formidable challenge for asylum seekers and refugees - 'like digging for gold' as one refugee put it. In Georgia, tourism and other service sectors employ almost half of the workforce, contributing to 80% of GDP. These are sectors where many asylum seekers and refugees are able to find seasonal employment, particularly in cities like Tbilisi and Batumi. Nevertheless, intense competition for these jobs remains a significant obstacle.

Furthermore, substantial improvements are needed in identifying and addressing the specific needs of asylum seekers, especially those with chronic medical conditions, disabilities, or severe mental

²⁴ Note: The cited advocacy note was obtained directly from colleagues at UNHCR Georgia. As of writing the document is not publicly available. For up-to-date information on the number of refugees and humanitarian status holders in Georgia please contact [UNHCR Georgia](#) directly.

health issues, requiring coordinated efforts and resources from various humanitarian actors as well as government entities like the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The above sections have summarized available information regarding the needs of refugees and other crisis-affected groups living in the Republic of Georgia. Based on the findings of this SDR, we conclude that collection of further primary data is recommended, particularly regarding the needs of potential beneficiaries who are not from Ukraine.

For future actions, we propose the following recommendations:

- Centralizing aid provision emerges as a crucial step to identify and assist potential beneficiaries who may be overlooked or missed. This strategic move would not only streamline service distribution but also enhance coordination efforts and program formulation based on reliable demographic metrics.
- To bolster the sustainability of existing programs, there is a call for better-targeted efforts that can move beyond sporadic, short-term initiatives. It is essential to recognize the unique needs of recently arrived Ukrainian refugees who may anticipate a return to their home countries. For them, a nuanced approach involving targeted immediate humanitarian relief and mental health provision is ideal. Conversely, refugees from regions with protracted crises may benefit more from livelihood-oriented approaches alongside cash assistance as, unlike Ukrainian refugees, those from other countries of origin do not currently receive the state's 300GEL cash assistance.
- Addressing the nutritional needs of children and infants, along with the hygiene needs of women, can be achieved by providing basic food and personal care items through direct cash assistance or local partners.
- A well-executed social media campaign is recommended to raise awareness among potential beneficiaries, encompassing both Ukrainian and other backgrounds. Such a campaign would not only promote business ventures launched under livelihood programs but could also aid in resource mobilization by leveraging increased public awareness of the challenges faced by local migrants.
- Collaborating with local actors such as “Dopomoga Ukraini” to establish a digital platform is a promising direction. This platform should prioritize delivering up-to-date and accurate information, offering support in the housing search process, and facilitating transactions between tenants and refugees.
- Incentive measures for businesses actively supporting the employment or professional practice of Ukrainians can contribute significantly to their economic empowerment.
- Providing regional support beyond the capital region is advocated to address the needs of those living outside the region and to prevent overcrowding and positively impacting living conditions. This support includes assistance in overcoming language barriers, adapting to

the Georgian labour market, engaging refugees in vocational training to enhance skills and employability and support in looking for work opportunities closer to home.

- Critical for the well-being of children and young people is their active involvement in sports, cultural, or educational activities throughout Georgia. These activities contribute not only to better mental and physical health but also offer parents, especially single mothers, the opportunity to pursue employment or work on their businesses as caregiving responsibilities may decrease.

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