



MINISTRY OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED  
PERSONS FROM THE OCCUPIED  
TERRITORIES, LABOUR, HEALTH AND  
SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA



საგანგებოდა კონტროლისა და  
საზოგადოებრივი ჯანმრთელობის  
ეროვნული ცენტრი  
GEORGIAN NATIONAL CENTER FOR DISEASE  
CONTROL AND PUBLIC HEALTH

## GEORGIA Brief 2020

# Collaboration with the World Health Organization

### Key Facts

World Health Organization (WHO) was founded as a specialized agency of the United Nations in 1948 to work for the attainment of the highest possible level of health by all peoples. The Constitution of WHO defines health as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Constitution was adopted by the International Health Conference in New York and signed on 22 July, 1946 by the representatives of 61 states and entered into force on 7 April 1948.

Georgia became a member of WHO on 16 May 1992.

WHO, as the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations system, adheres to the UN values of integrity, professionalism and respect for diversity. These values are inspired by the WHO vision of a world in which all peoples attain the highest possible level of health, and mission, to promote health, keep the world safe and serve the vulnerable, with measurable impact for people at country level.

WHO's Thirteenth General Program of Work (GPW 13) 2019-2023 summarizes WHO's mission, which is to: Promote health; Keep the world safe; Serve the vulnerable. GPW 13 is focused on the three interconnected strategic priorities to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages:

- Achieving universal health coverage (UHC)
- Addressing health emergencies
- Promoting healthier populations.



Source: World Health Organization

**Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus** was elected as WHO Director-General in May 2017 and took the office on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2017. He is the first WHO Director-General who was elected among multiple candidates by the World Health Assembly.

**Dr Hans Henri P. Kluge** was elected by the countries of the European Region and began his term as a WHO Regional Director for Europe on 1 February 2020, following his nomination by the WHO Regional Committee for Europe and appointment by the WHO Executive Board.



**The WHO Regional Office for Europe (WHO/Europe)** covers 53 European countries. WHO/Europe staff (public health professionals, scientific and technical experts) are based in the main office in Copenhagen, Denmark, in 5 technical centers (Barcelona, Bonn, Venice, Almaty, Moscow) and in 29 Member States' country offices.

## Governance of the WHO

The World Health Assembly (WHA) is the supreme decision-making body for WHO, supported by the Executive Board. WHA meets in WHO headquarters in Geneva in May each year. World Health Assembly consists of delegates from all member states (194), observers, the other United Nations (UN) agencies, intergovernmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations having official relations with WHO.

Within the European Region, the WHO Regional Committee for Europe fulfils the similar role. Representatives of each Member State in the European Region meet every year in September. At these meetings, the Member States (53) formulate regional policies, develop recommendations and supervise WHO/Europe's activities, and approve the budget.

The Standing Committee of the Regional Committee (SCRC) acts for and represents the Regional Committee and ensures that effect is given to its decisions and policies. The SCRC advises the Regional Committee on questions referred to it by that body and counsels the Regional Director as and when appropriate between sessions of the Regional Committee. The SCRC reports to the Regional Committee on its work.

We are proud that several prominent Georgian experts became part of the **WHO Team** since 1964, during different periods of time, this honour was shared by: **Dr. Tamaz Kereselidze, Dr. Alexander Anjaparidze, Dr. Nata Menabde; Dr. Bakhuti Shengelia, Dr. Lali Khotenashvili. Dr. Giorgi Kuchikhidze.**



**Dr. Nino Berdzuli** joined WHO/Europe in 2018 to lead the sexual and reproductive health programme and in 2020 Dr. Berdzuli was appointed as a **Director of the Division of Country Health Programmes (CHP)**.

Georgia was elected as a member in the following **WHO governing bodies**:

- **European Ministerial Board on Environment and Health** - David Sergeenko, member; Amiran Gamkrelidze, alternate member (2013-2015)
- **Standing Committee of the Regional Committee (SCRC)** - Dr. Nikoloz Pruidze 2006-2009; Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze (2015-2018);
  - Besides, Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze was elected as a **Chairman of the SCRC** for 2017-2018 years
- **Executive President of the 68<sup>th</sup> Session of the Regional Committee of Europe** - Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze, 2018, Rome, Italy
- **Executive Board** - Dr. David Sergeenko (2017-2020), later replaced by Dr. Tamar Gabunia
- **Joint Coordinating Board of the Special Programme for Research and Training in Tropical Diseases (JCB)** - Dr. Paata Imnadze (2003-2006 and 2019-2022)



In addition, in different periods of time, Georgian professionals were elected in the **WHO advisory bodies and working groups**:

- **Intergovernmental Working Group on International Health Regulations (IHR 2005)** - Dr. Paata Imnadze, 2004-2005

- **European Advisory Committee on Health Research** - Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze, 2004-2007
- **WHO European Technical Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization** - Dr. Paata Imnadze, 2005-2011
- **Editorial Board for the Report of the WHO European Region on "Health Inequality in Europe"**, Dr. Paata Imnadze, 2012
- **IHR Emergency Committee Concerning Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus** - Dr. Paata Imnadze, 2013 to present
- **European Health Systems Foresight Group** - Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze, 2017-2019







The Second session of the 25<sup>th</sup> Standing Committee of the Regional Committee for Europe took place in **Tbilisi, 28-29 November 2017**, as Georgia, represented by Dr. Amiran Gamkrelidze, was chairing the SCRC for 2017-2018.



Georgian specialists were recognized in awarding the **WHO prizes** for excellence in public health, which reward and recognize the major achievements, with proven impact for health gains in countries. The prizes are established either in the name of eminent health professionals and international figures or by prominent foundations that commit to support international and global public health innovation and success.

- In 2002, WHO European regional Bureau awarded Dr. Paata Imnadze with **Gold Medal** for his contribution to the declaration of European Region as a polio free.
- In 2009, at the World Health Assembly awarded the Infectious Diseases, AIDS and Clinical Immunology Research Center (General Director Tengiz Tsertsvadze) with the **Lee Jong Wook Memorial Prize** as the Best Infectious Diseases Institution in the European Region – to fight AIDS and Viral hepatitis, in particular, for the special and innovative way of the prevention, treatment and control of these diseases and contribution to the development of research potential.



- The same year, at the World Health Assembly, Georgian Respiratory Association (Dr. Ivane Chkhaidze, President) was awarded with the **United Arab Emirates Health Foundation Prize**

- The same year – in 2009, Dr. Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General presented Dr. Tamaz Maghlakelidze with the 2009 **United Nations Prize** for outstanding contribution to the development of medicine.

### ***Work of the WHO in Georgia***

The main strategic directions of WHO in Georgia, as well as in other countries in the world, are:

- Reducing excess mortality, morbidity and disability, especially in poor and marginalized populations;
- Promoting healthy lifestyles and reducing risk factors to human health that arise from environmental, economic, social and behavioral causes;
- Developing health systems that equitably improve health outcomes, respond to people's legitimate demands, and are financially fair;
- Framing an enabling policy and creating an institutional environment for the health sector, and promoting an effective health dimension to social, economic, environmental and development policy.

The overall goal of WHO in Georgia is to:

- Assist the government in developing its national health policy and strengthening healthcare systems;
- Provide needed technical assistance; improve preparedness for emergency situations;
- Promote up-dated standards of education and training in the healthcare sector;
- Provide evidence-based expertise and information in the healthcare sector to take all necessary actions to attain WHO objectives.

Georgia became a member of WHO on 16 May 1992. In 1993 a Liaison office was opened in Tbilisi. The Basic Agreement between Georgia and WHO has been signed in 1994. In 2005 the name of the office was changed to WHO Country Office in Georgia. Georgia acceded the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the Specialized Agencies on 28 February 2007.



The first Head of WHO Country Office (WHO CO) was Prof. Tamaz Kereselidze, who was one of the active participants of Global Smallpox Eradication campaign from WHO in 1970-ies. In 1999-2016 Head of WHO CO GEO was Dr. Rusudan Klimiashvili and in 2016-2019 - Dr. Marijan Ivanusa. Since March 2019 WHO Country Office is headed by Dr. Silviu Domete.

The WHO Country Office in Georgia is subordinated to the Regional Office for Europe. The Country Office plays a crucial role in administration, consolidation, management and enhancement of WHO collaboration in the country. It also contributes to interfacing between the Government and WHO, assists in informing the Government regarding WHO policies in a timely manner and elaborates strategies and activities while providing advice on healthcare sector development and inter-sectoral issues for health.

The WHO Country Office implements its activities in the country in close collaboration with the Ministry of IDPs, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia, UN agencies, governmental and non-governmental organizations and is active in the healthcare sector. The national counterpart for strategic collaboration with WHO in Georgia is Dr. Tamar Gabunia, First Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia. There is close collaboration between WHO country office, respective technical units in the regional office or headquarters and the National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia, including Lugar center.



The WHO significantly contributes to capacity-building in the country. Georgian medical professionals regularly participate in WHO meetings, conferences, workshops and trainings. WHO experts and consultants regularly visit Georgia to provide technical assistance to local professionals in their efforts to meet the country's needs and requirements. In line with WHO policy, the Ministry on a yearly basis actively participates in the work of WHO governing bodies, World Health Assemblies and Regional Committees.

WHO cooperates with Georgia, in the frame of **Biennial Collaborative Agreements (BCA)**, which defines the priorities for collaboration. BCA documents are elaborated through successive stages of consultations between the national health authorities and the regional and country levels of WHO offices.

Since early 1990s, the BCAs between the WHO Regional Office for Europe and the Government of Georgia was focusing on the following cooperative priorities:

- Development of national health policies, health strategies and action plans;
- Strengthening of health systems and public health:
  - Strengthening National Surveillance System and Laboratory Capacities for communicable diseases – 3 laboratories within the Lugar Center (polio, measles/rubella, influenza) are getting WHO accreditation



annually and 5 laboratories are included in the WHO laboratory network (Rota and others); Health System Performance Assessment (HSPA); Assessment of Georgian Public Health System; Health Financing/Inequality in health; National System of Health Accounts; Human Resources for Health; Support of Primary Health Care.

- Universal Health Coverage;
- Strengthening national health information systems: capacity building for morbidity and mortality data quality improvement;
- Cooperation in global strategies, such as Millennium Development Goals, Health 2020 Policy and Sustainable Development Goals (Health related goals);



- Maternal and Child Health:
  - Selective purchasing of selected services in the area of reproductive health.
- Strengthening National Immunization Systems, such as: Measles / Rubella / Influenza; Introducing new vaccines in National Immunization Programme (Hepatitis B, Rota, Pneumo, Hexa, HPV); Implementation and monitoring of the global vaccine action plan to achieve the goals for the Decade of Vaccines; Assessment of Vaccine Procurement System in Georgia.
- Addressing Non-Communicable Diseases:
  - Developing integrated NCD prevention and control policies and strategies;
  - STEPs Surveys;
  - Surveys on NCD risk-factors – Childhood Obesity Surveillance Initiative (COSI), Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC), Global Youth Tobacco Survey (GYTS), etc.;



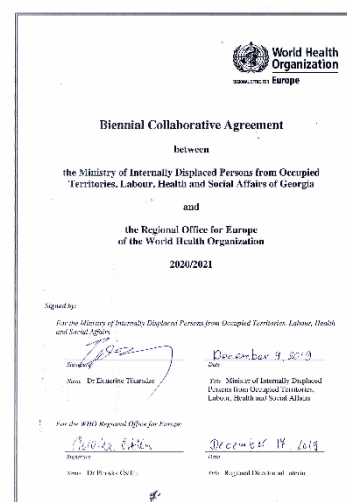
- Strengthening capacity of primary healthcare professionals personnel on NCD prevention and control;
- Strengthening tobacco control;
- National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP);
- Chemical safety – “Development of legislative and operational framework for collection and sharing of information on hazardous chemicals in Georgia”;
- GLAAS - Global analysis and Assessment of Sanitation and Drinking-Water 2016/2017 Survey;
- Implementation of mental health strategy in accordance with Helsinki Declaration;
- Cancer Strategy;
- Epilepsy demonstration Project;
- Road Safety.
- Addressing Communicable Diseases:
  - HIV/AIDS/STI, including the process of obtaining status of “Free from Mother to Child transmission of HIV and Syphilis”;
  - Viral Hepatitis / Hepatitis C Elimination Strategy for Georgia;
  - Tuberculosis/Multidrug resistance Tuberculosis (MDR-TB);
  - Influenza;
  - Malaria elimination /Leishmaniasis;
  - Laboratory based surveillance of Acute Flaccid Paralysis (AFP) and environmental samples to maintain polio-free status;
  - International Health regulations (IHR);
  - Disaster Preparedness and Response;
  - Antimicrobial Resistance: National Strategy, Global action plan;
- Strengthening Blood Safety System: Assessing blood establishments; Setting recommendations for upgrading of blood transfusion system in Georgia.



## BCA 2020-2021

As a response to the key health challenges and in line with Health 2020 and 2030 Agenda in Georgia, as well as with the WHO 13th General Programme of Work (GPW13) the following high priority areas have been agreed for collaboration in 2020-2021:

- Improved access to quality essential health services
- Reduced number of people suffering financial hardships
- Country health emergency preparedness strengthened



- Health emergencies rapidly detected and responded to



- Determinants of health addressed leaving no one behind

In addition, collaboration will be extended in the following areas:

- Improved availability of essential medicines, vaccines, diagnostics and devices for primary health care
  - Reduced risk factors through multi sectoral approaches.
- Limited technical assistance will also be provided in several other areas.

The World Health Organization (WHO) plays a pivotal role in supporting Georgia in responding to COVID19 outbreak. Georgia has implemented a multisectoral response to the COVID-19 outbreak coordinated by the MoH. Considering rapidly changing situation and emerging challenges country needs continuous support to address the short-term emergency needs, as well as the longer-term structural impacts, to strengthen capacities and effectively prevent, prepare for, detect and respond to public health emergencies. WHO is supporting the NCDC to contain and overcome the COVID-19 pandemic in a rapid, effective, coordinated, transparent, and participatory manner. For the effective management of the COVID-19 pandemic in Georgia, WHO rendered an assistance to the country in order to **Support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in Georgia, with a special focus on the most vulnerable populations**, In the frames of which, several projects will be implemented in Georgia, including:



- Contribution to the training of new graduates – conducting the COVID-19 Epidemiology training course for 110 epidemiologists and 50 lab specialists for their rapid involvement in national COVID response
- Contribution to national sero-surveillance study (sero-prevalence studies in priority areas)
- Developing policies and services for better addressing the NCDs and their risk factors
- Pilot study on implementation of WGS technologies for diagnostics and surveillance of TB in Georgia
- Revising and updating of the National Pandemic Preparedness plan
- Strengthening capacities of the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC)
- Launch and support inter-sectoral platform to successfully transfer existing knowledge, sharing best practice and interesting experience among members to strengthen public healthcare sector in Georgia.
- Support to networks of trusted key influencers in communities (health workers, schools, faith-based organizations, etc.)

As part of the project several activities were already conducted:

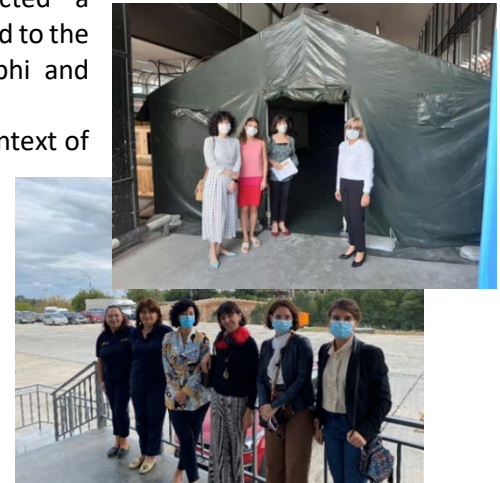


- Under the support of the WHO, 54 public health and lab specialists selected through the competition and designated for regional public health centers were trained by the NCDC mentors prior to contracting on their job positions; through this support the staff (up to 200 persons) of Tbilisi City Hall and various private laboratories passed this training program as well for 3 months period.



- Equipping Public Health Emergency Operations Center (PHEOC) at the NCDC with videoconferencing equipment to ensure a 24/7 connection between NCDC regional branches, MoH, designated healthcare facilities, and the WHO (in process).

- Trainings for epidemiologists at Points of Entries on COVID-19 related issues (“Sarphi”, “Sadakhlo” and “Red Bridge”)
- Under the International Health Regulations (IHR2005), conducted a Performance assessment of recommendations and requirements linked to the COVID-19 response at Points of Entry (custom checkpoint of Sarphi and Batumi seaport)
- The protocol “Management of ill travelers at points of Entry in the context of COVID-19” has been developed based on WHO template
- After visiting Points of entries two general recommendations were developed: Allocation of permanent space for the isolation of ill/infected travelers at the Points of Entries “Sarphi”, “Sadakhlo” and “Red Bridge” under the International Health Regulations and staffed with adequate human resources; At Points of Entry, one should completely follow the testing under the Biosafety rules.



In 2020 WHO assisted the Ministry of IDPs, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and NCDC with essential personal protective equipment and test systems for COVID-19. Besides, with the WHO technical assistance and expert consultancy following activities were conducted:

- Hospital Readiness Assessment
- Tabletop Exercise on COVID19 preparedness and clinical management took place, organized by the Ministry and NCDC
- Distance training on clinical management of severe cases
- Translation and printing of communication materials

Among other ongoing activities in a collaboration and with technical assistance from WHO includes, but is not limited to:

- Support to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 in Georgia, Assessment of risk factors for COVID-19 in health workers

The objective will be achieved through the strengthening of the national capacity to effectively prevent, prepare for, detect and respond to public health emergencies. Specific objectives will be to conduct case-control study (assessment of risk factors for COVID-19 in health workers) in Georgia. Four primary objectives of this prospective study among health workers in a health care facility in which a patient with a laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 infection is receiving, care are:

- To better understand the extent of human-to-human transmission among health workers by estimating the secondary infection rate<sup>1</sup> for health worker contacts at the individual level.
- To characterize the range of clinical presentations of infection and the risk factors for infection among health workers.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of infection prevention and control measures among health workers.



- To evaluate the effectiveness of infection prevention and control programmes at health facility and national level.
- Elimination of Mother to Child HIV and Syphilis Transmission (EMTCT) in Georgia – Preparation for validation
- Update the Action plan on the Elimination of Mother to Child HIV and Syphilis Transmission (EMTCT) for 2021-2022
- Elaboration of the Country Strategic plan for the elimination of Hepatitis C 2021 -2025, in the frames of which Strategic Planning workshop will be held on December 21 with active participation of experts from US CDC, WHO,



Bristol University, FIND, EASLF. The main subject of the workshop is the introduction of the new strategic Plan on HCV Elimination 2021-2025. The draft document was developed with CDC based on the 2019 TAG recommendations and in line with the updated WHO guidelines.

- WHO Collaborating Center on Viral Hepatitis at NCDC, Georgia
  - In collaboration with WHO, to learn about the components of a national hepatitis C elimination programme, including implementation of people-centred approaches through integrated screening and care of patients with hepatitis C and HIV and/or tuberculosis co-infection (using Georgia as an example)
  - Provide technical assistance in assessing and improving hepatitis B and C response and monitoring in the WHO European region through participation in WHO country missions
  - Upon request and in collaboration with WHO, organization and facilitation of international trainings on lab methods of hepatitis diagnostics, introduction of national external quality assurance programmes, etc.
- Training of Public Health professionals and service providers for Key Population for institutionalization of a newly updated National HIV Surveillance Guideline, including HIV consultation and testing Protocol and new HIV case reporting system in Georgia
  - Update of the National HIV Surveillance Guideline to reflect WHO new recommendations;
  - Training of Public Health Centers epidemiologists countrywide.
- **New initiative** - Georgia is nominated by WHO as a pilot country in 2021 to evaluate the proposed WHO approaches for validation of elimination of Viral Hepatitis



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Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied  
Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia  
144, A. Tsereteli avenue, 0119 Tbilisi, Georgia  
[www.moh.gov.ge](http://www.moh.gov.ge)



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საქართველოს ეპიდემიო

National Center for Disease Control and Public Health  
99, Kakheti Highway, 0198, Tbilisi Georgia  
[www.ncdc.ge](http://www.ncdc.ge)