UKRAINIAN REFUGEES IN GEORGIA PROFILE, INTENTIONS AND NEEDS

Ukrainian refugee girl in the streets of Kutaisi. March 2022 UNHCR/Nino Kajaia

REPORT BASED ON A SURVEY CONDUCTED BY WORLD VISION IN COLLABORATION WITH UNHCR

November 2022

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CONTEXT

Since the launch of the military offensive by the Russian Federation in Ukraine on 24 February 2022, more than 7.8 million refugees have been forced to flee to neighboring countries, while an additional estimated 6.5 million people have been displaced internally within Ukraine. Since then, more than 160,000 Ukrainians have entered Georgia which serves as both a transit and a destination country. As of October, some 25,000 remain in the country. UNHCR estimates that a similar number will remain in Georgia over the next several months.

From UNHCR's perspective, Ukrainians who fled due to the conflict in Ukraine and/or are unable to return are considered as refugees. 34 European countries have offered Ukrainians temporary protection or similar protection schemes.

UNHCR and World Vision were involved in providing immediate assistance to Ukrainian refugees arriving in Georgia from the first days of the armed conflict in Ukraine.

In Georgia around half of the Ukrainians (and half the respondents to this survey) originated from non-government-controlled areas of Ukraine via the Dariali (Larsi) border crossing points with Russia.

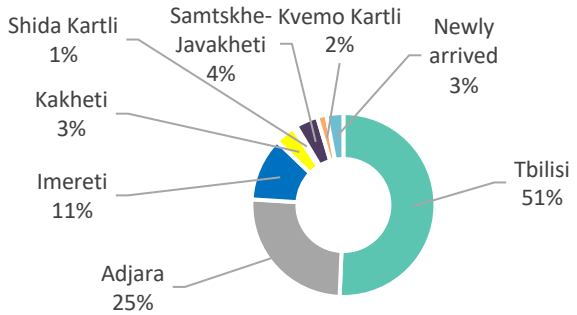
Many Ukrainians in Georgia came from Mariupol and Kharkiv when these places were severely affected by the conflict. In Georgia, Ukrainians can enter the country without requiring a visa, benefit from simplified border crossing procedures and reside for a year. While Georgia was one of the main feasible destination countries for many (especially coming from the eastern parts of Ukraine, whose only option was to transit through Russia), others chose to come to Georgia due to familiarity with the culture, language or because they had contacts or relatives. Some have mentioned education opportunities for children and less expensive costs of living as a reason to come to Georgia.

Not all expectations have been met and the cost of living, and especially rent, has proven to be unexpectedly high, due to the influx of many Russians also arriving after the start of conflict. Many Ukrainians have left Georgia but, a substantial number have remained. The survey explores the intentions and needs of 304 families currently living in Georgia.

METHODOLOGY

To identify needs and priorities and to establish an evidence base for programme interventions, World Vision Georgia conducted a Protection Risks and Needs Assessment of the Ukrainian population in several cities in Georgia. To complement quantitative elements, focus group discussions were used as an additional tool. This report presents the main findings from over 300 interviews conducted in August-October 2022 in Tbilisi (51%) and in six other regions of Georgia as well as the results of three Focus Group Discussions.

Location of data collection



Total number of individuals covered by the survey is 842. 49% of all interviews were conducted in person, while 31% of respondents were reached by phone. The rest of interviews were conducted at community centers, blue point or public spaces.

Most of the interviewees came from the Donetsk, Kherson and Kyiv Oblasts.

The interviews were conducted in various locations, including at the Larsi border and at hotels where newly arrived refugees were provided accommodation by the Government. Trained enumerators from *Initiative for Social Changes*, collected the data through using a Kobo Toolbox. The survey questionnaire combined a World Vision questionnaire used in Romania for Rapid Needs Assessments, and a UNHCR intentions questionnaire used across Europe.

In addition to the survey interviews, focus group discussions including 12 participants each were organized in Kutaisi, Tbilisi and Batumi in September 2022. The discussions involved 36 participants (30 women, 6 men) in total. Thus, the total number of Ukrainians participating in this assessment (survey and focus groups) is around 1000.

The results presented in this report should be interpreted in light of the chosen methodology:

- Despite the fact that the snowball method was used to reach Ukrainians in the targeted locations, the majority were reached through World Vision and UNHCR databases, i.e. individuals who have proactively reached out for assistance, thus rendering the sample to be the more vulnerable segment of the Ukrainian population in Georgia.
- The results reflect needs and intentions at the time of data collection, which might change due to the volatility of the situation.

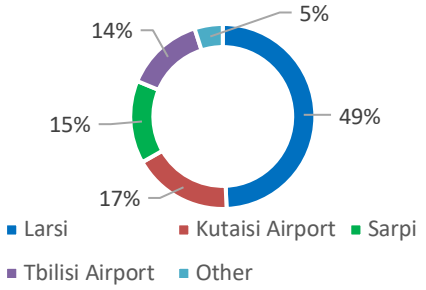
The assessment was conducted within Ukraine Crisis Response Project implemented by WV Georgia with financial support of Aktion Deutschland Hilft e.V. (ADH).

DISPLACEMENT PATTERNS & DEMOGRAPHICS

94% of respondents were citizens of Ukraine (the rest were third country nationals with residence in Ukraine). Their main spoken language was Ukrainian but 98% also spoke Russian, and 7% spoke English. Half the Ukrainians in Georgia come from the East, many from areas heavily affected by the conflict or not under control of the Ukrainian authorities anymore. Their only route to leave has been through Russia, arriving then in Georgia through the Dariali (Larsi) border point or other border crossing points.

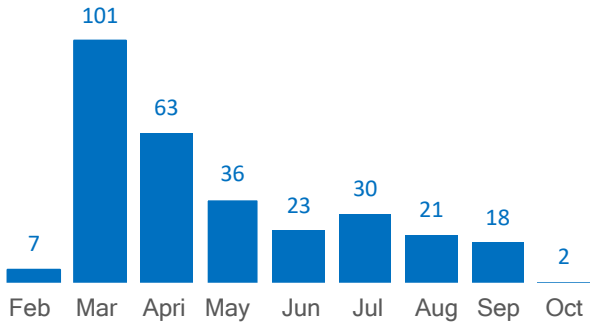
Some 49% of the interviewees reported that they entered Georgia through the Dariali (Larsi) border.

Entries by border point



30% of respondents arrived in Georgia without stopping in a transit country.

DATE OF ARRIVAL IN GEORGIA



Places of Origin - by household

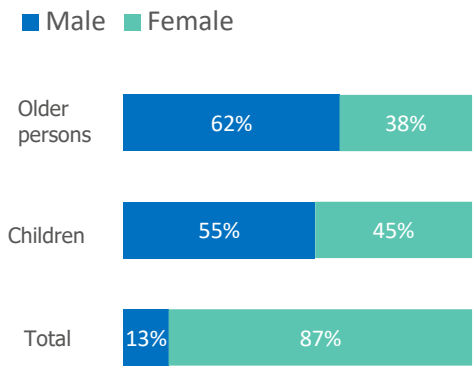
4% of respondents had gone back from Georgia to Ukraine at least once since their initial departure. The main reason mentioned was to retrieve documents and other personal effects.

While slightly more than half the current adult population of Ukrainians residing in Georgia are male (according to Ministry of Internal Affairs statistics), the majority of respondents in the survey were female (82%). The average age of respondents was 42. In total, there were 126 female-headed households among the respondents (41%).

Around 68% of households have at least one child. 65% of respondents have school or pre-school-aged children (3-18 years) in their household (in total 195 HH).

Kira, a 5-year-old girl from Zaporizhzhia, was involved in psychosocial and sports activities organized by World Vision Georgia. May 2022 World Vision Georgia

Family composition of respondents



Of those surveyed, 68% had been separated from family members. The majority of those staying behind in Ukraine are adult men (37%) and the older persons. The primary reason for separation was family members inability or unwillingness to leave to leave their homes because of illnesses, old age, chronic medical conditions or disabilities (37%). The second most cited reason was a limitation on freedom of movement for men due to the martial law in place (13%). 9% of respondents noted that they expect family members to join them within the next 3 months.

SURVEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE

94%
of respondents are citizens of Ukraine

96%
travelled from Ukraine accompanied by close family

82%
of all respondents are female

9%
are older persons

50%
of respondents had a university level education

49%
of respondents arrived in Georgia through Russia

70%
of respondents stopped in a transit country before arriving in Georgia

4%
of respondents had been back to Ukraine at least once since their initial departure

KEY FINDINGS

1 INTENTIONS

ONLY 4% HAVE DECIDED TO LEAVE GEORGIA, WHILE 30% HAVE NOTHING TO RETURN TO

In focus group discussions, participants found it very difficult to discuss future plans, given all the unknowns and because their current focus was on meeting basic needs. The majority is waiting for the war in Ukraine to end and for the situation to stabilize before deciding whether to stay in Georgia or return. Parents with school-aged children feel generally more confident they will remain. In some cases, Ukrainians plan to return to territories recovered by Ukrainian authorities, despite it being highly unsafe.

80% of respondents reported that they plan to stay in Georgia for at least 3 months, while 13% remain undecided. Only 4% of respondents reported that they have concrete plans to leave the country (the majority are planning to go back to Ukraine). Other destinations mentioned were Bulgaria, Spain, Germany and Canada. 9% of respondents were expecting relatives to join them soon.

76% of respondents reported that all school-aged children in their household are enrolled (registered) in Georgian schools for the school year 2022/2023. This finding may support the assumption that most will remain in Georgia at least until the end of the school year. In cases where children were not enrolled, the reason given was a preference to continue with online/remote learning in the Ukrainian curriculum.

Findings from focus group discussions confirmed that people want very much to return to their homes in Ukraine, but do not consider it safe or possible to do so the coming months. 30% of respondents reported that their homes in Ukraine had been destroyed or become uninhabitable, while 9% reported that their houses had been partially damaged but possible to return to in the future.

2 ACCOMMODATION, INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT

AFFORDABLE ACCOMMODATION IS A PRIORITY NEED
DESPITE A HIGH EDUCATION LEVEL, FINDING WORK IS VERY CHALLENGING

73% of the survey respondents were employed before leaving Ukraine. Half the respondents also reported having university level education (Bachelor/Masters), while 29% mentioned having technical/vocational qualifications.

Most Ukrainians struggle to find employment due to:

- Language barrier
- Lack of childcare
- Barriers to work for caregivers
- Lack of suitable jobs

Only 16% of respondents were employed while 31% reported that a main source of income was assistance provided by international organisations, NGOs, the Government or Volunteers. 28% of respondents were relying on savings to meet basic needs, while 22% relied on pension funds.

Problems with receiving pensions have been reported. 8% of respondents said they could not access their money since leaving home, due to credit cards being left or damaged.

The majority is struggling to find and stay in affordable accommodation. Well over half (56%) reported staying in rented accommodation, 13% of respondents reported that they are living in a home or apartment with a host community family they know, while 9% reported that they are living in a home or apartment with a host community family they didn't know before arriving in Georgia. 67% of respondents reported living in their current accommodation for more than 2 months already, however, 45% of respondents reported not knowing how long they would be able to stay in their current accommodation, due to their financial challenges.

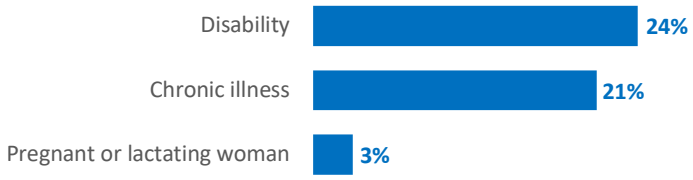
Household resources are diminishing, employment rates remain low and rental prices generally, especially in Tbilisi and Batumi, are reported to have increased by two to three times since the start of the conflict. Some Ukrainians with jobs have salaries that barely cover rent, let alone other basic needs. These circumstances present a huge challenge for Ukrainians to continue living in Georgia. 58% of respondents reported that the lack of income is currently their main source of stress.

3 HEALTHCARE & SPECIFIC NEEDS

A HIGH PROPORTION OF HOUSEHOLDS HAVE MEMBERS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS MANY FACE CHALLENGES IN ACCESSING MEDICAL SERVICES

As many as 24% of respondents reported having at least one household member with a disability (defined as a person with "problems hearing, speaking, walking and/or taking care of him/herself") while 21% reported having household members with chronic illnesses.

RESPONDENTS WITH AT LEAST ONE FAMILY MEMBER AT HEIGHTENED RISK



Family members taking care of persons with specific needs are often unable to seek employment, which in turn exacerbates household vulnerability.

26% of respondents reported that in the past 30 days, they faced challenges accessing health centers/hospitals and other health services.

Almost all respondents specified that the reason for this was financial limitations. 27% of respondents also reported that in the past 30 days they were not able to buy medicines also due to financial limitations.

51% of respondents said they were unaware of any available mental health services. The 27% who were aware mostly did not know how to access them. 30% of respondents considered that available mental health and psychosocial services would not meet their current needs and 42% were unsure if they would be relevant.

Medical care and medicines remain among the top concerns of Ukrainian refugees.

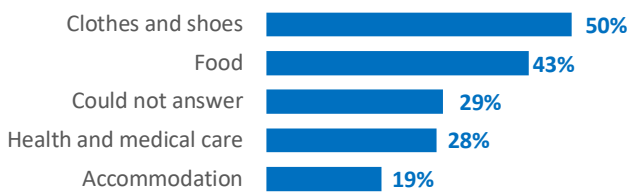
4 CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND WELLBEING

HALF OF CHILDREN LACK CLOTHES AND SHOES FOR WINTER

68% of households have at least one child, including 30% with at least one child under 5 years old. 65% of respondents have school-aged/pre-school-aged children (3-18 years) in their household (in total 195 HH).

According to 50% of respondents, children's most urgent needs are clothes and shoes. 43% of respondents reported that the most urgent need of children is food. 28% of respondents think that access to qualified health and medical care was an issue for children. Safe, affordable places to stay/accommodation (19%), reunification with family (8%), safe places to play (7%), and psychosocial support (6%) are also among the priorities mentioned by respondents.

CHILDREN'S URGENT NEEDS



A rather high number, around 29%, of children were still not enrolled in schools at the time of the survey. 23% of respondents reported that their children were involved in remote learning. The majority had access to learning materials. Around 5% of respondents reported that school-age children in the household had no access to any devices, while the rest reported that children had at least one device. However, 7% of respondents reported that school-age children in their households had no access to the internet.

In focus group discussions, participants evaluated conditions for children in Georgia quite positively. However, some Ukrainians reported cases of bullying at school. School uniforms and books, were often not affordable. Another problem has been the lack of textbooks in Ukrainian for those learning online. Parents are also worried about the lack of sports, cultural and recreational activities for children and many children complain of boredom. They also miss their friends and close relatives.

5 INFORMATION NEEDS

MANY UKRAINIANS CONTINUE TO FEEL UNINFORMED ABOUT SERVICES

43% of respondents felt they were not receiving enough information about available assistance and services. Information about health care services was specifically highlighted as being unclear and insufficient (**44%**).

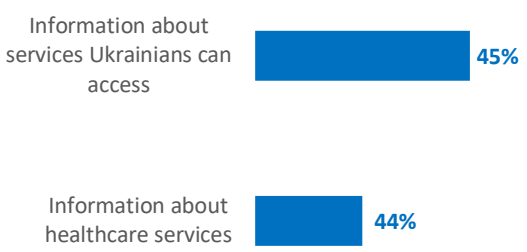
As for information-sharing mechanisms, participants in focus group discussions preferred social networks and groups on Telegram and Viber for information searches regarding ongoing programmes, services, or other resources. Apart from these sources, information is also obtained by word of mouth.

Respondents commented that publicly shared information on services and rights is not always organized, up-to-date and accessible to everyone.

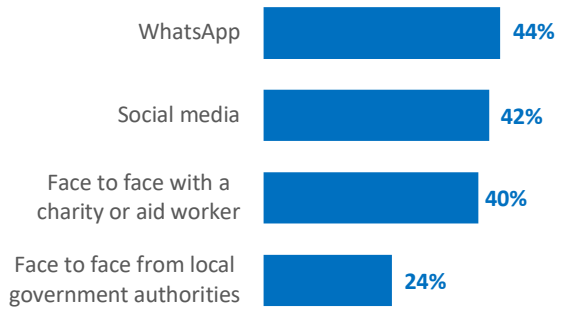
44% of respondents reported that their preferred channel for receiving information is WhatsApp, followed by **42%** who prefer social media (FB, Instagram, Twitter).**40%** preferred speaking face-to-face with a charity or aid worker, while **24%** chose face-to-face conversations with local the Government authorities.

For providing feedback and complaints, **35%** preferred WhatsApp, followed by **34%** who prefer using phone hotlines with partners.

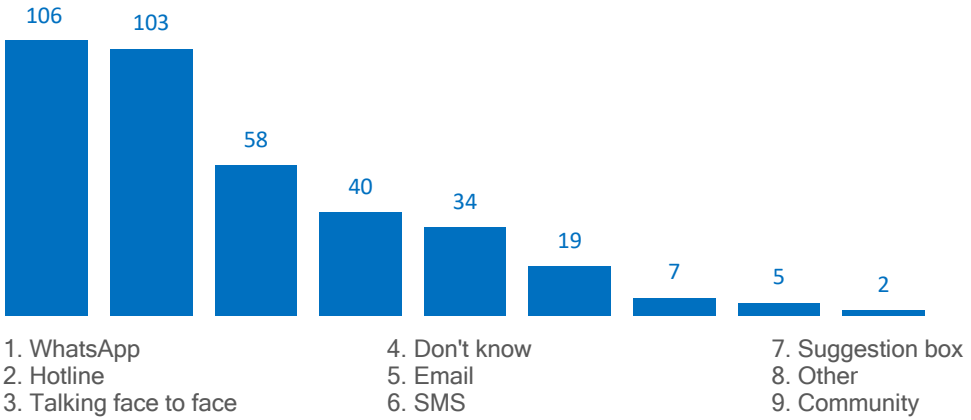
INFORMATION NEEDS*



PREFERRED INFORMATION CHANNEL*



PREFERABLE WAY TO SUBMIT GENERAL FEEDBACK OR COMPLAINTS



SURVEY RESULTS AT A GLANCE

Family separation

68%

of respondents have been separated from immediate family members. Family separation may exacerbate protection risks and existing vulnerabilities.

Persons with specific needs

24%

of households include at least one person with a disability and 21% have a person with a chronic illness. These families have fewer opportunities for self-reliance and heightened protection risks.

Documentation

29%

of respondents mentioned that some or all documents are missing, which may affect their access to rights and possibility of return or to move to another country.

Priority needs

Top priority needs named by respondents:

1. Cash to cover basic needs (35%)
2. Affordable accommodation (20%)
3. Food/water (19%)
4. Clothes or shoes (16%)
5. Medical care and medicine (14%)

Information needs

43%

of respondents felt they do not receive enough information about available assistance and services.

Intentions

80%

of respondents reported that they plan to stay in the country for at least the next 3 months, while 13% remain undecided and only 4% had concrete plans to leave.

Moldova. A warm welcome greets refugees from Ukraine at Moldovan border. April 2022 ©UNHCR/Caroline Bach

OVERVIEW OF PROTECTION RISKS

Almost all Ukrainians involved in this survey want to return to Ukraine at some point, but do not consider returning in the nearest future due to fear of ongoing military action, severely damaged/destroyed dwellings and, in some cases, missing documentation. A tiny percent of survey respondents had concrete plans to leave. Since the survey was conducted, the realities of winter in Ukraine with the ongoing destruction of energy infrastructure can only be adding to this concern. In this context it seems clear that the approximately 25,000 Ukrainians currently in Georgia are likely to stay in the country for the foreseeable future. This is also supported by trends and border entry/exit statistics over several weeks from September-November.

The one-year visa-free stay for many Ukrainians will end in spring 2023, raising the issue of prolongation of their legal stay in Georgia. People will either have to travel to an international border, exit and reenter, or apply for international protection. Otherwise, the Government could extend the visa-free regime for Ukrainians by decree.

According to the focus group discussion findings, Ukrainians generally feel safe and secure in Georgia. The focus group discussion participants reported that they are not afraid to go outside and that they feel gratitude towards Georgians and all those who have helped and supported them. However, several participants mentioned that the presence of many Russians made them feel uncomfortable.

While Ukrainian refugees remain welcome and supported in Georgia, displacement-related needs are also likely to remain high due to the demographic profile of the Ukrainians with many children, single women or female-headed households, elderly individuals, and a high proportion of households caring for a family member with specific needs. The high degree of uncertainty about the future, the possibility of returning home and separation from close family are contributing to high levels of stress and anxiety in addition to trauma suffered before and during flight. Many refugees reported having panic attacks and nightmares, and experience high levels of fear and anger. More than a third say that they are worried all the time. Parents describe deeply stressed children with many symptoms of psychological trauma.

Respondents of the survey described several sources of trauma including theft, armed violence, discrimination, intimidation and other kinds of abuse, particularly during the travel from Ukraine to Georgia. In a few cases, respondents mentioned that before arriving in Georgia they or a household member had experienced sexual assault and/or abduction. Psycho-social assistance to deal with trauma is a clear need that might not be easily addressed through the available services.

Additional stress factors in the situation of displacement in Georgia include lack of income to cover basic needs and accommodation, huge challenges in finding and negotiating rent for affordable accommodation, difficulties accessing health services as well as covering associated expenses, limited communication with loved ones at home and lack of information on rights and services. There is a particular gap for those living outside of Tbilisi and Batumi in different regions of Georgia.

Many realize the need to find a job in order to stay until the end of the war, and now understand that this end is not imminent. Despite high levels of education and the usefulness of Russian language in Georgia for managing everyday living, most are facing major challenges in finding jobs, particularly those that pay enough to cover rent as well as other basic needs.

While 71% of household with school-age children (3-18) reported plans to enroll their children in schools in Georgia, according to data provided by the Ministry of Education, only 45% of 4,848 school age Ukrainian children were enrolled in Georgian schools by November (2,344 were enrolled in Georgian schools, 1,528 of whom study in Ukrainian sector schools established in Tbilisi and Batumi). The preference for online education in the Ukrainian curriculum in the initial months of displacement is now severely jeopardized by conditions in Ukraine. Furthermore, the high proportion of children not attending school presents child protection risks that may be severe in some cases and undermines the potential for integration in Georgia.

While entering Georgia without an international passport is not a problem, leaving Georgia by most routes requires one. Many families coming from the east of Ukraine through Russia have family members lacking these documents and are sometimes left behind if the family moves on to another country. A Ukrainian identity document should give access to services as per Government decrees but in practice this can be difficult, especially when it comes to opening bank accounts. The Ukrainian Embassy in Tbilisi does issue new passports, but many cannot afford the fees and process-related costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Given the acute need for affordable accommodation, the Government should intensify efforts with municipalities to identify and offer affordable housing. In this regard, NGO partners, volunteer groups and the private sector need more resources to continue helping the most vulnerable Ukrainians.

2. Many Ukrainian families are headed by caregivers who are not in a position to work. Those with specific needs and vulnerabilities need additional support. Cash assistance should be expanded and sustained well into 2023 and for some families with acute vulnerabilities, additional cash to support rental costs should be considered.

3. Given the fundamental importance of jobs and self-reliance, attention should be paid to connecting Ukrainians to Government employment schemes as well as the private sector, and to provide support for enhancing their employability. Georgian language teaching should be expanded and promoted.

4. Given the frequent problems met by Ukrainians in accessing healthcare due to confusion or lack of information among service providers about available services offered through Decree #1215 for Ukrainians, the Government should proactively advise service providers and provide clear information to the Ukrainian refugees, with further support from NGOs.

5. Given the high proportion of school age children not enrolled in Georgian schools, Ukrainians should be encouraged and supported to enroll their children in local schools. Government programmes for language teaching and psychosocial support should be further capacitated.

6. Local municipalities and other stakeholders could be more committed to creating social spaces for successful students, as well as increasing the involvement of children and youth in sports, cultural or other educational/recreational activities.

7. Given the high portion of Ukrainians affected by trauma, the mental health and psychosocial support services offered in Georgia are very important and may need further capacitating.

8. Given that the visa-free one-year stay for many Ukrainians will end in spring 2023, the Government could consider extending the visa-free period, or encourage Ukrainians to apply for international protection to secure their legal stay and ensure predictable access to basic services as well as potential social assistance.

UNHCR
The UN Refugee Agency

World Vision
GEORGIA

Oksana and her 6-year-old, Anya, are refugees from Ukraine who received multi-purpose cash assistance and educational kits from World Vision Georgia Crisis Response program. June 2022 Word Vision Georgia

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