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Georgia: Situation and treatment of Jews; state protection and support services
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Estimates of the number of Jews living in Georgia vary (*The Hartford Courant* 17 Aug. 2008; US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 1; AP 15 Sept. 2009). A report submitted by Georgia to the Council of Europe indicates that, according to the 2002 Georgian census, Jews account for 0.1 percent of the population with 3,772 people identifying as Jews (Council of Europe 16 July 2007, Para. 28). Other sources indicate a higher number of Jews in Georgia, ranging from 7,000 (*The Hartford Courant* 17 Aug. 2008) to 13,000 people (AP 15 Sept. 2009). Sources report that the majority of Jews live in Tbilisi (*The Jewish Chronicle* 15 Aug. 2008; *The Jerusalem Post* 10 Aug. 2008; US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec.2c) and Kutaisi (ibid.). According to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), Georgia's Jewish population significantly declined following Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 (MRG n.d.; see also Council of Europe 16 July 2007, Para. 28).

Sources indicate that the Georgian population is tolerant toward Jews (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 3; ECRI 13 Feb. 2007, Para. 57) and does not display high levels of anti-Semitism (Stephen Roth Institute 2009; FJC n.d.b). According to the Federation of Jewish Communities of the CIS [Commonwealth of Independent States] (FJC), Jews have a long history of living in Georgia and it is one of the few countries without a history of anti-Semitism (FJC n.d.b).

Sources report that in the spring of 2008, a Jewish cemetery in the district of Adjara was "desecrated" (Stephen Roth Institute 2009; HRF 2008, 14; *Black Sea Press* 1 May 2008). According to the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Anti-Semitism and Racism, a research institute at Tel Aviv University, on 26 April 2008 vandals marked graves at the cemetery with swastikas and pro-Hitler slogans (2009). Two sources report that the incident occurred at or near the city of Batumi (Stephen Roth Institute 2009; *Black Sea Press* 1 May 2008), while the other source states that it occurred on Mount Peria (HRF 2008, 14).

The United States (US) Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008* states that there was one act of anti-Semitic vandalism in Georgia in 2008, but did not provide details (US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 2c). In addition, *Country Reports 2008* notes that on 1 April 2008, a political group distributed an anti-Semitic leaflet in Tbilisi metro stations (ibid.).

MRG notes that ethnic minorities suffered and were displaced during the August 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia, although they did not provide details on how the conflict affected Jews (n.d.). Sources indicate that Jewish aid agencies were active helping and evacuating Georgian Jews who were affected by the conflict (*The Jewish Chronicle* 15 Aug. 2008; *The Hartford Courant* 17 Aug. 2008; JDC 20 Aug. 2008). According to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), as reported by *The Hartford Courant*, more than 700 Jews were displaced by the conflict in August 2008 (17 Aug. 2008). *The Hartford Courant* also notes that 200 Jews were evacuated from Gori, a city which came under fire during the fighting (17 Aug. 2008).

State protection

The Constitution of Georgia provides for freedom of religion and belief and forbids persecution of a person on account of religion or belief (Georgia 24 Aug. 1995, Art. 9, Art. 14, Art. 19). The US *International Religious Freedom Report 2009* notes that Georgia's Criminal Code prohibits interference with worship services, interference with establishing religious organizations, and persecution of individuals based on religion or belief; punishment is a fine and/or imprisonment and is more severe if committed by a public official (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2).

Freedom House states that religious freedom is respected for Jews in Georgia (2009). MRG and the FJC corroborate that Georgian authorities have been "tolerant" towards Jews (MRG n.d.; FJC n.d.b). According to the London-based newspaper *The Jewish Chronicle*, the Georgian government has several Jewish ministers (15 Aug. 2008). FJC reports that a Rabbi and other Jewish community leaders participate in state activities and events (FJC n.d.b). Two sources indicate that the Georgian Ministry of Culture, Monument Protection and Sport has provided state funding to a Jewish history museum in Georgia (Council of Europe 16 July 2007, Para. 172; ECMI Sept. 2009, 27).

Support Services

Sources indicate that there are synagogues (FJC n.d.a; AP 15 Sept. 2009; Trend News Agency 15 Sept. 2009), a Jewish school (FJC n.d.a; Stephen Roth Institute 2009), Jewish community organizations (FJC n.d.a; *ibid.* n.d.b), and international Jewish organizations (*ibid.*; Stephen Roth Institute 2009) in Georgia. Several media sources report that in September 2009, a second synagogue opened in Tbilisi; President Mikhail Saakashvili participated in the ceremony (AP 15 Sept. 2009; Trend News Agency 15 Sept. 2009; Imedi TV 15 Sept. 2009). According to the *International Religious Freedom Report 2009*, the two synagogues in Tbilisi are state property, but are leased to the Jewish community for 0.61 US dollars per month (US 26 Oct. 2009, Sec. 2).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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