



**M-TAG Quarterly Report**  
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**Program Objectives**

The Media for Transparent and Accountable Governance (M-TAG) program aims to improve the public’s access to independent, reliable, and balanced information relevant to Georgia’s good governance. IREX implements the program with local partner organizations Ethics Charter and management consulting group Innova.

The program’s goal will be achieved through a set of coordinated activities in support of three objectives:

*Program Objective 1:* Journalists demonstrate accurate and ethical reporting on public interest issues, including progress towards key government reforms;

*Program Objective 2:* Regional media outlets demonstrate improved financial viability and transparency; and

*Program Objective 3:* Access to balanced and relevant information increases in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

**Introduction**

Electoral reform remained at the core of the political process in the reporting quarter, at least until concerns related to spread of COVID-19 overshadowed it. Georgian Dream and the opposition finally reached an agreement on March 8 after a round of negotiations at the U.S. Ambassador’s official residence. As a result, 120 members of parliament will be elected from the party lists, and 30 members will represent single mandate constituencies. Currently, the ratio between party lists and single mandate constituencies is 77 to 73, respectively. The electoral threshold will be 1% of votes, down from the current 5%. A capping mechanism will be introduced to ensure that parties with less than 40% are not allowed to collect a majority of seats in parliament.

The process entered a deadlock on February 10 after Gigi Ugulava, one of the leaders of the European Georgia political party, was jailed. The standoff between the government and the opposition started on November 14, when Georgian Dream voted down a constitutional amendment which would have enabled a transition to a fully proportional system in 2020. The government has heavy-handedly suppressed the protest that ensued and drew strong criticism from international partners for diverting from the path of democracy.

The issue of political prisoners has become a sticking point for the process to move forward. The opposition claims that, as was part of the March 8 agreement, Mtavari Arkhi founder Giorgi Rurua, Victorious Georgia leader Irakli Okruashvili, and Gigi Ugulava would be freed. The Georgian Dream flatly denied this claim, arguing that there are no political prisoners in Georgia and that this issue did not come up during the negotiations.

Irakli Shotadze, who resigned as Georgia's chief prosecutor in late 2015 after his handling of an investigation into the murder of two 16-year-old schoolboys, was re-elected in this role on February 18 amid public protests and a boycott by the opposition. The position was vacated by Shalva Tadumadze, who joined the Supreme Court in December 2019 in a highly controversial appointment.

On January 9, the Georgian government terminated its contract for the Anaklia deep seaport construction with the Anaklia Development Consortium, effectively crushing hopes that Georgia would benefit from this vital opportunity for its economy and security interests in the near future.

The first COVID-19 case in Georgia was confirmed on February 26. The Georgian government began closing its borders, first with China, then with Iran, and finally with Italy. Schools and universities were closed for spring holidays on March 2, and although they were initially set to re-open on March 16, on March 11 the holidays were prolonged until April 1. Georgian citizens returning from high-risk countries were directed to quarantine or required to self-isolate. Beginning on March 18, foreign citizens were banned from entering Georgia. On March 21, the Georgian government announced a state of emergency through April 21. Starting on March 30, the state of emergency was extended to include a nationwide quarantine and a curfew restricting citizens to their homes between 9:00 pm and 6:00 am. Economic activities were suspended except a few essential sectors such as food retail and pharmacies.

While the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in Georgia has remained low, the government drew criticism for not taking decisive action early enough. The Georgian Orthodox Church has refused to amend high-risk religious practices in defiance of recommendations from health professionals and the Georgian government. Concerns are growing that the population living in occupied territories will not have access to adequate testing and treatment.

On March 2, the de facto government of Tskhinvali introduced a travel ban for foreign citizens. Earlier, on February 27, it had closed all land entries with Georgia proper. The de facto government of Abkhazia likewise introduced a travel ban for foreign citizens on January 27 and on February 25 extended it to April 7.

On March 22, amid the pandemic, non-recognized elections were conducted in Abkhazia and Aslan Bzhania was elected as “President.” Former “President” Raul Khajimba resigned on January 12 after a local court declared the results of the September 2019 runoffs void. In 2019, Bzhania was poisoned with heavy metals. While both Khajimba and Bzhania are Moscow-backed candidates and hold pro-Russian positions, Bzhania appears to be more conciliatory and his approach towards Georgian-Abkhaz relations is perceived as more pragmatic.

Beginning in mid-March, the Georgian currency started to weaken against US dollar; the exchange rate is currently more than 3 to 1.

Giorgi Kobakhidze, who became the director of the Adjara Public Broadcaster in November 2019, has tightened grip on its editorial policy, with key journalists either being forced to resign, demoted, or fired. His actions drew criticism from local NGOs, the journalistic community, and international media freedom and human rights organizations.

The economic shock caused by the weakened national currency and the ban on non-essential economic activities under the state of emergency has had a negative effect on the advertising market. Companies have downsized marketing budgets or cut them altogether. Media outlets have found it more and more difficult to mobilize financial resources through advertising sales.

TV Pirveli paid taxes it owed to the state budget (approximately GEL 100,000, approximately \$31,000) on January 22, and the lien placed on its bank account on December 25 was finally lifted. However, on March 20, the lien was placed on the TV station’s bank account once again. The same measure was applied to Mtavari Arkhi. At the time, TV Pirveli owed GEL 80,000 (\$25,000) to the government and a request that the payment be postponed for three months was denied. The TV Pirveli case once again raised the issue of TV stations with a pro-government editorial policy receiving preferential treatment. TV Imedi, Maestro, and Rustavi2, which collectively accumulated GEL 55 million (\$17 million) in debt to the government prior to October 2019, are allowed to function freely. TV stations that critical of the government, on the other hand, cannot expect any leniency. The government plans to give five years to TV Imedi, Maestro, and Rustavi2 to repay their debt. TV Pirveli was given only 10 days.

On January 30, several men physically assaulted Nika Gvaramia, the director of Mtavari Arkhi, outside the Tbilisi city court, where he attended a hearing on the case of Giorgi Rurua. Gvaramia accused Georgian Dream of plotting the attack.

Journalists working at TV Maestro, which is owned by Imedi, have complained about censorship. Ana Tskhovrebova, host of the TV program Business News, said at the end of February that the TV station was closing the program after many attempts to influence its editorial policy had failed. Tiko Basharuli, producer of the public affairs talk show Maestroeledi, said that her program was closed for the same reason earlier in December.

The NGO community and cyber security experts came together to express concerns regarding draft amendments to the Law on Information Security, which the parliament started to consider in February. While they did not dispute the fact that the law adopted in 2012 proved ineffective in the face of high-

profile cyber-attacks and modern challenges or that it needed major revision, they criticized the draft for creating a system which could grant total control over the information system and/or personal and commercial data contained in them to the security services. The group provided the authors of the draft with comments and counter arguments.

TV MR GE continued to experience pressure from the authorities, which for years have tried to force this company out of the market. Mtavari Arkhi, Formula TV, and TV Pirveli are its only subscribers, as pro-government TV stations subscribe to the services of Tri Media Intelligence, which was set up with questionable financial backing. It is difficult for the three companies to bear the financial burden fully, as measuring ratings is expensive research. On the other hand, they cannot conduct their operations without such information and do not trust Tri Media Intelligence. GNCC continued to pressure IREX for the 2013 audit report assessing the methodology used by TV MR GE and its compliance with this methodology.

The founders and management of Formula TV also expressed concern about the pressure they are experiencing. They are often summoned to the prosecutor's office and to court, a time consuming and unnerving experience that distracts them from their main duties. Government representatives boycott TV stations which are critical of the government and do not give them interviews and comments, negatively impacting the quality of their content.

## Summary

From January to mid-March, M-TAG staff and IREX's freelance trainers extensively worked onsite with the following seven media partners: Information Center Network (ICN), Radio Way, Radio Marneuli, Livepress.ge, Qartli.ge, Batumelebi, and TV Borjomi.

- IREX provided ICN and Radio Way, which reinvigorated its teams with new members and an intensified production process, with skills trainings and guidance on organizational issues. Tamar Rukhadze worked with the Mtisambebi.ge team at the ICN Tbilisi office, helping with writing and editing stories about remote mountainous villages in Georgia (January 14). Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili consulted ICN head Gela Mtvlishvili on recruiting new journalists and interviewing applicants (January 31). Rukhadze trained ICN's journalists in news reporting and storytelling at ICN's Tbilisi (February 5-7) and Gurjaani offices (March 9, 11, 12). Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili, while working at ICN's Gurjaani office (March 9, 11, 12) and at Radio Way in Pankisi (March 10), assisted the organization with a wide variety of tasks, including the production of new radio programs (March 10-12). Lasha Nasaridze fixed various technical issues at the Radio Way studio in Pankisi (March 10, 11).
- Rusudan Tskhomelidze and Dachi Grdzlishvili worked with the Radio Marneuli management in Marneuli on income generating ideas (January 15) and with Radio Marneuli team on video production skills (January 27). Rusudan Tskhomelidze returned to Radio Marneuli to work on video stories with the reporters individually, assisting them with filming in the field and helping them with video editing (January 29-31 and February 4, 7, 13). Levan Tabatadze trained the Radio Marneuli team in producing web advertisements (February 22-23).

- Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili worked with the Livepress.ge team in Zugdidi on news reporting and studio production (February 10-14). Lasha Nasaridze fixed technical problems at the Livepress.ge newsroom and studio (February 13-14).
- Levan Tabatadze trained the Qartli.ge team in producing web advertisements (February 7-8). Shota Gogishvili trained the team in video production (February 18-20). Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili visited Qartli.ge in Gori to advise its management on organizational issues (March 6).
- Tamar Rukhadze, Dachi Grdzlishvili, and Shota Gogishvili worked with the Batumelebi team in Batumi to help the journalists make better use of their mobile studio (February 24-29).
- Rusudan Tskhomelidze trained the Borjomi TV team in Borjomi in story telling (March 9-13). Shota Gogishvili trained them in multimedia production for Facebook and Instagram (March 10-12).

This quarter, JNews launched its much awaited Georgian version. Rusudan Tskhomelidze helped JNews screen candidates for the editor and translator positions. She also reviewed, edited, and gave feedback on the translations.

Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili developed a guide for M-TAG's partners on the production of pre-election talk shows, which describes the main formats for the shows and explains how to plan and record them.

As the situation with COVID-19 became more worrisome, M-TAG switched to teleworking beginning on March 16. The M-TAG team quickly adjusted to the new environment and work routine and, in parallel, helped its 14 media partners make a similar transition. Program staff selected online tools for internal communication and, with media partners and freelance trainers, developed new delivery formats for consulting and training. While all 14 partners received support from the M-TAG team during the last two weeks of March, Qartli.ge, Radio NOR, Kutaisi Post, Samkhretis Karibche, Livepress.ge, Radio Atinati, ICN, and Radio Way benefited from more focused trainings. Radio Marneuli received sustained support throughout as the Marneuli municipality was among the first to institute a quarantine.

During the reporting period, M-TAG provided the following assistance to its partners:

- Tamar Rukhadze worked remotely with the Qartli.ge team, helping them with daily tasks – in planning, writing, and editing stories, as well as with talk show production (March 19-20).
- Rusudan Tskhomelidze worked remotely with the Radio NOR team, explaining how to produce audio and web stories from home (March 20).
- Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Dachi Grdzlishvili, and Shota Gogishvili also worked online with Kutaisi Post on COVID-19-related reporting (March 19-31).
- Tamar Rukhadze worked remotely with the Samkhretis Karibche team, helping them with daily tasks and COVID-19-related reporting (March 23-27).
- Tamar Rukhadze worked remotely with the Livepress.ge and Radio Atinati teams, helping them with daily news coverage. Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili also assisted Livepress.ge with recording its first talk show using online tools (March 30-April 3).

- On March 23, the Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities announced quarantine measures. From March 23 to March 31, Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Dachi Grdzlishvili, and Shota Gogishvili worked intensely with the Radio Marneuli team, meeting online with the journalists almost every day to help them plan COVID-19-related reporting and use infographics and animated videos to make information easier to comprehend and remember.
- Tamar Rukhadze continued to help ICN's Mtisambebi.ge and Reginfo.ge and Pankisi-based Radio Way with content production remotely on daily basis.

As soon as IREX switched to teleworking on March 16, Dachi Grdzlishvili, Rusudan Tskhomelidze, and Tamar Rukhadze contacted the partners immediately to gather information about their needs, challenges, and plans. They wrote a guide with step-by-step instructions for the partners on how to work remotely and assisted them with implementing these instructions. Dachi Grdzlishvili taught the partners how to record guests in talk shows remotely, stream programs online, and restream government briefings through their web pages.

To support its partners with a variety of technical tasks in a timely manner, IREX enlisted the help of freelance trainers Shota Gogishvili, Temur Kevlishvili, Magda Gugava, Levan Tabatadze, Lasha Nasaridze, and David Giorgobiani.

Following IREX advice and technical support, all M-TAG partners developed a special section on their websites devoted to COVID-19 to make it easier for readers to locate information, including an animated or still banner to flag the section.

In January and February, the company Goodweb – which developed the Content Management System (CMS) that hosts websites for some M-TAG partners – visited Radio Marneuli, Borjomi TV, Channel 9, Qartli.ge, Livepress.ge, Radio Atinati and M-TAG's former partner Spektri to conduct a final training on website management and maintenance. Traffic to M-TAG partner websites grew steadily this quarter, but the spread of COVID-19 led to a surge in the number of visitors as people have turned to trusted local media for information on the disease. By the end of the quarter, M-TAG partners reported 5,596,712 unique visitors collectively, which was almost 50% more as compared to the previous quarter. Dachi Grdzlishvili, along with Temur Kevlishvili of Goodweb, worked with M-TAG partners to ensure that their websites were technically able to withstand this sudden growth in traffic.

Unfortunately, the increased audience interest and website traffic did not result in increased advertising sales. With the Georgian economy at a standstill, companies have canceled advertising contracts and withdrawn from negotiations. Nevertheless, M-TAG's partners did not give up, shifting efforts to businesses that are allowed to operate and continuing to communicate with potential clients to build working relationships with them.

Beginning in March, Ethics Charter welcomed a new director, Mariam Gogosashvili, who has an extensive background in media law. Gogosashvili started during a difficult time, as Ethics Charter needed to re-arrange its activities to adjust to teleworking and to quickly respond to newly emerging needs of the media sector. IREX worked closely with its implementing partner to strengthen its capacity to provide relevant and timely support to Georgian journalists. IREX helped Ethics Charter to shape an

idea for a comprehensive guide on how to report on COVID-19 and to research existing resources. With IREX support, Ethics Charter will prepare and publish the guide next quarter.

In Q2 of Y6, Ethics Charter reviewed 13 complaints and trained 18 journalists in how to detect trolls, bots, and fake news and avoid spreading misinformation.

IREX and Innova continued work on sample organizational policies to be used by partners. This quarter, they shared a sample employee handbook, an organizational structure, and sample job descriptions with the partners.

MEC re-opened after the winter holidays on January 8 and hosted its first class of the spring semester on January 10. However, it had to close down beginning on March 2, when universities began the spring holidays earlier than usual. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the state of emergency in Georgia, MEC remains closed as of end of this quarter, with its team teleworking from home. In January and February 2020, MEC served 54 unique users and 90 course participants from GIPA and IBSU. Starting in March, MEC expected 20 additional unique users from GIPA and 31 from Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film University. However, the classes were cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Cooperation with other Donors**

In Year Q1Y6, M-TAG did not work with other donors.

### **Communications**

In Q2 of Y6, IREX M-TAG published six Facebook posts on project activities. The project's Facebook page increased likes from 1,550 to 1,556. The posts, featuring on-site trainings, garnered 2,452 views collectively.

### **Impact Summary**

To help build resilience against pro-Russian narratives and discourage nostalgia for the Soviet past, M-TAG is supporting its partners to produce specific content around key milestone events/dates as a pretext for initiating discussions. For example, in this quarter, an important date was February 25. On this date in 1921, the Red Army occupied Tbilisi and, after heavy battles, Georgia lost its independence. Nevertheless, the resistance continued long after the occupation both in the capital and throughout the country in smaller towns and villages.

Tamar Rukhadze and Rusudan Tskhomelidze helped M-TAG partners to select, plan, write, and edit stories on the Soviet occupation that describe events which took place in their regions, remember people who were part of the resistance, or became victims of political repression under the communist regime – and to talk with people about how they comprehend and perceive Georgia's Soviet past today.

Livepress.ge prepared several pieces on the Soviet occupation. One of them was [an unknown story on the uprising in Zugdidi](#) against the Soviet regime in 1924. The article published on Livepress.ge is based on research by a local historian.

Another article published on Livepress.ge on February 25 is about [Soviet toponyms](#) – names of villages and streets in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region that commemorate Communist ideology or leaders and have remained unchanged. The article raises the question of why Georgia has kept Soviet symbols 30 years after independence.

[“99 Years After the Soviet Occupation”](#) is the headline of Livepress.ge’s talk-show produced and published on the web on February 25. The program discusses Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations and how Georgians understand and perceive their Soviet history.

Qartli.ge prepared several articles on February 25.

[“How Gori Grew Red”](#) by Qartli.ge talks about the events that took place in the Shida Kartli region in 1918 and 1919, before the Bolshevik army took over the capital of Georgia.

Another article from Qartli.ge, [“Bandits Roaming in Qartli – Methods of Fighting the Bolsheviks Used in 1918-1921.”](#) discusses how the Bolsheviks gained control over the region during this period. According to the article, based on historical materials and newspapers published during these years, the village of Mejvriskhevi was the first place in Georgia where the Soviet regime was established in 1919.

Qartli.ge also wrote about [36 Mensheviks from Gori](#) and surrounding villages who fought against the Bolsheviks before and after the Soviet occupation. The article reveals unique historical materials from the regional archive, including the names of local people who were part of the resistance and became victims of Soviet repression after the occupation.

The article [“Sentenced to be Shot”](#) from Qartli.ge unfolds the story of Gabo Tatarashvili, the first rector of Gori University, who was declared an enemy of the state and sentenced to death in 1938. The Great Purge – a series of political repression and persecution campaigns from 1927 to 1938 – touched almost every region, city, and village, including Gori, the birthplace of Joseph Stalin, the architect of this reign of terror.

Radio Atinati interviewed a local historian on events related to the [Sovietization of Samegrelo and Abkhazia](#). Lasha Jikia discussed what happened in the region before and after the Bolshevik army seized the capital of Georgia.

Radio NOR interviewed Mikheil Bakhtadze, a historian researching the Soviet past. In the interview, [Bakhtadze talked about the 1921 occupation](#) and its impact on Georgia’s future and development. The journalist and the respondent also discussed misinformation related to the Soviet past.

Kutaisi Post published the article [“Fortress of Freedom in Kutaisi – the History of Heroism and Occupation”](#) on February 25. The author revealed the untold story of an armored train called “the



Fortress of Freedom” which local activists, the Gogvadze brothers, used to evacuate people and national treasures from besieged Kutaisi. The article described the events that unfolded in Kutaisi, where the Georgian government fled after the Red Army occupied Tbilisi.

In an article published on February 25, Radio Marneuli talks to people in the village of Shulaveri to see what they know about the Shulaveri Committee and its role in Georgia’s occupation. Readers learned from the article that there is almost no one in the village who has knowledge of the events that unfolded there in 1921. The article describes [how the Shulaveri Committee contributed to the occupation of Georgia](#) by the Bolsheviks.

TV Borjomi prepared [a multimedia article about local hero](#) Aleksandre (Foria) Tsagurishvili. His grandson, who is a military officer, told the story of his grandfather, who led units of partisans and fought against the Bolsheviks.

Reporting by M-TAG’s partners has led to improvements in the well-being of individuals and communities.

Radio Marneuli [reported about the village of Khikhani](#) in the Marneuli municipality, where residents experienced extreme hardship after the municipality was placed under quarantine due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, and they lost their daily earnings. The radio described the suffering through the lens of a single mother. Before Radio Marneuli brought the problem to light, only four families received help from the local government in the village of Khikhani. After the story was published, several organizations, private citizens, and the local government [have stepped up to help them](#).

A Radio Marneuli journalist reported that construction waste which was a public health danger was being left on the [streets in the village of Tsetelsofeli](#) for a long time. After strong winds damaged the roofs of residential houses made from asbestos tiles, the local government repaired them. However, broken tiles were left on the streets, thus becoming a health hazard for the population. After Radio Marneuli reported the story, [the local government removed the tiles from the streets](#).

Kutaisi Post reported about a boy who took his sweater off in the rain and wrapped a homeless dog in it to keep him warm. The video was published on Facebook. [Kutaisi Post found the boy and interviewed him](#). He told the media outlet that he is working to save money for university and that he wants to become a veterinarian. After Kutaisi Post published the story, [Kutaisi State University decided to pay 50% of the tuition fee](#) for the boy in the next academic year.

A journalist from TV Borjomi, Nino Vartapetyan, [won an award](#) in the media competition “Journalists for Corporate and Social Responsibility,” which is organized by the Georgian Center for Strategic Research and Development (CSRDG) with support from the European Union and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS). Her multimedia story on [villagers protesting the construction of energy transmission infrastructure](#) was the judged the best in the category of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

On February 1st, Mtisambebi.ge published [a story on a 25-year-old man, Misho Daushvili](#), who moved from Tbilisi to his ancestral village Shkmeri in the Racha region. With a bank loan he bought 15 cows,

and he is currently the only resident of the village. The author of the article described how hard the young man has to work with no help and no machinery, and says that a lawnmower and a milking machine, which Misho cannot afford, would be very helpful for him. Soon after the story was published, Misho's life changed significantly; [within two weeks, he had both machines](#). The community organization of Racha and Mtisambebi.ge's readers managed to collect this essential amount of money to help the young farmer.

Another story from Mtisambebi.ge exemplified the successful collaboration between media and other organizations. [The National Parliamentary Library of Georgia and Mtisambebi.ge](#) decided to provide people living alone in remote mountainous villages with news books and magazines. The initiative was inspired by stories in which Mtisambebi.ge's respondents described what is it like to be isolated in a village with no one to talk to. The project was set to launch in late March of 2020, but was postponed due to the outbreak of COVID-19.

Journalists [Rusudan Gvaramadze of Channel 9](#) and [Nana Khubutia of Livepress.ge](#) were named among 10 regional journalists who report on the challenges faced by civil society in Georgia in a highly professional manner. The Civil Society Institute polled regional NGOs to identify the winners of the competition "Journalists for Social Change" within the framework of its campaign, "This Country is Yours," which is supported by European Union and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation (KAS).

## **II. Start-up Activities**

### **Data Collection**

In Q2 of Y6, the M&E specialist focused on tasks from the Performance Monitoring Plan (PMP) and Y6 workplan, which included data collection from 14 Regional Media Strengthening Initiative (RMSI) partners.

The coders analyzed 353 materials produced by 13 RMSI partners from October to December 2019. The 14<sup>th</sup> partner, Radio Way, could not provide sufficient content to analyze this period. The findings are presented in the MCAT report.

Data was collected on M-TAG trainings and recorded in the internal database. The database contains information including the number of training opportunities, unique participants, locations, gender, and ages of training participants.

The M&E specialist prepared a Geographic Information System (GIS) report based on the training database. The GIS report covers information on the trainings implemented, participants trained, and location of trainings.

### **Program Beneficiary Selection**

The M-TAG COP updated the Media Sustainability Plans (MSPs) of 14 media partners in Q1 of Y6. The content of the MSPs, including benchmarks for commercial revenue and the number of website visitors, were agreed upon with the partners in January 2020.

### **III. Project Activities**

#### ***1. Objective 1: Journalists Demonstrate accurate and Ethical Reporting on Public Interest Issues, Including Progress Towards Key Government Reforms***

##### **1.1 Journalists Provide Accurate and In-depth Reporting on Reform Agenda**

###### **1.1.1 Certifying local trainers**

In Q2 of Y6, IREX worked with freelance trainers Shota Gogishvili (technical skills and multimedia production), Lasha Nasaridze (radio technician), and Levan Tabatadze (graphic designer for online advertisements) who visited partner media outlets for on-site work.

###### **1.1.2 Production and editorial skills**

Until mid-March, M-TAG staff (Dachi Grdzlishvili, Tamar Rukhadze and Rusudan Tskhomelidze) and IREX's free-lance trainers worked with M-TAG partners as usual, assisting them in person with content production, editorial management, and web maintenance. However, due to the global coronavirus pandemic, M-TAG switched to teleworking on March 16 following advice from the Georgian government and health authorities to private organizations. The M-TAG team quickly adjusted to the new environment and work routine and, in parallel, helped its 14 media partners with a similar transition. Program staff selected online instruments for communication internally and, with media partners and free-lance trainers, developed new delivery formats for consulting and training. While all 14 partners received support from the M-TAG team during the last two weeks of March, some of them benefited from more focused trainings.

On January 14, Tamar Rukhadze visited the Information Center Network's (ICN) Tbilisi office to work with Mtisambebi.ge. On this visit, she helped them write and edit stories about remote mountainous villages in Georgia. One of the stories presented two women living alone in the village of Tskere. By April, the [video](#) posted on the Mtisambebi.ge Facebook page had 1.1M views, 52K likes, 8.4K shares, and 2.9K comments. The video was filmed on January 13 in Anichka Bekauri's house, where she and her neighbor and only friend Makvala celebrated the New Year according to the Julian calendar.

On January 15, Rusudan Tskhomelidze and Dachi Grdzlishvili worked with Radio Marneuli in Marneuli, where they discussed several income-generating ideas with radio director Kamila Mamedova and technical director Etibar Dashdamirli. One of the ideas was to add a section to the website with information about the different services available in Marneuli. Tskhomelidze and Grdzlishvili explained how such a section should be structured and information about which kind of services could be published, such as a transport schedule connecting nearby villages and towns.

On January 27, Rusudan Tskhomelidze and Dachi Grdzlishvili visited Radio Marneuli once again to help their journalists with video production. Grdzlishvili explained how to use the multimedia camera DJI OSMO to produce videos. Tskhomelidze helped the journalists to brainstorm ideas for video stories and plan production of some of them.

Rusudan Tskhomelidze worked with Radio Marneuli on video production from January 29 to January 31, and then again on February 4, February 7, and February 13. She explained to the journalists how to plan a video story. While IREX freelance trainer Shota Gogishvili had introduced the rules for filming and editing in the past, it was still difficult for the Radio Marneuli journalists to develop video stories. Tskhomelidze worked with the journalists in the field and encouraged them to visualize the final story during the filming process. Although it is easier for radio journalists to tell a story, it is still a challenge for them to show it. Under Tskhomelidze's mentorship, the journalists filmed and edited stories independently. One story featured a blind man from Marneuli who overcame many challenges to lead a full life, while another highlighted a teacher who takes care of stray dogs. Both videos have collected thousands of views. In addition, Tskhomelidze helped the journalists with daily editorial tasks, participating in editorial planning, editing scripts of audio stories, and helping the journalists adapt the materials for their website.

Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili visited ICN's Tbilisi office on January 31 to consult ICN head Gela Mtvlishvili recruiting new journalists and interviewing applicants.

From February 5 to February 7, Tamar Rukhadze led a three-day training at ICN's Tbilisi office for its newly recruited interns. The first part included an introduction to news reporting and storytelling. The trainer explained the characteristics and differences between a news story and a feature story, outlined how stories should be selected, planned, and told, and described how to verify sources of information. The second part focused on practical exercises, including the steps of content production (selecting, planning, gathering information, and writing).

From February 10 to February 14, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili visited Zugdidi-based media partner Livepress.ge to help them with news reporting and studio production. Lasha Nasaridze joined Rukhadze and Grdzlishvili on February 13 and February 14 to help Livepress.ge with technical problems in the studio, including technical flaws in live stream broadcasting, balancing studio microphones, improving the quality of signal exchange between computers and the studio control room, and rewiring the newsroom and studio. Rukhadze and Grdzlishvili also discussed with the Livepress.ge team how to use the online studio during the pre-election and election period, including which new program formats and topics they can offer to their audiences.

From February 18 to February 20, Shota Gogishvili conducted a three-day training in video production at Qartli.ge. On the first day of the training, the trainer reviewed published content to discuss common mistakes in video production and video editing. The trainer worked with each team member individually, accompanied journalists to the field every day, and helped them with fieldwork. Gogishvili then supervised video editing after the fieldwork, focusing on sequencing shots, framing the piece, and adding a voice track to video reports. In addition, he advised the team on video production for Facebook, including a video about the [situation in occupied Akhlagori](#), a multimedia story about the [first rector of](#)

[Gori university](#), a multimedia story about [pottery makers from Nigozi](#), and a multimedia story about [an elderly couple from the occupied village of Kheiti](#) who now live in an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) settlement in Skra.

From February 24 to February 29, Tamar Rukhadze, Dachi Grdzelishvili, and Shota Gogishvili visited Batumi-based media partner Batumelebi to help them to make better use of their mobile studio. Last fall, Batumelebi started its first video program for YouTube in the format of face-to-face interviews hosted by local blogger and activist Ochi Kontslidze. Batumelebi expressed interest in launching another show in a less formal setting hosted by Jaba Ananidze, one of the Batumelebi's reporters. Batumelebi plans to turn their kitchen into a TV studio, where journalists and guests will have conversations in an informal atmosphere. Rukhadze and Grdzelishvili developed the format for the show, tested the setting, worked on studio design, set up cameras and lights, discussed details with the host and producer, and recorded a pilot version. Rukhadze and Gogishvili helped also helped design an intro for the program. In addition, as Batumelebi has started to produce lighter content for YouTube to attract different audiences, Rukhadze and Gogishvili helped them design a format for their culinary program "[Adjarian recipes](#)" and produce two videos. Furthermore, Rukhadze and Gogishvili helped Batumelebi design content which educates and entertains at the same time: "[Batumelebi's Top 10](#)". This media product presents interesting facts, such as the 10 most expensive books in the world or the 10 popular phrases from Georgian movies. The trainers assisted Batumelebi with other tasks as well, such as strengthening their social media content, multimedia production skills, and graphics. Gogishvili worked with Batumelebi on new packaging for social media content such as banners, infographics, and frames for short videos for Facebook and Instagram. He taught them how to use Video Mosaic in short videos to blur a face or protect sensitive content so as to preserve principles of ethical reporting. Gogishvili also explained how to produce Facebook live videos using the mobile direct switching device LIVEU Solo. Finally, he trained the editor of Batumelebi in using the video editing software Adobe Premiere (main instruments, how to review and edit raw materials, sequencing, framing, and voice track in video reports).

On March 6, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzelishvili visited Gori-based media partner Qartli.ge to discuss the problems the media outlet was facing. The composition of the Qartli.ge team has recently changed; two of its journalists, Giorgi Akhalkatsi and Malkhaz Mikeladze, left the organization to work for national TV stations. Although Giorgi Akhalkatsi still contributes some content to Qartli.ge, the publication found it hard to cope with the workload with fewer employees. Grdzelishvili and Rukhadze met with the two newly hired reporters, Ana Bakradze and Giorgi Tseradze, who are less experienced but are both hard working and highly motivated. Qartli.ge currently employs four reporters in addition to Saba Tsitsikashvili, the editor.

From March 9 to March 12, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzelishvili worked at ICN's Gurjaani office, assisting the organization with a wide variety of tasks. The main goals of this visit were to train ICN's newly hired reporters and Radio Way's new anchors as well as working with them on ideas for Radio Way's new programs and assisting Radio Way's staff with planning and structuring radio talk shows.

On March 9, March 11, and March 12, Tamar Rukhadze conducted trainings in Gurjaani at ICN's office. The first part included an introduction to news reporting and storytelling. The trainer explained the characteristics and differences between a news story and a feature story, outlined how stories should be

selected, planned, and told, and described how to verify sources of information. The second part focused on practical exercises, including the steps of content production (selecting, planning, gathering information, and writing). Additionally, Rukhadze reviewed video stories produced by local and international media to illustrate some methods of visual storytelling.

On March 10, Tamar Rukhadze visited Radio Way in Pankisi together with Dachi Grdzlishvili and Lasha Nasaridze. Nasaridze also spent March 11 with Radio Way. While Rukhadze worked with ICN's new reporters and Radio Way's new anchors in the newsroom, Grdzlishvili and Nasaridze worked on various technical issues in the studio, such as technical flaws in live stream broadcasts, setting up audio and video mixers, balancing color, voice, and image, improving the quality of signal exchange between the studio and control room, and synchronizing video and audio records. Grdzlishvili also set up a video streaming channel on Facebook for Radio Way and trained the journalists in using the modern streaming multicamera system Mevo. Nasaridze taught Radio Way's team how to manage the studio and to use the radio playout program Jazzler.

On March 11 and March 12, while training participants in ICN's Gurjaani office were working on assignments, Rukhadze and Grdzlishvili helped Gela Mtivlishvili and Radio Way's anchors with the production of new programs.

Radio Way's new team members are local activists from Pankisi: Luiza Mutoshvili, Sulkhan Bordzikashvili, and Ramzan Gorgishvili. Luiza Mutoshvili will produce and host a weekly program, "Radio café," which will provide a platform for local people to discuss any topic they are concerned with. Ramzan Gorgishvili and Sulkhan Bordzikashvili will produce and host two radio show together, "Focus" and "Ar Gaisuso" ("Don't be Silent"). "Focus" is a weekly public affairs program featuring one or more guests. "Ar Gaisuso" is also weekly program and has two anchors, Sulkhan and Ramzan, who deliberate topics which are either actively discussed by locals or avoided by them. "Ar Gaususo" will be more interactive than other programs; the hosts will read out comments and questions posted by listeners during the live broadcast on Facebook and answer them. All three radio programs will be aired through Facebook.

Once on-site work was no longer possible due to COVID-19, Rukhadze began supporting the ICN and Radio Way teams remotely. Since ICN has switched to teleworking, Mtisambebi.ge has suffered the most among its platforms because it relies heavily on field production. By contrast, Reginfo.ge – another ICN platform which provides regional news – has made the transition quite successfully.

From March 9 to March 13, Rusudan Tskhomelidze conducted a training at TV Borjomi. Around this time, COVID-19 started to gradually capture attention of the media. Tskhomelidze explained to the journalists how they should try to approach the issue from different angles. The TV station reported on the capacity and resources in Borjomi hospitals for patients with COVID-19, the situation in supermarkets, disinfecting public transport, safety recommendations, and resources available to students in villages to access online classes, among other subjects. Tskhomelidze mentored the journalists on ethical standards and personal safety issues while working during the crisis.

Shota Gogishvili joined Tskhomelidze from March 10 to March 12 to train the Borjomi TV team on multimedia production for Facebook and Instagram. He taught journalists how to set up administrative panels for social networks and how to prepare posts for different target groups. The journalists learned how to make Facebook live videos with the mobile direct switching device LIVEU Solo. Tskhomelidze and Gogishvili helped Borjomi TV create different infographics based on information from the World Health Organization (WHO), including materials to debunk myths about COVID-19 and advice on how to prevent the spread of the disease. The trainers created sample storytelling frames for social media, including for use on Instagram. Prior to the training, TV Borjomi had not published anything on its Instagram page; now they actively adapt content for this social media platform. Tskhomelidze and Gogishvili also helped TV Borjomi change the cover photo on its Facebook account into an infographic with advice on how to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

As soon as IREX switched to teleworking on March 16, Dachi Grzelishvili, Rusudan Tskhomelidze, and Tamar Rukhadze contacted the partners immediately to gather information about their needs, challenges, and plans. There was much confusion among the partners, because the journalists did not know how to report news when working from home. Tskhomelidze, Rukhadze, and Grzelishvili quickly wrote a guide which gave step-by-step instructions on how journalists can work remotely. The guide contained advice on obtaining necessary equipment, organizing workdays and creating a comfortable work atmosphere at home, online platforms for editorial meetings and planning, materials or archives that journalists may need, online tools to use to prepare materials, approaching COVID-19 from multiple angles, obtaining video content without leaving home, and ethical dilemmas that journalists are facing and how to overcome them. All partners received this guide at the very beginning of transitioning to the remote working format.

To support its partners with variety of technical tasks in a timely manner, IREX enlisted the help of freelance trainers Shota Gogishvili, Temur Kevlishvili, Magda Gugava, Levan Tabatadze, Lasha Nasaridze, and David Giorgobiani. Collectively, they bring expertise in data visualization, audio and video production, internet technology and safety, and TV and radio engineering and live streaming solutions. Grzelishvili receives assistance requests from the partners and directs them to the relevant experts.

From March 19 to March 20, Tamar Rukhadze worked remotely with Qartli.ge. She participated in editorial meetings to discuss daily news and assisted the Qartli.ge team in planning, writing, and editing stories. Rukhadze also supported the journalists following this online mentorship with daily reporting on COVID-19, talk show production, and fulfilling their obligations under their IREX subgrant. With the help of Shota Gogishvili, IREX provided Qartli.ge with an animated web banner on COVID 19 in Georgian, Ossetian, and Russian. Qartli.ge consolidated its coverage of COVID-19 under this banner. In addition, Rukhadze helped the Qartli.ge team with content production on COVID-19 for its websites in Ossetian and Russian.

The journalists at Radio NOR, who did not know how to produce audio or web stories from home, asked IREX for help. On March 20, Tskhomelidze met with them online, explaining how to produce materials at home and where to find stories and interesting people. Together with the Radio NOR team, Tskhomelidze made a to-do list for the week, and the team followed the agreed plan under her

supervision. Tskhomelidze also helped Radio NOR director Ararat Ttuyan to plan and prepare a new talk show, including work on formulating questions.

On March 23, Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities announced quarantine measures. Community Radio Marneuli, which broadcasts in Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian, became an even more important source of information for locals as a result. At the same time, it also became an indispensable source of news regarding the situation in the two municipalities for the national media. From March 23 to March 31, Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Dachi Grdzlishvili, and Shota Gogishvili worked intensely with the Radio Marneuli team, meeting online with the journalists almost every day. During the meetings, they discussed the difficulties and needs of the media outlet. Tskhomelidze and Grdzlishvili helped Radio Marneuli plan reporting on different issues and provided them with useful information on COVID-19 from reliable sources such as the WHO. Residents of the Marneuli municipality received information about symptoms, measures to prevent transmission of the virus, and safety recommendations from Radio Marneuli. Gogishvili helped to create infographics and animated videos about social distancing and the rules for the state of emergency for Radio Marneuli's website and social media account. He also helped develop an animated infographic in three languages for the cover of Radio Marneuli's Facebook account. Tskhomelidze regularly edited materials produced by Radio Marneuli team and gave them feedback.

From March 19 to March 31, Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Dachi Grdzlishvili and Shota Gogishvili also worked online with Kutaisi Post. They created a plan for reporting on COVID-19 and helped the Kutaisi Post team to follow its steps. Gogishvili helped develop a web banner under which Kutaisi Post published all the stories related to COVID-19. The trainers also assisted with an animated infographic for distribution via Kutaisi Post's social media pages which included information about government rules during the emergency. In addition, Gogishvili created sample frames for stories to be reported through social media and created a cover for Kutaisi Post's Facebook account. Tskhomelidze edited materials for the journalists and gave them feedback on their performance.

Rusudan Tskhomelidze provided ideas for stories related to COVID-19 to the Channel 9 team and helped them with reporting.

From March 23 to March 27, Tamar Rukhadze worked online with Samkhretis Karibche. The remote working format included daily online meetings with the entire team, discussions regarding the current difficulties as well as new opportunities in light of COVID-19, and ideas for in-depth articles. Rukhadze and the journalists also talked about how to make the website and the Facebook page more interesting and interactive and how to use posters, quotes, and videos from other sources. During this workweek, with Rukhadze's help, Samkhretis Karibche prepared several articles on COVID-19 informing its readers about the virus, its symptoms, and how to prevent its spread. The articles based on the recommendations from WHO and Georgia's National Center for Disease Control (NCDC) are among the five most popular media products published on Sknews.ge and have attracted hundreds of readers daily.

From March 30 to April 3, Tamar Rukhadze provided online assistance to Livepress.ge and Radio Atinati. Rukhadze offered story ideas, helped them with daily news coverage, and together with



Livepress.ge's team, planned an expanded story on COVID-19 which was later translated into Abkhazian and Russian. One of the challenges that Livepress.ge faced when teleworking was to produce a talk show without guests present in the studio. Under the guidance of Dachi Grdzlishvili and Tamar Rukhadze, Livepress.ge managed to record its first talk show using online tools. The trainers provided the Livepress.ge team with recommendations on how to improve programs in the future with regards to content and technical quality.

Tamar Rukhadze worked online with ICN (Mtisambebi.ge and Reginfo.ge) and Pankisi-based Radio Way, helping them with content production.

All M-TAG partners received assistance from IREX staff members and freelancers. Almost all of them now have a special section on their websites devoted to COVID-19 to make it easier for readers to locate information on the subject, including an animated or still banner to flag the section.

Apart from M-TAG's team meetings, the trainers conducted daily online meetings to discuss and coordinate their joint and individual activities.

This quarter, JNews launched its much awaited Georgian version. Rusudan Tskhomelidze helped JNews screen candidates for the editor and translator positions. She also reviewed, edited, and gave feedback on the translations.

Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili developed a guide for M-TAG's partners on the production of pre-election talk shows which describes the main formats for the shows and explains how to plan and record them. To make the [guide](#) more memorable and easier to navigate, Grdzlishvili included animations.

### **1.1.3 In-depth and investigative reporting mentoring and grants**

There are no updates on this component.

### **1.1.4 Sector-specific Reporting on reform**

IREX completed this activity in December 2016.

### **1.1.5 Support sharing of content among regional media**

The Georgian Association of Regional Broadcasters (GARB) now has a new server and uninterruptible power supply (UPS), which IREX procured for the association. Since the installation, GARB members are able to exchange news and other content without interruption and delays. This activity is complete.

#### **1.1.7.1 Content production sub-grants**

IREX completed this activity in June 2019.

### **1.1.7.2 Equipment grants**

IREX completed this activity in Y5.

### **1.3.1 Data Journalism – Access, Analyze, Visualize**

IREX completed this activity in Y3.

### **1.3.2 New Media Initiative**

In Y6 Q2, traffic to the websites of RMSI partners increased by over 47% collectively compared to the previous quarter, with 5,596,712 unique visitors.

*Please see the attached document containing data and commentary on individual media partners for more detailed information.*

#### Website Development and Maintenance

In Y5, IREX subcontractor Goodweb, a web development company, completed the redesign of desktop and mobile websites for seven M-TAG partners (Livepress.ge, Qartli.ge, Radio Atinati, Channel 9, TV Borjomi, Kutaisi Post, and Radio Marneuli). After the program was updated, several partners reported different types of bugs in their dashboards. Dachi Grdzlishvili assessed the partners' needs and passed the information on to Goodweb, who worked to fix some of the issues through software solutions. Nevertheless, M-TAG partners needed to improve their skills in web management and maintenance to handle some of the challenges. During Y6, Goodweb's Temur Kevlishvili conducted visits with M-TAG partners for individual skill-building trainings:

- January 13 to January 14: Radio Marneuli in Marneuli
- February 2 to February 4: TV Borjomi in Borjomi and Channel 9 in Akhaltsikhe
- February 5: Qartli.ge in Gori
- February 7: Livepress.ge in Zugdidi
- February 8: Radio Atinati in Zugdidi
- February 15-16: Spektri (a former RMSI partner which uses IREX-sponsored Content Management System (CMS) in Gurjaani

#### Sales, Traffic Management, and Analytics

In Y5, M-TAG conducted a group training for its 12 partners on how to produce online advertising. Levan Tabatadze led the training, assisted by Dachi Grdzlishvili. In Y6, M-TAG has followed up on the group training with individual visits to partners:

- February 7-8: Qartli.ge in Gori
- February 22-23: Radio Marneuli in Marneuli.

On the first day, Levan Tabatadze discussed types of internet advertisement, modern trends in visualization of advertisement, and the use of animation in advertising. On the second day, the trainer taught participants how to use the animation programs Animate CC, HTMP, and Canvas, and how to assemble static and dynamic banners. The training participants completed assignments under the supervision of the trainer.

### Multimedia Content Production for the Web

Please see information provided under 1.1 Journalists Provide Accurate and In-depth Reporting on Reform Agenda; 1.1.2 Production and editorial skills.

### Editorial Management and Technical Support

Please see information provided under 1.1 Journalists Provide Accurate and In-depth Reporting on Reform Agenda; 1.1.2 Production and editorial skills.

### Online TV/Video Production and Technical Consultations

Dachi Grdzlishvili provided remote advice to M-TAG's media partners on various technical issues on close to a daily basis. The partners required his support after they switched to teleworking in mid-March. He taught them how to record guests in talk shows remotely, stream programs online, and restream government briefings through their web pages.

From February 13 to February 14, Lasha Nasaridze helped Livepress.ge with technical problems in the studio, including technical flaws in live stream broadcasts, balancing studio microphones, improving the quality of signal exchange between computers and the studio control room, and rewiring the newsroom and studio.

From March 10 to March 11, Nasaridze helped Radio Way in Pankisi with various technical issues in the studio, including technical flaws in live stream broadcasts, setting up audio and video mixers, balancing color, voice and image, improving the quality of signal exchange between the studio and the control room, and synchronizing video and audio records. Nasaridze also taught Radio Way's team how to manage the studio and use the radio playout program Jazzler.

Please also see information provided under 1.1 Journalists Provide Accurate and In-depth Reporting on Reform Agenda; 1.1.2 Production and editorial skills.

### Citizen Journalist Engagement (CJE)

Partners used guidelines for citizen journalists designed as an interactive digital book by Dachi Grdzlishvili in their work with citizen contributors.

### Mobile Application

IREX discontinued the application Geomobilenews. Since more and more media outlets in Georgia are making their content—including links, promos, live streams, and square short videos—available through Facebook and other social media, there is no longer a need for this application.

## **1.2 Journalists and Media Outlets Adhere to Professional Standards and Ethics**

### **1.2.1 Organizational development support to Ethics Charter**

In Q2 of Y6, nine journalists joined the Charter and three suspended membership. As a result, the Charter ended the quarter with 350 active members.

Beginning on March 2, Mariam Gogosashvili replaced Giorgi Mgeladze as the executive director of the organization. A nine-member committee selected Gogosashvili from four finalists as part of a competitive selection process. Prior to joining the Charter, Gogosashvili led the media law unit at the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) beginning in 2018. From 2013 to 2017, she led the legal unit at Stereo+. From 2012 to 2013, Gogosashvili worked at GYLA's Media Legal Defense Center.

### **1.2.2 Support to media community to improve standards and ethics**

#### Review of complaints

During the reporting quarter, 19 complaints were filed with the Charter, out of which 17 were assessed as admissible. The Charter examined 13 cases, 10 of which were submitted and carried over from the previous reporting period. Fifteen cases were in the pipeline at the end of the reporting quarter.

The Charter reviewed the following 13 cases in the reporting quarter:

#### **1. Media Development Foundation, NGO “SAFARI,” and Tamta Todadze vs. Alia.ge**

Principle 1 (on accuracy), Principle 7 (on discrimination) and Principle 11 (on distortion of facts) were disputed. Alia.ge published a Facebook post by Facebook user Lado Sadghobelashvili, who claimed that Tamta Todadze used to be a member of the political party National Movement. Alia.ge did not verify this information provided by Lado Sadghobelashvili. Thus, the Charter determined that this publication violated Principle 1, which states that media outlets have an obligation to verify any information provided regardless of the source. Indicating the source of information does not exempt media outlets from their editorial responsibilities.

#### **2. Ekaterine Meskhidze vs. Maestro TV journalists Sandro Kachakhidze and Salome Gogokhia**

Principles 1 (on accuracy) and 7 (on discrimination) were disputed and the Council determined that violations took place. When reporting on a court decision regarding the case of Papuna Ugrekhelidze, a former chairman of the National Agency of Public Registry, the media outlet stated that the court pronounced Papuna Ugrekhelidze "innocent" in the sexual harassment against Ekaterine Meskhidze, the

agency's former employee. The Council established that in reality, the court did not review whether Papuna Ugrekhelidze committed sexual harassment or not. The journalists also violated Principle 7 by quoting Papuna Ugrekhelidze's lawyer who, for his part, quoted Papuna Ugrekhelidze as saying: "This person [Ekaterine Meskhidze] is an elderly woman, a grandmother of two children, and she doesn't interest me as a woman, I don't care about her." The Council concluded that the journalist, by publishing the above quote, contributed to the stigmatization and stereotyping of women based on age and looks.

### **3. Davit Begiashvili vs. Bpn.ge**

### **4. Davit Begiashvili vs. Commersant.ge**

### **5. David Begiashvili vs. Ipn.ge**

Principle 1 (on accuracy) and Principle 5 (on correction) were disputed. The Council found that all three media outlets violated both principles. The media outlets published information about businessman Davit Begiashvili claiming that his company, Albatross, was implicated in two scandals: the Ministry of Internal Affairs allegedly found drugs on company premises, and Albatross was involved in tearing down posters featuring Archil Tatumashvili (a Georgian citizen who was murdered while in the custody of de facto Ossetian authorities) from the walls of its office building. The Council concluded that the media outlets violated Principle 1 because the information was not true. In addition, the website Ipn.ge shared an article by Bpn.ge containing inaccurate information about Davit Begiashvili on its Facebook page. Although Ipn.ge did not write the article, the Council determined that it also bears editorial responsibility for disseminating information containing incorrect/unverified facts.

### **6. JSC "France Auto" vs. Giorgi Noniashvili**

The applicant argued that the information concerning former Minister of Sports Taniel Khechikashvili and his brother, which was disseminated by the Facebook page "Waste Detector," violated Principle 1 (on accuracy) and Principle 5 (on correction). The applicant disputed a section which claimed that "the founder of the winning company JSC 'France Auto' is Avtandil, the brother of Taniel Khechikashvili, the former Minister of Sports," arguing that Avtandil was not a founder of the company. The Council determined that this statement did not violate Principles 1 and 5, as Avtandil Khechikashvili was in fact among the founders of JSC "France Auto" when the company was incorporated. One member of the Council disagreed, noting that the controversial media post has created the impression that Avtandil Khechikashvili is still a partner and/or shareholder of JSC "France Auto" and further adding that media outlets must pay close attention to accuracy when preparing such reports.

### **7. Manana Gurgenidze vs. an unidentified Euronews.ge journalist**

The applicant disputed Principle 1 (on accuracy), Principle 3 (on verified sources), Principle 4 (on fair methods), Principle 10 (on privacy), and Principle 11 (on distortion of facts). Of these, the Council determined violations of Principles 1 and 10. The media outlet disseminated an unaltered form of, and without verification, a personal post published by a Facebook user containing inaccurate information, violating Principle 1. Regarding the violation of Principle 10, the Council concluded that the journalist disclosed information concerning a person's private health condition without a valid reason for public interest.

## 8. EVEX Hospitals vs. an unidentified Commersant.ge journalist

Principle 1 (on accuracy) and Principle 11 (on distortion of facts) were disputed; the Council established that only the former was violated. Commersant.ge disseminated false and unverified information about the medical institutions in the EVEX Hospitals chain and the EVEX Holding hospitals.

## 9. Anonymous applicant vs. an unidentified Rustavi 2 journalist

The Council was approached by a person who believed that Rustavi 2's humoristic program "Late Show – Hidden Camera" violated Principle 7 (on discrimination) and Principle 10 (on privacy). As requested by the applicant, the Council agreed to keep his/her identity anonymous. The Council determined that both principles in question were violated. The disputed edition of the show was filmed in the format of the so-called "hidden camera" as follows: an actor stops passers-by on the street and creates the impression that he is homophobic through leading questions and offensive terminology. According to the Council, the disputed show promoted discrimination against LGBTQI individuals by using hate speech. Furthermore, the show breached Principle 10 because the citizens did not know they were being filmed and were not informed afterwards that they were speaking with an actor.

## 10. Tbilisi State University (TSU) vs. Studio Monitor journalists Nino Ramishvili and Nino Zuriashvili

In response to Studio Monitor's controversial piece, "Disputed Forty Pages of the Dissertation – Documents Denounce TSU Rector for Plagiarism," the applicant argued against the use of the word "plagiarism." The Council determined that forty pages were in fact inserted into TSU Rector Giorgi Shervashidze's dissertation from another co-authored paper, therefore the article did not violate any principles.

## 11. FRESCO LLC vs. Faktpress.com

## 12. FRESCO LLC vs. Mins.ge

## 13. FRESCO LLC vs. Fact2.ge

All three online media outlets published a statement that they attributed to Vasil Sophromadze, chairman of the FRESCO Board of Directors. The Council determined that Sophromadze did not make this statement, therefore all three media outlets violated Principle 1 (on accuracy). Fact2.ge also violated Principle 5 (on correction).

The following 15 cases were in the Charter's pipeline at the end of reporting period:

Applicant	Respondent	Principle(s) under question
Nana Vardiashvili	Mtvari Arkhi	1 (on accuracy), 10 (on privacy)
Neli Ukleba	Tamar Dolenjashvili	1 (on accuracy), 3 (on verified)

		sources), 4 (on fair methods)
Mamuka Zhgenti	Nata Makhviladze	1 (on accuracy), 11 (on distortion of facts)
N(N)LP movement “Shame”	Irakli Chikhladze, Shorena Khvichia	1 (on accuracy)
Budu Ramishvili	Imedinews.ge	1 (on accuracy), 3 (on verified sources), 5 (on correction), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Budu Ramishvili	TV25.ge	1 (on accuracy), 3 (on verified sources), 5 (on correction), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Budu Ramishvili	Info9.ge	1 (on accuracy), 3 (on verified sources), 5 (on correction), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Lela Kakulia	Informacia.club	1 (on accuracy), 3 (on verified sources), 4 (on fair methods), 5 (on correction), 7 (on discrimination), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association	Rusa Shelia, Vaka Gorgiladze	1 (on accuracy), 3 (on verified sources), 5 (on correction), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Levan Katamadze	Rusa Shelia, Vaka Gorgiladze	1 (on accuracy), 4 (on fair methods), 10 (on privacy)
Sophio Khachapuridze	Kvira.ge	1 (on accuracy), 2 (on coercion), 3 (on verified sources), 4 (on fair methods), 5 (on correction), 8 (on children's rights), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Sophio Khachapuridze	Kvira.ge	1 (on accuracy), 2 (on coercion), 3 (on verified sources), 4 (on fair methods), 7 (on discrimination), 11 (on distortion of facts)
Anna Tskhovrebova, Nino Kvintradze, Mariam Mchedlishvili, Giga Benia and Nutsa Shubashvili	Nika Laliashvili	2 (on coercion)
Anna Gvalia	Nanuka Zhorzholiani	7 (on discrimination)
Union "Sapari", Nino Chikovani, Grigol Chikovani	Nanuka Zhorzholiani	7 (on discrimination), 10 (on privacy)

### Statements

The Charter is at the frontline of defending the rights of journalists and advocating for a more conducive legal and operational environment for media. It remains one of the most active members of the Media Advocacy Coalition. In the reporting quarter, the Charter published 16 statements: eight together with the Media Advocacy Coalition and other partner organizations, and eight independently.

The Charter's independent statements included two regarding Adjara TV, which further restricted the editorial freedoms of its journalists; one protesting MP Anri Okhanashvili's insulting comment against Tamar Chikhladze, a program host at TV Pirveli; one denouncing Armenophobic statements from a program host at Mtavari Arkhi; and one denouncing unfounded allegations concerning the professional activities of TV Pirveli journalists Vakho Sanaia and Diana Trapaidze. The Charter also protested the lien imposed on the accounts of TV companies Mtavari Arkhi and TV Pirveli. In addition, with the emergence of the first COVID-19 cases, the Charter urged reporters to adhere to ethical norms and to cover events with the utmost caution. The Charter appealed to reporters once again after Marneuli and Bolnisi municipalities were quarantined, urging them not to discriminate on the basis of ethnicity.

The statements made together with the Media Advocacy Coalition concerned Adjara TV, the lien imposed on the accounts of the TV companies, the assault against Nika Gvaramia of Mtavari Arkhi and the pressure on TV Pirveli.

### Service to Journalists

#### *Consultations*

In the reporting quarter, the Charter provided 19 consultations to journalists from the following eight media outlets: Chemi Kharagauli (4), On.ge (3), Ajara TV (5), TV Pirveli (2), Radio Mozaika (2), TV Lagodekhi (1), TV 25 (1), and Maestro TV (1). The journalists needed advice on how to report on COVID-19, information regarding media rights during the state of emergency (including restrictions on access to public records), and guidance on obtaining press accreditation and labor rights for journalists.

#### *Training*

On February 29 and March 1, 2020, the Charter conducted a training "Trolls, Bots and Fake News – How to Avoid Misinformation." Eighteen participants – among them journalists representing Adjara Public Broadcaster, TV company Dia, Radio Atinati, Tok TV, TV25, Expressnews, Chaikhana, and Kvirispalitra.ge – attended the training. Tamar Kintsurashvili and Sopho Gelava of Media Development Foundation, which specializes in fact-checking and media literacy, and Lika Zakashvili, editor of Publika.ge, led the training. The participants learned how to identify trolls, bots, and non-authentic profiles on social networks, and discussed the challenges that the social networks pose to ethical and responsible media. The trainers outlined steps to avoid getting trapped, such as how to recognize a fake page or a manipulation while working on stories. *Please see Appendix #1 and Appendix #2 for the agenda and list of participants, respectively.*

#### *Fostering Ethics Charter's Priorities*



On February 20, with the financial support of the U.S. Embassy, the Charter hosted a conference titled “Increasing the efficiency of broadcasters’ self-regulation mechanism.” Representatives of the Georgian National Communications Commission (GNCC), national and regional broadcasters, NGOs, and donor organizations took part in the conference. The participants analyzed the shortcomings of the broadcasters' self-regulation mechanism and discussed ways to make it more effective.

With the support of the Open Society Georgia Foundation, the Charter monitored content produced by Adjara TV to see whether its editorial policy changed after Giorgi Kokhreidze became the new director.

### **1.3.1 Data Journalism – Access, Analyze, Visualize**

IREX completed this activity completed in Y3.

### **1.3.2 New Media Initiative**

*Please see accompanying document containing data and commentary on individual media partners for more detailed information.*

## **1.4 Multimedia Education Center (MEC) Serves as a Professional and Independent Training Hub**

### **Cooperation with Universities**

In the spring 2020 semester, MEC partnered with the following three Georgian universities:

- Georgian Institute of Public Affairs (GIPA): Caucasus School of Journalism and Media Management (MA program)
- International Black Sea University (IBSU): Journalism School (BA program)
- Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film University (BA program in Journalism and Mass Communication)

MEC re-opened for the spring semester on January 8 and the first class was conducted at the Black Sea University on January 10.

After the Georgian government closed educational institutions for spring holidays earlier than usual on March 2 due to the emerging COVID-19 outbreak, MEC followed suit and its team started to telework. Although schools and universities were initially set to re-open on March 16, on March 11 the holidays were prolonged until April 1. On March 21, the Government of Georgia announced a state of emergency through April 21. Starting on March 30, the state of emergency was extended to include a nationwide quarantine and a curfew restricting citizens to their homes from 9:00 pm to 6:00 am.

In January and February 2020, MEC served 54 unique users and 90 course participants from GIPA and IBSU (please note that the students enrolled in more than one class are counted more than once). The majority of users were women aged 20-24. Starting in March, MEC expected 20 additional unique users

from GIPA for Nino Orjonikidze’s class in visual storytelling and 31 from Shota Rustaveli Theater and Film University. However, the classes were cancelled, again due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Throughout March, the MEC team stayed in touch with management personnel at universities. The universities were not be able to use MEC’s services as teaching hands-on components requires physical contact, and it would not have been possible to observe the necessary safety standards. Gatherings of more than three persons are also prohibited under governmental restrictions, making it impossible to conduct in-person teaching.

Below is the schedule of classes at MEC during the spring and summer 2020 semesters:

<b>Schedule</b>		
<b>2020   January–February–March–April–May–June–July</b>		
<b>MONDAY</b>		
<b>10:00 – 12:00</b>	<b>Audio Video Training Elene Asatiani</b>	<b>GIPA – MA I - JOUR</b>
<b>12:30 – 14:30</b>	<b>Basis of TV Journalism Tiko Nachkebia</b>	<b>GIPA – MA I - JOUR</b>
<b>TUESDAY</b>		
<b>13:00 - 17:00</b>	<b>The Art of the Interview Revaz Chichinadze</b>	<b>TAFU – BA III - JOUR</b>
<b>17:00 - 20:00</b>	<b>TV-Radio Production Revaz Chichinadze</b>	<b>TAFU – MA II - JOUR</b>
<b>WEDNESDAY</b>		
<b>10:00 – 12:00</b>	<b>Visual Storytelling Nino Orjonikidze</b>	<b>GIPA – BA II - JOUR</b>
<b>12:30 – 14:30</b>	<b>Basis of TV Journalism Tiko Nachkebia</b>	<b>GIPA – MA I - JOUR</b>
<b>THURSDAY</b>		
<b>10:00 – 14:00</b>	<b>News broadcast Tamar Mshvenieradze</b>	<b>IBSU – BA II - JOUR</b>
<b>14:00 - 16:00</b>	<b>Analytic Journalism Revaz Chichinadze</b>	<b>TAFU – BA III - JOUR</b>
<b>16:00 - 20:00</b>	<b>News Journalism Goga Chartolani</b>	<b>TAFU – BA II - JOUR</b>
<b>FRIDAY</b>		

10:00 – 14:00	News Broadcast - Ana Davitashvili	IBSU – BA II - JOUR
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## Organizational Development and Fundraising

The necessary restrictions imposed by the Government of Georgia to curtail the spread of COVID-19 have had a profoundly negative impact on MEC’s operations.

In January, the MEC management re-opened the facility and finalized a schedule of classes in consultation with university management. In parallel, it carried out negotiations with several commercial clients. The MEC team also resumed work on Georgian-Armenian partnership project.

Universities were not able to use MEC facilities beginning in March. All bookings for March, April, and May – including a roundtable by the Media Development Foundation, trainings by M-TAG, G2D-G and other IREX projects, and trainings in documentary film production, events, and presentations within the framework of the international documentary film festival Cinedoc – were canceled.

In March, the MEC team worked on the Georgian-Armenian partnership project through telework.

## Georgian-Armenian Partnership Project

During the reporting quarter, the MEC team continued to work on the Georgian-Armenian partnership project. MEC started the project in November 2019 to enable Armenian and Georgian journalists to detect and counter disinformation through creative content produced jointly. Participants from Armenia were selected competitively and they were matched with a Georgian regional media outlet.

In February, MEC transferred small content production grants to the participants. They are expected to finalize their projects in May.

The Armenian participants were set to travel to Georgia for filming in April, but because of the situation with COVID-19 and subsequent state of emergency and travel restrictions in both countries, this work will not be possible. A planned June 2020 meeting with project participants in Tbilisi will likewise have to be cancelled.

During the reporting quarter, the MEC team and Georgian participants helped the Armenian participants with materials to be filmed in Georgia and they exchanged information through various means of remote communication.

The MEC team recorded two educational videos for project participants about disinformation and propaganda, one in January with [Eto Buziashvili](#), a researcher at the Atlantic Council, and another in February with [Nino Danelia](#), a journalism professor from Ilia State University.

The Armenian participants included:

1. QETQ, a group of investigative journalists <https://hetq.am/en> (Shoushan Stepanyan)
2. Restart Times, a student-run media outlet <https://restarttimes.am/> (Michael Pambukchyan)
3. Fact Investigation Platform <https://fip.am/> (Harry Tsatryan)
4. Information Checking Centre <https://infocheck.am/am> (Ophelia Simonyan)

The Georgian participants included:

1. Kutaisi Post (Eka Kukhalashvili)
2. Batumelebi (Tsago Kakhaberidze)
3. JNews (Kristina Merabyan)
4. SK News (Mariam Bardzimidze)

MEC conducted a five-day workshop for the eight participants in December, teaching them how to detect misinformation and how to counter it through creative content production initiatives. The participating media outlets were awarded small grants (\$800 for participants from Armenia and \$400 for participants from Georgia) to work on content together.

As their final endeavors supported by the Georgian-Armenian Partnership Project, the Armenian and Georgian journalists will work on the following projects together:

INFOCHECK (Armenia) and KUTAISI POST (Georgia):

Reporters from the two countries identify news that is obviously fake but which people still believe to be true in Georgia and Armenia. One example of such disinformation is the EU forbidding the baptism of babies. Through human interest stories, the journalists will debunk similar myths.

RESTART TIMES (Armenia) and SAMKHRETIS KARIBCHE (Georgia):

The journalists research activities of Russian-funded clubs and societies in Armenia and Georgia to identify their goals and the tools they use to target different generations. The journalists will attend meetings organized by these clubs and societies and will interview members. Afterwards, they will produce stories about people who are under the influence of the Russian media.

FIP.AM (Armenia) and BATUMELEBI (Georgia):

In Georgia and Armenia, there are attempts to discredit young opposition politicians and activists, mainly through social media. The journalists tell stories of these young leaders and counter disinformation about them.

HETQ (Armenia) and JNEWS (Georgia):

Armenia is set to ratify the Council of Europe Convention of 2011 on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. However, the Armenian public is divided, and some actively oppose ratifying the document. Opponents of the Convention argue that it contradicts national traditions and values. In order to tackle these myths and clarify what this Convention is about, the journalists interview experts and tell the stories of two women from Armenia and Georgia.

## **Other Partnerships**

In February, MEC hosted a four-day training led by IREX's L2D-G and helped documentary filmmaker Devin Horan make a promotional video for a training course which was scheduled for April at MEC, but was cancelled later because of situation with COVID-19.

### **1.5 Georgian Media improve Content on Gender and Minority Issues**

IREX completed this activity in December 2018.

#### ***Objective 2: Regional Media Outlets Demonstrate Improved Financial Viability and Transparency***

##### **2.1 Targeted Business and Management Technical Assistance as Part of MSPs**

From January to March 2020, Innova worked with five RMSI partners. Services included consulting and coaching, recruitment and training of new staff members, collecting/processing data for follow-up work, assessing and analyzing annual performance indicators, and planning and preparing to address the identified needs of RMSI partners.

The five RMSI partners were:

- Radio Atinati (Zugdidi);
- Qartli.ge (Gori);
- Kutaisi Post (Kutaisi);
- Radio Marneuli (Marneuli); and
- JNews (Akhalkalaki).

A detailed description of activities is provided below.

#### **Sales Assistance for Kutaisi Post, Livepress.ge, Radio Marneuli, Qartli.ge, JNews**

Consultant assigned to the media organizations: Maka Kakulia

January 2020:

- The consultant supervised sales agents at Qartli.ge, Kutaisi Post, Radio Marneuli and JNews. She kept in touch with sales agents, reminding them to report on daily sales calls, visits, potential problems, etc.
- The consultant helped a sales agent at the Kutaisi Post resolve differences with organization's director. As a result, the Post retained an experienced sales agent.
- The owner of Livepress.ge was not able to hire a new sales agent in January.

February 2020:

- The consultant continued to train and guide salespeople at the four media outlets. Several sales agents from Qartli.ge left to pursue other opportunities, but fortunately the organization was able to hire a new agent and sales did not suffer as a result. The consultant trained the new sales agent.
- Livepress.ge selected several candidates for an interview, but unfortunately none agreed to work at the media outlet. The financial standing of the organization has worsened, and it cannot afford to hire a sales agent. As a result, the director has halted recruitment. In cooperation with other local media outlets, he has decided to sell advertising himself.

March 2020:

- The consultant continued to train and guide salespeople with the hope of landing sales contracts for all media outlets. Easter is usually a promising period for sales and several negotiations were in the final stages. On March 21, however, the Georgian government declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, shutting down the majority of businesses and asking the public to stay at home. In some cases, online sales were permitted; however, in-person services such as hairdressers, cafes, and restaurants had to close. Businesses were forced cut expenses, frequently including marketing budgets, resulting in terminated or suspended advertising contracts for the media outlets. The consultant and sales agents to target companies continuing operations, such as pharmacies and supermarkets, as well as those which were allowed to sell online.
- A Kutaisi Post sales agent was not able to continue work because of conflicting responsibilities with another job at a hospital of infectious diseases.

*Sales statistics for the reporting period*

<b>RMSI partner</b>	<b>Number of contacts</b>	<b>Number of visits</b>	<b>Rejected</b>	<b>Pending</b>	<b>Sales</b>
JNews	9	6	1	4	1
Qartli.ge	153	45	13	26	1
Radio Marneuli	134	23	7	23	0
Kutaisi Post	17	8	8	7	1

No sales activities are reported for Livepress.ge because they did not have a salesperson.

**Accounting System for Qartli.ge, Livepress.ge, Borjomi TV, and Channel 9**

Consultant assigned to the media organizations: Vakhtang Kelbakiani

The consultant introduced a double-entry accounting system which was developed in Excel for media organizations. He provided the final version of the system, incorporating all functional updates, to the media outlets on February 20. Further activities included:

- The consultant helped the Qartli.ge accountant to transfer data into the updated system. The accountant now works comfortably with the system and plans to discuss some minor challenges with the consultant.
- The Livepress.ge accountant prepared all the data and will input it into the system under the consultant's guidance in April.
- The Channel 9 accountant works comfortably with the system.
- The TV Borjomi accountant continues to work with an older version of the system. They plan to hire a new accountant, and will decide after that which program to use.

## **Policies and Procedures for All RMSI Partners**

Consultants assigned to the media organizations: Natia Gviniashvili and Maya Shishniashvili

The consultants developed organizational policies and procedures for RMSI partners that will help them increase the efficiency and transparency of their activities.

Following the recommendations provided by USAID to RMSI partners regarding lack of established policies and procedures, the consultants from Innova drafted the following documents:

- Employee handbook
- Organizational structure and sample job descriptions
- Salaries and time accounting.

The consultants have finalized the handbook along with organizational structure and sample job descriptions. The documents were presented and discussed with the IREX team before IREX sent them to RMSI partners. The Innova team is still working on the document regarding salaries and time accounting.

## **Developing a Marketing Plan for Radio Atinati**

Consultants assigned to the media organizations: Natia Gviniashvili and Maya Shishniashvili

Radio Atinati requested assistance to develop a marketing plan.

In March, the radio station gave its media kit and development strategy to Natia Gviniashvili, who analyzed the media kit and returned it to Radio Atinati with recommendations for improvement. Together with Maya Shishniashvili and other Innova consultants, Natia Gviniashvili analyzed factors that Radio Atinati can control to influence advertisers to purchase its products and developed recommendations for the marketing mix and the development of a marketing plan. The consultants presented a draft version to the Radio Atinati team and its director, but they could not finalize the plan due to the outbreak of COVID-19. The director of Radio Artinati asked the Innova consultants for assistance in developing a crisis management plan, particularly with possible grant proposals. The consultants shared several ideas with the Radio Atinati team and will resume working on the marketing plan in April or May, depending on the situation.

## **2.2 Development and Use of Audience Research for Revenue Generation**

IREX completed this activity in Y2.

### **2.3 Business Innovation Grants**

IREX will not pursue this activity.

### **2.4 Digital Switchover Assistance**

IREX completed this activity in Y1.

### **Objective 3: Access to balanced and relevant information increased in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.**

Radio Atinati, Livepress.ge, and Qartli.ge, along with other M-TAG partners, received a guide prepared by Rusudan Tskhomelidze, Tamar Rukhadze, and Dachi Grdzlishvili on the production of pre-election talk shows. This guide describes the main formats for the shows and explains how to plan and record them.

Livepress.ge, Qartli.ge, and Radio Atinati, along with other RSMI partners, received a sample employee handbook along with organizational chart and job descriptions developed by Innova. Qartli.ge sales agents also received training and guidance from an Innova consultant. In addition, Innova advised Radio Atinati on improving its media kit and assisted with the development of a marketing plan.

Temur Kevlishvili of Goodweb trained Qartli.ge, Livepress.ge, and Radio Atinati teams in web management and maintenance, on February 5, February 7, and February 8, respectively.

On February 7-8, Levan Tabatadze trained the Qartli.ge team in producing web advertisements.

From February 10 to February 14, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili visited Zugdidi-based media partner Livepress.ge to help them with news reporting and studio production. Lasha Nasaridze joined Rukhadze and Grdzlishvili on February 13 and February 14 to help Livepress.ge with technical problems in the studio, including technical flaws in live stream broadcasting, balancing studio microphones, improving the quality of signal exchange between computers and the studio control room, and rewiring the newsroom and studio. Rukhadze and Grdzlishvili also discussed with the Livepress.ge team how to use the online studio during the pre-election and election period, including which new program formats and topics they can offer to their audiences.

From February 18 to February 20, Shota Gogishvili conducted a three-day training in video production at Qartli.ge. On the first day of the training, the trainer reviewed published content to discuss common mistakes in video production and video editing. The trainer worked with each team member individually, accompanied journalists to the field every day, and helped them with fieldwork. Gogishvili then supervised video editing after the fieldwork, focusing on sequencing shots, framing the piece, and adding a voice track to video reports. In addition, he advised the team on video production for Facebook.



On March 6, Tamar Rukhadze and Dachi Grdzlishvili visited Gori-based media partner Qartli.ge. The composition of the Qartli.ge team has recently changed, with two of its journalists leaving the organization to work for national TV stations. Grdzlishvili and Rukhadze met with the two newly hired reporters, who are less experienced but hard working and highly motivated. Qartli.ge currently employs four reporters in addition to Saba Tsitsikashvili, the editor.

In mid-March, Livepress.ge, Qartli.ge, and Radio Atinati, along with other RSMI partners, received a guide, prepared by Tskhomelidze, Rukhadze, and Grdzlishvili, which gave step-by-step instructions on how journalists can work remotely. The guide contained advice on obtaining necessary equipment, organizing workdays and creating a comfortable work atmosphere at home, online platforms for editorial meetings and planning, materials or archives that journalists may need, online tools to use to prepare materials, approaching COVID-19 from multiple angles, obtaining video content without leaving home, and ethical dilemmas that journalists are facing and how to overcome them.

From March 19 to March 20, Tamar Rukhadze worked remotely with Qartli.ge. She participated in editorial meetings to discuss daily news and assisted the Qartli.ge team in planning, writing, and editing stories. Rukhadze also supported the journalists following this online mentorship with daily reporting on COVID-19, talk show production, and fulfilling their obligations under their IREX subgrant. With the help of Shota Gogishvili, IREX provided Qartli.ge with an animated web banner on COVID 19 in Georgian, Ossetian, and Russian. Qartli.ge consolidated its coverage of COVID-19 under this banner. In addition, Rukhadze helped the Qartli.ge team with content production on COVID-19 for its websites in Ossetian and Russian.

From March 30 to April 3, Tamar Rukhadze provided online assistance to Livepress.ge and Radio Atinati. Rukhadze offered story ideas, helped them with daily news coverage, and together with Livepress.ge's team, planned an expanded story on COVID-19 which was later translated into Abkhazian and Russian. One of the challenges that Livepress.ge faced when teleworking was to produce a talk show without guests present in the studio. Under the guidance of Dachi Grdzlishvili and Tamar Rukhadze, Livepress.ge managed to record its first talk show using online tools. The trainers provided the Livepress.ge team with recommendations on how to improve programs in the future with regards to content and technical quality.

### **3.1: Safety training**

IREX completed this activity in Y3.

## **3.2 Content Production & Equipment Subgrants; Associated Training**

### **3.2.1 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Tbilisi Bureau**

IREX completed this activity in Y2.

### **3.2.2 Radio Atinati**

Radio Atinati continued implementing a 16.5 month, \$30,470.85 subgrant awarded in July 2019, to produce the Russian-language radio program “Common Ground.” The radio program airs on Mondays and Fridays for 12 to 15 minutes, and the two editions have different formats. On Mondays, Radio Atinati broadcasts a review of materials published in Abkhazian media, which incorporates a new segment featuring interviews with experts. On Fridays, Radio Atinati airs a program prepared collaboratively with its partner Radio Soma. The partners agree on topics in advance, and journalists prepare audio reports. The radio programs are supplemented by multimedia pieces, one of which is featured per week.

The program continues to be available on the radio station’s website and live through the internet. All programs are uploaded to the Radio Atinati website and social media.

According to Google Analytics, the number of unique visitors to the radio station’s web page this quarter was 239,126, up from 155,366 in the previous quarter. The number of sessions from IP addresses registered in Russia was 11,345, up from 8,004 in the previous quarter.

In Q2 of Y6 Radio Atinati prepared 26 radio programs:

- January (9): review of press materials (4), talk show (5)
- February (8): review of press materials (4), talk-show (4)
- March (9): review of press materials (5), talk-show (4)

Radio Atinati prepared the following 11 multimedia stories under its M-TAG subgrant:

1. [Traditional holiday celebration](#)
2. [Poetry event held in Sokhumi](#)
3. [New fishing regulations in Abkhazia](#)
4. [Abkhazian-Russian negotiations to avoid energy crisis in Abkhazia](#)
5. [Virus prevention – Abkhazia tightens border control](#)
6. [Protesters camp out in the streets of Sokhumi to demand the adoption of an anti-corruption law](#)
7. [Seamstress from Sokhumi dresses dolls in Abkhazian national costumes](#)
8. [Dimitri Gulia’s Jubilee and the writer’s house-museum in Sokhumi](#)
9. [The threats of coronavirus epidemic in Abkhazia](#)
10. [Sokhumi botanical garden is 180 years old](#)
11. [Sokhumi amid coronavirus pandemic – situation in Sokhumi before the presidential elections](#)

In addition, Radio Atinati received the following five photo reports from Abkhazia:

1. [Tradition of celebrating old New Year in Abkhazia and Samegrelo](#)
2. [Enguri Hydropower](#)
3. [Pictures from Sokhumi](#)
4. [Sokhumi Botanical Garden](#)
5. [Presidential elections in Sokhumi](#)

Throughout this reporting period, Radio Atinati worked on topics that its Abkhazian and Georgian colleagues identified as particularly interesting, such as political events in Sokhumi (protests and elections, economic issues), the energy crisis, and the change in fishing regulations. After the spread of the COVID-19 virus, Radio Atinati and a Sokhumi journalist reported on the de facto Abkhaz government response to the threat, including the preventive measures taken before the presidential elections in Abkhazia.

*Please see Appendix #3 for links to the content produced by Radio Atinati.*

### **3.2.3 Livepress.ge**

Livepress.ge continued implementing a 16.5 month, \$31,965.12 subgrant awarded in July 2019 to produce information of interest to the residents of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and Abkhazia regions. In Q2 of Y6, Livepress.ge prepared and published 82 media products: 44 expanded news, 12 feature stories, 11 short videos for social media, 12 analytical stories, and three talk shows. Of those, 30 expanded news, 11 feature stories, and eight analytical articles were translated into Russian, and 26 expanded news, eight feature stories, and four analytical articles were translated into Abkhazian.

Beginning in late March, Livepress.ge gradually transitioned to teleworking in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. On March 23, IREX modified the scope of work to allow Livepress.ge to produce content with remote communication tools until the situation improves and Livepress.ge is able to return to normal working conditions.

Under its IREX subgrant, Livepress.ge is expected to produce one talk show incorporating a video report, 12 expanded news, three features, three short videos on the same topic for social media, and three analytical articles monthly. The modification allows Livepress.ge to prepare in-depth articles instead of multimedia features. The articles must contain text, a photo and/or infographic, and an audio recording in lieu of a video report. Livepress.ge can also replace short videos with other types of content such as information posters, infographics, and quotes, for distribution on Facebook. Livepress.ge will record talk shows using online tools, with only the program host and studio manager working in the studio, and guests joining from a remote location. Instead of video reports, the talk shows will incorporate information from the internet such as the latest data, advice, and analysis.

Livepress.ge prepared the following three talk shows during the reporting period:

- In January, the talk show "[Zugdidi and Europe](#)" presented Bertha von Suttner, a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who lived in Zugdidi and connected it with the Europe
- In February, the talk show "[99 years Since Soviet Occupation](#)" discussed the role of government in discouraging nostalgia towards the Soviet past
- In March, the talk show "[COVID-19 in Zugdidi](#)" discussed the spread of COVID-19 in Zugdidi

People on both sides of the administrative boundary line (ABL) with Abkhazia followed many Livepress.ge publications with interest.

Livepress.ge managed to record an [interview with Akhra Avidzba](#), an Abkhaz activist who helped organize protests in Sokhumi which culminated in the resignation of the de facto president at the time. Livepress.ge asked Avidzba if he sees the need to engage in dialogue with Tbilisi directly and what led to the radicalization of processes. People on both sides of the ABL followed the protests in Sokhumi with great interest, and the interview generated a lot of traffic and comments. The interview was liked more than 1,800 times on the web page.

A publication on the protection and popularization of Mingrelian language also drew attention. The piece featured the [story of French cook Gautier Henn](#), who returned to France after living in Georgia for three years and published a English-Georgian-Mingrelian phrasebook. Feedback from readers was largely positive and the story was liked more than 1,000 times on the web page. The publication interested people on both sides of the ABL.

[A story about a young female athlete](#) from Martvili, who plays in the women's U/19 national football team in Azerbaijan, also proved to be popular. The young woman's journey to success was not easy; she fought with stereotypes to earn her place in sports, which is often considered a masculine pastime. Readers expressed solidarity with the woman, who is fighting for women's rights through her profession.

Materials featuring successful people and business ideas continue to be popular. Readers applauded a woman from Sokhumi who currently lives in Zugdidi, where she [makes and successfully sells candied vegetables](#). A Facebook video on this story received more than 3,000 likes and was shared over 650 times.

Beginning in March, readers expressed heightened interest in materials on COVID-19. Residents of Samagrelo were particularly concerned because their region borders occupied Abkhazia, and patients from the Gali region of Abkhazia receive health care services in Zugdidi. Furthermore, residents of Abkhazia closely followed materials about COVID-19 as they do not receive detailed information on the pandemic locally. A publication titled "[Residents of Gali Against COVID-19 and Social Crisis](#)," for example, was widely read in both Russian and local languages.

According to Google Analytics, the number of unique visitors to Livepress.ge this quarter totaled 261,578, up from 100,804 in the previous quarter. There were 14,013 sessions from IP addresses registered in Russia, up from 5,712.

*Please see Appendix #4 for links to the content produced by Livepress.ge.*

### **3.2.4 Qartli.ge**

Qartli.ge began implementing a 12 month, \$20,769.72 subgrant awarded in December 2019 to produce information of interest to Georgians and Ossetians living in and around occupied territories.

In Q2 of Y6, Qartli.ge prepared and published 67 media products – 53 news in text format, seven feature stories with four corresponding short videos, and three talk-shows. Of those, 32 expanded news were translated into Russian and 34 were translated into Ossetian.

Beginning in late March, Qartli.ge gradually transitioned to teleworking in response to the outbreak of COVID-19. On March 23, IREX modified the scope of work to allow Qartli.ge to produce content with remote communication tools until the situation improves and Qartli.ge is able to return to normal working conditions.

Under its IREX subgrant, Qartli.ge is expected to produce one talk show incorporating a video report and a short video for social media, 18 expanded news, two features, and two short videos on the same topic for social media monthly. The modification allows Qartli.ge to prepare in-depth articles instead of multimedia features. The article must contain text, a photo and/or infographic, and an audio recording in lieu of a video report. Qartli.ge can also replace short videos with other types of content such as information posters, infographics, and quotes, for distribution on Facebook. Qartli.ge will record talk shows using online tools, with only program host and studio manager working in the studio, and guests joining from a remote location. Instead of video reports, the talk shows will incorporate information from the internet such as the latest data, advice, and analysis.

Qartli.ge prepared the following three talk shows during the reporting period:

- In January, a talk show about the [protest in Qere](#) reported on the residents of village Qere near the ABL and interviewed the head of the administration and procurement department at the Gori mayor's office. Qartli.ge promoted the talk show on Facebook through a [short video](#).
- On March 22, Qartli.ge recorded a talk show on the [Gori local budget](#) with guests joining remotely to discuss the possible impact of the measures taken on the viability of the local economy and on the volume and structure of the local budget. The show included an interview with the head of the budgetary and finance committee at the Gori mayor's office. Qartli.ge promoted the talk show on Facebook through this [video](#).
- On March 31, Qartli.ge published a talk show on the [social programs in Gori and Qareli](#) focusing on access to social assistance programs during the nationwide quarantine. The show featured interviews with the heads of health and social welfare services for the Gori and Khashuri. Qartli.ge promoted the talk show on Facebook through this [video](#).

Throughout January and half of February, only the editor-in-chief and two journalists worked on content production. Qartli.ge added one journalist to the team beginning in mid-February. Changes in staff composition led to the increased amount of content in March.

Qartli.ge contributor Giorgi Eliauri is originally from village of Vilda, which is located in the occupied territories. He speaks Ossetian and his grandparents still live Vilda. With Eliauri's help, Qartli.ge prepared two publications: one on his family members who live in Vilda, and another on residents of Isroli, both of which are in the occupied Tskhinvali region. The stories featuring Giorgi's [grandparents in the village of Vilda](#) and [Kazbeg Tsitsagi and Vero Ginturi in the village of Isroli](#) have strongly resonated in social networks.

In another story, Qartli.ge spotted and recorded the Russian military firing flickering lights close to villages of Karapila and Orchosani. After Qartli.ge published the [video](#) on Facebook, the [State Security Service confirmed](#) that the Russian military was moving 500-800 meters from the freeway. Many national media outlets have used the Qartli.ge's video of the incident and some have also interviewed Qartli.ge's Saba Tsitsikashvili. These publications included work from the [Georgian Public TV, Channel 1](#), [Mtavari Arkhi](#), and [TV Pirveli](#).

According to Google Analytics, the number of unique visitors to Qartli.ge this quarter totaled 287,420, up from 252,853 in the previous quarter. There were 7,456 sessions from IP addresses registered in Russia, up from 6,818 in the previous quarter.

*Please see Appendix #5 for links to the content produced by qatli.ge.*

### **3.2.5 Equipment Grants**

Although this activity was completed in Y4, the additional funds IREX received from USAID in late March 2018 enabled it to provide the three partners involved in Objective 3 with equipment to support video editing, field production, and studio set-up. Each partner received equipment specific to their needs and production capacity. All three partners completed in-kind awards in Q4 of Y5. Qartli.ge submitted inventory reports to IREX in Q1 of Y6, after which IREX transferred equipment to their possession.