



BRANCH DEVELOPMENT IN THE GEORGIA RED CROSS SOCIETY

CASE STUDY



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2007, only six Georgia Red Cross (GRCS) branches delivered regular services and only 10 were well positioned as auxiliaries to local authorities. All branches were fully dependent on international funding.

In 2019 the National Society reached 359,375 people with humanitarian services through its 39 branches. The Covid-19 crisis has seen the National Society exponentially extended its reach to over 2.7 million people, more than 60 percent of the country's population.

- Currently 31 out of 39 branches report that they make a difference in people's lives with their own resources.
- Over three quarters of GRCS branches have increased their active volunteer base to 80 volunteers or more which represents a 400 percent increase on volunteering numbers before the start of the branch development journey.
- All branches deliver at least two regular volunteer-led services.
- Eleven branches reach at least 500 people, and 24 at least 800 people through their services each year.
- All 39 branches are now well positioned in their local area, fulfilling their role as auxiliaries to the local authorities, and leading inter-agency coordination in the delivery of services.

Central to this transformation in performance and self-reliance has been a focus within GRCS on branch development. This case study describes key elements of this transformation within GRCS, and some of the dilemmas and challenges that the National Society has faced during this period.

Speaking of the 2008 conflict that provided impetus for GRCS to focus on branch development and the current Covid-19 crisis, GRCS President, Natia Loladze highlights the role of these crises in driving change. Whilst she would never wish for a repeat of these crises, "they have pushed us to be better and do better."



The case study highlights a number of key learnings about branch and National Society development. Particular learnings highlight the importance of:

- National Society services as a driver for change
- Developmental services that engage communities in participatory processes and 'help people help themselves' to address long-term needs, alongside relief services delivered with a 'charity' mindset
- Peer learning and healthy competition between branches as a powerful complement to headquarters-led processes
- Diversity in National Society membership and volunteering to extend service reach
- Sharing learning with other National Societies to motivate staff and volunteers and drive innovation
- Accepting that branch development, like any change process, does not happen in a straight line. National Societies and branches continue to 'fly the plane' whilst they are building, repairing and improving it.

In the case study, **section 1** provides background on the historical, socio-economic and humanitarian context in which GRCS is operating. **Section 2** describes the branch development journey GRCS has undertaken and some key lessons learned. **Section 3** illustrates some key themes of branch development with stories from individual branches, while **section 4** describes some of the tools and capacities that GRCS uses to support branch development.

IFRC is extremely grateful to the President of the Georgia Red Cross Society, branch board members, employees and volunteers, and management for sharing their stories of branch development for this case study.



1 OVERVIEW

1.1 Introduction

This case study traces the recent branch development journey of the Georgia Red Cross Society (GRCS), to serve as a learning on how GRCS branches have developed themselves with support from the national Headquarters in order to support communities to become stronger and more resilient.

There is no single path to branch development. GRCS' branch development journey reflects the National Society's unique context and choices. What is true for all National Societies however is that their strength and relevance depend on a strong network of branches. What is also true is that openness to learning from others, strategic choices, and sheer hard work are important ingredients for developing a strong branch network.

GRCS branches operate in complex contexts, many in contexts still impacted by past conflicts and other situations of violence. This is overlaid with poverty and high unemployment, diverse ethnic communities, and in 2020 the added complexity of the Covid-19 pandemic. Much progress has been made since the beginning of GRCS' branch development journey more than a decade ago; a larger volunteer base, a stronger auxiliary role at local level, diversified support, volunteer-led activities and most importantly, greater humanitarian impact. Although many challenges remain, notably the diversification of income sources and the sustainability of services, GRCS is determined to forge ahead through greater accountability to communities and local partners.

1.2 Georgia Red Cross Society

The Georgia Red Cross Society (GRCS) was created in 1918. In 1991, the National Society re-emerged as an autonomous organisation, 68 years after the establishment of the Georgian branch of the Committee of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR, following the country's independence. In 1993, the Parliament of Georgia ratified the 1949 Geneva Conventions. A timeline of the National Society's history is provided as figure 1 and a map of its activities is provided as figure 2.

Today GRCS has a network of 39 branches that are the service delivery arm of the organisation. It is one of the largest civil society organisations in Georgia with 15,000 registered volunteers (5,000 active), 4,700 members and 192 employees.¹ In 2019 the National Society reached 359,375 people through its humanitarian services. One year later, the National Society has exponentially extended its reach with over 2.7 million people, more than 60 percent of the country's population, benefiting from GRCS' Covid-19 response and social welfare activities.

The National Society is one of four National Societies to have achieved certification through the Organisational Capacity and Assessment Certification (OCAC; 2015). For more than a decade, the GRCS has been engaged in an active journey of development at branch level and has supported sister National Societies with their branch development processes. A timeline of GRCS' branch development journey is provided as figure 3.

1 2019 figures

Figure 1 GRCS National Society Timeline

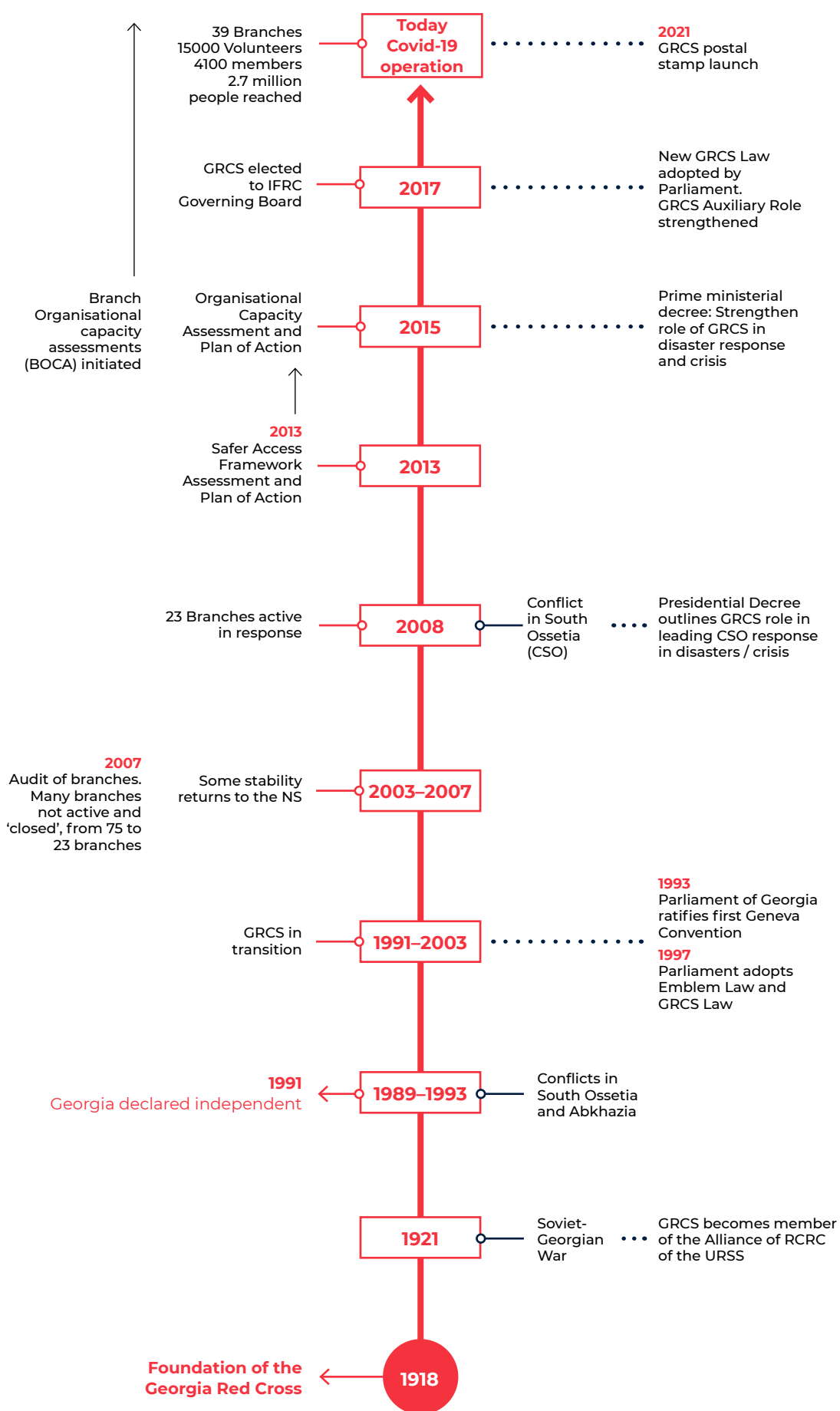
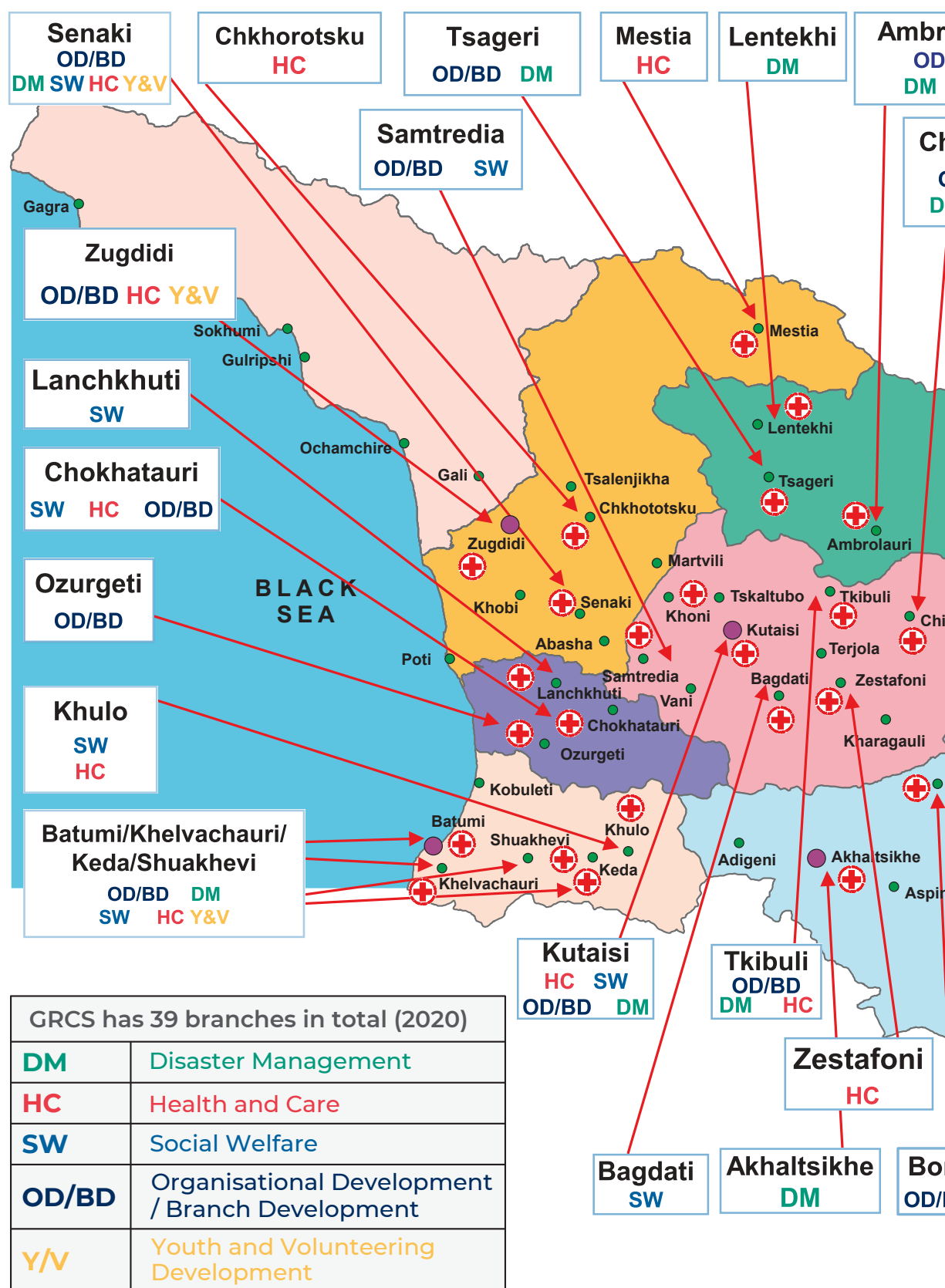
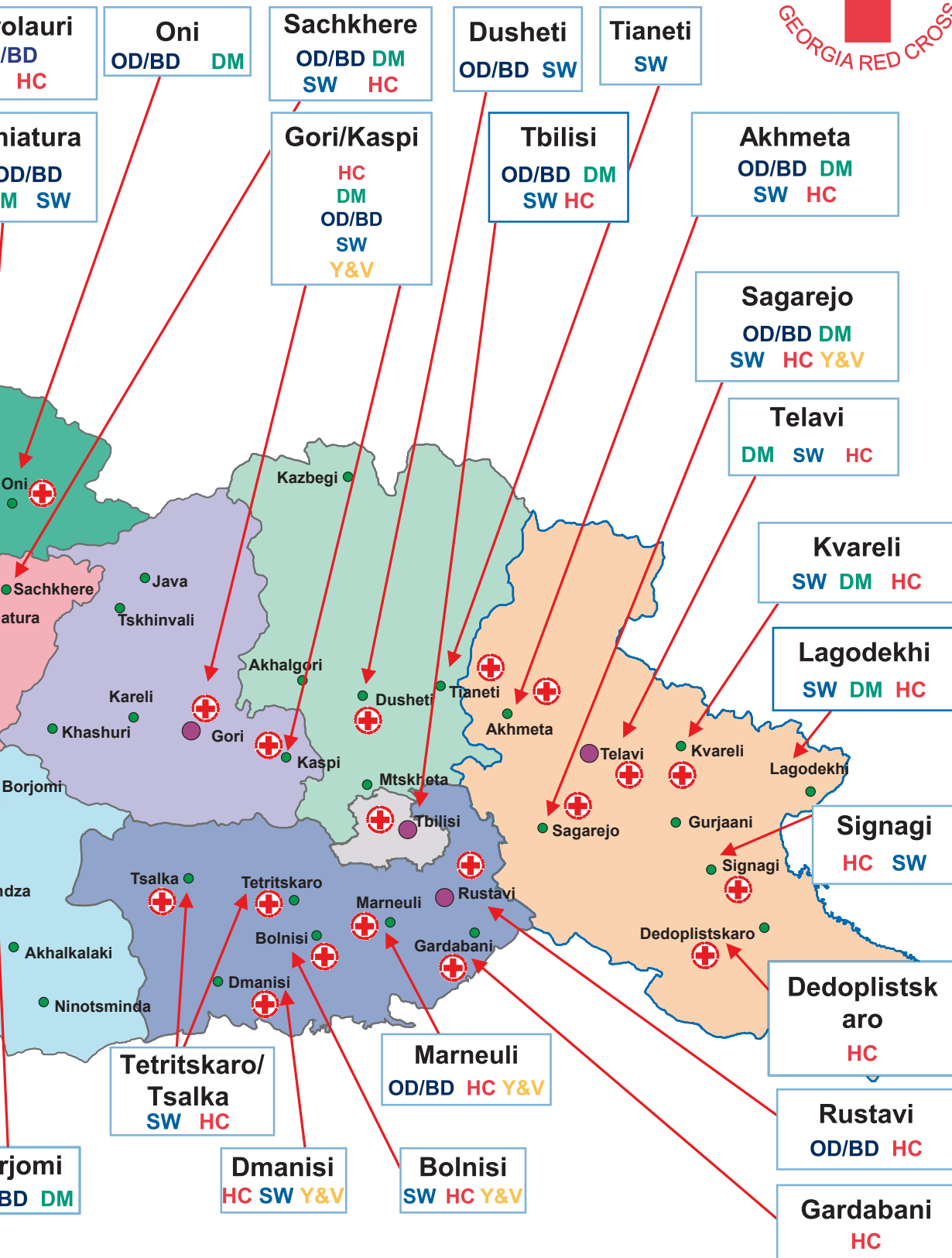


Figure 2 GRCS Activity Map







1.3 The country context

Located in the southern Caucasus and sharing borders with Turkey and Armenia to the south, Azerbaijan to the east, and Russia to the north, Georgia is at the crossroads between Western Asia and Eastern Europe.

The country's economy grew robustly between 2005 and 2019. Overall poverty declined from 30 percent in 2005 to 19.5 percent in 2019 (World Bank, 2020), however the poorest of the poor experienced limited and even negative growth. The Covid-19 pandemic is expected to reverse some of the country's past gains.

The largest burden of disease in Georgia relates to non-communicable diseases including circulatory diseases, cancer, diabetes and respiratory diseases (WHO, 2019). Despite recent universal healthcare reforms which have improved access to health, infant and maternal mortality rates remain high compared to other countries in the region (WHO, 2019). The country also faces ongoing challenges with increasing incidence of HIV and tuberculosis.

Ethnic and religious diversity, regional economic discrepancies, and mountainous geography make Georgia more susceptible to growing inequalities across social and spatial groups. Evidence of systematic discrepancies in incomes and sources of incomes across different social groups—men and women, minorities, rural and urban, internally displaced persons and the rest of the population—reveals that not all citizens may have the same opportunity to prosper.

- Population: 3.99 million
- Urban population: 59% of total population
- Ethnic groups: Georgian 86.8%, Azerbaijani 6.3%, Armenian 4.5%, other 2.3% (includes Russian, Ossetian, Yazidi, Ukrainian, Kist, Greek; 2014)
- Human development index: 0.786 (2018) — which places the country in the high human development category — positioning it at 70 out of 189 countries and territories.
- Life expectancy at birth: 73.6
- Female participation in labour market: 57.8 percent compared to 78.7 for men

- Number of female parliamentarians: 16.0 percent of parliamentary seats are held by women
- Main source of income: agriculture, mining, and production of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages, metals, machinery, and chemicals in small-scale industries.

1.4 GRCS' Auxiliary Role and country vulnerabilities

GRCS is a respected player in the disaster risk management arena and is active in national policy dialogue, assessments and operational responses. The National Society collaborates with the Emergency Management Service as well as other agencies and ministries, local civil society organisations, and international partners in preparedness, risk reduction and response.

Since 2008, GRCS has been the only non-state actor to be assigned specific functions in the Civil Safety National Plan (#416 Presidential Decree – revised in the #508 Resolution of the Prime Minister, September 2015). Under this Decree GRCS:

- participates in search and rescue activities under the coordination of the Emergency Management Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs.
- organises and coordinates the activities of non-state actors involved in emergency response.
- provides primary medical care for those injured and arranges field hospital under the coordination of the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs.
- provides food and water under the coordination of the Ministry of Agriculture.

Although GRCS branches do not have separate legal status, they must be registered with the authorities.

1.4.1 Geophysical and hydro-meteorological hazards

Georgia is exposed to both geophysical and hydro-meteorological hazards. Strong earthquakes with magnitudes of up to 7.0 and intensity of 9.0 on the Mercalli scale have occurred, with an average recurrence period of 103 years (UNDP, 2014:10). In 1991, a 7.0 earthquake in the Racha-Imereti region killed 100 people and affected 100,000 others. In 2002, an earthquake in the capital Tbilisi killed six, affected 3,700, and caused economic losses of USD 350 million.

Hydro-meteorological hazards are much more frequent. In the period 1995–2010 there has been an annual average of 380 landslides, 134 mudflows, 10 floods and 10 hail-storms. Mudflows and landslides over that period together caused almost 60 percent of all hazard-related economic losses.

1.4.2 Conflicts and other situations of violence

In Georgia, as in many other parts of the former Soviet Union, the breakdown of the USSR and rapid deterioration in socio-economic conditions were accompanied by changes in the distribution of power among different groups, which ignited conflicts and other situations of violence. Extreme tension in two regions of Georgia, Tskhinvali region in the north (1991–92) and Abkhazia in the west (1992–93), both bordering on Russia, led to open clashes and armed conflicts resulting in the displacement of more than 300,000 people.

In 2008, a new armed conflict between Georgia and Russia displaced more than 135,000 people, of whom approximately 26,000 did not return to their native lands.

1.4.3 Covid-19

Georgia's first Covid-19 case was registered at the end of February 2020. Swift containment measures and limited intra-regional mobility initially helped to limit spread of the virus, and the number of recorded cases remained relatively low. The relaxation of containment measures allowed for a gradual reopening of economic activities during summer and was followed by a surge of infections in September 2020. There is now widespread community transmission of Covid-19 across all regions of Georgia.

In many municipalities, branches along with local government agencies are the front line of response to the Covid-19 pandemic and its socio-economic consequences. In its auxiliary role, the GRCS supports the government with risk communications and community engagement, community-based surveillance, and epidemic control, including testing, control screening, and contact tracing. GRCS has established a support and referral hotline, is supporting persons in self and mandatory isolation, providing psychological first aid and psychosocial services, and is involved in food and hygiene distributions. GRCS is also facilitating social distancing in banks, hospitals, and food retail stores.

By the end of 2020, volunteers had delivered 120,000 food and hygiene parcels. Another 8,000 individuals had benefitted from psychological first aid and information and referrals provided by the hotline service. Older adults and persons with special needs (6,000) received home-based care. Over 2.7m people (more than 60% of the country's population) have benefitted from GRCS' Covid-19 response and social welfare activities, as well as information campaigns conducted via social media and television broadcasts.

The Government of Georgia has recognised GRCS's contribution to the Covid-19 response at all levels. Municipal governments who work closely with branches have acknowledged the extraordinary work of volunteers, highlighting that GRCS was one of the few, and in some cases the only non-state organisation supporting the public health response.

Georgia Red Cross Society, as an auxiliary organisation to the public authorities of Georgia . . . actively carries out work and delivers services in the Kakheti region, to support the most vulnerable people in emergencies and beyond. They are our reliable partners, and all the municipalities of the Kakheti region must contribute to this noble cause. I consider it as a personal obligation to help the Red Cross . . . in fulfilling their humanitarian mission. I believe in having a positive impact on the lives of many people in need through joint efforts. The staff and volunteers, who are directly involved in delivery of the Red Cross service, deserve only praise as they set a good example of civic responsibility to others!"

Irakli Shioshvili

First Deputy State Attorney
Governor in the Kakheti Region

GRCS' focus on building a diverse volunteer base has been key in supporting the government to deliver reliable Covid-19 health information to culturally and linguistically-diverse communities. GRCS' profile nationally and locally has been greatly elevated as a result of GRCS' work throughout the pandemic.

2 BRANCH DEVELOPMENT IN GRCS, 2008 – 2020

Throughout the Soviet era, the National Society had been a member of the Alliance of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies of the USSR and functioned as an extension of the public health services. It had the financial resource-base that came with this status and a large membership base which was facilitated by the Soviet regime. With the end of the regime the National Society collapsed, with most of its financial and human resource base disappearing overnight. In the early 2000s a leadership crisis further delayed the development of the new National Society and its branches. It was only from 2003 onwards that the National Society found a minimal level of stability.

2.1 Conflict as a trigger for branch development

Georgia Red Cross Society's branch development journey can be traced back to 2008 during the conflict between Russia and Georgia related to the territories of South-Ossetia and Abkhazia. It was the response to the needs of those affected by the 2008 war that was a turning point for GRCS and its branches. While the conflict brought extra challenges, it provided GRCS an opportunity to prove itself as a humanitarian actor and an auxiliary to the government response.

At the time many branches existed in name only. In 2007 the National Society undertook an audit of all branches and found that many branches had no volunteers and no activities. The number of branches registered with the Georgian authorities was reduced from 75 to 23. Of these, only six branches delivered regular services and only 10 branches were well positioned as auxiliaries to local authorities. All branches were fully dependent on international funding.

A wave of displacement swept over Georgia in August 2008 as violence broke out. The total number of persons displaced reached 138,000, out of which around 108,600 persons returned to their places of origin while approximately 30,000 remained to face possible long-term displacement.

GRCS branches across the country mobilised over 1000 volunteers to work in conflict-affected districts. Branches, supported by headquarters, collaborated with the ICRC and other Movement partners to support:

- needs assessment
- management of dead bodies
- setting up camps and a soup kitchen
- relief item distribution in IDP camps, in collective centres and to local hosting families
- distributions through lending their vehicles
- psychosocial support provision
- blood donations promotion, and
- housing IDPs (sometimes in their own homes)

Branches shared people and other resources, and throughout the operation supported more than 10,000 people. Many branches continue to provide services to internally displaced families living in settlements.

The National Society's presence through its branches and volunteers gained the respect of those assisted and the wider public. The boost to the National Society's image attracted new members and volunteers. The experience also had a very positive effect on internal cohesion within the organisation.

This response operations showed what GRCS branches and their volunteers were capable of achieving in a crisis but also highlighted many gaps in branch capacities, including volunteer management, security, critical incident management, and resource mobilisation. It was at this time that the National Society established that it needed a more systematic approach to branch development.

2.2 Branch development since 2008

“We understood that we need to have branches with certain capacities in place in communities, not branches just on paper.”

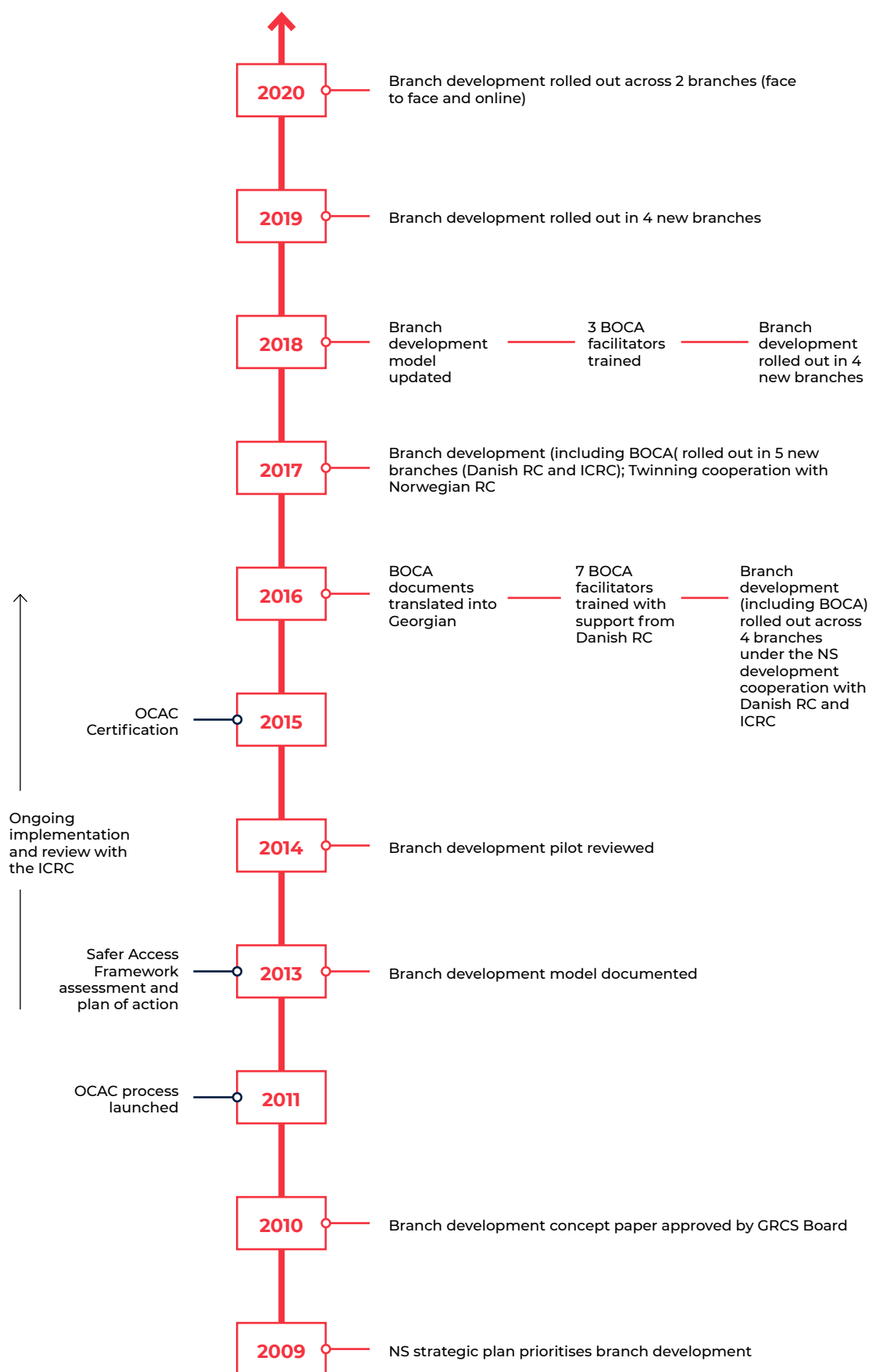
Taking lessons from the 2008 conflict and post conflict operations, GRCS partnered with the Danish Red Cross to pilot a branch development initiative to develop the capacities of an initial ten branches to locally design, resource and deliver community-based services and implement volunteer initiatives.

This partnership, which was extended to an additional eight branches (2014–2019), allowed GRCS to test different approaches to branch development and ultimately led to the elaboration of the Branch Development Model in 2013 which has since been adopted by the 39 branches. In 2015, GRCS, Danish RC and ICRC agreed a tripartite collaboration to support branch development, building on complementarities of partner capacities and expertise.

The core branch development issues identified through the pilot phase were:

- branches perceived headquarters as the main driver of branch development
- limited volunteer and member base, underscored by a weak culture of volunteerism in the wider community
- limited diversity in the volunteer and member base
- weak branch governance
- weak accountability
- weak relationships with local authorities
- limited local resource mobilisation
- few volunteer-led activities
- inactive branches
- weak communication between branches
- weak communication between branches and headquarters.

Figure 3 *The development of branches in GRCS*



Over a 10-year period (2008–2018) GRCS developed and integrated its Branch Development Model into the wider ecosystem of the National Society. The most recent iteration of the model was completed in 2018 and is presented under [“GRCS’ Branch Development Model”](#).

2.3 Outcomes of the branch development journey

Today, GRCS’ 39 branches provide good coverage of the country with the exception of two break away territories that are beyond the control of the State and not accessible to the Society.²

Branch activities address some of the most acute vulnerabilities in the country and include:

- Disaster risk management (disaster / pandemic response, preparedness and risk reduction)
- Health and care (psychosocial support, first aid, including psychological first aid, and free medical care)
- Support for internally displaced people
- Social services (programmes for older adults, individuals living in poverty, individuals living with a disability or disabilities)
- Youth programmes (support and activate youth representatives, non-formal education, mentoring system, skills building among youth to enhance their employability, social support and development initiatives)
- Community-development initiatives
- Tracing missing persons and restoring family links
- International Humanitarian Law

The organisational capacity of branches has significantly increased since 2008:

- 31 branches out of 39 report that they can make a difference in people’s lives with their own resources.
- Over three quarters of GRCS branches have increased their active volunteer base to 80 volunteers or more, representing a 400 percent increase in volunteer numbers before the start of the branch development journey.
- All branches deliver at least two regular volunteer-led services.
- Eleven branches reach at least 500 people, and 24 at least 800 people, through their services each year.

All 39 branches are now well positioned in their local area, fulfilling their role as auxiliaries to the local authorities, and leading inter-agency coordination in the delivery of services.

- 33 branches are now able to cover a portion of their core costs through local resource mobilisation efforts.
- Sixty percent of branches perform well on engagement and coordination with other local actors.
- 22 branches and one community have trained first aid teams and 16 branches have trained disaster response teams.

2 ICRC is active in these territories

- Annual branch forums, exchanges and informal communications contribute to shared learning and cross fertilisation of ideas.
- Branch governance has been enhanced through updated branch charters and training and mentoring for branch boards.
- Branch downward accountability has improved through weekly meetings with local / community officials and municipal authorities and upward accountability through the National Society's monthly branch reporting process.
- A full list of training courses for branches is provided in [Annex](#).

The progress made to date can be attributed to organisational focus on vulnerable groups and their needs, and an organisational culture of external engagement and partnership. There is also no doubt that the warm and collegial relations between branch employees and volunteers, and their passion and dedication to their work, has greatly contributed to the status of branches in local communities across the country.

2.4 Lessons learned from GRCS branch development

1. Balancing relief with a developmental approach.

At the beginning of the branch development journey, the National Society identified that it supported those in need primarily with a “charity or relief approach”. This was an effective response in some circumstances, such as addressing the immediate needs of those affected by war, but was not enough to address longer-term community needs. The National Society realised that it had to find a balance between providing immediate relief and empowering people to help themselves. It took time for branches to change their mindsets and to adapt to a more developmental approach.

“Before we had war and we were more focused on humanitarian assistance...but then we started the development process, so we started to engage with branches not to give the fish to communities, but showing communities how to get that fish, how to find those rivers where the fish comes from. This was also relevant to branches themselves, we encouraged them to solve their own problems with our support and guidance, they could find better opportunities for themselves. Branches initially could not understand, it took so much time, so much effort to make them believe in themselves. Branches were saying ‘No! communities do not want development they want relief, they want sugar and flour!’ We argued that communities could source their own livelihoods if branches helped them to develop. We are now more focused on strengthening resilience...but there are still cases where relief is important.”

2. Community engagement and learning by doing.

Key to GRCS' move to a more developmental approach has been branches' ability to facilitate community participation processes.

“We transformed our volunteer initiatives so that they are based on community needs. Having communities on board is so important....We started establishing day care centres in the municipalities and again it was based on community engagement. Without their support it was impossible to do anything. It is not just the words...it was learning by doing, it was like doing something, then analysing what you did and then modifying and then improving. We never gave up, if we had any mistakes and challenges, we were ready to discuss with branches, management, and governance.”

We (headquarters) can teach them (branches) how, but they know what to do! Movement partners teach us and we pass on that knowledge to branches. We always say we are open to learn. We are learning by doing. This is a true statement! I am learning together with you by doing and asking those with more experience to share their knowledge, then you have success."

3. Diversity in members and volunteers expands the reach of branches.

"We have witnessed that as our membership and volunteer base is more diverse, we can reach more communities and more people in those communities. At first, many families did not allow girls to come to our training and activities. We listened and we encouraged. Now many girls from different ethnic groups have joined the GRCS."

4. Tailoring support to the unique needs of each branch.

Each branch has different capacities and internal and external challenges. It is important to tailor support from headquarters to the specific needs of each branch.

5. Striking a balance between friendliness, sharing power, and challenging poor performance.

Balancing friendly working relationships between the national level and branches with the capacity to question and challenge decisions, poor performance or inappropriate behaviours. As the branch development journey progressed stronger branches began to speak up more and share their ideas with headquarters.

"Some of the branches that are well positioned have a stronger voice now and we (headquarters) are listening to them. They give us hints or tips with whom to meet and to start discussions. If we had a stronger voice, they cannot implement the tasks. It is better to have mutual understanding. It is not the point of who is stronger. We are very clear with our mission and priorities but there are different ways to implement and this can be subject for discussion."

6. Not everything has to be done by headquarters. Encouraging peer to peer.

"We could not cover all branches at the same time, so started working with some and the expectation from branches was that they were waiting for us to get support from us, so we should have done more to change mindsets so that branches could do more for themselves. Then we changed our approach to peer-to-peer support. We connected branches horizontally, sharing with each other, this sped up the development process. Not everything has to be done by headquarters."

7. Start with a baseline assessment of branch capacities.

“We only started using Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA)³ eight years into this journey, in 2016, and we could have done it earlier. Because BOCA gives you broad understanding of branch capacities. This baseline would have been useful earlier. In Dusheti Branch for example we started BOCA in 2019 and after this session, many participants told us ‘now we understood the meaning of branch development and we see how to move our branch forward’. This was one of our mistakes.”

8. Resourcing the branch development process.

“There were only two of us at the beginning focusing on branch development. Now we are three. But it is so much work. We could have done more to share the load across more departments. We could have drawn on more volunteers. We are now looking at setting up a regional structure so that branch managers can take responsibility for the development of branches in their region. This will reduce the load on headquarters. A regional structure will also help us to connect to regional government structures.”

9. Build and improve the plane whilst flying it.

Branch development like any change process does not happen in a straight line. There are many twists and turns and the day-to-day work continues alongside the change. National Societies and branches continue to ‘fly the plane’ whilst they are building, repairing and improving it. This takes courage, dedication, and perseverance in the face of failure. It is important along the way to take the time to celebrate the successes, even the small ones. Lots of small successes, every day, leads to transformation and stronger branches.

“As time progressed the national picture of GRCS branches began to emerge, the status of branches across the country, and we adapted our development process in line with this emerging picture. It’s like you do your work and then you need to analyse and then adjust all the time. It is a long and uphill process. You have to say I am going to enjoy this challenge, this is helping me and the National Society and branches to grow and be better.”

10. Share your learning with other National Societies.

GRCS has had active exchanges with its Danish, Norwegian, Armenian and Ukrainian sister societies. The Norwegian exchange is a twinning arrangement and involves branch to branch visits. The most recent review highlights the value of the mutual learning under this programme (see [“Distributed Network – Connecting across communities”](#)).

³ Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) is a self-assessment tool developed for branches of Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies to identify and assess their strengths, limitations and challenges in relation to a wide range of organisational capacities. It can be used as the one of the steps in a branch development process since it is focusing on assessing basic capacities, structures and conditions that are widely understood as being the core of what a branch needs to be able to function and perform well.

Branch development in Gori branch

Gori branch traces its history back to 1918 when the branch managed a local health clinic. Ninety years later, branch volunteers were the first responders to meet the needs of internally displaced people during the 2008 conflict between Georgia and Russia over the breakaway territory of South Ossetia. Building on this experience, the branch has since partnered with communities and local actors, as well as Movement supporters, to provide continued support to those displaced and other vulnerable groups.

At the height of the 2008 crisis the branch was assisting with needs assessment and supporting 2,300 displaced persons on a daily basis including distributing relief items, catering for two daily meals and providing psychosocial support.

This operation marked the first major collaboration between Gori branch and the municipality since the reestablishment of the branch in 1998. The branch's strong performance in the response resulted in the municipality giving the branch a more durable mandate for emergency operations. This was further reinforced with the 2008 national decree on the auxiliary role of the National Society in disaster response.

The branch's support to those internally displaced by the 2008 conflict continues to this day. The branch provides services to communities on the boundary line, territory still within the control of the Georgian government, including home visits, social care and medical check-ups.

Many individuals displaced by conflict live in run-down housing and cannot afford to pay for repairs. Rotten window frames, damp walls and concrete floors are common and living conditions are especially difficult in the winter months. Between 2013–14, partnering with ICRC, Gori, Zugdidi, Kutaisi, and Tbilisi branches renovated one room per house in 150 of the worst affected homes, ensuring that their occupants had at least "one warm room."

Volunteers from the four branches supported target households, first by introducing the project and identifying the room that participants wanted to renovate. Volunteers then accompanied householders to purchase the necessary materials and supported the identification of local tradespeople .

With the support of the Danish Red Cross, Gori branch has also been promoting the social inclusion of internally displaced youth living in eight settlements. The branch has been instrumental in establishing social connections between the eight settlements and fostering dialogue between youth, social service providers



and local decision makers. A common recreation area designed and built by youth has become an important site for social interaction between the settlements. The core activities have included engaging youth volunteers from the settlements; training youth in leadership, advocacy, healthy lifestyles, gender equality and the rights of IDPs (access to insurance, pensions, healthcare); and the implementation of a small grants scheme that supports youth-led activities.

"I am an IDP from Liakhvi gorge and now I live in Gori. At first it was very difficult for me to adapt to the new environment, however one day I saw people in red vests in the city and so began the history of me and the Red Cross organization. Here I was helped to overcome difficulties. Now I have the same mission – to help children create a better future, for which I do not spare any effort. Gori branch is actively working: creating parks for social and sports activities, trainings and organizing camps. For four years I have been involved in many projects, including now COVID-19 response activities, which was very important for our city." Tamar Khaduri, Volunteer, Gori Branch

Danish Red Cross support will be ending soon, however Gori Branch Manager, Marika Tskrialashvili, is adamant that activities will continue, saying *"Now that youth from the settlements are active volunteers, they will continue to support the branch to work with other young people. We know how to plan activities, how to write proposals and how to mobilise volunteers. Our volunteers even renovated our office with their own hands! We also fundraise through our money collection boxes (found in local supermarkets) and through our market stall selling items made by volunteers. For example, older volunteers have trained younger volunteers to knit, and these items are sold at the stall. There are also a number of activities that can be organised with little or no funds, simply relying on the skills of our volunteers. With our bread making machine and donations from local supermarkets we make bread for vulnerable households. Other activities include; organising guitar, language, and art classes, holding music concerts, and trained volunteers passing on their first aid, international humanitarian law, and disaster risk reduction knowledge to other young people"*.

A small grants scheme across different branches including Gori Branch, supported by local and international partners has led to diverse volunteer-led initiatives including:

- citizen journalism, encouraging youth to play an active role in collecting, reporting, analysing, and disseminating news and information,
- repairing the homes of vulnerable older adults and collecting firewood for these individuals during the winter,
- purchasing bicycles to more easily reach beneficiaries and to promote fitness,
- poetry readings promoting young local poets,
- healthy lifestyle and personal hygiene education sessions for youth and older adults,
- promoting Red Cross principles and values,
- supporting families to prepare for emergencies and first aid in schools and kindergartens,
- creating safe spaces for intergenerational conversations,
- awareness raising on environmental issues in schools and universities, and
- vocational training.

2.5 Looking forward

GRCS' branch development journey continues, and a number of challenges remain, including:

- Sustainability of some activities supported by international partners
- Developing branch level income generation activities, with a focus on commercial first aid and home care
- Funding GRCS branch to branch exchange visits and the annual branch forum through local resources
- Occupational health and safety for volunteers and employees
- Insurance for volunteers and employees
- Having adequate working spaces for all branches
- Volunteer turnover: many youth volunteers leave their local towns for education and employment in the capital city, Tbilisi
- Lack of motivational mechanisms for volunteers, as there is no established system of volunteer support in the country, and it still needs some development at the national legislative level
- Access to transport
- Branch staff compensation and benefits

The National Society hopes to address these in a number of ways, including:

- A regional branch management structure for improved branch coordination and engagement with regional government entities.
- Leveraging evidence from the home-based care programme to secure co-financing from local authorities.
- An analysis of income generation activities that the National Society and branches can expand (e.g. commercial first aid), or new commercial activities that could be established.
- Introducing processes that have been successfully embedded in branches at the national level, including defining and calculating core costs, negotiating more transparently with donors based on core cost calculations, and establishing a regular giving fundraising programme.
- Strengthening cooperation with local municipal authorities to allocate adequate working spaces and to fund branch capacity building initiatives.

“What we need for now is again strengthening resource mobilisation capacity of branches plus strengthening their knowledge in different areas. The situation changes, none of us knew this new Covid virus would come. So we need to adapt to new challenges but if you have strong branches, a clear mind and enthusiasm, then this supports further expansion and developing new services.”

3 KEY BRANCH DEVELOPMENT THEMES

3.1 Financial sustainability

“People, municipalities, saw us as a humanitarian relief organisation and did not understand why GRCS needed core financing. We said if you join us and support us, we can respond to needs together and the impact on local vulnerabilities will be better than working separately. We shared a vision of working together for stronger impact.”

The sustainability of a branch means the capacity to deliver services to vulnerable people for as long as these are needed. It is these services which justify the existence of the branch and, as such, are likely to provide the branch with the local importance and legitimacy to attract the local resources to sustain itself, even in resource-poor environments. Therefore, it is essential for a branch to constantly reflect how relevant its services are for the community it is serving.

The diversification of funding sources has been a major element of branch development in Georgia. In the 2000s, the National Society depended entirely on international funding. Today 24 of the 39 branches have at least three sources of local funding (membership fees, local fundraising, and local government support). This diversification has been achieved through extensive relationship-building, advocacy and delivering services that communities need. In turn local municipalities are keen to support the branch to continue its work.

“At the beginning branches did not believe that they could attract local resources. Relations with municipalities was like rocket science for them. They could not start raising funds locally they said. We don't know how to do that! Also, local municipality officials were surprised and curious, so you are Red Cross and now you are requesting support from us? Municipalities saw our role as relief but not long term social and development activities. For them it was also strange. We had to work hard to position ourselves through our auxiliary role.”

The National Society has signed 33 memoranda with local state authorities facilitating the provision of office and meeting spaces for branches, as well as funding for maintenance and restoration of these spaces. Local authorities co-funded 31 local projects and services at branch level in 2021, ranging from home-based care, to support to internally displaced communities, and pandemic response activities.

Dusheti Branch's experience in developing its financial sustainability

Established in 2013 to address high levels of poverty in the municipality, Dusheti branch is one of GRCS' youngest branches. In a normal year, the majority of the branch's financial and in-kind resources are raised within the municipality and used to provide support to 10 families living in poverty. The branch's BOCA process was supported by the local government. The branch's core activities are first aid, home visiting and running a Day Care Centre for older persons. In 2020, the branch has increased its resource mobilisation and activities, providing support to 50 families each month. Prior to Covid-19 the branch also organised free guitar and dance lessons and movie nights for the benefit of families living in poverty.

The branch works with other civil society organisations to extend its reach, with volunteers supporting the distribution of welfare parcels prepared by a local NGO called "Wave of Kindness", and cooking and serving meals on a daily basis at the local authority's canteen for 130 people living in poverty.

3.2 Diversity and inclusion

Working across demographic and cultural diversity

There is a well-established consensus that the recipients of services should have meaningful representation within the National Society. This consensus is often described as 'nothing about us without us'. GRCS and its branches recognise the value of a diverse volunteer base and work hard to remove economic, social and cultural barriers to participation.

Because people over 65 are in an economically disadvantaged position and have consistently less access than younger adults to household assets and facilities, such as flush toilets, baths or showers, water supply and sewage services, GRCS also has a focus on supporting older adults and engaging them as volunteers and members.



Working with diverse communities in Marneuli Branch

Marneuli district borders Azerbaijan and Armenia, and its 84 villages host a diverse population including Georgians, Abkhazians, South Ossetians, Armenians and Azerbaijanis. Georgian Azerbaijanis are the largest population grouping (83%) and are primarily of Muslim faith. The Marneuli branch has worked hard to mobilise Azerbaijani communities, overcoming a number of barriers including:

- language
- misunderstanding related to the Red Cross logo
- gender norms that prevent girls and women from participating in certain activities
- health beliefs that generated mistrust in the Covid-19 test

“At first the Azerbaijani communities did not understand why the Red Cross, and not the Red Crescent, was wanting to work with them” says Nana Talakhadze, School Teacher and Chairperson of Marneuli Branch. “We explained the principles of Unity and Impartiality, that only one National Society can exist in each country and that the National Society invites volunteers from all communities and supports all peoples”. The branch also had to overcome reticence around allowing young women to participate in community activities and as volunteers.”

“According to traditions of Azerbaijani community, a woman should be in the family and be less involved in public activities”, shares Nana. Over time the branch has overcome this reticence by “developing trust, listening, and supporting the community with social issues including early marriage, keeping children in school, social exclusion and language barriers”. The activities organised by the branch include regular communication and meetings with parents and young people, psychosocial and confidence building activities, thematic training sessions and simulations (during the COVID-19 pandemic training sessions were conducted online), jointly planned and implemented social and sports activities to empower young women. A great achievement is that of the branch’s 130 Azerbaijani volunteers 60 volunteers are now female.

Relying on volunteers from Azerbaijani, Abkhazian, South Ossetian and Armenian communities, the branch has also overcome language barriers. Branch volunteers now support other civil society actors with the translation of their materials. The branch has also partnered with the local Cultural Centre and arranges events to celebrate and appreciate the diversity of local communities and their cultures. These events include musical performances, as well as readings that display the work of authors from different ethnic groups. The readings include facilitated dialogues that promote conversations of connection.

In 2020, Marneuli was the first municipality to experience Covid-19 travel restrictions, due to its proximity to the national border. The branch was quick to support the municipality to disseminate Covid-19 risk and protective messaging into local languages.

“The communities hold a big trust for us now and we are going to them, in their homes, talking with them, encouraging them to let their youth participate in our activities including training in life skills and first aid. This year, cars equipped with loudspeakers are driving around villages with Red Cross volunteers informing the local population about the risk of Covid-19 in Georgian, Azerbaijani, and Armenian language. Covid-19 information leaflets have also been translated and distributed in local languages with the help of the branch.” said Nana.

Do what you love!



"Hello, my name is George Zakaroshvili, I am a 19 year old volunteer leader at the Georgia Red Cross Society. It is really hard to determine your role and function in society. I was in the process of seeking, I was trying to discover the world where I would be happy, the place where everyone would have the same interests, goals and with our work we would make our and others people's life more beautiful.

And here it is, in 2014 on 16th of February, I became a member of the National Society which became the indivisible part of my life, this is Georgia Red Cross Society. My life became more colourful at that moment, as much as this day became unforgettable for me. This was the first step, so it was the sweetest one. I loved the essence, significance and the active process of the project. I was full of warmth and

understood that we could beat loneliness with our common intention. The most important thing is that every day we help people who are in distress, afterwards we are full of kindness and warmth when we see their grateful eyes. I cooperate with competent people, who are making a great environment and supporting me with personal development. For me the Red Cross is associated with kindness and unity, that is the reason why I am calling you to join the Red Cross! I am really grateful that I had a chance to use and realize myself and my potential. Do what you love! My world turned around and I understood that our essence, our goal is to humanity. With love George."
George Zakaroshvili, Volunteer, Gori branch.

"In this way Sagarejo branch has been a platform for implementing activities in local communities. As more young people joined the branch, it became more and more fun and we developed a better understanding about the major issues in our community. It was really a joy for me to connect with older adults. The branch has a cosy and friendly environment. Mostly the issues that young people are interested in are related to the imbalance in the development between cities and rural areas

I was able to raise funds from a local embassy for community activities. We fundraised for hygiene and health kits. We created hygiene kits for 25 families. We went door to door and spoke with families about the importance of everyday hygiene for health. We included washing items, detergent, and towels in the kits." Giorgi Esaishvili, Volunteer, Sagarejo Branch, Georgia Red Cross Society

"Early on I was often asked 'why do you want to volunteer if you are not getting paid?'. I would say I am in the Red Cross to raise awareness and achieve positive change, this is better than getting paid! The Red Cross gave me the most important skills of my life; patience, how to communicate with others, support and gardening with the older generation, sharing stories between generations. Now no one asks "why are you volunteering?" because they see how much RC does in our country.

Sagarejo is a small town, there is a lack of information. Before when people saw me taking care of others, and I was not an employee, they would ask "why are you doing this?".

It was tough for the whole country moving from the Soviet system into a new country. People's mentality was not focused on helping others but on surviving the changes. It was not seen as cool to volunteer. This has been changing and I think the RC has been doing a tremendous job to change that mentality and raise awareness about the importance of volunteering." Ketí Meipariani, Volunteer Sagarejo Branch, Georgia Red Cross Society.

3.2.1 Engaging youth

Unemployment among youth, ethnic minority youth in particular, is a significant problem in Georgia. Consequently, increasing youth engagement is a priority for the National Society.

GRCS branches have effectively leveraged the social consciousness of youth in Georgia and channelled it towards humanitarian and social justice activities. Branches working with internally displaced youth have provided spaces for supporting youth to grapple with their difficult living conditions, to become active agents in making sense of the world and to make change in their communities. Some branches are working on the issue of child marriage and others are developing the skills and confidence of young people to design social change activities.

“We are school teachers and we present in schools about the Red Cross. Also existing volunteers invite other young people to join. In this way young people come to join the branch. Our youth organise activities together, they get to know each other, have fun together and they want to stay volunteers. If they have problems or needs they can come to our branch and talk with us. They know we are a helping hand. We arrange basketball training and other sports, we have board games, we play with them. Our branch is a very safe and free space for young people, a friendly atmosphere. In the summer we arrange outdoor movie nights. For our muslim youth volunteers, we invite their parents to have tea and coffee with us at the branch. The parents usually do not allow their children to go to the city. But when we speak with them, they better understand our work, and they allow their children to come to the city and to be involved in our branch activities.”

Ketevan Abashidze

Volunteer and school teacher
Marneuli branch, Georgia Red Cross Society



3.2.2 Engaging older adults as volunteers

GRCS has adopted an active ageing approach across its Day Care Centre for older persons and has a strong focus on older volunteers. And many of the stories from GRCS show that receiving service from the National Society, and its openness to diverse volunteers has touched older people's hearts and served as a motivation to continue to engage with the National Society as volunteers.

3.2.3 Addressing child marriage in diverse communities

Georgia has one of the highest rates of child marriage in Europe. It's a tradition that goes back centuries and isn't confined to one region or religion. And while reasons for the marriages differ from town to town and group to group, there are many commonalities. There is also evidence of marriage by abduction in some areas. The grooms are almost always older, have finished school, and are of legal age. And though the girls aren't necessarily forced into the marriages, cultural pressure is extremely strong. The practice reflects broad trends of gender inequality rather than being solely confined to traditions of ethnic minorities.

In recent years, a confluence of small-scale efforts has brought an increased understanding of early/child marriage in Georgia. Sagarejo and Maneuli district branches have been contributing to increasing understanding of this social issue.

Sagarejo branch in Khaheti region, in the most eastern part of the country, was re-established in the early 1990s. In those early days the branch played a role in supporting internally displaced persons fleeing the conflict in the breakaway region of Abkhazia.

“Today, Sagarejo is responding to needs of communities affected by child marriage”, says Maia Aleqsishvili, Sagarejo Branch Manager. “There are some cases of kidnapping of girls who want to study. We engage volunteers from communities where child marriage happens. We provide information about marriage to young people and organise awareness events with parents. We hold cultural events to show openness to different cultures and to help people from different ethnicities to feel welcome in our branch, to feel welcome in the Red Cross”.

Marneuli branch, in the neighbouring region of Kvemo Kartli, also addresses the problem of child marriage.

“A big problem in our municipality is young marriage. We work on this problem. We arrange presentations for volunteers and for their parents about young marriage, explaining the negative effects of young marriage. We also arrange theatre plays on such social issues...and the parents are very emotional to see their children on the stage. And in this way and through this important work with youth, communities from different ethnicities come to trust the branch.”

How a beneficiary became a volunteer

"I am Kemal Shushanidze, 74 years old. I have been a beneficiary of the GRCS Batumi branch Day Care Centre for older adults for many years. My involvement in the Red Cross has given me confidence, I have been involved in various activities and services with peers over the years, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Centre was closed, and we could no longer see each other.

What bothered us most was that we did not know what the coronavirus was, and I was just talking to friends from the balcony, or calling them on the phone.

However, after some time I realized that many good things could be done by following the safety rules. So I became a regular volunteer and passed training on COVID-19 and safety measures. Currently, I am involved in packaging food parcels and sometimes helping younger volunteers distribute food products to those who are in need in my neighbourhood. We are equipped with personal protective items and follow the safety rules, including social distancing.

Now I continue to help others through the Red Cross and believe that all will be well. I hope the pandemic will end soon and we will be able to gather and see each other again. Before that I will be at the service of those who need it the most." Kemal Shushanidze, Volunteer Batumi Branch, Georgia Red Cross

"I am 88 years old. I do not even remember when I became a beneficiary of the Sagarejo branch Day Care Centre for older adults, so I think I spent my whole life here and made best friends. I became so actively involved that I even changed my status of service recipient and have become a volunteer leader.

However, when my husband got sick, I stopped volunteering and took care of him. Because of this, I found myself in complete isolation. I was not used to such a life, I was afraid of no meaning in life. I totally missed communication with other people. After his death, I found myself completely alone, I could no longer see the future, though I am an optimistic person by nature and did my best to get involved in the daily life of the Sagarejo branch. I moved from complete isolation to active life. I started organizing cultural events, including poetry evenings in the branch; I know a lot of poems by heart and I still learn them. I found my place in this small cozy room, where you can spend interesting hours during the day. Before the pandemic, along with the Sagarejo branch volunteers, I was visiting lonely older people because they needed people's empathy and support to improve their ability to live. This home visiting service worked well for all, I was glad that I was not alone at home, and we were making them feel happy. I hope that everything will return to normal and I will continue my work in the Red Cross." Nazi Azariashvili, Sagarejo branch volunteer

Elene Gigashvili, 87 years old, has been a board member and volunteer of Gori Branch since 2000. As a volunteer Elene provides legal advice to individuals who attend the Day Care Centre for older adults managed by the Branch. She is also responsible for collecting the branch's membership fees.

"Aunt Lena, this is how she is called by children and elder people. "Lovely", "Dear" this is how she starts conversation, after a while it comes out that she knows everyone, then work, there is no unresolved task in her archive. Every single solitary elder is "Her", she knows everyone's problem and she is their carer.

She is a great example of being energetic, thoughtful and supportive for young people.

This was before the pandemic. Since the pandemic started, people are calling for help, some of them need legal support, some of them need a doctor, foodstuff parcel or they just want to talk about their personal problems. Such is our Lena."



3.3 Building relationships

Working with others

GRCS branches combine their core competencies with those of others to address needs in communities. When branch projects are funded from international sources, the branch, with its newly acquired experience, strives to keep the activity going in some form.

“If the project funded from overseas is running in the branch, during this implementation process of course there are training, experience, so the branch has institutional memory after implementation, not only institutional memory but the people and knowledge and the branch uses this to make it regular, they can find support from local partners to not to make that activity die.”

3.4 Distributed Network

Connecting across National Societies

The twinning programme initiated in 2016 between Georgia Red Cross (GRCS) branches and the Sør-Trøndelag District Branch of Norwegian Red Cross has created a space for learning, sharing problems, and exchanging views and perspectives on social issues. It has also facilitated the engagement and motivation of volunteers.

Joint training in first aid, emergency rescue, and volunteer engagement and management has developed the knowledge and skills of branches in both countries. The programme has increased participants' awareness of the breadth of the RC network, its capacity for cross-border collaboration and the many knowledge resources available to branches. For example, Sør-Trøndelag District Branch learned about the value of the Branch Organisational Capacity and Assessment (BOCA) tool from Georgian branches. Direct peer to peer communications between volunteers, members and employees from Norway and Georgia has also contributed to learning and motivation, expanded horizons and increased self-confidence. Georgian branches report improved volunteer English language skills as a result of the twinning. Sharing challenges and jointly exploring solutions has inspired participants both professionally and personally. Participants from Norway report feeling admiration for the capacity of GRCS branches to deliver services with limited resources.

The financial support provided by Sør-Trøndelag District Branch for a small grants scheme, the purchase of first aid equipment and washing machines for use by individuals and families in distress, and for peace building activities in internally displaced and ethnically diverse communities, has increased the humanitarian reach of GRCS branches.

Developing capacities of Georgian branches in commercial first aid, and of the Norwegian branch in proposal writing and project management of EU-funded projects, have emerged as priorities for the programme going forward.

The table below highlights the flow of learning between GRCS and other National Societies.

“We know you are good on volunteering management and we are good on branch development. Let's share!”

Table 1 Mutual learning

NATIONAL SOCIETY EXCHANGE PARTNER	GRCS LEARNING FROM SISTER SOCIETY	GRCS ACTION ON LEARNING	CONTRIBUTION TO SISTER SOCIETY
Denmark	Youth empowerment Branch and Volunteering Development	NS development in youth management direction, Establishment of youth unit, adopting and implementation of the Life-skills learning tool. Development of branch organisational and performance capacities, BOCA, volunteer initiatives through a small grant scheme	Shared working experience of intergenerational – older and young people – activities/ services
Armenia	Youth empowerment Resource mobilisation	Establishment of a youth unit to better support youth engagement. Creation of “giving warmth cards” – life stories of older people as an advocacy and donation tool, how Red Cross has made a difference in their lives.	Shared branch development journey, processes, tools.
Ukraine	Volunteering management	Peer to peer exchanges as a powerful tool for learning and confidence building. Updated policy and strategy for volunteering development and motivation mechanisms.	Supported OCAC. Supported analysis of BOCA data and development of national action plan to support branch development.
Norway	Volunteers motivated, improved English skills, expanded horizons and increased self-confidence.	First aid, emergency rescue, and volunteer engagement and management.	Introduction to BOCA. Proposal writing and project management of EU-funded projects.

3.5 Innovation

Stepping out of your comfort zone

For Zugdidi branch, the decision to undertake a WASH survey in schools during the Covid-19 pandemic was not an easy one. Branch leaders' concerns included the safety of volunteers, not having enough volunteers and not having the required digital competencies.

The headquarter team spoke with the branch, listening to their concerns, offering advice, and highlighting the branch's existing capacities. These capacities included the branch's strong relationship with the local Education and Resource Centre (Ministry of Education) and with school principals, and the possibility of engaging new volunteers through these relationships.

In the end Zugdidi branch stepped out of its comfort zone and decided to implement the survey. The branch learned a lot from this activity, including the power of its network, how to keep volunteers safe, how to contribute to the positioning and growth of the National Society by undertaking an important activity at a time of great need.

How volunteering benefits communities and volunteers themselves

"I have been a Red Cross volunteer for 12 years. Every day brings happiness, because I know that my "grandparents" are waiting for me with great warmth. It is a pleasure to see their kind and loving eyes. Then I am the happiest". Ketí Kharaishvili, Marneuli branch volunteer

"I have been volunteering for the Zugdidi branch for three years. I conduct thematic training courses for local communities. I participate in almost all the Red Cross activities that take place in the region. I am happy to be able to support people in difficult situations. It is interesting and very useful for me in terms of personal growth and the acquisition of various skills. I gain valuable work experience; that is why being with the Red Cross is so important to me." Maia Ghubeladze, Volunteer Zugdidi Branch (Journalist and Trainer)

3.6 Scaling up without harm

This massive scale-up in GRCS activity in response to Covid-19 was made possible through increased interest in volunteering and the in-kind and financial support from 30 new local and international supporters. The significant increase in activity has required a scale up of operations across all branches, including onboarding and management of volunteers, logistics, partnership management, coordination, monitoring and reporting, and fundraising and communications.

Having experienced "boom and bust" cycles in the past, the National Society is keen to address the inevitable scale-down and reduction in income through a more strategic approach. The National Society is planning to hold onto some of its increased capacity (people and expanded services) through an intensive local fundraising and partnership development campaign targeting municipal governments, by expanding its commercial first aid programme, and strengthening its external communications. Communicating what has been achieved is important for converting positive perceptions in regard to GRCS' considerable contribution to the pandemic response into future support.

Batumi branch – partnership for a greener street

In Batumi, a youth advocacy campaign successfully secured the support of Batumi City Hall to beautify a treeless city street. The volunteers also sourced a donation of trees from the Batumi Planting and Landscape Planning Service.

Salome Dolidze, a Batumi branch volunteer said: *“Taking care of the environment is the highest duty of any person. I am glad that the Red Cross has given me an opportunity to take care of the environment in my Batumi and to advocate together with my peers for waste cleaning and planting. It is very important to encourage and involve volunteers in such campaigns. There are so many volunteers who love the environment, and they contribute to the innovation for the development of the city and make us proud of the fact that we all take care of our city together. I am proud that we have succeeded, and this street is so beautiful today. This is one step forward toward caring for the environment which is critical for all.”*

Other advocacy campaigns organised by branches in the last two years have resulted in:

- transport being made available by Batumi and Kutaisi City Halls for 270 older adults to participate in Red Cross social activity centres
- securing social assistance from the government for 35 families
- the donation of wheelchairs to 50 individuals living with disabilities.





4 BRANCH DEVELOPMENT TOOLS AND APPROACHES IN GRCS

4.1 Branch performance standards

The National Society has had a set of branch performance standards in place since 2011. Branches are assessed annually against these standards.

At the beginning of the branch development journey, the National Society realised that a lack of projects, primarily funded by international donors, was creating unhealthy competition between branches. So it developed a set of minimum requirements for branches which showed that branches had a responsibility to define and resource their own activities. Branches were consulted in the process and branch representatives on the board were at the heart of adoption of the standards.

“The minimum requirements, which have been refined over time, reflect how to establish a branch, the basic requirements related to members and volunteers, activities, resource mobilisation. We don't say ‘must’ but it is close to ‘must’. They don't need to satisfy all criteria, but they need to show effort.”

Branches were initially resistant, and sceptical that they would be able to meet these requirements. However, once the National Society began to facilitate exchanges between branches, they realised that this was changing mindsets. Branches that were forging ahead with achieving the minimum requirements were advising other branches and motivating them to follow in their footsteps.

“The branches started believing in themselves. They had healthy competition.”

Branches that have not yet transitioned to the BOCA system are still assessed annually on these standards. Other branches use the BOCA indicators for their yearly review.

- Number of local volunteers active for at least 6 hours per week
- Number of newly recruited volunteers

- Number of recruited members
- Percentage of funds raised locally
- Branch core cost budget
- Regular branch activities and services
- Number of beneficiaries reached
- Demonstration of communication and coordination with local stakeholders (e.g., round table meetings, civil society coordination meetings)
- BOCA and implementation of the branch plan of action

Each year branches assess their status and at annual review meetings present their progress against the standards, and priority areas for development. During these discussions, branches are encouraged to articulate any support required from other branches or from headquarters.

“Our President sends thank you letters to branches after the annual assessment. And we have thematic awards for progress, achievements, first aid commercial training. We also have certificates.”

GRCS defines basic, middle and high performing branches according to the indicators below.

Table 2 GRCS branch performance targets by level

INDICATORS	TARGETS FOR BRANCH PERFORMANCE		
	BASIC LEVEL	MIDDLE LEVEL	HIGH LEVEL
Number of active local volunteers	50	80	100+
Number of newly recruited volunteers	40	70	100+
Number of recruited members	25	100	500+
Raised funds locally (including in kind)	3000 GEL	6000 GEL	9000 GEL +
Branch core cost	5000 GEL	7000 GEL	10000 GEL +
Regular branch services	2	5	7+
Regular volunteer activities	5	7	10+
Number of beneficiaries served	300	500	800+
Demonstrated examples of communication and coordination with local partners, key stakeholders	2 meetings with partners and key stakeholders (per year)	4 meetings with partners and key stakeholders (per quarter)	12 meetings with partners and key stakeholders (per month)
BOCA exercise and implementation / follow-up	Every 3 years	Every 2 years	Every year

Table 3 Status of branches in 2020 based on performance targets

INDICATORS	TARGETS FOR BRANCH PERFORMANCE		
	# OF BRANCHES AT BASIC LEVEL	# OF BRANCHES AT MIDDLE LEVEL	# OF BRANCHES AT HIGH LEVEL
Number of active local volunteers	8	22	9
Number of newly recruited volunteers	8	25	6
Number of recruited members	18	19	2
Raised funds locally (including in kind)	8	7	24
Branch core cost	6	9	24
Regular branch services	19	12	8
Regular volunteer activities	18	14	7
Number of beneficiaries served	14	15	10
Demonstrated examples of communication and coordination with local partners, key stakeholders	4	11	24
BOCA exercise and implementation / follow-up	4	17	19

4.2 Branch Development Model

In 2010 we developed a set of minimum requirements for branches... Then we discovered we needed a model. We had different approaches to working with branches, headquarters, municipalities and Participating National Societies. So, we understood that for coordination we needed a system and practical guidelines for branches that could support their development process."

The first iteration of the model was developed during the pilot phase of the branch development journey. GRCS emphasises the assistance received from Danish Red Cross throughout this journey, including in the development of the model which was inspired by a similar initiative in Belarus Red Cross. Branches were consulted in the process and branch representatives on the Board were part of decision making to adopt the model.

The separate components we were using were united. The elements in the model were enriched over time, additional components were added such as branch forums, knowledge and experience component. We added volunteer management strengthening and some of the services. Because at first, we only had social and first aid service and now we have disaster management and mental health. Needs assessment was not as embedded as it needed to be, so we added that."

Branches were sceptical because they were accustomed to projects that were designed and funded through their headquarters. They could not envisage being part of the design of activities, let alone sourcing funds from local actors. Municipalities were also resistant since until then, Red Cross was perceived as a relief organisation and not engaged in activities to

support the broader development of communities.

“People saw us as a humanitarian relief organisation and did not understand why GRCS needed core funding. We said if you join us and support us, we can respond to needs together and the impact on local vulnerabilities will be better than working separately. We shared a vision of working together for stronger impact.”

4.2.1 Adoption of the model by the National Board

The discussion on the proposed Branch Development Model within the National Board meeting was lively. How could branches operating in such diverse contexts and with different capacities all come under one system? Could this model work? Could we have success? How are we going to implement this?

“The Board looked at the model with a magnifying glass...For us to have a unified document for all branches, despite the fact that some branches are diverse, they were curious that such a proposal was being made. Then they asked for more information on how we are going to implement.

The Board requested more information on each element in the model. This was prepared and presented, and the more detailed model was approved by the Board.

“One thing is to have a model, but another is to break down how you are going to implement the model. So, we broke it down for the Board. How we are going to implement and reach our targets and so the descriptions are reflected in the Branch Development Model. After this, the Board were positive about trying. They agreed and expecting from us to know more about progress and success.”

4.2.2 Overview of the Branch Development Model

GRCS' Branch Development Model provides a structured approach to the whole organisation to developing the capacities of branches, including developing the knowledge, skills and experience of volunteers, members and employees; external communications and partnership development; youth engagement; volunteer-led activities; service delivery; and monitoring and evaluation of branch performance.

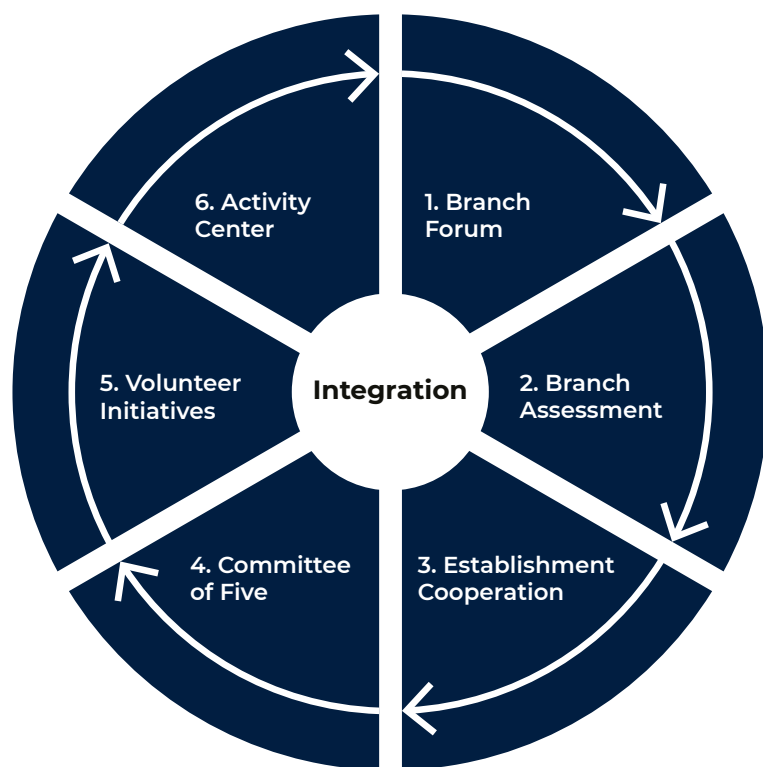
“Each component of the Branch Development Model, which is closely linked and integrated, serves for improvement of branch capacities and supports branch preparedness and response to address needs and challenges they (branches) face.”

The model's six core components (shown in figure 4) are summarised below.

- **Branch forum** – sharing and learning from each other and partnering on joint activities
- **Branch assessment** – assessing branch capacities against the performance standards
- **Establishment of cooperation** – auxiliary role, sharing best practice and partnering with other stakeholders, advocacy, promotion and fundraising
- **Committee of Five** – establishment of a youth unit and training of unit members
- **Volunteer initiatives** – competition to promote small-scale volunteer-designed and led action
- **Activity centre** – engaging and training community members and volunteers, implementing and monitoring activities.

The model is about integrating branch development across all programmatic areas. Even for donor funded projects focused on service delivery or activities, we are integrating branch development. For example, small grants to develop volunteering activities in communities, training, and the development of competencies are integrated into programmes.”

Figure 4 The six components of the Branch Development Model

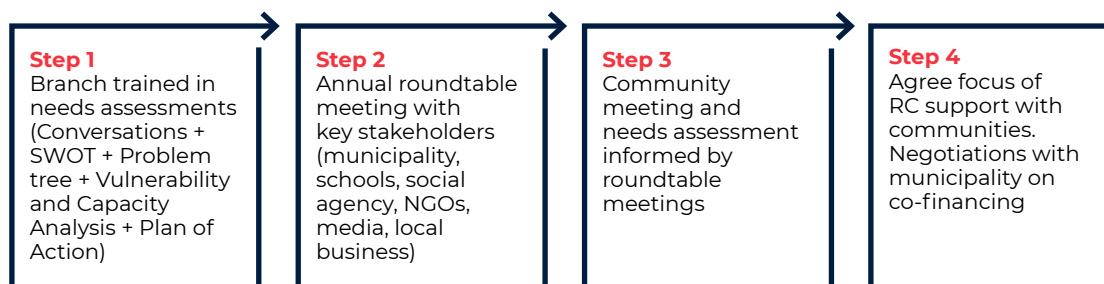


4.3 GRCS approach to needs assessments

A standardised approach to needs assessment has been at the centre of the branch development process (see figure 4). Branch level needs assessments inform local service delivery as well as national level programming. For example, the national home-based care programme was designed and refined based on branch assessments and lessons learned from the original home visiting service, which focused on provision of companionship, and support to cleaning, shopping, and small home repairs. The programme has been upgraded to a more professional home-based care programme which still includes the social care component, but now integrates referrals to other services and advocacy for social benefits, along with home-based medical care. Older people with poor health and people with functional impairments are the primary beneficiaries.

During the Covid-19 response, with the support of UNDP and a number of local municipalities, the programme was extended to all branches, reaching 5000 individuals, and is now managed through a digital platform. Evidence collected by the National Society shows that the programme improves health and independent functioning and reduces hospital admissions and associated cost. The National Society is drawing on this evidence to encourage all municipalities to co-finance the programme.

Figure 5 GRCS' standardised needs assessment approach



4.4 Use of Movement branch development tools

4.4.1 Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment

Nineteen GRCS branches have assessed their capacities using the Federation's Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment (BOCA) process. These processes were facilitated by eight GRCS BOCA-trained facilitators, including six facilitators from branches.

Highlights of the BOCA process for branches have included:

- building internal coherence within branches, greatly supported by the consensus-building element of the process;
- branches that may have been overestimating their capacities saw what they could do better;
- pride arising from the generally high scores on the autonomy rubric. For many branches, the strong relationship with and independence from local authorities was a key insight;
- seeing the value of planning for achieving results. Planning was not systematically undertaken in branches before BOCA.

There have also been challenges in the roll-out of BOCA, including:

- branches that lack the desire to enact change.
- branches that lack the appetite to implement the action plan that emerged from BOCA.
- financial outlay related to organising BOCA in each branch.

“BOCA has been crucial for Sagarejo's branch development; for identifying our strengths and weaknesses. We had previously done this, but BOCA helped us to be more systematic in identifying our weaknesses. After BOCA we developed an action plan. For example, the management of volunteers was a weakness and so the branch worked on improving its volunteer management. Also, prior to BOCA we worked primarily on supporting older adults and we had very few young people in the branch. After BOCA we reached out to younger people in local public schools, as well as to the students who study in various universities in Tbilisi. We provided information sessions for students on the RC principles and the work of the branch to increase interest in our work. After attracting younger volunteers, we started a Facebook site. More and more volunteers became interested. We arranged summer camps, movie nights and other events that attracted young people. Youth are now very involved and as a result our activities are more diverse. Our youth volunteers are playing a big role in the Covid-19 response”.

Maia Aleqshvili

Branch Manager
Sagarejo Branch

4.4.2 Safer Access Framework

GRCS has also been guided by the ICRC Safer Access Framework (SAF)⁴ since it was introduced by the ICRC.

“Because we have two frozen conflicts, it is important to have safer access to affected communities so SAF is a really helpful tool and we pay significant attention to it.”

The National Society has integrated the eight pillars of the SAF into its own policies and processes, including inductions, codes of conduct, communication and coordination protocols, volunteering management, training and simulation exercises, incident reporting, and partnership arrangements with local authorities. The SAF is therefore not only seen as relevant to those branches affected by conflict, but as a powerful acceptance, access and security framework for all branches.

“We all know the fundamental principles but living them in reality, we need to do more than to read and know my heart. All the components in the SAF are very familiar and feels like a second skin. For us it is not a burden that we are implementing something extra. SAF is an integrated component.”

In order to maintain its independence, the National Society has established clear boundaries in its relationships with government authorities and is proud to say that it has “never experienced government interference in its affairs”. Another important issue for the National Society is to ensure coherent messaging from all Movement partners, and SAF has been essential to this.

“The majority of local municipalities cannot distinguish between the different Movement components. Here we need one voice. When we have good Movement relations it helps with perceptions in the community. We cannot cross the border, but we help ICRC and they are happy working with our local volunteers and branches on the boundary lines and by the end we do good work.”

Branch formation in Georgia

In order to create a branch in GRCS, the following conditions must be in place:

- twenty-five subscribing members.
- an initiative group of at least five individuals.
- volunteers willing to be trained in first aid and disaster management.
- a statement to the national board, prepared by the initiative group, expressing their desire to start a branch.

If the meeting between the initiative group and the governing board goes well, the headquarters and initiative group jointly approach the municipality for an introductory meeting. The goal is to explain the mission and fundamental principles of the GRCS, secure a space from the municipality for the branch, discuss local needs and establish a coordination pathway between new branch and local authorities. Ultimately a memorandum of understanding is signed between the National Society and the municipality to formalise the partnership.

⁴ Safer Access Framework (SAF) allows NS to further their understanding of what it takes to increase and or maintain their acceptance, security and access to communities and people in need by understanding their operational context, taking stock of the lessons the NS learned and assessing their strengths and challenges in relation to the application of the SAF elements and the Fundamental Principles. It assesses the underpinning principles of safer access (access, perception, acceptance and security) by taking stock of lessons learned and examining detailed attributes related to the eight elements of Safer Access.

4.5 Headquarters capacities to support branch development

We had to learn how to do needs assessments, how to build a problem tree, how to do a SWOT, how to identify strategic direction.

We needed to tidy our house for branch development. When your house is untidy, then you need to put things in place, to make it clean, nice and welcoming.”

Once branch development was agreed as a strategic priority, GRCS was able to draw on its existing capacities, including:

- a vision for stronger branches
- a commitment to the idea that local branches are important players in the socio-economic development of communities
- a strategic approach and analytical, negotiation and facilitation skills
- networking skills
- knowledge of the Movement and the resources available to the National Society from this global network

However, its national board and management teams also had to develop knowledge and skills in a number of areas, including:

- changing mindsets, supporting change
- needs assessment
- how to engage, nurture, and facilitate the volunteer work
- programme design and proposal development
- resource mobilisation and partnership development and management
- meeting accountability requests from supporters
- organisational development approaches
- developing performance standards.



ANNEX – GRCS TRAINING COURSES

1. Georgia Red Cross basic induction course
2. Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment/VCA (full course)
3. Needs Assessment methodology, including SWOT analysis (full course)
4. Communication and public relations (basic course)
5. Resource mobilisation, including fundraising tools (basic & advanced courses)
6. Project planning and writing (full course)
7. BOCA full course (for facilitators)
8. Financial management and accounting (basic & advanced courses)
9. Disaster preparedness and risk reduction (basic course)
10. Family planning for emergency response (full course)
11. Copying mechanisms on disaster outcomes (full course)
12. Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction
13. Humanitarian diplomacy including advocacy tools (full course)
14. Home Care training (basic & advanced courses)
15. First Aid (basic & advances courses)
16. Psychological First Aid (basic course)
17. Non-communicable Diseases Prevention and healthy lifestyle (basic course)
18. Non-communicable Diseases Prevention and healthy lifestyle (full course)
19. Psychosocial support (basic course)
20. Climate change adaptation (basic course)
21. Emergency risk communication (basic & advanced courses)
22. WASH (basic course)
23. Health in emergencies (full course)
24. Community-based surveillance (basic course)
25. Epidemic control for volunteers (basic course)
26. Contact tracing (basic course)
27. Safer Access Framework (basic & full courses)
28. Risk assessment and management (basic & full courses)
29. Life Skills / ToT

Core seminars:

1. TB prevention, transmission and treatment
2. HIV/AIDS prevention and harm reduction approaches
3. HIV/AIDS, HepB&C, blood and sexually transmitted diseases, harm reduction approaches
4. Blood borne diseases, safe blood donation, voluntary non-remunerated blood donation



The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network, with **192 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies** and around **14 million volunteers**. Our volunteers are present in communities before, during and after a crisis or disaster. We work in the most hard to reach and complex settings in the world, saving lives and promoting human dignity. We support communities to become stronger and more resilient places where people can live safe and healthy lives, and have opportunities to thrive.