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USAID RULE OF LAW PROGRAM

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JUDICIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITY HIGHLIGHTS

Women’s Rights Practice Group Members and Legal Practitioners Discussed Challenges of Court Practice on Women’s Rights

The Women’s Rights Practice Group member judges, representatives of state institutions, practicing attorneys, and civil society representatives gathered on September 10, 2022, to discuss the main challenges confronting the protection of women’s rights in administrative and civil lawsuits.



United States Ambassador to Georgia **Kelly Degnan** welcomed the conference participants, stating:

“Judges carry the heavy burden and responsibility of upholding the rule of law, protecting democracy and human rights. That’s why the United States supports judges by providing them with necessary resources, training, and research, and supports your initiatives to improve the fair implementation of laws that maximize the protection of

women. Today’s conference is a great example of that support. For already thirty years, the U.S. has worked with a range of state and non-state institutions in Georgia to improve gender equality, increase women’s access to justice, enhance women’s educational entertainment, and increase the number of women in leadership positions in government at the national, regional, and local levels. We truly believe that a fair and effective justice system that treats women equitably and aligns with existing law is critical for ensuring the protection of all human rights.”

The key presenters at the meeting included judges from Tbilisi City Court (**Ketevan Mamatsashvili**), Tbilisi Court of Appeals (**Leila Mamulashvili, Shorena Tsikaridze**) and Rustavi City Court (**Nata Tedeshvili**), all representing administrative and civil law chambers. The judges stressed the importance of promoting a gender-sensitive approach in courts through exchanging best practices among law practitioners, including judges, lawyers and CSOs.

The civil society, state and legal support provider institutions represented at the conference included: Public Defender’s Office, Georgian Bar Association, Legal Aid Service, Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, Partnership for Human Rights, Women’s Initiatives Support Group, Rights Georgia, and Union Sapari. These participants highlighted the need to create a safe space for court hearings involving victims of violence, the importance of increasing both the competency of lawsuit

participants and their awareness of the importance of a gender-sensitive approach, and the impact these factors have on court practices.

The impact of other gender-related factors on court practices were also discussed. These included: gender



stereotypes and cultural attitudes, such as when only men are considered to have inheritance rights or the right to own real estate in the family, and women’s lack of financial resources, including the means to pay for legal representation, legal fees, transportation to courts.



Recommendations on Improving Challenges of Constitutional Court Procedures and Case Scheduling

In September 2022, USAID Rule of Law Program expert Prof. **Radoslav Prochazka** completed his four-day visit to Georgia. During the visit, he met with the President, judges, and the legal counselors of the Georgian Constitutional Court (CC), as well as Deputy Public Defender of Georgia



Giorgi Burjandze and civil society representatives engaged in litigation at the CC; he also studied the challenges of the CC’s procedure and case scheduling practices.

The information gained enabled the expert to prepare recommendations on how to improve the CC’s current practices and address the challenges the Court faces, including the average length of proceedings at the CC and increased backlog, which has led to public criticism.

In November, the Expert shared his report with the CC, met CC judges and legal staff, and discussed his recommendations in a Q&A session.

Judge Joseph Bellipanni Starts Shadowing & Mentoring of Tbilisi City Court Judges

Judge **Joseph Bellipanni**, a U.S. judge with 15 years of experience as a trial court judge, began his long-term shadowing and mentoring of Tbilisi City Court judges specialized in civil and administrative cases on September 11, 2022.

For six months, Judge Bellipanni is observing civil and administrative judicial proceedings, holding individual meetings with Georgian judges, and introducing judges to topics of American jurisprudence that are important and of interest to them.

Judge Bellipanni served for 15 years as a trial court state judge, handling felony criminal cases, complicated civil actions, mental health commitments, probate and will contests, dissolution of marriage proceedings, and varied civil and criminal juvenile and family matters. He conducted trials to the court and to juries, and supervised grand jury selection for complex cases. Judge Bellipanni also served as Chief Judge for 10 years, and was responsible for all aspects of court management, including budgeting and personnel management.



Training on Stress and Time Management for Judges

On September 17-18, 2022, sixteen judges participated in a training on stress and time management. The judges came from both regional and Tbilisi-based courts, including the Supreme Court of Georgia, Tbilisi City Court, Tbilisi Court of Appeals, Gori City Court, and Akhaltsikhe City Court.

The topics covered at the training included: stress psychology, stress-causing factors, professional burnout, reaction to stress, stress management techniques, time as a resource, and effective time management. This was the third training conducted by the USAID Rule of Law Program on stress and time management.

Judicial Study Tour on Rights of the Child Travels to Washington D.C. and Oregon

From September 19-29, 2022, a delegation of ten civil and administrative law judges participated in a study tour to the United States focused on the rights of the child to attend court hearings, meet with U.S. judicial experts, and study the best practices of family and juvenile court systems in the U.S. The study tour was organized as part of the USAID Rule of Law Program.



Selected through an open competition, the tour members include judges from eight courts including:

- ▶ Tbilisi Court of Appeals;
- ▶ Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi and Batumi City Courts; and
- ▶ Khashuri, Akhaltsikhe and Ozurgeti District Courts.

The study tour's first stop was Washington, DC, where the participants attended family and juvenile court hearings; met with representatives of the National Disability Rights Network and the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group; and discussed child and family rights issues with U.S. judges, attorneys, and other members of the legal profession.

The Georgian judges also met with Judge **Hiram Puig-Lugo** of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia Family Court. Judge Puig-Lugo is the former presiding judge of the Family Court, and immediate past president of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges. This meeting included a discussion on children-related cases in the U.S. court system and a tour of the Moultrie Courthouse.



The delegation of Georgian judges also had the opportunity to meet with the Juvenile Justice Advisory Group (JJAG) to learn about JJAG's active cooperation with the Mayor of Washington, DC and local government agencies on matters related to juvenile justice, how it obtains input from youth with experience navigating the juvenile justice system, and its process of reviewing and commenting on juvenile justice grant proposals.

From Washington, D.C., the study visit participants moved to Eugene, Oregon, where they observed Juvenile Court hearings, met with the State of Oregon Department of Human Services' Office of Services to Children and Families, and met with members of the Juvenile Court Litigation team.

Irma Togonidze, Judge of the Batumi City Court:

“The American system of justice is focused on creating a safe environment for children. The experiences and practical advice that I learned from American colleagues about the involvement of the child as a direct participant in the court process is very important for me...I was fascinated by the multidisciplinary approach that the American court system relies on in the process of separating an abused child from his or her family. The high level of responsibility and accountability of all parties involved in the protection of the child's rights at the court is notable. Also, the immediate response and control over the enforcement of the court order is very interesting.”



Judge **Tornike Kapanadze** from Ozurgeti District Court:

“During the study visit in the U.S., I received a lot of interesting information from American colleague judges, and I would particularly single out the U.S. practices concerning legal disputes related to minors... In Georgia, a case involving a child separated from the family is reviewed periodically, but it is not always done by the same judge. Each time the case re-enters the court, it is randomly assigned to different judges. It would be better

if the issue is regulated at the legislative level so that, as in America, in Georgia the issue of separating a child from his parents and transferring him/her to foster care, as well as reintegration into his/her family, is considered by the same judge over time. Through such a process, the judge knows the child’s history and the case completely. The child also gets used to the judge and has his/her trust, so it reduces the stress caused by the child’s relationship with the court.”

Webinar for Judges on Strategic Planning for Effective & Ethical Community Engagement

On September 20, 2022, judges and a court manager took part in a webinar organized by the USAID Rule of Law Program and the Center for Court Innovation (CCI), one of the most experienced organizations working on people-centered justice in the United States. The webinar focused on strategic planning for effective and ethical community engagement. The judges who attended the webinar represented the Batumi and Rustavi City Courts.

Lindsey Price Jackson, Senior Program Manager from CCI, shared the mechanics of strategic planning for increased

court-community engagement, which includes needs assessment process, early-phase planning, and action planning. She discussed the main tenets of procedural justice (voice, respect, neutrality and understanding) and highlighted several examples of courthouse planning that can significantly improve the court user experience. **Sruthi Narahariseti**, Researcher from Center for Court Innovation, took the webinar participants through the process of using community surveys as a means of ascertaining the needs of the court community.

The webinar’s key speaker was Judge **Alex Calabrese** from the Red Hook Community Justice Center, who talked about the benefits of community engagement and the innovations that he introduced at his court in New York City. The unique community-centered model of the Red Hook Community Justice Centre has been studied all over the world and serves as an example of how courts can work to address a wide range of community needs, apart from dispensing justice, by bringing under the court’s umbrella a range of community partners and supporting services to address the underlying needs of the court community.



Seminar on People-Centered Justice for Tbilisi City Court Staff

Staff members representing Tbilisi City Court senior management took part in a USAID Rule of Law Program seminar on People-Centered Justice (PCJ) on September 22, 2022. Among the participants were the Court Manager and Heads of Secretariats.

The Community Engagement Advisor at the USAID Rule of Law Program, Dr. **Tim Bunjevac**, and the Community Engagement Manager, **Oliko Shermadini**, delivered a



session on court-community engagement practices from around the world and introduced the concepts and theory of PCJ. The participants learned about successful examples of court outreach activities designed to increase public trust toward the courts.

Dr. Bunjevac spoke about the concept of PCJ, including the relevant theory and design approaches, and explored strategies for increasing courts' engagement with different court communities. His presentation included



an exploration of the differences between traditional and problem-solving courts; the five levers of Human-Centered Design in the courts; possible areas for expanding court-community engagement outside the courts; examples of court-community surveys; the roles and functions of court-community advisory boards; and opportunities for involving a range of external stakeholders to support court-community engagement.

The First Meeting of Children’s Rights Practice Group Member Judges Held

On October 8-9, 2022, the first meeting of the Children’s Rights Practice Group, consisting of Georgian civil and administrative law judges, was held with the support of the USAID Rule of Law Program.

The meeting provided an opportunity for practice group members to exchange their experiences on children’s rights cases, identify key issues faced in their practice, and brainstorm how those issues can be resolved within the current legal framework.



United States Ambassador to Georgia **Kelly Degnan:**

“I am so honored to be here, and impressed to see so many of you who have volunteered to come and focus on this very important issue. As a lawyer myself, I really have tremendous respect for the profession, and particularly for judges, because of the huge responsibility that judges carry as the guardians of the Constitution, the guardians of our democratic processes. The only way that any nation can maintain its democracy is if individual judges have all the tools and the training required to uphold the rule of law. We all know that the very legitimacy of a court depends on the ability of qualified judges to make reasoned, independent decisions based on evidence presented.”



The event was facilitated by the Judicial Reform Advisor of the USAID Rule of Law Program, **Inga Todria**. Judges from Kutaisi City Court (**Mickheil Bebiashvili**), Tbilisi Court of Appeals (**Shota Getsadze, Nana Daraselia**), Tbilisi City Court (**David Tsereteli, Manana Meskhishvili** and **Tamar Lakerbaia**), and the Supreme Court of Georgia (**Ekaterine Gasitashvili, Zurab Dzierishvili** and **Nino Bakakuri**) also led the presentations.

The sessions were moderated by judges **Diana Berekashvili** (Tbilisi Court of Appeals), **Badri Niparishvili** (Tetrtskaro Regional Court), **Vladimer Khuchua**, (Tetrtskharo Regional Court), **Tamar Zambakhidze** (Supreme Court), and **Manana Meskhishvili** (Tbilisi City Court).



Working in five small groups helped all of the judges to agree on some common problems they faced in the courtrooms. The participants proceeded to draft a guiding document outlining a list of challenges and possible ways to address them, which will inform the practice group's future meetings and activities.

Khashuri Regional Court Chair **Mevlud Khatashvili**, Judge Davit Tsereteli from Tbilisi City Court, and Judge Diana Berekashvili from Tbilisi Court of Appeals, all of whom just returned from a Judicial Study Tour focused on children's rights in Washington D.C. and Oregon, also shared their experiences and knowledge about the US court practices on hearing children's rights-related cases.



International Association for Court Administration Conference on People-Centered Justice in the New Normal

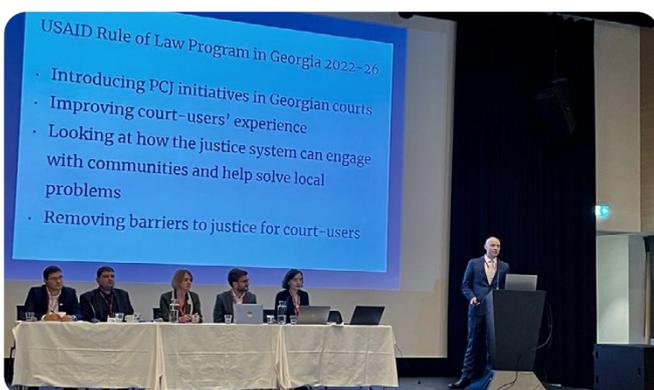
From October 17-20, an eight-member Georgian delegation attended the International Association for Court Administration (IACA) Conference in Helsinki, Finland, which was themed 'People-Centered Justice in the New Normal.'

The delegation consisted of the court managers from Batumi, Khashuri and Rustavi courts, Director of Democracy and Justice Programs at Social Justice Center **Guro Imnadze**, USAID Rule of Law Program Legal Education and Bar Reform Advisor **Nino Balanchivadze**, and USAID Rule of Law Program Community Engagement experts, Dr. **Tim Bunjevac** and **Oliko Shermadini**.



IACA is the principal global association of professionals engaged in promoting the effective administration of justice. Its annual conferences provide an opportunity for court and justice system professionals from around the world to network, build relationships, engage in professional development activities, and otherwise contribute to fostering court excellence, access to justice, and optimal public service.

The Georgian court managers' attendance at this year's conference provided an invaluable opportunity to exchange ideas and knowledge about contemporary issues in court administration from around the world.



Determining the Best Interest of a Child

A specially conveyed meeting between the Child Rights Practice Group member judges and representatives of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking was held on November 5, 2022. The focus of the meeting was the Code on the Rights of the Child, and the nine judges and seven Agency representatives discussed two issues: deciding on separation of a child from its parents, and the periodic review of the decision on how to protect the best interest of a child.

Presenters at the special practice group meeting included Tbilisi City Court Judges **David Tsereteli** and **Lela Mildenberger** and Agency representatives **Tamta Babunashvili** and **Elene Martashvili**. The discussion panels were moderated by Tbilisi City Court Judge **Khatuna Jinoria**.



In the discussions between judges and representatives of the State Care Agency, judges mentioned their belief that motions submitted to courts by the Agency should provide more comprehensive information so that the judicial review of each case can determine whether the separation of a child from its parents is necessary for the best interest of the child. Judges also expressed their belief that there should be detailed procedural regulations in the Administrative Procedural Code on the judicial review of motions on the separation of a child from parents based on the Code, including regulations that define rules for oral hearings, the right of a child to be heard, and the time of separation.



Court Staff Trained in Effective Communication with Court Users

In October and November 2022, Tbilisi and Gori City Courts and Akhaltsikhe Regional Court staff members joined a practical training on effective service and communication that was held with the support of the USAID Rule of Law Program.



The training served to improve the quality of interactions between court personnel and court users and is part of the Rule of Law Program’s overarching goal to make court services in Georgia more people-centered.

Using practical examples and tips, the participants discussed such topics as: the barriers to effective communication with court users, perception bias, building rapport, active listening, non-verbal communication, positive formation, and managing difficult situations. The expert also provided written Standards for User Interaction to the participants, which contain guiding rules and principles for communicating with the public.



Series of Workshops for Regional Court Judges and Judicial Personnel on Child Rights

The USAID Rule of Law Program, in partnership with the High School of Justice, is supporting a series of workshops on the rights of a child for civil and administrative law judges and judicial personnel at regional courts.

This initiative has two aims. The first is to identify common challenges in the adjudication of cases involving children. The second, depending on the challenge, is to provide recommendations to judges and judicial personnel on how to handle the challenge, offer legislative amendments to Parliament, or agree among the judiciary on a uniform practice.

Three appellate court judges - **Tamar Alania**, **Tamar Oniani** and **Diana Berekashvili** - are delivering the workshops and discussing with colleagues the challenges they confront related to the new Code on the Rights of the Child and



the lack of uniform practice among different courts. A total of fourteen workshops are planned throughout Georgia – seven for judges and seven for judicial personnel. The workshops were previously organized for courts in the Adjara, Kakheti and Kartli regions and another for regional courts in Rustavi, Bolnisi and Tetrtskaro. The next visits are scheduled in Imereti and Samegrelo regions.



American Judge Meets with Batumi City Court and Khelvachauri Court Judges

USAID Rule of Law Program-invited American judge **James Redwine** held a working meeting on November 17, 2022 with Batumi City Court (BCC) and Khelvachauri Court judges.

Judge Redwine, who is implementing a six-month judicial shadowing program at Batumi City Court, led



the discussion on procedural issues related to court backlogs and case management techniques with the aim of assisting his Georgian colleagues to address a range of systemic problems identified in this area. A particular emphasis was placed on motions for continuance and ways to control them, such as by scheduling hearings in the presence of representatives of both parties, promoting the effective enforcement of the scheduled hearings, and encouraging parties to settle following early case settlement negotiations.

The Georgian judges welcomed the opportunity to learn about the American practice of case-flow management and other judicial techniques used to reduce case delay. The meeting was very productive and the participants agreed to conduct another discussion on similar issues that arise in family disputes.

Public Discussion of an Important Decision by the Constitutional Court of Georgia

On November 29, 2022, the Constitutional Court of Georgia held a public discussion with the support of the USAID Rule of Law Program about an important decision made by the Court.

The event forms part of the Constitutional Court's public outreach strategy and provides a platform for engagement by the Court with ordinary citizens and the legal community. The event also provided a practical opportunity for judges of the common courts, lawyers, and academia to discuss the Constitutional Court's jurisprudence in a less formal environment.



The topic selected for discussion on this occasion was the Constitutional Court decision issued following a submission by the Tetrtskaro District Court relating to the constitutionality of two disputed legal provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code.

Questions from attendees representing local NGOs, Georgian Bar Association and academia highlighted the legal consequences and challenges that lawyers may face in practice following the Court's decision. Similar events covering the latest important decisions of the Constitutional Court will be held in the future with the support of the USAID Rule of Law Program.





Judge Carolan Starts Shadowing & Mentoring of Rustavi and Gardabani Judges

Judge **Robert Carolan**, a U.S. judge with 34 years of experience as a trial court judge, 9 years of international experience, and 17 years as a prosecutor, began his long-term shadowing and mentoring of Rustavi City Court and Gardabani District Court judges specialized in civil and administrative cases.

Based in Tbilisi, over the next six months Judge Carolan will observe civil and administrative judicial proceedings, hold individual meetings with Georgian judges, and introduce judges to topics of American jurisprudence that are important and of interest to them.

As part of his mission, Judge Carolan will participate in activities planned by the USAID Rule of Law Program to increase the skills of legal professionals in Tbilisi by strengthening and supporting the newly established judges' practice groups on women's rights, child rights, and freedom of expression.

Robert Carolan is a former Minnesota First Judicial District judge for Dakota County, Minnesota. He earned a Juris Doctor degree with distinction from the University of Iowa College of Law, as well as a Bachelor of Arts (magna cum laude) from St. Mary's College in Winona, Minnesota. In the United States, Judge Carolan served for 23 years as a trial judge in the district court in the First Judicial District of Minnesota. He then served another 11 years as a senior trial judge. Prior to that, he worked for 17 years as a trial attorney handling cases involving first degree murder, organized crime, terrorism, and complex product liability disputes. For eight years, he served as the chief prosecutor and office administrator of a prosecutorial staff of more than 40 professionals.



Judges Discuss Court Practices on Child-Parent Separation

As part of Human Rights Week 2022, the USAID Rule of Law Program gathered the Child Rights Practice Group judge members and alumni judges of USAID's judicial exchange program together with representatives of the Agency for State Care and Assistance for the Victims of Human Trafficking. Held in Kutaisi on December 3, 2022, judges and Agency representatives discussed court practices on deciding on the separation of a child from its parents, and the periodic review of the decision on how to protect the best interest of a child.



There are two different appellate interpretations of certain provisions of the recently established Code on the Rights of the Child. Judges at the Kutaisi Court of Appeals have held that the Code’s rules on extending child-parent separation time do not apply to child-parent separation cases decided before the Code was enacted, whereas judges at the Tbilisi Court of Appeals have held that the Code’s rules do apply in such cases.

Speakers at the meeting included USAID judicial exchange program alumni from Ozurgeti Regional Court **Tornike Kapanadze**, Kutaisi Court of Appeals Judge **Nana Kalandadze**, Batumi City Court Judge **Irma Togonidze**, and the Agency representatives **Tamta Babunashvili** and **Elene Martashvili**. The discussion panels were moderated by Kutaisi Court of Appeals Judge **Irma Peranidze**.



During discussions between the judges and representatives of the State Care Agency, both sides agreed that there should be detailed procedural regulations in the law on the judicial review of motions for separation of the child from parents based on the Code, including regulations that define rules for oral hearings and the time of separation.



Judicial Question Time with Students

The USAID Rule of Law Program held an information meeting that enabled students to meet with Judges **Ketevan Mamatshvili** (Tbilisi City Court), **Khatia Ardazishvili** (Tbilisi Court of Appeals) and **Badri Niparishvili** (Tetrtskaro Regional Court) to discuss Existing Court Practice on the Realization of Women’s Rights in Georgia.

Hosted by Grigol Robakidze University, the meeting enabled over ninety students to learn from the judges about issues, such as:



- ▶ restraining orders, gender stereotypes and gender bias, and ability to respond to them;
- ▶ the importance of checking one’s own biases from time to time; and
- ▶ women’s financial resources and property rights.

The discussion lasted over two hours, enabling the students to get an in-depth understanding of the gender stereotypes in society and their roots, the importance of women’s financial independence, and issues surrounding domestic violence, including whether restraining orders are effective to prevent violence against women and their revictimization.

Freedom of Expression Practice Group Judges and Legal Practitioners Discussed Court Practice

Judge members of the Freedom of Expression Practice Group, representatives of state institutions, practicing attorneys, and civil society representatives gathered to discuss the existing court practice and the main challenges confronting the freedom of expression in Georgia.



The key presenters at the meeting held on December 10, 2022, included administrative and civil law judges from Supreme Court of Georgia (**Tamar Zambakhidze**), Tbilisi City Court (**Tamar Chikhladze**), Tbilisi Court of Appeals (**Ketevan Meskhishvili**), and Tbilisi City Court (**Tamar Lakerbaia**). The civil society, state and legal support provider institutions represented at the meeting included: Georgian Democracy Initiative (GDI), Georgian Bar Association (GBA), Public Defender's Office, Women's Initiative Supporting Group (WISG), Legal Aid Service (LAS), and Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA).

Tbilisi Court of Appeals Judge **Ketevan Meskhishvili** stated that:

“Even without legislative changes, good court practices can be created by individual judges through legal reasoning and interpretation of domestic laws and application of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.”

Supreme Court of Georgia Judge **Tamar Zambakhidze** noted:

“We all agree that freedom of expression is a cornerstone of a democratic society and an important prerequisite for the development of any individual. The greatest importance is attached to the development of judicial practice on these disputes in order to achieve a fair balance between, on the



one hand, freedom of expression and, on the other hand, the rights of other persons, the common public interest. All this is greatly facilitated by the meetings of the Freedom of Expression Practice Group organized by the USAID Rule of Law Program, where judges, lawyers, representatives of non-governmental organizations have the means to jointly discuss problematic issues and standards for the protection of freedom of expression.”

“Today we had the opportunity to look at problematic issues related to freedom of expression from different perspectives. It may be interesting for the judges to hear how civil society views a particular issue of freedom of expression; it is also important for us to inform them of our position and to know the view of the courts regarding these topics. Such direct meetings strengthen our ties with the courts and, as a result, we understand each other better,”

said GYLA lawyer **Nona Kurdovanidze**.



Working Meeting on Practice and Challenges of Referring Cases to the Constitutional Court

On December 17-18, the USAID Rule of Law Program arranged a two-day workshop in Borjomi involving Constitutional Court (CC) judges, CC staff, and judges from common courts to discuss CC practices and the challenges of referring cases to the Constitutional Court.

The primary goal of the workshop was for the CC judges to share their knowledge and expertise with common court judges. The discussions focused on several important legal or practical issues, including:

- 1 how the CC sees the specific role of the judges of the common courts;
- 2 how authority should be distributed between the common courts and the Constitutional Court in terms of the interpretation of the Constitution, including when the common courts should directly apply

constitutional provisions or interpret the Constitution according to the existing constitutional standards set by the CC and when they should refer the matter to the CC for constitutional review;

- 3 is it the right of the common court judge or an obligation of the judge to refer a matter to the CC when there is an obvious problem with provisions of the law; and
- 4 should the CC require an applicant to exhaust its possible remedies in the common courts before it accepts a constitutional claim.

The participants of the workshop were provided with very detailed practical recommendations by CC Judge **Teimuraz Tugushi** about when and how a common court judge should refer a case to the CC.



Seminar on People-Centered Justice and Court-Community Engagement for Batumi City Court Staff

Enhancing the capacity of the courts in the Adjara region has been one of the USAID Rule of Law Program's priorities following the establishment of its Rule of Law Hub in Batumi. On January 21, 2023, 22 court staff from

Batumi City Court, including three judges, took part in a USAID Rule of Law Program seminar on People-Centered Justice (PCJ) and Court-Community Engagement.

The Community Engagement Advisor at the USAID Rule of Law Program, Dr. **Tim Bunjevac**, and the Community Engagement Coordinator, **Mariam Gobronidze**, delivered a session on court-community engagement practices from around the world and introduced the concepts and theory of PCJ.

US judge **James Redwine**, who is conducting a long-term shadowing mission in Adjara, also delivered a session about his experiences involving PCJ initiatives and court-community engagement practices during his time on the bench. The participants learned about successful examples of court outreach activities designed to increase public trust toward courts.

Dr. Bunjevac spoke about the concept of PCJ, including the relevant theory and design approaches, and explored strategies for increasing courts' engagement with different court communities. The session included:

- ▶ an exploration of the differences between traditional and problem-solving courts;



- ▶ the five levers of Human-Centered Design in the courts;
- ▶ possible areas for expanding court-community engagement outside the courts;
- ▶ examples of court-community surveys;
- ▶ the roles and functions of court-community advisory boards; and
- ▶ opportunities for involving a range of external stakeholders to support court-community engagement.



“The seminar showed me the importance of people-centered justice. Being more oriented towards society’s legal needs is a good way for the judiciary to gain public trust and confidence. Moreover, the seminar helped us to realize that even with reduced resources you can change a lot in the existing situation and make the court more people-centered and trustworthy.”

Irma Togonidze
Judge at BCC



The participants expressed a desire to be assisted by the Rule of Law Program team to develop its own Court-Community Engagement Plan based on the draft that was prepared during the seminar. The Acting Chairman of Batumi City Court, Judge **Jumber Bezhanidze**, thanked the Program for its support and affirmed his willingness for future cooperation.

American Judge James Redwine Discussed Family Law-related Procedures with Georgian Colleagues

The USAID Rule of Law Program's invited American judge **James Redwine** delivered a session to the Batumi City Court (BCC) judges and court staff on family law-related procedures and shared experiences about the tools he introduced at his court while serving as a judge.

The participants were introduced to the purpose of a Court Mission Statement. They were also introduced to samples of "Pre-Pre-Trial Orders," Pre-Trial Orders, Court Trial Orders, and Scheduling Orders that set out procedures for both family and non-family cases. The session also included a group exercise for identifying and developing a Mission Statement for Batumi City Court. According to BCC Chairman **Jumber Bezhanidze**, the session was very interesting "in particular, because of its practical application."



Judge Redwine also spoke about mediation, including the advantages of court-annexed and court-ordered mediation. The session concluded with a role-playing exercise, with Batumi City Court judges and court staff participating in and observing the mediation process in a domestic relations case.

USAID RULE OF LAW PROGRAM TEAM MEMBERS WORKING ON JUDICIAL SUPPORT ACTIONS:

- ▶ **Giorgi Chkheidze** Chief of Party
- ▶ **Neil Weinstein** Deputy Chief of Party
- ▶ **Inga Todria** Judicial Reform Advisor
- ▶ **Eka Oniani** Judicial Reform Specialist
- ▶ **Tim Bunjevac** Community Engagement Advisor
- ▶ **Mariam Gobronidze** Community Engagement Coordinator
- ▶ **Mamuka Mamatsashvili** Judicial Exchange Program Coordinator
- ▶ **Nino Balanchivadze** Legal Education and Bar reform Advisor
- ▶ **Mariam Vardosanidze** Legal Education and Bar Reform Specialist
- ▶ **Irina Khakhutaishvili** Regional Hub Attorney, Batumi
- ▶ **Ana Shalamberidze** Regional Hub Attorney, Kutaisi
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