

Georgia

Country name	Georgia
State title	Georgia
Name of citizen	Georgian
Official national language	Georgian (kat ¹)
Country name in official language	საქართველო (Sakartvelo)
State title in official language	საქართველო (Sakartvelo)
Script	Georgian
Romanization System	BGN/PCGN Agreement on Romanization of Georgian , 2009
ISO-3166 code (alpha-2/alpha-3)	GE/GEO
Capital (English conventional)	Tbilisi
Capital in official language	თბილისი (Tbilisi)
Population / Area	3,736,400 ² / 69,700km ²

Introduction

Georgia is in the south Caucasus³ and has international boundaries with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey. It is similar in size to Ireland and Sri Lanka. The disputed territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia each claim independence, but these are recognised by the UK Government as part of Georgia. From 1922 Georgia was incorporated into the Soviet Union; independence was declared in April 1991.

Geographical names policy

The Georgian language is written in its own script. BGN/PCGN policy is to apply the [BGN/PCGN Agreement for Georgian](#), 2009, to Georgian language geographical names across the whole of Georgia. This includes over Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In 2011 BGN and PCGN agreed a transliteration system to be used for [Abkhaz](#) when encountered, but Georgian sources are to be used primarily for geographical names in Abkhazia.

¹ ISO 639-3 language codes are given for languages mentioned in this Factfile.

² <https://www.geostat.ge/index.php/ka> [accessed 01/01/2023]

³ Also known as Southern Caucasia or Transcaucasia, it is a region to the south of the Caucasus mountains situated between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea consisting of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

BGN and PCGN also, in 2009, agreed a transliteration system for [Ossetian](#), that can be applied to Ossetian-language toponyms. However, Georgian sources are to be used primarily for geographical names in South Ossetia.

The [National Agency of Public Registry](#) is the official national body for spatial data infrastructure and maintains geospatial data and maps available in Georgian at <http://maps.napr.gov.ge>. Names data extracted from this source, romanized according to the BGN/PCGN system, and including references to variant spellings likely to be encountered, has been compiled by the Defence Geographic Centre and has been incorporated into the US [GEOnet](#) Names Server. The GNS is therefore a good source of names information for Georgia.

It is of note that names romanized according to the BGN/PCGN agreed system, which mirrors Georgia's national system, are often not fully employed on Georgian sources, e.g. road signs. These may be in a simplified form, very likely omitting the apostrophes that feature in the romanization system, with some other anglicisations and simplifications of consonant clusters also possible.

Languages

Georgian (kat) is the official language across Georgia. The Georgian language is a Caucasian language; linguistically distinct from the Turkic and Indo-European language groups it has a unique alphabet (also known as the Mkhedruli alphabet).

BGN and PCGN developed a transliteration system for Georgian script in 1981, and this system was employed on UK and US products after this date. In 2002, the State Department for Geodesy and Cartography of Georgia and the Institute of Linguistics at the Academy of Sciences developed their own system, which looks similar to, but is different from the BGN/PCGN 1981 system for a few specific romanizations. BGN and PCGN subsequently adopted the Georgian national system as the [BGN/PCGN 2009 Agreement](#), so this system reflects current UK and US policy, and post-2009 US and UK products use this system. The use of the apostrophe in the agreed system denotes ejective consonants⁴; linguists and academics writing about the Caucasus commonly use this marker, reflecting the 2009 system, so there is probably considerable application of the system (whether or not this is overtly recognised) in academic literature. However, the Georgian authorities do not appear to have widely adopted their own system, so Roman-script sources coming from Georgia do not usually conform to the approved transliteration system. In case of doubt as to the Roman script appearing on a UK product or other source, please contact PCGN.

Abkhaz (abk) is a north-western Caucasian language, reportedly spoken by 129,000 people⁵ in Abkhazia, an approximate 50% of the resident population. In the past 100 years, it has by turn been written in modified Roman, Georgian and Cyrillic scripts; today the language is written in an extended Cyrillic script devised in 1954 and updated in 1999. As with other Caucasian languages, it has many consonant sounds, represented in monographs and digraphs, and few vowels, the alphabet's inventory totalling 62 characters. In addition, Russian is the most widely-used language in the territory. It should be noted that Russian geographical names should not be used on HMG products covering Abkhazia.

⁴ In the 1981 system, ejective consonants were unmarked; aspirated consonants were marked with an apostrophe.

⁵ <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/abk>

Abkhaz has recognised status within Abkhazia⁶, and Abkhaz names may be shown (subordinate to Georgian) if felt useful to a product. If Abkhaz Cyrillic sources are encountered these may be romanized by means of the [BGN/PCGN Abkhaz Romanization System](#).

Ossetians (in both North Ossetia, in Russia, as well as South Ossetia) also have their own language, Ossetian (oss), which is widely spoken alongside Russian across the region. Since the Georgian-Ossetian war in 2008, it is believed likely that almost 90% of the population in South Ossetia is ethnically Ossetian (though data is not verifiable and is contested by Georgia). Ossetians speak an Indo-Iranian language, which preserves some archaic grammatical features of old Iranian but is not readily intelligible to a modern-Persian speaker⁷.

A Roman alphabet was used for Ossetian from 1923 to 1938, at which point a script based on Georgian was introduced for Ossetian in South Ossetia, to emphasise the autonomous oblast's place within the Georgian SSR, whilst Ossetian in North Ossetia switched to a modified Cyrillic script. This same Cyrillic script was subsequently imposed on South Ossetia in 1954, as part of a wider all-Union move to bring as many languages as possible into the same script family as Russian. This 1954 move unified the script for Ossetian as a whole, reinstating the visual difference between Ossetian and Georgian as written languages.

If Ossetian Cyrillic sources are encountered these may be romanized by means of the [BGN/PCGN Ossetian Romanization System](#); note though that the names would be for reference purposes only and would not be considered official names. Georgia does not confer any official status on the Ossetian language, though the South Ossetian authorities consider Ossetian and Russian co-official languages.

The Caucasus has always been a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual area and many other minority languages are spoken throughout Georgia, including: Armenian (hye); Assyrian (syr); Avar (ava); Azerbaijani (aze); Chechen (che); Estonian (est); German (deu); Greek (ell); Kurdish (kur); Polish (pol); Russian (rus); Udi (udi) and Ukrainian (ukr).

Inventory of characters (and their Unicode encodings⁸)⁹:

The [BGN/PCGN Romanization system for Georgian](#) contains only an apostrophe (Unicode encoding U+2019) in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script. This apostrophe can appear in conjunction with consonants /k/, /p/, /t/, /ts/, /ch/, and /q/ to mark the ejective form of that sound. Of these consonants, only /q/ does not appear in the system also in an unmarked form.

⁶ Abkhaz is accorded the status of second official language within Abkhazia in the 1995 Georgian Constitution.

⁷ Vocabulary relation can be seen in such examples as Cæp (sær) in Ossetian; رس (sar) in Persian [= head]; Фондз (fondz) in Ossetian, پنچ (panj) in Persian [= 5].

⁸ See www.unicode.org

⁹ Characters can be manually input into Microsoft Word documents by typing in these character codes and then holding down the ALT key and pressing /x/. The code will change to the required character. The letter can be copied and pasted into other programmes if required. Alternatively, the 'Insert – Symbol' command can be used; the code can be entered into the 'Character code' box which will show the corresponding letter. A GeoNames Soft-Copy Keyboard can be downloaded from the NGA website and used to enter the required letter-diacritic combinations for a particular region: http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/gns_services.html.

As noted above, BGN/PCGN systems for the romanization of [Abkhaz](#) and [Ossetian](#) also exist; these should be used only in circumstances as described above.

The Abkhaz system includes the following letter-diacritic combinations, with their Unicode encoding, in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script. It also includes an apostrophe (Unicode encoding U+2019).

Upper case character	Unicode encoding	Lower case character	Unicode encoding
ZH	005A+0048+035F	<u>zh</u>	007A+0068+035F
CH	0043+0048+035F	ch	0063+0068+035F
SH	0053+0048+035F	<u>sh</u>	0073+0068+035F
ÿ	0178	ÿ	00FF
ĵ	0248	ĵ	0249

Note that the characters with double underline are not available with a single code point. To insert the double underline, the cursor must lie between the two characters to be underlined before inserting.

The Ossetian system includes the following letter-diacritic combinations, with their Unicode encoding, in addition to the unmodified letters of the basic Roman script. It also includes an apostrophe (Unicode encoding U+2019).

Upper case character	Unicode encoding	Lower case character	Unicode encoding
Æ	00C6	æ	00E6
Ë	00CB	ë	00EB

Disputed territories

Georgia has two break-away regions: Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The UK position on both Abkhazia and South Ossetia is that they are occupied regions of Georgia, and should therefore be shown on HMG products as part of Georgia.

Abkhazia

Abkhazia had been an autonomous republic (Abkhaz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (Abkhaz ASSR)) of the Soviet Union, and on dissolution of the USSR, the region attempted to declare independence, resulting in a war of secession in 1992-3. Georgia has had no control over the region since, and ethnic cleansing of Georgians followed loss of control. The Abkhaz people have their own language which is now written in a Cyrillic script with 62 letters, but Russian is believed still to be the principal language of use.

Georgia considers the region as an autonomous republic within Georgian territory, and most of the international community recognises Georgia's sovereignty. In August 2008, the Georgian Parliament passed a resolution declaring Abkhazia a "Russian-occupied territory".

South Ossetia

South Ossetia had been an Autonomous Oblast' within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic but lost its status on Georgian independence. Like Abkhazia, Georgia considers it a "Russian-occupied territory" and it has *de facto* independence¹⁰. The region corresponds to the area of the former Autonomous Oblast'. It is notable that the area does not equate to Georgia's administrative delineation (South Ossetia covers parts of the Shida Kartli; Imereti; Rach'a-Lechkumi – Kvemo-

Svaneti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti regions of Georgia).

Since 2013, Russian troops demarcating the border around South Ossetia have extended control in a few places beyond the former Autonomous Oblast' boundary, notably in 2015 extending c.1600m to include a section of the Baku-Supsa oil pipeline.

In a referendum in 2017 almost 80% of the region's population voted in favour of a formal name change from "Republic of South Ossetia" to "Republic of South Ossetia – the State of Alania" (in Ossetian, *Республикæ Хуссар Ирыстон - Паддзахад Аллонстон* = *Respublikæ Khussar Iryston – Paddzakhad Allonston*; in Russian, *Республика Южная Осетия – Государство Алания* = *Respublika Yuzhnaya Osetiya – Gosudarstvo Alaniya*; following the style of North Ossetia's name North Ossetia – Alaniya (*Республика Северная Осетия – Алания* = *Respublika Severnaya Osetiya – Alaniya*)).

Map of Georgia



Map produced by PCGN for illustrative purposes only, and is not to be taken necessarily as representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.

¹⁰ South Ossetian authorities have differed over time in their preference over autonomy and integration with North Ossetia within Russia.

Administrative structure

Georgia comprises two autonomous republics (Abkhazia and Ajaria), nine regions (Georgian: *mkhare*) and the capital city, Tbilisi. Within these first-order divisions (ADM1s), are self-governing municipalities (Georgian: *munitsip'alit'et'i*) (ADM2s). The number of these municipalities, unsurprisingly, varies in different sources, given the interpretation of control over some municipalities. The number of sub-divisions according to the National Statistics Office of Georgia (<https://www.geostat.ge/>, data of 2020) (which includes municipalities not under Georgian control but with no sub-divisions for Abkhazia) are noted in the table below. Of these municipalities, five are city municipalities: Tbilisi; Batumi; Poti; Kutaisi and Rustavi (accounted for where '+1' is marked).

First-order administrative divisions

Region in romanized Georgian	Region in Georgian	ISO 3166-2 code	No. of ADM2s	Centre	Centre name in Georgian	Location of centre
Apkhazeti [Apkhazetas Avt'onomuri Resp'ublik'a] [Conventional: Abkhazia] ¹¹	აფხაზეთი [აფხაზეთას ავტონომური რესპუბლიკა]	GE-AB	-	Sokhumi ¹²	სოხუმი	43° 00' 07" N, 041° 00' 50" E
Ach'ara [Ach'aris Avt'onomuri Resp'ublik'a] [Conventional: Ajaria]	აჭარა [აჭარის ავტონომური რესპუბლიკა]	GE-AJ	5+1	Batumi	ბათუმი	41° 38' 32" N, 041° 38' 02" E
Guria	გურია	GE-GU	3	Ozurgeti	ოზურგეთი	41° 55' 28" N, 042° 00' 25" E
Imereti	იმერეთი	GE-IM	11+1	Kutaisi	ქუთაისი	42° 15' 50" N, 042° 41' 59" E
K'akheti	კახეთი	GE-KA	8	Telavi	თელავი	41° 55' 11" N, 045° 28' 23" E
Kvemo Kartli	ქვემო ქართლი	GE-KK	6+1	Rustavi	რუსთავი	41° 33' 46" N, 044° 58' 43" E
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	მცხეთა მთიანეთი	GE-MM	5	Mtskheta	მცხეთა	41° 50' 43" N, 044° 43' 08" E
Rach'a–Lechkhumi - Kvemo Svaneti	რაჭა–ლეჩხუმ - ქვემო სვანეთი	GE-RL	4	Ambrolauri	ამბროლაური	42° 31' 15" N, 043° 09' 14" E
Samegrelo–Zemo Svaneti	სამეგრელო–ზემო სვანეთი	GE-SZ	8+1	Zugdidi	ზუგდიდი	42° 30' 32" N, 041° 52' 15" E

¹¹ In Abkhaz, the region name is Аԥсны, romanized Apsny

¹² In Abkhaz, the city name is Аԥәа, romanized Aqw'a

<i>Region in romanized Georgian</i>	<i>Region in Georgian</i>	<i>ISO 3166-2 code</i>	<i>No. of ADM2s</i>	<i>Centre</i>	<i>Centre name in Georgian</i>	<i>Location of centre</i>
Samtskhe–Javakheti	სამცხე–ჯავახეთი	GE-SJ	6	Akhaltsikhe	ახალციხე	41° 38' 20" N, 042° 58' 57" E
Shida Kartli	შიდა ქართლი	GE-SK	7	Gori	გორი	41° 59' 03" N, 044° 06' 57" E
Tbilisi [Kalaki Tbilisi]	თბილისი [ქალაქი თბილისი]	GE-TB	-	Tbilisi	თბილისი	41° 41' 39" N, 044° 50' 01" E

Other Significant Locations

<i>PCGN Recommended Name</i>	<i>Name in Georgian (script and romanization)</i>	<i>Other official names (for international features)</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Feature Type</i>
Shkhara	შხარა (Shkhara)	Russian: Шхара (=Shkhara)	42° 59' 58" N, 043° 05' 31" E	Mountain on Georgia-Russia boundary; highest point in Georgia (5193m)
Caucasus	კავკასია (K'avk'asia)	Qafqaz (Azerbaijani); Կովկաս (=Kovkas (Armenian)); Кавказ (=Kavkaz (Russian; Ossetian); =K'avk'az (Abkhaz))	42° 00' 00" N, 045° 00' 00" E	Region
Greater Caucasus Range ¹³	დიდი კავკასიონი (Didi K'avk'asioni)	Böyük Qafqaz (Azerbaijani); Большой Кавказ (=Bolshoy Kavkaz (Russian))	43° 21' 18" N, 042° 26' 31" E	Mountain range
Lesser Caucasus Range	მცირე კავკასიონი (Mtsire K'avk'asioni)	Kiçik Qafqaz (Azerbaijani); Փոքր Կովկաս (=P'ok'r Kovkas (Armenian)); Küçük Kafkasya (Turkish)	41° 00' 00" N, 044° 00' 00" E	Mountain range

¹³ The Greater Caucasus range between Russia and Georgia/Azerbaijan is also commonly referred to as the Caucasus Mountains.

Useful references

- BBC Country Profile: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-17301647>
- BGN/PCGN Romanization systems for: [Georgian, BGN/PCGN 2009 Agreement](#); [Abkhaz, BGN/PCGN 2011 System](#); [Ossetian, BGN/PCGN 2009 System](#)
- CIA World Factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/georgia/>
- FCDO Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/georgia>
- Georgia [National Agency of Public Registry](#) ; official geospatial data: <http://maps.napr.gov.ge>
- ISO Online Browsing Platform (OBP): <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/>
- Language and scripts: www.ethnologue.com; <https://www.omniglot.com/writing/georgian.htm>
- US Board on Geographic Names GEOnet Names Server (GNS): <http://geonames.nga.mil/gns/html/>

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Edition 2
November 2023
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www.gov.uk/pcgn