

## **Environmental and Social Data Sheet**

### **Overview**

Project Name:	RURAL FIBRE NETWORK GEORGIA
Project Number:	2020-0408
Country:	GEORGIA
Project Description:	The project concerns the design and construction of a fibre optic telecommunications network at the regional level in Georgia to connect around 1 000 remote rural settlements. The new network will be operated as an open access infrastructure providing wholesale services only and will enable telecom operators to provide high speed broadband services to the population in those currently underserved rural areas.
EIA required:	no
Project included in Carbon Footprint Exercise <sup>1</sup> :	no

(details for projects included are provided in section: “EIB Carbon Footprint Exercise”)

### **Environmental and Social Assessment**

#### **Environmental Assessment**

The project will consist of the deployment of around 5 000 km of fibre optic cable and the installation of optical transmission and IP (internet protocol) equipment. In both cases, the promoter’s objective is to reuse existing telecommunications infrastructures (ducts, poles, etc.) as well as existing telecom network buildings to install the equipment. In case there is not available infrastructure in a particular network segment, small-scale construction works would be required. If this is the case, possible negative environmental and social impacts will still be limited, as they will be confined to the project sites, normally located on public land along the roads, and will be of short duration as usual for this kind of works. Residual risks are expected to be negligible after application of the standard mitigation measures for this kind of project. As part of the project preparation activities led by the World Bank, the promoter has prepared an Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF). Among other aspects, the ESMF describes the principles, objectives and approach to be followed while designing site-specific environmental and social mitigation measures for the limited potential impacts of the sub-projects including construction activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Only projects that meet the scope of the Carbon Footprint Exercise, as defined in the EIB Carbon Footprint Methodologies, are included, provided estimated emissions exceed the methodology thresholds: 20,000 tonnes CO2e/year absolute (gross) or 20,000 tonnes CO2e/year relative (net) – both increases and savings.

Luxembourg, 24 February 2021

In any case, the project's activities are not subject to mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments because they are not included in Annexes 1 and 2 of Georgia's Environmental Assessment Code of 2017. Equally, if the project were located in the EU, it would not require an EIA either, as the project activities do not fall under Annexes I and II of the EU Directive 2014/52/EU amending the EIA Directive 2011/92/EU.

### **Social Assessment, where applicable**

The design for the project is not yet finalised, so may cause potential resettlement impacts due to the project; however, these are expected to be limited due to the short duration and limited scope of the construction activities included in the project. Nonetheless, as the final project design is not closed yet, the promoter with assistance from the World Bank has developed a Resettlement Policy Framework, prepared to address possible resettlement issues in the project. Should the need for a resettlement be required, the Bank shall request that a copy of the resettlement action plan be included as an undertaking in the finance contract.

On the other hand, by expanding the potential coverage of high-speed broadband networks to reach currently underserved rural areas, the project will contribute towards the mitigation of the digital divide in Georgia and therefore act as an accelerator and enabler of several United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project will mainly contribute to SGD 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Investing in the digital economy can also bring economic growth and quality jobs, enabling women and young people to benefit from these core development policies and closing the gap between citizens and governments while creating a digital bridge with the world.

### **Public Consultation and Stakeholder Engagement**

During the project preparation phase, the promoter has actively conducted surveys and consultations to inform the affected communities about the project and understand better the views of different stakeholders (key government agencies), as well as the needs and expectations of the affected local communities. The promoter has prepared a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to ensure continuous communication during the whole life-cycle of the project.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The implementation and operation of the project should only have minor environmental and social impacts during the construction activities, which will be mitigated by using industry standard practices. The project is not expected to have any relevant negative residual impact. On the other hand, the project will result in a substantial improvement in availability of high-speed broadband services in currently underserved rural areas, leading to wide-ranging socio-economic benefits.

Therefore, the project has been classified as acceptable in environmental and social terms for the Bank's financing.