

GEORGIA:

IDPs' living conditions remain miserable, as national strategy is being developed

A profile of the internal displacement situation

1 September, 2006

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At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

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OVERVIEW

IDPs' living conditions remain miserable, as national strategy is being developed

Tens of thousands of people displaced from Georgia's secessionist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been living in limbo for more than a decade, waiting for an elusive solution to conflicts which broke out in the early 1990s. The majority of the 220,000-240,000 displaced have found refuge in the region bordering Abkhazia and in the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. Many of them still live in precarious conditions in former hotels and state buildings, and depend on meagre state benefits. During the past few years, some 45,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) returned to the Gali district in eastern Abkhazia, only to find bleak economic prospects.

During a visit to Georgia in December 2005, the UN Secretary-General's Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs declared that he was shocked by the misery in which thousands of IDPs were still living. In order to improve the situation of IDPs, the Georgian government has been developing a strategy on IDPs, with the support of the international community and civil society organisations. While the elaboration of a comprehensive plan seems to be welcomed by all relevant stakeholders, it remains to be seen whether its implementation will really improve the lives of IDPs.

Background and causes of displacement

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union and the declaration of independence in 1991, Georgia had to confront two regions within its own borders demanding their own independence, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The fighting that followed killed about 10,000 people and caused the displacement of some 300,000 (UNDP, 2004). The conflicts also resulted in the loss of control by the Georgian government over both regions, which owe their de facto autonomy largely to Russian backing.

Close to 95 per cent of IDPs originate from Abkhazia, and the rest from South Ossetia (CHR, 25 January 2001). In Abkhazia, virtually the entire ethnic Georgian population fled, primarily to the region bordering Abkhazia and to the Georgian capital, Tbilisi. At the same time, many ethnic Abkhaz were displaced within Abkhazia. Ethnic Georgians and Abkhaz also found refuge in Russia. Both groups generally characterise what happened to them as "ethnic cleansing" (Dale, 1997; IFRC, 30 November 2000). The conflict in South Ossetia caused the displacement of 60,000 people, mainly ethnic Ossetians from both the breakaway territory and other parts of Georgia; the vast majority of them found refuge in North Ossetia, Russia. About 10,000 ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia were displaced as well (CHR, 22 March 2006). By November 2004, some 241,000 IDPs were registered with the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) of Georgia. Between December 2004 and June 2005, the MRA, with financial and technical support from the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), verified the number of IDPs currently living in territories under Georgian control, registering a total of 221,597. The government had not however endorsed this figure as of mid-2006 (CHR, 22 March 2006; IDMC, May 2006). Approximately 70 percent of them live in urban areas, primarily Zugdidi, but also Tbilisi, and Kutaisi (World Bank, May 2005).

Peace remains elusive

In order to prevent the resumption of violence, the international community sent peacekeepers to South Ossetia and to Abkhazia in 1992 and 1994 respectively. In South Ossetia, a Joint Control Commission representing Georgia, Russia, North Ossetia and de facto South Ossetia, as well as Joint Peacekeeping Forces representing Georgia, Russia and North Ossetia, are meant to prevent the escalation of the South Ossetia conflict. The UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) performs a similar function in Abkhazia. Its contingent is entirely made up of Russians, as peacekeeping has been mandated to the Commonwealth of Independent States. Georgia has long criticised the presence of Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and in July 2006, the Georgian parliament passed a resolution requesting the government to expedite the withdrawal of both Russian peacekeeping contingents.

The UN has led the international community's efforts for a peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Return of refugees and IDPs, predominantly to the Gali district, has been at the centre of the peace process (CHR, 22 March 2006). In May 2006, the Georgian and Abkhazian sides exchanged proposals aimed at bringing peace (RFE/RL, 26 May 2006).

For the Georgian government, the IDP question is inextricably tied to Georgia's territorial integrity (NRC, November 2005). Following the election of President Mikhail Sakaashvili in January 2004, the new government has intensified efforts to bring South Ossetia back under its control; tensions rose and clashes caused the temporary displacement of several thousand people in July and August 2004. In 2005, South Ossetian authorities rejected a Georgian government plan providing more autonomy for South Ossetia (UN Country Team in Georgia, 31 January 2005; AFP, 26 January 2005).

One key element for solving both conflicts seems to be an improvement of relations between Georgia and Russia, which remained tense as of mid-2006. While Russia officially recognises the territorial integrity of Georgia, it has unofficially extended political, financial and military support to Abkhazia. In January 2005, the newly-elected Abkhazian "President" emphasised the importance of relations with Russia rather than with Georgia, since 90 per cent of Abkhazia's population hold Russian passports, the currency is the Russian rouble and a number of retired people receive Russian pensions. Tensions between Georgia and Russia increased in August 2006, following the set-up by Georgia of a pro-Tbilisi administration in the Kodori gorge – a small mountain territory in Abkhazia – after its troops battled a rebellious militia leader established in the gorge, and following the killing of two Russian peacekeepers by bandits.

Long-term IDPs still have humanitarian needs

During a visit to Georgia in December 2005, the UN Secretary-General's Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs, Walter Kälin, said he was "shocked by the misery" in which some of the 240,000 IDPs still lived (Brookings, 3 May 2006). In general, IDPs, and particularly those living in collective centres, have limited access to land and employment, and are therefore more susceptible to poverty than the rest of the population (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004; World Bank, May 2005). A decade after the major clashes which shook Georgia, the scale of humanitarian needs may actually have incrementally increased, rather than declined (OCHA, 19 November 2004). One of the most serious causes of IDP vulnerability is related to their emotional conditions, as the conflict and their difficult situation after the conflict have created feelings of dependency, passivity and depression that have hindered social integration and economic self-reliance (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi, July 2003). Of particular concern are vulnerable groups among the displaced, such as elderly, traumatised and disabled persons, as well as female-headed households (CHR, 22 March 2006).

Humanitarian agencies estimate that close to half of the displaced population live in collective centres, located in former hotels, schools, kindergartens, factories and hospitals. Of a total of 1,683 collective centres throughout the country, 70 per cent do not meet minimum living

standards, with inadequate access to clean water, unsafe electric systems and inadequate insulation (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004). In addition, it is believed that an increasing number of IDPs previously living in private accommodation have moved to collective centres as a result of decreasing willingness of local families to host them and their inability to pay rent (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman, November 2002). Little information is available on the living conditions of IDPs accommodated with host families.

According to a study commissioned by UNDP in 2004, the overall health status of IDPs, particularly those living in collective centres, is worse than that of the rest of the population (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004). Local observers also point out that due to corruption and lack of information, IDPs in rural areas have very limited – if any – access to the free-of-charge health services for IDPs. The Abkhaz Ministry of Health-in-Exile reported that the incidence and prevalence of the most frequent diseases among IDPs was on average more than twice the level of the general population.

Few returns to Abkhazia and South Ossetia

There were no significant return movements to Abkhazia in 2005-2006. The living conditions of the 45,000 Georgians who had previously returned to the Gali district of Abkhazia remain extremely poor, with deficient housing, limited economic opportunities and a general lack of public services (CHR, 22 March 2006; DRC, February 2006). Many returnees have to rely on relatives in Western Georgia in order to survive, or they continue to work there part of the year to support themselves. Returning children have to attend school in Russian, despite the fact that they are all ethnic Georgian (IDMC, May 2006). No ethnic Georgians have been able to return to the rest of Abkhazia. In early 2006, the de facto authorities declared that any return to the rest of Abkhazia would reignite conflict (UN Association of Georgia, 10 January 2006). Meanwhile, during a meeting chaired by the UN Special Representative for Georgia, the Georgian president's adviser on solving the Abkhaz conflict stressed that his government's priority was for displaced Georgians to go back to Abkhazia (IWPR, 25 May 2006).

In South Ossetia, returns that did occur after 2002 tended to strengthen the dominance of majority populations rather than promote multi-ethnic coexistence, as few minorities regained pre-war residences (OCHA, 15 January 2004). Since summer 2004, very few people have returned home due to the volatile security situation and persisting poor economic conditions (UNCT in Georgia, 30 November 2005).

National response to internal displacement

Since 1996, IDPs have been entitled to certain state benefits, as per the "Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) – the Persecuted Persons". Nevertheless, for many years, the Georgian government's pursuit of the goal of return of the displaced was so absolute as to deny displaced persons the ability to enjoy their full rights as citizens and lead productive lives in the meantime (Deng, 10 June 2003).

Recently, however, Georgia has taken steps to improve the living conditions of IDPs. Since 2002, IDPs have had the right to vote in local and parliamentary elections in their place of current residence, rather than in their place of origin, and since 2003 they have been able to run for election (Brookings, 5 November 2004). Since the end of 2003, IDPs have also been able to acquire property while keeping their national IDP status, thanks to a constitutional court decision (OCHA, November 2003). Furthermore, the Georgian government elected in 2004 has shown a more proactive and flexible approach to solving IDP problems than its predecessor. The Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation, which is responsible for coordinating other governmental

agencies' responses to internal displacement, was developing as of mid-2006 a national strategy on IDPs with the support of the international community and civil society organisations. The National Strategy was expected to deal with all aspects of displacement – housing, employment, social issues (education and health), and legal status. The government has stressed that integration of IDPs does not hinder their future return to their former residences. Thematic working groups involving the relevant government agencies, UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society are providing input to draft the strategy. The UN Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator and a representative from the Ministry chair the meetings supporting the development of the strategy. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is developing a database on collective centres throughout Georgia to inform the process. The Strategy will serve as a foundation for the government's plan of action, which will be implemented with anticipated support from the United Nations and other international organisations. Observers have pointed out the importance of the government feeling “ownership” of this process.

Until the end 2006, the Ministry will be administering the disbursement of social allowances to IDPs. The allowance system is then expected to be transferred to the Ministries of Labour, Health and Social Affairs and to the State Agency for Employment and Social Assistance. Only destitute households will receive assistance. The new programme seems little known to IDPs, and only 50,000 of them had submitted their applications to the new programme by May 2006 (UNCT in Georgia, 31 May 2006).

Property issues

The government has been supporting practical solutions for IDPs, such as the privatisation of hotels used as collective centres and assistance enabling IDPs to buy private apartments. However, according to observers, the lack of a general policy regarding the privatisation of collective centres has had a negative effect on the displaced. Privatisation is also complicated by the fact that the former state property's current owners are often difficult to identify. In general, mismanagement, corruption, and lack of funds have continued to limit the impact of the state's actions to improve the living conditions of the displaced (NRC, August 2005).

In March 2006, the Minister for Refugees announced the launch of a programme called “My House”, according to which IDPs can register their land titles in a state inventory, and thus ascertain their property rights in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Minister called on the leadership of the breakaway regions to cooperate in this process (UN Association of Georgia, 7 March 2006). A law on property restitution to the victims of the South Ossetian conflict is also expected to be adopted by Parliament and to enter into force in January 2007 (Government of Georgia, 18 May 2006). South Ossetian authorities have so far rejected the draft law (UN Association of Georgia, 20 April 2006).

International response

In addition to supporting the development of the national strategy on IDPs, humanitarian organisations are responding to the immediate needs of IDPs and returning IDPs. UNHCR is providing basic shelter assistance to returnees in Gali, in a programme carried out by NRC and the Danish Refugee Council, with the support of the Swiss Development Agency (SDC). UNHCR was also planning to monitor the return of IDPs to the Gali district of Abkhazia, but a starting date for the project still had to be worked out with the Georgian authorities as of August 2006. Other projects supporting IDPs, by both international and national partners, cover education, legal assistance and micro-credit. A limited number of agencies, such as ICRC and the UN's World

Food Programme, have continued to provide direct food aid to the most vulnerable IDPs, while other humanitarian organisations have increasingly mainstreamed IDPs into programmes benefiting the general population.

Organisations working in Abkhazia often operate under difficult conditions, facing bureaucratic and security obstacles. International NGOs working in Abkhazia have been requested to register with de facto authorities and to pay taxes, a measure opposed by the Georgian government. As of mid-2006, some NGOs had registered with the de facto authorities (Apsnypress, 25 April 2006; IDMC, May 2006). In certain parts of Abkhazia, such as Gali, the volatile security environment complicates the provision of humanitarian assistance (UNDP, January 2005).

Following the election of the new government in 2004, widespread donor disenchantment was replaced by a more optimistic approach towards the Georgian leadership. In order to improve the response to the humanitarian needs of IDPs, the European Union allocated funding for food security and income-generation projects to displaced and resident communities, as well as for projects improving the shelter conditions for IDPs in collective centres and for returnees to the Gali district (CHR, 22 March 2006). In June 2006, international donors pledged \$10 million at a conference hosted by Belgium on economic rehabilitation in the zone of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict (OSCE, 14 June 2006). Other major donors to programmes benefiting IDPs include SDC and USAID.

(September 2006)

CAUSES AND BACKGROUND

Background

Basic facts on Georgia (1995-2005)

- Georgia is multiethnic state made up of 68.8 percent Georgians, 9 percent Armenians, 7.4 percent Russians, 5.1 percent Azerbaijanis, 3.2 percent Ossetians, 1.9 percent Greeks, and 1.7 percent Abkhazians.
- Two regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, have taken up arms to gain independence from Georgia
- A Russian-dominated peacekeeping force and a UN international military observation force (UNOMIG) are trying to prevent the resumption of armed conflict

"The former Soviet republic of Georgia is a country spanning some 26,911 square miles in the Transcaucasus region to the south of the towering Caucasus mountain range. In 1989 the population of Georgia, which then included the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, stood at 5,443,359. The ethnic composition of the republic is situated between Russia to the north, Turkey and Armenia to the south, and Azerbaijan to the southeast is a mosaic depicting its rich and turbulent history. The Black Sea provides Georgia's economic and cultural gateway to the West. Significantly, the Abkhaz region occupies half of this spectacular and fertile coastline.

The ethnic composition of pre-war Georgia was 68.8 percent Georgian (including several regional subgroups speaking distinct languages in addition to Georgian, e.g. Mengrelians, Gurians, Svanetians); 9 percent Armenian; 7.4 percent Russian; 5.1 percent Azerbaijani; 3.2 percent Ossetian; 1.9 percent Greek; and 1.7 percent Abkhazian. Most of the population is of the Christian faith (followers of the Georgian Orthodox church) but Islam is professed by the people of Ajaria in southwestern Georgia, by Azerbaijanis in southeastern Georgia, and by the small population of Kurds.

In the northwestern corner of Georgia lie the 3,300 square miles of snow-capped mountains and subtropical coastline that form the territory of Abkhazia. Prior to the war, the total population of Abkhazia was roughly 537,000, with just under 100,000 people of ethnic Abkhaz origin. Historically, the Abkhaz people allied themselves with the Russian-speaking population (notably Russians and Armenians). Together, these groups comprised roughly half of the region's population. Ethnic Georgians comprised some 46 the population.."(Open Society Institute, 1995, pp.14-15)

"Not long after celebrating independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Georgia had to confront two nationalities within its own borders demanding their own independence. Abkhazia on the north eastern Black Sea coast, and South Ossetia, just two hours drive north from the capital Tbilisi, both declared themselves as separate and sovereign states. The fighting that followed killed about 10,000 people and destroyed many thousands of homes. Due to the sudden large shift in populations, and a continuing political deadlock, the majority of their houses remain uninhabitable to this day." (UNDP 2004)

"Now, 13 years after the war, repeated attempts to negotiate a solution to the conflict between the parties have not resulted in a final peace settlement. In short, the Georgian side envisions

Abkhazia as part of a Georgian state, while the Abkhazian side argues for full independence, or as a minimum, equal recognition with the Georgian state. Abkhazia as a free associated member of the Russian Federation has also been among solutions suggested from the Abkhazian side. A peace settlement concerns directly the state-territorial organization of Georgia, and is therefore crucial when it comes to a solution for its displaced population, as well as to its democratic and political development.” (NRC November 2005)

Ethnic divisions in Abkhazia during the Soviet era (1920-1989)

- According to the 1989 Soviet census, ethnic Abkhaz make up 17.8 per cent of the total population of Abkhazia
- Changing Soviet policies have influenced the ethnic and national consciousness of the population in Abkhazia
- In the 1930s, the Soviet Union favored Georgianization policies, but in the 1970s affirmative action policies in favor of the Abkhaz population was instituted
- Cities and regions were formally multi-ethnic but on a village level populations were ethnically concentrated

"The Abkhaz Autonomous Republic is named for the Abkhaz people, but the prewar population of Abkhazia was quite mixed. According to the 1989 Soviet census, ethnic Abkhaz were 17.8 per cent of the total population of 525,000 people, while Georgians were 45.7 per cent, Armenians 14.6 per cent, and Russians 14.3 per cent. The picture is more complicated however, since these demographic proportions varied throughout the period of Soviet rule, as the Georgian and Russian populations increased proportionally at the expense of the Abkhaz. Nevertheless, throughout the twentieth century the population has been multi-ethnic.

Throughout the period of Soviet power, this multi-ethnic population was the target of vacillating Soviet nationalities policies that assigned access to power and resources in accordance with official nationality. After enjoying in the 1920s the status of Unionrepublic, attached by treaty to the Transcaucasian Soviet Federal Socialist Republic, Abkhazia was joined to Georgia in 1931. Beginning in the 1930s, Soviet Georgianization policies closed Abkhaz language schools, changed place names, and guaranteed Georgians key official positions. Following the Second World War, Lavrentii Beria orchestrated resettlement of Georgians into Abkhazia to work in agriculture and the expanding industry, changing the ethnic balance of the population. But in 1978, in response to protests, Soviet authorities instituted "Abkhazization" affirmative action policies that reinstated Abkhaz language instruction and assigned official positions to people of Abkhaz nationality. These policies, with the privileges they conferred or rescinded, were applied to each citizen according to his or her official nationality, a fixed designation inscribed into the passport of every citizen over 16 years of age. Thus, changing Soviet policies over time concretized the idea of nationality for all residents of Abkhazia as an issue associated with competition for advantage.

In addition to official policies, patterns of daily life also worked to shape the ethnic consciousness of the prewar population. Almost all cities and regions were formally multinational. Residents still remaining in Tkvarcheli, for example, proclaim with pride that over fifty nationalities lived in that city of 22,000 people. Sukhumi's role as the designated economic and political centre for all of Abkhazia guaranteed integration at the republican level. Enterprises and state farms needed support from Sukhumi in order to function, and individuals made trips to Sukhumi since it was by far the best place to find many goods and services. At the household level, mixed marriages, particularly Georgian-Abkhaz, were common, and in a culture that emphasized strong ties with

extended family members, for many this meant frequent inter-ethnic interaction in their own homes.

Nevertheless, at the level of village life, there was a strong tendency toward nationally compact populations. In some cases this applied to whole villages. In Ochamchire district, for example, the villages Labra and Atara Armianskaia were primarily Armenian-populated, Mokva was primarily Russian, and Kochara was primarily Georgian. In other cases, for example the Georgian population of Dranda, members of one nationality lived compactly within a larger village or town. Furthermore, agricultural and economic organization especially in the countryside tended to coincide with village boundaries. Thus to the extent that nationalities lived compactly, they also tended to be organized economically by nationality. The 500 prewar households of the Armenian town of Shaumianovka, for example, constituted the workforce for a tea and tobacco state farm. And the neighbouring villages Tskenis-Tskali, with a largely Abkhaz population, and mostly Georgian Kochara, had shared a collective farm. But in late Soviet days they separated, forming two more or less mono-ethnic agricultural enterprises.

Thus, Soviet authority institutionalized both macro integration through Sukhumi's economic position, and micro differentiation through employment and residence patterns, creating a patchwork patterned prewar population. Personal level interaction modified this, but the zero sum game of the cultural politics of official nationalities policies worked to reify national difference."(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

For more information, please see Fédération Internationale des Ligues des Droits de l'Homme (FIDH), 02 Jun 2005

Ethnic Minorities in Georgia [[Internet](#)]

The Russian Federation: a major actor in the Abkhaz & South Ossetia conflicts (2001-2006)

- The presence of Russian peacekeeping forces has been an issue of discussion, but Russia has made clear that it does not want to change the status quo
- The Russian Federation finally accepted to close down its military bases in Georgia by 2008
- The presence of Chechen refugees in the Pankisi valley is an additional source of tension
- In 2004, massacre in Beslan School, North Ossetian Republic, Russian Federation had further negatively affected the already tense Georgian-Russian relationships
- New Abkhazian "President" elected in January 2005 emphasised importance of relations with Russia
- 90 percent of Abkhazia's population hold Russian passports, the currency is the Russian ruble and a number of retired people receive Russian pensions
- Russia officially recognises the territorial integrity of Georgia, from which Abkhazia became independent after a war in 1991-92 following the break-up of the Soviet Union, but unofficially supports the breakaway Black sea region on its southern border
- Ossetia and Abkhazia straddle the route of the four billion dollar BTC pipeline, which is scheduled to begin pumping Caspian Sea oil to western markets through Turkey
- In early August 2006 two Russian peacekeepers were killed when their convoy carrying money was attacked in Abkhazia

"What is Russia's involvement?"

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia owe their autonomy largely to Russian backing.

Russia provides their inhabitants with Russian passports and residency documents, allowing free movement into Russia.

Through them, the Abkhaz and Ossetians receive Russian pensions, which are much higher than pensions from the Georgian state. Georgians allege they receive military training and equipment. In addition to its peacekeeping bases in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russia maintains military bases in Georgia proper. Some government officials are direct imports from Russia. The currency is the Russian ruble, and there are Russian flags and posters of Russian President Vladimir Putin everywhere.

Why is Russia doing this?

Mostly for geopolitical reasons. Many regional experts claim they provide Russia with a foothold south of the Caucasus mountains. At the same time, Russia is concerned about separatist movements in its federation. If Abkhazia or South Ossetia successfully became breakaway states, Chechnya's calls for independence could be validated. However, Russia apparently does not want to see Abkhazia and South Ossetia fall back under Georgian sovereignty. Instead, it avoids officially recognising Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent republics but provides other types of support." (Alertnet 19 November 2004)

"In 2001 the Russian Federation continued to extend moral, political, financial and military support to Abkhazia. It openly showed its support to Abkhaz secessionists during the UN sponsored negotiations, and hindered the publication of the document on the status of Abkhazia, prepared by the Group of States Friends of Georgia.

[...]

Several large demonstrations of IDPs were held in Georgia, demanding the withdrawal of Russian peacekeeping troops from the conflict zone and possible deployment of Ukrainian or any other troops under the UN mandate (Ukraine has officially agreed to this possibility).

[...]

Russian authorities continued the practice of granting Russian citizenship to persons living in Abkhazia.

[...]

The total number of Chechen refugees in Georgia was approximately 7,000 at the end of 2001. They mainly lived in eight villages of Pankisi gorge with families of the local Kist population which is ethnically related with Chechens. [...]

In the last years, many businessmen who have been kidnapped in Georgia have been brought to Pankisi gorge and held there, and the location was also a centre of drug trafficking, in both of which some Georgian officials were believed to be involved. However, Georgian authorities accused Chechen refugees of involvement in criminal acts and therefore demanded for their deportation to Russia. Russia, again, accused Georgia of sheltering Chechen criminals and in this way – plus citing the international ant-terrorist campaign – tried to justify its bombing the territory of de-manding Georgia to accept the deployment of Russian Special Forces in Georgia." (IHF 28 May 2002, pp. 142-143)

"Russia has agreed on the practical details of its military pullout from Georgia. Envoys from Moscow and Tbilisi today signed two documents to that effect in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi. The agreements confirm a pledge given by Russia last year that the withdrawal would be completed within months.

Under the terms of a preliminary agreement reached last year (May 30, 2005) in Moscow, Russia had pledged to vacate the two former Soviet military bases it retains in Georgia by the end of 2008." (RFE/RL 31 March 2006)

"On April 17 [2006] State Secretary, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia Grigory Karasin held talks in Tbilisi with Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia Merab Antadze. A separate conversation took place with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, Gela Bezhuashvili.

On the whole the exchange of views reflected the difficulties at the present stage in bilateral Russian-Georgian relations. There was noted on the Russian side the importance of a responsible approach to their future on the basis of a mutually respectful dialogue bereft of negative emotional flare-ups.

The current situation in the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts was substantively discussed. There was particularly underlined Russia's stand on the need for consecutive advance on these issues within the framework of the already existing formats that have proven their effectiveness, without introducing uncoordinated initiatives that are fraught with the danger of the peace process getting rolled back many years. It was also firmly declared on the Russian side that the complex mission of the Russian peacekeepers in the conflict zones requires to be treated respectfully: no attempts to cast doubt on the effectiveness of their service, including those as a pretext for a change of their status, can be accepted." (Government of the Russian Federation 18 April 2006)

"The newly elected "president" of the Russian-backed breakaway Georgian republic of Abkhazia vowed to continue the fight for independence at his inauguration Saturday.

"I promise I will continue to fight for the freedom of our nation, strengthening of our state and for the inviolability of our independence," Sergei Bagapsh said according to a transcript provided by his office.

The former businessman was elected president on January 12 [2005] with 90 percent of votes after an earlier election in October was annulled because it was not supported by Russia.

A compromise deal between Bagapsh and the pro-Russia candidate in the October election, Raoul Khadjimba, now vice-president, gained Moscow's support.

Bagapsh, in his speech, emphasised the importance of relations with Russia and thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin for his support. An estimated 90 percent of Abkhazia's population hold Russian passports, the currency is the Russian ruble and a number of retired people receive Russian pensions.

[...]

Russia officially recognises the territorial integrity of Georgia, from which Abkhazia became independent after a war in 1991-92 following the break-up of the Soviet Union, but unofficially supports the breakaway Black sea region on its southern border.

Bagapsh also stated the objective of normalising relations with Georgia without providing any details.

Neither Georgia nor the international community has recognised Abkhazia.

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said on January 30 he was ready to resume talks with the separatist republic. He pledged when elected a year ago to reunite Georgia with Abkhazia and South Ossetia before the end of his presidency.

On January 28 the UN Security Council extended by six months a small UN ceasefire monitoring force established in Georgia in 1993.

Ossetia and Abkhazia straddle the route of the four billion dollar BTC [Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan] pipeline, which is scheduled to begin pumping Caspian Sea oil to western markets through Turkey later this year.

Western governments have recently stepped up their efforts to find settlements for the simmering regional conflicts, which have led to instability in the region and inflate the security costs for the BP-led pipeline project." (AFP 12 February 2005)

In August 2006- "Two Russian peacekeepers were killed when their convoy carrying money was attacked in the rebel Georgian region of Abkhazia, local officials were quoted as saying on Thursday.

The killing came at a time of high tensions between Georgia and Russia over the Black Sea enclave. Moscow has warned Tbilisi off any military attempt to regain control over the region." (Reuters 3 August 2006)

See also:

*Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), 5 Mar 2006
Georgia-Russian relations at boiling point [\[Internet\]](#)*

EurasiaNet, 23 March 2006, Is Russia looking for a fight with Georgia? [\[Internet\]](#)

Europe's role in solving the Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts (2006)

"Instability in the South Caucasus is a threat to European Union (EU) security. Geographic proximity, energy resources, pipelines and the challenges of international crime and trafficking make stability in the region a clear EU interest. Yet, the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts have the potential to ignite into full-fledged wars in Europe's neighbourhood.[...]

Since 2003 the EU has become more of a security actor in the South Caucasus, particularly in Georgia. It has appointed a Special Representative for the South Caucasus, launched a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) mission, and employed the Commission's Rapid Reaction Mechanism to support post "Rose Revolution" democratisation processes. It has included Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and started Action Plan negotiations due to end mid-2006. The Commission has allocated some €32 million for economic development confidence building programs in Georgia, and it has cooperated closely with the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)." (ICG 20 March 2006)

See also:

European Union (EU), 20 Jul 2006, Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on recent developments in Georgia - Abkhazia and South Ossetia [\[Internet\]](#)

European Union (EU), 21 Feb 2006

Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union on recent developments in Georgia-South Ossetia [\[Internet\]](#)

Cooperation between de facto authorities in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia (2006)

“On 15 February, the de-facto Parliament of breakaway Abkhazia ratified an agreement on friendship and cooperation between Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which was signed by Abkhaz and South Ossetian leaders Sergey Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity, respectively, in Tskhinvali last September. According to the agreement, the sides are committed to render mutual assistance in cases of emergency situations, in case peace and stability are threatened on the territories of one of the sides.” (UN Country Team in Georgia 28 February 2006)

Peacekeeping mandates: Russian peacekeepers asked to withdraw (2006)

- Georgian parliament passed resolution in July 2006 requesting the government to expedite the withdrawal from South Ossetia and Abkhazia of the Russian peacekeeping contingents that have been deployed there since 1992 and 1994 respectively
- The 500 Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia are part of a force that also includes equal numbers of Georgian and Ossetian servicemen
- In Abkhazia, by contrast, the Russian peacekeeping force is far larger (1,600 men), and is not complemented by contingents from any other country

“The Georgian parliament passed on July 18 [2006] by 144 votes (of a total of 235, and in the absence of opposition deputies) a resolution calling on the government to take immediate measures to expedite the withdrawal from South Ossetia and Abkhazia of the Russian peacekeeping contingents that have been deployed there since 1992 and 1994 respectively.

At the same time, it tasks the government with securing pledges from the international community to deploy alternative, international peacekeeping contingents and with convincing world public opinion of Tbilisi's continuing commitment to resolving its conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia by exclusively peaceful means.[...]

Different Peacekeepers

There are marked differences between the two peacekeeping operations. The 500 Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia are part of a force that also includes equal numbers of Georgian and Ossetian servicemen. That force was deployed in 1992 following the signing of an agreement between the then leaders of Georgia and Russia, Eduard Shevardnadze and Boris Yeltsin, that ended two years of sporadic low-level hostilities between informal Georgian and South Ossetian militias. The different national contingents patrol the conflict zone separately, however, hence the Georgian perception that the Russians selectively extend protection to Ossetian civilians and to Ossetian criminal clans engaged in smuggling, while ignoring Ossetian reprisals against the unrecognized republic's minority Georgian population.

From that angle, the question arises why, if Georgia's overriding concern is the security of the Georgian population of South Ossetia, rather than simply scoring political points, the Georgian authorities have not long ago raised with the OSCE the possibility of introducing mixed-nationality patrols? There is a recent precedent for doing so: following the fall of Grozny to the Chechen resistance forces in August 1996, Russian military police and Chechen militants patrolled the city jointly.

Whether Georgia is legally empowered unilaterally to demand the withdrawal of the Russian peacekeepers from South Ossetia is a matter of debate. In the event that Moscow agreed to their withdrawal, it should not prove too difficult for the international community to find a contingent of 500 men to replace them. Such acquiescence is, however, unlikely, given that up to 90 percent of

the South Ossetian population have acquired Russian passports, and thus could argue they are entitled to Russian "protection."

In Abkhazia, by contrast, the Russian peacekeeping force is far larger (1,600 men), and is not complemented by contingents from any other country. (Ukraine has offered to send peacekeepers to Abkhazia under the aegis of the UN, but not of the CIS.) Even though UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's outgoing special representative for Abkhazia, Ambassador Heidi Tagliavini, last month lauded the Russian presence, together with that of the unarmed UN Observer Mission in Georgia, as "the sole deterrent to prevent the situation spiraling out of control," Tbilisi repeatedly accuses the Russian peacekeepers of conniving with Abkhaz criminal gangs and of failing to protect Georgians who have returned to the homes in Abkhazia's southernmost Gali Raion from which they fled during the fighting of 1992-93." (RFE/RL 19 July 2006)

See also:

EurasiaNet, 3 Mar 2006, Georgian peacekeepers in South Ossetia: a dangerous move [[Internet](#)]

The severe economic breakdown seriously affects the State's capacity to care for the most vulnerable (2002-2005)

- Georgia is facing a severe economic recession since its separation from the Soviet economy in 1991
- This crisis, combined with civil conflict, political crisis and economic mismanagement has plunged the majority of the population into poverty
- At the end of 2003, the new Georgian leadership embarked on a reform programme but many Georgians still remain dependent on humanitarian aid
- 52.3 percent of the population live below the official poverty line, and 16.6 percent are reported as extremely poor (2005)

"Georgia is undergoing an economic and political crisis that dates back to independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Like other countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)—particularly those relatively poor in natural resources—Georgia experienced severe shock after separation from the highly centralized Soviet economy. According to government figures, between 1990 and 2000, the GDP fell by 78 percent. As a result, public finances are insufficient to maintain basic infrastructure or provide a social safety net for the vulnerable. On the positive side, the Government has recently managed to control inflation and limit public expenditures. Moreover, a national dialogue on economic growth and poverty reduction has begun." (WFP 2 September 2002)

"Very soon after the "Rose Revolution" of November 2003, the new Georgian leadership embarked on quite an ambitious reform programme to fix the fiscal sector, strengthen governance, combat corruption and smuggling, foster economic growth and reduce poverty, and restore public confidence. Despite the good will combined with certain progress in some areas (simultaneous reforms / restructuring started, enhanced revenue collection, timely payments of pending obligations, abolition of parallel structures) and extended international support, many Georgians remain vulnerable and dependent on humanitarian aid.

There are various interpretations of the underlying causes of vulnerability, as well as of whom should be considered vulnerable and why. For humanitarian purposes, the majority of vulnerable people belong to the more traditional relief types, such as conflict-affected persons, i.e. refugees,

IDPs and their host communities, returnees, or victims of natural disasters, such as droughts and earthquakes. On the other hand, there are other humanitarian-related vulnerable persons, the product of Georgia's painful prolonged "transition" and recovery from socio-economic collapse. Many are in part victims of the non-functioning social safety net, or are unemployed and simply poor.

The overall high-level of poverty, lack of adequate access to food, social and health services, and high unemployment rate, make some strata of the population particularly vulnerable. Among those most at risk are single and other elderly without an adequate support structure; institutionalized children and elderly; prisoners; persons with disabilities; families with a large number of children or families where one or more members is chronically ill; households living in the poorest districts/cities and/or in remote areas with weak or no access to infrastructure and basic services and often cut off completely during the long winter months. Also at risk are, to a varying extent, subsistence farmers, the unemployed, and a large number of those who are employed but are on a subsistence wage." (OCHA 19 November 2004)

"Although the proportion of the population living below the official poverty line (calculated according to consumption costs of households) has slightly decreased during 2004 from c. 54.5% to approximately 52.3% (in rural areas from 56.2 % to 53.4%), it is still very high overall. Even more alarming, the extreme poverty rate has increased to 16.9 % (from the 2003 baseline of 16.6%),¹ making Georgia the only CIS country with such a disturbing trend.[...]

The hardest-hit sectors of the population are the families with many children, single mothers, displaced, lonely pensioners, and the disabled." (UN Country Team in Georgia 30 November 2005)

Displacement of ethnic Russians, Armenians and Greeks (1992-1993)

- Abkhazia's large Russian and Armenian population looked for protection in Russia while most Greeks were repatriated to Greece

"There were [...] about 280,000 internally displaced persons in Georgia at year's end (1999). The overwhelming majority (266,000) were ethnic Georgians displaced from Abkhazia, about one third from the Gali district. The rest - about 14,000 persons - were displaced from South Ossetia. Of these, about 10,000 ethnic Georgians displaced from South Ossetia lived in government-controlled areas and about 4,000 persons remained displaced within South Ossetia. About two percent of Abkhazia's displaced were ethnic Jews, Ukrainians, Greeks, Abkhaz, Armenians, or Russians.

Some 42 percent of Georgia's displaced population lived in the Samegrelo region adjacent to Abkhazia, followed by Tbilisi (31 percent), and the Imereti region (13 percent). No significant new displacement or returns took place during the year." (USCR 2000, pp. 239)

"Caught in the middle of the madness were members of other official nationalities. In the earliest days of the war, Greece arranged an orderly and thorough evacuation for Abkhazia's Greek population of about 15,000 people. Many of these long-term residents of Abkhazia have found it difficult to adjust and some have attempted to return home.

Abkhazia's Russian and Armenian populations, each about 75,000 strong, were not temporary visitors who could simply return "home" when the fighting began. Most Armenians could trace their Abkhaz roots to the beginning of the century, and many came as a direct result of persecution in 1915. By the start of the war, Armenians in Abkhazia were Soviet cultural

constructs, speaking Russian and even Turkish, living in compact Armenian villages but in a multinational society, with few or no ties to Soviet Armenia. When the war began, Armenians found themselves directly in the line of fire, but "returning" to Armenia was a nonsensical option. Instead, the most natural option for many, especially women and children, was to flee to friends or distant relatives in Russia until the end of the war. In a frequent pattern, many young people stayed on in Russia, studying or earning money to send remittances back to Abkhazia.

Abkhaz Russians, despite cultural affinity with the Russian Federation, were also longtime residents. Like the Armenians, many Russians who had the necessary personal ties left their homes for Russia for the duration of the war, and many, particularly young people, have stayed on in Russia to work or study. In this way, the war scattered members of some nationalities and in some cases removed them altogether."(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

Abkhazia

Six years of on-and-off war (1992-1998)

- Armed conflict between Georgia and the secessionist province of Abkhazia broke out in August of 1992
- Fighting was resumed several times, most recently in May of 1998

"[T]he conflict began as a war of laws during the Soviet collapse, capped in July 1992 by a declaration of sovereignty by a partial Abkhaz Supreme Soviet, in turn quickly annulled by the Georgian Government. Some weeks later Georgian troops were ordered into Abkhazia, purportedly to secure transportation and communication lines. Whatever the intentions of the Georgian forces, on 14 August in Ochamchire district south of Sukhumi, Georgian and Abkhaz troops exchanged fire. The same day, Georgian troops entered Sukhumi, and Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba declared full mobilization. As Georgian troops occupied Sukhumi, the Abkhaz Government fled north to Gudauta, its base for the rest of the war, and the Gumista river just north of Sukhumi became the major front line. Just over one year later, Abkhaz forces took back Sukhumi and pushed Georgian forces back across the Inguri river and out of Abkhazia, an effective Abkhaz victory.

[...]Though the war had an identifiable front line and produced an eventual victor, the fighting was far from orderly. The very first days witnessed not a planned assault but rather random widespread violence in the city of Sukhumi and to the south. In addition to the Gumista front line, the war was also fought in patches in Ochamchire, whose villages had high prewar concentrations of Abkhaz. Lines of battle formed between villages of predominantly Abkhaz or Armenian, and Georgian population. To the east, ethnic Swans defended the Kodori river valley against the Abkhaz, while Abkhaz and many others were effectively blockaded in the mountain city of Tkvarcheli.

[...]The patchwork population and the scattered conduct of the fighting combined to produce a war that was effectively highly localized and highly personal. The story of one informant, a woman from Reka, is a representative illustration. Reka, a village of mixed but primarily Abkhaz population in Ochamchire district, is located a few kilometres up the road from the village Okhurei, which had a largely Swan and Mingrelian population. Throughout Soviet times, the two villages shared one citrus fruit collective farm, and most residents of the two villages worked there. Perhaps not surprisingly, there was a great deal of contact and intermarriage between the two villages. This informant's father is Abkhaz, and her mother Mingrelian, so in keeping with

accepted patrilinealism she considers herself Abkhaz. But she also considers herself to be from Okhurei, where her mother's family lived. Most members of her mother's family fought on the Georgian side during the war along the front line that ran between the villages. Those relatives are all now displaced and living in Tbilisi, while she stays in her husband's home in Reka, with portraits on the wall of her husband's Abkhaz brothers who were killed in the war. For this informant and many others, the war was not a political battle for sovereignty, but a highly personal, bloody contest among neighbours and family members."(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

"In May this year [1998] an increasingly tense situation in the Gali district finally exploded into the worst fighting seen in Abkhazia since the end of the war. An attack by Georgian guerillas on a group of Abkhazian militia in the village of Repi on 18 May 1998 was the catalyst for a large-scale Abkhazian response against an increase in such actions, sparking hostilities which also, for a while, drew in troops from Georgia's Interior and Defence Ministries. Although hostilities subsided after a cease-fire agreement was reached on 25 May, by the time the fighting had died down over 200 people were estimated to have been killed and most of the Georgian population, said to number some 30 to 40,000 people, had once more fled across to the Georgian side of the Inguri river border. Many left after what has been described as the systematic torching of their villages, in which an estimated 1,400 houses were destroyed." (AI, 1998, p.14)

Displacement and "ethnic cleansing" (1992-1999)

- Both the Georgians and the Abkhaz population consider themselves victims of ethnically directed violence
- Abkhaz population fled ethnically based threats of violence
- Georgians reportedly burned down Abkhaz homes during the war
- Abkhaz leadership argues that anti-Abkhaz ethnic violence was intentional and planned
- Many displaced Georgians state that they left because their lives were in danger because they were Georgian
- Destruction of property and looting reported to be ethnically directed towards Georgian homes in the Gali district
- UN source describes the violence in Abkhazia as "ethnic cleansing"

"One approach to [the question of 'ethnic cleansing'] would be to seek to determine whether there existed on either side at the highest levels a clearly formulated intention to eradicate an ethnic group. But such an intention might have existed without manifesting itself in any way during the war, while at the same time, even without a clear policy, wartime practices might be ethnically directed. In fact, the ways that people individually experienced the war, and their subjective understandings of what happened, far more directly determine future behaviour and thus the chances for a lasting settlement on the ground, than the existence or not of some official policy formulation. Therefore, the approach of this essay is to base the analysis on personal accounts of wartime experience by Georgian IDPs and current residents of Abkhazia. While over time personal understandings of what happened may be reworked and revised through ongoing conversations with others, these new collective understandings play a critical role in the search for a lasting settlement."(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

Abkhaz population

"Many accounts suggest that Abkhaz migration during the war was prompted by the threat of personal violence against the civilian Abkhaz population for reasons of ethnicity. In Sukhumi, certainly much thievery was perpetrated for its own sake, for economic gain. But residents relate that would-be perpetrators often first asked the nationality of the intended victim. Further, many

accounts suggest that the best defence for Abkhaz was to seek shelter with Georgian friends. Georgian friends at first could turn away thieves by saying the Abkhaz in their flat were relatives, but several months into the war even this ploy ceased to work.

Among those who fled from their homes in Sukhumi, many knew immediately, through friends and acquaintances, that Georgians had moved into their flats. A young woman now living in Adziubja relates that she previously lived in her own flat in Sukhumi, but it was taken over during the war by Georgians, who apparently stole everything when they left, since nothing of any value remains. While in fact it is not necessarily the Georgian occupants who later looted the flat, this story pattern in which Georgians are blamed, is quite widespread.[...]

Among those who lived in the countryside, many understand that Georgians intentionally burned down Abkhaz homes during the war. An Abkhaz man in Adziubja relates that Georgians intentionally destroyed 32 of 35 Abkhaz homes in upper Adziubja, and also the local Abkhaz language school. And a Mingrelian woman in the market in Ochamchire tells how Georgians burned down Abkhaz homes in her own village and others nearby, in Ochamchire district.

Theft and property destruction were not the only apparent threats. Both Natella Akaba's parliamentary Committee on Human Rights, and Otar Kakalia's former NGO, Askarial, have publicized information about many cases of physical threat, torture, and murder directed against ethnic Abkhaz civilians. All of these practices, to the extent they occurred, certainly constitute ethnically directed violence, even if it was not centralized and coordinated, and the belief that such violence took place is widespread among Abkhaz. Much Abkhaz migration during the war can be attributed to fear of ethnic violence, and at least some postwar migration is attributable to intentional destruction of Abkhaz homes.

In addition, much of the Abkhaz leadership argues that anti-Abkhaz ethnic violence was intentional and planned. In evidence many point to the thorough destruction of the Abkhaz State Archives in the first days of the war, and the Abkhaz State Security Service produces what it claims is a Georgian military map left behind during the war, indicating plans for the complete annihilation of Abkhaz villages in Ochamchire district. This official Abkhaz rhetoric of ethnic violence may serve to frame popular beliefs, but it is not the only source. Instead, local level experiences during the war also work directly to generate wide spread popular understanding of wartime violence."(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

Georgians

"In order to assess whether Georgian migration out of Abkhazia was ethnically driven it is necessary to consider two key parts to the claim of ethnic cleansing: that people were driven out by the threat of physical violence, and that Georgian homes and property were destroyed during and after the war to make return less likely.

Almost all displaced Georgians state clearly that they left because their lives were in danger precisely because they were Georgian. As evidence they recite stories of atrocities committed by Abkhaz forces against civilians during the war. Some of the stories are highly personal. For example a displaced Georgian in the market in Zugdidi, who is from Gali district, tells how Abkhaz forces killed her husband, and then killed her parents for good measure 'just because they were Georgian'. Another woman now living in Zugdidi tells how Abkhaz forces came to their home in Pitsunda and gave them a choice: either take an Abkhaz surname and fight on the Abkhaz side, or leave your home now. An older Georgian returnee to Gali district tells how after the war he witnessed Abkhaz approach a Georgian peasant neighbour and ask his surname. Hearing it was Mingrelian they proceeded to burn him. The role a victim's surname plays in these stories gives the violence a distinctly ethnic character.

[...]

In order to substantiate that Georgian mass migration was forced by ethnic violence, do we need to document that all displaced people were personally threatened at gunpoint, forced to hear of the horrors that would soon be practiced on their bodies, and given a choice whether to stay or not? Or, is it sufficient to ascertain that some unquestionably ethnically directed atrocities did take place, that people had reasonable opportunities to hear the tellings and retellings of these events, and that they fled in fear on this basis?

Concerning the second element of Georgian forced migration, many or most displaced Georgians say that their homes have been destroyed, or are now occupied by others. This knowledge comes through friends or even distant acquaintances, whom they have asked to check on the fate of their homes. In the market in Zugdidi, five displaced people say their houses in Gali district were burned after the war had ended. Armenians still living in Abkhazia note that Georgian homes in Dranda were intentionally attacked, and Abkhaz say the same thing about Georgian homes in Tamysh. Even Abkhaz authorities in Ochamchire city note that in the first days after the Abkhaz took back Sukhumi and then returned to Ochamchire, it was very difficult to control looting of the homes of people who had fled. Looting may be an exercise primarily for economic gain, but when people of a given official nationality are disproportionately selected as victims, the crimes take on an ethnic character.

Georgian authorities at all levels, like Abkhaz officials, tend to draw together the various accounts of violence and label it 'ethnic cleansing'. One head of administration from Gali district, in a conversation in Zugdidi, recited a list of murders and lootings directed against Georgians in Gali district since the war, and asked, 'Is this not genocide?' The Vice Mayor of Zugdidi agrees, noting that 5,000 Georgian houses were burned intentionally by the Abkhaz. The Kutaisi representative of the Abkhaz Council of Ministers in exile, echoing the words of Tamaz Nadareishvili and Zurab Erkvania, states that what happened after the war in Abkhazia was 'ethnic cleansing and genocide'. And he adds the personal account of his brother, who after returning to his village Otobaia in lower Gali district was attacked by the Abkhaz police and left paralyzed as a result." (Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

"Locked into constant interaction with one another, IDPs tell and retell one another stories of their wartime experiences. One result is the move from individual experiences of violence in which they, the victims, happened to be Georgian, to a sea of stories of ethnic violence in which all the victims are Georgian and all the perpetrators Abkhaz. Here, prolonged displacement works to create a compelling and widely shared narrative of ethnic cleansing."(Dale, 1997, sect.5.3)

"Even if it is accepted that application of the label 'ethnic cleansing' to the violence enacted upon either the Abkhaz or the Georgians would require demonstrating the existence of a concerted policy on the part of the leadership, what happened in practice may be much more important than what may or may not have been intended by some political entrepreneurs. The de facto conduct of this highly local war was superlatively ethnic in character. The best evidence is less the absolute horror of some observers' accounts than the fact that ethnicity is the primary trait of each key player in each of the accounts. Whatever role ethnicity per se may have played in producing the conflict, it has become the primary category with which people on the ground narrate and comprehend the war's violence. In practical terms, much of the Abkhaz population, and most of the Georgian population, have been displaced; property throughout Abkhazia has been destroyed, narrowing significantly the options for reconstruction and return in the near future; and among all former residents of Abkhazia the belief prevails that the best term for characterizing what happened to them is "ethnic cleansing".(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

This conclusion was echoed by the UN Special Rapporteur of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, Mr. A. Eide: "[In Abkhazia] the challenge to the territorial integrity of Georgia has been accompanied by processes of ethnic cleansing" (Commission on Human Rights, 6 July 1994, para. 31)

UNOMIG's role in regard to IDPs and returnees (2006)

- UNOMIG was originally established in August 1993 to verify compliance with the 1993 ceasefire agreement
- One of the purposes of UNOMIG, as enshrined in its mandate, is to contribute to conditions conducive for the return of refugees and displaced persons

“UNOMIG was established in 1993 by Security Council resolution 858 (1993) to observe the ceasefire and contribute to a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia (SRSG) acts simultaneously as head of UNOMIG and as chairperson of the political peace process. One of the purposes of UNOMIG, as enshrined in its mandate, is to contribute to conditions conducive for the return of refugees and displaced persons. In the Gali district, UNOMIG tracks and compiles crime statistics and follows up with the de facto authorities where possible. Further, it is tasked with observing the work of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Peacekeeping Forces who, according to the Quadripartite Agreement, are mandated, inter alia, to promote the safe return of refugees and IDPs.[...]

UNOMIG police work with local law enforcement authorities to strengthen their abilities to fight crime, which is a major deterrent to return. The Security Council has called for the deployment of United Nations police on both sides of the ceasefire line. While the Abkhaz de facto authorities assured the Representative that this issue was still on their agenda, the lack of political will to comply with the Security Council resolutions has been delaying their implementation until the time of writing.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

See also United Nations Security Council, 26 Jun 2006, Report of the Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/2006/435) [[Internet](#)]

see also: United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), 2 Nov 2005
Georgia: The Gali sector of UNOMIG [[Internet](#)]

For more information, consult the website of UNOMIG (<http://www.unomig.org>) [[Internet](#)]

The peace efforts: the challenge of IDP return (1994-2002)

- An agreement on ceasefire and separation of forces was signed in Moscow in 1994
- The parties agreed to the deployment of a peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States to monitor the agreement
- The UN Military Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) also monitors the agreement
- An agreement on the return of refugees and IDPs was signed in 1994 in Moscow
- In 1997, the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides was created, chaired by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG)
- The Council comprises three working groups, including one devoted to IDPs and refugees
- In May 1998, fighting broke out in the Gali District, causing the renewed displacement of approximately 30,000-40,000 persons
- In November 2000, a Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) led by the United Nations visited the Gali District to evaluate conditions for the return of IDPs to the region
- Attempts to resume negotiations on the political status of Abkhazia remained unsuccessful

"The 1992-1993 civil war in Abkhazia led to a displacement of over 250,000 persons and devastation of this once thriving agricultural centre and tourist destination squeezed between the Black Sea and the Caucasus mountains. In 1994 the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) and with the facilitation of the Russian Federation, signed the Moscow Agreement on the separation of forces, bringing two years of fighting to a halt. The Commonwealth of Independent States Peace Keeping Force (CISPKF) has been deployed to monitor compliance with the Agreement, with the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) monitoring the implementation of the Agreement and observing the operation of the CISPKF.

A Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons was also signed in 1994 by the Abkhaz and Georgian sides, the Russian Federation, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). This agreement, however, resulted at that time in a low level of official return of IDPs to the Gali District. By 1996 and 1997, an increasing number of spontaneous returnees drew the support and assistance of international organisations. A United Nations office for the protection of human rights in Abkhazia was established in 1996.

In 1997, negotiations resumed in Geneva, leading to the establishment of the Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides. The Council is chaired by the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General (SRSG) to Georgia, assisted by the Russian Federation as facilitator, and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Group of Friends of the Secretary General consisting of France, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Federation as observers. The Coordinating Council comprises three working groups: 1) On Security and the Non-Resumption of Hostilities; 2) On IDPs and Refugees; 3) On Social and Economic Issues. This Council has since been the main negotiating body within the UN-led peace-process for the settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia.

In 1998, within the framework of the Working Group on Social and Economic issues, the UN-led Needs Assessment Mission (NAM) visited Abkhazia. On 19 February 1998, four UN Military Observers (UNMOs) were kidnapped in Western Georgia during the Mission. Despite this incident, the Mission continued and was able to identify short- and medium-term needs in the primary production and social sectors. In addition, the Mission reviewed food security issues, landmines, facilities for post-trauma counselling and continuing humanitarian needs.

In the spring of 1998, the situation in the Gali District and Western Georgia deteriorated. From 12 March to 29 April 1998, a prolonged protest on the Georgian-controlled side of the Inguri River Bridge closed the only legal entry point into Abkhazia to vehicle traffic. The blockade severely impaired the movement of humanitarian aid workers and the delivery of assistance to civilians in need, as have a number of similar subsequent protests. In May 1998, fighting broke out in the Gali District, causing the renewed displacement of approximately 30,000-40,000 persons, many of whom were returnees receiving assistance from international organisations and were now displaced for the second time. During those events, many homes and communal facilities built or rehabilitated by UNHCR to support returnees were destroyed. Since the events of May 1998, security in Gali District has remained a serious concern to international community. The safety and dignity of returnees has not yet been guaranteed and international humanitarian organisations have not resumed regular assistance programs in areas of return.[...] In November 2000, a Joint Assessment Mission (JAM) visited the Gali District. The JAM was led by the United Nations, with the participation of OSCE, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE/HCNM), the Council of Europe, and the European Commission, while the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and UNHCR sent their observers. The purpose of the mission was to evaluate conditions for the safe, secure and dignified return of IDPs to the region.

Since the declaration of independence by the de facto Abkhaz authorities, attempts to resume negotiations on the political status of Abkhazia have been unsuccessful. To restart a dialogue, a document called 'Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi' was created by the SRSG to Georgia in late 2001. This document, known as 'Boden's paper', aimed at facilitating meaningful negotiations on the political status between the two parties in conflict, and received full support of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General; however, the Abkhaz side has not yet accepted to receive and discuss the document. Despite protracted efforts by the international community, the peace-process remains in a deadlock.

In parallel to these efforts aimed at resolving the political status of Abkhazia, the United Nations, in the framework of the 1997 Geneva Process, have addressed the issues of security, the return of IDPs and social and economic problems through the Coordinating Council and its three Working Groups.." (UN OCHA 20 January 2004)

International attempts to support the Abkhaz-Georgian dialogue (2003-2005)

- Countries supporting UN peace efforts in Georgia, "The Group of Friends for Georgia", tried to revitalize the settlement process in Geneva (February 2003)
- Georgian and Russian Presidents met in Sochi in March 2003, and agreed on the synchronized restoration of railroad links between Georgia and Abkhazia and IDP return
- A new political management was installed in Abkhazia in April 2003
- In July 2003, the UN Security Council endorsed the deployment of a civilian police force in return areas in Abkhazia and western Georgia
- Abkhaz side continued to invoke its 1999 declaration of independence as an obstacle to any negotiations regarding its status
- In 2004, UNOMIG continued its efforts to maintain stability in the zone of conflict and promote the resumption of dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, including on IDP return
- In December 2004, the Group of Friends reaffirmed in Geneva the importance of the return of refugees and IDPs, and acknowledged the key roles of UNOMIG and UNHCR in that regard

"Despite continuing efforts by the international community, in 2003 there was little progress in the political process over the conflict in Abkhazia. The 'UNSG's Group of Friends for Georgia' held a brainstorming session in Geneva on 19-20 February 2003, in which the 'Friends' reaffirmed their commitment to the principles of political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and recommended the establishment of task forces to deal with the three groups of issues: economic rehabilitation, IDPs and refugees, and political and security issues. Tbilisi-based 'Friends' visited Sukhumi on 3 March 2003, and met with local authorities, CIS PKF and UNOMIG, for the first time in 4 years. The expectations were that the three task forces, broader-based than existing working groups, would act as mechanisms to help revitalise the political and the Geneva/Coordinating Council process. The Abkhaz side, however, reiterated their refusal to accept the 'Boden' document. At the same time, they objected to establishment of the so-called Task Forces recommended by the 'Group of Friends' as part of the Geneva Process, since there existed the Coordinating Council mechanism. The UNSG's Group of Friends for Georgia met again in Geneva on 21-22 July 2003 to discuss situation in Abkhaz conflict zone. Economic cooperation, return of IDPs, political and security issues were discussed at the top-level meeting, chaired by Mr. Guéhenno, the United Nations USG for Peacekeeping Operations.

The Presidents of Georgia and the Russian Federation met in Sochi on 6-7 March 2003. They discussed, among others, issues related to Russian-Georgian co-operation, the political settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, and international and regional issues of mutual interest. The de facto Abkhaz authorities participated in part of the talks. The Presidents agreed on the necessity of synchronization of the repatriation process to the Gali district with the reopening of the railway line. The Sochi process has been designed to function through two working groups, one dealing with economic rehabilitation, with the emphasis on the railroad link restoration and Inguri Hydro-power station, and another on the return of IDPs and refugees. The bilateral working group on return of IDPs held two meetings (in June and July, in Moscow and Tbilisi respectively), with the participation of UN/UNHCR, which have not yet resulted in concrete agreements on principles and modalities of a potential return of the displaced persons concerned, initially to the Gali district.[...]

On July 30, the UN Security Council extended the UNOMIG mandate in Abkhazia, Georgia until 31 January 2004. Unanimously adopting resolution 1494 (2003), the Council also endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation to add a civilian police component to the Mission to strengthen its capacity to carry out its mandate and, in particular, to contribute to the creation of conditions conducive to the safe and dignified return of IDPs and refugees. Civil police was planned to work closely with Georgian and Abkhaz sides in building trust and cooperation in areas of law enforcement, good governance and protection of human rights, and more concretely helping the creating safer conditions for the return of IDPs in Gali District. In preparation for launching the deployment, under the auspices of UNOMIG, the high delegations of Georgia and breakaway Abkhazia visited and got acquainted with the peace processes and UN civil police experience in the post-conflict areas in the Balkans, i.e. Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, Serbia-Montenegro. Security issues were the main topic of discussion, which included the assistance provided by international civilian police to local law enforcement agencies. The actual deployment of the first division of 20 international UN civil policemen to Abkhazia, Georgia started in the last quarter of 2003, although the actual commencement of all planned civilian police officers' work is pending further consultations." (UN OCHA 20 January 2004)

"While the Abkhaz side took a generally constructive approach towards increased practical cooperation, it persisted in its refusal to receive the paper on competences and its transmittal letter. It continued to invoke its unilateral 'declaration of independence' of 1999 (see S/1999/1087, para. 7) as the key obstacle to any status negotiations." (UN SC 14 January 2004, para. 11)

In 2004, "UNOMIG, led by my Special Representative [Heidi Tagliavini], continued its efforts to maintain stability in the zone of conflict and promote the resumption of dialogue between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, in particular on economic cooperation, the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and political and security matters, which were established as priority directions for the peace process during the United Nations-chaired high-level meetings of the Group of Friends held in Geneva on 17 and 18 February 2004 [...]. The Group of Friends actively supported those efforts, the ultimate aim of which is to facilitate meaningful negotiations between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict using the paper entitled "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi" and its transmittal letter [...] as a starting point.[...]

On 13 and 14 December [2004], the high-level representatives of the Group of Friends convened in Geneva under the chairmanship of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations.[...]

The Friends emphasized the importance of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons and acknowledged the key roles of UNOMIG and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in that regard.” (UNSC 17 January 2005, para.3, 7)

Renewed hopes to bring peace to Georgian-Abkhazian conflict followed by tensions (2006)

- Since 2003, the UN has led efforts of the international community towards a peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz dispute
- Return of refugees and IDPs, predominantly to the Gali district, has been at the centre of the peace process
- UN-sponsored Georgian-Abkhaz talks were held in Geneva on 2-3 February [2006], where the key countries involved in the peace process stressed the need to address the core political cause of the conflict between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides
- In March 2006, the Georgian President appointed Irakli Alasania as Special Aid on Abkhaz issues
- In May 2006, Georgia and Abkhazia have in recent days exchanged proposals aimed at bringing peace in a conflict that has lingered unresolved since 1992
- The Group of Friends discussed with both sides their vision of ways for a comprehensive political resolution of the conflict
- In July 2006, Georgian President Saakashvili moved to set up a pro-Tbilisi Abkhaz administration in a small mountain territory next to breakaway Abkhazia, raising fears of a possible renewed conflict according to many analysts.

« The United Nations has since 1993 led efforts of the international community, including diplomatic efforts of the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General (France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America), towards a peaceful settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz dispute. Return of refugees and IDPs, predominantly to the Gali district, has been at the centre of the peace process. In a variety of resolutions, the Security Council has stressed “the urgent need for progress on the question of the refugees and internally displaced persons” and called on both sides to display a “genuine commitment to make returns the focus of special attention and to undertake this task in close coordination with UNOMIG and consultations with UNHCR and the Group of Friends”.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

“The UN-sponsored Georgian-Abkhaz talks were held in Geneva on 2-3 February [2006], where the key countries involved in the peace process stressed the need to address the core political cause of the conflict between the Georgian and Abkhaz sides.

In a press statement, the so-called Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, uniting Germany, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States, underlined that the basis of their efforts was the settlement of the conflict by peaceful means and in the framework of relevant Security Council resolutions.

The Group highlighted the immediate need for concrete results in the peace process and agreed that, in addition to continuing work on confidence-building measures, including the finalization of the package of documents on non-use of force and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees, there was a need to address the core political issues of the conflict.” (UNCT in Georgia 28 February 2006)

2006- "Georgia and Abkhazia have in recent days exchanged proposals aimed at bringing peace in a conflict that has lingered unresolved since 1992. What was the significance of the talks, and is there genuine hope for progress? Matthew Bryza, the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia, believes there is. A member of a high-level delegation of the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General that has just ended a visit to Georgia to discuss the peace talks, Bryza told Nino Gelashvili of RFE/RL's Georgian Service why he is hopeful." (RFE/RL 26 May 2006)

"On May 23-25 [2006], high-level representatives of the UN Secretary General's Group of Friends of Georgia (GFG) -- Germany (coordinator), Russia, Britain, France, and the United States -- visited Tbilisi, Sukhumi, and Batumi, where it held meetings with the leaders of both parties in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. The members of the GFG were received by the President of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, and the President of Abkhazia, Sergey Bagapsh.

In the course of these contacts the Georgian side transmitted to the members of the Group of Friends its document containing thoughts on defining the basic principles of a joint roadmap for settlement of the conflict. Based on the readiness of Tbilisi and Sukhumi to continue the talks on advancing the peace process, their representatives will presumably consider this document, just as the previously-submitted Abkhaz "Key to the Future" plan, in order to determine and translate into practice the mutually acceptable elements therein contained.

The Group of Friends discussed with both sides their vision of ways for a comprehensive political resolution of the conflict.

The outcomes of the GFG trip will be conveyed to the UN Secretary General." (Government of the Russian Federation 26 May 2006)

"The first session of the resumed Coordinating Council of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides convened on 15 May 2006 in Tbilisi, under the auspices of the UN and under the chairmanship of Madame Heidi Tagliavini, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General. Representatives of the Russian Federation as facilitator, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Group of Friends of the UN Secretary-General - Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, France and the United States of America in their capacity as observers participated in the meeting.

The Georgian delegation was led by Mr. Giorgi Khaindrava; the Abkhaz delegation by Mr. Sergey Shamba.

The Coordinating Council, which was established pursuant to the Final Statement of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides (Geneva, 17-19 November 1997), suspended its work in 2001. The agenda of the resumed Coordinating Council included discussions on security-related issues, refugees and IDPs, social and economic, as well as other matters." (UNOMIG 3 July 2006)

"New life was breathed into the Abkhazian peace process this week when Georgian presidential adviser Irakli Alasania personally handed a peace plan to the Abkhaz authorities.

The plan presented by Alasania, together with an Abkhaz plan which President Sergei Bagapsh handed over in Tbilisi on May 15, represent the most detailed documents to be presented since the conflict ended 12 years ago with Abkhazia claiming independence from Georgia – a claim still unrecognised by the outside world.[...]

Alasania, who is the Georgian president's adviser on Abkhaz conflict resolution, told the coordinating council that his government's priority was for the displaced Georgians – numbering about 250,000 – to go back to Abkhazia." (IWPR 25 May 2006)

“The announcement of the launch of the development of a detailed roadmap over the Abkhaz conflict resolution and appointment of Irakli Alasania as the Georgian President’s aide for Abkhaz issues have signaled Tbilisi’s efforts to revitalize the Abkhazia peace process.

President Saakashvili appointed Irakli Alasania, Chairman of the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government-in-exile, as his assistant for Abkhazian conflict issues on March 20.

This new appointment and resignation from his previous position paves the way for Alasania to participate in official talks with officials from breakaway Abkhaz. Despite a good personal relationship between Alasania and some representatives of the breakaway Abkhaz authorities, the Abkhaz side has always refused to hold official talks with Alasania, as Sokhumi denounces the Tbilisi-based Abkhaz government-in-exile as illegitimate.

Foreign Minister of breakaway Abkhazia Sergey Shamba welcomed the new appointment and said that the Abkhaz authorities have “very positive impressions” about Irakli Alasania, the Georgian media sources reported on March 20. “He is a person with whom it is possible to speak,” Shamba added.

The Georgian President’s spokesman Gela Charkviani said on March 20 that the new appointment was made in an attempt “to increase the level of coordination” over the Abkhaz conflict settlement within the Georgian government. Alasania also retained his position of the Georgian President’s personal representative for the Abkhaz conflict settlement.

The first announcement by Irakli Alasania after taking the position of presidential aide regarded the launch of the development of an action plan for settlement of the Abkhaz conflict. In October, 2005 the Georgian Parliament instructed the government to submit a detailed roadmap over resolution of the Abkhaz conflict by May 1, 2006.” (Civil Georgia 22 March 2006)

“Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili’s move to set up a pro-Tbilisi Abkhaz administration in a sliver of mountain territory next to breakaway Abkhazia has raised fears of a possible conflict, diplomats and an analyst said Friday.

‘Georgian authorities are trying to decide the problem ... by force,’ Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov was quoted by ITAR-TASS as saying during a visit to Malaysia. Saakashvili announced late Thursday that Abkhazia’s government-in-exile would be based in the Kodori Gorge district, saying he had taken a “fundamental political decision” to exert control over separatist Abkhazia.

‘Abkhazia’s legitimate government will function and carry out its jurisdiction and tasks from the territory of the Kodori Gorge,’ he said.

‘For the first time since 1993, Georgia will exercise constitutional order in the territory of Abkhazia.’

The announcement came as Georgian forces continued an operation to disarm a local militia in the volatile district, the only area within the Abkhazian region’s Soviet-era borders that is mostly under Georgian control.” (AFP 28 July 2006)

See also

Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty (RFE/RL), 26 Jul 2006

Georgia: Troops deployed to rein in militia [[Internet](#)]

Government of Georgia

Date: 26 Jan 2006

Statement by Mr. Irakli Alasania Special Representative of the President of Georgia New York, January 26, 2006 [[Internet](#)]

Displacement of ethnic Georgians (1992-1997)

- The majority of Georgians were forced to flee the province of Abkhazia
- Some Georgians, such as members of mixed marriages, children of mixed marriages, or older people, never left their homes

"The conflict moved several different populations, in diverse ways. In most cases, the general contours of migration are far less contested than the numbers of people involved, and claims concerning the magnitude of displacement have become effective political weapons.

Certainly the largest group affected by the war are ethnic Georgians, the vast majority of whom have left Abkhazia and have settled in other parts of Georgia. The Georgian Ministry for Refugees claimed in March 1997 that there were 268,072 displaced persons from Abkhazia in Georgia. The Abkhaz argue in turn that there were 239,900 Georgians in Abkhazia in 1989, according to the Soviet census. They claim that some never left Abkhazia, many others have repatriated already, and still others fled to Russia not Georgia. There are thus at most 140-150,000 displaced people still waiting to be repatriated in Georgia. Since a number of Georgians did indeed stay behind, it is difficult to see how the Georgian Government can substantiate its figures. However, without passing judgement on this issue, it is possible to describe the contours of Georgian migration. From cities, the vast majority of the Georgian population has gone. In towns that had quite small Georgian populations, like Verkhnaia Eshera above Sukhumi, and Labra below it, literally all the Georgians have left. In other places, when residents note that Georgians have remained, it often transpires that these "Georgians" are children of mixed marriages who self-identify as Abkhaz or some other nationality.

However, a number of Georgians never left Abkhazia, even during the fighting. Members of mixed marriages stayed, particularly if the husband was Abkhaz. Many older people stayed, particularly if they had no close relatives to help them flee or to take them into their homes in a safer place. Neighbours, in Nizhnaia Eshera, Tkvarcheli, Ochamchire and Kutol among other places, emphasize that these Georgians can stay with impunity precisely because they did not fight on the Georgian side. In other cases, Georgians who were long-term residents of a village considered it home and quite naturally not only stayed during the war, but also helped the Abkhaz as they were able. [...]

Those who stayed are certainly not representative of the Georgian population as a whole. The conditions under which they stayed show one way in which Georgians and Abkhaz have continued to live together. But the ominous implication is that without the full loyalty they demonstrated during the war these Georgians would not be welcome."(Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

South Ossetia

Debate over South Ossetia following heightened tensions between Georgia and Russia (2006)

- To nudge the Ossetians into choosing reintegration, Georgia has developed repatriation legislation for displaced Ossetians and millions of dollars in economic assistance from international donors

“The debate over South Ossetia's status has erupted in recent weeks following the first signs of renewed conflict between Georgia and Russia. One high-level Ossetian leader was assassinated and another was targeted in a series of attacks both the Georgians and Russians blamed one another.

A day after Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava - the only member of Georgian leadership whom the Ossetian government says it trusted - was fired, Georgia's parliament issued a resolution calling for the removal of 1,000 Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia.

The move enraged Moscow, which issued a statement calling the resolution ‘a provocative step aimed at fomenting tensions.’[...]

A 1992 ceasefire remained in place until the summer of 2004, when Georgia took control of a Georgian-Ossetian trading post in a bid to clamp down on smuggling, angering South Ossetians who draw much of their income from the market.

"Everything that was achieved during the political negotiations from 1992 to 2004 was brought to zero," says South Ossetia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Murat Dzhioev.

Many South Ossetians see the region as part of Russia and, indeed, would likely join with the Russian region North Ossetia and have to rely heavily on Russian support if it broke from Georgia. South Ossetians already carry Russian passports, Russian leaders have been "recommended" for Ossetian posts, and government workers' salaries draw on Russian coffers. The Ossetian leadership says that Russia remains their best bet for protection. "We understand that politics is mainly interests, but still Russia is a country which ensures some security for us against Georgia," says Irina Gagloeva, chairwoman of South Ossetian Committee on Information and Media.

To nudge the Ossetians into choosing reintegration, Georgia has developed repatriation legislation for displaced Ossetians and millions of dollars in economic assistance from international donors." (The Christian Science Monitor 1 August 2006)

New government plan foresees broader autonomy for South Ossetia (January 2005)

- Plan calls for the establishment of a special law on property restitution -- that will make generous payments to victims of the conflict, and the right for IDPs and refugees to return, backed up with financial assistance
- Plan was immediately rejected by South Ossetian leadership

“On 26 January, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili presented a vision for resolving the South Ossetian conflict at the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) session in Strasbourg. As per the President's statement, if during the Soviet period South Ossetia enjoyed a moderate form of autonomy, today, under the new plan, it will enjoy a distinctly broader form. The Plan envisages a constitutional guarantee of Autonomy that includes the right to freely and directly elected local self-governance, including an Executive Branch and the Parliament of South Ossetia. At the same time, Ossetian people's voices will be present in the Georgian Parliament.

The Plan allows the authorities of South Ossetia to determine and control their economic policies, according to local needs and priorities.

The Plan calls for the establishment of a special law on property restitution -- that will make generous payments to victims of the conflict. For those who were forced to flee, this initiative guarantees the right to return, backed up with financial assistance. In recognition of the difficult and not very smooth road to peace, it is suggested to establish a 3-year transitional period. During this period, mixed Georgian and Ossetian police forces will be established to guarantee public order and freedom of movement, Ossetian forces will gradually integrate into Georgian Armed Force and confidence will be restored.

President called on the Council of Europe to act as a peace facilitator, the OSCE as peace monitor, the EU as peace guarantor, the US as peace supporter and the Russian Federation as a welcomed and constructive partner for peace, and expressed his hope that people of South Ossetia and the international community will join their efforts and lend their active support to the new Peace Initiative.

To endorse this Peace Initiative, a special commission has been set up to work over the status of South Ossetia chaired by the Georgian Justice Minister Giorgi Papuashvili. Officials, as well as representatives of the non-governmental organizations and experts will be members of the commission. This commission will work over drafting the legal base of the proposals which were voiced by President Mikheil Saakashvili at the Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe." (UN Country Team in Georgia 31 January 2005)

Under the plan, "The South Ossetian language would also be granted official status and central government funds would be committed for as yet unspecified use in preserving South Ossetian culture." (EurasiaNet 27 January 2005)

"President Mikhail Saakashvili of Georgia, seeking to reunite his country, Wednesday offered autonomy to the separatist republic of South Ossetia but the offer was immediately rejected by the Ossetian leadership." (AFP 26 January 2005)

For more information on the plan, please see Government of Georgia, 26 Jan 2005 Remarks of the President of Georgia H.E. Mikheil Saakashvili to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [Reference below]

Delay in implementing agreement and sporadic violence in South Ossetian conflict zone (Dec 2004)

"After Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and South Ossetian de-facto leader Eduard Kokoiti signed an agreement envisaging the demilitarisation of the South Ossetian conflict zone before 20 November [2004] in Sochi, the securing of free movement of the population, the implementation of joint economic projects and an increase in the number of OSCE observers in the conflict zone, the situation in the region has been relatively calm. OSCE hailed the progress achieved between the Georgian and Ossetian sides. However, both sides complain about the delay in implementation of the Sochi agreement over the demilitarisation, blaming each other.

The collective co-Chairmen of the Joint Control Commission (JCC) over the South Ossetian conflict resolution issues held a meeting with Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania on 23 December in Tbilisi to discuss the ongoing situation in the South Ossetian conflict zone. Similar talks with de-facto president Kokoiti was held on the next day, 24 December. The main topic for discussion was the fulfilment of the Sochi agreement.

Sporadic shootouts were reported overnight on 23 December near the Georgian village of Eredvi in the South Ossetian conflict zone. No casualties were reported. The breakaway South Ossetia's Press and Information Committee reported sporadic shootings in the conflict zone overnight on December 27. No casualties have been reported. According to this report, the shooting was initiated from the Georgian villages of Achabeti, Kurta and Kheiti." (OCHA 30 December 2004)

Renewed temporary displacement due to conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia in 2004

"A precarious peace is back in place between Georgia and South Ossetia after the long-frozen conflict nearly became a hot war again and drew in Russia when dozens were killed in August 2004 fighting. President Saakashvili tried to break a twelve-year deadlock and take another step to restore Georgia's territorial integrity by undermining the regime in Tskhinvali, but seriously miscalculated. (ICG 26 November 2004, Executive Summary)

South Ossetia: peace efforts under the OSCE mediation (1992-2006)

- A ceasefire agreement was signed in 1992, followed by the deployment of a joint Russian, Ossetian and Georgian peacekeeping force
- The OSCE has been requested to help mediate and promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict
- A Joint Control Commission (JCC) supports confidence-building measures and helps to address issues of mutual concern, such as refugees and IDPs
- Georgia and South Ossetia declared 1998 the "Year of Return"
- In 1999 the JCC said that insufficient work had been carried out to address obstacles to return
- Most refugees and IDPs remain reluctant to return unless economic conditions improve and basic services are adequately restored
- However, the local population enjoys freedom of movement across the ceasefire line
- In 2000 Georgian-Russian economic document on the rehabilitation of the conflict zone and in 2002 "Draft Georgian-Russian Interstate Program" but nothing was implemented OSCE continued to support the peaceful settlement of the conflict and efforts were focused on confidence-building measures in 2002-2003
- Much of the inter-ethnic mixing that existed before 1990 in South Ossetia has been lost

"As early as the summer of 1992, an attempt was made to seek an amicable solution to the conflict and to establish an end to the hostilities. A cease-fire agreement was signed, leaving the authorities of the former Oblast in control of Tskhinvali, Java, Znauri and parts of Akhalkgori, and the central Government in control of Akhalkgori and several isolated ethnic Georgian villages. A peacekeeping force from the region was deployed. These forces consist of joint Russian, Ossetian and Georgian troops and are known as the Joint Peacekeeping Force or JPKF.

In 1992, a mission from the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), later renamed as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), was requested by the Georgian and South Ossetian sides to help mediate and promote a peaceful resolution to the conflict. With the OSCE's facilitation, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict settlement machinery has evolved. This machinery has two principal components: political negotiations of Georgian and

South Ossetian plenipotentiary delegations with the participation of Russia, North Ossetian authorities, and the OSCE; and the Joint Control Commission (JCC), which supports confidence-building measures and serves as a mechanism for the sides to address issues of mutual concern while leaving the issue of the region's political status to the political negotiators.

The JCC has three principal working groups: 1) On Military and Security Issues; 2) On Economic Issues; 3) On Refugees and IDPs. All four parties (i.e. Georgia, Russia, North Ossetia and South Ossetia) and the OSCE are represented on the JCC Working Groups. In addition, the JPKF is a participant on the working group on Military and Security Issues, the European Commission (EC) on the working group on economic issues, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the working group on refugees and IDPs.

“The two sides pledged in 1992 to create conditions for return of refugees and displaced persons [see Sochi Agreement on Resolving the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict, Article 4, 24 June 1992] yet it took over a decade to devise a detailed plan [“Draft Program on the Return, Settlement, Integration, and Re-integration of Refugees, Forcibly Displaced and Other Persons Affected by the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict Comprising Measures for the Restoration of the Economy in the Places of their Return”, JCC decision, Annex no. 2, 9 July 2002, Moscow]. In 1997 a procedure “On the voluntary return of IDPs and refugees resulting from the Georgian—Ossetian conflict to their permanent place of residence” was agreed by the JCC. The parties expressed readiness to accept the right to “voluntary repatriation” and to “choose their place of residence”. They pledged to protect returnees and guarantee them the property they were deprived of, freedom of movement, civil, cultural and social rights, and information on the return process. Implementation was to be coordinated by a permanent body of representatives of the four JCC participants. Shevardnadze and Chibirov declared 1998 the “Year of Return”. However, in 1999 the JCC said “insufficient work had been carried out to address obstacles to return” and recommended Georgia “speed up the consideration of the Property Restitution of Refugees and IDPs”. A clear outline of the process came only with the 2000 Georgian-Russian economic document on the rehabilitation of the conflict zone and a 2002 “Draft Georgian-Russian Interstate Program” but nothing was implemented, and Georgia's Parliament has yet to pass a property restitution law.” (ICG 26 November 2004, pp.25-26)

“[...] [M]uch of the inter-ethnic mixing that existed before 1990 has been lost. Before the war, Georgia had a population of some 164,000 ethnic Ossetians. Approximately 38,000 remain [outside of South Ossetia]. A handful of ethnically mixed villages survive in South Ossetia. While Ossetian authorities claim that up to 2,000 ethnic Georgian still live in Tskhinvali, Georgian officials in Gori say only a few dozen do. In parts of South Ossetia under Georgian government control, there are some 20,000 persons, mainly ethnic Georgians, in four districts.

Wartime displacement also significantly reduced South Ossetia's population, which has yet to reach 1990 numbers. Authorities there claim some 80,000 persons live in the region. However the real number of full time residents is likely around 65,000. No more than 36,600 are reported to have voted in the 2004 South Ossetian parliamentary elections.” (ICG 26 November 2004, p6)

“Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli lauded the OSCE's involvement in initiatives aimed at achieving lasting solutions to the frozen conflicts on its territory, in a speech delivered today at a special meeting of the Organization's Permanent Council.” (OSCE 27 March 2006)

South Ossetia: violent conflict in 1990-1992

- In 1989, the overall population of South Ossetia was approximately 99,700, including some 26,000 ethnic Georgians

- Declaration of autonomy of South Ossetia in 1989 was followed by a violent conflict with Georgia until 1992
- During the conflict, Georgians and South Ossetians both committed brutal atrocities, including decapitation of infants, executions in front of family members, and rape
- The 1990-1992 conflict in the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia is estimated to have displaced some 60,000 persons, the majority of them Ossets, but also about 10,000 ethnic Georgians

"Populations were closely inter-mixed before the 1990-1992 conflict. According to the last pre-war census in 1989, Ossetians living in South Ossetia numbered 65,000, with 98,000 in the rest of Georgia. The overall population of South Ossetia was approximately 99,700, including some 26,000 ethnic Georgians. The war brought massive displacement, which shattered much of this coexistence and brought South Ossetians much closer to their ethnic kin in North Ossetia (Russian Federation)." (ICG 26 November 2004, p5)

"The South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast consisted of the four districts of Tskhinvali, Akhagori (formerly Leningori), Java, and Znauri. Tskhinvali, the capital of the Oblast, is a half hour's drive north of Gori, the administrative centre of the Georgian region of Shida Kartli. In 1989, the Supreme Soviet of the Oblast declared its intention to raise its status to that of an Autonomous Republic within Georgia. The Georgian authorities annulled this decision and further revoked South Ossetia's status as an Autonomous Oblast. A violent conflict ensued during 1989-1992.

As a direct consequence of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, South Ossetia and adjoining regions of Georgia proper, including Gori, suffered substantial material damage, and over 60,000 individuals, mainly ethnic Ossetians, were displaced from their homes. Some 40,000 of them crossed into North Ossetia in the Russian Federation and became refugees. At the same time as the conflict raged, several violent earthquakes and aftershocks struck the region, causing significant damage, particularly in Java." (UN OCHA 15 January 2004)

"The conflict in the beginning of the 1990s was sporadic and anarchic. Neither Georgians nor Ossetians possessed a disciplined army, and fighting generally took place between small groups and paramilitaries, facilitated by the easy availability of arms. [...]

Both sides committed brutal atrocities, including decapitation of infants, executions in front of family members, and rape." (ICG 26 November 2004, p7)

"The 1990-1992 conflict in the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia is estimated to have displaced some 60,000 persons, including about 10,000 ethnic Georgians. The vast majority, however, were ethnic Ossets from both the breakaway territory and other parts of Georgia, most of whom have fled abroad (primarily to the Russian Federation region of North Ossetia).

Some were displaced as a direct consequence of fighting in and around the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, while others moved due to fear, harassment or forcible eviction in parts of Georgia that remained otherwise largely peaceful during the conflict. Within the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, about 5,000 persons were internally displaced." (CHR 22 March 2006)

POPULATION FIGURES AND PROFILE

Global figures

Some 220,000 - 240,000 remained displaced in Georgia as of 2006

“By November 2004, 241,032 IDPs were registered with the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation of Georgia. Between December 2004 and June 2005, the Ministry, with financial and technical support from UNHCR, verified the number of IDPs currently living in territories under Georgian control, registering a total of 221,597 [Note: Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation preliminary figures of October 2005 shared with UNHCR. The issue of the legal statutes of those IDPs who did not appear for the latest verification exercise in November 2004 or who had not yet successfully undergone verification due to problematic supporting documents remains unclear.] This number includes 210,409 IDPs of those previously registered with the Ministry as well as an additional 11,188 newly registered and newborn IDPs. Out of the total of verified IDPs, 209,013 (94.32 per cent) are from Abkhazia and 12,584 (5.68 per cent) from Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. In addition, some 5,000 persons remain displaced within Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. The number of persons still displaced inside Abkhazia is not known.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

Close to 240,000 continued to be displaced in Georgia as of end of 2004

- In 2005, the Georgian Government and UNHCR concluded the verification of IDP registration

“It is difficult to gauge the number of refugees and displaced persons in the region. By law or by virtue of administrative practice, the three countries tend to recognise the descendants of persons displaced in various capacities within the region as “refugees” or “displaced persons”, with the result that the total number of refugees and displaced persons never seems to decrease.” (Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe, 13 April 2006)

“The plight and status of IDPs in Georgia continues to generate much debate. According to official Government data, there are currently 237,069 persons (224,947 IDPs from Abkhazia and 12,122 IDPs from South Ossetia) displaced from the two ethnically fuelled conflicts in those regions, who still reside in Georgia proper, unable to officially return to their places of origin. After more than 11 years of displacement, approximately 42% of IDPs inhabit collective centres, only some of which were renovated several years ago to serve as temporary dwellings, while the majority of the remaining 58% continue to live in crowded conditions with host families or in rented apartments.” (OCHA 19 November 2004)

“The Ministry of Refugee and Accommodation on behalf of the Government of Georgia will be conducting a countrywide verification of the IDPs’ registration exercise. UNHCR is supporting the Ministry with its technical expertise and helping in securing the funding. The Swiss Government through its Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), Ministry of Foreign Affairs has contributed an earmarked budgetary of CHF 300,000 to support this important initiative of the Government of Georgia.

At the beginning of 2004 the total number of IDPs registered with the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation stood at approximately 260,000 persons. The last IDP registration took place in 1996 and it is important to collect and update basic information on IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Accurate figures of the IDP population in Georgia will enable the Georgian Government to use its resources more effectively for the benefit of IDPs." (OCHA 31 October 2004)

"Problems relate to organization, administration, technical issues and information: A major issue has been the procedures and regulations for those not showing up for verification. -Will they lose their status? In some regions, 25 % do not show up for verification. The Ministry has not decided (at least not been able to explain) what to do and the legal basis for whatever can be done. There are many other problems that was not solved before the verification started such as lack of reliable register of collective centers and their owners. Many IDPs do not live in the building they are registered, but has not been able to re-register because there is no administration of the building who is responsible for approving the change of address. Since this is not a registration but only verifying the information in the register, there is a lot of confusion about what to do with some of these issues." (NRC 15 March 2005)

"The current register of IDPs was made in 1996, and has been updated annually through the registration of the IDPs. The government has just finalized a "verification exercise" which includes the verification of IDPs documents as well as updating and upgrading the central IDP register and archive. NRC has been supporting efforts of getting a more accurate IDP data and sees the need for an updated register according to international standards.

However, the verification project undertaken by the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) in collaboration with UNHCR raised many questions and concerns among the IDP community. NRC, working with local partner organizations on a project providing information, counseling and free legal aid to IDPs in Georgia, has worked closely both with MRA and UNHCR as well as IDPs themselves during this process. The concerns outlined in a position paper last year, have to some extent been confirmed. Lack of information and understanding among IDPs regarding this process has been the source of complaints, frustration and distrust throughout the exercise. This report summarizes the experience of the meetings throughout Georgia with IDPs in collective centers, with clients approaching our legal aid offices as well as communication with MRA. It is followed by a series of recommendations." (NRC August 2005)

Total internally displaced population: 260,000 persons as of September 2003

- 95 percent of the IDPs in Georgia were displaced from Abkhazia, the rest from South Ossetia
- Between 40,000 and 100,000 Ossetians from South Ossetia and Georgia proper fled there during the conflict
- 38 percent of the IDP population lives in the Samegrelo province, bordering with Abkhazia
- Tbilisi is the second province with the highest concentration of IDPs (35 percent)
- The total population of Georgia has shrunk by 20 percent in 12 years, as a result of a massive outflow of workforces to other countries
- Abkhaz authorities suggest compiling a precise register of the Georgians eligible for repatriation
- There has never been a proper registration of IDPs, while IFRC estimated that 20 percent of the IDP addresses were non-existent or wrong

UNHCR Data as of 30 September 2003
IDPs from Abkhazia

	GAGRA	GALI	GUDAUTA	GULRIPSHI	OCHAMCHIRE	SUKHUMI	SUKHUMI DISTR.	TKVARCHELI	To
ADJARA	529	786	99	1675	1017	1758	778	142	67
GURIA	72	69	11	88	148	169	25	11	59
IMERETI	3828	3443	1218	4495	7784	5165	4049	556	305
KAKHETI	181	169	265	226	126	185	67	10	12
KARTLI	245	345	42	277	424	431	299	53	21
KVEMO KARTLI	2362	1255	466	1815	1799	1324	845	284	101
MTSKHETA- MTIANETI	84	126	123	229	180	218	16	23	99
RACHA- LECHKHUMI	323	48	78	66	162	178	324	30	12
SAMEGRELO	3245	54642	862	10232	12947	12740	4755	1226	100
SAMTSKHE- JAVAKHETI	191	583	48	481	289	320	345	41	22
TBILISI	10556	17229	2267	13085	11505	28689	6702	849	908
Total	21616	78695	5479	32669	36381	51177	18205	3225	247

IDPs from Districts of South Ossetia

TSKHINVALI	ZNAURI	JAVA	Total
10083	2389	203	12675

Persons of Concern to UNHCR (Government statistics)

	Total in Country	Per cent Female	Percent under 18
Georgia (IDPs) [note]	264,000	55	26

Note: includes some 250,000 IDPs and returnees from the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. As estimated 40,000 IPDs have returned spontaneously to Gali District. Also includes some 7,000 IDPs and refugees from the Georgian-Osset conflict. In 2001, 425 refugees and IDPs returned to their places of origin in South Ossetia and Georgia proper. (UNHCR June 2002, p. 383)

"According to the Georgian State Department for Statistics release of May 5, as per the findings of the national census taken in January 2002, Georgia's population shrank by 1.1 million people: from 5.5 million in 1989 to 4.4 million at the beginning of 2002. The census did not cover two conflict areas outside central government's control. As per official communication, Georgian and international experts believe the population of Abkhazia may be around 160,000 people at the moment, while South Ossetia is home to about 70,000 people. Generally, the shrinkage of Georgian population by such huge, almost 20 per cent, over the past 13 years, had been caused by an amassed outflow of workforce to other countries in hope to get better living and working opportunities. Most of the emigrants now live in the Russian Federation, but the emigration trend shows increasing percentage of emigration to the Ukraine, Western Europe and the USA." (UN OCHA May 2003)

"According to government as well as NGO figures, there are in Georgia today, some 280,000 internally displaced persons who have been uprooted as a result of armed conflict, out of a population of just 5 million. This displacement is actually the result of two separate armed conflicts in different regions of the country: in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia (also referred to as Tskhinvali region). The overwhelming majority of these internally displaced persons, some

266,000, are ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia, while the remainder were displaced by the conflict in South Ossetia.

In addition, the Government reports that some 20,000 persons were internally displaced as a result of natural disasters, in particular, floods, earthquake and landslides, which occurred in the Svanetia and Ajara regions between 1987 and 1989. Though little mention was made during the mission of this group of internally displaced persons, their plight was highlighted by the President and by the Minister for Refugees and Accommodation, who both called for international assistance in providing shelter assistance required to facilitate durable solutions." (UNHCHR 25 January 2001, paras. 11-12)

"It should be noted that figures for displacement associated with the Georgian-Osset conflict are estimates on account of the fact that there has never been an effective registration of the displaced. Today, estimates of the remaining internally displaced and refugee population remain vague, with conflicting figures offered by both sides. UNHCR estimates that there remain roughly 6,000 out of the 10,000 ethnic Georgian internally displaced persons in Georgia proper; 1,000 out of the 10,000 ethnic Osset internally displaced persons in South Ossetia; and 23,500 Osset refugees in North Ossetia and the North Caucasus." (UNHCHR 25 January 2001, para. 21)

"According to the records of the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) in November 1999, IDPs in Georgia are divided into approximately 49,570 households in private accommodation and 39,764 in collective centres (former sanatoria, hotels, tourist camps, hostels etc.). The total number of IDPs, according to the Ministry, is 272,000, with an average household size of just over 3,04 persons. However, according to the [IFRC] survey, 20 per cent of the IDPs addresses were non-existing or wrong. If we deduct 20 per cent households equally from both types of accommodation and apply the survey figures of average household size (3.38 persons per household in private accommodation, 3,51 in collective centres) the total number of IDP households would be approximately 40,000 in private accommodation and 32,000 in collective centres, a total of 245,700 persons. They are scattered throughout Georgia, with heavy concentrations, however, in the Tbilisi and Samegrelo-Imereti areas in western Georgia." (IFRC November 2000, p. 71)

"While precise figures are difficult to find, accounts claim that between 40,000 and 100,000 Ossetians from South Ossetia and Georgia proper fled there during the conflict. [*The lower figure is based on data from UNHCR (estimations as of 1998). According to UNHCR Tbilisi, 30,000 Ossetians from Georgia proper registered in North Ossetia as refugees, while 10,000 from South Ossetia became "de facto refugees" in North Ossetia. Crisis Group interview, August 2004. Officials of UNHCR Vladikavkaz consider that in 1995 there were some 55,000 persons in North Ossetia displaced by the Georgian--South Ossetian conflict. Crisis Group interview, October 2004. The 100,000 figure is used by North Ossetia officials (Crisis Group interview, October 2004) and is also quoted in Birch, "Ossetiya", op. cit., p. 505].*

Additionally, some 10,000 Georgians and persons of mixed ethnicity were displaced from South Ossetia to Georgia proper, and 5,000 internally displaced in South Ossetia.⁵⁰ The 1992 ceasefire was not followed by large-scale returns. In 2004 the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) found that "an overwhelming number of IDPs and returnees remain displaced...many if not most...reluctant to return to their places of origin". (ICG 26 November 2006, pp.5-6)

IDPs of concern to/assisted by UNHCR (based on UNHCR annual statistical reports)

31 December 2002	261,585 (including 144,839 women)
31 December 2001	264,221 (including 146,298 women)
31 December 2000	272,221

31 December 1999	278,500 (UNHCR also reports a total of 590 returns to places origin in 1999)
31 December 1998	277,000 (UNHCR also reports a total of 21,100 IDP resettled within the country in 1998)
31 December 1997	273,400
31 December 1996	272,359
31 December 1995	288,600 (including 150,000 IDPs assisted by UNHCR)
31 December 1994	280,000 (including 150,000 IDPs assisted by UNHCR) [Note 1]
31 December 1993	260,000 (including 70,000 IDPs assisted by UNHCR)

[Note 1: The number of internally displaced persons of concern to UNHCR (280,000) is based on a registration carried out by the Georgian State Committee for Refugees and Accommodation in mid-1994 as well as on an estimate of the unregistered population. The difference with the end-year statistics of 1993 reflects a more detailed registration of internally displaced persons rather than new displacements.]

Age groups:	0-4	5-17	18-59	60 +	Total
Total	9 410	63 337	15 2709	46 645	272 101
Female	4 524	31 957	85 595	28 525	150 601
Male	4 886	31 380	67 114	18 120	121 500

(UNHCR 26 January 2001)

Disaggregated data

About 44 percent of the IDPs live in collective centres (2004)

- No study exists that has examined the movement of IDPs between various living arrangements and the reasons for these movements
- Many IDPs who have purchase private accommodations for themselves reportedly refrain from registering their location for fear of losing IDP benefits
- Numbers of IDPs in collective centers has been growing

"As per official Government data, 262,000 persons (7% of the population) who were displaced from the two ethnically fuelled conflicts in South Ossetia (1989-1991) and Abkhazia (1992-1994), still reside in Georgia proper, unable to return to their places of origin. After more than 10 years of displacement, approximately 40 % of IDPs inhabit collective centres, only some of which were renovated several years ago to serve as temporary dwellings, while a majority of the remaining 60% continues to live in crowded conditions in host families. A limited number of IDPs received private shelter with donor assistance, but such approaches are costly and not widely applied." (UN OCHA November 2003, p. 12)

"Conflicts in Abkhazeti4 and South Ossetia, Georgia generated significant number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Georgia. First, IDPs came from South Ossetia in 1990/91 followed by the larger group from Abkhazia in 1992/93. According to the UNHCR statistics, currently there are 241 733 IDPs from Abkhazia and 11 631 from South Ossetia. IDPs represent approximately 5% of the Georgian population (UNHCR).

IDPs, upon displacement from their places of residences, were placed in one of three accommodations: 1) in collective centers (such as hostels, hotels, hospitals, school buildings, other state owned premises), 2) in host families (with relatives and friends), 3) in private accommodations by themselves (rented or bought an apartment/house). According to the IFRC (2000) as of November 1999 there were approximately 245 000 IDPs (or 71 467 IDP families), of which 55% lived in private accommodations [5]. *The [Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MoRA)] does not provide a breakdown on the percentage living with a host family or unhosted.* The slight minority, 45% of IDPs, live in approximately 1 540 collective centers throughout the country. According to IFRC, almost 70% of all IDP households reside in five locations:

- in (1) private and (2) collective accommodation in Tbilisi (32 per cent),
- in private accommodation in (3) urban and in (4) rural Samegrelo (27 per cent)
- in (5) collective centers in urban Imereti (10 per cent).

Discerning the exact number of IDPs and location is problematic. First, there are rumors that approximately 5% of persons eligible for IDP status have not registered with the Government of Georgia (GoG).[6] Secondly, there is anecdotal evidence that IDPs move from one of these three living arrangements to another, for example, leaving a host family and moving into a collective center or into a their own private accommodation. [7] *To our knowledge, no study exists that has examined the movement of IDPs between various living arrangements and the reasons for these movements.* Third, it is reported by local NGOs that many IDPs who have purchase private accommodations for themselves refrain from registering their location for fear of losing benefits."

[Footnote 5: IFRC found while conducting their survey a 20% error rate and, thus, these figures are 20% less than reported by the MoRA]

[Footnote 6: Meeting at UNAG Office 29 June 2002 with local NGOs]

[For example, IFRC in their 1999 study used the MoRA's lists and found 20% of the IDP addresses either wrong or nonexistent.] (Dershem & Gurgenedze November 2002, p. 9)

According to the Norwegian Refugee Council's office in Georgia, the number of IDPs in collective centers has been growing, reaching 44 per cent as of October 2004 (NRC 15 March 05).

Data of IDP population by shelter from the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation (as of January 2001) are available on website of the humanitarian community in Georgia, Assistance Georgia [Internet]

Survey highlights lack of consistent figures on IDPs (2002)

- Accurate statistics on numbers, locations and living arrangements of IDPs are not available
- There are few systematic surveys that allow for the assessment of differences in poverty or vulnerability between IDPs and the general population

"IDPs live in a wide variety of accommodations (collective centers, with host families, and by themselves in private accommodations), living arrangements (in collective centers with other relatives and previous friends and neighbors) and in different locations (regions and urban/rural settings). An IDP's accommodation, living arrangement and location can affect his or her economic situation and vulnerability. To begin to examine the differential effect(s) that accommodation, living arrangement and location has on an IDP requires having accurate, up-to-date, information on the numbers of IDPs in each of these various circumstances. However, **accurate and up-to-date statistics on the numbers, locations and living arrangements of IDPs is not available.** The government agency responsible for this information, the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, provides some statistical accounting of IDPs but the numbers are

not always consistent and data on types of accommodation, living arrangement and/or locations are very general.

To understand the relative difference of IDPs and the general population requires having accurate, up-to-date, information on the general population as well as IDPs. However, **there are few systematic, representative, and reoccurring surveys of the general population and IDPs of comparable data that will allow for the assessment of differences in rates of poverty or vulnerability between or among them.**

Moreover, even among the few systematic surveys and assessments of IDPs and the general population, **comparative findings are not easily found due to differences in sampling frames, definitions of concepts and terms, unit of analysis, implementation of fieldwork, respondent identification, and the design of questions.**" (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 4)

Demographic structure of the internally displaced population differs noticeably from the rest of the population (2000-2004)

- Households in the general population tend to be more multi-generational, according to a survey conducted by Save the Children in three region of western Georgia
- There is a larger proportion of younger persons and a smaller proportion of retired people among IDPs in collective centres than in the general population
- According to 2003 data, many IDP households have chosen not to bring children into their living conditions
- Single person households are more prevalent among IDPs than in the local population
- Birth of displaced children is reportedly be registered with delay
- The divorce rate among the displaced (1.8%) is much higher than in the general population (0.9%)

"Both the IFRC study and [Save the Children (SC)] surveys agree that there are a larger proportion of younger, 0-17 years of age and smaller proportion of retired people among IDPs living in collective centers than in the general population (26.2% vs. 24.2% and 13.3% vs. 18.0% respectively). [57] SC's surveys found an average age of 35.6 years for IDPs living in collective centers and 37.6 years for the general population.

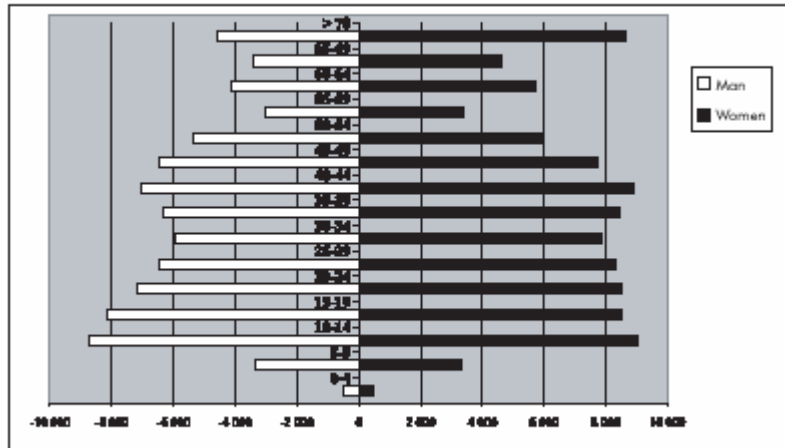
The size of households is only slightly smaller among IDPs living in collective centers than the local population (3.5 vs. 3.7 members), but lower among IDPs living in private accommodations (3.4 members). Single person households are more prevalent among IDPs living in private accommodations (16.4%) than among IDPs living in collective centers (15.9%) and the local population (12.9%)."

[Footnote 57: According to NGO representatives, a child born to IDP parent(s) is registered at the hospital to receive a birth certificate. The child's IDP registration occurs later. IDP benefits only start at the time of registration, which leaves a time (sometimes months) between birth and receipt of benefits. It has been reported, but not confirmed, that last year the government earned an income from the non-delivered allowances.] (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 30)

The census data once again confirmed alarming demographic trends among the IDP population in Georgia. As Figure 1 shows, the age pyramid for IDPs is considerably distorted and its basis is eroded. It means that many IDP households "...have chosen not to bring children into their living

conditions. The number of IDP children aged 5-9 is one-third of those aged 10-14, and those aged 0-4 are just 15 percent of those aged 5-9, a demographic free-fall. Unless drastic changes in demographic trends take place in the future, Georgia's IDPs will dwindle as a population group" [see Women and Children in Georgia. Situation Analysis 2003. UNICEF].

Figure 1. Age Structure of Internally Displaced Persons



Source: Census 2002; State Department of Statistics

Increased mortality (9.7 per 1000 population compared to 8.7 per 1,000 of general population in 1999) and decreased birth rate (3.5 per 1,000 population, compared to 10.17 per 1,000 population in general population)⁴, with twice as large divorce rates (1.8 compared to 0.9) [according to Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002], if accurate enough, paint a grim picture regarding the future demographic situation of the IDP population in Georgia. (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004, p7)

The International Federation of the Red Cross conducted a survey of the IDP population in 1999. IFRC published this survey in November 1999 under the title "Internally Displaced Persons: A Socio-Economic Survey".

Save the Children conducted a survey on an annual basis from 2000 to 2002. This survey was designed to provide comparable data of IDPs living in collective centres and local households in the regions of Samegrelo and Imereti, Western Georgia.

More detailed results of the SC survey are available on the website "AssistanceGeorgia" [Internet: <http://www.assistancegeorgia.org/ge/>]

Ratio of IDPs to the host of population and location (2003)

- Highest proportion of IDPs compared to host population is in Zugdidi
- From 2000 to 2003, there is a trend of IDPs from Abkhazia settled in other regions have moved to Tbilisi.
- The vast majority of IDPs from South Ossetia found refuge in Kartli and in Tbilisi
- About about 44% IDPs lived in collective centres as of 2003
- Highest number of IDPs residing in collective centres is in Tbilisi, where 85,000 IDPs were accomodated as of 2003

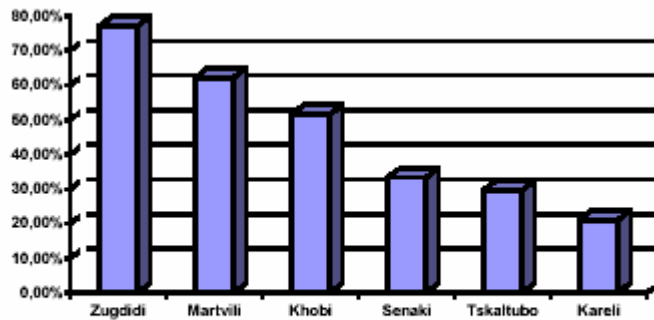


Fig. 1. Ratio of IDPs to the host population¹⁴

14: Data on the numbers of IDPs taken from “IDP Reference Book”, Tbilisi, 2003

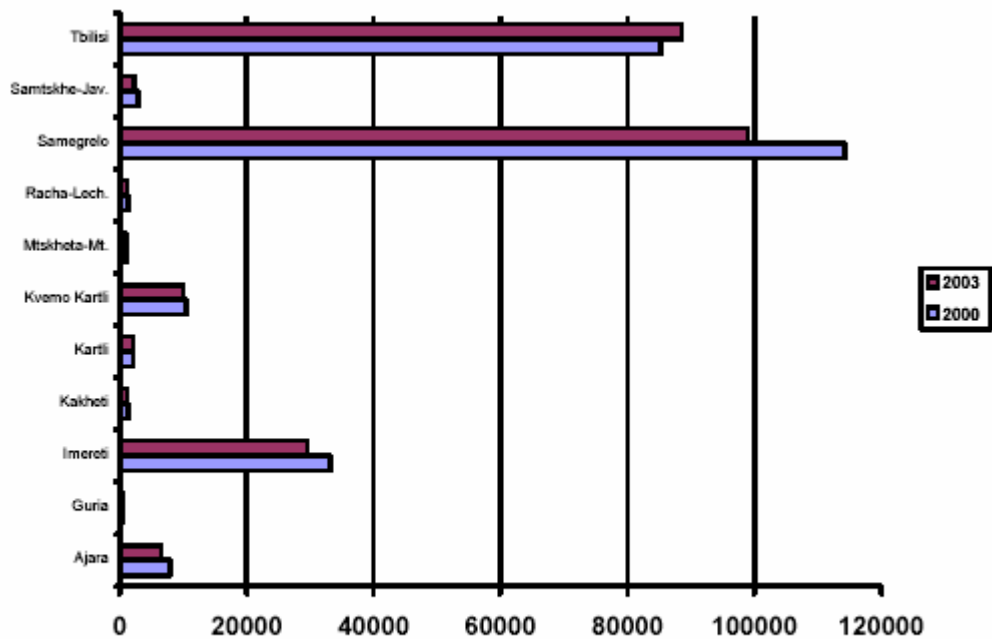


Fig 2. Location of IDPs from Abkhazia in 2000 and 2003

73.2% of IDPs live in urban areas. As can be seen from the above diagram, the settlements under the highest demographic pressure are the districts and towns of Samegrelo, especially Zugdidi, Martvili and Khobi, where IDPs comprise more than 50% of the population. As seen on Fig. 2, there is a trend of IDPs from Abkhazia moving from other regions to Tbilisi.

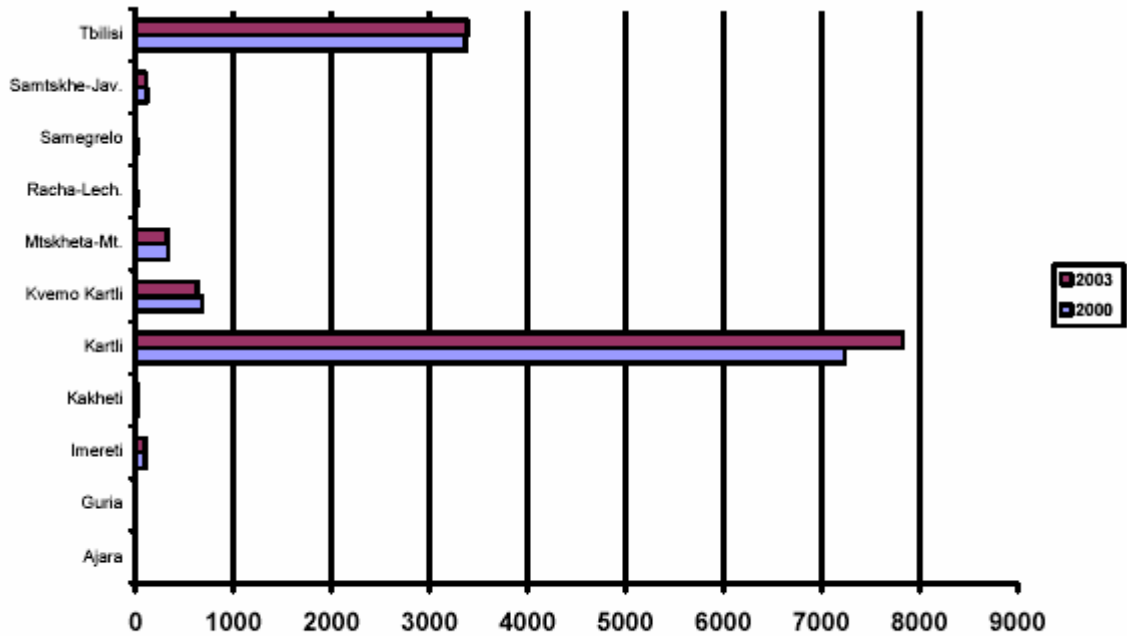


Fig. 3. Location of IDPs from Ossetia in 2000 and 2003

Although the share of IDPs living in private accommodation has declined, the majority, out of registered 82,000 IDP households, currently 56% live in private sector, while about 44% - in collective centres.

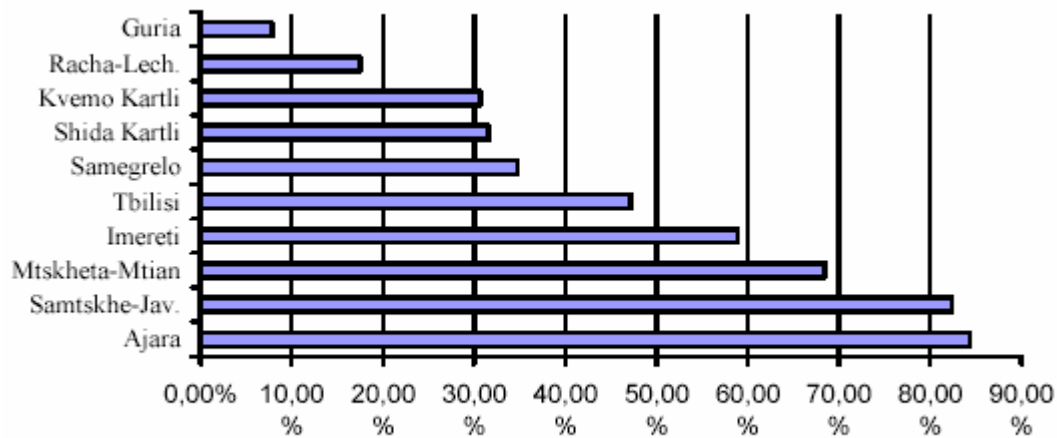


Fig 4. Percentage of IDPs living in collective centres across regions

[...]

shown on Fig 5, the highest relative share of IDPs living at collective centres are found in Ajara and Samtskhe-Javakheti, while the the highest concentration (number) of IDPs residing in collective centres is in Tbilisi, where are accommodated 85,000 IDPs or 26,750 families.

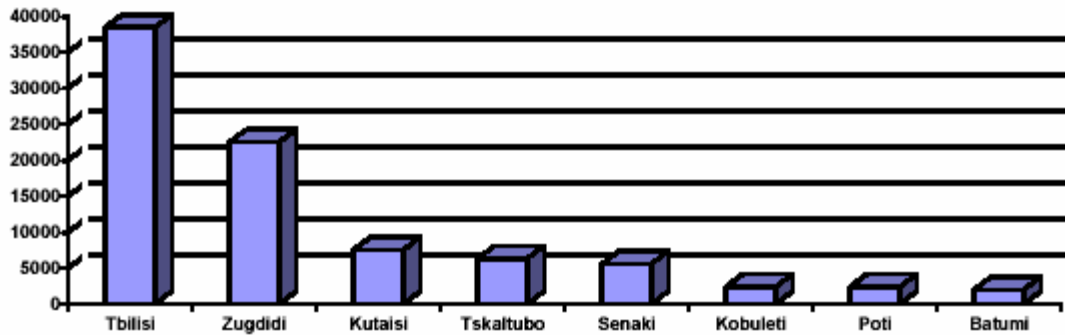


Fig. 5. Number of IDPs in collective centres across towns

(Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi, July 2004, pp16-17)

Number and ethnic origin of those who fled Abkhazia has been a highly controversial political issue between Abkhazia and Georgia (2000)

- The number of internally displaced willing to return to Abkhazia and to the Gali region varies from only 60,000 to some 130,000
- Authorities and other local institutions have no interest in reporting a decline in the number of IDPs under their care, as this would expose them to a reduction of funds allocated to them

"Like the number of victims of the conflict in Abkhazia (in addition to civilians killed - twice as many as participants in uniform? - some 8,000 Abkhazian soldiers and 13,000 Georgian soldiers or paramilitary fighters? Two committees are co-operating regularly on both sides to locate more than 1,000 missing persons, according to Mr Avtandil Ioseliani, Chairman of the relevant Georgian committee), the number and ethnic origin of those who have fled Abkhazia, have remained or have returned is a highly controversial political issue. According to Georgian estimates (cf., eg, UN doc. E/CN.4/1997/132, p. 34), the population of Abkhazia has declined (from 535,000 in 1992 to some 146,000 in 1997), in particular following the mass exodus in the course of the period of ethnic violence, by nearly 390,000 persons, in general of ethnic origin other than Abkhazian, including more than 200,000 Georgians. According to other figures (provided in part by the OSCE), the population in Abkhazia now stands at some 225,000 persons (315,000 according to the Abkhazian authorities!), with some 80 to 90,000 Abkhazians (in the past about 18% of the local population), or 35 to 40% of the total. In any case, the '300,000 persons displaced' from Abkhazia - and from South Ossetia! - who are said to have gone to the rest of Georgia seem very 'volatile' (some 100,000 of them are said to have settled there definitively or to have left for other countries?), so that the exact number (173,000 from Abkhazia and 10,000 from South Ossetia?) of those currently entitled to and having obtained the status of internally displaced person ('IDP') is not known (this was confirmed in the 1999 Report of the Georgian Ombudsman [...]). Nor does there seem to be a clear approximation on how many IDPs who would now like to return to Abkhazia and would be willing to settle in the Gali region (some 130,000 or only 60,000?). To cite an example, more than 50,000 IDPs were said to have returned de facto to Gali, but were driven out again following a renewed explosion of ethnic violence in May 1998; nevertheless, since then, some 40,000 persons (according to the estimates of several international observers) have again returned clandestinely and even resettled in Gali for all or at least part of the year. In short, as in the case of the Meskhetians [...], there is considerable uncertainty about the actual number of persons prepared to return to Gali immediately; yet

reliable data are essential, for example if it is decided to negotiate the return of IDPs from Abkhazia 'in stages'.

(ii) A rather convincing explanation for this disturbing lack of reliable official figures can be found by analysing more closely not only the political stakes, but also the consequences of granting IDP status: this status automatically entitles the person who has obtained it, by law at any rate, to a whole set of privileges and advantages as well as certain allowances in kind and subsidies, including 12 (or 18?) lari (about US\$ 6) in cash monthly (the minimum monthly wage in the civil services in Georgia is about US\$ 10). It is thus understandable that those judged eligible for this status have no interest in relinquishing it as long as they remain under Georgian jurisdiction, and both the civil services and non-official bodies have no interest either in reporting a decline in the number of IDPs under their care, because they would then face what would be a virtually automatic reduction in their funds, which are calculated according to the number of IDPs they are looking after. This is all the more valid in that the total 'funds allocated for refugees' in the national Budget is said to have increased considerably and even doubled this year (some 100 million lari?), and what was a policy of temporary assistance has now become a policy of economic and social development whose aim is to prevent the IDPs from increasingly becoming second class citizens during the long wait to be able to return home." (Council of Europe, Commissioner for Human Rights 13 July 2000, III - Refugees and displaced persons wishing to return to their place of origin)

Distribution of the displaced by type of accommodation (November 1999)

- 72 percent of the displaced live in urban areas
- 55 percent of the displaced live in private accommodation

Distribution of IDP households in Georgia, as of November 1999*

	K a k e t i	T b i l i s i	S h j i d a K a r t l i	K v e m o K a r t l i	S a m t k h e J a v a k h e t i	A j a r a	G u r i a	S a m e g r e l o	I m E r e t i	T o t a l N o.	T o t a l %
Tota l	3 6 2	22 ,9 78	2, 62 8	2, 67 1	92 8	2, 3 2 1	1 7 8	29, 51 5	9, 88 6	7 1, 4 6 7	100
Urba n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Priv ate acc om mod	5 5	13 ,8 62	61 1	1, 45 0	10 5	4 4 1	6 2	8,2 80	1, 17 7	2 6, 0 4 2	36

ation											
Communal centres	190	9,115	770	835	731	1,720	0	4,651	7,418	25,432	36
Total urban	246	22,978	1,382	2,285	836	2,661	62	12,931	8,595	51,474	72
Rural	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
Private accommodation	89	0	979	341	87	102	97	10,862	1,057	13,614	19
Communal centres	28	0	267	46	5	58	20	5,722	234	6,379	9
Total Rural	117	0	1,246	386	92	160	17	16,584	1,290	19,993	28

(Imereti contains Racha Lechkujmi and Kvemo Svaneti regions; Shida Karti contains Mtskheta Mtianeti)

* The figures of the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation less 20 per cent.

"Of the approximately 72,000 IDP households, 50,000, (over 70 per cent of the total) are concentrated in just five out of the possible 36 cells: namely in private and collective accommodation in Tbilisi (32 per cent), in private accommodation in urban and rural Samegrelo (27 per cent) and in collective centres in urban Imereti (10 per cent). However, the remaining, more scattered, groups are of considerable interest, if only because they tend to receive less public attention [...]." (IFRC November 2000, p. 71)

PATTERNS OF DISPLACEMENT

General pattern

Temporary displacement of children from South Ossetia (August 2004)

- Government of Georgia evacuated children and some mothers from South Ossetia

"In response to the escalation of situation in South Ossetia and continued shelling of Georgian villages that resulted in significant damage of living houses and basic infrastructure, the Government of Georgia decided to evacuate children and some mothers to various locations in Georgia. The evacuation started on 12 August [2004] from the ethnic Georgian villages of South Ossetia. Special "transit centre" was established in Tkviavi village to ensure preliminary registration and transportation of population. Government of Georgia took overall responsibility for handling the displacement process and for providing the displaced with accommodation, food, medical assistance and security. In light of these events, DMT Working Group on South Ossetia has been established comprised of OCHA, UNICEF, UNHCR, and WFP, and being led by UNHCR. On 17-18 August, the Group conducted needs assessments in the various locations where children and women from South Ossetia are being accommodated. The mission concluded that emergency assistance from the UN agencies in terms of food and non-food items is not needed for the time being. The UN agencies need to continue monitoring of the situation knowing that the majority of the children were sent out without their immediate family members. [...] As per Georgian Government, the children are expected to return by 20 September the latest, when the school season begins." (OCHA 31 August 2004)

For more information on this temporary relocation: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 20 August 2004, UNHCR/WFP Joint Assessment Missions in relation to recent relocation of women and children from South Ossetia [see link below]

Displacement patterns lead to a concentration of IDPs in a number of Georgian cities (1997-2005)

- Flight from Abkhazia generally chaotic causing breakup of villages
- IDPs concentrated to the towns of Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi
- Zugdidi (Georgia) has a large IDP population from the adjacent Gali district (Abkhazia) and Kutaisi (Georgia) has a high concentration from the Ochamchire district (Abkhazia)
- Forty to fifty percent of the IDP population lives in collective centers

"The displaced in Georgia are compactly settled in several senses. Not only have they almost all stayed in Georgia, there are particularly large IDP populations in Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi. In addition, within the districts where they have settled, they tend to live in clearly bounded spaces in close proximity to one another. This is particularly true for the 40-50 per cent of the IDP population living in collective centres, rather than in the private flats of friends or relatives. Collective centres include empty administrative buildings, schools, kindergartens, hotels, and tourist camps, among other buildings. In Zugdidi, just across the border from Abkhazia and

therefore the easiest safe place to reach, the proportion in such centres is higher, with about two-thirds of the displaced settled in collective centres.

Flight from Abkhazia was chaotic, and whole villages seldom made the journey and settled together. Instead, the IDP residents of most collective centres come from various districts of Abkhazia and were not acquainted before the war. Nevertheless, some patterns are clear. Zugdidi has a disproportionately large IDP population from the adjacent Gali district. And Kutaisi has a high concentration from Ochamchire district, primarily because transportation between the two places was made available during the war, and because the word went out among IDPs that Kutaisi, while farther away, had a lot of living space available.[...]

Thus the patterns of settlement of IDPs throughout Georgia work to create a relatively bounded and identifiable population."(Dale, 1997, sect.5.1)

"Almost 3 of every 4 IDPs live in an urban location, with approximately 2 of every 5 living in a collective center. Approximately 73% of IDPs live in urban areas. The three main urban areas, in rank order of number of IDPs, are Zugdidi, Tbilisi, and Kutaisi." (World Bank May 2005)

Displacement of Abkhaz population (1992-1999)

- Complicated and multidirectional displacement of Abkhazians took place within the province of Abkhazia
- In order to gain access to food-producing land, many families have left the economically devastated urban areas
- Many Abkhaz returned home after the war, but others entered a phase of more permanent dislocation, due to the destruction of housing and economic infrastructure.

"Unlike Georgians, Russians and Armenians, most Abkhaz did not leave the territory of Abkhazia. But Abkhaz experienced substantial internal displacement both during and after the war. As sources on all sides report, in Sukhumi the first days of the war were accompanied by looting and physical violence against the local population. While Abkhaz authorities retreated to Gudauta, Abkhaz who were not engaged infighting left Sukhumi for Gagra or Gudauta to the north for the duration of the war. Similarly, Abkhaz residents of villages to the south found themselves in the middle of confused criss-crossing front lines. Some also fled north, while others sought safety to the east in Tkvarcheli. But as the war progressed, Georgians effected a blockade against that mountainous city, and local residents as well as the newly displaced sought in turn to flee from Tkvarcheli. Indeed, it was the downing by Georgian forces in December 1992 of a Russian Mi-8 helicopter evacuating women and children from that city that raised the level of general malevolence in the war and catalyzed more concerted Russian military intervention on the Abkhaz side.

After the war ended, many Abkhaz returned home, but many others entered a phase of more permanent dislocation, due to the destruction of both living space and economic infrastructure. Some Georgian authorities claim that all of post-war Abkhazia is simply depopulated. This is true in some places, for example in industrial Tkvarcheli, whose prewar population of 22,000 has been reduced to about 8,000 due to the complete collapse of industry and communication and transportation networks. But in other cases the claims are exaggerated, for example Georgian Presidential Adviser Irakli Machavariani's statement that the present population of Ochamchire district is only about 3,000 people, when more than twice that number live in Ochamchire city alone.

Instead, postwar Abkhaz migration is complicated and multidirectional. Where homes in villages have been destroyed, Abkhaz have migrated either into the cities, or into former Georgian houses and flats in other villages. Even in villages with limited destruction, many youths have left their family homes to seek an income of some kind in Abkhaz cities or even in Russia, from where they send back remittances. Meanwhile, many other families have left economically devastated urban areas with no access to food-producing land, for the countryside. Thus many city dwellers have rapidly "ruralized". This pattern stands in sharp contrast, for example, to the displaced Azeris in Azerbaijan from Nagorno-Karabakh and the surrounding Armenian-occupied regions of Azerbaijan, two-thirds of whom were rural before displacement and two-thirds of whom now live in urban areas. On the other hand the pattern is similar to the choice faced by many Armenian refugees fleeing Azerbaijan. Given the devastation brought about by the earthquake in 1988 and the Soviet collapse, Armenia did not have the resources to resettle all of the hundreds of thousands of refugees in urban settings. Many faced a choice between accepting a new rural life and migrating further to some other country. [...]

The key characteristic of most postwar Abkhaz migration is its partial and unfinished nature. Most of the pragmatic solutions Abkhaz have found in order to survive in the postwar setting involve subsistence agriculture, not sustainable incomes, and temporarily occupied housing, not reconstruction." (Dale, 1997, sects.2.1-4.2)

PHYSICAL SECURITY & FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

General

Violence and threats of violence remain problem for IDPs who sporadically return to their original homes (2003)

Violence and threats of violence was one of the prime concerns as recalled by IDPs both prior to displacement and during the displacement process, and still remains a problem for those IDPs who sporadically return, or regularly shuttle, to their original homes in order to work on land. Violence, threat to life, looting, land mines⁴¹ and destruction of property are identified as principal threats in Gali region, and partly in South Ossetia. IDPs also identify the lack of investigation, punishment and trial of offenders as contributing to perpetuation of the problem.” (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003, p31).

Criminality remains high in South Ossetia (2003)

- Georgian and South Ossetian sides have strengthened their cooperation against criminality in South Ossetia
- However, criminality remains an acute problem in South Ossetia as a result of cross-border trade with Russia
- Law enforcement officers from both sides are suspected to be at times involved in criminal activities
- Security incidents and unproductive investigations have provoked dissatisfaction among the local population
- However, the security situation in general has been calm throughout 2002 and 2003, despite tensions with the Russian Federation in 2002
- The OSCE continues the collection of small arms and ammunition in the region

"The security situation, from a military point of view, remains in general calm and quiet. OSCE continued its monitoring of the JPKF in the Georgian-Ossetian zone of conflict, with an emphasis on transparency of their activities and co-operation among the sides. The JPKF monitors the ceasefire and also maintains a rapid reaction force, which has proved itself capable of responding quickly to threats to the peace and defusing tense situations in the past.

The Georgian and South Ossetian sides have over recent years achieved substantial agreements on joint action against criminality. A Joint Law Enforcement Coordination Body was formed in February 2000 with the JPKF, with participation of South Ossetian and local Georgian law enforcement authorities. In February 2002, the EU donated communication equipment and vehicles to the Joint Georgian-South Ossetian law enforcement unit, the 'Special Coordination Centre' (SCC), which is subordinated to the JCC. To address some of the shortcomings of the SCC, OSCE has urged the two sides to agree on concrete measures to improve the efficiency of the SCC for addressing the growing criminality in the region.

Criminality, nevertheless, remains an acute problem in South Ossetia, in part due to attempts to control the lucrative trade in 'transit' goods shipped between the Russian Federation and Georgia proper via South Ossetia. Robberies are common in the region, especially car thefts. Casualties are often suspected to be victims of 'business' disputes. Law enforcement officers from both sides are suspected to be at times involved in criminal activities. Furthermore, there have been cases of a kidnapping and assaults on officers in the zone of conflict. These incidents and unproductive investigations have provoked dissatisfaction among the local population. It has also become common that frustrated villagers block the major road for hours in protest against various events. There have been constant concerns among the international community that the present trend of rampant crime and series of incidents could incite ethnic tension and violence. The 'Falloy' market disputes are often of high importance in security matters. This is often combined with 'legal actions', for instance, 'escort' fees by the South Ossetian de facto authorities and 'Customs' fees by the Georgian authorities have caused further dissatisfaction among the population.

Although the security situation in general has been calm throughout 2002 and 2003, it has significantly deteriorated in mid-summer 2002, along with heightened tensions between Russian Federation and Georgia, which culminated in the Russian President's ultimatum to Georgia to take action against 'terrorists' or face Russian unilateral action. This was compounded with fear felt by the local authorities and population over hostile intentions by the Chechen boyevics who were allegedly seen in the vicinity of South Ossetian eastern 'border,' and the possibility of a Georgian 'anti-criminal' operation in the area. Although no major incidents related to those issues was recorded, these events resulted in some genuine concerns by the population for their safety as well as in partial mobilisation of South Ossetian military reserves called upon by local authorities. By late October 2002, the tension about Chechens was somewhat defused, and the South Ossetian de facto authorities were then more concerned over the 'anti-criminal' operation in South Ossetia (officially, Georgian authorities place this operation in 'Shida Kartli'). The mobilisation of troops in South Ossetia was retained for some time mainly due to the fear of Georgians using this operation as a pretext to take South Ossetia by force. By year's end, the tensions over the above issues abated, in parallel with positive developments in adjacent areas, which normally reflect on the situation in the zone of conflict. In recent months, heightened tensions in Georgia proper of late 2003 prompted local de facto authorities in South Ossetia to declare temporary 'State of Emergency', as they feared possible repercussions of the crisis in Georgia proper in South Ossetia. To date, however, there have been no indication of neither any serious deterioration or improvement of the existing situation in near future as regards to the new political management in Georgia proper.

In the framework of the conflict resolution mechanism, the OSCE Mission to Georgia has worked for enhancing the operational effectiveness of the Special Co-ordination Centre (SCC) in the zone of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. For this purpose, consultations were held between the Georgian and Ossetian sides, facilitated by the representatives from the Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU) of the OSCE and the OSCE Kosovo Police service School. OSCE has also continued with the implementation of the projects for the collection of small arms and ammunition of the zone of conflict - which commenced in 2000, for providing small-scale, community needs based assistance projects such as providing the most modern ultrasound equipment for children's clinic, arranging summer camps for vulnerable children from the conflict zone, small-scale various infrastructure rehabilitation works for the villages, etc. So far hundreds of small arms as well as munitions, grenades, landmines, and one 100mm gun have been collected. The OSCE is considering further plans to implement projects for the benefit of communities from the zone of conflict." (UN OCHA 15 January 2004)

Insecurity in Abkhazia: a concern for the safety of returnees (2003-2004)

- Violations of freedom of expression and insecurity in 2004
- The security situation was generally calm in 2002 and 2003
- The kidnapping of UNOMIG staff in June 2003 led to the suspension to UNOMIG patrols in the Kodori Valley
- In the Gali district, the level of violence has decreased in 2003 due to a moratorium on partisan activities
- Most criminal incidents are increasingly more of purely criminal rather than political nature
- Criminal activities typically increases during the hazelnut and mandarin seasons
- Insecurity in the Gali district continues to raise concerns for the safety of returnees and humanitarian aid workers
- UNOMIG increased its patrolling in the Gali district (October 2003)
- The UN has still not been able to establish a permanent human rights office in the Gali district

Development October 2003-December 2004

"There was a significant deterioration in the security environment in the Gali sector in early October, with the killing of 10 persons over an eight-day period. In the most serious incident, two Abkhaz militia personnel, one local woman and two of the perpetrators were killed on 5 October in an ambush near the Dikhazurga Abkhaz security post, east of Gali city close to the ceasefire line. In separate attacks, two men were killed on 3 October. On 9 October, one woman was killed during a robbery, and in addition, two dead bodies were found in Kokhora village, north of Gali city.

It will be recalled that, on 8 October 2003, the sides, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force signed in Gali a protocol under the terms of which both parties agreed to cooperate more closely with each other in the fight against crime and with UNOMIG to improve the prevailing security climate (see S/2003/1019, para. 10). The implementation of this protocol is monitored at the weekly quadripartite meetings. As a further step to improve security, UNOMIG increased its patrolling, with the redeployment to the Gali sector of six additional military observers from other parts of the mission area.

The security situation improved by mid-October, though there were further periods of instability. Six more killings were reported during the balance of the reporting period, including a murder on 17 October; the killing of one man on 3 November and of another one on 14 November; the killing of two men in separate incidents on 12 December; and, most recently, the murder of the mayor of Gagida, a village in the lower Gali district, on 20 December. Most of these incidents took place in locations near the ceasefire line. Figures for the overall reporting period included 16 killings in 10 separate incidents, 15 robberies, 3 shootings and 5 abductions. In addition, on 23 November, three persons were detained by the Abkhaz militia after an incident on 17 November, in which a CIS peacekeeping force vehicle was fired upon. They had all been released by 29 November. On 27 December, 25 local residents were temporarily detained by Abkhaz militia following the kidnapping of three Abkhaz guards on 25 December. The latter were freed unharmed on 28 December. Some villages organized self-protection units and/or employed security forces in the Gali sector remained on a heightened state of alert throughout the reporting period, initially in preparation for, and later as a result of, the Georgian parliamentary elections.

There was similar increase in the number of violent and criminal acts in the Zugdidi sector, though the number of killings was well below that recorded in the Gali sector: 6 killings in four separate incidents, 16 robberies and 3 shootings were recorded." (UN SC 14 January 2004, paras. 20-23)

"The human rights situation remained precarious, particularly in the Gali district. Monitoring by the United Nations Human Rights Office in Sukhumi of several murder and abduction cases in the Gali district confirmed that the rule of law remains too weak to ensure the protection of the basic human rights – to life, physical integrity and security – of its residents. The Human Rights Office also noted that many children in the Gali district still do not have the right to education in their mother tongue. The ability of the Human Rights Office to raise awareness of, and encourage adherence to, international human rights norms will remain limited until it is permitted to establish a full-time presence in the Gali district, as recommended by the November 2000 joint assessment mission (see S/2001/59, annex II)." (UN SC 14 January 2004, para. 27)

"Protracted uncertainty in Abkhazia, Georgia, was not conducive to fostering a climate of stability, rule of law and respect for human rights. Adoption by the de facto Abkhaz Parliament of the long-overdue "criminal code" and "criminal procedure code" was further delayed. Restrictions on independent media, including the suspension of printing of three Abkhaz independent newspapers for various periods of time and the tightening of de facto government control of electronic and print media, resulted in serious violations of freedom of expression. In the Gali district, weak law enforcement continued to contribute to numerous cases of extortion, murder, robbery and abduction, generating a feeling of insecurity among local residents. Cases of arbitrary arrest, prolonged detention and lack of access to legal counsel were also observed." (UNSC 17 January 2005, para.17)

About the role of guerilla groups operating in the Gali district, see also "[What did Georgia hope to gain from anti-smuggling operation?](#)", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 6 February 2004 [Internet]

2002- October 2003

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"In most of Abkhazia the security situation has generally been calm and stable throughout 2002 and 2003. However, a first major incident in recent years involving international community took place in June 2003. On 5 June 2003, four UNOMIG staff were kidnapped. The incident occurred when a joint UN Mission and CIS peace-keeping force were on a regular patrol in the upper Kodori valley, scene of previous clashes in the Georgia-Abkhazia conflict. The CIS soldiers were released shortly thereafter but the UN personnel, consisting of two military observers, a paramedic and a local interpreter were kept by unidentified armed group for almost a week. After various demands allegedly put forward by the kidnappers and negotiations by Georgian law enforcement bodies as well as official requests from the UN, hostages were released unharmed and brought to Tbilisi on June 10. All UNOMIG patrols to the area were suspended after the incident. This was the fourth time UNOMIG staff were kidnapped since the commencement of the Mission. Each time the kidnapping occurred in the same area and each time the hostages were released unharmed after negotiations. Another major incident during the UNOMIG's Mission was the downing of the UN helicopter in Kodori in October 2001, which killed all nine persons on board.

The two exceptions to a generally relatively quiet situation in Abkhazia are the Kodori Valley and Gali District, which are widely considered insecure areas for both the local population and

humanitarian agencies. A number of violent incidents, including some tragic ones, with criminal and possibly political motivations, continue to take place in Gali District. In 2003, the rise in criminality was also observed on Zugdidi side of the Inguri River. The latest reports of the Secretary General on the situation in Abkhazia acknowledged that the level of tension in Gali District has decreased in comparison with the same periods in previous years due to a moratorium on partisan activities. Figures concerning criminal actions are in general also lower, although 'cross-border' crime remains a serious problem, particularly in lower Gali. Criminal activities typically increased during the hazelnut and mandarin seasons. It has been noted of late that most criminal incidents are increasingly more of purely criminal rather than political nature.

In Gali District, criminality, including cases of robberies, shooting accidents, abductions, explosions, and sporadic paramilitary activities, continue to raise concerns about the safety of the growing returnee population that have already returned spontaneously, as well as the safety of humanitarian aid workers. Insecurity in the area also hampers visits, assessments, and possible additional support to the population of the area by international organisations. CISP KF and UNOMIG regularly conduct patrols in the Restricted Weapons Zone and the Security Zone to monitor the 1994 Moscow Agreement. CISP KF and UNOMIG have themselves been victims of criminality and/or partisan attacks, as have some NGOs. The Abkhaz de facto authorities have also been the target. On 11 March 2003, near the village of Zemo Bargebi in the Gali District, a gang of 4-5 men shot at a UNHCR truck. There were no casualties and it is assessed that the gang misidentified the vehicle for another that was possibly involved in smuggling scrap metal. A few days later, a private truck was attacked at the same location, with the driver killed and several passengers injured. On 16 April 2003, a HALO Trust soft skin vehicle was hijacked by four armed and masked men near the Sukhumi Airport. The vehicle was found abandoned in Sukhumi later the same day, along with the hijacked driver and passenger. However, reportedly the sum of US\$ 95,000 and other items were robbed.

The security concerns in Abkhazia were particularly raised in early April 2003, upon the resignation of the Cabinet of Ministers of the de facto authorities of Abkhazia, which coincided with the escape of 9 criminals from the detention centre in Sukhumi, all of them classified as 'dangerous', and 6 of whom had been sentenced to death. UNOMIG then imposed temporary movement restrictions. However, the tensions were gradually been reduced by end-April. By August 2003, the harvest season, including a traditional economic battle over lucrative hazelnuts business, compounded with the upcoming 10-year anniversary of the Abkhaz 'Independence/Victory Day' which falls on September 30, conspired to make the security situation more fragile again, including a possible threat to UN employees in view of global developments. As a preventive measure, UNOMIG imposed temporary security-related travel and movement regulations and restrictions for UNOMIG personnel, effective from 1 September - 15 October 2003." (UN OCHA 20 January 2004)

Mines in the Gali district: an obstacle to return (2002)

- Mines were used during the armed conflict in 1992-1993
- Homes, orchards and industrial estates are contaminated
- Incidents caused by mines continue to be reported

"In Abkhazia the mines were left over from the secessionist war with Georgia in 1992-93, which was characterised by front lines moving along the Black Sea coast from the Gumista River north of Sukhumi city to the Inguri River in the south.

Mines were laid in flat and fertile valleys to augment the natural obstacles of the rivers. Although the war is over, these mines are now an obstacle to the repatriation of over 300,000 displaced people.

Homes, agricultural land, orchards, and industrial estates lie deserted, contaminated by mines and UXO.

Abkhazia resembles the worst-affected areas of Bosnia, yet receives a fraction of the international aid deployed in the Balkans. The economy, which was based on light industry, tourism, citrus fruits, and vineyards, is shattered." (The HALO Trust, 2003)

"Landmines remained a threat, especially in the Gali sector, where two mine incidents took place, on 29 April and 6 May. In the 6 May incident, four people were killed and two injured. UNOMIG suspended its patrolling until the area was cleared by the CIS peacekeeping force." (UN SC 10 July 2002, para. 16)

For more information on land mines in Georgia and in Abkhazia, you can consult the [Landmine Monitor Report 2002 \[Internet\]](#).

SUBSISTENCE NEEDS

General

Change in economic benefits to IDPs (2006)

- Programme transferred from the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation to other Ministries has been delayed
- First stage of the programme will provide free healthcare and the second stage will provide cash assistance to the destitute households
- The former allowance system to IDPs will continue until the end of 2006, since as of May 2006, only 50,000 IDPs had submitted their applications to the new programme

“On 30 May 2006, a joint press-conference was organised by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) and State Agency of Employment and Social Assistance (SAESA) to brief the media on the current status of the "State Programme on Identification, Socio-Economic Assessment and Development of a Database of the most Destitute Households of Georgia" (the Programme). According to the Head of the SAESA, which is responsible for the implementation of the programme, distribution of cash assistance to the destitute households, scheduled to begin from 1 June 2006, is postponed according to the optimistic prognosis, until August, or the latest, September 2006. In other words, since the launching of cash distribution was postponed (due to various reasons given below), the Programme was split into two stages, the First Stage envisaging the provision of Health Insurance Package and the Second Stage, as initially planned, providing cash assistance to the destitute households.

Starting from 1 July 2006, households that applied for the Programme and whose "rating scores" is assessed by a Social Agent as 100,000 or below, will receive a "Healthcare Package" that includes free medical check up by a family doctor at medical ambulatory or regular bi-monthly home visits. Also, if advised by the family doctor, a patient can undertake free professional consultation with various physicians. The Package also includes: free diagnostic procedures such as blood tests, electric cardiographics, X-ray investigations, emergency medical service and emergency surgery, as well as planned surgeries of almost all types based on the medical prescription. It is expected that such service will significantly improve health status of the most vulnerable layers of society. It should be noted that part of those applicants, who are eligible for Healthcare Package, are still eligible for Cash assistance.

The Second Stage, i.e. cash assistance that was the initial concept of the "State Programme on Identification, Socio-Economic Assessment and Development of a Database of the most Destitute Households of Georgia" as already mentioned, is expected to start from 1 August or 1 September 2006. Number of reasons, including an enormous flow of applications close to the initial deadline (1 March), insufficient information distribution among IDP communities, who are also potential beneficiaries of the programme if their "rating score" makes them eligible, caused the delay in timely launching of the Programme. In addition, some potential beneficiaries were not able to obtain personal Identification Cards that are necessary for registration. The deadline for submission of applications has been prolonged until 15 July 2006.

Since the new Programme is needs-based and is supposed to replace the old category-based approach to social assistance, all destitute households/persons despite being defined as certain

category (persons with disabilities, IDPs, single pensioners) will be covered by the Programme. The Government initially planned to quit distribution of IDP monthly allowances (14 GEL) from 1 June 2006 when the new Programme was supposed to start, but due to the postponement of the launching and due to the low participation of IDPs in the registration process, it was decided to prolong allocation of IDP allowances till the end of 2006.

Meanwhile, 18 new Information Centres were opened near the collective settlements of IDP population in order to ensure that accurate information reaches them without further delay. So far, only 50,000 IDPs have submitted their applications to the programme. At the same time, the Government decided to maintain so-called "family allowances" (category-based assistance for the disabled persons, 1st category blinds, orphan children, single pensioners) until 31 December 2006, in order to ensure that no one is left without crucial aid. In addition, the State is going to provide electricity subsidies for certain amount of electricity fee to the part of the destitute households registered in the database through voucher system (details will be available soon).

The Programme is designed for 10 years and aims to identify and assist the most destitute layer of Georgian society. The Government of Georgia anticipates that by the end of this pilot programme, and in result of economic development and employment programmes extreme poverty will be eradicated.

Since 29 July 2005, the most destitute families in Georgia, the number of which is about 10% of total population (according to existing official data) can apply for assistance in 1,168 communication centres located throughout Georgia. So far, about 365,000 applications were received. Starting from October, Social Agents that were recruited and trained for this specific reason started verification of the economic status of the applicant households according to the developed methodology. Social Agents visit each family and conduct interviews, as well as assess the overall socio-economic conditions. Overall "welfare index" is based on the combination of multiple indicators and does not count on income level. Social Agents calculate so-called "rating-score" which is a combination of consumer index and needs index. Consumer index is a sum of the declared information about income and expenses, as well as information about estate and demographic status. It is calculated based on information about household members, living conditions, statement about expenses and income, economic conditions, etc. Needs index is a nominal amount of money that will assist the household in overcoming destitution and enable to live above the level of destitution.

For additional information, please contact State Agency for Employment and Social Assistance at: 144 Tsereteli Avenue, tel./fax: 69 55 13, e-mail: contact@saesa.gov.ge. The Agency operates a hotline 509-509 where interested individuals can get detailed information on related issues." (United Nations Country Team in Georgia 31 May 2006)

Vulnerable groups among IDPs are of great concern to UN Special Representative on the human rights of IDPs (2006)

- Little information is available about the more than half of IDPs in Georgia who have been accommodated with host families since their flight

"The living conditions of IDPs who have been accommodated in temporary collective shelters for many years, were of great concern to the Representative. Vulnerable groups among the displaced, such as elderly, traumatized and disabled persons, as well as female-headed households, are particularly affected.[...]

Little information is available about the more than half of IDPs in Georgia who have been accommodated with host families since their flight. Civil society representatives informed the Representative that living space for IDPs and their children in host families has often been extremely overcrowded for many years, which has led to further impoverishment, interpersonal tensions, and negative effects on the psychosocial development of children.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

Difficult living conditions for returnees to Gali, Abkhazia (2005)

“The situation in the Gali region is improving, but there remain many reasons for concern. Lack of access by the central government hinders efforts to support the population, who in addition, lack any official status there. The number of returnees is currently estimated to top c. 40,000, but there are also others who shuttle between Zugdidi and Gali on a seasonal basis to work their land plots and secure livelihood for their families. The socio-economic conditions remain difficult, mainly due to the inaccessibility of basic services.” (UN Country Team in Georgia 30 November 2005)

Georgia is an example of extended emergency in humanitarian terms (2004)

- While IDPs cannot as a group be considered as more vulnerable than other categories, the most vulnerable are often found in conflict areas and in areas of high concentration of IDPs

“Georgia today, almost a decade after its major clashes in the mid-1990s, still presents outstanding challenges from a humanitarian point of view. It continues to be overwhelmed by the economic consequences of the break-up of the former Soviet Union.

Upon the end of the civil war in Georgia, as of 1994, the international community started providing massive relief aid, in parallel with some development-oriented support. Since the mid-1990s, the international community has shifted away from primarily humanitarian aid into more transitional/developmental programmes, reflecting the changes in both society and the perceived priorities.

However, the purely humanitarian needs have persisted. Their scale has not been declining in recent years, and may actually be incrementally increasing. Thus, in humanitarian terms, Georgia is an example of an extended emergency.[...]

“The assistance situation in both regions [i.e. Abkhazia and South Ossetia] is not the critical emergency that it was in the period immediately following the two conflicts. Recently some international organisations have begun to reassess the qualifications of their beneficiaries, as more cash is finding its way into the local economy. However, existing humanitarian programmes are essential and some unmet basic needs of humanitarian concern remain.” (OCHA 19 November 2004)

“The issue of appropriate targeting and the lack of refined vulnerability criteria is still reported as an obstacle to organizations trying to direct limited resources to the most vulnerable. In addition, endemic corruption, coupled with people's general sense of entitlement, also complicate attempts to reach the most needy. However, the general trend shows that there is more understanding from the Government's side that proper and continuous targeting is a programme necessity, which is also manifested in positive policy action. In response to the fact that the official assistance categories often do not reflect reality, the respective aid organizations have defined their own criteria that better delineate the level of need among a given population. Georgia is

characterized by a prolonged period of unresolved conflicts, lack of durable solutions to the IDP issue, and a very limited number of returnees. Nonetheless, those most directly affected by the conflicts can no longer be considered, as an entire group, more vulnerable than other categories, even though in the conflict areas and areas of high concentration of IDPs a proportionally higher number of the most vulnerable are found to reside.” (OCHA 19 November 2004)

Health

Overall IDP health status is worse than the one of the general population (2002-2005)

- IDPs, primarily those living in collective centres, are more likely to be ill or have a chronic disease than the general population
- At the same time IDPs do enjoy better physical access to and availability of health services, but quality healthcare services are largely inaccessible to IDPs
- IDP morbidity rate exceeds the average indicators for the general population 2 - 2.5 times
- Some studies even suggest that a greater percentage of IDPs in collective centres receive medical care than the rest of the population

“Since January 2005, the State does not cover nonemergency medical interventions, such as chronic or post trauma psychosomatic diseases. Special clinics serving IDPs often lack modern and adequate medical equipment and other resources.” (UN Country Team in Georgia 30 November 2005)

“Quality healthcare services are largely inaccessible to IDPs, mainly because of the high costs involved. Moreover, IDPs are often unaware of those few benefits they are entitled to. The funding provided for healthcare policy holders has been only partial. The quality of medical treatment for IDPs is negatively influenced by the insufficient material-technical base of healthcare institutions for IDPs and lack of medicines. Based on information provided by the Abkhaz Ministry of Health in Exile, the IDP morbidity rate exceeds the average indicators for the general population 2 - 2.5 times. IDPs mainly suffer from diseases of the circulatory, respiratory, and digestive systems.” (OCHA 19 November 2004)

“Available evidence suggests that compared to the general population, the overall health status of IDPs is worse; with a higher share of IDP households that can't afford and consequently do not seek health care. When they do seek care, they pay more frequently and in higher amounts. IDPs may experience more obstacles in obtaining health care in higher level general (non IDP) health facilities. Publicly provided health benefits hardly match their health needs. IDPs generally have lower income and inferior living conditions exposing them to higher health risks and long term depreciation of health capital. In certain places throughout the country, IDPs feel stigmatized and marginalized from the local population, limiting their overall ability to address health related problems.

At the same time IDPs do enjoy better physical access to and availability of health services. In theory, IDPs are legally entitled to a wider package of publicly provided health care benefits and are able to use at least some of these benefits. A higher share of IDP households obtains health care free at the point of service. IDPs had considerable relief health assistance in the past and still enjoy some limited and occasional humanitarian health assistance opportunities at present. IDPs have developed strong social support networks amongst themselves and heavily rely on these networks while dealing with health related problems. Numerous gaps have been identified

in available valid data concerning the IDP health profile in Georgia. The need for further research was identified and selected policy recommendations were outlined. [...]

Apart from official data from MoHA, a number of original surveys and researches suggest that IDPs (particularly in collective centers) suffer more than local population at least from certain illnesses, including (i) psycho-neurological and cardiovascular disorders, (ii) infectious and parasitic diseases, and (iii) injuries and accidents." (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004).

"Most surveys report that **IDPs, primarily those living in collective centers, are more likely to be ill or have a chronic disease than the general population.** For example, in 2002, SC's survey found that 40.6% of IDPs families in collective centers had at least one member with an acute illness in the previous three months compared to 32.8% of families in the general population. As for chronic diseases, 33.1% of IDP families in collective centers had at least one member with a chronic disease compared to 18.4% of the families in the general population. When accounting for both illnesses and chronic diseases, a higher percentage of IDP families living in collective centers had both (55.4%) than in the general population (35.7%).

Several studies report that **IDPs have as many health care services available to them, and physical access to these medical services, as the general population.** That is, studies show that above 95% of IDPs living in collective centers have physical access to hospitals, obstetric clinics and polyclinics.

In SC's study in 2002, 80.3% of IDPs living in collective centers in west Georgia reported having medical expenses in the previous three months (Dec. 2001 to Feb. 2002) compared to 68.2% of households in the general population. Moreover, since households in the general population have, on average, a greater household income than IDPs **economic access to health care appears to be greater among the general population than IDPs living in collective centers.** However, some studies show that a greater percentage of IDPs living in collective centers receive free medical care than households in the general population. For example, in SC's survey in 2002, 26.4% of IDP households reported using medical services without payment compared to 15% of households in the general population." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 7-8)

IDPs are entitled by law to a series of free medical care (2004)

- According to clause 2 of Article 5 of the Law of Georgia on IDPs, the cost of medical treatment of vulnerable IDP at the medical institution shall be compensated by the state
- Since 1995, the State Health Program for Vulnerable carries special provisions for vulnerable IDPs and IDPs residing in Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti
- The number of IDPs eligible for these programs has increased from 120 thousand to 190 thousand as of January 2003
- IDPs theoretically are entitled to significant additional public benefits in health care, but in practice, their access to health services is still lower than the one of the rest of the population

"The concept of the Basic Benefit Package (BBP) was introduced. Through the State Health Programs (SHP), the state defined types of health services and entitled population groups to be financed through public sources. IDPs were identified as one of the vulnerable population groups to be targeted through the SHP. The legal framework for the introduction of targeted health care benefits for IDPs was set in clause 2 of Article 5 of the Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – the Persecuted: "cost of medical treatment of vulnerable IDP at the medical institution shall be compensated by the state according to the pre-determined procedure and within state

standards and tariffs". According to this clause, each year, the state budget law (budget allocations for MoLHSA, MoHA) and forthcoming normative acts (ministerial decrees of MoLHSA approving the annual SHP and the state medical standards and tariffs for medical services) define scope and volume of services to be covered from the central and local governmental budgets.

Since the introduction of the State Health Program, any public entitlements in health for the general population were also available for IDPs. E.g. IDP children from 0 to 3 years are targeted under the State Health Program for Children Aged 0 to 3 years; IDP pregnant women were entitled to prenatal care and delivery at the expense of the central government through the State Health Program for Safe Motherhood; IDPs requiring psychiatric care, renal dialysis, cardiac surgery, treatment of TB, diabetes were covered under their respective programs. IDPs also have access to limited outpatient care benefit that is financed through the State Rural Health Program (central budget) and municipal outpatient services programs financed by local budgets.

Since 1995, the State Health Program for Vulnerable (7.4 million GEL, or appr. 9% of total central government's health budget for 2004) carries special provisions for vulnerable IDPs and IDPs residing in Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti. Initially, vulnerable IDPs, for the purpose of the State Health Program for Vulnerable (SHPV) were defined according to the categories used for general population, which included single pensioners, orphans deprived of parents, single mothers, disabled and disabled war veterans. Also, the entire IDPs population residing in Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti (almost 100,000 persons) was considered vulnerable and covered under this program [Which may be logical, as considerable number of IDPs in Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti resides in collective centers; they have higher poverty and unemployment levels and are exposed to health care expenditures that are higher than elsewhere in Georgia]. The coverage of IDPs in this program has expanded over the years and since 2002, all IDP pensioners, students under the age 23, deprived of both parents, and all single-headed households are included. The number of IDPs eligible for these programs (now merged into a single program called the "State Health Program for the Populations' Inpatient Care") has increased from 120 thousand to 190 thousand as of January 1, 2003. These 190,000 IDPs have special State Insurance Policy cards that entitle them to a package of outpatient and inpatient care benefits. Up to 500 medical conditions requiring inpatient care are covered under this program. Limited dental care benefits (up to 40,000 GEL per year) were also provided to IDPs residing in Tbilisi under the State Program for Population Ambulatory Services. In addition, the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation has annual budget of 300,000 GEL for individual IDP assistance. A significant portion of these funds are used to cover medical care or related costs for IDPs based on a review of individual applications.

In other words, IDPs theoretically are entitled to significant additional public benefits in health care, above all, public benefits that are mandated for the general population. However, considering reports that more IDPs are unable to afford health care [...], it remains unclear how adequate these entitlements are, compared to the real health needs and poverty status of IDPs.

Moreover, IDPs, as the rest of the population never had access to full benefits mandated through the respective laws and regulations. The inability of the Georgian Government to significantly improve the mobilization of general public revenues¹ and the low priority on financing health in the public agenda² resulted in severe and continuous under-funding of the health sector for years. Diminishing public resources for health, the permanent default on obligations taken by the state and the resulting credibility gap between the state, providers and clients undermined the initial reform objectives of solidarity and equity in health. The under-funded and overstretched BBP – State Health Programs, failed to improve access and affordability of health services for the majority of the Georgian population. The complexity and lack of transparency in the BBP composition and health entitlements presented another barrier for obtaining publicly financed health services." (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004, pp29-30).

Field surveys reveal psychosocial trauma of displaced persons (2000-2003)

- There has been insufficient access to psychological counseling for IDPs
- 90 percent of the IDPs in collective center were over the threshold of depression in 2000
- Among IDPs living in collective centers, depression increased with age
- IDPs living in communal centres have been more exposed to depression than the rest of the local population
- Psychosocial trauma tend to increase with age and to affect primarily women and single heads of households
- Other surveys show that men have also been affected by displacement and have been less successful than women to adapt their new environment

“One of the most serious causes of IDP vulnerability is related to their state of mind, motivations and emotional conditions, which not only influence their life today, but to certain extent are forming their future, in particular related to their future return, as past behaviour of a person is the best predictor of his future conduct. Situation which led to the armed conflict, the conflict itself and the life conditions after the conflict all contributed to significant erosion of human capital through creation of dependency, passivity and depression that hinder social adaptability and economic self-reliance of the IDP population. Memories of exposure to violence and death, separation from beloved ones, condition of being uprooted, ambiguous identity, economic hardships, existence in a dilapidated environment and a decade of uncertainty led to a host of psychological problems in IDPs. If not attended, these problems will hinder the integration of IDPs in local communities, will block their economic activities and put under question the success of return to Abkhazia.

One more evident psychological problem of IDPs is linked to their conflicting sense of security and identity. On one hand, the feeling insecure in a new social and physical environment, losing cultural values and traditions, pushes IDPs to cling to their community, live close to one another in collective centres; while, on the other hand IDP identity evokes in them defensive reaction, and to be called an IDP is perceived by many as an offensive labelling aimed to marginalize them in the society. (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003, pp26-27)

“It should be emphasized that apart from scarce interventions, no comprehensive initiatives have been undertaken in the field of psychosocial rehabilitation of IDPs. IDPs, like all citizens of Georgia, are technically entitled to free psychiatric services, but these services envisage only in-patient treatment and do not include psychological counseling. Researches related to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder prove that with a decisive impact on their economic activity, IDPs suffer from depression and psychosomatic illnesses (e.g. alcoholism and winners) adversely impacted family structures. There have been insufficient structures to assist women who have experienced trauma and children with their secondary traumatization. Psychosocial problems, together with hard socio-economic conditions, were named as main motives compelling IDPs to increasingly migrate towards Tbilisi and from Georgia.” (UN OCHA November 2003, p. 14)

"Due to being displaced from their homes and livelihoods, and confronting high rates of unemployment, crowded living conditions, and decreasing hopes of returning back to their homes, most NGOs report that IDPs are showing signs of stress and depression.

In 2000, [Save the Children] used a standardized depression-scale instrument in a survey of IDPs living in collective centers in western Georgia. The same depression scale instrument was used in another survey of the general population in west Georgia in 2000.

The depression scale is from the Center for the Epidemiological Study of Depression (CES-D), and is thus called the CES-D scale. This scale is designed to detect psychological 'moods' associated with clinical depression in a general population. Respondents are asked how often they experience each of the eleven different symptoms during the previous week. A CES-D score of 16 or more is considered the threshold for symptoms of depression.

Using criteria of a score 16 or more on the CES-D Scale as showing symptoms of depression, 89.9% of the IDPs living in collective centers were over the threshold for depression compared to 65.4% of the general population. This finding corresponds with the health findings [...] that show higher rates of hypertension, neurosis and stomach ulcers in IDPs living in collective centers than the general population.

Most studies of depression find certain social groups with consistently higher levels of depression than others, such as women, divorced individuals, and widows. This finding was the case for both IDPs living in collective centers and the general population.

Also, most studies of depression find that younger adults and the elderly show higher symptoms of depression than middle-age people. This finding held true in the general population, however, it did not hold true for IDPs living in collective centers. Rather, among IDPs living in collective centers, depression increased with age." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 35-36)

"Various forms of psychosocial stress have long plagued Georgian internally displaced women and their families on a nearly epidemic scale. A 1995 Oxfam study rigorously examined 653 displaced women and children residing in collective centers in Tbilisi and other regions of Georgia. Its team of psychiatric specialists concluded that over 86 percent of adults suffered from posttraumatic stress disorder and its various resulting symptoms, including heart and cardiovascular diseases (21 percent), chronic migraines and long-lasting sleep disorders (51 percent), and severe depression (22 percent). Twenty-one percent of displaced women surveyed by USAID had been clinically diagnosed with a form of neurosis (Kharashvili 1995, 24–29; Zurikashvili 2000, 7).

Causes for psychosocial stress were both conflict- and postconflict-related. Substantial numbers of women surveyed by Oxfam were traumatized by the loss of their homes and property (91 percent), by bombings (82 per-cent), and by the loss of close family members during the conflict (34 percent), among many other factors. The continuing period of displacement, arduous living conditions, and deepening economic troubles has added to the stress disorders of people living in collective centers. In a 1997 examination of 219 internally displaced families, a Georgian nongovernmental organization (NGO), Foundation for the Development of Human Resources, concluded that conflict-related psychological and psychosomatic complaints among the internally displaced had decreased over the previous two years. Stress-related health problems and depression were now more attributable to factors related to the postdisplacement environment and the strains of everyday life. Many families increasingly believed themselves to be victimized, feeling ostracized and segregated by local populations unhappy with their continued presence and with the Georgian government's perceived lack of interest in their plight (FDHR 1997, 20-21; Kharashvili 1995, 24–29; Zurikashvili 2000, 7).

In addition to the heavy toll on the psychological and physical health of women, the trauma of displacement has also affected the psychological well-being of men in profound ways. Put simply, women have been much more successful at adapting to the difficult conditions and strains of every day life in the IDP community. As humanitarian aid has dwindled, many displaced women have worked tirelessly and relentlessly to provide desperately needed income and provisions for their families through petty street trade and other menial labor. Many men, meanwhile, have largely been unwilling to trade and to find other menial methods of generating income, instead

spending much time idle and loitering in housing centers. In a 1996 study of the internally displaced, the Foundation for the Development of Human Resources noted that men were much more fixed on re-turning to their past lives and were 'paralyzed' by the problems of the present day. Their lives were often characterized by escapism, by 'empty and routine time-passing,' and by a growing pattern of alcoholism. Any hope they had was held out for the 'magic rod' of outside help (FDHR 1996, 7).

Most displaced women interviewed by the CDIE team indicated that their husbands and other men were 'double traumatized' by the conflict and its aftermath. On the one hand, many displaced men felt personally responsible for losing the war and abandoning their homes and former lives, their families forced into exile and destitution simply through their inability to win the war. On the other hand, men have felt unable to fulfill their traditional role as leaders of their families. Worse, many were deeply ashamed that women had become more creative at finding alternative sources of income, however paltry, through trading and other ventures. Displaced men tended to shun income-generating donor programming such as microcredit out of this growing sense of shame. NGO and donor officials have indicated that up to three quarters of internally displaced persons participating in income-generating programming have been women. Not surprisingly, these same officials increasingly agreed that programs should concentrate on the problem of displaced men." (Buck September 2000, pp. 6-7)

Access to health care services is good despite low state funding (2000-2003)

- IDPs are often unaware of the few benefits they are entitled to with regard to access to healthcare
- As of January 2003, public health care policies have been issued to 190,000 IDPs (67 percent of the total IDP population)
- There have been many cases of IDPs contracting TB because of inadequate diet, housing, etc.
- IDP collective centres are often remote from inhabited areas, which makes visits to doctor difficult
- Total health expenditure fell from 4 percent of the GDP in 1991 to less than 1 percent in 1998
- There are 33 medical institutions for IDPs located on the entire Georgian territory, but other medical institutions are also available to IDPs

"Quality health service is largely inaccessible to IDPs because of the high costs involved. Moreover, IDPs are often unaware of the benefits they, as holders of IDP status or as part of the socially vulnerable community, are entitled to.

The State budget of 2003 has room for GEL 300,000 to provide vulnerable IDPs with a one-time allowance, for medicines or enable them to travel for the purpose of obtaining medical treatment if needed.

Since 1999, IDPs residing in Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti have been entitled to additional free medical service (costing GEL 300,000 and financed from the state budget). Furthermore, all IDP children under 14 are subject to the Children Medical Care Programme, which provides them with standard medical care. IDP women are entitled to the benefits as envisaged within the State Obstetrics Programme.

The Programme for Active Detection of Pathological Developments and Preventive Health Care is particularly important, as it allows IDPs to have a one-time medical examination.

The 2002 joint decree of the Ministry of Labour, Health Care and Social Welfare and the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation entitles certain groups of IDPs (all pensioners; single mothers and children dependent on them; children of 3-18; orphan students, deprived of both parents, under the age of 23, as well as all the IDPs resident in Samegrelo and Upper Svaneti) to the benefits of a state health care policy, which makes overnight medical care, basic medicines and part of in-patient treatment, if hospitalised, available to them free of charge. This practice is in force at the state medical institutions that have been contracted within the programme. As of January 1, 2003, the public health care policies have been issued to 190,000 IDPs (which is 67% of the total number of IDPs) residing across the country.

Many IDPs, as well as health-care workers have either no idea of the policies or have incomplete or inaccurate information. According to IDPs in Rustavi, it was only the cost of overnight care, which they did not have to pay when hospitalised.

Moreover, IDPs (e.g. in Tskaltubo) are not aware of the medical institutions where they can possibly get preferential medical treatment envisaged by the state health care policies.

IDPs have also had a problem with ambulances, which cost GEL 10-20, a fairly high price not only for IDPs but for locals as well. Due to the fact that telephone lines are inoperative at IDP collective centres, IDPs are often unable to call for an ambulance when they need to.

While the vaccination of children is free of charge all across Georgia, there are a number of cases when IDPs have been requested to pay GEL 1 - more than the cost of the syringe necessary for the vaccination of their children.

There have been many cases of IDPs contracting TB, because of inadequate diet, housing, etc. Often IDP collective centres are rather remote from inhabited areas, which make it impossible for them to visit a doctor due to the lack of money necessary for travel. Many IDPs are ill with either mental or neurological disorders (and consequently need daily medical treatment and specific medicines which are exceptionally expensive). Although they are supposed to be provided with necessary medicines free of charge, in reality they are not. Some of the collective centres are provided with medicines not in popular demand, while specific necessities of the IDPs often go unheeded.

There are special IDP polyclinics in some of the regions – in Tbilisi, Samegrelo, Imereti, Adjara - which operate under the Ministry of Health Care of Abkhazia. The polyclinics provide IDPs with free of charge medical service and medicines distributed by humanitarian aid organisations and the Ministry of Labour, Health Care and Social Welfare of Georgia.

The Social Insurance Fund of Georgia and Tbilisi Municipality provide for non-standard medical treatment necessary for IDPs, and make occasional arrangements for replenishing supplies of medicines at IDP medical institutions. The IDPs we have interviewed so far, however, underlined the necessity for the needs-based provision of medicines, since medicines provided to their polyclinics currently are not in popular demand." (UN OCHA June 2003, pp. 21-22)

"During the Soviet Period, health care was provided free of charge to all citizens. Every medical institution was financed from the state budget. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the transition to a market economy, private medical institutions started to emerge. IFRC reports that, 'total health expenditure fell from 4% of GDP in 1991 to less than 1% in 1998.' Some public medical institutions were also privatized, some still partly providing free medical care. Article 3.3 of the Georgian Constitution provides that, 'in the circumstances determined by law free medical care is provided.'

Apart from hospitals and other medical centers both local population and IDPs can be treated in, there are 33 medical institutions for IDPs located on the entire Georgian territory, including 10 medical points (poliklinika) and 11 ambulances where approximately 1000 IDP doctors and medical personal are employed.[62] In a SC study in west Georgia in 2000, virtually all IDPs living in collective centers reported that hospitals, obstetric clinics and polyclinics were available.[63] In addition, almost all (85.7%) mentioned that emergency services are also available."

[Footnote 62: Legitimate Structures of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic in Exile, Published in Tbilisi, 2000.]

[Footnote 63: Health Status and Health Care Services in Guria, Imereti and Samegrelo, by David Gzirishvili M.D., for Save the Children, August 2000.] (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 32)

See also "[Monitoring of Legal and Actual Status of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia](#)", a survey by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), 1999, section on healthcare [Internal link]

Deteriorating health situation in South Ossetia: (2002)

- Sanitary condition is very bad and there is an enormous need for medical supplies
- Sexually transmitted diseases and tuberculosis have been of concern to authorities and humanitarian agencies

"In September 2002, the Adventist Development Relief Agency (ADRA) continued the primary health care initiative programme for two more years. It first began in November 2000. The programme addresses some of the needs of the deteriorating health care system. Initial findings from ADRA's baseline survey indicate that the incidence of chronic thyroid diseases such as goiter is endemic, the sanitary situation is very bad, and there is a high level of ignorance amongst the local population concerning Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), particularly HIV/AIDS. In addition, the local authorities have expressed their concerns about the incidence of tuberculosis in the region. There is an enormous need for medical supplies (such as drugs and equipment to diagnose and treat TB and goiter), as well as rehabilitation of hospitals, which are now decrepit owing to lack of maintenance and war damage. ADRA plans to conduct further assessments in order to better assess and address the primary health care challenges in South Ossetia. DFID supported the translation into Ossetian and free distribution of the 'Mother's Calendar' which contains user-friendly guidelines for mother's to be and infant care." (UN OCHA 30 December 2002)

Field survey by Save the Children in western Georgia highlights health needs of the displaced (2000)

- SCF survey reveals that limited access to healthcare services during and after the war and poor living conditions have resulted in a slightly higher rate of physical limitations among displaced children

"On 2 June, Save the Children (SC) at the offices of the Institute of Polling and Marketing (IPM) presented an overview of selected differences between IDPs and general households in three regions of western Georgia (Guria, Imereti and Samegrelo). The presentation was based on a survey conducted in February 2000 by SC as part of the Georgia Assistance Initiative (GAI) -- a

programme funded by the US Agency for International Development (USAID)." (UN OCHA 10 June 2000)

"Health sector results show that IDPs are slightly more than twice as likely to have a physical disability as households in the general population. There appears to be a slight decrease in the frequency of respiratory and cardiovascular illnesses from 1996 to 2000." (UN OCHA 10 June 2000)

More detailed information from the GAI review can be found on the "Assistance Georgia" website [Internet: <http://www.assistancegeorgia.org.ge>]

Shelter and non-food items

Danish Refugee Council's Housing Assessment in Gali District of Abkhazia end 2005 (2006)

- Prior to this assessment, there was almost no information on the number of damaged houses in Gali district
- Assessment revealed that roughly 25% of all pre-war number of houses in Gali district have been damaged
- In addition, it was found that around 45% of the damaged houses were inhabited and in need of profound structural rehabilitation
- Many among the potential target group have already carried out some repairs of their temporary shelter, and have the capacity and determination to undertake rehabilitation works themselves
- However, emergency shelter repair will not be enough to contribute to the sustainability of the returns or to ensure dignified livelihood in the area

"A Housing Assessment project in Gali district was implemented by Danish Refugee Council (DRC) in autumn 2005 with financial assistance from the European Commission Humanitarian Aid department (ECHO). Prior to this assessment, there was almost no information on the number of damaged houses in Gai district. The objectives of the project included gathering information about the individual housing rehabilitation needs in Gali district, suggesting optimal models for shelter assistance activities and evaluating the overall costs of a likely rehabilitation intervention.

The Housing Assessment is set against the background of the armed conflict in Abkhazia. It is estimated that 79,000 persons have been displaced from the district as a result of the conflict and that during the last years around 45,000 persons have returned spontaneously to Gali district (including persons living there on a seasonal basis), many returning to destroyed pre-war homes without means to ensure adequate living conditions.

The Assessment was carried out in three steps: a technical damage assessment covering all settlements in Gali district, a complementary sample survey (conducted in 10 villages covering 150 households); and a beneficiary capacity assessment focusing on target population.

The Housing Assessment revealed that roughly 25% of all pre-war number of houses in Gali district have been damaged. In addition, it was found that around 45% of the damaged houses were inhabited and in need of profound structural rehabilitation of new builds.

Finally, the Housing Assessment has identified that the majority of category 0 (intact, or only doors and windows are missing), 1 (damages to windows and doors, roofing sheets and minor damages to outer and inner walls) and 2 (damages to windows, doors, roof structure and sheet and outer and inner walls) houses are connected to the electricity network, whereas there is a steady decline of this number for category 3 (no windows, doors and roof, damage to outer and inner walls), 4 (no windows, doors and roof, heavy damage to outer and inner walls), and 5 (house completely destroyed, part or no foundation left) houses. Furthermore, it was positively established that access to water is not considered an issue, as most households have their own wells or are connected to the main supply system.

Drawing on the information and data obtained from the beneficiary capacity assessment the report concluded that the returnee community in Gali district is capable and highly motivated to partake in rehabilitation of their damaged houses. Furthermore, the Housing Assessment establishes that many among the potential target group have already carried out some repairs of their temporary shelter, and they possess the capacity and determination to undertake rehabilitation works themselves.

DRC would like to underline that interventions with a long term perspective are needed in Gali. Emergency shelter repair will not be enough to contribute to the sustainability of the returns or to ensure dignified livelihood in the area.” (UN Country Team in Georgia 28 February 2006)

To view the assessment: Danish Refugee Council/ECHO, February 2006, Housing Assessment Gali District [link below]

Privatisation of hotels housing IDPs from Abkhazia (February 2005)

- Georgian authorities have offered 7,000 dollars to each group of displaced people sharing a hotel room a in Tbilisi and scheduled to move
- Since a single room is sometimes shared by several families, some families end up receiving considerably less
- Authorities have promised to find them a new home, in line with a 1993 law making it an obligation to provide IDPs from Abkhazia with free housing, but the government has gone back on its pledge to provide housing for all

“Nona Todua first lost her home 11 years ago, when she fled her native Abkhazia after the Black Sea region broke away from Georgia. Now, this Georgian refugee in Tbilisi is about to be made homeless again -- by Georgia.

The place she has been calling home for the past 11 years, a 12-square-meter (130-square-foot) hotel room with no kitchen which she shares with six other people, is anything but comfortable. But she has nowhere else to go to.

A year ago, Todua cheered the election of Georgia's young west-leaning President Mikhail Saakashvili, who had promised to reunite Abkhazia with the rest of Georgia.

But then, Saakashvili unveiled a large-scale privatization plan that includes the Tbilisi hotels housing refugees from Abkhazia, and Todua felt as though she had been stabbed in the back.

Georgian authorities have offered 7,000 dollars (5,350 euros) to each group of people sharing a hotel room and scheduled to move. But since a single room is sometimes shared by several families, some families end up receiving considerably less.

In that case, the authorities have promised to find them a new home, in line with a 1993 law making it an obligation to provide refugees from Abkhazia with free housing.

On the face of it, this looks like a good deal for all sides. The state takes hold of land which, once privatized, will bring it much needed money, and the refugees finally have a chance to acquire real, if modest, apartments.

But reality has proved to be quite different. A huge price hike in Tbilisi real estate has meant that refugee families lost considerable purchasing power. And the government has gone back on its pledge to provide housing for all.

And while 37-year-old Todua, her four-year-old daughter and her parents, are still waiting for an apartment, together with some fifteen other families living at Tbilisi's Adjara hotel, the authorities refuse to give them one.

Two weeks ago, the authorities cut off the gas and electricity to force the Adjara hotel families to leave. The hotel is now freezing cold, and has become infested with rats.

"This is a disgrace, we have been betrayed by our own government," said an incensed Todua.

But an official with the government commission in charge of refugees saw things quite differently.

"We did not promise them anything," Omar Abuladze told AFP.

"They saw they could make money with this, and now, they are doing all they can to get a little more," Abduladze added, echoing a feeling shared by many Georgians who became impoverished following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

[...]

Like Todua, other residents of the Adjara hotel feel totally let down. "We are being avoided like the plague. Is this really Saakashvili's Georgia?" said Lazi Maysaya, a former engineer, as he stood in an icy corridor.

The families expect the police to come and evict them anytime, although no law on evictions exists in Georgia.

If this happens, they know they will face a bleak prospect. Dali Djikia, a 56-year-old refugee who was evicted from Tbilisi's first privatized hotel six months ago, has still not found a new home. "I pity them," she said." (AFP 4 February 2005)

IDPs have same access to public utilities as the rest of the population (2002-2003)

- IDPs in collective centres are entitled financial support for utilities
- Due to the short supply of electricity, IDPs have to pay themselves for firewood, candles, and kerosene
- Most of collective centres are not properly connected to the water supply system
- However, IDPs living in collective centers receive almost equal amounts and quality of electricity and water as the general population
- Connection to the telephone network is also missing in collective centres

"In pursuance with *the Law on State Budget* (Chapter 2, Article 13) an IDP residing in a collective centre is entitled to utilities worth GEL 17,2 in Tbilisi and GEL 11,5 in the regions, of which GEL 1,5 is to cover communal utilities, with GEL 2 for paying staff at the centre and the remainder (GEL 13,7 in Tbilisi and GEL 8,0 in the regions) allotted for electricity.

Not unsurprisingly, IDPs in collective centres, for instance in Borjomi, have said that these sums are not enough, which is why they themselves have to make up for the difference in the cost thereof.

The situation is different in other regions (Samegrelo, Imereti, Bolnisi, Rustavi) where electricity is only supplied to IDPs either for a few hours a day or is not supplied at all. This is why IDPs have to pay for firewood, candles, and kerosene. IDPs in Bolnisi have said that the amount allotted by the government for electricity per person is more than they consume: when electricity supply is limited with four or even more people living in a room, families are unable to consume the electricity worth the amount allotted for the purpose. The same is true of Tskaltubo collective centres, which are only supplied with electricity two hours a day. The Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, however, pays Electricity Consumer Market GEL 8 per IDP. Veterans are entitled to 250kw/h to be paid for by the government and 50kw/h to be paid for by USAID. Pursuant to *the Law on Social Guarantees to Fighters for Territorial Integrity, Freedom and Independence, the Missing and those that Died of Battle Wounds*, the following family members are entitled to claim partial exemption from electricity payments: parents of any age group; a spouse that has not remarried; under-age children that are either at school or students; other disabled members of the family that were dependent on the deceased and receive a pension following his/her death.

IDPs in this category who reside in private accommodation must submit a certificate issued by the local Commissariat to their respective power supply company to be entitled to the exemption.

The situation with water supply is nothing less than dire. Water supply systems in most of collective centres are either completely out of order or the centres have been disconnected from the water-mains because of delays in payment for the service. IDPs are obliged to carry water from remote areas, and face a severe lack of clean drinking water, which in turn forces them to distil the water before it can be drunk.

Most of the collective centres visited by us are not furnished with telephone lines, which, if available, are often inoperative following delays in payment for the service, which makes calling an ambulance or fire-brigade for the occupants impossible." (UN OCHA June 2003, p. 19)

"Although the provision of social services, such as electricity and water is poor throughout Georgia, most surveys and assessments report that **IDPs living in collective centers receive almost equal amounts and quality of electricity and water as the general population**. For example, in SC's survey of collective centers in west Georgia in 2002, IDPs reported, on average, 7 hours a day of electricity during the winter months. In a nationwide survey by SC in 2002, the general population reported, on average, 9 hours of electricity a day in the winter months. As for potable water, in SC's study, when asked if accessing water was easy or difficult, 60.4% of IDPs in collective center reported that accessing water was easy compared to 76.6% of the general population. As for the amount of time water is available, IDPs reported, on average, 10 hours per day compared to 16 for the general population. When asked to evaluate the quality of the water, 79.1% of IDPs living in collective centers stated average to very good, compared to 82.1% of the general population with a similar evaluation." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 6-7)

IDPs in collective centres: substandard living conditions (2001-2004)

- Available data suggest that between 43 and 53 percent of IDPs live in collective centres
- Collective centres often do not meet minimum living standards for a lengthy period of time
- IDPs in collective centres report living space as their greatest difficulty
- Only 40% of IDPs in collective centres have access to an unshared toilet
- 70% of IDPs claim their collective center need major repairs

“While official statistics from the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation determine only two categories of shelter (private accommodation and collective centres) used by IDPs in Georgia, various experts have indicated that it is more adequate to distinguish at least several types of accommodation defined in functional terms, such as: collective centres (legally allocated in state-owned buildings of former hotels, hostels, schools, hospitals, etc); private housing owned by relatives/friends, living there for free together with a host family or independently; rented premises; purchased apartments or houses; and, illegal but as a rule tolerated forcible occupation (squatting) of abandoned apartments or houses, whether private or public. However, little data is available to reflect these differences.” (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003, p29).

“Poor sanitary conditions and inadequate hygienic standards of collective centers have been a major problem since the original displacement of IDPs, as most collective center buildings were not constructed with long-term accommodation in mind. Over the years, building conditions worsened due to a lack of maintenance and repairs. The IDPs experience severe problems with living space in these unsuitable quarters. Out of a total 1683 collective centers throughout the country, 70 percent need urgent repair, while almost all of them are unsafe from a public health perspective. IDPs live in crowded conditions wherein sewerage and water supply systems are dysfunctional. On average, IDPs have 7 to 9 sq. meters per person in collective centers compared to 18-30 sq. meters per person of the local population. Thirty-seven to forty percent of IDPs have unshared access to a toilet compared to 70-90 percent of the local population (SCF-2002 and IFRC-1999).” (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004, p27).

"Collective centers - There are several types of accommodations for IDPs in Georgia. While official statistics from the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation determine only two categories of shelter (private accommodation and collective centers), relevant reports on the issue provide more detailed classification. According to the available data, IDPs have been accommodated in one of the following types of premises: collective centers (former hotels, hostels, schools, hospitals, etc) owned by state; private housing owned by relatives/friends; rented apartments or houses; purchased apartments or houses; or occupation of abandoned apartment or houses.

According to the MoRA, as of September 2001, there are 125 216 (43%) of IDPs residing in collective centers. The percentage of IDPs residing in collective centers varies and, sometimes, contradictory findings are presented – there are more IDPs in collective centers than private accommodation. NRC reported that in 1995 53% lived in collective centers, while 37% lived with host families, and the remainder indicating other accommodation. IFRC suggests that after displacement government accommodated over 50% of all IDPs in collective centers (which is slightly lower than the MoRA figure of 57%). Thus, there is no reasonably accurate percentage, or trends, of IDPs living in collective centers as opposed to private housing.

While there is information available on communal centers and private accommodation, reports usually do not make difference between the latter one. Private accommodation usually implies

both host family and independent residency. More limited data is available on rented accommodation or occupation of abandoned buildings.

Since collective centers were constructed for different purposes, often they do not meet minimum living standards for a lengthy period of time. When asked by IFRC that was the worst problem in respect of housing, IDPs in collective centers identified living space as their greatest difficulty. IFRC reports an average of 8m² per person compared with 18m² for the local population. SC found 9m² per person in collective centers in west Georgia in 2002, compared with an average of 30m² for the general population nationally, 32m² for the general population in Imereti and Samegrelo, and 16m² for the general population in Tbilisi.

As for hygiene, IFRC reported that only 40% of IDPs had access to an unshared toilet compared to almost 70% of the general population; similar figures by SC, in 2002, were 37.6% for IDPs in collective centers compared almost 95% for the general population nationally.

The conditions of collective centers are not good, with those in rural areas considerably worse reports IFRC. In their study, they found few of the centers fully intact, and most had broken windows, leaking roofs and walls in disrepair. In SC survey of collective centers in west Georgia in 2002, on 5% of IDPs said that their collective center was in good condition, with 70.5% mentioning that their collective center need major repairs and fewer (24.1%) mentioning their collective center only needed minor repairs. When asked what major repairs were needed, most IDPs identified windows, the roof, and then the basic structure (plumbing, electricity and walls)." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 22-23)

See also

UN OCHA, *Study on IDP Rights, June 2003, section 3.6 on shelter (pp. 24-25) [Internet]*

More detailed information from the Save the Children's review can be found on the "Assistance Georgia" website [Internet: <http://www.assistancegeorgia.org.ge>].

See also "*Consolidated report on IDP settlement issue*", a report by the UN Association of Georgia (2000) [Internet]

Insufficient information on legal regime deters IDPs from purchasing property (2000-2002)

- Due to the fear of loosing their IDP status many either refrain from purchasing property or do is secretly
- IFRC reports that 30% of IDPs living in private accommodations own their own apartment or house
- Local NGOs believe that many of the IDPs that originally purchased housing have sold it, and moved to collective centers
- IFRC reports that IDPs living in private accommodation have approximately 16m² per person, which is twice as much as IDPs living in collective centers

"Private accommodations [...]

In the Soviet period, under a system of 'propiska' housing rights were regulated under the 1983 Housing Code, which did not provide right to ownership but rather tenancy. It did allow occupancy on an indefinite basis and allowed for inheritance by members of the household.

If a person was absent from the apartment for the period exceeding six months without a valid reason determined by the law, she or he could lose right to the property with a court order. At this point, the apartment could then be assigned to other person or family. There were eight valid reasons envisaged in the law, such as health condition, military service, employment outside the city/village, but displacement was not considered a valid reason for absence. Although Housing Code was abolished in 1995 and partly replaced by the new Civil Code of Georgia, the current law is not in force on territories of Abkhazeti and South Ossetia where the old Code is applied.

The new housing registration system in Georgia was primarily enacted for voting purposes. Thus, a person can simultaneously own several apartments or houses but is registered at only one location. An IDP may purchase an apartment or houses yet keep his or her registration at the temporary housing provided by the government (e.g., collective center) or offered by friends/relatives (host family or private accommodation). However, it has been reported by different NGO representatives that if IDPs were to purchase housing and property they would be required to register as permanent residents at that location, resulting in them losing their IDPs status and benefits.

IFRC reports that 30% of IDPs living in private accommodations own their own apartment or house, with 47.2% living in accommodations provided rent free from a private individual (31.3%) or the state (15.9%).^[41] But from these findings it is still unclear if the remaining 22.8% are renting their living space. **Thus, little, if any information is available on ownership of houses/apartments by IDPs and the legal ramifications to their repatriation status or benefits.** Local NGOs believe that many of the IDPs that originally purchased housing have sold it, and moved to collective centers, because they have exhausted their savings and their inability to earn a regular income. In general, all data indicate that compared to almost 95% of the general population owning their apartment or house, significantly fewer IDPs own their accommodations.^[42]

IFRC reports that IDPs living in private accommodation have approximately 16m² per person, which is twice as much as IDPs living in collective centers. Only a slightly higher percentage (45%) of IDPs living in private accommodations have access to an unshared toilet than IDPs living in collective centers (40%).

[Footnote 40: Rapid Assessment Shelter and Social Infrastructure in Guria, Imereti, and Samegrelo Regions of West Georgia, Ben Roohi for Save the Children, July 2000.]

[Footnote 41: In 1996, UNHCR reported that approximately 15% of IDPs from Abkhazeti had purchased houses (Assessment of the Shelter Sector for Refugees and IDPs in the Caucasus). In a study by SC that included a smaller number of IDPs living in private accommodations in 2002, of 111 IDP households living in private accommodations 55% reported owning their current apartment/house.]

[Footnote 42: According to the law, if an IDP purchases property and registers there s/he loses their IDP status, subsequently their cash benefits. NGOs report that although ownership of apartment/house does not imply registration at the given address, many IDPs were provided incorrect information. Due to the fear of losing their IDP status many either refrain from purchasing property or do so secretly (GYLA).] (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 24-25)

See also "[IDPs purchasing property do not lose their IDP status \(2003\)](#)" *[Internal link]*

IDPs leave host families and move to collective centres (1994-2003)

- Some reports indicate an increasing fatigue from host families
- There is no sufficient housing space to relocate IDPs who have to leave host families
- A small percentage of families in the general population are willing to host IDPs
- Host family fatigue increases with the duration of the IDPs stay, especially with non-relatives

"Majority of IDPs continue to demand effective services in support of social and economic activities that would enhance their livelihoods while displaced. The most prominent IDP demands are those for better housing, employment opportunities, or improved health and education services. A strong desire of majority of IDPs to move from the private sector to collective centres has long been obvious, as they either can no longer afford to pay rental or can no longer abuse host's hospitality. At the same time, approximately 70% of collective centres do not meet minimum living standards – roofs are leaking, windows are broken, water supply/sewage systems do not function, there is not access to safe potable water in majority of buildings, there are constant problems with electricity. The situation has been further deteriorated after the Tbilisi earthquake in April 2002." (UN OCHA November 2003, p. 13)

"Host families - IDPs living in private accommodations that do not own their apartment or house may be living with a host family. **(There is little data on the number of IDPs living with host families.)** Most surveys suggest that IDPs moved in with relatives.[43] The length of their stay is totally dependent on the willingness of the host families. Since displacement has, in many cases, gone on for almost 10 years some reports indicate an increasing fatigue by host families. [44] NRC reported that between 1994 and 1996 there was a movement of IDPs from private accommodations to collective centers due to the 'desire to stick together, have better access to humanitarian aid, and not to burden host families.' [45] NGO representatives, some of whom were personally approached by IDPs in search of alternative shelter, further support these results.

Several factors could be triggering departures from host families, such as the length of time, humanitarian assistance for host families being reduced, and the general economic status of the host family worsening. However, with the limited living space available in collective centers, accommodating new residents is difficult. **There is limited to no information on prevalence of this type of relocation and the outcomes.**

If there is a type of host family 'burn-out' factor then programs that would place IDPs with families on a temporary basis would appear to be ineffective. However, some data does suggest that it is not all host families that are facing burn-out. SC has reported some data that suggest two important findings: 1) that a small percentage of families in the general population are willing to host IDPs and 2) that a small percentage of former host families are willing to host IDPs again.

Specifically, a random household survey of 1450 households in the general population in west Georgia (Guria, Imereti and Samegrelo), 32.1% of rural households and 24.4% of urban households said they would be willing to host IDPs. When asked for how long, these rural households said, on average, 7 months and urban households said, on average, 5 months.

In this same household survey, 197 households had hosted IDPs previously (slightly more in rural areas). On average, these households have hosted IDPs for a little over 1 year. And, when asked if they would be willing to host an IDP family again, 62.5% answered yes. Finally, when asked how long they would be willing to host, former host families in rural areas answered, on average, 10 months and former host families in urban areas answered, on average, 8 months.

Thus, at least one-third of the general population in west Georgia is, at least theoretically, willing to host IDPs, which may quickly change if they were actually asked to do so. And, although it is a small number of the total number of host families, at least two-thirds of the 200 former host families would host IDPs again.

To reconcile the two versions of host-family burn-out and willingness to host, the answer may be in the amount of time a family must host IDPs. Even though there is little to no data, we would venture that host family burn-out occurs primarily among host families that accommodate IDPs for more than 2 years, and maybe even greater among host families accommodating non-relatives for more than 2 years. It may very well be these IDPs that have been highlighting host-family fatigue."

[Footnote 43: SC reports, that of the almost 200 former host families that were interviewed in 2000, 85.4% hosted relatives who were IDPs.

[Footnote 44: Specific groups and individuals mass exoduses and displaced persons, Report of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, Mr. Francis Deng, submitted pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/53, Profiles in displacement: Georgia, & Assessment of the Shelter Sector for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in the Caucasus, UNDHA, Complex Emergency Unit, Geneva, Switzerland, 1996 & GYLA).

[Footnote 45: While IDPs living in communal centers are protected from evictions under the Georgian legislation, there is no legal framework addressing the protection of those living with the host families.] (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 25-26)

Precarious housing conditions of the displaced (2000)

- Collective centres consist mainly of former hotels, sanatoriums and hospitals
- Only a small portion of the displaced persons have the financial means to establish themselves independently
- There have been reports of eviction of internally displaced persons from host families
- Displaced are fearful that moving to alternative, more comfortable accommodation would undermine their ultimate aim of return
- This apprehension could in part be attributed to outside influence

"As is often the case, in the initial period of displacement, large numbers of displaced people found emergency shelter in public buildings such as schools. Seven to nine years on, however, approximately 40 per cent of the displaced, numbering some 112,000 persons, remain in collective centres (defined as residences accommodating 10 or more internally displaced persons). Following efforts undertaken several years ago to move the displaced out of schools, with a view both to providing more suitable accommodation and to ending the disruption this created for the educational system, the collective centres in which the internally displaced currently reside consist mostly of former hotels, sanatoriums and hospitals. The Representative was informed of one case of 100 families living in a former factory. The mission visited collective centres in Tshkinvali (South Ossetia) and in Tskhaltubo and Ingiri, where internally displaced persons have been living for some seven to nine years.

Sixty per cent of internally displaced persons live in private accommodation. Though some internally displaced persons have the financial means to establish themselves independently, most of those in private accommodation are staying with host families, who frequently are relatives or former acquaintances. The continued hospitality of host families is noteworthy, especially given the difficult economic conditions facing the population of Georgia as a whole. This generosity, however, is beginning to show signs of strain: reportedly, the eviction of internally

displaced persons from host families is occurring. This suggests the need to ensure that host families receive support in shouldering the added burden of having taken internally displaced persons into their homes, several years ago now.

Although the mission did not visit internally displaced persons residing in private accommodation, where of course the conditions would vary depending on the situation of the host family, the prevailing view is that they are in a better situation than those in collective centres, where conditions are considered to be much worse. A survey comparing the shelter conditions of internally displaced persons in private accommodation versus those in collective centres was being undertaken in 2000.

A number of problems were common to the various collective centres visited by the mission. These problems largely stem from the fact that the buildings serving as collective centres were never designed for communal living. Even in hotels or sanatoriums, the rooms where entire families now live were intended for the temporary stay of one or two people. Conditions are cramped and overcrowded: on average, the general population has almost five times more living space than internally displaced persons living in collective centres. In hospitals, internally displaced families are crowded into empty rooms, surrounded by sick people in adjacent rooms.

In terms of structural conditions, a 1999 survey of 757 collective centres throughout Georgia, except Abkhazia and South Ossetia, classified approximately half of the buildings as being in very poor or poor condition and a third as being in need of minor repair. Roofing, sewerage and glazing were determined as being in urgent need of repair in order to winterize the shelters and contain disease. Electrical systems also were highlighted as a priority for repair. Water systems, not designed with a capacity for the number of people now using them, have been strained and also require repair. Former hotels housing the displaced have largely been gutted of their facilities and furniture.

Conditions in rural areas were reported to be even worse than in the towns and cities. The Representative was told of one case of 100 families living in a former gravel factory in very dusty conditions and with no windows. Furthermore, it was noted that this example was illustrative of conditions in outlying regions, to which, apparently, little attention and assistance had been devoted. (UNHCHR 25 January 2001, paras. 25-33)

**See also "Tbilisi struggles to house displaced Georgians", Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 24 July 2001 [[Internet](#)]*

Collective shelters in western Georgia need major repairs (2000)

- More than 85 percent of such people live in "collective" or public housing provided by the Georgian government
- Survey conducted by Save the Children in 2000 shows that the general population has on average almost 5 times more living space than the displaced living in collective centres

"While the Georgian conflicts themselves were relatively short in duration, the misery of internally displaced women and their families has only grown in the decade since the fighting largely ceased. Much of the distress can be attributed to the deteriorating living conditions endured by the vast majority of displaced persons. Today, more than 85 percent of such people live in 'collective' or public housing provided by the Georgian government, according to UNDP[*]. These collective centers consist of Soviet-era hotels, hospitals, schools, factories, and other buildings roughly converted into 'temporary' living centers.

Though conditions vary, most of the 3,600 collective centers throughout the country can barely be considered adequate housing. A 1995 Norwegian Refugee Council fact-finding mission pointed to the overcrowded nature of the centers, averaging 3.2 people per room; similarly, collective centers visited by the CDIE team averaged four persons to a room. Cooking spaces and toilets are usually shared, and sanitary conditions are often dismal. In one center visited by the CDIE team—a converted steel and cement storage facility near the city of Zugdidi—the plumbing system had broken down completely, causing the basement to be filled with open sewage. As a result, 82 families were crammed into windowless rooms on the two top floors desperate to avoid the stench. Unsurprisingly, environmentally based disease rates among the internally displaced have increased dramatically through the years, particularly cases of tuberculosis and hepatitis (Boutroue and Jones 1997, 15; NRC 1995; UNDP 1998, 18).

Gender roles were clearly delineated in prewar Georgian society; whereas men were traditional heads of the family, making the critical decisions involving family and livelihood matters, women ran the households. Put simply, women were in charge of maintaining family order, health, and welfare, with particular attention to their children. Since moving into collective centers, lack of space, decrepit living arrangements, growing rates of poverty have all made for particularly stressful times for displaced women. A 1997 survey by the Norwegian Refugee Council concluded that 51 percent of the IDP households consistently lacked adequate clothing, and 70 percent were without enough food. (UNDP 1998)"

[Footnote*: Immediately following the conflict, most internally displaced peoples lived in private housing, usually with 'host' families consisting of family members or friends. The Norwegian Refugee Council estimated that 84 percent of such people lived with host families and in private housing between 1991 and 1994. After 1995, however, many IDP families moved into public housing as the generosity of their host families began to wane and the likelihood of repatriation shrank to very low levels. In addition, almost all 'second- wave' Abkhazian internally displaced persons were housed in public shelters in 1998 (MacFarlane, Minear, and Shenfield 1996; Norwegian Refugee Council 1995).] (Buck September 2000, pp. 5-6)

More detailed information from the GAI review can be found on the "Assistance Georgia" website [Internet: <http://www.assistancegeorgia.org.ge>].

See also "Consolidated report on IDP settlement issue", a report by the UN Association of Georgia (2000) [Internet]

Food

Indicators show lower nutritional status of IDPs (1999-2004)

- There has been no generalizable nutritional survey of IDP children
- Available nutritional data suggest that malnutrition is higher among displaced population

"Two major nutritional problems may be identified in IDPs as well as in the rest of the Georgian population: (i) calories and protein malnutrition; and (ii) iodine deficiency.

There have been few surveys specifically assessing the nutritional status of IDPs, mainly due to the high cost and logistical problems associated with the necessary anthropometric measurements. Only two small surveys were carried out by the IFRC in West Georgia (Zugdidi and Jvari), involving up to 400 children in total." (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004).

"The nutritional status of children under 5 years of age is used as an indicator of nutritional problems in a population since they are undergoing rapid growth and tend to be the first affected by malnutrition.

Two indicators of malnutrition are generally used: acute and chronic. Acute malnutrition is general referred to as wasting, and chronic malnutrition is referred to as stunting.

A large-scale nutritional survey was conducted of children living in the general population in six regions of Georgia in 2000/2001 in response to the drought [Nutritional status of children less than 5 years of age in six drought-affected regions of Georgia: 2002-2001, National Center for Disease Control and Save the Children, 2002]. *However, to date, there has been no systematic, generalizable nutritional survey of IDP children.*

The only nutritional data available on IDP children is a small study conducted in 1999 by IFRC. This study reported a higher rate of acute malnutrition among IDP children (2.6%) than children from the general population (0.7%). The large-scale survey found 1% of children in the general population acutely malnourished. According to the World Health Organization, the international standard for low acute malnutrition is 5% or less.

Also, this study reported a higher rate of chronic malnutrition among IDP children (18.1%) than children from the general population (12.1%). The large-scale survey found 10% of children in the general population chronically malnourished. According to the World Health Organization, the international standard for low acute malnutrition is 20% or less.

As for adults, nutritional status is indicated by a body mass index (BMI). The 1999 IRRC study, using a BMI, found that 3% of adult IDPs and 4% of adults from the general population were underweight. Interestingly, 43% of adult IDPs and 34% of adults in the general population were overweight." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 35)

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

General

Disruption of education for returnees in Gali district of Abkhazia (2006)

“The Representative [UN Representative on the human rights of IDPs] was informed that Abkhaz de facto authorities, following an order from the Head of the de facto Department of Education in the Gali district in August 2005, have been attempting to restrict or eliminate the use of the Georgian language in public schools, and to enforce this policy with varying degrees of severity. The de facto authorities in Sukhumi told the Representative that this policy was not directed against the Georgian language per se, but aimed at preventing the use of Georgian-language school books which reportedly conveyed a distorted account of Georgian and Abkhaz history. The Representative was informed by other sources that the withdrawal of teaching material and, in some places, of Georgian-speaking teaching personnel, had led to a shortage of material and personnel in general, thus leading to an interruption of the regular functioning of local schools or impacting on the quality of education.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

Displaced children’s education is of lower quality than the one of the rest of the population (2004-2006)

- In effective education system is due to poor management and financing, deteriorated facilities, lack of training opportunities and school material
- Separated structures for IDP education strengthens isolation and exclusion of displaced children

According to NRC, many IDP schools are generally separated from mainstream schools and isolated. There is a high level of absenteeism and of illiteracy. Teachers have little opportunity for training and generally use outdated methods inherited from the Soviet system. IDP schools lack equipment and books, and are hosted in dilapidated buildings.

In the Gali region of Abkhazia, education is in Russian, despite the fact that school children are all ethnic Georgian (IDMC May 06)

“The main problems of the ineffective education system identified in the study are related to poor management and financing, deteriorated facilities, insufficient teaching and learning materials, lack of training opportunities for teachers, etc. The deficit of sufficient information on the ongoing changes in the education sector among IDP education stakeholders, results in their isolation from the education reform and negatively impacts their social integration. [...]

Segregation of education infrastructure: The most frequently named reasons to validate the existence of separate IDP kindergartens and schools are related to the economic, social and psychological state of IDP children. Some IDP parents believe that IDP teachers understand their children better and are more sensitive to their needs and problems; it also allows for the preservation of their cultural values and traditions. However, the need to retain the employment for IDP teachers from Abkhazia has obviously been the main motivation. Whatever the reasons, the segregated infrastructure strengthens isolation and exclusion of IDP youth. It apparently

hinders the integration of IDP youth within local communities and strengthens undesired labeling, marginalizing them in the society. Thus, if not properly addressed, segregated education will, in the long run, jeopardize the future of IDP youth. The segregated structure, strengthening IDPs' isolation and exclusion is inadmissible in any democratic society. If properly handled, it will make IDP youth more socially active and confident. Prosperous and successful youth is crucial for a lasting return when such an opportunity occurs.[...]

Funding

The funds allocated to IDP educational institutions can hardly cover salaries and are insufficient for any other expenses. A decrease of public resources resulted in the substantial growth of private spending on education, which has been a heavy burden for IDP families, especially as they do not receive any regular government subsidies to cover education related expenses (apart from exclusion from school fees).

Lack of Information

IDP teachers, school administrators and parents have limited access to information about ongoing changes in the education sector. As a result, they do not have good knowledge and an understanding of the ongoing processes in the education sector, which limits their involvement in the education reform.

Teachers

The salaries of IDP teachers are lower than the salaries of teachers in general schools, as IDP teachers were unable to participate in the attestation in 1996, which served as the basis for increasing teacher salaries in the country. The majority of IDP teachers have not undergone any training since displacement and have little access to information about ongoing education changes in the country.

Living conditions of IDP families

Education of IDP children is heavily influenced by social and economic conditions related to their IDP status. Children's education is a heavy material burden for most IDP families who seem to be experiencing stronger economic stratification, and often experience extremely poor quality of life. The majority of IDP children living in collective centers are deprived of minimum conditions necessary for study, which has a very unconstructive impact on their achievements.

Psychological state of IDP children

The symptoms of depression observed among IDP children have negative implications on their education. According to IDP teachers, psychological problems are observed even among children who have not been directly affected by the war, but have been influenced by the emotional state of their parents. IDP children, like their parents, often feel isolated and excluded, hate to be labeled "refugees" and experience difficulties with integrating in the broader communities.

Conditions at IDP schools and the quality of education received by IDP children

As a result of severe under-funding, the condition of educational facilities for IDPs is poor and continues to deteriorate; the majority of IDP kindergarten and school buildings are in urgent need of repair; there is a lack of necessary equipment, as well as teaching and learning materials. Frequently, IDP schools have lower educational standards and are less involved in the educational reforms taking place in the country.

Segregated infrastructure

Segregation of IDP educational infrastructure not only contributes to a different quality of education, but also strengthens the isolation and exclusion of IDP youth and is inadmissible in any democratic society. At the same time, the need for desegregation meets resistance from both teachers' communities who fear for their employment and are concerned with their

competitiveness in an integrated educational system and also from numerous bureaucratic cadre who may lose their *raison d'être* with change." (Matiashvili 2004, pp7-8)

Issue of language of education in Abkhazia: a decisive factor regarding return (2000-2005)

- Prohibition on instruction in Georgian in elementary education deters durable return of displaced ethnic Georgians
- Abkhaz authorities have shown readiness to reach compromise on the use of the Georgian language in Gali district schools
- Abkhaz and Georgian sides discussed language of instructions in schools in the Gali district (November 2002)
- UN and OSCE continued to report problems with the right of returnees to education in their own language in 2003
- The government of Georgia claims that the Abkhaz "authorities" have closed 122 Georgian schools in Abkhazia since 1992

"Another factor influencing the seasonal nature of return is the issue of education, in particular the language of instruction. According to the curriculum developed by the de facto Abkhaz 'Ministry of Education', elementary education, from grades one to five, is provided only in Russian. This is true even in what are designated as Georgian language (as opposed to Russian or mixed Russian/Georgian) schools. Though instruction is provided in the Georgian language from grade six onwards, the prohibition on instruction in Georgian in elementary education was pointed out as being a powerful deterrent to durable return of displaced ethnic Georgians as it threatens to impede the possibility for higher education elsewhere in Georgia. Though some language and cultural instruction is provided on the margins of the core material, Georgian history reportedly is not taught at all.

Principle 23 of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement affirms that the authorities concerned should ensure that internally displaced persons receive education which respects their cultural identity, language and religion. Furthermore, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes, in article 29.1 (c), that a child's education shall be directed, *inter alia*, to the development of 'his or her own cultural identity, language and values'. General reference was made to the content of these provisions when the Representative raised the issue of language of education policy with the de facto 'President' of Abkhazia. The Secretary-General subsequently reported to the Security Council that there have been 'signs that the Abkhaz authorities are taking a more pragmatic and flexible view on the use of the Georgian language in Gali district schools', pointing out that '[s]uch issues, relating to the education of children, are significant for the decision-making by displaced families considering a return to their former homes'." (UN CHR 25 January 2001, para. 80)

"The ethnic Georgian population in the Gali district continued to be denied the right to education in its native tongue, although elective courses in the Georgian language have recently been initiated in one of the Gali schools. The heads of the Education Departments of the two sides met on 11 March and 8 April to overcome the current obstacles. They agreed on a follow-up meeting, scheduled for 22 April for further discussions on this matter." (UN SC 19 April 2002, para. 27)

"On the ground, the Mission continued its efforts to promote dialogue between the sides within the framework of the Coordinating Council. On 14 November, Working Group III of the Council (on socio-economic issues) met in Sukhumi under the chairmanship of the United Nations Development Programme resident representative, with the assistance of the Georgian-Abkhaz

Bilateral Coordination Commission. The sides discussed the reinforcement of the Inguri riverbanks, restoration and protection of Abkhaz cultural monuments and the issue of the language of instruction in schools in the Gali district." (UNSC 13 January 2003, para. 6)

On visit to Georgia on 25-27 March 2003, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Mr. Rolf Ekéus "raised the issue of language of instruction in schools in the Gali district and discussed the situation of persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities in the region." (UN SC 9 April 2003, para. 6)

"The Human Rights Office [...] noted that many children in the Gali district still do not have the right to education in their mother tongue." (UN SC 14 January 2004, para. 27)

In January 2005, The UNSC called "in particular on the Abkhaz side to improve law enforcement involving the local population and to address the lack of instruction in their mother tongue for the ethnic Georgian population." (UNSC 28 January 2005)

As of March 2005, ethnic Georgians returning to Abkhazia could still not study in Georgian. "One of the problems is that most "returnee" teachers as well as their students are not fluent in Russian. They can speak only Georgian or Megrelian. But they are required to conduct lessons in Georgian." (NRC Georgia 15 March 2005)

"Some teachers still manage to teach Georgian language and history, but they work in clandestine circumstances and risk their lives every day." (Matiashvili 2004, p15)

The issue of teaching in native language in the Gali district schools has also been discussed by the working group III of the Coordinating Council in June 2002. See "Protocol of the meeting – Working Group III meeting held on 25 June 2002 in Tbilisi" [Internet]

"In spite of numerous statements made by the Abkhazian side that they are committed to a peaceful solution of the conflict and recognize the right of refugees and displaced persons to return, it flagrantly violates the human rights of even the small number of those who have returned to Abkhazia. The most painful blow for this population was the decision to ban the teaching of the Georgian language, literature and history.

In 1992/93 there were in Abkhazia 122 Georgian, 49 Abkhazian, 49 Armenian, 24 Russian and 62 mixed schools with 82,000 pupils, among them 35,000 Georgians.

In 1993 in the Gali region there were 58 Georgian schools, with 14,000 pupils and 1,800 qualified teachers. Last year there were 34 schools working with 4,514 pupils and 288 of them received Georgian certificates.

Today officially there is no single Georgian school. As to the mentioned 34 Georgian schools in the Gali district, they are working in clandestine circumstances and pupils and teachers are risking their lives every day."(UN CHR 21 October 1997)

Displaced children face difficult conditions at schools (2000-2004)

- IDP children are entitled to free education at state secondary schools and to certain benefits when it comes to higher education
- Rate of illiteracy has increased among IDP children, due to the fact that vulnerable displaced families cannot afford schooling costs (books, clothing)

- Fewer IDPs in collective centres are enrolled in higher educational institutions
- School enrollment of displaced children is high throughout the country but a high number of them actually do not visit schools, especially in the Zugdidi area
- Regions have different approaches, ranging from to the total integration of the displaced children into the regular system to the creation of a separate education system
- Experience in Zugdidi, where most displaced children visit separate schools run by displaced teachers, shows increasing isolation of the displaced children

"Pursuant to the "Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) - the Persecuted", IDP children are entitled to free education at secondary schools. However, there still are problems with access to education for IDPs. The problems remain the same: poor conditions and neglect/discrimination of IDP schools, since often they are in much worse conditions than regular schools; lack of new teaching methodology among IDP educators, especially in the regions; lack of school materials; growing illiteracy among IDP children/youth; unmotivated/unpaid teachers; and lack of information on education reform. The findings of the IDP Education Profile Review in Georgia indicate the need to integrate the IDP schools into the general educational system and for IDP schools to participate in educational reform." (OCHA 19 November 2004)

"Educational institutions and special structures for IDPs (i.e. Ministry of Education of the Abkhaz Government in Exile, IDP kindergartens, schools) are operating according to the Law of Georgia on Education and other relevant legislation." (Matiashvili 2004, p13)

"IFRC reports that between one fifth and one third of the IDPs, as well as the local population, have a university degree. About one third of the relevant age-group (18-24 years of age) is continuing their studies, most of them at university or technical college. Slightly fewer IDPs in collective centers were enrolled at this level than in the other two groups due to lack of finances.

Then again, it is well known, that in Georgia enrollment in higher educational institutions (e.g., universities or institutes) is competitive and thus very often 'connections' accompanied by "bribes" are the process to get admission. **IDPs, most likely, are at a disadvantage when it comes to having 'connections' and being able to offer 'bribes'"** (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 7)

"From general figures the most interesting is that of enrollment: from 1 to 3 percent of children do not belong to any school at all. They usually assist their parents in trade by selling cigarettes or roasted sunflower seeds. The only fact that most of IDP children are enrolled in primary and/or secondary education does not mean that they actually have access to them. Number of absentees grows with time reaching in some regions (especially Zugdidi region). This problem is, basically, caused by the fact of impossibility by IDP parents to provide educational materials and decent clothing for their children who are otherwise shy to attend classes. Some children do not go to school due to missed years."

Education process of IDP children in school is either together with locals or separately. Different regions have different approaches in this direction from having no separate school (in Gori region) through allowing only several (one in Ajara and just few in Imereti serving 10-12% of IDP children) to having mostly separate education system (in Samegrelo)." (UNA 2000)

"Overall, IDP schools can be divided into the following categories:

1. Schools operating in an emergency-like situation in Kodori Gorge and in the Gali district;
2. Schools, which moved with their whole staffs from the Gali district for the second time in 1998, currently operating in Zugdidi.

3. Schools in IDP collective centers (or near the collective centers) employing IDP teachers and staff from different parts of Abkhazia.” (Matiashvili 2004, p16)

See also "[Monitoring of Legal and Actual Status of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia](#)", section 2 on Education (pp. 10-14), report by the Georgian Young Lawyer Association [Internal link]

ISSUES OF SELF-RELIANCE AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Self-reliance

World Bank study finds no significant difference of employment between IDPs and general population (2005)

- Rates of employment among IDPs have stabilized to some degree because the governmental structures of Abkhazia, all of which are made up of IDPs, have remained intact and are considered “in exile”
- Study found that since 2002 the rate of employment for IDPs has been increasing and has surpassed the employment rate for the general population
- IDPs in urban areas are more likely to work in the public sector, while the general population tends to work in the private sector
- One outcome of many years of entitlements is that these programs may have developed disincentives for IDPs to seek employment, in that they prefer to live day-to-day until they are able to “return home.”
- IDPs living in collective centers do not possess the primary resource needed for subsistence agriculture, namely land
- Due to the destruction or fragmentation of their social capital since displacement, IDPs have limited access to information about scarce employment opportunities

“Since the first displacement of persons in 1991, it was not unusual to find higher rates of unemployment among IDPs than the general population (GP). However, as the number of years has increased since displacement (for some IDPs it has been almost 14 years), there is a growing concern that IDPs are still confronting higher rates of unemployment than the GP. Despite displacement, the rates of employment among IDPs has been stabilized to some degree because the governmental structures of Abkhazia, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs, all of which are made up of IDPs, have remained intact and are considered “in exile.” [...]

A sample of IDPs was drawn from the three main urban areas containing the largest number of IDPs living in collective centers and another comparative sample of the GP in the same urban areas. In addition, a random household sample of the general population (non-IDPs) was drawn in the same urban areas as a comparative group. The study found that the rates of employment between IDPs and the GP were found to be significantly different; however, this difference primarily occurred in a certain time period, between 1991 and 1999. Contributing factors to the higher unemployment rate among IDPs seems to be due to the confluence of several factors: a) displacement from their former employment; b) displacement to a collapsed economy with few employment opportunities; and c) years of uncertainty about the length of displacement created a distinctive to seek permanent employment.

Since 2002 the rate of employment for IDPs has been increasing and has surpassed the employment rate for the GP. This is most likely due to the socio-economic environment becoming more stabilized, the general employment situation starting to improve, and the need to economically to provide for a family. After many years of living away from their homes, assimilation has become tolerable and is starting to become a fact of life.[...]

Concerning monthly income from employment, the GP did have significantly higher rates of return than IDPs. However, IDPs and the GP who held identical higher paying positions (administrator/manager, skilled white collar, and skilled blue collar) in identical sectors (formal and informal) had similar wages and salaries. Thus, the significantly higher overall rates of return for the GP was primarily due to the GP having higher rates of employment in the private sphere whereas IDPs are predominately employed in the lower paying government sphere.[...]

In this study we did not detect any barriers or obstacles for IDPs in terms of obtaining employment, whether formal or informal, or the rate of returns from employment in the form of wages or salaries based on IDP status. Generally, IDPs have the same chance to be employed as the GP when having the same level of education, skills and experience. We did, however, find that IDPs have less quality of employment than GP (i.e., fewer hold higher status administrative/managerial positions).[...]

With few formal employment opportunities available, IDPs do not have the material resources needed for many informal income activities. The difficulty of finding formal employment opportunities has forced many Georgians to look for alternatives, leading to an increase in the number of self-employed workers. More than 78% of self-employed people are engaged in subsistence agricultural activities that allow them to avoid hunger but provide small -- if any -- monetary incomes. However, IDPs living in collective centers do not possess the primary resource needed for subsistence agriculture, namely land. In 1996, a law provided IDPs with the right to use allocated land, but IDPs were restricted from building any permanent structures. Such restrictions limit the ability of IDPs to compete in major informal economic activities, such as selling agricultural products or creating a small kiosk structure for retail trade and sales. Without collateral IDPs face many hurdles in obtaining even small credit for entrepreneurial activities. Due to displacement and unemployment, most IDPs do not have the material or financial resources to initiate even a small business.[...]

Conflict, displacement, cramped living conditions, provision of humanitarian assistance, poor job prospects as well as government entitlements have provided disincentives for IDPs to seek employment. Since displacement IDPs have received free-of-charge living quarters and humanitarian assistance in the form of food, clothing, and medicine. From the government, IDPs have been entitled to monthly stipends and benefits, such as subsidies for utilities and free transportation on public transport. There is anecdotal evidence that these programs have led to attitudes of dependency, passivity and depression among IDPs. One outcome of many years of entitlements is that these programs may have developed disincentives for IDPs to seek employment, in that they prefer to live day-to-day until they are able to "return home." Due to the destruction or fragmentation of their social capital since displacement, IDPs have limited access to information about scarce employment opportunities." (World Bank May 2005)

Access to income generating activities: higher unemployment among IDPs (2000-2004)

- Some studies approximately 80% to 90% of IDPs receiving a government benefit compared to 40% to 50% of the general population.
- But IDPs have a lower monthly household income, on average, than the general population
- There is little difference in the proportion of IDPs living in collective living in collective centers and general households that operate a business
- IDP household businesses generally involve petty trade whereas businesses of households in the general population involve sells of agricultural production

- Strong informal social support networks created by IDPs help them to cope with economic and other hardships

"Unemployment is a major problem throughout Georgia. However, most studies show that **the rate of unemployment is greater among IDPs** than the general population; ranging from rate of 40% of unemployment among IDPs living in collective centers vs. 20% for the general population. Some studies show, however, the difference in the rate of unemployment between the general population and IDPs decreases for those IDPs living in private accommodations, especially those living by themselves. Employment in Georgia is basically either through the public sector (although many of these jobs may be a case of 'underemployment' and represent the 'working poor') or the private sector, comprised mainly of small individual or household enterprises in the informal economy. Employment of IDPs, whether living in collective centers or not, in the public sector is lower than the general population simply because these positions were held by the general population prior to displacement. Moreover, over the last five years employment in the public sector has been declining, which would not allow for many IDPs to be hired.

As for the private sector, employment is based on an individual or household having some basic resources (land, animals, building) to exploit for income generation. Most surveys indicate that IDPs in collective centers have few resources, whereas IDPs in private accommodations may have some of these resources, which increase their opportunities for employment, compared to the general population.

Do you mean that unemployment in private accommodation for IDPs is very close to resident population or is it still significant but less than for collective centers? Do we think it is still a problem for private accommodation IDPs (or we don't know)? The operational difference is between focusing on collective centers because of characteristics of the population there or of the collective centers themselves vs. obstacles to IDPs employment in general.

Government transfers, although small and paid sporadically, are one source of needed cash income. IDPs receive an 'entitlement' based on their IDP status, as well as the old-age pension, veterans, multi-child, and other government benefits such as subsidized electricity. Studies show approximately 80% to 90% of IDPs receiving a government benefit compared to 40% to 50% of the general population.

Thus, **IDPs are at more likely than the general population to receive government benefits.** IDPs receive an entitlement based on their political and not economic status. In addition to this entitlement and other government benefits, IDPs receive a disproportionate amount of the humanitarian aid. Using an expenditure (consumption) based income, IFRC reported an average monthly income in 1999 of 114 GEL for IDPs living in collective centers, 146 GEL for IDPs living in private accommodations, and 152 GEL of the local population. Using an income-based approach, SC reported, in the winter of 2002, a median monthly household income in 2002 of 111 GEL for IDPs living in collective centers in west Georgia and 171 GEL for the local population nationwide. Thus, whether using an expenditure (consumption) or income-source based method, **IDPs have a lower monthly household income, on average, than the general population,** especially IDPs living in collective centers. For IDPs living in private accommodations the income gap with the general population is much less.

Another economic survival strategy throughout Georgia is to operate a household business. One of the few studies to do so is SC's. In their survey of IDPs living in collective centers, and another one of the general population in west Georgia in February 2002, 14.1% of IDPs living in collective centers operated a household business increasing slightly to 16.5% of the general population. This indicates that there may be **little difference in the proportion of IDPs living in collective centers and general households that operate a business.** The basic difference between them

is the type of household business; IDP household businesses generally involve petty trade whereas businesses of households in the general population involve sells of household agricultural production." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 5-6)

"Basic and urgent humanitarian needs still exist among some IDPs for food, health care and shelter. The allowance is sufficient to purchase 500g of bread daily, but it does not cover expenses for adequate caloric intake, let alone other household, hygiene and health needs. However, some IDPs with the physical or resource potential to meet their household needs are unable to do so because they cannot utilize this potential. These people require not only a response to their immediate needs, but also assistance to mobilize their own capacities to become self-sufficient. Such IDPs would also benefit from development activities aimed at improving their capacity to withstand risks (such as losing a job or poor harvests), prevent decapitalization, and falling into destitution again, requiring assistance to meet their basic needs." (UN OCHA 13 February 2003)

"IDPs are distinguished by very strong social support networks among themselves. Informal networks were reported to be particularly strong in IDPs residing in collective centers and in areas with apparent social isolation from local communities. These networks consist of friends, relatives, current and former neighbors from their original residences, are the most effective coping mechanisms for many IDP households to deal with economic and other hardships. These networks and labor migrants from IDP households and are the main sources of financial assistance to meet basic nutritional and health needs and in case of emergency." (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004)

The International Federation of the Red Cross conducted a survey of the IDP population in 1999. IFRC published this survey in November 1999 under the title "Internally Displaced Persons: A Socio-Economic Survey".

See also "[Cumulative Report on IDP employment issue](#)", UN Association of Georgia, 2000 [Internet]

See also a report from the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, "[Monitoring of Legal and Actual Status of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia](#)", 1999 [Internal link]

Current and past geographic locations of IDPs often impact on self-reliance opportunities (2003)

- Certain locations provide less opportunity than others, or/and may be characterised by more tensions with local population
- Place of origin of IDPs can have impact on access to resources, social networks and capital

Geographic specificities are relevant for designing IDP-related policies from two different perspectives. One of these is related to the location and type of the domicile of an IDP household. Certain locations indeed provide less opportunity than others, or/and may be characterised by more tensions with local population. One of such examples is Jvari in Samegrelo, a former settlement of construction workers for Enguri dam. There is no arable land, no employment or petty trade opportunity, and very scarce local resources, in addition to very difficult living conditions and poor social services. Especially important are the cases when the presence of IDPs have caused general deterioration of the quality of life in the area, either through excessive numbers of IDPs, or as a result of occupying for their accommodation main productive assets, as in the conspicuous cases of Tsqaltubo and Borjomi, where IDP presence have caused

economic stagnation and degradation of infrastructure, and also certain tension among the host population.

Another important link to geography is related to the place of origin of IDPs, as this has impact on access to resources (such as land plots in Gali region and rural South Ossetia), but also on social networks and capitals. Depending on where the Abkhazian IDPs have originated from, they may occupy different accommodation locations, enjoy different levels of political leverage, or have connection on one or another market niches. So, e.g. IDPs from Gagra district were the first to arrive to Tbilisi, and in many cases they had better conditions for adaptation and better housing. IDPs from Gali, especially those who currently live in the neighbouring zone and shuttle to work on their plots in the conflict region, are prone to insecurity. Relatively recent IDPs of Ossetian ethnicity from Pankisi Gorge have mostly moved to Tskhinvali (as have previously Ossetian IDPs from outside South Ossetia), not under the jurisdiction of the central government, and hence live in totally different conditions. As noted above, in general IDPs from South Ossetia and Abkhazia, although entitled to same rights and benefits, receive different share of public attention and in general their conditions differ strongly." (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003, p31).

Many barriers to the agricultural sustainability of the displaced population (2000-2003)

- IDPs, especially those living in collective centres, have little access to land to produce their own food
- There is also a lack productive inputs, such as equipment and livestock
- The needs are more acute for IDPs in collective centres located in urban areas
- Under Georgian Law, an internally displaced person is not entitled to own land without losing the status of internally displaced person and the benefits that it entails
- 1996 Law on Internally Displaced Persons provides for the allocation of land plots to the displaced for temporary use
- Internally displaced persons have pointed to problems of corruption

"With the collapse of the economy and the high rate of unemployment since independence, most households in Georgia rely on subsistence agriculture for cash income as well as food security. Most surveys find the IDPs, especially those living in collective centers, have little access to land in which to produce food, or potentially, a surplus to sell. In general, IDPs living in collective centers are 3½ times less likely to have access to land than the local population, and 2 times less than IDPs living in private accommodations. And, for the few IDPs that report having access to land, it is generally quite small; approximately 400m² on average reported by IFRC, which is 3 times less than the amount of land used by IDPs living in private accommodations and 6 times less than the local residents. Thus, **access to land is one of the primary disparities between IDPs and the general population.** However, this may not be as relevant for IDPs living in private accommodations by themselves or with host families. In addition, little is known about the proportion of IDPs who seek access to land but are unsuccessful, and for those who were successful, how it was accomplished.

As for IDPs living in collective centers in urban areas, urban agriculture is not a new phenomena and in transitional economies is quite prominent. Although the number is not known, some IDPs classified as living in urban areas actually live in peri-urban areas that potentially available land. Thus, access to small plots of land is an important strategy for basic household food security and income generation.

Although land is one of the most important inputs in subsistence household agriculture other productive inputs are also needed to produce food and a surplus, such as equipment and livestock. The IFRC and SC's surveys found that IDPs living in collective centers were 2 times less likely to own poultry than IDPs living in private accommodations and 4 times less likely to own poultry than local residents. A similar gap was found for the ownership of livestock, especially pigs and cows. IFRC and SC's surveys found that IDPs living in collective centers were 2 times less likely to own pigs than IDPs living in private accommodations, and 3 times less likely to own pigs than the local residents. As for another important livestock, IDPs were 3 times less likely to own cows than IDPs living in private accommodations, and 5 times less likely to own cows than the local residents.

As for equipment, cars can transport supplies to the field and products to market, tractors can prepare land, and sprayers can protect produce in the field. IDPs living in collective centers are 2 times less likely to own a car than IDPs living in private accommodations and 6 times less likely than local residents. For tractors and sprayers, local residents are 2 times more likely to own them than IDPs living in collective centers or private accommodations. Thus, most studies report that **IDPs have substantially fewer productive assets than the general population**. Again, this situation applies mostly to IDPs living in collective centers, and especially to those living in urban areas." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 5-6)

"As regards to exercising IDP economic rights, it is worth noting that although the basic law regulating IDP rights exempts IDPs from taxes on agricultural lands for temporary use, IDPs fail to enjoy the right, as the exemption provided by the law on the displaced is not envisaged by the Georgian Tax Code. Therefore, it is recommended to amend the Tax Code so as to unambiguously inform IDPs and the relevant structures on the above-mentioned exemption." (UN OCHA September 2003, p. 3)

The International Federation of the Red Cross conducted a survey of the IDP population in 1999. IFRC published this survey in November 1999 under the title "Internally Displaced Persons: A Socio-Economic Survey".

Save the Children conducted a survey on an annual basis from 2000 to 2002. This survey was designed to provide comparable data of IDPs living in collective centres and local households in the regions of Samegrelo and Imereti, Western Georgia.

"According to Law on IDPs, IDPs should be provided with plots of land and they should have the right of temporary users in these plots. This is obligation of local authorities. During questioning cases have been discovered when IDPs directly pointed on corruption: while requesting the plot of land if they did not pay "extra expenses" they either did not receive land (because limited land fund), or received it but of such a poor quality and so far from places of their settlement, that there was no sense in using the land. Besides the general responsibility of providing lands to IDPs, there is no program designed for assistance during cultivation of land. While it is impossible to cultivate the land without necessary equipment." (GYLA 1999, pp. 19-20)

Poor economic situation in South Ossetia hampers large-scale return of the displaced (2000-2002)

- The situation of the displaced, returnees and the local population is extremely difficult
- Returnees stay only in their houses during the cultivating season and go back to Georgia proper during the winter months
- Displaced persons of working age remain in Georgia proper or North Ossetia, where economic and employment opportunities are comparatively better

- There is a need to support the general economic development of the region

"Though the number of returns to South Ossetia is [...] much greater than to Georgia proper, it must be said that, for many returnees to South Ossetia, return is only semi-permanent. As an indication of the semi-permanent nature of return, it was estimated that about 50 per cent of rehabilitated houses in the region are unoccupied for a significant part of the year, usually during the winter months outside of the cultivating season and when the weather is warmer in other parts of Georgia. The poor economic situation in the region relative to that in Georgia proper and North Ossetia is the primary factor for this seasonal population movement. In general, and certainly with respect to those who remain permanently, most of the returnees coming from outside of South Ossetia are pensioners and elderly persons, whereas displaced persons of working age remain in Georgia proper or North Ossetia, where economic and employment opportunities, though still limited, are comparatively better (it was suggested that the living standard in South Ossetia is about half of what it is elsewhere in Georgia). UNHCR has observed that more sustainable return has occurred since it began providing returnees with agricultural inputs.

There is also a need to support the general economic development of the region. Though Tskhinvali was said to have previously been an industrial centre, there was little evidence of this as a result of the destruction of infrastructure and industry that had resulted from the war." (UNCHR 25 January 2001, paras. 102-103)

Situation of unaccompanied children and elderly IDPs (1999)

- Orphan IDPs often taken care of by relatives
- Old people are attended in communal IDP shelters

"Children without persons accompanying - there are orphan children but they have persons to take care of them. Grand parents or relatives are taking care of them. The refugees socium has found mechanisms of additional protection. This is visible especially in respect of children. There are no vagrants among refugee children almost. No cases of giving away children for adoption, all the children are living with their relations and neighbors.

The same could be said about old people. They are under protection at the centers of mass living of refugees. They are in a very poor situation being aided by strangers for such a long period of time.

"(The Horizonti Foundation, 29 January 1999, sect.9)

Public participation

IDPs lobby for their rights (2006)

With the support of the Danish Refugee Council, some collective centres in the city of Kutaisi have chosen a representative who is registered as a "lobbyist", in accordance with Georgian legislation which gives registered people the privilege to have access to parliament structures. Chosen representatives collect IDPs requests from collective centres and then advocates for IDPs' rights to the Parliament. The main issue is the privatization of collective centres. (IDMC May 2006)

Reform of election code restored IDPs' voting rights (2002-2004)

- IDPs could exercise their right to be elected in the November 2003 parliamentary elections
- Parliamentary elections were held again in March 2004, as the results of the Nov 2003 election were nullified
- Only 35 percent IDPs voted nationwide in March 2004 elections
- Electoral code was amended in 2002 and in 2003 to guarantee IDPs' voting rights
- The reason to discriminate against IDPs' political and civil rights were political

"The participation of IDPs in public life is also constrained. Until recently, IDPs have been limited in their constitutional right to elect local representatives. Violations of other political and civil rights of IDPs, signs of social isolation and "stigma" attached to the IDP status had been reported in numerous publications and have been reconfirmed through the FGDs [Focus Group Discussions] (Zoidze & Djibuti, 2004).

Discrimination against IDPs

"IFRC reported in 1999 that IDPs participated as fully as local residents in those elections in which they were entitled to vote, for President and Parliament. However, IDPs were not allowed to participate in elections for local councils, which requires permanent residential status.." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 36)

"The reasons for this restriction were not legal, but political. First, it was feared that if the displaced persons were to have a stake in the political processes in the areas where they resided, this would encourage their local integration and they would consequently lose the impetus to return to the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia (currently outside the Government's control). However, there is no objective reason why displaced persons should not be able to vote for the representative of the area in which they reside, and without in any way relinquishing their right to freedom of movement and right to return. Second, the concern has been raised that in a number of districts displaced persons outnumber the local population and could therefore unduly determine the outcome - an argument which runs counter to the principles of democracy. Those in favor of restricting voting rights also contended that internally displaced persons from Abkhazia already have political representation in parliament, through the deputies of the Abkhaz Government-in-Exile. These representatives, however, were last elected in 1990. In keeping with the right to political participation, internally displaced persons should be able to exercise and renew their rights to political participation on a regular basis. Moreover, according to the Georgian Constitution, international treaties ratified by Georgia take precedence over domestic law." (Deng 10 June 2003)

Amendment to electoral code in 2001 and 2002 to address discrimination

"In August 2001, the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Organic Law on the Unified Election Code of Georgia, which removed the earlier restrictions on IDP voting in local elections. IDPs could henceforth participate in local elections according to their current place of residence.[...]

Further amendments to the Unified Electoral Code made in August 2003 introduced provisions enabling IDPs to vote not only in the proportional component but also the majoritarian components of parliamentary elections. In other words, IDPs could now vote for the member of Parliament representing the district in which they currently were residing. The mandates of the Parliamentary deputies from Abkhazia would nonetheless continue to be extended.

The revised Unified Election Code of Georgia affirms, in Article 5, the right of every Georgian citizen 18 years of age and older to vote in all local, Presidential and Parliamentary elections. Article 9 regarding the registration of voters contains a number of special provisions to enable IDPs to realize this right. In general, voter's data is to be entered in the general list of voters according to the place of his/her residence. In the case of IDPs, however, the law specifies that IDPs "shall be entered in the general list of voters at their actual place of residence", for which the place of "temporary residence shall be indicated". This provision means that IDPs no longer need to change their place of permanent residence and give up their IDP status in order to vote in their current places of "temporary" residence. As in local elections, IDPs' names are included in the general list of voters based on the data on IDPs provided by the Ministry of Refugees. On election day, and on the basis of the voter list, each voter is to be issued a ballot paper after they submit certain documentation; the new Election Code specifies that an IDP Certificate counts among the accepted pieces of documentation. Furthermore, the revised Code affirms the right of every citizen to be elected as a member of Parliament and representative of local government, without any apparent restriction, for example changing permanent registration, which would impede this right for IDPs." (Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement 5 November 2004, pp37-38)

"IDP communities and civil society were particularly active in pressing for a review of national electoral legislation and for ensuring that this process included attention to the concerns over IDP voting rights." (Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement 5 November 2004, p35)

Parliamentary Elections 2 November 2003

"Public awareness campaign for IDP voting Rights was launched and implemented to promote and stimulate IDPs' participation in Parliamentary elections of 2 November (a video clip featuring former Defender, Central Electoral Commission Chairperson, Nana Devdariani was shot; 3,000 posters with key information on elections were distributed throughout Georgia in collective centres, Post-Bank branches, Precinct and District Election Commissions)." (UN OCHA December 2003, p. 1)

"Efforts to enforce IDPs' political and civil rights had long been neglected, mainly because of political considerations. However, a major progress has been achieved of late: at the November Parliamentary elections, for instance, IDPs could for the first time exercise their rights to passive (the right of citizen to be elected as the President, a member of the Parliament and the representative body of local self-governance – sakrebulo, a gamgebeli and a mayor) and active (the right of a citizen to elect, as above) votes." (UN OCHA December 2003, p. 9)

"These elections were the first governed by the significant amendments incorporated into the Unified Election Code in August 2003, according to which IDPs, for the first time, would be allowed to vote as well as stand for election in majoritarian as well as proportional elections, and without loss of IDP status or benefits." (Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement 5 November 2004, p39)

report of the international election observation mission:

"Repeating a pattern noted during previous elections, in August 2003 the [Unified Election Code (UEC)] was amended substantially while election preparations were already underway. The UEC incorporated many recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR and the Council of Europe's Venice Commission. Overall it provided an adequate framework for the conduct of democratic elections if implemented impartially and uniformly. Recommendations adopted by Parliament included provisions to:

- Permit internally displaced persons (IDPs) electoral rights in majoritarian contests" (OSCE 28 January 2004, p. 6)

"Reports on errors in voter lists included: omitting entire apartment blocs or streets; voters being listed in the wrong districts; listing many deceased persons; and large numbers of duplicate entries. Despite the enormity of the task, many PECs worked conscientiously to rectify errors. However, some PECs failed to supply PECs with voter lists, and many PECs appeared unfamiliar with new registration procedures and applied inconsistent methods. Many failed to display lists in a systematic or practical manner, and many minority populations were unable to read lists produced in Georgian. Other problems included: a 2,250-page list of deceased persons in Tbilisi that was unusable as it was not broken down by district or precinct; IDP voters not being systematically included in lists; and significant numbers of voters lacking ID documents." (OSCE 28 January 2004, p. 10)

"Parliamentary Elections, 28 March 2004: Repeat parliamentary elections were held as a result of the nullification of the results of the parliamentary elections of 2 November [2003]. In all but two districts,²⁴⁰ these elections concerned only the proportional component of the elections since the majoritarian elections of 2 November were not challenged, despite, the OSCE's finding that many of these were "equally flawed."²⁴¹ The OSCE report on the conduct of the election contains no reference to IDPs. However, among the identified problems which possibly may have had a bearing on IDP voting were that "potentially significant numbers of eligible voters lacked identity documents" and that "concern was expressed that some voters were registered at polling stations in places other than their official residence." Indeed, it appears that many IDPs failed to exercise their right to vote. A survey on IDP voting that was commissioned by UNDP and undertaken by a consortium of Georgian research organizations determined that voter turnout among IDPs nationwide was only 35 percent, which was "much lower" than among the general population.²⁴³ Among the reasons put forth to explain IDPs' low voter turnout were that "IDPs are less optimistic and lack faith in [*sic*] the improvement of the situation in the country through the elections". Because "IDPs are not able to assimilate with the population in [their] new places of inhabitation, [the] feeling of alienation is very strong" and "[t]herefore, IDPs do not interpret the elections as decisive" for them. These findings suggest that securing, in national legislation, the right of IDPs to vote is just a first step towards their political participation. So often marginalized in society, IDPs will also need to develop a belief that political structures will be responsive to their concerns.

Finally, in a significant development, the mandate of the Abkhaz parliamentary deputies, who were last elected in 1992, was revoked by a decision of Parliament on 30 April 2004. Their seats will be left vacant until such time that parliamentary elections can be held again in Abkhazia. Reportedly, this decision was not unanimously welcomed by IDPs, some of whom felt that with the loss of these deputies in Parliament, there is no longer anyone in Parliament who shares their identity and, in an environment where "politics and representation is still a question of personal networks," will really press for their interests.²⁴⁵ This concern would seem to underscore the importance of IDPs themselves running for parliament, now that they are eligible to do so." (Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement 5 November 2004, p40)

According to a survey conducted prior and after the March 2004 elections, the low participation of IDPs may be explained by several reasons:

- a) "according to the information of the State Department of Statistics, social and economical situation of IDPs is worse than the situation of other groups of the population that causes the deterioration of status of IDPs and the neglect of the entire country;
- b) due to same, IDPs are less optimistic and the lack of faith to the improvement of the situation in the country through the elections. [...]
- c) IDPs are not able to assimilate with population in new places of inhabitation, and feeling of alienation is very strong in them. Therefore, IDP do not interpret the elections as decisive moment important for the country." (BCG Research, May 2004, p5)

For more information on the regime on voting rights for IDPs as of 2004, see Georgia Chapter in Brookings-SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, Internally Displaced Persons' Voting Rights in the OSCE Region, November 5, 2004, by Erin Mooney and Balkees Jarrah [URL below]

IDPs in collective centres are socially isolated (2000-2002)

- As the size of the collective centers increase in a community the relations between IDPs and the general population becomes less friendly

"In [Save the Children's] 2002 survey, IDPs in collective centers and the general population were asked, 'approximately how many adult relatives /friends /neighbors live in this city/village who you believe will help you if needed?' A slightly higher percentage of IDPs living in collective centers, about 30%, mentioned no one would help them compared to 23.5% of the general population. Thus, **a slightly higher percentage of IDPs are socially isolated than the general population.**

As for community relations, IFRC and SC report that, on average, **IDPs and local residents have almost similar views of their relation: neither very friendly nor very hostile.** However, SC study in 2002 found that **as the size of the collective centers increase in a community the relations between IDPs and the general population becomes less friendly.**" (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 36)

The International Federation of the Red Cross conducted a survey of the IDP population in 1999. IFRC published this survey in November 1999 under the title "Internally Displaced Persons: A Socio-Economic Survey".

Save the Children conducted a survey on an annual basis from 2000 to 2002. This survey was designed to provide comparable data of IDPs living in collective centres and local households in the regions of Samegrelo and Imereti, Western Georgia. Data collected in 2000 for this survey are available on [Assistance Georgia](#), the website of the humanitarian community in Georgia [Internet]

IDPs stage demonstrations against national authorities and international organisations (2001-2002)

- IDPs in the Zugdidi sector protest against CIS peacekeeping forces against poor living conditions, and lack of return-conducive conditions
- They also demand the timely payment of their benefits by the Georgian authorities
- Freedom of movement of UNOMIG personnel has been occasionally restricted by demonstrators
- Protests by IDPs in Tbilisi have also been reported

"During the period under review, the situation in the Zugdidi sector was calm. [...] Several peaceful demonstrations took place, mostly by internally displaced persons in protest of their living conditions. The local authorities took some steps to improve the situation, in particular the supply of electricity. Since 6 January, a group of internally displaced persons has been blocking the movement of UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force at the main bridge over the Inguri River on the Georgian side. They protest, among other things, the extension of the CIS peacekeeping mandate, the resumption of the rail link between Sochi in the Russian Federation

and Sukhumi and the continuing granting of Russian citizenship and Russian passports to residents of Abkhazia." (UNSC 13 January 2002, para. 14)

See also RFE/RL, "[Georgian displaced persons suspend protest action](#)", 20 February 2003 [Internet]

"In the Zugdidi sector, UNOMIG patrols were on occasion confronted with demonstrations by internally displaced persons, who are becoming increasingly critical of the Georgian central authorities, as well as of the CIS peacekeeping force and international organizations, because of their perceived incapacity to achieve progress in creating conditions for return. In one incident a patrol vehicle was hit by a stone, and in another a patrol was temporarily encircled and had equipment stolen from it before being allowed to proceed.

UNOMIG's freedom of movement was restricted for a total of three weeks in January and February when internally displaced persons blocked the major ceasefire line crossing points. In response, UNOMIG had to temporarily introduce restrictions on patrolling in the Zugdidi sector." (UN SC 19 April 2002, paras. 18-19)

"Popular demonstrations are a feature of the region, primarily by the politicised and disaffected local population or IDPs demanding improvement of their social-economic condition, timely payment of benefits, and progress in negotiations on return and settlement. On 30 September 2001, for example, the bridge along the Inguri river was blocked by approximately 150 locals blaming local authorities for neglect of their poor living conditions. There were also several cases of denial of freedom of movement to UNOMIG escorts. The protesters were not hostile, but wanted the patrol to contact the authorities so that the unpaid benefits, allowances and salaries would be distributed." (UN OCHA 9 November 2001)

Reports of demonstrations by IDPs in Tbilisi:

United Nations Association of Georgia, "[Georgia: IDPs protest in front of Parliament](#)", 22 January 2003 [Internet]

UN Association of Georgia, "[Georgia: IDPs demand Abkhazia status determination](#)", 20 June 2002 [Internet]

RFE/RL, "[Displaced persons threaten to renounce Georgian citizenship](#)", 28 March 2002 [Internet]

Parallel structures of governance function as an assistance network for the displaced from Abkhazia (2001)

- The creation of a government-in-exile has allowed many displaced to keep their jobs
- The Supreme Council, which was the highest legislative body in the AR of Abkhazia before the war, was reconstructed in 1995
- The government-in-exile's hard-line stance on Abkhazia has been an obstacle to many peace initiatives

"After the Georgian population fled Abkhazia in the autumn of 1993, they restored the Georgian segment of executive power from Abkhazia to create a virtual government-in-exile with the intent of making it easier for people to trace relatives, find accommodations, benefit from humanitarian assistance and otherwise cope with their displacement. Each ministry or department of the

central Georgian government allowed its counterpart from the AR of Abkhazia to use its facilities to register staff who had worked before the war for the same organisation in Abkhazia.

By retaining these structures of government, some of the displaced were able to continue to work, not just in the government bureaucracy, but also as teachers, doctors and other specialists. For example, the exiled Ministry of Public Health provided the displaced population with qualified medical assistance and distributed medicines among the most vulnerable persons. The creation of two polyclinics for the displaced in Tbilisi and several others in other areas, including Zugdidi and Kutaisi, allowed the disabled, newborn, pregnant women and elderly among the displaced population to be registered for special assistance. Although these polyclinics are not well equipped, they do have qualified professional personnel on staff.

Administrative structures from Abkhazia were also revived, so a displaced person who lost identity documents during the flight could apply for new documents to the municipality of his/her city in exile. The displaced also have their own military commissariat, tax authorities, police force and many other institutions and agencies.

The Supreme Council, which was the highest legislative body in the AR of Abkhazia before the war, was reconstructed in 1995 following a decision by the Georgian Parliament. According to an election law adopted shortly before the war, the Abkhazian minority in Abkhazia had a special quota for representation in the Supreme Council. Representing 17.8 per cent of Abkhazia, they had 28 seats in the Supreme Council; Georgians, who represented 45,6 per cent of the population, held 26 seats. Eleven more deputies represented Abkhazia's other ethnic communities. The reconstructed Supreme council consist of 24 deputies.

Both the Abkhazian Council of Ministers and the Supreme Council of the AR of Abkhazia in exile say they represent the displaced in Georgia, and the official Georgian government recognises them as representatives of the displaced community. Yet both bodies maintain a radical position regarding the conflict-resolution process, a position that is not shared by a large part of the displaced community. The government-in-exile's hard-line stance on Abkhazia has been an obstacle to many peace initiatives developed in Georgia proper and by the displaced population itself." (Kharashvili 2001, pp. 234-235)

Displaced persons under pressure not to demand their right to vote (2000)

- Abkhaz political structures in exile have an interest in discouraging internally displaced from voting
- IDPs should be explained that exercise their right to political participation does not negate their right to return

"It was also suggested that the issue of political participation by the displaced has been manipulated by political forces bent on the return of the population and regain of territorial control over Abkhazia. Specifically, it was widely alleged that they have pressured internally displaced persons to refrain from demanding their right to vote by suggesting that in so doing the displaced will somehow lose their right to return. It thus is important not only to amend the electoral law but also to counter this misinformation by explaining to internally displaced persons that exercising their right to full political participation in the areas where they currently reside in no way negates their right to return.

Moreover, the representatives from Abkhazia, whose mandate continue to be extended indefinitely, also have an interest in discouraging internally displaced persons from voting in order to maintain their own positions. Their legitimacy, however, is beginning to be questioned by

internally displaced persons. However, because the displaced often depend upon the parallel system of services provided by the Government in Exile, they may feel compelled to refrain from openly expressing discontent with the current arrangement and demanding their right to vote for local and regional representatives. The reality is much more complex than the suggestion that internally displaced persons are simply apathetic in pressing for their right to full political participation.

Local NGOs pointed out that they had proposed that internally displaced persons at least be able to elect new representatives, but the Government had refused. The most appropriate corrective measure, however, would be for the legislation on electoral participation to be revised to enable internally displaced persons to participate in the election of local and regional representatives for the areas in which they currently reside. As noted above, a number of senior government officials at the national and regional level conceded that the current policy on political participation by the displaced required reform." (UN CHR 25 January 2001, paras. 67-69)

Marginal political participation of displaced women (2000)

- Internally displaced women are not associated to the political process of postconflict Georgia and the privatization
- Absence of political mobilization and lack of knowledge about rights make programmes educating women about their rights, in particular in rural areas, indispensable

"Internally displaced women remain very much disconnected from the political processes of postconflict Georgia. As in the broader Georgian and Caucasian political world, there are disproportionately few women in position of power. No women had central roles in the political run-up to the wars in Abkhazia and South Ossetia; likewise, no women currently participate in the ongoing political negotiations between the Georgian and separatist Abkhaz governments. Almost universally, the handful of displaced women currently in positions of power at both the national and local levels are former communist elites with little interest in advancing women's rights - displaced or otherwise.

The main representative institution for the IDP community from Abkhazia continues to be the 'Government of the Abkhaz Autonomous Republic in exile,' composed of the same unelected Georgian-Abkhaz party officials in power at the start of the war, though now residing in Tbilisi as a de facto shadow cabinet to the separatist Abkhaz government. Women interviewed by the CDIE team expressed almost universal disgust with the institution. They perceived it to be genuinely uninterested in and out of touch with issues and concerns of displaced people. Complaints about the government-in-exile typically revolved around nepotism and corruption (Zurikashvili 2000, 4).

Segregation from local communities and a lack of permanent residence has had adverse effects on the political rights of displaced women. In its report to the UN Development Program, the Gender Development Association (an indigenous women's group) notes that participation of displaced women in local elections and in privatization processes has been impeded by restrictive regulations and laws unmodified in the aftermath of people settling in collective centers and with host families (GDA 1999, 68). Many respondents in the survey voiced deep frustration with a lack of any kind of representation from local officials. Women were particularly concerned with the glaring absence of representation by the displaced in the privatization processes taking part throughout western Georgia. Those who confronted local officials about privatization issues were met with weak arguments and vague promises (Zurikashvili 2000, 4).

Most displaced women interviewed were much more interested in everyday economic and psychosocial issues confronting their families and communities than they were in political

questions. Political mobilization and motivation were rare, if not nonexistent. No survey respondents were members of political parties. Most felt betrayed and abandoned by President Shevardnadze's government, which was blamed by many for losing the war and abandoning displaced persons in their times of deepest need. Local officials, as mentioned above, tended to be distrusted. Individual leaders in the displaced-women community who have taken their concerns to local and government officials have tended to be striving in two general directions. First, leaders press officials regarding the immediate everyday needs of displaced communities. Second, they are concerned with improving and speeding the negotiation and repatriation processes with the Abkhaz government, with the ultimate goal of returning home and taking up their 'real' lives once again. Displaced women were often unaware of their rights. Of the 105 displaced women questioned in the survey, only 5 knew of their basic human rights under the UN Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Of those five, two leaders of women's organizations and three had recently graduated from university. The Georgian government has recently passed laws defending the rights of women, mothers, and children, but as several displaced women leaders stressed, most displaced women remained ignorant of the laws and their legal consequences. Several displaced women's organizations have dedicated efforts and programs to educating women about their rights, in particular women residing in rural and remote regions of the country (Zurikashvili 2000, 4)" (Buck September 2000, pp. 9-10)(

See also case studies on the Koka Farmers' Union: "[Cooperative boosts self-respect of displaced Georgian women](#)", Center for Development Information and Evaluation, USAID (July 2000) [pdf][Internet]

See also "[Willingness to participate voluntarily in community affairs](#)", SCF survey, February-June 2000 [Internet]

DOCUMENTATION NEEDS AND CITIZENSHIP

General

Law on Citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia creates difficulties for returnees (2006)

- Law does not apply to ethnic Georgians who had fled Abkhazia and then returned to Gali
- According to the law, non-Abkhaz “citizens” “have a right to obtain citizenship of the Russian Federation only”, which includes the option of returnees to keep their Georgian passport when acquiring Abkhaz “citizenship

“The ‘Law of the Republic of Abkhazia on Citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia’ of October 2005 [adopted by de facto authorities in Abkhazia] potentially creates important difficulties and administrative hurdles for returnees who do not want to accept Abkhaz citizenship even if it were not imposed on them and has no international significance. Certain parts of the ‘law’ contain provisions discriminating against persons of non-Abkhaz origin, including Georgian returnees.

For example, the ‘law’ makes the granting of citizenship conditional upon residence on the territory of Abkhazia during a period coinciding with the time closely after open hostilities had ceased, which was when many Georgians had fled the region. Its article 6 restricts the possibility of acquiring or maintaining dual citizenship to persons of Abkhaz ethnicity, while non-Abkhaz “citizens” “have a right to obtain citizenship of the Russian Federation only”, thus clearly excluding the option of returnees to the Gali district to keep their Georgian passport when acquiring Abkhaz “citizenship”. Concerning the law’s implementation and application in practice, de facto authorities in Sukhumi informed the Representative that Abkhaz “citizenship”, which, absent international recognition of Abkhazia’s independence, has an internal meaning only and would not be imposed on anyone including Georgian returnees. However, officials differed in their account of the impact which the lack of Abkhaz identity documents would have on Georgians who already had returned or would do so in the future. According to their diverging views, consequences for non-Abkhaz citizens would range from an exclusion from the right to vote and the obligation to perform military service, over the possible non-acknowledgement of their legal identity by administrative authorities, to their treatment as foreigners including the possibility of expulsion. The law may also be seen as creating a hostile atmosphere towards returnees and thus constitute a psychological obstacle to return.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

Many IDPs have lost their personal identification documents (1999-2006)

- Identification documents cumbersome to renew
- IDPs hesitant to give up their Soviet passports

"Personal identification is a serious problem in the regions of Georgia. Many of the refugees have lost their documents in the conflict zone and it is very complicated to renew them. There are cases when a person addresses corresponding instances several times but in vain, as he/she is asked to pay or submit a document (e. g. birth certificate) and he/she has none and has to live without any document. Often, these persons have problems with the police." [...]

The refugees do not want to give up their soviet passports as permanent residence is not written in the identification cards and the soviet passports are the only documents for them to prove their permanent residence when they return to Abkhazia. Therefore, the refugees from Abkhazia have refused to give up their passports. And, it has been decided to give the refugees new identification cards and enable them to keep their soviet passports at a time. Besides they have certificates of refugees issued by the Ministry of refugees and accommodation. These certificates are often changed and this entails many technical complications."(The Horizonti Foundation, 29 January 1999, sect.3)

"Ninety-nine percent [of IDPs] claim to be registered with the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation of Georgia, and possess respective cards. Only 1% of the [IDP] respondents reported to have no IDP card." (NRC 1997, p.17)

The archive in Abkhazia with birth & death records burnt during the conflict. IDPs then have to obtain such documents through courts which are able to issue them.

IDP families received one card per family. Now that families have grown, they still have the same card. (IDMC, May 2006)

ISSUES OF FAMILY UNITY, IDENTITY AND CULTURE

General

While many IDP children have never lived in Abkhazia, they are still affected by the context of internal displacement (2003)

Belonging to a certain generation is an important factor of vulnerability, as define opportunities for job and income, social flexibility and dynamism, or dependence on others. IDP children in general deserve special attention, as disadvantaged and vulnerable due to the unfavourable environment for personality formation (e.g. due to inadequate accommodation and lack of privacy), uncertain future and limited access to quality education and healthcare. Among IDPs there are 63,927 children under 17, which means that about 24% of IDPs were either born out of Abkhazia or were under 6 when had to flee, and therefore have very vague understanding of where they are supposed to return.³⁷ The effect of high exposure to crowding, living in dilapidated surroundings, and growing as IDP, which by the majority is perceived as derogatory status, - has not been specifically studied in Georgia, but by the worldwide experience is associated with low self-esteem, tendency toward delinquency and psychological and psychosomatic problems. Another important factor is the perception of Abkhazia and Abkhazians (less so of Ossetians) by the young generation, who in fact has no first hand information or impression of the people with whom they have to live after return. If in their parents' minds, along with the negative images of Abkhazians there are memories of friendship and good relations, the young generation probably has solely an enemy image of Abkhazians. Victimization among young generation may be revealed in later life either through search of an enemy image and aggressive tendencies, or the passivity and search of a saviour figure." (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003, p30).

Changing gender role: displaced women become the main household income earners (2000-2003)

- 72% of the displaced women were fully employed before the conflict while more that 60% of them were currently formally jobless in 1999
- They have however adapted much more readily to their new situation as displaced persons than have men and have become the main source of income in most displaced families
- Displaced women in urban areas are engaged in trade but are reluctant to register their activities with the government out of fear that existing humanitarian aid would not be distributed to "working" women and their families
- In western Georgia, women make up the vast majority of the seasonal agricultural work force on tea plantations and in corn farming
- Increasing numbers of Zugdidi-based displaced women have also begun to cross the border into the Gali region of Abkhazia to tend to family farms abandoned during the conflict
- Displaced women seeking basic loans to begin or expand their trading have turned to donor microcredit programs
- Women are still expected to perform traditional household duties of feeding and caring for their children, even after long and difficult days trading on street corners and in market places

"As in all intrastate conflicts, the forced displacement had major economic effects on the many thousands of internally displaced women who fled Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Prewar Georgia had been one of the wealthier republics in the former Soviet Union, benefiting in particular from its agriculture-intensive position as the breadbasket of the USSR. Abkhazia itself had long had the reputation as the richest region within Georgia, with its highly fertile lands accounting for much of Georgia's agricultural output and its strikingly beautiful Black Sea coastline attracting multitudes of tourists from through-out the Soviet Union.

Most of the Georgian women who fled the region left relatively prosperous lives behind them. Many were trained professionals who had worked as teachers, economists, and in manufacturing and healthcare, among other trades. Seventy-two percent of displaced women surveyed had been fully employed before the outbreak of war. Over 21 percent of displaced women, meanwhile, had completed higher education degrees, while 31 per-cent had finished vocational or professional schooling (Zurikashvili 2000, 5, 8).

In the years since the displacement, internally displaced women and men have struggled under the massive weight of poverty and unemployment. According to unofficial statistics, 75 percent of displaced families earn less than half the monthly subsistence income level, set by the Georgian government at \$35 per family member (Zurikashvili 1998, 8). Unsurprisingly, physical displacement has been accompanied by widespread professional displacement. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Norwegian Refugee Council concluded in 1998 that upwards of 64 percent of internally displaced persons were jobless (GDA 1999, 69). The CDIE survey confirmed that formal employment was one of the most acute and unsolved issues for displaced women, increasingly demoralized by almost a decade of epidemic-level rates of joblessness. Of women questioned in the survey, 68 percent were without work as of late 1999 (Zurikashvili 2000, 7-8).

Faced with such difficult living conditions, many internally displaced Georgian women have quietly taken the lead in providing basic income and food for their families. They have adapted much more readily to the extreme stresses of the life of displaced persons than have men. They have begun to alter the long-standing tradition of men as main earners and providers for the family.

According to a 1998 survey organized by the Women's Study Center of Tbilisi State University, women have come to be the main sources of income in 72 percent of Georgian displaced families. Displaced women have left their shelters and homes by the thousands throughout Georgia to squeeze out meager livings through unofficial trade and agriculture. In larger cities such as Tbilisi, they have become the backbone for much of the unofficial or gray-market trade that has flourished in recent years. They sell products in crowded bazaars, on street corners, in subway stations, peddling everything from sunflower seeds to imported electronics. Some women have opened street kiosks selling basic foodstuffs, cigarettes, and alcohol, to name a few of the items offered. The vast majority of the trading remains unofficial; 75 percent of the women questioned in the 1998 survey had refused to register their activities with the government (Zurikashvili 1998, 8).

Trading activity was rarely considered 'work' by the women themselves. Indeed, many women interviewed considered themselves unemployed even as they spent long hours laboring on streets and in markets. Others would simply not admit to their trading, even when sacks of produce were clearly visible in their living quarters. Reasons for the silence range from basic shame to the common fear that existing humanitarian aid would not be distributed to 'working' women and their families. Women traders, often skilled and educated professionals or farmers during their previous lives in Abkhazia, equated trading with basic survival and were rarely proud of their activities. The large majority made barely enough to make ends meet. One women

surveyed spoke for many when she said, 'We all consider ourselves unemployed, as all we can earn is the money for our daily bread' (Zurikashvili 2000, 8).

Major obstacles exist for displaced women who hope to transform trading from a method of survival into a formal venture. The 1998 survey found that 94 percent of displaced women who traded were strongly dissatisfied with business conditions. Corruption, extortion, and stifling tax levels were all cited as major impediments. Of those questioned, 93 percent claimed to have paid 'tributes' to the police, local administrations, and tax collectors (Zurikashvili 1998, 8).

As in cities, displaced women have become increasingly active in rural areas, providing needed food and income for their families and altering traditional gender roles along the way. In western Georgia, women make up the vast majority of the seasonal agricultural work force on tea plantations and in corn farming. One group of Zugdidi-based displaced women formed a small cooperative association, called Koka, that produced basic agricultural goods including fruits and milk products on donated farmland. Food was produced both for members' families and for trading in the marketplace (see box).

Increasing numbers of Zugdidi-based displaced women have also begun to cross the border and brave the short trip into the Gali region of Abkhazia to tend to family farms abandoned during the conflict. Known as pendulum migrants, these women grow vegetables, fruits, and nuts both for their own family and for trading in markets. They travel to Abkhazia early in the morning, often bribing Russian peacekeepers guarding the border, and return very late the same day. Though Abkhaz authorities have tolerated 'pendulum migration,' these displaced Georgian women work and travel in constant fear of Abkhaz reprisal.

Georgian men rarely risk the journey, so sure are they of military reprisal. From a gender perspective, this phenomenon represents yet another economic change attributable to the conflict as women have taken over the farming responsibilities reserved for men before the war. As with trading, many displaced families have come to rely on women to deliver income and food necessary for survival (Zurikashvili 2000, 8).

Donors have begun to recognize the value of internally displaced women traders as they have moved away from humanitarian assistance toward more development or "self-reliance" programming in recent years. Specifically, many desperately poor women who seek basic loans to begin or expand their trading have turned to donor microcredit programs for financing. The Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), a USAID-funded international NGO, offers innovative group lending. It consists of small low-interest short-term loans starting at \$100 to groups of traders without the need for collateral. Since most displaced persons have very little in the way of valuable possessions that could be put up as collateral, this system has quickly evolved into a critical method for assetless people to receive loans (Georgian banks customarily require collateral worth at least twice the amount of the loan). Recipients receive the money in small groups, usually no larger than seven people. Each member pledges solidarity with the group and promises to pay back as a group.

Though the program was not designed exclusively for women, 75 percent of FINCA's 4,500 clients are women, and well over 70 percent of those women are from displaced families based in the Tbilisi region. The Norwegian Refugee Council has partnered with an indigenous Georgian women's organization, Women in Business, to create a revolving fund of microcredit for women's ventures. They have the aim of eventually transforming the fund into a credit union. In addition to trading, the fund's successfully funded enterprises have included laundry services and bakeries. Generally, FINCA and Norwegian Refugee Council microcredit lending has been successful. Only 1 percent of FINCA's first time 'group-clients' have defaulted on loans. That represents a mere \$ 14,000 of the \$3.1 million invested.

The role of displaced women as leading family income earners has not led to a growing sense of empowerment within the family or IDP communities in general. On the contrary, gender roles have remained clearly delineated. Women are still expected to perform traditional household duties of feeding and caring for their children, even after long and difficult days trading on street corners and in market places. Men spend much of their time in and around the household, as observed by the CDIE team, but they do little to help in chores traditionally reserved for women in Georgian society. As many surveyed women stressed, time is always in critical demand. On an average day, respondents spent seven hours working outside the home and eight caring for their children. This double burden of both caring and providing for their families has left little time for rest and has logically contributed to growing levels of stress diagnosed in displaced women (Zurikashvili 2000, 9)." (Buck September 2000, pp. 7-9)

"The gender issue is especially important from the viewpoint of employment and income generation. In many cases it is the women who carry the heaviest burden, although frustration and depression among males due to their loss of a function of a breadwinner and provider may cause extreme depression and social exclusion, reflected in increased mortality and morbidity rates. At the same time, elder men are frequently in worse psychological condition also due to feeling of guilt coming from the military failure in conflict time ten years ago when they appeared unable to protect their homes and families." (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003, p31).

You can also consult following documents:

Stable Instability of the Displaced People in Western Georgia: a Food-security and Gender Survey after Five Years, Jose Luis Vivero Pol, in: Journal of Refugee Studies, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1999, pp. 349-366 (Oxford) [Not available on the web]

"Cooperative boosts self-respect of displaced Georgian women", USAID, July 2000 [Internet]

See also " *Field surveys reveal psycho-social trauma of displaced women and men (1995-2000)*" [Internal link]

Fate of Georgian and Abkhaz missing persons who disappeared during the conflict in Abkhazia still unknown (2002)

- Georgian and Abkhaz sides agree that over 1,000 Georgians and several hundred Abkhaz remain missing from the conflict
- ICRC increased its support to make progress on the issue

"Georgian and Abkhaz commissions on missing persons reported that over 1,000 Georgians and several hundred Abkhaz remained missing as a result of the 1992-1994 war in Abkhazia. Officials have agreed to joint efforts to determine their location and repatriate the remains of the dead. The ICRC assisted in this effort." (U.S. DOS 4 March 2002, sect. 1b)

"In January 2000, after the request of the two Missing Persons Commissions, ICRC decided to increase its support to them in their respective efforts to make progress on the issue of missing persons. An independent forensics specialist from Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) was invited by the ICRC to provide technical assistance to the two Commission on the issue of exhumation and identification of mortal remains related to conflict situations. This specialist's initial assessment mission took place in Tbilisi and Sukhumi in October 2000 and in April and October 2001. The fourth visit was carried out in early July 2002, in order to check the data collected, to identify possible sites for exhumation and contact families of missing persons." (ICRC September 2002)

Marital status of IDPs: surveys indicate higher percentage of single parents households (2000-2002)

- 2002 data show a higher percentage of single parent households among IDPs living in collective centers (13.7%) than among the general population (7.1%)
- But divorce rates among IDPs and the rest of the population are similar

"Marital status in IFRC report includes all individuals regardless of age, which makes it a little difficult to compare with other data since marital status in a population is, generally, based on individuals either 15 or 18 years of age or older. However, both IFRC's report and SC's surveys indicate a higher proportion of the general population being married than IDPs living in collective centers. Some local NGOs report that IDPs, especially those in collective centers, refrain from marriage mainly due to the limited living space as well as their inability to economically support a family.

Another difference is that SC's 2002 data shows a higher percentage of single parent households among IDPs living in collective centers (13.7%) than among the general population (7.1%). However, both studies show an almost equal percentage of divorced households (~2%). Thus, the higher percentage of single parent households in collective centers must be due to another reason, perhaps the spouse (most likely the husband) working outside the country. *There is no data on the percentage of IDPs households that are comprised of single parents due to the spouse working abroad.*

According to the old provision in the law, if an IDP male married non-IDP female, she would get IDP status. However, if an IDP female married non-IDP male he would not get IDP status. The provision has been abolished with the effect of the amendments to the law, nevertheless not regulated." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 30)

The International Federation of the Red Cross conducted a survey of the IDP population in 1999. IFRC published this survey in November 1999 under the title "Internally Displaced Persons: A Socio-Economic Survey".

Save the Children conducted a survey on an annual basis from 2000 to 2002. This survey was designed to provide comparable data of IDPs living in collective centres and local households in the regions of Samegrelo and Imereti, Western Georgia. Data collected in 2000 for this survey are available on [Assistance Georgia](#), the website of the humanitarian community in Georgia [Internet]

PROPERTY ISSUES

General

Draft law on property restitution to the victims of the South Ossetian conflict (2006)

- As of mid-2006, the government was assessing property costs and the number of potential claims
- According to the Georgian government, the law is expected to go before Georgia's parliament by the end of 2006, and could be operational by mid-2007
- South Ossetia rejected Tbilisi's draft law on restitution (April 06)

"The Georgian government is billing property restitution as a key for restoring trust between Tbilisi and the breakaway region of South Ossetia, but a recent roundtable on the topic -- the first ever since the 1992 cease-fire -- has prompted some observers to caution that Georgia's optimism may be premature.

The government's hopes are pinned on a draft law that would spell out the terms for restoring property to the estimated 60,000 Ossetian and Georgian refugees who left their residences in response to the 1991-1992 conflict between Georgia and South Ossetian separatists. Currently, the government is assessing property costs and the number of refugees who might appeal for restitution.[...]

A six-person commission made up of an equal number of representatives of Georgian, South Ossetian and international organizations lies at the center of the proposed program. The commission, Vardzelashvili said, will "legitimize" the restitution program for refugees. [...]

The law is expected to go before Georgia's parliament by the end of 2006, and could be operational by mid-2007, according to Vardzelashvili.

However, several key issues remain undecided, among them the amount of money needed for compensation, the number of refugees forecasted to petition the government for restitution, and whether or not to provide for moral compensation.

The plan is expected to take about nine years to complete, according to Vardzelashvili, who noted that the speed of implementation will depend largely on the amount of financial support the government receives from international organizations.

[...] Oksana Antonenko, director of IISS's Russia and Eurasia Program, stated that the roundtable provided a rare chance for dialogue between Ossetians and the Georgian government. "It was an opportunity for Ossetians to hear firsthand from the Georgian government about this law. There was no information about it before," Antonenko said. "For Georgia, it was an opportunity to understand the mood of the refugees...some were critical, some were constructive."

Nonetheless, she cautioned that although the Georgian government in the past several months has made "huge progress" on the draft property restitution law, "a lot of work" remains.

One key problem is the government's frame of reference, according to Antonenko. The draft law would authorize restitution to those who suffered from the 1991-1992 conflict with South Ossetian

separatists, although, according to Antonenko [Oksana Antonenko, director of IISS's Russia and Eurasia Program], most refugees were actually affected by the violence and ethnic tensions that preceded the actual fighting. "The title [of the law] should reflect the Georgian-Ossetian ethnic problem," Antonenko said in a telephone interview from London. "It is an ethnic-bound problem."

Antonenko notes that the government also needs to create a mechanism for refugees to receive compensation in lieu of their actual property, especially if "[i]tis an issue of choice between compensation and restitution," she said. If the government sets a precedent of protecting refugees' civil rights regardless of whether they want to sell their property or move back to Georgia, the plan will be more successful, she noted.

Defining how compensation will be provided for destroyed property or property that cannot now be sold is another critical issue, according to other meeting participants. Vardzelashvili stated that setting the amount of compensation to be offered could be one of the tasks set for the property restitution commission.[...]

But while many applaud the draft law, concerns exist that the current tensions between the Tskhinvali leadership and the Georgian government will preclude any real progress. [...]

The lack of participation by South Ossetia's leadership appear does not appear to discountenance Vardzelashvili. Although such cooperation will be crucial for the plan's full implementation, he noted, the Georgian government can start returning property to those who were forced to leave territory under Tbilisi's control without the participation of any "third parties." (EurasiaNet 17 April 2006)

"Deputy Chairman of the breakaway South Ossetian government Boris Chochiev criticized Tbilisi's draft law on restitution as "one more PR campaign" of the Georgian authorities, which will fail to become a relief for the refugees and internally displaced persons. [...]

Boris Chochiev made these remarks during the talks with Naveed Hussain, representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to Georgia on April 19 in Tskhinvali, the South Ossetian Press and Information Committee reported. [...]

Chochiev also noted that "the law will not work without settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian relations, confidence building and expression of good will by the Georgian side."

Georgia's draft law on property restitution to the victims of the South Ossetian conflict was developed by the Georgian Justice Ministry and hailed by the Council of Europe's (CoE) Venice Commission - the advisory body for constitutional issues -- on March 19, [2006].

Boris Chochiev, who is also a co-chairman of the Joint Control Commission (JCC), said that a JCC session will be held in late April in Tskhinvali with the participation of the representatives of the UNHCR." (United Nations Association of Georgia 20 April 2006)

To view the draft Law of Georgia on Property Restitution and Compensation on the territory of Georgia for the Victims of Conflict in Former South Ossetia District (draft from 18 May 2006 [link below]

To view the ppt presentation on the draft law on restitution: [\[Internet\]](#)

For more information, see also: Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), 24 March 2006, Georgia: Property restitution deal for South Ossetia [\[Internet\]](#)

Mixed results of privatization of IDPs' current dwellings (2006)

"The Government's recent strategy to privatize collective centres in Georgia and assist IDPs to acquire private apartments aims at providing them with property for use as private housing or business investment in lieu of the accommodation they were forced to abandon. Civil society representatives shared with the Representative their fears that, due to the absence of a comprehensive privatization policy, particularly vulnerable groups among IDPs might lose out in the process and would consequently find themselves in even more precarious situations." (CHR 22 March 2006)

IDPs in hotels in Bakhumi, Adjara Province, receive \$7000 from new owner to vacate the hotels (June 2006)

"A group of Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs) announced on June 28 that they will denounce Georgian citizenship and go to the unrecognized Abkhaz Republic as a protest against rehousing plan proposed by the Georgian authorities and Kazakh investors, who bought resort hotels on the Adjara's Black Sea coast.

Internally displaced persons living in the Meskheli hotel in Batumi for more than a decade already received USD 7 000 from the Kazakh TuranAlem Bank. Part of them has vacated the rooms in the hotel, while another part was unhappy with the compensation demanding a better proposal.

Georgian Parliamentary Chairperson Nino Burjanadze said on June 29 while commenting on IDPs protest that "nobody has the right to put even the fairest demands above the country's interests and state integrity."

"I can, by no means, justify any internally displaced person, who says that he will go to Abkhazia and receive Abkhaz citizenship. I am very cautious while making statements. I do not want to call these people betrayers, by really it is so," Burjanadze told reporters." (CIVIL.Ge 29 June 2006)

"Unfortunately, for the majority of the 1400 families who are forced to leave the hotels, things are not so simple. Following the announcement of the \$7,000 compensation deal, real estate prices have increased rapidly, and there is now little housing available for that amount, even in the outskirts of the provincial capital, Batumi. The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is helping people who are threatened of eviction in Adjara. The compensation process has been fraught with difficulties. Many have reported to NRC that they were told that if they did not accept the deal, they would be evicted without compensation. Others reported bureaucratic problems and delays with the registration of families who could get compensation." (NRC 8 June 2006)

Vouchers system in city of Kutaisi gives opportunity to IDPs to acquire housing (2005)

In Georgia's second largest city, Kutaisi, Urban Institute has helped the process of privatization by offering vouchers to families who were then able to get new housing.

"Georgia's Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, the City of Kutaisi and the Urban Institute (UI), signed a "Statement of Cooperation" on Thursday, October 21 at the Industrialists' House in Kutaisi. The document marks the launch of the Housing Purchase Voucher Pilot Program.

The one-year Housing Purchase Voucher Pilot Program is designed to provide approximately 130 internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their families with existing, permanent, safe housing through the marketplace. Vouchers are non-transferable and guaranteed by UI for up to a

specified amount for the purchase of a housing unit. A secondary objective is achieved by a “site-based” beneficiary selection process. To concentrate the impact of the program, collective centers have been pre-selected in one micro-region where there is potential for urban renewal. Approximately 40,000 IDPs are still living in “collective centers” (former public buildings) as a result of Georgia’s civil conflicts in the early 1990’s.” (Embassy of the United States in Georgia 21 October 2005)

IDPs purchasing property do not lose their IDP status (2003)

- UN-led legal review confirms that IDPs have the right to purchase property without being deprived of IDP status
- IDPs are not informed properly about their rights and prefer to register purchased property in others' name
- The constitutional court removed restriction to free property purchase by IDPs (November 2003)

"Regarding the purchase of property by IDPs, there is a perception that if an IDP purchases property (e.g. an apartment), s/he could be deprived of her/his status. This is incorrect. Property rights are not bound up with registration. According to Article 2, Point (3) of the Law of Georgia 'Concerning the Rule of Registration and Identification of Georgian Citizens and Aliens Living in Georgia,' being or not being registered should not restrict constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens of Georgia and aliens living in Georgia, including limiting rights of property or the provision for their implementation, unless envisaged by the election legislation.

Therefore, an IDP has a right to purchase and own property unreservedly on the territory of Georgia (The Constitution of Georgia, Article 21) without being deprived of IDP status.

In everyday life, IDPs often come across persons who, despite working on IDP related legal issues, still are not well informed about existing opportunities for IDPs to purchase real estate and get temporary or permanent registration. Due to such a lack of knowledge among persons concerned, IDPs are compelled to register the purchased property in others' names. This might ultimately result in IDPs losing their property.

Of course, it is desirable to create a proper legislative basis, so that neither IDPs nor other interested parties are unclear about the purchase of property."

[Footnote 1: At the same time, because of decisions of Sakrebulo, IDPs are exempt from paying tax for 0.3-0.7 ha land plots.]

[Footnote 2: Usually, legislative authority, i.e. a right to submit a bill to the Parliament, rests with the President of Georgia, Members of the Parliament of Georgia, any Parliamentary Commission, Parliamentary Faction, and with not less than 20,000 voters (citizens).

[Footnote 3: At present, the State only owns approximately 100 ha of agricultural land.] (UN OCHA June 2003, pp. 9-10)

On 7 November 2003, the Constitutional Court of Georgia declared unconstitutional the loss of the national IDP status following the registration of an IDP as resident in Georgia proper. Following this decision, the Parliament of Georgia removed Article 6, para. 2c of the “Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted” providing that “IDP status is lost in case IDP permanently settles and registers in a region of Georgia where reasons listed in article 1 of this law do not exist” (UNDP 28 February 2004)

Land allocation to IDPs: inconsistent implementation (1992-2003)

- Legislation provides for a taxation exemption for IDPs using agricultural land plots allocated to them temporarily but regulation enforcing this provision has not been passed
- In practice, IDPs either pay or do not pay land tax depending upon the regional authorities
- IDPs need additional help to get fertilizers, equipment for cultivating land, transport, fuel
- IDPs were not allowed to participate in land privatization since they were not considered local residents
- Land allocated to IDPs is often of lower quality and far from IDPs' places of residence

"Existing legislation does not envisage special norms pertaining to the availability of land to IDPs. According to this legislation, rules regulating ownership of land apply equally to all citizens of Georgia, including IDPs. As well as this, the legislation has no provision that would restrict an IDP in terms of (real or movable) property.

In addition, Article 5 of the 'Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted' envisages an exemption for IDPs who have agricultural land plots for temporary use. In particular, according to Point (h) of this article, agricultural land plots allocated to IDPs for their temporary use in accordance with existing norms for IDPs, are exempt from land tax. However, an amendment in the Tax Code of Georgia incorporating this has not been passed. This means that, in fact, IDPs are not exempt from paying the tax.[1]. Thus, the 'Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted', which exempts IDPs from paying the land tax, comes into collision with the Tax Code, which has not been correspondingly amended [2].

In practice, IDPs either pay or do not pay land tax depending upon the regional authorities. For example, the Khobi district administration refused to allocate land plots for the temporary use of IDPs registered in Senaki. However, consent was given after IDPs offered to pay. In general, the majority of local authorities are aware of IDPs' rights to have land plots for temporary use and try to assist those IDPs who express a desire to cultivate land. In their efforts to have land plots for cultivation, IDPs primarily face problems connected with the lack of land where they temporarily reside (as in Jvari), or natural conditions are not favourable for land cultivation (as in Borjomi), or the land allocated to them is of poor quality (as in Imereti region, Samegrelo and Bolnisi). It should be noted that the Land Reform in Georgia that enabled the population of Georgia to privatise land (however, IDPs failed to enjoy this right), was completed in 1994 [Footnote 3: At present, the State only owns approximately 100 ha of agricultural land.]. IDPs were late in addressing local authorities for allocating land plots to them. As a result, IDPs were in most cases given remote and poor quality land plots (as in Tskaltubo, Didi Jikhaisi and other regions). In such circumstances, IDPs have to fence pastures (as in Menji Resort case). This, in its turn, entails conflicts with locals. At meetings held in Samegrelo, Imereti and Bolnisi, IDPs repeatedly stated that if they are provided with technical (e.g. fertilizers, equipment for cultivating land, transport, fuel) and financial assistance, they are ready to cultivate even remote land plots. However, at Imereti meetings, IDPs reiterated that remote land plots need additional care in terms of security, because there are cases when the crop is stolen and/or the land plots are destroyed.

According to the data of the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, 12,000 IDP families were granted 4,000 ha of land for free on a temporary ownership basis on the territory of Georgia.

As for the land lease, neither the 'Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted', nor the Tax Code envisages provisions for preferential treatment of IDPs." (UN OCHA June 2003, p. 9)

"Background - The privatization of land, and agricultural reform, started in early 1992, with a Presidential decree, and should have been completed by 1 January 1999. The procedures and time schedules for the privatization process varied from village to village depending on the size, type of land (arable, perennials, pastures), allotment criteria, order of distribution. Privatization did not include certain state-owned land that cannot be sold to private persons, but can be rented or leased.[14] Individuals must obtain an ownership certificate issued by the local authorities at a cost of approximately \$19 USD per hectare. However, IDPs were not allowed to participate in land privatization process since they were not considered local residents. Until IDPs were given the right to land in 1996 (discussed below), they only had the right to rent or lease the land. No laws were in place that exempted IDPs from paying land tax. [15]

Even though IDPs could not participate in the land privatization process, according to the Georgian Law of 1996, [16] IDPs could be allocated plots of land with the right of temporary use as long as they did not construct any structures. Local authorities (i.e., Village Mayors) were to identify land that could be used and are responsible for ensuring use of it if IDPs request so. If IDPs stop using the land temporarily allocated to them for some reason (e.g., relocation to another place), the land is transferred back to the local authorities.[17]

Anecdotal evidence suggests several problems have arisen with the allocation of land to IDPs. First, the highest quality land was distributed in the privatization process and, subsequently, the land that can be allocated to IDPs is of poor quality. [18] Second, since IDPs cannot make build or permanently alter the land, it is difficult to produce sufficient quantities of food for consumption or sales. Third, local officials request IDPs to pay 'extra expenses' to receive an allocation of land. Fourth, when IDPs do receive an allocation of land it is all too often far from their place of residence."

[Footnote 14: "Whose Land?" – Overview in land reform and privatization process in Western Georgia Agriculture and its Implications for Displaced People, Accion contra el Hambre – Georgia, Zugdidi, August 1998

[Footnote 15: Annual land tax depending on soil quality ranges between 11,2 and 21 USD per hectare, with an average of 15,75 USD per hectare for Zugdidi region. ACH survey, August 1998.

[Footnote 16: Article 5 of the Law of Georgia on "Forcibly Displaced Persons – Persecuted," of June 28 1996.]

[Footnote 17: Report on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Law of Georgia, 2002.]

[Footnote 18: Whose Land? Overview of land reform and privatization in west Georgia, Accion contra el Hambre, 1998; The Working Group on Enhancing Capacities for Self-Sufficiency: Report of the Sub-Group on Agriculture, IRC, 1998; Monitoring of Legal and Actual Status of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia, Georgian Young Lawyers Association, 1999.] (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 13-14)

Privatisation in South Ossetia: rights of IDPs at risk (2002)

- Authorities in South Ossetia have agreed not to privatize apartments belonging to IDPs
- It is unlikely that IDPs from South Ossetia have been able to participate in the process of privatisation

"[S]ome IDPs are living in private accommodations. From 1991 to 1992, based on a government resolution, privatization of socially owned apartments was initiated. To date, approximately 90% of apartments have been privatized in Georgia (OSCE). In SC's nationwide survey in 2002, 92.5% of urban families and 97.6% of rural families owned their apartments or houses.

The privatization of housing occurred also in South Ossetia. (Not really. It is believed that privatization did not occur in Abkhazeti). An OSCE report indicates that through their intervention of OSCE, authorities agreed not to privatize apartments belonging to IDPs. **However, data available to us does not indicate percentage of apartments that have been privatized by either IDPs themselves or others.** Since IDPs did not reside in their homes in South Ossetia when privatization started it is unlikely that they participated in the process." (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, p. 24)

Properties left behind: uncertainty on the restitution process (2002-2003)

- IDPs have often lost all documents proving their property rights in Abkhazia
- Occupation of IDPs' properties has been legalized according to Housing Code still in force in Abkhazia
- IDPs have also sold their property but still lack official documents for the sale
- There are no data on houses which are still intact or unoccupied
- Draft laws on property restitution, have been prepared and submitted to the Georgian government but the issue remains unsolved
- While Georgian courts restitute property to Ossets in Georgia, this is not the case in South Ossetia
- Georgia made reservation to property rights enshrined in European Convention on Human Rights as a result of Abkhazia' secessions
- Some IDPs continue to use their land on a seasonal basis, especially in the Gali region and in South Ossetia
- UNHCR reported reinstatement of property rights by Georgian courts

"IDPs left their houses behind when they fled. There are four basic scenarios of what happened with their housing after displacement.

a. Some IDPs fled so quickly that they did not even have time to take essential documents or these documents were burnt or lost. The old Soviet passport contained the 'propiska' stamp documenting their residency. Another important document proving their right to occupancy was the one titled, 'Forma #1.' To complicate this situation, some archives have been destroyed making it even more difficult to reconstruct residency. A number of these houses were either totally destroyed or arbitrarily occupied by other persons who later legalized their stay according to the Housing Code.

b. Some IDPs sold their property for very low price. And, in many cases there are no legal documents showing the sale of the property.

c. Over time, some second-occupants have sold their legalized apartments to other people.

d. Finally, a number of houses remain undestroyed and unoccupied. *However, there is no statistical data available on this issue.*

Draft laws, addressing the issue of property restitution, have been prepared and submitted to the Georgian government for further adoption. However, the issue still remains unsolved. NGOs report facts of court cases (in Georgia, excluding Abkhazia and South Ossetia) when property was returned to its owner applying the Civil Code. It is also mentioned that while Georgian courts restitute property to Ossets in Georgia, this is not the case in South Ossetia.

Ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms was a pre-condition for Georgia to become a member of the Council of Europe. Georgia ratified the Convention with 8 reservations (2 of them particularly important for IDPs). One of them – territorial reservation restricted its application to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region before restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia.

Second reservation is as follows: 'not to apply article 1 [38] of the Protocol 1 to persons who were granted or will be granted status of persecuted in accordance with the Georgian Law on 'Forcibly Displaced Persons – Persecuted' until circumstances based on which they were granted the status cease to exist – until restoration of territorial integrity of Georgia. According to the given law, the state undertakes obligation to ensure property rights of persecuted to ownership existing at their permanent places of residency after elimination of reasons listed in paragraph 1, article 1 of this law.'

NGO Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) intends to appeal in the Constitutional Court on two grounds: reservations aims at restricting particular social group, thus being discriminative and against to the Georgian Constitution and impairing property right protected by the Constitution and other laws of Georgia.

IFRC reported that almost one-half of the IDP's houses in Abkhazia are reportedly destroyed and 12% needing major repairs. Also, one out of every five IDPs does not know the condition of his/her house. 'IDPs reported that their houses were either completely destroyed (30%), only walls remain (12%), damaged but repairable (11%), normal (22%), and 26% do not know.' SC found similar findings in 2000; 21.3% did not know the condition of their house, with 4.7% reporting it in good condition, 4.8% saying it needed minor repairs, 12.1% mentioning it needed major repairs, and 56.1% reporting that it was not repairable (dilapidated). Thus, IDPs living in collective centers have vulnerable shelter conditions presently and when, if, they return.

IFRC stated that some IDPs continue to use their land. Most are IDPs from the Gali region and from South Ossetia. SC's survey of IDPs in collective center in west Georgian in 2000, reported that that '2.3% of IDPs confirmed returning to Abkhazeti to use land for food production. These IDPs reported returning about once a month, remaining about 8 weeks and using, on average, about 0.2 hectares.

[...]

UNHCR reports that IDPs from Gali region bordering Zugdidi cross Enguri river (dividing Gali and Zugdidi) 'to work their land' but return back. [39] Other sources suggest that border crossing is mainly seasonal – when land needs to be cultivated or harvest (hassle nut, citrus) obtained."

[Footnote 38: Article 1 of the protocol determines that "Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law.

The preceding provisions shall not, however, in any way impair the rights of a State to enforce such laws as it deems necessary to control the use of property in accordance with the general interest or to secure the payment of taxes or other contributions or penalties."]

[Footnote 39: Prospects for the Return of Internally Displaced Persons and Refugees to Abkhazia, a UNHCR Review of the Situation in Georgia, May 1997.] (Dershem/Gurgenidze/Holtzman November 2002, pp. 21-22)

Reinstatement of property rights of persons displaced by the Georgian Osset conflict (2000)

"In an attempt to reinstate property ownership, 29 cases passed through the courts, which, without exception, ruled in favour of the original owner. These few court cases went a long way

towards removing a notable obstacle to return. After the court rulings, UNHCR found temporary shelter for the secondary occupier." (UNHCR June 2001, p. 358)

For more information on legal development regarding the right to restitution please consult the following publications (not available on Internet):

Report on the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Law of Georgia, by Giorgi Chkeidze and Konstantin Korkelia, in: The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the Law of the South Caucasus – Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Studies in Transnational Legal Policy, No. 34, The American Society on International Law, The Brookings Institution SAIS Project on Internal Displacement, 2003

Housing and Property Restitution in the Republic of Georgia, by Zurab Burduli and Anna Dolidze, in: Returning Home: Housing and Property Restitution Rights of Refugees and Displaced Persons, edited by Scott Leckie, Transnational Publishers, 2003

International study proposes concrete legal and political measures to resolve the housing and property issue in Georgia (1998)

- Proposals include the issuance of a Presidential Decree on the Right to Return, the adoption of a Restitution Law and the creation of a Housing and Property Claims Commission

"[An independent 1998 study commissioned by UNHCR] recommends that a multi-pronged strategy, grounded firmly in the rule of law, will stand the best chance of ensuring full respect for the housing rights and property rights of all affected persons and thus facilitate the large-scale exercise of the right to return. The study emphasizes that both the rights of refugees and IDPs and the rights of the secondary occupants must be fully secured throughout the process of return and beyond, and that the housing rights of all affected persons are guaranteed such that no person becomes homeless in the process.

It is recommended that several key measures be adopted to provide the legal framework required to redress past injustices, increase confidence sufficiently to allow large-scale return and to build a solid basis for national reconstruction and reconciliation. These measures include:

[...]

1. ***The Presidential Decree on the Right to Return*** should officially proclaim the right of refugees and IDPs to voluntarily return to their original homes, in an environment of equality, full protection of human rights and clear guarantees of safety and security. The Decree should form the first part of the return process. It should be declaratory in nature, forming a consolidated official pronouncement recognizing the basic nature of the rights associated with return. The decree should reiterate past pronouncements and instill confidence in the returnees that they will be afforded the full spectrum of rights enjoyed throughout Georgian society, including and to return to their original homes, the right to freedom of movement and to choose one's residence and the right to register in their areas of origin.

2. The second element of a comprehensive return package envisages the adoption of a ***Housing and Property Restitution Law*** clearly and precisely outlining the legal position of affected refugees, IDPs and secondary occupants with respect to all aspects of their housing and property rights. This study recommends that the new legislation ensure the right of refugees and IDPs to the restitution of their original homes should they wish to reclaim them. If a returnee does wish to return to their original home, in accordance with the law and a subsequent finding by the envisaged housing and property claims commission, the law should require the State to facilitate such return and to fully ensure the full protection of the housing rights of secondary occupants.

In cases where returnees do not wish to return to their original homes, the law should oblige the State to secure adequate housing for them in such manner that no detriment is suffered *vis-a-vis* their original housing situation, and which ensures the right of refugees and IDPs (should they choose to invoke it) to the ownership of a dwelling; a right they would have enjoyed had they not been forced by circumstances beyond their control to flee.

The law should enable all affected persons to present formal claims to the HPCC for adjudication within a limited time period.

This study argues that cash compensation should be generally avoided except in instances concerning compensation for past human rights violations or lost movable property. If compensation is to be paid at all, the law should delineate when, in what form, to whom and in what manner compensation should be provided.

Any financial compensation which is provided should come from the State budget of Georgia and should not be provided by the international community. Funds could, however, be allocated by the international community to assist in the establishment of the HPCC or towards the overall implementation of the new law.

The new law should also adequately address the reconstruction and rehabilitation of damaged housing in rural areas and develop the necessary mechanisms required to ensure that refugees and IDPs returning to rural areas will have access to housing which complies with international standards of adequacy. Equally, the law should ensure the existence of adequate safeguards to protect against homelessness and other possible housing rights violations.

3. Finally, this paper recommends, within the framework of the housing and property restitution law, that a fully independent and impartial, three-person ***Housing and Property Claims Commission (HPCC)*** be established to examine any housing or property claims put forth by refugees, IDPs or secondary occupants regarding these questions. The HPCC should be vested with the powers required to determine the housing and property rights of the claimants and thus guarantee every returnee the right to an effective remedy and the right to have his or her case heard on an individual basis.

The commission will fill a significant procedural and administrative gap and prevent the potentially serious overloading of the judicial system with related complaints which could, in turn, substantially delay the overall return process. The HPCC (which should be overseen and monitored by UNHCR and the OSCE) will be required by law to protect all persons against homelessness or other detriment with respect to their housing and living conditions. Decisions of the HPCC should be legally binding. The right to appeal any decision of the HPCC to the Supreme Court of Georgia should also be guaranteed.

The implementation of these recommendations are designed to facilitate the large-scale return of all remaining refugees and IDPs linked to the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict and thus assist in increasing regional stability and the further emergence and strengthening of the rule of law in Georgia. Although the specific modalities of the housing and property situation in Georgia are, of course, unique, each of the recommendations made in this study are consistent with international human rights law, including the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and the European Social Charter, and have been or are being successfully implemented by other countries confronting similar challenges and possessing similar legal obligations."(Scott Leckie, 7 July 1998, sect. "Executive Summary")

Right to property restitution: Georgian NGO submits draft legislation (1999)

- The property rights of as many as 60-80.000 persons could have been violated.
- Georgian Young Lawyers' Association asked to draft bill regulating property restitution and housing issues related to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict.
- Clear-cut cases could be determined by a Special Committee on housing rights

"Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) drafts the bill that regulates the property restitution and housing issues of the victims of the Georgian-Ossetian conflict. Judging from conflict details and the legal character of the restitution problem itself it certainly is one of the extremely complicated issues. In this case we talk about 60-80 thousands of persons, or about 20thousand families the property rights of which could have been violated. Inconsistency of the past and present legislation connected with the property rights and other issues prevents these rights from being restored. Usually these cases should be dealt with by court, but the huge volume of the work and the peculiar character of the issue would complicate the settlement of the subject in this manner. As the Georgian legislation prohibits establishment of the special courts, when elaborating the draft, or more precisely the restitution mechanism we talked about the establishment of the special committee.

The duties of this committee would be to settle relatively easy cases though simplified procedures. These cases may include the ones where the property ownership documents exist, the witnesses are present and so on. The experience of formation of such committees exists, for example in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The committee, naturally, can not solve more complicated legal issues, as for instance, when there is the property sales contract, but one side maintains that the contract was made under threat. Of course these issues remain in the competence of civil courts.

Particular problems are connected with the committee staffing and legislative framework issues. As for the staff the option foreseeing participation of 3 Georgian and 3 Ossetian representatives was discussed. But the division of votes could have stalled the work of the committee and to avoid this GYLA considered it possible to involve the representatives of international organizations in its activities. As for the way of accepting the draft, it is our opinion that if the Georgian Parliament passes the law without the advance agreement, it would complicate its implementation and participation of the Ossetian side. Also there exists the idea of implementing the foreseen activities based on the bilateral agreement. There are two options here - perhaps this agreement could have the general, declaratory character and it would only state the fact of the committee being formed, leaving the determination of the specific procedures for the committee itself. In this case the question on functionality of the developed procedures arises. According to the second option the bilateral agreement would contain the procedure details from the very beginning. This would prolong the negotiation process. Though by mid-November the Association plans the conference on this and other issues related to the restitution. The participants of this conference would be foreign experts, governmental and non-governmental organizations, and representatives of the Ossetian side.

As for the real dates of passing the bill or agreement, Mr. Burduli hopes that it is possible to reach the agreement on the legal form by the end of this year, and the restitution mechanism can become functional from the next year already."
(UNA, November 1999)

Discriminatory implementation of housing codes could impede IDP return to Abkhazia (1999)

- IDPs absent for more than six months sometimes lose their right to housing in Abkhazia
- Minorities are particularly at risk of violations of their rights to housing, and frequently suffer harassment when trying to ensure that right
- A solution to the housing issue considered fundamental for safe and lasting return to take place

"Both inside the security and restricted weapons zones and in the rest of Abkhazia, abuses of property rights continue to be a cause for concern. This will become more acute in a wide-scale return to Abkhazia; however, such abuses are currently pervasive in many larger villages in the territory. The housing code of the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic from 1983 is still in effect in Abkhazia. The *de facto* parliament of Abkhazia has only partially updated this legislation to reflect the current situation, passing a "Law on Rental" in September 1994 and "Regulations on the Means to Allot Residential and Immovable Property from the State Housing Fund to Persons and on the Payment of Expenditures for its Maintenance and Repairs" in February 1997. The housing code generally covers all state-owned buildings (including kolkhozes and "builders' cooperatives") and private property. All citizens are guaranteed the right to housing in article 2.1 of the 1997 Regulations. Article 69 of the 1983 Housing Code prohibits absences of more than six months – with certain exceptions such as working abroad or illness – unless extended by a court. Article 2.5 of the supplementary February 1997 Regulations, states that only persons constantly residing on the territory of Abkhazia have the right to acquire state housing and that exceptions to this can only be decided by the *de facto* Cabinet of Ministers. [Footnote: The term in Russian xxxxxx xxxxxx can be translated either as permanently, constantly or continuously residing, each of which has a different legal meaning in its application.] The application of this article is not further defined. Thus, persons who fled Abkhazia during the conflict, or those who have spent lengthy periods with relatives in Georgia proper or Russia, for example, may no longer have the right to continue living in their apartment, nor are they guaranteed housing elsewhere if their apartment has been reassigned.

The imprecise nature of the term constantly residing leads to discriminatory implementation in practice. HROAG is aware of 11 cases in which members of minority groups such as Russians, Georgians and Greeks, have complained that their apartment was illegally given to an Abkhaz family by the city housing authorities – even as they are residing within it. HROAG has received several complaints that the defendants (and sometimes even their lawyers) are harassed by the judge presiding the case or the prosecutors. One woman alleged that she was shot at in her apartment after a positive decision by the judge. The human rights office is aware of three positive decisions in the Sukhumi city court and Gagra administration; however, enforcement has been slow. While the complaints brought before the UN office cannot be considered exhaustive and completely representative, they do indicate a certain trend in which the laws are applied to the detriment of minorities. This may be in part due to the pre-eminence of *de facto* authorities, which negatively affects minorities by marginalizing their role and position. Moreover, there have been five reports of houses with Georgian/Mingrelian residents, being occupied by Abkhaz militia groups or *de facto* Abkhaz customs groups in the villages of Chlou, Dikhazurga, Gagra, Gali and Gumurishi. The owner's reception towards the new inhabitants is mixed; nonetheless, there is no legal basis for this occupation.[...]

[...] in order to ensure a safe and lasting return to both the Gali region and Abkhazia as a whole, housing issues must be resolved. Minorities are particularly at risk of violations to their rights to housing, and frequently suffer harassment when trying to ensure their right to housing."(Samuel, 1999, p.5-6)

See also the 20 March 2002 resolution of the Parliament of Georgia "On the unlawful misappropriation of state property and refugees and internally displaced persons' private property in Abkhazia" [Internet]

PATTERNS OF RETURN AND RESETTLEMENT

Return prospects

Many Georgian IDPs still have the hope of returning one day to their homes (2004)

“For the last eleven years the nation of Georgia has faced the serious problem of a large population of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Over half of the 250,000 men, women and children, forced into exile during the 1991-3 conflict still live in cramped 'temporary' accommodation. Trapped in overcrowded rooms in Georgia's former tourist hotels, sanatoriums, schools, kindergartens and shops, many exist in the hope of returning to their homes. However, due to the ongoing political stalemate the majority of these temporary shelters have turned into permanent residences. With the passing years a return home has seemed more and more of a distant dream. As a result frustration has been building up within the IDPs. They feel themselves living nowhere; neither properly located in their adopted communities, nor with any realistic hope of a return to their former lives.” (UNDP 2004)

According to the UN Special Representative on IDPs, “A defining feature of internal displacement in this region is that, unlike in many other situations where internally displaced populations are perceived by the authorities as associated with "the enemy" and targeted on that basis, in the South Caucasus, ethnic and external factors foster a general attitude of sympathy and solidarity with the displaced. Even so, there exist serious concerns about respect for the rights of the internally displaced, especially as regards facilitating solutions to their plight.[...]

In particular, the Government's pursuit of the goal of return, which in Georgia, as in Azerbaijan, is also shared by the overwhelming majority of the displaced, has for many years been so absolute as to deny displaced persons the ability to enjoy their full rights as citizens and lead productive lives in the interim.” (Deng 10 June 2003)

Return hampered by widespread poverty in South Ossetia (2003-2004)

- Since 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the civil war, and earthquake contributed to a grim economic climate in the area
- International aid has decreased in recent years, while the humanitarian situation slightly deteriorated
- Local authorities objectively cannot provide more than a minimal and irregular assistance to their own needy population
- Unprecedented level of crime and related manifestations, such as increased drug addiction and suicide rates, are a huge concern
- Lack of potential for improvement in the immediate future explains the low number of returnees into South Ossetia, even for the Ossetian ethnic group
- From 2000 to 2004 return on all sides virtually came to a halt

"During the time of the Soviet Union, the region was a relatively prosperous one. Its mines, factories, and farms supplied raw materials to markets across the Soviet Union, and the mountainous regions of Java were dotted with resorts and tourist bases. Since 1989, however,

the collapse of the Soviet Union, compounded with effects of the ensuing civil war and the powerful earthquake that hit the region, all contributed to a grim economic climate. Poverty has become widespread across the region and is growing.

The humanitarian situation in South Ossetia cannot be described as critical, but remains precarious and certainly requires more attention by international community. The Georgian-South Ossetian peace-process is practically in a deadlock, and the conflict in South Ossetia is at times described as a forgotten one. International aid has markedly decreased in recent years, while the humanitarian situation has actually slightly deteriorated, and some basic rehabilitation needs have grown. Local authorities have no external support to their budget for social security programmes and objectively cannot provide more than a minimal and irregular assistance to their own needy population. There is a widely-perceived need for continuing, and possibly increasing humanitarian aid, especially in the medical sector, as well as basic infrastructure rehabilitation in the fields of electricity, water, sanitation, etc.

[...]

A large majority of South Ossetia's population lives on extremely low salaries or pensions. Some are involved in petty trade or the 'transit' goods trade. Some have obtained the right of Russian pensions, which are considerably higher than the South Ossetian ones. Many working age people are economic migrants and increasingly emigrants to Russia, who then provide remittances that support their relatives. The majority of the population, however, survives on subsistence agriculture. Due to the gloomy overall socio-economic situation, unprecedented level of crime and related manifestations, such as increased drug addiction and suicide rates, have become a huge concern to all. Furthermore, South Ossetia faces demographic erosion as ever larger number of working-age people migrate, or rather emigrate, primarily to the Russian Federation, in search of better employment and income opportunities. Lack of income and employment opportunities is the central issue in addressing the dismal socio-economic situation in the region.

In the absence of adequate programmes to stimulate the economy, the local population, especially the most vulnerable groups, such as single elderly without family support, will remain dependent on humanitarian assistance, for which funding has been low and decreasing. It should be highlighted that the current situation is not conducive to potential returnees. The lack of potential for improvement in the immediate future is a crucial factor in the low number of returnees into South Ossetia, even for the Ossetian ethnic group. Due to the low level of return, UNHCR and its implementing partners have scaled down their presence in the region." (UN OCHA 15 January 2004)

"In a confidence building step in summer 2004, however, Georgia unilaterally pledged to support the return of ethnic Ossetians displaced during the 1990-1992 conflict. In August President Saakashvili signed a decree allocating 350,000 lari (\$197,700) to assist 25 Ossetian families to return to pre-war homes. Returnee residences were to be rehabilitated and furnished, and seed money provided. Deputy State Minister for Regional Issues Zenta Bestaeva, until recently an Ossetian refugee herself, was made responsible. The first five families returned in August 2004. The return of the other twenty had been expected in September but has been delayed. According to Bestaeva many more Ossetians originally from Georgia and now living in North Ossetia are interested in return. What reluctance they feel is linked not to fear or ethnic hatred but lack of housing and infrastructure. In many rural areas the homes Ossetians left fourteen years ago need rebuilding. Education facilities are derelict in previously predominantly Ossetian ethnic settlements. Parents are concerned there are no schools, and no Russian language instruction would be offered. Ossetians realise it would be difficult to find jobs -- the firms they had worked in were closed." (ICG 26 November 2004, p26)

"The returns that did occur after 1992 tended to strengthen the dominance of majority populations rather than promote multi-ethnic co-existence. Few minorities chose to regain pre-war residences. UNHCR assisted return of 278 ethnic Georgian families to South Ossetia and 86 Ossetian families to Georgia. A Georgian engineer who worked on the reconstruction of homes for returnees told Crisis Group (ICG) these figures were exaggerated because very few families came back permanently -- the majority sold their rebuilt property. "We did not achieve the expected results", he claimed. Allegedly South Ossetian authorities encouraged Ossetian refugees to settle in South Ossetia rather than in Georgia proper. In turn, Georgian local authorities did little to assist returning Ossetians regain possession of their property. From 2000 to 2004 return on all sides virtually came to a halt [according to UNCHR, "Global Shelter Assistance in South Ossetia/ Georgia Proper", 1997-2004]." (ICG 26 November 2004, pp.5-6)

De facto Abkhaz authorities' role vis-à-vis the returnees to Gali (2006)

- Very cautious attitude of de facto authorities regarding a possible return of IDPs

"The de facto Abkhaz authorities unilaterally declared their acceptance of the return of refugees and IDPs to the Gali district in March 1999. In his dialogue with a leading de facto official, the Representative [the UN Representative on the human rights of IDPs] was however informed that return in safety and dignity to areas beyond the Gali district could not be ensured for Georgian returnees. In October 2005, the Abkhaz de facto Parliament passed a "Law of the Republic of Abkhazia on Citizenship of the Republic of Abkhazia", which defines the group of persons eligible to apply for Abkhaz citizenship, regulates the procedure of its acquisition and enumerates grounds on which applications may be rejected. Although this "law", since it has been promulgated by internationally unrecognized authorities, would not have any international legal consequences, it nevertheless has a direct impact on individuals in the region of Abkhazia, particularly Georgian returnees." (CHR 22 March 2006)

"Georgians living in Gali district of Abkhazia will face no problems even if they refuse to accept Abkhaz passports, Foreign Minister of breakaway Abkhazia Sergey Shamba said in an interview with Russian news agency Regnum on January 10.

"Simply they will be deprived of right to vote if they refuse to take Abkhaz passports, as it is necessary to present ID during voting, in our case this [ID] is our internal passport," Shamba said.

He also said that situation has "improved a lot" after Georgian guerrilla groups were disbanded there.

"But in recent months escalation of tension is observed in Gali and we think that this is related with the Georgian side's demand to internationalize peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone and to deploy UN civil police [in Gali district]," Shamba said.

He also commented on possible return of Georgian internally displaced persons back to Abkhazia and said that that the Abkhaz side is very cautious in this regard.

"For Georgia this is not only a humanitarian issue, this problem has a political aspect for Tbilisi. The same is for us, because it is clear that demographic changes will trigger political changes as well," he said.

"In the current situation return of refugees in other parts of Abkhazia [apart of Gali district] will trigger renewal of violence, ethnic conflicts and consequently to Georgian-Abkhaz war," Shamba added." (United Nations Association of Georgia 10 January 2006)

UN supports confidence building measures to improve security in return areas (2003)

- The UN Security Council approved the addition of a small civilian component to the UNOMIG mission to improve security conditions in return areas
- The deployment of this component in areas under Abkhaz control has been postponed following Abkhaz opposition
- UNOMIG civilian police have started preparations for patrolling in the Zugdidi sector, in conjunction with UNOMIG military observers
- Daily UNOMIG ground patrols of the Gali and Zugdidi sectors continued
- Patrols in the Kodori Valley remained suspended in the wake of the kidnapping of four UNOMIG personnel on 5 June 2003
- UNOMIG continued its efforts at the operational level to build trust between the sides and reduce the potential for misunderstandings

"The UN Security Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) until 31 January 2004, subject to a review of this mandate by the Council in the event of changes in the mandate of the Collective Peacekeeping Forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS peacekeeping force).

Unanimously adopted resolution 1494, the Council also endorsed the Secretary-General's recommendation, contained in his report of 21 July (S/2003/751), to add a civilian component of 20 officers to the Mission to strengthen its capacity to carry out its mandate and, in particular, to contribute to the creation of conditions conducive to the safe and dignified return of internally displaced persons and refugees." (UN OCHA 2 September 2003)

"In keeping with the Security Council's decision to strengthen the capacity of UNOMIG to carry out its mandate by adding a civilian police component to the Mission, the first 10 officers, including the senior police adviser and his chief of staff, were deployed in November and December 2003. The deployment of the remaining members of the component, however, has been temporarily delayed. This followed advice from the de facto Abkhaz Government that the de facto Parliament had responded negatively to the establishment of a UNOMIG police presence on Abkhaz-controlled territory, especially in the Gali district, and that as a consequence it would be necessary to delay the deployment of the remaining officers.

My Special Representative has been working closely with the Abkhaz authorities to agree on a formula for the operation of those officers already in place in Abkhazia, Georgia, prior to the full deployment of the remaining personnel. In the meantime, UNOMIG civilian police have held introductory meetings with members of the Georgian Government and have begun a preliminary assessment of the most immediate training and equipment needs in the Zugdidi sector. They have also started preparations for patrolling in the Zugdidi sector, in conjunction with UNOMIG military observers. The selection of 15 Zugdidi district police officers for participating in training at the OSCE-led Kosovo Police Service School is also under way." (UN SG 14 January 2004, paras. 25-26)

"Daily UNOMIG ground patrols of the Gali and Zugdidi sectors continued throughout the period under review. No violations of the 1994 Moscow Agreement were recorded.

Patrols in the Kodori Valley remained suspended in the wake of the kidnapping of four UNOMIG personnel on 5 June 2003 (see S/2003/1019, para. 18). Following the completion of UNOMIG's inquiry into the hostage incident, which recommended additional security measures for the safety and security of the military observers, the Mission has begun working with the Georgian and Abkhaz sides, as well as with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) peacekeeping

force, to formulate an appropriate operational plan for the resumption of patrolling in the spring of 2004. Patrols will resume only when more robust security measures have been finalized and implemented, and following a demonstrable commitment by both sides, in particular the Georgian authorities, to ensure the security of UNOMIG staff. Helicopter patrols also remain suspended due to ongoing concerns about security; administrative flights have continued along specially designated routes over the Black Sea.

UNOMIG continued its efforts at the operational level to build trust between the sides and reduce the potential for misunderstandings. The UNOMIG-chaired joint fact-finding group, which includes the active participation of the sides and the peacekeeping force, continued to investigate violent incidents. The working group of the joint fact-finding group moved from Sukhumi to Gali to reduce its response time; most incidents continue to take place in the Gali sector. Eight cases are currently under investigations.

The weekly quadripartite meetings have continued to provide a constructive platform for both sides to discuss security-related matters in the presence of the Chief Military Observer and senior staff of the CIS peacekeeping force. Issues of concern during the reporting period included Georgian objections to Abkhaz 'border guards' and 'customs posts', and Abkhaz concerns about the activities of illegal armed groups operating across the ceasefire line.

[...]

UNOMIG worked to establish additional mechanisms to build confidence between the sides in the Kodori Valley. In this connection, it facilitated the establishment of a direct telephone link between the Abkhaz authorities and the senior Georgian representative in the upper Kodori Valley. It has already been used by the sides to brief each other on the extent of the damage following the October floods and subsequent winter snows; it has also been instrumental in facilitating humanitarian assistance to members of the local community.

[...]

It will recalled that, on 8 October 2003, the sides, UNOMIG and the CIS peacekeeping force signed in Gali a protocol under the terms of which both parties agreed to cooperate more closely with each other in the fight against crime and with UNOMIG to improve the prevailing security climate (see S/2003/1019, para. 10). The implementation of this protocol is monitored at the weekly quadripartite meetings. As a further step to improve security, UNOMIG increased its patrolling, with the redeployment to the Gali sector of six additional observers from other parts of the mission area." (UN SC 14 January 2004, paras. 15-21)

"Facilitating the return of internally displaced persons and refugees to their homes in safe and secure conditions remains a core aspiration of the United Nations, even though no additional progress has been made in the implementation of the 1994 quadripartite agreement on voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons (see/1994/397, annex II). The recent agreement between the Georgian and Russian sides [...] to proceed with the re-establishment of the railway in parallel with the repatriation of refugees and internally displaced persons should open the door to progress on this issue. The United Nations remains committed to the creation of conditions conducive to return, in accordance with UNOMIG's mandate and the recommendations of the Joint Assessment Mission to the Gali district of November 2000. Implementation of the measures proposed by the security assessment missions, aimed at creating a safer environment in the area, will also be an important factor in facilitating the process of the return of refugees and internally displaced persons." (UN SG 9 April 2003, para. 29)

House destruction or use by new occupants are major reasons preventing return (2003-2006)

- Living conditions of returnees in Gali remain extremely poor (2006)

- More than half of the houses left behind by IDPs in Abkhazia are not usable any more
- Occupancy of houses is named as a main reason of not returning of many IDPs from South Ossetia

“Over the last 15 years, the economic situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, has deteriorated dramatically, with GDP having fallen by 80-90 per cent, per capita income by 90 per cent, and unemployment risen to around 95 per cent. Most industries and State farms are severely damaged or destroyed. Livelihoods, both urban and rural, are now based on subsistence farming.

The infrastructure (electricity, telecommunications, roads, water sewerage) is in a state of collapse. Public services such as health care and education are inadequate. Thus, living conditions of returnees remain extremely poor, with deficient housing, limited economic opportunities and a general lack of public services. The scarcity of resources to rehabilitate or reconstruct houses in the Gali district is said to be among the main concerns of IDPs with regard to return.” (CHR 22 June 2006)

According to local observers, people go back and forth between Gali in Abkhazia and Zugdidi in Western Georgia. Those remaining in Gali often rely on their relatives in Western Georgia in order to survive. (IDMC May 2006)

“[T]he most sensitive issue related to the IDP problem is that of their return. Living in permanent uncertainty, and especially deprived of any reliable information about their homes, timing and conditions of return, is an especially strong stressor. More than half of the houses left behind by IDPs in Abkhazia are not usable any more, as according to existing data about half of IDP houses are destroyed, 12% need major repairs. Many have new owners. One out of five IDPs do not know anything about the condition of their house. But still, if ever repatriation takes speed, there is always a risk, as it happened in Gali in 1998, that repatriates are the group under very high risk if international guarantees are not secured, and even in case this happens.

Occupancy of houses is named as a main reason of not returning of many IDPs from South Ossetia, where the security situation has otherwise improved. The same is true regarding ethnic Ossetians from other parts of Georgia than South Ossetia. While returning itself may be possible, pursuing the restitution of property may appear to be a dangerous option.” (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003)

Some internally displaced have opted for resettlement (2000)

- Ossets have often opted to resettle in South out of fear for their safety
- Persons who participated in the hostilities, or have relatives who did, consider themselves to be at particular risk of reprisals should they return

"While the right of displaced persons to return to their previous areas of permanent residence must be ensured, it is also imperative that return not be viewed as the only possible durable solution for the displaced, who also have a right to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country. Although government policy, especially with regard to ethnic Georgians displaced from Abkhazia, appears to have been powerfully guided by the political priority placed on return of the displaced, resettlement in other parts of the country also must be supported for those internally displaced persons who desire it. The Guiding Principles, to which Georgian government officials responded so positively, affirm that the authorities have a duty and responsibility to establish conditions, as well as provide the means, which allow internally displaced persons to return

voluntarily to their homes or places of habitual residence or to resettle voluntarily in another part of the country.

Already, and despite the overriding emphasis on return, it is beginning to be recognized that certain internally displaced persons are unlikely to want to return, out of fear for their safety. The case, noted above, of the Osset man who had opted to resettle in South Ossetia rather than return to his previous residence in government-controlled Georgia, where he feared his safety could not be guaranteed, is one example. Persons who participated in the hostilities, or have relatives who did, consider themselves to be at particular risk of reprisals should they return and thus are likely to prefer resettlement.

An IRC pilot project is providing shelter construction assistance (roofing material, paint, windows, etc.) to some 30 families displaced from Abkhazia who have indicated that they will not return. An additional criterion for participation in the programme is that the prospective beneficiaries own land - a condition which, as detailed above, requires registering as a permanent resident in the area concerned and, under existing legislation, losing one's status as an internally displaced person and the benefits that this entails." (UN CHR 25 January 2001, paras. 105-107)

Return movements

Return to Abkhazia continues despite insecurity (2003-2006)

- An estimated 40,000-60,000 IDPs have spontaneously returned to the Gali district, at least on a seasonal basis
- The UN Country Team estimated their number at 45,000 as of 2006
- Donors have shown an increasing interest in supporting projects in the Gali district
- The pace of improvement in living conditions varies across the Sector and is entirely dependant on the locals' sense of security and their consequent willingness to invest in improving their situation

"Specific to Abkhazia, there are additional concerns of the international community such as the high-level of criminality and insecurity in some areas. Moreover, an estimated 15,000 landmines are spread throughout Abkhazia, which endangers humans and livestock, and restrict access to peoples' land. The most complex security situation is in Gali District where an estimated 40,000-60,000 IDPs have spontaneously returned or at least seasonally returned to farm their lands, but where the implementation of relief assistance or rehabilitative programming is limited by these security concerns. Unfortunately, partly because of the lack of rehabilitation on the most basic of infrastructure (i.e. schools, health centres, houses, water, sanitation) and security concerns a good number of these IDPs remain after the end of the summer. However, as a number of returnees, between 30,000 and 40,000 are now residing almost permanently in Gali district, and there is a broad understanding that socio-economic conditions in Abkhazia are not improving, but rather degrading for the most vulnerable strata of the population, some donors have indicated more willingness to support infrastructure and small community building projects. In late 2002 and throughout 2003, a somewhat greater interest by donors to support projects in Abkhazia has been noted, which resulted in launching or re-starting some important new programmes and initiatives, most importantly, this resulted in the reopening of the office of Première Urgence in November 2002, which Accion contra el Hambre reactivated its programme in January 2003, subsequently introducing two other projects, one funded by SDC and another implementing partner to WFP." (UN OCHA November 2003, pp. 17-18)

The Housing Assessment is set against the background of the armed conflict in Abkhazia. It is estimated that 79,000 persons have been displaced from the district as a result of the conflict and that during the last years around 45,000 persons have returned spontaneously to Gali district (including persons living there on a seasonal basis), many returning to destroyed pre-war homes without means to ensure adequate living conditions.” (UN Country Team in Georgia 28 February 2006)

“UNHCR plans to verify their exact number in the coming months.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

According to UNHCR in Georgia, no return occurred in 2005-2006. (IDMC May 2006).

“In some cases IDP only return to their homes temporarily to tend the land before returning to their camps on the Georgian side of the cease-fire line. The pace of improvement in living conditions varies across the Sector and is entirely dependant on the locals' sense of security and their consequent willingness to invest in improving their situation.” (UNOMIG 2 November 2005)

For a thorough discussion on return options, please see

Prospects for Return of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to Abkhazia in Georgia, Background Paper by Inger Christine Svendsen, Tbilisi, **Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)**, November 2005 [URL below]

UNHCR facilitates return to South Ossetia (2005-2006)

- Since 1997, UNHCR has been monitoring the needs and facilitating the return of both refugees and IDPs in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone
- Between 1997 and 2005, UNHCR has assisted 1,709 returnee families (5,735) individuals and another 200 other vulnerable individuals of concern, with shelter and other assistance
- The process of returning people to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone has been virtually suspended since summer 2004, and very few numbers are returning under current volatile circumstances
- Poor economic situation in South Ossetia has deterred many from returning home as opportunities for income generation and basic services are largely absent

“The poor economic situation in the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia has deterred many from returning home as opportunities for income generation and basic services are largely absent. The international community has paid much less attention to the situation in the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, with rehabilitation and reconstruction projects for returnees virtually inexistent. The Representative [on the Human Rights of IDPs] visited a settlement of returnees where houses had been provided by the humanitarian community. However, due to insufficient resources houses had not been adequately insulated against cold weather, and did not have water or sanitary facilities.” (CHR 22 March 2006)

“Since 1997, UNHCR has been monitoring the needs and facilitating the return of both refugees and IDPs in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone. Between 1997 and 2005 (November), it has assisted 1,709 returnee families (5,735) individuals and another 200 other vulnerable individuals of concern, with shelter and other assistance. It has also supported infrastructure projects in targeted villages of return/potential return conflict areas, through repair/rehabilitation of communal facilities such as schools, health points/hospitals, water distribution networks, youth centres, piglet farms, etc. Although returnees receive the support needed for the initial stages of their

return, their living conditions and reintegration are very much dependant on the overall economic situation in the conflict zone and the huge infrastructure and developmental needs in their areas of return. Humanitarian assistance and self reliance programmes are still required in the immediate term to help returnees meet their basic needs.

This, combined with longer-term infrastructure and developmental programmes benefiting entire communities, will help improve overall living conditions of returnees and return areas as well as ensure the sustainability of returns.

However, reportedly, the process of returning people to the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone has been virtually suspended since summer 2004, and very few numbers are returning under current volatile circumstances." (UN Country Team in Georgia 30 November 2005)

Seasonal nature of return to the Gali district (2000)

- Hazelnut crops draw displaced persons back to Abkhazia for the harvest in the summer
- Another factor influencing the seasonal nature of return is the issue of education
- The 'seasonal returnees' often go back and forth between Georgia proper and their home areas several times a season
- Movement back to Georgia proper also corresponds to times when internally displaced persons are scheduled to receive humanitarian assistance in Georgian proper

"There is indeed a clear seasonal pattern to return, connected with the cultivating season and taking advantage of the fertile land in the Gali district. Hazelnuts are one of the more lucrative crops, drawing displaced persons back to Abkhazia for the harvest in the summer who then return to Georgia proper for the fall and winter months. It was noted that, in the absence of access to land or to adequate opportunities for employment and income-generation in Georgian proper, economic desperation is a driving force in the decision of the displaced to return, if only temporarily.

Another factor influencing the seasonal nature of return is the issue of education, in particular the language of instruction. According to the curriculum developed by the de facto Abkhaz 'Ministry of Education', elementary education, from grades one to five, is provided only in Russian. This is true even in what are designated as Georgian language (as opposed to Russian or mixed Russian/Georgian) schools. Though instruction is provided in the Georgian language from grade six onwards, the prohibition on instruction in Georgian in elementary education was pointed out as being a powerful deterrent to durable return of displaced ethnic Georgians as it threatens to impede the possibility for higher education elsewhere in Georgia. Though some language and cultural instruction is provided on the margins of the core material, Georgian history reportedly is not taught at all.

[...]

It should be noted that the 'seasonal' nature of the return relates to the general timing of return as opposed to its duration. The 'seasonal returnees' often go back and forth between Georgia proper and their home areas several times a season. International observers noted that there is regular traffic of internally displaced persons, especially across the bridge near Zugdidi that connects southern Gali with Georgia proper. In the case of persons whose homes are in southernmost Gali (it was said that some displaced could see their homes across the Inguri river), the actual period of return may be as little as a few hours. Typically, it is several days of weeks, with displaced persons then going back to Georgia proper, in particular once they have harvested produce to sell. Movement back to Georgia proper have also been noted to correspond to times when internally displaced persons are scheduled to receive humanitarian assistance, which in

Abkhazia, where the activities of international humanitarian organizations are limited, is inadequate to meet the actual needs of the population there." (UNCHR 25 January 2001, paras. 79-82)

Report of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights (13 July 2000):

"To survive, [IDPs in Zugdidi], who live in frightful poverty, depend entirely on family support, ie other courageous family members who infiltrate the Abkhazian border region of Gali at night or with the help of 'gifts' to work for a few days or longer in order to make a living and pick up and bring back to Zugdidi whatever they can find for their families. It is said that 7 to 8,000 illegal workers (including more than one quarter of the IDPs registered in Zugdidi) leave and return every week! The 'cruel' question here of course has yet to receive an official answer: whether not only the electricity is in the process of being 'cut', but also food and financial aid to the IDPs near and along the border on the Georgian side in order to prompt them to return sporadically to Abkhazia and to try to ensure their material survival there and thus maintain international political pressure on the Abkhazian authorities. This is the actual opinion of many officials whom we met, who spoke of 'attempts to instrumentalise the Georgian IDPs', but I can neither confirm nor invalidate this hypothesis without additional reliable facts on the subject." (Council of Europe 13 July 2000, III - Refugees and displaced persons wishing to return to their place of origin)

UNHCR 1994 return plan fails (1995-2006)

- The Agreement remains the only document relevant to the return of IDPs and refugees signed by the parties (2006)
- Abkhaz representatives paid only lip-service to UNHCR's return plan
- UNHCR moved ahead despite reports on violence against Georgian returnees in Abkhazia
- Abkhaz "authorities" sought to implement the plan in a discriminatory manner
- The UNHCR plan was designed for the return of 80,000 IDPs, but only 311 people finally opted to repatriate under the plan

"From the outset, the Abkhaz government has officially supported the UNHCR-supervised repatriation plan as defined in the Quadripartite Agreement on the Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons signed in Moscow on April 4, 1994, by Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia and the UNHCR.

In practice, however, official support for the repatriation plan was consistently contradicted by the statements and actions of Abkhaz representatives both in Sukhumi and the Gali region. International NGOs report that in preliminary meetings in Sukhumi in May 1994, Abkhaz officials, notably Deputy Prime Minister Enver Kanba, expressed open hostility toward ethnic Georgians. Officials in the Gali region did the same. While fighting continued around Gali, there were almost daily reports of violent attacks on ethnic Georgians who had tried to return from Gali to check on their homes and gardens. The Abkhaz authorities attributed these deaths to landmines and bandits, taking no responsibility for the ethnic targeting that was in fact taking place.(OSI 1995, pp.19-20)

"The plan endorsed in April 1994 by Abkhazia, Georgia, Russia and the UNHCR called for the repatriation of the displaced population in stages, starting with some 80,000 people who fled the Gali region in southeastern Abkhazia as defeated Georgian troops retreated in September 1993.

Most of these people abandoned their homes before Abkhaz troops reached the region, seeking refuge with the local population in and around the Georgian town of Zugdidi across the Inguri river. Non governmental organizations working in Sukhumi believe that about 30,000 have already returned to the Gali region.

According to the UNHCR plan, some 80,000 IDPs were to be repatriated before the end of October 1994. The plan included, among other features, a computerized inventory of all potential returnees; provision of materials to the returnees for reconstruction of homes; a media campaign to inform and prepare the populations on both sides of the border; and a controversial prior review process whereby Abkhaz authorities reserved the right to screen potential returnees, excluding anyone who had taken up arms on the Georgian side (the majority of able-bodied men), or who intended to take up arms in the future. Abkhaz authorities later extended the exclusion criteria to persons having sent money out of Abkhazia. By autumn 1994, the NGO community believed Abkhaz officials had compiled a list of 14,000 to 25,000 Georgians not permitted to return to their homes.

Critics of the UNHCR repatriation program, including the NGO community in Tbilisi, faulted the plan for its hasty preparation, particularly for ignoring some of the refugee organization's own standard procedures in assessing community attitudes on both sides of the border before promoting a mass repatriation. Following are the main criticisms of the plan cited by leading NGOs working in Georgia:

An exclusionary clause included in the Quadripartite Agreement allows authorities to exclude former Georgian combatants from repatriating to their Abkhaz homes. But it also casts a wide net over all men of fighting age, excluding them for past as well as possible future activity; moreover, the time-frame for the screening process is open-ended, allowing the authorities to assess someone at any time. While the women and children related to excluded men would be allowed to return, critics point to the destabilizing effect of long-term family separation, and the massing of a restive male exile population on the Zugdidi side of the border.

The UNHCR headquarters staff in Geneva was aware of this program, and delegations were dispatched to Georgia to perform assessments. Geneva also deployed one of the most experienced field officers from its ex-Yugoslavia program to run the operation from Zugdidi. To the NGOs in Georgia it seemed inconceivable that the headquarters would proceed with a \$4 million plan without considering the physical risks to the returnees and the potential for the program to end in disaster. By September 1994, many NGOs were even more adamantly opposed to proceeding under the terms of the plan, citing the above criticisms and underscoring the UN's own weekly reports of rampant criminality in Abkhazia and daily assaults, abductions, rapes and house-burnings in the Gali region when Georgians tried to return from Zugdidi.

Despite repeated appeals by the groups that were to serve as implementing partners in the repatriation plan, UNHCR did not sufficiently survey either the displaced population in Georgia or the resident population in Abkhazia into which the IDPs would have to be reintegrated. While thousands trickled home on their own, only 311 people finally opted to repatriate under the UNHCR plan."(Open Society Institute 1995, pp.27-31)

Since then, UNHCR has taken a more cautious stand on the issue of return: "The adoption of two essential protocols concerning the return of IDPs and the rehabilitation of Abkhazia, is still awaited. In March [1999], the Abkhaz side unilaterally initiated the registration and repatriation of IDPs in Gali district. It is estimated that the current population in Gali region is around 30,000. However, the sustainability of return is questionable since there are still no security guarantees from either side." (UNHCR 1999, Mid-Year Progress Report-Georgia)

"In 1994, the Georgian and Abkhaz sides (the Parties), together with the Russian Federation and UNHCR, signed the Quadripartite agreement on voluntary return of refugees and displaced persons, based inter alia on "the right of all citizens to live in and to return to their country of origin" as enshrined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The Parties reaffirmed their "willingness to create conditions for the voluntary, safe and dignified return of displaced persons to their permanent places of residence in all regions of Abkhazia", expressed their "desire [...] to cooperate with each other to achieve full observance of the principles and safeguards governing voluntary repatriation" and agreed to guarantee "security and living conditions in the areas of return" before implementing repatriation operations. The Agreement obliges the Parties to ensure, inter alia, that returnees will be protected from harassment, that they have their expired identity and residence documents extended and their lost property restituted or, if not possible, will be duly compensated, to which end the establishment of a property claims mechanism was envisaged. A Quadripartite Commission was established under the Agreement to implement its provisions. However, the Commission functioned only from 1994 to 1995 before its work stalled due to disagreement between the Parties, having organized the return of only 311 persons. The Agreement remains the only document relevant to the return of IDPs and refugees signed by the parties." (CHR 22 March 2006)

See the full text of the Moscow Quadripartite Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons, Signed on 4 April 1994 [[Internal link](#)]

HUMANITARIAN ACCESS

General

Logistical and security obstacles to access vulnerable populations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia (2004)

- In Abkhazia, de facto authorities require a clearance process for staff of international organisations to travel to the region
- In mid-2004, CIS Peace Keeping Forces introduced a more rigorous notification process for the vehicles of all international organizations, except the UN, crossing the ceasefire line into Abkhazia
- One Ossetian peacekeeper died and two others were wounded in the South Ossetian conflict area in October 2004
- Access to South Ossetia became more limited in 2004

“There are many issues that challenge the work of the international community when working in conflict areas. Logistically, travelling to Abkhazia is more complicated than to other parts of Georgia and the de facto authorities there require a five-day "clearance" process from the personnel of most international organisations travelling to the region. In the summer of 2004, the CIS Peace Keeping Forces also introduced a more rigorous notification process for the vehicles of all international organizations, except the UN, crossing the ceasefire line. The de facto authorities in South Ossetia often show a strong interest in and distrust of programming which goes beyond a strictly humanitarian focus. The lack of international programming has kept the capacity of the local NGO community at a very basic level. Another challenge of working in Abkhazia is the difficulty in implementing cross border programmes between Abkhazia and Georgia Proper. Some organizations have managed to traverse these obstacles and have set up joint programmes. However, for many others the difficulties prove too great. With South Ossetia, the parties at the local level seem more willing to work together and the problems of strict borders do not exist as in Abkhazia. However, it is important to note that the situation has deteriorated in 2004 and access to South Ossetia has become more limited. These kinds of challenges, including security concerns in parts of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, can make working in the conflict zones more difficult but are not so limiting as to prevent organizations from implementing programmes there.” (OCHA 19 November 2004)

“One Ossetian peacekeeper died and two others were wounded in the South Ossetian conflict area on October 12, after the truck transporting the unit of the Ossetian Battalion of the Joint Peacekeeping Forces was attacked by unknown armed men, the Press and Information Committee of the South Ossetian unrecognized republic reported.” (UNAG 12 October 2004)

NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

National response

State institutions in charge of IDP protection and National IDP Legislation (2006)

- The Minister for Refugees and Accommodation acts as the government focal point for issues of internal displacement
- In order to protect and assist IDPs, the Georgian government has developed IDP-related legislation
- Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted of June 28, 1996
- In practice, efforts to enforce IDPs' political and civil rights have long been neglected, mainly due to political considerations
- In mid 2006, - the Georgian government started to develop an IDP strategy with the support of civil society organisations and international partners

There exists a certain solidarity between the Georgian Government and the internally displaced, at least the ethnic Georgians who constitute the majority of the displaced, which can be attributed in particular to shared ethnic kinship. Accordingly, and unlike in many cases of internal displacement, the displaced are not associated with the 'enemy', nor are they subject to attacks on their physical security on that basis (UN CHR 25 January 2001, paras. 109-110).

Who is in charge of responding to the needs of IDPs?

The Minister for Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) acts as the government focal point for issues of internal displacement. The Ministry of Agriculture (MoA), the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES), and the Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs (MoLHSA) are also involved in assisting the population. There is however no formally established state agency to respond to natural disasters or emergencies (OCHA 19 November 2004). In the provinces, there are local branches of the MRA. Unfortunately, it lacks staff and resources to be able to provide accurate information to IDPs, and in return to provide a comprehensive picture of their needs (IDMC, May 2006).

According to national and international interlocutors in Tbilisi it is difficult or impossible to have certain individual cases of IDPs resolved effectively, as the distribution of responsibilities among the various levels and branches of Government addressing internal displacement were unclear and cooperation between them inefficient." (CHR, 22 March 2006)

Another important actor in relation to IDPs is the "Abkhazian government in exile", i.e. members of the local government who found refuge in Tbilisi and who continue to represent the interests of people displaced from Abkhazia. For example, the Ministry of Education of the Abkhazian government in exile is an important link between the Georgian Ministry of Education and IDPs themselves (IDMC, May 2006).

What are the national legal mechanisms protecting IDPs?

In order to protect and assist IDPs, the Georgian government has developed IDP-related legislation and protective mechanisms. Since 1992 approximately 200 enactments and bylaws

(both general and specific) have been adopted. Georgian legislation regulates IDPs' rights by means of two types of legal acts, namely:

- a. Legal acts that are limited to IDPs only and do not apply to other citizens of Georgia. These acts regulate issues related to the specific state of IDPs;
- b. Legal acts that are not limited only to IDPs. These acts apply to the entire population of Georgia, including IDPs.

The principal law which regulates IDPs' rights is the 'Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted' of June 28, 1996. According to the Preamble, the Law 'defines the legal status of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia, establishes their legal, economic and social guarantees, and ensures the respect and realization of their rights and legal interests.' (UN OCHA June 2003, pp. 5-6). This law states that 'a citizen of Georgia or a stateless person permanently residing in Georgia can be considered as an Internally Displaced Person, if he/she was forced to leave his/her place of residence and has been displaced (within the territory of Georgia) on the grounds of threat to life, health or freedom of his/her family members as a result of aggression from a foreign state, internal conflict or mass violation of human rights.' Unlike the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the Georgian legislation does not view victims of natural and artificial disasters as IDPs. This may be explained by the fact that Georgian authorities were then advised by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) which does not have a mandate for this category of IDPs, and because by 1996, persons displaced as a result of armed conflict experienced the most serious problems (UN OCHA June 2003, p. 7).

"The 1996 Law of Georgia on Forcibly Displaced Persons - Persecuted Persons defines the legal status of IDPs in Georgia, establishes their legal, economic and social entitlements, and aims at ensuring respect and realization of their rights and legal interests, such as free choice of residence within Georgia. Benefits include the use of public utilities free of charge at the temporary residence of IDPs, as well as monthly financial allowances from the Government.

Those recognized as particularly vulnerable are entitled to free medical services. The law further envisages the return of private property to returnees and/or compensation for damages thereof, and obliges national and local authorities to 'create necessary social and economic conditions for the safe living of the Persecuted Person at his/her place of permanent residence'.

Despite these positive aspects, the law and ensuing policies of the former Government focused on return as the only desirable solution and created many obstacles to the local integration of those IDPs who were willing to start a new life away from their pre-war communities." (CHR 22 March 2006)

An unofficial English translation of the "Law on Internally Displaced Persons - Persecuted", as amended on 18 December 2001 is available on the Brookings Institution website [\[Internet\]](#)

What benefits do IDPs receive?

The state allocates allowances to IDPs, which represent the main source of income for the majority of them. The sum is much less than the subsistence minimum and it is paid to all IDPs even if they work and receive a salary meeting the subsistence minimum. Apart from state allowances, IDPs are entitled to certain benefits funded by the central government, such as discounts on community utilities, electricity, water supply, telephone communication and transportation. In addition, IDPs of the pension age and those who fought for the territorial integrity of Georgia receive pensions. Local authorities hosting IDPs also provide so-called 'civil service' to displaced persons, as well as other benefits envisaged by the local budget for local residents. Since the aid depends on the extent of the regional budget, assistance provided varies from place to place (UN OCHA June 2003, pp. 17-20).

2006 marked a major change in the allowance system of disbursement of social allowances. The allowance programme which until now had been administered by the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation has now been transferred to the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs and State Agency of Employment and Social Assistance. First stage of the programme will provide free healthcare and the second stage will provide cash assistance to the destitute households. The former allowance system to IDPs will however continue until the end of 2006, since as of May 2006, only 50,000 IDPs had submitted their applications to the new programme (UNCT in Georgia, 31 May 2006)

Examples of rights and exemptions granted by the Georgian law:

The right to have agricultural land plots for temporary use (Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted”, Article 5, paragraph h)

The right to be exempted from paying the land tax on agricultural land plots (Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted, article 5, paragraph h)

Exemptions of IDPs from fees payable for getting certificates with official stamp issued by registry offices; persons recognized as IDPs according to the rule established by legislation shall be exempt from state duties. (Decree # 201 of the President of Georgia of March 4, 1996; Law of Georgia on State Duties, article 5, para. 3d)

Right to free education in public schools (Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted)

Right to free passage of IDPs in Tbilisi in Public Electric Transport (Resolution # 264 of the Cabinet of Ministers of Georgia of May 10, 1995)

Right to preferential travel by railway transport (barring commercial train) on the territory of Georgia (50% discount) (Resolution of the Railway Department of Georgia, 1997; Order #1 of the Minister of Transport and Communications of Georgia on Railway Transportation Preferences for IDPs of January 3, 2001)

Discounts for electricity payment for IDPs residing in collective centres (Order #481 of the President of Georgia of November 26, 2001, Article 13, para. B)

Right to preserve his/her status after marriage (Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted)

Right to grant an IDP status to a child upon the parents' consent if one of them is not an IDP (Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons – Persecuted) (UN OCHA June 2003, annex A)

For a comprehensive review on the actual implementation of these rights, consult the Study on IDP Rights, UN OCHA, June 2003 [Link below]

See also "Monitoring of Legal and Actual Status of Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia", Georgian Young Lawyers' Association, 1999 [Internal link]

See also Government of Georgia, 20 March 2002

The resolution of the Parliament of Georgia "On the unlawful misappropriation of state property and refugees and internally displaced persons' private property in Abkhazia" [[Internet](#)]

In practice, efforts to enforce IDPs' political and civil rights have long been neglected, mainly due to political considerations (OCHA 19 November 2004). In 2002, the election code restored the right of IDPs to vote in local and parliamentary elections, and was further amended in 2003 to give IDPs the right to become elected (NRC Georgia, 14 March 2003 & OCHA, December 2003). In November 2003, the constitutional court also declared that legal provisions preventing IDPs from acquiring property without losing their national IDP status were unconstitutional. However, mismanagement, corruption, and lack of funds continue to limit the impact of the state's action towards the integration of IDPs (UN OCHA November 2003).

2006- The Georgian government is developing a national strategy on IDPs. The National Strategy is expected to deal with all aspects of displacement – housing, employment, and legal status. The

government has stressed that integration of IDPs does not hinder their future return to the habitual residence. Thematic working groups involving relevant government agencies, UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society are providing input to draft the strategy. The Strategy will serve as a foundation for the Government's action plan, which will be implemented with anticipated support from the United Nations and other International Organizations. It will be based on internationally accepted principles on internal displacement and other requirements. The Government stated that it wanted to ensure the transparency of and inclusion of IDPs into the strategy elaboration process.

The Strategy shall serve as an umbrella for all short- and long-term projects aimed at resolving the problems of IDPs, including their current integration and reintegration upon the return.

Stemmed from the above, the Prime Minister of Georgia has established the Government Commission on development of National Strategy for IDPs under the chairmanship of the Minister of Refugees and Accommodation. The Commission will also work on delineation of political status from social assistance since due to their current linkage many not vulnerable IDPs exercise this right thus undermining the efficiency of the system.

Certain activities have been already undertaken since the launching of the Strategy. Namely, a Secretariat has been established within the frames of the Government Commission, and it serves as facilitator of the process and ensures its implementation. A Roadmap of the Strategy and draft framework were elaborated with the assistance of international consultant. The Roadmap features concrete stages such as the preparation of draft, pre-implementation and implementation of the Strategy (UNCT in Georgia, 31 May 2006)

In March 2006, the Minister for Refugees announced the launch of an inventory of property owned by Georgian IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and called on the leadership of the breakaway regions to cooperate in this process (United Nations Association of Georgia, 7 March 2006).

Civil Society Organisations

In Georgia, numerous national NGOs run projects beneficial to or expressly targeting IDPs, such as income-generation projects, medical assistance and psychosocial rehabilitation, extra-curricular education for IDP children, promoting human rights awareness and vocational training (CHR, 22 March 2006).

Displaced women have mobilized to take charge and find solutions to pressing economic and social issues burdening their communities. Many organizations have evolved into advocacy organizations for displaced people on a national level. They have helped bring the government, donor, and even general public's attention to issues such as collective center degradation and psychosocial trauma. Other organizations have been effective partners for donors both in providing humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable displaced persons and for developing microcredit and small and medium-size enterprise programs. Still more groups first developed as small, community-based organizations of women desperate to improve conditions for their families (Buck September 2000, p. 10). Some national NGOs, particularly the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), have provided legal aid to IDPs (The Horizonti Foundation, 29 January 1999, sect.3). NRC's NGO partners, Legal Protection Institute, Society & Justice and Social Programs Foundation, work throughout Georgia to advocate on behalf of IDPs' rights to local authorities, and to bring up cases to the courts when necessary. In the city of Kutaisi for example, a court ruled that IDPs did not have to pay taxes which it judged illegal (IDMC, May 2006).

Some 75 NGOs in the Caucasus are part of the CRINGO network supported by the Danish Refugee Council (DRC). About 20-30 are in Georgia, and 16 of them are in Tbilisi. CRINGO is managing civil society input to develop the IDP strategy. NGOs seem to put a lot of hopes in this process, as according to some civil society observers, this is the first time in 15 years that the government has taken such an initiative. Local NGOs have started organising meetings on the different themes to provide input to IDP strategy.

Some civil society organisations defending the rights of IDPs and others reported harassments and physical threats from the government (IDMC, May 2006)

For more information on CRINGO, see:

Caucasian Refugee and IDP NGO Network - CRINGO, 2006, Suggested CRINGO Input towards IDP strategy process
[Reference below]

Caucasian Refugee and IDP NGO Network - CRINGO - Programme Document 2006 - 2010
[Reference below]

Caucasian Refugee and IDP NGO Network – CRINGO, 2006, Introduction to the CRINGO network
[Reference below]

For more information on the international and local organisations working with IDPs in Georgia, please see:

CALTRIDER, Luc, *IDP Assistance Partners*, prepared under the New Approach to IDP Assistance Initiative, Tbilisi 2004 [see reference below]

The UN in Georgia also publishes the IDP Newsletter, which highlights NGOs' IDP-related activities. Direct links to the IDP Newsletter can be found in the bibliographic list.

You can also consult Assistance Georgian, a web site initiated by the Save the Children's Georgian Assistance Initiative (GAI) which provides information in support of humanitarian and development aid activities in Georgia [Internet: <http://www.assistancegeorgia.org.ge>], and particularly its [information on organizations working with IDPs and refugees](#):

See also USAID Research Paper "[Aftermath: Women's Organizations in Postconflict Georgia](#)", September 2000 [Internet]

International response

Policy and Coordination

- 1999: New Approach to internal displacement in Georgia
- During his visit to Georgia in May 2000 – including to Abkhazia - the UN Special Representative on IDPs expressed his support to the "New Approach" policy
- In 2002, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe urged the Georgian government to refrain from instrumental use of the displaced population for political aims

- In 2003, a working group on legal issues, involving UN agencies, authorities and NGOs, reviewed IDP rights in the national legislation and their implementation on the ground
- In 2004, observers noted the little effectiveness of activities carried out under the new approach
- OCHA office closed down in 2004, but a new Transition Unit was created under the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator
- International Community is supporting development of national strategy on IDPs (2006)

In 1999, a group of organisations (UNDP, UNHCR, OCHA, and the World Bank), and the Government of Georgia forged a partnership to improve the lives of IDPs in Georgia and of their host communities by reforming government policy and supporting a transition from humanitarian assistance to development centred activities. This 'new approach' addressed the contradictory aspects of the long-term IDP problem - providing both for a proper life in their new adopted homes, as well as leaving the way open for a return to their former lives (UNDP 2004). Later, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) joined this initiative. The New Approach, guided by an emphasis on sustainable development, aims at overcoming legislative obstacles to the participation of IDPs in civil society, creating capacity building programmes for IDPs, rationalizing subsidies to IDPs, implementing comprehensive policy/advocacy activities, and piloting development-oriented assistance to IDPs (OCHA 19 November 2004). A Self-Reliance Fund, with an initial capital of US\$ 1.3 million was created to support innovative programmes that strengthened IDPs' self-reliance (UN OCHA October 2002). Under the New Approach, several in-depth reports on IDP issues were conducted in 2004, in particular on health, education and financial instruments (Zoidze & Djibuti 2004; Matiashvili 2004; Gaganidze & Sabadze 2004)

For more information on the New Approach, see UNDP, [The New Approach- IDP Assistance in Georgia](#) [[Internet](#)]

During his visit to Georgia in May 2000 – including to Abkhazia - the UN Special Representative on IDPs expressed his support to the "New Approach" policy. He also recommended the authorities to ensure for the internally displaced equitable access to social services and the right to fully participate in public affairs and to give special attention to the particular needs of women and women-headed households. Also, while the right to return in safety and dignity should be upheld, the right of IDPs to pursue alternatives to return should be recognized (UNHCHR 25 January 2001).

In 2002, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe urged the Georgian government to refrain from instrumental use of the displaced population for political aims. It also stressed that support should be given to the integration of IDPs and refugees in host communities, and that donors should ensure that humanitarian aid is not phased out before it is replaced by development assistance (COE 27 June 2002)

See also the report prepared by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Demography for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe [Report on the situation of refugees and displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, 4 June 2002](#) [[Internet](#)]

See also [Recommendation 1305 \(1996\) on the humanitarian situation of the displaced persons in Georgia, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 24 September 1996](#) [[Internet](#)]

International agencies generally acknowledged that more should be done to help IDPs take care of themselves. In 2003, a working group on legal issues, involving UN agencies, authorities and

NGOs, reviewed IDP rights in the national legislation and their implementation on the ground. The survey highlighted the lack of information among IDPs and officials about the rights of IDPs. It recommended a series of measures, such as a public awareness campaign on IDP rights and legal reforms, particularly regarding voting rights (OCHA June 2003 & December 2003).

OCHA closed its office in Georgia at the end of 2004. OCHA functions had been gradually handed over to UNDP and others. A new Transition Unit was created under the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in order to facilitate and coordinate the work of the UN Country Team agencies, as well as continue cooperation the Government, NGOs and donors) on the relevant issues (OCHA 30 December 2004). According to OCHA, there needs to be increased information sharing and coordination with the Government and with/between international and local organisations (OCHA 19 November 2004).

In January 2004, the UN Security Council (UNSC) stressed the urgent need for progress on the question of refugees and internally displaced persons in Georgia, and called on both sides to display a genuine commitment to make returns the focus of special attention and to undertake that task in close coordination with UNOMIG and consultations with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Group of Friends (UN SC 30 January 2004). In 2005 and in 2006, the UNSC recalled that the Abkhaz side bears a particular responsibility to protect the returnees and to facilitate the return of the remaining displaced population (UNSC 28 Jan 2005, para.18; UNSC 31 March 2006).

Support to the development of the national strategy on IDPs

In December 2005, the UN Secretary-General's Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs, Walter Kälin, visited Georgia and said that he was "shocked by the misery" in which some of the 240,000 IDPs still live, more than a decade after the main hostilities between Georgia and its secessionist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia had ceased. Kälin [recommended](#) that the government design a comprehensive policy to address the displacement crisis, in close consultation with civil society and the displaced themselves. He also urged Georgian institutions to urgently adopt and implement legislation on the rehabilitation and restitution of property to victims of the conflict (Brookings Institution, 3 May 2006)

UN agencies and international NGOs working on IDP issues are also supporting the MRA to develop the national policy on IDPs. The first draft of the policy has to be developed by the end of August in order to coincide with the budget allocation by the Georgian Parliament. A consultant funded by the Swiss Development Agency was hired to quick off the process. He defined the main functions of the Secretariat headed by the head of the department of international relations in the MRA as: coordination of the thematic groups, networking and alliance building, ensuring public awareness of the development of the strategy, ensuring that the thematic groups take a systematic view, monitoring the quality and the progress of the development process, provide input to a commission comprised of Ministers and overseeing the process, and drafting the strategy itself. Thematic groups are co-chaired by relevant Ministries and by international organisations. Each thematic group will be comprised of 2 government representatives, 2 UN representatives, 2 INGOs representatives, and 2 local NGO representatives. The process emphasizes the participation of civil society, and organisations working with IDPs will have direct representation in the working groups developing the strategy. UNDP's Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator chairs the meetings to support the development of the national strategy on IDPs. (IDMC May 2006). UNDP and UNHCR are prominent UN actors working on IDP issues. UNDP is supporting the development of the National Policy through a New Approach Support Unit. UNHCR assists the government in developing the strategy on IDPs, and also supports projects responding to the immediate needs of IDPs and returning IDPs. UNHCR is planning to monitor the return of IDPs to the Gali district of Abkhazia. Georgian authorities have agreed to the project but a date for starting the project still needs to be decided.

ICRC is developing a database on collective centres throughout Georgia to support the implementation of the national strategy on IDPs.

Observers have pointed out the importance for the government to feel the ownership of this process, and for relevant Ministries to be more involved in the development of the strategy. This will help the government to regain credibility in that regard. The MRA has expressed the need for specific expertise to help develop a comprehensive policy (IDMC, May 2006).

See also *"The Georgia Self-Reliance Fund (GRSF): support to innovative strategies for IDPs' integration (1999-2003)" [Internet]*

See also *Gaganidze Giorgi and Sabadze Eka, A Study of Effectiveness of the Financial Instruments Applied to Assist Entrepreneurial Activities of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within the UNDP Project "New Approach to IDP Assistance", Tbilisi 2004 [link below]*

For more information, consult *Assistance Georgia, a web site administered by Save the Children, which provides information in support of humanitarian and development aid activities in Georgia [Internet: <http://www.assistancegeorgia.org.ge>]*

For recommendations by the International community on priority areas requiring attention from the aid community and the government, see *United Nations Country Team in Georgia, 30 Nov 2005*

Georgia: Humanitarian situation and transition to development 2006 - Consolidated Policy Recommendations [Internet]

UN response

- Attention from the international community to IDPs has decreased over the past few years despite a continued high level of need

Attention from the international community to IDPs has decreased over the past few years despite a continued high level of need. UNHCR scaled down its direct assistance programmes to IDPs in 2004, but is still supporting the search for durable solutions for IDPs from South Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2005 (UNHCR December 2003 & December 2004). A limited number of agencies, such as ICRC and WFP, have continued to provide direct food aid to the most vulnerable IDPs, while other humanitarian organisations have increasingly mainstreamed IDPs into programmes benefiting the general population. UNHCR is planning to start register returnees to the Gali district in April 2006 (UNSC, 24 March 2006).

Some agencies have started carrying out various shelter rehabilitation programmes for IDPs, giving them ownership rights over their property, as a way to increase the feeling of responsibility among future IDP owners. Only state property is concerned though, which has fueled demands from IDPs to move from the private sector into collective centers. As of the end of 2004 however, most of the collective centers still failed to meet minimum standards (OCHA 19 November 2004).

The United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) has repaired roads and bridges in order to improve living conditions for IDPs and access for its military patrols (UN SC 13 January 2003, para. 29).

In South Ossetia, the Humanitarian situation cannot be described as critical, but remains precarious and certainly requires more attention by the international community. International aid

has markedly decreased in recent years, while the humanitarian situation has actually slightly deteriorated. Most international NGOs have completely closed down their presence in the area. UNHCR, WFP and UNICEF maintain only a low-level presence (OCHA 15 January 2004). The Human Right Office in Abkhazia monitors the human rights situation in Abkhazia and to contribute to the safe return of IDPs and refugees. Its main activities include human rights training, monitoring of human rights development, and dialogue with all relevant actors. The Office also supported the translation of key human rights instruments into the Abkhaz language, including the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (UNHCHR 2003 & UN SC 14 October 2002, para. 23).

In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, UNICEF and partners are helping improve access to safe water and delivering essential health and education services to displaced women and children (UNICEF, 2006).

For an overview of organisations working with IDPs in Georgia, please see: CALTRIDER, Luc, IDP Assistance Partners, prepared under the New Approach to IDP Assistance Initiative, Tbilisi 2004 [Link below]

Recommendations of the humanitarian community regarding Abkhazia can be found in the Georgia Humanitarian Situation and Strategy 2004 [Internet]

For details on activities by sector, consult the Abkhazia Briefing Note January 2004 [Internet]

For details on the programmes by sector in South Ossetia, consult UN OCHA's South Ossetia Briefing Note January 2004 [Internet]

International Red Cross Movement and international NGOs

- Some 20 international NGOs and over 5,000 registered local NGOs (100 NGOs of which can be classified as very active) provide assistance and expertise in the following areas: protection, rule of law and human rights, food, agriculture, shelter and non-food items, health, water and sanitation, education, mine clearance, and economic recovery
- Most international NGOs are based in Tbilisi, although their activities cover large parts of the country
- Displaced women have mobilized to take charge and find solutions to pressing economic and social issues burdening their communities

In 2004, ICRC provided food, health and shelter assistance to the most vulnerable households, many of them IDPs. The ICRC plans a sharp reduction in its economic assistance by 2005, primarily in western Georgia and to a lesser degree in Abkhazia (ICRC 16 January 2004). Between 2002 and 2005 the ICRC improved living conditions for some 10,500 displaced people in 77 collective centres (ICRC 23 February 2006).

Some 20 international NGOs and over 5,000 registered local NGOs (100 NGOs of which can be classified as very active) provide assistance and expertise in the following areas: protection, rule of law and human rights, food, agriculture, shelter and non-food items, health, water and sanitation, education, mine clearance, and economic recovery. Most international NGOs are

based in Tbilisi, although their activities cover large parts of the country. According to its 2005 two-year strategy for confidence-building measures for displaced and war-affected persons in Abkhazia, designed jointly with the Norwegian (NRC) and Danish (DRC) Refugee Councils and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), UNHCR will focus on protection monitoring and limited assistance to spontaneous returnees in the Gali and neighbouring districts. Work has already been initiated in a number of areas, including protection activities, small-scale shelter rehabilitation and school repairs. In the coming months, UNHCR will verify the numbers of returnees and IDPs currently living in the Gali district as well as investigate their socio-economic situation. Other international organizations, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have been providing humanitarian assistance to IDPs and returnees. UNICEF and NRC are planning to train teachers in conflict resolution themes and provide school kits. However, security concerns restrict the access of humanitarian personnel to the local population, especially in the Gali district [...]

International organizations, such as ICRC, UNHCR and NRC have been providing minimum humanitarian assistance to the displaced and returnees within Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, such as basic shelter. Monitoring missions undertaken by the European Community's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) during 2005 concluded that, while donors have renewed their financial support activities following the installation of the new Government, most have concentrated on development projects rather than paying attention to the humanitarian needs of Georgia's most vulnerable persons. In an effort to remedy the situation, the European Union has recently allocated significant funding for food security and income-generation projects to displaced and resident communities, as well as for projects improving the shelter conditions for IDPs in collective centres and for returnees to the Gali district (CHR 22 March 2006)

Council of Europe

In April 2006, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe said it welcomed steps by Georgia to some extent begin local integration of refugees and IDPs. It also stressed that there were still urgent humanitarian needs requiring international aid (CoE, 18 April 2006)

For more information, see the Council of Europe Information Office, Tbilisi [Internet] <http://portal.coe.ge/index.php?lan=en&id=index>

See also: [Implementation of resolution 1415 \(2005\) on the honouring of obligations and commitments by Georgia](#), Council of Europe (COE), Parliamentary Assembly, 15 December 2005 – the resolution mentions the need to “ensure the equal rights of internally displaced persons, along the lines of Assembly Resolution on refugees and displaced persons in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.”

Donor Response

- Starting from the early 1990s, the international community made a great contribution to the survival and well-being of the Georgian population, among others to assist IDPs
- Humanitarian aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been steadily decreasing since the 1998
- In 2004, widespread donor disenchantment was replaced by a more optimistic approach towards the new Georgian leadership

Starting from the early 1990s, the international community made a great contribution to the survival and well-being of the Georgian population, among others to assist IDPs. Overall international assistance exceeded USD 3.7 billion during 1992-2000, with humanitarian assistance a significant part of this assistance (Sumbadze & Tarkhan-Mouravi July 2003). Humanitarian aid to Abkhazia and South Ossetia has been steadily decreasing since the 1998. In certain parts of Abkhazia, most notably Gali district and the Kodori Valley, the volatile security environment has complicated the provision of humanitarian assistance (OCHA 20 January 2004). Persistent insecurity in the Gali district and in South Ossetia, and widespread corruption have long deterred donor countries from supporting activities in return areas.

By 2002, however, some major donors had increased their humanitarian funding to Georgia while other players expanded programmes addressing the needs of food insecurity and vulnerable households. In 2004, the European Commission approved a 4 million EURO humanitarian aid package to support IDPs and other vulnerable populations affected by the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict (EC-ECHO 27 August 2004). On the other hand, other donors, such as USAID, made a policy shift to development programmes after assisting Georgia for ten years in its transition to market economy, civil society development and humanitarian assistance. In 2004, widespread donor disenchantment was replaced by a more optimistic approach towards the new Georgian leadership (OCHA 19 November 2004).

The European Commission is the largest donor in the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The ongoing and planned programmes in Abkhazia that are financed by the EC include humanitarian assistance, economic rehabilitation, confidence building projects with local and international NGOs, and democracy and human rights projects with local NGOs (EC June 2006). While OSCE supports a range of activities in South Ossetia, and UNHCR, the World Food Program (WFP) and UNICEF have low-level presences. Donors have tended to focus on infrastructure and housing rehabilitation but have been wary about development projects, credit schemes, and social services (ICG 26 November 2004). To view the European Commission 2003-2006 programme for Georgia: [\[Internet\]](#)

Other major donors to programmes benefiting IDPs include the Swiss Development Agency and USAID.

See: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, January 2003, Swiss Programme for the South Caucasus 2002-2006 [\[Internet\]](#)

In June 2006, international donors pledged 10 million dollars at a conference hosted by Belgium on economic rehabilitation in the zone of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict (OSCE, 14 June 2006).

Reference to the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Known references to the Guiding Principles (as of August 2006)

- Reference to the Guiding Principles in the national legislation
- Other References to the Guiding Principles (in chronological order)
- Availability of the Guiding Principles in local languages
- Training on the Guiding Principles (in chronological order)

Reference to the Guiding Principles in the national legislation

None

Other References to the Guiding Principles (in chronological order)

Review of national legal framework: Analysis of the extent to which national legislation relevant to the needs of internally displaced persons in Georgia accords with the Guiding Principles is being carried out by the Georgian Young Lawyers Association, with the support of the Brookings Institution project on internal displacement and OSCE/ODIHR.
Source: National/local NGOs
Date: 2000/2001
Documents: · OSCE, Implementation Calendar of ODIHR projects, 14 September 2001 [Internet]

Large dissemination of the Guiding Principles: During his visit to Georgia, the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis Deng, observed that the Guiding Principles had been received most positively and were actively being promoted as a useful tool for protecting the rights of the internally displaced persons. The UN Representative on IDPs was pleased to find that the Principles were well known among government officials, local NGOs and representative of the international community and broadly accepted as a useful basis for dialogue about the situation of the internally displaced in Georgia. The Minister for Foreign Affairs suggested that the GP "should acquire, step by step, an obligatory character." (UN CHR 25 January 2001, para.)
Sources: Georgian government, national/local NGOs, regional organisation, academic institution
Date: 2000
Documents: · Report of the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on IDPs to the Commission of Human Rights, Profiles in displacement: Georgia, 17 January 2001 (see § 6) [Internet]

Regional workshop on internal displacement: To promote more effective solutions to the plight of internally displaced persons in the South Caucasus, a high level gathering was convened on May 10-12, 2000 in Tbilisi, Georgia at the invitation of the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Internally Displaced Persons, Dr. Francis M. Deng. Participants included officials of the Governments of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia responsible for displaced populations; NGOs, academic institutions and displaced communities from the three countries; representatives of regional organizations, international organizations, and international NGOs; and international experts. Workshop participants welcomed the GP as a useful restatement of hard international law as well as an instrument providing clear guidance in cases where existing international law contains grey areas.
Sources: Georgian government, national/local NGOs
Date: 10-12 May 2000
Documents: · Summary report of the Regional Workshop on Internal Displacement in the South Caucasus, 3 July 2000 [Internet]

<p>Initiative by national NGOs: A group of NGOs at the regional workshop on internal displacement in the South Caucasus (May 2000) made a series of proposals. These included the intention to develop a common framework for disseminating and promoting the Guiding Principles in the South Caucasus; the translation of the GP into local languages and in a format best suited to target groups; the initiation of regional consultations on issues relating to the internally displaced; the creation of country-specific monitoring mechanisms based on the GP to assess the region's displacement situations; the opening of a dialogue among governments, NGOs and international organizations about the issues raised and their potential policy implications.</p>
<p>Sources: National/local NGOs</p>
<p>Date: 10-12 May 2000</p>
<p>Documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Summary report of the Regional Workshop on Internal Displacement in the South Caucasus, 3 July 2000 (see annex I) [Internet]

Availability of the Guiding Principles in local languages

<p>The Guiding Principles have been translated into the Georgian language by the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), with the support of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and published by OCHA in the form of a booklet that is being disseminated throughout the country.</p>
<p>Date: 2000</p>
<p>Documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · GP in Georgian [Internet]

<p>The Guiding Principles have been translated into the Abkhaz language by the UN Human Rights Office in Abkhazia.</p>
<p>Sources: Report of the UN Secretary-General on the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, S/2002/1141, 14 October 2002</p>
<p>Date: 2002</p>
<p>Documents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · GP in Abkhaz [Internal link]

Training on the Guiding Principles

<p>NRC is developing a training programme on the rights of IDPs which will benefit IDPs, hostcommunities and partners.</p> <p>NRC training workshop: The Global IDP Project of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) together with NRC Georgia held a training workshop on the Guiding Principles in Borjomi, Georgia. The workshop was part of a global NRC effort to disseminate and explain the Guiding Principles to representatives of governments, NGOs, the UN agencies and the displaced themselves, in order to ensure better protection and assistance to internally displaced persons. Participants in the NRC workshop were selected from local NGOs and authorities in the Kutaisi and Zugdidi regions, where many of the IDPs currently reside. Many of them were so called "community mobilizers" working directly with the displaced population on rights awareness and self-help issues.</p>
<p>Sources: Local/national NGOs, local and national authorities</p>
<p>Date: 13-15 November 2000</p>
<p>Documents:</p>

· [Report of the Workshop on the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, Borjomi, Georgia, 13-15 November 2000 \[Internal link\]](#)

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