



Federal Foreign Office



# Through the eyes of women

**Brot**  
**für die Welt**





The collection of materials is prepared in the framework of the project “Re-loading Women, Peace and Security Agenda / WPS in the OSCE Region” by the IDP Women Association “Consent”, member of the Working Group, in cooperation with the NGO DRA e. V., with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Opinions expressed by civil activists and experts in this publication may not reflect the official position of the IDP Women Association “Consent”, of the DRA e. V. and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

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# Instead of Introduction: Why Women?

## About the Project

This collection of materials is prepared in the framework of the project “Re-loading Women, Peace and Security Agenda /WPS in the OSCE Region” by the IDP Women Association “Consent”, member of the Working Group.

The Working Group on Women and Gender Realities in the OSCE region was founded in Hamburg in 2016 as a reaction to the shrinking space for civil society and the fact that this process is not gender neutral. Members of the group, highly experienced peace and human rights activists from Germany, Italy, Sweden, Austria, Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan, see an essential role in women participating in dialogue formats, peace processes, negotiations, diplomatic and conflict-related analysis and debates. Acknowledging that women are multi-vulnerable in the contracting space for civil society, the Working Group sees its mission in promoting women as agents of change. The activities of the working group include monitoring missions in the conflict-affected areas of Ukraine and Georgia, activities in Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, advocacy work, as well as public debates and workshops both for experts and a general audience across the OSCE region.

Project was implemented in cooperation with the NGO “DRA” (Berlin) in the framework of “Working Group on Women and Gender Realities in the OSCE Region” of the “Civic Solidarity Platform”, namely the project “Strengthening Civil Society Cooperation in the OSCE Region in Regards to Security, Human Rights, Conflict Resolution and Gender Equality”, with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany. Opinions expressed in this report may not reflect the official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany.

The IDP Women Association “Consent” is a non-governmental, non-partisan organization that has been working on the rights of internally displaced women and girls affected by the conflicts in Georgia and the surrounding region since 1995. “Consent” works at different levels of society. At the community level, “Consent” works with conflict affected/IDP women and girls, as well as civil activists on the protection of their rights and their empowerment, increasing human security and providing different services. “Consent” supports capacity building in municipalities and conducts advocacy campaigns to protect the rights of IDPs and conflict affected persons both within the country and in the international arena.

In the current brochure diverse contributions such as monitoring reports from village activists, reports from the focus groups of IDPs and conflict affected population and interviews, from officials working on IDP issues, as well as several articles from civil society experts working on the rights of the conflict affected population and their human security are presented.

The collection is named “Through the eye of women”, as our aim was to show how and why the gender lens allows an alternative view on human security and the situation of women and men affected by the conflicts. Small reports from female civil activists residing in villages located alongside the conflict division line – show persisting threats to human security which are aggravated by existing “borderization” and economic stagnation

in the conflict affected regions.

“Consent” stresses the role of women and youth activists in promoting peace and human security from below and advocates for their increased inclusion in peacebuilding, mediation/negotiations and conflict prevention processes.

## Acknowledgments

The IDPWA express its gratitude for the Working Group “Gender and women Realities” of Civil Solidarity Platform for proposed opportunity to conduct monitoring and collect this information; to project coordinator Ms. Anna Osypova and staff of DRA e.V. Ms. Fiona Feller who kindly made the editing of English text; to Ms. Mariam Beria, who edited Georgian text; to volunteers and staff of IDPWA who collected materials and prepared the publication.

## Terminology:

There are some discrepancies in terminology in different articles, as conflict reality influences also terminology: e.g. the separated region by some authors is called Tskhinvali region by some – South Ossetia, by others – South Ossetia/Tskhinvali region. We did not change the toponymic used by authors.

Another term differently used by authors is related with naming of breakaway/ occupied regions and division line between them and centrally controlled territory of Georgia: in some articles it’s called as ‘Conflict division line’ or “division line”, or ABL (administrative border line), or former ABL, or de facto border. In all cases authors mean existing division line between separated parts of society.

By **IDPs** we mean here population which was forced to leave their homes due to conflict, massive violations of human rights and threat to life and resided temporarily on the Georgian territory, controlled by official Georgian government.

**Borderisation**’ encompasses three main elements: (1) the establishment of physical infrastructure to force commuters, vehicles and goods to use special ‘controlled crossing points’ established at the ABL; (2) surveillance and patrolling by either Russian border guards or security actors from the breakaway regions that monitor the situation and detain people if they are in violation of established ‘rules’; (3) a crossing regime requiring commuters to have specific documents and only use ‘official’ crossing points. (EUMM Monitor, 2018)

We use also term “**conflict affected population**” which describes those living in villages adjacent to the conflict division line – people, who continue to live in their homes, but who experience negative effects of unresolved conflicts and occupation and their human security is not protected.

## Peacebuilding Faces Security Challenges

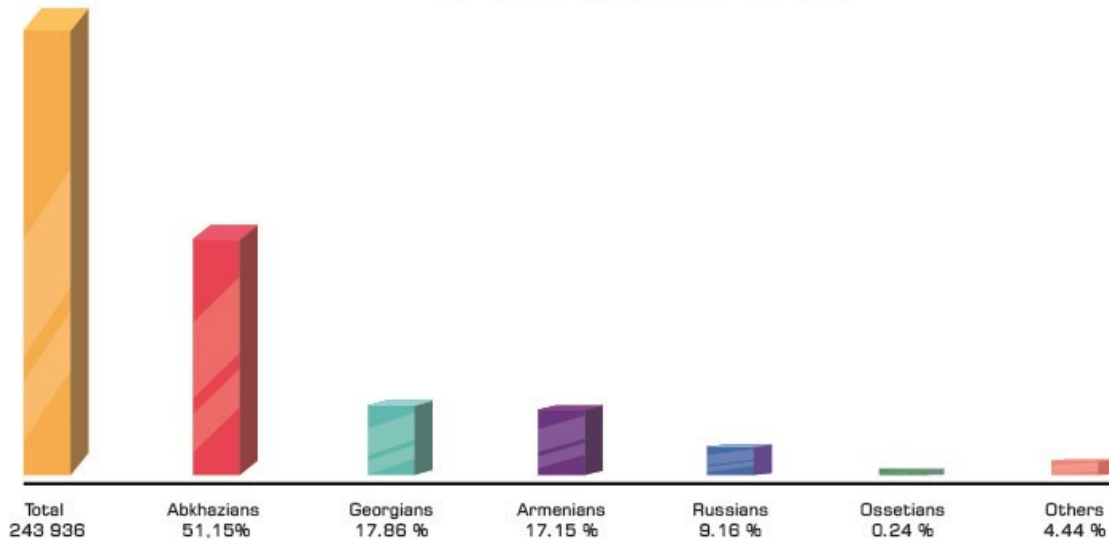
The current armed conflicts in the world have caused many human casualties and material losses.

According to statistics from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the number of refugees in the world amounted to 25.4 million in 2018, whereas the number of internally displaced persons<sup>1</sup> reached 40 million, including the IDPs living in Georgia. According to the statistics of the Ministry of IDPs from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs, today more than 282 000 IDPs are registered<sup>2</sup> in Georgia. Unfortunately, there are no statistics on the number of IDPs living outside the country. 864 Abkhazians and 14,385 Ossetians live<sup>3</sup> in Georgia according to the general census of 2014. The results of the general census of the current year and studies by the State Temporary Commission (established in 2013) for meeting the needs of the population residing near the conflict division line have shown that there are approximately 45,994 people (50.30% women and 49.70% of men)<sup>4</sup> directly affected by the conflict in Georgia. Naturally, there are some inaccuracies, because no system of collecting standardized statistical data existed after the armed conflicts in the 1990s. In comparison with the results<sup>5</sup> of the 1989 census, there are radical changes in the demographic situation of the de facto republics of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia - the number of ethnic Georgians has dramatically decreased. The 2008 Russian-Georgian war has added hundreds of families to the total number of IDPs. Statistical data is interesting in terms of ethnical composition: 124,785 Abkhazians and 43,562 Georgians (41,845 Armenians, 22,341 Russians, 595 Ossetians and others, out of a total of 243936 people)<sup>6</sup> live in the de facto Republic of Abkhazia, while 48,396 Ossetians and 3,966 Georgians (610 Russians , 378 Armenians, 12 Abkhazians and others, out of a total of 53,532 people)<sup>7</sup> live in the de facto Republic of South Ossetia. According to these data, Georgians constitute another large ethnic group after Abkhazians and Ossetians.

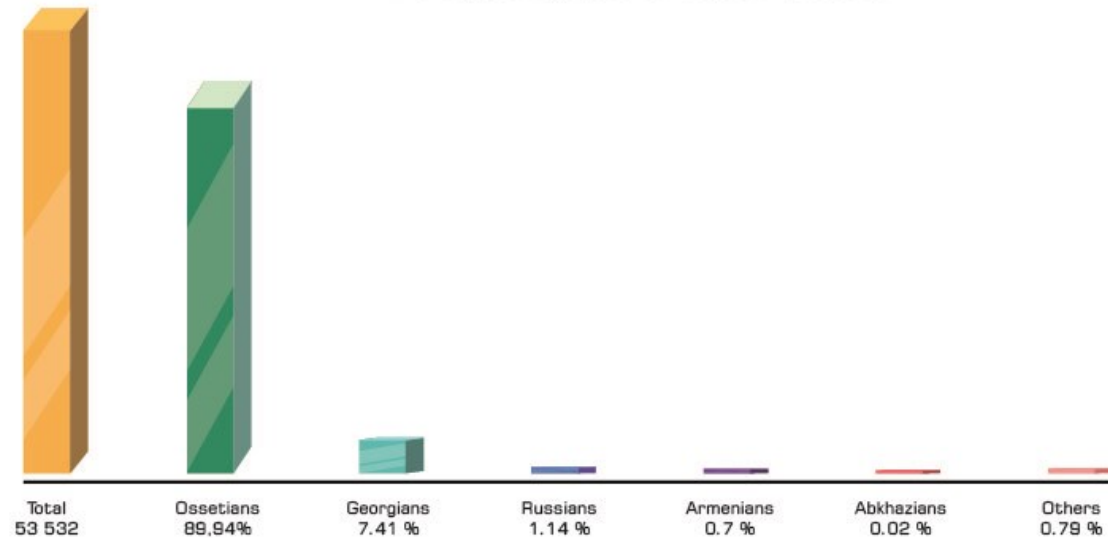
1. UNHCR, 2018 – <http://www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html>
2. Issues of IDPs from the Occupied Territories of Georgia – <http://mra.gov.ge/geo/static/55>
3. National Statistics Office of Georgia – <http://www.geostat.ge/>
4. Information Requested from National Statistics Office of Georgia – Letter #11-1221, 2017
5. General Census of Population 1989 – [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)
6. Office of the de facto republic of Abkhazia - <http://ugsra.org>
7. Office of the de facto republic of South Ossetia - <http://ugostat.ru>



### De facto republic of Abkhazia



### De facto republic of South Ossetia



The crucial point is not the numbers or the manipulation by these numbers. These numbers or even the restoration of a demographic balance is not the way out.

**There are people behind these numbers!**

After the 2008 Russian-Georgian war, the necessity appeared again on re-establishing of trust between Georgians and Abkhazians, Georgians and Ossetians, the biggest challenge and danger, however, is an increase of Russian control and influence in the de-facto republics, their high financial dependence on



and institutional merge with the Russian Federation. Unlike in Abkhazia, representatives of the South Ossetian de facto government openly welcome and support, unification processes with Russia. In fact, Russia has not responded properly to this wish of integration. One thing is obvious: the recognition of de facto republics and the fact of occupation has radically changed the situation.

In terms of human security, serious challenges arise because of the military presence in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/ South Ossetia, as well as the so-called borderization<sup>8</sup> process, carried out by the Russian Federal Security Agency. The first fact was observed in August 2009. Nowadays, the total length of the occupation line, which is identical to former Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) is over 350 km alongside dividing Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia from the rest of Georgia, and more than 52 km of barbed wire fences have already been placed. In case of Abkhazia, the occupational line is 145 km long, the total length of illegal barbed wire fences is 48 km.<sup>9</sup> In most cases, illegally placed barbed wires run across land plots, that civilians living near the division line are then no longer able to use them for their agricultural purposes. The practice of kidnapping or illegally imprisoning people continues. Based on the facts registered by the central government of Georgia, 222 people were detained near Tskhinvali and 80 persons in Abkhazia in 2017-2018 for crossing the conflict division line (which for the other side is so-called border). It is noteworthy to look at the 2017-2018 statistics of the Security Council of the de facto republic, according to which 1121 people were detained for violating the so-called border (ABL) during these two years. These figures indicate that number of affected by detention people is much higher than official statistics shows. Civilians are being forced<sup>10</sup> to pay 2000 to 20,000 rubles for each crossing of ABL at the so-called checkpoints. The majority of these people are inhabitants of one of the de facto republics who are trying to reach the Georgian-controlled territory. There is only one crossing point, allowing people to cross the ABL between South Ossetia and Georgia's controlled territory, through the Akhagori district. Since December 2018, movement towards Akhagori via the Odzisi checkpoint is only allowed if the Tskhinvali Security Committee (KGB) issued the respective permission. As for the direction of Abkhazia, on February 7, 2019, it became known that people will be able to pass one more so-called checkpoint in Saberio-Tskoushi section under the same conditions as across the Enguri Bridge. People crossing the de-facto border require to present a foreign passport with visa of de facto Abkhazia, or, a so-called residence permit issued in Abkhazia, "green cards" issued in 2016 or the Form # 9. In 2016-2017, existing five checkpoints were cancelled by the decision<sup>11</sup> of Abkhaz de facto authorities. People are crossing the so-called checkpoints for different purposes: for example, to participate in the free healthcare referral program offered by the central government of Georgia; to receive the education or different services; for trading purposes or to visit friends and relatives, etc. The situation around the division line is mon-

8. Borderisation is recognized as illegal action against sovereign state, defined in EU Monitoring reports (see also reference 1)

9. Information provided by the Georgian Security Service, "Tbilisi Times", 2019

10. Information about Ossetian statistics. Radio "Tavisupleba", 2019 – [www.radiotavisupleba.ge](http://www.radiotavisupleba.ge)

11. Another crossing is opened to Abkhazia direction. "Aktsenti", 2019 - <http://www.accentnews.ge>

itored by the EU Monitoring Mission, which operates within its specific mandate.

Ethnic Georgians living in the Gali and Akhagori districts and representing the vast majority of population (according to statistical data published by the de facto authorities they constitute 91% in Gali and 55, 52% in Akhagori ) in their everyday life regularly face difficulties due to the restriction of their freedom of movement, lack of access to education, health care or other fundamental human rights. To overcome difficulties created by the decisions of the de facto authorities and the occupation forces violating their rights. They mainly rely of the international protection mechanisms or support from Georgian side. However, in this regard, a good precedent in Abkhazia can become an effective mechanism of protection in future - On January 24, 2019, the Public Defender of the de-facto Republic of Abkhazia, Ms. Assida Shakril made a duly and necessary statement regarding the situation in Gali District, the restriction of the movement of people via the Enguri Checkpoint and the local protests. She touched upon the protection of fundamental rights of human beings such as the right<sup>12</sup> to health and education. She defended the human rights of students from Gali constantly traveling back and forth as well as the people, who are receiving medical care and other services on the territory controlled by Georgia. Strengthening and promoting the work of the Public Defender is in the interest of the Abkhazian Society itself. Equally, this example could be a model for human rights advocacy in South Ossetia, too, where the local Public Defender has not reacted to the most recent threat to human rights in the region, when school children and students and teachers, in total – 21 persons. Were not allowed to cross the check point due to its closure from January 11, 2019.

When people speak openly about the difficult situation and the problems created in the region, criminal cases should not be initiated against them. Obviously, the reaction of some people from the South Ossetian society, who are openly disgusted by such cases of human rights violations, is being ignored. The processes related to the fight against the Georgian identity in the Gali and Akhagori regions must be acknowledged. These include, for example, restriction of teaching in native Georgian language in Gali schools, introducing toponymical changes (i.e. renaming Georgian villages in the Gali district, or changing the name “Akhagori district” into “Leningori district”) and imposing forceful mechanisms to replace peoples’ surnames. Such actions from de facto authorities did not contribute to improvement of situation in Gali and Akhagori districts, can be seen as their weakness and, in fact, finally harms Abkhaz and Ossetian Societies as a whole. In the area where these societies live, the fundamental rights and freedoms of every human being are not fulfilled. Increased crime rates, drug abuse and other critical problems negatively affect human security and decrease the possibility of development in these isolated societies, which, in our case, is not useful for any side.

Parallel to measures addressing security challenges, the Georgian Government is planning to carry out new peace initiatives in the framework of the declared peace policy: to promote and simplify<sup>13</sup> trade and access to quality education and various services along the division lines, moving from building con-

12. Sokhumi Ombudsman to protect the interests of Gali residents - <http://netgazeti.ge>

13. Peace Initiative " Step Forward to the Better Future " - <http://smr.gov.ge/FileList.aspx?ID=97>

fidence to cooperation. Given the current reality in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the efforts are aimed at strengthening public diplomacy on the one hand and against discriminatory policies on the other hand. Taking these factors into consideration, it is important to cooperate with international actors and increase their involvement in achieving the proclaimed goals. Role of international and local non-governmental organisations in transforming conflict by carrying out long-term and holistic peace initiatives, in weakening tensions created by disinformation and Russian propaganda, and in changing existing negative attitudes and perceptions should be acknowledged and their potential considered.

## Peace and Human Security Guarantees

The issues related to security are constantly being discussed in the format of the Geneva International Discussions between Georgia and Russia introduced after the August 2008 war as well as during the meetings on Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) initiated in 2009. It should be noted here that Russia has not signed the agreement on the "non-renewal of fire" with Georgia.

**Georgian Side** - The first official document for the peaceful resolution of conflicts (Strategy and Action Plan "Engagement through the Cooperation")<sup>14</sup> was created in 2010 and is still valid. On March 7, 2013<sup>15</sup> and later on December 29, 2016<sup>16</sup> the Parliament of Georgia adopted the Resolution #16 on "Georgia's Foreign Policy", which also underlines the peaceful resolution<sup>17</sup> of conflicts. The latter was once again confirmed by the Parliament Resolution adopted on March 21, 2018. We should also consider the Association Agreement<sup>18</sup> between the EU and Georgia, which underlines the importance and support of efforts towards the peaceful resolution of conflicts, not only in Georgia but throughout the region. On April 4, 2018, the Government of Georgia approved new peace initiatives ("Step Forward to a Better Future")<sup>19</sup> of the State Minister's Office for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. Consequently, we can say that the political vision of peaceful resolution of conflicts is supported at both levels - executive and legislative - and the commitment on not using power is unilaterally recognized. However, de facto governments of Abkhazia and South Ossetia assess these initiatives as a "soft power" and a threat coming from Georgia side and try to resist them at the political level. We believe that it is not a way to consider peace initiatives.

In fact, today, Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian societies separated in consequence of the conflict have different possibilities for social development. Under the Russian occupation, Georgian authorities are unable to involve people living in the occupied territories in the agenda for achieving progress in social development, democracy, and cooperation with the EU. At the same time, the Georgian government has a positive obligation to protect the fundamental Human Rights in the occupied territories, to equally provide people with the benefits that the Association Agreement with the European Union offers to the citizens of Georgia and to strengthen peace with the population in the occupied territories. Unfortunately, even in the 21st Century, peaceful civilians residing near the division line

14. State Strategy for Occupied Territories - [http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/\\_7db17f7a.pdf](http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/_7db17f7a.pdf)

15. Resolution of Georgian Parliament on Foreign Policy Directions. March 7, 2013  
<http://civil.ge>

16. Resolution of Georgian Parliament on Foreign Policy Course, December 29, 2016  
<http://parliament.ge>

17. Resolution on "Otkhozoria-Tatuashvili List of Severe Violation of Human Rights by the Russian Federation in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Regions", 21 March 2018 - [www.parliament.ge](http://www.parliament.ge)

18. Association Agreement between the European Union, European Atomic Energy Union and their member states, on the one hand, and Georgia on the other hand. Parliament of Georgia, 2014. <http://www.parliament.ge>

19. Office of State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, peacekeeping Initiative, 2018 - [www.smr.gov.ge](http://www.smr.gov.ge)



face daily problems caused by the barbed wire fences created by Russian occupying forces, whereas the Russian occupying forces represented in de-facto republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with military bases, are exercising control, posing threats to the development of Abkhazian and Ossetian communities and endangering the main value of any human being, his rights and freedom.

The Georgian side cannot dictate to Abkhazian and Ossetian communities how to achieve development through freedom and what kind of environment they shall create for it, but part of the population living across the ABL can still see the big difference between today's Georgia, trying to establish its place in the European family of 21st century, and Georgia as it was under Soviet governance. In the Abkhazian and Ossetian societies it is necessary to stimulate a dialogue on how to work towards guaranteeing human security. Georgia is looking forward to its integration into the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, inside which all civil societies are united, and to thus achieve all human security standards. Even though Russian propaganda is trying to strengthen anti-western sentiments, our society will never become so vulnerable as to question its openly announced European choice. Future generations will prove it.

### **The Fate of One-sided Peacekeeping Messages**

Peace is quite fragile between the societies separated as a result of conflict if it is based on the inefficient principle of “playing on one side of the field”. Increasing the image of Georgians as enemies among the Abkhazian and Ossetian societies is contra-productive and generates more violence than peace. In the Abkhazian and Ossetian societies, it is vital to develop a discourse on how to build and maintain peace, and how to develop human security concept people-oriented, prevention-oriented and taking into account context specificity. Currently, the diversified and manifold potential for peace is more visible in the Abkhazian than in the South Ossetian society. By improving existent and developing new mechanisms, efforts to overcome fears of expressing opinions and to reduce individual and structural violence should be strengthened. It seems that the Abkhazian and Ossetian societies will have to overcome certain obstacles in order to reduce the Russian influence. In this regard, the steps taken in response to the increased Russian influence are more visible in the Abkhazian society. To maintain the current level of “independence”, they largely use the legal framework and promote a national narrative, and underline the importance of NGO presence and the prospects for cooperation with international governmental and non-governmental organizations. However, so far, no access is granted for organizations working on the human rights' situation. This would be useful for the society because it allows further activities to be determined at political and social levels and would strengthen the ombudsman mechanism. The current situation is even more difficult in the Ossetian society. In 2015, the heads of two NGOs in the de facto republic of South Ossetia were forced to close the organizations due to pressure from the authorities. Sadly, the South Ossetian community has not

been able to benefit from the experience of such experts and organizations. The de facto authorities are actively preventing this exchange, accusing the international organizations of being spies, and depriving their own citizens of this chance .

Accepting the Russian politics or Russian narrative with such loyalty strongly cracks their identity. And yet, in view of the past and present, if we look at the above statistical data and face the current circumstances, the Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian societies do have the resources and potential for a peaceful coexistence. This perspective is still alive thanks to life experiences, culture, traditions, contacts, mixed families and even common pain. The development of our societies and the right planning of future prosperity in the region is in our hands.

It is important for us to act now in order to create a better future and overcome the influence of the past on our consciousness. We have to create a larger number of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian formats and recognize the benefit that peace initiatives bring to us and to each person. We must act following the concept of reconciliation. I am not talking about the political settlement of conflicts, I would like to stress the need for peacebuilding and the development of the Abkhazian and Ossetian Societies.

In short, time is working against us. In the long term, it is necessary to work on various alternatives to solve the problems related to building trust or reconciliation in the Georgian, Abkhazian and Ossetian societies at the political or social level, otherwise, the time will come and the resolution of the conflicts will cost us even more.

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## **Findings of the Focus Groups**

Over all, six focus groups were conducted across Georgia, particularly, in the regions of Mtsketa- Mti- aneti (village Gremiskhevi), Shida Kartli (village Zemo Nikozi and Karaleti IDP settlement), Samegre- lo (Zugdidi and villages: Ganmukhuri and Ingiri) with IDPs and local residents, representatives of dif- ferent professions, people of different experience and age. Each group consisted of 10 people. The Fa- cilitators were: Marina Davitaia, Marina Grigolia, Tamar Kantaria, Nazi Beruashvili, Nino Mindiash- vili and Marina Pochkhua.

**The analysis is made by Project Coordinator Khatia KARDAVA**

The questions asked in the focus groups were:

1. How differently did the war affect women and men?
2. How did the war affect you and the village?
3. What are your human security concerns today? (For example, when visiting graves, etc.)
4. Have your health conditions changed due to the war and which problems have occurred?
5. Do you think you have a psychological trauma?
6. What kind of services or support do you expect from the local government?
7. Do you have information on how to behave during emergency situations? If you do - which information do you have and who should you contact in such cases?
8. What do you think about domestic violence? Has it increased in your village? What do people say?

### Summary of findings

Eight questions correspond to six main topics:

Topic #1.	The Influence of War on Individuals, Women, Men and their Communities
Topic #2.	Human Security Challenges in these Communities
Topic #3.	Health Conditions, a Psychological Picture of People Affected by War
Topic #4.	Expectations towards the Local Authorities
Topic #5.	Do people know how to behave in emergency situation?
Topic #6.	Public Attitude/Perception of Domestic Violence Statistics

### The Influence of War on Individuals, Women, Men and their Communities

In all focus groups, questions about war and security were very painful for the participants, especially for those who experienced the war in 1990-s and in 2008 (IDPs) and for the people who live near the demarcation line (victims of conflict).

The majority of respondents noted that their health condition worsened after the war. Almost every-

one is psychologically traumatized and suffers from stress.

The majority of respondents from the village Ganmukhuri (Samegrelo, located near the ABL with Abkhazia) stated that it was psychologically difficult to live near the demarcation line, especially, when the war was going on. The occupants moved freely in the village, burnt down the library and “the camp of the future”. It was reported that “the smell of death was in the air”.

In Zemo Nikozi (Shida Kartli, ABL with South Osetia), participants reported about constant fear and feelings of insecurity. Each of them has their own history of traumas in the aftermath of the August war.

“Even now, the noise makes me sick, my heartbeat quickens. I did not feel it then, but now it affects me more. When I hear the sound of the military training from Tskhinvali, I feel very bad,” says one of the participants.

“Since the war, I have a very high blood pressure. In my opinion, the death of my husband is also connected with the war,” says other person.

In Gremiskhevi, a community located near the conflict division line in Mtsketa Mtianeti, there is a feeling of fear and insecurity among the population. There is a very high youth migration from this village, which the focus group participants associate with the war.

“There is a mass migration of young people from the villages and the fact that only 42 pupils remain in all 12 classes in school is clear proof of it”.

Discussion about August war was especially hard for the displaced persons living in Karaleti IDP settlement, so hard that some could not hold back tears.

One of the volunteers (Koba Kh., 39 years old) said that the war destroyed and wiped out his village (Kekhvi) and left wounds in his heart that do not heal. The youngest member of the Focus Group (Sofiko Kh., 17 years old) notes that the more time passes, the more she suffers. She is worried and so are the others.

On the question ‘was the effect of war similar or different on men and women?’ we got different answers. In some focus groups, for example in Zemo Nikozi and Karaleti, the majority believes that men are more likely to suffer.

For example, Vladimir M. (60 years old) says that he as a man bottles up pain in his heart and, unlike women, speaks little about it. However, according to him, one of the main topics of conversation with



his wife is Tamarasheni (their home village).

Based on the state of her husband, Manana Z. (60 years old) confirms that men are more affected by the consequences of the war and it is difficult for them to get used to the reality. She notes that, unlike her husband, she tries to communicate with people and do various things to distract herself.

Nona G. (29 years old) also believes that men have suffered more. Her opinion is not groundless - her father-in-law has been paralyzed because of stress and a vulnerable emotional constitution.

In Gremiskhevi and Ingiri, almost everyone said that the war had equally ruined everybody - men and women.

Most of the participants in the Zugdidi focus group stated that women had suffered more from the war. The participants identified several factors specific to women:

Similar Effects of conflict	Different Effect
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The necessity to support the family</li><li>• The stress caused by the war</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sexual violence against women</li><li>• Veteran soldiers are not duly appreciated. Veterans and people with special needs (disabled people) do not get attention and help</li><li>• Alcoholism in men, psychological traumata in women</li><li>• Changing gender roles (women are assuming both roles)</li></ul>

When asked about the traces of war left on them and the village, many respondents from Zemo Nikozi mentioned the traces of armed conflict left on the soil that, consequently, affect the vegetables.

Laura: “For example, products contain lead. The soil has been affected, otherwise, where did the signs of radiation and poisoning, increased cases of allergic reactions and even stomatitis come from? And there is much more to consider.”

Many respondents mention the psychological traumas and stress as effect of the war.

Nikoloz: “The war had a bad effect in every sense: firstly, the loss of people, secondly, the loss of territories and problems with the territories, and thirdly, every family has suffered from economic problems and has been harmed. It is also important that families got stressed, and, of course, this has had a negative impact on health, children, women, and, in short, the war has had a negative impact on al-

most every part of society."

For the IDPs from Zugdidi, the results and effects of war are as follows: stress, worse health conditions and family problems (new families are not created).

In the Focus Group of Ganmukhuri, people have repeatedly mentioned that the developments had a negative psychological effect on the population, especially, on the IDPs. They had to leave their homes and settle in a new place. They are still afraid to live near the demarcation line and have the feeling that the same things may happen again. The war has affected the local population, too. Even after 10 years, their fear and feelings of insecurity are present.

### **Human Security Challenges in these Communities**

Across many focus groups, participants reported the challenges related to human security, of which there are, unfortunately, too many. Everywhere the lack of special documents that are needed to go to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region (South Ossetia) was mentioned. Due to the absence of documents, they cannot cross the line and visit their homes and cemeteries. To collect firewood in the woods is very dangerous. When cattle cross the demarcation line, they cannot bring them back, as it is not secure, they could be kidnapped by Russian soldiers.

Residents of Ganmukhuri have a feeling of permanent insecurity. In addition, they say that the demarcation line somewhat scares them. On many occasions, their family members were not able to visit them. Abkhazians, of course, interfere with their movement whenever possible, and if the residents need to go, they put their lives at great risk. People from the village across the border cannot visit them. They cannot go to school to study, cannot visit a doctor, attend a funeral of a relative, collect firewood or cultivate the land.

Two respondents from the Zugdidi focus group said that a human security system does not exist –not in 2008, and not now.

"I am not protected. I was just as scared and vulnerable in 2008. There was no security system. Because of my ethnicity, I cannot cross the occupied territory," said one participant.

The main problem of human security, as Nana M. (42 years old, from Karaleti settlement) notes, is that holy places and graves are not even accessible once a year - during the Easter holidays. The problem of contacting their relatives is equally important for her. Not everybody has a telephone connection or social networks.

In Zemo Nikozi the respondents mentioned the borderization process:

Guga: "We cannot say that we feel safe, because our neighbors are constantly changing the borders. Perhaps, we would feel more protected if it was not happening after the war. But if we recall the developments in Atotsy, i.e. the relocation of borders towards our territory, we are not protected. Nobody knows when (what year, month or day) they will decide to remind us about the difficult year of 2008."

"We do not feel protected when Tskhinvali is only 500 meters away".

"To some extent, we can say that the EUMM, the Police and Special Forces are here and we somehow feel protected in this regard, but we are not protected from incidents like bomb explosions and shootings during military trainings."

### **Health Conditions, a Psychological Picture of People Affected by War**

In all focus groups, participants discussed a variety of diseases caused by the war and the factors that have fostered the deterioration of health.

Various diseases were reported: unhealthy blood pressure, loss of vision, endocrinological problems and diabetes.

People interviewed in Ingiri noted that their health condition has worsened since the war. Various diseases have been reported: unhealthy blood pressure, problems with the joints, heart diseases and oncological diseases.

They cannot afford medical treatment unless it is covered by the National Insurance. They cannot afford the expensive medications. Almost everyone is psychologically traumatized.

Problems with the joints, hearing disorders and psychological stress have been detected in Karaleti. We should admit that psychological traumas are a common problem for everyone.

The only exception was Gremiskevi. Members of this focus group do not associate health with the war. Concerning health problems they mentioned mammalogical problems.

### **Expectations towards the Local Authorities**

On the question 'what kind of services or support do you expect from the local government?' the answers from the Zugdidi focus group were mostly nihilistic:

"I do not expect anything from the local government. I wish to get a living space".

"I am not getting any support and have no expectations."

“We have never received any support from the government. It would be desirable for them to pay attention to the IDPs living in the private sector.”

Even so, one grateful respondent mentioned:

“As our village is adjacent to the occupied territory, we have great support from the government, it is expressed in students’ financing and infrastructural projects”.

As for the expectations, the majority spoke about healthcare:

“I would like the local government to co-finance surgeries done on young people and provide for emergency services and a hotline.”

From the answers of the Ganmukhuri group, we can conclude that the local government is seen as a mediator between the various entities, for implementing social projects, and granting benefits. Everyone has admitted simultaneously that it is hard to live near the demarcation line, earn money and pay huge (utility) bills. Despite the fact that Ganmukhuri is a summer resort, they cannot see any benefit in living there.

Unemployment remains the main problem in Ingiri. The IDPs noted that they want the government to initiate special training programs for further employment of IDPs. In Anaklia, the government should take care of creating a perspective for the employment of IDPs.

In addition, the interviewed people noted that there is no youth development service in the village. They seek to create special programs for non-formal education and the development of the youth, and to organize events.

Conditions in the village Gremiskhevi are unbearable. They expect all kind of support and services from the local government. The above-mentioned migration is happening due to the poor infrastructure.

#### **Problems:**

- Gremiskhevi has a status of highland village, but its neighboring villages (such as: Petriani, Keveloba and Tsikhisunbani ) that are far above the sea level, for some reason, cannot enjoy the benefit of the status of being a highland population.
- The road is practically impassable and in rainy weather, the village can be reached only through the bypass road.
- Public transport is only available in the mornings and evenings, single ride each time.
- There is no drinking water. Dusheti Mayor has promised the population to solve this problem by 2020.

- They promised to supply the population with firewood but never did. Before the elections too many promises were given but none of them have been fulfilled.
- The police is not patrolling. Even if the entire village was robbed, the police would not hear anything.
- Jackals were found in the villages. They kidnap cattle and pigs, people cannot go to the toilet at night.

Any kind of initiative from the local government looks suspicious for the respondents of the Karaleti group, because they were disappointed many times.

As for the wishes, in the general opinion, drainage and internal roads should be improved. In addition, they are asking for the arrangement of a mini-stadium and squares for children. Teenagers have expressed their desire to have a library, where they would be able to arrange various literary events. The inappropriately equipped ambulatory (for example, lack of heating, Internet, scales, etc.) is a problem for young mothers. In this context, they call for appropriate actions from the responsible authority.

Everybody in Zemo Nikozi group has mentioned that there is a lack of services for young people. They want the government to build a house of culture and a playground.

One young respondent has declared that he is grateful to the local municipality:

“We young people, are grateful to the local government. Of course, the village trustee and the MP helped us to establish a library, provided us with the electricity that we did not have. Therefore, we can only thank them.”

### **Public Awareness about Urgent Situations and Behavior**

None of the members of the focus groups have any information on how to behave in emergency situations. They all said that in such cases they would call 112.

“I think there is no entity in the region that would assist people in an emergency. We experienced it in 2008. We were as unprotected as in 1993,” said one respondent from Zugdidi.



## Public Attitude/Perception of Domestic Violence Statistics

The majority of the focus groups believe that domestic violence has increased in their communities, but nobody speaks about it. This topic is tabooed.

One respondent from Ingiri village says: “I think that every third person is a victim of physical, psychological or material violence. Some people do not even realize that they are victims”.

In Zemo Nikozi, on the contrary, members of the group are convinced that this kind of thing used to happen more often, but women would not report incidents to the police. Nowadays, NGOs are intensively working on this issue and women are active, too. They are more informed about these problems.

According to the members of the focus group of the Karaleti IDP Settlement, the number of cases of violence has been minimized, mainly related to the tightening of the law.

The members of the focus group from Zugdidi highlighted the positive role of NGOs.

“Violence in my village has greatly diminished. Trainings conducted by NGOs played a big role in this.”

“People become aware of topic of Domestic Violence (Laws, Action Plan) because of NGOs.”

Some have the perception that it increased and that work in this direction remains to be done.

“Domestic violence is one of the most serious problems in our region. The situation is especially difficult in the villages adjacent to the conflict zone. Women's rights are violated every day. Women are not aware of their rights. The level of awareness is low”.

So, regardless of differences in opinions and attitudes, the main conclusions from the focus groups in different conflict affected regions are the following:

- War severely affected peaceful population, decreased their ability for productive farming, worsened their health and psychological status and increased feeling of insecurity
- The human security protection mechanisms should be institutionalized and implemented to guarantee that population can live in safety and security.

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**Iruza Kakava**, IDP from Abkhazia, currently living in village Koki, Samegrelo

### **-My life story**

Greetings!

I am Iruza Kakava, an IDP from Abkhazia. I represent the City Council of Zugdidi Municipality. I am the Majority Deputy of the second convocation of the Administrative Unit Koki-Khurcha (villages ad-

jacent to the conflict division line with Abkhazia).

I would like to talk about the problems and challenges that we have faced, and what worries us, the IDP women and girls living in the villages located on the edge of the conflict zone, today. Since 2010, I have been working in the sector of NGOs and have been implementing various social and economic projects. In 2010, I participated in the Project “Women for Equality, Peace and Development in Georgia”, which was implemented by the UN Women's Organization, the Foundation “Taso” and the Women's Information Center. In 2012, I founded the NGO “Enguri 1” in the framework of the Project “Strengthening IDPs and the Host Community”, implemented by the IDP Women's Association “Consent” and the German NGO “ASB” - Arbeiter Samariter Bund (founder of the Day Center for Disabled, IDPs and Socially Vulnerable Youths). Cooperation with these organizations has helped to raise awareness of topics such as: women's rights, teamwork, communication and cooperation with self-government, implementation of the UN SC Resolution 1325, the doctrine of conflict, writing projects, and other important and relevant skills. The training has strengthened me too. I have become more confident and motivated. The purpose of my life now is to help the IDP women and girls - people affected by the conflict, as well as the local population in receiving education and integrating into society. I want to tell you that women are more active now than in previous years, they know their rights, participate in various events and projects, and attend all meetings held by the legislative/executive bodies and NGOs in rural areas. In spite of this, women have to face many challenges.

The greatest pain is the longing to return to native Abkhazia, visit and embrace the cemeteries. The closure of crossing roads (Otobaia and Khurcha) worsens the life of the population. We do not have any access to our relatives, we cannot mourn for the deceased. This is confirmed by the live telecast from Otobaia Bridge in February 2019.

The IDP women and girls affected by the conflict often have difficulties to receive medical assistance on time or be engaged in various projects that could give them additional income. Due to the socio-economic situation of the IDPs, both women and young girls from the villages near the division line are living abroad to support their families, through hard work. We need to create enterprises in Georgia and employ our women locally, near their families.

Women are mostly employed in the preschool establishments, but due to the fact that they do not have the status of a teacher, salaries are very low, which is a big challenge. You know well that participation of women at the local level in decision-making positions is below 12%.

At present, I am the Deputy Chairman of the Fraction “Georgian Dream - Democratic Georgia”, which



I have achieved through big struggle, stress and hard work. Many women will not be able to do the same. My point is that although we do our best and work more than men, we are still in the minority when it comes to participating in a decision-making process. An obvious example is the election of the mayor of Zugdidi, scheduled for May 2019. A pre-election survey was conducted among the population to find out about local voting preferences. The voting list contained seven male candidates and not a single woman. I felt insulted and wondered if there was not any woman in Zugdidi, who would care for the city and its people, who would be an educated person and a good manager; who would know how to cope with problems, how to communicate with people, speak their language and care for their well-being? In general, the idea that only a man can become a mayor is a big challenge.

The working groups established in Zugdidi Municipality took part in localizing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and developing “the roadmap”, which covers all the requirements and problems of the IDP women and girls affected by the conflict.

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**Tsitsino Elikashvili**, resident of village Zardiantkari, volunteer of IDPWA

### **Abandoned village**

On August 8, 2008, during the Russian-Georgian war, the Georgian population of Zardiantkari, village from Mereti community, located on the conflict division line to South Ossetia, had to leave their homes because their lives were in danger. Part of the village is inhabited by ethnic Ossetians, and they have not left the village because they were protected by Ossetians and Russians.

Georgian law enforcers managed to control some territory of the village in June 2012, another part of the village is located beyond the occupation line and is controlled by the Russian military.

Villagers were able to return to their homes after 2012, but unfortunately, many young people did not return due to the security concerns and socio-economic hardship. So far, they live in the kindergarten building in Gori. Mostly, retired people remain in the village.

Tamaz Gablishvili and Mari Gablishvili from the village Zardiantkari were the only two students, who graduated from Mereti Public School in 2017- 2018 and joined the Gori State University in the same year. In the year 2018, only one child, Saba Taziashvili from Zardiantkari was in the first grade in Mereti public school.

During the war, the village was robbed in uncertain circumstances and some houses were burned. The roofs, doors and windows of almost all residents were damaged, the orchards were destroyed, poultry

and cattle killed. Almost all means of income, off which the population lived before the war has been destroyed.

In 2018, representatives of the IDP Women Association "Consent" met with the population and listened to their problems. People remaining in the villages need assistance. In the framework of the Project "Dignified Old Age", the association provides regular local assistance to the beneficiaries. Periodically, the mobile group of doctors gives free medical advice and distributes medications. In addition, the association provided free legal advice to the population and helped to register agricultural plots.

On January 7, 2019, the representatives of the Georgian Parliament, Mr. Gia Volski and Mr. Mamuka Mdinaradze, as well as the representatives of Gori City Hall, Mr. Giga Khojevanishvili and Mr. Simon Guledani, along with the representative of the Mereti community, Mrs. Rusudan Kiladze, wished the population a merry Christmas and a happy new year and distributed sweets and other products among all the families. Such assistance is very important for the population left without any income.

The damage inflicted by the war is so large that it exceeds the capacity of the families to deal with it. A rehabilitation of residential houses is necessary in the near future. It is important to set up a commission to identify losses and provide adequate assistance to each family.

In the framework of the Village Development Program, the Deputy Mayor of Gori, Mr. Guto Todadze, and the representative of the Mereti community, Ms. Rusudan Kiladze, met with the population of Mereti. It was jointly decided to cover the rural roads with bulk, put a fence around the cemetery and restore the buildings located in the center of the village.

In the Gori region only the Zardiantkari population was able to return to their homes without any assistance after 4-5 years. Villagers demand the exemption from utility bills and the award of a special status in order for the state to provide adequate assistance to villagers.

Editor's Note: Ms. Elicashvili is a trained nurse: during all these years, since 2012, she voluntarily serves elderly and disabled population of Zardiantkari village.

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**Lia Mikeladze**, resident of village Koshka, representative of IDPWA in the region

### **New opportunities for village Koshka**

On January 26, Mr. Ghoto Todadze, Head of the Department of Gori Municipality and Ms. Rusudan Kiladze, Head of the City Council of Mereti met with the residents of the villages Koshka and Guguti-

antkari in the community of Mereti. At the meeting, they talked about the various problems that concern the population. It was agreed that the funds allocated by the state under the Rural Development Program will be used to implement several projects: The GEL 12,000 allocated to the village of Koshka will be used to install irrigation canals and a filter in the well in the upper district, to secure 24-hour water supply and ensure reliable metering. The GEL 10,000 allocated to the village of Gugutiantkari will be used to improve the access road to the cemetery, install a filter on the wells, secure 24-hour water supply in the upper district and ensure metering.

According to the statistics, there are 125 families and 482 residents living in the village of Koshka, In Gugutiantkari there are 96 families and 253 residents, whereas in Zardiantkari there are 31 families and 129 residents.

Almost all walls and house roofs were damaged in the village during the 2008 war. The description of the damage was reported but not many people received help. Part of the village area, as well as the pastures became occupied after 2008 war. Cattle breeding and fruit growing are the main sources of livelihood of the population. Due to the loss of the territories, the number of cattle has been reduced, the population has no possibilities to store and feed them. In addition, the economic situation has worsened. Financial resources, which the population does not have, are essential to keep the orchards. The population cannot afford returning the money borrowed from Agro Credit Cards due to falling product prices and a decrease in sales. The government promised social allowances for the population, but enacted the contrary. The social services agency has stopped giving allowances to almost everybody. The state should take these problems into account and grant the population a status with which all families will be provided with social assistance. The safety and security of the inhabitants of these villages is another problem. The law enforcement agencies are trying to protect the population, but Ossetians are secretly sneaking into Georgian controlled territory and threatening the residents. There are a lot of cases of intimidation and kidnappings. Those people who have become victims of this system have no status and no privileges, which is unfortunate.

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**Arina Tavakarashvili**, associate professor

### **The Georgian-Ossetian conflict**

The Georgian-Ossetian conflict, which has been going on for the past 30 years, is one of the main problems of modern Georgia. The conflict began in Tskhinvali in the form of a civil protest against the independence of Georgia and manifested itself in various forms after its announcement. Although this

phenomenon is called the Georgian-Ossetian conflict, the conflict developed only in the territory of the former South Ossetian Autonomous Region and, fortunately, did not cover the whole of Georgia. However, several incidents occurred in other places of Georgia, but were soon stopped and did not spread further. Even today, Georgians and Ossetians live in Georgia in a calm atmosphere and there is no tension.

Peaceful and civilian coexistence is especially noticeable in the villages adjacent to the so-called demarcation line of the occupied territories, where there are many mixed families. Their relationships and numerous studies have proven that they live in a usual environment.

This does not mean that people living in these villages have no problems, and the war in Russia did not affect their lives. The Rural population is still coping with the consequences of the war. For them, stable peaceful conditions and economic development are very important, which should be reflected in an improved situation for them and for their children. That is why the activeness of the state in the international arena is very important, along with the promotion and implementation of social projects by the authorities and systematic intervention of international organizations to resolve the conflict. Discussion of this issue rarely takes place in the global context. Nevertheless since 2008, on the basis of a bilateral agreement of the governments (between governments of Georgia and Russia), the meetings related to this problem are being held in Geneva Format, even though they are not very stable, with not always consistent results.

Because of its less important geopolitical location, the above-mentioned conflict was not considered as significant and, accordingly, the international community and international organizations have not thought much about the preventive measures, therefore, the strategic vision for resolving the conflict has never been developed in the global context.

The Russian-Georgian war of 2008 has revealed the seriousness of the conflict and shown the reality and main goal of the conflict, which is to seize the above territories by war, occupy the silk road and take away Georgia's economic resources by war, which has led to the economic weakening of Georgia. Thus, along with the other challenges, the Georgian-Ossetian conflict and the issue of the return of the territories lost to war, still remain as serious problems for Georgia.

The severity of the war fell on the shoulders of the people living there and sowed a sense of insecurity, which is compounded by frequent cases of kidnappings of people wanting to cultivate the land. It sows fear and causes migration of mostly young people.

Therefore, from the point of view of preserving Georgian statehood and afterwards strengthening the

country, it is important to study the conflict in the long term, plan a strategic path to restore the trust lost to war between Georgians and Ossetians, and restore the territorial integrity.

The main problem lies in the fact that, until now, the causes of the conflict, the surrounding situation, the stages of conflict development and often inadequate actions regarding artificially inspired processes have not been studied deeply and with historical details. However, studies that reflect only the sequence of historical processes do exist.

The current situation requires quick and prompt action in terms of solving the social problems. Long-term projects and programs are needed that will increase the sustainability of the life of young people in the villages and restore the vitality of these places during all four seasons of the year and not only during the summer and New Year.

We had meetings in Gugutiantkari, Zardiaantkari, Knolevi, Ditsi and Kharapila. These villages are united by the security problem and the fear of the abduction of civilians, and there are also strong fears that the Russian army may once again cross the so-called occupied territory and invade Georgia. Despite the fact that in these villages no damage was caused by the war, the social problems are almost identical. Namely, in the villages there are no shops, where you can buy basic things and bread (in Ditsi there is a shop and the booths), there is no pharmacy or hospital. The first aid medications are three kilometers away. The residents of Gugutiantkari still have problems with drinking water. 10 years after the war, the roofs of houses of the residents of Zardiantkari are still not arranged properly and some of them are still covered with tarpaulin. It snows and rains into their houses. Some of their land plots, the harvest of which provides their only source of income, turned out to be beyond the demarcation line. They were left without income or with a small income, and their socio-economic situation has deteriorated. Unemployment and mass migration of young people from the villages, which leads to a decreasing number of inhabitants in these villages and their emptiness, adds to all problems mentioned above. It is a clear necessity to put additional efforts that these villages will be not depopulated, as in such case there is a danger of continuation of gripping occupation. This is a general picture of the situation of these villages. It requires the creation of a special commission for a more detailed study of problems and their further solution.

Our main problem is the lack of a long-term strategic vision and a program for which the state and the government should be responsible. Such an approach would once again strengthen trust in the long term, create a safe environment and facilitate the territorial integrity.



**Nukri Kvelashvili**, Co-Chair of the IV Working group of Georgia EaP National Platform

### **Conditions of IDP Settlement in Khurvaleti Village**

On December 19, together with the Public Defender, I visited the IDP settlement located near the demarcation line in the village of Khurvaleti, where I met with David Vanishvili living in the territory controlled by the occupants. In addition, I was at the community center of Khurvaleti IDP settlement to meet 30 residents of Khurvaleti village, local people and residents of nearby IDP settlements (Shavshvebi, Gori) as well as the employees of various NGOs, based in Shida Kartli. Unfortunately, the IDPs' conditions in the settlement were harsher than I expected. I will try to describe their misery. At the meeting, the IDPs spoke widely about the difficult socio-economic and other problems they face. Unfortunately, 10 years after the August war, road infrastructure is still undeveloped, and within the settlement in particular, the roads are not paved and no sewage/drainage systems are installed. The IDPs lack basic hygienic conditions, the settlement houses are designed and built without any toilets and bathrooms. The toilets are arranged in the yards, and people are forced to take their shower in the toilets, which in rainy and cold weather creates discomfort and problems for the population. According to the residents, originally, two public bathrooms were built for women and men, however, they said that because of the windy place the population avoided these bathrooms so as not to catch a cold. Later, one bath was rebuilt as a kindergarten, while the other is still closed.

According to the residents, municipal transport does not work. One resident has a minibus (in a poor state, which requires constant repair), which does regular trips to Gori. It is not enough because it does not meet the demands of the population. The population has to walk a long distance to the central motorway to get to Tbilisi, which is especially difficult on a snowy or rainy day. Due to the absence of municipal transport in the settlement, it is also difficult to use the outpatient services. In order to reach the outpatient service and buy medications, people have to travel to Gori, which is especially problematic for the elderly people.

In the settlement they have a family doctor without any elementary medical equipment and medicines, and according to the respondents, they often buy medical alcohol and cotton.

As for the agriculture, the IDPs cannot cultivate their own arable land because of the distance to the settlement. Many of them were forced to sell their land plots (especially the elderly, who have difficulties in covering long distances). Another problem is the absence of an irrigation system, which is the reason, why they cannot grow fruit and collect a harvest. Many families have begun to grow garlic because of the increased prices for garlic in the previous years, but this year they could not sell it because of its very low price. Many of them have to work as hired laborers to survive, but it is a seasonal

occupation with very low wages.

Unfortunately, the school bus does not serve a large number of schoolchildren living in the village (according to them, their number reaches 70), which makes it very troublesome for them to get around. They have to walk 3-4 kms. IDPs have also expressed their regret that the local school does not have an educational club. Mothers told us that a Georgian dance club had been opened before, and the children were excited, but, unfortunately, many families could not pay the money, and the circle was canceled. The residents told us that the difficult situation especially affects the youngsters. As they do not see their own personal development prospects in the settlement, they are forced to move to Tbilisi or elsewhere.

This is in short what can be said about the unbearable life in Khurvaleti settlement. Unfortunately, many of these problems and tasks are still relevant and not resolved in other IDP settlements, despite a number of infrastructure and social projects and programs implemented by the government. The state needs to focus resources and efforts on meeting the needs and requirements of IDPs.

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**Badri Tsikubadze**, civic activist, village Knolevi (Kareli district of Shida Kartli)

### **Phroni Gorge Villages on the Outskirts of the Conflict Zone**

For the villages of Phroni Gorge - Knolevi and Atotsi, located on the outskirts of the conflict zone, 2018 was not much different to 2017. Again, there were cases (widely known or not widely known) of kidnapping. The "borderization" process has continued and tens of hectares of Georgian land have been taken from the jurisdiction of Georgia. Part of the local population has been left without their possessions. However, one interesting change is obvious: when they were installing the barbed wire fences along the village of Knolevi, this fact was highlighted by several media outlets but the incident was soon forgotten. As for the village of Atotsi, the situation is radically different. The media was mobilized immediately and they offered us several news stories per day in chronological order after the start of the preparation works of the "borderization" by the Russian militaries. The second point worth mentioning is the activity of the civil sector, which is expressed by round-the-clock shifts and different activities at the division line.

Despite the difference in the development of the situation in both villages, the consequences of the conflict and the post-conflict period were very difficult: part of the arable land was lost along with pasture lands and the woods. In the case of Knolevi, the irrigation channels were blocked from the



Ossetian side. As a result, the amount of cattle catastrophically decreased and crops dried on the exposed lands.

After a sharp decline in income, the threat of hunger, kidnappings and the endless relocation of division lines, the feeling of increased vulnerability has become the factor that encourages young families to leave these villages. The remaining population is under high risk in many ways.

Mrs. Laura, whose house is located near the conflict division line, line, says: "During the first disorder, there was a very difficult situation, because of the short distance from the battle line to our yard, the bullets were falling like rain. One day, an explosive shell thrown from Znauri fell near my house and its splinters damaged my skull. I survived miraculously but I have become disabled. In the same year, my husband died during the clash. I had to raise my children alone with difficulty. Young people have left the village and moved to the city. If I were much younger I would go, too. I'm accustomed to being here and regardless of the greatest threat, I prefer to stay. During the summer of 2018, when I was working alone in my field, Russian soldiers kidnapped me, I was kept in a Tskhinvali isolator for 5 days. I cannot say that they treated me badly but I have been suffering big distress since then. Sometimes, I see that I am assaulted in my dreams. I wake up scared in the middle of the night. I don't even have anyone to talk to in order to distract myself. Then I just reassure myself that this is a dream, and that everything will be fine. Already 25 years, we live in fear. I do not matter but I hope my children will live in peace one day. I worry about the garden and the vineyard, which my ancestors turned into Heaven. Why should all this be destroyed?"

Severe economic, psycho-social and security problems in the villages caused by the war have directly affected the everyday life of women and young people, especially their health conditions and access to the necessary services.

Although many infrastructural projects have been implemented in recent years (natural gas, water, school, ambulance and mini stadiums have been set up, roads have been paved and an Internet connection has been established), which have mitigated the situation, there are still many problems (the feeling of existing threat and post-traumatic stress) that have a negative impact on the population's emotional state. The latter is likely to lead to domestic violence, conflict, psychological pressure or cases of alcoholism in women and men. The labor migration of the population has become more frequent, mostly illegal, which is no less dangerous.

I hope that 2019 will be a year of peace, economic prosperity of the population, the settlement of psycho-emotional, mental and day-to-day problems, mutual understanding, increased tolerance and love.

**Leila Ashordia**, Head of Tskhaltubo branch of IDP Women Association “Consent”

## **Town of Tskhaltubo**

Tskhaltubo represented previously famous resort with mineral baths, having 22 sanatoriums before war in early 90-s . After war in 21 sanatorium were settled IDPs from Abkhazia, and resort practically stopped to function. Originally, number of IDPs was equal to numbers of local population. Due to resettlement programs and migration, the number of IDPs significantly decreased, but currently still represents half of local population. In Tskhaltubo, the government has been implementing housing programs, to provide IDPs with durable houses. However, still many problems with IDP integration are observed.

In order to find out the current situation in Tskhaltubo in terms of providing dignified living conditions for IDPs, I have paid a visit to all top responsible persons and took an interview.

**Mr. Grigol Ivaneishvili**, Chairperson of Tskhaltubo City Council was the first to be interviewed.

**Question: What is the current situation in Tskhaltubo Municipality and are the constructions underway for housing IDPs?**

Mr. Grigol was aware of the process of construction; however, he did not possess any information regarding the start and end of the constructions of the two 10-story residential buildings. Along with these two buildings, six more residential apartments are to be constructed and Mr. Grigol did not have any specific response whether or not there are any winner companies in the tender yet. He clarified the information with the legal department, however as it turned out, the department was not competent in the issue either – they did not know the number of floors of the residential buildings to be constructed; in a nutshell, they possess approximate information and they explain the lack of their awareness by the fact that nobody keeps them abreast of developments. This is a center-based control and the monitoring group is also controlling it from the central government.

**The response from the Legal department of municipality was almost similar to the question – whether or not they consider that they should be engaged in this issue and they should be implementing similar activity.**

**Mr. Grigol Ioseliani**, the Mayor of the City Hall had the similar response. He was more or less informed that two residential apartments had already been constructed and 6 more are to be constructed, in total 8 multi-story residential apartments; however, he did not have any accurate information about the timeframes. He also did not have information that there was some fault in the process of

construction, the construction was terminated due to the reason of the construction company as they failed to pay salary to their workers and currently, a new company is in charge of constructing these two buildings, so that they are finished by the end of the year.

**Mr. Aleko Dadunashvili**, the Deputy Mayor stated the following: “We are engaged in all the activities, we attend all the meetings, we meet with the guests from Tbilisi, etc”. These standard responses sounded incompetent.

**Question: What is the system of exchanging information and communication between the state branches (local government, administration of state representative, representation of Abkhazia, IDPs division)?**

All the above-mentioned persons underlined normalization of communication. They stated that there is communication and that they are doing their utmost to be aware of the current developments. Again, this sounded like standard answer rather than reality.

**Question: Does the local government consider itself as a mediator in the issues of improving faults in the construction process as well as in the issue of supporting dignified living conditions?**

Not all of them consider themselves to be the mediators as they said that nobody asks for their opinion, nobody keeps them abreast of developments and they are not engaged in the process.

The answer was negative to the question, whether they had any experience of protection of IDP interests and what kind of communication they had established with construction companies. They do not communicate with the construction companies as the centralized monitoring group does it. We raised the question that the faulty residential buildings may turn into the problem of the town and the buildings on their balance sheet will also turn into their problem. Their answer to this was unambiguous - they said that nobody asks for their opinion in the construction process.

**Question: what can be done to improve this and what are the resources this or that body may have?**

They answered that if it is included in their competence and they are tasked with monitoring as well as with the role of a mediator, for sure, they will manage this. In addition, they pointed out that the management of self-governance is not avoiding the responsibility; merely, this is not their obligation and as for their obligations, they do their best.

**Question: Are you aware of the fact that in all ten residential buildings of a new IDP settlement Home-owners' Associations have been formed? Have the Associations addressed you for support?**

**Grigol Ivaneishvili:** - The IDP society mostly addresses respective services of the City Hall regarding various issues; and they address the City Council only in case the issue is specific.

**Grigol Ioseliani:** - Definitely, they address us and we support them as far as possible.

**Aleko Dadunashvili:** - “IDPs mainly address us in terms of social and healthcare issues”. He listed the programs however said that housing of IDPs is beyond their competence and consequently, they don’t address them in these terms.

**Question:** - Do you consider that you should be engaged in the issues of construction, selling of sanatorium and housing of IDPs?

All the representatives stated that in case this is included in their competence, it will be their pleasure to be engaged in it and presumably, results will also be better. However, currently, this is beyond their competence. This is why they are not participating in the process.

I also addressed Mr. **Zaza Chachava**, the Head of the Representation of Abkhazian Autonomous Republic. This entity has never been engaged in the construction process and neither monitoring of construction activity nor the issues of housing IDPs is within the competence of this body. But in case they are tasked with this, they will engage in the issue actively and take responsibility as well.

**Question:** Do IDPs apply to their entity?

“Yes, they do, sometimes.”, Mr. Chachava responds. “But when it comes to the issues, which are beyond my competences, I redirect them to the division so that they can get relevant answers to all the important issues”. Mr. Chachava spoke about the main activity of the body of representation of Abkhazia in the region of Imereti. These are as follows: emergency renovation works like on the water supply system, emergencies in the entrances of buildings, roof-related problems, sanitation system. Last year they spent up to GEL 10 000 on similar activities; they provided support to over 20 IDP settlements with funds from 800 to 1000 GEL. There are also social programs and a total of GEL 117 000 was spent on these programs last year. This year GEL 3000 will be added to these programs, i.e. the budget for one-off assistance has increased.

**Mr. Giorgi Santeladze**, the Deputy Head of IDP Division turned out to be the person having correct and competent answers to all the questions listed above.

Mr. Santeladze explained that construction of two ten-story residential buildings in Tskhaltubo should

be finished by the end of the year; these are the residential buildings, the construction of which was handed over to another construction company. Each residential apartment provides 70 apartments. In total, 140 families will be housed by the end of the year.

Regarding the issue, who the IDPs will be and which sanatorium they will be resettled from, Mr. Giorgi gave the following explanation: offers will be made to the IDPs residing in the cracked sanatoriums. There are a number of similar buildings in Tskhaltubo, however we face some problems here as well. If not all the residents of such sanatoriums agree to resettlement, the IDPs from another sanatorium will be housed. Some IDPs state that they don't want housing in Tskhaltubo but in the city of Kutaisi. In this case, they will be moved to Kutaisi based on a scoring system. It would be good if the transmission of 140 apartments in Tskhaltubo (two residential buildings in Tskhaltubo) and the transmission of 725 apartments in Kutaisi coincide in time. In this case, it would be possible to empty several sanatoriums.

“Along with these two residential buildings, six more buildings are to be constructed in Tskhaltubo. Their total cost will be GEL 3.5 million. Overall, 560 families will be provided with the housing by the end of 2020” - Mr. Santeladze said.

**Mr. Santeladze's** mentioned that communications between local self-government and IDP department exist, although he proposed that it would be better to have more close cooperation.

**Mr. Santeladze** was asked what is his opinion about scoring system for IDP durable housing and also how he sees the new system which should simplify the access of IDPs for filling application forms in the Houses of Justice.

**Mr. Santeladze** is still skeptical about this new opportunity. As he mentioned during the last year, only two cases were registered when IDPs applied to the House of Justice for filling of application form. Additionally, the Houses of Justice can provide property certificates only for those IDPs who possess the property which is registered, As the temporary space of residence is not in IDP property, such kind of certificates House of Justice cannot provide. It means that this service still is not fully available for IDPs.

Due to this, the departments will have to fill out the applications to grant the IDP points.

Along with the representatives of state bodies, I have interviewed several IDPs as well:



**Question: Who do you address in case of problems: local self-governance, IDP division or state bodies of Abkhazia?**

**Ms. Liana Abuladze:** - We address the entities of Abkhazia mainly for one-off allowances. As for all the other issues related to resettlement, we address solely the Ministry of IDPs from Occupied Territories Labor, Healthcare and Social Affairs of the of Georgia.

**Mr. Tina Zakaraia:** - Definitely, we address the IDP departments as our fundamental problem has been the issue of resettlement for the 26<sup>th</sup> year already and neither local government nor the Abkhazian government will be of any support to us. Otherwise, it would be good to delegate the responsibility of resettlement to the Abkhazian government as well.

**Ms. Abashmadze Zaira:** - We address IDP department, since none of other entities are responsible for us. None of the entities care for us, as if we were not the citizens of Georgia.

Based on the questions and answers of IDPs, once again it was revealed that local self-governance should be more sensitive in the resolution process of the IDPs' problems, particularly concerning their dignified resettlement.

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**Natia Omadze**, journalist, Head of Media Center in Shida Kartli

### **Why we need National and Local Action Plans for the UNSC Resolution 1325?**

UNSCR 1325 on **Women, Peace and Security** was adopted on December 31, 2000. In order to implement it, a National Action Plan has been under elaboration in Georgia for several years. The realization of the National Action Plan applies to the improvement of the social and economic conditions of women and girls affected by the war, their special promotion, the protection from and prevention of violence as well as their participation in peace negotiations, in planning humanitarian responses, in peacebuilding operations, post-conflict peaceful activities and management.

Up to present, Georgia, having two unsolved conflicts – the Georgian-Ossetian and the Georgian-Abkhazian – fails to have a local plan on UNSCR 1325, i.e. an Action Plan developed on the municipal level. However, it is obvious that a National Plan will not be able to respond to the challenges existing in different regions and villages due to their specificities.

The existence of such a document is extremely important for the Gori Municipality, that survived several conflicts during the past 20 years as well as the War of August in 2008. Since the 1990s several

thousands of IDPs have been residing in this municipality and, even now, the population still continues living there, adjacent to wires under the creeping occupation. All this had grave consequences and poses locals a lot of challenges.

Nowadays, a vast majority of the villages of the Gori Municipality are located adjacently to the occupied territories, thus, physical security is the fundamental problem of the locals. Along with the fact that occupational forces are marking so called administrative borders in Georgian villages, they permanently keep arresting local population under the accusation of so-called illegal border crossing and release locals only after they paid a cash fine.

One of the recent resonant cases occurred in the village of Khurvaleti, on September 29, 2018. Maia Otinashvili, 37, mother of three adolescent children, was kidnapped by masked armed persons from her own garden. Maia's husband and neighbors watched the young lady being forcefully kidnapped by people who had been hiding in the garden beforehand. They blindfolded Maia and took her first to a Russian military base, later to the Tskhinvali isolator and finally to prison. Mrs. Otinashvili was accused of illegal border crossing; she was first sentenced to a two-month pre-trial custody, later it was reduced to a ten-day pre-trial custody and finally changed to a one-month pre-trial custody. On the eleventh day of imprisonment, Leningori District Court sentenced Mrs. Maia to a one-year conditional sentence with a six-month trial period and released her from the Court hall.

The number of such detentions has been increasing more and more since 2008. For example, 21 persons were detained with this accusation in January, 2018. They are detaining everyone – women and men, clergymen and underaged, young and elderly people; due to this, the population residing in Georgian villages is restricted in the right of free movement and besides, feelings of insecurity are increasing among them.

Lia Chlachidze, a resident of the village of Ergneti, which is located several kilometers away from Tskhinvali, stresses on not only the problem of security, but also other problems faced by local women.

“Youth is leaving Ergneti. Young people who left to study in the city almost never come back. They start working there, often in another profession. What can they do if they return here? The resources of these young people are lost as they can't do anything for the village. The state funded their higher education as residents living adjacent to the border line. Nobody takes care of keeping these young people here and employing them... Neither is there any entertainment for young people in the village. We do not have a place, where they can hang out, talk and dance. If a boy wants to invite a girl for coffee, they have to go to Gori. There are only 56 students at school financed by the state fund-



ing received by twelfth grades for attending classes. Recently, young people asked to set up a meeting place within the framework of the Village Support and Civil Budget Program, however, the majority of the population preferred to finish the construction of the Ritual Hall. Construction of the hall started in the previous century and over 30 000 has already been spent on it. Thus, our young people remain without any entertainment place this year as well... Public transport is private and it runs without any schedule. Until the “Marshrutka” (mini-van) is full of passengers, it does not travel to the city and back; this hampers locals from starting a job in the city. Local elderly people are also in a poor state. They have to go to Gori for almost everything they need, starting from medications and a doctor to doing some shopping; this is very difficult for them. The doctor only comes to the medical center located in the village once a week, so locals prefer to go to the city rather than wait for the doctor. There is neither a shop, nor a bakery, nor a household service point“, - Lia Chlachidze says.

Ia Zubashvili, an IDP from Tskhinvali who lives in the Tsmindatskhali settlement in Gori, lists many similar and different problems faced by IDP women. She stresses the absence of possibilities of employment and self-realization and along with this, she also speaks about other needs.

“Psycho-rehabilitation programs are not operating in any of the IDP settlements, which aggravates post-traumatic conditions of IDPs nowadays. Mostly one-off and short-term programs were implemented which did not have any outcome. No surveys are conducted to enquire about IDPs needs, in consequence, the issues of infrastructure, internal roads, illumination, sanitation, etc. are not resolved. IDPs also face the problem of inaccessibility to various services. There are no centers in the IDP settlements for our children and youth where they can participate in different activities. In recent years similar buildings used to operate in all the settlements. These spaces are currently closed down or rented to other organizations and our children do not have access to services free of charge. Elderly IDPs also live in severe conditions. Their major problems include as follows: they are socially isolated, cannot realize their skills and suffer from disfunction. . They are in an informational vacuum and have low pensions that do not cover their essential needs - may it be the expenses for utility taxes, food, medicine or a visit to the doctor”, - Ia Zubashvili says.

These and other issues faced by conflict affected women were reflected in the Gender Equality Action Plan of the Gori Municipality, which is the first document in the history of modern Gori. The Gender Equality Council of the Gori Municipality worked on developing the plan in cooperation with NGOs. Issues treated in UNSCR 1325, such as the participation of women in decision making and conflict prevention, taking into account women’s needs in conflict as well as the protection, support for and rehabilitation of conflict affected women and children, hold an important place in the Action Plan.

The IDP Women Association “Consent” supported advocacy for the aforementioned issues. The association formed working groups with the participation of the representatives of the local governance, IDPs and leading women residing adjacent to border lines. Periodical meetings and discussions of the members of the working group revealed aforementioned problems. In the nearest future, the members of the working group will start visits to the villages of Gori Municipality together with the representatives of the Gori City Council and the City Hall in order to study women’s problems and needs on site. The first visit will be paid to the village of Mereti. Along with this, the members of the group will study the problems inflicted by the War of August of 2008 and will also register neglected houses in order to acquire these houses for homeless families in case of necessity.

There is almost no practice of applying women’s resources in the conflict resolution process in Georgia and particularly, of engaging the practical experience of conflict affected women. In order to actively engage women in this practice, it is necessary to inform and prepare them first. The Gender Equality Action Plan of the Gori Municipality pays attention to increasing women’s awareness and their activation. The document also includes such issues as information meetings about free of charge services available in the country, legal counseling on personal rights, as well as on the issues of violence, oppression and advocacy. It is planned to hold events supporting women’s economic empowerment (to provide them with skills for writing and implementing projects and searching for donors) and to activate an early warning system.

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**Eliko Bendeliani**, civic activist, Institute of Nationalism and Conflict Studies

### **Face to Face to the Conflict Division Line**

Many years have passed since the armed conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia / Tskhinvali region, but the population living alongside and beyond the division line still lives in a difficult situation. The unresolved conflict affects these people first. They have had many difficulties since the first days of the war and are still struggling with many problems: insecurity, a lack of development prospects, a lack of access to livelihoods and many others.

The ethnic Georgians living in the Gali and Akhagori districts, who returned to their homes hoping for a quick resolution of the conflict after the hot phase of the war, live under very difficult conditions. This return was mostly spontaneous, which resulted in severe problems in human security and many human rights violations in this region,

The fate of people living beyond the division line has been the subject of internal political discussion, as well as the topic of Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian civil dialogue and expert meetings.

This issue is one of the key issues in both the Geneva International Talks and the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRM) meetings. However, despite many efforts, the parties cannot reach agreement on humanitarian issues. At the same time, the issue of the Gali and Akhagori district has become hostage of political processes internally as well as in the Abkhazia and South Ossetia / Tskhinvali regions.

There is some distrust towards ethnic Georgians living in the occupied territories, because of this, they do not feel as part of any community. Questions often arise about the status and identity of these people.

There is a feeling that the parties have little information about the real needs and problems of the inhabitants of Gali and Akhagori. None of the sides have a consistent strategy towards them, and uncertainty and hopelessness among the population is growing day by day. The purpose of this article is to demonstrate and analyze the main challenges and future prospects of people living across the division line.

### **The Current Situation**

According to the latest census conducted by the de facto authorities of Abkhazia and South Ossetia / Tskhinvali region in 2011, 43 166<sup>20</sup> Georgians lived in Abkhazia in 2011, while the number of ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia was 3966.<sup>21</sup> However, according to various data, the number of Georgians living in these regions is bigger. 55-60 thousand Georgians live in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia there are about five thousand people. In addition, there are many people, who migrate seasonally from one side to another.

When speaking of the problems and challenges of the population living across the division line, the context in which the population lives should be taken into consideration. Security for them is one of the main problems, but there are a number of issues that complicate their conditions of living. For this part of the population, it is still not clear, what fate awaits them, if they will have to leave their homes, even if they are the indigenous population of that area and most of them never left the region during the hot phase of the conflict.

"In the 1990s, when we lived in our homes in danger to life, we had hoped that the situation would

20. <https://abkhazworld.com/aw/current-affairs/534-the-population-of-abkhazia-stands-at-240705>

21. <http://ugostat.ru/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Itogi-perepisi-RYUO.pdf>

change for the better, and today we are faced with the reality, when we have no hope, from year to year the situation becomes more difficult. I do not know how to live in this uncertainty. We have nowhere to go....." (Person living in Gali district)

### **Main Types of Human Security / Human Rights' Violations in the Occupied Territories**

One of the most important issues facing ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is their legal status and problems with the documents. Because of these problems nobody knows what the future is for this population. Special difficulties are encountered by ethnic Georgians living in Gali district. Despite the fact that the population has been living in this area, the de-facto government does not issue Abkhazian passports for them, they can currently only get a residence permit, which restricts their participation in elections, property registration and other fundamental rights. All this makes their condition even more uncertain.

"They are doing everything to make us take the residence permit. At this stage, as long as everybody takes this document, they are not making problems for us, but then, with the slightest pretext, they will have the right to send us out of Abkhazia. I suspect this is a good way to extort money and for corruption, which will further aggravate our already difficult situation. "(person living in Gali district)

In addition to the legal status of the population living on the occupied territories there are many other problems, the installation of the barbed wire fences by Russian border guards have further tightened the situation in regard to human security. Along the division line, the number of check points have decreased, which further complicated the free movement on both sides of the so-called administrative border. Unreasonable and arbitrary detentions of the population occur often, reasoned as illegal crossing of the so-called administrative border. These detentions represent one of the most serious problems.

Ethnic Georgians living in the occupied territories face restrictions to the freedom of education in the native language, freedom of speech and expression, a lack of access to healthcare services, socio-economical and many other problems, therefore they have lost the hope for a better future. This population, on the one hand, has been cut off from Georgia and Georgian territory, on the other hand they have not been integrated into the Abkhazian and Ossetian society, which creates an uncertainty vacuum around them.

"Everyone, leave us alone. We are tired " (Akhalgori resident)

It is noteworthy that the Georgian government possibilities to solve the problems faced by this population in Abkhazia is somewhat limited, but there are certain mechanisms that could be used more effectively. In addition, there are certain forces in Abkhazia who are aware of the importance of this issue and see the necessity to work in this direction.

To conclude, it is possible to mention that the ethnic Georgian population living in the occupied territories is marginalized and is associated with problems only on both sides. The impression is that none of the parties can see their potential. This is a population that has survived despite the difficult situation, permanent incidents, violations of rights and their vulnerability. They are trying to create stable living conditions without external interference and assistance.

The situation is not beneficial for any party, and in general, people living on both sides of the division line want to live in a stable and calm environment where their rights are protected and can live freely.

It is important for the parties to realize the importance of the issue, put fears aside and concentrate on the human dimension. In this direction, it is important to develop international mechanisms and increase international engagement.

If this part of the population is addressed in the right way, the ethnic Georgians in Abkhazia and South Ossetia can bring a positive impetus to the peace process as well as for sustainable development.



## Conclusion

Presented collection of articles, reports and letters shows a complicated situation in the regions of Georgia, affected by the conflict, and difficulties and barriers which internally displaced women and population affected by the conflict, need to overcome daily. To support efforts of women and the youth for improvement of their lives and realization of their rights, non-governmental organizations and women- civic activists use different frameworks, such as National Action Plan for the UN SC Resolution 1325 and Women, Peace and Security agenda; Local Plans, recently created institutional mechanism – Gender Equality Councils at municipality level; conduct monitoring of state obligations and present its results to Central and local authorities, cooperate with mass-media; bring the existing problems to the attention of international organizations and human rights defenders and constantly work on raising of awareness of women and other community members about their rights, existing laws and mechanisms. Women – civic activists work across the boundary lines, advocate for the improvement of lives of the most vulnerable, and build capacity for peace in communities, affected by the conflict. Regardless of frozen peace process, many obstacles and barriers they continue to volunteer for their communities, peace and better life.



