ACROSS THE GEORGIAN-ABKHAZ CONFLICT DIVIDE:

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF LOCALS IN SAMEGRELO-ZEMO SVANETI

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The present study was implemented by the Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies (GFSIS) within the framework of the Across the Georgian-Abkhaz Conflict Divide: Addressing the Needs of Locals (Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti) project funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland.

This report constitutes the results of the study which was aimed at producing an analysis of the current situation in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region of Georgia and the elaboration of recommendations towards a strategy for the development of the area located along the Abkhaz administrative border. From the beginning, the project was conceived as part of a programme consisting of two parallel research projects looking to explore the livelihoods of the communities on both sides of the Georgian-Abkhaz divide (administrative border) with the other being conducted by the Gali-based Institute of Democracy (ID). The objective of these two parallel research projects is to create a synergy when evaluating the general welfare of the populations living along and on both sides of the administrative boundary line (ABL), largely running across the Enguri River, as well as when assessing the efficiency of the assistance programmes towards mitigating the consequences of the conflict. Furthermore, the projects aim to promote the development of interpersonal trust between Georgian and Abkhaz researchers which helps to create an atmosphere of co-operation necessary for the development and implementation of future aid and development programmes as well as joint confidence-building projects.

The main objective of both projects is to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life in the region on both sides of the ABL. The first step towards achieving this objective is to understand the basic needs of the population and the possible ways to improve the effectiveness of social policies and targeted programmes implemented by the government as well as local and international NGOs and agencies. No less significant is the involvement of the Georgian and Abkhaz public in the discussion of the results of the research and in engaging in dialogue. In particular, the expected complementarity of the Georgian and Abkhaz studies will help international organisations working on both sides of the ABL to develop policies based upon greater public support and ensuring a long-term impact.

The principal content of the present study comprises quantitative evaluation (based upon a population survey) of the quality of life and life satisfaction in the conflict-affected populations of the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region and a SWOT-analysis of existing approaches, policies and programmes aimed at alleviating the consequences of conflicts based upon an expert survey. This report offers a critical analysis of these programmes and activities by assessing the overall impact and identifying the internal and external factors that have been conducive to or hindered the achievement of their goals. Based upon the data obtained, recommendations have been elaborated which are intended to make a contribution to increasing the effectiveness of social policies and development programmes in the region.

The research work was carried out under the guidance of two experts, Manana Gabashvili and Ana Diakonidze, whose reports have served as the primary basis for the present text.

The author would like to express gratitude to the members of the team of interviewers, led by Kristine Kilanava, who have conducted the survey in a responsible and professional way as well as experts and officials who have generously found time and agreed to respond to the interviewers’ queries.

Continued support to the research team was provided by the Project Manager, Dr Archil Gegeshidze, and the Project Co-ordinator, Ketevan Emukhvari, who were readily prepared to express their opinion or render necessary assistance.

FOREWORD
INTRODUCTION

Objectives of the Study; Methodological Approaches and Research Tools

As stated in the Foreword, the main purpose of this study is to analyse the socio-economic conditions and the quality of life of the residents of settlements in the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region located along the administrative border with Abkhazia as well as their perception of the past (following the year 2008) and expected changes in this area. The impact and effectiveness of governmental and non-governmental social programmes and projects aimed at improving the welfare and quality of life of the population were also investigated.

Accordingly, one of the principal objectives of this review is to track the strengths and weaknesses of the humanitarian aid and development assistance programmes in the region following the August 2008 events. These programmes are being considered, primarily, in terms of their compliance with the needs of the region and their relevance to the improvement of the quality of life of the population.

In addition to the analysis of the existing data, two basic empirical research tools have been utilised: a quantitative tool, implying a population survey (500 respondents) using a standard questionnaire and subsequent statistical processing of the results, and a qualitative tool, based upon the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews with experts and supplemented by several focus groups. This approach was used to determine the general issues and topics of concern for the respondents.

The population survey focused mainly upon the evaluation of the quality of life and life satisfaction in the conflict-affected populations of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti living along the conflict divide/administrative boundary line with Abkhazia (hereafter also ABL) as well as their assessment of the situation over the past several years and their expectations for the future. Moreover, the questions contained a ranked evaluation of various problems and difficulties experienced as well as value characteristics and attitudes towards and concerning various aspects of life.

Work with experts also focused upon identifying the key social problems and difficulties faced by the residents of the study area but more specific questions—regarding social policies and targeted programmes implemented in the region—were also posed in addition to the general topics with the answers later used to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the abovementioned activities. As a result, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses (a truncated SWOT-analysis) of existing approaches, policies and programmes aimed at mitigating the consequences of conflicts was conducted based upon an expert survey. This report provides a critical look at these programmes and activities by assessing their overall impact as well as identifying internal and external factors that have been favourable or unfavourable in achieving the set objectives.

Recommendations have been developed based upon the data obtained with the intention of enhancing the effectiveness of the social policies and development programmes in the region. The level of life satisfaction amongst the target groups was simultaneously used as the principal indicator of the success/failure of the current and past programmes and approaches. As noted above, the study employed two basic research tools – qualitative (expert interviews, focus groups) and quantitative (sociological survey).

Expert Survey

The expert survey conducted within the framework of the project and carried out in the form of individual in-depth semi-structured focused interviews constitutes one part of the study aimed at elaborating recommendations for working out the best strategy for the development of the area of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti located along the administrative border with Abkhazia. The principal aim of the work with the experts was to understand the current social situation and track the strengths and weaknesses of the humanitarian aid and development assistance programmes implemented in the region over the past four years following the August 2008 events. The programmes were considered, primarily, in terms of their compliance with the needs of the region and their relevance to the improvement of the quality of life of the population.

A verbal communicative approach to the focused interview was selected in that it offers the possibility for the competent engagement of a specialist in the analysis and resolution of the problem in question and for obtaining a professional expert assessment of a particular problem or programme aimed at its resolution without any external influence upon the respondent. The interviewer posed questions
or, more frequently, offered the respondent topics for discussion but deliberately did not engage in active dialogue, express opinions or disclose personal attitudes toward the respondents’ answers or the questions posed.

In turn, the use of focus groups (or, in our case, focused group discussions) was intended to determine the overall picture in the collective opinion of the group and try to understand the main apprehensions and priorities of concern to the population as well as, if possible, the causal and functional relations between different phenomena in the perspective of local residents.

**Population Survey**

The sociological survey was used as the principal method for collecting primary quantitative social data based upon oral (personal) communication with respondents living in the study area through asking questions whose content would reflect a problem to be studied at the empirical level (key social issues, living conditions, evaluation of the recent past, satisfaction with various aspects of life, degree of optimism, basic values, etc.).

The questionnaire which was used contained mostly closed (structured) questions entailing the selection of an answer from an attached list of options. Some of these questions were dichotomous (“yes/no”) whilst the rest were multiple choice providing more than two options. Responses to closed questions are easy to process, thereby determining their choice for inclusion, although their disadvantages relate to a relatively high likelihood of their hasty responses, random selection or the automaticity of the respondent as well as not always requiring a high level of professionalism on the part of the interviewers.

The survey was administered in 11 localities (see Table 1) along the Georgian-Abkhaz Administrative Boundary Line (ABL). The locations were selected at random although initial choices had to be altered in some cases due to the problem of accessibility to the area. The method of quota (proportional) sampling was used because of the lack of detailed demographic data which precluded the possibility to determine a fully adequate random sample. For each settlement, the number of respondents was determined in accordance with the population structure, proportion of IDPs and locals and gender distribution in each community. A total of 500 people were interviewed, 35% of whom were internally displaced persons (IDPs) and 55% were women.

**Table 1: Sample Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Settlement</th>
<th>IDPs</th>
<th>Locals</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zugdidi</td>
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<td>130</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>194</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potskho-Etseri</td>
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<tr>
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<td>32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ganmukhuri</td>
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<td>12</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tskoushi</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kalagani</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
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<td>Khaishi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>175 (35%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>325 (65%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>500 (100%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>273 (55%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>227 (45%)</strong></td>
<td><strong>500 (100%)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social Profile of the Respondents**

Persons with secondary and tertiary education levels were almost equally represented in the sample at 39% and 36%, respectively. Respondents were mostly of working age and married (65%). Only a very small percentage (4%) was comprised by students. Thirty per cent of respondents stated themselves to be unemployed. It should be noted that despite the high proportion of respondents living in rural areas, only 3% mentioned employment in the agricultural sector. Almost a fifth of the sample were homemakers and 15% work in public institutions.
The vast majority of respondents (98%) were Orthodox Christian and considered Georgian as their native language (although, certainly, for many families Mingrelian or Svan are also considered mother tongues). In view of such a homogeneous sample, it did not seem necessary to allocate ethnic or religious affiliation and mother tongue as variables. Special attention, however, was given to whether or not a respondent was an IDP from Abkhazia as well as age, sex, economic status and place of residence.

**GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION**

**Political Processes and New Realities**

The conflict in Abkhazia is, in a sense, unique in view of the specific demographic profile of the region since ethnic Abkhaz constituted less than one-fifth of the population of Abkhazia prior to the outbreak of hostilities whereas Georgians made up nearly half. The conflict has dramatically altered the demographic profile of Abkhazia. The vast majority of ethnic Georgians were either expelled from or voluntarily left Abkhazia, fearing for their lives. Most of the IDPs from Abkhazia are currently settled throughout Georgia although they predominantly live in Samegrelo, Imereti and Tbilisi.

The post-conflict situation continues to affect the living conditions of both the IDPs and all of the inhabitants of the border areas and settlements alongside the current political and economic processes in the country. The parliamentary elections of 1 October 2012 radically changed the political situation in Georgia. The United National Movement, as the party of the Georgian President, Mikheil Saakashvili, lost the elections, clearing the way for the now-former opposition Georgian Dream coalition to form a new government, led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili. Despite the fact that Mr Saakashvili retains his post for another year and notwithstanding the very impressive prerogatives granted to him by the Constitution, his current state as a “lame duck” and the decline of public support signify that the political climate has indeed shifted.

Mr Saakashvili’s rather controversial personality, his rhetoric and policies contributed to the maintenance of the belief in Abkhazia that reconciliation with Tbilisi is unlikely, serving the objective of the demonisation of Georgians and justifying the overall policy of blocking any possible positive initiatives offered by Tbilisi – either by direct refusal or proposing in exchange symbolic gestures that are, a priori, unacceptable for Tbilisi. The country’s new government has already announced its commitment to the continuation of the Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia whilst simultaneously stating that it intends to improve relations with Russia.

It is assumed that not only the rhetoric directed at Russia and the Abkhaz leadership will be softened in the nearest future but also that real changes- such as the freedom of movement across the ABL, the restoration of economic relations and inter-community dialogue-may follow. The signing of an agreement on the non-renewal of hostilities with Abkhazia is possible although, as stated by the new State Minister for Reintegration, Paata Zakareishvili: “The signing of a [peace] agreement with the Abkhaz side is only possible if we are regarded as parties to a conflict rather than as two sovereign states.” Mr Zakareishvili is convinced, however, that small steps towards reconciliation are still feasible such as softening (but retaining) Georgian legislation on “occupied territories,” launching direct negotiations between the parties and developing economic ties. He also, somewhat optimistically, expressed his belief that if Georgia continues to advance towards greater democracy and economic prosperity, then the attitude of the Abkhaz society to the possibility of reconciliation may change (regardless of Russia’s opposition) which will ultimately lead to reintegration into the Georgian state.

Time and further developments will show how justified the optimism of Mr Zakareishvili—a veteran of civil activism with extensive ties in Abkhazia—is. One thing is clear: A more constructive approach to Georgian-Abkhaz relations is planned. Even if the key issues are unlikely to be resolved in the near future, one can hope that this will have a beneficial impact upon the lives of the people on both sides of the ABL.

It should be emphasised, however, that some of the abovementioned changes came after the study was implemented and, therefore, could not be taken into account by the respondents or affect the results of the survey.
Social Situation in Georgia

The situation in Georgia can be subdivided into economic (economic development and growth, macroeconomic trends, investment, production and trade), social (poverty, unemployment, social security, demography, social infrastructure) and, finally, political areas (power, elections, political groups and foreign policy). As a result of the events of August 2008, Georgian society experienced a severe shock and the August hostilities will have long-term and far-reaching political, social and economic effects that have been exacerbated by the global crisis. That said, the reforms and public policy being carried out by the government, against the background of the above geopolitical and geo-economic realities, play an important role in securing stability and development.

Although the Georgian economy is still poorly integrated into the global economic system, the worldwide economic crisis has inevitably exerted additional pressure upon the country’s already fragile economy. The volatility of the Georgian economy is also linked to the fact that it is highly dependent upon the realisation of its transit potential and the prices of the transported goods, first of all—of energy resources. Unlike the neighbouring Azerbaijan and Russia, Georgia is relatively poor in hydrocarbons although the already exploited oil deposits in eastern Georgia, near the border with Azerbaijan, and the first signs of deep offshore oil deposits along the Black Sea coast are a cause for some optimism. Nevertheless, to date, the principal factor of economic development is the transit function of Georgia through which a number of significant oil and gas pipelines pass.

Georgia was hit hard by the effects of an economic crisis which coincided with the need to restore the economy after the armed conflict with Russia in August 2008 although the generous assistance of the West played a very important role in mitigating these consequences. After a sustained GDP growth of more than 10% in 2006-07, the economic growth rate slowed in 2008 and became negative in 2009. Despite great difficulties, such as inflation and a decline in foreign investment, the economy began to recover in 2010. In February 2011, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) raised its economic growth forecast for Georgia from 4.5% to 5.5% for 2011, but annual real GDP growth (i.e., adjusted for inflation) has, in fact, exceeded expectations and reached 6.8%. At the same time, a rise in inflation began (11.8% in December 2010, 12.3% in January, peaking at 13.6% in February-May 2011) which then proceeded to decrease gradually, falling to 8.5% by the end 2011 and finally reaching negative values by the end of spring 2012.

In parallel, the Georgian Government is facing substantial external debt service obligations in 2012-14, peaking at just over USD1 billion in 2013 (8% of GDP). In itself, the absolute value of the State debt is not significantly high but its maintenance is a heavy burden upon the national budget given the negative balance of payments.

Despite the significant macroeconomic achievements even before August 2008, however, mass poverty has diminished only slightly, if at all, and unemployment and social inequality remain high. Poverty is largely associated with low employment and labour productivity, especially in agriculture. Despite economic growth, the majority of the population still works mainly in agriculture and although this occupation generally ensures livelihoods, few people have a chance to improve their economic and social status. After all, whilst rural residents constitute more than half of the population and 55% of the labour force is employed in agriculture, this sector creates no more than 8-9% of GDP.

Indeed, unemployment is a serious social problem which continues to grow (allegedly underreported official data showed an increase from 12% in 2004 to 16% in the 2009 and have been fluctuating around this value since then).

Against the background of widespread poverty, the national social security system has assumed particular significance. Accordingly, social security- in the form of pensions and pension supplements

3 By June 2012, the total value of the external debt of Georgia reached an imposing value of USD12.2 billion (GEL 19.7 billion) of which only USD9.9 billion (32.2% of the total) constitutes the national debt. See “The Economy of Georgia,” 2012 (9). Accessible at http://www.geoeconomics.ge/.
4 Interview with Professor Vladimir Papava. “Georgia’s Economy is Chronically Sick,” Bank and Finance. Accessible at http://www.bfm.ge/society/4926--.html
for specific groups, child benefits, disability benefits and the most recently introduced (2006) targeted social assistance - traditionally consumes a significant share of the state budget.

Joint pension payments remain the largest subsection of the budget allocated for social assistance due to the large number of retirees (approximately 838,000 pensioners resided in Georgia by 2010). This is despite the relatively low basic pension-GEL 80 per month-whilst the cost of living by the winter of 2011 was GEL 150-160. In addition to poverty, other factors contribute to the low standard of living in Georgia. For instance, the provision of housing to vulnerable persons remains unsatisfactory. The construction of new housing has almost completely been taken over by the private sector with the government having virtually ceased to intervene in housing construction following a hasty privatisation of the housing stock in the early 1990s except for the rare case of housing for displaced persons (particularly, in the fall of 2008).

Emigration is still a popular way to resolve economic and social problems. Traditionally, the people of Georgia did not seek to migrate and only small groups of Georgians resided abroad. Since the early 1990s, however, the continuing economic crisis and political instability have forced hundreds of thousands of Georgian citizens to travel outside of the country in search of security, improved livelihoods and broader opportunities for self-realisation. As a result, Georgia has lost about one-fifth of its population to date. Although Russia and the CIS countries were originally the main target for emigration, the US and Europe have become an increasingly popular destination for migrants in recent years, in part because of a higher level and quality of life there but also because of the deteriorating conditions in Russia. Emigration leads to the loss of highly-skilled and hard-working residents of Georgia but remittances from abroad, mainly in the form of cash transfers, are essential for the sustenance of many families and, in general, for the economy of the country. At the same time, it should be noted that for the first time after a long hiatus, 2010 was marked by the growth of the population of Georgia, resulting from both natural growth and a positive migration balance.7

Naturally, emigration has affected ethnic minorities to a greater extent than ethnic Georgians leading to a significant increase in the proportion of Georgians in the population (from 67% in 1989 to 82% in 2002). In addition to the above reasons, this, in no small measure, has been enhanced by the conflicts and nationalistic sentiments of the early 1990s as well as better opportunities for migration for the representatives of certain ethnic groups – Jews, Greeks, etc. Nevertheless, polyethnicity remained present in Georgia and large, compactly settled groups of Armenians and Azerbaijanis co-exist with many smaller ethnic groups.

**Brief Description of the Region**

The Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti region is located in the central north-western part of Georgia. The territory of the region occupies 10.6% of the country’s total area which amounts to 7.4 thousand sq. km. The region ranks second in Georgia in terms of area.

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According to the 2002 census, Georgians constitute 98.6% of the population of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (466,100 persons – 10.67% of the total population of Georgia). The Georgian population of the region of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti is divided into Mingrelians (up to 90%), speaking the Mingrelian language, and Svans (up to 10%), using the Svan language, and residing predominantly in the north of the region – the Mestia Municipality.

In confessional terms, the vast majority of the population of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti numbering 462,435 people (99.2%) belongs to the Georgian Orthodox Church. The region also has a small number of followers of Islam (1,015 persons) and the Armenian Apostolic Church (190 persons).

Cities and towns of Samegrelo: Zugdidi (68,894 residents, 2002), Poti (53,149), Senaki (28,082), Tsalenjikha (8,945), Abasha (6,400), Martvili (5,600), Khobi (5,600) and Jvari (4,800) as well as the urban settlement of Chkhorotsku (5,900 residents, 2007). In addition, there is the urban settlement of Mestia (2,600) in Zemo Svaneti (Mestia Municipality).

The region’s economy depends mainly upon agriculture. The production of nuts, citrus fruit and corn is still the main source of income in Samegrelo whilst livestock and potatoes are principal sources of livelihood in Zemo Svaneti. The market (and or access to the market), however, is limited and remains as one of the overriding problems of the region.

The region investigated within the framework of this project is a strip of territory along the edge of the ABL and includes, as noted above, the following settlements: Zugdidi, Tsalenjikha, Anaklia, Khurcha, Khaishi, Potksko-Ets, Ruki, Ganmukhuri, Tskoushi, Kalagani and Chuberi.

The social situation in the region is grim and, as mentioned above, further burdened by a large number of IDPs from Abkhazia who in the mass remain in particularly dire socio-economic conditions. Indeed, the region is the place with the second largest concentration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) after Tbilisi with 34% of the total number of IDPs residing in Samegrelo at the present time (although comprising up to 40% during some periods following 1993). In this regard, the region is constantly in the spotlight of various humanitarian organisations whose programmes have been, however, designed mainly for emergency or post-emergency situations. Orientation towards development prospects, including long-term solutions for IDPs, such as socio-economic integration into the local community, has been less pronounced.

Numerous humanitarian issues remain unresolved, particularly the plight of internally displaced persons who have lost their homes, possessions and livelihoods and coupled with the limited ability (or will) of the respective governments to radically improve their situation and, at the same time, the difficulty or impossibility of returning to their places of permanent residence. Those who have managed to return or who migrate regularly/seasonally are in a no less difficult situation. It is particularly essential, therefore, to find ways to make life easier for these categories of people regardless of the ultimate resolution of political issues concerning the status of the disputed territories.

Internally Displaced Persons

For nearly two decades, the situation of internally displaced persons has continued to remain one of the most painful aspects of the Georgian reality whilst at the same time creating serious difficulties in terms of socio-economic development and stabilisation in the country. The state of the majority of internally displaced persons is still vulnerable, living conditions for many of them are still unacceptable, they often do not have regular and adequate sources of income and they are not sufficiently integrated into the local communities with prospects for their return to their places of permanent residents still obviously distant.

Although the humanitarian situation in Georgia was previously also quite dire due to the large number of internally displaced people from conflict zones (in 1992-1993), the situation deteriorated even further as a result of the war in August 2008 which prompted the emergence of additional tens of thousands of displaced persons and driving some of them from their places of residence not for the first time.

To illustrate, in the first 15 years following the armed conflict in Abkhazia, even on those rare occasions when the word “integration” was mentioned in connection with the IDPs, it usually followed the adjective

8 http://www.rec-caucasus.org/Flash/PDF/GE/GE2.pdf
9 Group discussions carried out in Zugdidi and Jvari.
10 Ministry for Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia (MRA).
“temporary.” With the adoption of the State Strategy on IDPs in 2007 (and later its Action Plan for 2008-11), and not without some pressure from the international community, the socio-economic integration of IDPs and a lasting solution to their housing problems have been identified as priorities. Prior to this, both the State and public discourse have focused upon the return of IDPs as the only viable option to overcome this challenge. Only after the 2008 hostilities, the reality of the fact that the return of IDPs was too distant a prospect was fully recognised and that alternative solutions needed to be sought.

The Georgian Government had to completely revise the Action Plan for the Implementation of the State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons which was adopted shortly before the war. Simultaneously, it urgently had to address the problems of about 24,000 new migrants displaced from South Ossetia who were added to the approximately 13,000 “old” IDPs from South Ossetia based in Tbilisi, Gori and settlements in Shida Kartli since the early 1990s. This was in addition to the more than 200,000 persons displaced from Abkhazia (although a portion of registered IDPs live in the Gali region of Abkhazia and their status raises certain questions).

A state programme to provide housing for “old” IDPs is being implemented, most frequently by transferring existing temporary housing into ownership or providing compensation. All registered IDPs are entitled to quite a modest allowance and enjoy other benefits such as, for example, in health care. Housing and benefits, however, are obviously insufficient to ensure the dignified existence of displaced families for whom the most important problem is the unemployment rate and the lack of a steady income. Although many of IDPs cannot be regarded as more vulnerable than some other general groups (for instance, certain ethnic minorities, residents of isolated mountain areas, etc.), the vulnerability of IDPs is characterised by different factors. Amongst the key aspects of the vulnerability of IDPs, or risks associated with their well-being, is the uncertainty about their future, a low income/unemployment, generally poor housing conditions, the destruction of social capital and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) found in many of the IDPs.

Poverty is the greatest scourge of IDPs as well as a large part of the Georgian population as a whole. Much of the poverty is linked to two interrelated factors: whether or not the family members are unemployed or working and the quality of human capital in the household (education, health, occupation). Many displaced persons are in a constant struggle for survival. After all, jobs are already scarce due to high unemployment in the country with IDPs facing additional challenges as compared to the local population because of their lack of connections and resources necessary to overcome administrative barriers or owing to difficulties in adapting to the unfamiliar labour market.

As noted above, members of households with access to land are not considered unemployed. Local authorities can temporarily allocate land to displaced persons at their request but the selection of the plots and their distribution is left to the discretion of the authorities. Even when the plots are available and the land is fertile, IDPs require fertiliser, equipment for cultivation, transport and fuel in order to harvest a decent crop and all this requires frequently unavailable additional funds. Accordingly, the lack of real estate, which could serve as collateral for loans, is a major problem.

Lack of adequate income opportunities means that many IDPs have to rely upon unstable income from petty trade, remittances and assistance from family and friends, subsistence farming on small gardens (when land is available) and the sale of agricultural products. The habit of constantly relying upon external aid leads to the development of the dependence syndrome, social passivity and even protracted depression over time. Of particular concern is the issue of creating the proper environment for children and adolescents since a lack of attention to their needs can have disastrous consequences for their mental and physical development in the future. Isolated housing and poor living conditions are not only a problem per se but can also interfere with the education and socialisation of the young generation.

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11 “Temporary integration is a very political and psychological issue: some believe it could affect the eventual return of IDPs or cause IDPs to lose their status should they attempt to settle temporarily.” Profile of Internal Displacement – Georgia: Compilation of the Information Available in the Global IDP Database of the Norwegian Refugee Council (as of 18 March 2004). Accessible at http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/pdfid/406424744.pdf, p. 134.
THE QUALITY OF LIFE AND THE NEEDS OF THE POPULATION

The quality of life for people living in the region depends upon many factors and is directly linked to the needs of the populations concerned as well as the level (and quality) of the satisfaction of these needs. Both qualitative and quantitative research have revealed many problems and factors of concern for the population and contributing to the negative aspects of their livelihoods.

The main problem in the region, of course, is the pervasive poverty and comprises a major factor contributing to the low quality of life.

Economic Prospects of the Population

The study region has experienced a very difficult past two decades. Not surprisingly, research points to a rather poor economic situation of the population living along the ABL and in the entire region. Approximately 75% of respondents identified themselves as “poor” or “below average” and, in general, this subjective self-evaluation is consistent with other more objective empirical data. According to their own estimates, approximately 63% of the respondents received an average monthly income of less than GEL 300 per month which is hardly enough to afford food and clothing.

There is a clear urban-rural divide when it comes to economic prospects. Most of the households which belong to the “well-off” group reside in Zugdidi and Tselenjikha. The principal sources of income in urban areas are regular/monthly salaries, revenues from business and trade activities as opposed to the income of rural residents which is typically collected from the sale of agricultural products or in the form of social allowances/benefits.

Unemployment was cited as one of the most urgent problems of the region in discussion groups (group interviews) and according to a special survey conducted by the project (40% of respondents). The recent initiative of President Saakashvili to intentionally turn the city of Anaklia into a major tourist centre has not made significant changes in this respect although it has created a certain number of jobs in construction companies and at two-to-three newly launched hotels alongside a temporary employment opportunity arising recently in Svaneti, in particular, with the construction of the road from Jvari to Mestia but, again, without a long-term prospect.

In fairness, it should be noted that unemployment is characteristic of not only the study region but also the whole of Georgia. Impressive economic growth that occurred in the country in 2004-05 was soon overshadowed by a rise in unemployment (according to official figures, the unemployment rate rose by 4% in 2005-10) and accompanied by an increased vulnerability of the population (according to data from 2008, 23.6% of the population lived below the poverty line and 9.3% – in extreme poverty). As for the actual study region, the overall employment rate amounts to 59% according to official data although most of these “working” individuals are self-employed, mainly in agriculture (77%), whilst a small part is engaged in so-called tourist industry (especially in Svaneti).

13 It is not easy, however, to obtain even temporary employment: “…very few people from our village were able to obtain temporary work at the construction site, they (construction companies) bring in their own people, they do not need us.” A Place of One’s Own, NRC’s Individual House Construction (2002-2009) in West Georgia, Tbilisi, August 2011, p. 11.
14 Group discussion in Jvari: “Approximately 60% of the male population of Jvari worked on the construction of the Jvari-Mestia road this summer.”
17 These are official figures. In actuality, the percentages may be lower.
For the evaluation of the socio-economic profile of the respondents, “objective” and “subjective” poverty indices have been developed. The Subjective Poverty Index (SPI) was determined based upon the answers to two questions: How would you assess the economic prospects of your family? and For what is your household income sufficient? Correspondingly, respondents were divided into four groups according to their levels of prosperity: the “poor,” “moderately well-off/at brink of poverty,” “moderately affluent” and “wealthy.”

The Objective Poverty Index (OPI) was estimated in a similar way based upon the answers to the following three questions: What does your family have in possession?, What were the approximate expenses incurred by your family over the past month? and What was the approximate cash income of your family over the past month? As a result of processing the OPI, the respondents were also divided into four analogous groups.

As already mentioned, most of the respondents consider themselves as belonging to the poor and middle class (75%) but the group that indicated the economic situation of their families as “average” declares that income is only sufficient to purchase food and clothing. The OPI also points to the fact that this low-income group is the largest and constitutes 63% of respondents. This is a group of people whose average monthly income and expenditure level are in the range of GEL 100-300 and who owns at least half of the listed assets. In all other cases, the subjective and objective assessments of the economic conditions are similar with some differences. The “moderately wealthy” group, therefore, comprises 22% of respondents according to the OPI as compared to 14% – in accordance with the SPI. The same is true in the case of the “wealthy/rich” group, although to a lesser degree, which clearly points to the fact that respondents tend to underestimate their own economic status in their responses.

In terms of economic status, significant differences were revealed between the income level of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and locals. Namely, the number of IDP families with incomes less than GEL 300 was 17% higher as compared to local residents; 11% more local residents have incomes in the range of GEL 300 to 700 and 7% more locals earn more than 700 GEL per month, in contrast to IDPs.

Results show that the economic situation of the respondents is also strongly influenced by the geography of their place of residence and there was a significant statistical correlation between the place of residence and economic status. When it comes to the percentage of people in the “moderately affluent” and “wealthy/rich” categories, Zugdidi is the clear leader. According to their own assessment, 36% of the respondents in Zugdidi belong to the top two groups and the ratio between the number of affluent (the “moderately affluent” and “wealthy” groups) and the number of relatively poor (the “poor” group) is 5:1.

\[\chi^2(15) = 59.84, p < .001.\] Chi-square (\(\chi^2\)), or the Pearson Criterion, is used here to test the hypothesis of the independence of variables when the exact law of the probability distribution is unknown. 15 - is the degree of freedom of contingency tables for a given set of values of nominal variables and p- cumulative probability of that the value of \(\chi^2\) is in a certain range.
and “moderately well-off/on the brink of poverty” categories) individuals is 1:1.7 in Zugdidi.

The situation deteriorates in Tsalenjikha and Chuberi/Khaishi where there are two relatively poor individuals for each affluent person (1:2). In Anaklia, Khurcha and Ganmukhuri, this ratio is even more striking and amounts to 1:3. According to this criterion, the poverty-stricken settlements are as follows: Rukhi (seven “relatively poor” for each “affluent” respondent), Potskho-Etseri, Kalagani and Tskoushi. In the last three locations, only about 1% of the population belongs to the “affluent” category and the corresponding ratio is catastrophically high and equals 1:54. It should be noted that the general picture of poverty is also affected by the large number of IDPs, poorer as a whole, as they are unevenly distributed amongst settlements.

In general, as shown in the previous diagram, the largest proportion of respondents in all localities is constituted by people “at brink of poverty.” The data also indicate a significant income gap between the urban and the rural populations. In Zugdidi, for example, a better economic situation of the population is achieved by the high proportion of people with regular earnings/permanent jobs and the proportion of those who own a business, are involved in commercial activities or do physical work to generate income.

Figure 2: Objective Poverty Index – Distribution by Place of Residence

There are three predominant sources of income amongst the respondents: pension (20% of respondents), wages (about 19%) and a special allowance received by IDPs (almost 17%). Other important sources of income are the production and marketing of agricultural products (10%) and the earnings gained from the implementation of irregular/temporary work (10%). Other sources of income are statistically insignificant. Given the large number of villagers amongst the respondents, the modest share of families living from the proceeds of the sale of agricultural products is surprising. This may have several explanations. First of all, it may be the result of the neglect of non-monetary income in the form of the products (food), mainly in inefficient subsistence farming practices of the local population since this income is often not recognised as such by the respondents. In addition, many respondents, especially IDPs, have no revenue-generating land and only 32% of the respondents said they owned a land plot.

Only in the villages of Anaklia, Khurcha and Ganmukhuri is agriculture the main source of income for the local residents (on average, amounting to the revenue share of 40% in each of these localities).

There are three main areas where the differences are significant when comparing the income of displaced people and residents. Obviously, a special allowance is received on a massive scale only by people with official IDP status with this allowance, under conditions of high unemployment and the frequent lack of land, being the only major source of income for this group as a whole. Accordingly, if 24% of respondents had identified the sale of agricultural products as their main source of income, only 9% of IDPs have indicated the same. It should also be noted that assistance from friends or relatives is a more common source of income for local residents (11%) than amongst IDPs (4%).
In the city of Zugdidi, which is a leader in terms of the socio-economic status of the people, the main sources of income are wages for permanent work and pensions. In the lowest income settlement—the village of Rukhi—residents must mainly rely upon state welfare benefits such as pensions (29%) and the allowance for IDPs (43%).

Based upon the survey data, it was possible to build a probabilistic description of the main socio-economic factor—the incidence of work/employment of respondents—using five predictors: age, sex, presence of IDP status, place of residence and level of education. The results of the binomial logistic regression show that location is the single most important factor influencing the probability of employment whereas none of other predictors had any significant effect upon the probability. The data show a significant gap between urban and rural areas when it comes to finding employment. Residents of Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha, therefore, are almost twice as likely to find work than are people living in other localities. This result seems logical and would not signify anything alarming if it were not for such a low percentage of people receiving income from farming—even if it provides enough food for most of the rural residents.

Perception of Key Issues

The survey clearly showed that the difficult economic situation, coupled with unemployment, is a major problem for the population in the region. Apart from the general poverty, however, the problem of access to quality education and health services was noted by almost all respondents. In particular, many respondents cited examples of poor school attendance amongst children from low-income families (mostly IDPs) due to a lack of clothing and or footwear. The problem associated with entrance exams to higher education was also noted as it also largely affects the most vulnerable groups—children from low-income families and IDP children. In these groups, parents cannot afford lessons by private tutors in order to make up for the fact that the curriculum taught in schools is very different from the requirements of the entrance exams and which means that these children/youths are often unable to continue their studies. The study of the so-called “Abkhaz” schools (eight of which are located in the region of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti), conducted by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), showed that low scores received by IDP students in university entrance examinations are the result of several factors including poorly equipped schools, lack of textbooks and other educational materials, poor conditions at home (“no conditions to prepare homework”), frequent incidence of illness amongst children and insolvency of parents (unable to pay for private tutoring). The root of these problems goes back to low incomes, limited household budgets and the lack of attention to these schools from the government.

In the health sector, in addition to poor access to diagnostics and treatment, the outbreak of certain diseases is identified as the main problem. A surge in the incidence of malignant neoplasms and thyrotoxicosis has recently been observed in the village Jvari (data on IDPs). Amongst the elderly population, the most problematic are those chronic diseases that limit movement as well as high blood pressure, diabetes and blood sugar levels, digestive problems, arthritis and heart disease aggravated by poor access to health care; namely, the high cost of prescription drugs, special medical treatment and operations as well as the lack of a streamlined health insurance system.

The survey revealed an ordered hierarchy of social and other problems in the subjective perception of the respondents. Amongst the main problems in their community, the respondents noted the following: 1. lack of social security/poverty – 30%; 2. economic crisis –18%; 3-5. a) failure to resolve the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict, b) harsh living conditions of IDPs and c) limited access to quality health care (12%,
11% and 10%, respectively). These data clearly indicate that the economic difficulties, together with concerns about political stability and poor living conditions of internally displaced persons, are key issues regardless of geography. Apparently, the population living along the administrative border is less concerned about topics such as corruption, the state of democracy in the country, infrastructure and limited access to quality education.

Again, there are marked differences in the perception of the problems by internally displaced persons and local residents. Not surprisingly, in comparison with the locals, IDPs are much more concerned about the state of the displaced population; on the other hand, local people give more weight to most of the other major problems (see Figure 3).

It is interesting to note that, rather unexpectedly, the perception of the hierarchy of problems is not significantly different amongst the different age groups. The only noticeable trend is that young people (aged 18 to 27) did not give the same level of importance to political issues such as the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict and tensions between Georgia and Russia (such a difference was observed during the survey although the political events of September 2012, marked by a significant political and protest mobilisation of young people just before the parliamentary elections, could have seriously affected this stance). In addition, in contrast to the older generation, few of the young people consider the economic crisis such a problematic phenomenon. Also worth noting is the fact that 62% of those respondents who highlighted the problem of the lack of access to quality education are people with relatively low-secondary or secondary vocational-education levels.

The identification of the problems upon a personal level gives a different picture. Major problems were identified as follows: unemployment (40%), lack of access to quality health care (29%) and the difficulties associated with crossing the administrative border with Abkhazia (11%). The last topic, obviously, is of primary interest to the IDPs from Abkhazia’s Gali region as well as the representatives of divided families. The problem of the lack of access to quality education and insufficient infrastructure development are subsequent in the order of importance and were mentioned by 8% of respondents.

In comparing the answers of displaced persons and local residents, it becomes clear that in addition to the concrete issues specifically relevant to displaced populations (e.g., crossing the administrative boundary line), there is no significant difference between the views of the IDPs and local residents when assessing the gravity of an issue in almost all other cases (see Figure 4).
Figure 4: Most Acute Issues for IDPs and Locals upon a Personal Level

The dominance of economic issues is also demonstrated by the choice of topics to which respondents attach great importance from the viewpoint of the improvement of living conditions in the region. These include the following in order of importance: creation/improvement of employment services (39%), support for small- and medium-sized businesses (23%) and an increase in funding for social security (22%).

Interviews with experts have identified several other specific problems that are difficult to identify by means of a closed questionnaire. One significant specific problem, therefore, relates to the so-called optimisation of hospitals. With the opening of new or the renovation of existing facilities, a part of other hospitals stops functioning which often creates serious problems for patients who live far from the new institutions. Visits to the doctor in a new location may require additional costs (such as passenger fare) and physical effort. Often this creates insurmountable difficulties for patients with acute illnesses that require emergency assistance on the spot. Frequently, such “readdressing” of medical services is carried out without a preliminary assessment of the needs and demands of the population (including estimates of the number of people in need of specific types of medical care in the area).

Unpredictable and unexpected change of the medical insurance company serving vulnerable populations (state insurance programme) can also lead to difficulties in access to adequate health care as shown by the example of the outpatient clinic of the village Jvari.

There is also a serious problem of the inadequate provision of information to vulnerable groups. Socially vulnerable people often do not have a full knowledge of their rights or of the existing programmes of social support (such as prosthetics programmes or preferential provision of hearing aids). In this respect, IDPs are somewhat better informed owing to special programmes of the NGO sector.

Infrastructure issues are also relevant such as, in particular, water supply, sewage and waste disposal, particularly in the city of Zugdidi. These same issues were named amongst the long-standing (since the late 1990s) and not fully addressed needs of many communities in the region. Although there is some positive change in several areas, however, with the supply of running water improved (usually with the help of special equipment, such as pumps, and according to schedule) and the issue of waste disposal

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31 Key respondents.
32 Key respondents, group discussion.
33 In 2012 and for reasons which remain unknown, the insurance company previously providing service to the Jvari outpatient clinic redirected its clients to a different agency which, in turn, began to redirect the patients to a clinic located in another city of the region. Information from key respondents.
34 Key respondents.
35 Programmes of the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) 2002-12.
36 Key respondents, group discussion.
beginning to be regulated, at the same time no positive changes in the functioning of the sewage system have yet been reached.

Summing up the problems associated with the social field, it can be said that their vast majority is caused by the financial difficulties of the population and, therefore, closely intertwined with the economic sphere – unemployment and poverty. Simultaneously, existing trends point towards poor management on the part of the authorities – both local and central. The lack of information about the programmes to support vulnerable populations also seems to be an issue relatively easy to resolve and not requiring high material costs but one that has been overlooked.

**Perception of the Problem of Georgian-Abkhaz Relations**

For many years, the topic of Georgian-Abkhaz relations has been the focus of Georgia’s population and, of course, is particularly acute in border regions and amongst the persons forcibly displaced from Abkhazia. There is no clear understanding of the problem, however, much less a vision of a possible resolution.

Opinions as to the factors contributing to the improvement of Georgian-Abkhaz relations vary greatly and it is impossible to select one dominant viewpoint. Thirty per cent of respondents were of the opinion that the key is the willingness of both sides to compromise. The next most popular answer is the loss of interest in Abkhazia on the part of Russian politicians (16%) which could have an impact upon changing attitudes within the Russia-Abkhazia-Georgia triangle. A similar situation exists with the answers to the question of how to address the problem. The most common opinion (18% of responses) was to accelerate the process of economic development in the country. Almost as many respondents considered it important to sign bilateral agreements on non-aggression and economic co-operation/renewal of trade between populations on both sides of the administrative boundary. It is noteworthy that almost no significant differences in opinion were observed between the displaced and local residents as concerns these issues.

The fate of displaced persons is one of the key topics of Georgian-Abkhaz relations along with the problem of the legal status/sovereignty of Abkhazia. Not surprisingly, almost all respondents (98% of those surveyed) believe that IDPs should be allowed to return to their homes without any preconditions. Nonetheless, today, there are more practical problems such as, for instance, the issue of the possibility to easily cross the ABL which the Abkhaz side considers as a state boundary. This problem, however, does not affect everyone equally. Of those surveyed, 68% of IDPs reported that they had never crossed the administrative border in the past year and only about 3% of the IDPs said they cross the boundary regularly (at least once a month). The vast majority of those crossing the ABL do so to visit relatives.

Noteworthy is the caution with which the respondents responded to a request to assess what qualities they believe characterise ethnic Abkhaz in accordance with the proposed list (honesty, courage, friendship, reliability, cultural affinity and diligence). In each of these categories, the majority of respondents preferred to choose as neutral a response as possible (e.g., “neither honest nor dishonest”, etc.). This demonstrates that although the respondents do not feel particular sympathy for the Abkhaz people, they are still considered as the ones who will eventually have to live side by side. Yet, on the whole, the general attitude regarding Abkhazia is very positive – 70% of respondents have no objection if an Abkhaz enters into marriage with a family member, they are ready to have ethnic Abkhaz amongst their friends and make friends with them, live in one neighbourhood or work with the Abkhaz or allow them to become citizens of Georgia (cumulative Bogardus Social Distance Scale).

**Life Satisfaction and Optimism**

In general, people living along the administrative boundary are dissatisfied with their lives. The only area in respect to which the vast majority of respondents expressed satisfaction is family relations. At the same time, an especially large part of the respondents is dissatisfied with income (86%), work (65%) and living conditions (67%). All of these factors are certainly related to each other and the respondents’ answers once again point to the difficult economic conditions of the population. If we consider the life satisfaction in the territorial cut, the largest proportion of respondents dissatisfied with their lives are found in Potskho-Etseri – 80% (almost all of them are IDPs), Ganmukhuri – 78% and Kalagani – 83%. The last two villages are almost adjacent to the ABL and are, therefore, under the combined stress of poor living conditions and political tensions. On the other hand, about 70% of the population in Zugdidi, Khurcha and Khaishi are satisfied with their lives in their place of residence. Significantly, Khurcha is also located in the direct vicinity of the administrative boundary but the economic situation is better there
than in Kalagani given, perhaps, the location of the village on an island which, even though near the right bank of the Enguri River, creates a sense of security and alleviates stress.

Figure 5: Life Satisfaction (Various Aspects of Life)

Upon closer examination of the table above, it is clear that IDPs have a much more negative perception of their life as compared to the locals. The following Figure 6 shows the differences between IDPs and non-IDPs only in those aspects for which the disparity was statistically significant. As is clear, life is still unsatisfactory for internally displaced persons, as opposed to locals, who have lived side by side with them for almost twenty years. The IDPs have a great deal more problems within the family, they are much more concerned about their health and they have significantly more trouble finding work as compared to the locals.

Figure 6: Differences in Life Satisfaction between IDPs and Locals

More than a fifth of respondents (23%) reported persistent discomfort and a further 45% feel “not too comfortable.” A fairly strong negative relationship between the amount of income and the feeling of comfort has been discovered.37 In other words, the level of discomfort increases with a decrease in

37 Gamma = -0.588 p <0.01. Gamma (ɤ) is the criterion for dependence/independence of ordinal variables, and p - cumulative likelihood that the appropriate value is within certain limits.
income. As mentioned earlier, there is a correlation between the status of IDPs and the level/source of income and so it is not surprising that the IDPs and local residents also differ significantly by how comfortable they feel. It is assumed that, within certain limits (especially amongst the poor), the level of income is one of the main factors that determines the extent to which a person is satisfied with life (see Figure 6).

Figure 7: The Difference in the Feeling of Comfort between IDPs and the Local Population

Moreover, there is also a natural link between the type of housing and a sense of comfort – in particular, people who own homes tend to display a higher level of comfort and satisfaction with life (and, again, many IDPs find themselves at a significant disadvantage not owning any permanent housing). It is interesting and important to note that despite the rather unenviable position of many of the respondents, they have no fear about the future. In general, the population living along the administrative boundary is not expecting deterioration in terms of certain aspects of life – whether it is the crime rate, discrimination on ethnic grounds, the development of infrastructure or the protection of citizens from abuse by law enforcement agencies. That said, however, 39% fear that it will be more difficult to cross the administrative boundary, 31% believe that it will be harder to find a job/income and 20% expect a decline in access to quality education and health care in the next three years.

Nevertheless, against the background of a rather gloomy perception of life by many of the respondents, it is surprising to observe their optimism about the future. The vast majority—at 93%—believes that things will go for the better within the next several years, 65% believe that the economic situation of their families will improve in the next three years, 40% do not plan any major changes in life and only about 27% are thinking about changing their profession. Those who plan to acquire a new profession are mostly unemployed, including housewives (51%). At the same time, only 11% of incumbent public servants are willing to change their job or profession. A relatively small proportion of respondents plan to change residence within the country (8%) and fewer still plan to move abroad for permanent residence (2%).

It is difficult to understand the reasons for such optimism as it is not linked to the question of whether or not a respondent is an IDP, high-income and better living conditions or the level of education. Indeed, the optimism is equally characteristic of both IDPs and local residents, people with very different levels of education and income. Moreover, no connection was shown between the state of income and plans for radical change in the future.

**Cluster Analysis**

Upon the basis of the data obtained as a result of a survey, an attempt was made to allocate several categories, or clusters, of respondents grouped according to the similarity of basic opinions and values according to which the majority of respondents were distributed.

Four main variables were used to determine the composition of a cluster: life satisfaction, how comfortable a person feels in the community, whether or not he has found his place in life and age
(although, in the end, contrary to expectations, age was an important but not a key determinant of the world view). The cluster analysis allowed for the identification of three main clusters which, in accordance with the following discussion, may be designated as the cluster of “happy people” (28%), the cluster of “depressed optimists” (31%) and the cluster of those “confused” (40%).

All of the respondents belonging to the first cluster feel comfortable in life. About 60% of them claim that they have found their place in life and generally feel good about themselves and their lives. When looking at the demographics of the “happy” cluster, it turns out that gender and marital status are not significantly related to belonging to the cluster and so there is approximately an equal number of men and women comprising the first cluster and about 40% of them are married. Age, however, is an important factor which differs in the case of the first and third clusters. For the first cluster of “happy” respondents, it is mostly the younger generation (aged 25-37).

Factors largely associated with the clusters are as follows: the level of income and the Objective Poverty Index (65% of respondents in the first cluster had a median income above GEL 400 per month and 54% of them fell under the “moderately affluent” and “wealthy/rich” categories). Ninety-eight per cent of these respondents look to the future with hope. They do not plan to either change anything in their lives (40%) or wish to change professions (23%). The vast majority of people in this cluster are local residents (86% as compared to 14% of IDPs). More than half has a university degree. The employed and unemployed are about equally represented.

In summary, therefore, the first cluster is a group of mostly wealthy, educated local residents (not IDPs), aged 25-37, who are comfortable in life and look to the future with hope. Generally, they have no plans to radically change anything in their lives.

The second largest cluster is the complete opposite of the first. The respondents in this cluster can be legitimately labelled as “depressed.” In this cluster, there are no people who feel comfortable; they are classified either in the group feeling “constant discomfort” (45%) or “not too comfortable” (54%). Absolutely all of the respondents from this cluster complained that they were unable to find their place in life and more than 60% of them are not satisfied with life in general.

In the second (but also in the third) cluster, there is a slightly higher proportion of women but the difference is not statistically significant. Age also plays no role in this group since it is a mixture of people from different age groups. Almost 80% have a monthly income of less than GEL 300 thereby falling into the category of “poor” according to the OPI. Of these cluster members, however, 87% are looking into future with hope (and this trend is present in all clusters). The proportion of people who want to change their profession or place of work is slightly higher as compared to the first cluster (40%). The share of displaced persons and local residents is about equal in this cluster. Sixty-one per cent of respondents in this cluster have secondary general and vocational education and the absolute majority is unemployed (85%).

It can be concluded, therefore, that this cluster is a group of mostly unemployed poor with predominantly secondary-level education (vocational or general) who do not feel comfortable in life, have yet to find their place and are generally dissatisfied with life. Nevertheless, they are quite optimistic about the future.
The vast majority of people in the third cluster feel “not too comfortable” (75%). They are confused and do not know whether or not they have found their place in life. In terms of life satisfaction, this factor is likely not a defining feature since groups of individuals both satisfied and dissatisfied with life are equally represented. Respondents in the “confused” cluster are mainly characterised by a rather low income (50% below GEL 300 and 20% lower than GEL 100 per month).

They are, however, in a better economic position than those in the second group and belong mainly to the category of “moderately well-off/at brink of poverty” according to the OPI. The rate of unemployment is also lower amongst them as compared to the second cluster (65%).

As in other clusters, the majority—at 95%—is also looking to the future with hope. Of these cluster members, however, nearly one in five is undecided regarding plans for the future and has no answer when it comes to planning. Sixty per cent of these respondents are locals with either a secondary or higher education. The average age is over 42 years.

It can be assumed that the third group consists mainly of middle-aged individuals with an average socio-economic status. They are in a state of confusion and unable to find their place in life or to plan for the future. This can be referred to as a mid-life crisis but due, it should be rather ascribed, to the difficulty of adaptation of individuals in that group to the rapidly changing conditions of life and the requirements of the current period which are so very different from the times of their youth.

**Overview of the Situation in Specific Settlements**

As has been repeatedly noted above, geography greatly affects both the social and economic conditions in a settlement as well as the values and other personal characteristics of the population. It is useful, therefore, to consider some notable variables for each of the specific communities (or in some cases, for several similar localities).
ECONOMIC SITUATION: In Zugdidi, according to the respondents, 36% belong to the “moderately affluent” and “well-off” categories with the largest proportion of the “well-off” category in comparison to other localities. The main sources of income are salaries from regular jobs, pensions and revenue from business.

SOCIAL SERVICES: Sixty-four per cent of respondents in Zugdidi assess the access to health services as “average” whilst 21% consider it “poor.” The average distance to the nearest health facility is about 2 km. According to about 40% of respondents, there have been cases over the past year when a member of their family needed medical care but could not obtain it for financial reasons. Approximately 15% of respondents in Zugdidi have a family member with special needs (disability, chronic illness). The majority of the members of these families believe that there are no specialised social services that would meet the necessities of persons with special needs (or there is no access to them).

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Most respondents from Zugdidi did not note any problems with access to drinking and irrigation water (the latter is relevant only for the 35% of respondents engaged in agriculture in one form or another). Such a response is somewhat paradoxical as there is a well-known problem with the tap water in Zugdidi where many residents are forced to dig individual wells and pump water. Apparently, people have completely lost hope of any improvement in this area.

Respondents indicated that they mainly use firewood for heating (73%) and only a small portion uses electric heaters (27%). The vast majority have access to basic means of communication, having a landline telephone, internet and mobile telephones. The postal service is also in operation in Zugdidi. The absolute majority of respondents rated the provision of electricity and the operation of public transport as “good” although less than half (43%) were concerned about the condition of roads which, in their opinion, are in poor condition.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: The main source of information in Zugdidi is television (96%); a significant share of the respondents also uses the internet to obtain news (45%). Twenty per cent consider that they are taking a certain part in the decision-making process in their town, 31% do so occasionally and 44% had never been involved in this process.

According to 90% of the respondents, they now feel much safer than three years ago. No international organisations had been mentioned as making significant contributions to the life of respondents in Zugdidi.

LIFE SATISFACTION AND A SENSE OF COMFORT: The following questions and answers reflect the attitude of the residents of Zugdidi towards themselves and assess their place in life. To the question How comfortable do you feel where you live?, the answers were divided into clearly unequal shares of
those satisfied and dissatisfied (comfortable – 38%, not too comfortable – 47%, I feel constant discomfort – 15%). Although quite a large number of respondents (almost 40%) seem to feel comfortable, this is not the highest rate in the region (probably due to the high demands of the urban population here). Interestingly, more than half of the respondents believe they have found their place in life and, therefore, are not going to change it (Can it be said that you have found your place in life? – I believe so – 57%, Probably not – 28%, Do not know – 15%), just as many respondents indicate that they trust others (Do you believe that the majority of people around you are trustworthy? – Yes, they are – 58%, No, they are not – 30%, Do not know – 12%) and almost half of the respondents are satisfied with life in general (Are you happy with life in general? – Yes, I am – 48%, No, I am not – 45%, Do not know – 7%). Particularly high is the proportion of respondents in Zugdidi who are satisfied with the freedom of speech and the ability to express their attitudes and thoughts (How freely can you publicly express your thoughts/attitude towards problems? – Freely – 72%, Not so freely – 21%, I am unable to express my thoughts – 7%) although some of this is obviously connected with the absence of such requirements.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: As expected, attitudes toward the Orthodox Church are highly positive. As for other religions, the majority of respondents (60%) did not express either positive or negative attitudes. Only when it came to non-traditional religious groups (such as, for instance, Jehovah’s Witnesses), a significant proportion of respondents (40%) openly expressed a negative attitude towards them. According to about half of the respondents in Zugdidi, no other Church should enjoy equal rights with the Orthodox Church. Seventeen per cent of respondents did not express a definite opinion on the matter whilst 32% believe that other Churches should have the same rights as the Orthodox Church.

VALUE ORIENTATION: Two core values that respondents identified as most important are “peace/order in the country” and “economic prosperity” (approximately 70% of respondents noted both subjects, revealing a purely materialistic value orientation).

It can be said that the overall situation in Zugdidi favourably differs from the situation in all other settlements of interest in almost all indicators. With regard to important topics, such as problems with tap water, people seem to have gotten used to hopelessness in this area and do not even mention it as a priority. It should also be noted that despite a much better access to the means of communication and information, the value profile, the degree of conservatism and the level of intolerance towards non-traditional groups or orientations resembles the situation in the poorer communities of the region.

**TSALENJIKHA** *(number of respondents – 70)*

ECONOMIC SITUATION: For every wealthy respondent in Tsalenjikha, there are two poor respondents. More than half of the respondents can be identified as belonging to the category of “at brink of poverty/moderately well-off” whilst 15% are “poor.” The main source of income for local people, apart from regular salary (52%) and pensions (38%), is income from farming.

SOCIAL SERVICES: Most respondents in Tsalenjikha evaluate access to health care in the community as “poor” (34%) or “average” (44%). According to one in two respondents, there were times when their families were in need of medical care but they were unable to afford it for financial reasons. The average distance to the nearest medical facility is 3.5 km. The majority of respondents do not have family members with disabilities (88%) but those who do note a complete lack of access to any social service appropriate to their needs.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Access to drinking and irrigation water is mostly rated as “good” or “average.” The main means of heating in the winter is firewood (87%). The vast majority of respondents have mobile telephones (96%) but only half of those surveyed have a landline telephone and internet access. Just as in Zugdidi, a majority of respondents in Tsalenjikha are satisfied with the situation with electricity supply (83%) and access to public transport (75%) but 29% believe that the roads are in poor condition whilst a slightly higher proportion-at 33%-claims that the state of the roads is “average” (which obviously would mean the same thing, tactfully stated).

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: Television is the most common source of information for respondents in Tsalenjikha (97%). At the same time, other sources of information were also mentioned such as, in particular, newspapers (48%) and the internet (36%).

Eighty-five per cent say they feel safer than three years ago.

According to 97% of respondents, no international organisations were mentioned as having a significant impact upon the lives of local residents whilst only 7% of respondents were aware of the work of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Nearly half of the respondents said they
are not involved in any decision-making at the local level, 30% admitted their sporadic participation in this process and 17% stated that they regularly participate in decision-making.

LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE SENSE OF COMFORT: Slightly fewer respondents than in Zugdidi evaluate their lives in Tsalenjikha positively, whether it be the comfort level (comfortable – 33%, not too comfortable – 54%, constant discomfort – 13%) or finding a place in their lives (I believe so – 52%, Probably not – 34%, Do not know – 14%). Overall life satisfaction, however, is significantly lower (Satisfied – 44%, Dissatisfied – 40%, Do not know/do not want to answer- 16%) which correlates with the relatively greater difficulty of self-expression (I can publicly express thoughts/attitude towards problems – 54%, Not so freely – 27%, I am unable to express thoughts/attitude towards problems – 14%) but also a greater confidence in others (I believe others are trustworthy – 62%, I believe others are not trustworthy – 25%).

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: The attitude towards the Orthodox Church is extremely positive amongst the absolute majority of the respondents. As for other religions or non-traditional religious groups, the majority of respondents (75%) is neutral towards them but 60% of respondents in Tsalenjikha believe that no other religious community should enjoy the same rights as the Orthodox Church although 30% do not agree with this position (others preferred not to answer this question.)

VALUE ORIENTATION: Order in the country was selected as an important attribute of life by 73% of respondents, the ability to influence decision-making – by 3%, economic well-being – by 75% and the democratic values/freedoms – by 27%.

Although Tsalenjikha, like Zugdidi, is considered a city, the material aspects of the situation are much worse. Whether the topic concerns physical infrastructure or the poverty level, there is much in common at the level of subjective perception of life and values as, in general, for most of the region except for the poorest communities.

RUKHI (number of respondents – 65)

ECONOMIC SITUATION: Data analysis shows that the villagers in Rukhi are the poorest of all the localities participating in the survey. For every “wealthy” respondent, there were seven “poor” ones. Governmental support, including benefits for IDPs, targeted social assistance and pensions were identified as the main sources of income. Almost a quarter of respondents also noted income from casual work.

SOCIAL SERVICES: Slightly over half (54%) of households in Rukhi in the last year found themselves in a position where they could not provide medical care for their families due to a lack of necessary funds. At the same time, 90% rated access to health care as either “average” or “poor.”

The average distance to the nearest medical facility is 2 km. Although the majority of respondents do not have a family member with special needs/disabilities (87%), all respondents in Rukhi noted a complete lack of social services for such individuals.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Whilst there is no concern about drinking water in the area, irrigation water is a problematic issue. Forty-six per cent say that access to irrigation water was “poor,” another 30% do not use it and only the remainder are satisfied with the state of affairs in this area. Eighty-five per cent of respondents use firewood for heating. There are no landline telephones and no post office in the village. The primary means of communication are mobile telephones (all respondents refer to their use) but only 17% indicated that they have access to the internet. Only a small proportion (10%) had problems with electricity and access to public transport but a significantly higher proportion (40%) is concerned about the state of the roads.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: The main source of information, as elsewhere in the region, is television (95% of responses), followed by family and friends (30%). The percentage of internet users in the village is second to last amongst the surveyed communities (9%). According to 94% of respondents, they feel more secure as compared to three years ago. Again, no non-governmental or international organisations were mentioned as having made a significant contribution to the local community. At the same time, 64% of respondents said that they never participate in decision-making at the local or other levels and only 22% said they do so occasionally.

LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE SENSE OF COMFORT: The extreme poverty of the population is reflected in the very low level of feeling comfortable with a little less than a tenth of respondents – ‘comfortable’ (13%), 51% – ‘not too comfortable’ and 36% – feeling ‘constant discomfort.’ There is, however, quite
a high percentage of those who have found their place in life (54%) and are generally satisfied with life (54%), appreciate freedom of expression (70%) and trust others (77%) which more closely resembles the situation in much more affluent communities. It is possible, therefore, that a particularly high level of discomfort has temporary and very specific causes not affecting overall life satisfaction.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: The approach towards different religious groups is identical to the other cases: a completely positive attitude towards the Orthodox Church and approximately 75% expressing a neutral attitude to other religions. In the case of non-traditional religions, however, about 30% expressed a negative attitude. This position corresponds to the opinion of 75% of respondents who believe that the Orthodox Church should have special privileges.

VALUE ORIENTATION: The two main priorities that respondents identified as most important in their lives is “economic prosperity,” identified by 93% of the respondents, and “peace/order in the country,” mentioned by 68%.

ANAKLIA, KHURCHA, GANMUKHURI (number of respondents – 70)

ECONOMIC SITUATION: Almost half of the respondents in these three villages located to the south-west of Zugdidi can be classified as “at brink of poverty/moderately well-off.” The “poor” to “rich” ratio here is 3:1. As in most other villages in the region, social benefits and income from farming were identified as the main sources of income.

SOCIAL SERVICES: Nearly half of the respondents had at least one case during the past year when members of their family or they themselves were unable to seek medical care because of the lack of funds. Only 5% of respondents rated the degree of access to health care as “good” whilst others consider the health care situation as either “average” or “poor.” Distance to the nearest medical facility greatly varies because of the difficult geography of settlements and ranges from 50 meters in Anaklia to an inconceivable 35 km in Khurcha. A quarter of the respondents have at least one disabled family member but social services for such individuals in these communities, as in most other localities, are completely absent.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: In Anaklia and Khurcha, drinking water is not a problem although 12 out of 24 respondents in Ganmukhuri rated the water situation as “average.” At the same time, the situation concerning irrigation water is mainly assessed as problematic in all three villages. The primary means of heating in winter are wood stoves (93%). Almost all of the respondents own a mobile telephone but only 22% have access to the internet and 60% have a landline telephone. The provision of public transport and electricity are mainly assessed as “good” (75%). The condition of the roads, however, is recognised primarily as “poor” (38%) or “average” (40%).

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: As elsewhere in the region, television is a key source of information. About 20% of respondents claim, however, that they rely upon newspapers in order to obtain information or depend upon their friends/relatives according to another 20% of those surveyed. Eighty-seven per cent feel much safer than they did three years ago. With regard to participation in decision-making at the local level, the answers were as follows: Yes, I do participate – 41%, No, I do not participate – 34%, Sometimes – 34%. Several international organisations were mentioned as having made a significant contribution to the life of local residents. According to 10% of respondents, UNHCR has a modest but positive impact upon their lives. The Danish Refugee Council (DRC), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the Mission of the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were also mentioned by some 7% of those surveyed (i.e., five respondents).

LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE SENSE OF COMFORT: Although the level of comfort in these settlements is relatively higher than in Rukhi (26%), it is still low and is consistent with an equally low overall life satisfaction (37%), finding a place in life (yes – 36%, probably not – 59%) and decreased subjective freedom of expression (58%). At the same time, there is a particularly high level of trust in others (83%) which is apparently caused by living in an area near the ABL where mutual trust is a key resource.

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: Attitudes towards the Orthodox Church are absolutely positive with people at the same time mostly neutral towards other religions (75%). About 60% expressed negative attitudes towards non-traditional religions. When it comes to the rights of other religious communities, public opinion is divided. Half of the respondents consider the privileged position of the Orthodox Church as the norm whilst the other half disagrees.

VALUE ORIENTATION: Ninety-seven per cent of the respondents identified “economic well-being” as the
most important value in their lives whilst approximately 50% of respondents from the three settlements also highlighted “public order” in the same category. The fact that “order” earned a comparatively low value amongst the communities near the ABL is apparently connected to a high level of trust in people in an environment where mutual aid is more important than order.

CHUBERI, KHAISHI (number of respondents – 44)

ECONOMIC SITUATION: In Chuberi/Khaishi, there were two poor individuals for every one wealthy person (ratio of 1:2) although there is a relatively low number of IDPs. More than half of respondents in both communities can be classified as relatively poor (i.e., “poor” or “at brink of poverty/moderately well-off”). Amongst the most common sources of income are the following: regular salary (41%), pensions (40%) and income from agricultural activities (30%).

SOCIAL SERVICES: As with the other communities, almost half of the respondents could recall at least one case in the last year when, due to a lack of funds, seeking medical assistance was problematic. The average distance to a medical facility is 2.5 km. No more than 5% of respondents rated the degree of access to health care as “good” whilst others believe that the access is either “average” (60%) or “poor” (35%). A quarter of respondents noted the presence of disabled persons in the family and the vast majority of respondents (83%) reported a lack of social services for people in this category.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: Drinking water is not a matter of concern for local residents but there is a serious problem with irrigation water – only 3% said that they have access to it. Firewood is used for heating during winter by all residents. Postal service and telephone lines in the villages are absent but about 30% have access to the internet and the vast majority uses mobile telephones. There are no problems with electricity supply or access to public transportation but the quality of roads, as in other localities, remains a serious problem – only 30% considered the roads “average” and 57% define the state of the roads as “poor.”

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: As elsewhere, TV is the most common source of information (96% watch television) but about 15% of the respondents also noted that they obtain their information from newspapers and from friends and relatives. Seventy-four per cent of respondents feel more secure than they did three years ago. Two respondents noted the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils (DRC and NRC) which have made a (modest) contribution to improving the lives of the residents but, in general, the perceived impact of international organisations here is negligible. More than half of respondents (56%) stated that they never take part in decision-making at the local or other levels.

LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE SENSE OF COMFORT:
How comfortable do you feel where you live?
It is interesting to note that in these two communities, which differ from some others by a more secure location but with more isolation and less community rootedness, a sense of comfort level (40%), though relatively low, is significantly higher in terms of finding a place in life (27%) and more general satisfaction with life (a very modest 20%, whilst 72% are dissatisfied with life). Rather low are the levels of freedom of expression (46%) and trust in others (53%).

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: Almost all of the respondents expressed a positive attitude towards the Orthodox Church. As for other (traditional) religious groups, 80% rated their attitude as either “neutral” or “negative.” At the same time, at least half of the respondents expressed a clearly negative attitude towards representatives of non-traditional religious groups. Only nine people, however, were of the view that other religious communities should not have the same rights as the Orthodox Church whilst the rest do not agree with that opinion.

VALUE ORIENTATION: As for the most important aspects of life, (again, as in other localities) “economic prosperity” received the most votes (87% of mentions) whilst 60% identified “peace/order in the country” and only 15% highlighted “democratic values and freedoms.”

POTSKHO-ETSERI, TSKOUSHI, KALAGANI (number of respondents – 57)

ECONOMIC SITUATION: Along with Rukhi, these villages are some of the poorest communities. About 60% of respondents in each of these settlements fall into the category of “poor” or “at brink of poverty.” Social benefits (pensions, IDP benefits), income from the sale of agricultural products and occasional work were identified as the main sources of income.
SOCIAL SERVICES: Seventy-one per cent of respondents had at least one case last year when their families were unable to obtain necessary medical care due to a lack of funds. The average distance to the nearest health care facility is 3.5 km. Access to health care is generally characterised as “poor” – 54% or “average” – 42% and only two of the respondents rated access to medical care as “good.” Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) have a family member with a disability but, according to views expressed by most of the respondents, there are no social services for such individuals in their communities.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE: For the most part, there is no problem with drinking water although in a few cases in Kalagani, four respondents stated that access to drinking water was unsatisfactory. In Potskho-Etseri, the topic of irrigation water is mainly irrelevant due to the lack of arable land. As for the two other localities, this is a problem since 11 out of 16 respondents in Tskoushi and 10 of 19 in Kalagani complained of “poor” access to irrigation water. Ninety-seven per cent of respondents in all three villages use firewood for heating in the winter.

There is no post office in the villages and only four respondents mentioned internet use. Twenty-six per cent have a landline and almost everyone uses a mobile telephone. The situation in relation to electricity supply was assessed as “good” by 75% of respondents. Each respondent in Tskoushi and Kalagani noted the poor condition of the roads; the same was true of respondents in Potskho-Etseri – except for seven optimists who rated the roads as “average.” In Tskoushi, access to public transport was generally liked but in the other two villages, almost everyone involved in the survey highlighted a very poor public transportation system.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: Ninety-eight per cent of respondents indicated television as their primary source of information whilst friends and family came in second (25%). Eighty-three per cent of respondents currently feel more secure than they did three years ago. Only two-to-three respondents noted the influence of international and non-governmental organisations upon the improvement of their living conditions. General involvement in decision-making is rather limited (only 16% take any part in this process).

LIFE SATISFACTION AND THE SENSE OF COMFORT: As in Rukhi, the residents of these villages also experience an increased level of discomfort (only 10% of respondents feel comfortable) but similarly – a significantly larger share of respondents have found a place in their life (44%) and are generally satisfied with their lives (36%) although these rates are not considered to be high. With the increased proportion of IDPs for whom mutual assistance is vital, however, the high degree of confidence in others is not surprising (75%). Freedom of expression is much lower, generally resembling the circumstances in most communities (60%).

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: Almost all respondents have a positive attitude towards the Orthodox Church and a “neutral” approach towards other (traditional) religious communities although as elsewhere, however, a more negative attitude is expressed towards the “non-traditional” religious groups (60%). Regarding the equal rights of the Orthodox Church and other religious communities, opinion is divided into two equal segments of 44% (the remaining 12% did not want to/were unable to answer the question).

VALUE ORIENTATION: As for the most important things in life, “economic well-being” received the highest number of votes (92% of mentions), 54% chose “order/peace in the country” and only 14% chose “democratic values and freedoms.”

Summing up the results of the review of the conditions in the settlements, a large variation in the level of security can be noted, on one hand, and a similarity in value judgments, on the other. Four groups of settlements can be roughly outlined – cities (Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha), particularly poor villages with a high level of discomfort (Rukhi, Potskho-Etseri, Tskoushi, Kalagani), villages with a population dissatisfied with life in spite of a higher material standard of living (Khaishi, Chuberi) and the remaining villages with intermediate indicators in all respects. It is important to note that the relationship between life satisfaction and the associated sense of an established place in life is far from simple and depends upon factors such as geography (proximity to the ABL, isolation), the number of IDPs and the degree of social embeddedness of the population. Similarly, the other interconnected pair of parameters is also subject to change – confidence in others and a comfortable existence.
SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC POLICY

This section examines the policies, actions and programmes—those implemented by both the State and the non-governmental or intergovernmental organisations—aimed at improving the quality of life for the residents of the region, including IDPs. The main objectives of the Georgian Government, local civil society and the international community in terms of the development of the region and the support of IDPs have not always been consistent and effective but, nonetheless, have played an important role in the transformation of society and the improvement of living conditions. In general, there is an objective and subjective improvement in many areas of life which is reflected in the results of both a public opinion poll and in-depth interviews with experts.

Changes in the Public Perception of Key Policies

It should be noted that, according to the majority of respondents (87%), people have begun to feel much more secure in the last three-to-four years than they did previously. The general assessment of the changes in a wide range of public life for the past three years is also positive. Respondents identified a number of items for which, in their opinion, the situation has improved within this past three-year period. These aspects relate to and include the following: political stability (67%) and improvements in physical infrastructure (77%), law enforcement agencies (77%), the social security system (62%) and crime (89%).

It is interesting that the previous government has implemented fairly radical reforms in these areas. The majority of those who believe that the quality of the physical and social infrastructure has improved live in urban areas (Zugdidi). The only area in which the situation has deteriorated in the opinion of the majority of the respondents is Georgian-Abkhaz relations although the vast majority believe, in fact, that little has changed overall. All other areas are dominated by the share of those who highlight improvements.

Interestingly, the belief in the improvement of law enforcement and local government (apparently, mostly during active reforms in 2004-05) is reflected directly upon the level of confidence in these institutions.
themselves. Respondents demonstrate a high level of confidence in the police (77%) and 60% trust the local government but only a little less than half of the respondents believe that the functioning of these institutions has truly improved over the last three years. When it comes to public confidence, however, the clear leader is the Orthodox Church (“church organisations”) leading with an impressive 86%. It is also interesting to note the remarkable fact that no statistically significant differences have been discovered between the displaced and local residents in any of the settlements on the scale depicting levels of confidence.

Figure 9: Level of Trust in Public Institutions and Organisations

Programmes to Respond to the Needs of the Population

Given the specificity associated with proximity to the conflict zone and the high concentration of IDPs, a number of existing response programmes are being implemented in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti that involve addressing unemployment and poverty as the major needs of the region and which, at the same time, are relevant to the country as a whole. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is supporting the Georgian Government primarily in the areas of economic development along with democratic governance, crisis prevention and environmental protection—the four main areas of co-operation between UNDP and the Government during 2006-10—which to this day remain the top priorities of co-operation.\(^\text{38}\)

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the Georgian Government has recognised the need for a strategic shift from rehabilitation programmes (humanitarian programmes aimed at emergency or post-emergency situations) to long-term development programmes in all regions of Georgia, including Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti.\(^\text{40}\) In order to promote regional development, the Ministry of Regional Development and Infrastructure was established in 2009 with the support of international organisations and the National Strategy for Regional Development was approved. The Action Plan for 2011-15 encompasses the key priorities of the environmental, economic and social sustainable development of the regions, including Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti. At the present stage, it is planned that the UNDP Regional Development Programme, supported by the Government, will work on the four following areas:\(^\text{41}\)

1. Food and Agriculture: agricultural production, food processing and agricultural exports.
2. Economy and Infrastructure: including manufacturing, tourism and other services with an emphasis upon the support and development of small- and medium-size enterprises.
3. Water and Environment: protection of water resources, development of irrigation systems and drinking water supply, sewerage, solid waste management and other environmental issues.

\(^{41}\) Key respondents.
4. Social sphere: education, health, social security and social services.

Most of the abovementioned areas are already included in the current response programme and supported by international organisations. According to the database of the Office of Regional Development of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, the following international and local organisations have been engaged in the process since 2008: UNDP, the EU Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), Danish Refugee Council (DRC), Save the Children Federation (SC), Action against Hunger (ACF), Centres for Civic Engagement (CCE), Human Rights Centre (HRC), Charity Humanitarian Centre “Abkhazeti” (CHCA), NGO “Atinati” and Association “Imedi” IDP Women’s Movement for Peace. In addition to these organisations, a number of other agencies have been working on long-term development in the region, amongst them: USAID, UN Women, the Institute for International Co-operation of the German Adult Education Association (dvv-International), Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the local NGO Education for Democracy (EfD).

Almost all of these programmes share a common ultimate goal to enhance human development which, in turn, can be associated with development assistance having specific tasks such as promoting the establishment and development of livelihoods and facilitating the process of integration of IDPs and the local population.

A special focus upon IDPs, in this case, is well founded as the region, as noted above, has one of the largest concentrations of displaced persons who, for the most part, are a particularly vulnerable social group. These projects, however, are not limited to IDP assistance and cover a wide range of local communities (NRC, USAID, UNDP projects), even more so, as practice shows, that complete and successful social and economic integration is a two-way process and requires working with all social groups. In addition to the above, it should be emphasised that an important component of the solution to the problems in the region, including those that are the focus of current projects, is the involvement of the media in the process.

According to the respondents, the various media broadcasts have had a positive impact upon regional development processes. The programme, Diary of a Farmer, has become very popular owing to the practical advice that it provides to the rural population. Radio “Atinati,” broadcasting an interactive talk show on human rights since the early 2000s, covers 800,000 people including residents of Gali on the other side of the administrative border. This is a unique opportunity towards mitigating the conflict, building peace and establishing mutual trust.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the Programmes

The following is a brief assessment of the current programmes in terms of their capacity to respond to the problems that affect the quality of life in the region. The programmes were considered according to the following parameters:

1) Relevance to the needs and priorities of the region (improvement of the quality of life – employment, jobs and reduction of poverty, access to quality education and health care).

2) Integration of IDPs into local communities (process and results).

3) Strengthening the capacity of vulnerable representatives of the following groups: IDPs, the disabled, the elderly, children, single mothers.

4) Increasing of gender sensitivity of the population and local authorities.

5) Co-operation between the authorities and civil society, co-ordination with other stakeholders.

6) Building peace and trust relationships amongst different groups, promotion of tolerance.

Information obtained in the framework of the project allows for the drawing of the following conclusions:

• With varying degrees of explicitness, all the above projects directly or indirectly indicate that their goal is to contribute to the well-being (in other words, the improvement of the quality of life) of their target groups through appropriate and effective response measures to the current needs of these groups.

• Most documents openly declare or, at least, imply the need to move from the humanitarian response

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42 A detailed review of the draft was kindly provided by the Office of the Regional Development of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti. See Appendix 1.

43 The programmes are discussed in detail in the research material prepared under this project by Manana Gabashvili.
and post-emergency activities to development assistance programmes. In this regard, some of the emergency assistance organisations have even reduced their presence in the country (for example, in accordance with the strategic development plan for 2010-11, the Norwegian Refugee Council closed its programmes on education and housing in Georgia in 2011 and is terminating its presence in the country).

- Most of the projects are aimed at psycho-social and socio-economic integration of IDPs into local communities and, in general, on assistance for IDPs.

- Almost all donors require the consideration of gender issues but the most effective action in this regard is taken by those organisations which include gender sensitivity in their mandates and missions.

- Co-ordination between different governmental agencies, as well as various levels of government, still requires effective fine-tuning. The same goes for co-ordination and partnership in a number of programmes although there is a tendency, however, towards improving co-operation between the parties concerned.

At the current stage, it is premature to assess the long-term effects of the programmes but their strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

The strengths of the programmes include the following:

- Focus upon the transition from emergency and post-emergency (humanitarian) assistance to development assistance programmes.

- Tendency to adapt projects to local circumstances.

- Relatively long-term (four-to-five years) projects (continuity).

- Multi-sectoral approach, consolidating interest simultaneously upon different areas in need of support in development.

- An integrated approach that includes, in addition to IDPs, other important target groups.

- Encouragement of authorities in achieving greater transparency and public accountability.

- Partnership with regional and local administrative bodies.

- Focus upon capacity-building through education (vocational education, human rights education, information technology, project management).

- Focus upon building the capacity of young people.

- Focus upon adult re-training (acquisition of new knowledge and working skills).

- Increased attention to a healthy lifestyle.

- Involvement of the media in the process of project implementation.

The weaknesses and gaps of existing programmes and projects include the following:

- Insufficient attention to groups that are still in need of emergency assistance.

- Lack of differentiation in the approach to the needs of different vulnerable groups.

- Insufficient attention to the long-term, “post-programme” situation and needs (for instance, the employment of graduates of vocational training courses).

- Inadequate coverage/inclusion of all relevant target groups (e.g., lack of proper attention to the needs of older people).

- Failure of efforts to empower “ordinary people,” encourage civic engagement and volunteer activism amongst all age groups.

- Insufficient efforts to raise public awareness in the field of environmental protection, gender equality, tolerance and democratic and civic activism.

- Lack of co-ordination between different levels of local government, even those that are directly involved in the same programmes, which is due to both a lack of skills and motivation and frequent rotation of personnel.

- Lack of strategic, long-term efforts to improve relations between the Georgian and Abkhaz communities along the conflict zone.
• Lack of reliable sources of economic, demographic and social information upon the basis of which it is possible to compile high-quality action plans.

• Absence or obsolescence/inefficiency of existing policy documents and national action plans and, in some cases, inconsistency of legislation.

General constraints to effective implementation of development projects and programmes:

• The absence of a clear perspective and vision of development priorities of the country as a whole and in individual regions, including conflict areas.

• The scale of poverty and vulnerability in the country, including the problem of IDPs.

• Not always adequate qualifications, motivation and commitment to professional ethics of public officials and employees.

• Weak traditions of dialogue between the state and the society.

• Weak democratic and administrative institutions, particularly the judiciary and local government.

• Inadequate systems of health care and (school, university and vocational) education.

• Extremely low productivity, especially in agriculture, compounded by an underdeveloped land market, small allotments and unavailability of appropriate collaterals.

Specific factors impeding the effective implementation of development projects and programmes in Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti:

• Proximity to the zone of conflict and traffic isolation which significantly limits the ability to attract investment for development.

• A large number of IDPs living in difficult conditions and often entirely dependent upon state aid which contributes to the development of dependency syndrome and inhibits economic initiative.

• The dominance of low-productivity agriculture in the region with limited (and non-uniformly distributed) land resources with a focus upon monocultures (hazelnuts, tangerines) and the need for large-scale investment for the rehabilitation of obsolete plantations (tea, tung, etc.).

• Despite repeated attempts, there is no strategic plan in place for the development of the region supported by the public and civil society.

• Strong politicisation of the public with the civic initiative supressed and the syndrome of fear of authorities.

• Conservatism of the society based upon patriarchal values and a deeply rooted system of informal relations and clan patronage.

• Weakness of the local education system, especially that of higher education, leading to a constant brain drain from the region.

CONCLUSION

In the past two decades, the population of the region has experienced many dramatic events. It is clear, however, that the biggest problem in the region to date is widespread poverty and the unemployment which causes it. This is reflected in a purely materialistic value orientation of the respondents for whom the most significant aspect of life is economic prosperity, as well as order in the country, whilst democratic freedoms are side-lined. Apparently, this is also reflected in the parliamentary election process as this specific region, amongst a few other mainly ethnic minority provinces, voted for the (former) ruling party.

The economic situation is not the same everywhere; it is much better in the cities but catastrophic in some locations (populated by a large numbers of IDPs) where the residents are entirely dependent upon state social assistance which is hardly enough to make ends meet. This position is reflected in the psychological state of people and it is in these settlements that persistent discomfort is noted, causing heavy damage to psychological development and personal fulfilment.
The second group of people, which can also be attributed to the “lost generation,” comprises older people who are unable to keep up with the course of events, adapt to change and find their place in life. In this, they differ from their younger and more dynamic cohorts whose members are ready for change and do not feel lost.

Given the fact that the majority of respondents do not live an easy life, however, their optimism, trust in people and institutions, their feeling of overall improvement, a certain degree of tolerance and sometimes even friendly relations with both ethnic Abkhaz and religious minorities (although this is true on a much smaller scale in relation to the so-called “non-traditional” religions and, as we know from other studies – sexual minorities) is surprising.

Often respondents themselves are not able to determine the extent of their deprivation and problems with various aspects of quality of life. They are little concerned, therefore, with issues of their participation in decision-making at the local or national levels or environmental protection. Or, in spite of the constant problems with tap water in Zugdidi and in several other towns, for example, people seem accustomed to using wells and hardly complain about the situation with drinking water or sanitation (also an important issue in many localities). Many, however, criticised the quality of the roads which is, of course, also an important part of life and mobility. Amongst the main problems related to social infrastructure, the remoteness and inaccessibility of health services has been noted. Particularly difficult is the situation of households which have chronically ill or disabled family members as there virtually are no social services which would facilitate their lives.

Despite the fact that there is a sense of improvement in many areas (except Abkhaz-Georgian relations), respondents are seldom aware that behind many of the changes for the better is the activity and support of international organisations whose contributions are clearly underestimated.

At the same time, the review of existing programmes in the region has shown that there is significant room for improvement in their performance which primarily concerns strategic planning and coordination of programmes including between different departments and levels of local government. Especially important is the fact that some vulnerable groups (especially the elderly and disabled) are deprived of adequate support from both the state and non-governmental agencies and organisations.

Experience has shown that existing strategic documents and action plans (in those cases where such are available) need to be revised and updated, taking into account the accumulated experience and the analysis of errors. This particularly concerns documents on the integration of IDPs, regional development, activities in the conflict zones, gender equality, development of self-government institutions, education, health care and public service.

It is clear that after decades of mismanagement, quick improvement of the socio-economic background will not be a simple task. It is necessary to openly admit that there are many challenges to the successful development of the region but the issue of public participation is perhaps the most important factor at the initial stage. The process of implementing the necessary reforms and changes can cause some degree of public resistance — especially against the background of continuing political instability, external threats and economic hardship. The growth of negative attitudes to reform can be caused by a combination of misinformation, lack of media coverage, the nature of political discourse, the lack of dialogue between the public and the authorities and the real disadvantages of planning and management.

Many difficult problems are also related to further socio-economic integration of IDPs into society as, in the nearest future, prospects of their return to Abkhazia are not visible. Especially IDPs living in remote villages, and without independent means of livelihood, should receive assistance in adapting to the requirements of the economic reality and establishing useful social connections and contacts as well as understanding the specifics of the law, business ethics — or sometimes their deficit, the requirements of the labour market, educational opportunities and, sometimes, career development.

In the field of human rights and jurisprudence, there are also a number of important issues associated with the rights of IDPs as individuals and as a group and methods for ensuring the full realisation of these rights.

Due to the fact that the Georgian state does not have sufficient financial and other material resources to address the needs of the population and, often, the required managerial experience, the success of the process is largely dependent upon international aid. It is the State, however, that must clearly define its own goals and priorities and take responsibility for the success of the reforms. The present

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44 See the abovementioned research material prepared by Manana Gabashvili.
period is crucial for the building process of the Georgian state and solving the social and economic problems of the population, improving their quality of life and eradicating poverty—which offends human dignity, especially along the administrative border with Abkhazia—are major steps in this direction in the formation of the Georgian statehood.

Within a very short time, the Georgian political landscape has changed dramatically. Political events that have occurred over the past two months are crucial for the formation of both Georgia’s relations with its past and defining the future. Georgia’s development as a stable democratic country—increasingly integrated into the global economy and the international community of states—is still dependent upon the achievement of its main tasks in the field of economic and social development and in the area of democratisation at all levels. The current period is an important test for the Georgian society and is a test which will show the direction in which it moves today.

To ensure a smooth and efficient process of development for both the region and the country, the government needs to develop a well thought out long-term strategy which will not only be detailed but flexible. This planning tool is to be developed in a transparent manner and taking into account existing and potentially available resources. The development of such a strategy should bring together the interests of different stakeholders of the process, take into account the expected impact upon society and the possible difficulties and include mechanisms for monitoring, feedback and control in a changing reality.

As to the specific problems of the region of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti and, in particular, the strip of territory along the ABL, they are directly related to the specific characteristics listed above: geography (proximity to the conflict zone, isolation), economy (domination by inefficient and capital-intensive agriculture, shortage of land), social situation (a large number of IDPs, mass migration and brain drain), inefficient social services (education, health care), the politicisation of the clan system of the local government and a conservative society.

Clearly, any programme of effective development in the region should be based upon an operative plan which, in turn, is based upon reliable data and dialogue with the public and is seen as a natural part of the national development strategy. But even before the development of such a plan and the provision of adequate resources for its implementation, certain priorities requiring attention are obvious: primarily, diversification of the regional economy, overcoming the (transportational) isolation, radical improvement of higher education, promotion of economic co-operation of communities on both sides of the ABL and an urgent solution of the issues of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, including IDPs. Even the understanding of these priorities, however, underscores the need to develop public discussion and, most importantly, a strategic plan for the region. The presence of such a plan will also assist international organisations, government agencies and other actors to better plan, co-ordinate and implement their projects and programmes aimed at the development of the region, undoubtedly deserving more targeted attention than it has today.