

09 July 2009

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## Georgia: IDPs in Georgia still need attention

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*Large-scale displacement was caused in August 2008 by conflict between Georgia and the Russian Federation over the fate of the secessionist territory of South Ossetia. Most of the people displaced were later able to return to their homes in areas adjacent to the administrative border with South Ossetia, and most ethnic Ossetians returned to their homes in South Ossetia. However, some 37,000 ethnic Georgians who fled South Ossetia have not been able to return by mid-2009.*

*In addition to the people displaced in 2008, some 220,000 to 247,000 people from Georgia's secessionist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are still waiting for a solution to their displacement following conflicts which broke out in the early 1990s. The majority of them live in the region bordering Abkhazia and in the Georgian capital Tbilisi, face difficult conditions in former hotels and public buildings, and depend on meagre state benefits. Over the past years, some 45,000 people have returned to the Gali district in eastern Abkhazia, only to find poor conditions and economic prospects there.*

# New Settlements - Internally Displaced

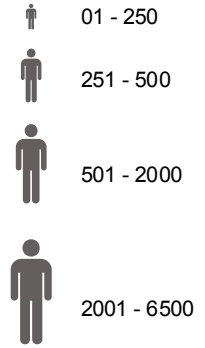
17 Feb 2009



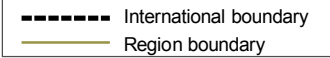
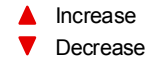
No.	Region	District	Settlements	Individuals
1	Kakheti	Kakheti	Lagodekhi	54
2	Kakheti	Kakheti	Sagarejo	70
3	Kakheti	Kakheti	Telavi	80
4	Kvemo Kartli	Bolnisi	Kvemo Bolnisi	79
5	Kvemo Kartli	Gardabani	Gardabani	321
6	Kvemo Kartli	Marneuli	Shaumiani	450
7	Kvemo Kartli	Tetri tskaro	Koda	1259
8	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Dusheti	Bazaleti	311
9	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Prezeti	761
10	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Saguramo	75
11	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Saguramo	136
12	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Saguramo	35
13	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Tserovani	6385
14	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Tsilikani	1287
15	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Tsinantmdzgvriantkari	127
16	Mtskheta-Mtianeti	Mtskheta	Tsinantmdzgvriantkari	72
17	Shida Kartli	Gori	Berbuki	454
18	Shida Kartli	Gori	Gori	78
19	Shida Kartli	Gori	Gori	67
20	Shida Kartli	Gori	Gori/Kvernati	14
21	Shida Kartli	Gori	Karaleti	1482
22	Shida Kartli	Gori	Karaleti/Tsmindatskali	1607
23	Shida Kartli	Gori	Shavshvebi	587
24	Shida Kartli	Gori	Skra	296
25	Shida Kartli	Kareli	Akhalsopeli	333
26	Shida Kartli	Kareli	Kareli	265
27	Shida Kartli	Kareli	Kareli	204
28	Shida Kartli	Kareli	Mokhisi	215
29	Shida Kartli	Kaspi	Didi Khurvaleti	440
30	Shida Kartli	Kaspi	Metekhi	128
31	Shida Kartli	Kaspi	Telani	170
32	Shida Kartli	Khashuri	Chumateleti	81
33	Shida Kartli	Khashuri	Khashuri	64
34	Shida Kartli	Khashuri	Surami	68
35	Shida Kartli	Khashuri	Surami	51
36	Shida Kartli	Khashuri	Surami	22
	<b>Total</b>			<b>18128</b>

## Legend

### No. of IDPs in new settlements by town/village



### Increase/Decrease in no. of IDPs since 09 Feb 2009



Map Doc Name:

IDPs\_new\_settlements\_270209

GLIDE Number:

IDPs\_new\_settlements\_270209

Creation Date:

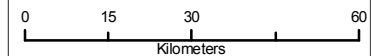
27 Feb 2009

Projection/Datum:

WGS84

Web Resources:

Nominal Scale at A4 paper size: 1:1,357,898



Map data source(s):

Civil Registering Agency, Govt. of Georgia.

### Disclaimers:

The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.



RUSSIAN FEDERATION

SOUTH OSSETIA

MTSKHETA-MTIANETI

SHIDA KARTLI

KVEMO KARTLI

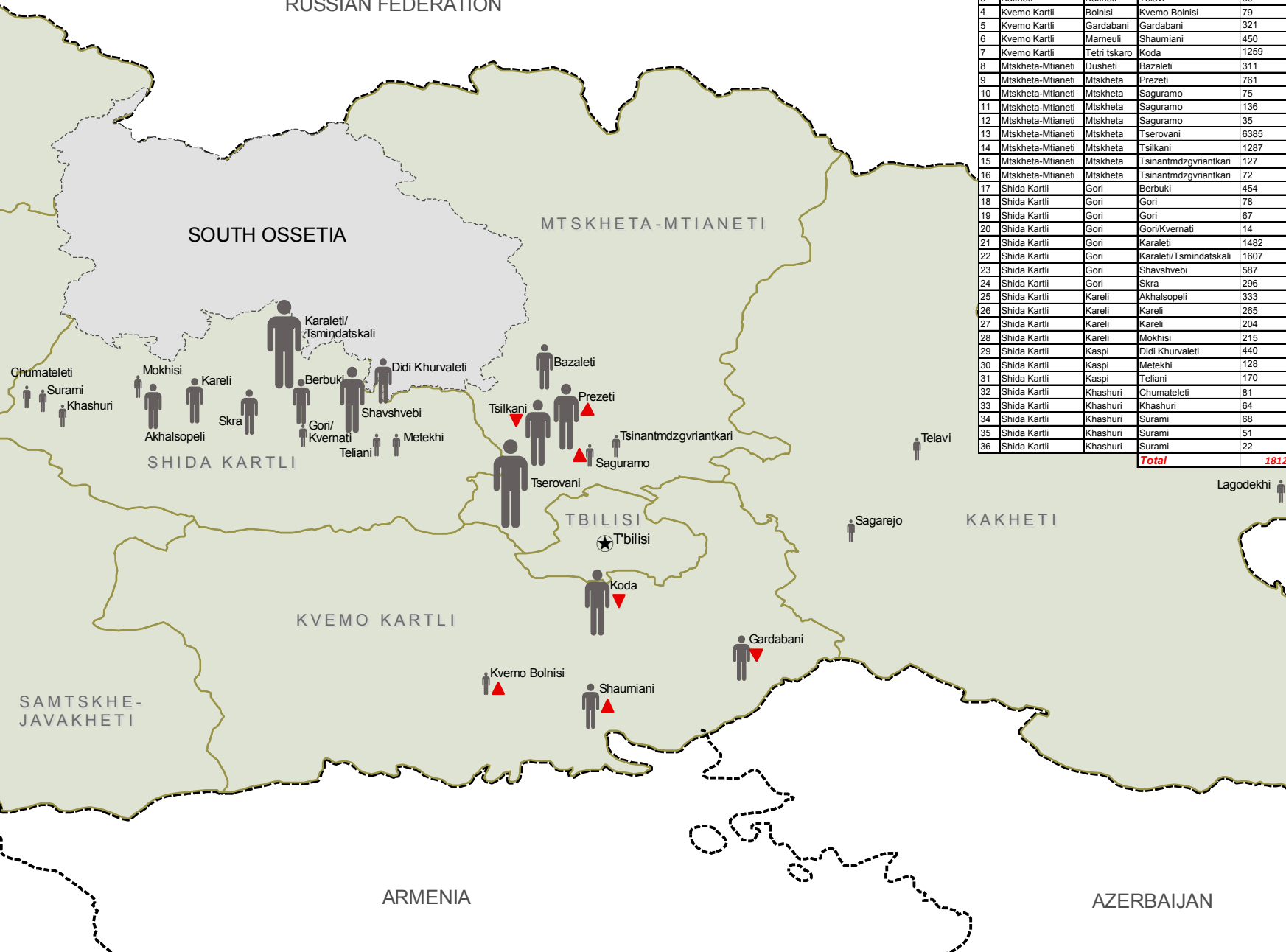
SAMTSKHE-JAVAKHETI

TBILISI

KAKHETI

ARMENIA

AZERBAIJAN



### **Causes of displacement and estimated numbers of IDPs**

The majority of internally displaced people (IDPs) in Georgia have been displaced since the early 1990s. In 1991, Georgia's declaration of independence was followed by increased tensions in the autonomous regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which both demanded full independence.

The fighting that followed caused the displacement of some 300,000 people, primarily to Georgia proper and also to the Russian Federation. Most of them were from Abkhazia, where virtually the entire ethnic Georgian population fled, primarily to the region on the Georgian side of the administrative border with Abkhazia, and to the Georgian capital, Tbilisi (CHR, 25 January 2001). At the same time, many ethnic Abkhaz were displaced within Abkhazia. Ethnic Georgians and Abkhaz also found refuge in the Russian Federation. Both groups generally describe what happened to them as "ethnic cleansing" (OSCE, 3 December 1996; Dale, 1997; IFRC, 30 November 2000).

The conflict in South Ossetia caused the displacement of 60,000 people, mainly ethnic Ossetians from both the break-away territory and other parts of Georgia; the vast majority of them found refuge in North Ossetia in the Russian Federation. About 10,000 ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia were also displaced within Georgia (CHR, 22 March 2006). Both regions then declared their independence and have since sought to maintain close relations with the Russian Federation rather than with Georgia.

In 2004 and 2005, the Georgian Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA), with the support of UNHCR and the Swiss government, identified and registered almost 222,000 IDPs living in territories under Georgian control (CHR, 22 March 2006). This figure was not endorsed by the Georgian government, who used the estimate of 247,000 in 2007, although no new displacement had occurred in the interim (GoG, 2 February 2007).

In August 2008, conflict broke out between Georgia and the Russian Federation over South Ossetia. Hundreds of people were killed and at least 158,000 ethnic Georgians and Ossetians fled their homes in South Ossetia, Georgia proper and Abkhazia. 128,000 of the people displaced were ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia, from areas in Georgia proper neighbouring South Ossetia and from the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia. In addition, 30,000 ethnic Ossetians found refuge temporarily in North Ossetia within the Russian Federation (OCHA, 18 August 2008). Forces on both sides in the conflict appear to have killed and injured civilians through indiscriminate attacks on the town of Gori and on the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali (HRW, 14 August 2008). The arrival of Russian and South Ossetian forces to ethnic Georgian villages in South Ossetia and on the Georgian side of the administrative border reportedly resulted in direct threats to the population, instructions to leave, looting and house burning (OSCE, November 2008).

An internationally-brokered ceasefire came a week later. However, the Russian Federation recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and kept

thousands of soldiers in both regions. At the end of April 2009, the Russian Federation signed border pacts with both regions, by which it assumed immediate responsibility for guarding their de facto borders with Georgia for the next ten years (AFP, 2 May 2009).

### **International efforts to bring peace**

Since October 2008, the European Union Monitoring Mission (EUMM) to Georgia has monitored the August 2008 ceasefire between the Russian Federation, Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but it has been prevented by the Russian Federation, Abkhazia and South Ossetia from entering the breakaway regions. Meanwhile, the mandates of the peacekeeping forces which had been patrolling South Ossetia and Abkhazia since the early 1990s to prevent the resumption of conflict failed to be renewed, mainly due to the Russian Federation's opposition (EU, 19 June 2009).

Following the August 2008 crisis, the UN, EU and OSCE chaired several rounds of discussions in Geneva, which included delegations from Georgia, the Russian Federation, the United States, and Abkhaz and South Ossetian representatives. One of the issues discussed was how to improve the living conditions of IDPs, but talks have failed to deliver tangible results (UNSC, 3 February 2009).

### **In search of durable solutions**

#### *People displaced in 2008*

The vast majority of Georgians displaced in August 2008 were first accommodated in Tbilisi in public buildings such as

schools. A minority were temporarily housed in tented camps (AI, 18 November 2008). In the months following the conflict, most of the displaced were able to return to their homes in areas adjacent to the administrative border with South Ossetia, and most ethnic Ossetians returned to their homes in South Ossetia. According to several reports, some IDPs were pressurised by Georgian authorities to return to their homes close to the administrative border before conditions were in place to guarantee their security or an adequate standard of living. In general, IDPs have not been adequately consulted on the sustainability of plans for their futures (HRC, 13 February 2009; OSCE, November 2008).

The Georgian government and the international community continue to emphasise the right of return of Georgian IDPs, but the Georgian government has predicted that about 37,600 people displaced in August 2008 will not return in the foreseeable future (CHR, 13 February 2009). The de facto South Ossetian authorities have assured the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the Human Rights Commissioner of the Council of Europe that they were committed to the right of return, including for ethnic Georgians who fled in August 2008, and that the latter group would face no discrimination and have their security fully guaranteed (HRW, 23 January 2009). In practice, however, South Ossetian villages previously under Georgian control have been razed to the ground with the exception of a handful of houses, making the return of IDPs more elusive than ever. The Council of Europe noted that the intention to cleanse the area of ethnic Georgians was clear (CoE, 29 April 2009, "consequences of war"). Another

major obstacle to return is the presence of unexploded ordnance and other dangerous remnants of the August 2008 fighting (CoE, 8 September 2008).

#### *People displaced in the early 1990s*

Prior to the August conflict, some 6,000 refugees and IDPs had returned to South Ossetia, the vast majority of them before 2005 due to the volatile security situation and poor economy in South Ossetia since then (UNCT, November 2006).

From the mid-1990s to the mid-2000s, an estimated 45,000 ethnic Georgian IDPs returned to the Gali district of Abkhazia. The authorities there have long maintained that the return of IDPs to Abkhazia – other than to Gali – was impossible (Civil Georgia, 17 February 2007). The living conditions of the returnees are extremely poor, with inadequate housing, limited economic opportunities and a general lack of public services (CHR, 22 March 2006; DRC, February 2006). In January 2009, OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities travelled to Abkhazia and said he found the situation "difficult" for Georgian parents eager for their children to be educated in their mother tongue. In March 2009, teachers in Gali said that they were pressurised by local officials to drop Georgian-language instruction; they were concerned about the fate of students, for whom school is a critical link to Georgian identity (RFE/RL, 22 March 2009). According to many local and international accounts, ethnic Georgians in Gali have been pressurised to acquire Abkhaz "citizenship" for which they are required to renounce the Georgian one. Most returning IDPs have reportedly not complied, among other reasons so that they continue to be

eligible to receive pensions and other benefits from the Georgian government.

#### **Continuing humanitarian needs of IDPs**

IDPs still face barriers to their enjoyment of economic and social rights. About 70 per cent of Georgia's long-term IDPs live in urban areas, primarily in Zugdidi in western Georgia, but also in Tbilisi and Kutaisi (World Bank, May 2005). Close to half of the displaced population live in collective centres in former hotels, schools, kindergartens, factories and hospitals. As of May 2009, some 12,500 people internally displaced in 2008 were also residing in collective centres or temporary private accommodation (CoE, 12 May 2009).

Returned villagers whose homes were damaged or destroyed during the conflict face particularly difficult conditions. In February 2009 the Representative of the UN Secretary-General on the human rights of IDPs (the RSG on IDPs) reported that people who were displaced in 2008 and had since returned to areas close to South Ossetia were in need of assistance to restore their livelihoods and repair or rebuild their houses (HRC, 13 February 2009).

The 2008 war with the Russian Federation and the global financial crisis seriously undermined Georgia's economy, and declines in growth are likely to affect the most vulnerable groups, such as IDPs (ICG, 26 November 2008). As they continue to be seen as outsiders, IDPs are reported to struggle to find work, and many inhabitants of collective centres remain extremely poor and depend on external assistance. There seem to be in-

sufficient opportunities for income generation for IDPs or information among IDPs of existing opportunities (UNHCR, October 2008).

Elderly IDPs and female-headed households may face particular difficulties; they are less likely to have an income or support for maintaining their homes in collective centres, and often live in insanitary dwellings. According to UNFPA, pregnant women displaced in August 2008 were particularly vulnerable, as the destruction of infrastructure, lack of access to reproductive health services and poverty led to an increased risk of complications during pregnancy and delivery (UNFPA, October 2008). Children in collective centres still live in inadequate cramped conditions, and are often seen as outsiders by other children and their families. One of the most serious causes of IDP vulnerability is related to their emotional conditions, as the conflicts and their difficult situation since have created feelings of dependency, helplessness and depression.

Abkhaz authorities have also closed the administrative border with Georgia since summer 2008. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult for returnees in Gali to maintain family contacts, sell their produce, access health care or pick up financial entitlements on the other side of the administrative border (CoE, 12 May 2009; CoE, 28 January 2009, Res.1648).

In 2009, the RSG on IDPs reported to the UN Human Rights Council that his biggest concern was the fate of the Georgians displaced in the 1990s because “they remain largely forgotten and marginalised”. He encouraged the government to implement its plans to improve the living

conditions of IDPs, in particular by closing collective centres, raising the monthly financial allowance to IDPs on the basis of up-to-date needs assessments, and by offering income-generating projects and providing land plots (HRC, 13 February 2009).

### **National response to internal displacement**

Since 1996, a comprehensive law on IDPs (the Law of Georgia on Internally Displaced Persons, most recently amended on 9 June 2006) has offered some support, including the use of public utilities free of charge in collective centres and modest monthly financial allowances. However it has not been effective in lifting most IDPs out of poverty. Following a 2006 government decree on social assistance to the general population, IDPs can enrol into a programme of social assistance if they give up their monthly IDP allowances. This programme is managed by the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs.

In the early 2000s, the government took steps to improve the living conditions of IDPs, who gained the right to vote in local and parliamentary elections in their current residence, rather than in their place of origin, to run for election, and to acquire property while keeping their national IDP status (Brookings, 5 November 2004; OCHA, November 2003).

In 2007, the government adopted the new State Strategy on IDPs which deals with all aspects of displacement: housing, employment, social issues including education and health, and legal status (GoG, 2 February 2007). It stressed that the integration of IDPs in their place of dis-

placement need not bar their future return to their original residence. UN agencies, international NGOs and national civil society bodies provided substantial input to the strategy. Meanwhile, the ICRC created a database to consolidate information on all of Georgia's collective centres for IDPs.

While an important tool, the Strategy has so far not been implemented, as the action plan drawn up to realise the strategy was revised after the August 2008 war and then only adopted in May 2009. Following the August 2008 conflict, the government of Georgia appointed focal points for the different sectors of the response and charged the Minister of Health, Labour and Social Affairs with the coordination of humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 7 October 2008).

It also resettled, with international donor support, some 18,000 people who had been recently displaced into individual family cottages built for them in three regions of Georgia, and offered financial compensation to almost 4,000 IDPs (CoE, 12 May 2009). However, the criteria used for allocating the new housing were not clear (HRC, 13 February 2009), and some IDPs also criticised the choice of location of the houses, away from basic amenities and in areas with few economic prospects (CoE, 28 January 2009).

In February 2009, the government hosted a donor meeting to present progress on the reintegration of people displaced in the 1990s. Its main goals were to increase IDP self-reliance through the provision of durable housing solutions, and to include the most vulnerable IDPs in the general social assistance programme (UNCT in Georgia, 5 March 2009).

In May 2009, the Georgian government finally started to grant IDP status to the people displaced from the August 2008 conflict, an important measure as the status is linked to a series of benefits (CoE, 12 May 2009).

### **Property issues**

Over the past few years, the government has sold hotels and other public buildings housing IDPs. According to local observers, these cases of privatisation have been most successful when IDPs have been able to negotiate rental conditions directly with the new owners, often with NGO or government support. In practice, thousands of IDPs have left or been evicted from their residences, sometimes without compensation. Because IDPs do not have ownership rights over their accommodation in collective centres, they have to rely on the goodwill of the state for compensation. Many have received compensation but have been unable to buy their own apartment and have ended up living with relatives or have used the compensation to rent an apartment (UNICEF/NRC, October 2006).

In 2009, the government announced a new initiative under the responsibility of the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA), according to which IDPs would be able to buy their current apartments in the collective centres. UNHCR called for the government to reach a consensus with the concerned families on rehabilitation standards (UNCT in Georgia, 16 April 2009).

IDPs have not been able to formalise their rights over their properties in conflict areas in the absence of Georgian

government control over Abkhazia or South Ossetia. In 2006, the MRA launched a programme called “My House”, according to which IDPs could register their ownership rights over their properties in Abkhazia in a state inventory, but the National Agency of Public Registry did not register the property rights as it lacked essential documents proving ownership, such as the cadastral maps of the claimed property. In addition, Abkhaz authorities refused to cooperate in this process. Similarly, a law on restitution of property to the victims of the South Ossetian conflict was passed in December 2006, but as of mid-2009 the law had not been implemented, and the South Ossetian de facto authorities had rejected it.

### **International response**

In the aftermath of the August 2008 crisis, the UN Resident Coordinator / Humanitarian Coordinator led coordination efforts through a Humanitarian Coordination Group involving UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs. The cluster approach was formally implemented until the end of March 2009. UNHCR acted as lead agency and played a prominent role in ensuring that protection and assistance needs of IDPs were being addressed promptly and effectively (HRC, 13 February 2009).

In order to respond to the many humanitarian needs of IDPs and other vulnerable populations in Georgia, UN agencies and some NGOs issued a flash appeal to donors for activities to be carried out over the next six months, which was then revised in October (OCHA, 18 August 2008; 7 October 2008). Donor governments mobilised quickly to pledge sup-

port to IDPs and other vulnerable populations, and channel assistance through humanitarian agencies present. Both the RSG on IDPs and the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner undertook visits to Georgia to assess the needs of IDPs and advocate for their rights in the aftermath of the conflict. The Russian government also provided funds to rebuild infrastructure in South Ossetia and offered humanitarian assistance to refugees in North Ossetia and vulnerable populations in South Ossetia.

One of the main constraints to the delivery of assistance has been the poor access due to legal and bureaucratic obstacles as well as continuing insecurity. The Law on Occupied Territories of Georgia allows access to foreigners from the Georgian side only (Government of Georgia, 28 October 2008), but South Ossetian authorities maintain that providers of assistance can only enter the region through the Russian Federation, while the administrative border with Abkhazia has remained closed.

The UN, the World Bank and other organisations have carried out a joint needs assessment at the request of the government to address humanitarian, recovery, reconstruction and development needs for the next three years (UN-World Bank Group, 22 October 2008). The findings, addressing among other things the needs of people displaced in the 1990s and in 2008, were presented at a donors’ conference in Brussels in October 2008. Of the \$4.7 billion committed following the conference, \$450 million were allocated to improving the housing conditions and medical costs of the old and new IDP caseloads (WB-EC, 23 October 2008; ICG, 26 November 2008). Since then,

programmes have mostly benefitted the new IDPs, reportedly causing tensions between them and many of those displaced since the early 1990s (HRC, 13 February 2009).

*Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's Internal Displacement profile. The full profile is available online [here](#).*

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## **About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

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

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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