

**Rapid Assessment on the Protection and Livelihoods situation of
Internally Displaced Children and Youth Living in Collective Centers in
the Republic of Georgia**

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Executive Summary	

As a result of the multiple protracted civil conflicts in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the 1990s, over 250,000 people have been displaced from their homes throughout the Republic of Georgia. Almost half of the displaced have been living in collective centers- old schools, hospitals, factories and hotels- since leaving their homes. Little has been done over the last 15 years to improve the living conditions of these Georgians and to find a more dignified solution to their crisis of displacement. Many of these families wait in limbo, living in buildings unfit for healthy living, neither able to return or create sustainable and dignified conditions for them and their children. In September of 2006 a rapid assessment was carried out in order to understand the situation concerning the protection situation of IDP children and youth living in collective centers. While many studies related to the conditions faced by IDPs in Georgia deal briefly with a limited number of protection issues concerning children and youth, there is no assessment which places the spotlight directly on their unique voices, beliefs and attitudes. As the Government of Georgia finishes outlining the strategy and principles of their “National Strategy for IDPs,” this assessment was recognized as an important step in gaining more insight into the issues IDP children and young people face in collective centers and in helping to ensure that the protection of IDP children and children’s rights will be both considered, improved upon and not violated in the design and implementation of programs of the “National Strategy for IDPs’.” Understanding the issues children and youth face in collective centers and the potential effects of the National Strategy on their live is crucial as over 25,000 children are currently living in the collective centers and will be affected by the National Strategy.

The design of the rapid assessment tools and methodology, training of researchers, monitoring of the data collection and analysis of data was carried out by the UNICEF consultant and staff from the Norwegian Refugee Council. Qualitative methods including site observation, key-informant interviews, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with children, youth, parents and those with special knowledge of the situation of IDP children and youth were used to gather data in the field. The collection of data in the field was carried out by two teams of ‘youth researchers;’ a Tbilisi based team and a Zugdidi based team. The use of youth researchers to collect data in the field allowed the assessment to capitalize on the rapport young people have with one another when discussing sensitive issues, hopefully leading to richer data. This also gave young people with previous experience

and commitments to local NGOs the opportunity to work on their research skills and build their own capacity to carry out such research in the future (See Annex A). In total, data was collected in 18 of the over 1600 collective centers throughout the country representing the urban and rural environments of various regions including; Tbilisi, Gori, Rustavi, Zugdidi, Tskaltubo and Senaki. A portion of the interviews and focus groups was translated for the UNICEF consultant who worked with the NRC focal points to organize and analyze the data according to pre-defined codes on issues related to child protection and livelihoods. This report presents the findings of the assessment as well as discussion and recommendations on ensuring that children are protected in the new “National Strategy for IDPs.”

While a number of the findings presented in this report may relate to protection issues faced by children and youth in the whole population – especially regarding drug use, sexual behavior, child marriage, and access to health, education and livelihoods opportunities – other findings suggest that IDP children and youth face certain protection concerns that are specific to their experience, making them especially vulnerable in comparison to children in the general population. The most significant issues specific to IDP children, which must be considered in the design and implementation of the “National Strategy for IDPs,” were found to be the following:

- Young IDPs are forced to wait in limbo remaining vulnerable to being asked to leave their homes and friends at any moment due to government policies over which they have no control.
- The protection environment of IDP children, especially with regards to schools in exile and lack of appropriate housing, has also been systematically compromised by political goals focused on return.
- Young IDPs face stigma by local children which leads to further psychological and social issues related to inferiority, identity and social isolation.
- IDP children and youth risk their security by temporarily returning to conflict zones (especially the Gali region) to visit family and take care of their land and livelihoods.

In order to ensure the social, psychological and physical health and development of IDP children through the implementation of the National Strategy and assist in the integration of IDP children into the general society, direct actions must be undertaken to combat these current protection gaps and to prevent these vulnerabilities from growing during the process of closing collective centers and relocating children and their families. Thus the government is recommended to immediately undertake the following steps in partnership with local NGOs and international organizations:

- **From “Waiting in Limbo” to Informed and Empowered Participation**
Inform children, youth and their families immediately of the ongoing processes regarding the “National Strategy for IDPs” and seek more dialogue with young people to consider their views on the strategy’s housing policies. This is essential in order to abide by the participatory principles laid out in the Draft

of the National Strategy for IDPs. Such steps will give young IDPs a greater sense of control over their lives and while also providing the thematic groups working on the strategy with more insight into how young people view the potential threats these policies might pose to their protection.

- **Technical Assistance in Implementing the National Strategy for IDPs**
Ensure that child protection experts are included in all Thematic Working Groups –Economic, Social, Legal and Housing- in order to assist those implementing the National Strategy in applying a child protection lens to all decisions. Ensure that the implementation of the national strategy is monitored and evaluated both with regards to the principled approach outlined in the draft as well as to the actual programs, to uphold the rights of children in this process.
- **Placing Children’s Real Needs Ahead of Political and Economic Concerns**
Place children’s protection needs ahead of political and economic motivations. Decisions regarding how and where to relocate families and their children and whether to close the schools-in-exile should be both transparent and evidence-based, and should include the participation of IDPs themselves. Investors’ interests and political goals with respect to return to Abkhazia should be second so that such goals do not compromise the children’s protection environment.
- **National Advocacy Program for Overcoming Stigma and Social Isolation**
Strategic Advocacy campaigns should be undertaken at a national level in order to help the general population overcome their stigma towards IDPs. Regardless of policy decisions regarding housing and other social services for IDPs in the National strategy, integration will not be possible as long as IDPs are stigmatized. Such stigma will lead to the general society isolating the IDP communities as well as the IDPs preferring such isolation to avoid such stigma. Advocacy campaigns should also inform the general public about the national strategy so that there are no misconceptions regarding what assistance is being given and why. Such advocacy must also help the larger Georgian society to understand the importance of assisting the IDP population in the process of building a stronger, more stable Georgian society.
- **Protection of Child and Youth IDPs from the Gali Region** - Multi-sectoral assistance is needed to ensure the protection of children who temporarily return to the Gali region. As collective centers are closed, adequate options and compensation must be provided so that families are not subject to ‘economically forced return’ to an insecure environment. More research is needed on the movement of young IDPs in and out of Gali especially regarding the economic and social motivations for returning and the risks young people face there.

As the government of Georgia seeks to support their displaced population and resolve an issue that has not been properly addressed for too many years, they have a unique opportunity to assist the displaced children and youth in advancing their personal lives and contributing to the development of the country. With this opportunity also comes the risk that, in the pull of economic and political forces, the most vulnerable, including the children, will be forgotten. It is also important in the process of implementing the “National Strategy for IDPs” that the vulnerabilities and concerns faced specifically and uniquely by IDP children and youth are not lost among the voices claiming that IDP children and children in the general population face the same situation. The imperative to address the specific needs of IDP children in collective centers is highlighted by the fact that the implementation of the National Strategy is certain to affect the social and psychological lives of thousands of IDP children who have been displaced for over a decade. These children are guaranteed to confront new life changes as they are moved out of their collective centers to undetermined locations through a strategy left still un-communicated to them. It is in both the interest of the IDP children as well of the government of Georgia that the standard benchmark for successful protection of IDP children in the “National Strategy for IDPs” be not be equated with those conditions endured by the poorest families in the general society. Rather, the goal should be to fulfill the high standards of child rights and protection Georgia has committed to as a partner to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Thus, the intention of this work and the UNICEF/NRC team is that the various questions and concerns raised in this rapid assessment will be earnestly considered by the government and thematic working groups as they work to honor their commitment and duty to protect IDP children in the process of implementing the new “National Strategy for IDPs.”

Introduction

After gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the Republic of Georgia was quickly faced with two armed rebellions within its territory during which unilateral declarations of independence were made by South Ossetia in 1991 and Abkhazia in 1999. As a result of these conflicts an estimated 10,000 people were killed and hundreds of thousands of Georgian’s were displaced from their homes. While absolute numbers of displaced people and their exact locations are difficult to come by, figures accepted by the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation cite that there are still currently 13,000 IDPs from South Ossetia and 230,000 IDPs from Abkhazia throughout the country (National Strategy toward Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia: Draft, 2006). While some refugees live with relatives or in other private accommodation, it is estimated that 45% of the displaced found refuge in over 1600 collective centres across the country. Prior to being taken over by IDPs in the 1990’s, these buildings had served as hospitals, military barracks, schools and hotels and were thus never meant to be used as living spaces. The lack of adequate improvements in the structural and sanitary conditions of the collective centres over the last 15 years has made housing both a critical and sensitive

issue for the country. Though the large scale conflicts in Abkhazia and Ossetia have been over for years, displaced families are still unable to return home. Their houses remain burned, bandits and criminals still harass the population and the rights of children are systematically abused, as they are refused education in their first-language. Parents are unable to see the future of their children under such conditions, thus making return a difficult choice. As the government has begun to privatize or close the collective centres, most IDPs remain unsettled, waiting to see whether this strategy will indeed improve their situation or lead to further isolation and vulnerability.

The UN Special Representative on the Human Rights of IDPs recognized these issues after visiting IDP communities in collective centers in 2005. He subsequently voiced the necessity of further integrating the IDPs into local society and for the government to fulfill the obligation to offer appropriate housing and socio-economic opportunities to the IDPs (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre: Norwegian Refugee Council, 2006). In order to advance a solution to the IDP issue, the Georgian government has developed and is preparing to implement their new “National Strategy for IDPs”. While the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation has been leading this process, thematic working groups composed of representatives from relevant government ministries, UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society are providing input to draft the strategy in the sectors of housing, legal issues, social issues and economic issues. As surveys by the IFRC and Save the Children estimate that 26.2% of the IDPs living in collective centres in Georgia are children (Dershem et al, 2005), the absolute number of children living in collective centres may be more than 25,000. Thus, children represent a very significant vulnerable group whose needs and protection concerns must be considered in designing and implementing this new strategy (see the Norwegian Refugee Council’s Global Profile on IDPs (Dershem, L. et al., 2005) for in-depth analysis of IDP numbers, demographics and housing conditions).

While many studies related to the conditions of the IDP population in Georgia deal briefly with a limited number of issues faced by IDP children, there are few assessments which place the spotlight on the protection concerns specific to children and youth while listening to their voices, beliefs and attitudes. This assessment is the result of UNICEF’s recognition of a gap in knowledge of the protection environment of IDP children in collective centers and the subsequent need to provide more information to ensure children are protected in the National Strategy for IDPs. Thus, it is intended to give those working on the National Strategy more insight into the issues IDP children and young people face in collective centers and to help them in designing programs which ensure that the protection of IDP children and children’s rights will be both considered, improved upon and not violated in the design and implementation of the government’s new National Strategy for IDPs.

The development and implementation of this National Strategy for IDPs presents the government of Georgia with a unique opportunity to assist displaced children and youth to advance their personal lives and contribute to the development of the country. Understanding the issues children face in these collective centers and the potential effects of the National Strategy on their lives is essential when considering the absolute number of children who will be affected by these policies. With this

opportunity comes the risk that in the pull of economic and political forces, the most vulnerable, including the children, will be forgotten. The protection needs specific to IDP children have, for the most part, gone unrecognized during the development of the National Strategy for IDPs, as they have been drowned out by voices claiming that IDP children and those in the general population face the same situation. The importance of ensuring for children's protection in this process is supported by the findings of this assessment which suggest that IDP children face unique challenges to their protection, development and integration including: stigma and social isolation, lack of control over their future in the face of policy decisions which affect them, vulnerability due to their living conditions, their education being compromised by political and economic forces, and their adoption of risky livelihood strategies when temporarily returning to conflict zones. The imperative to address the needs specific to IDP children in collective centers is heightened by the fact that the implementation of the National Strategy is certain to affect the social and psychological lives of thousands of IDP children. These children are guaranteed to confront new life changes as they are moved out of their collective centers to undetermined locations through a strategy left still uncommunicated to them. Thus, the intention of this work and the UNICEF/NRC team is that the various questions and concerns raised in this rapid assessment will be earnestly considered by the government and thematic working groups mutually honor their commitment and duty to protect IDP children in the process of implementing the new National Strategy for IDPs.

Methodology

Data for the rapid assessment was collected using qualitative methods, including: focus group discussions, key informant interviews and site observations. The tools and protocols for the assessment were developed by the UNICEF consultant and the research focal points from the Norwegian Refugee Council, who also monitored the data collection process (See Focus Group Discussion Question Guide, Annex D). After the field work was completed, a portion of the data was translated for the UNICEF consultant who worked together with the NRC focal points to organize and analyze the data according to pre-defined codes in livelihoods and child protection.

In the field, the data was collected over a period of two and a half weeks by youth researchers who were identified and trained by the UNICEF consultant and Norwegian Refugee Council focal points. The actual collection of data in the field was carried out by two teams of ‘youth researchers.’ The use of youth researchers to collect the data in the field allowed the assessment to capitalize on the rapport young people have with one another when discussing sensitive issues, hopefully leading to richer data. This also gave young people with previous experience and commitments to local NGOs the opportunity to work on their research skills and build their own capacity to carry out such research in the future (See Youth as Researchers, Annex A). These youth researchers, which include both IDPs and local youth, were identified and chosen based on their commitment to working with various local organizations already working in IDP communities. The IDP Women’s Association “Consent” and the NRC peer-educator program provided much assistance in connecting the consultant with potential researchers. In preparation for the field work, the youth researchers attended a five day training in Tbilisi, the first two days of which provided them with the theoretical background in research methods, livelihoods and child protection necessary to carry out the field work. The last two days of the training were devoted to practical exercises to develop the skills they needed to make contacts in the field, conduct interviews, lead focus group discussions and record their data. Additionally, the tools were shared with and further developed by the youth who played a part in their development.

The researchers worked in two teams, one based in Zugdidi and one in Tbilisi, each consisting of four young women and four young men ages 18-28. Each team collected data in nine (9) collective centers over a three week period from September 8th through September 27th 2006. The Tbilisi team conducted their visits in Tbilisi, Gori and Rustavi while the Zugdidi team visited collective centers in urban and rural Zugdidi, Senaki and Tskaltubo (See Annex D for information on the specific collective centers). At each collective center, three focus group discussions were conducted; one with female children/youth (~ ages 14-20), one with male children/youth (~ ages 14-20) and one with parents. Community leaders were also interviewed and the information they provided was combined with site observations in order to generate a community profile for each collective center. These profiles were seen as necessary in order to put the findings into context, especially considering the limited number of sites visited (See Annex D). Key-informants with special knowledge of children’s lives, such as teachers and health care workers, were also interviewed in each collective center. On the last 2 days the teams conducted interviews and focus group discussions with children/youth who temporarily return to Gali (Zugdidi team), and children/youth who have recently left the collective centers after their homes were privatized (Tbilisi team). Collecting data with these last two groups was the idea of the youth researchers themselves who wished to provide insight into the trajectory of the future conditions many of the IDPs may face– either returning to their homes in Abkhazia or leaving the collective centers.

Given the time and resources available and the magnitude of the population of IDPs living in collective centers (with over 160,000 IDPs living in over 1600 collective

centers spread across the country), sites were selected purposively in order to investigate areas in which the largest numbers of IDPs reside. To try and minimize bias, specific collective centers were selected to capture both a large range of IDP children's experiences and the variance in collective center conditions across the regions. It was recognized that both rural and urban centers should be chosen as well as centers inhabited by IDPs from Abkhazia as well as South Ossetia (who live primarily in Gori). Because the conditions of the collective centers vary significantly, efforts were also made to include those centers with poor conditions in to capture the concerns and needs of the most vulnerable children in the population while also visiting a few sites regarded as having relatively good conditions. As these sites tended to be areas close to urban centers of Zugdidi, Tbilisi and Gori it is very possible that this study missed the vulnerability of the most isolated IDPs living in rural areas.

As the IDPs have been displaced for over 15 years, they have participated in multiple assessments with little result and have become weary of such processes. It was recommended to the research team that in order to carry out interviews and FGD in the collective centers, time must be given to develop relationships and trust with the communities. Because of the nature of rapid assessment methodologies and time/budget constraints specific to this assessment, it was necessary to use convenience and snowball sampling to identify sites. In coordination with key informants and local organizations, gatekeepers made contacts for the teams and introduced them and the purpose of the research to the communities to garner their participation. While this non-random sampling of sites and participants is not optimal, the geographic spread and hidden nature of the displaced population combined with time and budget constraints of the assessment dictated the choice of these methods. The biases necessarily present in using such methods do not make the current findings invalid, but might suggest the need for a more extensive survey if gaps in the current findings are to be filled or statistical evidence related to the current qualitative results is desired.

Main Findings

Overarching Issues

Introducing the findings, it is important to emphasize that every child matters. Thus, regardless of magnitude, social, physical and political environments which compromise the protection of children and violate the rights of the child should be a policy concern of the government. While the findings of this rapid qualitative research with IDP youth and children are not able to give statistical evidence as to the magnitude of various protection concerns for the IDP population as a whole, they do point to the existence of protection issues which demand attention. Moreover, as the research was carried out in only 18 of the over 1,600 collective centers across the country, one can imagine that, though certain issues may have been overlooked in such a small sample, those issues which were uncovered here may not be isolated incidents but could very well be present in a large numbers of collective centers and for numerous children and parents of children among the IDP population.

The most frequently stated concerns of children, youth and parents were their lack of employment opportunities and lack of appropriate housing, in terms of both the housing conditions and the vulnerability of not having a 'home'. This increases their socio-economic vulnerability and creates barriers to fully realizing their self-reliance. Other social problems in the collective centers were often considered to be the secondary result of these two primary concerns.

Young people often mentioned that IDPs and locals were not different except that those living in collective centers do not own their own home. IDP children living in collective centers do, however, face other specific vulnerabilities not faced by the general population. The most significant of these in terms of the National Strategy are the following:

- Young IDPs are forced to wait in limbo remaining vulnerable to being asked to leave their homes and friends at any moment due to government policies over which they have no control.
- The protection environment of IDP children, especially with regards to schools in exile and lack of appropriate housing, has also been systematically compromised by political goals focused on return.
- Young IDPs face stigma by local children which leads to further psychological and social issues related to inferiority, identity and social isolation.
- IDP children and youth risk their security by temporarily returning to conflict zones (especially the Gali region) to visit family and take care of their land and livelihoods.

The conditions of various collective centers vary dramatically from one collective center to another and many protection concerns and vulnerabilities are site specific. There is no one image or idea that can capture the conditions or site specific

vulnerabilities in all collective centers. Thus, one must be careful about pre-conceptions and overarching generalizations when designing policies and solutions. While some IDPs live in old hotels or apartment buildings, theoretically fit for dwelling, others live in old hospitals, military barracks, factories and schools. In one collective center at a hospital, youth complained of the hospital waste, including at times, amputated body parts that children have found and played with in their yard. In a collective center in Rustavi, children and girls are often kept inside at night as drunken men wander around the 'sauna' next door, where used needles litter the ground and 'strange sounds' disturb the collective center residents. Some families enjoy a private toilet, while other centers maintain one outdoor toilet for over 200 people. These are just a few of the countless differences in conditions and challenges faced by those living in collective centers.

Knowledge of National Strategy and Children's Participation

The young people we interviewed are largely waiting in limbo with no control over their situation. They remain, for the most part, absolutely uninformed regarding the "National Strategy for IDPs," the governments plans with regard to their schools and houses, and what rights they have in this process, if any. There seems to be a general gap in efforts to communicate to IDP children and youth regarding the ongoing development of and changes to policies which will affect their lives – where they will live, where they will go to school, and whether they will soon have to pick up and move. IDP children and youth in collective centers have, to our knowledge, not been called on to participate in the National Strategy or to share their own concerns and voices regarding their situation. In the focus group discussions, nearly all children and youth stated that they had never heard about the governments plan to develop a new National Strategy for IDPs and had never been consulted about their concerns or desires. They were, however, aware of the key aspects being considered as part of this strategy; such as the potential privatization of their housing and closing of 'schools in exile.' Their awareness of these specific points was clothed in uncertainty regarding their future as the information had not come from the government but rather from stories circulating between IDP communities. Even within collective centers, children and youth declared that most of the time they aren't involved in decision-making processes and are almost never invited to take part in meetings where important decisions are often made. This lack of opportunity to participate in formulating the decisions which greatly affect their lives is important as it may further enhance the sense of hopelessness many young people feel for their future. It may also serve to discourage them to undertake their own initiatives to deal with their problems.

"I never attend the meetings of adults; probably they will not listen to me"
15 year old IDP girl in Tbilisi

Stigma and Social Isolation

The participants gave a variety of responses regarding the level and quality of experiences and concerns regarding stigma and social isolation. Some children stated

that over time they had developed good relations with local children. They claimed that it is not the collective center itself that is isolating but that the barriers can be overcome with effort and initiatives to make relationships with locals. Other children and parents tell a very different side of the story; engagements for marriage between girls and boys broken by parents who will not accept an IDP into their family; older people screaming at IDPs, asking them why the Abkhazians didn't just finish them off in Abkhazia; and children getting off the marshutka early to try to hide that they are IDPs and live at collective centers.

"I have concealed many times that I live in the hotel, because I am ashamed of that. I just do not want to be looked down on by anyone. They regard us a low class people, they think that they are better and superior to us." 15 year old IDP girl in Gori

Among children, the stigma of being an IDP, and especially of living in a collective center, makes it difficult for them to develop relations with local children and offer hospitality to their friends. Parents of local children may restrict such relationships as they are often afraid to let their child visit classmates at the collective centers.

"What can I say about integration? I have two children. There is a play ground near here, where both our and local children play. Once, I remember, my child returned in tears. He said that the children did not let him play with them and tried to humiliate him by saying that he was a refugee. What could I tell him? I advised not to make friends with such children and calmed him down. We are isolated from the local population." IDP parent in Gori

The schools in exile are also quite relevant to a discussion on stigma and social isolation as they seem to both contribute to the isolation of IDP children from the local children and, at the same time, are preferred by IDP children as a way to escape the prejudice they feel. From our data it seems that the isolation and stigma felt by IDPs may be caused by numerous dividers between the local and IDP populations including:

- Jealousy and misinformation among the general population regarding the assistance provided to IDPs.
- Entrenched prejudice within the Georgian society along lines of class, economic status and the rural/urban populations
- Memories of the IDPs poverty and suffering when they first arrived in Tbilisi and the burden this population's movement placed on the local communities have been crystallized into a general attitude that has now been passed down to children of the new generation who have no memory of this event.

In response to these difficulties IDPs have developed strategies to cope with such isolation. One group of IDPs opened a kindergarten at their collective centers that provides for both IDP children as well as for locals. This has brought parents and children of local and IDP communities together while also providing a service for the

community. Other families have taken their integration into their own hands and have left their free housing and IDP specific benefits in the collective centers in order to rent an apartment in the community and apply for social programs only as Georgian citizens.

The social and psychological pressures of the above mentioned stigma are unique to IDP children and are probably not faced by non-IDP children. This, no doubt, gives children from IDP families a very different experience of growing up in Georgian society and makes it necessary to deal with the attitudes of the larger society towards IDPs when considering integration, as such attitudes may be a primary cause of IDPs' social isolation.

Protection and Gali Returnees

Many children and youth living in collective centers in Zugdidi and the Samegrelo region are from the Gali region. Though they have fled their homes in Abkhazia, they maintain strong links with their family and land in Gali, and frequently, yet temporarily, return throughout the year. Families are separated from each other across the border and many children in collective centers of Samegrelo go to Gali to visit their grandparents and other relatives living there full time. Some take their holidays there, preferring the natural atmosphere of their Gali villages to urban Zugdidi despite the security threats. This cross border movement is most common in the late summer when children accompany their parents to profit from the hazelnut harvest. While in Gali visiting family and friends and working on the hazelnut harvest to support their family, young people have cited many threats to their security. In addition to working the land, young people and their parents also take risks to smuggle goods, such as cigarettes, across the border in order to earn a living. Thus, even though security issues prohibit many families and children from permanently returning to Abkhazia, it is common that they take the risk to return in order to see relatives and support their livelihoods. Young IDPs gave many reasons for visiting Abkhazia including:

- The need to take care of family graves, and care for their houses and land
- In order improve the economic situation of their family either through working on the land and harvesting agricultural products or through smuggling goods, such as cigarettes or marijuana
- To visit their parents, friends or relatives
- Because they miss their homes and homeland
- For vacation

“I go there to guard and then harvest my nuts. This is the main source of income for my family. Therefore, I have to take this risk and go there together with my parents and sister.”
22 year old male IDP in Zugdidi

“I go to Gali because of one very important reason: my income source is there – nuts and corn...I help my parents harvest agricultural outputs and we sell them to cover the cost of my studies in Zugdidi.”

19 year IDP youth living in Zugdidi

“My house is there and my main source of income is also there. I harvest nuts there, and bring them on this side of the river to sell here...during the harvest robbery and kidnapping are more frequent, of course, because they want nuts and money.” 15 year old IDP boy living in Zugdidi

While they are able to return temporarily, almost all those we interviewed stated that they did not feel secure, and faced numerous barriers to full return. A big concern for children and young people is the violation of their right to study in the Georgia language in most schools in the Gali region. This makes it nearly impossible for them to prepare to enter higher educational institutions in the rest of Georgia. For this reason some children are separated from their parents, who have returned to Gali, and live with other relatives while they finish their studies in Zugdidi.

“The Cigarette business is also very popular. They smuggle cigarettes produced in Abkhazia (to Zugdidi). This is mostly the business of women...they go by water and come back by water...they bring a case of two. But if they are caught it may cost them 8-9 years in prison. I keep asking myself: how desperate should one be to take this risk...One young girl was recently caught bringing cigarettes in her hand bag and she was sentenced to 9 years in prison. Her family could do nothing about it.”

From an interview with a driver who brings IDPs from Zugdidi to Gali and back

Almost all interviewees mentioned that boys are at significantly more risk than girls when in Gali. Most cited the special risk of boys being forcefully recruited into the Abkhazian army after the age of 18. Youth reported that Abkhazians search for boys 18 or over with the dual purpose of recruiting them for the army and extorting money from them. If boys are caught and refuse to go to the army, they are forced to pay a ‘fine’ reported to be anywhere from 50 lari to 500USD, depending on who catches them. This fine is not registered and may be applied multiple times to the same individual. Additionally, once they are on the Abkhazian's list as being a Georgian male of army age, they fear their family could face harassment for evading army service. Thus, many male youth remain in Zugdidi while the rest of their family returns to Gali during the summer.

“I personally was arrested several times. They caught me once, and I had to pay 50 lari, and on the same day they caught me for the second time and I had to pay another 50. Army was the reason.”

19 year old IDP living in Zugdidi.

The risk to IDP children’s security during the summer harvest is largely due to lawlessness and the blurred distinction between Abkhazian officials and ‘bandits.’ Many interviewees reported that people are sometimes rounded up by armed men and

forced to work without pay. Young people have also been subjected to this forced labor which is more prevalent during the lucrative nut harvest period when IDP children are returning to help their families. This labor exploitation is also manifest in the large portion of the harvest young people report being forced to surrender as tax, without compensation.

“Our right to employment is almost always violated, but especially during the nut season. The convoy will pass by and gather people to work under the threat of the gun. He does not pay a single tetri, even does not feed the people.” 22 year old IDP youth in Zugdidi

“They collected people from our village and forced them to work on cleaning of drainage channels and building new ones. For three days they kept people working non-stop on only bread and water.” 19 year old IDP boy in Zugdidi who often returns to his village of Khumushquri in Abkhazia

“In the Gali region, there is a group under the leadership of Otar Turanba. This man is violent. He does things that a normal human being can not even imagine. He kidnaps people and makes them work as slaves. He kidnaps virgins and rapes them...” 17 year old IDP girl living in Zugdidi

Issues Regarding ‘Privatization’ and Closing of Collective Centers

Youth, children and parents were consulted as to their experiences with having undergone the privatization process or their concerns regarding the future privatization of their housing. For the most part, the young IDPs, who had already left their collective centers, perceived the relocation process as having primarily negative effects for them and their family. The one positive effect consistently noted was that their new accommodations tended to be more spacious and in better condition than their rooms in the collective centers. The negative effects which were reported in our discussions included:

- As their residence changed, some people lost the economic benefits of their jobs due to the transport costs associated with commuting.
- Social networks - composed of neighbors, friends, relatives, employers, health care workers, etc - which were built and maintained over the last 12 or so years, have been fractured or destroyed. These networks, important for psychological and economic support in daily life, will have to be rebuilt in their communities – a task more challenging among those with whom the IDPs can not bond through the common experience of displacement.
- As social networks have been disrupted or lost in the relocation process, youth and their parents feel less capable of finding new jobs in their new communities.
- Family budgets have been stressed by their new expenses for electricity and water.

“I can find the locals, but the IDPs all in different places now....The same happened when coming from Abkhazia. I lost my friends from there. It happened again.”

22 year old youth who moved to Tbilisi after his housing was privatized in Batumi

Because the monetary compensation given to the IDPs was reportedly not always timely or adequate (at most, around \$7000 per room in Tbilisi), many families could not simply take the money and buy their own apartments, especially in Tbilisi. Those who could not buy their own apartment have ended up living with relatives or using the compensation to rent an apartment. There are also reports of some families choosing to use the money to leave the country and seek work abroad. There is a general fear that the compensation given will not be adequate and will thus force families to move to regions with less economic opportunity than is found in their current town/city. For example, while those IDPs who are being moved from Tbilisi to Tsalka are decreasing their vulnerability due to their housing conditions, they are increasing their socio-economic vulnerability considerably. Many of the respondents who have experienced the privatization process stated that their rights were violated as they were not consulted before and during the process. The perception among some is that it was the needs and demands of investors which were being met at the expense of the IDPs. In interviews people often referred to privatization as a second displacement stating, as one woman in Tbilisi did, *"We became refugees a second time."*

"They Kicked us out with nowhere to go, and did not ask what were our demands. Of Course it was a violation of our rights... When privatization started, we were scared all the time, because we thought we would be kicked out at any minute. And it actually happened like this. They made us leave the hotel against our will." IDP youth privatized from the Adjara Hotel in Tbilisi

For those who expected their buildings to be privatized, their greatest hope was that finally they might have the chance to own their own home and overcome what they see as one of the primary differences between them and the local population. Some wanted to own their current living space and did not want to move due to the relationships they have built in their community. Others also cited that they should have the right to retain their current dwelling considering the efforts they have put into making their space livable over the last years. Those, whose housing situation was worse, either due to condition or space, welcomed a change – a chance to get out of their miserable situation and obtain their own house elsewhere.

"I have been here for so many years now. I have the feeling that I have been frozen at one point in eternity."
23 year old IDP, now living in Tbilisi

Despite hopes that the privatization might, at least, give them their own homes, many expressed anxiety due to this uncertainty and fear they may be 'forced' to move again, especially if the sum given to them forces them to move far away or to the rural regions. In such cases, young people's social and psychological situation is sure to be disrupted as their networks of friends will become fragmented. Young people also shared their fears of having to change schools or leave school altogether due to high

transport costs and the need to assist their families with new expenses in a more economically depressed community.

Children in Need of Special Protection

In the collective centers visited by the researchers, especially vulnerable children were recognized as those who are mentally or physically disabled and those who lack parental supervision and care. It is important to note that, from our data, there do not seem to be large numbers of unaccompanied children in the collective centers. There are, however, a number of IDP children who lack parental care or supervision, including children who have been orphaned (due to the loss one or both of their parents), whose parents have left to work abroad, and children of single-parent households. Such children may be placed in the care of extended relatives or left without supervision. At one site researchers observed six children locked in a room because the parents feared for their safety while they ran errands or went to work.

Children who have been orphaned may be forced to give up studies and seek work to provide for themselves or their family. They may also be more at risk for becoming involved in dangerous forms of work, drug abuse or criminal activities. Disabled children have sometimes stopped attending school due to stigma experienced from other children or a lack of special services to meet their needs. Children with more serious/severe disabilities were not attending school at all, which may lead to their further isolation and reduced stimulation. There were also cases reported of IDP children in prison after getting in trouble with the law, specifically after smuggling cigarettes. Little information is available regarding the situation of children in prisons and detention facilities and this issue should be followed up on.

‘My mother drowned in the river 40 days ago. My father left to work in Russia 11 years ago and has not been in contact since then. I work at a farm in Poti where my mom used to work, looking after cows. I earned 220 GEL this month and they gave me some food as well... My sister left for Rustavi to study. I can not attend school because of my job.’ 15 years old boy in Senaki

Education

IDP families place a high value on proper schooling and sacrifice as much as possible to provide their children with an education. As IDP Children are given free primary and secondary schooling, almost all children reported being enrolled in school and having very few problems physically accessing the schools. However, there did seem to be a difference in children’s ability to gain physical access to school versus their ability to have economic access to gaining a proper education. Numerous economic barriers to attending school or learning their lessons were reported, including:

- Lack of socially acceptable or weather specific clothing
- Transportation costs
- Costs of books and other materials

- Confined living space which makes for difficult study environment
- Absences due to the need to provide economically for one self or family
- Shame due to not being able to provide requested school fees
- Inability to access classes in computers and English outside of school

“The main problem for us is that we have expenses for school... They need, clothes, especially in winter, and books. Our neighbor has two sons. They were going to school with one pair of shoes (borrowing one from another) one winter.” IDP Parent in Tbilisi

Continuing one’s studies after secondary school requires an economic investment that many IDPs can not afford. Students must pay for assistance in preparing for entrance exams as well as enrollment fees and give the labor-time to studying which might be otherwise used to work in order to supplement the family’s earnings. For students who do not reside in Tbilisi or another major city (Batumi, Zugdidi etc), the cost of sending students to university often means additional housing and food costs as well.

Schools in Exile

Among our respondents, there were varied opinions regarding preferences of local schools versus “schools in exile,” those administered by the Abkhazian Ministry of Education and Culture in Exile. Schools in Exile were sometimes preferred or desired because:

- Schools in exiles do not request extra money from them
- Children dress in similar ways and have fewer feelings of insecurity and inferiority based on poor clothing
- Because both children and teachers are IDPs there is no chance of being stigmatized as an IDP because they understand each other’s situation
- Parents want their children to develop patriotism for Abkhazia

“These children from poor families didn’t have any problem in my class and there was even a case when one child spent the whole summer wearing winter boots. I never commented on this fact and accordingly they were not ashamed of their poor clothes and shoes at our school.” Teacher from the School in exile of Tagiloni

Other students were quite happy at local schools and desired local schools, fearing that if they went to a separate school they would be even more isolated and stigmatized. This fear that schools in exile increase IDP children’s isolation from the general society is the main point driving recommendations to integrate these schools and their students into local school systems (See IDP Education Profile in Georgia, UNDP 2003).

Students attending schools in exile live in uncertainty as to whether their schools will close down. They worry about being separated from their classmates, having to integrate into a new environment and about the challenges they will face there.

Change of housing will also force children to change schools, and initiates an uncertain process involving the loss of friends, the need to make new friends and fears of prejudice from non-IDP children. Teachers are concerned that the “integration” of the ‘schools in exile’ with local schools is, in reality, a dismantling of IDP schools which will leave teachers and others unemployed.

Keeping these schools working may be both politically and economically beneficial for the Abkhazian Ministry of Education and Culture in Exile. This allows them to maintain structures and systems they will need in the event that they return to Abkhazia, as well as to retain jobs and capacities of the ministers, teachers and other staff involved in education. These schools also maintain the IDP children’s sense of belonging to Abkhazia and help to develop the patriotism of young people who may not even remember their homes. Maintaining this sense of patriotism in children is important to parents, teachers and politicians in order to cultivate a vision of return in younger generations. The abovementioned ‘benefits’ must be considered in choosing the right course of action which will maximize children’s access to education and their psychological and social health and development.

Health Status and Access to Health Care

Youth and their parents were quick to stress their perceived connection between the health problems they experience and the difficult environmental and sanitary conditions in their collective centers. Common ailments they mentioned included; bodily infections due to mosquito and other insect bites, digestive problems and diarrhea caused by poor sanitation and water quality, and respiratory ailments. In some cases, where families live in hospitals, parents expressed fear for their children’s health as they share corridors and toilets with patients who may have serious and acute infectious disease. Poor nutrition was also mentioned as a concern;

“There is a problem with food. When you look at these children it seems that they are not skinny, but the fact that they are fat only due to eating too much bread - they are full of carbohydrates.”

Key informant/teacher from Tskneti.

Sanitary conditions specific to the collective centers were identified as posing unique problems to female sexual health. Interviews with a gynecologist highlighted that the poor sexual health of girls has been seen in girls of younger ages in recent years. She credited the poor sanitary conditions at collective centers, as well as the difficulty of openness about problems with female sexual health in the family and infrequency of health check ups, as leading to the diseases to become serious by the time they reach her.

“Recently we have witnessed the widened occurrence of Gynecological problems, particularly among the younger. This seems to be mainly due to the terrible living conditions and highly polluted environment of collective centers. There is a huge problem with female hygiene as in most of the centers there are no individual bathroom and toilets. For the most part, we

can not detect these problems at an early stage, because young girls are hiding them from their parents or because the parents can not afford to take their daughters to the gynecologist because of the financial reasons. ” Gynecologist in Zugdidi

Though many IDP children and their families have medical policies, and certainly use them when possible, they nevertheless mentioned numerous barriers to receiving health care. Even with these policies, IDPs mention having to wait months to get assistance for their children. Many medications and procedures still carry costs which either prohibit access to treatments by the poorest IDPs or result in families incurring serious debt to heal themselves and their children. Additionally, IDPs mentioned that it is easier to benefit from the services of the IDP polyclinics than hospitals used by the general public as they have often been refused care at these medical institutions. This is perhaps due to health care providers and IDPs themselves having had poor information as to the patient’s rights guaranteed by their health policies (IDP Health Profile Review in Georgia, 2004). Doctors also may have refused to provide treatment in fear that they would not be reimbursed later by the government. Unable to claim social help, families often go into debt to take care of medical expenses. This debt may take years to pay off and may put stress on their social networks and relations.

“Despite extreme poverty we go to see a doctor when other remedies don’t help. We then have to sell whatever we have. Healthcare is not free and this is another huge problem we have to face. When we can not accumulate the amount needed, we address our relatives for help. But living at someone else’s expense is not fair... we owe almost every small shop located nearby.”
From focus group discussion with parents in Tskaltubo

IDPs have developed various coping strategies to deal with gaps in health coverage. In one collective center in Zugdidi, IDPs themselves created outpatient care services with the help of the NGO “Welfare Foundation”. The IDPs commit to paying 2 GEL a month, per household, and they are given various medications as required free of charge. The social networks of the communities are also critical to obtaining health care. In the event that a more expensive procedure needs to be done, IDPs may organize themselves to support one another by giving money to the one in need.

Livelihoods

The most intensely discussed concern was regarding the lack of opportunities for employment and development of marketable skills among young people. This lack of jobs was blamed, by the respondents, as the primary cause of many other issues faced by children and youth:

- Idleness of youth was thought to be caused by lack of employment opportunities and meaningful recreation. Boys’ use of drugs and involvement in gang/criminal activities were also attributed to these deficiencies.

- The adoption of risky livelihoods strategies such as working in hazardous conditions, seeking income from conflict zones and engaging in illegal activities such as smuggling and other criminal activity
- The desire to leave Georgia and seek work abroad which, though holding the potential benefit for the family of having remittances sent back, exposes young people to the risks of being trafficked and exploited.
- Youth without work expressed additional psycho-social problems including depression, a sense of hopelessness and the need to put on hold other life plans such as getting married and starting a family.

“The main problem is that we do not have jobs...Honestly, we are like prisoners. Instead of being happy that the new day has come, we are dreaming of the moment the day is over. When we sleep we do not want to wake up because we know that as soon as we open our eyes we see problems and only problems.”
18 year old IDP in Tskaltubo

During the years of primary and secondary school, until the age of 16 or 17, children are not encouraged by their parents to seek work. It is a point of family pride that children are supported through their schooling and, though some children expressed the desire to work, their parents sometimes will not allow it. In some circumstances where families and children are extremely vulnerable, children may skip school to work to support themselves and their family. They may also seek jobs in order to pay for extra expenses associated with their education.

Children and youth of both sexes expressed the desire to work, though opportunities for girls seemed to be rarer, as jobs available for boys were seen as not fit for girls. These include: intensive labor jobs, marshutka drivers, construction work, security services, and auto repair. For the most part, girls were expected to stay with their parents and help around the home. Interestingly, certain jobs had stigma associated with them. While some youth stressed that they would do any job available to them and that labor work is not shameful, others stated that such work is shameful and they would not accept jobs in labor or ‘work with a hoe.’ There was some indication that young people from collective centers had already left abroad and are currently sending money home. Girls reportedly go to Turkey, Germany and Russian to work as au pairs or babysitters and boys primarily seek work in manual labor. The majority of youth stated that they would like to leave the country to work but could not provide the ‘initial investment.’ Their desires to leave the country were largely supported by their parents, though youth and parents alike did show some level of hesitancy due to the dangers of trafficking.

The lack of employment opportunities and the need to contribute to family income means that some IDP children become involved with work that involves taking risks to overcome their poverty. Some children reported working in legitimate but potentially hazardous jobs, such as collecting bottles for recycling, collecting and moving scrap metal, working in construction and crossing into the conflict areas to

harvest agricultural products. Children who cross to Gali to earn their living endure multiple risks from forced recruitment into the Abkhazian army, to forced labor, fear of abuse and financial extortion. Other youth have turned to illegal activities such as committing robberies, selling drugs or smuggling goods, such as cigarettes. Boys may join gangs as a means of gaining access to social networks in order to access livelihoods resources by illegal means. Turning to activities such as smuggling, theft and drug use increases youth's own physical and psychological vulnerability, places them at risk of imprisonment and brings problems of social insecurity upon their greater community.

Security

Reports of threats to children's security and dangers of violence varied significantly by the location and living conditions of the collective center. In some cases young people reported that there were no concerns with safety or incidents in violence citing that they all know each other in the center and thus take care of one another. In other cases, where the center is more exposed to the public, (perhaps being located on a major road, or serving as a public space, such as a hospital) young people mention that they are afraid of strangers that frequent their buildings and say there is no way to ensure the security of their person or their possessions. Additional concerns for security included the lack of access to public transport, especially after 9 in the evening in rural areas, and the presence of gangs involved in drug taking, selling and other criminal activity in and around the collective center. Robbery and assaults were reported by young people to frequently occur at night, causing their family to fear for their safety, especially in the case of girls. In the 18 collective centers visited by our researchers there were only two cases where rape was mentioned as having been attempted. It should be considered that because this topic is rather taboo it is assumed that risk for sexual violence and abuse is higher than reported. While being an IDP itself may not increase the chance of being raped, the environment of many collective centers may place girls at high risk as paths around collective centers and collective toilets are often poorly lit at night.

Safe Spaces for Children at the Collective Centers

Certain collective centers revealed bigger risks for children due to their specific location and character. Though some of the collective centers had playgrounds or stadiums for football, most do not provide safe spaces where children, especially younger ones, can play or spend time during the day. Many buildings, such as those originally built as factories or hospitals, were never intended to be used as living spaces in the first place and thus present various physical hazards to children left unattended. Common spaces often resemble construction sites. Staircases are crumbling and walls are falling apart due to their age and poor construction. The safety issues of these buildings have been largely neglected by the government, international organizations and the residents themselves who have failed to make the necessary renovations over the last 14 years that would make the areas safer for children to freely move around in.

In the yards of collective centers that are shared by hospitals, IDPs report that the ground is littered with used needles and the remains of surgical operations. In one center, parents reported that children had found amputated parts of a body in the yard that had not been properly disposed of. In these contexts, children are often not allowed to go out or around the building without adult supervision.

Risky Behaviors: Drug Use, Sexuality and HIV/AIDS

Use of Marijuana is universally present among boys at collective centers and it is often not considered as a drug or serious concern. Young people responded that most boys use or have used marijuana (*plani*), and though girls may smoke *plani*, it is much more rare. Most *plani* reportedly comes from the Gali or Svaneti regions and can be bought for as low as 20 lari for a matchbox full. Respondents also reported that many young guys use or have tried IV drugs. The choice of drug young people inject varies but includes Subotex, heroin and over the counter drugs. The choice of the drug may depend on the price, though Subotex was most frequently mentioned in our discussions.

Drug use and drug trade leads to an insecure environment. Needles are left in yards for children to find and play with and crime is reportedly attributed to groups of young people providing for their drug habit. The use of intravenous drugs has also been attributed to large numbers of adolescents being diagnosed with hepatitis B and C. The use of IV drug use also represents the secondary health risk to the children living in collective centers where the used needles are scattered in their yard and entrance corridors.

“Used needles are everywhere here. Sometimes our children play with those needles and prick their dolls.”

18 year old girl from collective center in Gori

“Most of the adolescents who have seen me have been diagnosed with hepatitis B and C, particularly those who have served in the army. There seems to be a catastrophic growth in Hepatitis cases here. This diagnosis is also widely present in the drug users, of course.”

Pediatrician in Zugdidi

While girls are expected to abstain from all sexual activity before marriage, respondents reported that many boys and young men do visit “saunas” and prostitutes from adolescence. It was also mentioned that some girls in the collective centers prostituted themselves to improve their economic situation. The taboo nature of discussing sexual health and behavior in Georgia made it difficult to gather information on these subjects. Prostitution may be in fact much more common, or the mentioned prostitutes may not exist at all but rather be the result of stigma placed on girls considered to be having any sexual relation outside of marriage.

Collective centers represent a significant group of youth and children vulnerable to becoming infected with HIV/AIDS. Most young people had heard of HIV/AIDS

through trainings or television, though the quality of their knowledge is not adequate and many people requested further information. Numerous risk factors for the spread of HIV/AIDS exist among these youth including the prevalence of IV drug use, and boys and young men frequenting commercial sex workers. These behaviors combined with the societal taboo around open discussions of sexual and reproductive health and poor knowledge regarding the spread and prognosis of the disease increase risk not only among males, but also among their wives. All children, youth and parents denied the existence of the disease in their community though no testing has been done. Due to the lack of access to information and opportunities to learn more about HIV/AIDS, some adolescents demonstrated relatively insufficient knowledge about the disease.

“I also heard that HIV is curable. I don’t know how it is spread or how to avoid it, but we don’t have this here.” 16 year old youth from a collective center in Gori

Girl Children and Youth

Girls living in collective centers have little opportunity to work or find entertainment outside of their community. They expressed that they usually occupy themselves by chatting among friends and by watching TV. Though many girls would like to work, they have less employment opportunities outside the home because many of these jobs are oriented towards hard labor. Some girls seemed to be more isolated than boys as they are expected to stay home more often to help their parents and are kept closer to the family than boys out of fears for their security. While boys may go to town or gather in places at night, girls who gather in this way may be stigmatized by others in the community as “bad girls.” This most likely means they would be considered to be taking drugs or alcohol or as being sexually open with boys. Parents also mentioned that girls in collective centers have a much easier time getting married than boys. Girls may be able to find a husband among the local population and move outside of the collective center, creating more space for themselves and their family. Boys, on the other hand, find it difficult to find enough space in their collective center apartment to bring a new wife into the family.

Child Marriage and Kidnapping

Child marriages occur in the collective centers. While more ‘child marriages’ occur from the age of 14, some girls have been married at as young as 12 years of age. One reason girls may get married at a young age is to try to escape or overcome poverty in their own family. Parents may also push girls to get married to alleviate stress related to the family economic and space limitations. Sexual activity outside of marriage is extremely taboo for girls, and such behavior can result in harsh treatment from the family, stigma and rejection from one’s community, and difficulty finding a husband later in life. Thus, as young people begin to desire intimate relations in adolescence, they may be pressured to get married in order that their desires will be fulfilled in a socially and culturally acceptable way. Early marriage may also be the result of forced ‘kidnapping’ of girls for marriage. Marriage at such a young age can have numerous negative effects on the health and development of girls as they may be forced to leave

school for their new life in the home and may experience numerous complications from pregnancy.

“There are a lot of cases of early marriages at the community centers. Several years ago I had a 12 years old patient who was married. She got pregnant 4 times but could not maintain it. Finally, we had to make an urgent operation and she will never become a biological mother.” Gynecologist in Zugdidi

“I had girl in my class. She was 14 years old and pregnant. Sometimes they try to escape from the poverty and getting married is the way they do this” Key informant from a collective centre in Tskneti.

The occurrence of kidnapping for the purpose of marriage is still a significant protection concern at collective centers. There appear to be two major types of ‘kidnapping’ - girls are either kidnapped against their will or youth plan to elope in order to marry each other against their parents’ will. The second case may be classified as a ‘kidnapping’ in order to release the girl or the family from responsibility. The first case is clearly a violation of girls’ rights. Although this practice is illegal and not condoned by many parts of Georgian society, especially in Tbilisi, it is still occurring in some communities due to strong cultural beliefs and traditions. The psychological trauma of being ‘kidnapped’ for marriage can be very significant for girls depending on the reaction of her family. If the girl returns to the family after having been forced to spend the night out of the home, the girl and her family may be stigmatized by the community, as spending the night out of the house is automatically equated with having had sexual relation regardless of the reality of the situation. Thus, pressure for the girl to stay with the guy who abducted her may come from her parents, siblings, or the greater community who wish to avoid shame and conflict. In other families, the girl’s wishes may be considered and she will be allowed to return home if she does not want to stay with the man.

*“It is common belief here that once a girl turns 15 she is ready for marriage... and she will definitely be kidnapped. Those from our center who have gotten married early were mainly taken by the local boys”
17 year old IDP girl in Tskaltubo*

Conclusions and Recommendations for Ensuring Children’s Protection in the Design and Implementation of the National Strategy for IDPs’

In designing and implementing the National Strategy for IDPs, it is essential for the government and all thematic working groups to consider the potential ways that the protection environment of children and youth may be compromised as well as the ways in which the future of IDP children and youth can be strengthened through this process. The strategy should be analyzed through a child focused lens to ensure that children’s rights, psychological and social conditions, educational opportunities and environment are protected in each sectoral focus of the National Strategy; Legal, Housing, Economic and Social. Implementation of the National Strategy in all these sectors should be realized in accordance with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, specifically regarding the entitlement of children to special protection and assistance according to their needs as per principle 4.2. To ensure for IDP children’s protection in the implementation of the National Strategy for IDPs we recommend that the government, in partnership with engaged international and local organizations, mobilize to alleviate the conditions of vulnerability highlighted in this rapid assessment and commit to restoring IDP Georgian children’s dignified conditions of life by:

- Protecting children from various forms of violence, abuse and exploitation
- Protecting the rights of the child as laid out in the Convention of the Rights of the Child and by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
- Protecting children through putting positive policies into action that help create conditions conducive to the survival, development and the thriving of the child

Given the living conditions in the collective centers and the social vulnerabilities many IDP children face, ensuring the protection of children in this National Strategy should be considered as an opportunity and a duty- not only a political exercise. The benchmarks for fulfilling these obligations should not be merely to meet basic needs but to enable the conditions for children and young people to develop their assets (whether financial, educational, social or otherwise) and thrive. In this way, IDP children and youth will grow in an environment where they may realize their livelihoods in healthy ways, as opposed to those which are risky or illegal. An appropriate benchmark to strive for in protecting IDP children in Georgia through the National Strategy should be the social assistance provided to those below Georgia’s

poverty line only if this assistance truly aids these young people in obtaining the rights laid out in the CRC as well as ensures dignified conditions and a protective environment as per the above listed principles.

These general goals will be attained by ensuring that children's protection is an underlying principle, a thread, running through all considerations and decisions made by all thematic working groups. While the question, 'How could this decision harm these children and their future?' may seem simple and obvious, it must be asked directly or such issues risk being veiled by other interests, political, economic or otherwise. Most importantly, as the National Strategy is developed, it is essential that the government and other parties recognize that IDP children and youth do, in fact, face specific protection concerns and vulnerabilities which are different from those of the general population:

- Moving children from their homes and schools in the process of closing collective centers poses great psychological and social challenges to children as they fear losing their friends and are uncertain regarding the conditions of their new schools or when and where they will be asked to move.
- IDP children and youth, especially in the Zugdidi region, place themselves at risk as they maintain their social contacts with friends, families and relatives and participate in sustaining their families land and livelihoods in the Gali region.
- IDP children often face stigma from the local population. This prevents their ability to integrate and may lead to greater social isolation in their preferences with regards to their choice of friends or schools-in-exile.
- The protection environment of IDP children has been, even if unintentionally, by political goals and psychological needs of the older generation of IDPs and the government in order to maintain or recreate the vision of return and 'patriotic' values in the younger generation. The failure to make necessary improvements in housing conditions serves to prevent IDPs from becoming too settled. In this way they might always be ready for return and will not lose their desire to do so. IDP children may have been further isolated from the local population by enrolling them in schools in exile. By upholding these institutions, the Abkhazian government structures and jobs are maintained in exile, despite the lack of appropriate educational support for children.

The protection of children in collective centers will also be strengthened by confronting the numerous vulnerabilities faced by both IDP and non-IDP children in Georgia. While the National Strategy might prefer to address only the protection concerns of IDP children which are fundamentally different than those of the general population, issues such as child marriage and IV drug use are nonetheless important and should be given new attention at all levels of government, society and international NGOs. UNICEF, through their commitment to child protection, might play a leading role in helping to initiate dialogue on such sensitive issues.

The implementation of the strategy, for the sake of success, transparency and the planning of programs, should also be informed by sound research which demonstrates that IDPs concerns and needs are being met. Certain statements in the Draft version of National Strategy for IDPs might be reconsidered as they seem to be more opinion based rather than evidence based. Acting under the assumption of these being true may further compromise IDP children's protection:

- *“The social capital of IDPs primarily covers informal networks comprised of IDPs themselves, and therefore, though these networks do play an important social role, would not be conducive to integrating into the wider social fabric, leading to continuing isolation and lack of success in a broader social context”* (National Strategy Toward Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Georgia (draft), 2006). Social contact and networks are formed on all levels of society by people who have things in common – especially along class, religion, ethnicity etc – and such networks are beneficial not only for the social role they have but in their role in livelihoods support and development and as a safety net in times of need. Furthermore IDP networks can not be considered to be only between each other, but many IDPs have established networks with the greater communities in which they live.
- Children and adolescents being hindered in acquiring quality education, *“is related to still existing segregated schooling for IDPs, where there is a lower quality standard, worse conditions and equipment ”* (National Strategy Toward Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Georgia (draft), 2006). This fact is not recognized by existing data on the schools in exile but on informal observation. Research should be conducted to establish whether this is in fact true and to establish why assistance in training IDP teachers, the renovation of schools, and the provision of adequate materials has not yet happened.

Integration of IDPs into the general society should not mean the closing of all IDP structures (buildings, schools, etc), but should aim at improving material and technical support to enhance the capacities already present in IDP communities in education, health, etc. The government should help to enhance the capacity of IDPs involved in all sectors through more opportunities and trainings so that IDPs can assist in serving their communities now and when they return. It is thus important that they not only receive aid, but also play an integral part in delivering services.

In the Implementation of the National Strategy, the resolution of the housing issue is most critical. As the conditions in collective centers vary greatly so do the desires of children and families living in the centers with regards to whether they would like to privatize their own ownership over their apartments/rooms or whether they would like to seek new and improved accommodations. For this reason, the principled approach stressed in the governments National Strategy is critical as it includes commitments to “Free and Voluntary Decisions by IDPs” and “Dialogue with IDPs and their Participation in Decision Making.” The possibility must be left open that the planned phase one and phase two of the strategy may be altered if these are in conflict

with the above mentioned principles. Specifically, there is concern that the closing of collective centers in phase one, *“in some cases due to urgent investment opportunities”* (National Strategy toward Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Georgia (draft), 2006), may violate commitments to the above principles. In protecting children and their families in this process, economic and political interests related to investor opportunities should be understood and monitored in order that financial interests do not trump IDPs’ rights. The government should research and prove the adequacy of the sums of money provided to IDPs beforehand, in order to ensure that they will not be economically pressured to seek housing in already underdeveloped rural regions where education, health services and job opportunities are more difficult to access. Regardless of the amount of monetary compensation offered to the IDPs, it is essential that the government honor its’ commitments to the principles outlined in the National Strategy so that no collective centers will be forcibly emptied and so that IDPs in each collective center will be consulted and given their right to participate in this process. The government should also make note of past violations of IDP rights regarding the forced removal from buildings and make commitments that the current National Strategy will not result in further forced displacement.

There is a risk that closing the collective centers and seeking for their integration into the larger society will disperse concentrations of IDPs and leave them lost among the rest of Georgia’s vulnerable and poor. After the closure of a number of collective centers in Batumi and Tbilisi, the whereabouts of most of the families who had left the centers is unknown, making it difficult to monitor their progress and understand the real effects of the ‘privatization’ process on their lives. The lack of knowledge regarding the conditions of IDPs living in private accommodation throughout the country is due to the hidden nature of this population. As collective centres are closed, the rest of the IDP population risks becoming equally hidden and unknowable in the long term. It is also important, therefore, to monitor the movement and conditions of IDPs throughout the implementation of the National Strategy in order to evaluate the success of the National Strategy and ensure that IDP children’s specific protection concerns are recognized and addressed. Thus, as the closure of the collective centers is expressed as a primary aim in the National Strategy, this process must be analyzed regarding the potential positive and negative impact it will have on children’s rights, protection and psychosocial development, as the policies being formulated now will greatly affect the trajectory of the lives of IDP children and youth.

Recommendations for Ensuring Children’s Protection in the National Strategy

- **Technical Assistance in Implementing the National Strategy for IDPs**

Ensure that child protection experts are included in all Thematic Working Groups –Economic, Social, Legal and Housing- in order to assist those implementing the National Strategy in applying a child protection lens to all decisions. Ensure that the implementation of the national strategy is monitored and evaluated both with regards to the principled approach outlined in the draft as well as to the actual programs in order uphold the

rights of children in this process. Monitoring and Evaluation is essential to ensure accountability to principles set forth in the current draft. In ensuring that the principles in this strategy are adhered to in the implementation of specific programs and that the rights of IDP children and their families are not violated in this process, it is recommended that funding and technical assistance be allocated to assist local IDP organizations or an appropriate international organization to ensure the government is accountable to their commitments. Key indicators based on the strategies principles should be developed and the implementation of the strategy should be independently monitored and evaluated especially with regards to participation and the process of ‘privatization’ and allocation of new housing for the displaced.

- **Shift from “Waiting in Limbo” to Informed and Empowered Participation**

Children and youth in collective centers are at present living in great uncertainty as to where they will live or attend school. They wait in limbo wondering when the government will ask or force them to leave, where they will be able to afford to go and whether their friends will be there or not. The government should undertake campaigns to inform children, youth and their families immediately of the on going processes regarding the “National Strategy for IDPs.” More dialogue should be sought with young people in order to consider their views on the strategy’s housing policies. A more participatory approach is essential in order to abide by the principles laid out in the Draft of the National Strategy for IDPs, to give young IDPs a greater sense of control over their lives and in order for the sectors to gain more insight into how young people view the potential threats these policies might pose to their lives.

- **National Advocacy Program for Overcoming Stigma and Social Isolation**

Strategic Advocacy campaigns should be undertaken at a national level in order to help the general population overcome their stigma towards IDPs. Regardless of policy decisions regarding housing and other social services for IDPs in the National strategy, integration will not be possible as long as IDPs are stigmatized. Such stigma will lead to the general society isolating the IDP communities as well as the IDPs preferring such isolation to avoid such stigma. Advocacy campaigns should also inform the general public regarding the national strategy in order that there are no misconception regarding what assistance is being given and why this process is important in building a stronger, more stable Georgian society.

- **Increase the Protection of Child and Youth IDPs from the Gali Region**

More research should be conducted regarding the movement of young IDPs between Gali and Zugdidi, the dangers they face, the economic and social motivations for returning, and youth’s involvement in the political economy

along this border (between Abkhazia and Samegrelo). As collective centers are closed, adequate options and compensation must be provided in order that families are not subjected to 'economically forced return' into an insecure environment.

- **Health and Education**

Initiate Campaigns to disseminate information to IDP families and children to ensure that they are aware and capable of taking advantage of existing social services and programs from which children and youth might benefit. If the current health care policies are truly sufficient in covering the needs of those IDPs who are most poor, then assisting these families to access social services will help alleviate the depletion of household assets, stress on social networks and accumulation of debt in families faced with acute or chronic health needs.

More effort should be made to make education more economically accessible for IDP children living in collective centers. Not only physical access to schools but economic access to obtaining a proper education, such as improving school attendance and access to adequate study materials, should be provided. Though school fees are not officially charged to IDP children for primary or secondary school, numerous economic barriers still exist to gaining an education. Targeted delivery of educational materials and financial assistance to especially vulnerable children (including orphans, the extremely poor, those in single parent households, and disabled children) will better ensure that the economic situation of the child does not inhibit his or her opportunity to develop and learn.

Negotiations should be undertaken to quickly ensure that Abkhazian authorities stop violating the rights of Georgian Children to study in their native language in order that their education may improved and they will have greater potential to study later at higher institutions.

The real situation regarding children's quality of education and their psychosocial needs must be better understood and be given priority over political motivations when generating a policy regarding the 'schools in exile.' If the purposeful desegregation of schools is initiated special attention must be given to this process. This issue should not remain as a discussion within the social working group but be given its own priority working group composed of experts in education, psychosocial health and child protection, and IDPs who will be affected by the process. Additionally, the recommendations regarding desegregation in the IDP Education Profile Review in Georgia from 2003 should be considered.

Further Recommendations for the Protection of All Georgia's Children and Youth

- Intra-Venous drug use and frequenting commercial sex workers raise boy youth's, and eventually girl youth's, risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases (including other STDs and Hepatitis). Because boys and male youth are reportedly engaged in such high risk behaviors, more efforts should be made to inform the young population as to the risks and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. Specific campaigns should address the dangers of sharing needles and condom use with prostitutes so male youth prevent their own infection and prevent bringing such diseases home to their families and children.
- Traditional attitudes which restrict children's access to information regarding risky behaviors and options for protection put children at risk and should be questioned and confronted. Many issues related to the protection of children and youth in Georgian society, especially related to sexual and reproductive health, are taboo to discuss due to cultural and religious traditions. Open discussions on these and other sensitive protection issues must be encouraged and facilitated by local and international partners in health, education and social services. By refusing to enter into such discussions, children and youth will lack the knowledge and capacity to ensure their protection against health problems associated with risky drug use and sexual behavior.
- Advocacy campaigns should be initiated in order to address harmful attitudes, customs and practices including the kidnapping of girls against their will for marriage and the sanction of child marriage by the society and by the church. Public awareness and implementation of the national laws on the legal age for marriage and laws prohibiting kidnapping for marriage should be strengthened. Dialogue between all levels of society including the government, the church, health professionals, families and communities should be initiated to discuss the ways such practices harm the health and development of children, especially girls. Media campaigns paired with behavior change strategies may be especially useful in helping to change socio-cultural attitudes that uphold these practices. In these campaigns, the practice of kidnapping for marriage should be discouraged publicly. They should also encourage social awareness of the violation of the girls' rights in such cases so that her acceptance and reintegration into her family may be accepted among other community members.
- The traditional roles of 'Dzveli Biji' and 'Kurdi' remain embedded in Georgia society and are related to groups of male youth engaging in criminal activities. Though these issues are rarely talked about or confronted at the policy level, these phenomena should be explored as such groups are one of the various forces competing to harvest youth's valuable assets. Gaining a better understanding of such groups in Georgian society and reaching out to them may help build their positive potential and deter them from engaging in illegal and risky activities which might further destabilize their community.

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Annex A – Youth Researchers Experiences

A key aspect of this Rapid Assessment was the inclusion of sixteen young people living in Tbilisi and Zugdidi (see list of youth researchers below) in the development of the research tools and collection of data in the field. The use of youth researchers to collect the data in the field allowed the assessment to capitalize on the rapport young people have with one another when discussing sensitive issues, hopefully leading to richer data. This also gave young people with previous experience and commitments to local NGOs the opportunity to work on their research skills and build their own capacity to carry out such research in the future. Overall the youth expressed that they were proud to contribute to an assessment that might help to raise the voices and needs of IDP youth and hoped the data would be shared with different agencies, stakeholders and government ministries.

In cooperation with the Norwegian Refugee Council's peer-educator program and the IDP Women's Organization "Consent," youth active in these organizations were contacted about the assessment and invited to attend group discussions held in both Tbilisi and Zugdidi where we informed them of the purpose and protocols of the assessment and invited them to participate. Youth were eventually chosen based on their past experience in research, their motivation and time availability. Attempts were made to include both IDP and local youth as well as to build teams of youth from different university faculties and those working with a diverse group of local organizations. After the selection of a Zugdidi based team and one based in Tbilisi, each with 4 male and 4 female youth, the 16 youth attended a five day training in Tbilisi. The first two days provided them with the theoretical background in research methods, livelihoods and child protection necessary to carry out the field work. The last two days of the training were devoted to practical exercises focused on site selection, developing the skills needed to make contacts in the field, conducting interviews and focus group discussions and recording their data. Additionally, the research tools were shared with the youth as part of the training, during which time they adapted the questions to make them more appropriate and understandable as well as developed their own research themes. The Tbilisi team developed questions for young people whose collective centers had been privatized and for those who expected their collective centers to be closed in the near future. The Zugdidi team, recognizing the important links young people in collective centers have with families and land in the Gali region, developed questions to try to better understand the dangers young people face when temporarily returning to sustain their livelihoods. Including these local youth in the rapid assessment process was essential in trying to uncover key issues such as these, which may have otherwise been left out of the assessment. The teams then collected data in the field over a period of two and a half weeks, with each

of the two teams visiting nine collective centers and conducting numerous key-informant interviews on the two themes just mentioned.

After the data collection was completed and analysis had begun, the researchers were invited back to Tbilisi to exchange their views regarding the key-findings and discuss the difficulties and the benefits of their experiences. This final meeting proved to be a key step in the research process as the youth revealed critical aspects of the findings which were not as evident to the UNICEF consultant and researchers from the NRC. As this rapid assessment was the first time most of the youth had engaged in such an intensive research process it is understandable that there was a gap between what the youth observed in the field, and what was actually recorded on paper and reported. Thus, the final meeting was essential to ensuring the validity of the findings. Adaptations of this methodology which involve youth as enumerators, especially in gathering qualitative data, should devote more than one day to this process if time allows.

This exchange was also useful for the young people to share their experiences regarding what they saw and how they felt in the field. Many of them expressed the shock they felt in seeing the dire conditions in the collective centers. This experience was quite emotional for a number of them and discussing these experiences in the group helped them to realize that their feelings were normal and appropriate in such conditions. The youth also mentioned the psychological influence of collective center conditions on the personal level. One girl stated: “I was on a very bad mood when going back home...Once I was thinking that maybe I will jump from the minibus on the way home from Tskaltubo to Zugdidi, the conditions were so dire, and hopeless...But I am sure that now I am more strong personally and can listen to the people telling terrible stories without tears.” The Tbilisi team was also shocked by the unbearable conditions and some outcomes of the poverty, which they had not expected to see in their capital city – such as illiteracy among children. Efforts were made to support the young researchers to talk about their experiences and feelings during the data collection and monitoring process. This should always be a priority in studies using youth as researchers as they may be very sensitive and emotionally affected by the situations they encounter in the field day after day.

Involvement in this assessment was also found to build the capacity of these youth, many of whom were already active in working with IDPs, by both enhancing their knowledge of IDP issues and their abilities to research these issues and advocate for change. Many of the youth reported that they acquired valuable skills in interacting with people, leading the focus groups, conducting interviews, and gaining theoretical foundations for the methodologies of the study. The teams mentioned how challenging it was to get the residents to participate in the focus groups and interviews. The young people in Tbilisi stated that some collective centers refused to take part in the study, especially those who had previously received attention from NGOs. Others were reluctant, claiming they had participated in many similar assessments and were tired of not seeing results in their community. The researchers showed very good skill in coping with these attitudes and often found some willing participants by explaining, in more detail, the purpose of the study and by making it clear that they were not promising any material assistance.

Both the Tbilisi and Zugdidi teams expressed that being involved in the assessment gave them the will and enthusiasm to continue to engage with young IDPs and to think about

new initiatives to assist them. From the Tbilisi team, lawyers from “Consent” were able to identify legal issues regarding the housing and privatization process which they were unaware of before the research. They also expressed that working on this assessment has given them more confidence and a greater technical capacity with which to continue their work in giving legal counseling to IDPs. Researchers from the Zugdidi team stated that being part of this research process gave them new skills and new friends. This motivated them to form a new Youth Union, “Abkha,” which is aimed at supporting contact between Georgian and Abkhazian youth over the phone and internet for the purpose of dialogue and peace building.

Annex B - List of Youth Researchers

Zugdidi Based Team

Name	Age/Sex	Ngo Affiliation	Faculty or Profession
David Logua	21 M	NRC Peer Educator/Trainer	History of Diplomacy and International Relations
Irakli Tabagua	23 M	NRC Peer Educator/Trainer	History of Diplomacy and International Relations
Lado Tsakhakaia	19 M	Consent	Faculty of Economics 3rd Year student
Irakli Bagaturia	21 M	Consent/ Media Samegrelo	Political Science
Lika Rogava	19 F	Consent /Media Samegrelo	Faculty of Foreign Languages, English,
Ana Kuchua	19 F	NRC Peer educator/Mnatobi	Faculty of Law
Miranda Jobava	23 F	Media Samegrelo	Faculty of Law
Laneta Rodonea	28 F	Atinati	Foreign Languages, English

Tbilisi Based Team

Name	Age/Sex	Ngo Affiliation	Faculty or Profession
Nukri Kvitia	21/M	NRC Peer Educator “Consent”	Economist (accountant)
George Gelashvili	21/M	NRC Peer Educator	Faculty of Law
Levani Arkhania	24/M	“Consent”	Economist
Shava Jologua	21/M	NRC Peer Educator	Foreign Languages

Roza Iaradangulieva	29/F	NRC Peer Educator	Psychology
Nana Gogokhia	21/F	NRC Peer Educator “Consent”	Faculty of Law
Tamuna Ketsbaia	21/F	“Consent”	Faculty of Law
Tea Shonia	24/F	NRC Peer Educator “Consent”	Faculty of Law

Annex C - Focus Group and Key Informant Interview Question Guide

Date of Visit: / / Young Women Young Men Parents	Interviewed by: Notes Taken By: Discussion Recorded? Yes / No	Name of Collective Center: Or Institution/Organization: Conditions in Collective Center? Worst, Poor, Middle, Better, Best	
Town or City Name:	Region:	Urban / Rural	
Initials of Participants	Sex of Participant: Male or Female	Age of Participant:	(For Parents) Ages/Sex of Children? (ex. 4M,9F,17M)
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
9.			
10.			
11.			

12.			
<p>How were the focus group participants selected?</p> <p>What constraints did you have in getting accurate data?</p> <p>Comments on group dynamics and participation? Did one person dominate the group? Were all participants engaged?</p>			
<p>Personal Observations: Where was the Focus group held? Was anyone present who was not a participant (parents, leaders, etc)? Were respondents comfortable and open? Reserved?</p>			

Protocol for Oral informed consent for Focus Group Discussions and Interviews.

(Informed consent for all data collection activities will be requested orally and enumerators/facilitators are obliged to read this to all participants.)

Before beginning the Focus Group Discussion or interview introduce yourself and your team and briefly explain the Purpose of your visit.

Then read the following: “As you may or may not know, the Georgian government is in the process of developing a national strategy on IDPs related to issues of shelter, health, education, economics, and IDP legal process. UNICEF and the Norwegian Refugee Committee is conducting a Rapid Assessment in order to better understand the livelihoods and protection concerns of IDP children, youth and women living in the collective centers. There is currently very little information available on the specific concerns of young people and we are hoping that this research might be used to voice the concerns of young people to those responsible for the national strategy and capable of instituting programs and further research with IDP youth.

“Participation in this Focus Group Discussion (or Interview) is completely voluntary.

“Participation also has no connection with being included in a specific assistance program

“However UNICEF and NRC hope that the information gathered will help organizations and the Georgian government better target their programs and the national strategy for IDPs towards the needs and concerns on children and youth. Though our report of our findings might be shared with other international agencies and/or government ministries, we are not collecting names or other identifying information, so everybody participating will remain anonymous.

The discussion will take about 2 hours. First we will have an hour to discuss the problems and concerns related to the protection and livelihoods of young people in your center. These questions will be generally about education, health, work and safety. Next we will complete a short written questionnaire. For the last 30 minutes we will finish the discussion of your attitudes towards issues such as return, integration, isolation, stigma, and ask for solutions to some of the problems IDP youth and children face in collective centers. (Omit this when requesting consent for interviews, and inform them of the interview process and approximate duration)

“You may choose to answer or not answer any questions that I ask and to terminate the survey at any time.

“However we hope that everyone will participate and share in this discussion- so for those who like to speak a lot, please share your views – but also give space to others to share their concerns with us.

“Would you like to participate in this Focus Group Discussion (or Interview)?

Is there anyone who would not like to participate?

“If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them now. “

“Ok Let’s Begin!

Important Reminders

Sometimes the discussion may be difficult to start, so use your skills in probing and re-shaping questions in ways, which may be easier for the group to understand or relate to; however, beware of questions which might lead the groups to certain answers.

Though yes or no answers may be used to confirm the presence of some phenomena in the community, the discussion should not be limited to yes’s and no’s. Thus, while many questions are asked to try to understand whether certain issues exist in the community, if something interesting comes up in the discussion, remember to **ask the respondent to give specific examples or tell a story** to deepen our understanding.

Certain members of the group may tend to dominate the discussion, especially older youth who may be more confident. It is a skill to develop the balance between listening to these vocal participants and making them feel valued and at times cutting them short or asking them to wait and give a chance to others to respond. Some people have a tendency to begin speaking right when you are finished while others may need a second to speak. If one person is dominating, you might tell the group that

you will give them a few seconds to think about each question and then try to get a sense of which people might contribute and then choose people to speak. Sometimes you might want to call on certain participants who have not yet spoken.

After certain responses you might want to reflect the answer to the whole group to see if they have anything to add to the response or whether there is something they particularly agree with or disagree with in the response – this will give the facilitator and note-taker a sense of whether this response was specific to one person or widely accepted and agreed upon by all participants. This degree of group concordance in responses should be recorded by the note-taker (perhaps by noting that many people were giving signs of agreeing either with their voice or shaking their heads etc.... also where a response was not widely agreed upon or confirmed the note-taker should note that ‘one participant’ stated ____).

The first part of the discussion should take around one hour. Be careful to give time to each topic to develop rich and deep discussions; also be sure to move along at a consistent pace in order to cover all topics. Please use the question topics in the order given as they begin with lighter topics to make the group comfortable with communicating and volunteering information, and then move to more sensitive topics. As we have discussed there are many more questions in this guide than can be asked and thoroughly discussed in the time given. Suggestions are given as to which questions should be asked in which focus groups and to which key informants. As the data collection process progresses and you start to see patterns in the data you are collecting regarding certain themes, you might not need to spend as much time on these topics and instead put effort into exploring more deeply themes around which questions still remain.

For each topic which generates interesting discussions the facilitator should ask them to **propose solutions for the given problems** or ask them **how they cope** with this issue on a daily basis. Also try to understand **where young people go for support** with the given issue (parents, police, health care workers etc) in order to locate key informants. Finally ask **whether the youth at the collective center has received any assistance from the government or NGOs with the issue and what this assistance has been.**

Note-takers, remember to record what is said as accurately as possible, word for word, especially for interesting quotes, remembering to specify the age of the respondent.

After the focus group has ended, remember to thank the group and ask them if they have any questions for you. Give them the space and time to express their concerns and get information from you, as they have given us so much of their time and effort.

Last, when finished, make sure to conduct brief interviews specific young people and parents who showed a strong willingness to participate or exhibited special knowledge of a topic of interest that might be easier to discuss privately. This is a good time to gather individual’s personal experiences and stories on sensitive themes.

Questions Guide for Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews

Part I: Around 70 minutes

The time spent on each topic/theme should be limited so that all topics are covered. The note-taker should be strictly aware of the time, and notify the facilitator when it is time to move on to the next topic. If a discussion is especially interesting and generating new information allow the participants to finish their points.

Introductions: ~ 5 minutes

After finishing your own introduction of the purpose of the research and the informed consent, have members of the group go around and say their names and ages while the note-taker records this information.

Basic Concerns (Free-listing): ~ 10 minutes

Ask both questions to all groups though begin with question specific to the gender of the group. These concerns may be different for different ages in the group so try to get responses from both younger and older participants.

***What are the biggest concerns facing girls living in the IDP collective centers right now?

***What are the biggest concerns facing boys living in the IDP collective centers right now?

***What kind of problems have you or someone in your family experienced with IDP registration? Birth registration (for parents)? Could you explain the problems and the barriers to getting registered?

***What kinds of risky activities are young people involved in here? Can you describe some examples of risky activities IDP children and youth in collective centers are involved in?

***Do you think the concerns and problems of young IDPs living in collective centers are different than for local youth? What are the differences if any?

The following questions may be asked if time allows, though the information can also be gathered through good observation.

Are there safe spaces here for children to play? Where do they play? (Observe the area and make comments)

How do children under 12 spend most of their time during the day? What do they do for fun?

Differences between Girls?

Boys?

How do youth 12-25 spend most of the time during the day? What do they do for fun?

Differences between: Girls?

Boys?

How do they spend time at night? Boys? Girls?

Children in special need of protection: ~ 5-10 minutes

(Focus on these questions most deeply with Parents)

***Are some children or families in this community more vulnerable or at-risk than others? Who are these children and why are they more vulnerable? What are the main causes of vulnerability for children? (If they answer “poverty”, ask “why are some children more poor than others?”)

Are there any orphans in this collective center or children/young people separated from their parents?

Are there any groups of children or youth living together without adults? (If so, visit this group after the focus group discussion to talk to them)

***Are there any children in this collective center who are mentally or physically disabled? What kinds of disabilities do they have? Do they attend school? Do they get any special assistance?

(Ask for specific examples and perhaps follow up with families after the focus group discussion)

***Have children from this collective center been placed in institutions such as orphanages, homes for mentally or physically disabled children or been taken to prison? What is your opinion of the care at these institutions? (If yes, have them tell of a specific example or story of why the child was sent to this institution – which institution? This could make an interesting site visit also.)

*****Education: ~ 10 minutes**

(Focus on these questions most deeply with Parents and Teachers)

Do you (or your children) attend a local public school or a school in-exile? (note the number in the group who attend each) What do you like about the school? What don't you like about it?

What kinds of direct or indirect costs are there for families to send their children to school (transport, books, clothes payment to teachers, etc)?

***Do you or any children in the center, of school age, not attend primary school? High-School?

***Why aren't these children going to school?

(Give specific examples; note ages and follow up with these children in questions below))

Do children who are enrolled in school go regularly or miss/skip many days?

***What are some reasons girls and boys might be absent from school?

(Ask for specific examples)

Do you know of any young people in the center who have dropped out of school?

(Get specific examples)

***What are some reasons boys drop out of school?

***What are some reasons girls drop out of school?

Has anyone here stopped going to school? When did you stop attending and why?

How do you spend your time now?

*****For Schools in-Exile**

***If you (or your children) attend a school in-exile, what are some of the reasons you prefer to send your child there, rather than to a local public school? What are some of the disadvantages for the students at these schools?

***If you had the choice would you rather go (send your children) to the local public school or a school in-exile?

***If your school in exile closes, do you have fears about going (or sending your children) to the local school? What are they? What makes you happy about going to the local school?

Health and Risks: ~ 10 minutes

(Ask the first questions primarily to Parents and Health Care Workers)

What are the most common health problems young children face?

What are the most common health problems young people face in the collective center?

When you or your children get sick what do you do? Can you afford the treatment and medicine? Is treatment is free? What kind of costs are there? What do you do if you can not afford the costs? Are any families here in debt due to health problems?

(Ask the HIV and drug questions to children/youth and Health Care Workers)

*****HIV, Drugs and Sexual Behavior**

Do young people have sex before marriage? Girls? Guys? At what age do they start?

Do young guys ever go to prostitutes?

Have you ever heard of HIV/AIDS or STDs (sexually transmitted diseases)? How did you learn about it? How is this virus passed on? How can you prevent it? (note whether only one person seems to know this information or whether the group as a whole is informed)

What percentage of young people in the collective center take drugs? What kinds of drugs do they use? What about heroin? Where do young people get these drugs? (Tell that this is only for our research as most will not want to give this information)

Do young people drink alcohol? What kinds of problems does alcohol cause in your community, with young people or in families?

*****Livelihoods: ~ 15 minutes**

(Ask these questions primarily to children, youth and parents)

(When talking about work and jobs, it is important to try to capture the extent to which young people are involved in securing their households economic situation, not just looking at jobs in markets, factories etc but also working with parents in the home, going out to land to harvest fruit, nuts etc – All kinds of work should be explored and considered)

What is your parent's attitude towards you working?

Do you or any of your friends in the collective center have a job? What kind of job is it? (Get specific examples, ages, jobs hours worked, salary paid)

Name all the kinds of jobs boys usually do here? What kinds of work do boys do in the summer? During the school year?

Name all the kinds of jobs girls do here? What kinds of work do boys do in the summer? During the school year?

When, if ever, are young people absent from school in order to work?

Are there any jobs young people in this community do that are dangerous or risky? What are these jobs and the risks? How old are those kids working in these jobs?

*****Trafficking Risk**

Do you want to stay and work in your town after school or would you rather go somewhere else? Where?

As parents, would you support your son or daughter going abroad for work? Do your parents encourage you to stay here or to search for work elsewhere?

Have any IDP children or youth you know left the country to seek work elsewhere? (Get Specific Examples)

Boys? How old are they? Where have they gone? What work do they do? Do they send money home?

Girls? How old are they? Where have they gone? What work do they do? Do they send money home?

Do you know any young people who have been mistreated after they went for work abroad? Has anyone you know been subjected to forced labor? Have any girls or young women been forced or coerced into prostitution either in Georgia or abroad? (If so, get specific examples)

*****Security and Violence: ~ 10 minutes**

(Ask these questions to children/youth, parents and to community leaders, teachers and Police)

Perhaps explain to the group that even though these questions are really sensitive and rarely discussed in Georgian society, that it is really important if they could try to talk openly about these issues so that we can better understand the security issues faced by young people in the collective centers. Make sure to tell them that they don't need to say people's names, but only give examples, where appropriate, of how these issues are affecting their collective center.

(For parents and key informants)

What are the security or safety threats for children in the collective center? Are there any places that are unsafe for children/youth? How are these threats different for girls and boys?

What are your main fears for the safety of your girls? Why?

What are your main fears for the safety of your boys? Why?

Have there been incidents recently, where children/youth have been victims of physical or sexual violence?

(For children and youth)

Do you feel safe at this collective center? Why? Why not? Is there anywhere you would be afraid to go?

What types of violence have you been exposed to? What types of violence have friends of yours been exposed to? Do you know anyone who experiences violence in their home? (Explain)

Who causes violence in your community? When and why does violence occur?

What kinds of weapons do young guys carry in your collective center? Why do youth carry weapons (knives guns etc)?

Do young boys or girls form gangs in collective centers? What kinds of activities are these gangs involves in? Please explain how to us about these gangs?

How are economics and livelihoods related to violence in your community?

What kinds of illegal activities are young people involved with in your communities? Crime? Drugs? Prostitution?

Has anyone you known been abducted or kidnapped? Please explain.

If you experience violence in the community where do you go for help? Where would you report incidents of violence? What types of violence would you report to the police?

*****Gender Issues: ~ 10 minutes**

(These questions are primarily for girls, and female health care workers, though some may be asked to the boys and to the parents.)

Perhaps explain to the group that even though these questions are really sensitive and rarely discussed in Georgian society, that it is really important if they could try to talk openly about these issues so that we can better understand the specific issues faced by girls in the collective centers.

What kinds of physical or mental problems do girls experience in the collective centers? Do girls face and specific physical or psychological risks in the community?

What are the main problems of safety and security for women and girls in this community?

Is anywhere in the community where the girls feel unsafe, either alone or with friends? Why do they feel unsafe there? What are the dangers they face?

Can you move freely at all times of day and night? What are your restrictions? Why are you restricted? (especially for girls)

Without naming a specific person, have you known anyone in the collective center that has been a victim of sexual violence or forced to have sex against her will? If you do know someone who was raped, how and where did it happened? Can you be specific about what happened in these cases?

If no one speaks up, ask whether they think sexual violence and rape are problems for IDP girls in collective centers. If they say yes, ask them why they think this is a problem.

Is there anyone in the community girls can go to talk or for treatment if they feel unsafe or have faced sexual violence? Who would girls go to if they were victims of sexual violence?

(Get a specific person's name in order to follow up for key informant interviews)

Are there any cases you know of where girls got pregnant but didn't want to be? What did they do? (Did they get married or have an abortion etc) Can talk about this process?

Are there any cases you know of where girls or women are having sex with men in order to earn money? Without citing names, can you be specific with examples.

At what age do girls get married? What is a good age to get married? Why? Are there any cases or girls getting married at a young age? How old? Do you think it is good to get married at a young age? Why or why not?

Does kidnapping for marriage (against the girls wishes) exist in this community? Have you known anyone affected by this? At what age? Can you describe this process? How does this affect the girl's life? Give some specific examples of how this happens and whether the girls in the group are worried by this as a concern or not.

Part II: 30 Minutes

Hand out the written questionnaires and pens to the participants and go over the instructions with the group.

Part III: 30 Minutes

Child and Youth Participation

What opportunities are there for children and youth to be involved in decision making in the community? Do you feel young people's views are listened to, respected and considered by elder leaders in the community? Can you explain why or why not?

Are there examples of clashing views or values between young people and their parents?

What kinds of community activities do you participate in?

Social Isolation

"Many people say that social isolation and stigma is a major problem faced by IDPs living in collective centers. We want to briefly talk about these issues and about your ideas for the future regarding return and integration. Do you feel like social isolation and stigma are problems for children living in collective centers? (Explain)"

Do you interact with local children/youth or mainly those in collective centers? Why? (preference, distance, stigma, etc).

In what ways do you feel the same as other local children/youth in the city/town you live in?

In what ways do you feel different?

Stigma

What kind of stigma or prejudice do you feel from local youth towards you as a young IDP living in a collective center, if any? Can you give some examples of what this stigma or prejudice is and where you feel it? (Try to develop this discussion the best you can)

National Strategy

What is your understanding of the national strategy on IDPs being developed by the government?

If there was one message you could send those developing this strategy regarding the concerns and needs of children, what would you tell them?

Conclusions

Is there another topic of importance to you that you would like to discuss that we did not talk about?

Do any of you have any questions for us?

The following questions were developed with the teams in training accordance with two themes mentioned as important by the teams themselves. The Tbilisi team will spend 2-3 days focusing on interviewing children and youth whose collective center was recently privatized. The questions they developed will also be used at a collective center that is soon to be privatized. The Zugdidi developed questions they will use during 2-3 days of interviews with young people who have been moving between Gali and Zugdidi.

Questions developed for youth who visit Gali

What are the reasons you go to Gali?

(Some might go to get nuts, some, to visit relatives, some for drugs?)

How often do you go to Gali? When, at what time of year?

Do you go to Gali alone or with your families?

How do people manage to go into Gali and return? Do you cross legally or illegally? Do you have to pay someone to help you cross?

What are your main fears while traveling to Gali?

Do you feel safe in Gali? Why? Why not?

Is there anywhere you would be afraid to go, while there?

Who guarantees your safety?

What are your main fears when in Gali?

What kinds of violence do young people face in Gali?

Have your rights been violated in Gali? And how?

Are there different dangers for Girls and Boys in Gali?

Do you know anyone who has been abducted into Abkhazia forces? (explain)

Do you know anyone who has been kidnapped while in Gali? (explain)

Do girls face sexual violence going to Abkhazia? Do you personally know anyone who has faced sexual violence? (explain)

If your rights are violated in Gali who can you go to for help?

What kind of crimes are young people involved in Gali?

What kinds of constraints/stress from the Gali inhabitants or the authorities when you are there? Are there tensions between those who return and those who live there permanently?

Have you attended school in Gali?

What education problems do you face in Gali? (if you have attended schools there)

Are your employment rights abused in Gali? Are you being exploited through your work there? How? (ask for explanations)

How much money do you return to Zugdidi with when coming from Gali?

What else to people usually bring with them when they return to Zugdidi?

Why can some people go to Gali and feel safe and others can not go or are afraid to go?

Why do you not choose to stay in Gali all year?

Where do you feel better, here or in Gali and why?

Questions for young people in Tbilisi who have already or are soon to be faced with the privatization of their collective center

Questions for those whose collective centers have been privatized

What has been the positive and negative influence of privatization on you and your family?

How have living conditions changed after privatization of your collective center?

Has it resulted in economic changes in the family?

Has privatization allowed you to integrate into the non-IDP community more than living in collective centers?

How has privatization has supported your integration into a new community?

How has privatization affected relationships with your friends?
(- has it made you closer, more separated etc?)

How has the privatization influenced your educational opportunities?

How has privatization created barriers to your education?

How has privatization affected your job?

Has your viewpoint been considered when choosing to move to another place?

Are you satisfied with your relationships with new neighbors after moving?

Are you satisfied with your new school.... Relationships...?

If you have not gone to school yet, what are your hopes and fears regarding your new school?

Questions for those whose collective center is soon to be privatized

-In addition, some of the above questions will be asked regarding the future-

Do you see the privatization of your center seen as an opportunity or a threat? Why?

Do you want your hotel to be privatized- Yes or no? Why?

What new difficulties do expect from privatization?

What new opportunities do you expect from privatization?

What fears do you have from privatization?

How have expectations for privatization changed relationships in the family and with the neighbors?

Annex D – Community Center Profile Matrices

The views expressed herein are those of the authors and can therefore in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of UNICEF.

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