PROTECTION, SUPPORT and CARE

Humanitarian assistance for conflict affected children and their families

UNICEF emergency response in Georgia
August – October 2008
This brochure covers the UNICEF response to the emergency in Georgia. A short description of UNICEF’s assistance to South Ossetian children who fled to North Ossetia, Russian Federation can be found in a box on the back page.

Photo on cover:

*Children in the tent camp in Gori housing up to 1000 people. The camp was set up on the edge of the town for the displaced people affected by the conflict in and around South Ossetia, Georgia.*

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Out of estimated 128,500 internally displaced persons at the height of the crisis, 38,610 were children. Many more children who were not uprooted were also deeply affected by the conflict.

Nino Djebisashvili, 9, found shelter in one of the kindergartens in Tbilisi. Nino with her family fled the town of Gori which came under severe bombardment. When arrived in Tbilisi she refused to enter the building of the kindergarten as she was afraid of bombing. Tbilisi. 14 August 2008.

August – October 2008
In August 2008, hostilities broke out in Georgia leading to both internal and external displacement of large numbers of people, including children. UNICEF, as the leading international children’s agency with an ongoing development programme in Georgia, was quick to respond to the needs of the conflict-affected children and their families, providing supplies to the most vulnerable within the first few days of the crisis. Because of the sudden nature of the conflict, many of those who were displaced and those returning to their towns and villages required essential, life-sustaining support. About 60 per cent of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) have had no income to rely on during the displacement and are totally dependent on government and international aid to meet their basic needs.

UNICEF has provided assistance in the form of water, sanitation and hygiene supplies and services; health and nutrition support, as well as child protection and education services. In order to raise the requested funds for the humanitarian aid effort, UNICEF participated in a Joint UN Flash Appeal which was launched on August 18th, and later revised in October.

In late August, the displaced slowly began to return to their homes in the conflict-affected areas. While an estimated 73,000 of the 128,500 persons displaced in Georgia have been able to return home during the first two months, a significant proportion, or approximately 55,000 individuals, are still displaced. Around 15,000 of them are children. Out of the remaining IDPs, it is estimated that some 32,000, mostly originating from South Ossetia
or Abkhazia, will not be able to return to their homes in the foreseeable future. In addition, some 220,000 IDPs remain from previous conflicts.

In early October, Russian forces began to withdraw from the area north of Gori near the administrative border with South Ossetia, encompassing a network of villages with an estimated population of 24,000 people. With access to these villages improving and many IDPs returning home, a strengthened relief and recovery response is now necessary for the residents, many of whose homes and crops were destroyed. UNICEF is well positioned to respond to the needs of the conflict affected population as the organisation has had a longstanding presence in Georgia. Also, prior to the outbreak of August crisis, UNICEF had a history of providing support to children and their families in South Ossetia, mainly in the field of maternal and child healthcare and the promotion of breastfeeding.

1 Due to the fluid and often unexpected movements of the internally displaced population, these figures are under continual revision.

“There were eight of us in a car. We were trying to go to Gori, but then heard that Gori was being bombed. Finally, we ended up in Tbilisi, in this kindergarten”, says Levan, his hands trembling from stress, “we have left everything behind, our elderly relatives, our houses and we do not know what will happen next”.
FACTS AND FIGURES ON GEORGIA

Population: 4.4 million
Child population: 1.1 million
Severe child poverty: 28%
Under five mortality rate: 32 (per 1000 live births)
Life expectancy: 71 years
Primary school enrolment: 93%
Income level (Gross National Income per Capita): $1,560
Georgia ranked 96th out of 177 countries in the 2007 UNDP Development Report

THE UNICEF COUNTRY PROGRAMME IN GEORGIA 2006-2010

Contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and to the ongoing national social reform process in the area of child care, health and education by providing support to:

a. increased access to maternal and child health and nutrition services and the improved quality thereof;

b. improved protection for the most vulnerable children and young people from violence, abuse and exploitation, and

c. strengthening partnerships and monitoring systems at all levels to develop and implement evidence-based pro-poor social policies.
The basic needs of conflict-affected children and their families

Emergency shelters for the internally displaced were established quickly in vacant government buildings, empty schools and kindergartens. Tent camps were also set up. In the capital, Tbilisi, alone 672 IDP centres were established to accommodate the influx of internally displaced people. Although these centres served as crucial havens for the IDPs, they provided only the most basic shelter. Most of the makeshift IDP centres lacked even the basic sanitary facilities needed.

Women and children were particularly affected by the humanitarian crisis; many lacked clean clothes, suitable sanitation facilities, nutritious food, cooking facilities and psychosocial support. In addition, there was a scarcity of suitable beds or even mattresses in the centres and several families were forced to share rooms in empty schools, sleeping on desks or other improvised bedding. IDPs living in the hastily erected Gori tent camp also lacked mattresses and sleeping bags, a problem which became increasingly pressing as temperatures began to drop in September. Internally displaced children lacked school supplies and often did not have safe place to play or do their homework. They lacked toys and books to occupy their time or continue their education. The internally displaced population included women who had just given birth, or who were close to their due dates, and were therefore in need of special support and care.

In the early days of the crisis, UNICEF made quick assessments of the priority needs of the vulnerable populations and worked in close cooperation with the government, other UN agencies and local and international NGOs in ensuring that needed supplies and services reached the children and their families.

Shorena Davitashvili fled the village Charebi located near Tskhinvali of South Ossetia with her two children five-year old Jemal and seven-year old Beso. Under heavy bombardment they left their village and for a certain period they were hiding in the St George Church. But even the church was not a safe place for them and with the help of Georgian soldiers Shorena with children managed to escape. Shorena first moved to the relatives and then joined others in the tent town for IDPs near the Tbilisi airport. 17, August. 2008

“What I want most of all is to get back to my house, let me work on my land”, says Shorena Davitashvili, mother of five-year old Jemal and seven-year old Beso.
UNICEF also participated in a UN inter-agency humanitarian assessment mission to South Ossetia that took place in mid-September. The mission conducted an overall appraisal of the current humanitarian situation and promoted principled access for assistance and protection to South Ossetia. There is presently no UN presence on the ground in South Ossetia and the presence of NGOs is quite limited. Among the mission’s recommendations were to give precedence to the negotiation for humanitarian access and to questions of security, in addition to an urgent recommendation concerning the reestablishment of mass vaccination campaigns for polio and measles.

In Georgia, most of the internally displaced persons have been accommodated in temporary facilities such as kindergartens, schools, public and governmental buildings. Many of the facilities lack basic conditions such as toilets, potable water and electricity.

In an IDP collective centre located in the Industrial College in Tbilisi, Tamuna is comforting her son Lasha. “Lasha has been crying all night long,” said Tamuna, “maybe he still remembers the sound of the explosion. He also does not have a normal bed to sleep in”, she added. The college already housed IDPs displaced from an earlier conflict in the 1990s. Newly arrived IDPs face difficult living conditions in the centre. There are no beds and facilities for cooking are scarce. A few fortunate families have one bed and family members sleep there in turns.

A sigh of relief came as UNICEF distributed 100 beds for children in four collective centres in Tbilisi as part of its immediate response to the humanitarian crisis in Georgia. This means that four-year-old Bella and her two-year-old brother Aleko, who were cheerfully playing in front of the centre, will sleep in a bed tonight.

A temporary shelter for people displaced by the current conflict, in the Temka neighbourhood of Tbilisi, the capital. Displaced people in the city are being housed with relatives or friends, or in kindergartens or schools, while others are living in some 600 collective centres. Many of the latter shelters lack electricity, safe water and sanitation and other basics. The college is also home to people displaced by previous conflicts. UNICEF has provided 100 beds for children in four collective centres, including in Temka.
UNICEF’s response since the beginning of the Georgian crisis has directly benefited up to 78,000 conflict-affected children and their families. Working hand-in-hand with government counterparts and a range of local and international humanitarian partners, UNICEF is gradually shifting its focus from relief to recovery and hopefully soon, back to its regular programme of cooperation in Georgia.

Among UNICEF’s initial concerns were the displaced women and children living without safe water, basic hygiene items and access to sanitary facilities. As IDPs began moving in the thousands to the Georgian capital of Tbilisi and other cities, UNICEF delivered safe drinking water and other essential supplies, including emergency hygiene kits, to over 13,000 people in IDP collective centres. To respond to the educational and recreational needs of children, UNICEF quickly began preparations for the distribution of school-in-a-box and recreation kits for all conflict-affected school-aged children in Georgia. Another top priority during the first days of the conflict was to identify the most pressing needs of children and ensure that the media and donors were informed about the magnitude of the crisis.

During the first two months of emergency operations, UNICEF provided some US$3 million worth of supplies and services.

“While we must focus on immediate survival needs in health, nutrition and provision of water and hygienic standards, we will also need to focus on the emotional impact of children and helping them return to a degree of normality as quickly as possible. This is essential for prevention of long term developmental impacts upon children whose lives have been pulled apart by the intensive and rapidly escalating conflict,” said Benjamin Perks, UNICEF Deputy Representative, during the first week of the Georgia crisis.
UNICEF has focused its emergency response in Georgia on three main areas: health and nutrition, child protection and education, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH).

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Since August 14th, UNICEF has:

- distributed hygiene kits to approximately 13,260 IDPs
- distributed basic family water kits to approximately 3,170 IDP families (some 10,460 IDPs), mainly in collective centres in and around Gori, as well as in eastern and western Georgia, and to a lesser extent in the area north of Gori
- distributed water bottles to approximately 3,400 IDPs
- distributed 53 squatting plates benefiting 1,060 IDPs
- supplied chlorination supplies to the Gori Waterworks for additional treatment of the Gori water supply system, with an estimated 60,000 daily beneficiaries, since late September
- provided disinfectant to the Gori tent camp and collective centres’ sanitary facilities.

UNICEF’s role in water, sanitation and hygiene services in Georgia has been twofold; first, as the Humanitarian Coordination group’s lead agency in the sector, and second, as a direct service provider in water, sanitation and hygiene for internally displaced children and their families.

As the WASH cluster lead in Georgia, UNICEF headed partnership-building with local authorities in conflict-affected areas to ensure sanitation and water quality standards for IDPs and returnees, coordinated services and worked to eliminate gaps in services in the WASH sector.

Improving individual access to tap water

UNICEF’s early WASH assessments in conflict-affected regions revealed that in most areas, water supply was functioning adequately in the wake of the hostilities; however, there was still a great need for water and hygiene-related supplies, including jerrycans, collapsible water tanks and other water distribution supplies to enhance individual access to tap water. UNICEF assessment teams identified early on an urgent need for portable toilets and squatting plates for the IDP collective centres. Toilets in the IDP centres were routinely broken, non-existent or not connected to a water supply. Solid waste disposal was therefore a pressing matter in order to prevent disease outbreaks and other serious hygiene issues.
UNICEF, in partnership with the Georgian government, UN agencies and international and local NGOs, began distributing water supplies, such as basic family water kits and hygiene kits, to affected populations in mid-August. In Gori’s collective centres, UNICEF distributed basic family water kits in conjunction with the distribution of non-food items by UNHCR and partner NGOs. Through the distribution process, UNICEF and partners were able to assess the living conditions and wellbeing of the families, which greatly assisted in devising the next steps of UNICEF’s support. Hygiene promotion and education followed the distribution of the water kits in Gori. As access opens up to areas north of Gori, UNICEF will distribute basic family water kits and hygiene kits to returnees.

UNICEF and partners have distributed essential supplies to meet the basic needs of the displaced women and children living in the tent camp in Gori. On 29 August UNICEF distributed 340 family kits for 1100 people. Each family kit contains items such as water bucket, jerry cans and soaps. Since the conflict began, UNICEF has provided humanitarian assistance to more than 46,000 children and their families.

A basic family water kit includes a lidded bucket, two collapsible jerrycans and seven bars of soap.

A hygiene kit includes towels, soap, detergent, toothpaste and toothbrushes, as well as diapers and baby oil for families with children under the age of one, designed for one month use.
Promoting hygiene

In response to needs arising in the IDP collective centres, UNICEF oversaw the creation of an integrated hygiene programme comprising elements of personal hygiene and family water kit distribution with hygiene promotion, community water and sanitation management, and technical support to environmental sanitation. This was done in partnership with the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, and local and international NGOs. As part of this programme, UNICEF will provide 10,000 hygiene kits, benefiting approximately 30,000 people in conflict-affected areas through the end of the year.

Focus on WASH-services in Gori

As Russian forces left Gori in late August, IDPs began moving into the city in order to be near to their towns and villages. A small number of new IDPs arrived in Gori from South Ossetia, reportedly fleeing harassment there. Local authorities, in cooperation with UNHCR and other partners, quickly responded to this sudden influx of IDPs and set up a tent camp in Gori, accommodating 2,000 persons. UNICEF assisted by taking the lead in ensuring WASH services. To engage the inhabitants of the tent camp and ensure community ownership and management of services, UNICEF facilitated the establishment of a local water committee. Committee members were trained on the management of WASH facilities and hygiene promotion within the camp community.
The Gori tent camp – urgent assistance for ‘would-be returnees’

29 August 2008

Life in the town of Gori near the conflict zone of South Ossetia, Georgia, is getting back to normal again. Shops are open, people are returning but signs of war are still visible – burned-out apartment blocks and broken windows.

This is not the only thing that has changed over the past few weeks; a tented camp housing up to 2,000 IDPs has been set up on the edge of town for the displaced people coming back from Tbilisi to be closer to their towns and villages.

UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, IRC and other agencies are working to ensure that the basic standards for tented camps are observed with regard to water and sanitation, food and non-food items.

But for 10-year-old Solomon Surameli, this is not the place he wants to live. Solomon is from the village of Brotsleti which was heavily affected by the conflict. Solomon was forced to flee with his parents.

“I saw tanks coming, and the highway was encircled completely. I was very afraid. The bombs were dropped from the airplanes and the houses were burned. They stole from the houses whatever was there. When I first arrived here, there was nothing interesting for me to do. I sat around all
Solomon now has an opportunity to play and to develop. UNICEF, in partnership with NGOs World Vision International and Everychild, has set up Child Friendly Spaces in the camp to provide psychosocial support, and to organize recreation, informal learning and sports activities for the displaced children. This will help them to overcome the trauma and stress experienced as a result of the conflict and to have a sense of normality restored. The play and education activities will help them to get prepared for schooling which will be resumed in October.

"UNICEF will work with the Government to ensure that children are back to school, but at the same time we have to make sure that the displaced women and children have a decent environment and proper accommodation", said Giovanna Barberis, UNICEF Representative in Georgia. "Psychosocial support for those in need, mine-risk education, nutrition and hygiene, water and sanitation will be among the major areas of intervention for UNICEF in the coming weeks", added Barberis.

UNICEF and partners have distributed essential supplies to meet the basic needs of the displaced living in the tent camp. On 29 August, UNICEF distributed 340 family kits for 1,100 people. Each family kit contains items such as a water bucket, jerry cans and soap.

"Before, I could not bathe my one year old child", said Natela Gokadze, from the village of Tirdznisi, upon receiving the UNICEF Basic Family Water Kit. "This family kit will be a big help".

Distribution of food to the IDP families living in a tent camp in Gori housing up to 1000 people. The camp was set up on the edge of the town for the displaced people affected by the conflict in and around South Ossetia, Georgia.
Child Protection and Education

It is estimated that at the height of the crisis, almost 40,000 children were internally displaced. Many of them came from areas directly impacted by the conflict. Some of the children witnessed violence and destruction first-hand. All of the displaced children experienced the trauma of fleeing their homes suddenly, in frightening circumstances, and of relocating to temporary accommodation, often deprived of privacy, and in many cases were separated - temporarily or for longer periods – from members of their extended family, local communities and social circles. These children were in need of special support -- not only in the form of water, sanitation, health and nutrition services, but also psychosocial support, protection and care.

UNICEF is prioritizing the following five issues:

- psychosocial support services for displaced, returnee and conflict affected children
- the safe return of all Georgian children to school at the start of the new school year
- mine risk education for children living in high risk areas
- services, care and advocacy for the wellbeing of children with disabilities
- protection of unaccompanied and separated children and their return to their families.

To protect children impacted by the conflict, UNICEF has:

- established Child Friendly Spaces for 3,000 internally displaced children in collective centres,
- provided psychosocial support training for up to 2,000 education professionals, benefiting up to 40,000 children,
- conducted an explosive remnants of war (ERW) and mine risk awareness and education campaign, reaching up to 46,000 children,
- distributed school-in-a-box and recreation kits to benefit up to 78,000 children,
- designed, with partners, a protection framework for separated and unaccompanied children,
- supported the Government of Georgia in ensuring that all children return to school this academic year.

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One of UNICEF’s main priorities in all its work is to safeguard children’s right to care and protection. As the lead agency in the subcluster on Child Protection and Education in the Georgian humanitarian response, UNICEF is coordinating implementation of activities related to psychosocial assistance, child protection services and the provision of Child Friendly Spaces for displaced and returnee children. As activities are being implemented by several international and local NGOs, coordination has been crucial to ensure that as many children as possible are reached by these services, and that minimum operating standards are applied and monitored, primarily in collective centres. This has included regularly meeting and consulting with local authorities as well as parents of internally displaced children and children in return communities. UNICEF has also supported the opening of a Public Defender’s Office in Gori, to strengthen the protection of children’s rights in the nearby conflict affected areas.

When a child experiences trauma, such as conflict or displacement, and does not receive help to process what they are living through, ongoing post-traumatic responses to daily events often occur. Unresolved trauma can disconnect children and other family members from one another. After a traumatic event, the child needs support and a sense of safety to re-establish trust. Child Friendly Spaces, including recreation, informal learning and sports, are offering children care and protection and will help them slowly heal and return to normality.

In order to ensure that psychosocial assistance and support will be available in the long term, UNICEF, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science, is providing basic training on the application of crisis psychology, including crisis intervention and identification of trauma and disturbance, for up to 2,000 teachers and social workers from the Tbilisi and Gori regions, as well as for the staff of the Ministry of Education and Science. Up to 40,000 conflict-affected children are being helped in this way, which has the side benefit of supporting the Back to School campaign, inasmuch as the stabilization of children’s psychosocial wellbeing is crucial for their comfort, wellbeing and ability to learn in school.
Education and the Back to School Campaign

The UNICEF-coordinated Back to School campaign has galvanized civil society behind the right of children to return to normality and has prompted a re-focus on the rights of children.

As the lead coordination agency in the field of Education among humanitarian actors, UNICEF spearheaded the initiative to ensure that all children had access to school at the start of the new academic year. This has been done through coordination and oversight of activities in the areas of rehabilitation and supplies for schools; registration of internally displaced children in local schools; assistance to the Ministry of Education and Science in providing alternative schooling arrangements for communities where schools are being used as collective centres; the provision of Mine Risk Education in schools in conflict-affected areas; training and support for teachers and staff from Educational Resource Centres and general support to the Ministry of Education and Science. UNICEF, and partner organizations, are working with schools and municipal authorities to ensure that lack of documentation and undefined status do not act as a barrier to education for displaced children. UNICEF is also working with the Ministry of Education and Science to deliver day care activities and identify alternative preschool facilities where local kindergartens are still occupied by IDPs.
UNICEF has distributed 976 school-in-a-box kits and 642 recreation kits benefiting children in collective centres, conflict-affected schools and other child care institutions countrywide in Georgia. These educational and recreational materials stand to benefit up to 78,000 children impacted by the crisis.

In partnership with the Georgian government, Save the Children and ProCredit Bank, UNICEF spearheaded a large-scale text book collection drive for IDP children in September. Approximately 6,000 new and used textbooks were donated around the country during the one week long campaign, to make sure that displaced children had equal access to the books they needed upon returning to classes. Televised public service announcements about the return to school effort informed viewers that the textbooks could be dropped off at local bank branches.
Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and Mine Risk Education and Awareness

UNICEF is cooperating with HALO Trust and other international and local NGOs on an ERW and mine awareness project, including the development of mine risk education materials for use in schools, such as posters, booklets, sequence cards and workbooks. A training programme has been developed for teachers, based on a UNICEF teacher training manual and materials endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Science. The UNICEF ERW and Mine awareness campaign will cover the conflict-affected districts of Gori, Kareli, Kaspi and Khashuri, selected according to threat levels assessed by HALO Trust and the Ministry of Education and Science. The campaign will cover 180 schools, with a total of 46,000 enrolled children.

Support to vulnerable children

Early on in the IDP crisis, UNICEF conducted an assessment of child care institutions to determine the needs and status of the children residing in them. The assessment showed that in many centres children were in need of psychological counselling and support. The children were found to be at risk of receiving less care than before the conflict, as some of the centres have been partially occupied by IDPs. The assessment of child care institutions located in conflict areas generated a great deal of concern, as the children there had been exposed to severe stress and were in need of urgent psychological assistance. In response, UNICEF provided psychosocial support training for the staff of juvenile justice facilities and distributed educational and recreational materials to 37 child care institutions, including centres for children with disabilities, benefiting over 2,400 children.

Children in the school of Gori received textbooks as a result of a large-scale text book collection drive spearheaded by UNICEF in partnership with the Georgian government, Save the Children and ProCredit Bank in September. Approximately 6,000 new and used textbooks were donated around the country during the one week long campaign.
UNICEF also monitored the facilities and care provided for disabled children in IDP centres and helped to identify the children’s need for services. To enhance the overall standard of care and protection for children affected by the conflict, UNICEF, the ICRC and UNHCR established a mechanism to verify reports of unaccompanied children as well as a network to provide care for children separated from their families.

Health and Nutrition

UNICEF’s health and nutrition programmes have provided assistance to an estimated 28,000 people.

During emergency situations, the primary means of protecting the health of infants and young children is to guarantee their appropriate feeding. UNICEF’s Health and Nutrition programmes for the conflict-affected population therefore focused mainly on the promotion of exclusive breastfeeding and food quality and safety.

Health

UNICEF’s early assessments in collective centres and among conflict-affected populations revealed some especially vulnerable cases amongst children and

Natela Shoshiashvili and her family in the tent camp in Gori for the displaced people affected by the conflict in and around South Ossetia, Georgia. Natela is from Gori itself but her house was bombed and completely destroyed like many other houses nearby. She was lucky enough and fled before bombs hit her house. Her neighbours were not that lucky and many, including children, died during this bombing. Natela with two little children fled first to the nearby village and then to Tbilisi. After Gori was reopened she went back but her house was destroyed and she moved to the tent camp. Natela lost everything but a hope that one day she will be able to rebuild her house as well as the shattered life of her family.
mothers. Vulnerabilities included skin infections, difficult medical conditions of children and urgent need of specific, often expensive medications. Women in late stage pregnancy were also in need of medical care and counselling. UNICEF utilized its partnership with the Ministry of Health and Labour to refer the most difficult cases to appropriate medical institutions.

To respond to the health care and nutrition needs of children and mothers, UNICEF early on partnered with the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), dispatching 10 mobile health teams to the IDP centres to assess the situation and provide catch-up immunization services, identify possible infectious diseases as well as provide disinfection and vector-control services. UNICEF has also been cooperating with the NCDC on an impending national MR-immunization campaign, which UNICEF will support with vaccines, cold chain equipment, training for health workers, fuel, as well as with a public information campaign.

UNICEF supported a temporary centre for 42 internally displaced pregnant women and mothers with infants in Tbilisi, early on in the emergency phase. Hygiene supplies, beds and baby clothes were provided, as well as counselling on the importance of exclusive breastfeeding and early childhood nutrition and care.

Nutrition

During the early weeks of the emergency, UNICEF locally procured complementary food items, such as porridge powder and fruits, for all children aged 6-24 months residing in IDP centres. UNICEF supported the local NGO CLARITAS’ XXI mobile network of health professionals who were trained in supporting breastfeeding mothers and conducting breastfeeding advocacy.
The mobile health teams have also carried out counselling on safe and proper complementary feeding practices. The mobile teams are conducting a nutritional status assessment among internally displaced children (in the 0-2 year age group), have developed and printed educational materials on infant and young child feeding and are distributing micronutrients to targeted internally displaced children. Although no severely or moderately undernourished children have been identified among the displaced populations, the rate of exclusive breastfeeding among IDP mothers is very low; in fact it is lower than the already poor national average. UNICEF health sector staff are concerned that widespread distribution of breastmilk substitutes to IDPs has encouraged mothers to stop breastfeeding.

In fact, a major part of UNICEF’s assistance has been educating new mothers about the importance of breastfeeding – even after the shock of conflict and displacement. UNICEF, together with other prominent international aid organizations, urged new mothers affected by the conflict not to use breast milk substitutes and continue breastfeeding despite the difficult conditions caused by the emergency. It is a common misconception that in emergencies, many mothers can no longer breastfeed adequately due to stress or inadequate nutrition. As a result, many mothers felt under pressure and were likely to accept inappropriate donations of infant formula and other milk products. This exposes infants and young children to an increased risk of diarrhoea, infectious disease and malnutrition, as the preparation of breast milk substitutes requires stringent hygiene that is often lacking in displacement settings. The use of feeding bottles only adds further to the risk of infection as they are difficult to sterilize in collective centres.
An environment of calm and love for displaced breastfeeding mothers

In an ordinary classroom of Tbilisi School # 51, five mothers are holding their infants and telling each other stories of how they survived. Only two of them are breastfeeding. Having suffered the stress of the conflict in and around South Ossetia, Georgia, many of the displaced mothers have lost their breastmilk.

“After we fled from Gori, where I gave birth to Roland, my health situation worsened considerably”, says Rusudan Buchukuri, 21. She and her newborn child were undergoing medical treatment in the Gori hospital when the conflict erupted.

Having arrived in a hospital in Tbilisi, Rusudan soon had to leave yet again, this time for a temporary shelter, as the hospital was full of wounded people and there were no in-patient beds available. “In the first days of being here in Tbilisi we did not have medicine, enough food or drinking water. Now I realize that it is a miracle that we managed to survive”, says Rusudan, cradling her three-week-old infant. Rusudan was lucky, though, as she was among the 42 pregnant women and mothers with infants who joined the shelter for breastfeeding mothers set up by the Ministry of Education and Science, with the support of UNICEF.

Two classrooms in Tbilisi School # 51 were efficiently equipped with furniture and the essential supplies for new mothers and their babies, including blankets, plastic basins, cribs, shampoo, towels, bedding, buckets, thermoses and baby clothes.

“It is crucial not only to give all the necessary support and supplies to these mothers, but also to explain the importance of breastfeeding and of creating a calm and nurturing environment for their children,” says Dragoslav Popovich, UNICEF Regional Health Advisor.

Child Clinic Director, Professor Ketevan Nemsadze, who was invited by UNICEF to counsel the mothers, says that most of them do not know how to behave in such a post-trauma period. “The most important thing is for the mothers to focus on caring for their children and not to panic; the needed amount of breastmilk will be restored”, explains Professor Nemsadze in the presence of the mothers.

“Those whose children are up to six months old can start telling small stories about pictures or brochures they see here in the classroom”, she adds as she takes one of the children on her knees. “It is important to keep the child close, so that he or she feels the mother’s warmth. If you do so, reading will always be associated with happiness for them”.

“I cannot believe this is true, says Lia Kazarashvili, aged 26, as she breastfeeds her one-month-old daughter Mariam. “If not for this shelter, I would be looking into ways to provide artificial feeding for Mariam, as I was hopeless about being able to breastfeed. But Professor Ketavan explained how I could restore my breastmilk. She also told me that I should think about nice things when feeding the child - about her happy future, joyful life and even about her beautiful children. I don’t know how it works, but this method really helps. After I feed her now, Mariam is in a good mood and sleeps well”.

Rusudan Buchukuri with her three weeks old son Roland Chanadiri in UNICEF supported shelter for breastfeeding mothers. Doctor Ketevan Nemsadze provides consultation on breastfeeding. The shelter for breastfeeding mothers was set up by the Ministry of Education and Science with the support of UNICEF.

The shelter is equipped with furniture and the essential inventory for newly delivered mothers and their babies including blankets, plastic square basins, beds for babies, shampoo, towels for babies, bedding, water plastic caps, plastic buckets, thermos for hot water, iron, and baby clothes.

Tbilisi, Georgia. 26 August, 2008
On August 28, the UNICEF Regional Director for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Maria Calivis paid a visit to Georgia to assess the situation of the most vulnerable women and children affected by the conflict.

"UNICEF is working with the Government and with other partners to meet the most pressing needs of women and children," said Ms Calivis. "UNICEF offers a wide range of support including psycho-social interventions for children and their mothers who have had traumatic experiences. We have already provided day to day living and hygiene kits for families, complimentary food for infants and water supplies to meet the most basic needs of women and children."

Ms Calivis stressed the need to find better housing for children to help foster their transition back to a normal life.

"The first thing that strikes you when you visit the IDP centres is that this is not the type of environment these women and children should be staying in," Calivis said. "The conditions are deplorable and bleak. Children have a universal capacity to laugh and to play but mothers remind you that their children still cry at night and keep on asking when would they go home. I would not want these women and children to stay much longer in this situation."

Following her visit to Tbilisi, Ms. Calivis visited Moscow and North Ossetia, Russian Federation. In Vladikavkaz (30-31 August), North Ossetia, the Regional Director discussed the situation and needs of children and women with government officials, UN agencies and local and international NGOs. She also had an opportunity to dialogue with and help distribute school supplies to children who had been displaced from South Ossetia.
UNICEF funds as part of the Joint UN Flash Appeal

To finance the relief operations in Georgia following the conflict, the UN issued the first Joint UN Flash Appeal to donors on August 18, totalling US$56 million. UNICEF’s portion of the appeal was US$6.45 million, in aid of displaced children and their families. A revised Joint UN Flash Appeal was then launched in early October, seeking a total of US$109 million to assist at least 127,500 people affected by the current crisis, with a particular focus on preparing people living in damaged accommodation or in collective centres for the fast-approaching winter. UNICEF’s component in the revised Flash Appeal was US$4.6 million. The revised appeal takes into account a wide range of assessments conducted since the appeal’s first edition in August.

With the funds received based on the UN Joint Flash Appeal, UNICEF has implemented emergency programmes including:

- Promotion of Access to Quality Education for All Children ($628,396);
- Support for Child and Maternal Feeding ($345,931);
- Awareness Raising on Mines and ERW Amongst Children Affected by the Conflict in Georgia ($394,926);
- Psychosocial Assistance to Children Affected by Conflict in Georgia ($1,045,582);
- Life-Saving Support to Newly-Displaced to Meet Immediate Shelter, Non-Food and Domestic Needs ($2,662,974);
- Provision of Quality Water ($223,286);
- Distribution of Hygiene Kits for Conflict-Affected Populations and Hygiene IEC ($443,908);
- Sanitation Rehabilitation ($438,517).

A boy plays with a toy truck in a camp for people displaced by the current conflict, near the international airport in Tbilisi, the capital. Some 200 people from the town of Gori and from nearby villages in and around South Ossetia are living in the camp. There are a few tents and water, but the camp lacks adequate sanitation.
“No matter that our house is looted, burned, or destroyed -- we still want to be back home.” says Maya Tvauri, mother of two. “Having passed through this ordeal now I realize how good it is just to be alive,” adds Maya. “We do not ask for any help but we appeal for peace that will give us a chance to build our lives again.”

Maia is telling story of their escape from the conflict zone of South Ossetia, Georgia. Khatuna 6 (left) and Patima, 11 (right) Mindiashvili found shelter in the former building of the Ministry of Finance in Tbilisi. The family of Mindiashvili was caught by heavy shelling twice when trying to flee their village Kemerti in South Ossetia, Georgia. According to the UN estimates nearly 100,000 people, including 60,000 children and women have displaced within Georgia as a result of the recent escalation of the conflict in and around South Ossetia, Georgia.

UNICEF’s response in North Ossetia

Following the outbreak of hostilities in South Ossetia, there was an influx of refugees, totaling 34,589 persons, into North Ossetia in the Russian Federation. The Russian government has established 58 temporary accommodation centers since the onset of the conflict where 5,259 people, including 2,248 children were placed. More than 8,700 displaced were hosted at their relative’s homes in North Ossetia.

UNICEF’s zone office in Vladikavkaz, Russian Federation, conducted an assessment of the situation of the displaced children and women and provided assistance in conjunction with the Russian authorities. This assistance consisted of psychosocial support activities, distribution of school supplies to support children’s return to school, supplies for a UNICEF renovated boarding school, among other humanitarian assistance efforts.