

**“Urban dimensions of internal displacement in Georgia:
The phenomenon and the housing policy”**

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Abstract

The issue of forced displacement has been one of the distinctive features of Georgian cities over the last two decades. Internally displaced persons emerged as a separate vulnerable group due to violent ethno-political conflicts in the territories of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After being uprooted from their original homes and owing to the lack of housing options elsewhere in the country a considerable number of displaced were forced to settle collectively in non-residential buildings. Inappropriate for long-term living purposes and largely concentrated in urban fringe, their residential environment has fostered physical isolation, alienation and spatial segregation. The Government of Georgia bears legal responsibility for handling IDP problems. In 2007, state efforts were relatively weak and largely unclear before the State Strategy and Action Plan were adopted (referred as the Strategy), covering all displaced and aimed mainly at housing provision, promoting socio-economic integration and creating conditions for the dignified and safe return to their original place of residence. This article has two aims: first, to present the phenomenon of internal displacement, specifically of the ones living in cities, and the difficulties faced by them drawing on the nationwide representative survey; and second, to discuss aspects of the Strategy dealing with the housing issue.

Keywords

Displacement, poverty, housing, segregation, Georgia.

Introduction

The beginning of the independence period (from 1991) in Georgia was characterized by violent ethno-political conflicts, and their negative consequences on society were exacerbated by economic and political instability – economic transformation, the disruption of production and trade, hyperinflation, unemployment etc. In the early 1990s, separatist wars were fought both in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and in South Ossetia by the Ossetian and Abkhazian ethnic groups to separate from Georgia (Hovey, 2013: 14; Albuja et al., 2014). Due to the military threat a significant part of the population (of mostly Georgian ethnic background) was forced to leave their homes and find shelter in other, usually urban, parts of the country. The Government of Georgia has not regained control on these two regions up to now. The Russo-Georgian war (2008) increased the number of displaced due to the threat from the Russian army. Between the two phases of conflict there were extended periods without active hostilities but also peace – so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts. The IDPs from these two periods are referred to as the ‘old’ (the 1990s) and the ‘new’ (2008) IDPs (Ferris et al., 2011: 179). Overall, more than 370,000 people have been displaced. Between these events some internally displaced persons (IDP) left the country or managed to return to their homes adjacent to conflict areas. In 2013 according to The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia (commonly referred to as MRA), their number across Georgia reached 277,000, 251,000 ‘old’ and 26,000 ‘new’ IDPs, and around 115,000 or more lived in compact settlements (Ferris et al., 2011; MRA, 2013; Kabachnik et al., 2014: 7)¹. The remaining IDPs live ‘individually’, not many own apartments, as they got ‘a shelter’ with relatives or friends. They often move from one rental to another because of financial constraints. The latter group is not discussed here.

A substantial number of IDPs settled in various non-residential buildings (schools, kindergartens, hospitals, government buildings) never designed for permanent housing – called collective centres² (further referred as CC). Located primarily on the outskirts of cities, often isolated from the local environment and frequently in the vicinity of each other, they form compact settlements (Kabachnik et al., 2014). These buildings were provided by the state or squatted by the displaced. The housing issue represents a significant part of the IDP vulnerability assessment due to both its direct impact on their quality of life and its indirect impact on other aspects.

This article aims to describe the phenomenon of internal displacement in Georgian cities, the difficulties such as insufficient and inferior housing, unemployment issues, poor access to education and reskilling to improve employment prospects, spatial isolation and lack of

¹ The decrease was due to (labour) emigration or limited return to areas bordering the conflict.

² CCs are common in countries with IDPs or refugees, and are considered as one of the worst housing option due to its spatial isolation and unbearable living conditions.

integration with the local urban society. From 2007 the Government of Georgia (GoG) reformed its approach towards IDPs and in 2009 introduced a State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons and an Action Plan targeting local integration and housing improvements. Until then, return was the only solution pronounced by politicians and state agencies dealing with the issue; nor has the integration issue been tackled within the strategy so far (Kabachnik et al., 2012: 4).

In the following section of the paper the vulnerabilities of IDPs all over the world will be introduced. An introduction to the methodology used for studying IDP living conditions and livelihood strategies in eight Georgian cities and a description of the theoretical concept follows. The statements presented in the article are largely based on this survey combined with the secondary sources. The issues related to IDPs in Georgian cities are introduced and will be framed using a neighbourhood or area effect concept. The second part of the paper will introduce the basic targets of the current policy and its manifestations where housing is one of the main topics. Overall, the article debates that mismanagement or the inability of the Georgian state to address IDP needs have, in large part, caused the marginalization and isolation of IDPs together with the impact of the socially homogeneous environment created within their settlements.

The problem of internal displacement: an overview

'Internally displaced persons are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border' (OCHA, 1998: 5). The notion of internal displacement implies an involuntary resettlement *within* the borders of a country, however IDPs rarely find a viable return solution. Around 38 million people worldwide live in displacement (Bilak et al., 2015). In countries such as Colombia, Syria, Somalia, Azerbaijan and Georgia they constitute a considerable part of the population (Albuja et al., 2014: 9).

The consequences of displacement are severe, costly and long-lasting. When relocation is forced, it is experienced as traumatic, as it generally involves the subjective experience of a threat to one's life, a disruption of daily routine, a collapse of familiar networks and a challenge to beliefs and values (Tuval-Mashiach and Dekel, 2012: 24). Practically it means the loss of homes, land, belongings and livelihoods, creating special needs and vulnerabilities (IDMC and Brookings-LSE, 2013: 7).

IDPs are highly vulnerable people often with very limited access to employment, education, sufficient housing, especially in urban areas (Albuja et al., 2014; Williams, 2011). While some displaced may bring considerable human capital, their presence simultaneously is a burden on

the capacities of the governments and host societies. The local job market can rarely handle a large unplanned influx of forced migrants. It escalates pressure on services and infrastructure which have not always been able to meet the increase in demand (Walicki et al., 2009: 3; Gupta, 2015: 8).

IDPs often reside on the outskirts of cities sometimes in proximity to other vulnerable groups (Mitchneck et al., 2009: 125; Young and Jacobsen, 2013; Holtzman and Nezam, 2004). This spatial pattern can be attributed to the lack of vacant buildings in the city centre and the will of governments to exclude 'problematic groups' and 'remove eyesores' from the central areas where most of the financial flows are directed. Governments try to maintain control over IDPs which is best exercised in concentration.

IDPs are likely to own less, but have denser bonding 'social capital' such as support networks of community and kinship networks (Vervisch et al., 2013).

IDPs worldwide face a range of risks including physical threat, tenure insecurity, disrupted access to clean water, food, shelter and health care, and to the livelihoods which would improve their standard of living.

Research framework

Theoretical approach

In their influential work, Holtzman and Nezam address the problems of internal displacement and discuss well-being, employment, human and social capital, local integration and the role of state actors in Europe and Central Asia (2004). The authors emphasize the high level of socio-spatial isolation of IDPs from mainstream society and the experience of widespread unemployment making them one of the most disadvantaged groups (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004). The conditions and the environment IDPs are forced to live in are one of the basis for major disequilibria between them and locals.

The importance of neighbourhood as a determinant of socio-economic well-being at different stages in a person's life has been researched in the form of neighbourhood effect studies (Ellen and Turner, 2010: 834). It explores the effects of a disadvantaged social setting and limited, homogeneous environment on the individuals in such neighbourhoods. The similar concept of area effects attempts to consider the outcome in life-chances and opportunities that might vary if one lived or grew up in different types of area (Atkinson and Kintrea, 2001: 2278). These perspectives has never been applied to IDPs although considered as one of the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged group. The CCs where they reside are largely what scholars refer to as areas of concentrated poverty. Considering the residential environment and the problems IDPs face, approaching this issue with the neighbourhood effects concept in mind

seems appropriate. However, it is not the only source of vulnerability and this concept can provide clues not to every question.

The consequences of living in neighbourhoods of concentrated poverty received much attention in the academic world in the form of neighbourhood effect studies (Pinkster, 2009: 7). The roots of the concept go back to the work of William Julius Wilson's *The Truly Disadvantaged* (1987/2012). Wilson introduced the 'social isolation' hypothesis assuming that the social networks of residents in low-income neighbourhoods (referring to the black urban community in the USA) are spatially locally oriented and lack social resources to improve their lives (Wilson, 1987/2012). Most of the studies focusing on the role of spatial attributes on (immigrant) employment opportunities deal with segregation within cities. Their centre of attention is on neighbourhood effects – clarifying the role of the residence and its effect on the socio-economic progression of their residents (Hedberg and Tammaru, 2012: 2). Buck (2001) presents models through which neighbourhood affects individuals: epidemic, collective socialization, institutional, relative deprivation, competition and network models.

IDPs experience problems with entering the labour market and access to information. Recent studies in European cities have concentrated on the interaction of place, social environment and employment. The social structure of the place where people live and socialize may shape one's social network. The neighbourhood, as a potential place of interaction, is hypothesized as being one of the factors that influences social resources available to residents to improve their employment situation (Pinkster, 2009: 49). If more neighbourhood residents are employed, they are more likely to be sources of information about job vacancies for the unemployed; if more are on welfare, they are more likely to be sources of information about the welfare system and benefits it provides (Holzer, 1988). The social isolation hypothesis, used by Wilson, states that the social networks of disadvantaged residents in disadvantaged urban areas do not provide the necessary resources to 'get ahead' in life and improve one's social position (Pinkster, 2012: 3). A negative consequence of concentrations of poverty is thus that only contacts with specific individuals exist (Kempen, 2006: 103).

Residential segregation, spatial isolation and stigmatization over time lead to a constricted social network of residents in low-income neighbourhoods that limits their employment opportunities, further restricting social networks, which provide fewer, inferior, employment-related opportunities. The residential environment with its spatial character has created a similar surrounding for IDPs to that described in the neighbourhood effects literature. A considerable portion of studies illustrates that IDPs have very similar socio-economic realities. According to the survey results, IDPs spend much of their time in proximity to people with the same status, especially unemployed.

Methodology and Approach

This paper is based on the data from a research study – ‘Coping with Marginality and Exclusion: Can IDP Communities Successfully Integrate into Mainstream Urban Societies in Georgia?’ (CME-IDP)³. The representative quantitative survey has been conducted in eight cities (listed in Table 1) Georgia with the highest share of IDPs.

A demographic quota sampling method was used for respondent selection based on the proportions of six major gender-age groups (males and females of age 18-34, 35-54 and older than 54). This method ensured that a sufficient level of randomness and an acceptable representation of the target population was achieved. Around 100 respondents were interviewed in each city. The questionnaire collected individual and household data using a semi-structured questionnaire. The collected data can be grouped as follows: description of adaptation process of IDPs, Employment and job opportunities, Social capital and networks, attitudes towards the local population.

Statistical data from MRA and National Statistics Office of Georgia (GeoStat) is used as additional sources, as well as available documents and reports prepared by the GoG.

Internal displacement in Georgia

Cause of displacement

The period after regaining independence (1991) in Georgia was characterized by ethno-political conflicts as well as the negative consequences of economic and political instability. The conflicts evolved in the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, settled largely by Megrelians (an ethnic subgroup of Georgians) and an Abkhaz ethnic minority, but also Russians, Armenians and Greeks, and the Autonomous Region of South Ossetia, settled largely by two ethnic groups, the Ossetians and Georgians. This process has evolved in two main phases: first, the conflict in the early 1990s brought almost 370,000 people displaced from their homes (Ferris et al., 2011). The second, with the renewal of hostilities in and around South Ossetia that also affected Abkhazia for five days in August 2008, resulting in another inflow of 26,000 displaced (MRA, 2013). IDPs that fled from the danger areas found temporary housing in other parts of the country. The displaced population was followed by the Government of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia who fled Abkhazia in the autumn of 1993 and since then have functioned as the government in exile in the capital, Tbilisi.

The Government of Georgia has not regained political control on the two break-away regions, which at the moment are recognized as an independent states by the Russian Federation,

³ CME-IDP is an abbreviation for the survey ‘Coping with Marginality and Exclusion: Can IDP Communities Successfully Integrate into Mainstream Urban Societies in Georgia?’.

Nicaragua, Venezuela and Nauru. Thus, IDPs do not have an opportunity to return to their homes as citizens of Georgia.

Facts and Figures

The population of Georgia, as of 1st January 2015, was 3.7 million (GeoStat, 2014). The IDP population in Georgia reached 277,000 (more than 7% of the total population) (MRA, 2013). Their geographic distribution is uneven and concentrated in several big cities and the regions neighbouring the conflict zones. The IDP community in Georgia evolved as a low-income socio-cultural group. The monthly household income of more than half of the respondents in the CME-IDP research was around the national subsistence minimum, 250 Georgian Lari or 113 Euros (GeoStat, 2014: 70). Access to employment for IDPs is of vital importance for rebuilding livelihoods in the new place of residence influencing issues such as economic independence, interacting with locals, enlarging social network, restoring self-esteem and self-reliance, in addition to financially supporting families (Ager and Strang, 2008: 170; Hovey, 2013). A major barrier to employment is the difficulty related to non-recognition of qualifications, absence of previous work experience and the lack of state support for vocational training to promote reincorporation into the labour market (Gupta, 2015). It is particularly problematic for those who were displaced prior to gaining education or work experience (Tomlinson and Egan, 2002; Hovey, 2013: 10; Ager and Strang, 2008: 170). Some IDPs often have to accept jobs that do not suit their qualifications, or demand much lower or different skills (IDMC, 2009: 36). High unemployment constrains the lives of IDPs and their families, encompassing the threat of intergenerational unemployment. The survey among IDPs shows the particularly high rate of unemployment (Table 1). The national unemployment rate for 2012 and 2013 (GeoStat, 2014), the year when the research was held, was 15%.

Table 1. IDP employment status (by person). Source: CME-IDP, 2013.

City	Yes, Employed	Unemployed for more than 4 months	Total Surveyed
Batumi	21.60%	69.40%	88
Gori	34.80%	65.20%	92
Zugdidi	18.40%	81.60%	98
Tbilisi	25.30%	74.70%	79
Rustavi	33.70%	66.30%	83
Poti	22.60%	77.40%	93
Kutaisi	17.80%	82.20%	101
Tskaltubo	5.90%	94.10%	101
Total	23.20%	76.80%	828

Spatial Patterns

IDPs tend to be clustered in areas adjacent to the conflict zone and in and around major cities (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004). This is a common pattern and is present in Georgia where more

than 70% of IDPs are living in the capital Tbilisi (98,000), Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti⁴ (90,000 – 18.01% of total regional population) and in Mtskheta-Mtianeti⁵ region (11,000 – 9.24% of total regional population) (MRA, 2013). 73.2% of IDPs lived in cities in 2003 (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004). This pattern is largely the same in 2014.

IDPs were constrained in their choice of residence and location which considerably impacted their lives. The distribution of CCs, provided by the state or squatted, was ruled by the limited and insufficient supply (vacant buildings) and not by housing demand, as the weak Georgian state was unable to initiate projects to properly house displaced. IDPs had to accept the options available - buildings offering low, inadequate living standards, often on the outskirts of urban areas as options in the city centre was limited or non-existent. Their concentration and the number of residents are higher on the outskirts (Kabachnik et al., 2014). The substantial number of IDPs are highly dependent on public transport that makes their mobility even more complex creating varying degrees of isolation excluding IDPs from local people, basic amenities, employment and municipal services as almost no Georgian city offers a reliable public transport system. The inflow of IDPs into Georgian cities increased the local population sometimes by 20-30%, putting pressure on struggling job market. The sub-national and urban concentration of the displaced had further impact. Their presence in some cities caused a deterioration in the local quality of life (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003: 37). In cities such as Borjomi and Tskaltubo, it resulted in degradation of the existing tourist infrastructure⁶ as the hotels and guesthouses were transformed into CCs where IDPs still live. Besides the economic loss, it caused tensions between locals and IDPs.

The Effects of Inadequate Housing

Due to the urgency to accommodate the displaced population, with the state being too weak to provide any feasible solution, the existing building stock was utilized to house displaced. Their influx in urban areas created the new residential form in the Georgian cities. The compact way of settlement became common for IDPs living in CCs. These buildings accommodate hundreds of IDPs in miserable conditions; the number of which was around 1,600 a decade after the conflicts (Walicki, 2012: 1). Over the years the quality of the dwellings and the residential environment degraded further (Walicki, 2012; Kurshitashvili, 2012) (Figure 1). The result of CME-IDP survey illustrates high dissatisfaction with the residential environment. In seven out of nine cities more than 2/3 IDPs consider their residence either 'more or less convenient' or 'inconvenient'.

⁴ Neighbouring the conflict region Abkhazia.

⁵ Neighbouring the conflict region South Ossetia

⁶ The areas known for their spa resorts where the locals were employed. The tourism infrastructure were state owned (as a legacy of the Soviet era) and not yet privatized, which made it easier to use them for IDPs.



Figure 1. A CC (former administrative building) in Zugdidi. Source: Gogishvili, 2012.

The majority of buildings used for CCs were not residential. IDPs faced the necessity to adapt them to their residential needs by do-it-yourself practices - shifting rooms, extending interior space by using areas and facilities never meant for living (Figure 2). In the long-term this led to the deterioration of buildings. Further changes were made on land adjacent to CCs, resulting in the appropriation of so called no-man's-land or public land, by fencing the area or erecting minor constructions extending residential space (Figure 3). It often led to conflict with locals as sometimes they also wished to use the same land or were unhappy with the erected structures. These developments were a perfect manifestation of the housing problems, producing various coping strategies, justified by insufficient amount and quality of living space. This process of accelerated farther after the GoG declared, in the mid-1990s, that IDPs were allowed to use free, adjacent, lands (not defined) for family profit (Kharashvili, 2001: 236).



Figure 2. The interior of CC (former factory) in Zugdidi. Source: Gogua, 2013.



Figure 3 The adaptation of (abandoned) public space by IDPs in Tbilisi, Georgia. Source: Gogishvili, 2009.

Besides their residential conditions, IDPs are disadvantaged due to tenure insecurity. As claimed in one of the recent reports by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre ‘ownership has been a key symbol of the political and economic transition in former socialist countries such as Georgia’ (Gupta, 2015: 33). IDPs have been excluded from overall homeownership trends – around 97% in Georgia (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003: 36). Even if the law of Georgia on IDPs grants immunity from being evicted from CCs this has not always been realized (Dolidze et al., 2005; Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2009). The privatization process of CCs started only after the launch of the Strategy from 2009 and is currently underway.

Residential Segregation

CCs are often spatially isolated; limiting mobility, interaction and employment opportunities. Although IDPs have strong bonding social networks, they feel excluded from the wider local communities (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003). The residential location is predominantly important for low-income groups shaping their social networks, because they are expected to be more locally oriented in their social contacts due to the lack of resources which prevents them from networking further afield (Pinkster, 2009: 27).

Despite the presence of extended family and kin in many of the areas where the displaced have settled, their primary family networks are usually DPs⁷ like themselves, illustrating the low level of interaction with the local population (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 112; Kabachnik et al., 2013). More than the half of the respondents surveyed spent their free time either in the surroundings of their residence with IDPs and their family members or IDPs in other parts of the city. The geographic vicinity of network members plays a role in limiting residents’ interactions

⁷ Holtzman & Nezam use a broader term ‘Displaced Population’ to refer both to refugees and internally displaced persons.

with individuals and communities outside their ‘own’ (Andersson et al., 2014: 715; Buck, 2001). Owing to the high concentration of CCs, IDPs may gain less information about skill-enhancing and employment opportunities, as the neighbourhood socialization pattern leads them to depend more on localized social networks possibly limiting employment opportunities. A higher concentration of CCs also means relatively low opportunity for interaction between the displaced and locals and it makes more difficult for the displaced to increase the heterogeneity of social ties (Mitchneck et al., 2009).

One of the hypotheses regarding neighbourhood effects focuses on how social environment plays a role in determining employment search strategies, referred to as the ‘location’ and ‘milieu’ effect by Atkinson and Kintrea (2001) or categorized under the ‘network’ model by Buck (2001). Unemployment, insufficient housing and socio-spatial isolation focused into specific areas double the social disadvantages of IDPs. The lack of social interaction with locals that IDPs demonstrated in the survey (Table 2) has causal links to the limited social networks, which is a result of the spatially distinct settlement pattern. The reduction in access to information has the potential to negatively impact individuals, especially in post-conflict environments where information is vital (Mitchneck et al., 2009: 1026). One of the effects of limited interaction can be seen on the high rates of unemployment (Table 1). The spatial concentration of various vulnerable groups might initially be beneficial, but beyond the initial stage more economic advantage is associated with living elsewhere (Musterd and Ostendorf, 2009: 1527). This assessment can be extended to IDPs.

Table 2. How often do you travel to other parts of the city from where you live and how much time do you spend in the CC? Source: CME-IDP, 2013.

Frequency of movement towards other parts of the city		Time spent in/around CC	
Every day	24.50%	Whole day	66.54%
2-3 times a week	22.20%	Half day	22.61%
Once a week	12.80%	Few times (just sleep here)	10.86%
Less frequently	40.50%		

IDPs’ isolation is exacerbated by structural factors. The central government set up and maintains the parallel social infrastructure that existed in the breakaway regions. IDPs retain their own government in exile with clinics, educational facilities⁸ and some smaller institutions. The maintenance of parallel government structures is common and considered to help preserve the claim on the disputed territory. While they have served an important purpose with respect to

⁸ The majority of IDP schools have been shut down after continuous recommendations from I/NGOs working in Georgia. The data on the remaining number of schools is not accessible. The spatial pattern of ‘new districts’ might bring back this phenomenon

helping coordinate assistance, data gathering, and providing a focal point for addressing specific problems, this has also served to compartmentalize DP issues (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 127). The experience from past decades illustrates that the decision to maintain the government in exile was clearly political rather than supporting effective administration (UNHCR, 2009; Kabachnik et al., 2013). Exclusion, supported by institutional setting, strengthens the sense that the displaced are different from local societies, reinforcing the social isolation of the IDP population (Mitchneck et al., 2009: 1024). The displaced live in one locality and yet are forced into another 'virtual', non-existent locality. This feeling is further intensified by the planning and the design of 'new districts'.

Governance and state policy for IDPs

IDP Governance in Georgia

As IDPs are forced to move within the borders of their homeland their government holds the major responsibility for protecting and assisting them. In some countries IDPs have a special legal status that provides 'social, economic and legal assistance to safeguard rights endangered by displacement and support the enactment of durable solutions though not required under international law' (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1998: 5). The status is often criticized by some as supporting further stigmatization and increasing vulnerability.

After the 'first wave' of displacement Georgia adopted, and revised afterwards, legislation targeting displaced population determining basic rights and protection. However, from the early 1990s till the introduction of the State Strategy, in 2009, the government's political concern has been limited to the assumption that the IDP integration into local communities may halt their repatriation, thereby weakening Georgia's sovereign territorial claims. These concerns had been manifested in decisions harming IDPs:

- 1) IDPs were disallowed from owning land or voting in the municipality where they were living, unless they dropped their status. Between 2003-2009 these restrictions were removed by the Constitutional Court, however it is still unclear whether IDPs were informed about it (Kabachnik et al., 2013; Ferris et al., 2012);
- 2) IDPs were allocated into CCs scattered across the urban peripheries, contributing to their residential segregation (Kabachnik et al., 2013);
- 3) The authorities were often resistant to allowing international agencies to support the displaced in regaining their self-reliance as the state feared to lose control of them and their wish to return. In the public speech of the third president of Georgia, Mikheil Saakashvili, on 5th January 2008 during his second election campaign, he criticized international organizations for

advocating IDP integration into local communities and promised the displaced at the meeting to 'spend the next winter in a warmer climate; we will be back in our homes' (Civil Georgia, 2007);

4) Internally displaced children were encouraged to attend separate, 'IDP-only', schools run by the Abkhaz government in exile, which sought to recreate and maintain children's educational experience and identity.

As a result, IDPs feared integration too as something that would result in them giving up their right to return and cementing forever the socio-economic disadvantages and discrimination that many suffered in displacement (Conciliation Resources, 2009: 4). These fear can be attributed to the impact of governmental discourse and a lack of information on their rights. The state approach has changed after years and at least on the formal level looks promotes socio-economic integration.

State Strategy and Action Plan

The introduction of the state strategy and the action plan by the Government of Georgia was a step forward. Several other strategic documents were approved before, but always lacked a clarity. The current policy aims are to:

- a) Create conditions for the dignified and safe return of internally displaced persons;
- b) Support decent living conditions for the displaced population and their participation in society (The State Commission for the State Strategy for IDPs, 2009: 2).

Providing durable housing and socio-economic integration is considered as a primary means of achieving 'decent living conditions'. The state strategy defines and reports on living conditions, unemployment, social networks, education etc. It underlines the acuteness of the housing problem and negative externalities of the dilapidated, disadvantaged settlements including hindering economic development of the areas.

The central goal of the state strategy is provision of durable housing for displaced population that will be transferred into their ownership. IDPs settled in collective centres were considered as most vulnerable thus their needs are prioritized. The process started by reducing the number of collective centres and supporting rehabilitation of the buildings suitable for living purposes. This actions mirrored process in the broader transition from a socialist to a market-based economy, under which the ownership of public housing that companies allocate to their employees was transferred to its occupants. It has allowed IDPs, who had previously been unable to benefit from the privatisation process, to become homeowners (Gupta, 2015: 33). However, not all collective centres were 'treated' this way due to improper living conditions or commercial interests privately expressed by political and economic elites towards territories or buildings in different cities. Dolidze, Tatishvili and Chkhetia (2005) provide an extensive report on some of the cases like this when the commercial and political interests resulted in the

eviction of IDPs from several collective centres. By the end of 2013 29 thousand families have been provided with housing mostly by a renovation of collective centres (MRA, 2013).

New IDP Districts: Discussion of Patterns and Potential Shortcomings

In order provide further housing supply the state strategy considered construction of new building blocks for IDPs which will be transferred into ownership IDP ownership too. Recently MRA announced four more similar projects to be implemented. The national budget funds are utilized by MRA to construct the so-called 'new districts'⁹ (Figure 4).



Figure 4. The residential buildings in the new district in Poti, Western Georgia. Source: MRA, 2015.

By 2014 several large scale 'new districts' were realized in the cities of Batumi, Poti, Tskaltubo, Potskho Etseri and Zugdidi. There IDPs faced similar patterns of settlement as at the previous stages of their housing mobility ladder with minor difference related to the residence quality.

The districts are built on remote areas on the outskirts of cities, repeating location feature of collective centres. The four districts that were built between the years 2010-2012 are located on marginalized, distant, the least appealing part of the land within the city boundaries or adjacent to it. The territories used seemed unappealing for any other use, stayed vacant for decades or have been utilized for sheltering IDPs themselves.

'New districts' replicate other features of collective centres as well - a phenomenon officially tackled within the strategy. The surroundings of the new housing districts are used for non-residential purposes (mostly industrial) and are often uninhabited and utilized for factories, warehouses or are just empty. They are often bounded by derelict brownfields and decaying urban environment - areas with rather weak market positions. They often represent a dead-end

⁹ It should be noted that construction of the separated districts for IDPs has been practiced in the region of South Caucasus by Azerbaijan, experiencing the problem on much larger scale with around 600,000 IDPs.

in the urban structure of the city, staying disconnected from the rest of the activities, transport, local economy and financial flows.

The paragraphs above mostly referred to the spatial and the physical manifestation of strategy. However, there are other important aspects too. As the state strategy mentions severity of the homogeneous social environment and poor IDP networks it was expected that new developments will offer alterations. Nevertheless, all the housing units were allocated to displaced (largely from collective centres), which reproduces homogenous social environment as that existing in the collective centres. Bearing in mind the fact that MRA has not implemented any reasonable long-term program for overcoming joblessness, it is hard to expect any improvements towards the income-generating activities. The unemployment among IDPs was high before they moved into new apartments and 'new districts' will also be places of concentration of economic hardship.

Toponyms used locally in all districts represent another remarkable phenomenon. The names of IDPs original living locations such as region, municipalities, cities and small towns are used for local street names within districts, creating a context distinct from the area where these neighbourhoods are located. Similarly to parallel institutions established for IDPs contributing to the separation of them from the local societies and 'preserving' the identity of displaced groups the new 'local' gets linked to the hometowns from where IDPs have been displaced. Considering the binding legal procedures for naming the public places in Georgia, it is evident that local and central government have collaborated and used the approach on purpose.

Considering all described above it is hard to imagine that all the details that create a distinct phenomenon of a 'new district' came together by chance. There are a variety of factors shaping the project and its implementation and planning procedures. However, most of the statements on them are based on assumptions made and not on research or interview data. The location of 'new districts' is a number one detail that stands out after reviewing all the realized and 'in-progress' projects. The choice might be explained by the overall low land value in the brownfield areas especially on the edge of the city. Moreover, there is a higher flexibility for MRA to assemble land and provide housing on this areas rather than try to find small pieces of vacant land or housing estate within the city boundaries. On the other hand residential development in this areas might be promoted as the brownfield regeneration activities to the broader public. One more reason which might have made this project possible is the reason already mentioned above – by concentrating IDP population in specific areas local and national governments still manage to exercise some sort of control on IDP groups living in this areas.

Conclusion

As discussed in the paper the difficulties related to the IDP residence in urban environment has been manifested in three interconnected points summarized as institutionally driven [residential]

segregation. The policy and management (or mismanagement) efforts by the Georgian government was largely focused on hindering the integration of IDPs into society to keep their motivation for repatriation and maintain the territorial claim on the two breakaway regions. The issue of limited social capital and integration entered the governmental discourse only with the introduction of the state strategy.

The CCs associated with a large proportion of the IDP community are a manifestation of residential segregation. They offer less opportunity towards integration and more towards exclusion, not only because of the character of IDPs or their life aspirations, but due to the constraints that it creates in the everyday lives of IDPs, the spatial segregation and remoteness from other parts of the urban environment, extremely poor living standards, and the lack of basic amenities detrimental to reaching some level of economic well-being and integration. The congregation strategies exercised by IDPs do not promote local integration either. While it might be important during the first phase of living in displacement, after years it limits the chances of the displaced to reach out to the (adjacent) communities.

Even though the Strategy was directed towards dealing with the problems mentioned above, the efforts that have been demonstrated so far look less promising. The actions of MRA make it clear that supply of housing is the top priority due to which social and economic aspects of IDP lives are overlooked. Important issues such as access to education, reduction of unemployment, and improving IDP health care have been omitted from policies. Current actions illustrate the overall approach of MRA towards IDP problems that dismisses social aspects of integration and perceives housing to be the sole issue to deal with, which is expected to bring other improvements. In line with durable housing solutions and socio-economic integration of the population, the IDP action plan should ensure that employment opportunities are available to help the displaced become self-sustaining, eventually leading the State to the withdrawal of its target social assistance to IDPs (Kurshitashvili, 2012: 106). However, the public approval that might come from the physical provision of housing is much higher than the political benefits from the complicated process of socio-economic integration which might go unnoticed by the general public.

Although providing housing through 'new districts' seems to be a priority for the government, this could also lead to the further social exclusion while already being spatially separated. Tackling the problem by relying on an universal approach instead of considering local peculiarities and including policy beneficiaries in the decision making process, MRA is using a cookie-cutter approach and replicating an identical planning method in every case.

Considering the implementation status of the state strategy construction of similar residential areas will continue in several other cities. Although the planning documents and project of to-be-built new districts are not public yet some details are already visible. One of the

neighbourhoods that will be constructed for IDPs and house more than 2,000 families will be developed on the outskirts of Tbilisi close to the active military base and brownfield areas. The principle of building on remote areas is sustained again.

Last, but not least, by spatially grouping IDPs and providing them with a limited opportunities for contact outside of the neighbourhood, state officials keep exercising their control over them which proved to be important for central government to reach various political goals on different scales. These assumptions have been proved in different cases throughout the last decade, some of which are also outlined in the article.

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