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**URBAN DIMENSIONS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN GEORGIA:
The Phenomenon and the Emerging Housing Policy**

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The Phenomenon and the Emerging Housing Policy**

1st Draft: 7th of April, 2015

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Urban Dimensions of Internal Displacement in Georgia: The Phenomenon and the Emerging Housing Policy

The issue of forced displacement has been one of the distinctive features of Georgian cities over the last two decades since regaining independence. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) emerged as a separate vulnerable group due to violent ethno-political conflicts in the territories of the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Owing to the lack of housing options a considerable number of IDPs 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, covering all IDPs and aimed mainly at housing provision, promoting socio-economic integration and creating conditions for the dignified and safe return of IDPs to their original place of residence. This article has two aims: first, to present the specific phenomenon of internal displacement, specifically IDPs living in cities, and the difficulties faced by them drawing on the nationwide representative survey; and

second, to discuss aspects of the State Strategy dealing with the housing issue.

Keywords: *displacement, poverty, housing policy, residential segregation, Georgia*

1. 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, massive unemployment etc. In the early 90s, 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 Russo-Georgian war of 2008 resulted in a further increase in 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 lacking peace – so-called ‘frozen’ conflicts. Overall, more than 370,000 people have been displaced as a result. The IDPs from these two periods of displacement are referred to as the ‘old’ (the 1990s) and the ‘new’ (2008) IDPs (Ferris et al., 2011: 179). During these two exceptional events some IDPs left the country or managed to return to their homes adjacent to conflict areas. In 2013 according to MRA¹, 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)². The remaining IDPs live ‘individually’, not many own apartments, as they found ‘a shelter’ with relatives or friends. They often move from one rental apartment to another because of financial constraints. The latter group is not discussed here.

After being forced out from their homes a substantial number of IDPs had to settle in various non-residential buildings (schools, kindergartens, hospitals, government buildings) never designed for permanent housing – called collective centres³. 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 faced such as insufficient and low quality housing, high unemployment and under-employment, poor access to education and reskilling to improve employment prospects, spatial isolation and lack of integration with the local urban society. In 2007 the Government of Georgia reformed its approach towards IDPs and in 2009 introduced a State Strategy for

¹ The ministry facilitating IDP issues – The Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia, commonly referred to as MRA.

² The decrease in the total number was largely due to (labour) immigration or partial return to areas bordering the conflict.

³ Collective centres are common in countries with IDPs or refugees, and are considered as one of the worst housing options.

Internally Displaced Persons and an Action Plan for its implementation targeting local integration⁴ and housing improvements.

In the following section of the paper the vulnerabilities of IDPs all over the world will be introduced together with the data from Georgia. It is followed by an introduction to the survey methodology used for studying IDPs in eight Georgian cities and a description of the theoretical concept. The statements presented in the article are largely based on this survey combined with the secondary sources and government documents. The issues related to IDPs in Georgian cities are introduced and will be framed using a neighbourhood or area effect concept, emphasizing the impact on information networks. The second part of the paper will introduce the basic targets of the current policy and its manifestations. Overall, the article argues 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.

2. THE PROBLEM OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT: AN OVERVIEW

The notion of internal displacement implies an involuntary resettlement *within* the borders of a country:

‘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’ (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 1998: 5). They are often referred to as refugees, though they do not fall within the international legal definition⁵ as IDPs have not crossed international borders to find sanctuary. Even if displacement occurs within the borders of the state, IDPs rarely find a feasible solution to return to their homes. Around 33.3 million people worldwide today live in displacement. In countries such as Colombia, Iraq, 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 significant disruption of daily routine, a collapse of familiar networks and a challenge to beliefs and values (Tuval-Mashiach and Dekel, 2012: 24). In practical terms, it means the loss of homes, land, belongings and livelihoods, and the disruption of family and community life, creating special needs and vulnerabilities (IDMC and Brookings-LSE, 2013: 7).

⁴ Until the introduction of the state strategy, return was the only solution acceptable and mentioned by politicians and state agencies dealing with the issue; nor has the integration issue been tackled within the state strategy so far (Kabachnik et al., 2012, p. 4).

⁵ ‘The term “refugee” shall apply to any person as a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it (UN General Assembly, 1951, p. 14).’

IDPs are highly vulnerable people often with very limited access to employment, education, sufficient housing, especially while living in urban areas (Albuja et al., 2014; Williams, 2011). While some displaced may bring considerable human capital, their existence also presents a significant burden on the capacities of the governments and host societies. The local job market can rarely handle a large unplanned influx of forced migrants, especially during conflict or its aftermath. 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).

In almost the absolute majority of countries IDPs reside on the outskirts of cities sometimes in relative 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 centre of the city and the will of governments to exclude ‘problematic groups’ and ‘remove eyesores’ from the central areas where most of the financial flows are directed. Moreover, governments try to maintain control over IDPs which is best achieved if they are concentrated together. All the aspects listed above might not be present in every case, but are often repeated.

IDPs are more likely to own less, but have denser bonding ‘social capital’ such as support networks of community and kinship networks (Verisch et al., 2013). In the early days of displacement these networks might be helpful but afterwards limit interaction and construction of the bridging ties with locals. Similar assumptions are made about migrants arriving in foreign states where the support of ethnic communities is vital for the early years, but becomes problematic when migrants continue to maintain only limited ties (Bouma-Doff, 2007: 1104; Pinkster, 2009: 11), as this might lead to restricted information and isolation.

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. The conditions and the environment (Figure 1, Figure 2) they are forced to live in are the basis for major disequilibria between IDPs and locals.



Figure 1 IDP collective centre (former university dormitory) in Tbilisi, Georgia. Source: Gogishvili, 2011.

Figure 2 IDP collective centre (former administrative building) in Zugdidi, Georgia. Source: Gogishvili, 2012.

3. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

3.1. 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 argue that notwithstanding geographic location or national belonging, displaced populations ‘do constitute a significant source of vulnerability in affected societies’ (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 135). 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 overall importance of neighbourhood as a determinant of social and economic well-being at different stages in a person’s life has been researched throughout recent decades 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 and families residing in such neighbourhoods. The similar concept of area effects is the attempt 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). A neighbourhood effects perspective has never been applied to IDPs although considered as one of the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged groups in Georgia or internationally. The collective centres where they reside are largely what urban 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, this does not mean that it is the only source of vulnerability and that this concept can provide clues 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 research has grown rapidly during recent decades. 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 particularly locally oriented and lack social resources to improve their lives (Wilson, 1987/2012). Most of the studies that focus on the role of spatial attributes on [im]migrant 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) also brings together various 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. As a potential place of interaction, the neighbourhood is hypothesized as being one of the factors that influences social resources (such as information, support and advice) 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). There is a 'network' model in the neighbourhood effects concept which suggests that social inclusion depends on links to more advantaged, mainstream groups and thereby to networks offering critical information, material support or moral/cultural examples; these connections are rendered more difficult by spatial separation from these groups (Buck, 2001: 2255).

The *social isolation hypothesis*, first largely 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). According to the survey results, IDPs spend much of their time in proximity to people with the same status, especially unemployed.

It is argued that the concentration of the relatively poor or unemployed might lead to forming 'bonding capital', but not so much to 'bridging capital'. Bonding capital refers to strong ties between people that lead to a low amount of new information, while bridging capital refers to so-called weak ties that do give information about opportunities in the wider world (Kempen, 2006: 104). It enables people to participate in a network other than their own, which could provide them with useful (labour market) information (Bouma-Doff, 2007: 1002). Neighbourhood relations might be more important to those with limited resources and mobility than for those who are highly mobile and have easy access to economic resources (Bouma-Doff, 2007: 1001). This is also presented as a hypothesis called residual neighbourhood, which asserts that neighbourhood is the form of socializing for people with no broader networks – for example, low-income families, minority residents, unemployed (Logan and Spitze, 1994).

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.

3.2. 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)⁶. The representative quantitative survey has been conducted in eight cities (Figure 3) in 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.

⁶ A research study carried out by the Department of Human Geography, Tbilisi State University with the financial support of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN)

The questionnaire used for the survey collected individual and household data such as income, satisfaction with living conditions etc. using a semi-structured questionnaire. The collected data can be grouped as follows:

1. Description of adaptation process of IDPs;
2. Employment and job opportunities;
3. Social capital and networks;
4. Attitudes towards the local population.

Statistical data from MRA and GeoStat⁷ is used as additional sources, as well as available documents and reports prepared by departments of the Government of Georgia.

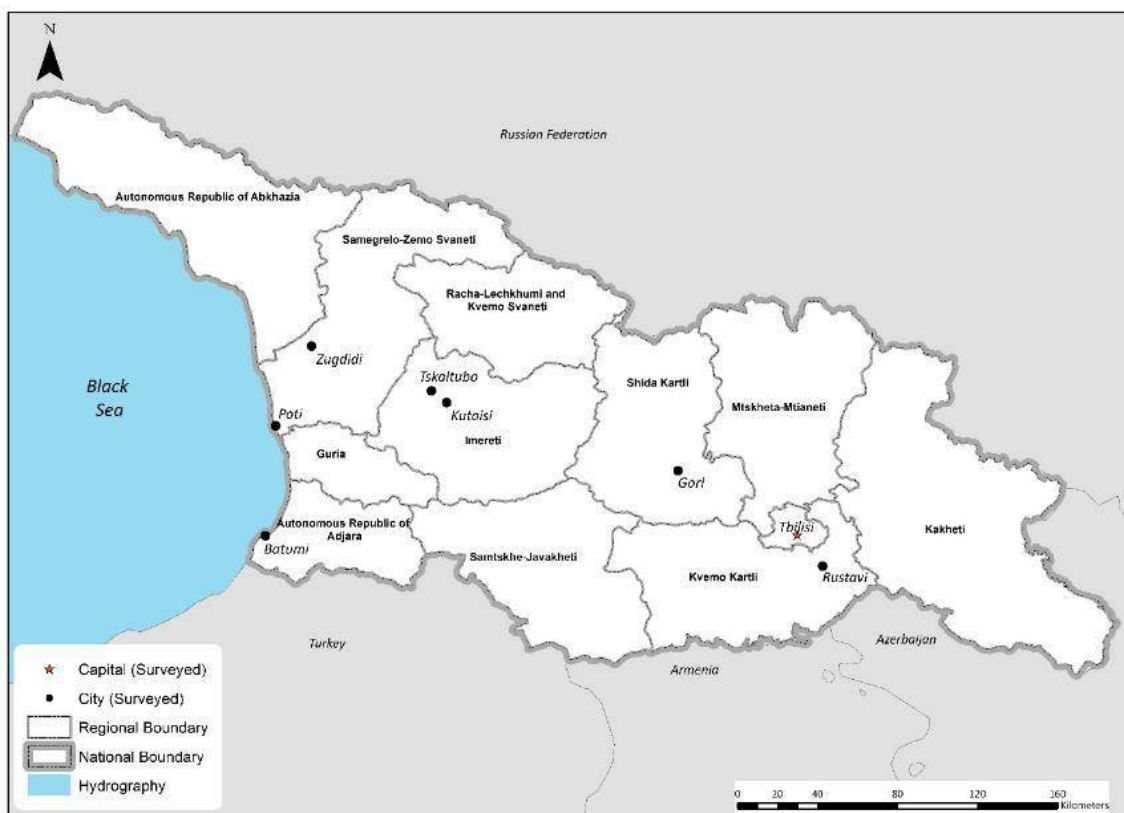


Figure 3 Regional Map of Georgia and eight biggest cities (also research areas) by IDP population in Georgia. Source: Jumpstart Georgia 2010, MRA 2012.

⁷ GeoStat is the National Statistics Office of Georgia.

4. INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN GEORGIA

4.1. 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.

4.2. Facts and Figures

The population of Georgia, as of 1st January 2015, was 4.4 million (GeoStat, 2014). The IDP population in Georgia reached 277,000 (more than 5% of the total population) (MRA, 2013). Their geographic distribution is uneven and concentrated in several big cities and the regions neighbouring the conflict zones.⁸

The internally displaced person's community in Georgia evolved largely as a low-income socio-cultural group. The monthly household income of more than half of the respondents in the CME-IDP⁹ 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 encouraging 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, deficiency of previous work experience and the lack of state support for vocational training to promote reincorporation into the local labour market (Gupta, 2015). The problem is particularly acute 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

⁸ Although, there are no detailed demographic data on IDP distribution for 2014 after four 'new districts' were introduced, they have all been built in four different locations thus affecting the distribution of the displaced population in favour of cities.

⁹ CME-IDP is an abbreviation for the research study 'Coping with Marginality and Exclusion: Can IDP Communities Successfully Integrate into Mainstream Urban Societies in Georgia?' (CRRC, 2011).

unemployment (Table 1). The national unemployment rate for 2012 (GeoStat, 2014), the year when the research was held, was 15%.

Location	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

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

4.3. Spatial Patterns of Displacement

IDPs tend to be clustered in areas adjacent to the conflict zone and in and around major cities. This is a common pattern (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 63) and is present in Georgia where more than 70% of IDPs are living in Tbilisi (98,000) and the Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti (Figure 3) region (90,000) (Table 2) (MRA, 2013)¹⁰. In 2003, 73.2% of IDPs lived in cities (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004). This pattern is largely the same in 2014.

Region	Population	IDP Population	% of IDP in Total Population
Abkhazia	No data	No data	No data
Adjara	390600	4727	1.21
Guria	140300	589	0.41
Imereti	704500	27078	3.84
Kakheti	406200	1458	0.35
Kvemo Kartli	505700	11620	2.25
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	109300	10106	9.24
Racha-Leckhumi and Kvemo Kartli	47300	963	2.03
Samegrelo and Zemo Svaneti	477100	86679	18.01
Samtskhe-Javakheti	212800	2327	1.09
Shida Kartli	313000	15126	4.83

Table 2 IDP share in Georgian regions in 2011. Source: GeoStat 2014, MRA 2012.

¹⁰ Neighbouring the conflict region of Abkhazia.

The displaced groups have a spatial concentration pattern on a macro scale, but are dispersed on a micro scale. IDPs were constrained in their choice of residence and location which had a considerable impact on their lives. The distribution of accommodation (collective centres), provided by the state or squatted, was ruled by the available supply (the amount of vacant building stock) and not by housing demand, as the weak Georgian state was unable to initiate projects to properly house displaced families. The existing stock was insufficient. IDPs had to accept the options available, which were buildings offering low, inadequate living standards, often on the outskirts of urban areas as space in the city centre was limited. The distribution of collective centres in Tbilisi provides an example of this (Figure 4). Even though these buildings can still be found in the central areas of cities, their concentration as well as the number of residents are higher on the outskirts (Kabachnik et al., 2014). The substantial numbers of IDPs are highly dependent on public transport that makes their mobility even more complex as no Georgian city offers a reliable public transport system.

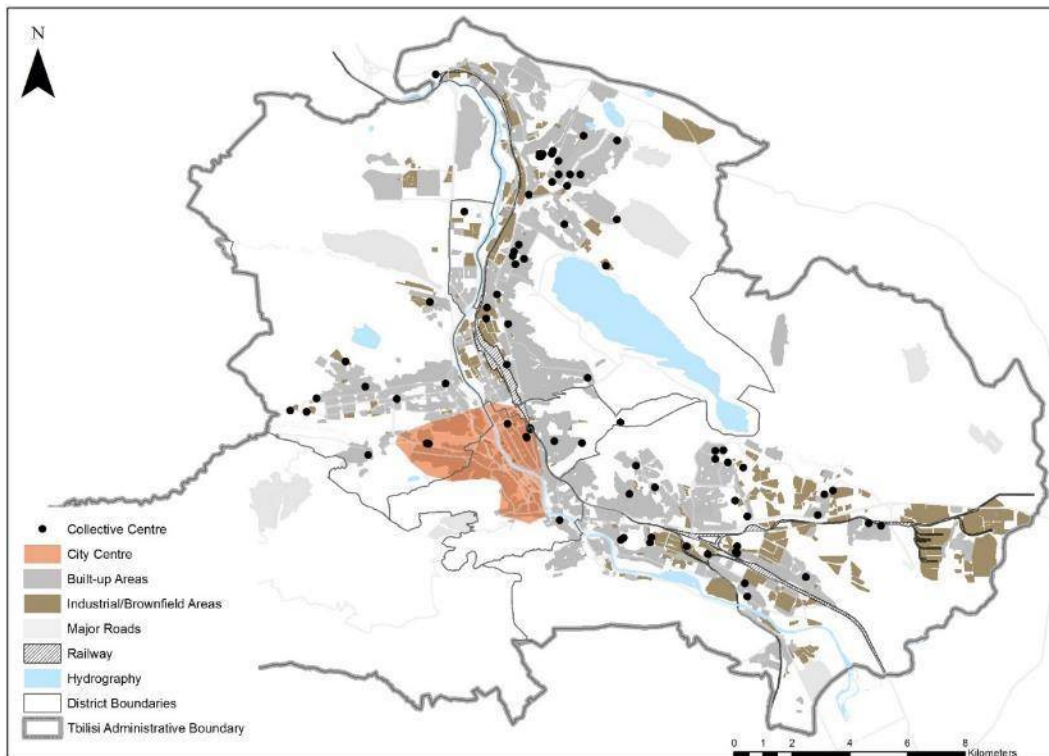


Figure 4 The location of IDP collective centres in Tbilisi, Georgia. Source: MRA, 2013.

It is crucial to study how the spatial settlement pattern within the city impacts dwellers of collective centres and vice versa. The inflow of IDPs into Georgian cities increased the local population sometimes by 20-30%, putting pressure on an already struggling job market. Such an increase can be beyond the carrying capacity of a city or region. Even when national rates of unemployment are high, existing data still illustrate higher rates among IDPs (*Table 1*), sometimes double the national figure (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 140). The population of some cities grew or remained stable despite the nationwide emigration. The total population of Georgia dropped by 17% (from 5.4 to 4.4 million) between 1989-2014 while some regions, municipalities or cities increased or remained the same – Samegrelo and Zemo Svaneti region

(bordering the conflict region of Abkhazia) increased by more than 10% within the same period; Zugdidi grew by 26%; Poti almost did not change despite the massive initial outmigration (GeoStat, 2014). This growth is fully attributed to the influx of IDPs in these cities.

The sub-national and urban concentration of the displaced had further impact. Their presence in some areas caused a deterioration in the quality of life (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003: 37). In cities such as Borjomi and Tskaltubo, it resulted in degradation of the existing tourist infrastructure¹¹ as the hotels and guesthouses were transformed into collective centres where IDPs still live. Besides the economic loss, it caused tensions between locals and IDPs.

4.4. The Effects of Inadequate Housing

IDPs in Georgia were forced to flee their homes and seek temporary housing. Due to the urgency to accommodate the displaced population, with the state being too weak to provide other feasible solutions, the existing building stock was utilized. IDP networks acted as a connection to get a temporary home for those who arrived later. 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 collective centres. 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 dramatically degraded (Walicki, 2012; Kurshitashvili, 2012). The settlements located on the outskirts of the city, poorly served by public transport, created varying degrees of isolation excluding IDPs from local people, basic amenities, employment and municipal services. The survey held in 2012 illustrates high dissatisfaction with the residential environment (Figure 5). The relative satisfaction in the cities of Batumi and Gori can be attributed to the fact that the majority of those surveyed are living in newly built buildings.

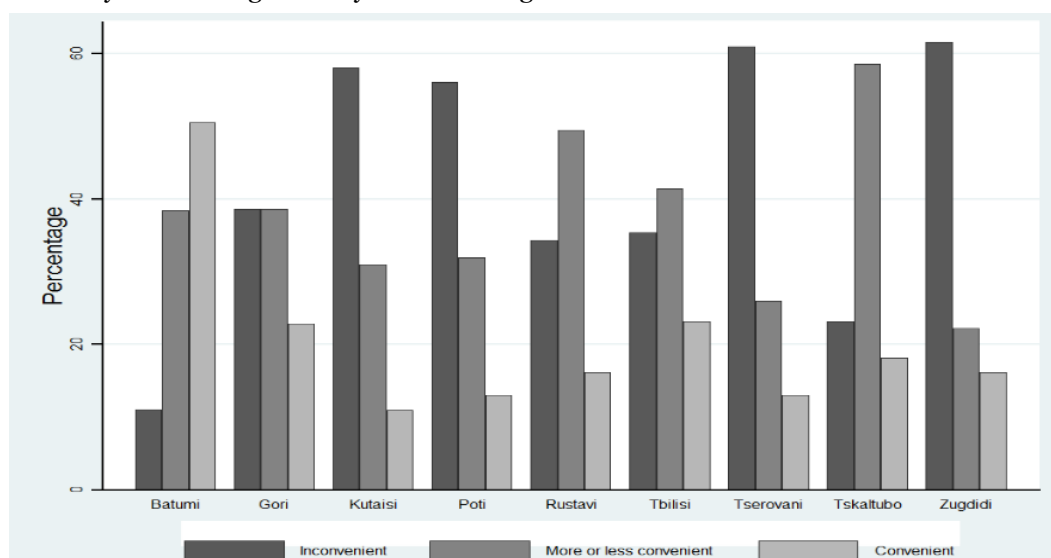


Figure 5 How convenient is your living space? Source: CME-IDP, 2013.

¹¹ 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.

As the majority by far of buildings used for collective centres were not designed for long-term residence, IDPs faced the necessity to adapt their living space to residential needs using do-it-yourself practices (Figure 6). In the long-term this caused the deterioration of buildings. Such changes involved shifting rooms, extending interior space by using areas and facilities never meant for living purposes.

Further changes were made on land adjacent to collective centres 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 7). It often led to conflict with locals as sometimes they also wished to use the same land or were unhappy with the IDPs' constructions. These developments were a perfect manifestation of the housing problems and produced various coping strategies. Insufficient amount and quality of living space justified this practice. The process of using adjacent land grew more after the Government declared, in the mid-1990s, that IDPs were allowed to use free lands (not defined) for family profit (Kharashvili, 2001: 236).



Figure 6 The interior of collective centre (former factory) in Zugdidi, Georgia. Source: Gogua, 2013.

Figure 7 The adaptation of (abandoned) public space by IDPs in Tbilisi, Georgia. Source: Gogishvili, 2010.

Besides their residential conditions, IDPs are disadvantaged due to tenure insecurity. Homeownership symbolizes stability and represents a valuable economic asset (Williams, 2011). As claimed in one of the recent reports delivered 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). Even if the law of Georgia on IDPs grants immunity to displaced groups from being evicted from their temporary housing this has not always been true (Dolidze et al., 2005; Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2009). IDPs have been excluded from overall homeownership trends – around 97% in Georgia (Sumbadze and Tarkhan-Mouravi, 2003: 36). The privatization process of collective centres started only after the launch of the State Strategy from 2009 and is underway now.

Collective centres create psychological and social pressure, health problems, through overcrowding and increasing deterioration of physical infrastructure never intended for such intensive occupation (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 140). The unacceptable living standards have been reported by a number of local and international organizations (Loughna et al., 2010: 19; Public Defender of Georgia, 2010: 28; UNHCR, 2009: 9).

4.5. Residential Segregation

Besides the health and social risks arising from living in cramped quarters, collective centres are often spatially isolated; limiting mobility, social interaction and employment opportunities. Although IDPs have strong bonding social networks, they still 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 IDPs¹² like themselves, illustrating the low level of interaction with the local population (Holtzman and Nezam, 2004: 112; Kabachnik et al., 2013) (Table 3). The same matter is highlighted in the State Strategy: ‘the limits of IDPs’ social networks and that their social capital does not facilitate their integration; this results in their isolation and lower participation in civil spheres (The State Commission for the State Strategy for IDPs, 2009: 6). The geographic vicinity of network members plays a role in limiting residents’ interactions with individuals and communities outside their ‘own’ (Andersson et al., 2014: 715; Buck, 2001). Owing to the high concentration of collective centres, 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 collective centres also means relatively low opportunity for interaction between the displaced and locals. While larger settlements, particularly those inhabited by IDPs from the same village/town, can facilitate maintenance of social networks, such larger settlements can conversely make it more difficult for the displaced to increase the heterogeneity of social ties (Mitchneck et al., 2009).

WHERE AND WITH WHOM DO YOU SPEND YOUR FREE TIME?	
In this neighbourhood, with other IDPs	24.50%
In this neighbourhood, with locals	22.20%
Other parts of the city, with IDPs	12.80%
Other parts of the city, with locals	40.50%
Among family members	22.20%
Has no free time	12.80%
Other	40.50%

Table 3 Where and with whom do you spend your free time? Source: CME-IDP, 2013.

One of the hypotheses regarding neighbourhood effects focuses on how the social environment plays a role in determining the employment search strategies, referred to as the ‘location’ and

¹² Holtzman & Nezam use a broader term ‘Displaced Population’ to refer both to refugees and internally displaced persons.

‘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 (Table 4, Table 5). The lack of social interaction with locals that IDPs demonstrated in the survey has causal links to the limited social networks, which is a result of the spatially distinct settlement pattern restricting one’s access to information. 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 extremely high rates of unemployment. 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.

FREQUENCY OF MOVEMENT [TOWARDS OTHER PARTS OF THE CITY]	
Every day	24.50%
2-3 times a week	22.20%
Once a week	12.80%
Less frequently	40.50%

Table 4 How often do you travel to other parts of the city from where you live? Source: CME-IDP, 2013.

TIME SPENT IN/AROUND COLLECTIVE CENTRE	
Whole day	66.54%
Half day	22.61%
Few times (just sleep here)	10.86%

Table 5 How much time do you spend in the collective centre? Source: CME-IDP, 2013.

IDPs’ isolation is further 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 facilities¹³ 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 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:

¹³ The majority of special 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 IDP Districts’ might bring back the idea of IDP schools.

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). This feeling has been particularly strong during the post-conflict decade, delinking IDPs from a range of personal contacts with local appointed and elected officials. The displaced live in one locality and yet are forced into another ‘virtual’, non-existent locality.

5. GOVERNANCE AND STATE POLICY FOR IDPs

5.1. 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 later revised, legislation targeting the displaced population determining basic rights and protections. However, from the early 1990s until the introduction of the State Strategy, in 2009, the government’s political concern has been limited to the assumption that IDP integration into local communities may halt their repatriation, thereby weakening Georgia’s sovereign territorial claims. These concerns have 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 collective centres 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 schools run by the Abkhaz government in exile, which sought to recreate and maintain children’s educational experience and identity as in their area of origin.

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 fears can be attributed

to the impact of governmental discourse and a lack of information on their rights. The state approach has changed after some years and at least at the formal level appears to promote socio-economic integration.

5.2. State Strategy and Action Plan

The introduction of the State Strategy and Action Plan by the Government of Georgia was a step forward. Several other strategic documents were approved before, but always lacked clarity. The current policy aims are to:

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

This article discusses the second goal.

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 the negative externalities of the dilapidated, disadvantaged settlements including hindering economic development of the areas. The central goal of the State Strategy is the provision of durable housing for the 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 the renovation of the buildings suitable for living purposes. These actions mirrored the 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 privatization process, to become homeowners (Gupta, 2015: 33). However, not all collective centres were 'treated' in this way due to improper living conditions or commercial interests privately expressed by political and economic elites towards land or buildings in different cities. Dolidze, Tatishvili and Chkhetia (2005) provide an extensive report on some such cases where commercial and political interests resulted in the eviction of IDPs from several collective centres. By the end of 2013, 29,000 families had been provided with housing, mostly by the renovation of collective centres (MRA, 2013).

5.3. New IDP Districts: Discussion of Patterns and Potential Shortcomings

In order to provide further housing supply the State Strategy considered the construction of new residential blocks for IDPs which will be transferred into IDP ownership too (Figure 8 a-b). By 2014, several large scale 'new districts' were realized in the cities of Batumi, Poti, Tskaltubo and Potskho Etseri and was underway in Zugdidi. There IDPs faced similar patterns of settlement as

at previous stages of their housing mobility ladder with a minor difference related to the quality of housing. Recently MRA announced a further four similar projects to be implemented.¹⁴ The districts are built in remote areas on the outskirts of cities, repeating the location feature of collective centres (Figure 9, Figure 10). The four districts that were built between the years 2010 to 2012 are located on marginalized, distant, and the least appealing area of land within the city boundaries or adjacent to it. The land used seemed to have been unappealing for any other use, had stayed vacant for decades or had already been utilized for sheltering IDPs.



Figure 8 a) New residential buildings in the 'new district' of Poti, Georgia. Source: Tsotsoria, 2013.
b) New residential buildings in the 'new district' of Batumi, Georgia. Source: MRA, 2011.



Figure 9 The map of the new IDP district location in the Batumi, Georgia. Source: Google Maps, 2015.

¹⁴ The construction of separate districts for IDPs has been practised in the region of South Caucasus by Azerbaijan, which is experiencing the problem on a much larger scale with around 600,000 IDPs (Trend AZ, 2013).



Figure 10 The map of new IDP district location in Poti, Georgia. Source: Google Maps, 2015.

'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 brownfield sites and decaying urban environments – areas with rather weak market positions. They often represent a dead-end in the urban structure of the city, remaining disconnected from other activities, transport, local economy and financial flows.

The paragraphs above mostly refer to the spatial and physical manifestation of the Strategy. However, there are other important aspects too. As the State Strategy refers to the severity of the homogeneous social environment and poor IDP networks, it was expected that new developments would offer alternatives. Nevertheless, all the housing units were allocated to the displaced (largely from collective centres), which reproduces the same homogeneous social environment as that existing in the collective centres. Bearing in mind the fact that MRA has not implemented any reasonable long-term programme for overcoming joblessness, it is hard to expect any improvements towards income-generating activities. 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 localities, such as regions, 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. Similar to the parallel institutions established for IDPs, this contributes to their separation from local society and to 'preserving' the identity of displaced groups, as the new 'locality' becomes linked to the hometowns from where IDPs have been displaced. Considering the binding legal procedures for naming public places in Georgia, it is evident that local and central government have collaborated and adopted this approach on purpose.

Considering all the 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

made about them are based on assumptions 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 brownfield areas especially on the edge of the city. Moreover, there is greater flexibility for MRA to assemble land and provide housing in these 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 these areas might be promoted as brownfield regeneration activities to the broader public. One more reason which might have made this project possible has already been mentioned above – by concentrating the IDP population in specific areas local and national governments still manage to exercise some sort of control over IDP groups living in these areas.

6. CONCLUSION

As discussed in this paper, the difficulties related to IDP residence in the urban environment have been manifested in three interconnected points summarized as institutionally driven [residential] segregation. The policy and management (or mismanagement) efforts of the Georgian government were largely focused on hindering the integration of IDPs into society to retain their motivation for repatriation and to 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 collective centres 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. They are concentrated into their residential areas due to the isolation of the collective centres, lack of incentive and motivation in business mobility, alienation from other groups of local society, etc. While congregation is important during the first phase of living in displacement, after several years it limits the chances of the displaced to reach out to other communities living around. They fail to develop bridging capital.

Even though the State Strategy was directed towards dealing with the problems mentioned above, the efforts and results that have so far been demonstrated look less promising. The actions of MRA make it clear that supply of housing is the top priority. By solely focusing on the physical part of the policy, social and economic aspects of IDP lives are overlooked. Important issues such as access to education, reduction of unemployment through providing IDP community empowerment and training, 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 proper 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 separation of IDPs from the local societies where they reside. Tackling the problem by relying on a 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, where only internally displaced families are accommodated.

Considering the implementation status of the State Strategy, the construction of similar residential areas will continue in several other cities. Although the planning documents and project of planned 'new districts' are not yet public 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 in remote areas is sustained again.

Last, but not least, by spatially grouping IDPs and providing them with limited opportunities for contact outside the neighbourhood, state officials continue to exercise 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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Acknowledgements:

Thank you to Antonio Calafati, Francesco Chiodelli, Enzo Falco, Ugo Rossi and all the Urban Studies research unit at the Gran Sasso Science Institute for their time and helpful comments that greatly strengthened and improved the text.

The present article is based on the original study conducted with the support of the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN). ASCN is a programme aimed at promoting the social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus (primarily Georgia and Armenia).