



MINISTRY OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS
FROM THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES, LABOUR,
HEALTH AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS OF GEORGIA



CONFERENCE ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT DEVOTED TO 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES ON INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

5 July 2019

A Conference devoted to a national celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement was held in Tbilisi on 5 July 2019. The Conference was aimed to discuss further the current strategies and action plans in finding durable solutions to a protracted internal displacement in Georgia. The event was co-hosted by the UN Resident Coordinator and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia (hereinafter MoH), with the organization support of UNHCR Regional Representation in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia). The UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights of IDPs was invited to Georgia to contribute to the event as a keynote speaker. Participants included different state and non-governmental agencies responsible for providing protection and solutions for IDPs, Office of the Public Defender of Georgia, civil society representatives, parliamentarians, donor community and development agencies.

Opening session was facilitated by **Ms. Yoko Akasaka, UNHCR Regional Representative a.i. in the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia)** who talked about the important roles played globally and in Georgia by Guiding Principles, progress Georgia has made *vis a vis* internally displaced and remaining challenges related to durable solutions. Welcoming speeches were delivered by **Ms. Sabine Machl, UN Residence Coordinator in Georgia**, who has emphasized the importance of re-opening of the discussion about the “*new approaches to IDP assistance*” that would lead to more sustainable way of life in host communities that will mainly focus on self-reliance of IDPs and try to reduce to the extent possible the heavy dependency of the IDP community on government provided support. She also emphasized the importance of further mainstreaming of IDPs in general government programming in view of Agenda 2030/SDGs. **Mr. Grigol Giorgadze, Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia**, outlined that addressing protracted displacement required coordinated actions from multiple state agencies so that all parties are duly consulted and informed. **Ms. Sophie Kiladze, Chair of the Human Rights and Civil Integration Committee of the Parliament of Georgia** talked about role of the legislative body in addressing internal displacement and more specifically what HR committee does in terms of oversight and legal drafting. She proudly mentioned that most of the recommendations made by the Ombudsman regarding the identified challenges related to protection of rights of IDPs have been successfully resolved.



Ms. Cecilia Jimenez-Damary, UN Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of IDPs delivered a keynote speech on Plan of Action for Advancing Prevention, Protection and Solutions for IDPs for 2018-2020. In her keynote speech, she provided background of its drafting process, which involved consultation with around 50 agencies with GP20 Steering Group - overseen by Austria, Honduras and Uganda; and stated Plan of Action helps to identify the key commitments including “not to leave anyone behind”, how to prevent displacement and what the solutions are. Moreover, the Plan of Action emphasizes IDP participation in all IDP approaches. As noted by Special Rapporteur, Georgia, like many other countries, is special and context driven, therefore, the vision and programs of IDPs need to be tailored to their needs. She also emphasized that recommendations of previous Special Rapporteur are important to be taken into account and she reaffirmed all the recommendations in Georgia, focusing on shift from status to needs based assistance without depriving IDP special protected status. She also noted that facilitating durable solutions should be sought through the use of the IASC framework and while return can be preferred solution of the IDPs, there are others such as local integration that can be considered, which will not mean giving up eventual return. She also highlighted that the coordinated approach of humanitarian and development actors are key, and engagement of local authorities needs to be further strengthened.

It is worth noting that during the event UNHCR Regional Representative presented Georgian version of GP 20 Campaign Mission Statement that advocates for the rights and freedoms of internally displaced people and called all the conference participants to sign up to support the campaign in case they are willing to support the work of the Special Rapporteur on HR of IDPs for her work in advancing prevention, protection and solutions for IDPs.



Mr. Murad Ablotia, Head of IDP and Eco-migrant’s Department of the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia delivered presentation on national legislation, policies and strategies on internal displacement and challenges faced in Georgia. Mr. Ablotia briefly talked about internal displacement background in Georgia. He noted that in addition to IDPs from occupied territories there are also persons displaced due to natural disasters (so called eco-migrants) in Georgia; their number is 5,900 families, more than 24,000

individuals; 2,000 families are currently under status determination procedure. Other topics of his presentation included policies and programmes on which MoH works such as durable housing for IDPs and elimination of all the collapsing collective centers. It was highlighted that pilot programme of purchasing housing in Tbilisi with the Government co-funding was initiated in the beginning of 2019 and is proceeding successfully; this is an opportunity for middle income IDPs to achieve durable housing solutions just with 15% cost contribution while the state covers other 85% of the cost of purchase of housing. Programs such as livelihood and social assistance were discussed as well and their importance was highlighted as, according to researches, unemployment rate among IDPs is double than among non-IDP population. Small grants target mainly agricultural sector and rural population therefore the livelihood opportunities are not limited only to urban areas. Presentation was concluded with the discussion on remaining challenges, which are protracted displacement, impossibility of IDPs to return to their homes, closing of collapsing collective centers and resettlement of IDPs, IDP access to employment and livelihood sources and needs-based social assistance.

Mr. Ablotia’s presentation was followed by the Q&A session. NGO representatives were particularly active and asked questions related to access to benefits by IDPs in Gali district and those who live in the villages adjacent to the dividing line, however particular attention was pressed on needs-based social

assistance and lack of information among IDPs about the existing state programs. It was noted by the representative of the MoH that assessment for housing programmes of the families permanently living in Gali district is a challenge as their actual housing conditions in Gali cannot be assessed in any way, which is an obligatory condition to participate in the selection procedure for housing. Regarding the lack of information about the state programmes the MoH representative noted that they are doing their best to raise awareness, e.g. they often visit regions and meet IDPs, they have volunteers who go from door to door in the regions to distribute information material to IDPs, as a result, the research showed that the rate of awareness about state services raised from 30% in the beginning of 2018 to 70% by end of 2018.

Mr. Dimitri Zviadadze, Programme Manager at Consortium Legal Aid Georgia shared results of IDP forum undertaken by LAG. IDP forum dedicated to 20th Anniversary of the United Nations Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement, was held on April 24. It was organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labor, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in the framework of the “Legal Assistance for IDPs in Georgia” project funded by UNHCR. Forum was attended by approx. 40 representatives of IDP communities from the different regions of Georgia including Zugdidi, Poti, Kopitnari, Khoni, Tskaltubo, Kutaisi, Tserovani, Rustavi and Tbilisi, also representatives of the national state institutions and IDP community and youth leaders, representatives of IDP community based organizations (CBOs) and/or home owners associations (HOAs) and socially active displaced persons participated in the event. The goal of the forum was to increase awareness on internal displacement related challenges, exchange ideas, perceptions and visions on ways forward in regard to addressing internal displacement in Georgia and to generate constructive dialogue between IDP communities, national and local stakeholders, as well as develop recommendations for all those concerned (presentation attached).

Office of the Public Defender of Georgia expressed its view in regard to collapsing collective centres and the need to close them as they pose threat to health and life. Representative of PDO stressed that situation in dividing line villages and in occupied territories is not improving, the right to life is not protected and right to freedom of movement, health and education is violated. People in Gali district cannot obtain de facto Abkhazian passports and can only apply for residence permit (which has limited duration), thus they have feeling of instability and insecurity, they cannot register their property and are restricted from the right to vote. Furthermore, it was mentioned that access to education becomes only harder in occupied territories, education in mother tongue is restricted, e.g. teachers are restricted to teach in Georgian language and some have been dismissed because of this.

Women Association “Consent” brought attention to the issue of municipalities stating that employees of municipalities shall be trained on IDP issues and awareness shall be raised. Other important issue discussed was lack of information and raising awareness both among municipality employees and IDPs.

Last topic discussed was **proposals for action to address protracted displacement** and support sustainable solutions, fourth priority area of the GP20 Plan of Action. Discussion focused on the need to have a reform of transition from status based assistance to needs based assistance. MoH expressed its wish and readiness to switch to needs based assistance as it is already a part of the state strategy, however the best and widely acceptable model of transition is not identified yet. It was also said that reform shall be discussed and agreed with the involvement of IDP community and other relevant stakeholders.

The UNHCR representative stated that UNHCR is actively cooperating with the Government in improving conditions of IDPs and achieving durable solutions. It was noted that IDP assistance program in Georgia is quite generous compared to other countries; As brief research undertaken regarding the topic showed, most of the IDP hosting countries do not provide the IDP status, housing is not given to IDPs under ownership and generally social benefits are attached to vulnerabilities and not linked to the status.

The Conference has given an opportunity to exchange their views among representatives of government and State agencies, donor community, UN agencies, civil society and IDP community representatives on ways forward for improving the situation of IDPs in Georgia, including in the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

At the end of the discussions, **four action points** have been identified, that will require further follow up from all the involved:

1. **Efficient communication mechanism to be set up** – as identified, irrespective of multiple stakeholders being involved in awareness and information sharing among the IDP communities, there is a need to further enhance existing systems. It should be aimed to establish a community-based communication and information dissemination mechanism.
2. **Improved interagency coordination mechanism** – number of participants referred to the need for better horizontal coordination, some referred to need for setting up interagency commission. However, considering that interagency coordination mechanism in a form of Steering Committee already exists at MoH, it is recommended to think of enhancing the existing mechanism by looking at its ToR and composition, i.e. engagement of various ministries with participation of the staff at decision making level, in order to identify what can be a more effective way of functioning and how to achieve it.
3. **Further mainstreaming of IDPs in existing livelihood programs** – it is important to mainstream the IDPs in the existing public and government programme, while ensuring that the needs of IDPs communities are analyzed and addressed in the spirit of “nobody is left behind”. As identified by the conference participants, there is still a need for positive discrimination towards IDPs; however key issue is investments in self-reliance and sustainability.
4. **Switch from status to needs based assistance for IDPs** – as suggested by the Special Rapporteur, it is important to expand consultative process to make it more inclusive, design of the reform model needs to be clear, however process cannot continue forever and decisions have to be made. Thus, recommendation is to re-launch discussions on it to come up with a specific plan of action. The question was posed if other state policies such as employment policy, public health, etc. should be reviewed simultaneously with the IDP social allowance policy.

During the closing remarks, Mr. Grigol Giorgadze, Deputy Minister of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia thanked all the participants for their respective contributions and participation and briefly talked about the Georgia GP20 Plan of Action that was submitted to the Global Protection Cluster and provides the commitments of the Georgian government *vis a vis* the implementation of Global Plan of Action. As outlined, there are 4 thematic priorities and related activities: (i) reforming IDP monthly allowance; (ii) information campaign among IDPs; (iii) accommodating under durable housing program; (iv) increasing access to livelihood opportunities.