



## Displacement in Georgia

IDP attitudes to conflict, return and justice

An Analysis of Survey Findings

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conciliation  
resources



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This report was written by Magdalena Frichova Grono (CR Programme Associate), and was produced in consultation with staff at CR and at CRRC, who gave advice and input into the analysis. The report draws on numerous consultations with regional experts and activists, including a two-day analysis workshop and a number of follow-up meetings with members of the *Synergy* IDP network.

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“We should talk about the rights of Georgians and the rights of the Abkhaz people. We should first make it clear how we are going to live there, [otherwise] we can’t build a relationship with the Abkhaz people.”

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The IDPs in Georgia survey was conducted in June 2010 among internally displaced persons (IDPs) displaced from Abkhazia as a result of the 1992-93 war and currently living in collective centres. This report provides a summary and an analysis of the survey findings. The analysis does not aspire to offer a conclusive interpretation of the survey data, but suggests one possible reading among many. It draws on extensive consultations with activists in the IDP network *Synergy* and a number of experts.

### Identification and integration

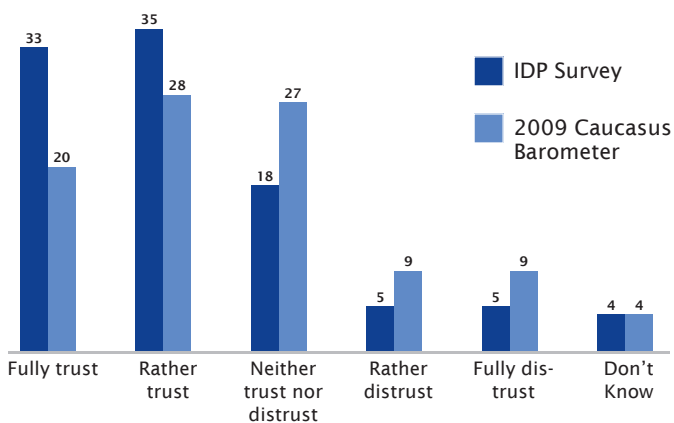
Most IDPs feel relatively at ease with Georgian society: nearly half of the respondents completely agree – and an additional third somewhat agree – that they feel a part of Georgian society. Nearly half reject the widespread assumption that IDPs are discriminated against because of their status. But the fact that 27% say they feel discriminated against and nearly as many chose to answer inconclusively, suggests there is much room for improvement in terms of IDPs’ integration.

The displaced are ambivalent about whether Georgian society is supportive of them: 54% completely or somewhat agree, 12% disagree and 31% answer inconclusively.

Many IDPs tend to feel politically marginalised: only 5% completely agree and 21% somewhat agree that the government takes their concerns seriously. 33% responded negatively and 38% inconclusively. The sense of frustration is most explicit in Tbilisi, where 43% disagree that the government pays serious attention to their concerns. A likely explanation for the variation between regions is that the public discourse in Tbilisi tends to be more liberal and pluralistic.

IDPs, however, cite a relatively high degree of trust in Georgian governmental institutions: 45% trust the executive government (compared to 31% Georgia-wide), and 68% trust the President of Georgia (48% Georgia-wide). This is perhaps somewhat paradoxical, but also typical of vulnerable communities.

**Q. 71.9 How much do you trust the President of Georgia? (%)**



The data indicates that perceptions of relations between Georgian and Abkhaz people are not as problem-free as IDPs generally claim and there is room to challenge assumptions and stereotypes about “the other”.

When asked whether there is more that unites Georgian and Abkhaz people than divides them, 68% completely or somewhat agreed and only a handful were in disagreement. The general perception of relations therefore appears to be cautiously positive; but there is a strong degree of uncertainty (26% answered inconclusively).

IDPs have a generally friendly disposition towards the Abkhaz (somewhat friendlier than the Georgia-wide population). But the relatively friendly outward projection is not matched by respondents’ perceptions of Abkhaz attitudes: only one third see Abkhaz as friendly to other ethnicities. IDPs also generally do not think Abkhaz are friendly towards Georgians: although only 19% agree that Abkhaz are hostile towards Georgians, nearly a half answered inconclusively.

The recurring high incidence of inconclusive answers in socially or politically sensitive questions leads IDP network members to believe that some of these may be implicitly negative answers influenced by considerations of social and political desirability. Different interpretations are possible; inconclusive answers may well be substantive in their own right, but IDP network members in analysing the results stressed that many IDPs are reluctant to openly air feelings of marginalisation or social vulnerability.

## Displacement and housing

Nearly 20 years since displacement from Abkhazia, a large majority of IDPs in collective centres still face serious socio-economic challenges: their living conditions are dire and access to employment opportunities and some services is inadequate. By far the biggest problems reported were the quality

of the living space (51% cite explicit dissatisfaction; only 11% are completely satisfied) and access to employment (an overwhelming 68% are dissatisfied). Only 18% say they work, as opposed to 33% Georgia-wide. These figures include those who are employed informally or part-time.

Were they to return today, going back to live in their former homes would be impossible or fraught with challenges for most IDPs (up to 75-85%), a reality that may not always be apparent to the Georgian public or the displaced community itself. Nearly half of respondents report that their dwelling in Abkhazia was destroyed or ruined; a quarter say other people live there, mostly without their permission; 10% do not know; in 11% of cases the dwelling is deserted; and 4% say their family uses the dwelling. Approximately 50% of IDPs would therefore be unable to return to their original homes because they have been destroyed. A further 25-35% would face issues of dealing with current inhabitants.

The fact that current inhabitants of Abkhazia have taken over much of the IDP property not destroyed compounds IDPs’ grievances related to conflict and displacement, although some respondents were also able to find more positive aspects, such as that the current dwellers look after their house. Over half of IDPs are deeply negative towards the current dwellers. There are those who resent that other people live in their houses, but there are also some who would rather see the house destroyed than someone else living in it, possibly preferring their “own ruins” to an intact house currently occupied by others. A quarter say they appreciate that someone is looking after IDPs’ houses.

There has been much speculation about “backchannel private property deals” between IDPs and their Abkhaz counterparts. In general, most people say they disapprove of such sales or rental arrangements: only 16% and 17% approve of IDPs selling or renting their dwelling respectively (70% and 65% explicitly disapprove). But the survey data is inconclusive about whether such arrangements actually happen: around 50% of respondents chose a “do not know” answer about property arrangements other IDPs may have made with the Abkhaz. Either this is not a common trend, or respondents do not wish to discuss this, given the issue’s sensitivity, and the lack of social and political desirability of such deals in Georgia; Georgian and Abkhaz experts alike thought that respondents may have been reluctant to answer this question.

A quarter of IDPs have been back to Abkhazia since first becoming displaced. The ethnic Georgian-inhabited Gali region naturally accounts for a majority of these visits: 64% of IDPs from Gali have been back. More women than men have been back to Abkhazia (26% as opposed to 19%), a trend one

can most likely ascribe to the relative ease with which women can travel across conflict boundary lines. Most of those who have visited Abkhazia were doing so mainly to visit family and friends or attend weddings and funerals.

## Return

The ability to regularly visit Abkhazia is an important consideration for 85% of respondents. A majority cited maintaining a dwelling (58%) and visiting graves and cemeteries (55%) as the most pressing reasons to visit in the event that they could not return permanently. There is a discrepancy between the purpose of the visits that have been underway, and the main reasons for prospective visits cited by IDPs who have not been back to Abkhazia. Those who have visited Abkhazia since becoming displaced do not cite visiting graves and maintaining a dwelling as priorities.

The displaced tend to focus on the right of return, often without realising the extent to which Abkhazia has changed or analysing what conditions would have to be fulfilled for them to be able to exercise that right. The survey attempted to tease out what proportion of IDPs would consider return to Abkhazia and under what conditions.

85% are only ready to consider returning if Georgia re-establishes control over Abkhazia, that is if Abkhazia's political status was in line with Georgia's stated political goals. 87% say they would consider returning to Abkhazia permanently if Abkhazia reintegrates with Georgia; a differently framed question confirms that only 9% would consider return if Abkhazia remains outside of Georgia's control.

Around 10% of IDPs were ready to consider returning under different status options to which Georgia would not agree. If most of the world, excluding Georgia, recognised the entity, 9% would consider return. This is less than if Abkhazia were integrated into Russia (11%) or if the current state of affairs continued, with Abkhazia not being recognised by most of the world (12%). If broken down by the settlement location, a relatively high number of IDPs from Tbilisi (20%) would be ready to return to Abkhazia in its current status; IDP network members again saw the capital's relatively more liberal environment as a factor underpinning regional variation in responses.

If Georgia consented to Abkhazia's independence, and most of the world also recognised it, 17% would consider returning. This seems a low figure given that the option presupposes Georgia's consent; a likely explanation is that respondents did not perceive as realistic that Georgia would see this as being in its interests.

Given that 85% are only ready to consider return if Abkhazia reintegrates with Georgia, IDPs' projections for whether and in what time frames that might happen are an important indicator of their own understanding of how probable return might or might not be. 26% believe that Abkhazia will be reintegrated in the next 10 years; 11% expect significantly longer timeframes; 14% say never. 49% say they do not know. Different interpretations of this figure are possible: it may mean that IDPs who have been waiting for return to be possible for nearly 20 years simply feel "do not know" is the most realistic answer at this point; IDP network members suggested it may reflect a degree of denial and some respondents' difficulty to accept a situation that is currently not in their favour.

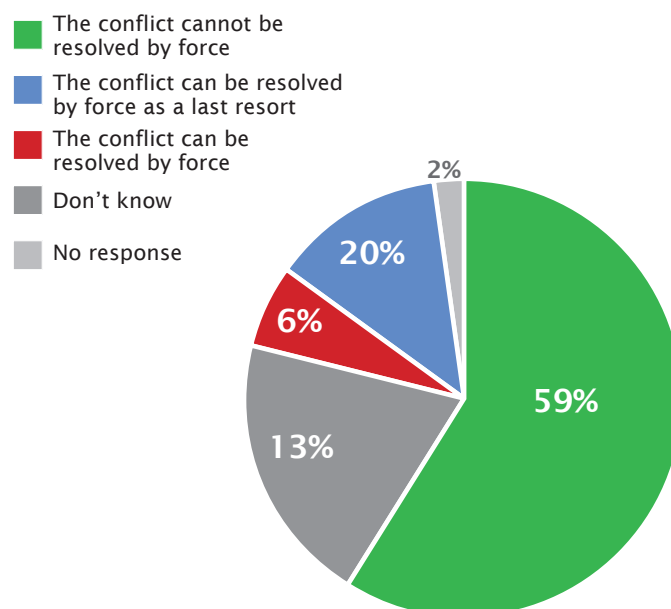
A more explicit sense of realism permeates IDP thinking about the prospects for Abkhazia's reintegration since the August 2008 conflict. 60% think the chances of Abkhazia becoming a part of Georgia have decreased since the 2008 conflict (as compared to 39% Georgia-wide).

## Conflict resolution

IDPs are potentially a valuable resource for building peace within Georgian society; they generally favour pragmatic approaches to conflict resolution and are in favour of practical peacebuilding and activities geared towards reconciliation.

They are not a predominantly belligerent group: 59% believe the conflict cannot be resolved by force. A quarter of respondents, however, do not

**Q. 61** Today, do you believe that the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict can be resolved by force, can be resolved by force as a last resort, or cannot be resolved by force? (%)



“People over thirty who make decisions in their families have made ties here. They will look carefully whether it is possible to live in Abkhazia – and how.”

rule out the military option: while only 6% believe that the conflict can be resolved by force, a further 20% think the conflict could be resolved by force as a last resort. Despite Georgia's troops being driven out of South Ossetia and the Kodori gorge in the 2008 war with Russia, 18% said that their belief that the conflict could be resolved by force (or could be resolved by force as a last resort) has increased or stayed the same since 2008.

A majority of the displaced do not see the conflict today as locally driven. 59% more or less agree that the conflict today is not between Georgian and Abkhaz parties, but between the Russian and Western governments. An overwhelming majority (85%) also agree that “the conflict today is not between Georgian and Abkhaz parties, but between the Georgian and Russian governments”.

But most IDPs are pragmatic in their approach to practical conflict resolution: a majority would support bilateral conflict resolution activities between Tbilisi and Sukhumi. 59% would support signing a non-use of force agreement with Abkhazia and 58% would support commencing negotiations with the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities about Abkhazia's status. Fewer would be in support of such measures with Russia (53% for a non-use of force agreement with Russia; 45% for launching negotiations with Russia about Abkhazia's status).

Were direct negotiations with the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities to restart, only a quarter of the respondents would prioritise status discussions. Most IDPs would focus on return issues (83%); nearly half would like issues of security along the ceasefire line to be tackled. Unrestricted travel of all Georgians to Abkhazia scored as low as status (24%). Development of trade between Georgian and Abkhaz people scored only 5%; this is noteworthy, given that trade is generally believed to be a useful tool for building up cross-conflict contacts (only 2% cited trade as a motivation for visiting Abkhazia).

A Georgia-wide poll, in which respondents were asked to rank which conflict resolution activity they would support, found that: 18% would support signing a non-use of force agreement with Abkhazia as the most important step; 16% would allow civil society a greater role in activities contributing to reconciliation; 14% would sign a

non-use of force agreement with Russia and 14% would also commence negotiations with Russia about the status of Abkhazia.

## Justice

There is a demand for justice issues to be addressed. A majority of respondents (59%) feel that injustices that happened in the past should be addressed in order to resolve the conflict; 32% think that past injustices should be left alone.

Judicial mechanisms of addressing legacies of past abuse – such as investigation and prosecution of war crimes – got high approval rates. 78% thought that war crimes should be investigated; this is a relatively high figure given that 40% of IDPs say their family members were involved in the fighting. From among those who favour the investigation of war crimes, half felt all perpetrators should be prosecuted; just under half felt only high ranking officials should be prosecuted; 11% said war crimes should be investigated but no one should be prosecuted. In general, 55% consider prosecution of persons accused of war crimes to be very or somewhat important in order to feel that past injustices have been addressed.

Reparations – symbolic and financial – would also be welcome by IDPs. Almost three quarters of respondents would support financial reparations to compensate victims or their families. 39% felt the Georgian government should be primarily responsible for financial reparations to the Georgian victims, followed by the Russian government (23%). 50% of respondents felt an apology to them by the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities was important in order for them to feel that past injustices have been addressed.

Documentation of past abuses was seen as important for 52%. Yet activities such as civil society-led documentation processes and publication in the media of personal war time stories were assessed in a mixed way.

The survey data indicates a limited, if understandably limited, ability on the part of IDPs to empathise with the Abkhaz side. When asked about symbolic gestures that would acknowledge the other side's losses, only a quarter of respondents were fully supportive, and a further 14% somewhat supportive.



## SURVEY FINDINGS

### 1. Introduction

The “IDPs in Georgia” survey was carried out by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC) in conjunction with Conciliation Resources (CR), with the financial support of the European Union’s Instrument for Stability. The survey was conducted in June 2010 with IDPs displaced from Abkhazia as a result of the 1992-93 war and currently living in state-owned temporary centres of collective settlement (hereafter, “collective centres”).<sup>1</sup>

This report provides a summary and an analysis of the survey data. The analysis contained here does not aspire to offer a conclusive interpretation of the survey findings; it suggests one possible reading among many.

It draws on consultations with a number of experts and IDP activists. The conclusions are informed by a two-day “live analysis” workshop held in November 2010 with key members of *Synergy*, a network of IDP non-governmental organisations (NGOs) from Tbilisi, Imereti and Samegrelo regions. In addition, discussions in a range of meetings (with *Synergy*

and other IDPs, among small groups of Georgian experts and representatives of international NGOs, and in mixed Georgian/Abkhaz groups) fed into the report.

The full survey in the form of frequency slides is available at [www.c-r.org](http://www.c-r.org) and [www.crrc.ge](http://www.crrc.ge). A description of the methodology and the fieldwork is detailed in the *IDPs in Georgia – fieldwork and methodology report*, available on request from CR and CRRC. Comparisons with Georgia-wide statistics (reflecting a sample of the country’s entire population) draw on data from the 2009 and 2010 editions of the Caucasus Barometer, an annual opinion poll conducted by the CRRC.<sup>2</sup>

### 2. Identification and integration

#### Identity/language

The survey shows that an overwhelming majority (94%) consider themselves a part of the Georgian ethnic group. 17% of the respondents say they consider themselves Mingrelian. 75% report speaking Georgian at home, whereas 23% report speaking Mingrelian<sup>3</sup>.

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1. Given challenges with representative sampling, IDPs currently living in private accommodation were not included in this survey. To shed greater light on their perspectives on return, conflict resolution and justice, focus groups were carried out with IDPs living in private accommodation in the Tbilisi, Kutaisi and Zugdidi areas. A descriptive report of these focus group discussions is available on request from CR and CRRC. Quotes used in this publication are taken either from the focus group report or from the November 2010 “live analysis” workshop with *Synergy*.

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2. Information about the Caucasus Barometer is available at the CRRC website (<http://www.crrccenters.org/caucasusbarometer/overview/>).

3. The Mingrelian language is one of the languages of the Kartvelian language group, which also comprises Georgian, Svan and Laz; Georgian being the only language among them which has a written form.



## Inter-ethnic relations

### Friendship and marriage

Most displaced report a friendly disposition towards Abkhaz. 82% of respondents were prepared to be friends with Abkhaz, fewer than with Greeks (91%) or Americans (83%), but more than with Azerbaijanis, Ossetians or Armenians. Abkhaz and Ossetians scored lowest among all the polled ethnic/national groups (both at 72%) in a Georgia-wide poll, bar the Chinese (64%).

If broken down according to where the displaced lived prior to the conflict, approval rates of friendship with Abkhaz vary: the lowest approval rate (77%) was expressed by former dwellers of Sukhumi (known as Sukhum to Abkhaz)<sup>4</sup>, in which nationalistic politics featured prominently prior to the outbreak of the 1992-93 war and where protracted fighting took place during the war. The highest approval rate (90%) was expressed by former dwellers of Ochamchire (known as Ochamchira to Abkhaz), which had had a strongly mixed population prior to the conflict.

Dramatically fewer IDPs (and respondents in a Georgia-wide poll alike) expressed approval of women of their ethnicity marrying outside of this ethnic group: only 40% IDPs would approve of Georgian women marrying Abkhaz men. Children from such a mixed marriage would no longer be considered ethnic Georgian – an important consideration in a still relatively traditional society. These low approval rates were common to all polled ethnicities. The Georgia-wide results placed Greeks (41%), Russians (39%) and even Americans (38%) ahead of Abkhaz and Ossetians (both at 32%).

### Cultural closeness

A widespread narrative among the displaced community is about the “harmonious inter-ethnic past” in Abkhazia prior to the conflict. Many say they consider Abkhaz to be “brothers” and emphasise there were no significant issues among Georgians and Abkhaz living in the pre-war Abkhazia, thereby de-emphasising the role of respective nationalisms in the outbreak of the war.

Though many IDPs, and many among the Georgian political leadership, assert cultural closeness and unproblematic Georgian-Abkhaz relations at the societal level, the survey does not overwhelmingly support this assumption. The general perception of relations appears to be cautiously positive, but there is a strong degree of uncertainty. While 68% more or less agree that more unites than divides

4. Place names are highly politicised in the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict. The place names used here reflect those in use at the onset of the conflict in the early 1990s; hence ‘Sukhumi’ is used rather than ‘Sukhum’. However, the version preferred by the other side is given in brackets after the first usage in each case.

Georgian and Abkhaz people in terms of culture, values and mentality, only 28% agreed completely and 26% neither agreed nor disagreed. Similarly, 65% more or less agree that Georgian people are friendly towards Abkhaz people, but only a quarter of respondents agree completely and 35% disagree or are inconclusive.

The respondents’ relatively friendly outward projection towards Abkhaz is not matched by their perceptions of Abkhaz people’s attitudes towards themselves or other ethnic groups: only 11% completely agree, and an additional 22% agree somewhat, that Abkhaz are friendly to other ethnicities. IDPs also generally do not think Abkhaz are friendly towards Georgians: only 35% disagree that Abkhaz are hostile towards Georgians; 46% answered inconclusively.

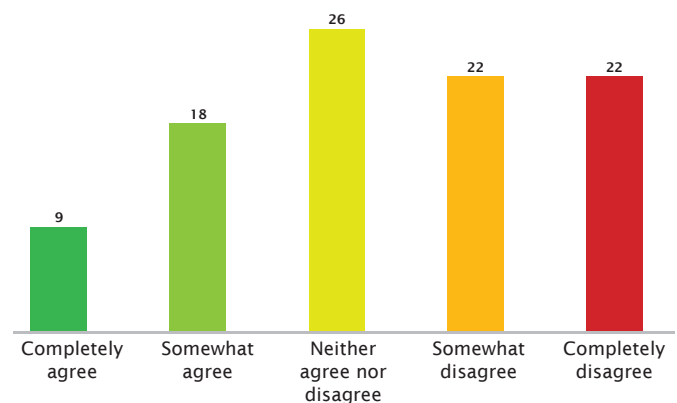
Given the conflict’s intractability, the IDPs’ inability to return to Abkhazia, and the lack of contact between the ethnic Abkhaz and ethnic Georgian communities, these numbers still paint a relatively optimistic picture. There is, however, much room to challenge assumptions and stereotypes and rebuild inter-ethnic relations.

## Integration

### IDPs as part of the Georgian society

It is commonly assumed that people displaced by conflict are insufficiently integrated into Georgian society and they feel marginalised and alienated. According to the survey data, however, IDPs say they are relatively at ease with Georgian society. Nearly 50% completely agree (and a total of 83% completely or somewhat agree) that they feel like a part of Georgian society. Only 1% disagree completely and 4% disagree somewhat. On balance, this portrays an optimistic picture according to which more integration has taken place than is commonly assumed. Some IDP network members, however, cautioned that with such sensitive questions IDPs may find it difficult, or even shameful, to admit they feel marginalised,

Q. 22.4 Do you agree or disagree with the statement “I feel discriminated against because I am an IDP”? (%)



and opt for answers that give them the greatest sense of normality.

Nearly half reject the often-cited assumption that IDPs are discriminated against because of their status. There is still much room for improvement in their integration, however, given that 27% explicitly say they feel discriminated against and nearly as many choose to answer inconclusively.

Respondents were similarly ambivalent about whether Georgian society is supportive of them: 54% completely or somewhat agree, 12% disagree and 31% neither agree nor disagree.

There was a high incidence of inconclusive answers, most often in socially or politically sensitive questions or questions requiring a higher degree of abstraction. Different interpretations can be made, of course, and it is possible that “don’t knows” are just that and need to be taken at face value. Based on their deep knowledge of the context and given the information some questions were seeking to tease out, *Synergy* members, however, felt that in some cases inconclusive answers likely represented at least some implicitly negative answers. They argued this was likely underpinned by a degree of self-censorship or apprehension or simply the wish to retain a non-confrontational attitude.

### Politically marginalised

The picture gets explicitly more ambivalent when the Georgian authorities’ approach to the displaced community is discussed. The data confirms that some IDPs feel politically marginalised.

Only 5% completely agree, and an additional 21% somewhat agree, that the Georgian government takes IDP concerns seriously; 33% somewhat or completely disagree and 38% neither agree nor disagree. Respondents from the capital were much more outspoken in their criticism of the authorities’ attitude: 43% of Tbilisi-based

IDPs responded critically, as opposed to 28% in Samegrelo, and 18% in other areas. Overall, the most outspoken answers were typically reported in Tbilisi, where the context is generally more liberal than in the regions of Georgia.

The IDPs’ sense of being on the margins of the government’s focus has steadily grown over the past two decades according to the IDP network. It was further fuelled by the August 2008 war, when violent conflict erupted in South Ossetia: permanent housing solutions in new villages or refurbished apartments were offered to a majority of persons displaced by that conflict within one or two years of their displacement. Although there were issues with poor construction or inadequate infrastructure or the provision of education and health facilities in some areas,<sup>5</sup> the government’s campaign to respond rapidly to the problems of “new IDPs” left many among the “old IDPs” disenchanted.<sup>6</sup>

### Trust in the authorities

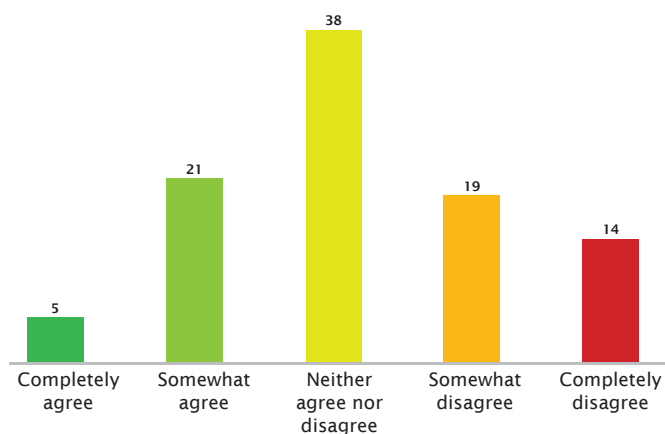
There is some incongruity between IDPs’ assessments of how seriously the authorities take their concerns and indicators of how much they trust the Georgian authorities (explored in the General Attitudes section of the survey).

IDPs cite a relatively high degree of trust in Georgian governmental institutions: 41% trust the Georgian parliament (compared to 30% Georgia-wide); 45% trust the executive government (31% Georgia-wide); and 68% trust the President of Georgia (48% Georgia-wide).

47% trust the Ministry of Accommodation and Refugees<sup>7</sup>; 28% say they neither trust nor distrust the Ministry. The Abkhaz authorities-in-exile are both trusted and distrusted by one third; the remaining third chose to say neither.

In general, 10-30% more IDPs than average Georgians trust different executive, legislative and judicial institutions. For vulnerable and marginalised groups (such as national minorities, including those in Georgia), a common trend tends to be to express trust in authorities relatively more than the general population. According to the IDP network this is not surprising: “IDPs have higher needs and expectations, and hence need to trust the government more”.<sup>8</sup>

**Q.22.3** Do you agree or disagree with the statement “I feel that IDP concerns are taken seriously by the Georgian government”? (%)



5. “Georgia: Quick Facts”, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre and Norwegian Refugee Council.  
6. This notwithstanding, in an impressive show of solidarity, many among the IDPs from Abkhazia have offered help and support to people displaced by the 2008 conflict, especially in the months immediately after the conflict.  
7. The Ministry was renamed shortly after the survey was conducted to ‘Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees’.  
8. IDP survey analysis workshop with IDP activists, Tbilisi, November 2010.



The survey was conducted in June 2010, just after local elections when expectations of the authorities were boosted by the pre-election campaign. Furthermore, in July 2010 Georgian authorities launched a new series of evictions of IDPs from state-owned collective centres in Tbilisi. Since then, hundreds have been forcibly resettled, reportedly with the aim to provide them durable housing solutions. Many instances have ignored international standards. It is reasonable to assume that this process has negatively impacted IDPs' perceptions of the authorities, especially in Tbilisi.

### 3. Displacement and housing

#### The current housing situation<sup>9</sup>

In 2009, the Georgian government adopted a revised action plan to implement its strategy for IDPs which concerned all internally displaced populations and aimed to provide housing, promote socio-economic integration and inform people about decisions affecting them. Elements of that action plan are yet to be implemented, especially in relation to the wave of IDPs from 1992-93.

Many IDPs, particularly those who live in state-owned temporary centres of collective settlement, continue to face difficult or precarious living conditions as the collective centres are mostly overcrowded and dilapidated nonresidential buildings.<sup>10</sup> The lack of access to employment opportunities and some social services is pressing. The survey confirms this in no uncertain terms.

In collective centres, one of the most burning problems reported by IDPs is the quality of the living space. Only 11% are completely satisfied and 20% somewhat satisfied with the living space they inhabit; 51% cite explicit dissatisfaction. Significant improvement has been achieved in providing utilities – a large majority (87%) are satisfied with the availability of electricity.<sup>11</sup> A lower number (58%) cite satisfaction with the availability of pipeline water.

In general, the biggest issue in the settlements is access to employment – only 15% are satisfied with the availability of employment opportunities, while an overwhelming 68% are dissatisfied. Employment levels among the displaced population appear significantly lower than Georgia-wide: only 18% of

9. As noted above, the survey was conducted in June 2010, just as government-organised evictions of IDPs from collective centres in Tbilisi started. This issue is hence not reflected in the survey.

10. Over 40 percent of Georgia's IDPs live in 1,658 temporary shelters, 515 of which are in Tbilisi. 2011 World Report: Georgia, Human Rights Watch, <http://www.hrw.org/en/world-report-2011/georgia>

11. The 24-hour provision of electricity has been among significant infrastructural achievements of the Saakashvili administration Georgia-wide.

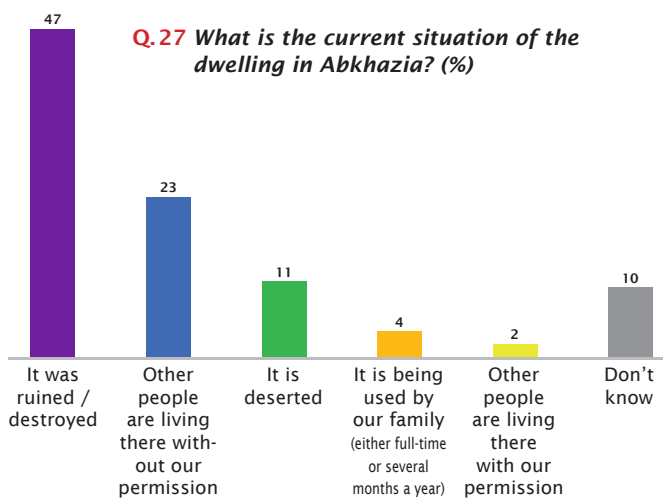
IDPs say they work,<sup>12</sup> as opposed to 33% Georgia-wide who reported having a job in 2009.<sup>13</sup>

Although much has been achieved in terms of access to services, there remains room for improvement. For example, only 47% are satisfied with the availability of healthcare facilities. Up to 64%, however, were completely or somewhat satisfied with access to pre-tertiary education.

89% are completely or somewhat satisfied with the proximity to friends and relatives of their current settlement. Given the importance of kinship ties in Georgia, this appears to confirm the widely-held assumption that kin groups are likely to be clustered together.

### IDPs' property in Abkhazia

The displaced Georgians' property in Abkhazia has been destroyed by conflict, left deserted or taken over by others (whether for refuge or profit).



Since the conflict in the 1990s, the Georgian side has considered property transactions in Abkhazia illegal. This was further spelled out by the 2008 Law on Occupied Territories. Even to the limited extent that one side can do so singlehandedly, the Abkhaz *de facto* administration has not addressed conflict-related property issues, for example by registering property acquisitions or transfers in a systematic way. Rather, it has tolerated an unregulated system of property transfers, often favouring ethnic Abkhaz. Real estate in Abkhazia is valuable, and its costs have increased after Abkhazia's recognition by Russia in 2008.

Given the current impasse in the conflict resolution process and the low probability that these property issues will be resolved in the short-to-medium

12. These numbers include people that are officially employed, informally employed and self-employed. They may work either full-time or part-time but the work they do brings them monetary income.

13. 2009 Caucasus Barometer.

term, the survey sought to elucidate IDPs' current perceptions of their preferences and calculations on property issues.

Nearly all (99%) of the respondents said they owned the dwelling in which they lived in Abkhazia prior to the conflict. Only 29% have any official documents confirming this ownership, however.

Were they to be able to return today, going back to live in their former homes would be impossible or fraught with challenges for up to 85% of IDPs – a stark reality that may not always be apparent to the Georgian public or the displaced community itself. Nearly half (47%) report that their dwelling was destroyed or ruined; 23% say other people live there without their permission; 2% say others live there with their permission; in 11% of cases the dwelling is deserted; 4% say their family uses the dwelling, and 10% do not know. In other words, many of those whose original homes have not been destroyed would face issues of dealing with current inhabitants.

This data also indicates that, based on the right to reparation, nearly a half of displaced families should be entitled to some form of compensation for property destroyed during the war. In the case of at least 25%, financial compensations or replacement dwelling in lieu of their original home would probably be appropriate should return of the original property not be an option.<sup>14</sup> None of this would of course address their right of return *per se*.

### Impact of property transfers on inter-ethnic relations

The fact that current inhabitants of Abkhazia have taken over much of the IDP property that has not been destroyed compounds IDPs' grievances related to conflict and displacement. Nevertheless, many respondents are able to transcend this and even look for positive aspects.

Nearly half resent that other people live in their houses, and one in eight would rather see the house destroyed than someone else living in it, possibly preferring their "own ruins" to an intact house currently owned by others. Respondents whose houses are not occupied paint only a marginally different picture: while fewer resent that others live in IDPs' houses, more say they would prefer to see the houses destroyed rather than have others live in it.

*Synergy* members believe that it might be psychologically easier for some IDPs to relate to "their own ruins" than to their house that is currently occupied by others.

A significant percentage – a quarter of respondents from both groups – say they appreciate that

14. Land ownership has not been established in Abkhazia since the Soviet times.

someone else is looking after their house. This is an important potential resource for peacebuilding.

### “Backchannel” property arrangements

According to various sources – among the displaced and in Abkhazia – a number of IDPs have allegedly concluded private “sales” or “rental” arrangements with the current residents of their dwelling in Abkhazia. By closing such deals, the current inhabitants of the properties might seek ways of “legitimising” their occupancy of displaced people’s homes. For some IDPs, such arrangements might potentially work as “a private compensation mechanism”, providing partial reparation for harm they have suffered as well as (often much-needed) income.

Yet for IDPs their property is often the only palpable link with Abkhazia. Moreover, such arrangements are politically unacceptable to official Tbilisi and also appear to be unacceptable to most of the Georgian population. They are also explicitly illegal in Georgia since the 2008 Law on Occupied Territories. Backchannel arrangements of this sort could not offer any comprehensive resolution; for that a broader conflict resolution as well as a restitution and reparations framework is needed. The survey, however, attempted to clarify whether such arrangements are a significant trend and how the displaced view this.

Most respondents said they disapproved of sales or rental arrangements. Only 16% and 17% approve of IDPs selling or renting their dwelling respectively (70% and 65% respectively disapprove). Disapproval rates of IDPs exchanging their dwelling in Abkhazia for other property are significantly higher in the capital than in the provinces.

When no financial gain is involved, approval rates for unofficial property arrangements with the Abkhaz go up significantly: 40% say they would approve of IDPs letting others live in their dwelling in Abkhazia in exchange for maintaining the house. Explicit disapproval stays high, at 43%, but inconclusive answers fall to 16%.

Whether such arrangements really happen proved difficult to ascertain. Nearly half the respondents said they knew no households who have sold or rented out their dwelling in Abkhazia; nearly 50% said they did not know; 7% knew some households who sold their dwelling.

Similarly but more surprisingly, 43% know no households who let other people live in their dwelling in Abkhazia without paying rent in exchange for maintaining it; 5% say 1 or 2 of every 10 IDP households they know do this; and 50% said they “do not know”.

Either backchannel property deals are not a common trend, or respondents do not wish to discuss this, given the issue’s sensitivity and the

“My neighbours have sold their house in Abkhazia and now they have a house here [and] I cannot criticise people who do this.”

illegality of such deals according to Georgian law. Georgian and Abkhaz experts alike thought that respondents probably opted against full disclosure. *Synergy* members added that subtle psychological issues are likely to influence the debate – for instance, a sense of guilt for “potentially taking money from those who occupy the houses from which IDPs were forced to flee”, or a sense of undermining one’s own “victim status” by making financial gains on it.

### Visiting Abkhazia

The conflict has resulted in mutual isolation of Georgian and Abkhaz societies. There has been little movement across the conflict divide, with the exception of the Gali region (known as Gal to Abkhaz). The number of IDPs who have been able to visit Abkhazia since 1992-93 has thus been a subject of much speculation.

The survey shows that 25% of the respondents have been back to Abkhazia since first becoming displaced. The Gali region naturally accounts for a majority of these visits: 64% from Gali have been back. 17% of what was a very mixed pre-war population in Ochamchire have visited, followed by 12% from Sukhumi, but only 6 % from Gulripshi (known as Gulrypsh to Abkhaz). The survey indicates that fewer Georgians lived in Gulripshi than in other regions; Georgian dwellings there were, according to Abkhaz experts, more often weekend houses – *dachas*.

More women than men have been back to Abkhazia (26% as opposed to 19%), not an uncommon trend and one that can be ascribed to the relative ease with which women can travel across conflict boundary lines.

Many more IDPs living in Samegrelo (45%) have gone back than those living in the capital (19%) or other regions (12%). It appears that many IDPs originally from Gali and Ochamchire regions, which are the easiest to access, live in Samegrelo.

Most of those who have visited Abkhazia cite visiting family and friends and attending weddings and funerals as the main purpose of their visit. Over half (56%) say they have relatives or close friends currently living in Abkhazia. Visiting graves and cemeteries scored much lower than visiting friends and family.

## 4. Media

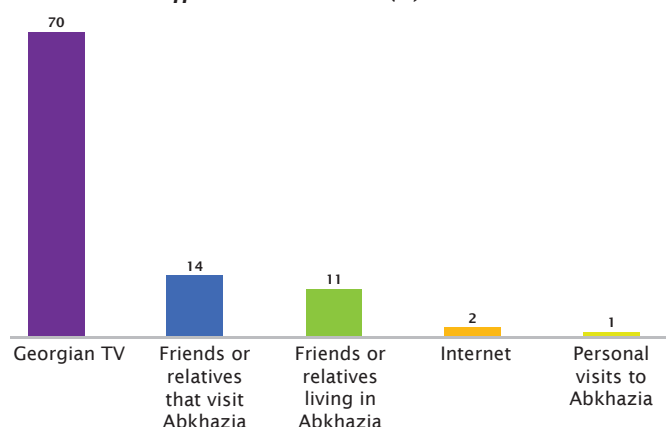
The survey confirms that an overwhelming majority of IDPs (93%) are very or quite interested in the events in Abkhazia today. 25% think their level of knowledge about events there is average; 42% say it ranges from below-average to zero. Only 7% say they know a lot.

The main source of information for 70% of respondents is Georgian TV, in part because of the low circulation and uneven distribution of print media in the country. Only 2% rely on the internet. While this figure is not surprising given the socio-economic standing of most IDPs in collective centres, it is noteworthy: over the past few years, the South Caucasus has seen a sharp increase in the numbers of internet users. There is much debate about the potential impact of online cross-conflict contact; this data, however, indicates that this is not yet widely relevant to those displaced from Abkhazia and living in collective centres.

Surprisingly few report relying on personal networks for information: only 11% rely on friends or relatives living in Abkhazia and 14% rely on friends or relatives visiting Abkhazia, although 56% say they have relatives or close friends living in Abkhazia today. Only 1% say they rely on personal visits to Abkhazia. This confirms just how steep the conflict divide is in practice and that regular substantive contact across it is relatively rare.

IDPs are not convinced their sources provide them with accurate information: 47% say they completely or somewhat trust their main source of news; 30% neither trust nor distrust it; and 12% completely or somewhat distrust it. 70% consider Georgian TV their main source yet a majority assesses their knowledge of events in Abkhazia as suboptimal and only 47% trust it. It appears that many displaced realise Georgian TV coverage of Abkhazia is neither exhaustive nor fully reliable and objective.

**Q.45 What is your main source of information about current affairs in Abkhazia? (%)**



## 5. Return

One of the survey's objectives was to elucidate IDPs' calculations regarding return. While it is likely that all – or an overwhelming majority – of the displaced wish to have the right to return, wanting to actually exercise that right might be a different matter. This currently remains a hypothetical debate, but understanding the conditions under which people would consider return desirable or possible is an important consideration for conflict resolution.

### Regular visits to Abkhazia

The ability to regularly visit Abkhazia is an essential consideration for IDPs: for 72% it is very important; for a further 13% it is somewhat important; 12% say it is not important. Age does not appear to be an important factor here.

If unable to return permanently, respondents ranked the reasons for visits to Abkhazia in the following order: visits to maintain a dwelling (58%) and visiting graves and cemeteries were cited most often (55%), followed by visiting friends and family (32%) and attending weddings and funerals (17%).

Interestingly, the most commonly cited reasons for prospective visits ranked lower among the reasons given by IDPs who have actually visited Abkhazia since becoming displaced. The 25% of IDPs who say they have been back to Abkhazia since the war cite their main purpose as visiting friends and family followed by attending weddings and celebrations. For visits currently underway, visiting family or friends is more important than maintaining a dwelling and visiting graves.

There are different possible explanations of the discrepancy between the reasons given for current visits and potential future visits. The IDP network suggested that those who visit Abkhazia today may have cited the “official purpose” of their visit as they formulate it for the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities as opposed to their personal motivation. IDPs who have not visited Abkhazia may emphasise symbolic aspects and/or what they consider socially desirable. There may also be a generational shift – visiting parents' graves is likely to be more important to people than visiting the graves of grandparents.

### Trade

Trade scored very low among the potential motivations to visit. Only 2% cited it among relevant reasons for visiting; moreover, only 5% would like to see the development of trade between Georgian and Abkhaz people discussed if negotiations with the Abkhaz side were launched (detailed below). This raises questions about the potential significance of trade for peacebuilding /



conflict resolution at this stage. It is often assumed that trade relations are an important aspect of cross-conflict and people-to-people contacts, as well as conflict transformation in the long run. Yet, at this point, interest in cross-conflict trade appears to be remarkably low among the displaced population.

### Conditions for return

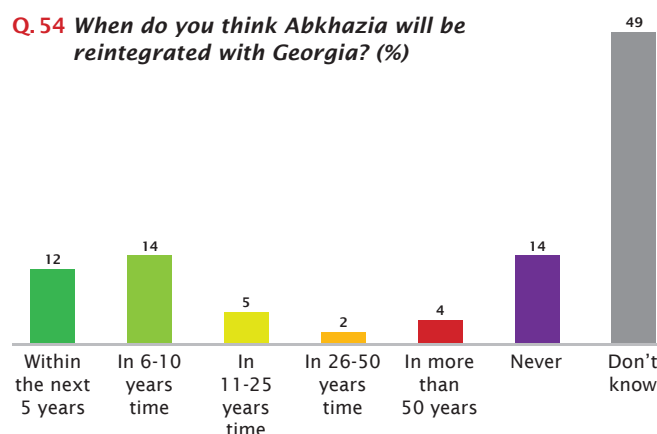
The survey appears to confirm the widely-held assumption that there is a gap between the IDPs' views on the right of return (which a vast majority want) and their views on actually exercising this right by physically returning to Abkhazia. This is understandable, given how hypothetical on the one hand, and how politicised on the other hand, the issue of return is. The following section attempts to tease out what proportion of IDPs would consider returning to Abkhazia under what conditions.

#### Abkhazia's political status

A vast majority of respondents (87%) would consider returning to Abkhazia permanently if Abkhazia reintegrates with Georgia. A differently framed question corroborated this in showing that 85% would not think of returning to Abkhazia if it were to remain outside of Georgia's control. Only 9% said they would consider return even then (and 6% said they did not know).

These figures confirm that an overwhelming majority of the displaced are only ready to

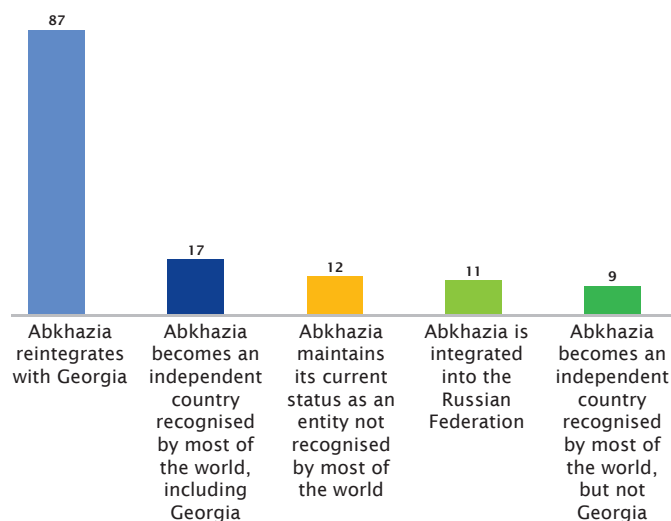
**Q. 54** When do you think Abkhazia will be reintegrated with Georgia? (%)



consider return if Abkhazia's political status is in line with Georgia's stated political goals – that is, its reintegration into Georgia. Yet most IDPs also recognise this goal is not imminently achievable, as discussed below.

The survey did not tease out whether and under what conditions IDPs would actually wish to exercise the right of return if Georgia reclaimed control of Abkhazia. Even then, a number of other considerations would probably still affect people's choices (for example, returning to live in their former homes would be unlikely for a majority of IDPs, as the survey indicates).

**Q.51 Would you consider returning to Abkhazia permanently, if...? (%)**



**Considering return if Abkhazia is not reintegrated**

If Abkhazia’s status were to be defined outside of Georgian territory, including with Georgia’s consent, dramatically fewer IDPs would consider returning.

17% would consider returning if Abkhazia becomes an independent country recognised by most of the world, including Georgia. This is a low number given that Tbilisi’s hypothetical agreement to an independent Abkhazia would presuppose the return of IDPs, and that such a scenario would be internationally sponsored, meaning that institutions to protect the rights of ethnic Georgian returnees would presumably be established. Some IDP network members suggested this figure is so low because most respondents did not perceive this as a realistic proposition.

Around 10% of IDPs are ready to consider returning under different status options to which Georgia would not agree. If most of the world excluding Georgia recognised the entity, only 9% would consider returning. This is only marginally less than if Abkhazia were integrated into Russia (11%) or if the current state of affairs continued, with Abkhazia not being recognised by most of the world (12%).

Breaking down by location the 12% of IDPs who would be ready to consider return to Abkhazia in the current political circumstances, responses show that those settled in Tbilisi are most likely to be ready to consider this (20%), as opposed to only 6% of IDPs in Samegrelo and 3% in other areas. *Synergy* experts commented that although Tbilisi-based IDPs are generally better integrated, they also tend to be more critical of their current

situation than their peers in rural areas – or that they are more ready to be outspoken.

Of those who would consider return even if Abkhazia remains outside of Georgia’s control, nearly all rank the following as essential conditions: free travel between Georgia and Abkhazia; the possibility for children to attend a Georgian-language school and for them to attend a Georgian Orthodox service; and guarantees that local authorities would protect Georgian returnees. An overwhelming majority also cited as essential conditions the withdrawal of Russian troops, the presence of Western peacekeepers, and that IDPs would not be considered traitors by the majority of Georgia’s population.

The ability to keep their Georgian citizenship is essential for two thirds, as is regaining real estate and the ability to earn as much as they do now. Maintaining full local Abkhaz rights is crucial for less than half of the respondents.

**Projections of timeframes for Abkhazia’s reintegration**

Given that 85% are only ready to consider returning if Abkhazia reintegrates with Georgia, responses on whether and when reintegration might happen provide an important indicator of their understanding of how and when they might return. After the 2008 war, the view that Abkhazia is unlikely to be reintegrated into Georgia in the medium-to-longer term, if ever, became increasingly widely held.

26% believe Abkhazia will be reintegrated in the next 10 years. 5% expect an 11-25 year timeframe; 6% estimate more than 26 years; 14% say never. Nearly half of respondents (49%) say they do not know. Different interpretations of this figure are possible: it may mean that IDPs who have been waiting for ultimate return to be possible for nearly 20 years simply feel “do not know” is the most realistic answer at this point; IDP network members also suggested it may reflect a degree of denial and some respondents’ difficulty to accept a situation that is currently not in their favour. It may be too painful for them to accept “never” or “in a very long time” as plausible answers, as this would imply no return in their own lifetime.

IDPs’ opinions about whether the prospects for Abkhazia’s reintegration have increased, decreased or stayed the same since the August 2008 war differ from comparable assessments by average Georgians. 60% of IDPs think the chances of Abkhazia becoming a part of Georgia have decreased since the 2008 conflict, versus only 39% Georgia-wide. IDP network members suggest that the comparison with Georgia-wide data shows that IDPs are more attuned to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict dynamic on the ground.



## 6. Conflict resolution

### IDPs' war-time role and return

When discussing return, the question of the role IDPs played during the 1992-93 war is often raised. Many in Abkhazia say they would not be prepared to see the return of former combatants or those who are believed to have committed crimes, or even their families. Georgian IDPs and Abkhaz society are both small and closely-knit enough communities for it to be relatively common to know who did what during the war.

17% of IDPs say they were involved in the fighting during the 1992-93 conflict, which means that if and when return is possible, nearly a fifth of the IDP community is likely to face difficulties linked to their role during the war. Furthermore, 41% say their family members were involved in warfare. As is commonly assumed, inhabitants of the Gali region were least involved in the fighting (8%, as compared with 29% of IDPs from Gulripshi, for instance).

### Root causes of conflict

Understanding each side's perceptions of the conflict's root causes is important for conflict

resolution efforts. On the Georgian side, displacement and the loss of control over Abkhazia has traditionally led to a tendency to project most, if not all, responsibility for the 1992-93 conflict on external actors (mainly Russia). The Kremlin and other power centres in Russia played a significant role to be sure, but there was a specifically Georgian-Abkhaz dynamic as well.

Many IDPs indeed view "external provocation" as an important cause of the war, with 35% offering this as the main reason for the war's outbreak. However, nearly as many (33%) blame "political elites vying for power". Although most scholarly analyses propose Georgian nationalism as a significant factor in the outbreak of the war, only a few respondents (9%) cite the nationalistic politics of the Georgian government of the time as the major reason for the war.

In accordance with common perceptions of the conflict in Georgia, a large majority (80%) of IDPs believe that Russia played a major role (and only 2% saw its role as "minor"). Yet a majority of respondents also assess the roles of both the Abkhaz and Georgian governments as "major": only marginally more respondents say the Abkhaz authorities (59%) played a major role than say likewise for the Georgian authorities (56%). Relatively few believe that Western powers were significant (17% attribute a major role to them).



This data indicates that IDPs do not resort to “the Russian hand” arguments alone. While 77% agree that both the Georgian and Abkhaz parties need to acknowledge their mistakes, there is, however, a tendency to shield the Georgian side from responsibility (especially unofficial structures and ordinary citizens).

Around half the respondents believe irregular armed forces played a major role in the outbreak of the conflict. The Georgian side is seen as bearing the smallest share of responsibility: 47% say that Georgian irregular armed forces played a major role, compared to 54% for Abkhaz irregulars and 59% for Russian irregulars. The figure for the Georgian side is somewhat surprising, especially given the well-documented role in the conflict of Georgian paramilitary groups such as the *Mkhedrioni*.

The tendency to transfer responsibility to the other side is more pronounced when discussing the role of ordinary citizens (among whom a majority of respondents would have counted themselves: only 2% of respondents say they worked in government or defence prior to the war). Twice as many IDPs believe that ordinary Abkhaz people played a major role in the outbreak of the conflict (25%) than ordinary Georgian people living in Abkhazia (11%); only 7% believe ordinary Georgians living outside of Abkhazia played a major role.

## Prospects for conflict resolution

The August 2008 conflict has profoundly impacted the conflict resolution landscape in the South Caucasus. In its aftermath, Russia (followed by a handful of other countries) recognised the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Russia solidified its military presence in both areas, which Tbilisi considers occupation of its *de jure* territory but which the Abkhaz view as a security guarantee. These developments have significantly lowered the chances of Abkhazia’s reintegration into Georgia. IDPs’ views on the options for resolving conflict in this post-2008 context are reported in this section.

A majority of respondents (59%) believe the conflict cannot be resolved by force. This corroborates the widespread assumption that IDPs are not predominantly a belligerent force in the Georgian society. *Synergy* network members suggest this can best be explained with reference to personal experiences of war and displacement.

Nevertheless, more than a quarter of IDPs do not exclude the military option. While only 6% believe that the conflict can be resolved by force, a further 20% think the conflict could be resolved by force as a last resort. The Georgian administrations have traditionally employed the “use of force as a last resort” formula in their public positions on the

conflict. Among many pitfalls of that formulation has been its openness to differing interpretations of what is meant by “last resort”. Despite Russia’s overwhelming military dominance in the war of 2008, 18% of IDPs say that their belief that the conflict can be resolved by force (whether or not as a last resort) has increased or stayed the same since 2008.

## People-to-people contacts

The survey confirms the widespread assumption that IDPs mostly believe that direct contacts between Georgians and Abkhaz are important and conducive to conflict resolution. The respondents make a strong case for people-to-people contacts, and so indirectly for peacebuilding. 78% more or less agree that “personal contacts between Georgian people and Abkhaz people are conducive to conflict resolution”; only 6% disagree.

A majority (74%) of respondents completely or somewhat agree that Abkhaz people and Georgian people can live together peacefully in a single state; only 9% completely or somewhat disagree. These answers appear to somewhat contradict those answers pertaining to perceptions of Abkhaz people and their perceived lack of friendliness to other ethnicities.

## Conflict now

59% of respondents more or less agree with the statement that the conflict today is not between Georgian and Abkhaz parties, but between the Russian and Western governments; 19% disagree. An overwhelming majority (85%) also agree that “the conflict today is not between Georgian and Abkhaz parties, but between the Georgian and Russian governments”; only 5% disagree with this statement.

These figures reflect the post-August 2008 situation in which the Georgian-Russian dimension of conflict has overshadowed the Georgian-Abkhaz dimension. They also more or less confirm a widely-held assumption that IDPs, and the Georgian population as a whole, generally believe the resolution of the conflict does not depend on Georgian or Abkhaz societies, but rather on Russia and the US.

There is no consensus among the displaced on how to assess political preferences on the part of the Abkhaz: 30% completely or somewhat agree, and 30% completely or somewhat disagree that “the Abkhaz people are willing to be a part of Russia”. The remaining 40% either do not know or neither agree nor disagree, which appear to be realistic responses from the IDP perspective given the relatively low level of accurate information they have about developments in Abkhazia (as detailed in the media section above).

The pattern is the same regarding whether “the Abkhaz people are willing to be part of Georgia”:

28% completely or somewhat agree; 29% completely or somewhat disagree; and 42% either say they do not know or say they neither agree nor disagree.

The survey did not measure IDPs' views of Abkhaz preferences for being an independent entity.

## Abkhazia's future?

Georgian political rhetoric has presented the reintegration of Abkhazia as an existential issue for Georgia – and Abkhazia as a region without which Georgia cannot survive. Opinion among IDPs is not nearly as clear-cut, however. Only one third completely agree that “Georgia cannot exist without Abkhazia”; a further 15% somewhat agree.

A popular political argument in Georgia is that Abkhazia would in fact benefit from reintegration into Georgia, as its ever-closer ties with Russia threaten to ultimately undermine its political existence and cultural identity. Though most analysts and many Abkhaz interlocutors agree with the underlying assumption that Russia is not likely to foster Abkhazia's independent political and civic institutions, they also see the Georgian premise as flawed – for one thing, Tbilisi has yet to show how it could become a credible or attractive alternative for the Abkhaz side.

IDPs' responses seemed to be underpinned by a preference for an Abkhazia in which there would be a place for them: 58% agree (completely or somewhat) that “Abkhazia cannot exist without Georgia”; only 8% disagree completely, and an additional 10% disagree somewhat. Similar trends are reflected in a reverse question: 52% completely or somewhat disagree that “Abkhazia cannot exist without Russia”; 23% agreed.

## Preferred approaches to conflict resolution

Most IDPs approach conflict resolution in a relatively pragmatic way and would support activities that foster ties between societies, people-to-people contact and activities that promote reconciliation.

85% of the respondents would support activities to establish the fate of missing persons on both sides. 72% would support giving civil society a greater role in activities contributing to reconciliation. Only 19% would, however, support an official apology by the Georgian government to the Abkhaz people for any wrongdoing.

Contrary to a widely-held assumption that bilateral political relations with the *de facto* authorities might be premature (as they might confer some legitimacy on the Abkhaz side), a majority (58%) would support beginning negotiations with the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities about Abkhazia's status. 59% said they would support signing a non-use of force agreement with Abkhazia. These figures somewhat qualify the 85% majority's view of the conflict as today being “not between Georgian and Abkhaz parties, but between the Georgian and Russian governments” (reported above).

Were direct negotiations with the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities to start again, however, only 24% of the displaced would prioritise discussions on the political status of Abkhazia. By far the biggest number would focus on return of IDPs (83%). Nearly half (48%) would like issues of security along the ceasefire line to be tackled. Unrestricted travel of all Georgians to Abkhazia was rated as low as status talks (24%). Development of trade between Georgian and Abkhaz people was rated surprisingly low at 5%.

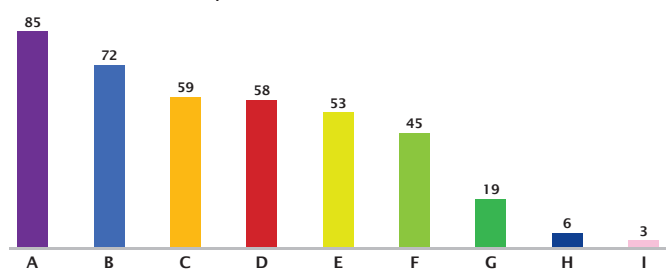
Fewer would be in support of direct engagement with Russia than with Abkhazia on these issues: 53% would support signing a non-use of force agreement with Russia, and 45% would support launching negotiations with Russia about Abkhazia's status.

6% would support the Georgian government launching a military intervention in Abkhazia – a figure that corresponds to the proportion of IDPs who believe the conflict can be resolved by force. Only 1% Georgia-wide would support military intervention.

A Georgia-wide poll regarding what conflict resolution activities the population would support shows a different picture: 18% would support signing a non-use of force agreement with Abkhazia as the most important activity; 16% would allow civil society a greater role in activities contributing to reconciliation; 14% would sign a non-use of force agreement with Russia and 14% would also commence negotiations with Russia about the status of Abkhazia.

### Q.63 In the next two years, would you support any of the following actions that the Georgian government could take in order to find a solution to the conflict? (%)

(Positive answers reported)



- A. Activities to establish the fate of missing persons
- B. Give civil society a greater role in reconciliation processes
- C. Sign a non-use of force agreement with Abkhazia
- D. Negotiations with the *de-facto* Abkhaz authorities about Abkhazia's status
- E. Sign a non-use of force agreement with Russia
- F. Negotiations with Russia about Abkhazia's status
- G. Officially apologise to the Abkhaz people by Georgian government
- H. Military intervention in Abkhazia
- I. Recognise independence of Abkhazia

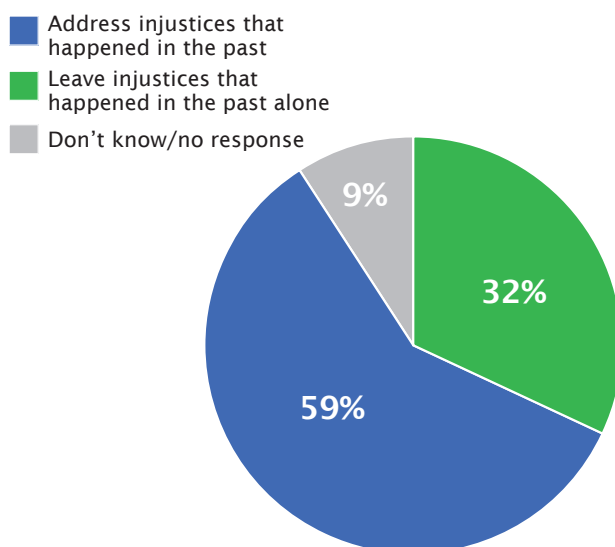


## 7. Justice

### The right to justice

There is a demand among the displaced for justice issues to be addressed. A majority (59%) feel that injustices that happened in the past should be addressed in order to resolve the conflict (compared to 49% Georgia-wide); 32% of IDPs think that past injustices should be left alone (compared to 36% Georgia-wide). A comparison with 2010

**Q. 65.2** *In order to resolve the conflict we should... (%)*



Caucasus Barometer data shows that IDPs have stronger and more clear-cut views on this (that is, more IDPs opted for “strongly” agree and disagree than the general population, which seems logical given that the displaced have been directly affected by the conflict).

The *Synergy* network commented that for many IDPs it is important to see an external assessment of past injustices, so as to get at least some closure.

Respondents had relatively clear ideas about what forms of justice they would like to see (unlike respondents in the focus group discussions with privately accommodated IDPs who appeared to struggle with definitions of justice).

Contrary to commonly-held assumptions, judicial mechanisms such as formal investigations and prosecution of war crimes scored relatively high approval rates: 78% thought that war crimes should be investigated (and of these respondents, just over half felt all perpetrators should be prosecuted and just under half felt that only high-ranking officials should be prosecuted); 11% said war crimes should be investigated but no one should be prosecuted. 55% consider prosecution of persons accused of war crimes very or somewhat important for them to feel that past injustices have been addressed. Only 14% stated explicitly that it was fully or somewhat unimportant.

This is interesting given that judicial mechanisms for addressing past abuses have not been much

debated in the Georgian-Abkhaz context, but also given that family members of some 40% of respondents were involved in the warfare and so involved in a context where many violations of the laws of war took place.

## The right to reparation

### Financial reparations

Almost three quarters of respondents would somewhat or fully support financial reparations to compensate victims of the conflict or their families. 56% think this is very important, which is roughly the same proportion of displaced persons whose property was destroyed. 2% would not support compensations at all; IDP network members remarked that this figure likely represents the opinion that financial compensations are not appropriate where loss of life is concerned.

Asked who should be primarily responsible for financial reparations to the Georgian victims, the largest share (39%) said the Georgian government, followed by the Russian government (23%). *Synergy* network members commented that the expectations of the Georgian government are high because IDPs would like it to take more responsibility for displaced people's issues. Only 3% said the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities should be responsible, probably because few wanted to place expectations on them that one would have of a state actor; further, most would probably not think it realistic.

### Symbolic reparations

The picture was less clear-cut when it came to symbolic reparations. 50% of respondents felt an apology by the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities was important in order for them to feel that past injustices have been addressed. Some among the IDP network members thought this may have been linked to people's hopes that an apology would accompany return or compensation. Others said that the authorities should at least say "sorry" in the absence of any other solutions; this would be psychologically important for people so they can move on.

However, when asked about symbolic gestures that would acknowledge the other side's losses, only a quarter of respondents were fully supportive and a further 14% somewhat supportive. Nearly one third said they did not know, meaning the aggregate figure of respondents who did not actively support such gestures was nearly 60%. This roughly corresponds to views on an official apology (a form of symbolic reparation) to the Abkhaz people by the Georgian authorities: only 35% of respondents felt it was very or somewhat important for the Abkhaz people to feel that past injustices have been addressed.

## The right to know

Documentation of past abuses was seen as important for 52% to feel that past injustices have been addressed. Only 15% saw it as unimportant. Yet civil society-led documentation processes were assessed in a mixed way. According to IDP network members, the high incidence of "do not know" or "refuse to answer" figures in this question appear to indicate that the displaced either do not believe civil society is well placed to do this type of work ("civil society should not do what the government is supposed to do"), or that they might not have much awareness of civil society activity.

Publication in the media of personal stories related to war-time experiences was also assessed with some hesitation. 37% of respondents were somewhat or fully supportive and 19% somewhat or fully negative (44% were neither supportive nor negative). The pronounced uncertainty about this is probably underpinned by a combination of factors: airing personal war-time narratives has not been a part of the accepted discourse on either side of the conflict; and the discourse on conflict in today's Georgia is insufficiently pluralistic, with a strong political emphasis on only the Georgian-Russian dimension.

## Assessment of Abkhaz needs

The survey data indicates a limited ability – arguably understandably – on the part of IDPs to empathise with the other side. Conflict divides inherently cause difficulties for one side to have deep insights into the other side's thinking and needs, whether because of broken communication structures, or due to differences in preferred settlement outcomes. The survey indicates that the displaced in general imagine that Abkhaz need past injustices to be addressed much less than IDPs do themselves. *Synergy* network members explained the respondents' limited empathy for Abkhaz by the fact that IDPs feel they have suffered greater losses, "because at least the Abkhaz still live on their land".

35% felt an official apology by the Georgian authorities would be very or somewhat important to the Abkhaz to feel past injustices have been addressed. This compares with 50% who thought an apology by the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities was important for Georgian IDPs. 36% did not express a clear view, and an additional 29% said it would be unimportant. Some members of the IDP network felt the 29% who did not think an apology was important were likely to be those predisposed to an aggressive stance: that is, overlapping with those who would not exclude the war as an option.

While IDPs seemed to underplay Abkhaz needs for symbolic reparation, they related more sympathetically to financial compensation for



damaged and destroyed property. 59% thought this would be important for Abkhaz, and only 16% said they thought this would be unimportant. Indeed, from the Abkhaz perspective, issues around damage and destruction of property (both private property and property considered by the *de facto* authorities as Abkhaz state property) are an important part of conflict-related property issues in general.

43% thought prosecution of persons on the Georgian side accused of war crimes would be very or somewhat important for the Abkhaz people to feel that past injustices have been addressed. 20% thought it would be unimportant. A high percentage chose not to offer a clear-cut answer either way.

Only 10% thought Georgia's recognition of Abkhazia's independence was important for Abkhaz to feel that past injustices have been addressed. This response would appear to indicate that it is challenging for the majority of IDPs to set aside their own political preferences in order to place themselves in the shoes of the Abkhaz.

## 8. Conclusion

IDPs' attitudes to displacement, return, conflict resolution and justice are crucial for ultimately resolving the conflict, yet they have been insufficiently understood. The purpose of the survey and this analysis is to shed some light on these issues, and provide an insight into current IDP opinion that can inform relevant policy formulation as well as ongoing debates, on both sides of the conflict divide.

The analysis in this report only provides one interpretation of the many possible. Its objective was to contextualise the survey findings and encourage further debate and investigation of these themes. It is being used to stimulate a wider public debate in Georgia, particularly among the displaced population.

It is accompanied by a policy brief that summarises key survey findings and explores a number of lessons relevant to policy makers. The five key areas of policy relevance are:

1. The need to **focus on welfare and integration**; addressing issues of human rights and dignity now is key and does not run counter to the right to return.
2. The benefits in **giving displaced communities a voice**, by involving IDP representatives in decision-making processes concerning integration, conflict resolution and other issues key to their wellbeing.
3. The importance of **facilitating broad public discussion on return** based on reliable sources of information and awareness of how significantly the situation in Abkhazia has changed over the last twenty years.
4. That **IDPs are a potential resource for peace** that could be greater utilised. Their strong rejection of force as a means to resolve the conflict is an important message for all parties to the conflict, and they are a vital resource for those engaging in peacebuilding practice and policy.
5. That beginning to **address injustices that happened in the past** could help progress toward conflict resolution.

For the full survey findings, this analysis, our policy brief and other related documents please visit [www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/displacement\\_in\\_georgia.php](http://www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/displacement_in_georgia.php). If you would like further information on the survey, or on our work in the Caucasus, please contact Rachel Clogg: [rclogg@c-r.org](mailto:rclogg@c-r.org)



This analysis is based on the findings of a survey conducted in 2010 among one thousand internally displaced persons displaced from Abkhazia as a result of the 1992-93 war. The survey provides insight into IDPs' attitudes to displacement, return, conflict resolution and justice.

The survey is available, together with this analysis, a policy brief based on the survey findings, and other related documents at [www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/displacement\\_in\\_georgia.php](http://www.c-r.org/our-work/caucasus/displacement_in_georgia.php)

If you would like further information on the survey, or on our work in the Caucasus, please contact Rachel Clogg: [rclogg@c-r.org](mailto:rclogg@c-r.org)

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