

# Georgia

## Quick facts

Number of IDPs	252,000–279,000
Percentage of total population	5.7%–6.3%
Start of current displacement situation	1992, 2008 (South Ossetia); 1994 (Abkhazia)
Peak number of IDPs (and year)	380,000 (old and new caseload), 2008
New displacement in 2008	128,000
Returns in 2008	96,000
Causes of displacement	International and internal armed conflict, human rights violations, generalised violence
Human development index	93



The majority of IDPs in Georgia have been displaced since the early 1990s. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, Abkhazia and South Ossetia demanded their independence from Georgia. The fighting that followed caused the displacement of some 300,000 people, the majority from Abkhazia, of whom between 220,000 and 247,000 were still displaced in 2008. Since the conflict, the two regions have claimed their independence and until 2008 a shaky ceasefire was in place.

In August 2008, conflict broke out between Georgia and the Russian Federation over the fate of South Ossetia. Hundreds of people were killed and at least 158,000 ethnic Georgians and South Ossetians fled their homes. 128,000 of the people displaced were ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia, but also from Abkhazia and Georgia proper. In addition, 30,000 ethnic Ossetians found refuge temporarily in the Russian Federation. An internationally-brokered ceasefire came a week later, and Russia recognised the independence of both regions following the crisis, complicating further the return process.

Some 32,000 Georgians had not been able to return as of the end of 2008, due to the destruction of their villages close to South Ossetia, or because they were not allowed to return to their homes by South Ossetian de facto authorities. Close to 15,000 were accommodated in government-built settlements.

Georgia's longer-term IDPs were in 2008 dispersed across the country, with around 70 per cent living in cities, primarily in collective centres and private accommodation in Zugdidi, Tbilisi and Kutaisi.

These IDPs are still facing barriers to the enjoyment of economic and social rights. They are not able to regain their properties in conflict areas as the Georgian government has no effective control of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. IDPs have struggled to find work, and many inhabitants of collective centres remain extremely poor.

Elderly IDPs and female-headed households face particular difficulties; they are less likely to have an income or support for maintaining their homes in collective centres, and often live in unhealthy dwellings. Children in collective centres still live in inadequate cramped conditions, and are often seen as outsiders by other children and their families.

Since 1996, a comprehensive law on IDPs has offered some support including the use of public utilities free of charge, and modest monthly financial allowances. However it was not effective in lifting most IDPs out of poverty. In 2007, the government adopted a national strategy on IDPs, developed by the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) with the assistance of the international community. Following the August 2008 crisis, the government has indicated its plan to modify the strategy to reflect new developments.

However, the Georgian government's prompt response in support of the new IDPs should be recognised, especially compared to its response in the 1990s during previous waves of displacement. It registered new IDPs following the August crisis, and the MRA is in charge of managing the new collective centres. Other ministries have also been involved, particularly the Ministry of the Interior which is building the new IDP settlements.

UN agencies, national and international NGOs have provided assistance to IDPs in collective centres for many years, including shelter repair, employment projects, legal and social assistance, and education. Over the past years, most of them merged activities targeting IDPs into wider programmes, but in the wake of the 2008 crisis, they mobilised quickly to bring urgently-needed assistance to those newly displaced. Under the new cluster approach, protection improved at the operational level for new IDPs.

Following the August 2008 crisis, the return of IDPs to their homes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia seems more distant than ever. Local integration and resettlement are thus the most likely durable solutions for them, and indeed the government has already started to change its policy in this respect, stating that it would support the provision of permanent accommodation for all IDPs by 2011.

A donor conference in Brussels in November 2008 raised \$4.7 billion, part of which is planned for the improvement of housing conditions of the old and new caseloads and their medical costs. As of the end of 2008 however, programmes had only benefited the new IDPs, causing tensions between them and many of those displaced since the early 1990s.