



UNITED NATIONS

**HUMANITARIAN SITUATION AND
TRANSITION TO DEVELOPMENT 2006
GEORGIA**

Progress Report

**Report Prepared by
Humanitarian Affairs Team, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in
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List of Abbreviations

ACH	Accion Contra el Hambre (Action Against Hunger)
AHI	Avian and Human Influenza
BDD	Basic Data and Directions 2007-2010
CoE	Council of Europe
CHF	Community Habitat Finance International
DFID	Department for International Cooperation
DMT	Disaster Management Team
DoS	Department of Statistics of the Ministry of Economic Development
DOTS	Directly Observed Treatment Short Course
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EADRCC	Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre
EC	European Commission
ECHO	European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office
ECMI	European Centre for Minority Issues
EDPRP	Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Programme
EMD	Emergency Management Department
ENP	European Neighbourhood Policy
ENVSEC	Environment and Security Initiative
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FFE	Food for Education
GCCD	Government Commission for Childcare and De-institutionalisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEL	Georgian Lari
GFATM	Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria
GNI	Gross National Income per capita
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
HPAI	Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IFRC	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
JCC	Joint Control Commission
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MCGF	Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund
MDR-TB	Multi-drug Resistant Tuberculosis
MoAF	Ministry of Agriculture and Food
MoED	Ministry of Economic Development
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoIA	Ministry of Internal Affairs
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoLHSA	Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs
MRA	Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
MTEF	Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSC	National Security Council
NTP	National Tuberculosis Program
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PCA	Partnership and Cooperation Agreement
PHC	Primary Health Care
PM	Prime Minister
SAESA	State Agency for Employment and Social Assistance
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SMCI	State Minister for Civil Integration
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SMRefC	State Minister for Reform Coordination
SMResC	State Minister for Conflict Resolution
S&RH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infections
SUSIF	State United Social Insurance Fund
TB	Tuberculosis
THIYC	The Health Initiative for Youth in the South Caucasus
TIP	Trafficking in Persons Report
UNCT	United Nations Country Team
UNDAC	United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHAT	United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Team
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNRCO	United Nations Resident Coordinators Office
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme of the United Nations
WHO	World Health Organisation of the United Nations

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Introduction

The 'Georgia Humanitarian Situation and Transition to Development – 2007' document has been prepared by the United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Team (UNHAT) under the coordination of the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (UNRCO) in Georgia. It is based on interviews and consultations with Government officials, donors, UN agencies, and a range of local, international and bilateral organisations. All organisations and interviewees were selected on the basis of their in-depth knowledge and experience with one or several of the topics included in this report. Relevant documentation and reports from the Government and others were reviewed as well.

Similar humanitarian situation reports as this one, using more or less the same format, have been prepared since 2003, initially under the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and since 2005 under the UNRCO.

This document aims *to describe and analyse Georgia's context and priority areas that need continued attention* from the Government and other stakeholders in the development of Georgia. It provides a brief overview of changes and progress made in the past year on a range of issues related to the following identified priority areas:

- Enabling transition and effective interventions from relief to recovery and development;
- Humanitarian situation of vulnerable and beneficiary communities, individuals and households;
- Disaster preparedness and response.

Considering last years' range of topics still to be valid and sufficient, it was decided not to add or remove any topics from this years' report. The structure of the report has also remained unchanged compared to last years' document.

Recommendations for proposed action and follow up included in the report represent the collective recommendations from those consulted. It is meant to generate debate amongst professionals and the public and entice stakeholders to take action. The document can be used as a resource document, for planning, advocacy and awareness raising, fund raising, coordination, or efforts on behalf of vulnerable people in Georgia.

The first part of the report will provide a broad situation analysis of Georgia's background, followed by the general socio-economic conditions in terms of poverty, employment, basic social services, food security and disasters. An overview of the international community's involvement provides a brief outline of the key international stakeholders in Georgia's progress and the areas they focus on. The second part of the report will consider the above-mentioned priority areas in more detail, followed by the recommendations for each of the issues. Annex 1 provides a list of consulted ministries, agencies and organisations, and Annex 2 a list of the main documents and sources used in the preparation of this report.

I SITUATION ANALYSIS

Country background and conceptual context

Early independence – For Georgia, the turbulent period of early independence after the break up of the Soviet Union in 1991 resulted in civil war, displacement of a large number of people, and several frozen conflicts. In the early 90s the economy virtually collapsed, corruption and crime became rampant, living standards plummeted, and many people ended up in abject poverty. Immediately following the end of the civil war in 1993, the international community provided support, initially mainly relief aid. From 1995 onwards, as Georgia tried to establish democracy and rebuild the country, the support for more development-oriented activities gradually increased, reflecting the changes in society and the perceived priorities. Slow progress, corruption, no improvement in people's situation led to a growing sense of discontent, leading to massive popular protest after fraudulent elections in late 2003. The so-called Rose Revolution of November 2003 led to the resignation of the Government and fresh elections.

Rapid reforms – From early 2004 onwards, after the Government change following the Rose Revolution of November 2003, a new, young and dynamic Government, seized the momentum: it embarked on a very ambitious, fast, and complex, reform process. Rapid and sustainable economic development, strengthening democratic governance, and restoring public confidence are the Government's main priorities to achieve its strategic objective: a free, unified, democratic, equitable and prosperous State of

Georgia¹. Georgia also intends to integrate into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. To date, the Georgian Government has reformed laws, policies and practices affecting all aspects of society. The international community, grown somewhat weary of the limited impact of their development efforts and the continued need for massive humanitarian relief in Georgia, responded with renewed interest and substantial support for the reform and rehabilitation programmes of the new Government.

Rapid changes – The effects of the reform process are starting to show, some fast and some slow. Economic growth in Georgia has been strong in the past years: the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth went from 5.9% in 2004 to 9.3% in 2005². Results in fighting corruption and improving the business climate are impressive and have the potential for creating broad based growth: the World Bank's 'Doing Business 2007' report has named Georgia the number one reformer in the world. Infrastructure improvements and re-establishment of a reliable energy supply have brought much needed relief to the population and businesses. The Government has recently put in place a new social assistance system targeting the most vulnerable people in society. Decentralization legislation was passed and local administration elections were successfully held in October 2006. The agricultural sector has been deregulated. An upgrade of military assets took place. The public health services as well as the education system are being completely overhauled. Georgia made significant progress in establishing closer relationships with both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Concerns – However, strong economic growth has so far not yet had the desired effect on employment and poverty. Unemployment grew to 13.8% in 2005. This is partly caused by the layoff of civil servants. Poverty incidence rose from 35.7% during 2004 to 39.4% in 2005. It improved again to 33.6% for the first quarter of 2006, but a firm trend towards poverty reduction still has to be established. GDP growth is expected to slow significantly in 2006, partly as a result of external shocks³. The economic embargo by Russia will have negative short and perhaps medium term effects. High inflation causes worries. The positive effects of introducing measures such as the improved revenue collection and privatisation will diminish. Relationships between civil society and the Government are weak, and there are worries about the functioning of the judiciary. Human rights and press freedom remain sensitive issues for the Government but need to be addressed. There is confusion and lack of information with the population on what is happening. The development of strategies and action plans for sustainable economic development – including agriculture and food security – and the Government coordination mechanisms are still weak. There are frequent changes of staff in government, causing volatility, loss of institutional memory and delays or changes in reforms and programmes. Democratic, efficient, accountable and transparent governance needs time to institutionalise and there is a huge need for capacity building as well as – a much more difficult – change in attitude and practice at all levels of Government. Besides, natural disasters pose a threat to the country and it needs to further develop its preparedness and response capacity.

Challenges – Some 15 years after independence, the conflicts with South Ossetia and Abkhazia are still not resolved and tensions have run up over the past year. This situation remains a major obstacle to improving the lives of many conflict-affected populations both in and outside the conflict areas. Georgia's relationship with Russia has reached an all time low, resulting in Russia installing an economic embargo, deporting Georgians from Russia, and threatening to cut off its gas supplies. As the Government is working on an ever-growing list of priorities, stability – political and economic – and security are paramount to its success.

As a result of the conflicts, economic recession, and natural disasters, many people are still poor, unemployed and vulnerable today, and will remain dependent on external support till the reforms have produced the expected improvements in terms of employment, income and higher living standards for those capable, and sufficient social security for those who are not. Till now, the international community has followed the dual approach of supporting Georgia's reforms and transition as well as providing humanitarian assistance and relief to meet the immediate basic needs. The Government has made tremendous progress and is taking on more responsibility for the vulnerable and poor in society. But humanitarian and emergency needs should continue to receive attention from the international

¹ Basic Data and Directions 2007-2010, Government of Georgia, Tbilisi

² Basic Data and Directions 2007-2010, Government of Georgia, Tbilisi

³ All data in the paragraph are taken from the Report on Implementation of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Program, Government of Georgia, Tbilisi 2006

community: combined development and humanitarian approaches will remain necessary for some time to come.

General socio-economic conditions

Georgia's socio-economic situation is still dominated by high levels of poverty, aggravated by high unemployment and insufficient social services, leading to problems of poor health and limited food accessibility. This hampers certain population groups in achieving their full potential and leading a life in safety, well being and with dignity. In the sections below these issues will be described in more detail.

Poverty

Definition of poverty – It is important to understand what is considered 'poverty' in the context of Georgia. In 2006, the Department of Statistics (DoS) of the Ministry of Economic Development (MoED) went through a revision process of the methodology of calculation of the official poverty line and corresponding poverty indicators. The official poverty line, or subsistence minimum, is defined as the cut-off line below which persons or households are considered to be poor according to their income or, as in the case of Georgia, their *consumption expenditure*. It is based on the cost of the Official Minimal Food Basket (updated using current prices every quarter). The basket is based on the actual food consumption pattern and the minimum calorie intake level of 2,300 kcal/day per equivalent adult. For calculation of the poverty line, non-food expenditures are added (derived from actual consumption patterns). At present the proportion of food expenditures to non-food expenditures is 70:30.⁴ *Poverty incidence* or level is defined as *the share of all poor individuals in the total population*. *Poverty sharpness* is an indicator related to the poorest individuals: a reduction of this indicator shows improvement in the life of the poorest. The official poverty figures using the new methodology for 2004 and 2005 were presented in June 2006. The official poverty line for 2004 was Georgian Lari (GEL) 84 per month (for a working age male, current prices) and GEL 93 for 2005. According to DoS, the minimum subsistence rose to GEL 165 in 2006.

Trends – Using the new methodology, the percentage of the population with consumption expenditure below the official poverty line for 2004 was 36%. Poverty sharpness was 6.1. For 2005 this was 39%, and 6.6 respectively, an increase. Inequality also rose slightly. The poverty level was down in the first quarter of 2006 to 33.6%.⁵ In future, DoS will publish poverty figures annually, so it is not clear yet if the downward trend observed in early 2006 continued. Families with unemployed members, rural families with no land or small plots of land and with few or no cattle, families with three or more children, and single parent families with children face a particularly high poverty risk.⁶ According to the State Agency for Employment and Social Assistance (SAESA) the category of the 10% 'most destitute' people that applied for the new state social assistance programme consists mainly of single elderly and pensioners, often with disabilities, no medical care, insufficient nutrition and their pension as the only source of income. The category 'poor', 40% of the applicants, is often from rural areas, areas with high internally displaced persons (IDP) populations, and areas with few job opportunities (see the Basic Social Services section on page 4 for more details on the new social assistance system). These figures translate into poor people having hardly any money or assets, being under- or unemployed, disabled, displaced and often lacking proper housing and heating in winter. They are often marginalized, as individuals or communities, go hungry and have bad and unbalanced diets, catch diseases easily, lack access to health services, quality education, and opportunities, and are often depressed. A very visible group of them lives, sometimes homeless, begging on the street and going through garbage bins, not captured by any of the statistics.

Approaches – Over the past 15 years since independence, a range of actors in Georgia have used many different approaches to address and mitigate the various symptoms and causes of peoples' poverty and vulnerability. From direct relief aid and food supplies, rehabilitation and reconstruction, rebuilding lives, to sustainable development and economic growth. The new Government is now taking on more responsibility in creating safety nets for the most vulnerable, hopefully making non-emergency relief aid

⁴ Food Security Situation, Trends in Figures, Statistical bulletin issue 23, Ministry of Economic Development of Georgia, Department of Statistics, Georgia, June 2006

⁵ Report on Implementation of the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Program, Government of Georgia, Tbilisi 2006

⁶ Programme Document for a Proposed Second Poverty Reduction Support Operation to Georgia, WB/IDA, September 2006

less and less necessary in the near future. It is also trying to create more work opportunities and include those marginalized. Continued external support will remain necessary, as well as the need to carefully monitor the effects and impact of the approaches on poverty levels, and increasingly focus on risk mitigation to avoid vulnerable people falling into poverty.

Employment

One of the key issues of poverty is employment. Unemployment increases the risk of economic vulnerability and a slide into poverty. Creating jobs is crucial for Georgia to make the change from rehabilitation to sustainable development and pulling people out of poverty. However, having a job is no guarantee either: civil service reforms, liberalisation of the labour market and the low level of salaries in both the public and the private sector still leave many at risk, or already living under the poverty line. Many people work in the informal sector or perform daily labour doing odd jobs, with its inherent risks and uncertainties.

Issues – Strong economic growth is the cornerstone of the reform process of the Georgian Government. The reform measures already taken – licensing, technical regulations, entrepreneurial legislation, and trade liberalisation – have dramatically changed the labour market. The public sector, previously the primary employer, is shrinking and there have been lay-offs of civil servants. On the back of liberalisation and privatisation, regulated by a very liberal new labour law, new opportunities are appearing in the private sector, especially the financial and communication sectors, agriculture, construction, and industry. Despite a strong growth in GDP in 2005 (9.3%), and a rise in Gross National Income per capita (GNI) from US\$ 1,050 in 2004 to US\$ 1,320 in 2005⁷, as already mentioned above, unemployment continued to rise and reached 13.8% in 2005: over 335,000 people. The President acknowledged the importance of unemployment in a speech in August 2006⁸, calling it an ‘unrealised potential’ and linking it to the need to improve the business environment, access to micro-credit, promote Small and Medium Enterprises (SME), and the need for quality professional and vocational training that matches the demands of the labour market. He also announced a Government supported intern programme (see below).

Many Georgians (up to an estimated one-fifth of the population) left Georgia in search of a better future elsewhere and are sending remittances home, keeping their relatives out of poverty and boosting local consumption. Bad relationships with Russia and Russia’s deportation of Georgians is jeopardising the level of remittances and seriously damaging the trade from Georgia and its related employment.

In the rural areas, where about half of the population live, most of them so-called self-employed, living mostly off their own production, the full impact of the reforms and privatisation still has to take effect. Given the lack of reliable information and a national strategy addressing the specific issues and vulnerabilities of rural poor, it is unclear how reforms will affect them and to what extent they will be able to improve their living standard. Rural investment and credit, agricultural business development and facilitation, consolidated supply chains, participatory regional planning, production associations and cooperatives are only just beginning and have employment creation potential.

New orientation –SAESA has around 30,000 people registered as unemployed and, according to their own information, annually assist around 5,000 people finding a job. This year SAESA organised the Presidential intern employment programme, where 50,000 people were offered the opportunity to gain work experience as an intern for 3 months, for a salary of 150 GEL/month. The banking system, insurance and construction companies provided most of the positions. Some were offered longer-term employment through this scheme, which will be repeated in 2007.

With the liberalization of the labour market and the focus on a free market system and business development, most Georgian people will have to change their concept of and attitude towards work: this will no longer be the full-time, long term, secure type of job. People will have to become more flexible, adaptable, mobile, quickly to adapt to new trends, investing in and continuously updating their skills and knowledge, finding their own profitable niche in a market oriented system. There will be some that will not be able or capable to make this shift and in need of a reliable safety net.

⁷ Programme Document for a Proposed Second Poverty Reduction Support Operation to Georgia, WB/IDA, September 2006

⁸ 5 August 2006, text available on www.president.gov.ge

Basic Social Services

Social services in Georgia have long been inadequate and difficult to access, especially for the poor, elderly and vulnerable. Changes made in social services in the past year as part of the reform process, and through special programmes and policies addressing specific issues and threats to vulnerable people, start to address the problems to some extent. This is especially important given the current slow rate of job creation through economic reforms. It needs to be carefully monitored what the actual effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the measures and new systems are on the access to and inclusiveness of social services for the most disadvantaged and needy. The new social security system and benefits are intended to provide sufficient security for the most destitute in society and reduce poverty levels in Georgia.

Social assistance – For long, pensions and social security allowances were insufficient, not paid in time and had huge backlogs. The amounts paid were well under the absolute subsistence minimum. Poor for whom this was the only source of income often needed to develop other coping mechanisms – such as selling off assets, help from relatives and their community, relief aid, burning furniture for heating, begging, and soup kitchens – in order to survive. In recent years, improvements were made: pensions were doubled early 2005 (to 28 GEL/month) and increased again (to the current rate of 38 GEL/month) in January 2006. Remaining pension arrears were completely paid off in 2006. In the mean time the Government prepared for a major shift to a needs based social assistance system (instead of the category based support inherited from the previous Government). The new social assistance system was started in July, after some start up delays. This is seen by many as an important breakthrough and a commendable effort in the Government’s approach to fight poverty. The system is based on voluntary application, assessment, and verification of applicants by especially trained social agents of the SAESA. All information has been entered into a database- designed to enable targeting - scored and ranked. 470,000 households, 47% of the population, are included in the database. All households received a rating score, a combination of consumer index and needs index that determines the actual benefit package they are entitled to. There are three types/levels of support:

- **Energy subsidy.** Those scoring under 200,000 on the rating score will receive energy vouchers. These vouchers absorb the shock of increased energy prices, covering the price difference between old and new, increased price levels.
- **Additional Health Care** assistance. Those qualifying for the second level of support (under 100,000 on the rating score) will receive energy subsidy plus a healthcare package. This benefit is expected to improve the health status and reduce vulnerability, often caused by medical expenditures in case of health problems, of a substantial part of the population: some 780,000 people are included in the health care coverage. It will include most types of health care and is in addition to the universal health care package covering the whole population.
- **Cash benefits.** Those qualifying for the third level of support (under 52,000 on the rating score) will receive cash assistance in addition to energy subsidy and the health care package. In September 2006, 67,000 households started receiving cash assistance, of which 7,500 in Tbilisi. The cash assistance consists of 30 GEL for the first person and an additional 12 GEL for every additional family member.

The new social assistance system will also include eligible Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), who will – unlike before – retain their political status as IDP, while having access to the general social security programme. The programme is designed for 10 years. There is a need to fine tune, further develop and update the database and system. Minimizing abuse and removing people who no longer qualify will be an important task. The aim of the Government is to decrease the number of destitute people and the level of poverty in the country and so in future minimizing the number of people receiving social security benefits. Ministries and international agencies can also use the database for targeting their assistance and support programmes.

Pensions – The Law on Pension administers pensioners, widows and widowers and orphans. The pension age is 60 years for women and 65 years for men. Since August 2006 Tbilisi municipality adds an amount for service period to the flat rate of 38 GEL/month: for people who worked for more than 10 years 2 GEL, and for more than 25 years worked, 10 GEL is added. From January 2007 this service-based addition will be rolled out over all of Georgia. Some 540,000 (age related) pensioners are now registered in the country’s new social security database and the pension fund can make arrangements for automatic payment to the bank accounts of people: this removed some difficulties with the previous delivery system

and duplications⁹. The pensions alone will not cover the minimum basic needs of elderly. For those who are assessed as being eligible, the pension will be supplemented with social security (as above), in the form of energy subsidy, a health package and/or cash. And many elderly are in need of this additional support. While the new social security package will vastly improve the situation, it needs to be carefully monitored if these benefits actually reach the most needy and are sufficient for them to live a decent life. The actual level of the benefits is still well below the minimum subsistence level, and although the actual amounts have increased, high inflation is reducing purchasing power.

Health care – The system of public health care suffered tremendously from lack of funding, inefficiency and corruption during the 1990s, often not able to provide even basic treatment. Those who could afford it could opt for services provided outside the public sector, in a mostly unregulated setting. Vulnerable people run the risk of ending up in poverty because of an illness in the family. Most poor could not even afford to pay for medical care.¹⁰ At the same time the population is ageing, changing the morbidity picture. As a result, trends in health status and health care utilization in Georgia are disturbing. Delivery, quality, access to and utilisation of medical services remain a concern. The extremely high morbidity and mortality rates of the 1990s have been reversed, but are still not very good. The stated goal of the health care system reform currently being undertaken in Georgia is the improvement of the health of the populations by: improving the geographical and financial accessibility of services; improving the quality of health services; protection of the vulnerable and poor population against health care expenditures; and improving equity in health outcomes and access to health care.

Under the ongoing reform of the public health care system the basic preventive and curative services offered previously through village ambulatories and primary level polyclinics will be expanded on and provided through new Primary Health Care Centers, based on the family medicine model. These services will be covered under the new ‘Universal Package’ of healthcare, and will be made available free of cost to the entire population. The Universal Package will include public healthcare activities, primary healthcare services, first aid and emergency healthcare, psychiatry, diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis (TB) and HIV/AIDS and provision of specific medicines. The state is also supporting a Supplementary Package of healthcare services for the poor (as mentioned above), including outpatient services by specialists, diagnostic services, and emergency and planned in-patient services. Together, the Universal and Supplementary Package make up the Basic Package. A total of 105 (out of a planned total of 708 needed to provide national coverage) Primary Health Care (PHC) facilities will be operational by the end of 2006. MoLHSA is currently elaborating the hospital optimisation strategy, planning to upgrade, rehabilitate and build a number of facilities, and sell off/privatise no longer needed public health buildings. Family physicians and general practice nurses have been trained to provide a wide(r) range of services, all to be provided under one roof.

The Government provides support to the reform for example through their infrastructure investment fund. It receives financial and technical support from the World Bank (WB), the European Union – both supporting construction and equipping PHC facilities in selected areas – the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom, that supports capacity building efforts, and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) providing policy assistance and supporting improvement of child, maternal and reproductive health, and prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and TB.

Key healthcare indicators are infant and maternal mortality. According to information from the Ministry of Labour, Health, and Social Affairs (MoLHSA), infant mortality was reduced from almost 18 per 1,000 live births in 2004, to 12.4 in 2005. Maternal mortality dropped from over 45 per 100,000 live births in 2004 to just over 21 in 2005.¹¹ The government has placed special emphasis on protecting the health of pregnant women and infants, providing antenatal care services free of cost and subsidizing the cost of hospital delivery care. The coming years will prove if the health of the Georgian population, especially the poor, will improve.

The Georgian Government, together with the donors, has prioritised and is addressing a number of health threats to the population and especially vulnerable or at risk groups. These priorities include child health, reproductive health, chronic diseases (cardio-vascular disease, hypertension, diabetes, etc.), HIV/AIDS,

⁹ All information in this paragraph from the State United Social Insurance Fund (SUSIF)

¹⁰ Common Country Assessment, Georgia, 2004, United Nations Country Team

¹¹ Available data may not be entirely reliable: there are discrepancies in state and medical statistics department’s records. The results of a UNFPA and USAID supported reproductive health survey are expected end of 2006 and might provide further information. There remains a need for improved registration and reporting systems.

sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and TB. The avian flu threat is dealt with separately in Chapter 3, Disaster Preparedness and Response. HIV/AIDS, STIs and TB are discussed in some detail below.

HIV/AIDS – Georgia internationally rates as a low prevalence country with a prevalence rate of 0.13% (around 1,100 officially registered cases). However, using internationally accepted indicators and standards, the number of HIV infected persons will actually be higher, probably between 3,000 – 5,600, 1/3 female. Especially widespread injecting drug use and intensive population movement between neighbouring high prevalence countries (Ukraine and the Russian Federation) cause Georgia to be at risk for an expanding HIV/AIDS epidemic¹². The most vulnerable population groups are injecting drug users, currently accounting for around 64% of the registered cases, men who have sex with men and sex workers¹³. There remains a strong social stigma attached to having the infection. The Law on HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control ensures equal access to free diagnostic and treatment services, including antiretroviral therapy for everyone living with HIV/AIDS. There has been 100% treatment coverage of registered patients since 2004, with currently 214 patients on antiretroviral drugs. National treatment guidelines have been developed, using World Health Organisation (WHO) standards and protocols for treatment and prevention.

Prevention activities include a blood safety programme, prevention of transmission from mother to child (since 2005, voluntary counselling and testing for HIV has been part of the protocols for antenatal care in Georgia), programmes targeting injecting drug users and sex workers, and awareness raising. Substitution therapy (to help drug addicts overcome their addiction) is legal in Georgia and since December 2005 there is a programme in place at the Institute on Drug Addiction, currently treating 60 patients.

The Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria (GFATM) finances the National Response Plan 2003-2007. Monitoring and evaluation of the activities need some improvement (see footnote 13). A new National Strategy towards Access to HIV/AIDS Prevention, Treatment and Care and Support in Georgia has already been prepared for 2006-2010, in line with the Universal Access concept agreed upon in the UN HIV/AIDS Summit held in June 2006. Further research and work with the two main focal groups, drug users and commercial sex-workers, is still needed. Funding from GFATM has been approved and will be available till 2010, after which the Government will take over responsibility. Political commitment is quite high and a Governmental Country Coordination Mechanism coordinates the Global Aids Programme, chaired by the First Lady, giving the programme an active and very visible advocate.

STIs – There are no reliable data on STIs available in Georgia. In December 2006, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) will present the results of the 2005 Georgia Reproductive Health Survey, conducted in collaboration with the US Centre for Disease Control, with support from both UNFPA and USAID. The results of the survey may help to improve targeting and identifying activities to prevent transmission and provide better access to treatment of STIs. The mode of transmission of STIs is sexual intercourse. Sex and STIs are shrouded by societal taboos and stigma in Georgia. Guidelines and surveillance systems on STIs are largely missing. The MoLHSA has recently established a Surveillance Working Group uniting relevant experts and stakeholders. The Working Group will develop an STI/HIV epidemiological profile for Georgia and a national plan of action to improve surveillance. National standards and guidelines on STI case management based on WHO guidelines will be developed as well. The Working Group will be working closely with GFATM. Initiatives like the Health Initiative for Youth in the South Caucasus (THIYC), aimed at making sustainable improvement in the sexual and reproductive health (S&RH) and rights of young people, work to establish safer sexual behaviour among youth through increased awareness and improved knowledge of S&RH. Several donors and organizations have been active in establishing programmes to reduce the rate of STI and HIV transmission and prevent the further spread among high-risk groups and to the general population. These programmes address awareness raising, behaviour change, hotlines, referral, surveillance, peer education, outreach and counselling, capacity building of health service providers, training of teachers, providing supplies, resource and information material, referral of trafficking victims. Health service providers in Abkhazia supported by Save the Children, funded by USAID, have started work on dealing with the threat of STIs and HIV, through strategic planning, training of health staff, service and supply delivery, rehabilitation of a clinic and a mobile team.

¹² WHO Georgia information. Data from different sources vary somewhat: see the Georgia country profile and information on www.who.int/hiv/countries/ and www.theglobalfund.org and www.unaids.org.

¹³ 2006 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, Country Report, Georgia, Reporting Period January 2003-December 2005.

Tuberculosis – The annual incidence of tuberculosis lies at 88 newly detected cases per 100,000 population, which lists Georgia as a country with a high TB burden. Directly Observed Treatment Short Course (DOTS) is now available countrywide. Yet, treatment interruption rates amount to 24 percent and have led to multi-drug resistance, while the country has limited capacity to effectively treat it. TB is a difficult, but treatable air-borne illness, it is highly contagious and the treatment is lengthy. TB thrives in overcrowded prisons in Georgia, where TB prevalence is high. Worrying is the multi-drug resistant form of TB (MDR-TB). Treatment for MDR-TB can take more than three years, but a cure cannot be guaranteed. MoLHSA established the National Tuberculosis Program of Georgia (NTP) in 1995. Improved access to diagnosis and effective treatment are the main focus. The programme also includes capacity building of the national staff involved in TB care delivery and raising awareness on TB among the general population, and aims to improve the TB program monitoring, supervision and evaluation system. At the moment, annually, some 6,000 patients in 69 TB dispensaries countrywide are being supported with food incentives by the World Food Programme (WFP) to help them complete their DOTS treatment and reduce the default rate. In Abkhazia, a TB programme assisted by international organizations (Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), WFP) treats some 70 TB regular and TB-MDR inpatients annually. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) implements a TB program improving and facilitating screening and testing and rehabilitating treatment facilities in prisons. Encouragingly, the prevalence rate in prisons has gone down significantly over a period of 10 years. By the end of 2008 ICRC will hand the responsibility for this programme over to the Georgian government. WHO continues the South Caucasus Program for control of TB. The construction of the National Centre for Treatment of TB and Lung Diseases is expected to be completed in 2007. At the moment the German Development Bank assists the Georgian Government in procurement of TB medicines: from 2008 onwards the Government will take on this responsibility.

Education – Education plays an important role in moving households from vulnerability to self-sufficiency. Access to quality education has been a problem especially for poor, vulnerable, and those in remote and isolated communities. There is a general lack of information in Georgia about early childcare and development and its importance, and pre-school enrolment is low. Although the numbers are impressive, with almost universal primary education and gross enrolment in secondary education approaching 100%, like all sectors, the education sector suffered from years of neglect and low levels of funding. This resulted in reduced quality of education and the dreadful state of most schools. Parents were expected to pay for books and supplies, something many poor could not afford. On average 10 percent of children in the WFP-assisted schools are at risk of dropping out because of poverty. At least two thirds of students may likely experience short-term hunger during class, with a negative impact on concentration and learning capacity. The WFP Food for Education programme (FFE) supports primary schools located in areas with a high rate of institutionalisation to support the Government's on-going de-institutionalisation process and improve concentration and learning capacity of students.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) is implementing ambitious reforms to address the crisis in education, supported by a number of donors. Ongoing reforms include: formulation and introduction of new curricula; optimisation of schools (a phased rehabilitation and re-equipping programme); computerization and connection to internet of schools; minority textbook development; accreditation of higher education institutions; civil service reform; introduction of a higher education grants programme for minorities and others; an overhaul of vocational training; integration of ethnic minorities through education reforms and state language programs. Education financing is moving to per capita funding, which supports schools in rural and mountainous areas and will create more equal access to education. The effects of the reforms will take a long time to completely take hold and again they need to be carefully monitored in terms of including the poor and vulnerable groups in society and assisting them to fully develop and realise their potential.

Basic infrastructure and utilities – Years of neglect have visibly deteriorated the state of the physical infrastructure in the country. Lack of proper housing, water, electricity and heating were the source of much suffering, especially for the poor, for many years. As networks are being restored and the supply of water, electricity and gas is improving and uninterrupted in some areas, the rising price levels for fuel, electricity and gas are becoming a problem for poor people. Whilst the Government is trying to secure uninterrupted supply of gas from different sources, it is assisting poor households with the introduction of energy subsidies (see social assistance above). It will take many years to completely rehabilitate and restore the supply networks. Rehabilitation of houses will take much longer. There are calls for the

development of a social housing policy for Georgia, to address housing problems of the general population but also to address needs of IDPs still living in collective centres.

Food Security

A promising harvest of winter crops (wheat and barley) in 2006 and sizeable and increased commercial cereal imports (804,000 MT which represent 47% of the total cereal supply in 2005/06) as well as stable production of meat, vegetables and potatoes indicate that availability of staple food is generally sufficient on Georgian markets. Food consumption in terms of energy intake expressed in calorie intake for the total population is 2,390 Kcal/day for 2005, above the Government's recommended level of 2,300 Kcal.

However, based on the Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO) classification, Georgia remains as a low-income food deficit country (LIFDC). Georgia's agricultural potential is still impaired by antiquated infrastructure, small size of land plots, lack of skills and inputs, limited access to credit and processing facilities, as well as under-developed market structures. Without alternative employment opportunities in place, subsistence farming remains the lifeline for the majority of Georgia's rural poor. Agricultural reform, aimed at improving productivity, is still in its starting phases and there is as yet no clear strategy how to address the issue of food security and poverty through agricultural development in the rural areas. A single confirmed case of bird flu in Georgia in early 2006 resulted in large-scale poultry slaughter, which negatively affected the country's poultry meat and egg production, availability and prices. The prices of sunflower oil and potato and also wheat flour and bread remained relatively stable, which is important from a food security point of view. However, the export ban on wheat by Russia, where Georgia imported around 75% of its wheat from, is likely to drive up wheat prices in the markets and for bread, while Georgia looks for alternative markets.

Food insecurity, which manifests itself in problems of food access, purchasing power, and utilization, is closely linked to poverty. According to Government estimates, about one third of the Georgian population did not consume adequate dietary energy intake (less than 2,300 Kcal) in 2005. The poor consumed only 1,590 Kcal/day. There was no change in the energy intake compared to 2004. The average intake for those below the poverty line rapidly decreases further as family size increases: for families with three or more children, average energy intake is only 1,390 Kcal/day. Food expenditure among poor subsistence farmers is on average above 70 percent, while sales of own production are below 25 percent of the total monthly cash income.

The social safety net is currently overstretched and requires external resources to lift people out of extreme poverty. In many cases, the state pension of an elderly person and remittances from extended family members are the sole regular cash income of an entire family. The problem of household's purchasing power is compounded by high unemployment, the vast majority of unemployed people being unregistered and relying on subsistence agriculture.

Problems of food utilization exist mainly in the form of micronutrient deficiencies, especially iron and iodine deficiencies, and in form of poor quality diets that are heavily carbohydrate based (65-70%) throughout the year. The prevalence of malnutrition is low thanks to a cultural practice of feeding children first and a low prevalence of infectious diseases.

Seasonal variation of food insecurity is significant. Food stores of rural households generally run out four to five months before the next harvest, the caloric consumption then declines by 20 percent. It coincides with the time of increased household expenditure on food and the need to acquire agricultural inputs for planting. Farmers resort to selling assets and taking loans at high interest rates.

Humanitarian Food Aid – Georgia has been receiving humanitarian food aid since 1993. Up till 2004, most of this aid was programme aid, or budgetary support, averaging at the rate of 187 thousand tons per year. So-called project aid, food distributed directly to beneficiaries, currently stands at 9,200 ton per year and will be phased out by the beginning of 2009. WFP continues providing several types of relief and recovery food aid: Food for Work activities help vulnerable rural small scale farmers improve food security and livelihoods through rehabilitation of productive assets and public infrastructure, and thus enhance their resilience to current and future shocks; the Food for Education programme provides in-school meals for all primary students, and in addition provides a dry take-home ration for those who are at risk of dropping out, and is in support of de-institutionalisation; TB patients assistance for patients following DOTS treatment; Relief food aid to soup kitchens, shelters, TB and psychiatric hospitals; Chechen refugees food assistance; Emergency response (this year provided to disaster affected IDPs

during heavy snowfall in early 2006). ICRC provides food assistance to thousands of destitute and vulnerable people in western Georgia and Abkhazia. They support canteen programmes, provide hot meals to homebound or bedridden elderly, and assist people with dry food rations and household essentials. Together with the Government and its partners, WFP and ICRC are currently planning and implementing exit and handing over strategies for these activities.

Disasters¹⁴

One of the greatest sources of vulnerability is the high risk of natural and manmade disasters that also threatens the overall development of the country. Due to its geographic location and complex natural setting, Georgia is a highly disaster-prone country, and in the past, a sequence of natural disasters have exerted a great toll on the country's development, as it was frequently hit by earthquakes, floods, droughts, landslides and avalanches. There are also chemical, biological and radioactive threats due to the low level of industrial safety standards. In addition, Georgia's position at the crossroads of bird migration routes makes it vulnerable to the emerging threat of early exposure to the avian flu pandemic.

Georgia is also exposed to spill-over from resurgent conflicts, with related humanitarian consequences, due to previous violent conflicts in the country, the volatile Russian North Caucasus region, with ongoing instability, Georgia's participation in military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, major oil and gas pipelines passing through the country, and other significant western interests.

Emerging threats such as mutating flu varieties (i.e. avian flu) pose a special danger and require special preparedness and significant material and financial resources due to their potential scale. In general, institutional capacity in disaster-related medicine is underdeveloped, and in case of a large-scale emergency, it will be very difficult to provide medical assistance to victims numbering even in hundreds, not to mention higher numbers.

International Collaboration

The primary responsibility for security, protection and care for the vulnerable and disadvantaged in society and their advancement belongs to the Georgian Government. In Georgia this includes the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation (MRA), the Ministry of Agriculture and Food (MoAF), the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES) and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs (MoLHSA). The Ministries of Finance (MoF) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) are responsible to create the financial systems and legal framework that create an enabling environment. The Emergency Management Department (EMD) of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) is responsible to prepare and respond to disasters and emergencies.

The Rose Revolution in 2003 sparked new interest in Georgia's plight with international donors and partners, after a period of donor fatigue, high donor dependency, and relatively little progress. Major donors, such as the EU, the United States of America (US), as well as multilateral organisations such as the United Nations agencies, WB, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), chose to support the new Government in its ambitious reform programme to fundamentally change the country and move away from poverty, corruption and conflict. A wide range of international organisations – along with hundreds of local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – assist in addressing Georgia's needs for relief, recovery and rehabilitation, and development assistance. The support is important in moving forward in the transition to development, after years of stagnation and brings with it capacities and competencies that can benefit Georgia.

Currently, a number of international organisations attend to the still widespread needs for humanitarian assistance in Georgia. They work with and through local partners, have office networks across the country and possess invaluable knowledge of the situation on the ground and beneficiary needs. As the Government is putting into place State strategies, systems and programmes for those in need of humanitarian aid, these organisations are looking to phase out their relief efforts (ICRC, WFP, European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office - ECHO), focus more on support to implementation of the Government strategies, for example for IDPs, vulnerable children, and minorities, and/or continue work

¹⁴ Disasters are considered in more detail in Chapter 3.

in areas such as rehabilitation and recovery, human rights, peace building and conflict resolution, disaster preparedness, health, education, agriculture, etc.

Simultaneously, there is substantial support for the reform process and Georgia's desired transition to become a vibrant, free market and stable democracy. The US Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), EU, WB, IMF and a number of other (bilateral) donors provide financial and technical support to such areas as governance; public and economic sector reforms; civil service reform; judicial reform; and policy development.

Different donor mechanisms for support are used. The UNCT supports the Government towards reaching the agreed five national priorities themes, based on the principles of the Georgian Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Georgia's Basic Data and Directions 2007-2010 (BDD) and laid down in the UN Development Assistance Framework Georgia 2006-2010 (UNDAF). The themes are: Poverty and Economic Growth, Governance, Basic Social Services, Volatility and Instability, and Environment. WB/IMF lend their support based on the Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (EDPRP), however the Government no longer considers this a useful document. The US funded Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund (MCGF) supports development of economic infrastructure and business. USAID has shifted its strategic focus to Georgia's long term development needs by supporting economic growth, development of the energy sector, strengthening the capacity of local governments to deliver services, community mobilization, and health and institutional capacity building. USAID, through Community Habitat Finance International (CHF), has started a five-year programme - the Georgian Employment and Infrastructure Initiative –focusing on jobs creation and infrastructure rehabilitation. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) remains the main support to the Government for disaster preparedness and response development.

Three international relationships warrant a more detailed description: two of them because they are part of the foundations for Georgia's reform process and one because it could become a major impediment.

European integration – Georgia's European orientation plays an extremely important role, setting standards and benchmarks in areas as human rights protection, environmental policies, and minority rights, but also in its social policies. Based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) entered into force on 1 July 1999, the EU's cooperation objectives are to build a relationship with Georgia in which the respect of democratic principles, the rule of law, and human rights, as well as the consolidation of a market economy are fostered and supported. Georgia, along with two other South Caucasus countries, has been included in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) since June 2004. In November 2006, the EU – Georgia ENP Action Plan was formally approved in Brussels. The Action Plan is a political document laying out the strategic objectives of the cooperation between Georgia and the EU. It has a timeframe of 5 years. The EU is also one of Georgia's major donors in areas such as technical assistance, post-conflict rehabilitation, democracy and human rights, security, macro-finance assistance, and judicial reform. The EU food security programme will be completed in early 2007.

NATO Alliance – The Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), which regulates Georgia's adjustment to North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) standards, was agreed in October 2004, and to an extent, addresses issues such as national disaster preparedness. In September 2006 NATO granted Intensified Dialogue with Georgia, which aims to help Georgian officials to understand better the very stringent commitments and standards that are expected of a potential NATO member state. This does, NATO pointed out, not mean that Georgia is on the verge of joining the Alliance but it needs a clear commitment to thorough reform and basic NATO principles, such as the peaceful resolution of internal and external disputes. Georgia will continue to implement its IPAP with NATO. This Plan will remain a key programme of defense and institutional reform in Georgia.

Russia-Georgia – Georgia's relationship with Russia was not very good, nevertheless, Russia was Georgia's most important trade partner, in 2005 accounting for 16% of its total foreign trade turnover.¹⁵ Relations deteriorated after Russia banned fresh fruits and vegetables, soon followed by Georgian wine and mineral waters (for which Russia was Georgia's the biggest export destination) in spring 2006. The situation worsened even further after Georgia arrested four alleged Russian military spies in September 2006 and quickly resulted in an almost complete economic and transport embargo and the closing of the borders. Only bank transfers from Russia to Georgia remained untouched. Russia deported hundreds of Georgians and harasses their business interests in Russia. Meanwhile, the two conflicts on Georgia's

¹⁵ Basic Data and Directions 2007-2010, Government of Georgia, Tbilisi

territory, a hampering factor to complete reforms and stability, with Russia playing an important role in the peace negotiations and peace keeping, are not being resolved. Russian energy giant Gazprom recently announced steep gas price increases starting from January 2007 and has threatened to halt supplies to Georgia (the worst case scenario for Georgia) unless it agrees to higher prices: alternatively Gazprom is willing to lower its tariffs if Georgia hands over some of its gas infrastructure to the company. Georgia currently seeks alternative suppliers. International efforts to defuse the rows and reduce tensions have so far produced no results. The effects this will have on Georgia, and especially vulnerable groups, are currently speculated upon. It certainly will reduce its economic growth rate. Georgia is determined not to let this affect the ongoing reform process. Some even believe this might in fact speed up necessary reforms, for example in the wine and agriculture sectors.

Coordination – There are various efforts and mechanisms coordinating assistance and collaboration, some very effective and efficient, but in some cases weak, stalling, or even non-existent. There is room for improvement, both from the Government and the international community's side, to reduce overlap, operational gaps, and improve coordination and efficiency. Transparent policy processes and institutionalised informational exchange would be beneficial in this respect.

II PRIORITY AREAS

1. Enabling Transition and Effective Intervention

The current situation in Georgia is a mixed one: on the one hand the Georgian Government is still dealing with and recovering from crisis and conflict, almost 15 years after violent conflicts and socio-economic collapse. Two conflicts have still not been resolved and almost 40% of the population lives in poverty. On the other hand, the country has stabilised to an extent, corruption is being brought under control, the economy is growing, and there are improvements in the provision of basic social services. Similarly, in some areas the first results of reform are starting to show, while in others reform is only starting. Thus, depending on the area and sector, relief, recovery and rehabilitation, or development and reform assistance are required. In general, there is tremendous motivation and commitment in the Government to break away from relief, dependency on aid and poverty towards self-determination, taking responsibility, and prosperity. However, Georgia will continue to need the mixed package of external assistance for some time to come. Enabling transition depends on a number of conditions. The Government needs to:

- Discard the 'aid dependency syndrome';
- Build capable institutions, including human resources;
- Establish effective coordination and information exchange between different sectors and agencies, including various levels of governance, as well as with civil society and the international community;
- Ensure participative decision making and strategic thinking in policy design;
- Create effective institutional mechanisms for implementation of policies; and
- Secure adequate information gathering and analysis.

Supporting agencies and organisations need to:

- Cooperate and coordinate closely with the Government and one another;
- Continuously adjust their plans to the transitional reality and changing needs in the country;
- Incorporate policies that ensure the Government takes over the respective humanitarian sector before moving to any other area or exiting.

Administering Reform

In order to effectively direct the transition, priority areas have been identified. It is paramount to design and implement systemic, long-term and well-planned interventions. Georgia's leadership has opted for fast and complex reforms for economic and social change, rather than slower and more gradual changes. This originates from the wish to shorten the period of a temporary system vacuum, break down the inertia of the old system, optimally exploit the initial political window of opportunity, and make changes irreversible. The stated ambition of European integration accelerates adoption of European standards in social and other policies.

Strategies – A number of strategic documents guide Georgia’s efforts to address its stated priorities, including humanitarian issues:

- The Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Programme (EDPRP), adopted in 2003 under the previous Government. Progress reports were issued in 2005 and 2006 and positively reviewed by the IMF/WB. However, the current Government does not subscribe to this document.
- The Office of the State Minister for Reform Coordination (SMRefC) prepared a consolidated Medium Term Action Strategy, called Basic Data and Directions for 2007-2010, incorporating the main priorities of the above mentioned documents and the Ministry of Finance’s Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF), for 2007-2010, which should positively influence Government planning and budgeting.¹⁶
- The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) for Georgia have also been accepted. A progress report for 2004-2005 has been prepared and published.
- The Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) regulates Georgia’s adjustment to NATO standards and includes the issue of national disaster preparedness.
- The European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan was agreed upon and signed with the EU in November 2006.
- The National Security Council (NSC) has developed the National Security Concept.
- The Georgian Anti-corruption Strategy and Action Plan guide the Governments fight against corruption.

Planning and implementation – To move from strategies to strategic planning to implementation is a major challenge. Georgia currently tries to address the issue of a lack of strategic programming and detailed actions plans, in order to improve implementation and allocation of resources. National strategies and plans subsequently need to be communicated to the right level, and funding needs to follow plans. The newly adopted local self-government system makes this more complex and challenging.

Data and information – Planning is often still hampered by unavailability of accurate and reliable statistical and research data, lack of standardised indicators and forms, and particularly the capacity to properly analyse the existing data. Clear information on development potential, vulnerable subgroups, actual social impact of aid and development programmes, etc. are often not available. The database developed for the social assistance system has improved the possibilities of targeting vulnerable people, but does not contain the whole population. Capacity building of the department of statistics is ongoing, and certain data are becoming more accurate and reliable. However, due to the governance reforms, some types of data previously collected at the local level might no longer be available or become unreliable due to staff cuts. Better analytical capacity will help officials, as well as aid agencies, to better comprehend and determine the true level of needs, poverty incidence, and priorities across the country.

Coordination – The Ministry of Finance seems best positioned for the financial coordination of humanitarian and development efforts, and is already monitoring humanitarian inflows and introducing an information system that would make implementation of the main international projects more transparent.

Financing – Financial discipline is particularly important and the introduction of a treasury single revenue account in April 2004 was an important milestone in improving public expenditure management. The treasury single account for all central Government revenues and expenditures will be expanded to include its coverage to local governments in 2007. The Government supports building line ministry capacity for program budgeting, multi-year planning, and identification of performance indicators.

Public administration – The capacity for policy development is still limited, as the new leadership makes efforts to create an efficient and competent public administration. Morale and motivation to deliver quality public services seems low. Construction of an effective civil service is one of the main pillars of Government reform, but the related lay-offs of civil servants are not popular. Eradicating corruption continues to be among the top priorities for the new Georgian leadership.¹⁷ The Government continues to implement its National Action Plan to implement the Anti-corruption strategy with success and continues to adopt dramatic anti-corruption reforms and high profile prosecutions. Georgia recently ranked 99th (out

¹⁶ Budget Systems Law that became effective in January 2004 abolished the system of protected items, facilitating reorientation of spending to newly identified priorities. The new law stipulates that annual budget laws be considered in the context of MTEF.

¹⁷ The latest National Anti-Corruption Strategy document was approved on June 24, 2005, by presidential decree #550.

of 163), up from 130th last year, in the 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index issued by the corruption watchdog Transparency International. The World Bank reported in July 2006 that Georgia saw the largest reduction in corruption among 27 transition countries from 2002-2005. The business climate has improved dramatically: the percentage of firms reporting that bribery of tax officials was frequent fell from 44% in 2002 to 11% in 2005.

Human resources – Frequent replacement or rotation of the top Government officials means changes in lower level public servants. This sometimes leads to unpredictability and *ad hoc* decisions, adding to general volatility of the political and social situation. As a result, long-term planning of humanitarian interventions or development programmes, as well as identifying partners in the Government, poses challenges to planners, implementers and analysts. It results in the loss of achieved progress and institutional memory. Developing and maintaining institutional culture and memory is important for more effectiveness and particularly for continuity in activities. A positive institutional culture helps to provide quality services.

Legal reform – Georgia is developing and adopting new legislation, including parts relevant to the humanitarian sphere, providing the legal basis for areas such as social work, child welfare, domestic violence, natural disasters, and rescue operations. Reducing licensing and regulations in economic or other activities was needed but legal gaps in important areas should be addressed, based on defined procedures of consultation.

Judiciary – The correct and effective execution and enforcement of the law are paramount to create and maintain a just state and respect for human rights. Although a lot has already been done, further reform and strengthening of the judiciary in order to improve its accountability and efficiency, ensure its impartiality, free from improper influence, and effective enforcement of judgments are ongoing.¹⁸

Parliament – Parliament does not only prepare and adopt legislation: it is the primary institutional mechanism for establishing public supervision over the executive branch of the Government and a venue for discussing issues of strategic importance. Parliament should move humanitarian issues to the centre of public debate. Gender-equality is a crosscutting issue that deserves serious attention.¹⁹

Civil society – Maintaining an open dialogue between the Government and civil society, as well as interest groups and communities is a challenge during any transition or period of uncertainty. However, constructive criticism is often valuable and not to be confused with dissent. There is need for more transparent and participatory development of strategies, involving the intended beneficiaries. In some instances this is done admirably, for example during the recent, very inclusive, development process of the national IDP strategy. However, this is not always the case and could be improved upon. Civil society is not only a watchdog and implementer of reform and could do better at cooperating with the Government as much as the Government could improve on their dialogue skills. Capacity building and long-term sustainability of NGOs, especially after the brain drain of civil society talents to the new Government, is an important aspect of enabling transition.

Democratisation and Local Self-Government – In December 2005, Parliament adopted the organic Law of Georgia on Local Self-Governance, creating 70 new administrative units and putting in place the foundations for decentralisation. On 5 October 2006, Georgia held elections for Sakrebulo (local self government bodies). Voter turn out was around 48%. Domestic election observers groups observed only minor problems at Election Day; in general voters could freely express their will. Some of the problems observed were caused by the late and rather sudden announcement of the elections, which caused time constraints in the preparation process for participants. Furthermore observers mentioned there was some ‘blurring’ of Government and the ruling party in the media. The Ministry of Justice is improving the country’s civil registry system, which, in a few years time, can produce a reliable voters list. Making local self-government work is the next challenge. Roles, responsibilities and authorities need to be clarified, a huge staff capacity building effort is needed, and implementation procedures need to be developed. However, good local self-government has the potential to give a very important and necessary boost to regional socio-economic development and to combat rural poverty through creating sustainable rural livelihoods, and therefore deserves strong, sustained support. A number of initiatives are already ongoing.

¹⁸ See also the Judicial Reform Index, Georgia. American Bar Association/CEELI, September 2005.

¹⁹ See also the report ‘The Reality. Women’s equal rights and equal opportunities in Georgia’, by Women for Future, Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association, Mari Meskhi and Violeta Neubauer, Tbilisi, 2006

To ensure maximum impact and provide linkages between the local, regional and national levels, a strong and inclusive coordination mechanism is needed.

Challenges and Recommendations

Targeting – Challenges in dealing with vulnerable populations, humanitarian assistance and development are formidable. There is a need for strategic and development-oriented approaches as well as an urgent humanitarian response, and in some cases permanent assistance. Many poor and vulnerable who have little chance to survive without external support need adequate care on a prolonged basis. However, the great majority of vulnerable individuals and households can and should be encouraged to take care of themselves through effective policies. Herein lays the basic challenge of properly targeting beneficiaries.

Integration and inclusion – Integrating the disabled, minorities, internally displaced and refugees, or migrants is a primary concern when planning any policy, though it is important not to create additional problems as a result of a rapid or unbalanced approach.

Dependency – Both the Government and beneficiaries have started taking their responsibility after a long period of external assistance: the Government for leading the country and beneficiaries for their own livelihoods. This will benefit from clear plans and timetables for taking on these responsibilities by Government and beneficiaries, supported by carefully planned exit strategies from donors.

Use of limited resources – The income of the Government has improved significantly over the past two years but given the magnitude of the humanitarian issues to address, it does not have sufficient resources. Properly targeting as part of clear policies and long term programmes and plans, monitoring and follow-up, transparency and accountability are key to ensuring the most effective and efficient use of resources.

Coordination – Although progress has been made in a number of areas, there is scope for better coordination among donors, implementing agencies, and the Government. Frequently, there is a need to identify or establish a unit, responsibilities and procedures for effective coordination in areas such as emergency response, conflict-affected populations, and vulnerable groups within a population. Especially in the case of phasing out external humanitarian support it should be clear with whom organisation should coordinate their exit strategy to prevent vulnerable groups from being left unattended.

Security and stability – Security and (economic) stability are key to the success of Georgia's transformation, improvement of the living conditions of the population, and providing a safe work environment for humanitarian assistance. This is particularly important in conflict zones. Negotiating better security and protection of conflict affected populations and for organisations working in conflict zones is extremely important.

In summary, Georgia has a number of challenges, the most urgent being the need to get away from the ongoing status of extended emergency and to definitively transition to development. The following recommendations summarize key areas for further action and follow up:

Strategies and planning for humanitarian assistance and development

- Continue to develop, adjust and adopt national humanitarian and development strategies, action plans, and relevant legislation, for example for IDPs, disabled, street children, minorities, Meskhetians, and disaster preparedness and response in a participatory and transparent manner. The process used for developing the IDP strategy could be used as a model for future endeavours.

Transparency and participation of key stakeholders

- It is the joint responsibility of the Government, national and international organisations to ensure regular dialogue, coordination, and information exchange on the humanitarian situation and assistance needs in Georgia. Appropriate mechanisms need to be reviewed or elaborated and institutionalised.
- Identify and promote civil society's and the general public's role in furthering reforms, humanitarian, and disaster preparedness and response issues.
- Ensure participation in planning and decision making processes in local self-government.

Continue to improve data collection, analysis, and dissemination

- Continue to support the Government's capacity building to collect more accurate and reliable information, and to better analyse it, as a basis for informed policy development, planning and decision making.

- Support further development and improvement of information management systems that are (electronically) accessible to all stakeholders and open to the public and include data, strategies, policies and principles, plans, and budgets.

Strengthen the Government's operational capacity and cooperation mechanisms

- Continued support to state reforms, capacity building and strengthening of national institutions, especially in health, education, agriculture, and social services, to improve support and protection for vulnerable populations.
- Institutionalise the initiatives of the Government in order to create a more stable environment and to sustain the reforms.
- It is the joint responsibility of the Government and international agencies to allocate and secure funding, as well as undertake funding mobilization for humanitarian assistance and reforms.
- Simultaneously strengthen the capacity of civil society and NGOs to complement the Government's response to transition challenges.

Transfer vulnerable people with potential from humanitarian aid to sustainable livelihoods

- Advance the current institutional framework for jobs creation, professional and vocational education and skills (re-)training, as well as lifelong and informal education responsive to market demands.
- Improve availability of and access to micro-credit and support to SME for vulnerable people with potential.
- Actively promote and create an attractive climate for investment and development in rural areas, regions, and towns where the economy is the most stagnant, with a view to create job opportunities.

Invest in diversification of rural economies and enhance rural productivity

- Promote economic diversification in rural areas, particularly in the non-farming sector, and create job opportunities to absorb the expected surplus of labour force due to intensification of agriculture.
- Support recovery and rehabilitative programmes targeting subsistence farmers; facilitate and assist farmers in establishing farmers' organisations, establishing linkages to supply chains and gaining access to wider markets.
- Promote activities such as extension services, promotion of cooperatives, availability of rural credits, food processing, marketing of food production, implementation of food safety standards, and protection of domestic markets.

Ensure state social assistance, including the additional health package for poor, reaches and addresses the needs of the poor layers of society countrywide

- Establish a surveillance or human security monitoring system that monitors and measures the actual effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the new social assistance system and reforms targeted at improving the living conditions of the most disadvantaged and needy, including the access to and inclusiveness of the services, and inequality trends.
- Support SAESA and the State United Social Insurance Fund (SUSIF) to maintain and improve the established social assistance programmes and its database.
- Analyse the ageing issue in Georgia and develop a national strategy and pension system that address future developments and challenges related to the ageing population.
- Improve the system of surveillance and public health monitoring to improve the quality of data and information to better target services and so protect the health of the population.
- Support the roll out of the Primary Healthcare Centres (PHC) facilities, based on family doctors, to have nationwide coverage, including remote areas.
- Enable more effective use of health care resources by (support to) upgrading, restructuring and better integrating the health service delivery infrastructure, and creating an appropriately sized, trained and distributed health sector labour force.
- Focus on preventive measures including tailored information campaigns addressing health-related behaviour across all population groups; raise awareness of the importance of a healthy diet, exercise, and the risks and consequences of infectious diseases (HIV/AIDS, TB), smoking and drug addiction.
- Continue to improve routine measures such as anti-natal care and provide relevant advice and support to reduce maternal and child morbidity and mortality.

Invest in human capital

- Continued support to the education reform programme, especially measures to benefit young and vulnerable children such as promotion of early childhood development programmes and pre-school, de-institutionalisation, and inclusive education.

2. Vulnerable and Beneficiary Populations

Vulnerability has many dimensions and aspects, covering a broad range of deprivations and needs, both in the present and the future. In times of peace, vulnerability is linked to notions of poverty, lack of capacities, lack of choices and opportunities for self-realisation, but also exposure to risks and threats. Indeed, human suffering stretches beyond economic poverty. Future threats and the risks of becoming poor contribute to vulnerability, regardless of their present occurrence. Other dimensions are social exclusion, relative disadvantage, and discrimination.

Based on policy-related considerations, the term *vulnerable communities*, such as conflict-affected populations, is characterised by the vulnerability of whole communities due to events or realities affecting all its members, such as conflict affected communities. Equally, the term *vulnerable individuals and households* refers to vulnerability relating to a specific problem, e.g. poverty, disease, or lack of human capital, individually or in a household.

While it is possible to deal with vulnerability in a community by providing adequate social welfare programs or protection, there are always vulnerable persons within any community due to age, loneliness, incurable diseases, disabilities or chronic mental disorders. The groups discussed below belong to 'traditional' beneficiary types covered in previous reports, as well as 'non-traditional' ones, such as deported Meskhetians, or victims of human trafficking.

Vulnerable and Beneficiary Communities

There are three main factors that make a community vulnerable. These are a) violent conflicts, b) (natural) disasters, and c) special social or economic factors such as geographic isolation, poor economic infrastructure or cultural isolation that leads to social exclusion or overall poverty. The conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and neighbouring Chechnya have displaced hundreds of thousands of people, left many homeless and unemployed, and added to the overall socio-economic crisis in the country. A significant group of the population, namely Meskhetians deported from Georgia in 1944, are expected to repatriate during the next several years, causing another humanitarian concern.

Internally Displaced Persons

2006 was the year of a major breakthrough in terms of Government efforts to start addressing the needs of IDPs, as well as virtual standstill for many IDPs. Regarding the latter, there has been no meaningful change in the past year in the circumstances of around 245,000 IDPs, who still reside in Georgia proper, unable to officially return to their places of origin.²⁰ 45% of IDPs continue to live in 1,600 collective centres, often in unacceptable conditions, unsuitable for habitation and run down after many years of total neglect. For many years organisations have been investing heavily in rehabilitation of collective centres, but more durable and dignified living conditions for IDPs are required. Alternative solutions to solve accommodation problems have been tried over the last few years on a small scale – provision of individual housing, privatisation of collective centres, housing vouchers, etc. – with various degrees of success and in some cases even worsening the situation of IDPs. A few cases of commercial buy-outs occurred where IDPs were living in buildings with a high commercial value (mainly in Tbilisi and Adjara). IDPs were left to their own devices to find alternative accommodation: the cash compensations provided to IDPs were mostly insufficient to acquire this.²¹ IDPs staying in private dwellings, in rented apartments, or with relatives often live squeezed into small spaces under inadequate living conditions. IDPs suffer from high unemployment, often living on insufficient allowances and humanitarian assistance, are exposed to high health risks but at the same time lack access to proper, affordable health

²⁰ Following the 2004-2005 IDP registration verification exercise conducted by the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation, with the support of UNHCR and the Swiss Government, the total number of verified IDPs is 221,597 (including 12,584 from South Ossetia and 209,013 from Abkhazia). However, the Ministry indicates that this verification was not announced as mandatory and therefore does not officially recognize these numbers. The latest official known figure of IDPs registered with the Government is from October 2005: there are 245,487 IDPs (including 12,767 from South Ossetia). The numbers of the 2006 verification process (registration is by law an annual requirement) were not yet made public at the time of writing this report.

²¹ Study on Privatisation of IDP Collective Centres in Georgia, New Approach, Ana Dolidze et al. Tbilisi, 2005.

care, and are isolated from the rest of society. In some locations separate schools for IDP children continue to exist. Many IDPs are depressed and have little hope for the future after so many years during which the conflicts were not resolved. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) still considers Georgia as ‘a protracted crisis’.

National Strategy toward Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia – In March 2006, an Inter-Ministerial Commission started the process to develop the National IDP Strategy in response to the need to develop a longer term strategy for the IDPs, while at the same time addressing their immediate humanitarian needs. Four thematic working groups, involving the relevant government agencies, UN agencies, international NGOs and civil society organisations, covered all priority concerns for IDPs – housing, economic issues (employment), social issues (education and health) and legal status. The draft Strategy was presented in October 2006 and will be discussed for approval in a Governmental session. The document defines the two main goals of the Government with regards to IDPs. These are:

1. Radical improvement of living conditions for IDPs, securing a life in dignity and integration into the Georgian society, and
2. Creating the necessary conditions for durable solutions, in particular for IDPs to return voluntarily, in dignity and safety.²²

The Strategy will serve as the basis for an action plan, budgeting and a reporting mechanism, aimed at achieving these strategic goals. The implementation of the Strategy will require a long term national financial investment and commitment on the part of the Government. The Government will be seeking international assistance and support from the United Nations and other international organizations. To close down all the centres and integrate that many people will be a lengthy process: the need for basic humanitarian support will therefore still continue during the implementation of the Strategy. Re-housing IDPs needs to be carefully regulated, something not done till now, and there is an urgent need for a National Housing Policy. To assist the strategy, the ICRC is completing and will soon hand over to the MRA a database on all collective centres in Georgia, with mapping, global positioning system, and state of the centres.

Newly recognized Internally Displaced Persons – MRA has started registering some of the hundreds of Georgian citizens recently deported from Russia as IDPs. MRA considers those deported Georgians that originate from Georgian conflict zones, fled to Russia during the conflicts in the early 1990s and lived in Russia as (often unregistered) refugees, to be IDPs.

Social Assistance – As Georgian citizens IDPs are entitled to general benefits and support, including the new social security system. Many IDPs registered after special efforts were made to provide IDPs with the necessary information about the new system. The accessibility and quality of the social services for IDPs, however, still need radical improvement.

Other issues and developments – Organizations working with IDPs stressed the importance, to continue the support for self-reliance schemes for those IDPs with higher human capitals, to link them into small and medium enterprises development (SME), micro-credit, employment creation schemes, and vocational training. Many other issues, such as equal and full access to quality education, full participation in social and cultural life, representation of IDPs all continue to need attention. Under the ‘My House’ programme, the Georgian Government started registration of immovable property of IDPs located in conflict zones in April 2006, as part of protecting the legal rights to private property of the displaced.

Refugees

In 1999, some 6,000 Chechen fled the war in Chechnya, Russia, to the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, which borders the Russian Federation. The Pankisi Gorge is traditionally home to Kists, who have inhabited the Gorge since long and over recent decades, migrated back and forth between Georgia and their historical homeland Chechnya. The refugees were granted *prima facie* refugee status²³ by the Government of

²² Draft National Strategy toward Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Georgia, Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, Tbilisi, October 2006.

²³ ‘*Prima facie* or Group Determination of Refugee Status is a practice by which all persons forming part of a large-scale influx are regarded as refugees on a *prima facie* basis. Group determination ensures that protection and assistance needs are met without prior individual status determination’. Definition from UNHCR, Status Determination and Protection Information Section, Master Glossary of Terms, Rev.1, June 2006

Georgia. The Government also decided that assistance should be provided only to the refugees living in the Pankisi Valley, but did not restrict their movement inside Georgia. The number of registered refugees has been in decline since 2002. An unknown number of Chechen – i.e. non-Kist – Chechens left Georgia for other destinations. In December 2005, there were 2,546 Chechen refugees officially registered by MRA, the vast majority of them living in the Pankisi Gorge. Some 80% of the refugee population consists of women, children and elderly people. Around 85% reside in private houses, with the local Kist residents, many of whom are relatives, and around 15% are sheltered in communal centres.²⁴

MRA performed a thorough verification of refugees' documents with local authorities during the summer of 2006 and is currently completing its 2006 annual registration of refugees. Georgia grants refugee status only for one year periods at a time. Although the final results are not yet published, MRA informed that this re-registration mechanism had successfully detected a substantial number of local Kists (i.e. Georgian citizens) who in previous years had managed to register as refugees. The number of MRA recognized Chechen refugees will probably be around 1,500 persons. MRA also indicated that it may consider altering the status of the Chechen refugees from *prima facie* to individual some time in the future. *Prima facie* status is not time limited and the Government of Georgia can change its policy about group recognition of refugees. No specific timeframe was indicated for this change. This intended change from *prima facie* to individual refugee status is of some concern: all registered refugees would need to re-apply for refugee status as an *individual*, the files of each refugee will need to be re-examined yet again, and their refugee status re-assessed and reconfirmed. Some refugees might have difficulty to prove individual humanitarian prosecution, a requirement for individual refugee status, yet they would still be in need of protection and support.

The legislation related to refugees is currently being reviewed. A number of minor issues in the 'Law of Georgia on Refugees' were amended in 2005, and MRA has now prepared a more complete re-draft of the law. The intention is to send the draft out for comments to the Government agencies soon. Earlier comments on the law, prepared by UNHCR in late 2004, can also assist the Government in bringing the law up to international standard – especially in the definition of a refugee according to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. The expectation is that this draft law will be finished and put forward for ratification in the spring of 2007.

Shortly after the arrival of Chechen refugees in Georgia, at the beginning of 2000, UNHCR was designated by the Georgian Government as the co-ordinating agency for the humanitarian assistance to be provided to the refugees in Pankisi. UNHCR, together with a small group of local and international implementing partners and donors, has been providing basic assistance in shelter, health and psychosocial care, sanitation, protection and education. WFP has been and continues to provide full food rations for the refugees. The situation in the impoverished Pankisi Gorge continues to be fragile, with growing anxiety and desperation with the refugees, caused by the protracted exile and little change in living conditions. Although security and protection of the refugees has improved somewhat over the years, the refugees continue to live in desperate conditions and longer-term solutions need to be urgently considered and pursued. In general, three types of durable solutions are possible:

Voluntary repatriation – Only a small number of refugees, probably around 20%, indicates it is interested in returning to Chechnya.²⁵ UNHCR does not actively facilitate and assist repatriation: their assessment of the situation in Chechnya is that it currently does not provide a safe and sustainable environment for people to return. However, some refugees have already been repatriated to Russia with the help of Russia's Federal Migration Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. UNHCR prefers repatriation to be undertaken using internationally accepted procedures.

Resettlement in third countries – This is the preferred solution of the majority of the refugees. Between 2003 and 2005, UNHCR has facilitated resettlement of around 300 Chechen refugees from Georgia in third countries, for 2006 the total annual number will probably be less than 100 people. A very small number of non-Chechen refugees, mainly from Iran and Yemen were also resettled during that period. Third-country resettlement is an almost exhausted solution for only a very small number of specific cases that fulfil criteria set by each resettlement country. Resettlement has become increasingly difficult in the post September 11 world, unfortunately especially so for Chechens. It appears refugees as well as Government officials have unrealistic expectations and insufficient knowledge of possibilities for

²⁴ UNHCR Assistance to Chechen Refugees in Georgia, UNHCR, Tbilisi, November 2005

²⁵ Refugees and Local Integration Survey 2005-2006, United Nations Association of Georgia, 2006.

refugees of being resettled in third countries. The resettlement destination countries set the criteria and numbers and also take the final decision on accepting or rejecting refugees.

Local integration – The framework for local integration in Georgia has serious legal complications. Naturalisation is difficult, since the Georgian citizenship law has strict requirements. Refugees are not accorded the right of residency: their stay in Georgia is therefore not counted towards the number of years of uninterrupted residency necessary to apply for Georgian citizenship. The European Commission (EC) funds efforts to address the legal issues of integration of refugees in the South Caucasus region. Local circumstances, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and little prospect are not enticing refugees to settle. Besides, refugees are not motivated and do not want to appear ‘too settled’ with a view on resettlement. Most of the refugee population has little or no information on local integration. However, considering the limitations of the two earlier mentioned options, it is important that the Georgian Government, assisted by the organisations already working with the refugees, considers the need to integrate long-term refugees in Georgian society: socially, economically and legally.

Non-Chechen refugees and asylum seekers – Some 20 non-Chechens, mostly from the CIS countries, have been granted refugee status by the Georgian government since 1998. There is no official programme to facilitate refugees to integrate in the society. Reportedly, MRA is working on a draft Law on Asylum, but details have so far not been shared with the international community. Since 2003, however, the number of asylum-seekers, particularly those from outside the CIS countries, especially from Iran, is slowly rising. The still weak referral mechanism, little information and knowledge, and lack of reception facilities might become a problem if the number of asylum applications increases.

Deported Meskhetians

In 1944, Stalin deported around 120,000 Meskhetians to remove ‘unreliable elements’ from Meskheta and Javakheti, a region now called Samtskhe-Javakheti, in South Georgia, into Central Asia. Initially they settled in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, but later also in Azerbaijan, Russia, Ukraine, and more recently in Turkey and the US. In some of these countries they face ethnic persecution and even expulsion. A group of only 700 Meskhetians managed to resettle in Georgia. Due to a variety of reasons, Meskhetians, by now numbering an estimated 450,000, have never been allowed to return. They want to be rehabilitated and given the right to return to Georgia, irrespective of their intentions to return or not. The actual number that would be interested in return will depend on many factors, especially on the circumstances where they live now: how well they are integrated there, pressure for them to leave, and the focus of their communities on returning. The European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) has recently completed a comprehensive research project ‘Between Integration and Resettlement: The Meskhetian’, covering Meskhetian communities in nine countries, providing a better view of their culture, traditions and daily life. It also studied the concept of homeland and the impact that concept has on their wish to stay in host countries or return to Georgia.

Renewed interest – For a long time, various political, ethnic, territorial and economic problems in and outside Georgia stalled the issue of Meskhetians returning. However, the Georgian Government has shown renewed interest and taken on the task to facilitate repatriation by 2012 as part of its commitments with the Council of Europe (CoE). It is, however, a very sensitive issue and careful planning is required, as this process involves a number of complicated economic, political, social, and legal issues, as well as serious psychological challenges. Perceptions, fears and expectations of both the Meskhetians and the Georgian population, especially in potential resettlement areas, need to be considered and dealt with carefully. In 2005, the Office of the State Minister for Conflict Resolution (SMResC) re-created the ‘State Commission Plan for Repatriation and Social Rehabilitation of the Population Deported by the Soviet Regime in the ‘40s of the 20th Century’ to address the issue.

Legal developments – From November 2005, with the support of ECMI, an Inter-agency working group, including relevant Government ministries, lawyers, civil society and Meskhetians, started drafting the Law on Repatriation. The draft is now in an advanced state and circulating in the Government for comments, in order to incorporate these in preparing a revised final draft for submission to the Council of Europe, with the aim to pass the law by the end of 2006 or early 2007. The Law on Citizenship will be brought in line with the Repatriation Law later: there will be a special shortened procedure for Meskhetians who return, they will be able to acquire Georgian citizenship 1 year after returning.

Further matters – Once the law is adopted, there is a need to establish a strategy formulation group, to draft the basic strategic document. It is essential that broad consultation takes place within Government and civil society during the process of developing a strategy. There is a lack of information amongst Meskhetians about the actual situation in Georgia and the progress on repatriation. The international community needs to be informed and organized in order to decide how they can support the repatriation process.

Minority-dominated areas and isolated communities

The challenges to the Georgian Government related to inter-ethnic relations are much broader than those of its two secessionist regions. Lack of participation of minority communities on a national level hinders dialogue with the centre. Information, especially important during this period of changes and reforms, does not seem to make its way to minorities. Minorities tend to feel isolated, also because many do not speak Georgian, harbour distrust toward the central Government, and look more towards culturally akin ethnic populations across the borders. Lack of social integration combined with economic stagnation and little prospects for development has led to high emigration from such regions, often leaving the more vulnerable people to look after themselves. This is especially true for the regions of Samtskhe-Javakheti, with a dominant Armenian population in its eastern part, and Akhalkalaki and Ninotsminda districts (Javakheti) and Kvemo Kartli, with compact settlements of an Azeri population. However, the Government and a range of organizations are actively taking measures that address minority issues, in order to accelerate the integration and development of these minority-populated regions and reduce social and ethnic tensions.

Minority languages – On being admitted to the Council of Europe in 1999, Georgia pledged to sign and ratify, within a year, the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities. This treaty was signed and came into force in April 2006. The Government is also committed to sign the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages – probably in 2007 – and to draft and adopt a Law on Minorities. A recent feasibility study by the ECMI assists the Government in identifying the key areas it needs to focus on as it implements the agreement on the Protection of Minorities. These areas are: the definition of what constitutes a national minority; minorities in public administration; education; economic opportunities; media and access to information; minority family names and toponyms; culture and religion; and the rule of law. The State Minister for Civil Integration (SMCI) already established a number of working groups looking into most of the issues. In the rush for reforms and efforts to include and integrate minorities, the Government is very ambitious in its drive for changes. One aspect, the languages of minorities, needs more attention, because it could become an obstacle in integration if not dealt with realistically.

Measures to establish and promote Georgian as the state language are understandable, but implementation needs to be practical and realistic. The Government needs to allow for a (long enough) transitional arrangement. Minority languages is a difficult, sensitive, political issue, given the ethnic conflicts Georgia already has, as it might be linked to separatist ideas. ECMI is currently implementing a study on minority languages in Georgia, which shows this is not the case: minority languages are mainly related to cultural aspects. It was pointed out that it is essential for minorities to learn the state language to be able to fully participate in the political, social and economic life of the country but that the most challenging task of Georgian society is to develop a civic notion of identity that can cross ethnic boundaries: ‘a set of values that all Georgian citizens can identify with, irrespective of their ethnicity’.²⁶

Integration – Special Government programs on civic integration, ethnic identity and promoting Georgian as the state language, such as ‘The future starts now’ under MoES, are being implemented. Short courses in Georgian language and retraining and improvement of professional skills of public administrators is now offered by the newly opened Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration in Kutaisi, especially targeting ethnic minorities and mountain area officials. The Government runs a higher education grants programme that targets students from Abkhaz, Azeri and Armenian minorities and small mountain areas. A wide range of organizations is now working in Samtskhe-Javakheti and starting to address Kvemo Kartli in terms of strengthening local authorities, regional development, strengthening civil society, employment creation, agricultural and economic development, youth centres organising summer camps, language training, computer courses, and art. The rehabilitation of the Tbilisi-Tsalka-Kartsakhi highway,

²⁶ Implementing the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in Georgia: a Feasibility Study, Jonathan Wheatley, ECMI Working Paper no. 28, October 2006

which will literally re-connect the region, undertaken through the Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund will start in Spring 2007, hopefully generating local employment for the population that depended heavily on the Russian military base in the area, but are to be closed down in the near future.

Highland communities – A similarly challenging problem today relates to certain communities in Georgia's highlands, with seasonally harsh climatic and environmental conditions, steep slopes, deficiency in land resources, and, in certain cases, aridity. Such communities are vulnerable because they are deprived of access to quality social services, and they particularly suffer from isolation due to poor communications and roads, which are easily destroyed as a result of even minor environmental accidents or disasters, and seasonal conditions. Some of these communities continue to experience the degradation of infrastructure, regardless of old or recent natural disasters such as earthquakes or landslides, and have little resources for recovery. Young people leave depressed areas in search of better livelihood, while old persons remain unattended and helpless. Often neglected, such communities face harsh winter conditions without adequate stocks of food and health care services. While there is a state programme for developing mountainous regions, more should be done by the Government and other actors to avoid the total depopulation of these areas.

Natural disaster victims

Major natural disasters that occurred during recent years, causing displacement of population in Georgia, identified gaps in existing national and international legislation that make this group of ecological migrants or natural disaster victims a vulnerable group requiring special attention.

According to the current legislation, the State is not obliged to provide natural disaster victims with material or other types of assistance. In the aftermath of the floods in 2005, the Government made a spontaneous decision to provide one-time financial assistance to the affected households. Though this was an extremely positive step by the Government, it was an *ad hoc* rather than a systematized procedure. The estimated total number of ecological migrants in Georgia ranges between approximately 120,000 and 170,000 (including those displaced back in the '80s).

Populations living in known high-risk areas in, for example, Adjara, Svaneti, or Kvemo Kartli, remain continuously at risk of displacement. In some cases, displaced people have moved, sometimes illegally, into empty houses, still belonging to the people who left them. This is not a sustainable solution. MRA informed it has specially designated funds available for one-time cash assistance for victims of natural disasters for damage and displacement. In relevant cases, MRA sends out a special team, including legal representation and seismic experts, to assess the damage and establish the level of such assistance. MRA indicated it has, for example, been purchasing replacement housing for victims of natural disasters. However, the needs are enormous.

Legal situation – The rights of victims of natural disasters have never been protected or stipulated by any of the legal instruments in Georgia. The 'Law on Internally Displaced Persons-the Persecuted²⁷' does not envisage persons displaced as a result of natural and/or human made disasters, and thus contradicts the 'Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,' developed by the UN in 1998. No further progress can be reported on the draft Law on State Insurance against Natural Disasters drafted earlier. Such an insurance system seems to be the only feasible solution so far to compensate the natural disaster victims for damages caused. Property insurance policies, as indicated to be part of the draft Law on Population and Territory Protection, and yet to be developed in Georgia, usually specifically exclude damages caused by natural and manmade disasters. The European Centre for Minority Issues is currently completing consultations for research into the issue of ecological migrants and people displaced by natural disasters.

Inhabitants of conflict zones

The political process to solve the two conflicts in Georgia, in South Ossetia and in Abkhazia are both deadlocked at the moment, diminishing hopes of a quick return to a stable situation, where people can rebuild their lives in peace and work on the rehabilitation and development of their areas and the country. The situation is different for each area as briefly described below.

²⁷ Please see more on this issue in the Disaster Preparedness and Response Chapter.

South Ossetia – All involved in the South Ossetia conflict are still dealing with the resulting situation after the short resumption of hostilities in the summer of 2004, shattering all carefully built up trust between the conflicting parties. Agreed de-militarization is not taking place, there are incidents and there is shooting on a daily basis, maintaining a high level of fear and violence. The Georgian Government is looking for a change in the format of the peace negotiations, which it currently considers to be disadvantageous for Georgia. As a result, the last 3 meetings of the Joint Control Commission (JCC), the internationally supported peace negotiation mechanism for the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, yielded little results. The situation is not made any easier by the deteriorated relationship between Russia and Georgia, substantial investments in military hardware by the Georgian Government, and a verbally agreed yet still not signed guarantee that both sides will not engage in military activities in future. *De facto* ‘presidential elections’ and a ‘referendum on independence’ mid-November 2006, although not recognized by the international community, made the situation uneasy and did nothing to reduce tensions, on the contrary.

In this climate of fear, distrust, violence and insecurity, the living standards of the South Ossetian people, already poor and mainly depending on subsistence agriculture after the clamp down on contraband and smuggling in 2004, have deteriorated even further. The Russian ban on Georgian fruit and vegetables also affected the South Ossetians. Russia, suspecting that some of the goods might actually come from Georgia, closed down the trade in the spring of 2006. Both sides regularly block access in and out of South Ossetia and domestic shopping can be confiscated as ‘contraband goods’. Work of some organisations is made difficult because of organisational restrictions, security concerns, lack of access to monitor progress and the lack of a strong civil society. There is some positive news in the form of the progress made in terms of economic recovery and development, for which there is total support from all parties. In June 2006, the international community pledged US\$ 10 million towards a proposed Economic Rehabilitation Programme for South Ossetia. The programme will be implemented under the overall coordination of the Office for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Programme Implementation Unit has already been established, and some minor project activities will start soon. After the winter more major projects are to be started in spring 2007. It is expected that other agencies, led by the EU, a critical and supportive donor to the South Ossetia peace process, will join in the recovery and development of South Ossetia once the security situation improves and eliminate dependency on external humanitarian assistance.

Abkhazia – The political process seeking to resolve the conflict between Abkhazia and Georgia is deadlocked and suffers from a complete lack of trust between the parties. Tensions rose high in July 2006, when a Georgian police operation cleaned a renegade militia out of Upper Kodori Gorge. This was the only part of Abkhazia not controlled by the *de facto* Abkhaz authorities. Since then, the Abkhaz Government in exile was installed there and the area has been re-named into Upper Abkhazia by the Georgian side. With no political solution in sight, and the Abkhaz *de facto* authorities continuing their efforts to establish state structures and institutions, much of the efforts of the international community are focused on the peace process and strengthening the ties between the two sides through activities such as rehabilitation and reconstruction projects, community mobilization projects, and strengthening of civil society. International humanitarian assistance, in the form of food for education (for 10,000 schoolchildren in 2006-2007), food for work, canteens and home care for vulnerable, for example from ICRC and WFP, are currently being or will in the coming years be phased out, partly taken over by social assistance provided by the *de facto* authorities and partly replaced by more sustainable rehabilitation and development assistance, developing SME, income and employment generation activities. Some foreign investment has started coming into the region, mainly looking at developing the agricultural sector and the very promising and already lively tourist industry in the area that was relatively undamaged by the conflict. Trade with Turkey is also picking up. Sukhumi is getting a face-lift and roads are being repaired. Mobile phone companies have opened for business. But at the moment, most people survive mainly on subsistence farming and small agricultural activities. In the mean time, social infrastructure is in a state of collapse and does not meet the basic needs of the local population: the state of the schools is appalling and the education system decrepit. Health facilities and services are in a terrible state, unable to provide even the most basic care. UNICEF, however, is supporting the system with medical equipment and supplies, and training local health staff in all areas related to immunization. One additional positive development is that HALO Trust has completed its de-mining operations in the Gali region and along the Gumista River banks in Sukhumi: it hopes to complete all work in the Abkhazian conflict zone, and declare the territory mine impact free by 2008.

Returnees to conflict zones

Despite repeated calls to address the need for dignified return of IDPs and refugees, including their security and human rights concerns, only limited progress has been made in this area. It is important to distinguish between the very different situations in the two conflict regions in Georgia.

Gali in Abkhazia – Return of displaced people to especially Gali district, Abkhazia, started soon after the end of the armed conflict, but new violence in 1998 forced most of the returnee population to flee a second time. Since then, many people have returned spontaneously. Some are commuting across the ceasefire line; others migrate seasonally or have settled permanently to work on their farms to ensure their livelihoods. MRA estimates around 45,000 people have returned. However, the security situation in Gali remains very poor; the area is highly criminalised with disturbing levels of harassments, robberies, extortion, and killings being reported, especially during the hazelnut and citrus harvest season. It does not seem possible for the involved parties to jointly agree and implement the necessary arrangements to address the severe security problems. A recent report by the International Crisis Group²⁸ mentions that international observers agree that impediments to return include: continuing criminality; poor law enforcement; a ban on return of former fighters; insufficient funds to reconstruct destroyed homes; uncertainty on language issues; and unwillingness to live under Abkhaz *de facto* rule. The local NGOs and international community support as best as possible those that returned to Gali. Despite difficult access to the area for some organisations, a number of activities assisting recovery and rehabilitation and improving livelihoods are ongoing in Gali district. In a strategic partnership, UNHCR, SDC, Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and Danish Refugee Council (DRC) support the peace process and confidence building through activities focusing on protection, basic shelter, income generation, community development, capacity building and education. For example, based on a housing assessment and a household economy survey, DRC supports shelter, micro finance and credit, and community mobilization programmes, addressing the most urgent and basic needs of people. EU, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) and other organisations also provide important support, including to civil society strengthening. Currently, there seems to be some confusion about who will open a human rights office in Gali. Although current support for Gali returnees is considered very important, there is a need for security guarantees and a long-term rehabilitation and development strategy. And with so many displaced people still requiring assistance elsewhere in Georgia, the need for a balanced overall approach needs to be emphasized.

South Ossetia – The process of returning people to the South Ossetia conflict zone has been almost at a complete standstill since the summer of 2004, when hostilities resumed for a short period of time. The situation is so tense, volatile, and divisive, and the overall economic situation so difficult, that few people are considering returning to the area. NRC has started a project providing legal advice to returnees and constructed UNHCR standard shelters, but these have largely remained empty, with few people taking advantage of the opportunity. UNHCR has been facilitating the return of refugees and IDPs to South Ossetia since 1997. To date, it supported around 6,000 people returning to the area with shelter and other assistance. The EU, as the main donor to South Ossetia, working through and with partners, has provided shelter assistance and repatriation kits and supported repair and rehabilitation of communal facilities such as schools, water supply, electricity, gas, railway, and irrigation networks in South Ossetia since 1998. All with a view to improving the living conditions of the local and returning populations, and re-start economic activity in the area. OSCE supports development of civil society organisations addressing human rights and conflict resolution issues. UNHCR, CoE, and OSCE are jointly supporting the Georgian Government in efforts to improve draft legislation on restitution, dealing with compensation and restitution settlement issues, bringing it up to a good standard. It is hoped that the new Infrastructure Rehabilitation Programme for South Ossetia, supported by the international community, will build the necessary confidence, trust and economic rehabilitation to enable IDPs and refugees to return.

²⁸ Abkhazia Today, Europe Report no. 176, International Crisis Group, 15 September 2006.

Vulnerable and beneficiary individuals and households

Elderly

Elderly people, particularly those living alone without family support, are very vulnerable and often in need of external support. Many vulnerable elderly have few possessions and often little or no income. State pensions have long been inadequate to satisfy their basic needs. The problems of the elderly are also related to their health, including hearing, vision, and limited mobility, that often become worse as they get older. Special medical treatment or special aids are often too expensive. The past 15 years have been extremely stressful for all people in Georgia and combined with isolation, a lack of social interaction and opportunities for participation in social and cultural events, this has left many elderly suffering from depression, hopelessness and low self-esteem.

Pensions – Pensions, as understood in most western societies, do not exist in Georgia: they are more like a social benefit. The Government has been working very hard to improve social assistance for vulnerable groups in Georgia and in the past year the pension system was overhauled. The pension backlog remaining from the previous government was completely cleared in 2006. Pensions are now at the flat rate of 38 GEL per month, an increase of 10 GEL, since the Pension Law was revised and became effective in January 2006. High inflation and rising prices are problematic and reduce the purchasing power of the pensions. Many pensioners need to apply for additional social assistance to survive. Careful monitoring of the new pension and social assistance systems need to ensure the benefits actually reach the most destitute and are sufficient.²⁹ In Abkhazia the *de facto* authorities have started to provide pensions to elderly holding Russian passports. The ICRC will continue support to those elderly without pensions or sufficient means and still in need, through the *de facto* authorities.

Support – For the time being, however, there remains a need for continuation of initiatives to support the elderly, including free canteens, (municipal programs, as well as programs provided by Catharsis, the Salvation Army, Caritas, etc.) home care or food aid programmes (ICRC, WFP). The ICRC programme will phase out by 2007, as soon as the state-run Social Assistance Programme has assumed the responsibility for supporting the remaining ICRC social caseload beneficiaries, mainly the elderly and disabled. The ICRC checks showed that 90% of the vulnerable people on support from ICRC will be covered by the new Social Assistance Programme. WFP gradually reduces and will phase out their support to soup kitchens for the most vulnerable by the end of 2008 by institutionalising them, partly by merging them with the President's 100 soup kitchens programme started up in late 2005.

In Abkhazia, ICRC works with Red Cross Abkhazia volunteers to deliver home assistance to destitute, single elderly. Georgian Red Cross volunteers regularly visited 1,500 lonely vulnerable pensioners in Tbilisi, bringing food and non-food items.

In addition, there are initiatives to support social activities for older people through various projects that form specialised social clubs for the elderly, offering them a warm place to meet, drink tea, have refreshments, socialize, listen to music and keep them mentally fit. Home care services and enterprises for elderly have also been established successfully on a small scale. A number of local organisations and their beneficiaries face problems after 2007, when CordAid, a major donor in this field, will phase out and alternatives will need to be found.

Importantly, the State has started to assume more responsibility for caring for elderly citizens in need, gradually replacing international humanitarian agencies in this key relief area. However, with the aging of the population a more structured approach to the consequences and programmes to address this are still needed. The recommendations of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing 2002³⁰ still need to be considered for implementation.

²⁹ For more details, please refer to the Basic Social Services section.

³⁰ From April 8 to 12, 2002 in Madrid, at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the International Plan on Ageing was revised and a long-term strategy elaborated. This was followed by the UN ECE Ministerial Conference on Ageing in September 2002, which adopted the Regional Implementation Strategy for the Madrid Plan of Action 2002.

Chronically ill and persons with disabilities

Persons with chronic illnesses or disabilities are another large, highly vulnerable group. Data on conditions that bear a social stigma (TB, STIs/HIV, disabilities, mental diseases) are still notoriously unreliable and in most cases there is serious underreporting. The State United Social Insurance Fund (SUSIF) currently has 220,000 people registered as disabled in the new social assistance database.

Any chronic illness in a household is likely to push it toward poverty and vulnerability. And being poor increases the risk of acquiring a chronic illness or developing a disability through higher risk jobs, unhealthy lifestyles, an unbalanced diet, and inadequate or interrupted medical treatment. Poverty may also lead to total social exclusion and isolation in cases where there is no money to pay for necessary prosthesis, a wheelchair, or special transport. Most buildings are not accessible to people with disabilities. Mental health care in Georgia is still appalling. Staff is often insufficiently qualified and unprofessional and diagnostics and treatment leave much to be desired. Often patients are locked up in institutions or hidden away at home for life. There is an urgent need for social (re-)integration of (former) patients. Society at large, where people have enough problems due to the turbulent times Georgia is going through, to a great extent continues to ignore the problem, and discrimination and stigma made the situation worse for many patients.

Support – A number of organizations support those with physical disabilities by providing prostheses and orthoses, crutches and wheelchairs. The prosthetic centre in Tbilisi, established by ICRC, is, with continued ICRC support, to become a sustainable private foundation. It also established a small prosthetic centre in Gagra in Abkhazia: now taken over by the *de facto* Ministry of Health. In partnership with the health authorities it organized an assessment of the national physical rehabilitation policy in Georgia. A number of national or international initiatives (funded by for example CordAid and Open Society Institute) continue to address the issue of mental health care, albeit on a small scale and with limited success. Other organisations and many volunteers have looked after bedridden patients and brought them food and some attention.

The new social assistance programme from the SAESA/SUSIF will to some extent relieve the burden of poor, chronically ill and disabled persons and their families. Registered disabled will receive a disabled pension (of 38 GEL/month). Those eligible for additional support, receive a healthcare package that includes a range of free health care services, energy subsidy and/or cash. SAESA will handle artificial aids (wheelchairs, hearing aids, etc.) as well as Government integration programs (e.g. for disabled). ICRC continues to distribute food to the most destitute beneficiaries, including disabled, until the social assistance programme will assume the responsibility for supporting them.

A new initiative will hopefully give the issue the high visibility and profile it needs and push the Government into action. In October 2006, Save the Children, funded by USAID, started the project Supporting Equal Opportunities for People with Disabilities. It will work at policy level through supporting a Government Interagency Working Group on Disabilities. This will identify weaknesses and gaps in laws and support to people with disabilities, and address them through elaborating a coherent policy, strategies and implementation mechanisms. The project will ensure public participation, consultation and discussions, and presentation of the needs and concerns of people living with disabilities. Public awareness campaigns and capacity building of the Coalition for Independent Living are also planned.

In Abkhazia, improving the lives of people with disabilities and chronic illnesses might be a good starting point for both sides to work jointly and build trust and respect.

Children and youth in special circumstances

In Georgia, several groups of children require special and continued attention to ensure their rights are protected, their needs are addressed, and they will have equal opportunity to fully develop their potential.

Street children

Street children are a very visible problem that can lead to child exploitation, crime, prostitution, sexually transmitted diseases, and human trafficking. Homeless children, but also children with homes and families, and sometimes whole families, often driven by extreme poverty, end up and live in the street. There are no reliable statistics on the number of street children, but estimates currently put it at around

2,000, half of them living in Tbilisi. A comprehensive assessment of street children currently being prepared by the Save the Children, funded by USAID, and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) should provide more information on numbers, situation and geographical distribution by early 2007. Future initiatives can build on this knowledge. The focus of support activities is on psychosocial rehabilitation and re-integration of children. Trust building is the first requirement for working with street children. Several night and day centres, shelters and mobile outreach offer food, basic hygiene and health care, psycho-social support, clothes, a bed, culture, special education programs for illiterate and innumerate children, family support services, and vocational training, all with the aim to rehabilitate children, return them to their family, reintegrate them into society and back into school. Alternatively, when return to parents or relatives is not an option, foster care can be considered. There are now centres in key urban areas (Tbilisi, Gori, Rustavi, and Chiatura). Former street children have been trained and act as leaders and peer-educators to better reach street and at risk children. To date, activities are being implemented by local and international organisations, without any guiding Government strategy.

National Strategy – The Government has recently shown an interest to better address the problem of street children issue in their Child Welfare and De-institutionalisation reform programme. There are proposals for an Interagency Working Group on Street Children to develop a National Strategy on Street Children. Standards for childcare have already been elaborated, and this strategy would detail a common definition of street children and the minimum services and responsibilities, processes, and protocols related to care for and dealing with street children. Children's participation, child protection, and children's rights need to be the guiding principles for the strategy. Subsequent budget allocations and fund raising (with private sector involvement), further capacity building of people and organisations dealing with street children (including the police force and social services), advocacy and public awareness raising on Child Welfare Reform will need to subsequently follow.

Institutionalised children

Currently over 5,000 children live in State and private institutions. 87% of the children have at least one parent³¹. Most institutions are worn out and run down, and cannot provide appropriate care and services. Poverty and food security problems, disability, remoteness and lack of social assistance caused desperate family's facing difficult times to place their children in an institution, depriving them of their basic right to have a family.

It is universally accepted that family and community based care for children is better than institutional care. Where possible, de-institutionalisation supports children to return to their parents or family and re-integrate in society. Proven alternatives to institutional care and in support of gate keeping of placement include: establishing community, youth, family support, and day-care centres; assisting in income generation possibilities and access to micro-credit for carers; food for education; a school bus; foster care; small group homes with care parents; and linking families to the new State social assistance programme. Two special programmes in Georgia specifically concentrate on the prevention of infant abandonment through support and shelter for new mothers facing difficulties, and help prepare institutionalised older youth lacking basic life skills to leave institutions. 7 sites (out of over 40 throughout Georgia) have alternative care at the moment. According to UNICEF, over the past 6 years some 800 children have been de-institutionalised. Three institutions were closed. However, numbers did not go down substantially, because other children replaced the ones that left.

The Government Commission for Childcare and De-institutionalisation (GCCD) is making progress in implementing the Governmental Action Plan on Childcare and De-institutionalisation, supported especially by UNICEF, EU and Every Child. The overall target is to have de-institutionalised 40% of the children currently in institutions by 2009 and to fully prevent new placement of children. To support the preparation of a national optimisation plan for institutions, an assessment of policy, all State institutions in Georgia and available and possible alternatives to institutional care is currently ongoing. The research institute will present its findings and recommendations, (e.g. closure, downsizing, a moratorium on intake, or transformation) by the end of 2006. An inter-ministerial Government Commission is preparing the transfer of the Child Welfare Department from MoES to MoLHSA, foreseen for 2008. EU continues their assistance by funding a 3-year project, started in October 2006, in support of reform and de-institutionalisation. The project will focus on improved policies and institutional structures; capacity building at national, regional and local levels to ensure a continuum of services for child welfare; assist

³¹ UNICEF in Georgia, UNICEF Country Programme 2006-2010.

design of regulatory and monitoring mechanisms for child services, e.g. licensing of institutions; prevention of and alternatives to institutional care. WFP's Food for Education programme will continue to June 2008 to support the de-institutionalisation efforts.

Capacity development – To address the shortage of qualified social workers in childcare in Georgia, different efforts are underway. One is to define and regulate professional standards and certification for social work and different specializations involved in childcare. This is undertaken by the Georgian Association of Social Workers and the MoLHSA, with international support. Since last year there is a new university programme in social work at the Tbilisi State University, providing undergraduate and postgraduate level qualifications. A certification programme for those already working in the field will also be established. Other training initiatives are underway to re-train current staff in new responsibilities and professional operational procedures for referral and support.

Legal progress – The following relevant laws in support of child and family protection and de-institutionalisation have been prepared, with support from international organisations and experts: draft Law on Foster Care and draft Law on Adoption, going for its second hearing in Parliament by the end of November 2006. The draft law on Social Assistance, including the by-law on standards for care, is being heard. Necessary changes to the civil code (family law) and higher education law have also been drafted.

Children with disabilities

According to UNICEF, 'there are 10,722 children with disabilities in Georgia ... kept at home or in specialized institutions. These children live in isolation and neglect because of the existing stigma and often deprived of the right to education'.³²

Inclusive education – The Georgian law ensures the right of children with disabilities to inclusive education, integrating them into regular schools. This has been piloted and promoted by a number of organisations and MoES receives support in this area. Ten schools (one in each district) in Tbilisi now have inclusive education for children with disabilities: relevant staff was trained and/or recruited and MoES received a grant to upgrade the facilities in the schools to suit children with disabilities. Other achievements include development of teacher manuals focusing on methods of teaching children with disabilities for grades 1 to 3 and teacher training (with involvement of the Georgian Institute of Teachers Training and other experts).

Assistance to children and parents – Some organisations support production of adaptive equipment for children. Parent training supports and helps parents to comprehend and cope with taking care of a child with special needs. The EU and Every Child are designing a support service for parents and foster carers. There is a great need for respite care. World Vision helps parents to create economic opportunities for families of children with disabilities by linking them to micro-credit/SME development initiatives or providing agricultural assets.

Further developments – In future, each region of Georgia is foreseen to have one school with inclusive education with trained staff and refurbished premises. Activities on inclusive education within kindergartens (3-7 year olds) are being implemented through UNICEF. Although this is very important for success, there are currently no Government plans for starting inclusive education at the pre-school level. There is still resistance in society and at schools to inclusive education. Parents, teachers and parent associations from schools with inclusive education can play an important role in alleviating reservations and lack of information with the community and school administrations.

IDP children and youth

There are over 103,000 IDP children and youth from 0-16 years old and very little was known about their situation. Recognizing the gap and also in order to inform the Governments' new national IDP Strategy in terms of protecting IDP children and their rights, UNICEF and NRC implemented a rapid assessment on the protection and livelihood situation of IDP children and youth living in collective centres in Georgia³³. In some respects IDP children and youth are very much like other Georgian youth, with similar child protection issues related to poverty, violence, and crime. IDP children and youth identified the lack of

³² UNICEF in Georgia, UNICEF Country Programme 2006-2010.

³³ Rapid Assessment on the Protection and Livelihoods situation of Internally Displaced Children and Youth Living in Collective Centres in the Republic of Georgia. UNICEF, Tbilisi, October 2006

employment opportunities and concerns about their housing situation as their biggest problems. The researchers identified specific vulnerabilities and concerns faced by IDP children and youth:

- the social stigma IDP children receive, leading to psychological and social issues;
- isolation because of specialised schools for IDP children ('schools in exile');
- risks and dangers related to temporary return to conflict zones (Gali);
- uncertainty related to the possible closure of collective centres (by some seen as further displacement) that would involve a big life change.

These issues need to be addressed in a sensitive manner during the operationalisation and implementation of the IDP Strategy in ways that do not compromise child and youth rights and protection and contribute to their dignity, development and thriving.

Children from minorities and children living in conflict zones

Children and youth from ethnic minorities are in many ways very similar to youth all over Georgia. They also face specific vulnerabilities, such as the language barrier and a sense of not being connected to, or integrated into, Georgian society, and remoteness. Various programmes and investments are addressing these issues in order for them not to become additional obstacles for their future and cause them to become (or stay) disenchanted with Georgian society. For example, the education system is being reformed and infrastructure is being rehabilitated. The EU and World Vision are supporting a number of Inter-community Centres for Youth in areas where most minority populations live, with a focus on integrating Georgian and ethnic youth. Summer camps, language training, computer courses, art, etc. are used to stimulate individual growth to create better opportunities and promote respect and understanding.

In conflict zones, education of children is of special concern, with many schools destroyed or badly maintained, high poverty levels and instability. In Abkhazia, activities such as school infrastructure rehabilitation, providing school kits, school feeding (WFP runs a Food for Education programme targeting 10,000 Abkhaz children in 2006-2007) and a special 'Back to school' programme assist to get children back into school and help them catch-up. However, a lot remains to be done.

Victims of trafficking in human beings

Trafficking in human beings makes the victims vulnerable to exploitation, violence, disease and social stigma. Georgia is a source and transit country for people trafficked for sexual exploitation and forced labour. The main destination for Georgian victims is Turkey. Georgia also functions as a transit route for trafficking from Central Asia, Russia, Moldova and Ukraine to Turkey, Greece, Western Europe, and United Arab Emirates. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) has information on 95 victims in the period of 3 years up to June 2006 – these were almost all women with an end destination in Turkey and almost always trafficked for sexual exploitation. IOM assisted 21 of them with voluntary return to their countries of origin and post-return rehabilitation programmes.

Under 'The Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act' of 2000 the US Department of State is required to annually submit, to the US Congress, a list of countries of origin, transit, or destination for victims of 'severe forms of trafficking'. The annual Trafficking in Persons Report (TIP) repeatedly placed Georgia in the list of Tier 2 countries in 2001, 2002, and 2003, and after three months on the Tier 3 List, again in 2004, 2005 and 2006. The current Tier 2 ranking means that Georgia does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but is making significant efforts to do so. The 2006 TIP report identified the following areas for improvement: increase prosecution and sentencing of traffickers, and proper referral, shelter, protection and rehabilitation of trafficking victims.

In 2004 the Georgian Government established an Anti-Trafficking Inter-agency Commission, now chaired by the Prosecutor General, including relevant Government agencies, national and international NGOs, to coordinate Georgia's anti-trafficking efforts. Early 2005, the Government renewed their fight against trafficking by starting the implementation of the two-year 'Plan of Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (2005-2006)', that had been approved by Presidential Decree in December 2004. The plan looks to: improvement of legal regulation of migrant labour and the legislative basis on combating trafficking; public awareness raising; information gathering, analysis and exchange; protection and rehabilitation of trafficking victims; and institutional strengthening.

Local and international organisations and donors (for example SDC, OSCE, IOM, USAID) have been active in most of these areas and will continue to support anti-trafficking and support to victims

programmes and activities. After a somewhat slow implementation rate in 2005, the Government is now taking more responsibility and significant progress was made, especially since the publication of the TIP report in mid 2006, in the following areas:

- *Law on trafficking.* The 'Law of Georgia on Combating Human Trafficking' was adopted on 28 April 2006. Since then, other legal articles have also been brought in line with this law. The law is generally considered to be of a good standard.
- *Identification and referral mechanism.* The criteria and mechanism for identification of trafficking victims was established and two mobile identification teams of 2 people each will be established: one team for East Georgia one for West Georgia. The mobile teams also have a referral system for further support available to victims. The Commission is currently working on defining a clearer profile of trafficking victims. In November 2006, World Vision will start support to identification, referral and re-integration support to victims. IOM has been providing similar assistance to the Government since 2000.
- *Assistance.* A State Fund to assist victims of trafficking was established, including regulations for use, from which recognized victims can be compensated financially (GEL 1,000) and their medical costs can be covered (up to a maximum of GEL 300).
- *Shelter regulation.* A Government Statute for shelters of trafficking victims was formulated. There is still only one shelter operated with support from USAID, in Adjara.
- *Institutional development.* The interagency Commission was reformed in August 2006. It holds regular meetings. OSCE and IOM provided training to the police, Prosecutors Office, border police and Interpol. Georgian police seem to be getting a better grip on organised crime.
- *Prosecution.* Actual punishment when convicted of trafficking is high in Georgia, from 5-20 years. In the past the prosecution could not always deliver sufficient proof of trafficking after arrests and investigation. Victims are not always willing to serve as witnesses because of lack of protection. Actual number of cases is low: less than a dozen in the past year.
- *International coordination.* A bilateral meeting between prosecutors and police of Turkey and Georgia was facilitated by IOM this year. This helped in the clarification of issues faced and discussions to identify what can be done jointly in the fight against trafficking were started.
- *Information.* Several thousand brochures developed by IOM were handed out by passport issuance offices throughout Georgia as part of an information campaign against trafficking in persons in Georgia.
- *Planning.* The Commission has started formulation of an action for the next two years, 2007-2008, to follow the current plan.

Returning Georgian migrants

IOM reports that migration from Georgia largely occurs irregularly and migrants are often exposed to human rights violations and sub-standard living condition in the host countries. As a result of tighter immigration legislation in many Western countries as well as new hope for a better life in their home country, Georgians return back home. IOM and World Vision have been actively assisting Georgian asylum seekers who return voluntarily or who have been refused asylum from Switzerland. IOM also assists Georgian migrants who return voluntarily from the United Kingdom and the Czech Republic to reintegrate into Georgian society and the labour market.

Recommendations for vulnerable and beneficiary populations

Internally Displaced Persons

- Strong leadership from MRA and excellent coordination and cooperation with all relevant parties (including Government agencies, civil society, the private sector, and international organizations) are priorities for the implementation of the strategy. MRA, assisted by the other stakeholders, needs to establish an effective and efficient coordination and monitoring mechanism to guard and ensure that all efforts are harmonized and contributing to achieving the main objectives of the strategy.

- Continue to mobilize, support and build capacity of civil society, continue to strengthen the countrywide IDP platform that contributed to the development of the strategy: IDPs need and want to be heard, talked with, participate and contribute to the process of integration.
- MRA to develop an information and advocacy campaign in order to continue to receive the full backing within Government for implementation of the strategy, as well as inform the general public of the strategy and its benefits for Georgia.
- MRA also needs to rapidly acquire and build the technical capacity in-house to support the implementation of the strategy. International organizations can provide support in this effort.
- Improved access to social services for IDPs.

Refugees

- The Government, UNHCR and the Chechen refugee community should jointly ensure support for people taken off the refugee list, and agree on a transition and local integration strategy.
- Chechen (of Kist origin) refugees willing to integrate locally should be encouraged and supported. Best practices and lessons learned from local integration support activities is valuable for planning future integration support to refugees, IDPs, asylum seekers, and other groups and individuals settling in Georgia.
- As and when the MRA decides to change the status of the refugees from Chechnya from *prima facie* to individually recognised, there should be a guarantee that no forced repatriation will take place. MRA and the international community should work together to identify – in advance – the possible consequences of this proposed policy change and how to address these.
- A participatory process, involving Government, international organization working with refugees and relevant experts should be used to bring up to international standard and finalise the draft Law on Refugees, the draft Law on Asylum and other related legislation to improve local integration.
- MRA, WFP, UNHCR, refugees and the local and international community should jointly plan the phasing out of WFP food aid for refugees and explore longer-term recovery and development alternatives, taking on responsibility for and funding of the basic food needs of refugees after autumn of 2007.

Deported Meskhetians

- Once legislation that regulates the return of the Meskhetian population is adopted, brief, involve and coordinate closely with all stakeholders, including the international community to carefully plan the return process.
- The plan should include activities to inform future repatriates on exact conditions of repatriation to enable them to make an informed decision, and adaptation and social integration programmes to help the process of learning Georgian and better integrate into host communities among returnees, while at the same time, respecting their cultural and religious identity.
- Identify and earmark available resources, both inside and outside the country, to implement the plan for a phased return of Meskhetians.
- Create public awareness and advocacy campaigns to create positive attitudes towards repatriation countrywide and especially among the host populations.

Minority-dominated areas and isolated communities

- The Local government and authorities in areas with minorities, assisted by central Government and other organisations, to develop and implement communication strategies to strengthen communication between regional and central level and to identify and fill the information gaps on new laws, reforms, etc. with minorities and in remote communities.
- The Government, assisted by other organisations, continue to develop economic and physical infrastructure, including (tele-)communications and roads, and stimulate economic development. Coordination by local government and involvement of local communities is essential to avoid overlap.
- The Government to introduce, at a realistic pace, the knowledge and use of the state language through regular education and special programmes, while at the same time creating conditions for preserving ethnic identity, culture and minority languages.
- The Government to sign and ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages and to implement the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities.

Natural disaster victims

- Develop Government policy on natural disaster victims, with special emphasis on developing a unified legal basis to ensure timely and effective assistance to those displaced as a result of natural disasters.

Inhabitants of conflict zones

South Ossetia

- The agreement on non-resumption of military activities should be signed by all parties as soon as possible, restoring a minimum basis of trust, followed by actively restoring security inside and around the conflict zone, and enabling organisations to safely work with the local population on improving their houses and livelihoods.
- Constructive dialogue, in or outside the JCC, actively seeking for an alternative peace resolution mechanism that is acceptable to all parties should take place as soon as possible.
- Continue work on establishing and improving basic public services – health, education – and create food security and income and employment opportunities for the population.
- Care should be taken that the Economic Rehabilitation Programme in South Ossetia includes capacity building components that ensure the proper use and maintenance of the infrastructure and facilities, and that the needs of the people are central in selection of activities and chosen project implementation modalities. As soon as possible, a shift should be made to a more long-term development approach for the area.
- Support the development of strong, non-political civil society in South Ossetia that can act as a vehicle and partner for change and development.

Abkhazia

- There is an urgent need to resume a constructive dialogue on the conflict resolution issue.
- There is a need to build an open and transparent relationship with the *de facto* authorities, to create a basic level of trust and cooperation.
- All stakeholders to continue to address the tremendous need for reconstruction in the health and education systems, including supplies, materials and upgrading facilities.
- Capacity building and professional upgrading, especially in the education and health sectors, to re-establish a basic level of quality services.
- Continue to work with and strengthen the already thriving and engaged civil society, enable them to have more contacts outside Abkhazia, and empower them to become an internal force for change.
- Continue to address security, housing and livelihood issues of the population.

Returnees to conflict zones

- All sides must make serious and concerted efforts to improve the security situation, provide protection and reduce criminality and tensions in both Gali district and South Ossetia, and create an enabling environment for local and international organisations to work with returnees in the conflict areas.
- All stakeholders to monitor the humanitarian, human rights and socio-economic situation and address existing gaps and violations.
- The international community continue support to the rehabilitation and development of basic infrastructure, public institutions and private houses in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and bordering zones, as much as possible using community mobilisation and local human resources to assist peoples' economic improvement.
- Human capacity building to ensure proper use and maintenance of the infrastructure needs to complement repair and rehabilitation efforts.
- Support economic development through micro-projects and support to SME.
- Efforts to re-establish quality basic health care and education should be continued and stepped up, so as not to further hamper the future of the children in the conflict zones.

Elderly

- The Government, especially SAESA and SUSIF, need to carefully monitor and where necessary improve the implementation and service delivery to elderly by the new pension system and social assistance programme and ensure all those eligible for support are assisted.
- Relief assistance to vulnerable elderly, such as food aid, home care services or assistance to elderly in remote areas, should only be phased out when alternative assistance for those receiving the aid is guaranteed.

- Assist the elderly in having more social interaction through better access to communications, increased mobility, aids, and through clubs and meeting places.
- Promote the issues and role of elderly in the community, and where possible involve them in development activities and volunteer work as well as regular employment and enterprise development.
- The Government needs to analyse the consequences of the ageing of the population and prepare a strategy to deal with those accordingly.

Chronically ill and persons with disabilities

- Both Government and other involved organisations need to (continue to) raise awareness in society about the needs of persons with disabilities and chronic and mental illnesses, focusing especially on removing the stigmas and their right to full integration and participation.
- The MoLHSA needs to significantly upgrade the system of data collection to provide a reliable basis for policy development
- The Government and the National Working Group on Disability need to make sure that the policy development process itself should guarantee full participation from all stakeholders, including children with disabilities. Relevant ministries need to commit sufficient funds towards the implementation of the future strategy.
- The MoLHSA needs to urgently build the capacity of mental health care staff, as well as further develop and finance home and community based care as alternatives to mental institutions.
- All relevant Government agencies, other organisations and disabled need to coordinate and work closely together to improve access to (re-)integration and inclusion in education, vocational training and employment, as well as social and cultural aspects of society.

Street children

- Stakeholders to jointly draft a National Strategy on street and at risk children. It is paramount for the street children and their families to be actively heard and involved.
- Develop an implementation plan based on the strategy, including measures for children and adolescents at risk, and through specialised programmes to return children to schooling and family or foster care, using the knowledge and experience of organisations working in the field.

Institutionalised children

- Complete the legal framework to facilitate child and family protection into overall Government policy.
- Define and establish institutional structures and regulatory framework and ensure an efficient transfer of the Child Welfare Department to MoLHSA, involving all experienced stakeholders.
- Continue capacity building and training of staff working in childcare and de-institutionalisation.
- Identify and allocate resources to fund the optimisation plan of the Government.
- Ensure inclusive coordination between involved ministries, agencies/donors/NGOs related to childcare.

Children with disabilities

- Resource and rehabilitation centres for disabled to be expanded to all regions, support for everyone.
- Roll out Teachers to be prepared on how to deal with children with special needs.
- Continue support for special programmes to assist disabled children and their families.
- Make society aware that disabled people are there and part of society and have the right to participate.
- The MoES needs to start the roll out of inclusive education to all parts of the country.
- The National Working Group on Disability, to develop a national strategy should include and specifically address children with disabilities.

IDP children and youth

- Throughout the work planning and implementation of the IDP strategy, the recommendations from the Rapid Assessment of IDP children, undertaken in 2006 by UNICEF, need to be incorporated and operationalised by the working groups and implementers.

Victims of trafficking in human beings

- Awareness raising: as part of the current action plan, the Ministry of Education is to include the subject of human trafficking in their secondary school curriculum.

- Funding: the Government needs to allocate sufficient resources to support the current and next action plan against trafficking and become less dependent on international organisations.
- Support to victims: Government, national and international NGOs need to ensure that experiences and lessons learned on victim identification, support and rehabilitation are used to improve current mechanisms, and institutionalised.
- Cooperation and coordination: the Government should build on the contacts already made with Turkey, and establish coordination with other major source and destination countries to coordinate and establish anti-trafficking measures.
- As part of their European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan, the Government of Georgia should implement the UN Convention against trans-national organised crime and its three protocols ('Palermo Protocols') on smuggling of migrants and trafficking of persons.

Returning Georgian migrants

- Continue support integration of Georgian migrants who wish or need to return to Georgia, by assisting them to reintegrate into Georgian society and the labour market.

3. Disaster Preparedness and Response

As stated earlier, Georgia is a disaster prone country. Fortunately and unlike 2005, there were no major natural disasters in 2006. But heavy snowfall in January, frost in early spring, rains during the spring sowing season, and drought in summer, did affect people and agricultural production. In May and October, there was seasonal flooding in the Lagodekhi area after heavy rains, causing relatively minor damage. Forest fires in Abastumani in Southern Georgia in August caused significant damage before rains helped to extinguish them. The impact of the Russian embargo and outcome of the gas price negotiations with Russian gas firm Gazprom are not yet clear at the time of writing this report, but could develop into a manmade economic crisis in Georgia. Georgia is also especially aware of the current serious risk of avian flu. Georgia is located on major flight routes of migrating birds and last winter had one confirmed case of the dreaded virus. This prompted a swift response from the Government. Unlike in neighbouring countries, where the disease spread to humans, no further cases in animals and none in humans were reported, but the threat remains. Georgia receives invaluable support from especially the World Bank, as well as from the UN, USAID and EC in addressing the issue.

The effects and impact of disasters are severe and intense, both short and long term: loss of human life, damage and loss of homes, farms, animals, and crops, bring irreversible change to social and economic structures. Effective early warning and evacuation systems, risk mitigation, as well as effective urban planning and the enforcement of strict building codes and standards, might limit the impact of disasters to some extent. There have been changes and progress made during the past year in the system of disaster response and preparedness in Georgia, as will be summarized in this chapter. This was partly in response to the comprehensive set of recommendations made by the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team (UNDAC) mission, fielded by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in June 2005³⁴. However, still much remains to be done.

Institutional framework –In response to the UNDAC mission's recommendations, the Emergency Situations and Civil Safety Service at the Ministry of Internal Affairs, was upgraded to the Emergency Management Department by ministerial decree on 17 December 2005. It is now the primary policy and operational level entity for emergency response and coordination in Georgia. Its Central Office in Tbilisi now has a staff of around 80 people. The Rescue Base at the Tbilisi Sea, forming the Central Team for emergency response, has been increased to 64 professional rescuers. Although there are no concrete plans as yet, the EMD is looking into establishing sub-offices in the regions in future. As part of this coordination system, each Ministry, including the Ministry of Defence, has appointed a focal point for disaster preparedness and response, who maintains contact with the EMD on all relevant matters. As indicated by the EMD, in case of emergencies, as the central entity on operational level, it will coordinate

³⁴ The findings of the mission were included in the UNRCO's 'Humanitarian Situation and Transition to Development Report Georgia, Consolidated Policy Recommendations, 2006'. See also the mission report 'UNDAC Mission to Georgia. Assessment of National Disaster Response Capacity, 6-17 June, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

with the relevant and necessary Ministries through their focal points. While improvements are observed in the institutional coordination structures, further capacity building and institutionalisation is still needed. However, the duplication and confusion that sometimes hampered response in the past is expected to be prevented. In addition, assessment procedures, lines of communication, and mechanisms of coordination will need continuous practicing and updating, especially when staff changes, new appointments and additional staff are being added. During the floods in late 2006, the response from Government was relatively swift and efficient.

Separately from the EMD, a special stand-by Inter-ministerial Commission,³⁵ created by special decree and chaired by the Head of Regional Affairs Department in the Prime Minister's office, was established in late 2005. The Commission includes the relevant ministries (Finance, Environment, Agriculture, EMD/MoIA, etc) and has as its main responsibility disaster prevention (see also below) as well as overall emergency response coordination role. In case of a disaster, this commission is activated to ensure proper situation and damage assessments and coordination of response activities. Although there is no officially formalised structure, EMD/MoIA and the Commission have established good relationships and communicate and coordinate with each other as and when necessary.

Legislation and strategic planning – The UNDAC mission in 2005 pointed out that Georgia misses overarching crisis management legislation as a legal basis for prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. The EMD has been working to complete various aspects of relevant legislation and planning. This includes the following:

- The EMD is currently finalising the draft of the Law on Population and Territory Protection. This law includes natural and man-made catastrophes, excluding war or terrorism, prevention, and the structural approach to disaster management, including the coordination and cooperation mechanisms. The proposed mechanism for insurance against disaster is included in this draft law and details need to be developed further by the private sector (i.e. insurance companies). Mandatory safety audits of objects should become the basis for insurance policies. Taking out insurance on private property is generally not very well developed in Georgia and it will need considerable time for this to become routine practice amongst the general population.
- The EMD has prepared a draft National Emergency Response Plan with input from civil and military experts from the US. Visits/consultations were made with all competent and relevant ministries/agencies, and the plan has been circulated for comments with the Government Ministries. The Government this year will put it forward for adoption. Details of this plan have not been shared with the international community yet. Once the Government adopts this plan, its success will depend very much on sufficient budget allocation towards its implementation. The currently available resources and assets at the EMD are limited and the implementation would need additional resources. However, the issue has the attention of the Prime Minister and MoIA, who will be looking into funding possibilities.
- The Law on Fire Safety was adopted by the Parliament in late 2005 bringing fire fighting under the mandate of the EMD. Whilst the day-to-day management of fire fighting will remain at municipality level, the State Fire Protection Service of the EMD is responsible for elaborating the main directions of policy development in the sphere of fire safety, regulations, equipment and standards, and should provide supervision on its performance.
- A Presidential decree ensured customs free import of emergency and relief supplies since 2005.

Disaster prevention and early warning – A number of developments are ongoing in the area of disaster prevention and early warning:

- In relation to prevention and risk reduction related to seismic threats, the EMD informed that building codes and standards already exist in Georgian law but that they are not sufficiently being enforced and monitored yet. The Law on Property Protection allocates the responsibility to implement these standards to the Government and construction companies. However, the EMD expects that, once the property insurance system is developed by the private sector and operational, mandatory safety audits of objects to be insured will greatly enhance the application of the codes and standards in construction.

³⁵ Prime-Ministerial Decree #197 of 3 November 2005

- This year, the Ministry of Environment has established the Centre for Monitoring and Prognosis that is primarily working on disaster prevention. A special team consisting of different scientists, including seismologists, meteorologists, and geologists, carries out regular assessments and compiles an overview of the various risks and threats by type and region in Georgia. It also prepares recommendations for protective measures and risk mitigation activities. A list deemed high priority issues was submitted for the year 2007. The earlier mentioned Inter Ministerial Commission for disaster prevention and response considers these priorities and subsequently prepares a proposal for submission to the weekly Government session for their consideration. In the past year, some 6.5 million GEL were spent on mid-size prevention activities, such as gabions and river protection works. This year Kobuleti area will receive funding for risk mitigation proposals to be funded from an already approved 2.8 million GEL.
- EMD/MoIA is currently discussing the possibility of a regional project to establish an early warning/disaster preparedness and assessment system in selected regions with the German Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, (GTZ). The proposed project entitled 'People-centred early-warning and disaster prevention in South Caucasus' will focus on strengthening disaster preparedness of local communities and to reduce risk of natural disasters. The project will likely include a communication and information component and is expected to focus on community mobilization, capacity building, and establishing efficient linkages between local, district and national level.
- Together with Armenia and Azerbaijan, Georgia is part of the Caucasus region Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC), jointly run by OSCE, UNDP and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) that started in late 2004. ENVSEC is a framework for co-operation on environmental issues across borders. The initiative addresses key environmental issues that may affect security in the Southern Caucasus. Some small initiatives related to river banks/flood protection have already been implemented in the past year, in coordination with GTZ and in cooperation with NATO. A conference will be held in late November 2006 in Tbilisi to further planning and implementation of this regional initiative. The program identified three common areas of concern for the South-Caucasus:
 - o Environmental degradation and access to natural resources in areas of conflict;
 - o Management of cross-border environmental concerns, such as water resources, natural hazards, industrial and military legacies;
 - o Population growth and rapid development in capital cities.

Disaster awareness and preparedness – The proposed Government structure and approach to disaster preparedness and response in case of emergencies are included in the draft National Emergency Response Plan from the EMD. In case of major disasters, the Government will use international procedures and standards requesting international support through the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the NATO disaster response centre. As mentioned above, the Government intends to respond independently to small-scale emergencies as much as possible, perhaps supported by international organisations present in Georgia. However, a clear procedure on how such assistance should be requested yet needs to be developed, as present arrangements are more of an *ad hoc* nature. Communication, cooperation and coordination will need to be swift and are often key in those circumstances.

A number of international organisations as well as Georgian Red Cross have made efforts to support disaster preparedness training and risk mitigation activities in a number of local communities/municipalities using a decentralised, bottom up approach, working in close coordination with Government officials at various levels, to prepare for and prevent floods and other calamities. This led to some interesting results, for example a number of micro-projects, and lessons learned. Local knowledge and experience are extremely valuable sources of information in risk assessment and mitigation, especially in high-risk areas. Experiences with methods and mechanisms to include this knowledge and mobilise local communities for disaster preparedness and risk mitigation are important. These can be used in future to assess the possibilities for further developing local awareness and preparedness activities and considering the involvement of communities and volunteers, for example Red Cross Volunteers, to systematically and effectively support national Government efforts. More interest and participation of national Government to facilitate such initiatives is important.

The EMD is currently considering a Government programme, including instructions, procedures and training in schools to prepare for emergencies. Education sector manuals and other awareness raising materials that have been prepared under previous support activities could be of use in programme, message and method design. Besides, the EMD in cooperation the Ministry of Education has already been providing lectures and training on disaster awareness and preparedness to public servants. This is part of professional retraining and improvement of professional skills of public administrators offered by the Zurab Zhvania School of Public Administration in Kutaisi.

Emergency response capacity and activities – A number of relatively small-scale emergencies were addressed this year. During the winter, WFP assisted the Government by providing 15-day relief food aid rations to around 13,500 vulnerable IDPs and UNHCR provided winterisation packages and supplies to IDPs during the very heavy snowfall and power interruptions at the beginning of 2006. During that same period, the US Department of State, through United Methodist Committee on Relief, mobilized resources from all US Department of State grantees in Georgia, in order to assist IDPs in need. More recently, in October 2006, the Government and the Salvation Army provided support to people affected by the flooding in the Lagodekhi area. In that case, as well as earlier in Spring, according to the EMD and Regional Affairs Department of the State Chancellery, there was no need for international assistance and local stocks were used to provide supplies. This is in line with the Governments objective to deal with disasters and emergencies independently where possible and only in case of major emergencies request international support. The international community will continue to provide support to capacity building in the area of disaster preparedness, management and risk mitigation. This year, training activities at the Rescue Base and of border guards (especially in patrolling and rescue operations in mountainous areas) were supported by SDC, OSCE, the US and French Governments, and will continue in the future.

As a follow-up of the UNDAC report recommendations, in March-April 2006 UNDP, in consultation with the Tbilisi Municipality, carried out an in-depth ‘Assessment of Tbilisi City’s Fire Service and its rescue capacity’. The Fire Service in Tbilisi, as in all parts of the country, is in a poor state and in urgent need of almost complete re-establishment. The survey recommended a wide range of short to long-term activities such as the need to elaborate a unified strategy for developing the fire-rescue service and identify a model service; need to define standard requirements for necessary equipment and tools; improvement of working conditions; strategy, training requirements and numbers of personnel; fire safety education and voluntary fire-brigades; need to address fire buildings’ situation. The survey results were presented to a donor roundtable in October 2006 that was attended by key interested stakeholders in this area (UNDP, US, SDC, Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Federation, and the Georgian Red Cross). The general consensus of the meeting was that improving the fire services is a high priority and that this needs to be undertaken as part of an overall national strategy to improve emergency preparedness and response capacity.

The Law on Fire Protection elaborated by MoIA was ratified by Parliament in December 2005 – the fire service staff nationwide will now be responsible to provide the first response in case of emergencies, i.e. serve as a rescuer. In order to prepare them for their broader tasks, the first training of fire-rescuers, organised by the EMD, has taken place in Tbilisi and 10 regions of Georgia. The Rescue Team of the EMD conducted trainings and some basic rescue equipment was also provided. On the other hand, as seen in the UNDP conducted assessment, present firemen are not regularly trained as fire fighters, and therefore, it is important that an integrated fire-fighter/rescuers’ training strategy is developed. As reported, the EMD is working on such initiatives. SDC is currently hosting an assessment mission to review the existing support to the EMD Rescue Base. Pending the mission results, SDC may consider adding medical and search components.

International Cooperation – The international community continues efforts to support the Government of Georgia in building sustainable national disaster management capacities and provides assistance during crisis situations. Major stakeholders include UNDP, SDC, WB, NATO, OSCE, GTZ, the French and US Governments. In the past all contributed to various activities and projects aimed at strengthening the capacity and capability, including institutional and organizational strengthening, training and public awareness on disaster preparedness, prevention, mitigation, response, policy development, legislative, regulatory and management framework, and technical capacities. The international community expressed a strong commitment to continue this support in the future.

To activate and coordinate the immediate response of the international community in times of disaster or emergency, the Government works closely with the Disaster Management Team (DMT). The DMT, led

by the UN, consists of relevant UN agencies, international NGOs and several donors. The DMT has been activated several times in recent years in Georgia (e.g. the earthquake in Tbilisi in April 2002, the floods/landslides in Svaneti, July 2004, and the floods in 2005), and has provided support to the Government in mitigating the consequences of disasters. Such activities included provision of immediate relief aid to the affected population; undertaking joint needs assessments, and assisting the Government in appeal preparation. Many donor countries have also provided emergency assistance (floods in 2005), mainly through NATO's EADRCC³⁶ network where the precursor to the EMD in MoIA played a significant role to mobilize humanitarian aid. As mentioned above, this year there was only one occasion where the international community was requested to provide support during the difficult winter period. There was no further need to mobilize or convene the DMT for emergencies. On a number of occasions, DMT members received information and updates (seasonal floods in eastern Georgia). However, the DMT framework was used for Avian and Human Influenza (AHI) pandemic planning as well as information exchange regarding national preparedness actions and needs. The DMT hosted twice a meeting where Government has presented information on the status of AHI preparedness. The DMT also continued its internal process of updating of contingency plans and remains on stand-by. In terms of regional cooperation, there is a standing agreement between the Black Sea Economic countries to provide each other with support in case of disasters.

Avian flu – The threat of avian flu prompted an enormous worldwide response on a scale not previously seen. Still only briefly mentioned in last years' Humanitarian Situation and Transition to Development Report, this area received most attention in 2006.

The MoLHSA and MoAF have been assigned the primary role to lead the national preparedness efforts. A special inter-ministerial group was established, co-chaired by both ministries that developed a draft national pandemic preparedness plan. In addition, the inter-ministerial commission was established under the chairmanship of Prime Minister (PM) to ensure all AHI-related activities are coordinated and implemented. As noted above, there was only one confirmed case of HPAI in Georgia in February 2006, and the Government's response was assessed positive.

In June 2006, the Georgian Government and the World Bank agreed on the Avian Influenza Control and Human pandemic Preparedness and Response Project in Georgia. Additional technical and financial support in this area is provided by – amongst others – the USA, the Japanese Government, the EU, FAO, WHO and UNICEF. The project will minimize the threat posed to humans and to the poultry industry by Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) infection, better known as avian flu, and prepare for, control and respond to influenza pandemics, and other infectious disease emergencies in humans. The national avian flu preparedness effort is directed and coordinated by a special Governmental Committee, coordinated by the Prime Minister. The project consists of 3 components (Animal Health, Human Health, and Public Awareness and Communication) coordinating and guiding the overall national efforts.

Recommendations

Strengthen the institutional framework for disaster management

- Further capacity building and institutionalisation of the structure is needed: assessment procedures, lines of communication, and mechanisms of coordination will need continuous practicing and updating.
- Identification and subsequent addressing of any remaining problems, gaps, and overlaps in disaster management structures and clarification and formalisation of the relationship between the EMD and the stand-by Inter-ministerial Commission / Regional Affairs Department located in the Chancellery's office.
- Advocacy and awareness efforts to ensure the most senior level political and decision making authorities support in prevention, preparedness, response and recovery with respect to disasters.

Participatory and transparent preparation of relevant legislation, strategies and plans

- Ensure participation of key stakeholders in drafting and expediting the adoption of laws concerning disaster preparedness and response, especially the law on the protection of the population and the territory.

³⁶ EADRCC is NATO's Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre.

- Draft legislation on insurance for natural disasters, envisaging financial support for those living in high-risk areas should be reviewed and responsibilities of both Government and the private sector in this area should be examined to ensure sufficient protection for the general population.
- Participatory elaboration of disaster risk reduction strategies.
- Participatory review – including consultations with civil society organizations and all international stakeholders – revision and subsequent adoption of the national emergency response plan.

Improve operational capacity for response

- Capacity building efforts for strengthening the EMD's operational capacity should be continued and include strengthening of a unified fire protection / rescue capacity, re-establishing of a specialised educational academy for preparing senior and medium level professionals in fire-fighting services, developing a standardized programmes for education and training of rescuer-fire-fighters;
- Improve regional emergency response coverage, especially in disaster-prone regions, by support to the EMD to provide training and advice to local authorities on disaster preparedness, prevention, and response, and coordinate the activities of regional emergency response teams.
- A comprehensive information system should be introduced to support national emergency response capacity by ensuring a continual flow of detailed information. A standardized format for damage, risk and needs assessment, which includes procedures and mechanisms for information exchange, should be adopted.
- Emergency telecommunications capacity, especially at the regional level, should be strengthened in order to facilitate rapid exchange of information during an emergency or disaster.
- Civil society, volunteer organizations and the Georgian Red Cross should be given an appropriate role in disaster preparedness, emergency response, and raising awareness. A cooperation mechanism needs to be elaborated. Lessons learned from implemented community participation programmes and decentralised approach to disaster response and preparedness should be used.

Improve early warning and prevention

- Improve coordination between various Government and donor funded early warning, risk identification, and mitigation activities and programs in Georgia.
- The Government should enforce strict application of seismic safety standards in the construction industry.
- Increased resource allocation is needed to fund preventive measures against floods, landslides and mudflows.

Raise public awareness in society

- A disaster awareness culture should be introduced at all levels of Government and society. Correct behaviour during disaster, overcoming stress, and first aid training need to be included. It is necessary to include basic civil safety messages in school curricula. Community based awareness raising programmes needs to be considered.

Effective international cooperation mechanisms

- The international community, guided by the UN and in close coordination with the responsible Government authorities, needs to review and – if necessary – update the in-country available coordination mechanism (international Disaster Management Team) for disaster preparedness and response in Georgia. A formal cooperation mechanism, clearly identifying main roles and responsibilities should be agreed.
- Key Government officials should be aware of international response tools, role and capacities of relevant international agencies, procedures for the request of international assistance, and preparation of flash appeals.

Avian flu preparedness

- The Government needs to ensure that the draft national pandemic preparedness plan is finalised and approved. The Government needs to ensure that the national preparedness plans are implemented and facilities and materials prepared and available.
- The international community should continue to support the Government in the implementation of the avian preparedness plans and activities, and monitor and advice the Government of their quality and sufficiency.

III CONCLUDING REMARKS

The *Georgian Humanitarian and Transition to Development 2006 – Progress Report* Document represents a continuation of discussions between the international community and the Georgian Government regarding the humanitarian and transitional situation in Georgia. It is meant to be useful for all those interested in humanitarian and development issues and needs and is aimed ultimately at improving conditions for the vulnerable populations of Georgia.

The preparation process has involved a wide range of relevant stakeholders and the recommendations included in the Document reflect this range of views. The Humanitarian Affairs Team, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Georgia, would like to thank all those who participated in this process and contributed to the creation of this Document. The Team would like to thank consultant Ms. Irene Pietersen for her assistance during the preparatory process.

ANNEX 1 – CONSULTED MINISTRIES, AGENCIES AND ORGANISATIONS

GOVERNMENT

Chancellery of the Government of Georgia, Department for Regional Issues
Ministry of Agriculture and Food, MoAF, www.maf.ge
Ministry of Economic Development/Department of Statistics, MoED/DoS, www.economy.gov.ge and www.statistics.ge
Ministry of Education and Science, MoES, www.mes.gov.ge
Ministry of Internal Affairs/Emergency Management Department, MoIA/EMD, www.police.ge
Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, MoLHSA, www.moh.ge
Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, MRA, www.mra.gov.ge
State Agency for Employment and Social Assistance, SAESA, www.saesa.gov.ge
State Ministry for Reform Coordination, www.reforms.ge
State United Social Insurance Fund, SUSIF, www.susif.ge

INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS/PROGRAMMES IN GEORGIA

Accion Contra el Hambre, ACH, www.actionagainsthunger.org
Adventist Development and Relief Agency, ADRA, www.adra.org
CARE International, www.care.org.ge
Catholic Relief Services, CRS, www.crs.org
CHF International Georgia, www.chf.ge
CoReform Project, www.abtassociates.com/collateral/Georgia_CoReform.pdf
Danish Refugee Council, DRC, www.drc.dk/South_Caucasus.2737.0.html
European Centre for Minority Issues, ECMI, www.ecmigeorgia.org
European Commission Food Security Programme, www.delgeo.cec.eu.int/en/programmes/food.html
EC, Post Conflict/Rehabilitation programme, www.delgeo.cec.eu.int/en/programmes/rehabilitation.html
Every Child, www.everychild.ge
Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, GTZ, www.gtz.de/en
International Committee of the Red Cross, ICRC, www.icrc.org
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, IFRC, www.ifrc.org
International Orthodox Christian Charities, IOCC, www.iocc.org
Norwegian Refugee Council, NRC, www.nrc.ge
Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, OSCE, www.osce.org/georgia
Save the Children, www.savethechildren.org/countries/middle-east-urasia/georgia.html
Swedish International Development Agency, SIDA, www.sida.se/
Swiss Development Co-operation, SDC, www.sdc.admin.ch/
United States Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration, Focal Point Georgia, www.state.gov/g/prm/
United States Agency for International Development, Office of Health and Social Development, USAID, <http://georgia.usaid.gov>
World Bank, WB, www.worldbank.org.ge
World Vision, WV, <http://georgia.worldvision.org>

LOCAL ORGANISATIONS

Association for People in Need of Special Care
Association 'Parents' Bridge'
Child and Environment
Coalition of NGOs
Georgian Red Cross Society
Georgian Association for Mental Health
IDP Women Association 'Consent'
'Taoba' Foundation
Union for Social Development

UNITED NATIONS

International Organization for Migration, IOM, www.iom.ge

United Nations Country Team and Resident Coordinator Office, www.ungeorgia.ge

Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations, FAO, www.fao.org/world/georgia

United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, www.unicef.org/georgia

United Nations Development Fund for Women, UNIFEM, www.ungeorgia.ge

United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, www.undp.org.ge

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, UNHCR, www.unhcr.org/country/geo.html

World Food Programme of the United Nations, WFP, www.who.int/en/

World Health Organisation of the United Nations, WHO, www.who.int/countries/geo/en/

United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, <http://georgia.unfpa.org/>

United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Team, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Georgia, www.ungeorgia.ge

ANNEX 2 – USED AND USEFUL SOURCES

Humanitarian situation - General

- Humanitarian and Transitional Recovery Update – Information Bulletin, Georgia. Monthly Newsletters from United Nations Humanitarian Affairs Team, Office of the UN Resident Coordinator in Georgia.
- Humanitarian Situation and Transition to Development 2006, Georgia, Consolidated Policy Recommendations, HAT/UNRSCO, Tbilisi, November 2005
- Mid-Term review of Humanitarian Situation and Strategy 2005, Georgia, HAT/UNRSCO, July 2005
- Humanitarian Situation and Strategy 2005, Georgia, UN OCHA, November 2004
- Humanitarian Situation and Strategy 2004, Georgia, UN OCHA, November 2003
- Refugee, bi-monthly newsletters of UN Association of Georgia and UNHCR on Refugees

Background, Policy and Reforms

- Basic Data and Directions for 2007-2010, Government of Georgia, Tbilisi, 2006.
- Concept of Healthcare Sector Reform, presentation by MoLHSA, Tbilisi, August 2006.
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- Democratisation/Election Unit, Activities overview, OSCE, November 2006.
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- Food Aid Statistics for Georgia, 2006. WFP, No. 2, August 2006.
- Food Security Situation, Trends in Figures, Georgia, DoS/MED, nos. 22, 23, 24, of 2006.
- Fourth Review under the Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility and Request for Waiver of Performance Criteria, Staff Report, IMF, September 2006.
- Georgia's Democratic Transformation, An Update since the Rose Revolution, Government of Georgia, November 2006
- Healthcare Model, unofficial translation of health reform strategy paper, MoLHSA, Tbilisi, October 2006.
- Human Rights Report 2005, Human Rights Information and Documentation Centre, Georgia, Tbilisi, 2006.
- Joint Staff Advisory Note on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Progress Report, IDA/IMF, September 2006
- Judicial Reform Index, Georgia. American Bar Association/CEELI, September 2005.
- Millennium Development Goals in Georgia, Progress Report for 2004-2005, Tbilisi 2006.
- Program Document for a Second Poverty Reduction Support Operation to Georgia, Report no. 36939-GE, World Bank/IDA, September 2006
- SAESA presentation on new social security system, November 2006
- TB, HIV/AIDS, STI Georgia country profiles from WHO (www.who.int), USAID (www.usaid.gov), and The Global Fund (www.theglobalfund.org).
- The Reality, Women's equal rights and equal opportunities in Georgia, authors from 'Women for Future' and 'Georgian Young Lawyers' Association' and Mari Meskhi, Violeta Neubauer, Tbilisi 2006.
- United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF), Georgia 2006-2010, UN Country Team in Georgia, March 2005.
- United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS, Country Report Georgia, Reporting Period January 2003 – December 2005
- Interviews: CARE, Co-reform, SMRefC, FAO, MoAF, MoES, MoLHSA, SAESA, SUSIF, UNDP, UNICEF, and WB.

Conflict

- Abkhazia Today, International Crisis Group, Europe Report no. 176, Tbilisi/Brussels, September 2006.
- Abkhazia Update, UNDP, April 2006.
- Abkhaz School Assessment and Abkhaz School Survey, UNICEF, 2006.

- Declaration by the Presidency on behalf of EU on the ‘referendum’ and the ‘presidential elections’ in South Ossetia, 12 November 2006.
- European Parliament Resolution on the situation in South Ossetia, 25 October 2006
- Georgia: Avoiding war in South Ossetia, International Crisis Group, Europe Report no. 159, Tbilisi/Brussels, November 2004.
- Georgia – South Ossetia: Refugee return the path to peace. International Crisis Group, Tbilisi/Brussels April 2005.
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³⁷ The Directory lists around 450 actors in humanitarian and development work in Georgia and contains Government offices, national and international organisation, embassies. The Directory can be searched by alphabet, operational geographic area and sectoral programming.

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