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Internal Displacement Policies in Georgia and Ukraine

07.12.2018

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"Internal displacement is the great tragedy of our time. The internally displaced people are among the most vulnerable of the human family". Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary General [\[1\]](#)

Introduction

Both Georgia and Ukraine suffer from a protracted internal displacement crisis caused by unresolved violent conflicts.

In Georgia, there were several major waves of displacement from autonomous entities of Georgia: Tskhinvali (South Ossetia) and Abkhazia - in 1991-1992 and 1992-1993 respectively and again from Tskhinvali in 2008. Currently, these territories are factually occupied by Russian federation, although by Russia they are recognized as independent.

The current internal displacement crisis in Ukraine arose from armed conflict triggered in March 2014 by Russia's annexation of Crimea, an autonomous republic of Ukraine, and the subsequent self-proclamations of independence by the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in eastern Ukraine. Over two million people have been internally displaced. With no clear prospects of conflict resolution, displacement is increasingly becoming protracted in Ukraine. [\[2\]](#)

Since, it is the Governments of the states where internally displaced persons are found that have the primary responsibility for their assistance and protection. Developing a national instrument on internal displacement, whether a law or a policy, is a particularly important reflection of national responsibility as well as a vehicle for its fulfilment. [\[3\]](#)

This paper aims to compare state policies of Georgia and Ukraine towards IDPs. The methodology used for this paper is secondary research and sources, also comparative analysis of state strategies and action plans on IDPs of Georgia and Ukraine.

Internally Displaced Persons in Georgia

The amount of IDPs are approximately 278 400, constituting above 7% of the whole society. Many IDPs continue to live in the same dire conditions as twenty-five years ago. The majority of IDPs still remains poor and vulnerable, their housing conditions are often still abominable, they do not have regular and adequate sources of income, they are not sufficiently integrated into the host societies, and there is little hope of return to their homes. [\[4\]](#)

Originally, IDPs in Georgia were regarded as temporary settlers in their host locations – in line with the government's view of the breakaway territories as being only temporarily out of Georgia's control. Hence, IDPs were mostly receiving temporary relief assistance and little was done to integrate them into their host communities. Consequently, for more than a decade, the Government of Georgia considered IDP return as the only durable solution and had no comprehensive vision to address IDP protection needs.

State Documents for durable solutions

In order to bring durable and sustainable solution for internally displaced persons, Government of Georgia, after a long process of negotiation between government agencies and donors, adopted Governmental Decree n #47 on "Approval of the State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons – IDPs" on February 2, 2007 [\[5\]](#), and "The State Strategy for Internally Displaced Persons – IDPs" entered into force.

The State Strategy determines two major goals of the state: to create conditions for dignified and safe return of IDPs and to support IDPs who have spontaneously returned to their places of permanent residence; and to support decent living conditions for the displaced population and their integration in all aspects of society.

It was the first state document in Georgia reflecting the general vision of IDPs' problems and the approach towards solving them. It was a late action, which government also admitted, in the foreword of the State Strategy for IDPs is written: "in planning and implementing IDP programs, the Georgian government, international organizations and local non-governmental organizations have experienced a lack of a coordinated and comprehensive approach to addressing IDPs' problems. This has resulted in insufficient attention paid to IDPs' interests and needs, and made it difficult to develop durable and sustainable solutions to their plight." [\[6\]](#)

In order to achieve these goals of the State Strategy, Government of Georgia adopted, updated and implemented the IDP Action Plan for implementation of the State Strategy. Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and IDPs has carried out IDPs' re-registration all along the country in parallel to other projects. It was planned also during the registration to investigate the main needs and priorities of IDPs but due to certain constrains, this does not happen. However, the preparation of the Action Plan was cooperative process, which included alongside with the MRA, also representatives of the international community and civil society/ as a result of which, it determined the IDPs' basic necessities that became a basis for the next Action Plans.

As a result of aggression of the Russian Federation in August, 2008 - the amendment was made to the State Strategy – to cover new wave of IDPs on December 4, 2008. The first goal of the Strategy has lost much of its relevance, and preconditions for the implementation of the Action Plan have changed, in particular with regards to return. It was necessary to think beyond immediate





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English (USA)  

იძულებით გადაადგილებულ ქართულ ასომცხენი

სიანდლები ჩვენს შიხანებ პროექტები გარეგან ღონისძიებები და პარტნიორები ვებგვერდი

IDPs through state budget funds since 2014. Current, 2017-2018 Action Plan for implementation of the State Strategy, which aims to achieve the goal of the State Strategy stated above, foresees implementing of three main activities:

- a) Improvement of IDPs' living conditions through Durable Housing Solution;
- b) Improvement of IDPs' social and economic conditions;
- c) Improvement of IDPs' awareness.

The Action Plan provided the main directions of activities toward the implementation of IDP State Strategy, including durable housing (with concrete planned figures and numbers); socio-economic measures, including better access to livelihoods, (with this aim the Livelihoods Agency was created which had separate action plan and separate funding): communication strategy was elaborated and included in the Action Plan as an integral part.

Internally Displaced Persons in Ukraine
 The Government of Ukraine reports that there are some 1.5 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). [10] According to UNHCR Ukraine is the ninth largest country in the world in terms of the number of Internally Displaced Persons [11]. Some of the most active IDPs have managed to find their place in the new reality (within the country or outside Ukraine), however, many have failed to cope with the displacement and are still struggling with huge economic and social problems. [12]

State Documents for durable solutions
 On December 2015 was adopted Comprehensive National Programme for Support, Social Adaptation and Reintegration of Citizens of Ukraine Internally Displaced from the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine and Anti-Terrorist Operation Conduct Area to Other Regions of Ukraine for the period until 2017 [13].
 The aim of the Programme was to solve basic problems of citizens of Ukraine internally displaced from the temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine and antiterrorist operation conduct area to other regions of Ukraine and to reduce social tension among them and in society; to promote social integration and adaptation of such persons at a new place of residence; to assist in ensuring the proper living conditions, rights and realization of the potential; to provide social, medical, psychological and material support; to create conditions for the payment of compensation of financial and moral damages; to create favourable conditions for the voluntary return to the previous place of residence (provided the actual full cessation of hostilities in areas where public authorities temporarily do not exercise their power).
 The Ukrainian government's policies and frameworks to guide its response to displacement acknowledge the protracted nature of the phenomenon and demonstrate its willingness to address it. Its most recent initiative was the adoption on 15 November, 2017 of a strategy to integrate IDPs and facilitate durable solutions. [14] That was approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine #909-p.
 The name of Strategy speaks about itself, that it is oriented on re-integration of IDPs: The Strategy of Integration of Internally Displaced Persons and Implementation of Long-Term Solutions to Internal Displacement until 2020. In the document is written: "this Strategy seeks to define long-term solutions for problems of internally displaced persons. As a result, individuals, who are now internally displaced, will no longer need special assistance and protection in connection to their displacement and will be able to exercise their rights without restrictions on the same level as other citizens." [15]

Conclusion
 From the brief overview of state actions towards IDP issues, it is clear that Georgia has lost too much time, to tackle this acute problem. Although the Ministry of IDPs of Georgia was established in the early days of the conflict, it mainly concentrated on emergency cases than on systematic planning and design of national approaches [16]. Moreover, the Georgian society and Government were thinking that the conflict would be resolved soon and they were accepting only one option: return to their homes – which prevented the integration of IDPs into Georgian society and has negatively affected their socio-economic situation.
 Nevertheless, Georgia has witnessed tremendous positive developments in which the role of programs implemented by civil society together with state programs was integral.

Ukraine, in contrast, from the early period elaborated state strategy, that provided all necessary services to IDPs. The reason is that, it is not the first post-Soviet country to fight a 'hybrid' or open war with Russia and knows that displacement will not be resolved in nearest future. Also, Ukraine has much more chances to learn from experiences of other countries, than Georgia had in the early of 90s.
 It is worth noting, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by Georgia and Ukraine that established a technical assistance program aimed at strengthening and developing Ukraine's technical capacities to deal with its IDP challenges. [17] By learning and applying successful lessons from Georgia [18], it will help build the Government of Ukraine's capacity to manage and assist IDPs better.

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