

## UNFPA Assists Georgia's Displaced and Vulnerable Populations



**Tbilisi, GEORGIA**— With their houses burned and bulldozed, and their families torn and splintered, mothers and their children living in Georgia certainly have stories of horror and survival to tell. “We fled out of the village and took a high road to get out,” said Nina, a mother living in the Tbilisi region where political tensions arose in early August. “But I wish we had not left this way because we could see the lower road being bombed, and fleeing civilians being killed in their cars,” she explained.

As Nina recalls the tragedy her ten year old son, Alexander (not his real name), sits beside her looking pale as he stares blankly at the ground. Living in a temporary shelter now, his schooling will be delayed along with other students in Georgia, and he is unsure when he will be returning home since his is no longer standing.



### The nightmare continues

Protection is always a concern in any emergency and there are few locks on the doors of the temporary shelters in the former Soviet offices of the Southern Caucasus Forces where over 1,700 internally displaced people (IDPs) have taken refuge. Here, some of the displaced families live in a nine-story building with one functioning bathroom, and working electricity on only three floors.

With only one mattress to provide for her family of four, Samira and her eldest daughter have to sleep sitting up on two wooden school chairs they were able to find. The family takes turn rotating on the mattress, but sleeping on the chairs has its benefits as the building is infested with rats. Samira's twelve year old daughter has chronic head-aches and her eye site seems to be dimming. Samira (not her real name) and her family are from Tordiza village which so far experienced the worst of the bombings. Prior to the crisis they lived in a farm house, tended orchards, and milked cows for fresh milk and home-made cheese.



An estimated two-thirds of the 120,000 people displaced by the conflict will return home once tensions die down. But some who went back to their homes in Gori recently have already returned to Tbilisi, demoralized and devastated. Villagers from north of Gori and from South Ossetia can't even imagine returning any time soon, particularly where there are cluster munitions, unexploded ordinance, and landmines in their villages and homes. This caseload are the new IDPs living in Georgia, but there was already 220,000 'old caseload' IDPs from Abkhazia and South Ossetia before they arrived.

### Hopeless and traumatized

When IDPs flooded into the capital and other cities, staff working at the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in Georgia jumped into action. The staff quickly turned to successful programming on reproductive health, data and population and gender in order to respond to the immediate humanitarian needs. Besides the professional commitments that resulted in long workdays and many sleepless nights, many of UNFPA's Tbilisi staff are personally involved, as they have family seeking refuge from the war.

Over the past seven years, the UNFPA-Georgia office has slowly and methodically trained, equipped and supported the deployment of four mobile reproductive health teams to provide services to communities without access to regular healthcare and hospitals. Today, the team from Gori has to serve patients in the centre of Tbilisi because of instability.



## Not enough funding

At this point, little is known or being openly discussed regarding gender-based violence (GBV) that has affected women and girls. Yet, some isolated incidents are being shared, and one is of a nineteen year old girl who was abducted on the road to Tbilisi, and taken to Tkshinvali until she was released last week. Another incident reported involved a 60 year old woman who was raped in her home, staying behind because her family thought she would be safe and could protect their home, property and land, the elderly are not immune to the violence women are facing.

"In order to effectively assist these people, we need better statistics on situations regarding gender-based violence, and reproductive health, such as the number of pregnant women affected by the conflict," said Tamar Khomasuridze, UNFPA's head of office in Georgia. Statistics are available from the centers visited by UNFPA's mobile service units in Tbilisi, Batumi, Rutavi and Kutaisi. But collaboration with the National Center for Disease Control will help to consolidate this data, a challenging task in an emergency situation. Despite all efforts on the ground, only modest funding has been provided for UNFPA to respond to the crisis, and Ms. Khomasuridze stresses there is need for more. On 18 August, UNFPA, in collaboration with 25 other UN agencies and NGOs, launched a Flash Appeal requesting \$58.5 million for an initial planning period of six months, which is subject to change in order to meet the needs of the situation.



UNFPA is requesting \$608,500 of these funds to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of the crisis-affected population. These funds will support capacity building of local health facilities to restore reproductive health services, provide emergency reproductive health kits, mobile teams' outreach services, and train medical staff on the emergency health standards. If UNFPA's portion of the appeal is funded, it would also mean post-rape treatment, including post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent the transmission of HIV, for survivors.



## Successful efforts

Already, UNFPA has provided support for the health and dignity of displaced populations through the provision of basic personnel hygiene kits. UNFPA has mobilized the volunteers-project Peer Educators, the Georgian Medical Students Association (GMSA), to stuff plastic bags with multivitamins, soap, towels, toothbrush-paste, underwear, sanitary napkins and razors. These are the items that some of the displaced people identified as priority needs in a quick assessment.

Mary Rogava, the president of GMSA and other students, all peer educators, have gathered to assemble the kits in the headquarters of the *Reproductive Health Initiative for Youth in Southern*

*Caucasus (RHIYSC)*, which has transformed itself into a successful humanitarian relief effort in response to the crisis. The kits are then sent to families, like Nina and her son Alexander, who will distribute them to families in temporary shelters. The kits are referred to as "dignity kits" because they allow women to attend to their families during their monthly menstruation without worry, and enable men to seek work or assistance with a clean shave.

When Nina and Alexander receive the dignity kits, they spring into action. First, Nina reviews the names on a long list of 65 women living in two temporary shelters. Then Alexander stands guard and watches as each family receives the kits with the twinkle in his eye he had before the crisis began.



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