

Strengthening Protection Capacity Project – South Caucasus

Azerbaijan and Georgia roundtable on IDP protection held in Tbilisi on 14 December

UNHCR hosted a roundtable on the protection of IDPs in Azerbaijan and Georgia in Tbilisi on 14 December under its projects Strengthening Protection Capacity Project – South Caucasus funded by the European Union. The Government of Azerbaijan was represented by the Cabinet of Ministers and the State Committee on Refugees and IDP Issues, and the Government of Georgia was represented by the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation. UNHCR partners Danish Refugee Council, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children and World Vision International, who work in both countries, also participated in the roundtable.



The SPCP-SC initiative in Azerbaijan has been funded by the European Commission. Its goals complement the strategic objectives of cooperation between Azerbaijan and the European Union set out in the 2007 European Neighbourhood Policy, including strengthening migration and asylum systems in a manner that meets international standards.

Opening the event, Mr Martin Klauke underlined continuing EU support for Azerbaijan and Georgia to respond to displacement challenges in cooperation with international society. He observed that both governments had much to learn from each other's experiences as two exceptional governments working to protect and integrate their IDP populations.

Dr Peter Nicolaus, UNHCR Representative to Georgia, commented that IDP integration was a priority in both countries given that significant parts of their respective populations were IDPs (8% in Azerbaijan and 5% in Georgia). Mr Arun Sala-Ngarm, UNHCR Representative to Azerbaijan, reiterated UNHCR commitment to return as the most viable durable solution, and praised both governments for focusing on integration needs of displaced persons pending return. Mr Sala-Ngarm commented that international community needed to be aware of the situation of displaced persons in Azerbaijan.

Mr Valeri Kopiashvili of the MRA Georgia underlined the role of the coordination mechanisms in place Georgia, bringing together the national authorities, international

„It is important to give the IDPs a possibility to live a normal life while they are waiting for return, which should be voluntary and be based on informed decisions. Possibility of living a normal life helps the displaced persons to make sound decisions about their future“.
(NRC Regional Representative Margaret Vikki)



agencies, civil society and donors to implement the State Strategy on IDPs. He stated that such mechanisms and transparency of the process with regards to the civil society and IDPs themselves

helped the government to continuously improve the implementation of the IDP Action Plan. Mr Kopiashvili informed the roundtable participants that the MRA and UNHCR benefited from the Azerbaijan State Programme on IDPs and its Action Plan. Ms Edina Dziho of UNHCR Georgia commented that the IDP Action Plan has become a „living document“, and emphasised that free and informed decision of IDPs themselves with respect to their integration and resettlement options was essential.

Mr Telman Mammadov, Head of Apparatus of the State Committee on Refugees and IDPs presented detailed information on the implementation of the Azerbaijan State Programme on IDPs and its Action Plan. Mr Mammadov underlined the right of IDPs to return to their homes, and informed the participants on the Great Return Project. For people who cannot return in the foreseeable future, Azerbaijan Government gradually provides housing and programmes to integrate them socio-economically. Mr Mammadov stated that efforts to integrate IDPs in Azerbaijan are financed mainly by the Government itself, including funding for international agencies operating in Azerbaijan.

Ms Leyla Nugmanova of UNHCR Azerbaijan presented a gap analysis of IDP protection in Azerbaijan. She observed that the Government of Azerbaijan has been the driving force and main agency in assisting displaced persons in Azerbaijan, and has been closely cooperating with UNHCR and other actors. The assessments that UNHCR has conducted in cooperation with the government demonstrated that community mobilisation and participation of displaced persons in decisions affecting their lives and their future were main issues that UNHCR has been addressing in its dialogue with the government of Azerbaijan.

Ms Margaret Vikki, the NRC Regional Representative, highlighted the essential role of the local civil society partners. She commented that it was important for the governments to acknowledge the local NGOs and involve them in assisting displaced populations. Michael Possmayer, the Deputy Regional Representative of DRC, observed that while Azerbaijan provided the required funding for IDP integration in Azerbaijan, Georgia was vulnerable to an anticipated decrease in financial support by the international community. The experience of the international organisation in both countries demonstrated that mechanisms for information sharing between governments and NGOs must be enhanced. He also stressed the need to continually review and revise the action plans on displaced populations in order to keep them relevant to the actual situation and needs of the people.

Mr Paolo Ferraris, the Director of World Vision International in Georgia, compared their operational experiences in both countries, emphasising an integrated approach to IDP needs, including education, psycho-social support, microfinance mechanisms and social community centres. Leslie Wilson, the Director of Save the Children in Georgia, commented that specific measures to empower children should be seen as central to IDP assistance programmes, and observed, based on their experiences in Azerbaijan and Georgia, that when children can continue their education and have access to child-friendly spaces, their parents are better attached to life.

Conclusions and major lessons learnt

Representatives of Azerbaijan and Georgia also commented that there was need for both countries to cooperate and share their experiences and best practices on behalf of their displaced populations. Following the roundtable, on 15 December, the delegation of Azerbaijan visited a housing project in Rustavi upon invitation by Mr Koba Subeliani, Georgian Minister of Refugees and Accommodation.

With regards to principled approaches, participants

- agreed on the need to to create and preserve humanitarian space irrespective of progress made towards a political solution of the underlying conflicts; there is need to give room for humanitarian actors to come in and address urgent humanitarian needs;
- emphasised that integration efforts should start as early as possible and in this respect praised the approach taken by Azerbaijan and the revised approach pursued by Georgia following the State Strategy on IDPs and the August 2008 crisis while noting that integration does in no way undermine the right to return;
- highlighted that integration efforts allows displaced population to stay engaged and active, thereby maintaining their skills and social assets, which also offers a better potential once conditions will allow their return
- underlined the need for comprehensive understanding of integration and related efforts (reaching beyond shelter needs but also addressing self-reliance);
- observed that international community's efforts moved from emergency response, to early recovery efforts, and that future efforts related to displacement population should be embedded in broader development strategies;
- emphasised IDPs rights to make well informed and free choice between voluntary return in safety and dignity, local integration and resettlement.

With regards to organising a systematic response, based on the systematic review of both countries' practices and government structures established and involved in responding to challenges of displacement, the participants highlighted

- the need for a strategic vision and organised strategy development in compliance with the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement
- the importance of IDP/beneficiary participation including all segments of displaced populations
- the need of translating the strategy into an action plan which is to be consequently implemented and updated regularly based on progress and continuous needs assessment
- the requirement to clearly attribute competences and responsibilities to the different national authorities and to be transparent on the distribution of roles
- the need to introduce a coordination body involving different government actors, international agencies, international and national NGOs and donors
- the essential role of a sound public information strategy and mechanisms to implement such a strategy, which is key to maintain trust of populations concerned to allow them to make well informed decisions affecting their and to engage in integration measures.

The participants further acknowledged that actors should not "over plan" but emphasise the need to create a response framework which gives room for all actors to contribute towards solutions in the area of their specific expertise and which permits actors to coordinate the efforts with a view to use synergies and prevent duplication.

With regards to specific measures and lessons from implementation of project in both countries,

- participants noted that response to IDP challenges must be comprehensive, needs-based and flexible, and acknowledged that there exists no “one fits all” recipe;
- with regards to the future, and acknowledging that involvement of the international agencies and NGOs is likely to be reduced, participants emphasised the need to involve NGOs and to gradually capacitate local NGOs to take over responsibilities;
- they emphasised that community mobilisation schemes and measures tailored for persons with specific needs should be mainstreamed in assistance programmes.