

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION ON
CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN GEORGIA**

A Report of Non-Governmental Organizations

**GEORGIA NGO CRC COORDINATIVE COUNCIL
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PREAMBLE

After the disintegration of the USSR Georgia was one of the first Soviet Republics to regain formal independence and sovereignty. In 1995 the country adopted its new constitution based on which it represents a presidential republic with a unicameral Parliament. A new government was formed, twenty ministries were organized, as well as a Constitutional Court responsible for supervising the law adherence in every state structure.

Georgia has shown its commitment to move from one-party rule to a democratic and pluralistic system of governance. Following the reestablishment of national independence on April 9, 1991, Georgia started building a democratic state. A core element of democracy is adherence to the concept of human rights and human freedoms, and the Georgian Government signed and joined various acts of human rights and international laws. Based on a 21 April 1994 resolution of Parliament, Georgia acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, thus committed itself to putting the Convention's provisions into effect. However, there is a critical need to create awareness of the CRC in Georgia and the necessity to develop expertise at all levels in effectively monitoring its implementation by the Government, NGOs, and other concerned agencies.

Two armed conflicts have had a devastating affect on the economy of Georgia. Lack of electricity, heating and water, high unemployment rates and low income have had a severe affect on children's well-being. The Government is no longer capable to provide adequate health care, education and social protection. The social safety nets that were intended to shield people from the impact of the transition are basically non-existent. The children of Georgia have proved particularly vulnerable to the blows of the transition. Their health has suffered from poor nutrition, unheated homes, insufficient winter clothing, and accidents as they take over the tasks of adults. Iodine deficiency disorders are common. In some regions up to 75% of children suffer from IDD. Few cultural and leisure activities are available for children, their education has suffered, and many have left schools entirely to help their parents earn money.

In one of the central districts of Tbilisi, in a small street, which has never been in any way remarkable or different from other streets of the same kind, we can see a row of fashionable restaurants or expensive bars. All night long young boys are washing expensive cars parked on the street, while policemen are walking nearby with impartial expressions on their faces. This street reflects the rapid social changes which have taken place in Georgia during the past few years. Today, we witness a big gap between the numerically small layer of the rich and the rest of the population of Georgia, which exists on the verge of poverty.

One of the main reasons why the state budget is not executed effectively and efficiently, and why there are high levels of corruption in the country is because democracy is still not yet fully established in Georgia. Despite all the efforts undertaken by the State, lack of financing is still very acute, which hinders implementation of the basic principles of the

Convention on the Rights of the Child in Georgia. Nevertheless, there have been certain positive changes such as a better legislative framework and economic reforms which over time should result in more optimistic forecasts for the future.

The NGO Alternative Report reflects both the achievements, along with the basic problems and constraints in the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in Georgia. However, it has not been possible to cover all the major issues adequately, due to the time available prior to the submission of the report. The Report was produced by the NGO CRC Coordinative Council which represents 35 local non-governmental organizations which are actively involved in addressing child rights and development issues in Georgia. Financial and technical assistance was provided by UNICEF and Save the Children respectively.

GENERAL MEASURES TARGETED AT IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CONVENTION

Government Resources for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

Georgia started a process of socio-economic reforms following two ethnic conflicts, civil war and severe economic decline, when GDP had dropped to 28 percent of its 1990 level, and GNP per capita was estimated as \$410, the second lowest among countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU) (UNDP 1999). Traditional economic ties with the rest of the FSU had ruptured leading to the loss of export markets and supply lines. The lack of subsidized energy led the country into an energy crisis that had devastating effects on both the economy and the population. The crisis still continues to affect the lives of the majority of the population.

The international community has provided substantial assistance to the process of reforms. The first set of reforms primarily addressed the short-term actions necessary to stabilize the economy and provide a legal and regulatory framework. These comprised monetary and legal reforms, the transfer of state assets to private sector, and initiation of long-term institutional transformations. Since 1995 the economy has grown an average of seven per cent per year. Some of the major target areas of reform were improvement of the fiscal system by maintaining stability and mobilizing more tax revenues, streamlining the government and improving the efficiency of public spending through management of essential public functions, reforms in the government pay and employment policies, social sector financing and provision, social insurance and protection policies.

In its letter entitled, “Development Policy to the World Bank”, dated March 6, 1996, the Government states that, “Despite this initial success, the economic situation remains fragile. The tax reform effort remains weak; the transformation of the economy into a market economy is still in an early transition stage, and the productive sector has not yet adjusted to new economic signals”. These words are as accurate today as when they were first written. Although it is noteworthy that the Human Development Index for Georgia has increased, with Georgia advancing to the 85th position in 1999 from that of 108th ranked in 1998, high levels of corruption and the inability of the Government to collect tax revenues partly restrict the Government from implementing programs to enhance the economic, social and cultural rights of children. The economic hardships affect vulnerable groups in Georgia, especially children. For instance, almost half of the children in institutions are from impoverished families and poverty is one of the main reasons why children are in institutional care. The Georgia Center for Strategic Research and Development estimates that approximately 49.6 percent of Georgian residents earn less than the monthly subsistence wage of Georgian Lari (GEL) 102 (US\$51).

Recommendation:

- The Government needs to increase its efforts to eliminate corruption and to collect tax revenues to generate more available resources to ensure that the economic, social and cultural rights of children are met.

System for Monitoring the Implementation of the CRC

The Government's Report on CRC implementation states that, "Since no national program for the elaboration of policies in the field of protection of the rights of the child has been adopted as yet, there also exists no system for monitoring the implementation of the Convention. Steps in that direction are being undertaken as part of action pursuant to the Presidential Decree "on measures for strengthening the protection of human rights in Georgia" (June 1997), in accordance with which an interdepartmental commission has been established under the direction of the deputy secretary of the National Security Council on matters of protection of human rights. The commission is responsible for preparing urgent organizational measures in connection with human rights, including rights of the child. Representatives of the parliamentary committee on human rights and the problems of national minorities are also actively involved in this work". Also, there is a section for women and children's problems within the office of the National Ombudsman in Georgia. However, there is no administrative authority directly responsible for monitoring CRC implementation, which would design the national program for ensuring CRC implementation and be in charge of addressing policy objectives countrywide.

The Georgian text of the Convention on the Rights of the Child ratified by the Parliament of Georgia is based on an inadequate translation of the CRC. An official version of the Convention has been translated, but it has no force in the courts. This issue needs reconsideration.

Recommendations:

- Establishment of an administrative authority directly responsible for monitoring CRC implementation, outline a congruent national policy on child rights, design corresponding measures for its implementation and ensure effective coordination and promotion of child rights in the country.
- The Government should review the issue of adjusting the legislation to the text of the CRC, based on the official translation of the CRC.

Donations to Charitable Organizations

Non-governmental and other civil society organizations step by step deepen their role in the society. Their range and area of activities in implementation of the CRC progressively grow. NGOs implement different programs mainly financed by foreign donors and international institutions. The programs are helping to solve the problems which exist in different public areas.

Unfortunately, the Georgian Government does not provide tax exemptions for donations to charity. Charity and humanitarian organizations also have to pay taxes in the same way as commercial establishments. This discourages sponsorship from the local private sector, and restricts the successful work of NGOs. Charity is the question of the day in the business sector. But while there is no corresponding legislative basis in the country, the businessmen's initiative is very limited. In particular, according to Georgian Legislation, the funds raised for charity are liable to the same taxation, as are profits.

Recommendation:

- ❑ The Georgian Government and non-governmental organizations should co-operate in the process of developing a law for tax exemption for donations to charity activities and charitable organizations.
- ❑ Monitoring mechanisms should be defined to oversee the proper implementation of the tax policy for charity activities and charitable organizations.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

According to Georgian legislation the age of a child (minority) is defined as under 18, but, unfortunately, in several state legislative structures there are certain controversies regarding this issue. On several occasions we have come across the wrong interpretation of the minority age threshold.

The legislative measures undertaken for the implementation of Article 1 of the CRC include the establishment and definition of legal minimum ages for various purposes. In Georgia domestic law has not established and the legal minimum ages have not been defined for the purposes of:

- ❑ Legal and medical counseling without parental consent;
- ❑ Medical treatment or surgery without parental consent;
- ❑ Having access to information concerning the biological family;
- ❑ Choosing a religion or attending religious school teaching.

Quite often there are violations of children's rights by law enforcement institutions which are designed to ensure public safety. Children are arrested and detained unlawfully, and there are cases when they are abused physically, sometimes with the purpose of getting testimony from them. In this aspect it is most appalling, that representatives of these structures do not possess information regarding the rights of children. Children also know very little about their own rights. Despite the fact that the convention on the rights of the child is part of the curriculum and is taught at secondary schools, the majority of children consider physical punishment by a teacher as admissible (Department of Education at the Municipality of Tbilisi).

Children detained in penitentiaries and those from the child institutions, who have reached majority age, have certain problems while trying to get their Identification Cards, without being registered according to their place of living. The Institute of Municipal Registration was abolished in Georgia in 1997, although some segments of the population are not aware of this fact. This lack of information quite often affects children in a negative way.

We do not see any evidence of children's active participation in public life countrywide. It is true that we had a children's parliament, but today it does not function due to lack of funding. It would be very advisable to re-establish the institute of children's parliament and to set up children's councils at schools, as it would be the place where children could express their viewpoints. A TV program on the first channel of Georgian television is a very interesting initiative. It is designed for children and covers the issues of children's rights. Teenagers themselves lead the program. One government program conducted by the Constitutional Court of Georgia which does promote Children's Participation is called "Persons and Constitution". It is in the form of a contest which aims to promote the legal education of the public, to ensure their better knowledge of the activities of the authority providing constitutional control, of democratic principles, and of mechanisms of human rights protection, etc. Groups of pupils and students in the country participate in the contest. The contest consists of three rounds. In the first round the pupils are interviewed and tested on issues related to the Constitution of Georgia and the legislation regulating the activities of the Constitutional Court. In the second and third rounds the participants carry out a hearing of the imitated case. The groups of students perform the duties of the Court, while other students play the roles of other participants – claimants and defendants. The jury assesses their performances. The winners are awarded with certificates. This program is important in that it promotes a deeper understanding for children of legal processes. In 1997-1998 43 groups (19 pupils and 24 students groups) participated in the contest. In 1998-1999 this figure increased to 60 groups (39 pupils and 21 students groups).

Today most Georgians are not aware of the Convention of the Child's Rights. This is one of the main reasons why child's rights are frequently abused in Georgia, in particular, the child's right to the protection of privacy. There are numerous cases when parents, teachers and other adults (relatives, law-enforcement officers, etc.), without the consent of

the child or even forcibly, interfere with his or her correspondence or journals, search the child's personal belongings and so forth (Children's Trust Hot Line).

In Georgia all public and private media have been commercialized. For this reason, unless properly paid, they do not disseminate information about non-commercial and charitable organizations. This is one of the reasons why the public is inadequately aware of the professional assistance that is provided to children by governmental, and, especially non-governmental organizations. This results in the violation of the child's right to free access to information. There are many professional organizations, which provide for the protection of children's health, including mental health (post-injury treatment, helping with overcoming crisis and its negative effects, psychosocial recovery and adaptation, preventive measures for the maintenance of health). The State must support such organizations in terms of publicity. This would improve the present situation in terms of informational support of the public, in general, and the children, in particular, and, whereupon required, enable children to take advantage of available assistance.

Recommendations:

- ❑ The legislative measures should be undertaken to define the legal minimum ages for various purposes such as legal and medical counseling without parental consent, etc.;
- ❑ It is requisite that information about the Convention of the Child's Rights is provided to the general public and appropriate guidance is given to educational, and, in particular, law-enforcement and other administrative agencies;
- ❑ The state and private sector mass media and other means of information services should cover the issues and provide information regarding activities of non-commercial and charity organizations as a public service free of charge;
- ❑ The population of Georgia should be properly informed about services and assistance, which State and especially international and local non-governmental organizations render to children.

FAMILY ENVIRONMENT AND ALTERNATIVE CARE

Adoption

The Parliament of Georgia passed the law, "On Adoption" on October 17, 1999. According to Article 1239 of the Civil Code adoption is awarded on limited grounds, namely, if it is necessary for the well-being and best interests of a child, and, if it is envisaged that the relationship between the adopting person and the adopted child will be a "parent-and-child" relationship. While the Civil Code does not prohibit adoption by foreign citizens or stateless persons, the issue is regulated by the Law of Georgia on Adoption Procedure of October 17, 1997. It states that if no proper adopter has been found in Georgia, adoption of a child in another country may be considered as an

alternative means for taking care of the child. Children may be adopted abroad after six months following their registration in the database of the Ministry of Education (MOE). However, the database is quite often not used, and adoption (both in-country and inter-country) takes place without following the defined norms and procedures from the maternity houses, child institutions and other instances. The information does not reach the MOE database, which is a major constraint in creating a centralized information system.

Recommendation:

- There should be a mechanism to monitor procedures on registering information in the database of the Ministry of Education (MOE) of Georgia on adoption, and promote the creation of a centralized information system. Active involvement of NGOs in this process is also recommended.

Foster Care

On July 9, 1999 the Parliament passed the law, “On Foster Care of Orphans and Children who Lack Care”. Georgia is the first country in the FSU to pass such a law. The law complies with the reforms in the education system which incorporates children’s institutions. One of the main priorities of this reform is the de-institutionalization of children placed in special children’s homes. The return of children to a family environment is the main goal of the State policy. This law has both moral and economical advantages. Firstly, the children have the possibility to live in a family environment, and, secondly, it is less expensive for the country to support such children than those who are in institutional care. However, the law does not provide for cancellation of the Fostering Contract. This is a violation of children’s rights. It is very doubtful that after expiry of the Fostering Contract, any of the children would wish to return to the children’s homes. The law also does not provide for possible participation of non-governmental organizations in the process of adoption and fostering, though these organizations might play a significant positive role, as many of them have experience of working with children living in difficult conditions.

The law “On Foster Care of Orphans and Children who Lack Care” does not include the social worker’s role in the process of implementation. The Ministry of Education with the support of UNICEF and the British non-governmental organization “European Children’s Trust” is carrying out training of social workers to ensure their active participation in the process of implementation of the law on Foster Care. In order to promote the realization of the main goal of the law, it is necessary to introduce the Institute of Social Workers on the legislative level, and to arrange for appropriate professional training. The Government must establish a group of social workers who will provide targeted social assistance and special aid for socially unprotected families and their children, and for homeless children as well.

The Government must pursue the policy of alternative care, and to develop the strategy of moving children from institutional to non-institutional alternative care environments. The law on Foster Care is quite progressive and in order to ensure its effective implementation, corresponding administrative procedures should be issued by different ministries in respect of social workers, state financial guarantees, etc. This might be a long process since the State has difficulties in reimbursing salaries and pensions on a timely basis. One cannot wait until this law is finally implemented and let generations of vulnerable children lack the fulfillment of their rights. The number of orphans is quite large for Georgia in comparison with its small population. Moreover, living conditions in the children's homes are extremely harsh. Therefore, the Government should enact measures to reform children's institutions. It is also necessary to familiarize the public with the Foster Care law by means of wide-ranging information campaign in mass media.

Recommendations:

- ❑ The law “On Foster Care of Orphans and Children who Lack Care” should be implemented.
- ❑ The Government should establish a group of social workers who will provide targeted social assistance and special aid for socially unprotected families and their children, and for homeless children as well. This should be a collaborative effort with NGOs who are also involved in providing assistance to vulnerable children.
- ❑ The Government should continue to actively implement its policy on alternatives to institutional care and to enact measures to reform children's institutions.
- ❑ It is also necessary to familiarize the public with the Foster Care law by means of wide-ranging information campaign in the mass media.

Parental Rights

The Civil Code of Georgia provides that parents are entitled to raise their children and to provide for their physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development in the best interests of their children. According to Georgian law, the duty to maintain, raise, and educate the child, to pay alimony and so forth equally lies with both parents, and the State has a duty to support them in this matter. Moreover, parents are required to maintain their minor children, as well as older disabled children who are in need of assistance. In the case of divorce, according to Article 72 of the Family Code, alimony should be paid on the basis of the following formula: for one child – one-fourth of income; for two children – one-third of income; and for three or more children – a half of income.

The Law does protect children whose parents grossly violate their duties to their children, however, there is little information about the operations of concerned relevant agencies. We are not aware of any single case of depriving a parent of his or her parental rights. The mechanism of accountability of parents for their deeds needs further development. We suspect that there are many cases of violence in families, which is one reason for the

growing number of homeless children. Often parents also force their children to go out and beg for money, and, thus, earn income for their families. Today in Georgia there is no agency which children could contact in case of abuse or violation of their rights on the part of their parents. There are governmental, as well as non-governmental organizations, which are set up to render assistance to children, but when children's rights are infringed, there is no agency directly responsible for the protection of their rights. The Ombudsman Office is in charge of providing assistance, but, unfortunately, the majority of children are not aware of this.

Recommendation:

- More public awareness is needed about the role of the Ombudsman Office in promoting and protecting children's rights.

Assistance to Vulnerable Families

In its report for 1998 with respect to the "Implementation of the Convention of the Rights of the Child", the Government of Georgia recognizes that the State does not provide adequate assistance to families. However, it is not known what is the proper scope of such assistance, in other words, how many people are in need of emergency assistance on the part of the governmental agencies. If we consider that the average monthly salary in Georgia amounts to GEL 20-30 (US \$10-15), while the average pension is GEO 10-12 (\$5-6), and the cost of the consumer's basket is more than GEL 100 (US \$50) a month, we can imagine how hard it is for parents to maintain their children. This is further aggravated by high levels of unemployment. For most of the people, the family is the only asylum from the unprotected and stressful life where many traditional values and guarantees no longer exist. Nevertheless, because of the severe economic hardships it is not likely that children will grow up in an environment which is necessary for their adequate development.

Some programs are directed at rendering assistance to families in need by the State, as well as by international humanitarian and charitable organizations, e.g., registered single mothers and households with handicap children. These families sometimes receive assistance, though it is not done on a regular basis. There is no governmental or alternative source, which would provide reliable information about the number of single mothers and one-parent families in Georgia.

Recommendations:

- The budget revenues for social assistance to vulnerable families should be raised significantly and the allocation of the budgetary funds should be ensured
- The participation of non-governmental organizations should included during the legislative process regarding enactment of social programs by the Parliament of Georgia. The State should take legal and administrative steps to provide assistance to

those NGOs that champion children's rights and protect children from physical or psychological abuse, insult, violence, rude treatment or exploitation.

Children's Institutions

Georgia still has retained institutions, like children's homes, which were characteristic to the Socialist system and which used to be under the control of the State. The current harsh economic and social situation is producing many orphans. Often poverty forces parents to give their children to children's homes because they are not able to maintain them. According to statistical data, Georgia has approximately 1,400,000 children who are living in need. Many are living in dire need. The majority of institutionalized children (73,5%) have both parents, 22,8% have one parent, and the number of absolute orphans amounts to only 3.7%. After certain improvements of the family environment a child can be returned to his/her home. On the positive side, only 4.7% of children are refused to return to a family. Only 600 children have been institutionalized because they are disabled out of a total estimated 25,000 disabled children in Georgia (Association of Handicapped).

Especially hard are the conditions of children who have no parents or a guardian, as quite often they have nowhere to live. At present in Tbilisi, as well as in other cities and regions, persons who have reached majority age remain in children's institutions. The fate of such young people is very unpredictable.

Parents who are not able to support their children have few choices other than to give their child to a children's institution or boarding school. There are no governmental or NGO social assistance programs which could provide for the support of children so that they could grow up in a family environment rather than at a children's institution or boarding school.

Today, like former times, the responsibility for children's institutions is shared by different governmental agencies which makes coordination difficult. Boarding schools are grouped under the supervision of three different ministries. The institutions under the Ministry of Education are responsible for the care of orphans, abandoned children, children of single mothers, children of prisoners or the disabled, children with physical or mental defects, and those from socially and economically vulnerable families. According to the Ministry of Education, from 1996 to the present the President of Georgia has issued three orders "On the Improvement of Care of the Children Living at Children's Homes and Boarding Schools". However, a MOE report also states that, "Neither of the above three orders has been implemented because of the lack of funds". According to the same report, the Ministry of Education supervises 63 children's homes, in which a total of

3,800 children board. In South Ossetia there are two boarding schools, where up to 300 students live. The school lessons are given in old railway cars. Their living conditions are no better. Another MOE source cites the number of children's institutions as 60 and they provide shelter to about twice as many children.

According to the Ministry of Education, in 1998 GEL 2,401,912 was appropriated for the funding of children's homes and boarding schools which are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Out of this amount, GEL 2,307,396 was actually spent. Therefore, the average daily expenditure per child amounted to GEL 2.00. These figures indicate that the Ministry of Education has spent 96% of the appropriated funds. This is a very high rate in terms of implementation of the State budget. For the purpose of comparison, only 50-60% of budgetary funds was actually allocated to the Ministry of Health to implement its programs. Even with these budgetary disbursements, children in institutions live under extremely difficult conditions.

At most of the institutions the premises of the facilities are badly deteriorated. The majority of buildings need capital repairs, the water supply system and sewerage are non-functioning. Children are badly in need of textbooks and stationary, clothes, footwear, kitchen utensils, furniture and toys. The situation is especially difficult in highland areas (NGO Women Aid Georgia 1999). We suspect that in some cases funds allocated for children's institutions could have been misappropriated.

An unacceptable situation exists at the children's homes which are under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. This is because children suffering serious psychological problems often can be found with children with little physical or mental disability. In addition, the level of care and treatment at such institutions is very low. The monitoring and control of children's institutions is not managed in a proper manner.

According to the Ministry of Education, the number of children in orphanages almost doubled in 1999 compared to 1998. Although no significant improvements have taken place in living conditions. A MOE report states that, "Over many years the levels of funding of the children's homes and boarding schools have been lower than required standards. What has been funded is just food and salaries, though inadequately and with much delays. Actually no funding has been provided for equipment, footwear, clothes, medications, etc". Children's institutions do rely on the assistance of international aid agencies.

The situation in children's institutions in Georgia was described in the 1999 UN Human Development Report as, "By the summer of 1998 the Ministry of Interior had registered 2,000 such children (waifs and strays) in Tbilisi. Many of them were orphans who had escaped from the public orphanages because of intolerable conditions. Others had either abandoned their families, or released by their poor parents to earn bread."

Presently special schools are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Social Security and Healthcare (In December 1999 the Parliament of Georgia

ratified a decree on merging the ministries of healthcare and social welfare). The criteria of assigning children to these institutions are quite inconsistent and not clearly defined.

The State Report on “Implementation of the Convention on Children’s Rights in Georgia” states that 63 orphan’s homes are subordinated to the Ministry of Education. The total number of children is 3,800.

Table 1.Children’s Institutions in Georgia.

#	Governmental agency that is responsible for monitoring children’s homes	Number of children’s homes	Number of children	Age
1	Ministry of Education	60	7,211	6-17
2	Ministry of Health	2	100	0-3
3	Ministry of Labor and Social Security	2	200	4-16
Total:		64	7,511	

According to the Ministry of Education the number of children’s homes is 60 and the number of children under their care is more than 7,000. The disparity in data leaves doubt that the registration of children by the Ministry of Education is accurate. Consequently, it is difficult to plan and implement programs for assistance. Also, it is difficult to determine the exact number of children under care. The figures provided by governmental and non-governmental organizations vary from 3,000 to 7,000.

It is difficult to arrive at a definition of “Institution” as some institutions are classified as “specialized schools” or “Sanatoriums” which offer education and healthcare services, as their chief programs. Moreover, no reliable information exists regarding the number of children who have left institutions, the majority of children at institutions (50-77%) have close links with their families.

Some adolescents have left their homes or are trying to find sources for existence (UNDP Report 1998). The estimated number of children in 1999 was 1,771. The majority of children in the street sell ice cream, food, small things, work in the gas stations and cafes. Some of them help to empty railway carriages and quite often sleep in the stations. They quite often pilfer as well. Approximately 33% of these children give all their income to their families, while 27% of them give part of their income to their families. Some of them share it with their friends (Children and the Environment 1999).

Recommendations:

- ❑ Non-governmental organizations should participate more actively in the planning and implementation of state programs involving children's institutions, including involvement in the registration of children under the care of state institutions.
- ❑ A national policy and strategy for the rehabilitation of institutionalized children should be developed which would take into consideration international and national experience and standards, and the international obligations of Georgia in the sphere of children's rights. The program should involve:

Implementation of a psychological, legal, medical, professional, and employment rehabilitation project which would promote integration of the children into society;

Increasing the role of local bodies of government and the public sector in creating institutional tools for improvement of social policy;

Monitoring the living conditions of children and youth from high-risk groups and developing preventive measures and methods of psychological assistance;

Ensuring the participation of youth from high-risk groups in developing policies and special programs which seek employment for them.

- ❑ In order to address the intolerable situation of children in institutional care, the Government should appoint a National Task Group comprising representatives from the children's institutions and other relevant government departments, NGOs, International NGOs, UN agencies, donor agencies and the private sector to propose recommendations to reform and improve the situation.

BASIC HEALTH AND WELFARE

Developing countries have a wide array of needs. Georgia is not an exception. A plethora of problems, that Georgian health system faces today, is enormous. Increased burden of disease and disability, real threat of depopulation (estimated negative growth rate), the combination of public health problems and severe resource limitations (despite the surplus of health workers) form the incomplete list of factors contributing to the deteriorating health of the overall population.

Though international loans and technical assistance have been provided to the Government of Georgia (GOG) to design and reform the existing health care system, the lack of tax revenues keeps the government under-funded and hampers its ability to

implement and sustain changes in the health care system. Still some progress have been made in dealing with critical primary health care problems, but no significant results have been achieved in terms of equity, equality, access and affordability of services.

Access to health care in Georgia is limited primarily by cost rather than by geography. Virtually all of the poor and many others near the poverty line are priced out of most essential services. In fact, the most vulnerable groups among the population that are children less than 5, women, pensioners, IDPs (internally displaced persons), the disabled, large family households, have been left outside the social safety net, which was provided for almost 70 years under the Soviet regime. While the State Medical Insurance Company (SMIC) was established to finance the health programs responsive to the basic needs of the Georgian population, only about ten per cent is currently covered under the SMIC. Lack of affordable health care had led to the worsened maternal and child health. Maternal and neonatal mortality and morbidity are substantially higher than that of other European countries. The fact that infant mortality rates continue to rise (estimated as 29 per 1,000) may, in part, reflect an improved reporting system, but most likely it is also a reflection of inadequate primary health care services. Perinatal deaths are the majority of infant deaths. However, significant drop of acute respiratory infections and diarrheal diseases has been achieved.

In order to be responsive to the current health trends the Ministry of Health of Georgia has recognized the importance of maternal and child health (MCH) and defined it as a priority in its National Health Policy Document. But good policy choices and effective programming are heavily dependent on the availability of relevant information, which is often lacking in relation to key data and statistics. The Government and NGOs lack the data to show what is really happening to children in Georgia especially in terms of their health protection. Compounding this problem is the lack of public awareness about health care entitlements under the health reforms. For example, essential medical services for children in the age group 0-3 is supposed to be free, but the evidence suggests that in the pediatric hospitals and maternity homes 63% of patients were charged for the officially free medical treatment (Source: State Statistics Department, 1997). Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that in the majority of cases the sick children's parents have to cover supposedly free medical expenses incurred. The problem is further aggravated by the fact that the rights to free health care of the most vulnerable children (such as the disabled, the homeless, refugees, ethnic minorities) are repeatedly neglected, which is a serious violation of CRC. Overall, there are fundamental failings on the part of civil society to recognize its collective responsibility for the protection and promotion of children's health and well being, including health education.

Recommendations:

- Identify the failures of the national government and international community to implement the programs aimed at improving children's health and overall well being.

- Recognize the social and political causes of poor health and work out the measures to address them.
- Establish and develop effective IEC (Information, education, and communication) campaign to increase the population's awareness on their health care entitlements under the ongoing health reform.
- Improve the access to education and primary health care facilities for all children from all-geographical areas and social strata by increased level of funding.
- Develop the local capacity to continuously assess, collect and disseminate, as the need may be the statistical data on MCH at the regional and national level.
- Develop the local capacity at the national and regional level to design, implement and monitor appropriate strategies for child health.

EDUCATION, LEISURE AND CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Education

In 1997 the Parliament of Georgia adopted the law on education. According to the law the primary and secondary education system was changed. At the present time this system consists of 12 stages. According to the law only the first 9 stages are free of charge. The right of the child to a primary education free of charge is provided by the law. Nevertheless, the reality is different.

There has been a significant reduction in spending on schools and although government primary and secondary education is free and universal, there are charges for textbooks and school activities, which are not affordable for all. Further, some of the schools in the remote highland regions are not geographically accessible and hence, the educational opportunities of the children can be limited as well.

The motivation of teachers is poor. Salaries are low and significant delays occur. As a result there is a large number of unskilled teachers and the general level of education is very low. Education programs need to be updated. Interactive methodologies should be implemented more actively. The Ministry of Education has started a pilot project on Active Learning Teaching Methods with the assistance of UNICEF.

In most of the secondary schools non-official fees are imposed with the purpose to pay in the "School Fund" or "Class Fund". These fees amount to GEL 3-8 (UNDP Human Development Report 1999). Teachers inform the pupils of the necessity of additional payments for the needs of the school. There are always reasons for additional payments: additional services school and class funds, new school inventory, etc. The fees are legal to

a certain extent. Parents are requested to pay for additional expenses. The schools also receive voluntary contributions and they have a right to organise fund-raising events like concerts, etc. Parents or non-governmental organisations seldom control utilisation of these funds. Unfortunately, very often the children participate in collection of the fees. Participation of the children in financial issues is often a reason for stress, negative emotions, and, consequently may have an adverse influence upon the children's mentality. The financial and accounting systems for these funds (both parents' voluntary contributions and fees for additional services) need to be properly established. Otherwise, there is a possibility of inexpedient utilization or even misappropriation. Some schools have established Parents' Councils, which take partial control over the proper utilisation of the funds. However, the number of schools with Parents' Councils is very small.

One positive step in relation to the CRC and Education has been the introduction of the Children's Rights Convention in the secondary school programme. However, there is a lack of qualified teachers in this sphere.

Considering the average income of the population, school manuals are expensive. Each pupil needs on average 7.4 manuals. In the 1997-1998 school year 4.7 manuals were purchased by the parents. Each set of manuals costs approximately GEL 16.80 (US\$8.40). According to the parents' estimation, the quality of manuals is low (65.4%) while the price is very high (79.7%) (Children's Rights Protection Fund 1997).

Only 81% of pupils attend school more or less regularly, while others have abandoned school for different reasons (UNDP Human Development Report 1999). Access to schools is a problem in some mountainous regions, while in other regions, poverty is a reason for low school attendance. Schools are not properly equipped. Very often they are not even heated. Specialised professional schools do not function due to the lack of finances.

Disabled children do not have access to education and there are no programs aimed at integrating disabled children into government schools. According to the existing practice the teachers are obliged to visit disabled children at home, but in reality this practice is seldom exercised.

Children's participation in the school life is minimal. Children seldom have any possibility to express their viewpoint on the issues related to their school.

Recommendations:

- ❑ The Government should increase its budgetary allocation to Education and ensure that the salaries of school principals and teachers are paid regularly and that schools receive a minimum operating budget.
- ❑ Mechanisms of control over the funds collected in schools should be established. Parents and non-governmental organizations should be involved in this process. Children should not be involved in the collection of fees for schools.

- ❑ The Government should adopt a policy of inclusive or integrated education which provides access by disabled children into the regular school system.
- ❑ Children’s participation in school life should become more active. Children must have a possibility to express their viewpoint on different issues. The Government should expand the pilot program of Active Learning Teaching Methods into a national program.

Leisure and Cultural Activities

According to the Presidential Decrees, programs of children’s leisure and healthy life style have been carried out during the last five years. State authorities, the Trade Union of Georgia and non-governmental organizations carry out a number of programs of children’s leisure. In particular:

- Ureki the House of Future
- New Houses of the 21th century
- Georgia the House of Future
- Future Tkhinvali, etc.

The program “Future Tkhinvali” ensures leisure and psychological rehabilitation of refugees from Samachablo. The program provides joint leisure for both Georgian and Ossetian children expatriated from Samachablo or left in the zone of conflict.

One of the main resources for ensuring children’s leisure and healthy life style are the State funds of medical insurance and social security, which were assigned to finance the above programs. However, State financing for leisure and cultural activities is provided for only 1% of children, while in 1988-1989 budgetary levels ensured that 13% of children were involved in the state financed leisure and cultural activities. (Children’s Federation of Georgia 1999).

There are a number of public property vacation spots, recreation houses, and sanatoriums on the property list of the Trade Union of Georgia, which are inaccessible for majority of the population. These should be made accessible to the public, especially to children from vulnerable families.

Recommendations:

- ❑ A strategy should be defined by the State for children’s leisure and cultural activities targeting at providing assistance to vulnerable children.
- ❑ The administration of former public property recreation facilities should be reconsidered to make them accessible to children from vulnerable families.

SPECIAL PROTECTION MEASURES

Laws on Refugees/ Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The Law of Georgia on Refugees, adopted on February 18, 1998 obliges the Government of Georgia to assist refugee children by placing them at state day care centers and educational institutions. This is the only special benefit which differentiates refugee children from adults and puts them in a privileged situation. The rest of the law says nothing about children in particular, but treats them in the same manner as adults.

The Law of Georgia on IDPs obliges the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation together with other relevant local administrative bodies to provide disabled, old people, children and families who lost their principle wage earnings with medicines free of charge and to facilitate displaced persons free access to education.

According to the Resolution of the President of Georgia # 16 of January 12, 1998, the ministries of Education, Economics and Refugees and Accommodation must ensure that 40 vacancies for repatriated Meshkhetians at the Admissions Department or the Tbilisi State University are allotted. Based on the Regulation of the Ministry of Education of Georgia # 78 of March 27, 1998, fifteen Meshkhetians have been enrolled at the different higher educational institutions of Georgia: Tbilisi State University, Akhaltsikhe Branch of the State University, Tbilisi State Medical Institute and Academy of Physical Culture and Sports. The students enrolled at the Admissions Department of the State University will continue to study at the corresponding departments once they successfully pass exams.

Where the Law does not refer to all the needs of IDPs, many other legal instruments, i.e. decrees, orders and regulations, had been endorsed. This was done for the improvement of conditions and alleviation of those difficulties and hardships which IDPs have to face.

The rule of spending the Minister's Special Fund and distributing one-time financial assistance to the most vulnerable IDPs and refugees for 1997 determines one time additional financial compensation for:

- single mothers supporting underage children;
- underage children having a guardian;
- multi-children families having more than three underage children;
- Disabled persons of all categories and underage handicapped children;
- spouses and children of victims of armed conflicts in Abkhazeti and Tskhinvali region.

The rule also stipulates that a Commission composed of the representatives from the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, the Parliamentary Committees on Migration and Citizens living abroad, and Health Care, as well as Social Problems may make special decisions in terms of assisting IDPs, including children, while discussing particular cases such as sending poor persons to receive medical treatment locally or abroad.

The ministries of Health Care, Social Security and Labour and Employment adopted a resolution on November 24, 1997 "about urgent measures for the population's social security and health service based on the President's # 685 resolution of 1996". The resolution identified the most vulnerable group of IDPs and proposed to provide them with a special medical treatment policy, according to which the holder of that policy has a right to receive medical treatment free of charge). In that group all children from 2 to 14, underage orphans and single mothers supporting underage children were included.

There are special Presidential decrees which deal particularly with Meskhetians, who after the adoption of the Law of Georgia on Refugees lost their refugee status, but still are in a refugee like situation. Meskhetians do not benefit from citizenship rights or any recognition of status of any sort. They are in a particularly vulnerable situation. Normally, they pay for their children to have access to education.

As the number of children and adolescents in a refugee like situation is not large, all operations and programmes developed by local authorities and NGOs, as well as by UNHCR, generally are related to IDPs. After the Law of Georgia on Refugees was adopted, the number of asylum seekers increased. Moreover, it should be noted that after accession of Georgia to the 1951 Geneva Convention, this number may increase and the children will need legal, social and physical protection.

UNHCR has signed a sub-agreement with the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) concerning the protection of refugee and IDP rights in Georgia. Lawyers from GYLA are working at protecting rights of needy persons and also ensuring that those rights are guaranteed. The GYLA is doing this by organizing training for those governmental and non-governmental bodies who are responsible to deal with refugee and IDP children. This is done to insure that all persons who need physical or legal protection are treated by competent authorities. The GYLA also monitors the situation in different regions of Georgia.

IDPs

Conflicts in Abkhazeti and South Ossetia caused mass internal displacement and refugee movements in Georgia. As result of these conflicts, two parts of Georgia were de facto separated (Tskhinvali Region in 1992 and Abkhazia Region in 1993) and more than a quarter of million of internally displaced people (IDPs) fled to internal regions of Georgia. Since 1991 approximately three hundred thousand IDPs from Abkhazeti and twelve thousand from South Ossetia had been displaced. Among them there were 84,017 children (0-18 years old). A total of 28,580 persons from South Ossetia were recognized as refugees in the Russian Federation. Military escalation of violence in Abkhazeti in May 1998 led to a new wave of IDPs, mainly accommodated in Samegrelo region of Western Georgia. Twenty one per cent of the whole IDP population was concentrated in the Zugdidi region, populated by 120,000 inhabitants. This resulted in tension among IDPs and the local population, due to already high rates of unemployment, which dramatically increased after the arrival of displaced people.

Displacement caused the separation of families, disruption of educational opportunities, lack of food, clothing, shelter and other necessities. Those displaced have been accommodated in hotels, communal centers and uninhabited buildings. Most of them live in school buildings or other offices. Among them are children who, as citizens of Georgia, appeared to have less access to rights and services than non-displaced children. In order to improve the difficult social and economic situation of displaced persons, the Law on IDPs was passed, determining some extra benefits for this category of people, particularly for children. Those IDP children who are concentrated in the capital city live in comparatively better conditions. They can receive better medical services and education.

Approximately one third of IDPs in the Zugdidi region live in communal centers, others live in private accommodations. People who are living in communal centers outside of Zugdidi experience difficulties in communications and transportation. Their monthly allowance from the government is around GEL 12 (US\$6). Until October 1999 they also received bread free of charge from World Food Program (WFP), but now bread distribution service has been suspended and there is a real danger of hunger, especially for families, without a breadwinner. Now, according to decision of the Georgian Government, IDPs in the Zugdidi region will receive 200 grams wheat flour, but they have no way to bake bread. As stated by the UNDP Administrator, IDPs are living in conditions of absolute poverty (less than US\$1). For many of people living in communal centers in the Zugdidi region, this governmental allowance is the only source of income, especially for elderly and disabled. Majority of able-bodied people have left to the capital of the country or have returned to the Gali district, but really vulnerable people stay in communal centers. Multi-children families, families with orphans, etc are among them. From 64,000 IDPs registered in the Zugdidi region, there are 28,570 children, of which 1,112 are orphans. The number of multi-children families in the region is 1,878. In general, there are 3,754 multi-children families and 2,040 orphans (among the IDP population) in Western Georgia. The majority of IDPs living in the centers are unemployed. Under such conditions, 4,378 IDP pupils living in the Zugdidi region have very few possibilities to purchase school supplies, textbooks and school uniforms. IDP pupils mainly attend special schools for IDPs, operating in the same building as regular schools, but in shift, and school teachers are also IDPs. The reasons why IDPs prefer to give their children to special schools, are as follows:

- a) They are much cheaper. Regardless of "free" education in primary school, each month children need to collect a certain amount of money for different needs of schools, and in IDP schools this practice does not exist.
- b) Psychologically it is easier for children to be among the "alike" IDP children. On the other hand, it can create difficulties in adaptation.

In each of the approximate 70 communal centers and in Zugdidi there are 2-3 children, who did not attend school mainly due to their poor economic conditions. Another reason

is that schools are located far from communal centers and families, which have no income, cannot pay for transportation. Many of children did not attend school in previous years, and now it is difficult for them to catch up with their peers. Presently, some families with children returned temporarily to the Gali district, where children cannot attend schools, especially in their native languages.

The 84,017 IDP children from Abkhazeti and South Osseti are of the greatest concern. Generally speaking, IDP children have the same access to pre-school, secondary or higher education as the local population. In Georgia IDP children are generally placed in the same schools, institutes and/or universities as local children. However, in some regions of Georgia, particularly in Zugdidi, there are three separate schools with separate classes, i.e. in the morning local children attend school while in the afternoon there are classes especially for IDP children. Curriculum remains the same as for local schools. There are no privileges for IDP children as provided for by a number of presidential decrees. They do purchase books and school supplies in the same way as local children. However, during the last two years IDP students have not paid fees for education.

From the outset the Georgian Government opened separate schools for IDP children, based on the reason that IDP children did not have adequate clothing and IDP teachers were unemployed. The creation of separate schools caused a separation of IDPs from the local population. Integration into the local society will be more difficult now than it was initially, at the time of displacement.

The situation is different in Tskhinvali region. Monitoring indicates that a school in the village Artsevi, which is predominantly a Georgian village, is divided into two sectors - Georgian and Ossetian. Meaning that, there are two different administrations, two different sources for financing and for accountability. The school building, which had been badly damaged during the conflict, was repaired by UNHCR and currently is physically shared by both ethnic Ossetians and Georgian classes. According to the Deputy Director of the Georgian sector there are 28 pupils in the Ossetian section and 75 pupils in the Georgian sectors. The Georgian section is governed by the Gori (Georgian) administration and the Ossetian by Tskhmvali (Ossetian) administration. Accordingly, the Georgian section is financed by the Georgian Government and Ossetian by the North Ossetian Government. Also, the school programmes in the Georgian section are composed by the Ministry of Education of Georgia, and in Ossetian sector by the relevant structures in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia. The Ossetian section has a special class called "Native language and literature". It is actually a class for Ossetian Language. Classes are conducted at the same time, so, relations and interaction of the students is ensured. There are a number of joint events organized by the school for the new year, and for various neutral holidays. There also are schools in Tskhinvali region where Ossetian and Georgian children study in the same classes and there are no tensions between them.

According to the relevant local authorities of the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation one of the current issues in Gori region is related to education. In particular, there are 19 secondary schools for IDPs from Abkhazeti in Georgia, whereas

there is no school for IDPs from Samachablo. Actually the idea to establish a school in Gori, where the IDPs live in compact settlement places existed, and agreement was reached with one of the local schools to use their building, with the local officials in charge of secondary education and preliminary agreement from the Ministry, but at the very last stage it was restricted by the Ministry of Education. This does not mean that IDP children from Samachablo have no access to education. They attend the same schools, institutes and/or universities as the local children. This fact does not cause any negative results, but to the contrary, helps IDP children to establish close relations with local children and to integrate into society.

One fifth of the IDPs is concentrated in the Zugdidi region. This region hosts about 30,000 IDP children. There are two thousand families with multiple children. These children live in extremely hard conditions. The State provides very poor aid to such families (equivalent to US\$ 7 per month). Approximately 85% of IDPs live in collective centers with one family to a room. The Norwegian Refugee Council conducted a survey in 1997, which found that 79% of IDPs households' report a lack of food and 51% said they lack clothing. Sixty six per cent of the interviewees were unemployed. Health and education levels were declining steadily and stress-related disease seems to have risen rapidly. Thirteen per cent of IDP children surveyed did not attend school, usually for the reason they did not have adequate clothing or shoes (UNDP Georgia 1998).

Children of IDPs show many behavioral and psychological disturbances stemming from war and displacement. During the conflict many buildings have been destroyed. Among them there were schools where previously children studied. Twenty-five schools in South Ossetia and 46 in Abkhazia have been rehabilitated by UNHCR either independently or together with implementing partners. However, the problem is still not properly addressed. Many children who have recently returned to their villages, mostly to South Ossetia, are not able to attend classes. The reason is that either the school building is not repaired or physically does not exist at all. For example, there are villages in South Ossetia where train wagons are used as a school building. In villages where there are no train wagons and buildings for schools, children are supposed to attend classes in the neighbouring villages and sometimes because of the lack of transport, minors are not able to travel from one place to another. Therefore, attention should be drawn to further rehabilitation of school buildings and to open extra classes in the local schools, where displaced and local children will be placed together. This will help IDP children to establish close and friendly relations with local children and to integrate into society.

Abandonment

The number of babies abandoned in maternity hospitals has increased, often because mothers, in some case displaced persons, lack adequate housing, or the family feels it has no means to raise another child. The actual selling of babies from hospitals was confirmed by a foreign NGO working with children's institutions (World Bank).

Street Children

The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs recorded over 2,000 street children in Tbilisi by the summer of 1998. Many are orphans who ran away from government homes where conditions are unbearable. Others leave or are sent out from poor families in search of food. A survey conducted by a local NGO with a mandate to aid street children found that 33% of child beggars questioned were orphans and 25% were giving their incomes to their families. Most did not attend school and 40% complained of health problems. The ones living at the railway station were found to be in especially dangerous conditions, obtaining money by unloading railway cars and apparently prostitution (UNDP Georgia 1998). From 800 to 1,100 children live entirely or partially in the streets of Tbilisi, although as noted above, more current statistics show twice as many. Kutaisi Municipality has recorded over 400 street children begging and pilfering in the streets of the city.

Child Labour

Although the majority of poor families give priority to their children's needs over their own, some parents have been unable to cope, and the social institutions, which used to help families, are no longer up to the task. Abandonment of infants and children, together with neglect and abuse, has increased. Perhaps the most dramatic indication of the toll the economic crisis has taken on Georgia's children is the appearance of "waifs and strays", or so called street children. Children as young as five years of age, now spend most of their time on the streets, begging, pilfering, in some cases working. Only the tradition of the extended family solidarity has enabled people to survive. Street children, IDP children and children in institutions suffer even more than other children, their casualties are more serious as they lack the informal ties and relationships that are the principle means of survival in the present crisis.

Some "street children" live with their families, and give money they earn through begging or employment to their families. Sometimes, people offer homeless children GEL 6-7 a day, along with shelter, to work. Such children have found work in cafes, bistros, at gas stations, even for street photographers, earning up to GEL10 per day. Often children do hard physical work. Children as young as 9 years old work in markets, sometimes at night, carrying and loading wares, for GEL 5 a day. This affects their education status, as they have no time for school, along with the other reasons keeping them out of schools (World Bank).

Disabled Children

Children with disabilities as well as those from disadvantaged backgrounds rarely receive any specialized assistance from the state that they require for primary and secondary education (UNDP Georgia 1998). Disabled children are isolated from their healthy peer

group. The Government needs to change the education system to integrate this category of children into the society.

Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse

Cases of child sexual exploitation and abuse in the law enforcement institutions in Georgia have been reported. Homeless children suffer from sexual exploitation as well.

Trafficking and Abduction

There have been unofficial reports of cases of trafficking and abduction of women and children in Georgia. More definite information about trafficking and abduction is not accessible to the population. There is a very cautious attitude concerning these issues in the society. Due to the sensitive character of the issue no serious research or assessment have been conducted in this regard.

Physical and Psychological Recovery and Social Reintegration

Because of the rapid social, economic and political transition in Georgia, certain segments of the society and vulnerable groups who have not benefited from transition have been described as “traumatized”. They are in need of social and psychological assistance, especially for children who had suffered from psychological stress. Psychological and social aid to the children is mainly provided by non-governmental organizations financed by different international donors and organizations. As was mentioned in the Governmental Report on implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 193), the Center for Social and Psychological Aid “Trust” was established in 1990. This center is a non-governmental organization, which provides psychological and social aid to children. The center has established 24-hour services: “telephone of trust”, service of aid at home, re-adaptation club. The center also conducts training of specialists, volunteers and organizations in the field of social and psychological aid.

Currently there are a number of non-governmental organizations which work on psycho-social rehabilitation of IDP children. Some of them co-operate with UNHCR. For example, UNHCR has been funding the UNV magazine White Crane, which is distributed throughout Georgia, including Abkhazia and South Ossetia, This magazine provides war-affected children with a forum to meet children with similar experiences, exchange their views and cope with their difficult circumstances. New programmes have been developed to address the needs of IDPs, especially children.

The new wave of IDPs after the escalation of violence in Gali district in 1998 brought new challenges to workers of psychosocial support groups. Children, who were displaced already for the second time, needed urgent assistance. One of the barriers was a lack of specialists in the regions where the majority of IDPs found themselves. IDP children, in addition to the necessity of healing of the war trauma, faced the problem of adaptation

within the local Georgian community. Children from the Gali district, especially pre-school children, mainly speak Mengrelian, which makes adaptation in regular schools even more difficult.

UNICEF Georgia has a programme called “Helping Children in Distress”, which included special training for teachers, dealing with traumatised children. Twenty psychologists and specialists in psycho-rehabilitation have been trained and who then train teachers from the regions. UN Volunteers, with the support of UNHCR and NRC, and in co-operation with four non-governmental organisations: FDHR, Centre of Psycho-Social Support “Ndoba”, the IDP Women Association and local Zugdidi-based association “Atinati”, organized a wide-scale psycho-social assistance project for the children traumatised during the war in Western Georgia. The assistance included group interactive sessions with psychological games, art therapy, individual consultations and rehabilitation children camps for IDP and local children. The project also included a preparation of local volunteers and “helpers” in communities and wide range training using basic material "Helping children in distress". A State program for psychiatric health care will include the opening of a specialized hospital near Tbilisi for psychological and social aid for children starting from 2000.

It is still difficult to say anything about a sustainable improvement of children’s psychological status in spite of these programs. More sustainable progress requires significant improvement of living and educational conditions, changing of the environment and creation of a healthy climate in families and in communities.

Recommendations:

- ❑ The Government should take measures to insure implementation of all legislative norms regarding the welfare of refugee and IDP children.
- ❑ Refugees and IDPs should be informed about their rights, freedoms and State obligations and what recourse they have in case their rights are violated.
- ❑ Research should be carried out to determine the magnitude and extent of sexual exploitation of children, child labour, and women and child sale, trafficking and abduction and immediate measures taken to address those abuses of women and child rights.

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