



**RESULTS OF THE MONITORING HELD  
BY FUND «SUKHUMI»  
IN THE FRAMEWORK  
OF «GENDER-RESPONSIVE EARLY  
WARNING SYSTEM» -**

**Compilation of the reports**



## INTRODUCTION - CONCEPT AND THE AIM OF THE PROJECT

In condition of two unresolved and frozen conflicts in the country, the topicality and implementation of the early warning system becomes more actual. While the movement of people along the so-called “dividing line” is being become restricted, when the violation of rights of the conflict zone population is so common, which directly affects the security of the conflict affected population, there is always a risk of escalation of the conflict and occurrence of violence. In addition, tension in society is also increasing due to very complex political and social background, high level of unemployment, which directly affect the deterioration of the psycho-emotional state of the population. Consequently, it negatively affects the psycho-emotional condition of the population, which endangers peace and stability. Obviously, in this context, in-depth study of the existing problems, the causes and factors behind them, tendencies of their escalation are very important, both on macro and micro levels, to timely prevent conflicts and violence in the society.

The desire and willingness to prevent the tensions in the communities and avoid the outbreak of the possible conflicts, has created the basis for the project called “Launching the Gender Responsive Early Warning System (GREWS)” further piloted and implemented by the Fund “Sukhumi”, with the support of Swedish international women’s organization “Kvinna till Kvinna”. To study the possible hotspots of tension and conflict escalation, Fund “Sukhumi” selected the regions and communities with a low degree of human security and high risk of conflict occurrence. Such hotspots are settlements of IDPs in Kutaisi, Tskaltubo and Zugdidi, and villages along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with Abkhazia - Khurcha/Koki, Orsantia, Ganmukhuri, Shamgona and Pakhulani/Tskoushi.

The GREWS project envisaged to collect the information on impending conflicts and crisis based on the specific needs and interests of women and men, systematize and analyze the data, work out timely warning and response strategy based on the existing information to prevent possible escalation of the violence. All these serve as prerequisites and precondition for security and lasting peace.

**Methodology** - the monitoring has been conducted by collecting quantitative and qualitative data and preserving the confidence of the respondents. To identify specific needs and interests of women and men (who perceive security and threats in different ways), “gender indicators” have been adapted and considered while collecting information. Several villages near the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL), (**Khurcha/Koki, Orsantia, Ganmukhuri, Shamgona** (Zugdidi municipality), **Pakhulani/Tskoushi** (Tsalenjikha municipality)) and

cities with a high concentration of IDPs (**Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Zugdidi**) have been selected as the locations for gathering information. The representatives of peace coalition established by the Fund “Sukhumi” and women`s initiative groups, including the representatives of women`s NGOs and community leaders, namely- Fund of Women-Entrepreneurs, Teacher`s Union “Education and Universe” (Kutaisi), Association of Women IDPs for Peace - “Imedi” (Zugdidi), women`s initiative groups in Tskaltubo, Khurcha and Pakhulani are involved in the project implementation.

Based on the data, collected during the project implementation, Fund “Sukhumi” has prepared **three reports** :

- ❖ **Special Emergency report on the closure of the “check-point” at the Enguri bridge due to the decision taken by the authorities of Sukhumi**, based on the information gathered by the organization monitors on June 28, 29, 30;
- ❖ **Report describing the attitude of Georgian population and situation during the presidential elections of Abkhazia**, based on the data collected in June-August 2019;
- ❖ **Report on the attitude of the IDPs and conflict affected population toward the issues of domestic violence against women**, based on the data collected in October-November 2019. The necessity of additional data collection on the given issue was caused by the repeated statements of respondents that any kind of political tension, difficult social and economic background in Abkhazia or in Georgia proper, has a huge and severe impact on women`s condition in the family, often expressed in physical, psychological or other types of violence against them.

The reports are represented below in chronological order.



## **FUND SUKHUMI'S POLICY BRIEF FROM THE GENDER-RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM (GREWS) REGARDING THE CLOSURE OF CROSSING POINT AT RIVER ENGURI INTRODUCTION**

On June 27, 2019 authorities in Sukhumi, without any prior warning, unilaterally closed the crossing point at the River Enguri. This move caused significant difficulties in daily lives of the Georgian communities living in Abkhazia, as well as IDPs and other conflict affected population living along the dividing line whose daily social and economic interactions are inextricably linked with the Gali district. For many people living in Abkhazia and across the dividing line the closure of the Enguri bridge is tantamount to depriving them of their basic social and economic rights. Specifically:

- **The existing situation endangered life and health of many people, who were prevented from going for emergency surgery and medical treatment to hospitals and clinics in Georgia proper;**
- **Many aspiring students registered in Gali district failed to participate in the first subject matter examination, at the Unified National Exams, awaiting the positive solution at the “crossing point” from morning to night;**
- **The situation is jeopardized for those, who lack basic services and live in severe socio-economic situation in Gali district and have to cross the divide for cheaper products and medicines; The people living along the dividing line were hindered from going for trade and work on the other side of the Enguri bridge, which represents the entire livelihood and only source for income of hundreds of families, especially women.**

**WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE DOING:**

**Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”, IDP women NGO based in Kutaisi with over 20 years of experience in advancing gender equality and women’s political empowerment, promoting women participation in peace-building.**

Fund Sukhumi has initiated **Gender Responsive Early Warning System (GREWS)**, a new systematic, rigorous and sophisticated conflict analysis initiative to collect, systematize and analyze the evolution of conflict situation in the region with the aim to provide early responses to prevent the escalation of violence and to build sustainable peace processes through dialogue and reconciliation.

GREWS in Georgia Proper is led by Fund “Sukhumi” in cooperation with its partner organizations – Coalition of Women’s NGOs for Peace, and women-led community hubs established by Fund “Sukhumi”, namely: Fund of Women Entrepreneurs, Union of teachers “Education and Universe” (Kutaisi), Association “Imedi”, IDP Women’s Movement for Peace (Zugdidi), Fund “Sukhumi”’s Community Women’s Initiative Groups in Khurcha and Pakhulani (villages along conflict dividing line, Zugdidi and Tsalenjikha districts).

Fund “Sukhumi”, through its initiative groups established in different villages along the conflict dividing line, continuously monitors and studies gender specific concerns and human security situation of conflict affected population. In June 2019, through quantitative and qualitative research method we have surveyed at least 140 people, out of which 100 are women and 40 men. This monitoring is ongoing and the main findings along the final analysis will be shared periodically with all stakeholders.

In this Policy Brief, Fund “Sukhumi”’s team would like to share with all stakeholders the urgent problems and difficulties encountered by the population living in Gali district and along the ABL in Georgia proper due to closure of the “crossing point”, which requires immediate attention and urgent response. Note that for security reasons the name of testimonies are not disclosed.

## MAIN IMPACTS

**Access to Healthcare:** Closure of the crossing point has been particularly acute for people who needed urgent operations and treatment in Georgia proper. There were cases when people required immediate renal dialysis, urgent operations, planned chemotherapy, and each day of delay could cost them a life.

«

*«... my relative has been operated [from the Gali district] here in Kutaisi... she was diagnosed with cancer... from the first date of the July she had to come back to start chemotherapy course ... Now I do not know when she will be ever able to come? chemotherapy course could not be delayed!». (Woman M.G. interviewed on 28.06.19 in Kutaisi).*

«

*“... Yesterday (June 28), severely ill patient was not allowed to go through the “border”. The emergency vehicle was awaiting for her on another side. The patient was asked for an “official permission document” by the border guards, and the patient returned to the Gali hospital. We do not know what would have happened to her... she was very seriously ill patient. We do not even know how long will it take to get that permission document” (Woman, N.E. interviewed on 29.06.19 in Khurcha).*

**Right to Education:** the particular concern of the Gali population is a restriction and hindrance to the entrants to participate in the Unified National Exams, which is the only opportunity for Georgian youth in the Gali district to get higher education as most of them do not/or poorly know Russian or Abkhazian languages. Moreover, the majority of ethnic Georgians who do not have Abkhazian passports cannot enroll at the “Sukhumi State University”. There is a perception among the local population that the “closure of checkpoints” is deliberate action from the Abkhaz officials to prevent aspiring students to take part at the exams. Most of the entrants and their parents refrained from talking about the situation openly. According to the online news agency “Netgazeti”, which published the article - “*The hands cut by the barbed wire – how the entrants from Gali are trying to sneak into the wire*” has deleted the article upon the request of the respondents. In the article was described the difficulties that the entrants from the Gali district have encountered to take part in the National Exams. Despite the fact that the information about the persons interviewed was confidential, due to security reason this material has been deleted upon the request of the respondents<sup>1</sup> According to Irina Abuladze, the Deputy Minister of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, “*The entrants [from the Gali district] were unable to participate in the first session of the unified national exams due to the closure of the Enguri*

<sup>1</sup> “How the entrants sneak out from Gali” available in Georgian „როგორ იპარებინან აბიტურენტები გალიდან“, Netgazeti, 02.07.2019 <https://netgazeti.ge/news/377487/?fbclid=IwAR0amodupOhHnSzXh7XRgSpeZhuxS12-ibp59RIULMrJ0I5b4I-5WAUIQ-Y>.

Bridge. (01.07.19)<sup>2</sup>. However, later on, Gali Resource Center reported (July 2), that only 11 were unable to pass through the “crossing point” from 185 registered aspiring student in the Gali district<sup>3</sup>. According to the information released in online news agency, some of the entrants have crossed the “crossing point” in exchange of certain sum. According to information shared by the residents of Gali district to “Livepress”, to pass the checkpoint is possible in exchange of 5000 rubles (224 GEL), if one does not have rubles, they are required to pay GEL 300.<sup>4</sup>

«

*“The situation of those entrants who were unable to pass the crossing point and failed to participate at the National Exams is acute ...” I hope that our Government will do its best to change the situation for better... We’ve heard that the Ministry of Education is trying to create alternative opportunity for them”(Man G.S. interviewed on 29.06.19 in Tskaltubo).*

«

*“We’ve heard that Abkhazia’s Security Service requested the list of those entrants and their families who wish cross the boundary, which caused even more panic as all know that study in Georgian [proper] is not at all welcomed by the Abkhaz officials... they are afraid to release such list as fear for any sanctions. Situation is very tensed.... And how such nervous and embarrassed children could pass the exams, I can’t even imagine that?!” (Woman, S.G. interviewed on 29.06.19, in Kutaisi).*

«

*“It turns out that some of the children are trying to move through the bypass roads... while some managed, others did not and were detained by the “border guards”, some hit their hands on the barbed wire... (woman, A.N. interviewed on 30.06.19)*

«

*“They are [Abkhaz officials] trying their best to get children to go to study in Sukhumi.... «Why do you go to Tbilisi?» I’ll pay for your study in Abkhazia” said once Nadaraia [Gali administration head]. (entrant, K.T. interviewed on 29.06.19, Gali district).*

2 “Due to closure of the Enguri bridge, the entrants unable to pass first exams” available in Georgian “ენგურის ჩაკეტვის გამო გალში მცხოვრები აბიტურიენტები პირველ გამოცდას ვერ დაესწრებიან”, Netgazeti, 01.07.19. <https://netgazeti.ge/news/377097/>

3 „ Gali entrant, who was hit while crossing the dividing line, have participated in the exam” available in Georgian „გალელი აბიტურიენტი, რომელიც საოკუპაციო ხაზის გადმოკვეთისას დაშავდა, გამოცდაზე გავიდა“, LivePress, 02.07.19, <https://www.livepress.ge/ka/akhali-ambebi/article/29673-galeli-abiturienti-romelic-saokupacio-khazis-kvethisas-dashavda-gamocdaze-gavida.html>

4 „Movement through Enguri bridge in exchange of certain sum is free” available in Georgian, “ენგურის ხიდზე გადაადგილება თანხის სანაცვლოდ თავისუფალია”, 01.07.19 <https://www.livepress.ge/ka/akhali-ambebi/article/29639-enguris-khidze-gadaadgileba-thankhis-sanacvlood-thavisufalia.html>



**Family Unity Violation:** Due to closure of the crossing point, many families have been physically divided. People's personal safety and family integrity were endangered. The cases identified during the monitoring proves that the family members appeared on different sides of the dividing line and nobody knows how long this situation will last. Restriction of movement have particularly aggravated the situation of the elderly people, who live alone in Gali and other districts across the dividing line, and have neither income nor any other source of livelihood. They have been frequently visited by their children to provide them with food and necessary medicines.

«

*"I have connected with that part [the Gali district] by my parents as they live in the village. I usually go to visit them. Blocking the road, takes away any possibility for such elderly people to live there. My parents are there and I do not know if they have food to eat. There have nothing in the garden, enough to eat." (Woman, L.S. interviewed on 20.06.19, Shamgona).*

«

*"My neighbor left Saberio (village in Gali district) to attend the wedding in Tbilisi. Then she could not come back and stucked in Tbilisi ... Her husband remained in Gali district... the next morning her husband was accidentally found by his neighbors with lost consciousness. Now this man is there alone and neighbors are taking care of him. His wife stays in Tbilisi and now she worries sick about him." (woman, E.Z. interviewed on 29.06.19, Pakhulani).*

**Economic Security.** One of the biggest concerns of the communities is losing their major source of income and livelihood due to the closure of the crossing point. Part of the population, who had traded along the dividing line to feed their families, lost their only source of income. Restriction of movement especially negatively impacts the local small businesses, which particularly affects the women, as the women are mainly engaged in trade.

«

*"We are at risk of hunger, we are threatened by starvation.... I look after the whole family and have two orphans. Now I'm sitting and waiting when the road will be opened to earn some money." (Woman, M.S. interviewed on 28.06.19, Zugdidi).*

«

*"Now, I'm mourning myself and my family... what can I do.. what will happen to my children? Many years, I'm commuting from here to Gali carrying goods and food? What now? I can't do anything here... I had no choice but staring at the "boundary" and waiting for its opening. Now we just have to put our hope in Lord. There is no one else to call, no one else to help" (woman, Z.P. interviewed on 29.06.19, Pakhulani)*



«

*“ I took some “goods” [in Zugdidi] to sell it in Gali... but that day the road was closed... Now I got so many goods...” (woman, N.K. interviewed on 28.06.19, Khurcha).*

**Food Security:** With the closure of the road, the population in the Gali district, who live in hard social and economic situation face increased risk of food crises as they no longer are able to buy food and other goods at affordable prices in Georgia proper.

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*“The villages of Gali are fully supplied with the food and goods from other side of Enguri... now they cannot afford the necessary products, which is of vital importance for them.” (Man, B.G. interviewed on 29.06.19, Kutaisi)*

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*“ the prices has immediately grow on everything in Gali, there is not enough products there. If the road will not be opened timely, people will be at danger and difficult situation. The population will have to buy the product at double price. “(Man, Z.T. interviewed on 29.06.19, Pakhulani).*

«

*“My father went to the market yesterday in Gali to get food [June 29] and said that everything is already very expensive... closure of the road for even one day can immediately affect everything.” (woman, K.D. interviewed on 29.06.19, Orsantia).*

## RECOMMENDATIONS: EARLY RESPONSES

To avoid and mitigate against these identified threats for the population, it is necessary to take immediate steps on the following directions:

- ***Participants of the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM)*** should initiate a dialogue and adopt measures ensuring immediate response to the most severe humanitarian problems, particularly paying immediate attention to enabling transportation of severely ill patients and allowing entrants to participate at the national exams.
- ***The Government of Georgia*** should immediately initiate proactive action and hold negotiations with the Abkhaz side to secure the opening of the crossing point, ensuring involvement of all international actors taking part in peace process in Georgia;
- ***The Government of Georgia*** should apply all possible ways to create alternate conditions of movement for the population from the Gali district with urgent health problems;
- ***The Government of Georgia*** should establish alternative conditions for all entrants from the Gali district who were unable to participate at the Unified National Exams due to the restriction of movement. The alternative date for exams should be set or special conditions created for youth to pass the exams remotely;
- ***Representative of political parties in Georgia*** – both the ruling party and the opposition parties, should refrain from any rhetoric and political statements about Abkhazia that might aggravate the political tension;
- ***All major international actors participating in the peace process in Georgia – UN, EU*** – should use existing political and financial leverage to mitigate the current situation and to assist people living in the Gali district;
- ***The Ombudsman's office*** is urged to monitor and respond to all facts of human rights violations occurred due to the closure of the crossing point at the Enguri River.
- ***Civil Society Organizations in Georgia*** to consolidate efforts and call upon all partners at local, national and international level to make steps to mitigate the difficulties encountered by the population due to closure of the crossing point and provide all possible support and assistance.



## GENDER RESPONSIVE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM REPORT (JUNE – AUGUST, 2019) SPECIAL FOCUS – PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN ABKHAZIA

### WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE ARE DOING:

Cultural-Humanitarian Fund “Sukhumi”, an NGO of IDP woman, is based in Kutaisi and for more than 20 years its work has focused on gender equality, women’s political empowerment and women’s involvement in peace building.

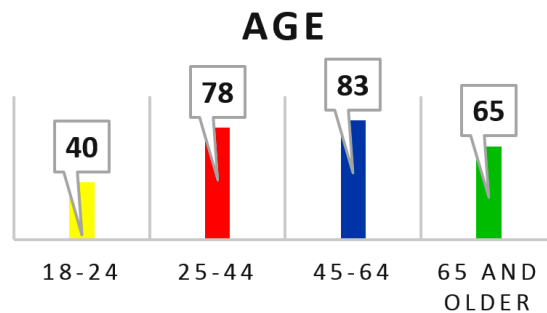
With the support of the Swedish Foundation Kvinna till Kvinna, Fund “Sukhumi” is implementing a small project - “Gender Responsive Early Warning System (GREWS) for Preventing Violence during the Presidential Elections in Abkhazia”. Monitoring was conducted using GREWS, a multidimensional and complex mechanism of conflict analysis, which involves collecting information concerning potential conflicts and crises, systematizing and analyzing this data, taking into consideration specific needs and interests of women and men in using existing information for timely warning against possible escalation of violence as well as developing an adequate response strategy, which in turn serves to create conditions for sustainable peace processes, dialogue and reconciliation.

**Methodology** – The monitoring was implemented using quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection while ensuring full confidentiality of the participants. ‘Gender indicators’ were adapted and considered in the data collection process in order to identify specific needs and interests of women and men (whose perceptions of security and threat are different. The target location of the monitoring was chosen villages and towns located along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL) with Abkhazia, and those highly concentrated by the IDPs, namely: Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Zugdidi, Khurcha/Koki, Orsantia, Ganmukhuri, Shamgona (Zugdidi Municipality), Pakhulani/Tskoushi (Tsalenjikha municipality).

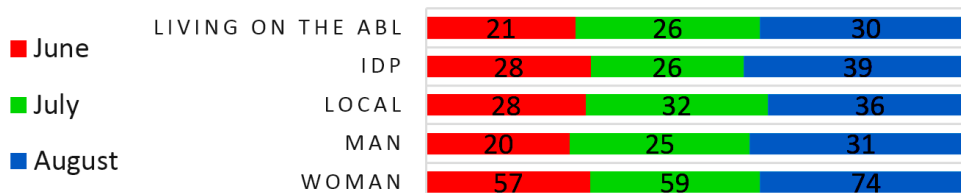
Other participants of the project implementation include representatives of the peace coalition founded by Fund “Sukhumi” and women’s initiative groups comprising representatives of women’s NGOs and community leaders, in particular, Fund of Women Entrepreneurs, Union of teachers “Education and Universe” (Kutaisi), Association “Imedi”, IDP Women’s Movement for Peace (Zugdidi), Fund “Sukhumi”’s Community Women’s Initiative Groups in Khurcha and Pakhulani (villages located along ABL with Abkhazia).

In the interests of safety, we cannot make the identities of the interviewees public.

Monitoring was implemented in three stages over June, July and August. 266 participants were surveyed overall (see **Chart #1 and Chart #2**).



### GENDER DATA

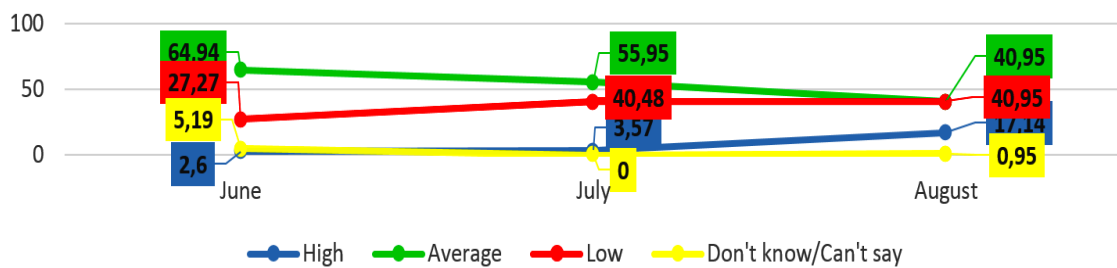


## FACTS AND MAIN TRENDS

The monitoring has identified the needs of Georgian population including the needs of Gali population, mainly ethnic Georgians, in terms of economy, food security, health and life security, family integrity, education and other humanitarian issues.

### *Influence of Abkhazian Elections on Georgian Society*

According to the majority (52,6%) of the respondents, the election process and its results will have “moderate” influence on the Georgian society. However, with the approach of the date of elections the monitoring detected increased tension in the society. There was also considerable increase in the number of respondents who considered that Abkhazian elections “have or will have high influence” on Georgian Society. In June only 2.6% considered that the influence was “high”, in August this number reached 17.14% (see **Chart #3**)



This is confirmed by the qualitative data as the respondents emphasized the influence of political processes in Abkhazia on the people connected to Gali district and on the families that had been separated and lived on both sides of the conflict line –



“...any kind of political changes are reflected on the Georgian side... one cannot avoid that” (A.G. woman, 45 y.o., from Zugdidi); “The influence is mainly felt by those who have part of their families in Gali, who are linked in some way with Abkhazia. Every change affects us” (N. B. Woman, 47 y.o., IDP, Ganmukhuri).

It became clear that with the approaching elections ethnic Georgians in Gali experienced more fear and heightened feeling of danger:



“In general, fear and stress prevail during elections... Everybody tries to stock up on groceries and medicines. They mainly fear that they could be left without food and try to stock up wheat flour in order to have at least bread” (E. K. woman, 51 y.o., from Zugdidi).



Enguri Checkpoint. Photo: by AFP



Pakhulani checkpoint. Photo: by Fund Sukhumi

Answering the question which field would be most influenced by the elections in Abkhazia, the priority was given to the following issues:



“prospects of conflict resolution”, “living conditions and security of ethnic Georgians in Gali district and other parts of Abkhazia” and “peace negotiations” (see **Chart #4**).

■ "Prospects for Conflict Resolution"

AUGUST

58,1

56,19

■ „Peace negotiations“

JULY

57,14

46,43

■ "Living conditions and security of ethnic Georgians in Gali district / other parts of Abkhazia"

JUNE

50,65

45,45

### Human Rights and Elections in Abkhazia

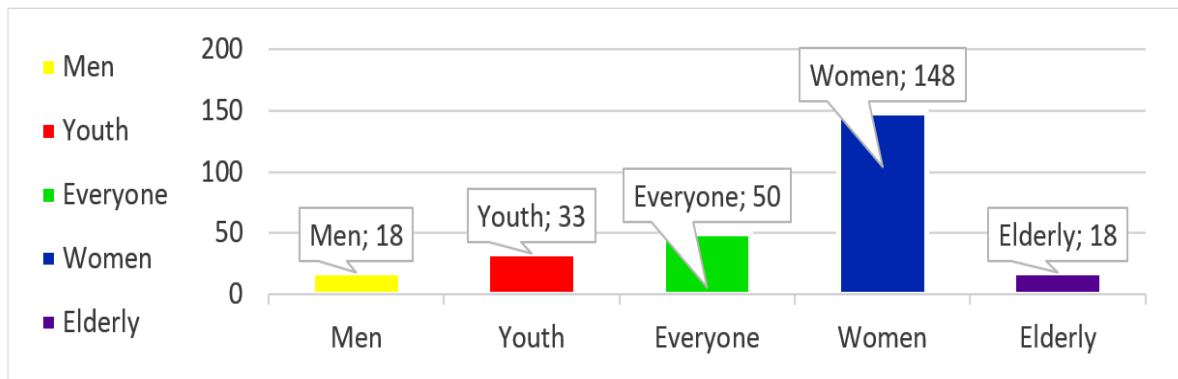
The monitoring has identified the close link between the political processes in the conflict zone and the situation with human rights. According to the respondents, the following are among the topical issues escalated by the political processes in Abkhazia: 53,01% - “increased feelings of insecurity”, 36,5% - “induces psychological problems (stress, depression)”, 30,4% - “increased alcoholism and drug addiction”, 30% - “rise in criminal rate”, 26,3% - “increased number of illegal detention of citizens”, 24,8% - “increased violence against women and domestic violence”.



Barbed wire fence dividing villages of Khurcha and Nabakevi, source – [www.timer.ge](http://www.timer.ge)



It is interesting to note that answering the question, whose security is most threatened, the majority of the respondents, in particular 55% responded: “women”. (See **Chart #5**).



The study identified an **increased trend towards domestic violence**. Grave social and political situation, constant tension and stress provoke use of alcohol and soft drugs in men, which in turn results in aggression towards women – *“Men are all on cannabis. They have degenerated. It’s in every yard and they bring it here too. They walk around stoned. Domestic violence is frequent. Such men then abuse women.”* (R. G. woman, 59 y.o., Ganmukhuri).

**Psychological problems (stress, depression)** are particularly severe in women under constant psychological pressure, who have to live in daily stress due to low level of security and increased domestic responsibilities. Lack of material resources and restricted access to healthcare services drive them to self-treatment thus endangering their health even more. *“All women who live there have neurosis. Believe me, I know. My cousin came across the line in a terrible condition, her whole body was hurting. We took her to a doctor and the diagnosis was neurosis. Then she took her medicines for others as well, she said others were in exactly the same condition and her medicines would help them too”* (-E. J. woman, 63 y.o., Orsantia). *“Not everyone [women] can go to a doctor, so they self-medicate”* (S. T. man, 36 y.o., Khurcha)



Village Nabakevi, photo: Fund «Sukhumi»

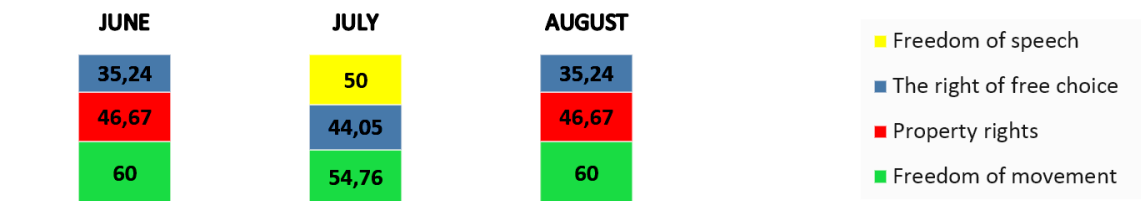


Cattle, village Kurcha (at the dividing line) by Fund Sukhumi



During the election period, in the last three months, in the opinion of the survey participants, several most serious violations were revealed: **psychological/verbal abuse** (e.g. humiliation, threats, etc) - 54,9%; **restriction of movement** – 66,1%; **detention/arrest** – 27,4%.

**High level of violation of civil and political rights** (in particular of Gali district population) was revealed. The three most salient problems named by the majority of participants were **restriction of the freedom of movement, restriction of property rights, restriction of electoral rights and freedom of speech**. These violations were estimated as serious by majority of the survey participants, 71%. (See **Chart #6**)



In terms of political rights, the survey participants named as one of the most burning issues the **right to participate in the elections**, which is restricted for majority of Gali population after 2014.<sup>5</sup> At present only 954 locals in Gali have the right to vote<sup>6</sup>, and this is only 0,75% of total registered voters in Abkhazia<sup>7</sup>. Consequently, through restriction of the right to vote, Georgian population of Gali district are deprived of their right to express their position towards Abkhazia's future policies as well as of the possibility to use passive electoral rights and be elected to the Parliament, as the President or to local self-government bodies. Majority of respondents, 59,4%, answered that Gali population should be given the right to participate in elections.

People's **indignation caused by the restriction of property rights** came through in individual interviews: *"Our own houses are not officially ours. Even that right is taken away from us, to make our property legally our own."* (T. K. 66 y.o., Gali)

**A dangerous tendency of arbitrary detentions on the 'border'** was also identified. This often occurs when locals look for their missing livestock close to the 'border'. As a result, they can no longer allow themselves to keep kettle thus depriving their families of the main source of livelihood - *"They are looking for an excuse ... If they just see you near the "border", they can find some fault, for no reason and accuse you of trying to cross the border. For example, this fact happened on July 20. A boy was looking for cattle near the border and he was*

<sup>5</sup> "Sokhumi Striking Off Over 22,000 'Illegal Passport' Holders from Voters List", Civil Georgia, Tbilisi, 1 Jul. 2014, available at <https://old.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27431>

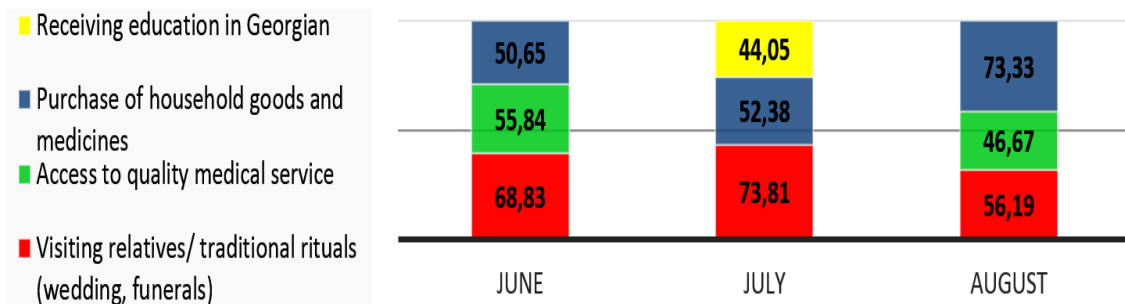
<sup>6</sup> "Most of the turnout for the de facto presidential election is in the Gali district", Livepress.ge 25.08.2019, available in Georgian at <https://www.livepress.ge/ka/akhali-ambebi/article/30253-de-faqto-prezidentis-archevnebe-yvelaze-meti-aqtivoba-galis-raionshia.html>

<sup>7</sup> "Presidential elections in Abkhazia – round two", Jamnews, Sukhum, 09.09.2019, available at <https://jam-news.net/presidential-elections-in-abkhazia-round-two/>

*caught. They told him he was stealing across the border and arrested him. The boy says he has the documents, if he wanted to cross, he would. He asks them why they are arresting him, but nobody listens. Then they had someone call from Sukhumi and he was released. That happens all the time". (N. B. woman, 67 y.o., Khurcha)*

**80.95%** of the respondents mentioned restrictions of the freedom of movement and considerable decrease in movement in the pre-election period. They link this problem with the following factors: political tension connected with presidential elections in Abkhazia 79,3%; problems with documents - 58%; conflict between the sides and low level of trust – 56,8%; personal security/ fear of arrest – 42,5%.

The survey participants identified four of the most serious problems caused by the restriction of movement during the three months: “Difficulties with purchasing household goods and medicines”, “Restriction of entrants’(school-leavers) right to receive education in Georgia”, “Visiting relatives/traditional rituals” and “Access to quality medical services” (see **Chart #7**).



Problems caused by **restriction of movement** came to the fore in particular on June 27 when Sukhumi authorities imposed closure of the checkpoint without prior warning. This action endangered **health and lives** of a great number of people whose road to hospitals and clinics for emergency operations and treatment was blocked. It also threatened the right to education for entrants from Gali as university National Examinations had already started. A large number of them waited at the checkpoint for the permission to cross from morning till night. Some managed to cross after a ‘monetary transaction’ with ‘border guards’.<sup>8</sup> Some school-leavers managed to find roundabout ways. A case of a school-leaver who was seriously injured while climbing over a barbed-wire fence and needed surgery became widely known.<sup>9</sup> Closure of the checkpoint divided many families and threatened their personal security and **family integrity**. There were many cases when members of a family ended up on different sides of the dividing line. Restriction of movement caused a serious threat for the elderly who were left without caregivers, had no income or source of subsistence apart from food

<sup>8</sup> “Movement across the Enguri bridge is allowed for a sum”, 01.07.19 <https://www.livepress.ge/ka/akhali-ambebi/article/29639-enguris-khidze-gadaadgileba-thankhis-sanacvlod-thavisufalia.html>

<sup>9</sup> “A School-leaver from Gali who was injured while crossing the occupation line takes an exam”, LivePress, 02.07.19, <https://www.livepress.ge/ka/akhali-ambebi/article/29673-galeli-abiturienti-romelic-saokupacio-khazis-kvethisas-dashavda-gamocdaze-qavida.html>

and medicines delivered by their family members - *“I have connected with that part [the Gali district] by my parents as they live in the village. I usually go to visit them. Blocking the road, takes away any possibility for such elderly people to live there. My parents are there and I do not know if they have food to eat. There have nothing in the garden, enough to eat. (T. B. woman, 34 y.o., Shamgona).*

Problems with movement considerably reduce **economic security**. Closing the Enguri bridge and restricting the freedom of movement had a traumatic effect on the people who are involved in seasonal work and/or support themselves and their families by trade along the dividing line. This problem turned into a heavy burden for women especially after July 2019, when ethnic Georgian men aged 18 to 60 were banned from crossing the dividing line –



Enguri checkpoint - Dominik K. Cagara Archive

*“Gali market is stocked with products from here. Our poor women carry heavy loads with their hands or on their backs. A woman sells things next to me in Zugdidi and on market days she goes to Gali. She is a young woman but she is so bent over, she looks like 70year-old” (M. T. woman, 43 y.o., Zugdidi).*

Restriction of movement is reflected on **food security** as well, as it limits the chances for Gali population to buy foodstuffs at reasonable prices and creates additional financial problems for people who suffer heavy social and economic conditions as it is. *“Blocking roads is a stress for Gali district. We cross to Zugdidi at least twice a week to buy food and necessary household products. When we can’t go, for example, we have to pay in Gali 4 Lari for tomatoes that cost 2 Lari in Zugdidi. Foodstuffs from Russia are also very expensive. Women have to carry all the products and everything falls on women’s shoulders” (Z. T. – woman, 55 y.o., Gali inhabitant).*

**Problems of communication with so called ‘border guards’ and arbitrary selective restrictions of movement** from their side are frequent at the checkpoint, even when a person follows every regulation established by Sukhumi authorities and has all the necessary documents. The respondents claimed that whether a person was allowed to pass or not depended on the will of ‘border guards’. There were frequent cases when the documents of a person allowed to pass by one group of ‘border guards’ where not found sufficient by another group. As a result, people have to wait for a long time at the checkpoint or go back. 28% of the participant refer to this problem. *“I’ve heard of cases when all the documents were in order, but they still made up something and didn’t let them cross. It often depends on*

*the person who is guarding the border. In a word, they will let you pass if they want to, if not, they'll find something and stop you. Everyone who goes across knows this and they always feel apprehensive whatever document they have.” (I. N. woman, 46 y.o., Shamgona).*

Restriction of movement and detention is a particularly painful experience for women. For one thing, they often travel with children and also, if a woman fails to get home in time, she might have additional problems - *“If a man is detained, he'll stay somewhere and wait. Even if he has to wait in the street, it's not a big deal. But women are in a terrible state. There is a place to stay there which is quite tidy, but imagine how you feel when you are detained and you have to wait no one knows how long. And if you are with children, it's absolutely dreadful.” (D. K. man, 57 y.o., Ganmukhuri)*

Unrestricted movement for the population is made particularly difficult by the fact that, according to the participants' claim, **obtaining necessary documents is becoming increasingly hard** - *“It takes so much effort to get the documents. They don't give them easily and may even refuse altogether... We have no rights at all. I got the documents two years ago. Now everything is in Tkvarcheli and we went there. There were a few of us. We hired a car, got there; there were so many people, we couldn't even get in. It was an absolute chaos, no one to give an adequate answer... We waited in the line the whole day. At five they told us the working hours were over and closed the doors in our face as if we were dogs”. (E. S. – woman, 62 y.o., IDP, Kutaisi).*

3 months of media monitoring has revealed that the influence of media on the political situation in Abkhazia is very weak as the interest of media in Abkhazian issues is practically non-existent. There were no cases of media coverage that might have provoked aggression and confrontation. Media was relatively more interested with the issue of closure of Enguri bridge before the national examinations, but this interest subsided after the issue was settled. With the approaching elections it was observed that the interest towards political processes in Abkhazia increased to a certain degree.

### **Importance of timely response to the existing problems**

**Permanent danger of closing the checkpoint on the administrative border and restricting the freedom of movement** has an extremely negative impact on people's lives and their security. This situation makes them feel extremely vulnerable and stressed. It endangers physical and economic security of the population, grossly violates fundamental human rights and leads to impoverishment of vulnerable population, psycho-emotional stress, and desperation. As a result, it increases dissatisfaction of the population and aggression, which in the long run has a negative impact on peaceful conflict resolution, Georgian-Abkhazian relations and confidence building, and creates a real threat of physical confrontation.

### **Early Warning Response Strategies and Recommendations**

#### **For International Organizations:**

- To use political and economic leverage to influence Abkhazian de facto government to protect principles of international humanitarian law and to prevent them from violating fundamental human rights of ethnic Georgians who live and travel on the territory controlled by them;
- To implement strict monitoring and assessment of protection of human rights, humanitarian and gender needs on the administrative border. All the cases of violation of human rights should receive wide response and they should be included in the agenda of Geneva talks;
- To make efforts in order to reach an agreement with the Abkhazian side that the closure of the checkpoint and restrictions of movement are made at previously agreed times and with allowance for needs of population;
- The participants of Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism and their partners (Ombudsman, relevant state bodies, international organizations, EU monitoring mission, Georgian and Abkhazian human rights organizations) should achieve an agreement with the Abkhazian side to elaborate the unified standards and norms for movement of population and to implement strict monitoring in order to eliminate the practices of selective/arbitrary restriction of free movement;
- With the help of international actors, Geneva talks should expand its agenda beyond security and political issues and should be oriented to protection of human rights;

- In cooperation with Georgian and Abkhazian human rights protection organizations priority should be given to projects that are aimed at empowerment and psycho-social rehabilitation of the population living adjacent to the dividing line, studying the degree of gender-specific security, protecting their rights and advocating solution of their problems.

#### **For Government Bodies:**

- For political parties in Georgia, including the ruling party and opposition: all political parties should realize their responsibility in their political narratives and decision-making and should abstain from decisions that could aggravate the hard living condition of the population living on both sides of the dividing line;
- Ombudsman's Office (involvement of the Abkhazian Ombudsman is also desirable) should be involved in documenting, studying and responding to the facts of violation of human rights by restricting free movement on the checkpoint

#### **For Representatives of Civil Society**

- To consolidate their efforts and call upon their partner organizations at the local, national and international levels to take all necessary measures in order to mitigate the difficulties experienced by the population living on the both sides of the administrative border and to provide all types of support and assistance to them.



## STUDY ON THE ATTITUDE OF THE IDPS AND CONFLICT AFFECTED POPULATION TO THE ISSUES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In October-November 2019, the monitors of Fund “Sukhumi” conducted a study of the population opinion on issues of domestic violence against women in the IDP settlements and villages located near the dividing line of Abkhazia.

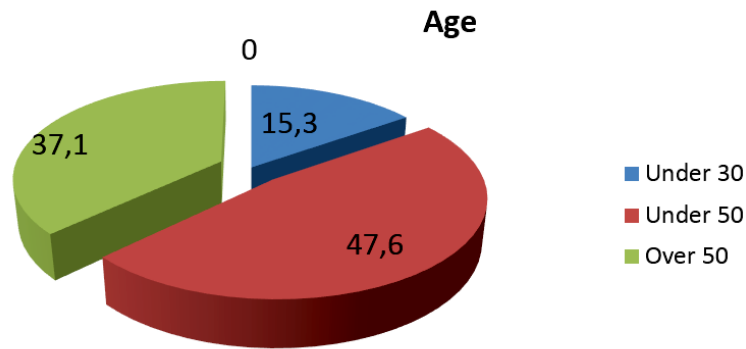
The necessity of additional data collection on the given issue was caused by the repeated statements of respondents that any kind of political tension, difficult social and economic background in Abkhazia or in Georgia proper, has a huge and severe impact on women’s condition in the family, often expressed in physical, psychological or other types of violence against them.

**The monitoring was aimed** to study the scale and topicality of the issue of domestic violence against women for the conflict affected population and IDPs; to identify the factors and reasons causing the violence and most common types of violence in the target regions; to study the awareness of population about existing protection services for victims of violence and access to them; to develop evidence-based recommendations and efficient strategies for the prevention and response to violence against women.

**Methodology-** the data have been collected through the quantitative and qualitative methods - individual face-to-face interviews and by the filling in the questionnaires. 208 people have been surveyed , out of which 152 were women and 56 - men. 120 women and 50 men have been surveyed through the questionnaire, while 32 women and 6 men have been individually interviewed. Kutaisi, Tskaltubo, Khurcha/Koki, Orsantia, Ganmukhuri,

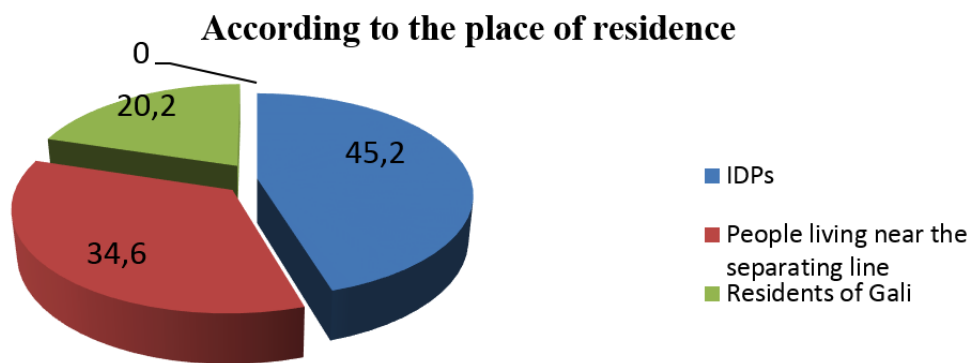


Shamgona, Kakhati (Zugdidi Municipality) and Pakhulani/Tskoushi (Tsalenjikha Municipality) have been selected as locations for the data collection. Socio-demographic characteristics of the surveyed people are the following: **Age of the participants (Diagram #1):**



#### **Social status of the participants**

The study involved 94 IDPs, 72 conflict affected population living in the villages located along the ABL in Georgia proper and 42 are residents of Gali region, who systematically commuting along the dividing line. (see Diagram #2).



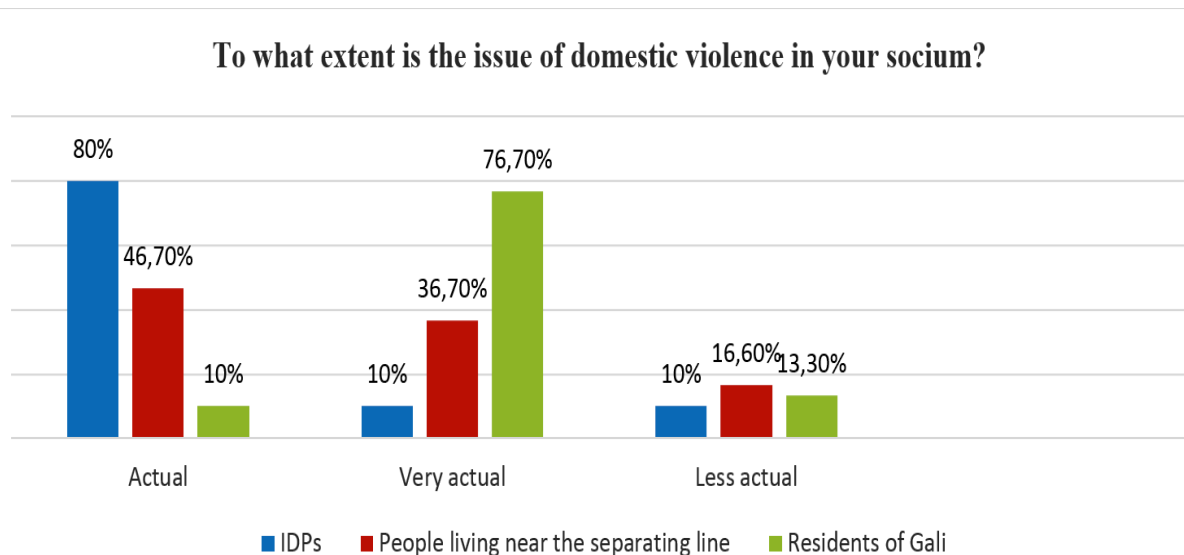
## MAIN FINDINGS

### Scale of the domestic violence and topicality of the issue

The study shows that domestic violence remains to be a complex and tabooed issue for the conflict affected population and the IDPs, especially for those living on both sides of the conflict line. Although the majority of the surveyed (85%) admits the seriousness and topicality of the issue and speaks out about a large scale of the facts of violence, real statistics of violence remains beyond the official data. The problem is hidden in a family and remains to be the personal tragedy of a woman.

The issue of violence is especially acute for the population living on the territory of Gali district. Their majority (86.7%) considers the problem to be either “very actual” or just “actual”. The problem is either “very actual” or “actual” for 90% of the IDPs and for 83.4% of the population living in the villages near to the “dividing line” in Georgia proper, (see Diagram #3). Domestic violence is the most common problem for 96% of women and 82.8% of men.

Diagram #3



The acuteness of the issue is proved by the qualitative data as well. The majority of respondents living in the villages near the “dividing line” think that violence is a part of their daily life, but it cannot be disclosed or spoken out in their reality. They have noted that domestic violence cases make the life of the population, who are deprived their basic rights, especially women, even worse and unbearable.



*„Unfortunately, domestic violence is widespread. When a third party is involved and asked to resolve the problem, it means that there is a total crisis. A Georgian woman can bear problems until the last minute and only calls for help if there is no way out” (G.D., woman, 54 y.o. from Koki);*



*“No woman will tell you that she is a victim of violence. Nobody speaks about this issue in the village, but everybody is aware of everything. Facts of violence happen frequently, but none of the men or women will disclose them.” (Kh.G., a woman of 61 from Shamgona)*



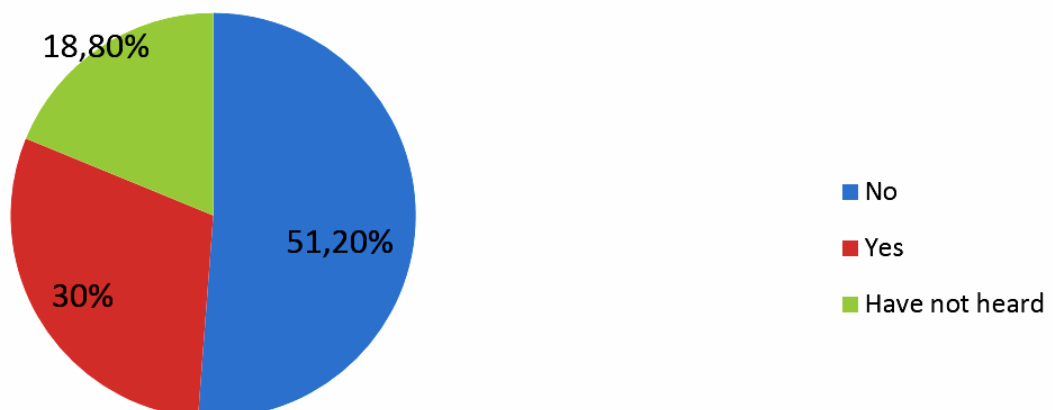
*“The facts of violence are common in the villages of Gali district if we consider the fact that there is total ruthlessness around us. There are few men in the villages and most of them are addicted to alcohol. They become drunk and start swearing at their wives. Consequently, there are many conflicts.” (M.D., a woman of 58 from Gali)*

51.2% of the respondents say that neither they and nor their acquaintances have been the victims of domestic violence. Only 30% state that there have been cases of violence in their life or life of their relatives (see Diagram #4). The data confirm the fact that society and women are not ready to speak openly about the problem and especially about a personal experience of violence. It is generally considered that violence against women is not an active point of discussion in a society where traditional and stereotypic gender roles are deeply rooted and awareness of the society of gender equality is not high.

However, the very fact that the majority of respondents acknowledge the severity of the problem of domestic violence and regard it as a pressing issue for their own community is a step forward and creates a real prerequisite for societal irreconcilability against this social evil irreconcilability of the social evil.

**Diagram #4**

**Have you or your acquaintance (relative, colleague, friend) ever been victims of any kinds of domestic violence?**



## Forms and causes of domestic violence

While talking about domestic violence, conflict affected population and IDPs often pointed out its **causes and affecting factors** like everyday stress they have to live with frequent closure of the “check-points, alcohol and drug addiction. In addition, respondents stressed on the difficulties with freedom of movement, which in turn creates economic, psychological and other problems, which in most cases fall on a woman’s shoulders;

«

*“Men and women have changed a lot... Love and respect has been lost. The only concern of people is just to live a daily life and it is just impossible to do without violence in this country. (T.I., a woman of 64 from Ganmukhuri, goes to Gali)*

«

*“There is domestic violence everywhere but the situation is more complex on the other side of Enguri... Condition of the women becomes more critical. Nobody mentions physical work but is not it violence when a woman performs the work to be done by a man? Whom should a woman ask for help?”(I.P., a woman of 71 from Pakhulani, crosses the border)*

«

*“After the closure of check-points near the conflict line, life in the village came to the standstill and the men often become drunk. Violence has become so common that it even surprises me what has these people made so mad? ...Conflict arises even in the families which have been considered to be examples of good family for thirty years. Nowadays, both men and women have a weak nervous systems.” (Q.E., a woman of 65 from Khurcha)*

«

*“I live in Nabakevi and often cross the border...My relative often became drunk and since his wife could not find the way out spilt the jug full of wine. He got mad and bit his wife with a rubber hose. Everyone in the village spoke about this case.” (M.K., a woman of 56 living in Nabakevi)*

«

*“Young people must become engaged in some activities. Marijuana has driven mad the youngsters. It is easily accessible in the village. It causes impotence and consequently, it makes problems in families.”(E.T., 68 year-old resident of Gali)*

While conducting the study, we tried to study the most typical forms of domestic violence, possible reasons causing it and its results. Consequently, the following three main reasons have been identified: “unemployment and financial problems in families” (64.12%); “mentality, stereotypes and usual practice of the domestic violence in the family”, “alcohol and drug addiction” (51.7%). (see the detailed Table #1).

Table #1

<i>What do you consider to be the main cause of domestic violence (determine 3 main causes)</i>	Total %
Unemployment and financial problems in the families	64.12
Drug/alcohol addiction	51.76
Mentality, stereotypes and traditions of some families	51.76
Low awareness of the society of its rights and mechanisms of protection	44.12
Poor living conditions	32.94
Unstable political situation of the country	24.71
Interference of relatives and neighbors in lives of others	15.88
Any kind of tension near the “separating line”	11.18

The findings of the qualitative data correspond to the quantitative data.

«

*“According to our traditions, a woman is a slave of a man. The one who dares to oppose is beaten. Our society has not understood that a woman is not a slave and object which is the main cause of violence”. (L.D., a woman of 37 from Kutaisi.)*

«

*“We were brought up in a different way, with different thinking. Nothing can change thinking of a man who has always been told that he is a master and a woman must be his slave. A month or even a year is not enough for it. Society needs to be informed in a right way but nobody does it...”(M.G., a woman of 54 from Kutaisi.)*

«

*“If you arrive in Gali, you will find yourself in the past century. Nothing has changed. People are aware neither of laws nor of the women`s rights. Conflicts arise in every second family but nobody admits it. People do not just shout at each other. All women have been beaten once or twice but the next day as if nothing had happened.”(M.B., a woman of 62, Orsantia, lives in Gali)*



*“Unemployment is a cause of everything. When you cannot even buy sweets for your children, how can you be in a good mood? Even one small spark is enough to make conflict.”- (About 8 respondents have the same opinion.)*

According to 35.9% of the surveyed population, **the most common forms of violence** are physical as well as a psychological one, while 25.3% consider it to be economic violence. As for the form of sexual violence, it has been mentioned only by 3% of the respondents. It proves that this form of violence is still tabooed and embarrassing for the respondents. To some extent, it is affected by the lack of recognition of the issue and low awareness of it and customs of the society which determine different behavior for men and women. According to them, a man can be aggressive, while a woman must be obedient, patient and concessive.



*“In the case of physical violence, one should consider that the woman has been the victim of all kinds of violence, even the sexual one. But only physical violence is discussed publicly. It is a fault of the stereotypes of our society. Years are necessary to break this circle and admit the problem.”(M.G., a woman of 32, Kutaisi).*



*“Nobody speaks out publicly about violence. It is easier to speak about psychological violence but nobody will dare to speak about the sexual one. There is no point in talking about this issue. What will change? Nothing... I would rather remain this problem in the family than make it public. This is my opinion.”(M.K., a woman of 38, Pakhulani)*

Supposedly, avoidance to speak publicly about violence is determined by the factor that the part of our society is still loyal to the facts of violence against women. Sometimes, while talking to the respondents, some of them do not even blame the husband or try to find some explanation justification to the facts of violence against a woman. Some of them even urge women to be patient and compromise for the sake of the family.



*“What can men do? They are unemployed. Wives are demanding and complaining all the time. If you tell a man that he is useless, it will drive him mad and people call it violence. Women must be more reserved and patient.”(V.G., a woman of 53, Khurcha) (5 people have the same opinion).*



*“Psychological violence between husband and wife is very common. But in such case, it is not only the fault of men. Women often demand much from men and when they are unable to handle the problem, respond to it by violence.”(V.P., a woman of 43, Orsantia)*



*“Who arrives in Gali knows that all forms of violence are widespread in the families of the nearby villages. I am a woman of 67 and I have also been a victim of violence but have not disclosed it and have not broken up the family.” (D.G., a woman of 71, Orsantia, crosses the border of Gali)*



*“Young people do not even bear swearing from their husbands now. On the one hand, it has a positive side and every woman must be aware of her rights. But on the other side, there are so many cases of marital breakdown. Nowadays everything is considered to be violence. If you do not compromise, it will lead to the family breakdown.” (A.K., a woman of 49, Ganmukhuri).*

Some respondents (77%) think that the victim of domestic violence is wife, elderly people (11.2%), child (8%), husband (3%) and only 0.6% consider it to be a disabled person. It is noteworthy that 77% of the inquired consider an abuser to be husband, daughter-in-law -7%, mother-in-law, wife and mother -4.7%, father -1.8%.

### **Response to the facts of violence**

The extent to which people share information about the facts of violence against them, as well as whom they ask for help, have been explored within the framework of in the given study.

According to the study, the majority (48.2%) of respondents do not speak out openly about the facts of violence, while 40.6% give an affirmative answer. 16.5% mainly share these facts with relatives, parents and people from close circle. 13.5% have asked the police for help and 9.41% applied to the NGO. The research showed that only a small part of the population shares the experience of domestic violence and they prefer to do it in a small circle of people.

In private talks, most of the respondents pointed out that women who are the victims of violence avoid asking the police for help as consider it to be useless - *“There have been conflicts and cases of violence in my family but instead of police, I have asked my parents for help and they helped me. Now I have a quiet, stable life. The police will neither settle your problems nor reconcile with your husband. So, there is no sense of calling the police.” (S. J., a woman of 39, Tskaltubo)*



Some people think that calling the police will complicate the situation – *“You can ask for help a person close to you or a parent but not others. Nobody wants to contact the police as it may worsen the situation. An abuser becomes more aggressive and it puts a woman in a difficult situation.”*(S.P., a woman of 52, Pakhulani)

Another factor why people prefer not to call the police is the society mentality. Nowadays it is still considered that domestic violence is a problem which must be discussed in a family and not publicly – *“The victim does not call the police because of the mentality and traditional approach. The condition of women on the other side of Enguri is especially difficult. People living in the villages of Gali district have no access to any kind of information. Nobody takes care of them. There is violence in every family and women try to hide it.”*-(Z.L., a woman of 61, Shamgona)

«

*“Nobody wants to contact the police. It does not look good in the village when the police comes to your house. Everybody avoids such relationship. It is better to divorce and leave silently.”*(R.K., a woman of 50, Pakhulani)

In private talks, the respondents noted that the initiative of a third party to help the victim is negatively perceived by the victims. Therefore, it prevents people from informing the police about the problems of others – *“There was one case in the village last year. A man tried to chook his wife and a neighbor called the police. Now this woman does not talk to any neighbor. You may try to help but you might be told to mind your own business.”* (Z.G. woman of 61, from Orsantia)

It is noteworthy that some respondents have emphasized the role and importance of a psychologist in resolving the problems in a family. Though, at the same time, they have noted that the society and women are not ready to discuss their problems with a psychologist – *“A psychologist and a lawyer of the Fund “Sukhumi” come to us....As I was having a hard time in the family, I needed a psychologist. With her help, I could have improved the situation. One cannot mention a psychologist to the women. They are ashamed and think that do not need such help...”*(M.B., a woman of 61, Khurcha).

The attitude mentioned above demonstrates the necessity to work with the society, raise awareness of the women who are the victims of violence and inform them on this issue. Certainly, anyone can become a victim of violence. It does not matter whether s/he is a person with higher education or a high level of awareness. But the extent to which the violence can be detected, responded to and eliminated, largely depends on a person’s awareness. Due to the lack of information, many women do not know that they are victims of violence, or, if they do, they are not aware of the available protection mechanisms. Besides, they do not know whom they can ask for help. In the study, 60.5% of the respondents note that they have heard about the Law of Georgia on “Elimination of Domestic Violence, Protection and Support of Victims of Domestic Violence”, but are not aware of its content. 24.7% of the respondents have not heard about the law and only 15.9% are aware of it and its content. Such a low awareness and lack of information about one’s rights is one of the risk factors of violence. Certainly, it promotes passivity of women to resist violence against them.

## Awareness of population on protection mechanisms and support services

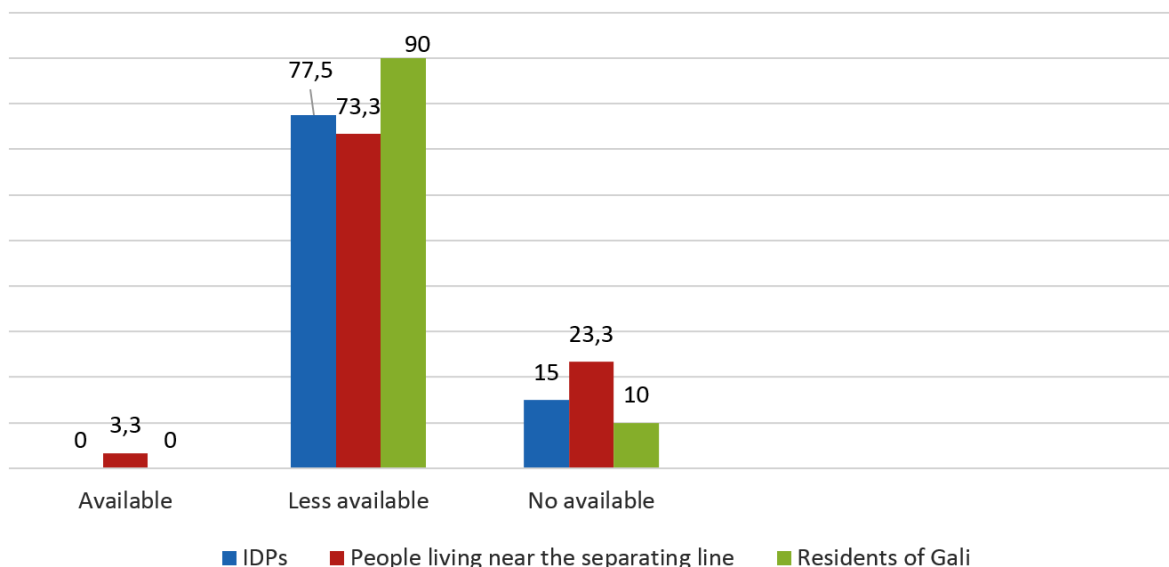
Based on the information received during the study, only 32.4% of the respondents have information on the existing services of victim support, while 66.5% note that is aware of only some of them. It should be pointed out that, 60.6% of the surveyed are informed about the NGOs working the issue of violence. It is explained by the active work of the NGOs and direct contact with the population. 44.7% of the respondents have information on the shelters run by the government and non-governmental organizations, 12.9% on the crisis centers and 11.2% on the hotline. The population is less informed about the victim support municipal services and programs (3.5%) and Legal Aid Service offered by the state (2.3%).

For 61.8% of the respondents, the main source of information is television. Some of them (27%) get information from the advertisements in public places and some (8.8%) at the meetings with NGOs. Only 3% note that has received the information on the victim support service from the government authorities.

It is noteworthy that, in spite of having information on the support services, **access to them** is quite a big problem. 78% think that existing services are less available for the population, while according to 17%, they are not available. Only 4% think that they are available. In this case, the distribution of answers according to the respondents' location is interesting. For example, the problem of service access is especially acute for the population of Gali district or villages near the "dividing line", rather than for the population of big cities in Georgia proper (see Diagram #5).

**Diagram #5**

To your mind, to what extent are the existing services available for the population of your city (municipality, village)?



The above mentioned is proved by the qualitative data:

«

*“The services might be available for the women living in Tbilisi, Kutaisi or Zugdidi. But, in peripheries stereotypes are deeply-rooted and people are not open to such things. It is hard to believe that a woman from Pakhulani will go to a psychologist in Zugdidi.” (S.P., a woman of 65, Pakhulani)*

«

*“The services are less available for the population living in villages and they have to bear such condition. They have neither the appropriate information nor courage to raise voice against it.”(S.K., a woman of 49, Khurcha)*

«

*“The support programs are mainly available to the city dwellers, as in many cases people do not have access to the internet. Besides, no measures are carried out to raise awareness of these people.”(M.V., a woman of 32, Ganmukhuri)*

The respondents have identified three different factors which impede access to support services. 42.4% have emphasized *distrust*, while 41.2% think that, these services do not respond to the needs of the victim and according to some respondents (40%), the lack of information prevents a victim/an alleged victim to apply for the relevant service. Based on the opinion of some respondents (37.6%), territorial distance and the lack of finances (29.5%) greatly affect the access.

«

*“I know there is a shelter, but this information doesn't tell me anything. I don't know how victim could get into a shelter, how long she could spend there... who would care about children's safety at this moment. If such details are not known by the woman, she will never take the risk and make the decision. To help someone, all information and details must be clear” (L.S. woman, 47, Orsantia).*

«

*“It would be great if there were information sheets providing all details about support services. For example, I did not know if the Legal Aid Bureau provides assistance to victims of violence. Can't all information be just put together, to provide more details and explanations to people” (M. B., woman 37, Pakhulani).*

Some respondents think that, to a certain extent, the insufficient spread of information on the available supporting services is determined by the lack of necessary resources. All the beneficiaries cannot be provided with the service and the information on it is not spread on purpose – *“Sometimes I think that they don’t want information to be spread. For instance, if lots of people get information about the municipal assistance program, many people will apply and ask for help. So, it is inconvenient for them. Fewer people get the information, lesser will ask for help, thus only few will get the assistance.”*(Z.K., a man of 44, Orsantia)

When asked to identify the most important services and necessary improvements, the majority of respondents (44.7%) emphasized the necessity to provide the population with more information on the available support services. While 41.18% prefer the implementation of special psychological and rehabilitation programs, for victims as well as for abusers. Some of the respondents have also emphasized on importance of breaking the stereotypes, raising the awareness of the population, increase the coverage of the services on a larger area, strengthening and enhancing the municipality role (see Table#2).

**Table #2**

<b>Which is the most important service of support?</b>	<b>%</b>
Provision of population with more information about services available to victims (distribution of information leaflets in public places and schools; TV and radio ads; advertisements in municipalities, meetings, etc.);	<b>44.7</b>
Special psychological and rehabilitation programs for victims and work with an abuser;	<b>41,18</b>
Work with the society to change the attitude to the victims (breaking stereotypes and stigmas);	<b>31.18</b>
To increase the number of the supporting institutions according to regions;	<b>24.12</b>
To strengthen the municipality role in combat against violence;	<b>22,35</b>
To implement mandatory practice of «Assessment of Needs of Women and Girls»(needs of victims/alleged victims, especially living near the separation line).	<b>22.76</b>
In-depth study of the causes of violent behavior.	<b>17.06</b>

## CONSEQUENCES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ON VICTIMS

The study has revealed the extent to which domestic violence has an impact on the psychosocial condition of the victim. It often leads to the deterioration of a woman's health and in many cases to a fatal result. Some respondents have noted that there are many cases when a woman is killed by the partner because of domestic violence or when depressed and stressed women try to commit suicide. This proved by the recent tragical accident in village Shamgona (close to ABL), when a young woman of 32, mother of three children committed suicide<sup>10</sup>. According to the information spread by the relatives, she was a victim of domestic violence and used to be systematically beaten by her husband. Though, neither the victim nor the family members had called the police. Once again, it emphasizes the importance of violence disclosure and victim assistance - *"Violence and conflict may have a fatal result and a worse thing might happen in a family. Children may be left without parents. This is a serious threat. There are a lot of such facts around and the state must deal with the issue with utmost attention" .-(P.G., a woman of 57, Orsantia)*

According to the respondents, violence worsens the psychological state of victim, affects the health condition and causes the loss of faculty. The victim also loses the initiative, becomes dependent on others, stays at home and has less contact with people:



*"In case of no response to violence, we will get emotionally disrupted women with poor health who are unable to realize their potential. Therefore, everything including democracy will be doubtful."-(P.D., a woman of 58, Pakhulani)*

Violence suppresses a person's will, abuses his inviolability, dignity and freedom. All these factors, expressed together or separately, are a waste of important human resources and impede the development of a society and a country in general:



*"Certainly, if we enslave women, make them objects of violence, do not protect them, it means that we fail to establish a state. No matter how hard we try. The society full of enslaved and righteous women does not have future."- (Ts. P., a woman of 43, Shamgona)*

<sup>10</sup> "Akhali taoba", December 29, 2019 „In connection to Eka Mikavas's suicide case, her husband Bakur Sordia was arrested", available at <https://akhalitaoba.ge/2019/12/eka-miqavas-thvithmkvlelobis-saqmeze-misi-meughle-bakur-sordia-daakaves/>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study demonstrates that, in spite of the fact, that the majority of respondents admit a large scale of violence in their society, it is unacceptable to disclose the facts of and speak out about it. Domestic violence is still tabooed for many people and must be discussed only with family members. Consequently, measures on raising awareness of each target group community and especially the population living in Gali district and near the “dividing line”, must be carried out more actively. It is necessary to encourage active and open talks on the issue of domestic violence and be irreconcilable with it.

➤ *It is necessary to hold active campaigns on raising awareness with participation of famous people/celebrities, self-government representatives, school directors, teachers, people respected in the communities who must express their critical attitude and intolerance to the norms and stereotypes established in the society, condemn domestic violence and encourage positive changes;*

➤ *The government needs to develop a special awareness-raising strategy for the residents of the conflict zone, parents, teachers and law enforcing authorities;*

The study has emphasized that the **causes of domestic violence are interconnected**. Unstable and unpredictable environment, problems of movement make a negative impact on the daily life of the population living on both sides of Enguri, and endanger economic and food stability of the population. It considerably increases tension, stress and aggression in the population and promotes alcohol and drug consumption by men. Consequently, it often leads to domestic conflicts and violence. Besides, social and cultural factors, unequal gender roles, unemployment, are among the factors effecting violence.

➤ *To work out relevant and efficient mechanisms of prevention, it is important to carry out an in-depth study of the causes and consequences of violence against women and damage to victims in these locations;*

➤ *It is important to create a special institution for analysis of femicide cases, which will be responsible to work on improvement of violence victim prevention activities and identify any failure of protective measures to the victims of femicide risk-group;*

➤ *It is necessary to collect data and conduct in-depth analysis of suicide cases among women, victims of violence especially in target locations of the study, to plan a better effective response strategy.*

The study has demonstrated the lack of awareness of the population of target regions, especially Gali region and villages near the “dividing line” (Georgia proper) on violence against women, protection mechanisms against violence and available support services. The above mentioned greatly affects applying for help. Besides, according to the study, only a small part of population calls the police in case of domestic violence or applies to the available services. On the one hand, the fact that not many people apply for help is caused by the lack of information on whom, where and when can a victim apply. On the other hand, it is affected by a high level of distrust to the existing services. Women do not believe that the state will consider their needs and it will improve a situation. Therefore, it shows the necessity of better services, which will be more available and support women to speak out openly about their experience of violence and get the appropriate help.

- *Spread of information on the available services of victim support by conducting a special mobile information campaign, distribution of information booklets and brochures to population;*
  
- *Implementation of psychological and rehabilitation programs, team building and work with conflict affected and IDP women and girls regularly (at least once in three months), especially on both sides of the conflict line and in the IDP settlements;*
  
- *Start work with abusers/potential abusers on «management of violent behavior».*





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