



## **Information Documents**

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**Consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia  
(April – September 2021)**

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## Introduction

1. At their 1080th meeting on 24 and 26 March 2010, the Ministers' Deputies took the following decision: "The Deputies, restating the previous decisions of the Committee of Ministers, invited the Secretary General to prepare his consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia based on his outline and taking into account the comments made during the present meeting".

2. It is recalled that the objective of the report is to take stock of the situation in Georgia following the August 2008 conflict, to report on the related activities of the Council of Europe and to propose further Council of Europe action. The report is composed of four parts:

- update on major developments in the period under review;
- assessment of statutory obligations and commitments related to the conflict and its consequences;
- the human rights situation in the areas affected by the conflict; and
- current Council of Europe activities aimed at addressing the consequences of the conflict, their follow-up and proposals for future action.

3. This 24th consolidated report covers the period between April 2021 and October 2021. It notably builds on the previous consolidated reports and on the related decisions by the Deputies.

4. A delegation of the Secretariat carried out a fact-finding visit to Tbilisi on 20-22 September 2021 and had the opportunity to discuss the situation with the Georgian authorities as well as representatives of international organisations and the expert community. The Secretariat wishes to express its gratitude to the Georgian authorities for their support in organising the visit and to all interlocutors for their assistance and valuable contributions.

5. The Secretary General intends to pursue her efforts in view of fact-finding visits to Abkhazia and South Ossetia for the preparation of future consolidated reports. In the period under review, the Secretariat and experts continued to have contacts for the purpose of the implementation of Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs) (cf. Section IV.1).

6. This report does not replace the monitoring procedures established in the Council of Europe. Nor should it be seen as prejudging any possible decisions in the cases related to the conflict and its consequences at the European Court of Human Rights.

7. Nothing in this report should be interpreted as being contrary to the full respect of the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders.<sup>1</sup>

8. This report does not prejudge or infringe upon a possible future political settlement of the conflict within the framework of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), nor the implementation of the six-point Ceasefire Agreement of 12 August 2008 and the implementing measures of 8 September 2008.

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<sup>1</sup> It is a fundamental objective of the member states of the Council of Europe to uphold the territorial integrity of Georgia. However, the Russian Federation recognised South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states on 26 August 2008.

## **I Update on major developments in the period under review**

9. The 53rd and 54th rounds of the Geneva International Discussions were held respectively on 29-30 June and 12-13 October 2021. Despite the ongoing challenges related to COVID-19, the Co-Chairs of the GID have remained fully engaged and kept close contact with all participants while continuing to address pertinent security and humanitarian related issues of the GID agenda.

10. The Co-Chairs noted that participants reiterated the importance of, and their commitment to, the GID process, addressing the security and humanitarian consequences on conflict-affected populations.

11. Particular focus was given to the GID core agenda item of non-use of force, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on the humanitarian situation on the ground. The Co-Chairs noted constructive co-operation between the participants in discussions on possible joint efforts to address the post-pandemic needs of communities, and to mitigate the pandemic's impact on humanitarian and socio-economic situations. The security situation on the ground was assessed by the Co-Chairs as relatively calm and stable, although participants reviewed issues including detentions cases, missing persons, freedom of movement and the security situation in certain areas. As in previous rounds, it was not possible to address issues relating to internally displaced persons and refugees due to a walkout of some participants, as indicated by the Co-Chairs.<sup>2</sup>

12. The Co-Chairs welcomed the continued utilisation of the Ergneti Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) meetings and emphasised the need to resume regular Gali IPRM meetings as soon as possible. The Georgian central government underlined that it was committed to sparing no efforts for the resumption of the Gali IPRM and the unimpeded functioning of both mechanisms on the basis of the founding principles and ground rules.

13. The Georgian central government expressed their strong criticism of the organisation of polling stations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia for the 17-19 September 2021 Russian State Duma Elections. Nine polling stations were reportedly organised in Abkhazia, and 10 polling stations in South Ossetia.

14. The Georgian central government strongly condemned the "agreement" between the Russian Federation and South Ossetia on simplified procedures for receiving dual (Russian) citizenship. This "agreement" was reportedly signed on 20 September 2021. Furthermore, the Georgian government conveyed its deep concern with respect to the reported decision to modify the cadastral map of the Russian Federation to include the village of Aibgha in the municipality of Gagra in Abkhazia.

## **II Assessment of statutory obligations and commitments related to the conflict and its consequences**

15. Below is an update on statutory obligations and specific commitments – as listed in PACE Opinions 193 (1996) and 209 (1999) – which have been selected for the purpose of reporting on the conflict in Georgia and its consequences. This part builds on Part 1 of the first and second consolidated reports on the conflict in Georgia ([SG/Inf\(2010\)8](#) and [SG/Inf\(2010\)19](#)).

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<sup>2</sup> Press communiqué of the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions, 30 June 2021, and 13 October 2021.

- i. *To accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council of Europe.*
- ii. *To settle international as well as internal disputes by peaceful means (an obligation incumbent upon all member states of the Council of Europe), rejecting resolutely any forms of threats of force against its neighbours.*

16. During the reporting period the Georgian central government reiterated its commitment to peace and continued its efforts aimed at creating a new strategic approach while working on policy review of its engagement strategy. The delegation was informed that this “State Strategy for De-Occupation and Peaceful Conflict Resolution” will focus on two pillars, namely the de-occupation of Georgia’s territories, and reconciliation and engagement between divided communities.

17. As reported previously, the European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgment on the merits on 21 January 2021 in the Inter-State application (II) No. 38263/08 *Georgia v. Russia* relating to the 2008 conflict and its consequences. The question of the application of Article 41 of the Convention has been reserved.<sup>3</sup> As for the pending Inter-State application (IV) 39611/18 lodged in August 2018, proceedings were resumed on 25 May 2021, and the parties were invited to submit written observations on the admissibility of the application. The examination of the latter case is thus currently pending before the Court at its admissibility stage.

18. The investigation authorised by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in January 2016 into war crimes and crimes against humanity allegedly committed in and around South Ossetia is ongoing.

- iii. *To respect strictly the provisions of international humanitarian law, including in cases of armed conflict on its territory.*

19. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has continued its activities in support of efforts aimed at clarifying the fate and whereabouts of persons unaccounted for as a result of the armed conflicts and in supporting their families. ICRC specialists continue to collect, analyse and reconcile available data for the identification of missing persons, and conducted forensic capacity-building activities. During the period under review, a Family Needs Review was launched to understand the current situation and needs of families of missing persons on all sides. The identified remains of 19 missing persons were handed over to their families and a further 10 new missing persons cases were registered during the reporting period. The excavation of potential gravesites began in May 2021 with 16 sites excavated and 14 sets of human remains recovered. In September, the 16th meeting of the “Coordination Mechanism for clarifying the fate and whereabouts of people who have been missing since the conflicts of the 1990s and August 2008 armed conflicts and their aftermath” took place in Ergneti.

20. ICRC representatives conveyed to the delegation that the ICRC continued to undertake a range of further activities to support the humanitarian response to challenges caused by the pandemic, including the provision of basic psychological support and information related to COVID-19 to families of missing persons.

21. Through this reporting period, after a pause due to the pandemic, the ICRC informed that it has resumed its visits to “penitentiary establishments” to assess and strengthen access to basic needs, family contact, and detention conditions.

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<sup>3</sup> European Court of Human Rights, Press Release, Grand Chamber judgment in the case *Georgia v. Russia* (II), 21 January 2021. <http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=003-6913071-9285190>.

iv. *To co-operate in good faith with international humanitarian organisations and to enable them to carry out their activities on its territory in conformity with their mandates.*

v. *To facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid to the most vulnerable groups of the population affected by the consequences of the conflict.*

22. The efforts of international humanitarian organisations in close co-ordination with the Georgian central government continued to be mobilised on the response to the COVID-19 crisis and its impact on the affected populations.

23. The delegation was informed by its international interlocutors that, in the Tbilisi-controlled territory, international organisations have continued to cater to the basic needs of people along the Administrative Boundary Line (ABL). Medical supplies, protective equipment and training to local health care facilities have been provided along the ABL, as well as cold chain equipment to support the rollout of COVID-19 vaccination programmes. The ICRC continued supporting the Georgia Red Cross Society in its auxiliary role to the health authorities in providing pandemic-related support activities to respond to the crisis. The ICRC also continued to undertake a range of activities including supporting families separated by ABLs to establish and maintain contacts, the reunification of families across ABLs, and supporting individuals living across ABLs in transmitting official documents.

24. In meetings with representatives of the international community, it was reported that, in Abkhazia, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the ICRC had provided financial and food assistance to the most vulnerable segments of the population, including isolated, older persons; worked to improve sanitation and hygiene in schools and “penitentiary establishments”; and delivered guidance and material assistance to health care, laboratory and/or forensic facilities. The Liaison Mechanism, operating under the aegis of the UNDP, also continued to facilitate *inter alia* the delivery of various types of humanitarian and medical aid.

25. The delegation was informed that, despite the limitations in access, the Georgian central government has mobilised and provided support to the people living in Abkhazia in its response to the COVID-19 related challenges by way of delivering material assistance, raising awareness and sharing medical experience and expertise (doctor-to-doctor co-operation), and facilitating the intervention of relevant international agencies. Medical evacuations and treatment of COVID-19 patients have also been enabled (cf. section on the humanitarian situation in Abkhazia), and COVID-19 vaccination programmes have been offered to people living in Abkhazia by the Georgian authorities via a simplified procedure not requiring registration.

26. Throughout the reporting period, access for international engagement to South Ossetia has remained limited to the ICRC. It provided assistance targeting health care and forensic facilities, the “penitentiary system” and older vulnerable people. It has also provided personal protective equipment and medical equipment for health structures in the region. The ICRC informed the delegation that it had continued to facilitate medical evacuations including the transfer of 88 patients from South Ossetia, as well as the supply of orthopaedic assistance to vulnerable persons in South Ossetia.

27. The delegation was informed that the Georgian central government had also offered humanitarian assistance to people living in South Ossetia, but no proposal had been accepted.

28. Representatives of the Georgian central government have reiterated that their priority was to assist the conflict-affected populations as much as possible. In that regard, the access of humanitarian organisations to these populations has been described as critical.

29. Besides the challenges of COVID-19, the Georgian central government continues to make available free access to health care, education and other social benefits for all residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Post-secondary education preparation programmes envisaged by the peace initiative “A Step to a Better Future” provided support to facilitate the enrolment of students in the higher education institutions of Georgia. In the field of health care, the state referral programme continued to be implemented, providing 990 patients from Abkhazia and South Ossetia with medical transportation and assistance between 9 February and 21 September 2021. Vaccines and pharmaceuticals products have been put at the disposal of the conflict-affected populations throughout the reporting period (with the facilitation of international partners), and bacteriological tests have also been made available.

30. The delegation was informed by the Georgian government that, in the framework of the implementation of the peace initiative “Step for a better future”, the Peace Fund was fully operational with contributions from international partners and was providing financing for a number of cross-ABL projects in the area of trade. Moreover, the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality was working on issues of social economic development and youth initiatives.

### **III Human rights situation in the areas affected by the conflict**

31. In general, representatives of the Georgian authorities met by the delegation in Tbilisi pointed to the deterioration of the humanitarian situation along the ABL due to the continued “borderisation” processes along the ABL, illegal detentions and unresolved cases, which on the whole contribute to the escalation of the situation on the ground. The Georgian central government and the Office of the Public Defender reiterated that lengthy closures of the “crossing points” had a severe impact on the affected population and noted the help offered to Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the fight against the coronavirus. Continued profound concern was expressed that the human rights situation had been exacerbated by the pandemic, including concerns with regard to the right to life, the right to freedom of movement, the right to property, the right to education in the native language and the right to liberty and security. These concerns were shared by several other interlocutors, in particular with regard to the situation of ethnic Georgian populations living in the conflict-affected areas.

32. The human rights and humanitarian situation of the conflict-affected communities remained under strain, notably due to persisting and/or newly imposed restrictions on freedom of movement, documentation issues, and obstacles to access to basic services. Prolonged closures of “crossing points” for public health reasons by Abkhazia and South Ossetia persisted for large parts of the period under review (cf. below).<sup>4</sup> Prolonged closures were reported by interlocutors as hindering timely medical evacuations in relation to COVID-19, as well as impeding access of vulnerable groups to humanitarian and medical assistance. At the same time, the delegation was informed that entry from Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the Russian Federation had been possible from August and September 2020 respectively.

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<sup>4</sup> To be noted, some “crossing points”, notably Mosabruni/ Odzisi, had long been closed prior to the pandemic, as reported in previous reports.

33. The delegation was in particular informed that no progress had been achieved on the investigation demanded by the Georgian authorities into the deaths of Giga Okhtozoria, David Basharuli and Archil Tatumashvili, nor regarding the deaths of Irakli Kvaratskhelia and Inal Jabiev.

### **III.1 Reports on Abkhazia**

#### **III.1.i Security**

34. No IPRM meetings were held during the period under review. The meetings have now been suspended for over three years. The importance of resuming them has been stressed by international actors and the Georgian central government. The EUMM-facilitated hotline continues to operate.

35. So-called “borderisation” activities have reportedly continued at a steady pace during the period under review, including in terms of refurbishing existing structures, the extension of fences, and the installation of surveillance equipment. The Representatives of the Georgian central government reported several incidents related to so-called “borderisation” activities during that period.

#### **III.1.ii Freedom of movement**

36. The “crossing points” on the ABL, including the main one at the Inguri bridge, had been closed as of 14 March 2020 due to the pandemic, and COVID-19 challenges have continued to dominate the freedom of movement issue. The protracted closure of “crossing points” permitted only limited crossings for certain vulnerable groups and for medical emergencies until regular cross-ABL traffic was re-established on 5 July 2021.<sup>5</sup> This represented a closure of 478 days and has worsened the humanitarian situation on the ground and amplified the challenges faced by conflict-affected communities.

37. It was reported that the closure of the “crossing points” had increased the number of attempted crossings of the ABL outside the “crossing points” in insecure conditions creating occurrences of risk for life and health and bringing about instances of illegal detentions and fines. Four people died in April 2021 attempting to cross into Tbilisi-controlled territory having attempted to swim across the river to avoid “crossing point” controls.

38. The Georgian central government informed of measures taken to facilitate crossings into the Tbilisi-controlled territory, such as introducing rapid antigen testing for those moving from Abkhazia to replace five-day quarantine obligations.

39. The delegation was informed by the Georgian authorities that illegal detentions have persisted through the reporting period, with the identification of 10 illegally-detained persons since the beginning of 2021. The delegation was informed by interlocutors that detention conditions in the region remain below minimum international standards.

40. The Georgian central government communicated the health situation and underlined the need for the continued health care of Irakli Bebuia, who was illegally sentenced to a nine-year imprisonment during the previous reporting period. The Georgian central government stressed the need for his immediate release.

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<sup>5</sup> Crossings for limited vulnerable groups had been permitted from Abkhazia to the Tbilisi-controlled territory from 11 February 2021.

41. The Georgian authorities released statements to inform that the “crossing points” were closed by the *de facto* authorities for the duration of the electoral day of 2 October. The Georgian authorities noted that movement was banned for all individuals except those in need of medical assistance and suggested such a decision had been taken in relation to the municipal elections taking place on Tbilisi-controlled territory.

### **III.1.iii Humanitarian situation**

42. All interlocutors met by the delegation underlined that restrictions on freedom of movement had seriously impeded people’s access to basic rights and services in the territory controlled by the Georgian central government, as well as access to livelihoods and medical treatment. The Georgian authorities and the international interlocutors stressed that the negative effects of the restrictions on freedom of movement affected ethnic Georgian populations in Abkhazia in particular. Interlocutors noted that the re-opening of “crossing points” for regular cross-ABL traffic was a positive development in addressing the challenges facing conflict-affected communities that had been exacerbated by the period of prolonged closure.

#### *Means of subsistence*

43. The delegation received reports that the prolonged closure of “crossing points” had continued to affect the issues noted in the previous report concerning access to cash. The reduced movement of goods related to the closure of “crossing points” was also again reported to have increased food scarcity, with resultant rises in food prices being exacerbated by reductions in income for agricultural producers. Issues related to “crossing point” closures, while affecting the whole population of Abkhazia, was said by interlocutors to have had an even greater impact on the living conditions of the ethnic Georgians in the Gali district.

44. Considering the long-term socio-economic challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, interlocutors welcomed the July opening of the ABL as a step towards improving access to pensions, benefits, affordable medicines, and trade activities.

#### *Access to medical care*

45. Challenges related to the provision of medical care were reported to have been deepened by COVID-19, with the focus of limited health resources on the pandemic reducing the capacity to treat chronic diseases and/or serious health issues. These conditions have been worsened by a reported lack of qualified medical staff able to work during the pandemic, and interlocutors noted that hospital capacity remained at its limit. The closures of the ABL placed a particular burden on those who would cross regularly for medical treatment and the purchase of medicines, with the lack of access to cheaper medicines from the other side of the ABL further compounded by rising medical prices.

46. As mentioned above, at the same time, urgent medical evacuations and treatment of COVID-19 patients have been enabled during this period, though concerns remain about accessing prompt and adequate medical care. The Georgian central government ensured that the patients concerned were immediately transported to hospitals in the Tbilisi-controlled territory. Equally, immunisation programmes for routine vaccinations were continued during the reporting period. The delegation was informed that, within the State Health Programme “Ambulance, Emergency and Medical Transportation”, 155 patients were transported from Abkhazia to Tbilisi-controlled territory between October 2020 and September 2021 to receive relevant medical treatment.



### **III.1.iv Identity documents**

47. During the period under review no major developments were reported. The documentation gap (cf. previous reports) continued to have an adverse impact on the status and effective enjoyment of rights of the ethnic Georgian population living in Gali but also in Ochamchire and Tkvarcheli. It was reported that the so-called “foreign temporary residence permits” continue to be issued and remain the only option for many ethnic Georgians, although it implies registering as so-called “foreign citizens”. The delegation was informed by the international community that it remained the case that newly-issued so-called “foreign temporary residence permits” were uncollected in many cases as people were unable to pay the required fees.

### **III.1.v Access to education**

48. As regards the situation of education in the Georgian language in schools in Abkhazia, previously expressed concerns about restrictions on access to education in the native language persist. To recall, education in the Georgian language has been banned not only at schools but also at kindergartens in the Gali district. The existing measures are widely seen as a form of ethnic discrimination by the Government of Georgia, as well as by international interlocutors.

49. As per information provided to the delegation, the trend of the decreasing numbers of hours taught in the native Georgian language continued into the new academic year beginning September 2021. To recall, it has been reported that currently, in 11 schools of the Tkvarcheli and Ochamchire districts, the Georgian language and literature are not taught at all. Regarding the situation in the whole of Gali, from the 1st grade to the 11th grade, one hour per week is devoted to the Georgian language and one hour to Georgian literature. Core subjects are taught in the Russian language. Teaching in the Abkhazian language has also been reportedly reduced to between one and four hours per week.

### *COVID-19 repercussions*

50. Face-to-face teaching reportedly resumed fully during the period under review. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the teaching-learning process in the Gali district and brought forward the issue of access to modern technology. The Georgian authorities informed the delegation that they had delivered computers to students and teachers in Abkhazia during the reporting period. Equally they provided access to nationwide online educational resources and the education project Tele-school (Teleskola). Support was also provided by the international community in the provision of computers and resources to support the delivery of online education.

## **III.2 Reports on South Ossetia**

### **III.2.i Security**

51. Security observers informed the delegation that, although no further incursions had been reported in the Chorchana-Tsnelisi section of the ABL during the period under review, the situation nevertheless remained conducive to tensions with the presence of armed units and the continued construction of new positions on site. It was underlined again, as on the previous occasions, that the risk of close encounters and escalation remained high. The presence of military equipment on site represented a serious danger for stability, it was stressed. The representatives of the Georgian central government also emphasised that the situation was continuing to have a severe impact on the local population, including in terms of effectively ridding people of their livelihoods and/or instigating a fear of accessing their properties.

52. During the reporting period, four IPRMs were held. The 100th IPRM of 15 June 2021 was marked by the participation of the OSCE Secretary General and the Director of Security and Defence Policy at the EU European External Action Service. In these IPRMs, concerns were expressed by the co-facilitators about the deepening socio-economic hardships of the conflict-affect population due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the closure of “crossing points”. Discussions were also held on pertinent illegal detention cases. Calls were repeated for resuming free movement and discussions were held on instances of “borderisation”.

53. During the period under review, the so-called “borderisation” process was continuing at several locations, with interlocutors noting daily activity that included retrenchment of ground lines and the installation/reinforcement of observation posts, as well as new fencing. The Georgian central government has reported 92 “borderisation” incidents since the beginning of 2021 and communicated that it was an active phase of fortification.

### **III.2.ii Freedom of movement**

54. The closure of the “crossing points” on the ABL, all closed by the end of February 2020, has persisted. The closure of the main “crossing point” of Mosabruni/Odzisi since September 2019 represents the longest closure since 2008. The situation remained largely unchanged during the period under review, with only the Zardiantkari “crossing point” open on a limited basis for medical evacuations and urgent cases since 2021. Interlocutors expressed their continued concern that the policy of closure reflects an instrumentalisation of the pandemic which has exacerbated the situation for local populations.

55. Incidents of illegal detentions were reported as continuing throughout the reporting period. According to the representatives of the Georgian central government, there have been 38 cases since the start of 2021.

56. The previous report noted the detention of the Georgian citizen, Zaza Gakheladze, by the *de facto* authorities and his subsequent “sentence” in February 2021 to 12 and a half years of “imprisonment”. Mr Gakheladze was released and returned to the Tbilisi-controlled territory on 14 July 2021 after 368 days of detention. Two further long-term illegal detainees were released in April and June respectively, with the release of Ramaz Begheluri and Lasha Khetereli.

57. Representatives of the Georgian authorities informed the delegation that the illegal detention of a Georgian citizen, Genadi Bestaev, continued. Mr Bestaev was “sentenced” during the reporting period to three years of “imprisonment”. The delegation was also informed of the illegal detention of the Georgian citizen, Gela Gochoshvili, since 14 August 2021. Representatives of the Georgian authorities will continue to raise these issues in the Ergneti IPRM meeting, as well as at the GID.

### **III.2.iii Humanitarian situation**

#### *Means of subsistence*

58. Reports continued that the humanitarian situation seems to be dire in South Ossetia, especially in the Akhgori district. The double impact of the closure of the ABL and of the (then) temporary closure by the Russian Federation of its border was mentioned as having seriously limited the entry of goods and food products, in addition to having hampered people’s access to pensions and other social benefits to which they are entitled in the Tbilisi-controlled territory and/or in the Russian Federation. As a result, reports of price increases and food shortages persisted through the reporting period.

### *Access to medical care*

59. The closure of the ABL continues to impact the access of residents from South Ossetia to medical facilities in the Tbilisi-controlled territory. Apart from exceptional crossings for medical purposes through the Akhgori “crossing point”, the situation has remained the same during the period under review. The Georgian central government raised continued concerns about the provision of timely medical evacuations in order to enable effective medical interventions, particularly in relation to COVID-19. Pandemic-related support to health care structures in South Ossetia has continued to be provided by the international community, though limited due to obstacles regarding access, and has included the donation of cold-chain equipment to support the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccination programme.

60. It was also reported that impediments to the freedom of movement were having an effect on the supply and levels of medicine provisions and equipment. The delegation was informed by international interlocutors of shortages of medical personnel, medicines, and modern equipment, as well as only limited and irregular deliveries of vaccines in relation to the pandemic.

### **III.2.iv Identity documents**

61. Despite the ABL being closed essentially since 2019, the continued lack of clarity and information on so-called crossing “permission documents” for the ethnic Georgian population in Akhgori remains of concern as it creates additional obstacles to the freedom of movement.

### **III.2.v Access to education, including teaching of/in the native language**

62. No progress has been noted during the reporting period regarding the situation of education in the Georgian language in schools in South Ossetia. Previously expressed concerns about restrictions on access to education in the native language persist. Representatives of the Georgian central government denounced the existing measures as discrimination based on ethnicity.

### **III.3 The situation of internally displaced persons**

63. During the period under review, no progress could be reported as regards the voluntary, safe, dignified, and unhindered return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees on the basis of internationally recognised principles.

64. In the absence of conditions conducive to their return, the delegation was informed that the Georgian central government continued to provide IDPs with alternative durable solutions in terms of housing and improvement of socio-economic conditions. Representatives of the Agency for Internally Displaced Persons, Ecomigrants and Livelihood informed the delegation that, as of today, 289,817 persons, who constitute more than 91,567 IDP families, have been granted IDP status.

65. The delegation was informed about various activities of the IDPs, Ecomigrants and Livelihood Agency (Agency) in 2021, which focused primarily on providing durable housing solutions and livelihood opportunities to the IDPs.

66. Providing durable housing solutions through 2021 involved the purchase of a further 891 individual houses and transferring them into private ownership of IDPs, privatising 791 state-owned living properties to IDPs under the privatisation programme as well as providing 684 IDP families with accommodation in newly constructed buildings. For improving IDPs living conditions, the Agency provided co-funding to 42 condominium co-operatives in 2021, and 20 common spaces were transferred to condominium co-operatives. The Municipal Development Fund (MDF), within the framework of Municipal Infrastructure and IDP Housing Programme, financed the construction of buildings in Kutaisi, Tskaltubo and Zugdidi.

67. In terms of improving the socio-economic conditions of IDPs, the Agency continued to allocate to IDPs monthly allowances and provided 10,309 IDPs with one-time monetary assistance. In cases of urgent need, IDPs were provided with temporary accommodation.

68. In order to support access to livelihood opportunities and address the economic integration needs of IDPs and ecomigrants, the Agency provided financial support in the framework of the "IDP Vocational Education Support Programme". A number of entrepreneurs (IDPs and Ecomigrants) were selected for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SME) grant support. Further awareness-raising activities were conducted to inform IDPs about livelihood programmes.

69. The delegation was informed of continuing activities that will be implemented by the end of 2021, including the purchase of 400 individual houses for IDP families, the accommodation of some 700 IDP families in newly built buildings, and the transfer of a further 400 state-owned properties to the private ownership of IDP families.

#### **IV Activities of Council of Europe organs and institutions and their follow-up**

##### **IV.1 Operational activities**

###### **IV.1.i DG II/Youth**

70. The Youth Peace Camp was held in July 2021 with the participation of facilitators from Sukhumi, Tbilisi and Tskhinvali.

###### **IV.1.ii Operational activities on confidence-building measures and their follow-up**

###### *Activities organised during the reporting period*

71. All through the period under review, the implementation of the operational activities on Council of Europe Confidence-Building Measures and their follow-up has been ensured in areas where the pragmatic approach has enabled long-established dialogue and trust built between all actors concerned. Fully fledged activities will be carried out as soon as the epidemiological situation permits to recover the previous regularity of people-to-people contacts.

72. The CBM priorities, included within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023 and previously identified jointly with relevant actors as well as closely co-ordinated with the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality and the Liaison Mechanism have been maintained.

###### *a) CBMs with Abkhazia*

73. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, most CBM activities had to be postponed; others have continued online.

74. Regarding the archive project, the group of specialists between Tbilisi and Sukhumi continued to work in an online format. This dialogue led to the printing of the publication on the criminal cases against Monks in Abkhazia in the 20th century, and includes a short documentary film. Finally, the preparations for the new publication and a film on the topic of "*Muhadjirstvo/Mahadjirstvo in the XIX century*" were finalised, with the film currently being subtitled. The presentations of the new publications produced under the auspices of this project will take place in Tbilisi and Sukhumi as soon as the sanitary situation allows.

75. Regarding the dialogue on the prevention and fight against domestic violence, psychologists and psychiatrists continued their contacts in virtual format.

*b) CBMs with South Ossetia*

76. Efforts continued to be deployed to launch CBM activities in South Ossetia. The Secretariat prepared the first meeting of teachers of the English language on modern techniques of foreign language teaching, in co-operation with the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe in Graz, to be held when the sanitary situation allows.

*c) Plans for further action*

77. Despite the difficult situation related to COVID-19, the Secretariat continues to build on the results of the CBMs to maintain the level of trust and contacts between actors on both sides of the ABL.

78. To the extent possible, priority will be given to direct contacts between actors on both sides of the ABL, in order to increase the impact and extend dialogue to new domains with a pragmatic approach relying on the technical support of experts from other member states. Concrete options continued to be explored by the Secretariat.

79. In addition to the planned follow-up on the previous and current initiatives mentioned above, efforts will focus on facilitating dialogue between mental health specialists, specialists on the situation of minors in prisons, and journalists. Other proposals are currently under discussion with the Georgian central government and stakeholders in Sukhumi. New initiatives in the cultural field will be explored at a later stage, while a dialogue between Abkhaz language specialists will be relaunched in 2022.