



EVERYDAY PEACE INDICATORS IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

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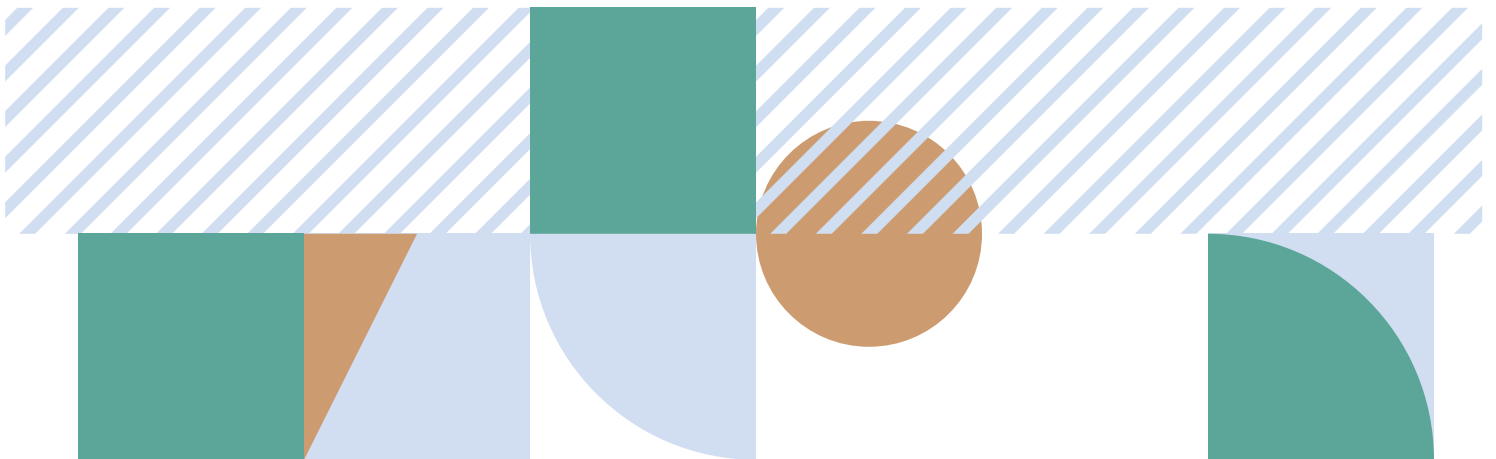
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ACRONYMS

ABL	Administration Boundary Line
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Centers
EPI	Everyday Peace Indicator
EUMM	European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
GID	Geneva International Discussion
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IPRM	Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
VFGD	Verification Focus Group Discussion
VKII	Verification Key Informant Interview
CCTV	Closed-circuit television camera



INTRODUCTION

The Georgian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian people have lived in protracted conflict realities for decades. The armed conflicts in 1991-1993 and 2008 left hundreds of people dead and thousands displaced. The conflict context has multiple dimensions; the Georgian-Russian war reinforced its geopolitical aspect, while Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-South Ossetian armed conflicts emphasized its local dimensions. Protracted conflicts in the Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian contexts characterize the difficult realities on the ground, with restricted movements across the Administration Boundary Line (ABL),¹ divided families, limited access to proper education, healthcare and other basic services and infrastructure.² Unresolved conflicts also affect lives of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Georgia proper, many of them live in collective centers and wait for resettlement and proper housing conditions even today.³ Covid-19 further impacted conflict-affected societies by drastically reducing livelihood opportunities, exposing people to additional problems and significantly deteriorating everyday life conditions.

While multiple need assessments and context and conflict analyses have been conducted in Georgian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian communities, there is a lack of research that explores the meaning of peace for conflict-affected people. More specifically, research projects usually focus on analyzing causes and consequences of the conflict(s) and overlook nuanced discussions around a contextualized understanding of peace. Furthermore, in politically unresolved, protracted conflict realities, peace might be perceived as an elusive concept. The idea of peacebuilding further complicates the understanding of peace, as this concept has multiple definitions. Usually, peacebuilding is defined as actions in post-conflict settings that identify and strengthen structures which will solidify peace.⁴ Peacebuilding is also associated with development processes.

To understand how conflict-affected people living in Georgia proper and in its breakaway regions perceive and describe the idea of peace and everyday peace, this research introduced the Everyday Peace Indicators (EPI) methodology. The EPI approach has been suggested by Roger Mac Ginty and Pamina Firchow. Mac Ginty discussed *Everyday Peace Power* and the concept of *Conflict Disruption*.⁵ He has also highlighted the capacity of so-called ordinary people to disrupt violent conflict and postulated core concepts that build up the everyday peace idea: sociality, reciprocity and solidarity. Firchow distinguished between Big-P (Peacebuilding) and small-p (peacebuilding) ideas and has discussed how identifying and using community-generated indicators can assist peacebuilding interventions and render them better adapted to local contexts and needs.⁶

Considering the protracted conflict reality and difficult conditions conflict-affected people live in, this research on everyday peace attempts to explore how people understand peace in their daily lives. More specifically, the research was guided by two questions:

- What are the perceptions of everyday peace in conflict-affected societies in the Georgian, Abkhaz and South Ossetian contexts?
- What are key factors influencing everyday peace in conflict-affected societies?

The research explores multiple components and a nuanced understanding of peace in everyday life in Georgian, Abkhazian and South Ossetian contexts. EPI research relies on qualitative and participatory approaches, where research participants are not passive respondents but actively engage in developing, verifying and interpreting indicators of everyday peace in their local contexts. Community-generated indicators strengthen local ownership of the research and

¹ According to Amnesty International (2018), since “the Borderization” began, around 1,000 families have lost all or partial access to their farmlands, pasture-lands and woodlands. Some families found their yards cut into two parts, where the house is under the de-facto South Ossetian control and the yard remains on the territory of Georgia proper. See, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur56/0581/2019/en/>

² PDG (2021) On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia. [Report] The Public Defender of Georgia. <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2022040413242699860.pdf> Accessed 29 April 2022. DRI (2021). Human Rights in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali. See, <https://www.democracyresearch.org/files/171Human%20rights%20in%20Abkhazia%20and%20South%20Ossetia%20Tskhinvali%20region.pdf>

³ Around 40,131 IDP families are waiting for resettlement, Public Defender (2021)

⁴ Boutros-Ghali, B. (1992) *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-Keeping*. United Nations.

⁵ Mac Ginty, R. (2021) *Everyday Peace: How So-called Ordinary People Can Disrupt Violent Conflict*. Oxford University Press.

⁶ Firchow, P. (2018) *Reclaiming Everyday Peace: Local Voices in the Politics of Measurement and Evaluation after War*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

preserve local language and articulation of certain issues. Furthermore, understanding contextualized perceptions of peace can help to advance peacebuilding policy planning and contribute to peace processes.

The following report discusses details of applied methodology and its limitations. It also provides an analysis of EPI research in each location across the ABLs, and analyzes context-specific aspects of everyday peace. Additionally, the report briefly talks about shared themes emerging in all seven locations and summarizes components of everyday peace for women and youth across the ABLs. In conclusion, it provides a reflective discussion on perceptions of everyday peace in conflict-affected societies.

METHODOLOGY

EPI methodology was applied to research everyday peace in conflict-affected communities in seven locations across the ABLs, namely Akhalgori, Gal/i, Gori, Sukhum/i, Tbilisi (IDP community), Tskhinval/i and Zugdidi during June-December 2021. While the EPI methodology combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, the project employed only the qualitative part and completed three out of four stages of EPI research, particularly the Develop, Verify and Analyze stages (the last stage, a survey, was not planned in the frame of the project).⁷

At the Development stage, semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with local community leaders in different occupations (teacher, doctor, etc.), representatives of civil society, and local governments to gather their perspectives about everyday peace in their communities. Separate Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were carried out with women, men, youth, and mixed groups at each location, except Akhalgori and Tskhinval/i, to research everyday peace perceptions and needs in conflict-affected societies. The four to ten members of each focus group were so-called “ordinary people” who were as representative of their local community as possible. Selection criteria for FGD participants considered age, gender and rural/urban disaggregation, representation of communities living near the ABLs and in IDP settlements, while in Tbilisi the research focused only on the IDP communities, living in collective centers and private accommodations. To ensure a participatory process not only at the data collection stage, discussion guides were developed in close collaboration with local researchers. This approach enabled making minor adjustments in the data collection instruments considering local contexts, language peculiarities, the safety of researchers and respondents - adhering to Do No Harm principles. However, KII and FGD participants were given great flexibility to discuss issues of their concerns, share their understanding of peace and everyday peace.

Collected data were organized in the MaxQDA 2020 software, and an open-coding system was utilized to develop a codebook to categorize indicators by common themes, enabling the generation of an initial list of qualitative indicators. Indicators were generated only from the discussion portions where respondents directly mentioned the connection of an issue with everyday peace (e.g., peace means... or peace would be...) or from their responses to the question about everyday peace, to limit space for the researchers' interpretation. Another key criterion focused on whether the issue was mentioned once or further elaborated by the respondents in relation to peace. Only the latter cases were adopted as EPIs to ensure that an indicator reflected the needs and perceptions of peace beyond the personal level. Through this process, around 21 to 37 community-sourced indicators were identified from each location, amounting to 159 EPIs overall.

At the second stage, the EPI Verification process was carried out at every research site except Akhalgori and Tskhinval/i. At least two verification FGDs were held with a wider group of local community members at five locations (overall, 22 to 34 members from each location) to double-check the relevance of the indicators, and to vote and prioritize EPIs that were the most relevant to their

community. After ranking the EPIs, respondents discussed top indicators and explained why these EPIs were the most important and relevant for the location. Based on the voting and discussion results, the final lists of verified EPIs were developed for each location (except Akhalgori and Tskhinval/i) that were later discussed with local key informants for providing further explanation and interpretation. Consequently, the initial lists of indicators narrowed down to 13 to 18 EPIs per location, and women-sourced indicators were outlined. Overall, more than 362 local community members (224 women, 138 men, 91 young persons)⁸ were engaged in the research process through 66 KIIs, 21 FGDs and 13 verification FGDs (see appendix 1).

At the last stage, the verified indicators were analyzed based on the explanations and interpretations provided at the verification FGDs in combination with relevant categories coded at the Development stage. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and common factors affecting perceptions of everyday peace across the ABLs. To ensure context-specific analysis, notes from regular debrief and reflections sessions with the local researchers and observation forms filled in after each FGD were taken into account.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

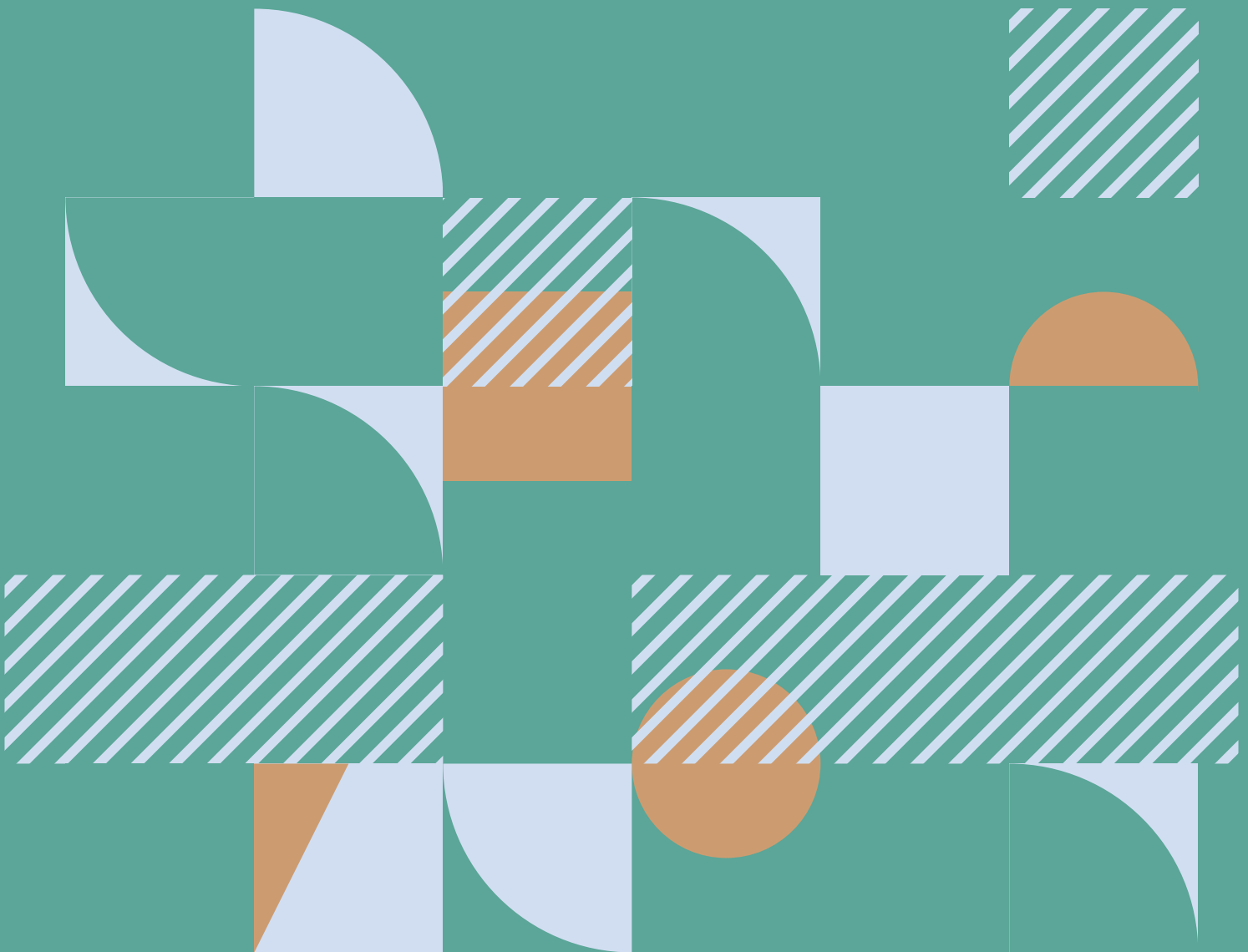
Considering the sensitivity of the research subject and the conflict context in which the research was conducted on different sides of dividing lines, the EPI methodology and research instruments were modified to some extent and adjusted to context-specific needs. Specifically, bearing in mind conflict sensitivity principles and safety concerns of the local researcher and respondents, only interviews were conducted in Akhalgori, resulting in the highest number of interviews from the location. A fewer number of people were engaged in the women FGD and interviews in Tskhinval/i, where other FGDs could not be organized. The Verification stage could not be carried out in Akhalgori nor Tskhinval/i, limiting the possibility of ranking EPIs and discussing priority issues for local communities.

Local researchers were allowed to adjust the research instruments, KII questionnaire and FGD discussion guides to the local context. However, key questions eliciting information about perceptions and needs for everyday peace remained identical for all locations. Respondents were free to choose the language they used during discussions. However, transcripts were provided in English, Georgian and Russian languages. Considering the nature of EPIs, the research team put a significant effort to maintain local voices throughout translation, yet some language specificities might not be completely reflected in the translated versions.

At the Development stage, some indicators were related to the same topic, such as cross-ABL movement, access to education, etc., but pointing out different aspects of the issue, and thus may be presented separately. In some cases, this might affect the ranking of some of the indicators. Moreover, during discussions at the Verification stage, respondents provided several interpretations for one indicator, affecting the measurability of such indicators for monitoring and evaluation purposes. However, this fits well with qualitative research purposes, as it provides a more complex view of the issue. Based on the observations of the research team, perceptions of everyday peace by respondents were sensitive to the local and regional events taking place in a specific period, requiring the consideration of the context during EPI analysis. Importantly, since only the qualitative part of the EPI methodology was applied within this research project, research results and indicators cannot be generalized. For representative data, the fourth stage, a survey, needs to be conducted in the respective locations.

⁸ Youth age group was defined as 15-24 years.

Everyday Peace Indicators



Gal/i verified EPIs

Peace is [when..]:

1. You do not feel like a second-class citizen
2. Families can afford to let their children go to school
3. Access to quality education
Knowledge of the English language, so that youth can engage in the international programmes
4. Life without war
Life without fear of war
5. Schools are equipped with computers
Schools have access to the internet
6. Children know at least one language properly
[Georgian or Russian] to study subjects at school
7. You are able to travel to other countries
8. You are able to travel to other countries
9. You are able to get an international education, participate in international programs
10. People are not afraid that they will not be allowed to cross the "border"
11. We trust each other [Georgians and Abkhaz]
12. Economic wellbeing, and more employment opportunities

Local community members in Gal/i municipality, from the city and five villages, engaged in everyday peace research, specifically, 60 people (34 women and 26 men, including 20 young persons). In the first stage of research 33 community members participated in the research through interviews and focus-group discussions, while a verification process engaged 27 people. The first round of interviews and focus groups helped us to develop 37 community-sourced indicators, which were verified and interpreted in the second stage of the fieldwork.

Gal/i research participants perceived everyday peace as a combination of needs and struggles that define their daily routine. The need to belong to the local community appeared to be the top concern and was reflected in several interconnected indicators such as **peace is when you do not feel like a second-class citizen**, and **peace is when we trust each other**. The need to feel fully integrated into the local context shapes people's sense of everyday peace. Discussions around education and language also constructed components of everyday peace. People identified very practical concerns and strategic issues that affect their daily routine and often distort their sense of stability. For example, language and education are core components of everyday life; language is essential for daily communication, as well as to get an education. Difficulty in moving across the ABL, issues with documentation, divided families and a constant fear of war also affect Gal/i research participants' everyday life. Everyday peace indicators tell the stories of individuals who approach problems with an open and critical mind, trying to see possible solutions or at least voice their fears and needs.

1. Need to belong – Peace is when you do not feel like a second-class citizen.

Top indicator(s) from Gal/i unpack the community's need for better integration in Abkhazian society. Research participants discussed several interconnected concerns: Gal/i population is often perceived as the enemy, and they are treated as “others” (also described as “guests”); lack of trust between Gal/i and Sukhum/i remains a key problem and the source of the issue; Abkhaz society should take into account and respond to the Gal/i population's problems more efficiently.

Interviews and focus-group discussions emphasized that the constant fear of rejection and not belonging to the society in which they live is a top issue for Gal/i research participants. Their emotional and physical well-being is affected by continuous stress and uncertainty. *“We are almost nobody here, but we do not have a place to go, nobody is expecting us on the other side either.”*⁹ This concern of not belonging and not being welcomed to either side of the conflict limits their sense of everyday peace. Some respondents also reframed the word enemy and said that Gal/i people are not necessarily perceived as enemies, but they are undoubtedly suspect – *“We live together, we work together, but mistrust remains.”*¹⁰ The lack of integration in Abkhazian society is also connected to the issue of trust. One indicator specifically emphasized the importance of trust in everyday life – *“peace is when we trust each other.”* Distrust is further strengthened by insufficient mechanisms to communicate between Sukhum/i and Gal/i.

In addition, a perceived inability to talk freely about problems disrupt everyday peace for research participants from Gal/i. The inability to talk freely was seen as a cause as well as consequence of the Gal/i population's silence – *“We think twice before we speak;” “We think carefully even when we raise a toast;” “We remain voiceless, because we are afraid.”*¹¹ Fear of speaking up undoubtedly limits their sense of daily peace. However, they do not perceive freedom of expression as a problem that only Gal/i people face. They acknowledge the struggles of Abkhazian society and see freedom of speech as a possible solution – *“We should inform the society that talking about problems is okay, as those problems are the concern of the entire society (including Abkhazians).”*¹²

⁹ Verification Focus-Group 2, Gal/i

¹⁰ Verification Focus-Group 3, Gal/i

¹¹ Verification KKI 1, Gal/i

¹² Mixed FGD, Gal/i

Importantly, Gal/i residents do not view the Sukhum/i population as a monolithic society without questions or disagreements. They brought up examples showing friendly communication between their communities, mentioning that some ordinary Abkhazians also want peaceful co-existence and a peaceful everyday life.

2. Access to education – Peace is when families can afford to let their children go to school to get quality education.

The second topic that research participants from Gal/i identified as a crucial aspect of their everyday peace related to the need for quality education. The indicators about education underlined four interconnected problems: (1) availability of quality education, (2) affordability of quality education, (3) school infrastructure, (4) access to international education and international programs. Poor economic conditions as well as limited programs offering education with high standards disadvantage Gal/i youth. While quality remains the biggest issue, many families also struggle with affordability; one indicator of peace deliberately stated, **Peace is when families can afford to let their children go to school and get quality education.**

Crumbling school facilities also perpetuate the problem. The majority of schools do not have computers or proper access to the internet. The latter left many children behind the school program during Covid-19 imposed lockdowns. Pursuing higher education remains problematic for Gal/i youth because they face barriers such as weak Georgian language skills and difficulty in crossing the ABL to participate in the Unified Educational Examination in Georgia proper. Limited access to international programs and international education at-large also combined two interconnected indicators: **Peace is when you are able to get an international education and Peace is when you are able to participate in international programs.** These two indicators also highlighted three linked concerns: traveling restrictions, documentation problems, and language barriers that will be further discussed below.

3. Language trap - Peace is when children know language(s) properly.

Language appeared to be one of the core constructs for everyday peace. As was mentioned earlier, while language is essential for daily communication as well as for educational purposes, it also builds up society's social and group identity. Conversations around language unpacked political and social issues. After Russian replaced the Georgian language in Gal/i schools, and Georgian began to be taught as a foreign language, people faced critical difficulties: first, they lost the right to get an education in their mother tongue; second, the quality of education significantly dropped, as few teachers spoke fluent Russian; and, third, young people struggled with not knowing any language properly.

Restrictions imposed on use of the Georgian language reinforced fear and limited freedom of expression for ordinary people in Gal/i district. Some people felt insecure in speaking Russian due to lack of fluency. To maintain a safe zone, research participants from Gal/i mentioned that people relied on the Megrelian language and used it for daily encounters. However, Georgian stayed crucial for receiving proper school education and the forced switch to Russian made Gal/i youth vulnerable and less competitive for international or cross-ABL educational opportunities. Knowledge of English is another issue that demonstrates the link between language and everyday peace. Learning English for research participants from Gal/i was associated with better opportunities to get quality education, participate in international programs and have greater potential for a better future. Gal/i participants cautiously talked about the growing anxiety of not knowing any language properly. The latter manifests even during internal-family intergenerational conversations.

4. Freedom of movement – Peace is when you are able to travel freely.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when you are able to travel from Sukhum/i to Tbilisi

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when families are not divided because of conflict

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when free trade relations exist, when the products are exported

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when people do not rely on social assistance and pension [for living]

Free movement across the ABL is another key component of everyday peace. Indicators around freedom of movement revealed psychological stress and physical barriers Gal/i people encounter on a daily basis according to research participants. Gal/i people continuously struggle with the three following issues: documentation; divided families ; economic vulnerability of the district. The uncertainty around movement across the ABL causes major distress among Gal/i residents, according to the research participants, especially, when people need to cross the ABL for health emergencies and basic household needs. Indicators on freedom of movement spoke about two types of fear – the checkpoint will be closed or they will not be allowed to travel. Gal/i research participants spoke that they feel trapped as they constantly face one out of these two problems – either the checkpoints are closed or people do not have the required documents to cross it. This is a never-ending vicious cycle that research participants spoke of as affecting their mental and physical well-being immensely.

The issue of documentation is connected to another concern – constant change of requirements. After „Form 9“ was annulled, the policy for obtaining a new „Residence Permit“ remained vague. People rarely knew proper, detailed procedures on how to get the documents required to cross the ABL, and they also lack trusted sources of information to update documents and avoid complications that disrupt their freedom of movement. Interestingly, problems with documentation affect all - men, women and youth, but each group differently. Youth are considered as the most vulnerable group in Gal/i because of issues with documentation as they struggle to get school certificates, travel across the ABL for educational opportunities, or even seek a job. Some research participants paid particular attention to women, as they usually cross the ABL for small trade and livelihoods, therefore restrictions on documentation remain extra-problematic for them as they search for alternative ways to cross ABL. However, men often become the primary targets for regular check-ups and the consequences for not having proper documents can be harsher for them.

Restrictions on movement also reinforce the economic vulnerability of Gal/i according to research participants and affect the lives of families divided by the conflict. Free trade is the key source of income for Gal/i residents, according to research participants. Checkpoint closures boost prices in Gal/i and people face the difficult reality of not knowing how to feed families. At the same time, the number of elders, people with health issues and those below the poverty line are increasing, while services that target their needs remain absent or impossible to access. Cross-ABL movement also often remains the only chance for family reunions. People often have a desperate need to cross the ABL to visit their family members and share their happy or mournful days.

5. Anticipation of war – Peace is when you are not afraid of war.

Predictably, people who experienced the war and live in a protracted conflict reality have a deeply rooted fear of war. Gal/i research participants spoke about anticipating war as the strongest marker of anxiety. At the

same time, they connected the “no war” condition to peace, in particular, with their perception of “negative peace” that is defined as an absence of direct armed violence/fight.

The indicators around fear of war stressed two interconnected issues: change in perception and context, as well as Gal/i’s proximity to the ABL. Fear of war remains vivid because of unresolved conflict and the uncertain geopolitical situation. Gal/i respondents talked about fear of war as a constant feeling, but less intense now compared to the past. However, the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and other geopolitical processes have strengthened anxiety and anticipation of war. Proximity to the ABL also affects Gal/i residents’ everyday life and distorts their feeling of stability. Stability was often reiterated during discussions and coupled with the word planning. The uncertainty limits people’s ability to plan for the future and even organize current daily life peacefully.

Research on everyday peace in Gal/i also highlighted women’s needs and perceptions of everyday peace and safety. The absence of women from political decision-making was a top concern and was supported with two arguments: first, politics is male-dominated field – *“Politics for men is a leverage to control, direct, dominate, influence on different agendas;”*¹⁴ second, aspects of culture demotivate women to engage in active politics and normalize staying on the sidelines – *“For many in our society, a free and active woman is not completely acceptable.”*¹⁵ Women also spoke about different everyday life-related struggles among them - poor infrastructure and low quality or absent healthcare services. Women in Gal/i shared frustration about abortion law and considered it to be discriminatory against women – *“When they issued an abortion ban, nobody asked women for their opinions.”*¹⁶ Additionally, absent and low-quality healthcare services affect the lives of pregnant women and those in need of urgent care, as well as women who are victims of domestic violence. Poor local infrastructure such as broken streetlights or few and badly refurbished kindergartens also influence women’s everyday life and perception of peacefulness. As primary caregivers for children, women need to have alternative places that take care of children and give women greater control of their time. In addition, broken streetlights limit women’s perception of safety and they struggle to go out at night even in the case of an emergency.

Everyday peace indicators from Gal/i tell stories of individuals as well as their community, their struggles to maintain agency, navigate at difficult times and remain hopeful. While describing their daily routine, people share components of their everyday peace. Absence of direct armed conflict is undoubtedly perceived as a sign of peace, but the latter is challenged by endless problems that disrupt normalcy of everyday life.

Sukhum/i verified EPIs

Peace is [when..]:

1. You have harmony inside of you/inner peace
2. Your state is capable of providing security
3. You are able to make plans for the future
4. Your child can get a high-quality education
5. You see people resting, living their lives and going out in the city, drinking coffee
6. You are able to freely travel abroad
7. you are able to travel freely and communicate with people who live all over the world
8. Having stable electricity
9. I call the police for help, and they provide me with this help
10. Not being afraid that at some point somebody decides that this is the best moment for a war
11. Having the opportunity to study and learn things I am interested in without facing any big obstacles
12. No one fears for their life
13. I call an ambulance and it arrives on time and has medicines

Everyday Peace in Sukhum/i

The EPI research process engaged members of local communities from different gender and age groups from central as well as suburban areas of Sukhum/i. Overall, 56 persons participated in six FGDs and seven KIIs (25 women and 31 men, including 24 youth). The research findings combine the perspectives of people working in civil society, academic, business and various public sectors, as well as so-called ordinary people living in the city. At the initial stage, 27 EPIs were identified, out of which 13 were verified by the local community members.

Community-driven indicators provide a complex view of the perceptions and needs for everyday peace amongst the residents of Sukhum/i. According to the EPI research findings, local communities mainly define peace in relation to security. Almost a quarter of verified EPIs in Sukhum/i demonstrated either the public demand for security or raised security concerns, particularly fear of war. People also prioritized development-related indicators, focusing on access to quality education, healthcare, local infrastructure, and reliable institutions. To some extent, both security and development-related EPIs are interconnected with the issue of stability. Fear of unexpected escalation of the conflict affects people's everyday lives (EPI #10), their sense of personal security (EPI #12), planning future (EPI #3) and perception of events/sounds. Importantly, the most voted indicator for everyday peace focuses on inner peace and tranquility. Categorized as transcendental peace, such indicators demonstrate that people in Sukhum/i define peace not only in terms of negative peace, but positive peace is also a significant aspect of their perceptions of everyday peace. However, in the local understanding of transcendental peace, boundaries between positive and negative peace are largely blurred.

1. Inner peace and security - Peace is when you have harmony inside of you.

The EPI related to inner peace and tranquility – **peace is when you have harmony inside of you/inner peace** – received the most votes at the verification stage. However, as local communities explain, there are various factors influencing inner peace at both personal and societal levels, such as security, internal and external aspects.

At the personal level, everyday peace relies solely on personal and family matters despite the conditions one might live in. It is an individual experience of peace in daily life and mental wellbeing, while the social dimension unfolds issues related to stability and how a social context influences a personal perception of peace. As one of the respondents noted, *"If you fear a war every day, you will not have any inner harmony."*¹⁷

The nexus of inner peace and security for people living in Sukhum/i is closely linked with the absence of war and fear of war. Although there is no armed conflict going on, the public perception of living in a protracted conflict is stronger than their perception of peace. Discussions around the indicator showed that people perceive the existing peace as fragile, mainly threatened by a possible attack from the Georgian side and the affiliation with the Russian Federation, the former named more often than the latter

Negative peace is the absence of organized violence or fear of violence. /Institute for Economics and Peace

Positive peace is the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies. /Institute for Economics and Peace

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when people around are not dressed in black

¹⁷ Verification FGD 1, Sukhum/i

in this context. The fear that war might start anytime is the major concern, creating a deep sense of uncertainty and instability affecting inner peace and harmony among the local communities engaged in the research. Beyond external factors, research participants discussed intra-societal dynamics, such as contradictions within Abkhaz society, protest rallies and pickets, which lead people to a critical point of discontent. Importantly, interpretations provided for this indicator show that the perception of everyday peace is contingent on the local and regional dynamics.

2. Security - Peace is when your state is capable of providing security.

Security concerns were linked to duty-bearers in the second most voted indicator – **peace is when your state is capable of providing security**. Sukhum/i residents stressed that the main function of authorities is to ensure the security of their citizens. A modernized and self-reliant army is perceived as the primary guarantor of public security, since the major concern derives from their constant fear of a military assault from the Georgian side. Importantly, the fear is mainly triggered by information about the threat of reprisals by Georgians disseminated via social media. The research participants were particularly worried about being expelled from the territory or killed. In their discussions about the possibilities of an armed conflict, they perceived the threat at both personal and societal levels, which was sometimes indivisible. Besides sporadic triggers, a sense of insecurity was also connected with the inability to achieve a peace agreement between the conflicting sides, indicating the implications of peace processes on individual perceptions of peace.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when there are no bullet marks on houses; houses are not destroyed and burnt.

The responsibility of duty-bearers to ensure rule of law and public safety was identified as another aspect of this indicator. Residents of Sukhum/i point out several factors that could enhance their daily security. The major one is related to the decreasing the number of local criminal incidents. Moreover, when such incidents occur, the public expects the police officers to apply appropriate measures so that the residents do not have to seek support from criminal groups. In addition, the local communities identified a separate indicator (EPI #9) – **peace is when I call the police for help, and they provide me with this help - demonstrating the significance of the issue and the importance of reliable** institutions for peace in everyday life. However, the research participants emphasized that citizens also share the responsibility for daily security by adhering to the laws and respecting the rights of others.

3. Stability and fear of war - Peace is being able to make plans for the future.

The next most voted everyday peace indicator in Sukhum/i was related to a sense of stability - **being able to make plans for the future**. Discussions around this indicator revealed several factors influencing a sense of stability, such as security, socio-economic development and institutional stability. Similar to the previous two EPIs, people attributed the strain on the fragility of existing peace as the main cause of instability in their daily operations. **Being afraid that at some point somebody decides that this is the best moment for a war** (EPI #10), people refrain from making investments and starting a business.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when the noise of shotguns does not incite the fear of war.

Moreover, for many, everyday peace and stability relies on stable jobs and adequate income to cover basic expenses and loans. The fear of losing a job hinders residents from managing earnings and better organizing their lives. Issues related to infrastructure development also affected daily stability. For example, **having stable electricity** was such a strong demand among the residents that it was identified as one of the indicators for everyday peace (EPI #8). Similarly, stable access to water is essential for making plans for the day. However, the issue of stable electricity combines factors beyond the need for infrastructure development, such as cryptocurrency mining and the electricity taxation system. Although widely acknowledged that the existing scale of crypto-mining exhausts electricity infrastructure and causes power outages, the opinions of research participants was divided as to whether to prioritize mining income, or stable access to electricity. The research participants noticed that only a small group of privileged individuals benefit from the mining industry, while the whole society has to accept its consequences. Similarly, some admit the need for taxing electricity consumption, so that people will care more about how they use resources, while others consider it to be an additional burden.

Another source of concern about the future derived from the unpredictable changes in the local political class and agenda, creating institutional instability. This hinders long-term planning in any area of social, political and economic development, as well as civic society engagement in the decision-making process. Efforts to achieve policy and program agreements with one administration are often wasted, since a new administration will subsequently require a new approach.

Age also influences how people perceive stability that changes over time. For the senior and older generations, the Soviet time was the most stable, followed by the absolute chaos and instability of the '90s. However, the younger generation (under 30-32 years) does not have a memory of a more stable period for reference, but still lacks a sense of stability, as they think that *"this stability can end at any moment, which means there is no stability."*¹⁸

4. Access to education - Peace is when your child can get a high-quality education.

Access to quality education was one of the key topics discussed amongst the research participants. As they phrased it, **peace is when your child can get a high-quality education**. For some, this indicator is associated with the past, when it was not safe for children to go to school or kindergarten due to the war. This war-related childhood trauma amongst the parents makes them particularly cautious about education opportunities for their children. However, the majority interpreted this indicator as access to quality education for children, so that educated generations can better serve the society.

Strong ties between quality education and peace for residents of Sukhum/i could be explained by the limited internationalization of higher education in Abkhazia due to the unresolved conflict, affecting the overall quality and modernization of the education system.¹⁹ Moreover, there are only a few opportunities for Abkhaz youth to study abroad, especially in Europe, while some of the programs they might be interested in are not available at universities in Sukhum/i.²⁰ Therefore, **having the opportunity to study and learn things I am interested in without facing any big obstacles** (EPI #11) is directly connected with peace for young women and men in Sukhum/i.

Another factor limiting access to better education opportunities at the local level is socio-economic inequality. According to the research participants, many cannot afford to study at private schools or hire a tutor, while self-education is not appealing since employers require official educational certificates. Due to the low quality of teaching at school, many need the additional support of a private tutor to pass the exams to enroll at university. At the primary and secondary education levels, the role of family and social assistance services was outlined as vital to ensure every child can study at school, despite the socio-economic conditions.

¹⁸ Youth FGD, Sukhum/i

¹⁹ Dzhikirba, S. and Relitz, S. (2020) Strengthening Internationalisation of Higher Education in Abkhazia: Status-quo, Potentials, Challenges, and Recommendations. Insights from Young Scholars and Peacebuilders from the Caucasus. Corridors Proceedings Vol.II, Berlin.

²⁰ Kanashvili, G. (2022) Where Abkhaz Students (Can't) Study? Tbilisi: Civil.ge. <https://civil.ge/archives/473741> Accessed 15 March 2022.

5. Transcendental peace - Peace is when you see people resting, living their lives and going out in the city, drinking coffee.

Although the absence of fear of war emerged as the leading factor for public perception of peace in Sukhum/i, the research participants identified indicators that best capture their understanding of positive peace in everyday life – **peace is when you see people resting, living their lives and going out in the city, drinking coffee.** According to their explanations, drinking coffee best captures the moment of peaceful life, bringing a feeling of tranquility. It was named as a daily experience of peace when one can drink coffee without concerns. In particular, the memory of the war makes people appreciate the opportunity to rest and exercise, and enjoy their daily routine, such as drinking coffee and walking along the seashore.

It is noteworthy that drinking coffee prepared in a Sukhumian way in a cafe is part of the local custom, deeply rooted in their habits. Thus, if locals are not able to keep this tradition, it means that their normal life is interrupted. Interestingly, while discussions around peace often lead to identifying a need for change, respondents in Sukhum/i emphasized that appreciating what you have is also important for experiencing peace.

6. Freedom of movement - Peace is being able to freely travel abroad.

Being able to freely travel abroad was named as another indicator of everyday peace by residents of Sukhum/i. The issue is directly linked to the protracted conflict and unresolved dispute over the status of Abkhazia. To travel abroad, they have to accept Russian citizenship that entails the identity issue. Besides, many cannot afford the cost of preparing a Russian passport and relevant documents, adding a socio-economic layer to the issue. Moreover, some Abkhaz cannot receive Russian citizenship, reinforcing the feeling of isolation.

European countries are the main destinations for Abkhaz for travelling and education purposes. As outlined earlier, young people aspire to a high-quality education at western universities. Yet, only a few manage to handle the documentation issues, making a significant effort and, sometimes, posing additional financial burden on their families. Creating motivation for youth to return to Abkhazia was another point of discussion under this indicator. On the one hand, local communities, especially the parents' generation, are concerned about a high rate of migration and brain drain from Abkhazia. On the other hand, many young people who complete their degrees in European or Russian universities struggle to find respective jobs in Abkhazia. In this regard, the research participants point out the scarcity of qualified personnel and professionals in various fields.

Feeling isolated, the demand for **being able to travel freely and communicate with people who live all over the world** (EPI #7) is another community-sourced indicator related to the issue of freedom of movement. The indicator captures the importance of interacting with foreigners and the interest in being exposed to different cultures, particularly for young women and men, whereas for the parents' generation, the fear of living in a total blockade, which they experienced after the war in the '90s, prevails in discussions about mobility.

Everyday peace indicators in Sukhum/i illustrate the complexity of public perception of peace in a protracted conflict setting. An overwhelming fear of war and a sense of insecurity indicates that the absence of armed conflict is necessary but not sufficient for people to call it peace. The unresolved conflict affects every aspect of life, from the socio-economic development of the whole society to self-realization and inner peace at the personal level. Although interpretations provided for each EPI entail political elements of the protracted conflict, representatives of local communities speak about the implications of the conflict on their everyday peace and stability, shifting the focus from political to human-oriented discourse. Moreover, indicators that research participants use to identify peace are often embedded in traditions, requiring an in-depth understanding of local customs, public memory and the social fabric in which residents of Sukhum/i operate.

Zugdidi verified EPIs

Peace is [when..]:

1. You have a dignified income, citizens should not worry about how to feed a family
2. The road [with Abkhazia] is open, not only IDPs, but others are free to move.
3. We can visit Sukhum/i and they can visit Batumi
4. Having your own roof (house)
You do not live at somebody's house
5. Stray dogs not wondering in groups and people are not afraid to go out because of them
6. There is no fear that tomorrow occupier will come, kick you out from your house and take away everything you worked for
7. You live close to a "boundary" line but are not afraid of going out and seeing someone armed cross the "border"
8. We are tolerant with each other, consider and respect each other's opinions
9. Your child has a well-equipped environment to comfortably get a quality education
10. You have opportunities for self-realisation
11. You can go out and relax after work (referencing a lack of cultural-recreation spaces)
12. You feel integrated in the local community and nobody points at you as "IDP", "Galian" [a person from the Gal/i region]
13. You are not afraid to stay at home alone at night due to the increased rate of crime
14. You are not afraid of changes due to the fear that Russia will move in "the border"
15. We are not divided by party affiliation
16. Articulating different political opinions is not a problem
17. You are not afraid of being different
18. You are not concerned that you will not be able to hold on to your job

Everyday Peace in Zugdidi

Fieldwork in Zugdidi interviewed 73 people (44 women and 29 men, including 12 young persons). KIIs and FGDs around everyday peace indicators were conducted with residents of the city of Zugdidi and 10 surrounding villages. Research participants' age varied from 18 to 73 years and represented both IDP and host communities. At the first stage of research, 26 peace indicators were identified, among them 18 prioritized by community members within the verification process.

Understanding of everyday peace in Zugdidi reflects multiple interconnected needs and challenges people face in their daily lives. Their perception of peace varies and unpacks different problems such as financial instability and poverty, restricted freedom of movement, the need for better housing conditions, fear of war, and other concerns that interfere with a sense of peacefulness. Research participants from Zugdidi understood the idea of peace as a positive concept that went beyond the absence of armed conflict or direct violence. Peace in everyday life embodies several components and people recognize the importance of acceptance, tolerance, respect for differences. Zugdidi research participants engaged in conversations around everyday peace with critical and open minds; they identified not only problems that distort their sense of everyday peace, but discussed possible efforts for strengthening conditions for everyday peace.

1. Dignified Income – peace is when citizens do not worry about how to feed a family

The need to have a dignified income was the top indicator for Zugdidi research participants that influenced their perception of everyday peace. Discussions around the importance of dignified income yielded issues of unemployment and poverty. Zugdidi research participants described the difficult reality they often face, which connects not only struggling with unemployment, but also uncertainty whether they can maintain current job positions or not – **peace is when you are not concerned that you will not be able to hold on to your job** (EPI #18). Research participants discussed causality between poor socio-economic conditions and deteriorating health, and argued that those affected by poverty usually experience health-related problems due to constant feelings of stress. Poverty and unemployment also reinforce feelings of injustice; economically vulnerable groups see themselves as always left behind, while they remain the ones who are working hard - *“I work every day physically, I work as worker/laborer, I do not hesitate doing physically demanding work, but workers’ rate is 20 GEL and it is impossible to take care of family with that amount of money.”*²¹ The need for dignified income is a common issue for both IDPs and host communities residing in Zugdidi municipality.

2. Freedom of movement – peace is the road [with Abkhazia] is open, not only IDPs, but others are free to move.

Proximity to the ABL affects Zugdidi research participants' perception of everyday peace. Thus, freedom of movement across the ABL was seen as a critical factor for peace. However, freedom of movement also reflected two problems people face daily: first, closure of ABL checkpoints, and second, fear of moving freely in the areas closer to the ABL.

Zugdidi and Gal/i municipalities are quite interdependent on each other in terms of trade and family connections. People from Gal/i who cross the ABL and buy basic household products in Zugdidi create income for Zugdidi residents; some also sell various items and supply local markets in Zugdidi. Despite economic interdependence, divided families were the stronger aspect of everyday peace for research participants. People spoke about family members who often remain isolated on the other side of the ABL. The elderly, children and people with health issues face the most difficult reality due to closed checkpoints. School children as well as university students who have part of their families in Gal/i often become trapped in one or another side of the ABL not knowing when movement will resume. Elderly and people with health issues who often need urgent medi-

cal or family care also remain vulnerable due to uncertainty around ABL crossings.

Research participants from Zugdidi also spoke about everyday peace as the ability to visit Abkhazia to see Sukhum/i and other places. Indicators such as **Peace is when we can visit Sukhum/i and they can visit Batumi** (EPI #3), also, **peace is when one can visit his/her house [in Abkhazia] and come back without fear** (EPI #2) reflected the importance of uninterrupted communication across the ABL along with the need for freedom of movement. The indicators indicating the importance of having freedom to move across the ABL to visit Abkhazia and come back consisted of a second theme that was prioritized by the research participants during verification. Interestingly, people spoke about visiting Abkhazia and coming back. Although the issue of IDP return was not overlooked, conversations often focused on visiting rather than full-scale return of IDPs, which seemed more realistic and doable in unresolved, protracted conflict reality. Discussions around freedom of movement touched another critical concern for residents of Zugdidi, especially for those villages which are located closer to the ABL. People felt they were under constant risk and exposed to an uncertain reality – they can get detained or suspected at any time without proper reason and explanation.

3. Better housing – peace is when you have your own roof (house).

The need for better housing as one more critical aspect of everyday peace. Research participants discussed having a roof, in other words, reliable housing, as an issue not only for IDPs but host communities too. However, housing remains a bigger concern for IDPs as they are often perceived as homeless, which in many cases reflects the reality (many IDPs still do not have reliable housing), but it also shows the stigma that continues to exist and marginalizes IDPs and their families.

The need for better housing conditions was described as a common issue for IDPs as well as some socially and economically disadvantaged host communities. One indicator specifically underlined the issue – **peace is when you do not live at somebody's house** (EPI #4). Even more, the protracted process of IDP resettlement affects people's mental and psychological well-being, IDPs find the never-ending process of resettlement to be a mentally abusive process that keeps them trapped in an endless waitlist – *“my husband is war veteran, we are waiting for an apartment for 25 years already; my kids are all grownups.”*²²

One more concern that distorts perception of everyday peace relates to still-existing stigma around being an IDP. In Zugdidi, IDPs are often labelled as Galian or even as refugees. People highlighted controversial opinions around existing stigma on IDPs. Some spoke about the change they have seen not only in IDP communities, but in the perception of host communities – *“Even 10 years ago I could tell who was an IDP and who was not, now I do not even think about it.”*²³ Some disagreed and spoke about the “labels” IDPs or people from Gal/i have. Some research participants argued that not taking seriously into account existing labeling and stigmatization of IDPs resembles ignorance, you know the issue is still out there but prefer to sideline it, or take it as partially resolved and thus, not important for deeper reflections.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when without fear one can visit his/her house in Abkhazia and come back

²² Verification FGD 2, Zugdidi

²³ Verification KII 1, Zugdidi

4. Nuances of everyday routine – peace is when stray dogs are not wandering in groups and people are not afraid to go out because of them.

Along with more systemic issues, everyday peace reflected practical, day-to-day concerns people face in their daily routine. For example, the fifth indicator of everyday peace in Zugdidi spoke about the issue of stray dogs. Apparently, uncontrolled stray dogs create multiple concerns for Zugdidi research participants who discussed several issues – some dogs are aggressive and bite people, and children are particularly vulnerable in this context. City residents struggle with safety while walking in the streets, especially if stray dogs wander around in large packs. One more concern reflected stray dogs' conditions, and mentioned that some people often abuse stray dogs, which is hard to tolerate. The indicator on stray dogs reiterated the practicality of everyday peace and prompted conversations on possible solutions to the issue so that Zugdidi residents can have one less stress-inducing factor in their daily routine.

5. Accepting diversity - peace is when we are tolerant with each other, consider and respect each other's opinions.

Several indicators discussed the importance of acceptance and tolerance for everyday peace. Research participants distinguished two themes: first, political polarization in the society and second, fear of being different. Two indicators highlighted how crucial political divisions are – **peace is when you are not divided by party affiliation** and **peace is when articulating different political opinions is not a problem** (EPI #15). People discussed examples that showed very simple manifestations of party affiliated divisions. *"It could happen that doctor does not accept you as a patient as she/he knows you support the other political party;"*²⁴ *"Once I was told – it is surprising you got a running water, well, you are an opposition;"*²⁵ *"Sometimes even a neighbor will not give you a ride, simply because you showed support for the other party."*²⁶ Deeply rooted political divisions affect perceptions of everyday peace for Zugdidi residents and distorts the normalcy of everyday life. It should be noted that fieldwork was conducted during the local municipality election period, which prompted research participants to discuss political party-related polarization in their society.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when all structures of the municipality works properly

Peace is when in region and municipality there is a space we can go, talk and someone will hear us

However, some respondents discussed the need for acceptance and tolerance beyond political party divisions. Two following indicators reflected some key insights how people link respect and acceptance with everyday peace – **peace is when we are tolerant with each other, consider and respect each other's opinions (EPI #16)** and **peace is when you are not afraid of being different (EPI #17)**. Both indicators prompted discussions around healthy society, free from irrelevant fears about "different" people and opinions. Conversations revealed that being different (identity-related or physical characteristics) does not mean that someone is bad, they are just different.

6. Fear of war – peace is when you have no fear that tomorrow an occupier will come, kick you out of your house and take away everything you worked for.

Conflict-affected people have a deeply rooted fear of war. Protracted

²⁴ Verification FGD 2, Zugdidi

²⁵ Verification FGD 2, Zugdidi

²⁶ Verification FGD 1, Zugdidi

conflict further strengthens the anticipation of war. Research participants identified indicators that highlighted two expected concerns – first, the unaddressed trauma of war-affected people and second, the danger of living in uncertain conditions. The following indicator demonstrates how traumatized war-affected people are – **peace is when you live close to a boundary line but are not afraid of going out and seeing someone armed cross the “border”** (EPI #7). People spoke about the contrasting feelings they have when they see military or police in the villages closer to the ABL; often, they do not foster a feeling of safety, on the contrary, sometimes people feel worried, as they associate the police or military with upcoming danger. However, residents of those villages which are at the ABL feel more worried due to uncertainty about whether military from the other side crosses the ABL or not.

Some indicators that addressed the topic of fear are related to criminal behavior – **peace is when I walk in the street with my family knowing that nobody will attack us** and **peace is when you sleep calmly at night and are not afraid of anything**. Zugdidi research participants spoke about their lack of confidence in local law enforcement and protection mechanisms to protect them from criminals.

Everyday peace for women is a combination of factors that help them to remain resilient. Domestic violence and forced migration were discussed as key problems for women in Zugdidi that distort their everyday peace. Women often become victims of domestic violence and their financial vulnerability, as well as some cultural norms that restrain women from speaking publicly about violence they have experienced reinforces the problem. Forced migration as a result of unemployment and increased poverty also affect women, in particular, when women take the burden of being breadwinners of the family and migrate to different countries to find a job, a common phenomenon.

Research participants from Zugdidi discussed the idea of everyday peace from various perspectives. In their view, peace in everyday life manifests through better socio-economic conditions, better housing, freedom to move across the ABL, less uncertainty and lower (or no) fear of war. Peace for communities in Zugdidi has deep and comprehensive meaning, and peace is not solely the absence of direct violence, especially in their protracted conflict reality.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when I can listen to birds singing, when my mind is free from problems and I can hear the nature

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when the sound of fireworks does not associate with gunfire and the sound of tank

Akhalgori EPIs (not verified)

Peace is [when..]:

- I am no longer afraid to speak with you and not asking to hide my name.
- Both sides find reconciliation and forgive each other for everything that had happened in the past.
- You are not longing to see your grandchildren [living across the conflict line] in old age.
- You do not fear your neighbor spying on you.
- You come and go as you please and these actions do not seem suspicious to anyone.
- You do not get labelled as a “spy”.
- You do not have a constant urge to run away from here and leave everything behind.
- Kids do not have to learn the difference between [Russian] armoured vehicles.
- Bribery is not involved in getting a university degree or starting a job.
- There is no war.
- The sound of gunfire does not wake you up.
- You can plan your future assured that a war will not change your plans.
- [For a cattle owner] A day has gone without a loss.
- Laws do not change if someone in Tskhinval/i or Tbilisi wakes up on the wrong side of the bed.
- You do not have to go to Tskhinval/i to get a haircut.
- You do not fear speaking in the Georgian language in Tskhinval/i.
- Your house survives the war undamaged.
- Your children are healthy and happy.
- Paychecks (pensions, salaries) arrive on time
- Cell-phone communication is not disrupted.
- You do not have to hide your family name/surname due to your ethnicity anymore [ethnic Ossetians].

Everyday Peace in Akhalgori

Fieldwork on everyday peace research in Akhalgori was conducted in the Summer-Fall of 2021. The local researcher engaged 24 people from the town and surrounding villages in conversations about everyday life and peace (15 women and 9 men, including 4 young persons, varying in age from 23 to 67 years). EPIs from Akhalgori are not verified and are based on individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This methodology was adapted due to context-specific needs, more specifically, to ensure the safety of research participants and provide a safe space for open conversations. Research participants from Akhalgori were ethnically diverse, and ethnic Georgians as well as ethnic Ossetians engaged in the conversations.

People in Akhalgori spoke about everyday peace in relative terms; for some, peace was the absence of direct violence, while for others, the protracted reality of conflict and a “no war” situation did not necessarily resonate with their concept of peace. Reflections about peace and war were highlighted by different viewpoints and experiences. For example, some people pointed out that Akhalgori did not see actual war and destruction, yet the district has had to deal with its severe consequences for years. Many respondents mentioned that they appreciated peace after the war in 2008. Others emphasized the constant fear of war that is overwhelmingly present in their lives – *“I know war, I know what it looks like, but I do not know peace.”*²⁷

Everyday life in Akhalgori reflects a protracted conflict reality; people talked about life in closed borders as living with uncertainty and overwhelming monotony. One of the most interesting conversations about daily routines stressed changes over time. People spoke about previous and current periods, and some showed a certain nostalgia about the pre-war period and its relative peacefulness. However, some respondents differentiated the 1990's period from late and early 2000s. The latter was more peaceful for Akhalgori residents, without ethnic divisions and oppressive reality, while in the 1990s some Ossetians had to hide family names or change them to feel safer.

Currently, the protracted conflict in Akhalgori has a major influence on daily life. People talked about different aspects that show how unresolved conflict affects their daily routine. Research participants from Akhalgori described their daily life as overwhelming monotony; they said they do the same things, they see the same people, and they follow the same, almost prescribed routine every day. Some described living in Akhalgori as “life without possibilities”, knowing that tomorrow will not be much different from today. Research participants also spoke about increasing internal migration; more and more people are leaving their homes and moving to Georgian-controlled territory, usually to Tserovani (IDP settlement of ethnic Georgians in Georgia proper). Life within closed “borders” and uncertainty affect Akhalgori residents’ mental and physical well-being. Many compared living in Akhalgori with living in prison, and many spoke about the anxiety that accompanies their daily life.

Defining components of everyday life that support or distort peace has been a challenging task without verification opportunity as we cannot tell how people understood developed indicators and prioritized them in Akhalgori. However, gathered data and frequent conversations with the local field researcher allow us to discuss various aspects research participants saw as indicators for peace or lack of it in their daily lives.

• **Absence of armed conflict – Peace is when there is no war**

The simplest conceptualization of everyday peace for Akhalgori citizens was “no war” reality – *“We do not have war, so, it is peace.”*²⁸ Besides the absence of armed conflict, many participants mentioned “undamaged, undestroyed houses” as an indicator for peace – **peace is when your house survives the war undamaged**. However, when people spoke about undamaged houses, they

²⁷ Research participant from Akhalgori, Male, 24, Georgian

²⁸ Research participant from Akhalgori, Male, 40, Georgian

referred to the war in 2008, more specifically to the fact that their houses were not destroyed during the war. As those houses in Akhagori that are left by their patrons, they have collapsed and many more are crumbling.

Interestingly, the relative quietness in Akhagori was described not only from the perspective of a no war reality, but because of reduced local criminal cases. Research participants talked about how they are not afraid of unexpected raids, they rarely hear gunshots, and nobody gets robbed on a daily basis. Overall, they stressed that the crime rate has been reduced to a minimum in the district. However, some also said that young men experience more frequent check-ups and questioning than women. All this resembled peace for some residents, yet many wondered whether this relative quietness is really peace. While contemplating components of positive peace, many concluded that the current reality in Akhagori is far away from real peace.

• **Freedom of expression – Peace is when I am no longer afraid to speak with you and not asking to hide my name.**

Although EPIs from Akhagori are not verified, two themes gathered the highest numbers of indicators – Freedom of Expression and No Fear of War. Akhagori residents discussed the need to express their concerns without fear and to have life without imposed limitations as crucial components of everyday peace. The following indicator - **Peace is when I am no longer afraid to speak with you and not asking to hide my name** revealed the importance of freedom to comprehend peace. Research participants from Akhagori repeated phrases such as peace is when “*nobody dictates you what to do,*” “*nobody restricts you from doing something or going somewhere,*” “*you make your decisions and decide how to organize your life.*” They used these phrases to describe how many imposed restrictions they face in their daily life and how this type of life cannot be understood as peaceful.

Alongside imposed restrictions, research participants talked about the lack of trust they have within their communities and how this affects their everyday peace. Two indicators reflected the conversations around the theme more specifically – **peace is when you do not fear your neighbor spying on you and peace is when you do not get labeled as a spy.** Apparently, certain limitations people face come from widespread distrust within the community itself. However, it is hard to say how much of this suspicion is purposefully generated by internal and external actors, and which local dynamics reinforce the mistrust further. One more fear that also shows how much freedom of expression and peace links for Akhagori people was fear of speaking in the Georgian language in Tskhinval/i. Although nobody mentioned a concrete case of recent abuse or discrimination because of speaking in Georgian in Tskhinval/i, the existence of the fear still demonstrates the limitation Georgian-speaking people face in their everyday life.

“*We are voiceless people*”²⁹ said one participant during the interview, and explained that being voiceless means an inability to protest, feelings of helplessness, and overwhelming frustration as nothing changes and you do not see any leverage for influencing your reality. Although we cannot generalize either EPIs nor specific perceptions and opinions of research participants to the entire Akhagori population, the word ‘voiceless’ describes the general mood and reality of people in the district.

• **No fear of war – peace is when you can plan your future assured that a war will not change your plans**

Never-ending fear of war also shapes people’s perception of everyday peace in Akhagori. Research participants spoke about a simple manifestation of this fear as kids learning about military weapons at school age or fear of noise that is often associated with gunshots. **Peace is when kids do not have to learn the difference between [Russian] armored vehicles** – this indicator reflects the reality that many people face when they live in protracted conflicts and closer to divid-

ing lines where conflict usually is more intense. Waking up with the sound of an alarm clock, not gunshots, was another indicator that reinforced a sense of everyday peace, however, as much as residents appreciated the current quietness, many spoke about overwhelming uncertainty – *“I am sure one day gunshots will wake me up.”*³⁰

This profound fear of war shapes up another indicator for everyday peace - **when you do not have a constant urge to run away from here and leave everything behind.** This indicator demonstrated the fragility and instability of the current context and the difficulty in planning for the future. Like other research locations, research participants in Akhalgori spoke about the importance of being able to make plans for the future and not being afraid that war will change everything. The fact that this indicator occurs in all research locations also shows that no matter what the protracted conflict context may be, people enduring war remain afraid of it forever.

• **Divided families – peace is when you are not longing to see your grandchildren [living across the conflict line] in old age.**

Almost everyone living in Akhalgori has family members either across the ABL with Georgia proper or in Vladikavkaz (Russia). Thus, the issue of divided families was a significant component for everyday peace, more specifically, having the ability to see all members of family whenever wished or needed – *“peace is when we can gather the family together in our house.”*³¹ The same indicator has been generated from discussions in other research locations, specifically in Gal/i. This demonstrates that although everyone who has endured conflict struggles with loss of the family members and loved ones, divided families are the critical concern for people living in Akhalgori or Gal/i, and the issue is an integral part of their daily life, as many cannot see their family members for months or years. Ethnic Ossetian participants spoke about the same issue, some emphasized that the current situation in Akhalgori does not favor either ethnic Georgians nor ethnic Ossetians, and that everyone struggles equally – *“some say Ossetians are happy here, tell me how I can be happy, when my children, who are ethnic Ossetians and living in Tbilisi, cannot come here and I cannot see my grandchildren for years.”*³²

Some participants linked the issue of divided families with strengthening restrictions on crossing the ABL with Georgia proper and worsened conditions in the district, which has forced many people to enroll in the “Family Reunification Program”³³ offered by the South Ossetian de facto leadership. The initiative, which appeared in 2020, suggested that Georgians living in Akhalgori “reunite” with their families in Georgia proper. In reality, after accepting the offer people would be deprived of the right to return to Akhalgori and they would have to abandon their immovable property left in the district. The program is a clear illustration of legitimizing forced displacement and pressure on ethnic Georgians to leave the district.

• **Freedom of movement – peace is when you come and go as you please.**

Although only one indicator speaks about the importance of free movement across the ABL for everyday peace, almost all participants mentioned this issue during their interviews. Freedom of movement was

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when the sound of gunfire does not wake you up.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when laws do not change if someone in Tskhinval/i or Tbilisi wakes up on the wrong side of the bed.

³⁰ Research participant from Akhalgori, male, 47, Ossetian

³¹ Research participant from Akhalgori, female, 26, Georgian

³² Research participant from Akhalgori, female, 67, Ossetian

³³ DRI (2021). The Akhalgori Deadlock. Available at: <http://www.democracyresearch.org/files/95akhalgori%20deadlock%2001.03.2021.pdf>

top-of-mind in Summer and Fall 2021, when fieldwork in Akhalgori was conducted, and the district population suffered because of closed roads dating from 2019.³⁴ Many participants talked about the closed road as an overwhelmingly stressful topic, some even mentioned that people stopped talking or asking about when the road would open to save themselves from repeated disappointment and accompanying anxiety. Freedom of movement across the ABL was also linked with an increasing number of people with health problems among Akhalgori residents. The first months of Covid-19 were particularly harsh as at least 25 people died because of closed checkpoints and delayed medical assistance in Akhalgori.³⁵ Like other research locations, especially Gal/i, free movement across the ABL is a strong indication of peace for Akhalgori people.

• **Reconciliation – peace is when both sides find reconciliation and forgive each other for everything that has happened in the past**

Reconciliation between Georgians and Ossetians has been identified as an important indicator for peace too. Interestingly, while talking about reconciliation, research participants from Akhalgori recounted contradictory stories. Some spoke about the lack of ethnic divisions in the district before the 2008 war, while others remembered ethnicity-based discrimination. However, the latter was mainly associated with the 1990's, not the early 2000's – *“when I was young, I was ashamed and scared to reveal I was Ossetian.”*³⁶

Many stories shared during interviews demonstrated inter-ethnic respect and friendship – *“when my brother passed away, entire Tserovani came to funeral to pay respect, this is how much we valued each other,”*³⁷ *“I had both Georgian and Ossetian classmates and before 2008 I did not even know who ethnic Georgian was and who ethnic Ossetians.”*³⁸

Inter-ethnic reconciliation and forgiveness was seen as strong indicator for everyday peace for research participants from Akhalgori, especially when they acknowledge the war and protracted conflict as mutually destructive for ethnic Georgians and ethnic Ossetians living in the district – *“I am Ossetian but nothing good came out from this war for me, for ordinary people the war is hell, nothing more.”*³⁹

• **Absence of basic infrastructure and embedded daily corruption.**

There are two topics that appeared in every conversation among research participants which were identified as crucial factors influencing everyday peace in the district. **Bribery is not involved in getting a university degree or starting a job** and **You do not have to go to Tskhinval/i to get a haircut** – these two indicators reflected two widespread and crucial problems of everyday life for research participants from Akhalgori experience.

Daily corruption, bribery and nepotism were described as crucial components of everyday life in Akhalgori. People spoke about two issues – getting a diploma without getting an education and having a job without meeting qualifications through nepotism; and the issue of daily corruption. First, many research participants mentioned that you can get a university diploma without necessarily studying and attending the lectures at the university (in Tskhinval/i). The same approach applies with employment within local structures. Research participants said that even if you do not have a certain educational degree or qualifications, you can start a job in the district because of bribes or nepotism. One specific detail many mentioned was a tendency to bring people from Tskhinval/i to Akhalgori to hold higher positions in the district's local government structures, which usually led to change inside the structures, as everyone wanted to employ their family, relatives or friends. Another issue research participants discussed repeatedly was uncontrolled daily corruption, as many people are obliged to pay bribes in different places to get the best service available there. All these have become an inseparable part of daily routine for Akhalgori

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Research participant from Akhalgori, male, 60, Ossetian

³⁷ Research participant from Akhalgori, male, 38, Ossetian

³⁸ Research participant from Akhalgori, male, 24, Ossetian

³⁹ Research participant from Akhalgori, female, 55, Ossetian

⁴⁰ Research participant from Akhalgori, female, 45, Georgian

residents and as one respondent concluded - *“everything is formality here, and everyone knows everything, and they just keep a blind eye to these processes.”*

Another topic that affects the daily life of Akhalgori residents is poor or absent basic infrastructure in the district. For example, many research participants spoke about the issue of running water, roads and public transport. Some people said that they do not have regular running water despite promises and even some attempts to solve the issue. Equally problematic was the absence of asphalt paved driveways, which complicated daily transportation for district residents. Many also mentioned poor public transport, in most cases, even its complete absence. Basic infrastructure is a critical part of daily life and it either removes unnecessary stress and helps people to live their everyday life peacefully, or it creates another problem to deal with.

Everyday peace in Akhalgori is a complex topic. Although the war remains the scariest scenario, people do not feel they live in peace because of multiple imposed restrictions and issues they have to deal with every day.

EPIs for reflection:

Peace is when paychecks (pensions, salaries) arrive on time.

Peace is when cell-phones communication is not disrupted

Gori Verified EPIs

Peace is [when..]:

1. You know that justice stand above everything (rule of law)
2. Houses are not struck by bullets
3. People are not afraid of being kidnapped
4. The noise of fireworks/shotguns does not incite fear of war
5. The noise of fireworks/shotguns does not incite fear of war
6. There is love and harmony in the society like in old times (in the 90s)
7. The absence of fear that when your daughter/son goes out whether they return home or not
8. Being able to visit graves on the other side of the ABL [conflict dividing line]
9. Being able to visit your friends and relatives across the ABL
10. You do not fear living close by military base
11. Being able to enjoy sunset/ chirping of birds/ a cup of coffee in a rose garden
12. Georgians and Ossetians sit down together at Supra [traditional table]
13. You are not concerned about your safety because of the way you dress [young girls]
14. You are not afraid of attending a protest rally

Everyday Peace in Gori

Local community members from urban as well as rural areas of Gori municipality, including villages along with the ABL and IDP settlements, engaged in the EPI research process. Overall, 68 persons participated in seven FGDs and six KIIs, including 46 women and 22 men, 20 youth. At the initial stage, 21 EPIs were identified, out of which 14 were verified by the local community members.

Exploring EPIs in the Gori municipality reveals various factors influencing everyday peace for local communities. More than half of the EPIs define peace in the context of security, with a focus on human security. However, the most voted indicator demonstrates the importance of rule of law and a sense of justice for public perception of peace. For local communities, everyday peace is also associated with freedom of movement and stability, much needed in the context of protracted conflict and the ongoing “borderization” process. Moreover, unaddressed trauma caused by the war and forced displacement affects personal well-being as well as socio-economic development at the local level.

1. Rule of law and justice - Peace is when you know that justice stands above everything.

Everyday peace is most associated with a sense of justice amongst the residents of the Gori municipality. As they phrased it, **peace is when you know that justice stands above everything**. Based on their experience, Gori community members believe that rule of law is essential for avoiding the chaos that led to internal conflicts in the ‘90s. Having a sense of justice is important for experiencing peace on a daily basis. Some Gori residents expressed the opinion that it is a basis for sustainable peace in any society.

EPI research participants point out several issues that define a lack of justice. First, they perceive that privileged groups enjoy special protection from local authorities. Even if they commit a crime or violate road safety rules, they are allowed to go unpunished, which creates impunity syndrome amongst the Gori population. Importantly, high-profile criminal cases at the local level as well as the ones covered by national TV inflict a sense of insecurity. Moreover, research participants name areas in the city and villages near the ABL where privileged drivers, including police officers, exceed the speed limit, causing pedestrian injuries and fatalities. Young people as well as adults, particularly parents, are alarmed to such a degree that they specified the issue in another EPI (#7), **peace is the absence of fear that when your daughter/son goes out whether they return home or not**,⁴¹ indicating the importance of daily security for the public perception of everyday peace.

In addition to the unequal treatment of so-called ordinary people and privileged groups in criminal cases and violation of road safety rules, the local community members raise the issue of nepotism in the workplace and during the job recruitment process. They also questioned the impartiality of the selection process for social assistance programs. Furthermore, they state that not only individuals but whole villages are treated

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when you are not afraid of attending a protest rally.

⁴¹ In another EPI the locals further specify the issue of road safety in the Gori Municipality: Peace is when you are not afraid of your daughter/son getting hit by a car in the street.

differently if they have a connection with local authorities. For example, infrastructural issues are better resolved in villages influential politicians come from, while similar issues in neighboring villages are neglected.

Community members engaged in this research emphasize trust in state institutions as a key factor in shaping a sense of justice. As the police are a major contact point for citizens with the state, the people expect police officers to embody most qualities that they expect from state institutions, particularly equal treatment, adhering to rules, accountability, and a high standard of citizenship. In addition, from citizens' perspective, the level of independence and transparency determines public trust towards the justice system and state institutions in general – *“if the court ruling is pre-defined rather than based on judging a case, the state is fragile and so is peace.”*⁴² Importantly, research participants also stressed the need to enhance awareness of the rights and responsibilities of citizens to develop a rules-based order in society.

Underlining responsive and reliable state institutions and active citizenship as a key aspect of justice and peace demonstrates that positive peace dominates in public perception of everyday peace in the Gori municipality. However, for residents of villages adjacent to the ABL, a sense of justice also relates to the right to legally register and access lands they once owned but are now located in non-government-controlled areas. This is particularly true for those whose farmlands, pasturelands and even houses are either divided by or left behind barbed wires installed by Russian soldiers as part of the “borderization” process; for them, a sense of injustice derives from the protracted conflict that disrupts everyday peace for people living in villages close to the ABL for decades.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when people do not have to defend certain groups or certain rights at a street protest

2. Fear of war - Peace is when houses are not struck by bullets.

Although the EPI research findings show the complexity of public perception of peace, the absence of armed conflict, especially when houses are not struck by bullets, is the main indicator of everyday peace in Gori. This EPI takes its roots from the experience of war in 2008, and refers to three phases of conflict:

1. Conflict escalation and anticipation of war: *“before the war started, there were constant shootings, provocations ... bullets were stuck not only to the roof of a house but windows as well.”*⁴³
2. Culmination and a state of war – a direct attack on and bombing of houses
3. Post-war period: *“When I returned to Gori, there were bullet marks on my house.”*⁴⁴

The memory of shootings leading up to and during the war is vivid for younger as well as older participants of the research. Unfolding this EPI shows the impact of the war on public perception of everyday peace in Gori. The fear and trauma left by the war persisted years after the cease-fire. For example, for about six years after the August War, a few armed soldiers were still guarding schools during classes to ensure the safety of pupils in villages close to the ABL. While discussing this EPI, research participants further spoke about how war-related trauma still affects their health and the ability to pursue what they call “normal life”.

⁴² Verification FGD 3, Gori municipality

⁴³ Verification FGD 2, Gori municipality

⁴⁴ Verification FGD 2, Gori municipality

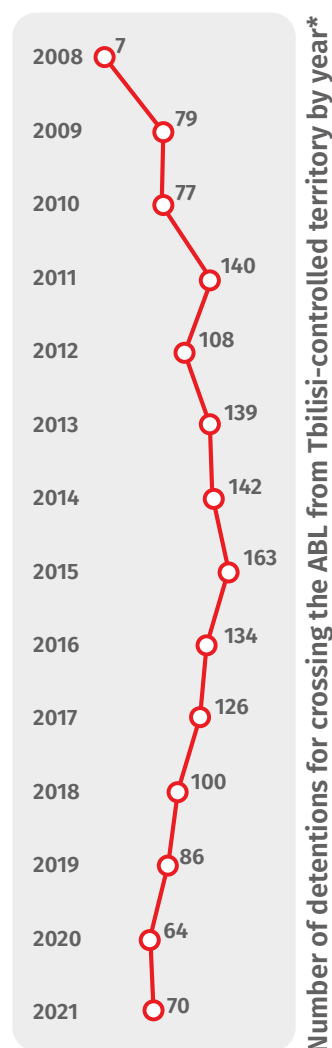
Moreover, in some of the villages (for example, Zardiaantkari and Koshka), houses damaged and destroyed by bombs are yet to be repaired. Families have no other choice but to live in half-demolished houses with damaged roofs and bullet-perforated walls; some houses are abandoned.

3. Security - Peace is when people are not afraid of being kidnapped.

The absence of war is necessary but not sufficient for local communities to say that they live in peace. For residents of villages adjacent to the ABLs, **peace is when people are not afraid of being kidnapped.** As of 2018, at least 34 villages had been divided by barbed wires and fences as part of the “borderization” process led by Russian soldiers. Houses and yards of more than 20 families have been cut through by the “borderization” fences.⁴⁵ In these conditions, the constant fear of abduction affects residents’ sense of security and stability, as well as the social-economic life of the locals, influencing their perception of everyday peace.

Feeling secure in their own houses and villages was the most important need for peace for local communities. While discussing this EPI, research participants shared personal stories of either themselves or their family members and relatives being captured and imprisoned for months or years by Russian troops. They feel particularly helpless as any measures to protect themselves, such as avoiding contact with the dividing line, are ineffective. For example, they recalled cases of people being kidnapped from the Georgian-controlled areas and dragged to the uncontrolled territories to be held in prison. In the absence of closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV), there is no possibility of tracking or recording such incidents. Therefore, the locals consider installing CCTV cameras along the ABL as one way to create a sense of relative security and stability.

In addition to incidents of illegal detention, the people living near the ABL experience a constant fear of possible provocations from Russian servicemen that could flare up an armed conflict again. Due to the “borderization” and fear of detention, hundreds of local farmers cannot access the lands they used for cultivating crops, grazing cattle or collecting firewood, which are the major source of livelihood in the area.⁴⁶ Moreover, since cattle do not recognize dividing lines, unless there is a physical barrier such as fences or barbed wire,⁴⁷ village residents either lose their livestock or risk being arrested to bring them back if they cross the ABL. Living in these conditions, they describe everyday peace as when they do not fear herding cattle to the pasture. Importantly, in some of the villages where the problem is particularly severe, the people have abandoned pastoral farming, reducing their income as well as access to resources. Similarly, the lack of security and unpredictability affect local agriculture and enterprises, which has led to people in villages close to the ABL having become reliant on state support programs.



This graph provides data on illegal detentions for crossing the ABL from Tbilisi-controlled territory, as the Georgian authorities do not have regular access to information on the detention of those attempting to cross the ABL from Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetian. The statistics are collected from the reports of Amnesty International and the Public Defender of Georgia (2019, 2020, 2021).⁴⁸ However, according to Amnesty International, “the South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region de facto authorities’ own statistics reveal much higher numbers. For example, according to the head of the de facto National Security, in 2016, 549 people were detained for “violation of [the] border regime”. Most of them, 325, were “South Ossetian citizens” (presumably, ethnic Ossetians living in South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region who tried to cross into the Tbilisi-controlled side of the ABL), 133 were “Georgian citizens” (presumably residents in Tbilisi-controlled territory trying to cross into South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region side of ABL), and 23 were Russian and foreign citizens.”⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Amnesty International (2018) Behind Barbed Wire: Human Rights Toll of “Borderization” in Georgia. London: Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR5605812019ENGLISH.PDF> Accessed 18 September 2020.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ As of March 2018, the total length of the barbed wire and other fencing along the ABL with South Ossetia/Tskhinvali Region was more than 52 km out of 350 km (Amnesty international, 2018).

⁴⁸ PDG (2019) On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia. [Report] The Public Defender of Georgia. <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2020070407523954521.pdf> Accessed 29 April 2022.

PDG (2020) On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia. [Report] The Public Defender of Georgia. <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2021070814020446986.pdf> Accessed 29 April 2022.

PDG (2021) On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia. [Report] The Public Defender of Georgia. <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2022040413242699860.pdf> Accessed 29 April 2022. 51 Verification KII 2, female respondent, Gori municipality

⁴⁹ Amnesty International (2018) Behind Barbed Wire: Human Rights Toll of “Borderization” in Georgia. London: Amnesty International. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/EUR5605812019ENGLISH.PDF> Accessed 18 September 2020.

Furthermore, the fear of being abducted is especially dominant among people whose family members and relatives are left on the other side of the conflict-divide. To keep the connections or help each other, e.g., deliver medicines or basic goods, they put their safety at risk. Moreover, in some villages, for example, in Khurvaleti, the locals fear attending holiday services at the church located in the Georgian-controlled-area but close to the ABL. They are also restricted from visiting the graves of their family members and ancestors.

4. Trauma and fear of war - Peace is when the noise of fireworks/shotguns does not incite fear of war.

In addition to demonstrating a constant fear of war, one of the most voted EPIs was **peace is when the noise of fireworks/shotguns does not incite fear of war**. Discussions around this EPI show the implications of war-related traumas on people's perception of everyday peace. Both younger and senior age groups speak about still having nightmares about the war in 2008. Some developed claustrophobia due to hiding in basements for shelter from bombs. Locals also name cases of speech disorder among children caused by the fear experienced during the war. Importantly, besides their own trauma, parents also carry worries about the traumatic experience of their children.

Similar to other locations, sounds were one of the key trauma triggers among the residents of the Gori municipality. However, even if the trigger might be the same (sounds), the source of it differed depending on proximity to the dividing line. For example, residents of the city of Gori spoke about the sounds of fireworks inciting the fear of war, while for those living close to the ABL, it was the sounds of shotguns from military drills in Tskhinval/i, exacerbating the level of stress and insecurity. War-sourced traumas affect the daily lives of locals. For example, even ordinary sounds, like the sound of an airplane, can act as a trauma trigger, inciting fear of war. Although the issue is evident, the research participants could not share any experience of receiving mental health support.

Another source of fear linked with the experience of war is the proximity of military bases. As one of the EPIs (#10) shows, for local communities, **peace is when you do not fear living close by a military base**, referring to the pre-2008 period when people were not concerned about having a military base, a military academy and military hospitals in the city. However, this indicator is contingent on the conflict dynamics and location. During a passive phase of the conflict, the presence of military personnel and police officers enhance the sense of security, particularly for those living nearby the ABL with fear of illegal detention by Russian soldiers. However, in case of escalation, the locals feel that they would be the least protected, as military infrastructure and police are the primary targets during a war.

During discussions around these indicators, local community members also pointed at peace processes as one of the factors helping them to cope with a constant sense of insecurity. Although they lack information about topics discussed at the Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) and Geneva International Discussion (GID) meetings, the fact

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when Russian military bases are not visible from your window.

that such dialogue takes place makes the locals feel relative peace and stability. However, when IPRM meetings were halted, it was perceived as an indicator of growing tensions between the conflicting sides, increasing security concerns among the people living close to the ABL. Similarly, the research participants believe that if there were no presence and regular monitoring of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia (EUMM), the situation would be much worse on the ground. Still, they also expressed some discontent about the absence of effective mechanisms for protecting residents during violent incidents and illegal detentions.

5. Fear of war and stability - Peace is when you do not hold back building a house due to fear of war breaking out.

Due to a sense of insecurity and instability, for the people in villages nearby the ABL, **peace is when you do not hold back building a house due to fear of war breaking out.** The traumatic experience of two displacements, in the 1990s and 2008, when families had to abandon their houses and belongings, makes people reconsider any investment in building or renovating houses. Moreover, due to the ongoing “borderization,” forced displacement became an endless process, as some families had to disassemble houses with their hands as the “border” cut through their houses and yard during the past years. The sense of insecurity and unconscious fear that something might happen again results in a lack of investments in real estate as well as local enterprises.

Importantly, residents of the city of Gori have to some extent overcome this fear and the issue is not so relevant anymore. However, the whole municipality is affected by the unstable and risky business environment that deters large-scale investment programs that could create employment opportunities as well as contribute to the development of the area.

6. Transcendental peace - Peace is when there is love and harmony in the society like in old times (in the 90s).

Discussions around the EPI - **peace is when there is love and harmony in the society like in old times (in the 90s)** - unfold the implications of social interaction and its dynamics on the public perception of peace in Gori. People have survived the economic hardship and political chaos of the ‘90s by maintaining strong social bonds with their neighbors, relatives and friends. Daily gatherings, sharing scarce resources, and providing a helping hand to each other created a sense of unity and belonging that shaped their everyday peace. This feeling of nostalgia predominates amongst senior and older age groups, recalling the time when people had “different respect” towards each other. As one of the FGD participants put together, *“in the old times [referring to the Soviet time], there was no distinction between ethnic groups. It did not matter whether a person was ethnic Georgian, Azerbaijani or Ossetian, we all lived together and had equal rights.”*⁵⁰

As Gori residents observe, relationships in society are disrupted by the wars and transformation in human interaction over the past few decades. The pandemic and limited face-to-face communication further contributed to intra-societal isolation tendencies. A cumulative effect of these changes is the increased level of aggression in society, which disrupts everyday peace at the personal as well as community levels.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when Georgia and Ossetians sit down together at supra (traditional feast).

⁵⁰ Verification FGD 3, Gori municipality

In a search for harmony and love, for many of the research participants **peace is being able to enjoy the sunset/chirping of birds/drinking a cup of coffee in a rose garden** (EPI #11). This EPI could be a measurement of inner peace. However, similar to other locations, in Gori, inner peace is connected with a sense of security. As the locals phrase it, drinking coffee when there is no disturbing noise of shotguns or *“watching the sunset is the best embodiment that you are not afraid, and you can go out in nature and enjoy it without fear.”*⁵¹

7. Freedom of movement - Peace is being able to visit graves on the other side of the ABL

8. Peace is being able to visit your friends and relatives across the ABL

Freedom of movement was one of the most discussed topics in the context of everyday peace in Gori, especially among IDPs and residents of villages along the ABL.⁵² These two EPIs - **peace is being able to visit graves on the other side of the ABL and peace is being able to visit your friends and relatives across the ABL** indicate the importance of free mobility for the public perception of peace, as well as the demand for direct communication between conflict-divided societies, despite the years of separation.

To consider the scale of the issue, around 400 people crossed only one checkpoint connecting residents of Akhagori with Georgia proper daily when it was open, based on the Georgian Public Defender 2021 report.⁵³ Due to the long-term closure of checkpoints and the “borderization” process, people cannot visit their family members and relatives living on the other side of the dividing line for years. The “borderization” process disrupts a deep-rooted tradition of visiting graves of family members and ancestors. Many requests for opening humanitarian corridors during the Easter holiday to visit graves once a year have gone in vain. Therefore, for local community members, the most important change for peace is associated with lifting restrictions on movement across the ABL.

*“I am from Khurvaleti where barbed wires cut through the village as well as cemetery into two parts and we no longer have access to the half left on the other side. When my father passed away, his relatives living in Ossetian village Orchosani on the other side could not come to the funeral. But they had so much love and respect for each other that these relatives climbed up to the top of the mountain to watch the funeral. Since the war started [in 2008], we have not seen these relatives in person.”*⁵⁴

Considering the high number of mixed Georgian-Ossetian families, and the need for interaction across the ABL, the mobility restrictions hinder the confidence-building process, the quality of life, and the perception of peace in the conflict-affected communities.

⁵¹ Verification KII 2, female respondent, Gori municipality

⁵² If the votes for these two separate indicators were added up, freedom of movement would be set as the most important indicator for everyday peace in Gori

⁵³ PDG (2021) On the Situation of Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in Georgia. [Report] The Public Defender of Georgia. <https://www.ombudsman.ge/res/docs/2022040413242699860.pdf> Accessed 29 April 2022.

⁵⁴ Verification FGD 3, Gori municipality

Tskhinval/i EPIs (not verified)

Peace is [when..]:

- You do not go to bed hearing gunshots.
- Throwing firecrackers do not incite fear of war.
- I can sleep in any room of a house, not only in the one facing north.
- We are not afraid that we will be forced to get vaccinated against Covid-19.
- You do not need to sleep dressed [be ready to run away in case of war].
- The border [with Russia] is not closed because of Covid-19.
- Nobody tells you that you are not allowed to cross the border [with Russia] because you do not have documents.
- You sleep in your bed at night.
- You are not afraid that if your mother gets Covid-19, she cannot receive proper treatment in our hospitals.
- You buy or renovate a house without fear that war will destroy it.
- You are not afraid of electricity cut in winter that you have to sit in a dark and cold house.
- Peace is safety.
- You can plan your future and it depends on you, not external factors.
- You can safely walk in the street, cross a road without fear of cars.
- Society has an opportunity to freely talk about its problems.
- People have an opportunity to develop and make progress.
- Non-governmental organizations are not restricted.
- You are confident in your childrens' future.
- Your parents finally believe that a war will not happen again.
- Nobody drives drunk.
- Drivers follow the rules.

Everyday Peace in Tskhinval/i

EPI research gathered 17 people from Tskhinval/i and its surrounding villages to participate in semi-structured interviews and one focus-group discussion. 12 interviews and one women's focus-group engaged 12 women and 5 men, including 5 young persons, in conversations around everyday life and everyday peace in Tskhinval/i.

The indicators from Tskhinval/i are not verified and the research methodology was adapted due to context-specific needs; more specifically, to ensure safety of research participants and provide a safe space for open conversations. Although we cannot tell how Tskhinval/i research participants interpreted and ranked indicators of everyday peace, careful consideration of transcripts and frequent conversations with the local field researcher allowed us to identify several themes that incorporated most of the everyday peace indicators.

• **No fear of war – peace is when your parents finally believe that a war will not happen again.**

War was a central topic of conversation among research participants from Tskhinval/i. Conversations revealed various concerns, most of them linked with the fear that war will happen again. For example, the existing fear of war restrains people from buying or renovating houses, as they are afraid that war might destroy them, and thus they associate peace with the absence of this fear – **peace is when you buy or renovate a house without fear that war will destroy it.** Other indicators also highlighted how overwhelmingly present the fear of war is in people's lives in Tskhinval/i. However, some indicators also showed changes that have happened over time as research participants spoke about their altered routines: *“you do not need to sleep dressed [be ready to run away in case of war],”* or *“I can sleep in any room of a house, not only in the one facing north.”* The latter was an interesting indicator as the „sleeping in rooms facing the north“ was associated with a threat coming from the „South“ from „Georgia“. This indicator might have two interpretations – first, „Georgia“ remains the main source of danger for research participants from Tskhinval/i; second, people sleep in any room in the house as they feel safer, however, the research cannot claim what is reason behind this relative safety - not considering „Georgia“ as a threat anymore or other factors.

Indicators such as **peace is when you do not go to bed hearing gunshots, or peace is when nobody is shooting guns** create an assumption that residents of Tskhinval/i and its surrounding villages deal with high intensity conflict and hear gunshots every day. However, at the current time Tskhinval/i was described differently, as research participants mentioned that they rarely hear gunshots, and the area is relatively quiet. However, fear of war remains indestructible, and even fireworks or other types of noise incite fear. The latter also confirms the unresolved war trauma many conflict-affected societies experience. Tskhinval/i residents are no exception, as many people there live with war memories and remain sensitive towards war-related triggers.

• **Safety and stability – peace is safety**

In addition to discussing the existing fear of war, research participants from Tskhinval/i talked about the need for safety and stability to have a sense of peace. Everyday safety appeared to be a significant concern. Part of this is related to the post-war status quo, as some participants characterized it, as fragile and unreliable. Daily safety and security do not seem guaranteed for Tskhinval/i people, they remain conscious that anything can change at any moment. Interestingly, everyday safety was discussed in the context of internal dynamics as well. For example, some spoke about the case of Inal Jabiev,⁵⁵ who alarmed many in society and triggered questions on whether human rights to life and health are properly protected in the region. Several remarks underlined “government's” failure to protect Jabiev's right to life and health and left many people distrustful towards political leadership.

Discussion around everyday safety also highlighted the issue of mental well-being, as the current state of mind in Tskhinval/i was described by one respondent as “national depression”.⁵⁶ Although the war has ended and some issues seem to be resolved, some still feel they are stuck, and nothing has substantially changed.

Along with safety and security, the need for stability has shaped the perception of everyday peace for Tskhinval/i participants. Discussions around the need for stability differentiated two inter-linked topics - how institutions function in everyday life, and how crucial it is that hope for the future remains. People need strong institutions to feel they live in a stable environment; one indicator specifically mentioned that **peace is when non-governmental organizations are not restricted**, while another underlined the need for a better environment where **people have an opportunity to develop and make progress**. The region started to isolate itself from the outside world in 2014, after accepting legislative amendments to restrict the work of non-governmental organizations, which soon were branded as “foreign partners,” and eventually declared self-liquidation.⁵⁷ Additionally, the region became inaccessible for international organizations and only the International Committee of the Red Cross managed to operate on the ground within the restricted mandate. Repeated statements from de facto leaders of the region to seek integration into Russia further isolated Tskhinval/i, not only from Georgia proper, but from the rest of the world.⁵⁸

The inability to plan for the future and have strong hope for it was a critical issue that influenced the sense of everyday peace for research participants from Tskhinval/i. People think not much depends on them and they feel they are not in charge of their fate. The following indicator also expresses that concern - **peace is when you can plan your future and it depends on you, not external factors**. An inability to plan for the future further reinforces feelings of insecurity and instability. People constantly worry what will happen tomorrow – “*we are not sure what is going to happen tomorrow, we do not know whether the situation will worsen or not.*”⁵⁹ According to research participants, a major part of the society in Tskhinval/i does not feel they live in a stable and reliable environment, which strongly distorts their perception of everyday peace.

• **Freedom to express – peace is when society has an opportunity to freely talk about its problems**

Freedom to express opinions and talk about critical issues without constraints was discussed as an important indicator of peace. Some noted that freedom to raise discussions around problems is a characteristic of a healthy society, and when you are able to engage in critical conversations your society remains functional and maintains the capacity to develop. Interestingly, discussions around freedom of expression draw attention to the closed “borders” South Ossetian people have to live within. Isolation was seen as a source as well as consequence of their closure to the outside world – “*We are closed. We are allowed to talk exactly as much as someone in the power grants the permission.*”⁶⁰ This isolation, closure and the inability to raise critical issues for open, public discussions has led to apathy and frustration among many – “*speak, do not speak, it is all the same, nobody cares.*”⁶¹ Also, many felt a sense of injustice, especially in the context of increasing nepotism, where people do not feel they can make progress without certain connections with the “people with power” – “*people are watching all this and feel like nothing depends on me, nothing I do matters.*”⁶²

• **Covid-19 – peace is when you are not afraid that if your mother gets Covid-19, she cannot receive proper treatment in our hospitals.**

Covid-19 and problems associated with it came up several times during conversations about everyday life in Tskhinval/i. Key concerns were the poor healthcare system that has deteriorated further because of the Covid crisis, closed roads and restricted movement across the „border“ with Russia, as well as forced vaccination. Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia showed reluctance to coop-

⁵⁶ Research participant from Tskhinval/i, female, 60, Ossetian

⁵⁷ Freedom House (2021). South Ossetia/Tskhinvali. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/south-ossetia/freedom-world/2020>

⁵⁸ DRI (2021). Human Rights in Abkhazia and South Ossetia/Tskhinvali. Available at:

<https://www.democracyresearch.org/files/171Human%20Rights%20in%20Abkhazia%20and%20South%20Ossetia%20Tskhinvali%20region.pdf>

⁵⁹ Women focus group discussion, Tskhinval/i

⁶⁰ Research participant from Tskhinval/i, female, 60, Ossetian

⁶¹ Women focus group discussion, Tskhinval/i

⁶² Women focus group discussion, Tskhinval/i

erate with WHO and other international organizations to manage the Covid-19 crisis in the region, and remained at greater risk with a significant part of the population being elderly, severely under-equipped hospitals and lack of basic protective gears.⁶³ This background experience prompted discussions around Covid-related difficulties and how the latter affected everyday life and everyday peace for research participants from Tskhinval/i.

Interestingly, one indicator manifested the fear of Covid vaccines – **peace is when we are not afraid that we will be forced to get vaccinated against Covid-19.** Again, due to the inability to verify indicators, it is hard to say how overwhelming this fear is among Tskhinval/i people and how many research participants would prioritize the indicator. However, several conversations did raise the issue and framed it as a barrier to peace in everyday life in Tskhinval/i.

• **Freedom of movement – peace is when nobody tells you that you are not allowed to cross the border [with Russia] because you do not have documents**

The inability to move freely across “borders” has been highlighted as a significant factor distorting everyday peace for Tskhinval/i residents. Free movement has been a common issue for all the research locations, as people living in protracted conflict reality struggle with closed checkpoints and the inability to go wherever and whenever they want. Expectedly, the problem was also emphasized by Tskhinval/i research participants. However, there was an interesting aspect specific to Tskhinval/i, in that many participants talked about restricted movement across the border with Russia as a problem, but not with Georgia proper. At the time of the fieldwork, the road with Russia was closed due to Covid-related uncertainties, so there was an important contextual factor to consider. Nevertheless, some research participants talked about the issue of documentation as another layer that complicated free movement across the “border” with Russia.

• **Basic infrastructure – peace is when you can safely walk in the street and cross a road without fear of cars**

Pedestrian as well as drivers’ safety were discussed as a crucial component of everyday safety in Tskhinval/i. Many participants spoke about drunk drivers and people ignoring rules of the road and exposing pedestrians and other drivers to danger. Poor infrastructure has been identified as a contributing factor to this concern, as well as low civic consciousness among residents who decide to drive drunk. Besides road safety, other issues such as problems with electricity or water were also raised as barriers to having a sense of safety and peace in everyday life – *“Life is peaceful when you have basic comfort.”*⁶⁴ Proper basic infrastructure such as roads, pedestrian lanes, and a clean city affect whether people feel peaceful or not in their everyday lives. And according to Tskhinval/i residents, the area lacks many aspects of city and village infrastructure.

Despite the challenges, the research conducted in Tskhinval/i showed how research participants understood and conceptualized peace in their everyday life. Conversations demonstrated that perception of daily peace is shaped and affected by multiple interlinked factors. Everyday peace manifests issues that are situational and short-term, as well as deep-rooted societal concerns about the current conditions and their future development.

Tbilisi verified EPIs

Peace is [when..]:

1. The rate of crime in the country is decreased to a minimum
2. Return to home [in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia]
3. 20% of the country is not occupied by Russia
4. For IDPs, peace is being safe at home
5. Safe travel across the ABL
6. You can visit the graves of your family members [in Abkhazia] on the Easter holiday
7. Life without facemasks
8. There is no war [the absence of war]
9. Being able to freely travel wherever you would like to
10. Peacefully living together with Abkhazians
11. Being able to express myself and do not hide who I am, what I am, what I do, or what I think
12. You are not afraid of letting your children play/stay in the yard
13. Economic prosperity
14. There is justice/rule of law
15. You are not afraid of noise
16. You are able to concentrate on everyday life and do not focus on the psychological traumas of the past

Everyday Peace in Tbilisi

IDP community members, mainly from Abkhazia and also from the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, living in IDP collective centres as well as in private accommodation, were engaged in the EPI research process in Tbilisi. Overall, 64 persons participated in seven FGDs (four FGDs at the development and three FGDs at the verification stages), including 48 women and 16 men, 6 young persons. At the initial stage, 30 EPIs were identified, out of which 16 were verified by the community members.

EPIs generated in the IDP communities in Tbilisi revealed the implications of displacement as well as a range of social, economic and security factors that impacted people's perceptions of peace. For IDPs, everyday peace is tightly linked with a sense of security, where personal security bridges two dimensions: (a) daily security, connected with a crime rate, and (b) national security, related to Russia's occupation of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia. Moreover, the protracted conflicts and forced displacements significantly influence the understanding of everyday peace for IDPs. A safe return to their homes and free travel to the other sides of conflict divides are perceived as key components of a peaceful life. A traumatising experience of displacement underpins the importance of safe and stable housing for IDPs. Dealing with trauma and integration with local communities were identified as essential needs for experiencing everyday peace. Recognising the role of communication between the conflict-divided societies, IDPs consider confidence building as the only approach to resolve the conflicts peacefully, in which they request active engagement of IDP communities as well.

1. Daily security - Peace is when the crime rate in the country is decreased to a minimum.

Daily security was the most important indicator in the context of everyday peace among IDP community members in Tbilisi. Specifically, as they phrased it, **peace is when the crime rate in the country is decreased to a minimum**. Concerns related to the crime rate are mainly derived from daily experience and observations of the research participants. People were mostly worried about cases of robbery and looting happening in the city. Moreover, high profile cases of homicide further exacerbated their sense of insecurity. The issue was particularly pressing for parents, as they defined **everyday peace is when you are not afraid of letting your children play/stay in the yard** (EPI #12). In addition to criminal threats, parents of teenagers were concerned about growing drug use in their neighbourhoods, as evidence, they referred to the number of syringes in the streets and dark corners of buildings. While discussing these EPIs, the research participants stressed the importance of state institutions, including the police and justice systems, to effectively address each case to mitigate the increased crime rate in the country.

It should be noted that the timing of the first round of FGDs with IDP communities in Tbilisi (June-September 2021) might have affected their perceptions of everyday peace and daily security. Specifically, they referred to the July 5 violence against journalists⁶⁵ several times while discussing

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when there is justice/rule of law.

EPI for reflection:

Peace is being able to express myself and do not hide who I am, what I am, what I do, or what I think.

peace and human security issues. Furthermore, one of the factors influencing the understanding of everyday peace in relation to reducing the crime rate could also be the traumatic experience of looting, rape, and burglaries that IDPs endured in the '90s.

2. Return of IDPs - Peace is a return to your home [in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia]

For IDPs, **peace is a return to their home** in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, as the second most voted EPI demonstrates. This has been a driving force in IDPs' lives for the last few decades. Conversely, the inability to return to their homes causes continuous distress and a sense of instability, solidifying the traumatic experience of forced displacement.

Although the majority of the research participants strongly advocate for returning to their homes in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia, IDPs' position on that matter was not unanimous. Age, level of integration, and socio-economic conditions were the main factors that might influence attitudes towards returning or not. Yet, the correlation between these factors and an actual decision might not be strong, as the discussion around this EPI illustrates.

Some research participants believed that parents and older generations who have had the experience of living in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia are keen on the idea of returning home, while younger generations born and raised in Tbilisi might be more reluctant about the option. Others think that young people will also return if peace and security are guaranteed. Similarly, some consider that integration might affect the motivation to return to Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia among those who are better integrated and established in Tbilisi society. However, others defuse this option, saying that *"Tbilisi accepted me, but Sokhumi will always remain the first in my life"*.⁶⁶

In terms of socio-economic factors, some argue that both young and senior generations of IDPs have struggled to such a high degree to find jobs and a certain level of stability in Tbilisi that, due to this experience, they might be afraid of undergoing the same process again if they return. For those who still live in IDP settlements in dire conditions, a return to their homes might be a more imminent demand. However, others believe that even if some IDPs are well established, integrated and financially well-off, *"home is the place where your ancestors lived and are buried"*,⁶⁷ emphasising social-psychological bonds with the place they call home. Hence, the memory of living in Abkhazia, particular places and routines, have been romanticised and passed on to the younger generation to preserve ties with ancestral roots.

Whether they return or not, the freedom of choice and the right to return to their homes is associated with justice for the IDP communities living in Tbilisi. Nevertheless, the respondents recognised the importance of a political settlement and addressing the root causes of the conflict as vital processes to progress discussions about a safe return of IDPs. On that matter, community members do not see tangible steps being taken by either the Government of Georgia nor international organisations, contrib-

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when I do not want to move abroad [migrate].

⁶⁶ KII, female respondent, Tbilisi, IDP community

⁶⁷ Verification FGD 3, Tbilisi, IDP community

uting to growing frustration and pessimism about returning. Importantly, while unfolding this EPI, IDP communities emphasised the importance of reconciliation, building trust and relationships with conflict-torn societies. The research participants consider a peaceful return as the sole option for peaceful coexistence with Abkhazians and South Ossetians.

3. Security - Peace is when 20% of the country is not occupied by Russia

Peace is when 20% of the country is not occupied by Russia was one of the most voted and discussed indicators in the IDP communities in Tbilisi. In addition to concerns related to the territorial integrity of the country, the occupation imposes an immediate security threat at the societal as well as national levels. In particular, the proximity and capabilities of Russian military bases undermine public confidence in efforts to sustain peace and stability.

Moreover, IDP community members in Tbilisi recognise that the toll of occupation on people living along the ABLs is much heavier than on those living at a distance, for example, in the capital city. In their understanding, the war has not ceased for residents in villages adjacent to the ABLs, who live in a mode of everyday survival and fear of Russian troops, with their physical and mental health deterioration. Watching barbed wires and fences erected every day and being denied access to visit family members and relatives, are some of those daily implications of the occupation that cannot be fully comprehended from distance. However, constant fear and pressure that *“you never know whether you will wake up on Georgian or Russian territory tomorrow”*⁶⁸ still reinforce the sense of insecurity and instability amongst the IDP communities in Tbilisi.

Unfolding different dimensions of the occupation, the research participants felt that Georgia’s economic dependence on Russia, the occupant, was as equally worrying as the territorial occupation. It was their perception that economic security is not sufficiently considered at the decision-making level in government, which further strengthens Moscow’s position in the country. A growing Russian influence raises concerns amongst the IDPs, since they believe that a sovereign and independent Georgia is not compatible with the Kremlin’s geopolitical interests.

Some respondents from the IDP community in Tbilisi believe that there is a lack of resistance against Russia’s economic and soft power in the country. Those with a critical stance further argue that “Georgia is occupied by Russia” remains mainly trending words without meaningful actions backing it. The same argument points out that the sole focus on Russia’s occupation is not sufficient for confidence-building with Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Therefore, building peace requires a more comprehensive approach.

4. Better housing - For IDPs, peace is being safe at home

The IDP community members in Tbilisi associate the concept of a “safe home” with a return to the place of displacement⁶⁹ and decent conditions for living at their current location. Under the EPI **peace is being safe at home**, research participants discussed housing issues in Tbilisi. Although the implementation of housing policy has improved over the last few

EPI for reflection:

Peace is when there is no war.

years, and the majority of IDPs have received private flats, many remain in the waiting mode for almost three decades. Meanwhile, the IDPs in collective centres live under constant safety concerns, as some of the buildings no longer meet safety standards. Conditions at these settlements are miserable, with leaking roofs, common bathrooms and rooms too cramped to fit a family. For example, 535 families (around 2000 people) live in the former student accommodations of Georgian Technical University, where at least 4 persons share a 12 m² room, as IDPs pointed out during the FGDs.

More than half of 111,982 IDPs (37,868 families)⁷⁰ registered only in Tbilisi received a flat within the Durable Housing Solution Programme or compensation for resettlement, as one of the KII respondents noted.⁷¹ Overall, the research participants assessed the programme positively, as it provided great relief for thousands of IDPs after decades of living in dire conditions. However, a lack of strategic planning and clear action plan, poor management and monitoring systems were outlined as key flaws of the housing policy, resulting in a prolonged process and reduced quality of some of the residential buildings. Furthermore, the impartiality during the selection and distribution process was also contested. IDPs claim that some families received flats for each member, while others in real need of assistance were still on a waiting list. However, IDP community members do not have the ability to raise their concerns either in the Parliament, the executive branch or in the media.

5. Freedom of movement - Peace is safe travel across the ABLs

Similar to other locations, IDP communities in Tbilisi define everyday **peace as safe travel across the ABLs**. Visiting grandparents and relatives and **graves of family members on the Easter holiday** (EPI #6) were named as the main purposes for travel on the other side of the dividing lines. Restrictions imposed on freedom of movement and closing checkpoints for long periods affect many Tbilisi IDPs, as their family members remain on the other side of the ABLs. Therefore, the difficulties that residents of Gal/i and Akhlagori have to endure to cross the ABLs are particularly painful for the IDP communities. For example, the Engur/i incident, when four persons were drawn to cross the river to Zugdidi,⁷² was often mentioned while discussing the importance of safe mobility. Such incidents and stories of human suffering due to the protracted conflict and inability to reach an agreement on free travel disturb people's perception of peace and security.

Furthermore, the research participants consider **the ability to freely travel wherever they would like to** (EPI #9) as a basic human right as well as a direct indicator of peace. Yet, recognising that the conflicts might not be resolved in the near future, the people want to have access to the other sides of the divides at least for holidays and special occasions – *“If the long-term peace to me is the return to my home, today peace means a safe travel to Abkhazia”*.⁷³ Importantly, community members identify freedom of movement as a key factor for maintaining connections and building relationships with people living on the other sides of the ABLs.

6. Mental health

Two of the community-driven EPIs – **peace is when you are not afraid of noise** (EPI #15) and **peace is when you are able to concentrate on everyday life and do not focus on the psychological traumas of the past** (EPI #16) demonstrate the link between psychological wellbeing and everyday peace for IDPs in Tbilisi. Similar to other locations, mental health issues derive from the traumatic experience of war and displacement. Loud noise, the sound of an airplane and fireworks, and pictures of war (even from a movie) were named as the most common trauma triggers. Accumulated trauma disrupts not only their perception of peace but also causes various physical health issues. Importantly, the pandemic has caused further deterioration in mental health conditions across all age groups.

The source of trauma and how it is perceived are distinct between younger and older generations,

⁷⁰ MoH (no data) Internally Displaced Persons Statistics. MoH: <https://www.moh.gov.ge/ka/703/>

⁷¹ Official statistics collected by IDFI also show that the housing issue of around 50% of IDPs in Georgia proper remains to be resolved.

IDFI (2022) IDP Families Waiting for Housing: State Policy during 2017-2021. IDFI: https://idfi.ge/ge/idp_families_in_georgia_and_state_policy_in_2017_2021

⁷² Civil.ge (2021) Fourth Gali Georgian found dead in Enguri River. Civil.ge: <https://civil.ge/archives/411273>

⁷³ Women FGD, Tbilisi, IDP community

as targeted focus group discussions demonstrate. First-hand experience and a vivid memory of the war and displacement are deeply encoded in the minds of parents and older generations of IDPs, recurring in different forms over time. Moreover, the instability and hopelessness related to return and resettlement issues add to the frustration caused by the lack of opportunities for self-realisation. Many cannot meet the living standards they enjoyed in Sukhum/i, reinforcing the feeling of loss and shame. Consequently, older people, in particular, consider themselves as “a lost generation.”

However, the younger generations, who have no clear memory of the war, mainly suffer from trauma inherited from their parents and grandparents. Yet, some in the oldest youth group carry both their own war traumas as well as the ones passed down from their older family members. Young people and children of families where war-related stories are often recalled and those living in IDP settlements struggle the most to deal with the trauma. In this kind of environment, gatherings of neighbours and relatives usually imply a recollection of memories of war and a better life in Sukhum/i [or other locations]. The memory of war and traumatised childhood haunt some young people to such a degree that they associate peace with not knowing the past. As one of the respondents said, *“If I had a choice between going through the same life or not being born at all, I would choose not to be born.”*⁷⁴

Although mental health support is essential for dealing with trauma, there is a lack of qualified support services accessible for IDP communities in Tbilisi. In addition, the prevailing stigma in society hinders many from seeking psychological assistance.

7. Confidence building processes

IDP communities in Tbilisi identified several EPIs related to confidence-building with Abkhazians and South Ossetians. Out of them, the EPI **peace is peacefully living together with Abkhazians [and South Ossetians]** received the most votes (EPI #10).⁷⁵ To create conditions for peaceful co-existence with Abkhazians and South Ossetians, research participants stressed the importance of being able to interact with the people living in the non-controlled territories and having the opportunity to communicate with Abkhazians. In terms of direct interaction, the community members note that peace is when Abkhaz do not face issues to travel here [Tbilisi]. Although identified as everyday peace indicators, one can argue that some of these EPIs, e.g., EPI #10, are more results of confidence-building efforts rather than indicators.

In the context of limited face-to-face interaction between conflict-torn societies, the older generation of IDPs still maintain communication with their Abkhaz and South Ossetian friends, relatives, colleagues and former neighbours. However, younger generations are largely deprived of opportunities to establish such social networks due to the decades of separation. For example, based on Caucasus House/CRRC 2021 survey findings, 72% of young people do not know a person currently living in Abkhazia or the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia.⁷⁶ The absence of direct interaction reduces the understanding of each other’s perspectives on conflict and peace. Yet, in the IDP communities in Tbilisi, confidence-building was considered instrumental for progressing dialogue for conflict resolution.⁷⁷ Importantly, the same research shows that a significant portion of youth (42%) is ready to engage in peace initiatives.

However, a different perspective about a confidence-building process reinforces the narrative that there is no incompatibility between Georgians and Abkhaz as ethnic groups, supported by an example of ethnic Georgians and Abkhaz peacefully living together in the Adjara region. According to this argument, addressing political issues is key for conflict resolution. Once a political agreement is achieved, the people will find common ground for peaceful co-existence. However, some IDPs still struggle to forget the war in the 90s and to express readiness to peacefully live with the

⁷⁴ Youth FGD, Tbilisi, IDP community

⁷⁵ Note: the majority of the participants for verification/focus group discussions were IDPs from Abkhazia that influenced the wording of original indicators.

⁷⁶ Caucasus House/CRRC (2021) Study of Youth Civic and Political Engagement and Participation in Peacebuilding in Georgia. [Study Report]

⁷⁷ Similarly, Caucasus House/CRRC (2021) survey shows that “Young people living in Georgia unanimously (95%) believe that conflicts in Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia should be resolved through negotiations.”

people on the other side, especially, when they do not see similar sentiments from Abkhazians. In that regard, younger participants shared personal stories of overcoming anger against Abkhazians caused by the displacement and traumatising experience of the war. In this process, confidence-building and dialogue projects, such as the Georgian-Abkhaz Dialogue of the Berghof Foundation, helped them to understand the other side. Thus, they believe that such projects help rationalise the thoughts and experiences to see a wider picture beyond the anger.

The Tbilisi IDP community perceives Russia to be the major factor hindering confidence-building processes between conflict-divided societies. Russian troops create physical barriers to face-to-face interaction, while the Kremlin disrupts any opportunities for peaceful resolution of the conflicts. However, the IDP community members also criticise the Government of Georgia for disregarding and excluding the IDPs from the confidence-building process. They believe that IDPs have essential capacities in terms of personal connections as well as knowledge of how to communicate with the people on the other side of the ABLs. Moreover, the protracted conflicts remain the key issue affecting the everyday life of IDPs. Therefore, they are highly motivated to actively engage in the peacebuilding and confidence-building processes.

8. Integration of IDPs

Although it is not captured under EPIs, integration of IDPs in their host communities was one of the most widely discussed issues at the FGDs in Tbilisi. Research participants had different experiences and positions about whether IDPs are integrated into the societies they currently live in or not. Some believed that IDPs, especially from the 90s, are completely integrated into society and the challenges they face are similar to those other groups face. Nevertheless, those FGD participants who consider themselves integrated do not position themselves as IDPs, partly because society has accepted them and there is no need to mention their status, but also, they do not want people to feel sorry for them, indicating unconscious insecurities related to their status. Others who consider integration as an issue believe that hiding the IDP status is related to the remaining stereotypes and stigma in society.

Many IDPs share traumatising experiences of being treated differently or bullied at school or kindergartens due to their status. As an example, one adult respondent recalled her kindergarten teacher saying, *“you are a good girl but an IDP”*.⁷⁸ Feeling singled out and marginalised from an early age affected their full-scale integration into local communities. Although IDPs refrain from speaking up about it openly, some believe that Tbilisians do not like them nor treat them equally. Thus, they think that IDPs have to put in double effort, including at work or in education, to earn their place in society.

Interestingly, the research participants noticed that not all factors hindering their integration derived from their host communities. Some factors, such as a constant focus on returning to their homes and dealing with their traumas, affect their openness to investing in integration. Here, social-economic context and age play an important role. The older generations prefer living in the memory of their past life in Abkhazia rather than facing their current poor reality. For the younger generation, it was easier to adapt to new life and create a social network in the city. Furthermore, a type of settlement also affected IDPs' integration process; living in private properties alleviated the process, while the collective centres siloed IDPs from the rest of the residents. A combination of these factors amid the absence of integration programmes has contributed to the slow and insufficient integration of IDPs within society.

SHARED ASPECTS OF EVERYDAY PEACE ACROSS RESEARCH LOCATIONS

The research examined various components of everyday peace in different locations. Due to research methodology limitations, we could not provide a comparative analysis of indicators across the ABLs, however, some common themes were observed as crucial supporting or interrupting factors for everyday peace in all seven locations. More specifically, issues of security, mobility and trauma were identified as key components for everyday peace, though all three factors were approached from different perspectives and reflected context-specific aspects.

Security was identified as a significant component of everyday peace, consisting of three dimensions: “national”, daily and human security.

- Residents at all locations spoke about the importance of “**national**” **security** guarantees to have a sense of peace. While participants from Zugdidi, Tbilisi (IDP communities) and Gori spoke about the prospective danger coming from Russian occupation, participants in break-away regions discussed security concerns related to Georgia proper and the uncertain conditions in which they live. However, the perspectives on “national” security concerns for participants in Sukhum/i and Tskhinval/i were different from those of living in Gal/i and Akhalgori. Although they all live in breakaway regions, the research showed that the reality for people living in Gal/i and Sukhum/i, as well as in Akhalgori and Tskhinval/i, is different.
- Another aspect of security that was discussed as an important component of peace was **daily security/safety**. People across the locations unpacked various pressing issues they face in everyday life, and which distort their sense of peace. For example, the issue of stray dogs who disrupt the daily safety of many people in Zugdidi; the same issue (though less acute) was highlighted by Gori residents. Research participants at several locations spoke about road safety as a critical factor for ensuring a sense of peace in everyday life. Some research participants discussed increasing criminal activity as also disrupting the feeling of peaceful life. Research participants living closer to the ABL, especially in Gori, emphasized the issue of uncontrolled arrests and everyday fear of experiencing unjust detention by Russian troops. Although abduction and arrest were not discussed as daily issues for research participants in Zugdidi, people also spoke about the daily insecurity they face when they work in their agricultural fields, which are close to the ABL with Abkhazia.
- The aspects of **human security** were also discussed as a component of everyday peace. Insecurities and instabilities caused by protracted conflict affect each component of human security. For example, four dimensions of human security concerns were clearly identified to be crucial components of everyday peace: economic, health, community and political security. Research participants at several locations spoke about the need for basic income, employment and proper access to a social safety net as top concern. People in Zugdidi identified economic security as the top priority for everyday peace. Components of health security were also discussed across the locations. For example, availability and access to proper health services and infrastructure, issues pregnant women face, and the need to live in a safer environment. The latter was also discussed from a community security perspective. People in at least in two locations spoke about the need to be well-integrated into the local context and have the ability to speak freely in their mother tongue. Aspects of political security also were discussed in different locations, such as the need for justice and free speech, which also help define people’s perception of peace in everyday life.

Mobility was another component of everyday peace that was discussed in all seven research locations. However, like security, it has several aspects – daily mobility, cross-ABL movement and international travel.

- Safer conditions for **daily mobility** were discussed as a significant aspect of everyday peace.

Research participants in some locations spoke about the fear of letting their children play in yards, as they do not feel they live in a safe environment. At some locations people spoke about increased criminal activity and the fear associated with it on a daily basis. Daily mobility was very much linked with issues discussed while speaking about everyday safety/security.

- **Cross-ABL movement** is crucial for people living closer to the ABL. Zugdidi, Gal/i, Gori and Akhalgori research participants stressed the need for free movement across the ABL. Economic interdependence, families living on the other side of the line, medical emergencies and the need to buy basic household items are key reasons behind the need for daily mobility across the ABLs. The temporary opening of the three crossing points along the Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetian ABL in April 2022 showed the importance of free movement for local residents; within a five-day period 1,100 crossings were observed. Interestingly, research participants in several locations also spoke about the importance of **visiting the “other side.”** More specifically, the opportunity for not only IDPs, but for others as well, to cross the ABL and visit different places on the other side of it and return safely was highly valued. Some participants considered “return” back to Abkhazia or Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia from a longer-term perspective, but free movement and the ability to visit and return back safely was seen as a more realistic option. Interestingly, the need to cross the ABL safely was mostly discussed among participants from Georgia proper, as well as people from Gal/i and Akhalgori.
- **International travel** was another component of mobility that, according to several research locations, was an important factor to have a perception of peace. The topic was intensively discussed among respondents from Sukhum/i and Gal/i. Participants from Sukhum/i were particularly concerned about their limited opportunities to travel beyond the region. The issue was highlighted within youth focus groups, as young people feel the burden of restricted international movement, and feel they are deprived of opportunities because they live in conflict regions.

Trauma was another topic that was highlighted in all seven locations. Similar to other components of everyday peace, the topic of trauma was also discussed from different perspectives. Everyday fear, mental health and transgenerational character of traumatic experience were identified as crucial aspects during conversations.

- **Fear** is embodied in the everyday life of conflict-affected people. Although all research participants spoke about fear and uncertainty in their daily lives, discussions in the breakaway regions particularly emphasized the issue. Research participants from Sukhum/i, Gal/i, Akhalgori and Tskhinval/i spoke about their fear of war and the overwhelming uncertainty they live under, and which interrupts their perception of peace and stability.
- Research participants across the locations also spoke about the importance of **mental health** for everyday peace. Living in a protracted conflict reality disrupts normal life. The above-mentioned fear, along with the increasing distrust and suspicion that some research participants experience while living in uncertain, protracted conflict contexts, affects their mental health. Thus, proper conditions and the ability to protect mental well-being significantly impacts the perception of peace.
- **Transgenerational trauma** was another topic also repeatedly discussed across the locations. Although all youth focus groups addressed one or another type of traumatizing experience or memory related to the protracted conflict reality or the war, internally displaced people emphasized the issue. IDP collective centers maintain and transfer stories and experiences that particularly strengthen the transgenerational aspect of war memories and enduring traumas.

WOMEN'S PERCEPTION OF EVERYDAY PEACE

FGDs were conducted with women at each target location (overall 6 FGDs); in Akhalgori, instead of gathering a group of women, individual interviews were conducted.

Women-facilitated FGDs gathered women of different ages in research locations to explore components that strengthen or distort everyday peace for them. Women living in different contexts with different backgrounds raised more or less similar issues as daily concerns, yet the research cannot claim that women-sourced indicators are identical across the locations. However, one can identify several themes that reflect women's needs and perceptions of everyday peace.

The lack of women's participation in political decision making was repeated as an important concern across a few research locations. Women's equal and active participation in politics was seen as a decisive factor in solving most of the problems that women face. Conversations elaborated two expected arguments why women were not actively involved in politics. First, politics is male-dominated sphere, and men are reluctant to acknowledge women's equal participation as a critical factor in solving community or national level problems. Second, certain societal norms and aspects of the culture demotivates women to participate in active politics, portraying it as unsuitable work for them and normalizing women staying on the sidelines.

Domestic violence was another concern also repeated in several research locations. Women, youth and mixed groups all discussed domestic violence as the major factor interrupting daily peace for many women around them. The issue was highlighted through discussion of various components of the culture that silence women and discourages them from speaking about abuse or violence publicly. Some research participants also spoke about problems with legislation, especially in breakaway regions, that further strengthens the culture of silence. Many women also discussed lack of services, such as immediate and longer-term accommodation, psycho-social and financial support, as crucial factors that often constrain women from speaking about experienced abuse and violence.

The issue of healthcare was one more topic raised among women research participants.; specifically, the problem with abortion in Gal/i.⁸⁰ The issue of abortion was discussed not only from a healthcare perspective, but again linked with women's absence from active politics. Some women participants mentioned that as women have limited leverage in the law-making processes and do not hold decision-making positions, they cannot reject such initiatives or offer any alternatives to them. Women participants from several locations also discussed the issue of poor healthcare services for women. According to some, pregnant women experience the most difficulties due to poor healthcare infrastructure and services, and breakaway regions, especially women from Gal/i, emphasized the importance of the issue.

The need for everyday safety and **better basic infrastructure** was another topic actively discussed by women research participants. Everyday safety is a complex issue that has various layers and was unpacked by young and elder women from their perspectives. For example, young women talked about "dressing safely" and being self-conscious in the streets to avoid any harassment or offensive remarks. Interestingly, young women in some locations, mostly in breakaway regions, talked about the so-called advantage of being a woman and not getting questioned or suspected by local police as often as their male counterparts. Some older women mentioned that traveling across the ABL is safer for women than men; according to them, women are viewed as less suspicious and questioned less often.

In addition to talking about problems women face in their everyday life that distort their sense of peace, some women participants spoke about strong and resilient women in their communities. The women in the focus group in Sukhum/i argued that women are breadwinners in most families around them. Conversations about IDP women highlighted the similar points. Women participants

talked about the strength and resilience of IDP women and their tireless care for their families. Discussions also emphasized that usually women work outside of their families while remain main caregivers inside the family, responsible for basic daily work, such as cooking and cleaning as well as general house maintenance.

As the methodology chapter noted, to create greater comfort for women participants, their focus groups were facilitated by women to provide a safe space for open and critical discussions. Hence, women-led focus groups discussed a wide range of topics, including the ones that were described as women's everyday peace indicators. While the themes discussed above demonstrate that women did address their needs for daily peace and barriers to it, those everyday peace indicators were rarely prioritized and voted at the verification stage. Although so-called women-sourced indicators were not disregarded as being unimportant, they were separated from community-oriented ones. In other words, in some cases both men and women agreed that issues identified by women should be discussed and dealt with separately, and that indicators understood as community-based were higher priorities.

This pattern of not prioritizing women-sourced indicators and isolating them from community-oriented ones was repeated across research locations. While the research cannot provide comprehensive arguments explaining the reasons behind this repeated pattern, one can still suggest several questions for critical reflections. Do initiatives working with and for women exclude men from the same communities? And does this intentional or unintentional exclusion motivate separating women's needs from community needs? Is there a strategy as well as techniques that can help women to engage men and boys from their communities into their work or to discuss women-specific needs cooperatively? Answering these and further questions was beyond the scope of our research, however, they are important to reflect on and respond to for everyone aiming to build everyday peace for women.

Women-sourced indicators

Peace is [when..]:

- Streetlights are on at night
- Young women and men have equal opportunity to receive higher education
- Young women do not see early marriage as their future, not thinking that is the only chance to change their situation
- You access information about assistance services for women
- Kindergartens are in villages, as it would make women's life a bit easier in the villages
- Women have access to medical centres
- You are not concerned about your safety because of the way you dress [young girls]

NEEDS AND PERCEPTIONS OF PEACE AMONG YOUTH

Overall, 91 young persons were engaged in the research process. FGDs were conducted with youth at each target location (overall 5 FGDs), except in Akhalgori and Tskhinval/i, instead of gathering a group of young people, individual interviews were conducted.

The overarching themes in youth perception of peace across all research locations were stability, the absence of war (security) and inner peace (mental health). Interestingly, initial thoughts about peace were rather more abstract than practical when young people were explaining their understanding of peace. However, throughout discussions, some youth groups offered more detailed examples of how they experience peace in everyday life. Importantly, analyzing the research findings demonstrates that youth perception of peace is significantly influenced by the experience of living in the protracted conflict context and related restrictions, especially in some locations.

Feeling confident about tomorrow, in other words, being able to make plans for the future, was the closest association to peace among youth across the conflict divides. Most youth felt that they have no control over their future, which was one of the disturbing feelings exacerbating the sense of instability. There were common as well as distinct causes generating and feeding the sense of instability, mainly intertwined with security concerns. The majority of the young respondents fear that the protracted conflicts might flare up into full-scale war at any time, altering their lives drastically. Although the issue was raised at every location, young people in Sukhum/i were especially worried about the prospect of war. The instability-insecurity nexus had an additional layer for youth living in regions adjacent to the ABLs, namely the fear of being kidnapped by Russian troops (Gori) and being checked by local forces for documents or other reasons (Gal/i, Akhalgori). The latter was mainly an issue for young men rather than women, demonstrating a gendered experience of peace and security. For young IDPs in Tbilisi, the sense of instability was further affected by the uncertainties related to the return to their homes [in Abkhazia].

The importance of mental well-being for everyday peace for youth derives from constant stress generated by fear of war, and war-related trauma based on their personal experiences or inherited from parents. In addition, an enhanced awareness about mental health in the younger generation could play a role as well. Young people from Gori and Tbilisi (IDPs) spoke about the trauma caused by the war in 2008, occurring in nightmares and instant reactions to various trauma triggers, for example, the sounds of airplanes and fireworks. Youth in villages near the ABLs struggle to adjust to the noise of military drills in Tskhinval/i. As one young man from Akhalgori explained, **peace is when kids do not have to know the difference between different types of Russian armored vehicles** (EPI, Akhalgori). In addition, some young people, for example, IDPs, struggle to deal with trans-generational trauma. Constant reference to a perfect pre-war life in Abkhazia, while they have to adjust to much worse conditions at present, further affects their mental health. Consequently, IDP youth define peace as not knowing the past (due to the traumatic experience of war) (EPI, Tbilisi) and the ability to concentrate on everyday life and not focus on the psychological traumas of the past (EPI, Tbilisi). Another source of trauma for some IDP young people was stigma and bullying at school due to their IDP status. Interestingly, both youth with experience of discrimination, and those without such experiences, tend to hide their status, indicating the unconscious insecurities they carry.

A lack of spaces for entertainment, relaxation and self-realization, such as venues for informal education, cultural and sports activities, was one of the major concerns for youth in Akhalgori, Gori, Gal/i and Zugdidi, especially in the rural areas and along the ABLs. Although both male and female participants voiced the issue, they noted that entertainment and self-realization opportunities are even less accessible for young women due to deep-rooted cultural and gender norms. Importantly, residents of Gal/i and Akhalgori also connect the issue with early marriages, pointing out that young women see marriage as the only option to change their situation and create some

opportunities for their future. Furthermore, restrictions on cross-ABL movement worsen conditions for residents of Gal/i and Akhalgori, as they cannot enjoy services and opportunities in Georgia proper.

While the demand for better education and employment opportunities was high at every location, youth on different sides of the ABLs identified distinct challenges. For example, young people in Gal/i first encounter education issues at school, as they cannot receive secondary education in their native language (Georgian), affecting their overall education background and career prospects. Students from Gal/i who acquire higher education in Georgia proper cannot use their diplomas or certificates to find a job back in the region. Discontent among youth in Sukhum/i derives from the lack of bachelor's and master's programs they are interested in, while the unresolved conflict and related documentation issues limit the opportunities for studying at Western universities. Therefore, to them, **peace means having the opportunity to study and learn things I am interested in without facing any big obstacles** (EPI Sukhum/i). In addition to the common issue of lack of jobs, Gori youth complain about the lack of part-time jobs and flexible schedules, so that they do not have to choose between employment and education. In Akhalgori, nepotism and bribery were identified as the main concern related to both education and employment prospects.

Freedom of self-expression was identified as yet another element of peace among young people in different research locations, but especially in the Gori municipality. Young respondents believe that traditional norms controlling their style, behavior and entertainment options limit their opportunities for self-expression. They further point out that social standards and respective public pressure are different for young women and men. Not being “properly” dressed might affect young women's reputation more than that of men. Although both groups express discontent, female respondents link the issue with verbal and sometimes physical harassment in the street. Therefore, they define peace as **when you are not concerned about your safety because of the way you dress** (EPI, Gori). Similar safety concerns extend to youth with distinct styles representing subcultures (Gori) and the LGBTI community (Tbilisi). Similarly, young residents of Sukhum/i experience the pressure of meeting the standards set by traditional norms and public opinion, reinforcing the feeling of being judged by the older generation. As for youth in Gal/i, freedom of speech and freedom of choice are the most important in this regard.

Analyzing the research findings demonstrate that although there are significant similarities in everyday peace perceptions across all age groups, young people identify some distinct challenges that affect the quality of their life and sense of everyday peace. Born and raised in a protracted conflict setting, they seek stability and security as a critical base from which to pursue their goals, deal with trauma, and establish themselves in the society with their rights and freedoms respected.

SUMMARY: PERCEPTION OF PEACE IN CONFLICT-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Community-driven Everyday Peace Indicators unfold the complexity of the perception of peace in the conflict-affected context. Although peace itself might be perceived as an elusive concept in any society, exploring the meaning of peace for people living in a protracted conflict setting for decades has both scholarly and practical purposes. Analyzing the EPI research findings from each target location demonstrated that (a) everyday peace consists of multiple interdependent and complementary elements, among which security, mobility and mental health emerge as cross-cutting issues, (b) EPIs unfold how these key elements affect or are experienced in the daily life of community members, (c) subsequently, the EPI research helps identify the need for change in particular areas so that public perception of peace and overall quality of life can be enhanced, and (d) EPIs contextualize both needs and perceptions of everyday peace in a particular community that enables adopting context-specific and tailored approaches.

Analyzing the research findings demonstrate that both negative and positive peace indicators are integral parts of the perception of everyday peace amongst the communities living in a protracted conflict context. Once people experience war, negative peace, specifically, the absence of war and fear of war, shapes a significant part of their perception of peace. In this regard, it is not surprising that a prevailing understanding of peace within these societies is related to security and stability, since a mutually acceptable vision of conflict resolution has yet to be developed in Abkhaz, Georgian and South Ossetian societies. Moreover, the existing fragile peace is highly contingent on regional and global dynamics.

However, at the locations where verification FGDs were conducted, the most voted EPIs can be classified as positive peace indicators. The importance of the attitudes, institutions and structures that create and sustain peaceful societies is revealed in local communities' association of peace with the harmony in society (Sukhum/i), being perceived as equal members of society (Gal/i), a dignified income (Zugdidi), a sense of justice (Gori), and a minimum crime rate (Tbilisi). Nevertheless, factors influencing the sense of social harmony, justice and equality are related to the protracted conflicts and fear of war, demonstrating how negative and positive peace are intertwined in the public perception of peace, especially in the protracted conflict context. Other examples could be EPIs related to access to services and institutional and infrastructural developments, as they are tightly interlinked with the issues of unresolved conflicts and fear of conflict escalation.

Responses to the question "What does peace mean to you?" indicate that people see a wider picture of peace that involves both a narrow and broader understanding of peacebuilding. Community members from some locations, except Sukhum/i and Tskhinval/i, stress the importance of cross-ABL confidence-building efforts. However, intra-societal discussions and confidence-building work were also perceived as essential for enhancing everyday peace at almost every research location. Moreover, everyday peace requires addressing a range of development issues in the local communities. Infrastructure and institutional development needs stood out as key elements for experiencing peace daily. People named institutions and services that have the greatest impact on their perception of peace and everyday life. Importantly, the EPI methodology enabled the identification of specific needs of women, youth, IDPs and people living in urban and rural areas, including villages close to the ABLs. Therefore, research results can be employed to define peacebuilding and development agendas.

Interestingly, although the interpretations provided for most EPIs entail political elements of the protracted conflicts, representatives of local communities speak about the implications of the conflict on their everyday peace and stability, shifting the focus from political to human-oriented discourse. While there were unique indicators for each location, EPIs generated from communities living on different sides of ABLs demonstrate that people have similar needs for peace, share the

fear of conflict escalation and struggle to deal with the traumatizing experiences of war. Despite their location, they identify security, stability, freedom of movement, and access to basic services as key elements of peace. Evidently, most disruptions to their everyday peace derive from the inability to reach a political settlement of the conflicts, but some of the issues that would enhance the quality of their lives and perceptions of peace can be addressed even in the context of unresolved conflicts.

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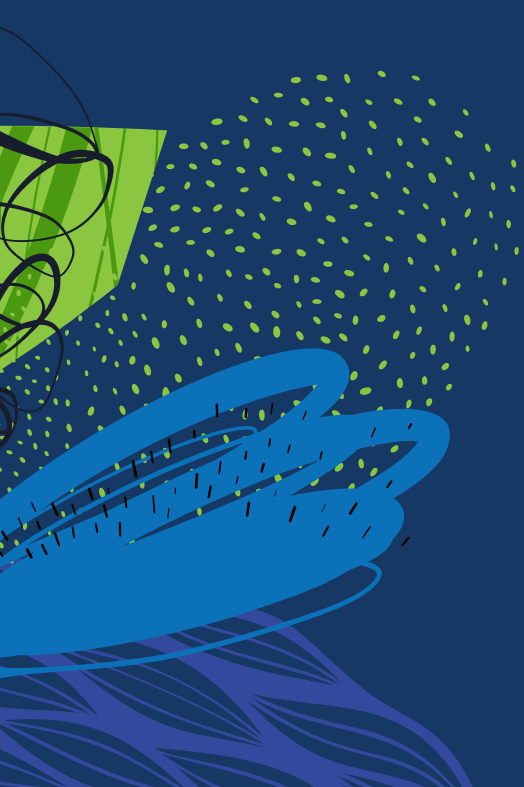
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APPENDIX 1: LIST OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS AND INTERVIEWS

ACTIVITY	# OF PARTICIPANTS	# OF WOMEN	DATE
Gal/i			
KII 1	1	1	13.06.2021
KII 2	1	1	14.06.2021
KII 3	1	0	15.06.2021
FGD 1 MIXED	7	4	09.07.2021
FGD 2 YOUTH	9	4	16.07.2021
FGD 3 WOMEN	7	7	16.07.2021
FGD 4 MEN	7	0	27.07.2021
VFGD 1	10	6	06.10.2021
VFGD 2	8	5	28.10.2021
VFGD 3	7	4	31.10.2021
VKII 1	1	1	06.12.2021
VKII 2	1	1	08.12.2021
Sukhum/i			
KII 1	1	0	16.06.2021
KII 2	1	1	25.06.2021
KII 3	1	1	08.07.2021
KII 4	1	0	09.07.2021
KII 5	1	0	11.07.2021
FGD 1 YOUTH	7	3	13.08.2021
FGD 2 WOMEN	5	5	19.08.2021
FGD 3 MEN	7	0	24.08.2021
FGD 4 MIXED	7	3	26.08.2021
VFGD 1	12	6	05.11.2021
VFGD 2	11	4	5.12.2021
VKII 1	1	1	18.12.2021
VKII 2	1	0	25.12.2021
Zugdidi			
KII 1	1	1	16.06.2021
KII 2	1	1	24.06.2021
KII 3	1	0	25.06.2021
KII 4	1	0	07.07.2021
FGD 1 YOUTH	9	2	22.07.2021
FGD 2 WOMEN	9	9	27.07.2021
FGD 3 MEN	7	0	30.07.2021
FGD 4 MIXED	10	5	03.08.2021
VFGD 1	18	15	15.10.2021
VFGD 2	14	10	20.10.2021
VKII 1	1	1	07.12.2021
VKII 2	1	0	07.12.2021

Gori			
KII 1	1	0	23.06.2021
KII 2	1	1	25.06.2021
KII 3	1	1	25.06.2021
KII 4	1	1	22.06.2021
FGD 1 MIXED	9	7	19.07.2021
FGD 2 YOUTH	8	7	19.07.2021
FGD 3 MEN	8	0	22.07.2021
FGD 4 WOMEN	8	8	22.07.2021
VFGD 1	7	3	15.10.2021
VFGD 2	14	8	16.10.2021
VFGD 3	8	8	11.11.2021
VKII 1	1	1	15.12.2021
VKII 2	1	1	17.12.2021
Tbilisi			
KII 1	1	1	29.06.2021
KII 2	1	1	01.07.2021
KII 3	1	0	24.06.2021
KII 4	1	0	05.07.2021
FGD 1 YOUTH	6	3	23.07.2021
FGD 2 MIXED	4	2	28.07.2021
FGD 3 MEN	5	0	02.08.2021
FGD 4 WOMEN	7	7	18.09.2021
VFGD 1	20	17	03.11.2021
VFGD 2	11	11	25.11.2021
VFGD 3	5	5	26.11.2021
VKII 1	1	1	27.12.2021
VKII 2	1	0	28.12.2021
Akhalgori			
INTERVIEW 1	1	1	20.06.2021
INTERVIEW 2	1	0	21.06.2021
INTERVIEW 3	1	0	9.07.2021
INTERVIEW 4	1	1	14.08.2021
INTERVIEW 5	1	1	16.08.2021
INTERVIEW 6	1	1	20.08.2021
INTERVIEW 7	1	0	21.08.2021
INTERVIEW 8	1	1	24.08.2021
INTERVIEW 9	1	1	29.08.2021
INTERVIEW 10	1	0	16.09.2021
INTERVIEW 11	1	1	16.09.2021
INTERVIEW 12	1	0	20.09.2021

Akhalgori			
INTERVIEW 13	1	1	20.09.2022
INTERVIEW 14	1	0	21.09.2021
INTERVIEW 15	1	1	22.09.2021
INTERVIEW 16	1	1	26.09.2021
INTERVIEW 17	1	1	03.10.2021
INTERVIEW 18	1	1	18.10.2021
INTERVIEW 19	1	0	22.10.2021
INTERVIEW 20	1	1	25.10.2021
INTERVIEW 21	1	0	29.10.2021
INTERVIEW 22	1	0	29.10.2021
INTERVIEW 23	1	1	30.10.2021
INTERVIEW 24	1	0	03.11.2021
Tskhinval/i			
KII 1	1	1	10.08.2021
KII 2	1	0	15.08.2021
FGD WOMEN	5	5	17.08.2021
INTERVIEW 1	1	0	19.08.2021
INTERVIEW 2	1	1	29.08.2021
INTERVIEW 3	1	0	23.09.2021
INTERVIEW 4	1	1	23.09.2021
INTERVIEW 5	1	1	23.09.2021
INTERVIEW 6	1	1	03.12.2021
INTERVIEW 7	1	0	03.12.2021
INTERVIEW 8	1	1	10.12.2021
INTERVIEW 9	1	0	10.12.2021
INTERVIEW 10	1	1	10.12.2021



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