

Action Plan for Engagement

Introduction

Georgia is committed to a renewed, long-term outreach to the populations of its regions of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, whose citizens are entitled to all benefits available to Georgian citizens. *Georgia seeks to engage with these populations, to reduce their isolation and to improve their welfare, in the interest of human and regional security.*

This policy was set forth in the engagement strategy approved by the Government of Georgia in January 2010. This Action Plan puts that commitment into practical effect, with a range of initiatives that promote the general welfare of the populations currently legitimately residing in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region / South Ossetia, enable them to access benefits, participate in wider civic life and lay the foundation for future reconciliation between divided communities.

All principles of the Action Plan apply in equal measure to the respective populations and residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia without regard for their ethnicity, religion, gender or political beliefs. The Government of Georgia recognizes the differing challenges, from geographic, demographic and political considerations, to engagement with the two populations, and the different preferences and opportunities that exist. These factors have been taken into consideration in particular components of the Action Plan.

This is a human-centered approach; the Action Plan is intended to create a favorable environment for intensifying interaction, cooperation and partnership between the populations across the dividing lines and to build confidence among all communities of Georgia. Through the success of these measures, the Government of Georgia seeks to achieve reconciliations and greater trust between divided communities.

The Action Plan intends to pursuit of *four dimensions* of engagement – humanitarian, human, social and economic – that encompass a comprehensive range of programme (program) areas, with projects falling under one or more programmes (programs). *Seven instruments* will empower the activities the Action Plan promotes and serve the projects created under it. These instruments exemplify the bottom-up approach of the Action Plan, which rests on grassroots initiatives.

All initiatives carried out under the Action Plan will be in accordance with Georgian law. Many will require new procedures and administrative structures. The Action Plan includes the legal basis necessary to implement

the initiatives of the Government of Georgia. After the Action Plan is adopted, a package of legislative amendments will be drafted and submitted to the Parliament of Georgia.

The Law on Occupied Territories, adopted in October 2008 by the Parliament of Georgia and amended in February 2010 in accordance with the recommendations of the Venice Commission, reserves for the Government of Georgia the right to consent on activities that respond to humanitarian needs and support confidence-building. The Action Plan is an expression of the Government of Georgia's support for projects and programmes (programs) that are in line with the goals of the engagement strategy and in compliance with the Law on Occupied Territories. An executive edict will provide for prior approval of projects carried out under the Action Plan, obviating the need for exemptions from the Law on Occupied Territories.

Methodology

The Action Plan reflects the Government of Georgia's intentions, but it has been developed in concert with all the stakeholders in the engagement strategy: political parties, civil-society organizations, groups of experts, international NGOs, foreign governments and inter-governmental organizations. It incorporates previously adopted joint projects and confidence-building measures with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia; drafts have been shared with the authorities in control of those regions. The Action Plan's success will require the continued interest and support of all stakeholders.

The Action Plan is a comprehensive document and framework for future development. It centers on *four dimensions of programme areas and projects* to directly benefit the populations of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and their engagement with counterparts across the dividing lines, which are enabled by a collection of *seven instruments*.

The Office of the State Minister for Reintegration (SMR) is the lead agency in developing the Action Plan, and will oversee its implementation. The SMR will coordinate the efforts of the Georgian Government in support of the Action Plan. The SMR will welcome the advice of civil society in coordinating the efforts of the implementing parties.

The Action Plan is a *foundation* for the programmes (programs) that will serve the Strategy. It is a living document – it will be subject to an operational review every six months, and a strategic review after three years by an inter-ministerial working group under the Deputy Prime Minister/State Minister for Reintegration. This working group will monitor and evaluate the implementation of the Action Plan, taking into consideration input from all stakeholders.

The Government of Georgia seeks comprehensive engagement with the populations of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia along humanitarian, human, social and economic dimensions. The heart of the Action Plan is a catalogue of projects that aim to (1) directly improve the welfare of the populations of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia so that they may have the same opportunities available as the rest of Georgia and (2) support interaction between divided communities. The urgency of addressing these needs is underscored by the United Nations' 2015 target date for meeting the Millennium Development Goals for poverty, healthcare, education, gender equality, environmental protection and international cooperation.

The State Strategy identified a number of programme (program) areas and goals; the Action Plan elaborates projects within them that the Government of Georgia has already undertaken, intends to undertake or seeks partner organizations to undertake. The programme (program) areas are:

Humanitarian Dimension

- Humanitarian relief
- Natural disaster relief

Human Dimension

- Inter-community relations
- Preservation of cultural heritage and identity
- Free flow of information
- Human rights
- Youth Activities

Social Dimension

- Education
- Healthcare
- Environment

Economic Dimension

- Trade
- Joint Production
- Communications
- Infrastructure

Instruments for Engagement

Seven new instruments enable implementation of the Action Plan. Different instruments provide for the integration of residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia into Georgian civic life; facilitate communication and coordination between Tbilisi and the authorities in control in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia; and create the

institutional, financial and administrative bases for projects carried out under the Action Plan. Each instrument will serve a distinct, complementary purpose. While these instruments will be free standing, the SMR will coordinate their functioning and will continue to develop and implement Georgia's policy of engagement with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

Status-Neutral Liaison Mechanism

The Action Plan will establish a status-neutral liaison mechanism (LM) to facilitate communication among the Government of Georgia, the authorities in control in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and the voluntary associations operating there. The LM will facilitate or execute mutually approved projects and support implementers in their operations.

The LM will consist of Liaison Offers appointed with consent from both parties, with offices and small support staffs in Sokhumi, Tskhinvali, and Tbilisi. It can be based on previous arrangements, such as the Georgian/Abkhazian Joint Bilateral Coordination Commission. The LM will be operated under the umbrella of an international humanitarian organization.

Neutral Identification Card and Travel Document

Two new documents will allow residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia greater access to social services and the freedom of movement. These documents will be introduced without prejudice to Georgian citizens' identification cards or passports.

The entire population of Georgia is entitled to the same civil rights and social benefits, access to which the Georgian Government is seeking to improve for all. To address the practical and political difficulties that some legitimate residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia face in obtaining Georgian identification documents, legislation will be introduced that will provide for an easily obtainable 'neutral identification card' (NID), which will allow the holder to claim all the social benefits available to Georgian citizens, conduct business and other activities in Georgia, and seek employment in both private and public sectors. ('Neutral' in this case means 'neutral with respect to citizenship status'. The issuance and acceptance of an NID is solely for practical purposes. For residents of Abkhazia, the NID will be written in Georgian and Abkhaz, in accordance with the constitution of Georgia).

This card will enable the holder to acquire a 'neutral travel document' (NTD), allowing for travel abroad (the NTD is, essentially, a laissez-passer). The NTD will obviate the need for a foreign passport issued in violation of

international law, as confirmed by the report of the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia (“Tagliavini Report”). The NTD will be developed with the assistance of international legal experts so as to benefit from lessons learned elsewhere and to harmonize with international law.

Trust Fund

A Trust Fund (TF), managed by an international organization according to proven practices – with an advisory function for donors – will be established to provide grants for implementing organizations operating in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and across the dividing lines. The TF will ease the matching of donors and grantees and ensure that funded projects support the goals in the four dimensions of the Action Plan, but will not preclude funding of worthy projects by interested donors, by consultation with the SMR.

The precise format of the trust fund will be determined after adoption of the Action Plan. Models might include the EU-Africa Infrastructure Trust fund or the World Bank Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. The TF will also take into account lessons learned from EU/UNDP Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism (COBERM).

Joint Investment Fund

A joint investment fund (JIF) will be established to provide seed money to ventures operating in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and across the division lines. The JIF will support businesses that promote local economic development, generate employment and building commercial ties between communities on both sides of the dividing lines. The privately operated JIF will be jointly funded by donors and businesses, and will engage the services of national and regional Chambers of Commerce.

Cooperation Agency

A Cooperation Agency (CA) will be established to enable and facilitate interactions across the lines of division. Implementing the engagement strategy will require new functions that cannot be delegated from existing executive agencies, so the CA will be established as a legal person of public law (LPPL) under the authority of the SMR. The CA will act in accordance with the policies of the Government of Georgia in assisting state-funded programmes (programs). It will assist organizations that seek help in finding partners across the dividing lines, coordinate the efforts of local authorities to improve the local operating environments, ensure that project activity and business development complies with Georgian and international law and promote opportunities to potential implements in Georgia and abroad.

Financial Institution

The normal operations of humanitarian and developmental organizations as well as businesses present in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia entail financial transactions there. A financial institution (FI) will be established in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia that will allow for account setup and maintenance, cash transfers and other legal transactions. One option is for the FI to be operated by a bank already established in Georgia, without offering all the services of a retail or commercial bank.

Integrated Social-Economic Zone

Integrated Social-Economic Zones (ISEZ), with facilities for business and social services, will be established in the areas adjacent to the dividing lines in territory under Georgian control, thereby creating demand for goods and services from across the dividing lines.

The existence of an ISEZ creates a value chain across the dividing lines – from the supply of raw materials, to production, packaging quality control and distribution. It will focus on agriculture, but envisages the development of other value-added businesses. The concept also entails a needs-assessment and provision of seeds and technical assistance to farmers (vocational training, machinery for cultivation and maintenance, etc.). Processing and packaging facilities for agricultural products will be built within the ISEZ. The benefits for business could trump political objections and the added transaction costs of crossing the lines of division.

Enterprises operating in an ISEZ and employing the population there may be exempted from certain taxes.

An ISEZ will also promote agricultural exports, taking advantage of Georgia's business ties as well as special trade regimes that Georgia enjoys or will enjoy in the future. An accredited laboratory and standards agency will certify export products in the zone as well as those brought there from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

Programme Areas and Projects

This list is illustrative and should not be regarded as definitive; the Government of Georgia invites all interested parties to propose and carry out projects that support the shared goals expressed in the Action Plan. Furthermore, the programme (program) areas are only for clarity of organization; many projects serve multiple purposes and fit within multiple programme (program) areas. (Unless otherwise specified, "joint" refers to

populations on both sides of the dividing lines, with a special emphasis on IDPs and divided communities).

Humanitarian Dimension

Humanitarian Relief

The Action Plan supports the ongoing efforts of those government organizations – providing relief to the conflict-affected populations of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia – that save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain human dignity. New instruments established under the Action plan will reduce the administrative burden on these organizations.

Natural Disaster Response

Natural disasters affect populations without regard for dividing lines. The Action Plan includes measures to reduce the harm from environmental disasters and epidemics in conflict-affected areas by:

- Conducting joint analyses of common threats to which the region is prone, including earthquakes, landslides, avalanches and animal-borne infectious diseases.
- Developing joint emergency-preparedness mechanisms (rescue and rehabilitation)
- Conducting joint training for emergency responders.

Human Dimension

Intercommunity Relations

The Action Plan rests not only on cooperation in practical matters of material benefit, but also on re-establishment of connections that are essential to re-conciliation and of value in their own right. Except where noted, these measures concern connections between communities residing in Abkhazia or the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and exiled communities.

The Action Plan builds on the confidence-building efforts and informal dialogue of civil-society groups. The Government of Georgia places particular importance on UN SCR 1325, and the SMR will ensure that the Action Plan is implemented in its spirit.

The Action Plan will support initiatives that will:

- Allow for visits for family events, including births, weddings, funerals, gravesite visitations and religious rites.
- Enable mixed families to gather and visit across the dividing lines.
- Allow for meetings of elders councils.
- Allow for religious pilgrimages and access to cultural and historical sites.
- Provide for exchanges between journalists.
- Provide for exchanges between professionals (not limited to exiled communities)
- Promote cultural and athletic exchanges (not limited to exiled communities).
- Establish a commission for reburials, prisoner exchanges and missing-in-action matters.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Identity

The Action Plan includes further measures to actively promote the preservation and development of Abkhaz and Ossetian cultural heritage and identity in Georgia. This includes measures to protect Ossetian as a national-minority language and Abkhaz as an official language in Abkhazia, as stipulated in the Constitution of Georgia by:

- Producing books on Abkhaz culture, in Abkhaz as well as Georgian, and on Ossetian culture, in Ossetian and Georgian.
- Providing Abkhaz and Ossetian language training in Georgian schools and universities.
- Establishing contacts with Abkhaz diaspora organizations engaged in cultural-heritage preservation and holding annual conferences on Abkhaz culture.
- Seeking UNESCO support for joint activities on cultural preservation.
- Supporting the development of the Sokhumi archive (the Tbilisi archive is already donating materials).
- Establishing Abkhaz and Ossetian culture centres (centers) in a museum in Tbilisi.

- Supporting Abkhaz and Ossetian language radio broadcasts.
- Providing for the free exercise of religion, by easing travel for clergy and the transport of religious articles across the division lines (handled in the LM).

Free Flow of Information

All elements of the Action Plan contribute to, and benefit from the free flow of information between divided communities. The Action Plan contains measures targeted at improving its flow by:

- Providing for regularly scheduled meetings of journalists from Abkhazia, the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia and the rest of Georgia.
- Including residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia in Georgian study tours and/or other programs to the EU, NATO and other international organizations.
- Providing a joint web portal for communications and social networking between divided communities. Promoting the use of Internet, taking advantage of the low-cost, high-speed access provided by the Government of Georgia.
- Improving the capacity of radio and television-transmitting stations near the dividing lines.

Human Rights

Georgia has an interest in the protection of the human rights of all its residents, including those in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. The Action Plan includes measures to ensure those safeguards and promote understanding of human rights by:

- Inviting international human-rights organizations and inter-governmental organizations concerned with human rights to monitor human rights on the ground in conflict-affected areas, within agreed frameworks.
- Promoting education on human-rights issues in conflict-affected areas by translating and providing instructional booklets and holding seminars.
- Supporting groups advocating for social justice and property rights in conflict-affected areas.

Youth Activities

Young people of the divided communities do not have pre-conflict memories of their shared past. The Action Plan includes athletic, cultural and recreational activities to bring together youth from across the lines of division to promote friendship and understanding in the next generations by:

- Staging concerts and theatrical productions with youth performers from across the dividing lines.
- Holding sports tournaments and clinics for young athletes from across the dividing lines.
- Creating summer camps for children from across the dividing lines.
- Promoting joint youth-leadership programmes (programs) for the future elites of Georgia.
- Extending the eligibility for youth grant programs to residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.

Social Dimension

Education

In order to ensure that residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia have access to the same education benefits/avenues offered to all Georgian citizens, holders of the NID are eligible for entrance to Georgian universities, for international scholarship programmes (programs) for Georgian students, and for international exchange programmes (programs) for Georgian teachers. Furthermore, the Action Plan introduces proactive steps to ease and encourage the availability of existing educational avenues to residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia by:

- Extending the offer of nationwide university entrance-exams in Abkhaz and Ossetian languages to NID holders, and introducing exams in Russian for them.
- Certifying to international standards the educational credits of students from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.
- Providing all first-grade pupils in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia with a laptop computer, under the new

Government of Georgia nationwide 'one laptop per child' programme (program).

- Extending the law 'Teach and Learn with Georgia' programme (program) to Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia. This programme (program) provides a thousand English-language instructors across Georgia. Other programmes (programs) could support widespread instruction in European languages that allow for greater international integration.
- Creating elementary-school textbooks and kindergarten-level reading materials in Abkhaz and Ossetian, under an extra-ministerial commission and a task group at the Georgian Ministry of Education, in collaboration with scholars from Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.
- Expanding the scope of Abkhazian studies at Tbilisi State University, and establishing academic exchanges with institutions in Abkhazia.
- Offering research grants for joint research projects.
- Offering support (printed materials, electronic resources, facilities, and management) to libraries in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia

Healthcare

All healthcare benefits for Georgian citizens are open to residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia; holders of the neutral ID are able to receive medical treatment in Georgia, including emergency transportation. The Action Plan includes further active measures to improve health and healthcare in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia by:

- Conducting joint needs-assessments to determine which resources are best made available in Tbilisi and what needs to be provided in Zugdidi or Gori. Focusing on HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, cancer, drug abuse and trans-boundary infectious threats.
- Forming joint working-groups on healthcare, with an emphasis on early warnings.
- Conducting inventories of ongoing medicine needs in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia for insulin and tuberculosis drugs.

- Extending eligibility for health insurance to residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, and establishing a special operating fund for those conditions not covered by health insurance.
- Providing mobile clinics to residents of Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.
- Providing opportunities for cooperation on sanitary and phytosanitary issues.
- Providing HIV/AIDS voluntary counseling and testing services.
- Providing access to infertility treatment.

Environment

The natural environment is a treasure of all of Georgia's regions, and environmental degradation does not respect political division lines. The Action Plan aims to protect common environmental issues by:

- Promoting protection of the environment in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, by supporting environmental NGOs, advocacy groups and watchdog organizations.
- Establishing protected areas in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia on the model of Georgia's national-parks system and seeking UNESCO protected-area status for them.

Economic Dimension

Trade and dividing-line crossings have persisted, despite the hardships imposed by the conflict as a result of established relations and the proximity of production and trading centres (centers) on both sides. In particular, Zugdidi and Gori are attractive markets for businesspeople and consumers in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia respectively, as they are closer than other potential markets of equal size and many goods are less expensive there than elsewhere.

The Action Plan supports existing trade relations by eliminating obstacles, and promotes new trade opportunities. Measures to improve economic relations, infrastructure, and transportation links include:

Trade

- Easing access to markets by offering buses from the division lines to Zugdidi, Kutaisi, Batumi, Gori or Tbilisi; allowing buses with license

plates issued in Abkhazia and/or the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia to cross the dividing lines. Improving roads to trading centres (centers).

- Promoting employment and the development of labor-intensive industries through vocational education and the establishment of learning centres (centers) in the ISEZs.
- Enabling integration into international commerce by establishing an accredited quality-control laboratory and standards agency to certify production to international and regional standards.

Joint Production

- Promoting joint production ventures
- Providing startup funding to joint-production ventures operating across division lines.

Communications

- Re-establishing postal service with Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia
- Providing low-cost, high-speed Internet service to Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.
- Restoring the Gori-Tskhinvali communication transmission line to provide communication services to the population of the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia.
- Conducting joint studies on the Poti-Sokhumi undersea trunk line to provide a broad range of telecommunications services and information access to the population of Abkhazia.

Infrastructure

- Establishing a passenger-ferry service between Batumi and Sokhumi.
- Rehabilitating irrigation systems.
- Rehabilitating schools and hospitals in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, providing sanitation and protection against the elements. A project would conduct a needs assessment and prioritize facilities for rehabilitation.