

Security for all – a challenge for Eastern Abkhazia

Community perceptions of safety and security



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The spelling of geographical names in the English-language report and Russian-language report corresponds with the common usage in each language.



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Executive summary and recommendations

THIS IS THE THIRD ANNUAL SURVEY CONDUCTED IN EASTERN ABKHAZIA

by the Institute for Democracy and Saferworld since 2011. The survey tracks and summarises local perceptions of safety and security, gathered in four research areas: Gal/i town and surrounding villages, Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i towns and surrounding villages, Upper Gal/i, and Lower Gal/i (see map, page iv). The methodology included a household survey conducted in January 2013 and a series of follow-up focus group discussions conducted in March 2013 (for more information on the methodology, see Annex 1).

Communities and their needs

This year's results show further slight improvements in local perceptions of safety and security, suggesting that positive changes noted between surveys conducted in 2011 and 2012 represent a trend, rather than a one-off anomaly. Respondents attribute positive changes to fewer incidents relating to safety and security, a decreased threat of renewed violence, and improved infrastructure. Unemployment tops the list of communities concerns while, as in the previous year's survey, at the regional level concerns regarding crime, extortion, presence of armed groups, and kidnappings have virtually disappeared from the list of major community problems.

These positive outcomes, however, are not evenly distributed and there are considerable differences between the four research areas. The Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group and, to a lesser degree, the Gal/i town groups reported an overall improvement, while respondents in the more isolated and rural Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i groups are more inclined to report a worsening of their situation in comparison to the previous year.

In general, respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i are more concerned by access to services (e.g. electricity, potable water), than by rights issues (e.g. access to Abkhaz passports, freedom of movement), which are pressing issues for communities in Lower and Upper Gal/i, as well as in Gal/i town and surroundings, albeit to a relatively lesser degree. Upper Gal/i is the only area where the majority of respondents note a worsening of their security situation, and in Lower Gal/i more people report deterioration than improvement (although the majority felt the situation was unchanged). In both research groups these negative perceptions were related to difficulties commuting across the Ingur/i River, and closely related to that, by difficulties obtaining Abkhaz passports. Problems with crime were identified as a major community concern by respondents in Lower Gal/i.

Recommendations for responding to communities' safety and security priorities

- Carefully monitor the nature, cause, and frequency of incidents of crime in Lower Gal/i and develop measures to combat crime in the area
- Simplify procedures for obtaining Abkhaz passports for permanent/long-term residents in Eastern Abkhazia and improve communication about such procedures, including about legal requirements for obtaining passports and reasons for delays or failure to issue passports
- Improve procedures for crossing the Ingur/i River, including by opening additional checkpoints
- Increase investments into socio-economic rehabilitation of the area, particularly emphasising job creation and healthcare provision.

Personal safety and the role of security providers

In terms of threats to personal security, respondents generally listed the same issues that were identified as major problems facing their communities. Results similarly showed some significant geographical differentiations between communities living in the Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i regional clusters on one hand, and the Lower and Upper Gal/i clusters on the other, with the latter two reporting a greater sense of insecurity on a personal level.

Regardless of geographic area, ethnicity, or gender, respondents do not feel that formal security actors are able to appropriately meet their security needs; however, friends and relatives and local authorities are perceived as providing a degree of effective security provision. Responses across the different groups show low community-level interactions with the central authorities in Sukhum/i and with the Abkhaz police – over half of respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i report having no interactions with these actors.

While lack of trust in security providers is a common perception across the four regional clusters, a comparison between Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and the other three groups shows that the three predominantly ethnic Georgian populated areas are more likely to abstain from reporting a crime because of security concerns and social vulnerabilities. Thus, in Upper Gal/i respondents cited fear of reprisals and ethnic barriers as a reason for not reporting crime. In Lower Gal/i respondents additionally mentioned language barriers as a reason. On the other hand, respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were more likely to abstain from reporting a crime because of a general lack of confidence in the capacity and professionalism of security actors.

Recommendations for improving security providers' responsiveness to local needs

- Take practical steps based on outreach and good communication to increase trust between communities and security actors, especially the police. Particular attention should be placed on increasing trust in the Lower and the Upper Gal/i areas. These steps could include *inter alia* undertaking regular patrols of areas which report higher safety concerns, regular meetings with the communities, setting up a system for making and following up on complaints, recruiting local people into police and local government structures
- Create regular communication channels, for example, by organising meetings between communities in Lower Gal/i and the Russian border guards to address issues of concern to communities, such as the sudden erection of road blocks, harassment, and detention of people not carrying identification documents.

Perceptions of the likelihood of increased tensions and a return to violence

Generally respondents thought an increase in tensions within the region was unlikely and there was less uncertainty about the future in comparison with previous years. However, once again, there are clear differences across various regional clusters and different ethnicities. Thus, the predominantly ethnic Abkhaz respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i are more confident about the future, while ethnic Georgian respondents, particularly in Lower and Upper Gal/i, report higher levels of anxiety about their future safety.

As in previous surveys, political and military factors, particularly relations between Tbilisi and Moscow and between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i, are perceived to carry the greatest risk of increasing tensions. Problems in crossing the Ingur/i were, however, identified as more likely to occur, particularly in Upper Gal/i.

Recommendations for reducing tensions in communities

- Implement social rehabilitation programmes to decrease anxiety about the future related to proximity to the territories with a border regime, especially in Lower and Upper Gal/i
- Engage community groups in Lower and Upper Gal/i in discussions with relevant authority representatives on the best ways of managing cross-Ingur/i movement.

Contacts and confidence between ethnic groups

Respondents in all four research areas report increased and improved levels of inter-ethnic personal contacts in the region. Lower Gal/i residents, while registering an improvement, reported the lowest levels of interaction with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia, which underlines their ethnic isolation. While over two-thirds in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i reported having friendships with other ethnic groups, only one-third in Upper Gal/i and only 2% of respondents in Lower Gal/i did so. Respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i, however, interact more often with other ethnic groups when selling their agricultural produce in other parts of Abkhazia.

As in the previous two surveys, respondents remain overwhelmingly supportive of a wide variety of measures aimed at increasing local-level security and building trust between different ethnic groups in Eastern Abkhazia. But people remain doubtful about the potential impact of these measures. Analysis of the perceived efficacy of various security- and trust-building measures reveals that respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and to a lesser degree in Gal/i town give higher importance to measures/activities with a greater emphasis on political and/or civil dialogue between different ethnic groups in Abkhazia (e.g. exchange of ideas for preventing war and violence, meetings with former neighbours, protecting human rights), whereas in Lower and Upper Gal/i priority is given to joint business initiatives and provision of basic social and security services.

Recommendations for increasing local-level security and trust between ethnic groups

- Carefully assess local sensitivities and preferences when designing confidence-building measures
- Develop regular engagement mechanisms for communities to communicate their human rights concerns to relevant authorities and consult on the locally preferred course of action
- Develop programmes to establish shared business and trade interests, to encourage ethnic Abkhaz to promote and protect the rights of ethnic Georgians in Eastern Abkhazia, and to bring youth from the Gal/i district together with youth from other districts, so that they have greater experience of interaction with each other.

Map of Eastern Abkhazia



This map is intended for illustrative purposes only. Saferworld takes no position on whether this representation is legally or politically valid.

Introduction

THIS REPORT ASSESSES PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS of the safety and security of communities living in Eastern Abkhazia, based on the results of a household survey and focus group discussions.¹ It also provides local assessments of the perceptions of the effectiveness of security providers and perspectives on the potential for increased tensions and ways to reduce them.

The aim of the report is to provide locally informed insights on the local dynamics and factors that shape the security and livelihoods of communities in Eastern Abkhazia and, based on this assessment, propose locally appropriate ways of responding to causes of insecurity. Findings are based on a household survey conducted in January 2013 across four target areas, as well as five focus group discussions with local people living in these areas. Saferworld published two previous tracker surveys in March 2011 and July 2012.² Comparative analysis of the results of these surveys with the most recent data allows us to identify trends and changes regarding the safety and security situation in Eastern Abkhazia over the past three years.

The report comes at a time that presents both challenges and new opportunities. The first peaceful and democratic transition of power in post-independence Georgia in October 2012 has increased hopes for normalisation of Tbilisi-Moscow and Tbilisi-Sukhum/i ties. However, this change in Georgian internal politics has had little effect so far on Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Russian relationships. The Abkhaz authorities have introduced new stricter regulations for crossing the Ingur/i River for both local residents and visiting foreign nationals, but at the same time opened two new crossing points in the Lower Gal/i zone.³ Abkhaz authorities have also ordered international humanitarian organisations based in Abkhazia to relocate their activities to the Gal/i district, which has been perceived as an attempt to curb international presence in Abkhazia.⁴

The February 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, which will take place just a few kilometres away from Abkhazia, increase pressure to ensure security and stability in the region. It thus makes all major stakeholders, including those in Sukhum/i, Moscow, and Tbilisi, interested in engaging in constructive cooperation on a bilateral and trilateral basis, as well as improving security provision and good communication between Abkhaz

¹ The term 'Eastern Abkhazia' refers to the Gal/i and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i districts, which together constitute the research area.

² See Institute for Democracy and Saferworld, *Isolation and Opportunity in Eastern Abkhazia: A survey community security*, March 2011 and Institute for Democracy and Saferworld, *Potential for Change: A survey of community security in Eastern Abkhazia*, July 2012.

³ Although not substantial, these changes include more formalised procedures for crossing the Ingur/i River and thus reflect the position of the Abkhaz leadership on ensuring that the Ingur/i operates as a state border. The new rules for crossing the Ingur/i require having proper passports, including Abkhaz passports for local residents, which brings into focus the issue of obtaining the Abkhaz passports.

⁴ Exceptions are the United Nations Development Programme, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, International Committee of the Red Cross, and Medecins sans Frontiers.

security providers and the predominantly ethnic Georgian population within Eastern Abkhazia.

This report begins by looking into the overall situation in communities, their perceptions of safety and security, personal safety, trends over the last year, and perceptions of security providers. The study then investigates the potential for increased tension, events which are believed to be more likely to cause tension, and the likelihood of triggers occurring. Finally, the study explores the level and types of engagement between different ethnic groups that presently exist, types of engagement that people would be willing to participate in, and how effective they think such measures would be to increase local security provision and trust between communities in Eastern Abkhazia.

1

Communities and their needs

THIS SECTION LOOKS AT THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION in Eastern Abkhazia, identifying respondents' key concerns and emerging trends in the situation of specific communities. The findings provide evidence of communities' most pressing needs, which can be used by relevant security actors to frame their responses.

How is the situation within communities changing?

Respondents report no significant demographic changes

As in previous reports, the overwhelming majority of respondents in Eastern Abkhazia identify themselves as ethnic Georgians (77%), while 22% identify themselves as ethnic Abkhaz.⁵ The ethnic breakdown in the four group areas also remains unchanged, with Upper Gal/i exclusively ethnic Georgian and Gal/i town and Lower Gal/i overwhelmingly so, 96% and 98% respectively. Three quarters of residents in the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group are ethnic Abkhaz, with ethnic Georgians mostly constituting the remainder.⁶

Respondents across all four research areas had mixed perceptions of the demographic situation, in keeping with last year's survey. Forty five per cent noted no change, a quarter thought there had been an increase in the number of families living in their village, and 18% said there were fewer. The latter represents a two-fold increase on last year's corresponding figure, mirrored in a reduction in the number of respondents saying they didn't know. Ethnic Abkhaz respondents were notably more inclined to register a reduction in the number of families – 36% compared with only 13% of ethnic Georgians.

The figures – while conflicting – offer some indication of population stability, suggesting that people, despite concerns about socio-economic conditions and perceived threats to personal security (explored below), have chosen to remain *in situ*.

Increased feelings of physical safety are challenged by obstacles to population movement

When asked how the general situation in their community has changed over the past year, respondents displayed a mixed picture. As with the previous survey, almost half of respondents (47%) said the situation has not changed. There has been a slight

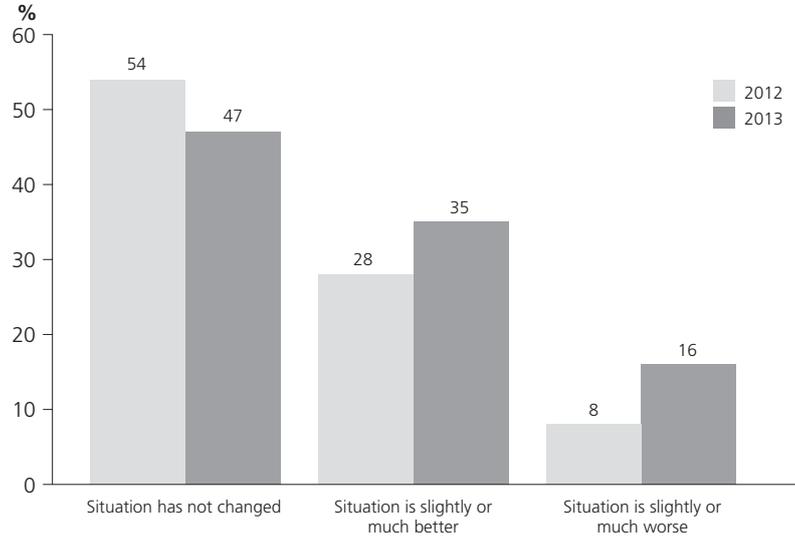
⁵ A statistically insignificant 1% identified themselves as ethnic Russian and Armenian.

⁶ It should be noted that the borders of the Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i research area group do not overlap with the administrative borders of the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i districts. The research areas were defined by the research team prior to the first survey in 2010.

increase in the number of respondents reporting an improvement in the overall situation (from 28% to 35%). However, the number of those who said the situation has worsened doubled from 8% to 16% (see figure 1).

Figure 1. Changes in the overall community situation: comparison between 2012 and 2013 survey results

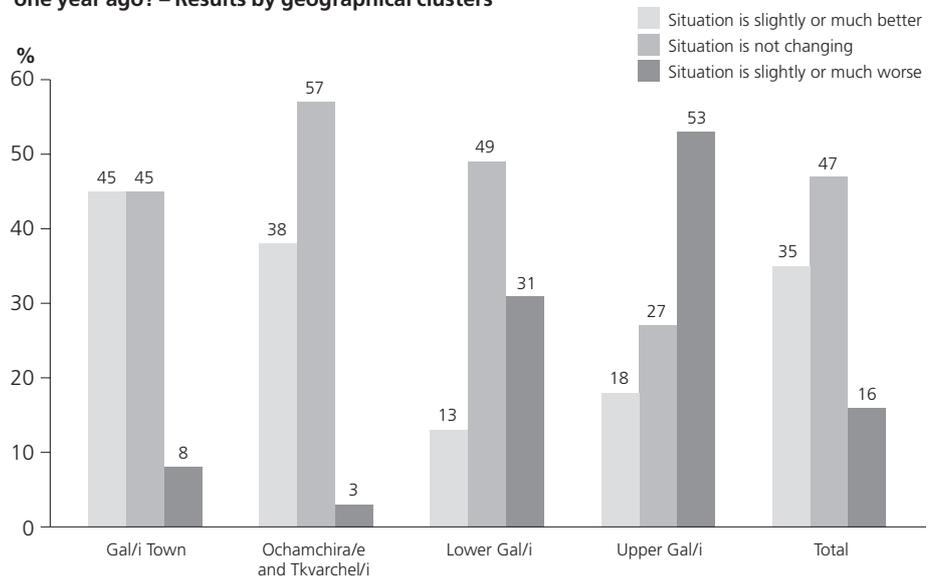
How has the situation in your community changed compared to a year ago?



Responses differed according to regional cluster, with notable differences between perceptions in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i clusters on the one hand, and the Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i clusters on the other. The overwhelming majority of respondents in the Gal/i town and the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i clusters noted either an improvement (45% and 38% respectively) or reported no significant changes in the overall situation in their community (45% and 57%). Only 8% in these clusters said the situation in their communities had deteriorated.

In contrast, respondents in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i reported a lesser degree of improvement in the general community situation (13% and 18% respectively). More importantly, 31% of respondents in Lower Gal/i and 53% in Upper Gal/i said the situation in their communities has deteriorated (see figure 2). As explored below, this is likely to be connected to perceived difficulties crossing the Ingur/i and freedom of movement within villages.

Figure 2. How would you describe the situation in your community/village compared to one year ago? – Results by geographical clusters



Those who said the situation in their communities has improved cited the following three major factors which they believe contributed to improvements: fewer incidents related to safety and security (75%), decreased threat of renewal of violence (36%), and improved roads (28%). By contrast, those who said the situation in their communities has worsened cited the following three major factors: crossing the Ingur/i River has become more difficult (70%), decreased contacts with relatives (30%), and difficulties in obtaining passports (28%). It is worth noting that no respondent in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i mentioned these factors as contributing to the deterioration of the situation in their communities, whereas rural, ethnic Georgian communities in Lower and Upper Gal/i are strongly reliant on the ability to commute across the Ingur/i River for their sense of security and well-being. Increased levels of dissatisfaction with the overall community situation in rural, ethnic Georgian communities of Lower and Upper Gal/i groups is apparently linked to the introduction of new stricter regulations at the Ingur/i River crossing point in November 2012. They may also be related to increased obstacles to movement within villages, related to regular raids carried out by Russian border guards and the obligation to carry identity documents at all times. This issue was raised in focus group discussions in Lower Gal/i.⁷

People do not feel economically stable

As in previous surveys, agriculture tops the employment structure with 66% of respondents citing it as their main source of income. Agriculture is almost the sole source of family income in Lower Gal/i (95%) and Upper Gal/i (91%), while in the Gal/i town group it generates income for 63% and in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i for 44% of respondents. When looked at by ethnicity, 72% of ethnic Georgian respondents cite agriculture as their main source of income, as opposed to 45% of Abkhaz. This may be related to the fact that the majority of Abkhaz respondents live in the more urban Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i area.

Other secondary sources of income include pensions or social payments (9%), seasonal work other than agriculture (7% – this most likely includes work at construction sites, seasonal trade, and service sector), and employment in the public sector (7%) among other less significant responses. Ethnic Abkhaz rely more on jobs in the public sector (16%) than ethnic Georgians (4%), pointing to the fact that most of the public sector jobs in the area are occupied by ethnic Abkhaz. Ethnic Abkhaz also reported greater reliance on small business as a source of income (9%) and employment in the private sector (8%), compared with their ethnic Georgian neighbours (2% and 3% respectively).

Asked whether they expect their family's income to increase over the course of the year, 55% – similar to the previous year's survey – could not respond. 22% – compared with 29% last year – said they expected an increase in their income over the course of the year, while 23% – compared with 12% last year – expected no increase in their income, reflecting decreased optimism about prospects for economic well-being. In terms of regional differentiation, respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were twice as positive about the likelihood of an increase in their income – 38% compared with an average of 16% in the other three regional clusters. However, more importantly, the fact that over half of respondents – regardless of their ethnicity – could not offer an answer to this question indicates uncertainty among the local population as a whole about economic stability.

What are communities' critical needs?

Unemployment and problems with socio-economic infrastructure again top the list

Given the lack of an industrial base and limited opportunities in what is a restricted services sector, it is unsurprising that unemployment remains communities' most

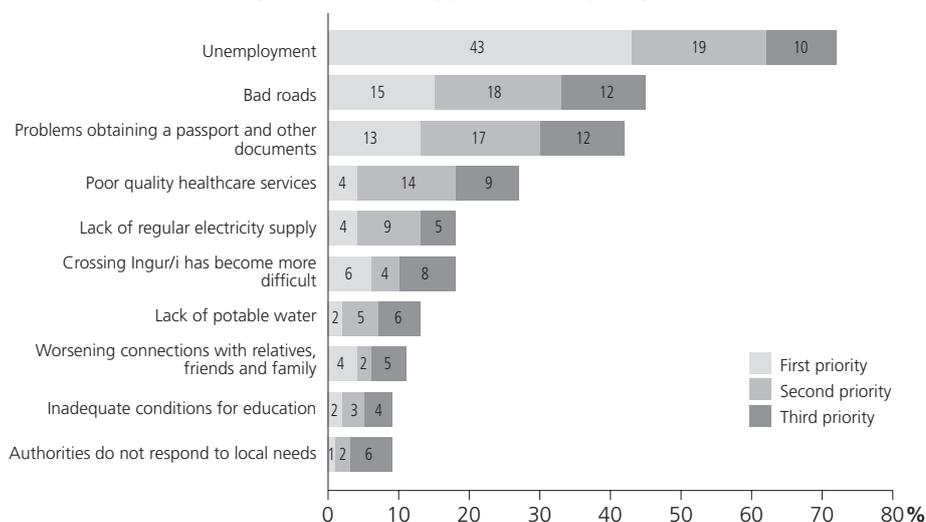
⁷ "We can't move freely within the village", focus group participant, unemployed, Lower Gal/i, March 2013. "As soon as it gets dark, we can't go to visit our neighbours. We always have to have documents with us", agronomist, Lower Gal/i, March 2013.

pressing need: 72% – almost as much as in last year’s survey – cite it as one of the three most important problems facing their community. Residents of the Gal/i town group and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i named unemployment as a concern more than residents in the two other areas: 78% and 82% in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, respectively, and 44% and 57% in Lower and Upper Gal/i, respectively.

The poor state of roads remained the second most pressing problem with 45% of all respondents citing this concern. Notably, however, this represents a decrease on last year’s figure – 55% – and is probably due to significant improvements made by the authorities in this respect, in particular the re-surfacing of the Ingur/i-Sukhum/i highway and roads within Gal/i town. This is probably why this problem received lowest consideration in the Gal/i town group (33%), compared with 62% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, 53% in Lower Gal/i, and 44% in Upper Gal/i.

Figure 3. The most urgent problems facing communities⁸

What are the three most urgent problems facing your community/village?



Poor healthcare was named the fourth most pressing problem, with 28% of respondents citing it, the same as in last year’s survey. In terms of regional differentiation, people in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were more likely to be concerned with this problem (33% in both groups) than people in Lower and Upper Gal/i (13% and 9% respectively). However, in terms of ethnic differentiation, almost equal numbers of ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz respondents (26%) identified the issue as either first, second, or third most urgent problem facing their communities.

When further exploring perceptions of other socio-economic infrastructure, regional and ethnic differences become more apparent: respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i are more concerned by access to services, such as access to potable water and electricity, than by rights issues, such as freedom of movement and access to identification documents, which have a more pressing impact on ethnic Georgian communities. Thus, a lack of regular electricity supply was cited by 50% of respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i as one of the three main community problems, whereas only 9% in Gal/i town and virtually no one in Lower and Upper Gal/i mentioned this as a problem. A similar trend can be observed in responses identifying the lack of potable water supply as one of the three main community problems. Thirteen per cent of respondents – up from 9% in the previous survey – cited this as a problem, but it was cited only by the respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (24%) and in Gal/i town (13%) and by virtually no one in the other two groups.

These results may be related to a perception that Gal/i district receives more attention from authorities than other areas of Abkhazia, expressed during focus group discussions

⁸ Only the top ten responses have been included. Other proposed answers to this question gathered less than 9% of responses and are not included in figure 3.

in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i districts: “They do everything in Gal/i, it’s a fact”⁹; “they did the roads there, changed the pipes and dug sewerage channels”¹⁰; “all attention is focused on that region”¹¹; “they don’t pay attention elsewhere.”¹² While these observations may not be factually accurate, it is important that authorities pay attention to this concern and that decisions on where to spend funds are made transparently and justified to the population. This will help ensure that other districts do not feel they are being overlooked in favour of Gal/i district, which could create tensions between populations living in different districts.

Obtaining identification documents and interaction across the Ingur/i River remain a pressing concern

Forty two per cent of respondents, almost as many as in the previous survey, cited problems obtaining a passport and other identification documents as one of the three most urgent community problems. This problem – a major impediment in crossing the Ingur/i River – was almost wholly an ethnic Georgian concern (54%), with only 2% of ethnic Abkhaz respondents citing it. This reflects the greater difficulty ethnic Georgians have as they do not possess acceptable documents when submitting a passport application.

There are both political and procedural considerations when discussing difficulties for ethnic Georgians in obtaining Abkhaz passports. Abkhaz authorities acknowledge the existence of a problem, but also point to the fact that according to official data, more passports were issued in Gal/i region over the last year than in any other part of Abkhazia. In private conversations, they also cite national security concerns suggesting that loyalty to the Abkhaz statehood should be a precondition to granting of citizenship. Indeed, officially joint Georgian and Abkhaz citizenship is legally prohibited. Another problem is that the process of obtaining passports is cumbersome, requiring much documentation, which the ethnic Georgian population often has difficulties in collecting. This is especially true for some documents that must be obtained in Georgia and then certified, such as marriage and birth certificates. Since many parts of Eastern Abkhazia are generally isolated, local residents sometimes have to travel long distances to passport offices to address issues related to documents, which is both time-consuming and expensive. In some instances, the passport office simply would not tell the applicants whether or not they would be issued a passport, even though the law requires the passport office to issue the passport or notify the applicant of refusal within two months of receiving the required set of documents.

Related to this issue, 17% of respondents – down from 29% last year – named difficulties in crossing the Ingur/i Bridge as a major community problem. This was cited by 23% of ethnic Georgian respondents, who need to cross for family ties, but was not cited by ethnic Abkhaz respondents. As one would expect, the two areas closest to the Ingur/i River – Upper and Lower Gal/i – registered great concern. However, notably, the overall level of concern with this problem in Upper Gal/i has dramatically decreased from 92% in 2012 survey to 51% this year. In Lower Gal/i, the level of concern with difficulties in crossing the Ingur/i remained practically unchanged at 31%.

It should be noted that following the introduction of new regulations for crossing the Ingur/i Bridge, the Abkhaz authorities announced plans to open up new crossing points.¹³ Two crossing points were opened in May 2013 – one in Otobaia and another in Nabakevi.¹⁴ Opening additional crossing points may significantly contribute to improving the lives of Gal/i district residents and reducing the number of unsanctioned crossings to the other side of the Ingur/i River.

The next most frequently cited problem – worsening connections with friends and relatives on the other side of the Ingur/i River – is linked to problems obtaining passports

⁹ Focus group participant, unemployed, Ochamchira/e district, March 2013.

¹⁰ Focus group participant, teacher, Ochamchira/e district, March 2013.

¹¹ Focus group participant, unemployed, Ochamchira/e district, March 2013.

¹² Focus group participant, shop assistant, Ochamchira/e district, March 2013.

¹³ “Mezhdú Abkhazíey i Gruzíey poyavyatsa novye KPP” (“New checkpoint appears between Abkhazia and Georgia”), www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Mezhdú-Abkhazíey-i-Gruzíey-poyavyatsya-novye-KPP.html, 20 January 2013

¹⁴ “Na gosudarstvennoy granitse Respublíki Abkhazía s Gruzíey otkryli dva propusknikh punkta” (“Two checkpoints were opened on the state border of the Republic of Abkhazia with Georgia”), <http://apsnypress.info/news/8973.html>, 15 May 2013

and difficulties crossing the Ingur/i Bridge. While 11% of all respondents – similar to last year's survey – cited the problem, 13% of Georgian, as opposed to just 3% of Abkhaz respondents, did so. Notably, this problem was ranked highly in Upper Gal/i (36%), suggesting that residents there, who are further away from the Ingur/i Bridge, have greater difficulties in travelling across the river to meet relatives, family, and friends.

Female respondents tended to be more concerned about cross-Ingur/i movement, reflecting perhaps greater frequency of cross-Ingur/i movement.¹⁵ Eight per cent of female respondents mentioned difficulties in crossing the Ingur/i Bridge as the first priority need, compared with just 3% of male respondents.¹⁶ They were also twice as concerned (13%) than their male counterparts (7%) about worsened connections with friends and family on the other side of the Inguri River.

Respondents' answers indicate visible signs of increased and sustained law and order

There have been notable positive changes in non-socioeconomic matters relating to 'hard' security concerns, which barely register among respondents' most urgent problems. Concern with the criminal situation has remained almost unchanged, with only 4% of respondents citing it. This signals that the dramatic decrease in concern about crime recorded in the previous year's survey is sustainable and accurate. Last year's survey saw a drop from 15% to 3%. Similarly, last year's survey recorded 5% of respondents mentioning extortion; this year no one did. There were also virtually no references to shooting in the distance, presence of armed groups, or kidnappings as urgent problems.

Some of these security-related issues, while seemingly not of particular concern to the respondents in the entire survey area, are, however, of importance in Lower Gal/i. Thirty per cent of respondents in this cluster mentioned crime as a pressing problem, compared with no respondents in the other three groups. Similarly, kidnapping merits no mention in any area apart from Lower Gal/i, where 4% of respondents cite it. The area was the scene of a number of highly publicised kidnappings last summer,¹⁷ reinforcing Lower Gal/i respondents' concern regarding the general crime situation, suggesting there is a pressing need for local authority representatives to further improve security provision in this area.

¹⁵ Data drawn from another section of the survey suggest that women do indeed cross the border into Georgia proper more often than men. Eight per cent of female respondents, for example, say they "quite frequently" have contact with Russian border guards, compared with just 3% of male respondents. Contact with Abkhaz border guards was numbered at 32% and 24% for women and men, respectively.

¹⁶ However, when the first, second, and third priorities are combined the difference between the perceptions of men and women is less visible – with 15% of men and 19% of women citing difficulties crossing the Inguri Bridge as a top three most urgent problem.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Caucasus Knot* (2012) "In Gal/i District of Abkhazia, local resident Lasha Belkaniya kidnapped", 22 June, www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/21372 and *Kavkaz News* (2012) "V Gal'skom rajone pokhishchen 9-letnyi malchik" ("Nine year old boy kidnapped in Gal/i district"), 15 August, <http://news.rambler.ru/15131667>

2

Personal safety and the role of security actors

THIS CHAPTER EXAMINES THREATS faced by residents of Eastern Abkhazia, and how these threats affect people's sense of personal security. It also evaluates the role of security actors in responding to these threats.

What are the threats to personal safety?

Everyday problems pose the greatest risk to personal safety

Respondents mostly identified everyday problems – many the same as their most urgent community problems – when asked to name threats that affect their personal safety.

A number of changes have occurred over the past year. Perceptions of unemployment as a risk to personal safety have leapt forward, with 66% of respondents mentioning it as an insecurity factor, compared with 25% in last year's survey. Other socio-economic factors have decreased in comparison to last year's results: in particular, poor roads, mentioned by 43% compared with 56% last year, and inadequate healthcare, down from 37% to 29%.

Crime as a factor in people's sense of personal insecurity – which was curiously mentioned by less than 1% last year – was named in this year's survey by 5% of respondents. Notably, however, the problem was mentioned exclusively in the Lower Gal/i group, where 36% mentioned it as one of the top three personal causes of insecurity.

On a positive note, unresponsiveness of authorities as a factor in insecurity has decreased, with 10% of respondents mentioning it, almost half as many as in the previous year's survey. Although increased concern with crime seems to belie this, the near elimination of extortion – mentioned by less than 1% of respondents – is indicative of concrete changes initiated through pro-active engagement on the part of the authorities.

The presence of the Russian military, which exercised a lot of concern in last year's survey, with 32% of respondents then mentioning it as a personal security concern, was only mentioned by 12% of respondents in this year's survey. This suggests that last year's concerns about the Russian military presence and the possibility of a 'Russification' of the area do not resonate so markedly and possibly indicates a degree of normalisation in relations between local residents and the Russian military.

Difficulty crossing the Ingur/i Bridge was mentioned as a source of personal insecurity by 21% of respondents, up from 10% last year. This near doubling of the figure is

apparently linked to the introduction of new regulations for crossing the Ingur/i Bridge in November 2012, which occurred a few months before the time of data collection for the survey. Alongside these results, however, only 16% of respondents mention decreased contact with friends and family living on the other side of the Ingur/i, down from 25% in last year's survey.

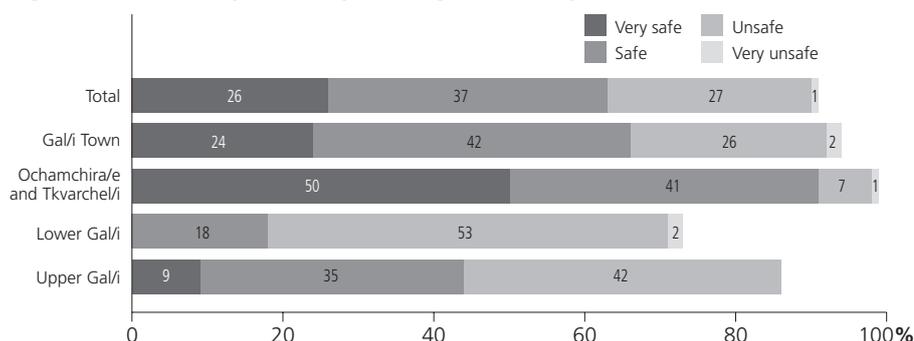
The results showed some broad geographical differentiation, with the situation in Lower Gal/i providing cause for concern. Respondents in this group reported sustained concerns over crime (36%) and kidnapping (15%), both of which are virtually absent from the list of personal safety threats in other regional groups. Meanwhile, Upper Gal/i respondents placed greater emphasis on issues related to crossing the Ingur/i River (69%), while respondents in Gal/i town and the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i groups mentioned more socio-economic issues.

How safe do people feel?

Residents in Lower and Upper Gal/i report higher levels of insecurity, especially with nightfall

Overall, more people feel safe than unsafe. Sixty three per cent of respondents said they personally felt 'very safe' (26%) or 'safe' (37%) in their community/village, while only 27% of respondents said they personally felt 'unsafe' and only 1% said they felt 'very unsafe'. Asked how their personal feeling of safety had changed over the previous year, just over half of respondents (52%) said they felt the same, 31% said they felt 'much safer' (21%) or 'safer' (10%), 12% said they felt 'less safe' (11%) or 'much less safe' (1%).

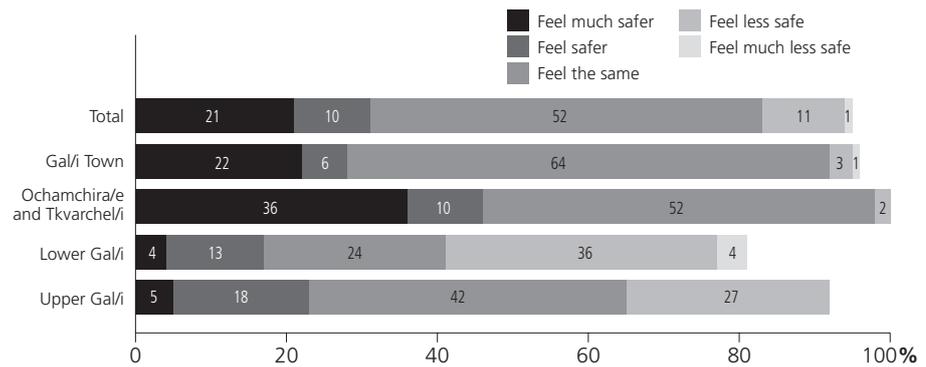
Figure 4. How safe do you feel in your village/community?



There are noticeable differences, however, between communities living in the Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i groups on the one hand, and the Lower and Upper Gal/i groups on the other, with the latter two reporting a greater sense of insecurity on a personal level. Thus, while only 7% of respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i said they felt 'unsafe', in Upper Gal/i 42% and in Lower Gal/i 53% provided same answer. Responses in the Gal/i town group were in line with the total average (26%).

Similar regional differentiation was revealed when asked about changes in personal feelings of safety over the previous year. Again, Lower Gal/i respondents were far more concerned, with about 17% saying they felt 'safer' or 'much safer', 24% noting no changes, and 36% feeling 'less safe'. Upper Gal/i respondents were slightly more positive: 24% said they were safer, 42% noted no change, and 27% felt less safe. By contrast, in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, almost half of respondents (46%) – more than double the total average level – noted improvements in their personal safety, while another half noted no significant change in their feelings of safety over the last year. Only 2% in this group said they felt 'less safe' (see figure 5).

Figure 5. How have your personal feelings of safety changed over the last year?¹⁸



Fewer people in the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town clusters indicated that they felt less safe at night: 10% of Gal/i town respondents and 4% of Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i respondents. The figure for Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i represents a dramatic turnaround on the figure for the previous year – 90%. A similar improvement was noted in Upper Gal/i, where last year’s figure was also 90%; this year only 22% of respondents there said they felt less safe at night. The number of Lower Gal/i respondents saying they felt this way remained high, however, at 62%. This may be due to a combination of multiple factors, such as proximity to the territories with a border regime along the Ingur/i River, a higher concern about crime, the poor condition of roads, and, as will be discussed further below, low trust in local security actors – all of which contribute to a deep-seated sense of isolation among the population of the area.

How does the public perceive security providers?

Findings highlight low levels of outreach and interaction between local communities and formal security structures

Respondents were asked with which security actors (including informal actors, such as family and friends) they interact most. Predictably, as with the previous surveys, people interact more often with relatives and friends than any other actors – 56% interact with them frequently (or very frequently). Interestingly, respondents in Lower Gal/i reported least interaction – only 13% said they interact with relatives and friends ‘quite’ or ‘very frequently’. Similarly, Upper Gal/i reported around half as much interaction with relatives and friends (35%) than their neighbours in Gal/i town (70%) and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (66%). It is worth recalling that the above-average number of respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i reporting a worsening of the situation in their communities attributed this deterioration to difficulties crossing the Ingur/i River and maintaining links with their relatives on the other side of the divide.

Local government ranked a distant second with 19% of total respondents saying they interact frequently with this actor. Notably, residents in Lower Gal/i reported higher than average interactions with local government – 42%, compared with an average of 8% for the other three regional clusters.

As in the previous year’s survey, responses across the different groups show infrequent interactions between communities and central authorities in Sukhum/i and the Abkhaz police – of the total number of respondents only 3% and 6% respectively said they interact with these actors frequently. Importantly, no respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i reported frequent interaction, and 55% and 51% respectively said they have never come into contact with the central authorities in Sukhum/i. In terms of interactions with the Abkhaz police, 51% of respondents in Upper Gal/i and 58% in Lower Gal/i said they did not interact with this actor, with 27% in Lower Gal/i saying the Abkhaz police was absent from the local area. These findings point to a need to improve outreach

¹⁸ The missing percentages in the figure denote responses “Do not know” and “Refuse to answer”, which were omitted for the sake of simplicity.

and communication between the local communities and the Abkhaz authorities and police.

Respondents were also asked to name which security actors have primary responsibility for ensuring security in local communities. An overwhelming majority – 79% – identified friends and relatives as their primary security providers, up from 44% on last year's results. This is presumably less a positive reflection on the ability of friends and family to provide security and more a negative judgement on organisations one would ordinarily expect to provide security. Interestingly, the number of those naming friends and relatives as security providers was higher in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i than in Lower and Upper Gal/i, with almost a 20% differential. Respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town were also more inclined to name village elders and religious organisations than in Upper and Lower Gal/i, suggesting that the social fabric in the latter two areas is less cohesive than one would ordinarily expect in rural communities.

Similar to the previous year, 63% of all respondents named local government as their 'primary security provider', reflecting the fact that these actors are seen as more accessible and dependable by communities. What is particularly noticeable is the very high figures citing local government as a primary security provider recorded by respondents from both Lower and Upper Gal/i: 89% and 91%, respectively. In the previous year's survey, similarly high scores were recorded in these areas (76% and 70%, respectively). This was reinforced during focus group discussions: participants in groups in Gal/i district were more likely to give a positive appraisal of both rural and district administrations than participants in focus groups in other districts. Indeed, elsewhere, there were complaints that the district administration rarely consulted the population and were poorly acquainted with local problems, fuelling people's disinclination to engage with local authorities.¹⁹ In some places, it was acknowledged that the rural administration did their best to support the population, but was limited in what they could achieve: "the rural administration does what they can. Perhaps they can't do much without the district administration, but we still go to them."²⁰ The discrepancy in attitudes among groups suggests that relations between the population and local authorities are very dependent on personalities in a given structure, rather than being the product of a coherent policy of public outreach and engagement, demonstrating that when individuals within authority structures take the initiative, this is noticed by the population.

Only 18% of respondents mentioned central authorities in Sukhum/i as a 'primary security provider', a marked decrease on the previous year's result, which was 34%. This decrease was reflected in all group areas, resulting in a similar dynamic as recorded the previous year, with slightly more people naming central authorities in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (25%) and Lower Gal/i (20%) than in Gal/i Town (13%) and Upper Gal/i (15%) (see figure 6). This decrease may be related to the perception that central authorities did not fulfil election promises made during the campaigning period, resulting in feelings of disappointment towards authorities: "as soon as there are elections they are here promising everything, but unfortunately it is just words"²¹; "they promise everything, but after the elections they just disappear."²²

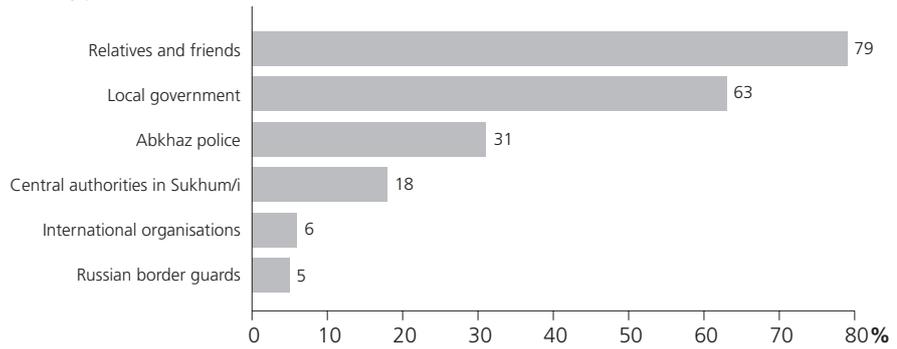
¹⁹ When asked whether they were satisfied with local and central authorities, focus groups in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i districts gave the following responses: "No, neither local nor central authorities pay us any attention," agronomist, Ochamchira/e; "When have the local administration been interested in us? They only care when they need our votes," teacher, Ochamchira/e district; "Who has ever been to see to ask about our problems? And we have a lot of problems. Neither central nor local authorities pay us any attention," teacher, Ochamchira/e district; "To be honest, we don't go to see the district administration. Maybe they'd help us, but we don't want to go and see them to tell them our problems" public service employee, Tkvarchel/i district.

²⁰ Focus group participant, teacher, Tkvarchel/i district, March 2013.

²¹ Focus group participant, driver, Ochamchira/e district, March 2013.

²² Focus group participant, teacher, Gal/i district, March 2013.

Figure 6. Perceptions of structures responsible for providing security at the community level
Which security actor protects you in your village/community (who do you consider your primary security provider)?²³

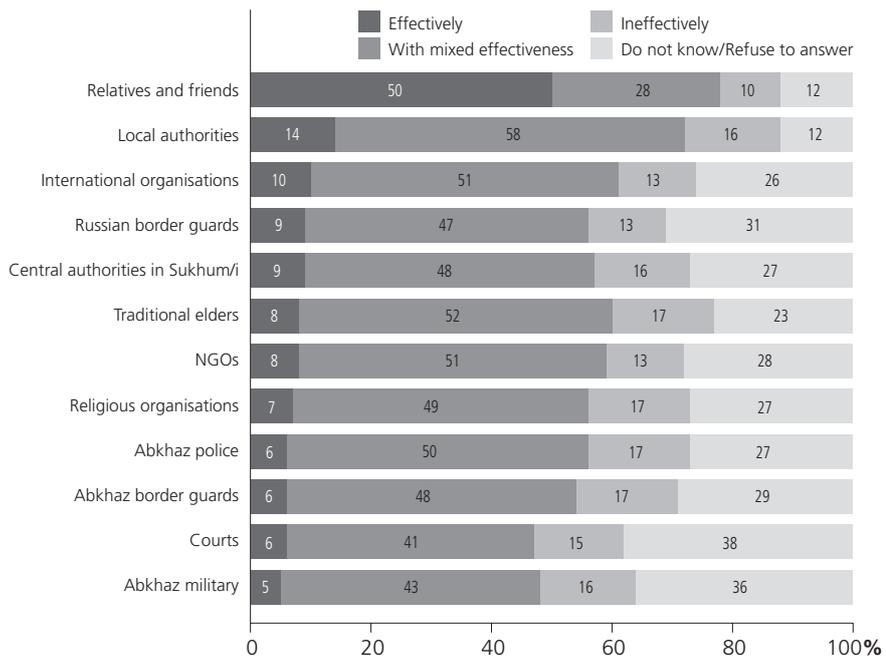


Some notable group variations were also noted regarding perceptions of Abkhaz police and Russian border guards. Abkhaz police were named by 31% of respondents – down from 37% the previous year – as an actor responsible for providing security in the area. Only 4% of Upper Gal/i respondents cited Abkhaz police, as opposed to 24% in Lower Gal/i, 29% in Gal/i town and surroundings, and 53% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i. Interestingly, however, when asked about the Russian border guards, respondents in Upper Gal/i displayed much higher levels of reliance on the Russian military presence. While in the other three regional clusters combined, an average of only 1% of respondents named Russian border guards as actors responsible for security provision, 26% of respondents in Upper Gal/i did so.

Communities are critical of formal security providers

Respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of security providers present in their area. The results show that regardless of geographic area, ethnicity, or gender considerations, respondents remain highly critical of the effectiveness of all formal security actors (see figure 7). The results also show a high number of evasive responses, such as ‘don’t know’ or ‘refuse to answer’.

Figure 7. Effectiveness of security actors in dealing with local concerns²⁴
How well the following actors dealing with security problems affecting your community/village?



²³ Other responses received less than 5% and are not included in the figure.

²⁴ We combined the ‘very effective’ and ‘quite effective’, and ‘very ineffective’ and ‘quite ineffective’ responses.

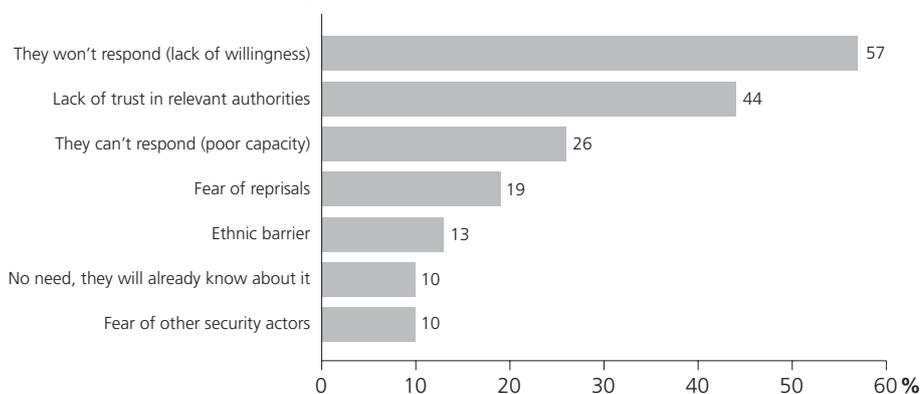
Informal societal networks, such as relatives and friends, continue to be perceived as the most effective security providers with 50% of respondents citing them. Similar to last year's results, local government and international organisations occupy distant second and third places in terms of their perceived efficiency. Central authorities in Sukhum/i and the Abkhaz police have been rated as effective by only 9% and 6% of respondents respectively. Relatively, the highest evaluation of effectiveness of these actors was in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (15% for authorities in Sukhum/i and 9% for Abkhaz police). By contrast, in Lower and Upper Gal/i, authorities in Sukhumi and the Abkhaz police were rated as effective by only 2% of respondents.

Interestingly, there has been a slight positive change in perceptions of effectiveness of the Russian border guards – 9% of respondents, up from 4% in the previous year. This slight development, along with the above mentioned threefold decrease of Russian military presence in the list of major personal threats, shows that despite concerns expressed in last year's survey about the Russian military presence in Eastern Abkhazia, there are now signs of a gradual normalisation of relations between the Russian military and local residents. This is particularly noticeable in Upper Gal/i, where 26% listed Russian border guards as 'quite effective' in providing security in their area. It is worth noting, however, that unlike Upper Gal/i, residents in Lower Gal/i, who live in closer proximity to the territories with a border regime along the Ingur/i River, are less enthusiastic about the Russian military presence – no one in this cluster cited Russian border guards as an effective security provider. This may be due to different – more negative – experiences by residents of Lower Gal/i, who complained of frequent arbitrary road blockages, mistreatment, detentions, and even beatings by Russian border guards.²⁵

Some insights as to why so few respondents name formal security providers as effective can be obtained when analysing people's readiness to contact formal security providers and looking at factors that prevent the majority of local residents from reporting a crime or other violent incident.

Twenty nine per cent of respondents said they feel 'very' or 'fairly' confident when they have to notify authorities of a crime or other violent incident. The largest number of respondents, 36%, answered 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all'. This shows that distrust of security actors remains high, signifying that relevant authorities still have to work harder at gaining the trust of those they are meant to serve. However, these results also show a further decrease in levels of distrust, suggesting gradual improvement since 2011.²⁶ The reasons respondents give for not reporting violent criminal incidents are revealing (see figure 8).

Figure 8. Factors preventing local residents from reporting crime or other violent incidents to the authorities across research areas



²⁵ Thus, for example, in December 2012 a group of residents from the village of Nabakevi wrote an open letter addressed to the Abkhaz officials, Russian military command, and international rights organisations complaining of mistreatment and beatings by Russian border guards of local villagers, whom the border guards suspected of attempting unsanctioned crossing of the division line along the Ingur/i River.

²⁶ In 2012 survey, 48% of respondents said they were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' in reporting a crime or violent incident. In the 2011 survey, 67% of respondents provided the same answer.

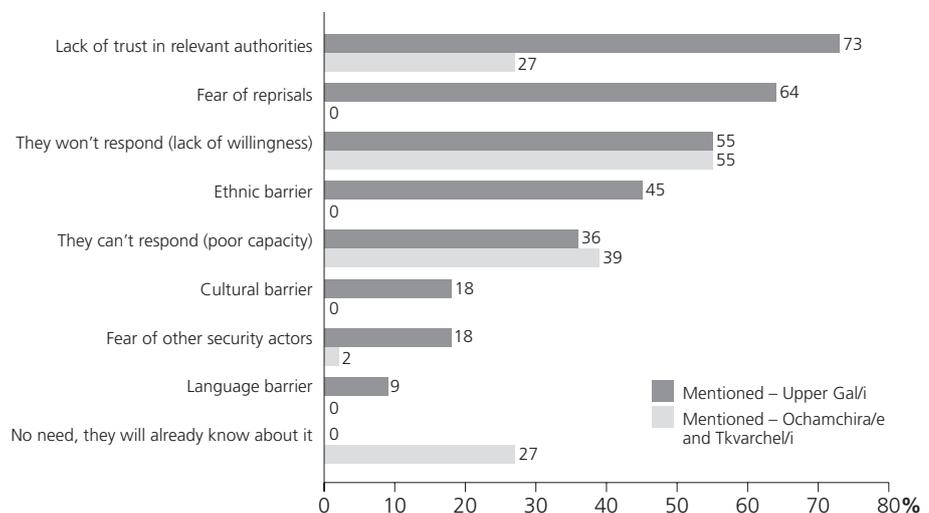
Fifty seven per cent say they do not report such crimes because the relevant authorities lack the willingness to respond. This view was spread almost evenly across all group areas, but was less pronounced in Lower Gal/i, where it was mentioned by 33% of respondents.

Perhaps related, 44% of respondents mentioned a lack of trust in the relevant authorities as a reason for not reporting violent crime. The figure for Gal/i town was close to average at 53%; lowest in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and for Lower Gal/i at 27% and 25% respectively (a rare commonality between these two groups); and highest 73% for Upper Gal/i, which coincides with previously reported low levels of trust of the Abkhaz police among its residents.

The third most frequently cited reason for not reporting a crime was that the relevant authorities lack the capacity to respond, with 26% of respondents mentioning this. Both Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and Upper Gal/i registered above average rates under this response.

A comparison between Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and the other three groups shows that the three predominantly ethnic Georgian populated areas are more likely to abstain from reporting a crime because of security concerns and social vulnerabilities (such as ‘fear of reprisals’ or, closely related to this, ‘fear of [negative reaction] from other security players’, as well as ethnic, cultural, and language barriers), whereas for the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group it is more characteristic to abstain from reporting a crime because of their general lack of confidence in the capacity and professionalism of security actors. The comparison between this group and Upper Gal/i is a case in point (see figure 9).

Figure 9. Factors preventing local residents from reporting crime or other violent incidents to the authorities: comparison between Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and Upper Gal/i



Upper Gal/i is distinct from the other areas in that 64% of respondents cited fear of reprisals as a reason for not reporting crime, as compared with an average of 11% in the other three research areas. This is in line with the general distrust of the Abkhaz authorities and police in Upper Gal/i. Reprisals generally take place in a lawless context. Another notable difference is that Upper Gal/i respondents were far more likely to cite ethnic barriers as an impediment to reporting crime: while this issue was mentioned on average by 9% in the other three research areas, 46% did so in Upper Gal/i.

Lower Gal/i stood out in that more respondents there mentioned language barriers as an impediment to reporting crime – 33% compared with an average 7% across the three other regions.²⁷

²⁷ Male respondents were twice as likely to mention language barriers as compared with female respondents.

3

Perceptions of the likelihood of increased tensions and a return to violence

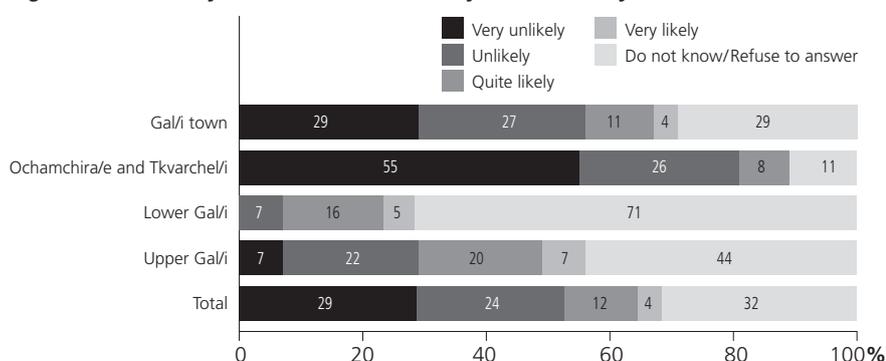
THIS SECTION ADDRESSES THE POTENTIAL for increased tensions and a renewal of conflict, identifying the most likely triggers for this. The findings should be useful for local and international actors when designing strategies to prevent a return to violence.

What is the potential for renewed conflict?

Outbreak of violent conflict is perceived as less likely

Sixteen per cent of respondents (as opposed to 10% last year and 20% the year before) when asked in January 2013 believed greater tension in their village/community was quite or very likely in the next six months. Importantly, however, 53% (as opposed to 40% last year) do not anticipate an escalation in tensions. In what can be seen as yet another slight positive improvement, there seems to be less uncertainty among respondents. Last year over half had difficulty answering this question – suggestive of a high degree of fluidity and perceived instability – but this year only 32% did so.

Figure 10. How likely is it that the situation in your community will become more tense?



However, one can see a clear difference between regional clusters: in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, respondents feel more confident about the future, whereas in Lower and Upper Gal/i, high levels of uncertainty about the future were recorded (see figure 10). Thus, 81% of respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i – almost three times more than in Upper Gal/i (29%) and over eleven times more than in Lower Gal/i (7%) –

do not anticipate an escalation in tensions. Compared with Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, roughly three times more respondents in Lower Gal/i (22%) and Upper Gal/i (27%) thought an escalation was ‘likely’ or ‘very likely’. Furthermore, in comparison to Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, the number of respondents who are not ready to offer a more confident prognosis for the immediate future is roughly three times larger in Gal/i town, four times larger in Upper Gal/i, and seven times larger in Lower Gal/i, indicating higher levels of insecurity and anxiety about the future within the ethnic Georgian population (see figure 10).

What events could trigger increased tensions?

Respondents cite political and military factors as more likely to trigger conflict

There have been no major changes in the sequence of the top four most important potential triggers. When asked to name the factors that carry the greatest risk of escalating tensions and/or a renewal of conflict, respondents – as in the previous year’s survey – named political and military factors in far greater numbers than socio-economic concerns.

As with the previous year’s results, the two top triggers identified were escalation in tension between Tbilisi and Moscow and between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i, mentioned by 25% (as opposed to 40% last year) and 18% of respondents (as opposed to 26% last year), respectively. There is a high degree of abstentions from those questioned, however, with 63% of respondents – twice as many as in the previous year – unable to or refusing to answer. This negatively affects the accuracy of drawing comparisons with the previous year’s results and complicates analysis. Lower Gal/i was particularly troubling in this regard, with respondents *en masse* saying they didn’t know or didn’t want to give answers. Given that Tbilisi’s relations with both Moscow and Sukhum/i are the two most cited potential triggers, it is possible that this greater level of uncertainty may be due to recent political changes in Tbilisi, with people still unsure in what direction the new government wishes to take its policies *vis-à-vis* the conflicts.

The respondents were also asked how likely they think it is for particular trigger events to happen this year. The results show that only a tiny segment of respondents believed escalation between Tbilisi and Moscow or between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i is likely or very likely during the course of the year (4% in both instances). Thirty per cent, however, said there was such a possibility, another 30% said it was unlikely, and some 36% found it hard to predict or refused to respond.

The flow of arms into Eastern Abkhazia was the third most cited potential trigger for heightened tension or a renewal of conflict (13%). Concern over this potential trigger is spread evenly in the three research areas.²⁸ A high level of abstentions regarding a clear response, particularly in Lower and Upper Gal/i, does not allow for a proper analysis by regional clusters; however, it is notable that 62% of respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i believed the flow of arms into the region and the worsening of the criminal situation was unlikely to take place in the course of the year, thus reflecting higher levels of confidence in this particular research area.

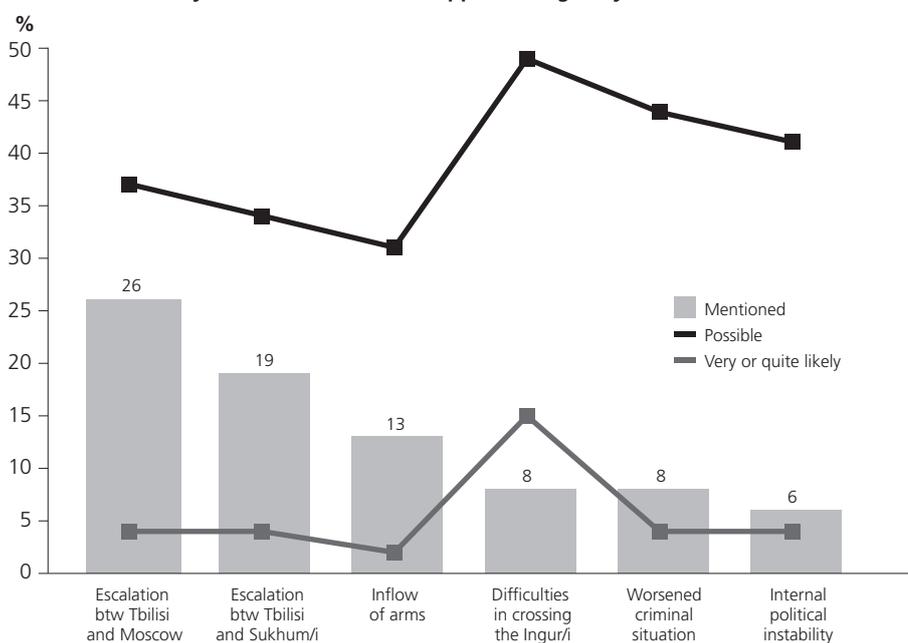
A worse criminal situation was mentioned as a potential trigger factor by 8% of total respondents. It was mostly a feeling recorded in Upper Gal/i, where 18% of respondents cited it, whereas Lower Gal/i respondents – who more than others see crime as a greater threat to their personal safety – once again abstained from providing an answer to this question. However, over 7% of respondents in Lower Gal/i, as opposed to 2% average for the three other groups, said it was likely that the criminal situation would lead to a deterioration of the environment in their communities.

²⁸ As mentioned above, results on Lower Gal/i are completely missing due to a refusal by all respondents to answer most of the questions relating to potential trigger factors and their perceived likelihood.

Difficulties crossing the Ingur/i River were named as the most likely factor to contribute to increased tension

Difficulties crossing the Ingur/i River were cited as a potential trigger by 8% of respondents. This factor is closely related to political developments between Tbilisi and Moscow and Sukhum/i, with heightened tensions invariably entailing a clamp-down on cross-border movement. Importantly, this trigger factor was named as the most likely one to occur in the course of the year, with 15% of respondents saying it is likely or very likely, and 34% saying it will ‘possibly’ take place in the course of the year (see figure 11). Respondents in Upper Gal/i, who earlier cited difficulty in crossing the Ingur/i as a major community concern, were more inclined to think this incident would take place in the course of the year than their neighbours in other areas (35% in Upper Gal/i, 18% in Lower Gal/i, 16% in Gal/i town, and only 1% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i).

Figure 11. Which events do you think are able to cause increased tension/renewal of conflict? How likely is it for each event to happen during the year?²⁹



What emerges from these figures is a picture of a society deeply concerned by factors outside of their own control. The threat of a renewal of conflict is generally seen as coming from outside their communities – not from within. While this may present a picture of communities at peace amongst themselves – something explored in the next chapter in greater detail – it also demonstrates how disempowered people in Eastern Abkhazia feel. Their futures are determined, in their minds, not by their own actions but by outside factors and forces. Any change in the outside world prompts uncertainty and leaves the population feeling vulnerable and insecure.

²⁹ Only those potential trigger factors, which were mentioned by more than 5% of respondents, were included. The upper linear line illustrates the combined level of likelihood/possibility of any given trigger factor.

4

Contacts and confidence between ethnic groups

THIS SECTION LOOKS AT THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS between members of different ethnic groups; in Eastern Abkhazia, ethnic Georgians and Abkhaz have traditionally lived side by side and there was a high rate of interethnic marriages and friendships. Although such relationships became harder to maintain since the outbreak of conflict in the early 1990s, research shows contacts are still widespread. Reducing tensions and preventing local-level violence depends on the ability and desire of local communities to cooperate with each other; this section examines how these contacts can be further strengthened.

How has the level and nature of contact with other ethnic groups changed?

Communities report increased and improved levels of personal contact in the region, but Lower Gal/i remains ethnically isolated

In keeping with the positive trend recorded in last year's survey, respondents have reported increased and improved levels of inter-ethnic personal contact in the region. When asked about the nature of their families' relationships with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia, 57% of the respondents mentioned friendship, up significantly from 2012 and 2011 when 37% and 28%, respectively, mentioned this. Follow up discussions in focus groups have confirmed these results, with many participants noting improvement and expressing strong desire to improve further inter-ethnic relations: "Why should we, ordinary people, have negative relationships? Everything that has happened was a result of wrong policies, but the local population has no relation to this [policy]. We must keep up and restore our relationships."³⁰ While 71% in Gal/i town and 75% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i reported having friendships with other ethnic groups, less than twice as many in Upper Gal/i (33%) and only 2% of respondents in Lower Gal/i did so. This can perhaps be explained by Lower Gal/i's isolated and ethnically homogenous environment and the fact that it is located further away from ethnic Abkhaz communities, which could make it difficult to find friends from other ethnic groups.

The number of respondents mentioning family connections remained stable at 28%. Family relationships were mentioned most in Upper Gal/i (49%) and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (34%), while in line with the above, Lower Gal/i respondents reported the lowest levels of family connections at only 7%.

³⁰ Focus group participant 6, pensioner woman, Ochamchira/e district, March 2013.

Business and trade connections were mentioned by some 8% of respondents. Interestingly, 18% of respondents in Lower Gal/i and 16% in Upper Gal/i, as opposed to only 7% in Gal/i town and 2% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, cited such interactions. This disparity points to the fact that residents in Lower and Upper Gal/i interact more often with the ethnic Abkhaz when they sell their agricultural produce in other parts of Abkhazia.

Some 20% of respondents mention having no relations with other ethnicities. Again, Lower Gal/i respondents recorded the highest numbers here, with over half of them mentioning this, compared with – at the other extreme – just 4% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (see figure 12). Broken down by ethnic group, there is wide disparity, with 34% of ethnic Georgian respondents reporting no relationships with other ethnic groups, as opposed to just 3% of ethnic Abkhaz. This should not necessarily come as a surprise, given that the ethnic Abkhaz constitute a minority in the areas covered by the survey and even in the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i research area, where they constitute a majority, they live in mixed communities or close neighbourhoods with the ethnic Georgians. Ethnic Georgians, on the other hand, especially those in Lower Gal/i, would find it more difficult to make friends with ethnic Abkhaz, given that no Abkhaz live in many of their neighbourhoods.

A low level of connectivity of course invariably leads to higher levels of distrust, with more Lower Gal/i respondents than others predictably characterising their relationships with other ethnicities in these terms. Although only 7% of them did so, this is quite high compared with the average across the region of just 2%. It is notable that 9% of respondents in Lower Gal/i – more than in any other research area – either refused or had difficulty in describing their relationship with the other ethnic groups, which arguably also points to a level of ethnic distrust within this group. In keeping with last year's survey, no respondents mentioned open hostility towards other ethnicities.

Responses to the question asking respondents to assess changes in their relationships with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia within the last six months further attest to improving ethnic relations. While similar to the previous year's results, the vast majority (70%) said there had been no change, over a quarter (26%) registered improvements in relations, and less than 1% said that, in their experience, relations had become worse. Interestingly, Lower Gal/i respondents were more positive, with 36% of them saying relations with other ethnic groups had improved.

What measures do people support for building trust and strengthening security in their communities?

Increased willingness to implement measures to decrease conflict and strengthen security, but continued doubts over their efficacy

As in the two previous surveys, respondents were asked to evaluate a range of proposed measures designed to increase local-level security and to indicate whether they thought such measures would increase or establish trust between ethnic groups in Eastern Abkhazia.

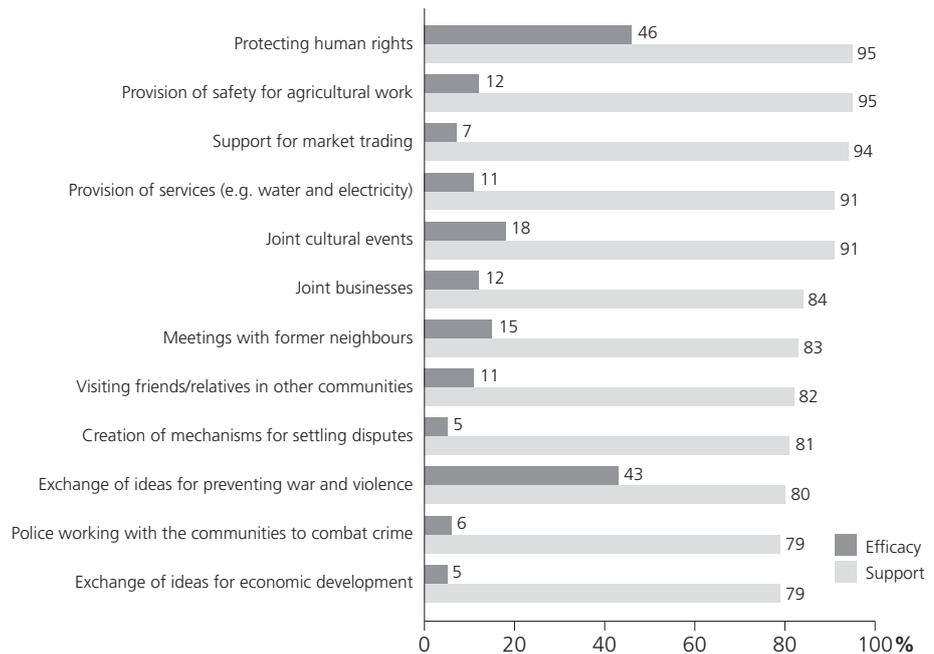
This year's batch of respondents were even more positive than those last year, with most measures receiving over 80% approval, as opposed to around 70% last year. However, similar to previous years' results, respondents had little faith in their efficacy in terms of building trust amongst the ethnic groups in Eastern Abkhazia (see figure 12).

There are big discrepancies in perceptions of the efficiency of measures to build trust and confidence

It is notable that the one concrete security-related proposal – having police work with communities to combat crime – received relatively little support from ethnic Georgian respondents in Lower Gal/i (29%) and slightly more than that but still below average in Upper Gal/i (58%), as opposed to 89% in Gal/i town and 98% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i. In line with the findings in the previous chapter, this reflects higher levels of distrust of the Abkhaz police by respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i. Importantly,

Figure 12. Perceived effectiveness of engagement measures

Which measures aimed at strengthening security in your community would you support?
Which measures would build trust and confidence with other ethnic groups?



however, 15% of respondents in Lower Gal/i, as opposed to an average 4% in the other three areas, believed closer work to combat crime by the Abkhaz police with local communities would be an effective measure for building security and inter-ethnic trust in their communities. This echoes findings highlighted in chapter 1 about greater community concerns about crime in Lower Gal/i and also represents an important call for action to the Abkhaz police.

There are a number of other marked differences in how residents within the four research areas view the efficacy of certain measures.

Social services provision was mentioned as an effective measure by 36% of respondents in Lower Gal/i, as opposed to only 8% average in three other areas. Provision of safety for agricultural work was mentioned as an efficient measure for increasing security and improving trust between ethnic groups by 30% of respondents in Lower Gal/i, which is twice as much as in Upper Gal/i, almost three times as much as in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, and six times as much as in Gal/i town. Higher importance given to this factor can be explained by the fact that the communities in Lower Gal/i live closer to the territories with a border regime along the Ingur/i River and thus face more limitations and disruptions in their free movement and agricultural activities.³¹

Respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i also give greater priority to support for market trading with other communities – 26% and 16% respectively, as opposed to only 1% in Gal/i town and under 4% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i. Similar results are observed on the issue of setting up joint businesses: 22% of respondents in both Lower and Upper Gal/i prioritised this measure as an efficient one, whereas only 11% in Gal/i town and 3% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i did so. These findings coincide with an earlier finding showing that business/trade interactions are the most common forms of interaction that the respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i have with their ethnic Abkhaz fellow citizens.

Residents in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i placed much higher importance (54% and 58% respectively) on the exchange of ideas for preventing war and violence than their neighbours in Lower and Upper Gal/i (0% in Lower Gal/i and 18% in Upper Gal/i). This hints that the population in the first two regions are more

³¹ The Abkhaz and Russian border guards require all persons in this zone to have identification on themselves at all times. Local communities have frequently complained about sudden road closures and occasional detentions of local villagers.

ready for an open inter-community dialogue, whereas more rural and isolated communities in Lower and Upper Gal/i do not yet feel sufficiently confident to engage their Abkhaz counterparts in such discussions.

Other measures scored similarly across the four research areas. Measures aimed at protection of human rights received on average the highest score (46%) in terms of their perceived efficiency. Respondents in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were slightly more likely to prioritise this measure than respondents in the two other areas.

In general, analysis of the perceived efficacy of various security and trust-building measures reveals that respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, and to a lesser degree in Gal/i town, give higher importance to measures/activities with a more salient emphasis on political and/or civil dialogue (e.g. exchange of ideas for preventing war and violence, meetings with former neighbours, protecting human rights), whereas in Lower and Upper Gal/i priority is given to joint business initiatives and provision of basic social and security services.³²

³² The only exception to this rule is the organisation of joint cultural events, which was mentioned by an average 32% of respondents in both Lower and Upper Gal/i taken together, as opposed to an average 12% in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i.

Conclusion

THE SURVEY RESULTS DEMONSTRATE FURTHER OVERALL IMPROVEMENTS

in local perceptions of safety and security, suggesting that positive changes in the area represent a positive trend, rather than a one-off anomaly. Respondents generally report fewer security incidents, a decreased threat of renewed violence, improved infrastructure, and increased contacts between ethnic groups. Concerns regarding crime, extortion, presence of armed groups, and kidnappings have virtually disappeared from the list of major problems of most communities.

However, these positive outcomes are unevenly distributed across the various areas in Eastern Abkhazia, and there are considerable regional differences. Respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and, to a lesser degree, Gal/i town, report an overall improvement, while respondents in the more isolated and rural Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i groups continue to experience higher levels of insecurity and isolation. Differences in local security concerns and dynamics require tailored policies, which take into consideration local specificities and needs. This conclusion therefore summarises the different dynamics in each of the four target research areas.

The Gal/i town group

Compared with last year, the overwhelming majority of respondents in Gal/i town and surrounding villages report either an improvement (45%) or no significant change to the overall situation in their community. Compared with the other three research areas, Gal/i town registered the highest percentage of respondents noting improvement in the overall community situation. The area has seen major infrastructure development with the re-surfacing of Ingur/i–Sukhum/i highway and roads within Gal/i town, as a result of which bad roads – previously a major community problem – received lowest consideration.

In many respects, in the Gal/i town area perceptions were similar to the average perspectives throughout Eastern Abkhazia. Gal/i residents' middle-ground position points to the benefits they have received from recent improvements in the region; but they also continue to experience challenges that tend to have a greater impact in the more isolated and rural Lower and Upper Gal/i groups, particularly relating to obtaining Abkhaz passports, the ability to commute across the Ingur/i River, and a lack of trust in local security providers.

Respondents in Gal/i town report high levels of inter-ethnic contact and are highly supportive of all measures aimed at providing improved local security and building inter-ethnic trust. They believe the most efficient measures are those aimed at protecting human rights and engaged in community-level dialogue on ways to prevent war and violence, demonstrating that residents feel sufficiently confident to engage their Abkhaz counterparts in such discussions.

The Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group

Of the four research areas, residents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, which has a majority ethnic Abkhaz population, report the highest levels of safety and security and lowest levels of anxiety about the future. Forty six per cent – more than double the total average – noted improvements in their personal safety conditions compared with a year ago. Ninety one per cent – more than double the total average for the other three areas – said they felt very safe or safe in their communities. Respondents in this group were twice as optimistic about a potential increase in their income (38% compared with 16% in the other research areas).

It therefore comes as no surprise that respondents in this area place greater emphasis on acute socio-economic and infrastructural problems. Unemployment, bad roads, lack of regular electricity supply, and lack of access to potable water were ranked as the greatest community problems in this area. There is also a perception among the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i residents that Gal/i town receives the lion's share of investments and assistance and that their problems are being overlooked.

Respondents from this area are more confident in reporting incidents to authorities. However, similar to other areas, there is widespread distrust about security actors, as many do not believe the security actors have the necessary capacity and professionalism to deal with their problems.

Residents report high levels of friendships and family links with other ethnic groups. Similar to Gal/i town, they prioritise measures aimed at protecting human rights and engaging in community-level dialogue on ways to prevent war and violence as the most effective to increase local security and build confidence between different ethnic groups.

Lower Gal/i

Compared with the above-mentioned areas, respondents in Lower Gal/i report less overall improvement, with one third reporting a worsening in the overall community situation compared with last year. These negative perceptions are fuelled by difficulties crossing the Ingur/i and obtaining Abkhaz passports, poor roads, and restrictions on freedom of movement within villages because of the sudden erection of road blocks and harassment or detention of people not carrying identification documents.

Some security-related issues, while seemingly not of particular concern to respondents in the entire survey area, are, however, of importance in Lower Gal/i. Thus, one third of respondents in this cluster mentioned crime as a pressing community problem and a cause of personal insecurity, compared with no respondents in the other groups. Similarly, kidnapping merits no mention in any area apart from Lower Gal/i, where 15% of respondents cite it as a cause of personal insecurity.

Compared with the other research areas, residents in Lower Gal/i report very low levels of interaction with other ethnic groups. At the same time, however, over a third of respondents in Lower Gal/i also reported improvements in relations with other ethnic groups. They also report higher than average business/trade interactions with other ethnic groups and believe support to such interactions, along with provision of basic social and security services, could be efficient measures for building trust between different communities.

Upper Gal/i

Like Lower Gal/i, community perceptions in Upper Gal/i are worrying and require urgent attention. This was the only area where more than half of respondents (53%) reported a deterioration in their community situation compared with last year. Respondents cited difficulties in crossing the Ingur/i River and, closely related to that, worsened links with relatives and friends on the other side of the river and difficulties in obtaining Abkhaz passports as main reasons for such perceived deterioration.

Similar to Lower Gal/i, over half of respondents reported having no contact with central authorities in Sukhum/i and only a handful believe the Abkhaz authorities and police are effective in providing security in their communities. Interestingly, Upper Gal/i respondents named Russian border guards as the most effective security providers (26%, as opposed to only average 1% in the other three areas combined), suggesting that a degree of normalisation of relations between the local residents and Russian border guards is underway.

Respondents in Upper Gal/i reported the lowest levels of confidence in reporting crime to responsible authorities. Lack of trust in Abkhaz authorities and police, fear of reprisals, and ethnic barriers were cited as the main reasons preventing residents from reporting a crime or a violent incident to the relevant authorities.

In Upper Gal/i, 27% of respondents, more than other areas, expect an escalation of tensions, thus demonstrating higher levels of insecurity and anxiety about the future. One third of respondents believe this escalation is more likely to be caused by difficulties in crossing the Ingur/i River.

Respondents note improving levels of interaction with other ethnic groups and almost half of the respondents reported having family ties with people from other ethnicities. Similar to Lower Gal/i, they also report higher than average business/trade interactions with other ethnic groups. In terms of measures deemed to be most efficient in providing security and building trust across the divides both within Abkhazia and across the Ingur/i River, respondents in Upper Gal/i cite organising joint cultural events, measures to protect human rights, and the establishment of joint business and trade.

Annex 1: Methodology

This report is based on data collected in a tracker survey undertaken between January and March 2013. Each tracker survey comprises a household survey and a series of focus groups discussions.

The survey methodology was developed in April 2010 following a set of baseline focus group discussions designed to provide greater insight into how communities understand 'community', 'security', and 'conflict' and to explore ways of encouraging community participation in identifying community security priorities and developing appropriate responses, as well as promoting more active involvement in this process on the part of the authorities. After this initial study stage, a household survey was conducted between September–December 2010. The research team updated the questionnaire for the second survey on the basis of the lessons learned from the first, taking into account specific local characteristics. However, the main thrust of the survey did not change, which allowed us to conduct detailed comparative analysis of results of the two surveys and track changes in the situation in the year between the surveys.

For this report, households were surveyed in January 2013. The survey involved 400 people from four target groups of towns and villages (Gal/i town group – 7 villages, 150 people; the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i town group – 6 villages, 110 people; the Upper Gal/i group – 3 villages, 50 people; and the Lower Gal/i group – 5 villages, 90 people).

The sample included two levels of clustering. Each village comprised a first-level cluster, and each household within each village comprised a second-level cluster. Villages within each target group were selected with probability proportional to size. Households within each village were selected using systematic sampling beginning in the centre of the village and using a step size of four. Respondents within each household were selected using the most recent birthday method. In total, 44% of respondents were men and 56% were women. All were over 18 years old.

After an initial analysis of the survey results, an accompanying set of focus group discussions was conducted in March 2013 in order to provide further insight into some key issues: (1) perceptions of the authorities' responsiveness to local needs; (2) attitudes to other ethnic groups; (3) impact of the situation with crossing to the other side of the Ingur/i River on day-to-day life in Eastern Abkhazia.

Five representative villages were selected, one from each of the target areas, except for the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group, where two villages were selected, one from each of the districts. 16 women and 24 men attended the focus group discussions, and each focus group had an approximately equal number of participants aged between 18–35 and 36–64.

In order to guarantee an acceptable level of anonymity for the participants, the Institute for Democracy and Saferworld decided not to disclose the names of the recruiting villages. Due to the very small community sizes, the personal data included in this report might otherwise suffice to identify participants. During the focus group discussions, the moderator asked questions according to instructions, which included four main questions and a number of follow-up questions, as well as prompts to stimulate debate or get the discussion back on track.

Additional methodology information and full datasets (aside from information about focus group locations and participants) is available upon request.

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COVER PHOTO: A girl and representative of the Road Patrol Service (traffic police) talk to a local resident during a community-led initiative to increase awareness about road safety in Gal'i town centre. © INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY



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