REPORT

Institute for Democracy and **Saferworld**

Security for local communities

Can the achievements of the past few years be preserved?

May 2014

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INSTITUTE FOR DEMOCRACY AND SAFERWORLD

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Acknowledgements

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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.

Contents

List of figures

Executive summary

THIS REPORT ANALYSES THE RESULTS OF THE FOURTH ANNUAL SURVEY conducted since 2011 in the eastern districts of Abkhazia by the Institute for Democracy with support from Saferworld. The survey tracks and summarises local perceptions of safety and security and the analysis is based on quantitative and qualitative data gathered in four research areas: 1) Gal/i town and its surrounding villages, 2) Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i towns and surrounding villages, 3) Upper Gal/i, and 4) Lower Gal/i. The methodology included a household survey conducted in January 2014 and focus group discussions conducted in February 2014. The survey coincided with the start of the winter Olympics in Sochi and with a lull in the internal political tensions in Abkhazia, which had been dominating the domestic political situation over the past year. The fall-out from the political tensions, which put the spotlight on the contentious issue surrounding the citizenship of the ethnic Georgian population living in eastern districts of Abkhazia and the resulting suspension in the issuing of Abkhaz passports, has raised concerns among local people living in these areas. These concerns were reflected in the survey results and in the focus group discussions.

Communities and their needs

The results of this year's survey show a mixed picture. The safety situation has improved in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town, but deteriorated in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i. Residents in the former two areas cited fewer security incidents as well as improved road and electricity infrastructure as factors that contributed to overall improvements in their communities. They seemed to be more preoccupied with socio-economic problems, such as unemployment, healthcare and infrastructure. In contrast, residents in Lower and Upper Gal/i pointed to an increased number of incidents causing insecurity, such as problems with obtaining passports, and the consequent difficulties in crossing the check points on the Ingur/i River, which contributed to an overall deterioration in security within their communities. Similarly, they also tended to prioritise problems related to their safety and their socio-political rights over socio-economic issues, such as having access to identification documents, having the ability to cross the check points on the Ingur/i River, or kidnapping and crime. The results also show that the residents of Lower and Upper Gal/i experienced physical security incidents more frequently than people living in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town.

Overall, while unemployment still tops the list of problems faced by communities, last year's decision by the Abkhaz authorities to suspend the issuing of passports to ethnic Georgian residents has become a major concern. Respondents note that their inability to access passports negatively affects their ability to exercise their rights on a whole range of issues. As well as being unable to cross the check points on the Ingur/i River,

a lack of identification within Abkhazia makes it impossible to buy and sell property, apply for jobs, open a business or receive social assistance.

One of the most worrying developments in this year's survey is the visible increase in local concerns over criminality and kidnapping. These problems were particularly noted in Lower Gal/i, and to a lesser extent in Upper Gal/, too. During the focus groups, locals pointed out that crime levels have particularly increased since the mass amnesty in Georgia in early 2013, which allegedly included some criminal elements originally from the Gal/i district. There may be multiple reasons for the apparent increase in crime in Lower and Upper Gal/i and this issue requires further investigation from the relevant security actors. In any case, this development represents a step back from the positive trends captured in the previous two surveys, when the problems of crime and kidnapping were declining in importance and were not in the list of the top ten major community problems.

Recommendations for responding to communities' safety and security priorities

- Take active steps to combat increased crime in Lower and Upper Gal/i. Focus in particular on preventing kidnappings in Lower Gal/i;
- Provide local residents with proper identification documents to ensure that they are able to exercise their basic social and economic rights, such as property rights, freedom of movement (both for crossing the checking points on the Ingur/i River and moving freely within Abkhazia), access to jobs and social assistance;
- Emphasise job creation and healthcare provision in the area, and specifically focus on improving the provision of potable water in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i.

The role of the security providers

There have been no positive changes in local attitudes towards security actors. Residents report very low levels of interaction with formal security structures, and instead turn to informal networks such as friends and family for providing security. Low levels of interaction with local security providers are equally characteristic of both ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz communities. Similarly, friends and relatives are still rated as the most effective actors in providing security, while the perceived efficiency of formal structures, such as the police, local administrations and central authorities in Sukhum/i was very low in all four research areas.

Low levels of interaction with and confidence in formal security actors mean that people are reluctant to contact them for help. As a result, many crimes go unreported. In all four research areas, the number of people who displayed a lack of confidence in reporting criminal/violent incidents to the authorities outweighed those who expressed confidence in their ability to respond to such incidents. The lack of confidence in reporting crimes was particularly high in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i, the areas which also reported experiencing the highest levels of insecurity and the most frequent security incidents. Most of the respondents said they were likely to opt not to report a crime because they did not trust the formal security structures to resolve their problems. Some also expressed concern over possible reprisals from criminal elements or even the police itself. However, the results also show that there is potential for greater community-police engagement and cooperation.

Recommendations for improving security providers' responsiveness to local needs

- Reduce the chronic under-reporting of crime, particularly in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i, by taking practical steps to establish regular communication with security providers with a view to building trust between them and local communities;

- Improve operational responses to criminal activities by engaging in regular patrols in vulnerable areas; better identifying and managing cases; and dealing effectively with offenders.

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

This year's results have shown that people are more concerned with a possible increase in tensions in their communities than in previous years. The share of respondents who believed that greater tension in their communities was likely has slightly increased, while the share of respondents who did not believe there to be an increase in tensions has halved compared to the previous year. There has also been an increase in the share of respondents who had difficulties in making predictions, suggesting a sense of uncertainty over the immediate future.

Major differences between research areas remain: respondents in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were relatively more confident about the near future, whereas in Lower and Upper Gal/i people were more inclined to expect a deterioration of the situation. As in previous surveys, relations between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i and Tbilisi and Moscow are perceived as carrying the greatest risk of escalating tensions.

Recommendations for reducing tensions in communities

- Engage in a joint analysis and discussion with community groups in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i over ways to reduce crime and kidnappings;
- Regularly inform and consult with local communities about security measures undertaken in their localities, including decisions and measures in place that affect their ability to move freely and enjoy basic rights as permanent residents of Abkhazia.

Contacts and confidence between ethnic groups

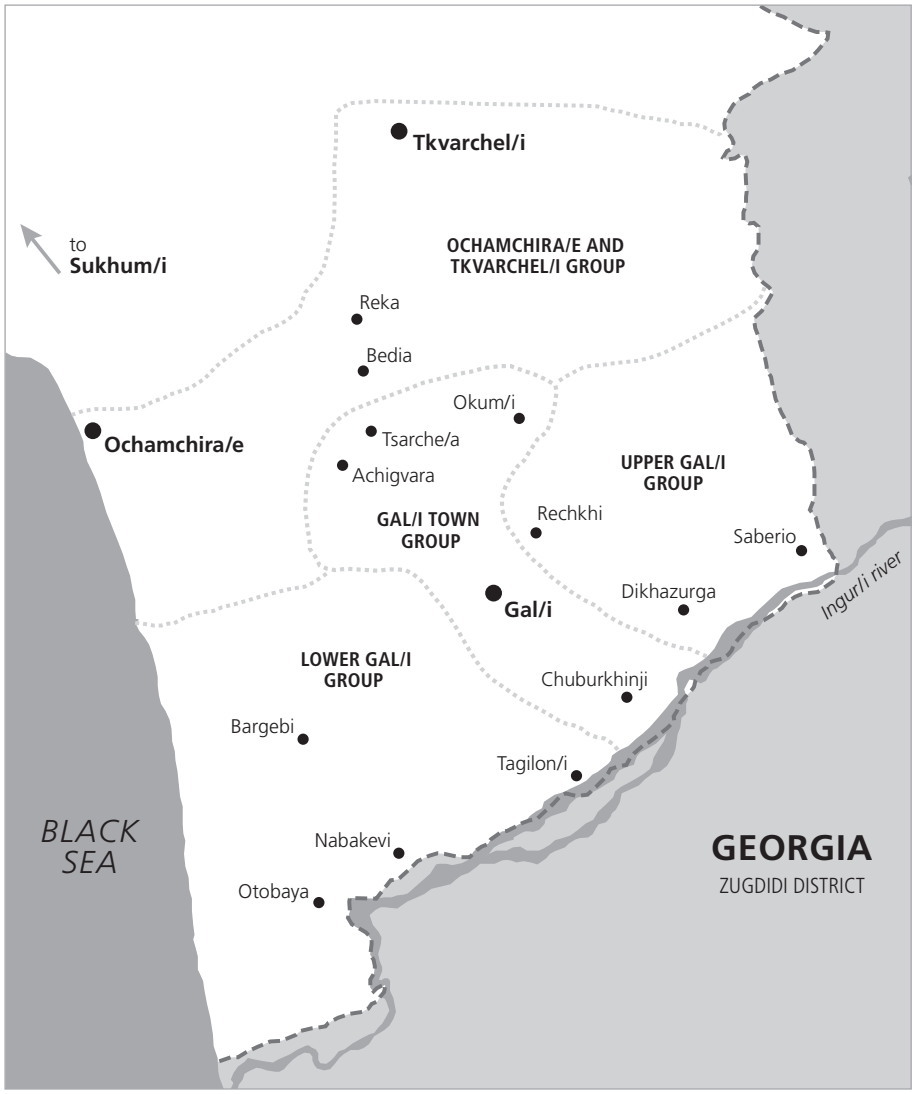
Despite the fact that many ethnic Georgian communities feel isolated and experience higher levels of insecurity, there is a significant potential for building closer ties between these communities and Abkhaz society as a whole. The results show that relations between local ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhaz continue to improve. Respondents noted either improvements or no change in inter-ethnic relations, and none reported a deterioration in these relations. The overwhelming majority of respondents, ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhaz alike, reported having friendly relations with other ethnic groups living in their area. Inter-ethnic links were noted to be particularly developed in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, where ethnic Abkhaz and Georgian communities live side-by-side. They are least noted in Lower Gal/i; underlining the ethnic isolation of the people living in this area.

As in previous surveys, the respondents were highly supportive of all proposed confidence-building measures to improve relations between ethnicities Importantly, respondents' opinions about the effectiveness of these measures reveal that not only has there been an increase in people's general support for various confidence-building measures, but also that their belief in the effectiveness of these measures has strengthened. In particular, 85% of respondents, almost twice as many compared to the previous survey, said that various measures aimed at the protection of human rights would be effective in building trust and confidence between different ethnic groups in Abkhazia. In terms of regional differentiation, the list of top five measures deemed most effective was basically the same across the four research areas. However, respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were more inclined to prioritise business-related measures, such as trade with other ethnic communities and the creation of joint businesses.

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

- Develop measures aimed at promoting and protecting human rights, such as access to legal aid and regular engagement mechanisms for communities to communicate their human rights concerns to relevant authorities;
- Encourage Georgian and Abkhaz residents to create joint business and trade interests;
- Increase contacts between young ethnic Georgian residents and young Abkhaz through cultural, educational and sports activities.

Map of research areas



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

Introduction

THE RESIDENTS OF THE EASTERN DISTRICTS OF ABKHAZIA, predominantly ethnic Georgians, are one of the groups which suffer most from the continuing effects of the unresolved Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. Ethnic Georgians living in Gal/i, parts of Ochamchira/e, and Tkvarchel/i districts often feel abandoned and marginalised. They lack access to proper identification documents, experience difficulties in maintaining family contacts and trade links across the Ingur/i River, and intermittently face discrimination and criminal attacks, which go largely unreported to the Abkhaz authorities. In spite of these difficulties, local ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz communities have maintained close relations, which gives hope for the future peaceful coexistence of the two peoples in Abkhazia.

The question of providing safety and security in these districts of Abkhazia is one of the most important challenges facing Abkhaz society today. The policies adopted by the Abkhaz authorities towards the ethnic Georgian minority living in the area will largely shape the future development of a multi-ethnic Abkhaz society as a whole.

This report examines the perceptions of safety and security of the communities living in Gal/i district and locations in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i districts, which together form the eastern part of Abkhazia. The aim of the report is to provide locally-informed insights on dynamics and factors that shape people's livelihoods and experiences of security in communities living in the eastern areas of Abkhazia, ethnic Georgian and Abkhaz alike. These insights will be used to facilitate discussions around the need to protect people's rights and to respond to their security and justice needs. The report summarises perspectives on four trends: general community needs and concerns; local attitudes to various security actors; the potential for future tensions; and local potential for reducing tensions and transforming the conflict.

This is the fourth such study conducted by Saferworld since 2011. Findings are based on focus group discussionsand a survey of 400 people from four target areas held in January 2014. These target areas, referred to in the text as 'research areas' or 'groups', consist of sets of towns and villages with similar features in terms of safety and security. These groups were defined by the study team back in 2010 and have not been changed since then. This allows researchers track changes and identify trends over time. The resulting analysis does not attempt to provide an authoritative analysis of the security situation in the eastern districts of Abkhazia, but instead provides access to local perspectives on such issues.

This report comes at a time when the future integrity of the Abkhaz people within a multi-ethnic society is being actively discussed within Abkhazia. The issue of the ethnic Georgian minority residing in the eastern part of Abkhazia is one of the major contentions in these discussions. Some segments of Abkhaz society see ethnic Georgians

as a threat and consequently they propose measures to further isolate them from the political life of Abkhazia, while more liberal elements advocate for their integration. Under pressure from the domestic opposition in May 2013, the Abkhaz authorities imposed a moratorium on granting Abkhaz citizenship to ethnic Georgian residents. By the end of 2013 the authorities had also started reviewing the "legality" of issuing Abkhaz passports to ethnic Georgians residents, which, as of March 2014, has resulted in the revocation of over 1,000 passports belonging to ethnic Georgian residents in the Gal/i district. Lack of access to proper documentation means that ethnic Georgian residents are not able to enjoy basic rights, including the right to own, buy and sell property, the right to education and the right to freedom of movement within Abkhazia. Due to the lack of documents, people resort to unsanctioned crossings over the Ingur/i River, risking detentions and sanctions by Russian and Abkhaz border guards. As seen from the analysis below, residents of the eastern districts (predominantly ethnic Georgian) are acutely affected by these developments.

The report begins by looking into the communities' overall experiences and perceptions of safety and security, including their personal safety, trends over the last year, and their attitudes towards security providers. It then investigates the potential for increased tensions, focusing on events which are believed more likely to increase or trigger them. Finally, the study researches the existing types of engagement between different ethnic groups, and explores the types of inter-ethnic engagement that people would be willing to participate in, including how effective they think such measures would be in increasing the quality of local security provision and in building trust between communities in Eastern Abkhazia.

1

Communities, their needs and their perceptions of personal safety

THIS SECTION DISCUSSES THE OVERALL SITUATION in the communities living in the eastern districts of Abkhazia. It looks at the make-up of these communities, how they think the situation is changing, factors that undermine their security and livelihoods, the frequency of physical security incidents, and the levels and causes of perceptions of insecurity. The information in this chapter provides evidence on local priorities, which can be used by relevant security actors to frame their responses.

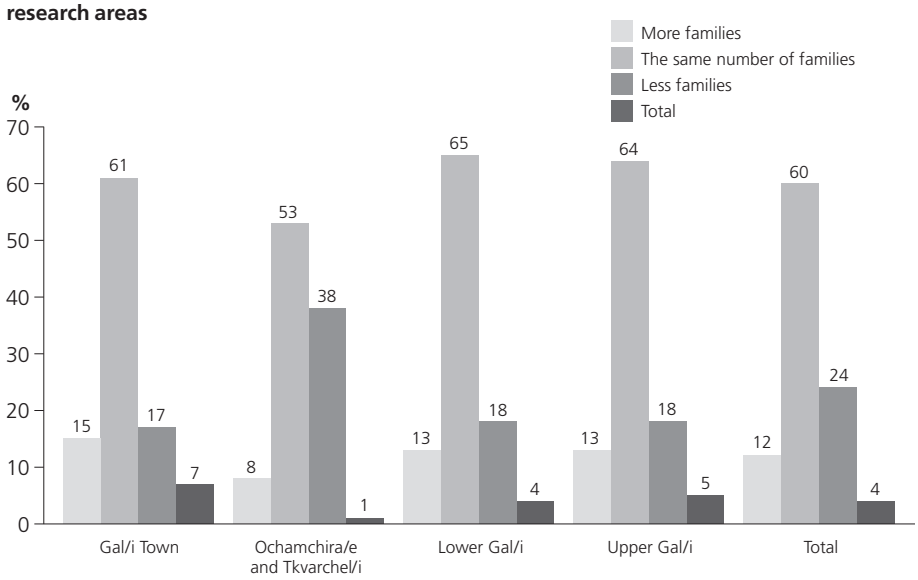
1.1. Dynamics of change within communities

The demographic situation overall seems stable, but there is a negative trend in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i

As in previous reports, in the communities sampled for the survey, most respondents – 76% – identified themselves as ethnic Georgians, while 22% were identified as Abkhaz. The remaining 2% were Russians and other nationalities. Most of the ethnic Abkhaz respondents came from the Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i research area, where they comprised 69% of the total respondents from that area. The other remaining three research areas are almost exclusively ethnic Georgian.

When asked if the number of families in their towns/villages had changed compared to a year ago, 60% of the respondents said there had been no change, 13% said there had been an increase, while 24% said there had been a reduction in the number of families. In all four research areas, the amount of respondents who said the number of families had decreased outweighed those who noted an increase. The most dramatic reduction in the number of families was noted in the Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i group, where 38% of respondents said there were fewer families in their communities (see figure 1). Correspondingly, in a pattern similar to the previous survey, ethnic Abkhaz respondents were more inclined to register a reduction in the number of families – 32%, as compared to 21% of ethnic Georgians.

Figure 1. The number of families in your community compared to a year ago: results by research areas



Uncertainties about economic stability remain

The population is heavily reliant on agriculture for their livelihood. 79% of total respondents surveyed this year named agriculture as their main source of income. Reliance on agriculture was highest among the respondents from Upper Gal/i (97%), followed by Lower Gal/i (85%), Gal/i town (80%), and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i (64%). Pensions and other social allowances were listed as a distant second most important source of income, with only 11% mentioning them as their main source of income. Reliance on pensions and social allowances was highest in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i – 21%, compared to an average of 6% in the other three research areas. This may indicate that the population in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i has slightly better access to social assistance, while in other areas where residents often lack proper documentation; people do not have the same level of access to these benefits. The public and private (other than agriculture) sectors each served as the main source of income for only 4% of the respondents.

Asked whether they expected their family's income to increase over the course of the year, 62% (compared to 55% in previous survey) could not respond, indicating the high levels of uncertainty among the local population about their economic stability. 30% (compared with 23% in previous survey) said they expected no increase, and only 8% (compared with 22% in previous survey) said they expected some increase in their income during the course of the year. In terms of regional differentiation, the share of respondents who were more optimistic about the possibility of an increase in their income was slightly higher than average in Gal/i town (11%) and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (8%), and lower in Lower Gal/i (5%) and Upper Gali (2%).

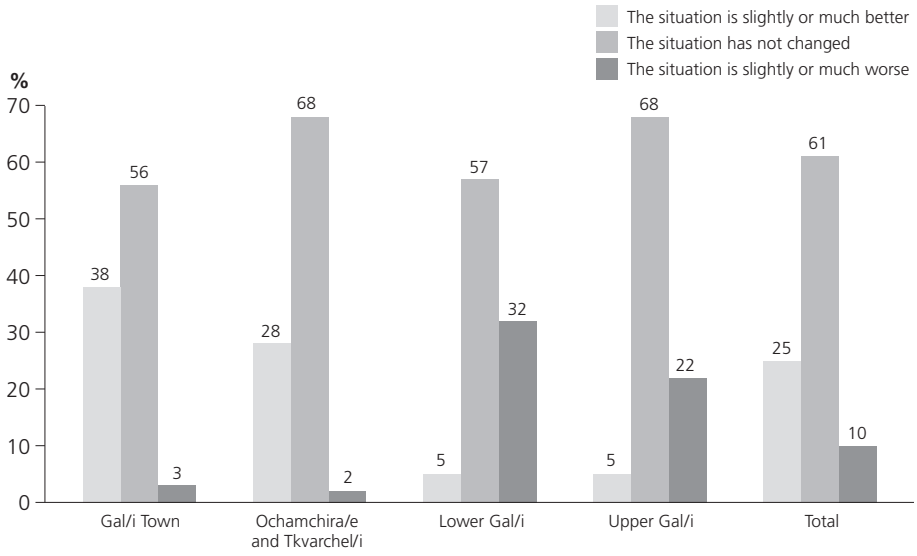
The overall trend in terms of safety and security is positive in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, while there are negative trends in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i

When asked about how the situation in their community has changed compared to a year ago, 25% of the total respondents said the situation improved, 10% said the situation had worsened and 61% said it had not changed.

Similar to the previous survey, responses differed widely according to the research areas. The respondents in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i noted either improvements (38% and 28% respectively) or no change in the overall situation in their community (56% and 68% respectively). Furthermore, 14% of respondents in Gal/i town and 17% in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i said the situation had become "much better". Only a tiny portion of respondents in these areas (3% and 2% respectively) said the situation had deteriorated.

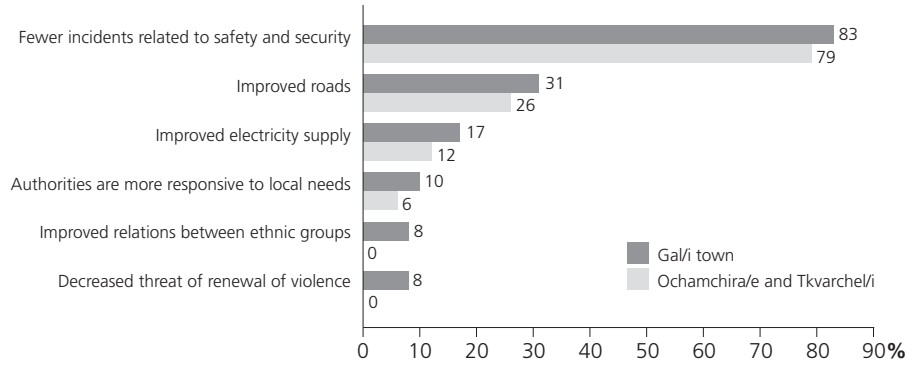
The situation looks diametrically opposite in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i. While similarly to the other two research areas, the majority of respondents in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i noted no changes in the overall situation, only 5% in both research areas said the situation had improved. 32% in Lower Gal/i and 22% in Upper Gal/i said situation in their villages had become worse (see figure 2). Furthermore, 12% in Lower Gal/i and 10% in Upper Gal/i said the situation had become "much worse".

Figure 2. How would you describe the situation in your community/village compared to one year ago? – Results by geographical research areas[1]



In Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarcheli, the respondents who noted improvements cited fewer incidents related to safety and security (respectively, 83% and 79%), improved roads (31% and 26%), improved electricity supply (17% and 12%) among factors which contributed to the overall improvement in the situation of the communities (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Factors that contributed to improvements in the overall situation in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i[2]



By contrast, in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i, the respondents who said the overall situation in their communities has deteriorated cited a number of factors, which they believed had contributed to the deterioration. The top three factors, which are common to both research areas included: more incidents related to safety and security (89% in Lower Gal/i and 38% in Upper Gal/i), increased difficulties in obtaining passports and other documentation (32% in Lower Gal/i and 92% in Upper Gal/i) and difficulties in crossing the check points on the Ingur/i River (21% in Lower Gal/i and 92% in Upper Gal/i). The increased number of security incidents correlates to the increased levels of

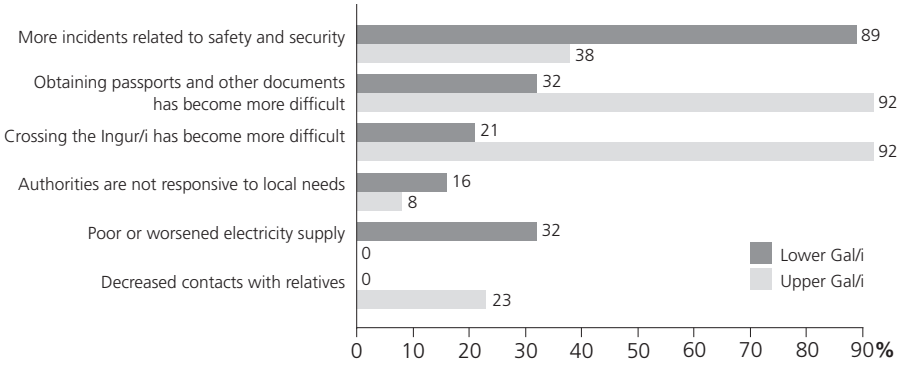
1 For simplicity, the response options "Don't know" and "Refuse to answer" are not included in this graph.

2 Respondents were asked "Why do you think the situation in your community/village is slightly better or much better?" and were allowed to choose up to three answers.

criminality in these two areas, and in particular the number of kidnappings in Lower Gal/i (reported further below). Focus groups have also shown that local residents are very worried about the suspension of issuing passports and the revocation of over 1000 passports already issued to residents living in eastern parts of Abkhazia. They noted that the inability to access passports negatively affects the ability of local people exercise their rights on a whole range of issues, including the ability to freely move back and forth across the checkpoints on the Ingur/i River, as well as free movement within Abkhazia, the right to register, buy and sell property, vote in local and national elections; apply for a job or open their own business; receive social assistance etc.

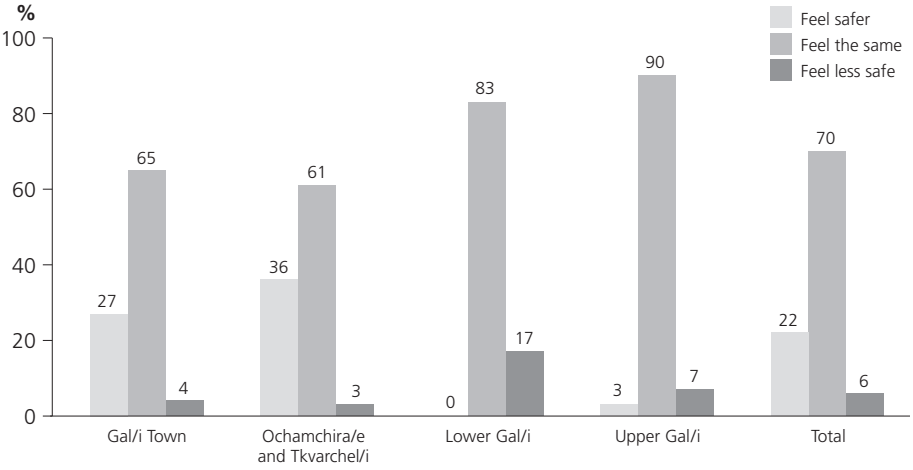
In addition to this, 32% of respondents who noted a deterioration of the situation in Lower Gal/i pointed to a poor or worsened electricity supply, and 23% of respondents who noted a deterioration in Upper Gal/i mentioned decreased contacts with relatives as factors contributing to an overall deterioration of the situation in their respective communities (see figure 4).

Figure 4. Factors that contributed to a deterioration of the overall situation in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i[3]



The respondents were also asked how safe they personally felt compared to a year ago (see figure 5). The results are similar to those elaborated above in Figure 2. In all the research areas the absolute majority of respondents said their personal feeling of security has not changed in comparison to the previous year. 27% in Gal/i town and 28% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i said they felt safer compared to a year ago, and only 4% and 3% in these areas respectively said they felt less safe. By contrast, no one in in Lower Gal/i and only 3% in Upper Gal/i said they felt safer. The overwhelming majority said they felt the same, while 17% and 7% respectively in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i said they felt less safe.

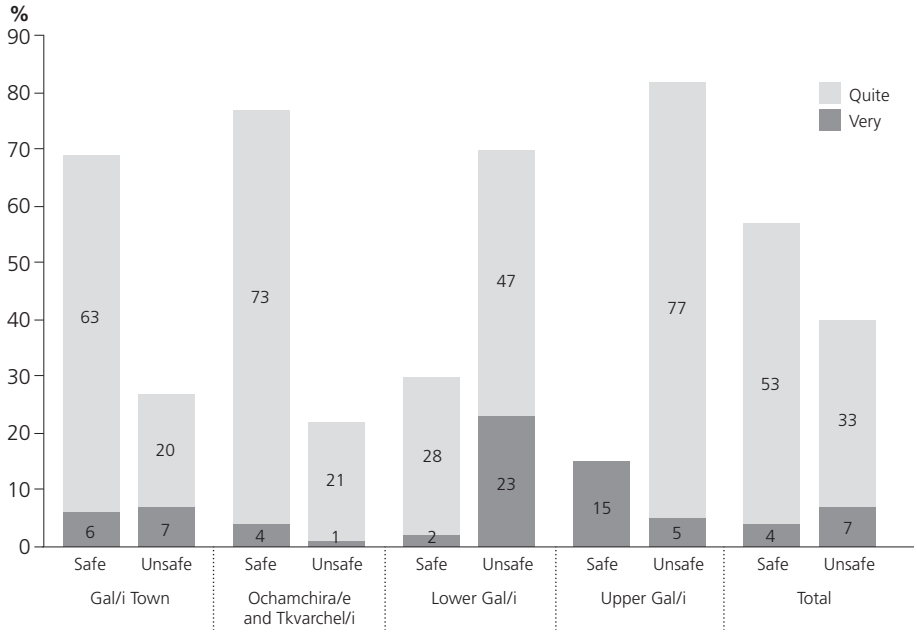
Figure 5. Changes in personal feelings of safety and security over the previous year
How has your feeling of security changed compared to a year ago?



3 Respondents were asked "Why do you think the community situation is slightly worse or much worse?" and were allowed to choose up to three answers.

A similar picture can be seen when the respondents were asked how safe they felt in their village. Overall, more respondents said they felt safe (57%) than unsafe (40%). But when each geographic research area is looked at separately, strong differences are revealed. Thus, 69% in the Gal/i town group and 77% in the Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i group said they feel safe in their communities, whereas only 30% in Lower Gal/i and 15% in Upper Gal/i responded positively to the same question. At the same time, while only 27% in Gal/i town and 21% in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i said they felt unsafe, the share of respondents who felt similarly unsafe was much higher – 70% – in Lower Gal/i and highest – 82% – in Upper Gal/i (see figure 6).

Figure 6. How safe do you feel in your village/community?



The majority of people in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i reported feeling less or much less safe after dark, which is another strong contrastbetween them and the more secure communities in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i (see figure 7). Thus, 71% of respondents in Lower Gal/i and 82% in Upper Gal/i said they felt less safe in their settlements after dark, while only 27% in Gal/i town and 7% in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i responded positively to this question. Higher insecurity levels in Lower and Upper Gal/i may be linked to the higher levels of crime, including kidnappings in these areas (see further below). Focus groups have also shown that local residents are worried that because they live in a territory with a special border regime, they are subject to frequent searches and house-checks by Russian border guards. In terms of gender, more women reported feeling less safe after dark (36%) than men (28%).

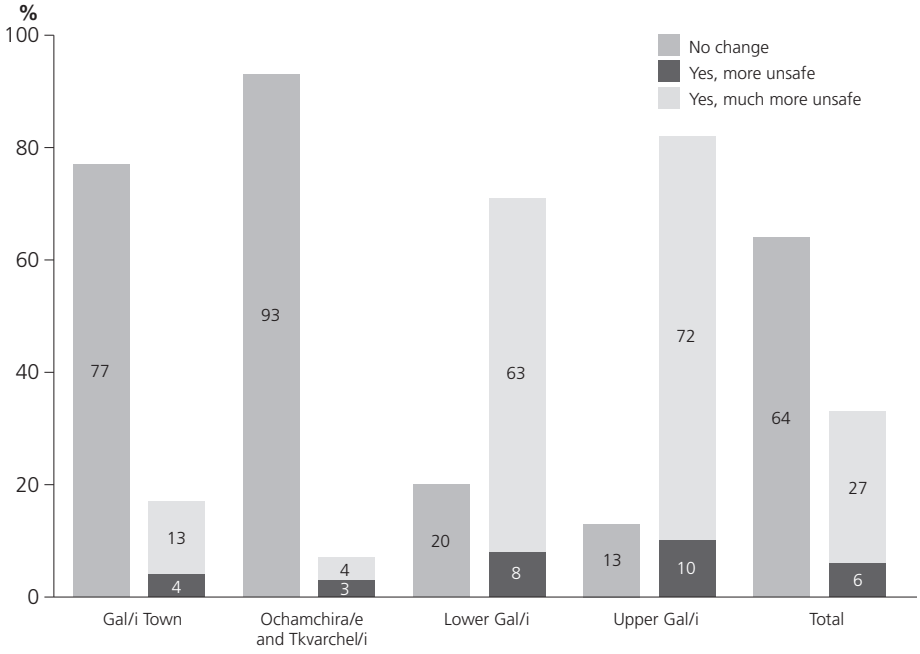
1.2. Community problems and perceived threats to personal security

The respondents were asked to identify up to three problems which they deem to be most important in their communities. They were further asked to identify three factors that make them feel personally insecure. The resulting list of major problems represents a mix of socio-economic and physical security concerns, whose prominence varies across the research areas.

Residents in the Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town groups prioritise socio-economic problems

As in previous surveys, unemployment is the number one problem strongly affecting all of the communities: 82% of total respondents cited unemployment as one of the three most important problems affecting local communities. Similarly, 84% have further identified it as one of the three problems that represents a personal threat to their livelihoods and sense of security (see figure 8).

Figure 7. Residents in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i feel less safe after dark
Do you think it is less safe after dark than in the day time in this settlement?



Residents in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town prioritised unemployment more than the other two areas. Thus, 94% in the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group listed unemployment as one of the three most important community problems, while a further 98% identified it as a factor which threatens their personal feeling of safety. In Gal/i town, the figures were similar to the total average: 83% (main community problem) and 82% (personal insecurity factor). By comparison, in Lower Gal/i 68% of respondents identified unemployment as a major community problem and 83% listed it as a personal insecurity factor, while in Upper Gal/i the figures were respectively 68% and 60%.

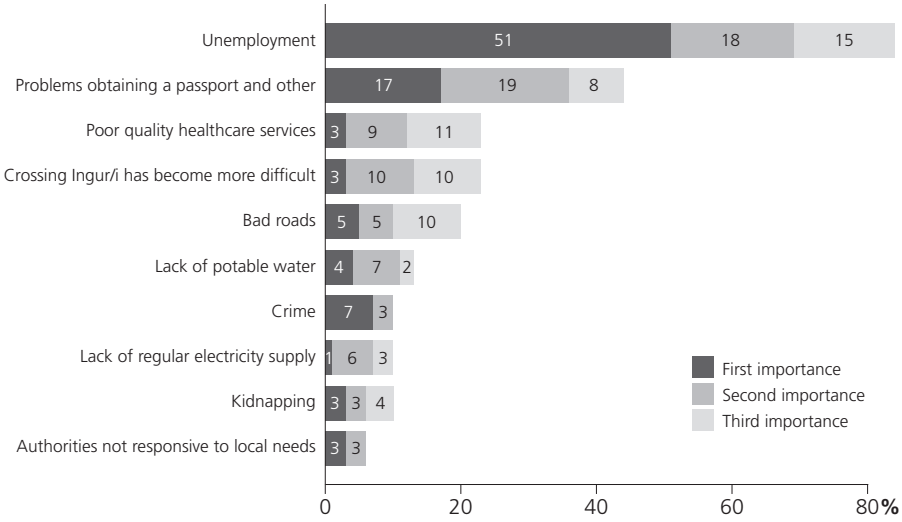
In terms of the ethnicity of the respondents, ethnic Abkhaz were more likely to prioritise this problem than ethnic Georgians: thus, 98% of ethnic Abkhaz respondents cited unemployment as a personal insecurity factor, compared to 80% of ethnic Georgians. In terms of gender, men were more inclined to cite unemployment as personal insecurity factor (90%) than women (78%).

Another major socio-economic problem mentioned by the respondents was the poor quality of healthcare services. 21% of total respondents mentioned poor healthcare as one of the three most important community problems. Similarly, 22% also mentioned it as a factor, which makes them feel insecure. In terms of regional differentiation, this problem was prioritised more in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i (29% – main community problem; 31% – personal insecurity factor) and Gal/i town (29% both main community problem and personal insecurity factor). Ethnic Abkhaz were more inclined to mention it as a major community problem (29%) and a personal insecurity factor (38%) than ethnic Georgians (17% for both community problem and personal insecurity factor). In terms of the gender of the respondents, there have been no major differences in how men and women prioritised this problem.

The importance of bad roads as a major community and personal security problem has significantly declined in comparison with the previous surveys. Only 22% of the respondents, compared to 45% in previous survey, mentioned it as one of the three most important community problems, and 20% mentioned it as a personal insecurity factor. This reflects the fact that road infrastructure has been significantly improved in the past couple of years, particularly with the re-surfacing of the Ingur/i-Sukhum/i high-way as well as the roads within Gal/i town. However, the fact that this problem still remains in the list of the top five community problems, indicates that local residents

in remote villages still suffer from poor road infrastructure. There was no major difference in the prioritisation of this problem between ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz respondents. Men were slightly more predisposed to prioritising this problem, compared to female respondents, which is probably due to their greater mobility.

Figure 8. Factors that undermine personal feelings of safety
What are the three main factors making you feel personally insecure?



The lack of access to potable water did not make it to the top five major community and personal problems overall. However, it was listed as the second major problem (after unemployment), which in the opinion of respondents in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i, undermines both their communities' and the respondents' personal sense of security. Thus, 33% of respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i listed access to potable water as both a major community problem and a personal insecurity factor, compared to only an average of 4% in the other three research areas.

Concerns over obtaining identification documents and crossing the checkpoints on the Ingur/i River have increased

The problems with obtaining passports and other identification documents have become the second most important community-level problem, as well as a personal insecurity factor. Thus, 45% of total respondents, compared to 42% in the previous survey, cited problems related to obtaining identification documents as one of the three most important concerns in their communities. Similarly, 44% said it was a factor that made them feel personally insecure. Similar to previous surveys, this problem affected mainly ethnic Georgians: 58% of ethnic Georgian respondents, compared to only 7% ethnic Abkhaz cited this as a major community problem, and similarly, 59% of ethnic Georgians compared to only 9% of ethnic Abkhaz identified this as a factor undermining their personal security. In terms of regional differentiation, this problem was most notable in Upper Gal/i (83% – community problem; 81% – personal insecurity factor), followed by Lower Gal/i (58% both a community problem and a personal insecurity factor), Gal/i town (52% and 48%, respectively), and was of lowest importance in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (12% and 14%, respectively).

Crossing the check points on the Ingur/i River was cited as the third most important community and personal problem, by 25% and 22% respectively of the total respondents. Similarly to the previous survey, the respondents in Upper Gal/i registered the highest concern: 83% of respondents, compared to 51% in the previous survey cited difficulties in crossing the checking points on the Ingur/i River as one of the top three community concerns, while 73% identified it as a personal insecurity factor. This pattern is consistent with the higher prioritisation in Upper Gal/i of problems related to passports, because locally acceptable identification documents are instrumental for getting proper authorisation to cross the check points on the Ingur/i River. Local people cross

to the other side of the Ingur/i River to maintain family ties, conduct small-scale trade, and access social services, and consequently, the ability to get through the checkpoints is one of the major reasons why the local ethnic Georgian residents want to obtain Abkhaz passports. Consequently,the inability to obtain identification documents negatively affects local residents' ability to cross the Ingur/i River. As one focus group participant pointed out: *"Many residents of our village do not have Abkhaz citizenship passports and that is why they have to cross the border illegally. They often get detained and have to pay a 1,200 roubles fine. Not everyone can afford paying such a sum several times a month."*[4]

On the positive side, the salience of this problem has somewhat reduced in Lower Gal/i, where just 23% of respondents (compared to 31% in the previous survey) named it as a major community problem, and 20% said it was a personal insecurity factor. In Gal/i town the prioritisation of this problem was similar (23% – community problem; 21% – personal insecurity factor), while in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i none of the respondents listed it among the top three community and personal problems.

In terms of ethnicity, the problem of crossing the the Ingur/i River was almost entirely an ethnic Georgian concern: 33% of ethnic Georgian respondents, compared to none of the ethnic Abkhaz listed it as a community problem, and 29% of ethnic Georgians, compared to only 1% of ethnic Abkhaz respondents cited this problem as a personal insecurity factor. In terms of gender, women were slightly more predisposed to mention this problem, probably indicating that they rely on such crossings more than men: thus, 28% of female respondents, compared to 22% of men identified problems crossing the check points as a major community problem. It is also notable that among those respondents who mentioned difficulties in being able to cross the Ingur/i River as a reason for the deterioration in the overall situation in their communities, the number of female respondents prevailed (57%) over men (36%).

Concerns with crime levels and kidnappings have increased, particularly in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i

As with the previous survey, several problems related to physical security concerns, such as extortion, shootings and the presence of illegal armed groups, which were once a major problem in the Gal/i district, were virtually non-existent in the list of major community and personal concerns. However, contrary to the positive trends reflected in the previous two surveys, the level of concern with criminality has increased, particularly in remote rural areas of Lower and Upper Gal/i.

Overall, 7% of respondents, compared to 4% in the previous survey, cited crime as a major concern in their communities, and 10% cited it as a personal insecurity factor. More positively, and in consistence with the previously registered positive trends, almost no one in the Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i groups mentioned this as one of the top three problems. By contrast, however, in Upper Gal/i 29% of respondents cited crime as a major community concern and furthermore, 44% cited it as a personal insecurity factor. In Lower Gal/i the responses were 13% and 23% respectively.

There has been a dramatic rise in people's concern with kidnappings for ransom, particularly in Lower Gal/i, where several kidnappings have taken place during the past year. Similar to the previous survey, kidnappings were practically not mentioned as a community problem or a personal insecurity factor in either Gal/i town or in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i. However, it was mentioned as a major community problem by over half (51%) of respondents in Lower Gal/i, which is a significant increase from the 4% recorded in this research area in the previous survey. Similarly, 50% in Lower Gal/i cited kidnappings as a personal insecurity factor. Kidnappings were also mentioned in Upper Gal/i with 12% citing them as a major community problem, and 10% as a personal insecurity factor. The concerns of the communities in

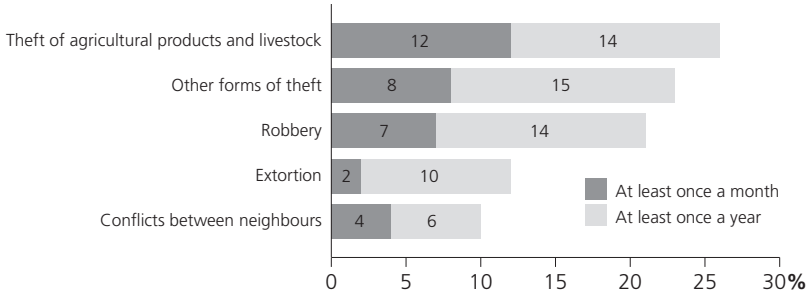
4 Focus group participant, female, housewife, Gal/i district, February 2014

Lower and Upper Gal/i with increased levels of criminality closely follows local developments during the past year. During the focus groups, locals pointed out that crime levels have particularly increased after the mass amnesty in Georgia in early 2013, which allegedly included some criminal elements originally from the Gal/i district. There may be multiple reasons for perceived increase in crime in Lower and Upper Gal/i. This issue should be dealt with as a priority by the local law-enforcement structures to prevent further deterioration of local people's sense of security and safety.

Physical security incidents are higher in Lower and Upper Gal/i

Respondents were asked to evaluate the frequency of a range of physical security incidents that have taken place in their community in the past year. According to respondents, the most frequent incidents overall are the theft of agricultural products and livestock (12% said such incidents took place at least once a month during the past year, and 14% at least once a year), other thefts (8% and 15% respectively), robbery (7% and 14%), extortion (2% and 10%) and conflicts between neighbours (4% and 6%) (see figure 9).

Figure 9. Major incidents and their frequency
How often has the following happened in your community/village over the last year?[5]



The incidents affecting physical security appear to be less frequent in Ochamchira/e andTkvarchel/i, as opposed to the other three overwhelmingly ethnic Georgian populated areas. Thus, for example, while in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i 13% of respondents mentioned hearing of or witnessing agricultural thefts throughout a year, the average among three other regions was 34%. Robberies were witnessed by 13% in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i and Gal/i town, while the average for both Lower and Upper Gal/i was 39%. Extortion was mentioned to have taken place most frequently in Lower Gal/i – 37%, compared to 15% in Upper Gal/i and an average of 6% in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i. In a similar trend, an average of 13% of respondents in Lower and Upper Gal/i said they witnessed kidnappings in their community/village, compared to an average of only 3% in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i. It is important to note that the responses above provide an indicative picture of the nature and frequency of incidents and should not be taken to represent authoritative statistics. For example, it may be the case that different respondents are referring to the same incident. However, these perceptions reflect local levels of concern with particular physical security incidents and should be carefully reviewed by relevant security actors when planning their responses.

5 Only the five major incidents are included in the graph. Other incidents had less than 10% response rates and are not included.

2

The role of security providers

THIS CHAPTER EVALUATES THE PERFORMANCE of the various security actors in responding to community concerns and personal threats faced by the communities. The evidence in this chapter should be of help to both national and international agencies when planning their policies and security responses in order to ensure a proper alignment of these responses with the priorities of local communities.

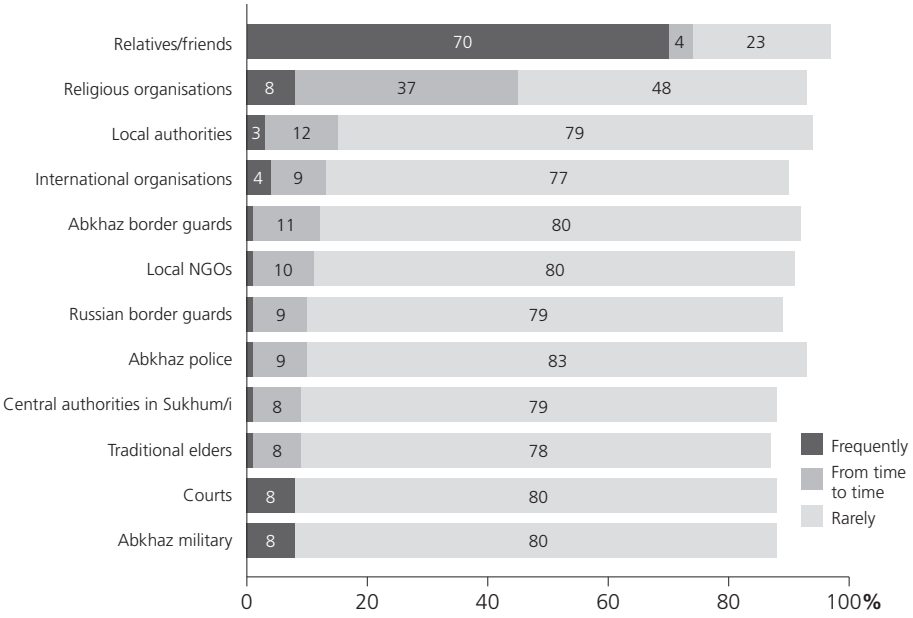
2.1. Assessing the effectiveness of security actors

Relations with security actors are characterised by an overreliance on informal social networks and very low levels of interaction with and trust in formal security actors

Respondents were asked with which security actors (including informal actors, such as family and friends) they interacted the most. The responses revealed very low levels of interaction with virtually all security actors present in their locality (see figure 10). As with previous surveys, respondents interact most often with relatives and friends following a security incident (70% of total respondents said they interact with them frequently or very frequently). Positive response rates on frequent interaction with relatives and friends to address security concerns in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i were somewhat lower (average 50% for both areas), compared to Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i (79%). This may be due to the fact that the residents in Lower and Upper Gal/i appear to have more difficulties in accessing identification documents and crossing the check points on the Ingur/i River (as reflected in their higher prioritisation of these problems) and therefore, have more difficulties in maintaining regular contacts with their relatives across the Ingur/i River. There were no major regional differences. It is noteworthy, that a very low level of interaction with local security providers is equally characteristic to both ethnic Georgian and ethnic Abkhaz respondents. The focus group results overlap with the quantitative data. Thus, the majority of respondents pointed out that their contacts with the law enforcement structures were limited to the process of applying for a passport and crossing the check points on Ingur/i River.

Respondents were also asked to name up to three security actors, which in their opinion have primary responsibility for ensuring security in local communities. An overwhelming majority – 81% (similar to 79% in the previous survey) – identified friends and relatives as their primary security providers. Local authorities ranked a distant second with only 8% (compared to 19% in previous survey) saying they frequently interact with this actor. Residents in Gal/i town reported a higher than average interaction with local authorities – 16%, compared to an average of 3% in the other three

Figure 10. Residents have very low interaction levels with local security actors
How frequently do you interact with the following security actors?[6]



areas. As regards to other security actors, including the central authorities in Sukhum/i and the Abkhaz police, very little or no interaction was reported by respondents. Other security actors received practically no responses. This may indicate that the residents do not consider other actors, including the central authorities in Sukhum/i and the Abkhaz police as structures which provide security in their communities.

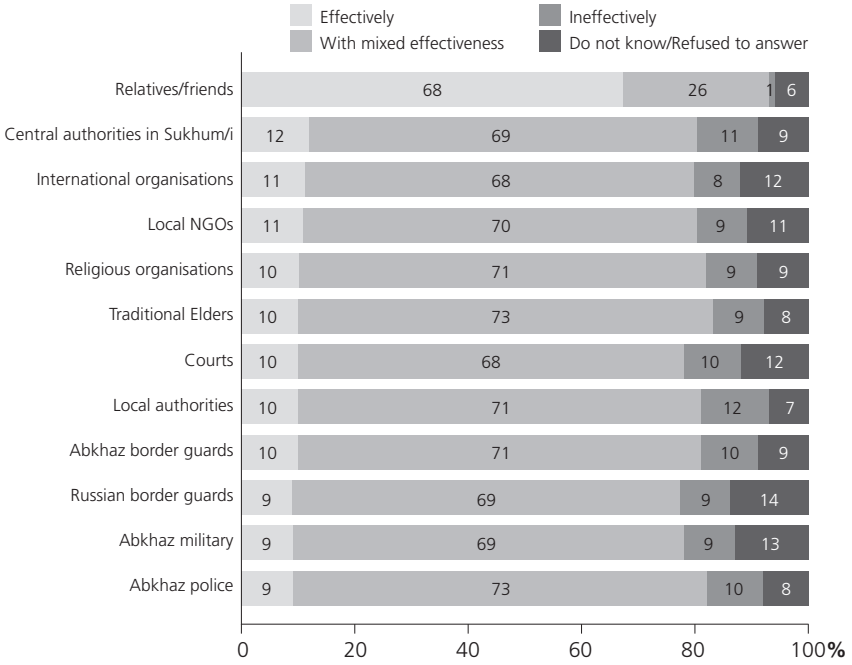
The effectiveness of security providers remains low

Respondents were asked to evaluate the effectiveness of the security providers present in their area. As with the previous survey, 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 11). Interestingly, women were slightly more critical of the effectiveness of practically all the listed security actors than men. The overall differences, however, were not significant, and also in some responses, the share of female respondents, who evaluated a certain security actor positively, was slightly larger than that of the male respondents.

Relatives and friends are perceived as the most effective security actors with 68% (compared to 50% in the previous survey), rating them as 'effective' or 'very effective'. The perceived effectiveness of major formal security actors has not changed significantly, but there were slight improvements. Thus, central authorities in Sukhum/i were assessed as effective by 12% and ineffective by 11% (compared with 9% and 16% respectively in the previous survey). The Abkhaz police were assessed as effective by 9% and ineffective by 10% of respondents (compared with 6% and 17% in the previous survey). Unlike in the previous survey, there was a dramatic decrease in the share of evasive responses, such as "don't know" or "refuse to answer". Instead, the overwhelming majority of respondents assessed the effectiveness of most security actors as neither effective nor ineffective.

6 For simplicity and easier readability, we combined the 'frequently' and 'very frequently' responses, and the 'rarely' and 'quite rarely' responses.

Figure 11. Effectiveness of security actors in dealing with local concerns
How well do the following actors deal with security problems affecting your community/village?[7]



2.2. Communities' readiness to contact local security providers for help

The general lack of confidence in reporting crimes to relevant authorities remains high

Low levels of interaction with formal security actors, as well as a low assessment of their efficiency negatively affect people's readiness to contact them. As a result, many crimes and violent incidents do not get reported to the relevant authorities. Overall, the share of respondents who displayed a lack of confidence when reporting criminal incidents was bigger than those who were confident about reporting them. This was particularly the case in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i, which, as discussed above, experience higher levels of insecurity compared to Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i (see figure 12).

Thus, when asked how confident they felt reporting criminal incidents to the authorities, 38% of the total respondents, compared with 29% in the previous survey, said they felt confident doing so. 27% said they were 'not quite confident' or 'not confident at all'. 35% expressed uncertainty, which in itself may be also construed as lack of confidence. In Lower Gal/i the respondents displayed the least confidence in reporting crimes to formal security providers (25% confident; 75% not confident or uncertain). It was followed by Upper Gal/i (34% – confident; 66% – not confident or uncertain). In Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i, the share of respondents who are confident is higher than average (42% and 41% respectively), however, the number of those, who display a lack of confidence or uncertainty in reporting criminal incidents still outweighs those who are confident. As one of the focus group participants said: "We have no relations/interactions with them [i.e. law enforcement structures]. They treat us as potential criminals."[8]

Those who expressed confidence in reporting criminal or violent incidents, were further asked to identify several security actors that they would turn to if they were to report such incidents. The results further reinforced the above findings that people rely on informal social networks, rather than formal security structures to provide for security and obtain justice (see figure 13). Thus, 96% of respondents named relatives and friends as the actors whom they would turn to if faced with a criminal or violent incident. 78% said they would inform the local authorities, 32% would turn to the Abkhaz police and only 3%, almost exclusively from Upper Gal/i, said they would turn to the central authorities in Sukhum/i.

7 We combined the 'very effective' and 'quite effective' responses, and the 'very ineffective' and 'quite ineffective' responses.
8 Focus group participant, male, unemployed, Gal/i district, February 2014

Figure 12. Do you feel confident reporting criminal/violent incidents to the relevant authorities?

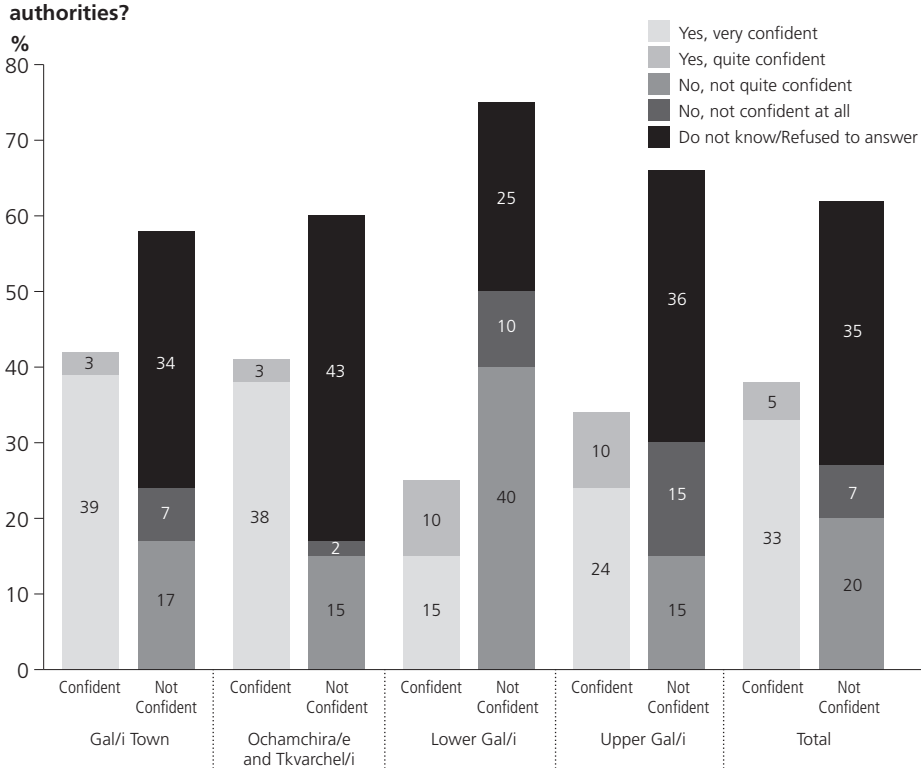
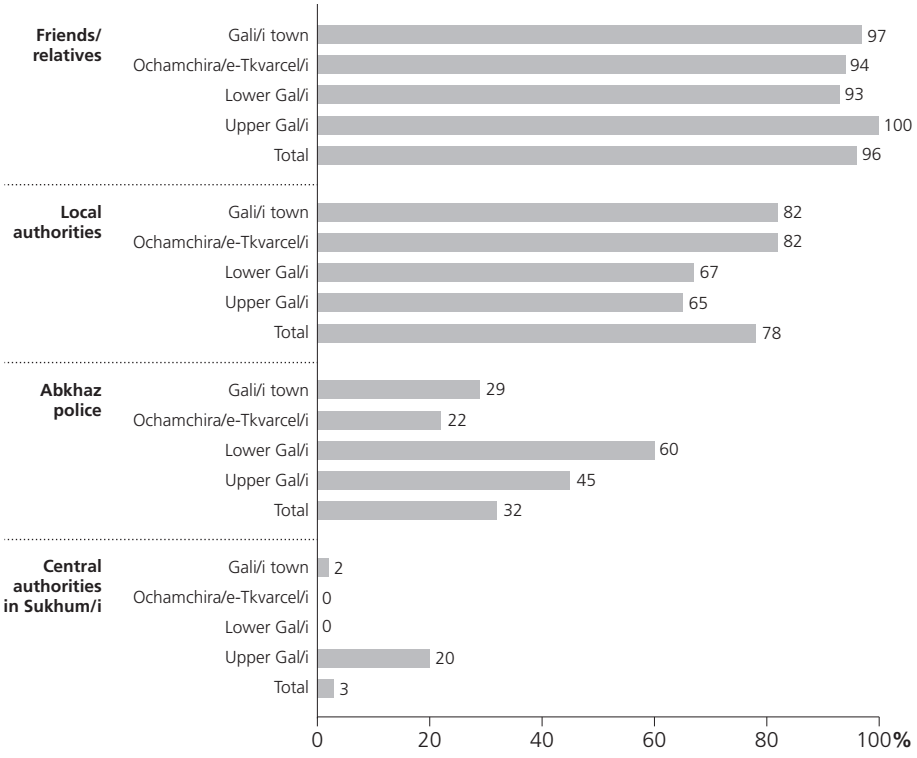


Figure 13. Whom would you address if you were the victim of a crime? – Comparisons between different security actors and research areas[9]



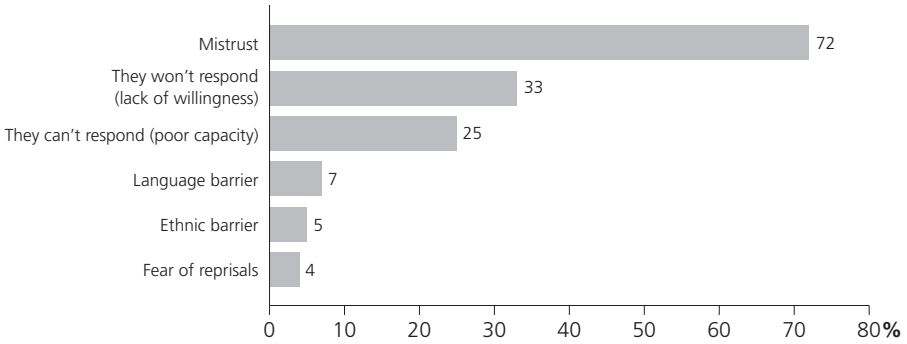
In terms of regional differentiation, respondents in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i were on average more predisposed to informing local government of incidents (82% in both areas) than in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i (67% and 65% respectively). However, the respondents in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i who expressed confidence in reporting incidents were more inclined to report them directly to the Abkhaz police (60% in Lower Gal/i and 45% in Upper Gal/i, compared with

9 Respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses.

29% in Gal/i town and 22% in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i). This may imply that even though the majority of people in Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i, (who experience greater insecurity than the people in the other two areas) do not feel confident reporting incidents to formal security structures, there is a potential for greater community-police engagement and cooperation in these vulnerable areas. As one of the focus group participants said: *"The population fears them* [i.e. law enforcement structures, and the Abkhaz police, in particular]. *Maybe they are not that scary, but we have such an impression of them. If they contacted us more often, this fear and mistrust towards them would disappear."*[10]

Finally, those respondents, who expressed a lack of confidence in reporting criminal or violent incidents, were further asked to identify the reasons for not addressing anyone if they were victim of a crime or violence. Overall, 72% of respondents cited a lack of trust in relevant authorities as a major factor discouraging them from reporting criminal incidents. The second most frequently cited reason was a perceived lack of willingness among the authorities to respond to security incidents (33%), followed by the low capacity of these authorities (25%) (see figure 14).

Figure 14. Factors discouraging local residents from reporting crime or other violent incidents to the relevant authorities[11]



The results of the focus group discussions fully correspond with the quantitative data. Many focus group participants said they saw no use in informing the law enforcement structures about violations, because they expected no proper reaction. Some also expressed fear of possible repercussions. As one participant said: *"There are no structures, to which we could apply with a complaint. This is because there is no guarantee that you would not suffer from your own complaint."*[12]

10 Focus group participant, female, housewife, Gal/i district, February 2014
11 Respondents were allowed to choose multiple responses.
12 Focus group participant, male, engineer, Gal/i district, February 2014

3

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

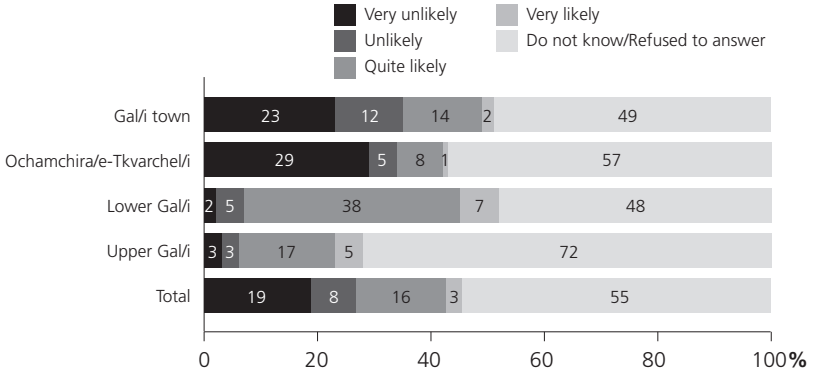
3.1. Potential for renewed conflict

People are more concerned with a possible increase in tensions in their communities than before

The previous two surveys captured positive trends year on year as less people considered an escalation of tensions in their communities likely. In this latest survey, the positive trend of the last two years has been reversed.

Thus, 19% of respondents, as opposed to 16% last year and 10% the year before, when asked in January 2014, believed greater tension in their village was quite or very likely in the next six months. The share of respondents, who said an escalation in tensions was unlikely or very unlikely has halved to 27%, as opposed to 53% in previous survey. There has also been an increase in the share of respondents who had difficulties in making predictions, suggesting a sense of uncertainty over the immediate future: 55%, compared with 32% in the previous survey (see figure 15).

Figure 15. How likely is it that there will be an increase in tensions in your community?



In terms of differences between the research areas, respondents in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i appeared more confident about the near future, whereas in Lower and Upper Gal/i people were inclined to expect a deterioration of the situation.

In comparison with the previous survey, the share of respondents who anticipated tensions in their communities would increase during the year has increased in Lower Gal/i (from 22% to 45%), which probably reflects people's anxiety over access to passports and the increased security incidents, including kidnappings, over the last year in this area. In Upper Gal/i, the share of respondents who anticipated increased tensions remained roughly the same, but the share of those who did not expect tensions visibly dropped (from 29% to only 6%), while responses which displayed uncertainty ("don't know" and "refuse to answer") increased from 44% to 72%. Also, compared to the previous year's results, the share of respondents who said they did not anticipate increased tensions in Gal/i town and Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i has also decreased: in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, from 81% in the previous survey to only 34% in this year's survey; in Gal/i town, from 56% to 35%, while the share of respondents who had difficulties in responding to this question increased in both regions.

The respondents were asked to name the factors, which in their opinion carry the greatest risk of escalating tensions. 26% (compared to 18% in the previous survey) cited political escalation between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i and 17% (compared to 25% in the previous survey) cited political escalation between Tbilisi and Moscow as the two most important trigger events. Similar to the previous survey, there was a high degree of abstentions among the respondents, who said they did not know or did not want to answer this question. However, when asked how likely that such escalation would take place during the year, only a small segment of respondents said it was likely (4% and 3% respectively). One-third of respondents said such an escalation between Tbilisi and Sukhum/i and Tbilisi and Moscow is possible, 45% found this scenario unlikely and 21% found it hard to predict or refused to respond.

4

Contacts and confidence between ethnic groups

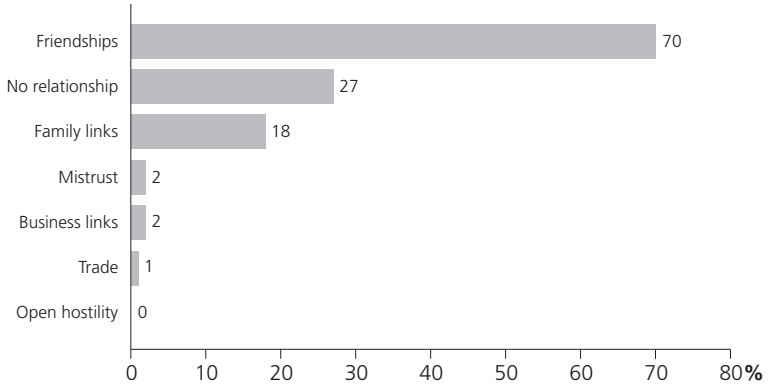
THIS SECTION EXPLORES THE LEVEL AND TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT that presently exist between ethnic groups, in particular between ethnic Georgians and Abkhaz, the types of inter-ethnic engagement in which people would be willing to participate, and how effective people think such measures would be in increasing trust and confidence between ethnic groups. The information contained in this chapter could be useful when planning measures to strengthen contacts and social bonds between different ethnic groups, and in particular, between ethnic Georgians and ethnic Abkhaz living in eastern areas of Abkhazia.

4.1. The nature and level of connections with other ethnic groups

There is a significant potential for building closer ties between ethnic Georgian communities and Abkhaz society as a whole

When asked how their relations with other ethnic groups had changed over the past year, the overwhelming majority of respondents (78%) noted no change, while 21% noted improvements. It is important to note that most of the respondents, who cited improvements in inter-ethnic relations, came from Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (36%) and Gal/i town (23%).

Figure 16. What kind of relationship does your family have with other ethnicities in Abkhazia?[13]



13 The respondents could choose up to three options.

The respondents were further asked about the nature of their family's relationships with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia (see figure 16). Given that almost all the respondents were either ethnic Georgians or ethnic Abkhaz living in mixed or neighbouring communities, this question implied the relations between these two main ethnicities. 70% of respondents characterised their family relationships with other ethnicities as being that of friendship and a further 18% said they had family connections with other ethnicities. In terms of regional differentiation, the results in Gal/i town were in line with the total average (71%), highest in Ochamchira/e-Tkvarchel/i (88%) (where ethnic Abkhaz and Georgian communities live closely side by side), relatively less in Upper Gal/i (60%) and least noted in Lower Gal/i (37%).

Some 27% of respondents said they had no relationships with other ethnicities in Abkhazia. There was a slightly higher occurrence among women (30%) than men (25%). Similarly to the above, the share of respondents who said they had no relationships with people from other ethnicities in Abkhazia was lowest in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (8%), average in Gal/i town and highest in Upper Gal/i (38%) and Lower Gal/i (58%). These figures show that the communities in Lower and Upper Gal/i remain more isolated and communicate with other ethnic groups less, which may be a contributing factor to a greater sense of insecurity among them. Importantly, in line with the previous survey results, only a tiny segment of respondents characterised their relationships with other ethnicities as mistrustful and none characterised these relationships as openly hostile (see figure 16). These figures show that the communities living in the eastern districts of Abkhazia, on the whole, continue to enjoy a relatively high level of interaction and close relations with each other in spite of their different ethnic backgrounds and the lack of resolution of the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict on the political level. Significantly, this also means that there is a strong potential for integrating ethnic Georgian communities into the wider Abkhaz society as a whole.

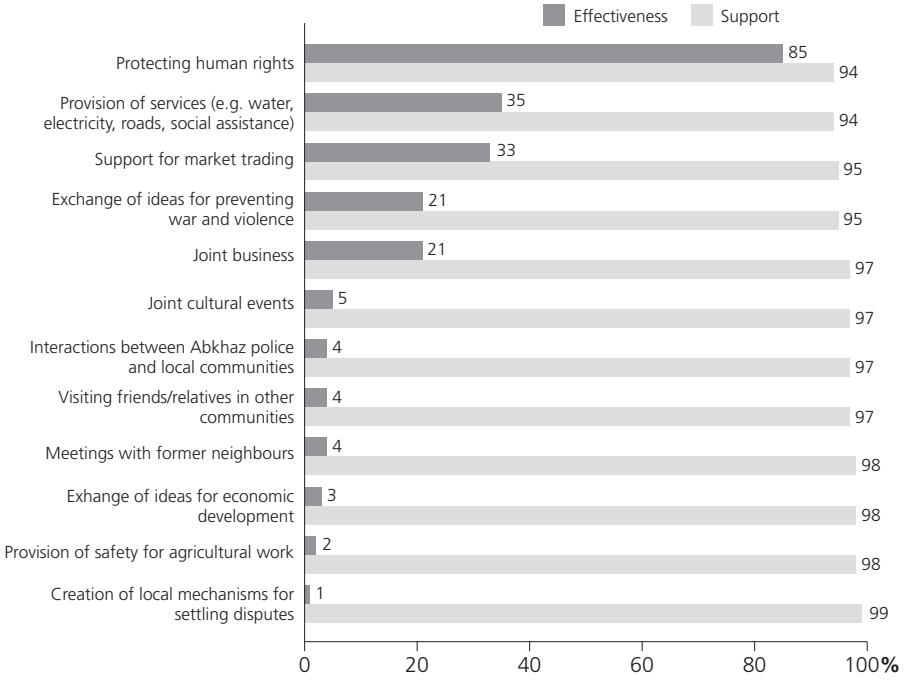
4.2. The desire to establish ethnic relations and support for measures aimed at strengthening them

Communities' belief in local confidence-building measures have increased

Respondents were asked to evaluate a number of proposed measures aimed at increasing security in local communities, as well as to indicate which measures could establish or improve trust between ethnic groups residing in Abkhazia. As with previous surveys, the respondents were highly supportive of all the proposed confidence-building measures. The level of support for these measures fluctuated between 94% and 99% and thus, unlike the previous survey, we could draw no comparisons between various measures, given that the figures were very similar.

The respondents' opinions about the effectiveness of these measures revealed that not only people's general support for various confidence-building measures has increased, but also that their belief in the effectiveness of these measures has strengthened. Thus, 85% of respondents, almost twice as many compared with the previous survey (46%), said various measures aimed at the protection of human rights would be effective in building trust and confidence between different ethnic groups in Abkhazia. Other measures, which were deemed to be most effective, were the provision of various public services (e.g. water, electricity, road and social infrastructure), support for communities to trade in each other's markets, joint businesses and other measures (see figure 17).

Figure 17. Which measures aimed at strengthening security in your community would you support? / Which measures would build trust and confidence with other ethnic groups?[14]



In terms of regional differentiation, the list of top five measures deemed most effective was basically the same across the four research areas (see figure 17). However, respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were more inclined to prioritise certain types of measures than their counterparts in other areas. Thus, for example, unlike the previous survey results, this year respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i, mostly ethnic Abkhaz, were more inclined to prioritise business-related measures: 47% in this area, compared with an average of 28% in the other three areas, believed trade with other ethnic communities would be effective for building confidence and trust. Similarly, 39% in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i rated the creation of joint businesses with representatives of other ethnic communities as an effective measure, compared with an average of 10% for the other three areas. Overall, the data shows that communities believe measures, which provide practical and tangible benefit to different ethnic communities, especially in terms of improving their livelihood conditions, are often deemed as most effective in building inter-ethnic trust.

14 On the first question, the respondents were asked to express their opinion on each of the measures. On the second question, the respondents were allowed to choose up to three measures, which they believed were most effective.

Conclusion

THE RESULTS OF THE SURVEY demonstrate that the achievements of the last several years in terms of improved stability, reduced crime levels and greater safety for communities should not be taken for granted. The decision last year by the Abkhaz authorities to suspend issuing passports to ethnic Georgian residents and the subsequent decision to revoke the validity of some of the already issued passports have predictably increased communities' concerns over access to identification documents, which allow them to enjoy basic rights, access services, and provides them with the ability to cross the check points on the Ingur/i River. These two factors are closely inter-linked as the communities' sense of security and well-being heavily depend on maintaining family ties and engaging in small-scale trade across the Ingur/i River.

There has also been a visible surge in communities' concerns over increased crime levels and kidnappings for ransom. These problems were particularly salient in the more remote and isolated areas of Lower Gal/i and Upper Gal/i. The Abkhaz authorities should pay closer attention to the factors that undermine the sense of security of the local residents in these areas and take steps to ensure that the achievements of the last several years in terms of providing greater security for the local communities are not reversed, but maintained.

When devising tailored policies for different communities and localities, the individual characteristics of each context should be taken into account. Therefore, this conclusion summarises the specific dynamics in each of the four target areas.

The Gal/i town group

The overall picture for the Gal/i town group remained positive. Although more than half of the respondents reported no change in the overall situation in their communities, over one third of the respondents – more than in any other target area – reported improvements. The respondents pointed to fewer incidents related to safety and security and some development in infrastructure as the main reasons for the overall improvement of the situation in their communities. Similarly, the share of respondents who said they felt safe in their community was more than twice as much (69%) as those who said they felt unsafe (27%).

Residents in the Gal/i town group appear to be equally concerned with both socio-economic problems, such as unemployment, healthcare and infrastructure, as well as problems related to their safety and socio-political rights, such as having access to passports and the ability to legally cross the Ingur/i River. At the same time, the frequency of physical security incidents was lower in this area than the total average. Even though the general assessment of the effectiveness of security actors was low, the share of respondents in the Gal/i town group who felt confident reporting criminal incidents to the relevant authorities was higher than average. This indicates higher

levels of self-confidence and resilience among the population in the area, compared to the other two ethnic Georgian populated areas.

As before, respondents in Gal/i town continued to report high levels of contacts with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia. One quarter of respondents in the area said their relations with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia have improved compared to a year ago, and virtually no respondents noted a deterioration. The respondents are also highly supportive of all measures aimed at improving the quality of local security provision and building inter-ethnic trust.

The Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group

As in previous surveys, the predominantly ethnic Abkhaz respondents from Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i enjoy the highest levels of safety and security among the four research areas. The incidents affecting their physical security appear to be less frequent in this area, as opposed to the other three overwhelmingly ethnic Georgian populated areas. A number of problems characteristic to other ethnic Georgian communities, such as access to passports, crossing the Ingur/i River, crime and kidnapping are completely absent from the list of major problems in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i. Instead, the residents of this research area prioritise socio-economic problems, such as unemployment, access to potable water and healthcare services among others. Economic difficulties are apparently a contributing factor to negative demographic trends in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i: the share of respondents in the area who noted a decrease in the number of families compared to a year ago was much higher than in the other three areas (38% compared to an average of 18% in the other three areas).

Similar to all other areas, the level of contact with and the general appraisal of the formal security actors are very low. However, the share of respondents who felt confident in reporting criminal incidents to the relevant authorities, was above average and equal to that of Gal/i town (41%). Respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i expressed greater confidence about their physical security in the near term compared to respondents in the other three areas. However, the share of respondents who expressed uncertainty about stable conditions in their communities, has also increased compared to the previous year, which indicates a lack of confidence over the near future.

Respondents in the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i group continued to report the highest levels of inter-ethnic relations, which is not surprising given that the ethnic Abkhaz and Georgians live side by side in these regions and many families are of mixed ethnic background. As a result, the residents in this area appear to be the most enthusiastic about supporting various confidence building measures. Along with strong support for measures aimed at protecting human rights, respondents in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i were more inclined to prioritise various business-related measures, such as trade with other ethnic communities and the creation of joint businesses.

Lower Gal/i

The survey results in Lower Gal/i demonstrate a worsened security situation there, which requires special attention by the Abkhaz authorities. One-third of respondents in Lower Gal/i – more than in any other research area – reported a deterioration of the overall security situation in their communities, while over half of the respondents noted no change in their situation compared to a year ago. Only 30% said they felt safe in their villages during the day, while 70% said they felt unsafe. Furthermore, 71% of respondents said they felt less safe in their settlements after dark. None of the respondents in this area said they felt safer compared to a year ago.

The respondents named the following reasons for the deterioration of the situation: an increased number of incidents related to safety and security, problems accessing identification documents, poor electricity supply and problems crossing the Ingur/i

River. One of the most worrying developments in this year's survey was the visible increase in local concerns over criminality and kidnapping, which are particularly acute problems in Lower Gal/i. Throughout 2013 there have been a number of kidnappings for ransom, mostly in the Lower Gal/i area, many of which were not even reported to the authorities. Lower Gal/i was also an area, where residents reported the highest rate of other physical security incidents, such as thefts, robberies and extortion. However, it should be noted that these incidents are purely criminal in their nature and usually have no ethnic character, which can be deducted from the fact that the inter-ethnic relations have not deteriorated.

Respondents in Lower Gal/i were also least confident reporting criminal/violent incidents to the relevant authorities: 25% were confident, while 75% were not confident or were uncertain. They also had the highest rates in terms of anxiety over the near future. This anxiety most probably reflects the increased security incidents, including kidnappings, over the last year in this area.

Lower Gal/i residents have the lowest level of contacts with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia, which underscores their ethnic isolation. It was the only research area, where none of the respondents noted an improvement in inter-ethnic relations compared to the previous year. However, on the positive side, none of the respondents noted a deterioration either. The residents also appear to be in solidarity with their neighbours from other research areas in supporting various measures aimed at increasing contacts and building trust between various ethnic groups.

Upper Gal/i

The situation in Upper Gal/i is not much better than in Lower Gal/i and thus, should also be a source of concern for the Abkhaz authorities. 22% of respondents in this group said the situation in their village has become worse. By comparison, the same figure in Gal/i town was only 3%, and in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i only 2%. The respondents in Upper Gal/i were almost unanimous in their perception that problems accessing passports and crossing the check points on the Ingur/i River were the two major reasons for deterioration of the overall situation in their communities. Some also mentioned decreased contacts with relatives, which should be seen as a consequence of the two above-mentioned problems.

Upper Gal/i was the only area where unemployment was listed as only the third most important community problem and personal insecurity factor, after access to passports and crossing of the checking points on the Ingur/i River. Other major community concerns were crime, kidnappings and access to healthcare services. Upper Gal/i had the highest ratio of respondents who reported feeling unsafe in their villages: 82%. By comparison, the same figure was almost four times lower in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i (22%). Furthermore, 82% of respondents also said they felt less safe after dark (by comparison, in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i this figure was only 7%).

The level of security incidents experienced by respondents in Upper Gal/i is comparable to that in Lower Gal/i and thus, is visibly higher than in Gal/i town and even more so than in Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i. At the same time, as in Lower Gal/i, the level of confidence in reporting problems to the relevant authorities is lower than the average. Upper Gal/i respondents also had the second highest indicators, after Lower Gal/i, in terms of anxiety over the near future.

Similarly to Lower Gal/i, residents in Upper Gal/i reported low levels of interaction with other ethnic groups in Abkhazia. Even though no one mentioned a deterioration in inter-ethnic relations, only 5% noted improvements over the last year, and 93% noted no change in these relations. In terms of support towards various confidence-building measures, respondents in Upper Gal/i were no exception in expressing strong support for various measures. In addition to measures aimed at protecting human rights, the respondents were in favour of supporting trade in local products between various ethnic communities.

Annex 1: Methodology

This report is based on quantitative and qualitative data collected in a tracker survey undertaken between January and February 2014. 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 a 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 has updated the questionnaire since then on the basis of the lessons learned from the first, taking into account specific local characteristics. However, the main thrust of the survey has not changed, which allows us to conduct detailed comparative analysis of results of the previous surveys and track changes in the situation over each year.

For this report, households were surveyed in January 2014. The survey involved 400 people from four target groups of towns and villages (Gal/i town group – Gal/i town and 8 villages, 140 people; the Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i town group – Ochamchira/e and Tkvarchel/i towns and 3 villages, 120 people; the Upper Gal/i group – 2 villages, 40 people; and the Lower Gal/i group – 5 villages, 100 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. The number of women and men among the respondents was equal. All were over 18 years old.

In addition to quantitative data, an accompanying set of focus group discussions was conducted in order to provide further insight into some key issues: (1) access to passports and other documentation; (2) problems related to crossing the Ingur/i River; (3) relations between the population and law-enforcement structures.

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

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COVER PHOTO: Villager from Gumurishi, Abkhazia, 2013.

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