

Coping with Marginality and Exclusion: Can IDP (Internally Displaced Person) Communities Successfully Integrate into Mainstream Urban Societies in Georgia?

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After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, alienation and marginalization among citizens became a serious problem in all post-Soviet cities. In Georgia, this general problem has been aggravated by an influx of internally displaced people (IDP). These individuals form a distinctive group in Georgia's urban society today, a group that differs from "mainstream" social groups in terms of its identity, networking, mobility, residential and place-making patterns.

The proposed research will explore social and spatial barriers to inclusion of IDP groups in "mainstream" urban societies across a variety of urban contexts throughout Georgia. The study will investigate the role social networks, informal and formal institutions, and spatial practices play in assisting or impeding coping strategies used by IDPs to adapt to the challenging circumstances of their everyday lives and integrate into mainstream societies. These issues will also be analysed within the context of adopted legislation and policies, strategies and practices of various institutions involved in this field.

The study has scientific merit in that it will afford an opportunity to apply and contribute to a number of theories and foundational work in: 1) social capital, networks and mobility; 2) the conceptual developments of social resilience, including those pertaining to "persistent resilience" as currently advanced by the University of Birmingham; 3) "multiple economies," which include formal and informal economic practices; and, 4) "right to the city" and post-socialist city—critical geographical perspectives on socio-spatial practices.

The empirical part of the research will be based on data collection and analysis from nine case study areas—the eight cities with the largest IDP population and one newly-formed IDP settlement. Research methods will include: semi-structured interviews and focus groups with IDP communities and government officials; social network analysis; analysis of media and official documents (including statistical data); field observations; and, GIS (spatial) analysis of residence locations, including time series.