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THE YOUTH-ORIENTED PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY FOR IDP YOUTH IN MTSKHETA-MTIANETI REGION



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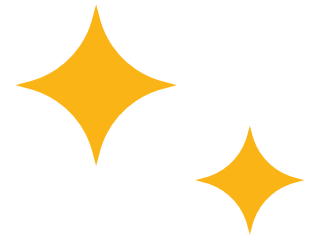
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research evaluates and analyzes the means of youth engagement in the local self-government of the Tserovani IDP settlement's youth-oriented programs and services. Additionally, it examines current challenges and offers recommendations. Research methods consisted of focus group interviews with youth residing in the target municipality and key informant interviews with local government and non-governmental organization representatives. According to research findings, local and central governments carry out some activities for the youth residing in the Tserovani IDP settlement. Still, various unresolved institutional and infrastructural problems impede the youth's abilities to fulfill their potential and develop different skills. In addition, those issues hinder quality service delivery processes.

Keywords: Youth, Municipal Services, Engagement in Local Self-Governance, Tserovani Internally Displaced Person (IDP) settlement





MAIN FINDINGS

The residents of the Tserovani IDP settlement, particularly the youth, endure challenges that are primarily related to limited resources and inefficient municipal services. Even though there are extracurricular activities for students, recreational infrastructure that helps them develop different skills is absent as the existing resources are limited. Practically, there are no activities for the youth who don't study at school and residents do not have access to quality health services.

Seldom are activities planned for the youth, and only a limited number can use those services. The youth residing in the Tserovani settlement have access to a library, a reader's club, sports classes, and art/cultural groups. However, one thing they do not have in the settlement is an entertainment facility (i.e. cinema, theater, etc.) in the settlement.

As for the challenges related to coping with the unemployment issue, the reason for it, according to most of the surveyed, was the absence of job opportunities at the local level and the lack of skilled labor. To an extent, Tserovani's proximity to the capital city, Tbilisi, mitigates this issue as residents commute to the capital for work. Because the residents have IDP status, they belong to Mtskheta and the Akhagori Municipalities. Administratively, the Tserovani settlement belongs to Akhagori Municipality; however, it is in the Mtskheta Municipality. Tserovani receives funding from the central government, which to some extent is a constraint as the resources are limited, especially for youth activities.



INTRODUCTION

Georgian youth are considered one of the most vulnerable groups in the country. Most struggle to reach their full potential and rarely engage in different civic activities. As of January 2023, 702,544 youth (aged 15-30) comprise 19% of the Georgian population (GeoStat, 2023). Every region has its challenges and limitations. However, one of the most vulnerable groups is found in the Tserovani IDP settlement, which was built after the August war with Russia in 2008. Tserovani is among 21 IDP settlements in Georgia and is considered the largest. This settlement has 9000 residents (some sources quote 6000 inhabitants), but the number of the displaced population is not exact. One of the challenges is that there is no precise data about the residents.

The IDP settlement's proximity to the capital makes mobility between the capital and the Tserovani residential area convenient; however, there are several systemic and infrastructural challenges at the local level. For Tserovani residents, a challenge is public service delivery tailored to the local context and youth interests and needs. It is difficult for youth to engage in social and political life because of their place of residence, cultural customs, and ethnic or religious differences. Residents, especially youth, are not as engaged in identifying and improving the processes of necessary municipal services. There is no mechanism in place that enables locals to evaluate the effectiveness of existing services. There is minimal information about current services on the local municipality's website, and locals learn about that information verbally from their fellow settlement residents, which makes it difficult for residents to have full details on the services. One way for locals to learn about updates and services is a closed Facebook group, which seems to be the most effective channel for communication currently.

The report analyzes barriers to engagement in local self-government faced by the youth residing in the Tserovani IDP settlement. It also examines the youth-oriented municipal services, and their related challenges, and provides recommendations for resolving them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY



The research purpose and the selection criteria of the participants.

The study aimed to assess the current accessibility of municipal programs and services for youth in the Tserovani IDP settlement, pinpoint barriers, and propose viable solutions. For research clarity, municipal services were categorized into three primary domains:

- Examination of existing mechanisms for youth engagement in local self-government
- Analysis of youth-oriented services and barriers within local municipalities in the Tserovani IDP settlement.
- Proposal of methods to enhance the evaluation mechanisms of services at the local municipality level in the Tserovani IDP settlement.

The research employed quantitative methods for data collection through focus groups and key informant interviews. Two focus group interviews (one online and one in-person) were conducted with local youth aged 14-29, who had 15 participants in total, and two key informant interviews were held with representatives of local municipalities and non-governmental organizations.

Data collection primarily involved requesting public information (FOI requests), processing reports and statistics, and analyzing other secondary sources. The core analysis relied on findings from research conducted with the target groups.





RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

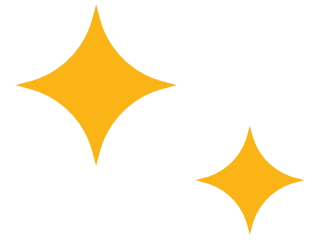
Inaccurate Statistics and Lack of Materials

One significant limitation we encountered during research was the scarcity of literature on the Tserovani IDP settlement and data regarding the effectiveness of local self-governments' public services. Desk research relied on studies conducted by various organizations at different times, complicating the analysis of regional contexts according to consistent criteria. Furthermore, the existing studies are outdated and fail to accurately portray the current situation. Additionally, the statistics available are imprecise and outdated, posing challenges to quantitative data analysis and hindering a comprehensive understanding of the severity of the issue.

Representativeness

The participation of municipal representatives from the Tserovani IDP settlement in the focus groups prevents generalization in a regional context. However, it is notable that in focus groups conducted within the same region, responses often echoed each other, indicating a prevailing trend. Even though Tserovani belongs to the Mtskheta-Mtianeti Municipality, the youth mainly discussed the challenges they faced in the Tserovani settlement. Despite the active and motivated nature of the young participants in the study within their respective regions, generalizing results within a regional context is invalid. Moreover, regarding representativeness, it is essential to acknowledge that the information provided by youth reflects only the realities of the Tserovani settlement.





CHAPTER 1

MECHANISMS OF YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

According to the data of 2021, the population of the Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region, to which Tserovani belongs, is 93.4000 people. 76% of the population live in villages. Youth aged 14-29 are approximately 19.900, 21.3% of the local population. Approximately 9000 people live in the Tserovani IDP settlement. According to the GeoStat 2020 data, the unemployment rate in the region is 18.3%, whereas the employment rate is 39.5%, according to the Fridrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) research. The data about youth employment is not available (FES 2021).

The focus group participants who were surveyed at least once approached the municipality to receive municipal service. In the Tserovani settlement, youth political and civic activism is low. During the past 1-2 years, 72% of the residents surveyed did not participate in any civic activism action.

When talking about the involvement of young people, considering the upcoming 2024 parliamentary election, participation in elections is worth mentioning. According to the Local Self-Government Code, Article 164 on the implementation of local self-government in the occupied territories of Georgia implies that “The local self-government bodies created as a result of the 2006 elections of local self-government representative in the municipalities of Akhagori, Eredvi, Kurti, Tigvi and Azhar, including administrative bodies and territorial bodies of self-governing units, bodies, including governors, and territorial self-governing units, shall exercise authority over the above-mentioned territories until the restoration of Georgian jurisdiction and the establishment of local self-government bodies by the rules of the Georgian legislation” (Local Self-Government Code 2014).

Therefore, in local elections, the population in the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region participates in the self-government elections because they live in the Mtskheta municipality (because the Tserovani IDP settlement is included in the territorial unit of Mtskheta). However, they are unable to elect the representatives of their municipality. This does not apply to parliamentary elections, during which the population of Tserovani votes. That said, since it is a pre-election period in Georgia, it is essential to spark the interest of youth to go to election polls and participate as full-fledged citizens of this country in the elections.



During the focus group, young people indicated that they had different experiences in cooperation with self-government. The opinion was divided; some positively evaluated the experience of cooperation with the local self-government, while some were dissatisfied with their work. The overwhelming majority of youth interviewed consider themselves to be active citizens. According to their point of view, the active youth citizenship is manifested through approaching the relevant department of local self-government with official letters and collecting signatures (Tserovani IDP Settlement, youth, June 30, 2024).

Since the Tserovani IDP settlement was created as a result of the war in 2008, residents have had to deal with many different challenges with joint efforts and, in some cases, with their funds daily. Many young people live in the IDP settlement and actively try to engage in local events and projects. According to youth, the active involvement of the local youth was higher in past years. In the process of implementing social projects, the unanimity of the local population is especially noticeable; this was also observed during the flood in Tserovani in May 2024. During this period, Mtskheta-Mtianeti municipality assisted the affected population.

According to the focus group participants, young people are often involved in painting the pedestrian crossings, solving the problem of homeless dogs, and organizing community clean-up actions. The main initiators are young people themselves. They implement initiatives in various directions with the help of several international donor organizations (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, July 6, 2024). Also, the focus group participants noted that several successful joint initiatives were implemented in close collaboration with the local self-government.

“We have had a positive experience in planning and implementing joint events with local self-government in previous years. Also, we were able to mobilize young people to help the local population that was affected by the flood”. (Tserovani, Young, July 20, 2024)

Extracurricular activities subsidized by the local municipality are available in the Tserovani IDP settlement, such as dance and tutoring in various school subjects. From time to time, youth competitions, tournaments, and various intellectual events are organized at the local level. One of the biggest challenges is getting quality healthcare services locally. According to the focus group participants, this is complicated by the bureaucratic formality associated with the population registration in the administrative unit of Tserovani (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, June 30, 2024). According to youth interviewed, the local



population is often not informed precisely where they can get medical services.

“Access to health care services is a problem in the settlement of Tserovani IDPs, the local population refrains from criticizing them, because criticism may worsen the situation” (Tserovani, Young, June 30, 2024).

Only one non-governmental organization and a few social enterprises are present in the local community. One of the ways to improve communication with local government is to have a feedback mechanism in place. Youth believe that local self-government representatives are often not properly informed about the challenges the local population faces. The lack of a mechanism to evaluate public service delivery and programs exacerbates these challenges. According to the focus group participants, local self-government staff are not always staffed with qualified personnel; often, they do not have comprehensive information about the existing services and the needs of the local population (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, June 30, 2024).





CHAPTER 2

OBSTACLES TO DELIVERING YOUTH TAILORED SERVICES IN THE TSEROVANI IDP SETTLEMENT

Based on its history and arrangement, the Tserovani IDP settlement is a non-standard administrative unit. Most of the local population comes from Akhagori Municipality and the Big and Little Liakhvi valleys. The settlement's population resides in four municipalities: Akhagori, Eredvi, Kurta, and Tigva. Of those listed, only the physical buildings of Akhagori self-government exist, which creates significant logistical problems for the population of other municipalities. Also, Mtskheta-Mtianeti municipality shares the responsibility of providing public services to some extent.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT

In general, registering in the Tserovani IDP settlement is enough to receive public services, including youth-oriented services. However, several challenges arise because the administrative buildings of some municipalities are not in the settlement.

LACK OF YOUTH SPACES

In the Tserovani settlement, there is no meeting space for young people who have finished school. The youth center building is mainly used by schoolchildren, and school graduates do not have a place to gather, discuss, share ideas, and make plans. Activities are limited to sports events, which do not respond to the needs, wants, or desires of the youth. All this encourages them to look for interesting opportunities outside the settlement. The interviews revealed a lack of readiness and openness on the part of the local authorities, which is manifested by an insufficient understanding of the need for youth-oriented projects.

FEEDBACK MECHANISM

The young people interviewed cannot recall a single case in which they had the opportunity to evaluate the public services provided. There is no formal feedback mechanism; only private conversations allow for feedback (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication,



July 6, 2024). Currently, young people consider writing an official letter to the local authorities as the best way to respond to problems. It should be noted that a special section on the Akhlagori Municipality website allows residents to write to the local municipality regarding any issue. We used this feature during the research, but it did not yield feedback.

Young people also stated that public institutions staffed by people with outdated thinking and views are another challenge. According to them, vacancies are published on a special portal of public services (public services are obliged to do so by law), but this portal is not promoted, and young people are not provided with information about the vacancies.

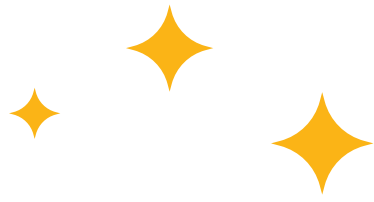
INFRASTRUCTURAL BARRIERS

In addition to the above, youth also face barriers related to mobility around Tserovani, which prevents them from using public services. There is a big problem with internal roads in the settlement, and in many cases, especially during winter and rain, these roads cannot be used due to damaged pavement and lack of lighting (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, June 30, 2024). It is important to mention that these roads are not meant for intensive pedestrian traffic, and there are no corresponding traffic signs, which poses a danger to the population.

It is worth noting that compared to past years, the issue of internal roads is no longer so acute; however, it is still a problem. In addition, the settlement faces issues of basic needs such as drinking water and sewage. The water problem is especially acute in the summer since the supplied water is insufficient to meet the population's basic needs and to irrigate the soil. Due to the sewage problem, the settlement was flooded several times. It should be noted that there is a questionnaire on the website of the Akhlagori municipality, through which the population can determine which problem they consider the highest priority. At the time of writing the report, 40% of 306 votes, believed that the problem of drinking water is the most acute in the municipality (Akhlagori Municipality. 2024). This problem is partly attributed to the low awareness of the population about effective management and sustainable use of water. Proper water management practices are essential, especially in a settlement like this, where these basic needs are still unmet.

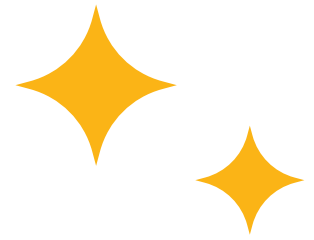
LACK OF FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Youth consider the lack of financial resources the main reason for the lack of youth-oriented services. For the settlement, in which about 9,000 people (unspecified number), including 1,100 schoolchildren, live, the amount allocated from the central budget is wholly insufficient



and cannot meet the needs of the population (Tserovani village, Akhlagori Municipality, 2024 budget, 2024). In addition, the youth are not as active anymore, which is evident in their reduced involvement in organized events and activities (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Local municipality representative, personal communication, August 2, 2024). A social cafe functioned in the settlement for four years, but it was closed because young people preferred to spend their money outside the settlement on activities that were a priority for them (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Non-government sector, personal communication, July 13, 2024).





CHAPTER 3

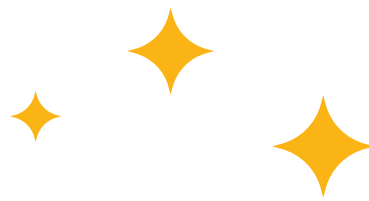
YOUTH-ORIENTED SERVICE EVALUATION MECHANISMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE TSEROVANI IDP SETTLEMENT

The right of citizens to participate in the management of public affairs is one of the basic principles of democratic governance. Representative democracy is characterized by the broad involvement of various interested parties in public policy development, during which each branch of government is obliged to have and develop public involvement mechanisms. This implies the participation of different formal and informal social groups and specific individuals and the exchange of information between political/professional associations and public institutions.

Public engagement helps local governments implement social and other reforms tailored to actual needs, develop evidence-based services, and improve existing ones. This, in turn, allows citizens to enjoy their share of the wealth accumulated in the state. In states where the degree of decentralization is not so high, encouraging civic engagement at the local level is particularly important. In such countries, society is often unprepared to actively implement local self-government to achieve the desired results. However, this is a process of growing a society's political culture. The importance of public involvement is also emphasized in the preamble of the "European Charter on Local Self-Government" (Georgia ratified the Charter in December 2004). The charter states that "the right of citizens to participate in the conduct of state affairs is one of the democratic principles common to all member states of the Council of Europe" (European Charter of Local Self-Government 1985).

In addition to the fact that the IDP settlement of Tserovani has scarce financial resources, the population is not given an opportunity to evaluate public services. At this stage, the mechanism that allows residents to express their opinions at the municipal level is a survey published on the municipality's website. Residents can vote for the most important issue for them from the three priority areas listed—drinking water, road, and social issues. It is unknown where the current results are analyzed and what forms of response exist.

It is practically impossible to solve the existing challenges quickly; however, taking into account several recommendations and taking effective steps can contribute to improving the



situation. According to the interviewees, the recommendations expressed by the participants in the research can be divided into three main directions:

- **LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT**

Local government has the most significant role in resolving the current challenges. First, it is important to listen to people's opinions before planning specific activities or events. The most important thing is that the information received from people is reflected in the budget or action plan. Most respondents believe that the population does not want to be involved at this stage because they believe that their opinions will not be considered (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, July 6, 2024). The population should be able to provide feedback not only on plans but also on already implemented activities or the quality of public services. This can be the impetus for creating more citizen-centric service delivery. An anonymous online feedback mechanism is more acceptable for most research participants because they can express their opinions boldly and honestly. An anonymous feedback section can be placed on the municipality's website so that it is accessible and easy to find for everyone. Also, it would be helpful to study other municipalities' experiences in solving similar problems and transferring the best practices. Also, putting more emphasis on coordination and communication between municipalities. This will help the municipalities inform the population about the services intended for them in a timely and efficient manner, reducing the dependence on the central government and increasing the identity of the settlement.

Another way the local municipality can contribute to the empowerment of youth is through effective internship programs that are paid and offer flexible conditions to disabled people or students. This, on the one hand, will contribute to the development of young people's professional skills, and on the other hand, it will encourage youth to stay in their place and train qualified personnel in the future.

Also, it is no less important for young people to create an independent space where they can gather, organize discussions, make plans, and hold one or another event. This space should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their views or positions, and should serve the interests of young people (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Non-government sector, personal communication, July 13, 2024).

- **NON-GOVERNMENTAL SECTOR**

Although the role of local government in solving problems is immense, the non-governmental



sector is equally important. First, non-governmental organizations must raise public awareness on various issues. They should work for the community and provide information on public services, ongoing programs, and forms of citizen involvement. This is especially important for the middle-aged and older population, who may have less access to resources than younger people. There are several ways to do all this - distribution of information brochures, educational training courses, organizing discussions, etc.

In addition, the importance of the non-governmental sector is great in terms of strengthening the competencies and skills of the population, including the youth. In many cases, citizens want to be involved and contribute to the development of their municipality; however, he does not have the necessary knowledge and skills to do so and does not know whom to turn to. Accordingly, in situations when formal education cannot meet the needs of the development of competencies necessary for an active citizen, the importance of non-formal education has increased even more.

The non-governmental sector also plays a significant role in communicating with local authorities and advocating for people's needs. On the one hand, non-governmental organizations can mobilize society, show the authorities what the real needs of the population are, and suggest what measures need to be taken in response to them.

- **MEDIA**

Another factor highlighted during the research regarding responding to challenges is the media, which has a special function as it highlights problems and puts them into the spotlight. The media forces the public, including the local government, to see the actual situation and take effective action.

In addition, the media can act as a kind of motivator since it has the power to highlight the challenges of young people and encourage them to work harder and contribute to the development of their community (Tserovani IDP Settlement, Non-government sector, personal communication, July 13, 2024). There is generally limited material on the settlement issues of Tserovani IDPs, which, to some extent, indicates the fact that the media is less interested in the challenges in the settlement, or the material is not published with sufficient frequency. The role of the local media is crucial, but it does not exist at this stage, and this somewhat hinders the awareness of the local population and the general audience on various issues.



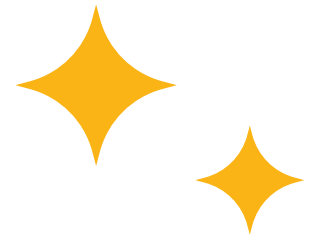
CONCLUSION

The report analyzes youth-oriented municipal services in Tserovani IDP settlement and related challenges. Also, the document proposes possible mechanisms for evaluating municipal services and in general providing feedback. The research is based on the study of existing reports on the target settlement, analysis of the results of focus groups with youth, and interviews with representatives of local authorities and non-governmental organizations. According to the results of the research, the problem is mainly the existing mechanism of administrative arrangement, scarce financial and human resources, low population awareness about public services, the absence of a mechanism for evaluating public services, and the quality of existing services.

Despite the scarce resources, the local self-government offers various recreational and educational programs to the youth in which they are actively involved. The problem is the lack of services that are adapted to actual needs. It should be noted that there is a precedent of local self-government financing various programs and social projects, which contributes to implementing youth initiatives. However, the insufficient budget remains a challenge in this respect. The challenge is the weak communication between the representatives of the municipalities and the young people, which causes them to be unable to share their visions and priorities in depth. Consequently, decisions are often made independently and without the involvement of youth, which is why the existing services and programs cannot respond to the population's needs and do not increase the quality of youth involvement in the decision-making process.

In addition to communication, it is important to create and implement an effective feedback mechanism to improve the involvement of youth in self-government and tailor services to them. First, it concerns the creation of a mechanism for evaluating municipal services. Within the research framework, young people have repeatedly expressed the opinion that it is necessary to periodically survey municipal needs and inform the population about new services. To measure the level of satisfaction of the population with the need for research or services, the local youth named the embedding of the assessment mechanism on the municipality's website and social network as the most straightforward and accessible form.

Finally, it can be said that the greater involvement of the population, especially the youth, in the decision-making process and developing feedback mechanisms may be a determining factor in developing youth-oriented services.



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ANNEXES

The list of the focus groups and interviews conducted throughout the study:

1. Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, June 30, 2024.
2. Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, personal communication, July 6, 2024.
3. Tserovani IDP Settlement, Non-government sector, personal communication, July 13, 2024.
4. Tserovani IDP Settlement, Local municipality representative, personal communication, August 2, 2024.
5. Tserovani IDP Settlement, Youth, Online interview, September 2, 2024.

