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Providing Welfare Service Within and Across Contested Borders:

The Activities of Civil Society Organisations in Transnistria and Abkhazia

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Abstract

When the USSR ceased to exist, a bordering process occurred not only between the 15 newly independent Republics, but also *within* some of them. This happened as conflicts froze, resulting in the formation of several entities labelled as *de facto* states. *De facto* states have received quite some attention from a geopolitical perspective. This scholarship shows that *de facto* statehood has a negative impact on locals' daily lives and that Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) are essential in providing welfare services. However, what CSOs are doing in terms of social welfare services provision, whom they are targeting, and how this context impacts their functioning, has never been investigated. This working paper aims to address these gaps by focusing on CSOs providing welfare services in two territories whose borders remain contested: Abkhazia and Transnistria. This is done by mapping the presence of CSOs providing welfare services within and across the *de facto* borders.

This paper is based on desk research in which we systematically searched for, first, donors active in this field and, second, CSOs providing social services in Abkhazia and Transnistria. We also analysed databases, policy documents and reports about how donors and International NGOs (INGO) frame their priorities, interact with local CSOs and the *de facto* state's authorities. Hence, this desk research enables to understand better what CSOs are doing in term of social welfare provision, whom they are targeting, and within which legal context respectively in Abkhazia and Transnistria.

Our result section shows a relatively high number and diversity of CSOs providing social welfare services within the two selected *de facto* states, with some of them receiving the support of international donors and organisations with whom their priorities align. Youth, children - including those with special needs - and women appear as the main target of projects whose scope is to enhance their economic and social inclusion and address some difficulties they face in life (e.g., domestic violence). D*e facto* borders resulting from the *de facto* statehood impact the functioning of CSOs not only by being selectively closed (particularly for Abkhazia) but also *via* a range of *de facto* bordering practices such as different legislations and citizenship policies. Importantly, both *de facto* states find themselves at the crossroad of different geopolitical projects: the European Neighbourhood policy and its Eastern Partnership component on one side, and the Russian led Eurasian Economic Union on the other side. These global components also produce local social effects including in the provision of social welfare services by CSOs active in Abkhazia and Transnistria.

Keywords:

De Facto Borders, Welfare Services, Civil Society Organisations, Post-Soviet Space

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Introduction

Contested Terminology

This research paper focusses on social welfare provision by CSOs in Abkhazia and Transnistria. These two territories are often denominated as *de facto* states by academics, since they can be considered as political entities with a territory, a government and a population but lack a full international recognition as a state (Pegg, 1998). Yet the concept of *de facto* state remains contested and is strongly opposed by the defenders of a fully-fledged independent Abkhazia and Transnistria state, which parted in the 1990s from Georgia and Moldova respectively. In the same way, naming a border *de facto* is contested and various denominations are claimed by different actors. Thus, using one term over another remains politically charged. In this working paper, the use of the term *de facto* states and *de facto* borders is not an acknowledgment nor a contestation to the existing separations. Rather, the concept is used as an analytical category to describe and analyse the present, on-ground situation in the two selected cases – that are, two political and territorial entities which have not received full international recognition.

In both cases, *de facto* authorities established a *de facto* borderline under the supervision of *de facto* (military) custom guards. Overtime, a *de facto* statehood has developed with governmental institutions based in main cities acting as capitals: Sukhum/i for Abkhazia and Tiraspol for Transnistria. Several terms are used to name this territorial division. For the case of Transnistria, the most found designation by international organisations and donors is following the division between the left bank and right bank of the Dniester River - with "left bank" standing for Transnistria (UN[1], UNDP, Sweden[2], EU[3]). This, even though the river line does not exactly reflect the reality on the ground in as far as localities located on the left bank are under Chisinau control and the city of Bender, located on the right bank, is instead part of Transnistria. "Breakaway unrecognized territories" is also used to describe these two territories, to emphasise the lack of official recognition of the separation process (UNDP[4]). The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) highlights "the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognized borders with a special status for Transnistria[5]" and enshrines its action in the European Union Confidence Building Measures Programmes (EU-CBM) whose aim is to foster cooperation across the security zone on both banks of the Dniester River (project document 2019-2021[6]). The two reports (Hammarberg, 2013; 2018) from the senior UN human rights expert, use the term "left bank" and "right bank" and "*de facto* authorities" emphasising that "terminology and language imply no political position". Likewise, in this working paper the choice of terminology does not aim at supporting or approving any of the parties involved. We tried as much as possible to follow the most

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[1] Republic of Moldova–United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022 United Nations Development Assistance Framework for the Republic of Moldova
[2] One UN Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova (2019-2022)
[3] See for example the EU Roadmap for engagement with Civil Society in the Republic of Moldova (2018-2020)
[4] Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova (2019-2022)
[5] https://www.osce.org/mission-to-moldova - accessed 15/03/2021
[6] https://www.md.undp.org/content/moldova/en/home/projects/confidence-building-measures-programme-5.html - accessed 15/03/2021

common denominations used in English since different names are used in different languages by different parties. For example, Transnistria is chosen over Pridnestrovie, Bender is chosen over Bendery in Russian and Tighina in Romanian, Dubossar is chosen over Dubossary in Russian and Dubăsari in Romanian. For the case of Abkhazia, the use of the most common denomination in English remains situated since Georgian authors use Georgian denominations: Sukhumi over Sukhum in Abkhaz, Gali over Gal in Abkhaz, Ochamchire over Ochamchira in Abkhaz, Gulripshi over Gulripsh in Abkhaz. Thus, together with other academics (see for example Clogg, 2008) we chose an inclusive denomination Sukhum/i, Gal/i, Ochamchire/a, Gulripsh/i.

De Facto State: Genealogy of a Concept

In 1991, the end of the USSR resulted in 15 independent countries, and a consequent redefinition and relocation of borders across the region. Several territorial entities within the post-Soviet space parted and claimed an independent status (de Tingy, 2009). While some territories were peacefully reintegrated, others went through wars and were either forcefully integrated into fully-fledged states or remained *de facto* independent as the conflict involving them froze over the years (Ó Beacháin et al*.,* 2016). In some cases, these entities became *de facto* states.

Defined by Pegg (1998, p.1) in line with the criteria set by the Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States (1933), a *de facto* state is a "secessionist entity that receives popular support and have achieved sufficient capacity to provide governmental services to a given population in a defined territorial area, over which it maintains effective control for an extended period of time". The first criterion to be defined as a state is to have a permanent population; the second one, is to exists over a defined territory; the third one, is to have a government; and fourth, to have the capacity of establishing and maintaining relations with other states. This last criterion is what *de facto* states are missing: lacking international recognition, such a state cannot exist *de jure* and remains *de facto*. Hence, a *de facto* state cannot have official relations with other states that do not recognise its existence; meaning the lack of recognition for its institutions, its representatives, its governing functions (e.g., leading an army and polices forces, minting coins, issuing identity documents) and state symbols such as the national flag, state coat of arms and anthem (Kolstø, 2006).

Originating in international relations, the concept of *de facto* states has been studied mostly from a (geo)political perspective (Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 2011; Dembinska & Campana, 2017). A first set of publications focused on definitions (Pegg, 1998), historical trajectories (Roper, 2001; Auch, 2005) and geopolitical issues arising due to the existence of such entities. The attitude of other actors involved as parent states (e.g. Georgia and Moldova), sponsor states (e.g. Russia) and as international players (e.g. the European Union (EU), NATO, OSCE) has been extensively researched (De Waal, 2004; Popescu, 2010; Caspersen, 2012; Relitz, 2016) alongside *de facto* states' quest for international recognition (Caspersen, 2012; Ó Beacháin et.al., 2016). A second set of research documents the internal issues *de facto* states face, paying a particular attention to domestic processes such as democratisation and elections (Kopeček et al*.,* 2016), public attitudes toward the two of the main international actors: Russia and the EU (O'Loughlin et al., 2011) alongside nation-building and identity (Kolossov, 2001).

However, this state-centric approach leads to marginal attention being devoted to the socio-economic development of *de facto* states (Baar & Baarová, 2017). Thus, research on social aspects such as the daily lives of the inhabitants in *de facto* states remains inadequate (Kolossov & O'Loughlin, 2011) despite the *de facto* statehood having a major impact on their everday living (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2011).

In post-Soviet countries, the dissolution of the USSR ended the Soviet welfare system officially based on the equal provision of quality care for all citizens and created a temporary vacuum in welfare provision in each country (An, 2014). Populations living in *de facto* states' territory had to cope not only with this vacuum in welfare provision but also faced the consequences of conflicts leading to the installation of a *de facto* statehood. It has been documented that *de facto* borders – and related geopolitical struggles and citizenship regimes – have a significant impact on peoples' access to rights and protection (Krasniqi, 2018) and that important welfare losses occur for *de facto* states' inhabitants, and, to some extent, for parent states' inhabitants as well (D'Alessandro, 2007). Thus, we assume that CSOs prove to be essential as providers or mediators of access to social welfare in *de facto* states. However, this critical role has been overlooked and little is known about CSOs in *de facto* states and particularly the different functions they uptake in the provision of social welfare services.

Social Transformations and the New Role of Civil Society in Social Welfare Provision in The Post-Soviet Space

In this working paper, we chose the term "Civil Society Organisation" (CSO) as broader than the denomination "Nongovernmental Organisation" (NGO) as CSOs encompass diverse organisations which do not necessarily have to operate in total independence and autonomy from the state – e.g., state-sponsored organisations in theory detached from the state but in reality, much more imbricated as shown in the below-presented typology (Atlani Duault, 2007). Martti Muukkonen (2009, p.684) included concepts such as "third sector", "non-profit", "voluntary sector", "philanthropy", "nongovernmental organizations", "social economy", and "public benefit organizations" within the broad field of "civil society studies". Likewise, we consider here as CSO all those organisations operating somehow within established institutions such as the state and the market (Salamon et al., 1999). This is particularly relevant as we deal with a non-Western European scenario. Some scholars argue that what can be framed as a civil society in the former Soviet Union dates to Tsarist Russia. In the Caucasus in particular, the first civil society groups appeared in the second half of the nineteenth century and an institutionalised civil society was structured in the late nineteenth century (Aliyev, 2015). Aliyev (2015, p.53) poses that the development of professional guilds and artisans' unions served as "rudimentary primordial forms of social capital and civic association in the economic, cultural and social life of the region." This dynamic was fostered by the decline of slavery in the mid-seventeenth century and completed by the Emancipation reform of Alexander II (1861).

Studying the development of a civil society in Georgia, Nodia (2005) notes that the main input came from young Georgians returning to Georgia after completing their education in Russian universities where they were impregnated by liberal ideas. Following the October 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, the end of the Tsarist Empire had major consequences as the ethnic groups of the Caucasus created their first independent nation-states and, by the end

of 1918, the region had three "*de facto* independent nation-states – the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Republic of Armenia and the Georgian Democratic Republic" (Aliyev, 2015, p.57). This independence ended when the communist took over the region in the 1920s, which resulted in major changes for civil society organisations.

During the Soviet period, civil ("public") organisations were seen as "an imitation of civil organisations in democratic countries" (Nodia, 2005, p.12). Examples of these organisations included trade unions, the youth party's organisation Komsomol, the peace committee, and creative artists' associations. However, the role of CSOs in the USSR changed over time, particularly from 1985 onward, when Mikhail Gorbachev became the head of the Communist Party and launched the policies of 'perestroika' (restructuring) and "glasnost" ("what can be said" - openness). Yet, researchers from the region do not always characterise this period as "the beginning of the rebirth" of an independent civil society in the USSR, giving the development of the *neformalny* – non-formal movement in the 1960s and 1970s (Aliyev, 2015, p.80).

Different dynamics were at play across the USSR. If in the Caucasus, the development of an independent civil society happened during the perestroika period, across the Russian territory the mobilisation of soldiers' mothers committees against the mandatory military service at a time of the deadly Afghanistan war, is often considered at the start of protest movements which embodied a nascent civil society - whose rise had become already apparent in 1989 as the Soviet system was on the verge to collapse (Carrère d'Encausse, 2000).

We acknowledge that this genealogy of civil society has a Western-centric bias as it relies on a Western understanding of civil society. We follow the thoughts of Babajanian, (2005, p.212) who claims - taking the case of Armenia - that at the end of the USSR, "Western driven political projects" supported groups gathered around a common cause with funding and trainings which was seen by several analysts as a "neo-imperialist project to impose Western hegemony", hence preventing more traditional and indigenous forms of civil society to be recognised. Western standards prevailed in a post-Cold war context as Soviet standards, models and practices were by and large discredited by the end of the ensemble that birthed and grew them. This post-Soviet context marked by the dismantlement of well-established and accepted institutions, enabled the development of CSOs (Atlani-Duault, 2007). This development was largely encouraged by international incentives such as international organisations providing key resources (e.g., funding, trainings) to set up local CSOs according to international (i.e., Western) standards. If these incentives fuelled to some extent the emergence of a local civil society, they also led to the rise of state-run CSOs - the so-called Government-Organised Nongovernmental Organisations - GONGO (Popescu, 2006; Aliyev, 2015). These GONGOs offer a façade of independence but are practically so closely interlinked with the (local) *de facto* authorities that they become an extension of their policies and power. Aliyev (2015, p.87) noticed that no matter what the extent of the government's involvement is in the creation and operation of a CSO, this lack of autonomy in decision-making and financial independence and the lack of neutrality from the political and economic actors negatively affect its capacity to act as a civil society actor.

In the Caucasus, distinguishing a GONGO from a genuine CSO can prove to be "a challenging task" (Aliyev, 2015, p.87) and the merge between the "non-profit groups" and the "non-governmental organisations" under the Russian "Federal Law on Non-Profit Organisation" (1996, last amended in 2010) and the Georgian Ministry of Justice's decision

(2010) is only increasing this challenge. To classify CSOs according to their institutional development, Nodia (2005) in the case of Georgia looks at eight criteria: 1) activities and experience; 2) external relations; 3) structure (differentiation between the organisations structural units, division of functions, rights and responsibilities); 4) procedure; 5) mission and strategy; 6) technical base; 7) funds and 8) human resources. Based on these criteria, Nodia classified the Georgia-based CSOs into four levels depending on the way they are organised and the scale of their activities.

The "first tier organisations" are characterised by a strong experience in implementing projects including in several localities, they are structured in "effective upper, middle and lower structural units" which makes their functioning non-hierarchical and horizontal. They act according to internationally accepted standards: studying the target group's needs, setting up a strategic plan with short- and long-term goals and evaluating the work done. They benefit from effective and continuous funding and have a wide range of partnerships. Expanding on this classification, Aliyev (2015) argues that these organisations uncommon not only in Georgia but across the Caucasus.

The "second tier organisations" are more modest in size and do not work outside one city or regions. They partially separate executive and decision-making functions. If they have definite goals, they may not always exist in the form of a mission statement and there is no strategic planning procedure. Projects are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. These types of organisations are more common than first-tier organisations in Georgia and presumably in the rest of the Caucasus, although substantive data remains missing (Aliyev, 2015, p.97).

The "third tier organisations" are even smaller, having implemented one or two small projects with a limited budget (not exceeding $5,000). They are characterised by a top-down management where the head of the organisation personally takes the decision. There is no strategic planning, no continuity in services offered to the target groups with whom relations occur spontaneously. The activities do not spread beyond the area where they are legally registered. Organisations of this type are widespread in Georgia and the region beyond according to Aliyev's analysis (2015).

Finally, the "fourth tier organisations", gather most of the organisation registered in the Caucasus region, being "NGOs on paper only" (Aliyev, 2015, p.97). The same persons are often the founders, board members and employees. The organisation is defined by a charter and no mission statement exists. These organisations do not implement donor-funded projects and volunteers performed rather small-scale activities. They have no proper office and relationships are limited to personnel contacts. Many of these organisations have been created because a grant was available and ceased to exist soon after.

Studying the development of civil society after the end of the USSR, Atlani Duault (2007) differentiates four archetypes of CSOs in the post-Soviet space. The first category encompasses "former Soviet associations that have been rebaptized as NGOs" such as the national branch of the Communist Union of Youth (Komsomol), changing its name and branding but keeping the same hierarchical approach waiting for readymade solutions from donors to be implemented. The second category gathers people who have created NGOs emanating of government structures such as medical institutes, family planning units and the medico-legal departments that deal with drug addiction. Their transformation into an NGO is a strategy to attract external funds as donors were reluctant to finance former state structures. However, according to Duault (2007), the NGO status is only a façade as

no structural changes occurred whatsoever in these organisations. Hence, if we follow the definition of Popescu (2006), this type of NGO can be labelled as "GONGO". One example of such organisation could be an NGO gathering women but emanating from the state institute of Gynaecology and Obstetrics.

The third category is made by newly created local NGOs with three subdivisions. The first subgroup depicts small and ill-defined structures, having no relation to any official structures and attempting to use the post-Soviet freedoms to turn the organisational goals into actions despite the very little resources available. The second subgroup encompasses also newly created NGOs but whose activities are motivated first and foremost by making profit: one example could be a women's association sponsored by pharmaceutical companies to sell contraceptive pills. Several groups attempting to use the post-Soviet transition's newly available resources, call themselves NGOs and were legally registered as such, although they constituted in reality private businesses. A last subgroup lies between the modest idealistic model and the commercial one in disguise. This third subgroup gathers NGOs having a particular goal (e.g., HIV prevention), and headed by former high-positioned staff of Soviet structures (apparatchik) who used to oversee fulfilling this particular goal within the Soviet institutions. These members of staff often found themselves unemployed after the end of the USSR and saw a potential new employer in donors.

Duault (2007) labels these donors driven NGOs as DONGOs which have been studied in different pots-Soviet countries (see also Kandiyoti, 2004 for Uzbekistan). In the case of Uzbekistan for example, Ilkhamov (2005, p.304) emphasises that the commitment to the public interest of the majority of CSOs cannot be put in doubt. However, one cannot deny that the "overflow of funds have created a sort of market of jobs" with charity offers being more "market driven" and guided "by logic of supply and demand than the needs of civil society." In a context were economic and social resources were and still are scarce, starting an NGO can be a good opportunity to gain skills, serving a cause one feels close to and, in some cases, oppose people officially in charge and contrast their practices seen as outdated.

The fourth and last group gathers what is labelled as "nascent NGOs": merely group of friends which gets together under no formal organisations or legal status such as addict groups and gay groups[7] , not knowing how to get started and lacking resources but gathered by a common cause.

Analysing CSOs development across the Caucasus region, Aliyev (2015) offers no typology but a chronological evolution of CSOs following the end of the Soviet Union. He first noticed, the sharp rise of CSOs due to the liberal legislature or the absence of law and the impetus from donors. Second, the "Rose Revolution" (2003) in Georgia contributed further to the empowerment of CSOs. However, no mushrooming of "civic development" nor "Western-supported democratisation" happened in the aftermath of the 2003 revolution. Third, in 2011, the Arab Spring gave a brief impetus to the protest movements in the Caucasus, resulting in further restrictions and limitations imposed on the civil sector. According to Aliyev (2015, p.90), the period 1999 to 2011 is characterised by a "decline of the independent formal civil society in the Caucasus" as authoritarianism raised across the region.

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[7] Named as such by the author (Atlani-Duault, 2007, p.69) but today would be refered as LGBTQI

Thus, CSOs across the post-Soviet space are rooted in a long-term history. The end of the USSR was a major change and opened new perspectives for a diverse civil society to raise and consolidate its action, particularly in the field of social services provision as the newly independent 15 states did not immediately provide what was before widely covered by the central Soviet committee and its local sub-divisions. This vacuum, the extent of which varied greatly between the 15 independent Republics, was favourable to the influx of international donors which fostered the rise of CSOs set up by the inhabitants of these Republics. These CSOs are characterised by a great degree of diversity in the size, the type of service(s) they provide, their duration and frequency of service provision, the resources mobilised, including financial resources and the implementation over a given territory (e.g., some CSOs have a headquarter and several antennas whereas others have no premises and gather in private apartments, school basements etc.). CSOs are in theory independent from state-led structures and remain not-for-profit. However, the civil society in the post-Soviet space is characterised by a high degree of heterogeneity including types of CSOs that conferred to the GONGO, and business-like organisations being non-profit only on paper.

Moreover, we argue that a focus on CSOs is interesting, as we assume they are essential actors in the provision of welfare services in Transnistria and Abkhazia. Thus, this working paper aims to investigate the provision of social welfare services by CSOs in these two territories labelled as *de facto* states. Although both located in the post-Soviet space, Abkhazia and Transnistria feature different policies and different geopolitical relations, which makes the selection of these cases particularly suitable to disclose the glocal interactions, i.e., interactions that take place simultaneously at the local and global levels (Robertson, 1995).

As newly independent states, *de facto* states failed to deliver a comprehensive social protection and, in several cases, CSOs acted as providers or mediators of social welfare, filling gaps that are not (sufficiently) covered by the *de facto* authorities in charge. These functions of provider and mediator are typically fulfilled by CSOs in dysfunctional states and post-conflict societies (Popescu, 2010, Marchetti & Toci, 2011). Kolstø & Blakkisrud (2011, p.192) documented that *de facto* statehood hampers significantly redistributive policies leaving the population with a very limited social security net encompassing pension, social benefits, and healthcare. Transnistrian authorities do provide medicine free of charge and cover the costs of urgent operations but relay heavily on Russia, which is often seen as its patron state, for medical infrastructures (Kolstø & Blakkisrud, 2011). Abkhazia similarly depends on Russian funding which makes up nearly 50% of Abkhazian budget and whose major share (36%) is allocated to socio-economic development (sputnik-abkhazia.ru, 2021) for covering expenditures on health, education, and law enforcement (Gaprindashvili et al, 2019).

The mapping of Transnistrian and Abkhazian CSOs we will present in this working paper does not intend to present a typology of CSOs active in Transnistria and Abkhazia. The above-mentioned typologies emphasise the important role played by donors in CSOs' activities in the provision of social welfare services. This role is strengthened by the geopolitical situation since Abkhazia and Transnistria are at the intersection of several major projects such as the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union and the Eastern Partnership promoted by the EU. This significant role played by donors in the emergence and growth of CSOs is emphasised in both the literature review and the mapping presented below. Donors provide key material resources: not only funding and infrastructures but also know-how *via* trainings, field visits and exchanges of expertise. Since donors significantly shape

the field of CSOs in Abkhazia and Transnistria, we also chose to analyse their policies and better grasp the CSOs' role in social welfare provision.

The Impact of Borders and Bordering Practices on Social Welfare Provision

Based on the gaps identified above, this working paper questions to the extent to which CSOs are present and active to provide welfare services within and across the *de facto* border of Abkhazia and Transnistria. Concretely, we aim to investigate what kind of CSOs are providing social welfare services in Abkhazia and Transnistria, how they position themselves within the field of welfare services provision, what are their aims and priorities, their target groups and which resources do they mobilise? Furthermore, this data will be used to reflect on the extent to which their activities are impacted by the *de facto* state's policies, including the day-to-day governance of *de facto* borders and the consequences of (everyday) bordering practices.

Like CSOs, the concept of border is central to this study. International borders are meant to demarcate the territorial limits of belonging, inclusion, and exclusion: they mark who is 'in' and who is 'out' of a given polity, who belongs to a specific place and who does not (Orsini et al., 2019). *De facto* borders are borders existing on the ground but not recognised in international law, thus with no existence *de jure*. Borders are not only indispensable tools for the construction and legitimation of the nation state and its territorial sovereignty; they also translate in the everyday social life as the possibility or impossibility to cross a variety of intangible borders operating at multiple spatial scales. In fact, the effect international borders produce exceeds largely their (linear) geography to also affect people's daily lives substantially on both sides of frontiers, through a range of bordering practices (Yuval-Davis et al., 2019).

Here, bordering practices grasp 'the everyday construction of borders through ideology, cultural mediation, discourses, political institutions, attitudes and everyday forms of transnationalism' (EUBorderscapes research project, Yuval-Davis et al. 2017). We assume here that the *de facto* borders of Abkhazia and Transnistria also have an impact on CSOs providing social welfare services (e.g., a specific legislation targeting selectively CSOs receiving foreign donations, unforeseen closure of the *de facto* border).

Bordering practices also impact the provision of social welfare services. With our focus on the provision of welfare services across and within the contested borders, we question state-centric approaches which reproduce what is called "methodological nationalism" – as many studies take a given nation state as the unit of analysis (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2003). We therefore approach the role of CSOs from a transnational social work perspective. Although social work research centrally focuses on the materialisation of negotiation processes between individual and societal needs – with processes of in/exclusion from social welfare at its core – Western/nation state-centric approaches have been blamed for being analytically limited. Studying the provision of social welfare services within not fully recognised borders necessarily entails going beyond the nation-states, to thus escape perspectives which see state borders and institutions as pivotal for organizing and funding welfare provision – as it is the case in most (Western) countries (Schrooten, 2020, p.5).

In what follows, we provide a brief overview on the structuration of Abkhazia and Transnistria up until today and discuss the current knowledge on the civil society field in these two territories.

Abkhazia And Transnistria: Historical Background

Abkhazian stands to be ethnically distinct from the Georgian (Kvarchelia, 1998) with whom they have an interrelated history comprising alliances and conflicts. Over time, (parts of) the territory, which is today's Abkhazia, was included into three major empires that established their influence over the region: the Byzantines, the Ottoman, and the Russian. The belonging to this multi-ethnic ensemble has deep consequences on Abkhazia and has triggered important population movements. In 1864, the Tsarist annexation of the Caucasus following the Caucasian War (1817-1864), pushed thousands of Abkhazians to seek refuge in the neighbouring Ottoman Empire (Clogg in Hewitt, 1999). However, during extended periods of time (part of) Abkhazia was independent. For example, from the years 780 to 978, the Abkhazian Kingdom at its apogee stretched over what is today western Georgia, known as Samegrelo and populated by Mingrelian, a Georgian regional ethnic subdivision. From 1918 to 1921, Abkhazia was an autonomous entity within the Democratic Republic of Georgia and then became a socialist Soviet Republic associated with the Georgian Soviet socialist Republic. In 1931, this status was ended by Stalin who made Abkhazia "a mere autonomous republic" triggering strong protests in Abkhazia as the change of status came along the suppression of Abkhaz schools and language in the public space (Kvarchelia, 1999, p.19). During the Soviet Union, Abkhazia remained an Autonomous Republic within the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic (Clogg, 2008). After Georgia became a sovereign country, a conflict erupted over Abkhazia in 1992-1993. Backed up by Russia and North Caucasus fighters, Abkhazia won the war and parted from the rest of Georgia without gaining international recognition (Gaprindashvili et al., 2019). Nonetheless, Abkhazian author Liana Kvarchelia (1999, p.23) emphasised that: "the bulk of the Abkhazian forces consisted of Abkhazians, local non-Georgians, and even Georgians – the rest being volunteers from the North-Caucasian republics and Cossacks". On the 4th of April 1994, a Declaration on measures for a political settlement of the Georgian/Abkhaz conflict was signed by the Georgian and the Abkhaz in presence of the UN, Russia and the OSCE (at that time CSCE). Since then, under the aegis of the UN and its agencies (mainly UNHCR), various phases of negotiations for political settlement took place but did not result in conflict resolution (MacFarlane, 2000). The political resolution of the conflict is currently in a stalemate and since 2006, Georgians and Abkhaz sides have not met for peace talks. However, Abkhaz and Georgians meet occasionally within the framework of Geneva International Discussion along with Russia, the EU, the UN and the OSCE representatives (De Waal, 2020). In 2008, After a new five-day war erupted in South Ossetia opposing Russian and Georgian forces, Russia recognised the independence of Abkhazia, followed since then by six UN members. The population of Abkhazia remains diverse till today, in 2011, the Abkhaz Office of Government Statistics released a census counting 240,705 inhabitants whose half is Abkhazian, 18% Georgian, 17% Armenian and 9% Russian. Additionally, 1,33% declared their nationality to be Mingrelian[8]. Most of the Abkhaz

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[8] https://abkhazworld.com/aw/current-affairs/534-the-population-of-abkhazia-stands-at-240705 (source Apsny Press)

population has adopted Russian citizenship, their motivations ranging from receiving internationally valid travel documents, working permits and pensions, and because the Russian influence is part of the everyday life (Ganohariti, 2019).

Contrary to Abkhazia, Transnistria was not funded on an ethnical basis but is rather a political construct. When the Moldovan Republic of Bessarabia was proclaimed independent in 1917, Transnistria was not part of it (Roper, 2001). It became an autonomous political entity in 1924 and was incorporated into the Soviet Socialist Republic of Moldova in 1944, being therefore "a late addition" (Dembinska, 2009, p.617). The competing political and economic interests of Moldova and Transnistrian elites escalated into Transnistria parting on September 2, 1990 (Roper, 2001). Armed clashes started in November 1990 and heightened into an armed conflict in March 1992. In July 1992, the Russian Federation and Moldova signed a resolution terminating the hostilities. This resolution enables the presence of Russian armed forces in Transnistria as a peacekeeping force. However, this presence operated against the internationally recognised principles of peacekeeping as neutral and impartial since there was direct military participation within the conflict (Rodkiewicz, 2011). Yet, this military presence enabled Transnistria to maintain itself as a *de facto* state. In 2003, the Kozak Memorandum[9] named after its promotor - the Russian politician Dimitri Kozak who was then the deputy chief of the presidential administration - under EU and US sanctions since 2014 due his involvement in the Crimean crisis - was a major step in the conflict settlement process. This Memorandum foresaw a united state - the Federal Republic of Moldova (article 2), with a unified defence for the transitional period, customs, and monetary currency spaces (article 3.1). However, this settlement was rejected by the then president of Moldova Vladimir Voronin, mainly due to the veto power that would have been granted to Transnistria according to the institutional settings (articles 9 and 10). The current negotiation framework is named "5+2" as it encompasses, the OSCE, Russia and Ukraine (as "international mediators"), the EU, the US (as "international observers") plus Moldova and Transnistria (as "the conflict sides"). A framework whose scope is to seek for a "comprehensive settlement based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Republic of Moldova within its internationally recognised borders with a special status for Transnistria within Moldova" (OSCE press release, 2017). In Transnistria, according to the 2015 census, 475.665 inhabitants are permanently living there, a 14% less (minus 79682 people) compared to the last census in 2004[10]. The Transnistrian population is multi-ethnic, but most of the population declares its nationality to be Russian (33,79%), Moldovan (33,16%) and Ukrainian (26,66%). The share of the Russian and Moldovan population is slightly rising (+2,45% and +0,20% respectively) whereas the share of the Ukrainian population is decreasing (-3,08%)[11].

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[9] Russian Draft Memorandum on the Basic Principles of the State Structure of a United State in Moldova
[10] Transnistria's "government website http://gov-pmr.org/item/6831 **Краткие предварительные итоги переписи населения Приднестровья** 2015 **года** – Brief preliminary results of the 2015 Transnistrian population census in the year 2015.
[11] http://pridnestrovie-daily.net/archives/16390

Civil Society Organisations in Abkhazia and Transnistria

Against this brief historical background, the first traces of CSOs in Abkhazia date back to the mid-1980s, during the perestroika era. Two organisations, the Assistance Foundation for the Promotion of Scientific Research and the Youth Creative Union were set up to protect traditional crafts, historical monuments, and the environment (Centre for Humanitarian Programmes – (CHP), 2018). In 1988, the charitable organisation Children's Fund of Abkhazia was established and is still operating. The years 1990-2000 marked the most active period for CSOs in Abkhazia (CHP, 2018, p.82). Whereas, in the post-war period, Abkhazia lacked international humanitarian funding (MacFarlane, 2000), and in such circumstances, civil society organisations emerged "as a natural response to humanitarian needs" (Hoch, et al., 2017, p.332). CSOs were involved mainly in psycho-social rehabilitation of war victims. Currently, due to Abkhazia's unrecognised status, CSOs channel humanitarian support provided by international actors in Abkhazia as these international actors cannot work directly with the *de facto* authorities.

Popescu (2010, p.11-13) distinguished four stages of civil society development in Abkhazia, starting from the post-war period when, as mentioned above, civil society actors were mainly engaged in the physical and psychological rehabilitation of those affected by war. This first movement was followed by a second stage from 1997-1998, when civil society groups started to participate in political dialogue with the Georgian side, to promote their perspectives on the war and conflict resolution. Such meetings were mediated by various international actors. Lately, in the third and fourth stages of CSOs' development, their focus shifted gradually. Two major events made local Abkhaz organisations focus more on internal politics. First, the political crisis following the 2004 elections, when the Abkhaz Central Electoral Commission (CEC) issued contradictory results after lengthy deliberations, giving the win to the opposition candidate, Sergey Bagapsh over the ruling candidate backed by Moscow, Raul Khajimba. The latter refused to acknowledge his defeat and supporters of both candidates demonstrated in a tense domestic context (International Crisis Group, 2006, p.12). The crisis was solved via a compromise, as new elections were organised with Bagapsh as President and Khajimba as vice president running on a joint ticket.

The second major shift shaping Abkhaz civil society is the recognition of Abkhazia independence in 2008 by Russia, following the 5 days August war opposing Russian and Georgian military forces in South Ossetia. An overview from 2008 shows that from then onwards, CSOs' scope of operations concentrates primarily on civil education and social and economic support of vulnerable groups (CHP, 2008) but little is said about the type of social services they provide in Abkhazia where resources remain scarce and underdeveloped institutions are lacking relevant equipment and adequate human capacities to provide adequately social welfare services (Hammarberg & Grono, 2017). Besides, those who do not hold Abkhaz citizenship - mainly Georgian returned IDPs in Gal/i area - are deprived of certain rights and benefits which triggers a high sense of vulnerability as documented in several reports (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Hammarberg & Grono, 2017; Council of Europe October 2018 - March 2019). Around 206,000 Georgian internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been accounted by the UNCHR (2009). While being citizens of Georgia, Georgians living in Abkhazia are not eligible for Abkhaz "passport" - the document which is a "gateway to a range of rights" (Human Rights Watch, 2011, p.31). An alternative is to obtain a "foreign permanent residence permit" which in comparison to the

Abkhaz "passport" ensures access to a limited number of rights and forces ethnic Georgians to declare themselves as foreigners in what they considered as "their ancestral land" (Council of Europe, October 2018 - March 2019, p.9). Access to education in their native language is also a problem for ethnic Georgians as, since 2015, in all the schools of the Gal/i district, Russian is the teaching language. This has a significant impact on the quality of education as not all pupils and teachers know the Russian language (Democracy & Freedom Watch, 2016). However, little is known about the role CSOs plays nowadays in addressing these social challenges and other social issues in Abkhazia.

According to the analysis of Popescu (2010, p.1), if Abkhazia is not a "beacon of democracy, it does enjoy a higher degree of pluralism than Transnistria" where he observed "no active civil society". This situation has nonetheless evolved over time. In 2013, a report on Transnistria encouraged local authorities to initiate a baseline study "to identify the key problems as a first step to producing a comprehensive action plan for human rights implementation. The process should be transparent and benefit from a dialogue with civil society groups" (Hammarberg 2013, p.10). CSOs reported to be under the scrutiny of surveillance services (KGB) but, they also highlighted how "this had become less intrusive and visible in recent times" (Hammarberg 2013, p.14). In 2018, a follow-up report was conducted, and it was noticed that authorities are more open to collaborate with CSOs in areas such as HIV prevention, services for survivors of domestic violence and accessibility for persons with disabilities. In these areas, the reports noted "the most visible improvements with regards to Human Rights" (Hammarberg, 2018, p.33). However, some civil society activists complained about feeling intimidated when invited for discussions at the Transnistrian security office (Hammarberg, 2018).

Finally, some CSO workers also reported difficulties regarding grants provided by international development partners (e.g., regulatory limitations such as the clearance procedure at the Transnistrian grants coordination council cited in Hammarberg, 2018). Based on this report, three follow-up recommendations were formulated: first, to review ambiguous legislative provisions regarding political activities of NGOs in order to not intimidate civil society members and human rights activists more precisely; second, to stop security services' routine "discussions" – i.e. intimidations - with active NGOs; and, third, to improve the administrative arrangements concerned with support funding for CSOs, to allow an easier operationalisation of support funds (grants) provided by international development partners.

In 2019, the Sustainability Index report (p.140) depicted Transnistria as an "hostile environment" for CSOs. The 2018 law on non-governmental organizations - NGO law[12] places the work of CSOs under significant control and prohibit them from receiving foreign funding if engaging in ill-defined political activities – e.g., protests, interpretation of laws, and criticism of the government's actions. This lack of clarity and transparency is also reported in the 2018 follow-up report from Hammarberg (p.33). The Amendments on the NGO law adopted in November 2018 require CSOs to report to tax services in Tiraspol the volume of funding they receive, as well as information about the programs and actions that they plan to implement in the region. Violations of these legal provisions can lead to sanctions and, in some cases, to the forced dissolution of the incriminated organisation.

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[12] **Закон о некоммерческих организациях (НКО)**, accessible in Russian http://president.gospmr.org/pravovye-akty/zakoni/zakon-pridnestrovskoy-moldavskoy-respubliki-o-nekommercheskih-organizatsiyah-.html

CSOs in Transnistria are reported to be subject to other forms of pressure such as travel bans on human rights defenders, intimidation by local Security Service representatives, and the initiation of criminal cases. CSOs in the region are also targeted by negative public discourses which damage their public image – and, thus, their ability to collect funding and operate on the ground. For example, in 2019, the government official media channels broadcast and published several articles and reports denigrating CSOs (Sustainability Index report, 2019, p.140). These analyses provide useful insights to the legal and policy environment in which CSOs operate in Transnistria. However, little is known about the specific constraints faced by CSOs providing welfare services and the role international donors play in this provision.

Methodology

Through desk research, we first searched for donors as they proved to be critical in supporting CSOs, particularly those providing social welfare services. Given these donors' wider interest in the region, detecting CSOs through their donors provided us with information on their priorities, both, in terms of their actual activities and the targeted beneficiaries. Moreover, in such a way we could also have a sense of the amount of financial and non-financial resources mobilised. Second, we mapped CSOs active across the *de facto* borders and within Abkhazia and Transnistria in the provision of social welfare services.

The desk research was conducted initially by searching for documents which mentioned CSOs. This was done using the key words "non-profit organisations" + "Abkhazia" +"Transnistria"[13]; "civil society organisations" + "Abkhazia" + "Transnistria"[14]; "non-governmental organisations" + "Abkhazia" + "Transnistria"[15]; "charity fund" + "charity" + "Transnistria"[16]; "civil gathering" + "Abkhazia" + "Transnistria"[17]. These terms were searched using "Google" for the research in English, and "Yandex" for research in Russian.

Next, we consulted the websites of the main donors and international actors: the EU, OSCE, UN Funds and Programmes: UNDP, UNICEF, UNICEF, World Food programme, UN Specialized Agencies: FAO, WHO and other entities and bodies: UNAID, UN Women, UNHCR and the IOM. We searched for the nature and scope of their activities in Moldova and Georgia and focused on the specific programmes and projects implemented in Abkhazia and Transnistria. We analysed their activity and country reports and any other relevant materials founded – and which included policy documents, studies, and notes on social issues. Third, we went through the websites of parent states authorities: Moldovan government, Ministry of internal affairs; Georgian government; Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality. There we searched for relevant documentation such as policy documents and programmes dedicated to Transnistria and Abkhazia. Fourth, *de facto* state authorities and more precisely the "Ministry of Health",

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[13] "**некоммерческие организации**" + "**Абхазия**" + "**Приднестровье**"

[14] "**гражданское общество**" + "**Абхазия**" + "**Приднестровье**" ; "სამოქალაქო საზოგადოება" + „აფხაზეთი"

[15] "**неправительственные организации**" + "**Абхазия**" + "**Приднестровье**" ; "არასამთავრობო ორგანიზაცია" + "აფხაზეთი"

[16] "**благотворительные организации**" + "**Абхазия**" + "**Приднестровье**" ; "საქველმოქმედო ორგანიზაცია"+ "აფხაზეთი"

[17] "**общественные объединения**" + "**Абхазия**" + "**Приднестровье**"

"Ministry of Foreign Affairs", "Ministry of Justice". We also searched for relevant documents on their websites. These data sets gave a first overview of the field of CSOs active in social welfare provision within and across *de facto* borders of Abkhazia and Transnistria.

CSOs' websites encompassing descriptions of past and on-going projects, self-description of the history of the organisation, mission, and target groups. When available, social media channels were also checked to gain further understanding of CSOs' activities and the targeted groups. However, several organisations have no online resources available with no profile or accounts on social media and little is said about their activities. Thus, information about some CSOs was searched also through news articles, briefings on initiatives or carried out activities and projects, also documented in donors and international organisations' reports.

Based on the analysis of the documents found through these searches, we were able to collect information on the type of support each CSO provide, and the different groups they target. In the following result section, we first present the donors and international organisations active in both Abkhazia and Transnistria in the provision of social welfare services. Second, we look at what social welfare services CSOs provide and which categories of beneficiaries they target. Third, we show the different locations of CSOs in the two *de facto* states considered. Last, we detail the different legal statuses of CSOs providing social welfare services and we also detail legal aspects impacting CSOs work. We conclude this working paper with a discussion presenting the main findings with contextual elements.

Classifying Social Welfare Services: Constructing Categories for the Analysis

For methodological purposes, we constructed six categories according to the type of support provided: "Psychological support", "Legal support", "Assisted /support to employment", "Healthcare", "Economic and social support" and "General support (including advocacy)". We also categorised beneficiaries of social welfare services provided by CSOs according to seven categories: "Children, families and young people", "Women", "People living with HIV", "Elderly people", "Minorities" and "people with disabilities" and "unspecified beneficiaries". This last category encompasses "people in poor economic and social conditions"; "Unprotected groups within the population"; "People with limited capacities"; "Socially disadvantaged populations"; "Poor citizens", "Socially vulnerable population" and "Citizens in need of psychological support."

These divisions of beneficiaries were constructed based on the self-description CSO provided, donors' and international organisations' strategic documents and reports. We are conscious of their limits as some of these categories are rather broad. For example, the category "social and economic support" for Transnistria encompasses CSOs describing their activities as "counselling", "information", "organisation", and "consulting services". The "provision of social support services" and the "support to victims of domestic violence" and "human trafficking" is also included. This category also comprises CSOs providing (professional) "training", "master classes", "seminars", "educational services" targeting "people with a handicap", "living in rural area", "disadvantaged" "girls" and "women".

The category "General support & advocacy" includes "information provision and holding of informative sessions", "counselling to refer subscribers to other social services,

organisations, institutions where their needs can be met more fully and expertly"; "support for community leaders, voluntary associations, NGOs and representatives of socially-oriented organisations".

In Abkhazia "social and economic support" includes CSOs who describe their activities as "consulting services", "awareness raising", "non-formal education including workshops and trainings", "support of cultural and educational activities". CSOs working towards "social inclusion" of beneficiaries and organizing "charitable and fundraising activities" mainly for "seriously ill children" are also part of "social and economic support".

The category "General support & advocacy" include CSOs describing their actions in a broader term without necessarily specifying their activities, for example: "youth policy", "youth development", "development of youth initiatives". The category also encompasses organizations positioning themselves as contributors to "democratic development" and "good governance". Advocacy is conducted in favour of promoting of "gender equality" and "increasing women's role in society."

In a second table, we mapped the locations where CSOs are active. This enabled us to see the extent to which the territory is covered by CSOs providing social welfare services.

A third table shows how CSOs position themselves according to the legal denomination they chose. We intend to see if this legal status has consequences on their activities in providing social welfare services.

However, this mapping has two main limits: firstly, it does not enable to know to the extent to which the CSOs are (still) active. Some CSOs may be active only for one project whereas others are constantly busy, providing services daily. Secondly, it does not allow to appreciate the size of the organisations and the scope of their activities on the ground. Only scarce information on donors is provided by CSOs, which is understandable in a context where foreign donations are highly controlled and conditioned (law on Foreign Agent, 2018 active in Transnistria).

It should also be noted that, the translation of "Общественная организация" into English is debated and research in the Russian search engine Yandex shows that it is never translated into "CSO". Possible translations include: "nongovernmental organization", "voluntary organization" and "public organisation".

Results

An Active Role of International Donors in The Provision of Social Welfare Services by CSOs

In **Abkhazia,** the EU is the largest donor and finances various international organizations and UN agencies. Between 2008 and 2016, the EU spent about $40 million on Abkhazia, supporting local CSOs and dialogue projects, improving healthcare and education, repairing water facilities, and rebuilding houses in the Gal/i district (De Waal, 2018, p 26.). European institutions have been actively engaged in Abkhazia since 2009, after the initiation of the Non-Recognition and Engagement Policy (NREP) which promotes support of Georgia's territorial integrity and the non-recognition of Abkhazia as an independent

state. De Waal (2018) emphasises that in the last years the EU aid to the region was insignificant in comparison to what Russia spent in Abkhazia.

UNDP is the largest implementer of EU funded projects and is one the most active UN agencies on-ground. From 2016 onwards, EU's funding for UNDP activities amount to $17,5 M (UNDP Georgia website[18]). For the period 2016-2021, UNDP carried out seven projects amounting to $28,8M (Including joint projects with other UN agencies and programmes such as FAO and UNICEF amounting of $3.1M)). UNDP's activities in Abkhazia span from improving vocational education training, supporting civil society organisations, strengthening community resilience, improving rural development, supporting grassroot initiatives and projects of civil society around conflict prevention and peace building. The largest project carried out during the last years is: COBERM- Confidence Building Early Response Mechanism "a flagship EU-UNDP programme, which provides a rapid response mechanism supporting confidence building opportunities to prevent and transform conflicts in Georgia" (UNDP project id 00094503 – third phase of COBERM 2016-2019[19]).

The American agency for cooperation (USAID) is on top of the EU, another major contributor with $8.1M funding is allocated to UNDP[20].

On top of UNDP, four other UN affiliated bodies: UNHCR, UN Women, UNICEF, and FAO - are present in Abkhazia together with the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and four international non-governmental organisations (INGOs): Halo Trust, Danish Refugee Council (DRC), World Vision and Action Against Hunger. Two of these organisations, the Halo Trust and ICRC, address specific fields. The former's mandate envisages clearing landmines while ICRC, present in Abkhazia since 1992, is a neutral intermediary working within the framework of the Coordination Mechanism set up in 2010 to clarify the fate of missing persons during the 1992-1993 war. Other international non-governmental organisations work in the field of health, educational and social support to women, underserved and vulnerable children in Abkhazia, strengthening rural communities and improving vocational education by increasing capacities of farmers and supporting youths, construction, and rehabilitation of teaching institutions, IDPs protection[21]. It can be emphasised that all organisations' activities are by nature humanitarian as the Georgian law on Occupied Territories, adopted after the 2008 war, allows only humanitarian activities to be carried in Abkhazia, prohibiting any economic and financial interventions.

The EU is also the largest donor also in **Transnistria** where its engagement has increased over the past years, with various development initiatives implemented in the region (Varghese, 2011). UNDP is also the EU's main implementing partners. The agency is present in Transnistria since 2007 and supports various initiatives ranging from economic and trade cooperation to infrastructural projects, education, healthcare, social issues, and humanitarian aid[22]. EU - UNDP cooperation in Transnistria takes place under the Confidence Building Measure (CBM) Programme introduced in 2009 with the objective to increase mutual trust between Chisinau and Tiraspol. So far, four phases have been

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[18] https://www.ge.undp.org/content/georgia/en/home/about-us/funding-and-delivery.html, accessed 12/05/2021

[19] https://open.undp.org/projects/00087546, accessed 12/05/2021

[20] https://open.undp.org/projects/00096567, accessed 12/05/2021

[21] Information from the organisations' website and strategic documents

[22] UNDP website md.undp.org and strategic documents: Republic of Moldova–United Nations Partnership Framework for Sustainable Development 2018–2022

implemented and a fifth phase is in progress - until 2022. From 2009 to 2022, the EU financial contribution to the project amount to € 54.3M (Project Document EU CBMs Programme 2019-2022, p 12-13), € 33.7M of which were allocated to UNDP (md.undp.org). CBM is the largest initiative implemented in the region over the past years with a "multi-dimensional approach on supporting business links and entrepreneurship, social infrastructures, civil society development, healthcare and environmental protection" (Project Document EU CBMs Programme 2019-2022, p.12).

Other EU partners in Transnistria within the CBM programme are the World Health Organisation (WHO) with capacity building activities in the health sector; the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) in the area of migration and development; the German Cooperation Agency (GIZ) and the Czech Development Agency in particular in the modernisation of the health sector (Action Document for EU Support to CBMs V - 2019-2022, 2018).

Another long-term project in Transnistria is implemented within the frameworks of the UN-Moldova partnership and is called "Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova". It is funded by Sweden and implemented in the region since 2014 by the following UN programmes and agencies: UNAIDS, UNODC, WHO, UNDP, OHCHR, UNDP, IOM, and UNICEF. Two phases have been already carried out and the third one is in progress. The first two phases were carried out within the "UN-Moldova Partnership Framework 2013-2017 (UNPF)" and envisaged tackling issues related to HIV, AIDS, and tuberculosis by promoting prevention, treatment, and care services for the population at risk; people with disabilities are also targeted; as well as gender/domestic violence. The third phase of the project is currently being implemented in line with the principles outlined in Moldova-UN Partnership Framework 2018-2022 for sustainable development (UNDAF), aiming at increasing capacities of vulnerable rights holders as well as duty-bearers. The project targets children, Roma and other ethnic and linguistic minorities, people affected by HIV and tuberculosis, drug addicts' prisoners and victims of domestic violence (Third phase project document, 2019, p 17-39).

Other donors supporting civil society' development in Transnistria include notably the American Embassy and USAID, the Soros Moldova Foundation, the Swiss Development Cooperation, the Czech Embassy and the Czech development organisation: People in Need, the Norwegian Embassy to Romania and the private foundation National Endowment for Democracy (CBM 2007-2011 project document, p.5).

The Russian Federation also supports welfare services provision within Transnistria *via* the construction, renovation, and purchase of equipment for healthcare and education infrastructures. Additionally, Transnistria benefits from Gazprom's - the Russian gas company- supply without paying for it. Legally speaking, the contract is between Gazprom and the Moldovan gas company - Moldovagaz. This alleviates the budget of the Transnistrian authorities although the population living in Transnistria is still paying for gas. According to Kosienkowski and Schreiber (2014, p.12) Russia's spending in Transnistria on food supplies and pension supplements are branded "as a gift from Mother Russia" and prove to be efficient in the "battle for hearts and minds in which the EU is a reluctant player". Russia also provides financial support to cover the Transnistrian budget losses (Berg & Vits, 2020, p.9) whereas the EU is mostly involved in trade matters, especially since 2014 within the framework of the Association Agreement completed by a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (AA/DCFTA). These two regulatory frameworks have however

created additional costs for compliance which generates benefits for economical elites (Berg & Vits, 2020, p.12).

This Russian state's support is completed by autonomous non-profit organisations such as the "Eurasian Initiative" operating in Transnistria since 2012 with the support of Russian funds (Miarka, 2019, p.6).

Abkhazia: Civil Society Organisations as Actors of Social Service Provision

Abkhazia's regulatory environment has an impact on the presence and functioning of CSOs. The legislative framework within which civil society organisations currently operate consists of "regulatory and legal documents" such as the "constitution" or the "law on non-profit organizations" which regulates rights, responsibilities and defines different statuses of CSOs. Overall, today there is no restrictive "legislation" in Abkhazia directed towards CSOs (Hammarberg & Grono, 2017, p.31). However, fears surrounding the adoption of a new piece of legislation approximating the Russian "law on foreign agents[23]" - is present among CSO representatives as they assume it will "significantly restrict their freedom, networking with foreign partners while tightening control over their projects and financial activities" (CHP, 2018, p.108). To this date, it remains unknown if this law will be passed in Abkhazia and to what extent it will copy an eponym law in force in Russia.

This legal environment is the framework in which the 46 organisations, mapped *via* our desk research, provide social welfare services. Twenty-six CSOs were identified through the centre "Prospect" established in 2017 within the joint EU-UNDP Civil Society Support Programme to strengthen CSOs' capacities in *de facto* states. Nine additional organisations were found through the list of the Abkhaz "ministry of justice" which was published in 2018, to identify those CSOs having a charity organisations status. Four organisations were mentioned in an analytical report on CSOs produced in 2018 by the Center for Humanitarian Programmes (CHP) - an active NGO in Abkhazia. The remaining seven CSOs were found through search on the different internet engines selected for this study.

The oldest organisation among those found in the mapping was established in 1988, while the youngest one dates to 2017. For seventeen organisations there was no information on when they started operating. The majority of CSOs (18) was founded between 1994 and 2006, while during the past 10 years only five organisations have been established. It remains to be seen what the trend for those seventeen organisations whose year of establishment is unknown. For the remaining organisations, the relatively low number of young ones could be explained by a high competition for resources and a lack of funding from donors who tend to favour already experienced organisations. Another explanation could be that younger actors from the civil society sector might be informally active at the grassroot level with initiatives or voluntary groups with no formal registration making it difficult to map them.

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[23] Law N°121 "On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent"

Table 1. below summarises the key areas of work and target groups of CSOs. Some organisations combined different activities ranging from awareness campaigns and education-cultural events for youth, to social assistance events, charity, fundraising activities supporting mainly the medical treatment of seriously ill children.

Table 1. List of CSOs Area of Activities and Their Target Groups Operating in Abkhazia

Target group / Types of support	Children, families and Young people	Women	People living with HIV/TB	Elderly people	Ethnic minorities	People with disabilities	Unspecified beneficiaries	Total
Psychological Support	1	1	0	0	0	2	0	4
Legal support	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	5
Assisted Employment	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Healthcare	5	0	0	0	1	3	4	13
Economic and social support	18	5	1	0	2	5	9	40
General support & Advocacy	1	0	0	1	à	1	9	12
Total	26	7	1	1	3	11	25	

The result shows that the majority of CSOs work with unspecified beneficiaries, then families and young people are the most common beneficiaries. The third most targeted group are people with disabilities followed by women. This focus could be explained by donors' priorities as we described them above, showing how in recent years support of projects related to educational and social support to women, youth and vulnerable children have increased in Abkhazia. Three organisations were found to work with ethnic minorities. Two of them target Georgian ethnic minorities residing in Gal/i while the remaining one aims to build relations between ethnic minorities in general, with no further specification. Although Abkhazia has an ageing population with nearly 20% of residents over 60 years of age (International Crisis Group, 2020), projects targeting the elderly are less frequent. The underrepresentation of the elderly group could be explained by the societal structure of Abkhazia where the main provider of care is first and foremost the family. However, this also implies that the situation of elderly people living alone and/or in social isolation which is highlighted by the Hammarberg - Gorno reports (2017, p.49-50) as a social issue remains mostly unaddressed. Another group that receives little attention is, people with tuberculosis: we found only one organisation supporting them, probably because from 2011 the Abkhazian Health Ministry has been implementing a national anti-tuberculosis programme and, since 2019, eight ambulatory centres are operating in Abkhazia (Esiava, 2019).

Regarding types of support, table one reveals that CSOs working in Abkhazia are mostly active in economic and social support, which includes educational activities, youth initiatives, awareness-raising campaigns, and charity events. Healthcare support is another popular activity that envisages rehabilitation, funding of treatment, medical assistance of beneficiaries. One organisation also works for the development of rehabilitation specialists which pointing out the necessity of trainings for medical staff. Another organisation aims at identifying ill patients and ensuring their safe transportation to Georgian healthcare facilities by involving CSOs and authorities. Patients who are treated on Tbilisi administered territories face bureaucratic difficulties when crossing the *de facto* border at the Inguri Bridge. These difficulties may delay their transportation and, thus, their access to proper medical care (Khubutia, 2021). Currently, the Inguri bridge is the only land connection between Abkhazia (Gal/i district) to the territories administrated by Tbilisi and, from time to time, the possibility to cross is restricted due to various reasons such as elections, political destabilisation in the bordering district of Zugdidi, control on the circulation of viruses – e.g. the swine flu and Covid-19, ("Sukhumi, Tskhinvali Authorities", 2020). This has a great humanitarian impact on those who claim their elderly and IDPs' pensions in the Tbilisi administrated territories or use medical services in Georgia. Those who lack documents and attempt to "illegally" cross the border are at a risk of detention (Council of Europe report 2018-2019). In some cases, crossing the *de facto* border proved to be vital that people are putting their lives at huge risk and dying by swimming through the Inguri river[24]. In such circumstances, CSOs take the role of mediators by involving as many actors as possible to ensure the quickest possible solution for those facing difficulties.

The third most popular type of work is general support including advocacy. As for the four CSOs we mapped, they gave relatively little attention to psychological issues despite the frequency of post-war traumas and socio-economic hardships affecting the mental health of the population in Abkhazia. This population also faces restriction on movement, identity

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[24] For example: https://civil.ge/archives/411042 - "Three Drown in Inguri", 2021

documentation gap, and difficulties in accessing quality education and property rights. Yet only five CSOs address legal issues. Several studies and reports documented both the psychological issues and the legal "limbo" these individuals experience (MacFarlane et al, 1996; Humanitarian Aid Decision 2006; Living in a Limbo, 2011; Democracy & Freedom Watch, 2016; Council of Europe, 2018-2019). To help people in Abkhazia coping with legal issues, organisations act as mediators with *de facto* authorities. They hold consultancy services providing informational and legal assistance on housing, pension rights and access to the Abkhaz citizenship. This is for example the focus of the Center for Human Rights Programmes (CHP), one of the oldest and most active organisations.

Looking at Table 2. we see that half of CSOs operate in the *de facto* capital Sukhum/i. The second highest presence of CSOs is in Gal/i, the main city of the eponym district neighbouring the district of Zugdidi located in Georgia proper – which is where most of the Georgian population present in Abkhazia is living.

Table 2. shows that five organisations are based in Gal/i and two are branches/consultancy services of Sukhum/i based organisations. The Gal/i district attracts a special attention among international organisations and donors since it is mostly inhabited by "spontaneously" returned Georgian often with no Abkhaz documents and thus deprived of basic benefits and human rights (Hammarberg & Grono, 2017). Two CSOs operate in Ochamchire/a and targets youth and educational activities. There are also two branches of Sukhumi-based organisations working with women and the public. Gulripsh/i and Tkvarchel/i also have branches of the above-mentioned organisations. Two CSOs are operating on the Tbilisi-controlled territory and implementing various projects and activities with IDPs in zones close to conflict areas. These CSOs are based in Tbilisi but have branches throughout Georgia proper. Only one CSO operates in Gagra and targets women. One organisation is present in Gudauta and most of its activities are targeting youth.

Table 3. shows that the highest number of CSOs are either labelled as "funds" or "charity organisations". According to the Abkhaz "law on charitable activities", charitable organisations must obtain their status in form of a certificate issued by the "Ministry of Justice" which is valid for three years. As of 2018, there were fifteen organizations who had the status of "Charitable organization" with different expiration dates ranging from 2019 to 2021 – and it is not clear if those whose certificate expired renewed it. This does not mean that other organisations who have applied and were not granted certificates cannot carry out their activities. However, they will not receive "state" benefits such as for instance the taxes exemption. In this mapping, all organisations that have in their name the words "charity" or "charitable" are considered charitable organisations. Based on desk research, it remains unknown how many of them hold a certificate. Ten organisations offering social services are "funds". Nine organisations are registered as "общественные организации" which is translated into English as either social or public organisations (see methodology). Five CSOs are "associations" and "unions" – "ассоциации и союзы". According to the "law on Public Associations," associations may be established at the initiative of at least ten adult citizens. Other forms of organisations that are defined in this law as "on non-profit organizations", namely non-profit partnerships, institutions and autonomous non-profit organisations were not found in this desk research.

Table 2. Locations of CSOs' Operations

Location	Sukhum/i	Gal/i	Ochamchire/a	Tkhvarcheli	Gulripsh/i	Tbilisi	Gagra	Gudauta	Unknown
Number of registered CSOs	23	5+2 branches	2+2 branches	1+1 branch	1+1 branch	2	1	1	10

Table 3. CSOs Status

CSO designation in Russian	общественные и религиозные организации (объединения)	некоммерческие партнерства	учреждения	автономные некоммерческие организации	социальные благотворительные и иные фонды	ассоциации и союзы	Status Unspecified
CSO designation in English	social (Public) or religious organizations (combinations),	non-profit partnerships	institutions	autonomous non-profit organizations	social, charitable and any other funds	associations and unions	
Number of entities registered as such	9	0	0	0	25	5	7

Overall, this overview shows that CSOs in Abkhazia have been playing an active role in the provision of social services. Yet, although nowadays their operations are not restricted from a legislative point of view, scarce resources and small funding make them heavily dependent on donors' requirements and priorities.

Moreover, the situation in Abkhazia may change in a few years due to the foreseen adoption of the "Program for the Formation of a Common Socio-Economic Space between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Abkhazia based on harmonisation of legislation of Republic of Abkhazia and Russian Federation" ("Program of common social zone", 2020). According to this program which was signed by the Abkhaz "president" Bzhania and Putin in November 2020. The document has forty-five points to be implemented between 2021 and 2023 (presidentofabkhazia.org, 2020) among which is the approximation of socio-economic legislation (point 37).

The agreement triggered various opinions among the Abkhaz society. There are aspects of the document which are positively perceived such as the prospect of increasing pensions and salaries for state employees (Khashig, 2020 cited in Kvakhadze, 2021). At the same time, there are concerning issues that, as believed, will threaten the 'sovereignty of independent Abkhazia' (Khashig, 2020). The independent Abkhaz journalist Inal Khashig (2020) outlines three main concerns: "first, the removal of the ban on the acquisition of real estate by citizens of states that have recognised Abkhaz statehood; second, Russians will receive the right to acquire Abkhaz citizenship; and third, the denationalization of the Abkhaz energy sector and the arrival of Russian companies on this market." The first two aspects are about Abkhaz society fearing demographic expansion of Russians and granting Georgian IDPs who hold Russian citizenship the right to purchase the real estate (Kavkhadze, 2021). As for the energy sectors, there are fears that the inclusion of Russian companies in the local market will sharply increase the price of electricity (Khashig, 2020). Another main concern for the civil society sector is point thirty-seven of the agreement which stipulates the harmonisation of Abkhazian and Russian legislation on the regulation of foreign non-profit organisations and foreign agents[25] (presidentofabkhazia.org, 2020). It is believed that this provision will put restrictions and control on CSOs' projects and their activities with foreign partners (CHP, 2018).

Transnistria: An Active Role of Civil Society Organisations in The Provision of Welfare Services Despite Legal Constraints

Since 2018, CSOs in Transnistria are subject to an NGO law forbidding local CSOs receiving foreign donations to engage in what is broadly framed as "political activities" under the threat of liquidation. The law fosters a restrictive legal environment with little legal certainty since what is considered as a political activity is not defined. In general, this law makes it more difficult for CSOs to finance their activities (Organisation Apriori, 2018). Already in 2006, a presidential decree prohibited foreign funding of CSOs registered in Transnistria and was later narrowed to CSOs involved in political activities (Dura, 2010). Article 32 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of opinion and association but the whole legal system is

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[25] Officially law On Amendments to Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation regarding the Regulation of the Activities of Non-profit Organisations Performing the Functions of a Foreign Agent – enacted in 2012.

vague, and the many legislative gaps allow for corruption and arbitrary application of the law (Dura, 2010). Overall, the legislative system discourages CSO's registration, does not help external foundations to make donations, and day-to-day bureaucracy remains complex (Venturini 2011, p.12).

Our desk research mapped 61 CSOs active in the provision of social welfare. Six of them are part of the UNDP Joint Action to Strengthen Human Rights in the Transnistrian Region of the Republic of Moldova. In 2018, this programme launched social community-based services in five Transnistrian localities: Dubossar, Grigoriopol, Ribnitsa, Slobozia and Tiraspol. These activities were implemented by four consortiums, encompassing one or two CSOs from both banks of the Dniester River or a CSO registered in both banks.

53 CSOs were identified on the Apriori register published in September 2020 which contains seventy-five active organisations, twenty more that the last registered released in November 2017. The seventy-five organisations are divided in nine areas of activities: 1) Human rights; 2) Information, education, and culture; 3) Public health and promotion of a healthy lifestyle; 4) Ecology and tourism; 5) Charity work, support for socially vulnerable groups; 6) Development of volunteering activities of the population; 7) Social entrepreneurship; 8) Protection of animals' rights; 9) Economic development.

This mapping shows a greater activity of CSOs whose number is significantly above than what is regularly mentioned by other mapping and counting. In 2018, a statistical analysis counted 8,570 CSOs out of 4671 are active in Moldova and only twenty in Transnistria[26]. This figure is confirmed by several authors (Hensel, 2006; Comai, 2006; Venturi, 2009; Belitser, 2005) although their work was conducted more than ten years ago. More recently, the CSOs sustainability index published by USAID counted about 100 CSOs active in Transnistria (2019, p.140). According to the " government consolidated register of legal persons[27]" 621 CSOs designated in Russian as social gathering - "Общественные объединения" are registered in Transnistria.

The increasing number of CSOs[28] could be explained by the major role played by these organisations in the provision of welfare services indispensable to the population living in Transnistria.

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[26]   https://eapcivilsociety.eu/news/project-news/statistical-analysis-on-the-civil-society-sector-in-the-republic-of-moldova-infographics.html - accessed 02/02/2021

[27] **ЕГРЮЛ: Единый государственный реестр юридических лиц** - accessed on 02/02/2021

[28] Based on a previous mapping by Apriori in 2017 counting 55 CSOs in Transnistria, including those not involved in social services provision, an updated version of this listing published in 2020 counted 75 CSOs.

Table 4. List Of CSOs' Area of Activities and Their Target Groups Operating in Transnistria

Target group / Type of support	Children, families, and young people	Women	People living with HIV	Elderly people	Minorities[29]	People living with disabilities	Unspecified beneficiaries	Total
Psychological support	7	3	1	0	1	2	3	15
Legal support	9	5	1	1	1	4	10	27
Assisted /support to employment	7	2	0	0	2	0	7	18
Healthcare	6	1	5	1	1	1	4	18
Economic and social support	18	2	1	1	3	3	4	29
General support & Advocacy	3	1	3	1	1	1	2	11
Total	50	14	11	4	9	11	30	

[29] Roma and Bulgarian

Table 4., shows a classification of CSOs according to the area of activities and the beneficiaries they target. Some CSOs are active in more than one field and may have more than one category of beneficiaries.

The results highlight a clear prioritisation on youth and children, a category regularly highlighted by donors as a priority (UNDP, p.9&21; EU, p.2). Women are the second group targeted as it often happens in post-conflict situations, since they tend to be perceived by donors as agents of (ethnic) reconciliation (Helms, 2003). The predominance of gender-based domestic violence and its wide social acceptance can also explain why women are primarily targeted. No specific figures for Transnistria were found, but across the territory of Moldova, 63.4% of women aged >15 suffered at least one form of physical, psychological, or sexual violence during their lives according to the UNDP project document *ending gender-based violence and achieving the sustained development goals (SDGs) project* (2018-2020). Rates in rural areas are even higher at 69% (the highest among CIS countries). One study cited in this project documented the "prevalence of physical violence in 50% of the interviewed men". Problematic traditional perceptions and stereotypes and persisting gender inequality in families and society are pointed out as root causes of violence; 27.7% men and 17.5% women believe that a woman should tolerate violence to save the family, and 41.1% men and 19.1% women believe that there are situations when a woman's beating is justified. The study mentions a worse situation not only in rural areas, but also within certain ethnic groups.

The two categories less targeted by CSOs active in the provision of social welfare are first ethnic minorities and, second, elderly people. Underinvestment in minorities support could be explained by the targets of donors aiming more at bringing the two banks of the Dniester together in line with the Confidence Building paradigm, rather than supporting access to welfare based on ethnic belonging. For elderly people, the main social support identified is the payment of the greater share of pension by Russia - which spends 43 euros per capita per year on food supplies and pension supplements in Transnistria alone (Kosienkowski & Schreiber, 2014, footnote p.10).

People living with HIV are also receiving specific support as they became beneficiaries of CSOs activities after the collapse of the USSR and the progressive end of systematic contacts tracing and forced hospitalisation practices. The end of these practices was a conditionality imposed by international donors for local structures to receive financial support after the end of the USSR (Atlani-Duault, 2007).

People with disabilities are also a specific category of CSOs beneficiaries advocating in favour of their rights (e.g., accessibility, independent living), providing psychological and social support and organising tailored activities such as sports. Their family members are also included in this support as an essential component of deinstitutionalisation. In some cases, they started themselves a CSO to support their beloved living with disabilities (e.g., association of families with disabled children)

Table 4. shows that CSOs most-common activity is economic and social support, closely followed by legal support which can be explained by the peculiar situation of Transnistria being a *de facto* state (e.g., additional legal and administrative limbo to access healthcare). Psychological support and healthcare ranked third and fourth followed by "assisted employment", which can be explained by a scarcity in the job market.

Table 5. Locations of CSOs Operations

Bank	Left					Right		
Location	Tiraspol	Dubossary/ Dubăsari	Ribnitsa	Carmanova	Parkani	Bender/y Tighina	Tîrnauca Ternovka	Unknown
Number of registered CSOs	33	5	6	1	4	8	2	2

Table 6. CSOs Status

CSO self-designation in Russian	Некоммерческое партнерство (НП)	Общественная организация (ОО)	Неправительственная организация (НПО)	Инициативная группа (ИГ)	(Республиканский) благотворительный фонд (РБФ)	(Республиканске) общественное движение
Suggested translation into English	Non-commercial partnership	Civil society organisation Social/public organisation	Non-governmental organisation	Initiative group	(Republican) Charity fund	(Republican) social movement
Number of entities registered as such in Transnistria	24	9	2	3	6	2

According to Table 5., Tiraspol, the main city gathers more than a half of the organisations active locally (33/61). The cities of Bender located on the Right bank, Ribnitsa, Dubossar and Parkani follow with multiple CSOs comprised between height and four. The city of Parkani is an interesting case since it is known to be a Bulgarian settlement in Transnistria and half the four CSOs mapped there include this ethnic component in the description of the social services they provide (e.g., "improving social support to women and young people, combines the preservation and development of Bulgarian culture with the stimulation of women social activism, the prevention of HIV and SIDA and the improvement of reproductive health").

The CSOs located on the right bank are mostly in the city of Bender. This is interesting since this area is closely interlinked with the rest of the territory controlled by Chisinau - which most likely has an impact on the CSOs activities, including those providing social services. This impact remains to be documented, for example in a study focusing on borderlands.

One CSO - "VOLONteers here we are" - whose location is unknown seems to be active across Transnistria to mobilise and train volunteers. Its self-description mentions an activity "not only in the whole country" but also publicises partnerships with organisations abroad in the framework of the Partnering Across Borders program.

According to Table 6. the highest number of CSOs (twenty-four) is registered under the denomination "non-commercial partnership" which means that the organisation is an emanation of another civil society organisation (*Общественная организация*) and exists as such as a legal entity. Civil society organisations are created by people, nine of them which provide social welfare services in Transnistria are mapped here. Six organisations are registered as "charity fund which means that all the funds available have to be allocated for service provision to beneficiaries and cannot be used to run the fund (e.g., pay for staff). Initiative groups (three entities registered as such in Transnistria) are informal gathering of people of good will without a formal structure but with a common interest. Seven CSOs are registered under different denominations such as Children fund (Детский фонд), Tiraspol association of families with disabled children (Тираспольская Ассоциация семей детей инвалидов) and Union of Transnistrian social youth (Приднестровское социальное молодежное объединение) which could be a reminiscence of the youth communist organisation, Komsomol. CSOs are free to choose their denomination which explain the diversity of names that have to be approved by the registration Chamber which only checks that there are no two identical names.

In sum, the overview shows a relatively active presence of CSOs providing social welfare services within Transnistria and across the *de facto* border, which might be an answer to dire social conditions experienced by the population. CSOs are thus filling gaps in social welfare provisions hampered by the *de facto* statehood (O'Loughlin et al. 2011). Although, they are willing to keep a tight control on CSOs activities, *de facto* authorities would not be in a position to suppress CSOs, even the ones receiving foreign donations from donors not acknowledging the *de facto* authorities of Transnistria. Conditioning international support to the acceptance of a fully-fledged statehood and depriving local CSOs from foreign donations would seriously hamper access to social welfare for the population under the control of the *de facto* authorities. This could not only increase an already high emigration (Fomenco, 2019), but also trigger social discontent further compromising the *de facto* statehood.

Discussion: The Landscape of CSOs, Donors and International Organisations Providing Social Welfare Services in Abkhazia and Transnistria

This mapping shows first a high density of local CSOs providing social welfare services in both Abkhazia and Transnistria, some of them benefiting from the support of several international donors and organisations. In Abkhazia, international non-governmental organisations are also active in the provision of social welfare services. Such a level of activities addresses certainly gaps about welfare protection of the citizens that *de facto* authorities are not filling in.

Our mapping shows a clear prioritisation on youth and children, including children with special needs, living in difficult family situation and orphans. A comprehensive support is provided to young people ranging from extra curriculum activities to addressing special needs such as invalidity. Women are also among the main beneficiaries which can be explained by their weaker inclusion in labour market, the high prevalence of domestic violence that affects mostly women and their important role in post-conflict societies. A third category of beneficiaries targeted by CSOs is people living with HIV and affected by AIDS, especially in the Transnistrian context where CSOs also work on the preventive aspects, implementing voluntary testing and awareness raising campaigns. In Abkhazia, CSOs are also involved in interethnic dialogue and advocating for reconciliation between Abkhaz and Georgians. In both contexts, the elderly are among the less targeted beneficiaries despite acute needs. Our analysis shows that CSOs and donor priorities are aligned, which suggests a strong interdependency and complementarity between these two actors in the provision of social welfare services.

If most of the CSOs are in the main city, Sukhum/i and Tiraspol, several other CSOs are also located across both territories, reaching rural areas where social needs are in some cases even more acute (e.g., higher prevalence of domestic violence).

The *de facto* statehood and their resulting *de facto* borders, impacts the functioning of CSOs providing social services in Abkhazia and Transnistria in different ways. Firstly, specific regulations such as the NGO law constraint their activities. It remains to be assessed as to what extent these laws impact the provision of social services that are not *prima facie*, a political activity but could be classified as such, considering the law is selectively applied in the case of Transnistria. In Abkhazia, the pending approximation with the economic and social legislation in force in Russia, including the "law on foreign agents", is a concern as it could trigger a more active surveillance and repression on CSOs - thus also affecting those providing social welfare services.

Secondly, restrictions on *de facto* border crossing can also hamper the provision of social services by CSOs. This is particularly true for Abkhazia, where the *de facto* border is selectively closed from time to time for an indefinite duration and a "visa" is required to enter for non-Abkhaz "passport" holders and for those not holding a residency permit. The *de facto* Transnistrian border is in comparison easier to cross, being open most of the time (the Covid-19 pandemic being an exception) and not requiring any visa for non-Transnistrian "passport" holders.

Third, Russia, in both cases not only played a role in the creation and endurance of the *de facto* borders as a sponsor state, but also contributes to the provision of social support

mostly by budget transfers, or through the payment of pension complements and, to some extent, the possibility to access healthcare in Russia thanks to ongoing passportisation processes in both Abkhazia and Transnistria. Access to healthcare in Russia is also impacted by the geography: if Abkhazia has a direct connection via its common *de facto* border with Russia, Transnistria is landlocked between Moldova proper and Ukraine. A geography which may encourage the inhabitants to seek additional support in Moldova proper rather that in Russia. Additionally, in 2008, Russia has recognised Abkhazia as an independent state contrary to Transnistria which remains unrecognised by any state till date and voted to join the Russian Federation in 2006. Russia did not take any significant action after this referendum and its formal acknowledgment of the Abkhazian statehood seems to have had little effect over budgetary support, payment of pensions and the leeway of Abkhazia regarding its internal affairs.

Fourth, the EU is an active actor for the provision of social welfare services in both Abkhazia and Transnistria, where it operates as a major donor. This can be explained by the location of both de *facto* states in "the European neighbourhood". It should also be noted that, both Abkhazia and Transnistria parted from parent states that are part of the EU neighbourhood policy (2004) and its Eastern neighbourhood partnership (2009). Moldova and Georgia both signed an Association Agreement with the EU in 2014 and they enjoy a visa-free regime which can also influence the choices of citizenship in the two *de facto* territories.

This is particularly the case of Transnistria where there is a civic citizenship regime defined according to the *jus soli* principle. On the contrary, Abkhazia has opted for an ethnic citizenship which follows the principle of the *jus sanguinis* (Ganohariti, 2019). The chosen citizenship regime has paramount implications for the citizenship holder, as for example, it conditions the access to dual citizenship and social rights and obligations. Transnistria enables its *de facto* citizens to gain multiple citizenships, whereas Abkhazia has limited the access to dual citizenship besides the Russian one, thus creating differences regarding mobility and access to social welfare and medical care (Alessandro, 2007). This can be explained by the ethnic dimension: Abkhazia as a project of "ethnic secessionism" evolved as an "ethnocracy" i.e., "democracy for one ethnic group" with a very "lame" pluralism allowing a certain openness for certain entities including civil society organisations (Popescu, 2006, p.25). However, ethnic Georgians who account for 20% of the Abkhaz population and live mostly around the Gal/i district remain to some extent marginalised – not only can they not vote or hold the highest political charges but also their access to social services in Abkhazia and proper Georgia remains difficult.

Finally, CSOs providing social services in Transnistria and Abkhazia are impacted by the socio-economic structure of both territories. Transnistria is industrialised, urban, and more closely interconnected to the territory under Chisinau control. Whereas Abkhazia's economy is based on some agricultural products (e.g., mandarins, nuts, and lemons) and relies heavily on tourism. There is no industrial production – the connection with the rest of the Georgian territory is hampered by a randomly open checkpoint and mountainous geography.

However, despite multiple structural and conjunctural constraints, the number of CSOs providing social services in Abkhazia and Transnistria keeps rising. This is arguably due to a dynamic environment where a fruitful cooperation between donors, CSOs and INGOs enables to fill gaps in social protection by the *de facto* statehood. It may also indicate greater needs in territories that remain isolated (particularly Abkhazia) and secluded.

To conclude, this mapping enabled to answer the following questions: What are CSOs providing social services doing in Abkhazia and Transnistria? In what context do they operate? The questions that remain to be explored are: How does a CSO providing social welfare services in a *de facto* territory function daily? To what extent are CSOs providing social welfare services affected by the *de facto* bordering practices resulting from the *de facto* borders? Assuming that *de facto* borders significantly impact everyday life for people living on both sides of these demarcations (O'Loughlin et al., 2011), what explains this impact? And lastly, what is the impact of the *de facto* borders on beneficiaries' access to social welfare services?

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