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### ***Circular migration in Georgia***

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Circular migration of population in the most simple way be identified as a "... process of leaving and then returning to one's place of origin" (Newland, 2009, p.6). As experts note, this process is not new, but "... it is newly on the policy agenda of governments" (Newland, 2009, p.6), as it causes remarkable challenges for both donor's and destination's countries. This concerns Georgia as well. Emigration is a new phenomenon for Georgia. It first manifested itself at the beginning of 1990s by the large-scale emigration flows for permanent residence in other countries triggered by war and economic crisis in Georgia. Emigration patterns later transformed into temporary migration flows of working age population that left Georgia to have higher earnings abroad.

Hence, as a typical post-Soviet country Georgia was seriously affected by out-migration after its independence in 1991. The last 2002 population census in Georgia registered a drop of some 20 percent compared to the population registered in the 1989 census (State Department for Statistics of Georgia, 2003).

### **Main directions of circular migration in Georgia**

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the creation of new international borders changed the situation radically and many people who belonged to minorities or suffered from economic hardships felt trapped inside the new independent countries and were eager to get out (Tishkov et al., 2005). After permanent migration, which was particularly complicated in Georgia due to territorial conflicts at the beginning of the 1990s, the new pattern of temporary labour migration emerged in the late 1990s, both to Russia and to the West. The visa free travel zone, with so called "transparent" borders at the territory of the former Soviet Union, as well as cheap transportation costs enabled temporary and circular migration patterns to Russia even for the poorest inhabitants of Georgia.

In the opinion of experts, since the mid-1990s temporary labour migration has become a "nationwide strategy" in Georgia (CRRC, 2007, p.10). Due to limited employment opportunities people go abroad to earn money and support their families in Georgia. According to the results of the last available representative survey on migration<sup>1</sup> the number of migrants from Georgia currently abroad is estimated at 140,000 people; another 138,000 are estimated to be returnees in Georgia. Hence, between 7% and 8% of the current Georgian population has experienced some kind of migration, i.e., either they are absent migrants or they have migrated and returned (CRRC/ISET, 2010, p.9). Given the decreasing possibilities for permanent immigration to most developed countries, these temporary moves abroad, called by some "incomplete migration" (Okolski,1997), are replacing traditional forms of migration. They will most likely be the dominant form of out-migration from Georgia in the near future since many developed countries increasingly need immigration.

The Russian Federation used to be the major country of destination for Georgian migrants. The ease of entry due to the lack of a visa regime (before 2000) as well as pre-existing linkages, historical and economic ties, geographical and cultural proximity and the knowledge of the Russian language made Russia an attractive place to go. Given Georgia's geopolitical orientation and its standoff with Russia, not to mention the introduction of the visa regime in 2000 and the armed conflict and border closure in 2008 things changed. Russia lost some of its luster as the main destination for Georgian migrants. Survey results, conducted in Georgia among households, show that Western European countries, particularly Greece, now have a higher share of Georgian migrants than Russia (CRRC/ISET, 2010, p.1). Other studies also confirm this: according to OECD data, the stock of Georgian labour in Greece has constantly increased during the last ten years and had multiplied almost tenfold by 2009 with 25,631 Georgians in Greece<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup>Survey of up to 1500 households of three categories of households (households with no migrants, households with currently absent migrants and households with returned migrants) conducted by CRRC at the end of 2008.

<sup>2</sup> International Migration Database OECD, available at: <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=MIG>

Meanwhile, Turkey has become important for temporary labour migration since Georgia's independence from the Soviet Union due to easy travel arrangements. And after the abolition of Turkey's visa requirements for Georgian citizens in 2006 and the closure of borders with the Russian Federation in 2008, Turkey became the major destination for Georgians (IOM, 2008, p.12).

A specific feature of Georgian labour migration is that it is largely illegal. Numerous attempts to develop a labour migration law in Georgia have failed for various reasons. Cooperation with different countries aimed at regulating labour migration has also been unsuccessful; for the moment Georgia has not signed bilateral labour migration agreements with foreign countries regulating the labour migration flows of Georgian citizens abroad. Accordingly, Georgian migrants usually rely on unofficial, and often illegal, migration industry. That is why Georgian labour migration is rather expensive. Georgian migrants use different methods to reach a host country and find a job there. Most of them are unable to get official work permits and work mainly in the "black" labour market (IOM, 2000; Badurashvili, 2005; People's Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation, 2010). As a result, there are no legal mechanisms to protect Georgian labour migrants when their rights are violated.

### **Policy framework and the social forces shaping circular migration in Georgia**

In 2007 by the request of the Georgian Government the International Organization for Migration (IOM) conducted a comprehensive assessment of migration management in Georgia, which found that migration management policy in Georgia needed to be strengthened, as "...the current migration realities and trends are at times not adequately covered by the existing legislation of Georgia...and... the legal provisions need to be defined in a clearer manner, with an enhanced orientation towards EU requirements certainly being advisable. These issues call for strong leadership and comprehensive policies, supported by appropriate legislation and by-laws, an effective, trained and equipped migration management administration, as well as efficient practices" (IOM, 2007, p. 5).

Later experts stated that Georgia currently has "...neither a migration policy nor legislation to regulate the inward and outward movement of citizens despite the importance of migration for the country and the national economy" (CIPDD, 2009, p. 3). In the opinion of some experts, "...Georgia displayed patterns of inertia until late 2009 and complied only selectively with the migration-related ENP<sup>3</sup>-rules ... As a result ... the European Commission bluntly expressed its dissatisfaction with the Georgian migration policy in its progress report of 2008 criticizing the lack of a written policy document and the "extremely liberal nature" of the unwritten migration policy" (Ademmer, 2011, p.12).

In 2009, Georgia, the European Commission and 16 EU Member States moved to the implementation phase of the Mobility Partnership (MP), which encourages circular migration. As a result, the Georgian government expressed its intention of stimulating circular migration: "Georgia's main priority is facilitation of legal labour movement including agreement on labour and circular migration opportunities" (Office of the State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration, 2010, p. 39).

However, currently there are still no effective mechanisms in Georgia to support legal labour migration. While bilateral agreements for labour migrants would be beneficial for all parties, the Georgian government has been reluctant to establish them even with the top destination countries of Georgian migrants such as Greece, Turkey, Ukraine, Italy, Germany and Russia. And it should be noted that agreements with the latter are not expected anytime soon, as the Georgian government has refused to have any official contact with the Russian government since the armed conflict in 2008.

At the same time, Georgia may benefit from Mobility Partnership, e.g. through the models of bilateral agreements on circular migration used by some of the EU Member States (MS) such as Bulgaria

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<sup>3</sup>ENP stands for the European Neighborhood Policy.

and Romania. This is the case as, at the moment, the local labour market is unable to absorb all job seekers in Georgia, especially all university graduates, and temporary labour mobility arrangements may contribute to easing pressure on domestic labour market. On the other hand, the old MS, in particular those with experience as host countries for labour immigration, may provide models of good practice. France was the first EU Member State that offered to Georgia the conclusion of a bilateral agreement on circular migration. The agreement would provide possible employment for 500-600 persons per year under a short-term scheme. However, as an expert from the International Labour Organization noted, the signing of the agreement that was planned for October, 2010, has still not taken place because the Georgian side, in his opinion, is not yet ready for its signing and implementation.

The main obstacle for effective improvements in the fields of circular migration from Georgia is, in the opinion of experts, that the government follows its liberal economic policy. Until recently it did not consider any management of labour market in Georgia necessary, leaving the market to regulate itself. This was an issue of concern for some international partners, who over a long period tried to achieve a mutual understanding with policy-makers in Georgia concerning the state's role in labour-market management and for the facilitation of circular labour migration in the context of the increased labour mobility of citizens of Georgia to the European Union Member States and other destination countries.

Finally, at the beginning of July 2012 Georgia introduced a new post of the State Minister of Employment that would have "an efficient" staff of 20-25 people to tackle unemployment-related problems in Georgia (Civil.ge. Daily news online, 03.07.2012). Since 25 July 2012 the registration of job seekers and the creation of databases on all the unemployed has started. With this purpose employment agents visit all households in Georgia and fill a special questionnaire on each unemployed person (News.ge, 10.07.2012,). It is not clear yet how the new system of state employment services will operate. Nor is it clear whether this new governmental structure will consider circular migration as an opportunity to improve the situation on the domestic labour market. For the moment the government links these new activities to the necessity to define the extent of unemployment in Georgia and has officially announced its plans to provide a state-sponsored health insurance policy for all unemployed persons (News.ge, 10.07.2012,). Currently Georgia has no state employment agencies, no benefits for the unemployed, and no regular information on Georgian labour market supply and demand. Given these conditions, taking any effective measures for the facilitation of circular migration for Georgians would seem to be premature. .

At the same time there is a legal practice for sending Georgians for work abroad through intermediate private employment agencies. Private employment agencies and individuals are currently the only suppliers of job matching services on the Georgian labour market and have no competition from public employment service as the latter was dissolved in 2006. At present no legislation regulating private employment agencies and labour migration exist. This leads to shadow (or "black") labour market. Due to the lack of bilateral agreements between Georgia and other countries there are limited opportunities for Georgians to go legally abroad for work. So companies and individuals dealing with organizing trips abroad profit a lot from these activities, as many people in Georgia are ready to pay for the arrangement of trip abroad, to the West. According to information available from the mass-media and informal contacts, arranging a trip costs from \$1,500 to \$5,000 depending on the destination country. Most private agencies do not identify themselves as private employment agencies. The International Labour Organization (2007) conducted a special study on employment agencies in Georgia in 2007 and concluded that officially no private employment agency exists apart from vacancies published online. Few foreign companies employ Georgian citizens or implement cultural or educational programs abroad (ILO, 2007, p.11). The situation in Georgia has not changed since then. Consequently it is impossible to find out which private organization or individual person carries out job matching activities in Georgia. The only company freely advertising services on employment abroad, based on our research, is a Georgian-American company KMS-Georgia, but it operates on a very limited scale and facilitates employment abroad for 20-25 individuals a year on average (Tsereteli, 2012).

## Policy Recommendations

In order to facilitate circular migration, the Georgian government should organise pre-migration assistance services and take leadership in creating special services that will improve the collection and dissemination of information on legal migration routes. This might include the creation of support centres that would gather information on migration programmes and opportunities in destination countries. Basic language training could also be provided by these centres, as the significant language barriers that exist for many Georgians abroad seem likely to prevent migrants from utilising their skills and education effectively.

The Georgian government promises to create more jobs in Georgia in the near future combined with on-going economic development. However, it will necessarily lead to an increase in employment as the experience of the recent years in Georgia shows. In our opinion national policies still do not adequately address the issues of labour migration and do not consider circular migration opportunities as one of the possible solutions for improving the situation on the local labour market. Moreover, although the Georgian government tries to promote the return of Georgian nationals, the opening of the Georgian border for low skilled and cheap labour from South-Asia and Africa has created competition for return migrants and has ignored local labour market specifics in Georgia. For employed persons there are no legal provisions or institutions for verifying whether the employment of an alien is allowed *vis-à-vis* the availability of the local work-force. Similarly for self-employed persons there is no institution and no legal provisions in place to carry out the “economic benefits test” to verify the economic viability and interest of Georgia in any particular small or medium enterprise venture.

In fact, even today, there is neither a single government agency in Georgia coordinating migration management. Nor, alternatively, is there clear “terms of reference” for the division of tasks between the existing agencies (there are at least 8 ministers dealing with the migration and management in various competencies). The State Commission on Migration created, in 2010, is an advisory body of the Georgian government, and deals with both immigration and emigration policies. However, at present it does not have enough human and financial capacity to play this role. The Commission also coordinates the implementation of the visa facilitation agreement and readmission agreement with the EU, signed in January 2011 (in force since March 2011). The readmission agreement defines clear responsibilities for both Georgia and EU countries concerning the prevention of irregular migration and the readmission procedures for Georgian citizens. At the same time, the visa facilitation agreement simplifies the procedure of obtaining visa for some categories of Georgian citizens, such as students, researchers etc. (Zurabishvili, 2010).

It must be noted that up to now the focus of the Mobility Partnership (MP) implementation in Georgia still lays on the readmission and reintegration of returnees in Georgia and there is no progress in facilitating circular migration.

In order to facilitate the circular migration of Georgian citizens the gradual extension of visa liberalization and other activities under the MP should be activated. The conclusion of labour and social security agreements should aim to contribute to the sustainable return of labor migrants.

Currently Georgia still does not have a written migration policy document. For the moment, there is a working group on “migration strategy” under the State Migration Commission. According to the information provided in April 2012 by an expert from the IOM Mission to Georgia, the final draft version will be available soon. It will then be shared with the international community and civil society for comment, before being sent to the government for approval.

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