



## **CARIM EAST – CONSORTIUM FOR APPLIED RESEARCH ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION**

Co-financed by the European Union

# ***The demographic and economic framework of circular migration in Georgia***

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CARIM-East Explanatory Note 12/89

Demographic-Economic Module

September 2012



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## 1. Introduction

A critical limitation in addressing circular migration trends and characteristics of circular migration from Georgia is the lack of appropriate statistics to quantitatively measure and assess the phenomenon. The current system in this respect is disastrous. In Georgia, even the balance of external migration cannot be established, there are practically no statistical data as regards territorial population mobility. In this regard, the immediate substantial reform of the official migration statistics and its provision with respective resources is indispensable. On the other hand, migration research in general, including research on circular migration, requires significant development. It needs to acquire a systemic nature, as the existing incidental studies are fragmented and completely inadequate compared to the significance of the problem.

Given the current situation, this note will first address the importance of developing and supporting circular migration schemes for Georgia. Second, it will offer a number of crucial measures to be inserted in rational and efficient circular migration policies.

## 2. Why are circular migration schemes so important for Georgia?

Developing and facilitating organized circular migration schemes would promote migration efficiency and decrease those high social and economic losses that are typical of current labour emigration trends from Georgia. In particular:

- In the post-soviet period the population of Georgia decreased by more than 1 million: 20% of the country's population. Then a further 10% of the population left abroad seeking employment. The balance of permanent migration has still been negative. The circular form of labour emigration is likely to produce a positive impact on the demographic development of the country by addressing depopulation dynamics (see Tukhashvili and Shelya, 2012).
- The formation of circular migration schemes is a way to ensure that the labour markets of sending and host countries will become even more interrelated, and, in general, that the international labour market will become more effective. Due to its uncontrollable nature, the workforce that currently leaves to work abroad is sometimes the workforce demanded in the labour market of Georgia itself. Poor labour market policy on site and insufficient information awareness boost inefficient emigration.
- Circular migration is a valid alternative to irregular migration. Rational circular migration policies help with social vulnerability and the difficult stressful situations stemming from irregular employment of migrants abroad. The scale of legal migration from Georgia to Europe is, indeed, almost insignificant, which generally aggravates the social situation not only in the host country, but in Georgia itself too. Indeed, the development of circular migration is in itself the basis for a decrease of irregularity.
- The development of circular migration will reduce social problems in Georgia generated by the factual separation of migrant families. The widespread condition of irregularity of Georgian migrants living abroad does not allow them to adopt family reunification schemes with numerous negative consequences. As indicated in our previous research on return migrants, during the entire period of emigration (4 years on average) 57% of respondents could not stay with their families even once.
- The formation of circular migration schemes speeds up and increases the chance of using accumulated human capital abroad in the homeland. In view of the high intensity, complex demographic situation and irregularity, it can play a special role in Georgia both from the economic and social point of view.

### 3. How to enhance and support circular migration schemes

The formation of circular migration policies includes the following priorities: signing international agreements on sending and receiving the workforce; social protection of labour emigrants; decreased number of deportations; and, in general, abandonment of deportations that violate human dignity (for example, the transfer of deportees from Russia to Georgia by a freight carrier in 2006). A significant outcome could be reached by the maximum regularization of the workforce currently employed irregularly abroad, it is also worthwhile granting dual citizenship.

To develop an efficient circular migration policy, some specific measures should be adopted:

- Improving the knowledge of labour markets' structures of sending and host countries to create an information system for the job vacancies market and the harmonization of internal and external markets. Currently, only 12% of Georgian labour migrants know where they are going to be employed abroad in advance.
- Diminishing bureaucratic barriers by promoting a simplification in immigration-emigration processes. In Georgia's practice the current process is extremely complex, drawn out and contains a number of hurdles. Based on the materials gathered in Georgia during the latest studies (European Initiative Liberal Academy of Tbilisi, 2012), the bureaucratic system related to exit permits is extremely visible.
- Ensuring adequate, decent employment of newcomers to immigration countries who have arrived seeking a job in line with their professional qualifications as well as human resources. This means the promotion of workforce supply in accordance with labour market requirements, the arrangement of preliminary special education and, in general, the encouragement of accumulation of emigration human capital.
- In Georgia a relevant role will be played by the development of efficient policies targeted at facilitating the return process and the reintegration of migrants. Reintegration is one of the major and most problematic stages of circular migration. Small-scale studies on the subject in 2009-2011 identified significant tendencies and problems typical of the reintegration stage in Georgia. The research materials have pointed out that 40% of returnees are absolutely determined to enter labour emigration again. The main reason for this is feeble reintegration activity.
- It is vital to define reasonable, optimal migration duration. The average duration identified as a result of research among migrants who have returned to Georgia is four years: though we need to define varieties of different durations as well as their economic and social desirability. Migration of any duration has its disadvantages but these disadvantages can be kept to a minimum.
- The general formation of circular migration among Georgians will largely depend on the development of border labour migrations. Currently circular migration exists on the border between Georgia and Turkey, Armenia and Azerbaijan and more exceptionally at the border with Russia in the Qazbegi administrative municipality. Despite the visa-free regime (except Russia), the store for the growth of border migrations is huge due to the fast-growing economy in these areas and extensive prospects for economic border integration. From the social point of view, as regards essence and effectiveness, a growth in the intensity of border shuttle labour mobility among these countries is realistic. It must be studied and presented as an object of active migration policy and at the same time included in a general policy of circular migration. Still, currently, despite the visa-free regime, there are numerous gaps in the development of border migration both from the organizational point of view and from the point of view of employment and social protection. The prospects for border migration in Georgia are extensive given that that a significant proportion of the population in these regions comprises the majority ethnic group of the bordering state and these populations are often identical from the linguistic, cultural and confessional perspective (border migrations with Azerbaijan and Armenia). This

process will enhance the regulation of near-border labour markets and will diminish the excessive inclination of the population to reach EU states and other more distant countries.

- Last but not least, the informational and statistical base of the migration process needs to be improved dramatically. Thus, the formation of circular migration is the key task in terms of managing the external migration of the Georgian population and its national as well as international role is extremely vital. The development of a circular migration policy will be extremely important not only for regulating the mobility of the Georgian population, but also from the point of view of settling problems of European integration in Georgia.

## References

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