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### ***Refugees and displaced persons in Georgia***

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Forced migration is the most pressing problem in terms of the territorial mobility of the Georgian population. Forced migration has varied over time. Mass-scale transfer of the local population by conquerors and forced migration to other countries (Iran, Turkey and Russia) took place in the past. But there was also further organized and disorganized migrations from these countries and individuals sought asylum in Georgia. Of course, we will examine only those flows that currently present a significant problem.

## Refugees

Most refugees found themselves in Georgia as a result of the last Russian-Chechen war. They arrived in Georgia from Russia in several flows. According to the 2002 census, 3,751 refugee arrived in Georgia, mostly Chechens. They were primarily settled in the Pankisi Gorge close to the Georgian-Chechen border, in the village of Duisi and other surrounding centres. Most of them have already gone back to Russia. The Russian and Georgian authorities have undertaken measures to get the rest of them back to the home country. 573 refugees have remained. Their gender and age distribution is presented in table 1.

**Table 1. Age and gender distribution of refugees in Georgia in 2012**

Gender	Age					Total
	0-4 years	5-11 years	12-17 years	18-59 years	60 years and older	
Men	29	52	38	151	15	285
Women	24	35	41	183	5	288
Total	53	87	79	334	20	573

Source: <http://www.mra.gov.ge>

In post-Soviet ethno-political conflicts and ethnic cleansing undertaken by separatists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia part of the Georgian population was forced to leave the country. These forced migrants are presently staying in the Russian Federation, some of them reside near the Russian-Georgian border, in Krasnodar territory. Only a fraction has refugee status.

During the post-Soviet period large flows of Ossetians moved out of Georgia, some of them have refugee status and reside in North Ossetia and other parts of Russia. A significant share of these individuals left Georgia in the early 1990s due to the difficult economic situation and political chaos: above all, the presence of illegal armed gangs. And during the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 a large group of Ossetians had to leave the Tskhinvali Region and hide in the North-Ossetian Republic of the Russian Federation. According to a Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 1,200 persons had not returned to their homes, as of April 2009<sup>1</sup>.

## Displaced persons

In the early post-Soviet period over half of the population of the Abkhazian region of Georgia moved to other regions as a result of ethnic cleansing. According to the census of 1989, 525,000 people resided in Abkhazian ASSR. In 2003, according to the census carried out by the separatist authorities,

<sup>1</sup> V. Pakhomenko. Inhabited island [in Russian]. <http://www.polit.ru/article/2009/09/22/demo/>

only 215,900 stayed there. 309,000 (59%) were driven out of Abkhazia by ethnic cleansing<sup>2</sup>. Large flows of refugees were registered coming from Tskhinvali Region (15,000)<sup>3</sup>, where in 2008 ethnic cleansing occurred during the Russian-Georgian war and where the Georgian population was driven out completely. As of 2012, 265,109 persons in Georgia (6% of the population of Georgia)<sup>4</sup> had the status of displaced persons and were paid a corresponding allowance (see table 2).

**Table 2. The load of displaced persons on the population of Georgia, as of April 2012**

Regions	Population, thousand persons	Displaced persons, persons	Load on every 10000 persons
Adjara	393.9	6 556	166
Guria	139.8	531	38
Imereti	705.7	25 539	362
Kakheti	406.1	1500	37
Mtskheta-Mtianeti	109.3	10 640	974
Racha-Lechkhumi and Kvemo Svaneti	46.7	937	201
Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti	478.2	89 538	1872
Samtskhe-Javakheti	213.8	2 359	110
Kvemo Kartli	511.2	12 336	241
Shida Kartli	314.0	16 161	515
Tbilisi	1172.0	98 550	841
Have no address		462	
Total	4490.7	265 109	590

Source: <http://www.mra.gov.ge>

As can be seen from the table, forced migrants are rather non-uniformly distributed across Georgian regions. An especially high load of displaced persons on the population can be seen in the areas adjacent to the conflict: Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti, Shida Kartli and Mtskheta-Mtianeti, as well as Tbilisi. Naturally, the mass forced exile of the population significantly worsened the demographic situation in the occupied regions, where less than half of the population remained.

Despite efforts on the part of the Georgian government and considerable international aid, the position of displaced persons is rather grave. Many studies are devoted to their daily routine. We led the study carried out by the Center of Migration Studies of the Ivane Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, which covered refugees from both Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region in locations with their highest concentration (in the cities of Tbilisi, Zugdidi, Gori)<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> According to objective assessment of T. Blumgardt, at present 185,000-205,000 persons reside in Abkhazia: 27.5% - Georgians, 32.9% - Armenians, 30.2% - Abkhazians, 8.2% - Russians, 1.2% - others. According to his data, the current population is only 55,000-60,000, while 20,000-25,000 reside in other countries and are only registered in Abkhazia. Blumgardt T. Population of Abkhazia. Where is the truth?! [in Russian] <http://abkhazeti.info/news/1305685446/php>

<sup>3</sup> V. Pakhomenko. Inhabited island [in Russian]. <http://www.polit.ru/article/2009/09/22/demo/>

<sup>4</sup> From 1 August to 27 December 2013 the Ministry of Refugees and Settlement will register and account for persons displaced from occupied Georgian territories. This will allow obtaining detailed information on the demographic and social state of temporarily displaced persons.

<sup>5</sup> Internally Displaced Persons in the Georgian Labour Market. Universali, Tbilisi, 2012.

The study revealed that unemployment is very high among displaced persons. Their main income is provided by public welfare payments or retirement benefits, which is significantly lower than minimum subsistence level. One of the characteristic features of unemployment is that it is long-term. 49% of unemployed displaced persons from Abkhazia have been jobless for over three years. Because of this the income of their families did not exceed, on average, 180 lari, which is much lower than the minimum subsistence level.

Although new jobs were recently created in areas with a high concentration of IDPs, this is not enough. Professional retraining has been organized, in order to help them better adapt to the labor market, but it has not yet had significant results. That is why labor emigration is much more intensive among displaced persons than emigration from Georgia on average<sup>6</sup>. This can be explained by very grave living conditions in areas where they temporarily reside, their limited employment opportunities in the local labor market, and their extremely low income level. It was revealed that a displaced labor emigrant sends 358 US dollars from overseas to his or her family every month: this is 3.5 times more than the income of families staying behind (101 USD)<sup>7</sup>. Money transfers fill the gap between the budget of families staying behind and the minimum subsistence level.

The international community acknowledged that the right way to resolve the problem of forced migrants is to ensure their return to previous places of residence, to the regions of Georgia occupied by the Russian Federation. Despite considerable efforts on the part of the international community, there are no clear prospects of this.

### **Problem of repatriation of Meskhetian Turks**

Resettlement of the so-called Meskhetian Turks is a problem for Georgia. In 1944, during WWII, they were deported from Georgian areas bordering on Turkey and were sent to Central Asia and Kazakhstan. In fact, following the Ruling of the Soviet Defense Committee No. 6279 of 31 July 1944 and the Decree of the Soviet Ministry of Interior No. 00117, 19,818 families were transferred from areas bordering Turkey, including Turkish families – 14,493, Kurds – 1,830, Azerbaijanis – 3,058, Ezids – 7, Tartars – 126 and Hemshils – 304 families<sup>8</sup>.

In the postwar period (in 1957) during the return of the deported population the-then government of the USSR did not bring Crimean Tartars and Meskhetian Turks back to their regions for political reasons. In the period preceding the collapse of the USSR, in 1989, they were attacked during the notorious (and provoked) Ferghana conflict, driven out from their places of residence without any particular destination and spontaneously guided in the European part of the USSR and Azerbaijan. Some of them then went abroad (20,000 persons to Turkey and 10,000 persons to the USA), some of them integrated, some formed refugee camps and can be mostly found in North Caucasus and Azerbaijan<sup>9</sup>. Some demand to be returned to their historic homeland: Georgia.

In the post-Soviet period catastrophic events occurred in Georgia: namely domestic discord, political chaos, economic collapse, the Russian-Georgian war and other destructive processes. Given these the organized return of Meskhetian Turks became impossible. In addition to the local population in the places they had been deported from, one can find persons who moved there 70 years ago from other areas of Georgia, most of them were born and grew up in this area. Besides, this near-border region has exhausted its demographic capacity. At the same time the population of the Javakheti region (primarily

<sup>6</sup> Tukhasvili M., Toria M. Labor emigration of persons displaced from Abkhazia. – In volume “Migration 3”. Tbilisi, “Universal”, 2009, p. 86-97.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 93

<sup>8</sup> Meskhetian Turks. <http://iberiana.wordpress.com/turqi-mesxebi/#1> [in Georgian]

<sup>9</sup> Meskhetian Turks. <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/es/90520/>.

ethnic Armenians) is emphatically against the return of the Turkish population to this region<sup>10</sup>. And the near-border mountainous area of Adjara is located in the zone of environmental disaster.

On the other hand, Georgia's obligation regarding the return of Meskhetian Turks to Georgia, undertaken when Georgia joined the Council of Europe, needs to be implemented. One should note that their small-scale organized movement started long ago. Their cultural and economic adaptation and integration into the local environment in a non-border region of Georgia (Samtredia municipality) proceeded normally.

Therefore, forced migrations are a grave problem for present-day Georgia. Alleviating the dire consequences of those migrations would be impossible without the assistance of the international community. The main tasks are the de-occupation of those Georgian territories occupied by the Russian Federation and the creation of conditions for the safe return of refugees to their previous places of residence.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid

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