



Irregular Georgian Migration to Greece: The role of migration policies and social networks

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Case Study: Migration System 2 (Georgia)



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1. Introduction

Georgians are one of the largest immigrant groups in Greece and vice versa Greece is one of the major destinations for Georgian immigrants. However, few studies have been devoted to this group which is usually examined in conjunction with other migrant groups as part of broader studies.

According to Chatziprokopiou and Triandafyllidou (2013) the causes of irregular migration in general can be found at the junctions between individual search for life prospects, demand in the labour market, and restrictive migration control policies. Similar approaches have been expressed by other authors¹. This case study aims at examining the way in which these three forces (individual activity, labour market and policies) intertwine in the case of irregular Georgian migration to Greece by asking the following questions:

- How do the Greek policies of migration and asylum management and migration control affect the plans and the actions of Georgian irregular migrants?
- What other factors determine the migrants' plans?

In general, most scholars² separate the trends of Georgian migration into three periods that more or less coincide with the periods of the country's socio-political and economic development. During the first period, up to 1995, migration outflows were mainly triggered by ethnic motivations and those migrating for financial reasons were significantly fewer in numbers. The second wave, between 1996 and 2004, was smaller in size and driven mainly by economic motives. As for the current phase, starting in 2004, despite the improvement in the country's economical and political situation, poverty does continue to beset the Georgian population, thus motivation to migrate or remain abroad remains strong.

Georgian labor migration to Greece followed the repatriation of Georgian co-ethnics in the early 1990's. Greece became a preferable destination for Georgian migrants for several reasons. Specifically because of its labour market demand, its economic attractiveness, the developed transport infrastructure between the two countries, the cultural and physical similarities of their peoples and the presence of developed social networks (People's Harmonious Development Society & TASO Foundation, 2010; Marouf, 2013). The economic attractiveness of the country owes to the fact that immigration to Greece costs much less than migration to other destinations as well as the fact that it offers jobs in the domestic sector, which enable immigrant women from Georgia to minimise spending thus ensuring more money for their families back in Georgia. Moreover, the geographical proximity compared to Northern Europe and America, and the fact that transport infrastructure between the two countries has improved through the development of enterprises, such as travel agencies and bus companies, is facilitating migration in the country.

Migration from Georgia to Greece can be divided into three phases, based on changes in the Greek migration policy framework. The first phase begins with the onset of migration flows from Georgia countries in the early 1990s and is mainly characterized by irregularity regarding the residence status. This period ends with the implementation of the first regularisation program in 1998 marking the start of the second phase. After that Georgians, as the immigrants any other nationality, were able to regularise their residence status and thus their quality of life and working conditions improved significantly. The decrease of existing residence permits for work reasons and the fact that the last regularization program took place in 2007 and involved only those who had arrived in the country by 2005 has led Georgian migrants to seek and use alternative strategies to regularize their stay.

¹For instance see Düvell, 2009

² For instance see CRR/ISSET, 2010 and Badurashvili & Nadareishvili, 2012.

Therefore, perhaps we can now speak of a third phase characterized by a "return to irregularity" and a "false and temporary regularity".

It is difficult to estimate the number of Georgian migrants, but there is clearly a large presence of Georgians living irregularly in Greece, using different strategies to avoid detection by the authorities or to regularise their residence status in order to avoid detention and deportation.

During the last years there has been a reduction of the Georgian population in Greece, which is linked to both a drop in new arrivals, which have been limited to people who come to the country following first degree relatives, and an observed return tendency. This decrease mainly relates to the impact of the crisis on the Greek labour market, namely the increase of unemployment and reduction of wages.

Georgian immigration to Greece is highly gendered and the majority of migrant women are employed in the domestic sector. The gap between the sexes appears to have been intensified in the recent year, a fact that is probably connected with the position of the Georgian men in the labour market, as the sectors in which Georgian men were mainly occupied, such as manufacturing and construction, have been severely affected by the economic crisis. This has led to an extremely high unemployment rate for Georgian men, while the corresponding rate for women is significantly lower. The fact that, probably, the majority of Georgian citizens residing in Greece are undocumented impacts the conditions of their employment, making them much more vulnerable. This is reinforced in the case of domestic work, which, due to the nature of the profession, is much harder to regulate due to both the privacy of the workplace and the isolation of the workers constitutes an obstacle to their collective action.

This report follows the course of migration from Georgia to Greece, from the decision to migrate to the possible return decision. After a brief overview of the political and economic situation in Georgia and the main emigration trends from the country, we will examine the most important motivations for migration and the choice of Greece as a destination as well as the travel arrangements to Greece. Then we will look at the Greek control and migration management policies and the impact they have on Georgian migrants and the strategies they follow in order to avoid any negative consequences and finally the interaction between the residence status and the position of Georgians in the Greek labour market. Finally, we will look at the return of Georgian migrants to their country of origin.

2. Methodology

The fieldwork that led to this case study can be divided into two phases. The first phase³ focused on data collection, review of the existing literature and conducting interviews with actors in Greece and Georgia in order to summarize the existing knowledge on undocumented migration between Georgia and Greece. In the second phase includes interviews with Georgian immigrants in Greece and Georgia.

The literature on Georgian migration focuses primarily on irregular migration, gender issues, and the impact of migration and remittances. With regard to research on migration from Georgia to Greece, the first publications, during the 1990s and early 2000s, referred to immigrants from the former Soviet Union in general, including Georgians, although the research mainly focused on co-ethnic repatriates from ex USSR countries, the largest group of whom were Georgians⁴. In addition, information about Georgian migrants can be drawn from the studies that are mainly focused on female migration and domestic work⁵. However, some recent studies and publications have been devoted to Georgian migration to Greece⁶ (Marouf, 2013).

For the purposes of this research, we have conducted 11 interviews⁷ with government officials and other stakeholders, including representatives of NGOs, international organizations and Georgian associations in Greece and 6 interviews⁸ with their counterparts in Georgia. The interviews were conducted between February and April 2013 and no difficulties have been encountered in identifying and approaching the actors both in Greece and in Georgia.

With regards to the second phase, initially 30 interviews with Georgian immigrants in Greece were conducted. Triandafyllidou (2010) defines irregular migrants as third country nationals who, irrespective of their mode of entry into the country, have no residence permit and are threatened with deportation if they identified. However, in the context of this study, we have considered necessary to include individuals who do not fit (or at least did not fit at the time of the interviews) the above category in our sample for a full understanding of the phenomenon. We thus have decided to include four individuals who had filed asylum applications and four persons who were in possession of a valid residence permit. Concerning the demographic characteristics of our sample, it mostly consisted of women and covered a wide range of ages. In addition, an effort was made so as to include in the sample persons with different lengths of stay in the country, therefore the time spent in the country ranges from several months to 15 years. The interviews were conducted between September 2013 and February 2014, mainly in Athens, in public places⁹ or residences. The sample was selected using the "snowball" method and the use of an interpreter was only necessary in very few cases.

Subsequently, in May 2014, we have conducted 17 interviews with Georgian immigrants who had returned to their home country and two interviews with people who had thought about the possibility to migrate to Greece and eventually did not proceed. In the case of the latter, it was not deemed

³ This research phase has also led to the Background Report of the IRMA research project for the case of Georgia (Marouf, 2013).

⁴ Almost 2/3 of the co-ethnic repatriates from the former Soviet Union came from Georgia (Nikolova & Marouf, 2010).

⁵ For instance see: KETHI, 2007 and Marouf, 2013.

⁶ For instance see: Nikolova & Marouf, 2010; People's Harmonious Development Society & TASO Foundation, 2010; Human Rights Defence Centre, 2011.

⁷ See: 9.1. Annex I: Interviews with stakeholders in Greece.

⁸ See: 9.2. Annex II: Interviews with stakeholders in Georgia.

⁹ In Georgian migrant associations and cafés.

necessary seek additional interviewees. The initial design of the study also foresaw conducting interviews with relatives of irregular immigrants in Greece¹⁰. An interesting element that emerged in the course of fieldwork in Georgia was the fact that the interviewees often belonged to more than one of the above categories: they had returned to Georgia but they also either were considering emigrating back to Greece or their family members¹¹ still remained in the country and often they remained economically dependent on them. The sample was again selected using the "snowball" sampling method while the use of an interpreter was much more frequent in this series of interviews. The interviews were conducted in public places¹² and residences in Tbilisi and smaller towns and villages in the regions of Tianeti and Chiatura. With regards to gender, in this case our sample consisted of almost an equal number of men and women while still covering a wide range of ages and durations of stay in Greece.

The interviews were conducted using a semi-structured questionnaire the main themes of which included: the decision to migrate, the preparation and the travel arrangements, the settlement and employment in Greece, issues related to legal documents and future plans.

¹⁰ Specifically, the initial research design included interviews with: 10 Georgian migrants who have returned to their home country; 10 relatives of irregular migrants in Greece; and 10 Georgians who have thought about the possibility to migrate to Greece and ultimately failed to do so.

¹¹ Spouses, parents, children or siblings.

¹² Cafes and restaurants.

3. Georgia as a country of emigration to Greece

In this section, after a brief overview of the political and economic situation in Georgia and the main migration trends in the country, we will look at the main push factors for migration, the choice of Greece as a destination country as well as the travel arrangements to Greece.

3.1 Historical, political and economic overview and main migration trends

According to Badurashvili, and Nadareishvili (2012) we can distinguish three periods of socio-economic and political development in Georgia. The first one, starting in 1991, is characterized by total political and economic stagnation. Georgia's transition into the post-Soviet era was exceptionally complex, due to territorial conflicts and civil unrests. Separatist movements that emerged in the regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia which used to enjoy an autonomous status during the Soviet era- compelled the majority of their Georgian population to flee those regions. In addition, civil war erupted following the removal of the first democratically elected president in 1992, in turn followed by an economic collapse. The period of political and economic stabilization begins in 1995, when Eduard Shevardnadze, the former Soviet foreign minister, was elected president and remained in that position until the 'Rose Revolution' in 2003. The third period begins in 2004 with the election of Mikheil Saakashvili and is one of economic development (Badurashvili, and Nadareishvili, 2012).

During this latest period, the Georgian government implemented macro-economic reforms, which have radically accelerated the country's economic growth. Those economic reforms allowed the country to present consistently high economic growth rates, with an average real GDP growth of 9.6% between 2003 and 2008. They also resulted in high performance with regards to the country's Foreign Direct Investment, until 2009 and 2010 when, due to the war with Russia and the global economic depression, the latter faced a sharp decrease. Improvements in the tax collection system meant a considerable increase in the budget revenues and finally the reforms resulted in a decrease of corruption. Yet, those positive outcomes came hand in hand with two negative ones; namely a sizable and increasing trade deficit and high inflation rates (ETF, 2010: 7). With regards to the recent war in South Ossetia between Georgia and Russia in August 2008, it has been argued that the country's President aimed to place Georgia in the international spotlight so as to test whether the West would consent to Russia's domination in the region but nevertheless, none of the parties involved, Georgia, Russia or the West, surfaced as a winner (Antonenko, 2008).

In general, most scholars separate the trends of Georgian migration into three periods that more or less coincide with the periods of Georgia's socio-political and economic development described above. The CRRC/ISET (2010) report distinguishes three waves of international migration: the Collapse and Conflict starting in 1990 and ending in 1995, the Economic Struggle between 1996 and 2004, and the Possible Revival from 2004 onwards. During the first period, up to 1994-5, migration outflows were mainly triggered by ethnic motivations and those migrating for financial reasons were significantly fewer in numbers (Asalania, 2006). Thus, this first wave of migrants was mainly comprised of war refugees and ethnic minorities, such as Greeks and Jews, returning to their homelands. The second wave, between 1996 and 2004, was smaller in size and driven mainly by economic motives (CRRC/ISET, 2010). As for the current phase, starting in 2004, despite the improvement in the country's economic and political situation, poverty does continue to beset the Georgian population, thus motivation to migrate or remain abroad remains strong.

Table 1: Net Migration to Georgia (2000-2013)

Year	Net Migration (in thousands)
2000	-35.2
2001	-32.6
2002	-27.8
2003	-27.5
2004	5.5
2005	76.3
2006	-12.1
2007	-20.7
2008	-10.2
2009	34.2
2010	18.1
2011	20.2
2012	-21.5
2013	-2.6

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia¹³

According to the official statistics of Georgia on migration, a very high emigration flow has been observed between 1992 and 1996 followed by a period of lower stable outflow, which did not exceed 30,000 per year per year until 2003 while after 2004 we can observe a strong tendency for return (Badurashvili, 2012). This trend, however, does not appear to last long. According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia¹⁴, during 2012 and 2013, for which we have more detailed information available, the balance between emigration and return of Georgian citizens is negative, with outflows exceeding inflows by 31,000 to 20,000 persons respectively.

The total number of Georgian emigrants is indisputably high and, while there seems to be a lack of reliable data, there are various estimates of its size,. Based on some estimates Georgian emigrants exceed 20% of the country's population, yet the Danish Refugee Council directed us towards a more conservative estimate of around 350,000 persons, who make up approximately 8% of the country's population (Interview 17).

¹³ Available from: http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=173&lang=eng

¹⁴ Available from:: http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=173&lang=eng

3.2 The migration decision and the choice of Greece as a destination country

According to a report by the People's Harmonious Development Society and the TASO Foundation (2010) Greece has become a major destination country for Georgian migrants for several reasons. Specifically, because of its labour market demand, its economic attractiveness, the developed transport infrastructure between the two countries, the cultural and physical similarities of their peoples and the presence of developed social networks.

The country's economic attractiveness lies on one hand on the fact that migration to Greece costs considerably less than migration to other destinations and on the other hand on the fact because it offers positions for live-in domestic work, which allow migrant women from Georgia to minimize their expenses and save more money to provide for their families back in Georgia. In addition, the geographical proximity, in comparison to Northern Europe and America, and the fact that the transportation infrastructure between the two countries has improved through the development of businesses such as travel agencies and bus companies, facilitates migration to the country. (People's Harmonious Development Society & the TASO Foundation, 2010: 13 & 33)

The cultural and religious similarities and physical likeness between Greece and Georgia, including the long presence of ethnic Greeks in Georgia, have often been mentioned by interviewees involved in Georgian associations as one of the main factors attracting Georgian migrants to the country.

However, the most important factor appears to be the presence of developed social networks. According to Badurashvili (2004), migrant networks are one of the most important factors affecting the direction of migration as they significantly reduce the cost of migration, providing information and support and consequently minimizing the risk. The author also stresses the fact that, as networks expand, they can evolve into an independent factor of international movements. In the case of Georgians in Greece the large-scale repatriation of Greek co-ethnics that took place mainly in the mid 1990 'seems to have set the stage for the development of networks between the two countries.

With regards to the motives for emigration from Georgia, our field research agrees with a previous study of KETHI (2007) on women's migration in Greece. Therefore, the majority of women from Georgia, when asked about the reasons that led them to the decision to migrate, responded that their motives were financial, namely low salaries, difficulties in finding employment, poverty and the need to provide economic assistance to their families. There was, however, a significant percentage of women who claimed that they have migrated for personal or family reasons.

Ketevan describes the conditions that led her to migration. The reason was high unemployment as none of her family members had a job:

"Much need. Did not work home, not husband, not boy we have, two grand-sons, daughter in law, we decided (for me to) go to Greece." (Ketevan, 51 years old)

However, the Danish Refugee Council (Interview 17) underlined the fact that motivation for migration is not as much linked to high unemployment as they are to the mismatch between the wages and the cost of living that leads to poverty. As described by the 58 year-old Natela and the 26 year-old Bedisa:

"It was nothing. 300 lari is nothing. And that was it. It was much need and I went (to Greece)." (Natela, 58 years old)

"200 of our lari is nothing, you cannot live" (Bedisa, 26 years old)

We should also note the fact that several owners of small and medium businesses attribute their decision to migrate to the unstable political landscape of the country. As narrated by Levan:

"We had some businesses and we had a very good time, but then, when the government changed also in the factory too many big problems were created, some were driven away, and my business closed. I tried then to do something else but we opened a large restaurant, which did not exist in my city as big, let's say a club, for the young people, we had live music, we did some events and we went well but after some time they were asking us money, to pay every month. (...) They

wanted a pay-off. (...) From the government. We said no and that's why they made us, they gave us some fines and such huge that we could not pay and we shut down. (...) Yes, it went very well. Yes. And the people were very happy but these things, you know what it was? The previous state were all our friends, then when the state changed they were all caught, or left abroad or caught and put in person and us, they thought we were their people and they were looking for a reason to... do you understand? Now it changed, now, I'm talking about 2003 when it changes, that Saakashvili came, from 2003 until 2012, It was them and for this reason we left, most people we left for this reason, because they were 'chasing' us let's say." (Levan, 46 years old)

A similar case was described by Zurab who owned a small shop selling pies which went quite well, however, during the same period the shop was expropriated for something else to be built and he was not ever compensated.

Zurab's wife, Denola, who during the time of the interview already lived in Greece for four years explains that the couple had never thought of migration until the opportunity presented itself:

"To tell you the truth, I never would have thought I will leave, let's say, my family, I will leave my children and go, but this thing that happened, sister in law got married, so we had like an opportunity to go, I say maybe stay two years there and I will return." (Denola, 37 years old)

The New Economics of Labour Migration (NELM)¹⁵ does not link migration to the maximization of profit throughout the work life of migrants, but to the achievement of specific objectives. This approach argues that the decision to migrate is often not made only by the migrants themselves; their families may also participate in them. Therefore, the migration of one or more members of a family forms risk sharing tactic as the income sent by migrants in the form of remittances provides an income for the household in the country of origin or the necessary capital that can be used in other economic activities (Castles, de Haas & Miller, 2014: 38)¹⁶.

The majority of the interviewees began the venture of migration with that in mind, yet, in many cases their objectives were adjusted, in others the migration of additional family members was considered essential for a more rapid achievement of the family goal while in certain cases the return of some family members was decided as they did not earn the expected profits and the costs required for their presence in Greece ward the family off its target¹⁷.

3.3 Entering the country

Female migration from Eastern Europe has become an integral part of the international migratory flows towards the EU and Greece over the past twenty years. Greece and other Southern European countries became particularly attractive destinations as they were more easily accessible, in comparison to Western European countries, as well as more tolerant towards informal employment at a time when the EU immigration control policies became increasingly stringent (Marouf, 2013).

Since the ratification of the first Greek immigration legislation in 1991, the only way for a third country national to enter the country and obtain a residence permit for employment is by an invitation procedure (metaklisi). However, this process has been too complicated to respond to the changing labour market needs. In addition, it was unrealistic considering the labour market sectors in which immigrants are mainly employed. This legal gap has been largely filled by a series of regularization programs carried out from 1998 to 2007 (Triandafyllidou & Marouf, 2009).

¹⁵ The New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) is an approach that is often contrasted with the Neoclassical Economic approaches of migration that see emigration and return migration as decisions taken based on cost-benefit assessments and the maximization lifetime earnings.

¹⁶ See also: Emke-Pouloupoulou, 2007:146-147.

¹⁷ The latter is particularly frequent in cases of Georgian couples who have migrated to Greece: during the recent years often men struggle to find full-time work while women had the opportunity to work as live-in domestic workers. As a result, the return of the husband appeared to be the appropriate solution as while losing the little extra income they earned working in Greece they also reduced the costs and living in the country.

Georgian migrants enter the country either with visa or by crossing the Greek-Turkish border illegally. In the first case, and since the invitation system is rarely used in practice, Georgians wishing to emigrate to Greece do it using a tourist visa -in some cases after an invitation by their relatives who reside in the country legally-, remaining in the country after the end of its validity.

According to the Greek consulate in Georgia, the percentage of requests for entry visa with a positive outcome are quite high (Marouf, 2013), but according to many migrants, access to the consulate itself has been quite problematic. As a result, aspiring immigrants turn to intermediaries in order to obtain a visa for Greece or they travel with a visa issued for another European country. This phenomenon, however, seems to have waned in the past few years.

About half of our interviewees came to Greece holding a visa, of those almost half issued a visa at the Greek consulate following the legal course, often after the invitation of relatives who already lived legally in Greece, while the rest either came to Greece with a visa of other European country¹⁸ or used an "agency" (grafeio) in order to issue the visa at a cost ranging from 1,500 to 4,000 euros, while normally the visa processing fees for Georgian citizens is 35 euros¹⁹.

It is clear however that the way of entry did matter to them, not only because of the risks associated with illegal entry into the country, but also because of the link of the visa with the regularization programs. This very fact is an indication of the range of information that immigrants seek from their networks of relatives and friends during the organization of their journey. Yet, many who did not manage to have a visa issued ended up crossing the border illegally, intentionally or not, like Dali, who after many failed attempts of visa issuance decided to travel to Greece without the necessary documents or Manana who believed that the agreement made with the "agency" that organized her journey to Greece entailed legal entry to the country and on the way discovered she was wrong:

"I was looking lots, but it was very hard ours there, how they call it? (The consulate) Yes, yes. I did not issue a visa, I didn't do what I wanted, but then I decided I will come like this." (Dali, 44 years old)

"No, I live in the province, I'm not from Tbilisi, I was studying here, and when I decided to go to Greece I came here to fix my visa and my papers to go to Greece legally. But came out like this; that they put me on the bus and I entered the country illegally, without us knowing it." (Manana, 36 years old)

So, half of our interviewees responded that they came to Greece "in hidden" or "like everyone". Searching for smuggles does not appear to be a difficult task, one usually started by discussing his/her plan either with their circles²⁰ in the country of origin or with any of their acquaintances who were already in Greece.

"To tell you, to tell you the truth, and me now and others and even 10,000 you can interview and they can tell you different things, right? There are these things and whoever wanted to leave somewhere could, let's say, hear this even in a street." (Baia, 33 years old)

"Here (in Greece) was a man, they told me you will go there, they gave me a number, telephone, and I called, they told me: come down to Turkey to discuss here, how it is, how much it is..." (Toma, 31 years old)

Many entered Greece without a visa in tourist buses carrying their compatriots always with the aid of an 'agency'. In these cases the aspiring migrants were either hiding in a specially designed part of the vehicle, or remained in place, as there had been an understanding between the 'agency' and specific border officials. It is however worth noting that based on our interview with FRONTEX, the border control authorities have now acquired equipment allowing them to detect these cases and as a result the irregular entries by bus have decreased significantly (Interview 10).

¹⁸ Usually Germany.

¹⁹ See: <http://www.mfa.gr/albania/ypiresies/theoreseis-eisodou/theoreseis-schengen.html>

²⁰ Friends, relatives, neighbors.

Others crossed the Greek-Turkish land border on foot, with the help of a smuggler, which usually an unpleasant and quite dangerous experience:

“Every while they were changing the people who accompanied them, they were leading the way. They were about 18 people until Greece ... She says that in the forest where she was walking, she was walking on these wild cut wood and in these days that she was walking in the end her foot swelled and blackened and she did not know what it was but it was in a situation that she thought that will lose it.” (Tamari, 47 years old)

The cost of entry without a visa is similar to that of the visa issuance through an ‘agency’, it ranges between 1,500 and 4,500 euros. The amount is usually paid upon arrival to Greece and in many cases it is covered by relatives who are already in the country and is repaid later by the migrant. As Anastasia, who came to Greece at the age of about 40 to help her daughters financially, recounts:

“My cousin was waiting for me here. She came for me that she knew when I will come, to pay. She had money, I did not have.” (Anastasia, 46 years old)

Networks play an important role in the initial settlement and job search of Georgians in Greece. Firstly, most interviewees came to Greece after consulting with relatives or friends who were already in the country. Often they were hosted by these persons for short periods until they find work²¹, as in the case of Nutsha who came to Greece at age 19 and was hosted by a friend of her sister’s *“... a while, it was about two weeks”* (Nutsha, 29 years old) or that of Natela who came to Greece at the age of 42 *“Four days I stayed with was my sister. Then work. At a home, yes.”* (Natela, 58 years old)

Of course in cases of immigrants who do not work as live-in domestic workers, the periods of stay with friends and relatives are clearly bigger and can cover their entire stay in the country. There are however persons who came to Greece following a general trend from their village or their neighborhood to the country without having a specific person to whom they could rely, or who did not receive the expected support by their networks. These people often sought support for their basic needs in work agencies.

“I had a friend who had gone there²² first, she had worked, and she told me 'Come to go find some work and this' but then she told me some lies, so it is, so it is, you know how they tell you, but there when I went on my own I looked and job and everything ... Some agency, there was back then a Georgian agency, and now you know how many, then we were 20-40 people, and so we started.” (Natia, 52 years old)

Shorena, who came to Greece 14 years ago at the age of 21, had a similar experience:

“Here, in Omonia were many Georgians where there was an agency, we lived together and you found (a job) later, they help each other.” (Shorena, 35 years old)

It is important to emphasize that when we speak about migrant networks we should not overlook the network of actors, such as the employers and their connections or the employment agencies, which do not belong to one community of common descent. For instance, with regards to search of employment both the networks and the recruitment agencies play a dominant role. The case of Tamari who found her first job as a domestic maid through an agency, paying 150 Euros, and from then onwards sought and found work in the circles of her first employers is typical. The networks created among immigrants and their Greek employers are not limited to job search issues: Denola sought the help of her former employers in order to try to regularize her residence status while the 26 year old Endzela who wished to continue her studies managed to accomplish that despite her irregular status thanks to the support and acquaintances of her employer.

²¹ Some weeks or even days.

²² To Greece.

4. Residence status issues and ‘survival strategies’

In this section we will examine the Greek control and migration management policies and their impact on Georgian migrants as well as the strategies they follow in order to avoid any negative consequences and finally the interaction between the residence status and the position of Georgians in Greek labour market.

4.1 Control policies

During the last few years Greece has implemented a series of measures aimed at controlling irregular migration both at the border and within the country including increasing police presence in border areas, strengthening the controls at the points of exit, intensifying the controls within the country²³, as well as creating pre-departure detention centres and extending the maximum detention time of undocumented migrants to 18 months (Triandafyllidou et al., 2014).

Table 2: Georgian citizens apprehended and deported (2009-2014)

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Apprehensions	2522	1456	879	793	568	732
Deportations ²⁴	267	333	154	236	497	1087

Source: Hellenic Police

As mentioned previously, the improvement of border control equipment is likely to have altered the ways of entry of Georgians in Greece, yet we must emphasize that during this period the entrance Georgians had already waned. However, concerning the control within the country, despite the intensification, the situation appears not to have changed for Georgians. As in our previous research, in 2008-09²⁵ and 2010²⁶, the Georgians living undocumented in Greece respond that they indeed fear control and this restricts their movements, as many try to move as little as possible. Yet, in reality, they stress that are rarely controlled by the police authorities of the country and that this fact is linked to their appearance which is not very different from that of Greeks.

"Well, I thought of it²⁷, they do not stop me, how do I know? (he laughs) I do not look like the blacks, these, these, I look a little like the Greeks, Russia ..." (Kakha, 52 years old)

²³ Operation ‘Xenios Zeus’, later replaced by operation ‘Theseus’

²⁴ We should point out that in these tables are included third country nationals who were deported either by forced (except for repatriations) or voluntary returns (executed by DOM and the Greek Police).

²⁵ Interviews conducted in the framework of the IDEA research project (See: Nikolova & Marouf, 2010)

²⁶ Interviews with domestic workers, including Georgians, conducted in the framework of the FRIM project (See: Marouf 2013)

²⁷ The possibility of being stopped by the police for a check.

"To tell you. I'm not a young girl (she laughs), I am sorry to say this but I never had some problem. Never. No, I walk like this, quietly for myself, I never have a problem. Never. Many times along, beside me is the police and they do something, if I don't do something bad, I am like this, I never, they don't even ask me. Once somebody (a policeman) wanted something, I answered and nothing. For papers they never answered me. (...) But I am always afraid, this is true, you have no papers and you are scared of something. It's ... I understand that it is not right to be a foreigner and be here without papers, I certainly do not like it, it is a lot of trouble for us. Not only for me, for us, who do not have papers. Truth is, it is very difficult, but I certainly never had such a problem."
(Eka, 50 years old)

The readmission agreement between Georgia and the EU that came into force in March 2011 allows the Greek authorities to expel the Georgian nationals who do not have the necessary legal documents without any difficulty, thanks to the excellent cooperation of the Georgian side. This makes the extension of maximum detention time indifferent to Georgians. Moreover many of the interviewees who consider their presence in Greece temporary are considering expulsion as a slight modification of their plan.

"If you would hold me, what will they tell me? What have you done? I have not done nothing. You will leave. They will give me a deport, is in not? But they cannot do anything else. That's why I am not afraid." (Toma, 31 years old)

4.2 Policies for the management of migration and asylum

For over 20 years the Greek immigration policy has been largely characterized by a reactive approach to irregular migration and informal employment (Triandafyllidou et al., 2014). The invitation system for foreign workers (metaklisi), does not seem to correspond to the Greek labour market mainly because of the complicated and lengthy procedures involved (ibid). The regularization programs²⁸ of the late 1990s and the mid-2000s have been main legislative measures to normalize the situation (ibid).

Nikolova and Marouf (2010) distinguish two phases of migration from Georgia and Ukraine, based on changes in the Greek migration policy framework. The first phase begins with the onset of the migration flows from the two countries in the early 1990s and is mainly characterized by irregularity with regards to the residence status. This period ends with the implementation of the first regularization program in 1998. After that Georgians, as immigrants of any other nationality, were able to regularize their residence status and thus their quality of life and their working conditions improved significantly. According to Marouf (2013) the fact that the last regularization program was conducted in 2007 and involved only those who had arrived in the country by 2005 has led Georgian migrants to seek and use alternative strategies in order to resolve their residence status issues. Therefore, perhaps we can now speak of a new phase, characterized by a "return to irregularity" and a "false and temporary regularity" while many of the organizations interviewed propose as a solution an open, stable and permanent regularization process.

Amid the crisis, with the Article 42 of the Law. 3907/2011, referring to the asylum system, opens the door to an ongoing process of regularization giving access to third country nationals residing in Greece and proving that they have developed strong ties with the country to stay permits for 'exceptional reasons' of one year duration that can then be renewed as permits of other types. These provisions were included and specified in the Article 19 of the "Code of Migration and Social Integration" (N. 4251/14) and mainly concern those who enjoyed a regular status in the past, those

²⁸ Three such programs have been conducted in 1998, 2001 and 2005 and in 2007 smaller regularization program took place targeting once more those who had entered Greece before 2005.

who reside in the country for more than 10 years, but also the second-generation immigrants, since attendance of Greek school is considered proof of strong ties with the country. In addition, in September 2013, a Joint Ministerial Decision of the Ministries of Interior and Labour, Social Security and Welfare (JMD 43574/2013), gave the possibility to third country nationals accompanying Greek citizens with tetraplegia, paraplegia, mental retardation or disability of at least eighty percent to apply for a regularization of their residence and work status for six months after its publication for. The JMD targeted people who worked as escorts of the persons concerned for at least one year before its publication, and the persons with disabilities (or their supporters judges) had to enter in a contract with the third country national, subject to the conditions of the labor legislation. As we shall see in the following sections, these two initiatives give the opportunity to some Georgian immigrants who meet the relevant criteria to regularize their residence status in the country.

With regards to the asylum system, Law 3907/2011 voted in January 2011 provided for the creation of the new Asylum Service which eventually was launched in June 2013. The establishment of the new Asylum Service came in response to very large accumulation of pending requests under the previous system. For a considerable time, filing an asylum request was one of the main strategies of Georgian undocumented immigrants in order to regularize their residence status.

4.3 *Survival strategies*

In this section we will present the main strategies used by the Georgian migrants in order to avoid arrest, detention and expulsion and even regularize their residence status. We will see that cases of interviewees who attempted or succeeded in regularizing their status in various ways, cases where they used the asylum system as a form of regularization but also the way the situation is faced by those who have not been able to regularize their residence status.

4.3.1 *Regularization*

The regularization programs of the period 1998-2007 have been known to Georgian immigrants and, as already mentioned, have affected their preferences for the way of entering Greece, as entering the country with a visa from the Greek Consulate would allow them access to these programs. Undocumented Georgian migrants are constantly anticipating a new "law"; a new regularization program modelled after the previous ones which of course never comes.

"Now I do not have papers (...) OK, we'll see, when law comes that I can fix my papers all right, we'll see." (Eva, 28 years old)

These include also people who were residing in Greece during the period when the regularization programs took place, yet have failed to regularize their status due to their manner of entry into the country. As described by Manana who came to Greece in 2000 at a young age and returned to Georgia in 2010, when she realized that the chances to regularize her status were rather weak and her potential, both professional and personal, being undocumented, was rather limited:

"I stayed in Greece many years, waiting, they were constantly saying they will be fixed, the law will come, the law will come, but, if I remember, it was 2005, the law came but (...) only for that, they wanted Greek visa, of Greece, so I could not do it once again, and then the government changed, if I remember well, and they were constantly saying on television now the law will come, now the law will come, I waited, I waited and like this I got lost. I could not go nowhere." (Manana, 36 years old)

Some of our interviewees²⁹, despite their efforts to regularize their residence status in other ways, ended obtaining a residence permit through marriage with a Greek citizen. As Anastasia, who came to Greece in 2007, recounts:

"No. We did the application in... when we were not married, because I knew they were doing something, let's say law, we went to apply to the Ministry of Interior, we waited for some answer for a year, but no, nothing, afterwards we got married religiously here, in the church, and we went to Georgia afterwards and we signed there. We made like this all the papers and again I came back with the visa." (Anastasia, 46 years old)

Among the interviewees was a young man who had applied for a residence permit for exceptional reasons and thereby regularized his status, as he was Greek high school graduate. In addition, three of our respondents³⁰ were interested in the regularization process for the companions of persons with disabilities introduced by the relevant JMD and indeed one had already filed an application at the time of the interview.

Generally, Georgian immigrants appear broadly informed on developments pertaining to migration management policies. The ways in which immigrants are informed about the issues are mainly three: their social networks composed of compatriots -friends and relatives- and of Greek employers; Georgian organizations and; lawyers, with whom they mainly come into contact through their networks and organizations. Some of our interviewees were facing or had faced in the past difficulties in acquiring information due to the absence of networks or the insufficient awareness of their networks:

"The law had come out that year that I came here, in 2004 I have come, I do not remember exactly, but somewhere there had come the law, but, because I did not know, no one lead me, what I had to do, it was a chance, I should have fixed the papers, because no one showed me the way in the end I stayed. Certainly you can fix them now if you pay but I never tried." (Makvala, 30 years old)

Among the interviewees there were cases of –regularization either because they themselves stopped to collecting the necessary insurance stamps or because they have acquired a residence permit as dependents and their husbands returned to Georgia or failed to renew their permits.

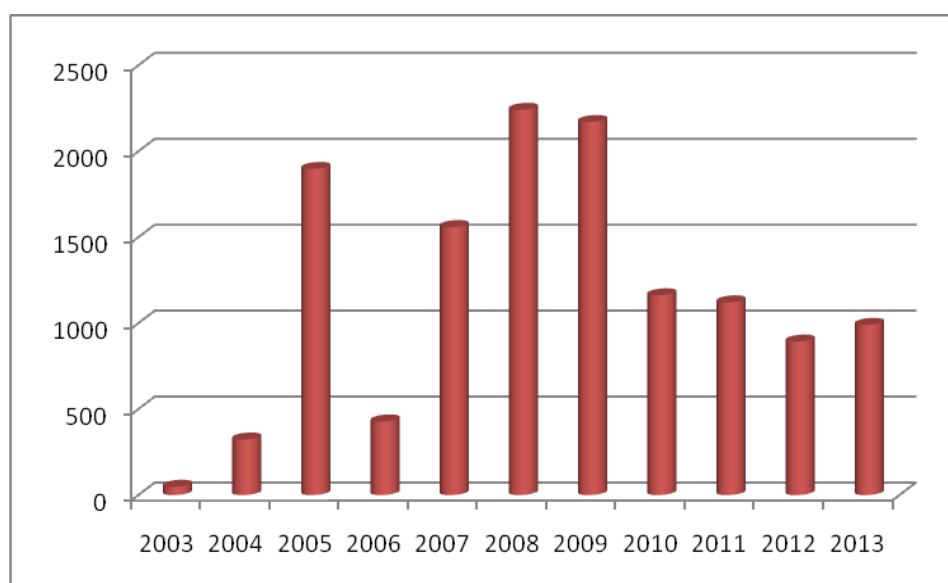
4.3.2 Asylum applications

Georgian undocumented migrants in Greece often apply for asylum. Until the launch of the New Asylum Service, as the requests processing rate had been quite slow, the "pink card" offered them the opportunity to remain in the country for a long period without the fear of persecution or deportation by renewing their application every six months until their claim was examined. According to the Asylum Department of the Hellenic Police, the UNHCR and the Greek Forum of Migrants, confirmed also by the relevant statistics, Georgians are one of the main nationalities in terms of asylum applications. The rapid increase in asylum applications from 2005 onwards is probably linked to the fact that the regularization programs of 2005 and 2007 targeted only to those who had come to the country by the end of 2004.

²⁹ Specifically three of our interviewees acquired a residence permit after their marriage while a fourth one has acquired a residence permit after the birth of her daughter since her father is a Greek citizen.

³⁰ Specifically one of our interviewees had already applied when the interview took place as the elderly woman she cared for met the requirements, while two others were aware of the JMD and were discussing these prospects with people in their environment who met the conditions but during the interview it not clear whether they would actually apply or not.

Graph 1: Asylum applications by Georgian citizens in Greece (2003-2013)



Source: UNHCR³¹

Some of our respondents proceeded to submit an asylum application after a police check and detention in order to avoid deportation. Others knew the process through their networks and proceeded to it soon after their arrival. As described by Levan³²:

«Levan: They³³ were also in Thessaloniki, I went to Athens because I knew that the law is coming to issue legal papers and I wanted to issue papers and then return to Thessaloniki. More I wanted to stay in Thessaloniki but for this reason I was told to come here, to do papers, to fix, after go wherever you want.

Q: And did you indeed issue papers with ...

Levan: No. Because as the law came out, the law said that only the one who has Greek visa makes but until 2004. But I went 2005. They did not give me. After I issued a red card, something like this.” (Levan, 46 years old)

In additions there have been cases where the employers insisted on the regularization of their worker's residence status thus resorting to asylum application in the absence of any other solution or where the very company employing the interviewee issued, through a lawyer, the "pink card". Such was the case of Tamaz who nevertheless retained the asylum request for a very short time as at some point his 'pink card' stopped being renewed and as a result he remained undocumented for four years.

³¹ Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org>

³² Two more interviewees had similar experiences.

³³ Some of his friends.

4.3.2 Undocumented stay

Thus, especially until 2013, asylum applications have been an easy solution, especially for men, as in their case the existence of documents was more likely to be necessary in order to work. However, many of our interviewees indicated that while aware of this possibility they preferred not to proceed. As described by Dali:

"I did nothing. Papers I did not do something because, you know, when you have nobody here from the top I cannot do anything. We'll see. The fake I don't want to do. If it is to make, to make real papers. We make here, we pay a lot but then they can catch and go where you came from, and that's why I do not want to do, if I do I want to do real paper, normal paper I want to do." (Dali, 40 years old)

The exact same picture is also presented by Toma:

"What is this³⁴? Red Card? Yes, I thought many times but you know what? They make here many but they are not. They may make fake and they ask for money." (Toma, 31 years old)

A very important deterrent regarding the asylum claims of Georgians residing in Greece is the cost. Most of the respondents have applied for asylum through lawyers paying significant amounts of money ranging from 500 to 1,500 euros. This cost is prohibitive for some, especially if you take into account that benefits of this document are small compared to those of a residence permit; it does allow you to move freely within the country, possibly gives you access to social insurance but does not allow you to visit your home or invite your family to the country.

A second deterrent is the frequent occurrence of false "pink cards". As described by the police authorities (Interviews 7 and 8), the "pink card" is a document without safeguards and is quite easy to forge, while police has faced a large number of such incidents. Immigrant organizations (Interview 3) have mentioned cases of Georgians holding fake asylum applications thinking they are authentic.

Similar problems have been reported by interviewees who applied for regularization with the assistance of lawyers. Specifically, there was a case of a Georgian man who paid 4,000 euros to a lawyer in order to apply for a residence permit and received the certificate, which however turned out to be fake, as well as that of a woman paid a lawyer 1,500 euros, during the 2005 regularization program, in order to submit the application on her behalf and he disappeared with the money without performing any action. Such instances have discouraged many interviewees from applying for asylum, as they believe they cannot be certain of its validity.

4.4 Irregular status and employment

The fact that a significant proportion of the Georgian citizens residing in Greece are undocumented has an impact in their employment situation putting them in a more vulnerable position. This is reinforced in the case of domestic work, which, due to the nature of the profession, is much more difficult to regulate. As described by the representatives of the Georgian Consulate in Athens (Interview 1) and the Caucasus Cultural Centre (Interview 2) the rights of Georgian workers are not protected in practice as they work on the basis of verbal agreements that are often violated. In fact, there have been cases where employers refuse to pay their employees knowing that they will not be able to claim their payment through legal proceedings because of their irregular residence status.

³⁴ The asylum application.

Moreover, according to the representative of the Georgian Women's Union of Greece (Interview 4), even those who have managed to have a residence permit issued and renewed in the past faced the possibility of losing their jobs, as employers show preference to those who are willing to work uninsured and therefore cost less.

Based on our interview with the Caucasus Cultural Centre (Interview 2), the excessively demanding schedules of the workers in the domestic sector, especially those employed in the care of elderly people, whose presence is constantly needed, could be associated with the loss of documents, since, in many cases, the workers do not have the time to deal with bureaucratic issues. The above has also been confirmed by our field research.

Psimenos and Skamnakis (2008) have argued that the lack of work permit leads newcomers to irregular uninsured work which in turn sets obstacles to the acquisition and renewal of documents, creating a vicious circle of "welfare marginalization". Moreover, the very fact that even if full-time domestic worker and her employers did everything according to the insurance regulations she would not enjoy the same privileges³⁵ as workers in other employment sectors is likely to discourage them from being insured and / or regularized (Maroufouf, 2013).

However, we must stress that some immigrants have stronger incentives to regularize than others. Immigrants who came to Greece at a younger age, without leaving their families behind and who do not consider their stay in the country temporary have a stronger incentive to be regularized as this would allow their further development on both a professional and a personal level. On the other hand, women who see their migration as temporary often consider insurance as a waste of money that only serves in obtaining or renewing their stay permits. The same goes for women who live in Greece with their spouses and, despite the fact that they are employed, they choose not to be insured and hold residence permits for family reunification as dependent family members. Such were the cases of Natali and Nana: in the case of the first, the fact that her husband was unemployed and therefore unable to renew his residence permit created a problem for both of them regardless of the fact that she continued working while in the case of the latter the same problem was created after the return of her husband to Georgia.

The above indicate that beyond the policies of migration control and migration management policies on labour and insurance also play a significant role on the residence status of migrants. Therefore, alongside the arrangements that are already in place and allow certain immigrants to (re) regularize their residence status it might be just as important to provide incentives for developing insurance awareness both workers and employers.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that many domestic workers, mostly of younger age, find themselves trapped in this profession purely because of their legal status. They consider that they would not be able to find work in any other sector, as they cannot be insured, and, at the same time, they feel that the environment of the home protects them from any possible police checks.

³⁵ E.g.: access to unemployment or maternity benefits

5. The return to Georgia and its sustainability

According to Cassarino (2004) return to the country of origin can be divided into three broad categories based on the degree of *preparedness* of the migrant who returns: a high level of preparedness, a low level of preparedness and lack of preparedness. What appears to be particularly interesting in the case of Georgian migrants, and also probably in the cases of migrants of other nationalities who return from Greece, it is that their characteristics before the return and the conditions after the return do not coincide with the typology of Cassarino and explanation for this can be found in Greek immigration policy of the last decades and its implementation.

The majority of our interviewees fall into the category of immigrants with low preparedness for return, although their legal status is often that of irregular migrants or rejected asylum seekers, which according to Cassarino corresponds to a lack of preparedness, while the length of their stay in the country is often over 3-4 years, which, according to the author corresponds to a high level of preparedness. Indeed, it is the implementation of the Greek migration policy that has allowed people with a long presence in the country to live and work undocumented or in a precarious legal status (as that of an asylum seeker) without seeking a more rational solution.

5.1. Return policies and programs

In general, a number of government agencies and NGOs and international organizations such as the IOM and the Danish Refugee Council, have engaged in activities related to the repatriation and reintegration of returnees in Georgia. For example, the Danish Refugee Council has been active in the field of reintegration since 2007, helping to build the capacity of NGOs and the creation of appropriate systems and simultaneously providing direct assistance to returnees (Interview 16). The state, through the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Areas, Refugees and Housing, provides returnees grants for small business of about \$ 3,000 upon the completion of a relevant course and the compilation of a business plan (Interview 14). The Targeted Initiative (Targeted Initiative) for Georgia offers repatriates general advice, job search assistance through counseling and employment centers, additional education through vocational training or apprenticeship programs, limited medical assistance when deemed necessary for the further reintegration, temporary housing and assistance in the creation of small businesses (Interview 17). Yet, Zurabishvili (2012) stresses that the programs that are available do not hasten the creation of an environment in which returnees could either create businesses or apply the skills they have acquired during their migration abroad.

While the first phase of the field research was conducted an intense discussion on the forthcoming launch of a larger-scale, state-funded program to promote the return of Georgian migrants and their reintegration into Georgia's labor market was taking place (Interviews 1, 2 and 4). However, some of our interviewees appeared more cautious, stressing that from the standpoint of the Georgian state such a move would place the country closer to Europe, yet the economic value of remittances is 8% of the country's GDP, and a considerable number of families depend on this money (Interview 16).

5.2. The return decision

For some of our respondents, the decision to return came smoothly as they met some more or less clear goal such as buying a house or a store or supporting their children during their studies. In several of these cases, the primary goal was not sufficient in ensuring the expected benefits and thus a sustainable return. As seen from the following passages that led either to an extension of the stay abroad or to the decision of a second migration:

"I do not know how it happened, I cannot leave, that is to say my husband left and now I am getting ready maybe, maybe I will leave in a little while. We wanted to leave together but we did not make it. That is to say, it's probably that we have need. There is no other reason, yes, that's it." (Denola, 37 years old)

"Because I gathered what I wanted, I gathered something, I bought the house here and I wanted something to eat, I have some work, but the money ended, and then what to do? Again I went." (Natia, 52 years old)

Yet, many of our interviewees consider to return or decide to return by nostalgia for their families whom they are unable to see due to their residence status, which does not allow them to travel. One such case is that of Nino who is thinking of returning although her family still needs the money:

"Now, because the children were two years old, I have not seen how they grew up, nothing, it's been four years, now I'm thinking to stay for a while and not, I don't have then to stay here, a few more years to insure a little life to my children and then I think to return back." (Nino, 36 years old)

In fact, some of our interviewees mentioned that if they had a residence permit and thus were able to travel to Georgia and visit their families they might be thinking of their migration in the longer term. However, in the cases of people who have migrated to Greece at a younger age, the absence of documents plays a central role in their decision to return, but not for the same reason. The main problem is not the fact that they are not able to travel to their homeland, but the fact that they feel and indeed are limited both in their personal and professional lives.

"I have it, let's say, in mind; in two years I have to do all these, what I have in my mind. Okay, maybe it will not happen in these two years, but as you think of it and more, and more you are making it bigger. So I have to leave in these two years. It will happen, it will not happen, it will happen what I have in mind it does not matter. Better to leave. This, the when you are like this without documents is very difficult." (Eliso, 27 years)

It is, thus, worth to note that the irregular status, and the policies regarding the control and entry in the country affect the migration project on both the mid-term and the long-term. In the med-term Georgian migrants face irregularity and entrapment in Greece. On the long-term, people who have not fulfilled their migration target, because they have no other way to visit their homeland and their families as well as people, mostly of younger age, who would like to remain in the country, yet their status does not allow them to make plans for the future, are often driven to return. Moreover, the lack of freedom of movement does not give these migrants the opportunity to visit Georgia during the preparation of their return, in order to make a more realistic assessment of their prospects there.

5.3. The return in practice

According to Cassarino (2004) the level of preparedness depends on the willingness and readiness to return, thus in order to achieve a high level of preparedness the return decision must be the result of free choice, accompanied by adequate resources and information about the conditions in the country of origin. The lack of freedom of movement associated with the control and visa policies often does not allow that. Migrants often decide to return under the psychological stress experienced due to the great longing for their home and their relatives, while not being able to verify firsthand the conditions in their homeland.

As already mentioned, repatriation and reintegration programs are in place in both Greece and Georgia. It is worth to stress that none of our respondents was affected by the existence of return programs in the decision to return to Georgia and did not benefit from any of these programs. In addition, while our respondents in Greece seemed to be aware of IOM programs this was not the case for our respondents in Georgia.

Many of the migrants who have returned to Georgia expressed their wish to return to Greece as the economic conditions had not improved substantially and the money they had accumulated or the investments they had made were not able to cover the needs of themselves and their families:

"We have 700 euros salary, now not, only cows but from there you eat. Only corn and beans. (...) But if you have only the apartment what to do? Since you cannot live and eat bread. It is difficult, the situation is difficult." (Ketevan, 51 years old)

The situation appears to be more difficult for older migrants:

"My aunt is gone, but she still wants to return. She is thinking about it. She says, let's say, maybe one 2-3 years, until I go to retirement, then I will return, say, when she will have the pension. Because is it too hard to get a job when you get back, and at this age when you are old." (Eliso, 27 years old)

The youngest, on the other hand, seem to be optimistic without idealizing the situation in Georgia:

"I decided because I had no papers and thus waiting, waiting many years passed for me and I did not go ahead. I could not ... I had a job, my family was there but it was not what fulfilled me and still I was illegal, and I was in Greece, I was illegally and this bothered me too much and I decided to go. I have no regrets, I have no regrets. Although I was unemployed for a year and it was a little hard for me I never thought to go back to Greece unless I go for a holiday (she laughs). And in no other country I want (to go). Because when you go from here, from there, it is difficult to move on in your life, so I understood. You must stay, to make do, meet people, to make friends..." (Manana, 36 years old)

Finally, during our field research there have been cases of migrants who, despite being undocumented migrants or asylum seekers in Greece, according to the typology of Cassarino (2004) returned to Georgia with a high degree of preparedness. These people returned to the country after the victory of the Georgian Dream political party, believing that they can play a role in the developments and transfer their experience and expertise acquired in Greece to Georgia. Unfortunately they were wrong:

"We thought that we would start some things after we had lived in Greece for years and we learned many things and we thought that this power will need us in Georgia and Georgia will need our experiences. But when we came here the situation was not so much what we expected, first of all no one is interested in what you know, who you are, no need, no political will." (Levan, 46 years old)

6. Conclusion

Female migration from Eastern Europe has become an integral part of the international migratory flows towards the EU and Greece over the past twenty years. Greece and other southern European countries have been particularly attractive destinations, as they were more easily accessible compared to Western European countries and at the same time more tolerant towards informal employment at a time when the EU immigration control policies became increasingly stringent.

It is difficult to estimate the number of Georgian migrants, but there is clearly a large presence of Georgians living irregularly in Greece, using different strategies to avoid detection by the authorities or to regularise their residence status in order to avoid detention and deportation. During the past few years there has been a reduction of the Georgian population in Greece, which is linked to both a drop in new arrivals, which have been limited to people who come to the country following first degree relatives, and an observed return tendency. This decrease mainly relates to the impact of the crisis on the Greek labour market, namely the increase of unemployment and reduction of wages.

In the case of the Georgian immigrants, social networks, that are composed not only by their compatriots but also by people of other nationalities, including Greeks employers, play a very important role not only in the initial decision to migrate and the travel arrangements, but also in finding work or trying to regularize their status, as well as organizing their return to Georgia. Georgian immigrants enter Greece with a visa or by crossing the border illegally. It is clear however that the way of entry does matter to them, not only because of the risks associated with illegal entry into the country, but also because of the link of the visa with the regularization programs. This very fact is an indication of the range of information that immigrants seek from their networks of relatives and friends during the organization of their journey.

The majority of our interviewees decided to migrate in order to achieve specific goals, considering their migration as short or mid-term, while their entire family was often involved in the decision. In this light, although they were aware of the difficulties they were about to face with regards to their residence status they were not deterred. However, as financial targets change and their stay in country is extended the issue of residence status becomes increasingly important.

With regards to return to Georgia, the lack of freedom of movement associated with their undocumented status do not allow for the migrants' adequate preparation as they decide to return under the psychological stress experienced due to great longing for their home and their relatives and are, at the same time, unable to verify the conditions in their homeland. This results in many returnees expressing their desire to return to Greece, as the economic conditions in Georgia have not improved substantially and the money they have accumulated or the investments they have made have been proved insufficient in meeting the needs of themselves and their families.

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8. Annexes

9.1. Annex I: Interviews with stakeholders in Greece

Interview Number	Stakeholders in Greece	Type of communication	Date
1	Georgian Consulate in Athens	Interview	13.03.2013
2	Caucuses Cultural Centre (Athens)	Interview	05.02.2013
3	Georgian Immigrants for Democratic Georgia	Interview	08.03.2013
4	Georgian Women's Union of Greece (Athens)	Interview via phone	24.03.2013
5	UNHCR	Interview	08.02.2013
6	Greek Council for Refugees	Interview via phone & E-mail response	17.02.2013
7	Hellenic Police, Directorate of Immigration, Operations and Coordination Department	Interview	11.02.2013
8	Hellenic Police, Asylum Department, Directorate of Immigration	Interview	11.02.2013
9	Greek Forum of Migrants	Interview	15.02.2013
10	FRONTEX	Interview	01.02.2013
11	Hellenic Police, Directorate of Immigration	Interview	05.04.2013

9.2. Annex II: Interviews with stakeholders in Georgia

Interview Number	Stakeholders in Georgia	Type of communication	Date
12	Greek Embassy in Tbilisi	Interview via phone	14.03.2013
13	IOM Mission to Georgia	Interview via Skype	19.02.2013
14	Office of the State Ministry for Diaspora Issues	Interview via Skype & phone	04.03.2013
15	People's Harmonious Development Society	E-mail response	20.02.2013
16	Danish Refugee Council	Interview via Skype	27.03.2013
17	EU TARGETED INITIATIVE FOR GEORGIA	E-mail response	29.03.2013

9.3. Annex III:

Map: Legal and illegal entry of Georgians in Greece

