



Irregular migration between Georgia and Greece

Everyone can cross a low fence

Michaela Maroufouf

Deliverable 2.1.

Background Report: Migration System 2 (Georgia)



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1. Introduction

Georgians is one of the largest immigrant groups residing in Greece. In fact, Greece is one of the most important destinations for Georgian migrants. However, few studies have been devoted to Georgian migrants, who are usually examined along with other groups within broader studies.

In general, most scholars 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. What is particularly interesting in the case of Georgian migrants in Greece is the fact that they cover the entire spectrum of residence statuses of third country nationals: there are significant numbers of repatriates, residence permit holders, asylum seekers as well as persons of irregular status.

In the following section, I will discuss the methodology used for the purposes of this background report. In the third section I will summarize the most important information on Georgia as a country of emigration from the early 1990's until today, drawing from the relevant literature. I will start by providing a basic historical, political and economic overview of the country, followed by a presentation of its different phases as a country of emigration. I will then continue by discussing the gender issues that arise with regards to Georgian migration and the socio-economic impact of migration and remittances. In the fourth section I will present Greece as a destination country for Georgian migrants mainly focusing on the trends of migration from Georgia to Greece and exploring the reasons that rendered Greece an attractive destination to Georgians. In the fifth section, I will focus on the Georgian population residing in Greece and its access to the labour market. Finally, in the sixth section I will look into the obstacles faced by Georgians in the process of migrating and remaining in Greece and the strategies they have developed in order to cope with them.

2. Methodology

This background report aims to summarise the existing knowledge concerning irregular migration between Georgia and Greece, based on both primary and secondary research. In this context, we have examined the existing literature, we have collected data from various sources and we have conducted a series of interviews with stakeholders both in Greece and in Georgia.

Literature on Georgian emigration focuses mainly on irregular migration, gender issues, and the impact of migration and remittances. With regards to research on migration from Georgia to Greece, the first publications in the 1990's and early 2000's referred to migrants from the former Soviet Union in general, including Georgians, although the research mostly focused on the co-ethnic repatriates of which Georgians were the most numerous group¹. Information on Georgians can be drawn from studies focusing mainly on female migration and domestic work², yet recently there have been some studies and publication devoted specifically to Georgian migration to Greece³.

For the purposes of this study we have conducted over ten interviews with state officials and other stakeholders, such as representatives of Nongovernmental Organisations, International Organisations and Georgian associations in Greece and 6 interviews with similar actors in Georgia⁴ between February and April 2013. In addition, we have collected or requested data from various sources ranging from Labour Force Survey statistics, insurance statistics and residence permits data to visa application statistics.

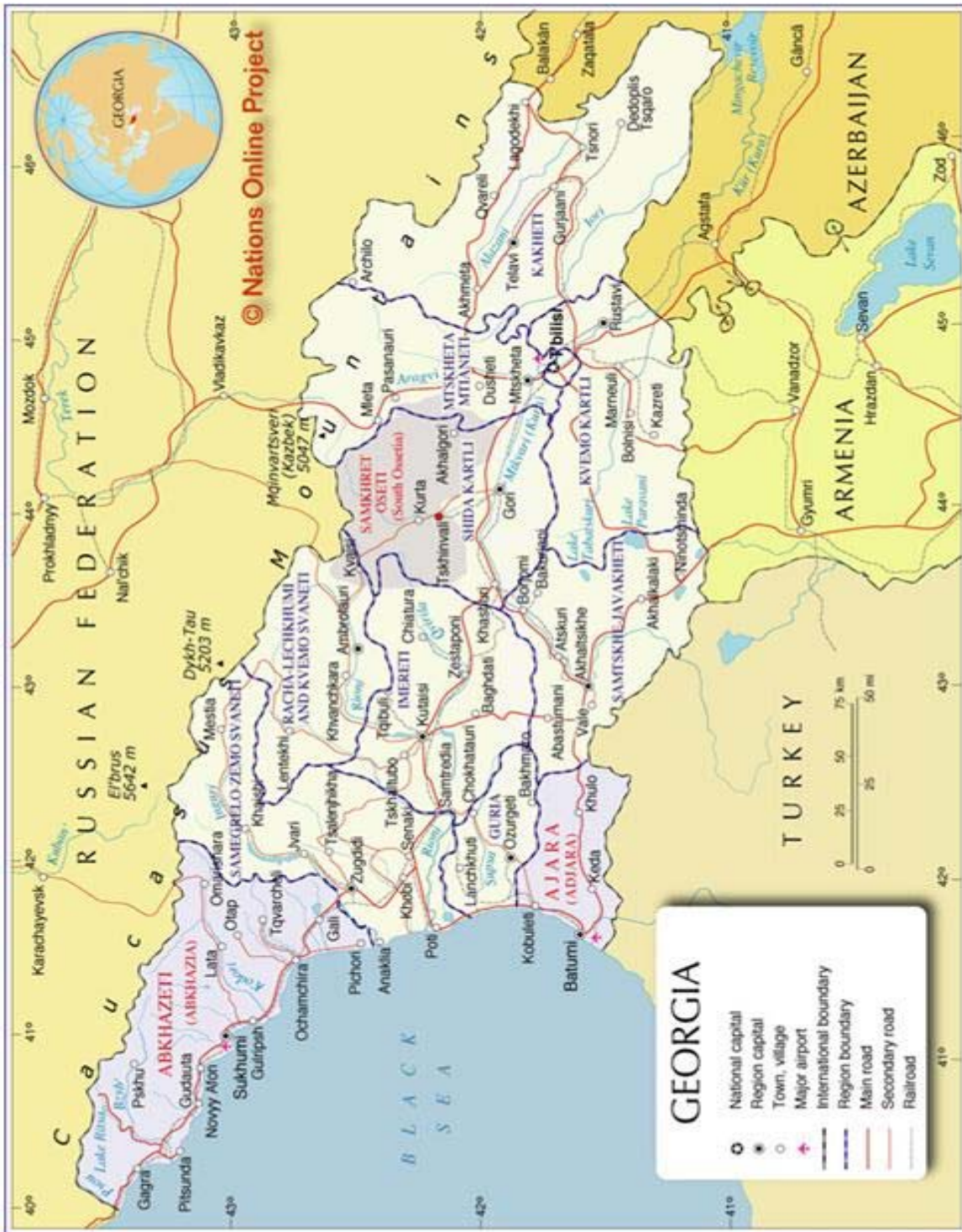
¹About 2/3 of the co-ethnic repatriates from the former Soviet Union came from Georgia (Nikolova & Marouf, 2010).

²For instance see KETHI, 2007; Marouf, 2013

³For instance see: Nikolova & Marouf, 2010; People's Harmonious Development Society and TASO Foundation, 2010; Human Rights Defence Centre, 2011.

⁴For a full list of the interviewees see: Annexes I & II

Map 1: Georgia



Source: Nations Online Project⁵

⁵ Available at: http://www.nationsonline.org/maps/georgia_map.jpg

3. Georgia as a country of emigration

In this section I will try to summarize the most important information on Georgia as an emigration country from the early 90's until today, as portrayed by the relevant literature. I will start by providing a basic historical, political and economic overview of the country, followed by a presentation of its different phases as a country of emigration. I will then continue by discussing the gender issues that arise with regards to Georgian migration and the socio-economic impact of migration and remittances.

3.1. *Historical, political and economic overview*

According to the CIA World Factbook⁶ Georgia is situated in the Southwestern Asia, however it regards itself as part of Europe. It borders the Black Sea, between Turkey and Russia, with a sliver of land north of the Caucasus extending into Europe. It is strategically located east of the Black Sea and controls much of the Caucasus Mountains and the routes through them. It is estimated that the country's population is slightly over 4.5 million people 1.1 million of which reside in the capital, Tbilisi.

Georgia declared independence from the Russian Empire on May 26, 1918, at the heart of the Russian Civil War. During its short stay in power, the Menshevik government came across significant problems with ethnic minorities, as it faced intricacies with the Abkhaz, Ossetian, and Ajarian minorities, and a conflict with Armenia with regards to the Armenian-inhabited territories within Georgian territory (Cornell, 2002).

In 1921, following the collapse of the first Georgian republic and its integration into the Soviet Union, which led to the formation of what is often named the 'Second Georgian Republic', Abkhazia officially emerged as an independent Soviet Republic in federation with Georgia. It was later (1931) incorporated into the Georgian Republic as an Autonomous Republic; Ajaria was created as an Autonomous Republic during the same year, and almost a year later, in 1922, South Ossetia was given the status as an Autonomous *Oblast*. The Transcaucasian Federated Soviet Socialist Republic (ZSFSR), consisting of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, which joined the Soviet Union, was created during the same year. In 1936, the adoption of a new constitution by the USSR led to the termination of the ZSFSR, and thus, the three South Caucasian republics became individual members of the Soviet Union.

According to Cornell, Georgia maintained a deep sense of independence from the Soviet leadership from the 1920s through the 1980s. Thus, the fact that Georgia, along with the Baltic republics, was where the earliest and the strongest secessionist movements in the union emerged during the 1970s and 1980s isn't surprising. (Cornell, 2002)

⁶ Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gg.html>

Table I: Ethnic Composition of the Georgian Population in 1989 and 2002

Ethnicity	1989 Census of the USSR	2002 Census of Georgia
Georgian	70.1%	84%
Armenian	8.1%	5.7%
Russian	6.3%	1.5%
Azeri	5.7%	6.5%
Ossetian	3%	
Greek	1.9%	
Abkhaz	1.8%	
Ukrainian	0.9%	
Other	2.2%	2.5%

Sources: Cornell (2002: 158) & CIA The World Factbook⁵

Based on the 2002 census, Georgians constitute about 84% of the country's population. Other ethnic groups present are the Azeris (6.5%), the Armenians (5.7%) and the Russians (1.5%) while 2.5% of the country's population belongs to other smaller groups (CIA The World Factbook).⁵ However, a comparison of the above figures with those of the last Soviet census, conducted in 1989, clearly show the drastic population outflow that has occurred due to the economic hardships and the ethno political conflict in the region since Georgia's independence in 1991. Based on the 1989 census the ethnic break-up of Georgia was: 70.1% Georgians, 8.1% Armenians, 6.3% Russians, 5.7% Azeris, 3% Ossetians, 1.9% Greeks, 1.8% Abkhaz, 0.9% Ukrainians and 2.2% others. (Cornell, 2002)

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)

3.2. Main migration trends

The estimates on the number of Georgian emigrants vary vastly and there appears to be a lack of reliable data.⁷ Nonetheless, the number of Georgian emigrants is indisputably high. Based on some estimates, over 20% of the country's population has emigrated⁸, yet the Danish Refugee Council offered the conservative estimate of 350,000 persons (i.e. roughly 8% of the country's population!):

"Since 2007 we implemented 45 researches in the area and also we can get the information from other researches, from other sources, other organizations. Yeah. The numbers are quite different, and you hear something that is one million and two hundred thousand, but I do not think, and we do not think this is correct, the last, that was in, we have been co-operating with a state university, there is a center on migration research and also there is an organization called Caucasus Research Resources Center, they have been doing household researches, and, according to some indications, so this might prove absolutely not reliable, and also this is with the support of, if you know, Michel Poulin, the professor from Leuven University, (...) we came to a conclusion that it should be around three hundred and fifty thousand people out of the country, no more." (Interview 16)

According to Georgia's official statistics on migration, a very high migration outflow prevailed between 1992 and 1996. This was followed by a period of much lower, stable outflow, not exceeding 30,000 persons per year until 2003, while after 2004 an opposite trend can be observed. (Badurashvili, 2012b)

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.⁹ 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 home-lands. The second wave, between 1996 and 2004, was smaller in size and driven mainly by economic motives. (CRRC/ISET, 2010: 8) 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.

Russia is the major destination country for Georgian migrants. It became an attractive destination due to the easy access offered by the lack of a visa regime in place up to 2000, as well as the two countries' strong historical and economic ties, its geographical and cultural proximity and the fact that the Russian language was widely spoken by Georgians. Yet, this trend started changing after the implementation of a visa regime in 2000 and of course after the war and the closing of the borders in 2008 (Badurashvili & Nadareishvili, 2012a: 5). In addition, according to Erlich, Vacharadze and Babunashvili (2009: 19-20) based on interviews with returned migrants, the hostile sentiments of Russians towards Georgians and the tensed relations between the two countries following these events have had a negative effect on the daily lives of Georgian migrants in Russia.

Since the mid- 90's, Europe and North America became increasingly popular destination countries for Georgian emigrants, though Russia did continue being the primary destination country. (Badurashvili &

⁷For instance, Badurashvili & Nadareishvili (2012a: 4-5) cite an estimate by the World Bank suggesting that 25% of Georgia's recent population resides abroad and as well as other estimates ranging from 200,000 to 1,000,000 persons residing abroad, regardless of their legal status; CRRC/ISET (2010) provide a much lower estimate of merely 140,000 emigrants, based on the data of a household survey conducted by CRRC in the end of 2008.

⁸For instance, according to the UN Population Division and the World Bank the number of Georgian international migrants in 2005 exceeded one million and was estimated at 22.9% of the country's total population. (IOM, 2008b: 11)

⁹For instance see: Asalania, 2006 (who separates Georgian emigration into two phases: pre and post 1994); CRRC/ISET, 2010

Nadareishvili, 2012a: 6) Thus, Greece, Germany and the United States are among the main countries of destination for Georgians. (IOM, 2008 b: 20)

According to CRRC/ISET (2010), even though, during recent years, the Georgian government has managed to strengthen the country's business environment, a lot remains to be done with regards to the creation of sustainable employment opportunities which could decrease the country's need for high levels of international migration. Based on their data, the major push factors, namely the need for employment and higher wages, continue to persist¹⁰. (CRRC/ISET, 2010: 3)

Similar views were expressed by the Danish Refugee Council, stressing out that motivation for migration is not as much linked to unemployment as it is to a mismatch between wages and the cost of living leading to poverty. The organization's response on whether Georgia is going through a period of stability and return with regards to its emigration was a firmly negative one:

"No, no, no, not stability, no return at all (...) because if we look into the structure of emigration and the reason why they emigrate, most organizations would say 'because of the unemployment'. This is not true. Because we don't have the problem of unemployment here, we have rather the problem of poverty. That means that the wages or salaries generated from employment are not adequate to the price of life in this country. "(Interview 16)

According to the same organization, there are some early signs showing a shift of migration towards Asian countries. Russia and Ukraine do remain the main destination countries but flows towards the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and the Arabian Peninsula appear to be emerging. (Interview 16)

3.3. Gender Issues

Georgian emigration during the Soviet period comprised mainly of men migrating to Russia and Ukraine, in order to be employed in seasonal or construction work, which lead to reinforced gender norms placing the responsibilities for economic provision upon men, and the responsibilities for domestic provision upon women (Hofmann & Buckley, 2008). The shift in migration destinations towards countries with a higher demand for female work force, such as Europe, Turkey, and Israel marked a significant change with regards to gender and Georgian emigration (Hofmann & Buckley, 2008). The number of Georgian women emigrating to Greece, Italy, and Germany is significantly higher than that of men, while the opposite is true for Ireland, Russia, and France.(IOM 2003 in ETF, 2011; Zurabishvili & Zurabishvili, 2010)

According to Curro (2012), the Georgian society is profoundly infused with characteristics that are regarded as essential elements of its national tradition. Broader characteristics and stereotypes of Georgian society can be traced back to the so-called 'Mediterranean value system', which involves 'close emotional relationships within extended families, the importance of kinship, parent-child interdependency, and certain modesty in sexual relations' (Curro, 2012). This culture values "informal" relations between persons and mainly between friends and family members and the attachment to specific roles and norms. In other words, Georgians are expected to comply with social norms rooted in age-long traditions and practices, including gender roles and the rights, duties and responsibilities they entail. (Curro, 2012)

The Georgian society has been, and remains a traditional one and the migration process does not seem to have affected the gender roles in Georgia. Yet, as some evidence suggest, female returnees are 9% more likely to perform traditionally male tasks than the average Georgian woman, however the opposite is true for male returnees who are in fact less likely to perform female tasks. With regards to whether more efforts needed to be done in order to ensure the equality of genders in Georgia the majority of women agreed or strongly agreed. In this case too female returnees seemed ahead of their compatriot women, who did not have

¹⁰See also CRRC, 2007: 21

a migration experience.¹¹ The above findings suggest a possible effect of migration on the opinions and values of these women, with regards to gender equality and gender roles.(CRRC/ISET, 2010: 3)

Hofmann and Buckley (2012) have examined the ways Georgian female migrants use to compromise temporary labour migration with the cultural norms tying “proper” women to their homes and families. The two main strategies migrant women employ are presenting migration as a necessity rather than a choice and stressing the unique and exceptional nature of their own migration experience. The authors note that even though migration is usually considered an empowering experience for women, the use of these strategies that enable migrant women to fit their migration experiences within the frame of the traditional gender norms does not challenge those norms and might even have the opposite effect.

Lundkvist-Houndoumadi (2010) notes that Georgian migrant women play an important role in shaping gender roles in the country. This might not be the case with the narratives of migration, as they do tend to present their experience in a way that fits traditional gender norms, yet it is the case on the level of everyday life with the alteration of the distribution of responsibilities and roles within transnational families.

3.4. Migration and Development

Remittances are a considerable part of Georgia's economy. In fact, based on data by the National Bank of Georgia, in 2009 and 2010, remittances exceeded the country's Foreign Direct Investment (see Table 1.4). According to Gerber and Torosyan (2011) there are two main schools of thought with regards to remittances. The first, associates them with persistent dependence, increased inequality, and conspicuous and wasteful consumption, and other negative effects. The second regards them as a potential source of productive investment capital, insurance against uncertainty in local labor markets, and a means of ameliorating poverty, fostering positive spinoff effects, and providing foreign currency. The authors point out that while empirical studies on the impact of remittances on the Georgian society as well as the national level seem to reach mixed conclusions, the few studies devoted to their impact on the households that receive them show an improvement on their economic well-being, without the negative effects described by the literature. They have also noted a previously neglected and potentially important aspect of remittances; they foster the formation of social capital by increasing the amount of money that households give as gifts to other households. (Gerber & Torosyan, 2011)

Table II: Remittances sent back to Georgia in millions of USD (2004-2011)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011 ¹²
Greece	7.8	15.5	16.9	26.0	47.2	60.4	60.7	17.4
Total	259.1	403.1	553.2	866.9	1,001.1	840.8	939.6	227.4
Total FDI	499.1	449.8	1,190.4	2,014.8	1,564.0	658.4	531.1	-

Source: National Bank of Georgia (<http://www.nbg.ge/>)¹³

The EU and Georgia have maintained relations for a number of years. In 1999 the EU-Georgia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) entered into force while in 2006 an Action Plan was adopted promoting Georgia's further economic integration with the EU (European Commission, 2008). Migration has become part of the Georgian political agenda, mainly in the context of the country's relations to the EU. Yet Georgia has

¹¹86% of the returnee women agreed or strongly agreed compared to 72% of the non-migrant women.

¹² First trimester (January-March 2011)

¹³ Data compiled by the IOM Mission to Georgia

procrastinated until late 2009 and selectively complied with the European Neighborhood Policy rules pertaining to migration. In addition, the country did not go to great lengths so as to create dense web of bilateral agreements with EU or Schengen states. (Ademmer, 2011) An agreement between the European Union and Georgia on the readmission of persons residing without authorization¹⁴ was signed in the beginning of 2011. Several actors are currently involved in managing the different aspects of immigration and emigration from/to Georgia. According to the Office of the State Minister for Diaspora Issues:

"We are trying to prepare a country, not only our Ministry that is the will of the State. What we are trying with the cooperation of other Ministries, as is, there is a Ministry of Migration¹⁵, there is a separate Ministry, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Internal Affairs, we have a cooperation in order to try, and of course with the assistance of IOM, the Danish Refugee Council, the European Union, we are trying, let's say, to offer them things so as to bring them back." (Interview 14)

Generally, a number of state actors and nongovernmental organizations such as IOM and the Danish Refugee Council have been involved in activities concerning return migration and the reintegration of returnees. For instance, the Danish Refugee Council has been active in the field of reintegration since 2007. It assists with capacity building within the governmental organizations by helping to establish the appropriate systems, while, at the same time, it provides direct assistance to return migrants (Interview 16). The state, through the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Refugees and Accommodation, provides small business grants of approximately 3,000 USD to returnees, upon the completion of a seminar and the compilation of a business plan (Interview 14). Additionally, the Targeted Initiative for Georgia offers return migrants general counseling, assistance in job search by referral to the job Counseling and placement Centers, additional education via vocational training or apprenticeship programs, limited medical assistance considered necessary for further reintegration, temporary accommodation assistance and micro- business start-up assistance (Interview 17).

Among its other activities, the IOM Mission to Georgia used to run Migrant Resource Centers which received people with questions with regards to migrating abroad. Those Migrant Resource Centers were later handed over to the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Refugees and Accommodation and IOM is currently only sideways involved in this activity. Greece was one of the important destinations for the potential migrants visiting these facilities, asking questions on the situation in the country and other practical information. (IOM Mission to Georgia Interview) Based upon the data collected by IOM, between July 2006 and June 2008 2,161 potential labour migrants visited IOM's Migration Resource Centres in Georgia, 304 (14%) of which were interested in migrating to Greece. What seems rather interesting is that the only destination choices with higher percentages were the United States (20%) and any country (20%). (IOM, 2008)

With regards to the IOM Assisted Voluntary Return program, the organization's Mission to Georgia is not necessarily involved; it does so only in special cases of people with specific needs, in fact there have only been three such cases¹⁶ in the past 2.5-3 years (IOM Mission to Georgia Interview). Based on data provided by IOM, a total of 31 Georgians have applied to return from Greece to Georgia under IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return program between 2009 and 2012, and 22 have actually participated the program.

Recently, there has been a lot of discussion over the imminent launch of a larger scale state- funded scheme to promote the return of Georgian emigrants and their reintegration in the Georgian labour market (Interviews 1, 2 and 4). However, others, such as the Danish Refugee Council, are more skeptical towards both the possibility of success of such an endeavor:

"It is of the (...) Georgian state interest letting these people where they are right now, because of many factors. The annual rate of remittances is more than one billion, 8% of GDP. The remittances are way more than foreign direct investments. Many families are heavily depended on these remittances and I don't think

¹⁴<http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2011:052:0047:0065:EN:PDF>

¹⁵Refers to the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Refugees and Accommodation.

¹⁶Two of those cases concerned people with psychological problems while the third case was that of a woman claiming that her child was abducted in Greece.

that it is in the interest of the Georgian government to remove those people and take the burden that is no real interest. But, however there is the political interest of getting closer to Europe.” (Interview 16)

4. Greece as a destination country for Georgian migrants

In this section I am going to present the trends and patterns of Georgian migration to Greece. In addition, I will try to explore what makes Greece an attractive destination for Georgian migrants.

Based on a study on female migration in Greece conducted by KETHI (2007), the majority of women from Georgia who were asked about the reasons that led them to the decision to migrate named primarily financial ones such as the low wages (54.3%), the difficulties in finding employment (45.7%), poverty (34.3%) and the need to provide financial assistance to their families (28.6%). Additionally, a significant percentage of women claimed that they migrated for security reasons (25.7%) as well as personal or family reasons (25.7%).

According to the report of the People’s Harmonious Development Society and the TASO Foundation (2010) Greece became an attractive destination for Georgian immigrants for a number of reasons, namely its demand of workforce in labour markets, its economical attractiveness, the developed transportation infrastructure between the two countries, the cultural similarities / physical likeness their people and the presence of a developed social network.

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 Greece. As stated by the representative of the Caucasus Cultural Centre:

“Because it is orthodox, we are of the same creed, it is close in mentality, because we are a Southern country too, then, relatives and friends, Greeks of Georgia have come previously (...) The Greeks were always welcome in Georgia and even the word Berdzeni (ბერძენი), means, is let’s say a compliment, it is called Berdzeni (ბერძენი), it means clever, wise, successful. It shows a very old communication and it does not differ as a nationality.” (Interview 2)

As it is clear by the aforementioned quote, the presence of a developed social network streaming from the ethnic Greeks who repatriated from Georgia in the early and mid-90’s, is considered self-evident. It also agrees with the findings of the interviews conducted by the EU Targeted Initiative for Georgia with the beneficiaries of their reintegration program returning from Greece:

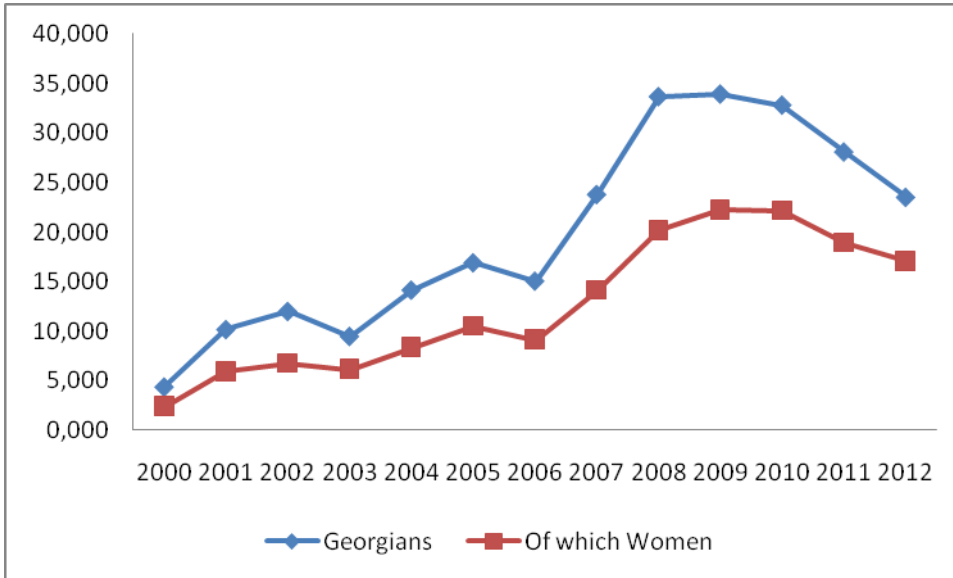
“According to the personal interviews with our beneficiaries, most of the returnees followed the example of their friends or family members. There are lots of cases when the whole family has been migrated, there are also cases of family reunification after several years of separation.”(Interview 17)

According to the Georgian Consulate of Athens, although merely 12,000 persons are registered in the Consulate¹⁷, which of course is in no way mandatory, roughly 150,000 Georgian citizens reside in Greece, the

¹⁷There seems to be some distrust among Georgian citizens residing abroad in an irregular status with regards to the use of this information, thus most of them are reluctant to register fearing that the consulate may share their information with the authorities of the host country (IOM Mission to Georgia Interview).

majority of which came to Greece from the beginning till the mid '90s. This number is based upon a collection of estimations of Georgian communities throughout Greece (Georgian Consulate of Athens Interview). However their number is closer to 55,000 persons, if we consider the estimates based on a household study cited by the Danish Refugee Council, according to which about 15% of all Georgians abroad reside in Greece. (Interview 16)

Diagram 1: Georgian Population in Greece 2000-2012



Source: Labour Force Survey, 4th Trimester of each year, Hellenic Statistical Authority (El.Stat.)

According to a study by the People's Harmonious Development Society and the TASO Foundation (2010: 11) Kakheti, Imereti and Tsalka have been identified as the areas of Georgia where the population is more actively involved in migration to Greece.

With regards to the inflows of migration from Georgia, according to most of our interviewees the largest volume entered the country from the beginning till the mid-90's:

"From the beginning it was very big, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, from '93, '94, and on it was at times but now I do not know, I cannot say for sure, no one knows the data, we don't even know how many Georgians" (Interview 2)

Currently, according to the Consulate, the number of people returning to Georgia exceeds the number of those migrating to Greece and *'the number of people who are willing to go back to Georgia is increasing, it's not a big number but we see the process (...) one of the reasons may be the crisis in Greece and the less possibilities to find employment'* (Interview 1).

The same view is expressed by both the Georgian Women's Union of Greece and the Caucasus Cultural Centre:

"All right, they do not come here now (...) More are leaving than coming. In Georgia, as a country, a better situation exists than in Greece."(Interview 4)

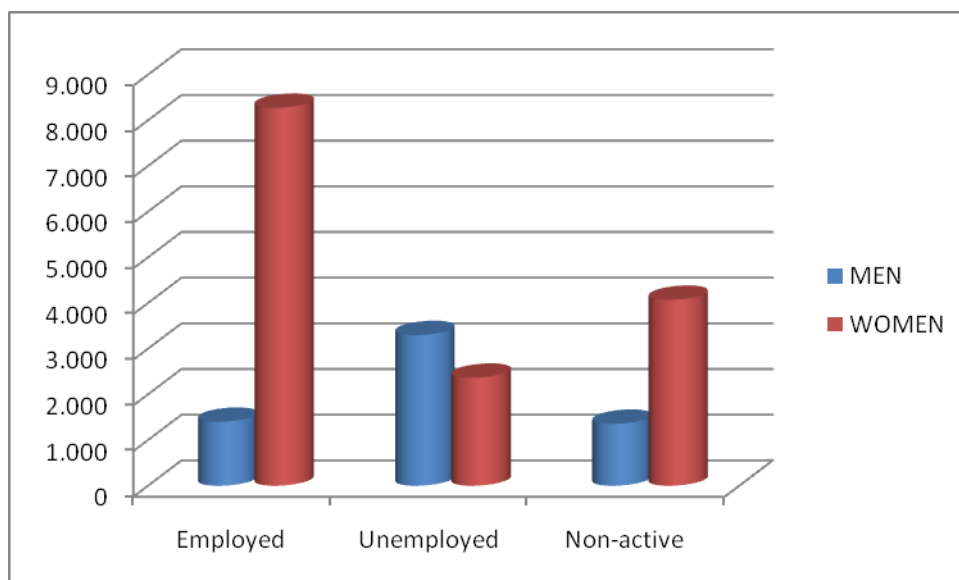
"They have lessened, and many are going back, because, due to the crisis..." (Interview 2)

5. The profile of Georgian migrants in Greece and their labour market situation

Based on the data of the 2001 census conducted by the Hellenic Statistical Authority, almost 30,000 Georgian citizens resided in Greece. Their main volume was concentrated in the Prefecture of Central Macedonia (62%), and over 70% resided in the greater area of Macedonia, which is most likely linked to the great concentration of co-ethnic repatriated from Georgia in the same area. There was also a significant concentration of Georgian citizens in Attica (14%) and Crete (8%). (Nikolova & Marouf, 2010: 341)

Nikolova and Marouf (2010: 342) suggest that more recent data, namely the data on residence permits valid in October 2007 show a change in that pattern. The percentage of Georgian permit holders residing in Attica was 39% and in Central Macedonia 36% while 8% resided in Crete. Based on qualitative data, the authors concluded that this shift has taken place due to the vast inflow of Georgian immigrants as well as the relocation of Georgian citizens already residing in the country from smaller provincial towns of Greece to Athens, where they had better chances of being employed.

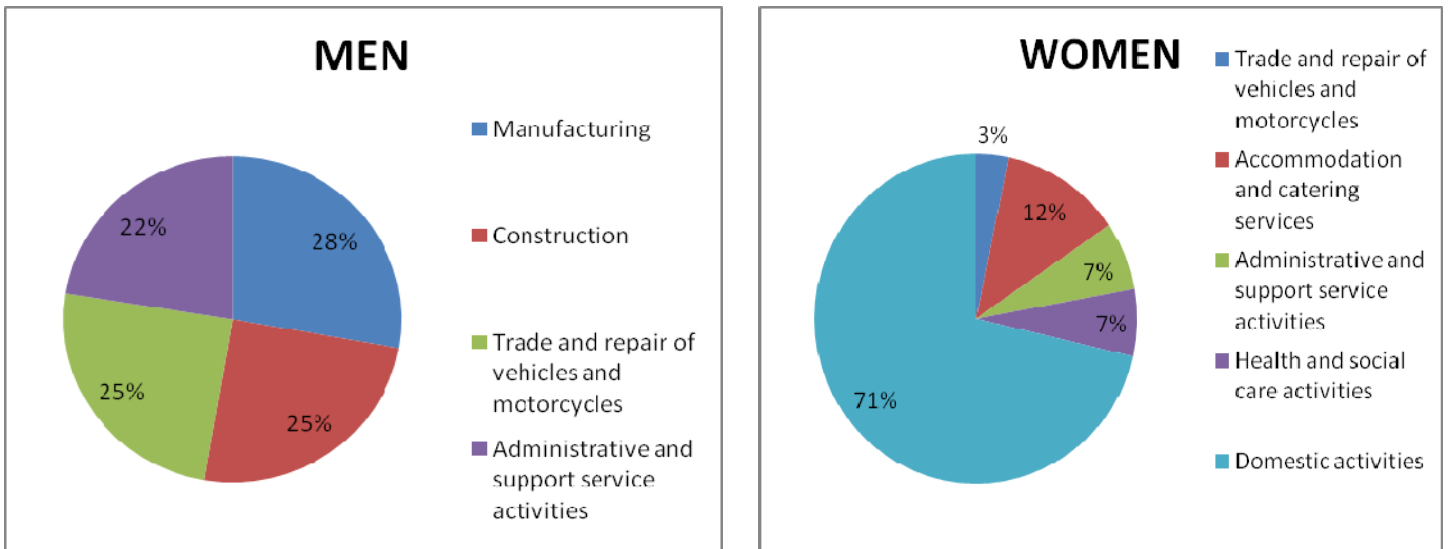
Diagram 2: Georgian citizens (over 15 y.o.) by status of employment and gender, 2012



Source: Labour Force Survey, 4th Trimester of 2012, Hellenic Statistical Authority (El.Stat.)

As described above, based on Labor Force Survey data, Georgian migration to Greece is highly gendered. In the 4th trimester of 2012 73% of the 23,500 Georgian citizens residing in Greece were women (See graph 4.1). The gender gap appears to have deepened over the past few years, which can be most likely linked to Georgian's labor market situation as the sectors where Georgian men were typically employed, such as manufacturing and construction work, suffered more by the economic crisis than the domestic sector, which is the main labour market niche of Georgian women. This has resulted in an astonishing 70% unemployment rate for Georgian men, while the unemployment rate for Georgian women is significantly lower at 22% (See Graphs 5.1 and 5.2).

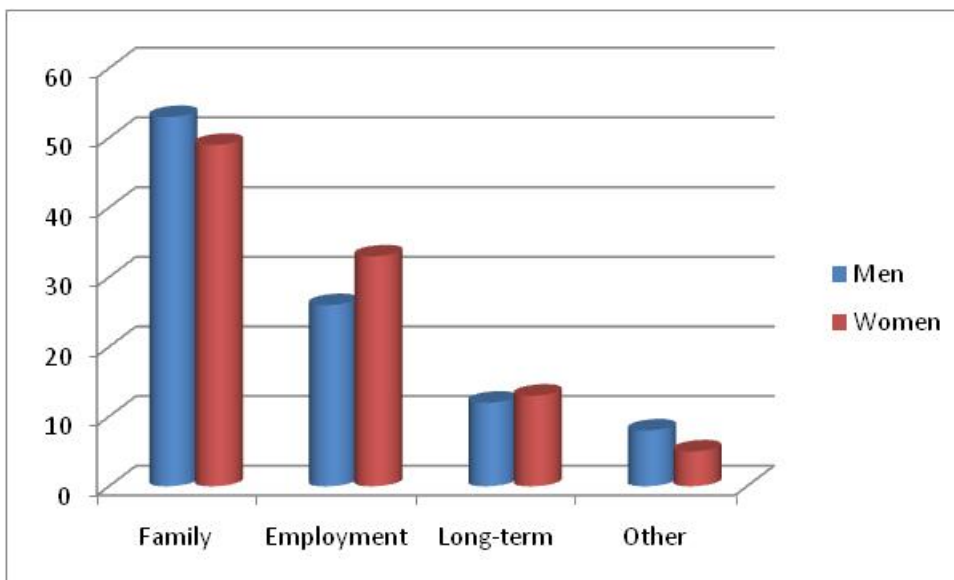
Diagram 3: Employed Georgian citizens (over 15 y.o.) by sector of employment and gender, 2012



Source: Labour Force Survey, 4th Trimester of 2012, Hellenic Statistical Authority (El.Stat.)

The gender imbalance of the Georgian population residing in Greece is also verified by the data on residence permits according to which, in July 2012, 70% of the 13,000 Georgian permit holders were women. (See Graph 5.3) Of course the data on residence permits holders refer only to a relatively small segment of the Georgian population, as the majority stays in the country without the proper documents. Interestingly, the vast majority of the over 7,000 Georgians holding permits for family reasons in December 2012 are family members of Greek or EU citizens and only about 850 of them are family members of third country nationals.

Diagram 4: Georgian residence permit holders by gender and purpose in percentages (July 2012)



Source: Ministry of Interior Affairs

The fact that perhaps the majority of Georgian citizens residing in Greece are undocumented has an impact on their employment situation as it makes them more vulnerable. This vulnerability is enhanced in the case of domestic work, which is by definition much harder to regulate. As described by the Georgian Consulate of Athens (Interview 1) and the representative of the Caucasus Cultural Centre (Interview 2), Georgian workers' rights are not protected in practice as they work on the basis of verbal agreements that are often breached. In fact, there have been cases in which employers refuse to pay their workers knowing that they will not be able to pursue their claim through legal channels due to their irregular status.

In addition, according to the representative of the Georgian Women's Union of Greece (Interview 4), even those who have managed to have a permit issued and renewed in the past face the possibility of losing their papers, as employers show a preference to those who are willing to work uninsured and thus cost less. Based on our interview with the Caucasus Cultural Centre (Interview 2), the excessive working hours of domestic workers, especially those employed in the care of elderly whose presence is constantly needed, can also be linked to the loss of documents, as the workers do not have the opportunity nor the time to take care of personal matters.

6. Plans, pathways and survival strategies – The role of social networks and intermediaries

In this section I will examine the challenges faced by Georgian migrants with regards to entering the country and the different strategies they use in order to deal with the (ir)regularity of their legal status.

6.1. Entering the Country

Georgian migrants either enter the country using a Visa or they enter in an irregular manner. In order to accomplish the later they have a number of options; hiding in special compartments of buses entering the country or crossing the Greek-Turkish land borders on foot, usually with the assistance of a conductor, in order to avoid obstacles such as roadblocks or minefields. (People's Harmonious Development Society & TASO Foundation, 2010)

Map 2: Routes of Georgian Irregular and Mixed Migration Flows



Source: i-Map, Interactive Map on Migration¹⁸

¹⁸ Available from: <https://www.imap-migration.org/>

The representative of Georgian Women's Union of Greece pointed out that entering on a visa is much more expensive than entering irregularly. The reason for this high cost is that often visa's are not obtained directly by the consulate, but through intermediaries. She also mentioned that there are persons who do cross the border without a conductor, despite the dangers involved:

"Very few come on a visa (...) hidden they come, they know something roads, on foot to come here (...) It costs too much to come with a visa, 4,000¹⁹ (...) if someone helps you to come here on foot, some borders that you can cross, as I've heard, about 1,500. Some do not pay anything, they know the roads. Some die on the way." (Interview 4)

Table III: Visa applications and their outcomes

Year	Applications	Positive	Rejections (%)	National
2005	5,455	4,072	1,007 9 (20%)	376
2006	5,744	4,781	856 (15%)	107
2007	7,661	6,597	898 (12%)	166
2008	8,203	6,419	1,571 (20%)	213
2009	6,676	3,810	2,697 (41%)	169
2010	6,253	4,339	1,755 (29%)	159
2011	6,568	5,071	1,375 (21%)	122
2012	5,581	4,348	1,167 (21%)	66

Source: Greek Embassy in Tbilisi

According to the representative of the Caucasus Cultural Centre the main way of entering the country without visa is by bus:

"They come by bus, they come. Bus, and anyone who has the ability by plane, but you have to have a visa, otherwise they do not let you leave by plane from there. That's why the undocumented come more by bus or some other ways." (Interview 2)

However, based on our interview with FRONTEX the border control authorities have acquired equipment able to locate such cases thus reducing the number of those entering by bus.

Table IV: Georgian citizens arrested and deported (2006-2012²⁰)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Arrested	1,708	1,441	2,961	2,522	1,456	879	729
Deported		260	247	267	336		197

Source: Hellenic Police (<http://www.astynomia.gr/>)

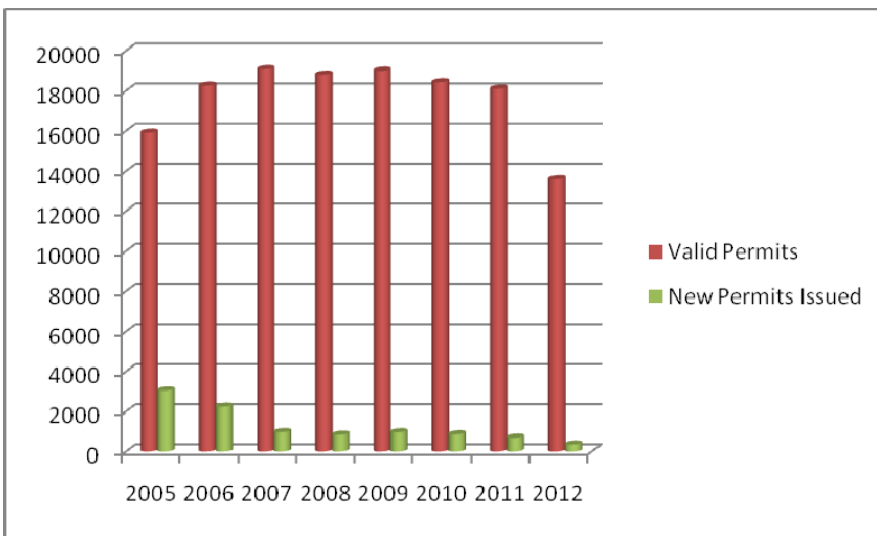
¹⁹The Georgian Immigrants for Democratic Georgia representative estimated the 'price of a visa' at 2,500 euros.

²⁰The data of 2012 refer only to the first 11 months of the year (data on arrests and deportations on December 2012 are not included).

6.2. Legal status issues and survival strategies

Nikolova and Marouf (2010) separate migration from Georgia and Ukraine into two phases, based on Greece’s shifts in migration policy. The first phase begins with the start of migratory flows from those countries in the early 1990’s and it is characterized mainly by irregular residence status. This period ends with the implementation of the first regularization program in 1998. After that, Georgians, like any other nationality, are given the opportunity to regularize their status thereby significantly improving their living and working conditions.

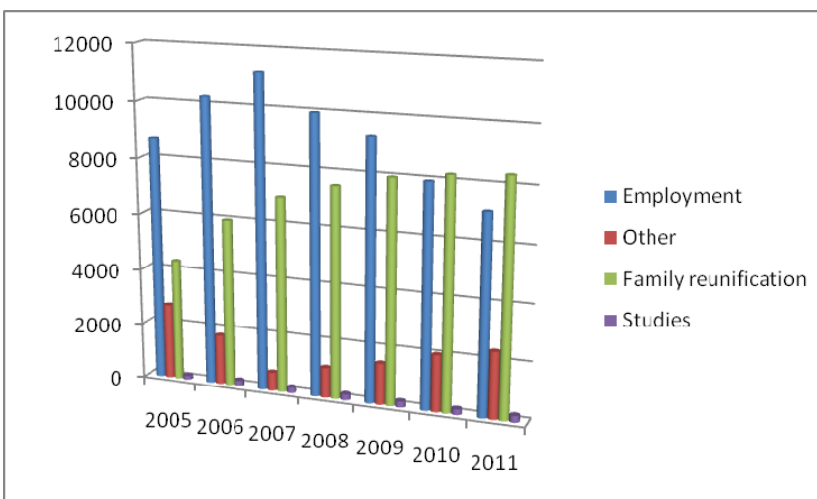
Diagram 5: Valid residence permits and new residence permits of Georgian citizens by year (2005-2012)



Source: Ministry of Interior Affairs

The decline in valid residence permits for the purpose of employment, along with the fact that the last regularization program took place in 2007- concerning only those who arrived by 2005- has led Georgian migrants to search and use alternative strategies in regularizing their status. As a result, we can perhaps now speak of a new phase characterized by a ‘return to irregularity’ and ‘false and temporary regularity’.

Diagram 6: Valid residence permits of Georgian citizens by category and year (2005-2011)



Source: Ministry of Interior Affairs

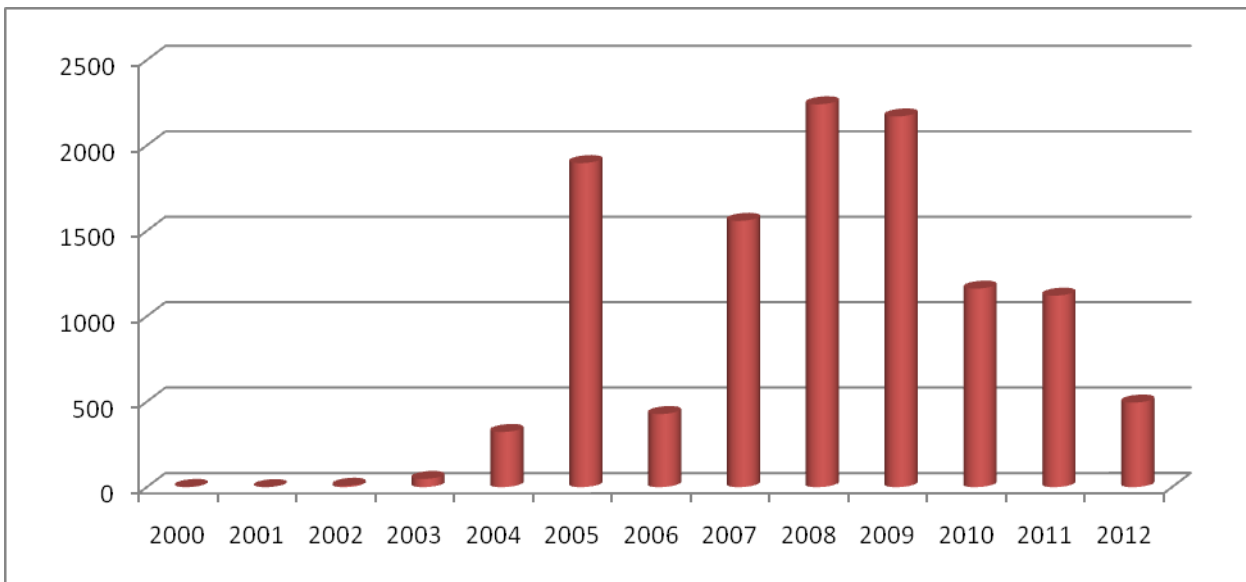
The expulsion of undocumented Georgian nationals, according to the Directorate of Immigration of the Hellenic Police, has been facilitated greatly by the readmission agreement between Georgia and the EU that has entered into force in March 2011:

“...especially in recent years we have applied and are implementing the readmission agreement between EU and Georgia and we have an excellent cooperation. Georgians are being returned.” (Interview 11)

In order to avoid deportation, undocumented Georgian immigrants in Greece often apply for asylum upon their arrest, as the applications are processed in a significantly slow paste, offering them the opportunity to remain in the country without any fear of prosecution. According to the Asylum Department of the Hellenic police, the UNHCR Greece and the Greek Forum of Migrants Georgians are one of the top nationalities with regards to asylum applications:

“In the recent years the nationals of the countries who enter the asylum procedure are mainly from Pakistan, Bangladesh, Albania, Georgia. This is the vast majority.”(Interview 8)

Diagram 7: Asylum applications by Georgian citizens in Greece



Source: UNHCR Greece, (at <http://www.unhcr.org>)²¹

“...Pakistan, Bangladesh and Georgia continue to have a significant presence in asylum applications. Let me stress though that this is not associated with arrivals, it does not mean they are newcomers because the asylum application may take place after 5 years of presence in the country when (one is) arrested and decides to file for asylum. But these are the main nationalities.” (Interview 5)

“The illegality among Georgians is very high. But most are in northern Greece not in Athens. That’s why you see very high figures in asylum from the Georgians. Because they are not regularized they find a solution there. In 2009 they were the third group, after Bangladesh and Pakistan. The absurdity that the fourth group were the Afghans is that they should have been the first.” (Interview 9)

It is of course clear to the Georgian asylum seekers that they will not be recognized as refugees, they are merely applying, taking advantage of the backlog in Greece’s asylum system where a decision on an applicant’s status can take over four years, in order to be able to remain in the country without the fear of arrest or deportation, using the so-called ‘pink card’. As the representative of the Caucasus Cultural Centre puts it:

²¹Data compiled by the IOM Mission to Georgia

“Asylum, there is no other solution not to get caught on the street, because they catch you on the street and take you to jail, three months, and this is too much, then this costs, from lawyers and so on. And asylum application means that you wait. Nobody has gotten, not one single case among the Georgians, but the fact that you are waiting enables you to work.” (Interview 2)

Yet, according to the Greek Council for Refugees, there are cases in which Georgian migrants can be attributed a humanitarian status, allowing them to remain in the country for a period of time, after the examination of their asylum application:

“There are countries which prima facie do not “produce refugee flows” as a rule. However there is an exception e.g. there specific decisions in the second degree granting status to Albanian or Georgians or even Chinese (...) With the policy followed by the Police the Georgian pregnant (woman) has access to asylum and not the Afghan able-bodied refugee. Asylum has lost its real meaning.” (Interview 6)

Another issue that often arose during the interviews is that of forged ‘pink cards’ bought by Georgian migrants knowingly or not. As described by our interviewees of the Asylum Department and the Operations and Coordination Department of the Hellenic Police, as well as Georgian Immigrants for Democratic Georgia:

“Drawing a false document such as a pink card, that has no safeguards, it is a plain paper like the driving license, that is to say you too can make one, you need a printer and a computer and a stamp from the bookstore.” (Interview 8)

“The issue of counterfeiting is particularly intense. There is a tremendous growth. Oh well, how many are the forgers?! We do not understand ... we heat all the time, we catch them, they go to jail, because it is a serious offense, they go in for felony, the offense of forgery is a serious one, with stamps and such.” (Interview 7)

“Right now we have three cases where the guy was arrested with fake pink card, and he didn’t know that it’s fake.” (Interview 3)

The Greek Council for Refugees mentions another practice that streams from the fact that the ‘pink card’ is not considered to be a ‘secure’ public document:

“I just know that on pink cards they change the photos so that additional bearers can ensure access, e.g. to health. It is not a particularly ‘safe’ public document.” (Interview 6)

Another strategy used by Georgian migrants in order to regularize their status that recently drew some media attention is through ‘white marriages’ with Greek citizens.²²

The Georgian immigrant associations I have interviewed have all criticized the Greek government of its migration management and attributed the Georgian migrants’ irregularity of status to the lack of correct policy planning. The head of Caucasus Cultural Centre pointed out the need for a special scheme for the regularization of domestic workers similar to those implemented for instance in Italy. (Interview 2)

The representatives of two Georgian immigrant organizations go a step further, suggesting that Greece could benefit significantly, and in many different ways by the regularization of Georgian migrants:

“Greeks are very wrong, (...) biggest mistake was that almost 3,000 Georgians were here and they did not give papers (...) I pay almost 140 each month, then I pay, also a fee, and taxes, 70 euro each month, and so if everyone paid, and another mistake was not letting women bring (their) children. If you do not let me bring the child, I, all the money, all money, because I work inside²³, I send to Georgia.” (Interview 4)

²²See for instance see: <http://www.imerisia.gr/article.asp?catid=26510&subid=2&pubid=112982769>

²³ She means as a live-in domestic worker.

The representative of Georgian Women's Union of Greece focuses on Greece's losses in terms of taxes, insurance contributions and remittances. The representative of Georgian Immigrants for Democratic Georgia, on the other hand, points out that undocumented Georgians who do work in Greece and wish to remain in the country are willing to pay hundreds of Euros on documents that constitute products of corruption or forgery in order to avoid the fear of arrest and deportation.

"Greece is losing a lot of money, they are losing a lot of money. I can tell you, 100% of our immigrants, if there were any possibility of paying a, for example, they are paying up to 600 Euros each to some lawyers to get the pink card, and most of them are fake (...) If Greek government issued some law or something to give to Georgian immigrants their legal papers any migrant would be happy to pay a thousand Euros."
(Interview 3)

Thus a regularization program or procedure would constitute a 'win-win situation' as it would allow migrants to regularize their status while benefiting the state economically.

7. Conclusion

Greece has become an attractive destination for Georgian immigrants for a number of reasons, namely: its demand of workforce, its economical attractiveness, the developed transportation infrastructure between the two countries, the cultural similarities and physical likeness of their people and the presence of a developed social network.

Migration from Georgia to Greece can be separated into three phases, based on Greece's shifts in migration policy. The first phase begins with the start of migratory inflows in the early 1990's and it is characterized mainly by irregularity of residence status. This period ends with the implementation of the first regularization program in 1998. After that, Georgians, as any other nationality, are given the opportunity to regularize their status and their living and working conditions are significantly improved.

The decline in valid residence permits for the purpose of employment, along with the fact that the last regularization program took place in 2007- concerning only those who arrived by 2005- has led Georgian migrants to search and use alternative strategies in regularizing their status. As a result, we can perhaps now speak of a new phase characterized by a 'return to irregularity' and 'false and temporary regularity'.

It is hard to estimate the number of Georgian migrants, yet it is clear that there is an extensive presence of undocumented Georgians in Greece, using different strategies to remain undetected or to regularize their status so as to avoid detention and deportation. Georgian migration in Greece appears to be significantly gendered and the majority of female migrants is employed in the domestic sector. The gender gap appears to have deepened over the past few years, which could be linked to Georgia's labor market situation as the sectors where Georgian men were typically employed, such as manufacturing and construction work, suffered more by the economic crisis than the domestic sector which is the main niche of Georgian women. This has resulted in an astonishing 70% unemployment rate for Georgian men, while the unemployment rate for Georgian women significantly lower at 22%. The fact that perhaps the majority of Georgian citizens residing in Greece are undocumented has an impact on their employment situation as it makes them particularly vulnerable. This is enhanced in the case of domestic work which is by definition much harder to regulate.

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9. ANNEXES

9.1. Annex I: List of 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 Greece	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: List of 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

