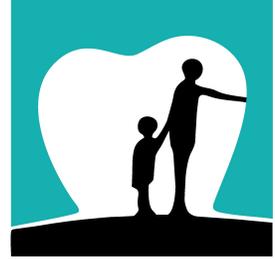


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[VOICES OF MIGRATION IN GEORGIA]

[Qualitative research on the migrants and their communities in Georgia]

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OVERVIEW

All too often migrants are seen as numbers. How many go where? How much money do they send back? How much of these remittances is invested? The Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRC) – Georgia, in cooperation with Danish Refugee Council, has sought to go beyond the numbers and to highlight the voices of both migrants themselves and households whence migrants depart. It is our hope that this report will lead to better policies and more discussion on how to better maximize human resources in Georgia and around the world.

Focus groups were held with three different types of households in Imereti and Achara – households with no migrants, households with returned migrants, and households with absent migrants. Personal interviews were held with returned migrants (see the Methodology Section).

THE GENERAL POPULATION

Among the general population, researchers noted little difference between the knowledge, attitudes and practices of these different types of households. Most likely, the lack of different views among these households speaks to how tightly-knit Georgian society is and how information sharing occurs amongst households.

In all roundtables held with representatives of the general population, dramatic misconceptions about demographic trends in Georgia was a trend that was immediately noticeable. All focus group participants radically overestimated rates of out migration from Georgia, and also overestimated the percentage of these migrants who are ethnic Georgians. Moreover, many focus group participants showed some troubling signs of xenophobia. They feared that high Azerbaijani birth rates would soon lead to Azerbaijanis outnumbering Georgians in Georgia, and feared a Chinese takeover of Georgia. Acharans also feared Turkish immigration.

These trends can mostly likely be explained by geographical factors. CRRC carried out focus groups in Western Georgia (Imereti and Achara). In both locales, there are high levels of ethnic homogeneity. A substantial body of research has shown that such stereotypes exist in communities that have fewer contacts with ethnic or religious minorities, and this would hold true for households included in these focus group discussions. Furthermore, as demonstrated by CRRC's Global Development Network survey, migration levels vary substantially across Georgia and are indeed much higher in Western Georgia, where the agricultural lands are poorer and the industrial centres have collapsed. Therefore, migrants, while still overestimating the actual numbers, are providing more accurate representations of their communities, as compared to Georgia as a whole.

Despite expressing worries about demographic trends and xenophobia toward Chinese immigrants, Georgian participants generally maintained a high level of social openness and tolerance towards immigrants. Georgians displayed typically European attitudes towards

immigration – mirroring nation-state conceptions of immigrants across Europe. They believed themselves to be open to foreigners, so long as they learned the Georgian language and valued Georgian culture and traditions.

Discussion participants also understood the need to recruit foreign investors to promote business in Georgia and to bring in certain highly-skilled professionals that Georgian society currently lacks. It was implicitly understood that Georgians themselves do not have enough capital or skills to start globally competitive large-scale enterprises that would be able to employ the masses of unemployed in Imereti and Achara without outside help.

Alternatively, participants demonstrated an intimate knowledge of migration's upsides and downsides by displaying a complex understanding of personal cost-benefit analyses of migration. They understood that migration often separates families, creates problems for raising children and causes marital stress. While participants in principle believed Georgians should remain in Georgia, they admitted that migration should be a personal choice and that family survival trumps any national aspirations.

Beyond the downsides, focus group participants were especially supportive of study abroad – perhaps a continuation of the Soviet legacy of going to Moscow or St. Petersburg for higher education. They understood that those who went abroad for education gained knowledge not easily obtained within the Georgian education system. However, participants rightly understood that the vast majority of Georgian migrants are not legally employed in their host country, and thus downplayed the skills obtained by these migrants abroad. In particular, women are employed in domestic and personal care jobs in Greece and Turkey, while men are often employed in low-skill construction work. None of these jobs appear to participants to help migrants return with a useful skill set – though returned migrants do note the improved work ethic of migrants employed in Europe.

Indeed, contrasts between Europe and Russia and participants' characterizations of these different destination countries proved fascinating. On the one hand, participants viewed their social standing in Europe as much lower than in Russia. They saw Europe as a destination of servitude where Georgians have an inferiority complex. There, they carry out the most menial tasks and are never seen as equals to Europeans. However, participants also viewed Europe as a better destination than Russia overall, and as more law oriented.

Nevertheless, Europe's systematic and enforced laws were a deterrent for many participants who said they preferred to operate in the murkier and more corrupt ways of Russia and Ukraine to which they were more accustomed, and where one could pay money to secure employment or resolve a bureaucratic problem. Older participants especially saw Russia as a familiar place. They were conscious of their own linguistic limitations, and realised that Russia or Ukraine were more feasible destinations if they considered migration as both an escape and independence. Migration was seen by some as an escape from the complex web of indebtedness and reciprocity that is needed to survive in Georgia. Participants saw migrants as being self-

sufficient and in control of their own lives, implicitly contrasting such control with their own lack thereof.

Given their understanding of both sides of migration, immigration and emigration, it came as no surprise that the respondents displayed acute insight into the types of policies relating to migration they would like to see.

First, they want to see the protection of Georgian citizens. They view consular officials as haughty and not there to serve Georgians abroad. They call for reform of Georgian consular services. Much of what they ask for looks similar to what the Mexican government has already implemented in the United States¹. The respondents also understand that Georgian pride often prevents people from taking less prestigious jobs – particularly people who were well-employed in the Soviet era. However, they note that this phenomenon is slowly changing among members of the younger generation. There is room to change this through governmental policy.

Participants are also acutely aware of the need to promote cultural influence. They believe the Office of the Minister for Diaspora Affairs should work to create a database of Georgian citizens and ethnic Georgians abroad, and to promote Georgian culture abroad through Georgian language schools and cultural events.

RETURNED MIGRANTS

While returned migrants possess many of the same beliefs and attitudes as their community members, they also display much more accurate and detailed knowledge about various aspects of the migration process.

Returned migrants have clearly invested deep resources into learning about the nuances of working legally and illegally abroad. They have a clear understanding that most Georgians work abroad illegally – generally by overstaying their short-term visa in Europe, or going to a visa-free country to work such as Ukraine or Turkey without work permits. They understand that, generally, the only way for Georgians to obtain legal status abroad is to marry a citizen out of love or as a sham marriage, maintain student status (which allows for limited work), or have exceptional professional skills which almost no Georgian migrant possesses. Whether based on rumour or personal experience, migrants generally believe the US to be less bureaucratic and more immigrant-friendly. This can be explained by the ease with which irregular migrants work in the US.

Since most migrants were irregular, their employment profile generally represents the labour market for those with no official employment status regardless of their destination (for complete destination information, see the Returned Migrants Section) Women were generally

¹ See Jorge Durand. 2004. "From Traitors to Heroes: 100 Years of Mexican Migration Policies." *Migration Information Source*. March, 2004. Accessed: <http://www.migrationinformation.org/Feature/display.cfm?ID=203>.

employed in childcare, old age care, housecleaning and gardening. Men mostly did construction work. A few students combined study and work and, even though this work was generally unskilled, it was legal. Two sailors from the sample also worked legally all over the world.

Interest in destinations is generally path-dependent and informed by previous experience. Those who had positive experiences desire to return to the place of their last migration, while those with more negative experiences look for new options.

Indeed many returned migrants claimed that their co-migrants desire to leave Georgia again – and many continue to do so. Returnees note that they had acquaintances who returned after the Rose Revolution with heightened expectations of their ability to find work and remain in Georgia, but most of these people soon left again. They highlight lack of employment as particularly painful for returned migrants, who face a serious diminution of their social status if they cannot find good work since they can no longer provide for their families in the way they were accustomed.

METHODOLOGY

CRRC recently carried out a survey in Georgia of 1,485 families as part of a worldwide project implemented by the Global Development Network (GDN). This sample was composed of households:

1. With no migrants (NM)
2. With migrants that had lived abroad and had returned to Georgia (RM)
3. With absent migrants who were currently resident abroad (AM)

Focus group discussions were held with household members from this survey in Achara and Imereti – two regions heavily affected by migration. These discussions were held between 14 and 20 December in Kutaisi and Batumi. Half the participants were drawn from rural communities surrounding Kutaisi and Batumi and half were drawn from the cities themselves. The full recruitment strategy can be seen in the annex to this report.

The focus group/interview discussion guide was developed by CRRC based on previous experience in migration and social research.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

1. GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

Most of the participants of the Imereti and Achara Focus Groups (FGs) think that life for them would be quite difficult in the European Union because it is far from their homeland and

families. Most of them stated that it would be difficult to adapt to a new environment, country, people, workplace and traditions. Two participants from the Kutaisi FG mentioned a sense of insecurity and uncertainty as the biggest trouble for emigrants from Georgia.

- *“Everything depends on one's personality and the way one gets used to a new environment. It would have been very difficult for me to adapt to the new environment and people.” (Male, 30, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Well, I think, this is very individual, but for me it would be rather tough. I thought of going abroad to work but I cannot imagine leaving my son here. Leaving without my family and working as a servant for foreigners is impossible for me.” (Female, 26, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I will never be able to live abroad. I miss Kutaisi and always have nostalgia whenever I go to Tbilisi.” (Female, 68, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Certainly, it would be very hard for me. First of all you are far from your family and homeland and you are working as a servant for someone. This is very insulting. But people have to go abroad because this is the only way to financially support their families and relatives.” (Male, employed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“On the one hand, one may feel relieved to leave this country, but on the other hand it is very tough. People emigrate because they do not see any prospects in this country.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“My daughter-in-law worked abroad for several years, and she came back devastated. I would never wish for anyone to go abroad and work as a servant.” (Female, 61, Accountant, Imereti, RM).*
- *“I am sure that life is very difficult for our migrants. When I went to live abroad I realised that living in Georgia is much better. Relationships among people are warmer here and you can always rely on their help.” (Female, 35, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“I worked in Antalya a year ago and had a normal income. But I was always worried and afraid that my employer would not pay me. I always had the feeling that I was not protected, and this was the hardest part for me while I was a migrant.” (Male, 25, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“We all are financially insecure abroad because we are nobodies there and we work illegally.” (Male, 50, employed, Imereti, RM).*

Although life for Georgian migrants is difficult everywhere, the majority of participants believe that living in Russia now, after the August events, is harder for Georgians than living in any other country.

- *“Georgians are being chased in Russia now.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Russians have a negative attitude towards Caucasians now. Skinheads are killing Caucasians.” (Male, employed, Imereti, AM).*

- *“The older generation still respects Georgians and has friendly feelings, but younger people hate us. I cannot imagine living in Russia now, and I am really sorry for Georgians who live there now. Everybody is insecure in Russia.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Now it is really difficult to have a normal relationship with Russians and live there safely. They have very negative attitude towards us, and I believe it is easier for Georgians to live in the European Union than in Russia.” (Male, 23, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Russians are very aggressive towards Georgians, no matter whether you live legally or illegally there.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“I cannot imagine how one can live in Russia now. They are aggressors.” (Male, 27, employed, Achara, NM).*
- *“It would have been very difficult for me to live in Russia. I have relatives there who emigrated many years ago but they still do not feel at home there.” (Male, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*

However, some participants thought that living in Russia would not be problematic, since there would be no language barrier and Russia is geographically close, the country is also Orthodox and people are still friends.

- *“I personally would feel better in Russia, because I do not have a language barrier. At the same time Russia is closer and you can come back more easily than from any other country.” (Male, 71, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I have many Russian friends and this would make my life in Russia comfortable.” (Female, 68, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“It is almost three years since I came back from Russia. I studied there and did not have any problems because I was Georgian.” (Male, 20, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“Intelligent people from Georgia and Russia still communicate well, although there are uneducated people everywhere who hate each other.” (Male, 24, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“It would have been very easy for me to live in Russia. I speak Russian and not English. Also, I am sure that Europeans, unlike Russians, are very unfriendly people. Russians have the same religion and are closer to us than Europeans.” (Female, 20, students, Achara, NM).*

Respondents perceive that migration has many positive aspects, despite various challenges that migrants face abroad. For example, all focus group respondents named learning new things, getting an education, becoming more independent, and earning money to support their families as positive aspects of migration.

- *“I really support those people who go abroad to study. They acquire new knowledge and bring new experience and information to our country.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“The educational system is terrible here, and by going abroad to study one can learn a lot. (Male, 71, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“The positive side of living abroad is that you get more experience both personally and professionally.” (Female, 20, student, Achara, NM).*
- *“Emigration has some positive aspects: one can see how comfortable life is, and can get a good education and earn money.” (Female, 50, housewife, Achara, RM).*
- *“By working abroad you can improve your social status and learn to be independent.” (Male, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“My everyday life in Germany was completely different from what it is now. I had a tight schedule there and I was not dependent on anyone. I could rely only on myself and earn money by working hard. It is difficult, but you earn what you deserve. And now I am a student here and completely rely on my parents.” (Female, 32, student, Achara, RM).*
- *“I agree. I had more freedom in Germany. I could not rely on anyone and had to do everything by myself.” (Female, 32, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“Maybe the situation is not perfect abroad but salaries are higher and migrants from Georgia can financially support their families here.” (Male, 51, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“The positive thing that I see is that people earn money and help their families. We all live with money sent from migration.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*

According to the discussions, the major negative aspects of migration are related to children growing up without parental care, family problems, brain drain, demographic issues and a loss of cultural identity.

- *“The negative aspect [of migration] for me is that parents leave and children are brought up by grandparents or other relatives. This is a major problem for a child's psychological development.” (Female, 47, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“There may be some positive aspects [of migration], but I think that leaving families and children is the worst part of migration.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“The negative thing is that you leave to work in another country and cannot do anything for Georgia.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“The most problematic [thing] is that mainly younger people, who should get married and have children, leave and this negatively affects the demographic situation in Georgia.” (Female, 43, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“Migration is the biggest problem for Georgia nowadays. Every year more and more Georgians are leaving, and according to statistical data the dominant nationality in*

Georgia in 45 years will be Azerbaijanis. This is very dangerous.” (Female, 32, student, Achara, RM).

- *“Soon there will be no Georgians living here. People who leave do not want to come back.” (Female, 61, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“There is always a chance that you stay there [abroad] forever and never come back.” (Male, 24, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“The worst thing about migration is that you do not have a chance realise your dreams in your own country and you emigrate.” (Female, 32, unemployed, Achara, NM).*
- *“The most awful thing is that people have to leave their homeland.” (Female, 44, Achara, AM).*
- *“My son, grandson and daughter-in-law are living in Spain. My grandson hardly remembers Georgian and likes everything Spanish.” (Male, 50, employed, Imereti, RM).*

According to the pie charts completed by FG members, approximately 50 to 60% of the population left Georgia, out of which 70-80% are ethnic Georgians. The participants thought that Imereti/Racha had the highest migration rates, and that women tend to leave Georgia more than men, thus having a negative impact on families.

- *“A lot of people left from Kutaisi.” (Female, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“In some of the districts one can see that men are doing housework because all of the women left.” (Female, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Women have more chances to find a job abroad than men.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“In our village one can see that from almost every family at least one woman migrated.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“The fact that women migrate causes the splintering of families.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Many IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons] left.” (Male, 51, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“Men mostly emigrated to Russia and Ukraine; as for women, most of them left for Greece.” (Male, 35, employed, Achara, RM).*

Most of the participants thought that Georgians agree to perform unskilled labour more easily abroad than they do in Georgia because they are less aware of public opinion and social pressure there. However, many participants thought that people would work in unskilled labour in Georgia if they were paid the same amount as in the European Union. If Georgians go abroad and see the way Europeans live, Georgian mentality will be changed and people will no longer consider working as dishwashers or street cleaners as not prestigious.

- *“Georgians are chatterboxes. People intervene in each other’s business, and if someone sees an educated person cleaning streets, the next day the whole city talks about it. This person received a good education and worked in a prestigious position in the past and today is a street cleaner. This is not good for his/her reputation.” (Male, 25, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“For a person who has studied and worked a number of years and now, because of the difficult situation, cannot find a proper job it is unbearable to perform unskilled labour here, because he/she has many acquaintances. As for abroad, it is easier because no one knows him/her there.” (Female, 43, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“I agree, Georgians are arrogant and do not want to be seen as street cleaners, but if every person does what he can do Georgia will flourish.” (Male, employed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“I have worked as a housemaid because of my son and I am not ashamed.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“If salaries were higher, people would not be ashamed to perform unskilled labour.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Georgians were more categorical towards this issue in the past; they seem to be more relaxed nowadays.” (Female, 32, student, Achara, RM).*
- *“If Georgians were paid more, for example 700 lari, no one would be ashamed to perform unskilled labour.” (Female, 35, employed, Achara, RM).*

2. KNOWLEDGE OF PROCESS OF MIGRATION

Imereti and Achara FG members know that finding a job abroad without having a legal residence is rather difficult, although the situation varies from country to country. For example: getting a legal job in Russia was easier in the past than in any other country, but it has become very complicated for Georgians in the current political atmosphere.

- *“In the past it was really easy to get a legal job in Russia. But now it is complicated.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“It was easy to get a job in Russia because there was no language barrier for us.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Today it is almost impossible for us to find any legal or illegal work in Russia.” (Female, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Even for Russians it is hard to find a job, and I cannot imagine how Georgians can get anything there.” (Male, 25, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“I agree finding work in Russia nowadays is as difficult as it is in the European Union.” (Female, 45, housewife, Achara, AM).*

Finding a job abroad is easier in countries like Turkey and Ukraine, where Georgians do not need visas.

- *“I know that there are agencies in Turkey that help you to get a job there.” (Male, 30, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“It is easier to find work in Turkey, because you do not need a visa to cross the border and can stay there legally for three months.” (Female, 68, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I know that many people go to Turkey from Batumi. They stay there three months and then come back; afterwards they can cross the border again.” (Male, 26, employed, Achara, AM).*
- *“Getting a job in Ukraine is also easy because we do not need a visa.” (Female, 26, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Although one needs to do a lot of paperwork in Ukraine in order to get a legal job, still it is more realistic to work there legally than in any other country.” (Female, employed, Achara, AM).*

The participants were well-informed that, in order to get a legal job in the European Union and the US, one needs to have a work permit, which is quite difficult for Georgians to receive. Language barriers and education were also named by FG members as the main obstacles for their compatriots.

- *“Georgians go to the European Union and US with short term visas and then stay there illegally. Accordingly, finding a legal job for them becomes impossible.” (Female, 71, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Women who work there as housekeepers cannot even leave the houses because they are scared.” (Female, 34, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Language is a big barrier.” (Female, employed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“One needs to have a European education because finding a legal job with a Georgian diploma is impossible. For example, I am a journalist and even if I knew perfect German I would not be able to work as a journalist in Germany.” (Female, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*

According to information given by FG members, around 60% to 80% of migrants from Georgia work illegally; this is caused by a lack of qualifications, a low number of jobs available, not knowing the relevant language, and lack of a residence/work permit.

- *“Language and lack of qualification are big barriers. One really needs to have a high qualification to get a job abroad.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Getting a visa is the main issue.” (Female, 43, unemployed, Imereti NM).*
- *“Very often in foreign countries jobs are not available even for their citizens, so how can they give work to Georgians?” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“They [Georgian immigrants] do not have work permits and this complicates the process.” (Female, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“They live illegally and do not speak the language. I think this is the main problem.” (Male, 35, employed, Achara, RM).*

The participants shared stories they had heard or personally experienced during migration. Most of these narratives have negatively influenced their perception of migration.

- *“I’ve heard that several Georgians were lost in Egypt when they were crossing the border illegally² and they were not found. After hearing this fact I was really afraid to go.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I worked in Turkey for three months and they did not pay me my salary, and when I asked for money my employer called for the police and I had to leave.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“My relative was also working in one of the factories in Turkey and he also was not paid anything. Certainly, after hearing this story I did not go to Turkey.” (Female, 60, pensioner, Imereti, RM).*

² Georgians often attempt to cross from Egypt into Israel. For a recent occurrence of this, see Ashraf Sweilam. “Border guards arrest 13 Georgians.” in *Daily News Egypt*, March 30, 2008. Accessed: <http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=12795>

- *“My friend is a sailor and he went to the US with great expectations. Unfortunately, due to problems with legal residence and language he could not find a job there and finally was deported.” (Female, 20, student, Achara, NM).*
- *“I hear various stories, some positive and some negative. For example, one of my friends lives in Germany and is quite happy while another friend is imprisoned there.” (Female, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*

3. GOVERNMENT’S ROLE IN THE MIGRATION PROCESS

According to participants, the Georgian government must be more involved in the migration process. Namely, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should work more actively to protect the rights of Georgian citizens in foreign countries. But the most important thing that the Georgian government should do is to create jobs so that migrants will return and never leave Georgia again.

- *“Consulates should work more actively in order to protect rights of our compatriots. Georgian citizens should be protected everywhere.” (Male, employed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Consulates should work so that whenever our citizens have concerns or questions, they can address our representative and get help.” (Male, unemployed, Achara, AM).*
- *“The creation of jobs in Georgia is the most important thing that that government can do for migrants.” (Female, 26, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“The government should improve situation in our country so that people come back.” (Female, employed, Imereti, AM).*

Many participants did not know anything about the State Minister for Diaspora Affairs, while others knew his name. All were quite sceptical about this position.

- *“I have not heard much about him. I only know his name and that he has organized several concerts.” (Male, 71, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I cannot remember anything that this minister has done except some cultural event.” (Female, 68, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I do not know anything about him but will be glad to learn more.” (Male, 29, employed, Achara, NM).*
- *“He does not do anything except travel. He sees places in his old age that he has not seen so far.” (Male, 51, employed, Achara, RM).*

The priorities for the state minister should be the creation of a database of Georgians living abroad, helping Georgian migrants obtain work permits, protecting Georgian citizens and organizing gatherings for Georgians in foreign countries.

- *“Data about all migrants should be recorded and the ministry should help them with work and protect their rights in the country that they currently live.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“The representatives of this ministry should find out the problems that our compatriots have abroad and try to help solve these troubles.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“This ministry should play an important role in signing memoranda between Georgia and other countries that will enable Georgian citizens to get work permits more easily than they currently do.” (Male, 50, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“This ministry should organise meetings of Georgians abroad more often so that they do not forget their culture and traditions.” (Female, 32, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“The organisation of various events for Georgians abroad is very important. This way they can meet each other, share problems and be closer to their homeland.” (Female, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*

After a description of community-led associations created by migrants and a discussion of some examples, participants confessed that they had never heard about such associations in Georgia. The main reason that such organizations do not exist, according to participants, is that migrants live in difficult conditions abroad and do not have enough funds, confidence and resources to finance such organisations.

- *“I have not heard anything about such organisations.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Migrants from Georgia are so involved in their own problems that they do not have time and energy to think about anything else.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“How can we talk about such associations when people work only to survive?” (Female, 43, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“Georgians who work abroad do not have high salaries for financing such associations.” (Female, 40, employed, Achara, NM).*
- *“I have heard about Armenians helping their communities, and Jews, but I have never heard of Georgians doing the same.” (Female, 35, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“I know that Badri Kakabadze, who currently lives in Russia, plans to renovate our theatre.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“I have heard that migrants have sent money to build churches here.” (Male, employed, Imereti, AM).*

However, some members named several Georgian businessmen abroad who have built churches in their regions as well as Paata Burchuldaze’s foundation, *Iavnana*.

- *“I am sure that Iavnana, which is founded by Paata Burchuladze, helps lots of people.” (Female, 32, student, Achara, RM).*

- *“If we had more people like Paata Burchuladze who really love their country, it would be much better. However, unfortunately there is not enough confidence in our society to finance such associations.” (Male, 34, employed, Achara, RM).*

Having such organisations in Georgia would be of great importance to people. The participants think that the priority for such associations should be financing various community projects connected with the development of local businesses and agricultural projects that will create work places for Georgian citizens. Renovating churches, helping to maintain Georgia's cultural heritage, and supporting children without parental care were also mentioned by the participants.

- *“Such associations should help develop local businesses and encourage emigrants to come back by giving them work places.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“It would be also great if these associations could help to export goods from Georgia.” (Female, 32, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“We need help in the development of agriculture.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“There are many factories in Kutaisi which can be renovated and many people can be employed.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“I think that the reconstruction of factories should be the priority for such associations. For example, one can create a chips factory in Khulo because this region always has a rich potato harvest or an orange factory in other regions of Achara.” (Male, 28, unemployed, Achara, NM).*
- *“Development of agriculture is one of the main priorities for our country. For example such associations can finance building green houses in different regions of our country.” (Male, 34, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“Reconstruction of churches, maintenance of cultural heritage should be among priorities of such associations.” (Female, 52, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“If they take care of kids without parental care everybody will be happy.” (Male, 25, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*

Moreover, the participants thought that the Georgian government should help and encourage migrants to create such associations, because creating additional work places will help reduce migration from Georgia.

- *“The government should make laws in connection to small and medium businesses more loyal, and encourage such associations to finance business in Georgia.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“The government should help such associations in our country.” (Male, 71, pensioner, Imereti, AM).*

- *“I am sure that Georgian government can find various ways to help develop such associations.” (Female, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*

4. PERCEPTIONS OF IMMIGRATION

The members of FGs think that some foreigners who have resources to invest in business and have Georgian spouses should be allowed to live in the country, especially those who speak Georgian, respect Georgian traditions and possess high levels of qualification or skills that Georgia needs.

- *“Foreigners who love and respect Georgians should be allowed to live here.” (Male, 23, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“First of all they should love Georgia, should speak the language and should have a profession that our country needs.” (Male, 29, employed, Achara, NM).*
- *“We have a very high unemployment rate and only those people who have skills in unique professions should be allowed to work here.” (Female, 20, student, Achara, NM).*
- *“Priority should be given to foreigners who will start business here and give work to Georgians.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Rich people should come to live here and they will be able to finance business and create workplaces for Georgians.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Foreigners who will make investments are welcome.” (Male, 71, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Those who are married to Georgians should be allowed to live and work here.” (Female, 32, unemployed, Achara, NM).*

Most of the participants were against immigrants from poor and undeveloped countries, because Georgia cannot benefit from such immigration. All of them believe that countries that have high unemployment rates should not allow a massive immigration of foreigners from poor countries.

- *“It does not make sense if people like us immigrate here; we do not need more poor people.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“No, we do not want servants from abroad.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Anybody should be allowed to live here but only if there are enough jobs available for Georgians.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*

The attitude towards Chinese people was quite negative among the participants, and some members were more sceptical towards Turks and blamed them for depriving locals of income.

- *“I am against Chinese people. Everybody has heard that they falsified one lari coins.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“We should not allow liars like the Chinese people to come and live here.” (Female, housewife, Imereti, AM).*
- *“I know that in many countries prohibited Chinese products, therefore more attention should be paid to this problem.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Those Chinese people are already widespread in Georgia and I am against this.” (Female, 44, Achara, AM).*
- *“In the current situation, when our people are living in terrible conditions, how can we talk about this? How can one justify the fact that Turkish companies are coming and employing only their people, when our compatriots are starving. For example, Turks and not Georgians worked while building Tbilisi Airport... can anybody tell me why?” (Female, 43, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“There are so many unemployed people in Kutaisi, but all those firms and companies bring their own staff here.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*

Focus Group members from Kutaisi and some from Achara believed that Georgian citizenship should be given to those people who really deserve it. For example, it should be given to those who did something important for the country, know Georgian language and history very well, and have lived in Georgia for more than five years.

- *“Georgian citizenship should be given to people who have done something good for our country.” (Male, 71, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I think we should give citizenship only based on contribution or good things done for Georgia.” (Male, 25, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“I know that our citizens have to wait several years for getting citizenship abroad and we should have the same principles for foreigners here.” (Female, 47, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“As abroad, we have to give them five or ten years and if he/she proves to be honest and dedicated then he/she can become a citizen.” (Male, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Citizenship should be given to those foreigners who live here for 5 years and speak Georgian.” (Female, 60, pensioner, Imereti, RM).*
- *“To those who speak good Georgian and know our history well.” (Male, 51, employed, Achara, RM).*

Some Achara FG members were more critical towards granting citizenship and thought it should be given only in very exceptional cases.

- *“I think that citizenship should not be given to anyone because this may affect our nationality.” (Female, 20, student, Achara, NM).*

- *“Citizenship should be given only in the exceptional cases.” (Female, 43, housewife, Achara, NM).*
- *“I would never give citizenship to Chinese people or nations whose population is growing quickly because it is dangerous for our nationality.” (Male, 29, employed, Achara, NM).*

Most of the FG members from both regions knew the term asylum.

- *“Asylum means a place where one is protected and secured.” (Female, 31, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“This means that you cannot stay in your country and you are given asylum [elsewhere].” (Female, 68, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“People ask for asylum if they are kicked out from their own countries.” (Male, 25, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“This is the place where you can stay for a while, where you are protected and given something to eat. (Female, 61, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“People get asylum when they are forced to leave their home country due to political or religious reasons.” (Male, 28, unemployed, Achara, NM).*
- *“A place where a person will feel protected.” (Male, 29, employed, Achara, RM).*

5. PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION AND CURRENT EVENTS

Although migration has many negative aspects, the participants still think that the decision of the members of their family or community to migrate was correct. This was the only way to survive and financially support families in Georgia.

- *“When your family is starving here, this is the only way to survive.” (Female, 68, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Before leaving they were very poor. They did not have work here and could not earn a penny. Their children and parents needed help and therefore had to go abroad.” (Male, employed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“My relative is living in the United States and has achieved many things there that she would never achieve here. I fully support her decision.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“My aunt is in Germany and is working hard. Her decision to migrate was absolutely correct.” (Male, 20, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“My cousin left and his work is very demanding. But this was a wise decision because now he and his family live comfortably.” (Male, 26, employed, Achara, NM).*

Having acquaintances, language skills and a guaranteed job would be determining factors for the participants in deciding where to migrate.

- *“I would go the country where my friends/relatives live.”(Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Knowing the language would be also very important for me. As far as I speak German, I would go to Germany.” (Female, 43, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“Language and people I know.” (Male, 26, employed, Achara, NM).*
- *“Because of language I would go to Germany.” (Female, 32, employed, Achara, RM).*
- *“I would go only if I had guaranteed work and salary there.” (Female, 47, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I would go to the country where I am offered a high salary.” (Female, 52, unemployed, Imereti, RM).*

The participants believe that the Georgian government has a responsibility toward Georgian citizens who choose to live and work abroad.

- *“The Georgian government should create jobs and encourage migrants to come back.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“The Georgian government has responsibilities toward these people but never fulfils them.” (Female, 45, employed, Imereti, RM).*
- *“Our government should protect its citizens no matter where they live.” (Male, 26, employed, Achara, NM).*

Although participants note that many migrants returned from Russia after the recent events, the participants still think the number of migrants from Georgia has increased in recent years.

- *“The number of returned migrants increased from Russia but at the same time rate of migration to other countries increased.” (Male, 46, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Because of the current situation in Georgia people try to leave the country.” (Female, 47, employed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“I have seen lot of people who left but have never seen any returned migrant.” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“Lots of people came back after the Rose Revolution but afterwards the rate of migration increased again.” (Female, 43, housewife, Imereti, RM).*
- *“The only people who came back are the ones who are deported or were imprisoned there [abroad].” (Male, unemployed, Imereti, AM).*
- *“I have not seen anyone returning; those who returned migrated again.” (Male, 26, employed, Achara, NM).*

None of the members knew about programmes or organizations that either help people while they are working abroad or assist them to come back. Only two participants from Kutaisi focus groups had some information about an *au pair* program in Germany and the Goethe Institute, which finances scholarships in Germany.

- *“I have heard about an au pair program that helps young women to go for work and study.” (Female, 34, unemployed, Imereti, NM).*
- *“Goethe institute has six month scholarships to Germany.” (Female, 68, pensioner, Imereti, NM).*

INTERVIEWS WITH RETURNED MIGRANTS

CRRG Georgia conducted 26 interviews with returned migrants in Imereti and Achara. Respondents from Imereti region were represented from urban and rural settlements; respondents from Achara region were represented from urban settlements. Nine respondents had been in Russia, 6 in Turkey, 5 in Germany, 3 in Greece and one each in Ukraine, Italy and China. There were 17 Female and 9 male respondents.

PIAPT 1 GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

Respondents' perception of daily life in a European Union member country was generally positive. The majority of respondents would like to live and work in the European Union and send remittances to their families. Most of them imagined themselves performing some type of manual labour. Respondents described everyday life in European Union countries as structured and safe. They perceived the negative aspects of migrant's everyday life in the European Union as related to bad working and living conditions, including lower salaries and social status when compared to European Union citizens.

- *“I would accept such a life with pleasure. You have a job, you know your schedule and get adequate pay for your work. You can plan the next day and are not afraid of future uncertainties.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Ukraine)*
- *“From my experience I swear I won't go to live in any foreign country. I won't work like a beggar. I'd prefer to work for a few cents here than to bow to someone there. I was told that workers are not considered humans abroad, so I would work in construction here even for the lowest pay, rather than go there.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*
- *“I would go abroad with pleasure if I had money. I would do domestic work in a family there and would have no need to go outside. I would be safe and send all the money I earn to Georgia.” (Female, 46, Kutaisi, returned from Russia)*

Most respondents think that aggressive nationalistic sentiments in Russia and strained political relations between the two countries recently worsened daily life for Georgian

migrants when compared to previous years. Therefore, migration in Russia is considered risky and uncertain for Georgians. The positive features of migration to Russia are the continued social links and knowledge of Russian by the older generation. Respondents believed that Georgians can adapt more easily in corrupt Russian society than within a law abiding European environment due to a similar mentality.

- *“I have no will at all to go to Russia; I would have to know beforehand where would I stay and work there and I would not go there hoping on good fate. It would be unsafe since Georgians and Caucasians are persecuted there. I’d rather go to Europe.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Russians have a nationalist mentality. They hate all non-Russians.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Ukraine)*
- *“Neither now and not then did they perceive Caucasians positively, but we had normal relations in past and did not have any problems. I recall that time with pleasure.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Our people poorly cope with the law. In the Communist period you could pay a bribe for your interests and this still works in Ukraine and Russia. If you have a problem, you can solve it by bribes and you can’t do this in Europe. Georgian people feel better when laws are less respected.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*
- *“I know Russian well and when it was possible, I often went to Russia. I had no communication problems with Russians. We had such good relations that I’m sorry that we have such a strained situation today.” (Female, 68, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

The August events had a negative impact on Georgian migration to Russia. Respondents said that Russians are aggressive towards ethnic Georgians who are at risk. However, some respondents said there is no harassment of Georgians and their relation with Russians remain the same.

- *“I hear they are very aggressive towards Georgians. A lot of people had to leave their jobs because of this.” (Female, 22, Kutaisi, returned from Germany)*
- *“I don’t think that people go to Russia to find jobs and improve their lives now, because it is risky. There is aggression towards Georgians.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“Forty-five percent of our population was dispersed in Russian cities. Now they are persecuted and forced to return; a few people were even killed.” (Female, 68, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“My Russian friends and classmates call me almost every half hour and ask how I am. Our attitudes have not changed, but politics need a revision.” (Female, 65, Tskhaltubo, returned from Turkey)*

Poverty and unemployment are the main motives for migration from Georgia. The positive aspect of migration is that unemployed people can find jobs abroad, provide their households with income, add to their work experience and learn to live independently. The negative aspects include draining Georgia of human resources and the fact that people cannot see their families for years. Additionally, many migrants work illegally and have to hide from officials in host countries.

- *“The positive aspect is that you save yourself and your family. The negative aspect is that Georgia loses its people.” (Male, 40, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“The economic situation in Georgia is hopeless. Jobs are catastrophically few. If you go abroad to work, then you learn the value of your work.... (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“People sustain themselves this way; they live by remittances. Otherwise, Georgia would have been bankrupt. Can you imagine?! The negative aspect is that they [migrants] could not find jobs here and had to leave.” (Male, 41, Kutaisi, returned from Greece)*
- *“The positive aspect of migration is that you become accustomed to living independently and gain new experiences.” (Female, 22, Kutaisi, returned from Germany)*
- *The only negative aspect is that you leave your family and go alone.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“You are living far from your country to study and work. It takes a lot of effort from you to study and work and you have to live through these hardships.” (Female, 22, Kutaisi, returned from Germany)*

Respondents estimate the average number of migrants from Georgia as 1-2 million. Ethnic Georgians make up about 50 percent of migrants.

- *“My friend works in an analytical organisation. According to their information, about 3,000,000 or more persons have left since 1991. Most of them are Russian-speaking and Georgians make up about 50% of them. I know many examples of whole families that left for Russia.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*
- *“I think those who left are more than those who stayed. I don’t know any family without a migrant I would say 60-70% of the population has left.” (Female, 51, Kutaisi, returned from Italy)*
- *“Sixty-five percent have left. At least half of them are Georgians the others are Russians, but none of them could live in Russia either. My Russian friends left Georgia, but eight of ten returned back after a few years.” (Female, 65, Tskhaltubo, returned from Turkey)*

According to respondents, the majority of Georgian migrants are from small towns and rural settlements in Western Georgia (Samegrelo and Imereti). The main factors that make people

migrate are poverty, political harassment, and the need to flee because they committed a crime. Most migrants from Samegrelo went to Russia, while there are many migrants from the eastern Kakheti region in Germany. Women usually go to Greece, Italy and Turkey.

- *“They are from different regions of Georgia A lot of people left from Samegrelo, Imereti. Some left from Tbilisi and a relatively small number from Batumi, mostly from rural areas. A lot of Mingrelians left for Russia. Now more people go to Ukraine since no visa is needed and it is easier to go there.”*
- *“Most of them [migrants] are from Imereti. At least two or three persons from each apartment building, if not from each family in Kutaisi, have left for abroad. Men go mainly to Russia; women go to Greece, Italy, and Turkey. A lot of people from Achara are in Ukraine as they sell citrus [there], but they all come back [to Georgia].” (Male, Batumi, returned from Ukraine)*
- *“Mostly from Western Georgia, as there was greater poverty here. For example, Tskhaltubo was a resort and people were employed when tourists used to come. Now only one bath works.” (Female, 36, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*

Respondents agreed that negative attitude towards unskilled labour in Georgia is bad and needs to be changed. It originates from social stereotypes and a proud national character; however, Georgians perform such work if it is well-paid.

- *“Actually such complexes exist, but you are freed of them abroad. I have worked as cleaner as well as in a factory. If there were higher salaries in Georgia, for these kinds of jobs a lot of people would work. The reason why women avoid working as waitresses in Georgia depends on low pay and Georgian culture; drunken men often abuse waitresses.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Georgians are proud people in general. On the one hand, this is bad, but on the other, it is also good. But people forget their pride abroad; they accept all kinds of business abroad such as dirty, criminal business. This is a shame for Georgia.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“There should be the same pay as abroad. The pay should be adequate when there are European prices on goods. People receive up to 1000 Euros for cleaning. There should be the same pay in Georgia.” (Male, 41, Kutaisi, returned from Greece)*

Respondents reported that negative attitudes towards unskilled labour are already changing in Georgia. People are willing to work in jobs they previously would not have due to the shortage of jobs. Young people are more open to changes than older ones who were used to a better life in the Soviet era. Higher salaries will change Georgians’ perception of unskilled jobs. Acceptable minimum salaries for the respondents to work in Georgia are 800 GEL in Batumi, 500 GEL in Kutaisi, and 300 GEL in Tskhaltubo.

- *“I think such attitudes have somehow been changing already. We have neighbours that work as street cleaners. I respect them very much. They wake up early in the morning*

and clean the streets. I think this service works really well and a lot of people are employed in it – both young and old.”(Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)

- *“The young generation agrees to any kind of job in order just to get a job. People of my age avoid some jobs because of pride, because they lived better. Everyone had money and a car. Now anyone who owns a car works as a taxi driver to earn money for their family.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*
- *“Such attitudes may change among lower and middle class, but will never change among people that have higher social and economic status. They would never accept this [working as unskilled labour] and perceive such people [unskilled labourers] as unequal.” (Female, 54, Batumi, returned from Turkey)*

A. KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

Respondents said that it is almost impossible for Georgians to currently find a legal job in Russia. Russians avoid employing Georgians. However, corruption among Russian officials provides the opportunity for illegal migrants to pay bribes and be employed. Most of Georgian migrants in Russia work illegally, according to respondents.

- *“I doubt that it is possible to find a job legally in Russia, especially for Georgians. However, corruption is at its highest level in Russia; if you pay a bribe you can start working.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Finding legal employment in Russia is very difficult. This is true for Georgians especially. This is not a declared, but an unwritten rule. If you are Georgian, they won’t hire you. That’s why only a handful of Georgians work legally in Russia, maybe even less than 10% of Georgians living there.” (Female, 60, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*
- *“Even if you have visa, they don’t want to employ you if you are Georgian.” (Male, 30, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*

Respondents think it is easier to find a job in the European Union than in Russia – though there are many caveats to finding a legal job in the European Union. You can get employment permission if you are a student, an outstanding professional or marry a citizen of the host country. However, respondents believe that a significant number of Georgian migrants in European Union work illegally.

- *“You can find a legal job if you get married to a citizen of the host country, no matter really or formally [if you marry for the sake of a visa], another way is if you are a student. A student has the right to work a certain number of hours per year. These two options are the most realistic. Another way is to be an outstanding professional needed in their labour market...” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“It is easier to find a legal job in the European Union than in Russia if you have a visa and permission to work.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*

- *“In Greece only 5% work legally. If you don’t have documents, you can’t work legally. That’s why everyone works illegally.” (Female, 47, Tskhaltubo, returned from Greece)*

It is relatively easy to find a job in Turkey, according to respondents; however, work conditions are especially difficult. Employment services offer help to migrants, but there is a risk of being misled by them or employers. Migrants sometimes don’t receive their pay at their jobs, according to respondents.

- *“Georgians in Turkey work mostly illegally. It is almost impossible to get legal work there. They have their own labour force and nobody will hire a foreigner.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“You can travel in Turkey legally and finding a job is easier [once you are there].”(Female, 46, Kutaisi, returned from Russia)*
- *“In Turkey, there are employment services that are not trustworthy, sometimes you have to pay them beforehand and there is a risk of being misled by them, sometimes you are not paid your salary for your work.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

According to respondents, finding a job legally in Ukraine is similar to Russia, because bribes help. However, there are no negative attitudes towards Georgians and finding a job is easier.

- *“It is easy, especially if you have some skills. The process of registration is also easier.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*
- *“I guess Georgians won’t have problems in Ukraine, because we have good relations. I think politics determine everything.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“It is easier to find a job in Ukraine than in Russia. There are not such critical attitudes towards Georgians.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

Generally, respondents perceive that it is easy to find a job in the US if you get there. The greatest difficulty is to obtain a visa.

- *“As far as I know, finding a legal job in the US is easier than in Europe, because Europe is more bureaucratic.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“It is possible to find a legal job in the US. The system is more democratic and works better there.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“All the people I know work legally in the US.” (Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

Respondents think the grand majority of Georgian migrants work illegally.

- *“Ten percent of migrants work legally, others illegally.” (Male, 40, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Ninety-five percent work illegally, even citizens or are legal migrants work illegally. Employers pay less to illegal than to legal employees, and do not pay taxes, so they prefer to have a cheap labour force.” (Female, Batumi, returned from Russia)*

- *“There might be a very small number of people who work legally. Even Europe has problems with workplaces and salaries, and it has serious unemployment. I’m not sure that Georgian migrants are well employed.” (Male, 28, Batumi, returned from Germany)*

The biggest problems for Georgian migrants working abroad are expired visas, the absence of citizenship of the host country, a lack of money to prepare documentation for legal settlement, and the short duration of visas. After visas expire, they prefer to stay illegally rather than spend money on travel back.

- *“They have to hide their employment because they do not have documents and visas in proper order, otherwise they would be deported.” (Female, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Absence of citizenship is the first problem. It s very difficult to get citizenship.” (Female, 54, Batumi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“You need money to live legally and to prepare documentation. They [Georgian migrants] prefer to keep money rather than submitting documents to live legally.” (Female, 37, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Legal settlement requires money and you should return [to Georgia] after a certain period of time. Travel is very expensive and when people arrive there they have to stay illegally and work. They return after they earn some money.” (Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

Respondents told an equal number of positive and negative stories about friends who have migrated. Most respondents said they were not affected by the stories. Some of them said that their personal migration experience worsened their perception of migration.

- *“My friend was working in Donetsk, Ukraine, as a metalworker in a factory. He had good working conditions and was provided with a flat. He had more pay than he could get at the same job in Georgia. He got bonus pay if he worked overtime.” (Male, 40, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Living abroad has changed my attitude towards migration. Even though you have rights and a good income, you remain alien to them [host country nationals]. I did not want to stay there any more because this attitude created an inferiority complex.” (Female, 37, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“My friend who lives abroad has leukaemia. He has insurance and the insurance company paid 1,800,000 Euros for his medical treatment. On the one hand, I’m happy that he is alive. On the other, I’m sad because I know if he had lived in Georgia he would have died long ago.” (Male, 28, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Two women were arrested in the city we lived in. They had trafficked 15 women from Georgia, took their passports away, and forced them to work as prostitutes. They were*

*living like prisoners. One person discovered them, called Georgia and saved them.”
(Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

B. THE GOVERNMENT’S ROLE IN THE MIGRATION PROCESS

Respondents mentioned that the government should strengthen consular offices to better defend Georgians citizens’ rights and interests abroad and also sign agreements for more liberal migration procedures with destination countries.

- *“The government should protect interests of migrants; our consular services should protect Georgia’s citizens. I’ve heard from the media that there have been road accidents. Medical and transportation help was not sufficiently provided.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“There have been many cases of Georgians being persecuted and the government could not help them; I guess they [the Georgian government] are avoiding confrontation with that state.” (Female, 37, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“I haven’t seen any protected Georgians in Germany. My friend had problems and he did not receive any support from our embassy. Ordinary citizens of Georgia are not protected at all.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“I think the rights of Georgians abroad should be protected as much as possible. They should be registered; their needs should be understood and protected through the judicial system. Georgian religious communities do everything there [abroad] now. The state should also help its people. I have never needed help from a consular official, but those who needed help have been disappointed. I have not known anyone who was received help from the consular service. It is always unobtainable for the lower classes.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*

Most respondents have heard about the position of State Minister for Diaspora Affairs, but most of them do not know anything about this job. Only one person recalled an initiative of this ministry.

- *“I don’t know if it was done as a PR stunt or if it was really done [supported], but during the war this ministry organised live chains of Georgians in different European states.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*
- *“I laughed at the establishment of this ministry. It’s funny because only 2-3% of Georgians abroad have links with Diasporas.” (Female, 37, Batumi, returned from Russia)*

The priorities for the State Minister for Diaspora Affairs should be protecting the interests of Georgian citizens abroad, consolidating Georgian diasporas, registering Georgian migrants to prevent criminals from migrating, and helping those who want to return but cannot due to documentation issues. The ministry should also support Georgian culture and education abroad.

- *“Consolidation of Georgian diasporas, but I don’t know how should this be achieved... perhaps in cooperation with churches.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“It should protect the interests of Georgian citizens abroad. However, the ministry can’t do anything if they are illegal.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Criminals should not be allowed to go abroad and shame Georgia. Those people should be checked by every means.” (Female, 51, Kutaisi, returned from Italy)*
- *“Help those who want to return and cannot do it because of documents; there are a lot of people who want to return but can’t.” (Female, 46, Kutaisi, returned from Russia)*
- *“The Minister should provide Georgian literature and press to Georgians abroad so that they do not forget Georgian. It should also [help] raise children in a Georgian way and open Georgian schools and kindergartens.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

Respondents thought positively about the idea of creating community-led diaspora associations; however, they were aware that remittances may not reach their destinations. Respondents cannot recall examples of projects funded by the Georgian diaspora, although some Georgian businessmen individually make contributions for community projects.

- *“I’ve heard about the Armenian Diaspora in Los Angeles, which sent money to the Batumi Armenian Church. I have never heard anything similar about Georgians. Georgians help their own relatives more than any organized structures.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Such contributions may be sent to Georgia, but how many of them reach their destination? There are many Georgian businessmen abroad who are able and make contributions.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Such associations and their assistance rarely reach ordinary people. I can’t understand where so many grants go to.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

Respondents thought associations of diasporas would work well if they had good management and cooperate with communities in Georgia. Some respondents support the government’s involvement in activities of associations to oversee the usage of remittances, while other respondents do not trust government and prefer the programs to be community-run only.

- *“I think the Office of the Minister for Diaspora Affairs should support the creation of such associations.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Ukraine)*
- *“The government cannot support this [community-driven associations]. It should depend on the people who are the initiators of the idea and have direct touch with communities that need such projects; there is no need for state mediation.” (Female, Batumi, returned from Germany)*

- *“The state should control the use of remittances; there are a lot of homeless in Georgia, and they [the State] could buy homes for them.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“If a real patriot heads the associations, then 80% of remittances may reach their destination. Twenty percent would be lost anyway. The government should support such associations in every way and reduce their taxes.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“I would not give even a cent to such associations. If I want, I would send money to help people personally. I have no guarantee that such associations would not consume money themselves. I don’t want to work as a cleaner abroad and have somebody buy an SUV with the money I earned. If remittances will be used for their target it would be good, but you can’t control [the money].” (Female, 65, Tskhaltubo, returned from Turkey)*

The majority of respondents consider unemployment in Georgia as the biggest problem. Therefore, they think that diaspora associations should aim to create additional jobs in Georgia. They should support agriculture, industry, tourism, educational institutions, and healthcare. Also they should support philanthropic activities and build churches.

- *“That would be good if they enhance capacity of staff in factories or organizations, support development of tourism and agriculture, for example wineries, cocoa or coffee.” (Male, 40, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“I would support establishing enterprises to employ people. Unemployment is the main problem here. If one is able to do something here they should support employing people.” (Female, 46, Kutaisi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Fund healthcare system or establish foundations to support single mothers, open free computer study centres in schools, and introduce speech therapists and psychologists in schools.” (Female, 38, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“If I had the ability, I would support building a church in this district. We don’t have a place to pray, why do we have to walk 6 or 7 kilometres away to light a candle?” (Female, 54, Tskhaltubo, returned from Greece)*

C. PERCEPTIONS OF IMMIGRATION

Respondents thought that Georgia should let people immigrate who love and respect Georgian people and culture, create material wealth, perform specific jobs that Georgians cannot, and introduce new technologies or bring investments into the country. Immigration control should be strengthened, according to respondents. Most of the respondents have negative attitudes towards Chinese immigrants, however; some feel positively about them, too.

- *“I would not wish many other nationalities to come here. However, those who make investments and employ people should be given the right to work and live here.” (Female, 46, Kutaisi, returned from Russia)*
- *“I think our president allows too many people to work and live here. So many Turks here in Georgia have opened their own restaurants or shops. They should not be allowed to freely do what they like or we should be able to open our business in Turkey. We don’t have any rights there; you can’t open a business in Turkey if it’s not registered under a Turkish citizen.” (Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“Everyone should be allowed to live here except the Chinese. Although I respect Chinese culture, I’m afraid that Georgians will be mixed with them and look like them.” (Female, 60, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*
- *“Allow everyone because we have never been nationalists and never will be.” (Male, 30, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*
- *“Chinese migration has had a positive effect, because they do what Georgians could not do. This is good for the economy. An honest labour force would not be bad for Georgia.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*

Most respondents thought that the citizenship policy is much too liberal in Georgia now. A few respondents support giving Georgian citizenship to all those who wish, while some would not grant it to any at all. Most respondents do not support giving citizenship to Chinese immigrants.

- *“They should have not only a financial interest, but also like and respect Georgian culture and people. They should also have the will to contribute something to Georgia.” (Male, 40, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“[They] should have to live in Georgia for a certain period. Other countries don’t grant citizenship immediately and why should we give it? About 5 or 6 years will show whether a person deserves citizenship or not; their actions should also be considered.” (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“I think Germany is a good example. We should give temporary rights to immigrants live in Georgia, but the government should observe their actions, inquire why they came to Georgia and ask how long they are going to stay.” (Male, 28, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Everyone except the Chinese. These people are very dangerous for Georgia. This problem is worldwide, by the way.” (Female, 60, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*
- *“Georgian citizenship should be given to all those who want it.” (Female, 47, Tskhaltubo, returned from Greece)*

Some respondents thought that immigration in Georgia is so low that it cannot make any impact. Respondents see the positive effects of immigration as investments and job

opportunities. The majority of respondents believe that immigration will have negative economic, cultural and demographic effects on Georgia. They think that immigrants have a negative cultural influence on young people in Georgia. Some respondents do not wish ethnicities other than Georgians to settle in Georgia and be considered equal to ethnic Georgians. Such respondents also perceive families of mixed ethnicity as negative.

- *“Immigration in Georgia will not be high enough to have any major influence on us.” (Female, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“Georgian young people don’t copy useful manners and take only negative influences from foreigners. For example, it is not acceptable for me to see a Georgian man wearing a ring in his nose. We have our traditions. Our people experience bad influences and forget where we are from.” (Male, 28, returned to Batumi from Germany)*
- *“[Immigration has a] very bad effect. Georgia will be without Georgians, maybe a person will be recorded as Georgian in his passport, but he won’t be Georgian. Chinese who came a few years ago talk in Georgian and call themselves Georgians.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“I don’t like immigration because others will get rich in our country and we will serve them. There are so many Turkish hotels in Batumi and I guess only two or three Georgians are employed there and only as cleaners. The other employees are all Turks and Russians.” (Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“It will have a very good effect. I don’t think anybody can take anything away from us. It was in Russia that Armenians and Georgians built everything.” (Female, 60, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*
- *“There is a threat of mixing blood. Positive effects are investments that increase employment.” (Female, 47, Tskhaltubo, returned from Greece)*

Most respondents associated the word asylum with a temporary place to stay, mostly for political refugees. Some respondents think that Georgia should not give asylum to anyone.

- *“Usually refugees who have fled their countries seek asylum because of political reasons or they could not succeed at anything in their home countries.” (Male, 28, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“You can understand asylum in a different way. For example, I gave asylum and hosted a family for 3-4 years, and when they managed to put their life together they left. But some people come for asylum. Then they wipe you out and they become a host and you become a guest. No one should be given an asylum here. Georgia is not big enough to keep these people.” (Female, 51, Kutaisi, returned from Italy)*
- *“No one gives you asylum in Turkey. You can sleep in a street but no one will host you.” (Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

D. PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION AND CURRENT EVENTS

Most respondents thought positively about decisions of members of their community who migrated as they had no other way, however they are sad that they could not find jobs in Georgia.

- *“I support their decision to migrate because there are fewer opportunities of study and getting a good education in Georgia than abroad. My sister is in the US, and she works as a babysitter in New York. She would have needed to find a very serious job here to get the salary she gets there.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“My sister has always been thinking of going away from here. She first went to Germany, then to the US and decided to stay forever there. She works days and nights, but she is a free person and she knows that she may get everything she had here in Georgia and it depends on her work. I understand her as well as any other migrant, but I’m very sorry that they leave and don’t come back.” (Female, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“I’m happy for that [people migrating], because there is no other way. Villages are empty of young people because everyone has gone to Greece.” (Female, 51, Batumi)*
- *“They are poor, so how else can they feed their families? A mother went and then took her child. There are only three women left in our district.” (Female, 68, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*

Factors that determine destination country are knowledge of language, similarity of lifestyle and culture, ability to take family to the destination country, previous migration experience, migration policy of a host country and its political relation towards Georgia.

- *“Ability of free communication would determine my decision. I would prefer to go to a country where I wouldn’t have a language barrier. I grew up in the Soviet era, therefore, I know the lifestyle of Russians, Byelorussians and Kazakhs, but I wouldn’t understand German lifestyle. In Europe I’d prefer to live in Spain, Italy or Portugal. As I’ve heard, their lifestyle is close to ours and they are less law abiding. Sometimes you should place human relations higher than laws. I don’t mean justifying murders, but I mean daily life.” (Male, Batumi, returned from Ukraine)*
- *“I would choose Germany because I know the language and culture, and also know how to work with German people and how to communicate with them.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“I would go to Italy because they do not deport people.” (Female, 51, Kutaisi, returned from Italy)*
- *“I would go where I’m paid more.” (Female, 27, Kutaisi, returned from Turkey)*
- *“Where people have positive attitudes towards Georgians.” (Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*

All respondents agreed that the Georgian government's capacity to defend the rights of their citizens who legally dwell abroad should be improved. Absence of information on migrants is considered a major problem and respondents think that consular offices should improve this. Consular offices should be more cooperative with migrants when migrants address them for help.

- *"They should protect citizens; this is the primary responsibility of consular offices. They are responsible for protecting the safety of their people... if a person addresses to an embassy. Unfortunately, in most cases embassies do not have statistical figures on migrants. This problem appears during elections. When a person leaves abroad he should be registered. Embassies should have a full list of Georgian citizens in the host country to provide them with protection."* (Female, Batumi, returned from Germany)
- *"The State should have no responsibilities for those who are illegal migrants."* (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)
- *"[The Government] should protect Georgian citizens everywhere, and inquire about their problems but the Government is not responsible for those who have escaped from Georgia because they have committed a crime and continue doing the same in the host countries."* (Male, 28, Batumi, returned from Germany)
- *"There should be an opportunity if a person contacts an embassy for help. When I got sick I could not contact any doctor or hospital. I could not find anyone to help me solve my problem and I could not continue working. I had to return to Georgia depressed."* (Female, 51, Kutaisi, returned from Italy)

Most respondents recalled migrants that returned, but only a few decided to stay in Georgia. Most migrants left shortly after they returned as they could not find jobs in Georgia. Most migrants periodically visit their families for a short period and then go back. Some people return because they have problems with documents and then are not able to leave again.

- *"I know a person who returned, but I think he did not go back because he was not pleased with his job there and found a better job here."* (Male, Batumi)
- *"People move, all of them return, but not forever. They stay for some period and leave again."* (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)
- *"I know people that returned and they live better than they did before they departed."* (Female, 36, Batumi, returned from Russia)
- *"People who return still want to leave again but some can't because of problems with documents."* (Male, 41, Kutaisi, returned from Greece)

Respondents thought that voluntary migration from Georgia has increased during the last period while number of returned migrants has decreased, while the number of returned migrants would be more than departures in sum if deported people from Russia were considered. Respondents tell stories that some migrants had expected economic

improvement after the Rose Revolution in 2003 and returned to find jobs in Georgia, but after a few months of fruitless efforts they left again.

- *“The number of returnees has decreased. After the Rose Revolution many Georgians returned with big expectations but then left again. Now more people migrate than a few years ago and fewer people return.” (Female, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“If we consider those who have been deported, the number of returnees might have increased; otherwise there are the same number of returnees and departees.” (Female, 37, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“They return either because their visas expired or they were deported. Those who return stay for month or two and leave again. Some girls returned and wanted to stay in Georgia forever but after month and a half returned to Germany because there are no jobs here.” (Female, 34, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“A very low percentage of people return and the number of migrants is increasing. I wish it were easier for people to obtain visas so people could go there, work and return easily.” (Male, 41, Kutaisi, returned from Greece)*
- *“More people leave than return in general. However, due to the Russia situation more people return than leave. (Male, 30, Tskhaltubo, returned from Russia)*

Of all the respondents, only one could recall a Georgian organization that assists victims of trafficking, and one other respondent named agencies in European countries that assist migrant employment in their home countries. Consular offices are unable to help people.

- *“There is one organization in Batumi that mainly assists victims of trafficking; I don’t remember its name.” (Male, 40, Batumi, returned from Russia)*
- *“There is an agency in Germany. Each student or worker can register there and the agency provides them with employment in their home country. My wife contacted them and they found her a job in Batumi. There are such organizations in England too. If you finish a good university and have a relevant qualification, they will provide you with employment in the host country. This program is called “High School Migrant”. (Female, Batumi, returned from Germany)*
- *“Mostly consular offices work on these issues, but they are not very effective. A ship sank and both the Ukrainian and Greek embassies helped transport a body to Georgia.” (Male, 32, Batumi, Sailor, last time was in Russia)*

RECOMMENDATIONS

GOVERNMENT

- Mount campaigns targeting those between 35 and 60 years of age on the need to instill the pride of helping to build Georgia regardless of the job.
- Hold further discussions with Georgian migrant communities and diaspora organizations about how to better fund community projects in Georgia. Key to the success of any such proposal will be financial transparency.
- Foster reasonable plans to help diversified local economies develop, which are based on value-added on agricultural production. The stabilization of the Georgian countryside will not occur until this happens.
- Create a public information campaign about reform of Georgian consular services abroad. Make information available at airports and other points of departure giving consular information to Georgian citizens.
- Develop a unified database with at least three categories of individuals – Georgian citizens abroad, ethnic Georgians (not citizens abroad), and friends of Georgia abroad. These lists can be used by ambassadorial and governmental staff to target their development ideas and extend their influence.
- Develop, pilot and implement reintegration programmes to support returning Georgian migrants.

NGOS AND CIVIL SOCIETY

- Engage large donors such as MCG and other large funders of agricultural development to discuss what role migrants can play in stabilizing rural economies.
- Help provide education and foster discussions in communities about community driven development and hometown associations (HTAs).
- Help organize migrants to lobby the government to promote their interests, such as better consular services.

ANNEX 1 RECRUITMENT MATRIX FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Composition criteria of focus groups

- HH with returned migrant / current migrant / no migrant
- Settlement
- Gender
- Age

Location, date	Characteristic 1: RM = HH with returned migrant CM= HH with current migrant NM = HH with no migrant	Characteristic 2: Rayon's center, Rural areas	Characteristic 3: Gender and age
Kutaisi	RM	5 participants from Kutaisi, 5 from Tskhaltubo rural areas	Equal representation of gender and age groups by settlements
Kutaisi	CM	5 participants from Kutaisi, 5 from Tskhaltubo rural areas	Equal representation of gender and age groups by settlements
Kutaisi	NM	5 participants from Kutaisi, 5 from Tskhaltubo rural areas	Equal representation of gender and age groups by settlements
Batumi	RM	5 participants from Batumi, 5 from rural areas	Equal representation of gender and age groups by settlements
Batumi	CM	5 participants from Batumi, 5 from rural areas	Equal representation of gender and age groups by settlements
Batumi	NM	5 participants from Batumi, 5 from rural areas	Equal representation of gender and age groups by settlements

DISCUSSION GUIDE

GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION

What do you think life would be like for a person like yourself as a migrant in a country of the European Union? Could you describe what you think your daily life would be like?

[FOLLOW UP] And what about Russia?

[FOLLOW UP] What impact do you think August events had on migration in Russia?

What do you think about people leaving Georgia to work and live? What are the positive and negative aspects of this?

[SHOW PIE CHART 1 AND ASK TO FILL IN ITS PIECES] What is your understanding of how many people left Georgia since Georgian independence? Could you fill in the number of pie pieces of Georgia's population that left? What percentage of those people are ethnic Georgians?

[FOLLOW UP] Who were these people? Where were they from?

There is a perception that Georgians agree on performing unskilled labor abroad more easily than they do in Georgia, because they are aware of public opinion. Do you think is it good or bad?

[FOLLOW UP] And how do you think this attitude may be changed?

[PROBE IF LOW SALARY IS MENTIONED, WHAT WOULD BE ACCEPTABLE SALARY FOR THEM TO AGREE ON UNSKILLED LABOR]

KNOWLEDGE OF THE PROCESS OF MIGRATION

What do you know about the process of getting a job legally in the following places?

First let's talk about

-Russia

Now let's talk about

-EU

Now

-Turkey

Now

-Ukraine

Now

-US

[SHOW PIE CHART 2 AND ASK TO FILL ITS PIECES] Using the pie chart, of all Georgian citizens working abroad, how many are working illegally? Could you fill in the number of pie pieces of Georgia migrants working illegally?

[FOLLOW UP] Regarding those people, what do you think the biggest problems for them working legally are?

Could you tell me of any stories you are familiar with, either positive or negative, about migrants you personally know?

[FOLLOW UP] How has that story influenced your perceptions of migration?

GOVERNMENT'S ROLE IN THE MIGRATION PROCESS

What kind of role do you think the Georgian government should play in the process of Georgian citizens working abroad?

As you may know, the Georgian Government in 2008 created a new position of State Minister for Diaspora Affairs. What do you know about this State Minister's job?

What do you think the priorities should be for this State Minister?

Some governments have actively worked with their citizens abroad to create community led and run associations to work on community level projects. Here are some pictures and some examples of these [GIVE EXAMPLES]. Have you ever heard of such a thing?

[FOLLOW UP] What do you think about the idea?

If such a program were to be implemented in Georgia, how do you think it could be best run? What role, if any, could the government play?

What kind of community projects do you think that groups like this could work on are most important in your community?

PERCEPTIONS OF IMMIGRATION

What kind of people do you think Georgia should let live and work in Georgia, besides Georgian citizens?

[FOLLOW UP] Why?

What kind of people do you think should be allowed to settle permanently in Georgia and obtain Georgian citizenship?

[FOLLOW UP] Why?

What kinds of effects do you think immigration will have on Georgia over the next 5 years?

What do you understand by the term asylum?

PERCEPTIONS OF MIGRATION AND CURRENT EVENTS

If you have members of your family or community who migrated, what do you think about that decision? Why?

If you were going to migrate for work purposes, how would you decide where to go? What factors would determine your destination?

What responsibilities, if any, do you think the Georgian government has towards Georgian citizens who choose to live and work abroad?

Have you noticed people who left your community to work abroad returning?

Are there more or fewer than last year?

Do you know of any programs or organizations that either help people while they are working abroad or that assist them to come back home? If so which ones? Where did you learn about the programs? Can you describe them?

How do think these programs work?