



## Migration Profile

### GEORGIA

#### A. Executive Summary

Georgia (69,700 sq km) is located in the Caucasus region of Eurasia and has a population of 3,716,900 (2020) that is mainly urbanized, with 58% of that population residing in the capital, Tbilisi. The major ethnic groups include: Georgian (86.6%), Azeri (6.3%), Armenian (4.5%), Russian and Yezidi (2.3%). The main religion is Orthodox (83.4%), followed by Muslims (10.7%), and Armenian Apostolic Church (2.9%).

After independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, post-communist Georgia suffered an initial decade of civil unrest and economic crisis which lasted until the Rose Revolution of 2003. That was when the new government introduced democratic and economic reforms. In August 2008, the worsening relationship between Russia, Georgia and the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulted in a brief war, which ended with the ceasefire agreement of 12 August 2008. The ceasefire was negotiated according to the Geneva International Discussions protocols. The issue of regional autonomy is still debated in the country. On 22 June 2020, the United Nations Human Rights Council reiterated its support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, praising the efforts of the Georgian government to strengthen democracy.

Georgia has significant economic, social and political potential. Its governance and state institutions are growing stronger, yet despite impressive economic reforms and growth, with GDP per capita growing at an annual rate of 4.8% between 2010 and 2019, one fifth of Georgia's population still lives in poverty. According to World Bank forecasts, Georgia will likely experience a general economic slow-down in 2020 due to a combination of the COVID-19 pandemic and a decline in oil prices.

Migration and displacement are high on the Georgian government's agenda. Currently, the Migration Strategy 2016-2020 is the government's third strategic document which outlines its migration policy. Implementation of this policy is the work of Georgia's State Commission on Migration Issues.

As a result of the conflicts in the early 1990s and again in August 2008, Georgia has one of the world's highest incidences of internal displacement relative to its overall population. By the end of 2019, some 301,000 persons were displaced. Recognizing the need for better coordination between national and local stakeholders, the government set up a strong mechanism in the form of a

dedicated ministry for IDPs, together with a steering committee comprised of several ministries, UN agencies and civil society organizations, which operated until early 2019.

Georgia is in Tier 1 of the USA Global Trafficking Report (2020). Although the government meets the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, some gaps remain with regards to victims that remain in-country through the end of the trial, likely hindering their cooperation, particularly from foreign victims who want to repatriate, due to slow court proceedings.

IOM, ILO, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and the Georgian Red Cross work together and are actively engaged with the government, civil society organizations and Caritas Georgia in the management of migration and displacement. Also, UNHCR has been involved in Georgia since the early 1990s and has implemented multi-sectoral programs to assist the IDPs. The IFRC (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society) Country Cluster Office, and which supports Georgia Red Cross, is based in Tbilisi and covers the three countries of South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, where natural disasters are frequent.

## **B. Country Profile**

### **I. Basic Information**

Georgia (69,700 sq km) is located in the Caucasus region of Eurasia and has a population of 3,716,900 (2020) that is mainly urbanized with 58% of the population residing in the capital, Tbilisi. The major ethnic groups include Georgian (86.6%), Azeri (6.3%), Armenian (4.5%), Russian and Yezidi (2.3%). The main religion is Orthodox (83.4%), followed by Muslims (10.7%), and Armenian Apostolic Church (2.9%). The remaining 3% include Catholics, Yezidis, Jews and Protestants.

Although Georgia's GDP per capita grew at an annual rate of 4.8% between 2010 and 2019, one-fifth of the population lives in poverty. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, economic forecasts predict that the economy will contract by 4.8% in 2020.

Migration and displacement have been high in the Georgian political agenda since 1997. In 2008, the brief war with Russia brought about by the aspirations of separatists, the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia experienced grave repercussions in the form of the violation of human rights of Georgians who were forced out of their communities. Georgia's national elections of 31 October 2020 are of special interest to the international community, given the country's strong aspiration to be part of NATO and also continue its partnership with the EU.

## **II. International and Internal Migrants**

According to the 2014 census, the flow of emigrants from Georgia has been increasing over the years. Between 2002 and 2014, as many as 1.15 million people left the country for a period of at least six months or longer. In the early 2000s, the most common destinations for Georgian migrants were the post-Soviet countries (Russia and Ukraine), in addition to Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Turkey and the United States. After 2006-2008, migration to Russia became more difficult for Georgians, and as a result these migration patterns changed. The proportion of women among Georgian migrants rose slightly, such that by 2018, they made up about half of all Georgian labour migrants. These women were primarily en route to Western Europe, Greece and Turkey, where

they could find employment as caregivers. It should be noted that since 28 March 2017, all Georgian citizens can benefit from visa-free travel to the Schengen area for 90 days in a 180-day period.

In 2019, emigrants totalled 105,107, an increase of 6.2% over the previous year. The number of immigrants totalled 96,864 persons, an increase of 9.9% compared to the previous year. In the same time period, Georgia's working age population (15-64 years old) was estimated at 3,191,462 people. An overwhelming majority of immigrants (85.3%) and emigrants (84.9%) fall within this age range.

It can be concluded from the data made available in 2016 by the Georgia State Commission on Migration Issues that the majority of emigrants had been living in the Tbilisi, Imereti (internal regions) and Kvemo Kartli regions bordering Armenia. Moreover, among emigrants from the Imereti, Kakheti and Mtskheta-Mtianeti regions, the number of migrant women significantly exceeds the number of men.

In countries where Georgian migrants reside, ties between them and Georgia are strong: they show little interest in obtaining the citizenship of the country of residence; rather, they wish to return home and they visit frequently. These ties are further reinforced by various diaspora organizations that create bridges between Georgia and the country of residence and promote Georgian culture and language. A large majority of Georgian migrants, especially those who still have children in Georgia, send remittances. These are mainly used for investments in farm equipment and to pay for health and education. Emigration can have negative social side-effects: for example the deterioration of family unity, which can severely affect the younger members of the family if their parents have emigrated.

Georgian migrants who are legally established abroad are usually well integrated, although the number of Georgians who have returned began to rise after 2017, when the visa obligation was waived. The jump between 2018 and 2019 was especially great (46%). This is consistent with a general increase in Georgian migration towards the EU, with rising numbers of detections of illegal stay being reported by Member States.

IOM supports the voluntary return of Georgian nationals. In the last decade, IOM Georgia has assisted 9,926 Georgian nationals residing in 30 foreign countries to return to Georgia voluntarily. The main sources were Greece, Germany, Belgium, Poland and Switzerland. IOM implemented reintegration programs, working together with key partners. These included the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees (MRA) working through Mobility Centres. These agencies assisted migrants in their return, transportation, temporary accommodation, and medical assistance (both counselling and services). They also provided vocational training (including counselling, funding and employment services). Business development was also supported through counselling, training, assistance in business plan development and grants. In the period 2014-2017, the Mobility Centres project was financed by the European Union's "More for More" program. After completion of these projects, the responsibility for their administration and the delivery of the assistance provided by these centres, was transferred to the MRA.

Generally, the majority of immigrants to Georgia arrive from the Russian Federation, followed by Ukraine and Kazakhstan. They are usually well integrated, because they (partially) share a common history and a common socio-cultural and (sometimes) religious orientation with

Georgian society. As many Georgians are still fluent in Russian, also a common *lingua franca* exists. It is expected, though, that an increase in immigrants from Asia will eventually become an issue from the point of view of integrating immigrants coming from Turkey, Iran, China or India, due to their lack of fluency in Russian and of knowledge of the region's traditions.

On the other hand, immigration is a necessary strategy for a country losing workers through emigration and lacking vocational training for the resident population. Labour migration to Georgia is dominated by males in the 20-40 year-old age group. This is typical of early-stage immigration; later, if immigration continues, the country will have to prepare for immigration related to family formation and family reunification.

Internal migration in Georgia is mainly a response to armed conflicts, natural disasters, and socio-economic factors. Hence, the major groups of internal migrants in Georgia consist of migrants who hope to improve their socio-economic conditions by switching between rural and urban locations; and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) affected by armed conflict in the occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali Region/South Ossetia or by environmental hazards, i.e. ecological migrants (eco-migrants).

There is a difference between the urban and rural population by age and sex. The median age in Georgia is higher in the countryside (40.07 years) than in urban areas (35.19 years). This can be explained by migration from rural regions to the urban areas during the peak economically active ages. When this happens, it is usually older people who are left behind.

Georgian newspapers in English cover the topic of migration quite extensively and give space to both the challenges and progress made since the EU-Georgia Agreement on Visa Liberalization adopted by the Council in February 2017. These reports also include interviews with migrants in third countries, who have been trapped in countries under quarantine for COVID-19. No relevant news is reported on immigrants to Georgia. Only IOM provides news about the impact of COVID-19 on the various communities of migrants. IOM's Rapid Need Assessment revealed that the most acute needs are the result of loss of income. The survey revealed the limitations in access to healthcare among the target groups, as well as general reluctance among migrants to seek healthcare in Georgia, citing issues of language barriers, affordability, mistrust and fears related to their legal status or occupation in the case of sex workers.

### **III. Emigration and Skilled Migration**

During the mid- to late-1990s, migrants from Georgia who moved to USA and Western Europe were (mostly) well educated, and trying to escape the difficult economic and socio-political situation in post-Soviet Georgia. Since then, Georgia has developed a dynamic economy, but even so, it struggles with youth unemployment and this, in turn, encourages migration for education and work.

In 2019 the European Training Foundation (ETF) published a study that indicated Georgia has both over-qualified and under-qualified populations. Many people work in jobs that do not correspond to their educational levels. Analysis shows that the highest incidence of over-education in Georgia is among semi-skilled professionals: clerks, service and sales workers, and operators and technicians (30%).

Another study conducted in 2017 by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre (CRRC) in Georgia for the Georgian Young Lawyers Association (GYLA) and the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development (CIPDD) showed that before leaving the country, 37% of emigrants had acquired secondary education, 19% had obtained secondary technical or secondary special education, 11% held a Bachelor's degree, 7% held a Master's degree, and 22% had five years of higher education (specialist diploma).

Nowadays, skilled young Georgian professionals live mostly in Western Europe: the United Kingdom, Germany and France. In 2018, this represented 39,967 graduates. In order to counter this "brain drain" of young people from Georgia, the Georgian Government declared the internationalization of its education system a priority.

The Rustaveli Foundation helps Georgian diaspora and emigrants to maintain contact with their motherland and contributes to the development of science. Between 2011-2016, the foundation financed 69 joint research projects. In addition, the Rustaveli Foundation funds scientific research internships for young scientists abroad for periods of two to eight months. From 2011 to 2016, 215 young Georgian scientists benefited from this program. Apart from state scholarships, there are other scholarship programs that help Georgian citizens acquire higher education abroad. Some are state-funded programs of foreign countries: the US funds the Future Leaders Exchange Program, the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program, and the Fulbright Graduate Student Program; the UK funds Chevening; Germany funds DAAD scholarships; and the Netherlands funds the Netherlands Fellowship Programme). Other initiatives are funded within the framework of the EU's educational programs (TEMPUS, ERASMUS), whilst others still are exchange and/or scholarship programs of Georgian or foreign tertiary institutions. After returning to Georgia, beneficiaries of these programs are in high demand and easily find jobs. Some beneficiaries currently hold top positions in Georgian state entities and the business sector, as well as various international or non-governmental organizations.

#### **IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees)**

At the end of 2019 the recorded number of IDPs was 301,000: 8% of the total population. This includes the people displaced by the armed conflicts in the early 1990s, 1998 and 2008. Despite the numbers, the level of internal displacement is considered to be low, and the government has made considerable progress in providing solutions to the protracted displacement. The situation varies significantly between IDPs in Georgia and those in the occupied territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. IDPs living in occupied territories are deprived of property and civic rights, and they also experience restricted freedom of movement which impacts family ties.

In order to give a clear sign of political commitment for the resolution of this issue, Georgia has recently recognized the need for better coordination between national and local stakeholders. The country set up a strong mechanism in the form of a dedicated ministry for IDPs and also a steering committee comprising several ministries, UN agencies and civil society organizations. This operated until early 2019. It has also developed a promising multiyear decentralization strategy that has the potential to grant local government entities more powers to deal with internal displacement.

In 2017, the UN Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced people commended the Georgian Law on IDPs of 1 March 2014 as a significant step for their protection.

The Law includes provisions for the elimination of the differentiation between internally displaced persons in “compact” and “private” accommodation. What this means is that all such persons receive an equal allowance. The law also includes recognition of the right to restitution of property belonging to internally displaced persons in the occupied territory and the right to inherit it. Further, it introduces guarantees for the integration of internally displaced persons into other parts of the country before their return to their places of permanent residence. Georgia’s strong commitment to return for displaced persons in Georgia is reflected in a simplified procedure for granting “internally displaced person status”, and many wish to retain it. Nevertheless, the Special Rapporteur emphasized that a better approach would be the transition from legal status to a needs-based responses, as proposed by the Government. This would end the “internally displaced person status” designation and enable needs-based approaches to durable solutions for internally displaced persons in Georgia.

With regards to “eco-migrants”, noteworthy legislation was adopted that sets out criteria for deciding on accommodation of persons affected by and displaced as a result of natural disasters. An amendment in 2015 identified the circumstances in which a family is considered to be “eco-migrant”. At the time of writing, however, there is no “eco-migrants” legislation related to environmental changes. In 2018, floods caused the displacement of 310 people. IDMC claims that data for “eco-migrants” are not available for 2019, but it is assumed that flooding will most probably have an impact on the data.

In the history of independent Georgia, the first mass request of asylum occurred in 1999; the cause was the renewed hostilities in the Russian Federation (the Autonomous Republic of Chechnya). A second significant wave of asylum seekers began in 2012 when the number of asylum seekers increased 20 times compared with 2010-2011, and even more by the end of 2014. Such an increase was mainly the result of an escalation of civil confrontation and armed conflict in the Middle East. The conflict that started in Ukraine in 2014 has also increased the number of asylum seekers in Georgia.

According to UNDESA (using World Info data), 20,055 people – roughly half of one percent of the country’s population – fled Georgia in 2018 and applied for asylum in other countries. The leading destinations include France, Germany and Greece. Overall, 98% of asylum applications have been rejected. Of the 3,764 Georgians who fled to Germany, only 9 were accepted – an acceptance rate of 0.22%.

On 23 February 2019 the independent paper *The Caucasian Knot* reported that Georgia had registered over 280,000 forced migrants from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Germany allocated €10 million for improving their housing and employment conditions. Generally speaking, international media focus on the critical situation of forced migrants from Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but they are not investigating the differences of treatment in relationship to the local poor. They highlight the situation of Georgians trying to seek asylum in France or other EU countries by changing their surnames to re-enter the Schengen area. Georgia was declared a safe country by many EU countries, but Georgians continue to leave in order to find better health care and labour opportunities abroad.

## **V. Victims of Human Trafficking**

Although the latest Human Trafficking Report 2020 places Georgia in Tier 1 among the countries who meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, human traffickers keep exploiting domestic and foreign victims, especially children. A recent UNICEF Survey suggests that 30% of these children are of Roma ethnicity or Azerbaijani Kurds, and that 70% of children living and working in the streets are Georgians who are moved from one city to another with their families. According to the Social Services Agency, some of these children are Moldovan citizens. The increasing poverty rate in Georgia underlies the proportion of children living below the minimum subsistence level. One in every five children lives in a household in which the basic needs of its members are unmet.

According to the latest OSCE Report (May 2020), the absence of comprehensive general data makes it difficult to assess the exact scope and magnitude of human trafficking in Georgia. Data collected and information provided during the visit from both Georgian authorities and civil society organizations indicate that Georgia is a country of origin, transit and destination for various forms of human trafficking.

In Georgia, traffickers recruit victims with false promises of well-paying jobs in tea processing plants, hospitals, salons, restaurants, and hotels. Traffickers exploit women and girls from Georgia in sex trafficking within the country, and in Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Georgia is also a transit country for women from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan who are exploited in Turkey. Traffickers exploit women from Azerbaijan and Central Asia in sex trafficking in the tourist areas of the Adjara region and in larger cities, like Tbilisi and Batumi, in saunas, brothels, bars, strip clubs, casinos, and hotels. Georgian men and women are exploited in forced labour within Georgia and in Turkey, United Arab Emirates, Egypt, Cyprus, and Iraq. Georgian, Romani, and Kurdish children are subjected to forced begging and coerced into criminality in Georgia. Chinese women in commercial sex and Southeast Asian women working in massage parlours are vulnerable to sex trafficking. No information was available about the presence of human trafficking in the Russian-occupied Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Nevertheless, the government and NGOs consider internally displaced persons from these occupied territories particularly vulnerable to trafficking with some observers reporting anecdotal evidence of cases of forced labour.

Forced labour is a major issue for Georgian government, as Human Rights Watch Report highlighted that Georgian labour law does not sufficiently regulate working hours, rest time, weekly breaks, and night work, and does not provide for comprehensive government oversight of labour conditions. Lax regulations and resulting labour practices that often prioritize production targets undermine the safety of workers, especially in manganese mines in Georgia. Poland is increasingly becoming a new destination country for trafficking of Georgian men employed in forced labour, together with Iraq and Turkey.

Despite the above gaps, Georgia is strengthening its efforts to guarantee access to programs and activities for victims of human trafficking. The Georgian Anti-Trafficking Law provides for a dual procedure for identification of trafficked persons: "victim identification" and "statutory victim identification". With regard to the first, the law established the Permanent Group of the Co-ordination Council on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings ("the Permanent Group") as a competent authority for identifying and granting the status of victim. For a person to be identified as a victim, three special mobile groups established by the State Fund for Protection of and Assistance to Statutory Victims of Trafficking in Human Beings interview the potential victim of

human trafficking according to a questionnaire. This questionnaire is then sent to the Permanent Group to examine the case and decide on granting victim status within 48 hours. In addition to the Permanent Group's victim identification procedure, law enforcement can also grant a victim status to a trafficked person during criminal proceedings. As for the second measure, the status of a "statutory" victim of trafficking is granted by law enforcement authorities in accordance with Criminal Procedure Code of Georgia and is linked with the victim's co-operation with the criminal proceedings. To guide the law enforcement agencies in their outreach to identify trafficked persons, in 2015, the Ministry of Interior adopted Standard Operative Procedures (SOPs) to identify trafficked persons, which also includes indicators for various exploitative purposes. Police mobile groups in the Division for Combating Human Trafficking and Illegal Migration of the Ministry of Interior's Criminal Police Department detect and identify trafficked persons. Since September 2019, the number of these police mobile groups has increased from four to six in order to increase the proactive identification of victims.

In terms of programs and activities in 2019, there are government-run crisis centres in five cities. NGOs such as People's Harmonious Development Society and "Tanagdoma" - a centre for information and counselling on reproductive health in Tbilisi - provide initial psychological care, medical assistance, legal support, and temporary shelter for potential victims awaiting official victim status. Additionally, the government operates anti-trafficking shelters in Tbilisi and Batumi and other victim assistance programs. The government also provides medical aid, psychological counselling, legal assistance, childcare services, reintegration support, and one-time financial payments of 1,000 lari (\$350) to victims. It disseminates leaflets on various trafficking issues, including at border crossings, universities, tourism information centres, metro stations, and public service halls throughout the country. Government officials funded and also participate in various television, radio, and print media programs intended to raise awareness. An anti-trafficking hotline operated by the MOIA (Ministry of Internal Affairs) and another hotline operated by the State Fund to deal with calls from trafficking victims continue to be funded.

## **VI. National Legal Framework**

In order to improve migration management, a new Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons was adopted in 2014. It set new grounds for the entry and stay of aliens in Georgia, introduced new visa categories, classified types of residence permits, and introduced effective mechanisms for removing aliens from the country. All of these measures are in full compliance with universally recognized principles and norms of international law and ensure the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. As a result of the monitoring of the implementation process, several amendments have been made to the Law and certain provisions have been further refined. A Law on Labour Migration was adopted (2015); it establishes a national mechanism for regulating labour migration and determines public administration principles in this field, with the intention of promoting the development of legal labour migration and reducing illegal activities.

Georgia is well advanced with statelessness determining procedures compared with other countries. Its Ordinance No. 523 on the Approval of the Procedures for Determining the Status of a Stateless Person in Georgia states explicitly that this procedure is open to any stateless person, regardless of the legality of the person's stay in Georgia.

Georgia has also ratified a number of Conventions addressing slavery and forced labour such as the ILO Forced Labour Convention No.29, the ILO Convention on the Abolition of Forced Labour No.105, and the ILO Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour No.182.

Georgia is in Tier 1 of the USA Global Trafficking Report (2020). Although the government meets the minimum standards for eliminating trafficking, some gaps remain with regards to victims remaining in-country until the end of their trial, which likely hinders victim cooperation, particularly from foreign victims who want to repatriate, due to slow court proceedings.

The government has been particularly active with law enforcement actions and protection efforts for victims of trafficking. Domestically, human trafficking was first criminalized through the Criminal Code Article 143 in 2003, subsequently amended several times to align it with the international definition and provisions for combating human trafficking.

A dedicated Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons (Anti-Trafficking Law) was adopted in 2006 and amended in 2012 following the recommendations included in an evaluation by GRETA, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, who proposed improvements to the social and legal protection, assistance and rehabilitation of child victims. The Law defines the legal and institutional framework for preventing and combating human trafficking, outlines the roles and competencies of different national agencies involved in anti-trafficking work, and provides for procedures for co-ordination of activities by establishing the Inter-Agency Co-ordination Council on the Implementation of Actions against Trafficking in Human Beings. The Law further envisaged the establishment of the State Fund for Protection and Support of Victims and Persons affected by Human Trafficking.

Georgia's adoption of these laws is consistent with its international commitment to cooperate with the EU in the fight against illegal migration and transnational and trans-boundary organized crime. Special emphasis is given to the development of mechanisms for facilitating the return and reintegration of Georgian citizens and protecting their rights, and for integrating persons with refugee or humanitarian status, and asylum seekers in Georgia. In order to effectively address contemporary challenges and fulfil international obligations, a Unified Migration Analytical System is being developed in order to facilitate informed decision-making in migration management and the policy planning process. In Georgia, the process of institutionalization of migration management began in 2010 with the establishment of the State Commission on Migration Issues. The Commission was set up by the Government of Georgia to coordinate the country's migration policy and is a consultative body of the Government that discusses and makes decisions about issues related to migration management. Currently, the Commission comprises 13 state agencies that are directly involved in the migration management process: the Ministry of Justice responsible for administering the Unified Migration Analytical System (UMAS), the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the State Security Service, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Diaspora Issues, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs.

## **7. Main Actors**

IOM, ILO, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) and the Georgian Red Cross are actively engaged with the government in migration and displacement management, as are civil

society organizations and Caritas Georgia. UNHCR has been involved in Georgia since the early 1990s and has had multi-sectoral programs to assist the IDPs. The IFRC (International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society) Country Cluster Office which supports Georgia Red Cross is based in Tbilisi and covers the three countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia) where disasters are frequent.

In terms of strengths, the network of organizations involved in migration issues is well established in the country and has operated with good results under the aegis of IOM Georgia.

IOM is the most important organization that has assisted the Government of Georgia in developing an effective migration management system that is comprehensive and consistent with international standards. Throughout its work and cooperation in Georgia, IOM supports the implementation of the GCM (Global Compact on Migration), which was endorsed by the Government in December 2018.

In 2015, the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons launched the one-year project of return and reintegration of Georgian citizens from abroad. After a restricted tender, the following Georgian NGOs participated in this project: International Union for Migration and Integration and Development /MIDE, Public Defender's Office, Charity Humanitarian Centre *Abkhazeti*, Fund for Demographic Development, Young Barristers, and VIPR Group.

#### *The Catholic Church*

From the point of view of the Catholic Church, Caritas Georgia is actually the flagbearer for work in the field of migration and displacement among local Georgia NGOs, as well as the representative of Catholic Church. Caritas Georgia works very closely with IOM and since 2007 it has been involved in the voluntary return and reintegration of 789 Georgian citizens who were willing to leave the host country, in collaboration with CORDAID (Caritas Netherlands), Caritas Belgium Caritas Austria and the Danish Refugee Council. The first Shelter for Homeless People was built by Caritas Georgia in Tbilisi by November 1999 (a State shelter started up 18 years later), and St. John Paul II once resided there. The Shelter was handed over to The Missionaries of Charity (associated with Mother Teresa's Sisters) and currently hosts some 30-35 residents. In the seaport of Batumi, Caritas Georgia has been running the Shelter for Homeless People since 2010. It serves 30 residents. People from other countries, including Russia or Ukraine, also stay there occasionally. Caritas negotiates with relevant structures in both countries to try and restore family links.

The German Agency *Solwodi* cares for vulnerable women, mainly victims of human trafficking, and is supported by Misereor, funded by Germany's Catholic Bishops and also cooperates with Caritas Georgia.

The organization *OFII / Office Français de l'immigration et de l'intégration* initiated its work with Caritas Georgia in 2019. It provides reintegration assistance for returnees from France with a focus on social and healthcare issues. OFII also works in collaboration with other organizations in Georgia: IDP Women Association *Consent*, a Georgian NGO based in Tbilisi also working with IDPs; and *Association (AIDE)*, Organization "People in Need".

#### *Orthodox Church*

The Orthodox Church of Georgia is a powerful national symbol that was suppressed for a long period in history until a few years ago. Apart from having its own NGOs working in parish communities and being particularly active in education and healthcare, the Orthodox Church has a great influence on diaspora migrants, as witnessed by the declaration of the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II during the Georgian Diaspora Meeting that was held in May 2017 in Tbilisi.

Notwithstanding the good relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church, there has not been much collaboration on this topic. The role of both Churches could be strengthened especially in local communities, particularly where they are more active.

### **VIII. Other Important Issues**

On 30 June 2020, the United Nations Network on Migration was launched in Georgia by the UN Country Team. It aims to provide coordinated and coherent United Nations system-wide support to the Government of Georgia for strengthening migration policies and enhancing migration management efforts, in line with the Migration Strategy of Georgia 2016-2020 and 2021-2030. The Network was established on the basis of the willingness of Georgia's government to advance the guiding principles and objectives spelled out in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCM) endorsed in 2018. The Network comes after the project EMERGE, which seeks to identify core civil society partners in Georgia and Armenia and enhance their expertise on migration issues (e.g., GCM). The project will work with media throughout 2021 to increase accurate, balanced and more positive coverage of migration issues.

Although the Catholic Church is in the front line and is highly respected thanks to Caritas Georgia, they have not been active in the discussion on the Global Compacts.

### **September 2020**

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