



Migration profile

Georgia

A. Executive Summary

Georgia, strategically situated at the crossroads between Europe and Asia, has an ancient cultural heritage. The country gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, and later suffered civil unrest and economic crisis throughout the 1990s. In 2008 the relations between Russia and the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia further deteriorated and resulted in a war outbreak. Since then, there have been tensions and conflicts between both countries.ⁱ There are still concerns about human rights in the conflict-affected areas, with restrictions on freedom of movement.ⁱⁱ

Georgia is mainly an emigrant country. The top destinations are the Russian Federation, Greece, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.ⁱⁱⁱ Push factors are mostly economic.^{iv} The Georgian diaspora represents a great potential for the country's economic development and for strengthening ties with the international community.^v Remittances strongly impact Georgia's economy, which amounted to 2.35 billion USD in 2021.^{vi} Conversely, immigrants only represent 1.99% of the total population. They are mainly Georgian returnees or foreigners arriving from Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and India.^{vii} As for refugees, in 2022, most of them came from Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and Russia. Since February 2022, more than 160,000 Ukrainians have entered Georgia. Likewise, there are many internally displaced persons in Georgia determined by the 1992-1993 and 2008 conflicts. Finally, in 2021 85 displacements caused by two flood-related events were recorded.

Georgia has experienced a successful development over the past decade. Nevertheless, critical structural challenges persist, particularly weak productivity and difficulty in creating high-quality jobs. Its trade openness and reliance on tourism make it vulnerable to external and global shocks, and the high dollarisation and dependence on external savings amplify the risks even more. Despite these issues, Georgia's economy is recovering from the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and associated sanctions.^{viii}

In 2021 Georgia's GDP amounted to US\$ 18,629,365,600,^{ix} experiencing an annual growth rate of 10.5% from the previous year which had a -6.8% decrease in 2020.^x Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) net inflows represented 6.8% of the GDP.^{xi} Georgia also presented high inflation rates; for instance, inflation on consumer prices amounted to 9.6% of its GDP.^{xii}

Country Profile

I. Basic Information

Georgia is located in southwest Asia, on the eastern coast of the Black Sea and south of the Caucasus Mountains. It shares borders with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey. It has a mountainous relief and around 25,000 rivers. It is administratively divided into nine regions, one city (Tbilisi) and two autonomous republics (Abjasia and Ayaria).^{xiii}

It has a territory extension of 69,700 sq. km (including Abjasia and South Ossetia, self-proclaimed independent territories),^{xiv} and in 2022 its population was 3,688,600.^{xv} Tbilisi is the capital and largest city.^{xvi} Georgian is the official language, and 71% of the people speak it. Other languages include Russian (9%), Armenian (7%), and Azeri (6%).^{xvii} Regarding religion, most of the population is Georgian Orthodox, followed by Muslims, Armenian and Russian Orthodox. Other faiths include Catholics, Jews, and Protestants.^{xviii} Concerning the ethnic distribution, Georgians are the major group (84% of the population). Other ethnicities include Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Jews, Azerbaijanis, Ossetians, and Abkhazians.^{xx}

II. International and Internal Migrants

According to Georgian official data, as of 2021, there were 74,000 immigrants in Georgia (corresponding to 1.99% of the country's population). Among them, 41,750 (56.42% of the stock) were male and 32,250 female (43.58%). 8,500 were 14 years old or younger, and 5,100 were 65 years old or older. Most of these immigrants were Georgian returnees (39,500, corresponding to 53.38% of the stock). Other countries of origin were Russia (10,900 people, 14.73% of the stock), Turkey (2,800 people, 3.78% of the stock), Azerbaijan (2,500 people, 3.38% of the stock), and India (1,400 people, 1.89% of the stock).^{xxi}

In recent years, one of the main migration movements into Georgia has been, then, the inflow of returnees. After decades of intense emigration, a growing number of this Georgian diaspora is now returning, becoming the main group of arrivals from abroad. This new migration trend seems to have been further boosted by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Because of a sharp increase in job insecurity abroad, 23,000 Georgian citizens formerly residing abroad moved back into the country in the first six months of 2021. However, according to IOM's reports, a significant share of these returnees are finding it difficult to readapt and reintegrate into the local economy and social structure. Thus, many of them do not have jobs and face insecurity, low earnings, and lack of essential services.^{xxii}

Since 2022, another important migratory phenomenon is a sharp increase of Russians migrating to Georgia. It appears that the combination of a considerable economic growth in Georgia and the socioeconomic instability in the Russian Federation has turned the Caucasian Republic into an attractive destination for Russian migrants. It also must be kept in mind the strong historical and cultural ties between the two countries and the fact that a big share of the Georgian population still speaks Russian as a consequence of the previous Soviet dominion. The growing number of new arrivals from Russia shows this new trend. In 2021, there were 36,400 entries from Russia, while in 2022 they jumped to 222,300. Most of them, however, will not become Georgian residents: some go back to Russia, while others continue their migrant journey into other countries. Nonetheless, it is already noticeable that the Russian community in Georgia is increasing. According to the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, between January 1 and September 30, 2022, there were already 112,700 Russian citizens living in the country. This represents a large growth compared to the 10,900 people registered in the previous year.^{xxiii}

Internal migration in Georgia is also a strong phenomenon. It is mostly an urban-to-rural movement, or relocating into the capital, Tbilisi, from other less populated regions. Therefore, while some regions are constantly losing inhabitants (due to internal migration, as well as emigration), Tbilisi is instead increasing its population. Internal migrants are mostly young people, contributing thus to the social imbalances between the city capital and the rest of the country.^{xxiv}

III. Emigration and Skilled Migration

Georgia is considered an emigrant country. Since the mid-1990s, migrants have been moving to the USA and Western Europe to flee from the socio-economic challenges of the post-Soviet period.^{xxv}

According to the National Statistics Office of Georgia, in 2021, the net migration was -25,966 persons, recording only 99,974 emigrants. Most of them were male (61,740), while females were only 38,234. Their vast majority was between 15 and 65 years old.^{xxvi} The top countries of destination were the Russian Federation, Greece, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Armenia.^{xxvii}

The main push factors for Georgian emigrants have been mainly economic. However, others have moved abroad to study or for family reunification reasons.^{xxviii} In recent years, emigration has been mainly caused by political instability and security threats. Existing diaspora networks and migrant communities are also playing a significant role in encouraging emigration.^{xxix}

Through the Diaspora Economic Forum organised by IOM, the Georgia diaspora has the opportunity to participate and receive information on economic and investment opportunities, business development and services offered by the state and other non-governmental actors. The Georgian diaspora has great potential for the country's economic development and for strengthening ties with the international community.^{xxx}

Meanwhile, returnees are often faced with serious integration concerns due to restrictions in public and economic life. They also need to readapt and rebuild their lives in Georgia, even though many economic and social challenges that previously motivated their emigration movement are still unchanged or have even worsened during the ongoing crisis.^{xxxi} To this aim, the Migration Strategy of Georgia has been developed to improve migration management, including the reintegration of many returnees.^{xxxii}

Remittances strongly impact Georgia's economy. Compared to 2012, the figure has risen by 76% and amounted to 2.35 billion USD by 2021. 6.2% of the local households received remittances in 2021, and most of them came in from Russia.^{xxxiii}

IV. Forced Migrants (internally displaced, asylum seekers and refugees, climate displaced people)

In 2022, in Georgia there were 24,024 persons holding a refugee status, and 1,160 asylum seekers were also registered in the country. They mainly came from Ukraine (94.27%), Syria (1.86%), Iraq (1.57%), and Russia (0.92%).^{xxxiv} Since February 2022, more than 160,000 Ukrainians have entered Georgia, which serves as both a transit and destination country. About half of the Ukrainians in Georgia came from areas not controlled by the Ukrainian government through the Dariali (Larsi) border with Russia. Others instead came from

Mariupol and Kharkiv, especially when the conflict severely affected those cities. Ukrainians do not need a visa to enter the country, benefit from border crossing procedures, and are allowed to stay in the country for one year.^{xxxv} The Georgian government provides assistance to them, including accommodation. Newcomers are provided with a two-week stay in hotels, but afterwards refugees must find their own accommodation.^{xxxvi} In addition, the government gives them financial assistance (300 lari - \$106, a month), but the amount is not enough, as housing in Georgia is very expensive, especially in Tbilisi and Batumi.^{xxxvii} Local institutions also provide food, transportation, access to social services, provision of information, and limited medical care.^{xxxviii xxxix} Assistance to refugees does not cover everything due to financial constraints, as Georgia is one of the poorest countries in the region, and there is also no international financial aid available for Georgia to support Ukrainians.^{xl}

Georgian law recognises refugee and asylum seeker status, and the government has a system in place to provide protection to them. However, the refugee population has been facing problems related to access to education, as there are significant language barriers, despite the provision of Georgian language classes by the government. Furthermore, asylum seekers do not receive any financial support from the government, and the government-run reception centre caters to only 10% of the asylum-seeker population.^{xli}

In 2022, Georgia registered 291,358 internally displaced persons affected by the 1992-1993 and 2008 conflicts. This number also includes all of those people who returned to the Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as people displaced by the 2008 conflict who were subsequently relocated or provided with housing. The government gave monthly allowances to people recognised as IDPs, promoted their socio-economic integration, and sought to create conditions for their return in safety and dignity.^{xlii}

Finally, 85 displacements caused by two flood-related events were also recorded in 2021.^{xliii}

V. Victims of Human Trafficking

The Human Trafficking Prosecution Unit in Georgia works to combat human trafficking in the country. In 2021, it rescued and assisted 116 victims, and it expanded its resources.^{xliv} Due to its ongoing anti-trafficking efforts, even during the Covid-19 pandemic, Georgia is considered Tier 1 in the U.S. Trafficking in Persons Report.^{xlv}

Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Georgia, as well as victims originally from Georgia but residing abroad. Recruitment is made through false promises of well-paying jobs in tea processing plants, salons, restaurants, hospitals, and hotels. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, solicitation has been perpetrated by online means, such as chats, websites, or advertisements for escort services. Women and girls are exploited in sex trafficking locally or in countries like Cyprus, Egypt, Turkey, and the United Arab Emirates. Georgia is also a transit country for female victims coming from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan that are exploited in Turkey. Traffickers also lure women from Central Asia, particularly Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, for sex trafficking in the tourist areas of the Adjara region and larger cities like Tbilisi and Batumi. Georgian men and women are also exploited in forced labour within the country and in Cyprus, Egypt, and Turkey. Children are subjected to forced begging and coerced into criminality in Georgia. Romani and Kurdish children,

Armenian refugees, and internally displaced children from South Ossetia and Abkhazia who are homeless or live on the street are vulnerable to trafficking, especially forced begging.^{xlvi}

In 2021, the government investigated 18 new cases and continued previous year's investigations. It initiated one prosecution of 5 defendants and continued another one involving 5 defendants in 2020. Courts convicted 5 traffickers for forced labour (compared with 26 traffickers for child sex trafficking in 2020). Judges issued sentences from 8 to 15 year's imprisonment for 3 traffickers and sentenced 2 more from one year and four months to one year and six months imprisonment. In 2021, the government implemented the 2021-2022 National Action Plan and amended the criminal code. It also maintained special trafficking units. Inspections were carried out in hotels, bars, nightclubs, casinos, and other shady businesses. In 2021, 130 inspections resulted in 6 criminal investigations, including 2 for forced labour. Because of the pandemic, courts held a small number of remote hearings. The government trained investigators, mobile unit members, labour inspectors, prosecutors and border patrols on human trafficking issues.^{xlvii}

Mobile units and the task force screened 444 individuals in commercial sex, begging, or employed in vulnerable sectors for trafficking indicators. Furthermore, the government identified 4 victims of forced labour (2 adult male victims, one boy and one girl). Authorities screened 624 Georgian nationals deported from other countries for trafficking indicators at border crossings and the international airport. A multi-disciplinary national referral mechanism provided standard operating procedures for the official identification and referral of victims to social services. Government-operated crisis centres in 5 cities and NGOs provided medical assistance, legal support, psychological care, and temporary shelter for potential victims awaiting to have the official victim status recognised to them. Likewise, in 2021, the government created a new mobile group and crisis centre in the Adjara region to identify potential victims among vulnerable children.^{xlviii}

VI. National Legal Framework

The Constitution of Georgia and the Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship protect citizens' rights both within the country and abroad, in accordance with international law and legislation of Georgia.^{xliv}

The 2005 Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, which was replaced by the 2014 Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, which sets new grounds for the entry and stay of foreigners in Georgia, introduced new visa categories, classified types of residence permits, and introduced effective mechanisms to remove foreigners from the country.ⁱ

The 2016 Law of Georgia on International Protection defines the conditions of entry, stay and standards of treatment on the territory of Georgia for foreigners and stateless persons who have requested international protection. It sets the legal status, rights and obligations, as well as social and economic guarantees of asylum seekers, refugees, humanitarian status holders and persons under temporary protection.ⁱⁱ

The 2015 Law on Labor Migration aims to promote the development of legal labour migration by reducing irregular labour migration and trafficking. Articles 143-1 and 143-2 of the Criminal Code criminalised sex and labour trafficking and prescribed penalties for offences involving either an adult or a child victim.ⁱⁱⁱ The Parliament of Georgia adopted the Law on

Combating Trafficking in Persons, representing a legal base for the prevention and fight against this crime.^{liii} Georgia signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol. It also ratified the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Council of Europe's Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings.^{liv} Georgia ratified the Forced Labour Convention and the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention for the elimination of child labour and the protection of children.^{lv}

Georgia ratified the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol in 1999. Georgia acceded to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons in December 2011 and to the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness in July 2014.^{lvi}

VII. Main Actors

The State

The State Commission on Migration Issues coordinates the country's migration policy. The following authorities are involved in the migration management process: the Ministry of Justice, responsible for administering the Unified Migration Analytical System, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA), 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, and the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Affairs.^{lvii}

The Migration Department under the Ministry of Internal Affairs handles the detection and identification of foreigners without legal grounds, the removal of foreigners staying in Georgia without legal grounds, and the management of temporary accommodation centres. It also ensures the right to asylum and drafts legislative amendments and proposals. The Division of International Protection Issues of the Migration Department is the main authority responsible for asylum procedures and registering asylum-seekers.^{lviii}

The government maintains several professional trafficking units, including the Anti-Trafficking and Illegal Migration Unit within the Central Criminal Police Department and six mobile units under MOIA. The Prosecutor General's Office also has special prosecutors devoted to trafficking cases and operates a task force in the Adjara region.^{lix}

The Interagency Coordinating Council on Combating Trafficking in persons includes the Minister of Justice, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs, the Chief Prosecutor's Office of Georgia; the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs; the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Georgia; the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; the Deputy of State Minister of Georgia For Diaspora Issues; the Director of Legal Entity of Public Law State fund for Protection and Assistance of Victims and statutory victims of human trafficking and the Public Defender of Georgia. The Council elaborates the National Action Plan every two years to implement an effective and coordinated policy to combat trafficking in human beings.^{lx}

International Organisations

UNHCR in Georgia assists the government to enhance the quality of the refugee status determination procedure, and promotes amendments to further align the legislation governing refugee/stateless issues with international standards and monitoring the

implementation of the country's international responsibilities relating to the protection of refugees and stateless individuals.^{lxi} UNHCR in Georgia advocates for an effective asylum system and legislation, and fosters protection and integration for refugees, humanitarian status holders, and asylum-seekers.^{lxii}

IOM supports the Government of Georgia in developing an effective migration and border management system, providing a comprehensive response to evolving migration challenges in line with international standards. It is also actively involved in the assisted voluntary return and sustainable reintegration of Georgian nationals from other countries, through the provision of local reintegration assistance at the individual level in the economic, social, and psychosocial dimensions.^{lxiii}

UNICEF in Georgia works closely with the government and NGOs to help them identify unaccompanied minors with the aim of addressing their needs. UNICEF works with the Ministry of Education and Science and local municipalities to simplify the regulations on enrolment procedures in public preschools for all refugee preschool-age children.^{lxiv}

NGOs and Other Organisations

Rights Georgia is one of the most prominent NGOs in Georgia. For over two decades it has been defending human rights in the South Caucasian country on different fronts, including providing legal assistance to refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless persons. It also runs a hotline for asylum seekers, where they can call and get help in their resettlement process. They have recently started, in cooperation with different European NGOs, a specific programme for supporting Ukrainian refugees hosted in Georgia.^{lxv} Additionally, Rights Georgia is the local non-governmental partner of UNHCR in matters of legal aid provision for refugees and asylum seekers in the country.^{lxvi}

Other organisations are developing similar lines of work in the country. For example, the Legal Aid Consortium Georgia (LAG) focuses on providing free-of-charge legal help to different categories of displaced populations: refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and IDP returnees. It is an umbrella organisation including 4 different Georgian NGOs, each of them operating in a different region of the country. Their activities encompass the provision of relevant legal information (both to displaced people they directly reach out to and through public dissemination of formative material); research and advocacy on the needs and hardships faced by the groups they attend to; legal counselling and assistance including in-court representation; or giving different types of training and education to the displaced.^{lxvii}

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) also provides humanitarian assistance to refugees, IDPs, and returnees in Georgia through their Regional Office for South Caucasus and Central Asia, located in Tbilisi. Their work on behalf of displaced people includes offering them legal assistance, food security, education, shelter, camp management, water, sanitation, and hygiene.^{lxviii}^{lxix}

Similarly, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) also runs a local mission for the South Caucasus, where one of their primary groups of interest is the large group of internally displaced returnees in Georgia. DRC's goal with this population is primarily poverty reduction. Their main activities include assistance in economic recovery, facilitating access to social services, provision of shelter and housing, and promotion of small and medium-scale infrastructure projects in the areas inhabited by populations of concern.^{lxx}

The Catholic Church

Caritas Georgia promotes human development and social justice, supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged people in accordance with Christian values, and promoting their responsibility and dignity. Caritas Georgia has developed the following programmes: healthcare, social assistance; protection and development of children and youth; development of communities and individuals; emergency response, and preparedness. In particular, the Caritas Georgia Development Programme Project aims at supporting people in need, improving their livelihoods, preventing economic migration of families and individuals, and strengthening Caritas social ministries at the parish level. In addition, the “Sustainable Reintegration after Voluntary Return” Project provides material support to Georgian migrants who have decided to return voluntarily to their country of origin.^{lxxi}

Caritas Georgia, one of Caritas Internationalis affiliated agencies, in a context subverted by the pandemic, has been supporting in a special way those people living in poverty. For this reason, Caritas is actively working to adapt its services and obtain additional resources to protect vulnerable groups in the country from the pandemic. Caritas provides shelter for homeless people in Batumi, has again implemented the 24-hour working day schedule, and responds to all the needs of beneficiaries to protect them from the virus. It also supports single mothers and their children at the Diruna Mother and Child Care Centres in St. Barbare, where beneficiaries receive meals and hygiene items.^{lxxii}

The German agency Solwodi has developed programmes “Help for women” in vulnerable situations. The counselling centre of the Solwodi Return and Reintegration Programme offers both initial non-binding counselling and ongoing counselling for single and single-parent women in the context of return. The aim of the programme is to enable single and single-parent women to return and to support their economic and social new beginning. In cooperation with local non-governmental organisations, the programme offers holistic and personalised counselling and support for women. This support can be provided by contacts with partner organisations in the target countries. Financial support instead is offered after their return and is aimed at vocational training, higher education, rent, children’s school fees, mentoring, internships, and income-generating activities.^{lxxiii}

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