



THE MAIN PECULIARITIES OF LABOUR MIGRANTS' INTEGRATION IN GEORGIA (CASE OF TBILISI AND BATUMI)

Izvirni znanstveni članek

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Abstract

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Georgia became a country of intensive emigration. However, the last decade has marked a notable change in the country's migration profile due to the inflow of immigrants. This is a new challenge for contemporary Georgia, especially in terms of immigrant integration. The purpose of this paper is to identify the main features of labour migrants' integration into Georgian society. The research findings are mostly based on the results of a qualitative sociological research, employing in-depth interviews with migrant workers residing in Georgia, and experts of the field. Lack of complete legislation and sound policies is the main characteristic feature of labour immigration management in Georgia; therefore, the migrant integration process goes spontaneously: one group of migrants, namely English- and Russian-speakers, as well as skilled workers still feel comfortable, and they keep intense communication with the local population. Another part of migrants who is denied state support in studying Georgian remains isolated from the host society.

Keywords: labour immigration, integration, Georgia, Tbilisi, Batumi

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POSEBNOSTI INTEGRACIJE DELOVNIH MIGRANTOV V GRUZIJI (PRIMER TBILISIJA IN BATUMIJA)

Izvleček

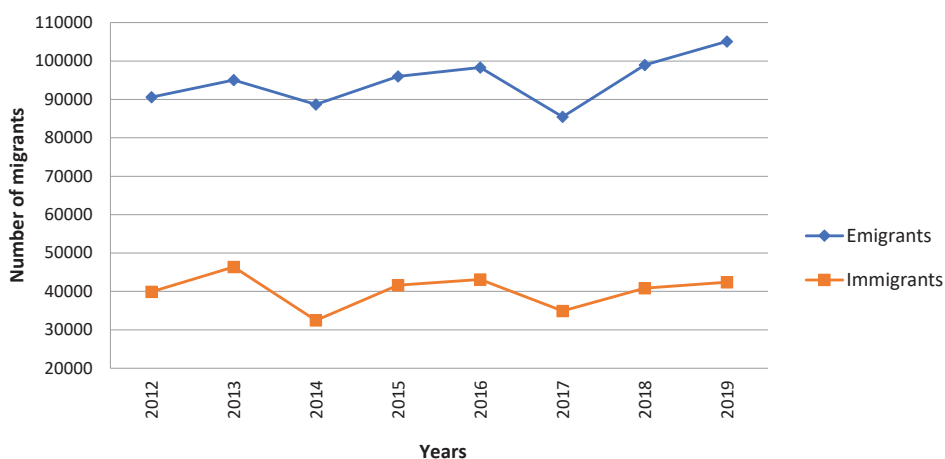
Po razpadu Sovjetske zveze je Gruzija postala država intenzivnega izseljevanja. V zadnjem desetletju pa so se migracijski procesi v državi zaradi intenzivnejšega priseljevanja spremenili. To je nov izziv za sodobno Gruzijo, zlasti z vidika integracije priseljencev. Namen prispevka je opredeliti glavne značilnosti integracije delovnih migrantov v gruzijsko družbo. Raziskovalne ugotovitve temeljijo predvsem na rezultatih kvalitativne sociološke raziskave, pri kateri smo uporabili poglobljene intervjuje z delavci migranti, ki prebivajo v Gruziji, in strokovnjaki s tega področja. Glavna značilnost politike priseljevanja delovne sile v Gruziji je pomanjkanje popolne zakonodaje in trdnih migracijskih politik, zato proces integracije priseljencev poteka spontano: ena skupina migrantov, in sicer angleško in rusko govoreči ter kvalificirani delavci, se v gruzijski družbi dobro počuti (zaradi uspešne integracije) in ohranja intenzivno komunikacijo z lokalnim gruzijskim prebivalstvom. Druga skupina migrantov, ki jim država ne nudi podpore pri učenju gruzijščine, pa ostaja izolirana od gruzijske družbe.

Ključne besede: delovna migracija, integracija, Gruzija, Tbilisi, Batumi

1 INTRODUCTION

Georgia has been a country of immigration for centuries, including the Soviet period. In the 1990s, due to worsened socio-economic conditions and ethnic conflicts, large-scale emigration flows started. During the period of independence, about 1.5 million people have left the country. In the last decade emigration significantly decreased and net migration came to balance. Moreover, in 2020 immigration even exceeded emigration. Immigration statistics is misleading because of the approach of the National Statistics Office of Georgia, which includes in immigration statistics any person who stayed on the territory of Georgia for at least 183 days and at the same time Georgia was not his/her permanent residence country for the last six months regardless of his/her citizenship (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2020). Article 3.1 of law of Georgia on immigration states: “*An immigrant is an alien who has acquired the right of permanent residence in Georgia under Georgian legislation*” (Law of Georgia on Immigration, 1997). Therefore, for further analysis, it would be relevant to exclude a number of Georgian citizens from the official immigration statistics. Nevertheless, during the last decade, immigration to Georgia grew significantly (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Dynamics of number of immigrants and emigrants in Georgia (2012–2019).



Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia,
<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/322/migration>.

As obvious from Table 1 Russian nationals constitute a big part of immigration flow to Georgia. It should be also mentioned that significant part of Russian immigrants is represented by ethnic Georgians.

Table 1: Number of immigrants in Georgia by countries of their citizenship (2012–2019).

Immigrants by country of citizenship	Year							
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Russia	7.475	10.427	9.692	10.552	11.185	9.723	10.323	11.515
Turkey	6.959	10.007	4.672	5.810	6.294	4.365	3.934	3.419
Iran	675	1.080	825	1.766	418	1.335	3.798	5.664
Azerbaijan	1.883	3.211	2.163	2.839	3.420	3.501	3.761	3.669
India	1.215	1.212	679	800	1.435	2.686	3.015	2.846
Ukraine	1.853	1.610	1.552	2.886	2.922	2.275	2.175	2.303
Armenia	10.724	7.043	3.856	4.143	6.241	2.042	2.174	2.274
USA	1.102	1.536	883	1.081	1.101	1.075	1.159	1.349
China	626	1.143	584	1.267	873	904	974	944
Others	7.103	8.942	7.434	10.344	9.036	6.909	8.861	8.334
Stateless persons	250	168	115	145	217	81	94	69
Not specified	25	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total number	39.890	46.379	32.455	41.633	43.142	34.896	40.269	42.386

Source: National Statistics Office of Georgia,
<https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/322/migration>.

To respond to growing immigration, the Georgian government, on the one hand, speeded up developing respective legislation in the last decade while on the other hand it accelerated the building up institutions to manage immigration.

Managing labour migration requires sound policies, qualified staff, and institutional knowledge. In Georgia’s case, there is an additional challenge: Georgian scholars keep focusing on emigration issues, thus leaving labour migrants’ integration out of their interest. The given work, in fact, is the first attempt to fill this gap by undertaking an academic study of the topic.

The paper reveals the main features of labour migrants’ integration into Georgian society.

The research aims to answer the following questions:

- Are Georgia’s legislation and governmental policies on migrant integration comprehensive and effective?
- What are the main challenges revealed by the sociological survey?
- What are the specific aspects of integration processes in Tbilisi and Batumi?

2 DATA AND METHODS

The research is mainly based on qualitative sociological research methods. It includes in-depth interviews with labour migrants, as well as with experts in Tbilisi and Batumi. Within the research framework, 56 in-depth interviews were conducted with migrant workers (Table 2) employed in various economic sectors of the above-mentioned cities, using the qualitative sociological method with semi-structured questionnaires in the English, Georgian, Russian and Turkish languages. As part of the qualitative sociological research, the authors interviewed 13 specifically selected experts using the in-depth interview method. The majority of them were pundits of the respective area, while others – public servants involved in migration management. The research was conducted between July and November 2021.

Table 2: Main characteristics of interviewed labour migrants.

Labour migrants	Tbilisi	Batumi
Gender	Female 50%; Male 50%	Female 46%; Male 54%
Medium age	37 years	38 years
Marital status	39% married; 61% single	64% married; 36% single
Country of citizenship (by alphabetic order)	Azerbaijan, Belarus, China, Egypt, India, Iran, New Zealand, Romania, Russia, Serbia, South Africa, United Kingdom, Turkey, Ukraine, USA, Uzbekistan	Belarus, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lithuania, Nigeria, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Ukraine

Labour migrants	Tbilisi	Batumi
Visa type / residence permit / citizenship (Number)	Residence permit – 14 Working visa – 2 Visa free regime – 10 Dual citizenship – 2	Residence permit – 8 Working visa – 0 Visa free regime – 19 Dual citizenship – 0 Tourist visa – 1
Type of employment	Employer – 3 Self-employed and freelancer – 6 Employed – 19	Employer – 10 Self-employed and freelancer – 13 Employed – 5
Branch of Employment	Education – 35% Tourism – 11% Real estate – 7% Other services – 40% NGO – 7%	Tourism – 11% Restaurant business – 7% Real estate – 14% Other services – 47% Construction – 14% Industry – 7%
Position (Number)	Head of company – 3 Manager – 5 Other positions – 20	Head of company – 10 Manager – 1 Other positions – 17
Total number of respondents	28	28

Due to several reasons, the sociological research was conducted in two cities: Tbilisi and Batumi. Tbilisi is the capital and the biggest economic and cultural centre of Georgia with a population of about 1.2 million. Batumi – the administrative centre of Ajara Autonomous Republic, is the second biggest city (150,000 inhabitants) of the country, situated near the Turkish border. Batumi, especially since the 19th century, became a very important port of the Caucasus region. Both Tbilisi and Batumi always have been multicultural cities, tolerant to different religions and cultures. Not surprisingly, in Georgia, the overwhelming majority of immigrants are concentrated in those cities.

For the selection of the respondents, we used a two-stage sample design. From the beginning, the respondents were chosen based on purposive sampling, considering the following characteristics – country of origin and occupation. Thus, at that stage, we purposely chose 10 respondents. In the second stage, we used snowball sampling. Under this method, the respondents propose other people who fit into the selected category. Accordingly, one respondent connected the researcher with another one and so on, until the needed number of people in the target audience were interviewed. Based on the snowball sample 46 migrants were interviewed. Overall, the research covered 56 migrants living and working in two Georgian cities.

We may conditionally divide all 56 respondents into three categories based on countries of their origin: economically highly developed countries, post-Soviet countries, and other countries. Migrants from economically highly developed countries mostly included native English speakers from the United Kingdom, the USA, New Zealand,

South Africa and the EU countries. Respondents from the post-communist states were citizens of Russia, Belarus, Serbia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Lithuania. Other countries included migrants mostly from the Middle East (Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Egypt), as well as from Asia (China, India) and Africa (Nigeria).

One of the methods of the research is collection-processing-analyzing official data on international mobility. A big part of statistics was obtained from the official site of the National Statistics Office of Georgia. Some statistics were also provided by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia. Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions significantly altered immigration dynamics. With this in mind, we did not include 2020 and 2021 immigration statistics in the paper.

In order to review and assess socio-economic and legal variables of immigration in general, and immigrants' integration, in particular, we reviewed reports and researches of the Georgian governmental agencies, international organizations and local NGOs, including the State Commission on Migration Issues, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Institute for Development for Freedom of Information (IDFI), Tolerance and Diversity Institute (TDI).

A significant part of the paper is dedicated to the description and assessment of the Georgian legislation on migration. All laws and legal acts on migration are available on the official website of the Parliament of Georgia.

The authors critically reviewed and analyzed various academic literature on the subject, and applied a comparative method when disclosing similarities and differences between the migrant integration processes in Tbilisi and Batumi.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Human mobility is an ancient socio-geographic phenomenon. Ernst Georg Ravenstein pioneered the theorization of migration in the 1870–1880s (Rees, Lomax, 2019, p. 352). Since then, a wide variety of works have been dedicated to migration studies.

Among the international migration theories, the *neoclassical* is the best-known one. The theory argues that the main motivation for human mobility is economic: a difference in wages between sending and receiving countries is the decisive factor for migration. In other words, people move to areas where they expect to earn more money. According to this theory, migration decisions are made by individuals. Migrants have to bear material and non-material costs before and after reaching the country of destination, which include travel expenses, housing prior to finding employment, learning a foreign language and cultural peculiarities of the host society, getting used to the new labour market, establishing new contacts and suspending old ones. Accordingly, a potential migrant chooses the country, where profit seems higher after consideration of the above costs (Massey et al., 1993). The main hindrance of neo-classical theory is that it very much focuses on the economic component of migration

and underestimates its socio-cultural and political dimensions. The theory also ignores the role of historic ties between sending and receiving countries.

The theory of mobility (intervening opportunities) represents a modification of the gravity model. This theory tries to describe the likelihood of migration. The central point of the theory is that there is no necessary connection between mobility and distance. Considering intervening opportunities, a migrant may change his/her mind and settles in a place different from the originally planned destination (Stouffer, 1940).

The New economics of labour migration (NELM), also known as the *theory of household economics*, is one of the most influential migration theories since the 1980s. NELM focuses on two main aspects of migration: a decision on migration is made at the group (mostly family) and not individual level, and the main task of migration is rather diversification of revenues within a family than maximization of income. By combining these aspects, we conclude that a family or household duly controls its own material well-being by diversifying its labour resources. In the best scenario, one part of a family members is engaged in household work, the second part in internal migration, and the third part in international migration. Notably, unlike a neoclassical theory, NELM does not consider international migration as a one-way process. Moreover, NELM is making emphasis on return migration (King, 2012). We believe that this theory has two main shortcomings: it is less or even not applicable to socio-economically developed societies and independent individuals, as well as to the situation when an entire family migrates.

Alternative models known as historical-structural theories review international migrations through the lens of Marxism. Michael Piore (1979), based on a fact that industrialized societies have permanent demand for a labour force, believes that international migration is rather caused by *pull* than *push* factors (Wickramasinghe, Wimalaratana, 2016). Some scholars (e.g., Arango, 2000) criticize *the dual labour market theory* as it does not provide a comprehensive analysis of migration causes, especially the push factors.

One of the most influential social theories of post-modernity is Immanuel Wallerstein's *world-systems theory*. It gives a good historical analysis of the emergence of the Capitalist World Economy, as well as modern characteristics of economic ties between the highly developed North and developing South. Wallerstein (1974) also provides a geographic structure of the world economy: core – semi-periphery – periphery. However, this theory is very much focused on highlighting the negative sides of international economic relations, ignoring the benefits that it brings to developing countries and to the part of their population.

Wilbur Zelinsky (1971) uses geographic, in particular time-space approach for migration process analysis. He gives a five-stage mobility pattern of Europe, arguing that there is a clear correlation between intensity, as well as the character of migration and historic type of society. He singled out five types of European societies from pre-modern traditional up to future super-advanced. Although this concept looks quite attractive, it

still lacks the geographic scope. It covers historical specificities of advanced countries but is less applicable for the developing part of the world (King, 2012).

Migration network theory arose on a basis of the *social capital concept*. The social networks help to distribute information about job opportunities, accommodation possibilities, and the main features of the cultural and religious life of receiving countries. In general, those networks have a positive effect on the migration decision-making process and reduce the costs and social risks for newcomers (Massey et al., 1993; Arango, 2004).

The migration process does not end with mobility, i.e., with a person transferring from one place to another, as it is followed by a complex and difficult process of integration.

The term “Integration” still does not have a legal definition and is being interpreted differently. We share the definition formulated by Rinus Penninx: “*Integration is a process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups.*” This process at the group level takes quite a time and its results could be revealed no earlier than at the second generation of immigrants (Penninx, 2003).

In general, the integration process is measured by legal-political, socio-economic, and cultural-religious dimensions (Penninx, Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). Entzinger and Biezeveld (2003) argue that besides the mentioned three domains of migrant integration there is one more: attitudes of recipient societies. However, we believe that the latter does not function independently, as it is a part of all other three domains.

Russel King and Aija Lulle (2016), based on the frameworks of Ager and Strang (2004), and Heckmann (2005) offered a simplified approach, more precisely, a list of spheres of migrants’ integration. This includes: economic, social and cultural, educational, political and citizenship integration(s), as well as spatial dimensions of integration. The latter one, which is distinct from the previously known dimensions, creates a good opportunity in finding out territorial (regional) peculiarities of migrants’ integration.

One of the important topics which touched the interest of geographers is the sense of belonging of immigrants to the host society. According to Yuval-Davis (2016), belonging is constructed by three interrelated analytical facets, such as social locations, emotional attachments to different communities and groups, and ethical and political value systems of immigrants and locals. On the other hand, a whole set of factors (cultural, including language, social interaction, economic, legal, safety, and comfort) determines a sense of belonging. Some researchers argued that a sense of belonging is shaped by the combination of contextual aspects (Cichocka, 2021, p.1953). In this paper, we outline those factors that in our understanding play a rather important role in developing a sense of belonging in the cases of Tbilisi and Batumi.

In 2005, the EU Commission of the European Communities adopted *A Common Agenda for Integration* including 11 common basic principles of the immigrant integration policy (CEC, 2005). The very first principle states that integration is a two-way

process. The rest 10 principles conditionally could be divided into two sets: the first set of principles is addressed to host countries and the second one – is to immigrant communities. The authorities of EU member states are recommended to ensure the rights and freedoms of immigrants to employment, education, participation in the democratic process, access to institutions, practice their own religion and culture, as well as to enhance frequent interaction between immigrants and member state citizens. Simultaneously, the governments of the member states should mainstream the integration policies and develop indicators and evaluation mechanisms of the policy implementation. On the other hand, immigrants are suggested to pay respect to the basic values of the European Union; to get basic knowledge of the host society's language, history, and institutions.

4 LABOUR IMMIGRATION TO GEORGIA: LEGAL ISSUES AND GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES

Labour migration in Georgia is regulated by national laws and procedures, as well as international instruments to which Georgia is a signatory. Among the laws regulating labour migration, the Constitution of Georgia, the Law on Labor Migration, and the Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons are of primary importance.

According to Georgian legislation, the term “labour immigrant” refers to a foreigner with a work residence permit. This status allows an immigrant (including freelancers) to carry out entrepreneurial or labour activities (Parliament of Georgia, 2015). A person coming to Georgia for employment should get an immigration visa (D1 category) in the first place. Persons who come to Georgia for family reunion purposes are eligible for a D4 category visa (Guidebook on Legal Immigration, 2015).

Since 2015, the number of immigration visas issued in Georgia has reduced. This can be explained by the legislative changes, more specifically: nationals of 98 countries are allowed to enter Georgia without a visa; from this, citizens of 28 countries apart from visa-free entry are eligible to one year stay (Immigrant Integration Policy and Practice in Georgia, 2021). Therefore, an immigrant visa is no longer a mandatory requirement for the nationals of the above countries. Under international agreements and national legislation, Georgia allows visa-free entry to citizens of the USA, the EU countries, Turkey, Ukraine, most members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), as well as part of the Persian Gulf countries.

The work residence permit is issued to individuals coming to Georgia for labour or entrepreneurial activities, as well as to freelancers. In 2015–2018, Residence permits were mostly issued to men (66%) who belonged to the 18–65 age group. As for work residence permits, they were mostly granted to people aged 26–40 (Migration Profile of Georgia, 2019).

It is remarkable that many foreigners participated in the governmental project “Remotely from Georgia” launched during the Covid-19 pandemic. Among them were freelancers, full-time employees, or investors, who could stay in Georgia for at least 360 days without a visa and whose monthly income exceeded 2.000 USD. Between August and October 2021, about 1.100 foreign citizens were involved in the “Remotely from Georgia” program (Agenda.ge, 2020).

The institutionalization of migration management in Georgia began in 2010 with the establishment of the State Commission on Migration Issues – the consultative unit of the government of Georgia. Nine national agencies, as well as 10 local NGOs and international organizations with consultative status, take part in its work (Table 3).

Table 3: Structure of the State Commission on Migration Issues of Georgia.

The State Commission on Migration Issues				
Agencies-members of the commission				
Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development	Ministry of Justice (Chair)	Ministry of Education and Science	Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Ministry of Internal Affairs (Co-chair)
State Security Service	Ministry of Finance	Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Labour, Health and Social Affairs		National Statistics Office
Organizations with the Consultative Status				
Civil Development Agency	Migration Centre	Delegation of the European Union to Georgia	International Organization for Migration	UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)
Public Defender's Office	International Centre for Migration Policy Development	Georgian Young Lawyer's Association	German International Cooperation Society (Giz)	Innovations and Reforms Centre
Thematic Working Groups				
Working Group on Statelessness	Working Group on Unified Migration Data Analytical System	Migration Laboratory	Working Group on Migration Risk Analysis	Working Group on Integration Issues

Source: State Commission on Migration Issues, https://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=5&clang=1.

Since 2013 the commission has been developing the migration strategy of Georgia. Taking into consideration the dynamic character of migratory and political processes (e.g., Georgia's Association Agreement with the EU and the Visa Liberalization Action Plan of 2015), migration strategy has been subjected to frequent modifications. Apart from Georgian citizens living inside or outside the country, the target groups of the latest strategy (2021–2030) include immigrants (regardless of status), returned migrants, stateless refugees and asylum seekers (Migration Strategy of Georgia, 2020).

The 2021–2030 migration action plan aims at solving the problems in the field of migrant integration. The following objectives are singled out in this direction:

- Designing unified approaches towards immigrants' integration;
- Raising public awareness on immigrants' potential;
- Providing immigrants with wider opportunities for learning the state language.

The Georgian legislation (The Parliament of Georgia, 2014a) ensures all basic rights and freedoms for integration to foreigners residing in Georgia, which includes: education, employment, entrepreneurship, healthcare, social protection, residence, acquisition of citizenship, family reunification, own and inherit property, religion, cultural traditions, use of mother tongue etc.). However, there still is a need for developing a consolidated and complex program targeted at labour migrants and members of their families.

Citizenship is the highest stage of civic integration. The basic principles of Georgian citizenship and the grounds for its obtaining are regulated by the Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship (The Parliament of Georgia, 2014b). In 2018, new amendments to the law defined the conditions of dual citizenship. A foreign national may retain his/her citizenship and acquire Georgian citizenship (i.e., becomes dual national) based on the decision made by the President of Georgia. In 2005–2013 there were 53,067 cases of granting Georgian citizenship to foreign nationals, and in 2014–2017, 16,463 individuals were granted Georgian citizenship by means of exception, including citizens of Russia (61%), USA (7%), Armenia (6%), Greece (4%), Israel (4%), Ukraine (4%), Turkey (2%) and Iran (1%) (IDFI 2018).

5 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The review of Georgia's migration statistics confirms that people mostly prefer to move to those destinations which are closer to their country of origin (Ravenstein, 1889). A large part of migrant workers arriving in Georgia is from neighbourhood areas (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Ukraine). In 2019, about 2/3 of all labour migrants residing in Georgia were from the above-mentioned countries.

A qualitative study does not provide enough ground for measuring the main reasons for the mobility of migrants to Georgia, however, we may still draw some general

conclusions. The sociological research showed that economic considerations still prevail over other factors, especially for people from the economically developing world. The interviewed migrant workers underline that the business environment in Georgia is favourable. The country ranked seventh in the world for ease of doing business and second – for ease of starting a business (Doing Business, 2020). Therefore, many migrants have good perspectives for successful business activities in Georgia. It is also an important fact to note that part of immigrants is wealthier and more skilled than locals. A 33-year-old Russian immigrant woman noted: “– *I arrived in Georgia as a tourist but finding this country attractive, decided to stay here and start my business. I would not have rushed with such decision in Russia, compared to which Georgia has many favourable conditions for doing business.*”

According to the research results, the majority of the job-seekers had heard about Georgia through social networks and found a workplace before arrival. In the case of migrants from the post-Soviet space and Asian countries, the importance of network connections is crucial. This is especially true in the case of Iranians and Ukrainians, who arrived in Georgia with the help of other migrant networks residing in Georgia. One of the main principles of NELM theory states that a decision on migration is made at the family level. The research shows that it is applicable mostly in the case of labour migrants, who arrived from economically developing countries.

The research revealed that the lack of legislation and procedures on labour migrants' integration is among acute problems for Georgia. The interviewed governmental official noted: “Improvement of the legislative framework is critical from a migration perspective. The law on Labor Migration deals only with emigration, while immigration is regulated by the governmental ordinance. The country does not have integration programs and there is no plan for elaborating one in a near future.”

Almost all respondents noted that they like the natural environment (landscape, climate, and biodiversity) of the host country. They spend their free time with friends (mostly migrants) or family. Research showed that the majority of immigrants residing in Georgia feel safe and emotionally calm. Accordingly, when listing the reasons for choosing to stay in the country, they ranked psychological well-being higher than economic considerations. “*Although I don't speak Georgian and I don't have a stable income at the moment, I am still satisfied with my arrival, because here my priority is my mental comfort and for me, this is the most important thing today*” – a 41-year-old migrant woman from Lithuania commented.

The size of a city does not necessarily determine to which extent the local community is open or tolerant to migrant integrations. It could go either way (e.g. Cichoka, 2021; Gauci, 2020). Our study revealed that Batumi is a very migrant-friendly city. This can be conditioned by the cultural diversity and historical past of the city: at different times this region was under the Ottoman and Russian Empires, and therefore until now Batumi has remained a home of both Muslims and Christians. In the Soviet days, it was an important tourist destination. All these factors have bred a particularly

tolerant attitude of its residents towards foreigners. Most of the migrants in Batumi are Turks and former Soviets who already own real estate and other property. For immigrants from post-Soviet countries, it is easier to interact with locals. This is because of shared cultural values from the Soviet past, and the absence of language barriers between them. A 33-year-old Russian man noted: *"You know even though Batumi's population is over 100.000, everyone knows each other and crime is rare; here, if you do something wrong, everyone will know about it. You will be forced to leave the city. That's why everyone here helps each other; if someone finds a phone on the bench or something else, it is immediately returned to the owner."*

In 2019, only 31 per cent of real estate buyers in Batumi were Georgian citizens, while 69 per cent came on the account of foreigners, with Russians and Ukrainians having the higher share. Foreigners buy the property for investment purposes. It is notable, that 69 per cent of bank loans in Batumi were also taken by foreigners (Kordzaia, Chiligashvili, 2019). An increasing number of short- and medium-term residents, and second-home owners, including freelancers, shows that residential tourism is a developing phenomenon in Batumi, which eventually leads to what Benson and O'Reilly labelled as "lifestyle migration" (2009: 621).

The research reveals that the political situation in sending countries serves as an important push factor. Part of the respondents from Russia and Belarus noted that their mobility was caused by political reasons. *"Now more Belarusians and Russians are arriving. I sell and rent flats in Batumi and there are a lot of Russians, in Particular Jehovah's Witnesses, and Belarusians, who do not want to live under Lukashenko's rule"* – a 33-year-old Belarus migrant man commented. *"My spouse is a media journalist; I worked for the Russian TV channel NTV. We decided to leave Russia because of our professional and political considerations. We realized that it was difficult to work under the existing regime in our country. We are not very outspoken liberals but when politics strongly affects your professional activities, it is very depressing,"* – a 43-year-old migrant woman from Russia said. The immigration of part of Iranian nationals is affected by the harsh political conditions in their country. As they have very limited possibilities in terms of moving to European countries or the USA, they choose Georgia as a final destination. For some Ukrainians a reason was a forced migration conditioned by the occupation of Crimea and part of Donbas by Russia in 2014–2015.

Education is one of the most important factors of integration. In Tbilisi and Batumi secondary and high school education is available in Russian, as well as in English languages. In both cities Russian secondary schools are public. Since there are no Turkish, Arabic, Chinese or Iranian schools, the children of migrants from these countries attend Georgian public or English private schools.

The language barrier is an acute problem for immigrants. The sociological survey showed that for foreigners the main obstacle on the way of integration is the lack of knowledge of the Georgian language. On the one hand, part of immigrants lacks motivation for learning the state language, while on the other hand, the host government

does not provide them with special programs on language study. The mentioned program in Georgia is available for asylum seekers and internationally protected individuals through various state-funded activities. The only official free online resource for learning Georgian is the web portal – »Georgian as a Foreign Language«, which is adapted only for English speakers and cannot meet the demand of all segments of foreigners living in Georgia (Georgian as a Foreign Language, 2014).

Many migrants from Asia (mostly from Iran and China) do not speak Georgian, Russian or English. This creates additional difficulty for them in the process of integration. Such migrants have less contact with the local population and live rather isolated. In such situations, residents also show little or no interest in their integration. *“Consequently, there is not a big integration desire from the Georgians and probably less from the part of immigrants”* – noted the expert of migration field.

A certain part of migrants learns the Georgian language, especially those who wish to stay or have a long-term job in Georgia: *“I’m learning the Georgian language, though, in fact, I don’t need it...”* – said a 24-year-old American man. For most of the respondents, such efforts are not necessary, because most of the population in Georgia speaks English and Russian (English is rather spoken by young people, while Russian – by elders). The additional discouraging factor is the difficulty of the Georgian language. *“I don’t learn Georgian. For communication I use mostly Russian language when I speak with the elder generation and English when I communicate with youth”* – a 30-year-old freelancer man from Russia commented.

From a religious point of view, both cities are favourable due to the abundance of churches (Orthodox, Catholic and Armenian Apostolic), mosques, and synagogues, and the tolerant attitude of the local population towards other confessions. None of the respondents noted having problems because of their religious beliefs or rituals. *“I’ve never got any problem because of performing religious rituals”* – a 42-year-old Iranian migrant woman residing in Tbilisi said. 29-year-old Turk migrant worker residing in Batumi noted that *“Muslim Turks in Batumi freely exercise all religious practices”*. However, according to the survey conducted by the IOM Georgia, for the Georgian population difference in religion is the most important problem in terms of integration (IOM Georgia, 2021).

Almost all migrants have bank accounts in Georgia and enjoy various banking services. As for a standard health insurance package, it is available only for those immigrants who work for big companies. Other migrants prefer to pay for certain health services (when needed). They also do not have enough information about the health care sector and health insurance in Georgia. *„It would have been helpful if insurance companies familiarized migrants with their terms. I don’t know what they offer. I should find them on my own and I don’t have time for it. If they had come and suggested their products, I would probably have agreed,”* – 40 years old Azerbaijani national said. *“We don’t have health insurance. We have a doctor and pay for an appointment or medical services”* – a 33-year-old Ukrainian national woman commented.

Compared to other groups, immigrants from Asia (including the Middle East) and Africa, find it more difficult to integrate into Georgian society. This can be explained by different factors and, first of all, by procedural difficulties in obtaining a legal status of a resident. This creates a serious problem, as they sell houses in their homeland and buy real estate in Georgia, but still, cannot get the status of permanent resident (Khatishvili et al, 2021). Some respondents claim this is an unfair approach because they are legally employed, pay taxes and cannot get the residence permit, and often appeal to the court. *"It's like gambling, you don't know if you may stay here or not... I have a job and pay taxes... all my documentations are valid, so I prefer to get a legal status... but the government office refused to accept my labour contract and I have turned to the court ..."* – a 36-year-old Iranian migrant man complained.

Safety, stability and comfort of a place matter. It is noteworthy that most of the migrants surveyed in Batumi are married and arrived in Georgia with their families. The majority of the migrants working in Tbilisi are single. This can be explained by the fact that Batumi is a city with a quiet environment which is more attractive for families and couples with small children. The sociological survey showed that Batumi is mainly chosen by migrants from Moscow, Kyiv and other overcrowded megacities: *„Situation here is more relaxed compared to Moscow. I wish to live in a calm environment. The sea, beautiful nature, mountains and, basically, just a comfortable life"* – a 33-year-old Russian migrant woman noted.

In general, it should be noted that for Russian and English-speaking immigrants it is much easier to integrate into Georgian society. They feel themselves more comfortable in Georgia, as they do not need to learn the Georgian language and can freely communicate in English with a significant part of the population. It is remarkable that English and Russian speakers learn the Georgian language if they intend to stay for a long time. English speakers also find themselves in a better legal position compared to Asian migrants. A 35-year-old Iranian migrant woman noted that because of being Iranian, her documents are checked more thoroughly at the border crossing point, which is not the case with westerners.

The research revealed that the lack of comprehensive legislation and procedures on labour migrants' integration is among the acute problems for Georgia. The interviewed governmental official noted: "Improvement of the legislative framework is critical from a migration perspective. The law on Labour Migration deals only with emigration, while immigration is regulated by the governmental ordinance. The country does not have integration programs and there is no plan for elaborating one in a near future."

6 KEY FINDINGS

The research identified the main opportunities and challenges of the process of labour migrants' integration into Georgian society.

Georgia's liberal emigration legislation, easiness of starting and doing business, good climate, hospitable people, and general safe environment make Georgia an attractive place for migrants. In Georgia, people representing different confessions do not face problems in exercising their religious or cultural rituals.

It is noteworthy that the vast majority of respondents emphasized that Georgian society is friendly and tolerant towards foreigners, which creates fertile ground for the successful integration of immigrants. The Georgian government has also taken important steps as well, in particular, by adopting important legal acts that initiated the institutionalization of migration management.

A significant part of labour migrants come to Georgia with the purpose to start their own businesses. Immigrants being wealthier than the local population – is a specificity of Georgia's labour migration. Labour migrants who arrive from the economically developed world or the post-Soviet countries often have higher qualifications than locals. Labour migration in general, positively affects Georgia's economy, as part of migrants bring their investments thus contributing to economic development. Highly-qualified migrants, such as freelancers, entrepreneurs and skilled specialists are important for Georgia's economy, as they bring new business practices. Almost all migrants have bank accounts and use different kinds of bank services.

Batumi has rather favourable conditions for integration than Tbilisi, accordingly, communication between locals and migrants is more intensive in this city. Batumi is an especially comfortable place for migrants from post-Soviet countries.

The general observation is that the integration of migrant workers in Georgia goes spontaneously. At the same time, it does not proceed similarly in different groups of migrants and depends on their education level, material wealth, country of origin, and cultural-religious belonging. Migrant Integration from economically developed countries goes more smoothly than that from developing ones. Newcomers with higher incomes get more opportunities to integrate into Georgian society.

It is more difficult for migrants from Asian countries to integrate compared to other migrant groups, which is conditioned by legal, cultural, linguistic and other factors. The migrants who speak Russian or English languages rather smoothly undergo integration even if they do not speak Georgian. Those who do not speak Georgian or above languages face bigger problems.

Although Georgia's migration policy is liberal, there are shortcomings in its enforcement. Uneven execution of procedures, including unjustified denials in granting residence permits, hinders the integration of migrants from developing countries.

Immigrants, in most cases, are not covered by state or private healthcare programs (Immigration Policy and Practice in Georgia, 2021). Exceptions are those migrants who work in big companies or corporations.

Investors (e.g. Turks, Chinese) often bring labour force from their respective countries. Such cases run into contrary expectations of creating new jobs for locals.

There is a differentiated approach from the state's side towards the migrants from different countries. The law is applied more strictly to immigrants from Asia and Africa, which is also reflected in the visa policy (citizens of developed countries do not need a visa).

The targeted groups of the governmental integration policies include ethnic minorities and persons under international protection, but not labour migrants. Due to the absence of special governmental programs, both migrants and the local population are not fully aware of the advantages that immigration and the integration of migrants might bring to the host country.

Elaboration and implementation of the consolidated policy of integration is a formidable task not only for the counties like Georgia, which have a weak economy but also for some new member states of the EU (e.g., Zogata-Kusz, 2020; Okólski, Wach, 2020).

Lack of resources, respective experience and knowledge are the reasons for conditioning the absence of complete migration legislation and policy, as well as effective state institutions in Georgia. In general, it can be concluded that in terms of immigration management, including labour immigration, Georgia lags behind the highly developed EU countries; however, certain achievements made in this area create a ground for further progress.

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POSEBNOSTI INTEGRACIJE DELOVNIH MIGRANTOV V GRUZIJI (PRIMER TBILISIJA IN BATUMIJA)

Povzetek

Prispevek oriše priložnosti in izzive procesa vključevanja delovnih migrantov v gruzijsko družbo na primeru dveh gruzijskih mest – Tbilisija in Batumija. Avtorji predstavijo glavne poudarke raziskave, ki so jo izpeljali v omenjenih dveh gruzijskih mestih med junijem in novembrom 2021 s pomočjo poglobljenih intervjujev. V raziskavo je bilo vključenih 56 delovnih migrantov, polovica iz Tbilisija in polovica iz Batumija.

Gruzija je zaradi liberalne migracijske zakonodaje, enostavnega postopka ustanavljanja podjetij in poslovanja, ugodnega podnebja, varnega okolja in odprtosti družbe različnim verskim skupinam privlačna za priseljevanje.

Večina anketirancev je v raziskavi poudarila, da je gruzijska družba prijazna in strpna do tujcev, kar po njihovem mnenju ustvarja dobre pogoje za uspešno vključevanje migrantov. K temu je pripomogla tudi gruzijska vlada, saj je v preteklosti sprejela nekaj pomembnih pravnih aktov na področju urejanja migracij.

Raziskava je pokazala nekaj značilnosti priseljevanja in priseljencev v Gruziji:

- Veliko priseljencev se priseli v Gruzijo zaradi podjetniških priložnosti, saj v Gruziji lažje kot v izvornem okolju, ustanovijo svoje podjetje.
- Priseljenci so v Gruziji navadno premožnejši od lokalnega prebivalstva.
- Delovni migranti, ki se v Gruzijo priselijo iz gospodarsko razvitejših držav ali držav nekdanje Sovjetske zveze, so navadno boljše kvalificirani kot domače gruzijsko prebivalstvo.
- Delovna migracija pozitivno vpliva na gruzijsko gospodarstvo, saj delovni migranti s seboj prinesejo svoje prihranke in tako prispevajo h gospodarskemu razvoju Gruzije.
- Visoko kvalificirani migranti, kot so samostojni podjetniki, podjetniki in usposobljeni strokovnjaki, so pomembni za gruzijsko gospodarstvo, saj prinašajo s seboj nove poslovne priložnosti.
- Mesto Batumi ima boljše pogoje za integracijo priseljencev, saj je komunikacija med priseljenci in domačini po ocenah iz raziskave boljša in intenzivnejša. Prav

tako je raziskava pokazala, da je Batumi priljubljen zlasti za priseljevanje tistih, ki prihajajo iz držav nekdanje Sovjetske zveze.

- Integracija priseljencev je odvisna od stopnje izobrazbe priseljencev, njihovega finančnega položaja, države izvora in kulturno-verskih značilnosti. Integracija priseljencev iz gospodarsko razvitejših držav je lažja kot pri tistih, ki prihajajo iz držav v gospodarskem razvoju. Prav tako je lažje vključevanje v gruzijsko družbo za tiste priseljence, ki so v boljšem finančnem položaju.
- V primerjavi z ostalimi priseljenci, se v gruzijsko družbo težje vključijo priseljenci iz azijskih držav, kar je posledica predvsem pravnih, kulturnih, jezikovnih značilnosti.
- V gruzijsko družbo se lažje vključijo tisti priseljenci, ki govorijo rusko ali angleško, tudi če ne govorijo gruzijsko. Ostali se pri vključevanju v gruzijsko družbo soočajo z večjimi izzivi.
- V večini primerov priseljenci niso vključeni v državne ali zasebne programe zdravstvenega varstva. Izjema so tisti priseljenci, ki delajo v velikih podjetjih (korporacijah).
- Investitorji (npr. Kitajci, Turki) pogosto s seboj pripeljejo svojo delovno silo, kar pomeni, da novih ustvarjenih delovnih mest ne zasedejo domačini, temveč priseljenci iz držav investitorja.

Čeprav je gruzijska migracijska politika liberalna, se pri izvajanju te politike kažejo določene pomanjkljivosti, kot so neenakomerno izvajanje postopkov, neupravičene zavrnitve pri izdajanju dovoljenj za prebivanje, oviranje priseljevanja tistih, ki prihajajo iz držav v gospodarskem razvoju ipd. Migracijski zakoni so strožji do priseljencev iz azijskih in afriških držav, kar se posledično kaže tudi v izdajanju vizumov (priseljenci iz gospodarsko razvitih držav pa vizumov sploh ne potrebujejo).

Trenutno Gruzija na področju upravljanja priseljevanja, vključno s področjem priseljevanja delovne sile, zaostaja za gospodarsko razvitimi državami EU.