

# The Methodology of Out-Migration in Georgia

Shorena Tsiklauri

**Abstract**—Out-migration is an important issue for Georgia as well as since independence has loosed due to emigration one fifth of its population. During Soviet time out-migration from USSR was almost impossible and one of the most important instruments in regulating population movement within the Soviet Union was the system of compulsory residential registrations, so-called “propiska”. Since independent here was not any regulation for migration from Georgia. The majorities of Georgian migrants go abroad by tourist visa and then overstay, becoming the irregular labor migrants. The official statistics on migration published for this period was based on the administrative system of population registration, were insignificant in terms of numbers and did not represent the real scope of these migration movements. This paper discusses the data quality and methodology of migration statistics in Georgia and we are going to answer the questions: what is the real reason of increasing immigration flows according to the official numbers since 2000s?

**Keywords**—Data quality, Georgia, methodology, out-migration, policy.

## I. INTRODUCTION

MIGRATION as a phenomenon has been attracting a growing attention for over a century now and transnational frameworks have developed to contribute to dealing with it. However, more efforts directed towards managing migration did not translate into a better-managed migration, as the number of irregular migrants has been steadily growing over these years [7].

Migration related decisions are believed to rest within the nation state, as it is the matter of exercising their sovereignty over their territory. However, migration phenomenon itself transcends state borders and involves interrelations between different states and actors, state as well as non-state. Due to this today we see many transnational efforts and setups directed towards managing migration. However, bigger part of transnational effort is directed towards regulating cross border movement, reducing irregular migration and eliminating trafficking and smuggling of human beings.

In absolute terms number of migrants has almost doubled since the second half of the 20th century, however if we look at the percentage of migrants compared to the world population, change has been rather insignificant. What has changed rather substantially is how migration is being felt in different parts of the world, which have not experienced this phenomenon in the past.

From this point we discuss the methodology of out migration in Georgia and analyze the trend of net-migration since 1950's.

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## II. PRESENTATION OF THE COUNTRY

Georgia is a sovereign state in the South-Caucasus region. It is bounded to the west by the Black Sea, to the north by Russia, to the south by Turkey and Armenia, and to the southeast by Azerbaijan. The South Caucasus is often thought of as a transitional region between Europe and Asia. This isthmus between the Black and Caspian Seas is an age-old north-south and east-west trade and transport crossroads. The region invaded many times, quashing periods of self-rule. These invasions and other contacts have resulted in many and diverse historical, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic links with neighboring peoples. The region remained under the influence of various conquerors such as Persians, Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Turks and Mongols.

From 1922 to 1991, Georgia was republic of the Soviet Union and it deeply affected economic and social development, borders, and nationality relations. Soviet control, in particular, resulted in the isolation of the crossroads country from the rest of the world. In 1991, Georgia seceded from the USSR. After obtaining independence country had political and economic instability and regional conflicts. Georgia remains weak in comparison to neighboring powers in terms of populations, economies, armed forces, and other capabilities.

As a result of ethnic conflicts which emerged after independence, a number of national minorities and significant numbers of the majority populations left their homelands, which in turn had a negative impact on cultural development as well as demographical situation.

TABLE I  
MAIN DEMOGRAPHIC INDICATORS FOR GEORGIA ACCORDING TO POPULATION CENSUSES [3], [4]

	1959	1989	2002	2014
Population (thousands)	4 044	5 400	4 371	4 491
Population 65 years and over (%)	7.6	8.9	12.7	14.0
Total fertility rate	2.6	2.1	1.4	2.2
Infant mortality rate (‰)	34.9	21.9	23.8	9.5
Life Expectancy	72.6	71.3	71.5	72.9
Net-migration	-15.2	-17.9	-29.1	-6.5

Demographic situation in Georgia is a negative since 1990's. The Number of Georgian population was steadily growing until the beginning of 1990s, when the social-economic instability caused to emigrate many people, resulting in a decline of population growth.

The proportion of persons 65 years and older increased from 7.6 to 12.7 per cent between the period from 1959 to 2002. In 1989 Georgia was the initial stage of population ageing, the proportion of persons 65 years and older was 8.9.

The birth rate has dropped dramatically.

Because of the 70-years “Soviet” experience, many

countries of the post-communist region, including Georgia have populations with relatively low levels of religiosity as measured by religious practices such as attendance at religious services, fasting and prayer. Nevertheless, many of these countries have high levels of subjective forms of religiosity, including religious affiliation, trust in religious institutions and the importance of religion in one's daily life. Georgia is distinctive by the type of religious affiliation and is characterized by the prevalence of mono-religious population: 85% of Georgians consider themselves to belong to the Orthodox Church [2].

Soon after independence, Georgia had to face armed conflicts, which resulted into a loss of control by the Georgian government over most of Abkhazia and a large part of South Ossetia. Political instability and protracted economic crisis had influence on population registration systems and contributed to the increase in migration flows.

Population of Georgia has decreased from 5.5 million in 1991 to 3.7 million in 2013 since its independence from the USSR. The main impact of population decline is related to emigration. In the years followed independence, an economic crisis, civil war and other armed conflicts led to the displacement of many people. The growing poverty, unemployment, limited access to basic social services; low income and its unequal distribution have had a clear direct impact on population dynamics in Georgia. The population of Georgia faces challenges of depopulation and ageing.

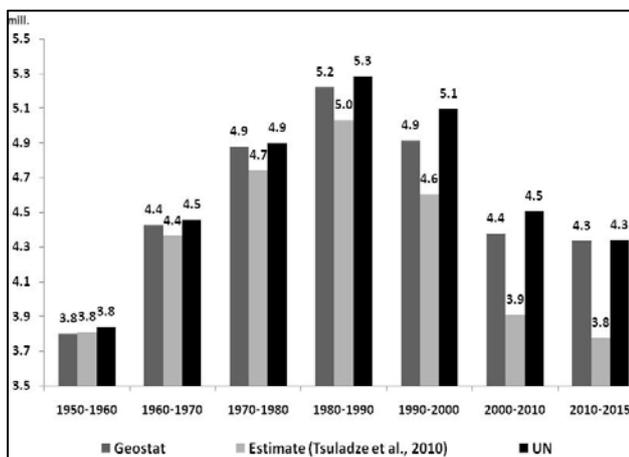


Fig. 1 Population trends in Georgia according to official [3], [4] and experts [5] estimates

In Georgia migration flows were relatively stable until the early 1990s and net-migration was slightly negative. On the contrary, the huge deficit observed in Georgia in 1992-1996 is obviously related to the split of the USSR that resulted in important out-migration (ethnic and/or economic migration). In 2005, the picks are very unrealistic without any event to explain this important in-migration flow (see Fig. 2). This difference estimation of net-migration reflected to the trends of population. Since 2002, official numbers, local experts and UN estimation is difference.

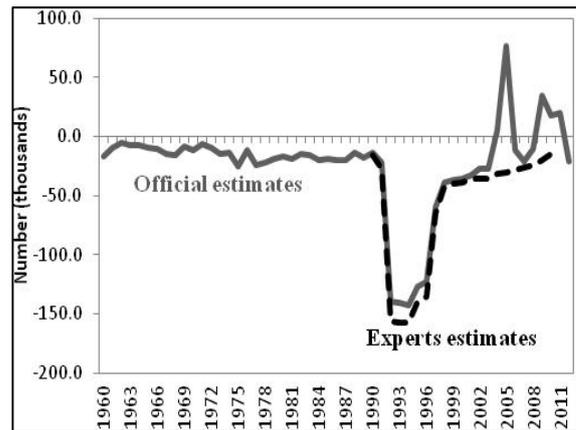


Fig. 2 Net migration (in thousands) trends in Georgia according to official [3], [4] and experts [5] estimates

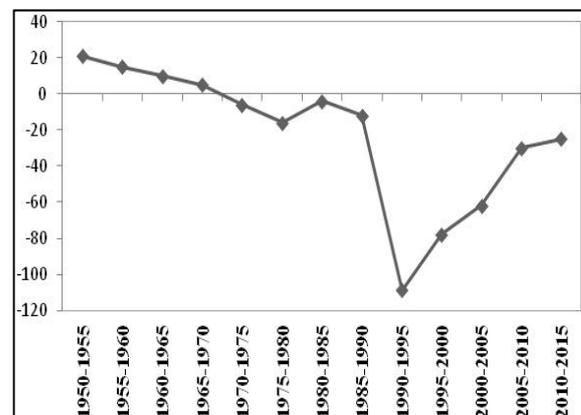


Fig. 3 Net migration (in thousands) trends in Georgia according to UN estimates (medium variant) [6]

Preliminary results of census held in November, 2014 show Georgia's population at 3,729,635, which is 14.7% decline compared to 2002 when the previous census was carried out and when the figure stood at 4.37 million. This result shows that migration data quality is a problem and it is very important to deal with statistical data and have better estimates of the trends and levels of migration flows, especially since early 2000s.

### III. AVAILABILITY OF DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Before 1959, only limited demographic information is available for Georgia, namely data on annual population counts and crude data on vital statistics periodically published in the statistical abstracts. After the 1959 population census, the systematic collection, processing and tabulation of routine vital statistics were set up. But, during the whole Soviet time statistical offices used to publish only aggregated demographic data on the whole "Soviet Union territory", as more detailed information on population was considered as being a "secret" and even if the demographic data is available there are many gaps in the time-series on population and vital statistics in Georgia [1].

The significant problem in this regard is the statistical data on migration. Indeed demographic data quality and especially

migration statistics has always been at issue in Georgia, but after the collapse of the Soviet Union population statistics has deteriorated rapidly.

#### IV. THE METHODOLOGY OF MIGRATION

In general, the Georgian official statistics on migration has always been at issue especially in 1990's after the collapse of Soviet Union. The population census held in Georgia in 2002 allowed the statistical office to reassess the inter-census population counts for the 1990s and to provide more reliable estimates of migration flows between 1989 and 2002. The total net-migration is calculated on the basis of the total population change in the period between two population censuses, excluding the total natural increase for the corresponding time-period.

The official statistics on migration published before 2005 by the national statistical office was based on the administrative system of population registration. These figures were insignificant in terms of numbers and did not represent the real scope of these migration movements. For this reason, the Georgian statistical office did not to use this source of information for its estimation of out-migration and did not publish these data anymore. Moreover, since 2005 the National Statistical Office of Georgia does not receive the information on population movements from the local registers and consequently does not have any statistical information on migration based on administrative data on population registration. The official statistical estimation for the period 2004 to 2011, based on the data on passenger-flows provided to the National Statistics Office by the Georgian Border Department. This data informs only about the gross numbers of entries and exits and there is still no way to track individual comings and goings in order to distinguish migrants from other passengers. Consequently, the annual population estimates in Georgia are produced on the basis of data on cross-border flows. No other official statistics on migration in Georgia were published since 2003 aside of the yearly updating figures on net migration flows and corresponding rates calculated on the basis of data from the Georgian Border Department.

Since 2012 the National Statistics office of Georgia has changed the methodology of estimating of the annual migration flows for Georgia, which for the period 2004-2011 as it was already mentioned before was based on the total stock of passengers' flows.

Now a Georgian Border Department tracking the individual record on each person crossing Georgian border provides statisticians with data on number of persons who entered to Georgia and spent here period at least 6 months. These categories of travelers are considered to be international migrants according to UN and EU recommendations [8].

According to this methodology, an international immigrant is a person recorded when crossing the National border

- who entered the country and has cumulated a minimum of 183 days of residence in the country during the twelve following months;
- who was not usual resident of the country when entering

the country which means that he spent at least a cumulate duration of 183 days of residence outside the country during the twelve months before entering the country.

Similarly an international emigrant is a person recorded when crossing the National border

- who crossed the border and left the country and has cumulated a minimum of 183 days of residence outside the country during the twelve following months;
- who was usual resident of the country when leaving the country which means that he spent at least a cumulate duration of 183 days of residence inside the country during the twelve months before leaving the country.

This methodology allows producing statistical figures for international migrations before the end of the year  $T + 1$ . It respects strictly the UN recommendations defining international migration as change of country of usual residence and the ones defining the country of usual residence as the country where the person spend most of the twelve months following the move.

#### V. MIGRATION POLICY IN GEORGIA

During the Soviet era, out-migration from the USSR was almost impossible and all changes of residence were subject to out- and in-registration. Some experts suggest that the system of compulsory residential registrations, so-called "propiska" was one of the most important instruments in regulating population movement within the Soviet Union, especially of unskilled and low-skilled labor.

The Soviet government attempted to promote labour mobility for certain highly skilled professionals and workers attracting them into "labour-shortage" areas within the USSR. Under this system, a large number of young professionals and skilled workers migrated from one republic to another to fill the "labour-shortages" in specific job categories.

New policy of migration in Georgia: Many experts suggest that today Georgia does not have any important migration policy document. The existing legislation on migration issues consists of a number of laws, regulations and instructions stipulating the rights of Georgian as well as foreign nationals and regulating the issues of entry, residence, return, and irregular migration.

Several administrative institutions involved in the management of migration in Georgia: The President of Georgia is authorized to take decisions on the granting, removal, and reinstatement of Georgian citizenship; granting of asylum; defining the procedures for issuance, extension and suspension of Georgian visas; defining the procedure of issuing permits for residence in Georgia; and for making decisions on declaring an alien persona non grata. The Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation being responsible for assigned with the task to develop migration policy documents and manage refugee affairs, it also acts as the government focal point for the issues of internal displacement. The Ministry of Justice (Civil registry Agency) being responsible for the creation, management, and update of civil registry and related citizenship issues of Georgian citizens and since 2009 this agency is also responsible for procedures

related to granting Georgian citizenship. Ministry of Foreign Affairs is coordinating international agreements and operating in the field of return and readmission through consular representations abroad. To some extent the Ministry is also in charge of the relations with the Georgian Diaspora. Ministry of Internal Affairs (The Georgian Border Police) is responsible for border management and providing protection of Georgian borders, fighting and preventing trans-border crime and trafficking of human beings. State Minister on Diaspora Issues is responsible for establishing and upholding economic and cultural linkages with major Georgian Diaspora organizations abroad.

The experts were aware of some new legal initiatives concerning the migration policies under consideration. The Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs together with the Minister of reintegration is currently working on the legislation related to the legalization of labor activity of Georgian migrants abroad. The project is being implemented on the basis of the experience of EU countries. Representatives from IOM mentioned that the issues related to the so-called “mobility of partnership” were under discussion (Joint Declaration on a Mobility Partnership 2009). The EU has offered to Georgia a number of pilot projects focusing on the legalization and regularization of the migration flows from Georgia as well as on the return of migrants from Europe to Georgia.

#### VI. SUMMERY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Georgia, data quality has always been at issue and the positive net-migration trend in the recent period is related to methodology of migration statistics.

It is very important to deal with statistical data and have better estimates of the trends and levels of migration flows, especially since early 2000s.

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