

Innovations and Reforms Center

Immigration to Georgia: Current State and Challenges

Study Report

Immigration to Georgia: Current state and Challenges

Report prepared for IRC in the framework of the EU funded action “Support Georgia for Proper and Balanced Immigration Policy Formation”

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Executive summary

The study was commissioned by Innovations and Reforms Center (IRC) in the framework of the EU supported project “Support Georgia for Proper and Balanced Migration Policy Formation”, and undertaken by the Business Consulting Group (BCG) in summer, 2014. The study had two main objectives: to undertake a research on immigration to Georgia with a special focus on the firsthand experiences of immigrants of various backgrounds living in Georgia, and to study the attitudes of Tbilisi population towards immigrants. The study demonstrated that the Tbilisi residents despite their multiethnic background are not quite open and inclusive of immigrants, from certain countries, coming to Georgia, breaking to a certain extent the myth of 'tolerance' and giving another perspective to the concept of 'hospitality'. Other major findings of the study follow:

The study was carried out in Summer 2014

- The existing Georgian legislative framework regulates issues related to the entry, stay and departure procedures of immigrants to Georgia, and citizenship acquisition issues.
- The existing Georgian migration policy does not account for specific immigrant integration measures, hence, no state institutional setting exists that will address integration issues of immigrants coming to Georgia with the aim to settle long-term or permanently. Exception in this regard is persons having a humanitarian or refugee status; certain social and educational programs are available for their better integration;
- Quite a limited share – 11% – of sampled Tbilisi population personally knows at least one immigrant living in Georgia. Hence, the majority of sampled Tbilisi population receives information regarding immigration and immigrants either from media (mainly TV), or other secondary sources;
- Majority of surveyed respondents has quite negative attitudes towards immigrants, and specifically, towards immigrants coming from Asian, Middle Eastern, and African countries;
- A significant share of polled Tbilisi residents exhibit strong intolerant attitudes towards immigrants. The phenomenon of 'selected intolerance' was observed, that is addressed not towards immigrants coming from all possible countries/regions, but to immigrants coming from particular countries/regions;
- A significant share of polled Tbilisi residents agree with the statements supporting tightening visa regulations and banning granting of the Georgian citizenship to representatives of certain countries;
- Immigrants lack the understanding/knowledge of the existing and upcoming immigration procedures;
- Student immigrants living in Georgia experience difficulties in dealing with respective state agencies responsible for provisions of student visas/residence permits, recount cases of groundless rejections, aggravated by the fact that after the rejection on rather important grounds, they can still remain in the country;

- Immigrants to Georgia, especially, of different skin color/religion, experience intolerant attitudes and discrimination from local residents;

Introduction

For the last decades, Georgia was frequently characterized as a country with ‘non-existent’ migration policy, or a country with ‘extremely liberal’ visa regime. This characterization was mainly derived from the fact that in the first years of independence there was no institutional basis formed to reflect the increased emigration of the Georgian nationals abroad. Followed by the new developments after the so called “Rose Revolution” - opening the Georgian borders and establishing a 'relaxed' visa regime, in order to boost tourism, business and economic development. This coincided with the weakly developed methodology of migration statistical data collection, making it difficult to get reliable data on the migrant flows and stocks – both emigration and immigration.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, it was precisely emigration – caused both by political and economic reasons – that characterized migratory flows from Georgia. Today, however, the existing migration statistics demonstrate that Georgia can be considered as a country of transit, as well as a country of immigration, with not only more immigrants coming to the country, but immigrants coming from the distant and culturally diverse countries to study, to work and to live. For a country, which does not have an experience of incorporating immigrants in the mainstream society during the recent history, to examine the gaps in the immigration policy becomes of utmost importance if the goal is to ensure successful incorporation/stay of immigrants in Georgia.

Hence, the focus of this report is to present the analysis of the immigration policy of Georgia and provide recommendations for the relevant stakeholders on how it can be improved in order to reflect the existing gaps and challenges. The structure of the report follows:

- Review of the Georgian immigration policy;
- Fieldwork report - qualitative and quantitative study of immigrant experiences in Georgia and attitudes of Tbilisi population towards immigrants;
- Conclusions and Recommendations.

Immigration to Georgia is a relatively new trend with very little scholarly or policy analysis covering the issues related to the examination of the Georgian immigration policy, or the lives of immigrants in Georgia, or the attitudes of local population towards immigrants. Hence, the present analysis could be considered as the first attempt to describe and analyze the situation that could, in the future, serve as a baseline for shaping the Georgian immigration policy, to allow the realization of its benefits for all parties involved.

Immigration policy in Georgia

Present report covers the period that is often referred as a period, when Georgia had ‘a very liberal migration policy’¹. This, on the one hand, means that the country did not pose any exit restrictions to the Georgian nationals willing to leave the country either for short or long term periods. On the other hand, it waived visa or residence permit requirements for the citizens of 118 countries in order to enter the country and stay from 90 to up to 360 days and, at the same time, provided opportunities for visitors to obtain visas at the border crossing points².

The legal documents relevant to immigration mostly cover issues related to the acquisition of the Georgian citizenship or residence permit, getting visa, and legal status of aliens in Georgia, which are very important issues indeed. However, the state immigration policy, which usually takes into account not only abovementioned issues but such issues as integration, civic and political participation of immigrants, educational opportunities and acculturation, largely remain undeveloped and nonexistent³. At the same time, when it comes to regular labour, education, business immigrants, or immigrants who would like to settle in Georgia permanently, there is almost no institutional framework which defines and institutionalizes relevant provisions that enable successful integration of immigrants in the Georgian society⁴.

Migration Policy Index⁵ resource is one of the well-developed instruments to measure immigrant integration policies in the EU countries. It uses following seven major indicators to measure immigration policies of the countries:⁶

- Labour market mobility
- Family reunion for third-country nationals
- Education
- Political participation
- Long term residence
- Access to Nationality
- Anti-discrimination.

¹ http://www.migrationpolicycentre.eu/docs/policy_brief/PolicyBrief-Georgia-2013.pdf, p. 2.

² Many of these provisions are revised in the new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, which came into force in September, 2014. For more information, see: http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf

³ To a certain extent, integration issues are covered by the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia, in respect to Refugees, Stateless and Sheltered persons. See for more details: <http://mra.gov.ge/geo/static/3917> At the same time, there are specific programs aimed at facilitation of reintegration of return Georgian migrants administered both by the Ministry, and by the international Projects (for example, Targeted Initiative Georgia of IOM and the Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Accommodation and Refugees of Georgia). For more information, please, consult: <http://mra.gov.ge/geo/static/2369>.

⁴ See, for example, the list of relevant legislative documents: http://migration.commission.ge/index.php?article_id=15&clang=0

⁵ <http://www.mipex.eu/>

⁶ http://www.mipex.eu/sites/default/files/downloads/mipex_indicators_2010.pdf

As the authors of the Index state, integration presupposes existence of equal opportunities both for locals and migrants⁷:

In socio-economic terms, migrants must have equal opportunities to lead just as dignified, independent and active lives as the rest of the population. In civic terms, all residents can commit themselves to mutual rights and responsibilities on the basis of equality. When migrants feel secure, confident and welcome, they are able to invest in their new country of residence and make valued contributions to society. Over time, migrants can take up more opportunities to participate, more rights, more responsibilities and, if they wish, full national citizenship.

The process of integration is specific to the needs and abilities of each individual and each local community. Although government policy is only one of a number of factors which affects integration, it is vital because it sets the legal and political framework within which other aspects of integration occur. The state can strive to remove obstacles and achieve equal outcomes and equal membership by investing in the active participation of all, the exercise of comparable rights and responsibilities and the acquisition of intercultural competences.

Important message from this quote to be taken into account is that immigrants should not be considered as threats but rather as opportunities for the future development of the countries. Hence, creating a welcoming climate where immigrants feel respected will bring benefits not only to them, but to the society as a whole. Defining clear standards and rules of incorporation is essential, but at the same time it is crucial to promote the openness among the local population towards immigrants, create opportunities for their inclusion.

Georgian migration, and specifically, immigration policy, is still under construction, and during this process has undergone quite dramatic changes. These changes mostly occurred in the immigration regulations, and, specifically, in the regulations of entry and stay in Georgia for foreign nationals as well expulsion regulations and fight against irregular immigration. The new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons that came into force on September 1st 2014, quite significantly changed provisions in the previous Law on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, that has been in force since 2006. However, in both cases, neither of these laws covered issued related to the establishment of immigrant integration mechanisms, unless it dealt with refugees and stateless persons. In the latter cases, provision of Georgian language/culture courses is envisaged.

Overall, the Georgian legislation related to migration/immigration does not have specific provisions regarding the **labor market mobility** – Georgian labor market is still considered to be quite liberal, with no requirement of minimal wage, or the necessity for employers to prove the need for employing the foreign labor force. With the new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, however, foreign workers will need to apply and receive special work visa, and respectively, if a worker stays in Georgia for longer-term,

⁷ <http://www.mipex.eu/methodology>

a work residence permit. Still at this point, there are no provisions in the Georgian legislation that regulate labor market mobility, and in this sense, Georgian labor market is open to the foreign nationals.

When it comes to **family re-unification** provisions, Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons⁸ specifically acknowledges the principle of family unity, as well as best interests of children⁹. According to the Law of Georgia on Refugees as Humanitarian status, a person, granted refugee status, will have right to reunite with his/her family within one year after receiving the status (Article 7). A person with the humanitarian status can also use this right. At the same time, Georgia ensures the protection of family members of refugees or humanitarian status holders (Article 6).¹⁰ The new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons introduced a new type of visa – D4 immigration visa for individuals, coming to Georgia with the family reunification purposes. The law also introduced a **residence permit for the purpose of family reunification** for the family members of an alien holding a residence permit¹¹. Also, permanent residence permit shall be issued to a spouse, parent, and child of a citizen of Georgia. Spouses of Georgian citizens can also benefit from a simplified procedure of Georgian citizenship acquisition¹².

Educational provisions do not make explicit references regarding immigrants – again, due to quite a low number of immigrants coming to Georgia in the previous years, there was little need for such provisions. However, now, with the increased number of immigrants, and immigrants who come to Georgia with their families and minors with the aim to settle long-term, acknowledging their presence and their needs seems necessary. The first step in this direction has been undertaken recently, with the establishment of an online platform to teach and learn Georgian as a foreign language - http://geofl.ge/#!/page_home. The Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia has developed the web site. Besides being a resource that can be definitely used by immigrants who are already in the country, the web site might also contribute to the popularization of Georgian language in general¹³. At the same time, the existing educational provisions cannot be regarded as discriminatory in any way towards immigrants, since currently, children of foreign nationals are freely admitted both to public/private kindergartens and schools, and although enrollment in the higher educational institutions in Georgia is a centralized process involving passing a National Unified Exam, foreigners willing to study at Georgian higher educational institutions can be enrolled only based on enrollment applications and interviews.

⁸ Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf

⁹ See, for example: Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf, P. 1.

¹⁰ Law of Georgia on Refugees and Humanitarian status, http://migration.commission.ge/files/annex_20_block_2_-_law_on_refugees_and_humanitarian_status.pdf P. 4-5.

¹¹ Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf, P. 15

¹² Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship, <http://migration.commission.ge/files/matsne-2343650.pdf>, P.32.

¹³ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NDyiMtukvU&feature=share

Political participation of aliens living in Georgia is rather limited to the right to assembly and manifestation– unless naturalized, foreign citizens and stateless persons are not allowed to partake in the political life of the country, including but not limited to participation in the elections, becoming a member of a political party or establishing a political party.

Issuance of **long-term residence permits** is mainly governed by the Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons¹⁴ (Chapter IV). The Law defines nine different types of resident permits, depending on the purpose of the stay of an alien in the country and a category of an applicant. A temporary residence permit can be issued for not more than 6-year period.

Organic Law of Georgia on the Georgian Citizenship¹⁵ sets regulations that govern acquisition of the Georgian **citizenship** by an alien (Chapter II). There are following types of naturalization:

- a) granting citizenship under regular procedure;
- b) granting citizenship under simplified procedure;
- c) granting citizenship by way of exception;
- d) granting citizenship by way of its restoration¹⁶.

Each procedure is described in detail in the Law, for example, citizenship under simplified procedures can be granted to a spouse of a Georgian citizen who has lawfully resided in Georgia for the last two years, knows Georgian language and history and basic principle of law governing Georgia within established limits, or to a person, having a repatriate or a refugee status. It is the Public Service Development Agency (PSDA) that prepares the decisions of the cases and holds tests on the knowledge of language, history and legal aspects, and it is the President of Georgia who grants the citizenship to applicants.

Chapter II of the Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons¹⁷ lists **non-discrimination** as one of the principles that will govern ‘Entry, Stay, Transit, and Departure of Aliens into/in/through/from Georgia’. It also specifically forbids ‘discriminatory, degrading, and humiliating treatment of aliens’¹⁸. Besides, Georgia has a separate Anti-Discrimination Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination¹⁹. The purpose of the Law follows (Article I): ‘This Law is intended to eliminate every form of discrimination and to ensure equal rights of every natural and legal persons under the legislation of Georgia, irrespective of race, skin colour, language, sex, age,

¹⁴ Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf

¹⁵ Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship, <http://migration.commission.ge/files/matsne-2343650.pdf>

¹⁶ Organic Law of Georgia on Georgian Citizenship, <http://migration.commission.ge/files/matsne-2343650.pdf>, P.32.

¹⁷ Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf, P. 1.

¹⁸ Ibid, P.2.

¹⁹ Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination, https://matsne.gov.ge/index.php?option=com_ldmssearch&view=docView&id=2339687&lang=en&Itemid=

citizenship, origin, place of birth or residence, property or social status, religious or belief, national, ethnic or social origin, profession, marital status, health, disability, sexual orientation gender identity and expression, political or other opinions, or other characteristics²⁰. Hence, the Georgian legislation fully acknowledges and prohibits discrimination of individuals, including non-citizens of Georgia based on the abovementioned grounds.

Once the country that previously did not experience noticeable immigration flows, realizes that immigration started, one way to approach is to build a wall and try to stop it, and another - to face the situation and channel it in the most favorable direction as possible. Building the walls has never proved to be effective and efficient – the example of the wall built between the USA and Mexico is a good one. Costing huge amounts to taxpayers, it hardly achieves its goal – to stop or at least, significantly reduce immigration²¹. Second approach proves to be more beneficial if relevant immigration strategies are adopted. As the Migration Policy Index demonstrate, it is quite possible to achieve high scores once the goal is to ensure the successful integration of immigrants, rather than to exclude them from existing social and economic benefits.

²⁰ Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination,
https://matsne.gov.ge/index.php?option=com_idmssearch&view=docView&id=2339687&lang=en&Itemid=

²¹ http://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/04/opinion/04massey.html?_r=0

Fieldwork report

The study methodology was based on a mixed method approach and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods in order to capture reliable picture of immigration to Georgia. Decision to employ both qualitative and quantitative methods was also conditioned by the fact that there is no more or less complete data base of immigrants in Georgia, and it was practically impossible undertake a representative survey of immigrants living in the country. Therefore, employing qualitative approach when studying immigrant experience was deemed more relevant and, at the same time, based on the research goals aimed at discovering immigrant strategies and practices, more productive. Hence, the research team divided immigrant groups in five major categories based on the country of origin and purpose of immigration, and then conducted in-depth interviews discussions with them. Overall, 44 in-depth interviews were conducted with immigrants. For the purpose of present research, an immigrant was defined as a foreign national, who has been living permanently in Georgia for at least the last 9 months. At this stage, a combination of snow-ball and purposive sampling was employed. Major part of the qualitative fieldwork was conducted in Tbilisi, where more immigrants are concentrated, and in two Georgian regions - Adjara, which receives immigrants from Turkey, and Kakheti region, where farmers from India prefer to settle and engage in agricultural activities. At the same time, three focus group discussions were conducted with randomly selected Georgian nationals in Tbilisi, Batumi and Telavi, aimed at examining their attitudes towards immigrants. Results of the focus group discussions enriched other components of the study, and specifically, quantitative part, during which a representative sample of Tbilisi residents was surveyed with the same aim - to examine what they think about immigration in general and to immigrants in particular.

During the quantitative part research, 600 structured interviews were conducted from August 6 to August 28 2014, with Tbilisi residents, aged 18+, using three-stage cluster selection of pre-stratification. For the formation of the sampling, the data of the census districts were used from the general population census of 2002.

There are 3900 enumeration districts in Tbilisi. In each enumeration districts there are on average 80.6 families.

In order to ensure the extent of sampling, at the initial stage stratification was implemented.

In the 1990s city of Tbilisi was divided in 10 districts. These districts were: Samgori, Isani, Krtsanisi, Mtatsminda, Didube, Chugureti, Vake, Saburtalo, Nadzaladevi, Gldani. Each of these districts represents different stratum. Later, nearby villages became part of Tbilisi, so, villages of Krtsanisi, Phonichala and Didi Lilo were incorporated in the district of Samgori; villages of Kodjori, Shindisi, Tsavkisi and Tabakhmela - in the district of Mtatsminda; village of Dighomi and Lisi village in the districts of Saburtalo and Zahesi respectively, and village of Gldani - in the district of Gldani.

Hence, for the purpose of present survey, Tbilisi was also divided in 10 strata.

Primary sampling unit was enumeration district. In total 120 clusters were selected in Tbilisi. The number of clusters and conducted interviews are given in the Table 1 below. Selection of clusters in each strata was made using the PPS (Probability Proportional to Size) sampling method.

Table 1. Number of cluster and conducted interviews

N of Stratum	District	N of Interviews	N of Clusters
1	Saburtalo	75	15
2	Mtatsminda	30	6
3	Krtsanisi	25	5
4	Didube	45	9
5	Chugureti	30	6
6	Isani	65	13
7	Samgori	95	19
8	Gldani	90	18
9	Nadzaladevi	85	17
10	Vake	60	12
Total		600	120

The second sampling unit was a household. Selection of households in clusters was made by random walk method. In each selected cluster, starting point and household selection step was defined.

In order to select respondents in the households, last birthday principle was used.

Confidence interval is 5% with 95% confidence level.

Immigration to Georgia: Current State

Due to the poor statistical data, the number of immigrants currently living in the country, on temporarily or permanent basis, is difficult to obtain. This leads to the creation of certain myths and stereotypes among the Georgian population regarding the numbers of immigrants in the country, the purpose of their stay, and the role they play in the economic and cultural development of the country - sometimes fueled by unprofessional media coverage and political speculations on migration issues.

One of the reasons why the existing national statistics on migration is difficult to interpret is due to the fact, that from 2004 till 2011 the National Statistics Office of Georgia calculated the net migration based on the raw number of border crossings. Another additional type of data collected along was only the nationality of migrants. At the same time, such important information as the duration of the stay was not paid attention to, as well as the gender of the migrants, or, in the case of emigrants, their destination (see Table 2).

Table 2. Net Migration in Georgia (thousands of people)²²

Year	Net migration
2004	5,5
2005	76,3
2006	-12,1
2007	-20,7
2008	-10,2
2009	34,2
2010	18,1
2011	20,2
2012	-21,5

Source: *GeoStat*

However, starting from 2012, National Statistics Office of Georgia changed its data collection methodology and the Ministry of Internal Affairs started gathering migration data based on a new definition of an ‘immigrant’ and an ‘emigrant’. Hence, immigrant denotes a citizen of a foreign country, who is admitted to Georgia and stays in the country for at least 6 months and one day. An ‘emigrant’, on the other hand, is defined as a citizen of Georgia who emigrates from the country and stays abroad for at least 6 months and one day.²³ Taking into consideration that the data collected with the new methodology estimates the negative net migration of 21,500 individuals, this dramatic change from recorded positive net migration in 2011 of 20,000 individuals, could only partially be explained by the changes in the data collection methodology.

²² http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=173&lang=eng, accessed on April 5, 2014.

²³ http://www.geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/georgian/press/Population%20press_30.04%20Geo.pdf. P. 6.

Data provided by the Public Service Development Agency show that recently more and more immigrants have started to arrive to Georgia. What is important, the reasons why immigrants come to Georgia are quite diverse. Moreover, the immigrants originate from a quite diverse list of countries, some of which are both culturally and geographically distant from Georgia. When looking at the reasons of granting residence permits (Annex 1), a quite surprising picture emerges, suggesting that along with educational immigrants, Georgia attracts economic immigrants as well. This finding is hardly anticipated, since the economic situation that the country faces is quite difficult, with the lack of well-paid jobs and unemployment, which is often cited as one of the push factors that drives emigration from the **country**²⁴. According to the PSDA data, provided in a Table 3 below, Russia, China and Turkey are the leading country from where immigrants coming to Georgia originate. At the same time, it needs to be taken into account, that when it comes to a number of temporary residence permits issued, it does not refer to an actual number of immigrants, since the same person may apply for a temporary residence permit every year. On the contrary, the data on permanent residency permits provides a better understanding of the long-term immigration patterns to Georgia, in terms of the country of origin.

Table 3. Permanent and Temporary Residence permits issued to foreign nationals coming to Georgia: Top 10 countries (2009-2013)

	Permanent	Temporary	Total
Russia	5668	959	6627
China	6	6415	6421
Turkey	108	5045	5153
India	41	4570	4611
Iran	36	2514	2550
Ukraine	622	448	1070
Azerbaijan	348	656	1004
Egypt	10	942	952
Armenia	630	120	750
USA	118	533	651

Source: PSDA officially requested data

In case of Russia and Ukraine, the main reason for granting permanent residence permits is either the fact that a person is a former Georgian citizen, or is a close relative of a Georgian citizen, or a person, holding a permanent residence permit in Georgia, while in case of Iranian, Chinese and Turkish immigrants, the main reason for requesting temporary residence permits is work, and in case of Indians - both work and educational reasons are named more often when applying for temporary residence permits. And although the table above

²⁴ See, for example: Lasha Labadze & Mirian Tukhashvili. (2012). Costs and Benefits of Labour Mobility between the EU and the Eastern Partnership Partner Countries. *Country Report: Georgia*. Available from: http://www.iset-pi.ge/files/georgia_final.pdf; International Organisation for Migration & Association for Economic Education. (2003). Labour Migration from Georgia. Available from: http://iom.ge/pdf/lab_migr_from_georgia2003.pdf; Erin Trough Hofmann & Cynthia Buckley. (2011). Cultural Responses to Changing Gender Patterns of Migration in Georgia. Available from: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2010.00681.x/abstract>

summarizes only the statistics of issuance of residence permits, that does not fully capture the scale of immigration to Georgia²⁵, it is still noteworthy that immigration to Georgia is increasing from countries such as India, China, or Egypt, that have no previous experience of close historic and cultural links with Georgia. Settling in Georgia for family reunification purposes is not widespread so far, and is fairly outnumbered by the immigrants coming for educational and work-related purposes. Interestingly, the table above also breaks one of the myths that is quite persistent in the Georgian public discourse and is often fuelled by unprofessional media coverage - that big numbers of immigrants are granted permanent residency; from 2009 till 2013 in Georgia, a total of 8525 permanent residence permits have been issued and its significant part was granted to either former Georgian citizens or close relatives of Georgian citizens or permanent residence permit holders.

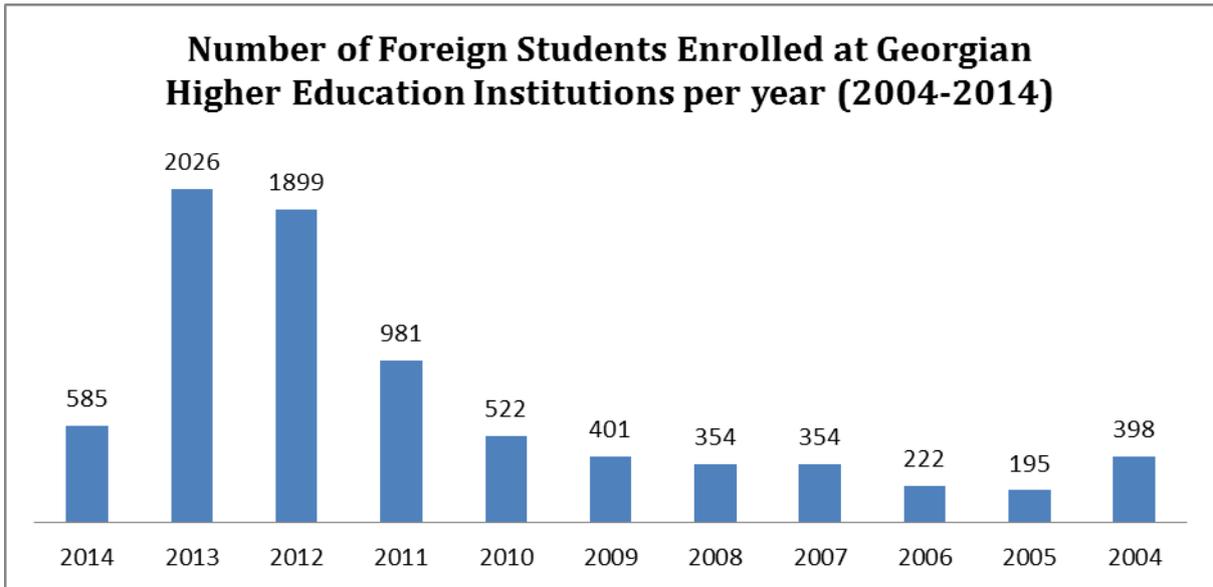
According to Tbilisi State Medical University, there are about 800 Indian students studying there²⁶. Since 2005, the TSMU web site has been publishing the photos of its Indian students. In the photo from 2005 we can only see 16 students, while the photos taken in the subsequent years show a substantial increase in the number of the Indian students. According to the information provided on the web site, the higher university officials regularly visit India in order to meet with the prospective students and hold information sessions. The data, provided by the Ministry of Education and Sciences of Georgia (see Graph 1 below), also demonstrates a stable annual increase in the number of foreign students at Georgian higher educational institutions till 2014. There could be several contributing factors explaining why enrolment of foreign students decreased in 2014. One could be changes in the new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, which introduced several amendments to the procedures of issuing visas and residence permits, aimed at regularization of immigrant flows. Second factor could be the gradual increase of higher education tuition fees for foreign students, which may be as high as 7,000 USD per annum depending on the higher education institution and the specialization. Hence, together with the living expenses, as some of the foreign students noted during the in-depth interviewing, increases the overall costs that they and their families pay in order to get higher education in Georgia. The cost of higher education in Georgia, hence, becomes comparable to other educational options that prospective students take into consideration when making decisions regarding their educational opportunities.

Graph1.

²⁵ In terms of existing liberal visa regime, not all immigrants arriving to Georgia had to apply and receive residence permits in order to stay in Georgia for up to 360 days after arrival. However, this proposition will change from September, 2014, when the new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons will come into force. For more information, see:

http://migration.commission.ge/files/aliens_law_new.pdf

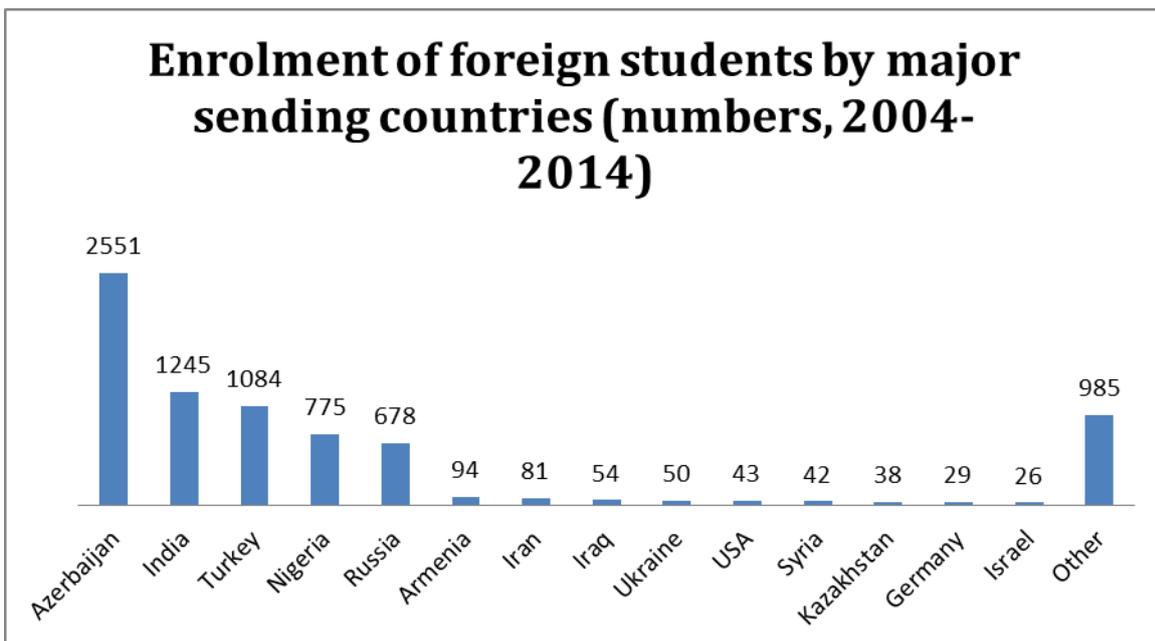
²⁶ <http://tsmu.page.tl/Indian-Students.htm>



Source: Ministry of Education and Sciences

In 2004-2014, students from Azerbaijan constituted the biggest group of foreign national educational migrants, followed by educational migrants from India, Turkey, Nigeria and Russia (Graph 2), enrolled in Georgian higher educational institutions. When it comes to Azerbaijani students, presumable, a part of them consists of ethnic Georgians - Ingilo - who are settled in the adjacent to Georgia regions of Azerbaijan. Yet another part could be those, who were unable to enroll at the higher educational institutions back home, and choose Georgian higher education institutions due to its proximity to Azerbaijan and comparable educational costs. Reasons, why students from such countries as India, Turkey or Nigeria prefer to come to Georgia to undertake their undergraduate studies, are discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Graph 2.



Source: Ministry of Education and Sciences.

Besides educational migrants, Georgia became attractive to a specific group of investors, and specifically, investors in agriculture. According to a representative of one of the consultancy organizations - Crown Immigration, expressed in various media stories²⁷, only this organization helped about 2,000 Indians, mainly from Punjab Province of India, to buy land in Georgia. If we assume that this is not the only organization that provides similar services, and that farmers could buy land directly as well, number of Indian farmers who, up until recent bought land in Georgia could be estimated as being in excess of 2,000.

When it comes to overall geographical dispersion of the major groups of immigrants in Georgia, no reliable data exist. However, based on an anecdotal evidence and observation, Turkish immigrants are mainly concentrated in Adjara region and Tbilisi; Chinese - mostly in Tbilisi, although they own businesses in other Georgian regions as well; Indian students and businessmen - in Tbilisi, while Indian farmers are dispersed in the agrarian parts of the country, like Kakheti, or Gardabani; Nigerian students - mostly in Tbilisi. Hence, Tbilisi both being the capital and the major educational and business center of the country, attracts relatively bigger numbers of immigrants, while other regions of Georgia - except for Adjara region - are less exposed to immigration.

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMzTgcbCSWg#t=233>, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-22015124>, http://article.wn.com/view/2013/04/03/Indian_farmers_look_to_reap_profits_on_Georgian_land/

Immigrants in Georgia: Immigrant' View

In this section we focus our analysis mainly on the qualitative component of the research, and namely, in-depth interview data conducted with the immigrants themselves. Consequently, present analysis should not be statistically generalized to all immigrant population currently living in Georgia. However, we believe that the in-depth interviews provide quite important insights and patterns of both immigrant flows to Georgia, and how immigrants structure their lives after the immigration, that can offer solid analytical understanding of the state of the immigration and immigrants in the country.

Many of the respondents stress that despite several challenges that they faced and still face in Georgia, overall, they would rather evaluate their migratory experience more positive than negative. Mainly, this assessment is connected with the fact that for many of them coming to Georgia was the first act of independence when they had to manage their lives on their own, solve problems and live independently from their families; and this is very much valued by most of them. At the same time, while having quite limited opportunities to interact with local population due to poor Georgian language skills and - sometimes - unwillingness of the locals to interact with them, some immigrants do not get an in-depth understanding of the Georgian culture, country and people, even after spending several years in the country, and hence, have no intention to stay in Georgia permanently.

Below we will discuss the major reasons why immigrants come to Georgia, which major challenges they face while staying in Georgia, and how they try to solve them.

Why Georgia

An important question was to determine what was the main reason for choosing to come to Georgia rather than going to some other country. As the migration theories argue, the immigrants, in most cases are the most motivated ones among the sending countries' populations, who leave their countries in search for a better opportunities and better lives. Also, they often rely on quite pragmatic calculations, defining whether the costs of emigration can be later compensated by the rewards they can get in the new country. Sometimes, if we speak about the rural communities, emigration is rather considered as a household strategy than as an individual decision, when the household makes the final decision about the country of destination and which family member is going to migrate.

In this respect, Georgia, not being the most well-known country in the world, not being a country with a flourishing economy or the highest level of education or quality of life may seem to be a quite peculiar country to choose to migrate. However, the interviews with the immigrants provide a remarkable insight in how the process of migration decision-making takes place, which actors, and which factors play the major role in pulling immigrants to Georgia.

Actors:

Individual Immigrants vs. Households

In cases of many respondents that were interviewed, the decisions to emigrate in general, and to emigrate precisely to Georgia were not individual decisions, but rather household decisions, especially in cases of educational immigrants. Here the major actors are parents of the immigrants, who actively participate in the process of choosing the destination country, enrollment processes and, most importantly, who cover the costs associated with studying abroad - tuition fees, living costs and travel. Immigrants themselves are, of course, involved in the process, but often rely on the decisions made by parents and/or other relatives.

Of course, there are cases when respondents declare that they were the sole and principal initiators of the immigration, that they secured the money to cover costs associated with migration. These are mostly immigrants who come to start business in Georgia, or to work.

Consultancy centers

Consultancy centers play an important role in bringing Georgia to the attention of prospective educational immigrants. As some of the respondents mentioned, prior getting consultation at the center, they did not have any idea about educational opportunities in Georgia let alone about Georgia itself, and/or considered going to study to some other countries. One of the consultancy centers mentioned by the Indian students is OM Consultancy, which not only assists prospective students from India to get enrolled at the Georgian higher education institutions²⁸, but operates a hostel in Tbilisi, where newly arrived Indian students can live for the first year of their studies²⁹. The consultancy holds information sessions with participation of professors from respective universities, and provides a discount of 500 USD off tuition fee if the prospective students hire the consultancy to administer the enrolment process (in this case, Tbilisi State Medical University).

Tbilisi State Medical University lists five partner consultancy agencies³⁰:

- 'OM' The Overseas Educational Promoters, working in India, and for Indian citizens from Er-Riadh, Kuwait, and UAE. 'OM' also works in Sri-Lanka and Republic of Maldives;
- 'Kia Consultants', working in Trinidad and Tobago, Carribean, USA, Canada and the UK;
- Cyberrys International, Overseas Educational and Business consultant' , working in United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait and Qatar;
- 'Novruz-Az' LTD, working in Turkey and Azerbaijan, and
- 'J.C.Travels', working in Switzerland, France, UK, Germany and Gulf Area.

²⁸ <http://www.omedu.com/georgia.htm>

²⁹ <http://omhostel.weebly.com/index.html>

³⁰ http://tsmu.edu/tsmu12/tsmu/tsmuuni/index_eng.php

Factors

Cost

When it comes to educational immigrants, the tuition costs are often mentioned to be the utmost factor that defined the decision to migrate to Georgia. Despite the fact that compared to the Georgian students, their tuition fees are higher (for example, for one of the programs of the University - US Medical Doctor Program, the tuition fee for foreigners is set at 12,000 USD, while for Georgian students - at 8,000 GEL)³¹. Based on the interviews, apparently, the universities in Georgia have a tendency to increase tuition fees regularly, which, together with the rent prices and living costs, may turn the prospective educational immigrants away from Georgia, making 'Georgian' prices comparable to other educational options that they have.

Recognition

Another factor influencing migration decision of educational immigrants to Georgia is the fact, that the diplomas of the universities where foreign students come to study are, as a rule, recognized by the immigrants' home countries. This is a very important issue, since after investing a significant amount of money in their education, foreign students and their families need to be sure that after graduation they will be able to practice medicine in their home countries. Besides, Georgian universities are often members of international educational consortia, participate in the international projects, which also attract prospective students.

Social Networks

The existence of social networks that connect prospective migrants with their compatriots already living in Georgia, is a valuable resource that they build on both prior and after arrival to Georgia. Prospective immigrants have a number of sources to receive information regarding the country of destination - consultancy centers, internet, the media. However, as the in-depth interviews demonstrate, the information they can get from their peers - friends, relatives, or just fellow citizens already working/leaving/studying in Georgia, often becomes a significant factor for taking the final decision. If a close friend recommends the university, the country, the people - this could serve as an additional stimulus for choosing Georgia as a destination country.

As many respondents mentioned, the fact that they are able to find their fellow citizens in Georgia on whom they could rely in case of necessity, is important for them. Social networks play an important role in dissemination of information about different aspects of Georgian life to prospective migrants, being it living costs, business operation rules, visa regulations or the quality of education. Besides, once in the country, thanks to social networks immigrants are able to solve more effectively everyday problems, find jobs, housing or simply, spend free time nicely.

At the same time, social networks may serve as a 'repellent' function - in case of several immigrants, they specifically stress that they are not going to recommend coming to Georgia

³¹ <http://www.tsmu.edu/tsmu12/tsmu/tsmuuni/index.php?p=sajaro>

to anyone. This is often the case of immigrants who came to Georgia to start businesses, and specifically, in cases, when the businesses did not turn out to be as successful as it was expected.

Economic attractiveness

For immigrants who come to Georgia with the aim to start business, high standings of Georgia in the ratings related to business activities (for example World Bank Doing Business) were important, that attracts potential investors. The recent improvements in this respect do have an impact on immigrant entrepreneurs, who are looking for a novel places where to start new businesses. Moreover, some of the immigrants note, that it is not only easier, but also cheaper to start business in Georgia, than in their country of origin; for those who are involved in agriculture, the cost of renting land is rather low and its productivity is high compared to the price, thus creating environment important to generate profit.

Why they come

Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews and residence permit data, several reasons why immigrants come to Georgia were identified. These reasons are quite specific and vary greatly according to the country of origin and the age/social status of immigrants. In this respect we could say that Georgia occupies quite distinct niches for prospective immigrants from different countries. For younger immigrants it is education, for older immigrants - work or business development.

As a rule, a set or combination of factors is taken into account by prospective migrants when making decision both regarding the migration per se, and the country of emigration. Hence, it is difficult to define the most important one. For example, in case of an educational immigrant from India, who came to study to Georgia, one of the reasons was that it was cheaper to study here than in India. However, yet another reason that influenced her decision was that in Georgia she could study in English, while in Germany - her second option - she should have studied in German. Hence, she decided to come to Georgia, even despite the fact that education in Germany might have cost her less. Often, not less important are the migrant networks that facilitate immigration of nationals of certain countries - the fact that there already were acquaintances or friends/relatives in Georgia.

However, during the interviews it became apparent that sometimes original migration goals change: for example, a Turkish immigrant, who first came to Georgia to work as a driver for a Turkish company, later established his own transport company, and eventually, got married to a Georgian citizen, and now plans to stay in Georgia permanently. Or another case of an Indian immigrant, who came to study to Georgia, but due to problems with visa, was not able to finish studies, and started to work in order to cover living expenses. Hence, the Table 4 below is based on the original 'goals' of immigrants as stated in their interviews rather than their transformed ones:

Table 4. Number of immigrants based on the country of origin and original purpose of immigration to Georgia (44 total)

	India	Turkey	Sri-Lanka	Nigeria	Trinidad and Tobago	Syria/Iraq/Iran	China
Education	8	2	1	5	1	3 (Iraq)	
Business/work	6	9		1		1 (Iraq)	4
Family reunification						1 (Iran)	
Long-term residence						2 (Syria)	
Total:	16	11	1	6	1	7	4

In case of two immigrants from Syria the conflict and the necessity to flee the home country was mentioned as the main reason to come to Georgia. These particular immigrants came to Georgia to stay long-term - potentially, permanently, or until the situation in their home country improves.

Challenges

*Visa/Residence permit*³²

Problems related to obtaining visa and/or relevant residence permit stand out among the problems mentioned by the respondents. The fact that up until now the visa regime of Georgia was quite liberal with a number of countries granted visa free entry to Georgia, and possibility to obtain visas at the border crossing check-points for nationals of remaining countries, does not necessarily mean that **all** the immigrants coming to Georgia were allowed to enter the country. Quite the opposite: as respondents note, there are a number of cases when immigrants are denied visas at the border, and have to return to their country of origin.

We got [visa] at the airport, that day a lot of people were deported, they did not get visa. More than half of the people [from the plane] were deported and they had paid tuition fee, they had paid everything and they had went through everything.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (1)

The major problem in this case is that immigrants often are not given proper explanations regarding decisions behind the refusal to grant visa or residence permit, causing frustration and discontent among immigrants. On the other hand, immigrants themselves are often not familiar with the existing visa regulations. Below we will discuss the major issues regarding the issuance of visa/residence permits in more detail:

Lack of information: many prospective migrants and already arrived immigrants, who have been living in Georgia for several years, do not have enough information on how the visa

³² Interviews were conducted in summer, 2014, prior the enactment of the new Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, hence discussion here refers only to the state of the visa regime and issuance of residence permits prior to September, 1st, 2014.

regime of Georgia works and what they need to do either prior or post arrival in order to avoid problems related to their legal presence in the country. Sometimes the problem is partly caused by the consultancy companies that facilitate immigration to Georgia and do not inform their clients. Sometimes, it is the fault of the educational institutions that fail to inform the students on necessary steps to meet the existing visa regulations. And sometimes, it is the fault of the immigrants themselves who do not take interest and time in getting familiar with the existing immigrant related regulations in Georgia. Immigrants lack of interest towards understanding immigration related regulation prior to arrival can partly be caused by the wide spread publicity of Georgia's overly liberal visa policy, which breeds misconception among immigrants.

In several cases educational immigrants from Turkey or from Trinidad and Tobago, noted that they do not need visas to enter the country. Because of that, they do not even try to get residence permits, but simply cross a border to Turkey or go to their home countries, once their visa-free - 90, or 360-day period of stay - comes to an end, and cross the Georgian border all over again, so that they can stay for another 90 or 360-days in the country without visa:

-Well, we do not need visa for Georgia, we can stay here for 360 days without visa [...] Yes, I go home every year, but those who do not, just take two weeks and go to Turkey, because we also do not need visa for Turkey. So we can just take two weeks for vacation, go to Turkey, when we come back, it is the first day ad we can stay for 360 days again. So, it is really good, we are so blessed that we do not have this problem, because I know some students have.

Trinidad and Tobago, student, year of arrival 2011

And although this immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago is happy that he and his fellow citizens do not have problems with the Georgian visas, yet another problem that educational immigrants might face in the future is that if they are unable to get a residence permit with a local identification number, they may not be able to graduate at all, since in order to issue a diploma, the university needs to indicate the local ID number. Lack of awareness in this regard is also demonstrated by the quote below:

*We can get visa immediately, when we enter this country, also we can come here with our ID card, so visa in not a problem for us. I got it at the airport [...] So, we do not have problems on border. And I got arrival visa, every three months I have to leave Georgia, in three-months it expires and we have to get another visa. I can get one year visa, but I prefer three-month visas.*³³

Turkey, student, year of arrival 2009

The question, who is responsible for informing immigrant educational students about the visa requirements even in cases when they do not need visas to stay in Georgia, remains open. If we look at the experience of the US and the UK universities in this respect, it is precisely the university that informs its international students about the provisions related to certain type of

³³ it seems that a person considers an entry stamp, which he/she gets at a border crossing point as a visa

visas, how to renew visa, how to leave/enter the country. Moreover, in the case of the UK, the university shall check the student's immigration status prior to the enrollment. At the same time, dissemination of informational brochures at the border, as well as Georgian consulates and partner consultancy centers abroad, will contribute to increasing the awareness of prospective immigrants regarding their regulated stay in Georgia.

Lack of information is also revealed when discussing visa-related issues with immigrants from India, who came to Georgia to run agricultural business.

[regarding visas] it is not a problem for Indians. We heard that now visa regime is getting tougher, but as I know it is only for students. I got visa here and did not face any problem... It is important that the visa regime does not change. People should not need to leave the country and cross borders frequently. This requires money and when you are here to work, it's very difficult.

India, Businessman, Year of Arrival 2012

Taking into consideration that these interviews were held in the summer 2014, just before the new regulations entered into force, it shows misconceptions, which may exist and the need of information provided to serve the needs of different immigrant categories.

Lack of clear criteria for issuance/non issuance of visas/residence permits: even if the respondent herself/himself has never experienced any problem with getting/extending visas or getting residence permit in Georgia, in most cases they have heard about such problems, or their friends have had similar problems. What is more frustrating for immigrants, is that, as a rule, the respective authorities do not provide any grounds/reasons why the visa/residence permit was denied.

Yes, I wanted to get a student visa, but I was rejected like my friends, one of them had to apply four times, but she could not get the visa, now she is trying to get a tourists visa, she paid fine too. The worst thing is that they do not give the reason; we do not know why we are not given visas. We study here, we have been here for a long time, so what is the reason of it? I do not know...

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (1)

Yes, so many times they [visa applicants] are rejected and we do not know the reason, so we have to pay again and wait for the visa. First year when I arrived it was a problem, three times I was rejected, then second and third times was OK, but now it is a problem again. Why are they rejected fourth year students? They should provide visas from first year to sixth year. They must save information about students and give them visas for six years, so that we do not have problems. For tourists and for people who come to work they can do it, but we are students and we cannot study without visas.

[...] And if you ask them [relevant authorities] why they rejected, you will not get the answer, but we need to know the reason not to make mistake again.

India, student, year of arrival 2010

In some cases, the visa eventually was granted to the same applicant after s/he applied a second, or third time. Some immigrants consider this as a way of 'extorting' money from them. For some of them, inability to get visa jeopardizes the whole purpose of their stay in Georgia - especially, for educational or business immigrants: the former, unable to get visa, cannot continue to study, and all their investments up till now becomes wasted; the latter - risk losing their businesses and investments. And in both cases, this situation is not beneficial for the country itself, since it diminishes the idea of predictability and stability, that an immigrant expects from a state - to be treated in a fair way.

As it is evident from a quote below, the strategy that some educational migrants employ if rejected student visas, is precisely to get three-month tourists visas over and over. And although some educational immigrants understand well that they need to have a long-term - student visa - or residence permit, rejections and/or fear of rejection, does not leave them other options:

I have a tourist visa again. I wanted to get a student visa because I think it's more logical to have it, but I was rejected, so I just get a tourist visa every three months.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (1)

Actually, we want Georgian government to sit down and acknowledge the fact that Africans are in Georgia and let us understand the requirements. We want to do correct procedures to follow to have legitimate documents, for example, student's visa, residence permit and so on. It is not fair when a student goes to get a visa and you deny them. And there is no Nigerian embassy here and we cannot complain anywhere.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (2)

As mentioned above, this problem is characteristic not only for educational immigrants - an Indian restaurant owner complained about being rejected visa, as well as an Indian waitress at a restaurant. A Chinese trade business owner also mentioned problems with getting visa, as well as an Iranian, who came to Georgia for family reunification reasons, and who fears that her family may need to leave Georgia if problems with visa persist, as it happened with some of their acquaintances. Apparent arbitrariness in the decision-making regarding granting/denial of residence permits/visas, lack of justification, also may lead to the further frustration among immigrants, and decrease in the number of educational and business immigrants who are a potential source of revenue not only for the universities, but for the economy as well; immigrants, who may contribute to the development of the local economy and who can create new jobs. When asked about a possibility of leaving Georgia because of visa related problems, one of the respondents stated:

[Concerning if he would like to go or stay] No, I need to do everything again in another country. I prefer here.... [about problems] For me visa. My families do not have problems.

India, Businessman, year of arrival 2012

Described cases of visa/permit refusals indicate the existence of an institutional problem that the relevant state agencies needed to address before the changes in the Law of Georgia on the Legal Status of Aliens and Stateless Persons, that came in force in September, 2014. What will be impact of the new Law on the implementation of residence permit/visa granting provisions, remains a topic for further research.

Cost of living

For educational immigrants, the major problem associated with costs of living is the tuition fees, which they have to pay in Georgia. When it comes to education, the major pull factor for the immigrants is the cost of the higher education in Georgia and easiness to enroll in the educational programs for non-nationals. However, based on the interviews it became evident that the cost for education in some instructions increases annually for the newly enrolled students. As one of the respondents put it:

Firstly it was 2500 USD, then - 3500 USD, when I shifted here [respondent shifted to Tbilisi State Medical University after two years of study at AIETI] it was 4500 USD, and for the students who arrive now it costs 7000 USD. This is only for foreigners, for Georgians it is 2250 GEL.

India, student, year of arrival 2010

This trend - increasing tuition fees regularly - may contribute to decrease in the competitiveness of the Georgian higher educational institutions. It should also be taken into account that when it comes to prospective students, it is often their families, who finance the educations of their children. Once the costs increase, the families may not find it feasible to cover all expenses related both to the studies and living for their children. Although tuition fees to study medicine in Georgia might still be lower than in India or Nigeria or Turkey, but when adding up all other expenses together, the prospective students and their families may start looking for other options as well. At the same time, another issue should also be considered: some immigrants complain about the low quality of education that they get, and lack of practical medical training. Besides, one educational immigrant also mentioned the difference in the quality of education between the Georgian and English-language sectors:

First, there is a big difference between programs in Georgian and English languages. If I had a daughter, I would not send her to this school, the education level is really low and there is nothing for foreign students.

Turkey, student, year of arrival 2009

There is yet one issue that the educational institutions - and in this case, medical education institutions, need to take into account if they want to remain competitive. The fact that after completing their studies in Georgia, international students - in most cases - have to take special qualifying exams back in their countries in order to be able to practice the medicine, to which the Georgian universities do not prepare them. Hence, coupled together - the price and the quality of education - poses a certain threat to the competitiveness of the Georgian medical schools. As one of the respondents notes, although after arrival they recommended their fellow prospective students to come to Georgia because it was cheaper to study here:

- [...] now we do not tell anyone, because it is the same as in India. [...] and in India you can get a better education. From first year they study using the real bodies, but here we use plastic ones. They should improve the medical equipment here in Georgia. In Germany, USA, UK there are a lot of medical laboratories but here even when you are a fifth year student, they do not show real bodies.

India, student, year of arrival 2010

Another problem is the apartment rent prices. Since most of the immigrants who come to Georgia need to rent places, they tend to complain about certain 'exploitation' that they face from home owners and real estate agents.

- Our next problem is the house rent. If you are an Indian, they will take more money. We get money from our parents, 200-300 USD a month, if we pay 150USD for house, what are we going to eat, how can we pay bills, busses, other expenses. So they should not make this much business with foreign people.

-So, you have to pay more than local people?

- So much more, when my Georgia friends asked me how much I pay for rent and I told 500-600 USD, they were shocked. They told it had to cost 300 USD.

India, student, year of arrival 2010

We are two people and pay 750 USD. You know how it is? Because we are foreigners, people take dollars from us, if we were Georgians, they would take GEL, and it would cost less. They kind of exploit the fact that we are foreigners. They exploit us. They are supposed to be hospitable. But they behave in the opposite way. Once I was looking for a house. Georgian agent told us it was 400 USD for Georgians, but for us it would be 450 or 500 USD.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (1)

Rent prices are problematic also for immigrants who come here to work and have blue collar jobs in hospitality or service sectors:

You know, I do not like many things in Georgia, for example, rent [...] I found one room and one hall nearly 300 USD, it's too much expensive to live in Georgia. Because if someone works, how would he get his 300 USD? You know in Georgia who works, [earns] nearly 600 GEL who works, maximum!

Syria, long-term residence, year of arrival 2013

However, since the housing market is largely unregulated by the state, and in most cases, the educational institutions do not have housing facilities that they can offer to students in need, the housing issues of student corps remain difficult to solve. The solution that educational immigrants found is apartment sharing, when there are several students living together, thus decreasing their accommodation costs. At the same time, in the long term perspective, if the higher educational institutions need to remain competitive, they could also implement certain measures, for instance establish an international student's unit, in order to offer support services, like housing, to international students will be a big step forward.

When it comes to everyday living costs, the opinions of the respondents differ - for immigrants from Turkey prices seem to be reasonable, and even cheaper than in Turkey, while immigrants from India complain about high and gradually increasing prices. Respondents are generally happy about the public transportation costs, which they find quite affordable.

Intolerance

Despite the existing 'hospitality and tolerance myth' among the Georgian population, the experience of the interviewed immigrants is not uniform. One businessman from Turkey noted, that people are nice in Georgia and he personally experiences no problems; he also doubted the fact that had other people from Turkey experienced problems with locals, they would have left. An immigrant from Iran, who came to Georgia for family reunification reason, shares similar attitude:

In the evening we go to park and there are foreigners there. Iranian and Georgian children play together. This is good. I like Georgia.

Iran, family reunification, year of arrival to Georgia 2013

However, some of the other respondents find their stay in the country to be lacking personal security. Many of them say that they experience hatred from the local population and even, and some of them have been under the threat of physical violence. The word '*zangi*'³⁴ - that could be translated as '*nigger*' along with '*maimuni*' - '*monkey*', is among the very few Georgian words that respondents use in the interviews. Although often the first impressions that foreigners get about the country is quite positive, because of the hostile attitudes they experience from the general public, their assessments change for worse. What is more important, it is not only verbal abuse, but sometimes a physical one as well:

*I like food here, I like the city and it is very beautiful. And Georgian people are nice when they want to be. But I do not like Georgia because of people's mentality about how they receive foreigners. I do not want to say that it is racial discrimination, but when I am walking in the street, people call me '*zangi*' and '*sheni* ..' and some bad words. [...] And some days ago I was at my friend's house, I was sitting next to the window, I was on the seventh floor. Someone from the downstairs picked up something and threw at me. I was like - what do you want? And he told me something like '*tsadi sheni*' [...].*

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (2)

Although for this particular respondent, fortunately, the incident ended where it started, one of his friends became a victim of a physical abuse in Tbilisi:

- Yes, my friend was beaten on the road, in the street, he was coming back home, it was 12 pm -1 am. He was just walking and some Georgian guys who were drunk jumped on him and beat him. He was in a hospital for a month.

- For a month?

³⁴ The word "zangi" was rather common in Georgia when talking about a person with black skin colour, however not fully acknowledged, that it may be an insulting term.

-Yes, he was on the news also, on the internet. And this case was not investigated at all, the police said there was no proof or anything, nothing was done.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2011 (2)

Here the respondent touches upon an important issue - role of the law enforcement agencies in monitoring and preventing similar violations. In some other interviews, respondents also expressed frustration with the Georgian police when it comes to investigation of racial discrimination cases. Since they believe they cannot rely on Georgian police, one of the strategies that immigrants employ in order not to get in trouble, is to avoid any potentially dangerous situations. However, in some cases, respondents talked about the positive interventions of the Georgian police when it was needed:

I just call the police and they immediately come. Once in Batumi one person came and told us there was not our place and we called the police and they made him pay a fine. The police told us that in all cases we can call them. So, the security is very good.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2012

Other instances of intollerant attitude is demonstrated in the reponses of Indian busineemen:

[about Georgians] Like foreigners, but they still consider us enemies. In Tbilisi they look at us realy badly. For them my attire is funny, but got uset to it...

Georgians do not like Indians. This is a problem and we are afraid that they might create trouble for us. However here, locals treat us well, but we still don't want to walk around alone. We feel more secure when together.

India, Businessman, year of arrival 2012

Besides individual abuses, businesses of the immigrants may be attacked. A hair-dressing salon of a friend of one of the respondents, was attacked by Georgians demanding he leaves the country. This case, as the respondent notes, *'makes you think, was it a mistake to come to Georgia or not?'* (Nigeria, students, arrived in 2011 (2)).

When speaking among the most intolerant groups of population, respondents often refer to the youth - and specifically, male youth, and the seniors - females.

[...] But I do not like that a few people, who see my skin, automatically think I am Nigerian. I do not know what is wrong with Nigerians, but they treat you differently and not in a good way. Especially the guys who are in the age group of 18-25 [...] And of course, in every country there are this kind of people, but others see it and just do not say anything, they just stand [...]. Sometimes strangers touch my hair, I do not understand why they do it.

Trinidad and Tobago, student, year of arrival 2011

Once [...] when I was waiting for a bus, an old woman came and looked at me, she saw I was with Indians. And she said - 'zangi', and spitted. I was very angry, but she was an old lady and I did not tell her anything. When they do it I feel so bad.

Nigeria, student, year of arrival 2012

- *Sometimes I meet drunk Georgians and they say something to us, they shout without any reason. That is why I told there is a little bit of racism, but it happens rarely.*

- ***And how do you solve those problems?***

- *We escape from such situations, we do not tell them anything, we try not to get in trouble.*

Sri-Lanka, student, year of arrival 2011

It may be because of stories like this that some foreigners are reluctant to deal with locals and live lives without much interaction with locals. One of the respondents, whose answer was not negative towards attitude may be an indication towards thus:

I don't know. Chinese do not have problems. We live our own life, we don't bother anyone and have no problem.

Chinese, Businessman, year of arrival 2009

During the focus group discussions questions about a general attitude towards the immigrants was asked. The answers received varied from positive to neutral and to negative; some respondents expressed fear towards certain groups of immigrants; some expressed annoyance and some appreciation. In this respect, the focus groups to certain extent represented all the varieties of attitudes towards immigration and immigrants, that one can find in Georgia. Below is an excerpt of a focus group discussion that demonstrates the rationale behind such attitudes as explained by respondents themselves:

- *R1: [...] Although there are ethnic groups, that are so different from our cultural habits, that they to a certain extent, annoy me..*

- ***Moderator: And who are these groups?***

- *R1: Take for example Indians, Pakistanis, and others. The way they dress, their habits, hygienic habits, they annoy me much more than Europeans or others. Maybe it's because we have more in common with them [Europeans] rather than people from Middle East, but at this point, I do not have aggression, because there are not so many of them.*

- *R2: And I am afraid of Iranians. When the visa regime was abolished [with Iran], I have an association with terrorism and to my mind, it is very dangerous them to come.*

- *R3: I do not have a very different attitude, I see foreigners outdoors, in the streets and do not have any kind of aggression towards them. If anybody is going to come, will invest and employ our people and will not bring his/her own people to employ, which is a positive factor, of course. There is a high unemployment here. [...] I will add one thing: if they are coming here forever, this will endanger our demographic situation, and at the end we will receive a very difficult situation in the country, it does not matter from where these immigrants will be coming. From such countries as Italy, France and others, which are much more developed than we are, I do not think there will be such a massive immigration from there.*

FG 1

This excerpt demonstrates the major reasons behind the attitudes of general population towards immigrants: the fear of the 'others' is rationalized as the fear of terrorism, fear of demographic crisis. Perception of immigrants as 'dirty', not having proper hygienic habits is not new when a society faces first more or less massive influx of immigrants - this was one of the major discourse in the USA when the massive immigration from Ireland, Italy and Eastern Europe started. As scholars of racism in the US discovered, that time Irish, Italians, and Polish immigrant were precisely considered to be 'dirty', to be 'criminals' and 'deviants' by the receiving society, and even of not being of 'white' race³⁵. However, gradually, all these groups overcame the discrimination, and now constitute an important part of American society, and the American society itself found resources to accommodate and incorporate them for the benefit of both. And this will be the task for the Georgian society as well, since, as in-depth interviews with immigrants demonstrate, it is not only the attitudinal problem, but some groups of Georgian population demonstrate open disapproval of respondents of non-Caucasian races, which they express both verbally, and physically. This is a quite alarming trend, which, if not given appropriate attention from the respective agencies, may develop in organized extremist/racist movements that will specifically target non-white individuals. Taking into consideration the apparent distancing of the local population from non-white immigrants and their exclusion, which, we assume, is based on a latent racism as well, this scenario is quite plausible. Already now, immigrant respondents mention cases when in the public transportation passengers switch seats if they sit next to them; cases, when if noted in the public spaces with 'white' companions, they and their companions are verbally abused; cases, when they are verbally and physically abused simply for walking the streets.

[...] I can go out anytime but I feel uncomfortable here when I am with my boyfriend - he is black, a lot of Georgians are racists. Especially young Georgians, but I remember one lady wanted to spit on me because I was with my boyfriend. She started talking in Georgian, but I did not understand it. She was old and could not do many things, but young people can. [...] I remember once some Georgian drunk guys stood in front of us and they wanted to know whether I was Georgian or not. And what I was doing with my boyfriend. Sometimes when we walk they start talking about us, calling bad words because of him, they stare at us like we are freaks and this scares me a lot.

Turkey, student, year of arrival 2009

This particular respondent herself notes that due to the fact that she looks '*like Georgian*', she personally never experienced any form of racism. However, as long as she is spotted with her non-white boyfriend, they both become objects of abuse. The boyfriend of this respondent, a student from Nigeria, reflecting on this situation noted in his interview: '*Sometimes, when I walk with my girlfriend, they think she is Georgian. But when they realize she is not, they walk away*'. They walk away because while what they think is permissible for a non-Georgian - walking with a black guy - is not permissible for a Georgian girl. This is typical racist reasoning, which, apparently calls for the 'purity' of blood.

³⁵ See, for example: Louise DeSalvo. (2003). Color: White/Complexion: Dark. In Jennifer Guglielmo & Salvatore Salerno, eds. *Are Italians White? How Racism is Made in America*. Pp. 18-19; Robert Miles & Malcolm Brown. (2003). *Racism* (2nd ed). P. 77.

At the same time, the following quote demonstrates that racism and discrimination is not the problem of a certain - we could say - uneducated or poorly education part of the population, but can be demonstrated by university professors as well, which clearly does not contribute to the creation of a healthy environment even within the higher educational institutions:

I have friends [...] and they know Russian, they told me some teachers were talking about some Indian and black students and making fun of them. He is a professor, he should not be doing that.

Turkey, student, year of arrival 2009

At the same time, some respondents note that they have never experienced any sign of racism or discrimination. Even immigrants from African or Middle Eastern countries, who are often victims of such an attitudes, nevertheless state that not every and single Georgian person they meet demonstrates such attitudes towards them. Hence, this could be rather a sign of a selective intolerance, which is manifested only in regard to representatives of certain groups. Such an attitude is presumable noticed by immigrants themselves, as one immigrant from Nigeria notes: "*Here [in Georgia] people do not like Chinese*", (Nigeria, work, year of arrival 2008), or another immigrant from Trinidad and Tobago specifically stressing that Georgian do not like Nigerians. As one of the Chinese immigrants himself notes: "*Some people are good. But some do not like us. [...] Why are we bad people? We do not steal anything. We work and do not cheat anybody*". Presumable, because of such attitude - in the case of this particular immigrant, his store was once looted by a Georgian customer - Chinese tend to keep in touch with each other rather than interacting with Georgians.

Based on the analysis of the interviews, along with Chinese, respondents with dark skin most often become subjects of selective intolerance:

Georgia is a beautiful country, I like Georgia, but there is a mental problems. Sometimes people, who see my skin, automatically have a bad reaction, I do not know why. Sometimes I meet people who are friendly, but mostly they have a bad reaction. But I feel safe - you can walk the street any hour of the night and feel totally safe. Maybe someone will come to you and say something, but no one will rob you.

Iraq, student, year of arrival 2013

Although the existing data do not provide opportunity to undertake a causal analysis, it seems that immigrants, who managed to integrate in the Georgian society - be it a Nigerian, or a Chinese, or a Turk - tend to dismiss racism and xenophobia. This assumption still need further research to be proved, but apparently, ability to integrate in the social and economic life and to create opportunities for interaction and communication between immigrants and local population is one of the solutions that can be employed in order to facilitate positive stay of immigrants in the country.

The few cases of intolerance described above, need to be given a special attention and preventive measures should be implemented both regarding the increasing the awareness of the local population on racism and racial discrimination issues, and local police officers on how to respond and prevent similar cases.

Language

Language barrier remains one of the most important problems for immigrants, and specifically, immigrants who do not have a regular contact with local population. Although the educational institutions provide its students with Georgian language classes - sometimes, one academic year long ones - based on the assessments expressed in the interviews, immigrants only manage to acquire the basic, survival Georgian language skills. Unless they themselves try to master it independently, they can hardly enter into a meaningful communication in Georgian with local population.

In case of labor migrants, some of them manage to learn Georgian quite well, with some of the interviews being recorded in Georgian language rather than in English. This could be explained by the fact that due to their regular interactions with local population, they are able to learn and practice the Georgian language. When in the case of educational immigrants, because the language of education is English, and, in most cases, their classes are quite multicultural, the language of communication with their classmates is again English rather than Georgian. At the same time, since, many of educational immigrants share apartments with either their fellow citizens or classmates, they do not have many opportunities to practice Georgian outside the school as well, hence, with little or no practice, their Georgian language skills remain passive.

When answering the question about who respondents mostly socialize with, it was precisely the language problem that was often mentioned as a reason why they cannot establish effective communication with the local population. Hence, language problem could be considered as an important barrier for a successful integration of immigrants in the Georgian society. Language problem was named by several educational immigrants as the main reason why they could not find a job in Georgia, although they are willing to work part-time or during the holidays.

Concluding remarks

To summarize, life of immigrants in Georgia varies greatly from being absolutely positive to rather negative, and full of regrets. The quality of life of immigrants in Georgia, regrettably, often depends on his/her skin color. Interaction with local population in some cases is almost non-existent, partly caused by the unwillingness of the local population to engage with immigrants, and partly due to lack of Georgian language capacities among immigrants.

Overall, based on the analysis of the in-depth interviews, a phenomenon of selective intolerance was noticed that some locals exhibit towards representative of certain nationalities. This is an alarming finding that calls for an immediate attention of the relevant authorities. Latent and manifest racism seem to undermine the positive sides of the life in Georgia for these particular groups of immigrants. That population is not ready and open towards immigrants, was demonstrated by the quantitative study results, that surveyed residents of Tbilisi: apparent exclusion of immigrants by a certain part of the general

population, xenophobic attitudes and need for further restriction of visa regime are more in detail analyzed in the sections below.

Immigrants in Georgia: Tbilisi Residents' View

Overall attitudes: anti-immigrant

Attitudes of sampled Tbilisi population towards immigrants and immigration to Georgia are more negative than positive. Although these data are not generalizable to the whole Georgian population, taking into consideration the fact that Tbilisi population's overall level of education and income is higher than in the regions, that they presumably have a higher exposure to immigrants, we still consider the results as symptomatic as to what is the magnitude of either anti- or pro-immigrant attitudes among the population.

Only 11 percent of the sampled population knows personally one or more migrants – hence, presumable, the attitudes of the bigger share of respondents towards immigrants and immigration are formed based on an indirect information regarding immigrants/immigrant to Georgia, rather than direct interactions with immigrants. Despite this, when asked whether respondents think that the level of immigration in the country increased, decreased or remained the same during the last three years, about two-thirds (64%) believed that it increased, while only 8% think that it decreased, with 24% agreeing with the option that number of immigrants to Georgia remained the same.

As demonstrated by other studies, TV in Georgia is often the major source of news. It is true in the case of provision of information regarding immigrants and immigration - TV was named more often (38%) as a major source of information for respondents regarding immigrants living in Georgia, followed by friends/close acquaintances (22%), and internet (8%). Hence – how TV represents immigrants to Georgia is important in contributing to formation of attitudes of the respondents towards immigrants.

Overall, the study revealed that a significant part of the sampled population has certain phobias of Georgia and Georgian society threatened by immigrants – that due to high fertility rate of immigrants they may outnumber Georgians turning them into minority; that immigrants buying land and settling densely will result in them requesting autonomy. Based on the analysis of collected data, the majority of the sampled population is far from being open and inclusive of immigrants. Hence, the quantitative data indirectly confirms the experiences of immigrants presented in the sections above - from a population exhibiting intolerance, it is difficult to expect tolerant attitudes towards immigrants. Below we will focus on the analysis of several major findings of the quantitative survey.

Intolerance

Majority of respondents exhibit clear exclusionist attitudes towards immigrants. They do not only oppose the idea of immigrants settling permanently or long term in Georgia, but oppose

the idea of foreign citizens coming to visit Georgia short-term as well. At the same time, this exclusionism is not directed towards all immigrants, regardless from which countries they come. On the contrary, Tbilisi residents are quite selective in this sense, and direct their exclusionism to immigrants coming from certain countries only – mostly, from Asia, Middle East, immigrants having different skin color, and to immigrants of other than Orthodox Christian religion. Hence, quite high level of exclusionist attitudes that call for ‘closing’ the country and limiting entry of representatives of certain nationalities.

When asked what are the three major things/factors that respondents like and do not like when dealing with immigrants, about a third of the sample (30%) stated that they do not like anything about immigrants; yet another 24 percent was hard to answer the question, which makes more than half of the sample being unable to name at least a single positive thing associated with immigrants in Georgia (Table 5). On the other hand, only 9 percent of the sample said that there is nothing that makes them uneasy when they deal with immigrants.

Table 5. What Tbilisi residents like/dislike about immigrants

<i>When it comes to dealing with immigrants, are there any three the most important things/factors, that you do not like/that irritate you?</i>	%	<i>When it comes to dealing with immigrants, are there any three the most important things/factors that you like?</i>	%
Settling of foreigners in Georgia will lead to shortage of jobs for local population	18	Do not like anything/everything irritates me	30
I do not like that they are loud in public spaces and outdoors/streets	10	They run businesses successfully / use modern techniques how to run wbusiness	11
Dissemination of different culture/religion will threaten Georgian traditions	10	Deal responsibly with their jobs/affairs	7
Living next to representatives of other cultures/religion will lead to proliferation of various diseases	10	I learn a lot of interesting things about foreign countries thanks to interacting with them	4
I like everything/ nothing irritates me	9	Investments	4
It irritates me when they marry Georgian girls/boys	6	It’s interesting to live next to representatives of other cultures	4
It irritates me when they hang out with Georgian girls/boys	4	Interacting with them lets me improve foreign language proficiency	2

Immigrants, perceived by Tbilisi residents as ‘others’, are, hence, considered as a certain threat to the existing status quo. The reasons that irritate Tbilisi residents when it comes to immigrants, presented in the Table 5 above, are quite symptomatic, and signal proliferation of certain phobias and myths in the society. The fact, that immigrants do not pose competition to the local population with regards to employment opportunities is well documented in

numerous studies³⁶. Moreover, for a country like Georgia with high unemployment rate and job scarcity, immigrants, on the contrary, are often the job creators rather than job 'stealers'. Yet another phobia is connected with the belief that immigrants threaten Georgian traditions and their presence will contribute to the proliferation of various diseases.

At the same time, however, if considered as a resource rather than a threat, immigrants may contribute to the cultural exchange, to sharing diverse experiences, to bringing the world closer to Georgian society and increasing level of multiculturalism of the Georgian society. Those respondents who find in the presence of immigrants positive sides, specifically mention their business skills, benefits of interaction with them, and investments, that they bring to the country. These are the foundations that could be used to build on if the long-term goal for the country's development is diversity and inclusion.

Further closure

Bigger share of the sampled population believes that at the time of the fieldwork it was quite easy for foreign nationals both to receive tourist/short-term visa and get Georgian citizenship. On a scale from '1' to '11', where '1' meant 'very difficult' and '11' – 'very easy' to obtain visa for a foreigner – only 5% chose options from '1' to '5', i.e. 'difficult', while 74% - options from '7' to '11', with only 2% choosing neutral '6'. Another 18% was hard to answer this question. The mean score is 9.45. On a question measuring easiness/difficulty of getting Georgian citizenship for foreign nationals where the same scale was used, only 8% of respondents stated that it was difficult to get Georgian citizenship (options from '1' to '5'), while 63% thought that it was either somehow, or very easy to get Georgian citizenship (options from '7' to '11'). In this case 23% was hard to answer, and yet another 5% chose a neutral option. The mean score in this case is 8.77, i.e. respondents believe that getting Georgian citizenship is slightly more difficult than getting a Georgian visa. But in both cases mean scores are quite high, and well demonstrate the overall assessment of the visa/citizenship situation by respondents - it is easy to get Georgian visa, and it is easy to get Georgian citizenship.

On a question requiring respondents to either agree or disagree with two statements (Table 6), about two-third of the sample (aggregation of options: 'completely agree' and 'agree') chose the second one – a statement which not only argued that granting of the Georgian citizenship to foreign nationals needs to be limited, but that nationals of certain countries should never be allowed to become Georgian citizens. About a quarter of the sample agreed (aggregation of options: 'completely agree' and 'agree') with the first statement.

Table 6. Citizenship: limiting or not

<u>Statement 1:</u>	<u>Statement 2:</u>
Citizen of any country who came to	Granting of Georgian citizenship should be limited,

³⁶ Migration Policy Institute. Immigration and the labor market: Theory, evidence and policy. Available at: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/Immigration-and-the-Labour-Market.pdf>.

Georgia has to be able to become Georgian citizen according to existing legal framework and defined timeframe.		and citizens of certain foreign countries should not be allowed under any circumstances to become a Georgian citizen even according to existing legal framework and defined timeframe.	
<i>Completely agree with the first statement</i>	<i>Agree with the first statement</i>	<i>Agree with the second statement</i>	<i>Completely agree with the second statement</i>
7%	18%	26%	40%
Agree with none of the statements		5%	
<i>Hard to answer</i>		4%	

Two-thirds of the sample believe that visa regulations need to be tightened in relation to representatives of certain countries; another 59% of sampled population supports the idea that nationals of certain countries should be banned from granting Georgian citizenship altogether. Surprisingly, the list of top ‘blacklisted’ countries is almost identical (Table 7).

Table 7. Visa/citizenship restrictions

According to your opinion, in relation to representatives of which countries should be tightened issuance of entry visas to Georgia?		Please, name, in relation to citizens of which countries granting of Georgian citizenship should not be allowed?	
Country	% ³⁷	Country	% ³⁸
China	19	China	19
African Countries	17	African Countries	16
India	13	India	12
Iran	12	Iran	12
Pakistan	8	Pakistan	8
Nigeria	7	Nigeria	7
Turkey	7	Turkey	8
Egypt	3	Egypt	3
Russia	2	Syria	4
Syria	2	Russia	2
All countries	3	All countries	3
Other	5	Other	5
Do not know/Refuse to answer	1	Do not know/Refuse to answer	1

As the table above demonstrates, when asked, in relation to representatives of which countries visa regulations need to be tightened or nationals of which countries have to be banned from granting Georgian citizenship altogether, respondents more often name following countries: China, and, vaguely, - ‘African countries’, although some of them specifically mention ‘Nigeria’ as well. And if we combine these two answers – ‘African countries’ and ‘Nigeria’, we get 23-24% of ‘afro-phobes’, which constitute about 15-16% of

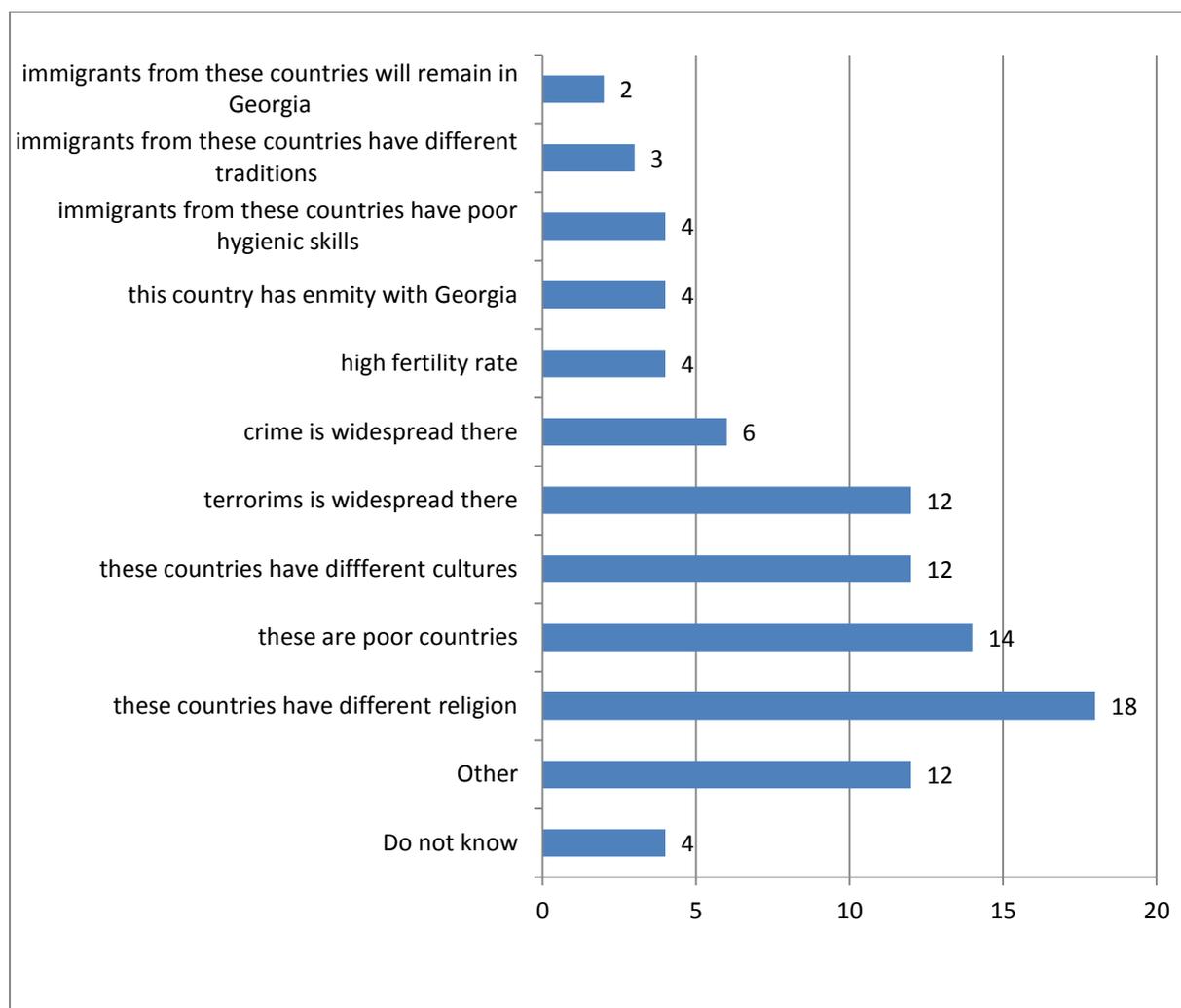
³⁷ Percent calculated from the 66% of the sample that thinks that visa regulations need to be tightened in relation to citizens of certain countries.

³⁸ Percent calculated from the 59% of the sample that thinks that citizens of certain countries should not be awarded Georgian citizenship.

the total sample. Not a single Western European or Northern American country made it to the top 10 countries, citizens of which, according to respondents, are not welcome in Georgia. At the same time, there is a minor share of the respondents – ‘hardcore xenophobes’- 3% - that thinks that nationals of all countries should be banned from entering the country in one way or another.

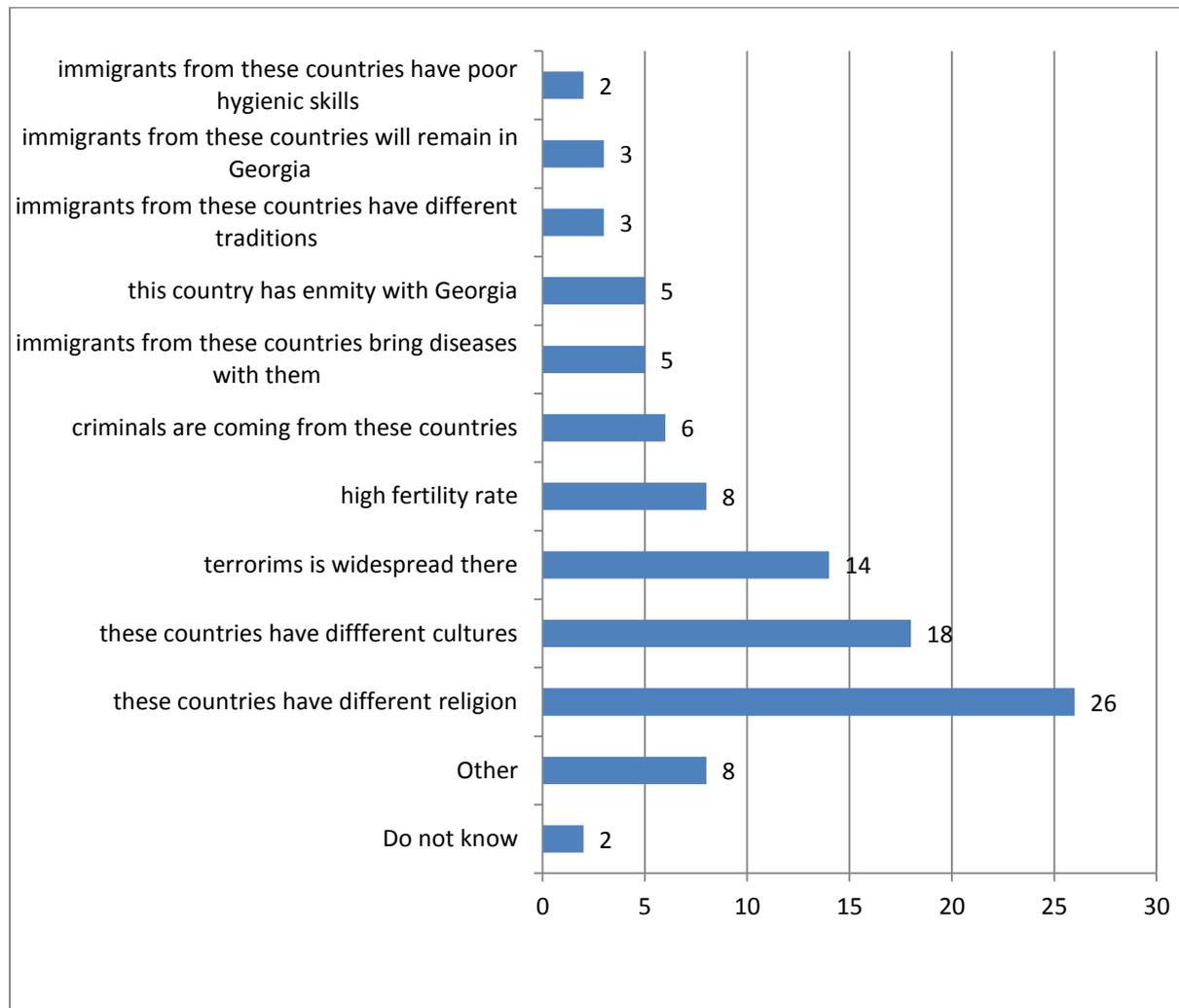
Main reasons why respondents think that citizens of these countries need to be subject of visa/citizenship restrictions, again, are quite similar. On a question, why respondents think that visa regulations need to be tightened in regard to citizens of this or that country, the major reasons named refer to differences in religion, cultures, terrorism, as well as a classical reference to the immigrants as being ‘dirty’, criminals and terrorists (Graphs 3-4). At the same time, issue of 'high fertility' among immigrants is a clear reference to the fear of their numbers increasing in the country, that may sometime in the future change demographic situation.

Graph 3. Why do you think that visa restrictions should be imposed on the countries that you named (in a preceding question)? % ³⁹



³⁹ % of the sample that answered this question.

Graph 4. Why do you think that granting Georgian citizenship should not be allowed to the citizens of countries that you named (in a preceding question)? % ⁴⁰



Attitudes of sampled Tbilisi population differ quite visibly when asked about tourists and foreign nationals, who come to Georgia on a long-term basis with the aim to work and do business. In the first case the majority of the sample agrees with the statement that 'citizens of foreign countries should have the right to come to Georgia as tourists' with the mean score of 9.76. In the latter case, the majority disagrees, and the mean score is 4.97⁴¹. Hence, while Tbilisi residents are quite positive with the foreigners coming as tourists, on a short term visits, they are not that open with the prospects of a long-term stay of immigrants. And possibly, here is when the paradox of Georgian hospitality can be solved: while being hospitable and open towards 'guests' - and in this case, guest is a short-term visitor, Georgians, maybe due to recent traumatic conflicts in Georgia, or maybe due to the complexes of 'small nation', or maybe due to latent xenophobia and racism, or maybe due to insecure economic conditions in the country, tend to perceive long-term immigrants rather as

⁴⁰ % of the sample that answered this question.

⁴¹ In both questions the same scale from '1' to '11' was used, where '1' denoted 'completely disagree', and '11' denoted 'agree completely'.

a threat. Or, these reasons may all interplay and result in the need for exclusion, abuse, and discrimination.

During one of the focus group discussions, an idea of 'quotas' was discussed - participants - 'qualitative quotas', to let certain type of immigrants in the country, and, respectively, ban certain type of immigrants from entering Georgia. However, how this 'quota' is going to work and who is going to set the criteria, whether this 'quota' may become a discriminatory tool or not, is a crucial question. There is a quite ample evidence of how countries use immigrant quotas, or point systems, in order to make sure that they attract the 'right' immigrants, but it should be also taken into account, that on the one hand, these are in most cases developed countries, that due to well developed labor market data have quite clear idea where they experience labor force shortages and, on the other, they can offer access to more important resources than Georgia could at this stage afford.

Focus group participants also noted an important aspect that apparently affects the way they treat immigrants - the willingness of immigrants themselves to integrate. This could be a simple desire to study Georgian language, that is very much valued by respondents; this could be the fact, that an immigrant has certain skills, or that an immigrant behaves 'like Georgia' - all these things are highly appreciated. And this refers to all immigrants, regardless of their country of origin:

- R1: For example, close to my work an Egyptian guys has a grocery store open. Personally he is a very good guy, but I want to stress here your attention that he leant Georgian. When I go in the store, I talk to him in Georgian, what I want, and he also more or less responds in Georgian, tells me how much it costs and so on. This all makes me very positive towards him and this motivation should be exactly immigrants when they go to other countries to live.

-R2: I know several foreigners who know how to write and read in Georgian fluently.

FG2

- R1: Turks are very hardworking people. [...] and they are very clean. Some Georgian restaurants are not as clean as Turkish ones.

-R2: Turks and Chinese, both, are very hardworking people. Many Georgian may find it demeaning to do jobs that they are doing, but they are not ashamed of that.

FG1

- R1: I witnessed this in the public transport, which made me think positively about habits of Turks, maybe they are closer to us in terms of some habits, be it respecting people, for example. There were 6 Indians in the bus, and several aged passengers got in, and they [Indians] did not get up, continued talking as usual. And there was another case, when elderly passengers got in the bus, and Turks were sitting, and they [Turks] got up and vacated their seats for them. Such habits are characteristic for Georgians, and we have something in common.

-R2: I can also bring one example - about black persons. I remember well once, when my black friend got up and let a Georgian woman take his seat saying - 'Deda [mother in Georgian], sit down'. And I was ashamed that I saw that woman only after he already gave her his seat [...]

-R3: *Black persons are in most cases very well behaved people, kind and positive.*

FG1

When it comes to other positive sides of immigration as seen by respondents, these are often economic ones and are associated in the first place with investing in Georgia. However, investment here is understood quite specifically - buying land is not good. Similarly, opening a small business where immigrants themselves are employed. However, opening a business, which employs local population, that brings benefits to locals, and contributes to the economic development of the country - is appreciated and assessed positively. And here comes the role of the state, that needs to regulate the issues related to the entry and stay of immigrants in the country. Some focus group participants were quite explicit in pointing out that this sphere is not properly regulated, that it should be the state to set the standards for the immigrants, be it a student, investor or a worker. It is the role of the state to make sure that the investor employs local workforce, or that workers are living in proper housings and have proper working conditions.

Concluding remarks

In the sections above we mainly focused on the discussion of attitudes of Tbilisi residents as well as focus group participants in Tbilisi, Batumi and Telavi, towards immigration and immigrants. These attitudes vary to a certain degree ranging from unwelcoming and hostile to open and positive. For a country that started to face immigration quite recently, cautiousness towards immigration and immigrants is quite understandable. However, as one of the participants of focus groups pointed out, *'If we think about it, it is what globalization is about, borders are open too and everywhere happens the same'* (FG 2).

Hence, Georgia will either get used to immigration and immigrants, or will end up in conflicting relations with immigrants, that might eventually lead to the closure and exclusionism of the country. For a successful integration of immigrants their willingness is not enough - the receiving communities need to be ready to open up and let them become a full-pledged members of the societies. What the results of Tbilisi population and focus groups unfortunately demonstrate, at this stage the receiving communities still need to undertake important steps in this direction.

Recommendations

What the results of the survey of Tbilisi residents and focus groups demonstrate, anti-immigrant attitudes are quite openly manifested by the respondents. However, when we deal with anti-immigrant and discriminatory sentiments expressed by the respondents, they could be also considered as a manifestation of an overall poor understanding of the concept of human rights and anti-discrimination, that, in a current quite difficult economic situation that Georgia is currently facing, may be easily amplified with immigrants becoming 'scapegoats'.

More globally, ability to accept the 'other' is at the core of the existing attitudes of Tbilisi residents towards immigrants. Hence, the more the issue of immigration and immigrants is on the agenda of policymaking and public discourse, the better opportunities for Georgian society becoming more open.

When thinking about the development of the immigration policy, the major question that the Georgian society - and the Georgian government - needs to answer, is what kind of society they want to build - an inclusive one, where foreigners coming to the country feel safe and secure along with the local population, or a 'closed' one, where xenophobic attitudes and hatred towards the 'others' are cultivated. What we witness now is an ambivalent state of mind: on the one hand the Government is speaking about the 'adherence' to the European values and commitments to become a member of the European family, which is precisely built on the idea of inclusiveness, and on the other hand some immigrants in the interviews indicate the lack of safety and security concerns. If strategically approached, Georgia could use its position to attract quite specific groups of immigrants that benefit the country both short and long-term. To achieve this goal, a set of complex measures need to be taken, including but not limited to the strengthening of the rule of law, overall improvement of the level of education of the population, increasing media professionalism, and, of course, advancing the abovementioned political agenda in all the groups of the population.

Below are presented several major directions that could be addressed in order to improve the situation:

1. Relevant state institutions could hold regular information sessions with the appropriate representatives of higher education institutions and intermediary companies with international students in order to disseminate information and familiarize them: a) with the requirements/procedures for international students to obtain student visas/student residence permits, and b) with the responsibilities of the inviting higher education institutions in this respect.
2. Relevant state institutions should develop a clear set of justification criteria to accompany each visa related decision, and specifically, refusals to grant the requested immigrant status. The justifications for the decision should be delivered to the applicants in Georgian and English languages. Moreover, consistency shall be ensured when a person is denied a residence permit on the grounds of public order and national security; the research shows that frequently no further action is taken against the immigrant after receiving refusal on this ground and can legally stay in the country on other grounds. Therefore, it creates feeling of insecurity and arbitrary decision-making among immigrants;
3. Relevant state institutions could provide guidance for immigrants to familiarize them with the requirements/procedures for immigrants to renew/obtain student visas/students permits/residence permits. The guidance can be advertised through the diplomatic representations of the countries, via diaspora organizations and through institutions (including their web sites), which provide services for immigrants. Guidance in the form of legislation is not sufficient and does not address differences in the level of comprehension among immigrants.

4. Relevant state organizations and NGOs could coordinate to organize a mass scale Information Campaign with the goal to decrease xenophobia and hatred towards the immigrants, especially in the communities affected by a relatively high immigration level and support their acceptance through joint community initiatives aimed at:
 - a. General Georgian population;
 - b. For secondary school students and teachers;
 - c. Georgian youth.
5. A working group in Immigration issues could be established in the framework of the State Commission on Migration Issues, which will develop a strategy of immigrant integration based on the protection of fundamental human rights, and human dignity.
6. There is a need of implementing immigrant integration framework, which will encompass all immigrants, not only refugees and people with humanitarian status or stateless persons. The state immigrant integration program activities should be coordinated with the activities of the relevant local civil society organisations and international organisations to facilitate successful immigrant integration.
7. The Ministry of Education and Sciences could establish a special unit that will a) create a database of certified consultancy services operating in the foreign countries, that offer education in Georgia; b) on behalf of the Ministry approves all enrolment of the foreign students in the Georgian universities; c) provide a list of approved foreign students to the PSDA in order to ensure the issuance of proper student visas. The unit will update the list annually based on the university exams and enrollment procedures, and provide the PSDA with the updated lists in due time.
8. Special trainings for media representatives should be organized both by the relevant state and international/local NGOs working in migration sphere to increase skills of journalists in covering issues related to immigrants and immigration.
9. Establishment of an Immigrant Day event, that could be celebrated once, or twice a year, nationwide, with the aim to familiarize immigrant cultures to the local population, and familiarize Georgian culture to the immigrant populations. The Immigrant Day event may also incorporate an immigrant parade, a popular event in many countries. Immigrant Day may become an event uniting state organizations, NGOs, and grass-root CSOs, with the aim to bring local population and immigrants together.

Annex 1

Reason for granting residence permits from 2009 through 2014

Reason for issuing a residence permit	Number of residence permits issued in 2009-2014
Person is involved in professional activity / freelance professions	19263
Granted to the family member/custodian/person being under custody of the citizen of Georgia/holder of the Georgian residence permit	4743
Person's Georgian citizenship was terminated/ a person voluntarily renounced the Georgian citizenship	4555
To study/for medical treatment	3578
Reason not known	1597
Invited by the Government entity as a highly skilled person	514
Works in religious or charity organisation	299
Has been legally residing in Georgia for more than 6 years	9

Source: Public Service Development Agency