

Estimates for Georgian Migrants in Turkey: Regular and Irregular Migration

ENIGMMA Working Paper

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Abstract

Official migration statistics only show a partial picture of labour and other migration flows due to the informal nature of many jobs. Adding up net emigration from Georgia during recent years, total emigrant stocks might be twice as high as officially recorded or estimated. This factor is probably even higher for Turkey, given its proximity and relative ease of immigration and circulation. Based on previous work on emigration indicators for Georgia and an extensive data collection, I propose an estimate for the number of regular and irregular Georgian migrants in Turkey, contributing to a much-needed evidence-based discussion.

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1. Introduction

Turkey continues to be one of the major destinations for Georgian labour migrants. Established migration networks, the relative ease of movement due to the visa-free regime, and higher wages and opportunities in Turkey's formal and informal labour market attract many – often seasonal – workers from Georgia who are mainly occupied in agriculture, retail, tourism, manufacturing, construction as well as care and domestic work¹.

Many Georgians are working in the informal economy in Turkey, and numbers seem to have been increasing within the last 15 years. The geographic proximity, a liberal visa regime and an established informal labour market in Turkey are among the main facilitating factors for Georgian circular migrants, who exit and re-enter Turkey to comply with visa regulations (Georgians are exempted from visa for travels of up to 90 days). While wages in the informal labour market are not necessarily lower than for Turkish workers, employers prefer foreign workers, benefitting from their irregular status by e.g. not providing social security for them. In the construction sector, Georgians are willing to work for lower wages than local workers.

Georgia has been experiencing continued emigration since its independence, albeit decreasing in volume in recent years. Migration statistics for Georgia are contested, and recent census results from 2014 have shown a marked population decline since 2002². Existing reports and data point to widespread undercoverage of emigration and emigrants, likely also related to irregular and circular migration³. Irregular migration is likely to be a main reason for the current undercoverage of emigrants from Georgia, as both migration flow data as well as census data for Georgia are unable to capture all forms of emigration adequately⁴.

2. Irregular Migration

I argue that this is also the case for the Georgia-Turkey migration corridor. The latest available data (for the year 2015) from the Turkish Statistical Institute refer to 25,019 immigrants in Turkey born in Georgia (see table 1). These population statistics are based on the population registers. As I will show, even this figure based on register data probably only covers a fraction of all Georgian migrants.

Compared to the 25,000 immigrants by country of birth, the number of Georgian citizens resident in Turkey is lower by a quarter and amounts to 19,091. The difference is likely to be the number of naturalised persons born in Georgia – although this cannot be corroborated as naturalisation data are not available after 2007.

Regarding flows, immigration and emigration statistics are not publicly available from Turkish statistics. The latest available immigration data reported to EUROSTAT are from 2011, and there is no data at all for emigration from Turkey since 2005 (the time-frame considered for the analysis). However, changes in stocks do point to continuous immigration, and particularly large (net) inflows between 2012 and 2015 (see table 1, data only shown for 2010-2015). This net increase consisted almost entirely of an increase among female migrants. The number of female migrants with Georgian

¹ Badurashvili, I. (2012). Circular migration in Georgia; Toksöz, G., Erdogdu, S., & Kaska, S. (2012). Irregular Labour Migration in Turkey and Situation of Migrant Workers in the Labour Market; Tchaidze, R., & Torosyan, K. (2010). Development on the Move : Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia.

² GeoStat. (2016). Population. http://www.geostat.ge/index.php?action=page&p_id=152&lang=eng

³ Hosner, R., Zurabishvili, T., & Hofmann, M. (2016). Putting the Pieces Together: Identifying Emigration Indicators for Georgia. Forthcoming.

⁴ Tukhashvili, M. (2012). Statistical data collection on migration in Georgia.

citizenship increased from around 1,500 in 2012 to 13,200 in 2013, while the corresponding increase among male migrants was minor in comparison (from around 900 to 2,400). A similar pattern is visible from 2014 to 2015, bringing the total share of women among Georgian migrants to 88% in 2015 (compared to 62% in 2011). This finding is consistent with other studies that point out the large share of female Georgian emigrants in Turkey who are employed in child care, housekeeping and other forms of domestic work⁵.

Table 1. Stock and flow indicators for migrants from Georgia in Turkey, 2010-2015

Population (migrant stock)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Migrants (country of birth)	:	5,000	:	:	:	25,019
of which female (in %)	:	:	:	:	:	84%
Migrants (citizenship)	:	1,740	2,441	15,653	13,475	19,091
of which female (in %)	:	62%	63%	84%	86%	88%
Regular migration (flows)	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Immigrants (citizenship)	334	384	:	:	:	:

Sources: TURKSTAT. (2016). Foreign-born population by place of birth and sex, 2015; EUROSTAT. (2016). Population on 1 January by five year age group, sex and citizenship. [migr_pop1ctz]; EUROSTAT. (2016). Immigration by five year age group, sex and citizenship [migr_imm1ctz].

Given the absence of data on migration flows (after 2011), another indicator to consider is residence permits. For 2015 alone, the recently established Directorate General of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior reports more than 19,000 residence permits issued during that year, most of them (around 9,400) work permits, the category where Georgia ranks first before Ukraine and Syria, followed by permits for family reasons (around 2,800, see table 2). Data from previous years is not available disaggregated by citizenship. Education is not a main migration motive for Georgians – the number of Georgian students in tertiary education in Turkey fluctuated between 40 and 230 in recent years.

The total volume of Georgian emigrants and/or migrant workers in Turkey has been estimated to be much higher, with widely diverging figures. A recent study⁶ gives estimates for the overall population of regular and irregular migrants from Georgia in Turkey between 150,000 and 5 million (a much too broad and highly implausible estimate based on the number of seized and deported irregular migrants), and for the number of Georgians employed in the informal sector between 290,000 and 380,000 (estimate based on border crossing data).

Table 2. Stay and Residence Indicators for Georgians (by citizenship) in Turkey, 2010-2015

Stay and residence	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Residence permits (on 31 Dec)	:	:	:	:	:	19,242
Family reasons	:	:	:	:	:	2,771
Work permits	:	:	:	:	:	9,398
International students in tertiary education	311	380	424	45	:	:

Sources: DGMM. (2016). Statistics on Residence Permits; UNESCO. (2016). International student Mobility in tertiary education. Inbound internationally mobile students by country of origin.

⁵ Tchaidze, R., & Torosyan, K. (2010). Development on the Move : Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia.

⁶ Toksöz, G., Erdogdu, S., & Kaska, S. (2012). Irregular Labour Migration in Turkey and Situation of Migrant Workers in the Labour Market.

3. Remittances

It has been suggested before that remittances data can provide relevant indicators for understanding migration systems⁷. Indeed, remittances sent and received might be a viable proxy for the size of migrant populations, in conjunction with other migration indicators.

Remittance data from the National Bank of Georgia show much larger amounts of transfers than would be expected based on the official number of Georgian emigrants in Turkey. What is more, taking into consideration the circular character of migration to Turkey, the share of remittances transferred via unofficial channels or brought personally by migrants themselves could also be quite high. Official remittances sent from Turkey to Georgia in 2015 amounted to almost 69 million US Dollars, up from 64 million in 2014 (see table 3). After the Russian Federation, Greece, Italy and the US, remittances sent from Turkey sent to Georgia show the highest volume. The total number of transfers – sent through money transfer operators and banks – stood at around 194,000, which translates into an average transfer of 356 US Dollars or 963 Turkish Lira.

Table 3. Remittances indicators for Georgia and Turkey, 2010-2015

Remittances	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
Money transfers sent (in 1,000 USD)	33,628	27,643	29,980	41,736	64,337	68,945
Money transfers sent, average amount (USD)	:	:	:	333	423	356
Money transfers sent, number of flows	:	:	:	125,062	151,923	193,731
Money transfers sent (in 1,000 TRY)	50,574	46,129	53,938	79,223	140,538	186,606
Money transfers sent, average amount (TRY)	:	:	:	633	925	963

Sources: National Bank of Georgia. (2016). Statistics, Money Transfers by Countries, 2000-2016 (REMC); National Bank of Georgia. (2016). Money Transfers by Countries, 2013-2015. Unpublished data; OANDA. (2016). Average Exchange Rates. <http://www.oanda.com/currency/average>; own calculations.

The Georgia on the Move study⁸ investigated migration as well as remittance behaviour, based on a survey among returned migrants and non-migrants in Georgia, and is so far the best (quantitative) source to explore remittance sending on the micro level. 83% of migrants who had returned from Turkey reported that they had sent remittances. 62% said they had used banks and money transfer agencies, 31% had entrusted remittances to friends or other personal contacts. On average, migrants made 6 transfers per person per year.

Applying these factors to the total number of transfers⁹, I arrive at an estimate of 61,000 migrants (stocks) in Turkey in 2015 – an estimate more than twice as high as the official statistics of 25,000, and therefore in line with the hypothesis that the factor of underestimation is at least two. As emigration from Georgia is drastically undercovered, and this is likely to be particularly acute for the Georgia-Turkey corridor, I am confident that this estimate is sound (see table 4).

⁷ Hosner, R., Zurabishvili, T., & Hofmann, M. (2016). Putting the Pieces Together: Identifying Emigration Indicators for Georgia. Forthcoming.

⁸ Tchaidze, R., & Torosyan, K. (2010). Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia.

⁹ Estimated number of migrants (year x) = Number of transfers / average number of remittances per person per year / share of money transfers of all remittances / share of remittance senders among migrants.

Table 4. Estimate for Georgian migrant stock in Turkey, 2015

Population (migrant stock)	2015
Migrants (stock) - estimate (based on remittances data)	61,000

Sources: own calculations and estimates; National Bank of Georgia. (2016). Statistics, Money Transfers by Countries, 2000-2016 (REMC); National Bank of Georgia. (2016). Money Transfers by Countries, 2013-2015.; Tchaidze, R., & Torosyan, K. (2010). Development on the Move: Measuring and Optimising Migration's Economic and Social Impacts in Georgia.

It has to be noted that the data for the Development on the Move study were collected in 2008, whereas the remittances data used are from 2015. So remittance sending behaviour might have changed during that time (more remittance senders, higher number of transfers sent, larger share of migrants using MTOs), which would result in different estimates. To my knowledge Tchaidze and Torosyan's study is the most recent available.

4. Conclusion

Although irregular migration is a phenomenon which is hard to assess and corroborate with data, the objective was to suggest an estimate for regular and irregular migrants (who take up residence) from Georgia in Turkey. Summarising the data collection and the analyses above I propose a point estimate - 61,000 migrants - for the total number of regular and irregular migrants in Turkey for 2015, based on remittances data and a migrant survey. This estimate is considerably higher than official statistics, but lower than existing estimates. Considering the large number of Georgian emigrants unaccounted for, the magnitude of the estimate seems plausible.