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FORCED MIGRATION IN GEORGIA AND ITS SOCIAL AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCES

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The collapse of the Soviet Union and formation of the new independent states was followed by the grave economic and political crisis that in its turn gave the rise to ethnic conflicts and a large-scale population forced migration in Georgia. Owing to the ethnic cleansing the population in Georgia driven from Abkhazia and former South Ossetian Autonomous District accounted for approximately 270 thousand people, 99% of them were Georgians. In the conditions of the widespread crisis only 37% of the households were settled in other regions of the country in an organized way. A Great part of them stay with relatives, friends or in rented apartments. With the aim of studying social and demographic situation the author conducted some surveys of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Through these surveys we received certain information about socio-economic situation of forced migrants, social disposition, demographic situation and reproductive behavior. The survey involved primarily the IDPs from Abkhazia. Through the survey it was found that destruction caused by the war greatly affected the family structure. Before ethnic cleansing in Abkhazia a great part of families consisted of extended households, and at present their number has dropped from 44.8% to 9.3%. On the contrary the incomplete nuclear households have expanded from 2.1% to 39.6%. Many family members are scattered. Our study showed that internally displaced persons have maintained their demographic unity in spite of their territorial distribution. In their newlywed families 60% of couples are their representatives (IDPs). It should be noted that IDPs suffer from lack of dwelling spaces. 62% of their households live only in one room, 32.5% - in double room. A great part of them are unemployed (64%) and they make a living with illegal employment and petty trade. The grave social being has influenced the demographic reproductive rates of the IDPs. The crude birth rate has dropped to 6 births per 1000 population. Prior to the conflict in Abkhazia this indicator was at 16.7 births per 1000. The reduction of necessary resources for demographic growth and growing death rate has formed the tendency of natural decrease. The average life expectancy has reduced. Through the sociological survey it was found the reproductive attitude in newlywed couples. Over half of them (53.3%) are going to have only one child within next five years and the remainder has desire to have two children. They indicate the grave financial situation (51.6%) as the main reason for low fertility. Such situation gradually lessens the possibility of demographic restoration of Abkhazia. In our estimation, at present about 150 thousand people reside in Abkhazia that is 28% of the previous population resided there prior to the conflict. For the restoration of reproductive regime and for formation of the optimum demographic situation of the internally displaced persons it is necessary to develop a targeted state program which will include the governmental assistance for fertility growth as well as protection of mothers and children. Georgian Orthodox Church and numerous nongovernmental organizations can make important contribution to
demographic salvation of internally displaced persons. Particular attention should be paid to the international assistance and its effective use.

**Keywords**: Georgia, Migration, Internally displaced persons.

**Introduction**

The massive and uncontrolled movement of population involving millions of people has become a salient and worrying feature of the post-Soviet scene. Against a background of political instability, economic disorder and ethnic conflicts, the vast and diverse region once filled by the former USSR and since replaced by the loose non-state formation - the Commonwealth of Independent State (CIS), has been experiencing the largest refugee and migratory flows since the Second World War. Although the movements have so far largely remained within and between the successor states of the USSR, the scale and complexity of existing and potential problems of forced migration have serious and far reaching implications for neighboring countries and the international community generally.

At present the most pressing problem to be solved in Georgia is how to deal with the ethnic conflicts and eliminate their effects as smoothly as possible. Careful scientific assessment and thorough study of ethnic conflicts and forced migration as phenomena will help to avoid their numerous adverse effects.

Although these conflicts in Georgia include other dimensions in addition to the ethnic one - e.g. political, economic, environmental - they are referred to here as ethnic conflicts because members of certain groups are being assaulted, killed or otherwise "removed" from certain areas and symbols of their cultural identity destroyed by members of other groups in large part because of their involuntary membership in those groups: they are killed, and their villages and towns are leveled, not because of what they have done, but because of who they are. Ethnic cleansing is, among other things, a sign of genocide.

In any country ethnic conflicts lead to intensive increase of migration processes. That creates abnormal political situation and forces the major part of its population to flee to more politically stable region or neighboring country in hope to maintain decent family life and continue economic and general work activities.

Georgia, as a newly sovereign state has neither the experience nor the institutions to manage this large-scale forced movement of people. From this point our subject of research is greatly in need of study of the results of analogical studies for other countries as such phenomena - ethnic conflicts and forced migration didn't take place in Georgia before and they have not been studied.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the formation of the New Independent States takes place under extremely complex political and socio-economic conditions. Ethnic cleansing incited by reactionary and separatist forces in Georgian regions (Abkhazia and former South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast) caused grave consequences to the population of Georgia. The population driven out from the conflict regions accounted for to some 270 thousand people, 99% of which are Georgians.

It is well-known to the international community that every effort of the Georgian Government is directed towards peaceful settlement of ethnic conflicts. Along with political agreements, we consider it important to devise in advance the ways of organized return process of forcibly displaced contingent. It is necessary to assess carefully the situation in displaced population and work out a strategy for restoration of the conflict regions.

Presently the conflict zones are economically ruined and deserted, which in case of settling the conflicts, will necessitate a total restoration and restoration of socio-economic life, for which the normalization of demographic situation is one of the most important aspects. Judging by general observations the birth rate process among the refugees has almost stopped, the family cell structures collapsed, significantly weakening previously strong family ties. The great majority of internally displaced persons (IDP) went in so-called labor emigration in rather unfavorable terms. Marriages among IDPs are rare, and so on.
**Sociological Research**

With the aim of socio-demographic study of the population expelled from Abkhazia, a wide-scale sociological research was conducted with our participation. The conducted research encompassed many demographic aspects. After processing the materials derived from the sociological research we received quite interesting answers. In this article our assessment is based on the official statistical data and information obtained through concrete sociological researches conducted in recent years with our direct participation.

It is commonly known fact that family members being in emigration and the quality of their adaptation have an important impact on emigrational behavior of family members remaining in their home countries. Their emigrational potential is rather high and it coincides with the spectrum of the factual migration directions. 63.9% of the men and 45.5% of the women polled have desire to emigrate abroad permanently or temporarily. Percent distribution of the men polled according to the countries where they want to emigrate is as follows: Russia (17.9%), US (39.3%), Greece (3.6%), Germany (25.0%). For women – Russia (19.4%), US (47.2%), Greece (8.3%), Germany (8.3%); It should be noted that emigration intensity declined toward Russia and increased toward the US and Western Europe. One of the reasons of this is introduction of the visa regime for the citizens of Georgia. Percent indicators of those women and men who have desire to go abroad temporarily are rather low as compared with the same indicators of those who wish to go abroad permanently. It should be noted that the share of women who have desire to emigrate to the US is rather high. In our opinion it is conditioned by many opportunities for employment, specificity of employment and high labor remuneration in the US. The main reasons of potential emigrants to leave the country are also of economic nature along with the reunification of their families.

Unfortunately, for the duration of forced migration, expelled population was dislocated disproportionately all over the country’s territory and currently the areas adjacent to the conflict regions are overpopulated. For example, nearly 23% of forcibly displaced persons have taken refuge in Zugdidi administrative region where population has doubled in size. In the country’s capital (Tbilisi) their share made up 27.4%.

On the other hand, the conflict zones are deserted due to population mass expulsion. For instance, there is a steep decline in the number even of Abkhazians. Quite a number of them fled from the regime existing there, and part of them - labor emigrants are dispersed throughout the Russian Federation. By Professor R. Gachechiladze’s estimates almost the entire population of ethnic Greeks and Jews living in Abkhazia emigrated to Greece and Israel respectively. In 1989 there were 14,7 thousand Jews living in Abkhazia. The total number of Greeks and Jews emigrated from these communities is estimated at 14 thousand (a few remained). A large number of Slavs emigrated from Abkhazia to Russia and Ukraine. According various sources and our estimation the Slavs comprised 10% of Abkhazia's total population in 2000. In this case, 15-20 thousand Slavs remained in Abkhazia compared to the 88,6 thousand Russians, Ukrainians and Byelorussians resided there in 1989. Those who stayed there are mostly elderly people. A substantial part of the ethnic Armenians also emigrated from Abkhazia. Nearly 70% of them moved to Russian Federation, mostly to Krasnodar and Stavropol Krams and Rostov Oblast.

By the various statistical materials and in our estimation, presently the total population in Abkhazia might have been approximately 150 thousand people. This is 28-30% of the population of Abkhazia enumerated in 1989 (525 thousand). Such a steep reduction became one of the important factors in Abkhazia's complete economic and social disruption, functional crisis of populated areas and in formation of reproductive regime which is characterized by the severe depopulation type.

One of the pressing problems to be solved at present is a shelter for displaced persons. In times of severe crisis only 37% of households were settled in an organized way. Greater part of them stay with relatives, friends or have rented flats. Who was settled in an organized way they live in recreational facilities and hotels that, in turn, stopped their functioning.

Recent polls among displaced persons showed that 90% of them suffer from lack of dwelling spaces. 62% lives in one room, 32.5% - in double room, while they owned comfortable houses and farms in
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previous places of their residence. All these private properties are estimated by foreign experts at 7 billion USD. Who are homeless, oftentimes they try without any permission to settle into the buildings of State institutions that due to crisis are temporarily out of work. They live, for example, even in children's hospitals.

One of the acute problems associated with this conflict is a dramatic process in demographic development of displaced contingent. As our research showed, destructions caused by the war have greatly changed population reproductive regime and family structure. Prior to the ethnic cleansing, extended families prevailed over the Abkhazia's whole territory, and at present, their share in expelled households has reduced from 44.8% to 9.3%. In contrast, the number of incomplete nuclear families has expanded from 2.1% to 39.6%. This evident degradation is associated with the fact that many died in conflict; the elderly population remained in Abkhazia and all the family members had to go to make a living inside and outside the country for a long time. Family members are dispersed and consequently, family's reproductive function has diminished.

On the other hand, it should be noted, that despite territorial distribution of expellees, they strive to maintain their demographic unity. Our research showed that 60% of couples in their newlywed families are their representatives. But lately it becomes apparent that incompactness of resettlement brings about their marriage to the local population. This, in its turn, factually reduces the size of those who must provide Abkhazia's demographic restoration.

The research showed that an overwhelming majority of expellees now live below the poverty threshold. The State support which they don't receive regularly, accounts for one third of the living wage. Employment situation among expellees is graver against the backdrop of dramatic unemployment existing in the country. Greater part of them (64%) is unemployed and they make a living with illegal employment and petty trade. The State's role in their employment is insignificant. The study revealed that 77% of them have found a job by themselves. 90% of the respondents pointed out the great importance of the international humanitarian relief that unfortunately has been reduced since 1998.

It is natural that under such appalling conditions the demographic situation has extremely worsened. The crude birth rate has dropped to 6 births per 1000 inhabitants, whereas prior to ethnic cleansing this figure among Abkhazia's Georgian population made up 16.7 births per 1000 inhabitants. The death rate (10.3%) significantly outnumbered the birth rate and therefore the drastic natural decrease has been formed among internally displaced persons. The death rates increased in lower age groups. For example, 50.2% in 2000 of died persons were under the age of 60. On the whole, according to all reproductive indicators, the sharp decreasing reproductive regime has formed in displaced contingent even against the background of critical demographic situation created in Georgia. The total fertility rate in Georgia has fallen to 1.4 births per 1000 women. One of the reasons of declining birth rate among women, who are in active reproductive age, is their poor health. In their contingent 89% of women doesn't enjoy good health; 63% of women are ill with anxiety, hypertension, diabetes, goiter, hepatitis.

The study on reproductive attitude among displaced population gave us the following information. 59% of them has desire to have 3 children, 40.8 wishes to have one or two children. But on the question – “How many children are you going to have within the next five years”, 55.3% of respondents gave the definite answer that they are going to have only one child, 36.6% - two children, only 9.5% is going to have 3 and more children. Sociological polls conducted among newlywed couples gave us the same picture. The realization of such undesirable reproductive attitude under current conditions is completely impossible to them. The birth rate indicates that their reproductive attitude expresses the rapid depopulation.

On the question: “What is the reason that you wish or are going to have less number of children than you wish,” 51.6% pointed out “grave economic conditions,” 35.4% - “the absence of favorable conditions for children's upbringing, 25.6% - “unsatisfactory housing” and 10.9% cited “health condition.”
Conclusion

The existing situation requires particular efforts of the State to stop the acute depopulation process among internally displaced contingent in the near future. We see the solution to the problem in working out the State program entitled “Demographic Salvation of Internally Displaced Persons.” This program must envisage not only restoration of wide reproductive regime, but measures which must be taken and carried out after returning the displaced persons to their previous dwelling places. The program must cover the State assistance with the purpose of stimulating fertility as well as maternal and children's social protection. Along with the State, Georgian Orthodox Church and numerous nongovernmental organizations must take part in the implementation of this program. We consider it necessary that internally displaced women who gave birth to two children they must be granted the status “Mother of many children” and enjoy all the privileges which extend to the mothers having many children.

Because depopulation problems are common not only to Georgia but to many post-communist countries, the great importance must be attached to the international efforts to work out and realize the demographic principles. In our concrete case the main importance in assigning and distributing the international humanitarian aid must be attached to the demographic restoration factor of the internally displaced population.

References