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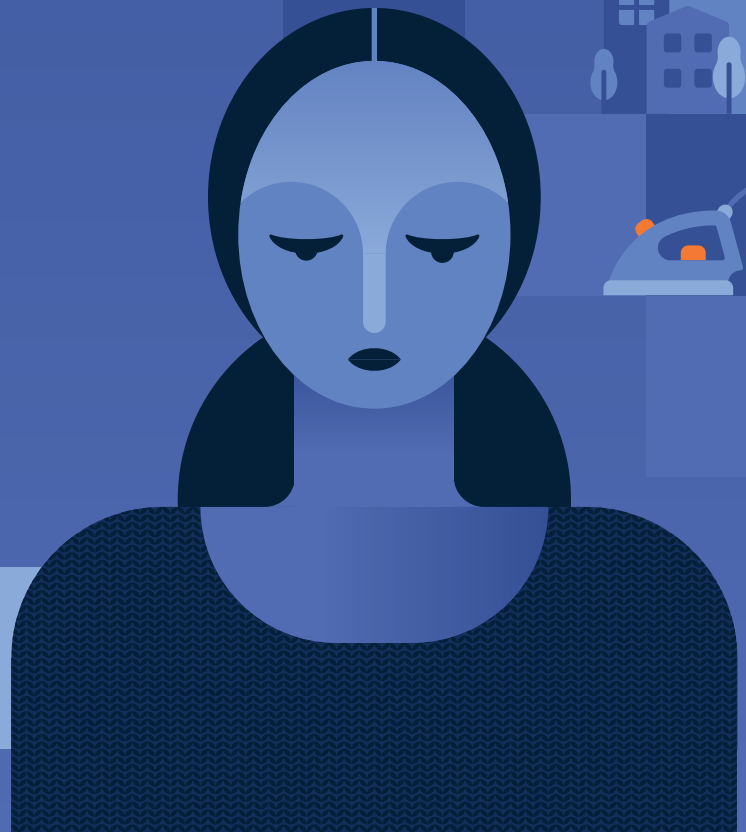


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SOCIOECONOMIC STABILITY FOR GEORGIAN LABOR MIGRANT WOMEN

STUDY OF GEORGIAN LABOR MIGRANT
WOMEN'S NEEDS IN THE PROCESS OF
RETURN AND REINTEGRATION



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2023



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ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AVRR	Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration
BpfA	Beijing Platform for Action
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
Geostat	National Statistics Office of Georgia
GDP	Gross domestic product
GCM	Global Compact for Migration
ICRMW	International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families
ILO	International Labor Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
LEPL	Legal Entity under Public Law
NNLE	Non-entrepreneurial (non-commercial) legal entity
RDA	Rural Development Agency
SCMI	The State Commission on Migration Issues
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UN DESA	United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UN Women	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The presented study, initiated by Women Engage for Common Future – Georgia (WECF) and the UN Joint Program for Gender Equality in Georgia, aimed at studying the issues around the socioeconomic stability of labor migrant women from Georgia in the context of return and reintegration. The study is based on data retrieved through qualitative methods, desk research, and secondary statistical data.

The study outlines that in recent years, Georgia has made important steps towards developing migration systems, although the feminization of migration is often overlooked. Important gaps are observed in legislation, policy, and programs, hindering the return and sustainable reintegration of migrant women.

The experiences of labor migrant and return labor migrant women demonstrate that socioeconomic stability and the sustainability of return and reintegration are highly affected by migration experiences, the socioeconomic situation in the country, and return and reintegration assistance, as well as other sectoral legislation, policy, and programs, all of which lack a gender perspective.

The recommendations developed based on the study findings highlight (1) the importance of assistance for labor migrant women's timely and dignified return to decrease the social cost of feminized migration, and maximize the use of migration potential.; and (2) the importance of a systematic integration of gender perspectives in the country's legislation, policies and programs related to migration and socioeconomic empowerment, in order to guarantee a sustainable reintegration upon return. To ensure the socioeconomic stability for Georgian labor migrant women, state agencies, as well as international and local organizations should be equally involved in the implementation of developed recommendations.

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1960s, with the increase in the number of migrant women, the concept of feminization of migration began to appear. Such conceptualization of migration not only attempted to conceptualize the phenomenon of women's increased migration but to better capture female agency, and the impact of gender and migration on socioeconomic development (Caritas, 2012).

Signs of the feminization of migration are visible in Georgia as well - in a country commonly regarded as an exporter of labor, where women increasingly emigrate independently in search of well-being for their families (OECD and CRRG Georgia, 2017). Due to the irregularity of labor migration, it is difficult to talk explicitly about its scope, and hence, different sources estimate the number of emigrants from Georgia differently. According to the UN DESA, 861,000 people left Georgia by 2020, constituting 23% of the total population, of which 51% are women, while according to the National Statistics Office of Georgia (Geostat), the number of emigrants by 2021 was 99,975 persons, of which 38% are women.

Return and reintegration are integral parts of the migration cycle since pre-departure and migration experiences have an important impact on these processes (Cassarino, 2014). As in the context of migration management, so from a socioeconomic perspective of migration, the concepts of return and sustainable reintegration are increasingly gaining attention and are placed high in the process of policy and program design on international and national levels, entailing the safe and dignified return of labor migrants, their economic self-sufficiency, social stability, and psychological well-being, or, when the decision on further migration “is a matter of choice, rather than a necessity” (IOM, 2017; UNHCR, 2004).

Return and sustainable reintegration are critical for the Georgian context as well, as with the increase in migration, voluntary or forced return increases as well, while reintegration is often quite challenging, considering that the economic, social and psychological factors that determine migration often remain unchanged upon return (IOM, 2021). This is further aggravated due to limited opportunities for skills development among migrants, and the process of alienation caused by a prolonged separation from home.

Still, studies on the feminization of migration and the effects and outcomes of women's increased migration from Georgia are scarce. Studies from the last decade mostly focus on causes of migration, its social impact, and economic value (OECD, 2022; OECD and CRRG Georgia, 2017; Vanore, 2015; აროშვილი, 2021ა; აროშვილი, 2021ბ; კაპანაძე, 2018; ლობჯანიძე, 2009), changes in gender roles and its impact (Hofmann, 2014; Zurabishvili and Zurabishvili, 2010; ჩაჩავა 2020), and challenges migrant women face in their destination countries (კარაპეტიაძე, 2021). The limited number of studies on return and reintegration



mainly focus on general outcomes of available reintegration programs, and frequently overlook gender analysis - solely offering gender-segregated data (IOM, 2021; Cida, 2016).

Against this background, the study initiated by the organization Women Engage for a Common Future - Georgia (WECF) and the UN Joint Program for Gender Equality in Georgia, aimed at investigating the issues of socioeconomic stability of Georgian labor migrant women in the context of return and reintegration. Making use of desk research, qualitative methods, and gender analysis, the study investigates the needs of returned labor migrant women in the process of return and reintegration, and through the analysis of legislation, policy, programs, international practices, and migrant women's experiences, it develops recommendations to support labor migrant women's return and sustainable reintegration, and their socioeconomic stability.

METHODOLOGY

To develop evidence-based recommendations, the study makes use of qualitative research methods, desk research, and secondary statistical data. In-depth interviews were conducted with migrant and return migrant women, as well as with researchers, and representatives of state, local non-state, and international organizations that work on issues of migration, return and reintegration, and more generally, women's economic empowerment.

In total, 22 in-depth interviews were conducted with labor migrant and return labor migrant women to gain an in-depth understanding of their migration experiences, the major socioeconomic challenges they face before migration and upon return, reasons for migration, re-migration, return, and other related issues.

Women participating in the study are labor migrants who have emigrated for between 3-22 years or have re-emigrated after one or several attempts to return home, and return migrants who came back to Georgia 1-8 years ago and have or have not benefited from return and reintegration assistance or other state and non-state programs focusing on economic empowerment, and who have or have not found employment upon return. Migrant and return migrant women belong to different age groups (between 32 and 72 years old), are from Tbilisi, as well as urban and rural settlements from different regions of Georgia, and their marital status differs. All participants are or were engaged in low-skilled, low-wage labor – mostly domestic work - caring for children, the elderly, cleaning, etc. Respondents' current or former countries of migration are Greece, Israel, Italy, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Turkey, and the United States of America.

10 in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with representatives of state, international, and local non-state organizations, and researchers to collect knowledge on international best practices, policies, and approaches around issues of migration, return and reintegration, and women's economic empowerment more generally. Respondents are engaged in academic research, drafting of legislation, policy, and programs, and the provision of services.

In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted face-to-face, as well as online, using the "Zoom" video conferencing program, and adhering to ethical standards.

The desk research aimed at reviewing national and international contexts, political and normative frameworks to analyze the links between migration, women's empowerment, and development, and to study the feminization of migration from Georgia, along with best

practices relevant to the Georgian context. Statistical data that was publicly available or retrieved from public institutions were also analyzed.

Even though the study represents quite a diverse group of migrant women, its major limitation can be identified as an issue of representation and thus, limited generalizability. Additionally, the study target group is women engaged in low-wage domestic labor and the service industry and does not cover issues of return and reintegration of women engaged in other types of labor during migration.



CHALLENGES FOR LABOR MIGRANT WOMEN'S SOCIOECONOMIC STABILITY

Based on the experiences of the migrant women, the following chapter summarizes the barriers that prevent their timely and dignified return, analyzes the importance of return and sustainable reintegration, and economic and social challenges during this process.

Conversations with female migrants engaged in the study, alongside recent research, indicate alignment with global trends (Hennebry, Grass, & McLaughlin, 2016) - the rising need for domestic labor in the international job market drives women's labor migration from Georgia, a phenomenon shaped by socioeconomic challenges. If unemployment and low wages are the major reasons for migrating, structural issues, such as weak health and social welfare system, expensive bank loans, housing challenges, and other issues contribute to the reproduction of poverty, aggravate households' economic hardships, and thus, render migration inevitable while creating significant barriers for return and sustainable reintegration.

Dependence on remittances

Unemployment and poverty remain major challenges for Georgia, with international economic indicators¹, as well as society's attitudes² attesting to this, and due to which women's migration is an acute decision in a search for socioeconomic well-being. The respondents of the study, despite having higher or vocational education, were excluded from the labor market, could not find jobs, or even when employed within their field of expertise, the working conditions were unfavorable, and wages were so low that they sometimes could not satisfy minimal daily needs, due to which respondents had to leave their profession for more precarious work abroad.

Some of the respondents expected the period of migration to last for a long time due to the socioeconomic conditions in their home country. Others expected to return after solving financial problems, or in the case of finding a job in Georgia. Providing for the family is becoming more difficult, and thus, migration is prolonged when there are children in the household and/or when extended family (parents, siblings, relatives) have a low income or no income at all. Besides, the needs of the left behind family are constantly increasing, and

1 The World Bank, country context overview, see: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/georgia/overview>

2 Caucasus Barometer time-series dataset Georgia, see: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb-ge/IMPIS1>



after providing for children, migrant women continue their efforts in migration to provide for grandchildren – “I was saying I would solve the problems and return but problems piled up one after another, the Georgian economy went backward...” (Emigrant, 48 years old).

The picture painted depicts Georgia’s adverse socioeconomic condition, due to which families remain dependent on remittances generation after generation. Indeed, the influence of remittances on the Georgian economy is increasing annually. According to the most recent data from the National Bank of Georgia, workers’ remittances totaled around 2.3 billion USD in 2022 – around 9% of Georgia’s GDP. If we compare this to recent years, especially the period before the pandemic, workers’ remittances in 2019 totaled 916.3 million USD – around 5% of GDP³. The critical importance of remittances for the country’s economy was especially visible during the crises of the COVID-19 pandemic when income from international tourism and direct foreign investments decreased dramatically, while the number of remittances increased and became the major source of foreign currency inflow after export (PMCG, 2022). More specifically, according to the data of the National Bank of Georgia, workers’ remittances in 2020 constituted around 7% of the GDP (1.2 billion USD), and around 9% of the GDP in 2021 (1.6 billion USD).⁴

Unfortunately, gender-disaggregated data on remittances is not available, but considering that most of the remittances are coming from Italy and Greece- the major receiving countries of Georgian women migrant workers – one can make assumptions about the important economic contributions of migrant women.⁵

Studies show that in the last decade, remittances constituted an important share of recipient households’ income, although the sustainable impact on the economy is questionable since the greatest share of remittances is spent on primary needs, such as food (79%), utility bills (63%), and clothing (53%). Only 7% of those receiving remittances manage to collect savings for starting a business or buying fixed or unfixed assets (SCMI, 2019).

The interviews done within the presented study show the same tendency. Emigrant women try to keep only a small share of their income and send the greatest share back home, which is later spent on the family’s or extended family’s daily needs and consumption of household goods. It is noteworthy that households’ high dependency on remittances prolongs women’s emigration on the one hand, and on the other, does not allow them to save for future economic security and sustainability.

3 The National Bank of Georgia. Balance of Payments of Georgia (BPM-5).

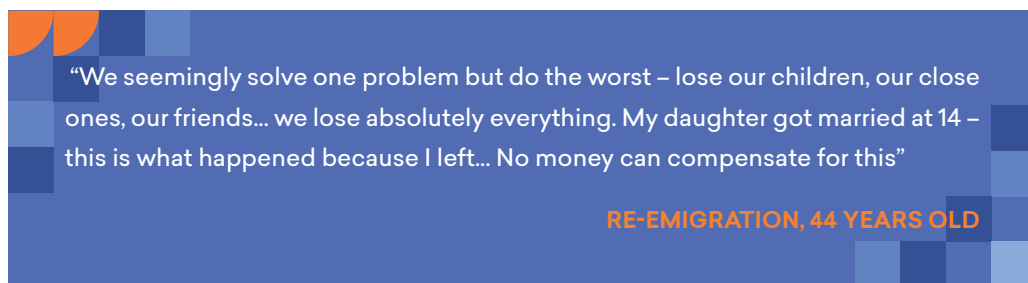
4 *ibid.*

5 The National Bank of Georgia, money transfers, see: <https://nbg.gov.ge/en/page/money-transfers>

The social cost of women’s labor migration

Although migration is an important strategy for overcoming poverty in developing countries, and among them, Georgia, stories of migrant women reveal the social dangers of long-term migration. Supporting the timely and dignified return and reintegration of migrant women is critically important to eliminate those dangers.

Studies show that on the one hand, a mother’s emigration improves children’s chances for material well-being and access to education, while on the other, causes a deficiency of physical and emotional care in sending countries of migrants, thus negatively affecting the processes of socialization and self-realization among the children left behind (Vanore, 2015). Leaving family, home, and country behind is an enormous stress factor for migrant women, especially when they have underage children. Leaving one’s own parenting responsibilities behind to take care of someone else’s children and the elderly is linked with numerous psychosocial difficulties. Although respondents themselves have not felt criticism or moral pressure from society, they often suffer from feelings of guilt.



Physical and emotional stress at work adds to the pain of being far from home and family, often negatively affecting women’s physical and mental health. The jobs of migrant women are often very stressful, women have to live permanently in someone else’s family, “live someone else’s life”. This is often accompanied by conditions that violate labor rights. Long-term emigration almost inevitably causes alienation from one’s family and society, making women feel superfluous and often leading to repeated migration.

Alongside the stress caused by being far from family and arduous work conditions, traveling or staying illegally in a foreign country creates further difficulties for migrant women. Those who choose to migrate illegally have been victims of fraud and extortion, making their financial burden even heavier. While the physical act of traversing borders illegally is often associated with enormous stress and danger. Even upon successful entry into the country of destination, staying illegally in a foreign country is extremely stressful due to the constant fear of deportation. Documented stay, on the other hand, is typically associated with less anxiety and more social protection, along with access to legal services.

Migrant women’s experiences show that psychological, social, and economic factors are highly intertwined and immensely affect both the timely return and sustainability of the reintegration of migrant women. The importance of the role and responsibilities of family members left behind are also clearly outlined in this process.

Challenges to economic stability for the returned migrant women

The reasons for return differ for migrant women participating in the study, with most of them citing personal or family matters, rather than financial self-sufficiency. Sometimes women return due to an exhaustion of physical or emotional resources. Other times to take care of aging parents, or grandchildren. While more rarely, due to fulfilling the “goals” they had set for their migration – the payment of debts, and purchase of real estate, or property, among others. However, this does not translate to ownership of financial capital and socioeconomic stability for the migrant women.

Job scarcity and low salaries are major challenges for returned migrant women’s economic stability. According to the most recent calculations, a living wage that would cover all necessary costs of living in Georgia today constitutes 1770 GEL,⁶ while the minimum wage is 250 GEL⁷. The presented study shows that lack of experience often prevents women from finding employment with decent earnings. Migrant women from Georgia are usually employed in domestic work – taking care of children or the elderly, cleaning houses, etc. Despite the physical and emotional difficulties of their work, domestic labor is not highly compensated and deprives women of the chance to develop professional skills suitable to the contemporary labor market, resulting in an erosion of skills, and creating barriers to reintegrating into the local labor market upon return. Domestic labor in Georgia is often associated with low pay and cannot ensure economic stability for the worker’s family. Hence, returned migrant women find a solution in re-emigration: “If my country cannot offer me anything but being a cleaning woman... then I prefer to be cleaning women remunerated in dollars” (Re-emigration, 57).

Reintegration into the labor market is especially difficult for returned migrant women over 50 since employers in the formal sector usually hire younger and more experienced candidates. This was testified in interviews with representatives of different sectors, as well as official statistics. According to 2020 data, the level of economic activity for women over 55 is twice as low (48%) (UN Women, 2021). It is noteworthy that this coincides with the number of emigrants by age and gender – the number of female emigrants exceeds the number of male

6 Georgia Fair Labor Platform, Living wage in Georgia, see: <https://shroma.ge/living-wage>

7 Geostat, subsistence minimum, see: <https://www.geostat.ge/en/modules/categories/791/subsistence-minimum>

emigrants in the age group over 55 (Geostat, 2021b). This allows us to conclude that together with unpaid caring responsibilities, age is an important barrier to women's economic activity and when they are no longer considered a part of the "desired workforce" in Georgia's labor market, women seek a source of livelihood abroad.

"When I returned at the age of 50 and went back to school where I used to teach before emigrating, I was told that due to my age and 10 years gap in teaching practice, I could not get a reference to return to teaching... After returning I suddenly found out that my country does not need me at the age of 50 anymore, despite my potential and enthusiasm to work within my specialization"

RE-EMIGRATION, 57

Considering that migrant women have little hope for finding decent employment, the major strategy for economic integration after a return is starting one's own business. However, since earning savings and developing qualifications is difficult during emigration, these become important barriers to self-employment, together with other factors. Several respondents participating in the study, who had experience in business management before leaving, could manage to save, and/or own property, and successfully re-established or started a business. While respondents who tried but could not establish successful businesses upon return, named a lack of financial resources, as well as a lack of knowledge and experience, as major reasons. They also discuss structural economic problems, such as people's typically low purchasing power, the large amount of cheap imported agricultural products, the instability of the market, and rapidly inflating prices.

Respondents unanimously agree that migrant women's preparation for self-employment – the development of business competencies, familiarizing themselves with Georgia's business environment, and awareness of existing opportunities should start while in emigration so that they can plan their return better and be ready for challenges they could face. Additionally, this may be one of the motivators for migrant women to return. Women's low access to finances limits self-employment opportunities further. Again, due to high unemployment and the absence of a stable income, women have limited access to loans. As of June 2022, only 17% of those with credit taken from banks were women. While in the micro-financing sector similar amounts of loans are provided to men and women, women typically withdraw more from pawning services and installment loans, while taking out less for small and medium-scale entrepreneurship, and agricultural and micro-business loans (Parliament of Georgia, 2022).

High interest rates limit access to finances even further. According to data from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund⁸, Georgia ranks 32nd in mean lending interest rate⁹, which is one of the highest among developing countries¹⁰. Additionally, respondents often discussed negative experiences with banks, since bank loans and the risk of losing housing due to an inability to pay back loans, oftentimes determine the decision to emigrate. Other studies conducted in Georgia also confirm that losing housing due to an inability to pay debts often results in emigration in search of better livelihoods (ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი, 2020d). Respondents also needed bank loans to cover expenses associated with emigrating and the need to pay debts back prolonged the emigration period further. Considering all the above, migrant women tend to avoid starting a business.

Challenges to social stability for returned migrant women

Together with economic stability, access to healthcare, and social services is crucial for returned migrants.

Poor infrastructure of care – low access to quality preschool education institutions, or kindergartens, and almost no availability of care services for the elderly and persons with chronic or prolonged illness (UN Women, 2018), increases women’s unpaid domestic labor and hinders their participation in the labor market. According to 2021 Geostat data, labor market participation for men in the last 10 years was between 62-67%, compared to women’s 40-46%, while according to most recent data (2023), this indicator was 64% for men, and 43% for women, indicating a high share of women outside of the labor market. Women name family-related responsibilities as reasons for their economic inactivity twice as often as men (UN Women, 2018). Several participants of the presented study also recall leaving jobs due to family care responsibilities. Migrant women also often have to return from migration to take care of elderly parents, or grandchildren, which automatically prevents their economic reintegration upon return. The issue of payment and maternity leave is a part of this problem as well. Despite numerous waves of labor reform, no solid guarantees of legal protection for parents responsible for care have been introduced. On one hand, the existing system approaches women employed in the private and public sectors differently, and on the other,

8 The World Bank/International Monetary Fund, International financial statistics and data files, Lending interest rates (%), see: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/FR.INR.LEND?end=2021&name_desc=false&start=1960

9 Forbes Georgia, Georgia ranks 32 on mean lending interest rate in the world, see: <https://forbes.ge/blogs/sa-banko-seskhis-sidzvirith-saqarthvelo-msophlioshi-32-e-adgilzea>

10 Business Media Georgia, The interest rates on loans in Georgia are very high, see: <https://bm.ge/ka/article/saqart-veloshi-sesxebze-saprocento-ganakvetebi-dzalian-magalia---mkvlevari/77472>

does not see women employed in the informal economy or those self-employed at all (ფრიდრიხ ებერტის ფონდი, 2022).

Alongside a poor infrastructure for care, the weakness of essential social protection systems such as retirement pensions and healthcare, an absence of unemployment assistance, and scarcity of social assistance hinder the return and reintegration process for migrants. Several respondents of the presented study returned to Georgia after retirement. However, they considered re-emigration since their pension cannot meet their basic needs. In some cases, respondents migrated already after retirement, while sometimes the reason for migrating is the need to provide for a parent or parents living on a pension. Numerous other studies also state that pensions available in Georgia are not enough for decent living at older age. The fact that almost half of the pensioners in the country have bank loans to meet their daily needs further testifies to this finding.¹¹ Despite pension reform, the security of retired migrant women will become more challenging over time and will still present a barrier to their return, since although their earnings are mostly sent to family members in Georgia, migrant women are left behind funded pension scheme, similar to workers employed in the informal sector.

Together with pensioners, healthcare expenses are a huge burden for low-income households and become one of the reasons for migration or barriers to return, as respondents argue. Despite universal healthcare, residents today still have to cover a huge part (48%) of healthcare services themselves, while the high cost of prescription drugs most heavily burdens low-income households (ჯანდაცვის მსოფლიო ორგანიზაცია, 2022). Respondents recall cases when medical treatment was so expensive after returning from migration due to health conditions (when they could no longer work) that they had to migrate again aftercare in order to repay loans withdrawn for treatment.

In cases of failed attempts to reintegrate into the labor market, returned migrant women are further challenged by flaws in employment policy - an absence of unemployment insurance and unemployment benefits. The major tool for poverty reduction in Georgia today is the “Targeted Social Assistance Program” which is noted to be flawed and cannot address the needs of even the poorest segments of the population (ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი, 2020b). As one of the respondents states, after failed attempts to find a job, she was granted the status of socially vulnerable and was eligible for an assistance amount of 270 GEL. However, this is not sufficient for her and her young daughter so she sees repeat emigration as a solution. In countries like Georgia, where the number of unregistered and informal workers is high, a social welfare system available to all of those unemployed is crucial, alongside state employment services (Ibid).

11 Social Justice Center, Pension Loan Crisis – Interview with Ia Eradze, see: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/sapensio-seskhebis-krizisi-interviu-ia-eradzestan>





LEGAL AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT

International labor migration is an important issue for countries sending and receiving migrants, and thus, is the subject of numerous conventions and agreements. Georgia is a signatory of many such conventions and agreements, based on which it carries significant responsibilities in regard to migration management. Among them, supporting return and reintegration. Alongside labor migration, the following chapter reviews the normative and political environment in Georgia around women's empowerment and other sector policies that directly or indirectly affect migrant women's socioeconomic condition and return and reintegration process.

Analysis shows that despite important steps forward, there are significant flaws in migration management and women's empowerment related legislation and policy, as well as in the implementation process, which mostly links back to the state's unsystematic approaches, and lack of gender mainstreaming in legislation and policy making.

Labor migration

Agreements on labor migration mostly focus on the protection of dignity and rights of labor migrants, and cover issues such as work conditions, health protection, the functioning of employment agencies, regulation of domestic labor, labor inspection, and social security mechanisms, among others.

Georgia has ratified a number of conventions of the International Labor Organization on Labor Migration, among them Convention No. 181 on Private Employment Agencies, Convention No. 82 on Employment Service, and Convention No. 111 on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, all of which mainly focus on managing regular migration and protection of labor rights. Georgia also has ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and its General Recommendation No. 26 which highlights states' responsibilities to respect and protect the rights of labor migrant women who are at high risk of violence and discrimination, and calls for countries, Georgia among them, to ratify the UN (1990) Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families. The latter is one of the UN's 18 core human rights instruments and covers the whole migration cycle, among them return and reintegration,



and calls for states to collaborate for the dignified return of irregular labor migrants and their family members in their countries of origin.¹²

By integration into UN Sustainable Development Goals, issues of migration were placed high in the agendas of states and development partners,¹³ resulting in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) in 2018. Signatory countries, Georgia among them, take responsibility to collaborate to support safe, orderly, and regular migration. The Global Compact covers the whole migration cycle, among them return and reintegration, highlighting the importance of gender sensitivity and the importance of supporting gender equality, empowering women and girls, and acknowledging their independence, agency, and leadership, so that migrant women are not seen as victims.¹⁴

The process of association with the European Union was a significant push factor for developing systems for migration management on a national level.¹⁵ The State Commission on Migration Issues (SCMI) was established in 2010, uniting important migration related actors in thematic working groups. The commission made important steps with regard to legal regulation of labor migration, and in 2015 the first legal act – the Law of Georgia on Labor Migration, was adopted. It aimed at supporting regular labor migration and decreasing irregular labor migration and trafficking. The law regulates issues of labor migration from Georgia through the regulation of intermediary companies and informing those intending to migrate. Despite numerous international conventions and agreements highlighting the high risks of discrimination, exploitation, and violence against labor migrant women, the law disregards gender aspects.

Specific instruments and priorities for migration management are defined in its migration strategies. The most recent strategy for 2021-2030 highlights the importance of supporting the sustainable reintegration of returned citizens. According to the strategy, with an increased tendency for return, it is important to improve available reintegration programs, through increasing its budget, as well as adding services. It is noteworthy that, in terms of reintegration, the strategy highlights the importance of considering the needs of returned migrant women in the process of program design. Despite such records in the strategy and undertaken responsibilities, gender aspects are not reflected either in the thematic

12 According to state's sixth periodical report on implementation of Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Convention is in the process of pre-ratification (2020).

13 The following goals and targets of SDGs cover the migration issues: 10.2; 10.7; 17.9; 17.17.

14 Global Compact for Migration, see: https://refugeesmigrants.un.org/sites/default/files/180711_final_draft_0.pdf

15 Under the Partnership for Mobility initiative, important instruments for fighting against irregular migration were signed between Georgia and EU, such as agreement on simplifying the visa procedures, readmission of undocumented persons, aiming at returning Georgia's citizens living illegally in EU.

directions of SCMI's working groups or in its action plans. Action plans for 2022 and 2023 almost completely ignore gender perspectives and do not highlight women's needs in any form at all.

On a positive note, Georgia's national action plan for 2022-2024 on the UN Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace, and Security focuses on migrant women and includes support for returned migrant women IPDs to start income-generating projects, employment, or self-employment. But since the later action plan covers only migrant IDPs, it is essential to integrate gender perspectives into the 2023 action plan for migration, on the one hand, to protect the rights of migrant women, fight discrimination, exploitation, and violence, and on the other, to support their socioeconomic stability.

Women's empowerment

Analyzing the state's gender equality policy and women's empowerment agenda is crucial in regard to the socioeconomic stability of migrant women, since after returning from migration, the same structural barriers prevent women's sustainable reintegration and their equal participation in economic, social, cultural, and political life.

Establishing institutional mechanisms for women's empowerment is one of the major goals of the Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA), and includes the creation of specific strategies, action plans, and programs for strengthening gender equality, while also suggesting the integration of gender perspectives in legislation and public policy in every sphere so that each decision is based on gender analysis and impact assessments on men and women.

Among international human rights instruments, the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) is of great importance, creating a broad core framework for effective implementation of gender mechanisms and calls for states to undertake immediate measures and policies to eliminate discrimination against women (Article 2 and general recommendation No. 28). Here, the mentioned recommendation follows the belief that ignorance towards gender perspectives, the gender neutrality of legislation, policies, and programs are indirect sources of discrimination since they disregard existing gender inequalities, and thus, strengthen them.

Alongside the responsibility of migration management, the UN Sustainable Development Goals mentioned above entail important responsibilities towards ensuring gender equality and supporting women's empowerment, obliging states to support women's full and efficient participation in political, economic, and social life, and decision-making processes at all levels.

In recent years, numerous steps have been made in this direction. The state regards the achievement of gender equality as highly important through constitutional amendments. The Law of Georgia on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (2014), represents the core framework for ensuring equality in the country, placing responsibility for rights' protection upon the Public Defender (Ombudsmen) and courts. The Law of Georgia on Gender Equality (2010), is also of high importance, aiming at creating conditions for the equal realization of men's and women's rights, freedoms, and opportunities (Parliament of Georgia, 2021a). The law also defines institutional mechanisms for gender equality and women's empowerment, encompassing different branches and levels of government, such as The Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council (later the Gender Equality Council); Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence Against Women, and Domestic Violence; Municipal councils for gender equality; and Public Defender's Office (Ombudsmen). Still, based on recent assessments, the latter Law remains an ineffective mechanism in ensuring gender equality since it does not include comprehensive obligations for relevant agencies, does not emphasize the importance of gender mainstreaming, nor does it impose an obligation to its instruments into practice for effective implementation (Parliament of Georgia, 2021a).

It is noteworthy that the Gender Equality Council represents an important mechanism for the implementation of gender mainstreaming responsibilities. Specifically, it uses instruments such as designing interventions under Georgian legislation to fight gender inequality and monitoring the government's activities regarding gender equality, among others. It should be assessed positively that recently the Council has actively been utilizing some of the instruments, among them the gender impact assessment tool, although the studies show that these changes are mostly implemented through initiatives and funding from international donors (ჯალაღანია, 2021). The interviews conducted within this study also show that donors play a crucial role in the Council's work since a lack of resources is one of the major challenges it faces today which is partially compensated by international development partners' aid through finance and expertise. Since gender mainstreaming responsibilities are not clearly defined under the Law on Gender Equality, a number of issues remain ignored. One of such issues, as mentioned above, is the complete lack of gender perspectives in the Law on Migration and the Action Plan on Migration. Hence, increasing the Council's support in designing gender sensitive legislative and executive frameworks for labor migration is crucial.

The state Concept of Economic Empowerment of Women designed by the Gender Equality Council with the support of UNDP can be seen as a starting point for increasing gender sensitivity within labor migration policy, since, when defining the systematic issues in women's economic empowerment, the Concept emphasizes the need of sustainable and long-term empowerment of migrant women and their family members. Envisioning



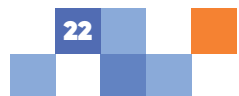
migrant women as an independent group in the concept of economic empowerment and emphasizing their role in the elimination of poverty is a step forward in terms of the state's policy and mandate. It is also important that discussions on these issues go beyond supporting migrant women's transfer to the formal labor market and cover other directions in the Concept, such as care work, fighting discriminating social norms, equal access to economic resources, and others. Thus, it is important that records in such policy documents are translated into specific action plans, that adequate resources are allocated, that required instruments and mechanisms are designed, and that these do not remain donor-initiated, stand-alone practices.

Economic empowerment and development policies

As the above discussed legal and political context shows, issues of labor migration and women's empowerment are intertwined with different interlinked strategic sectors, among which the economic and state development strategies are noteworthy. One of the most recent framework strategies – “Vision 2030 – Georgia's Development Strategy” – covers numerous sectors but emphasizes two aspects of migration: (1) supporting legal labor migration, entailing support for temporary regular employment abroad (circular labor migration), and improving the regulation and management of labor migration in Georgia (5.2); (2) making credible steps to develop sustainable connection, continuous communication and mutually beneficial collaboration with the country's diaspora, as well as to support the dignified return of Georgian citizens living abroad (2.1.1). As for economic development, women's economic empowerment component is scarce, only emphasizing the importance of gender balance in employment services, elimination of gender harassment and gender discrimination in the workplace, and the production of gender business statistics (3.1).

It is noteworthy that in a context where empirical data indicates a tendency for the feminization of migration, while international obligations emphasize the necessity of protecting the rights of migrant women, the relevant components of the state's core strategic document for development disregard gender perspectives. Vision 2030 prioritizes the return and readmission process, which is a positive development, although simultaneously developing a gender sensitive and responsive reintegration program that will be linked back to the state's economic development priorities, is crucial. Otherwise, the challenges in the reintegration process will deepen further and will heavily reflect on the socioeconomic condition of migrant women and their families.

Economic empowerment is an important tool in achieving women's empowerment and gender equality, entailing the creation of opportunities for women to equally participate in and benefit from the process of economic growth in the country and actively participate in decision-making processes.



Important to note in terms of women’s economic empowerment is the strategy 2021-2025 for the development of small and medium businesses, one of seven priorities of which entails support for women’s entrepreneurship, their engagement in “non-traditional” occupations for women, encouraging women’s participation in state programs, strengthening digital skills among women, and increasing state agencies’ capabilities for the development of gender-conscious approaches. The issue of financial literacy should be mentioned alongside economic empowerment since as already mentioned above, management of remittances, savings, and other financial issues are challenging for migrants, as well as their family members. Highlighting the importance of financial education for migrants and their family members in the National Bank of Georgia’s National Strategy for Financial Education for 2023 is an important step in this direction¹⁶. Thus, it is important to reflect on this issue in respective work plans with clearly defined indicators, goals, timelines, and the allocation of adequate resources.

Studies show that rural women are especially prone to socioeconomic vulnerabilities (Parliament of Georgia, 2021b). Georgia’s strategy for rural and agricultural development for 2021-2027 touches upon the challenges and barriers rural women face, although specific issues are not reflected in specific goals, and the only emphasis is on gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis, which in practice is mostly translated into data separated by sex and does not include any socioeconomic characteristics. The action plan for 2021-2023 mentions women in two components – in terms of skills development, and support for women’s employment in non-agricultural occupations. It is noteworthy that both components are linked to the EU-supported ENPARD program, indicating that similar to other spheres, the women’s empowerment component here is again a donor’s initiative, rather than an integral part of the state’s policy framework.

16 Order of the president of the National Bank of Georgia on approval of Georgia’s National Strategy on Financial Education 2023, see: <https://finedu.gov.ge/storage/files/doc/სტრატეგია%202023.pdf>



ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FOR RETURN MIGRANTS

As already mentioned above, issues of labor migration and women's empowerment are intertwined with numerous interlinked sectors. The following chapter seeks to identify state and non-state programs specifically focused on return and sustainable reintegration assistance for migrants and to analyze what sectoral programs, especially ones focused on economic empowerment, would contribute to a timely return and sustainable reintegration of migrants, to what extent the above mentioned political and normative agenda is reflected on specific programs, and to what extent gender dimensions are incorporated.

The analysis of the existing programs shows that similar to political and normative frameworks, return and reintegration assistance programs lack gender sensitivity, are often fragmented, are not tailored to the needs of migrant women, have low sustainability, are implemented with scarce resources, and are restricted in their range of coverage – disregarding the scope of migration and return, as well as documented migrants who often face similar challenges during the reintegration process as undocumented return migrants. Other sectoral economic empowerment programs tend to be more sustainable. However, these programs also lack of gender sensitivity, and the structural obstacles female returnees encounter when attempting to access these opportunities mirrors the broader challenges faced by women in Georgia.

Return and reintegration assistance programs

Together with the state, international organizations and national development funds also implement return and reintegration assistance programs for migrants in Georgia, with the active involvement of local non-governmental organizations.

Based on the Migration Strategy Action Plan, and with the aim of successful, sustainable, and long-term reintegration of migrants returned to Georgia, LEPL Internally Displaced Persons, Eco-Migrants and Livelihood Agency is implementing the state program The Reintegration Assistance to Returned Georgian Migrants since 2015. The targeted beneficiaries of the program are Georgian citizens or permanent residence permit holders in Georgia who have been abroad illegally for more than one year, had asylum applications abroad, have been granted asylum, or have applied to the program within one year upon their arrival.

The reintegration assistance program encompasses the provision of services for return migrants, such as medical services worth up to 1,000 GEL; temporary housing for up to 6 nights in the case of emergencies; professional training and qualification enhancement



assistance which is part of the state employment assistance program, or funding professional training opportunities with up to 1,000 GEL; support to social projects with technical equipment or other equipment worth of up to 4,000 GEL. It is noteworthy that, compared to the review process of other components, the review of requests for this later service lasts longer, while assessment is based on a grading system where the focus is made on the candidate's experience, projects' risks and sustainability, while history of migration, and degree of vulnerability are also assessed. According to the Agency, there are no quotas or prioritized groups for funding social projects at the moment, although, in practice, attention is paid to single parents, those with minors, and candidates with other socio-economic challenges.

Among non-state programs, one of the largest by scale has been implemented since 2003 by the Georgian mission of the International Organization of Migration. Similar to the state program, IOM's Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration Program (AVRR) assists irregular migrants and unsuccessful asylum seekers from Georgia. While in contrast to state programs, AVRR services are spread out at different stages, covering pre-departure, as well as post-arrival stages. Services differ across countries but most commonly they cover medical expenses, allowances for travel home and logistics related to arrival, cash grants and microcredit, reinstallation allowance, educational expenses, and employment assistance. Worth noting are the meetings organized with the participation of migrants who returned at different periods, allowing them to share migration experiences. The program evaluation confirmed that these meetings, mostly engaging migrant women, were an important tool in the psycho-social rehabilitation process.

Interviews with representatives of local organizations outlined that other non-state programs implemented within the last 3 years are smaller by scale compared to IOM's AVRR, are mostly funded by French and German state institutions, and are focused on the return and reintegration of irregular migrants from these countries. Reintegration services provided within these programs are similar to the ones described above and cover medical fees, allowances for professional education, employment assistance, and project grants up to EUR 1500-3000.

Interviews conducted within the presented study also show that small grants to support businesses of return migrants, under different programs mostly related to cattle breeding and greenhouse farming in rural areas. While in urban settlements projects most frequently funded are for the establishment of tailors, bakeries, and other kinds of services. In regard to self-employment assistance, support in purchasing different kinds of equipment and tools, such as appliances for beauty salons, tractors, chainsaws, mowers, and other agricultural inventory is also very common.



Sustainability of return and reintegration assistance programs

According to IOM's Reintegration Sustainability Survey (RSS), the average composite reintegration score for Georgian migrants returned under different programs is 0.61 (on a scale between 0 minimum and 1 maximum), which is 0.049 points lower than the average composite reintegration score in the global sample. Georgian returnees score the lowest on economic sustainability measures and the highest on the psycho-social dimension (IOM, 2021). The highest number of applications in both state and non-state programs are for the single allowance of medications and support for small businesses. The findings of the presented study also show that economic hardship is of primary concern in the reintegration process.

Again, according to the assessment of reintegration programs, 50%-60% of funded income generation projects work successfully and are important sources of daily income for families. Although, together with a reintegration grant, ownership of finances or other capital – a building, land, experience of business management – appeared to be linked to success for such business projects. A similar pattern is outlined in the presented study as well. Migrant women, who own no such capital, find it impossible to start a business venture with 3,000-4,000 GEL. Lack of relevant knowledge and experience is another important barrier – something that is rarely foreseen in the design of reintegration programs. As mentioned above, funding of income generation projects depends on the applicant's experience, the project's risks, and its sustainability – the identification of which requires certain skills in developing business plans – something that returned migrant women rarely possess. The importance of affordable loans was also outlined in this regard. As also mentioned above, the interest rates for loans are very high in Georgia, which, according to experts, puts small and medium business holders in an especially unfavorable condition.¹⁷ Generally, although respondents assess such programs positively, they believe these are just single undertakings and without additional assistance and support, achieving sustainable outcomes would be difficult.

Returned migrants interviewed within this study are less interested in professional and skills training since they often regard these as a “waste of time”. This may stem from the impossibility of envisioning immediate outcomes and from limited opportunities to apply acquired skills. According to stakeholders interviewed within the study, most women returnees under 50 years old and living in urban areas are interested in professional training and re-training courses, while these courses mostly offer training in gender occupations such

17 Business Media Georgia, The interest rates on loans in Georgia are very high, see: <https://bm.ge/ka/article/saqart-veloshi-sesxebze-saprocento-ganakvetebi-dzalian-magalia---mkvlevari/77472>

as sewing, baking, beauty services, and sometimes accounting as well, skills that are typically considered “acceptable for women”. Women in rural areas are less interested in educational courses. The reasons behind it might be geographical availability, transportation, and road infrastructure issues that are also outlined in the Vocational Education and Training Strategy 2021-2025. Despite the gradual increase in demand for educational programs and respective increase in its budget, the employment rate after the completion of courses is extremely low, indicating potential flaws in program design (ადამიანის უფლებების სწავლებისა და მონიტორინგის ცენტრი, 2020a). Although the program is free, the learning process requires time away from work and care responsibilities that informally employed people cannot afford (სოციალური სამართლიანობის ცენტრი, 2021). The same issues surface with returned migrants as well. The interviews show that respondents find it problematic to start acquiring new skills and developing qualifications after their return, since, as a rule, this process is time-consuming and requires time away from economic activity. Thus, respondents believe that increasing one’s qualifications should start while in emigration and allow flexible schedules which would create additional motivation for women to better prepare for their return and in turn, would make the reintegration process more efficient and sustainable. The cases when respondents managed to go through professional training in emigration are rare but it turned out to have a notable impact on the reintegration process after return.

One of the components of return and reintegration assistance programs is, as already mentioned above, medical assistance. However, according to migrants’ experiences and assessments, this component can be considered inefficient, mostly due to scarce resources allocated for healthcare services. As mentioned earlier, one’s own or family members’ – especially those of aging parents - medical expenses are a huge burden that often encourages re-emigration. Hence, a one-time allowance provided under these programs cannot support return and sustainable reintegration.

Considering the scope is also essential when assessing return and reintegration programs. As mentioned above, these programs cover only undocumented returnees and those who have applied for asylum abroad. Those who do not meet these criteria are offered merely consultation services.

The presented study outlined that since women in migration are mostly informally employed in the care and service sectors, working conditions and salaries are almost the same for both documented and undocumented migrants. Hence, outcomes of feminized migration affect both documented and undocumented migrants equally heavily and indicate a need for equal support. The Migration Strategy for 2021-2030 mentions the necessity of supporting documented migrants upon return. Nevertheless, no specific steps have been taken so far.



Representatives of responsible institutions argue that this requires the development of independent approaches and additional financial resources.

The State Migration Strategy for 2021-2030 outlines the need for additional services and respectively an increased budget. Although the budget of the state program has not increased notably since its launch – the primary budget of 590,00 GEL increased to 650,000 GEL in 2018 and is stagnant still, with no changes in the budget for 2023 either. With the available resources, the program provides services to approximately 150-200 returned migrants annually. According to the agency, in 2022, more than 60 returnees received medical services, 175 income-generating projects were funded, 9 returnees were provided temporary housing services, and 60 migrants were redirected to the Employment Agency, out of which 4 were provided with an educational course in the private sector. According to the representatives of IOM, 1,356 migrants returned to Georgia under IOM's AVRR program, of which 777 were labor migrant women. While 350 migrants returned to Georgia under different programs in 2019-2022, of which 55% were women.

Considering the high rates of emigration and return, the mentioned programs cannot satisfy the existing needs properly in this direction either. Data on returned migrants comes from several sources that are often fragmented and contradictory and hardly depict reality. Nevertheless, to get a grasp on the scope, in 2021-2022, only in EU/Schengen area countries, 26,610 citizens of Georgia were issued a request to leave, of which, 11,145 Georgian citizens returned voluntarily or by deportation, of which 23% were women¹⁸. In the last three years, 1,706 returnees received service under both state and non-state return and reintegration assistance programs, 48% of which were women¹⁹.

It is noteworthy that according to a 2019 public opinion poll, 72% of returned migrants had no information on state or non-state reintegration programs available in the country (მსკ, 2023). This trend was visible in the presented study as well. Respondents often have no information on return and reintegration assistance programs, or the information they possess is fragmented and inaccurate, based on which migrant women may make misleading conclusions about available programs.

Economic empowerment programs

Among state programs for economic empowerment, one of the largest in scope is Enterprise Georgia launched in 2014. One of the focuses of the program is micro and small business

18 Eurostat: Returns of irregular migrants: Quarterly statistics, see: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title>Returns_of_irregular_migrants_-_quarterly_statistics#Returns_of_non-EU_citizens

19 Data retrieved from state and non-state entities.

support, the development of a contemporary entrepreneurship culture, and the creation of new employment opportunities. The program offers up to 30,000-40,000 GEL for starting a business or improving an existing one. It also offers training in entrepreneurial issues and developing business plans for potential beneficiaries who overcome the first stage of the program successfully.²⁰

One of the programmatic priorities here is the support of women entrepreneurs. There are no sub-groups prioritized in this component, although the program’s action plan for 2020-2023 envisions the development of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge for women entrepreneurs from Georgia’s regions, outside of the capital, and those representing vulnerable groups. The action plan defines vulnerable women as those belonging to ethnic and religious minorities, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, girls under 21, women over 65, and those living in high mountainous regions.²¹

In 2021, 48% of beneficiaries of Enterprise Georgia’s micro and small entrepreneurship support grants were women, which is a statistically good result, however, qualitative research reveals that women are engaged in low-productivity occupations and have little access to big grants and enterprises (კვაჭიძის საფარო, 2017).

A returned migrant woman beneficiary of Enterprise Georgia’s small grants program participating in the presented study states that she received information about this program while still in migration, and although her decision to return was mostly determined by private reasons, the availability of such grant programs was one more reason, albeit a small one, to “risk” returning to Georgia. It is important to note that this respondent had experience in small business management before migration, managed to earn some savings while working abroad, and had fixed assets allocated for her business, all of which contributed to receiving the grant, as well as successfully managing it.

State agricultural programs, implemented by the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Agriculture of Georgia’s NNLE Rural Development Agency (RDA) also provide interesting analysis for the study. In contrast to Enterprise Georgia, RDA does not prioritize women’s engagement, and as representatives of a state ministry, available programs are equally accessible to all. The only program focused on women is a pilot project supported by UN

20 Enterprise Georgia, Micro and Small Business Support Program, see: <https://www.enterprisegeorgia.gov.ge/ka/Business-Development/microgrants>

21 Enterprise Georgia, 2020-2023 Work Plan, see: <https://www.enterprisegeorgia.gov.ge/files/1/%E1%83%A1%E1%83%90%E1%83%9B%E1%83%9D%E1%83%A5%E1%83%9B%E1%83%94%E1%83%93%E1%83%9D%20%E1%83%92%E1%83%94%E1%83%92%E1%83%9B%E1%83%90.pdf>

Women that entails financial and technical support to women beneficiaries to establish new greenhouses in Marneuli and Lagodekhi municipalities.

22% of beneficiaries, both individual entrepreneurs and non-entrepreneurs, financed or co-financed under RDA's implemented programs and projects from 2021-2022 were women.²² Data shows that women's engagement is higher in relatively small-budget projects. The potential reason behind it is that the higher the budget, the higher the share of co-financing. Additionally, ownership of the mortgaged property is required, and women rarely possess those (კავშირის საფარი, 2017). According to 2017 Geostat data, ownership of agricultural land differs notably among men (82%) and women (18%), while in 2020 nearly twice as many men (59%) owned newly registered enterprises, compared to women (30%).

The statistics mentioned above indicate that economic empowerment programs are rarely focused on women's economic empowerment and leave many, among them migrants, unaddressed. Encouraging participation in similar projects is essential for the socioeconomic stability of migrant women, since, in contrast to reintegration programs, sectoral programs have more guarantee for long-term and sustainable support. It is also noteworthy that here mentioned state programs either do not encourage women's participation at all or identify them as vulnerable rather than a priority group – an approach that represents women as passive, assistance-receiving subjects and contributes further to their stigmatization. This is especially noteworthy in regard to migrant women since such an approach disregards their independence, agency, and leadership – all characteristics that they acquired through labor migration.

International organizations working in Georgia also prioritize women's economic empowerment, funding educational, consulting, and financial programs, along with “community mobilization components”. Programs' target groups are often categorized based on content and geographical area and mostly cover women who are internally displaced, with disabilities, are ethnic minorities, socially vulnerable, living in rural areas, unemployed, engaged in low-wage occupations, single mothers, and mothers providing for families. It is noteworthy that compared to state programs, those funded by international donors better reach vulnerable groups, and their success is often determined by the engagement of local organizations in the process. Although returned migrant women are rarely targeted as a separate group, other prerequisites from the list often cover their needs as well.

These programs are efficient in individual cases, however, since women's empowerment is not a consistent part of state policy, programs funded by international donors are isolated initiatives and have limited impact on the transformation of structural causes of inequality.

22 Public information requested from RDA.



INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The following chapter reviews international and national best practices in terms of labor migrants' return and reintegration that may be relevant to the Georgian context.

International experience shows that for return and sustainable reintegration, it is crucial that preparation for reintegration starts before departure when the migrant is in their country of origin, their family members are involved, and their community is engaged in the process.

Experience also shows that the distribution of responsibilities among state and non-state entities is important. It is noteworthy that reintegration programs established as best practices cover both documented and undocumented migrants – the importance of which surfaced within the presented study as well.

Experiences of countries historically and geopolitically similar to Georgia show that, as a rule, return, and reintegration are integral parts of migration policies, and specific programs, especially focused on migrant women, are very rare. Components of return and reintegration in migration policies are more or less similar across countries and cover the following services: the provision of temporary housing, psycho-social and medical services, and livelihood development assistance. The efficiency of service provision depends on allocated financial resources, as well as on coordination and cooperation among involved parties.

Among global practices, international society mainly assesses the approaches of Southeast Asian (ASEAN) countries as successful examples, where characteristics of women's migration are similar to those in Georgia (a high level of female migration, and participation in low-income domestic and care work in the context of developing countries with backgrounds of adverse socioeconomic conditions). Alongside international declarations and national legislation protecting the rights of the labor migrants, ASEAN countries carry the responsibility to protect labor migrants' rights based on the regional declaration as well²³, which aims at efficient management of the entire cycle of labor migration – starting from preparation for emigration, up until their return and reintegration in their country of origin.

Among countries of the ASEAN region, the Philippines is often considered one of the leaders in terms of migration policies and support to women labor migrants. The Philippines was one of the first to ratify the UN International Convention on the Protection of the Rights

23 ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, see: <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/migpractice/docs/117/Declaration.pdf>



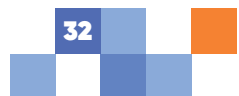
of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families in 1995 and established several state entities to manage labor migration. The Philippines' state strategy for reintegration consists of several stages. The first stage unites programs that are implemented when a migrant is in their country of destination; professional training for migrants engaged in domestic labor; a competence assessment program which entails issuing of a certificate confirming professional competencies after relevant examination, to support employment upon return to the Philippines; and an educational program focused on savings, investments, and entrepreneurship for migrants, as well as family members left behind (UN Women, 2015).

The second stage of the Philippines' state reintegration program entails support upon return and mainly focuses on the generation of livelihood sources. The latter entails funding of business proposals with 20% participation, and an educational component that both return migrants and their family members can benefit from, while returned migrant women in vulnerable situations are separate target groups and are offered educational opportunities and funding for the proposed businesses. In addition, reintegration programs in the Philippines include legal, medical, and psychological consultations, as well as wage employment referral assistance (ILO, 2018; ILO, 2019).

Alongside state reintegration programs, the active engagement of local non-governmental organizations in the process of migrants' return and reintegration is noteworthy. The Philippines non-governmental organization, "Atikha", was one of the first globally to raise concerns on the feminization of migration and focuses mainly on gender aspects of migration until today. The organization's primary initiatives are aimed towards the individual empowerment of migrant women, while later on, acquiring a broader approach to development, programs began to cover migrant women's left behind family members, as well as local communities (UN Women, 2012).

According to the organization's strategy, the process of reintegration should start from pre-departure. This includes educational programs for women and their family members to prepare them for the potential impacts and outcomes of prolonged migration. The program focuses on issues of changing gender roles due to migration, distance parenting, the effective management of remittances, and other issues crucial for mitigating the social cost of women's migration.

Coinciding with the results of the above-mentioned studies, Atikha's experience also demonstrates that migration experiences have a huge influence on sustainable reintegration upon return. Hence, to achieve sustainability of reintegration, the organization focuses on women's stay in the country of destination, in order to assist them in increasing the potential of remittances and directing savings into households' financial stability. In 2008, EC-UN Joint Migration and Development Initiatives named Atikha's one of the most successful programs focusing on financial literacy and mobilizing investments in agriculture as best practice. The



program assists Filipino migrants and their family members in investing their savings in their province of origin which allows them to build stability for the future, and simultaneously, contribute to the development of local communities. This support entails training in financial literacy, business development, and strengthening partnerships, while migrant women and their family members, local community, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations, local government, and others are equally invested in the process.

Reintegration services upon return mostly entail counseling and individual mentoring – mapping of opportunities for investment and enterprises for migrants, support in implementing business ideas, and management. At the same time, special services are contemplated to support migrants who return unprepared, such as legal and psychological counseling, the provision of material and non-material resources, skills training, and more.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the experiences of labor migrant and return labor migrant women, and analysis of legislation, policies, programs, and international practice, the presented paper studies the issues of socioeconomic stability for labor migrant women from Georgia in the context of return and reintegration.

It is noteworthy that in recent years, Georgia has made significant steps towards developing migration management systems, although the feminization of migration is overlooked. Important flaws are observed in legislation, policy, and programs, hindering the return and sustainable reintegration of migrant women.

Findings of the presented study, as well as international experiences demonstrate the challenges migrant women face in achieving socioeconomic stability and are linked to migration experiences, as well as the socioeconomic situation in their country of origin, and existing structural barriers to gender equality.

The study reveals that while in migration, Georgian migrant women have limited opportunities for accumulating financial capital, experience, and access to necessary information which prolongs their migration, while also not allowing them to save for future economic stability and security. First and foremost, this is a result of families' high dependence on remittances and lack of relevant educational and informational sources that could contribute to a full realization of migration potential and would prepare a solid ground for sustainable reintegration.

Despite labor migration being an important strategy for the elimination of poverty, the experiences of migrant women are indicative of social perils existing due to women's prolonged migration, such as physical and emotional care deficits in sending countries, stress caused by separation from families and leaving their care responsibilities behind, physical and emotional difficulties related to difficult working conditions in emigration, and alienation from family members caused by prolonged separation. To eliminate these challenges, supporting migrant women's timely and dignified return and reintegration beginning immediately after emigrating, is vital.

After returning from long migration, the socioeconomic situation in the country and historical structural barriers preventing equal opportunities for women to participate in economic, social, cultural, and political life, hinder women's sustainable reintegration as well. High unemployment rates, low wages, de-qualification, and consequently, low competitiveness in the labor market, low access to care infrastructure, and a lack of substantial social welfare services such as low pensions, high prices on healthcare services and medication, and a lack of unemployment assistance, high interest rates on loans from commercial institutions,

housing challenges, and other difficulties hinder migrant women's socioeconomic reintegration.

It is noteworthy that despite empirical data indicating a trend of feminization of labor migration, and international obligations highlighting the importance of protecting migrant women's rights, feminization of migration is not integrated into the state's overall vision and policy, and the country's relevant normative and political agenda is completely ignorant of gender perspectives. Similarly, neither return nor reintegration assistance programs are gender sensitive, they too have an effect of one-time social assistance due to a scarce budget and reactive character, and cannot contribute to the sustainable economic empowerment of returning migrants and their families. Existing programs do not give migrants sufficient incentives for return, and while return migrants often find solution again in re-emigration, the prevention of this is crucial for the sustainability of reintegration. Hereby, due to narrow coverage, existing programs cannot meet the needs raised by the high scale of migration and return. In addition, they do not cover documented emigrants who often face similar challenges in the process of reintegration. Although economic empowerment programs are more sustainable, often they are not gender sensitive, and structural challenges returning migrant women encounter in accessing such programs mirror the broader challenges women generally face in Georgia.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study conclusions, and international good practices, the study developed recommendations directed towards state agencies, as well as international, and local organizations that have resources to support state initiatives and to implement non-governmental programs.

To improve the normative and political environment for the feminization of migration, it is important:

- To systematically integrate gender issues in the Law of Georgia on Labor Migration, migration strategy, respective work plans, and programs with the active participation of **the Permanent Parliamentary Gender Equality Council**, based on international responsibilities and best practices;
- To add a working group on the feminization of migration to the thematic groups of the **State Commission on Migration Issues** which will define the needs of migrant women and promote their interests in state policies;
- For the **Parliament of Georgia** to ensure ratification of fundamental international conventions, among them the UN (1990) Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, and UN (158) and ILO conventions that would support the strengthening of national mechanisms for human rights, gender equality, and women's labor rights protection;
- For the **National Statistics Office of Georgia**, in cooperation with **relevant state entities**, to develop a methodology based on international standards for a systematic census of returning migrants, so data is processed in a consolidated manner, along with being segregated by gender and socioeconomic characteristics.

To reduce the social cost of feminized migration, to maximize the use of migration potential, and to support the timely return of migrant women, it is important:

- For the **State Commission on Migration Issues** to review the existing approaches towards return and sustainable reintegration in Georgia's migration strategy, so that support for return and sustainable reintegration starts immediately after women's emigration, rather than implying strategies only after return as in the current approach;
- With the active engagement of **diplomatic missions and international and local organizations**, to create educational opportunities tailored to the work schedules of labor migrant women, guaranteeing funds for professional educational courses in the host country and/or online opportunities in Georgia;



- For the **State Commission on Migration Issues** to define remittance-dependent family members as a priority group in migration strategy and work plans, and for responsible entities assigned in the work plan to guarantee their active participation in relevant programs so that the use of migration potential is maximized during women's stay in the host country;
- With the engagement of the **National Bank of Georgia and other state entities**, to develop/update financial education programs tailored to the needs of migrant women's family members that are left behind;
- For the **Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development**, in active cooperation with **other state entities, as well as with private and civic sectors**, to create an informational portal, which will unify systematically updated information on entrepreneurship, investment, reintegration, and educational opportunities. In this regard, it is essential to review and update the dissemination of information sources for migrants.

For the sustainable reintegration of returned migrant women, it is important:

- For the **Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labor and Social Affairs of Georgia**, through **relevant agencies**, to guarantee return migrant women's engagement in educational programs and entrepreneurial activities on a centralized and municipal level which will contribute to high productive employment. Hereby, access to educational programs should increase, and scholarships should be offered during the study period to cover the living expenses;
- For the **Ministry of Internally Displaced Persons from the Occupied Territories, Health, Labor and Social Affairs of Georgia**, through its **relevant agencies**, to amend the available reintegration programs, or develop and implement support services for women returning from both regular and irregular labor migration;
- For **Enterprise Georgia** and the **Rural Development Agency** to define return migrant women as a priority group in their programs for economic empowerment, and encourage their participation according to their needs (offering opportunities for preliminary training, business loans with low interest rates, and reconsidering the financial requirements among other strategies).

Achieving socioeconomic stability for migrant women is not possible solely through narrowly-scaled programs focused on migration. Thus, it is important:

- To reform the country's socioeconomic system - strengthen care infrastructure, and increase access to health and social welfare services, and financial resources. And to develop specific programs and services in relation to these fields. In addition, further studies should be conducted.

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